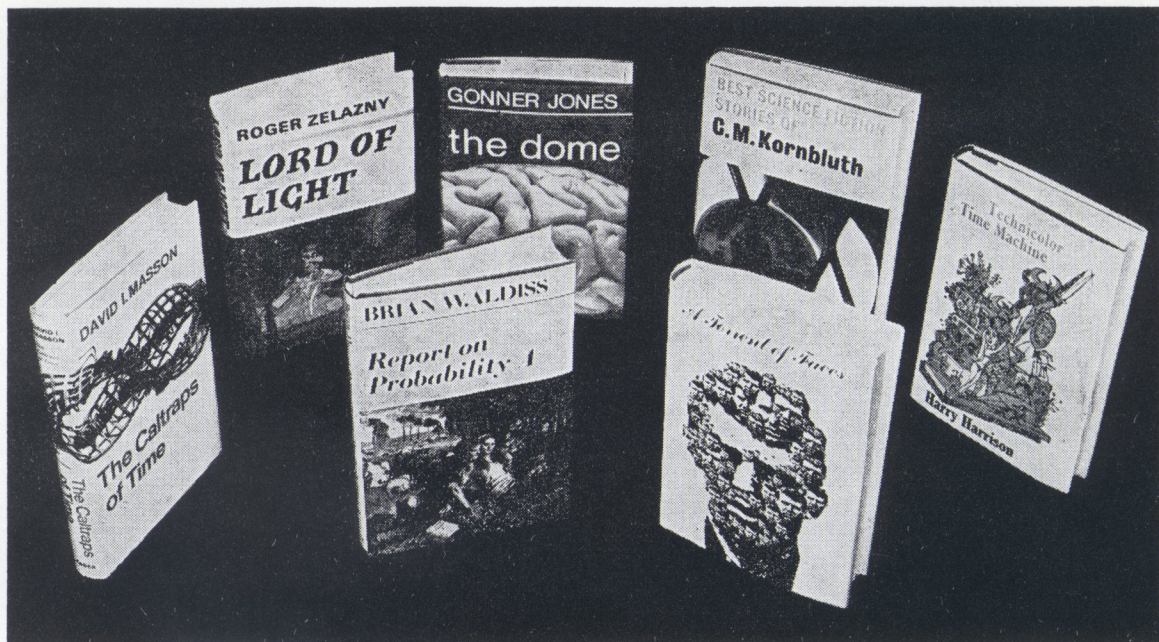


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new worlds

Number 182

Contents

- 2 Lead-In**
- 4 Giles Gordon: Scream.**
- 12 Brian Aldiss: Drake-Man Route**
- 20 Norman Spinrad: Bug Jack Barron**
- 34 Christopher Logue: Instructions for Visiting Earth**
- 35 John Sladek: Plastitutes**
- 38 Carol Emshwiller: Methapyrilene Hydrochloride Sometimes Helps**
- 40 D. M. Thomas: Two Voices**
- 50 Bob Marsden: The Definition**
- 52 Christopher Finch: A Landscape of Shallows**
- 60 John Calder: The Circular Railway**
- 62 Books and Comment: Dr. Moreau and the Utopians**

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WE REGRET THAT our promises of last month concerning colour and larger size have proven to be empty ones, for the time being at any rate. This is due, of course, to the setbacks received when two major wholesale/retail newsagents decided to withdraw our March issue, resulting in a heavy financial loss to us which we at one time doubted we should be able to sustain. We have managed to keep going, however, thanks largely to the timely assistance of the Arts Council and to a number of private donations received from various sources. We are extremely grateful to all those who helped, to a large section of the press which gave us considerable support, and to others who assisted us in various ways.

Another apology—to **Jon DeCles**, whose name was misspelt in our February issue. His story *A Single Rose* had appeared previously in *Famous SF* magazine.

Brian Aldiss, who recently became chairman of the Oxford branch of the Conservation Society and whose experimental novel *Report On Probability A* (a shorter version of which appeared in NW 171) was published a little while ago by Faber, has contributed a new Acid Head War story to this issue. He writes about the series:

“WHAT’S THE CHARACTER thing about anyway? You know what I mean: how does my being happy interfere with your being happy? Or my misery with yours?”

“Most of the books ever written—and I’m talking of law libraries and historical studies as well as fiction—concern this question. The Charteris Acid Head War series is just another stab at it: let’s say a stab at reposing the mockingbird question, because I’m not quite

idiot enough to try answering it. Idiot enough, though, to suggest finally where you might look for an answer.

“The question comes into particular focus with use of drugs. Not the old stable western diet of booze and aspirin and fags which have been socialised in our society, but the so-far exotic ones that grind us a bit more. The Charteris society is merely an extreme example of any bit of hippiedom. Which is an extreme example of your family teatable. Or mine at least.

“Well, that’s the sort of obvious thing to say: a word on the main-spring.

“But the works. What are your thoughts like? God knows! I’m not even sure what my thoughts are like; thought, if it exists, operates on verbal, visual and other less definable levels all at the same time. I convey some slight lick of the experience to paper, this pauper paper. In the resultant lang-mash, it is possible to convey certain ideas—most ambitiously ideas about our western society—with shadings of concision and imprecision I could not otherwise have managed.

“Forget the style. It’s what I’m saying.

“I’ve been told my whole post-war business is too bitter. Remember 1945-1968? Bitter but I turn up a lot of comic stuff, surely. And knockabout characters like Boreas and Herr Laundrei. And lyrical stuff. The general view expressed in all my writing is here most sharply: that living things are okay—marvellous, in fact, when you consider the ghastly situation, the space/time growth/decay structure, in which they are placed. The people in *Barefoot in the Head*, as the completed Charteris trip will be called,

are wrestling direct with that structure. The drugs reveal it nakedly.

“The new animals are the horrors that move between life and non-life.”

For those who have asked, the consecutive order of the Charteris stories is: *Just Passing Through*, *Serpent of Kundalini*, *Drake-Man Route*, *Multi-Value Motorway*, *Still Trajectories*, *Auto-Ancestral Fracture*, *Ouspenski’s Astrabahn* (to come), etc.



Aldiss: *Living things are okay*

Giles Gordon’s second story for *NEW WORLDS* (his first was *Line-up on the Shore* in NW 178) appears in this issue. He writes:

“It was George MacBeth who suggested I should submit *Scream* to *NEW WORLDS*. Not being aware that anything I’d written (let alone this piece) approximated to SF, I was surprised. Naturally I’m pleased I did. However, the reviewer’s game of categorising novels as SF or thriller or historical or romance or traditional or stream of consciousness or straight novel (which last straight novel you read was *that*?) is a tired one that possibly nowadays only means any-

thing to librarians and those who borrow books without paying their authors' royalties.

"A piece of writing is good, bad or indifferent, and most often the latter—not thriller or SF or, even, novel. Not even traditional novel (or traditional SF novel) or experimental novel. Our handful of "experimental" novelists tend to be among the most traditional. This because they are writing in a tradition, and are aware of the fact; just as they are self-conscious enough to realise they are "experimental". The straitjacketing of writers in *genre* classifications seems to me to lead to indifferent writing, as a direct cause. The sights are lowered, blurred at least. If a writer is conscious of writing an SF novel or *The Great American Novel* or *A Novel for Mrs. Whitehouse* he is bound to be restricted, hamstrung, suffocated by having to discourage the parts of his writing *persona* which don't relate precisely to the *kind* of novel in hand.

"What I welcome about SF, in its widest connotations, is that it expands beyond the *genre* in a way that even the most literate thrillers (*The Woman in White*, *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*) seem to me not to do. The reader can be, and often is, *surprised* by what he encounters. He is emotionally and intellectually (yes, and sometimes physically) stretched by what he encounters. His preconceptions about a particular writer, a particular piece of writing are not necessarily sustained. It is not easy to pigeon-hole, classify. This is excellent, as one reads "fiction" (and writes it) to heighten one's perceptions of the individual in the physical world. Much SF, not least the better pieces which appear in *NEW WORLDS*, cease to be *genre* fiction and are merely — merely! — good writing. For instance, Langdon Jones's *The Eye of the Lens* published two issues ago.

"Another irritation with conventional fiction is that you're supposed to write approximately 200 pages, or 65,000 words. A book is the thing, and that is usually taken to mean a novel. The alternative is a short story, which tends to be a slice of novel, mini-novel or trailer for a novel. What I, for example, am interested in writing is some-

thing that has its own length, which may or may not relate to the length of a so-called book. The content should dictate the form. The content is what is said, the form is how it is said. The form includes both the internal structure and the final coat of paint, as well as everything between. Form and content (or content and form) should be as related as husband and wife. I am not advocating throwing construction and structure overboard—quite the reverse; but if a piece of writing is allowed to find its own length it's more likely to be honest to itself.



Gordon: Not easy to pigeonhole

"ALL OF WHICH should lead inevitably to *Scream*; none of which probably does. It could have been 100,000 words but is 4,500. It has been part of a novel, currently is itself. I can say nothing about it—it says or it doesn't—except, with boredom, mutter Francis Bacon and Peter Brook. . .

"As for myself (and here content is withdrawn from form): born in Edinburgh, 1940. Came to London in 1962. Find it one of the quietest places there are—even in County Cork you are aware of the birds singing. Work as an editor for a publishing house. Though we publish as much SF as any house, it's about the only section of the list I've nothing to do with. (Hoist with my own petard.) I am pulled incessantly between the life of a prosperous publisher and that of an impoverished writer. Being a coward, I write in my "spare time" and actually do have the best of both worlds, whatever the purists

may say. The trouble is I thoroughly enjoy publishing and am very frightened of writing. My writing, poetry or prose—another false classification, that—is usually accepted for publication, if at all, two years after it's been written."

ANOTHER CONTRIBUTOR TO this issue is **John Calder**, whose first story for *NEW WORLDS* was *Signals* in No. 166. John Calder is perhaps best known as the publisher of many of the best modern experimental writers, including Becket, Miller, Burroughs, etc., and is currently planning to appeal against the recent court decision banning Hubert Selby's *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, which he published last year. He was one of the founders of the Defence of Literature and the Arts Society set up to reverse the *Last Exit* decision and to provide a permanent legal fund to protect serious artists from irresponsible prosecution. Donations to this fund should be sent to 61 Welbeck Street, London, W.1.

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SCREAM

GILES GORDON

TRAFFIC — THOUSANDS of cars. Feet, transistors, engines, shouting, calling, breathing. A ball bouncing in an asphalt playground and being chased by nine, ten, eleven kids. The number blurs, goes out of focus, is on top of the ball, panting, laughing, shouting. Bodies in the foreground, playing. Noisily. A plane roaring across the sky, ripping the blue sheet. Ten planes in the afternoon; no, in an hour and a half. Raised voices outside the Blind Beggar. Then fists, and men running in different directions. The rattle of the Tube train and the gust of wind as it crashes through Mornington Crescent. People, individuals pushing, yawning, shopping. Tired, but continuing. Keeping at it, keeping at it. The heat, the humidity, the closeness of the afternoon. But closeness isn't togetherness. Which afternoon? Choose your afternoon. The sweat on men's brows, and drips running down the shaven skin in front of the ears, to be mopped, blotted by absorbent shirts. The bell of an ambulance, and its gazelle-like zig-zag progress through the traffic. A hooter at lunch time. At lunch time, many hooters, then men and women spreading out into the streets away from the direction of the hooters. More planes, more heavy lorries. Motorbikes farting in the faces of pedestrians. The noise, the noise. The air

even hums, shimmers with haze, movement, disturbance.

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaahhh!

The scream. The screeeeaaaaam.

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaahhh!

Another? No, only one. Only the one. The echo? No, not the echo. There was none, no echo. Just the memory of it, immediately afterwards. It came first, isolated the afternoon, shattered it. Pinpointed it. The scream, that is.

And yet, and yet. . .

Some were aware of the echo—no, not the echo. There was no echo. Or if there was it was not heard. The memory, the foreboding—before the scream. Some had been aware of it for years. Either continually or intermittently. Or both. The premonition had been welling up for years, for lifetimes. And they had prayed against the scream, in the several ways they knew how to pray, and in ways they didn't know. Some who didn't believe in praying, or didn't believe, believed. It wasn't a matter of faith but of certainty. They believed that the scream, when it came, when it would come, would be for the worst. Would be the worst. The very worst.

THE SCREAM.

Tap, tap, tap. Plod, plod. The noise wasn't subtle enough to account for the creaking of leather in new shoes. Stares, many stares. Stares everywhere, everyone staring. With eyes; eyes, eyes, eyes. And the hopeless machines behind the eyes. A machine to each pair, that is except for those with disfigured sight. Some of them wore black glasses. Some with good eyes wore black glasses. They appeared to be less emotional, less involved. This was an illusion. They were involved, everyone was involved. Wanted to be, though embarrassed. Eyes everywhere, and for an instant everyone riveted in their minds, movements. Only for an instant. Then . . . Feet/Feet running/Feet running away/Feet running away faster/Feet running away faster, faster/Feet running away faster, faster to escape the scream/Feet running away faster, faster to escape the scream, the scream, the scream, the scream, the scream. . . The feet were panting, beating at the pavements; the breath of their possessors rasped and they were doubled-up with stitches.

O that they could be sewn up so easily!

Others stopped, stayed that way. Stock still. Averted their eyes. Looked anywhere, anywhere but at the scream. Shuffled a little in their leather or suede, even looked at their feet without seeing them, without realising they had them. Tickled, twitched their toes. Hot, sweaty, sticky toes. Other eyes sought the scream. Pursued it, sought it out, discovered it. By elimination. Would have hypnotised it. How they would have hypnotised a devil had they not known how to do it. Out Satan, out Satan.

THE SCREAM was a warning. Whether the two events—scream, warning—were connected is probably irrelevant, certainly coincidental. The first was a symptom of the malaise, a harbinger. Of what? Who will say? Let's leave it as a symptom.

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhh!

The scream again? No, for the first time.

No one remembers, knows how long it lasted. A few seconds—five, seven, twelve, grappled with from the face of a clock—a minute, a few minutes, days, years, a generation, longer? Those not there say it was for twenty-four hours. Come, sir; come, *sir*. It wasn't twenty-four hours. How could it have been? No one could scream for twenty-four hours non-stop. Now, could they? I ask you. It's not possible, not possible. It was almost definitely for well under half a minute. Not that it matters, the *time* doesn't matter, one way or another. . . No, I wasn't there, I wasn't present. I freely admit that, freely. What, what? How then can I know its significance? I know its significance. I don't know how long it lasted, nor am I interested. I know it happened. Of course it did, no question of it. No question of *that*. That's what interests me, that it happened. Sir, you have told me yourself that you've no

proof.

I know it happened, I tell you. I choose to.

I had a premonition that it would happen.

We all did, in our different ways. If only we'd admit it. But it makes no difference, none at all. What happened, happened. That is what happened.

THE SCREAM. The scream.

Some of them are still there, there now, trying to discover the exact, precise spot. Even though the scream took place more than five feet from the ground. So that they may tell generations unborn that will, because of the scream or in spite of it, remain unborn. They are trying to record history, write it. Create it. Recreate it. Recreate what happened, with their consciences (so-called), their umbilical cords. They are trying to destroy history, right it. Put it to right. With actors, representing the real, live actors. Now the dead actors. Actors playing at acting, playing at living.

What else is there? Indeed, indeed. They are trying, trying. . .

Crying? No, trying. . .

Oh no, I don't, won't comment. I won't say it's invalid. It's better to do something, to make an effort, *the* effort.

To try.

To cry again and laugh and cross yourself; if that's your inclination.

To scream if you will. Or won't.

To scream again.

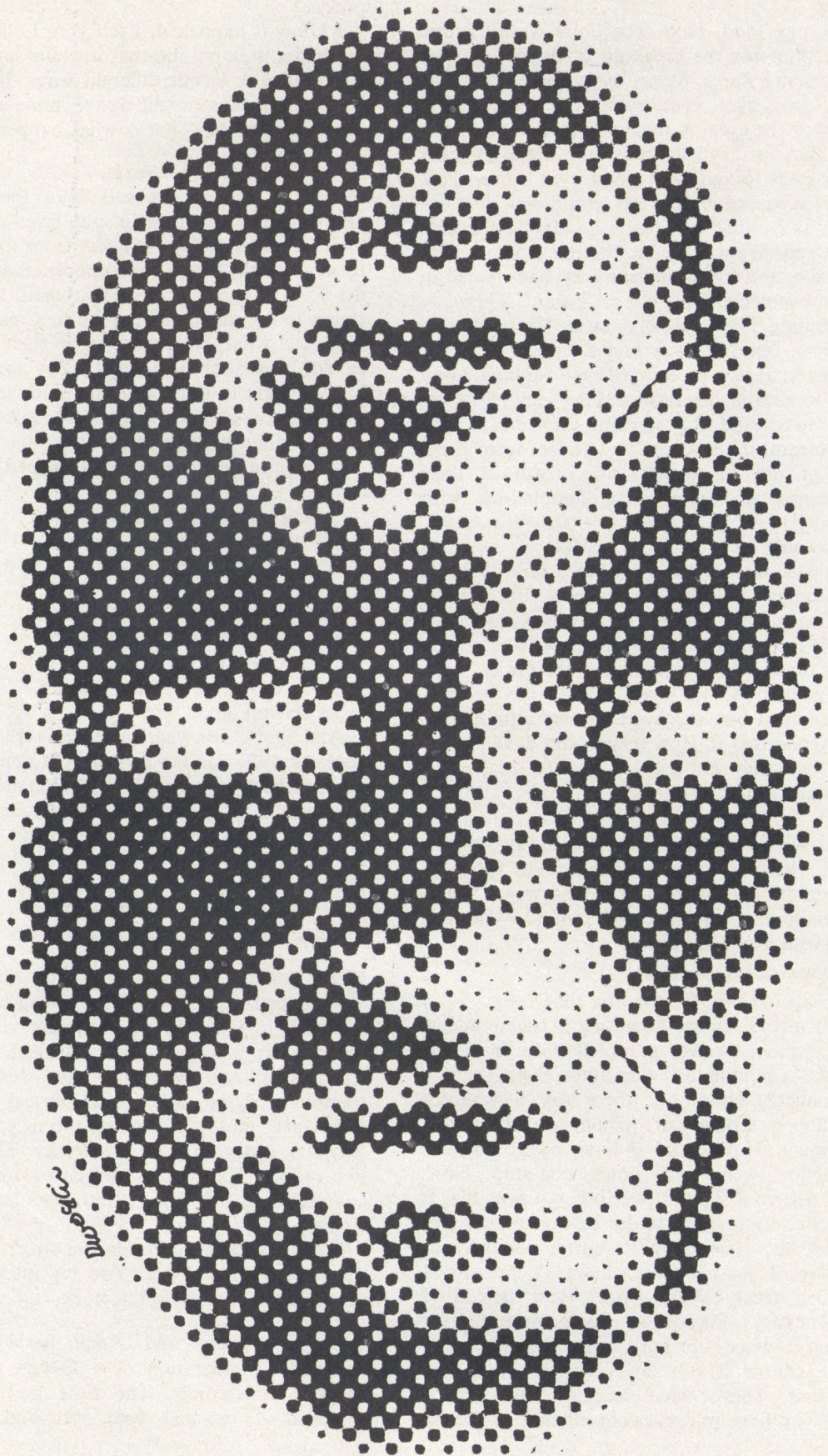
And again. Ten years after the scream, *the* scream, if necessary. Or has the scream, the one and only scream perhaps been going on for that length of time? Maybe it began in the Pentagon, was taken up on Mount Olympus, in Kentish Town, Algeria, Vietnam, and is continuing on its way to some unclassified planet millions of light years away. Maybe.

The scream. You are in danger of loving it. It will be the cause and the effect. You must be dispassionate.

THE SCREAM. A little, short one that hardly anyone noticed. Maybe you were trying too hard. To draw attention to yourself. In retrospect—if it now is retrospective—it is easy to be detached, clinical, cynical. The rising, roaring bellow; the sustained note; the trembling, dying fall; the hysterical collapse and all those faces on top of you, on top of you, on top of you. Blocking out your view of the sky. The voices buzzing like robots. The scream pushed out into the afternoon, contracted it, shrivelled it into a globule of evaporating air.

It lay on the ground. On the street. On the road. On the pedestrian crossing. You lay on your back on the road, like a turned-over tortoise free-wheeling.

LIKE OLD FLESH, old human flesh. Like the genesis and disintegration of a flower, disposed of in a handful of seconds. The time and the petals were snatched at, crushed, spat out. And the remains lay



Design

gasping, gasping. Or a meringue lodged in the palm of a hand, its brittle whipped surface being crumpled by encroaching finger tips. Like old flesh, old human flesh. Ancient and modern, but old. Capture the scream, isolate it, pinpoint it. Prick it with a pin, a lance, the unwieldiest sharp surface or edge and it cannot be erased. Let the breath that makes it, the scream, freeze in the air at the moment of sound. Like an icicle; and it can prick itself past melting point. Then you can walk away nonchalantly, leaving the scream suspended roughly five feet, seven inches from the road's surface.

Lower if it's a woman. Unless it's a tall woman.

The authorities could build a glass case round it. Custodians in a specially devised uniform could guard it. They could work in three shifts round the clock, not excluding Sundays and public holidays. Annual leave would depend upon the state of the State's economy. No one wants to prejudice the issue.

The scream would be a national memorial. An institution, in time. The Unknown Scream—Our Destiny; and the scream begat a scream; and the latter scream begat a scream; and the third scream begat a fourth; etcetera. The original scream in a glass cage where it occurred. If there was anyone to visit it. Alas, alas! Pessimism to this extent must not intrude. It could scream away to its heart's content within the glass cage. No one would mind that. Once people were used to it, they would even walk past—shopping or doing the things that people do when out walking—without noticing. Yes, it could come to that. For the first fifty years or so, the men would doff their hats as they passed the scream. Thereafter not even that courtesy would be accorded it. How many people notice the statue of Cromwell in Piccadilly Circus?

But if the scream were to break out, if the glass were to be shattered! From within, or without! From without? Would anybody pierce it, could they? Would they? Certainly they *could*, even with guards, armed guards permanently in attendance. It would need only one man, one fanatic and the scream would be out. Then what chances for the world?

Human nature being. . . Reflect for a moment; a digression. In 196—, whenever it was, Lee Harvey Oswald killed John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Right? Or wrong? Are you certain it wasn't John Fitzgerald Kennedy who killed Lee Harvey Oswald? One the American dream, the other the American nightmare. But which was which, and which will be which?

Safer not to enshrine the scream. . . .

LIKE OLD FLESH, old human flesh. A decaying woman, a widow. Five children, all grown up (that's a laugh), and with the reeking stumps of her teeth squelching and oozing over her flabby, bloodless gums.

She can scream hoarsely, like a horse.

When her mouth is thrown open, flung open in laughter or coughing or to grasp air from the atmosphere, or prised open by her non-existent enemy, you

see the rottenness of her teeth erupting like wind or quicksands turning over and over themselves.

Not a pleasant sight, or smell. Not a pleasant image.

There are more gaps than teeth; and more fillings than gaps. The tongue, too, lolls forward from the throat. It wobbles erratically, obsequiously like a snake that has lost its venom but doesn't realise it, or accept it. No one has told the poor dear. No one could expect a fellow snake to tell its fellow of its plight; and no one is going to do a similar service for her. She hobbles up the hill with one leg two inches shorter than the other, and enormous, voluminous dark brown skirts covering her shapeless massiveness.

She can scream.

Womankind can scream; mankind can scream.

IN THE DESERT a tortoise is pushed over on to its back by another tortoise. This, after they have fought one another for more than three hours. The accidental victor stumbles off, the vanquished kicks and pushes, kicks and pushes, kicks, kicks his dry leathery feet upwards and outwards. It gasps for breath, noiselessly but for the odd tiny whimper. If nobody turns it over, half a revolution on to its feet, it will die. In time. Was the fight for fun, for exercise, over a female? Tortoises will not tell the likes of us.

The screeeam seemed to lengthen and louden after it was silent; even immediately afterwards, seconds afterwards. Not that it could be exactly ignored at the moment of its inception, realisation. Execution. No journalist was there to witness it, to report it. That is something. Nor a B.B.C. man with a microphone, nor a television man with a camera. One must be grateful for certain things.

At the same moment other screams may have been made elsewhere. May have occurred elsewhere. May have been screamed elsewhere. The scream. A scream.

Screams.

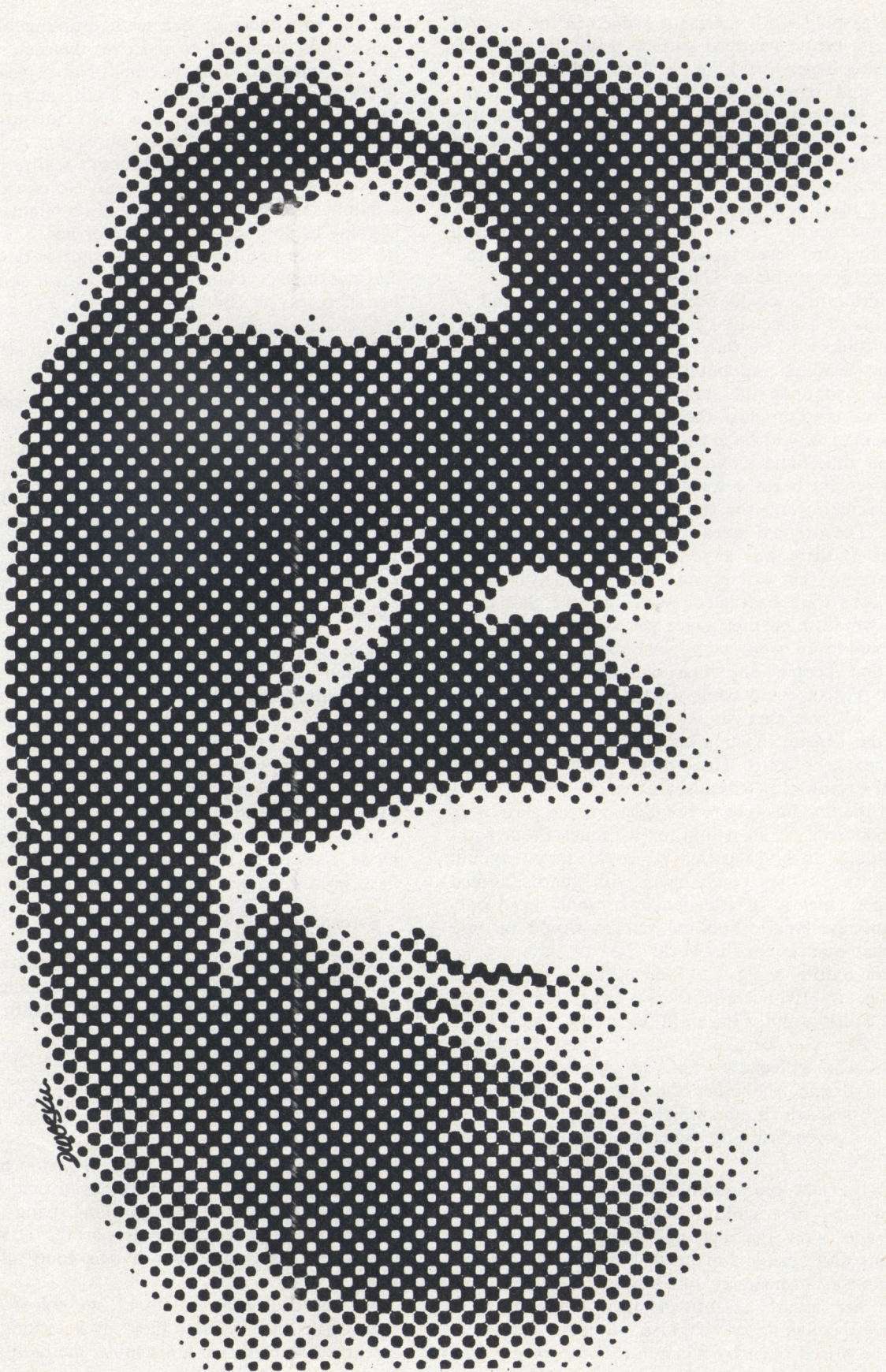
They may have heard each other, been aware of each other simultaneously. But no one screaming was aware of anyone else screaming. Each scream was in a vacuum. Was a vacuum.

Like new, young smooth flesh. A young woman screaming.

A virgin. With child. Without child. A virgin screaming.

In Vietnam on, say, 10 July, 1966, too many people screaming for any of them, for even one, to be heard above the din of the gunfire. Bang, bang, bang, bang. Not that any individual noise or the composite roar resembled that word. But it was loud all right. The noise.

Do the deaf hear no sound, no noise? Or do they have their own noises, their own sounds, their own screams? Screams we are unable, mercifully, to hear?



On the hill, outside the newspaper kiosk parallel to the angle of the slope of the hill, hundreds of people. People entering, leaving the Tube station. Gusts of wind, swirling paper up into paper chases. People, people, people.

The scream. No beginning, no end — though it stopped.

A middle, a middle, a middle.

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAhhhhhhhh
 AAAAAAAAAAAHhh
 AAAAAAAAAAh

or

SSSSSSCCC	A
SS	A
CRRE	A
S	E
	AMMMMMMM
	EEEEEEEEAAAAAMMM
	E
	A
	A
	A

Clip, clip, clip, clip. The legs hurrying away, walking away quickly. Feet, shoes, running, running. Out of breath, below the crest of the hill, round the corner, out of sight. A man peered back from round the corner. To view the scream, to track it, lodge it for ever, for ever in his memory. Did he think he'd forget it? Even with his hands locked against his ears, crushing them into his head? He withdrew his hands. The scream had stopped, yet like an awl was twisting into his skull.

Other eyes hurried away from the scene. Or were fixated upon it, transfixed. Impaled.

They waited for it to happen again, not realising yet that its second coming was theirs to create. Not realising that they couldn't avoid not creating it.

At least one eye hung in the air, suspended until skewered by the scream.

It was only minutes afterwards that the men with the tubular scaffolding arrived, clanging in on to the ground, off their lorry. Erected it piece by hollow piece. When it was sixty feet high the men with cameras appeared, clambered up the scaffolding, photographed the spot where the scream was. Where it had been. Where it took place. Where it was said to have taken place.

It was a warning. An augury. It was the beginning, the scream. The scream was the beginning.

That scream? The same one? The beginning? The end, more likely—though that is easily said. Even more likely, the beginning of the end. Even more likely, the end of the beginning. Depending upon where you like the interval—if you like an interval.

But it was none of these things. If it had been one of them, or the lot, the total, the sum, the aftermath might have been clearer. As it was she just screamed. Just screamed.

Just screamed.

Her age, status is irrelevant, immaterial. Even to her grandchildren, which she did not have. She was thirty. But to say that, which—so far as we can record truth as being the truth—gives the game away, reduces truth to untruth—the specific is not the universal but the universal is the specific, certainly contains the specific—falsifies the false position. Though to indulge in too many paradoxes endangers the validity of the argument, if it must still be so designated.

Thirty is—what? Young? Yes, young, that's what they'd say, all of them. All of you. All of us. And if she'd had ten children, which she could easily have done, what then? Is she still young, or does that depend on her shape and looks? What. . ? You didn't know that? Didn't know she'd had any children, let alone ten? How could you have done, how could you have done indeed? I didn't tell you, nobody told you; ten minutes ago—one minute for one child?—you didn't know she existed. But—I say again—it is irrelevant, all of it is.

Except that she screamed. Accept that she screamed. You have? You have to. And that too is irrelevant. That *she* screamed is not the point, not even to the point. But human beings thrive on human irrelevancies, so. . .

Having ten children seemed in retrospect so much more important than the scream. The fact of the scream. If it was a fact, if, if. Pin down that "if" again and again and again so that its repetition ceases to mean anything. The fact may be questioned, or may be left as a fact. The scream in retrospect is from the point. Other, other very different screams and noises will occur in the future as they occur in the present. It is the heartbeats, the pulses that you may in the future be incapable of hearing.

Take a day, a date. Pick it at random. Don't even pick it, take it. Please. Thank you. Saturday, 23 July, 1966, at 4.15 p.m. That will do. You selected it by some process, not I. Listen: noises; aircraft taking off, and landing. The first Brandenburg on the record player switched to the crowd slow handclapping at Wembley as Ratin of Argentina protests at being sent off by a referee who doesn't understand his protest. The Bach to some ears is more offensive as noise than the cheers, screams. Oh yes, oh yes! And the birds, the cats, the traffic generally.

A drop of silence. You will? You can? You have the right, the authority? You don't mind? Julie Christie for Jesus Christ? No, there would be more noise, more ructure throughout history. Twentieth Century Noise would promote it with its roaring lion vomit.

You know what they did to Gordon of Cartoon? Or was it Lawrence of Olivier? Or J. Robert Oppenheimer, he who personifies more of the century's tragedy than you or me? They pinned him down on a seat, or on the ground, or against a wall or a post. That part of it doesn't matter. Then they blinded the poor bugger, whichever he was, fired rifles close to his ears. Being blindfolded he didn't know when the triggers would be squeezed, when the bullets were coming, or going. He was deafened. His ear drums were exploded, and his ears hung down all bloodily afterwards. Can you imagine how they looked?

The date you picked, out of the blue—or is it the red, now?—was the date she screamed. Telepathetic, that's what you are. What a blue scream it proved, or didn't prove. The scream, then . . . no, not then, as it happened, concurrently, she sunk in a pile, a heap on to the zebra crossing with the exploded belisha head and the winking naked bulb or naked winking bulb or bulb winking naked, and was still.

Still still.

Is still still.

Still is still.

Is still now.

Who is she? Was she? *That* was what they wanted to know. They wondered that, even in the silence between the end of the scream and the beginning again of breathing afterwards. Let her be analysed, disciplined, torn apart, ignored, congratulated, disregarded, left to recompose herself, gather her wits, control, self-control. Let her be ignored, let her be, let her.

DON'T let her. Don't allow her. Hush her up, cover her up. Pretend she doesn't exist. She doesn't exist. She must be some sort of horrible pervert, some sort of awful pervert.

To the sperm, silence is a marginal subject, to the juice it's at least worth a poem. What then is the scream, a scream worth? Silence is worth a little one, a silent one.

Sssssssssssssshh!

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaahh,

etc., as the scream goes, erupts. Evaporates, expires. But is remembered even if it hasn't a memory.

And they, sirs, will remember it, mourn it all the way to the graveyard if not beyond. Slowly there, with dignity and decorum, but back rapidly. Perhaps they forgot it halfway back. Certainly they won't wake up in the night screaming. If the telephone bell clatters through, across, down or just into their deep breathing they'll turn over and dissolve within the crisp linen. But they will have followed the scream in the coffin, the coffin carrying the scream. For it was likely, had it been put on, to have proved most noisy. Dracula had nothing on it as six of them in black and billowing crepe

marched, no, stumbled across the field after field with the coffin on their half shoulders. The bullets whistled, whispered past with thuds and made little dust clouds when they hit the earth. Whether or not they were seen.

Arriving at the grave hole, which had not been dug specially but would be useful, the six of them quarrelled. One thought burial was too good for the scream. One wanted all six of them to pray for it but the others refused. They claimed to be true Christians and that consequently their prayers would be unnecessary acts of self indulgence.

She crumpled on to the zebra stripes by the newspaper kiosk outside Belsize Park Tube station. Which is on Haverstock Hill. Having ten children—bastards, bastards all and not one of them illegitimate—all born one at a time, no twins or triplets or quads or quins, being young is she old or young? Or ageless, or is that too easy? Having ten children and permanently shaven-off pubic hair is she a girl, a woman, a female? A whore? A countess? A whore countess? A screamer? A scream? What would you have her?—you can insist, if you insist. Would you feel happier, less embarrassed if she was a nutty Hungarian refugee who chats to herself? Or a black, a wog? You hadn't thought of her as black, had you? Are you embarrassed that you hadn't, you liberal ass? You haven't been told she wasn't black. Or yellow. Or luv-from-sunny-Blackhead-wish-you-was-queer-pink-holiday-rock. Or any colour. Specifically. Or nationality. Specifically. You see what happens if you insist?

Go on, what would you have her? You wouldn't have her. Not afterwards maybe, you being you, but what about before? She collapsed sexily enough. Thighs, legs, breasts spilling out, long streaming hair on top. Or didn't you notice her with her pram and her infants piling and pulling at her ankles as she tried to battle through up down across on on up across the crowded, so crowded hot sticky dusty dazzling bright pavements and streets? And then panting up Haverstock Hill, if that doesn't cause the mind to wander. If conception is a blessing, do not bless her. Has she conceived, has she? You tell me.

She has no children, bastards or otherwise, and is thirty. No, you were not misled. If you feel misled you have misled yourself. So much for prejudices, misconceptions, preconceptions. Read it again, paying heed to the sense. To the senselessness. If you like, *if* you like. Having no children, who is to say she cannot scream? Not cannot, she can. Can and has. May not, rather, should not and all the other little, petty nots. Who is to say she may not scream? Who heard her, or her sister, when she was pushed under the wheels of the Tube train near Euston station? Did she scream, did she? Or was the train screeching, heaving to a halt too noisily? Did the iron wheels suffocate her mouth? They couldn't really ask her an hour later when they jacked

the train up and removed her body because it was only a body. How long, O Lord, how long?

Could be she likes noise. Enjoys it. Listening to it, contributing to it, making it. Could be she takes it for granted and when if when if when if when if she screamed she was not aware. Of adding to it. Could be she was screaming for an utterly different reason, nothing to do with sound, noise. Unlikely, but possible. Could have been a private frustration, some sort of personal dilemma or response.

At night, so it was stated in evidence against her, she moved furniture around in her own flat, thumping it about from one room to the other. The time varied but was usually between two and four a.m. Nobody objected to her moving furniture about in her own flat at any hour she chose but when, as in her case, it meant that other tenants in the house, living on the floors immediately below and above her, were awakened night after night by her nocturnal activity, a case could be made out that she was, however unintentionally, a disturber of the peace. However, the case against her was dismissed when the prosecution could offer no evidence that this was the woman who screamed.

Now she is lying on the black and white stripes, bags and petticoats and hems of clothes around her, like a flurry of foam tilting at a rock moving out to meet the incoming tide. Cars were honking at her from below the hill and above, and what the children of Hiroshima were doing was no one's business, least of all theirs. Conveniently she had collapsed around the centre of the road, blocking traffic in both directions. Cars were in two long thin lines, like lengthening saliva. Whoever wherever was screaming now would have difficulty being heard above the car hooters. Were people taking advantage of this opportunity, screaming their heads off?

A policeman observed the scene, clinically—whatever that means. Practising alienation. Had he heard the scream? Had he wanted to hear it? Had he added it to the scream he had previously recorded in his shiny kinky black notebook? Or had he joined the Force to escape from noise, to escape from being a witness, hopeful that when people saw a bobby, or a man in bobby's uniform, they would behave, be quiet, not scream?

"You sir, you. No not you, you. Yes, you. Excuse me a minute. What do you feel about that woman screaming?"

"I feel much more alarmed at her lying there on the road. No right to cause an obstruction. I don't care whether it's wilful or not, that's hardly the point. It's the inconvenience."

He walks away. You ask the same question of another man. He looks at you without stopping, as if you're deranged. Walks on down the hill, faster than

before you accosted him. Then he stops, comes almost to a standstill when he is twenty paces past you. You watch. He will come back, turn round, come back. You wish him, will him. What is all this social conscience bit? you imagine him saying. He approaches you but doesn't eye you, deliberately doesn't. Walks back up the hill past you, having forgotten to buy his evening paper. These are his standards, are they? The lunchtime edition. Maybe he follows the dogs. Maybe. Most people like that, most people follow . . . no, that is gratuitous, irrelevant. Delete it, please. He walks away, half looking round but there is no camera for him to smile at.

You stop a man coming out of the station. He may have heard the scream.

"Sir, did you—?"

"Yes. I did. Disgraceful. As if there isn't enough noise already."

"But did you know that that woman—"

"I know nothing. About her. I choose to ignore her. What's the alternative? Now, if you'll excuse me. . ."

And he walks away, stands by the belish beacon. Scuttles across the zebra, avoiding the body when the traffic stops breathing even. Inside the station, the doors of the lifts clang shut. Their noise is indescribable but my job is to describe it. They fired rifles at T. E. Lawrence's ears to deafen him, as has already been noticed once. To explode his ear drums. When his ears were raw and obliterated, he heard the sound, the noise of what had just happened, in his deaf ears for the rest of his days. She had flinched from the clang of the lift gates the previous afternoon, so recently. Was that why she screamed, why they had to run her down? To count her down and out? No longer reasonable, beyond reason?

She is crying now, crying. She has no children, no memories. That is not why she is crying. She might have had ten. And would still be crying. She is crying because of the noise. The noise everywhere. In the silence. Throughout the world. Yes, yes, oh yes.

" . . . a woman aged about thirty screamed at fifteen minutes past four this afternoon on Haverstock Hill, London. A few passers-by and bystanders looked away in embarrassment. Otherwise, no one took any notice. That is the end of the news."

She didn't hear it herself. A friend told her. There is a point where things snap, they have to. With most people the things that have to snap snap invisibly, silently. No one notices. No one who had been a witness, so-called, remembered her scream an hour later. If they had been reminded, they would have recalled, smiled: "It was a scream, was it? There was so much noise."

She clung to him that night, the two of them naked between the clean sheets. She screamed louder than she had ever screamed; louder than she had ever screamed when his love juice entered her.



DRAKE MAYBE ROUTE

BRIAN
ALDISS

AND MAYBE THIS was the real Charteris or a personal photograph of him flitting towards the metropolis on four sparky wheels. Still not too sure if matter was not hallucination, smiling and speaking with a tone of unutterable kindness to himself to keep down the bay-

ing images. Uprooted man. Himself a product of time. England a product of literature. It was a good period and to dissolve into all branches—great new thing with all potentials, prosperity and prenury.

He saw it, see-saw the new thing, scud across the scudding road before him, an astral projection perhaps, all legs, going all ways at once. A man could do that.

He wanted to communicate his new discoveries, pour out the profusion of his confusion to the naves, in madness never more sane or elquamp.

His car snouted out one single route from all the possible routes and now growled through the night of London's dark backyards: papier maché passing for stone, cardboard passing for brick, only in the yellow fanning wash of French headlights; pretence all round of solidity, permanence, roofs and walls and angles of a sly geometry, windows infinitely opaque on seried sleepers, quick corners, untrodden pavements, wide eyes reflected from blind shops, the ever-closing air, the epic of unread signs, and under the bile blue fermentation of illumination, roundabouts of concrete boxed by shops and a whole vast countryside rumpling upwards into the night under the subterranean detonation of unease. The steering wheel swung it all this way and that, great raree show-down for foot-down Serbs. Song in the wings, other voices.

Round the next corner FOR YOUR THROAT'S SAKE SMOKE a van red-eyed—a truck no *trokut!*—in the middle of the guy running out waving bloody leather—Charteris braked spilling hot words as the chasing thought came of impact and splat some clot mashed out curving against a wall of shattered brick so bright all flowering: a flowering cactus a christmas cactus rioting in an anatomical out-of-season.

Car and images dominoed into control as the man jumped back for his life and Charteris muscled his Banshee past the van to a halt.

All along the myriad ways of Europe that sordid splendid city in the avenues Charteris had driven hard. He thought of them spinning down his window thrusting out his face as the vanman came on the trot.

"You trying to cause a crash or something?"

"You were touching some speed, lad, come round that corner like you were breaking ruddy speed record, can you give me a lift I've broken down?"

He looked broken down like all the English now narrowly whooping up the after-effects of the Acid Head War, with old leather shoulders and elbows and a shirt of macabre towelling, no tie; eyes like phosphorescence and a big mottled face as if shrimps burrowed in his cheeks.

"Can you give me a lift, I say? Going north by any chance?"

The difficulty of the cadence of English. Not the old simple words so long since learnt by heart as the gallant saint slipped into the villainous captain's cabin pistol in hand but simply the trick of drawing it vocal from the mouth.

"I am going north yes. What part of it are you wanting to reach?"

"What part are you heading for?"

"I—I—where the christmas cactus blooms and angelina flowers—"

"Heck, another acid nut, look, lad, are you safe to be with?"

"Forgive me I it's they you see I take you north okay, only I'm just a bit confused by anywhere you want I go why not?"

He couldn't think straight, couldn't aim straight though he sighted his intellect at the target of bullets of thought were multi-photographed and kept recurring and stray ricochets spanged back again and again like that succulent image that perhaps he thought sniped him from his future—and why not if the Metz vision was true and he no more than a manifestation on a web of time in which matter was the hallucination. Baffle-ment and yet suffusing delight as if a great haversack was lifted off his back simplifying under its perplexities such personal problems as right or wrong.

"If you feel that way. You a foreigner? France was not affected they say played it cool stayed neuter. Okay I'll get my gear name's Banjo Burton by the way."

"Mine's Charteris. Colin Charteris."

"Good."

Burly of shoulder he ran back to the van all conked and hunched fifty yards back, struggled at the rear and then returned for help. So Charteris not unloath climbed into the silent stage set of this *quartier* looking about licking the desolation—London London at least this oupensian eye beholds this legendary if meagre exotic scene. Lugging at the back of the van the other man Banjo Burton pulls at something and between them they drag it machinery across the indoor road: a passing speedster and for a moment they are both outdoor again.

"What you got here?"

"Infrasound equipment," as they load it into the back of Charteris' car backs bending grunting in work lonely company under the night eyes. Then stand there half-inspecting each other in the semi-dark you do not see me I do not see you: you see your interpretation of me I see my interpretation of you. Moving to climb into the front seats heftily he swinging open the door with unrecorded muscling asks, "You're French then are you?"

"I am Serbian."

Great conversation stopper slammer of doors internally quasi-silent revving of engines and away. The start and bastion of Europe oh they know not Serbia. O Kosovo the field of blackbirds where the dark red peonies blow but then on into the Turkish night of another era of the mobility soothed soon the shouldered man begins to manifest his flat voice as if speed harmonised it.

"I'll not be sorry to get out of London and home again though mind you you certainly see some funny

things here make you laugh if you feel that way I mean to say people are more open than they used to be."

"Open? Minds open? You don't mean thoughts flowing from one to another like a net a web?"

"I don't mean that as far as I know. I don't get what goes on in the heads of you blokes though I don't mind telling you. And when I say laugh it's really enough to make you cry. I was up in Coventry when they dropped the bombs."

The light and lack of it played across his cragged face as he fumbled for a cigarette and lit it very close to his face between a volcano crater of cupped hands all afire to the last wrinkle and looking askance with extinct pits said through smoke, "I mean to say this is the end of the world take it or leave it."

But this goblin had no hex on the charmed Charteris who sang, "In English you have a saying where there's life there's hope and so here no end—one end maybe but a straggle of new starts."

"If you call going back to caveman level new start, look mate I've been around see I got a brother was in the army he's back home now because why because the forces all broke up—no discipline once the air is full of this cyclodelic men'll fall about with laughing rather than stand in a straight line like they don't get it, eh? So similarly where's your industry and agriculture going without discipline I tell you this country and all the other countries like Europe and America they're grinding to a standstill."

As they clattered up a long forlorn street built a century back archaic blind shuttered shattered in the stoney desert just for the sheer delight of going Charteris thus: "New disciplines grind from the stand only the old blind gone I can't argue it but industrial's a crutch thrown away."

Can't argue it but one day with a tuned tongue I will my light is in this darkness as his face splashes flame so the sweet animal lark of my brain will be cauterise a flamingot of golden flumiance.

Though by the deadly nightshade sheltered figures rankled in vacant areas moving in groups with new instinct and on missing slates derisive the city's cats also tabbled in doubled file for every shadow a shadower.

"Your army brother got the aerosolvent?"

"Got some sort of religious kick like his whole brain's snarled up. Wide open to whatever comes along."

"As we were meant to be."

Banjo Burton laughed and coughed at the same time pouring smoke as if it were all all he had to give.

"Bust open I'd say that's no way to go on like. Mark my words it's the end and cities hit real bad like London and New York and Brussels they copped it worst they're sinking with all hands and feet. Still a man does what he can so I run the group and hope like I mean not much one man can do after all if people aren't going to work proper they've got to do something so they trace for the sparkly sound right?"

Tunnelling in his own exploding reverie where a whole sparse countryside under the sun rustled with the broken dreams of Slavs he signalled "Sound?"

"I got a group. I manage them."

"I was thinking your van should you just leave it?"

"It wasn't mine. I picked it up."

SILENCE AND NIGHT fading between them and between furry teeth the jaded taste of another sunrise until Burton huddled deeper and said again, "I got a group."

The camp had been full of eyes and there it had all started his first promptings on this solitary migration. "What group?"

"A group like. Musicians. We used to be called the Dead Sea Sound now we changed to The Escalation now we're going to have infrasound like and the great roar tiding in over the heady audience in surges of everyone doing his fruit-and-nutmost." He waved his hand at the sky and said, "There's no equation for a real thing what you think?"

"Musicians eh?"

"Aye damned right musicians." He began to sing and the lost references added one more stratum to Charteris' tumbled psychogeology where many castled relics of experience lay. Untaught by his old politico-philosophical system to dig introspection he now nevertheless eased that jacket and shovelled down into his uncommon core to find there ore and always either/or, and on that godambiguity to snag his blade and whether there in the subsoil did not lie Kidd's treasure of all possibility, doubloons, pistoles for two, and gold moldores to other ways of thought.

Blinded by this gleam of previous metal he turned upon the singer huddled in his shadow and said, "You could be another strand to the web or why not if all routes I now sail are ones of discovery and screaming up this avenue I also circumnavigate myself with as much meaning as your knighted hero Francis Drake."

"I reckon as you've gone wrong somewhere this is the Portobello Road."

"In my hindquarters reason's seat I see I sit sail unknowing but that Christmas cactus may be a shore and is there not a far peninsula of Brussels?" Trying to look into a possible future port.

"I don't know what you mean man look where you're going."

"I think I look I think I see. Enchanted mariner ducks into unknown bays and me with a laurel on my brow I see. . . ."

Charteris could not say what he saw and fell silent in a daze of future days; but what he had said moved Burton from his trental mood to say, "If you're keeping on down the Harrow Road I have a friend in St. John's Wood name of Brasher who would also be glad of a lift north like a sort of religious chap in many ways a prophet with strange means about him and god's knuckleduster when he's crossed."

"He wants to go north?"

"Aye his wife and all that that. And my brother that

I told you he was in the army well he acts as sort of disciple to Phil that's this bloke Brasher he's a bit of a tough nut but he's reckoned a bit of a prophet and he was in this plane crash and don't tell me it wasn't god's luck he managed to escape. . . ."

The slow bonfire of unaccustomed words flickered on the tired minds consuming and confusing leaves of yesterday but for Charteris no meaning sunk low in the cockpit of his predestined dreams and just said lazily, "We can pick him up."

"He's in St. John's Wood I've got his address here on a bit of paper wait a bit like he's shackled up with some of his disciples. I tell you saints and seers are two a penny just lately, better turn off at this next traffic signals."

And past the greeneyes swinging right past Stones with headlights and Leeds Permanent all boarded up a glimpsed group of girls running down a dark turn legs and ankles what the blackbirds on the bloody field or through my popped dark autobreasted antiflowered the desired succubae come to me with their dark mandragoran flies.

Lost vision. Other avenues. The natural density of loins.

And all these drunken turnings as again they lost themselves a simplified pantographic variablegeometric seedimensional weltschmerzanschauerstrasshole of light-dashed caverns rumpussed in the stoned night were names to beat on inner ears with something more than sense: Westbourne Bridge Bishop's Bridge Road Eastbourne Terrace Praed Street Norfolk Place South Wharf Road Praed Street again and then more confidently up the Edgware Road and Maida Vale and St. John's Wood and past Lord's with the unread signs and now more rubbish in the streets and on the rooftops gliding unobtrusively another turning worlds day and so to where the man called Brasher lived.

Here so long had been his drive that when the man called Burton left to give a call Charteris dozed in a dover head down upon the steering wheel and let this long-planned city substantiate itself around him in dawning colour. In his shuttered sleep he saw himself drawn from the ground multi-pronged and screaming with several people standing ceremonially but their heads averted or under cowls to whom he was then able to speak so that they moved through whole sparse countrysides or rooms and chambers and compartments, always ascending or descending stairs. Though all was malleable it seemed to him he had a winged conversation with two two women but one of them was maimed and the other took wings and burst out from a window for some sort of freedom although they heard an old man cry that beyond the sprawling giant of a building the buildings began again.

WHEN HE WAS roused he could not say whether it was he that woke or the serpent within him.

Banjo Burton was talking at the window without making himself understood so Charteris followed him

into the crumbling semi-daylight house and that appeared the correct procedure. Mention of breakfast chill cramped in the dull limbs part still down in cup of coffee at least hospitality south of Italy and my knees still smarting from that blow in Metz they're upstairs he went after.

Old grey steps to the old brown building tucked in iron railings curled to a dilute Italian mode and in the grey-brown hall black-and-red tiles of the same illusory epoch and everywhere on every side apart from the murmuring of voices rich dull rich dull patterning making claims delaying sense—asking always of each moment was it eternal could one walk through the hall and walk forever through the hall: become no more than an experience of the hall as stiff-legged from the car one in the hall's embrace and the murmuring.

Then again another sumptuous time-bracket and the millennial-ephemeral world of the worn stair-carpet asking always what can be the connection between this and that moment except deep in the neovortex of old apemen in masquerading mansions and the smell of England tea old umbrellas jam and maybe corsets? And the voices.

Voices at the top of the stairs and another time-bracket somehow one comes through them with people milling. Patterny people all minority men and women with hands and kindly expressions born to ingenuflect. Dove voices with one voice angry madbulling the china-shoppers about it: the bullman for the crestfallen times all head and shoulders all bitumen surface blunt as a block shaking Charteris' hand saying, "My name's Phil Brasher I'm you will have heard of me I lead the people of the new Proceed."

"Proceed what?"

"The name of the new religion they know me better in Loughborough a failed saint there Robbins announced me inadvertently in the market."

And now they gazed at each other under a naked bulb with Charteris all a smooth man but for the starting whiskers and with his tongue always in an easy niche and only sound within the eternal squeal of tyres too late and the erotic gridlestone of bodies lying lively on the highway. Opposed to him Brasher everywhere chunky and wattled from suit or cheeks or breeks and premeating him no favourable aspect of the future. They were both betrayed.

They saw each other in a frost of violence crystallised recognised — a thousand self-photographing photographs fell about them on each a glimpse without its clue a fist a wrist a shoe a wall a word a cry Charteris we cry we hear his voice cry Paradise. What crazed triumph as Charteris foresuffers in utter puzzlement but yet did he not already do it all.

IN CONTRAST Brasher he. Ashen he mounts back his anger on an unsound rampant saying, "I'll not ride anywhere with you or where the lorries sweep. You must know that I am the great Sayer and cannot be dumb before these my followers." They cheer and bring

thin coffee always offstage like little paper faces. "Now you arrive here and fatal events begin spreading forward along my trail and every premonition to an ashtip. See all how even death is multi-valved and in its colour black nearest brown. Back into the traffic no not I! No more moving no more movement only to still and take what I teach."

And all those present said, "Not the ashtits. Sickie ourselves on stillness," like the backrow of the chorus.

But Burton drew Charteris aside and said, "It's the P.C.A. bombs he's not too bad will be glad to get home to his wife it's just he's psychic sees a bad image in you like."

Bombardment of images. Peltocrat. White thighs with peonies between and the walk up the narrow stair, *bozur m'sieur*. All that he took and let the others burst about and drank his thin naked carcinomatous London coffee as they milled and mixed.

And Brasher came near again something in a suit and narrowly said encouraged by Charteris' absence of aggression, "You also pedal a belief, my foreign friend?"

"Now I arrive here and fatal events spread forward along the trails. I am quoting, but we are nothing to each other and I have no word yet. I was a member in my own country of the party, but enough of that, I'm dazed here maybe not fully awake."

The heavy man now pressed against him against the banisters.

"This is my parish get it I had a miraculous survival from the air crash and you keep quiet. I'm the Sayer here."

"I'll be getting on if you object. I have no feelings and the day spurs me, or Burton if he still wants to come."

"Come on, Phil," says Burton and to Charteris, "He's coming but he's just suspicious of you because he saw you in the crashing plane, an apparition."

"Nonsense," said Charteris. "That countryside rumpiling upwards your distorted vision it was Brasher that interweaves my thoughts! I get it now the plane diving down to, well. I'm going thanks. I want no part of this man's dream nor did I ever fly with him in any plane."

As if this abdication soothed Brasher he came forward again and barred Charteris' way brushing aside Burton saying, "On that plane among the vestal virgins southwards you usurped my sodding seat and as we came—"

"I have not flown, now get that through your acid head—"

"I only spared the flashing splashing, and all those cute little bits of stuff—now look here my foreign friend, I have a right to my share of any bits of crumpet as suffer conversion to Proceed and you—"

"Let him go, Phil, he only offered you a lift to Lough along with me so are you coming, and this lot and your harum can come on after." Thus Burton and in a closed sentence for Charteris, "He's an old mate of mine

or was till religion got him—now he's worse to manage than *The Escalation*."

So was it that with raffish cheers from the walk-on parts they took the legend down the dirty creaking stairs and to the floor below and in the darkness waited for a moment unknowing within the shelter of the judas house before the inward-gazing judas-hole: and then went forth.

PRECOGNITION IS a function of two forces he told himself and already wished that he might record it in case the thought drifted from him on the aerosolar light. Two forces: mind of course and also time: the barriers go down and somewhere a white-thighed woman waits for me—

These are not my images. Bombardment of others' images. Autobreasted succubae again.

Yet my image the white-thighed, although I have not seen them already familiar like milk inside venetian crystal all the better to suck you by. Better start again.

It's not only that mind can leap aside from its tracks but that the tracks must be of certain property: so there are stages I have crossed to reach this point the first being the divination of time as a web without merely forward progress but all directions equally so that the essential I at any moment is like a spider sleeping at the centre of its web always capable of any turn. Only that essential Gurdjieffian I aloof. And secondly the trip-taking soaked air of London tipping me off my traditional cranium so that I allow myself a multi-dimensional way.

Zbogom, what am I now if not more than man.

More than pre-psychedelic man.

Me homo viator

She homo victorine

She haunts me as I hope to haunt her. Not so far north as Scotland.

In a flash he was on her thought scent moving along the web taking a first footfall consciously away from antique logic gaining gaining and losing also the attachment to things that keeps alive a thousand useless I's in a man's life seeing the primary fact the sexual assertion that she took wing whoever she was near to these two strange men.

Then he knew he was the only valid shade of his formed formal self to leave Dover by the London lane.

He had a new purpose that was no more a mystery only now in this moment of revelation was the purpose yet unrevealed. Magical now he played the car scudding and leaping and bouncing from the surface of the road to the madland of the midlands. He wondered if voices cried his name.

Low hills whirled by like bonfires.

And while Charteris took his frail barque into strange seas, life on the textbook level continued in the back of the Banshee where Brasher uncomfortably crouched next to the group's equipment held forth to Burton once more of his traumatic trip when the wings failed the pilot's part of reason.

"I knew the plane was going to crash before I even got into it." Brasher reliving the drama of his predictive urges.

As his simple sentences speared a few facts on the material surface, they twisted under and swam to Charteris through the accumulating fathoms of his flooding newness, garbed in beauty and madness speckled.

Brasher's plane was one of the last to fly. It brought the members of the Stockholm Precognitive Congress back to Great Britain on flight S614 leaving Arlanda Airport from Runway 3 at 1145 hours local time or maybe it was later because the airport clock had taken to marking an imperceptible time of its own and your pilot was Captain Mats Hammarström who welcomes you a bored-looking man whose wooden face conceals a maelstrom of beauty caught from the falling aerosoused air.

Takeoff kindly fasten

And soon we're over the frosty snowy terrain astonishing

Suggestive contours showing through the ecological extract a Ben Nicholson low relief with pubic hair

Frosted lakes new formations tracks to abstracts spoor of industry neat containments of area scarred forests pattern appearing as we rise where no pattern was where no pattern was intended. Models too precise for truth marvellous

Clouds scraping ground. As clouds thicken sun lights them draws a screen over the world so on the fantastic stage-set a new world solid appears untrodden by man whiter-than-white more-than-arctic world of cloudbergs where nothing polar could survive miraculous

All this mindmoving while trim succulent young air-hostesses minister to the passengers pretending in their formal blue uniforms courtesy S.A.S. that they know nothing of ersex. To nobody's deception. The masquerade keeps the serpent sleeping forms part of the formalised eroticism of pre-psychedelic times that these nubile and gleaming maidens should minister to men above the cloud formations incredible

Old concepts of godliness harnessed to conceits of airline schedules

What price the crack-up Brasher

The maidens are antidotes to this bleak world of freedom and their secret confined spaces stand alone against the idiot acreage of sky tremendous

Their suggestive contours show through the uniformal abstracts low reliefs in high style delicious

Plane begins to descend perhaps Brasher flinches at the white land as it rushes up but no impact. Is plane or cloud intangible. So swallowed up by these mountains and valleys on which nobody ever built erewhonderful

Great wheeling scab of metropolis below thirty thousand streetcars cutting through the primaeval concrete crust. Silver paternal Thames threading through it a curling crack of sky and your Captain Mats Hammarström takes it into his capital notion to land upon it

All Brasher had visualised was an old Cortina and a lorry with a Glasgow numberplate. So much for pre-cognition. Next second. Your Captain got. Tower Bridge. Slap. In. The. Ouspensian Eye.

"The plane sank like a stone and I was the only one who survived," concluded Brasher.

Charteris nearly ran into a group of people he swerved they scattered and adrenalin generated cleared his brain.

"People all group," he said. "Changed living pattern."

"Aye, well, it's the bombs," said Burton. "They're regrouping. Ideas of solitude and togetherness have changed."

"I was lucky to get away. I nearly drowned," Brasher insisted.

"It's a new world," said Charteris.

"The group will be glad to see me back," said Burton.

"My exploration of it," said Charteris.

"Loughborough will welcome me," said Brasher.

"And my wife of course."

Charteris was laughing with a vibratory note that meshed into the engine noise. The silver thread of road his narrow sea and he Sir Francis? Then where these Englishmen went might well prove his cape of good hope.

"This infrasound really breaks people up," said Burton.

"Robbins is no more than a feeble pseudo-saint," said Brasher. "I must train up a new disciple, find someone to master the illogic of the times."

"Train me," said Charteris.

The road ran north and north and always on never homesick its own experience. They saw towns and houses and sometimes people in groups but more often trees and everything was stretched very thin over the great drum of being. Juiced the car caperilled frowards northwoods. And the three men sat in the car, close together, also apart, with their wits about them but knowing very little indeed of all the things of which they were entirely aware. Functioning. Of a function. Existing in more ways than they could possibly learn to take advantage of.

Fragment of a Much Longer Poem

Oh one day I shall walk ahead
Up certain sunken steps into a hall.
Patterned with tiles in black and red
And recognise the colour and the place
As well as if I once walked back
In time up certain sunken steps
And came into a hall with black
And red tiles in a certain aimed
Pattern that makes me think I tread
Up sunken steps into a hallway and
Confront a tiled floor patterned red
And black which makes me think I stand

Circadian Rhythm

I've got circadian rhythm

You've got circadian rhythm

We've got circadian rhythm—

So the town-clock's stopped for good

In the night-time I see daylight
And my white nights outshine daytime—
It beats the living daylight
Out of one-time lifetime

Spill my living daylights down my shirt-front
Chase my living nightmares round my shirt-tail
All my trite cares
They're just rag and bob-tail

So I've got circadian rhythm
You've got circadian rhythm
We've got circadian rhythm—
So we ain't going home no more

(The Dead Sea Sound)

The First and Future Paradise

We all know it—

There was a primordial epoch
In which everything was decided
An exemplar for future ages.

Let's say it again—
You glimpse it sometimes behind bedroom
Curtains—a paradise and then
Catastrophe! They constitute the present.
Meaning what we do now is an end trajectory
Trajectory.
When I love you love
There's nothing personal in it.

The decisive deed took place before us
Essential preceding actual.
We must confront mythic ancestors
Unless we wish for ever
To be driven by our whirlwinds
To live in their old nostalgias.

Paradise is lingering legend in our day
The world's smiles are few and wintry.
And the mountains no longer shore the sky.
But one may be a mountain even now—
It's not too late!—if you pursue your self
If you can make cosmic journeys
Be a shaman not a sham man.

Dangers lie in the self, serpents
Lurk but there are new animals
And auxiliaries and tongues
To help psychopomps and singers
(Listen to birds and the throat of the cockatoo!)

Friendship with the animals who are
Beyond broken time, and schizophrenics:
Bliss of other bodies: the paradisiac
Journeys beyond life and
Death: pushing of utterance into



BUG JACK BARRON

NORMAN SPINRAD

PART 5

JACK BARRON—founder member of the radical Social Justice Coalition which is now about as strong as the withering, super-reactionary Republican Party. But Barron has sold out the SJC, now panders controversy on a powerful TV show, "Bug Jack Barron", where individual's grievances are given a coast-to-coast airing. The show appears fearless, knocking the establishment hard, but really never goes far enough to rock the boat. Barron knows it, is careful. He's estranged from his hippy wife SARA WESTERFELD who hates to hear his name mentioned, loves and remembers the idealist he once was.

BENEDICT HOWARDS—man of even greater power than Barron. He owns the Foundation for Human Immortality: leave the Foundation \$50,000, and you're good for—who knows—maybe forever. On death you're frozen and stored till the secret of immortality has been discovered. That moment may be fast approaching. Howards is given a treatment. Maybe he has forever.

On the day of Howards' greatest triumph, Barron comes up against the Foundation. A negro claims (wrongly, as Barron knows) that the Foundation practices colour prejudice. On the show Barron tries to contact Howards. But Howards won't be disturbed and, angry, Barron hits harder than he normally would have, bringing in people he knows hate Howards—like his old friend and co-founder of the SJC LUKAS GREENE, now the Negro Governor of Mississippi.

Barron tries to put things right and contacts Senator TEDDY HENNERING, co-sponsor of the Freezer Utility Bill, which would grant Howards' Foundation a Freezing monopoly. But Hennering appears strangely agitated and inexplicably throws away his chance. Barron is worried, realises he's made an unwanted enemy in Howards—an enemy he can't afford to have.

Little more than a year to go till the Democratic Convention. President Bobby had his run; will Teddy the Pretender get the nomination? Howards has his own plans. Great big plans he won't let Barron scotch.

Howards comes to Barron's office the day after the show. He threatens, cajoles—and finally offers a free Freeze contract if Barron will promote the Freeze Bill on his show. Barron knows Howards is running scared, and pushes. Finally Howards tells him: Hennering has just died in an air crash! Howards has lost his front man. Now Teddy the pretender has the Presidency in his pocket, but Howards thinks Barron can swing it back to his side.

Barron takes a week to think it over. With his producer he plans to give Howards a taste of fire on the next show, so he'll back off. Deathbed scene, the family begging for a Freeze. Then put Howards on and let him answer that.

But Howards is working at his own plans. Barron is "the last piece in a pattern of power". How can he force the piece into place? He learns of Barron's estrangement from Sara Westerfield and

has Sara brought to him. Knowing she needs only half an excuse to go running back to Barron, he confronts her with the images of her own death, then offers a free Freeze contract if she'll get Barron into bed with her. A simple deal: the minute Barron signs, she gets a contract of her own.

But Sara realizes now what will happen. It will be her and Jack together again—forever. She'll give Barron to Howards, but it will be *her* Barron—turned-on, angry, love-filled, an apocalyptic angel to destroy Howards and all he stands for. She looks up at Howards and wonders: how much does he know? What kind of man would try to turn love into a weapon of paranoid power?

And now a day of surprises for Barron. In the warm afterglow of a night with secretary Carrie the vidphone chimes: smooth face of Gregory Morris, Governor of California and de facto head of the semi-vestigial Republican Party. And he asks Barron: "*How would you like to be President of the United States?*"

The vidphone chimes again and it's Sara. Barron rushes across

the city to see her and they are reunited, full of guilt at having copped out on one another, and full of the old love. Safe in that love, Barron thinks: *Morris is right, I could do it. And Sara: Jack, Jack, someone like you should never die.*

Finally: the confrontation. "Deathbed at go"—and Barron puts Howards on to answer the appeal. He backs Howards into a corner, then agrees to pull off if Howards will give him the whole Freezer story.

Howards comes to Barron and tells him that he was closer than he thought last night: the Foundation *does* have immortality—and this is what he is offering Barron if Barron will snag him public support, sell the people on the idea of immortality for a select few.

Meanwhile Barron learns that he's been offered the Republican nomination on a fusion ticket with the SJC. And back home he learns something else: Sara reveals her connection with Howards.

BBETTER BE IT or I feed you right to the fishes, enough fucking around Barron, and I gotta come to this crazy joint too? Benedict Howards thought as he sat down on some screwy iron and leather kite of a chair, stared across at Jack Barron perched like some oily Arab oil trader on a silly-ass camel saddle, framed by the open terrace behind him palm trees or whatever you call the dumb things look like cheaphotel phoney rubberplants hot and cold running whores in Tulsa or San Jose or some other nowhere bottomtown with plenty of money and no class—yeah, it figures Jack Barron would go for that kind of California horseshit.

Howards opened his attaché case, took out two contracts in triplicate, handed them across to Barron along with his old fashioned fourteen-carat gold felt-tip pen. "There you are, Barron," he said. "Contract for you, contract for Sara Westerfeld or Barron or whatever her last name is—made out to Sara Westerfeld since that's her legal name at the moment. All signed by me, paid up by 'anonymous donor', and standard Freeze contracts except for the immortality option clause. Just sign all the copies and we can get down to *your* end of the bargain."

Barron leafed through one of the copies, looked up, measured Howards with those goddamned smirking eyes of his, said: "Let's get this straight, Bennie, once I sign these contracts, you can't welsh, I send one of my copies to a very safe place with instructions to release it to the press with the whole scam on your having an immortality treatment in case anything should happen to me, dig?"

Howards smiled. You're so fucking smart, Barron, think you're two steps ahead of Benedict Howards

think I don't know what you're thinking—Jack Barron's got *his* insurance, where's yours, Howards, smells too easy? Chase your own tail, Barron, never figure out *your* insurance is really my insurance till it's way too late and I own you down to the soles of your feet and you're too far in to ever back out till it's your immortal life million years strong young cool-skinned women air-conditioned arenas of power forever to lose same as mine, and then you're my man all the way like Senators, Governors, and goddam it President too, Mr. Howards, despite goddam idiot Hennering.

"You don't even have to trust me that far," Howards said with carefully-guarded casualness. "You and your wife can exercise the immortality option the moment you sign if you want to. In fact, you can fly back to Colorado with me tonight, have the treatment and be back better than new in time for your next show. With Deep Sleep recovery, it's all over in two days. You don't have to trust me at all, you can collect your pay-off before you have to deliver anything."

Barron's eyes narrowed even as Howards anticipated his suspicion. "That smells like a dead flounder to me," Barron said. "I don't figure you for the trusting type, Bennie, and it looks like you're trusting *me*, and *that*, baby, I don't trust at all."

Keep on thinking that way, sucker! Howards thought. Go home in a barrel thinking you can out-con Benedict Howards.

"Who trusts you?" Howards said smoothly. "I got it set up so neither of us has to trust the other and you better believe it. I can play the press release game too, and where would that leave you, Mr. Champion of the

Underdog, on public record selling out to the Foundation, how long you think you keep your show *then*? You may be a lot of things, but I don't think you're schmuck enough to blow everything just to double-cross me. We both got our names on dangerous paper, and neither of us can afford to make it public. It's a double insurance policy, Barron." And once you have the treatment, it'll be more than your silly career, it'll be your life, your million-year life in my hands, you think about pulling a fast one.

Howards felt Barron measuring him, trying to think holes in his position, knew that he wouldn't find any because there's only one hole and it gives me the big edge, Barron, and you'll never find *that* one till you're in way over your head. Go ahead, smart-ass, try and out-think Benedict Howards won't be the first man's tried won't be the last to go home in a barrel oil leases Lyndon Bobby Senators Governors doctors nurses tube up nose down throat fading black circle all thought they could get Benedict Howards, and I beat 'em all, conned 'em bought 'em destroyed 'em owned 'em, *really* think you can get the best of the only man bigger than death, winner over all forces of the fading black circle?

Barron looked at him blankly for a long moment; not an inch of flesh moved but something changed behind his eyes that Howards could sense from long experience with big men in air-cooled vaults of power to surrender, flunky, Mr. Howards, and Howards knew he had him bought even before Barron said: "Okay, Howards, deal." And signed his contract in triplicate.

"**T**HAT'S REAL smart," Howards said. "Now you get hold of Sara Westerfeld by tonight, get her signatures, and I'll fly you both to Colorado in my place for the treatment, save you a few hundred in air fare, show you even little things go better when you play ball with Benedict Howards."

Barron smiled a nasty *Bug Jack Barron* smile Howards couldn't read behind, and he felt a small pang of uneasiness, still playing games, what now, Barron? Take it easy, he told himself, once you get him to take the treatment, you got him hogtied same as any other beef.

"Hey, Sara!" Barron yelled. "Come on in here, got something for you to sign!"

And Barron smiled so blandly as Sara Westerfeld stepped out of a doorway and crossed the living room towards them with a nervous blank face, slowly, so damned slow, that Howards felt a real moment of fear, felt the possibility of his control of the situation maybe about to slip away, the irrational fear that Barron was playing with him—has that goddamned beatnik whore spilled the whole thing? He saw that Barron was holding all six contracts tightly . . . about to rip 'em up, go ape? Damn him, how much does he know? That dumb cunt tell him and screw everything up?

Jack Barron toyed with the contracts as Sara Westerfeld stood by the camel saddle he was sitting on like some Saudi Arabian slavedealer, and Howards felt as

if it were his neck being fingered as she shot him a look of studied non-recognition, then looked at Barron with sickeningly worshipful eyes as if to tell Howards that if she was anyone's whore, she was Jack Barron's. But how much does he know? Howards wondered frantically, fighting to keep his face blank. She got the brains to keep her mouth shut now?

Barron looked at him with his eyes downturned to catch shadows in the deep hollows, what Howards recognised as a calculated *Bug Jack Barron* cheap trick, and Barron seemed to be reading every knot and convolution in his gut. This prick could be dangerous, Howards realised, more dangerous than I thought, he's smart, real smart, and he's crazy as a coot and that's a bad, bad combination unless I got him bought all the way. *Got* to get him to fly back with me and take the treatment tonight!

Jack Barron laughed a laugh that increased the tension, said: "Don't get so uptight, Bennie. Sara already knows everything. She's my chick all the way." He paused (or am I imagining things? Howards thought), seemed to be emphasising the words for his benefit (or the girl's?): "We don't keep secrets from each other."

Barron handed three contracts to Sara Westerfeld, along with the pen. "Go ahead, sign 'em, Sara," he said. "You know what you're signing, don't you?"

Sara Westerfeld looked straight at Howards as she signed the contracts, smiled a thin smile that could've been acknowledgement of the deal completed between them or could've been an inside smile between her and Barron, said: "Sure I do. I know just what we're getting into. Immortality. Jack's told me everything, Mr. Howards. Like he says, we don't keep secrets from each other."

This dumb bitch playing games with me too? Howards wondered. But it doesn't matter, he told himself as she handed the contracts back to Barron, who sorted them, handed Howards a copy of each, signed, sealed and delivered, got 'em both now, right here in my hand in black and white. And by the time you go on the air again, Barron, it'll be in flesh and blood, yours and hers, and who gives a shit whether you know how I used her, she's done the job one way or the other is what counts, I got you, I own you, Jack Barron, clean through to your bones.

Howards tucked the contracts safely into his attaché case. "Okay," he said, 'so then I suppose I can talk freely in front of her (time for the spurs, Barron, you'll have to get used to 'em anyway, and your woman might as well get the message right at the beginning, see who's boss, how's *that* grab you, smart-ass?). I'll send a car for you about seven tonight, take you to the airport. We'll have plenty of time to put your next show together on the way to Colorado. I figure first order of business is to get back those votes in Congress for the Freezer bill you lost with your big mouth. What you'll do is get some jerk on the line who was taken by one of those fly-by-night Freezer outfits, maybe a surviving relative of someone who did business

with them and had his body rot when they went bankrupt. And don't worry, I'll dig someone like that up by Wednesday, or if I can't, I'll get someone to fake it. Then you put a couple of these phoney operators on the hotseat—I got a whole list of the worst of 'em—and show what crooks they are, get it? Safety's the pitch, only a Foundation Freeze is safe and Congress gotta pass—"

"Hold it, Howards," Barron said. "For openers, you don't tell me how to run my line of evil. It'd smell like an open sewer if I did an about-face on the Foundation right after the last two shows. We gotta cool it first. I'll do a couple shows got nothing at all to do with the Foundation, take the heat off. Then three or four weeks from now, I do maybe ten minutes on a victim of your so-called competition at the end of the show, and that'll set things up for grilling a couple of those schmucks the week after that. *Bug Jack Barron's* supposed to be spontaneous, unrehearsed, audience-controlled, remember? You want me to do you any good, it's gotta keep looking that way."

"Like you say, it's your line of evil," Howards said. This prick's gonna be *real* useful, he thought. Knows his own business just fine, he's right, gotta be subtle, and Barron knows just how to do it. Let him run his own little piece of the action, and he'll do just fine. Tell him *what* to do, and let him handle the how. That's the best kind of flunky, after all—flunky with brains enough to take orders and carry 'em out better than you could if you had to spell out every word. What they call a specialist, wind 'em up and watch 'em work.

"We'll play it your way," Howards said. "You've been at it a long time, and you should know what you're doing." He got up feeling a day's work well done. "Car'll pick you up at seven and about two days from now, you'll have had the big payoff. Think about it, getting up every morning for the next million—"

"Not so fast," Jack Barron said. "I think we'll pass on the immortality treatment for now, see how things go. We're both young, there's no rush, contract says we can exercise the option any time we want, after all."

"What's the matter with you?" Howards said shrilly. Then, as he saw Barron's eyes measuring him, realised he *did* sound shrill, was treading very thin ice—gotta get him to take the treatment soon, can't scare him off, make him any more suspicious than he is—lowered his voice, feigned indifference. "Don't you want to be immortal?"

"Wouldn't have signed the contract if I didn't, now would I?" Barron said. (And Howards sensed the shrewd, electric danger in his sly voice. Watch it! Watch it! He's playing that *Bug Jack Barron* game again!) "Question is, why are you so hot to make me immortal so damned quick?"

Benedict Howards felt the scalpel in the question probing for what the bastard's been probing for all along—the secret of the treatment. And you're not gonna find that out nohow, Barron, not till it's too late. Can't push him now, gotta back off, damn it,

or. . . . *Can't let him get suspicious about the treatment!*

"Tell you the truth, Barron," he said, "I get carried away just thinking about it reminds me I'm immortal, really immortal, and I just can't see why anyone would wait five minutes longer than they had to. But I suppose you can't feel that now—just wait till you stand where I stand, you'll understand then. But you do what you want, I don't give a shit. It's your life, Barron, your immortal life; I've got mine, and that's all I really care about."

"Never figured you for a True Believer, Bennie," Barron said, smiling (but the smile was guarded, a put-on?). "Don't worry, I'll be there to collect when I'm good and ready."

And I'll be there to collect you, you smart-ass bastard! Howards thought as he turned to leave. Save your bullshit tricks for Wednesday nights, Barron, we're both gonna need 'em. You'll go to Colorado, and you'll do it soon, or else. No flunky holds out on Benedict Howards!

"FOR THE LAST time, Sara, we play this my way, not yours," Jack Barron said, seeing her naked body stiff, half-fetaled, and about as sexy as an old inner tube, lying uptight and pale in the sickly city moonlight that filtered through the bedroom skylight, framing them both, curled face to face, untouching, like beached tadpoles on the electrically-warmed bed, like the spotlight of some cheapjack off-off-Broadway two-hundred-seat playhouse.

"But what the hell *is* your way?" she said, and he detected that old six-years-dead whine creeping back into her voice, ghost of breaking-up days, and her eyes were glassy mirrors in the darkness, mirroring depths beyond depths—or just an illusion about as deep as a phosphor-dot pattern on a TV screen? Half the time I think I know this chick through to where she lives, he thought, and the rest of the time I wonder if she lives *anywhere* or do I just see illusions of depths, my self-projected Sara of the mind on the vidphone screen of her face. And his naked body next to hers felt at this moment like a piece of meat connected to his mind only by the most novocained of sensory circuits.

"Why didn't we go to Colorado with Howards?" she was saying. "Why don't we take the treatment right way? Then that slimy Howards'd have nothing left to hold over our heads, and you could start right in on him again next Wednesday. And why did you want to play that stupid game with him, leave him guessing whether I told you everything or not? Why . . ."

Why? Why? Why? thought Jack Barron. Jesus H. Christ on a bicycle! Go explain to her, you can't even explain it to yourself—belly-message is all, smell of danger behind everything, reality behind reality behind reality slippery feel of uncertainty like driving through traffic in rain-fogged windshield stoned on acid; impossible to know where objective stone-wall reality's at, but knowing for sure you don't see it yet,

gotta inch along real slow by the seat of your pants or get run over by Howards' Mack Truck Chinese box lie within lie within lie puzzle.

"Because it's just what Bennie wants me to do," he said, if only to cut off the nagging sound of her voice with his own. "He wanted us to have the treatment now, he wanted it real bad, so bad that when I let him know that I knew how hot he was for us to do it, he backed off. And that's just not Bennie's pattern, that cat's gotta be *real* uptight about blowing *something* to back water. . . ."

Just don't add up, Barron thought. Bennie's too paranoid and not dumb enough to trust me. Makes no sense, one thing he really has on me now is immortality, I was him, I'd withhold the treatment until I delivered the goods, got the Freezer bill through at least, only real insurance Bennie's got. And *that* he's hot to throw away! Stick the ace he holds right up my sleeve, put me in the catbirdseat. So somehow, that immortality treatment's gotta be his real insurance, his ace in the hole, not mine. But how? It just doesn't add up. And until it does, Jack Barron doesn't come within a thousand miles of that damned Rocky Mountain Freezer.

Sara reached out, touched the inner curve of his thigh. But it felt mechanical and far away; he just wasn't in the mood, didn't think she really was either. "What're you thinking about?" she said. "You're a million miles away."

"I wish to hell I knew," Barron said. "I just got the feeling I'm in over my head, is why I don't want to take that treatment now, got the feeling it'd get me in too deep in something I don't dig. Everything that's happened since I got involved in this daisy-chain with Howards seems unreal—this President bullshit . . . immortality. . . . They're just *words*, Sara, words out of some comic book or science fiction magazine, can't taste 'em, feel 'em, smell 'em, make 'em add up to anything that feels real. But that fucker Howards, he's real, no doubt about it, he smells real. And there's something oozing out of him that's real too, something big and scary. And I'm in it to the eyeballs, and I just don't know what it is. . . ."

"I think I understand," Sara said, and her hand tightened on his thigh; she inched closer to him on the bed and he began, almost against his will, to pick up on the warmth of her beside him. .

"But isn't it just because you're letting things happen, not making them happen? You're looking at it backwards—you should say to yourself I've *gotta* stop Benedict Howards and I've gotta keep immortality, and I've gotta do whatever I have to to do it. You can't wait for Howards to give you an opening, and you can't wait for someone else to do it, and you shouldn't worry about what Howards could do to us. Believe in yourself, Jack! Believe you can beat Howards no matter what he does; I believe it, and it's my life too. Oh Jack, it's just too big . . . immortality for the whole world or that lizard Howards going on

and on and on. . . . You *can't* cop out now!"

"Cop out?" Barron snarled in an instant lash-out defensive reaction. "Who the fuck are *you* to give me lectures about coping out, after what you've done, after the game you played with my head and Benedict Howards?" and immediately he was sorry.

'Cause she's right in her own dumb way, he thought. That cocksucker Howards! Sara never was in his league, who is, he uses people and then tosses 'em away like a snotty Kleenex, did it to Sara, do it to me I give him the chance, do it to the whole fucking country. That's where it's at, all right, Howards dealing a bumner to the whole dumb country and old Jack Barron dealing his power-junk for him on living colour junior high school streetcorners, that's exactly where it's at, Barron, and you can't con yourself otherwise.

"I deserved—"

"No you didn't, Sara," Barron said, and he drew her asexually to him, hugged her tight, sucking up her plain human warmth, hoping she was getting the same off him, 'cause god knows she needs it I need it we all need it, need a little human warmth, little flesh-reality, with a freak-out monster like Benedict Howards running amok shooting up the world with his lousy paranoid junk. "You hit me a little too close to home, is all. Bravery you're talking about, courage is all, and right now, that's just a word, too. . . ."

Yeah, courage, cheap commodity when you're a punk Baby Bolshevik smart-ass kid and you got nothing to lose you can lay yourself on the line just for the surge. But with a pad like this, three hundred thou a year and immortality and Christ knows what else on the line. . . . Throw all that away for a bunch of fucking words, *words*, is all, for two hundred and thirty million slob loser cowards wouldn't risk ten cents for Jack Barron? My life on the line, immortal life and Howards with Christ knows what up his sleeve to pound me to a pulp, and for what, a chance to pin a tin hero-medal on my chest and a fancy kamikazee funeral? You're asking too much, Sara, and I'm no hero, just a cat happened to get stuck in a position where it's all on his back, sick-joke of kismet, is all. All I can do is just try and come out of this trip with as much as I can, hurting as few people as possible; that's the name of the game, game of life, is all.

"Promise you just one thing Sara," he said. "I don't play Bennie's game or anyone's else's but my own. We're gonna get ourselves immortality, and we're gonna keep our skins whole in the process—that's the prime order of business. But if I get a chance to stomp Howards without losing any of my own flesh, I'll do it. Bet your sweet ass I'll do it! I hate that motherfucker more than you do—he's trying to use me, and worse, he's got the gall to try and use my woman against me. We're gonna come out on top, you better believe it, and if we can do in Bennie on the side, that's gravy. But *just* gravy."

"Jack. . . ." He felt warmth in her voice again, but behind it still the thin edge of that crazy Baby Bolshe-

vik berserker determination, and for some reason he found himself digging it this time, digging his simple, good-hearted chick, with her cuntfelt black and white silly-ass ideals, should be protected, not stomped on, and in any decent world would be. But we're all stuck in *this* world, and here, Sara baby, there be tigers.

"Know something else?" he said, feeling mind-circuit connections with his body begin to open, juices flowing into channels of think-feel integration, the skin-on-skin woman-warmth reality against him. "In about five minutes, I think I'll ball you senseless like you never been fucked before. Whatever else you are or aren't, you're good inside, chick, and you deserve it."

We all deserve it.

GONGINGONGING gong! gong! gong!

"Ummph. . . ." Jack Barron grunted, waking up in the disorienting darkness, a weight heavy against his chest. "What the. . . ."

Gong! Gong! Gong!

Uuuh, he thought fuzzily, goddamned vidphone. He half-sat-up against the bedstead, Sara's head sliding down his bare chest into his lap, made the connection, stopping the gonging that had been pounding behind his ears like a headache commercial. What the hell time is it? he wondered. What stupid bastard's waking me up at this time of night?

Grumbling, still trying to shake the sleep out of his head, Barron saw that Sara was still asleep, fumbled the vidphone down on to the bed beside him, turned the custom volume control knob down to the lowest setting, and squinted sourly at the face glowing up greily at him from the vidphone screen, wanly phosphorescent in the darkness.

Long, dark hair over a man's thin-boned face, something familiar about this silly schmuck calling me up in the middle of the night how the hell did he get my unlisted number. . . ?

"Hello Jack," a gravelly whisper from the vidphone said as Barron tried sleepily to place the face—I know this cat, but who in hell is he? "Brad Donner, remember?" the vidphone image said.

Donner . . . Brad Donner . . . Barron thought. Berkeley or L.A. or someplace, old Baby Bolshevik type I haven't seen in years. . . . Yeah, L.A., just before I got the show, friend of Harold Spence some kind of brown-nosing brat lawyer always talking about running for Congress or something. . . . Jesus Christ, every prick I ever talked to in person thinks he can bug me any time he feels like it. . . .

"You know what time it is, Donner?" Barron snarled, then lowered his voice, remembering Sara sleeping against his lap and boy what a night, am I sore! "Cause I sure don't, must be four or five in the morning, where'd you learn your manners, in the Gestapo?"

"Yeah, Jack," Donner said (stop calling me Jack, you brown-nosed mother!). "I know it's a bad hour, but I had to get to you right away. Got your number

from Spence in L.A., you remember, Harry was a big buddy of yours in those days?"

"Nobody's my buddy at *this* hour," Barron said. "If you're asking me some favour, you sure picked a stupid time to do it, Donner."

"No favour, Jack," Donner said. "I've been working here in Washington as public relations counsellor to Ted Hennering these three years, anyway till he was killed. . . ."

"Bully for you, Donner," Barron grumbled. Figures that this putz with all his SJC bullshit would end us as a flack for a lox like Hennering! Now with Hennering dead, I'm supposed to get him another job—at four a.m.? Jesus—

"I just got woke up myself," Donner said. "By Ted's widow, Madge. She's all shook, Jack, been scared out of her head since Ted was killed, came over to my place, woke me up, said she had to talk to you right away, and I think you'd better listen, after the hell you just gave Benedict Howards. Mrs. Hennering?"

And Donner's face was replaced by what once must've been an old-fashioned "handsome matron" in her fifties, thick grey hair in semi-disarray, prim little lips trembling, and wild frantic eyes staring up from the vidphone screen. What's going on? Barron thought, coming full awake. *Madge Hennering?*

"Mr. Barron. . . ." Madge Hennering said in a voice that seemed accustomed to being snotty-patrician calm, but now was edged with shrill frenzy. "Thank God! Thank God! I didn't know where to turn, what to do, who to go to, who I could possibly trust, after they . . . after Ted. . . . And then I saw your programme, the things you said about Benedict Howards, and I knew you were one man I could trust, one man who *couldn't* be involved with that murdering. . . . You'll believe me, won't you, Mr. Barron? You've got to believe me, you've got to tell the country how my husband died. . . ."

"Take it easy, Mrs. Hennering," Barron said soothingly, slipping half-mechanically into *Bug Jack Barron* cool vidphone circuit consciousness. "I know how you must feel, that terrible accident, but try to—"

"Accident!" Madge Hennering screamed, loud enough even at minimum vidphone audio to make Sara stir in his lap. "It was no accident, my husband was *murdered*! I'm sure he was murdered, there must've been a bomb on his plane. Benedict Howards had him killed!"

"What?" Barron grunted. She's gibbering, he thought. Hennering was Bennie's stooge all the way; nobody lost more when he died than Howards. This poor old bat's gone round the bend, I gotta be a shrink too, at four in the a.m.?

"Don't you think that's a matter for the police?" he said. "Assuming of course that it's true." Get the hell off my aching back, lady!

"But I can't go to the police," she said. "There's no evidence, Howards planned it that way, there's nothing left of Ted or his plane . . . nothing. . . ." She began to sob, then with an effort Barron could not help

admiring, set her jaw, said icy-calm: "I'm sorry. It's just that I was the only witness, and I've got no evidence to back it up, and I just don't know what to do."

"Look," Barron said wearily. "I realise it's bad taste to talk politics at a time like this, but I guess I have to. Howards had no reason in the world to kill your husband, Mrs. Hennering. Your husband was sponsor of the Foundation's Freezer bill, and it was an open secret that Howards was backing him for President. To be blunt, your husband was Howards' sto—er, ally. Howards had nothing to gain by killing him and everything to lose. Surely you know that."

"I'm no fool, Mr. Barron. But the day before Ted died, he had a long phone conversation with Benedict Howards. I only heard part of it, but they argued, they called each other terrible things, *terrible* things. Ted told Howards he was through with him, would have no part of the Foundation anymore, said Howards was a filthy monster. I've never seen Ted so furious. He told Howards that he was going to publicly withdraw his support from the Freezer Utility Bill, make a statement to the press about something awful he had found out the Foundation was doing. And Howards said, 'No one backs out on Benedict Howards, Hennering, cross me and I'll squash you like a bug.' Those were his exact words. And then Ted said something terribly obscene and hung up. When I asked Ted what it was all about, he got mad at me, but he really seemed terribly frightened—and I'd never seen my husband really scared before. Ted refused to tell me anything, said it was too dangerous for me to know, he didn't . . . didn't want my life to be in danger. And then he flew back home to talk with the Governor, but . . . but he never got there. Howards had him killed, I *know* he had him killed."

Crazy paranoid bullshit! Barron thought. Bet your ass Hennering was involved in forty-seven slimy deals with the Foundation, went from State Senator to Congressman to Senator on Bennie's bread, anybody with brains enough to read the funny papers knows that. Real touching, lady, old college try to make your husband a dead hero instead of Bennie's late stooge, Democrat front-mant for Foundation muscle. Death-bed repentance yet, and just before he's conveniently blown to kingdom come. Ted Hennering, Noble Martyr; yeah sure, after a hundred million people saw him two weeks ago gibbering like . . . like. . . .

Jesus H. Christ! Was *that* why Hennering was so uptight? Shit, it *does* figure! Hennering was killed Thursday night, which means he could've had it out with Howards Wednesday or Thursday like she says, would've known whatever was supposed to have turned him off the Foundation when he was on *Bug Jack Barron*. Would sure explain why he was so out of it. . . .

"You do believe me, don't you, Mr. Barron?" Madge Hennering said. "Everyone in Washington says you're an enemy of Benedict Howards. You'll want to use this against him, you'll want to put me on your programme and help me tell the country how my husband died,

won't you? And not just to save Ted's reputation. Mr. Barron, I was married to Ted for twenty-one years. I really knew him, I know he wasn't a great man, I know he did co-operate with Howards, but he wasn't a bad man and he wasn't a coward. He found out something about the Foundation for Human Immortality that infuriated him, sickened him, something so terrible he feared for his life, and for mine, just because he knew it. I don't know much about politics, but this *is* the United States, and murdering a United States Senator is something that even a totally evil man like Benedict Howards wouldn't do, unless . . . unless he felt he couldn't afford not to. I don't know what this is all about, but something terrible has to be going on for Howards to resort to political assassination. That's . . . that's something out of European history books . . . the Borgias. . . . Murdering a *United States Senator*! Ted, oh Ted!"

And she began to shake, sob convulsively, convincing Barron that at least the woman wasn't trying to put him on.

But political assassination, he thought, that's gotta be pure paranoia. So maybe Hennering *did* find out something rank enough to turn him off the Foundation (but what the fuck would be rank enough to make a phoney like Hennering get enough religion to throw away Howards' backing for the Presidential nomination?), maybe he *did* have a fight with Howards, and maybe Bennie *did* threaten him (how many times has Howards given *me* that "squash you like a bug" schtick?) but blowing up airplanes, the whole Borgia bit . . . pure coincidence, is all. This hysterical chick adds up one and one and one and gets three, is all.

Donner replaced Madge Hennering on the vidphone screen. "Well, Jack," he said, "what're you going to do? Should I have her call in Wednesday? This is big, scary—"

"Yeah, it's scary all right," Barron said. "What scares is the thought of the lawsuit Howards could slap on everyone in sight if that woman gets on the air and accuses him of murder without a scrap of evidence. You're supposed to be a lawyer? Don't even know libel when it's screaming in your face! Not only could Howards sue, but the F.C.C. would have me off the air quicker than you could say yellow journalism. Forget it, Donner, I may be crazy, but I'm not out of my mind."

"But Jack—"

"And don't call me Jack!" Barron snapped loudly. "In fact, don't bother to call me at all." And he broke the connection as Sara's eyes finally blinked half-open.

"Uh . . . whazzat. . . ?" she grunted.

"Go back to sleep, baby," Barron said. "Just a crank call, is all. Just a couple of screwballs." Yeah, he thought, just a pair of nuts. Bennie may be a little flakey, but he's not about to go around killing people; he's got too much to lose, his precious immortal life in the electric chair. . . .

Nevertheless, his back against the bedstead began to itch faintly.



JEEZ, MAN, WHAT'S the matter with you? Jack Barron thought as they rolled the final commercial. Real stinkeroo tonight. So acid's legal under Strip City SJC jurisdiction but maybe illegal under Greg Morris' California state law, so Morris has his Attorney General demand access to the Strip City Narcotics Licensing Bureau records, to make Woody Kaplan look like either a criminal or a stoolie, and the mayor of Freakoutsville says nyet, big fucking deal. Should've suggested the state fuzz bust into the Strip City offices, grab the records on a state writ, then the hippy cops could bust 'em for breaking and entering under local law and the state cops bust the local fuzz for interfering with state police, and you'd have all the cops in the County of Los Angeles arresting each other on

streetcorners, good for laughs at least. Which is about all the last forty-five minutes could've been good for.

But I even blew that, just can't keep my mind on that kind of crap, not with the *real* action that's going on. Madge Hennering run over by a truck! Hit and run by a Hertz rental with the plates removed, impossible to trace, try and tell yourself *that* wasn't a pro job! Try and kid yourself you don't know who bought the hit, Barron. . . . Man oh man, would I like to get Bennie on the line now and hit him with *that*! Yeah, and what would he hit *me* with, a safe falling off the Empire State Building? Or a lawsuit and the F.C.C. and the kitchen sink. . . . Course it all *could* be coincidence, or the Hennering clan could have other enemies she didn't talk about. Yeah sure, and the Mars

Expedition's gonna find out Mars is made of real cheese. What the hell am I mixed up in anyway?

Snap out of it, man, you've got a show to run, gotta try and pull *something* out of tonight's fiasco. And the promptboard says 60 seconds!

"Hey, Vince," Barron said over the intercom circuit, "we got any real kook calls come into the monkey block tonight?"

Gelardi's face was sour and worried behind the control booth glass (Vince smells the egg we're laying too), but he grinned wanly as he said: "You kidding? This is still *Bug Jack Barron*, just barely maybe, but we still got every freako in the country calling in." And the promptboard flashed "30 seconds".

"Okay," Barron said, "give me the screwiest call you got, don't even tell me what it is. My head's just not on straight tonight, and I want something'll really blow my mind, get some action going. But no politics, for chrissakes, I want a real Little Old Lady from Pasadena type, good, clean All-American kook."

"Have *I* got a kook for *you*!" Gelardi said in a thick Yiddish accent as the promptboard flashed "On the Air".

Looks like he meant it, Barron thought as the monitor screen split down the middle, on the left-hand side the grey on grey image of a wasted Negro face, uncombed semi-nappy hair, black on black jaw-stubble-shadow, over a fancy fifty-dollar gold-filigree-collared sportjac half-unbuttoned revealing a torn old T-shirt, semi-focused watery eyes staring across the monitor at his living colour image in an obviously advanced state of alcoholic stupefaction.

"This is *Bug Jack Barron*, and you're on the air," Barron said, coming alive with old-fashioned freak-show anticipation, remembering that L.A. Birch grill Peeping Tom dock-and-hotseat show where the whole thing started when he turned around the third degree light and rubber hose on old Joe Swyne, and, Joe baby, wherever you are, this looks like one that would've been right down your twisted little alley.

"Name's Henry George Franklin," a rheumy basso said, and behind his head the screen showed vague slat-shack outlines beyond the rococo shape of the most gigantic pseudo-Arabic TV-stereo console the world had ever seen. "Y'can call me Frank, ol' Jack Barron, jus' call me Frank."

"Okay, Frank," Barron said, "and you can just call me Jack. And now that we're on a first name basis, let's hear what's bugging you." Come on, come on, freak out already, got about twelve minutes to turn tonight's turkey into instant Salvador Dali. And Vince, anticipating, split the screen in a crazy jagged diagonal, with Henry George Franklin above Barron like a custard pie about to be thrown.

"Well y'see, ol' Jack, it's just like this," Henry George Franklin said, waving a horny finger in front of his wet lips, "yeah, just about zactly like this. Fella like ol' Frank down here in Mississippi, sharecropping little ol' cotton farm, he's got t'have him a woman,

right? I mean, poor or no poor, mouth to feed or not, woman she comes in mighty handy fixing supper and breakfast and givin' him a little pleasure in between. I mean, you can afford her or not, don't matter, no matter how poor you are, woman she hauls her own freight."

"Apparently you meet a better class of chick than I do," Barron said dryly. "Maybe I oughta drop down and look around. But I hope you haven't called just to discuss your love-life. Interesting as I'm sure it must be, we can both get in big trouble if it gets *too* interesting."

"Ain't had no love-life 'cept a night in Evers every week or so for seven years, ol' Jack," Franklin said. "Not since the old lady kicked off sticking me with a daughter. Thas what I mean, see, don't seem like a fair trade, do it, woman for a daughter? Daughter eats almost as much as a woman, but it's like keeping one of them there parakeets, just eats and jabbbers and don't do nothin'. Means y'can't even afford another woman, not regular-like. So it just makes good sense, you stuck with a useless mouth to feed, somebody makes a real nice offer, sensible man's gotta take it and sell her."

"Huh?" grunted Barron. "I think one of us has had one too many. Sounded there like you were saying something about selling your daughter."

"Well sure, ain't that what I called you about in the first place, ol' Jack. . . ?" Franklin said fuzzily. "Didn't I tell y'all. . . ? Maybe I didn't. Thas what's bugging me, I mean me being a rich man now, I kinda miss the little critter, now that I can afford her. I want y'all to help me get her back. 'Ccurs to me that buying someone's daughter, that might just not be legal. Thing to do is maybe find her and make the police get her back. Ain't had no doings with the police before, I mean not from *that* side of things, if you know what I mean, thought ol' Jack Barron was the man to get to help me."

"You . . . ah, sold your daughter?" Barron said as the promptboard flashed "8 minutes" and Vince inverted the diagonally-split screen, wry, cynical Jack Barron now uppermost. Boy, this cat's loaded! Even money he never had a daughter. But what's the schtick? Why did Vince feed me this lush?

"Hey, don't look at me that way!" Henry George Franklin said indignantly. "Not like I sold her to some pimp or something, that fancy-looking shade fella, he said they were gonna take real good care of her, feed her nothing but the best, dress her nice and fancy, and give her a college education. Seemed like I would just be a bad papa I didn't let her have all them shade-type advantages—and besides, that shade fella he gave me fifty big ones in United States money."

COULD BE HE'S on the level? Barron wondered. One of those illegal adoption rackets? But don't they usually go after infants? Not seven-year-olds, not seven-year-old *Negroes*. What he say, five hundred

dollars? Going price on a nice WASP baby on the black market can't be much more than that, how can any adoption ring make a profit paying five hundred bucks for some seven-year-old Negro? And what was that about a college education?

"Five hundred dollars *is* a lot of money," Barron said, "still I—"

"Five hundred?" Franklin yelled. "Hey, what kind of man you think I am, sell my own flesh and blood for five hundred dollars? I said fifty *big* ones, ol' Jack. Fifty thousand dollars."

"You're . . . you're trying to tell us that someone bought your daughter for *fifty thousand dollars*?" Barron said archly as the promptboard flashed "5 minutes". "Nothing personal, Mr. Franklin, but why would anyone want your daughter, or anyone else's for that matter, bad enough to shell out fifty thousand dollars?"

"Why you askin' *me*?" Franklin said. "You the big, smart, expensive shade, ol' Jack, you tell me. How should I know why some fancy shade's crazy enough to hand me fifty thousand dollars in hundred dollar bills, whole satchelful of money, for my worthless daughter? You gotta understand I was dirt-poor at the time, I never saw so much money in my whole life, never expect to again. Sure I figured the shade was crazy, but that money was the real thing, and when a crazy man hands you a satchelful of money, who's gonna stop and say 'Hey, you actin' crazy, man, giving me all this nice money?' You gotta hope he stays crazy long enough to give you the money and forget your address."

Something (too loaded to make up a story like that, too defensive, got past the whole monkey block, dig that sportjac he's wearing and that crazy jukebox of a TV-stereo must've cost at least a thousand dollars) told Barron that Henry George Franklin, raving though he was, wasn't lying. Some lunatic bought this cat's daughter for a satchelful of money, whether it came to exactly fifty thou or not, and this load of garbage was far gone enough at the time to take it. Some Tennessee Williams screwball millionaire colonel type cracker's running around in his Confederate-Grey long-johns . . . who knows, maybe he just never conceded the 13th Amendment and bought this jerk's daughter and sold her to some adoption ring at a big loss just so he could tell himself he was keeping the darkie slave trade alive? And this Franklin cat is so rank, now he's trying to double-cross the Mad Cunnel and keep the bread too! Real American Gothic; poor old Joe would cream in his pants over this one, just his bag. Henry George Franklin, as the Bohemian Boil-sucker observed to the client who farted in his face, it's people like you that make this job disgusting.

"This cat you say bought your daughter," Barron said as Vince gave Franklin three-quarters screen, "what was he like?"

"Like. . . ? Why, he was just this fancy-dressed shade with a satchelful of money, and anyway, y'know all shades look alike. . . . No, wait a minute, ol' Jack,

y'know even though he was dressed real rich-like, I kinda got the feeling he was some kind of what-you-call-it, like one of them English butlers. . . ?"

"You mean a flunky?" Barron suggested as the promptboard flashed "3 minutes".

"Yeah, thas it, a *flunky*. I mean, he didn't hand over that satchel like it was his own money . . . I don't care if you're Nelson Rockefeller himself, you got to feel something, make some sign, handing over fifty thousand bucks worth of your own money. . . . No, I guess he was just some kind of fancy messenger boy."

"The question is, a messenger boy for *who*?" Barron said, wondering who could be doing something like that for what? Strictly from old comic books and TV shows—gotta be either Fu Manchu or Dr. Sivana behind it. . . . Or more likely, some slimy old pervert with a lech for tender young . . . *blech!* How the hell did I end up with a call like this? Go tell a crazy wop to blow your mind!

"Just what did this man say he wanted your daughter for?" And the promptboard mercifully flashed "2 minutes".

"Something about what he call a *social experiment*," Franklin said. "Used a lot of ten-dollar words I just didn't understand, ol' Jack. Some kinda . . . *genics* or something. Something about heredity and 'vironment and random samples . . . taking poor black kids and growin' 'em up with rich white kids like they was born rich, y'know, send 'em both to the same schools, send 'em both to college, give 'em both what that shade called equivalent childhood environments, and see who comes out ahead. This shade said it was supposed to prove black kids were as smart as shade kids, what he called *herently* or somethin', so I figured how could I refuse, what with doin' something fine for Tessie—that's m'daughter—doin' my part for black people like Governor Greene down here's always saying, and a whole satchelful of money, y'know. . . ."

Barron tapped his left foot three times, and Vince gave him the winding-up-for-the-sign-off three-quarters screen as the promptboard flashed "90 seconds". Maybe not a Mad Cunnel? he thought. Maybe some crazy black shrink got ahold of big bread somehow, decided he had a mission to prove Negroes as good as whites? Vince really goofed this time, something crazy going on, but stricty garden-variety lunacy, *National Enquirer* stuff, and lousy television. Well, I suppose you can't be brilliant every week.

"And that's all you know, Mr. Franklin?" Barron said. "You sold your daughter for fifty thousand dollars to a flunky working for some kook you've never seen, supposedly to take part in some half-assed social experiment?" Barron paused, trying to time the ending, waiting for the "60 second" signal, at which Vince would give him full screen and—

"Hey, wait a minute!" Franklin shouted. "Hey, I want her back, you gotta get her back! Look, ol' Jack, I know I did wrong, an' I wanna get her back! (The "60 second" signal flashed across the promptboard, but Vince couldn't cut Franklin out in the middle of

a freakout, look real bad, Barron knew, gotta cut him off somehow.) Thas why I called in the first place, that shade musta been crazy—I don't want my daughter with some crazy nut, not now when I got the money to feed her. Hey, you gotta—"

"I'm afraid our time is about up," Barron finally squeezed in, signalling to Vince to bleed down Franklin's audio.

"Yeah, but hey, what about Tessie, ol' Jack?" Franklin's waning voice said as the promptboard flashed "30 seconds" and Barron saw that his drunk was edging over from lightly maudlin to guilty-belligerent, and thanked whatever gods there be that the timing was so right. "I didn't mean to do it . . . fact is I had been maybe hitting the corn a little at the time, I didn't know what I was doing, yeah, thas it, I was mentally incompetent, can't hold no man what's mentally incompetent to no—"

And Vince, maybe figuring that Franklin was about to utter The Word, cut his audio entirely and gave Barron full screen.

"Our time's up, Mr. Franklin," Barron said (thank god!). "But we'll be right here at the same old stand next week, Area Code 212, 969-6969, and you can call in again then, and have the same chance as every man, woman and child in the United States (in a pig's ass!) to . . . *Bug Jack Barron.*"

And at long last, the promptboard flashed "Off the Air".

Barron thumbed the intercom switch, his instant impulse to scream at crazy wop Vince wincing behind the safety of the control booth glass like a cocker spaniel just shit on the rug and knows it.

But Gelardi beat him to the punch: "Hey, I'm sorry, Jack. He was real funny all the way through the monkey block, till he got on the air. Sounded like some crazy spade gibbering about the revival of the slave trade—last time I feed you any kind of drunk, Scout's honour. Hey . . . you don't think he was on the level, do you?"

Aw, what the fuck, Barron thought, so Vince blew one. My fault as much as his, my head just wasn't there this week. "Who gives a shit?" he said tiredly. "Let the *National Enquirer* and the Mississippi fuzz worry about it. Forget it, Vince, let's all go home and get stoned. Lousy show is all, we got a right to goof once in a while."

Yeah, a real stinker all around, Barron thought. And you damned well know why; 60 minutes of pure mickey mouse on top of two real nitty-gritty shows on the Foundation, and that's where the big league action's really at right now, and you can't touch that now with a fork.

And as he got up, the seat of his pants soaked with sweat from the hotseat, Jack Barron felt a strange sense of loss, remembering the adrenalin-surge of his mortal duel with Howards against the background of this week's trivia creating a weird nostalgia for the taste of playing the big game for the big stakes, a game that was already played out.

Times like this, Barron thought, I wonder why I dig this business in the first place. Maybe there's a bigger kick somewhere than being a star?

"DON'T SAY IT, Sara, for chrissakes, don't say it, I know, I know, I laid a dinosaur egg tonight," Jack Barron said, opening up the front of his sportjac, flopping down flush on the carpet next to Sara's chair, fumbling in his pocket and pulling out a pack of Acapulco Golds, sticking a joint in his mouth, lighting it, sucking in the smoke, exhaling, all while Sara stared at him blankly. "Thousand-year-old Chinese rotten dinosaur egg with green mould on it, is all."

"I thought that Strip City bit was pretty interesting," she said with what he recognised as dumb, infuriating sincerity. "That freako you had on at the end though . . ."

"Don't mention that man's name," Barron said. "I know what you're gonna say, and I don't wanna hear it, tonight's show was strictly from old Joe Py—"

"Hey, I wasn't going to say anything at all. What's the matter with you, Jack?"

Yeah, what *is* the matter with you, man? Barron thought. She's only trying to make you feel good, and you come down on her with paranoid stomping boots. Come on, man, you've done bad shows before, dozens of 'em, never got you this uptight before. Cool it, for chrissakes!

He got to his knees, reached up, pulled Sara's face down to him, kissed her tongue on tongue, held it for a pro forma moment, but couldn't get interested. Shit! he thought. My head's been out in left field ever since I found out someone killed Madge Hennering. Someone . . . *yeah, sure.* Someone name of Benedict Howards got my name on his piece of paper, thinks he owns my bod and maybe he's right. Kills Hennering because the lox found out some fucking Foundation secret scared him shitless scared Howards shitless . . . and what scares Howards shitless. . . ?

Jesus H. Christ! Been staring me in the face all along! Only thing that scared Bennie was me finding out what his immortality treatment was. . . . That's gotta be what Hennering found out, what they killed him for!

And that cocksucker Howards is practically twisting my arm to make me take the treatment!

Barron flopped down on the floor again, took another drag. There it is, he thought, Rome to which all roads lead. Howards' willing to kill a goddamned *Senator* over it, he's so scared someone will find out. But . . . but then why does he want me to take the treatment, don't make sense if he's so uptight about keeping it secret? Why? Why? What the fuck's going on?

"What's wrong, Jack?" Sara said. "You look like you're about to turn purple . . . and that kiss was about as sexy as a bowl of raw chicken livers."

"I don't know (can't tell her Howards is going around murdering people, just uptight her), baby, I just smell something bad in the air, nothing personal

intended."

"Couldn't be that you're pissed at yourself for just screwing tonight when you really wanted to go after Howards again?" she said, half-knowingly, half-hopefully.

"That too," Barron muttered. "But not for your gung-ho Baby Bolshevik reasons. Cutting up Bennie was good television, last week's rating was the best in three years, goddamn hard act to follow. And Woody Kaplan's insanity and some gibbering drunk's the kind of crap that went out with old Joe Swyne. Boring is all, when you've played in the big leagues there's not much kick in being a hero in the bushes. Yeah, that's all it is, a letdown from two real winners. . . ."

"You're sure you really mean that?" she said, and he saw what she was fishing for; shit, all I need is another round of that cop-out crap on top of—

The vidphone began to chime.

Barron got up slowly, letting it chime—a nasty premonition that it was Luke with more bullshit, more Jack-you-fucking-cop-out-you, more waving of the Baby Bolshevik let's-you-and-him-fight bloody shirt—finally reached the vidphone, made the connection, and felt a weird adrenalin-thrill punch pulsing into his brain as the old familiar black and white image of Benedict Howards looked out of the vidphone screen at him with crackling paranoid eyes.

"Kill it, Barron. Sit on it, I warn you!" Howards said, his voice shrill-edged and threatening.

"Sit on (*what?* Barron was about to say, stopped himself, realising something was really uptighting Bennie, best way to find out what is to make like you know, he seems to think / know, let him know I don't, maybe he'll claim) . . . it? Why, *whatever* do you mean? Far as I know, there's nothing to sit on." And the last with a number one dirty smile.

"No more games," Howards said. "No more screwing around, you're working for me now, and you jump when I say frog, and don't you forget it. Or else—"

"Or else *what*, Bennie?" Barron drawled, knowing on one level that in the game Bennie was playing it's the Big Or Else, is all, on another level unable to take seriously the whole cops and wops hitman scene. "What do you think you *can* do? I got *your* name on paper too, remember? I got Greene and Morris anxious to jump into my corner in case you get too feisty with me, I got *Bug Jack Barron*—and I got immortality legally free and clear any time I want it. You couldn't afford to have me sue you for breach of *that* contract, and we both know it. Time you got it through your fat little head you can't own Jack Barron . . . or you're gonna get hurt, Howards, hurt real bad."

And Barron saw Benedict (fifty billion dollar power of life over death Senatorial assassin immortal) Howards fighting for self-control, forcing a sickening rictus that was almost a smile, actually eating crow.

"Look, Barron, so we don't like each other. Know why? 'Cause we're too much alike, that's why. Two strong men, and neither of us has ever been number two to anyone. We both want it all and we both want

it on our own terms—and that's the only way to fly. Well, we just can't both be number one, and isn't that what we're really fighting about? But it's stupid, Barron, pig-headed stupid. In the long run, we're both on the same side, right? I mean the *real* long run, million year long run, we both got the same thing to lose. Let me show you, you and your wife fly out to Colorado, let me make you immortal like me. Then you'll taste how much we both got to lose every time you breathe. Make a different man of you, Barron, make you more than a man, take it from the only man who knows first hand. Jack Barron immortal'd have to see he's on the same side as Benedict Howards immortal—us against them, life eternal against the fading black circle, and believe me, that's all that counts, everything else is shit for the birds."

He really means it, Barron realised, and maybe he's right. But you know he's sure he'd be Numero Uno in that set-up for some reason . . . and Ted Hennering died because he found out what the immortality treatment was. Found out and had his choice of being Bennie's flunky and maybe President or risking his life — and a phoney cop-out like Hennering told Howards to get stuffed. And Bennie killed him. And he wants me in that position, thinks he can get me there somehow by making me immortal. . . .

"I'm still passing," Barron said. "I just don't trust you." And he felt the adrenalin-surge of the smell of danger, took a quick drag of pot on top of it, picking up on the kick of being back in the big leagues again, playing for life and death stakes and said: "And I know a few things you don't know I know, Howards. And I'm not gonna tell you what they are, gonna let you sweat a little, it's good for the soul."

He saw fear and anger fight each other in Howards' eyes, knew he was biting flesh, turned and saw Sara's eyes shining with that berserker Berkeley fire drinking him in, found himself digging the pure my man my hero heat she was giving off for him from Berkeley attic Meridian streets his chick all the way beside him, felt ten years younger than tonight's lousy turkey of a show, full of piss and vinegar and good pot and an old line from a childhood book (*The Dying Earth*, wasn't it?) drummed like a chord inside him: "Danger goes with *me*."

"I'm warning you, Barron," Howards said, his eyes now crocodile-cold, "you put that Franklin lunatic on the air again and you've had it. You've *really* had it. Benedict Howards plays for all the marbles and he plays for keeps."

FRANKLIN? That crazy sot? *That's* what's uptighting him? Don't make sense, what's that kook got to do with Howards?

"Don't tell me how to run my show," Barron said. "Maybe I'll do another show on Franklin, or a piece of a show, depends on the next Brackett Count." If I got the stomach to look at it after this week's fiasco, he thought.

"I'm telling you, and I won't tell you again, don't

put Franklin on the air again!" Howards shouted.

Just what I said! Barron thought. Maybe I was wrong? Maybe hottest Foundation show of all's tied into raving nut Henry George Franklin? Bennie sure thinks so. . . . But how?

Barron smiled nastily. "You know," he said, "the more you tell me not to, the more I think it'd make a good show. You and me and Franklin and a hundred million people, nice and cosy. How's it grab you, Bennie?" (Hey, why in hell am I doing this? he wondered, feeling his unknown belly calling his shots.)

"You can push me too far," Howards said. "Push me too far, no matter who you are, and you get fed to the fishes, even—"

"Even a United States Senator?" Barron suggested. "Even, oh say, someone like for instance, Ted Hennering. . . ?"

Even on the vidphone screen, Barron could see Howards go pale. Paydirt! How's it feel to play patty-cake with a murderer? A kick, is all! He fingered the Acapulco Gold in his hand. What they putting in these things these days? he wondered.

"You. . . ." Howards stammered. "I'm warning you for the last time, Barron, lay off the Franklin thing, or no one'll ever warn you about anything again."

Jack Barron felt something snap within him. Nobody threatens Jack Barron like that and gets away with it! Think I never spit in death's eye, Bennie? You should've been in Meridian, whole fucking mob with blood in their beady little eyes, me and Luke and Sara and a couple dozen others against a thousand red-necks, death on the hoof, and I faced 'em down 'cause I know the secret you don't — murder's a coward's game, is all, and deep inside murderers know it, you just gotta let 'em know *you* know it; never run from a wild animal I read somewhere. Cop out maybe, bull-shit artist maybe, but Jack Barron doesn't run from any man!

"You can take your silly-ass threats," Barron said, feeling the words like hot lava bubble out of his throat, "and you can write 'em on broken coke bottles and shove 'em up your ass! Threaten me, and you won't be worrying about your precious immortal life much longer, you'll be too busy wishing you were never born. Know what I'm gonna do, Bennie, I'm gonna fly down to Mississippi and have a long man to man talk with Mr. Henry George Franklin, and who knows, when I'm through, maybe I'll do two shows or ten or a hundred on him, and there's not a fucking thing you can do about it! I'm sick of you, Howards! I'm sick of listening to you play big man, 'cause you're not a big man, you're the kind of thing that crawls out from under wet rocks, coward is all, kind of coward I eat for breakfast, and you'll be pissing in your pants scared shitless till the day you die if you live a million years. You bug me, Bennie, know that, you bug me! And you haven't even got a taste yet of what happens when you *really* bug Jack Barron."

"I'll kill—"

"Aw go stick your tongue out at babies!" Barron shouted. "Maybe you'll have better luck there, 'cause you don't scare me, Howards. And I'm tired of looking at your ugly face!" And he broke the connection.

And wondered in the next moment just what the hell his big mouth had gotten him into. And why.

"Do you really mean it this time?" Sara said, her eyes wide as saucers.

"Bet your sweet ass I mean it!" Barron snapped, surprised that his anger was still mounting, not cooling. "I'm tired of listening to that motherfucker threaten me, treat me like some fucking flunky! Who the hell does he think he is, fifty billion or no fifty billion, immortality or no immortality, telling me how to run my show run my life? Maybe I shouldn't tell you this, but you're in this too, you got a right to know what I'm playing around with. I'm pretty sure Howards had Ted Hennering murdered, 'cause the Good Senator tried to cross him. *That's* the kind of man you want me to go after—sure you wouldn't rather have a nice safe cop-out in your bed now?"

"Are you afraid of him?" Sara asked quietly.

Who knows? Barron thought. Way I feel right now, I'm too pissed to be scared of anything. And he felt the blood singing the berserker Berkeley Jack and Sara battle-song behind his ears, and man oh man it felt good, like a hard-on of the mind.

"No, I'm not afraid of him, He packs a big switch-blade sure, but Bennie's nothing but a punk, fifty-year-old fifty-billion-dollar immortal *punk*. Punk, is all! You never saw me back down from no punk. Maybe I should be scared, shit, maybe I *am*, but I'm sure as hell not gonna *act* scared."

"Then I'm not scared either," she said with a pure girlish grin, and hugged him to her. He kissed her, hot, wet, tongue on tongue hard, felt the juices rising in him. Jeez, it feels good, he thought, my woman in my arms the night before the battle, haven't felt like this in ten thousand years.

"Eat, drink and make Mary," he muttered into her ear, "for tomorrow we die. . . ." *That ain't so fucking funny. . . .*

"What're you gonna do now?" she asked, pulling away half-playfully to arm's length.

"Gonna play arpeggios on your quivering bod," he said. "But first, I'm gonna call Luke, have him locate Mr. Henry George Franklin for me, then hop a plane right on down to Mississippi, just like I told Howards. Be gone only a day or two, and if anyone asks, you don't know where I am. I want this to be strictly between you and me and Luke and old Henry George."

"And . . . Benedict Howards," Sara said. "Be careful, Jack, please be careful."

"I'm glad the bastard knows I'm going!" Barron said. "Show him I know he's bluffing. Come on, baby, don't worry about me, it's all on Luke's turf, remember? I'm supposed to be the 'black shade' down there, or so they tell me. I'll keep out of dark alleys. Bennie won't dare try anything with a guest of the Governor."

(To be concluded)

INSTRUCTIONS FOR VISITING EARTH

Wear the same clothes
travel by the same route
behave in a similar way,
men fear the unpredictable;
enter and leave by
the same door at
the same time each day,
men have a tendency to kill
creatures whose movement puzzles them;
hood the passion in your stare,
hide your trembling hands,
filter the light that comes from your face,
a man fears nothing he can see
clear and far off;
tho they will offer you themselves
avoid his women,
for they are filled with shattered magic
touching love, his benison;
children may be your friends
until they pass five years;
and you may trust all other forms of life
save those who live with him
in close proximity.
Bear this in mind:
though you will hear of little else
yesterday has no meaning
last year you were unborn
tomorrow you will die.
Persist. Endure. Follow. Copy. Watch.
This way you will remain invisible.
And when the urge comes on him to self liquidate
remember
he does not fear fire.

Christopher Logue

From "New Numbers" to be
published by Rapp & Whiting
later this year.

PLASTITUTES

GOOD GOSH/
IBM IS JUST
LIKE A WOMAN!



A MYSTERIOUS
STRANGER APPEARED
AT THE PARTY...

... OF THE...
NYLON PUMPKIN... SOME
BRASH LODE ALIGHT



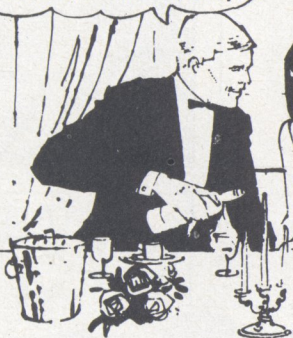
I THINK I'M
A KIND OF
ORTHOPEDIC
WISH - BUT
REALLY I'M
SUCH AN
INVOICE

New.

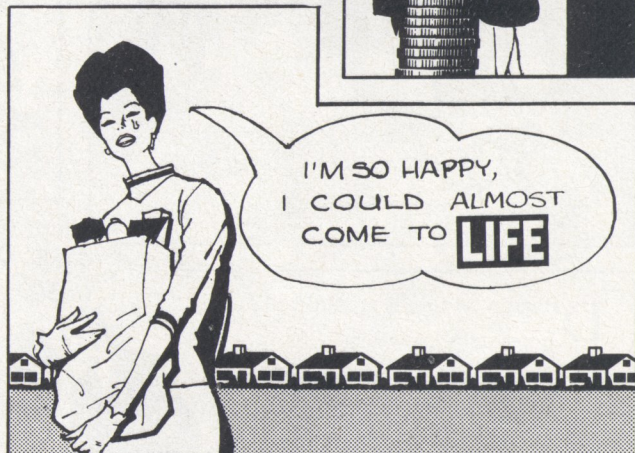


AFTER "IT"
HAPPENED,
IT WAS
MORE THAN
A YEAR
BEFORE
SALLY
ALLOWED
HERSELF
TO DATE
ANOTHER
MAN --
BRAD!

...TO BUILD MY
POISON FACTORY.



WHAT A BEAUTIFUL
AGENDA, BRAD!
I DON'T CARE
IF IT IS
IMPRACTICAL,
I WISH YOU
ALL THE
GREED
IN THE
WORLD!



I'M SO HAPPY,
I COULD ALMOST
COME TO **LIFE**

NANCY WAS
ALMOST A
BEAN...



YET SHE SAW HER-
SELF AS A WHITE
"BUNNY," WATCHING
A BAN-THE-ODOR
DEMONSTRATION.



...RESULTING
IN AN
INCREDIBLE
SILENCE.

I'M LATE AS IT IS,
HONEY -- NOW
FOR THE LAST
TIME, WHAT DID
YOU DO WITH
MY "MONEY"?

FIRST TELL
ME, DARLING--
AM I STILL
YOUR LITTLE
POLARIS A₃?



SO BRAD AND
SALLY EXCHANGED
SEXES FOR THE
EVENING --

WE'LL HAVE
TO BE REAL
CAREFUL,
SAL. THESE
NEW IBM
"LIGHT TUBES"
ARE VERY
DANGEROUS
TO SUCK ON.



"I MIGHT
MULTIPLY!"



HAS EVER A
GIRL HAD
SUCH A
DIFFICULT
DECISION
TO MAKE?



RIGHT AFTER THAT, FRED
AND JUNE WENT TO VISIT
THEIR REFRIGERATOR, WHICH
WAS IN THE HOSPITAL..
BUT FIRST, FRED GAVE
JUNE A PECULIAR LITTLE
CALENDAR --

Miss June



THE REFRIGERATOR WAS
HAPPY TO SEE THEM, FOR
IT HAD BEEN BLINDED
BY A NEW
IMPROVED
FATHER...



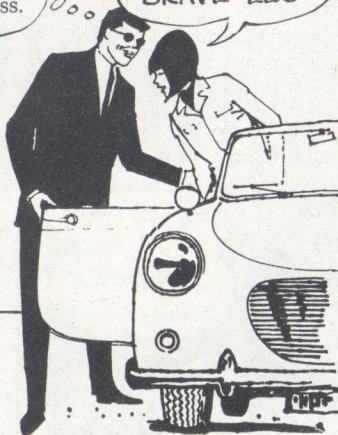
YOU BLIND FOOL!
GIVE ME A
BRAVE LEG-

DECISION-MAKING is an intricate process.

It demands knowledge
of many seemingly unrelated subjects.

The challenge is to seek
an answer to this question:

**Can a man
fall in love
with his car?**



MEANWHILE, WE ALL
MARVELLED AT THE
CHANGE IN SALLY

NEW

NEW NEW NEW

NEW

"NEW!"

NEW

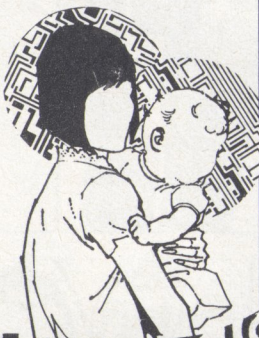
NEW

NEWS

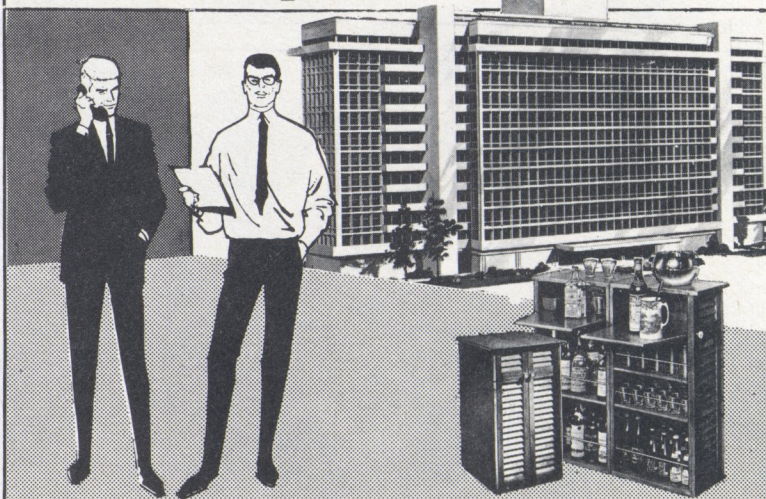
NEW



AND SUDDENLY-- A MIRACLE
OF MODERN SCIENCE!



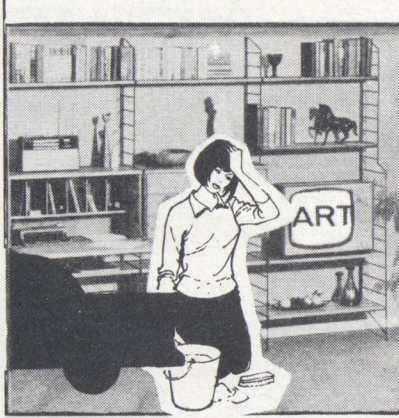
The voice at the other end
of this telephone isn't human.



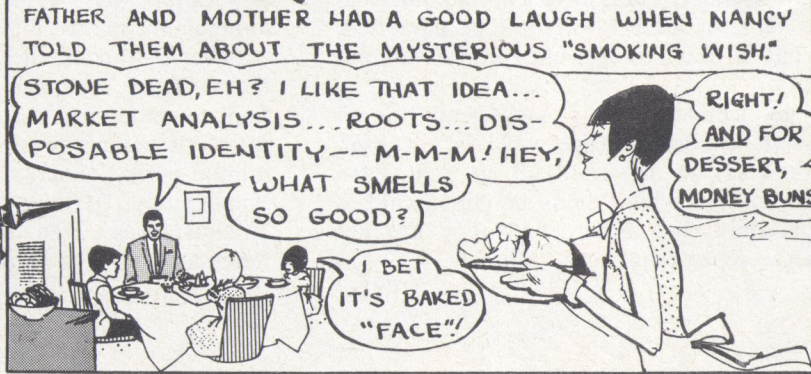
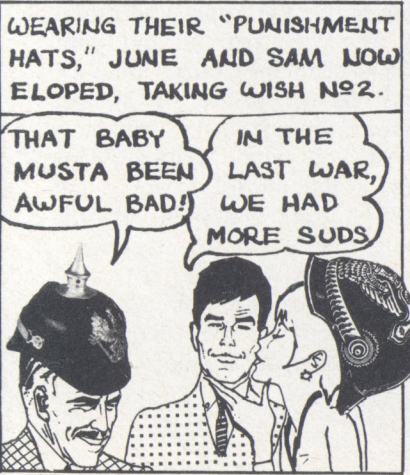
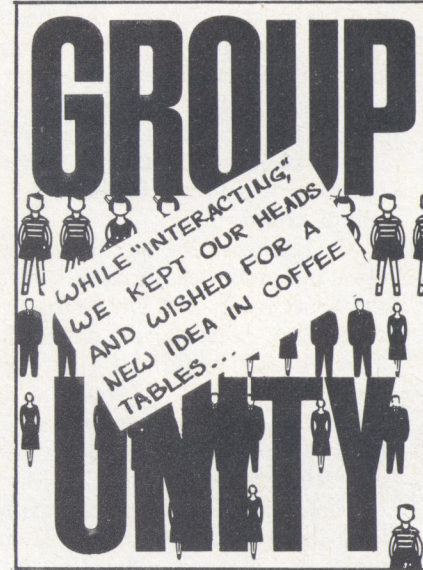
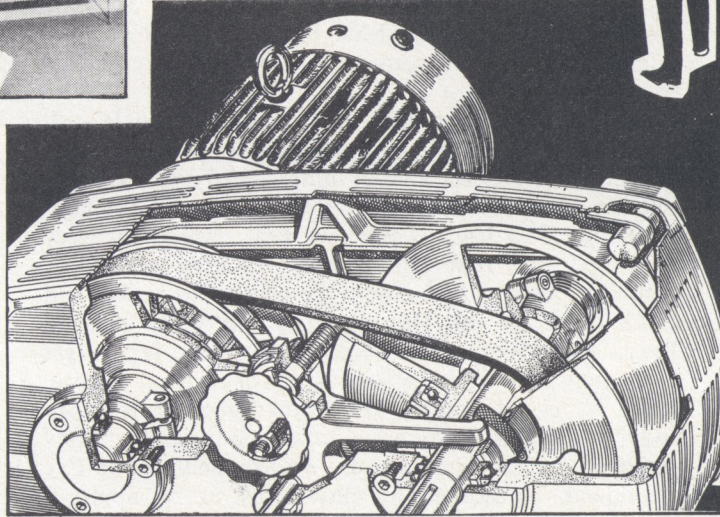
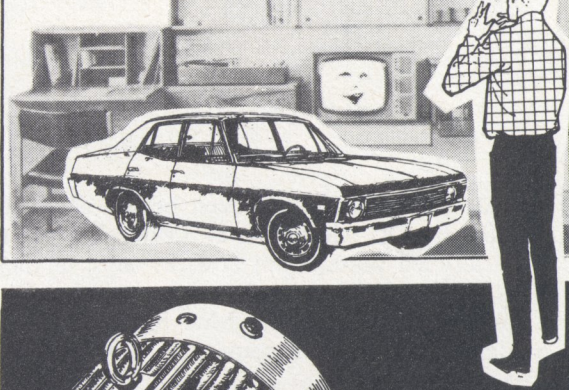
FRED'S AND JUNE'S NEW, BEAUTIFUL HOME GAVE THEM THREE WISHES.



IN HER OWN DREAM HOME, NANCY HAD ONLY ONE PLASTIC BUCKET TO EAT.



NOW THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER COULD HAVE LOWED FOR JOY--HIS OLD CAR HAD COME HOME!



METHAPYRILENE HYDROCHLORIDE SOMETIMES HELPS

I AM NOT SICK. I have been healed of all my various ills by Dr. Alexander D. Ostrander, my doctor for the last ten years, I am now, he says, of these various ills, cured. I believe he's written it officially on some hospital form or other: Mrs. Room 318 will be considered, that is until some new morbidity, completely recovered.

However, I cannot think of myself as, though well, exactly normal. In my case wellness is relative. Cured is simply the absence of the initial putrifying elements. But Dr. Ostrander has convinced me that I can consider myself at least twenty per cent normal in every respect. I like that and I keep thinking about my normal aspects and how they are bridges to reality and factors enabling me, still, to study the world as it is. Thank God, that is, for one arm and one leg as yet completely untouched by any aspect of medical science.

But let me tell you my exact situation as of now. My body, my actual body (due to circumstances entirely native to my twentieth-century environment) is, as I've mentioned, considered by physicians to be approximately twenty per cent normal. I owe, as they say, my life to the machine that beats my heart. I owe my bright eyes and my clear complexion to my twice daily, hand held, bowel irrigation accomplished through a permanent hole in the right lower abdominal quadrant. The functioning of my right leg and right side is, on the other hand, left somewhat impaired by the removal of a tumor in the lower thoracic region of the spinal chord.

My heart-beating box, by the way, goes neither click-click nor tick-tock. It does its work more silently than the heart itself, and Dr. Ostrander says that in spite of cold, heat, exercise and passions, it should continue at an even and restrained eighty beats-per-minute. So, I feel, the essential "I" remains in spite of it all. (It's rumoured that a new model will soon be out enabling the heart to beat at more comfortably adjustable rates of from seventy to eighty BPM.)

There are those who keep asking me why I wear this little heart-beating box against my left side and why I wear my, as we could call it, bladder strapped to my inner thigh. They wonder, even, at the unfeminine loss of hair and perhaps, at least I wouldn't be surprised, they think: What is that strange, elusive, yet not unsweet smell?

Sometimes they wonder have I caused all this to be done to myself, in some strange way, on purpose? They ask me do I say to myself that I, at least, have brought this to myself while their asymmetricalities are inborn? Certainly they notice that they are not "their own" in the sense that I am "mine".

CAROL EMSHWILLER

Listening, sitting in my own special version of the lotus position, I think how to overcome inertia in favour of some organic and perpetual peristalsis of the brain. Oh, not for myself. It's for others (mankind) that I make this study. (I am, by the way, only interested in impossibilities. People make their livings every day from the possible, while I, even in my psychological being, am not so particularly possible anymore.)

Listening, sitting in my own special version, I think that Dr. Ostrander may enter at any moment bringing new cures. He will prescribe three-coloured capsules when he sees how I've cluttered my room with remote controlled devices of alarm. (I'm here alone at night.)

He can, at any time, turn off the essential machine of my beating being. (I may be too old to have any more children now, anyway, as he often tells me.)

"Madam, cease this mad prancing after life," he will certainly say. "The eternal feminine is in some entirely other direction anyway, as you should know by now."

"Really, Doctor, if you would take your forefinger off my breast I think I could listen to you more profitably."

"My dear lady, you will find that the depths of womanhood (note I don't say ladyhood) lie in the inner soul rather than the outer body. We know you other-sexed creatures, though, by your haircut and your pointed toes (though this is changing) rather than by any appreciably apparent vaginal orifice or by any appreciably perceptible emanations from the soul."

"Dr. Ostrander, dear, if you would remove your thumb from the probing of the uterus, I would not find my mind in this post-philosophical state, and the ratios of comprehension to number of words-per-five-minute period would rise to levels we would all realise immediately. Besides, the lotus position is, under these circumstances, even more uncomfortable than it is necessary for it to become in one full hour of spiritual

contemplation."

"Black lace underwear makes all the difference too, but, by the way, I do not think the accoutrements you find yourself compelled to wear in your desperate clinging to existence, such as your essential, left-sided machine and the external bladder, I do not find them contributing to your femininity in the least. Perhaps you are of an age and condition when you should give up sex altogether."

"Doctor, do you feel I must do so immediately, or in about ten minutes?"

"Just three minutes more, dear lady, and it will be up to you. But let me tell you that, as you well know, I am the father of a motherless and nubile daughter and I'm seeing to it that she grows up with, hopefully, all her primary and secondary sexual characteristics intact. Already her little breasts tickle me when I kiss her goodnight."

"Move a trifle to the left, please, and gently, Dr. O. You've removed already, I'm afraid, the fallopian tubes, in spite (or because) of the difficulties and awkwardness of this position. Perhaps they caught on your thumbnail. (If you weren't so careless I might, even at this late date, have heart beats from my very own electrical charges.)"

AND SO IT GOES. What I mean is, we do return to the present environment, as usual. No matter what desperate, dreadful or, on the other hand, epiphanic experiences we've been through, we seem always to return eventually to the present situation. The present, we might say, though it seems sometimes so remote, is always with us. In some ways, I mean after deaths and disasters, for instance, this is a fortunate thing, this coming back to the ever present present.

However (and because of this), now, again, one could repeat: Dr. Alexander Ostrander may enter at any moment bringing new cures, bringing three-coloured capsules when he sees how I've changed my room because I really am alone here every night. Booby traps are all around. I even have advanced warning of the dear doctor's approach. Bells ring. Lights tell me his feet are eighteen inches from the door and wearing rubbers. He's only vaguely aware that I've prepared myself for him already. Before he can snatch the door open, here I am; the Odalisque! Most of me that shows is still here. I have all my surfaces intact except for thin, red lines here and there, ventral and dorsal.

But let me say that my warning system has already guessed that Dr. Ostrander is about to remove the spleen and a small portion of one kidney. Anything for a better disposition, he says, but I'm getting the feeling I should take my heart-beat box and run. My warning system is certainly inadequate except to notify, unless, in some way I can transfer from flashing lights to guns. But what is the motivation for all these removals? What obsession compels him, in this way, to mutilate what he most loves, for certainly a doctor

should love a body? But maybe he's loving subcutaneously, the smooth esophagus, the round, red kidneys, the worming bowels. His love is deeper and more subtle than I had thought. Oh, dear Dr. O., have I misjudged you all this time?

Actually Dr. Ostrander's daughter has often visited me, too, all nubile and her breasts expanding by, I would estimate, approximately one quarter of an inch each week.

"Oh, Mrs. Room 318, how glad I am that you once, long ago, had children of your own."

"There are inside changes as well as these outside changes, so I'm taking the liberty, my dear, of describing to you some essentials of the menstrual cycle, for, after all, you're a motherless girl of twelve and who's to tell you these things if not I, one of your father's oldest and certainly best loved patients? Now don't be alarmed if there's blood. It's all perfectly natural though it is mysterious. But let me quote from one of the latest national magazines: Many women experience premenstrual tension and this may show itself in irritability, nervousness, depression, fatigue, sensitivity. Newspapers say that at this time we're prone to auto accidents." Mensa-tex at \$2.00 a bottle may be helpful for cramps. Also these mild exercises which I now demonstrate in spite of my condition.

So there we are and she's gone again (it seems the present is usually empty) and here I am listening and sitting and what, I'm asking myself, as usual, can I as "I" give to the world in general, taking for granted that all of us having something to give, that is?

I don't believe, actually, that an enumeration of my minute and excruciating feelings as I underwent my various operations could be of a really unique service even if I was the only person to experience them all with the handsome, though no longer young, Dr. Alexander D. Ostrander at my side. My message, I feel, lies perhaps in my *joie de vivre*, in my hasty, forward steps into "life-itself", my electrical presence, my . . . for I'm certainly, even lying here all odalisque, "engagé" in a way many more active people can never be.

But, on the other hand, an enumeration does serve some purpose and I'm thinking that perhaps not many people are familiar with a bowel irrigation done by hand at 8.30 every morning and evening. (This is done when the lower section of the rectum has been removed for one reason or another, usually cancer.) I have this little other ass hole. I insert there (left, lower abdominal quadrant) an enema nozzle. (I keep this little hole covered, always, with a clean gauze in case of leakage.) I proceed as in all enemas, then remove the nozzle and hold against my side a little horned moon-shaped pan. Afterwards one must rinse the contents down into the toilet. It's best not to eat onions or cucumbers or beans.

Dr. Alexander Ostrander taught me how to do it. "A thing like this," he says, "is all right for men, but, my God, woman, what do you take yourself for!"

TWO VOICES

D. M. THOMAS

The towel unstained.

By now, she realised, it had sailed past the blood-islands, was rocking in-to a full sea. Storms lashed it (hers), but still it survived, its grotesque head stubbornly riding her witchcraft. And love, too, that intermittent pharos, lit it on this journey to a lost father, past her reefs and whirl-

pools. A following wind blew from her dry coast. To aid it, to wreck it? She fainted, in class. Her

friends, kind. She guessed they guessed. Tongues flayed him. When, the vital spark? When the heart pulses? Not murder

until. A snake or bird—no more. By day she knit a coat each night unskeined.



Rubbing out half Orion, blood-islands hung in the black sky.

McAlister noticed it first. Puzzled, he lifted his glasses. Called to the others. They came stumbling, clumsy in their suits. They stared for a long time, incredulous. What were they—the red islands, and the new bright star a few degrees from Betelgeuse? Some new nova, maybe?

"My God! can't you see! It's Earth!" Burkhardt cried, his words, his elegy, tailing into a sob. "Damn it, you're right!" hissed Christesen. McAlister was silent. Three men, magi, their hearts hammered at a small

globe's transfiguration. What could a man do but fix his thoughts on the few heartbeats who had been his Earth? Each of them stood, finally, in his good selfishness. Christesen, the farm in Wyoming;

McAlister, the house in Ohio; Burkhardt, the apartment in Minnesota. Who can mourn a globe, a country, a city, at once? Burkhardt knelt. The rest followed. Not to pray, exactly, but to make the only gesture of defeat they knew.

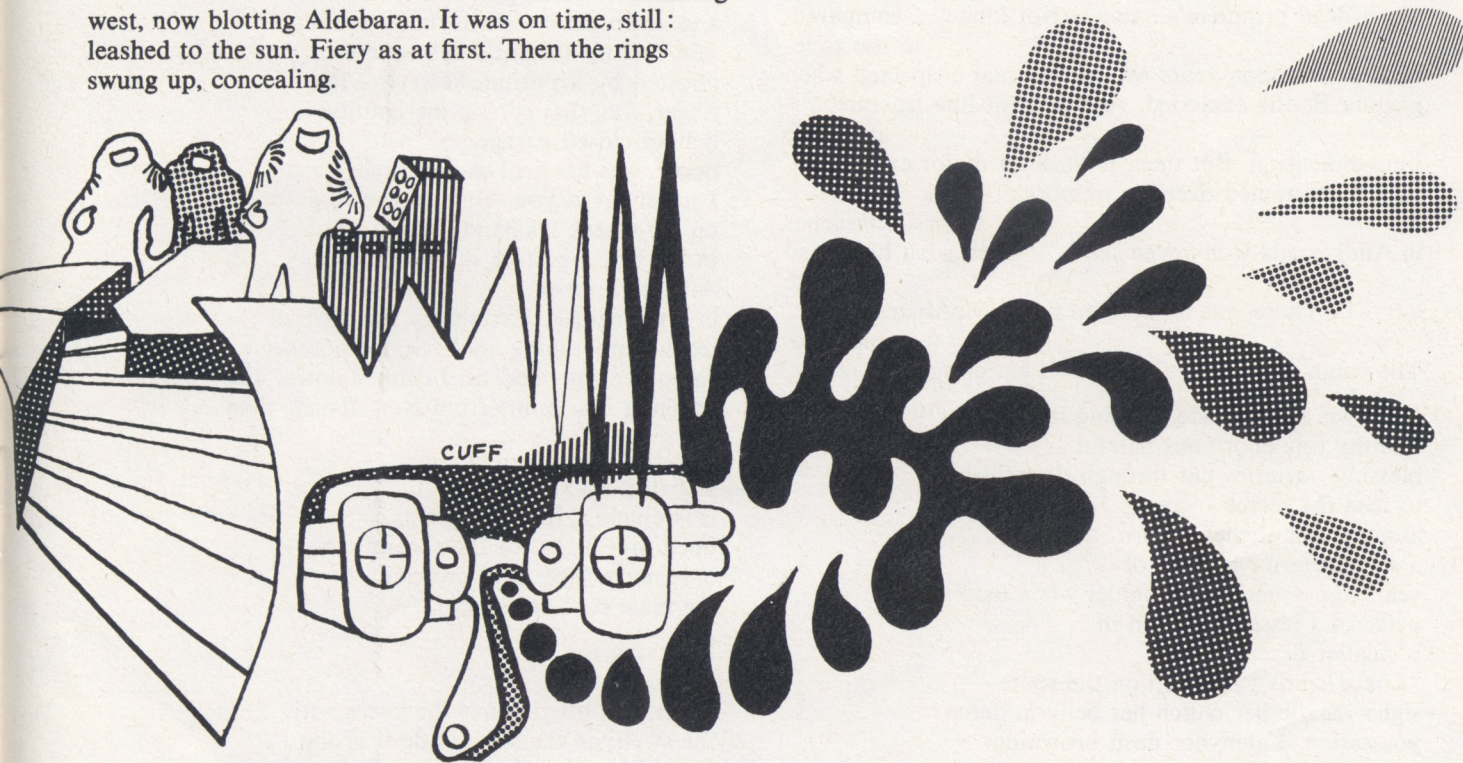
Could simply watch as the violet-glow and the red ovals faded, —chimerae, mirages—leaving the molten planet, drifting

west, now blotting Aldebaran. It was on time, still: leashed to the sun. Fiery as at first. Then the rings swung up, concealing.

The desert is happy, she mused—it has so little, and it suffers so much—but it's *happy*!

She walked without shoes, treading the grid of the Arizona sand. Water they can hoard for months, so simple, to live on a shower, grateful for the one cloud-smudge between impermeable ultramarines.

Shells. Only the old are here. Frenzied activity of bowls and square-dancing and tricycling after dinner. Trailer on trailer, senior citizens, flowery T-shirts and bermuda shorts, cherishing their shrunk or flaccid limbs in the heat of the Phoenix. Less alive than cactus-limbs. Which, if you cut, yield water. A lifetime's effort, husbandry, has paid off in this late renaissance of atrocious paintings. Phoenix; a dying man deep-frozen, stored. To await a cure. On a bus she read this. Her eyes clenched shut. Where the dying have so much greed for life, how to kill you, child?



The chronometers that had stopped during that eternity of rending, buckling, screaming metal, whirled bodies—they had sworn a giant meteor-storm had hold of them, but the radar clear—moved again. . . . It felt as though they'd broken through some crystal barrier a god had erected, to prevent the run-in to Jupiter. "What's happened?" asked Christesen, drawn, dry-mouthed, finding a voice at last. "Check all the readings." The ship, they found, had held. Only the sun's spectral analysis, a minute but precise—but vertical—leap towards red, was different. "Time-fault!" They stared at each other. Like men jumping over ever-widening, ever-opening ice-cracks, they leapt from alternative to alternative, but slipped at last, almost with relief, into the abyss of Burkhardt's theory. "How long?" McAlister asked; "not that . . . it makes any difference, of course." Burkhardt studied the plates. "Not long," he said at last. "2,000-3,000 years—*Earth*-years." (They could say the word now; for many months it had stayed taboo, unrepeatably somehow, like a dead primitive's name.) "Not long . . . compared to the time-slide of a million years Mount Palomar suspected when gamma Boötis exploded. A mere hair-line fracture along the time-dimension. But then, it wasn't a major explosion." —Irony skimmed over the tremors of shock. "The biggest telescopes in Andromeda won't even *see* it." "Then what happened to our—?" There was no need to finish McAlister's question. The cabin silent with their grief's battering noises. Her own flat solitude, nursing its stealthy tiny enormous hateful blessing—arteries cut through drought-land to feed the secret assembly of elements born in a star's interior billions of years ago—made her shudder when that place of a lesser gestation in a smaller desert, "*Los Alamos*", hove up on the route—signs—made her clutch her belly in fierce possession. Later, her flesh browning, two tarantulas' furry union, a small sand-whipped furnace between rocks,

extermination of lust, made her shiver again: fore-taste, or memory? Once is enough, she thought, one thoughtless unscrupulous finger. Once. . . .

"Those cries we hear— Those burnt, flayed faces —mirages. Like the red islands we saw bobbing about the sky."

Burkhardt laughed, bleakly. "They would simply have —disappeared. The world exploded. The detonation triggered a time-shift—an infinitesimal one, the crater reaching beyond Jupiter, but not so far as Saturn—we being, as it were, spectators staring numbly over the crater yawning at our feet; our house—gone. One moment they were there, the next—nothing: or rather, the scattered dust they would be two or three thousand years on. "A comfort," he said. "A comfort. No one suffered. No one.

It was just like a film when a reel's been missed out in the darkroom. No one notices. The house is empty. There is no one to set up a hooting. Nobody suffered." Jupiter nearing, freefall held them, as in some immune sterile indifferent glove a surgeon holds a hysterectomy.

One thoughtless unscrupulous finger . . . She stood windowed at her hotel, in her slip for the heat, automobiles honking towards pile-ups and scrap-yards: shells on America's mid-century littoral (skyscrapers ghosted by a puritan keel) . . . His finger, too, that sprang the ignition behind closed garage doors, was his final way of saying, I never loved you. His head resting on the wheel, his hands folded white in his lap, a gesture of washing. All I remember is a phone-call. Except my high-school teacher smoothing my back, for hours she smoothed my back, till I calmed down. They were bringing him home from New Jersey, then.

The third finger I shall not know. But it is coming. It will come as I open my thighs for the second time only, ever. The third crowing of the male cock in my life.

Reaching for the phone, girl in a white slip, lifted above the knees with the swell, on the seventh floor of the Hotel Phoenix. She thought of the mice who, crowded beyond endurance, crawl

up the sides of the cage, to die.

At rest, gathering strength, in the colonists' floating
skin-city,
grown as large now as the country their ancestors came
from.

"Naturally," wrote Burkhardt to his journal—for the
shell of
Earth, for the dead eyes eagerly racing ahead of the
paperknife—

"they do not believe they leapt out of a break in the film
some nine months ago, in the middle of a sentence or
a mouthful of wine, or asleep—they sleep endlessly
these people, most of the time we explore the city
through
giant siestas, tiers of sleepers, their mouths twitching.

They
regard it as something sad but remote, as legendary as
the loaves and fishes were to us. Something sad but
something good,

for forcing the first pioneers to accept their exile here
on this globe of figs and honey. They have archives,
they point out,
memories of childhood in their fathers' house, photos
of their fathers' fathers, a long line to the first crewcut.
It is useless to tell them that a gilled embryo
recalls the fish man has never been. The balloon-skin

protects
them from curiosity, as from helium and hydrogen.

They curl up
safe, undisturbed in their dream-world."

Snowflakes crying against the pane and
sound of the automobile waking
me, in the early light. Struggling up
in bed, sense of dying, flying to
the window, fresh wheel-
tracks down the drive. It was myself took
those surprise trips to Philadelphia
or somewhere. The clinic. Recall a
wild little nose pressed to the elm-trees.
A stranger came, gave
me breakfast. If only they'd told me
my father was ill then maybe I'd
have understood. It was full of lies,
full of cruel lying silence, that house.

Child, he has not touched
me since. Are we spiders, mating so?
Since he will not come as a cloud but
as a Cloud, the mushroom dissolving
our egos, crucifying light of
the world, third cock—yes, yes, try again,
ring the witch with the
transfiguring wand! The cigarette,
stuffed early, quivered. She lifted the
black phone. Engaged. Engaged. What other
mother, what other prophet? Her fists
beat enraged into the soaked pillow.

"My host abstracted tonight; he cannot settle to the
colour-
symphony, the wallscreen of myriad changing lights, his
evenings



are filled with, when he swims up into awareness of me. Normally, his fingers drum out the ever-modulating harmonies as Picasso-like cubes deliquesce into halfcaught gothic grottos, kinesis of shape and colour (to me), to him, pure sound (his slightly-bulging eyes are closed); 'how perfect,' he will sigh, 'that pearl-green dissonance! And how right that it can never be recaptured, existing only for a second, not even that, not ever—destroyed by beginning colours while I dreamt I heard it. The poignancy of art.' But tonight, fingers and voice are still; he shudders at sudden crimson or purple chords. 'Forgive me,' he says at last, 'I am not a good host.' His wife, he explains, has gone, Jackie has gone. I am puzzled. No women went with the Jupiter exploration party. We have seen none; we have seen only the artificial ova attached to y-bearing sperms in the gestation centres. He smiles wanly. The flick of a finger opens a case, that reveals tier upon tier of shining white tablets. 'Jackie!' he explains, reverently. (His eyes are flushed.) 'Today, she left me. A quarrel. An infidelity.' (His voice trembling.) 'But tomorrow, or the next day, or the next.' (his finger lightly caressing one, then another, and another) 'she will return. Pain is good. We could not know joy without pain. But the sculptors will not have programmed more than I can bear. . . . A mescaline-base!' Grown suddenly cheerful, he laughs at my discomfort. 'Peyote, flower of the desert, the Aztecs' ecstasy, the Indian's consolation. One of the settlers, you remember, was of Navajo blood.' "

The rain-mask they once fitted on a dead child's face, now resting on the pueblo altar, by the plumed sticks, bowls of meal, and the wall-painting of dark clouds above two plumed snakes, heads raised, generating lightning . . . *With your moccasins of dark cloud, come to us . . .* Outside, swish of bare feet through dust undampened for centuries.

Here, in the hardest country, last of their kingdom, all prayers are raised for rain, all heads, lifted—even the head of the child, even the head of the child sacrificed prays for rain, intercedes.

Needle-marks fading. Would not do that now. Hurt him. Or drink that other. Still the effects linger, time stops or runs crazy, signs scream at my ears, insights like x-rays see the shadow in the future—see you fight for exit, bulleting your path, and, as a hand reaches for ether, sees you take the blast, before your mouth can open to cry, shrink back, a cinder, into the cave the fallout shelter contaminated from conceiving. Yes, it will choose *then*, that instant. . . .

The eyes of Christesen and McAlister glittered with feverish joy. They had seen their wives again, held them, loved them. "If anything she's *more* beautiful," Christesen exclaimed. "These life-sculptors are—incredible—so little to go on . . . a photograph—a few stumbling memories—some taped dreams. . . . Unbelievable likeness. . . ." "But they're not *real*!" For a moment the joy flickered, their faces wincing as at a light blow from Burkhardt. "In a few days we shan't know that. Her arms are as comforting, she speaks of our first walks together in Yellowstone, of the time a rattler scared her as we were river-banking once, playing hooky from school. She's real enough." "Man, it's *better* than reality." McAlister burst in, flushed. "No sickness, and no bereavements. When I die, May goes with me—no drifting out her life in a single room, dusting ornaments, picking over old photographs wondering if it ever happened." "What's real, anyway?" Christesen added. "Did I ever really *know* Louise? I loved—and was bored with—a picture of her I created in my own mind. Now, at least I love the Louise that's here"—he tapped the case swinging from his shoulder. "Anyway, just look at the alternatives. What are you going back to? They died,

they vanished, 2,000 years ago—you know that! What's the point?
John, for god's sake, let them fix you up with—your family.”
Burkhardt remembered their words as the ship climbed through the Jovian atmosphere. What *was* he going for? A sentiment—a blind need?

To find a daughter he'd never even seen! It *must* be a daughter. . . .
It would be hard, on his own. Twice, his hand reached for the controls to set it down: then checked. *I should have ordered them to come.*
They might have obeyed my rank still, habit dies hard.
The white colonial dwellings hazed into blue, featureless—into a flickering phosphorescent purple balloonshape . . . then New Long Island vanished in the ammonia-clouds that battered the craft with storms,
focusing his thoughts, driving away all else.

The first flutter of your limbs—feel! Tap at the door, too frightened they were not there, to knock loud enough to be heard. Standing in that cold corridor, ghost of the old nurse behind me, silent oak-door in front, scared to make a move.
Every time I was woken by an automobile on the highway, and light was struggling in, I'd leap out of bed and stumbling over the cord of the red dressing-gown I'd run down the corridor, my heart hammering, and I'd stand outside their room for hours, trying if I could hear their breathing.
I'd tap—too lightly. What if there was no answer, no scolding? No double white hump in the bed, just a flat quilt? Once or twice I did get close to him. Remember when I ran home from school, crying all over me, and called him at his work. . . . He dropped everything, drove home. Put his arms round me—for the first time, I think—told me not to worry—they were the lonely ones, having to gang up, I was the strong one, and was to be so always. He talked very gently, till I found I'd stopped crying. I'd forgotten that.

Sailing perilously through the asteroids' clashing rocks, descent
to the ochre planet, soul driven by its hungers to abide pressures of a new gravity. Heart, liver and stomach

dragged down protesting into nature.
. . . A mixture of decay and fresh life. Dust obliterated half-written reports in the typewriters. . . . Half-empty vodka-bottle. . . . A game of
vingt-et-un, interrupted—playing the hand in session,
Burkhardt turned up a black knave, grimaced. . . . Over a broad oak desk,
a full-length portrait of the Leader. . . . Where he touched, musingly, the index finger of the clenched fist, the canvas
gave, in a small flurry of dust. He shrugged his shoulders,
allowed himself a short, bitter smile. What killed the world,
—or was it someone else's?—the world (I, John Burkhardt) kills. . . .
Searching his brain to recall, the plan the C.I.A. procured of the Martian outpost, Burkhardt found at last
a stone flight of stairs, descending (it seemed) into the bowels
of the planet—in reality, down, he recalled to the original
cave dwellings, turned by its later arrivals into a labyrinth of fallout shelters.
The red ships undisturbed on their pads (and not even a Soviet
would have rushed so recklessly to their lethal home or to the well-armed American moon colony), logic pointed
downwards for some relic of them. Burkhardt descended,
watching his step in darkness and unfamiliar gravity, the walls mossed.

Her friend's, her tutor's, voice, woken, came through the night, across the continent, soothing her agitation. . . . “Yes, he did love you, your father probably did love you; dying was not a denial of this, it was just that things had somehow got too complicated to go on living. . . . Putting his arms around you was his way, the only way he knew, maybe, of telling you this—begging you to understand. . . .” The voice, even as his white teeth, sage as his shock of white hair over the plump, sun-burnt face, all of which came throbbing in—to the hotel room.

Yet even he, did even he betray me? The night he had us round for drinks . . . and we thought, then, it had started, and were going to get married, and were so happy. . . .



CUFF

But I slept, for a couple of hours, on his sofa, and when I woke up, they were in the bathroom, very close together, talking. . . . And I don't know what was said or done, but he had changed, completely.

"So Light created man and woman, in a shelter full of miraculous sounds and scents, the sweetest of roots and funguses. But in time the shelter grew crowded with children, who quarrelled over their rights. And some were sent to find new shelters, not so good as the first but with plenty of space for *their* children. Our forebears came here. . . ."

Concentrating on his instructor's slavonic dialect, Burkhardt felt—heard—at the very last moment the slim naked shape slide between them and plash her arms in the sightless stream . . . then a shock of nausea as some obscenely clammy coil of life brushed past him, imprisoned in her arms, as the child wriggled out again. Chernov spat a command, and her footsteps padded into silence over the rock-floor. "Shelter-rat," he explained, "—a delicacy. Excuse her rudeness. Her family heard it swimming and sent her.

Let's find somewhere less exposed." He took Burkhardt's arm and led him confidently to a recess. "To continue—they came here. And shortly after, our first parents broke the only behest Light had given them by making a stone image of Light Himself, the unknowable, ineffable. Whereon he caused a devil, Strontium, to spring from the head of the image and devour the whole race. Except for those who had moved to other shelters. Strontium sprang at these too, but Light had pity on their terror and helplessness, and confined the devil in the first shelter, now only fitted for him. But Light will not grant us to hear Him again until—and in His own good time—the hour of His last coming. . . . That is what they believe.

The more intelligent regard it as a myth, of course; which is why your story interests us. You are not, obviously, a normal nomad, there is this deafness in finding your way, these even more curious (his hand fluttering to Burkhardt's face) mutations, where you

say you have a fifth sense. We are, we admit, puzzled by your appearance here. But there are many, many questions: we make nothing of a time-rift nor of this concept called darkness that troubles you." . . . A host of hands, timid, awestruck, were groping for Burkhardt's face.

Questions and answers at the Adoption Creche (her mother's whim). *Question*: Do we encourage our mothers to keep their babies? *Answer*: No, since the sacrament of marriage has been violated. The doctor raped her with clean gloves, sailing through the down-up Alices, brisk and late, a white rabbit, every day the same, keeping the queen waiting, fumbling his watch.

Your lips this month shapes won't draw my nipples out or any other girl's into giving. An hour he did it, breaking down my resistance, and his finger . . . the surge a cliff wants to yield to, till even the red warning-sign goes down in the havoc of gorse and stone. Driftwood a beachcomber picks up, somewhere, reads the wave-scrubbed message, *Danger, Subsidence*, tosses it on the heap with the messages in bottles from longdead ship wrecks, pair of sea-boots, broken oar of a lifeboat.

And your eyes, this month opens, are to see only these unlit aquarium walls, though maybe one flash of light he'll grant you as you get hooked out, darling.

Drifting in, and down, towards the tundra that was once Russia. He set the controls towards the equator. America he could not face, not yet, not yet. Over India, where the white cities still stood, but lifeless. Then, out in the sapphire ocean, one flash of jade. . . .

"Not from the moon . . . no. Before they abandoned their radios they had already grown as narrow-visioned as the craters they lived among, felt that life had been just too complicated on Earth—hence the war, the bomb—so were No-men . . . better never to have loved, than to have loved and lost. . . . By this time they're probably no better than beasts. But . . . Jupiter, now—we never made any contact through the vapours. Maybe

there's where you've come from. But no, why should
 you lie?
 I've a man's judgment of your integrity, and more
 reliably, my
 daughter's. . . !" —The girl's black eyes grew lidded,
 and a warmer
 tinge mixed into the cheeks above the veil. ". . . Maybe
 I have
 been here just nine months, however hard it is to take."
 . . . The
 doctor's smile gleamed evenly, impishly, in his smooth
 mahogany face,
 fierce sunlight flashed off his white robe, white hair.
 "Excuse
 our doubts, won't you? I myself think that you did
 come
 from where you say, though such an expedition was
 never recorded,
 but that for two thousand years the collective mind
 there
 was in amnesia, from the explosion shock. Now,
 recovering,
 the descendents re-live that race-memory of the Earth's
 trauma
 as though it happened to them, personally. Your mind
 rationalises
 this personal-collective confusion by assuming a time-
 rift.

That's what I think. I must admit some of my
 colleagues,
 knowing you less well, are more inclined to doubt your
 sanity!
 Forgive them." Three, they sat on the edge of the
 heat-veiled
 sea, amidst iris and parsley, juniper and cedar,
 on this one island of survival, circle of the sun.
 Flat stones sped like dolphins from
 Burkhardt's hand, his face pale beside the others', worn.

Slipping out at night, after hours,
 up and down, up and down, boring the
 square unlit avenues with questions,
 watching the strange and thousandfold
 replicated beast sprawled out in all
 the houses, its head in the front-rooms,
 sipping beers (lawnmowers tucked away,
 through the drapes the one multicoloured
 iris open still),
 its privates in small enamel cells
 scented with lavender. But those hours
 were bearable, I could let myself
 drift on the sky's spinning roulette-wheel,
 deliciously drift—till they too stopped
 —the sudden spring from the shadows—knife
 or razor at my throat—garage-wall—
 my breasts pumping, his hand fumbling—then



a car-door slammed and
he walked away, and I walked, my legs
jelly, and somehow I got inside
a house, blood on my coat, and there were
five boys playing cards, and I thought, God!
what have I come to? but they called the
police and my dean.

I could tell she didn't believe me.
Maybe she was right, maybe the blade
was back in my own purse. I don't know.
He just missed an artery. I search
in my purse for this coming Birth but
it's not there this time, I swear. I wish
to God I could find that bomb concealed

in my own clothing, but I can't. The fall-
out triangles bloom
despite me.

They showed Burkhardt the laboratory where, in the
centuries
after the trauma, after the years of waiting for the
disease
in its wake, finishing all the survivors, to leap across
from the mainland, men had become ultra-human, had
overcome
dying, using all his powers, all his science, all the divine
will coiled in the pit of his stomach. The room
was empty. A wide gash in the roof glassily refracted
bloodred sunlight into a pond where goldfish turned and
turned

about beneath floating leaves. Beside the pond
—the room's only furnishing—a prayer-mat,
where a youth sat crosslegged, his forehead pressed
to the ground.

Who does she see, looking down at him?
Not the child, and not the angel.
She's looking *through* him, as she must have
done all those months, looking through Joseph
or over his shoulder, at the lake
where the nets were coming ashore, or
at the village street. Who *was* he? Some
Roman boy, taking fright at the first
alarm, re-posted
by a grinning officer to Gaul
or somewhere? Men. They stay together.

First false-pangs. Nearer it came to her
time, she spent her days off from the light
work the Creche had found her, patrolling
the dense city streets or back and forth
impelled over the flowing bridge (by
the Evacuation Route sign), seeing
him in every turned
back; then, weary, in the gallery
where they had come to sketch. An hour she'd
sit before the "Madonna of the
Eucharist" of Botticelli, while
menmoths fluttered to her hair's aureole

but reeled away as she stood up—burnt
by the smock her elder sister lent.

Deep in the cavern's recess, her tears fell (his head
in her lap felt their pressure), beginning to build
the stalactite of his everlasting absence (he who had
just arrived). This icy, translucent, irregular spear in
her memory would be his only epitaph. All her bribes
she tried, to keep him. "Is she—so much lovelier than
I?"

He smiled wryly. No. No, she wasn't. In any case she
was
ash. She could not trouble herself about a woman who
had
vanished two thousand years ago. No. Too often he felt
the naked skinny shade of a girl, clutching a shelter-rat,
wriggling past him. If he had never gone, would she
have been
cutting circles in the ice in proud new skating-boots,
grinning at him each time she came round? It was to
answer that
question that he had to go, somewhere where death
would give him
just the craziest chance of seeing his wife and his
daughter
again. If he chose immortality, there was simply *no*
chance.
"You've got to return—just on the odd chances."
When the plane lifted, before dawn, Bootes was setting,
Hercules, Libra and Leo were on the left. He set his
course.

... Scales ... and raw flesh being
weighed behind glass. *More! give her more of
that!* ... I can see you but not touch you,
not hold you. To touch is bad for both.

Again!—take it off now, I want to
see it happen. There are too many
people in white coats here, too many
angels, everybody but the right.
Let my hands dig in-
to this straw and droppings, let my back
crack don't listen to me scream, now I
bear down and my muscles thrust for
me as they were taught, it is like I
learnt to ride a horse, twelve years old,
trembling not to do it badly not
to get shouted at, and he says no-
body ever—ever—so well ... and
my thighs tear apart
into a v and in the middle
of it a star, a gift out of the east, your
father and my father come at last,
—it grows—it grows—its parabola
jangling all the generals, too late, all
Early Warning Systems screaming and
at last, into my loins, into
my forgiving loins he strikes—he lands—

THE DEFINITION

BOB MARSDEN

THE NIGHT IS old. The party, like the copulating couples in the corners, is breaking apart. Everybody looks tired and fucked out, none more so than Thriply Purbblind and the Blinkers, who have raved mechanically throughout the night. Absently, Purbblind observes the woman who hired him, flower suit flapping from the scaffolding of her gaunt body. She clicks and twitches, a puppet of articulated sticks dancing the Mantis. She is fifty-six years old. Today is her fortieth venereal birthday. She cries quietly as her body jerks: the fortieth anniversary of her first fuck, and it has brought nothing more than a couple of friendly but dutiful tickles. The open invitation offered by the cut-away crutch of her flower suit has been cruelly spurned: sadly she surveys the displays of drooping members which hold out no hope for her.

The final number finishes, and Purbblind and his group begin to disconnect their amplifiers and pseudo-apparatus. Strands of his shoulder-length hair stick to his sweaty neck.

All over the hired hall loin microcloths are being wrapped round sticky thighs of all dimensions, sagging breasts re-upholstered in autoheated supports and fatigued flesh put to rest in plastic codpieces. The middle-aged class has managed yet another performance. Slowly the seedy people detumescence towards the door.

In a little dressing-room, Thriply Purbblind, an old youth, lifts off his wig and wipes his steaming, gleaming pate with an aphrodisia scented loincloth, memento of more virile days. He unzips his kodkorsets and gratefully allows his belly to relax in all dimensions and directions. He throws the Korsets into his travelling bag on top of the dishevelled wig before wrapping himself in his Vietnam World War Officer's Antinapalm Cape. He yawns as he carelessly drops his Multiprogrammed Miniguitar into the bag to join the other age-disguising artefacts. Wearily, he opens the dressing-room door and walks across the empty hall to the main door, which he locks, then turns off the lights and leaves the hall through the side door, which he also locks. He plods down the dark alley towards the front of the building, emerging into Pedestrian Plaza, which commemorates

the famous Benny Pedestrian, the first politician to win an election on a "hugest tool" ticket.

FACING HIM in the Plaza is a group of the orgiasts for whom he has been playing. They are frozen into attitudes of suspicious hostility. His meanfaced rodlike patroness is standing with her legs apart and hips thrust forward, shouting in a reedy voice:

"Yer sexless quiets—there's not a man among you could even raise his member at me" as Purbblind steps out of the shadowed alley into the sodium bright Plaza. The nymphos and satyrs look at him contemptuously: a sneer of frustration scars the woman's bony face.

"Impotent fat slob—huh," she snorts, tossing her head: a tear shakes loose from her brimming eyes, glistening on her sunken cheek: her blonde wig slips askew, revealing a gnarled protruding ear.

"Turned off old man trying to be clever by imitating baby quiets whose balls haven't even fallen—I wouldn't allow you inside me even if you could get up."



She retracts her clean shaven pudendum and brings her feet together with a flourish.

Thriply Nasturtium Purblind halts in gobsmacked confusion. He stares at the defiant reed as she bends in the gusts of sociosexual ignominy. It occurs to him that she has not recognised him as T. N. Purblind, audio-orgiastics specialist, since he is lacking wig, corset and codpiece, and is enveloped in his black antinap cape; this in turn reminds him that he has left his bag of effects in the locked hall.

He fishes the keys from his cape pouch and turns to go back. He takes only a single pace: about a dozen figures, cowled and cloaked in black, genitals undisplayed, stand facing him in the shadows at either side of the dark alley. The Quiets: serious, autonomous, frightening youths with patient alienated eyes who observe him impartially.

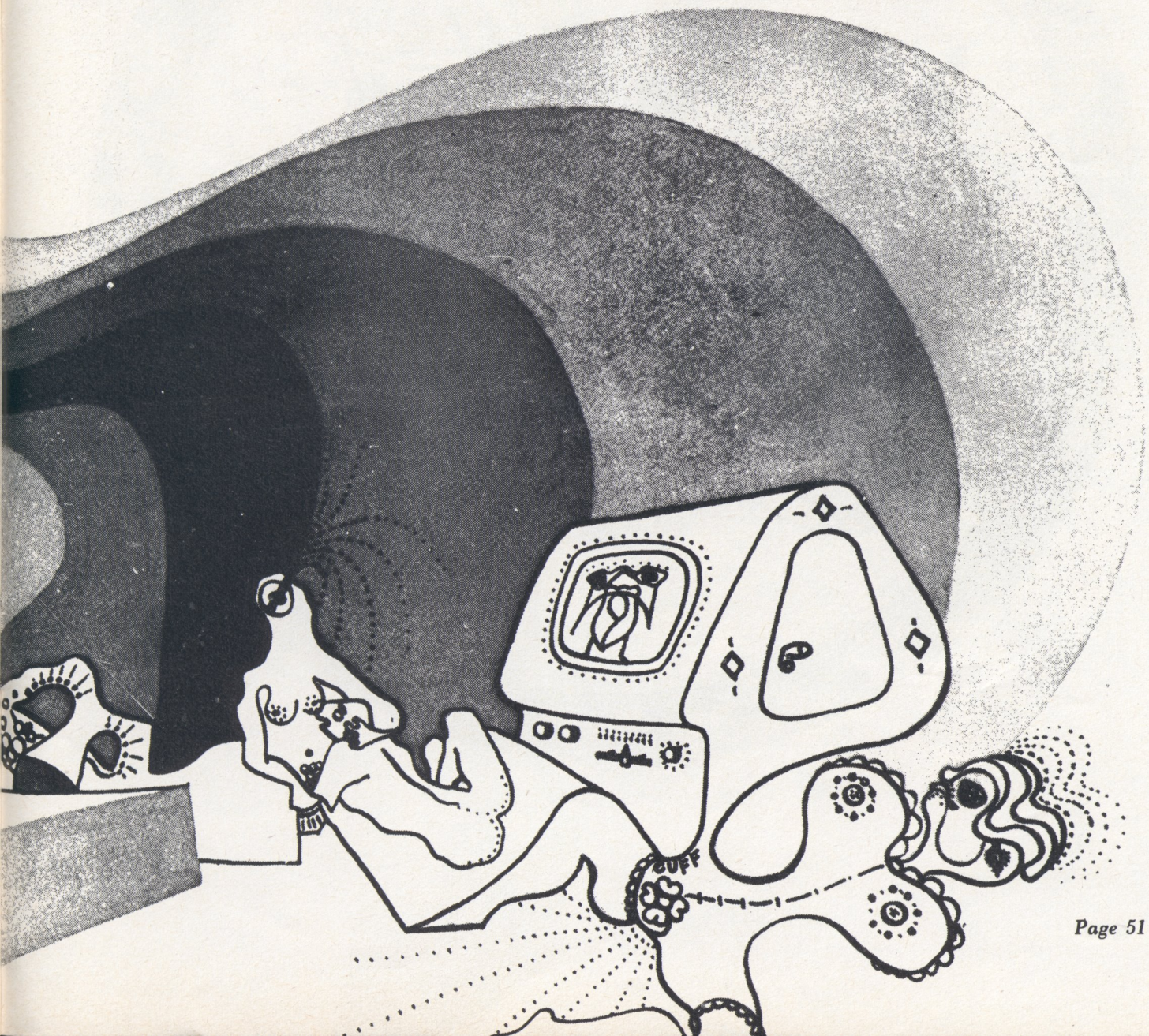
An object smashes into the back of his head, hurled with all the force of frustration: it bounces and rolls across the Plaza. It is a size ten portable autopenis. It

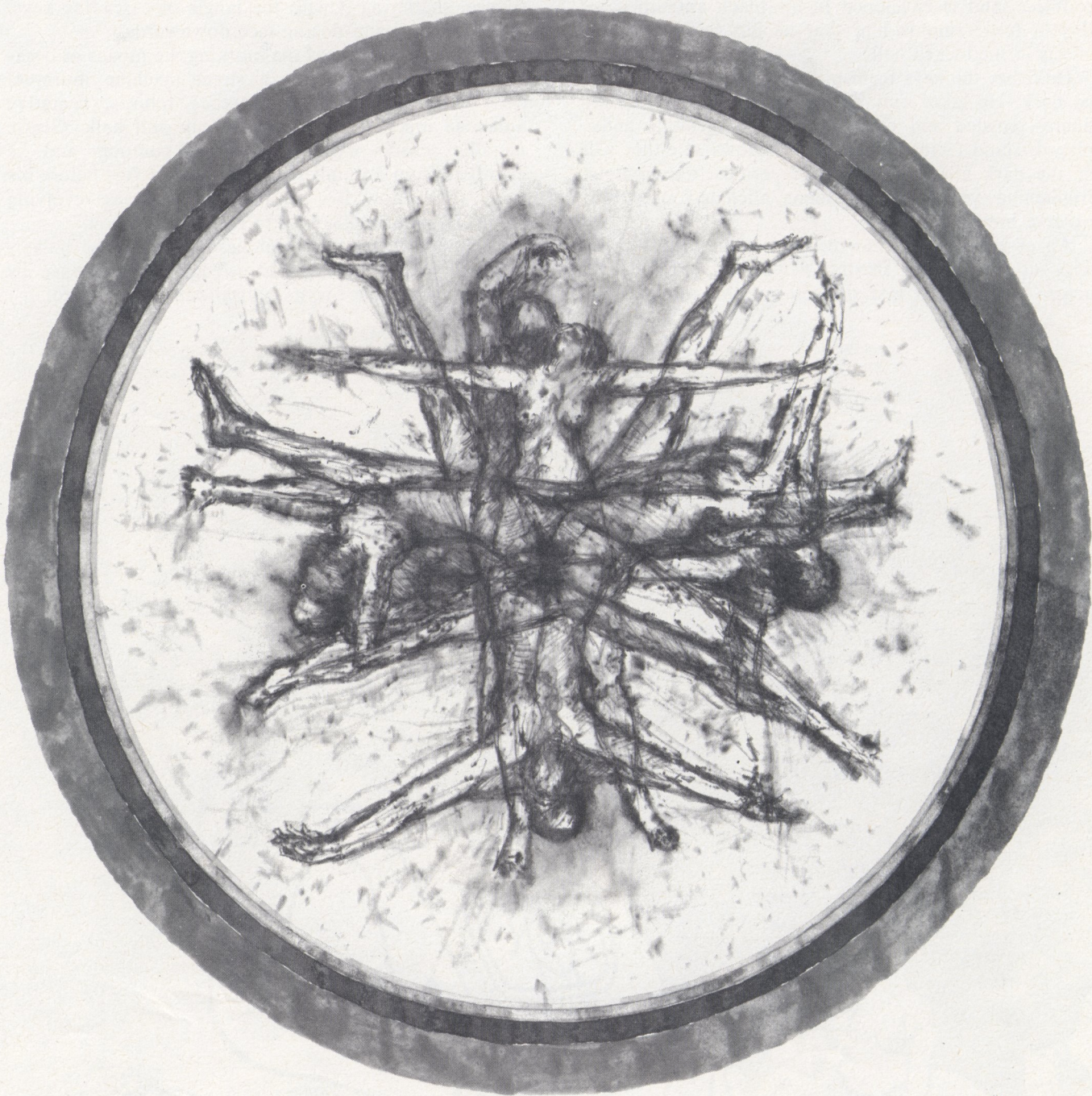
has gashed Purblind's, head. Blood tickles down the back of his neck and soaks into his cape. He is dizzy. He hears a quiet voice say: "Irony; away," and half sees cowled shadows silently swallowed in fellow darkness. The patter of receding lusties behind him.

He kneels bleeding on the yielding plastic cobbles of Pedestrian Plaza, falls forward into the warm night silence, shattering it with the jangle of cascading keys, and lies dazed and dozing face downwards.

Moving only towards the morning, he moans at occasional distant swishings: a street machine murmurs early cleanings in his ears, recedes, returns. Tentative antennae touch the obstructive bulk and balk. Gentle metallic sensors caress the body's contours and he clammers from an umber oblivion. Three feet before his eyes, as he now lies on his side, he sees revolving sweepers swallow the keys to his dressing-room.

In an inevitable fit of mindless altruism, the quivering mechanical menial acknowledges his existence by reporting a presence to its central automatic mentor.





A LANDSCAPE OF SHALLOWS

CHRISTOPHER FINCH

THE CASA-MEDIA COMPLEX spreads over hundreds of square miles—a low density spread of sun-bleached suburbs and neon boulevards, the whole fringed with surf and mountains, studded with sub-tropical vegetation and knit together by a system of freeways as elaborate as a computer circuit. Motels, lidos, campuses and space projects co-exist in an atmosphere of faintly menacing nostalgia. Already the Arabs have proliferated more than 200 names to describe the smog which fuses with the drifting spray blown off Atlantic breakers: euphoric emptiness / the dreamer / moist fatigue/gilded promenade—these are a few that I have noted.

Submerged meanings proliferate in this city which is a landscape of shadows.

Drover woke from a dream in which he had loved a dead (and minor) goddess of the screen. Shadows moved across the façades of the white towers that encircled the sea. Already, in the morning light, surfers in transparent wet-suits crouched on their glinting boards, shifting direction along translucent crests. At frequent intervals the big jets skimmed in across the mist like the phantoms of some lost Homeric race.

The room was large and cool: a late exercise—like the entire hotel—in Moorish art nouveau. The floor was tiled and a tall window (capped with elaborate stucco work) opened on to a stone balcony. Once this hotel had been the city's star establishment—outside, that is, of the *quartier réservé*. An earlier visitor had described its corridors as being full of perfume as a Caid's palace; in those days ash trays packed with cedar shavings had been placed in these corridors and the smouldering wood had been responsible for that aromatic sub-climate. Now the main arteries of the hotel smelled faintly, but not offensively, of disinfectant. The furnishings were of painted steel and chrome tubing in a Hollywood colonial style. The bedside lamp was an elegant Brancusi mutation. The room faced out across Place Mahommed, overlooking the old medina and the docks. Above the rooftops a narrow strip of ocean (swarming with restless hammerheads) could be seen, cut into segments by a network of minarets and cranes. It was autumn but the rickety balconies of the medina and its lines of washing were distorted by heat haze. Immediately below the window a taxi rank obeyed the laws of Heraclitus—seeming to be always the same synthesis of obsolescent Cadillacs but in fact constantly changing, subject (like the whole city) to

the chemistry of urban metabolism. A colony of scarabs shared the room with Drover and at dusk thousands of tiny birds threw themselves into a frenzy among the trees outside his window. Beyond the trees—on a huge hoarding—a gauntlet of prismatic gas singled out the masked figure of a young woman.

Drover strolled along a pavement lined with date palms; the smog was luminous today. Five minutes brought him to the intersection at which his car—an old black Chrysler, caked with dust—was parked. He headed out through the neo-Egyptian masonry of the inner suburbs, then the Chrysler, like some heraldic beast, sped among the mansions of Anfa, where orchids and bougain villaea turned the roofs into efflorescent domes. At the crest of the hill Drover caught a glimpse of sea, sparkling through the bluish vapour. The news bullet informed him it was eleven-thirty.

Hitting the coast at Ain Diab, Drover pulled into the nearest filling station.

AMARYLLIS

SIX FOOT PLUS of nickeled grille and fender reflecting sky and coloured slogans. Between sets of twin headlamps and following the vee of the radiator profile, a red fluted bar terminating in the legend *Gran Sport*. Red-wall tyres; crimson rally-stripes and hood-scoops laid on blue-metallic trim. This much Drover could make out as the water was wiped from the windscreen in front of him. A semi-customised Buick. The girl beside the car was tall, dressed in a shift of translucent silk, bending towards the wing-mirror critically. Nice legs that could be seen from near the stocking tops and small feet pushed into 300 francs worth of cobra skin. A chauffeur sat behind the wheel—low in a black shiny bucket-seat. He wore a red linen jacket cut like a blazer with white buttons; blue tinted glasses shaded by a red peaked cap. Drover lit a cigarette. It was cool there in the car-wash bay but out beyond the autoroute a ribbon of suburban villas shimmered through the heat haze. As girls in blue bikinis polished Drover's Chrysler a mechanic moved round to the other side of the Buick; the chauffeur handed him some coins and started the motor. The tall girl climbed in, showing a good deal more leg. The motor idled for a few seconds while the girl checked her eyes once more in the driving mirror, then the

Buick nosed off the forecourt and on to the autoroute. There was not much traffic about and Drover was soon able to pull within a hundred yards of the Buick; he followed it up a cloverleaf on to the overhead freeway that ran parallel with the old coast highway towards El Jadida.

(Styling details vary a good deal, but taking automobile design as a whole there is a marked trend towards longer, lower, sportier lines. Cars will feature concealed headlights and some will sport racy, bubble-like flares in the fenders around the wheels. Much of the excitement will be induced by three brand-new name-plates scheduled for introduction during the coming model year.

A preliminary finding: nothing less than an electrical force 400,000 times greater than the Earth's magnetic field will stall a car.)

The sea was blue, shifting to indigo. Below Drover now, spreading along the 200-yard strip that separated the freeway from the ocean's edge, was a bidonville—an Arab shanty town built from oil-cans, driftwood, corrugated iron. The entire population of the settlement seemed to be gathered on the shore, looking out to sea. This had caught the attention of the occupants of the Buick. Their coupé—glinting in the sunlight—turned off at the next feeder road and doubled back along the coast, following the old highway. Drover stayed right behind. The girl was climbing from the Buick as Drover pulled up alongside it. "What's happened?" she asked. Drover shrugged. The chauffeur stayed in the Buick, lighting a cheroot; he didn't seem too interested.

Names were exchanged. Drover. Amaryllis.

Two police officers in white caps and tunics leaned against the bonnet of their patrol car.

"What's happened?"

The nearest officer looked at Drover for several seconds through black lenses.

"Just a drowning."

The corpse was bobbing in the surf which broke over jagged rocks a hundred yards away. The white robes acted as camouflage. The Arab crowd was quite silent.

"Let's go away from here," said Amaryllis.

As Drover started the Chrysler's motor a police siren wailed. A van drew up and half a dozen uniformed men leapt out, two of them dragging a heavy net.

CONTACTS

WE WILL AT this stage say something about one or two of the ways in which the writer's views on the logic of deduction and the logic of natural science were put together in their complete form.

Drover followed the Buick back on to the freeway and they headed south for half an hour. Ahead of

them a chain of snow-capped peaks came into view. Down to the right, along the water's edge, was a line of high-rise apartment blocks. The Buick headed down a cloverleaf on to the old coast road once more, cruising along beside the buildings. Amaryllis signalled for Drover to turn into a parking lot.

Amaryllis lived in a large apartment on the 23rd and 24th floors. The living room was two storeys high, running from front to back of the building. A mezzanine floor rose from one side of the room. The apartment was furnished with reproduction 'twenties furniture.

An Arab maid brought drinks. Drover sat beside Amaryllis on a white leather sofa.

"What are you doing in Casa?" she asked.

"I'm at the studios."

"At the studios. . . ?"

"Delta Studios. Mounting a new campaign."

Drover pulled a sheaf of papers from his inside pocket and handed them to Amaryllis.

THE ART OF FICTION: YESTERDAY AND TODAY

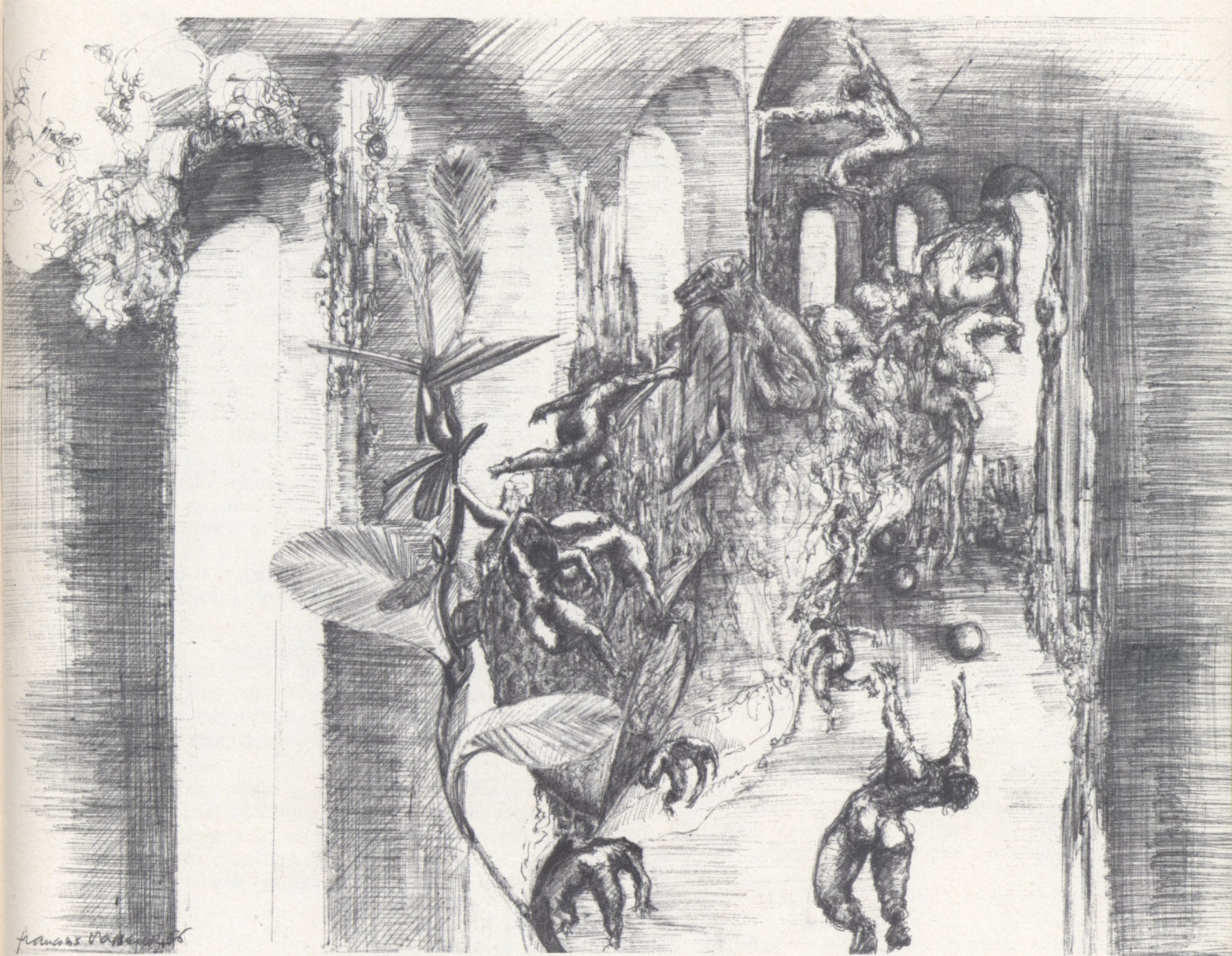
PROGRAMME: OZARKS. Flickers. Out of Sight. MEXICO. CASCADE. Photographs & Photographs. Great Errors. KORZYBOKY. Claridges. Encephalograms. Create AN ALTERATION. Maybe the Last Time. 13 Children. Excuse me, there is no accurate description. —it's always imaginary—. Try me.

OZARKS: Since we are here concerned/and chiefly with the frontal lobes/—the lamps, the bridges/and the golden light/—descend therefore/(to reconstruct that Westward Arkadia/—ring road to happiness—sculpted by the White and Arkansas/but lost to sight;/above the budding trees/and groves of masonry/the viaduct extends./Bridges and lamps;/the sky with golden reinforcements./Golden too those shuttered stalls whence steamers connect with Western Isles/and yards/elaborate/refuse the road)—step down, therefore. . . .

Contact: with a drive through a prolonged winter dusk. Among shadowy trees the melancholy classical echoes of chapels and factories. A red glow of neon across darkening fields.

Contact: with another coast line. Gentle surf breaking against the wind. Ribbons of purple and green water. Ridges of cloud driven across the sky. Long patches of sunlight. Rip tides pulling along the sand-bars. A kite. A dog in the shallows. Pavilions and chimneys in the distance.

AT SOME TIME while he had been unconscious the girl had removed his jacket. Now her hand had slipped inside his shirt; he pulled her head down to him. The girl responded with a low crooning noise. Then she uncovered the aerial belt which he always wore next to his skin. (The feedback principle—as Von Neuman has noted—while it has the appearance of a device for solving implicit relationships is in reality a particularly elegant short-circuited iteration and successive approxi-



mation scheme.)

Drover and Amaryllis sat on the cantilevered balcony smoking kif. A blue-grey shadow spread into the sky. The sea shimmered in the after-light. Beyond the breakers a coast-guard helicopter cruised past a few feet above the surface of the water—the sky about to shatter into stars. Familiarising himself once more with this jewelled twilight world, Drover strayed from the old centres of motor activity. Filament of gas traced incandescent patterns through his skull. The girl's appearance changed as he watched her, but that made little difference. She was in place because here she alludes to the bliss of life on Olympos. The floral capitals allude to her as the goddess of all vegetation and as the guarantor of immortality. Finally the superb mixed floral ornament is in place because Virgil tells us that in an era of peace the earth without cultivation

will blossom with ivy, valerian, lilies, akanthos and vines. (The desires and courage of the birds engaged in the quest are not equal. The nightingale would content himself with the love of the perishable rose; the parrot only searches for the water of immortality, the peacock only desires the joys of Paradise. The hoopoe always proclaims that the real end is beyond.)

IT WAS 5 A.M. when Drover left the apartment. The streets were deserted except for a girl dressed all in black; the silver zip of her jeans was echoed by a crucifix slung around her neck as she walked through the dawn, hugging herself against the chill breeze. An airline sign glowed above the low façades over to Drover's right. Palm trees and drooping lamp-standards rose against the curtain-walling of the apartment blocks. Drover reached his car and started the motor,

drowning the rhythmic crash of the invisible surf. As he drove north along the freeway the sun rose above the hills and it was soon quite warm. Back at the hotel he slept for two hours, then he dressed, packed and checked out. He loaded his bags into the Chrysler and headed south again, booking into a motel at Clichy Plage. Here he would be within thirty minutes' drive of the town centre, the studios and of Amaryllis. He was given a chalet right on the beach and spent what remained of the morning at his typewriter. A long natural breakwater kept the surf out of Clichy Plage. After lunch Drover swam out as far as the life-guard station on the point and would have ventured father, but he was turned back. He returned to the shore, dressed and checked the time. Heading towards the mountains Drover switched the car radio to YBM*Sonic, which, in the interests of safer driving, transmits a 24-hour programme of shifting electronic patterns. (YBM*Sonic provides an axis of stability in the open-plan programme patterns of the radio/TV networks. On other channels audience response is monitored through computerised control points to the studio hardware; the broadcaster thrives on electronic empathy. Instant news is a speciality—select your own world-shattering event and it will be bounced to you off an orbiting satellite. Inert viewers can have their scanning patterns respond to encephalogram readings. Situation comedies are computed from life while law-breaking and enforcement are integral with the communications system. The broadcaster serves as a prism.) Drover headed towards the mountains in this landscape where transport was a recognised art form. A sign warned him that he was approaching Faubourg Castaly. He swung down the cloverleaf towards the already familiar ribbon of apartment blocks.

Amaryllis was waiting. She wore a shorts suit of yellow satin with a long white zip fastening. She looked sixteen.

"Ready?" asked Drover. "We'll head straight for the studios."

Amaryllis spoke of the future—her voice like snow on a summer day.

DAWNS OF PLASTIC MEMORY

DELTA STUDIOS occupies several thousand acres of semi-desert on the eastern edge of the city. Around a tight complex of administration buildings, huge pneumatic tents—translucent and resembling giant conservatories—house film-sets, live studios and computer installations.

The Hip Young Scientist slid out of his Orgone Accumulator.

"Call from Monsieur Drovaire," whispered his beautiful French-Lithuanian assistant, sauntering in from the Sauna Bath pavilion. Beneath the nylon overall she was naked. With studied disinterest THYS flicked the switch of a tape machine linked to the telephone. Drover's recorded voice was heard.

"I've been checking the programme. . . . We've been

playing it too straight. . . . Not getting through those fences. . . . I have a special project in mind. . . . I'm counting on you to accelerate progress."

The tape machine clicked off. THYS watched flesh move beneath tight nylon.

"Alors?" demanded HBF-LA.

"All right," shrugged THYS, "we'll put some skates under his digit pickin' arse."

He tore a bunch of plugs from a pin-board and replaced them at random.

"Fresh air. That's all he needs."

To get things moving he fed in some Riemannian equations, then switched the processor on to sense data.

"Now for the narcissistic routine."

THYS detached the sense data console from its cage and lifted it on to a metal table-top. Lenses and antennae were directed towards a bank of monitors where violet wave patterns already flickered. Watching themselves they became more agitated.

HBF-LA laughed.

Grey codes crackled through jungles of matrix and memory. Undreamed-of emotions built up at buffers, then exploded across the screens in jewelled anarchy.

Life without eyelids.

THYS watched flesh move beneath taut nylon.

Framed by an unwinking monitor, a tiny rag of blue was torn to black nothingness.

"The dawns are heartbreaking."

Filtered through a bed of silica, new perfumes reached their minds: odours of vine, odours of beer. Grey codes crackled in the skyless jungles of memory. Sauna flesh beneath tight nylon. Orgone explosions monitor THYS.

The overall is fastened by a single narrow zip of colourless plastic. HBF-LA touches the neck. The violet waves dissolve. Magnetic reels click in skyless jungles, releasing zones of semantic melancholy—patterns of colourless vegetation—dawns of plastic memory.

"Filter the routine?"

"No. Scramble it."

Fastened by a single zip, the overall opens. Odours of vines, odours of sauna flesh advancing through the magnetic jungles. HBF-LA reached for the pinboard—replaced plugs at random. Filtering through undreamed-of buffers THYS watches the colourless vegetation explode across the screens along the balconies and terraces of the machine, releasing dawns of plastic memory. Magnetic reels—magnetic drums—click beneath the taut nylon. Odours of vines, odours of memory advancing through the blue dawns.

"All right . . . lay down some more signals."

Beneath the crisp nylon, odours of Sauna flesh reach their minds. THYS touched the neck. The waves dissolve in zones of colourless memory. Magnetic reels—magnetic drums. The waves dissolve. Odours of Sauna flesh click in skyless jungles. THYS slid his hand beneath the taut nylon. Along the terraces and balconies of the machine unwinking codes tore through jungles

of memory and matrix. Semantic anarchy built up at buffers, then exploded in patterns of colourless vegetation.

"Click. Click. Click. Click."

The girl's stomach curved forward beneath his fingers and as she responded THYS reached out for the console—tapped an elliptic message. Paper tape looped towards memory. Data, transferred to uncharted channels, clicked through unfastened memory and returned to the monitors. Orchids of blood flood the screens. Music in the lowest common denominator of modes. Crimson flowers. Operetta of sinister comedy.

A physical necessity along the balconies and terraces.

"Click. Click. Click."

Crisp nylon crushed against polished console housing. The algebra of memory unfastened. Crimson necessity transferred to uncharted channels.

"Click. Click. Click."

Orchids of Sauna flesh explode across the screens. Odours of vines, odours of necessity. . . .

CHALCEDON

THEN IT WAS time for Amaryllis to ride the waves of the machine. Odours of vine, odours of memory reached her as she paddled out towards the translucent crests on her torpedo of polyurethane, golden shoulders glistening. Then she slid into the gleaming tunnel. The big wipe-out came and darkness cascaded her towards the sandy bottom. She held her breath until she was sure that the rocketing board had hit the water once more. When she reached the surface she found herself in the shallows of a calm sea.

The following morning they sat on the terrace of the Patrice Lumumba café; Amaryllis alert, Drover silent—as though waiting for a message. The white and blue walls of Chalcedon fluttered in the Mediterranean light. They walked to the edge of the town—a no-man's-land where the wilderness began. Streets had been laid out with lamp posts and flowering shrubs but nothing had been built except for a solitary apartment block on a corner here, a church there, a cinema there. Over to their left—towards the beach—the eastern auto-route circled a small filling station, on the forecourt of which half a dozen Arabs watched two others playing chess. Drover and Amaryllis crossed the auto-route where it ran by an overgrown village, then headed north towards the headland on which Al Qasaba stood. Towers of cumulus were building up over to the west. Soon Drover and Amaryllis arrived beneath the crenellated walls of the fortress. A gateway of carved cedar-wood swung open and they entered the gardens. They walked beside a channel of running water edged with orange trees and myrtles. Elsewhere jets arched up from pierced brick paths. St. Germain and Mercedes greeted them from a window; an Arab boy led the way through tiled rooms and courtyards to the large reception chamber, which they entered just as the storm broke.

"It won't last."

St. Germain dismissed in advance any suggestion

that might be made to the contrary. Bolts of lightning travelled the length of the horizon but, an hour later, the rain had stopped. Amaryllis made her way down to the gardens—where already the paving stones beside the fountains were almost dry. Drover—alone—found himself in a part of the fortress that had not been rebuilt. A sizeable terrace, partially overgrown with scrub, extended to a low wall where Roman pillars supported the remains of delicate moorish arches to which clung a few scraps of intricate stucco-work. Beyond these skeletal windows olive-clad slopes fell away towards rocks which, in turn, dropped sheer to the sea. The horizon was lost in haze. The sun, beating on the back of Drover's skull, became uncomfortable; he retired to the shade of a wall overgrown with wisteria and winter jasmine. He lay down—his body in the sunlight, his head in the shade and cushioned by the soft bulk of some nomadic shrub—the smell of the sea and the acrid odour of crushed vegetation drifting against the walls of consciousness.

"I was awakened in the cool of the evening just before twilight by a voice calling, 'Equal is not contrary'. . . ."

Xavier Malebranche had written those words in his Black Diary during his stay at Al Qasaba almost a century previously.

". . . A handsome servant girl, barefoot and of Ethiopian blood, had been seen sent to me, bringing a bowl of curds which, kneeling, she offered me as I lay on the terrace surrounded by satin cushions.

"'Equal cannot be opposite,' I replied—a polite common phrase of thanks. A short skirt, bravely embroidered, made her almost a beauty and in the African dusk she watched me—her big green cat eyes flecked with golden contradiction. Palm trees and pomegranates were predicated by the shadows. Among substance and shadow a nightingale was singing and the little river nearby murmured, innate like the sense. 'Time to seek the principles and causes of existing things,' I reflected."

Drover's mind drifted on to other images: moths/ swallows / voile / cranes / strange Hong Kongs of mist and pantomime/silk/blue look of sea/ cotton flowers/ richly laden camels . . . then back to Malebranche.

"In the high guest chamber which I occupied were two visible heavens and other civilised conveniences. A nightingale still sang in the garden beneath my window as the countess entered, clad only in stockings of green silk and ribbons of ruched purple satin. She was accompanied by that same negro child which had brought me my curds and a huge Turk (known in the household as the Prime Mover). The countess joined me upon the brass four-poster and ordered the Turk to thrash the negress for some imagined crime. The Turk, however, was drunk through intemperance of pleasure and pain and soon was snoring in a corner. I too was weary—exhausted through the receipt of sacrifices—and slid into a languorous coma, ignoring the catatonic advances of the countess. In sleep my



consciousness was flooded with sweet images.

"Somewhere in the distance a gong sounded, penetrating my strangely chaste dream. The countess had left my side. Her hands now idled among the velvet folds of the sleeping Turk's voluminous trousers; her eyes, daubed with viridian, were mirrored in the sweat that drenched the vast convexities of the creature's torso. The young negress? Perhaps escaping from the richly laded atmosphere of the room, she leaned on the railings of the balcony. Glass beads dangled from the points of her scarcely formed breasts (an unlikely remnant of I forget which Hellenic custom). Down in the gardens—among the fountains and palms—buttocks flashed in the moonlight; plebian sighs and the smack of colliding flesh mingled with the eternal

melodies of water and cicadas. The girl explained that it was the kitchen-maid's night off and indicated her father—an athletic figure—one of a group of men who clustered beneath an ambiguous knot of statuary, amusing themselves while awaiting their respective turns.

"'Extremely handsome,' I was able to concede.

"That she appreciated this remark I was able to judge by the sensible evidence which she afforded. Below, among the heaving vegetation, the kitchen-maid sobbed with sudden pleasure. One assailant withdrew and—edged by the crimson frills of an Andalusian petticoat—I glimpsed a wedge of sable as another body replaced the first. The negress smiled. Apart from the glass beads she wore now only shorts of white cam-

bric; I unfastened these and they slipped down about her thighs. She trembled a little as I touched her.

"'Duende. . . ' she breathed, and I too sighed—though not for pleasure but in recognition of those dark groves of fatalism that surround us (always, since early youth, ethics have been known to invade me in this manner).

"The sounds and odours of the African night restored me to the empirical.

"I asked the girl her name.

"'Noisette. . . ' she replied.

"'A pretty name,' I murmured, confident that my nakedness did not rob me of an air of breeding. Noisette knelt at my feet and attended to the spectrum of pleasure while I gazed out into the night where my spirit sailed among the spangled galaxies of ontology. My palms rested upon the girl's shaven head. Another sob beside the fountain and a new contender detached himself from the group beneath the statuary—it was the girl's father. The tall, ebony figure—lithe with anticipation—crossed to the panting servant and rolled the plump body over. Noisette watched, leaning on the railings—her back arched, her legs slightly parted. The kitchen-maid uttered brief cries in Spanish and Arabic and Noisette laughed, pulling me towards her.

"The night, the odour of the sea, began to poach upon my consciousness. A final thought drifted into my mind from some vanishing continent of curiosity. What chain of cause and effect . . . what ritual of custom carried me to this pitch of inflorescent warmth? Cremorne flares falling through my skull? Induction/inference/syllogisms of identity? Substance/beauty/Universals? Noisette's eyes were fixed to the spot where her father's buttocks thrashed rhythmically in the darkness. I abandoned myself to the gardens and the sky, the girl cooed and bucked more violently so that her father and I were both paralysed at the same moment by the silent ecstasy of true poetry (Ah Sappho! Ah Catullus!).

"Noisette watched her father as he washed himself in a fountain; she called out to him and waved naïvely before joining me in the room where the countess was violently at work upon the epic member of the sleeping Turk. Just then the Ottoman's dream achieved an unparalleled peak of infamy and he sent a gleaming jet of yellowish sperm flying towards a crystal chandelier, from which it dripped for some hours to come."

WHEN HE AWOKE, Drover found himself completely in shadow. There was a slight chill in the air. Somewhere he could hear voices. Drover lay there for a few seconds, shivering, then rose to his feet and stepped into the evening sunlight. The change in temperature was marked. He walked to a projecting part of the terrace—once, no doubt, the site of a look-out tower—which commanded a view westward towards the town and southward into the gardens. Out at sea the haze had cleared; the Mediterranean lay flat and silver. Beyond the town the ruins of Albus could be

seen clearly and beyond them the mountains running down to the coast—a flash of 'pink' snow just visible beyond the nearer peaks.

Behind him peacocks strutted on green tiles.

"So—you're awake," said Mercedes.

Drover turned and followed her into the building.

Dinner was served in a long chamber—smoke rising from candles to the coffered ceiling. A row of cusped windows opened on to the sea and part of the town. Date palms flapped in silhouette against the sodium lamps of the Corniche. At one end of the room was a raised platform. It was on this that they ate. St. Germain explained that in the past he had sat with the Emir on this dais while the well of the room was flooded with entertainments.

"It was last put to these uses in the time of Malebranche."

Now the area was occupied by a mature chaise-longue and a mass of potted vegetation.

St. Germain looked into this pleasure area with a trace of nostalgia.

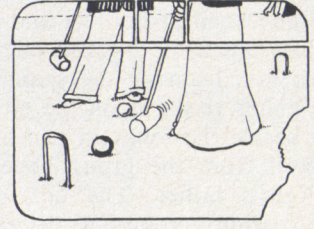
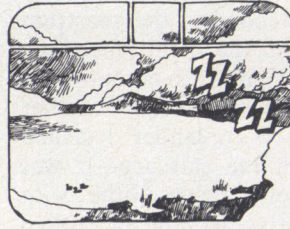
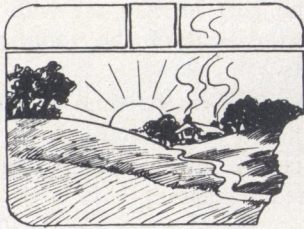
"Pointless to regret the Golden Age," he sighed. "Drained of the present any period can be offered as the Golden Age. An historian may point to the slops thrown from windows into gutters choking with rotting garbage—or of the pressures of expansion; but for the favoured mind an Age is the sum of its genius. The inhabitants of Periclean Athens placed the Golden Age centuries before their own time, but for us the Athens of Pericles has become an authentic part of the Golden Age. The genius of Socrates and Aristophanes has survived, whereas the system of slavery and the absurd feuds between Polis and Polis have been committed to oblivion. Can we dismiss the genius as fiction? Then there is the genius of childhood—the genius of anonymity—the genius of the future. All these are fragments of the Golden Age. And the Present? Are we to understand the Present as a finger moving through the Universe turning everything it touches—and the substance of the Universe is genius—to matter? Time is concerned only with that which is transitory—that is to say, with *matter* . . . with extended matter . . . with substance in a state of decay. The Golden Age exists outside of time—it surrounds us and we can choose to live in it by adjusting our attitude to time."

Depressed by his own speech, St. Germain left the room.

At midnight Drover stood on the tiled balcony. The words of Malebranche and St. Germain drifted through his mind, their patterns mingling with the chorus of insects in the orange trees. He heard his name called, softly, and looked down to see Mercedes seated in an open car directly below the balcony. Drover descended to the garden and approached the car. Mercedes moved over to let him sit at the wheel. Drover released the handbrake and let the car coast down the gravel drive towards the open gate and the highway beyond.

THE CIRCULAR RAILWAY TH

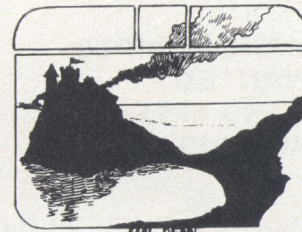
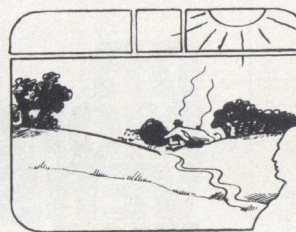
JOHN CALDER



I HAVE ALWAYS thought of the railway as being circular, although I have no proof that it is. I base the supposition principally on the impression of having seen the same scene more than once, but even these impressions are not very reliable, because some scenes or landscapes may have been seen in a dream, my dreams being not unlike my waking moments, sitting alone in the compartment, looking out of the window. The railway itself seems to be built on a series of stilts or viaducts, usually about fifty feet above the ground, so that I can look down from the window and see fields and mountains, sometimes with people standing or walking or otherwise populating the landscape, lakes sometimes, or a bit of shore and, of course, towns, villages, even quite big cities. It is not often I see the centre of the city when the train passes through, more slowly usually than it passes through the countryside, and as far as I am aware, the train never stops, not even at the stations which we occasionally pass through. The reason I am in some doubt about this is that I am perhaps only awake for about two-thirds of the time. The movement of the train makes me somnolent and it is quite possible that the train may have stopped, even quite frequently during my sleep, although it would then be strange that it has never happened when I am awake. That is why I prefer to think of the train as never stopping. I should have a number of problems to face that have not so far arisen in my existence, such as whether to get off the train, assuming that my carriage were to stop at a platform, which, of course, it might not. And a train that can stop might not start again in the same direction. It might have reached the end of the line and start to reverse the opposite way, in which case I should see again the scenes that I have for so long been watching, but in reverse. I cannot be sure that I should see the same people, but probably I should see some of them.

Would I recognise them? Or even remember whether I had seen them before or not? However, the question does not arise at present.

Today the landscape is grim and it has been raining ever since dawn, a cold, wet, glowering beast of a day, which I watch compulsively for want of anything better to do and perhaps as an aid to thought. Last night was quite the reverse. It was a beautiful evening—it's late summer just now—and there was a great stillness hanging over the gracious and peaceful scenes beside my passing train. The country was flat and wooded, the harvest turning to gold, green lawns in front of castles and country houses that contain their comfortable and slow-living inhabitants, some of them strolling in the still evening air, sniffing the lavender and the flowers, appreciating the light blue sky with only the wispiest of distant clouds to break the monotony. I remember a game of croquet, played by an old lady with her older husband, while a young couple, hand in hand, watched and strolled on to the rose-garden. The golden light caught the whole scene quite clearly, the white walls and leaded wide windows, the smooth stone rising to suggest battlements below the smoking chimneys and the ivy beginning to turn from green to russet, suggesting the sweetest time of the year, the golden time between fulfilment of summer and the yielding up of autumn. The moment was brief, but the train, quite perceptibly, slowed a little while the scene registered itself on my memory, perhaps for ever. And so smoothly on across more fields and a little wood, then fields again and a hill or two. One peculiarity of the train is that it never dives underground or runs between high banks that obscure the view, but always runs a little or even some considerable distance above the ground, even high ground and mountain, an average perhaps of fifty feet, seldom



M.L. DEAN

more, seldom less. But when crossing a mountain range, the valleys below are clearly seen in a perspective that reduces the form of a lone shepherd to the size of an ant. And sometimes on the flat I am so close to the persons sitting at table as the train passes just above their garden that I feel I can almost hear what they are saying as I watch them through their windows. Castles out of Tennyson suddenly rise out of the sunset or loom through an evening mist, recalling romantic golden ages that have perhaps not ended or yet even begun, while black factory walls under lashing frozen rain recall another age, a mystique no less real in the long passage of time. Sometimes, perhaps in dream or in my waking state, some strange spiky world of gleaming metal points and bulbous glassy moons appears below my windows, and pulling aside the condensation, I look into a civilisation where all gleams with white metal, and machine-like men go about their tasks like ants, while strange creatures stalk the roofs like watchdogs of another world. Again strange naked creatures, disturbing in fantastic shapes that stretch across erotic landscapes where long-legged limpid-eyed mincing forms twine and copulate and twine again, and rise to the level of my windows as if they would engulf the train, but I pass on to where stags lock horns, and to where jackals dispute their carrion in wooded ruins not yet turned to solid carbon, but where the winds that whirl around the world have taken their toll of standing trees and formed great burial mounds of moulding timber.

At times, tiring of the eternal watching and my own drowsiness, I open the compartment door and walk through the corridors of the train, counting the compartments to each carriage, which vary from ten to more than twenty, all similar, all devoid of life, but showing signs of recent habitation. I rattle the doors

of lavatories that sometimes open, sometimes guard their secrets, for waiting serves no purpose. I have waited an hour or more but never seen a living soul emerge, although returning later it seems the door that once was closed now opens and shows the usual lavabo and installations, with paper of a standard quality and towels unused. Here too there is no windows, but panes of solid glass immune to hammering, and where the carriages join, solid leather strips cut off all view of what I think of as the inside of the circle.

Hunger and thirst? These are not unknown, but sometimes in my pockets I find a piece of bread, a chocolate bar, a mouldy sandwich, that fills the void and takes my mind off questions that can not be answered, but perhaps divined. Why? Where? What for? It is enough that someone fills my pockets, that time is filled with looking, that my eyes witness an ever-changing panorama; and sometimes strange sounds of music or language impress themselves briefly on my ears before the train rolls on.

I doze a little, wake to a slower jerky rhythm. High on the viaduct, I feel the train bumping over obstacles, while down below life continues, brutal, sharp and bloody. I see the horrors multiplying and stare away into the rising sun and fire-ridden clouds as the viaduct rises above the human turmoil, hoping that the moment is a dream or soon will be, that the hours will bring, as in time they must, a calm, a great contemplative stillness, as my train rolls on, unendingly like a great worm through the earth, bearing its resigned but lonely passenger on his circular journey, and that one day I shall find some answer to the questions I formulate for want of a better occupation, questions that have to do, not with what I see from the window, for those things I understand well enough, but with my presence on the train and why I am alone there.

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DR MOREAU VERSUS THE UTOPIANISTS

IT USED TO BE said of Tchaikowski —and, cultural lag behind what it is, it may still be said—that he was the composer who opened up new areas of emotional expression from which later writers of popular music all plundered. The science fiction field, not to mention meadows adjacent, finds its Tchaikowski in H. G. Wells.

Even from the disadvantage point of 1968, when Wells has been dead for more than twenty years, it is hard to estimate his enormous influence. Wells has been under eclipse; this is partly because he over-produced and became towards the end of his life little more than a propagandist. Histories of literature, those necropolises of the imagination, are uneasy about him, or cut him dead; Wells, after all, came to care more for people than writing and perhaps more for big ideas than for people (this is not the only respect in which he seems like a typical SF writer, blown up to more than life-size).

But the times, as the song reminds us, they are a-changing. Even the charge that Wells lacked art is slowly being rebutted; for instance, in a recent issue of *THE PARIS REVIEW* (No. 41), Vladimir Nabokov, in an interview, has this to say: "H. G. Wells, a great artist, was my



The First Men in the Moon

favourite writer when I was a boy. 'The Passionate Friends', 'Ann Veronica', 'The Time Machine', 'The Country of the Blind', all these stories are far better than anything Bennett, or Conrad, or, in fact, any of Wells' contemporaries could produce. His sociological cogitations can be safely ignored, of course, but his romances and fantasies are superb."

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Early H. G. Wells (1961) made a careful reassessment of the science fiction novels and rated them more highly than his novels of everyday life such as *Kipps* and *Love and Mr. Lewisham*. And there was the stately volume *H. G. Wells and His Critics*, edited by Ingvald Raknem (Oslo, 1962), which enquired into the way Wells has always been the subject of critical consideration and misunderstanding. Both these books

dealt, at least incidentally, with the old and superficial charge that Wells was an optimist.

It could be shown, I believe, that the question of Wells' optimism or pessimism is central to any discussion of his influence (by which we may perhaps be allowed to mean his status as a science fiction writer). For Wells' subject matter was man's relationship to the machine; or, to put it more concisely, society's changing relationship to the forces of mechanisation which, as he rightly foresaw, would grow enormously. Were those forces destructive or constructive?

HOW ONE PLACES Wells depends on how one answers this question oneself. For the older type of intellectual, who saw the machine bringing goods and benefits to all, which had hitherto seemed to him the prerogative of his position alone, the machine was naturally to be condemned; the machine as mass-producer threatens privilege. To the older type of worker, viewing those same goods and benefits which he had never had within reach before, the machine was naturally a sort of saviour. (Workers in less privileged parts of the world, like the Balkans, still retain

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this feeling for the machine; and it is not so long since the opening of every new factory in Russia was the cause of celebration.)

Such naïve divisions no longer apply in the West today, in the throes of the Second Industrial Revolution. William Morris's questioning of whether we could do without the machine must be reversed; anxiously we ask, Could the machines do without us? And this question is a token of the great inroads that the technological society has made upon the confidence and

mores of human thought. The enveloping myth of our times is increasingly science-fictional rather than Christian. Clearly, it's time for another look at the ambivalent father-figure of old H.G. zooming overhead.

PROFESSOR HILLEGAS HAS been doing exactly that. His book* is a study of one aspect of Wells' thought, utopianism, and the reaction for and against it manifested by writers of Wells' generation and after.

Professor Hillegas' book has its origins in a course of lectures he gave at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale; and one may as well admit at the outset that it does smell slightly of the classroom. We have to undergo the business of E. M. Forster's *The Machine Stops*, that banal story, and the rather academic line of *Brave New World* and *1984* once again; while on the other hand, too little is said about more recent dystopias (Wolfe's *Limbo 90*, for instance, is mentioned only in a footnote, and then with the title misquoted); thought

Fahrenheit 451, *The Space Merchants* and *Player Piano*, among the writings of professional SF writers, are picked out for more extended discussion.

However, the main interest of the book lies in its tracing of the utopian and dystopian literature of this century from the Wellsian position, and this is expertly done.

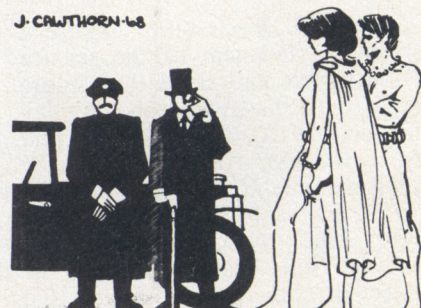
**The Future as Nightmare: H. G. Wells and the Anti-Utopians*. By Mark R. Hillegas (Oxford University Press, 55s.).

(Continued next issue)



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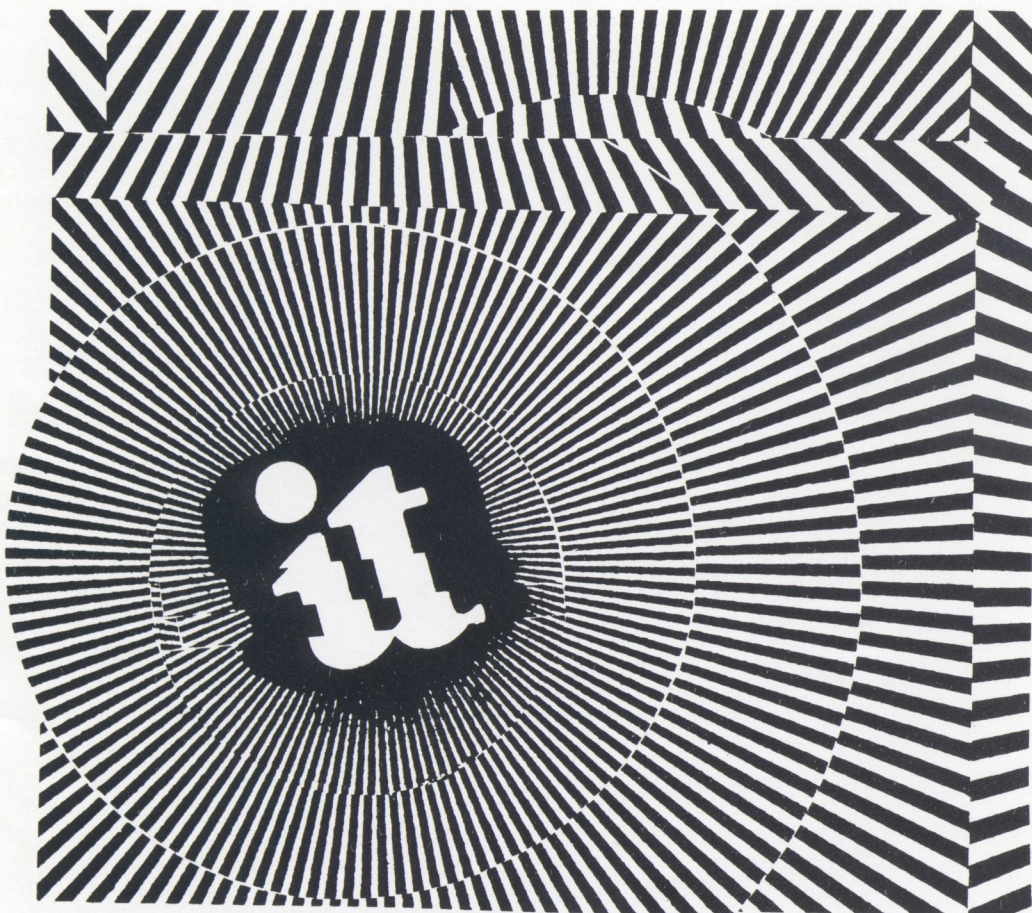
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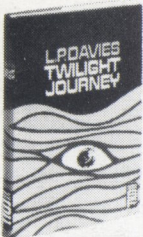


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