COMPACT SF

NEW WORLDS

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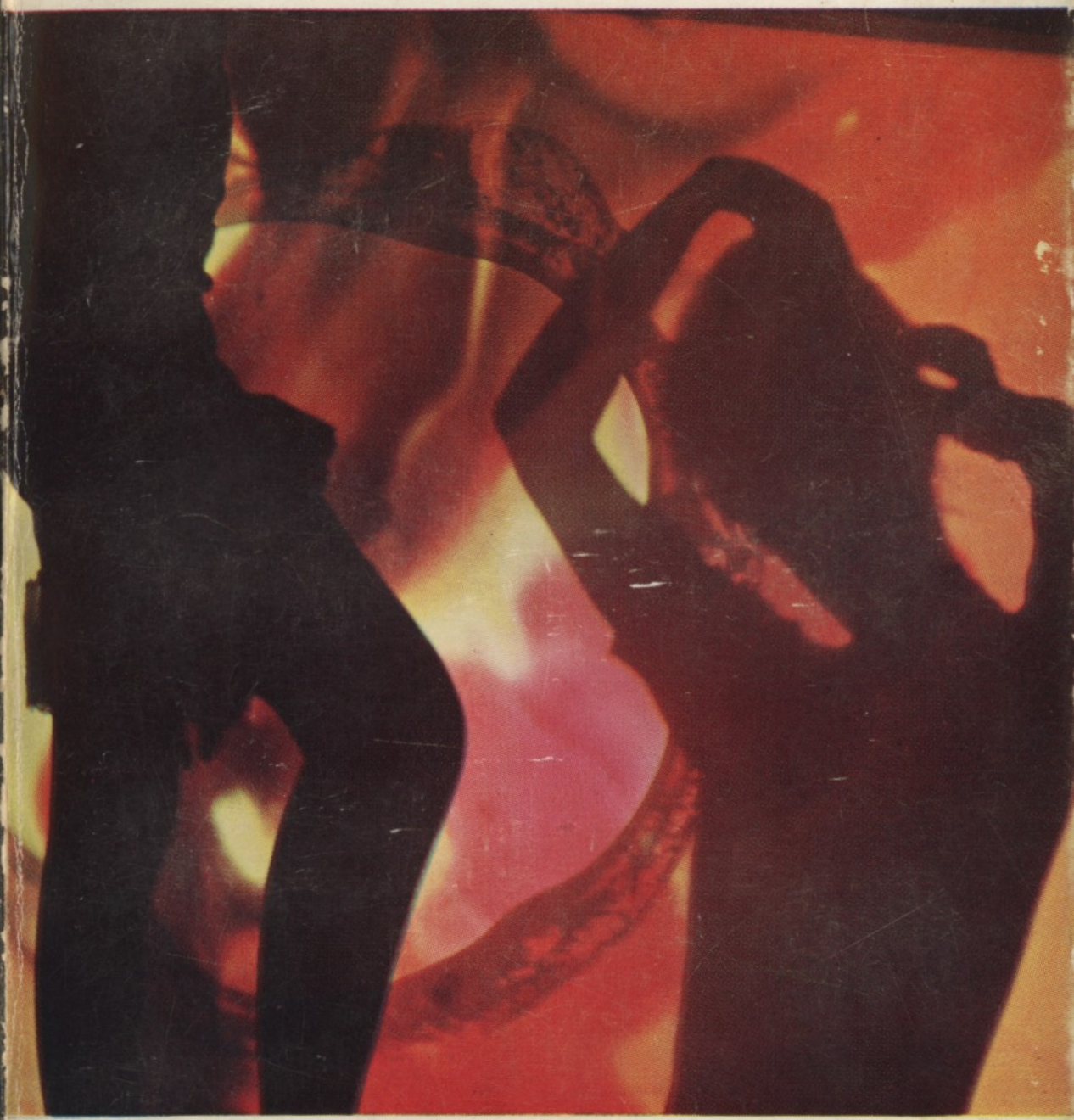

THOMAS M. DISCH

ECHO ROUND HIS BONES

NEW WORLDS SF

Volume 50 Number 169

Contents

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

DEATH OF CORDWAINER SMITH

IT WAS WITH sadness that we learned recently of the death of "Cordwainer Smith", the author of such well-known stories as *The Game of Rat and Dragon, Alpha Ralpha Boulevard* and the popular Lords of the Instrumentality and Rediscovery of Man series. A professor at John Hopkins, Smith's real name was Paul Linebarger. For a time he was one of President Kennedy's advisors on Asian affairs. He was in his early fifties.

Smith was an original ; a true science fiction myth maker. His best stories had the quality of allegorical myth and lately dealt quite specifically with America's racial problems (*The Boy Who Bought Old Earth, The Dead Lady of Clown Town,* etc.). If his later work became a trifle overbaroque and whimsical, his earlier work was full of an underlying intellectual honesty which is too rarely found in sf.

It was our intention in 1966 to celebrate the centenary of H. G. Wells in some way, but our own project was delayed, and the press seems to have covered virtually every aspect of his life and work. We still hope to publish an extremely perceptive assessment of Wells's scientific romances by Brian Aldiss. This was originally a speech given at a recent PEN Club meeting in honour of Wells. Mr. Aldiss spoke of the tradition of Wells and the rival tradition of Verne. He felt that English sf owed most to Wells whereas American sf was most indebted to Verne. Now, he said, increasing numbers of U.S. writers—including Thomas M. Disch, Kurt Vonnegut and Walter Miller—are writing in the more enduring tradition of Wells.

The response to our recent readership survey has been

very satisfying. A representative proportion of our readers has responded, and the results are now in the process of tabulation. Although no definite statistics are yet to hand, a number of interesting facts have already come to light.

NEW WORLDS readers clearly cover a wide spectrum of society. The magazine is bought by people who cover a great range of employment and educational attainments. The science fiction reader has been often considered a particular "type" of person, conforming to certain patterns of behaviour, but it is clear now that this picture is entirely false.

Our readers are university students, soldiers, bricklayers, directors, and we can count at least two blacksmiths among them. One of the things that binds this great diversity of people together, is the fact that there appears to be a discernible leaning towards technological interests, although there is a definite interest in some of the arts—music, photography, etc.

The strongest interest, however, is that expressed for the social sciences. This was expected, but not to such a great degree—a very large proportion of our readers are keenly interested in such subjects as sociology, politics, psychology and history.

The most contradictory response of all was that to the work of J. G. Ballard. Ballard is at the same time the most popular and the most unpopular writer in British science fiction. In the survey he received sympathetic insight and misunderstanding. It can be seen that an appreciation of Ballard is connected in no way with educational qualifications, but appears to take place entirely on an emotional level. These interesting findings show that Ballard is the most controversial figure in science fiction, and that he is arousing more interest and enthusiasm than any other writer in the field. Nearly all of the survey forms returned contained comments on his work, particularly those stories that have appeared in recent issues of NEW WORLDS, and one can see that the controversy will increase in intensity as Ballard continues to develop as a writer.

It was noted with pleasure that a great deal of interest has been expressed in the work of younger writers, includ-

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ECHO ROUND HIS BONES

thomas m. disch

Part One of Two Parts

one

Nathan Hansard

THE FINGER ON the trigger grew tense. The safety was released, and in almost the same moment the grey morning stillness was shattered by the report of the rifle. Then, just as a mirror slivers and the images multiply, a myriad echoes returned from the ripening April hillsides—a mirthful, mocking sound. The echoes re-echoed, faded, and died, but the stillness did not settle back on the land, the stillness was broken.

The officer who had been marching at the head of the brief column of men—a captain, no more—came striding back along the dirt track. He was a man of thirty-five or perhaps forty years, with fair, regular features, set now in an expression of anger—or, if not anger quite, irritation. Some would have judged him a handsome man; others might have objected that his manner was rather too neutral—a neutrality expressive not so much of tranquillity as of truce. His jaw was set and his lips moulded in the military cast. His blue eyes were glazed by that years-long unrelenting discipline. They might not, it could be argued, have been by nature such severe features: without that

discipline the jaw might have been more relaxed, the lips fuller, the eyes brighter—yes, and the captain might have been another man.

He stopped at the end of the column and addressed himself to the red-haired soldier standing on the outside of the last file—a master-sergeant, as may be ascertained from the chevron sewn to the sleeve of his fatigue jacket.

"Worsaw?"

"Sir." The sergeant came, approximately, to attention.

"You were instructed to collect all ammunition after rifle practice."

"Yes sir."

"All cartridges were to be given back to you. No one should have any ammunition now therefore."

"No sir."

"And this was done?"

"Yes sir. So far as I know."

"And yet the shot we just heard was certainly fired by one of us. Give me your rifle, Worsaw."

With visible reluctance the sergeant handed his rifle to the captain. "The barrel is warm," the captain observed. Worsaw made no reply.

"May I take your word, Worsaw, that this rifle is unloaded?"

"Yes sir."

The captain put the butt of the rifle against his shoulder and laid his finger over the trigger. He remarked that the safety was off. Worsaw said nothing.

"May I pull the trigger, Worsaw?" The rifle was pointed at the sergeant's right shin. Worsaw still said nothing, but beads of sweat had broken out on his freckled face.

"Do I have your permission? Answer me."

Worsaw broke down. "No sir," he said.

The captain broke open the magazine and removed the cartridge clip. He handed the rifle back to the sergeant. "Is it possible then, Worsaw, that the shot that brought us to a halt a moment ago was fired by this rifle?" There was, even now, no trace of sarcasm in the captain's voice.

"I saw a rabbit, sir—"

The captain's brow furrowed. "Did you hit it, Worsaw?"

"No sir."

"Fortunately for you. Do you realise that it is a federal offence to kill wildlife on this land?"

"It was just a rabbit, sir. We shoot them around here all the time. Usually, when we come out for rifle practice or that sort of stuff—"

"Do you mean to say that it is *not* against the law?"

"No sir, I wouldn't know about that. I just know that usually—"

"Shut up, Worsaw."

Worsaw's face had become so red that his reddish-blond eyebrows and lashes seemed pale in comparison. In his bafflement, his lower lip had begun to tic back and forth as though some buried fragment of his character were trying to pout.

"I despise a liar," the captain said blandly. He inserted his thumbnail under the tip of the chevron sewn on Worsaw's right sleeve and ripped it off with one quick motion. Then the other chevron.

The captain returned to the front of the column, and the march back to the trucks that would return them to Camp Jackson was resumed.

This captain, who will be the hero of our history, was a man of the future—that is to say, of what would seem futurity to us, for to the captain it seemed the most commonplace present. Yet there are degrees of living in the future, of being contemporary there, and it must be admitted that in many ways the captain was more a man of the past (of his past, and even perhaps of ours) than of the future.

Consider only his occupation: a career officer in the Regular Army—surely a most uncharacteristic employment in the year 1990. By that time everyone knew that the army, the Regular Army (for though the draft still did operate and young men were compelled to surrender their three years to the Reserve Army, they all knew that this was a joke, that the Reserves were useless, that they were maintained only as a device for keeping themselves out of the labour force or off the unemployment rolls that much longer after college) was a career for louts and nincompoops. But if *everyone* knew this . . . Everyone who was with it; everyone who was truly comfortable living

in the future. These contemporaries of the captain (many of whom—some 29 per cent—were so far unlike him as to prefer three years of post-graduate study in the comfortable and permissive prisons that had been built for C.O.'s —the chonchies, as they were called—rather than submit to the ritual non-activities of the Reserves) regarded the captain and his like as—and this is their most charitable judgment—fossils.

It is true that military service traditionally requires qualities more of character than of intelligence. Does this mean then that our hero is on the stupid side? By no means! And to dispel any lingering doubts of this let us hasten to note that in third grade the captain's I.Q., as measured by the Stanford-Binet Short Form, was a respectable 128—certainly as much or more as we can fairly demand of a hero in this line of work.

In fact, it had been the captain's experience that he possessed intelligence in excess of his needs; he would often have been happier in his calling if he had been as blind to certain distinctions—often of a moral character —as most of his fellow officers seemed to be. Once, indeed, this over-acuteness had directly injured the captain's prospects, and it might be that that long-ago event was the cause, even this much later, of the captain's relatively low position, considering his age, in the military hierarchy. We shall have opportunity to hear more of this unpleasant moment—but in its proper place.

It may just as plausibly be the case that the captain's lack of advancement was due simply to a lack of vacancies. The Regular Army of 1990 was much smaller than the army of our own time—partly because of international agreements, but basically in recognition of the fact that a force of 25,000 men was more than ample to prosecute a nuclear war—and this, in 1990, was the only war that the two great powers' blocs were equipped to fight. Disarmament was a *fait accompli,* though it was of a sort that no one of our time had quite anticipated; instead of eliminating nuclear devices it had preserved them alone. In truth, "disarmament" is something of a euphemism; what had been done had been done more in the interests of domestic economy than of world peace. The bombs that the pacifists complained of (and in 1990, *everyone* was a pacifist) were

still up there, biding their time, waiting for the day that everyone agreed was inevitable. Everyone, that is to say, who was with it; everyone who was truly comfortable living in the future.

Thus, the captain, though he lived in the future, was very little representative of it. His political opinions were conservative to a point just short of reaction. He read few of what we would think of as the better books of his time, saw few of the better movies—not because he lacked aesthetic sensibilities, no (for instance, his musical taste was highly developed), but because these things were made for other, and possibly better, tastes than his. He had no sense of fashion—and this was not a small lack, for among his contemporaries fashion was a potent force. Other-directedness had carried all before it; shame, not guilt, was the greater shaper of souls, and the most important question one could ask oneself was : "Am I with it?" And the captain would have had to answer, "No".

He wore the wrong clothes, in the wrong colours, to the wrong places. His hair was too short (though by present standards it would have seemed rather full for a military man); his face was too pale (he wouldn't use even the discreetest cosmetics); his hands were bare of rings. Once, it is true, there had been a gold band on the fourth finger of his left hand, but that had been some years ago. Unfashionableness has its price, and for the captain the price had been steep. It had cost him his wife and son. She had been too contemporary for him—or he too outmoded for her. In effect, their love had spanned a century, and though at first it was quite strong enough to stand the strain, in time it was the times than won. They were divorced on grounds of incompatibility.

At this point it may have occurred to the reader to wonder why in a tale of the future we should have chosen a hero so little representative of his age. It is an easy paradox to resolve, for the captain's position in the military establishment had brought him (or, more precisely, was soon to bring him) into contact with that phenomenon which, of all the phenomena of his age, was most advanced, most contemporary, most at the forefront of the future—with, in short, the matter transmitter—or, in the

popular phrase, the manmitter—or, in the still more popular phrase, the Steel Womb.

"Brought into contact" is perhaps too weak and passive a phrase. The captain's role was to be more heroic than such words would suggest. "Came into conflict" would do much better. Indeed, he was to come into conflict with much more than the Steel Womb—but with the military establishment as well, with society in general, and with himself. It could even be said, without stretching meanings too far, that in his conflict he pitted himself against the nature of reality itself.

One final paradox before we re-embark upon this tale: It was to be this captain, the military man, the man of war, who was, at the last minute and by the most remarkable device, to rescue the world from that ultimate catastrophe, the war to end wars, the Armageddon that we are all, even now, waiting for. But by that time he would not be the same man, but a different man, a man quite thoroughly of the future—because he had made it in his own image.

At twilight of that same day on which we last saw him the captain was sitting alone in the office of "A" Artillery Company. It was as bare a room as it could possibly be and yet be characterized as an office. On the grey metal desk were only an appointment calendar that showed the date to be the twentieth of April, a telephone, and a file folder containing brief statistical profiles of the twenty-five men under the captain's command: Barnstock, Blake, Cavender, Dahlgren, Doggett . . .

The walls of the room were bare, except for framed photos, cut out of magazines, of General Samuel ("Wolf") Smith, Army Chief of Staff, and of President Lind, whose presence here would have to be considered as merely commemorative, since he had been assassinated some forty days before. As yet, apparently, no one had found a good likeness of Lee Madigan, his successor, to replace Lind's photo. On the cover of LIFE, Madigan had been squinting into the sun; on TIME's cover he was shown splattered with the president's blood.

There was a metal file, and it was empty; a metal wastebasket, it was empty; metal chairs, empty. The captain cannot be held strictly to account for the bareness of

the room, for he had been in occupancy only two days. Even so, it was not much different from the office he had left behind in the Pentagon Building, where he had been the aide of General Pittmann.

. . . Fanning, Green, Horner, Lesh, Maggit, Norris, Nelsen, Nelson . . . They were Southerners mostly, the men of "A" Company. In the Southern states 68 per cent of the Regular Army was recruited from the backwoods and back alleys of that country-within-a-country, that fossil society that produced fossil men. . . . Lathrop, Perigrine, Pearsall, Pearsall, Rand, Ross . . . Good men in their way—that cannot be denied. But they were not, any more than their captain, contemporary with their own times. Plain, simple, honest men—Squires, Sumner, Truemile, Thorn, Worsaw, Young—but also mean-spirited, resentful, stupid men, as the captain well knew. You cannot justly expect anything else of men who have been outmoded, who have had no better prospect than *this,* who will never make much money or have much fun or taste the sparkling elixir of being With It, who are, and always will be, deprived—and who know it.

These were not precisely the terms with which the captain regarded this problem—though he had been long enough in the Army (since 1976) to realize that they did not misrepresent the state of affairs. But he looked at things on a reduced scale (he was only a captain, after all) and considered how to deal with the twenty-five men under his command so as to divert the full force of their resentment from his own person. He had expected to be resented—this is the fate of all officers who inherit the command of an established company—but he hadn't expected matters to go to such mutinous extremes as they had this morning after rifle drill.

Rifle drill was a charade. Nobody expected rifles to be used in the next war. In much the same way, the captain suspected, this contest of wills between himself and his men was a charade—a form that had to be gone through before a state of equilibrium could be reached, a tradition-sanctioned period of mutual testing-out. The captain's object was to abbreviate this period as much as possible; the company's to draw it out to their advantage.

The phone rang, the captain answered it. The orderly of

Colonel Ives hoped that the captain would be free to see the colonel. Certainly—whenever it was convenient to the colonel. In half an hour? In half an hour. Splendid. In the meantime perhaps it would be possible for the captain to instruct "A" Company to prepare for a jump in the morning?

The captain felt his mouth grow dry; his blood quickened perceptibly. He was hardly aware of answering or of hanging up the receiver.

Prepare to jump . . .

He seemed for a moment to fission, to become two men —an old man and a young man, and while the old man sat behind the bare desk the young one stood crouched before the open hatch of an airplane, rifle in hand (they

had used rifles in that war), staring out into the vast brightness and down, far down, at the unfamiliar land, the improbable rice paddies. The land had been so *green*. And then he had jumped, and the land had come rushing up against him. The land, in that instant, became his enemy, and he . . . Did he become the enemy of that land?

But the captain knew better than to ask himself such questions. A policy of deliberate and selective amnesia was the wisest. It had served him in good stead these twelve years.

He put on his hat and went out through the door of the orderly room into a yard of unvigorous grass. Worsaw was sitting on the steps of the brick barracks building, smoking. The captain addressed him without thinking:

"Sergeant!"

Worsaw rose and stood to attention smartly. "Sir!"

"That is to say—" (Trying to make the blunder seem a deliberate cruelty, and not—which is inadmissible—an error). "—*Private* Worsaw. Inform the men that they are to be prepared to make a jump in the morning at eight hundred hours."

How quickly the clouds of resentment could overcast the man's pale eyes! But Worsaw replied, in an even tone, "Yes sir."

"And shine those shoes, Private. They're a disgrace to this company."

"Yes *sir*."

"You're in the Army now, Private. Don't you forget it."

"No *sir*."

As though, the captain thought wryly, as he walked *away, he had any choice. Poor devil. As though he* could *forget it. As though any of us could.*

"This will be your first jump, won't it, Captain?"

"Yes sir."

Colonel Ives laid a forefinger upon the soft folds of his chin. "Let me caution you against expecting much, then. It will be no different there than it is here at Camp Jackson. You breathe the same air, see the same dome overhead, drink the same water, live in the same buildings, with the same men."

"Yes—so I've been told, but even so it's hard to believe."

"There are *some* differences. For instance, you can't drive in to D.C. on the weekends. And there are fewer officers. It can become very boring."

"You wouldn't be able to tell me, I suppose, to whom I'll be reporting?"

Colonel Ives shook his head aggrievedly. "I don't know myself. Security around the Womb is absolute. It would be easier to break into heaven, or Fort Knox. You'll receive your final instructions tomorrow, just before you go into the Womb, but not from me. I only work here."

Then why, the captain wondered, *did you have me come to see you?*

The colonel was not long in answering the unasked question: "I heard about the little to-do you had this morning with the men."

"Yes—with Sergeant Worsaw."

"Ah—then you mean to say his rank has been restored already?"

"No. I'm afraid I was only speaking loosely."

"A shame that it had to happen. Worsaw is a good man, an absolutely top-notch technician. The men respect him—even the, um, coloured boys. You're not a Southerner yourself are you, Captain?"

"No sir."

"Didn't think so. We Southerners are sometimes hard to explain to other folks. Take Worsaw now—a good man, but he does have a stubborn streak, and when he takes a notion into his head—" Colonel Ives clucked with dismay. "But a good man—we can't let ourselves forget that."

Colonel Ives waited until the captain had agreed to this last statement.

"Of course these things will happen. They're inevitable when you're taking over a new command. I remember, in my own case—did I tell you that I was once at the head of "A" Company myself? Yes indeed!—I had a little trouble with that fellow too. But I smoothed it over, and soon we were all working together like clockwork. Of course it was easier for me than it will be for you. I hadn't gone so far as to strip him of rank. That was a

very strong gesture, captain. I imagine you must have regretted it since?"

"No sir. I was convinced at the time, and still am, that he merited it. Amply."

"Of course, of course. But we must remember the Golden Rule, eh? Live and let live. The Army is a team, and we've all got to pull together. You can't do your work without Worsaw, Captain, and I can't do my work without you. We can't let *prejudice*—" Colonel Ives paused to smile. "—or *temper* affect our judgment. Mutual co-operation: that's the Army way. You co-operate with Worsaw, I co-operate with you."

The captain's attitude throughout this speech had been one of almost Egyptian stiffness. Now there was a long silence, while Colonel Ives waited, bobbing his head up and down into his chins, for the captain to agree with him.

"Is that all, sir?" the captain asked.

"Now isn't that just like a Northerner? Always in a rush to be off somewhere else. Well, don't let *me* slow you down, Captain. But if I might offer a word of advice—though it's none of my business—"

"By all means, Colonel."

"I'd restore Worsaw's rank by the end of the week. I'm sure that will have been punishment enough for what he did. I seem to recall, in my day, that a little poaching wasn't unheard-of after rifle drill. Nothing official, of course, but then everything isn't always done in official ways, Captain. If you take my meaning."

"I'll consider your recommendation, sir."

"Do. Do. Good-night, Captain—and *bon voyage*."

Outside the captain wandered about for some time to no apparent purpose. Perhaps he was considering the colonel's suggestion; more probably he was only considering the colonel. His wanderings brought him to the centre of the unlighted parade grounds.

He looked about him, scanning the sky—forgetting, since he had lived so many years beneath it, that this was not the real sky but a simulation, for Camp Jackson, Virginia, was nestled under the western edge of the Washington D.C. Dome. The dome was studded with

millions of subminiaturized photo-electric cells which read the positions of the revolving stars and reduplicated their shifting pattern on the underside of its immense canopy.

There, low in the east, in the constellation of Taurus, was Mars, the red planet, portent of war. It was very strange, it almost exceeded belief, that in less than twelve hours, he, Captain Nathan Hansard of "A" Artillery Company of the Camp Jackson/Mars Command Post, would be standing with his feet firmly planted upon that speck of reddish light.

two

The Steel Womb

It measured, on the outside, 14.4ft. × 14.14ft. × 10.00ft., so that an observer regarding it from the floor of the hall in which it stood would see each face of it as a golden rectangle. The walls were two feet thick, of solid chrome-vanadium steel. They were covered with banks and boards of winking coloured lights; the play of these lights, itself an imposing spectacle, was accompanied by nervous cracklings and humming sounds vaguely suggestive of electricity, or, at least, of Science. There was a single opening to this sanctum—a portal some four feet in diameter set into the centre of one of the golden rectangles, like the door of a bank vault. Even when this portal was open, though, it was not possible for onlookers to glimpse the awesome central chamber itself, for a mobile steel antechamber would hide it from view at such times. No one but the men who had made the jump —the priests, as it were, of this mystery—had ever seen what it was like inside the Steel Womb.

And it was all fakery, mere public relations and stagecraft. The jump to Mars could have been made with the equivalent of four tin cans full of electronic hardware and a power source no greater than would have been available from a wall socket. The lights winked only for the benefit of the photographers from LIFE; the air hummed so that the visiting Congressmen might be persuaded that the nation was getting its money's worth. The whole set had been designed not by any engineer but

by Emily Golden, who had also done the sets, a decade before, for Kubrick's *Brave New World.*

Superfluous it might be, but it was no less daunting for all that. Hansard was given ample time to savour the spectacle. Once "A" Company had arrived at the outer, outer gate of the security complex of which the transmitter was the navelstone, there had been a continuous sorting-through of passes and authorizations, there had been searches, identity checks, telephone confirmations—every imaginable kind of appetizer. It was an hour before they reached the heart of the labyrinth, the hall that housed the Holy of Holies, and it was another hour before each man had been cleared for the jump. The hall they waited in was about as big as a small-town high school auditorium. The walls were pale, unpainted concrete, the better to focus all eyes upon that magnificent Christmas tree at the centre of the room. Large as it was, however, the hall seemed crowded now; there were guards everywhere.

There were guards before the portal of the Womb—a dozen at least. There were guards at the doubly-locked door that led out of the hall. There were guards all around the Christmas tree, like so many khaki-wrapped presents, and there were guards, seemingly, to guard the presents. There was a whole cordon of guards around the men of "A" Company, and there were also guards behind the glass partitions halfway up the walls of the hall. It was there, in the booths behind those windows, that the technicians adjusted the multitude of dials that made the Christmas tree glow and bubble—and operated the single toggle switch that could send the contents of the transmitter from Earth to Mars in, literally, no time at all.

The lights were reaching their apotheosis, and the countdown had already begun for the opening of the portal (countdowns being the very stuff of drama), when the door that led into the hall opened, and a two-star general, under heavy guard, entered and approached Hansard. Hansard recognized him from his photograph as General Foss, the chief of all Mars operations.

After the formalities of introduction and identification, General Foss explained his purpose succinctly: "You are

to present this attaché case, containing a Priority-A letter, to the commanding officer, General Pittmann, immediately upon arrival. You will witness him remove the letter from the case."

"General Pittmann—the C.O.!"

General Foss made no further explanations; none were necessary, and he did not seem disposed to practise conversation for its own sake.

Hansard was embarrassed at his outburst, but he was nonetheless pleased to be enlightened. That General Pittmann was now heading the Mars Command Post explained the otherwise inexplicable fact of Hansard's transfer from the Pentagon to Camp Jackson. It was not Hansard who was being transferred so much as Pittmann; the General's aide had simply been swept up in his wake.

They might have told me, Hansard thought, though it did not surprise him that they had not. It wouldn't have been the Army way.

Already the first squad of eight men, concealed in the belly of the mobile antechamber as in some streamlined Trojan horse, were approaching the portal of the transmitter. The antechamber locked magnetically into place, and there was a pause while the portal opened and the eight men, all unseen, entered the Womb. Then the antechamber moved back, revealing only the closed portal. The multitude of lights ornamenting the surface of the transmitter now darkened—with the exception of a single green globe above the portal, indicating that the eight men were still visible within. The hall had grown hushed. Even the guards, themselves a part of the stagecraft, regarded this moment of the mystery with reverence.

The green light turned to red: the men were on Mars.

The Christmas tree lit up again, and the process was repeated three more times for three more squads of men. Nine, ten, even a dozen men, might have occupied the inner chamber without discomfort, but there was a regulation to the effect that eight (8) was to be the maximum number of men to be allowed in the manmitter at any one time. No one knew why such a regulation should have been made—but there it was. It was now a part of the

rites surrounding the mystery and had to be observed. It was the Army way.

After the four squads had made the jump, there remained a single soldier, a Negro private whose name Hansard was uncertain of (he was either Young or Pearsall)—and Hansard himself. A warrant officer informed Hansard that he had the option of making the jump with this soldier or going through alone afterward.

"I'll go now." It was more comfortable, in a way, to have company.

He tucked the attaché case under his arm and climbed up the ladder and into the antechamber. The private followed. They sat upon a narrow ledge and waited while the Trojan horse rolled slowly and smoothly toward the portal of the manmitter.

"Made many jumps, Private?"

"No sir, this is the first. I'm the only one in the company that hasn't been there before."

"Not the only one, Private. It's my first jump too."

The antechamber locked against the steel wall of the transmitter, and the portal opened inward with a discreet *click*. Crouching, Hansard and the private entered. The door closed behind them.

Here there were no special effects, neither rumblings nor flashing lights. The noise in his ears was the pulse of his own blood. The feeling in his stomach was a cramped muscle. As he had done in the practice session he stared intently at the sign stencilled with white paint on the wall of the vault:

CAMP JACKSON/EARTH
MATTER TRANSMITTER.

Then, in an instant—or rather, in no time at all, the sign had changed. Now it read:

CAMP JACKSON/MARS
MATTER TRANSMITTER

It was simple as that.

The instantaneous transmission of matter, the most important innovation in the history of transportation since the wheel, was the invention of a single man, Dr. Bernard Xavier Panofsky. Born in Poland in 1929, Panofsky spent his youth and early adolesence in a Nazi labour camp,

where his childhood genius first manifested itself in a series of highly ingenious, and successful, escape plans. Upon being liberated, so the story goes, he immediately applied himself to the formal study of mathematics and found to his chagrin that he had, independently and all ignorantly, re-invented that branch of mathematics known as *analysis situs*, or topology.

In the late Sixties and already a middle-aged man, Panofsky masterminded his final escape plan: he and three confederates were the last men known to have got over the Berlin Wall. Within a year he had obtained an Associate Professorship in mathematics at a Catholic university in Washington D.C. By 1970 topology was an unfashionable field, and even Game Theory, after a long heyday, was losing favour to the newer science of Irrationality. In consequence, though Panofsky was one of the world's foremost topologists, the research grant that he received was trifling. In all his work he never used a computer, never employed more than a single assistant, and even in building the pilot model of the transmitter spent only $18,560.00. There wasn't a mathematician in the country who didn't agree that Panofsky's example had set the prestige of their science back fifty years.

It is an almost invariable rule that the great mathematicians have done their most original work in their youth, and Panofsky had been no exception. The theoretical basis of the transmitter had been laid as long ago as 1943, when the 14-year-old prisoner, in fashioning his own topological axioms, naïvely evolved certain features discordant with the classical theories—chiefly that principle that became known as the Paradox of the Exploding Klein Bottle. It was to be the work of his next forty years to try to resolve these discrepancies; then, this proving impossible, to exploit them.

The first transmission was made on Christmas Day of 1983, when Panofsky transported a small silver crucifix (weight: 7.4 grams) from his laboratory on the campus to his home seven blocks away. Because of the circumstances surrounding this event, Panofsky's achievement was not given serious attention by the scientific community for almost a year. It did not help that the press insisted on speaking of the transmission as a "Miracle",

or that a shrewd New York entrepreneur, Max Brede (pronounced Brady), was selling replicas (in plated nickel) of the Miraculous Hopping Cross within weeks of the first newspaper stories.

But of course it was a fact, not a miracle, and facts can be verified. Quickly enough Panofsky's invention was taken seriously—and taken away. The Army, under the Emergency Allocation of Resources Act (rather hastily drawn up by Congress for the occasion) had appropriated the transmitter despite all that Panofsky and his sponsors (which now included not only his university, but General Motors and Ford-Chrysler as well) could do. Since that time Panofsky found himself once again a prisoner, for it was obviously contrary to the Nation's best interests that the mind that harboured such strategic secrets should experience all the dangers of freedom. Like the President and ten or twelve other "Most Valuable" men, Panofsky lived virtually under house arrest. To be sure, it was the most elegant of houses, having been specially constructed for him on a site facing the university campus, but the gilt of the cage did little to cheer the prisoner within, whose singular (and inadvertent) manner of escaping from those circumstances we shall have opportunity to consider later in this history.

The invention suffered a fate similar to the inventor's. The transmitters, as we have already seen, were even more fastly guarded than he, and they were used almost exclusively for defence purposes (though the State Department had managed to have its chief embassies provided with small, one-man models), to the despair of Panofsky and a minority of editorialists, both right and left, and to the secret relief of every major element of the economy. Understandably the business community dreaded to think what chaos would result from the widespread use of a mode of transportation that was instantaneous, weighed (in the final, improved model) a mere 49½ ounces, and consumed virtually no power.

Yet even in its military application the transmitter had changed the face of the earth. In 1983, the year of the Miraculous Hopping Cross, the Russians had established a thriving and populous base on the moon, while the United States had twice suffered the ignominy of having

lost the teams of astronauts they had tried to land in the Mare Imbrium. More than prestige was involved, for the Russians claimed to have developed a missile that could be launched from the moon with 50 per cent greater accuracy than the then presently-existing ICBM's, a boast made more probable by Russia's unilateral Earthside disarmament. International pressures began to mount that the U.S. follow suit, ignoring the fact that the Russian disarmament was more apparent than real. With the advent of the transmitter, the situation was reversed.

By 1985, thanks to its transmitters, the U.S. manpower on Mars exceeded Soviet lunar manpower by 400 per cent. All American nuclear weapons were removed to the neighbouring planet, and by 1986 world disarmament was a fact, if not a very significant one. For the sword of Damocles was still poised above the earth, and the thread by which it hung seemed more frayed than ever.

The missiles that were stockpiled on Mars were not, strictly speaking, to be launched from that planet, but rather they were to be transmitted thence to satellites in permanent orbit above enemy territory and these satellites, in turn, would relay them to their destinations. The satellites were clap-trap affairs, their only purpose being to keep aloft the 49½ ounces of receiving equipment—and a miniature radar that could trigger the self-annihilation of the receiver should any object approach it nearer than fifty feet—i.e., should the Russians try to kidnap one. Once at the satellite, each missile was programmed to home in on its target by itself.

If only the receivers could have been dispensed with! The strategists of the Pentagon sighed for that millenial possibility, but it was not to be: all their mathematicians confirmed Panofsky's assurance that transmission could only be made from one machine *here* to another machine *there*. If the necessity for that second machine, the receiver, had not existed, anything might have been possible. Anything—but particularly a conclusive end to the Cold War. A victory! For, with a means of delivering bombs *directly and instantaneously* from Mars to Russian soil . . .

From Mars? From anywhere—from the other end of the galaxy, if need be. Without the necessity of sending

a receiver on ahead to one's destination, distances were meaningless. Mars could be dispensed with; the satellites could be dispensed with; in the long run, with the universe at one's disposal, even Earth could probably be dispensed with.

But the receivers, alas, *were* necessary. The relay satellites were necessary. And Mars—or some such storehouse—was necessary.

And finally there was that necessity which all the other necessities took for granted—the necessity for Armageddon. Bombs, after all, are made to be dropped.

"Welcome to Mars, Nathan."

"It's good to be back, sir."

"To be—Oh, well, thank you. It's good to *have* you back. Sit down and tell me about the trip." General Pittmann sat down in one of two facing easy chairs, crossing his legs so that his ankle rested on his knee. He might have been a store mannequin, so perfectly did his tailored uniform drape itself about him while preserving immaculate its crease. Perfect, too, were the manicured nails, the thick hair just starting to grey, the deeply tanned and artificially weathered complexion, the unemphatic, slightly mocking smile.

"The trip was uneventful but never dull for a moment. This case, sir, contains a letter for you. Priority-A. I was instructed by General Foss to see you take it out of the case."

"Old Chatterbox Foss, eh? Here's the key, Nathan. Will you open it up for me? I've been expecting something on this order."

As General Pittmann read the letter the smile disappeared from his face, and a slight frown creased his brow, but even this seemed somehow decorative. "As I feared," he said, handing the letter to Hansard, who regarded it doubtfully. "Yes, read it, Nathan. It will ease my mind if someone else knows. I'll take my chances that you're not a security risk."

The letter directed that the total nuclear arsenal of Camp Jackson/Mars be released upon the enemy, who was unnamed, who did not need to be named, on the first day of June, 1990, according to existing Operational Plan

B. It was signed by President Lee Madigan and sealed with the Great Seal.

Hansard handed the letter back to his superior. "It hardly gives a person chance to breathe," he commented with calculated ambiguity.

The smile ventured a tentative return. "Oh, we have six weeks of breathing—and I'm certain that before the deadline falls due the order will have been rescinded. Yes, surely it will. This is mere brinkmanship. The news of the order will be leaked through the usual channels, and the Russians will negotiate whatever issue has brought the matter up. Jamaica, I should imagine, in this case. Also, Madigan has to show he isn't soft. How will they know to dread our bombs unless we're ready to drop them? We are ready to drop them, aren't we, Nathan?"

"The command isn't mine to give, sir."

"Nor mine. It is the President's. But it *is* ours to obey. It *is* our finger—mine or yours—" As if in demonstration, Pittmann lifted a single manicured finger in the immemorial gesture of the young Baptist. "—which must be prepared to press the button. But don't you feel, for instance, that such an action would be, as I've somewhere seen it called . . . genocidal?"

"As you've said, sir—the whole concept of a deterrent force is valueless if we refuse to employ it."

"Which doesn't quite answer my question."

"With your permission, sir—I don't think it's my place to answer such a question."

"Nor is it, indeed, mine to ask it. You're right, Nathan, sometimes it is the wisest course to step back from too precise a knowledge of consequences. That is part of the rationale, I'm sure, of our being on Mars and the Russians on the moon. We can take a more disinterested view out here."

"Out here . . ." Hansard echoed, gliding away from a subject he had little taste for. "It's strange, but I have no feeling yet of being out *here* at all. Camp Jackson/Mars and Camp Jackson/Virginia are so much the same."

"The sense of their difference will come all too quickly. But if you're in a hurry, you might visit the viewing dome and look out at the dust and the rocks and the dusty, rocky craters. Otherwise, we have few tourist attractions

here. The sense of difference lies more in the absence of Earth than in the presence of the dust and rocks. As you will find. Tell me, Nathan, have you wondered why you've been chosen for this assignment?"

"As your aide, sir."

"Of course—but I had upwards of a dozen aides in Washington, several of them closer than you, as chance would have it."

"Then I appreciate that you've chosen me from among them."

"It wasn't I who chose you—though I approve the choice—but the psychologists. We're here, you and I, mostly on account of our latest Multi-Phasics—those tests we took in December with all thoses dirty questions. It seems we are very solid personality types."

"I'm glad to hear it."

"It hasn't always been the case with you, has it, Nathan?"

"You've seen my file, sir, so you know. But all that happened in the past. I've matured since then."

"Maturity, ah yes. Undoubtedly we're mature enough for the work. We can do what has to be done, even if we don't quite like to give it a name."

Hansard regarded the general curiously, for his speech was most uncharacteristic of the terran Pittmann that Hansard had known. Mars was having an effect upon him.

"But all that is neither here nor there, and you must be anxious to see your quarters and look over the lovely Martian landscape. You'll be disillusioned quickly enough without my help. The great problem here is boredom. The great problem anywhere is boredom, but here it is more acute. The library is well-stocked though not exactly up-to-the-minute. The army usually seems to regard books less than ten years old as subversive. I suggest that you try something solid and dull and very long, like *War and Peace*. No, I forgot—they don't have that here. For my own part, I've been going through Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*. Some day, when the time lies heavier on your hands, remind me to tell you the story of Stilicho, the barbarian who was the general of the Roman Armies. A paragon of fidelity, Stilicho. Honorius, the Emperor he served, was some kind of cretin and spent all his time breeding poultry.

The Empire was falling apart at the seams, there were Goths and Vandals everywhere, and only Stilicho was holding them off. Honorius, at the instigation of a eunuch, finally had him assassinated. It was his only definitive act. It's a wonderful allegory, but I see you're anxious to sightsee. Officers' Mess is at thirteen hundred hours. As we two are the only officers here, I shall probably see you then. And, Captain—"

"Sir?"

"There's no need for you to frown so. I assure you, it's all brinkmanship and bluff. It's happened ten times before, to my sure knowledge. In a week or two it will be over.

"Or," the general added to himself, *sotto voce,* when Hansard had left the room, "in six weeks at the very limit."

three

The Echo

The antechamber locked against the steel wall of the transmitter, and the portal opened inward with a discreet *click*. Crouching, Hansard and the private entered. The door closed behind them.

Here there were no special effects, neither rumblings nor flashing lights. The noise in his ears was the pulse of his own blood. The feeling in his stomach was a cramped muscle. As he had done in the practice session, he stared intently at the sign stencilled with white paint on the wall of the vault:

CAMP JACKSON/EARTH

MATTER TRANSMITTER.

For the briefest of moments he thought the EARTH had flickered to MARS, but he decided his nerves were playing tricks, for EARTH, solidly EARTH, it had remained. He waited. It should have taken only a few seconds for the technician in the glass booths outside to flick the switch that would transfer them to Mars. Hansard wondered if something had gone wrong.

"They sure do take their own sweet time," the Negro private complained.

Hansard watched as the second-hand of his wristwatch

moved twice around the dial. The private seated across from him rose to his feet with an uncanny quietness and walked over to the portal, which here seemed no more than a hairline-thin circle drawn upon the solid steel. As a preventive measure against claustrophobia, however, a massive, functionless door-handle ornamented its surface.

"This son-of-a-bitch ain't working!" the private said. "We're *stuck* in this goddamn tomb!"

"Calm down, Private—and *sit* down. You heard what they said at the practice session about touching the walls. Keep your hand away from that handle."

But the private, thoroughly panicked, had not heard Hansard's words. "I'm getting *out* of here. I'm not gonna—"

His hand was only centimetres away from the door handle when he saw the other hand. It was freckled and covered with a nap of red hair. It was reaching for him through the wall.

The private screamed and stumbled backward. Even these clumsy movements were performed with that same catlike quietness. A second disembodied hand, differing from the first in that it held a revolver appeared. Then, bit by bit, the plane of the door surrendered the entire front of the body, so that it formed a sort of bas-relief. The private continued his muted screaming.

Hansard did not at first recognize the apparition as Worsaw. Perhaps, after all, it was not Worsaw, for Hansard had seen him only minutes before, in uniform and clean-shaven—and this man, *this* Worsaw, was dressed in walking shorts and a tee-shirt and sported a full red beard.

"Hiya, Meatball," he said (and certainly it was Worsaw's voice that spoke), addressing the private, who became silent once more. "How'd you like to be integrated?" A rhetorical question, for without waiting for a reply, he shot the private three times in the face. The body crumpled backward against—and partly through—the wall.

Hansard had heard of no other cases of insanity produced by transmittal, but then he knew so little about it altogether. Perhaps he was not mad but only dreaming.

Except that in dreams the dreamers should not be discountenanced by the bizarreness of the dream-world.

"That takes care of *one* son-of-a-bitch," the spectral Worsaw said.

Before the man's murderous inference could be realized, Hansard acted. In a single motion he threw himself from the bench and the attaché case that he had been holding at Worsaw's gun hand. The gun went off, doing harm only to the case.

In leaping from the bench Hansard had landed on the floor of the steel vault—or, more precisely, in it, for his hands had sunk several inches into the steel, which felt like chilled turpentine against his skin. This was strange, really very strange, but Hansard had for the time being accepted the logic of this dream-world and was not to be distracted from his immediate purpose—which was to disarm Worsaw—by any untimely sense of wonderment. He sprang up to catch hold of Worsaw's hand, but found that with the same movement his legs sank knee-deep into the insubstantial floor.

Hansard's actions would have been fatally slow, except that when the attaché case had struck him Worsaw had staggered backward half a step. Mere inches, but far enough that his face vanished into the wall out of which it had materialized. But the gun and the hand that held it were still within the vault, and Hansard, lunging and sinking at once, caught hold of the former.

He tried to lever the weapon out of Worsaw's hand, but Worsaw held fast to it. As he struggled, Hansard found himself sinking deeper into the floor, and the drag of his weight unbalanced Worsaw. Hansard gave a violent twist to the arm of the falling man. The gun fired.

And Worsaw was dead.

Hansard, waist-deep in chrome-vanadium steel, stared at the bleeding body before him. He tried not to think, fearing that if he ventured even the smallest speculation, he would lose all capacity for action. It was hard to maintain even the most provisional faith in the dream-world.

He found that if he moved slowly he was able to raise himself out of the floor, which then supported the full weight of his body in the customary manner of steel floors. He picked up the attaché case (even here in the

dream-world a Priority-A letter commands respect) and sat down carefully on the bench. Avoiding the sight of the two corpses, he stared intently at the sign stencilled on the wall of the vault:

CAMP JACKSON/EARTH
MATTER TRANSMITTER.

He counted to ten (no better strategy suggested itself), but the corpses were still there afterward, and when he poked the toe of his shoe at the floor, he punctured the steel with his foot. He was stuck in his dream.

Which was only a polite way of saying, he realized, that he was mad. But damn it, he didn't *feel* mad.

There was no time for finer flights of epistemology, for at that moment another man entered through the wall of the vault. It was Worsaw. He was bare-chested and wearing skivvies, and Hansard was glad to see that his hands were empty. The living Worsaw looked at the dead Worsaw on the floor and swore.

Now Hansard did panic—though in his panic he did a wiser thing than he could have conceived soberly. He ran away. He turned around on the bench where he had been sitting and ran away through the steel wall.

Coming out of the wall, he fell four feet and sank up to the middle of his calves in the concrete floor. Directly in front of him, not two feet away was one of the M.P.'s that guarded the manmitter.

"Guard!" he shouted. "Guard, there's someone—" His voice died in his throat as the hand that he had placed upon the guard's shoulder sank through his flesh as through a light mist of sea-spray. The guard gave no sign that he had felt Hansard's hand nor heard his voice.

But others did—and now Hansard became aware that the hall was filled with unauthorized personnel. Some of them Hansard recognized as men from his own company —though like the two Worsaws they were all bearded and dressed as though they were on furlough in Hawaii—and others were complete strangers. They moved about the hall freely, unchallenged by the guards to whom they seemed to be invisible.

Worsaw stepped out of the steel wall behind Hansard. He was holding the gun that had belonged to his dead

double. "All right, Captain, the fun's done. Now, let's see what you got in that briefcase."

Hansard broke into a sprint, but two of Worsaw's confederates blocked his path in the direction he had taken.

"Don't waste bullets, Snooky," one of these men shouted—a scrawny, tow-headed man that Hansard recognized as Corporal Lesh. "We'll get him."

Hansard veered to the right, rounding the corner of the manmitter. There, in a heap before the door of the Steel Womb, were half the men of "A" Company—all eight of the Negroes and five whites—in their uniforms and either dead or dying. Nearby was another, more orderly pile of bodies; here the remaining men of the company were bound up hand and foot. A second Lesh and a man unknown to Hansard stood guard over them with rifles.

Worsaw—the same Worsaw that Hansard had seen enter the manmitter with the last squad that morning—struggled to his feet and shouted, "Don't kill that bastard—you hear me. Don't touch him. I want him for myself."

Lesh, who had been raising his rifle to take aim at Hansard, seemed uncertain whether to heed his prisoner's request or kick him back into the heap. His doubt was resolved by the other Worsaw—the Worsaw with the revolver—who commanded Lesh to do as his double (or would it be triple in this case?) had ordered. "If the fourteen of us can't take care of a goddam fairy officer, then he deserves to get away."

Hansard was encircled, and each moment the circle narrowed. He stood with his back to the wall of the transmitter (upon which the Christmas-tree lights were festively a-burble once more) and considered whether to make a dash to the right or to the left—and then realized that his encirclement was only apparent, that there was a clear path to the rear.

He turned and leaped once more through the steel wall of the vault. Forgetting that the floor of the inner chamber was raised two feet above the floor-level of the hall, he found himself standing knee-deep in steel again.

Like a wading pool, he thought, and the thought saved his life, For, if he could wade in it, should he not be able equally to swim in it?

Filling his lungs, he bent double and plunged his whole body into the yielding floor. With his eyes closed and the handle of the attaché case clenched between his teeth (Priority-A is, after all, the ultimate security rating), he went through the motions of swimming underwater. His limbs moved through the metamorphosed steel more easily than through water, but he had no way of knowing if these motions were propelling him forward. There was no sensation, as there would be for a swimmer, of water flowing over his skin, but only a feeling through his entire body, internally as well as externally, of tingling—as though he had been dipped into a mild solution of pure electricity, could such a thing be.

He swam until he was sure that, if his swimming was having any effect at all, he was out of the hall. Then he changed directions, angling to the right. At least, starved for oxygen, he had to surface. He came up inside a broom closet. It was as good a place as any to catch his breath and gather his wits.

He rested there, only his head projecting out of the floor (his body, cradled in its substance, showed no tendencies either to rise or sink), fearful that his laboured breathing would betray his presence to the . . . What *were* they: mutineers? phantoms?

Or phantasms, the product of his own paranoia?

But he knew perfectly well that he was not mad, and if he ever were to become mad he would not have inclined in the direction of paranoia. He had taken an MMPI only last December, and Pittmann had shown him the results. It was scarcely possible to be more sane than Nathan Hansard.

In the dim light that filtered into the closet through the crack under the door, Hansard could see motes of dust riding in the air. He blew at them, but his breath did not affect their demure Brownian movements. Yet he could feel the movement of that same air against his fingertip.

Conclusion? That he, and the crew that had come baying after his blood, were of another substance than the physical world they moved in. That he was, in short, a spirit. A ghost.

Was he, then, dead. No—for death, he had long ago

decided, was mere insentience. Or, if he had died inside the transmitter and this *were* some sort of afterlife, the system of Dante's Inferno was evidently not going to be of any use as a guide.

Whatever had happened had happened during the time Hansard was in the transmitter. Instead of going to Mars at the moment of the jump, there had been a malfunction and his new immaterial condition (for it was simpler to assume that it was himself that had changed and not the world about him) was its result.

And all the other wraiths—the three separate Worsaws, the two Leshes, the pile of corpses—were *all* of them the result of similar malfunctions? The bearded Worsaw, he who had first stepped into the vault and would now step out of it no more, was probably, by this theory, the product of some earlier transmission breakdown—but what then of the two *other* Worsaws? Where had they come from? From subsequent breakdowns, presumably. But this would mean that the original Worsaw who had gone through the machine—the *real* Worsaw—had continued the course of his own life in the real world, served his term of duty on Mars, and returned to Earth—and made the Mars jump again. Twice again, counting today's jump. And this *real* Worsaw went on with his life in complete ignorance of the existence of the doppelgangers splitting off from him. And if all this were true . . .

Then there would be another Nathan Hansard too, on the Mars Command Post, of whom he—the Nathan Hansard resting in the concrete floor of the broom closet—was a mere carbon copy resulting from the imperfect operation of the transmitter.

Though for all he knew, this was its normal function.

In support of his theory, Hansard recollected that there had been a moment within the transmitter when he had thought he'd seen the word EARTH flicked to MARS. *Had* he made the jump to Mars and then bounced back like a rubber ball in that briefest of moments when the operating switch was flicked on?

Like a rubber ball, or like . . . an echo.

But this was not the time nor the place to elaborate ingenious theories. Worsaw and his confederates were

undoubtedly searching the building and the grounds for him at this moment. He ducked back beneath the floor and swam on through the foundations, surfacing only for air to get his bearings—now bobbing up into an office full of silent, industrious clerks (for there were no noises in this dream-world except the sound of his own breathing), then into an empty corridor or unfurnished room (with which the building seemed to abound, like some gigantic coral reef). It was several minutes before he was outside the labyrinth of the security complex, in the sunlight of the April noonday, where he saw—but was not seen by—two of Worsaw's bearded friends.

It would not do to remain in Camp Jackson. He had lost the cap of his uniform in the transmitter or in his flight from the hall, so that he would be conspicuously out-of-uniform here. Among the throngs of the city, however, he would be as good as invisible, since if he refrained from walking through walls there were no visual evidences of his dematerialized state.

He considered how he could travel the ten miles into downtown D.C. most quickly. *Not* by swimming. Ordinarily he would have taken the bus . . .

It felt strange to pass out the gate of Camp Jackson without showing a pass or I-D. The city-bound bus was waiting at the kerb. Hansard got on, careful to walk lightly so that his feet would not pass through the floor, and took an empty seat by a window. A moment later a private sat down in the same seat—and in Hansard. Hansard, much shaken, moved to the seat across the aisle.

The bus started up slowly, and Hansard was able to keep from sinking all the way through his seat. Each time the bus accelerated or decelerated Hansard was in danger of slipping out of the vehicle altogether. At a traffic light just before the bridge over the Potomac, the bus braked suddenly and Hansard somersaulted through the seat in front of him, down through the floor of the bus and the transmission, and deep into the roadway itself.

After that he decided to hike the rest of the way into the city.

four

The Real World

In witnessing the foregoing remarkable events, it may have occurred to the reader to wonder how he would himself have reacted in Hansard's circumstances, and if this reader were of a sceptical temperament he might very well question the plausibility of Hansard's so-sudden and so-apt adjustment to the enormous changes in the world about him. Yet this hypothetical sceptic shows the same ready adaptability every night in his dreams. Hansard, in those first perilous minutes, was living in a dream, and his actions showed the directness and simplicity of the actions of a dreamer. What had he done, after all, but flee from the face of danger? It can be objected that Hansard was *not* dreaming, but can we be so sure of that yet? When else, in the usual course of experience, does one walk through steel walls? So that it is not really so wonderful that Hansard should have fallen into a half-dreaming state and been able to act so naturally amid so much that was unnatural. Perhaps our sceptical reader might even allow that, with wind in the right direction, he might not have acted entirely differently himself. At least he should not discount the possibility.

Hansard did not shake off this sense of unreality at once. Indeed, with the occasion for action past, with nothing to do but explore and reflect, this sense grew, and with its growth he felt the beginnings of dread, of a subtle terror worse than anything he had experienced in the hall outside the transmitter. For it is possible to flee the figures of the nightmare, but there is no escape from the nightmare itself but waking.

The worst of it was that none of the people that he passed on the city's streets, nor the drivers of cars and buses, nor clerks in stores, *no one,* would look at him. They disregarded Hansard with an indifference worthy of God. Hansard stood between the jeweller and his lamp, but the wraith's shadow was as imperceptible to the jeweller as was the wraith himself. Hansard grasped the diamond in his own hand; the jeweller contined his care-

ful cutting. Once, when he was crossing a street, a truck turned the corner and, without even ruffling Hansard's hair, drove straight through him.

It was as though he were a beggar or deformed, but in that case they would at least have looked away, which was some sort of recognition. No, it was as though each one of them had said to him: *You do not exist,* and it became increasingly difficult not to believe them.

So that Hansard walked through this unheeding, intangible city as through a dream-landscape, observing but not understanding it, not even endeavouring as yet to understand it. He walked past the immemorial, unmemorable white stoneheaps of the capital buildings: the unfenestrated mausoleum that housed the National Gallery, the monumental Yawn of the Supreme Court, the Capitol's Great White Wart, and that supreme dullness, the Washington Monument. Though he had lived in the district of Columbia for the last eight years, though he had passed these buildings almost daily, though he even supposed that he admired them, he had never seen them before. He had always regarded them with the same unseeing, reverential eyes with which he would have regarded, for instance, his nation's flag. But now, curiously (for architecture was far from being his immediate concern), he saw them as they were, with the veil of the commonplace ripped away. Why, he wondered, did the capitals of the columns burst into those Corinthian bouquets? Why, for that matter, were the columns there? Everything about these buildings seemed arbitrary, puzzling. Presumably they had been built for human purposes—but what purpose can be served by a 555-foot obelisk?

He stood beneath the blossoming, odourless cherry trees and tried to argue against the horror mounting within him.

At those rare moments when the skin of the world is peeled away and its substance laid bare before us, the world may assume either of two aspects—benign or malignant. There are those sublime, Wordsworthian moments when Nature apparels herself in celestial light, but there are other moments too, when, with the same trembling sensibility, the same incontrovertible sureness,

we see that the fair surface of things—all flesh, these white and scentless blossoms, the rippled surface of the reflecting pool, even the proud sun itself—are but the whiting on the sepulchre, within which . . . it were best not to look.

Hansard stood at such a brink that first afternoon—and then he drew back. Once already in his life, long ago and in another country, he had stepped beyond that threshold and let himself see what lay there, so that this time he was able to foresee well in advance that such a moment threatened again. (The symptoms were clear: a minacious cold seemed to settle over him, followed by a feeling of hollowness that, originating in the pit of his stomach, spread slowly to all his limbs; his thoughts, like the music on a record played off-centre on a turntable, moved through his consciousness at eccentric *tempi,* now too fast and now too slow). He foresaw what was to be and he resisted it. This is not an easy thing to do. Most of us are passive before our strongest emotions, as before one of the Olympian gods. Even Medusa-headed horror has an allure, though we won't often admit it, and when we do surrender ourselves to her it is with averted eyes and the pretence that we are not helping out.

The same reader who may at first have tended to overvalue Hansard's quick reflexes in the face of an immediate danger may now be inclined to value his struggle with the "Medusa" too lightly or not at all. Let such a reader be assured of the reality of this peril. Had Hansard succumbed to these feelings—had he, slipping into solipsism, let himself believe that the Real World was not any longer as real as it had been, then we would either have a much shorter and sadder tale to tell or we would have had to find another hero for it.

But for all that, it is true that a man in good health can bear a few hours of supernatural terror without lasting ill effect. The worst fear, after all, is of the known rather than the unknown—a truth that Hansard became aware of as soon as he realized, about sunset, that the hollow feeling in the pit of his stomach was a symptom of more than malaise, that it was simply hunger pangs. And worse than the hunger pangs was his thirst.

In restaurants he could see people eating, but their food—like all matter that belonged exclusively to the Real World—sifted through his fingers like vapour. He could not turn a water faucet nor lift a glass, and if he could have it would have availed him nothing, for the water of the Real World was as insubstantial as its solid matter. Hansard stood in a public fountain and let the water cascade through his body without dampening his clothes, or his thirst. It began to seem that his sojourn in the dream-world might not be of much longer duration than a dream. How long could one go without food or water? Three days? Four?

But what then of Worsaw and the others in Camp Jackson? To judge only by the length of their beards these men were veterans of the dream-world, from which it was only reasonable to suppose that there was someplace in this city ghostly food and ghostly drink to satisfy his most unghostly appetites. He had only to find it.

If the theory he had developed earlier that day concerning the cause of his changed condition were correct, there could be but one source of the food that sustained Worsaw and Co.: it had to originate from a transmitter, just as they themselves had. The "ghost" of food that had been transmitted to Mars would be, logically, the only food a ghost could eat; the "ghost" of water would be the only water a ghost could drink.

And would the same not hold true of air as well? Did Hansard breathe the same air that the residents of the Real World breathed—or another air, the "ghost" of theirs? If the latter were the case, that would explain the strange silence of the dream-world, in which the only noises audible to Hansard were the noises he made himself, and these, in turn, were inaudible in the Real World. The air that bore the sound waves Hansard produced was a different medium from the air of the Real World.

It was a theory easily confirmed or disproven. The transmitters that supplied the Mars Command Post with a constant fresh supply of both air and water were located beneath the D.C. dome, just outside the eastern perimeter of Camp Jackson itself.

As the simulated daylight of the domed city modulated

from dusk to darkness, Hansard walked back toward Camp Jackson on the delicate snow-crust of the sidewalks, occasionally popping his toes through the thin membrane of the surface. He had discarded his military hat and jacket, depositing them with his attaché case inside the thick walls of the Lincoln Memorial, where, invisible to all eyes, Hansard was certain a Top-Priority secrecy could be preserved indefinitely. His tie was loosened, and his shirt open at the collar, despite the discomfort this caused him. Except for the officer's stripe down his pant's leg, he should pass for a pedestrian of the Real World—or so he hoped.

Hansard arrived at the barricade about the Mars "pipelines" an hour after the false twilight of the domed city had dimmed to extinction. The D.C. dome was composed of two shells: the inner was an energy-screen designed late in the 1970's as a defence against the neutron bombs. Had it ever been put to the test, the unhappy residents of the city would have found it no more effective a defence than a magic pentagram drawn with the fat of a hanged man—an awesome but an empty symbol. Subsequent to its erection, however, this energy dome was found to have the pragmatic property of supporting a second outer dome, or skin, of plastic. Soon, from this single phenomenon, an entire technology had developed, and now it was possible to build outer-domes substantial enough to act as a weather shield over areas twelve miles in diameter and able to support a complex of lighting and ventilation systems as well.

The Mars pumps stood just outside Camp Jackson, since they were officially administered by NASA, though in fact by the Army. Accordingly it was Army guards who patrolled the barrier built about the pumping stations. Hansard need take no heed of either guards or barrier, but he did, if his theory was correct, have to be wary not to encounter any of the other men of Company "A", for this would be their only source of water as well as Hansard's.

Within the barrier the grounds sloping up to the concrete pumphouse were attractively landscaped—for the benefit, apparently, of the inner guards, since the barrier prevented anyone else from seeing them. Hansard lowered

himself into the earth and swam slowly up the hill through lawn and flowerbeds.

Reaching the pumphouse and having satisfied himself that he was alone, Hansard again assumed a standing posture and walked through the concrete wall of the building.

And found himself drowning.

The entire pumphouse was filled with water—real liquid water, or rather, unreal water of the sort that an unreal Hansard might drink, or drown in. Instead of floundering back through the wall, Hansard swam upward. The water rose to a height of fourteen feet, which was yet a few feet less than the high ceiling of the building. Surfacing, Hansard's ears popped.

The surface of the water was brightly lighted by the illuminated panels of the ceiling, and Hansard could see that the water in the centre of this strange reservoir was bubbling furiously. Remarkable as these phenomena were, Hansard's first consideration was to quench his thirst and be gone. He could fit these facts to his theories at his leisure.

Regretful that he could carry back no water to the city except what was sloshing about in the toes of his shoes, Hansard returned on the bus—this time, without mischance. He got off outside the New St. George, a hotel that in the ordinary scheme of things he would have never been able to afford. At the reception desk he informed himself of the number of an unoccupied suite and found his way to it up the stairs (he suspected that the hotel's elevators would start and stop too quickly for him to be able to keep from popping out through the floor). Once in possession of his rooms, he realized that he might just as well have gone to a flophouse, for he was unable to turn on the light switch. Shivering in his damp clothes, he went to sleep in the midst of the suite's undoubtable, but darkened, luxury. He slept on a canopied bed, but he would have been just as comfortable, after all, in the floor.

He woke with a bad head-cold and screaming.

It had been so many years since he had had the dream that he had been able to convince himself that he had rid

himself of it. The dream always concluded with the same image, but it might begin in a variety of ways. For instance:

He was there. Drenched. Mud up to his thighs. A buzzing somewhere, always a buzzing. Always wet. Always knowing that the enveloping greenness was made green by wishing for his death. Always bodies, scrapheaps of bodies along the muddy road. He was very young. He didn't always want to look. "I won't look," he said. Whenever he was there, in that country, in his dreams, he knew how young he was. But you could look at anything if you had to. And diseases, lots of diseases. And always something that buzzed.

The people of that country were very little. Little adults, like the children in the paintings of the Colonial period. Their faces were children's faces. He could see long rows of their faces pressed up against the wire. He was carrying pots of cooked rice. When they spoke it sounded more like screaming than speech. The compound always got fuller. Every part of the fence was filled with their faces. They asked for "incendigel" which seemed to be the word for rice in their country. This part of the dream could never have happened, he knew, except in the unreal world of dreaming, because an officer would not have carried the pots of rice himself. A private would have done that. But in the dream it was always Hansard who carried the pots of rice, or "incendigel," and the little people stared at him hungrily, wishing for his death.

It was not a credible world, not in the sense that, for instance, Milwaukee or Los Angeles were real and credible. It was a dream-world of little half-people who could not speak unless they screamed.

And there was a lady in the middle of the road with most of her head missing. The medic cut open her belly and took out the baby. "It's going to live," he said.

"Thank God," said Hansard.

"Burn it all down," said the captain. The little men behind the wire fence began screaming when the interpreter told them what the captain was saying. They tried to get out, and the captain had to use tear gas, though he didn't want to, since supplies were limited this far inland.

He was there, in the fields. It was a hot, windless noonday. The grains were swollen with their ripeness. The flamethrowers made a buzzing sound. Far across the blackened field a small figure waved at Hansard as though in greeting. "Welcome, welcome," he was screaming, in his strange language.

He was screaming. He found that he had fallen through the bed. He was looking up into the bedsprings. He stopped screaming and clambered up through the mattress into daylight.

"I've stopped dreaming," he said aloud. "That was all a dream, it never happened." Though this was not strictly true, it helped him to hear himself say it. "And now it's all over, and I'm back in the Real World."

But despite these reassurances and the good advice implicit in them that he should turn to daylight matters now, he could not keep from remembering that one moment of the dream—when he had been looking out through the wire fence at Captain Hansard carrying that big pot of rice. His mouth watered. He was hungry. He was so hungry and he had no food.

five

The Voyeur

One of the minor provisions of the Emergency Allocation of Resources Act had been that the various transmitters built by the government were to be situated in different states. As soon as the first receiver had made the long rocket-journey to Mars and landed, materials for the construction of the Command Posts (of which there were six) were transmitted from Texas, California, and Ohio. Camp Jackson/Virginia, because it was under the D.C. dome, was an obvious choice for the location of the one transmitter through which the personnel staffing the Command Posts was provided. Food, nonperishable goods, and artillery, however, were still supplied through the California and Ohio transmitters.

It would have been a simple enough matter to stow away in the back of a Real World truck or train bound from Washington to Cincinnati, but it was certain that if he did he would arrive in a severe, not to say fatal,

state of anoxic anoxemia. For the air that Hansard breathed here in the city was not the air of the Real World, but the dematerialized air created by the transmitters and kept from dispersing by the dome above the city. Outside the dome, on the open highway or in another city, his store of dematerialized oxygen would be quickly dissipated. The dome kept him alive—but it also kept him a prisoner.

Yet there had to be food of some sort coming through the transmitters, for the men of Camp Jackson were surely sustained by more than air and water. And since the greatest aid to solving a problem is knowing that it can be solved, Hansard need not and did not panic.

Whatever food they were eating had to be going through the Camp Jackson transmitter, and since only personnel went through the transmitters it must be that the men were bringing food with them to Mars—probably concealed in their duffels. Though this was against regulations, it was a commonplace practice since the Command Post lacked a PX. But how could they know to bring *enough*?

Unless there was a way, which Hansard had yet to discover, of communicating with the inhabitants of the Real World . . .

Reluctant to return to Camp Jackson during the day, Hansard bethought himself of some other way that he might put the day to good use—and remembered that the State Department had been provided with a small manmitter by means of which they were able to transport personnel to overseas embassies. If anyone were to go through this manmitter today, it would be well for Hansard to be on hand: Hansard could gain an ally for himself, and the new ghost would be spared considerable anguish in learning to cope with his changed condition.

It would be too much to hope that the possible State Department traveller would be bringing food with him. Nevertheless, Hansard hoped just that.

As he went out of the New St. George, Hansard stopped at the cashier's box and made out a personal cheque in the amount of $50.00, which he placed in the hotel's locked safe. It was not a wholly whimsical gesture, for Hansard had a highly-developed conscience and he

would have suffered a pang of guilt to have skipped out on a hotel bill.

He did not know in which of the several State Department buildings the small manmitter would be located, but it was a simple matter to find it by searching through the various corridors for heavy concentrations of armed guards. When he did find it, at four in the afternoon, it was immediately apparent that he had not been the first to search it out.

The walls and floor of the small anteroom adjoining the manmitter were covered with delicate traceries of dried blood, which no cleaning woman would ever remove, for they were not of the Real World. When Hansand touched a fingertip to one of these stains, the thin film crumbled into a fine powder, like ancient lace. There had been murders here, and Hansard was certain that he knew the identity of the murderers.

And the victims? He hesitated to think of what distinguished men had used the State Department's manmitter during recent months. Had not even the then-Vice-President Madigan travelled to King Charles III's Coronation via this manmitter?

Hansard, rapt in these sombre considerations, was startled by the sudden flash of red above the door of the manmitter's receiver-compartment, indicating that a reception had just been completed. There was a flurry of activity among the guards in the anteroom, of whose presence Hansard had been scarcely aware till then.

The door of the manmitter opened, and a strange couple came out: an old man in a power-wheelchair and an attractive black-haired woman in her early thirties. Both wore heavy fur coats and caps that were matted with rain. A guardsman approached the old man and seemed to engage him in an argument.

If only I knew how to lipread, Hansard thought, not for the first time.

His attention had been so caught up by this scene that he was not at once aware of the voices approaching the anteroom in the outer corridor. Voices: it could only be . . .

Hansard dodged first behind the couple in fur coats, then surveyed the room for a vantage from which he

could eavesdrop without being seen. The guard who was addressing the man in the wheelchair had been sitting at a desk, and by this desk was a wastebasket. From the centre of the room the contents of the wastebasket would be invisible.

Hansard lowered himself into the floor, careful not to allow his body to slip through the ceiling of the room immediately below, for it was only so—immersed in the "material" of the Real World—that gravity seemed to lose its hold on him. At last he was totally enveloped except for his head, which was out of sight in the wastebasket. And none too soon—for by the sudden clarity of the intruders' voices, Hansard knew he was no longer alone in the room.

"I told you this would be a waste of time," said a voice that seemed tantalizingly familiar. Not Worsaw's, though it had something of the same Southern softness to it.

A second voice that could only have belonged to the Arkansan Lesh whined a torpid stream of obscenities in reply to the first speaker, to the general effect that he, being of an inferior nature, should shut up.

A third speaker agreed with this estimate and expanded upon it. He suggested that the first speaker owed himself and Lesh an apology.

"I apologize, I apologize."

"You apologize, *sir.*"

"I apologize, sir," the first voice echoed miserably.

"You're goddam right, and you'd just better remember it too. We don't *have* to keep you alive, you know. Any time I'd like, I could just saw your fat head off, you son of a bitch, and if it wasn't for Worsaw I'd of done it long ago. I should smash your face in, that's what I should do."

"Ah, Lesh," said the third speaker, "don't you ever get tired of that crap? What time is it anyhow?"

The first voice, which Hansard still could not place, said, "The clock over the desk says four-fifteen. And that means that Greenwich Mean Time would be ten-fifteen, and all the embassies in Europe will be shut down. There may still be a few people, like that old cripple, coming back *here,* but that isn't going to help *us* any."

"You think you're pretty goddamn smart, don't you?" Lesh whined.

"There's probably something to what he says though," the third voice put in. "There ain't any point sitting around here if nobody else is going through. Leastwise, *I* got better things to do."

Lesh, after a few more obscenities, agreed. Their voices faded, as they left the room.

Hansard decided to follow them. He risked little in doing so, for, in his present state, concealment took little effort, and escape perhaps less. He dropped through the floor into the room below, and his momentum took him through the floor of that room in turn—and so on, into the basement. This method of descent allowed him time to be outside the building and hidden from sight before the three men had exited from the front door. The man whose voice had seemed familiar to Hansard walked behind the other two (who carried rifles) and was bent under the weight of a field pack, so that it was not possible to see his face. The two armed men mounted a Camp Jackson-bound bus, leaving their companion to continue the journey on foot, for with the added weight of the pack and the consequent increase in momentum he would probably not have been able to stay inside the vehicle.

When the bus was out of sight, however, this figure removed his back pack and laid it in the middle of a shrub, then turned down a street in a direction that carried him away from Camp Jackson.

A canteen swung from his cartridge belt. Hansard needed that canteen for himself. He removed the field pack from the shrubbery and "buried" it hastily in the sidewalk, then set off after the vanishing figure in a soundless pantomime of pursuit: a lion padding after an inaudible quarry through a silent jungle.

After several turnings, they entered an area of luxury apartment buildings. The figure turned in at the main entrance of one of these buildings. Hansard, reluctant to follow him inside (for he might have joined more of his confederates within), waited in the doorway of the building opposite. An hour passed.

With misgivings—for he had never till now intruded upon the private lives of dwellers in the Real World—

Hansard began his own exploration of the building, starting at the top floor and working his way down through the ceilings. He encountered families at dinner or stupefied before the television, witnessed soundless quarrels, and surprised people in yet more private moments. A suspicion of his quarry's intent in coming here grew in Hansard's mind, and in Apartment 4-E this suspicion was confirmed.

Hansard found him he sought in the apartment of an attractive and evidently newlywed couple. In the twilit room the man was sitting upon their bed and pretending to guide, with his intangible touch, the most intimate motions of their love. While the voyeur's attention was thus directed toward the lovers, Hansard approached him from behind, slipped his tie around the man's throat, and tightened the slip-knot. The voyeur fell backward off the bed, and Hansard saw now for the first time who his enemy had been: Colonel Willard Ives.

Hansard dragged Ives, choking, out of the bedroom. He wrested away the man's canteen and drank greedily from it. He had been all day without water.

While Hansard was drinking from the canteen, the colonel attempted to escape from him. Two evenings ago, in Ives' office, it would have been unthinkable that he should ever have occasion to assault his superior officer, but the circumstances were exceptional, and Hansard performed that unthinkable action with scarcely a scruple. Afterward he gave Ives his handkerchief to stop the bleeding of his nose.

"I'll have you court-martialled for this," Ives snuffled, without much conviction. "I'll see that you— I'll teach you to—"

Hansard, whose character had been made somewhat unpliable by fourteen years of military life, was not without retroactive qualms. "Accept my apologies, Colonel. But I can hardly be expected to regard you in the light of my superior at the moment—when I see you obeying the orders of a corporal."

Ives looked up, eyes wide with emotion. "You called me *Colonel*. Then, you know me . . . back there?"

"I was talking with you in your office only two nights ago, Colonel. Surely you remember?"

"No. No, not with me." Ives bit his lower lip, and Hansard realized that this was not, in fact, the same man. This Ives was a good seventy-five pounds lighter than his double in the Real World, and there were innumerable other details—the shaggy hair, the darker complexion, the cringing manner—that showed him to be much changed from his old (or would it be his other?) self. "*I* was never a colonel. I was only a major when I went through the manmitter two years ago. Sometimes he brings me to my office—to the Colonel's office—and humiliates me there, in front of him. That's the only reason he wants me alive—so he can humiliate me. Starve me and humiliate me. If I had any courage, I'd . . . I'd . . . kill myself. I would. I'd go outside the dome . . . and . . ." Choking with pity for himself, he was obliged to stop speaking.

"He?" Hansard asked.

"Worsaw. The one you killed in the manmitter. I wish you'd killed all three of him, instead of just one."

"How many men—of our sort—are there in Camp Jackson?"

Ives turned his gaze away from Hansard's. "I don't know."

"Colonel—or Major, if you prefer—I should not like to hurt you again."

"Wouldn't you? I doubt that. You're just the same as Worsaw. You're all the same, all of you. As soon as the discipline is gone, you lose all sense of what's right and decent. You betray your allegiance. You murder and rape. You act like . . . like jungle savages—all of you."

"It doesn't seem to me, Major, that you're in a good position from which to offer moral instruction. Let me repeat my question: how many—"

"Seventeen, twenty, twenty-four—the number varies. Oh, you think you're so fine and upstanding, don't you! So damn *white*! They always do when they're new here, before they've had to . . . had to eat their . . ." He trailed off in vacancy.

"What, Major? What is it you eat here? Where do you get your food?"

Ives' eyes dropped in a mockery of shyness to contemplate the buttons of Hansard's shirt. His smile twisted

with a slight, enigmatic contempt for the man who held him prisoner. It was, in fact, the characteristic smile of a prisoner—who, though powerless, knows what distance separates himself, exalted in his guilt, from the common run.

With horror Hansard realized what the men of Camp Jackson were living on. His horror was all the more potent because he also knew that this realization had been with him from the first moment he had seen the pile of corpses outside the portal of the manmitter. For he had assessed the situation correctly: all the food that sustained Worsaw and his men would have to have come to them through the transmitter.

He knew this, yet even now he refused to believe it. "Then all those men who went through the transmitter, *all* of them . . ."

"Those niggers, you mean? You're a Northerner, aren't you, Captain? Only a Northerner would call a bunch of niggers men."

"You foulness! You corruption!"

"You wait, Captain—wait till you get hungry enough. The day will come that you'll wish you had a piece of nigger-meat to put in your belly. You talk about us now, but just wait. Worsaw was the one who saw the way it had to be. He had the strength . . . and the . . . and the foresight to do what had to be done. So that we got the niggers and the nigger-lovers before they got *us*. He's kept us alive here. No one else was able to; only Worsaw. I was . . . afraid to face facts, but Worsaw went right ahead and did it. He's a . . ." The colonel began to choke again, but he finished his testimonial first. ". . . a good man."

"I recall that you said the same thing when last we met." Hansard rose to his feet.

"Where are you going?" Ives asked anxiously. "You won't tell *him* what I've been telling you? I'm not supposed to be here. I—"

"I'm hardly likely to have many conversations with your master, Ives. I'm going now, but you just stay here. Or go back in the bedroom if you like, and wallow in your filth. As long as you can't infect *them*, it can't matter."

Hansard was at the door when Ives called upon him in a strangely muffled tone. Hansard looked back. Ives was sitting on the floor, his face buried in his hands.

"Captain, please! I beg of you, Captain! Do this one thing—do it, I beg of you. I don't have the strength myself, but *you* could. Oh, for the love of God, *please*!"

"You want me to kill you—is that it, Major?"

"Yes," Ives whispered into his hands, "oh yes."

"You can go to hell, Major—but it will have to be under your own steam."

When Hansard left him, Ives was crying.

He proceeded back immediately to where he had hidden Ives' field pack. He pulled it out of the sidewalk; in the pool of light beneath a street lamp, he unbuckled it. The flesh that still adhered to the gnawed bones had a slightly carrion odour. Hansard dumped the charry remains into the ground and pushed them down beyond arm's reach. At the bottom of the pack there was a .45 automatic pistol and ammunition, wrapped in a plastic poncho. This Hansard kept for himself.

It was after sunset, time to return to the reservoir and fill his canteen. But when he began walking his legs betrayed him and he had to sit down. Likewise, his hands, as he put a clip of ammunition into the automatic, were trembling.

He was not terrified that the men at Camp Jackson would get him. He was confident that he could prevent that. He *was* terrified that he might get one of them—once he was hungry enough. And then? How much farther was it possible to sink then? He might have asked Ives while he had the chance.

six

Scene with a Small Boy

For a while food and sleep can replace each other. Knowing this, Hansard refrained from purposeless activities, went on no more idle walks, and found a residence for himself on the Virginia side of the Potomac, nearer to his water supply. After his encounter with Ives, the idea of intruding upon the privacy of residents of the Real

World was more than ever distasteful to him; on the other hand, he valued his own privacy and did not want to make his home in a public concourse. The Arlington Public Library provided a happy compromise. When there were people there, they behaved sedately; it was open evenings, so Hansard did not have to spend the time after sunset in darkness; even the silence of this world, so unnatural elsewhere, seemed fitting here. At such times as Hansard could no longer pretend to himself that he was asleep (he had made the basement stacks his special burrow), he could come upstairs and read, over the shoulders of whoever was in the library that day, fragments and snippets of a variety of things, as Providence saw fit to furnish: the College Outline synopses of *A Farewell to Arms*, and *Light in August*, and diverse other Great Old Novels that were required reading in Arlington high schools; paradigms of Bantu verbs; back-number spools of the *Washington Post*; articles on how to develop hard, manly arms, on how to retire gracefully, on how to synthesize potatoes; and several graceful anecdotes from the lives of Christopher Robin and Pooh Bear . . .

It was a mistake to go into the children's room and read the Milne book, for it opened his heart wide to the temptation that he had all this while been strong enough to ignore. His wife and son lived beneath the D.C. dome. He could visit them with no more effort that it would take to get on an S-S-bound bus.

Since the divorce, Hansard's ex-wife had managed to make do on her meagre alimony by moving into government-subsidized Sergeant Shriver Manors, popularly known as the S-S, a model development of the early 70's and now the city's most venerable slum. (*Really* poor people, of course, had to squat out in the suburbs, breathing the poisonous air of the megalopolitan landscape). Hansard had been able to see his son, who was now eight years old, one weekend each month, but there had always been a constraint between father and son since the divorce, and Hansard still tended to think of Nathan Junior as the insouciant, golden-haired four-year-old who had listened with solemn attention to the adventures of Winnie the Pooh. The present Nathan Junior was therefore, in his father's eyes, something of an usur-

per—with very tenuous claims to the title of true son or to Hansard's affection. An injustice, surely—but an injustice that no amount of fair treatment could expunge; the heart listens to no reasons but its own.

With Ives' example before him, Hansard should have known better than to surrender to this temptation. *Only a glimpse,* he told himself. *I won't look at anything they wouldn't want me to see.* Could he really deceive himself so far as to credit these sophistries? Apparently not, for as the bus was passing near the Washington Monument, Hansard had second thoughts and dismounted.

He walked along the edge of the reflecting pool. He had grown so accustomed to his altered condition that as he debated with himself he did not dodge the lower branches of the cherry trees but passed through them unheedingly. He knew better than to believe the tempter's whispered *"Just this once."* No, there would be a second time, if he let there be a first—and a third time, and more. There is no food that can sate curiosity.

Curiosity? the tempter argued. *Merely that*? *Isn't there love in it too*?

Love is reciprocal, the conscientious Hansard replied. *What has a phantom like me to do with love*? *And besides* (and this was the crux of it) *there is no love there any more.*

It can be seen that the debate had insensibly shifted its focus from Nathan Junior to Marion, and the tempter cleverly pointed this out. *Don't go for her sake, then, but for his. It is your duty as a father.*

The tempter's arguments became weaker and weaker, his true purpose more transparent. Hansard would surely have resisted him, had not a curious thing happened at that moment . . .

Across the reflecting pool he saw, among the many tourists and lunch-hour strollers, a woman—and this woman seemed for a moment to have been looking at him. She was a handsome woman, about Marion's age and, like Marion, a blonde. It was impossible, of course, that she had seen him, but for a moment he had been able to believe it. He strode up to the edge of the pool (but there he had to stop, for the water of the Real World did not sustain a swimmer's weight as the land would)

and called to her: "Hello there! Hello! Can you see me? Wait—listen! No, no, stay a while!" But already she had turned away and was walking toward the Capitol and out of sight.

Then Hansard knew that despite all his good resolves he would become, like that man he had so much detested, a voyeur. He would trespass against his wife's and son's privacy. For it was not within him, nor would it be within any of us, to endure the unrelenting terror of his perfect isolation and aloneness amid the throngs of that city, where every unseeing pair of eyes was a denial of his existence. If that seems to overstate the case, then let us say, instead of aloneness, alienation. We will all agree that there is little chance of coping with *that*.

We have observed earlier that Hansard was very little a man of his own times and that even in ours he would have seemed rather out-of-date. Alienation, therefore, was for him a thoroughly unfamiliar experience, though the word had been dinned into his ears in every humanities course he'd ever taken (which had been as few as possible). So that, despite a well-developed conscience of the old-fashioned, post-Puritan sort, he was singularly ill-equipped to handle his new emotions. The bottom seemed to be dropping out—as though existence had been a hangman's trap which now was sprung. He felt a hollowness at the core of his being; he felt malaise; he felt curiously will-less, as though he had just discovered himself to be an automaton, as in a sense he had. In his innocence, he showed symptoms of a classic simplicity, like the dreams of some forest- or mountain-dweller, someone far beyond the pale, who has escaped even the mention of Freud's name. There is no need, therefore, to go into great detail here, except to remind the knowing reader that though Hansard experienced his first bout of the *nausée* at a rather advanced age (for that unfortunate experience that had required his presence some years before in an Army mental hospital could not fairly have been said to be "alienation" in the sense we employ here), it was no less devastating for that. Indeed, as is so often the case when an adult comes down with a childhood disease, it was rather worse.

The practical consequence was that he got back on the

bus, but not without first resorting to his cache in the wall of the Lincoln Memorial and taking out the jacket of his uniform. Then, replacing the attaché case in the wall and very carefully straightening his tie (his concern with a good appearance was proportional to his intent to do wrong), he set off . . . downwards.

She was sprawled on the living-room tuckaway—the tuckaway that had been their wedding gift from his parents—smoking and reading a personalized novel (in which the heroine was given the reader's own name). She had let herself grow heavier. It is true that a certain degree of stoutness had been fashionable for the last two years. Even so, she was beginning to exceed that certain limit. Her elaborate hairdo was preserved inviolate in a large pink plastic bubble.

There was a man in the room, but he paid little attention to Marion and she as little to him. His hairdo was likewise protected by a bubble (his was black), and his face was smeared with a cream that would give it that "smooth, leathery look" that was so much admired this year. A typical Welfare dandy. He was performing isometric exercises in a kimono that Hansard had brought back from Saigon for Marion, who had then been his fiancée.

The surprising thing was that he was not jealous. A little taken aback perhaps, a little disapproving—but his disapproval was more of her generally lax style of life than of the presence of another man. Adultery he could not countenance (and, in fact, he *had* not), but Marion was free now to do as she liked, within the limits of what was commonly accepted.

Love? Had he, so little time as four years ago, loved this woman? How can emotion vanish so utterly that even its memory is gone?

Marion rose from the tuckaway and went to the door to press the buzzer opening the downstairs entry (her apartment was on 28), then disappeared into the kitchen. She had left her book open on the table beside the couch, and Hansard bent over to read a passage from it:

Marion Hansard, sitting up on the bed, glanced into the mirror of the vanity. There were times, and this was one

of them, when Marion was startled by her own beauty. Usually she didn't think of herself as especially attractive, though she had never been and never would be drab. But how could Marion Hansard hope to compete with the dark-eyed beauties of Mexico City, with their raven hair and haughty, sensual expression?

Hansard looked away from his ex-wife's romance with the same embarrassment he would have felt had he walked in upon her in the performance of a shameful act. He made up his mind to leave the apartment.

Then his son came in the room.

It must have been to let him in that Marion had risen from the couch. His hair was darker than Hansard remembered, and he had lost another milk tooth. Also, he was dressed more poorly than when he went for a weekend expedition with his father.

The man in the black hair-bubble spoke to Nathan Junior in an equable manner, and Hansard was more than ever assured that he enjoyed resident status in his ex-wife's apartment. Marion returned from the kitchen and also addressed her son, whose cheeks were beginning to colour. He seemed to be protesting what his mother had just told him or commanded him to do. More than ever Hansard was distressed by the vast silence of this world. It may be amusing for a few moments to watch a television with the sound cut off, but it is quite another thing when you see the words spilling soundlessly from your own son's lips. The man in the black hair-bubble concluded what must have been an argument by pushing Nathan Junior gently but firmly into the outer hall and locking the door behind him. Hansard followed his son into the elevator. He knew from experience that no elevator in S-S Manors could move quickly enough to be any danger to him.

S-S Manors had been so designed that children played on the high roof-tops instead of cluttering up the sidewalks and streets below. The architects had designed their lofty playground with considerable imagination and poor materials, and now the labyrinth, the honeycomb of playhouses, and the elaborate jumble-gym were all in the first stages of disintegration. Originally a cyclone fence had screened in the entire play area, but there were only

a few shreds and tatters of that left. Even the guardrails were broken through in places.

As soon as Nathan Junior came out of the elevator he was herded into the labyrinth by an older boy. Hansard followed him inside. The twisting concrete corridors were jammed with children, all as small or smaller than his son. Any kind of games were out of the question here. The rest of the playground was monopolized by the older boys for their own games.

Nathan Junior fought his way to a group of his own friends. They stood together whispering, then the seven of them ran pell-mell out of the labyrinth toward that corner of the roof where a game of isometric baseball was in progress. The leader of the escapees (not Nathan Junior) caught the ball and ran with it back to the labyrinth. Nathan Junior, not being a very good runner, lagged behind and was caught by one of the older boys.

This boy—he was about fourteen—took hold of Nathan Junior by the ankles, turned him upside down, and carried him to the edge of the roof where the fencing had been caved through. He held the smaller boy, twisting and screaming (though for Hansard it happened in dumbshow), out over abyss. It was a sheer drop of thirty-five storeys to the street. He let go of one ankle. Hansard had to turn away. He told himself that what he was seeing was a common experience, that it had probably happened to every one of the children up here at one time or another, that his son was in no real danger. It helped not at all.

At last the torture was brought to an end, and Nathan Junior was allowed to return to the little prison that the architects had unwittingly provided. *I'll leave now,* Hansard told himself. *I should never have come here.* But he was no more able to follow his own good advice than he had been to help his son. He followed him into the labyrinth once more. Nathan Junior pushed his way through to where his friends were, and immediately he struck up an argument with a slightly younger and smaller boy. The victim became the aggressor. A fight started, and it was clear that the smaller boy stood no chance against Nathan Junior, who was soon sitting on his chest and

pounding his head against the concrete surface of the roof.

"Stop it!" Hansard yelled at his son. "For God's sake, stop it!"

But Nathan Junior, of course, could not hear him.

Hansard ran out of the labyrinth and down the thirty-four flights of stairs to the street. In his haste he would sometimes plunge through walls or trample over the residents of the building who used the stairwells as their community centre, *faute de mieux*. But at street level he had to rest. He had not eaten for five days. He was very weak. Without having intended to, he fell into a light slumber.

And he was there again, in the country that was so intensely green. But now it was black, and a buzzing was in his ears. It was black, and the flame thrower was in his hands, his own hands. The little boy who had broken out from the stockade—he could not have been more than four years old—was running across the blackened field toward him. Such a small boy, such a very small boy: how could he run carrying that heavy carbine? His arms were too short for him to raise it to his shoulder, so that when he fired it he had to let the devastated earth itself receive the recoil. He ran forward, screaming his hatred, but for some reason Hansard could hear nothing but the buzzing of the flame thrower. He ran forward, such a very small boy, and when he was close enough Hansard let him have it with the flame thrower.

But the face that caught fire was no longer a little Chink face. It was Nathan Junior's.

When Hansard, considerably weakened by his exertions of the afternoon, returned to the reservoir that night to drink and fill his canteen, he found that the high barrier that had been built around the pumping station was being patrolled by Worsaw's men. Through the night the men kept doggedly to their posts. From a distance Hansard reconnoitred their position and found no flaw in it. The lamps of the Real World shone brightly upon the streets surrounding the barrier, and there was no angle from which Hansard might approach near enough un-

seen to the barrier to be able to swim the rest of the way underground.

At dawn the men surrendered their posts to a second shift. *They must be running out of meat,* Hansard thought. His canteen had given out. He had very little strength left. In a siege he had no doubt that they would outlast him.

And therefore, he decided, *I shall have to make my raid tonight.*

He returned to the library stacks to sleep, not daring to go to sleep within hearing range of his hunters, for it was only too likely that he would wake up screaming. He usually did now.

seven

Sciamachy

Since there was a danger that he might exhaust all his strength in rehearsals, after the second trial run he rested on the library steps and basked in the warm airs of late April. He could not, so weak as this, so hungry as this, take much satisfaction in mere warmth and quiet—unless it could be called a satisfaction to drift off into cloudy, unthinking distances. The sun swooped down from noonday to the horizon in seeming minutes. The simulated stars of the dome winked on, winked off.

Now.

He walked over to the Gove Street intersection. Half a mile further down, Gove Street ran past the pumping station. A number of cars were stopped at the intersection for a red light. Hansard got into the back seat of a taxi beside a young lady in a mink suit. The taxi did not start off with too sudden a jerk and Hansard was able to stay on the seat.

The pumping station came in sight. The taxi would pass by it many feet nearer than Hansard would have been able to approach by himself. He took a deep breath and tensed his body. As soon as the taxi was driving parallel with the barrier Hansard leaped through the floor and down into the roadway. He could only hope that he had vanished into the pavement before either of the men

guarding this face of the barrier had had a chance to notice him.

He had rehearsed the dive, but not the swimming. Earlier he had discovered that without the onus of necessity he possessed neither the strength nor the breath for a sustained effort. This was not a clear guarantee that, given the necessity, he *would* find the strength. It is all very well to praise the virtues, but strength is finally a simple matter of carbohydrates and proteins. It was a chance he had to take.

A foolish chance—for already he could feel his strength failing, his arms refusing another stroke, his lungs demanding air, taking control of his protesting will, his arms reaching up, to the air, his body breaking through the surface, into the air, his lungs, the air, ah, ah yes.

And it was not after all a failure, not yet, for he had come up seven feet the other side of the barrier. Seven feet! he would have been surprised to find he'd swum that far altogether.

Ives had said there were at least seventeen men, probably more. Two men guarded each of the four faces of the barrier, and they worked in two shifts: that would account for sixteen. And the seventeenth, wouldn't he be guarding the reservoir itself?

He would be.

He would be Worsaw.

Reasoning thus, Hansard decided in spite of his weariness to swim up the hill. It wasn't necessary to go the whole distance in a single effort. He stripped for easier swimming, hung the .45 he had taken from Ives' pack in a sling fixed to his belt, then, inchmeal, keeping as much as possible within the interstices of flowerbeds and shrubs, he advanced up the slope. He could see guards about the station, but they seemed to be guards of the Real World.

Swimming, he thought of water, of the dryness in his throat, of water, the water filling the immaterial shell of the pumping station. He had since his first visit here developed a theory to account for what he had seen then. The ghostly water produced by the echo-effect of transmission was contained by the floor and walls of the station, just as the ground of the Real World supported the ghostly Hansard. (The *why* of this was as yet obscure to

him, but he was pragmatist enough to content himself with the *how* of most things). When the pressure of the mounting water became too great, the excess quantity of it simply sank through the floor of the station. Just so, Hansard could submerge himself in the ground by entering it with sufficient force. As for the turbulent bubbling he had observed, that was undoubtedly caused by the "echo" of the air that the other pump was producing as it transmitted air to the Mars Command Posts. The air-pump was below the level that had been attained by the water, and so the ghostly air would be constantly bubbling up through the ghostly water and escaping through the skylight in the ceiling.

About thirty feet from the station, Hansard was confronted with a blank stretch of lawn from which the nearest cover—a plot of tulips, was eight feet distant. Hansard decided to swim for it underground.

He came up on the wrong side of the flowerbed and was blinded at once by the beam of a flashlight. He ducked back into the ethereal subsurface with Worsaw's rebel yell still ringing in his ears. Below the surface he could hear nothing, though he deduced, from the sudden stinging sensation in his left shoulder, that Worsaw was firing at him.

Without knowing it was stupid or cunning, only because he was desperate and had no better plan (though none worse either), Hansard swam straight toward his enemy, toward where he supposed him still to be. He surfaced only a few feet away.

Swearing, Worsaw threw his emptied pistol at the head that had just bobbed up out of the lawn.

Hansard had taken out his .45, but before he could use it he had to fend off Worsaw's kick. The man's heavy combat boot grazed Hansard's brow and struck full-force against the hand that held the automatic. The weapon flew out of his hand.

Hansard had drawn himself halfway out of the ground, but before he could get to his feet, Worsaw had thrown himself on top of him, grabbing hold of Hansard's shoulders and pressing them back into the earth. Hansard tried

to pull Worsaw's hands away, but he was at a disadvantage—and he was weak.

Slowly Worsaw forced Hansard's face below the surface of the earth, into the airless, opaque ether below. Hansard grappled himself against the other man, not in an effort to resist him (he had too little strength for that), but to guarantee that when he went under Worsaw would go under with him. So long as they maintained the struggle, there was no force to prevent their sinking thus, together into the earth, eyes open but unseeing, down ineluctably, neither weakening yet, though surely the first to weaken would be Hansard. And then? And then, curiously, the chill turpentine-like substance of the earth seemed to give way to another substance. Hansard could feel the water—real and tangible—fill his nostrils and the hollows of his ears. The water within the building, seeping through the floor under its own pressure, had spread out to form a sort of fan-shaped watertable beneath the station. It was to the edge of this water table that the two men had descended in their struggle.

Worsaw's grip loosened—he did not assimilate novelty so quickly—and Hansard was able to break away from him. He swam now into the water table and upwards, and in a short time he was within the transmitting station, though still under water. He surfaced and caught his breath. If only Worsaw did not too quickly realize where . . .

But already Worsaw, deducing where Hansard had gone, had entered the transmitting station and was swimming up after him, like the relentless monster of a nightmare that pursues the dreamer through any landscape that is conjured up, which even when it has once been killed, rises up again to continue the pursuit.

Hansard took a deep breath and dived down to confront the nightmare. He caught hold of Worsaw's throat, but his grip was weak. Worsaw tore his hands away. Improbably, he was smiling, and his red hair and beard waved dreamily in the clear water. Worsaw's knee came up hard against Hansard's diaphragm, and he felt the breath go out of his lungs.

Then Hansard was unable to see any more. His upper

body was once more plunged into "solid" matter. Surely they had not already sunk as far as the floor in their struggle?

Suddenly Worsaw released his grip. Hansard fought free. He surfaced. The water was tinged a deep pink. Had his shoulder wound bled that much?

The headless corpse of ex-Sergeant Worsaw floated up lazily to the surface. Air was still bubbling out the windpipe.

Hansard did not at once understand: their fight had carried them into the transmitter itself. It was then that Hansard had found himself unable to see. Worsaw, pursuing his advantage unthinkingly, had entered the transmitter at a point several inches above Hansard's point-of-entry, and passed through the plane of transmission. The various molecules of his head had joined the stream of water that was being transmitted continuously to Mars.

Finding an area of water as yet untainted by the blood, Hansard drank, then filled his canteen. He dragged the decapitated body down through the water and outside the station. There he shoved it beneath a tulip bed. It was a better burial than he would have received at Worsaw's hands.

He checked the wound in his shoulder. It was superficial.

It seemed strange, now that he thought of it, that Worsaw's confederates had not come in response to the shots that had been fired. More than strange.

He looked about desperately for the lost .45.

Then Hansard heard it.

It sounded like a marching band advancing down Gove Street. From the prominence of the hill Hansard could see much of Gove Street, and it was filled with nothing but its usual swift stream of headlights. The invisible marching band became very loud. It was playing *The Stars and Stripes Forever.*

eight

Bridgetta

The same afternoon that Hansard had waited out, drowsy, hungry, half-aware, on the steps of the Arlington Library witnessed elsewhere a dialogue that was to be of decisive consequence for our story. Herewith, a small part of that conversation:

"*We* are all in agreement."

"But when aren't you, popsicle? *We're* in agreement too, you know."

"If it's a question of food, then one of us is perfectly willing to go without. We're already overpopulated, or we will be by tomorrow. Besides, I should think you'd *enjoy* a new face around here."

"It is not a matter of largesse, and you are mistaken to think that I could prefer any face to your own. Your cheeks are like pomegranates. Your nose like a cherry. You are another Tuesday Weld."

"For heaven's sake—Tuesday Weld is pushing *fifty*, grandfather!"

"Grandfather, indeed! I'm your husband. Sometimes I think you don't believe it. Is that why you want that young stud around here? So you can be unfaithful to me? Frailty, thy name is—"

"I should like to have the *opportunity*. What good is virtue that is never tried?"

"I am deeply hurt." Then, after a suitable pause: "But it is so typically American a name, like Coca-Cola on the tongue: Tuesday Weld."

"The Army's also typically American. But you won't give him a chance."

"*You* will, I'm sure, my darling. Is it his uniform you love him for?"

"He cuts a handsome figure in his uniform, I can't deny it."

"Off! I hate uniforms. I hate people from the Army. They want to destroy the world. They are *going* to destroy the world. And they would like to keep me prisoner for-

ever. God damn the Army. There is no justice. I am outraged."

She calmly: "But if they're going to destroy the world, it seems all the better reason why, while there's still time, we might show some charity."

"All right then, you can have his head on a silver platter. I knew from the first you wouldn't stop till you'd had your way. If you can find him before *they* do, you can bring him home and feed him a meal. Like a stray dog, eh? But if he makes messes, or whines at night . . ."

"We get rid of him, my love. Of course."

"Kiss me, popsicle. No, not there—on the nose."

Hansard walked down the slope to where he had left his clothes, dressed, hesitated, then walked through the wall built about the power station. Worsaw's confederates had disappeared. A very few late strollers passed by on the sidewalk, taxis and buses sped past in the street, and all these soundless goings-on were accompanied by the incongruous Sousa march-tune, as though a film were being shown with the wrong sound-track.

He was very weak. Indeed if it had not been for this supererogatory strangeness, he would very likely have let himself bed down for the night on the roof of the power station.

Among the strollers, a woman came down the street toward Hansard. Even worn down as he was, even knowing she was of the Real World and hence inaccessible, he could not help but notice her. In the lamplight her red hair took on a murky tinge of purple. And admirable eyes—what joke made them glint as they did now? The same, doubtless, that curled the corners of her lavender lips. And her figure—what could be inferred of it beneath the jumble of synthetic ostrich-plumes of her evening coat—that was admirable too. She reminded him . . .

The woman stopped on the sidewalk, not three feet away from Hansard. She turned to study the blank face of the wall behind Hansard. She seemed, almost, to be looking at *him*.

"I wish she were," he said aloud.

The smile on the woman's thin lips widened. The Sousa march was now very loud, but not too loud to drown the

sound of her laughter. It was a discreet laugh, scarcely more than a titter. But he had heard it. She lifted a gloved hand and touched the tip of a finger to the end of Hansard's nose. And he felt it.

"She *is*, she *is*," the woman said softly. "Or isn't that what you'd wished?"

"I—" Hansard's mouth hung open stupidly. Too many things needed to be said all at once, and the one that took priority was only a banal: "I—I'm hungry."

"And so, perhaps, are those other little men, who may still be watching our carcasses for all that John Phillip Sousa can do. And therefore I suggest that you follow me, keeping at a healthy distance, until we're well out of the neighbourhood. You have strength left in you for another couple miles, I hope."

He shook his head, and with no more ado she turned on her heels (a low heel, out of keeping with the elegance of coat) and returned in the direction from which she'd come. Halfway up Gove Street she reached into a window recess and took out a pocket radio and two miniature amplifying units. She turned the radio off, and the music ceased.

"Good thing they were playing Sousa," she commented. "A Brahms quartet wouldn't have been half as frightful. On the other hand, a little Moussorgsky . . . And by the way, here's a chocolate bar. That should help for now."

His hand trembled taking off the tinsel wrapping. The taste of the chocolate exploded through his mouth like a bomb, and tears welled from his eyes. "Thank you," he said, when he had finished eating it.

"I should hope so. But this is still not the place to talk. Follow me a little further. I know a lovely little place on ahead where we can sit down and rest. Are you bleeding? Do you need a bandage? No? Then, come along."

As he followed her this time, the paranoid suspicion came to him that she was fattening him up on chocolate bars, as the witch fattened Hansel, so that when it was time to cook him he'd make a better meal. It did not, then, occur to him that if she had a source of chocolate bars she wouldn't have to cook *him*. But he was very weak

and most of his attention had to be devoted, light-headed as he was, to the business of staying upright.

After a few turnings and short-cuts through opaque obstacles, she led him up the steps of a brightly-lighted Howard Johnson's. They sat across from each other in a green-and-orange plastic booth, where she presented him with a second candy bar and accepted his offer of a drink from the canteen.

"I suppose I should introduce myself," she said.

"I'm sorry. I seem to remember your face from somewhere, but I can't remember . . ."

"*But*—I was about to say—*I won't* introduce myself, not quite yet at least. Not until you've told me something about yourself."

With marvellous restraint Hansard pushed the remaining half of the candy bar aside. "My name is Nathan Hansard. I'm a Captain in the United States Army. Serial number—"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, this isn't a prisoner-of-war camp. Just tell me what's happened to you since you went through the manmitter."

When Hansard had finished his narrative, she nodded her head approvingly, making the high-piled hair (which was a much healthier shade of red under the incandescent light) to tremble becomingly. "Very noble, Captain. Really very noble and brave, as you realize full-well without *my* saying so. I see I was wrong not to have spoken to you yesterday."

"Yesterday? Ah, now I do remember. You were looking at me from the other side of the reflecting pool."

She nodded and went on: "But you can understand why we've had to be suspicious. Just because a man is good-looking is no guarantee he won't want to . . . put me in his cooking pot."

Hansard smiled. With the two candy bars eaten, he was able to concentrate more of his attention on the personal graces of his benefactress. "I understand. In fact I have to confess that I wasn't without suspicions of my own when I was following you up Gove Street a little while ago. You look so . . . well-fed."

"Ah, you have a smooth tongue, Captain. You'll turn my head with your flattery, sure. Another candy bar?"

"Not just now, thank you. And I must also thank you, I think, for saving my life. It was your radio, wasn't it, that turned them away?"

"Yes. I had been waiting farther up Gove Street, hoping I could spot you before they did. I didn't know where else to look, but I was certain the transmitter would be your only source of water. But you got through the wall without my ever seeing you. When I heard the gunshots, I had to assume you were already inside, and I turned on the radio full-blast. Once one has become accustomed to the silences of this world, music takes on a rather dreadful intensity. Or rather, I suppose, we're able to hear it the way it was meant to be heard."

"Well, again I must thank you. Thank you, Miss . . .?"

"Mrs."

"Excuse me. With your gloves on, I couldn't tell."

"But you can just call me Bridgetta. My husband calls me Jet, but I think that's vulgar. Of course, so does he—that's why he uses it. He thinks it's American to be vulgar. He doesn't understand that vulgarity isn't fashionable any more. It's because he first arrived in the States in the late Sixties that—"

"I'm afraid . . . I'm afraid you'll have to speak a bit more slowly. My mind isn't as quick as it would be if it had a full stomach."

"Excuse me. Panofsky."

"Panofsky?" He was more than ever lost.

"You asked my name, and that's what it is—Mrs. Panofsky, Bridgetta Panofsky, wife of Bernard. You've perhaps heard of my husband."

"God damn," Hansard said. "*God* damn."

There were many celebrities of that year—writers, actors, or criminals—who might have entertained as high an estimate of their own notoriety and of whom Hansard would have been as unaware as we today perforce must be, but the name Panofsky was known to everyone. Literally, to all. "I've heard of him, yes," Hansard said.

Bridgetta smiled coolly, allowing him time to reassemble his composure.

"Then that's why—" Hansard exclaimed, as he began to programme himself with remembered data.

"Yes," she said, "that's why we're like you—sublimated."

"Eh? I'm afraid I never had time to read Freud."

"Sublimated is only Bernie's word for being *this* way." Illustratively, she brushed her hand through a bouquet of plastic flowers that graced the formica tabletop. "You see, the powers-that-be have let Bernie equip the homestead with transmitters so he can carry on his research there. Bernie can do just about anything, if he tells them it's for research. Except drive out the front door. The existence of the transmitters in Elba—that's what we call the homestead—is strictly—what's the favourite word now for very, very private?"

"Priority-A."

"Just so. And for once the whole rigamarole has worked to his advantage. Since no one knows we have transmitters no one comes to bother us at Elba, as they do in the State Department."

"The State Department! I saw you there too—almost a week ago. I'm sure it was you, except your hair was another colour. And the man with you, in the wheelchair, that would have been Panofsky."

"Panofsky-Sub-One, if you saw him in the State Department"

"Again, slowly?"

"We use a numeral subscript to distinguish between our different levels of reality. For instance, there must be a Nathan Hansard on Mars now. He'd be Hansard-Sub-One, and you're Hansard-Sub-Two."

"But if you know the State Department manmitter is watched, why do you use it?"

"We only use it coming back from someplace, not going there. A week ago—where would we have been coming from? Moscow, I think. Borominska was premiering in a revival of Tudor's *Lilac Garden*. Bernie insisted on being there."

Hansard recalled now, from a long-ago article in *Time*, the fact that Panofsky was an ardent balletomane and made frequent—and instantaneous—excursions via manmitter to the world's ballet capitals throughout their seasons, these brief tours being the single concession that the government had agreed to make to Panofsky for the loss

of his freedom. At any performance of significance Panofsky was to be seen in the box of honour, or, at the intermission, outside his box, presiding regally over a strange *mélange* of Secret Service guards and ballet enthusiasts, always the dominating figure in such groups—even in his wheelchair.

"Tell me," she asked after a pause, "do you like me better as a redhead?"

"It's hard to decide. There's something to be said on both sides of the question."

She cocked her head slyly, smiling. "Say, Captain Hansard, I'm glad you're here."

"The feeling is mutual, Mrs. Panofsky. I'd rather be having a steak dinner with you than with 'A' Company."

"We'll have some fun together, Captain."

"But some food first?"

"Mmm." Bridgetta Panofsky leaned forward through Howard Johnson's formica tabletop and, apropos of nothing, she laid a gloved hand on Nathan Hansard's throat and slowly, deliberately, and a little insistently kissed his lips.

"Hey, you're married, remember?"

Her laughter was too self-assured to be due to embarrassment. "Such an old-fashioned *pickle,*" she commented, as she stood to leave. "But I rather like that."

Jesus Christ, Hansard thought to himself. He thought it with such force that he wasn't quite sure he had not said it aloud. For Hansard's moral sense was too finely formed to tolerate a double standard; the notion of an adultery with another man's wife was as noxious to him as, years before, his own wife's adultery had been. In any case, moral sense notwithstanding, he had scarcely had an opportunity yet to be tempted, nor was he, given that opportunity, in condition to respond to it.

Perhaps this was what she had in mind when Bridgetta said to him, as they left the restaurant: "First thing, we'll get some chicken broth into your belly, and then maybe some soft-boiled eggs. But no steaks—not for a day or so. Do you like curries? Bernie can make very good curries."

"Don't know. Never had a curry."

"Lord, you *are* a military man! I've always liked men

in uniform, but Bernie doesn't feel that way at all. Oh, now you've started blushing again. Really, you don't have the blood to waste on blushing, Captain."

"You'll have to excuse me," Hansard said stiffly.

"No, no," Bridgetta said, with an abrupt shift of mood, "you'll have to excuse *me*. You see, if the truth be told, Captain—if you would see what I'm feeling tonight, you'd see . . ." She broke off for a while, then, shaking her head as though in anger for her own awkwardness. "I'm afraid, that's all. And when a person is afraid, why then she reaches out. You know? Will you hold my hand at least? Like that. Thank you."

After they had walked on a way, he asked, "What are you afraid of?"

"Why, what is anybody afraid of, Captain?"

"I don't know."

"Of dying, certainly."

(Concluded next month)

conjugation

CHRIS PRIEST

EXTRACT FROM THE DIARY OF 1ST-CLASS SPACEMAN STOLANSKI.

New York and Kennedy, pleasant sight. Home, and six years' wandering. Wife? Jean and the kids . . . three at the last count. More? Not Jean. Faithful as a dog, my Jean.

Weather lousy. Goddam rain in September . . . clouds visible from here. Still in orbit . . . hell! So near to home.

Something wrong, though. What?

PART OF AN ADDRESS BY PROFESSOR T. N. WILLIAMSON, PhD, TO THE ALFRED KORZYBSKI INSTITUTE.

Circumstances of existence, and theories of evolution. Semantics with emphasis on language and communication of idea. Required integration and cohesion impossible without full development of parsing and syntax. Comprehension, for instance, of an idea without the necessary background information not entirely feasible.

MINOR PASSAGE FROM THE MS. OF AN UNFINISHED NOVEL BY KENNETH G. ROBBS.

The city, in its black mantle of night, with its covert impressions of movement, with its traffic and its arteries of steel, and its hive-bound humans. Two, man and girl, in love. Conversation:

"Your eyes and your hair. Beauty." This to Annette.

"Humour and understanding, Jack."

The man with a laugh on his face. Kiss in a doorway, and caresses beneath clothing. Stronger feelings of love and understanding. Taxi to her flat, and hurried intercourse in the dark. More conversation:

Annette: "My darling. So strong and smooth."

Jack: "All yours. Taken in love."

REPORT FROM THE NEWS-PAGE OF THE *New York Times.*

18th September, 2048. Kennedy Port, N.Y. Return from space: *Outwarder II.* Crew well, and equipment in order. Captain, Commander D.H. ("Dannie") Ross, in press-conference at V.I.P. lounge. Report: "Swell trip."

His wife, Miriam Avril Ross (29) and his two fine lads Mike (8) and Billy (6) the centre of attraction. Question to Mrs. Ross, about her husband's flight.

"Just happy. My Dannie back so soon."

FRAGMENT OF TAPE-RECORDED CONVERSATION AT THE NINTH ANNUAL REUNION OF THE LITERATURE RESTORATION SOCIETY.

"The apostrophe more vital in contemporary thought."

"How so?"

"Instanced example. *Finnegan's Wake* in early 20th-Century renaissance. The apostrophe ambivalent. The Wake *of* Finnegan? Or . . ."

"Your reasoning insecure."

"No no, unfinished development of my idea."

"Continuing? Apologies for interruption."

"The Wake of Finnegan. Or . . . Something else. What?"

ENTRY IN THE EMERGENCY-LOG OF FIRE-CHIEF WATSON, *Kennedy Port.*

9:19:48. 16:03 *hrs.*

Landing Area: TK. Co-ordinates 783/298.

Crew: Mitchison Cowley Atzatchek Pallini Kearley & Rico.

Scramble-code 19, buzzer in fire-dispersal building and klaxon on main building. Check with Central, explosion in *Outwarder II.* Selection: Tender F.

Arrival at point of explosion. Much smoke and debris. No immediate evidence of fire. Check.

Damaged space-module at approximately 15 deg. list. Utilisation of buttressing equipment: prompt forestalling of any danger of collapse. (Commendation: Atzatchek. Initiative and disregard for personal safety). Check.

Thorough inspection of space-module. Attached inventory of damaged equipment (per Cat. 109657) self-explanatory.

Return to fire-dispersal. Check.

TRANSCRIPTION (exp.) OF VIDEOTAPED NETWORK PLAY EARLY ON THE EVENING OF 17th SEPTEMBER.

End of sponsor's announcement. Fade.

Fade-in credits. ("MESCALINE PASSIONATE" Pt. III). Theme music.

Fade-out music and credits.

Scene: Hotel bedroom. Mescaline in bed, her back to the camera. Door (r.) and Francesca entrance. Bath-robe loose across her breasts.

MESCALINE (appreciative glance at F.)

This heat . . . intolerable.

FRANCESCA

Drink? Only cold thing here, water. Wonder-worker on whisky. (*Her hand at her robe. Slow movement of release.*)

MESCALINE (movement from bed to F.)

Frank.

BRIEF PRECIS OF THE REGULAR SCIENCE COLUMN IN THE LAST-KNOWN EDITION OF THE *Tribune*.

19 September. Damage to drive-compartment of *Outwarder II*. Not an explosion, as first. Spontaneous, total *implosion* perhaps. Drive-compartment a total ruin. Smoke still very evident. Tests in laboratory, on nature of the smoke, results widely varied. Non-igneous, non-toxic, no solid state yet discovered. Dispersion-quotient nonexistent; even in high winds.

Tests on the passed-water of the returned astronauts. Similar results. Blood-tests on 1st-Class Spaceman Stolanski, shortly prior to his sudden death, with same result. No evident unifying factor. Urine and blood with no state other than a liquid one? Smoke with no state other than gaseous? All totally inert?

UNUSED SCRIPT FOR AN ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT ON THE EVENING OF THE TWENTIETH. ORIGINAL CONTEXT NOW UNCERTAIN.

Our nation, historically sound, proven stable and wise, constant adversary of the warmonger, now at a new stage. Your government in the face of an adversary incomprehensible and intangible. The menace more terrible because so unimaginable. Your lives in continuance as before, yet under the shadow of something.

Only one question now. What?

The answer outside our comprehension. At present.

PART OF THE LAST NEWS-SHEET TO BE HANDED OUT IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO THE DECLARATION OF MARTIAL LAW IN ALL CITIES OF A POPULATION EXCEEDING 60,000.

9:20:48. Commander "Dannie" Ross, late of the *Outwarder*. Missing. Last sighting at Kennedy Port, in the vicinity of the wreck of his late ship. Search later: no trace of Ross. No possible means of exit from the field.

MESSAGE RECOVERED FROM THE WRECKAGE OF A BOEING STRATOSPHERIC, WASHED ASHORE ON LONG ISLAND REACH.

. . . flight otherwise routine. Most passengers and crew unconscious now. No reply from Kennedy. Baltimore: homing signal, but no other response. Landing impossible without base servos. Twenty minutes to ETA. Further attempt in ten minutes . . .

FRAGMENT OF PAPER FOUND ON THE BODY OF FIRE-TENDER OPERATIVE ATZATCHEK.

My buddies, in panic. Like a rabble. That noise, my God. Like a turbo, only worse. Close, too. And that smoke. Movement like water, except faster.

Then I look, and *Outwarder* has gone. What the hell? The smoke's still here, though. Wish I knew what to do.

The smoke's thickening, and the noise is getting louder. Holy Maria, what a racket! Wish I knew what—

PAVANE:

THE WHITE BOAT

In its first five issues our companion magazine sf IMPULSE featured Keith Roberts' story-cycle PAVANE. The stories postulate a present-day England controlled by a militant brand of Catholicism, in which various technological developments are anathema. Western civilisation exists without the benefits of electric power, radio and television, most forms of internal combustion, the hospital service and state education; equally there is no over-population problem, no arms race, no Bomb. Centred in Dorset and the West Country, PAVANE traces the growth of England from a semi-barbaric feudalism to independence and responsibility. We were very pleased to receive the opportunity to publish this fine story in the series.

BECKY HAD ALWAYS lived in the cottage overlooking the bay.

The bay was black; black because there a seam of rock that was nearly coal burst open to the water and the sea had nibbled in over the years, picking and grinding, breaking up the fossil-ridden shale to a fine dark grit, spreading it over the beach and the humped, tilted headlands. The grass had taken the colour of it and the little houses that stood mean-shouldered glaring at the water; the boats and jetties had taken it, and the brambles and gorse; even the rabbits that thumped across the cliff paths on summer evenings seemed to have something of the same dusky hue. Here the paths tilted, tumbling over to steepen and plunge at the sea; the whole land seemed ready to slide and splash, grumble into the ocean.

It was a summer evening when Becky first saw the White Boat. She'd been sent, in the little skiff that was all her father owned, to clear the day's crop from the lobster pots strung out along the shore. She worked methodically, sculling along the bobbing line of buoys; the baskets in the bottom of the boat were full and bustling, the great crustaceans black and slate-grey as the cliffs, snapping and wriggling, waving wobbling, angry claws. Becky regarded them thoughtfully. A good catch; the family would feed well in the week to come.

She pulled up the last pot, feeling the drag and surge of it against the slow-flowing tide. It was empty, save for the grey-white rags of bait. She dropped the tarred basket back over the side, leaned to see the ghost-shape of it vanish in the cloudy green beneath the keel. Sat feeling the little aches spread in shoulders and arms, narrowing her eyes against the evening haze of sunlight. Saw the Boat.

Only she didn't know then that White Boat was her name.

She was coming in fast and quiet, bow parting the sea, raising a bright ridge of foam. Mainsail down and furled, tall jib filling in the slight breeze. The calling of the crew came clear and faint across the water. Instinct made the girl scurry from her, pushing at the oars, scudding the little shell back to the shelter of the land. She grounded

on the Ledges, the natural moles of stone that reached out into the sea, skipped ashore all torn frock and long brown legs, wetted herself to the middle in her haste to drag the boat up and tie off.

Strange boats seldom came into the bay. Fishing boats were common enough, the stubby-bowed, round bilged craft of the coast; this boat was different. Becky watched back at her cautiously, riding at anchor now in the ruffled pale shield of the sea. She was slim and long, flush decked, a racer; her tall mast with the spreading outriggers rolled slowly, a pencil against the greying sky. As she watched, a dinghy was launched; she saw a man climb down to rig the outboard. She scrambled farther up the cliff, lugging the heavy basket with the catch; crouched wild as a rabbit in a stand of gorse, staring down with huge brown eyes. She saw lights come on in the cabin of the yacht; they reflected in the water in wobbling yellow spears. The afterglow flared and faded as she lay.

This was a wild, mournful place. An eternal brooding seemed to hang over the bulging cliffs; a brooding, and worse. An enigma, a shadow of old sin. For here once a great mad priest had come, and called the waves and wind and water to witness his craziness. Becky had heard the tale often enough at her mother's knee; how he had taken a boat, and ridden out to his death; and how the village had hummed with soldiers and priests come to exorcise and complain and quiz the locals for their part in armed rebellion. They'd got little satisfaction; and the place had quietened by degrees, as the gales went and came, as the boats were hauled out and tarred and launched again. The waves were indifferent, and the wind; and the rocks neither knew nor cared who owned them, Christ's Vicar or an English King.

Becky was late home that evening; her father grumbled and swore, threatening her with beating, accusing her of outlandish crimes. She loved to sit out on the Ledges, none knew that better than he; sit and touch the fossils that showed like coiled springs in the rock, feel the breeze and watch the lap and splash of water and lose the sense of time. And that with babies to be fed and meals to stew and a house to clean, and him with an ailing, coughing wife. The girl was useless, idle to her bones. Giving her-

self airs and graces, lazing her time away ; fine for the rich folk in Londinium maybe, but he had a living to earn.

Becky was not beaten. Neither did she speak of the Boat.

She lay awake that night, tired but unable to sleep, hearing her mother cough, watching between the drawn blinds the thin turquoise wedge of night sky ; she saw it pale with the dawn, a single planet burn like a spark before being swallowed by the rising sun. From the house could be heard a faint susurration, soft nearly as the sound the blood makes in the ears. A slow, miles-long heave and roll, a breathing ; the dim, immemorial noise of the sea.

If the boat stayed in the bay, no sound came from her ; and in the morning she was gone. Becky walked to the sea late in the day, trod barefoot among the tumbled blocks of stone that lined the foreshore, smelling the old harsh smell of salt, hearing the water slap and chuckle while from high above came the endless sinister trickling of the cliffs. Into her consciousness stole, maybe for the first time, the sense of loneliness ; an oppression born of the gentle miles of summer water, the tall blackness of the headlands, the fingers of the stone ledges pushing out into the sea. She saw, not for the first time, how the Ledges curved, in obedience it seemed to some cosmic plan, became ridges of stone that climbed the dark beach, curled away through the dipping strata of the cliffs. Full of the signs and ghosts of other life, the ammonites she collected as a child till Father Antony had scolded and warned, told her once and for all time if God created the rocks in seven days then He created those markings too. She was close to heresy, the things were best forgotten. She brooded, scrinching her toes in the water, feeling the sharp grit move and squeeze. She was fourteen, slight and dark, breasts beginning to push at her dress.

It was months before she saw the Boat again. A winter had come and gone, noisy and grey ; the wind plucked at the cliffs, yanking out the amber teeth of stone, sending them crashing and bumbling to the beach. Becky walked the bay in the short, glaring days, scrounging for driftwood, planks, broken pieces of boats, seacoal to burn. Now and again she would watch the water, thin brown face and brilliant eyes staring, searching for something she

couldn't understand out over the waste of sea. With the spring, the White Boat returned.

It was an April evening, nearly May. Something made Becky linger over her work, hauling in the great black pots, scooping the clicking life into the baskets she kept prepared. While White Boat came sidling in from the dusk, driven by a puttering engine, growing from the vastness of the water.

"Boat ahoy . . ."

Becky stood in the coracle and stared. Behind her the headland cliffs, heaving slowly with the movement of the sea ; in front of her the Boat, tall now and menacing with closeness, white prow cutting the water, raising a thin vee of foam that chuckled away to lose itself in the dusk. She was aware, nearly painfully, of the boards beneath her feet, the flapping of the soiled dress round her knees. The Boat edged forward, ragged silhouette of a man in her bows clinging one-handed to the forestay while he waved and called.

"Boat ahoy . . ."

Becky saw the mainsail stowed and neat-wrapped on its boom, the complication of cabin coamings and hatches and rigging ; up close she was nearly surprised to see the paint of White Boat could have weathered, the long jib-sheets frayed. As if the Boat had been nothing but a vision or a dream, lacking weight and substance.

The coracle ground, dipping, against the hull ; Becky lurched, caught at the high deck. Hands gripped and steadied ; the great steel mast rolled above her, daunting, as White Boat drifted slow, moved in by the tide.

"Easy there . . ." Then, "What're ye selling, little girl?"

From somewhere, a ripple of laughter. Becky swallowed, staring up. Men crowded the rail, dark shapes against the evening light.

"Lobsters, sir. Fine lobsters . . ."

Her father would be pleased. What, sell fish afore landing 'em, and the price good too? No haggling with Master Smythe up in the village, no waiting for the hauliers to fetch the stuff away. They paid her well, dropping real gold coins into the boat, laughing as she dived and scrabbled for them ; swung her clear laughing again, called to her as she sculled back into the bay. She carried with her

a memory of their voices, wild and rough and keen. Never it seemed had the land loomed so fast, the coracle been easier to beach. She scuttled for home, carrying what was left of her catch, money clutched hot in her hand; turned as White Boat turned below her in the dusk, heard the splash and rattle as her anchor dropped down to catch the bottom of the sea. There were lights aboard already, sharp pinpoints that gleamed like a cluster of eyes; above them the rigging of the boat was dark, a filigree against the silver-grey crawling of the water.

Her father swore at her, for selling the catch. She stared back wide eyed.

"*The Bermudan* . . ." He spat, hulking across the kitchen to slam dirty plates down in the sink, crank angrily at the handle of the tall old pump. "You keep away from en . . ."

"But f——"

He turned back, dark-faced with rage. "Keep *away* from en . . . Doan't want no more tellin' . . ."

Already her face had the ability to freeze, turn into the likeness of a dark, sculpted cat. She veiled her eyes, watching down at her plate. Heard above in the bedroom her mother's racking cough. There would be spatters of pink on the sheets come morning, that she knew. She tucked one foot behind the other, stroking with her toes the contour of a grimy shin, and thought carefully of nothing at all.

The exchange, inconclusive as it was, served over the weeks to rivet Becky's attention; the strange yacht began to obsess her. She saw White Boat in dreams; in her fantasies she seemed to fly, riffling through the wind like the great gulls that haunted the beach and headlands. In the mornings the cliffs resounded with their noise; in Becky's ears, still ringing with sleep, the birdshouts echoed like the creaking of ropes, the ratchet-clatter of sheet winches. Sometimes then the headlands would seem to sway gently and roll like the sea, dizzying. Becky would squat and rub her arms and shiver, wait for the spells to pass and worry about death; till queer rhythms and passions reached culmination, she stepped on a knifeblade, upturned in the boat, and slicing shock and redness turned her instantly into a woman. She cleaned herself, whimpering. Nobody

saw ; the secret she hugged to herself, to her thin body, as she hugged all secrets. Thoughts, and dreams.

There was a wedding once, in the little black village, in the little black church. At that time Becky became aware, obscurely, that the people too had taken the colour of the place ; an airborne, invisible smut had changed them all. The fantasies took new and more sinister shapes ; once she dreamed she saw the villagers, her parents, all the people she knew, melt chaotically into the landscape till the cliffs were bodies and bones and old beseeching hands, teeth and eyes and crumbling ancient foreheads. Sometimes now she was afraid of the bay ; but always it drew her with its own magnetism. She could not be said to think, sitting there alone and brooding ; she felt, vividly, things not readily understandable.

She cut her black hair, sitting puzzled in front of a cracked and spotted mirror, turning her head, snipping and shortening till she looked nearly like a boy, one of the wild fisherboys of the coast. Stroked and teased the result while the liquid huge eyes watched back uncertainly from the glass. She seemed to sense round her a trap, its bars thick and black as the bars of the lobster pots she used. Her world was landlocked, encompassed by the headlands of the bay, by the voice of the priest and her father's tread. Only White Boat was free ; and free she would come, gliding and shimmering in her head, unsettling. In the critical events of adolescence, after the fright her pride in the shedding of her blood, the Boat seemed to have taken a part. Almost as if from under the bright mysterious horizon she had seen and could somehow understand.

Becky kept her tryst with the yacht, time and again, watching from the tangles of bramble above the bay.

The sea itself drew her now. Nights or early iron-grey mornings she would slide her frock over her head among the piled slabs of rock ; ease into the burning ice of the water, lie and let the waves lift her and move and slap. At such times it seemed the bay came in on her with an agoraphobic crowding, the rolling heights of headlands grey under the vast spaces of air ; it was as if her nakedness brought her somehow in power of the place, as if it could then tumble round her quickly, trap and enfold. She would scuttle from the water, thresh into her dress ; the

awkwardness of her damp body under the cloth was a huge comfort, the cliffs receded and gained their proper aloofness and perspective. Were once more safe.

As a by-product, she was learning to swim.

That in itself was a mystery; she felt instinctively her father and the Church would not approve. She avoided Father Antony; but the eyes of icons and the great Christos over the altar would still single her out in services and watch and accuse. By swimming she gave her body, obscurely, to assault; entered into a mystic relationship with White Boat, who also swam. She needed fulfilment, the shadowy fulfilment of the sea. She experienced a curious confusion, a sense of sin too formless to be categorized and as such more terrifying and in its turn alluring. The Confessional was closed to her; she walked alone, carefully, in a world of shadows and brittle glass. She avoided now the touches, the pressures, the accidental gratifications of her body that came nearly naturally with walking and moving and working. She wished in an unformed way to proscribe at least a vague area of evil, reduce the menace she herself had sought and that now in its turn sought her.

The idea came it seemed of its own, unlooked for and unwanted. Slowly there grew in her, watching the yacht swing at her mooring out in the darkening mystery of the water, the knowledge that White Boat alone might save her from herself. Only the Boat could fly, out from the twin iron headlands to a broader world. Where did she come from? To where did she vanish so mysteriously, from where did she return?

The priest spoke words over her mother's grave, God looked down from the sky; but Becky knew the earth had taken her to squeeze and squeeze, make her into more black shale.

The Boat came back.

She was frightened now and unsure. Before, with the less cluttered faith of childhood, she had not questioned. The Boat had gone away, the Boat would return. Now she knew, that all things change and Change is forever. One day, the Boat would go and not come back.

She had passed from knowledge of evil to indifference; for this she felt herself already damned.

The thing she had rehearsed and dreamed of blended so with reality that she lived another dream. She rose silently in the black house, hearing the squabbling cough of a child. Her hands shook as she dressed; in her body was a fast, violent quivering, as if some electric force had control of her and drove her without volition. The sensation, and the mad thumping of her heart, seemed partially to cut her off from earthly contact; shapes of familiar things, chair backs, dresser top, doorlatch, seemed to her fingertips muffled and vague. She slid the catch back carefully, not breathing, listening and staring in the dark. It was as if she moved now from point to point with an even pace that could not falter or check. She knew she would go to the bay, watch the Boat up-anchor and drift away; her mind, complicated, reserved beneath the image others that would be presented in their turn, in sequence to an unimagined end.

The village was black, lightless and dead; the air moved raw on her face and arms, a drifting of wet vapour that was nearly rain. The sky above her seemed to press solidly, dark as pitch except where to the east one depthless iron grey streak showed where in the upper air there was dawn. Against it the tower of the church stood dark and remote, held out stiffly its ragged gargoyle ears.

In the centre of the bay a shallow ravine conducted to the beach a rill dribbling from the far-off Luckford Ponds. A plank bridge with a single handrail spanned the brook; the steps that led down to it were slimy with the damp. Once Becky slipped on a rounded stone; once felt beneath her pad the quick recoil of a worm. She crossed the bridge, hearing the chuckle of water; a scramble over wet rock and the bay opened out ahead, barely visible, a dull-grey vastness. On it, floating in a half seen mirror, the darker grey ghost of the Boat. She crossed the beach, toes sinking in grit, felt awkwardly with her feet among the planes of tumbled stone. The water rose to ankles and calves, half-noticed; before her was a faint calling, the hard *tonk-tonk-tonk* of a winch.

Rain spattered on the dawn wind, wetting her hair. She moved forward, still with the same mindless steadiness.

The stone ledge, the mole, sloped slowly, water slapping and creaming where it nosed under the sea. She floundered beside it, waist deep, feet in furry tangles of weed. Soon she was swimming, into the broad cold madness of the water. As the land receded she fell into a rhythm of movement, half hypnotic; it seemed she would follow White Boat, tirelessly, to the far end of the world. The aches increasing in shoulders and arms were unnoticed, unimportant. Ahead, between the slapping dark troughs of waves, the shadow of the boat had altered, foreshortening as she turned to face the sea. Grown above the hull a taller shade that was the raising of the gently flapping jib.

To Becky it seemed an accident that she was here, and that the sea was deep and the cliffs tall and the Boat too far off to reach. She nuzzled at the water, drowsily; but the first bayonet stab in her lungs started something that was nearly an orgasm, she shouted and retched and kicked. Felt coldness close instantly over her head, screamed and fought for air.

And there were voices ahead, a confusion of sounds and orders; the shape of the Boat changing again as she turned back into the wind.

There were hands on her shoulders and arms; something grabbed in her dress, the fabric tore, she went under again gulping at the sea. She wallowed, centred in a confusion of grey and black, white of foam, glaring red. Was hauled out thrashing, landed on a sloping deck, lay feeling beneath her opened mouth the smoothness of wood. The voices surged round her, seeming like the lap and splash of the sea to retreat and advance.

"That one . . ."

"Bloody fishergirl . . ."

The words roared quite unnecessarily in her ear, receded in their turn. She stayed still, panting; water ran from her; she sensed, six feet beneath, the grey sliding of the sea. She lay quiet, numbly, knowing she had done a terrible thing.

They fetched her a blanket, muffled her in it. She sat up and coughed more water, hearing ropes creak, the slide and slap of waves. Her mind seemed still dissociated from her body, a cool grey thing that had watched the other Becky spit and drown. She was aware vaguely of questions;

she clutched the rough cloth across her throat and shook her head, angry now with herself and the people round her. The movement started a spinning sickness ; she was aware of being lifted, caught a last glimpse of the black land-streak miles off as the boat heeled to the wind. One foot caught the side of the hatch as they lowered her ; the pain jarred to her brain, ebbed. She was aware of a maze of images, disconnected ; white planking above her head, hands working at the blanket and her dress. She frowned and mumbled, trying to collect her thoughts ; but the impressions faded, one by one, into greyness and silence.

She lay quiet, cocooned in blankets, unwilling to open her eyes. Soon she would have to move, go down and rake the stove to life, set the pots of gruel simmering and bubbling for breakfast. The house rolled faintly and incongruously, shivering like a live thing ; across beneath the eaves ran the chuckling slap of water. The dream-image persisted, stubbornly refusing to fade. She moved her head on the pillow, rubbing and grumbling, fought a hand free to touch hair still sticky with salt. The fingers moved back down, discovering nakedness. That in itself was a sin, to tumble into bed unclothed. She grunted and snuggled, defeating the dream with sleep.

The water made a thousand noises in the cabin. Rippling and laughing, strumming, smacking against the side of White Boat. Becky's eyes popped open again, in sudden alarm. With waking came remembrance, and a clawing panic. She shot upright ; her head thumped against the decking two feet above. She rubbed dazedly, seeing the sun reflections play across the low roof, the bursts and tinkles and momentary skeins of light. The cabin was in subtle motion, leaning ; she saw a bright yellow oilskin sway gently, at an angle from the upright on which it hung. Perspectives seemed wrong ; she was pressed against a six-inch wooden board that served to stop her rolling from the bunk.

The boy was watching her, holding easily to a stanchion. The eyes above the tangle of beard were bright and keen, and he was laughing. "Get your things on," he said. "Skipper wants to see you. Come up on deck. You all right now?"

She stared at him wild eyed.

"You'll be all right," he said. "Just get dressed. "It'll be all right."

She knew then the dream or nightmare was true.

Tiny things confused her. The latches that held the bunkboard, she had to grope and push and still they wouldn't come undone. She swung her legs experimentally. Air rushed at her body ; she scrabbled at the blankets, came out with a thump, took a fall, lost the blankets again. There were clothes left for her, jeans and an old sweater. She grabbed for them, panting. Her fingers refused to obey her, slipping and trembling ; it seemed an age before she could force her legs into the trews.

The companionway twitched aside to land her among pots and pans. She clung to the steps, countering the great lean of the boat, pulled herself up to be dazed by sunlight.

And there was no land. Just a smudge, impossibly far off across the racing green of the sea. She winced, screwing her eyes ; the boy who had spoken to her helped her again.

The skipper sat immobile, carved it seemed from buttercup-yellow oilskin, thin face and grey eyes watching past her along the deck of the Boat. Above him was the huge steady curving of the sails ; behind the crew, clinging in the stern, watching her bold-eyed. She saw bearded mouths grinning, dropped her eyes, twisted her fingers in her lap.

Before these people she was nearly dumb. She sat still, watching her fingers twine and move, conscious of the nearness of the water, the huge speed of the boat. The conversation was unsatisfactory, Skipper watching down at the compass, one arm curled easy along the tiller, listening it seemed with only the smallest part of his mind. The faces grinned, sea-lit and uncaring. She had jammed herself into their lives ; they should have hated her for it but they were laughing. She wanted to be dead.

She was crying.

Somebody had an arm round her shoulders. She noticed she was shivering ; they fetched an oilskin, wrestled her into it. She felt the hard collar scumble her hair, scratch at her ears. She must go with them, they couldn't turn back ; that much she understood. That was what she had wanted most, a lifetime ago. Now she wanted her father's kitchen, her own room again. Shipbound, caught in their tightly male and ordered world, she was useless. Their in-

difference brought the welling angry tears; their kindness stung. She tried to help, in the little galley, but even the meals they made were strange; there were complications, nuances, relishes she had never seen. White Boat defeated her.

She crawled forward, away from the rest, clung to the root of the mast with one arm round the metal hearing the tall halliards slap and bang, seeing the bows fall and rise and punch at the sea. Diamond-hard spray blew back; her feet, bare on the deck, chilled almost at once. The cold reached through the oilskin; soon she was shivering as each cloud shadow eclipsed the boat, darkened the milk green of the sea. The dream was gone, blown away by the wind; White Boat was a hard thing, brutal and huge, smashing at the water. She could work her father's little cockleshell through the tides and currents of the coast; here she was awkward and in the way. A dozen times she moved desperately as the crew ran to handle the complication of ropes. The calls reached her dimly, *stand by to go about, let the sheets fly;* then the thundering of the jib, scuffle of feet on planking as White Boat surged onto each new tack. Changed the angle of her decking and the flying sun and cloud shadows, the stinging attack of the spray. The horizon became a new hill, slanting away and up; Becky looked into racing water where before she had seen the sky.

They sent her food but she refused it, setting her mouth. She was sulking; and worse, she felt ill. She needed cottage and bay now with a new urgency, an almost ecstatic longing for solidness, for things that didn't roll and move. But these things were lost for all time; there was only the hurtling green of the water, fading now to deeper and deeper grey as the clouds grew up across the sun, the endless slap and tinkle of ropes, the misery at the churning pit of her stomach.

They offered her the helm, in the late afternoon. She refused. White Boat had been a dream; reality was killing it.

There was a little sea toilet, in a place too low to stand. She closed the lid and pumped, saw the contents flash past through the curving glass tube. The sea opened her stomach, brought up first food then chyme then glistening trans-

parent sticky stuff that bearded her chin. She wiped and spat and worked the pump and sicked over again till the sides of her chest were a dull pain and her head throbbed in time it seemed with the thumping of the waves. The voices through the bulkhead door she remembered later, in fragments, like the recalled pieces of a dream.

"Then we'll do that, skipper. Hitch a few pounds of chain to her feet, and gently over the side . . ."

The voice she knew. That was the boy who had helped her. The angry rising inflection she didn't know; that was the voice of Wales.

Something unheard.

"How can she talk man, what does she bloody know? Just a bloody dumb kid, see . . ."

"Make up the log," said the skipper bitterly.

"Don't you see, man?"

"Make up the log . . ."

Becky leaned her head on her arms, and groaned.

She couldn't reach the bunk. She arced her body awkwardly, tried again. The blankets were delicious heaven. She huddled into them, too empty to worry about the afterscent of vomit on her cothes. Fell into a sleep shot through with vivid dreams; the face of the Christos, Father Antony like an old dried animal, mouth champing as he scolded and blessed; the church tower in the pre-dawn glow, the gargoyle ears. Then flowers dusty in a cottage garden, her mum bawling and grumbling before she died, icy feel of water round her groin, shape of White Boat fading into mist. All faint things and worries and griefs, scuttling lobsters, tar and pebbles, feel of the night sea wind, the Great Catechism torn and snatched. She moved finally into a deeper dream where it seemed the Boat herself talked to her. Her voice was rushing and immense yet chuckling and lisping and somehow coloured, blue and roaring green. She spoke about the little people on her back and her duties, her rushing and scurrying and fighting with the wind; she told great truths that were lost as soon as uttered, blown away and buried in the dark. Becky clenched her fists writhing; woke to hear still the bang and slap of the sea, slept again.

She came round to someone gently shaking her shoulder.

Again she was disoriented. The motion of the boat was stopped; lamps burned in the cabin; through the port other lights gleamed, made rippling reflections that reached to within inches of the glass. From outside came a sound she knew; the fast rap and flutter of halliards against masts, night-noise of a harbour of boats. She swung her legs down blearily; rubbed her face, not knowing where she was. Not daring to ask.

A meal was laid in the cabin, great kedgerees of rice and shellfish pieces, mushrooms and eggs. Surprisingly, she was hungry; she sat shoulder to shoulder with the boy who had spoken for her, had she realized argued for her life in the bright afternoon. She ate mechanically and quickly, eyes not leaving her plate; round her the talk flowed, unheeding. She crouched small, glad to be forgotten.

They took her with them when they went ashore. In the dinghy she felt more at ease. They sat in a waterfront bar, in France, drank bottle on bottle of wine till her head spun again and voices and noise seemed blended in a warm roaring. She snuggled, on the Welshman's knees, feeling safe again and wanted. She tried to talk then, about the fossils in the rocks and her father and the Church and swimming and nearly being drowned; they scumbled her hair, laughing, not understanding. The wine ran down her neck inside the sweater; she laughed back and watched the lamps spin, head drooping, lids half closed on dark-lashed hazel eyes.

"Ahoy White Boat . . ."

She stood shivering, seeing the lamps drive spindled images into the water, hearing men reel along the quay, hearing the shouts, feeling still the tingling surprise of foreignness. While White Boat answered faint from the mass of vessels, the tender crept splashing out of the night.

She was still barefooted; she felt the water tart against her ankles as she scuttled down to catch the dinghy's bow.

"Here," said David. "Not puttin' you to bed twice in a bloody day . . ."

She felt her head hit the rolled blankets that served as a pillow; muttered and grinned, pushed blearily at the waistband of her jeans, gave up, collapsed in sleep.

The miles of water slid past, chuckling in a dream.

She woke quickly to darkness, knowing once more she'd been fooled. They had slipped out of harbour, in the night; that heave and roll, chuckling and bowstring sense of tightness, was the feel of the open sea.

White Boat, and these people, never slept.

There were voices again. And lights gleaming, rattle of descending sails, scrape of something rolling against the hull. Scufflings then, and thuds. She lay curled in the bunk, face turned away from the cabin.

"No, she's asleep . . ."

"Easy with that now, man . . ."

She chuckled, silently The clink of bottles, thump of secret bales, amused her. There was nothing more to fear; these people were smugglers.

She woke heavy and irritable. The source of irritation was for a time mysterious. She attempted, unwillingly, to analyse her feelings; for her, an unusual exercise. The wildest, most romantic notions of White Boat were true; yet she was cheated. This she knew instinctively. She saw the village street then, the little black clustering houses, the church. The priest mouthing silently, condemning; her father, black-faced, slowly unfastening his broad buckled belt. To this she would return, irrevocably; the dream was finished.

That was it; the point of pain, the taste and very essence of it. That she didn't belong, aboard White Boat. She never would. Abruptly she found herself hating her crew for the knowledge they had given so freely. They should have beaten her, loved her till she bled, tied her feet, slammed her into the deep green sea. They had done nothing because to them she was worth nothing. Not even death.

She refused food, for the second time. She thought the skipper looked at her with worried eyes. She ignored him; she took up her old position, gripping the friendly thickness of the mast. The day was sunny and bright; the boat moved fast, under the great spread whiteness of a Genoa, dipping lee scuppers under, jouncing through the sea. Almost she wished for the sickness of the day before, the hour when she'd wanted so urgently to die. As White Boat raised, slowly, the coast of England.

Her mind seemed split now into halves, one part want-

ing the voyage indefinitely prolonged, the other needing to rush on disaster, have it over and done. The day faded slowly to dusk, dusk to deep night. In the dark she saw the cressets of a signal tower, flaring moving pinpoints; and another answering it, and another far beyond. They would be signalling for her, without a doubt; calling across the moors, through all the long bays. She curled her lip. She had discovered cynicism.

The wind blew chill across the sea.

Forward of the mast, a hatch gave access to the sail locker. She lowered herself into it, curled atop the big sausage shapes of canvas. The bulkhead door, ajar and creaking, showed shifting gleams of yellow from the cabin lamps. Here the water noise was intensified; she listened sullenly to the chuckle and seethe, half wanting in her bitterness the boat to strike some reef and drown. While the light moved, forward and back across the sloping painted walls. She began picking half unconsciously at the paint, crumbling little brittle flakes in her palm.

The loose boards interested her.

By the lamplight she saw part of the wooden side move slightly, out of time with the upright that supported it. She edged across, pulled experimentally. There was a hatch, behind it a space into which she could reach her arm. She groped tentatively, drew out a slim oilcloth packet. Then another. There were many of them, crowded away in the double hull; little things, not much bigger than the boxes of lucifers she bought sometimes in the village shop.

On impulse she pushed one of them into the waistband of her trews. Scurried the rest out of sight again, closed the trap, sat frowning. Rubbing the little packet, feeling it warm slowly against her flesh, determined for the first time in her life to steal. Wanting some part of White Boat maybe, something to hold at night and remember. Something precious.

Somebody had been very careless.

There was a voice above her, a moving of feet on the deck. She scrambled guiltily, climbed back through the hatch. But they weren't interested in her. Ahead the coastline showed solid, velvet-black; she saw the loom of twin headlands, faintest gleam of waves round long stone moles.

Realized with a shock and thrill of coldness that she was home.

She saw other things, heresies that stopped her breath. Machines, uncovered now, whirred and ticked in the cabin. Bands of light flickered pink, moved against a scale of figures ; she heard the chanting as they edged into the bay, seven fathoms, five, four. As the devil-boat came in, with nobody at the lead . . .

The dinghy, swung from its place atop the cabin, thumped into the sea. She scrambled down, clutching her parcelled dress. Another bundle was lowered, heavier, chinking musically. For her father, she was told ; and to say, t'was from the Boat. A bribe of silence that, or a double bluff ; confession of a little crime to hide one monstrously worse. They called to her, low-voiced ; she waved mechanically, seeing as she turned away the last descending flutter of the jib. The dinghy headed in slow, the Welsh boy at the tiller. She knelt upright on the bottom boards till the boat bumped the mole, grated and rolled. She was out then quickly, scuttling away. He called her as she reached the bottom of the path. She turned waiting, a frail shadow in the night.

He seemed unsure how to go on. "You must understand, see," he said unhappily. "You must never do this again. Do you understand, Becky?"

"Yes," she said. "Goodbye." Turned and ran again up the path to the stream, over the bridge to home.

There was a window they always left open, over the wash-house roof. She left the bundles in the outhouse ; the door hinge creaked as she closed it but nothing stirred. She climbed cautiously, padded through the dark to her room. Lay on the bed, feeling the faint rocking that meant mystically she was still in communion with the great boat down there in the bay. A last conscious thought made her pull the package from her waist, tuck it firmly beneath the layers of the mattress.

Her father seemed in the dawn light a stranger. There was no explanation she cared to give him, nothing to say. She was still drugged with sleep ; she felt with indifference the unbuckling of her trews, heard him draw the belt slow through his hands. Dazed, she imagined the beating would have no power to hurt ; she was wrong. The pain exploded

forward and back through her body, stabbed in red flashes behind her eyes. She squeezed the bedrail, needing to die, knowing disjointedly there was no help in words. Her body had sprung from rock and shale, the gloomy vastness of the fields; the strap fell not on her but on the headlands, the rocks, the sea. Exorcising the loneliness of the place, the misery and hopelessness and pain. He finished finally, turned away groping to barge through the door. Downstairs in the little house a child wailed, sensing hatred and fear; she moved her head slightly on the pillow, hearing it seemed from far off the breathing wash of the sea.

Her fingers moved down to coil on the packet in the bed. Slowly, with indifference, she began picking at the fastenings. Scratching the knots, pulling and teasing till the wrapping came away. It was her pleasure to imagine herself blind, condemned to touch and feel. The fingers, oversensitive, strayed and tapped, turning the little thing, feeling variations of texture, shapes of warmth and coldness, exploring bleakly the tiny map of heresy. A tear, her first, rolled an inch from one eye, stopped. Left a shining track against the brownness of the skin.

She had the heart of White Boat. Gripped in her hand.

The priest came, tramping heavy on the stairs. Her father pushed ahead of him, covered her roughly. Her hand stayed by her side, unseen, as Father Antony talked. She lay quiet, face down, lashes brushing her cheek, knowing immobility and patience were her best defence. The light from the window faded as he sat; when he left, it was nearly night.

In the gloom she lifted the stolen thing, touched it to her face. The heretical smell of it, of wax and bakelite and brass, assaulted her mind faintly. She stroked it again, lovingly; while she held it gripped it seemed she could call White Boat to her bidding, bring her in from her wanderings time and again.

The sun stayed hidden in the days that followed, while she lay on the cliffs and saw the yacht flit in and go. A greater barrier separated her now than the sea she had learned to cross; a barrier built not by others but by her own stupidity.

She killed a great blue lobster, slowly and with pain, driving nails through the membraned cracks of its armour

while it threshed and writhed. Cut it apart slowly, hating herself and all the world, dropped the pieces in the sea for a bitter, useless sacrifice. This and other things she did to ease the emptiness in her, fill the progression of iron-grey afternoons. There were vices to be learned, at night and out on the rocks, little gratifications of pleasure and pain. She indulged her body, contemptuously; because White Boat had come cajoling and free, thrown her back laughing, indifferent to hurt. Life stretched before her now like an endless cage; where, she asked herself, was the Change once promised, the great things the priest John had seen? The Golden Age that would bring other White Boats, other days and hope; the wild waves of the very air made to talk and sing. . .

She fondled the tiny heart of the Boat, in the black dark, felt the wires and coils, the little tubes of valves.

The church was still and cold, the priest's breathing heavy behind the little carved screen. She waited while he talked and murmured, unhearing; while her hands closed and opened on the thing she carried, the sweat sprang out on the palms.

And it was done, hopelessly and sullen. She pushed the little machine at the grille, waited greyly for the intake of breath, the panic-scrabble of feet from the other side.

The face of Father Antony was beyond description.

The village stirred, whispering and grumbling, people scurrying forward and back between the houses gaping at the soldiers in the street, the shouting horsemen and officers. Sappers, working desperately, rigged sheerlegs along the line of cliffs, swung tackles from the heavy beams. Garrisons stood at Alert right back to Durnovaria; this land had rebelled before, the commanders were taking no chances. Signallers, ironic-faced, worked and flapped the arms of half a hundred semaphores; despatch riders galloped, raking their mounts bloody as the questions and instructions flew. A curfew was clapped on the village, the people driven to their homes; but nothing could stop the rumours, the whisperings and unease. Heresy walked like a spectre, blew in on the sea wind; till a man saw the old monk himself, grim faced and empty-eyed, stalking the clifftops in his tattered gown. Detachments of cavalry

quartered the downs, but there was nothing to be found. Through the night, and into the darkest time before the dawn, the one street of the village echoed to the marching tramp of men. Then there was a silent time of waiting. The breeze soughed up from the bay, moving the tangles of gorse, crying across the huddled roofs; while Becky, lying quiet, listened for the first whisper, the shout that would send soldiers to their posts, train the waiting guns.

She lay on her face, hair tangled on the pillow, hearing the night wind, clenching and slowly unclenching her hands. It seemed the shouting still echoed in her brain, the harangues, thumping of tables, red-faced noise of priests. She saw her father stand glowering and sullen while the cobalt-tuniced Major questioned over and again, probing, insisting, till in misery questions became answers and answers made their own fresh confusion. The sea moved in her brain, dulling sense; while the cannon came trundling and peering behind the straining mules, crashing trails and limbers on the rough ground till the noise clapped forward and back between the houses and she put hands to ears and cried to stop, just to stop . . .

They wrung her dry, between them. She told things she had told to nobody, secrets of bay and beach and lapping waves, fears and dreams; everything they heard stony-faced while the clerks scribbled, the semaphores clacked on the hills. They left her finally, in her house, in her room, soldiers guarding the door and her father swearing and drunk downstairs and the neighbours pecking and fluttering over the children, making as they spoke of her and hers the sign of the Cross. She lay an age while understanding came and grew, while her nails marked her palms and the tears squeezed hot and slow. The wind droned, soughing under the eaves; blowing strong and cool and steady, bringing White Boat in to death.

Never before had her union with the Boat seemed stronger. She saw her with the clarity of nightmare, moon washing the tilted deck, sails gleaming darkly against the loom of land. She tried in desperation to force her mind out over the sea; she prayed to turn, go back, fly away. White Boat heard, but made no answer; she came on steadily, angry and inexorable.

Becky sat up, quietly. Padded to the window, saw the

bright night, the moonglow in the little cluttered yard. In the street footsteps clicked, faded to quiet. A bird called, hunting, while cloud wisps groped for and extinguished the light.

She shivered, easing at the sash. Once before she had known an alien steadiness, a coldness that made her movements smooth and calm. She placed a foot carefully on the outhouse tiles, ducked through the window, thumped into the deeper shadow of the house wall. Waited, listening to silence.

They were not stupid, these soldiers of the Pope. She sensed rather than saw the sentry at the bottom of the garden, slipped like a wraith through darkness till she was near enough almost to touch his cloak. Waited patient, eyes watching white and blind while the moon eased clear of cloud, was obscured again. In front of her the boy yawned, leaned his musket against the wall. Called something sleepily, sauntered a dozen paces up the road.

She was over the wall instantly, feet scuffling. Her skirt snagged, pulled clear. She ran, padding on the road, waiting for the shout, the flash and bang of a gun. The dream was undisturbed.

The bay lay silver and broad. She moved cautiously, parting bracken, wriggling to the edge of the cliff. Beneath her, twenty yards away, men clustered smoking and talking. The pipes they lit carefully, backs to the sea and shielded by their cloaks, unwilling to expose the slightest gleam of light. The tide was making, washing in across the ramps and up among the rocks ; the moon stood now above the far headland, showing it stark against a milky haze.

In front of her were the guns.

She watched down at them, eyes wide. Six heavy pieces, humped and sullen, staring out across the sea. She saw the cunning behind the placement ; that shot, ball or canister, fired nearly level with the water, would hurtle on spreading and rebounding. The Boat would have no chance. She would come in, onto the guns ; and they would fire. There would be no warning, no offers of quarter ; just the sudden orange thunder from the land, the shot coming tearing and smashing . . .

She strained her eyes. Far out on the dim verge of sky and sea was a smudge that danced as she watched and re-

turned, insistent, dark grey against the greyness of the void. The tallness of a sail, heading in toward the coast.

She ran again, scrambling and jumping. Slid into the stream, followed it where its chuckling could mask sounds of movement, crouched glaring on the edge of the beach. The soldiers too had seen; there was a stirring, a rustling surge of dark figures away from the cliff. Men ran to point and stare, train night glasses at the sea. Their backs were to the guns.

There was no time to think; none to do more than swallow, try and quiet the thunder of her heart. Then she was running desperately, feet spurning the grit, stumbling on boulders and buried stones. Behind her a shout, the rolling crash of a musket, cursing of an officer. The ball glanced from rock, threw splinters at her back and calves. She leaped and swerved, landed on her knees. Saw men running, the bright flash of a sword. Another report, distant and unassociated. She panted, rolled on her back beside the first of the guns.

It was unimportant that her body burned with fire. Her fingers gripped the lanyard, curled lovingly and pulled.

A hugeness of flame, a roar; the flash lit the cliffs, sparkled out across the sea. The gun lurched back, angry and alive; while all down the line the pieces fired, random now and furious, the shot fizzing over the water. The cannonade echoed from the headlands, boomed across the village; woke a girl who mocked and squealed, in her bed, in her room, the noise vaunting up wild and high into the night.

While White Boat, turning, laughed at the guns.

And spurned the land.

LOST GROUND

david masson

"EAT UP YOUR bacon now, May," said Miriel. "Daddy's ready to run you up—don't keep him waiting." May, humming irrepressibly to herself, picked up her fork and began toying with the crisp fragments. "May!" said Miriel sharply again. The ten-year-old's brown curls tossed, but she fell to. Philip, his dark eyes scanning the faces of his mother and sister with the air of an anxious dog, spooned in his porridge. He was only in his third year. Roydon, shifting about a little in his chair, was hidden behind the paper, uneasily aware of its sour biscuity odour in the sun. "STRIKE DUE TO LAST BITTER SPELL?" read one of the headlines. "LATE RAGE-STORMS STALL OHIO" said another. Roydon frowned, inserted a tiny earphone into one ear and switched on the mini-tape recorder which he had set to the last forecast.

"A system of depressions and associated troughs will follow one another in quick succession over Scotland and the north," it said. "Insecure, rather sad feeling today and tomorrow, followed by short-lived griefs, some

heavy, some stormy, with cheerful intervals. By midweek the griefs will be dying out, rather sooner in the south. Drives weak to moderate, veering creative to instinctive. Temperament chillier than normal for the rest of the week, but serene; however, some early-morning fear in the latter half of the week is expected to form in low-lying areas, dispersing slowly each day."

Roydon snapped off the recorder and removed his ear-plug. "Better give May a slow pep-pill before she goes. The forecast's a bit gloomy; I shouldn't be surprised if there were griefs on and off this afternoon, too."

"O.K. Here you are, May; swallow that with your tea," said Miriel. "And *you* might as well have one yourself, darling. I can give Phil a quick quarter-dose if he goes out to play."

"Oh *need* I, Mummy?" from May. "The school's O.K., and they always pass the stuff round at break."

"Yes, May—I think Miss Weatherbridge is a bit careless about these things; she has a lot of other things to think about, after all."

"Oh, all right!"

Roydon dumped a singing May from his little city-car, the green one. The pep-pill was already lifting his spirits, protected as they were by the car-aerosol. He had to check himself from chanting rowdily and dodging about in the workwards traffic. "I should have waited till lunch-time and had a quick one," he thought. "Miriel coddles me—and I take it from her." The vision of her brown oval face old-fashionedly curtained in the straight fall of soft dark hair hovered between him and the traffic for an instant. After eleven years it was still a mystery and an enchantment to him. He opened the draught and let the sadness seep in for a little. A few of the school-children waiting to cross at the next school were in tears. "Feckless parents," he thought. They would be all right after a minute in the air-conditioned school.

In the studio office all was bustle and confusion. Panset, the chief, was in and out constantly. Mood-weather bothered him comparatively little, except that in periods of unusually warm temperament he usually had to take a tranquilliser outside. The pep aerosols were functioning nicely all over the building. The night's programme of

current affairs was beginning to take shape, but must rest in a half-cooked state till late that afternoon, when Roydon would leave it in the hands and mouths of the studio people. He rang up Miriel at lunchtime to say he might be later than usual, the way things were running.

"Are you coming out for lunch, Vic?" he called to his mate across the table, fixing him unconsciously with a characteristically searching gaze under his thick brows; "I'm getting sick of the canteen stuff."

"Better pep yourself up again, then Royo, there's a nasty grief outside," said Ken Mattock, coming in, breathing deeply and erratically through pinched nostrils.

"Oh, the corner place will do us. That's not far, we'll survive it, eh, Vic?"

"I'll take a quick booster first if you don't mind. I'm a bit low this morning," said Vic, helping himself from his pharmapouch. "Right—that'll fix me, I'm ready now."

That night, a rather disturbed May eventually persuaded to bed, Miriel broached the subject of school precautions again. "You know," she said, "I don't care for the way they hand out their peps and tranqs—much too rough-and-ready. I delivered May after lunch in the red city-car: she was quite upset coming in. I had a word with the head. I'm going to keep her carefully drugged up and the school will have her for lunch in future. That means she won't be so easily exposed."

"You coddle her too much," said Roydon.

"No, Roy, I can't have her education going to pieces because of all these ups and downs. It may be all right for some parents, but not for us. We have her future to think of."

Roydon gave way. He sighed for the Golden Ages of his parents' memory, when the world's atmosphere had nothing worse than true weather and a little fallout for men to contend with. A feature item on the chaos in Africa and India, scarcely mitigated by pharmacological aid, underlined his thoughts. The Indians and Africans were trying to ride out griefs by hectic dance-sessions on the lines of the old Mediterranean tarantella-remedy, and angers and fears by great choral chants, but these folk-remedies were naturally very chancy. Only the most advanced nations had been able to meet the new

emotional influences in the air with air-conditioning and with drugs subtle enough to act quick enough or slow enough and without seriously affecting judgment or the body's reactions. His "own" World-Day programme came through and he watched it dutifully and critically. It was followed by a Men-of-Science interview with a microdiathesiologist.

"You see," explained the pundit, "the mood-climate differs not only from country to country, but from place to place, from street to roof, from valley to slope, and often in quite spectacular ways. Take the corner of a high building or the top of a cliff. This sort of site is subject to great turbulence. While the general mood-weather round it may be gloomy one day or one hour and optimistic the next, the mood at the *acron,* as we call it, is often switching minute by minute from despair to ecstasy and back again. Hence the semi-mystical nature-loving joy one moment and the suicide-leap the next."

"But such violent changes are not met with in other places, are they?"

"Not commonly. Indeed the micro-sentiment at many spots is more stable than that of the general mood-weather at man-height. The surface of marshes is nearly always depressed and fearful. That of a park or a well-kept garden are warm, friendly, serene. And of course there is a third class of microdiathesis which varies on a 24-hour cycle. A wood or a lake at noon is usually gay and serene, at midnight amorous in moonlight but hostile and intensely fearful in darkness. The nature of the cycle in this case depends on the illumination."

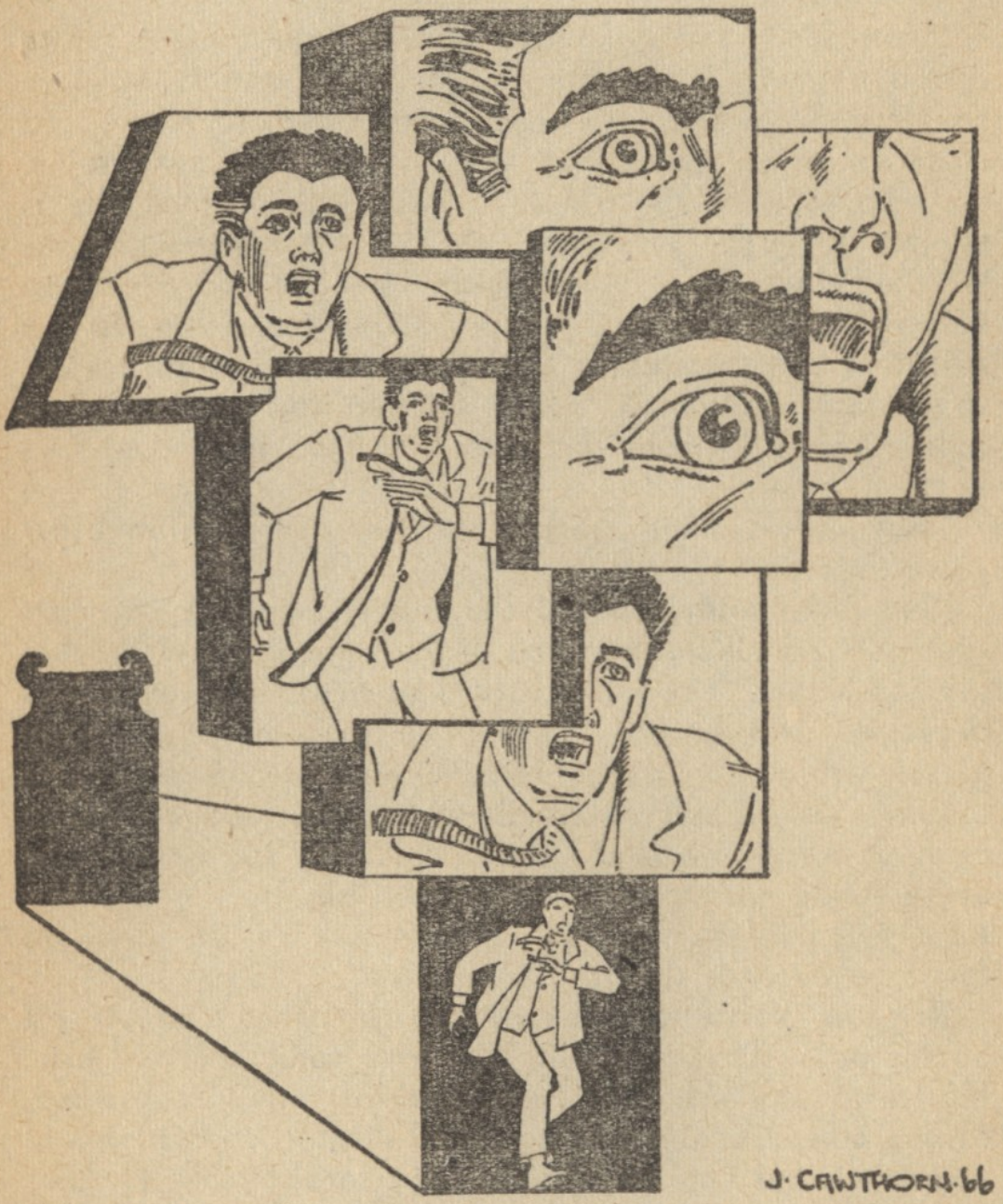
Roydon, yawning ostentatiously, switched the set off at this point. Details of this sort were rather beyond him, his yawn implied. But his heartbeat was accelerating. Programmes like this one he found disquieting. The world was dangerous enough without *these* local effects. He preferred not to know. The shelter of Miriel's arms and hair blotted out the world and its perils.

Three years later it happened. Roydon, now in the studio team of World-Day, and normally working from 3 to 11 p.m., was rung at the studio one March afternoon at 5.

"I thought I told you not to ring me at night—it's far too hectic here!"

"Roy, Roy, it's Phil! He—he—"

"He had an accident!" shouted Roydon. He recalled that Phil was usually brought home by some rather older



children from infant school. Sobbing, Miriel told him that Phil and his friends had run into an unexpected pocket of terror in a dip in the road coming home. They had scattered, Phil darting insanely across the road, it seemed, and straight under a car. It was all over in a moment.

After the funeral, which ironically took place on a gay, serene morning, Miriel, who had kept herself on a tight rein, seemed to go to pieces. She refused all drugs, scarcely roused on the most cheerful of days, and gave herself up to a sort of resentfulness of sorrow. Roydon's parents, who had stayed on for some days, took May under their roof not far off, and for the rest of term were to fetch her to school and back. Roydon managed to secure leave and took Miriel west to a wild part of the country neither of them had seen before, which she could not associate with Philip. They left the two city-cars behind and hired a run-about. Gradually she began to pick up, but there was a ghostly something about her look, an air of looking through or past Roydon, which worried him. It was a fine spring and the mood-weather was optimistic, with only the occasional grief. Roydon let the griefs wash over Miriel when they were out walking, and sometimes over himself, as he felt they would help to purge the emotional load.

The first Sunday they went to church. The rather meagre congregation huddled in the cool Early English interior. The sermon was uninspiring. But there was a soothing quality about the grey-green gloom and the thin arches. The motor of the tranquilliser-cordial hummed gently in the silences. Afterwards Roydon was rather sorry they had gone, for they were strolling through the churchyard when Miriel stopped with a shudder. The funeral was too recent. Drunken gravestones, their inscriptions worn to rivers in the soft local stone, leant around them. But she had stopped at a very tall and broad headstone.

"Look," she said uncertainly, "Roy you could have had an ancestor here."

"Well, could be, certainly ends with 'Back,' and it certainly has an R as second letter, and the length looks right. Can't make out the forename, can you?"

"No, I don't think I can. And what a long inscription."

"From the few words I can make out, it was one of those paragons of all the virtues. Local bigwig, I expect. They used to make them out to be saints, on their tomb-stones, in those days; whereas they probably fathered half the brats in the parish really, and twisted their tenants. I must have a look at the parish register some time, just

in case he really had the same name. Still, it's not absolutely unique as a name."

"What is all this about the Snevley Fields?" said the big man at the bar.

Roydon turned half round from his half-pint. Miriel was upstairs. The big man, who looked like a landowner or a business man, was talking to a squat little fellow who might be a farmer or a lawyer.

"What do you want to know about the Snevley Fields?"

"Something queer is going on there—what is it?"

"Something decidedly queer is certainly going on there," said the squat man, who, like the big man, had a whisky in front of him. Roydon cocked his World-Day-educated ear. "It seems that all Morris's cattle have disappeared there. So has Midgley's dog. Midgley was walking the Carruthers side and his dog went after rabbits. That was a week ago and no one has seen the dog since."

"But it's perfectly open country, no badger-holes or fox-holes either."

"Exactly. And no cow-holes! . . . Midgley's a bit scared to go in himself. As for Morris, he thinks the place is bewitched. Talks about fairies and I don't know what. Won't stir near there. A bit superstitious, old Morris is."

"Was it in daylight?"

"We don't know about Morris's cattle. But Midgley's dog went early one afternoon."

"Any clues?"

"No! Only thing is, the Snevley Fields seem to have been re-hedged by someone. The old hawthorn's given way to hazel, Morris says. He looked through binoculars. Says it goes beyond the brook, too."

"Snevley's is let, isn't it?"

"Yes—to someone from Scrutton. But they haven't been there for weeks."

"You talking about them Snevley Fields?" put in a long man in an overcoat, drinking stout, on the far side.

"Yes, and Harry says it goes on beyond the brook."

"Too true; and another thing," said the long man; "you know that brook runs straight down a fair way between them two hedges? Someone digged it that way long since." The other two nodded assent. So did three

other listeners. "Well now it don't. It runs all squiggly-squaggly. And them hedges—they've gone!"

There was a heavy silence. "I know another man as lost a dog thereabouts," called a dark man in a corner. Silence. Heads turned. " 'Twere Ted. His bitch were round Parker's Knoll, a week come Friday 'twere. *She* were chasing rabbits, too. Ted says he had his eye on her, and she just vanished."

"How d'you mean, vanished?" put in the big man.

"Vanished in full view, right in the middle of the next field. Here, Fred, turn up the aero-what'sit. That crossness is seeping in again—I can feel me hackles rising."

" 'Tis the whisky in you, Bill," called the squat man amid general laughter, but the landlord picked up an aerosol hand-sprayer and pumped the cordial-tranquilliser over the room.

"Well, as I were saying. She vanished in full view. One moment she were there, going hell for leather in the middle of a field. Next moment—she weren't there. Never came back no more."

"That's a hell of a lot of land that is. From Snevley's to Parker's Knoll."

"And from Goff's Brook to t'other side of Snevley, I shouldn't wonder," came from a small man who had not yet spoken.

Roydon, who was used to interviewing, or failing to interview, rural types, held his peace, but after a moment or two found occasion to ask the barman the name of the long man and the squat man, and still later buttonholed the landlord and got from him their addresses (they turned out to be the village grocer and the local garage man) and the approximate location of Goff's Brook, Snevley's, and Parker's Knoll. He represented himself as an amateur landscape painter with some ideas about later fishing.

Next morning, with a strong instinctive drive prevalent and a cordial temperament abroad, Roydon took Miriel out on foot looking for the mystery area. The forecast was fairly optimistic and he thought it would be good for her to tramp around with him while he tried to work up what promised to be something of a news story. In two hours they were in sight of the farmhouse known as Snevley's. Beyond it down a slight slope were the Snevley Fields, a

set of meadows already powdered with buttercups. The pair paused. "Let's work round this field and up to that copse. We might get a better view of that break in the hedges they were talking about."

When they reached a field-corner next the copse, where a distinct drop in the emotional temperature could be felt, Roydon took some photographs. The chilliness was becoming palpable hostility, and his wife was unprotected by drugs. "You stick it out here, Miriel. I'll walk uphill and see what can be seen from that tree." Roydon strode off. A brusquely suspicious mood dominated the summit. Reaching the tree at the top he turned. Miriel was not to be seen.

Roydon, shouting her name at the top of his voice, glared round an arc of countryside. Away down a narrow meadow between two hedges he thought he saw a flickering speck running, running very hard. An instant later it was swallowed up, in the line of the nearer hedge. Perhaps it was a rook in the air between. Moving cloud-shadows confused the view. After a minute of calling, Roydon ran back down the long slope and at length arrived, gasping and dizzy, his knees aching, at the spot where he had left her. There were some snapped twigs and after staring around he thought he could see the imprint of her shoes in the earth not far off, pointing homeward. But beyond this on all sides tall wiry grasses swallowed up everything. The feeling of hostility grew, mingled with acute fear. The wind hissed among the twigs and grasses. "Bitch, bitch!" Roydon found himself muttering. He forced himself to swallow a pill, but found minutes later that it must have been a slow-acting one he had chosen. Hoarse with shouting and cursing, he began to stumble back the way they had come, convinced that she had started home. As he approached Snevley's a squall of rage and grief burst upon him. Sobbing and swearing, tears coursing down his cheeks, he ran round the yard and burst in through the open doorway. No one was at home. He rushed through the rooms without finding anyone or any trace, tried all the cupboards, and finally ran out again, and on to the village. At last, in a state of maudlin warmth now that the pill had taken effect in more cordial surroundings, he stumbled into the inn. Miriel was not in their room. No

one had seen her. Someone brought him to the police-station, in whose tranquillised air he told his story.

"That settles it," said the sergeant; "I'm ringing HQ. These disappearances are beyond us."

Roydon found himself at the receiving end of the interviewing on that evening's World-Day. Ken had shot up from London by jet to see him personally. By next day the C.I.D. and half the newshawks of the west of the country were in the district. No one dare enter the "Forbidden Zone" and a cordon was to be thrown up by the army. During the week a helicopter and a set of tracker-dogs on the end of microphoned long lines were brought up.

The tracker-dogs found nothing, but two disappeared, their lines neatly cut. The helicopter only discovered fields empty of all but birds; but two locals (Midgley and the squat man) who were persuaded to go up in it, averred that (so far as they could tell since they had never flown before) the country had changed quite a lot. The area was closed off now with rolls of barbed wire, military posts established round it, and a desultory watch was kept up, with an occasional searchlight at night. "I'd sooner run straight acrost a bleedin' minefield 'n gow in theer," Roydon heard one soldier say to another.

"Reckon it *is* a minefield—only the other sort. I reckon it's holes in it, bloody great pits, all camouflaged up," said the other.

Roydon flew up to London. He meant to resign. The city seemed to him meaningless, like an undubbed film in a foreign language. Its noise and bustle seemed to be all on the other side of an invisible barrier.

"Look here, Royo," said Vic, taking him aside near the studio; "a team of investigators is going up there; why not join them as a reporter? Panset'll recommend you, he says."

"Who are they?"

"Scientists of some sort. You know they got some anomalies with their lidar probe when Ken was there—or perhaps you don't? Some of them think there's something odd about the spacetime geometry of the region. That's the line they're working on now."

May was adopted by her aunt and uncle. Roydon was attached to the group of scientists, shut up the house, and

returned to that accursèd green countryside to which he was now bound, as with the thongs of a rack, by ties of fear, hatred, memory and love. He came gradually to follow, in a hazy way, the investigators' reasoning and the drift of their experiments with masers and charged particles. So it was that six months later Roydon himself, carrying out a prepared "interview" of the group's spokesman on TV, had given the public its first picture of what was happening.

"A set of anachronistic cells or domains has come into being on the landscape, covering a wide area. Each cell has reverted to an earlier point in time—we are not at present sure exactly what point—and its neighbour cells have similiarly reverted, but apparently with no discernible pattern. We have a patchwork quilt of time-levels."

"How far back are these time-levels from ours?"

"We don't know. Some may be only a few seconds or even microseconds. Others may be a few weeks, years, even centuries. Some are certainly many years back. The change in visible landmarks fits that, according to early tithe-maps."

"But if we can see the country how is it we can't see the persons and animals that have disappeared?"

"We think they have moved out of the area, but in the time of the cell in which they found themselves."

"Does the first cell you meet fix your time-level, then?"

"We don't know. It may—or it may not."

One day Roydon, allowed past the army posts as one of the team, slipped quietly away towards the spot where he had last seen his wife. He was certain now that she had run off further into the area and believed he might have caught a glimpse of her running and not of some bird flying. But the landscape was confusing, was difficult to identify. Where he thought to have found the field-corner below the hill there seemed to be a long stone dike with stone steps jutting out of it, and a fence to one side. He climbed over the dike, keeping bent low in case he was spotted from outside. He was determined to follow Miriel and search, if need be for years, in this past world. The atmosphere was serene, with a slight intellectual drive in it. He combed the copse, returned, walked along the fence, slithered down some rocks which he never remembered

seeing before, ran into a richly cordial atmosphere, skirted a round dewpond, and past a gnarled old thorn came face to face with a stinking old man in tatters, who touched his forehead and sank on one knee.

"Where do you come from?"

Roydon had to repeat this three times before the man answered: "Scrotton, ant plaze thee, Serr."

"Have you even see a young woman in strange dress in these parts?"

"?"

"Have — you — seen — a young — woman — near here —ever — wearing — strange — dress?"

Roydon had to repeat this once more, then: "Noo, Serr, hant nivver seen noo witch, Serr!" and the creature took to his heels. As Roydon stared after him he vanished in mid-stride. Much shaken, Roydon walked slowly onward, stumbled over some gravel, was pushing through some lush undergrowth, and found himself on a sheep track among tussocks of grass. A grotesque sight met his eyes a few yards further on down the track. A thin man in a sort of sacking hood, ragged hose like ill-fitting tights, and bare feet, was perched on a short ladder leaning crazily in towards the track. The ladder was leaning on nothing, and indeed its poles ended at their tops in a curious vertical chopped cut, which kept changing its pattern, yet this ladder stood still and only rocked slightly with the man's movements. It was some time before Roydon realised that the changing texture at the tops of the poles coincided with their growing slightly shorter or longer as they rocked. The man kept descending and coming up again with bundles of what looked to Roydon (who had seen a museum of antiquities) like thatching straw, and thrusting them above the ladder where, together with his hands, they disappeared. His handless arms would ply about for a time, then the arms would reappear, but not the bundles. A great heap of these bundles lay on the ground. The place was thick with flies and gnats. The ladder-man was humming an endless, eery, plaintive chant. Behind him was the rim of a forest clearing. Two lean dogs like lurchers, but with longish pointed ears, were slinking about near it. The trees of the forest seemed to be chopped short at about ten feet up. The ladder-man and his dogs were all

totally oblivious of Roydon's shouting and gesticulating. Something, however, held Roydon back from passing under or beyond the ladder. Perhaps it was that only ten feet on the far side of the man the forest-clearing swung in abruptly to march right up to the sheep-track. This part of the beheaded forest, moreover, was frost-laden, from the boughs to the ground, and devoid of undergrowth, and a light snow-shower was scudding down from nowhere. Through this wintry woodscape, lit by a ruddy glow from the east, a pack of huge savage hounds presently broke, baying fiercely, and plunged obliquely towards the still oblivious ladder-man and his dogs. Instead of overwhelming them the pack vanished one by one in the still air of the clearing, and the silence returned piecemeal hound by hound.

A last hound, a straggler, was still bounding up, when the man called out, as if to someone well beyond Roydon's shoulder: "Pest taak they, Will, maak hust, 'tis aal boott nohn!" He paused, apparently listening, then broke into a snort of laughter and resumed his whistling and humming.

An obscure trumpeting, mingled with cries, broke out deep in the frosty wood; crackling branches and rhythmical thuds intervened.

Seized with a kind of panic, Roydon turned down the track, thrust through a dark thicket, and found himself without warning in the middle of a curious wide tunnel or cave apparently made of blackish glass, and dimly lit from nowhere in particular. There was a marked cheerfulness and a strong organising drive in the air. Coming out into the daylight he saw a wide flat level strip, like the track of a gigantic snail a hundred yards across, made of the same material, stretching out from his feet. On its edges a number of glassy boxes and tubes, on spring legs or spikes, were standing, some winking and clicking busily. The strip looked rather as if it had been sprayed on.

"What kind of a past era is this?" he thought. Beyond the strip were banks of rich shrubs powdered with exotic butterflies. The growl of a helicopter came from the west, and Roydon took cover beneath a shrub, disturbing the butterflies somewhat. When the helicopter appeared it had an unfamiliar look, and most of it was formed of greenish

and blackish glassy material. After it had gone Roydon walked on above the shrubs. Then he took cover beneath the shrub, disturbing the butterflies, hearing the machine. When it had gone he began to walk on. Then he took cover under the butterfly-laden shrub, keeping the helicopter under observation. When it had departed he walked on, shaking his head uncertainly. There was something he could not quite remember. A *déjà vu* sensation. Odd. He recalled the tunnel and the strip. What an odd strip! What kind of past age could this be? And what peculiar gadgets these are down its edges. Why do they click and blink like that? . . . He found himself walking above the shrubs, feeling unaccountably odd and dazed. Then he saw Parker's Knoll or what should have been Parker's Knoll, miles ahead. It was topped by a device like a glass water-tower. The entire landscape between seemed to be dotted with tallish block buildings of greenish opaque glass, with banks of shrubs between. Men, women and children, in closely clinging clothing with a dull whitish lustre, were moving about. The sound of their voices came to him. The sky was pullulating with aircraft like a swarm of insects, and droned and screamed with them, but the voices could be heard quite clearly nevertheless. Only the strip and its neighbourhood seemed deserted. Then he saw a sort of Parker's Knoll, but decorated with a glassy tower, and the people in their clinging clothes, and the aircraft overhead. He shook his head to clear it, and saw Parker's Knoll, topped with a tower, and the population, and the crowded skies, and heard the noises. Roydon sat down (and in between the first bending of his knees and being seated, had a visionary flash of millions upon millions of—what? of the same event, which he instantly forgot). He sat down, and tried to collect his thoughts. Could it be that he was somewhere in the future, not the past? Could the helicopter have come out of the world of that future? The machine came back and for the second time (was it the second time?) Roydon took cover, but he was astonished to hear a loud-hailer of sorts address him:

"We can detect you under that growth. Who are you? Can we help you? . . . Who are you? Are you Roydon Greenback? Please come out from under. Please come out from under. We would like to help you." There was some-

thing peculiarly vulgar and sprawling about the accents of the speaker, and his vowels were difficult to recognise.

Roydon clambered out and waved. After a moment he called out, "Yes, I am Roydon Greenback. Who are you? Where am I?"

The helicopter descended some way and a rope ladder was lowered. "Please climb in."

"I am looking for my wife."

"We don't know where she is, but perhaps we can help you. Will you come with us first?"

Silently, Roydon climbed up the ladder, which was at once extraordinarily smooth and very easy to hold on to. As he went up there was a sort of blink, and looking down by the helicopter hatch, he was astonished to see that the landscape was once more deserted and green, indeed rather lush and jungly, except that the glassy strip and a few of the shrub-banks up to a little past where he had sat down, were still there below him. A big gloved hand hauled him in.

"Roydon Greenback. Well. You are something of a legend to us, the man who entered the poikilchronistic jungle to search for the woman he loved. Well, well. As luck would have it, you got into a domain that started at plus-sixty-one years and has been running a cog-slipper static ever since. So you levelled up with our time. You are sixty-one years behind us in source. We shall take you to our world of sixty-one years ahead."

The voice was no longer sprawling, but the same slipshod quality seemed to slur its vowels, and what with this and the unfamiliar vocabulary, Roydon could hardly comprehend two words in three. He looked at its owner, a tall red-headed man of middle age with shaggy locks and a long beard. His clothes, like those of his companions, seemed to consist of a translucent skin-diving suit with pockets, and without mask or oxygen, and, encasing the hands and upper arms, long translucent gloves. There were half a dozen persons in the cabin, two of them women.

"I am Paul Sattern, chronismologist in chief. This is Fenn Vaughan, chronismologist-maturator ; Mary Scarrick, entomologist ; Richard Metcalfe, chronistic metrologist ; Elizabeth Raine, air chemist ; Morris Ekwall, transitional diathesiologist ; Zen Haddock, botanist, who also takes

soil samples for the podologists; and at the controls, Peter Datch."

The correct response to an introduction seemed to be a nod. It appeared that Morris Ekwall was concerned, in some esoteric way, with the violent local changes in mood-weather that accompanied the area's time-shifts, while Richard Metcalfe spent most of his time dumping gadgets on the terrain and reading their messages on instruments in the helicopter. What Vaughan and Sattern actually did Roydon never discovered, but the others were concerned with the insects, plants, soil and atmosphere itself. At intervals one or more of them would go down the ladder and come up again rather swiftly.

"Teams of chronismologists," Sattern told Roydon, "are engaged in mapping the poikilochronism and its changes; the domains are constantly altering."

"How do you mean? Do they change their time-level?"

"Usually a domain divides into several quite independent domains, especially if it's a big one; or a whole set of bounds and domains is replaced by new unrelated ones, in one part of the poik. There's not always much visible sign—you have to instrumentate to discern."

"And Richard here," said Vaughan, "is trying just now to catch them at it. He thinks they don't just go click, they go whoosh—eh Richard?" and he sang, softly:

"Micro, nano, pico, femto,
it's all the same to metro Met;
No matter what he pegs down there,
he hasn't snapped them switching yet."

Richard looked pained.

"Are we free of it now?" asked Roydon.

"Free?" said Sattern. "You mean, beyond the poik? No. It's much bigger than in your day. It's growing about three hectares a year now. Swallowed many square kilometres of our normal-density regions in the last ten years—but slowly. We had to reallocate the population. Devil of a lot of economic and social problems. Lost some strays, too—like you."

Sattern broke off and gave a terse account of their discovery of Roydon into a microphone.

Roydon, looking over the side some minutes later, saw the hated green, already peppered with odd glassy lumps

and bumps, cease abruptly. Beyond was a tangle of curved highways crawling with moving specks. Helicopters seemed now to jostle them on all sides, and above them a dense crowd of swift jetcraft littered the sky. Soon an endless forest of multi-storied buildings, glassy in texture, gawky oblongs jutting into the air, thrust all round them and in every direction. Here and there great banks of flowers or butterfly-powdered shrubs glowed at the buildings' feet, but much of the ground was a close-cropped grey-green herbage. The helicopter dropped on to a squat cube of a building, and Roydon was escorted down into the Chronismatic Centre.

Here he found a small quiet crowd gathered, all clothed like the helicopter party. One wall of the huge room converted itself silently into a coloured vision screen, and for the next hour he was subjected to a merciless interview from the reporters in that screen, with their unfamiliar flat accents and phraseology. After that a series of interchanges took place between the helicopter party, some of the crowd, and the screen reporters, who seemed to be in London, with occasional shunts to New York, Moscow, and Peiping. The exchanges were largely lost on Roydon, whose nerves seemed to be dancing a jig all over his body. A girl with darkish red hair and green eyes, whom he took for Sattern's secretary, led him off for a meal and a sleeping potion.

He woke on a couch and the purgatory began again. Housed in the building, occasionally treated to visitape recordings of his interview, interviewed anew by scientists and reporters, invited to appear in feature programmes, put through tests of blood-pressure, skin-potential, electro-encephalogram, blood-fluid makeup, and many others, he collapsed at the end of a week and was kept under deep narcosis for ten days.

He came to to find the red-haired girl, whose name was Sal, contemplating him. "Someone is asking to see you," she said. "Prepare yourself for a shock." She looked serious.

"Who is it? Are they here?"

"No of course not. On the screen. It's someone from your family. Think now—who could be alive after sixty-one years?"

"It's not—it's not May?"

"It's your daughter. She was called May. Now remember, she has lived all her life in ordinary time. How old was she when you last saw her?"

Even so, Roydon could not believe for a long time that the rather bowed, though well-preserved, old lady in grey slacks and tunic could be his own daughter. He was unspeakably embarrassed when after a minute of awkward speech a slow tear or two rolled down the face on the screen. "You are just like your photo," she whispered brokenly, then broke down completely and sobbed. "You never came back—you never came back!"

Gradually he pieced out her history. Brought up for the rest of her growing years with her uncle's children she had adjusted to the situation but had always mourned her parents, especially Roydon. An unhappy marriage at twenty had lasted four years. Another at thirty with an older man had terminated with his death seven years before. Her two children—she held up their stereophotographs—were grown up. She brought out stereophotograps of five grandchildren. Four minutes' link-up with her son and three with her daughter followed. She herself was living in the section of normal-density Britain still known as Aberdeen, where her husband's folk were. Roydon offered to go and see her but it seemed that no ordinary person travelled much today. "Surface and even air travel are too crowded, and stratocruising is only for long distance," said Sal, who had come back in after half an hour. May assured him she was content with the screen, and they agreed he should contact her once a week.

Sal, it began to appear, was a liaison officer for the Centre with other institutions. But she took Roydon under her particular care and few minutes of a day went by without her turning up with provender, conversation or means of entertainment. She got him to fix himself up with one of the translucent suits by means of some sort of long-distance measurement recorder. She explained many ways and words that he could not understand. Her green eyes fixing his, she would speak slowly in her husky voice. She kept a sharp eye on his reaction to the mood-weather if he were outside, and produced the antidote.

"The mood-climate's not what it was," Sattern complained to Sal and Roydon one day, looking in from a

conference with the chiefs of other helicopter-parties. "Spring used to be hopeful, summer serene, autumn regretful, winter gloomy. Now, it's all mixed up. You never know what to expect."

"You're getting more vulnerable in your old age, Paul," said Sal, grinning.

"Something in what you say, actually. The inocs are wearing off. I must get some boosters."

"How do you make out here with mood-weather?" asked Roydon.

"It doesn't worry us much," said Sal. "We inoculate during childhood; only the most violent moodstorms touch us. Your age hadn't got inocs for that; we'll have to cross-dope you pretty carefully for outside. But the endocrine typometer gave us enough data on you to give you a reasonable safeguard."

A week or two later Sal told Roydon that Paul Sattern's team would like him to accompany them on trips, hoping he could set them right on some points about the past. He was given unlimited credit for purchase, and the official position of "historical advisor." Chronismologists were in great demand, as the poikilochronism was regarded as a public danger, and were highly paid, partly because of the risks they ran. "QUALIFIED CHRONISMOLOGIST," Roydon read on an old-fashioned plastic news-sheet's advertisement page: "Vacancies for chronismologists. Higher Sc. degrees essential. Starting credit equivalent £5,000 to £6,000 p.a. rising by £500 p.a. Minimal service one year."

"Two other poiks have been detected," Sal told him, "one in Bonnium and one in Ceylon."

"Yes," said Paul; "and we think there are some in Central Africa and one in Antarctica, only Antarctica is rather sparsely populated, and news from much of Central Africa is nil—mood-climate closed chunks of it down. The whole world, including the oceans, might become one vast poik in a few millennia or even centuries, unless we can find out enough about these chronismatic processes to know how to stabilise or reverse them. It's a race against Time, in two senses."

"I had no idea how things were," said Roydon weakly.

"Well, we have enough to do in our own little corner of

ordinary time and space. Do you feel like coming with us tomorrow?"

I must see, Roydon thought, if I can't get a better clue to where She went. That rook—was it a rook? Can I trace the place? Will they take me there? Miriel's dark hair and oval face swam up at him suddenly and he groped his way out of the room, muttering something. Paul Sattern looked after him and, turning to Sal with a bitter smile, shook his head ever so slightly. The girl flushed and, biting her lip, picked up a nest of tapes and walked out of the other door. She encountered Richard, the gadget-man, past the doorway. Richard, who had his eyes on her face, turned pale and said nothing, but came on into the room.

"Well?" said Paul.

"Those linking atto-second counters—will they be ready?" uttered Richard harshly, as though the technical sentence was code for something else.

"Of course. You can peg them in a new line from LV3 to PN8 tomorrow. But I think the femto-counters may show something yet."

"Too slow," said Richard and began a brisk discussion, but his manner was distrait and he jumped when Sal came back in. Roydon, recovering next door, heard much of the discussion, but it might as well have been the conversation of rooks or starlings. Fenn Vaughan strolled in and past the trio, singing:

"Where the femto-seconds pass
Richard sits upon—"

Paul kicked his shin. Fenn walked on whistling. The group broke up in silence.

"What are all those things?" said Roydon. The craft was slowly cruising over the greenery.

"Those are future buildings," explained Sal, who had pressed Paul to take her along to keep an eye on Roydon. "We don't know whether they're some kind of plascrete or something new. The three-metre top bound stopped them existing above that at first, but they're growing up now a centimetre a week by infection, and pushing up the top bound. One day they'll be complete. That's why they look like ruins. Dick says the time is plus-ninety-four years in that patch below. But of course it's mostly the

same with present and past buildings—if they're new domains, the buildings can't grow above the top bound at first. Look at all that lot to the west; they're all sorts of dates, mostly present to past, but they grew up when there wasn't any building there so they are still incomplete."

"But surely the whole world from one of these domains must look very queer—masses of foundations and nothing else?"

"No, no, if you went down there you'd see complete buildings, probably a normal-density district, all around you; only the domain part itself would have these shells. Someone coming on to the domain from the world of that date would probably think it was a patch where demolition work had been going on. One reason why we don't often see people near those shells."

"What's that odd brown patch down there?"

"Oh, that's just the other way. It's minus-three-hundred-odd years, Dick says. Most of the domains are minus a century or more round here—aren't they, Paul?—which is why they're still un-built-up."

"How big are the domains?"

"Anything from a metre to a couple of kilometres across, and any shape. Dick says they may even start by growing quickly from a mere point, and changing time-level as they grow. That's where his atto-second lines may pick up something."

Roydon's eyes devoured the hated green. The craft sank and Richard went down the ladder with his first gadget. They proceeded methodically across country like a mathematically-minded crane-fly ovipositing on a lawn.

"Why, that—that looks very like the village! Is it part of the—the poik?"

"Yes, been inside it for dozens of years. A lot of it is minus-twenty-five-years now."

"Is that why it's got all those odd buildings among it?"

"Yes."

"Look, there are some people! How is it they don't know they're isolated?"

"Don't you realise?" cried Paul. "The 'open' domains can be entered. They're mostly on the poik margins. But most of the inner domains, once entered, can only be left geographically. You can see men and animals crossing

them and vanishing. Watch that nineteenth-century labourer on that ploughland. There—he's gone! But he doesn't know that. He's in a complete nineteenth-century world. Once you're down in a patch of, say, minus-twenty-five years like the village, you've dropped through a hole twenty-five years deep, and have to walk about on that level for evermore. That's the risk we all run if we happen to cross a domain-bound without knowing it. We can't get back. That's what your wife must have done. You were lucky, what with the cog-slipper."

Roydon shuddered—but not from fear—and choked.

"And of course, there's not much sign of a bound in an agricultural area like that when it's mostly minus a century or so; it had been broadly the same for generations."

"How is it you can see all those domains from the air?"

"The top bound at roughly three metres, that Sal was talking about. It rises to three metres above 'old' buildings too. All domains are 'open' at the top bound, more or less, and you can see them from above. Down below you can only see neighbouring domains from an 'open' one. Some 'open' ones harden up into 'closed' ones, by the way."

"Don't the villagers and so on see the helicopter?"

"Yes, but they must have helicopters at minus-twenty-five-years, so they probably just think we're another. If another came by they'd see us go through each other in a ghost-collision that neither lot of us would know anything about—above the three-metre bound."

"What about the people in the place you picked me up from?"

"That's approx-zero. It shows how the area would have been today if there hadn't been a poik at all. The population is real there to themselves, but unreal in our poik-ridden world. Ghosts, if you like."

"Can I go down by the village?"

"Village? No. It's tricky with people about. Let Richard peg his ninth counter down behind that big barn, on his own."

At the eleventh descent: "Why, that's the hill I ran down!" shouted Roydon.

"Is that the Spot on the east?" asked Paul.

"I think so."

"Well, that's where Richard pegs his next counter."

"Can I go down then?"

"Yes, but don't do anything rash. Tell us what you think and we'll take action."

Roydon followed Richard down the ladder when they came over the place. "Wait, Royo, I'm coming too," called Sal and clambered down third. Richard said nothing, but his face was set as he peered at the ground before fixing into it on its long prong his gadget for recording millionths of millionths of millionths of a second.

"Can't make it out—the dike's rubble, the fence is all rotted away; brambles and nettles everywhere too, and all those docks," muttered Roydon. He turned, his eyes searching along what he hoped was the line taken by that hurrying speck so long ago. Richard straightened his back and stared at him, but said nothing. The fool thinks, Richard said to himself, because we snatched him from a cog-slipper, that all domain-time is frozen for ever, doesn't realise most of it's moved sixty-one years on, is going onward all the time, let alone what's shunted or re-bounded.

Sal, who, a little way off, was anxiously watching Roydon, happened to glance at Richard and read his expression in a flash of intuition. "Roy!" she shrieked. At that moment an unexpected and violent gust of instinctive drive invaded the hollow. At the cry, which sounded to him like his wife's voice, Roydon's pale face turned white. He rushed off along the old hedge-line. The hedge seemed to him to swing round and to flicker beside him—was She was running along its far side?

Sal, racing at an angle to cut him off, had reached twenty strides when she vanished. Two seconds later and some way off, Roydon vanished too. "Richard, you fool, come up!" roared Paul from the helicopter. "That patch is a maze of little domains. Come up! We can winch you down where she vanished." But when Richard, white and babbling, was lowered down on the spot, he saw five paces onward the brink of a deep quarry. Below, men in tiny white shorts working ultrasonic excavators, far in the future, were gaping at the broken body.

Roydon's flickering hedge was the edge of a furze thicket. Roydon was running on dry heath. It was very hot. The flickering was the bobbing of twenty-seven crouching heads. A dozen bone-tipped wooden spears flashed towards him, aimed at his hamstrings. Three struck him high in the calves, one went in above a knee. He fell. The skin-clad figures, quacking and barking, loped towards him.

"Leave Richard. We must get that madman!" shouted Fenn Vaughan in Paul's ear. "I've pin-pointed his vanishing. I think I saw something strike him just before."

"All right. Swing her round, Peter. Let Fenn con."

In ten seconds the craft was over the point of Roydon's disappearance, a patch of heath. Half a naked, shaggy thigh could be seen, and a queer coughing uproar rose from the ground. Paul and Fenn, stun-guns at the ready, slipped down the ladder.

The tribe was tying Roydon up with leather thongs. He looked dazed. With blood-curdling howls Fenn and Paul rushed on them. A flash of lightning and a simultaneous crack of thunder completed the tribe's panic, and in a torrential rain-squall they scattered over the heather. Paul and Fenn carried Roydon a few paces back inside the domain bounds where the helicopter could again be seen ghostily through the diminishing downpour, and slashed his bonds loose, looking anxiously about them. From the helicopter's wall the echo of a blackbird's call could be heard ten feet away, somewhere in the nineteenth century. Paul clamped emergency dressings on the wounds. Roydon staggered to his feet. "Must find her," he said, thickly.

"We've had one death on your account—we don't want three. Up the ladder, you fool, before the tribe comes back." The sun was glinting on the wet heath.

At that moment an even fainter echo from the helicopter's base reached the group on the ground. "Miriel, Miriel," it seemed to say. The men and women in the craft, speechless, were gesturing wildly to one side. "Up the ladder to the red mark—they'll trawl you over," shouted Paul. All three clambered post-haste above the red three-metre mark.

"We'll drop you quietly and try to pick up Richard," said Peter's voice at last. The helicopter drifted some metres north, its loaded ladder swaying dangerously. An

old gentleman clad in a sombre jacket, a deal of lace at the neck, and breeches, was kneeling on the ground by a little plot of smooth grass. He did not look up even when the three dropped beside him, and seemed not to hear the noise of the machine which now vanished southward. A green May morning burgeoned all around him. "Miriel, Miriel!" he was crying.

At last he looked up at the group around him. He seemed not quite right in the head: at any rate he gave little sign of surprise. "Here is a lock of her hair cut off when she came to us, here is a lock of white hair when she was taken, here is her ring, her wedding ring. She besought I would bury them near to the place where she came to us, for her body is in Mafford churchyard and her soul with her Maker, but her heart, I fear, is here, though she cherished our people for sixty years. Who are you, sirs, are you of the company of the blessèd angels, are you come to take me to Heaven to be with her?"

"She was my wife," said Roydon quietly.

"Ah, sir, but she was an old old woman when she departed this life on Friday last. How can that be?"

"Never mind: it is true. I should like to see her grave, though I know now where it lies: I have seen it long since. Did she live here all her life after she came to you?"

"Yes, sir, she was, as you might say, the mother of our little flock. Mourned and lamented by one and all, sir, by young and old, by man and woman, and a noble stone they will put up, sir, at the head of the grave. Matthew is carving it but 'twill not be ready for a day or two, I fear. She was the mother of our village, though her heart, I fear, was elsewhere, and that gave her a sadness, a kind of resignation all her days. Resigned to God's will, she was, and indeed she loved our people dearly. Miriel has cherished and succoured our village, but she will not come among us again." And the old man, smiling sadly, nodded off among the meadow flowers.

Roydon picked up the ring and slipped it on the little finger of his left hand. His spear-wounds were yelling at him, but in his heart a vast dark-grey calm was spreading.

the total experience kick

CHARLES PLATT

IT ALL HAPPENED back in that wild winter of '82, when Total Experience was sweeping through the music business and knocking the small agencies over right and left. Half of them went bankrupt buying the new T.E. equipment; the other half were left behind by the trend, unable to afford it.

At that time, I was fairly new on the staff of Sound Trends—an outfit as cheap as its name. They couldn't afford the T.E. equipment, and they were worried, not partial to the idea of going bankrupt because they couldn't get on to the latest music kick.

I was leafing through the small ads section of "Discord Weekly" when I caught sight of a paragraph that really started me thinking and scheming. "Urgently wanted by major Total Experience music company," the ad. read.

"Grade III computer programmer with tone generator experience and wide knowledge of musical instrument modification. Must be trendy, go-ahead, able to sight-read Fortran."

My first thought was one of disappointment. The job was ideal for me, but I was stuck in Sound Trends, sinking fast, tied to them by a pretty strong contract.

Then I began to see glimmerings of an idea. I checked with a contact I had on the staff of "Discord Weekly" and found that the small ad. in question had been placed by Harry King, biggest firm in the business. They wouldn't be using a discreet small ad., I reasoned, unless trying to do some fast recruitment on the quiet. And *that* could only be because they'd caught on to something new and suddenly needed staff to develop it.

So this was our chance (I put it to Sound Trends' director) to get inside the Harry King organisation, scrap the Total Experience kick, and steal the idea King was working on to supersede T.E. Send me in as a spy, I reasoned, and Sound Trends doesn't go bust after all—it gets one jump ahead of everyone else.

They were desperate enough to try it out. And that's how it was that, the next day, I was sitting in Harry King's own office overlooking the old Shell Centre and the Thames, beginning to wonder if my idea of amateur spies was quite as foolproof as it had first seemed. At that time, King was by far the biggest man in the business ; somehow he'd come up with the right ideas at the right time, and within twelve months his empire was made.

I presented a hastily assembled file of false information about my freelance status and previous experience, which he glanced at. He gave me a lot of talk about fantastic prospects and salary increases, which was obviously phoney. After these preliminaries we got down to business.

He strode up and down, gesticulating, creasing up his pastel pink one-nighter suit. (Its style just wasn't right for his age or waistline, but he had to maintain the trendy-young-man image).

"You think total experience is just another gimmick?" he said loudly. "It's not. Never was. It's an in-no-vation." He spoke the word slowly, as though only having learnt it recently. "A genuine in-no-vation. Total musical appeal

to all the senses. Lemme show you something. What we've pushed the kids so far is nothing, nothing at all." He pressed desk buttons and the window opaqued, indirect lighting glowed, and two wall panels retracted to expose a pair of T.E. projectors. A Diacora screen lowered. He looked around, grunted. "Sit in that chair over there, and get this." He pressed another contact and the lights dimmed.

The screen lit up in a whirl of colours and a jangling screech totally unlike anything I had experienced before blasted out from giant acoustic panels in the ceiling. The screen cleared and suddenly there was a giant-size image of Marc Nova in shatteringly intimate close-up, all in depth-effect colour, singing (somewhere behind the rest of the noise) his latest number. Bass notes of slightly different frequency produced stomach-churning beats. The two T.E. projectors focused on me and flickered in a subliminal pattern. Blasts of hot air, scented with a smooth, moist perfume mixed with acrid body odour, wafted over me—it matched Marc Nova's image perfectly, I noted with admiration.

The effect was cataclysmic; as the bass beats speeded up and the pitch rose, colours flashed across the screen faster and a high-pitched whistling, hissing noise filled my ears. The sequence ended just when I felt more of it would be unbearable and I sat weakly, sweating, as if I'd awakened from a nightmare. King pressed the desk buttons and the room restored itself to its former state. "Make no mistake, fella," he was saying, pounding his desk, "that may look great now, but we gotta think ahead past it, past T.E., even, to what the trend's gonna be in six months' time." He shuffled papers on his desk, almost like an actor who's forgotten his next line. The awkward moment was broken when a girl walked in.

She dropped some folders on King's desk, then looked round and saw me. "I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't realise you had someone in here. . . ."

When I say she looked round and saw me, this isn't really an accurate description. My image may have registered in her brain, vaguely, as a person, a visitor; but her glance went right through me, passing over me as if I was a piece of furniture. I looked down from her cold green eyes

and saw a face that was beautiful, perfectly formed, yet equally cold. Then she turned back to King. "Is there anything else?"

"No thanks, honey," he said, getting up from his chair behind the desk. She went out of the room. King walked over to the window, stared out a moment. "Right," he said. "Let's make a little trip, O.K.? Go see the boy you'll work with if you join our organisation." We walked up to the roof and soon were jetting over the Thames in his private 'copter.

He steered with one hand and gestured with the other. "I keep my boys split up, see? Find it works out better. They like their familiar surroundings, and this way there's less chance of any ideas leaking out. Get what I mean?"

I nodded, uneasily, reminded of my role as a spy. I glanced at King's fat face; his eyes were invisible behind pola grey shades stretched across his forehead.

The 'copter began to lose height as we came down over a shabby area in Camden, east side.

"This boy," said King, "he's a creep, know what I mean? But he's a genius as well. Lemme handle him. True creative genius."

We touched down on a makeshift platform built over one of a line of Camden back-to-backs, and walked down a rusty fire escape to the front door. King rang the obsolescent mechanical doorbell.

After some time a thin, stooping, pasty-faced figure dressed in pyjamas opened the door.

"Hi there, Gerry boy," King exclaimed, stamping into the place.

"Careful Mr. King. Damp rot in the floor, you know."

King's high spirits faded a little, but he forced a broad smile all the same. We went into the back room.

"I been working on the feedback unit, like you said, but I can't demonstrate it properly until. . . ."

"Yeah, all right, so long as it's ready for the Trafalgar Square bit next week. Right now, this is the man who'll be working with you in future, if he likes the set up." 'Gerry boy' smiled nervously and we shook hands.

"My name's Joe Forrest," I said. "Glad to know you." For the first time, I really noticed the surroundings. A broken-down bed was in one corner of the shabby little

room, two cats curled up on it. An '82 Descomp unit stood by the window, case shining, only a few months old. There was a dirty dinner plate on top of it and another cat sleeping on the keyboard. Adjacent to the Descomp three obsolete, battered quarter-track stereo tape decks and two oscilloscopes so old that the tubes were faded yellow stood on a rough bench covered with odd electrical components. There were signal generators and tone benders, boxes of second-hand parts and incomplete assemblies. It seemed impossible that such a cheap set-up could produce anything of remote value.

"What was the, ah, feedback unit you mentioned?" I asked, fishing for information. This could be what we were after.

"It's upstairs," 'Gerry boy' said, shuffling to the door in his carpet slippers. "Come up, and I'll show you. . . ."

"Just hold on a moment," said King. "I'm thinking that if Mr. . . . uh . . . Forrest is . . . uh . . . interested in our organisation, some kind of routine . . . uh . . . loyalty test, is required. And if not, he'd best not see all our little secrets. Right?" I saw King could be tough if the occasion arose.

'Gerry boy' looked confused, as if the politics of big business were beyond him. King smiled blandly at me. "Well, what's your answer, Forrest? Subject to, ah, formal agreement, you interested in joining up with the big family of Harry King?" He laughed heavily.

I swallowed uncomfortably. How could I back out? "Yes, of course I am," I said. "Only . . ."

"Fine, fine. Got a meter, Gerry boy?"

"I think so, Mr. King." He found a battered Verilyser under a pile of junk on the bench, and I watched with dumb fascination as he strapped it on my wrist, plugging the lead into an oscilloscope. My mind acted as if overloaded: it seemed impossible to find a way out of the situation, and all I could do was think around in circles, fascinated by the unstoppable sequence of events.

"I must apologise for this, ah, inconvenience," King said, looking just a tiny bit uncomfortable. "But in our business, you know, we can't afford to take any chances over personnel loyalty." He dragged out a sheet of standard questions from his pocket.

'Gerry boy' adjusted the equipment and we went ahead. "Are you, Joseph A. Forrest, presently in the employment of any rival company or engaged in any work which could be construed as competitive and contrary to the interests of the Harry King organisation?"

I tried to stay calm, watching the oscilloscope trace. "No," I said, firmly. The trace kinked in the characteristic sine curve that Harry King, 'Gerry boy,' myself and anyone else knows only too well as signifying 'untruth.' I started to sweat, heavily.

"Hold it a moment," said 'Gerry boy.' He turned to me, displaying two fingers of his hand. "How many fingers am I holding up?" he said.

"Two," I replied. Again the 'untruth' sine curve resulted.

"I bungled it. Wrong polarity. Truths registered as untruths." He reversed the leads. "Go ahead now." I met his eyes briefly, and the hard look he gave me only confirmed my suspicion that, for some reason, he'd fixed the test for me.

King went through the whole list of questions and my answers flashed up 'truthful' every time. By the end of it he was overflowing with good spirits. "First thing tomorrow, you get down to my office, we fix the contract. Then straight along to the main studio, see how we make the recordings. We'll be starting Marc Nova's new tape. How about that, hey?"

I smiled weakly, still a bit shaken. "Terrific."

King turned to 'Gerry boy.' "You got room for Joe to live upstairs? Be better if you two were working as closely as possible." Gerry nodded. "Fine, fine." King pounded him heartily on the shoulder.

"Please, Mr. King, my asthma . . ." he crumpled up, coughing and gasping for breath. King ceased his pounding, looked a bit put out.

"You oughta get this dump cleaned up."

"I can't afford it right now, with mother at the clinic. . . ."

"Well, you get our new gimmick working, we see what we can do." I followed him out of the house, turning once to glance back at Gerry, standing in the doorway, watching us leave. His normally impassive face looked faintly, cynically, amused.

The studio was, undeniably, impressive. Vast banks of unitised equipment—the T.E. recording gear—were attended by technicians, monitor-tranceivers clipped to their ears. In one corner Gerry shuffled around a piece of hardware making adjustments, still wearing carpet slippers. It was basically a tone synthesizer, but heavily modified.

The other side of the double-glass wall that divided the studio in two, Marc Nova, Britain's leading subvocalist, confronted the T.E. cameras, standing on a platform as spotless white as the backdrop. Above and around him, polychrome projectors stood ready to beam down the effects that were so much a part of T.E. To one side, session musicians, mostly unemployed jazzmen, sat holding their outdated, physically blown instruments, almost protectively.

Harry King and myself and a number of others observed the scene from a gallery fifteen feet above. "None of the old methods, here," King was saying. "This studio layout was designed specially for T.E.—none of the old makeshift mods and breadboard electronics. See the white goo they're pasting on Nova's face? Symbolic of our methods. Blank it out, then build up what you want. The correct skin-pigment tint will be added when the film is processed. And using that goo we can fix his face up, too. More aggressive, more sexy . . . sculpt a bit on here and there and the stuff dries to a homogeneous plastic texture in ten minutes. It's the only way to get just what you want." He peered down at the electronics section. "Same thing goes for the sound. Each component synthesized separately, harmonics and overtones meshed separately, one at a time. Hold it, I think they're gonna make the subvocal tape now. It's the first step."

Marc Nova strapped an S mike around his neck and sat down in a comfortable chair. The session musicians started to play the intro to the new number. He began silently mouthing the words.

"See, the days when you had to compromise are over," King said quietly to me. "Used to be that you often found a kid with a great image, but he couldn't get anywhere near the singing voice you needed. Or you found the right voice, but the guy was a monster. This way, we choose the face,

and as long as we got the throat movements and vowel forms for the timing and sound shapes, it don't matter if he can sing or not. Gerry boy's equipment puts together whatever kind of voice we want."

The recording ended and the musicians packed up, having provided the mime-backing. Their job was over; nothing as imperfect or uncontrollable as the noise of a wind-blown instrument could be allowed to form part of the finished recording. The technicians rewound and played the tape over the studio sound system. The voice was hard, harsh and demanding, wonderfully sexual. The lyrics were bare and blunt, yet suggestive in a curiously subtle way.

"What do you think, Sam?" said King, addressing a man I hadn't noticed before. He wore clothes that were modern, yet not immediate; he had a clean, but not slick, haircut. His face was kind of dull. He stared down at the studio, looking bored.

"It's O.K.," he said, after a while.

"As great as the last Marc Nova smash?"

"Dunno, really. This one could be a bit bigger."

King slapped him on the shoulder. "We done it again, boys," he called down to the technicians. "Sure hit. Keep it moving."

I drew King aside. "Who's the fellow called Sam that you just spoke to?"

"Our special kink. Statistically Average Man. We used a census, found a guy typical of the music buyers. Looks like them, thinks like them, wears the same clothes, and most important, he's *got the same tastes*. Get the picture? His word is the ultimate. What he says will sell, sells. If he says no, we scrap it."

I stared at Sam's blank face, fascinated. Suddenly I realised just how totally ordinary the man was. No distinguishing features at all.

King looked round as a girl came in, carrying papers. He took them, started to look through them. I stared at her, unable to look away. Our eyes met briefly; I saw she was the one—Jane—who'd come into King's office during my interview. Once again it was as though she looked straight through me. Despite the stunning appearance, there was little, if any, warmth. Her face was hard, and

though her lips weren't thin, they were firmly set. Hers was a cold, self-contained kind of beauty.

I moved some of my essentials into Gerry's house that night, not looking forward to it. He'd cleared up a lot of the mess, but the place was still shabby and smelled of cats and Gerry's feet. He greeted me very amiably, sitting on the bed in my room while I put away the stuff I'd brought with me.

"How was it at the studio this morning?" he asked.

"Instructive. I hadn't realised the scale of the organisation."

Gerry shook his head. "Don't be deceived. If Harry King can cut a corner, he will. Why do you think I'm working in this dump? Because it's good security, cheap and convenient. I wouldn't be surprised if the organisation's nearly bankrupt."

"For a bankrupt firm, it's doing pretty well."

"You're misled by the surface effect. Sure it's got the best studio facilities, the best equipment. But it's more than King can afford, yet. He's already spent next year's profits."

"How come?"

"He was nothing twelve months ago, remember that. And he won't use accountants. *I* don't think he ever adapted to decimal currency properly, when Sterling was discontinued. Still treats cents like pennies, dollars like pounds. That's partly guesswork, you understand."

I shrugged, sat down carefully on a fragile-looking chair. "I've got something to ask you," I said, changing the subject. "Why did you fake that Verilyser test? Don't pretend you didn't; I know as well as you do that you can't reverse a truth reading simply by swapping over the output wires."

Gerry's face creased into a faint, cynical smile. "I fixed it because I'm sick of Harry King. You're the fourth one who's seen this enterprise; the other three were scared off by it. I'm not interested in your loyalty, and I need an assistant. It seemed the logical thing to do. For all I care, you could be an industrial spy."

I breathed in sharply; the casual way he'd touched on my secret was unsettling, though his attitude was reassuring.

Gerry blew his nose loudly, on a dirty handkerchief. I saw, with distaste, that it wasn't even disposable. He shoved it back in his pocket.

"Since you haven't seen it yet, you might as well get familiarised with the new gimmick." Gerry stood up and I followed him into another room. It was completely bare, except for a large modified Hammond organ in the centre of the floor. This had been extensively remodelled and enlarged, but the dual keyboard remained.

"Emotion detector, amplifier and feedback unit," Gerry said. "Styling people haven't cleaned up the appearance of it yet, but it's otherwise complete." He opened an inspection panel; I looked in and saw there was a little padded seat and control panel inside the unit.

"New gimmick. Marc Nova pretends to play this thing —that's why we left the old Hammond keyboard on the outside—while I sit in there and press the buttons that really control it. Harry King's got the idea that groups may be coming back, replacing the solo singer. In a way this is the first step in the trend."

"How's this unit different from T.E.?" I asked.

"I'll show you." He turned on power switches, then climbed inside the machine. Music came from a loudspeaker somewhere. "That's the monosensory version of Nova's latest tape," Gerry said. "I don't know what it does for you, but for me it's just boring." As he spoke he made adjustments on the control panel. I began to feel vaguely lethargic; the music suddenly seemed more banal, as if the nature of it had changed slightly, becoming duller. Involuntarily I yawned, as the feeling increased in intensity.

"Alternatively, some people reckon the music gives you a kick." His voice seemed to come from a long way off.

The feeling of the music changed. I became aware of aspects of the melody line that were exciting. The beat was uplifting. Soon I felt like dancing; I was almost deliriously happy, as if on a drug.

The music ended and the sensation vanished. "You see," said Gerry, getting out of the unit, "music is basically emotional. Pop music is both very simple in construction, and yet complicated in appeal; it carries a lot of emotional punches to the listener. In the past, songwriters used to feel this instinctively; Lennon-McCartney

songs, for instance, were early examples of how adolescent happiness, with an underlying miserable sadness, could be implied in the same melody line. The last three chords in 'She Loves You' are the best example.

"Well, as you know, now songwriting is computerised, the emotional content of a melody can be evaluated and controlled. Inevitably, the sex-appeal component is usually played up. This unit takes the system a stage further; it selects an individual emotional component in the general response that the music is invoking in each member of the audience. It detects it, re-broadcasts it. The stimulus is received by the brain it was drawn from, but in a much-amplified form. The unit then re-detects it, amplifies it again, and re-broadcasts. Positive feedback effect. The trick is to key into natural cortical frequencies."

I thought it over. "Does King know what you have here?"

Gerry shrugged. "He knows what it does. If someone gave him an atomic warhead in a matchbox he wouldn't be impressed—he'd just accept it as another marvel of science. That's how he looks at this."

"But the implications. . . . T.E. used existing audio-visual-sensory techniques, just combining them. This is something entirely new. There's a difference."

Gerry shook his head. "No difference. This gadget uses techniques already applied now in brain surgery, cortical analysis, EEG developments. They're slightly modified, but not very greatly."

I followed him out of the room, back into my bedroom. In spite of the impact of the experience, I was already thinking ahead. My company, Sound Trends, would find it difficult to get staff to manufacture such a piece of equipment; it would be more costly than T.E., and they couldn't even afford that. And I doubted my ability to reconstruct a unit, even after lengthy study of the one I had seen.

"I've a proposition, Gerry," I said, slowly. He sat on the bed, stroking a tabby cat on his lap. "You don't admire the Harry King empire very much, do you?"

Gerry shook his head. "To some extent that's true."

I took the plunge. "I know of an organisation that would pay you 50% more, provide proper facilities, guaranteed

conditions, what you wanted—if you'd leave the King organisation."

"I'm under contract, Joe."

"There's bound to be a loophole."

He sat there, silent, for some time. He pushed the cat off his lap and stood up, walking to the window, a kind of tragi-comic figure. "There's another reason," he said, in a rather small voice. "I don't dare antagonise Harry King. Look, this may sound ridiculous to you. It *is* ridiculous. But ever since I met her, I've just been crazy about his daughter. I love her. I can't help it."

"Have I ever met the girl?" I said.

"She came into the studio today. In the gallery, where you were."

Suddenly it clicked. The frigid blonde, the one I'd thought was King's secretary. The one called Jane.

"It's funny," Gerry went on, "but all my life I've had a kind of a vision of a perfect girl. When I saw her the vision came alive; it was unbelievable. She's the only reason for my coming to work here in the first place. I just *know* that, sooner or later, something will happen. . . ."

Inwardly, I groaned. The situation was doubly ridiculous; Gerry disliked the organisation, but the only reason he wouldn't leave was based on a piece of hopeless romanticism. What could I do? I couldn't tell him he'd got no chance with the girl—him, a stooped, asthmatic, penniless electronics expert; her, a frigid, untouchable beauty, the boss's daughter. He must be aware of the facts. Throwing them in his face wouldn't help.

"Well," I said lamely, "think it over, Gerry."

He walked to the doorway. "I suspected you were from a rival firm, when we first met, and when I fixed that test. So this is no surprise to me. I'm just sorry to mess up your plans, Joe. My motives must look pretty hopeless. But somehow, I just feel that if I wait long enough, things will turn out all right. . . ." He lapsed into silence for a moment, then pulled himself together. "Goodnight, then."

I stayed up quite late, thinking the problem through. There had to be a solution somewhere; but right then, I couldn't see it. Even if Gerry were more glamorous, from what I'd seen of the girl, she had little interest in men. Although Gerry would be in a position to join Sound

Trends if he somehow managed to marry the girl, there was just no way I could see of arranging it.

I fell into a restless sleep and dreamed of emotional feedback units governing the entire world. Teenagers, old men and newly born children were moving in the same relentless rhythm of beat music; the Earth's crust gave way way and I woke up shouting for help. . . .

A week later, I was in Trafalgar Square under Nelson's Column with the rest of the studio crew, hoisting great banks of acoustic panels into place, positioning T.E. projectors, cursing the cold wind and trying to coax generators and mixer units into life. A vast Diacora screen, suspended above the stage that had been erected yesterday, rippled and snapped in the brisk wind. It was Easter Monday; but the warmth of Spring had yet to arrive.

By three-thirty, teenagers were already crowding the square, some of them in the period costume fitting to the occasion, carrying placards and the tripod-symbols reminiscent of the old pageantry of disarmament campaigns. I even saw a few shaggy false beards.

The event had been plugged for the past few days in all the media as something really new; not just another Total Experience Marc Nova concert. But few people realised that the new gimmick lay within the re-styled Hammond organ standing to one side of the stage.

Gerry was there, making final adjustments. It had been a surprisingly busy week with him, eliminating bugs in the circuits, familiarising me with the principles involved. Harry King stood to one side, a little nervous because this was the first time the feedback unit had been used with a large audience, in public.

By four, the massive generators were roaring away, the projectors were all live, the sound system tested out O.K. The show started, the music blasting out in great waves of sound, the audience shouting and chanting, the artistes raving through their acts. It was just the usual Easter concert; the feedback unit wasn't to be employed until Marc Nova came on at the end. I monitored the cameras that were being used for the projection of a vastly enlarged image of each performer, on the screen over the stage, and time passed surprisingly quickly. I realised suddenly that

the hysterical compère was announcing the last act; Gerry was climbing into the feedback unit; Marc Nova stood ready, offstage, impassive and bored as always. I tensed, afraid that somehow there would be a mistake, that the unit would be a failure. But then Marc Nova was out there pounding away on the dummy Hammond keyboard, miming his guts out; the earthy, vital music screamed through the speakers; his sensual features moved, magnified in a riot of colour, over the screen behind him; and I knew everything was going to work out fine.

By the end of the first verse, I could feel excitement building up slowly, subtly. Gerry was keeping the feedback damped heavily at first, letting the emotions gradually mount. The dancing and screaming in the crowd below me became more frantic and excited, and though I knew the emotion was artificially amplified, I couldn't fight it, myself. The sea of moving people, bathed in the flickering of the T.E. projectors, became blurred by sheer happiness.

The number ended, and the sensation cut off. I came back to reality with a jolt, mopped sweat off my forehead. Even Marc Nova seemed to have been slightly affected; he rested against the feedback unit for a moment, before announcing the next number. And then it started again.

Except that this time it was different. The distinction was hard to see, at first, but then it became clear: Gerry had switched the selectivity of the unit. He was no longer detecting and amplifying the happiness component of the emotional response. This time, it was love that swelled up inside the audience, and inside me; a meaningless, overwhelming, feeling of helpless romantic love. And as I looked down near the foot of the stage, I saw why. In the crowd was Harry King's daughter Jane, conspicuous by the fact that she was standing cold and motionless, unlike the dancing, screaming kids either side of her. Gerry must have seen her there, near the front of the audience, and as I felt the helpless awakening of sheer joy and affection within me, I couldn't help admiring Gerry, feeling sorry for him, and hoping his desperate scheme would pay off. Then further thought became difficult; vision blurred, the mind slowed down. All I could contemplate was love, for the world around me, for all people, for everything. The intensity increased, and increased again. With a kind of

detached concern I saw Marc Nova falter and then slump against the unit, overcome. People were fainting in the audience. I could hardly stand up.

From my position near the stage I saw faint trails of smoke creeping out of one side of the feedback unit. Insulation burning? Components overloading? Suddenly the cover at the back swung open and Gerry staggered out, wiping his eyes. And still the emotion of love thundered over me and over everyone else.

Somehow I got down on to the stage, amidst the shouting and pandemonium, and staggered over to Gerry and the unit. Inside I could see coils glowing with heat. Desperately, I lunged at the power cable and pulled it free.

The vast feeling of emptiness that descended on me was overpowering, as the love emotion was suddenly turned off. But recovery came fairly quickly; I barely managed to drag the unconscious figure of Gerry out of Trafalgar Square before the confused, bewildered audience became a destructive mob.

Back at Gerry's house, that evening, we talked about what had happened.

"I saw what you tried to do," I said. "In fact I think I'd more or less guessed your intentions beforehand. Your inclusion of a 'love' selectivity circuit in the unit was, really, a give-away."

Gerry smiled, half-heartedly.

"But did it work?" I went on. "Did it have any effect on the girl?"

Gerry sighed, and shook his head. "I'd planned on using the unit as a kind of twentieth century love potion. It was just a vague idea, you understand; just a hope. If she was there—and Harry King usually gets her a position in the audience of an important show; he values her reactions—if she was there, I thought the least I could do was, perhaps, awaken her interest in some way."

"And did you?"

"No." The reply was bare, defeated, an empty sound in the drab room. "Even as I increased the intensity I could see it was ineffective. Her eyes never changed, Joe. She just stood there, bored. And I know why; it's in the principles of the unit. It doesn't *implant* emotions, it *intensifies* them.

If there's no love response at all in a person, there's nothing there to intensify. There was no love in Jane, none at all."

I surveyed the workroom, the junk and the equipment, Gerry sitting on his bed surrounded by it all. It was a depressing scene.

"I suppose you feel pretty bad about it," I said.

He looked up. "There's a sense of loss, of disappointment. But it's a funny thing, Joe. It must be the defeat of the situation, or something. But . . . somehow, I just don't feel I love the girl any more."

I felt a little uncomfortable, meeting his eyes, and looked away. "See how you feel tomorrow, Gerry," I said, and went out of the room and up to bed.

That's all past history, of course; three months in the past. And in this business, three months is a hell of a long time. It's time enough for the Harry King empire to go bust, deep in debt, and for Gerry to desert the organisation and the girl, and come over to Sound Trends as we'd originally planned.

Our company's rushing ahead, now; emotional feedback has swept the country. Gerry and I are still working together, and we get on well. We have a great new kick lined up for when the feedback gimmick gets that tarnished, outdated feel to it.

I know Gerry thinks back about the past, sometimes, and I still feel guilty, in a way, about the method I used for getting him free from the Harry King organisation. Perhaps one day, when I know him better, I'll tell him what really happened—how, suspecting his plans for using the unit to try and awaken love in the girl, I made some hasty modifications to it the night beforehand. How I fixed it, so that a field of opposite polarity to that of the emotion broadcast would, instead of being converted and dissipated electrically, be set up within the unit.

I fixed it so that, when the love-intensification component was selected, the field broadcast outside would be balanced by a negative field *inside* the machine. So that when, on that Easter Monday, Gerry boosted the love-emotion intensification, he felt the exact opposite himself; not hate, but a negation of love.

It was a hamfisted, desperate kind of scheme, and as it was, my modifications sent several circuits out of adjustment and brought the unit near complete overloading.

But it worked. One day when Gerry thinks back and tries to understand how his helpless romantic attachment for the girl suddenly vanished, I'll tell him the true story.

Editorial (*concluded from page* 3)

ing particularly Charles Platt, George Collyn and Keith Roberts (whose second story for this magazine is in the current issue). This shows that a healthy interest is being taken in the future of science fiction, and that readers are concerned that there should always be an outlet for those with a fresh approach to sf, and that a monopoly of "big names" can cause only harm to the field. This is an opinion that has long been held by the editorial staff of this magazine, and it is gratifying to see that it is an opinion shared by the majority of our readers.

This survey, too, has made it clear that there is a great deal of dissatisfaction with the current condition of science fiction. Lack of ideas, poor writing, cliché thinking and lack of real imagination, are all charges that have been levelled at certain kinds of modern science fiction.

Our readers, clearly, have very strong ideas on science fiction, and have felt the need to express them. Often, the forms returned were filled out in remarkable detail, and we have received many long letters expanding on the answers. We should like to extend our thanks to all those who have expressed their interest in NEW WORLDS. We feel that any form of literature that can evoke such a detailed and enthusiastic response is in a very healthy state of growth and development.

Michael Moorcock
Langdon Jones

CORRECTION

Science Fiction Book Club regret that in their full-page advertisement in the November issue, EIGHTH SEAL was inadvertently printed as originally published by Gollancz. The correct publisher is, of course, DOBSON.

tomorrow is a million years

j.g.ballard

IN THE EVENING the time-winds would blow across the Sea of Dreams, and the silver wreck of the excursion module would loom across the jewelled sand to where Glanville lay in the pavilion by the edge of the reef. During the first week after the crash, when he could barely move his head, he had seen the images of the *Santa Maria* and the *Golden Hind* sailing towards him through the copper sand, the fading light of the sunset illuminating the ornamental casements of the high stern-castles. Later, sitting up in the surgical chair, he had seen the spectral crews of these spectral ships, their dark figures watching him from the quarter-decks. Once, when he could walk again, Glanville went out on to the surface of the lake, his wife guiding his elbow as he hobbled on his stick. Two hundred yards from the module he had suddenly seen an immense ship materialise from the wreck and move through the sand towards them, its square sails lifted by the time-winds. In the cerise light Glanville recognised the two bow anchors jutting like tusks, the try-works amidships, and the whaling irons and harpoons. Judith held his arm, drawing him back to the pavilion, but Glanville knocked away her hand.

Rolling slowly, the great ship crested silently through the sand, its hull towering above them as if they had been

watching from a skiff twenty yards off its starboard bow. As it swept by with a faint sigh of sand, the whisper of the time-winds, Glanville pointed to the three men looking down at them from the quarter-rail, the tallest with stern eyes and a face like a biscuit, the second jaunty, the third ruddy and pipe-smoking.

"Can you see them?" Glanville shouted. "Starbuck, Stubb and Flask, the mates of the *Pequod*!" Glanville pointed to the helm, where a wild-eyed old man gazed at the edge of the reef on which he seemed collision-bent. "Ahab . . .!" he cried in warning. But the ship had reached the reef, and then in an instant faded across the clinker-like rocks, its mizzen-sail lit for a last moment by the dying light.

"The *Pequod*! My God, you could see the crew, Ishmael and Tashtego . . . Ahab was there, and the mates, Melville's three momentous men! Did you see them, Judith?"

His wife nodded, helping him on towards the pavilion, her frown hidden in the dusk light. Glanville knew perfectly well that she never saw the spectral ships, but nonetheless she seemed to sense that something vast and strange moved across the sand-lake out of the time-winds. For the moment, she was more interested in making certain that he recovered from the long flight and the absurd accident when the excursion module had crashed on landing.

"But why the *Pequod*?" Glanville asked, as they sat in their chairs on the veranda of the pavilion. He mopped his plump, unshaven face with a flowered handkerchief. "The *Golden Hind* and the *Santa Maria,* yes . . . ships of discovery; Drake circumnavigating the globe has a certain resemblance to ourselves half-crossing the universe—but Crusoe's ship would have been more appropriate, don't you agree?"

"Why?" Judith glanced at the sand inundating the slatted metal floor of the veranda. She filled her glass with soda from the syphon, and then played with the sparkling fluid, watching the bubbles with her severe eyes. "Because we're marooned?"

"No. . . ." Irritated by his wife's reply, Glanville turned to face her. Sometimes her phlegmatic attitude annoyed him—she seemed almost to enjoy deflating his mood of optimism, however forced that might be. "What I meant

was that Crusoe, like ourselves here, made a new world for himself out of the pieces of the old he brought with him. We can do the same, Judith." He paused, wondering how to re-assert his physical authority, and then said with quiet emphasis; "We're not marooned."

His wife nodded, her long face expressionless. Barely moving her head, she looked up at the night sky visible beyond the edge of the awning. High above them, a single point of light traversed the starless sky, its intermittent beacon punctuating its way towards the northern pole. "No, we're not marooned—not for long, anyway, with that up there. It won't be long at all before Captain Thornwald catches up with us."

Glanville stared into the bottom of his glass. Unlike his wife, he took little pleasure in the sight of the automatic emergency beacon of the control ship broadcasting their position to the universe at large. "He'll catch up with us, all right. That's the luck of the thing. Instead of having him always at our heels we'll finally be free of him for ever. They won't send anyone after Thornwald."

"Perhaps not." Judith tapped the metal table. "But how do you propose to get rid of him—don't tell me you're going to be locked together in mortal combat? At the moment you can hardly move one foot after the other."

Glanville smiled, with an effort ignoring the sarcasm in his wife's voice. Whatever the qualities of skill, shrewdness and even courage, of a kind, that had brought them here, she still regarded him as something of an obscure joke. At times he wondered whether it would have been better to have left her behind. Alone here, on this lost world, he would have had no-one to remind him of his sagging, middle-aged figure, his little indecisions and fantasies. He would have been able to sit back in front of the long sunsets and enjoy the strange poetry of the Sea of Dreams.

However, once he had disposed of Captain Thornwald she might at last take him seriously. "Don't worry, there'll be no mortal combat—we'll let the time-winds blow over him."

Undeterred, Judith said: "You'll let one of your spectral ships run him down? But perhaps he won't see them."

Glanville gazed out at the dark grottoes of the sand-reef that fringed the northern shore of the lake two miles

away. Despite its uniformity—the lake-systems covered the entire planet—the flat perspectives of the landscape fascinated him. "It doesn't matter whether he sees them or not. By the way, the *Pequod* this evening . . . it's a pity you missed Ahab. They were all there, exactly as Melville described them in *Moby Dick*."

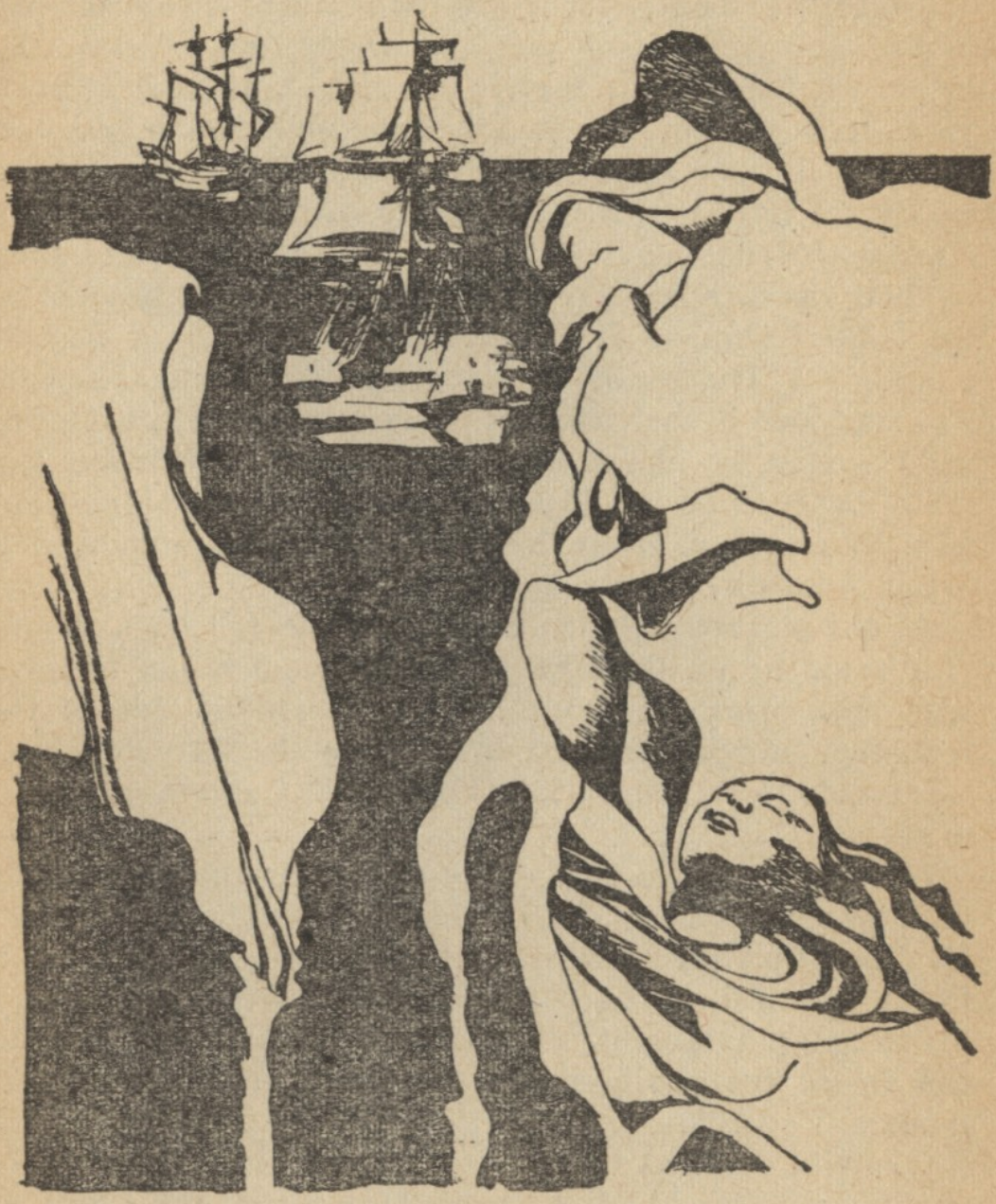
His wife stood up, as if aware that he might begin one of his rhapsodies again. She brushed away the white sand that lay like lace across the blue brocade of her gown. "I hope you're right. Perhaps you'll see the *Flying Dutchman* next."

Distracted by his thoughts, Glanville watched her tall figure move away across the gradient of the beach, following the tide-line formed by the sand blown off the lake's surface. The *Flying Dutchman*? A curious remark. By coming to this remote planet they themselves would lose seven years of their lives by time-dilation if they ever chose to return home, by coincidence the period that elapsed while the condemned Dutchman roved the seas. . . . Every seven years he would come ashore, free to stay there only if he found the love of a faithful woman.

Was he himself the Dutchman? Perhaps, in a remote sense. Or Thornwald? He and Judith had met during the preliminary inquiries and, incredible though it seemed, there might have been something between them—it was difficult to believe that Thornwald would have pursued them this far, sacrificing all hopes of seniority and promotion, over a minor emigration infringement. The bacterial scattering might be serious on some planets, but they had restricted themselves to arid worlds on an empty edge of the universe.

Glanville looked out at the wreck of the excursion module. For a moment there was a glimmer of royals and top-gallants, as if the entire *Cutty Sark* was about to disgorge itself from the sand. This strange phenomenon, a consequence of the time-sickness brought on by the vast distances of interstellar space, had revealed itself more and more during their long flight. The farther they penetrated into deep space, the greater the nostalgia of the human mind and its eagerness to transform any man-made objects, such as the space-ships in which they travelled, into their archaic forbears. Judith, for some reason, had been

immune, but Glanville had seen a succession of extraordinary visions, fragments of the myths and dreams of the Earth's past, reborn out of the dead lakes and fossil seas of the alien worlds.



Judith, of course, not only lacked all imagination but felt no sense of guilt—Glanville's crime, the memory of which he had almost completely repressed, was no responsibility of hers, man and wife though they might be. Besides, the failures of which she silently accused him every day were those of character, more serious in her eyes than

embezzlement, grand larceny or even murder. It was precisely this that made possible his plan to deal once and for all with Captain Thornwald.

Three weeks later, when Thornwald arrived, Glanville had recovered completely from the accident. From the top of the sand-reef overhanging the western edge of the lake he watched the police captain's capsule land two hundred yards from the pavilion. Judith stood under the awning on the veranda, one hand raised to ward off the dust kicked up by the retro-jets. She had never questioned Glanville's strategy for dealing with Thornwald, but now and then he had noticed her glancing upwards at the beacon of the control ship, as if calculating the number of days it would take Thornwald to catch up with them. Glanville was surprised by her patience. Once, a week before Thornwald arrived, he almost challenged her to say whether she really believed he would be able to outwit the police captain. By a curious irony, he realised that she probably did —but if so, why did she still despise him?

As the starboard hatch of the capsule fell back, Glanville stood up on the edge of the reef and began to wave with both arms. He made his way down the side of the reef, then jumped the last five feet to the lake floor and ran across to the capsule. "Thornwald! Captain, it's good to see you!"

Framed within the steel collar of his suit, the policeman's tired face looked up at Glanville through the open hatch. He stood up with an effort and accepted Glanville's hand, then climbed down on to the ground. Careful not to turn his back on Glanville, he unzipped his suit and glanced quickly at the pavilion and the wreck of the excursion module.

Glanville strolled to and fro around him. Thornwald's cautious manner, the hand near the weapon in his holster, for some reason amused him. "Captain, you made a superb landing, beautiful marksmanship—getting here at all, for that matter. You saw the beacon, I suppose, but even so . . ." When Thornwald was about to speak, Glanville rattled on: "No, of course I didn't leave it on deliberately—damn it, we actually crashed! Can you imagine it, after coming all this way—very nearly broke our necks.

Luckily, Judith was all right, not a scratch on her. She'll be glad to see you, Captain."

Thornwald nodded slowly, his eyes following Glanville's pudgy, sweating figure as it roved about the capsule. A tall, stooped man with a tough, pessimistic face and all the wariness of a long-serving policeman, he seemed somehow unsettled by Glanville's manic gaiety.

Glanville pointed to the pavilion. "Come on, we'll have lunch, you must be tired out." He gestured at the sand-lake and the blank sky. "Nothing much here, I know, but it's restful. After a few days—"

"Glanville!" Thornwald stopped. Face set, he put a hand out as if to touch Glanville's shoulder. "You realise why I'm here?"

"Of course, Captain." Glanville gave him an easy smile. "For heaven's sake, stop looking so serious. I'm not going to escape. There's nowhere to go."

"As long as you realise that." Thornwald plodded forward through the top surface of fine sand, his feet placed carefully as if testing the validity of this planet with its euphoric tenant. "You can have something to eat, then we'll get ready to go back."

"If you like, Captain. Still, there's no desperate hurry. Seven years here and back, what difference will a few hours or even days make? All those whipper-snappers you left behind you in the department will be chief commissioners now ; I wouldn't be in too much of a hurry. Besides, the emigration laws may even have been changed. . . ."

Thornwald nodded dourly. Glanville was about to introduce him to Judith, standing quietly on the veranda twenty feet from him, but suddenly Thornwald stopped and glanced across the lake, as if searching for an invisible marksman hidden among the reefs.

"All right?" Glanville asked. Changing the pitch and tempo of his voice, he remarked quietly: "I call it the Sea of Dreams. We're a long way from home, Captain, remember that. There are strange visions here at sunset. Keep your back turned on them." He waved at Judith, who was watching them approach with pursed lips. "Captain Thornwald, my dear. Rescue at last."

"Of a kind." She faced Thornwald who stood beside Glanville, as if hesitating to enter the pavilion. "I hope you

feel all this is necessary, Captain. Revenge is a poor motive for justice."

Glanville cleared his throat. "Well, yes, my dear, but . . . Come on, Captain, sit down, we'll have a drink. Judith, could you—?"

After a pause she nodded and went into the pavilion.

Glanville made a temporising gesture. "A difficult moment, Captain. But as you know, Judith was always rather headstrong."

Thornwald nodded, watching Glanville as the latter drew the chairs around the table. He pointed to the wreck of the excursion module. "How badly was it damaged? We'll have a look at it later."

"A waste of time, Captain. It's a complete write-off."

Thornwald scrutinised the wreck. "Even so, I'll want to decontaminate it before we leave."

"Isn't that pointless?—no-one will ever come here. The whole planet is dead. Anyway, there's a good deal of fuel in the tanks; if you short a circuit with your sprays the whole thing could go up." Glanville looked around impatiently. "Where are those drinks? Judith is . . ."

He started to stand up, and found Thornwald following him to the door of the pavilion. "It's all right, Captain."

Thornwald leaned stolidly on the door. He looked down at Glanville's plump, sweating face. "Let me help you."

Glanville shrugged and beckoned him forward, but then stopped. "Captain, for heaven's sake! If I wanted to escape I wouldn't have been waiting for you here. Believe me, I haven't got a gun hidden away in a whisky bottle or something—I just don't want a scene between you and Judith."

Thornwald nodded, then waited in the doorway. When Glanville returned with the tray he went back to his seat, eyes searching the pavilion and the surrounding beach as if looking for a missing element in a puzzle. "Glanville, I have to prefer charges against you—you're aware what you face when you get back?"

Glanville shrugged. "Of course. But after all, the offence was comparatively trivial, wasn't it?" He reached for Thornwald's bulky flight-suit which was spread across the veranda-rail. "Let me move this out of the sun. Where's Judith gone?"

As Thornwald glanced at the door of the pavilion Glanville reached down to the steel pencil in the right knee of the suit. He withdrew it from the slot, then deliberately dropped it to the metal floor.

"What's this?" he asked. "A torch?" His thumb pushed back the nozzle and then moved quickly to the spring tab.

"Don't press that!" Thornwald was on his feet. "It's a radio reflector, you'll fill the place with—" He reached across the table and tried to grasp it from Glanville, then flung up his forearm to protect his face.

A blinding jet of vaporised aluminium suddenly erupted from the nozzle in Glanville's hand, gushing out like a firework. Within two or three seconds its spangled cloud filled the veranda, painting the walls and ceiling. Thornwald kicked aside the table and buried his face in his hands, his hair and forehead covered with the silver paint.

Glanville backed to the steps, flecks of the paint spattering his arms and chest, hosing the jet directly at the policeman. He tossed the canister on to the floor, where its last spurts gusted out into the sunlight, swept up by the convection currents like a swarm of fireflies. Then, head down, Glanville turned and ran towards the edge of the sand-reef fifty yards away.

Two hours later, as he crouched deep in the grottoes of the reef on the west shore of the lake, Glanville watched with amusement as Thornwald's silver-painted figure stepped out of the pavilion into the sunlight. The cloud of vapour above the pavilion had settled, and the drab grey panels of the roof and sides were now a brilliant aluminised silver, shining in the sunlight like a temple. Framed in the doorway was Judith, watching as Thornwald walked slowly towards his capsule. Apart from the two clear handprints across his face, his entire body was covered with the aluminium particles. His hair glittered in the sunlight like silver foil.

"Glanville . . .!" Thornwald's voice, slightly querulous, echoed in the galleries of the reef. The flap of his holster was open, but the weapon still lay within its sheath, and Glanville guessed that he had no intention of trying to track him through the galleries and corridors of the reef. The columns of fused sand could barely support their own weight; every few hours there would be a dull eruption as

one or other of the great pillar-systems collapsed into a cloud of dust.

Grinning to himself, Glanville watched Thornwald glance back at the pavilion. Evidently intrigued by this duel between the two men, Judith had sat down on the veranda, watching like some mediæval lady at a tourney.

The police captain moved towards the reef, his legs stiff and awkward, as if self-conscious of his glittering form. Chortling, Glanville scraped the sand from the curved roof over his head and rubbed it into the flecks of silver paint on his sleeves and trousers. As he drank from the flask of water he had hidden in the reef three days earlier, he glanced at his watch. It was nearly three o'clock—within four hours phantoms would move across the sand-lake. He patted the parcel wrapped in grey plastic sheeting on the ledge beside him.

At seven o'clock the time-winds began to blow across the Sea of Dreams. As the sun fell away behind the western ridges, the long shadows of the sand-reefs crossed the lake-floor, dimming the quartz-veins as if closing off a maze of secret pathways.

Crouched at the foot of the reef, Glanville edged along the beach, his sand-smeared figure barely visible in the darkness. Four hundred yards away, Thornwald sat alone on the veranda of the pavilion, his silver figure illuminated in the last cerise rays of the sun. Watching him across the lake-bed, Glanville assumed that already the time-winds were moving towards him, carrying strange images of ships and phantom seas, perhaps of mermaids and hallucinatory monsters. Thornwald sat stiffly in his chair, one hand on the rail in front of him.

Glanville moved along the beach, picking his way between the veins of frosted quartz. As the wreck of the excursion module and the smaller capsule nearby came between himself and the pavilion, he began to see the faint outlines of a low-hulled ship, a schooner or brigantine, with its sails reefed, as if waiting at anchor in some pirate lagoon. Ignoring it, Glanville crept into a shallow fault that crossed the lake, its floor some three feet below the surrounding surface. Catching his breath, he undid the parcel,

then carried the object inside it under one arm as he set off towards the glimmering wreck of the module.

Twenty minutes later Glanville stepped out from his vantage point behind the excursion module. Around him rode the spectral hulks of two square-sailed ships, their bows dipping through the warm sand. Intent on the pavilion ahead of him, where the silver figure of Thornwald had stood up like an electrified ghost, Glanville stepped through the translucent image of an anchor-cable that curved down into the surface of the lake in front of him. Holding the object he had taken from the parcel above his head like a lantern, he walked steadily towards the pavilion.

The hulls of the ships rode silently at their anchors behind him as he reached the edge of the lake. Thirty yards away, the silver paint around the pavilion speckled the sand with a sheen of false moonlight, but the remainder of the beach and lake were in a profound darkness. As he walked the last yards to the pavilion with a slow rhythmic stride, Glanville could see clearly Thornwald's tall figure pressed against the wall of the veranda, his appalled face, in the shape of his own hands, staring at the apparition in front of him. As Glanville reached the steps Thornwald made a passive gesture at him, one hand raised towards the pistol lying on the table.

Quickly, Glanville threw aside the object he had carried with him. He seized the pistol before Thornwald could move, then whispered, more to himself than to Thornwald: "Strange seas, Captain, I warned you. . . ." He crouched down and began to back away along the veranda, the pistol levelled at Thornwald's chest.

Then the door on his left opened and before he could move the translucent figure of his wife stepped from the interior of the pavilion and knocked the weapon from his hand.

He turned to her angrily, then shouted at the headless spectre that stepped through him and strode off towards the dark ships moored in the centre of the lake.

Two hours after dawn the next morning Captain Thornwald finished his preparations for departure. In the last minutes he stood on the veranda, gazing out at the even

sunlight over the empty lake as he wiped away the last traces of the aluminium paint with a solvent sponge. He looked down at the seated figure of Glanville tied to the chair by the table. Despite the events of the previous night, Glanville now seemed composed and relaxed, a trace even of humour playing about his soft mouth.

Something about this bizarre amiability made Thornwald shudder. He secured the pistol in his holster—another evening by this insane lake and he would be pointing it at his own head.

"Captain . . ." Glanville glanced at him with docile eyes, then shrugged his fat shoulders inside the ropes. "When are you going to untie these? We'll be leaving soon."

Thornwald threw the sponge on to the silver sand below the pavilion. "*I'll* be going soon, Glanville. You're staying here." When Glanville began to protest, he said: "I don't think there's much point in your leaving. As you said, you've built your own little world here."

"But . . ." Glanville searched the captain's face. "Frankly, Thornwald, I can't understand you. Why did you come here in the first place, then? Where's Judith, by the way? She's around here somewhere."

Thornwald paused, steeling himself against the name and the memory of the previous night. "Yes, she's around here, all right." As if testing some unconscious element of Glanville's memory, he said clearly: "She's in the module, as a matter of fact."

"The module?" Glanville pulled at his ropes, then squinted over his shoulder into the sunlight. "But I told her not to go there. When's she coming back?"

"She'll be back, don't worry. This evening, I imagine, when the time-winds blow, though I don't want to be here when she comes. This sea of yours has bad dreams, Glanville."

"What do you mean?"

Thornwald walked across the veranda. "Glanville, have you any idea why I'm here, why I've hunted you all this way?"

"God only knows—something to do with the emigration laws."

"Emigration laws?" Thornwald shook his head. "Any

charges there would be minor." After a pause, he said: "Murder, Glanville."

Glanville looked up with real surprise. "Murder? You're out of your mind! Of whom, for heaven's sake?"

Thornwald patted the raw skin around his chin. The pale image of his hands still clung to his face. "Of your wife."

"Judith? But she's here, you idiot! You saw her yourself when you arrived!"

"*You* saw her, Glanville. I didn't. But I realised that you'd brought her here with you when you started playing her part, using that mincing crazy voice of yours. You weren't very keen on my going out to the module. Then, last night, you brought something from it for me."

Thornwald walked across the veranda, averting his eyes from the wreck of the module. He remembered the insane vision he had seen the previous evening as he sat watching for Glanville, waiting for this madman who had absconded with the body of his murdered wife. The time-winds had carried across to him the image of a spectral ship whose rotting timbers had formed a strange portcullis in the evening sun—a dungeon-grate. Then, suddenly, he had seen a terrifying apparition walking across this sea of blood towards him, the nightmare commander of this ship of Hell, a tall woman with the slow rhythmic stride of his own requiem. *"Her locks were yellow as gold . . . the nightmare life-in-death was she, who thicks man's blood with cold."* Aghast at the sight of Judith's head on this lamia, he had barely recognised Glanville, her mad Mariner, bearing her head like a wild lantern before he snatched the pistol.

Glanville flexed his shoulders against the ropes. "Captain, I don't know about Judith . . . she's not too happy here, and we've never got on with just ourselves for company. I'd like to come with you."

"I'm sorry, Glanville, there's not much point—you're in the right place here."

"But, Captain, aren't you exceeding your authority? If there is a murder charge . . ."

"Not 'captain,' Glanville—'commissioner.' I was promoted before I left, and that gives me absolute discretion in these cases. I think this planet is remote enough; no-one's likely to come here and disturb you."

He went over to Glanville and looked down at him, then took a clasp knife from his pocket and laid it on the table. "You should be able to get a hand around that if you stand up. Goodbye, Glanville, I'll leave you here in your gilded hell."

"But, Thornwald . . . Commissioner!" Glanville swung himself round in the chair. "Where's Judith? Call her."

Thornwald glanced back across the sunlight. "I can't, Glanville. But you'll see her soon. This evening, when the time-winds blow, they'll bring her back to you, a dead woman from this dead sea."

He set off towards the capsule across the jewelled sand.

UP THE FLAGPOLE

ROGER ZELAZNY'S *This Immortal* (Ace) is the start of several other novels. It deals with the freakish, strong, scarred immortal (or is he?) Nomikos (or is that his name?)—bereaved husband, negotiator with the all-powerful Vegans, fighter, in Greece, with mythic Greek monsters recreated by radiation. He looks a bit like Gully Foyle, sounds a bit like Philip Marlowe. The style is vivid and elliptical. *This Immortal* is a book which does not define its own terms, swinging wildly from Raymond Chandler through Hemingway and Bester and back to Homer, touching here and there on those ancient myths which actually prod at the buried part of the mind. The book grips you, says 'this is what I'm about', releases you and grabs you again in a different place. Roger Zelazny has separated the strands and plaited them instead of letting the cat into the wool-basket to play. *This Immortal* would have been more fascinating, nevertheless, if, like so many of us, you've ever asked yourself what would have happened if Philip Marlowe had been Odysseus. Here is a clue to the answer.

Shoot at the Moon, William F. Temple (Ronald Whiting and Wheaton, 18s.) tells the story of an improbably mixed band of people sent to the moon, the interplay of their characters, of two murders and an eventual scientific discovery. Primarily it is a murder story of the enclosed group, snowbound in the country house, one-of-us-must-have-killed-Sir-Ronald-in-the-library variety. The background to the people involved is very well done, for Temple's per-

ception of character is impressive, and the flow of the dialogue is natural, something rare in sf. Not for the technologically minded though.

Harry Harrison's *Make Room, Make Room* (Doubleday $3.95) is the story of a grimly overcrowded, decrepit and dirty New York, where the essential services and decencies are breaking down under pressure of population. A gangster is murdered by a desperate youth, an honest cop investigating it falls in love with the gangster's girl. The love affair ends because of the cold semi-starvation and lack of privacy of the average citizen's life. The evocation of a crumbling, decaying New York is powerful—the disaster in this disaster-story is *real* disaster. Nevertheless, the central thesis of the story, that only the Coil can save us from overpopulation, and that this has been rejected by a bigoted government, seems untenable and the plot is disjointed. For example, the murder and its investigation, apparently the main plot of the book, is quickly forgotten.

Although Mr. Harrison would no doubt fight any man in the room who dared to suggest he had artistic leanings, the central idea of the book is artistic—the unstoppable decay of a great city and the slow death of its inhabitants.

Mandrake by Susan Cooper (Penguin SF, 4s.) is the story of an anthropologist outlawed when the inhabitants of Great Britain, led by a mad bureaucrat, return to their birth-place and isolate themselves into small, mutually hostile communities. The idea is that the earth is impelling men to do this as a last-ditch stand against its own destruction by nuclear weapons in their hands. This is an idea so patently ridiculous it is bound to turn out to be true. Nevertheless, the man-on-the-run plot is thin, the idea of any hero saving the world by hand-to-hand combat becomes, sadly, less and less close to life, and the whole book is too much like a *Dr. Who* script.

Damon Knight's *The Other Foot* (Ronald Whiting and Wheaton, 18s.) is a longer version of his GALAXY story. The new story holds up well considering that it has only one element—the switch of minds between a man and an intelligent biped from another planet. But the theme is essentially a conceit, an entrancing thought about something that could never happen and wouldn't matter if it did.

Sybil Sue Blue by Rosel George Brown (Doubleday $3.95) is the story of a woman cop, her husband dead on another planet, and her flight to the planet to find him, or whatever is coming from the planet to harm earth. Lightly written, true-seeming in places, it still gives the impression, like *Mandrake,* like *The Other Foot* and like *The Other Foot* and like the next book on the list, of being that top-of-the-head, let's-run-an-extrapolation-up-the-flagpole-and-see-what-comes-down type of science fiction, which never really hits where it hurts.

Shepheard Mead's *The Carefully Considered Rape of the World* (Macdonald, 25s.) has a plot obviously based on that of *The Midwich Cuckoos*—i.e., in it, men from space impregnate simultaneously every woman in the world (short on ovarian biology here). The result is unamazing from start to maternity ward. Enjoyable whimsies about convents full of pregnant nuns and secluded girls' schools full of expectant adolescents—haven't laughed so much since the last lynch-party. The book was recently printed in condensed form in a saucy man's mag. Mead is the author of *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. Good luck to him in his new venture.

Digits and Dastards (Ballantine) is a collection of six Frederik Pohl stories, written over ten years, and two factual pieces. Skilful, wistful and written by a master, the themes mainly of effort, disappointment and failed human endeavour. Well worth reading if a diet of brilliant near-misses and good ideas gone wrong begins to pall.

The Fiery Flower by Paul I. Wellman (Mayflower-Dell) is the story of an amazingly naïve famous film star cast up on a desert island ruled by a huge, godlike man, with hairy ears and a cloven hoof.

Hilary Bailey

Brief Reviews:

Nebula Award Stories 1965 (Doubleday, $4.95). Frothy stories voted best and runners up by Science Fiction Writers of America. The emphasis is on style rather than subject matter or quality of idea. Toughest and most original, containing the best but least pyrotechnical writing is *The Drowned Giant* by Ballard. Frothiest is prize-sweeping *Repent Harlequin, Said the Ticktock Man* by Ellison. *The Saliva Tree* is Aldiss at play, lacking the quality of Aldiss at thought. Zelazny's two pieces are *He Who Shapes* and *The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth,* with well-sustained mood and lots of atmosphere but saying very little. *Computers Don't Argue* by Dickson says "look out, the machines may control us one day"—weary, but well done and almost a relief to find something to bite on however stale. American critics, it seems, are concentrating too much on style—not enough on subject matter and form. One is reminded of the worst of *fin de siècle* work. Is this the way U.S. sf will end? When will the richly decorated balloon pop? Bah!

The Tenth Victim, Robert Sheckley (Mayflower 3s. 6d.). This is an expanded "camped up" version of short story *The Seventh Victim;* humour strained and repetitive, often weak, but not bad light reading.

Orbit 1 (Whiting & Wheaton (U.K.), 18s; Berkley (U.S.), 50c.) is a collection of original stories collected by Damon Knight. None are outstanding, most are readable, conventional sf stories. One of the best is by newcomer Virginia Kidd. Unrepresentative work by Disch and Roberts, representative work by McKenna, Anderson, Wilhelm. Women writers too rarely seen include Sonya Dorman and Allison Rice. The Blish story is unbelievably badly written, has a good start and descends rapidly into sf cliché. Collection has standard of good issue of, say, F&SF.

The Terminal Beach, J. G. Ballard, Penguin 4s. 6d., has a back cover which, it seems, tries to confuse public into thinking they're getting *The Crystal World,* and out of

date biographical information inside. Annoying minor details. The stories are among Ballard's best conventional work, including several that have not appeared in magazines—*The Lost Leonardo, The Delta at Sunset, The Volcano Dances,* the moving *The Drowned Giant,* the title story which offers a good introduction and key to his latest experimental pieces. Economically written, packing more per para than anything else in sf, these are highly recommended.

— WEB

Other books received (not necessarily excluded for review in future issues):

Reviewed in previous issues:

The Worlds of SF, R. Mills (ed.), Panther 5s.
Code Three, Rick Raphel, Gollancz 21s.
All Flesh is Grass, Clifford Simak, Berkley 50c.
Trader to the Stars, Poul Anderson, Berkley 50c.
Fahrenheit 451, Ray Bradbury, Ballantine 60c.
Star Guard (50c.), *The Stars are Ours* (45c.) and *Star Born* (45c.), Andre Norton, Ace.
Heinlein Triad (*Puppet Masters, Waldo, Magic Inc.*) Gollancz 21s.

Resurrected:

Hawk of the Wilderness, William L. Chester, Ace SF Classic, 50c.
Tama, Princess of Mercury, Ray Cummings, Ace SF Classic, 40c.
Jan of the Jungle, Otis A. Kline, Ace SF Classic, 40c.

Juveniles:

Space Cadet, Robert Heinlein, Gollancz, 16s.
Lord of Thunder, Andre Norton, Gollancz, 15s.
The Universe Between, Alan E. Nourse, Faber 18s.

Recommended:

Who Can Replace a Man? Brian Aldiss, Harcourt, Brance, World $4.50.

Now Wait for Last Year, P. K. Dick, Doubleday, $3.95.
Quest of Three Worlds, Cordwainer Smith, Ace, 40c.
The Dream Master (orig. *He Who Shapes*), Zelazny, Ace, 40c.
Day of the Minotaur (orig. *The Blue Monkeys*), T. B. Swann, Ace, 40c.
The Best of SF 5, J. Merril (ed.), Mayflower, 5s.
The Impossible Man, J. G. Ballard, Berkley, 50c.

Others:

The Beasts of Kohl, Rackham/*A Planet of Your Own,* Brunner, Ace, 50c.
Worlds for the Taking, Kenneth Bulmer, Ace, 40c.
The Pilgrim Project, Hank Searls, Mayflower, 5s.
Checkpoint Lambda, Murray Leinster, Berkley, 50c.
Mission to Universe, Gordon Dickson, Berkley, 50c.
World of Ptauus, Larry Niven, Ballantine, 50c.
Catastrophe Planet, Keith Laumer, Berkley, 50c.
New Writings in SF 9, E. J. Carnell (ed.), Dobson, 16s.
The Fury out of Time, Lloyd Biggle Jr., Dobson, 21s.
Andover and the Android, Kate Wilhelm, Dobson, 16s.
Spectrum 5, Amis & Conquest (eds.), Gollancz, 21s.
The Frederik Pohl Omnibus (8 novelettes, 5 shorts), Gollancz, 25s.
No Different Flesh (People stories), Zenna Henderson, 21s.
Mindswap, Robert Sheckley, Gollancz, 21s.
Dune, Frank Herbert, Gollancz, 30s.
The Revolving Boy, Gertrude Friedberg, Doubleday, $3.95.
Turning On, Damon Knight, Doubleday, $3.95.
Who is Lewis Pinder? L. P. Davies, Doubleday, $3.95.
Watchers of the Dark, Lloyd Biggle Jr., Doubleday, $3.95.
A Handful of Darkness, Philip K. Dick, Panther, 3s. 6d.

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Published on the last Wednesday of every month by Roberts & Vinter Ltd., 42-44 Dock Street, London, E.1. Subscriptions 48/- per year ($7.00). No responsibility accepted for loss or damage of MSS or artwork. All characters fictitious. © December 1966 by NEW WORLDS SF.

Printed by Richmond Hill Printing Works, 23/25 Abbot Road, Winton, Bournemouth.

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