COMPACT SF

NEW WORLDS

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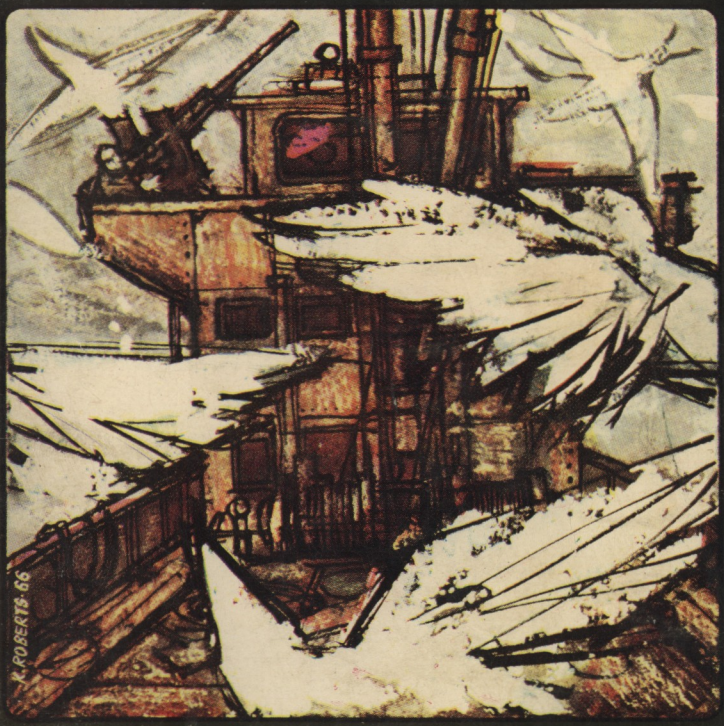

J.G. BALLARD

STORM BIRD, STORM DREAMER

NEW WORLDS SF

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Contents

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

TOO MANY BAD BOOKS

ON OUR DESK this month we have over thirty science fiction books in hardcover and paperback due to be sent out to our reviewers. Of these, some are bad, a few are good and the majority are mediocre. They consist of a large percentage of collections, a great number of reprints and some new novels. There is only one really good new novel among them. Most of the worthwhile stories in the collections have already appeared in at least one anthology already.

It is our opinion that certain sf publishers are committed to producing too many titles a month, that they are selecting hastily, and that the general quality of the field is being harmed because of this. Reviewers, faced with a mediocre batch of books to be read, cannot be blamed if they state the opinion that sf is in the doldrums. The fact is, of course, that sf is in very good shape, although it would be hard to tell it from looking at most of the British publishers' current lists. The work of young British and American writers is not being seen sufficiently in this country. It seems up to U.S. publishers to produce their work in book form. The only hardcover publisher in this country who appears to be making any serious attempt to publish fresh work is Whiting and Wheaton who will publish *Shoot at the Moon* by William Temple and *The Genocides* by Thomas M. Disch. Keith Roberts's *The Furies* has been well-received in the States, but has yet to appear here. Roger Zelazny's work is not, as far as we know, scheduled for publication in this country, apart from a collection which Compact Books intend to bring out next year. Until recently, no one was publishing Philip K. Dick's work, most

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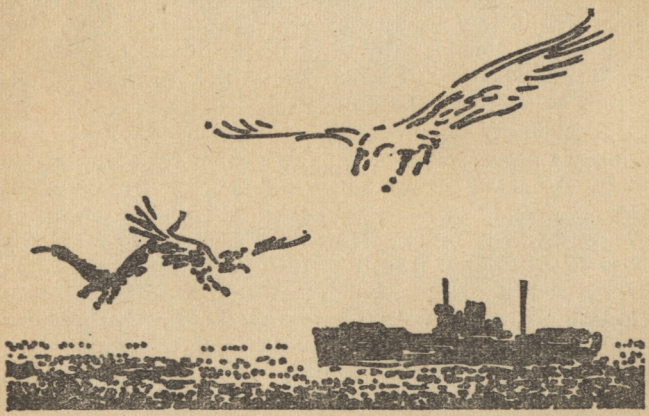
storm bird storm dreamer



j. g. ballard

AT DAWN THE bodies of the great birds shone in the damp light of the marsh, their grey plumage hanging in the still water like fallen clouds. Each morning when Crispin went out on to the deck of the picket ship he would see the birds lying in the creeks and waterways where they had died two months earlier, their wounds cleansed now by the slow current, and he would watch the white-haired woman who lived in the empty house below the cliff walking by the river. Along the narrow beach the huge birds, larger than condors, lay at her feet. As Crispin gazed at her from the bridge of the picket ship she moved among them, now and then stooping to pluck a feather from the outstretched wings. At the end of her walk, when she returned across the damp meadow to the empty house, her arms would be loaded with immense white plumes.

At first, Crispin had felt an obscure sense of annoyance at the way this strange woman descended on to the beach and calmly plundered the plumage of the dead birds. Although many thousands of the creatures lay along the margins of the river and in the marshes around the inlet where the picket ship was moored, Crispin still maintained a proprietary attitude towards them. He himself, almost single-handedly, had been responsible for the slaughter of the birds in the last terrifying battles when they had come from their eyries along the North Sea and attacked the picket ship. Each of the immense white creatures—for the most part gulls and gannets, with a few fulmars and petrels among them—carried *his* bullet in its heart like a jewel.

As he watched the woman cross the overgrown lawn to her house Crispin remembered again the frantic hours before the birds' final hopeless attack. Hopeless it seemed now, when their bodies lay in a wet quilt over the cold Norfolk marshes, but then, only two months earlier, when the sky above the ship had been dark with their massing forms, it was Crispin who had given up hope. The birds had been larger than men, with wing-spans of twenty feet or

more that shut out the sun. Crispin had raced like a madman across the rusty metal decks, dragging the ammunition cans in his torn arms from the armoury and loading them into the breeches of the machine-guns, while Quimby, the idiot-youth from the farm at Long Reach whom Crispin had persuaded to be his gun-loader, gibbered to himself on the foredeck, hopping about on his club foot as he tried to escape from the huge shadows sweeping across him. When the birds began their first dive, and the sky turned into a white scythe, Crispin had barely enough time to buckle himself into the shoulder harness of the turret.

Yet he had won, shooting the first wave down into the marshes as they soared towards him like a white armada, then turning to fire at the second group swooping in low across the river behind his back. The hull of the picket ship was still dented with the impacts their bodies had made as they struck the sides above the waterline. At the height of the battle the birds had been everywhere, wings like screaming crosses against the sky, their corpses crashing through the rigging on to the decks around him as he swung the heavy guns, firing from rail to rail. A dozen times Crispin had given up hope, cursing the men who had left him alone on this rusty hulk to face the giant birds, and who made him pay for Quimby out of his own pocket.

But then, when the battle had seemed to last forever, when the sky was still full of birds and his ammunition had nearly gone, he noticed Quimby dancing on the corpses heaped on the deck, pitching them into the water with his two-pronged fork as they thudded around him.

Then Crispin knew that he had won. When the firing slackened Quimby dragged up more ammunition, eager for killing, his face and deformed chest smeared with feathers and blood. Shouting himself now, with a fierce pride in his own courage and fear, Crispin had destroyed the remainder of the birds, shooting the stragglers, a few fledgling peregrines, as they fled towards the cliff. For an hour after the last of the birds had died, when the river and the creeks near the ship ran red with their blood, Crispin had sat in the turret, firing the guns at the sky that had dared attack him.

Later, when the excitement and pulse of the battle had passed, he realised that the only witness of his stand against

this aerial armageddon had been a club-footed idiot to whom no one would ever listen. Of course, the white-haired woman had been there, hiding behind the shutters in her house, but Crispin had not noticed her until several hours had passed, when she began to walk among the corpses. To begin with, therefore, he had been glad to see the birds lying where they had fallen, their blurred forms eddying away in the cold water of the river and the marshes. He sent Quimby back to his farm, and watched the idiot-dwarf punt his way down-river among the swollen corpses. Then, cross-bandoliers of machine-gun cartridges around his chest, Crispin took command of his bridge.

The woman's appearance on the scene he welcomed, glad someone else was there to share his triumph, and well aware that she must have noticed him patrolling the captain's walk of the picket ship. But after a single glance the woman never again looked at him. She seemed intent only on searching the beach and the meadow below her house. On the third day after the battle she had come out on to the lawn with Quimby, and the dwarf spent the morning and afternoon clearing away the bodies of the birds that had fallen there. He heaped them on to a heavy wooden tumbril, then harnessed himself between the shafts and dragged them away to a pit near the farm. The following day he appeared again in a wooden skiff and punted the woman, standing alone in the bows like an aloof wraith, among the bodies of the birds floating in the water. Now and then Quimby turned one of the huge corpses over with his pole, as if searching for something among them—there were apocryphal stories, which many townsfolk believed, that the beaks of the birds carried tusks of ivory, but Crispin knew this to be nonsense.

These movements of the woman puzzled Crispin, who felt that his conquest of the birds had also tamed the landscape around the picket ship and everything on it. Shortly afterwards, when the woman began to collect the wing feathers of the birds, he felt that she was in some way usurping a privilege reserved for him alone. Sooner or later the river-voles, rats and other predators of the marshes would destroy the birds, but until then he resented anyone else looting this drowned treasure which he had won so hard. After the battle he sent a short message in his crabbed

handwriting to the district officer at the station twenty miles away, and until a reply came he preferred that the thousands of bodies should lie where they had fallen. As a conscripted member of the picket service he was not eligible for a bounty, but Crispin dimly hoped he might receive a medal or some sort of commendation.

The knowledge that the woman was his only witness, apart from the idiot Quimby, deterred Crispin from doing anything that might antagonise her. Also, the woman's odd behaviour made Crispin suspect that she too might be mad. He had never seen her at a shorter distance than the three hundred yards separating the picket ship from the bank below her house, but through the telescope mounted on the rail of the bridge he followed her along the beach, and saw more clearly the white hair and the ashen skin of her high face. Her arms were thin but strong, hands held at her waist as she moved about in a grey ankle-length robe. Her bedraggled appearance was that of someone unaware that she had lived alone for a long time.

For several hours Crispin watched her walking among the corpses. The tide cast a fresh freight on to the sand each day, but now that the bodies were decomposing, their appearance, except at a distance, was devoid of any sentiment. The shallow inlet in which the picket ship was moored—the vessel was one of the hundreds of old coastal freighters hastily converted to duty when the first flocks of giant birds appeared two years earlier—faced the house across the river. Through the telescope Crispin could count the scores of pock-marks in the white stucco where spent bullets from his guns had lodged themselves.

At the end of her walk the woman had filled her arms with a garland of feathers. As Crispin watched, hands clasping the bandoliers across his chest, she went over to one of the birds, walking into the shallow water to peer into its half-submerged face. Then she plucked a single plume from its wing and added it to the collection in her arms.

Restlessly Crispin returned to the telescope. In the narrow eyepiece her swaying figure, half-hidden by the spray of white feathers, resembled that of some huge decorative bird, a white peacock. Perhaps in some bizarre way she imagined she was a bird?


J. CRUTHERS '66

In the wheel-house Crispin fingered the signal pistol fastened to the wall. When she came out the next morning he could fire one of the flares over her head, warning her that the birds were his, subjects of his own transitory kingdom. The farmer, Hassell, who had come with Quimby for permission to burn some of the birds for use as fertiliser, had plainly acknowledged Crispin's moral rights over them.

Usually Crispin made a thorough inspection of the ship each morning, counting the ammunition cases and checking the gunnery mountings. The metal caissons were splitting the rusty decks. The whole ship was settling into the mud below. At high tide Crispin would listen to the water pouring through a thousand cracks and rivet holes like an army of silver-tongued rats.

This morning, however, his inspection was brief. After testing the turret on the bridge—there was always the chance of a few stragglers appearing from the nesting grounds along the abandoned coast—he went back to his telescope. The woman was somewhere behind the house, cutting down the remains of a small rose pergola. Now and then she would look up at the sky and at the cliff above, scanning the dark line of the escarpment as if waiting for one of the birds.

This reminder that he had overcome his own fears of the giant birds made Crispin realise why he resented the woman plucking their feathers. As their bodies and plumage began to dissolve he felt a growing need to preserve them. Often he found himself thinking of their great tragic faces as they swooped down upon him, in many ways more to be pitied than feared, victims of what the district officer had called a "biological accident"—Crispin vaguely remembered him describing the new growth promoters used on the crops in East Anglia and the extraordinary and unforeseen effects on the bird life.

Five years earlier Crispin had been working in the fields as a labourer, unable to find anything better after his wasted years of military service. He remembered the first of the new sprays being applied to the wheat and fruit crops, and the tacky phosphorescent residue that made them glimmer in the moonlight, transforming the placid agricultural backwater into a strange landscape where the forces of some unseen nature were forever gathering them-

selves in readiness. The fields had been covered with the dead bodies of gulls and magpies whose mouths were clogged with this silverine gum. Crispin himself had saved many of the half-conscious birds, cleaning their beaks and feathers, and sending them off to their sailing grounds along the coast.

Three years later the birds had returned. The first giant cormorants and black-headed gulls had wingspans of ten or twelve feet, strong bodies and beaks that could slash a dog apart. Soaring low over the fields as Crispin drove his tractor under the empty skies, they seemed to be waiting for something.

The next autumn a second generation of even larger birds appeared, sparrows as fierce as eagles, gannets and gulls with the wingspans of condors. These immense creatures, with bodies as broad and powerful as a man's, flew out of the storms along the coast, killing the cattle in the fields and attacking the farmers and their families. Returning for some reason to the infected crops that had given them this wild spur to growth, they were the advance guard of an aerial armada of millions of birds that filled the skies over the country. Driven by hunger, they began to attack the human beings who were their only source of food. Crispin had been too busy defending the farm where he lived to follow the course of the battle against the birds all over the world. The farm, only ten miles from the coast, had been besieged. After the dairy cattle had been slaughtered, the birds turned to the farm buildings. One night Crispin woke as a huge frigate-bird, its shoulders wider than a door, had shattered the wooden shutters across his window and thrust itself into his room. Seizing his pitchfork, Crispin nailed it by the neck to the wall.

After the destruction of the farm, in which the owner, his family, and three of the labourers died, Crispin volunteered to join the picket service. The district officer who headed the motorised militia column at first refused Crispin's offer of help. Surveying the small, ferret-like man with his beaked nose and the birthmark like a star below his left eye, hobbling in little more than a blood-streaked singlet across the wreck of the farmhouse, as the last of the birds wheeled away like giant crosses, the district officer

had shaken his head, seeing in Crispin's eyes only the blind hunt for revenge.

However, when they counted the dead birds around the brick kiln where Crispin had made his stand, armed only with a scythe a head taller than himself, the officer had taken Crispin on. Crispin was given a rifle, and for half an hour they moved through the shattered fields nearby, filled with the stripped skeletons of cattle and pigs, finishing off the wounded birds that lay there.

Finally, Crispin had come to the picket ship, a drab hulk rusting in a backwater of riverine creeks and marshes, where a dwarf punted his coracle among the dead birds and a mad woman bedecked herself on the beach with garlands of feathers.

For an hour Crispin paced around the ship, as the woman worked behind the house. At one point she ap-

peared with a laundry basket filled with feathers and spread them out on a trestle table beside the rose pergola.

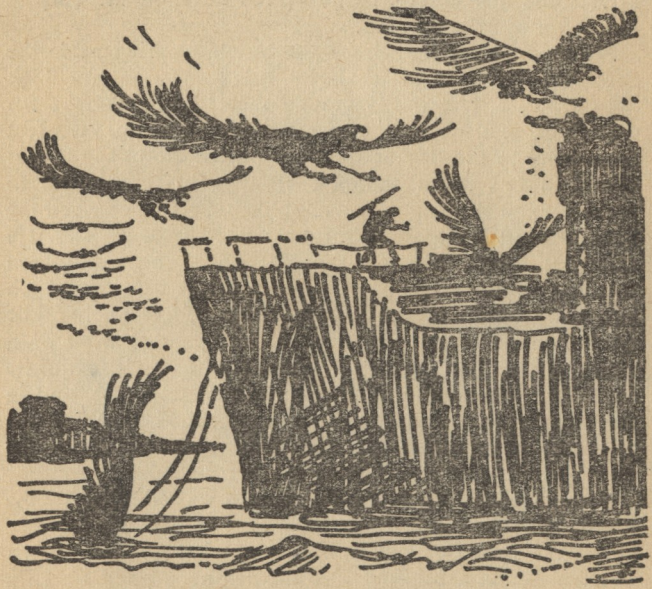
At the stern of the ship Crispin kicked open the galley door. He peered into the murky interior.

"Quimby! Are you there?"

This damp hovel was still maintained as a home from home by Quimby. The dwarf would pay sudden visits to Crispin, presumably in the hope of seeing further action against the birds.

When there was no reply Crispin shouldered his rifle and made for the gangway. Still eyeing the opposite shore, where a small fire was now sending a plume of grey smoke into the placid air, he tightened his bandoliers and stepped down the creaking gangway to the launch at the bottom.

The dead bodies of the birds were massed around the picket ship in a soggy raft. After trying to drive the launch through them Crispin stopped the outboard motor and



seized the gaff. Many of the birds weighed as much as five hundred pounds, lying in the water with their wings interlocked, tangled up with the cables and rope tossed down from the decks. Crispin could barely push them apart with the gaff, and slowly forced the launch to the mouth of the inlet.

He remembered the district officer telling him that the birds were closely related to the reptiles—evidently this explained their blind ferocity and hatred of the mammals —but to Crispin their washed faces in the water looked more like those of drowned dolphins, almost man-like in their composed and individual expressions. As he made his way across the river past the drifting forms it seemed to him that he had been attacked by a race of winged men, driven on not by cruelty or blind instinct but a sense of some unknown and irrevocable destiny. Along the opposite bank the silver forms of the birds lay among the trees and on the open patches of grass. As he sat in the launch on the water the landscape seemed to Crispin like the morning after some apocalyptic battle of the heavens, the corpses like those of fallen angels.

He moored the launch by the beach, pushing aside the dead birds lying in the shallows. For some reason a flock of pigeons, a few doves among them, had fallen at the water's edge. Their plump-breasted bodies, at least ten feet from head to tail, lay as if asleep on the damp sand, eyes closed in the warm sunlight. Holding his bandoliers to prevent them slipping off his shoulders, Crispin climbed the bank. Ahead lay a small meadow filled with corpses. He walked through them towards the house, now and then treading on the wing-tips. A wooden bridge crossed a ditch into the grounds of the house. Beside it, like an heraldic symbol pointing his way, reared the upended wing of a white eagle. The immense plumes with their exquisite modelling reminded him of monumental sculpture, and in the slightly darker light as he approached the cliff the apparent preservation of the birds' plumage made the meadow resemble a vast avian mortuary-garden.

As he rounded the house the woman was standing by the trestle table, laying out more feathers to dry. To her left, beside the frame of the gazebo, was what Crispin at first assumed to be a bonfire of white feathers, piled on to a

crude wooden framework she had built from the remains of the pergola. An air of dilapidation hung over the house —most of the windows had been broken by the birds during their attacks over the past years, and the garden and yard were filled with litter.

The woman turned to face Crispin. To his surprise she gazed at him with a hard eye, unimpressed by the brigand-like appearance he presented with his cartridge bandoliers, rifle and scarred face. Through the telescope he had guessed her to be elderly, but in fact she was barely more than thirty years old, her white hair as thick and well-groomed as the plumage of the dead birds in the fields around them. The rest of her, however, despite the strong figure and firm hands, was as neglected as the house. Her handsome face, devoid of all make-up, seemed to have been deliberately exposed to the cutting winter winds, and the long woollen robe she wore was stained with oil, its frayed hem revealing a pair of worn sandals.

Crispin came to a halt in front of her, for a moment wondering why he was visiting her at all. The few bales of feathers heaped on the pyre and drying on the trestle table seemed no challenge to his authority over the birds—the walk across the meadow had more than reminded him of that. Yet he was aware that something, perhaps their shared experience of the birds, bonded him and the young woman. The empty killing sky, the freighted fields silent in the sun, and the pyre beside them imposed a sense of a common past.

Laying the last of the feathers on the trestle, the woman said: "They'll dry soon. The sun is warm today. Can you help me?"

Crispin moved forward uncertainly. "How do you mean? Of course."

The woman pointed to a section of the rose pergola that was still standing. A rusty saw was embedded in a small groove the woman had managed to cut in one of the uprights. "Can you cut that down for me?"

Crispin followed her over to the pergola, unslinging his rifle. He pointed to the remains of a pine fence that had collapsed to one side of the old kitchen garden. "You want wood? That'll burn better."

"No—I need this frame. It's got to be strong." She

hesitated as Crispin continued to fiddle with his rifle, her voice more defensive. "Can you do it? The little dwarf couldn't come today. He usually helps me."

Crispin raised a hand to silence her. "I'll help you." He leaned his rifle against the pergola and took hold of the saw, after a few strokes freed it from its groove and made a clean start.

"Thank you." As he worked the woman stood beside him, looking down with a friendly smile as the cartridge bandoliers began to flap rhythmically to the motion of his arm and chest.

Crispin stopped, reluctant to shed the bandoliers of machine-gun bullets, the badge of his authority. He glanced in the direction of the picket ship, and the woman, taking her cue, said: "You're the captain? I've seen you on the bridge."

"Well . . ." Crispin had never heard himself described as the vessel's captain, but the title seemed to carry a certain status. He nodded modestly. "Crispin," he said by way of introduction. "Captain Crispin. Glad to help you."

"I'm Catherine York." Holding her white hair to her neck with one hand, the woman smiled again. She pointed to the rusting hulk. "It's a fine ship."

Crispin worked away at the saw, wondering whether she was missing the point. When he carried the frame over to the pyre and laid it at the base of the feathers he replaced his bandoliers with calculated effect. The woman appeared not to notice, but a moment later, when she glanced up at the sky, he raised his rifle and went up to her.

"Did you see one? Don't worry, I'll get it." He tried to follow her eyes as they swept across the sky after some invisible object that seemed to vanish beyond the cliff, but she turned away and began to adjust the feathers mechanically. Crispin gestured at the fields around them, feeling his pulse beat again at the prospect and fear of battle. "I shot all these . . ."

"What? I'm sorry. What did you say?" The woman looked around. She appeared to have lost interest in Crispin and was vaguely waiting for him to leave.

"Do you want more wood?" Crispin asked. "I can get some."

"I have enough." She touched the feathers on the trestle,

then thanked Crispin and walked off into the house, half-closing the hall door on its rusty hinges.

Crispin made his way across the lawn and through the meadow. The birds lay around him as before, but the memory, however fleeting, of the woman's sympathetic smile made him ignore them. He set off in the launch, pushing away the floating birds with brusque motions of the gaff. The picket ship sat at its moorings, the soggy raft of grey corpses around it. For once the rusting hulk depressed Crispin.

As he climbed the gangway he saw Quimby's small figure on the bridge, wild eyes roving about at the sky. Crispin had expressly forbidden the dwarf to be near the steering helm, though there was little likelihood of the picket ship going anywhere. Irritably he shouted at Quimby to get off the ship.

The dwarf leapt down the threadbare network of ratlines to the deck. He scurried over to Crispin.

"Crisp!" he shouted in his hoarse whisper. "They saw one! Coming in from the coast! Hassell told me to warn you."

Crispin stopped. Heart pounding, he scanned the sky out of the sides of his eyes, at the same time keeping a close watch on the dwarf. "When?"

"Yesterday." The dwarf wriggled one shoulder, as if trying to dislodge a stray memory. "Or was it this morning? Anyway, it's coming. Are you ready, Crisp?"

Crispin walked past, one hand firmly on the breach of the rifle. "I'm always ready," he rejoined. "What about you?" He jerked a finger at the house. "You should have been with the woman. Catherine York. I had to help her. She said she didn't want to see you again."

"What?" The dwarf scurried about, hands dancing along the rusty rail. He gave up with an elaborate shrug. "Ah, she's a strange one. Lost her man, you know, Crisp. And her baby."

Crispin paused at the foot of the bridge companionway. "Is that right? How did it happen?"

"A dove killed the man, pulled him to pieces on the roof, then took the baby. A tame bird, mark you." He nodded when Crispin looked at him sceptically. "That's it. He was

another strange one, that York. Kept this big dove on a chain."

Crispin climbed on to the bridge and stared across the river at the house. After musing to himself for five minutes he kicked Quimby off the ship, and then spent half an hour checking the gunnery installation. The reported sighting of one of the birds he discounted—no doubt a few strays were still flitting about, searching for their flocks—but the vulnerability of the woman across the river reminded him to take every precaution. Near the house she would be relatively safe, but in the open, during her walks along the beach, she would be all too easy prey.

It was this undefined feeling of responsibility towards Catherine York that prompted him, later that afternoon, to take the launch out again. A quarter of a mile down-river he moored the craft by a large open meadow, directly below the flight path of the birds as they had flown in to attack the picket ship. Here, on the cool green turf, the dying birds had fallen most thickly. A recent fall of rain concealed the odour of the immense gulls and fulmars lying across each other like angels. In the past Crispin had always moved with pride among this white harvest he had reaped from the sky, but now he hurried down the winding aisles between the birds, a wicker basket under his arm, intent only on his errand.

When he reached the higher ground in the centre of the meadow he placed the basket on the carcass of a dead falcon and began to pluck the feathers from the wings and breasts of the birds lying about him. Despite the rain, the plumage was almost dry. Crispin worked steadily for half an hour, tearing out the feathers with his hands, then carried the baskets full of plumes down to the launch. As he scurried about the meadow his bent head and shoulders were barely visible above the corpses of the birds.

By the time he set off in the launch the small craft was loaded from bow to stern with the bright plumes. Crispin stood in the steering well, peering over his cargo as he drove up-river. He moored the boat on the beach below the woman's house. A thin trail of smoke rose from the fire, and he could hear Mrs. York chopping more kindling.

Crispin walked through the shallow water around the boat, selecting the choicest of the plumes and arranging

them around the basket—a falcon's brilliant tail-feathers, the mother-of-pearl plumes of a fulmar, the brown breast-feathers of an eider. Shouldering the basket, he set off towards the house.

Catherine York was moving the trestle closer to the fire, straightening the plumes as the smoke drifted past them. More of the feathers had been added to the pyre built on to the frame of the pergola. The outer ones had been woven together to form a firm rim.

Crispin put the basket down in front of her, then stood back. "Mrs. York, I brought these. I thought you might use them."

The woman glanced obliquely at the sky, then shook her head as if puzzled. Crispin suddenly wondered if she recognised him. "What are they?"

"Feathers. For over there." Crispin pointed at the pyre. "They're the best I could find."

Catherine York knelt down, her skirt hiding the scuffed sandals. She touched the coloured plumes as if recalling their original owners. "They are beautiful. Thank you, captain." She stood up. "I'd like to keep them, but I need only this kind."

Crispin followed her hand as she pointed to the white feathers on the trestle. With a curse, he slapped the breach of the rifle.

"Doves! They're all doves! I should have noticed!" He picked up the basket. "I'll get you some."

"Crispin . . ." Catherine York took his arm. Her troubled eyes wandered about his face, as if hoping to find some kindly way of warning him off. "I have enough, thank you. It's nearly finished now."

Crispin hesitated, waiting for himself to say something to this beautiful white-haired woman whose hands and robe were covered with the soft down of the doves. Then he picked up the basket and made his way back to the launch.

As he sailed across the river to the ship he moved up and down the launch, casting the cargo of feathers on to the water. Behind him, the soft plumes formed a coloured wake.

That night, as Crispin lay in his rusty bunk in the cap-

tain's cabin, his dreams of the giant birds who filled the moonlit skies of his sleep were broken by the faint ripple of the air in the rigging overhead, the muffled hoot of an aerial voice calling to itself. Waking, Crispin lay still with his head against the metal stanchion, listening to the faint whoop and swerve around the mast.

Crispin leapt from the bunk. He seized his rifle and raced bare-foot up the companionway to the bridge. As he stepped on to the deck, sliding the barrel of the rifle into the air, he caught a last glimpse against the moonlit night of a huge white bird flying away across the river.

Crispin rushed to the rail, trying to steady the rifle enough to get in a shot at the bird. He gave up as it passed beyond his range, its outline masked by the cliff. Once warned, the bird would never return to the ship. A stray, no doubt it was hoping to nest among the masts and rigging.

Shortly before dawn, after a ceaseless watch from the rail, Crispin set off across the river in the launch. Over-excited by the bird, he was convinced he had seen it circling above the house. Perhaps it had seen Catherine York asleep through one of the shattered windows. The muffled echo of the engine beat across the water, broken by the floating forms of the dead birds. Crispin crouched forward with the rifle and drove the launch on to the beach. He ran through the darkened meadow, where the corpses lay like silver shadows. He darted into the cobbled yard and knelt by the kitchen door, trying to catch the sounds of the sleeping woman in the room above.

For an hour, as the dawn lifted over the cliff, Crispin prowled around the house. There were no signs of the bird, but at last he came across the mound of feathers mounted on the pergola frame. Peering into the soft grey bowl, he realised that he had caught the dove in the very act of building a nest.

Careful not to wake the woman, sleeping above him beyond the cracked panes, he destroyed the nest. With his rifle butt he stoved in the sides, then knocked a hole through the woven bottom. Then, happy that he had saved Catherine York from the nightmare of walking from her house the next morning and seeing the bird waiting to attack

her from its perch on this stolen nest, Crispin set off through the gathering light and returned to the ship.

For the next two days, despite his vigil on the bridge, Crispin saw no more of the dove. Catherine York remained within the house, unaware of her escape. At night, Crispin would patrol her house. The changing weather, and the first taste of the winter to come, had unsettled the landscape, and during the day Crispin spent more time upon the bridge, uneager to look out on the marshes that surrounded the ship.

On the night of the storm, Crispin saw the bird again. All afternoon the dark clouds had come in from the sea along the river basin, and by evening the cliff beyond the house was hidden by the rain. Crispin was in the bridge-house, listening to the bulkheads groaning as the ship was driven further into the mud by the wind.

Lightning flickered across the river, lighting up the thousands of corpses in the meadows. Crispin leaned on the helm, gazing at the gaunt reflection of himself in the darkened glass, when a huge white face, beaked like his own, swam into his image. As he stared at this apparition, a pair of immense white wings seemed to unfurl themselves from his shoulders. Then a great gentle dove, illuminated in a flicker of lightning, rose into the gusting wind around the mast, its wings weaving themselves among the steel cables.

It was still hovering there, trying to find shelter from the rain, when Crispin stepped on to the deck and shot it through the heart.

At first light Crispin left the bridge-house and climbed on to the roof. The dead bird hung, its wings outstretched, in a clutter of steel coils beside the look-out's nest. Its mournful face gaped down at Crispin, its expression barely changed since it loomed out of his own reflection at the height of the storm. Now, as the flat wind faded across the water, Crispin watched the house below the cliff. Against the dark vegetation of the meadows and marshes the bird hung like a white cross, and he waited for Catherine York to come to a window, afraid that a sudden gust might topple the dove to the deck.

When Quimby arrived in his coracle two hours later, eager to see the bird, Crispin sent him up the mast to secure the dove to the cross-tree. Dancing about beneath the bird, the dwarf seemed mesmerised by Crispin, doing whatever the latter told him.

"Fire a shot at her, Crisp!" he exhorted Crispin, who stood disconsolately by the rail. "Over the house, that'll bring her out!"

"Do you think so?" Crispin raised the rifle, ejecting the cartridge whose bullet had destroyed the bird. He watched the bright shell tumble down into the feathery water below. "I don't know . . . it might frighten her. I'll go over there."

"That's the way, Crisp . . ." The dwarf scuttled about. "Bring her back here—I'll tidy it up for you."

"Maybe I will."

As he berthed the launch on the beach Crispin looked back at the picket ship, reassuring himself that the dead

dove was clearly visible in the distance. In the morning sunlight the plumage shone like snow against the rusting masts.

When he neared the house he saw Catherine York standing in the doorway, her wind-blown hair hiding her face, watching him approach with stern eyes.

He was ten yards from her when she stepped into the house and half-closed the door. Crispin began to run, and she leaned out and shouted angrily: "Go away! Go back to the ship! Back to those dead birds you love so much!"

"Miss Catherine . . ." Crispin stammered to a halt by the door. "I saved you . . . Mrs. York!"

"Saved? Save the birds, captain!"

Crispin tried to speak, but she slammed the door. He walked back through the meadow and punted across the river to the picket ship, unaware of Quimby's insane moon eyes staring down at him from the rail.

"Crisp . . . What's the matter?" For once the dwarf was gentle. "What happened?"

Crispin shook his head. He gazed up at the dead bird, struggling to find some solution to the woman's last retort. "Quimby," he said in a quiet voice to the dwarf, "Quimby, she thinks she's a bird."

During the next week this conviction grew in Crispin's bewildered mind, as did his obsession with the dead bird. Looming over him like an immense murdered angel, the dove's eyes seemed to follow him about the ship, reminding him of when it had first appeared, almost from within his own face, in the mirror-glass of the bridge-house.

It was this sense of identity with the bird that was to spur Crispin to his final stratagem.

Climbing the mast, he secured himself to the lookout's nest, and with a hacksaw cut away the steel cables tangled around the dove's body. In the gathering wind the great white form of the bird swayed and dipped, its fallen wings almost knocking Crispin from his perch. At intervals the rain beat across them, but the drops helped to wash away the blood on the bird's breast and the chips of rust from the hacksaw. At last Crispin lowered the bird to the deck, then lashed it to the hatch-cover behind the funnel.

Exhausted, he slept until the next day. At dawn, armed with a machete, he began to eviscerate the bird.

Three days later, Crispin stood on the cliff above the house, the picket ship far below him across the river. The hollow carcass of the dove which he wore over his head and shoulders seemed little heavier than a pillow. In the brief spell of warm sunlight he lifted the outstretched wings, feeling their buoyancy and the cutting flow of air through the feathers. A few stronger gusts moved across the crest of the ridge, almost lifting him into the wind, and he stepped closer to the small oak which hid him from the house below.

Against the trunk rested his rifle and bandoliers. Crispin lowered the wings and gazed up at the sky, making certain for the last time that no stray hawk or peregrine was about. The effectiveness of the disguise had exceeded all his hopes. Kneeling on the ground, the wings furled at his sides and the hollowed head of the bird lowered over his face, he felt he completely resembled the dove.

Below him the ground sloped towards the house. From the deck of the picket ship the cliff face had seemed almost vertical, but in fact the ground shelved downwards at a steady but gentle gradient. With luck he might even manage to be airborne for a few steps. However, for most of the way to the house he intended simply to run down-hill.

As he waited for Catherine York to appear he freed his right arm from the metal clamp he had fastened to the wing-bone of the bird. He reached out to set the safety catch on his rifle. By divesting himself of the weapon and his bandoliers, and assuming the disguise of the birds, he had, as he understood, accepted the insane logic of the woman's mind. Yet the symbolic flight he was about to perform would free not only Catherine York, but himself as well, from the spell of the birds.

A door opened in the house, a broken pane of glass catching the sunlight. Crispin stood up behind the oak, his hands bracing themselves on the wings. Catherine York appeared, carrying something across the yard. She paused by the rebuilt nest, her white hair lifting in the breeze, and adjusted some of the feathers.

Stepping from behind the tree, Crispin walked forward

down the slope. Ten yards ahead he reached a patch of worn turf. He began to run, the wings flapping unevenly at his sides. As he gained speed his feet raced across the ground. Suddenly the wings steadied as they gained their purchase on the updraft, and he found himself able to glide, the air rushing past his face.

He was a hundred yards from the house when the woman noticed him. A few moments later, when she had brought her shotgun from the kitchen, Crispin was too busy trying to control the speeding glider in which he had become a confused but jubilant passenger. His voice cried out as he soared across the falling ground, feet leaping in ten-yard strides, the smell of the bird's blood and plumage filling his lungs.

He reached the perimeter of the meadow that ringed the house, crossing the hedge fifteen feet above the ground. He was holding with one hand to the soaring carcass of the dove, his head half-lost inside the skull, when the woman fired twice at him. The first charge went through the tail, but the second shot him in the chest, down into the soft grass of the meadow among the dead birds.

Half an hour later, when she saw that Crispin had died, Catherine York walked forward to the twisted carcass of the dove and began to pluck away the choicest plumes, carrying them back to the nest which she was building again for the great bird that would come one day and bring back her son.

The Flight of Daedalus

fragment of an abandoned poem

thomas m. disch

There, where the stars
are Doppler-red and speed
grows dizzy at the verge of c,
far as the final power can extrapolate,
shattering the crystal sphere,
through the Empyrean:
here
the dull perspective of the sea,
flush to the eye at every corner—
(no flame, no thunder,
only the squid's hiss,
the ink that clouds its tidy mandibles)
—bends, shrinks,
blends into a general concentricity
of elliptical beads
pendant from the sun,
and, further still, recedes
until their utter dissolution.

The elements all
vanish into the equation I create,
as a soldier detonates a mine, or as a poet
leaves the poem behind.

a MAN must die

JOHN CLUTE

HE RAN AWAY for the third time, and as usual it had all been arranged. The proper hour was One of Day. His tutor, Dwight, had laid out his travelling veils last night at Three of Dark, just before bedtime, and now they floated about him. The great brown door of the nursery shushed into the wall when he touched it tap-tap-tap, his own private code. He stepped outside, into the corridor. He ran away down the corridors with the white lights. He didn't go down the green-lighted corridors because they were dead ends, and the red-lighted corridors were forbidden. "I am following the white lights," he said proudly to an Ox, who curtsied. It was a female Ox. He ran on. His veils flushed as he ran.

He was running away to Father.

The corridors began to curve before him, more and more, a delicate and soothing increment as he ran on, and eventually he reached Wall. Wall was black. He trotted beside black Wall until he came to a new corridor. It was lighted red. A third-generation Ox got up to its knees and

went grunt-grunt meaning no. The red corridor spiralled upwards. Ox guarded it. Father was upwards. He was too young to see Father. That's what Dwight had said. Ambition and the worldly drives are poisonous to the young, Dwight had said (reading from a textbook made of paper). Dwight also said, first things first. Dwight had seen Father when Father was young. Dwight had seen everything, but Dwight didn't remember much. Dwight was a first-generation Ox and said oh no he didn't regret it, smiling out of his own world.

He was wearing his travelling veils and stared Ox down, but Ox still went grunt-grunt meaning no. It obeyed its instructions, for there was no Star pinned under the gossamer veils. "My name is Picasso Perkins III," to humble Ox who wouldn't move. "Step aside now."

Picasso Perkins III had been born to command.

But he could not command poor Ox so he turned left. Ox had no years and would not remember. To the left the lights were white, and Picasso ran, his decorous veil sinuous behind him. He felt although he was not aware of the mathematical joy of corridors bending at the proper moment. His eyes shone. Ox salaamed in his wake.

Eventually there was only one white corridor and it led to only one room. This was their game. Picasso took off his veils and stood naked. Clothes were for travelling. Dwight, standing in the final room, said, "Now I'll tell you the third lesson."

Picasso was flushed from running and the game of lessons.

He said, "I have run and run and exercised my legs and my talent for individual initiative. But I didn't see Father."

"My little Ass," said Dwight fondly but without particular intonation, being an Ox. Dwight had no years and already Ass for short was almost as tall, and his shoulders were straight and Dwight's sloped from his thin neck. Ass was learning pride. Dwight taught him. His teeth showed as he grinned. He had run away with much physical exertion. Dwight had told him about the cost of energy. Dwight nor any other Ox was allowed to run and run and waste energy like Ass. And Dwight was not strong. If he broke the law and ran all the way to black Wall and Father's corridor and back by the arduous route of the white lights,

he would lie panting and in great pain, because his lungs had grown tiny.

"This is the third lesson," said Dwight. "We are the crew of the Starship *Lunge*." Ass did not blink, having no preconceptions to be shattered; and a month later, after he had run away for the fourth and last time, and after Dwight had said, "The fourth lesson is, you will die before our ship, the Starship *Lunge*, reaches landfall, but I am now authorized to extend you the privileges of the cinema," not even then did Ass blink or have bad dreams in the nursery.

"What is the cinema?"

Ass was smiling because it was a new thing.

But Dwight was almost sad, and when he was almost sad he was almost querulous, a memory of his mortal time perhaps. His broad lips flapped blub-blub. He looked Ass almost in the eye and said, "But I will not die."

"Well of course not. Poor Ox," said Picasso Perkins III, whose father was the Captain of the *Lunge*. And he ran off to see what cinema was.

Picasso sat alone in the projection room and watched the educational tape. It was about human biology, and birth control. He was very moved but there was no one to discuss his reaction with.

A second-generation Ox groped for words. Picasso was a teenager with pimples, and was impatient. Having viewed Shakespeare on the cinema and read much rhetoric, being born to command, he said, "Come, Ox, out out out out out with it," widening his eyes and shifting on Hilda, the masseuse-couch.

Picasso was widely-read, being alone.

"Cushy, cushy, cushy," murmured Hilda beneath him, intending him to relax.

Picasso slapped her off.

Ox managed, "Dwight," then got out, its eyes filling with tears, "X," meaning emergency.

"Where?" sitting upright smoothly, unfastening Hilda, long and taut from daily exercise, arching over hunched knobby Ox. He smiled what was intended to be a bittersweet smile, the smile of the grown man faced once again with the fragility of existence; but could not manage this. He knew it. Ox began to stutter at his waist. "WHERE?"

And finally Ox managed where, "Level K, Room 17." A spittle-stutter. Picasso began to move. And the second-generation Ox wept in swift Picasso's wake, loving mortals.

The Lord ran swiftly through the simulated gravity down the corridors of his childhood and then down the corridors of the Oxen, past the first-generation quarters, then the second, and finally, crouching now, down to shadowy level K, knowing his way from the charts he had studied. Stooped Dwight awaited him at the entrance to Room 17. "Thank you, my Lord."

For Picasso wore the Star now, since the previous month, and could not now be commanded.

"Well?" It meant something to Picasso to think it meant something to Dwight, and he added, "Well, my friend?"

Dwight knuckled to Picasso's Star. One month ago Picasso's intercom had spat at him and had said, "My boy, this is your Father. You are now of sufficient age, you have from this moment the run of the ship. Go to your room." And the Star was on his bed. "Place the Star on your wrist." He did so, and it adhered. "Do not come forward until you are called."

Picasso was in command below now. Dwight said, "Two of the third generation have bred, and the Star must be present for me to act."

"How long ago?"

"Minutes only."

They crouched into the low room. The mother, poor Ox, hunkered by the newly-born monster, which ran at the orifices and mewled and which had already begun to age. The pregnancy had taken only a few weeks, Picasso knew from his educational tapes. The fat of its belly began to disappear. Shins and elbows poked through the grey flesh. The umbilical cord shrivelled into dust. The monster opened its mouth to scream and the teeth that had just poked through its pale gums fell to the floor.

They splintered soundlessly on the floor.

"Fast," said Picasso Perkins III. Dwight aimed and his laser bisected and trisected the tiny aged shape, whose hands and feet had already begun to break off. "Fast," said Picasso, vomiting into a corner of the room, "fast."

The mother, who had forgotten the monster, smiled softly from her cot.

He beckoned Dwight into the corridor. He could not stand upright. He wiped at his mouth. The Star shone in the low dusk.

"Why wasn't she sterilized?"

Dwight smiled.

"*Dwight.* Why wasn't she sterilized? Where is the doctor? Where is the Doctor of the Ship?"

And at this point Picasso's inner ear deserted him, and his head spun, and he thought, holding on, *the Doctor of the Ship is forward with Father and must not be disturbed.*

Dwight smiled from his world.

And he said, "Doctor?" He smiled. He said, "Oh, the Doctor. My Lord, the Doctor of the Ship is dead. My Lord, you are the Doctor."

His doe eyes did not change.

Above them suddenly the intercom rattled and blew out sparks. It had rarely sounded and had gone bad. Picasso had not previously wondered why, but now the inner ear of habit had gone, and he was naked, he was holding on by dumb will, his hand touched his Star by rote and he looked up at the intercom, which continued to rattle. Dwight kneeled calmly. Had Dwight forgotten the monster?

The intercom burbled and sighed and shut up. Picasso stared down at Dwight, and he said, "Have you forgotten what happened in there?" jerking his arm backwards to the four-foot door.

"No, my Lord. But it is done."

His drooping face remained placid, and the intercom became coherent.

"Picasso Perkins," it said in the voice of his father.

"Father?"

"Speak up, boy."

"Sir?"

"That's better. Now what was the trouble?"

"A fourth-generation baby. It was taken care of."

"Destroyed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good work, son."

The intercom whined.

"Father?"

"Well?" a bit impatiently.

"Father, where is the Doctor of the Ship?"

The intercom died.

"Father?"

Picasso could hear the muted hubbub of the distant Oxen, and Dwight's rapid shallow breathing, but the intercom was dead.

He banged his fist at the wall, which noiselessly absorbed the shock.

He began to run.

He ran for an hour. He was panting, he had wasted much energy. He sat on his large bed. The walls whinnied in on him for his balance had gone.

For if there was no Doctor of the Ship . . .

He screwed his eyes shut.

The intercom sparked.

"Father?"

He was on his feet, he had leapt to his feet.

"My son," said the intercom, "I think it is time we met. Come forward now. On the double."

"Sir."

His heart pounded with what he could only assume was joyful anticipation.

The question of the Doctor had unleashed the dozens of other questions, would they be answered? Of course his feeling was one of joyful anticipation.

He kept himself from thinking. He slipped into his veils, slim Picasso, and ran ran ran off smoothly, mortals being allowed the light fantastic.

He toed the third-generation guard, who kneeled blinking awake.

"Aside," and the Star shone.

Picasso began to mount the spiral ramp, he mounted and turned, mounted and turned, past doors marked NO in glowing letters. He had read *Alice in Wonderland* on paper and tried to chuckle as he passed the doors marked NO, but his larynx caught and he began to cough. The passage spiralled up and grew brighter. Dwight would lie panting twenty turns back, having tiny lungs.

The passage levelled on to shimmering broadloom, and soft music from the intercom.

"You are here," his father's voice through the music, "turn right at the third door."

He did. The black door swung inwards and he swallowed

his throat and entered. A tall man stood with raised arm signifying peace beside a maroon console.

"My son," said the tall man, who was wrinkled. Picasso's educational films had shown old men.

"Sir," he said.

And stepped closer.

"No further, if you please," said his father.

And Picasso's mouth opened. His tall body shook dissonantly, his mouth opened and shut and opened. He took another step.

"PLEASE," said his father.

But Picasso could see through his father. His father's white uniform had a maroon console showing through it, an aluminium knob twinkled through his father's waist.

"Move back," said his father, but this time his lips didn't move, and his voice was stereophonic.

"Father," said Picasso Perkins III.

His father faded out, going *click* as he disappeared.

He opened his eyes at the azure ceiling. His head ached where it had struck the broadloom. Soft music mooned from the hidden speakers. He sat.

"Captain Perkins," said the stereophonic voice of his father.

He dizzied himself turning his head to search, but could see nothing.

"What is this?" he yelled.

"Please," said the voice, "I shall explain."

Picasso moved himself slowly to a chair, which purred soothingly until it had adjusted itself to his form.

"Well?" imperiously, for he had been born to command, after all.

The stereophonic voice said, "This is the computer unit of the Starship *Lunge*, and requests permission to use the first person singular."

Picasso remembered about computer ethics from his educational tapes and said, "Permission granted."

"I thank you. May I first make my apologies. I did not realize that the simulation—to your left—" and his father appeared again, waveringly and shamefaced, "was so weak."

"Turn off the music," said Picasso, and there was silence.

"I had hoped to break it to you gradually," continued the voice, "that you were the only mortal left aboard the *Lunge*, but as you are now aware I was unsuccessful. I am unfortunately wearing out, and you have not the knowledge to repair me. That, and the lack of a Doctor, he died with your father, years ago, have made imperative your rapid initiation into your adult role. I must again apologize for the clumsiness with which your coming of age has been handled."

The chair crooned to Picasso, who had begun to cry.

"You are the Captain of the Starship *Lunge*," the voice went on obliviously, "landfall can be expected in approximately sixty years, the journey is in its seventieth year, and your cargo, deepfrozen behind the doors marked NO, is several thousand rabbits impregnated with livestock and personnel sufficient to colonize the system to which we are heading. As the several million foetuses in the wombs of these rabbits must be extracted immediately upon defrosting, the three upper chambers contain a deepfrozen medical team, all mortals."

"What happened?" said Picasso, "did I faint or did you knock me out?"

"You fainted, Captain, immediately after the simulacrum of your father dissolved."

"You may continue with your briefing," said Picasso, having come back to himself.

"Thank you, sir. In addition to the mortal medical team, there is in the first chamber another mortal. He is the pilot, and barring an emergency he must not be awoken until the final month before landfall. That is in his contract. You will of course understand the reason for that clause."

"No," said Picasso, and it seemed he was trying to make the computer uncomfortable, "no, I don't understand at all."

"Well," said the computer, its voice dutifully hesitant, "the four members of the original crew were accorded the benefits and the adulation of befitting heroes and heroines before their departure. Should you reach landfall alive you will be accorded the same. Your grandparents were volunteers, Captain."

"Who will accord me adulation, Uncle Computer," said Picasso, "the rabbits?"

His father's voice chuckled benignly.

Picasso Perkins III, Captain of the Starship *Lunge*, noticed from his wet cheeks that he had been crying. He began to turn his back on Uncle Computer, but realized that it was all around him.

"What is in store for me, Uncle Computer?"

"I am afraid there is not a great deal in store for you, Captain. Unless you Opt you will grow old in this solitary environment and eventually you will die. You come of a race of heroes," said the computer, exaggerating, "and in my opinion you will not Opt, you will not leave the Starship *Lunge* helpless."

"I could always awaken the pilot," said Picasso, but he knew that he would not do this. He had been bred to command, pride had been bred into him by the educational tapes, he had no desire to become an Ox and look at the world forever passing with a doe smile. If he awoke the pilot he would lose his ship, too. After all, he was God.

"You must not awaken the pilot," said the computer, "that would be a breach of contract."

"That is certainly true," said Picasso, Lord of Oxen, and, he had discovered, rabbits.

"Then you agree," said the computer.

"I have no choice," said Picasso, and stood out of his humming chair. "I think it is time for you to tell me about the death of my parents."

"Yes," said the computer. "Close your eyes."

Picasso did so.

"Now look," said the computer.

Picasso did so, and sat down again.

Two old men and two old women stood before him politely. They were all somewhat translucent. After nodding to Picasso courteously, they began to go about what seemed to be their daily tasks.

"These are real heroes," said Uncle Computer warmly, "they were in their mid-twenties when they left Earth, never to see her again, never to see again the land of their birth, their native soil, their parents and kith, and kin. Here you see them engaged in their daily pursuits. They have been doing what you see them doing there for many years. In ten years, alas, they will all be dead."

"Who wrote your script?" said Picasso.

There was a miffed silence.

"Well?"

"It's a free adaptation from some notes set down by Dwight Mulligan before he Opted," said the computer. "May I continue?"

"Please."

The figures began sadly to fade out.

"They died," said the computer, "this band of men and women, these heroes of the latter days of Earth, these pioneers, and were succeeded by their offspring. Here they are now."

Five figures strode to the space before Picasso, three men and two women.

"The Mulligans," who nodded briskly, one woman and two men, one of the men familiar like an old toothache and then Picasso realized that it was Dwight before he'd Opted, "and the Perkins's," and the Perkins's stepped forward, his father and his mother, and his mother was so beautiful and so sinuous and sad that tears once again started to Picasso's eyes.

But she was as translucent as any of them.

Dwight had a thin, hungry face, he was sallow and beanstalky ; he turned and left the room.

"As you are aware, Dwight Mulligan Opted, leaving the two couples."

"He was a little *de trop*?"

"I believe that was the case," said the computer. "But to continue, you realize that your mother was Mulligan's sister, and Mulligan's wife your father's sister."

"Go on," said Picasso.

"Disaster did not strike until after the death of Mrs. Mulligan," and the simulacrum vanished in a sweet despond. The simulacrum Mulligan began immediately to lour and sulk in one corner of the room. His sister, Picasso's mother, busied herself with a translucent and willowy dance, and Picasso's father kept time by clapping his hands. They laughed soundlessly to one another. Then Mulligan suddenly stepped between the happily married couple, and he and his sister started to waltz stridingly about the room. Captain Perkins stood very straight and stern. He put his hand to his forehead in agony. Then he stepped over to the whizzing incestuous couple and cut in. Mulligan pointed

his finger at the door and sneered volumes. Picasso's mother cupped her face in her hands and keened mournfully. Captain Perkins punched Mulligan in the face.

"Yea team," said Picasso Perkins III.

The two men took up a boxing stance. They sparred back and forth until Captain Perkins' superior strength and skill began to tell, and Mulligan began to drip blood that dripped to the floor but faded before it touched the broadloom. Picasso's mother sat on the floor in desperate straits.

Then they all faded out so abruptly that they *clicked*.

"What?" said Picasso.

"The rest of the story takes place beyond the limits of this room, unfortunately," said the computer. "Doctor Mulligan, in a morose frenzy, detached a lifeboat and disappeared. Your father did not take kindly to your birth, eight months later, although your mother protested her innocence. The last scene was melancholy and brief. Your mother, who had always been unstable, though of the highest intelligence, disappeared one day in the second lifeboat, leaving you in Dwight's care. Your father committed suicide, after leaving you a short message."

"What was the message?"

A piece of paper drifted from the ceiling and landed on Picasso's knee. He turned it over and read his father's message:

"Son, if you take my advice you'll stay clear of women. Your loving father."

Picasso walked over to the console. He had much to learn about all those knobs.

"You will teach me what I need to know."

"I am your servant," said Uncle Computer.

Oxen in three rows according to generation stood or hunched to attention; third-generation Oxen, having tired immediately, were allowed to sit. This was the crew of the Starship *Lunge*. On the dais in the centre of the hall stood Picasso, and beside him improved simulations of his father, his mother and Dr. Mulligan. They were quarrelling.

"Shut up," said Picasso, "I'll turn you off."

Despite everything Picasso had learned over the past seven years, the computer unit was more and more demonstrating the random whimsy and punchiness that the

educational tapes had indicated were the signs of incremental senility. Soon it would die. But it shut up.

To work then, thought Picasso.

Picasso Perkins, Jr., Captain of the Starship *Lunge*, stepped forward no longer translucent and addressed his crew. "We are gathered here," he said eloquently, a recorded message, "here, here, here . . ." getting stuck. Picasso kicked the small console behind him. "Sorry," it whispered mechanically, being no one but itself. The Oxen stood in their seventh heaven. The third-generation slept smiling. "We are gathered here on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the birth of a man. This man is Picasso Perkins III." He chuckled indulgently. "My mortal son." Oxen clapped. The third-generation, awoken by the happy sound, went grunt, meaning yes.

The Captain spread his arms for quiet.

"Soon I shall die, my children," he said.

The third-generation went grunt, meaning yes, in the calm silence.

The Captain pointed to the large softly-contoured device in the far corner of the room.

"My children," he said, "the time has come for my son, who is mortal, to make his decision. Yes, my dear son," said the Captain turning to Picasso, "it is time for you to declare whether or not you intend to Opt. Will you become immortal, my son?" Picasso watched Dwight from the corner of his eye; Dwight who had chosen peace forever, and the stunted form that resulted from the gene changes; Dwight who had chosen to relinquish his frontal lobe to live forever. "My son," repeated the Captain, "will you become immortal?" All Oxen stared attentively at their Lords, and Dwight was as they were. Did Dwight remember that Primary Option required a human doctor? "Do you Opt?"

The hall rested in silence.

"I do not Opt."

All Oxen knelt.

"My children," said Picasso Perkins III uncomfortably. Slowly and smiling, the most natural thing in the world, his father and his mother and Dr. Mulligan faded out, they were gone, no Ox noticed, and the Captain of the Starship

Lunge stepped from the dais and walked among his crew, touching them and they were blessed thereby.

He would beat at chess, he would bed a whore, he would argue with his peers, he would win a free election, he would . . .

His dreams grew worse. The rabbits exploded into livestock and personnel who touched his frail corpse and he went *click*.

As the years passed he slept less, and sometimes the rabbits came at him when he was awake. All Oxen knelt at his coming and wept when he had passed, but he was a distant Lord, although he loved them. They were as they had been, and they lived because he watered them and fed them. He lasered fourteen more fourth-generation babies, for whom the buildup of mutated gene commands backfired, all good things come to an end. Dwight said what he had said the year before. The supply of films was finite.

One night he gave the dwindling computer certain taxing commands, and that night his ashen and beautiful mother came to him in his room and he locked the door. The next morning he called for the computer but it had died from the strain.

"I am alone," he muttered to himself.

When he was seventy-eight he tottered at the brink of blackness Dwight need never feel. He injected himself against his cancers but hovered at the edge of the limitless vertigo, and it was almost welcome. How long?

He moved slowly to the control room, and time had passed. Sometimes he lost track. There were only months to go, but he would be dead.

"Is this why I am mortal?"

He snorted petulantly and was forced to catch his breath in the chair he had always chosen, because he liked its tone of voice. Since Hilda the masseuse had broken this chair was the only voice left. He had put some of Hilda's tapes into it and now it murmured, "Cushy cushy cushy."

He fell into a catnap.

When he awoke he remembered that there was something he must do before he died. It hurt when he moved. He stood finally before the first door marked NO. He put his key in the slot and the operating panel came into view. He

pushed the proper sequence and began the ten-hour process that would defrost the pilot.

He put on his travelling veils.

He walked among his Oxen, their sweet eyes followed him as he strode. They forgot their small duties until he had gone. He found Dwight. "I would not have lasted without you. Goodby, Dwight."

"Good-bye," said Dwight softly with doe eyes.

"My friend," said Picasso Perkins III, but Dwight had begun to doze.

He moved slowly back past the doors marked NO, where the rabbits slept frozen, carrying their populations. He hurried as much as that was possible. He had seen rabbits on the educational tapes and they had sharp teeth, they were rodents, they frightened him.

He sat at the maroon console. The pilot would come. The pilot would know the way. The cancers pained his breast.

He heard a sound. He had been asleep.

"My life has been of value. That is why I am mortal."

But it had been a dream of gnashing rabbits?

Footsteps.

Picasso switched off the music. He remembered how irritating that music could be. He stood by the maroon console with his right arm raised signifying peace.

The door slid open.

And an enormous rabbit walked in.

The pilot, a fit young man, pulled off his huge helmet and absently folded its projections into place. He was shocked. He stared down at the body of the man who had keeled over as soon as he entered the room. He dropped the defrost helmet to the floor and leaned over the corpse. His hands were sweating and he wiped them off on his puffy white defrost suit. The room stank of age. He thought, what in God's name has happened here.

He bustled about the ship, he verified the course to landfall, he found no other mortals, he noted that the computer unit had defuncted. He didn't like Oxen, not at all—possibly because he had almost Opted the year before, subjective time—but they gazed after him beatifically. He

strode heavily back to the control room. He gazed at the dead mortal, and began to comprehend. The crazy old screwed-up face with its wide-open toothless mouth. How long had that old man been alone? He buzzed for a platoon of Oxen after closing the eyelids of the corpse and folding the shrivelled arms across the eaten chest. He began to comprehend. He would never know the details, but the result lay before him. Alone with a bunch of Oxen, he thought, good God. He thought, there are all sorts of heroes.

EDITORIAL—*continued from page* 3

of which is superior to most of the books in front of us at time of writing. J. G. Ballard has had five short story collections published in the U.S.A. and only two in Britain. Fritz Leiber's work is hardly represented. Samuel R. Delany, a talented up-and-coming writer, has not been published here at all. It is two years since Brian Aldiss's best novel *Greybeard* appeared in hardcover. Where is the paperback? These are random examples. There are many more. The publishers may complain that they are not being offered this work. We fear that they are playing safe and are wary of new material and that this attitude will ultimately result in falling sales. If, indeed, they are not receiving the new work, then they should begin to look for it, not wait until it turns up. It could be too late by then.

Michael Moorcock

flesh of my flesh

jerrold james mundis

JOHN SKILMAN STUMBLED, felt a sharp blow against his knee, then was tumbling down the wooded slope, his hands groping, his legs tangling. Something jabbed his ribs and he cried out. The thorns of a raspberry bush tore at his face. Shoulders flat against the ground, his body suspended in mid-somersault, he saw the moon through the tainted sky, red, and before his back and legs struck the ground and catapulted his upper body into the night, to strike again, he thought: . . . *and the entire moon became as blood.*

He no longer resisted his fall, rather stared at the filtered moon when his body turned that way, and repeated the phrase . . . *moon* . . . down . . . *became* . . . flame, flame in his ankle, bones of fire . . . *as blood.* There was blood

upon his face when he sprawled to a halt on the floor of the valley. He felt that. He touched his face and then in the moonlight saw the dark shadow upon the pale, ulcered skin of his hand. There was something to do. Something about the blood, but he could not think of it.

He turned his head and stared back at the summit of the ridge. It seemed to him impossible that it was no higher, for he knew that he had fallen from some place more elevated, soaring, celestial, and that the fall had been long and arduous. He had fallen, yes.

Above the ridge he saw the glow, the red glow of vengeance reaching its hungry, its holy and spiritual fingers up toward the fixed stars from whence it had been hurled.

Oh, Lord God, Lamb of God, in whose blood the sins of the world shall be washed away! Only words, an affirmation, homage, homage and supplication could help him now. He pushed himself to his knees, and his lips, which were swollen and in one place torn, began to move, but he could think of no words. It was dark in his brain and the darkness frightened him. He struck his breast in anguish, for the anger of the Lord was terrible and His wrath was quick.

"Thou art the Alpha and the Omega," he rasped. Tears swelled from his eyes and ran down his cheeks, cutting furrows in the dirt and mixing with the congealing blood. "The One who is and who was and who is coming, the Almighty."

John Skilman wept. The sobs pulled from his bony chest, pulled deeply and with pain, then plunged into the recesses of his lungs and hurled themselves out as moist, hacking coughs which threw him to the ground, twisted. Blood and spittle dribbled out of his mouth on to the earth, and when finally a lull in the attack came, his body seized upon it quickly and sank into unconsciousness.

Ten hours he lay without movement. At a little after daybreak, he moaned. But the pain was too great, too much was unknown, and mostly there was a whimpering fear: his consciousness would not respond—instead, it hid itself in a dream, retreating, moving backward along the path John Skilman had made. In his dream he went up the slope, across the wide back of the ridge, down through the tangled brittle underbrush, past the sickened pines and the maples

and the oaks with their curling leaves. He paused by the edge of the great swamp, at the side of a tiny skeleton. The small bones . . . the fragile bones . . . gross birds had picked them dry . . . once they had lived . . . At the moment of recognition he turned away and the fact became a fiction, less than that, for it ceased to exist. He went through the swamp, slowly, where swollen red-skinned frogs bobbed in stagnant pools, and snakes lay decaying. The only sounds came from screeching songbirds, ragged-feathered, their feet blistered. There were, at moments, also the chomping mud slurps of blind and maddened muskrats.

After many miles he came to a small farm on the gentle slope of a hill. He saw a dark figure moving behind a patient horse, furrowing the ground, and he rushed forward, fusing joyously with his own image.

Through the afternoon Skilman ploughed and as the day lengthened, he stopped once to mop his forehead, then with a rag he wiped the horse's chest, legs and flanks. When night had come and hay had been pitched for the horse and the two cows, he stood before the house and looked out to the field. Though he saw only darkness, he smiled: tomorrow he could begin seeding.

He passed through the door and went first to the infant's crib. He saw that Matthew was asleep, as he had been two hours ago when John had last looked in, so he went to prepare his supper. He stood a moment before a small table which held a worn Bible and a double picture-frame. He bowed his head and asked for guidance and for strength, then took the frame into his hands and looked upon the likeness of his wife.

The empty glass on the opposing section caused his mind to reconstruct the photograph that had once rested there. He struggled against it: to dwell on the memory of his daughter was sinful, for Rachel was ugly in the eyes of the Lord. Yet he saw her dark hair and the large eyes her mother had given her. He could not plug his ears to the sound of her laughter as she played with Matthew, and the infant's happy gurgling.

Lord, forgive me for having brought such a creature into the world, he prayed. According to Thy command didst I chastise her, my God, until her very flesh bled beneath the

lash, and into the night I drove her, my own daughter, a Jezebel, a harlot from the temples of Babylon. Thou saw fit that I should discover her and her defiler in mine own house, mixing sacrilege with carnality in the holy presence of Thy written word, and that I should be the instrument of Thy vengeance. I pray for the salvation of her soul. Thy will be done.

When his sparse meal was finished, John Skilman washed and dried the utensils and returned them to their proper places, then went and sat beside the crib of his son. Two hours passed in silence while he watched the child, wishing it would wake and turn upon him the happy eyes with which it used to greet its sister.

With the death of his wife, Skilman had experienced a deep sense of loss. He had looked upon her as he looked upon the seasons, always present, their continued existence an unconscious assumption, something that simply *was*. He had rarely thought of her while she lived: now there were few moments when he did not think of her. His memories were limited to corporeal images—her brown hair, worn severely as he told her it should be; her throat, pale even against the tight lace collar that circled it; translucent skin, with a fine network of tiny blue veins. He could see only her physical being, for he had known her in no other way. He had looked into her eyes, but had never seen what lay beyond them. She had trembled in his arms, and he had responded according to nature; only once had he wondered why she still trembled when all was done, and then it was but a moment's curiosity. He fed her, he clothed her, he provided shelter: spirituality, to John Skilman, was something that existed between God and man.

Now that Rachel, too, was gone, Skilman filled his days with work, but against the nights he was powerless. Solitude and isolation tore at him like angry demons. He had carved this farm into the hillside to take himself away from the dwellings and habitats of man. Wherever man gathered, there also came the horned serpent. But the hand of the Unholy One had reached even this far. Into the heart of a neighbour's son the consuming flame of lust had been kindled, and through it, Rachel became unclean.

A cry from the infant broke Skilman's thoughts. He closed the child in his arms and was happy, but an instant

later he began to brood over the melancholy that had possessed Matthew in the last few months. Rachel seemed to have taken with her much of the child's happiness. He attended to its needs, then replaced it in the crib where it quietly sucked from a bottle. Skilman opened the Bible and while Matthew satisfied his hunger, read to him from the book of Isaiah.

Something wrenched the dream of John Skilman.

It resisted. It wished to stay in the glow of the lamp, with the man and the baby.

A sick and ulcerous form, in a valley miles away, groaned.

Pain attacked and began to dissolve the dream. In an attempt to perpetuate itself, it fled the house and for a moment floated in the yard, free and suspended, and saw another day, saw suddenly a brilliant whiteness usurp the sun. From the city to the east, a flaming cloud rose. Again a flash, another pillar of fire. John Skilman was running from the fields. A great hammer of wind bowed the trees, ripped shingles from the barn and hurled Skilman to the ground. A roar, a third sheet of white. Skilman was in the house, grabbing the infant to his breast.

"And another came forth," he said, *"a fiery-coloured horse; and to the one seated upon it there was granted to take peace away from the earth so that they should slaughter one another; and a great sword was given him."*

Bearing the infant, Skilman plunged into the woods as the sword of God wielded by the hands of men struck a fifth and sixth time. In Skilman's ears rang the blare of trumpets and the sound of hooves as the Horsemen rode upon the earth.

The dream died.

Skilman opened his eyes and the red sun sent lancets of fire into them. He covered his face with his hand and rolled on to his stomach. When he took his hand away, the grey skin of his palm sloughed off and clung wetly across his eyes. He picked with numbed fingers until he grasped it and pulled it free.

He struggled to his knees, then by leaning against a tree managed to rise to his feet. He stepped forward and fell.

When he found that he could not stand, he began to crawl up the opposing slope.

Beneath the rags that had been his shirt he saw the ulcers which covered most of his arms. There were pustules also. He touched one with an exploratory finger: it exploded, then oozed a thick white liquid from its crater. He made a sound. The sound meant nothing.

He tried with his brain to make sounds of significance, but he could not. When he reached the peak of the incline, he stopped for a moment.

"And I heard a loud voice out of the sanctuary say to the seven angels: 'Go and pour out the seven bowls of the anger of God into the earth.'" His tongue was cracked and the words were barely discernible, but that mattered little. This sound was right, he felt that it was so.

He crawled in the shadows where the sun could not stir the fire that lay upon his back and burned within his head. There was a dryness in his mouth and throat, and at intervals he stopped to lick moisture from his arms. Once he sniffed about the carcass of a dead animal, then ate part of it.

His goal was more sensation than idea. It was late afternoon when he thought: *The feast of the Lord hath been prepared, and He waiteth my coming.* For a while he crawled with renewed strength.

The sun dropped lower in the sky until from a vantage point Skilman saw it resting upon the pines of the horizon. He stared at it and his field of vision was lost in flames. The heat swelled with each beat of his pulse, then relaxed, then grew, and he began to sway with its rhythm. It pulled him, it wanted him: it was love and it was peace, and it shone over the new land, the Kingdom of God. Diamonds glittered there, and gold, rare flowers scented the air and hosts of angels, archangels, seraphim and cherubim sang the glory and the goodness of God.

Skilman's head bobbed up and down. He mumbled, "Yea, Lord, thy servant comes," and he followed the sun.

Darkness came, the moon rose and Skilman went on. The flesh of his elbows and knees was torn, and on his left knee an exposed piece of bone dug into the dirt as he crawled. A rolling layer of orange clouds obscured the moon, and his surroundings became visible only as

shadows. A wind sprang up. It howled through the trees, ripping away limbs, raising dust whorls from the powdery undergrowth and hurling small pieces of the dying forest against Skilman. A slender twig lodged itself in the spongy tissue of his shoulder, but he did not notice it. An explosion shook the night and a white finger arched down, touched a tall pine, then disappeared, the tree in flames. A sharp, bullet-like sheet of rain swept down and across Skilman. He raised himself to his knees and held his arms toward the heavens.

"Eloi, Eloi!" he cried.

He pitched forward. The rain beat down steadily, turning the earth around him into mud. The thin shoulders of John Skilman shuddered as he wept. Never had the tormented Elijah been abandoned thus, so desolate, so terribly sickened and alone. He fell into the half-world that hovers between sleep and consciousness, and in the fury of the storm he saw another night, by the edge of the swamp, a foul stench convulsing his stomach, the long sword and the plagues of God slashing his mind and body. Then, too, had he wailed in the darkness, and a voice had come to him.

". . . your son, your only son whom you so love . . ."

He bound the infant hand and foot and put him upon the altar. The slaughtering knife was high.

He saw no angel, there was no ram tangled in the thickets which he could catch by its horns.

"MATTHEW!"

The storm had passed, leaving a drifting mist in its wake. The night was quiet. He lay in the mud, trying to remember what it was that had awakened him, but he could not. He rose to his hands and knees. His flesh was puckered and white from the rain. When he touched it, it was like moss in the swamp and fell away in little pieces. Vaguely he felt that it should not be like this. He had no sense of time, only the red moon which seemed to move across the sky, pulling him. It was a companion as he crawled and he made sounds to it.

During the night his hand came down on a small dying thing, and the thing squealed and plunged needle-teeth into Skilman's wrist. He felt the movement, but no pain. He laid down next to it and watched it and made friendly

noises even though he knew it was not of his kind. After a while, though, it lay still. He prodded it. It would not move, so, saddened, he left. Some time, he felt, there had been many living things, there had been many like himself. He was not sure of this, but he wanted to think it had been so, and that it would be again.

A grey light edged slowly into the darkness and the new day found Skilman at the lip of a sluggish stream. Small bodies of corruption drifted lazily across the viscous surface. There was fire within him, flaming in his chest and smouldering in his stomach and bowels. His brain was a red ember. He dipped his face into the stream, drank, then crawled a few feet from it and went to sleep.

It was early afternoon when he awoke. His vision was blurred and his body was heavy, pressed to the earth. He breathed quickly and shallowly and each inspiration was a new pain. With effort he pulled himself to a sitting position: a whirling vertigo overcame him and he was nauseous. His head rolled from side to side. He blinked rapidly. The ground beneath him seemed to sway. His mouth hung slackly and he moaned. The sunlight rippled, wave-like, and he raised his eyes to the sky to stare at the sun which was revolving. Dully he watched it gain momentum, then, when it was a spinning, blinding disc, he saw it tear loose from its orbit and plummet toward the earth, scorching. The forest burst into flames and his skin began to crackle. He screamed and dragged himself to the stream. The water boiled and great clouds of steam rose from it. Trees flamed, groaned, crashed to the earth, and above the holocaust rang bell-toned trumpets as God cleansed the entire earth with the terrible fire of his wrath.

In a final moment of terror Skilman raised himself from the waters and held up his arms to greet his God. His fingers were spread and reaching and from his body the water of the stream mixed with the fluid of his sores and ran down his legs.

He looked . . . and lo! . . . from the ashes and ruin were rising heavy-leafed shade trees, blossoming flowers, and the earth became fertile and began to put forth grass, and vegetation bore seed according to its kind and the trees yielded fruit. A mist went up from the earth and it watered the entire surface of the ground.

Into the man's nostrils was breathed a new life and his body became whole and clean again.

Now a river issued from the mountains to water the place and from there it began to be parted and it became, as it were, four heads ; Pishon which circles the entire land of Havilah where there is gold and bdellium gum and the onyx stone, and the second was Gihon, and the third Hiddekel, and the last was the Euphrates.

The heavens parted and a golden voice said to the man, "From every tree of the garden you may eat to satisfaction."

Accordingly, he crossed the river and went into the garden. From the ground was forming every wild beast of the field and every flying creature of the heavens, and the man began to give them names. Throughout the day did he name them, joyfully, and when he was done and the darkness began to settle again, a gentle lion laid down beneath a tree and offered itself as a pillow for the man's head. A lamb nestled near at hand and bleated in pleasure as the man stroked the soft wool of its back. And every beast brought him fruit and things to eat and rested them at his feet, and some brought him broad leaves on which were clear drops of water. The man was happy except for one thing, which was that within the garden he had found no helper that was a complement of him. A tear rolled down his cheek. The beasts drew round him and licked his hands and offered comfort to him, but the man was lonely.

During the first hours of the night he watched the moon, and he spoke to Him who had created him and told Him of his need. After he had done this the man arose and walked through the garden, but still he found no likeness unto himself. Weary, he laid down to sleep, and his rest was troubled. A dream came to him, and when it had left he awakened. He pondered a while, for the dream was unclear. He looked up at the many luminaries in the sky: they saw that the man's face was troubled and they pitied him. Again the dream was sent and this time he was gladdened, for now he understood. He picked himself from the cool grass and walked about until he found a sharp stone, then he sat down beside it, and his heart was full.

Dawn broke through the polluted atmosphere with

brilliant rainbow shafts. The golden-red light crept slowly across the dead forest. It reached first the rigid, talon-like fingers, then lengthened down the withered arm and fell across the grinning face, it warmed the throat and shoulders and spread across the fragile chest. It passed a gaping, crusted wound, paused briefly on the slender bone which rested beside the still form, then moved on.

The Thinking Seat

PETER TATE

ALL THEIR HOVER-hopping way along the autoshelf, they could watch how the sea crawled mechanically on the imported beaches.

They tumbled through Playa 107, a nucleus in a cloud of Spanish-simulant dust, unseeing and unseen as neon-spotters probed the customer belt and fisherballoons jigged in the wind of their passing.

"Join the Firmfishers," begged an audio-streamer across the main street. "Begin with Endoswim," pleaded the rubber-buoy suit sellers.

Charlie Haldane came out on to the porch of his brain-chance casino on the promenade of Playa 108. His rada-route had shown him the hopper moving along the coast at constant speed. The nearer it comes, the better the chance for me, he thought.

He stepped off the sidewalk and propped himself carefully against the "UQ for IQ" display board. He rattled a pair of formulae dice in his pocket.

Came the sound of a breeze—Charlie was old enough to remember the sound and fashion the metaphor. The hopper came unveiled through the calella spiderwork, across the watered streets.

Charlie moved into the middle of the road and cleared his throat. The hopper was upon him.

"Minds meet within . . ." he began.

The slipstream spun him back on to the sidewalk, his pi tie tangled about his scrawny neck. That was the last he saw of Dulles and Rada and they of him.

"I read an Aldiss once," said Dulles, talking for his own sake and unconcerned whether Rada could hear. "Folk on the beaches with their deck-chairs turned inland."

He paused. He prompted himself. "Glub-glub people on a day-trip to the landside."

He looked down again on the lifeless, gelatine ocean.

Rada chuckled behind him. She might have heard or might simply be enjoying the prospect of Playa 109, somewhere ahead along the autoshelf, the latest of the instant happiness resorts that had mushroomed on California's Pacific Coast.

She chuckled again. Dulles was moved to inquire the reason.

"You think of some things," she said. "Glub-glub people."

"It's true—well, it's printed fiction, paper reality."

Dulles had grown accustomed to the obscurities, the mystery memories of words read and scenes absorbed which pushed themselves unbidden into his mind at sudden appropriate moments. But he still thrilled to their relevance. Lack of outside appreciation left him unreasonably impatient.

"It is all written," he said again.

"All right, all right."

Rada, her arms circling his waist, exerted an affectionate pressure. She was aware of Dulles's introversion. She was also aware that sometimes it rode painfully close to a vicious self-indulgence.

Studying him deeply in the short time she had known him, she had attributed his attitude, in turn, to shyness, to lack of interest, to self-love, to habitual detachment. The latter, she felt, was about as close as she would ever get—

at least she could reconcile it with his infrequent displays of emotion.

Playa 109 differed only in minute detail from the other beachtowns up and down the coast. They could have stopped at any, but the attraction of 109 was in its newness, in the chance of finding something its ancestors lacked.

Dulles guided the hopper into the first scootel, dispatched the air curtain and closed the finger-texture lock on the control panel.

He dismounted, slapping life back into his legs. Then he gave Rada his arm while she tested stiff knee-joints.

They walked together to the check-in unit.

Rada watched while he button-booked their reservation. She experienced a purely feminine pang when, after he identified himself, she saw he had digitised two single rooms and the unit had registered assent.

Ten years ago, only the most masochistic swimmer would have ventured on to the chilly beaches of Western California, and the country behind the coast was fast becoming depopulated as farmers forsook their hapless spreads and moved into the cities in search of bread.

The shore had been narrow, rocky, virtually straight.

Now, the U.S. Republic, on instruction of the congressional committee on retreating tourism, had constructed offshore islands and bars, breakwaters and lagoons and small curving bays and sprinkled fine white sand along the coastline in an effort to emulate the Mediterranean beaches that had taken all the holiday trade.

By fortunate accident, carry-off water from the nuclear desalinization plant at Point Concepcion, fed into the sea by a long pipe-line half a mile offshore together with by-produced brine from the plant, had combined with the sea to raise water temperature within several miles of the coast to a constant 70 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit.

Summer fogs, onshore winds had all gone. So had majestic spray-falls and exciting tides. The holiday people had come—but there were those amongst them who mourned the passing of the wild state sea.

The combers had their own bar on the outskirts of Playa 109. They were combers only by appearance and

conversation, because where there was no rise and fall, there was little glamour along the high-water mark.

But they did, at least, have their own culture. Gogan, his hands forever moving over the whorled conch shell that carried an echo of the past, had a poetry that somehow conveyed their thoughts and scripted their souls.

Today, however, bearded Gogan was silent with his eyes fixed on the autoshelf.

He saw the hopper pass and noted how the girl clasped the waist of a man with a face he knew rather than recognised.

He wanted the girl instantly. Not in any physical sense, but because it would be a compliment to his ego to have her so ; because the man and he were alike, probably even in what they desired of women. He wanted not so much to gain the girl but to deprive the man.

He watched the hopper until it disappeared around a curve in the shelf. Only when it passed out of sight did he wonder whether it might not keep right on going.

And then he looked back at the lifeless sea and the words started.

"Me in sea-spin," he said.

"Cool it," shouted Vangoj, his literary lieutenant. "Cool everything. Gogan speaks with the tongue of tongues."

Gogan rose from his stained wooden chair and planted his left buttock on the balcony rail.

"Man, men, I'm morbid, men," he said.
"To drown to be slow hair
To be fish minstrelsy
One eye to flick and stare
The fathomed wreck to see—
Forever down to drown
Descend the squid's conclave
Black roof the whale's belly
Oyster floor the grave—"

"It's coming on strong," shouted Vangoj in the studied pause for effect.

"It's beginning to begin," echoed the disciples. "Happen it will happen."

"—To breathe in Neptune's cup
Nudge gale and tempest
Feel the mermaid up
To stay to pin my hair
On the seahorse's stirrup—"

He stood up abruptly to signify the conclusion. He bowed his head. The weatherworn trestle tables swayed and crumpled beneath the heavy hand of acclaim.

The combers left them where they had fallen. There was one ritual still to come.

Gogan held the huge conch to his ear, one hand supporting its weight while the other moved in the fashion of a caress across the surface.

"Simpatico sea," he said finally. "Water with us."

The combers set about restoring the tables.

Dulles and Rada, out walking as Playa 109 began its loud night's journey into day, passed the bingo settlement and its tight-lipped, nervous residents without a second glance.

They took the rotor road through the midway but were disenchanted. Rada, though she would have felt more comfortable blaming the state on the morose Dulles, had to admit that there was little to draw them from the road.

Dulles was thinking, It isn't me. Something outside me takes the words away. Something about the world makes me afraid to speak for fear of ridicule.

He watched the faces around him, the parents guiding children up helter-skelter steps, the hard youths and harder girls scowling through the tri-di tent and making jagged progress in the shatter palace; the empty, fortyish women heading for the bingo settlement with its promise of money and light and greedy camaraderie.

"Futile," he said.

Rada drew closer in to him, anxious that she should not miss a word.

"No depth," she said, trying to match his thought pattern. "People going nowhere, wasting time like mad."

But Dulles, cast in upon himself, was aware of only one speaker. Until conscience prevailed and he thought, Why take it out on Rada? Why take it out on me?

He stopped and turned her to face him gently.

"I'm sorry," he said, and kissed her lightly, noting the way she clung at the least opportunity, sad and sick with his own inadequacy.

"Fun by order jars on me. These people don't have the capacity to feel real happiness."

"And you do, I suppose. You with the long face are the really happy one."

She chided with no thought of malice. He kissed her again.

"No," he said, "I'm not happy. I was never meant to be happy. I am just sad and stupidly deep enough to realise that the other people are missing something despite their laughter. And I call them shallow with such contempt because I envy them their ignorance."

Rada guided him out of the fairground and on to the coast road.

There was little relief in the autoshelf, hacked out of the cliff-face, but she could just make out a path winding upward to some ruined split-levels that had once been retreats for the artists and admen of the fifties and sixties.

Beyond them, the path disappeared over the rim of the cliff. There might be some kind of silence up there.

She led Dulles unprotesting up the path and the canned clamour of Playa 109 receded as they climbed.

At one time, there must have been a sizable settlement on the cliff-top. Trees had been carefully planted to provide a break from the wind and Swedish-style houses—now fallen away—nestled in the hollows.

They could see that rusty railings followed the line of the cliff-edge. An area in the rough centre of the settlement had been kept clear of development.

Though it was long overgrown, it was still possible to see that this had been some kind of play area. Mysterious shoulders of tubular steel thrust upward to support the night.

Dulles and Rada, hand in hand, walked toward them.

Chains dangled from horizontal spars. At the end of the chains, wooden . . .

"Seats?" asked Dulles.

"They're the right height," said Rada. She ran a hand over one of the two seats.

"They seem to be worn smooth by some regular kind of use."

She sat on one of the seats experimentally. The chains wailed in protest, but held. She lifted her feet clear of the ground. The seat began a gentle, swinging motion. She clasped the chains and flung her weight backwards.

"On the pendulum principle," said Dulles. "Do you think I could . . ."

"Try," said Rada. "If you break one, who will miss it?"

He sat down and began his own rocking. He threw himself backwards. Some child instinct made him stiffen his legs as he returned forward, promoting the impetus.

The rusted joints shrieked above them like sea-birds wakened suddenly and frightened without the sun.

"You know what?" he shouted. He was above her, below her, above her again before she called back, "What?"

And by that time, all he wanted to say was, "What what? What did I ask you?"

Back of the promenade away from the noise, one came upon a graceful, sound-proofed menagerie of many abstract spires where expressionists of wind and limb gathered to produce their gospels.

And there were always those with respect for what might be a talent because it was too diffuse and introvert to be seen for what it really was, those who would pay money for a part of it, just in case.

It was on these amateur afficionados that Gogan depended for his livelihood. His comber friends, appreciative perhaps, had no money to throw.

Each night, Gogan entered the poetry zone and introduced himself to the open mouths with one hand clasping a loud-hailer and the other cradling his shell.

There he was tonight, head picked out by a messianic spotlight, beginning the words.

"Writ on a corner in Playa 109," he said. "Writ in my head, that is."

The audience applauded dutifully and waited.

"There's a truth limits man,
A truth prevents his going any farther
The world is changing

The world knows it's changing
Heavy is the sorrow of the day
The old have the look of doom
The young mistake their fate in that look
This is truth
But it isn't all truth . . ."

The crowd murmured, still seeking the stamp of genius. So far there was only a certain turn of phrase, a spontaneity.

"Life has meaning
But I do not know that meaning
Even when I felt it were meaningless
I hoped and prayed and sought a meaning
It wasn't all frolic poesy
There were dues to pay
Summoning Death and God
I'd a wild dare to tackle them . . ."

Dulles and Rada, exploring the backbone of Playa 109, still heady and close with their shared elevation, came suddenly upon the art centre and moved into it, attracted by the Voice through deserted sculpture zones, paint zones, glass zones, to the poetry.

"I'd an innocence, I'd a seriousness," they heard Gogan say as they settled into seats.

"I'd a humour save me from amateur philosophy
I am able to contradict my beliefs
I am able able
Because I want to know the meaning of everything
Yet sit I like a brokenness
Moaning: On what responsibility
I put on thee Gogan
Death and God
Hard hard it's hard
I learned life were no dream
I learned truth deceived
Man is not God
Life is a century
Death an instant . . ."

Dulles applauded, intrigued by the familiarity of the words.

It could well have been that they expressed his feelings in much the same way that he expressed them to himself. He dug for a more specific reference, found none and was content to allow that Gogan had spoken his own thoughts.

He watched the man with a new interest. Shortly, the words came again.

"Writ with one buttock on the balcony of Gogan's Bar," said Gogan. "Writ on the buttock. So I'll quote."

There were a few awkward laughs.

Gogan placed the loudhailer on the floor and draped himself over a reversed chair, his hands moving on the ridged surface of the shell.

"I know I'm one who even if he does see the light still won't be completely all right and good for that," he said in one breath.

"Yesterday I believed in man today I don't and tomorrow"—he paused—"tomorrow's a toss-up."

"Some days I see all people
In deep pain with life
And other days
I see them victors
Living things great as to question their living . . ."

Gogan fell silent as Vangoj, just back from the scootel, fluttered on to the stage and pressed a piece of paper into his hand.

The paper contained one word—"Dulles." Gogan shielded his eyes against the spotlight. He saw the girl before he saw the man, and having seen her, knew what he must do.

"To see back and forth like that and not go crazy is something," he said.

"Something Dulles ran home to jump out of . . ."

Dulles heard his name but had so committed himself that the reference passed almost unregistered . . .

"And you, Mr. Dulles,
What say you in all your bronze watchings?
What wandering now?

Tell they man is in deep pain with life?
Man is the victory of life?"

Rada shifted uncomfortably on her chair.

"How much more of this . . ." she began. But she could see Dulles was beyond mere words. She stood up. He paid no attention. She made a pretence of stretching her legs, careful that her movement should interfere with his view of the stage.

When he offered no reaction, she sat down again. Gogan had watched the pantomime with a faint amusement.

"Big Fat Hairy Vision of Evil," he shouted, to recall attention.

"Evil evil evil
World is evil
Life is evil
All is evil
If I ride the horse of hate
With its evil hooded eye
Turning world to evil
Evil is death warmed over
Evil is Live spelled backwards
Evil is lamb burning bright
Evil is love fried upon a spit
And turned upon itself . . ."

"I'm leaving," said Rada with sudden decision. "You can stay if you like."

Dulles did not even notice her departure. It was some time later that he turned to find the adjoining seat empty. He pondered only momentarily before he let his eyes drift back to the stage.

"I am paranoid about evil," said Gogan.

"Evil is forty years old
And in my wrong mind
Evil is being out of my head
Asleep or awake
Evil passes blind
Thru filtertips of mind
In pot visions

Where a horse walks
A horse who wants to eat me . . ."

Now, fewer of Gogan's utterances had any special significance for Dulles. Occasionally, a phrase took a handhold on his mental structure and clung to his thoughts.

"Ah but I will not look out
Before that date
Thru Horse's fur windows
And vomit landscapes . . ."

Gogan bowed lazily to the scattered thunder of applause, rose from the chair and slouched off the stage. The crowd began to disperse, but Dulles sat where he had fallen seeming hours earlier. A shadow hovered above him. Gogan lowered himself into the seat once occupied by Rada.

"So your chick blew," he said.

The words grated on Dulles. They were shaped for effect and unoriginal, foreign to a poet.

"The lady who was with me left," he said. "Yes, that's right."

"Why?"

Dulles did not feel disposed to be diplomatic with the man.

"I got the impression she didn't like your—poetry."

Gogan was unperturbed.

"Such people exist. But you stayed on."

"Yes. I found something in what you said."

"You were meant to."

"Why me particularly?"

"You look like somebody who could make use of my philosophy."

"So you pick us out and then bestow your benefits."

Dulles did not like Gogan. That was definite, the most tangible emotion Dulles had felt for some considerable time.

"You don't have to like me," said Gogan, as though he had read the thoughts. Lesser men might have been confused into giving him credit for the power. Dulles knew as much had been evident in his tone.

"It doesn't matter to me," Gogan added. "You felt some

kind of attraction or you wouldn't have stayed. You can admit what you like."

Dulles watched the plump hands moving on the shell.

"It probably doesn't," he said. Gogan brooded for perhaps fifteen seconds. "Doesn't what?" he said finally.

"Matter to you."

Another pause. The hall had emptied and now the silence hung heavy beneath the dome.

"Anyhow," said Dulles with emphasis and became immediately engrossed in the echoing progress of the three syllables around the sector.

"I want the girl," said Gogan.

"I'm sorry . . ."

"I'm going to get her."

"Which girl? The girl who was with me?"

"No less."

"Why?"

Dulles was ashamed of the stupidity of the question immediately he had framed it.

"All right," he said quickly, "I can work that out for myself. Why tell me?"

"I like to give fair warning."

"Thanks." Dulles was amused. He could not see Rada accepting the advances of the man whose language she had so lately rejected. "As long as you don't expect me to give her to you with all due ceremony and a chorus of Muses."

"Like it might be an idea, man," said Gogan acidly. "Or like you might not know anything about it."

"And you can drop the cool talk," said Dulles. "It sounds as phoney as some of your poetry."

"Listen, dad," Gogan flared, "unless you're inside me saying it, you don't have any right to call it phoney. Besides . . ."

He stood up and seemed to be waiting for Dulles to follow, but Dulles made no move. "You just as well come," said Gogan. "In her eyes, you've committed yourself to me anyhow. Or don't you understand that?"

"When I need a translation of your works, I'll let you know. As for committing myself, the id belongs to me and nobody else."

"You may have trouble convincing her of that. Now come and see us."

And since it seemed like a dare, Dulles went.

They sat on the edge of Gogan's bar and watched the sky lightening. There had been a rough general introduction at the beginning, but no attempt to draw Dulles into the recreations of the group.

He sat with his back to them, only too conscious of the psychotropic boosts that travelled from arm to arm and the various behaviours that followed. Gogan sat beside him, wordless.

He felt something like an early affection for the man. At least Gogan seemed to realise that conversation, far from promoting thought, pushed it right out of existence.

When the California sun hoisted itself on bloody fingers over the cliffs behind Playa 109, he decided he should return to the scootel.

He stood up, stiffly. Gogan took his feet off the railings which bordered the open-air bar.

"Home time?" he asked.

"No percentage in staying," said Dulles. "I don't know what I was supposed to learn . . ."

"Nothing," cut in Gogan. "Nothing at all. So don't fall in the sticky sea. And I hope your lady is waiting faithfully for you."

"It's not that kind of relationship," said Dulles, more as an explanation than as a protest.

He descended to the autoshelf and followed the pedistrip around the bay. It was early and the walker mechanism had not been started for the day. He used his legs and was glad of the exercise.

When he eventually let himself into his room, Rada was waiting.

He wondered how she had entered and then realised that, since her time-pass key was identical to his own she had access to his room and he to hers.

"Good morning," he said loosely.

Rada watched him scornfully.

"The poet's just sat down," she said.

"No. As a matter of fact . . ."

"As a matter of fact, you went back to his place and he gave a private recital."

"You know."

"It was obvious from the start. I didn't have to follow you."

"What was obvious?"

"The way that bearded . . . minstrel attracted you."

Dulles struggled silently for the means to explain.

"It wasn't so much the man," he said.

"Of course not."

". . . as the words he used."

"He set you up," Rada said contemptuously. "He seduced you."

"Seduced me! For crying out loud . . ."

"Oh, don't come the dewy-eyed innocent. There must be some reason why I don't interest you."

Dulles could feel the conversation receding beyond his grasp.

"But I am interested in you . . ."

"As what? As a salve to your flagging ego because you are so ashamed of yourself?"

"Look . . ."

"I've sat here all night and I've finally figured it out. You don't have to explain anything to me. It is a chemical accident. It is nobody's fault. They . . . you . . . are to be pitied. I know all the excuses . . ."

"Shut up," shouted Dulles, his voice shrill with panic. "It isn't like that at all. There was nothing. We just sat. We didn't even speak. I don't know why he asked me there even, because there seemed no purpose . . ."

"Dulles," said Rada coldly, "there is no need for you to say anything. I'm sorry I imposed myself on you for so long."

She stood up and walked towards the door. Dulles made a weak attempt to halt her but she brushed him aside.

"Rada," he said quietly, "God, Rada, listen to me."

But she was gone. And suddenly, Dulles knew Gogan's purpose.

He swung alone in the darkness, gripping tightly to his vehicle. He could have been somewhere at the back of space, but his feet dangled a scant few inches above the ground, occasionally brushing tall blades of grass.

Gogan, he thought, aware of a certain insight that came

with the tidal movement. An unhappy man who would seek to deprive everyone of their ration of joy.

He sees a couple, he works to make them separate. He finds a smile, he slaps it with words until it becomes a down-turned mouth. Hence the poetry of pessimism, the preoccupation with evil and its deserts.

The rusty hinges tolled their agreement above his head.

He pushed hard with his feet; he thrust himself backwards, propelling the swing higher and higher until the joints jerked in protest and he had to slow down, his stomach chilled with the prospect of accidental launching.

He folded his arms around the chains and clasped his hands. He let the swing take him where it would.

Then there was Rada. The exchange that morning had been short and violent and that, in itself, might be a virtue.

When she came to consider it coldly, Rada would realise that her case was purely circumstantial. A night of waiting could produce all manner of delusions. Next time he saw her, she would probably apologise.

He drifted gently above the grass. There was no moon but his eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness.

The other swing hung motionless a few feet from his own. There was little about it now to remind him that he and Rada once rode feet-first to the stars.

Sadness welled momentarily. He kicked his own swing back into motion savagely and closed his eyes, trusting the breeze thus produced to free his mind of Rada.

And it did.

In this great creaking cradle, he thought of tumbling seas far beyond the feeble trickle on the beaches below. His mind climbed trees and clung to leafy rigging as it teetered above the tilting earth.

He was a child flying on a great black, weeping bird who showed him wonderful lands veiled in darkness, the bird wailing for the sun.

Suddenly, sunlit memories trembled about him and he picked at them, laughing, thrusting, kicking the present out of sight.

And then, just as suddenly, they were gone and he was alone in darkness, with the swing losing impetus and he was listening desperately to scrabbling footsteps and two voices.

He flung himself from the swing and landed on his knees in the grass. He moved at a crouch away from the swings, the one still idling to a halt, the other so still that it could be impaled to the ground.

He reached an ancient roundabout, feeling the hand-rails quiver beneath his touch. He sat down on its footboard so that his head would not be outlined in the night's dull luminance. Then he waited.

"Someone's been here," said the girl, feeling the movement still in the left-hand swing.

"But gone, baby," said the man. "That's the main thing, gone."

They sat down. They levered with feet against the ground. They thrust and recoiled, recoiled and thrust and the twin swings bore them speedily aloft.

"I'm a silkie on a survey," shouted the man.

"I'm a siren swinging for kicks," shouted the girl.

"Kicksville. The sea folk cometh . . ."

For Dulles, slinking away across the moist grass, the straining joints complained like battered bed-springs.

Not too early next morning, Dulles skipped from the pedistrip and climbed the steps to Gogan's bar.

In full daylight it was unjumbled only because it lay under the enormity of the sky. Three-legged tables, two-legged chairs were heaped in one corner.

Well-scattered among the trestles, combers lay with their heads cradled on ragged sleeves.

Gogan sat alone at the bar, swilling a drink in a glass. He raised a hand in greeting as Dulles weaved his way across the rock floor. Dulles nodded in return.

"Drink?"

Dulles was about to agree when he noted the begrimed state of the glass. "Too early," he said. "Sun and schnapps don't mix for me."

Gogan refilled his own glass.

"I knew you'd come back," he said.

"Why?"

"Whatever you may not find here, daddy, what you *do* find is closer to what you want than you'll find anywhere else."

"And what do I want?"

"Something sincere. Something—ephemeral. You're a dreamer like I am. You don't care very much for the way things are going."

"So far so good. But you could tell that by the way I stopped to listen the other night. Dreamers are pretty unsubtle people . . ."

"What did your girl say afterwards?"

Gogan's expression was one of polite curiosity. Dulles wondered how best to answer, but did not let his indecision show.

"Nothing," he said eventually. "I told you before I don't have to answer to her."

Gogan, the man on his swing—strange how it had suddenly become *his* swing—Gogan would know he was lying. Let him wonder whether there was a reason beyond pride for the lie. Let him puzzle out the Dulles strategy.

"Great," said Gogan almost without pause. "You have her well-trained."

"She knows the way things are . . . Anyhow, I didn't come here to talk about my romance. I've been noticing the way you seem to mourn the sea."

"That's true," said Gogan, surprised. "This lukewarm treacle stinks of syntheticism. All this bloody high-powered bliss up and down the coast. It makes me sick to my stomach . . ."

" 'Vomiting landscapes'," said Dulles.

"One time I was," said Gogan. "One time when there was some kind of spontaneity to push the brush."

"But surely you could have kept on painting—inspiration went out of the art a long time ago. The great criterion was output at the end of it, not style . . ."

"Output was the great thing," said Gogan. "But painting takes too long. I have a certain turn of phrase. People pay to hear me talk—some even call it poetry. To me it's more of a language."

He moved his arm absently on the bar counter and jogged the great conch at his elbow. He used both hands in the attempt to prevent it falling on the floor. His glass shattered but he paid it no attention.

He simply cast around for another and, finding none, put the bottle to his mouth and swallowed it noisily. His free hand grasped the shell, the fingers quivering slightly.

He saw Dulles was eyeing it curiously.

"I read a book once," he said. "About these kids marooned on a desert island with some kind of a war going on. They found a shell like this"—he opened his hand so Dulles could see more of the shell—"and they said whoever held it had freedom of speech. That didn't last very long. This—well, maybe it makes me some kind of spokesman. At least, Vangoj and the rest seem to think so . . . Vangoj—God, what a crazy name . . . He used to be a painter, too. Stopped when I did . . . Stopped because I did.

"Anyhow, the shell . . . I guess it's more because it reminds me of what this California coastline used to be like—you know? Rugged seascapes, artists' split-levels, beaches where you could bathe raw and nobody see you. Seaside where you could do most things. Seaside where the sea *was* beside you and not some soulless bit of jelly oozing apologetically over the sand . . . s-s-s-l-l-l-p-p-p . . . sorry . . . s-s-s-l-l-l-p-p-p . . . sorry . . . s-s-s-l-l-l-p-p-p- . . . sorry . . ."

Gogan paused. He took a long swallow from the bottle and then took the shell in both hands.

"Walking into the summer cold sea arms folded," he said, "trying to keep the wave and frolicy bather splashings from further chilling him. He moves as if not to—but I know he'll eventually go with a NOW IN! and become warm . . ."

Dulles, apparently listening impressed was trying to hold on to as many of the words as he could so that he could feed them into his memory banks later—perhaps up on the swing. They had to mean something to him.

"That curious warm is all too familiar
As when frogs from fish kicked
And fins winged flew
And whatever it was decided lungs
And a chance in the change above the sea.

"There he wades millions of years that are legs
Back into that biggest and strangest of wombs
He stands—the sea is up to his belly button—
He would it nothing more than a holiday's dip—"

Now Dulles was examining the texture of the verse. It

was a little more onomatopaeic than the stuff Gogan had given out at the centre—a change of style, maybe, if poets could change style.

"But I feel he's algae for skin
He who calls the dinosaur his unfortunate brother
And what with crawling anthropods
Oh they're only bathers on a summer shore
Yet it is possible to drown in a surface of air
Deem the entire earth one NOW IN! and fated out
again . . ."

The clapping came from among the trestle tables. Vangoj had raised his head at the sound of his master's voice.

"Man," he stated, "isn't he the cat's behind? Isn't he the talking end?"

"I guess you could say that," said Dulles.

Gogan had the shell held high and was brushing it with his lips.

"You came about the sea," he reminded Dulles. "Have you got some kind of plan?"

"It could be. I need time to work on it—but there's a way of bringing the chill back to these waters, and starting a few waves. I'm sure of it."

"How?"

"As I said, I need time. These elements are artificially produced. It is a matter of putting the producers out of action. I'll come back and tell you when I've worked it out in detail."

"Try for a bit of fog," Gogan called after him as he descended the steps. "Think drizzle."

Dulles thought drizzle all the way back around the autoshelf, while the sun hung like a memento dollar in the steely sky.

For two days Rada had been elusive, moving through the corridors of the scootel at unlikely times and always—outside or inside—away from Dulles.

He finally ran her to ground, his belly full of swallowed pride, at her bedroom trimirror, preparing to be off again.

"You know it isn't right, what you think," he said. She went on with her make-up.

He sat down on the edge of the bed and considered his approach. He wanted Rada to believe him, but again there was the inner struggle to recognise what prompted the desire. Was it a need for her affection? Somehow that didn't seem to matter, if it ever had. I don't like to be considered queer, thought Dulles finally and left it at that.

"What do I have to do to prove what I say?" he asked.

Rada patted her hair and examined her eyes in the mirror.

"Well?"

"Surely that's up to you," she said, sharply. "I'm not bound to give it a thought."

"God, don't make it any easier for me . . ."

"Should I?"

Such negative argument wore Dulles down very quickly.

"All right, I'll prove it. Then perhaps you'll be sorry you ever believed such a thing in the beginning."

"Put yourself in my place," she countered, and added, "but of course, you can't. You're your own man. You don't answer to anybody."

"When did . . ." he let slip and then steadied himself. He was against telling her that he knew of her pairing with Gogan because it made her position that much stronger, made her that much more able to whip him with the fact of his impotence. He rephrased his reply.

"When a girl demands an answer all the time, she takes too much on herself," he said. "When I give you an explanation for anything, you must believe what I say. Otherwise I just stop saying anything. Do you understand that?"

She shrugged as though she did not care to put her mind to it.

He wanted to strike some kind of fire into her stony, thin-lipped face. Bitch to put him through it. Bitch to bring him to the position where he had to say, "I did this because . . ."

"I'll show you," he said. "Conclusively. At least, it will be conclusive to me. It will be up to you to recognise it for what it is."

"I don't have time," said Rada shortly.

She yearned for him to display some emotion indicative of affection. If he knew about Gogan, why didn't he say so? Why, for God's sake, couldn't he be jealous?

She had her suspicions about the slight movement she had found in the swing. But if Dulles did not admit the knowledge, she could not. Whether he knew or whether he did not, a revelation would be too hurtful to him. How much did she have to hurt him before he responded?

"Make it soon, daddy," she said with a brusqueness that betrayed no trace of the nausea it brought. "When I see my Gogan tonight, we'll be swinging and swinging."

But Dulles only rose and left the room quickly, closing the door with deliberate dignity behind him.

"Formation of hurricanes can be contained if excess heating and evaporation of ocean waters in the regions of hurricane genesis can be eliminated. A thin layer of organic salt of magnesium spread on the sea surface will deflect part of sunlight back into space before it has a chance to heat the water . . ."

Dulles spun wondrously under the metallic sky, over the dusty cliff top, listening to the words clicking away in his brain.

Just let them run their sweet course, he told himself. No prompting. No wrenching details out of context. You'll ruin the machinery . . .

The fluency faltered momentarily, tripped on a word. Conception. No, Concepcion—Point Concepcion, not three miles away.

"Huge dual-purpose plant for simultaneously converting sea water to fresh water and generating very large blocks of electric power, using nuclear reactor as energy source . . ."

Dulles, tumbling for earth, was scooped up by a gigantic hand at the seat of his pants and hurled feet first at the sky.

"Heat generated by plant must be carried off," he shouted out loud. "So must brine . . . Mixed, decontaminated, returned to ocean. Result? Warm, sticky sea . . ."

And then . . . Dulles was only aware of his mobile surroundings—not because he wanted to be so aware, but because the access to his memory banks had closed. Slam!

He shook his head, opened his eyes and let the breeze of his progress play on his pupils. It was no good.

He posed his mind a question. How does one put a nuclear reactor out of action?

He waited a long time for the answer, until the swing fell to wandering idly from side to side and his feet dragged unnoticed in the turf.

How?

He goaded the wing into a more violent movement. He searched feverishly through snippets stored in the cerebellum cellar. He searched in vain.

The plain fact is, he told himself with disappointment lying like a sickness on his stomach—I never found out. I don't know. This bastard swing . . .

He cursed it as a man might scourge a lover who betrayed him. He did not pause to wonder at the way he cursed it or the reason its impotence bothered him.

What the hell does it matter? he thought finally. And paused.

"What the hell does it matter?" he asked out loud. "What the hell does it matter what I tell them so long as I get them there?"

He ran his hand caressingly over the framework and brushed the sharp dust of old paint fondly from his fingers.

"Writ on the steps of Puerto Rican Harlem," said his own voice, unbidden. "Writ in Horace Greely Square. 'Something Miss Brody ran home to jump out of . . . And you, Mr. Greeley, what say you in all your bronze watchings . . .'

"Gregory Corso . . . 'Ah but i will not look out before that date thru Horse's fur windows and vomit landscapes!' Lawrence Ferlinghetti. The beat poets. The Greenwich Villagers at the vile Vanguard . . ."

Walking rapidly away from the playground, bound for the cliff-path, he threw a last glance over his shoulder. Thanks for the bonus, he thought. Thanks for showing me my real friend in need.

He had a plan and a prospect and Rada could make what she would of his motives.

Three miles along the pedistrip, he drew a tattered piece of paper from his pocket and made a rough outline of the humped and sullen building that squatted uncomfortably amidst the terrain of Point Concepcion.

On his way back to the scootel, he purchased a lunch pail, an old-fashioned alarm clock. And—as an afterthought—a small damp-resistant bag of potassium nitrate.

Dulles drew for a long time in the thin layer of blown sand on the bar's rock floor. When he had finished, he stood back.

"It isn't very satisfactory," he said. He drew a wavy perimeter around the outline.

"A slight fence," he said. "Not even electrified. No photo-cell circuits to avoid. The place is wide open. Who would want to raid a power-station, anyhow?"

Gogan hunched his shoulders. "Just a few sea-nuts like us, daddy," he said, only for the resultant laughter.

Dulles marked an "X" on one of the two connections between station and sea, the wider of the two.

"The intake," he said loosely. "The other one is the tube that carries the heat and the brine back out to sea. Some kind of explosion planted in the intake would jam the station's function for a considerable time. Long enough, maybe, for the Heads to realise that there may be people not quite sympathetic with their ideas."

"Look," said Vangoj, "do we really want to stop the power supply? Could we not just damage the pipe that runs the heat into the sea?"

It seemed to make sense to him.

"And how long do you think your tides and tempests would last then?" Dulles spat at him.

"Man's right," said Gogan. "We have to do this thing right, people."

Rada squeezed between Dulles and Gogan and stared down at the drawing.

"Looks like fun," she said.

"No women," said Dulles. "At least . . ." He questioned his own hasty insistence. Surely, she had been . . . Well, he wished her no harm. He guessed he owed her that much. He looked hard at Gogan. "Whether you take your women with you is up to you."

"What do you mean? Aren't you coming?"

"No. And as far as the fate of this girl lies with me, I say she's not going either."

Rada was silent. She wanted to watch reactions. She was aware that Dulles seemed to be making some kind of provision for her, but she needed to know more about his intentions.

"Why?" Gogan was suspicious.

"I have to be frank with you," said Dulles. "I have been in trouble with the Heads before. They know me as a peace-lover, a hostile element to hostility. They know I may turn up anywhere with my fixation for past tradition."

"Is that a fact?" said Gogan, still not convinced.

"I'll go with you if you like. But I'm warning you now—they'll have a photosolid file and an odorstat of me at that plant. You are new to them—your scent won't register as known. You won't have your own little spot on the electro-latency chart. I tell you, people—once you're known these days, there's no such thing as mistaken identity."

Gogan hesitated. The others waited for his response.

"Now you've told us the plan, we don't really need you," he said. "But you smell like a coward to me."

Dulles shoved him hard with one shoulder and snatched the shell from the bar.

"That doesn't sound like gratitude to me," he said softly. He swung the shell between lax fingers. He let it drop a few inches towards the floor and caught it. Gogan started forward, stopped, fell back.

Dulles slammed the conch down hard on the bar-top, but kept his hand on it. Gogan shuddered. The others, watching Dulles, were not witness to their leader's agony.

"Gregory Corso," said Dulles, tossing the shell from hand to hand. "Lawrence Ferlinghetti. And Allen Ginsberg, too, I'll bet . . ."

"Stop," shouted Gogan. In the silence, only the conch moved, flickering as sunlight caught its crystalline surface.

"All right, you're no coward," said Gogan. "We have to talk."

He turned and walked away to a remote corner of the bar. Dulles followed, still tossing the shell up into the air.

"Give me the shell," said Gogan. "I'm pleading, daddy. A man has to have something."

"Your fetishism is no concern of mine," said Dulles. "The shell bit is the least of your perversions."

Gogan tugged the cork from a bottle he held and passed it to Dulles in a pretence of friendship. "Well, what's on your mind?"

"I want you to do this job," said Dulles, "and I don't see how you can get out of it. Not unless you want me to

start telling your buddies about your second-hand soul. All those old beat poets from Greenwich Village."

He grinned mirthlessly. "I don't say the beat boys would enjoy your free helping from their works, but they'd give you all credit for performance . . ."

"What's the rub?" asked Gogan.

"'Where's the rub?'" Dulles corrected him. "If we're getting Shakespeare, let's get him right."

"Shit," said Gogan. "What's the catch? Who gets killed? What's the catch?"

"No danger," said Dulles. "I just want a clear field with Rada, if you like. While you're helping yourselves to the seaside, I'll be up and away with the girl. It's that simple."

Gogan regarded him silently.

"I don't have to believe you . . ."

"True. But you have to do something. We can't just stand like this forever."

"They'll do as you say," said Gogan finally. "But when we come back, I'll get you somehow. What have you got against me, anyhow? Are you Jack Kerouac's grandson or something?"

"Nothing so devious. Just a night on the swings for two. And many, many swings after that."

"I thought, too," said Gogan, "that there'd been somebody there."

"But the main thing was that I'd gone," said Dulles. "That was the main thing."

"Great. Right, well how about my shell?"

"When you come back," said Dulles.

"But . . ."

"People," Dulles shouted. "I've got something to tell you about Gogan."

He propelled the man towards them with one hand and fondled the shell with the other.

"All right," said Gogan. He raised his voice. "We're going tomorrow morning. There'll be an evening tide."

"Those names," said Vangoj, later. "What's the signif?"

"People we knew," said Gogan. "People we didn't know we both knew."

Gogan stumbled aimlessly across the rocks towards Point Concepcion. He staggered to one peak and looked down on

the massive desalinization plant. Late, he realised he was against the sky-line and dropped to his stomach, only to swear volubly as the conch, hidden in his shirt, dug into his chest.

Dulles had been still sleeping when he and the others left camp. Rada who had crept close to him in the night, appeared to have pushed the shell gently from his hand so that she could link her fingers to his as they slumbered.

Gogan had nearly stepped on the shell as he and the combers had left the bar and fallen upon it and fondled its substantial weight with an alacrity that had not gone altogether unnoticed.

The others strung out in a ragged line behind him now, came up level, crawling the last few feet to the summit.

Vangoj carried the satchel that contained the charge. Dulles had sealed the lunch pail and handed it to them with the strict warning that it was not to be opened. From within came an ominous hollow ticking. Vangoj bellied his way across to Gogan. "Can you see anything that looks like an intake?" he asked.

Gogan ran an inexperienced eye over the plant layout and then along the line of the sea.

"If we follow the beach," he said, "we'll come across it."

He had little enthusiasm for the manoeuvre and it showed, though he must not, he knew, transmit his reluctance to the others.

He must not allow the others cause to suspect that he might have been forced into the jaunt.

They might begin to doubt his ability to lead, never really proven and very shaky since Dulles had silenced him with his shell play.

"Let's move," he said, in an effort to sound decisive. He rose and, crouching slightly, loped down the rough incline and on to the ribbon of beach that separated the plant from the sea.

He moved quickly on the firm sand, forcing the others to hurry, hoping that they would read resolution into his haste.

They rattled across the steel catwalk that bridged a dull plastic pipe that ran from the bowels of the humming plant out along the sea-bed.

"Waste water carrier," said Vangoj breathlessly.

Gogan was vaguely aware of something unusual. It was a while before he realised that small waves were breaking on the beach.

He pointed them out to Vangoj.

"Some disturbance in the water," said Vangoj, the expert. "Like a whirlpool. Like suction."

"Then we must be close to the intake."

The party ran bent almost double, though it was more of a gesture to the non-existent air of conspiracy than a useful pose.

There was no cover for them and, had they thought about it, they would have been more deceptive wandering in their usual comber fashion along the tide mark.

But Gogan was concerned solely with planting the explosive and getting back to his bar and the comfort of a bottle.

The non-committal sound of moving water was loud now. The group mounted the concrete staging and clustered around the barred door of the mekapump unit.

They did a slow circuit of the building in search of a means of access and resolved finally that a window would have to be broken. They looked for some missile to shatter the glass and found none.

Then Vangoj brought his eyes to rest on the shell Gogan had now transferred to his right hand.

"We'll have to use that."

"No bloody fear."

"Look, we all know how much you value it. We'll be careful. Just a small hole near the shutter."

Gogan surrendered the shell. Vangoj sent glass flying with one brisk movement, thrust his hand inside the window and opened the shutter. Then he pulled himself up over the steel frame.

"No need to go in," he said. "I can just drop the bomb gently in among the machinery and we'll go. Dulles says it's all set. If anything goes wrong, it is his fault."

Gogan grunted, dusting his shell clean of Vangoj's finger prints and licking the slight abrasion the jagged glass had made on the conch's surface. It lay heavy in his hands. Nerves, he explained to himself. Even breathing is an effort. Unconscious muscular tension.

"Right."

Vangoj was back amongst them and they jumped to the sand and ran hard along the beach. They stopped at the point where Gogan had first noted the movement in the sea.

They squatted along the edge of the sea, listening to the delicate wash and suck of the water.

"My sea-ghost rise
and slower hair," said Gogan as he began to relax.
The others hummed contentedly.

"I make it about sixty seconds," said Vangoj. "Then comes the sea to life."

". . . silverstreaks my eyes
Up up I whirl
And wonder where."

Gogan pressed the shell to his lips. He placed it to his ear. "Man! Let's hear the tide begin," he said.

But the shell was dumb. He dug into it with his fingers and located powder.

"It's full up with something," he said.

"Sand," said Vangoj. "I bet that crumb, Dulles, filled it with sand just for devilment. Put it down in the shallows and let the sea wash it out . . . Hey . . ." He paused and his face took on an expression of delight. "A ritual cleansing ceremony, what else? Dump it in the shallows, Daddy Gogan, and we'll adopt attitudes of worship."

Gogan placed the shell gently on the wet sand at the edge of the sea. He turned its mouth to face the oncoming water.

The combers knelt in a horseshoe, hands clasped and heads bowed. In the silence, only the sea shuddered.

"The prayer, Daddy," prompted Vangoj. "The cleansing prayer. Ten seconds."

"To—to breathe in Neptune's cup," said Gogan, tasting salt on his lips.

"Nudge gale and tempest
Feel the mermaid up . . ."

"Now," yelled Vangoj.

And as the first terrible water trickled into its beckoning mouth, the shell exploded.

"If a man can be murderous for me," observed Rada, unthinking, watching her shadow grow beanstalk tall as she rode up and away from the earth.

"What?" Dulles, hard against his squat shadow had heard only broken syllables as he swooped past her, bound for landfall.

"What what? STOP!" shouted Rada.

Dulles steadied himself against the earth and waited. She drifted ever more slowly past his right side. She did not speak until she was entirely still.

"You said you'd do something positive," she said. Then she paused again. "Mur . . . killing is positive. It could be taken to be a sign of jealousy . . ."

"Or a form of safeguard," said Dulles, his tired eyes cast far out across the plate-glass sea.

"Then you did it—to keep me?"

Rada laid a hand gently on his arm, silently begging him to turn his eyes upon her and share the warmth, praying he would take her into some awkward kind of embrace. But he freed his arm and dug purposefully with his heels.

"To keep you?" he queried, pushing himself ever higher. "To win back a trollop like you?"

He allowed himself a scant five seconds of dry laughter but it scored Rada like thrown gravel. She strained her eyes to see him riding out of the sun. She heard only—"I . . . did . . . it . . . to . . . keep . . . my . . . seat . . . on . . . the . . . swing . . ."

JOHN T. SLADEK

THE POETS OF MILLGROVE, IOWA

Throw away that truss

THE ASTRONAUT WAS almost happy about having decapitated a mole while shaving. He'd always wanted to use one of those peculiarly-shaped patches that came in the Bandaid assortment. But when he dug down in the flight bag and came up with the tin box, he found it empty.

"Jeanne," he muttered.

"What?" Jeanne spread a drop of enamel on her toenail and thrust out her foot to inspect it.

"Did we carry an empty tin Bandaid box all the way from California?" Without waiting for the obvious answer, he went into the bathroom, stuck a piece of toilet paper over the wound, and began brushing his teeth electrically. The noise cut off the radio's words from the bedroom, and he found himself alone with his face.

The Astronaut's face, if shaved by a Gillette blade, could have aroused bubbles of admiration from the head of an oil millionaire's daughter: "Hmmm, not bad-looking, either!" (But not, he thought, with a piece of bloody toilet paper glued to it.) It featured a square, pink jaw terminating in a chin like a ripe apricot, superbly cloven. His

nostrils were slightly flared, sensing danger, his eyebrows seriously straight and incapable of mockery, and his forehead—whatever a forehead should be—intelligent, he guessed. Even his teeth were proper reminders of death, orderly rows of military tombstones.

Today, however, his face showed classic lines of "nervous tension." He and Jeanne had travelled two thousand miles to his home town, where he was born but not raised, so that he could give his speech at the Millgrove Harvest Festival. So that Jeanne could paint her nails and worry about losing her tan. His own tan was turning yellow, he noted, unplugging the razor.

"—a modern miracle!" the radio blurted.

The Astronaut rolled deodorant under each arm and behind his knees.

For teenagers with troubled skin

He had left her alone in the MILLGROVE MOTE, as the faulty neon sign told her, and Jeanne, examining her toes, remembered she had nothing to read. There was only the worn and stained copy of *Popular Mechanics* by the toilet. Seated, wearing her patented lastex with fiberfil inserts, kolitron panels, nickel-chrome and neoprene clips, six-way stretch girdle that b-r-e-a-t-h-e-d, Jeanne read how to build her own. She yawned over elaborate schematic diagrams and finally turned to: "Honey, I got the job!"—a man embraced a woman who smiled and raised one foot from the floor. The woman, smiling, embraced the smiling man with his hand, embracing her, clutching a rolled-up newspaper. Smiling, they embraced. He embraced this woman with her foot raised in salute.

Jeanne saw the man had chosen one of the following occupations:

Accounting
Advanced Mathematics
Advertising
Air Conditioning

Tool Design
Welding Processes
Yard Maintenance
Zoo Sanitary Engineering

But after all, as the magazine indicated, life is what you convert it into, what you Bild-UR-Self. The radio played the opening chords of a song about a hot rod, and Jeanne's girdle s-i-g-h-e-d.

Nothing to Buy

"It don't make you—you know—sterile, does it?" asked the grinning sheriff.

The Astronaut shook his head, then turned its profile to the older man and bent over his coke.

"That's all right then."

In the rear of the store the druggist, Bud Goslin, his glasses glittering, moved among his glittering bottles of vitamins. He hummed a tune the Astronaut could not identify.

The kind of girl Tab Hunter wants

Jeanne picked at the polish on her toenail. At home, the water in the pool would be turning brown and filthy, like the ook in the bottom of the golf bag in the garage. Nola has the key, she thought. Nothing can possibly happen. I'm getting a cold.

The radio gave a recipe. Jeanne wondered how Fritz, her dog, was getting along.

She saw what she had done and took out the bottle of polish remover.

Sodium propionate added, to retard spoilage

The Astronaut's gesture took in rubber syringes, steel nail files, lavender soap, paragoric, kleenex, comic books, morphine, green stamps, and the hidden drawer of condoms.

"There is a certain poetry in all this," he said. The grinning sheriff nodded, and he went on, "a certain poetry. Yes, a certain poetry. You know?" The grinning sheriff and Bud Goslin both nodded.

Teen Queen Screen Dream was the magazine the young girl held. Dropping a quarter in Bud Goslin's hand, she glided toward the door.

"All the nice young nooky come in here," said the sheriff, grinning at his lemon phosphate.

"I know, I know."

Bud Goslin came from behind his counter and rushed at the kids sitting in the floor.

"If you kids don't want to buy any," he said, "you can't sit here reading them all day." He snatched the comics from them and herded the boys out the door. The air-conditioning made a faint coughing sound.

"Christ, I wish I was thirty years younger. All the nice young nooky come in here," said the grinning sheriff.

What am I doing here? the Astronaut asked himself. This is not my town. I was not raised here, only born here.

But he felt the same about the town in which he was raised. This is not my town, what am I doing here? he thought, in London and New York and Menominee, Wisconsin.

In front of the courthouse stood a raw wood platform, from which the Astronaut would "launch" his speech, as the mayor put it. Jeanne would not be there, for reasons of her own. They would give him the key to the city, and the poets of Millgrove would read poems in his honour. He would give his speech, and then they would hang him, as in *Untamed Town*, the innocent man they hang, and all day he listens to them building the raw wood scaffold . . .

He stood up and reached in his pocket.

"Your money's no good," said the druggist.

Count the number of beans in this jar

I'll kill him, thought Jeanne, painting her toenails Kotton Kandy. The right foot smeared on the bed. Going on and leaving me without anything to read.

When the polish had dried, she slipped on her sandals and the peasant skirt and the acetate blouse, and went next door to the Sof-Top Ice Cream stand. The rays of the setting sun made her white blouse glow pink. She drank a cup of coffee at the picnic table and watched the sunset. Mosquitoes clung to the warmth of her arms. The girl behind the counter read *The New Liz*, wetting her thumb to turn the pages. A motorcycle went by, and the rider waved to the girl behind the counter. She did not look up.

It was dark enough for Jeanne to remove the sunglasses she'd bought in Paris, but she left them in place. Fritz is at Nola's, she assured herself. Nothing can possibly happen.

Astonishing and unbelievable!

The parade came by the bunting-draped platform slowly at first; a file of doll-buggies draped in bunting. Little girls dressed in white pushed bunting-draped buggies containing plastic dolls past the platform of wood, draped in bunting. Some of the little girls cried, and their mothers removed them from the parade. Others glided smoothly past, walking to an invisible rhythm, pushing buggies past the mayor, the grinning sheriff, the grinning wife of the mayor, the sheriff's wife, Bud Goslin, and the Astronaut.

The Astronaut wore a dress uniform and saluted when the flag went by. The Millgrove High School band went by, playing "Them Bases." The Astronaut, seeing his country's flag, saluted it, and the flag was carried by, along with the flag of Millgrove High School, green and red. A woman across the street wore Jeanne's french sunglasses, the Astronaut saw.

A series of antique cars passed, each one exactly like the one before. Then came a float depicting the Harvest Festival: corn and pumpkins spilling out of a cornucopia held by Betty Mason, queen of the Harvest Festival. The American Legion followed, marching to some invisible, inaudible rhythm of their own, and the Astronaut saluted his country's flag.

The crowd gathered around the bunting-draped platform, while the mayor raised and lowered the adjustable microphone several times.

"Testing," he breathed cautiously into it, and an unearthly howl went up from the loudspeakers. Bud Goslin dropped to one knee beside the amplifier box. Light blazed from his glasses. He stood up.

"Testing," said the mayor once more, and his amplified voice shouted from the speakers. Chuckling, he added, "Five, four, three, two, one." The crowd laughed.

"Well, I hope everyone is having a good time, here," said the mayor. "I know I am."

A hundred pairs of silver sunglasses tilted to look at him.

"Yes, we're here to celebrate our tenth annual Harvest Festival, and if you ain't having a good time, I say it's your own darned fault!" The crowd smiled.

"We have with us a young man I'm sure all of you know. A boy who was born right here in Millgrove, a real down-to-earth fella—" He paused, while the crowd laughed very hard.

"—seriously though, a boy who represents all that is fine about our town, a boy who has done more, seen more, and I guess travelled more than any of us ever will: Our Astronaut!"

The crowd clapped.

"Bud Goslin here—Bud Goslin—" said the mayor over their noise, "—Bud has written a little poem in Our Astronaut's honour. Bud?"

The druggist stood up, looking ashamed, and read rapidly from a paper:

"Our Astronaut
He soars far upward in the night,
He comes back safe, to our greatest delight.
He's the finest boy that Millgrove has got,
So let's give a big cheer for our Astronaut!"

Bud sat down amid mild applause.

"And now, Mr. Fenner, Hal Fenner of the High School English Department, has another poem for our boy," said the mayor. Mr. Fenner was quite young, but had a moustache. His poem was untitled.

"Hail to thee, blithe astronaut," it began. After a number of puzzling references to the Confederate dead, it finished, ". . . blazing a heavenly trail!"

"And now a word from our guest of honour," the mayor announced. The Astronaut walked militarily to the microphone and waited until the applause died.

"I don't know what you came out here to hear," he said. "Let me start like this:

"All this pigs**t you hear about astronauts is so much f**king—uh—s**t. What the f**k, a guy goes up inside this little metal room, see, it don't mean a f**k of a lot. Any f**king body could do it, you see what I mean?"

"Look out, mister," said a hoarse voice at his feet. "There's a lot of *women* here."

"They put you through a lot of f**king tests and all, but what the f**k. Any f**king asshole with two eyes and two hands could operate the c**ksucker. F**king A. All you got is this f**king little—"

"You tell 'em, captain," said a young man in a motorcycle jacket. He had his arm around the woman in the french sunglasses. The grinning sheriff was no longer grinning.

"—this f**king little board with some motherf**king little red and green lights on on it, see? And you just throw switches to keep the green lights on. Christ-all-f**king-mighty, even this c**ksucking fairy teacher, with his blithe f**king spirit, could operate the f**ker."

The sheriff stood up, as a man in mirror sunglasses yelled, "We don't talk that way in front of ladies, Mister." The entire crowd was murmuring, not listening now, but only trying to see what was going to happen to him.

"He's drunk!" a woman screamed.

The sheriff got a hammer lock on the Astronaut and eased him away from the microphone. The mayor came forward and adjusted it several times, saying, "Well, folks, I guess our boy was still flying too high, heheh." He was preparing to entertain them with a few imitations, when he discovered he still held the large, wooden, gold-painted key. He walked back to drop it disgustedly on the empty seat, and stood for a moment, watching the Astronaut and the sheriff descend from the platform. The mayor returned to the microphone, saying, "Speaking of high flyers, have you ever heard a chicken hawk? I guess most of you have, and he sounds something like this:"

Then the mayor screamed.

the garbage world

CHARLES PLATT

conclusion

LUCIAN ROACH AWOKE feeling half dead, as if the night's sleep had exhausted rather than refreshed him. Yellow light was filtering dimly through the windows of the tractor; he looked out and saw the mud lake bathed in the sickly morning glow of the rising sun. The dew was forming a light mist that mingled with brown gases, given off by the mud itself, as it grew warm in the morning light.

Lucian grimaced and fell back on the bunk where he had spent the night.

"Get up, you lazy bum," Gaylord shouted, from what sounded like inches away. He laughed heartily. "Got to get an early start, you know. Expect you need some fresh air to wake you up."

Before Lucian could stop him, Gaylord had opened one of the tractor's windows. The heavily polluted outside air

came rolling in in a great yellow-brown mass that sent Lucian coughing and gasping for breath. It had been bad enough during the night, getting used to the rather unpleasant body odours of Gaylord and Juliette. Gaylord watched Lucian with a malicious grin, enjoying the offworlder's discomfort.

As the red-orange sun rose higher in the sky, above the wall of jungle which surrounded the lake, the three of them put all the essentials they could think of into shoulder-packs that Lucian dug out of the tractor's emergency stores. Food concentrates ; enough water for several days ; knives ; simple hand weapons ; plastic foam blankets that rolled up compactly but expanded when opened out to form a good, warm covering ; spare air filters ; and basic emergency drugs for first aid.

And so they ventured out of the tractor, where it lay at the edge of the mud, its power gone. Already its tracks had started to sink into the bank of the lake ; eventually, Lucian realised, it would be completely engulfed in the thick, brown mud.

Lucian choked on the outside air, at first. He would have preferred to wear a full air filtering mask, but it was too cumbersome for the long trip to the village. He had to make do with the simple filters the Koprans used.

"Soon get used to it," Gaylord said, chuckling. "By the time we get back to the village, you won't feel right breathing any other kind of air. Once Kopran air gets into you, it kind of feels its way all round until there's a bit of it just about everywhere you can think of. And it stays there, see. Yes, you'll get used to it."

Lucian was too out of breath to answer ; struggling along the edge of the mud lake, his legs often went into the thick mud up to the knee. Great waves of marsh gas swept gently around them, carried on the light wind that had blown up. The orange light of the sun, seen through the thick gases, lent a vile light to the whole panorama, and made the jungle appear a dark green that was almost brown in tint.

Eventually they struggled as far as the path that the tractor had hewn in the jungle, on their way to the lake. The thick-stemmed, giant plants and foliage had been

trampled down flat, making progress on foot easier, hindered only by an occasional tree that had fallen across the path.

They stopped to rest for a little while. No one seemed to have anything to say. Lucian found himself studying Juliette's face, trying to see her without the straggly hair and the coating of dirt. She looked up abruptly, and their eyes met for a short moment before she looked quickly away again. Squatting cross-legged, she began tracing abstract patterns with her finger in the mud.

Lucian tried to analyse his feelings about the girl, without success. The situation was confused by her introverted, moody outlook, so different from when he had first met her.

Gaylord, however, was for some reason in good spirits; perhaps he was enjoying the challenge of struggling back through the jungle and across the dunes of refuse, back to the village on foot.

"Reckon we've rested enough," he said. "You can tell, it's going to be a good day. We'd best take advantage of it."

Together they stood up and started tramping into the jungle, the thick carpet of foliage sagging and shifting under foot, making the going difficult.

And so they went on, for the whole of the morning, following the path of the tractor back towards the village. The great green plants towered either side, the strangely coloured flowers swinging in the wind, and occasionally they heard some of the wild dogs barking. The sun beat down raising a humid kind of heat, and insects flew to and fro in the shadows.

They stopped briefly for lunch, washed down sparingly with their water ration, and then carried on throughout the afternoon. Gaylord had been wrong about the weather; the sunlight became intermittent, often occluded by thick dark clouds, until finally the whole sky was overcast.

The Yellow Rain

"DON'T LIKE THE look of it," Gaylord said, rubbing his stubbly chin. "It don't happen often—once a year, maybe. Not much water vapour, see. That's what my grandpa used

to say. Usually only gets like this when some of the cheap-jack asteroids start sending down 'economy' blimps. They wrap up their garbage in plastic that ain't good enough to come down through the air without burning up. So all the stuff inside gets spread out, vaporises in the heat. Sooner or later it's all got to come down, when it's cool enough to condense."

"As rain, you mean?" Lucian said.

"Kind of. Not as you'd know it, though. It's thick, yellow usually, kind of like liquid melted plastic." As he spoke, a few drops spattered down around them. The sky was now almost black with clouds.

Gaylord held out his hand, where a large drop of yellow rain was slowly trickling over his skin. "See what I mean?" he said, chuckling.

They took refuge under the spreading leaves of one of the giant plants as the rain became heavier. The droplets smacked down like bullets, each one making a splash two inches across. They had to move to a stronger shelter as some of the raindrops started falling right through the leaves of the plant they were under, punching neat holes in the green foliage.

"Never seen it like this before," Gaylord said, half to himself. "Must've been a whole load of economy blimps, to bring on a storm like this."

Abruptly there was a crash of thunder, and in the distance fork lightning flickered across the sky. Seen through the rain and mist, it was a deep red colour.

Then the earth tremors started. At first, Lucian thought it was his imagination, as he felt the ground shake and tremble a little under him. But each minor quake became larger than the last, until it was obvious that the ground was settling, in irregular jerks, by a few inches at a time.

Gaylord grimaced. "Expected it," he said. "It's the rain, see. Loosens up the garbage. Ground's not very close packed, anyhow. Just have to put up with it as best . . ."

He didn't finish the sentence. Another crash of thunder sounded almost overhead, and a few yards away a savage fork of lightning split a tree in two, sending flaming branches and leaves flying. The heat and brightness of the impact sent Lucian's senses completely numb. A moment later, accompanied by a great rumble, the ground shook

and then seemed to fall from under them; Juliette screamed and grabbed for Lucian for support, and Gaylord held on to both of them and the tree trunk. All around the rain was streaming down, lightning was cracking through the humid air, and the repeated earthquakes sent trees and plants snapping and splintering down on to the sodden bed of vegetation that covered the heaving ground.

Lucian shut his eyes and just held on to Juliette and Gaylord as best he could. The chaotic thundering of the quakes and the storm went on and on, until it seemed entirely meaningless. When, at last, the storm began to diminish and the yellow rain thinned out a bit, it came as almost a surprise. The heaving of the ground became less violent, and happened less often.

Lucian opened his eyes and looked around. Juliette had wrapped her arms around him, her head on his chest. They were all three of them completely drenched in the yellow rain, which had left its own particular sharp stench behind. The sun came out again, and the whole jungle began to steam, great yellow clouds of vapour rising up all around.

Gaylord stood up and stretched, blinking. Lucian shook Juliette's shoulder, and she stirred as if from a deep sleep.

"It's over?" she asked.

Lucian nodded. Then she seemed to become aware of her position close to him, and pulled away, avoiding his eyes. She stood up, brushing off some of the wet leaves and twigs that had fallen on her, and walked over to where Gaylord stood.

"Best bloody storm I ever seen," Gaylord was saying. "Hell, yes. Must write it up when we get back, must put it in my diary. Even grandpa never recorded anything like that."

"You seem to take it pretty lightly," Lucian said. "We're lucky to be still alive."

Gaylord just roared with laughter.

They trekked on a little further, until it became dark; but the spongy ground made going very difficult. It would be easier when it had dried out. They finally settled down to spend their first night away from the tractor under a kind of bushy plant that grew out from a short, stumpy trunk, like a giant green mushroom.

Love and Warm Mud

THE NEXT MORNING dawned with the usual dim orange sunlight. Lucian awoke before the other two, feeling a little sick from the foetid air he had been breathing. Deciding he needed a short walk to exercise his stiff limbs, he quietly crept away from the bush where they had been sleeping, and went along the path a little way.

He paused, wiggling his shoulders to try and loosen them a bit, and looked round in surprise when he heard Juliette walking quickly along the path, after him.

"Where are you going?" she said. "I saw you creep off like that . . ."

He smiled. "Just walking. I feel a bit rough." He paused, a little uncertainly. "You're quite welcome to walk along with me."

"All right."

They went a little way, in silence. The light still wasn't very strong, and so it was hardly surprising that Juliette missed seeing the gap in the layer of vegetation over which they walked. She stumbled, and before Lucian could catch her, she fell away to one side of the track, grabbing hold of his arm in an effort to keep her balance.

They fell together, down into what turned out to be a small pool of warm, liquid mud.

Lucian's first impulse was to panic; he floundered around. But then he found the pool was only three or four feet deep and ten feet or so wide, and relaxed, laughing.

Juliette, entangled in Lucian's clothing and lying half under him, only her head above the surface, at first looked blank; but finally she broke into laughter too. They lay there for a moment, in the warm, liquid mud, the sun shining down through the trees above. It seemed the most natural thing to do as Lucian, his arm already trapped behind Juliette, turned to her mud-spattered face and, without thinking, kissed her.

It was better than the first time, when they'd been outside the survey craft, during the party. This time, she was sober, he was willing, and the mud flowed around them, warm and enveloping. It all helped.

Finally he drew away from her, more surprised than anything.

"I'm sorry," he began, "I . . ."

"Don't spoil it by saying anything," she said, touching his lips with her finger gently. Again they kissed, and Lucian shifted his position in the pool, feeling the mud creeping inside his clothes and warming his skin, deliciously soothing. He picked up a handful and squeezed it out between his fingers; he rubbed it all over his arms, loving the liquid smoothness of it. He wiggled his toes in it and they embraced again, rolling over in the pool, churning it up and spattering mud on to the surrounding vegetation.

Finally, she pulled herself away from him. "We must get back. Father will wonder what's happened to us . . ."

"I can hardly believe in this," Lucian said. "Why did you . . . I mean, the past few days you've not been exactly friendly."

She was silent for a moment. "You're starting to understand us," she said slowly, "so this may make sense to you. You see, living here, we're in a strange situation. For years, the rich, playboy people in the asteroid belt, and the millionaire industrialists, have dumped all their refuse down on us, regardless. What was first a service we provided, in order to stay alive, is now just a useful habit, with everyone taking advantage of our helplessness. But, on the other hand, if the garbage didn't come down to us, we wouldn't be able to stay alive. We live on it; we'd die without it."

"So you're both at the mercy of, yet dependent on, the rest of us."

She nodded. "We can't stand the offworlder's attitude—throwing dirt on us and then despising us because we're dirty. I've seen the offworlders' way of life on TV. I've been taught to despise it. But without their refuse . . ."

"I see," Lucian said, quietly. It made sense, in a way. "I suppose we rather treated it as our right to land here and take over, didn't we? But, have things changed? Have *I* changed? How has this happened, all of a sudden?"

She dabbed warm mud on his face. "I don't see you flinching away from me."

"But that's just because I'm unavoidably dirty already."

"Yes. So dirty you can enjoy a mud bath. It's lovely,

isn't it? I have one a week at home. Now do you see? I'm sorry I was so bitchy . . . I suppose I felt *something* for you from the start, but it was just impossible, you were untouchable. I had to keep it bottled up inside me . . ."

He kissed her gently. "It's all very clear, now."

They were disturbed suddenly by Gaylord's rough voice.

"Congratulations!" he said, standing over them where they lay in the pool of mud. "I admire your style of doing things, Lucian. Except you might have left it a bit later. It's an hour after sunrise and we've got a long way to go. So get out of that mud and we'll be off."

Lucian struggled out of the mud and pulled Juliette after him.

"You don't . . . mind, father?" she said.

Gaylord laughed. "Told him two days ago, if he'd drop his offworld habits and just get dirty, it'd be a bloody good idea for you two to get together."

The three of them walked back to where they'd spent the night, and picked up their packs. Then they set off through the jungle again, making slow but constant progress. Walking over the rough layer of vegetation was too much of an effort to allow talking; and in any case, Lucian was quite happy to be left alone with his thoughts.

The scenery became boring; the face of the jungle was monotonously the same. But by evening, in the dusk, they could see the end of it up ahead. With a last effort, they reached the end of the vegetation, the dunes of refuse now stretching out in front of them.

"Should be safe from dogs, here," Gaylord said, dumping his pack. "And I reckon we'll make it back to the village in a few hours' more walking."

Exhausted from the trek, they all lay down to sleep after a short meal, saying little. The events of the day were still confusingly fresh in Lucian's mind.

The Deserted Excavation

THEY SET OFF early the next morning, trudging over the dunes of mud and refuse, occasionally stopping to rest, speaking little to one another. It was with a feeling of immense relief that, after an hour's progress, Lucian saw

on the horizon, silhouetted against the early morning sun, the unmistakable shape of the derrick that the planetary excavation team had used in drilling the vast hole down to the asteroid's bedrock.

He pointed it out to Gaylord.

"That's good," Gaylord said. "Shouldn't take more than an hour or two to get there, I reckon. But where's the rest of the stuff they had there? Where's the four ships they came in?"

The derrick was the only shape visible on the horizon. Lucian shrugged.

"They must have completed their work and left," he said. "They operate fast, and their services are in demand. No reason for them to hang about."

"But if their work is finished here, does that mean the new gravity generator can be switched on?" Juliette asked, looking a little nervous.

"Yes—if there is a generator. If Larkin ever intends to activate it. Even if he did, he'd wait a reasonable time for us to return . . ."

"I hope so," Juliette said quietly.

They walked on, heading for the landmark. Lucian felt strangely unconcerned now, by the dirt on his skin and by the filth all around him. He saw himself on equal terms with the offworlders, united with Gaylord by the events of the last three days, and quite emotionally attached to Juliette. He thought back to his reactions upon first arriving on Kopra, a mere ten days ago, and smiled. Then, it had seemed another world altogether.

Sore-footed and exhausted, they finally reached the excavation site. Great mounds of rubble and refuse were still heaped up all around, some of them miniature mountains of up to two hundred feet in height. The men had not bothered to fill the hole in again after they had completed digging it. The derrick was the only piece of equipment remaining ; Lucian assumed it had been abandoned because it had been designed specifically for this job, unsuited to any other. Its lattice work structure stood proudly over the vast hole, thick, black cables hanging down into the depths of the excavation.

Great mud roads and pathways hewn in the ground snaked around the heaps of excavated refuse, the ground

churned up by the tracks of heavy vehicles. Lucian, feeling dwarfed by the great piles of earth and rubbish, walked to where the ships had touched down originally. Here, the ground was still a little warm ; they must have blasted off earlier that morning, or during the previous night.

Isaac Gaylord and Juliette were still standing at the mouth of the immense hole, staring down, apparently fascinated by it. Its depths were sinister and black. The vertical walls, shiny and slick from the laser cutting action that had fused the refuse and earth together, stretched smoothly down out of sight. Lucian wondered what lay at the bottom—a new gravity generator, or some other scheme of Larkin's.

He threw a stone down into the hole, and though they waited for several minutes, there was no sound of it hitting bottom.

At length they turned away from the deserted scene, and walked on towards the village. Behind them, the criss-cross steel structure of the derrick and the great mounds of refuse, already covered in patches of fast-growing vegetation, were silhouetted against the yellow sky. The sun, still low in the sky, cast long shadows over the ground.

The Defecated Village

EVENTUALLY THEY SAW the rough single-storey buildings of the village in the distance, partly obscured by the inevitable mistiness of the air. At first it seemed that, as at the excavation site, there was no sign of human life. Lucian felt a cold sensation inside him ; the idea that everyone had been evacuated prior to dangerous terraforming operations seemed very plausible. But then he saw the nose of the survey craft protruding above the vegetation around the landing field, and he was reassured that at least Larkin was still on Kopra.

They walked up the village street. The place had undergone a subtle transformation. Clumps of tall grass and weeds that had once littered the street had been uprooted, and fresh, clean gravel had been laid. The trees had been trimmed of their long, tangled branches, and some attempt had been made to give the gardens of the houses a defined

shape and form. Weeds had been removed, several houses had even been repainted. The general air of sordid filth was gone ; the village was almost orderly in appearance.

They encountered a villager, walking down the street towards them.

"Isaac Gaylord, no less," he said, obviously surprised. "They said you were lost, dead, out into the jungle somewhere."

"Who said?" demanded Gaylord. "And who's the silly bastard who's been wasting everyone's time prettying this place up to look like some pansy offworld asteroid?"

The man looked away, embarrassed.

"It's that son of mine, isn't it?" Gaylord persisted. "Isn't it?"

The villager scratched his head. "Well, yes, it was, Isaac. Seemed a good idea, in a way ; people thought it might get us more in favour with the offworlders, show them we weren't as uncivilised as they seemed to think . . . give us a better bargaining position."

"Save me from imbeciles," Gaylord said, shaking his head. "You mean to say you all went along with this scheme?"

"Norman is head man, Isaac. What he says goes."

Gaylord looked as if he had an unpleasant taste in his mouth. "I must see this son of mine. I can tell you, I don't like this set up, not at all."

Followed by Lucian and Juliette, he marched up the street, heavy feet crunching into the gravel and breaking up its newly-laid surface. Villagers looked out of their homes in surprise, and stopped in the street as Gaylord, Juliette and Lucian walked past.

Like some of the others, Gaylord's house had been repainted. It was now a brilliant, spotless white, and its garden had been meticulously ordered in neat flower beds. A notice inside a roped-off area read, "Please keep off—grass-seeded."

Gaylord trampled straight over the flowers and the grass-seeded area. "Ain't going to be no bloody pretty little flowers for people to waste their time over while I'm around," he muttered.

As he approached, the front door of the house opened,

and Norman walked out. When he saw his father, he stopped, and his naturally pale face turned even whiter.

"Father," he said weakly.

Gaylord walked up to his son.

"Yes, pansy face," he said. "Your father's come back. What the hell have you been doing here, damn it? Behind my back."

"I didn't know," Norman stammered. "I thought . . . Minister Larkin said you were lost out in the jungle. In a mud lake. We all thought that you were dead . . ."

"So you just believed all that that offworld bastard had to say, did you? Hasn't anyone any sense around here? Do I look dead, now?"

"I—no, of course not."

"No, of course not," he mimicked. "Listen, you—I don't like the new smell of this place, not at all. It's . . . hell, it's *sanitary*. Trying to get round the offworlders, were you?"

"That—that was one idea. What's wrong with . . ."

"To think a son of mine should turn out this way. Don't you realise, an offworlder like Larkin hasn't any time for most of his own race, let alone scum on a garbage world? To him, folk living here are plain filthy, and always will be. Clear?"

Norman nodded silently, his personality once more dominated by his father.

Gaylord turned and walked angrily into the house, slamming the front door after him. Norman was left outside with Juliette and Lucian.

"Are you . . . is that the offworlder?" he said, peering at Lucian's face.

"In a manner of speaking, yes," said Lucian. "Interesting to see I'm dirtier than you now, Norman." This was in fact true; Norman's face showed evidence of recent vigorous washing, and his clothes had been cleaned.

"Don't look so disconcerted," said Juliette. "You'd be pretty filthy after three days' walking through the jungle. Not that it's really very important."

Norman looked confused. "I'd better go and see what father's doing," he said. "I didn't ever expect . . . that is, I've changed things round in the house quite a lot."

After he'd gone, Juliette laughed. "Poor Norman. I feel

sorry for him, in a way. When you showed such unconcern about being as filthy as the rest of us . . . the only conclusion is that you've gone native."

"Why not?"

"No reason why not. But I could see it was upsetting to Norman. You see, he's never really fitted into the family; he's always been a little odd. Like father says, he washes himself too often. He's always watched the television a lot —especially the pleasure asteroid programmes. Personally I think he's had secret desires to emulate the offworlders, all along."

"That seems odd, when you look at his father. There isn't exactly much similarity between them."

Juliette laughed. "Hardly. But, well, I'll tell you our family secret. After I was born, my mother was found no longer able to have children. Isaac was upset; he needed a son to perpetuate the Gaylord line of head-men. The only solution was to adopt a young male child and pretend that he was my parents' natural son. So that's what happened, shortly before my mother died. That's why Norman doesn't fit in—why father has never really liked him very much."

"It explains a lot," Lucian said, thinking back to his conversation where Norman had shown strange interest in the possibility of permanent evacuation from Kopra. "So while Isaac was away, Norman had his chance to tidy the place up." He laughed. "A bit sad, really."

"Yes. It won't be long before father gets things back to normal."

"Though it remains to be seen how long anyone has to do anything here," Lucian said, suddenly bringing his mind back to Larkin and the situation on Kopra. "I'd better go and see Larkin, and find out exactly what he intends to do, and when."

"All right," she said, "but be careful. I don't trust that man."

Lucian laughed. He kissed her lightly. "Not all of us offworlders are double-dealing, despicable hypocrites," he said.

She smiled. "You may not be, Lucian. But I wouldn't say that Minister Larkin was far from it."

LUCIAN WALKED UP the survey craft's familiar entrance ramp and used his key to open the hatch. He shut it behind him with a bang.

"Anyone here? Minister Larkin?" There was a moment's silence, then he heard footsteps on the deck above.

He walked up to Larkin's cabin, and found him standing outside his door, in the corridor.

"What is this?" said Larkin. "Who are you? Do you realise you are trespassing in the vessel of the imperial government? The penalties involved are severe. Answer me at once, or . . ."

Lucian laughed. "For God's sake, it's me, Lucian Roach, Minister Larkin. I'm just filthy dirty because I've had to cross several miles of jungle and Kopran desert on foot."

Larkin examined Lucian's face. "Really? Yes, I can see it is you now, Roach. I'd given you up as lost. But what a filthy state you're in. How repulsive. Have a shower at once, get the dirt off, and then tell me what happened to you."

Lucian shook his head. "I think I ought to talk to you first."

Larkin was obviously taken aback. "That's hardly a very proper mode of address to a superior, is it, Mr. Roach?" He smiled frostily. "You are also forgetting that to me, your body odour at present is quite . . . quite . . ."

"All right, all right. But the situation seems urgent and I just don't feel like wasting time on formalities. Bear with me a moment." He pushed past Larkin and walked into the cabin, leaving filthy footmarks on the clean metal flooring. He suddenly felt irritated by Larkin's formalities.

Larkin followed him. "I'm prepared to overlook this breach of conduct, Roach, in view of the circumstances. But I must strongly caution you that . . ."

But Lucian wasn't listening. He was looking at the charts and plans laid out on Larkin's desk. One showed a cross-section of the hole the engineering crew had drilled in the asteroid. Another was a sheet of planetary stress calculations. The third, and most important, was a blueprint of a

hundred megaton shaped charge, diagrams indicating its placement in the hole, plotted blast configurations, geological fault lines . . . Suspicions crystallised. Lucian picked up the chart angrily, determined now to get some straight answers.

"What exactly is this?" he demanded, turning to face Larkin. With detached surprise, part of him noted that the administrator was two or three inches shorter than himself —something he had never realised before. The man's authority seemed to have evaporated.

"Give me those charts, Roach. That is classified information."

On sudden impulse, Lucian crumpled the charts in his dirty hands and threw them in Larkin's face. He was angry over the deception, at the destruction of the asteroid that was obviously planned, and exasperated by Larkin's officiousness. "What are you doing, Minister Larkin? Blowing up the whole of Kopra?"

Larkin stared back, clenching and unclenching his jaw muscles. Finally his normally rigid self-control broke. "Yes, Roach. Precisely. We will blow this foetid asteroid cleanly into four pieces. The stress lines have been plotted, the charge has been positioned. It is fused and timed to explode in six hours' time. It is certainly beyond *your* control, now." The man was clearly worked up to an angry pitch. His hands were trembling.

"But why?" Lucian asked. "For God's sake, why destroy the asteroid? The higher-gravity, patch-up plan you told us —that sounded all right."

"Your intimate contact with the environment seems to have upset your judgment, Roach. Do you really not see how truly disgusting this asteroid is? Its existence alone nauseates me. The idea of people living on it is almost unthinkable. Another thing, Roach—Kopra has even become the largest body now in the asteroid belt. It's preposterous, shameful . . . We're solving the problem extremely neatly. A nice clean explosion, dividing the asteroid into four pieces. Scavenger ships will collect odd fragments, though the blast has been very carefully plotted to minimise any stray refuse breaking apart from the four main pieces. These will be installed with 10-gee generators, making human habitation impossible. They will be evenly

distributed at points around the belt, facilitating easier, cleaner refuse disposal. It's a purge, Roach, don't you see? It's cleaning out the mess once and for all."

All of Larkin's facial muscles were tensed. His cheek twitched spasmodically and his knuckles were white where he held on to the edge of the desk tightly.

"But what about the people?" Lucian asked. "Or don't they matter—do they get blown up too, all in the cause of cleanliness?"

"If I had my way, they would. But the government is lenient. It recognises the human rights of persons who are barely human. It has prepared for evacuees to be purged in a way similar to their sordid planet. Psychiatric surgery . . ."

"But that usually ruins the personality."

"They have no personalities. Can you imagine these filthy animals being allowed to live anywhere else in the solar system, Roach, without surgery? For that matter, I can only conclude from your own behaviour that your close proximity with them has unbalanced your mind to such an extent that you yourself are no longer fit to mix with civilised humanity. As I see it, I have no alternative but to recommend you for psychosurgery along with the rest of them." Larkin's lips thinned into a grim smile. Lucian was brought up short. Larkin's threat was clearly not bluff.

"That's ridiculous. You're talking irrationally. It would never be permitted. I would not submit . . ."

Larkin's malicious smile became still grimmer. His nostrils dilated as he breathed deeply, regaining his composure.

"Your position, Roach, is unfavourable. You are recorded in my log as missing. Your identity has, in fact, been cancelled. There is now nothing to distinguish you from a Kopran—your filthiness, manner of speech, and social status are the same. You can grovel with them in the ship's hold and then be purged by surgery. Or of course you can remain on Kopra until it is exploded."

"That's insane. You've become completely unbalanced."

Larkin shook his head. "Not I, Roach. You. Need I remind you of your initial revulsion when confronted by the Kopran landscape? I find this change in you tragic and

inexplicable. I had hopes for your career and respect for your intelligence. You have sacrificed both. Am I correct?"

Lucian thought hard, trying to decide his best move. Violating Larkin's authority had been the first big mistake. Challenging him had been the second. One had always to conform to the man's personal pride and to his inflexible system of doing things by the official methods. Now, the only possible way out was to be subservient.

"I must apologise, Minister Larkin. I must plead temporary abnormality, induced by the environment here. If you could exert some lenience . . ."

"Too late, Roach. Your tirade was not a temporary lapse —it had the qualities of long-suppressed emotion. I cannot allow myself to permit such an unbalanced personality to go untreated. You will wait outside the ship until I embark the evacuees. As a concession, I may see to it that you are subsequently treated separately from them. But you can expect no more than this."

Lucian saw he was trapped. He took a quick step forward, his arm pulled back to hit Larkin. At once Larkin took his hand out of his jacket pocket, where it had been resting during the argument. He pointed a gun at Lucian's stomach.

"I had not anticipated using this against my own assistant; it was to be in case of trouble with the natives. Now, will you please leave this space vehicle, Mr. Roach? I am still in command of it."

Slowly, Lucian walked down to the hatchway. There was no alternative.

"Your keys, Mr. Roach," Larkin said. Lucian fished them out and dropped them on the floor. Larkin stooped to pick them up, but his eyes remained on Lucian's face and the gun stayed pointed at his stomach.

Lucian walked out and down the entry ramp. Behind him, the noise of the hatch shutting was somehow very final.

Norman Gaylord: Power-crazed Mysophobe

THE EVENTS OF the past quarter of an hour seemed unreal and unbelievable; Lucian had never expected Larkin to react so violently. Possibly it was rooted in the man's back-

ground—fanatical mysophobia was becoming more and more common in the fastidiously sterile civilised areas of the asteroid belt. This, coupled with Larkin's rigid, authoritarian discipline and methods had been sufficient to cause the man to react so unexpectedly. Admittedly, Lucian had acted in a way which called for disciplinary action ; service regulations would confirm this. But the cold enjoyment with which Larkin had blocked every possible way of escape hinted that, beneath his rigidly controlled exterior, more violent passions lay in check.

The peace and calm of the village was a strange contrast to Lucian's mood. He walked slowly along the street and up to Gaylord's house.

Inside, Gaylord was sitting sprawled out, in one of the home-made chairs, in front of a fire burning brightly in the fireplace. He was eating a great plateful of food, lips smacking noisily, nose twitching, belching healthily now and then.

Juliette, who had been sitting opposite her father, stood up as Lucian entered. "Well?" she asked. "What did Larkin say?"

"Not so fast. I'll tell you all about it in a minute. I'm quite exhausted—how about some food first?"

She walked out to the kitchen and Lucian sat down wearily opposite Gaylord.

Later, when Juliette had brought him a plateful of assorted vegetables, eggs and meat, some of them home-grown and others salvaged from refuse carried in blimps, Lucian told them the full story, about the plan to blow up Kopra using a "clean" explosion, and about Larkin's threats.

"I was afraid *something* like this might happen," Juliette said, "but it's almost unbelievable . . ."

Isaac Gaylord laughed. "I believe it. I believe anything of those offworld scum. No disrespect to you, Lucian. Reckon you're more one of us now, than one of them, whether you like it or not."

"You're taking things very lightly, father," Juliette said. "This man has plans to destroy our homes, our world, and to . . . to have us undergo brain surgery . . ."

Gaylord just laughed again. "How many offworlders are there left on Kopra now, in control? Just this little turd

Larkin. And how many are there of us? Hundred and fifty, maybe, plus Lucian here who knows all the layout of the survey ship. Now, look at it that way, and we've got the odds in our favour, haven't we?"

"But there's so little time," Lucian said. "And that ship's well protected. It's fought off other colonists before now who tried to attack it."

"This isn't the same as before," Gaylord said. "For a start, we're Koprans, not just 'other colonists'. Another thing, I'm willing to bet Larkin's never even dreamed we might attack the ship. He treats us like ignorant savages, probably thinks of us the same way. So he'll be sitting up there unprepared, an easy target."

"Maybe. But what are you planning to attack him with?"

Gaylord got to his feet and started pacing up and down the room. "Hah! *Now* you'll see how useful a hoard is." He paused a moment, chewing on his thick lower lip. "If only mine hadn't been stolen . . . but I've given stuff to Norman, in the past, that'll do as well."

He turned and walked quickly to the door, opening it.

It was just as had happened the last time Lucian had been in the room—with Larkin, shortly after they'd landed. Gaylord flung the door wide, and then stood rooted to the spot, staring at his son Norman who was crouched down where he'd obviously been listening at the door. Norman sprang up guiltily, his face wary. Lucian saw he had something held almost protectively against him—some kind of metal box.

"What's the matter," demanded Gaylord, "do you prefer listening at doors? Do you spend all your time at it?"

Norman stared back at his father, a nervous tick pulling at the corner of his mouth. "I just wanted to hear what was going on—what you were talking about behind my back," he said.

Gaylord dragged his son into the room and slammed the door behind him.

"Don't be bloody ridiculous. No one's been saying anything behind your back. Not in my house. Still, it's a waste of time trying to pound any simple fact into your thick head." He sat down again in his chair by the fire.

Norman stood in silence a moment, obviously tensed up.

"You . . . wouldn't talk to me like that if you knew what

happened while you were away," he said, at length. His voice was weak, yet somehow defiant.

Gaylord looked round. "What's that?" he said.

Norman was still holding the small metal box tightly. "I . . . I don't have to tell you anything."

Gaylord stood up again, and walked over to Norman, towering over him. "No, you don't. But you're bloody well going to."

"Don't . . . don't push me too far, father." Norman swallowed hard, his prominent Adam's apple twitching under the white skin of his thin neck. "You don't know, you don't realise, that I don't have to give in to you any more. I've got more power than you'll ever have. I found out two days ago what . . . what Larkin was doing. I knew they were putting explosives into the hole, not a gravity generator. So . . . so I was clever. I added an extra charge of my own, last night. Not much, but enough to alter the shape of the big charge, so when they let the big one off it'll break Kopra up into a lot of tiny fragments, not just four neat pieces. It'll litter up the asteroid belt . . . unless, unless, Larkin co-operates." He held up the metal box. "I've got the control unit here. This button deactivates the explosives I placed." Norman smiled tightly. "Larkin can hardly refuse to treat me properly, faced with this kind of threat."

Gaylord's eyes narrowed. Otherwise his expression remained the same. He seemed to be sizing up the situation. "Just out to save your own skin, are you?" he asked.

Watching the scene, Lucian realised that for Norman, this was his big moment; he was becoming elated by the power he felt he had.

"Yes, yes, that's right. Why should I lift a finger to help the rest of you? You'd never be acceptable to live anywhere else but Kopra. You're filthy, degenerate. Larkin's right—you all need psychiatric treatment. It's been hell for me, brought up here in this filth, knowing all along there were decent, clean-living people out there, just out of reach. Watching the TV broadcasts . . . trapped in this stinking hole . . ."

Gaylord stirred from his immobility abruptly and without warning slapped his foster-son deliberately on each side

of his face, with heavy, open-handed blows that raised red marks on Norman's white skin.

"I've heard enough," he said. "You good-for-nothing . . . I've put up with your queer habits for long enough. You've gone too far, this time. Don't you see you're in this as much as all of us? You can't save yourself alone."

Norman, stunned by the blows, cowered against the wall, still clutching the metal box.

"Careful, father. Don't . . . don't hit me again. This works both ways. This button deactivates the explosives I planted. But this one detonates them. If I do that, it'll start the fuse on the rest, and the whole lot will go up. I'd be more careful, if I were you. I've got the power to control the whole asteroid, and what happens to everyone on it."

Gaylord's immediate reaction was to shout with laughter. "Proper little dictator, aren't you?" Then, without warning, he lunged forward, cuffed Norman round the ear and snatched the control box away from him. "Now stop playing God else I'll damn well clout you like I used to when you were five years old."

Enraged, Norman grasped futilely for the box, biting, scratching and screaming. His saliva frothed at the corners of his mouth and he began crying hysterically. Gaylord brushed him away with angry gestures, studying the control box. Lucian looked on, confused. It had all happened much too fast.

"Get hold of yourself, boy," Gaylord said. "A minute ago you were calling *us* cases for psychiatric treatment."

Still sobbing, Norman turned away and slumped down into a chair. His hands made little fists.

Gaylord was still examining the control box. He glanced over at Norman. "Where did you get this?" he asked quietly.

Norman said nothing. He remained slumped on his side in the chair, eyes tightly closed.

"It came from my hoard, didn't it, Norman?" Abruptly Gaylord reached over and cuffed the boy around the head. "Didn't it?"

Norman sat up defiantly in the chair. "Yes, yes, it did. Your hoard. I took it, you know. I stole it all. All in my hiding place. You never guessed, did you?"

Gaylord nodded slowly. "It all fits in with your stupid,

crazy mind. God, what a failure you've turned out to be. Thought you'd take my hoard away, discredit me. Then get the position of head man. To bargain with Larkin, you thought, and get yourself off Kopra, on to a nice clean pleasure world. Right?"

"Yes. That's right. And it would have worked. I sabotaged the tractor, too—took out the pile dampers. I knew it'd either blow up or the safeties would cut off the power. And I fixed the radio equipment. You should never have got back here."

Gaylord stared at his foster-son, almost sadly. For the first time, Lucian saw the man showing some faint traces of emotion.

"You really hate me, don't you, Norman?"

"Yes. I do. I hate all the filthy, slovenly people here, grovelling in the dirt. I hate the filth and the smell and everything. If it wasn't for you, I'd have got free of it, all of it."

"At the cost of everyone in the village," Lucian reminded him. Norman said nothing. Like most true religious or political fanatics, the end had no doubt justified the means. Now that he had lost his objective, and the elaborate and carefully laid schemes had fallen through, he was sullen and resigned to his fate. The tantrums were over and he just sat, radiating resentfulness and harbouring revenge, drained of his violent emotions.

Gaylord shrugged and turned away from Norman, as if shaking off the mood of depression that he'd felt for a moment. He prised the back off the control box with his thick, black fingernails. He peered inside, then carefully ripped out the power pack. Next he dug his stumpy fingers in and wrenched out all the modular circuit plates. Having fixed the device, he threw the remains carelessly into the corner of the room.

"One last question, Norman," Gaylord said. "Where did you hide my hoard?"

Norman smiled faintly, as if enjoying the memory of the incident he'd been reminded of. "That was the best part. While you and all the other dirty peasants were out scavenging where the blimp came down, that day the offworlders landed, I was using your own excursion truck to take all

your hoard and hide it under the platform in the main hall. It's all there. It's been there all along."

Gaylord sighed. "I ought to tear you into little pieces. But I haven't got the energy to spare. Lucian, Juliette, we'd better go and get my stuff now, from where this creature hid it."

"Why now?" asked Lucian. "Isn't it more important to plan a way of getting control of the survey craft, and fixing Larkin? When I saw him an hour ago, he said the explosion was timed to go off in six hours' time. We have to allow at least an hour to get clear of the asteroid in the survey craft, before the explosion. It doesn't leave much . . ."

"Suit yourself," Gaylord replied. "You get into the ship any bloody way you like. But I'm after getting my hoard back first."

"He's probably right," Juliette said quietly to Lucian. "He has guns, explosives, all kinds of things in his hoard."

Lucian shrugged. He and Juliette followed Gaylord outside, leaving Norman still slumped in the chair, staring fixedly at the opposite wall. There was a fanatically wild look set on his face.

Gaylord climbed on to the excursion truck, at the back of his house, and started the motors. The noise built up to a shrill whine; Lucian and Juliette pulled themselves up on to the back of the vehicle and it went bumping off across the rough ground. Gaylord steered it over towards the assembly hall, and without slowing at all smashed in through the closed doors, ploughing through the lines of chairs inside until he reached the platform at the end.

"If the whole asteroid's going to be blown up, no point in trying to keep things in one piece," he said. He jumped down from the driving seat, walked to the edge of the dais, bent over, dug his hands under the front of it, and lifted. The whole platform came up, groaning. With a grunt, Gaylord gave it a last heave and sent it falling back against the wall.

Underneath, packed closely together, was his entire hoard. In a vast glittering array it lay before him: polished metal, plastic oddments, fragments salvaged from refuse over a hundred years.

Gaylord climbed back into the driving seat of the truck.

He turned the vehicle, and then lowered the back of it like a large scoop. Lucian realised that this was how the vehicle had been designed, for use in collecting refuse from the impact sites of blimps that landed some distance from the village.

"My grandpa built this truck," Gaylord said. "Never failed me yet."

He revved the motors and edged the truck forward. With a vast crashing, crunching sound, the front of the load-carrying section dug in under the hoard, scooping it up. Gaylord stopped the truck, pressed another lever, and the scoop raised itself clear of the ground, swivelling upright so that the cargo wouldn't fall out again. He climbed down, loaded a few remaining items in by hand, and then, with Lucian and Juliette perched on top of the great glittering pile of metal, plastic and organic refuse, Gaylord ploughed back through the array of overturned and broken chairs and out of the hall.

The Attack

HE HEADED DOWN the street, and at every bump of the uneven road the load of his hoard shook and rattled. The noise brought some of the villagers out of their homes to watch the truck go by. Some called out, others just stood in surprised silence.

They drove on through the village, down towards the landing field. Without a pause, Gaylord carried on straight across the field towards where the survey craft stood.

"This is insane!" Lucian shouted, trying to make himself heard above the clattering of the load and the whining and groaning of the motors. "Larkin won't ask questions. When he sees us coming, he'll just turn the guns on us."

"Leave this to me," Gaylord shouted back. "We got to hit him before he knows what's up. No time for roundabout moves. Chances are he won't see us till we're on his doorstep."

Lucian held on to the side of the truck, unashamedly frightened, as they neared the ship. He watched the gun turrets, and felt a cold chill as he saw one of them begin to move. A crack like a thunderclap echoed over the land-

ing field, and a thin beam of energy shot through the air, ploughing into the ground a few yards away. The Kopran soil splashed up in a fountain of mud and refuse, leaving a deep crater.

"It's no use," Lucian shouted. "He won't let us in the ship. We'd be better off heading back out of range of his weapons."

"Shut your bloody mouth," Gaylord shouted back, "and leave it to me."

They were now almost alongside the smooth metal shell of the survey craft. Lucian still stared up at the remote-controlled gun turret. It was swivelling again, following the truck. He closed his eyes as he saw the turret clearly taking aim. Another one of the beams sliced down with an ear-splitting crack, and this time the heat of the explosion as it blasted into he ground nearby hit the side of Lucian's face in a great searing wave. Crying, Juliette collapsed into his arms. He hardly noticed; he was more concerned with his own safety. The danger was too obviously immediate to allow the proper concern he should be feeling for the girl.

As the dust settled and the heat subsided, Gaylord, still in the driving seat, cut the motors and pulled on the brakes, and burst into a long loud laugh. He looked back at Juliette and Lucian cowering in the rear of the vehicle.

"For God's sake, what's up with you? Like a pair of frightened mice. We're safe here, don't you see? I should've thought you knew, Lucian, the guns won't track in to fire this close to the ship. It's like a precaution, see; if the guns could fire this close to the shell of it, some damn fool gunner'd only get it a few degrees off and burn up part of the ship itself."

As if to emphasise what he said, the gun fired again, blasting another crater in the ground and spraying them with mud. But the shot came no closer than the last one had done.

Gaylord laughed again. He climbed into the back of the truck and started rummaging around. "I know about this, see," he said, "from out of my pa's diaries. He attacked an offworld ship, just like this, when some scum had double-dealed him out of his cargo. This ship's not quite the same model as the one he had a go at, of course, but I reckoned it was near enough."

He dug an old, battered loudhailer out of the great pile of junk and stood up. "Listen here, Larkin," he said. His amplified voice boomed and echoed off the side of the ship. "This is Isaac Gaylord. Head man, remember? If you've stopped buggering about with your guns, I want entry into your ship's hold. Get that?"

For a moment there was no response. Then servo mechanisms inside the ship's metal shell clicked, and two large doors slid slowly back, grinding and squeaking in their channels.

Gaylord laughed. "Knows he can't hit us with the weapons when we're this close. So he reckons to trap us inside. That's the way into the hold ; right, Lucian?"

Lucian nodded. "There's a spiral ramp around the inside of the ship, up to the hold, which is just above the engines."

"Any chance of us getting up from there to his cabin?"

"None at all. There are several sets of emergency doors he'll have sealed across the passage ways."

Gaylord chewed on his lip. He shrugged. "All right. Once I park the truck inside, I'll come back down and we'll go after him from the outside."

"Why bother with the truck?"

"Now you're talking like an offworlder. *Why bother?* My hoard, is why. You think I'm going to take any chance of this ship blasting off without my hoard safe inside it first? Must be crazy."

Gaylord rummaged around, found a few scraps of metal, and jumped down off the truck. Using a massive hammer he wedged the scraps in under the sliding doors, blocking the channels they slid in.

"Get off the truck and wait here," he said to Lucian and Juliette. He got back in the driving seat, revved the motors and drove into the dark doorway and out of sight up the ramp.

Lucian and Juliette waited in the entrance. Soon after Gaylord had gone in, the door-closing mechanism hummed, and one of the doors began edging inwards, bit by bit, pushing its way over Gaylord's crude wedge, the metal grinding and squealing in protest. But the other door held firm. The motor whined and emitted a few wisps of smoke before lapsing silent, probably burnt out.

"Score another one to your father," Lucian said.

Gaylord came pounding down the ramp, laden down with weapons and an extendable ladder clutched clumsily in both arms.

"Stowed the truck OK," he said. "Now here's where it gets a bit tricky."

"Larkin's retracted the entry ramp," Lucian said, "and in any case the main hatch is flanked by automatic weapons. We wouldn't have a chance to get in that way."

"So we don't. There's escape hatches, isn't there? Which one's nearest where we are now?"

Lucian thought carefully. He walked round the ship a little way, the others following. "The lowest hatch is about thirty feet up. Should be above us here."

Gaylord hefted the compact extendable ladder. "Thought this'd be useful. A few rungs missing—which is why some offworlder threw it away, I guess. Far as I remember, it works all right. Goes up to twenty-five feet."

He dug one end of the ladder into the ground, and started cranking it up. It unfolded section by section, extending out of sight over the gentle curvature of the side of the ship.

Gaylord stopped cranking and pulled out two side stays, which he wedged firmly in the ground.

"That's as far as it goes," he said. "Follow me up."

Clutching one of the guns, he climbed swiftly up the ladder. The bottom of it sank a little way into the soft ground, but then held. Lucian followed, Juliette coming last. The ladder began to sway dangerously, being unattached at the top. Twice it sank a little further into the ground below.

Lucian was becoming convinced he wasn't cut out for this kind of adventurous life. He felt positively sick with fear, and the sight of the ground twenty feet below sent his stomach heaving. It was only with great effort and strength of mind that he carried on up to the top of the ladder.

Above him, Gaylord had located the escape hatch. Lucian watched the Kopran first of all lever uselessly at the hatch with his gun barrel, then raise the weapon and aim it at the lock. He gave several random blasts, the cracking of the laser beam resounding in Lucian's ears. One of the shots

finally struck the activator mechanism of the hatch and without warning the door swung outwards.

Gaylord leaned back quickly to avoid it, and the ladder simultaneously lifted away from the side of the ship. For a long, awful moment it teetered upright, and they hung helplessly in mid-air, before finally, it swung back against the ship with a reassuring thump.

Gaylord at once grabbed hold of the bottom edge of the hatch and pulled himself into it. Lucian, hands trembling, followed him, and just made it without losing his hold. He helped Juliette up after him; she looked a little nervous, but generally seemed to be taking it much more calmly than he was.

They found themselves inside one of the gun turrets. Lucian explained that each turret could either be individually manned or remotely controlled from the main cabin.

From here, Lucian took the lead. He tried to visualise the plan of the survey craft in his head, and led them along corridors and stairways, creeping quietly through the ship until they were, he estimated, very near the nose of it. He led them into a cramped compartment half filled with food stores, and explained quietly to Gaylord and Juliette that the main cabin should be directly underneath.

Together, they aimed their weapons at the floor. With a deafening roar that resounded in the confined space, they used the rifles to punch out a neat circle. Gaylord stamped on it and it fell into the cabin below, spraying little droplets of molten metal.

It was almost too easy, then. Gaylord was the first to jump down through the hole into the cabin, gun ready. But Larkin had been taken completely by surprise. He was seated over at his desk, talking to headquarters by radio. Confronted by Gaylord, he ceased fumbling for his gun, and weakly raised his hands.

Gaylord shouted with laughter, which Lucian guessed was perhaps as much a direct release of tension as anything else. The big Kopran jumped over the desk, pulled Larkin out of the way, and sat down at the communicator. He saw an official's face in the viewscreen.

"Dunno who or what you are," he growled, showing his yellow, battered teeth to good effect, "but my name's Gaylord and as head man of the village here, we're taking over

from this turd Larkin." He smiled, holding the microphone in his grimy hands. His face, darkened with dirt, looked wonderfully evil. "We've found out all about your bloody weapons and the rest of it, see. We know what you got planned. But it ain't going to work out, see? I'm going to have a good try at stopping this bloody asteroid from being blown up, and if that don't work out, we've fixed things anyway so it'll spread itself all over your little sterile pleasure worlds. Got that? It'll all blow up into little pieces, all the filthy stinking muck, and *you're* the ones who it'll land on."

He grinned maliciously. The stunned official at the other end of the connexion started making stuttering noises, but Gaylord snapped the switch off before the man could finish his reply.

He turned to Larkin, grabbing hold of the man by the back of his collar. "Your turn now, Minister Larkin."

The offworlder's eyes shifted nervously round the cabin, helplessly turning to Lucian.

"For God's sake, Roach," he said, his voice half strangled by Gaylord's grip on his collar. "If you have any common sense left in you whatsoever, you'll come to my aid in preventing this insane, sub-normal savage from interfering with government operations. You realise the penalties involved—the consequences of being complicit in such a subversive scheme . . ."

Lucian shook his head. "Sorry," he said. "But I've gone native."

Beside him, Juliette looked up and smiled. Lucian put his arm round her.

Larkin was becoming desperate. He was clearly very scared indeed. "You must be out of your mind, consorting with these people," he said. "If I can't appeal to your reason, let me make an offer. I can't keep things completely quiet, but I'd play down your part in this. I'd do my best. I give you my word as a government minister. Just turn your gun on this savage and stop him . . . stop him from doing anything . . ."

Gaylord shook Larkin gently by the collar, holding the man up so his feet were only just touching the floor. "I think we've heard enough," he said, grinning widely. Juliette tried to smother a giggle. "If you've finished,

Larkin, we have some talking to do. Though first we got to get the villagers in here soon as we can."

"You can talk to them through the ship's external PA system," Lucian said. He stepped over to the control panel, and closed some switches. He handed Gaylord the microphone.

Gaylord looked out of the cabin window. The villagers were collected at the edge of the landing field, where they had been watching from a safe distance. "Listen here, you people," Gaylord said. His words were amplified by external loudspeakers. "This is Isaac Gaylord speaking. I'm in charge of this ship now. I'm telling you to get your stuff together and drag it over here, right away. The whole asteroid's going to blow up inside a few hours. Got that? This is your head man speaking, not some double-dealing offworlder."

Lucian pressed other switches, and at the bottom of the ship the entry ramp extended and the hatch opened. The villagers could be seen hurrying back to their homes to collect what possessions they could.

"That seems to have fixed it up all right," Gaylord said. He turned back to Larkin, deliberately keeping his dirty face unpleasantly close to the offworlder, who tried to shrink away, pressing himself against the wall.

"Listen now, Larkin," Gaylord said. "I got to explain things. What's happened, see, is my son—foster-son, rather —he's put a bit of explosive of his own down in that hole of yours, along with the big charge. It was remote-controlled, see, but the control box has been busted up. So there's no way of deactivating Norman's extra charge. And if what he said is right, and I reckon it is, that extra explosive, when it's set off by the big one going off, is just right to upset all your plans and blow Kopra into lots of little bits instead of just four big ones. Get the idea?"

Larkin paled visibly. "A messy fragmentation instead of a clean one? That's what I heard you say to HQ on the radio. But I thought you must be bluffing. Haven't you any conception of what this means? It'll pollute the whole asteroid belt. It'll be impossible to prevent. Chaos, complete chaos . . ."

Gaylord laughed. "Don't take it so serious. Just a little bit of dirt, is all. Still, you wouldn't want that, would you?

It'd mess things up for all you clean-living types, right? They might even hold you responsible, for being so bloody incompetent as to let it happen."

Larkin turned even paler. He evidently hadn't considered this aspect.

"Still," Gaylord went on, "you can save things yet. We can't do anything about the extra charge my Norman put down the hole—if the big one goes off, the extra one goes off too. But that big one is timed, isn't it? Perhaps you even know where the timer is. Perhaps you could get out there and re-set it. For next week, say; to give us bargaining time. Remember, if you don't, there just ain't no way at all of stopping Kopra blowing into one big cloud of little bits of garbage."

"There . . . there is a chance," Larkin said. "I know the approximate location, though I didn't actually supervise the installation. It's somewhere near the excavation site . . ."

"Then you got about an hour to go out there and fix it," Gaylord said. "And another thing. You *better* fix it, Larkin, because once we let you out of this ship we don't plan to let you back in again. That way, you got more of an incentive to do the job right. Get the idea? We'll blast clear in about half an hour's time, leaving you here. And we won't come back till we're sure you fixed things so the asteroid doesn't blow up."

Larkin nodded weakly. "I understand," he said.

Gaylord gave vent to one of his great guffaws. "What'd I tell you? Just got to take the initiative, and win out every time. Come on, you," he said, grabbing Larkin by the shoulder. "Let's escort you outside, shall we?"

"What . . . what about air filters, protective clothing?" the man said, nervously.

"Filters? All right, get your filters. Don't want to have you breathing our air and passing out. You'd only mess up the job, you being a pansy offworlder, not used to the smell. But the hell with special clothes. You'll just have to get *dirty*, Larkin."

Gaylord grinned maliciously.

Villagers were now entering the survey craft through the main hatch. They wandered around the ship, footsteps echoing in the corridors, looking lost. A few of them tenta-

tively dumped possessions in the vacant cabins, others squatted down in the corridors. The people stared around at the sterile metal of the ship with wide, uncomprehending eyes.

"Go where you like," Gaylord shouted, waving his arms expansively. "It's our ship, now. Make yourselves at home. Just leave us the control cabin, is all."

He and Lucian escorted Larkin down to the main hatch. Gaylord took the man's gun and made sure he carried no other weapons.

"Right," he said. "You got about an hour and a half till that bomb's due to go off. If you haven't fixed it up by then, it's just tough luck." He grinned, thumbs in his belt, unconsciously copying all the traditions and characteristics of an old-time pirate. "Whether you fix it or not won't matter so much to us. We'll be quite a few thousand miles away."

Larkin walked down the ramp. He paused at the bottom and looked back.

"I've got no alternative but to comply. But I warn you, Roach, if I manage to prevent the explosives from detonating, it still won't be pleasant for you. A court martial, almost certainly a death sentence. You're making a very great mistake . . ."

"Get on with it," Lucian said. "You're not going to change my mind now. It's too late for that."

As he spoke, Juliette came up alongside him. Lucian held her close and together they stared down defiantly at Larkin. Before the man turned away Lucian saw the revulsion in his face.

They watched as Larkin began picking his way over the marshy, ragged ground, clearly wincing at his close contact with the dirtiness of the environment. It was late afternoon and the light was beginning to fade a little; the evening mists were drawing in, and the pathetic figure of the off-worlder gradually became lost in the swirling yellow-brown vapours, as he trudged out to the excavation site.

About a quarter of an hour later, it seemed that all the villagers had entered the ship safely. Gaylord conducted a quick count, followed by Lucian and Juliette up and down the ladders and passageways. The men and women had made themselves at home as best they could, sitting with

their belongings in little groups, mostly in silence. Really, Lucian thought, they had adapted to the situation very well; there was no hysteria and the general reaction seemed to be calm expectancy. It came, he realised, from their generally unstable day-to-day existence.

They completed the count, and discovered just one person was missing. Gaylord chewed on his lip and concentrated carefully, running his finger down the list of names.

"It's Norman," Juliette said suddenly. "Norman isn't here."

"Bugger me," said Gaylord, slapping his forehead with the palm of his hand. "I'd forgotten all about the little bastard. Must be wishful thinking."

"Not so wishful you'd leave him here, with the possibility of Kopra being blown up," Lucian said.

Gaylord sniffed. "How long we got till we have to get clear of this dump?" he said slowly.

"We ought to leave any time now," Lucian said. "The sooner the better. We have to get well clear so that if it explodes, we don't get caught in the flying debris."

Gaylord was silent for a moment.

"You're not just going to blast off and leave Norman?" Juliette said.

Gaylord shrugged. "He knew what was going on. Everyone else got here. He should have done. Anyway, he always was worthless. Tried to put things over on us, didn't he? Didn't care if we lived or died. Hell with him."

"That's ridiculous," Lucian said. "He can't be held responsible; he's obviously not rational. He's like a child. We can't . . ."

"The sooner we get clear of here, the safer everyone'll be. All hundred-and-fifty of us."

Lucian and Gaylord stared at one another for a long moment. Finally Lucian turned away and walked quickly to the hatch.

"You do what you like, but I'm going to find him," he said. "You can try taking off in this ship if you feel like handling the controls alone. It's entirely up to you."

He hurried out of the survey craft and down the ramp.

Juliette watched him go, indecisively. Abruptly, she too turned away from Gaylord, and ran after Lucian, following him down the ramp, calling after him.

"Stupid bastards," Gaylord muttered to himself. "Stupid bloody bastards."

First Signs of Death

LUCIAN FELT HE was walking on condemned soil. The future explosion of the bomb seemed to have a kind of inevitability that endowed the familiar scene of the village with a sense of unreality. Its impending destruction filled Lucian's imagination.

He heard Juliette calling from behind him, and stopped to wait for her to catch up.

"I'm so sorry about father," she said. "I didn't know he could be quite so heartless. I knew he always hated Norman, but . . ."

Lucian shrugged. "He must always have had this streak in him. It just took the right circumstances to bring it out."

They walked quickly up the village street, the houses lying empty and deserted on either side. Their very existence in the face of impending destruction seemed somehow paradoxical. The wind rustled in the foliage of the trees and blew dust and leaves across the street. Otherwise the eerie silence was total.

They neared Gaylord's house. One of the windows was open ; the rough curtain swung in the breeze. There was no sign of life.

Lucian tried to open the door. It was blocked. He barged it a few times, and it finally gave way enough for them to get inside.

They called out to Norman, but there was no reply. Juliette led the way into the living room. She stopped when she saw the scene laid out in front of her.

The television set was on, with the sound turned right down. The coloured pictures flashed silently across the screen. A chair had been set facing the TV, a little way back from it. In the chair sat Norman, his legs stretched out, feet resting on a low stool. He was wearing the latest fashion in clothes favoured by the pleasure asteroid society ; the clothes were in immaculate condition, almost as new. Norman's arm was stretched out to a table nearby, where his hand rested by a delicate wine glass. The glass

was half full of a rich green liquid, bubbles lazily rising to the surface.

Lucian crept into the room, as if afraid of disturbing the tableau. He walked round to get a better view of Norman.

The pale face was totally relaxed. The eyes were closed. Norman was quite obviously dead. Lucian searched for a pulse, then sniffed the wine glass. The odour was strange; sharp and bitter. Behind him, Juliette began to cry quietly. The TV pictures flickered and sparkled with colours, spreading rainbow light over the dim room. Cardboard characters of a situation drama gesticulated and mouthed words in outrageous close-ups, rendered meaningless without sound.

Lucian turned away from the scene.

"Poor Norman," Juliette said. "But I suppose . . . I suppose really this was the only thing he could do, under the circumstances."

Lucian shrugged. Together they walked out of the room, leaving the dead body of Gaylord's foster-son still staring at the silent TV screen through his sightless eyes.

They hurried back to the survey craft, trying to avoid looking at the silent village. The dimming sunlight as dusk fell was somehow threatening. The wind was rising.

Evacuation

GAYLORD MET THEM at the entry hatch.

"Did you find him?"

Lucian nodded. He shut the hatch and locked it. They hurried up to the main cabin together. "He was dead. He'd arranged it perfectly, to suit his feelings. Some kind of poison in a wine glass. Stretched out where he'd been watching the television."

The details sounded dry and bare, devoid of any feeling.

"So there wasn't no point in your going out there, after all," Gaylord said. "We could've been away from Kopra fifteen minutes ago."

Lucian began strapping himself into the pilot's take-off couch.

"Of course we could," he said. "Except that, we wouldn't have known if we'd left Norman dead or alive. It would

have been on my conscience, on yours, and on everyone else's."

Gaylord fumbled with the clasps on the co-pilot's couch, trying to fit his large frame on to it. He seemed strangely thoughtful.

"I suppose," he said slowly, "I suppose you might've got a point there."

Lucian realised this was the nearest Gaylord could ever come to admitting he had been wrong.

Quickly he checked out the systems of the survey craft. All were go. He switched on the PA system to speak to the villagers on board the ship.

"We're taking off in thirty seconds. Lie down flat, on anything soft. The softer the better. You're going to feel very heavy, and it may be unpleasant. But it won't last long, and no one should come to any harm."

He switched off the microphone and started the take-off computer. The seconds ticked away. He tried to relax, lying back in the couch and just monitoring the dials and indicators. He glanced quickly behind him. Juliette was stretched out on the third couch. She smiled at him. The grubbiness of her face and her tangled hair struck him as being particularly appealing.

Faintly, he heard the fuel pumps start, following the pre-programmed take-off sequence. Their steady murmuring rose to a higher pitch. Down in the lower half of the ship valves opened and the fuel started to gush down to the combustion chambers.

Ignition. The floor shifted a little under them as the rockets fired and built up thrust. Feedback controls evened the power, and inexorably the ship began to rise. Lucian glanced out of the adjacent window, taking a last look at the village and the Kopran landscape. It had grown almost dark, now, and the yellow mist swirled and drifted over the village, obscuring it.

Acceleration increased and the roar of the motors vibrated through the ship. Lucian saw the indicator stay steady at the thrust of four gravities. He was used to it; but beside him, he heard Gaylord gasp and grunt, breathing heavily. He hoped Juliette would be all right.

Outside the window, the asteroid dwindled in size. The survey craft had achieved a high enough velocity to escape

the artificial gravity of Kopra, but there was not very much of a margin. Lucian watched the fuel indicator drop, and felt the motors cut out one by one, smoothly decreasing thrust, leaving just enough fuel for subsequent manoeuvring and landing . . . though where they would be landing, of course, was strictly speculation.

The firing sequence ended; the computer clicked once and the pattern of panel lights changed. Lucian switched on the ship's artificial gravity, and unstrapped himself from the couch. The sun appeared from behind the bulk of the asteroid below, and light flooded into the cabin.

Lucian saw that both Juliette and Gaylord were unconscious. He gave each of them quick shots of a stimulant, and then bent over the computer, making a quick calculation. They would be about a hundred thousand miles away from Kopra, he found, when the explosives were timed to go off. It might be unpleasant, for a while, avoiding the flying rock. But they should survive.

Gaylord stirred from his couch, getting up groggily, shaking his head.

"Feels like I been buried under a pile of garbage," he mumbled. Grimacing, he spat on the floor. Lucian at first flinched instinctively, then relaxed. It hardly mattered now.

He took another look at Juliette. She was just regaining consciousness. She'd feel better once the drug he'd given her took full effect.

Lucian picked up a medikit and left the control cabin, walking down through the ship, checking no one had been injured by the take-off. Where necessary he administered drugs, but most of the hardy villagers were just a little shaken, and many were already staring excitedly out of the viewing windows.

Completing his tour, Lucian went back to the main cabin. Now it was just a matter of waiting to see whether Larkin, down below them on Kopra, would be able to stop the explosion.

Garbage Party

"I STILL FEEL a bit guilty about leaving Larkin down there," he said to Gaylord, a little later. "I mean, we took the trouble over Norman . . ."

"It's not the same at all," Gaylord said. "That Larkin, he always was a first class bastard, knew just what he was doing. He deserves all he gets. Remember what he had planned for us? Kind of poetic justice, if he gets blown up by his own nasty plans."

Lucian sighed. "I suppose you're right."

"In a way," Juliette said, "I hope he *doesn't* manage to prevent the explosion. I mean, the asteroid's my home ; but think of all the complications if, now, Kopra stays in one piece. It'll be very hard for us to go on living there. On the other hand, if it does fall to pieces, messily, the way Norman fixed it, it'll dirty up all the asteroid belt. And if everyone living there is like Larkin, well, they *need* a bit of dirtying up."

Gaylord gave a great bellow of laughter.

"That's what I like to hear. Girl with a bit of spirit. Hell, we're all sitting here feeling fed up. We oughta be enjoying ourselves, while we got time." He rubbed his big hands together. "I know just what we need now, too. A drink, is what. Drown our sorrows. Thought I was crazy, taking all that trouble to load in my hoard, didn't you? Might've thought different if you'd of known there was three gallons of home brew packed in with the rest of the junk."

Chuckling, his high spirits back again, Gaylord left the cabin and went down to the hold.

He returned a little later with several villagers, carrying a battered oil drum. He swept all the papers off Larkin's desk, and dumped the drum down in the middle of it, ruining the precious, imported polished mahogany, that Larkin had had brought specially from Earth. Someone came in carrying paper cups, found in the ship's kitchen. Before Lucian had time to sort out what was going on, villagers were filing into the cabin, filling their cups and walking out again in an orderly procession, while Gaylord talked and shouted, trying to impart his happy mood to everyone else.

Juliette nudged Lucian. "Don't you want anything to drink?" she said, smiling.

"Yes . . . yes, I suppose I do," he said, and filled his cup with the rest of them. He remembered how strong the liquor had seemed in the past, but now he found it almost

pleasant-tasting and easy to swallow. His tastes had changed in the same way that he now never noticed the powerful smell of the villagers, and their dirtiness. Perhaps it was partly because of the trek through the jungle, but it was certainly also due to a simple reorientation of his attitudes.

It took very little time for the party to get going. The metal corridors and stairways resounded to the pounding of feet and the shouting and singing of the villagers. Some had brought their own TV sets with them, and these were blasting out programmes that were insane in their banality, when contrasted with the raw, earthy celebrations in progress. Lucian now understood the villagers' reason for liking the random TV background noise. It was marvellously, incredibly funny. While the latest panel game played through its complex ritual, and personalities flashed synthetic smiles, the Koprans on board the hijacked survey craft poured raw alcohol down their throats, shouted, sang and made love with great abandon.

Lucian and Juliette, arms round one another, walked a little unsteadily down to the lower levels of the ship. It had never looked like this before. The villagers had taken over completely ; some had even started painting the metal walls a tasteful shade of brown, before stopping in the middle of the job and turning to some other occupation. Dirt was everywhere, and all the stores had been examined and left opened. A fire hose trailed down a corridor, gently gushing water. Lucian turned the stop valve off, oblivious to the protests of people who had been paddling in the water. In one cabin, a game of strip poker was in advanced stages, there being much shouting and laughing. Lucian and Juliette politely refused invitations to join the game.

Down in the hold, they found Gaylord, seated on top of his excursion truck, quite drunk, his hoard spread out all around him. In front of a noisy but enthusiastic audience, he was going through his complete collection, piece by piece, explaining the past history and significance of every object.

"This came down almost seventy years ago," he was saying. "See here, in my pa's catalogue, reference 20-01-73, emergency ration pack used in escape module from 'Star Seeker,' old heavy duty transport ship. Ration pack enables

14-day survival. It's in my pa's diary, see, this pack kept him going for a week, while he was trekking back to the village. Broke his leg, he did, had to crawl all the way. I'm telling you, it's true. All down here, in his own writing. Now this piece . . ."

Further up in the survey craft, nearer the control cabin, the orgy was entering its later stages. A lot of people had passed out; most were half naked. Personal possessions were littered everywhere, thrown around in drunken abandon. One villager was holding an oxygen cylinder between his knees, taking great gasps of breath as the gas escaped through the valve and into his mouth and nose. He was giggling gently.

The control cabin was a refuge from the unrestrained exhibitionism and chaos that now filled the ship on every level. Lucian, feeling a little drunk, shut the door, and took Juliette in his arms. She smiled, looking up at him a little sleepily.

He kissed her, long and thoroughly, tongues touching, hands caressing. He started to undress her. She wore very few clothes.

"The acceleration couch must be comfortable," she said, her speech a little slurred.

He laughed and picked her up in his arms, carrying her over to the pilot's couch, from where Larkin had, not so very long ago, once controlled the survey craft.

This was the final irony, Lucian thought to himself. Me and a ship full of drunken Koprans, filthy dirty and smelling of old socks and manure. Me up here with one of them, a lovely, dirty girl. Me as filthy as she is. Waiting for the asteroid to blow itself to pieces and spread garbage all over the asteroid belt.

They lay down side by side, quietly making love, taking it very gently and slowly, not hurrying the build-up of tension and emotion. Gradually the caresses became more intimate and impassioned.

For a moment, she stopped him, abruptly.

"Look," she said, pointing out of the porthole behind him. "It's starting to happen."

He turned round and saw, out in space, the asteroid becoming suffused in a great enveloping field of fire. The surface cracked and divided, again and again, into smaller

and smaller fragments that were silhouetted black against the redness of the inner glow. The asteroid seemed to expand as the pieces moved outwards with a kind of leisurely slowness. The field of fire brightened, as if trying to swallow the entire asteroid, and a great corona spread out all around it. Slowly, very slowly, the pieces of rock and refuse and garbage, exploded out from the core of white flame.

"We will be safe, won't we?" she murmured.

"I think so," he said. As he spoke, they heard a great cheer run through the entire ship. The villagers, too, had seen the explosion of Kopra.

"As far as they're concerned," Lucian said, "it may be the end of their home world, but it's a smack in the eye for the rest of the asteroid belt. Maybe it's a good thing. Hell, the whole outlook had become crazy about cleanliness. I know—I was brought up in it."

She smiled, looking back at him, away from the window. "Just think," she said, "of all that rubbish. A hundred years' worth of garbage. All raining down on the pleasure asteroids. Why, it'll turn them *all* into garbage worlds."

Lucian smiled. "Then we'll have a lot to choose from, won't we?" he said.

She tickled him ; he held her down and kissed her. Their bodies, coated generously with honest Kopran dirt, pressed together. Soon they had both forgotten all about the asteroid, still exploding in space outside the window.

And so, while the drunken, dirty Kopran villagers sang and shouted down in the corridors and cabins of the survey craft, and while the garbage world burst apart in a cloud of white fire, Lucian Roach and Juliette Gaylord embraced and made love passionately together on the control cabin acceleration couch.

the tennyson effect

graham m. hall

GAUNT STRODE THE pale pinnacles across the distant near horizon.

The Moon: a view to the west.

Luna; an alien awe.

Dawn on Earth's satellite. Peaks pin-pointed by search-light sun.

"The sun sipped the Lake of Dreams
And the dust was wine . . ."

Lines from a poem by Paul Windust, 1984—?, now standing vaingloriously before the womb-wall window of Research Dome 21675/LD, part of Unit LD, nestling, like foam in a bath, beneath the east rim of the Lake of Dreams.

To the south, the Seas of Serenity and Tranquillity, aptly-named, though sea-less.

To the east, the Caucasus Mountains, the present couch of the rising sun.

Eye-piece Windust turns away from the floor-low win-

dow into the room. He is alone. Floor-space of slightly under one square kilometre trammelled by one pair of soiling feet. Attached to: Paul Tiresias Windust, poet and expatriate *de luxe*.

Alone with the greatest mind in the Universe. A mind taintless of original sin. A computer yclept *Alpha*.

Long rows of metal-grey computer consoles reach out into the gloomdusk at the far end like fingers into fog.

"I dreamt of strange engines . . ."

That when prodded by a science-mind do strange things.

Cabinets standing like robot warriors, clicking and ticking softly to each other like a dying fire.

Spools spinning smoothly. Here and there a green light gleams, a holiday-making glow-worm.

Windust wanders aimlessly to the intake units. Beside the rank of clinical metal, man looks out of place. Blue jeans sold, traded in for regulation plastic silver cover-all.

Typewriter-type keyboard for simple instruction.

Q W E R T Y U I O P . . . Z X . . .

Finger the familiar plastic letters. Letters, words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs. Construct/create. String together.

Windust picks out with tongue-clenching deliberation.

"I think, therefore I am."

Here we have the well-known Descartean cliché.

Clicking like a strontium-sick geiger, *Alpha* ingests. A crescendo (on the crescent) and down to a silence filled with soft noises. Breathing. Humming. Ticking.

No reply-tape rattle. No data request.

Alpha above fiddling little principles. After 400 years, Descartes is put in his place.

Dawn Luna-time, day-break Greenwich (a quarter of a million miles away) Mean Time.

The working day begins.

Workmates and torquemada-overseers appear, sleep-bleared although they weren't really tired the night before.

Windust is employed by the State.

His overseer is a man of France, Doctor Monnayeurs, with an accent all Kensington and claret.

His workmate, fellow-employee, is David Chamberlain Jones, jaundice-journalist, adept prose-exposer.

Monnayeurs a aussi un collègue. Il s'appelle Docteur Anthony Charles.

Monnayeurs is a research cybernetician. Charles is a psycho-semanticist.

Science is their business.

Colour them clinically.

Optic Windust walks a score of yards back to the wall-window.

To the left, an egg-dome. Living ¼s. Small. Call them eighths.

Rising time, lit up. Sections lit like ice-cream briquettes.

Eeeny-miney miney-mo.

Mine. Dark as dust.

Three up, four to the right.

Bridget's. Ten square metres of the Elysian Fields, transplanted by Hermes at the request of Calliope to nurture befavoured Windust.

Bridget's apartment, cubicle, box.

Yesterday evening Paul Tiresias Windust lay upon a couch in that cubicle.

By the satin-warm un-nyloned side of Computer Technician Bridget Doyle.

He was in a state of undress, your Worship.

Windust's conjuring hand lay lovingly upon a flatsmooth stomach. Nay, a belly.

It was not his own. The seductive young man.

He had just been informed that there was life within that belly ; not Bridget's, not his, but both. Fused.

Confused.

"I'm pregnant," she said, as if it was hunger or happiness.

Pregnant. Up the stick, in the cart/club/family way. Expecting. Full point. Stop, man. Oh Jesus make it terminate.

Babies weren't (hadn't ever been) born on the Moon. Neither had blue whales or green chairs.

It was not possible.

It was true.

Jesus.

"I'm your daddy, son stroke daughter." Me. The name's Windust. The family name.

Twisted Jesus.

Doors are made to open. They are situated in the heart, mind and walls.

Colour them convenient.

The swing doors of the computer room swung. Open.

Threshold-crossing came David Chamberlain Jones, overslept and slept-in. Jones the News. Creases in a crumpled suit. Plastic silver to boot, from neck.

Mood-dispersing Jones, bulligerent.

"Good morning. Good morning. And how's the Luna Shakespeare this fine and sunny morning?"

Deft mental fingers delicately add to a card-house diatribe. Silence in course.

"All those question-and-answer things are over, then? Five months of filling in stupid questionnaires and being given a third-rate third-degree by a bunch of smart-alec psychos. And for why?"

The beauty of rhetoric.

"They don't tell us. Perhaps today they'll stoop to enlightening us."

Black souls cannot be lighted, save by darkness visible.

"Five months we've been stuck on this damned hunk of rock. I'll begin to smell like prime Cheddar soon. The only girls I'll attract when I get back Earthside will be the mousy ones. If I go back Earthside."

Why the conditional? Oh yes, Jones saves his £250 a day remuneration (no chance to spend) to pay for transport to the planet Mars (red dust canals). A new colony, a new news agency. Jones, the Martian Reuter.

"Them questions. Bugger me if I know what they were after. They must have got the essence of Jones filed away now. And you. Ugh. I wouldn't like to see yours. Still waters run deep, all right. They're usually pretty stagnant too."

Grow green hair and call it duckweed. And that's an order.

Swing doors swung. *Enter R.*, conversing, that chart-plotting two-some, Drs. Monnayeurs and Charles.

Greetings, a choral work by *Zwei Wissenschaftler*.

Solo aria by Charles.

"Now we have completed our examinations we can inform you of the reasons behind them. To have done so earlier would, we fear, perchance have affected our results —almost certainly in one case.

"As you know, you have been here these past months to help us with an important—a revolutionary—experiment."

"Balls!"

Jones! Leave your genitals out of this! This is a scientific discussion. You newspapermen try to bring sex into *every*-thing!

"That may be why you're here. I'm here because you're paying me £250 a day, plus keep."

"Precisely," precisely. "And Mr. Windust is here because he wanted new concepts for his poetry—the first extra-terrestrial versifier. But, according to your individual talents, you've been here helping us.

"You, Mr. Jones, were selected because you are down-to-earth."

Positively a mud-wallower.

"And you write prose which, while not exactly of Dickensian standard, is straightforward, smooth and, relatively speaking, technically sound."

Sound of dung dropping.

"On the other hand, you don't have an ounce of poetry in your soul—if you have a soul. I suspect that if you were ever blessed with one you sold it to some editor on The Street long ago at three and sixpence a line.

"You, Mr. Windust, are a poet. You're not just an excellent writer who chooses verse as an occasional medium, as were, say, D. H. Lawrence, Kipling or de la Mare. You are more akin to Shakespeare or William Blake. You are A Poet. And, therefore, you could no more do Mr. Jones' job than he could create a sonnet.

"He was selected because he is completely a prose-writer, and you because you are so utterly a poet."

Oh yes, so utterly. A father, too. Would you be so kind as to act as midwife, Dr. Charles? I'm afraid our home is a little off the midwife's route.

Simper.

"Poetry finds its way to something deeper in man than the mind, although it only uses words and letters, basically the same symbols as prose."

Here is the Oxford English Dictionary, Doctor. You *do* know the alphabet, I take it? I expect three volumes of a modern *Paradise Lost* by next Tuesday. You may go.

"I'm a psycho-semanticist. That is, I deal with the human mind in relation to meanings. I had been working on the concept of this basic emotional difference between prose

and poetry when Dr. Monnayeurs published a paper on computer-poetry."

Alpha-Red Law/D 10-i-sun.

"We decided to merge our researches. Because of a certain amount of defence application, we needed top security. In the 21st century, that means the Moon."

Moon, menses, month. Maane, ma (n). Security, top.

"The exhaustive psycho-analysis has revealed the difference in mental process between a poet and a . . . hack. By means of a minor computer, we have reduced this mental difference to cybernetic terms, raised it to the power of ten, and used it to programme *Alpha*, here in this room. Thus, *Alpha* has a poet's mind to the power of ten."

Ten x Ten x Ten x Ten x Ten x Ten x Ten x Ten x Ten x Tennyson.

"If the machine also had all the subtle vocabulary and experience of a poet, we could almost expect it to turn out work approximately 100 thousand million times better than Shakespeare's. Patently impossible."

Science-man. Keep thy sodium nose from the Lake of Dreams! Where the bee sucks; there—f*ck off.

"In fact, *Alpha* can express something in the region of pure emotion—what we call Emotion^{10}. We say 'Love', *Alpha* communicates 'Love^{10}'."

Or Fear^{18} or Hate^{18} or Grief^{10} or Jealousy^{10}? Is madness an emotion? Fondly fondle your emotional equations! *Frankenstein, A Cautionary Fable*, was written by a poet's wife.

The wife of a poet . . .

My wise-eyed Goddess, Bridget!

Soap-slogan transfiguration when they met in the Unit canteen. Art versus Science. Plus love. Ohms-sexual.

It's like a fish now. All gills and sea-water.

Swim, little one.

And he swam and he swam right over the . . .

Damn!

"You can't express pure emotion by any symbols. *Alpha* overcomes this obstacle admirably. Mind-to-mind communication. One way, of course. For a long time, we've been able to make telepathic computers. *Alpha* is a broadcasting telepath. The most powerful mind in the Universe."

"Jesus H Christ!"

Luna is not in His parish, Jones.

"It's the news story of the century!" (a century but four years old). "And I've got to sit on it!"

Alpha communicates directly from mind to mind, but we have governed it so that it has to beam its thought-waves. Otherwise it would work just as much against its users as against its subjects. In popular terminology, I suppose it would be called a mental ray-gun. Switch it on, point it at someone, flip the 'Love' switch and the person is overwhelmed with Love."

Doyle! You never told me you had an in-built *Alpha*. Built-in where?

Monnayeurs interjectus.

"Actually, we have a device that inexorably attracts humans—an audi-hypnosis instrument called 'Pied Piper'. Invented by the Pan-Asians and used with remarkable success in the later stages of the Australian War. Draw a regiment into a straight line and then open up with enfilade laser fire. Not very nice."

Positively inhospitable.

"You look a little surprised, Mr. Jones? Come, come, this is the 21st century. There is very little science cannot do now. There still remains the development of more subtle ways of doing them. Hence—*Alpha*. More humane than u/r irradiation."

Humane. Inhuman.

"In fact, you might say that we four together have created the latest Ultimate Weapon."

Sob.

S O B
a w r
s e o
s n o
o k
o e
n

Sorley, Rosenberg and Grenfell.

Bitter?

No, make mine a whisky. Treble.

"Right, gentlemen. Now I really think you should go off to lunch. We have finished with you for today. We will not be requiring your services until testing."

Company, dismiss. Four's a riot.

• • •

Which way's Alice Springs? White sun on white sandust. Suit cool, F or C. Throat dry.

It's all in the mind, McCabe. Double one up.

Courting balloons hand-in-hand trip across the dust-floor. Bridget and Paul. Have you strucked oil?

Yes, but never in anger.

My round, I believe.

Rotund in a space-suit. Light as air. Three kinds of sun-silted floor. The sky, the crater. And the domes, 'way back over there.

Coitus interruptus by vacuum and plastic silver. State-issue, to keep all the air in, all the joy out. Stroll to the horizon and then back to the Box for two falls, two sub-missions and a quick knock-out.

Breathless, we flung us on the hilly moon. Laughed at the sun, and kissed the lovely dust.

Curtains.

• • •

When you see millions of the mouthless dead
Across your dreams in pale battalions go
Say not soft things as other men have said.

Antique copy of ancient poem. Created by C. H. Sorley, poet of war. Died of Wounds. R.I.P. *Pro Patria Mori.* With ten million *mori.*

Marlborough and other poems, in priceless first edition. Moon-bound valueless. Being scanned by Window Windust, wind-dumb. In the casual dusk of a warm dark room. In a sun-struck dome on a daylit moon. Near a love-blushed woman with a life-filled womb.

"Meaning is of the intellect;
Poetry is not."

Newton was a Christian.

"Here we are, platoon. This is the *Alpha* mains-connection plug. It is used for connecting *Alpha* to the mains. It is a male plug, which, like all you randy young soldiers, takes great pleasure in raping members of the

opposite sex. When such an operation is carried out, *Alpha* becomes electrified. Just like you randy young soldiers. *Alpha* is capable of enslaving two billion people. We have every hope that it will."

"Right then, 234618. What is the *Alpha* mains connection plug?"

It is morning. Computer Technician Bridget Doyle is vomitting into a small bowl.

• • •

Sunset on Luna. A view to the west.

Jagged mountain-shadow crawls across the filldust plain. Cold feeling.

Viewer Windust shivers, fragile glass.

"And the ice claimed the Lake of Dreams
And the Gods awoke . . ."

End of a poem by Paul Tiresias Windust, 1984-near future.

Phoenix sun falling off edge of globe.

A finger of darkness scratches at the dome window. Come to Hell, poet-man, and versify in horror.

No shepherds' delight. Theatrical dimming to black.

Windust moves into the room. McGonagal meet Shakespeare. Awed, I'm sure.

Ponder at A S D F G H J K L. Tap out gently, sugar plum.

What will the Gods say, seeing us strung
As nobly and as taut as they?

Typing-pool rattle. *Alpha* excretes tape, contempt.

REQUEST MORE DATA *re* ABSTRACT CONCEPT 'GODS'.

Atheism[10].

Moses was a poet. He wrote the Pentateunuch.

The Blue Lagoon all over again.

Fly away swing doors. Lintel-burrowing steps Dogtor Tony Charles, all skin and toothpaste.

"Good morning, friend. It's good to see you in here. Taking lessons from your superior, eh? I'll enrol you as the Moon University's first student if you like."

Me no like.

"Testing day today. Jones, surprisingly enough, has volunteered as the guinea pig for *Alpha*'s first run. Encouraged by generous financial remuneration, of course.

As soon as he and Dr. Monnayeurs arrive we'll get under way."

Is it true what they say about Swinburne?
Is it true what we hear about Keats?
Are they really so perverse?
No, they are by far worse
And now let me phall you of Yeats.

"If you'll just come down the corridor a little way." (Footstepping interlude). "Here we are. It's sound-proofed, you see. We're trying out Pied Piper as well."

Pin-ball guts. Spaceship dashboard. Dials and wires and knobs.

Which one's the windscreen wipers?

Alpha in fish-box window. Joined by Jones, gleeful. Thumbs up.

Where are you going?

Mars.

Hop in.

Monnayeurs.

"Good morning, both. A.O.K.?"

Like a rocket, man. A billion-dollar failure.

"We might as well get started then."

Kiddies, it's time to open the Christmas presents. OOOoooh.

Flipswitch.

Pinkyperky Jones kinky jerky. Eyes like a mad rabbit. Scuttling like a souped-up crab into range of *Alpha* output.

Relax.

Who cut the strings?

Flipswitch Mark II.

Redhot maw grab finger. Mash bones. Yank sinew. Tear flesh. Eeeeeeeeeeeeeee.

A soundless scream. Mouth working in fish-box.

Feet scrabble (a word game for all the family) on plasti-flooring. 200 metres covered. A new Intergalactic Empire Record. Play international anthems. Praise international Gods.

Crushed into wall. Fear[10]. Filled your pants, Jones? That's naughty.

Damned uncomfortable.

Fistbatter on wall. Snap crackle and pop go the knuckles. Bottle-red blood spurts, trickles.

Can't you feel the pain there, friend?

Sightless soundless Jones on blasted knees in pool of blood-water. Fear-mad.

This is a scientific experiment. Watch with detachment.

Don't weep for him, Windust.

A crushed volunteer is better than ten pressed men.

Flipflop switch.

Jones rumpled, cheek to plasti. Fear gone.

Must escape. Must get away. Oh oh oh oh.

Don't weep for him, Windust.

Back into range, you fool. Flapping switch.

Ever seen a man stand on two broken legs?

Like a languid puppet Jones runs for the way out. A crack in the plasti-glass dome, a skater's nightmare. Ripple, branch, grow. The Miracle of Life. Void in, air out. Lungs out. Eyes pop-pop like tomatoes.

Don't spew, Windust. Can't you see a man's dying out there? Have some respect.

Monnayeurs yelping into phone.

"Get out there and patch the dome! Don't you see, *Alpha* might be ruined!!"

There are no worms on the Moon. No adolescent flies. So who will eat David now, poor thing?

Time will eat poor David now.

PRESSMAN'S DEATH PLUNGE.

Drama of first Moon fatality.

72-point Sans Serif. Keep it quiet.

Here dead lies he because he did not choose
To live without a bank from which to spend.
Life, to be sure, is nothing much to lose
But rich men think it is, and Jones wanted to be rich.

Jesus Wept (John XI 35).

That's poetry. And damn good journalism.

Windust wept.

That's sadness.

• • •

"Jones is dead." Fishbone words in Bridget's throat. "The Tennyson Effect killed him. Oh, what are we going to do?"

Start a family. Fingers feel it, pear-size. Soft with life. Hi, kid.

The fruit on the Tree of Knowledge were apples. Grandaddy God's.

"What are we going to *do*? From here, that thing could drive half the world mad with fear. It's horrible."

Straight out of Poe.

Call it the Windust Effect.

A brainchild.

Apple-size fleshchild. Croon to it. It's a hateful world you're joining.

"What are we going to *do*?"

Why us? Make love.

"No, Paul. Not now, please."

Silence.

"They'll just bury him out there in the plain."

They do that sort of thing with dead bodies, y'know. It's because if they're left lying about, you start to think.

Death dreams. You too can be a body like me. After only ten short years. Send for details today!

"They won't be able to bury all those billions, though. It'll be the end of all of it. The world. Damn you, Paul! If it can't be our world, it can be our child's!"

Undepression covers me
I am filled with unelation.
I unhope for all save Death
And deathlong satiation.

"We must do *something*!"

Make love? Go for a moonlit stroll over Jones' dead body? Sleep??

"Yes, *we* must do something. Can't you see, you cloud-struck dreamer, that *Alpha* is you. You[10], if you like, but it's your mind that drove Jones to his death."

I have an alibi, officer, I was with the doctor all the time. If you hang me on the Moon, will it take six times as long?

"Do something!"

A scream.

"Do something!!"

A feeble fisting.

"Do something, oh, for God's sake please do something!"

Muffled sobbing into rumpled sheeting.

Paul Tiresias Windust, b.1984, wonders. A murderer.

My mind?

Me?

Oh, do something!

Windust left the living eighth. Conveyor-coverwayed to the computer room.

Hallo, me.

• • •

Computer Technician Bridget Doyle, natal-haggard, lies on the bed in her cubicle. Sightless staring at ceiling.

Windust enters. Sits. Drops weary poet's head into writer's hands.

Bridget turns, churning, toward him.

Paul Windust looks up. Eyes wet.

"I think I've done it," he says quietly.

• • •

The computer room. Misty in grey-gloom. Glow-worms haphazard. Spools spooning, in love with each other. Yellow lights dancing. Locusts creaking.

Alpha is thinking.

Crescendo reached.

A lone red light flames. Warning. Alarm. A failure. Breakdown. Output beaming system shorted.

Rattling like machine-guns, noisy as Armistice Day. A control panel bursts into electric blue flame, acrid acid smoke. Here, a transmission link melts. There, a circuit shorts.

Breakdown builds up. Fire begins to ravage memory banks, licks at consoles. Paint burns. Dome fills with smoke and fumes. Sprinklers burst into rain.

Then.

Alpha explodes, silently shattering its dome and attendant scientists.

The living quarters escape.

A wave of energy bursts out of the Lake of Dreams, spreading like a globular ripple.

The mind energy races across the Moon, leaps space, engulfs the Earth, envelopes the Sun and roars out into the purple void towards the cold light of the stars.

Alpha's last act.

Peace[10].

the realms of tolkien

daphne castell

IN 1954, WHEN I was working in a university science faculty, Allen and Unwin published a Book. The effect upon the learned and respectable body of people who composed the faculty staff was extraordinary. Lecturers and other responsible people went about quoting it, drawing maps of its geography in enthusiastic detail; one head of a department used to leave messages for his colleagues in High Elven, and for his secretary in Grey Elven.

The Book was, of course, Professor J. R. R. Tolkien's "Fellowship of the Ring", which was followed by the two companions that complete the three-volume work, "The Lord of the Rings".

The publication of a book of this nature could be called an adventure; for though its predecessor, "The Hobbit", had been a successful children's book, no one could have seen quite such a wildly enthusiastic reception for what is, after all, the unusual and special product of a unique talent.

For those not fortunate enough to have encountered "The Lord of the Rings", I should explain that it is extremely difficult to classify—if one has to classify a work of fiction. It is a combination of almost everything good you can think of in a story. It has high adventure, romance, fantasy, wonder, convincing people and dialogue, horror,

humour, and a noble story of the struggle of good against evil. It concerns the alliance of the Hobbits, a little furry people, with Men descended from the Kings of Númenor and with Elves, against the powers of Evil sent forth by Sauron, the Dark Lord, from the Land of Mordor, and against the many servants who present themselves in amazingly varied and unpleasant guises. Each race in the book has its own language and customs; and we are given details of food, clothing, plant life and terrain. Its addicts are many and generally incurable. After England, it overran America like wildfire; and since the paperback edition reached the U.S.A., hoardings and subway walls in various parts of the continent have been adorned with fervent exclamations of "Frodo lives!" "Gandalf is God", and other expressions which show how strongly the Tolkien-fever has wrought.

I went to see Professor Tolkien in his house in Headington, Oxford, not long ago. The house is a pleasant one, dripping, at this time of the year with white roses and overhanging tree foliage. He had told me firmly that he was giving no more interviews, and then relented to add, "But I'll make an exception for you, as you're an old student of mine." I think that others of his former students would remember many such acts of kindness. Such as, for instance, the failure of some minor examination, and the administration by him of glasses of sherry and the consoling words, "But, my dear girl, *everybody* fails that!"

He talks very quickly, striding up and down the converted garage which serves as his study, waving his pipe, making little jabs with it to mark important points; and now and then jamming it back in, and talking round it. It is not always easy to hear him; and one dare not miss anything, for he has the habits of speech of the true story-teller, and seldom indulges in the phrase-ridden and repetitive ways most people use nowadays. Every sentence is important, and lively, and striking—"deeply buried," he says, "in the lunatic beliefs of children," and "my heart is in my works, not on my sleeve."

His first fictional work, "The Hobbit", came into print almost by accident, after a friend who had read it in manuscript had recommended it lovingly to a friend of hers, who worked for Allen and Unwin.

It was, in fact, written after he had already begun to chronicle privately the "Lord of the Rings", and the events referred to in that book as part of its historical background, the story of the Silmaril, and so on. More chronicles, he hopes, will come; but time poses an extremely difficult problem for him, and he is at present working on the revision of the next edition of the "Lord of the Rings".

"I love it (revision). I am a natural niggler, fascinated by detail. But it is becoming evident that I had better get *on*, and leave what is printed, with its inevitable defects. I'm a very busy man, I always have been, with a great deal of my own work to do; and they keep on expecting a 'Great Book' of me. 'Great Book', is what they say and expect, and it alarms me."

He finds it surprising and pleasing that the "Lord of the Rings" has had such a success. It seems to him that nowadays almost any kind of fiction is mishandled, through not being sufficiently enjoyed. He thinks that there is now a tendency both to believe and teach in schools and colleges that "enjoyment" is an illiterate reaction; that if you are a serious reader, you should take the construction to pieces; find and analyse sources, dissect it into symbols, and debase it into allegory. Any idea of actually reading the book for fun is lost.

"It seems to me comparable to a man who having eaten anything, from a salad to a complete and well-planned dinner, uses an emetic, and sends the results for chemical analysis."

He finds the matrix of a quickly-moving, well-written narrative ideal for presenting and developing character, dialogue and background, the flesh and clothing which cover the skeleton of plot; many people do not realize how much they can enjoy what is simply a well-told story.

"What about the view that some people have, that the 'Lord of the Rings' is really the allegory of an atomic holocaust?" I asked him.

"That's absolutely absurd. Absurd. These wretched people who must find an allegory in everything! For one thing, a good deal of it was written before the nineteen-thirties." And he began to explain the ordering of the composition of his work.

The legendary cycle of the Silmarillian, to which the

"Lord of the Rings" is a sequel was begun in 1917, with the "Fall of Gondolin", which he wrote while convalescing on sick-leave from the army.

In general plot, and in several major episodes, most of the cycle was already constructed before 1930, and before the publication of "The Hobbit" (there are references within "The Hobbit" to Glamdring and Orcrist, the elvish swords, as being made in Gondolin, before its fall, for the goblin wars).

"The choice of the ring as a link with the older stuff was inevitable. Most of the allusions to older legends scattered about the tale, or summarized in Appendix A are to things which really have an existence of some kind in the history of which the 'Lord of the Rings' is part.

"There's one exception that puzzles me—Berúthiel. I really don't know anything of her—you remember Aragorn's allusion in Book I (page 325) to the cats of Queen Berúthiel, that could find their way home on a blind night? She just popped up, and obviously called for attention, but I don't really know anything certain about her ; though, oddly enough, I have a notion that she was the wife of one of the ship-kings of Pelargir. She loathed the smell of the sea, and fish, and the gulls. Rather like Skadi, the giantess, who came to the gods in Valhalla, demanding a recompense for the accidental death of her father. She wanted a husband. The gods all lined up behind a curtain, and she selected the pair of feet that appealed to her most. She thought she'd got Baldur, the beautiful god, but it turned out to be Njord the sea-god, and after she'd married him, she got absolutely fed up with the seaside life, and the gulls kept her awake, and finally she went back to live in Jötunheim.

"Well, Berúthiel went back to live in the inland city, and went to the bad (or returned to it—she was a black Númenorean in origin, I guess). She was one of these people who loathe cats, but cats will jump on them and follow them about—you know how sometimes they pursue people who hate them? I have a friend like that. I'm afraid she took to torturing them for amusement, but she kept some and used them—trained them to go on evil errands by night, to spy on her enemies or terrify them."

I should very much have liked to hear more about Queen

Berúthiel, who sent a pleasant grue down my spine—it is not often you have the chance to listen to an entirely new story from your favourite storyteller.

But, as Professor Tolkien had said, he did not really know much more to tell me; and time was running short, and I was anxious to know what he thought of other schools of writing which run roughly parallel with his own, in particular fantasy and science fiction.

I asked him what he thought of Naomi Mitchison's description of his work as "glorified science fiction". He said he supposed it was valid, if she means that the pleasure of "wonder" is also produced by good science fiction, and that this pleasure must be one of the aims of the author.

He has an interest in, and an appreciation of good science fiction. He was a close friend of the late C. S. Lewis, who also wrote science fiction. "There's a terrible undergrowth of rubbish produced by it, of course; though not worse in its way than the awful stuff which is also produced under the labels Fairy-Tale or Fantasy.

"The relationship between science fiction and fantasy is difficult and topically important. At present, there's a good deal of serious dissension among sf writers, especially in the Science Fiction Writers' Association of America. Obviously many readers of sf are attracted by it because it performs the same operation as fantasy—it provides Recovery and Escape (I analysed these in my Essay on Fairy Stories)—and wonder. But when they invoke the word 'Science', and use an element of scientific knowledge (very variable, sometimes, in scope and accuracy) authors nowadays are more easily able to produce suspension of disbelief. The legendary laboratory 'professor' has replaced the wizard."

Some writers and readers of sf are really primarily interested in the "science", rather than the "wonder", or the "Escape", but it is made more vivid for them by stories which exhibit the working-out of what they believe to be scientific truths.

"It's a very good medium for the imagination to work with, of course. But it's been much misused by lesser writers, as if a lot of them will never come to terms with it."

He says that the only "science", or body of knowledge,

with which he himself is professionally acquainted is that of language. He uses this with special emphasis—"just as, for instance, a composer will make special use of horns, if he is specially interested in them. Nothing has given me more pleasure than the praise of those who like my books for my names, whether of English form, or Elvish, or other tongues." To give each of the two separate Elvish tongues in the book individuality, yet similarity, meant much painstaking labour.

"I had to posit a basic and phonetic structure of Primitive Elvish, and then modify this by series of changes (such as actually do occur in known languages) so that the two end results would each have a consistent structure and character, but be quite different. I have met very few (either in person or by letter) among the most intelligent, who can distinguish between the two different Elvish languages, or see or feel that (say) the hymn to Elbereth is in an entirely different mode and prosody from that of Galadriel's lament."

It is when dealing with the question of language, he feels, that science fiction writers do not always work satisfactorily. He spoke of three distinctions of what he means by the word "Language". The first is what people normally think of when they talk of "language": what is used by people in talking, and by authors as a medium. Good writers of sf can write well, and therefore write good dialogue.

"But I think Language (2) is often neglected by them, that is to say, language as an invention, and as the most important single ingredient in human culture in general, or in any particular culture. They treat it comparatively poorly in descriptions of strange cultures, and the problems of communications between alien beings in different worlds (with which they are often faced) are apt to be perfunctorily and unconvincingly treated."

Remembering the number of "translator machines", "communication helmets", and telepathic races to be encountered in sf, I heartily agree with him.

"I think," he went on, "that some are interested in and know something about mechanical (computer) analyses of language, but few know anything about its phonetics, history, or process of change. Then there is Language (3),

word and name-making as a minor art-form, which hardly anyone thinks of, and fewer practise. Few people have by talent or education the experience for this. They have little feeling for the sound texture and structure of their native language, and less for any others they happen to be acquainted with. They know little or nothing of the history of them, or of their visible symbols. In consequence, even if they thought it important, they would have no notion how to set about making a group of names, or supposed alien words that belong to (and feel and look like belonging to) a real language with a definite character of its own. When they invent names and words, these are apt to take on a quite childish level. The names are absolutely appalling in many cases, they simply don't bother with them. They leave me totally unconvinced. But this is not peculiar to sf—it is quite as evident in fantasy. E. R. Eddison is a notable example, all the more because he was a great writer."

It is in keeping with his preoccupation with language that he should enjoy so much the making of verse. Personally, I find the verse in the "Lord of the Rings" and in "The Hobbit" particularly enjoyable. It seems to me to have a mystical bardic ring, and at its best can certainly call forth in me, and in many other readers I know that unmistakable and exciting shiver of the skin which recognizes an absolutely right combination of imagery, rhythm and meaning. He admits that he prefers writing verse to almost anything else. (Parenthetically, he adds, "Almost impossible to sell verse, though.")

Though there is much verse, readers have claimed that there is not much (or not enough) romance in the "Lord of the Rings".

"There's a time and a place for everything," he says. "Love is the background of history—not least, when least attended to.

"In the time of a great war and high adventure, love and the carrying on with the race, and so on, are in the background. They're not referred to the whole time, but they're there. There's surely enough given in flashes for an attentive reader to see, even without the Appendix (of Aragorn and Arwen) the whole tale as one aspect of the love-story of this pair, and the achievement of a high

noble, and romantic love. There's Eowyn's love for Aragorn—a sort of calf-love, as well as the true romance. You get the scene in Rivendell, with Aragorn suddenly revealed in princely dignity to Frodo, standing by Arwen. There's Aragorn's vision, after he has plighted his troth to Arwen and left her; and what were his thoughts after receiving the furled standard, or when he unfurled it after achieving the paths of the dead. There is also Sam, who had other deep concerns, though he put his service first."

I wanted to know whether he would choose any particular passages as his own favourites. After a little thought, he said that there were two places in "The Lord of the Rings" which stayed in his own mind more than others, and which he still found himself moved by when he thought of them. One is the point at which the cock crows in the pause before the great battle in the Pelennor fields. Gandalf, who has gained in stature as the story grows, from the smoke-ring blowing, slightly comic old wizard of "The Hobbit" to the Enemy of Sauron, the power for good of the Third Age of the world, confronts the King of the Nazgûl, the wraith which is all the more dreadful because it is invisible to all except the Ring-wearer. Then the cock crows, caring nothing for battle or death, welcoming the morning, and at the same moment the horns of the North, the horns of the riders of Rohan are heard echoing on the sides of the mountains.

The other passage is when Frodo and Sam lie down to sleep in the stony shadows near Cirith Ungol, on the borders of Mordor. Gollum, the dreadful little being, who has guided them so far, partly by force, partly by persuasion on their part, has crept off to make an evil bargain with Shelob (derivation for those who wish to know: she lob [spider]—those who have read "The Hobbit" will remember the song of Bilbo "Lazy Lob and crazy Cob") the unspeakable creature who has her lair in the mountain passages. She is one of the most genuine purveyors of horror and disgust you will meet with in the book.

Gollum returns, and sees the strange peace on the faces of Sam and Frodo, and for a moment the evil and malice die out of his face, and he looks only like some very old weary hobbit, a creature of the same race as Frodo and Sam, but lonely and lost and bewildered by years and

events. He touches Frodo timidly, and Sam awakes, and sees him, and starts up with honest indignation and suspicion, at this creature "pawing" his master, Frodo. Gollum's last chance of what looks like repentance is gone. In this passage, in particular, Professor Tolkien achieves an identification of the reader with a totally alien kind of being, such as many sf writers hope to, and can seldom accomplish. It is one thing to create alien beings. It is quite another to give them such actions and reactions that they remain consistently in accord with their alien life and surroundings, and yet can reach through to, and touch the relative chords in the mind of human beings. Professor Tolkien says: "It seems that Gollum is about to repent, and that Sam waking up suddenly like that, and naturally feeling full of righteous resentment, has spoilt the chance. But there wasn't the chance for Gollum. He'd been evil for too long. There's a point of no return in these things, and Gollum had passed it." However, he still manages to make one feel there a genuine pang of pity for the (it seems) not absolutely irredeemable Gollum, loathesome as he is.

It is, of course, perfectly possible to find fault with the "Lord of the Rings". No work is faultless, least of all fiction, which depends as painting does on the individual imagination as creator, and on the acceptance of other individual imaginations. You may not like this kind of romantic fantasy. Certainly there are passages in which the humour is a little Boys' Own Paperish—the hot baths in the house at Crickhollow, for instance, when most of the water is splashed on to the floor. Yet this is preceded by one of the most menacing passages any writer of suspense could produce—the moment when they look back, crossing the river on the ferry-boat, and see a figure that looks like a bundle left behind. ". . . It seemed to move and sway this way and that, as if searching the ground. It then crawled, or went crouching, back into the gloom beyond the lamps." M. R. James had this particular skill, and very few other writers. And immediately after the bath episode, they set off and travel through the forest, where they are continuously forced away from the path they wish to take. "They all got an uncomfortable feeling that they were being watched with disapproval, deepening to dislike and even enmity" . . . "the cry fell as if muffled

by a heavy curtain. There was no echo or answer though the wood seemed to become more crowded and more watchful than before."

The characters, too, can be rather too jolly, childlike, and primitive, particularly Sam, whose fierce devotion at times becomes oppressive. But they all seem to me to grow and develop nobly, from the exciteable, jocular, setting-out-is-fun crowd at the beginning of the first book, the "Fellowship of the Ring", until by the end of the third book, the "Return of the King", some have become heroic figures, and all have gained breadth and sadness and wisdom. The work itself has no neatly rounded, complete happy ending. Frodo is too sorely hurt to return fully to his own world, and in the end passes overseas with Elrond and Galadriel, at the end of the Third Age.

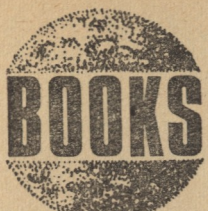
Even in the wedding of Aragorn and Arwen there are the seeds of sorrow, for Arwen is of Elf-kin, and must give

up her right to pass over the seas, when Aragorn at last dies.

There is always the knowledge, in the story, that this is only the Third Age of the World; that other battles have been fought with the Enemy in the past, in other shapes; and that there are more Ages of the World to come.

As Sam says, under the shadows of Cirith Ungol; "But that's a long tale, of course, and goes on past the happiness and into grief, and beyond it—and the Silmaril went on and came to Eärendil. And why, sir, I never thought of that before! We've got—you've got some of the light of it in that star-glass that the Lady gave you! Why, to think of it, we're in the same tale still! It's going on. Don't the great tales never end?"

The addicts of Professor Tolkien's works, I think, would be quite happy if this particular cycle of stories never did end. The news that there are more stories to come will certainly please as many people as much as it did me. It was a remarkable and intoxicating experience to talk to a writer who is still so closely a part of the new mythology which he has begun for us; and if I have tried, by including as many delectable quotations from him as possible, to lure new addicts in, I hope that I may be forgiven.



'CHRONOSOPHY'

Michael Orgill

The Voices of Time, edited by J. T. Fraser (Braziller, 710 pp. $12.50).

THE MOST IMPORTANT task an intelligent human being can perform is a constant search for meaning in his world. Anything that aids men in this almost moral quest should be welcomed; but more important, such aids should be viewed critically. Anyone with an elemental knowledge of the history of science will remember the misdirected omni-answers such as Technocracy that some scientists have given mankind. The quest is in every sense a dangerous duty, and its failures are far more prevalent than its successes. We study *Faust* to learn those approaches which man cannot follow, and, on a more contemporary level, we see the quest perverted in the increased fragmentation of disciplines so inherent, it seems, in modern intellectual life. We cannot abandon the quest, but we must be very careful about the "answers" it gives.

The Voices of Time, a massive study of the problem of time, demonstrates in what way the quest can both succeed and go askew. It is comprised of twenty-seven original essays by international specialists in wide-ranging disciplines, and it is a self-proclaimed attempt to provide a *Weltanschauung* for the intelligent layman. J. T. Fraser, the editor, a senior scientist at General Precision Inc., em-

phatically states that this work is not to be viewed as a summary of an established field, or as an encyclopaedia of available knowledge. Rather, it is to be looked upon as an attempt to forge a new discipline which he calls "chronosophy," in which all interested in the problem of time will work to gain new understanding. Further, Fraser says that "time must and should occupy the centre of man's intellectual and emotive interest" and goes on to suggest that the study of time can give the layman a foundation for his own "pursuit of a coherent world view".

Stripped of his rhetoric, Fraser seems to want an interdisciplinary understanding of time, and he and his contributors have made a remarkable effort to show the extent of time's relevance to every conceivable human endeavour. He sees time as a subject of study relevant to the scientist, the artist, and the philosopher, in fact to all men.

However, one senses throughout this volume an almost quixotic sense of mission. Fraser and his contributors picture themselves and their subject as the one last hope; it is only in this way that the apocalyptic fragmentation of knowledge can be curbed. Most intellectuals who are concerned with this problem will not buy that; other cross-disciplinary fields (communications, for example) could perform the same task. But it is very true that time can provide an excellent medium for a fusion of knowledge, and it would be wise to explore many of Fraser's suggestions further.

One interesting example is found in Dr. Joseph Needham's article discussing China's attitude toward time. He extensively documents the conclusion that China is just as time-orientated as the West, contrary to popular myth. Thus, the theory which states that China did not develop an advanced technology because it lacked the proper attitude toward change and time is debunked, and other explanations for China's cultural development will have to be found. But, as exciting as this conclusion is, Fraser does not explore it further; in fact he mildly disagrees with this conclusion, saying that "man's personal and intimate view of time" is something slightly different from the time sense Dr. Needham described. Fraser then deals with other equally interesting possibilities and drops the matter com-

pletely. In view of the turmoil in Asia resulting in part from this lack of technical sense, a lack which a theory of time would explain, it is amazing that Fraser did not explore the matter with a bit more interest.

And it is here that the main fault of the book lies. In his introduction and comments, Fraser hammers home the excessive view that time is omni-important. This refrain becomes disturbing as article after article suggests that our world is something more than embellished time, and one feels that Fraser has destroyed the effectiveness of his book to a degree by his blatant ignorance of the conclusions at which his contributors are arriving.

There are other faults in this book, all of which tend to decrease the probability that the book will accomplish Fraser's objectives. Most of the articles are poorly written, often using professional jargon excessively. If this book were written with the layman in mind, and if its objectives include a cultivation of the generalist point of view, this is a serious fault indeed. More damning, however, is the fact that articles often repeat what other essays within the book have said, and many blatantly contradict each other. For example, A. Cornelius Benjamin's article, "Ideas of Time in the History of Philosophy", states that the Christian philosophers are not really important in the history of philosophy, as far as their philosophy of time is concerned. But in the essay following, J. L. Russell develops a thesis that has the Christian attitude toward time determining the course of technology and culture in the West. Fraser could have undertaken some rigorous editing, it seems, to eliminate both bad writing and blatant contradiction.

But, faults aside, there is much to admire in this book, much that is thought provoking. If one is willing to take the great amount of time that this work requires, there is much here that would take up a lifetime of thought. An excellent example is John Cohen's "Subjective Time" which ranges from Pavlov's respondent conditioning to the place of the subjective time sense in literature and art. Much of what Cohen discusses is applicable to the recent renaissance in sf. "A theory of time," he states, "adequate to a 'world picture' must encompass human experience as an integral part of nature." As Fraser points out in his introduction, Snow's "two cultures" may be expressed as the gap between

those who know the world as experience felt, and those who know it as experience understood. *The Voices of Time*, with all its faults, gives us many of the tools we need in the essential task of bringing these two valuable groups together. This is certainly something to be hoped for.

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