

21ST ANNUAL WORLD FANTASY CONVENTION—1995

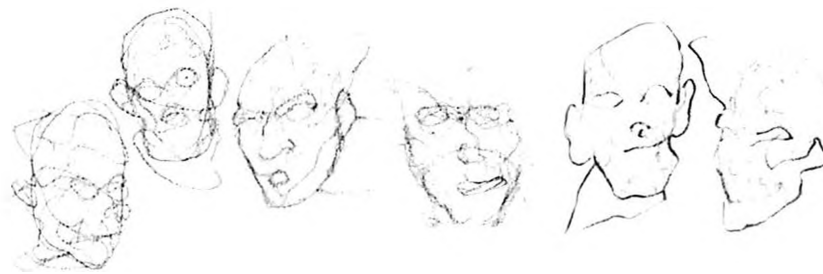


The 21st Annual

WORLD FANTASY CONVENTION

October 26 — 29, 1995

Inner Harbor — Baltimore, Maryland



Guests of Honor

Terry Bisson, Lucius Shepard, Howard Waldrop — *Writers*

Rick Berry — *Artist*

Lloyd Arthur Eshbach — *Publisher*

Edward Bryant — *Toastmaster*

A WORD FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to the 21st World Fantasy Convention.

To those attending for the first time, be open for those marvelous opportunities to talk to people, for this is the place. To those who have attended before, be open for those marvelous opportunities to talk to people, for this is still the place.

This convention is the result of the work of many, many (but still never enough) people. You will find them listed on the next page under the rubric of "Committee." They deserve your praise, for without them . . .

In addition, I want to thank our Guests of Honor. Their presence honors the convention.

See you next year in Schaumburg!

Michael J. Walsh
Chairman

P.S. Jules Verne lives!

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An eyeBALL production.





Benny

face a sort of matte pink. Conditions of the weather and his exposure to it determine complexion. A powerful dose of the ol' UV tunes it to a radioactive crimson, easily mistaken as a prelude to violence or flight. Don't be afraid. A straight lipless mouth divides the distance between bottom of nose and chin with simple precision. The nose itself is smallish and draws abruptly to a point. (His wife, while learning faces-made-easy at art school, was instructed to center the tip of the nose by means of an imaginary half-inch circle at its outermost point. On seeing RB for the first time, she recognized him immediately.) The eyes, slightly magnified behind aviator-style glasses, scan the horizon through covert slits, a slow song drawn out lengthwise in a culvert. When he is like this, talking with him is not so different from seeing him on television.

Further arguments, I hope, can now be avoided. Nothing clears the air like a frank exchange of blows.

It is also, perhaps, unfair to examine his work. Let us do so. So much is evident, whether he would wish it or not, in the product itself that it seems churlish to tell you something that you already know, even if you are mistaken. We are spoiled for choice. What bores me: The repeatable. The mundane. The demonstration of routine competence or even routine excellence. The accomplishment of form within the boundaries of recognized ability. To stare at the new arrivals in a bookstore is to remember Humphrey Bogart: I'll slap you and you'll like it.

I have bigger, fatter dreams than that, and they are answered; with the Rick Berry painting, there are no cheap tricks. They are not the gutless agreement of well-rehearsed technique. Each piece seems to belong to itself. It is not the loose collection of identikit arms, legs and faces which blemish so many books and minds. In the Berry work, risks, assertions and blowzy speculation are freely given and received, often to extraordinary and incomprehensible effect. Charming. Something is happening. It is no longer the correct chords in the right order played at the proper speed. (Perhaps some people want this. I do not.) It is the frozen-framed record of the powerful artsy processes of highest quality brains in actual motion. This man cannot help himself. He is completely real. Seeing him paint, finger a keyboard, or mess up his hair with a spatula and corn-base mazola is the actual magic of something from nothing. An engine of nature that tears the seat out of your pants and staples it to your forehead.

I have watched glomfaced for a decade and a half . . . you could hardly call it luck. Fifteen years ago he was the same thing as his paintings and he still is. Only more so. π

Palpating the Berry Forehead

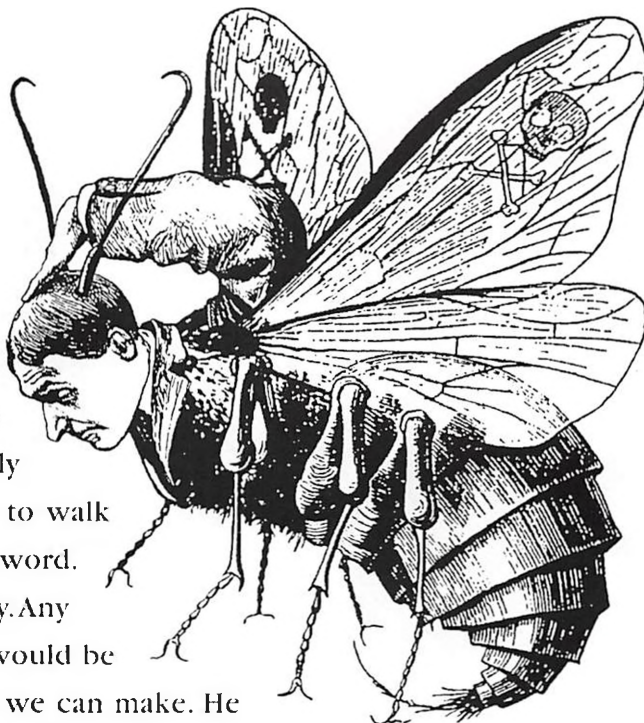
by Phil Hale

I CANNOT CONTINUE. We don't want to know the chords to "Heartbreak Hotel." They are not the song, they only degrade it. To write about Rick Berry is to walk backwards—so often a word is only a word. The man himself is another thing entirely. Any pretense of objectivity I might assume would be offensive, and rightly so, but it is a start we can make. He is best known as a painter and all-round digital guy;

you are almost certainly well familiar with his work, whether you know it or not. Let us leave it be for a time. Let us find him where he lives. To freshen the brain I shuffle through fifteen years of Berry recorded on various low-wattage snapshots. I recognize him there.

So often I have tailgated folks who should know better. I overhear them bickering uselessly about this unique man. His art his talent his charisma, blah, blah, blah. And all of it extending drunkenly from the most spurious and bumheaded suppositions and extrapolations. To hear them talk you would think him an open book. Inevitably it makes you think of "The twelve blind men and Richard Berry." The first, palpating the Berry forehead, declares Richard Berry to be "hard, but warm, too, like a bowling ball covered in leatherette and left on the radiator overnight." The second, clutching at his arm, says "Richard Berry is like a number of towels twisted into a thick and lumpen braid and then hardened with polyester resin." The third, wringing at an ear, describes him as "an apricot, forgotten on the vine and left to fung out through a dry winter," etc., etc. They are all correct. Who has not had such thoughts? I place the photos in chronological order. In later ones he appears almost exactly his earlier self, only more so. Carried through fifteen years, all the extraneous features fading, the face slowly becoming dominated by the few simple prominences and aberrations that define it.

Please. Let me try: The head is larger than you might expect. Boned dome of forehead, and above, shy plumes of ginger fire burning in pale retreat to the horizon. The



PHOTOGRAPH BY S. PATRICK BROWN

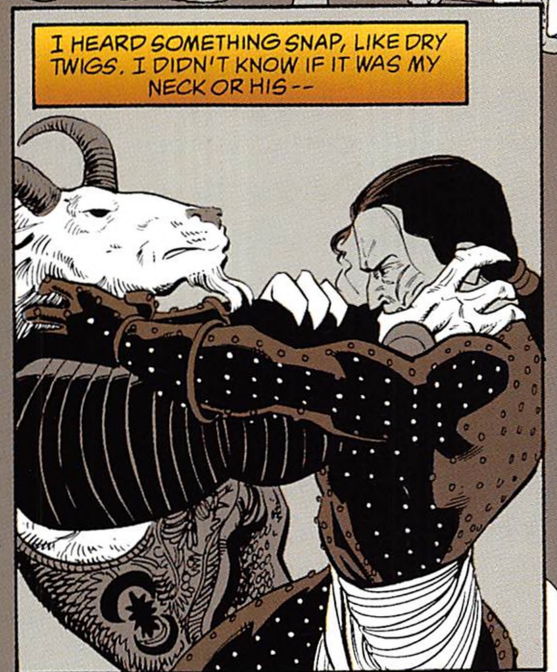


HELP US NOW, AND WE WILL RESTORE TO YOU ALL THAT IS YOURS! JOIN US AND RULE AMBER!

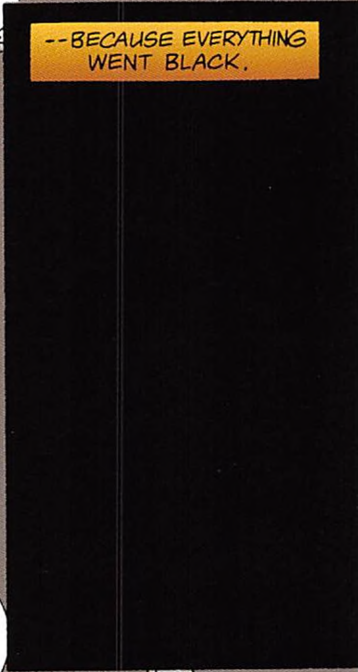
LORD CORWIN OF AMBER, WHY DO YOU STRIVE WITH ME? IT WAS YOU WHO GAVE US THIS PASSAGE...



NEVER!



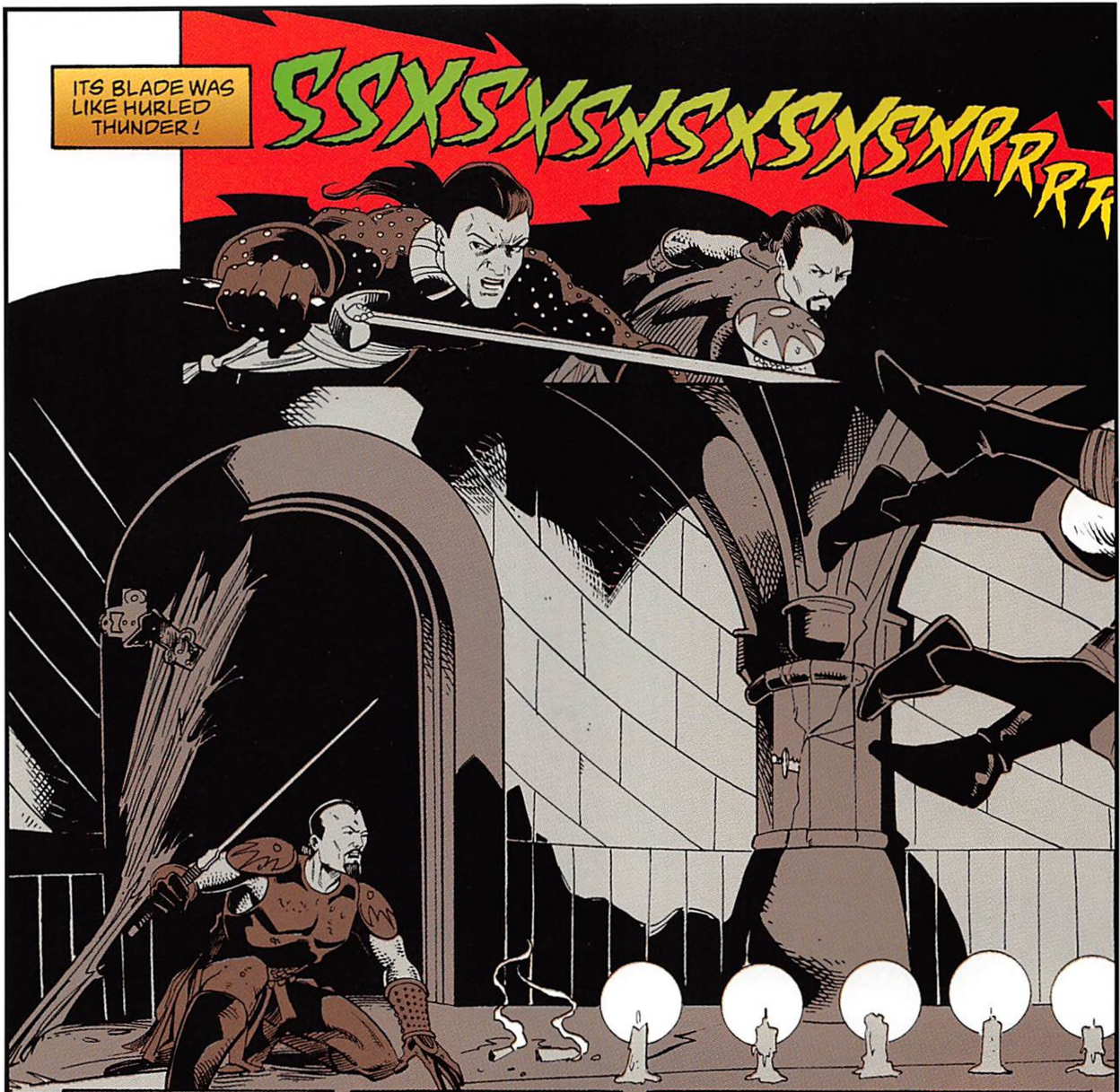
I HEARD SOMETHING SNAP, LIKE DRY TWIGS. I DIDN'T KNOW IF IT WAS MY NECK OR HIS --



--BECAUSE EVERYTHING WENT BLACK.

ITS BLADE WAS LIKE HURLED THUNDER!

SSXSXSXSXSXSXSXRRA



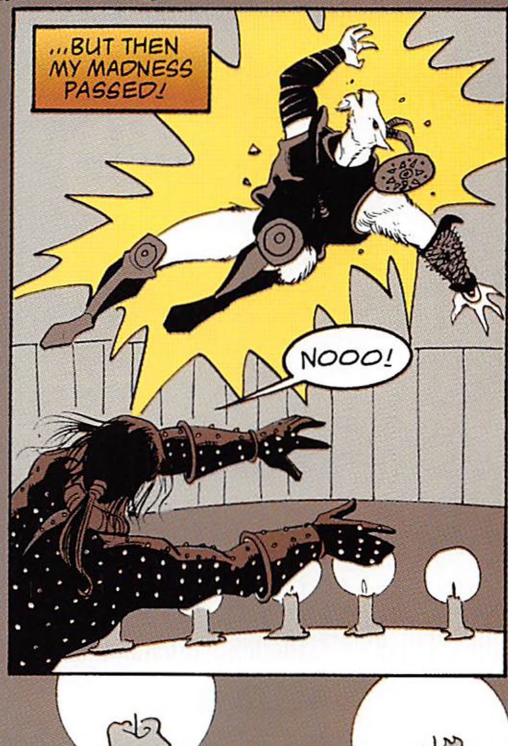
FOR A MOMENT I WAS TEMPTED...



...FOR MORE THAN A MOMENT...



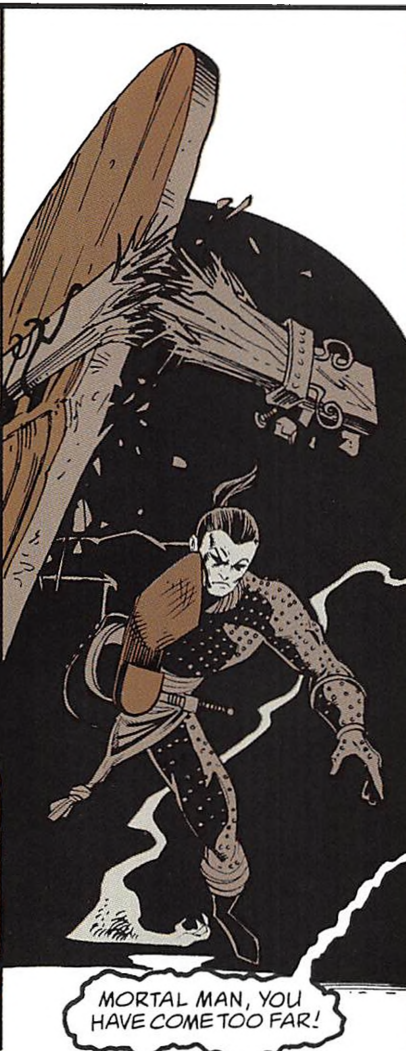
...BUT THEN MY MADNESS PASSED!



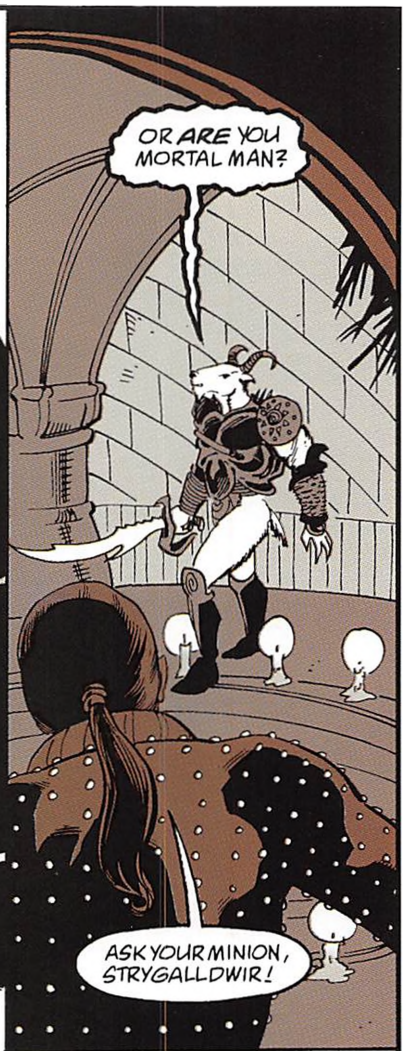


I CUT A TORCH FOR THE DARK STAIR AND STARTED UP.

WAIT FOR ME!



MORTAL MAN, YOU HAVE COME TOO FAR!



OR ARE YOU MORTAL MAN?

ASK YOUR MINION, STRYGALLDWIR!



YOU SLEW IT. THEREFORE, I MUST ASK YOU.

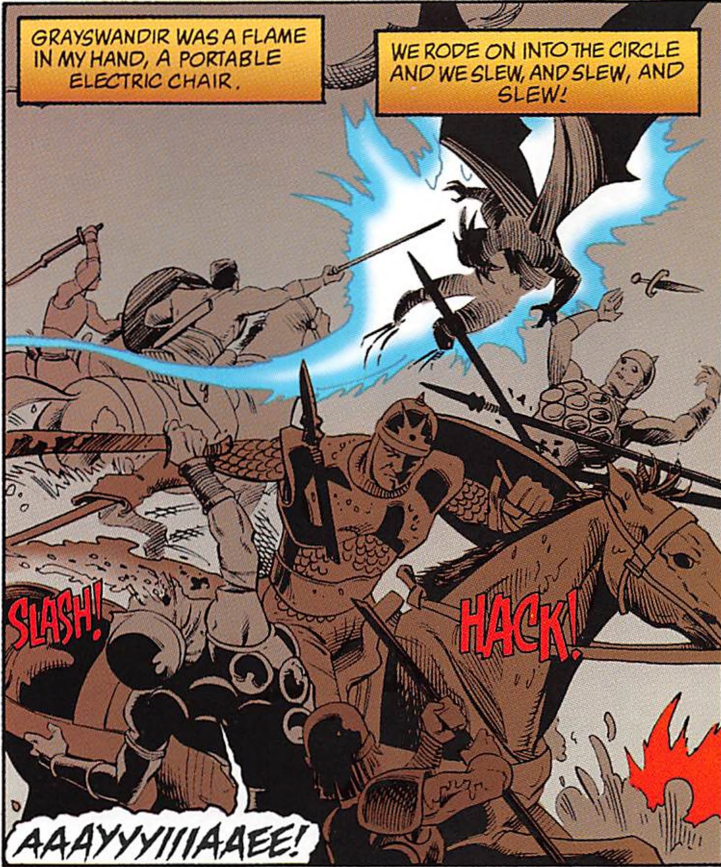
THIS IS THE CREATURE! THIS THING! WHAT IS IT?



IT IS MY HATE-SPAWN, MY SIN AGAINST A THING I LOVED. AND MINE TO KILL.



YOURS TO KILL IF YOU CAN!



GRAYSWANDIR WAS A FLAME IN MY HAND, A PORTABLE ELECTRIC CHAIR.

WE RODE ON INTO THE CIRCLE AND WE SLEW, AND SLEW, AND SLEW!



ONWARD, TO THE CITADEL!



THE CITADEL MARKED THE CENTER OF THE SPREADING CIRCLE.



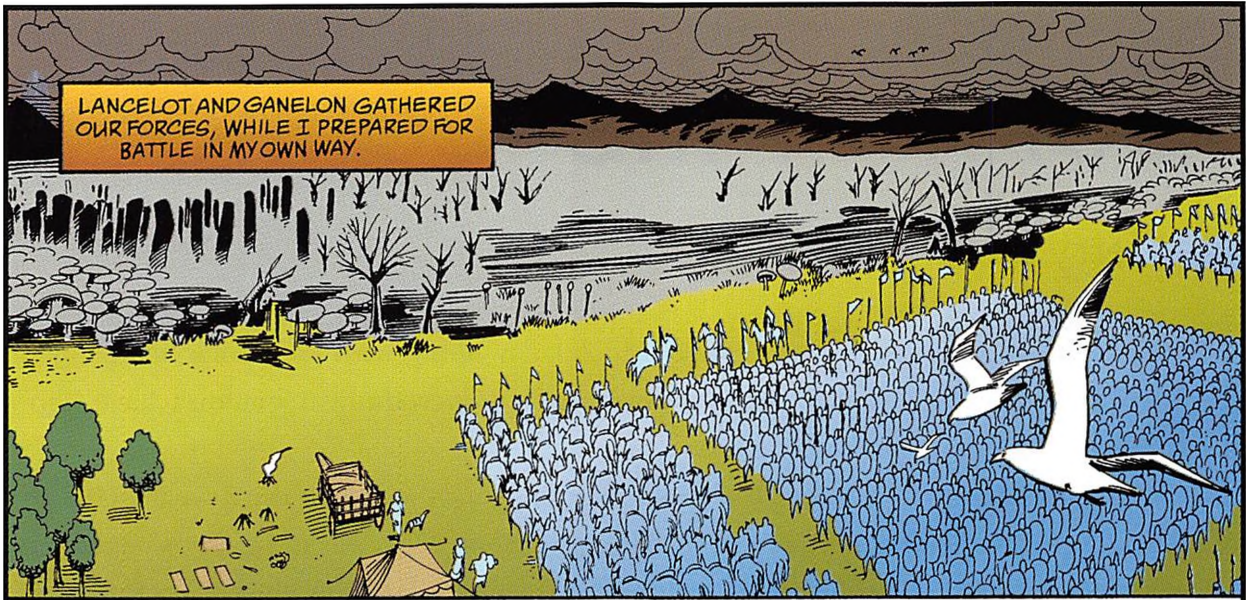
I KNEW SOMEHOW THAT HE AWAITED ME AT THE TOP OF THE TOWER.

THE HORNED ONE'S MINE!

AND WELCOME TO HIM!



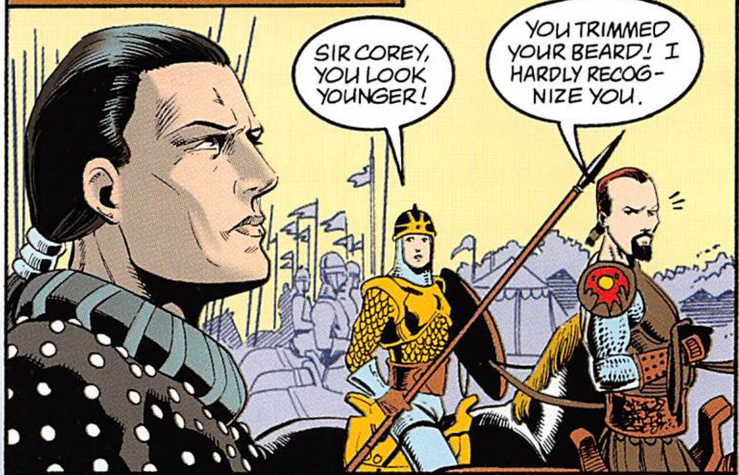
LANCELOT AND GANELON GATHERED OUR FORCES, WHILE I PREPARED FOR BATTLE IN MY OWN WAY.



I HAD FINALLY REGAINED ALL MY WEIGHT, AND SHED THE YEARS THAT CLUNG TO ME.



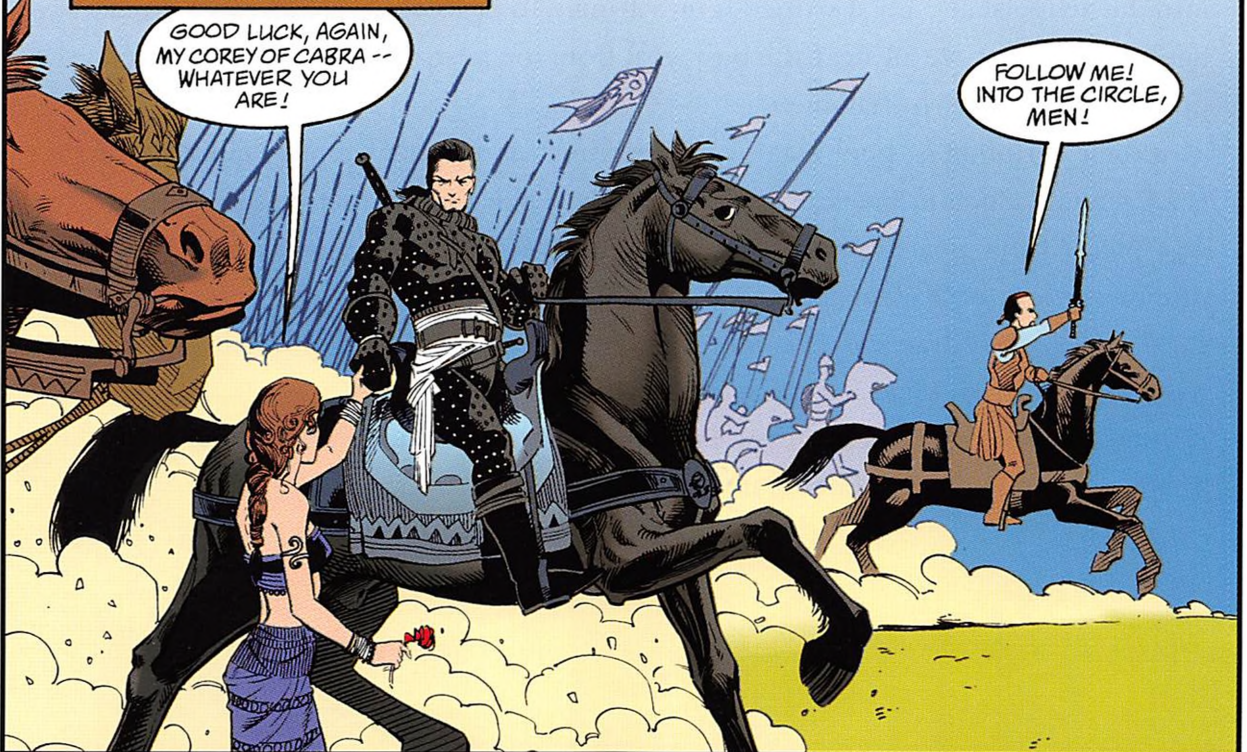
I WOULD GO TO BATTLE AS MYSELF!



SIR COREY, YOU LOOK YOUNGER!

YOU TRIMMED YOUR BEARD! I HARDLY RECOGNIZE YOU.

I SAID GOODBYE TO LORRAINE, WHO HAD FOLLOWED US TO THE FIELD.



GOOD LUCK, AGAIN, MY COREY OF CABRA -- WHATEVER YOU ARE!

FOLLOW ME! INTO THE CIRCLE, MEN!

Corwin, the Comic

by Terry Bisson

THANK GOD (OR AT LEAST AMBER) for Roger Zelazny. Along with Moorcock he changed the face of High Fantasy, unmedievalizing it unmercifully. It couldn't have happened to a more tiresome genre.

I only met Zelazny once, but I have known his work for almost thirty years. Like an exotic track in familiar sand ("where'd that come from?"), "Rose" and "Lamps" signalled a sea change in SF, from a literature written by scientists for schoolboys to a literature written by the schoolboys (and girls) themselves; by truants and troublemakers and poets. Along with Disch, Delany, Russ, Malzberg (and others) Zelazny talked about new things in new ways. I had grown up on the grand old Simak stuff but grown weary of it, grown away from it. There had been poets in SF before (e.g. Bradbury) but they hadn't taken over the building; they hadn't unscrewed the doors themselves from the jams. I liked the new spirit. Here were stories that flew, not just stories about things that flew.

Zelazny was a word-slinger, a street singer, SF's Villon.

I hadn't paid much attention to his novels. I undertook adapting the Amber books without having read them (yes, Byron, I lied; we all lie), knowing only that the author was one I trusted to dazzle me. When I sat down with *Nine Princes* I stood up, amazed at how many of my own "original" ideas had been swiped from Zelazny: shape-shifting road signs, cars in fantasy landscapes, magic gas tanks: Zelazny had wedged the bypass into the zeitgeist and I had swiped it unwittingly. To have been embarrassed would have been ungenerous. We all steal; the best steal from the best, and Zelazny had picked every pocket from Homer to Hammett.

Comic scripting is "poor man's screenwriting," and Zelazny, a most cinematic writer, is a joy and a cinch to break down into panels. When I heard that he liked the scripts, I was pleased but not surprised. What's not to like? All I did was follow Corwin into Amber, stay out of his way and take down his talk. The only change I made was to toss the Luckies, since fratricidal slaughter is not PG-13 in America unless it's smoke-free. Now I sort of wish I had left them in.

But only sort of. Zelazny never expected or even reached for perfection. Not here. That's why he left for Amber, right? TE

political radical who is also guest of honor at the World Fantasy Convention. In fact, he *is* a bundle of contradictions.

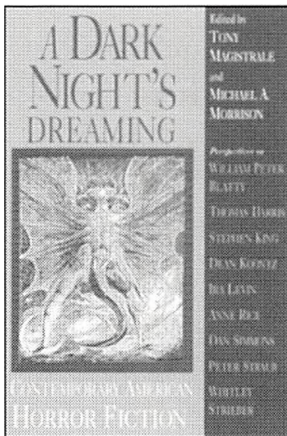
In his presence, however, you feel all these various things are meant to go together. They're what being an American writer is about. A lot of this has to do with politics. While aesthetically Terry appears to be a funny bone, in politics he is very coherent, convincing, compelling. He's been actively involved in leftist politics for thirty years now, and is, along with his wife Judy Jenson, still doing the work. This is an inspiration, and of course it's comforting to have someone in SF farther to the left than I am.

Another religion he and I happily share is hiking in the mountains. At this point we've taken a good many walks together, in New York, Tennessee, and California. We're slated for more, and that makes me happy. As we hike along we talk about books, mountains, politics, and history, both personal and general. We miss some of what we walk by. I learn more about what Terry loves and hates. And he learns the same about me. Among the many things I have learned from Terry is the courage of my convictions. Finally I have given up beating around the bush. "You know, I really hate T.S. Eliot."

"Really? I love T.S. Eliot."

On it will go.

π



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"Joyce Carol Oates."

"Oh I hate her."

"Thomas Pynchon."

"Hate him."

"William Henry Hudson."

"Oh I love him."

"The Rapture."

"Oh I loved that."

"Brian Wilson."

"Hate him."

"Steven Spielberg."

"I love the first *half* of Spielberg."

"Abraham Lincoln."

"Oh I hate Lincoln."

Sometimes his judgments are hard to explain. One time he brought a video of his current favorite movie to show to me and my wife. Lisa and I are not really movie people. I've only seen five of them in my life, and Lisa mostly likes romantic comedies. So Terry showed us *Miracle Mile*, a romantic comedy that turned into nuclear apocalypse with all the characters either shot, exploded, torched, or drowned in a helicopter. "Isn't that great?" Terry said. "I love that movie."

We do better with literature. This is our religion, as it is many of yours. We pass back and forth books like the treasures they are. Our success ratio with recommendations are about like batting averages, but that's high enough. I got Terry onto Joyce Cary, for instance, and he turned me on to William Henry Hudson.

His own books are as good as his recommendations, or better. They are by no means as black-and-white as his aesthetic judgment. They are funny, like his aesthetic judgment, but they are also sly, subtle, subversive, surreal, and short. He writes the best hundred-page novels in the business. *Talking Man* is pure poetry, *Fire On the Mountain* is the most radical alternative history ever, *Voyage To The Red Planet* is the funniest Mars novel ever (and all that competition). His "Bears Discover Fire" is a great American folk tale. He has said that I was the one who suggested he started writing short fiction, and although this is not true I am proud to have done it. The collection called *Bears Discover Fire* is one of the best collections of short fiction ever published in our field (American literature).

On paper it looks like Terry must be a bundle of contradictions: a Kentuckian with a passion for New York, an auto mechanic writing sophisticated postmodern fiction, a

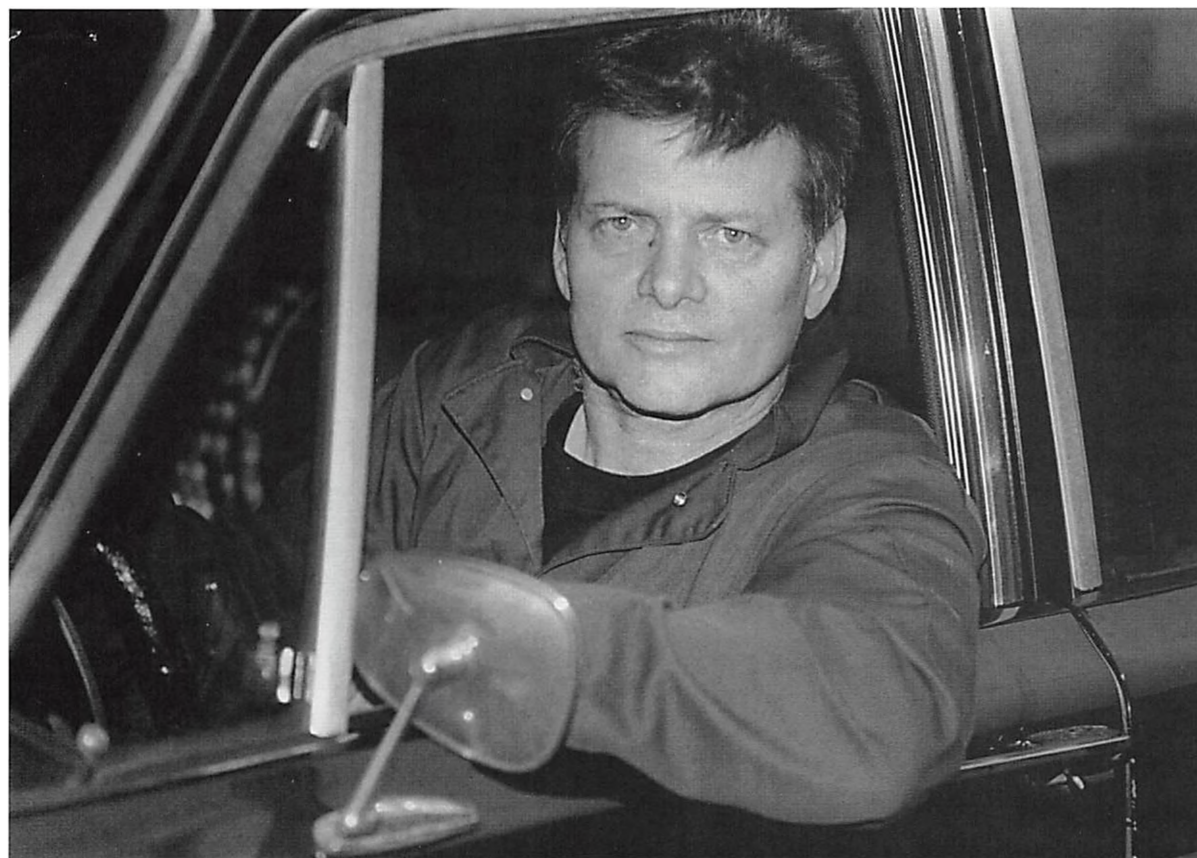
Terry Bisson is a Man of Strong Opinions

by Kim Stanley Robinson

TERRY BISSON IS A MAN OF STRONG OPINIONS. Never will you hear him say, Well, I was looking forward to that movie, the director is usually quite good, and the film wasn't bad but I was mildly disappointed by some weakness in the execution. No. Terry will say: "I hate that."

This is his second most common aesthetic judgment, right after "I love that." It's a binary system, like hitting a funny bone. Sometimes to be agreeable he will say to me, "Yeah, that was okay," but as if he doubts there is any such category—he's just indicating to me that he's listening. Usually he either loves it or hates it.

There's no way to tell which it'll be. I've been enjoying my friendship with Terry since 1988, and I've heard him make maybe a thousand love/hate judgments, and I still don't have the slightest idea how he will come down about any particular thing. No one does. At the last Chattacon a bunch of us invented a parlor game in which we sat around Terry mentioning films, books, writers, musicians:



PHOTOGRAPH BY LARRY LASZLO

TITLES PUBLISHED BY FANTASY PRESS, 1957-1961

Spacebounds of IPC

Edward E. Smith, Ph.D. - 2/12/47

The Legion of Space

Jack Williamson - 5/24/47

The Forbidden Garden

John Taine - 8/29/47

Of Worlds Beyond

Lloyd Arthur Eshbach (ed) - 8/30/47

The Book of Ptath

A.E. Van Vogt - 12/8/47

The Black Flame

Stanley G. Weinbaum - 2/20/48

Triplanetary

Edward E. Smith, Ph.D. - 4/26/48

Beyond This Horizon

Robert A. Heinlein - 6/30/48

Sinister Barrier

Eric Frank Russell - 8/6/48

Skylark Three

Edward E. Smith, Ph.D. - 10/5/48

Divide and Rule

L. Sprague de Camp - 11/26/48

Darker Than You Think

Jack Williamson - 12/30/48

Skylark of Valeron

Edward E. Smith, Ph.D. - 3/7/49

A Martian Odyssey and Others

Stanley G. Weinbaum - 4/12/49

Seven Out of Time

Arthur Leo Zagat - 7/1/49

The Incredible Planet

John W. Campbell, Jr. - 10/7/49

First Lensman

Edward E. Smith, Ph.D. - 1/2/50

Masters of Time

A.E. Van Vogt - 3/30/50

The Bridge of Light

A. Hyatt Verrill - 6/9/50

Genus Homo

L. Sprague de Camp &
P. Schuyler Miller - 7/15/50

The Cometeers

Jack Williamson - 11/5/50

Galactic Patrol

Edward E. Smith, Ph.D. - 11/24/50

The Moon Is Hell

John W. Campbell, Jr. - 1/2/51

Dreadful Sanctuary

Eric Frank Russell - 3/27/51

Beyond Infinity

Robert Spencer Carr - 6/8/51

Seeds of Life

John Taine - 6/29/51

Gray Lensman

Edward E. Smith, Ph.D. - 10/15/51

The Crystal Horde

John Taine - 6/20/52

The Red Peri

Stanley G. Weinbaum - 8/15/52

The Legion of Time

Jack Williamson - 11/10/52

The Titan

P. Schuyler Miller - 12/10/52

Second Stage Lensman

Edward E. Smith, Ph.D. - 2/20/53

The Black Star Passes

John W. Campbell, Jr. - 6/30/53

Man of Many Minds

E. Everett Evans - 12/23/53

Assignment in Eternity

Robert A. Heinlein - 1954

Deep Space

Eric Frank Russell - 7/2/54

Three Thousand Years

Thomas Calvert McClary - 8/5/54

Children of the Lens

Edward E. Smith, Ph.D. - 9/13/54

The History of Civilization

Edward E. Smith, Ph.D. - 10/54

Operation: Outer Space

Murray Leinster - 10/27/54

G.O.G. 666

John Taine - 12/31/54

Tyrant of Time

Lloyd Arthur Eshbach - 1/2/55

Under the Triple Suns

Stanton A. Coblenz - 2/11/55

Alien Minds

E. Everett Evans - 8/30/55

Islands of Space

John W. Campbell, Jr. - 1956

The Vortex Blaster

Edward E. Smith, Ph.D. - 8/27/60

Invaders from the Infinite

John W. Campbell, Jr. - 1961



buy groceries and took far less time to operate than the store had required.

As for Fantasy Press, sales continued to decline. The competition of the major publishers, as well as growing lists from the other specialist houses, meant that the buyers' dollars were spread over a steadily broadening market. But I felt that my operation was sound, and if I could just keep going, continuing to issue books, I'd make it. There was still some good reprint material to be had—Jack Williamson's *Golden Blood*, *The Reign of Wizardry* and *The Metal Man and Others*, for example. Then there were other John Taine books: *Tomorrow* and *Twelve Eighty-Seven*, which had been published in magazines, as well as *To Be Kept*, a novel never published anywhere. I had ideas for original books, had indeed set one such idea into motion.

This was to be a series of connected novels based on the central theme, *The Undying*, an idea advanced by P. Schuyler Miller. Six authors had agreed to participate—Murray Leinster, E.E. "Doc" Smith, Jack Williamson, Eric Frank Russell, George O. Smith and, of course, P. Schuyler Miller. This would have been something brand-new in the field. Planning had begun with suggestions from five of the six—but rising problems prevented my carrying it through to completion.

Capital—this was the problem—I just had to have a better financial base. So I decided to incorporate, I took the necessary legal steps.

The corporation was formed in 1954. I wrote to a selected list of fan customers. I made no glowing promises, but presented facts as I saw them, as well as plans I had made. Seventy fans responded with purchases of stock ranging from a single certificate at \$25 up to forty shares at \$1,000. It was a financial shot in the arm for Fantasy Press—but it wasn't enough.

Looking back on everything I tried as a publisher, I regret this step above all others I took. I can see now that I should have quit long before I did—and certainly before I incorporated. But like others in failing businesses, I could not or would not recognize facts. Things just *had* to get better! But they didn't. And my fan friends, who I'm sure were more concerned about giving me an assist than in making money, lost all they invested.

The day came when the owner of the warehouse in Myerstown where the Fantasy Press stock was stored wanted the space—and I was offered a better and more challenging job, advertising manager of Moody Press, Chicago, a major religious publishing house. I needed a buyer for the remainder of the Fantasy Press inventory, mostly skids of unbound books, though there were several thousand finished books as well. I finally persuaded Don Grant to take them off my hands.

Fantasy Press did not go out with a bang—rather, it died with hardly a whimper. π

Some months later the four of us discussed possible ways for me to leave Glidden and handle Fantasy Press full-time. The partners were getting a bit weary of the endless work; and I was willing. To avoid taking too much cash out of FP for my salary we decided to rent a storeroom on a secondary shopping street and set up a used bookshop (which idea appealed to me) and operate Fantasy Press and the store from the same address. We hoped that profits from the bookstore would help to defray a major part of my family's support. We found this storeroom at 120 N. 9th Street, just a half-block away from our new warehouse, and there we set up The Book Shelf. This happened, I think, in 1948.

By the time the bookshop was well established and I was doing all the work of Fantasy Press (except art and bookkeeping), I decided the time had come to try it on my own, if possible. I broached the idea of my buying out my partners, and they were willing. We arrived at a mutually acceptable figure—I paid a substantial portion—and at the beginning of 1950 I was sole owner of the publishing business. I was also out of ready cash. In passing, eventually I had to sell my quite extensive SF and fantasy collection to complete paying off my former partners.

I continued operating from the North 9th Street address until mid-1952. My time had to be divided between the store and Fantasy Press. I carried new SF and fantasy in stock, buying at dealer's discount from all the U.S. publishers who issued material I could use and importing some books from Britain. Because I was building up a walk-in trade at The Book Shelf, I had to spend time buying used books, which meant attending auction sales and calling at homes where books were available. Fortunately my mother lived nearby and could take my place in the store when I had to be absent.

At one time I hired a secretary and concentrated on mail-order business, sending catalogs to the Fantasy Press list. I tried selling used books to dealers everywhere, answering ads in the used book trade magazine *The Antiquarian Bookman*.

Finally I decided that the store was not worth the time and effort it demanded. I determined to consolidate everything. I'd hunt for a small farm with a house to live in and with the usual extra buildings from which I could operate Fantasy Press. In the course of time I found what I wanted, bought it and sold my home in Reading. Ten acres of land came with the farmlet, six acres tillable—and I tried to play farmer, based on book larnin'. I wasn't too successful.

Shortly after moving to the country I sought for a way to make use of my general book stock left from The Book Shelf, then stored in the barn. I discovered a large general farmers' market called The Green Dragon a few miles from the farm, near Ephrata. The market operated on Fridays, so I rented space and opened a book stand. This helped to

reprint rights to Fantasy Press books. I made a few sales, the authors and publisher sharing the proceeds, but I was two decades too early. In later years at least 30 of the books I published were reissued as paperbacks, but that didn't help me a bit.

I recall a visit to the offices of Pyramid books. I had one objective in mind—to sell them the *Skylark* series. I played up the growing importance of paperbacks in the SF field and urged them to take a chance on one book—*Skylark of Space* by Edward E. Smith, Ph.D. I told them they'd have to deal with Doc, since this was not my publication; but if it succeeded, they'd want the second and third book in the series which I had published. They finally brought out *Skylark of Space*, followed later by the other Smith books, all too late to help Fantasy Press.

The Smith paperbacks have been in print continually since their first appearance three decades ago.

My daytime visits to editorial offices led to personal evening visits in the homes of some fine people . . . Don Wollheim, then editor of Ace, invited me to see his L. Frank Baum collection—fine copies of the very rare first editions of the famous juvenile fantasies including the *Oz* books . . . The apartment of Herb Alexander, editor of Pocket Books, its walls lined with a fortune in 16th-century color originals by Hogarth . . . I accepted an invitation by Oscar J. Friend to visit him and his charming wife—and George O. Smith, Will Jenkins (“Murray Leinster”) and his wife, and Willey and Olga Ley, who were there for the evening . . . Or Horace and Evelyn Gold's apartment, Isaac Asimov and Judy Merrill and a few other authors present . . . Or the unique Fletcher Pratt flat with enough birds and animals to rival a small zoo.

The partnership was set up on November 1, 1946. It was dissolved on January 2, 1950. When FP began publishing books, packing and shipping were carried out in the basement of MacGregor's home. Reserve stocks of books and cartons were also stored there. When a new book came out all of us pitched in to pack, address and ship the advance orders. Daily orders were handled by MacGregor. Houck took care of the general bookkeeping. I kept the fan address list up to date, took care of all correspondence, read proof, made printer and binder contact and so on. Donnell, of course, was busy with artwork. Don probably put in more hours than any of the rest of us.

After months of disorder in MacGregor's basement, with a growing stock and the inevitable dust that went with it, spurred by Mrs. MacGregor's complaints, we decided we should rent separate quarters for our operation. We found a room at a low rental, a basement room at 9th and Washington Sts. in Reading—a building long since demolished. All book stock, cartons, work tables, etc., were transferred to our new base of operations.

by a similar display with wider exposure at the American Booksellers' Association Convention at Washington, D.C., in May, 1949. A Danish dealer, Boghallen, arranged a large combined display at Raadhuspladsen, Copenhagen, in cooperation with the ASFP. All of this was written up in a special science-fantasy issue of *The Antiquarian Bookman* dated September 3, 1949.

I refer to all of this as a blunder. We were seeking publicity as a group that we could not get—could not afford—as individual publishers. In this we succeeded, but with negligible returns in sales. We succeeded in accomplishing a secondary and unforeseen result. By our increased visibility we called the attention of the major general publishers to what they suddenly decided was a market they were missing—and their ill-conceived entry into the SF book field hastened our demise. I suppose the failure of the specialist publishers was inevitable anyway because of our inadequate financing, plus the fact that we were ahead of the times, but this hardly justified our hurrying our collective failure.

During this period I made frequent business trips to New York City, meeting with people in the SF scene. A few of these visits come to mind, and because of the people with whom I was associated, I believe they may be worth recording.

I think of the time while in New York I took John W. Campbell, Marty Greenberg and L. Ron Hubbard to lunch. Someone suggested a Swedish smorgasbord, and I had my first—and last—taste of kidney. Yuck! Afterward we wound up in my hotel room for relaxed conversation.

The incident is stamped indelibly in my mind because of one statement that Ron Hubbard made. What led him to say what he did I can't recall—but in so many words Hubbard said:

"I'd like to start a religion. That's where the money is!"

There was a sequel to that gathering in my hotel room. The place—the kitchen of John W. Campbell's home in New Jersey. Present were Campbell, Hubbard and an author who is as big a name today as he was then—bigger, if anything. It was at that session at Campbell's kitchen table that the initial ideas for a new "science" were developed. That's where Dianetics was born, later to father an abortion called Scientology.

Not many months later the first of the Dianetics articles appeared in *Astounding*. Significantly, at the beginning stress was placed on the "science" of Dianetics. Today the same mishmash of yoga, psychology, psychiatry and what-not is now labeled Scientology, a religion with "churches" scattered around the country. And L. Ron Hubbard, one-time pulp paper fiction writer, is now a millionaire. How right he was when he said, "That's where the money is!"

Part of the motivation behind my New York trips was the possible sale of paperback

Having said this, I depart immediately from the announced plan with an observation that keeps intruding in my thoughts. How little we knew about the publishing business! And by “we” I mean Fantasy Press, Gnome Press, Shasta Publishers, Prime Press and every other SF specialist publisher. It is amazing that we succeeded to the degree we did. Our pricing of the books, for example. My partners and I figured on a probable average cost including royalty of \$1.00 per book. We reasoned—if we’d set the retail price at \$2.50, we’d make out quite well, even though we sold an unknown quantity at an average discount of 40%. To provide a margin of safety we decided to charge \$3.00.

It was much later, during my days at Moody Press in the middle 1960’s, that I learned the rule of thumb of book publishing. For a non-royalty book you multiply your manufacturing cost by four and for a royalty book by five to arrive at a retail price. Anything less than this will lead to trouble. Our manufacturing costs without royalty ranged from 75¢ to \$1.15 per copy.

A further observation. When Fantasy Press was at its peak I remember sitting in the office of Walter Bradbury of Doubleday. As I recall it, he was the managing editor, the big editorial boss of the giant publisher. I had met him earlier, how and when I’ve forgotten. A fine man, by the way, a real gentleman. This was about the time when Doubleday was planning to launch its Science Fiction Book Club. I was in his office at his invitation to discuss his plans for the club. In the course of conversation, referring to FP and Gnome Press, Bradbury said:

“If you fellows succeed it will be unique in publishing history. You publish one kind of fiction, and that’s all. What if interest dies? You have nothing else to fall back on, nowhere else to go.” I recognized the obvious truth of his statement, but there was nothing I could do about it. We were committed to science fiction and fantasy—even our logo bound us to one kind of fiction.

One blunder in which Fantasy Press and its friendly competitors participated was the formation of The Associated Fantasy Publishers. There were nine publishers involved originally: Arkham House, Avalon Company, Fantasy Press, Fantasy Publishing Company, Inc., Gnome Press, Hadley Publishing Company, New Era Publishers, Prime Press and Shasta Publishers. The Grandon Company joined the group a few months later. The inclusion of Avalon and New Era, each with a single book, was hardly justified, but the added numbers helped to make the association appear more important.

The formation of the loosely organized group took place at the Torcon, the World Science Fiction Convention at Toronto in 1948. We exhibited first as a group with a booth at the Book Festival, Museum of Science and Industry, in November at Radio City, New York. We used a colorful backdrop painted for us by Hannes Bok. This was followed

but we always were ready to put in our \$2,000. We never needed to do so.

In the beginning we were really riding high, though there were minor aggravations. For example, with *Spacehounds*, after all the artwork was completed and plates were on hand, and all proofs had been okayed by Smith and me, the printer reported that the paper mill could not make delivery of the paper for at least sixty days, probably longer. Woerner blamed the mill, but I've always believed he was late in placing the order for the sheet I had selected. This meant that publication of the book would be at least six or eight weeks late. And I wanted desperately to meet the announced date.

I can still recall my session with Fred Woerner. I flatly refused to accept the delay. I had leverage—we were going to publish other books—there were other printers—and we had some say as to where Glidden's printing business went. He'd better find an answer. So he came up with alternate paper—not white but ivory—expensive deckle edge which would have to be trimmed off—not enough for the 3,000 copies we had ordered; we could produce only about 2,000 copies—but we'd have a book.

Spacehounds of IPC came out only two weeks after the announced date; and fans responded with congratulations and praise. After Hadley's delays I suppose nobody really expected us to live up to our schedule. Within a few months we sold out our initial printing. By that time we had other books under way, with still others signed up and announced.

Then the partners had their first ruction. I suggested that we reprint *Spacehounds*, and they didn't see why we should. We had a "discussion" during which I blew my stack. Afterward I apologized—but what was really important, I had my way. Two printings followed with a total of 5,518 copies produced—and of course all copies sold.

A number of times I was asked, "Did you really need your partners?" The answer is an unqualified "yes." True—with the exception of the artwork there was nothing they did which I couldn't have done myself—and drawings could have been bought. But—I would never have taken the chance on my own. I'm not a gambler by nature, and there were too many uncertainties for me to have made the venture alone. So without the partners there would never have been a Fantasy Press.

It would be possible, I suppose, to reconstruct a step-by-step record of the progress of Fantasy Press including a title-by-title report. Possible—and boring*. So I've decided to tell of the high spots of FP in its heyday, the incidents which stand out in my memory as being most interesting or most significant.

*Boring, that is, only for those with no interest in the history of the field. The books published by Fantasy Press were a significant part of the foundation upon which our entire industry rests. A list of the Fantasy Press titles can be found following this essay.

his address was available through the letter departments of the SF magazines.

Then I presented my idea for a gimmick. We'd issue a limited quantity—say 500—numbered copies of each book, inscribed by the author to the individual fan, on all orders received before publication. These autograph sheets would be sewn into the books during the binding process, not merely tipped in. The others weren't particularly impressed with this idea, but I was certain that what would appeal to the fan in me would also appeal to other fans. And it meant that specially printed sheets with the list of names and numbers could be shipped to the author well in advance of the completion of a book.

The final item of business: before we could do anything else we'd need a letterhead and envelopes. That was Don's department; he'd come up with a design, and one of the printers with whom we worked on our Glidden advertising would produce our stationery for us. We'd need postage stamps for a promotional mailing, and that would suffice for the moment. I believe we each contributed \$20.00 toward these initial expenditures, a total of \$80.00 as our starting capital.

Don designed a letterhead, quite unusual, which we had printed on goldenrod bond with maroon ink in imitation embossed effect. We bought postage stamps. I wrote to Doc Smith telling of our plans and asking for the book rights to *Spacebonds of IPC*. I chose this title because it was complete in itself. Hadley had announced plans to publish *Skylark Three* and *Skylark of Valeron* so I didn't consider these. Doc replied promptly and with characteristic enthusiasm. Of course we could have *Spacebonds*. So we drew up a contract which he and we signed, paid him a token fee to make it legal, and went ahead with publication plans.

At this point the contacts which Glidden afforded us became invaluable. I called Fred Woerner, Printer, and told him of our plans. He was quite interested. But since we were just starting out and had no established credit, he'd have to have a cash advance before beginning work. I suggested \$500 and he readily agreed.

About this time I wrote a letter which went out to the fans on our mailing list. It was a professional selling letter (if I do say so myself) announcing the formation of Fantasy Press, our purpose, our first book, and the signed, numbered copy feature for advance orders. We also announced a publication date.

The results were overwhelming. Orders flowed in to our post office box with enthusiastic letters—we opened a bank account—and by the time the manuscript was given to Woerner we not only had more than the \$500 needed for deposit, but we had enough cash on hand to pay the entire printing and binding bill, to buy shipping cartons and to care for incidental expenses. Technically, I suppose, we shouldn't have used the money;

was the assistant sales manager for the Syndicate Sales Department, dealing with Woolworth, Grant and other chains of stores. He and I shared the same office. And Donnell was the artist with whom I worked on the house magazine, *The Wilhelm Ambassador*; all of which I wrote.

On this particular day the three of us were in Don's office and somehow the subject of science fiction came up. (They were not even casual SF readers.) During the conversation I said, "How'd you guys like to go into the science fiction book publishing business?" It was an idle question spoken in jest. MacGregor answered, "You mean like Hadley?" He and Don knew about Hadley through his too-frequent phone calls to the office.

"Yes, like Hadley."

Mac then asked, "How much money would it take?"

"Oh, about two thousand dollars to put out the first book."

"Well, there are three of us here—you, Don and me. We could get Lyman Houck—he's an accountant—we could each put in five hundred. Why not?"

"You're serious?"

"Sure. You get the stories, Don will do the illustrating, Lyman can do the bookkeeping, and I can wrap and ship books. How 'bout it, Don?"

And as simply as that the idea of Fantasy Press came into being. For the moment the discussion ended there. Mac said he'd talk to Houck, his next-door neighbor, a good friend and a fellow Mason (as were we all), and report back. He did, and Houck was interested.

With the wild idea now within the realm of possibility, I began giving serious thought to some of its ramifications. I didn't have five hundred dollars, but one way or another I could raise that much. We'd need a name. I'd have to decide on a couple of stories for our beginning, the first title being of utmost importance. And I'd need a gimmick to bring in advance orders.

A week or two later the four of us met in Houck's basement to discuss details of our organization—if, indeed, we were going to organize. We started by agreeing to go ahead. We'd have a lawyer, a friend of MacGregor's, draw up partnership papers. Then we discussed possible trading names. I've forgotten the names I suggested, but Fantasy Press was the final choice. SF was a kind of fantasy, and if we wanted to branch into the weird and supernatural, the name would still fit.

The key to our initial success was the acquiring of a story by Doc Smith—Edward E. Smith, Ph.D. We had a thousand Smith fans to promote, and logically they'd buy a second Smith book. This was entirely up to me, my new partners agreed, since they knew absolutely nothing about the SF field. I had never met or corresponded with Smith, but

Francisco Chronicle and the like. Shortly thereafter John W. Campbell, Jr., reviewed *Skylark* in *Astounding*—and Hadley sold out the first printing at \$3.00 per copy in one month!

My association with Hadley began at about the time Don Grant and Ken Krueger, his partners, were bowing out—Grant to leave for college and Krueger, discharged from military service, to return home to Buffalo, New York. At the time I knew nothing about the existing partnership; and Hadley's publishing from that point on was entirely his own.

Some of the details are hazy, but as I recall it, I designed a letterhead for Tom and had it printed in Reading—with his paying the bill, of course. About this time I began writing some letters for Hadley since he simply never got around to answering inquiries. I also learned that he kept no records, so I had him send me his orders after he had filled them. They arrived in a carton just as he had dropped them into it, envelopes and letters, after shipping the books. So I typed up a 3 x 5 card for each fan.

Sour notes made themselves heard. Because my name had appeared on some letters of acknowledgment and the like, I began getting complaints concerning nondelivery of books, something over which I had no control. (Looking back, I wonder why I ever put my address on any communication.) A letter from the Better Business Bureau of Spokane, Washington, threatening legal action was the last straw. I had nothing to gain and plenty to lose by Hadley's carelessness (and I'm certain that's all it was), so one day I phoned Tom to tell him, regretfully, he'd have to get along without my help. I warned him of possible trouble ahead for him indicated by letters I had received and which I sent him. I told him I was sending him all his correspondence, now organized, and a full set of file cards listing his customers and their purchases. With his permission I'd make a copy of the names and addresses for myself.

Hadley agreed without argument. He said he didn't blame me for saying I had had enough—that his interest was dying, and one of these days he'd quit the game himself. And that was that.

For my efforts I had gained some experience, had added several welcome books to my collection, but most important for future developments, had a thousand addresses of fans who had bought *Skylark of Space*.

Looking back over the years and trying to be completely honest, I don't think I had even a remote idea that I might go into the SF book publishing business. Certainly I must have thought of it as something I'd enjoy, but I had no money. And with a wife and two sons to support, there was no possibility of my gambling on so speculative a venture.

Then one day in the Glidden office the picture quite unexpectedly changed. My closest associates there were Herb MacGregor and A.J. Donnell. Mac, as everyone called him,

The Fantasy Press Story

excerpted from:

Over My Shoulder: Reflections on a Science Fiction Era

Oswald Train, 1983

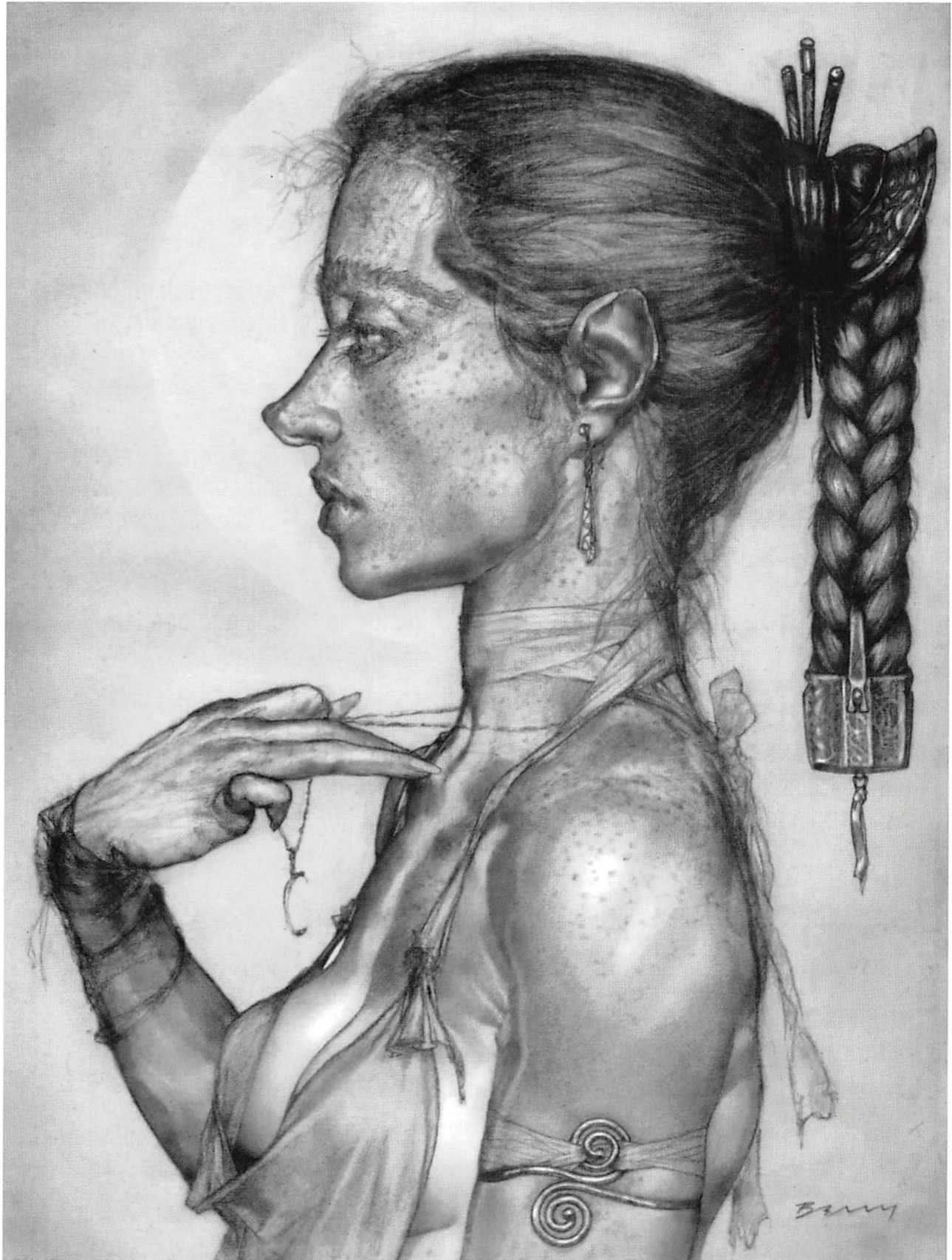
by Lloyd Arthur Eshbach

THE ARRIVAL OF A POORLY MIMEOGRAPHED postal card from "Buffalo Book Co., Providence, R.I." late in 1945 did not seem important. Yet that card in the course of time was instrumental in changing the direction of my life. It announced the coming publication of *The Skylark of Space* by Edward E. Smith, Ph.D., in book form. Price, \$3.00. Because I was a Doc Smith fan I ordered the book, sending cash with the order.

I was then working as an advertising copywriter for The Glidden Company, paint manufacturer, and part of my job was selling paint by mail. Because I wanted books like Smith's to continue appearing to be added to my collection, and because Buffalo Book Co. had been anything but professional in their sales efforts, I decided to give the new and obviously amateur publishers some friendly advice. So one evening I wrote a long and I believe cordial letter of comment and suggestion, criticizing what I called shortcomings and offering ideas for possible future use. In my letter I explained my motivation and mentioned my experience on the Glidden staff to add weight to my observations.

Weeks passed with no response to my letter. Then one day I received a long-distance phone call at the Glidden office. "This is Tom Hadley. You wrote me about the books I published. You seem to know something about this business—and I need help. I've published a thousand copies of two books—sold a hundred or so of each and don't know what to do with the rest."

During the following weeks there was an interchange of letters and phone calls—my letters and Hadley's calls. He rarely wrote letters. Among other things I asked about review copies. He didn't know the term, had sent none out. So I had Tom send me ten copies of *Skylark of Space* which I mailed out to the editors of the SF magazines and book review editors of such newspapers as *The New York Times*, *Boston Post*, *San*



Warner Aspect looks forward to publishing the following fine fantasy in 1996:

JANUARY

CHILDREN OF ENCHANTMENT, Anne Kelleher Bush. The sequel to the highly acclaimed first novel *Daughter of Prophecy*. "Bush has created a wonderful and richly textured world." —*Realms of Fantasy*

FEBRUARY

THE SWORD OF BEDWYR and **LUTHIEN'S GAMBLE**, R.A. Salvatore. By the *New York Times* bestselling author! "Salvatore describes and choreographs battle scenes better than any other contemporary fantasist." —*Publishers Weekly*

MARCH

TOUCH WOOD, edited by Peter Crowther. "A major anthology and one that deserves to be remembered for many years." —*Mystery Scene*

APRIL

THE BAKER'S BOY and **A MAN BETRAYED**, J.V. Jones. The #1 national fantasy bestseller and Volume II in The Book of Words trilogy: "Promises to be a long and successful fantasy series." —*Cleveland Plain Dealer*

MAY

THE MAGESTONE, Andre Norton and Mary H. Schaub. A new Witch World novel!

JUNE

THE MAGIC TOUCH, Jody Lynn Nye. "A delight." —Christopher Stasheff, author of *Quicksilver's Knight*

ASPECT



**WHERE IMAGINATION
KNOWS NO BOUNDS**

While Lloyd was still in Chicago, the American Gemological Society was preparing a collection of cabochons of all the stones found in the US. They lacked six stones—Lloyd had five. They were delighted with the stones and the cutting, which are now part of the permanent collection in the Smithsonian.

Perhaps the most amazing stone in his collection is a piece of “Atomic Glass.” It is a chunk of sand fused into glass from the Trinity site—the very first atomic explosion. A soldier who was an SF fan sent the piece to E.E. “Doc” Smith, whose daughter much later gave it to Lloyd to cut. It’s not “hot,” and indeed I’ve set several of the stones. They are extremely difficult to cut, and have a distinctive and peculiar luminosity. The settings need to reflect and contain the aura of these stones.

His work lends itself exquisitely to jewelry. When I’m working with his stones they will often suggest design directions or particular balances. One of the reasons our work is so compatible is a particular harmony of vision. When I ask him to cut something specific for a commission or a particular idea—it’s always “right.” Lloyd himself is a skilled fabricator and has made beautiful jewelry. But jewelry is work for him—lapidary is the pleasure. His understanding of jewelry does make him an even better cutter.

Lloyd retired in 1975, and has indeed concentrated on his writing. But he is still true to lapidary work, his second love. His crowded studio is filled with vividly colored, recently slabbed minerals and stones in various stages of cutting. He still hunts for the exceptional mineral and he still loves “tak[ing] a rough rock that doesn’t look like much of anything . . . and then when I polish it, it becomes something really beautiful.” ■

Grey and Edgar Rice Burroughs, discovered *The Boy Mineral Collector*; a somewhat saccharine geology book. (One hopes, but doubts, that *The Girl Mineral Collector* also existed.) Being a loner as a child, the solitude of mineral collecting and the romance of stones appealed to him.

In an Army-Navy Store he found a knapsack (a WWI gas mask case) and a stone-breaker (a shoemaker's hammer), and with these tools explored the minerals of his native Pennsylvania for the next few years.

Mineral collecting faded away in his teens. It was almost thirty years later in Chicago that his interest in minerals resurfaced. Lloyd was working in publishing at the Moody Bible Institute, and spent many happy lunch hours exploring the neighborhood junk shops. Amidst the old plates and assorted metal objects was someone's mineral collection. He bought it and brought it back to the office. While showing it around he talked about (and remembered) being a child mineral collector and the stories of the ten-year-old in Pennsylvania. (He later cut the best tiger-eye of his career from a piece in that collection.)

His next step was learning to cut stones. Fortunately at that time there was a marvelous lapidary program in Chicago. In 1965 Lloyd studied with Ray Mitchell, the founder of "Lapidary in the Parks" and a superb craftsman. (When Mitchell retired, Lloyd was offered his position.) By 1966 he was doing prize-winning work—a First in individual jewelry for tiger-eye cat-tails with jade leaves set in a base of rutilated quartz backed in aventurine. In a blind jurying, his work took four Firsts, two Seconds, and two Thirds.

Stones are cut by first taking a rock and "slabbing" it into sheets with a diamond-edged saw. Then you draw a shape on the slab—Lloyd uses adhesive paper. Then the shape is sawn out and rounded and polished on a series of wheels to create a "cabochon." A cabochon is a stone that is cut with a rounded or flat surface and not faceted. But this is only the technical part, however important. The art is in looking at a slab and selecting out of a myriad of patterns the small precise area where the perfect design lies. The place in the stone where everything is "right."

Over the years, during his business travel through twelve states, he acquired an incredible collection of minerals, many of which he still has. At that time lapidary shops, sometimes containing unusual local minerals, dotted many small towns. Lloyd could never pass up anything really interesting since "he might never see that stone again." The names alone are magic: chalcedony, carnelian, jade, moss agate, sapphire, tiger eye, aventurine, chrysophase, rose agate, jet, malachite, moonstone, opal, hematite. It's not surprising that an author would love to cut things with such marvelous names.

Lloyd Eshbach, His Second Love

by Laurie T. Edison

FIRST MET LLOYD AT A RIVERCON over ten years ago. A slight grey-haired man stopped in front of my table and said: “That’s a beautifully set watermelon tourmaline.” I looked up and saw the boulder opal he was wearing. The stone was magnificent and beautifully cut. We started to talk about stones and within fifteen minutes I realized I was talking to someone who shared my fascination with unusual semi-precious stones and their cutting. We were instantly sympathetic. I had no idea he was Lloyd Arthur Eshbach, publisher, writer, First Fandom member.

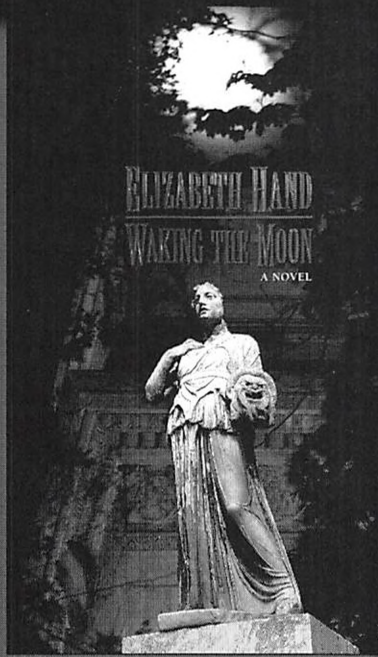
For the next few years we continued to talk stones whenever we met. When Lloyd decided to retire from lapidary work to concentrate exclusively on his writing, he offered to sell me a large group of stones. When that first box of stones arrived, I opened the wrappings and found a wooden cigar box with each stone individually wrapped in white paper, labelled with their names—chatoyant malachite, purple obsidian, psilomelane—stones occasionally mentioned but rarely seen. I was overwhelmed. The stones were beautifully cut, with a rare sense of balance and design. His eye for color, balance and design is the best I’ve seen in over twenty years as a jeweler. I particularly remember a “floral” agate that looked like a Victorian garden seen through glass.

Lloyd never quite stopped cutting stones, and the cigar boxes kept coming. We’ve been working together now for many years, and I am still amazed at what emerges from those boxes. Over the years the pieces he’s cut for me have resulted in work that shows the best of both of our talents. Making the jewelry with these stones is especially wonderful. They require complex and balanced designs for the silver and stones to work together.

So how did Lloyd Arthur Eshbach become the fine artist of stone cutting that he is? Not surprisingly, it began in a library in 1920. Lloyd, already addicted to Zane



HarperPrism proudly congratulates our nominees,
 Elizabeth Hand for **WAKING THE MOON**
 (best novel), Poppy Z. Brite for **LOVE IN VEIN**
 (best anthology), and Robert Devereaux for
 "A Slow Red Whisper of Sand"
 from **LOVE IN VEIN**.



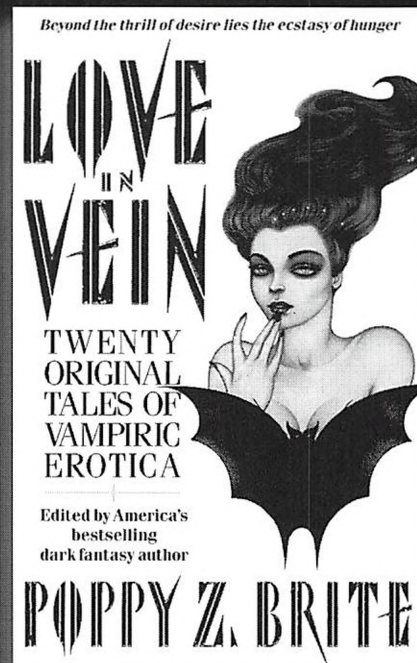
WAKING THE MOON by Elizabeth Hand

"Extraordinary...an ambitious, erotically-charged thriller...mingles the invention of Anne Rice with the punch of Camille Paglia."
 —Clive Barker

"Elegantly written...luch and decadent...a marvelous fantasy thriller."
 —*The Denver Post*

"Ms. Hand is a superior stylist."
 —*New York Times*

"Entertaining and well-constructed....The tropical lushness of Hand's descriptions are only one reward....The book's characters are nicely balanced, its plot robust, and Hand's Goddess is scary enough to make even her most worshipful adherents reconsider."
 —*Cleveland Plain Dealer*




LOVE IN VEIN

Twenty Original Tales of Vampire Erotica
 Edited by Poppy Z. Brite

"Brite's vision is disturbingly dark, deliciously erotic, sweetly savage, and unquietly her own."
 —Dan Simmons

"Literate and lyrical...a celebration of the aphrodisiac qualities of blood and flesh."
 —*Kirkus Reviews*

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rocked him back. Almost enough, he thought, to turn a grown man straight.

He smiled at her. She grinned back. He knew he was grinning now.

Barney glanced up and saw Penny Savin trudging toward the door of the shop. In her hands, she held Ernest's crisp Lee Wranglers.

"Even in this new world, I don't want those," he mused out loud. He wondered if they would eventually come to miss even Ernest. Maybe. But he also figured that the sorts of folks remaining on earth would generate sufficient personality difference to afford each one of them sufficient grinding surfaces to keep edges sharp and distinct.

This wasn't heaven. But he didn't figure it was hell. Maybe it just *was*.

He dared to kiss Kit, and it was fine. "You wanna know what people are going to do now and forever, here on earth, world without end?" He felt like whirling Kit around in a dance of joy and liberation. "They're all gonna just put their new pants on one leg at a time."

Kit smiled tentatively, apparently unsure what she had just heard.

O Happy, Brave New World, Barney thought. It would make one hell of a billboard. He realized he felt *good*.

The next morning, he wasn't so sure. π

He who gives this testimony speaks:

"Yes, I am coming soon!"

—Revelation, 22:20

untidy heaps of leather jackets and worn, raggedy jeans. Studs glinted in the sunlight like dew on new shoots.

For another thing, Barney didn't hear the chants of the Latter Deist Dawn throng. On the far side of Speer, the sidewalk was littered with crumpled saffron fabric. And paper.

There were scattered signs and leaflets and broadsides all over the street. Barney wished the propaganda had gone with the bearers.

"Jeez," said Kit wonderingly, "I guess it really happened, didn't it?"

Barney craned his neck. Ernest Savin was no longer on his aluminum ladder. Penny Savin was outside, though, numbly poking through the remains of a red Pendleton shirt, a pair of nearly new Lee Wranglers, and some tatty Sears-looking underwear briefs with skid marks visible even from the street.

Barney smiled. There might just be hope for Penny yet. Cosmic ways were clearly difficult to fathom, true. But he was getting the impression that the Great Dichotomy of Who Went and Who Stayed might not be what quite a number of folks had guessed or expected. And maybe it wouldn't be so bad after all.

A world without the Latter Deist Dawn, the Neo-Nazi Youths, and Ernest Savin might not be so bad. Nor would a world with Kit Falcon and Penny Savin be so unwelcome.

Barney had the strangest feeling that maybe, just maybe, most of his friends were still here. And perhaps with some surprising company. His ears took in silence and his brain registered the absence of talk show host and social gadfly Gerda Bramlett. She was no longer on the air.

He reached out and clicked the radio to silence.

In that silence, Barney heard the sound of a car smashing into a light pole. It was driverless, of course, a dull blue sedan of some make or another. His vision focused. Some vehicles had drifted off to the sides of the street; but there were still plenty of automobiles under the control of their drivers. Two of them slowly moved past and Barney could read the bumper stickers. One said: *Live and Let Live*. The other read: *Conserve Your Own Damn Family Values*.

Hmm, he thought.

"Pretty weird," said Kit, marveling at all this, now standing beside him. "Just what the hell are people gonna do in this brave, strange new world?"

"First thing," he said, "is maybe you ought to call your folks back in Detroit to see if they're okay.

"Think they'll be there?"

"I hops so," said Barney. He scrutinized her. "I guess they brought you up right."

"What about you?" Kit grabbed him and planted an exuberant kiss on his lips that

"Yep," said Barney glumly. "Back home to the 'burbs."

Kit had started to look stricken. The encounter with Ernest Savin was coming home to her. "I can't afford another rent increase," she said. "I can't charge my clients any more than I do already."

"Make dubs and sell 'em as porn tapes to the adult theaters," said Barney helpfully.

"The tapes aren't that exciting."

"Just kidding," he said.

"Well, Gerda Bramlett says it won't matter anyway."

"Huh?" Barney looked at her. He felt depressed now. What the hell was he going to do? What were *they* going to do?

"What I was trying to tell you earlier," said Kit. She gave the scraped walnut radio cabinet a sudden, hard rap with her fist.

The volume on the broadcast swelled up suddenly. The voice wasn't Gerda's. "We interrupt the Bramlett Hour to bring you this special news bulletin. Christians, pull over to the side of the road if you are driving. Pull over—"

And then the voice was drowned out.

Everything was drowned out.

The sound.

The sound crashed around them like combers on a beach.

But that's not the sound, thought Barney, it's only a fraction of what it sounds *like*. It's the power of the ocean, but the sound's something else entirely. The molecules of his body shivered, started to come apart, one from the next. That's what it felt like. Then they settled back into his familiar shape.

He realized he was listening to what sounded like the great mother of all blue notes sounded on an alto sax as big as the Ritz.

"What *is* that?" Kit cried out.

Probably A-sharp, Barney wanted to say, but didn't. *Couldn't*.

Pretty jazzy. He waited for the rest of the riff, but it never came. **The sound** gradually died, muted, faded, diminished, evaporated. Only the memory was left, but it permeated every bone, every cell.

Barney saw the billboard on the north side of Speer waver as though caught in a hurricane wind. Slowly, gracelessly, it began to crumple. First one support, then the other, torqued like squeezed aluminum foil. The **RAPTURE** sign toppled face forward into the vacant lot beside the boulevard.

Barney had the damndest feeling that much had just changed. For one thing, he didn't hear the shouting of the Neo-Nazi Youths anymore. On the near side of Speer, he saw

"May I say something?"

"No," said her husband.

"Yes," Kit and Barney said together.

Penny looked from one to the other. Then she seemed to gather courage. "You can be saved at any time. You and Kit both. All you have to do—"

Her husband interrupted her. "They won't. One's a crass materialist. The other's a pornographer. No chance of salvation here."

"... in spite of the Neo-Nazi Youths' propensity toward extremism in the defense of virtue and patriotism," said Gerda Bramlett on the radio, "one must still admire their tenacious adherence to principle, and their support of universal family values ..."

"Listen," said Ernest, "I'd love to listen to all of this, including your weird Satanic beliefs, but I've got some work to do outside." He made a shearing motion with his hands. "Don't forget. Another hundred in the check next month." He glanced significantly from Barney to Kit and back again. "That's a hundred *each*." He turned on his heel and started to exit.

Penny looked abashed. With her overdone makeup, her overteased hair; with her ridiculous clothing, she drew herself up, shoulders straight, and took a deep breath. She looked first Kit, then Barney in the eyes. "I am really sorry—"

"Come *on!*" Her husband grabbed her wrist and literally towed Penny from the store. The bell jangled harshly as the door slammed shut.

Kit had taken a step forward. She stopped, settled back on her heels. "Maybe I *could* make a slasher movie," she said. "I could take a principal role."

Barney raised his hands ineffectually, stared into his own palms, shook his head dolefully. "I want to live and let live, you know? But I could never take what she takes."

Kit smiled, but without humor. "Perhaps she believes she'll get her reward later." She glanced up at the sound of tramping boot leather.

The first of the Neo-Nazi Youths for Humane and Fascist Unification in Our Schools stomped arrogantly past the front of the store. Skinheads in leather and chains and denim stared back in at them through the window.

Some nice Levis there, Barney could not help thinking.

Outside, Ernest was climbing his aluminum ladder for whatever mysterious maintenance he claimed to be carrying out. He paused a few rungs up and gave the procession a thumbs-up.

Directly across Speer Boulevard, the Latter Deist Dawn people had appeared, swaying and chanting, robed and looking very orange. Some of the NNYHFUIOS screamed at them. "Back home with you, slopes!"

"I been to Vo-Tech," said Ernest stiffly.

"Listen to Gerda Bramlett," said Kit, interrupting.

The voice crackled with static. Barney's radio tubes could use some maintenance.

"... other news of our secular hell." Static. "... marching on the State Capitol, in protest of the Denver Public School System's announcement that the temporary hiring freeze on homosexuals would be lifted. Spokesmen for the NNYHFUIOS said earlier that—" The voice fuzzed out again.

"Huh?" said Barney, the initials not registering.

"The Neo-Nazi Youths for Humane and Fascist Unification in Our Schools," said Kit.

"In fact," said Ernest with some satisfaction, I believe that's them now. I heard the chanting up Speer before I came in. They're marching down to the Capitol for the anti-queer rally at noon."

"Not very Christian," said Barney.

Now Kit was staring out the window. "Looks like a sure-fire double feature." They all followed her gaze. A long line of saffron-robed men and women swaying in something of a metaphysical conga line up Speer from the east. Barney heard chanting though he couldn't quite make out the words. But he had a pretty good idea. He'd seen these people before. He knew.

"The Latter Deist Dawn brethren," he said. "Chanting for better jobs, promotions, better dental plans, nicer cars, houses in the suburbs, about every single material goal you can imagine."

Ernest laughed. "At least they're not Christian. They'll be staying here with you two when the Rapture comes. Have fun eating pureed veggies."

"They're mostly all Anglos," Barney protested. "They may look Buddhist, but they're about as holy as *I* am."

"Well, you don't look Buddhist," said Ernest. "And you don't look holy. You especially don't look Christian." Kit and Barney exchanged looks. How do you *look* Christian other than having a plastic fish icon adhered to the back of your car? "Fact is," Ernest continued, "what I really know is that none of you or your friends or your families or *anybody* is gonna head upstairs when Gabriel blows his horn."

Barney didn't have to think about it. "If that's club that'd have me, then I don't think I want to join."

"That's dumb," said Ernest.

"That's Groucho," said Barney.

Ernest looked severe. "Then remain here in the earthly Hell."

"Excuse me?" Penny spoke up at last. Her facial tone had subsided to a mild pink.

The bell abruptly jangled as Kit Falcon rushed pell-mell into the jeans recycling shop. "Yo, Barney, turn on the—" She stopped short when she spotted the two staring Savins. Her silver asparagus tip nose stud and lower lip rings glittered in the artificial light.

Barney raised one hand. "Rent increase coming up, Kit. I'll save our holy landlords from having to cross your threshold."

Penny Savin began to blush with astounding rapidity, pink fleshing to outright crimson. "I couldn't go into your shop."

"And your husband can't enter unless I invite him," said Kit, her tan features crinkling in a smile nonetheless. "I've read my vampire lore."

"Wait a doggoned minute—" Ernest started to say.

"Bloodsucker," said Kit, still smiling ingenuously, but showing sharp teeth.

"Kids," said Barney, holding up both hands now, palms out. "Settle down."

"Actually," said Ernest, tone carrying out his name, "I might come in. I was thinking about possibly commissioning one of your tapes. Penny and I are coming up on our tenth."

"Barter instead of the rent increase?" said Kit.

Penny covered her face with her hands. Barney could see one bright blue eye peeking out from between taut fingers.

"Naw," said Ernest. "Cash, along with a professional discount."

Kit shook her head. "I don't do splatter flicks anyway." She looked tempted to say something else intemperate, but turned toward Barney instead. "Turn on the radio—that talk station . . . you know, the one you listen to all the time?"

Barney didn't question the order. He flicked the switch on the radio sitting by the cash register. The tubes took a few moments to warm up. "Is this gonna be like JFK back in November of '63?"

"Maybe bigger," said Kit. "Good old Gerda's been making some really wild claims she says are piped directly from the big D."

"Dallas?" Barney really was confused now.

"The Deity."

The voice crackled from the speaker. Barney recognized her. "Gerda Bramlett," he said, "Phyllis Schlafly's Mr. Hyde role model. The lady who's calling for a boycott of the Papal visit because the new catechism allows that married folks can enjoy procreation moderately."

"Gerda opposes licentiousness," said Ernest.

"I'm surprised you know the word," said Barney with some evident admiration.

Barney considered saying some other yid things. He thought twice, tried to moderate his reaction. Tried a diversionary tactic. Gestured toward the street with his thumb.

"That billboard?"

"The one raised by the Church of the Heaven Sent Commandments?" Ernest grinned with recognition.

"The Rapture ad. Yeah, that one."

Ernest glanced at the familiar billboard. "So?"

"I need to get something straight," Barney said, "if that's the phrase I'm looking for. The Rapture's coming soon, right?"

"Right on," said Ernest. His wife nodded vehemently, features serious.

"Every good Christian's gonna translate right out of their earthly dimension and bop up to heaven, right?"

"Well, that's taking something pretty darned serious and making light of it," said Ernest.

Penny nodded vehemently.

"What I said, or what he said?" Barney said to Penny.

"What you said."

"Good," said Barney. "I try for poetry as well as accuracy." He took a breath. "So here's the deal . . . It's gonna be quick, right? Zap, and you're outta here. You'll leave your clothes and pacemakers and cars behind?"

"Robes will be prepared and waiting for us," said Penney.

"How about dental fillings?"

"Don't confuse the issue," said Ernest. "Those bumper stickers that say *Caution: In Case of Rapture This Car Will Be Driverless* are absolutely accurate. Better pull off the freeway when the Rapture happens."

Barney agreed. "I'm guessing most of the driverless hulks'll either be mid-size Chevies or those big old hulking, gas-guzzling lumber barges."

"Not too many rice burners," said Ernest. "You can be sure of that. The Lord abhors cars made outside the U.S.A. He looked sharply at Barney. "So what's your point?"

"You can't take money up there, right?"

"No earthly goods," said Ernest. "The Lord will provide."

"You can't take it with you."

"No," Ernest repeated with some evident exasperation.

"Then why, if the Rapture's upon us, are you foisting off a rent increase?"

The Savins exchanged glances. Ernest said, with some asperity, "It could be today, it could be Christmas. I need the increase now."

The door-jangle pulled his eyes back into focus.

He blinked owlshly at the door, stared at the couple who had just entered. It was his landlords, the slumlords, the capitalist exploiters of his marginal economic situation. Ernest and Penny Savin looked back at him. Barney owed them a hundred bucks on the previous month's rent.

"This afternoon," Barney said. "I've got a check coming in from my Russian resale guy."

"That's nice," said Ernest in his most abrasive and patronizing voice. "But we have another matter to discuss with you, my friend."

You're not my friend, Barney said to himself. We're only marginally in the same species.

"Good morning, Barney," said Penny. She was a slender brunette, rarely saying anything when in the company of her husband. Barney had always speculated that Penny might have had some sort of decent life had it not been for whatever ghastly previous events had once conspired to fold her into Ernest's life.

Ernest was in his late forties, an intense, jowly fellow who had—disappointingly, in Barney's estimation—managed to keep most of the musculature he'd gained as a college jock. Today he wore a red Pendleton shirt and a reasonably new pair of Lee Wrangler blue jeans. He also wore an NRA billed cap. Barney knew Ernest wasn't a member; he simply wore the cap to irritate people like his renters.

Ernest smirked. "The hundred you already owe?" He gestured at the Wranglers with one thick thumb. "Maybe I can help with donation. These do you any good?"

Barney shook his head patiently. "They're not 501s. Sorry. You can't put one over on those East Bloc kids or the Japanese."

"Little heathens," Ernest said. "They'll be getting theirs soon enough." He shrugged. "Okay, so I tried to help."

"Ernest," Penny said. It sounded as much like a warning to behave as her voice ever indicated.

"May as well get to the point," said her husband. "Your rent's going up. Gotta do it, what with the new roof and the heating system upgrade."

"What upgrade?" said Barney. "I've been here two winters and my customers and I freeze our collective tuchases every halfway cold day."

"I'm gonna get a contractor out here," said Ernest quickly. "And don't forget, I had the vents blown out last spring. Oh yeah, and try not to use profanity in front of my wife."

"It's obscenity, not profanity."

"Whatever. It's a yid thing."

The wall dividing his half of the duplex storefront from his neighbor was thin. He could hear the noises vibrating out of Anniversary Video next door. Clearly sexual, the sounds seemed—rhythmic grunts and whuffles. Or maybe, he speculated, Kit was editing a video documentary about acute asthmatics.

“Oooh, baby, oooh, ahhh, oooh, baby, baby, oooh, *ooob!*” The man’s voice penetrated the wall like a cordless drill straining against the wettest wood. More snortings. Perhaps the documentary concerned asthmatics attempting vigorous sex.

Barney shook his head. Anniversary Video was the logical outgrowth of the make over and glamour photo salons where spouses and significant others, predominantly female, employed expert advice to have themselves turned into ravishing minxes for portraits specifically designed to kindle the often waning passions of the other partner in the relationship.

It had been Kit Falcon’s brainstorm to go one step further. Admittedly it was a major step . . . Her brainstorm, Barney had told her, had resulted from a severe low pressure trough.

“Don’t *you* go criticizing *my* relationships,” she’d said, but then she had laughed.

Here was her bright idea: she obtained commissions which required her to hide in couples’ bedroom closets. She set up her video and audio equipment under low light, muffled-sound conditions that would challenge the most accomplished CIA spooks. Then she taped what were generically and euphemistically termed marital relationship encounters—a label used regardless of whether the couples were actually married or not. It was more a tonal judgment than a legal definition.

The encounters were usually nasty, brutish, and, in the main, short. It was Kit’s commissioned job to edit the sexual episodes into something visually attractive, aesthetically stimulating if possible, and tarted up with a public domain musical score. The videos made theoretically great anniversary gifts.

Kit’s clientele was comprised of sad wives, depressed lovers, and bewildered husbands. They paid Kit Falcon all too modest a fee for her romantic docudramas.

Barney had watched a few of Kit’s creations on the editing table. “Too bad you can’t use body doubles,” he’d said.

Kit had smiled compassionately as she looked down at an ambulatory cardiac arrest writhing intimately and whuffling into the ear of a worn body that had seen far too many pregnancies.

“I wish . . .” she had said a little wistfully. She grinned up at him. “The innovation I’d like to introduce would be *bawdy* doubles.”

Barney grinned back. “Spot on.”

Raptured Up In Blue

by Edward Bryant

*Write therefore the things you have seen,
and the things which are, and the things
which shall take place after these things*

—Revelation 1:19

DAMN GOOD ADVICE for a science fiction writer, thought Barney Giambrocco. But valid theology? He set down his copy of *The New English Bible* and stared out at the pair of monstrous signs. One was his.

The supports for the pair of huge billboards bestrode Speer Boulevard like the legs of a colossus. The sign on the north read:

BEFORE ARMAGEDDON.

BEFORE THE SECOND COMING.

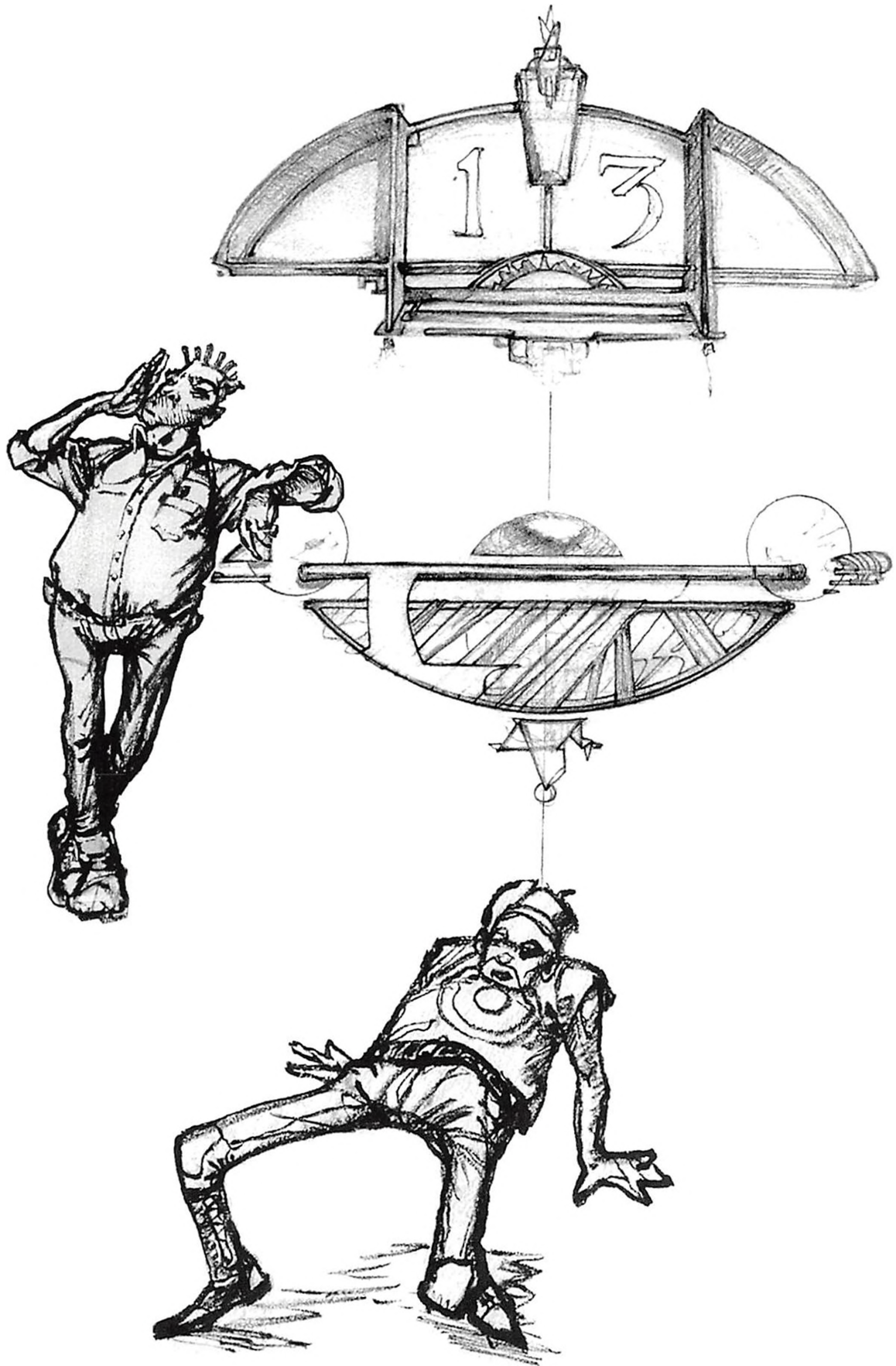
THERE WILL BE . . . THE RAPTURE.

At night, the sign was rimmed in neon. **RAPTURE** was limned in a pink, pulsating glow you could see from most of downtown Denver. Barney thought the billboard would make a wonderful nighttime logo for a dance bar. Club Rapture. Tres cool.

The billboard south of the boulevard was his. Fully as large as its counterpart, the black paint was flaking, the lettering a little shaky. He'd painted it himself. The sign read:

I Buy 501s

Barney Giambrocco gazed out the smeared, cracked pane fronting his blue jeans recycling operation and contemplated the symbolism. Gog and Magog? Nope, more like Gog and Magog lumped together on the north, with Curley, Moe, and Larry on his side of the street.



then the shifting of the wind, turned like a hand avenging to pat instead your frozen cheek: *there now* and there you stand, blinking, shivering and exposed, warmed again but never truly because you know something now that you did not know before. You have learned, here, not to trust your perceptions, you have learned what it is to fear, to watch one thing become another; to watch yourself perhaps change in some way, subtle and resistless, forever if not for good.

They do say travel instructs the mind.

And now we move to that kindest spot, the bright tablelands of personality. To give you my own experience of Ed as a colleague and friend—terse and generous with hard-headed advice, with praise and with insight, and all drawn and laced with that sly, bone-dry needle of wit—like the Taj Mahal, or that rough sweet hole-in-the-wall café where you met your best beloved, no outside description can truly do the thing justice; you must see, you must experience Ed the person for and by yourself.

Because that's what travel is, truly. Sieved through vision, caught and branded you go on, farther than a dare can drive you, farther than you thought you could . . . and then come back, to say, if you can, what you have seen. In the first Datlow/Windling *Year's Best* anthology, Ed is quoted thusly: *The older I get and the more dark fantasy I create, the more I seem to write from experience.* Say if you can what you have seen: his experience, his travels, his country; our gain.

So tell us a story, traveller, about all the places you've been, temples and prairies, fleshpots and silly fairs; give us distance and strangeness, shadows that go backwards, water as bitter-rich as blood. Frighten us, and make us laugh; shame us with our credulity; give us tenderness and the stain of frozen tears. And tell us too about the aliens you met, so cryptic and inscrutable, past fathoming or trust; tell us now what you saw us do, beneath that other sun. π

ness to transcend inner distance, to walk alien in any number of lands, using found tools to make your mark, is essential: the giving-over to vision gives the path that vision takes for without it there is no path, there is nowhere for us to go.

But in postulating the writer as traveller—watchful, gleeful, intrepid, helpless—we might in fancy take another leap, sideways or inside-out, and in that leap make of ourselves the travellers, the wanderers, and change—sea-change—the writer himself into our destination of choice.

So: the country that we have chosen to call Ed Bryant can then be considered, can be traversed in a variety of ways from an equally-varied array of starting points; let inclination be your guide. Approach him as award-winning writer of fiction, as essayist, reviewer, teacher, cinephile and sometimes-actor; connoisseur of the quizzical and blunt, the dry and the bloody, the vast and the hidden and all points in between; interest in and knowledge of the fields of fantasy, science fiction, and horror (and attendance at this convention presumes the same) insists as well upon a certain prior familiarity with the landscape of the Land of Ed.

A guide-book overview (should you, perhaps a cautious traveller, require one) might begin with the monthly column in *Locus*, cast net to offer insight on the new, the inspired, the dire in horror fiction; other venues—*Pulphouse*, *Cemetery Dance*, the *Bloomsbury Review*—as well display his byline and commentary, far-sighted, knowledgeable within and beyond the field(s) served, informed by both humor and cool. The current Datlow/Windling *Year's Best* itself contains a healthy 8,000-plus words of media dissection, reviews of film and television and music from the year past, all filtered through a critical sensibility that tempers justice with mercy: the calm far highlands, say, of our imaginary Bryantland, where the vista is endless and perspective is everything.

Travel now farther, not down but away from those highlands to a region (we suspect) somewhat more tropical: the landscape of Ed's fiction. Consider his back-to-back Nebulas (for "giANTS" and "Stone"); consider the collections (among them *Particle Theory*, *Neon Twilight*, *Among the Dead and Other Events Leading Up To the Apocalypse*), his perennial presence in various *Year's Best* and other best-of anthologies, in the *Norton Book of Science Fiction*, *Light Years and Dark* (containing my own favorite Ed Bryant story, "Dancing Chickens"—which is yours? "A Sad Lost Love at the Diner of the Damned"? "Human Remains"? "While She Was Out"?). Warm here, yes, as the tropics are warm, humid as a kiss in the dark but sometimes—in a heartbeat—it can freeze, green gone grey and wet with death, white wind risen to force you silent with the chill of your own dismay because what you expected, what you thought you would see here is in fact, black fact and true not what you see before you now at all . . . and

A Map of Ed Bryant

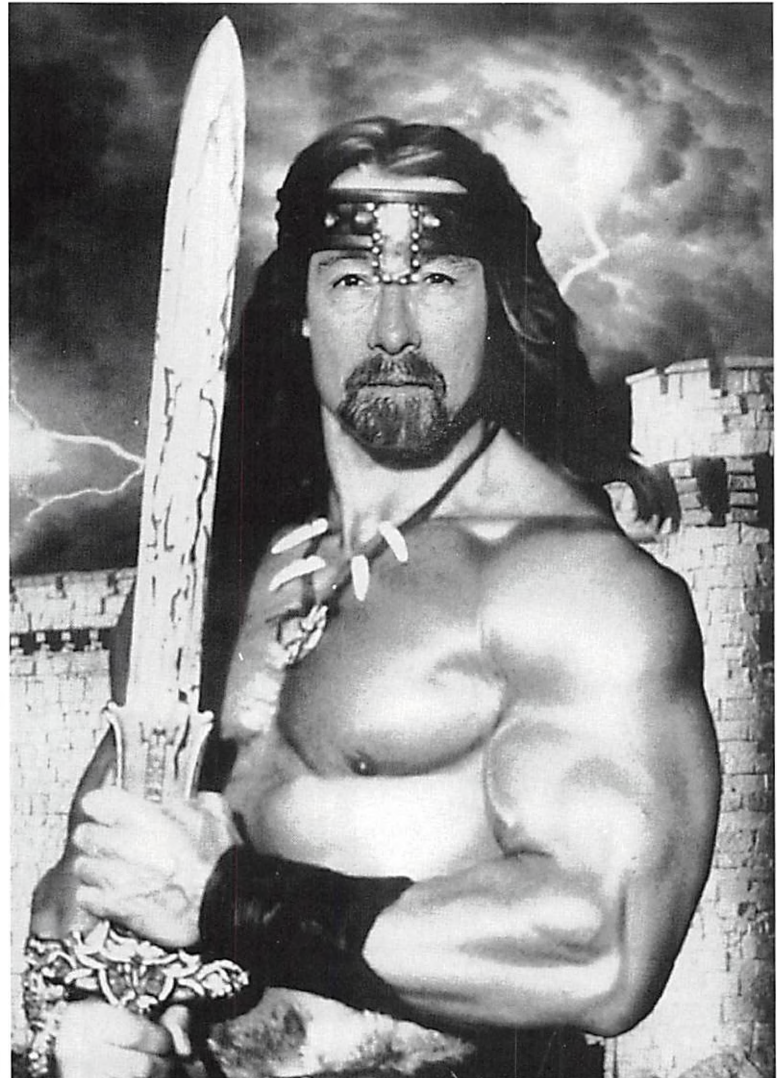
by Kathe Koja

SOME OF US ARE SHAPED FOR TRAVEL: the infant wanderlust born bright at the rim of the cradle may carry us, foot in hand, to places and situations we could never have imagined, never in stories, in dreams crafted with care by self or others. Vision is a function of more than sight: we see what we see partly because it is there before us, our landscape, and when by distance (or its twin fraternal, time) that landscape alters we may find that we too have altered, have changed to match the changes shown around us on all sides.

Of course there are those—we all know them—who refuse to travel. Not from financial lack, or illness, or even simple sloth, but because somewhere inside they are made uncomfortable by what they perceive as alien: the climate or the language, customs or milieu, any of the thousand tweaks or twinges that tell us, like Toto, we're not in Kansas anymore. To travel is, in ways subtle and not, to willingly abdicate control, to reinvent ourselves *as* the alien; to be the stranger. Some people fear this, fearing perhaps as well what, confirmed as strangers, they might further begin to become.

Ed Bryant is a born traveller.

To write—and to write as well as he does—this willing-



THE COLOR OF DISTANCE

Amy Thomson

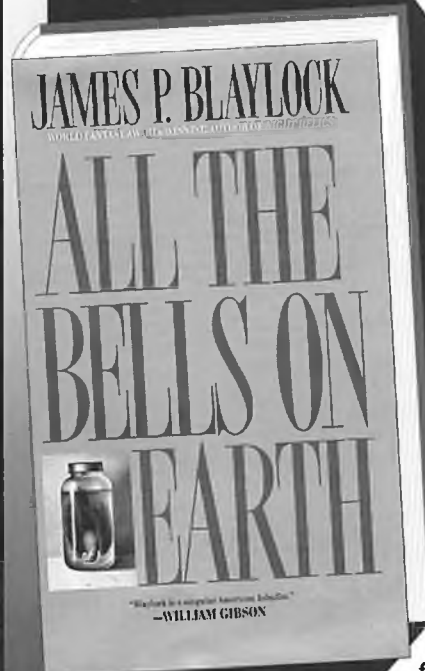
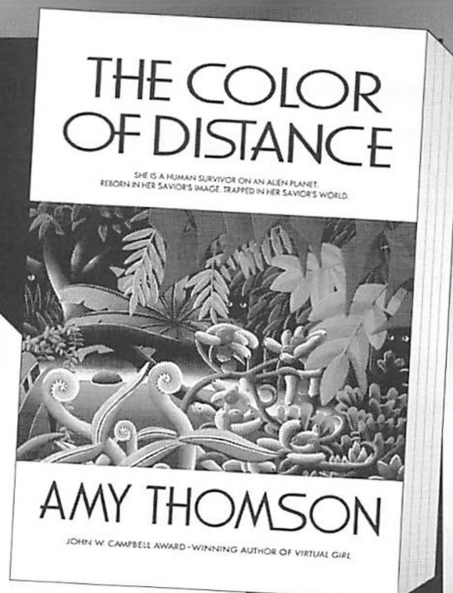
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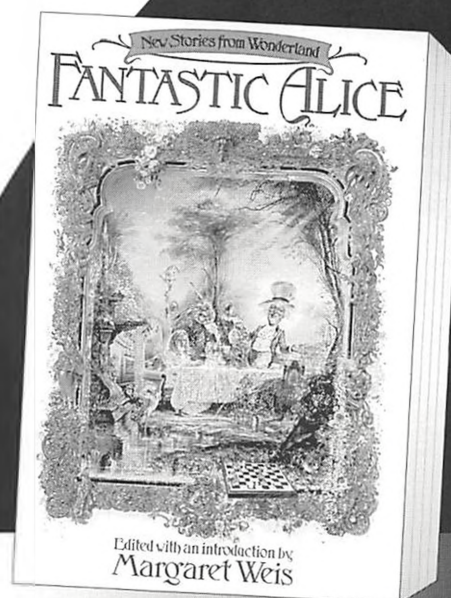
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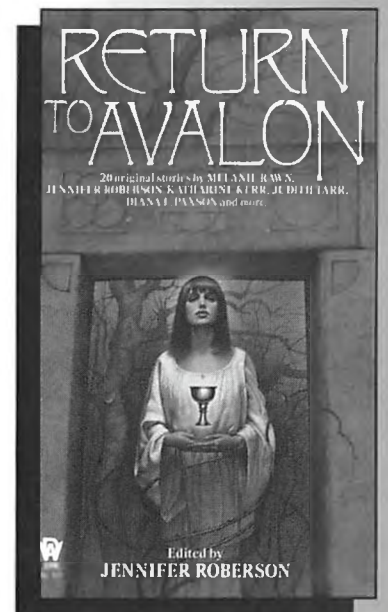
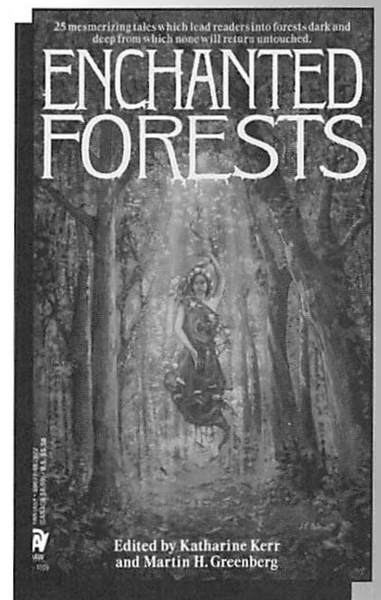
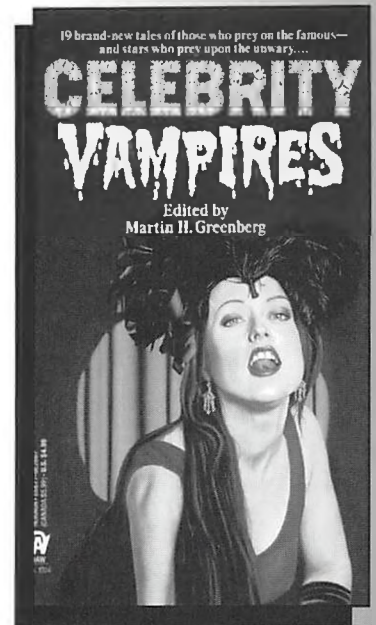
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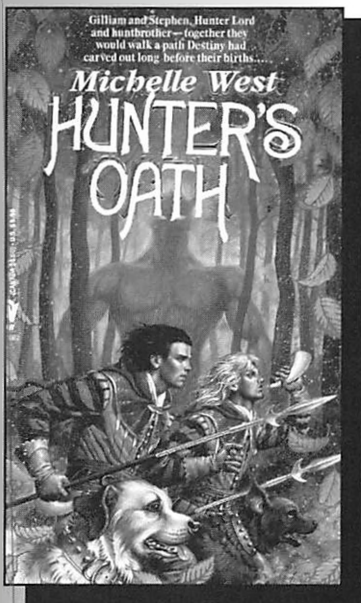
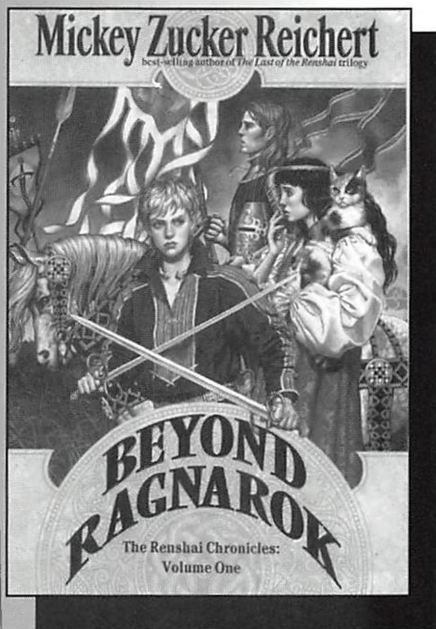
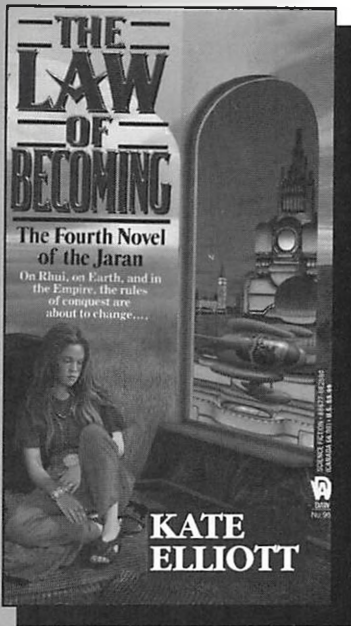
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But first, you see, there's this one little problem. To win the aforementioned War Against Evil, four mantic objects of great power had been summoned forth from dark recesses in which they had lain secreted for a thousand years—and if they are left in the open, Bad Things start to happen. Dinosaurs come to battle dragons, and 747s eclipse the Moon, for starters. So it is that our heroes must go upon their four separate anti-quests to bury for another thousand years the powers that saved the world. And you can join them—Forever After....

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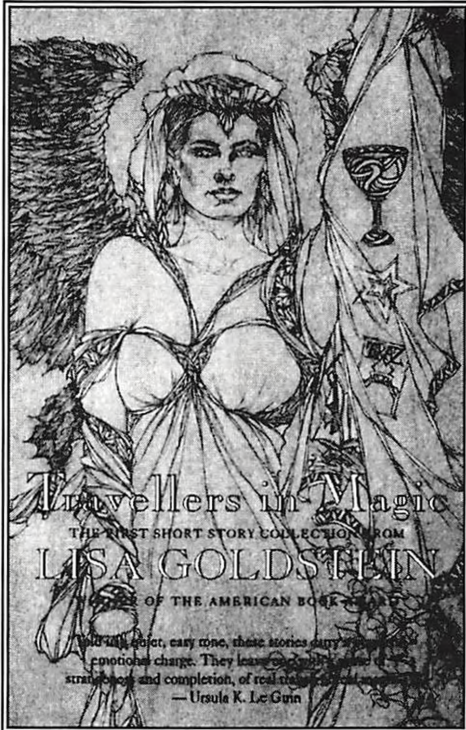
1976 - NEW YORK, NEW YORK

- Life Achievement - Fritz Leiber
- Best Novel - *Bid Time Return* by Richard Matheson
- Best Short Fiction - "Belsen Express" by Fritz Leiber
- Best Anthology/Collection - *The Enquiries of Dr. Esterbazy* by Avram Davidson
- Best Artist - Frank Frazetta
- Special Award, Professional - Donald M. Grant
- Special Award, Non-Professional - Carcosa Press: K.E. Wagner, D. Drake, et al.

1975 - PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

- Life Achievement - Robert Bloch
- Best Novel - *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld* by Patricia McKillip
- Best Short Fiction - "Pages from a Young Girl's Diary" by Robert Aickman
- Best Anthology/Collection - *Worse Things Waiting* by Manly Wade Wellman
- Best Artist - Lee Brown Coye
- Special Award, Professional - Ian & Betty Ballantine
- Special Award, Non-Professional - Stuart David Schiff

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1982 – NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT

Life Achievement – Italo Calvino
Best Novel – *Little, Big* by John Crowley
Best Novella – “The Fire When it Comes”
by Parke Godwin
Best Short Fiction – “The Dark Country”
by Dennis Etchison
Best Anthology/Collection – *Elsewhere*
edited by Terri Windling & Mark Arnold
Best Artist – Michael Whelan
Special Award, Professional – Edward L. Ferman
Special Award, Non-Professional – Robert Collins
Convention Award –
Joseph Payne Brennan & Roy Krenkel

1980 – BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

Life Achievement – Manly Wade Wellman
Best Novel – *Watchtower* by Elizabeth A. Lynn
Best Short Fiction – (tie) – “The Woman Who Loved
the Moon” by Elizabeth A. Lynn &
“Mackintosh Willy” by Ramsey Campbell
Best Anthology/Collection – *Amazons!*
by Jessica Amanda Salmonson
Best Artist – Don Maitz
Special Award, Professional – Donald M. Grant
Special Award, Non-Professional – Paul Allen
Convention Award – Stephen King

1978 – FORT WORTH, TEXAS

Life Achievement – Frank Belknap Long
Best Novel – *Our Lady of Darkness* by Fritz Leiber
Best Short Fiction – “The Chimney”
by Ramsey Campbell
Best Anthology/Collection – *Murgunstrumm
and Others* by Hugh B. Cave
Best Artist – Lee Brown Coye
Special Award, Professional – E.F. Bleiler
Special Award, Non-Professional – Robert Weinberg
Convention Award – Glenn Lord

1981 – BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

Life Achievement – C.L. Moore
Best Novel – *The Shadow of the Torturer*
by Gene Wolfe
Best Short Fiction – “The Ugly Chickens”
by Howard Waldrop
Best Anthology/Collection – *Dark Forces*
edited by Kirby McCauley
Best Artist – Michael Whelan
Special Award, Professional – Donald A. Wollheim
Special Award, Non-Professional –
Pat Cadigan & Arnold Fenner
Convention Award – Gahan Wilson

1979 – PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

Life Achievement – Jorge Luis Borgès
Best Novel – *Gloriana* by Michael Moorcock
Best Short Fiction – “Naples” by Avram Davidson
Best Anthology/Collection – *Shadows*
edited by Charles L. Grant
Best Artist – (tie) – Alicia Austin & Dale Enzenbacher
Special Award, Professional – Edward L. Ferman
Special Award, Non-Professional – Donald H. Tuck
Convention Award – Kirby McCauley

1977 – LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

Life Achievement – Ray Bradbury
Best Novel – *Doctor Rat* by William Kotzwinkle
Best Short Fiction – “There’s a Long—Long Trail
A-Winding” by Russell Kirk
Best Anthology/Collection – *Frights*
edited by Kirby McCauley
Best Artist – Roger Dean
Special Award, Professional –
Alternate World Recordings
Special Award, Non-Professional – Stuart David Schiff

1988 – LONDON, ENGLAND

- Life Achievement – Everett F. Bleiler
- Best Novel – *Replay* by Ken Grimwood
- Best Novella – “Buffalo Gals, Won’t You Come Out Tonight” by Ursula K. Le Guin
- Best Short Fiction – “Friends’ Best Man” by Jonathan Carroll
- Best Anthology – (tie) – *The Architecture of Fear* edited by Kathryn Cramer & Peter D. Pautz & *The Dark Descent* edited by David G. Hartwell
- Best Collection – *The Jaguar Hunter* by Lucius Shepard
- Best Artist – J.K. Potter
- Special Award, Professional – David G. Hartwell
- Special Award, Non-Professional – (tie) – David B. Silva & Robert & Nancy Garcia

1986 – PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

- Life Achievement – Avram Davidson
- Best Novel – *Song of Kali* by Dan Simmons
- Best Novella – “Nadelman’s God” by T.E.D. Klein
- Best Short Fiction – “Paper Dragons” by James Blaylock
- Best Anthology/Collection – *Imaginary Lands* edited by Robin McKinley
- Best Artist – (tie) – Jeff Jones & Thomas Canty
- Special Award, Professional – Pat LoBrutto
- Special Award, Non-Professional – Douglas E. Winter
- Convention Award – Donald A. Wollheim

1984 – OTTAWA, ONTARIO, CANADA

- Life Achievement – (voted by the previous winners) – L. Sprague de Camp, Richard Matheson, E. Hoffman Price, Jack Vance & Donald Wandrei
- Best Novel – *The Dragon Waiting* by John M. Ford
- Best Novella – “Black Air” by Kim Stanley Robinson
- Best Short Fiction – “Elle Est Troi (La Mort)” by Tanith Lee
- Best Anthology/Collection – *High Spirits* by Robertson Davies
- Best Artist – Stephen Gervais
- Special Award, Professional – Ian & Betty Ballantine, Joy Chant & George Sharp
- Special Award, Non-Professional – Stephen Jones & David A. Sutton
- Convention Award – Donald M. Grant

1987 – NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

- Life Achievement – Jack Finney
- Best Novel – *Perfume* by Patrick Suskind
- Best Novella – “Hatrack River” by Orson Scott Card
- Best Short Fiction – “Red Light” by David J. Schow
- Best Anthology/Collection – *Tales Of The Quintana Roo* by James Tiptree, Jr.
- Best Artist – Robert Gould
- Special Award, Professional – Jane Yolen
- Special Award, Non-Professional – (tie) – Jeff Connor & W. Paul Ganley
- Convention Award – Andre Norton

1985 – TUCSON, ARIZONA

- Life Achievement – Theodore Sturgeon
- Best Novel – *The Bridge of Birds* by Barry Hughart
- Best Novella – “The Unconquered Country” by Geoff Ryman
- Best Short Fiction – “Still Life with Scorpion” by Scott Baker
- Best Anthology/Collection – *Clive Barker’s Books of Blood, Volumes I-III* by Clive Barker
- Best Artist – Edward Gorey
- Special Award, Professional – Chris Van Allsburg
- Special Award, Non-Professional – Stuart David Schiff
- Convention Award – Evangeline Walton

1983 – CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

- Life Achievement – Ronald Dahl
- Best Novel – *Niffi the Lean* by Michael Shea
- Best Novella – (tie) – “Confess the Seasons” by Charles L. Grant & “Beyond All Measure” by Karl Edward Wagner
- Best Short Fiction – “The Gorgon” by Tanith Lee
- Best Anthology/Collection – *Nightmare Seasons* by Charles L. Grant
- Best Artist – Michael Whelan
- Special Award, Professional – Donald M. Grant
- Special Award, Non-Professional – Stuart David Schiff
- Convention Award – Arkham House

1994 – NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

- Life Achievement - Jack Williamson
- Best Novel - *Glimpses* by Lewis Shiner
- Best Novella - "Under the Crust" by Terry Lamsley
- Best Short Fiction - "The Lodger" by Fred Chappell
- Best Anthology - *Full Spectrum 4* edited by Lou Aronica, Amy Stout & Betsy Mitchell
- Best Collection - *Alone with the Horrors* by Ramsey Campbell
- Best Artist - (tie) - Alan Clarke & J.K. Potter
- Special Award, Professional - Tim Underwood & Chuck Miller
- Special Award, Non-Professional - Marc Michau

1992 – PINE MOUNTAIN, GEORGIA

- Life Achievement - Edd Cartier
- Best Novel - *Boy's Life* by Robert R. McCammon
- Best Novella - "The Ragthorn" by Robert Holdstock & Garry Kilworth
- Best Short Fiction - "The Somewhere Doors" by Fred Chappell
- Best Anthology - *The Year's Best Fantasy: Fourth Annual Collection* edited by Ellen Datlow & Terri Windling
- Best Collection - *The Ends of the Earth* by Lucius Shepard
- Best Artist - Tim Hildebrandt
- Special Award, Professional - George Scithers & Darrell Schweitzer
- Special Award, Non-Professional - W. Paul Ganely

1990 – CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

- Life Achievement - R.A. Lafferty
- Best Novel - *Madouc* by Jack Vance
- Best Novella - "Great Work of Time" by John Crowley
- Best Short Fiction - "The Illusionist" by Steve Millhauser
- Best Anthology - *The Year's Best Fantasy: Second Annual Collection* edited by Ellen Datlow & Terri Windling
- Best Collection - *Richard Matheson: Collected Stories* by Richard Matheson
- Best Artist - Thomas Canty
- Special Award, Professional - Mark V. Ziesing
- Special Award, Non-Professional - Peggy Nadramia

1993 – MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

- Life Achievement - Harlan Ellison
- Best Novel - *Last Call* by Tim Powers
- Best Novella - "The Ghost Village" by Peter Straub
- Best Short Fiction - (tie) - "Graves" by Joe Haldeman & "This Year's Class Picture" by Dan Simmons
- Best Anthology - *Metaborror* edited by Dennis Etchison
- Best Collection - *The Sons of Noab* by Jack Cady
- Best Artist - James Gurney
- Special Award, Professional - Jeanne Cavellos
- Special Award, Non-Professional - Doug & Tomi Lewis

1991 – TUCSON, ARIZONA

- Life Achievement - Ray Russell
- Best Novel - (tie) - *Only Begotten Daughter* by James Morrow & *Thomas the Rhymer* by Ellen Kushner
- Best Novella - "Bones" by Pat Murphy
- Best Short Fiction - "A Midsummer Night's Dream" by Neil Gaiman & Charles Vess
- Best Anthology - *Best New Horror* edited by Stephen Jones & Ramsey Campbell
- Best Collection - *The Start of the End of it All and Other Stories* by Carol Emshwiller
- Best Artist - Dave McKean
- Special Award, Professional - Arnie Fenner
- Special Award, Non-Professional - Richard Chizmar

1989 – SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

- Life Achievement - Evangeline Walton
- Best Novel - *Koko* by Peter Straub
- Best Novella - "The Skin Trade" by George R.R. Martin
- Best Short Fiction - "Winter Solstice, Camelot Station" by John M. Ford
- Best Anthology - *The Year's Best Fantasy: First Annual Collection* edited by Ellen Datlow & Terri Windling
- Best Collection - (tie) - *Angry Candy* by Harlan Ellison & *Storeys from the Old Hotel* by Gene Wolfe
- Best Artist - Edward Gorey
- Special Award, Professional - (tie) - Robert Weinberg & Terri Windling
- Special Award, Non-Professional - Kristine Kathryn Rusch & Dean Wesley Smith

World Fantasy Award Nominees - 1995

BEST NOVEL -

Brittle Innings by Michael Bishop
From the Teeth of Angels by Jonathan Carroll
Love & Sleep by John Crowley
Waking the Moon by Elizabeth Hand
Towing Jehovah by James Morrow
The Circus of the Earth and the Air by Brooke Stevens

BEST SHORT FICTION -

"The Man in the Black Suit" by Stephen King
"The Sisterhood of Night" by Steven Millhauser
"The Homecoming" by Nicholas Royle
"To Receive is Better" by Michael Marshall Smith
"The Changeling's tale" by Michael Swanwick

BEST ARTIST -

Bob Eggleton
Brian Froud
Rick Lieder*
Dave McKean
Gahan Wilson
Jacek Yerka

SPECIAL AWARD, NON-PROFESSIONAL -

Michael Andre-Driussi, for *Lexicon Urthbus*
John & Kim Betancourt, for Wildside Press
Richard Chizmar, for CD Productions
Bryan Cholfin, for Broken Mirrors Press
David Sutton, for *Voices From Shadow*

LIFE ACHIEVEMENT -

To be announced

*While I am honored by the recognition of my work by the World Fantasy Convention voters, the fact that my wife, Kathe Koja, is one of the judges precludes me from further participation in the award process, so I have withdrawn myself from eligibility for this year's award.

—Rick Lieder

BEST NOVELLA -

"The God Who Slept With Women" by Brian W. Aldiss
"A Slow Red Whisper of Sand" by Robert Devereaux
"Last Summer at Mars Hill" by Elizabeth Hand
"Out of the Night, When the Full Moon is . . ." by Kim Newman
"The Last Time" by Lucius Shepard
"Fee" by Peter Straub

BEST ANTHOLOGY -

Love in Vein
edited by Poppy Z. Brite & Martin H. Greenberg
Little Deaths edited by Ellen Datlow
Black Thorn, White Rose
edited by Ellen Datlow & Terri Windling
Shadows Over Innsmouth edited by Stephen P. Jones

BEST COLLECTION -

The Early Fears by Robert Bloch
The Calvin Coolidge Home for Dead Comedians and A Conflagration Artist by Bradley Denton
Travellers in Magic by Lisa Goldstein
The Earth Wire & Other Stories by Joel Lane
Haunted: Tales of the Grotesque
by Joyce Carol Oates

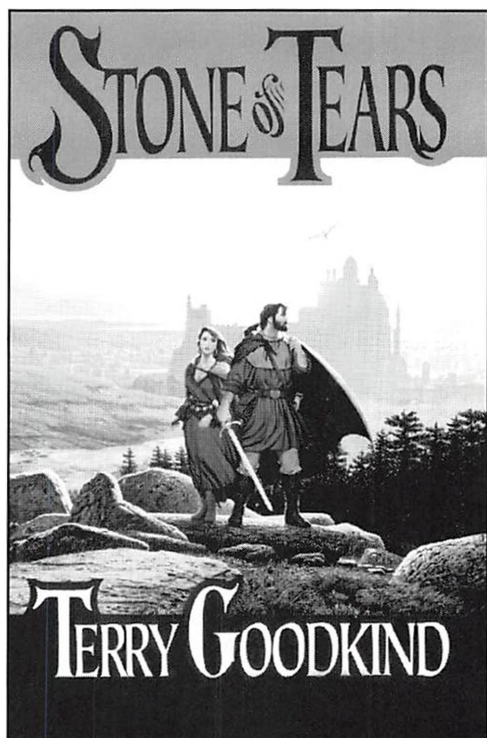
SPECIAL AWARD, PROFESSIONAL -

John Clute, for reviewing
Ellen Datlow, for editing
Fedogan & Bremer, for publishing
Paul Williams, for editing
Mark V. Ziesing, for publishing

THE JUDGES -

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JEAN-DANIEL BREQUE
JANE JOHNSON
KATHE KOJA
BRIAN STABLEFORD

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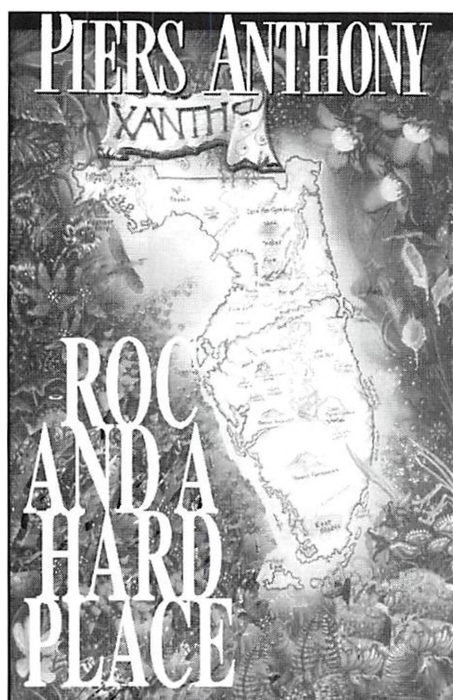


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Piers Anthony

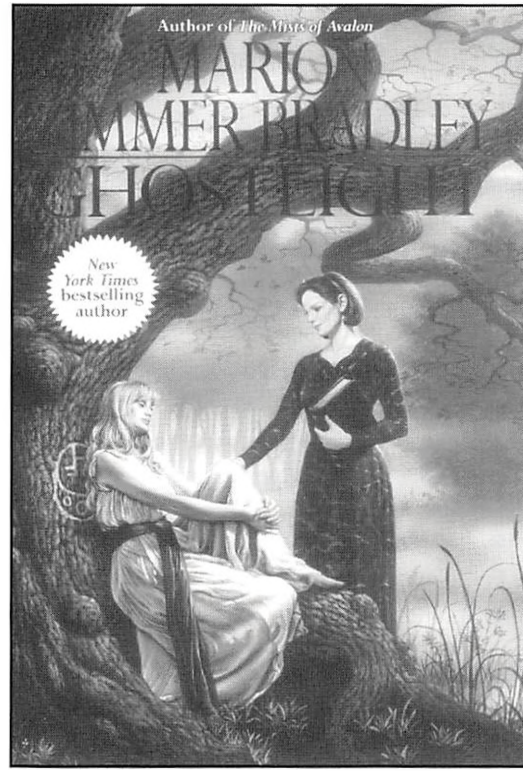
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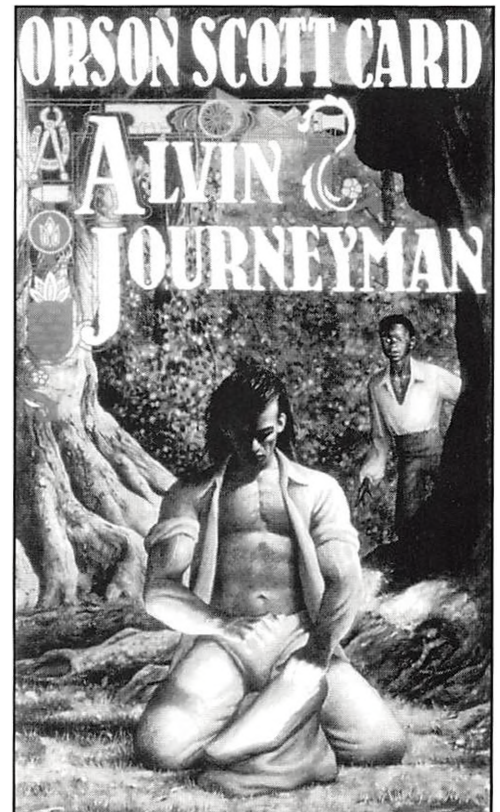


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Chair: Michael J. Walsh

Aide: Mary-Rita Blute

Artshow Director: Tom Schaad

Artshow Manager: Joe Mayhew

Assistant Artshow Manager:

Walter Miles

Banquet: Marty Gear

Bookroom: Scott and Jane Dennis

Assistants: Larry Smith and Sally Kobee

Hospitality: Lance Oszko

Programming: Mike and Beth Zipser

Registration: Colette Schleifer

Computer Wizard: Mark Schleifer

Souvenir Book: Stephen P. Brown

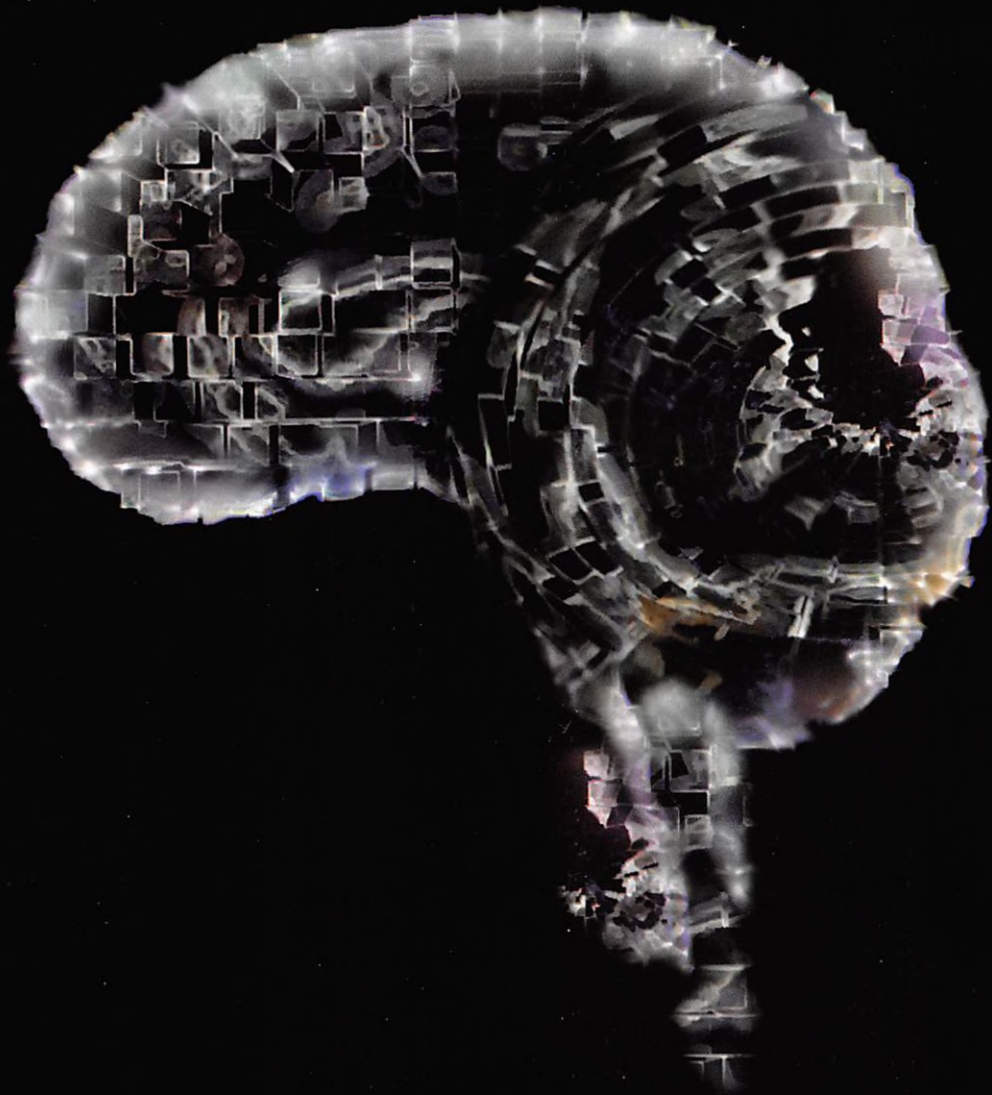
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Edgar Allan Poe Liaison: Sue Wheeler

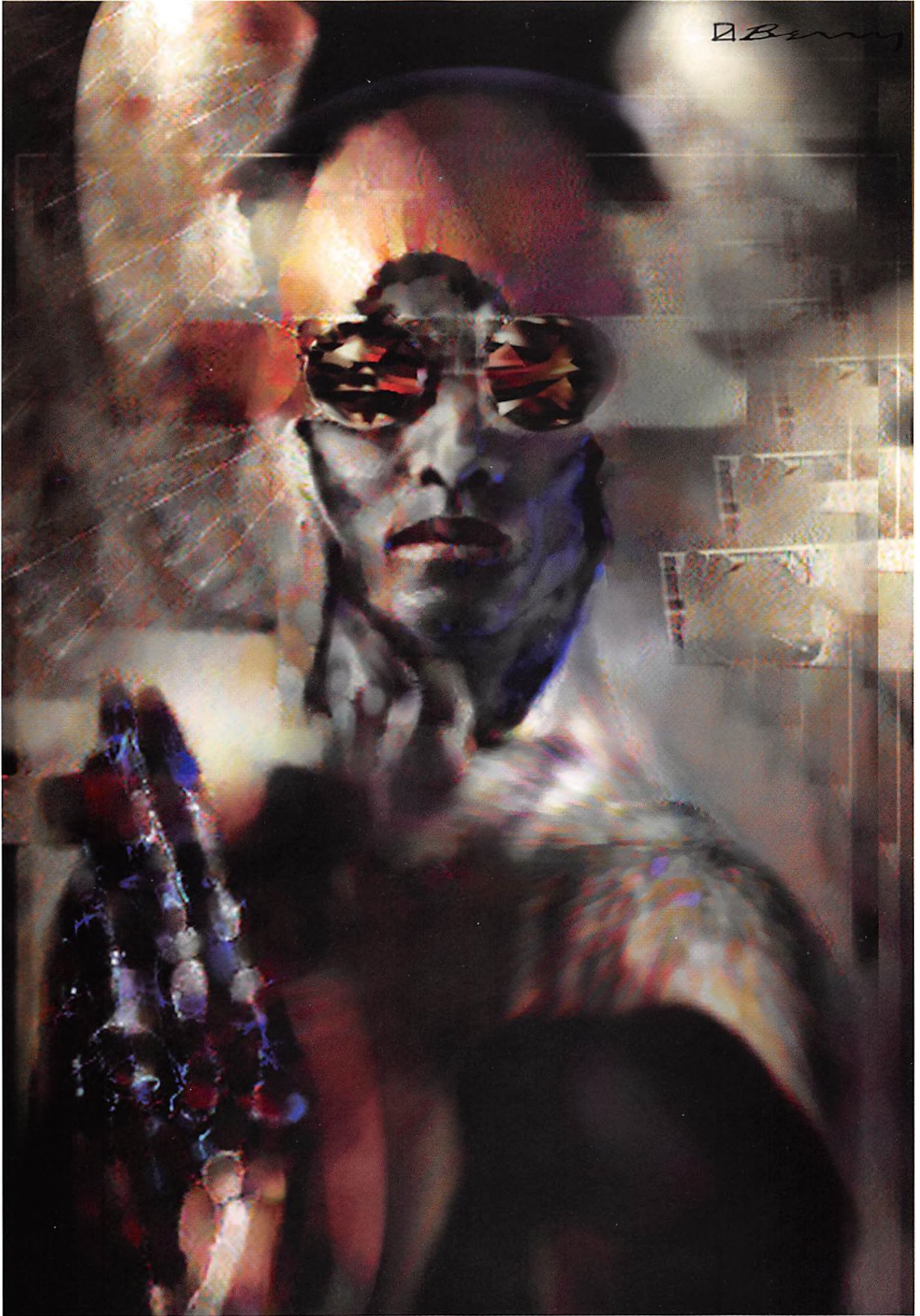
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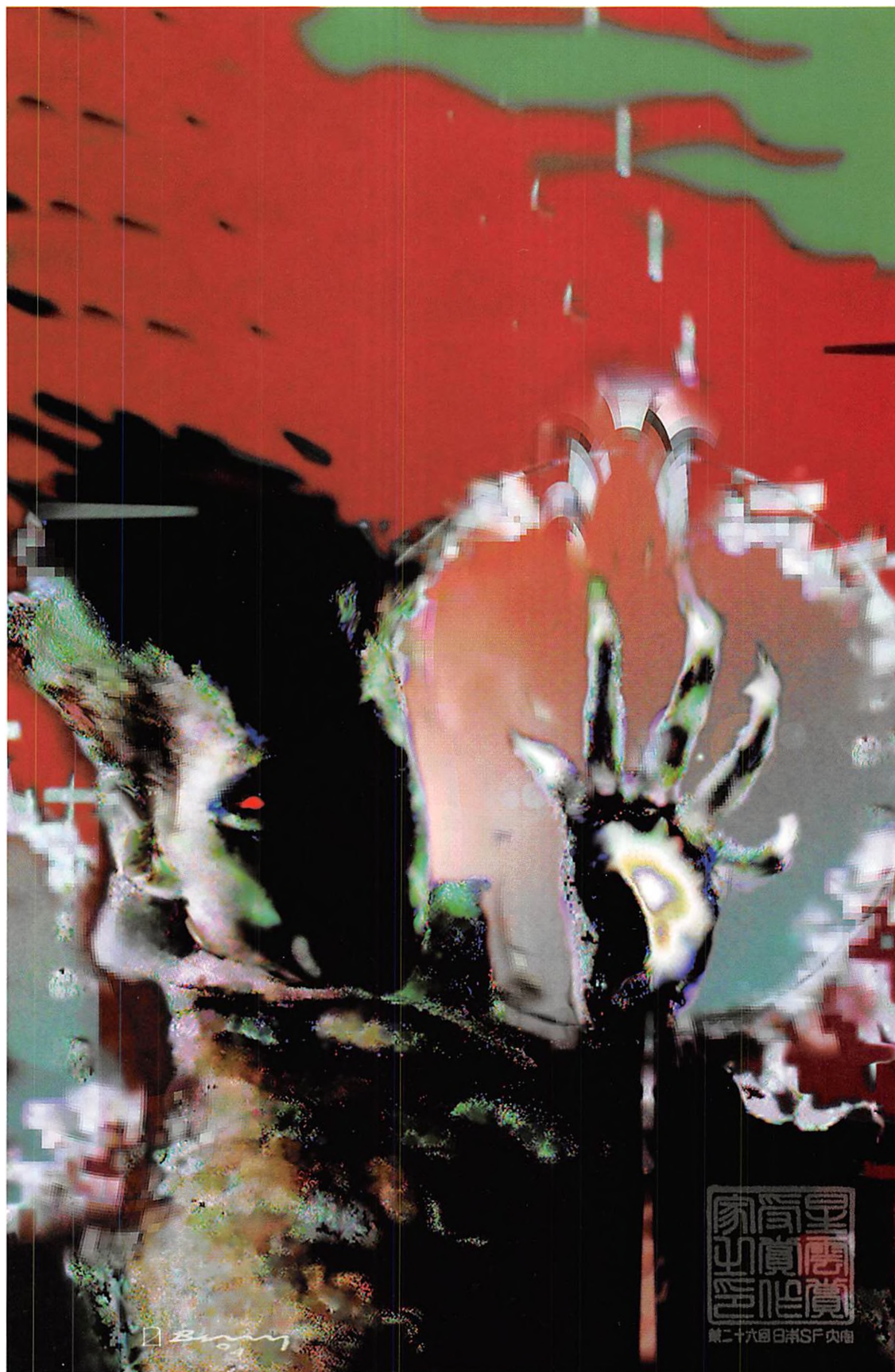
Eva Whitley

RICK BERRY

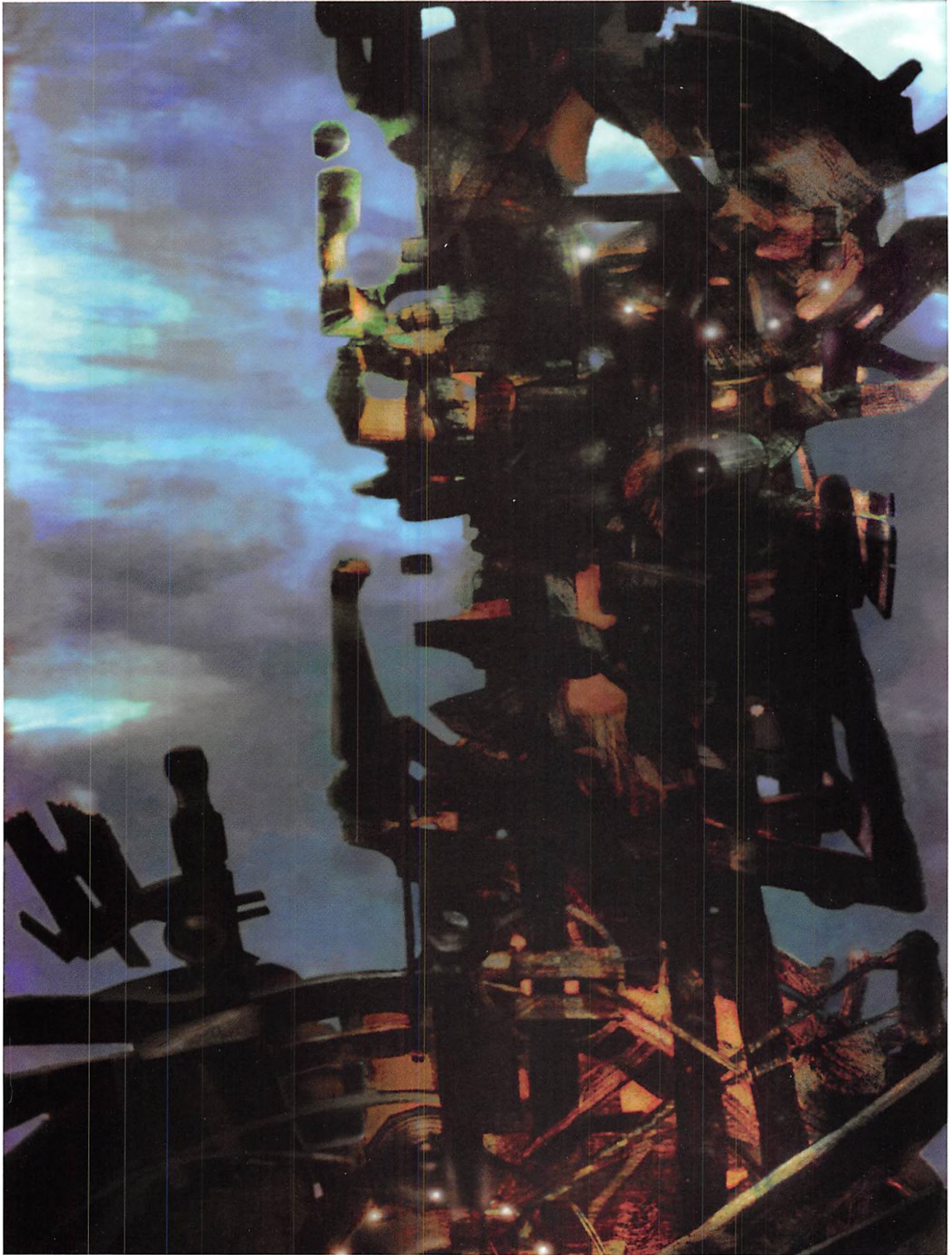


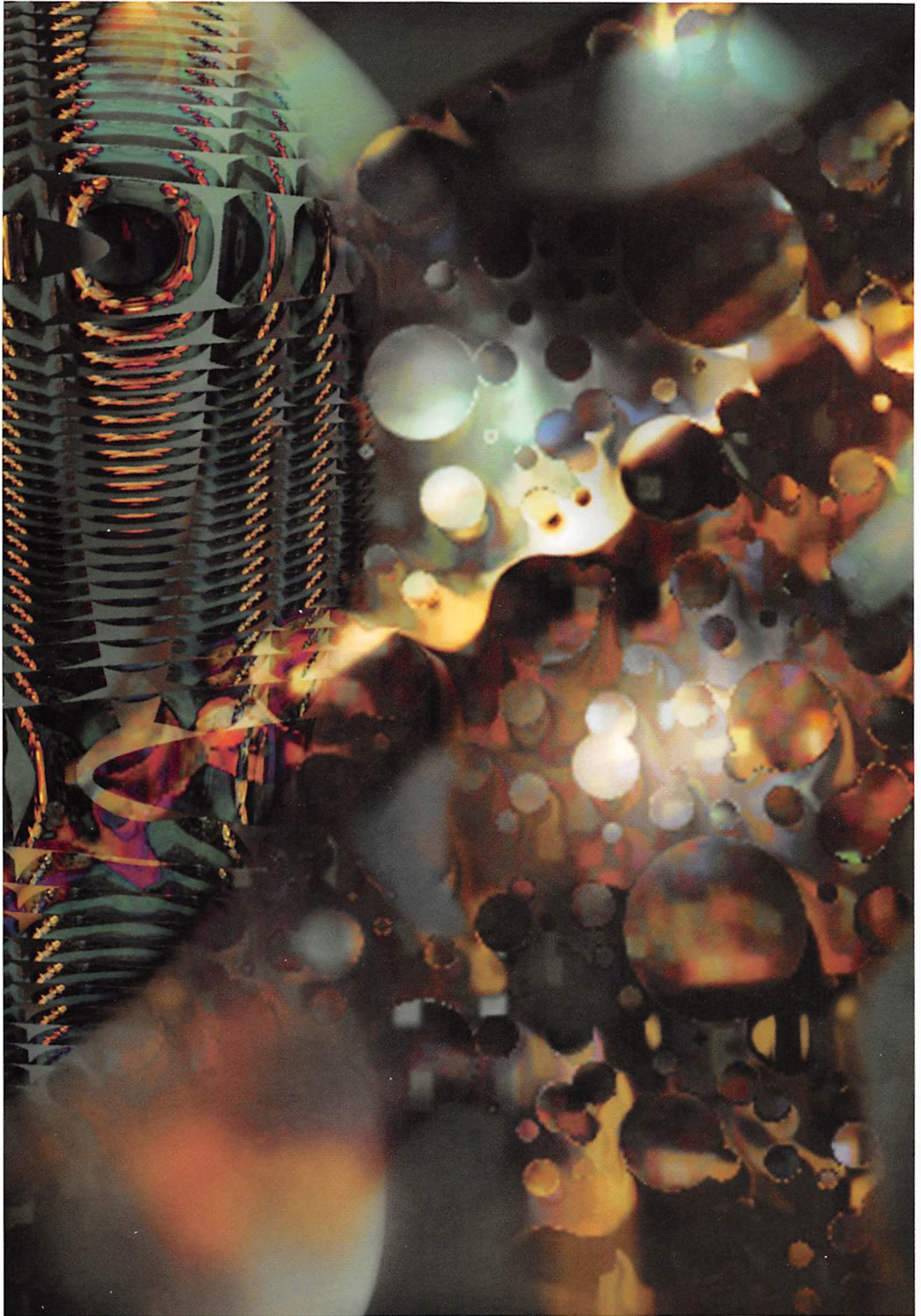


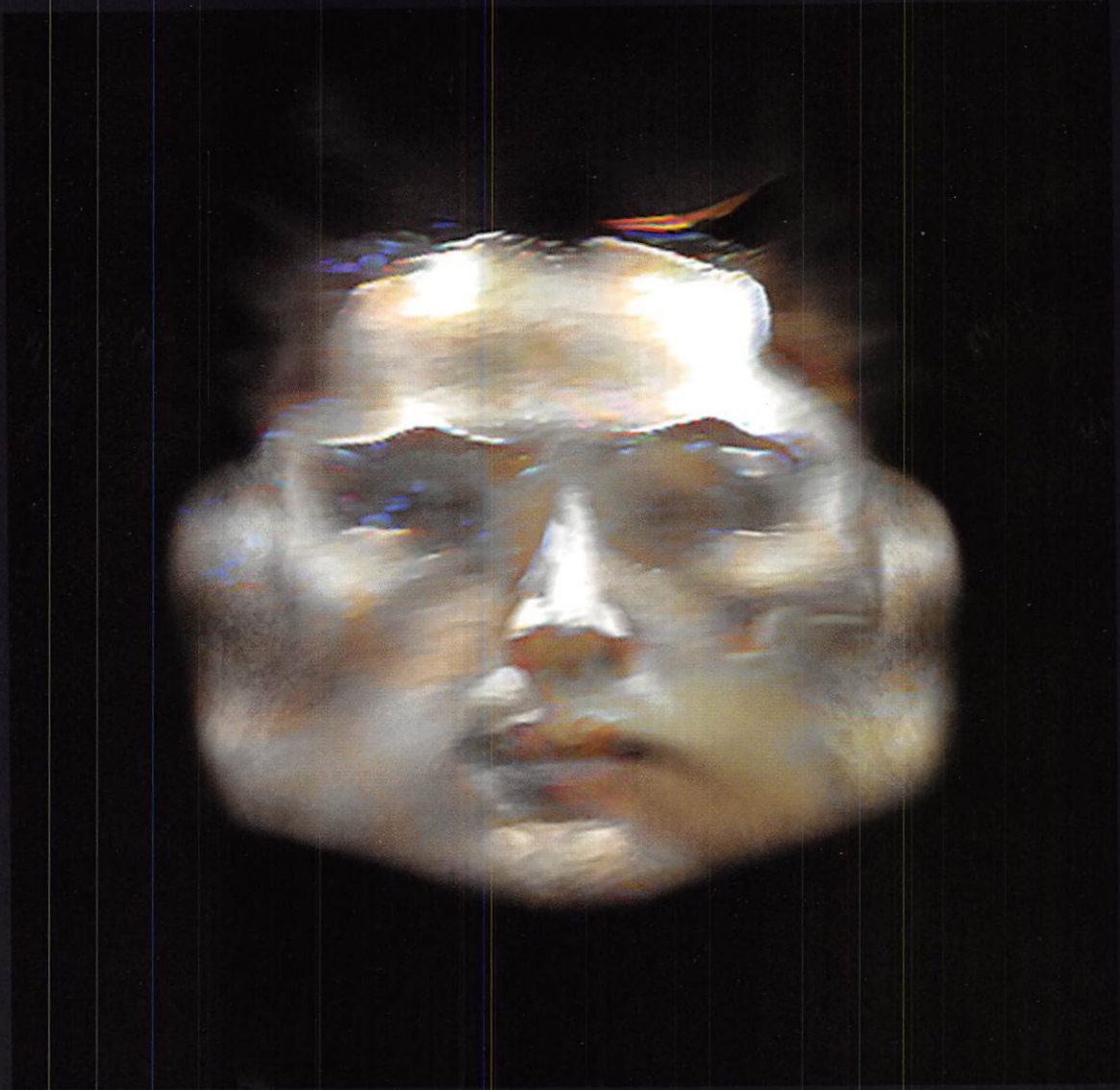










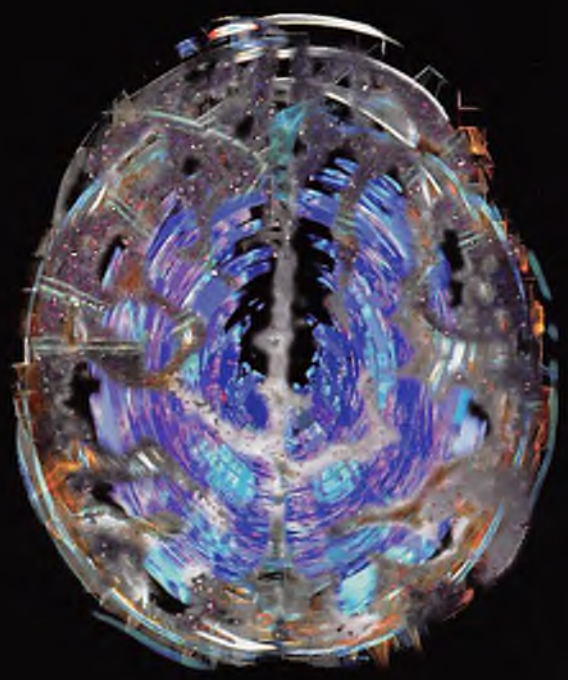


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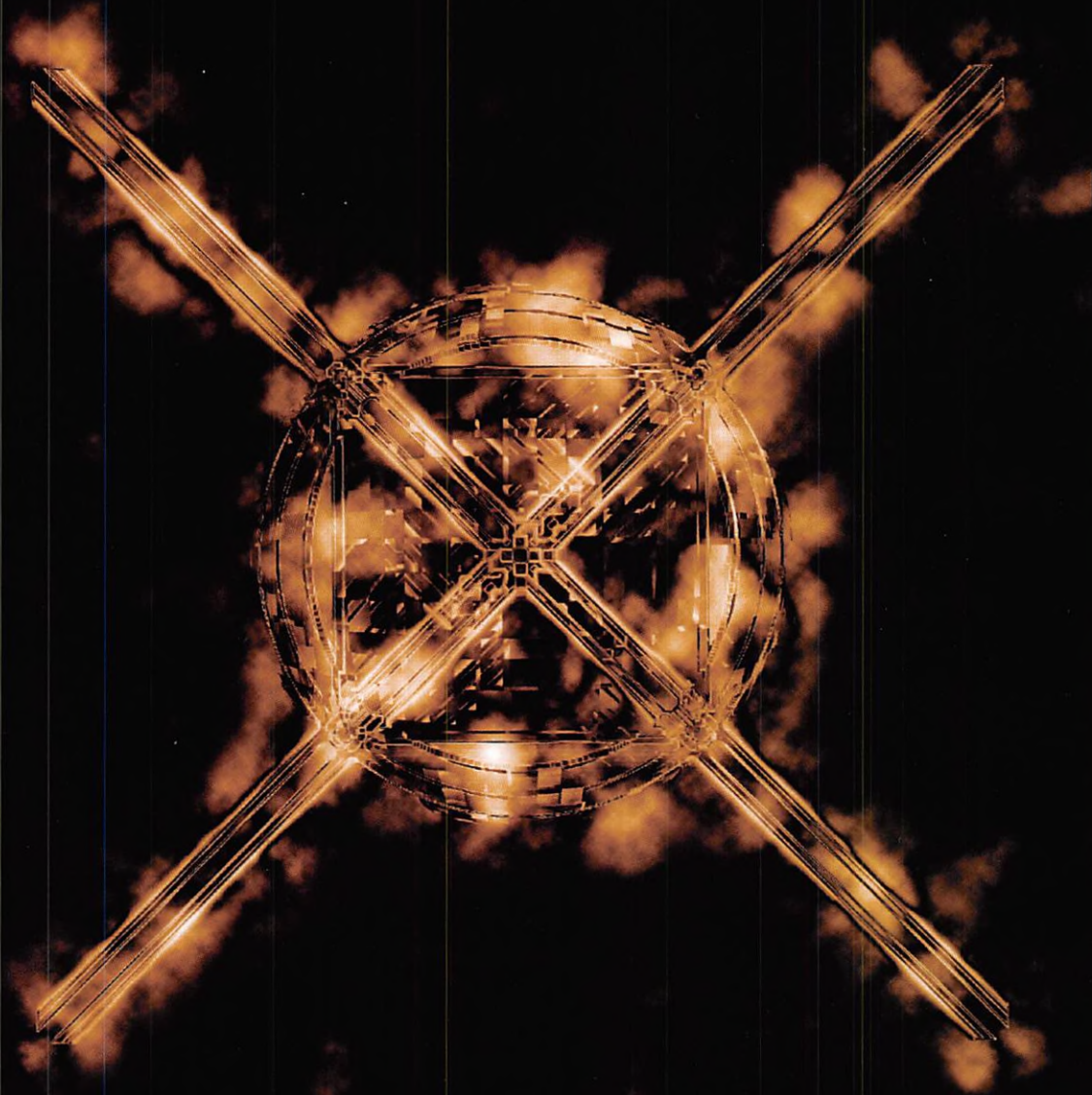
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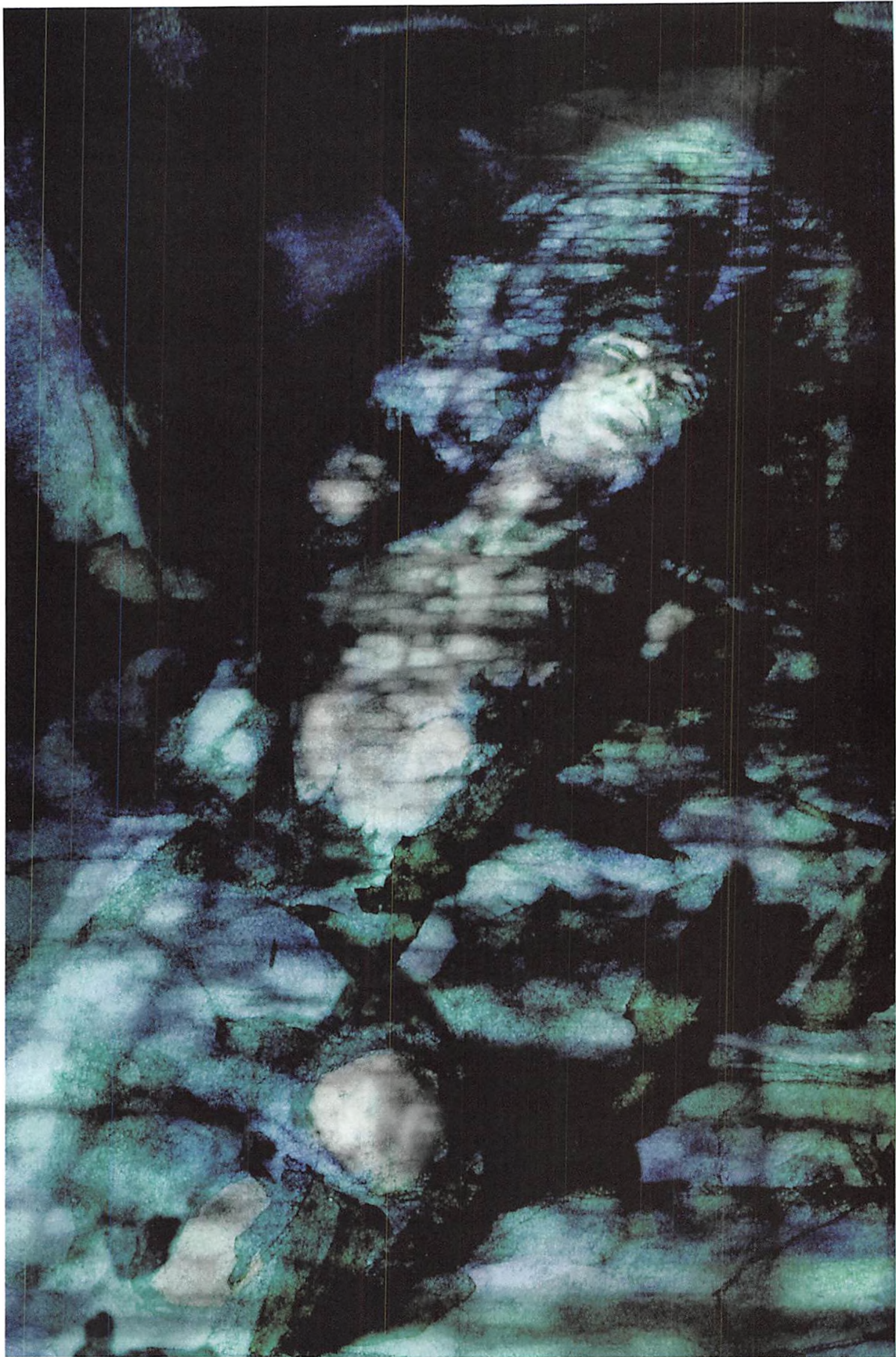
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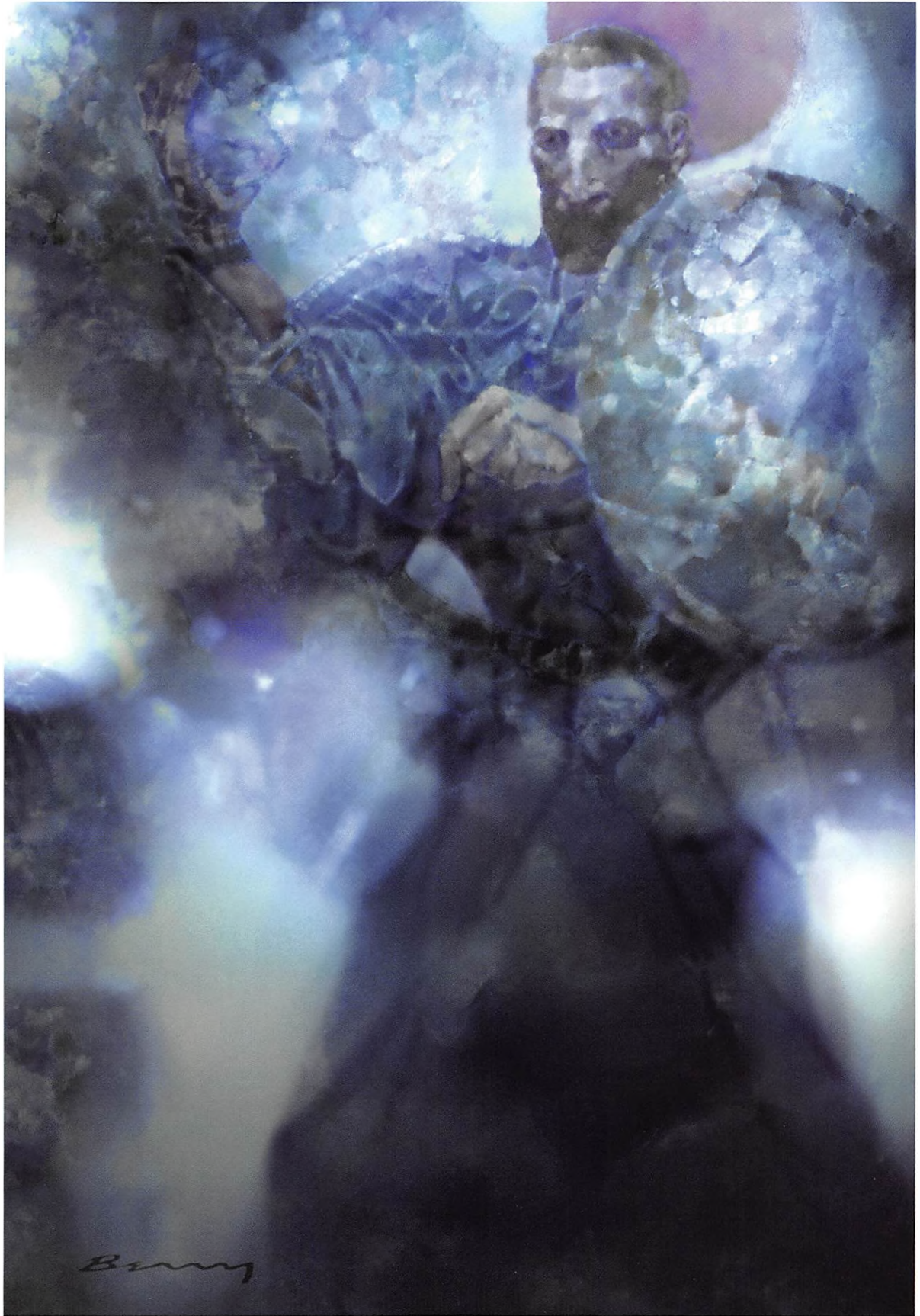
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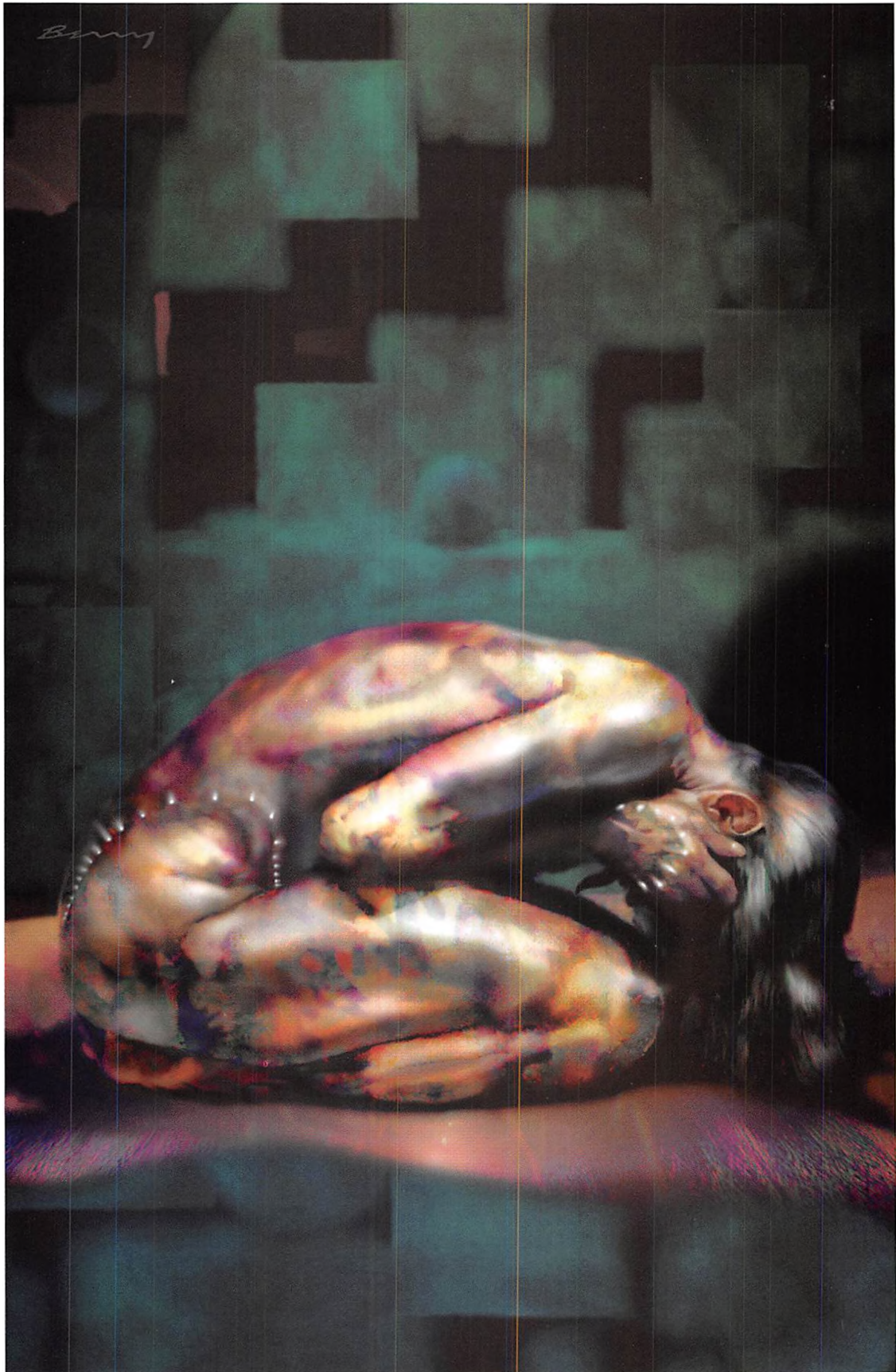




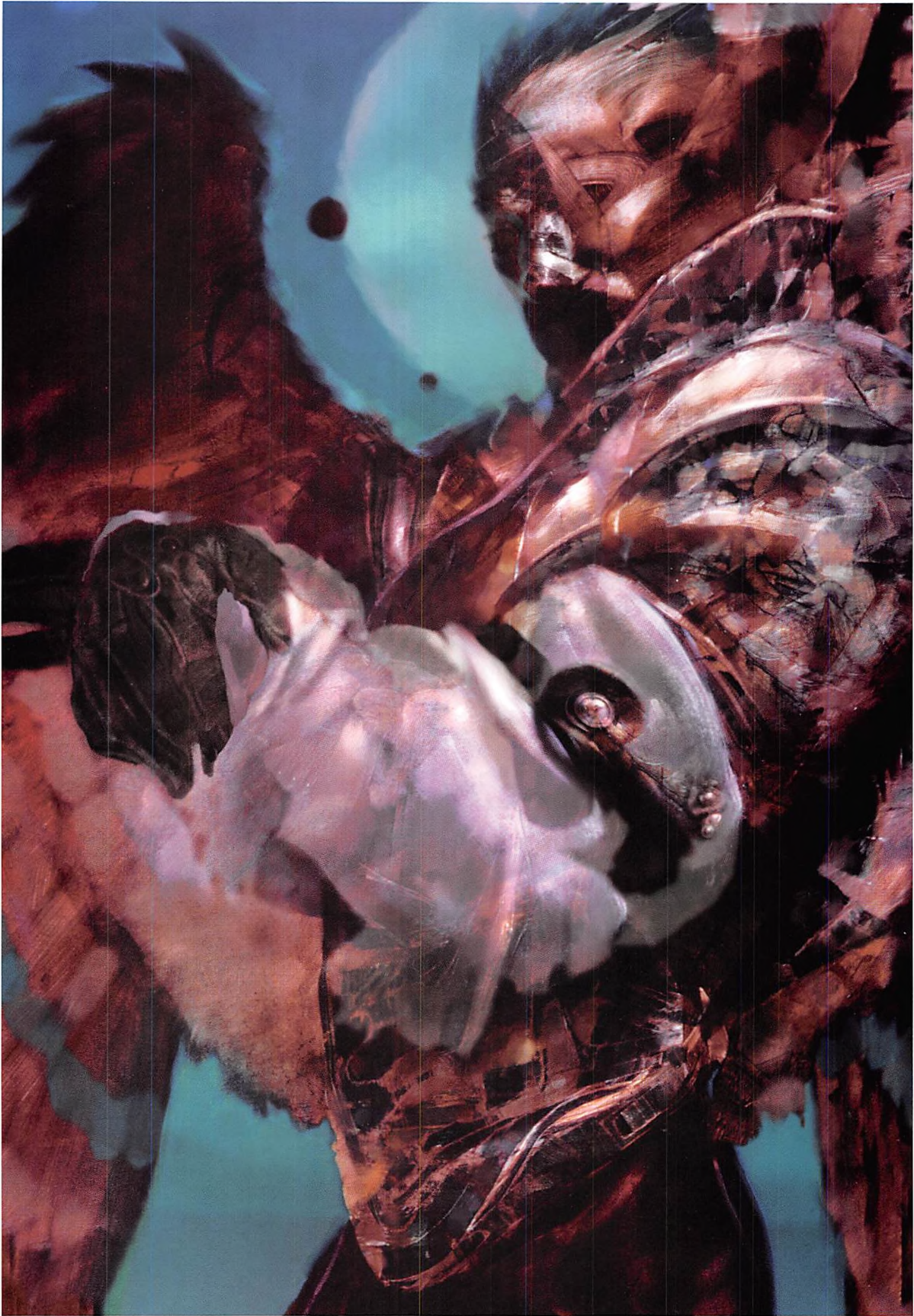


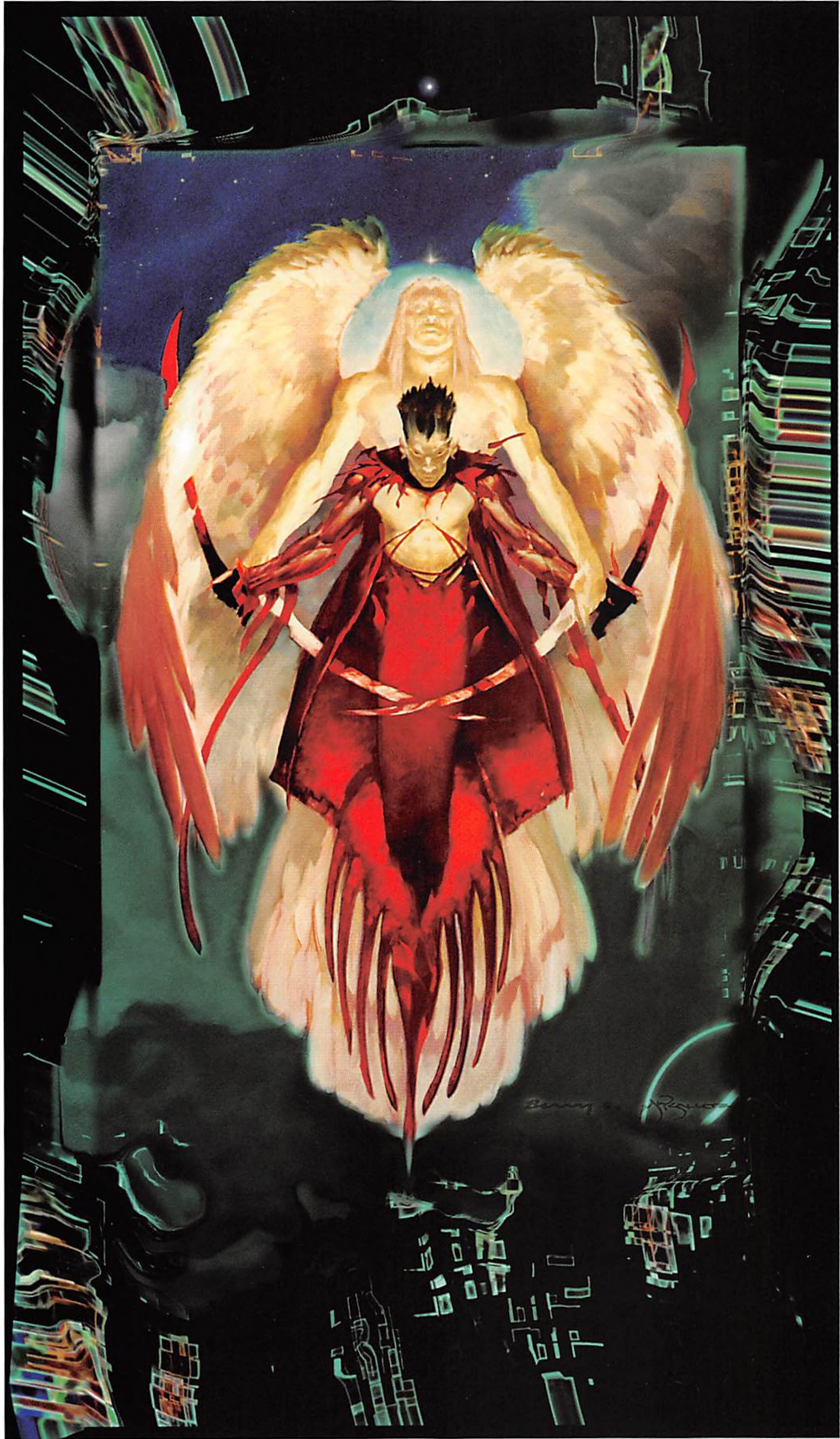




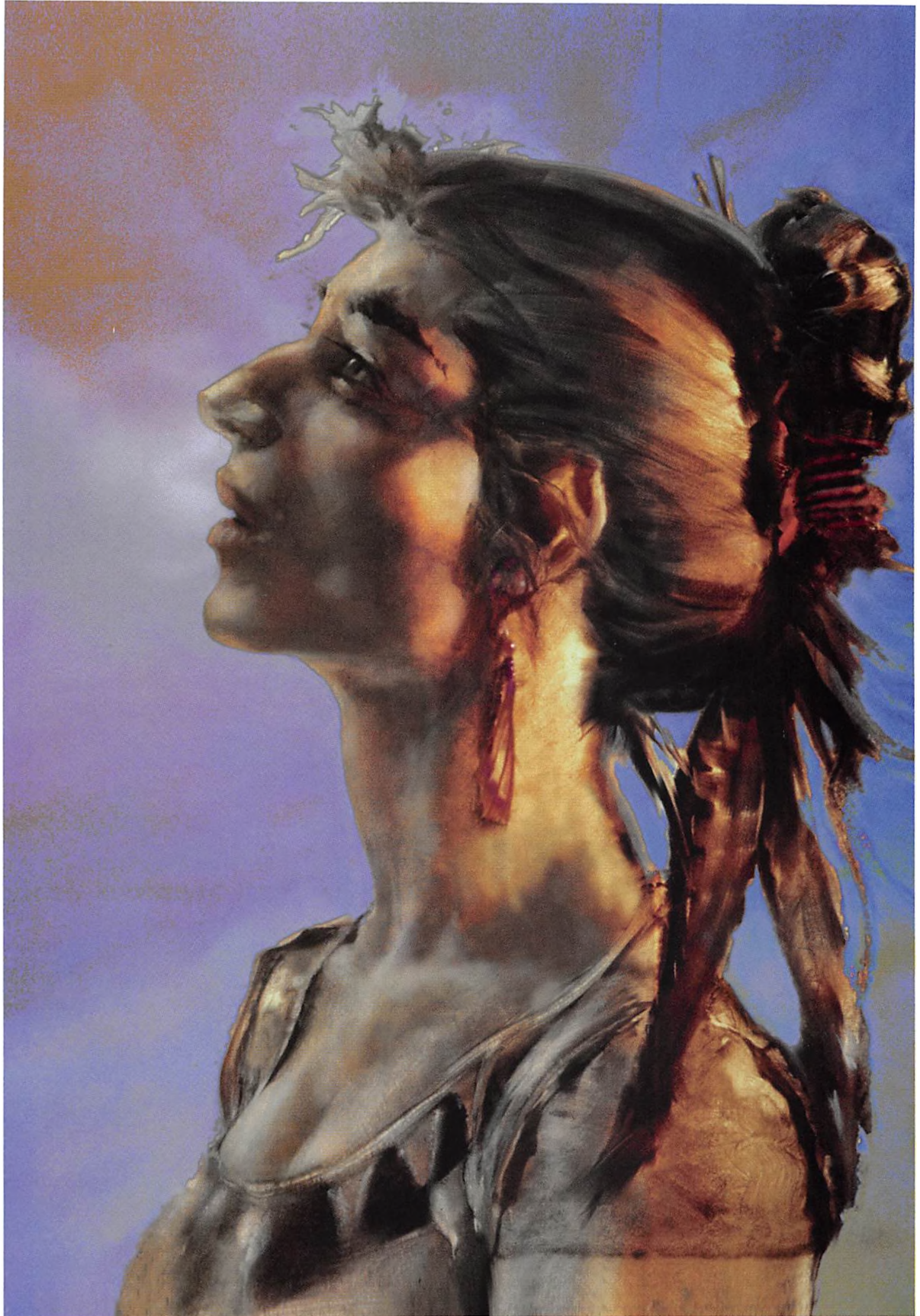






























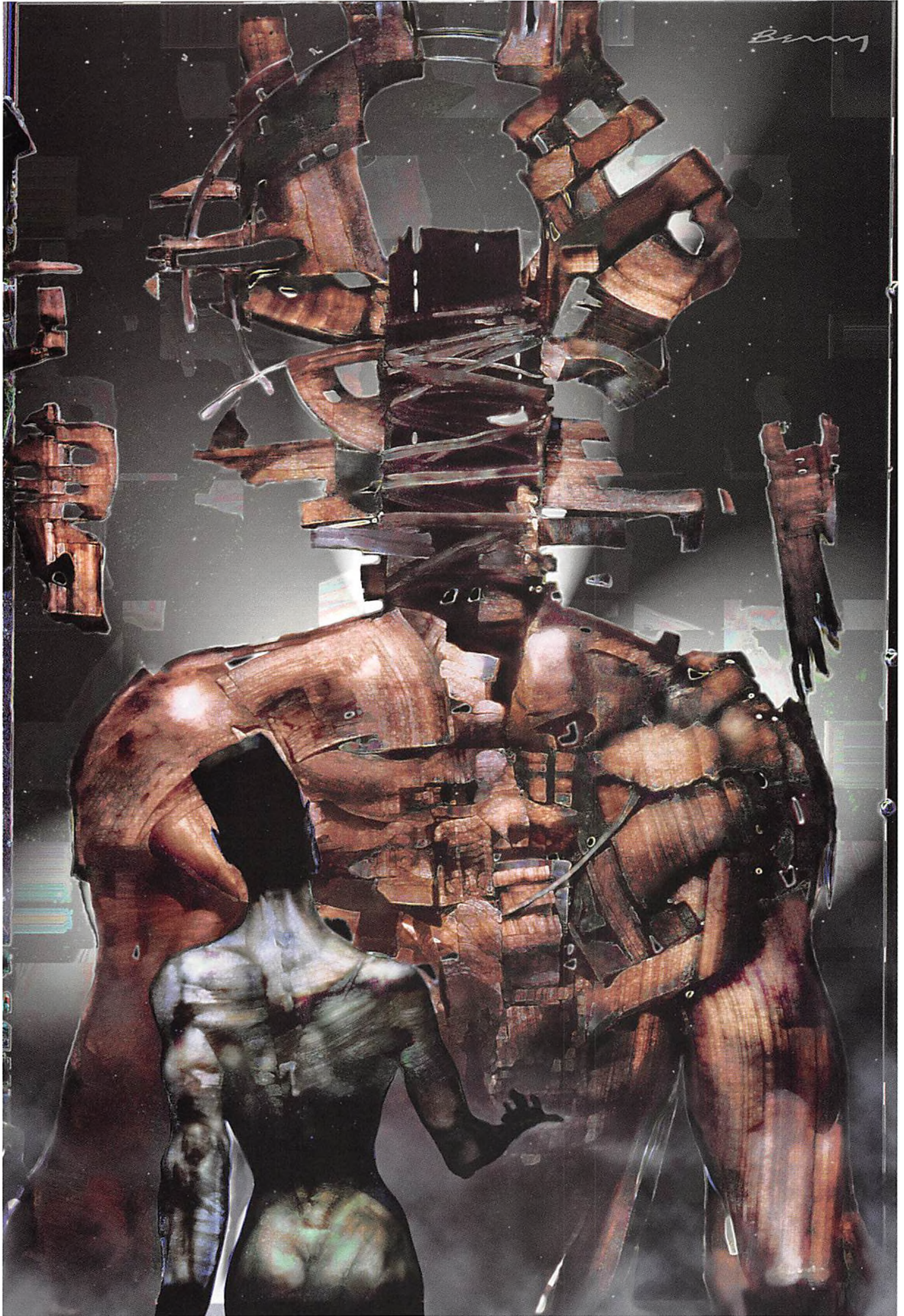


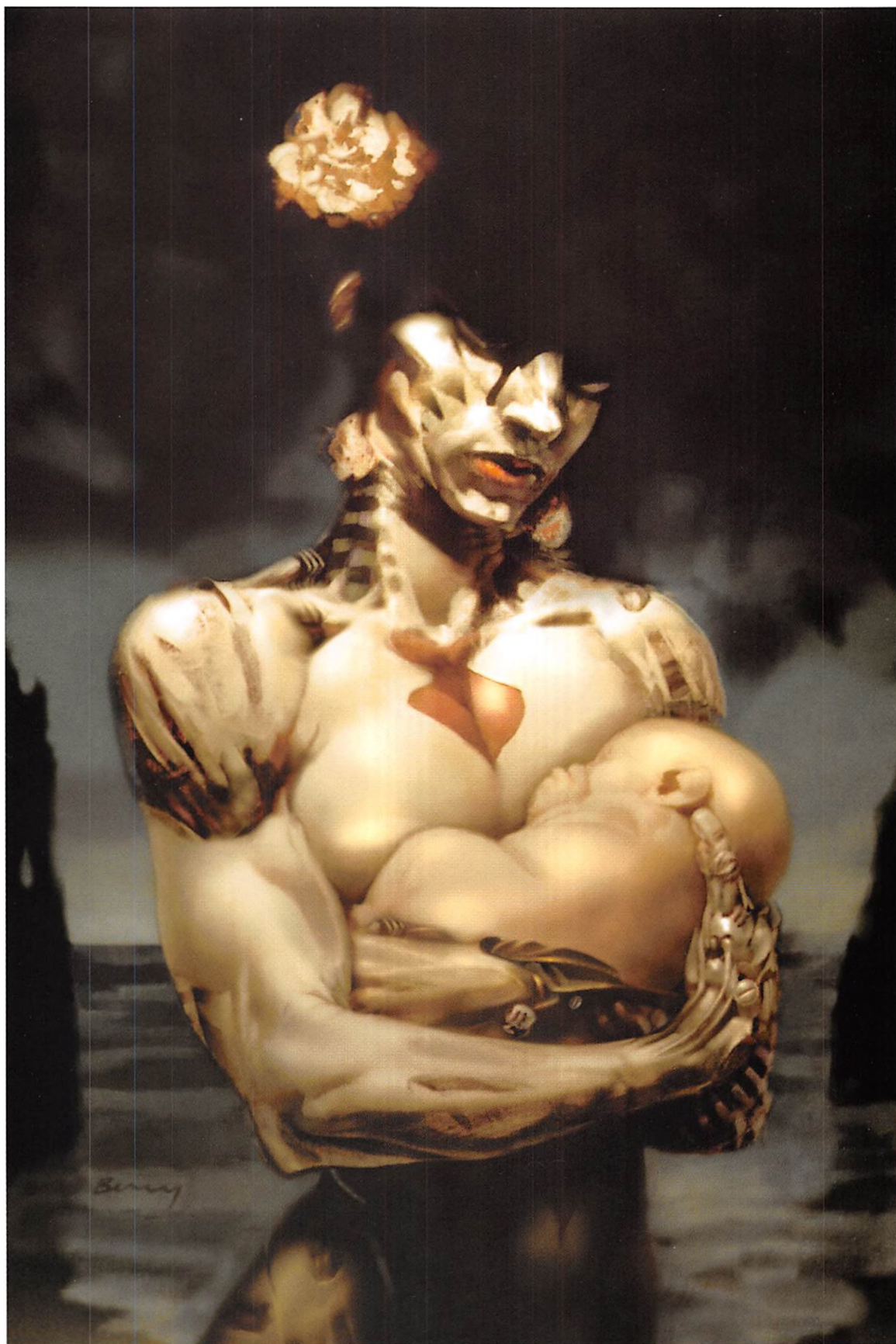




Benny











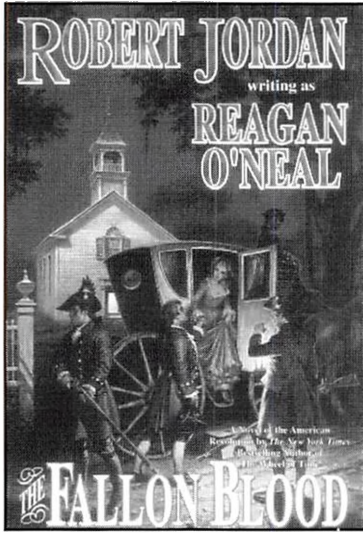
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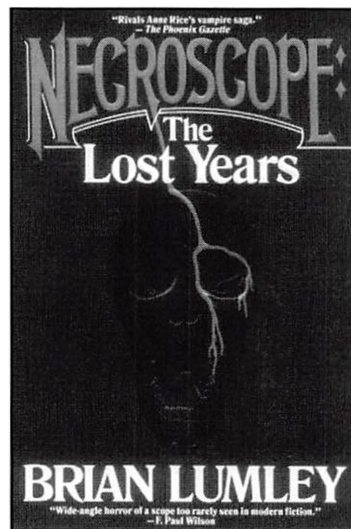
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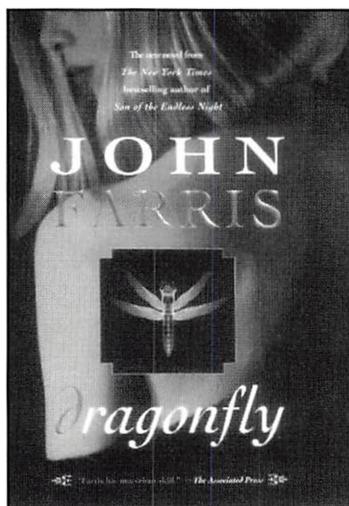
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Howard Waldrop: The Conquest of Austin (1974–1994)

by Lisa Tuttle

WAS BORN TOO LATE to experience Paris in the '20s; for me, and for many of my friends, Austin was the moveable feast. And one day, I was sure, people would be as eager to hear about the early, struggling days of Howard Waldrop, Steven Utley, Bruce Sterling, Lisa Tuttle, etc. as they ever were to read about the exploits of the Fitzgeralds, Hemingway, and Gertrude Stein.

Has it happened yet? Are we famous now?

Never mind.

Howard Waldrop and I first met in Dallas in 1972, but the potential drama of that first encounter was entirely eclipsed by my first meeting with George R.R. Martin, Howard's



PHOTOGRAPH BY MARTHA GRENON

pen-pal of many years. George and I had both been nominated for the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer, and the local fans and writers were hoping for a shoot-out. (They didn't get it, and neither of us won the award that year.)

I remember Howard as being a lot older then: a grizzled army veteran given to smiting his forehead and shrieking at my frequent displays of ignorance: "No roots! No culture! She's a baby, Steve, a baby!"

There was (and, of course, still is, although now it seems a mere drop in the vast ocean of time) six years difference in age between us. What Howard meant by "culture" was the vast amount of popular culture—movies, comics, TV, music—which he'd been consuming while I was yet barely out of the womb.

What made the difference in our ages shrink to insignificance very quickly was our equal standing as writers. We'd both had approximately two and a half short stories published at that point, putting us slightly behind George R.R. Martin, yet still ahead of Tom Reamy and George Proctor. All of us were Neo-Pros, driven by that restless urge not only to write, but to talk, bitch, moan, speculate, and agonize on the subject of writing whenever two or three of us were gathered together. The other thing we did was to collaborate on stories, with an avidity almost sexual, even though most of the collaborators were heterosexual men. Displacement activity, anyone?

Inevitably, we decided to start a series of weekend writers' workshops. It was Howard who created the name that a generation of writers became known by when he stuck a hand-lettered sign in his front yard in Grand Prairie, Texas, on the occasion of the first one: "WELCOME TO TURKEY CITY!"

While Howard was still living in the aptly-named Grand Prairie, in the early months of 1974 I had taken up residence in the famous blue bedroom of Harlan Ellison's house, in Los Angeles. However, I had fallen in love with Steven Utley, Howard's good friend and sometime collaborator, who was living in a place called Carrollton. Both Carrollton and Grand Prairie were more-or-less suburbs of Dallas and/or Fort Worth, and I vaguely imagined that they couldn't be more than a mile or two apart, if only because Steven and Howard seemed to spend so much time together.

When I decided, rather abruptly, to fly back to Texas, it was Howard I called, since Steve didn't have a telephone. Neither did Howard; but his landlord and sometime collaborator, Buddy Saunders, did, and Buddy lived right next door. So I called Buddy, and Buddy fetched Howard, and I asked Howard how I could get a message to Steven that I'd be arriving first thing the next morning.

Now, Howard might have said it was impossible, or he might have given me the phone number of Steven's boss (another fan, and one who lived only a couple of blocks

from Steven) or—but Howard said, “Don’t worry. I’ll make sure Steve is at the airport to meet you.”

And he did, and he was.

As I later learned, the distance between Grand Prairie and Carrollton is not negligible: the entire city of Dallas lies in between. As I know from experience, people who live places like the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex (as they called it), or Los Angeles, or rural Scotland, are often in the habit of driving great distances on quite minor errands. But Howard didn’t have a car. After he hung up, Howard went out and got on his bicycle and set off on an epic journey across north Texas, to deliver a message from one of his friends to another. I must point out that Howard’s bike was not a modern, multi-gear messenger’s special—it was just your basic, old-fashioned bicycle. Much of the trip had to be made on the freeways. He was stopped twice by the police. I don’t know what he said to them, what holy light encircled his noble brow, but they neither arrested him nor beat him up. They let him continue. The Dallas Police! In 1974! And so, after four hours or so of hard pedalling, Howard reached the minimally-converted garage which Steven then called home, and commenced to pound on the door. Message delivered. Friendship was served. Cyrano de Bergerac could not have done better.

When I learned what Howard had done, I was both awed and appalled, feelings which would often recur in my continuing relationship with Mr. Waldrop.

The other thing that comes to mind immediately when I think of Howard and the early days in Texas is the Big Chief Tablet novel. I don’t know the real title (if it had one); I call it that because Howard wrote it, longhand, of course, on the rough, lined pages of a bumper-sized Big Chief Tablet—the kind I’d used in elementary school, for my first writing lessons; it was something of a shock to discover they still existed in the 1970s. I never read it and I don’t know if anyone has, or even if it still exists. It was a *roman à clef* written in a few days out of intense unhappiness and, perhaps, anger. Writing it marked the end of his Cyrano de Bergerac period. Howard often compared himself to Rostand’s hero in those days for the way he kept falling in love with young women who insisted on how much they valued his *friendship*, while they yearned romantically after someone less available. He wouldn’t let anyone read the novel: “You’re all in it,” he told his friends. “You wouldn’t like it.”

We were consumed with curiosity and frustration: that was life with Howard. Yet even while his housemates and other interested parties might carp and moan at him about putting similar effort into something he at least intended to *try* to sell, I think he has to be admired for his absolutely uncompromising integrity.

Howard writes stories because they have to be written, because there is something

he wants to explore, some idea he wants to work out. He's not inspired by the knowledge that there's money to be made from dinosaurs, or trilogies, or whatever, and the news of an original anthology about vampire cats, desperately seeking stories, would leave him cold. I don't mean to imply that Howard writes only to please himself, or that he's indifferent to publication—nothing could be further from the truth than the image of Howard Waldrop as some ivory tower artist writing for an audience of one. No, Howard writes stories that are meant to be heard and read by others. He writes, first of all, for his friends—and the incident of the Big Chief Tablet Novel should demonstrate how very aware he was, as not all writers have been, of the difference between therapy and art. Thus, as everyone knows, the best way to get Howard to actually sit down and write a story is to invite him to a convention and schedule a reading. Howard won't read from a book already published, and he won't pull out the story that went down well at the last public occasion (as I do)—no, Howard feels compelled to give his every audience a premiere. And it's lucky for us, his fans, that he does, because without those conventions, there have been years when I doubt he'd have finished a single story.

I don't know what he lives on. For years, since quitting a demanding part time job as a headphone tester, Howard has been, as the saying has it a "full-time writer"—which means not that he writes all the time (snort), but that he has no other source of income. So it's not that he doesn't need the money that his writing brings in.

George Martin has expressed the opinion that Howard's fear or hatred of money makes him psychologically compelled to sell his stories to the lowest-paying market—but this wobbly premise doesn't stand up to the most cursory glance at an acknowledgements page, where *Omni* and *Playboy*, possibly the best-paying markets in the 1980s, figure prominently, along with *Shayol* and various anthologies. No, while there might be a psychological dissertation in the subject of Howard's relationship to money, I don't think it would get you very close to Howard's reality.

In the 1980s, everyone became obsessed with markets and market forces and "the bottom line." (For Howard's disgusted take on the '80s see "Do Ya, Do Ya Wanna Dance?") Looked at in cost-effective terms, Howard's career makes no sense: how could anyone justify six months of research, followed by three days of sleepless, white-hot writing, then another day or two of calmer rewriting, to produce a short story which might net \$1,000, tops? But how do you count the cost of stories not written, or talents warped by market pressures into producing flabby, derivative novels that are nominally "commercial"? Luckily for us all, Howard's bottom line is not finance. It's friendship.

Just read his introductions to his stories in any of his three collections*. Most of them include brief publishing histories. These are not just for bibliophiles; often, they are inti-

mately connected with why, how or when the story was written: e.g. “Three or four years ago, Joe asked me the question that always gets me in trouble, the one all my writer friends ask: ‘I may get to edit an original anthology someday. If I do, will you write a story for me?’ I always give the same answer, ‘Sure. You bet. Can’t wait.’”

Like I said: Howard writes his stories for his friends.

And his friends, whether they know him, or only his stories, do appreciate it, and keep hoping he’ll be rewarded. But fame and fortune don’t usually come to nonprolific short story writers. (“Short story collections don’t sell” is the standard wisdom in mass-market publishing.) He hasn’t written a novel since *Them Bones* (1984)**, which didn’t get the attention it deserved. It’s too easy to imagine the specialness of his stories lost or destroyed by television or the movies . . . When it’s possible to imagine them filmed at all. Most of his stories are too intelligent, quirky and original for genuine mass popularity, although I doubt Howard knows this. He thinks he’s a good old boy, immersed in popular culture, and doesn’t realize how really strange his own thought-processes are—how often he has expressed amazement, when embarking on a new story, that no one before him had thought of putting these particular ideas together. It is obvious, to the gratefully stunned reader, that no one but Howard Waldrop could have conceived it, let alone executed it with such peculiar grace.

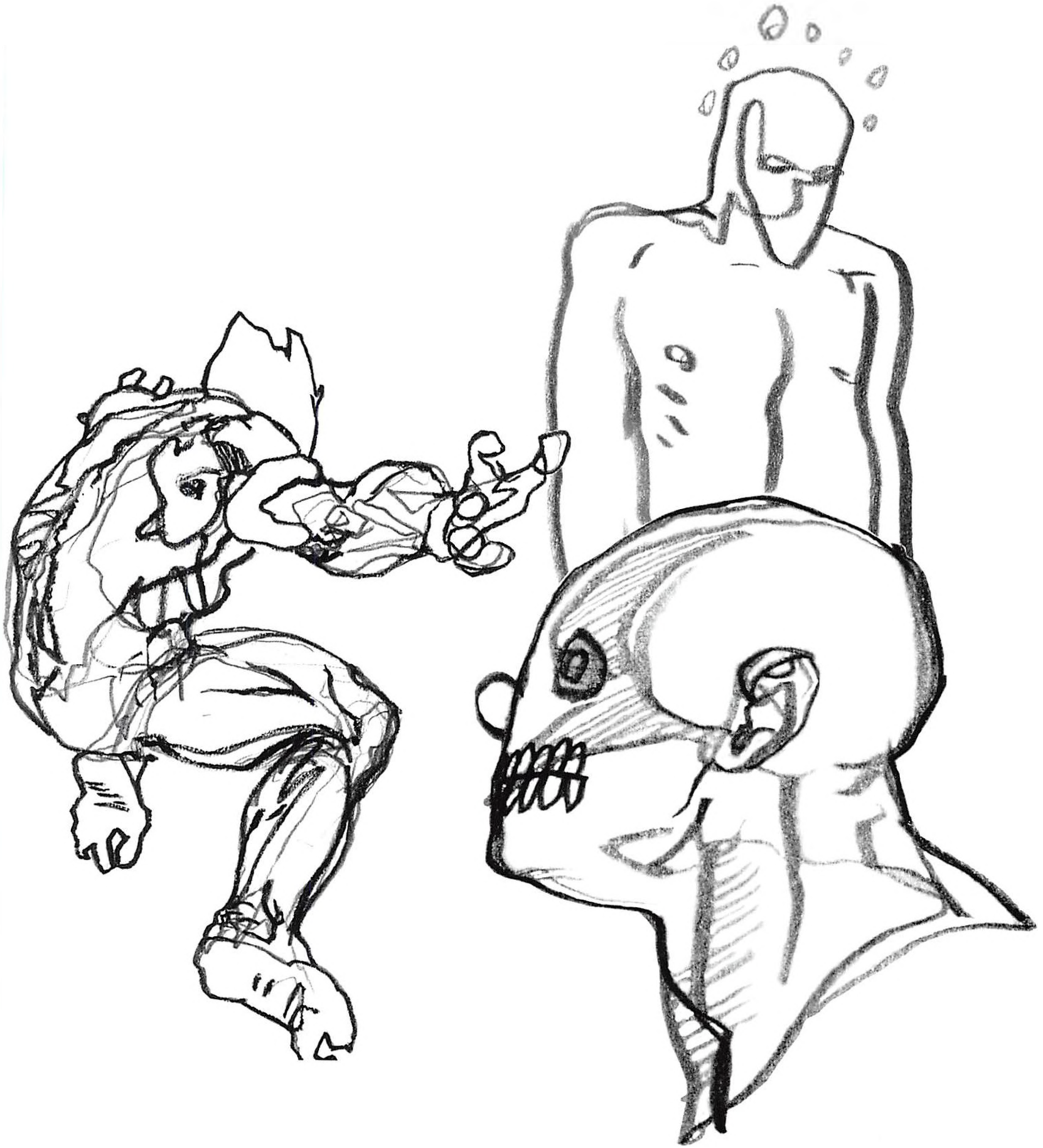
O rare Howard Waldrop! In a time when it seems that only the over-paid and massively-selling are rated, when books that aren’t readily categorizable aren’t published, when script-writers are ordered to “dumb it down”—now, more than ever we need fresh injections of the unique, uncategorizable, original intelligence and wit of the Waldrop short story. And will we get them?

The Austin years are over. Howard, who became obsessed with fishing as a result of researching “God’s Hooks!” in 1980, has finally done what he’s threatened for years, and moved to Washington State where he can live beside a river and fish all the time. I’m glad, of course, if realizing his dream makes him happy, but I’m also worried in case he stops writing.

To the friends of Howard Waldrop I say: Your duty is clear. Keep inviting him to conventions, edit anthologies or magazines, and pursue the man for his stories. Make him give you his word. The fish must not have him! He’s a precious human resource who must be sustained. ■

* *Howard Who?* Doubleday, 1986
All About Strange Monsters of the Recent Past Ursus Imprints, 1987
Night of the Coolers Ursus Imprints, 1990

** Unless you count *A Dozen Tough Jobs*, which I’d call a novella (Ziesing, 1989)



El Castillo de la Perseverancia

by Howard Waldrop

I.

EVERY DAY, RHONDA HAD PASSED THE BRIGHT PINK WALL ON the Avenida Guerrero opposite the Bella Vista Hotel on the way to her art classes.

Today it was neither bright nor altogether pink. Someone had sprayed a dark blue cloudlike smudge across three meters of it, and in the cloud, had painted in neon green, in Spanish:

*The World, which has slumbered so long,
now begins to awaken . . .*

A few other passersby noticed it, made *tssking* noises and continued on. One man, wearing two hats, a derby topped by a planters' hat, stopped, hands on hips, staring. He slowly shook his head.

"Next thing you know, the *alcalde* will ask for new taxes to clean such messes," he said, not to her, or to anyone.

Rhonda went on toward the Cortes Palace. She remembered how confusing the streets were to her when she had first come here six months ago. When she found that the College of Fine Arts was next to Hernan Cortes' old summer home, she realized she could find her way to classes from anywhere in the town except from across the barrancas, or from out past the Morelos State Penitentiary, places she'd only been a couple of times sketching for her classes.

She neared the old *zocalo* and tried to imagine what it had been like here five hundred years ago; probably too many guys in jaguar skins and parrot feathers running around.

There was a furniture and appliance store ahead. A man was in the front window setting up a display. She neared it. He was arranging dozens of alarm clocks—quartzes, electrics, windups—and clock radio phones on small tilted shelves, from one side of the large window to the other, reaching back behind him through a small doorway that

opened back into the store. Small hands passed the timepieces out to him.

He looked up and saw Rhonda watching him, and smiled at her over his dapper mustache. He was dressed in a natty suit, *muy guapa*, the locals would say. He said something back through the small door; the thick glass muffling his words. A rectangle of card-board came out. The man laid it down, lay his head on his steepled horizontal hands, feigning sleep. Then he picked up one of the clocks, shook it around like it was coming apart, and made big circles with his thumbs and index fingers around his eyes, mouth agape.

Then he turned the rectangle around. In Spanish, the sign said:

*¡The whole world, which wants to sleep so long,
can now wake itself up!*

A chill went through Rhonda, a true horripilation through her whole upper body and down her right leg.

The man had a puzzled look on his face. He had placed the sign in its holder among the clocks, indicating his wares for sale with spread hands.

She slowly shook her head no.

The man looked crestfallen, then straightened himself, shot his cuffs, and crawled back through his little door.

As Rhonda turned to continue on to class, a 1965 blue and white Ford Galaxie convertible came by her, its top down.

In the car were three masked and cloaked wrestlers.

2.

The three men walked into the office of the registrar in the collegia menor.

"¿En que puedo serville?" asked the woman at the desk without looking up.

"Si," said the older of the three men. "I am Señor Nadie. These are my compañeros, El Ravo Tepextehualtepec, and El Hijo de la Selva, whom I was fortunate enough to pass on the street on my way here in my car, and offered a ride, as we were all coming here to inquire about classes."

The woman had looked up. The older man was dressed in tights, boots and a black cape, but had a bare chest, with salt and pepper hair on it. His mask, which like those of the others covered his whole head, had a question mark on the face of it. The second was in a head-to-foot body suit, with red shorts and boots, a yellow cloak, and on the

chest and mask was a yellow lightning bolt. The third was naked but for a loincloth and jungle boots. His mask was woodland camo.

"You have your B.U.P.'s?" asked the woman.

"Certainly," said El Ravo Tepextehualtepec, whom all his fans called El Ravo Tepe, to differentiate him from all the other El Ravos in the sport.

"Day or night classes?" she asked.

"Day, of course," said El Hijo de la Selva. "Night is when we wrestle."

3. *Hecho en Mexico*

Outside, near his pickup, his dog barked twice.

"Hush, Hecho," he said.

He put on the face mask and the disposable gloves over his plastic coveralls, cranked up the compressor and began spraying primer paint all over the taped and mudded dry-wall.

All around were the sounds of hammering and nailguns. Two weeks ago this part of Yucatán was a newly-drained swamp. Now it was three rows of apartment blocks on the outskirts of a town that had not been there a year before, worker's rooms for the byproducts of the tourist trade.

At least now they gave you gloves and coveralls and masks. When he'd started as a painter's helper two years ago, at the age of seventeen, you went to work and sprayed the stuff all week and threw away your clothes on *viernes*. You got the stuff off your body with paint thinner and Go-Jo Cleaner.

He could hear Hecho begin to whine even over the *brrrupping* noise of the compressor. "Hush!" he yelled out, muffled. He turned off the compressor.

There was a long whine, and the sound of shaking in the pickup bed.

He looked out. The rope with which he tied his dog in the pickup was frayed and hung over the side. He saw his dog running, a half-meter of rope dangling from its collar. It climbed a pile of lumber scraps at the end of the site.

"Come back here!" he said. As he cupped his hands to yell, he tore the coveralls open on the latchplate on the doorjamb.

Hecho lay down on the lumber pile, head between his paws. He had never done that before. *Loco perro*.

He turned to go back to the inside room, passing the stacks of medicine cabinet mirrors at the front door. Why they had been stacked there, when half the apartments

weren't even weathered-in yet, he had no idea.

He pulled down his facemask and pulled off the gloves, which were stuck now to the torn plastic coveralls by the primer paint, so he let them dangle. He'd have to get another pair when he put on new coveralls anyway.

The dog yowled and ran away.

He stopped. In the mirror, the torn plastic flapped like another skin. The gloves hung like newly-shed hands from the ends of his arms. His facemask with a big smear of grey across it looked like another loose mouth and jaw next to his own.

He was turning to admire the effect when something put him on like a cheap suit.

4.

A slow Wednesday night at the Arena Tomalin:

After the prelims, El Hijo de la Selva fought Dinosaurito in a three-fall event. He won the first fall, lost the second, and won the third.

Then, to louder applause from the sparse crowd, El Ravo Tepe took on El Buitré Marvelloso. He won the first fall, lost the second, won the third and the match.

Two masked women wrestlers allowed all but the most iron-kidneyed a chance to visit the *taza de retrete*.

The main event: Señor Nadie contra El Pocilga Desordenado, a Tabascan who had failed at sumo in Japan, and who had come back and sat on a series of lesser *luchadores* until he gained the chance to go against the top-rated masked wrestler.

Señor Nadie won the first fall with a combination of wristlocks and outside-bar-stepover-toeholds. El Pocilga won the second by falling onto Señor Nadie as soon as the round started. At the end of the third fall, Señor Nadie left the ring victorious while the maintenance crew tried to get El Pocilga out of the snarled net that had been the ringropes and turnbuckles. Two spectators had been hit by the flying ringposts and were treated for cuts and bruises.

Such was wrestling in Quanahuac.

5. Sin Horquilla

He was at the company picnic in the park outside Ciudad Juárez to which he had taken his wife and children every year for the past twelve years. Today he was playing

washer toss with three other older men while all around him younger people and their families played hundred-to-a-side soccer. The park was filled with screams of joy and pain, discord and harmony, like any other Sociedad Anonima outing.

Suddenly, the El Pato® sauce he'd been sampling since nine in the morning caught up with him.

"*¡Condenar!*" he said. Sweat broke out on his mustached upper lip. He took off for the line of old outhouses at the far edge of the park.

"That's the fastest I've seen him move in many years," said one of his co-workers.

He slowed a little when he realized he would make it. A woman came out of the one he was headed for, slamming the heavy wooden door on its tired screen door spring. The local priest, there to bless the chalupas at the big sit-down outdoor dinner that night, came out of another.

"Excuse me, padre," he said, crossing himself. As he reached for the worn brass doorhandle, the horseshoe nailed above the doorway fell down with a clang. He hesitated, then went in. When he was through, he would find a rock to nail the iron thing back up with. The door closed behind him.

The priest experienced a horripilation that stopped and turned him. He looked around. He fixed his collar and shook his shirt cuffs where they stuck out from his cassock.

There was a sound like giant rubbery wings behind him.

Something hit the ceiling of the third outhouse from the inside. There was a thrashing around, and a smash against the walls. Then another series of thumps up against the inside of the slanted corrugated tin roof that buckled it.

A sound of low mumbling came from the outhouse, then a third thrashing, then silence.

The priest started towards it. He wondered if the man had suffered a heart attack or a seizure of some kind.

"Are you all right?" he asked, reaching for the doorhandle, looking around to see if he could see the company doctor.

He swung the door open. The man's head lolled, the whites of his eyes showing. Then they came down and snapped into focus on the priest.

"In Christ's name . . ." said the priest.

"Fuck your God." said the man, and headed for the line of cars parked across from the soccer field.

6.

Rhonda walked by the wall again on her way to meet Federico, the Italian student in her life-drawing class.

The wall had been painted over the week before—there was a pink swath, done with a roller, through most of the design. In another week the enamel would bleed through the pink latex, and the words would show again.

Federico was to meet her at the Cine, just off the Avenida Morelos. They were going to see *Los Manos de Orlak* con Peter Lorre, and *El Maldición de la Momia* con Lon Chaney menor. The Cine Morelos seemed to stay in business by showing films that had been on American television for fifty years.

She realized she'd gone one block too far on the Avenida Guerrero, and turned to her left. She saw one of the diagonal streets leading down the block behind the Bella Vista Hotel and headed toward it.

She passed an upscale cantina—one of the tourist traps, no doubt—and heard music coming out. Lounge music must sound the same in every country.

A smooth baritone came out of the speakers—she pictured the tuxedoed smoothie to whom it belonged. He did not have a mustache, and never would.

Then she heard his words:

*My world, so asleep in its bed,
woke to the morning of your love.*

She stopped, hand on the doorframe, and looked inside.

The singer was old, bleary-eyed, and looked as if he'd come out second in his youth in a clawhammer fight. He was dressed like Leo Carillo, who had played Pancho in the old *Cisco Kid* television show, hat and all, or like a Latino Andy Devine. He saw Rhonda and smiled at her over his salt-and-pepper walrus mustache.

She turned and went down the street toward the Cine Morelos.

Far off in the distance the two volcanoes loomed in the last of the blue-purple light.

7.

The air was cool and smelled good outside the dressing rooms behind the Arena Tomalin.

There were already two cigarette glows in the dark against the far wall of the little

courtyard reserved for the wrestlers.

The man who had just come out lit one of his own with a lighter from the left pocket of his dressing gown.

"Ay," he said, "Some night, eh?"

"We were talking of the same thing. Not at all like last week."

"During a night like this," said the man who had just come out, "I ask myself, what would Santo have done in the same situation."

"Ah, Santo," said one of the others.

"Or Blue Demon," said the other.

"They do not make them like Santo anymore. Such grace and sureness, both in the ring and out."

"Like when he fought the Frankenstein monster in the Wax Museum."

"Or the Martians, like in *Santo Contra la Invasión de los Marcianos!*"

"Or when he teamed with Blue Demon to fight the Nazis in Atlantis!"

"The Vampire Women? What about those?"

"Which Vampire Women? *The Vampire Women* was *un roncador grande*. I spent days watching it one afternoon," said one of the men who had been there first.

"No, no. Not the *Vampire Women* movie, that was bad. The *Santo en la Venganza de los Mujeres Vampiros*."

"Oh, sí. Putting Santo in any movie improves it."

"Have you seen the Crying Woman movies. Or the *Mummies of Guanajuatos?*"

"Of course. Or the Aztec Mummy films. Ah, that Popoca. To think he was in love five hundred years with the dead princess. The pains he went through . . ."

"And *La Nave de los Monstruos!* Uk, Zak and Utir! Espectro of the Planet Death! Tor the Robot. That was a movie!"

"To think how it must be," said one of them, "To wrestle cleanly, to be famous, to play yourself in movies of your own adventures . . ."

They all sighed.

"What Santo probably would have done on such a messed-up wrestling night as this," said the youngest, "is to have tried to forget about it, and go home and get a good night's sleep."

"As I am," said the second.

"And me," said the third.

Their three cigarettes became flying red dots in the night, bouncing sparks in the concrete courtyard.

The door to the dressing rooms opened, they went in, and it closed.

8. Soy Un Hombre Mas Pobre ...

The limo dropped him outside his Mexico City office, at the corner of Salvador and Piño Suarez.

He went inside, nodding to the guard, took his elevator to the private entry to his office, went inside and put his sharkskin attaché on the corner of his desk. There were three pieces of paper in his IN box that he had to sign sometime during the day. There was a package on the credenza all the way across the office.

A light blinked on his phone. He picked it up. “¿Bueno, y que?” he said. It was the president of the American company he worked for. He listened. “*En seguida. Entonces. Si. No. Si, si. Buenos días.*” He hung up.

He got the package from the antique dealer and unwrapped it, using his mammoth ivory scrimshaw letter opener.

Inside was the Cantiflas chocolate mug, the carnival glass pitcher with the 1968 Olympics commemorative design etched into it, and a book, a recognition guide to European mushrooms. They were not for him, but gifts for executives of other companies who had an interest in them. He looked at them a moment, wondering at the things people spent their time acquiring. He started to call his secretary and reached for the key on his computer. He bumped the book off onto the stainproof pile carpet.

It flipped open to the chapter on morels, and an old 1000-peso note fell out. Once it had been worth \$120.00 US. After the fourth devaluation, it was worthless. He bent to pick it up.

He realized it was *all* about money. Everything. Entirely. From beginning to end, every second of it, even from before till after.

There was a surflike pounding in the air. He looked up and knew what he would see, and sure enough, the four hundred billion coins, dubloons, sesterces, pieces of eight, yen, marks, francs and pine-tree shillings washed over him in a cleansing, baptismal wave.

Now that he understood, he laughed. It was simple, so utterly simple.

9.

In three different provinces that week, three new *luchadores enmascarados* appeared on Amateur King of the Hill match nights. One wore a red horned mask, one

a mask that was the mask of a human head and face with a zipper through it, one wore the mask of a globe of the earth. The speed with which they dispatched all comers was the only topic of the conversation of those who saw them.

Who were those guys? Where had they come from?

10.

She poured non-diary creamer into her coffee and watched it soak up all the brown color. Nothing that dissolves instantly can be good for you, she thought. When she had started classes six months ago, there were still pots of cream or milk at the end of the student cafeteria serving line.

It was mid-afternoon, a Tuesday, so her first break for lunch, the choice being 10 A.M. Or then. There were few people there, the occasional professor, a group of provincial eighteen-year olds like a flock of birds, solitaires and couples.

She usually sat in the corner, as far away from the serving line as she could, so she wouldn't be bothered. Most local guys were pretty much jerks about women. So were most American guys; it was just that the local guys were more honest about it.

As she'd entered, she'd seen that the tables where she'd like to sit had people at them, but now as she turned away from the creamer, she saw they'd all emptied out. There were china cups and plates on the dark brown serving trays scattered around, napkins with lipstick on them, paper cups. As she neared the farthest table, she saw there was a paperback book lying, creased and dogeared, near one of the trays.

She looked up to see if anyone was moving away. No one.

She sat, took a drink of coffee, opened her microwave burrito, and looked at the book. A collection of dramas. But not, as she turned the pages, by Rudolfo Usigli or Lopé de Vega, but a collection of medieval English Mystery and Morality plays, with transliterated Middle English on one page, and Spanish on the other. It was by a couple of Italians.

A double-dogear marked a play called *The Castle of Perseverance*. She turned back to the introduction, read part of it. It was evidently a play like *Everyman*, which she had seen in high school, with personified evils and goods and a (to the modern mind) yokel of a protagonist, like Goofy, only dumb. In this case he was called Mankind.

She put the book with hers, finished her burrito and the caffeined chemical drink, and headed for her 3 P.M. painting class.

11.

He adjusted his mask and let himself into the apartment with a key.

There was no one there. He went to the music system and turned it on. A preset radio station came on, volume at six. He turned it down. The song was ? and the Mysterians' "96 Tears." When it was nearly over it faded and up came "Sleepwalk" by Santo and Johnny. It was the same all over Mexico; stations from the Estados Unidos leaked in all over the FM band. He wondered how powerful their stations were.

He loosened his shirt and found himself a Tres Equis in the refrigerador. He was halfway through it when he heard a key in the lock and the woman came in.

"Oh," she said. "You're already here. Sorry." She had a shopping bag and a grocery sack with her.

"Uf!" she said, putting the grocery sack on the counter, and opening the refrigerador. "The traffic! The crowding! I thought I would swoon!" She closed the door, the empty sack flew into the garbage. "They are tearing up Calle las Casas again." She walked into the bedroom. Through the open door he saw her pass back and forth, more or less clothing alternately covering and revealing different parts of her.

"Then I ran into the son of that French film director, the one who worked in Brazil so many years. The father, I mean. I still don't know what *el hijo* does for a living." She stayed out of sight. There was the sound of running water.

He took another swallow of beer.

She passed by naked; a second later she went by covered from neck to ankles, then came back by hopping through some garment on one foot.

"He tried to catch me up on some gossip which you would not be interested in. It made very little sense, even to me," she said.

He slowly moved the beer around in the bottom of the can with a slight swirling motion of his hand.

She stood in the bedroom doorway. She wore white silk hose and red high heels. The single other garment was a red and black lace cupless push-up bustier that ended at the navel, and from which the garter clips hung. She had on a thick woven gold-link necklace. Her glistening black hair stood out from around the Creature From the Black Lagoon mask she now wore.

"Come here, you big lug," she said, crooking her finger.

He put the beer can down beside the chair, stood as if in a dream, and began to walk.

12.

—Caramba! What a fight! Now El Diablo Peligroso has Lobo Griso in the *cangrejo Monterrey!* The Grey Wolf is begging for mercy! Now the referee puts the question. *¿Que? ¡Grito Tio!* Yes, Yes, Señors y Señores; El Diablo Peligroso remains undefeated since appearing on the scene less than a month ago!—

*

—the inside-bar-stepover-toehold. Now Vestido Zooto works on—wait! Wait! Yes. *¡Cielo!* Carne Xipe has broken loose! He's under—now out! Wait. Yes, yes, now he has Vestido Zooto in the *¡alacran de pecho!* Yes, Yes! The pectoral scorpion has done its work. Carne Xipe wins again. They are taking Zooto out of the ring in agony. His arms hang useless at his sides—

*

—The crowd boos. Not much has happened. El Balon Gordo reaches out—what happened? Oh, look, look! El Mundo Grosero has El Balon in his famous hold, *el sueño de Japon.* El Balon is groggy. He's reaching for—El Mundo is using only one hand—he's, he's looking at his watch! What a gesture! Late for supper, eh, Mundo? There goes El Balon. He's on his knees, he's falling. He's down. Goodness gracious! Mundo is already leaving the ring! Now the referee is counting *him!*—he's put one foot back in the ring—he's in. *Now* he's the winner. The crowd is on its feet—listen to them. They are booing and cheering at the same time! Never have I seen this! Never—

*

“Your correspondent has asked himself again and again; where did these *luchadores* come from? How could they rise so fast in the world of wrestling? What are their goals? they are all three undefeated. The fans both love them and hate them; they want to see them like the fabled Juggernaut, unstoppable. And they want to see them stopped, dead cold. And there are only three who could possibly do it: the three shining companions—they know who they are—sure, professional, persevering, unpresuming. The only question is: when and where will the fight be? The whole wrestling world; no, all Mexico asks. We await our answer.”

Pin-Down Martinez
Estrellos de Luchadores

13.

Rhonda sat up in bed, chilled and panting. She'd had a dream that made no sense that she could remember; it had only irritated her that it was taking so long and nothing was happening. Then she'd jerked awake, thinking she was cold.

Instead the room was stifling. She found her glasses on the bedside table, went to the window of her rented room and opened it.

More hot air came in. She undid her pajama top buttons, stood at the window. The clock said 0110.

Around the edges of the four-story building behind the rooming house she saw soft flashes. She leaned out the left window.

Lightning played off clouds above the distant twin volcanoes. She could only see the shape of Iztacchihuatl, but saw residual flashes, which must be beyond Popocatépetl, and further south. Maybe the storm was coming this way, though most of their weather came from the west, off the Pacific.

There was no thunder; the storm was thirty kilometers away. In a minute or two came the faintest stirring of a breeze, so slight she did not know from which direction. The air coming into the room was slightly cooler. She stayed there, elbows resting on the window sill. The clock said 0211.

She turned on the light and wrote her aunt, who'd sent her a blanket two weeks before, a thank-you aerogramme. Then she turned off the light and went back to sleep.

She was surprised to find, when she left for class the next morning, that it had rained during the night, and the streets were dark and glistening under a cerulean sky with not a hint of cadmium white in it.

14.

"I want flesh," said Carne Xipe, moving around the office ceaselessly. "I want them to worship flesh, the flesh, food, meat. As when the pyramids—battle, blood sacrifice! Sacrifice—" He rubbed the mask that covered his head, the mask of a head with a zipper through it.

"Of course you do," said Mundo Grosero, tapping a cigarette on the face of his watch.

"Bah!" said Diablo Peligroso. "Flesh is no good unless there is the worship of the power behind it. Inversion. Their religion turned upside down, backwards. Renunciation. Flesh is just one way. No God! Evil. Ha ha. Let them know they are tempted, and

there is nothing, *nothing* at the other end. Call on their God, hear an empty echo. I am the call. *I* am the empty echo. I want them to call out and only hear themselves calling out." His red horned mask, and the eyes in it, were filled with pain.

"Of course you do," said Mundo Grosero.

Carne Xipe and El Diablo Peligroso looked at him.

"And what do *you* want for them?" asked El Diablo.

"That's easy," said El Mundo Grosero, flicking out his Safari lighter so that the flame stood up to the end of his cigarette. A smile turned up through the Southern Western Hemisphere of his mask.

"I want to make them all just like *yanquis*."

15.

"You have to fight them," said Señor Sanabria, the head of the wrestling *federación*.

"To paraphrase a boxer," said Señor Nadie, "We don't *have* to do anything but be Latino and die."

Señor Sanabria looked back and forth from El Ravo Tepe to El Hijo. "Help me," he said.

"I hate to say it," said El Ravo Tepe, "but the big question-mark guy is right. We know nothing of these gents. We don't know their aims, whether they are honorable."

"You've fought plenty of people," said Sanabria, "with, shall we say, *espíritus groseros* before. Especially you, Señor Nadie. Remember El Gorilla Acapulcano? El Gigante Gordo?"

"Those were merely dirty wrestlers," said Señor Nadie.

"Si," said El Hijo, the youngest. "Or so I've heard."

"Then it's not the money?" asked the president.

"Of course not!" said El Hijo de la Selva. He looked at the other two. "Or do I speak out of turn?"

"I'd do it for five old centavos—" They all laughed — "actually, ten," said Señor Nadie, "... if I were sure of two things. Myself. And them."

"That goes for me, too," said El Ravo Tepe.

"Also," said El Hijo.

"Then," said Señor Sanabria. "I must bring up an indelicate inducement." He reached in his desk, pulled out some xeroxed pages of typed copy.

"It's from Pin-Down Martinez, isn't it?" asked Señor Nadie. "He still uses that out-moded Underwood Standard at the wrestling magazine office."

"Only it's not for the *Estrellos*," said Sanabria. "It's a guest editorial for the Saturday morning newspaper. He sent a copy over this morning." He offered it to Señor Nadie.

"Tell me."

"He says if you three do not take the challenge, he will believe for once and for all those scurrilous rumors are true, that wrestling matches are fixed."

El Ravo was on his feet. El Hijo de la Selva was looking for something to throw, and somewhere to throw it.

Señor Nadie held up his hand.

"¿Compañeros?"

16.

¡GIGANTIC SPECTACLE!

ARENA TOMALIN

¡BATTLE OF THE AGES!

*

LUCHA LIBRÉ

*

FREE-FOR-ALL WRESTLING

STYLO TEJAS DEATH-MATCH

con Barbed Wire

*

Los Compañeros de los Arenas:

SEÑOR NADIE

EL RAVO TEPEXTEHUALTEPEC

y

EL HIJO DE LA SELVA

contra

EL MUNDO Grosero

EL CARNE Xipe

y

EL DIABLO Peligroso

MIERCOLES 2 NOVIEMBRE en punto de 9

ARENA TOMALIN

*

¡Vds. Ahi o Vds un Trasnochadé!

17.

Rhonda was coming down with a cold or sore throat or the flu. She ached all over, but after her last class, she took the book she had found in the cafeteria to the college Lost and Found. She had been meaning to do it for a week or two, but had remembered it that morning, before she became really miserable.

"I found this book," she said to the student behind the desk.

"¡Ay, caramba!" he said. "It must be made of gold." He looked it over, and at the piece of paper in his hand. "Lucky you," he said, handing it over to her.

"Reward." It said. "Lost book. Anthology of plays. *Plays of Mystery and Morality* ed. Malcondotti and Prolisse. En Español with English text on facing page. Call NAhuatl 4-1009. Reward."

She picked up the phone on the desk and called someone who wasn't the one with the offer of the reward, but said that he would be back soon. She gave him her mailing address, and told him to pick up the book at the lost and found.

She put the phone back on the cradle. "The person calling for the book is named José Humanidades," she said to the student on the desk. "He says please make a note of that and not give it to anyone else."

"*Effectamente,*" he said, reaching for a pen and paper.

*

Two days later, she received an envelope with no return address. Inside were two tickets to a wrestling match at the Arena Tomalin, and a piece of paper that said "Thanks for finding it."

By then, her cold had already raged and was on the ebb tide, she was miserable, and had been taking cough suppressant with codeine for eighteen hours.

18.

First Federico was going with her, then he wasn't, then he was.

Rhonda started for the Arena Tomalin, which was used for every kind of sporting event in this town. As she turned the corner and saw the huge lines, she stopped. Never before in her life had she been to a wrestling match or considered going to one.

She'd had another big dose of cough medicine just before she left the *pension*, and had gotten a little unsteady on her feet.

She sat on the low wall across from the arena. She saw that TV trucks were parked off to one side, their satellite antennae pointed at the same spot in the sky. Why would anyone come to a wrestling match if it were on TV?

To her left, on another building, was a bright blue cloud spray, and in the middle of it, in neon green, the slogan:

*That world, which has slumbered so long,
Now begins to awaken.*

She stared at it. It was the only one she had seen besides that first one across from the Hotel Bella Vista. She got up and moved towards the long lines of people at the doors of the Arena.

"Immediate seating for blue reserved seat tickets through the blue door by the ticket booth," said an usher with a megaphone to the crowd. "Immediate reserved seating through the blue door."

She looked down. Her tickets were blue.

She left a note and a ticket for Federico at the window and followed another usher to a seat in the third row. She looked around. Television cameras were on platforms built around the domed ceiling of the sportatorium, and reporters with minicams walked back and forth in front of the ring.

There were four long aisles into the place. People rushed to and fro.

"¡Dulce de algodón!" yelled a man with a tray in front of him in which fluffy pink head-sized balls were stuck. "¡Dulces de algodón!" Rhonda noticed she was four seats over from the aisle, which probably meant she would be handing food and money back and across each way all night. Or however long it took.

In a few minutes, the announcer came out. The audience applauded and cheered. He began to speak, and they were with him until the word "preliminaries" came out.

The crowd was on its feet, booing and whistling. The booing stopped when two clowns, dressed as masked wrestlers came down the eastern and western aisles. Their masks had large red noses on the front of them, their tights were baggy, and they had on boots with meter-long toes.

They went through all the motions. Just as they prepared to grapple for the first time, a huge bank of the arena lights sputtered out, then all the lights around the ceiling, except for those on the side of the ring with Rhonda.

Giant shadows of the two wrestling clowns sprang up onto the far wall of the place. They were ten meters high. Rhonda watched them, instead of the clowns, as did other

spectators. The titanic figures swirled and swooped. The crowd began laughing and applauding. The clowns redoubled their efforts.

Soon both the noses were gone—one clown bounced the other one's like a jack-ball off the canvas mat. The second pulled an athletic supporter out of his shorts, put the other one's nose in it, whirled it around and around his head and let go like a slingshot, hitting the other right between the eyeslits. He fell to the canvas with a thud, stiff-legged.

The crowd roared with laughter. To Rhonda, who had been watching the big shadows, it didn't seem that funny.

*

They had fixed the lights.

Other people with reserved seats had begun to file in around her—she had never thought wrestling, like opera, was something you could be fashionably late to. The people had talked during the entire clown act, and now were talking through the match between the two clean-cut non-masked wrestlers in the one-fall, ten-minute time limit match.

Some people further back were on their feet, yelling encouragement. Some people could get excited about almost anything.

She looked around. Still no Federico.

*

That match over, the crowd grew restless as technical people put up the 2½ meter high cyclone fence with two strands of barbed wire on top, and two cages, at diagonal corners of the square.

Rhonda nodded in the warm air. The cough medicine was still working on her. The next thing she knew, there was a fanfare on the speakers, jolting her awake.

"Señors and Señores," said the announcer, his voice echoing and rising, "Let's get ready to *escaramuza!*" The crowd went crazy.

"The Challengers:

From Ciudad Juarez, El Diablo Peligroso!"

The north door of the Arena flew open with Spielberg light effects, and coming down the aisle was a man in red tights with a horned, masked head.

"From Mexico City, El Mundo Grosero!"

The west door opened, the lights blinded everybody, and a wrestler with blue and green tights, and a mask of the globe of the earth came down that aisle.

"From the Yucatán, El Carne Xipe!"

From the south, amid the lights, came a man with a flesh-colored cape, flesh-colored body suit with red gashes in it and—at first Rhonda thought he had no mask on, but as he passed, she saw that his mask was the mask of a normal-looking head, with a zipper through it, all the way from the base of the neck, over the top and down to the chin.

The three wrestlers got to the ring at the same time and got into the little cage in their corner of the ring.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," yelled the announcer. "The Champions. The Compañeros of the Ring: Señor Nadie, El Ravo Tepextehualtepec and El Hijo de la Selva!!!"

The roar that went up was earsplitting. The three men bounded up the eastern aisle, waving to the crowd, and went into their cage, where the maintenance people waited.

"A Texas-style barbed-wire Death Match, no time limit, for the true championship team of all Mexico. Once the contestants are in, the match begins. It ends only when one team, or member of a team, remains conscious or in the ring. For this, there is no referee," said the announcer. "Officials of the Mexican Union of All-Professional Wrestling are explaining to each team the conditions of the match . . ."

*

"What do you mean?" asked El Ravo Tepe, "no unmasking? The official said it was legal. What fun is it to fight another *enmascarado* if you can't take off his mask?"

"Would you like it done to you?" asked Señor Nadie.

"Has never happened. And never will," said El Ravo.

"I am of two minds," said El Hijo. "I would not like it done to me. In many ways it cheapens the sport. But then, there are some people who deserve unmasking. They are not worthy of the mask. Humiliation is the only thing they understand. I have done it once; the guy asked for it. But I didn't like it"

"The true *enmascarado* has no need of such displays," said Señor Nadie. "Would that we all had the spirit and wisdom of a Santo or a Demonio Azul. Then would we know when an opponent is truly defeated, rather than just unconscious. We could all, in a normal match, quit before the count, and still know we had won. Bullfighting must be a lot like that, only in the end, someone or something dies, and there must be blood on the sand."

The two others were quiet in the cage, then El Hijo spoke.

"I know one thing. Those *Pavos* we fight will have no compunction about taking off our masks."

"Heads inside or not," said El Ravo Tepe.

*

Rhonda listened to the conversations around her.

"—*a de J.C.*" said the man in the front row to someone else.

A candy hawker came by. Rhonda passed some jujubes and money across from right to left and left to right.

"Aw, go ahead," said another man to the woman beside him. "It won't hurt." He held up a candied apple. "Caramel. Look." He bit into it. "Yummmm."

"I'm on a diet," she said. "My doctor told me not to."

The guy with the fruit for sale stood nervously licking his lips.

"No," she said, finally.

"Aw, phooey," said the man. "Give me another one, though." He took the candied fruit on the stick and bit into it, turning toward the ring. He sat with one in each hand.

"*¡Dulce. Dulce de algodón!*" said another concessionaire, beside her on the aisle. She noticed the small badge on his hat. Hummingbird Foods, Southern Division, in the shape of a smiling cloisonne hummer.

"... so he burned up the meat," said a man with his hat on to the priest beside him dressed in street clothes. He bit into a potato-and-egg burrito. "Look, all he did was get some of the recipe a little wrong. No reason to upset, just get some more meat and do it right."

"*¡Achicharados!*" yelled another foodseller. "*¡Achicharados!* Hot dripping *achicharados!*"

"I hope we get to see some real holds," said a girl who had not yet had her *quinceaños* to the boy beside her as she clutched a copy of *Estrellos de Luchadores* to her.

"*¡Bomba zumbida!*" said the boy. "*¡Una bomba atomica!*"

"Sure, we'll give you the horse," said a man in a business suit to another dressed as a rancher, "just put up all your property as collateral."

"... John Wayne," said a woman. "When he died, everything changed. I said, things will never ever be the same with the Duke dead, I assure you that. Why, the communists ..."

An old man sighed a row back. "The Japanese. *Los Alemanes. ¡Ay de me!*"

"*¡Achicharados!*" yelled the barker.

A beerseller came by. Someone past Rhonda stopped him. He passed over a bottle of beer, Rhonda passed the money back, and the change. The person next to her tapped her on the shoulder. He held up an *abrebotella* which was attached by an elastic cord to an Orvis pin-reel on the Hummingbird Foods man's white jacket. She pulled it over

to the man with the beer bottle. He opened the cap. Foam went everywhere, and he let go of the bottle opener. It *zeeted* back and thumped the beerseller in the chest.

¡Mal educado!” said the vendor, glaring and moving on.

The house lights went down. The bell rang.

The wrestlers charged from their cages into the ring. The technical people knocked the cages down in a trice, and one locked each door with a Club®.

By then, no one was watching the maintenance men.

*

Rhonda tried to keep up with what was going on. Everyone was screaming. The devil-suit wrestler had the Tarzan-guy in some kind of stranglehold. The guy with the globe for a head had the whole head of the guy with the question mark in one big hand. The guy with a face for a mask had both his hands into the chest of the guy with the lightning bolts.

Then it all changed, and everybody had a different hold on everybody else. Punches flew. Feet pounded. Somebody smashed against the cyclone fence. The barbed wire whined. There were screams inside and outside the ring. Sinews cracked. She heard the sound of breathing, from the crowd, the wrestlers, herself. She saw drops of sweat on the canvas, and imagined how hot it was out there.

Then the lights went out again, everywhere but her side of the arena, and the giant shadows sprang up. The three guys who'd come in together looked around a second, which gave their opponents time to jump on their heads again.

*

¡Caracoles!” he said. He was an old man now, and the TV was turned up loud so he could hear it.

He watched what was happening.

“I am truly needed,” he said to himself. He reached for his cane, pulled himself up, reached the balance point, went backwards into the chair again.

Then he swung up and stood, pushing with his cane to keep from going too far forwards.

¡Ay de me!” He started toward the closet in the back room.

He had not wrestled in more than thirty years. He had not even played himself in the movies for twenty-five. He had watched a series of younger, stronger men wrestle under his name, and people who could actually act play him in the films. When they'd had the huge going-away party for him when he left the sport, it was an actor up there getting

all the silver watches and memberships in country clubs.

He tried to keep an eye on the TV from the back room. He opened the closet door with a key. He looked over the rows of silver masks and tights, the cloaks and capes. When he had put them aside, and moved to this retirement community, no one had known.

He reached for one of his special masks. He was more than two hundred kilometers away. He would have to call his Air Force general friend, get a jet, parachute into the Arena Tomalin through the skylight, just as he had done in the old days.

His cane caught on a pair of tights and he fell forward, smashing his head against the back of the closet. He came up bleeding, silver sequins and rhinestones stuck on his gashed forehead. He pressed a pair of tights against the cut, moved back to the living room and his chair.

“¡Uf,” he said. *“No tengo energia como lo!”*

He sat in his chair, bloody tights wadded against his balding head, tears running down his face.

On the TV, Carne Xipe had El Hijo de la Selva in the Deltoid Grinder hold.

*

“I don’t understand,” yelled El Hijo to Señor Nadie. “We keep knocking them down but they won’t—Ouch! Yahh!” There was a pop of sinews as El Diablo Peligroso grabbed him three or four places.

“We must keep on, amigos,” said Señor Nadie. He grabbed El Mundo Grosero where it would do the most good, going from an inside to an outside-stepover-bar-toehold, forgetting for a second that the object was not a fall, but to remove him from the ring.

From somewhere, Carne Xipe stuck a finger in the eyeslit of his mask and poked.

Señor Nadie screamed and caught the hand as he fell. He was dragged toward the side of the ring by two pairs of hands.

Then he saw El Ravo’s boots out of his good eye, and the hands let go, and Señor Nadie came up, throwing punches and kidney chops, eye watering.

*

The big shadow of the devil and the world crossed the lightning.

Then the forest eclipsed the world, and the question mark sailed through the air and took out the masked unmasked shadow.

With grunts from below, the shadows loomed up and up the far walls.

Somebody screamed, louder than ever, and there was the sound of breaking bone.

*

They stood panting, El Hijo de la Selva holding his useless left hand. Even his mask was twisted with pain.

The three challengers closed in on them, their strength seemingly renewed. Carne Xipe had his arms out to the sides, ready to reapply the Pectoral Scorpion. El Diablo Peligroso moved sideways back and forth, waiting for his chance to get into the Monterrey Crab. El Mundo Grosero had his right arm out, head high, wanting one of the champions to walk into the Japanese sleepfold.

Closer and closer they came.

"We must persevere," said Señor Nadie, barely able to keep his breath going. "We must fight the best fight of our lives, cleanly and—"

A woman was screaming above all the other noise in the darkened arena.

"¡Desvestidos los mascars!" she shrieked.

The wrestlers did not know to whom she was yelling.

Then in English: "Take off their masks!"

The noise in the sportatorium went way down.

"Rip off their masks, you namby-pamby jerks!" she yelled through the silence.

The champions looked at each other, then charged in.

*

Rhonda looked around her. For a second, everyone in the Arena Tomalin looked back. Then their heads turned away as the wrestlers collided.

She sat back down.

*

El Hijo de La Selva pulled with his good hand at the barely moving head of Carne Xipe. The mask of the mask of a face came loose, like pulling off a second skin. El Hijo jerked back—underneath was the same face as on the mask. Then he pulled the mask completely off, and the body quit struggling.

*

There was a river beyond the darkness, leading toward a place that was light. A dog stood on the bank of the river, barking, jumping back and forth. He stepped into the water, and the dog ran in a splashing circle around him, then began to swim, looking back over its shoulder, barking encouragement.

He swam toward the light, following the dog, familiar yet not the same as before. Then they were on the other side in the light.

*

El Ravo Tepextehualtepec swung El Diablo Peligroso around and around by the horns, faster and faster, keeping a turning point on the Club® in the enemy corner. The mask began to loosen as El Diablo pulled a couple of g's. Then the mask came over the chin, ripping cartilage from his nose, blood flying, and he sailed through the air into the corner post like a sack of cement.

*

The nun pointed to the block of granite as big as Mount Everest. And he saw far up it the tiny hummingbird brushing the edge of the block with its wings.

A small polished groove encircled the block.

He sighed. He was at a kind of peace. He was getting exactly what he deserved.

*

Señor Nadie sat on the heaving chest of El Mundo Grosero. There was nothing left for El Mundo to do, and not much to do it with. Señor Nadie heard the cheering as El Ravo and El Hijo finished their work.

He leaned down very close to the Indian Ocean where the mouth was; it twisted away, revealing the Australian and Pacific ear.

Señor Nadie grabbed the whole Eastern Hemisphere with his large hand. He leaned down close to the ear and pulled.

"Caducidad." he said as he did.

*

He rushed northwest through the air, swooped over mountains, came down close to the fields, zoomed faster, went past a town out to a shack in the Salinas Valley, went down to the ground, through the door, across the room, and up between a woman's legs.

And came right back out again.

"A girl," said the midwife.

They were going to name her Elena Esperanza por América Rodríguez when it came time for the christening, and they were going to raise her to have it better than they had, and get a good education, and become a doctor or a teacher or an astronaut.

Wait, he wanted to say, there has been some mistake. I'm not a girl, I'm a grown man.

I'm not being born to a poor illegal family in California, I'm a rich man living in Mexico City. I'm not even really a wrestler, I'm an arbitrageur, an executive. I have more platinum cards than other people my age have hemorrhoids. I am feared in my field. I can destroy people's lives, close down whole towns with a memo. There has been some mistake. I will make a few phone calls and clear all this up. That was what he meant to say.

What he said was:

"WAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHH!"

19.

Rhonda went by the painted-over wall on her way to classes. She came even with the furniture and appliance store in the early morning, and saw the little dapper man was finishing a new display, this time of those tiny model beds that would be perfect in a three-year-old's palace.

He saw her, brightened, indicated his wares, reached back through the small door and took out a placard and put it on the easel:

*Now the world, awake so long,
Can find easeful slumber.*

She smiled. He smiled, then climbed through the door and was gone.

Rhonda walked on, and again the blue and white Ford Galaxie went by.

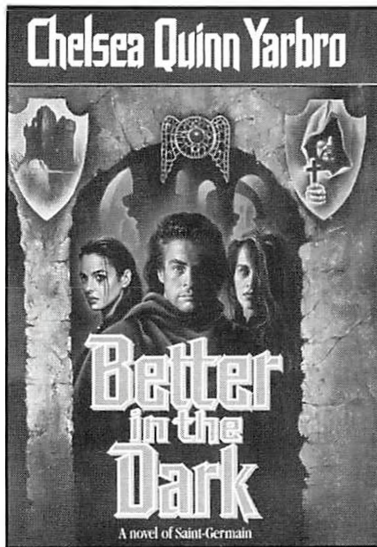
Only this time, the wrestlers had on their question mark, lightning bolt and camouflage masks, but were wearing jeans and T-shirts, except the older one driving, who wore a bush jacket over his T-shirt. They turned out of sight down toward the collegia menor.

*

Señor Nadie was on his way to his woodworking class. El Ravo Tepe was taking electronics. And El Hijo de la Selva was enrolled in gardening. □

—For Fred Duarte and Karen Meschke, and Miguel Ramos; John D. Berry who came up with *exactly* the right word at *exactly* the right time, and Pat Cadigan who knew it had to be a *junior* college. —HW

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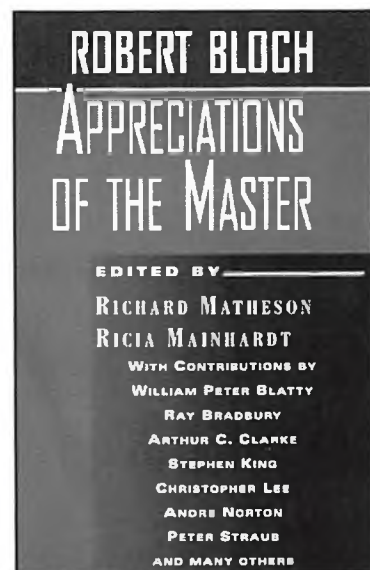


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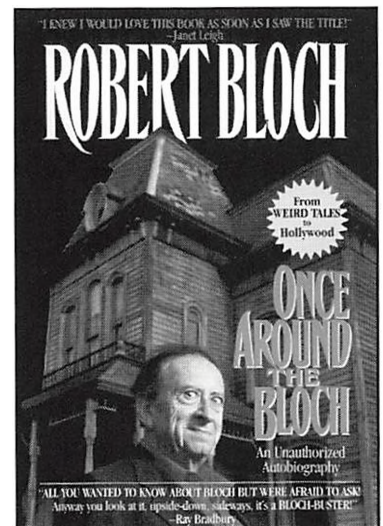
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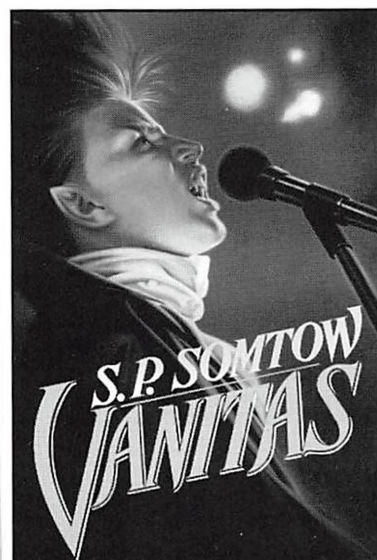


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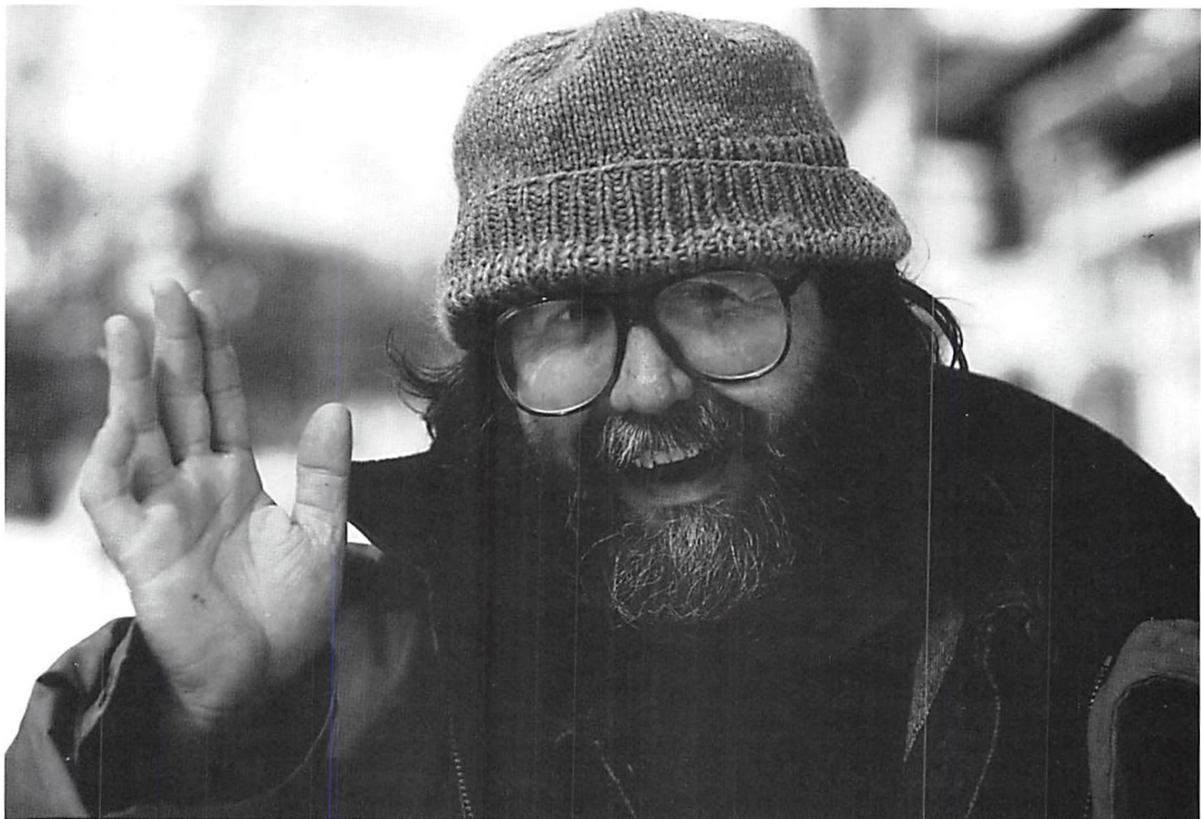
Seven Distant Views of Mount Asahi

by Elizabeth Hand

1. Thunder from a far-off mountaintop

FIRST HEARD OF Lucius Shepard in 1980. That was the summer I met Paul Witcover, who was to become my closest friend and sometime collaborator. It was the night before Paul left to attend the Clarion writer's workshop in Michigan; after a few moments eyeballing each other in the gloom of a Georgetown restaurant, we settled down to the first of thousands of discussions of literature and its discontents. It was one of those rare incendiary meetings that time has done nothing to extinguish: when we finally had to leave with our respective dates (Paul with his mother, me with my boyfriend, Paul's cousin), I was consoled only by Paul's promise to call me when he got back from Clarion in six weeks.

Well, six weeks later he did call, with exciting news: he was living with someone from Clarion (Mickie Massimino, now a journalist—it didn't last), but what he *really*



wanted to tell me was that at Clarion he'd met the most *amazing, incredible, fantastic* writer. Another student who would *just blow me away*, he'd blown *everyone* away, he was *so great*: a guy named Lucius Shepard. When I met Mickie she concurred; Lucius was not just a great guy, he was a great writer, a *really* great writer, and I wouldn't have to wait very long to read his stuff myself and join this small but incredibly fortunate group of mortals who had been touched by his words.

Oh, I said cautiously (but without envy: that would come later). So what's he like? Who does he write like?

He doesn't write like *anyone*, Paul and Mickie insisted. That's one of the things that makes him so amazing.

Actually, Mickie added off-handedly, he's a little like Gabriel García Márquez.

Oh, I said.

In the months that followed I heard a lot about Lucius (of course we were on a first-name basis). Paul and Mickie and I were all aspiring writers—Paul was actually a *published* writer—and Lucius Shepard had become our touchstone. He was older than us, he had done incredible things, and there was absolutely no doubt in any of our minds but that Lucius was going to Make It (i.e., get a novel published). Paul and Mickie heard from him, or of him, periodically. They would relay the news to me, along with sundry tidbits from *The Life of Lucius*, which seemed to fall somewhere between that of the Emperor Hadrian and Evil Knievel. The curious thing was that as the years passed and Lucius did, indeed, Make It—Big—his *Life* lost none of its luster. Indeed, the legend grew to such fantastical proportions that I began to suspect there was an entire vast and hungry army of Luciuses out there, a Lucius Shepard Escadrille composed of soldiers of fortune who all wrote like angels, made love like Bogart, and drank like that guy in *Under the Volcano*.

Lucius Shepard: Was a biker. Was a gunrunner. Fought with the Sandinistas. Fought the fascists in 1930s Spain. Played rockabilly guitar with Hasel Adkins. Killed a man (with his teeth). Was killed by a man. Wrote all of Bob Dylan's songs. Practiced arcane rites involving parking meters and the *Popul Vuh*. Sang like Caruso. Seduced the young Patti Smith. Wept at weddings. Supplied opium to the Dalai Lama. Could replicate the DNA structure of psilocybin mushrooms with his tongue. Spoke basque. Catered to lepers in the slums of Calcutta.

And still found time, though less often as the years went by, to now and then drop a note to *people I knew*. My own proximity to this literary marvel left me awestruck and not a little afraid.

2. Autumn rain in the province of Nayoro

SOME TIME LATER, the *Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* came out with Lucius's first published work, a story called "Solitario's Eyes." It was a cover story (I think: if it wasn't, it should have been) and Paul was right. It blew me away—the only writer I could think of to compare him with *was* García Márquez. Now, of course, an entire literary industry has sprung up around magical realism; but back then writers like García Márquez, Julio Cortazar, Juan José Arreola, José Donoso, Carlos Fuentes, were still making an impact on a generation of American readers, and I was amazed at the *hubris* of this Lucius guy. Over the next few years I read more of his stories, and other comparisons sprang to mind: Paul Bowles, Joseph Conrad, Robert Stone. Finally, in 1984, *Green Eyes* came out (I have my original Ace Special right here), that beautiful, sexy, eerie amalgam of voodoo and biological engineering, and I had to admit that Paul and Mickie were right.

This Lucius guy was something else.

3. A chill mist on the northern slopes

I CONTINUED TO TRACK Lucius's career, figuring that this was a hurricane that sooner or later would blow through D.C. He didn't, but sometime in the mid-1980s I was in New York with my darling starter husband. Paul was in the city as well, and by chance so was Mickie and—be still my heart—*so was Lucius*. We arranged a meeting at a tiny Bangladeshi restaurant my husband knew, packing our own hooch, and there at a table the size of my kneecap we sat drinking and waiting for the great man to arrive. I was still working for the Smithsonian, an unpublished and perhaps unpublishable young writer who had never even *met* a real writer (Paul and Mickie didn't count). I was nervous (Lucius Shepard had thrown battery acid at a luncheon partner who bored him) and passed the time eating pappadams and glancing at my copy of Norman Mailer's *Ancient Evenings*, a coprophiliac account of the Third Egyptian Dynasty, when suddenly a shadow fell across our lamb kourma and pakoras.

Hey, a voice rumbled.

A moment later an Antæan figure with long hair and tweed jacket descended into the seat beside me. Smoke circled his head like fumes rising from a volcano. There was a scattering of grey ash on the lower slopes of Harris tweed. I could not have been more intimidated if Bear Mountain (to whom this person bore some resemblance) had suddenly taken it into its head to breast down the Hudson and over to Curry Chasm, there

to partake of what was left of my chicken vindaloo.

Almost immediately, Paul and Mickie and Lucius began discussing mutual friends. My husband (whose literary taste began and ended with *Moby Dick* and the works of John Madden) went back to eating. I listened, not taking in so much *what* was being said as the way it sounded—Lucius had a remarkable, a truly entrancing voice: Orson Welles filtered through Screaming Jay Hawkins. I was so enthralled I just sat in silence, waiting for some *bon mot* to drop in my direction. After a few minutes Lucius paused to light another cigarette and glanced down at the book by my elbow.

“That’s a terrible fucking book,” he said, dropping a smoldering match onto Norman Mailer’s head. “*Really* bad writing.”

I could only gape, stunned by my good fortune. The Great man had spoken to *me*.

4. Charred remnants of an earlier civilization

A YEAR OR SO LATER I tossed *Ancient Evenings*, having failed to get more than halfway through. He was right: it *was* a terrible book.

5. Rain that is sweeter far than ash

OVER THE YEARS THAT FOLLOWED, my path crossed Lucius’s a few times, most memorably outside a convention where he gave me some solid advice about the literary life.

Don’t you worry about all that stuff, he rumbled, knocking ashes into his pocket. You just find a style and run with it. Like, I’ll just keep bein’ Big, and you just keep bein’ Blonde.

Mostly, though, I continued to belong to that circle of people (vast, I imagined, and extending to the antipodes and perhaps beyond) who knew someone who knew Lucius Shepard. So it was that I often found myself listening to music from Jojouka that Lucius recommended, reading obscure books that Lucius liked, eating meals in Nepalese and Peruvian restaurants where Lucius dined, reading the subtitles of a Lithuanian movie that Lucius had found indispensable. I would not be at all surprised to learn that Lucius held the previous mortgage on my home. But I began to hear other stories, too: about how Lucius taught at places like Clarion, staying up all night, going through stories and then writing page after page of beautifully thought-out critiques and suggestions for his students—another Herculean task—in addition to working on his own fiction.

Meanwhile, of course, I was always reading Lucius. Delectable tales like “The Man Who Painted the Dragon Griaule” and “All the Perfumes of Araby,” and the others collected in *The Jaguar Hunter* and *The Ends of the Earth*; the scary *Life During Wartime* and the baroquely gorgeous *The Golden*. Lucius Shepard is one of the only writers who has mapped that dark territory where the brittle, urbane paranoia of Robert Stone or Graham Greene or Alexander Stuart meets the decadent exoticism of Paul Bowles and the sensual, magical lyricism of Angela Carter. One of those places where you might not want to live, but that I, for one, can’t resist visiting, again and again. For me, Lucius Shepard’s work has always been just about perfect. My only wish is that there were *more* of it.

And it wasn’t until I reread *Green Eyes* recently that I realized I had paid him the ultimate compliment: some of my best ideas came from him.

6. Upon the southern face birds are gathering

LAST SUMMER I FINALLY SAW Lucius again, too briefly, while I was in Seattle teaching at Clarion West. We met for dinner at a mexican restaurant with two of the Clarion organizers, where I drank margaritas (Lucius drinks his mixed with human blood) and ate and listened, still enthralled by that wonderful voice and the amazing stories it told. Afterward, packing ourselves into cars to head to a party, I was bowled over by an astonishing revelation:

In addition to being one of the very best writers I have ever had the pleasure of meeting, *Lucius Shepard is an incredibly nice guy.*

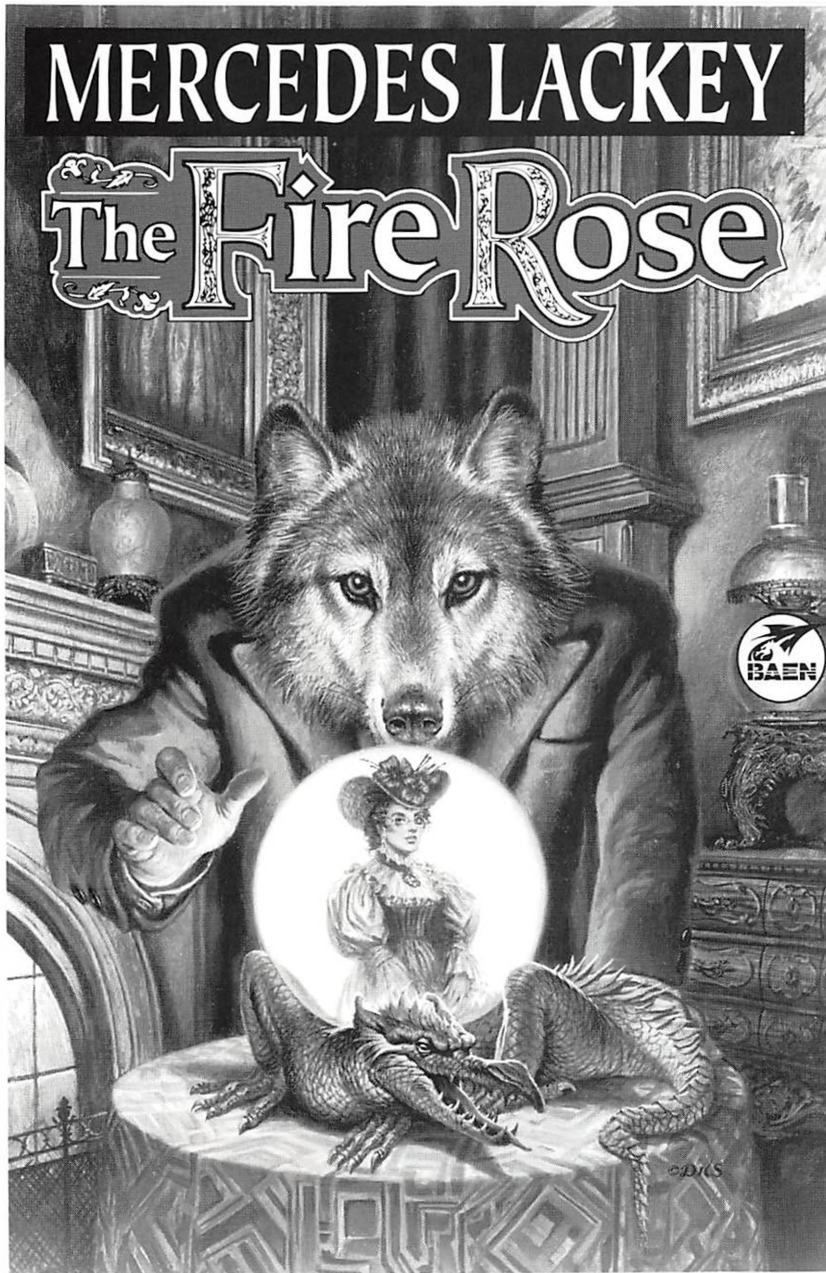
7. Moonrise over the eastern sea

BUT THEN, TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH, I really can’t say that I know him all that well. ■

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Rosalind Hawkins is a medieval scholar from a respectable family whose father has speculated away the family money and died, leaving her with no fortune and no future. Desolate with grief, she goes West to take a job as a governess to a wealthy man in San Francisco, the center of culture in the new West. Perhaps there she will rediscover a reason for living.

But when she arrives at Jason Cameron’s mansion on a hill overlooking the Pacific, she discovers that there are no children, not even a wife, in residence. The household is very odd indeed and oddest of all is the master of the house, who is never seen and communicates only through a speaking tube at night. But despite her mis-

givings, Rosalind stays...and is happy. For her job in the household is to read to him: Latin, French, Greek, German—and she feels herself coming alive once more.

As for Jason Cameron, through his contact with Rosalind, he, too, is renewed. An Adept and Alchemist, Master of the Element of Fire, he had attempted the old French werewolf transformation—and bungled it. Stuck in wolf form, over the centuries he had slowly been losing his humanity. Rosalind is bringing it back to him. But when a rival alchemist offers Rosalind the chance to restore her family’s fortune in exchange for Jason’s secret, who will she side with? And then the Earthquake strikes....



Human History

by Lucius Shepard

STORIES, I'M TOLD BY OLD HAY (who's told enough of them to pass for an expert), must have a beginning and middle and end that taken altogether form a shape, a movement that pleases the mind of the listener. And so in order to give my chronicle of those weeks in Edgeville and the land beyond a proper shape, I must begin before the beginning, create a false beginning that will illuminate the events of later days. I'm not sure this is the most truthful way to go about things. Sometimes I think it would be best to jump right in, to leap backward and forward in chronology like an excited man telling his story for the first time; but since I've never written anything down before, I guess I'll play it conservative and do as old Hay has advised.

This happened in the summer, then, when the apes and the tigers keep mostly to the high country, the snow peaks east of town, and strangers come from Windbroken, the next town north, and from even farther away, with goods for trade or maybe to settle, and it's more-or-less safe to ride out onto the flats. Edgeville, you see, is tucked into a horseshoe canyon of adobe-colored stone, its sides smoothly dimpled as if by the pressure of enormous thumbs; the houses and shops—shingle-roofed and painted white for the most part—are set close together toward the rear of the canyon, thinning out toward the mouth, where barricades of razor wire and trenches and various concealed traps are laid. Beyond the canyon the flats begin, a hardpan waste that appears to stretch into infinity, into a line of darkness that never lifts from the horizon. Out there live the Bad Men and the beasts, and on the other side . . . Well, it's said by some that the other side doesn't exist.

I'd taken a little roan out onto the flats that morning to look for tiger bones, which I use for carving. I rode east toward the mountains, keeping close to the cliffs, and before I'd gone more than a couple of miles I began to hear a mechanical hooting. Curious, I followed the sound, and after another mile I caught sight of a red car with a bubble top parked at the base of a cliff. I'd seen a couple like it last time I was to market in Windbroken; some old boy had built them from plans he'd gotten from the Captains. They were the talk of the town, but I didn't see much point to them—only place level

enough to drive them was out on the flats. Whoever was inside the car wore a golden helmet that sparkled in the sun. As I drew closer, I realized that the driver was pressing the middle of the steering wheel with the heel of his hand, and that was causing the hooting noise. He kept it up even after I had pulled the roan to a halt beside the car, acting as if he didn't notice me. I sat watching him for half-a-minute, and then shouted, "Hey!" He glanced at me, but continued beating on the steering wheel. The sound was wicked loud and made the roan skittish.

"Hey!" I shouted again. "You don't quit doin' that, you gonna bring down the apes."

That stopped him . . . for a moment. He turned to me and said, "You think I care 'bout apes? Shit!" Then he went back to beating on the wheel.

The helmet had a funny metal grille across the front that halfway hid his face; what I could see of it was pinched, pale, and squinty-eyed, and his body—he was wearing a red coverall that matched the car's paint—appeared to be starved-thin. "You may not care 'bout 'em," I said. "But you keep up with that nonsense, they gonna start droppin' rocks down on you. Apes like their peace and quiet."

He stopped making his racket and stared at me defiantly. "Ain't gonna happen," he said. "I'm a man of destiny. My future is a thing assured."

"Yeah?" I said with a laugh. "And how's that?"

He popped open the bubble top and clambered out. The roan backed off a few paces. "I'm gonna cross the flats," he said, puffing up his chest and swaggering in place: you might have thought he was ten feet tall instead of the puny piece of work he was.

"That right?" I said, gazing west toward nothing, toward that empty land and dark horizon. "Got any last requests? Messages to your kinfolks?"

"I 'spect you heard that before," he said. "'You probably get lots out here tryin' to make a crossin'."

"Nope, never met anybody else that much of a damn fool."

"Well, you never met nobody with a map, neither." He reached into the car, pulled out some bedraggled-looking papers and shook them at me, causing the roan to snort and prance sideways. He glanced from side to side as if expecting eavesdroppers and said, "This world ain't nothing like you think it is . . . not a'tall. I found these here maps up north, and believe you me, they're a revelation!"

"What you gonna do with the Bad Men? Hit 'em over the head with them papers?" I got the roan under control and slipped off him; I must have stood a head taller than the driver, even with his helmet.

"They'll never spot me. I'm goin' where they ain't got the balls to go."

There was no point in arguing with a lunatic, so I changed the subject. "You ain't

gonna have a chance to hide out from the Bad Men, you don't quit hootin' at the apes. What for you doin' that, anyway?"

"Just gearin' up," he said. "Gettin' up my energy."

"Well, I'd do it out away from the cliff if I was you."

He glanced up at the clifftop. "I ain't never seen them apes. What're they like?"

"They got white fur and blue eyes . . . least most of 'em. 'Bout the size of a man, but skinnier. And 'bout as smart, too."

"Now I don't believe that," he said. "Not one lick."

"I didn't neither," I said. "But I know someone who went up amongst 'em, and after he come back, well, I believed it then."

He looked at me expectantly. I hadn't been meaning to get into it, but seeing that I had nothing pressing, I told him a little about Wall.

"The man was huge," I said. "I mean I never seen anybody close to that big. He musta stood close to seven feet . . . and he wasn't just tall. He was big all over. Chest like a barrel, thighs like a bull. Man, even his fingers were big. Bigger'n most men's dinguses, if you know what I'm talkin' 'bout."

The driver chuckled.

"One peculiar thing. He had this real soft voice. Almost like a woman's voice, just deeper. And that just accentuated his ugliness. Shit, I seen apes better lookin'! He had these big tufted eyebrows that met up with his hairline. Hair all over him. He come from one of them ruined cities up to the north. A hard place, the way he told it. Lotta Bad Men. Cannibalism. Stuff like that. But he wasn't no savage, he was all right. Didn't say much, though. I figger he liked the apes 'bout as good as he did us."

"He went and lived with 'em, did he?"

"Not 'lived'," I said. "Not exactly. Kinda hung around 'em, more like. He was helpin' us, y'see. The apes they steal our babies, and he thought he might be able to get 'em back."

"And did he?"

The roan grunted and nuzzled the driver's chest; he swatted its nose.

"He said we wouldn't want 'em back, the way they was. But he told us a lot 'bout how the apes live. Said they had this cave where they . . ." I broke off, trying to remember how Wall had described it. The wind blew lonely cold notes in the hollows of the cliff; the sky seemed the visual counterpart of that music: a high mackerel sky with a pale white sun. "They'd taken the skulls of the people they'd killed, busted 'em up and stuck 'em on the walls of this cave. Stuck 'em flat, y'know, like flattened skull faces all over the walls and ceiling. Painted 'em all over with weird designs. Our babies, our kids,

were livin' in the cave, and the apes, they'd go into the cave and fuck 'em. Girls, boys. Didn't make no difference. They'd just do 'em."

"Damn," said the driver, sympathizing.

"Now don't that sound like they smart like men?" I said. "Don't it?"

"Guess it does at that," he said after a bit. "Damn."

"You don't wanna mess with them apes," I told him. "I was you, I'd be movin' my car."

"Well, I reckon I will," he said.

There was nothing more I could do for him. I mounted up, swinging the roan's head so he faced toward the dark end of everything.

"What you doin' out here?" asked the driver.

"Just huntin' for tiger bones," I said. "I carve shit from 'em."

"Huh," he said as if this were a great intelligence. Now that he saw I was making to leave, he didn't want to let me go. I could tell he was scared.

"You don't think I'm gonna make it, do ya?" he said.

I didn't want to hex him but I couldn't lie. "Not hardly. It's a long way to forever."

"You don't understand," he said. "I got maps, I got secret knowledge."

"Then maybe you'll be all right." I wheeled the roan around and waved to him. "Luck to you!"

"Don't need it!" he cried as I started away. "I got more heart than that horse of yours. I got ..."

"Take it anyway!" I shouted, and spurred the roan westward.

*

HOW DID IT HAPPEN, THIS WORLD? Our ancestors decided they didn't care to know, so they told the Captains to take that knowledge from them. Maybe I would have done the same if I was them, but sometimes I regretted their decision. What I did know happened was that one day the Captains came down from the orbital stations and waked the survivors of a great disaster, brought them forth from the caves where they were sleeping, and told them the truth about the world. The Captains offered our ancestors a choice. Said they could live up on the stations or on the earth. A bunch of our ancestors flew to the stations to take a look-see: it must have been pretty bad, because not a one wanted to emigrate. The Captains weren't surprised; they didn't think all that highly of themselves or of their life, and our ancestors got the notion that maybe the Captains felt responsible for what had happened to the world. But no matter whether or not they were responsible, the Captains were a big help. They asked our ancestors if they wanted to remember what had happened or if they wanted to forget; they had machines, they said,

that could erase memory. Our ancestors apparently couldn't live with the idea of all that death behind them, maybe because it was too close to deal with easily, and so they chose to forget. And they also chose further to reject many of the old world's advantages, which is why we have rifles and horses and hydroponics and no more . . . except for our hobbies (like the man in the gold helmet with his bubble car) and the hospitals. The hospital in Edgeville was a long silver windowless building where we went to get injections and also where we talked to the Captains. We'd punch a black stud on a silver panel and their images would fade in on a screen. It was almost never the same Captain, but they looked a lot alike and they wouldn't say their names. Ask them, and they merely said, "I am the Captain of the Southern Watch." They have these lean pale faces and wet-looking purplish eyes, and they are every one skinny and nervous and not very tall. The apes and the tigers? My guess is that there were animals in the sleeping caves, too. Our ancestors could have had the Captains do away with them; but maybe it was decided that enemies were needed to keep us strong. I used to hate our ancestors for that, though I suppose I understood it. They wanted a challenging life, one that would make us hardy and self-sufficient, and they got that sure enough. Gazing out from the Edge into that rotten darkness at the end of the flats, you had the idea you were looking back into that gulf of time between now and the destruction of the old world, and you'd get sick inside with the feelings that arose. That alone was almost too much to bear. And on top of that the Bad Men burned our houses and stole our women. The apes defiled our children, and the tigers haunted us with their beauty . . . Could be that was the worst thing of all.

How did this world happen?

That's the whole of what I used to know about human history, and even now I don't know a whole lot more. It wasn't enough to make a clear picture, but for seven hundred years it was all the knowing most of us wanted.

*

I WOKE ONE MORNING to the smell of snow in the air. Snow meant danger. Snow meant apes and maybe tigers. The apes used the snow for cover to infiltrate the town, and sometimes it was all we could do to beat them off. I rolled over. Kiri was still asleep, her black hair fanned out over the pillow. Moonlight streamed through the window beside her, erasing the worry lines from her brow, the faint crows-feet from around her eyes, and she looked eighteen again. Visible on her bared shoulder was the tattoo of a raven, the mark of a duelist. Her features were sharp, but so finely made their sharpness didn't lessen her beauty: like a hawk become a woman.

I was tempted to wake her, to love her. But if it was going to be a big snow, soon she'd be up in the high passes, sniping at the apes filtering down, and she'd be needing all the sleep she could get. So I eased out of bed and pulled on my flannel shirt and denims, my leather jacket, and I tiptoed into the front room. The door to Bradley's room was open, his bed empty, but I didn't worry much. Here in Edgeville we don't baby our kids. We let them run and learn the world their own way. What little worry I did feel was over the fact that Bradley had lately been running with Clay Fornoff. There wasn't much doubt in anybody's mind that Clay would wind up a Bad Man, and I just hoped Bradley would have better sense than to follow him the whole route.

I cracked the front door, took a lungful of chill air and stepped out. Our house was at the back of the canyon, and the moonlight was so strong that I could see the shapes of separate shingles on the hundreds of roofs packed together on the slope below. I could see the ruts in the dirt streets brimful of shadow, the fleeting shapes of dogs, blazes of moonlight reflected from a thousand windows, and at the center of it all, the silver rectangle of the hospital. Leafless trees stood sentinel on the corners, and darkness looked to be welling through the mouth of the canyon from the flats. If I strained my eyes, I thought, I might could see eight thousand souls shining in their little frame shacks.

I walked at a brisk pace down through the town. The shadows were sharp, dead-black, and the stars glittered like points of ice. My boots made husking noises on the frozen dirt, and my breath steamed, turning into ice chips on my beard. From the sty in back of Fornoff's store I could hear the muffled grunt of some pig having a dream.

Fornoff's was a lantern-lit barnlike place, with sacks of meal and garden tools stored up in the rafters, the walls ranged by shelves stocked with every kind of foodstuff, most of it dried or preserved. Brooms, bolts of cloth, small tools, and just about everything else were stacked in corners or heaped in bins, and in the back was a cold box where Fornoff kept his meat. A group of men and women were sitting on nail kegs around the pot-bellied stove, drinking coffee and talking in low voices; they glanced up and gave a wave when I entered. Dust adrift in the orange light glowed like pollen. The fat black stove snapped and crackled. I wrangled up another keg and joined them.

"Where's Kiri at?" asked Marvin Blank, a tall, lean man with a horsey face that struck a bargain between ugly and distinctive; he had a sticking plaster on his chin to cover a shaving nick.

"Sleepin'," I told him, and he said that was fine, he'd pick her a mount and fetch her when it came time.

The others went back to their planning. They were Cane Reynolds, Dingy Grossman,

Martha Alardyce, Hart Menckyn, and Fornoff. All in their early to mid-thirties, except for Fornoff, who was beer-bellied and vast and wrinkled, with a bushy gray beard bibbing his chest. Then Callie Dressler came in from the back with a tray of hot rolls. Callie was about twenty-five, twenty-six, with a feline cleverness to her features. She had a deep tan, blackberry eyes, chestnut hair to her shoulders, and a nice figure. You could see her nipples poking up her wool shirt, and her denims couldn't have been any tighter. She was a widow, just moved to town from Windbroken, and was helping out at the store. According to Fornoff's wife, the reason she'd moved was to kick up her heels. Windbroken is fairly strait-laced compared to Edgeville. Among the population of Windbroken we had the deserved reputation of not being too concerned over who was sleeping with whom . . . maybe because having to deal with the apes and the tigers gave us a less hidebound perspective on the importance of fidelity. Anyway, I was made both pleased and nervous by Callie's presence. Kiri didn't mind if I got it wet away from home once in awhile, but I knew how she'd react if I ever got involved with anyone, and Callie was a temptation in that regard: she had in her both wildness and innocence, a mixture that has always troubled my heart. And so when old Fornoff announced that he was assigning me and Callie to guard the front of the store, I was of two minds about it. Not that the assignment didn't make sense. What with Callie being new, me not being much with a rifle, and the store being hard to get at, it was probably the best place for us. Callie smiled coyly and contrived to nudge my shoulder with her breast as she handed me a roll.

I'd been intending to go back and wake Kiri myself, but the snow began falling sooner than I'd expected. Martin Blanks heaved up from his keg, said he was going to fetch her and stumped out. The others followed suit, and so it was that at first light, with snow whirling around us, I found myself sitting hip-to-hip with Callie in the recessed doorway, blankets over our knees and rifles at the ready. The sky grayed, the snow came in big flakes like bits of ragged, dirty wool, and the wind sent it spinning in every direction, howling, shaping mournful words from the eaves and gutters. All I could see of the houses across the street were intimations of walls and dark roofpeaks. It was going to be a bad one, and I didn't try to avoid Callie when she nestled close, wanting all the creature comforts I could get.

We talked a little that first hour, mostly just things such as "You got enough blanket?" and "Want some more coffee?" Every so often we heard gunfire over the wind. Then, just when I was starting to think that nothing much was going to happen, I heard glass breaking from the side of the store. I came to my feet and told Callie to stay put.

"I'm comin' with you," she said, wide-eyed.

"No," I said. "Someone's got to watch the front. Stay here. I'll be back in a minute."

Out in the wind, my beard and eyebrows iced up at once. Visibility wasn't more than a few feet. I kept flat against the wall until I reached the corner, then jumped out, leveling my gun. Nothing but whirling snow met my eye. I eased along the wall, my heart pumping. Suddenly the wind spun the flakes in a kind of eddy, clearing an avenue of sight, and I spotted the ape. He was standing about a dozen feet away beside a broken window, his fur almost the same dirty white color as the snow, and he was carrying a bone club. He was a scrawny specimen, old, his fur worn down to the nub in patches, and the black mask of his face as wrinkled as a prune. Yet in the center of his face were set two young-looking blue eyes. It's hard to think of blue eyes being savage, but these were. They blinked rapidly, seeming to semaphore rage and shock and madness, and their force stunned me for a split-second. Then he came at me, swinging the club, and I fired. The bullet reddened his chest and blew him backward into a drift. I went over to him, keeping the rifle trained. He lay spreadeagled, looking up at the toiling sky. Blood was bubbling from his chest, miring his fur, and for a moment his eyes fixed on me. One hand clenched, his chest heaved. Then the eyes jellied and went dead. Snowflakes fell down to cover them. Watching them whiten, I felt a touch of regret. Not for him personally, you understand, just the sort of generalized, winnowing sadness you feel when you see death happen.

I walked back to the front of the store, calling as I went to Callie so she wouldn't think me an ape and shoot. "What was it?" she said as I settled next to her.

"Ape," I said. "An old one. He probably wanted to die, that's why he was tryin' for the store. They know the odds are against them this deep into town."

"Why'd he do that?" she said, and from the depth of her perplexity, the innocence of her question, I realized that she was so young and vital, it could never be made clear to her how apes and people will just up and grow weary of the world.

"Beats me," I told her. "Just crazy, I guess."

While we kept watch, she told me some about Windbroken. I'd only visited the town twice and hadn't thought much of it. Prettier than our town, that's for sure. With nicer houses and picket fences and larger trees. But the people acted as if that prettiness made them superior: seems they don't have quite enough danger in their lives to keep them real. Callie didn't strike me that way, however, and I figured that she had found her rightful place in Edgeville.

She cuddled closer to me, and before long she slipped a hand under the blanket and rested it on my thigh, moving her fingers a bit, enough to get my dingus twitching. I told her to stop it, and she grinned. "What for?" she asked. "Don't you like it?"

"That ain't the point." I lifted her hand away. "I'm married."

"Oh, I heard 'bout how married you are from Miz Fornoff." She shifted away, acting huffy. "Says you 'bout as married as a tomcat."

"That ol' woman don't know nothin'!"

"Don't tell me that! She ain't the only one talks 'bout you." Her grin came back, sexy and mischievous. "Claire Alardyce, Martha's girl? You oughta hear what she says! And Laney Fellowes, and Andrea Simpkins—she told me 'bout the time you and her went out on the flats and . . ."

"Well, so what?" I said angrily. "It's no business of yours what I do!"

"Not yet."

"Not ever!"

"Why?" She asked this with the stubborn rectitude of a child denied a treat. "Don't you think I'm pretty?"

I couldn't say she wasn't, so I got by with, "You're all right."

"If I'm just all right," she said, pitching her voice husky, "how come you try to see down my shirt every time you come in the store?"

I shrugged and stared off into the snow. "Just 'cause a man takes a peek, don't mean he's gonna buy the goods."

"You don't have to peek," she said.

The odd tremor in her voice made me turn to her. She had opened her coat and was unbuttoning her shirt, exposing the plump upper slopes of her breasts: they were as brown as the rest of her and looked full of juice. She slipped loose another button, and I could see one of her nipples, erect, the dark areola pebbled from the cold. I swear to God, I think my mouth started to water. She had the shirt mostly unbuttoned now, and she took my free hand and brought it over to cup one breast. I couldn't help giving it a squeeze, and when I did, she arched into the pressure, closed her eyes and let out a hiss of pleasure. Next thing I knew, I was bending to her and putting my mouth where my hand had been, and she was saying my name over and over, saying it soft so I could just hear it above the wind and pushing my head down into a sweet warmth that smelled of harsh soap and vanilla water. And then she stiffened, froze right up, and was pushing me away, whispering my name with an different kind of urgency. "What's the matter," I asked, and she nodded her head toward the street, her lips parted, eyes bugged. I looked around and forgot all about Callie Dressler's breasts.

Standing in the middle of the street was a tiger . . . and not just an ordinary tiger, if any of them can be said to be ordinary. He appeared to be more than twice the length of a man, and his head would have come at least to my shoulder. His fur was pure white,

and his stripes were vaguely drawn the way some lines are in a delicate charcoal sketch. In the thick eddying snow he kept vanishing and reappearing as would a dream creature or the image of a beast surfacing in a magic mirror. But he was no dream. The wind brought his heavy scent to me, and for the time he stood there, I lived in terror that the wind would shift, that he would twitch his head toward us, burn with me those yellow eyes like sad crystals.

I had seen tigers prowling the slopes of the mountains at a distance, but never had I been so close to one, and it seemed that the vast weight of his life was diminishing mine, that if he were to stand there long enough I would be crushed and transformed into some distillate of being. I had no thought for my gun, for Callie, and barely any thought for my own safety. All my thoughts were as insubstantial and flighty as the flakes whirling about his massive head. He remained motionless for several seconds, testing the wind. His tail lashed, he made a small thunder in his throat, and then he sprang off along the street, disappearing into a tornado of snow that spun up from one of the drifts.

My chest ached, and I realized I had stopped breathing. I continued staring at the spot where the tiger had been. I turned to Callie, my mouth open. She lifted her eyes to mine, and a scratchy sound came from her throat. "I . . ." she said, and gave her head a shake.

"I know," I said. "God almighty damn!"

Her face seemed to have been made even more beautiful by the apparition of the tiger, as if the keenness of the sight had carved away the last of her baby fat, hollowing her cheeks, bringing out the sensitivity and soulfulness of the woman she would become. In that moment she looked to have captured something of the tiger's beauty, and maybe she had, maybe we both had, because she was staring at me as intently as I at her, as if she were seeing a new element in my face. I don't remember wanting to kiss her, I just did. The kiss lasted a long, long time. Like the tiger, it was not ordinary. It was a kind of admission, that kiss, an ultimate acknowledgment, and it was far more of a threat to Kiri and me than had been my fumbling with Callie's breasts. It was an event that would be very hard to pull back from. We stood most of the remainder of the watch in silence, and we didn't get cozy again. We talked stiffly of inconsequential matters and were overly solicitous of one another's comfort. Both of us knew that what might have been a fling had gotten out of hand.

We had a tiger between us, now.

*

IT HAD BEEN BAD UP IN THE PASSES, Kiri said. Charlie Hatton had been bitten in the neck, Mick Rattiger's skull had been crushed. Four men dead altogether. She stripped off her clothes and stood by the bedroom window, staring out at the moonstruck snow, her tawny skin drenched in whiteness. Dueling scars on her stomach and arms. Lean and small-breasted, with long fluid muscles running from thigh to buttock, and wings of black hair pulled back from her face: she posed a polar opposite to Callie's almost teenage beauty, her butterfat breasts and berry mouth. She slipped beneath the covers, lay on her back and took my hand. "How was it with you?" she asked.

I wanted to tell her about the tiger, but I didn't have the words yet, the words with which to tell *her*; anyway. My incapacity had only a little to do with Callie; I wanted to tell Kiri in a way that would open her to her own beauty. She'd never been a happy woman; too much of her was bound up by the disciplines of a duelist, by the bleakness of her youth in the northern ruins. She expected death, she believed in the lessons of pain, and she lived by a harsh code that I could never fully understand. I think she looked upon Brad and me as an aberration on her part, a sign that she grown soft.

"Shot an ape," I said. "That's 'bout it."

She made a dry, amused noise and closed her eyes.

"I saw Bradley," I said. "He did fine, but I think he's off with Clay again tonight."

"He'll be all right."

She turned on her side to face me and caressed my cheek, a sign that she wanted to make love. Directness was at odds with her nature: she lived by signs, hints, intimations. I kissed her mouth, the tiny crow tattoo on her shoulder. Pressing against me, her body felt supple, sinuous, all her muscles tensed as if for battle. There's always been a mean edge to our lovemaking, and that night was no exception. She seemed to be fighting me as I entered her, and she clawed my back so fiercely, I had to pin her wrists above her head, and when she cried out at the end, it sounded like a cry of victory, a celebration of triumph over her body's resistance to pleasure.

She went to sleep almost immediately afterward, and I sat on the edge of the bed, writing at the night table by the light of the moon. I was trying to write some words for Kiri, talking not about the tiger, but about how it had been that night with her. I had, You see, come to the realization of how much I loved her, how much I wanted to split open her hard shell and make her bloom at least for a season. Whatever I felt for Callie, I decided, was nothing by comparison, no matter if it was real.

But thinking all this made me restless and unhappy, and no words would come. So I dressed, grabbed a rifle and went for a walk, going kneedeep through the snowcrust, ploughing ahead, having no real destination in mind. The town was quiet, but there

were maybe a dozen fires flickering atop the canyon walls, and from those fires came the howling of apes mourning their dead. They'd be coming back with the next storm. The rooftops were mantled with snow; snow ledged the windows and marbled the boughs of the leafless trees, and the sound of my breath seemed harsh and unnatural in all that white stillness. I turned a corner and came in sight of the hospital, its silver metal walls flashing and rippling with the moonlight. Seeing it, I realized that therein lay the only soul to whom I could speak my heart, the only one who was bound to listen and who would be sure to feel the current in my words. I walked to the door, put my hand flat against an inset silver rectangle, and after a second the door slid open with a hiss. I stepped into the anteroom. Soft light began to shine from the walls, and a whispery voice asked if I needed treatment.

"Just a little conversation," I said.

The room was about fifteen by fifteen, and a large screen occupied most of the rear wall, fronted by three chairs of silver metal and some sort of foam. I plopped into one and punched the black button. The screen brightened, dissolving to a shot of a solitary Captain. A woman. It's difficult to tell sometimes what sex they are, because they all wear the same purple robes, almost the exact dark shade as their eyes, and their hair is uniformly close-cropped, but I knew this one for a woman, because when the picture had come into focus, she had been turned a bit sideways and I could see that her robe was pushed out a tad in front. Her skin was the color of the winter moon, and her cheeks were so hollowed that she looked toothless (yet she was pretty in an exotic way), and her eyes were too large for her face, a face that registered a gloomy, withdrawn quality during the entire time we talked.

"What's your name?" I asked; I always hoped one of them would just say to hell with it and come clean.

"I am the Captain of the Southern Watch." Her voice was so soft as to be toneless.

I studied her a moment, thinking where to begin, and for some reason I decided to tell her about the tiger. "Listen," I said. "I want your promise that you're not goin' to go off and hurt yourself after I'm done."

She appeared reluctant but said, "You have my word."

You had to get this out of them before you tell them anything fraught with emotion, or else they were liable to kill themselves; at least that was what I'd heard all my life. Their guilt over what happened to the world was to blame . . . Or so I thought at the time. But sometimes I would think that we were to them like the tigers were to us: beautiful strong lives that wounded them by merely being.

"Ever see a tiger?" I asked.

"Pictures of them," she said.

"Naw, I mean up close . . . so close you could smell it."

The idea seemed to trouble her: she blinked, her mouth thinned and she shook her head.

"I saw one that close this morning," I said. "Twenty, twenty-five feet away."

I went on to tell her of its heart-stopping beauty, its power, how I couldn't breathe on seeing it; I told her what had happened as a result between me and Callie. I could see my words were hurting her—her bony fingers curled into fists, and her face grew strained—but I couldn't stop. I wanted to hurt her, to make her feel as diminutive and worthless as the tiger had made me feel. I knew this wasn't fair. No matter if the Captains were responsible for the way things were, they weren't responsible for tigers; I was sure that either tigers or something like them must always have existed to help whomever was around keep things in perspective.

By the time I finished, she was trembling, leaning away from me, as if my words had a physical value that was beating her back. She glanced from one side to the other, then—apparently finding no help for her condition—she turned back to me. "Is that all?" she said.

"Why do you talk to us?" I asked after a pause. "You obviously don't enjoy it."

"Enjoy?" The concept seemed to perplex her. "You are our lives."

"How can that be? We don't know your names, we never see you in the flesh."

"Do the important things of your life all lie close at hand?"

I thought about it. "Yeah."

She shrugged. "Then in this we are different from you."

I tipped my head, trying to see her in a new light, to read the world behind that pale mask. "But you want us close at hand, don't you?"

"Why do you think that?"

"Just a theory of mine."

She arched an eyebrow.

"Y'see," I said, "you got us livin' with a limited technology, but whenever somebody wants to know somethin' new, a hobby, you let 'em investigate whatever it is . . . less it's somethin' too big. I figure you're lettin' us work our way to you."

Her eyes narrowed, but she said nothing.

"I've talked to a whole buncha you people in my time, and I get the idea you're ashamed of what you are, that you don't want us to see it . . . 'least not 'til we're strong enough to swallow whatever it is you're hidin'."

"Suppose that is the truth," she said. "How would you feel about us?"

"Probably not much different from now."

"And how is that?"

"Tell you the truth, I don't feel much 'bout you one way or the other. You're just faces and voices is all, and you don't have any real mystery to you like there is to stuff like God. You're like distant cousins who never come to visit, and who nobody misses at family reunions."

The hint of a smile lifted the corner of her mouth. I had the idea my answer had pleased her, though for no reason I could fathom.

"Well," I said, standing, picking up my rifle. "It's been fun."

"Goodbye, Robert Hillyard," she said.

That irritated me, her knowing my name and the reverse not being true. "Why the hell won't you tell us your names?" I asked her.

She almost smiled again. "And you claim we have no mystery," she said.

*

DAYS, I WORKED IN THE HYDROPONIC SHED, a long low building of caulked boards and plastic foam two streets east of the hospital. The shed and its contents were my hobby, and I liked breathing its rich air, mixing chemicals, watering, strolling along the aisles and watching the green shoots that had pushed up. I would hum, make up songs and forget about everything else. Nights—at least for the next couple of weeks—I spent with Kiri. She had a duel coming up, and she was working herself up into that fierce calm in which she did her best fighting. It wasn't to be a duel to the death—she had stopped fighting those when Brad came along—but you could get hurt badly enough in a first blood duel, and she was deadly serious. Kiri was one of the best there was. It had been years since she'd lost, but now, in her thirties, she had to work harder than ever to keep her edge. Sometimes there was just no being around her during her preparation. She would snap and snarl and dare you to say Boo. On several occasions I thought about dropping over to Fornoff's and seeing how Callie was doing; but I managed to resist the impulse. Kiri needed me, and I knew that pretty soon she would have to give up dueling, and then she'd need me even more to help her get through that time. So whenever it became necessary for her to have some solitude, I would take a rifle and climb up to the north wall of the canyon and see if I could pick off an ape or two. The north wall was higher than the south, where the apes tended to congregate, and was cut off from the ape encampments by a deep cut that we had mined with explosives and otherwise booby-trapped. Though it was a clear shot, you couldn't see the apes very well

unless they started dancing around their fires; even then, the range was so extreme, you had to be lucky to score a hit. Funny thing was, they didn't seem to mind when you did; they just kept dancing.

One night Brad and I climbed up to top of the north wall. He was a lanky kid of thirteen and favored Kiri some, having her black hair and thin, hawkish face. We staked ourselves out behind a pile of loose rocks, rested our rifles across our knees and sat back to enjoy the night air. The weather had warmed a little; the sky was clear, and the stars were winking with such intensity they looked to be jumping from place to place. It was so quiet, the silence had a hum. There were fires on the south wall, but no apes in sight, and we got to talking about this and that. I could tell there was something weighing on his mind, but he couldn't seem to spit it out. Finally, though, he screwed up his courage and told me what was troubling him.

"Y'know Hazel Aldred?" he said.

"Big ol' girl?" I said. "Kinda pretty, but on the heavy side?"

"Yeah." He dug his heel into some loose gravel and set to carving out a trench.

"Well, what about her?"

"Nothin'," he said after a bit; he stared off toward the south wall.

I studied him and made a guess. "Don't tell me you been gettin' prone and lowdown with ol' Hazel?"

"How'd you know?" He pushed hair back from his eyes and stared at me fiercely. "Who told you?"

"It don't take no genius to figure it out." I aimed at a distant fire and squeezed off an imaginary round. "So what about it?"

"Well . . ." More digging with his heel.

"Didn't go so hot . . . That it?"

He ducked his eyes and mumbled, "Uh-huh."

I waited for him to say more, and when he kept quiet, I said, "Am I gonna have to tell this story?"

Silence.

"Lookit, Bradley," I said. "I been gettin' my share for a long time now, and I'm here to tell you, it don't always work out so hot, no matter how many times you done it."

"That ain't what Clay says."

"Shit! Clay! You believe everything he tells you?"

"Naw, but . . ."

"You're goin' on like you do!"

On the south wall a solitary ape capered for a moment in front of a fire, looking like

a spirit or a devil dancing inside the flame. To ease the pressure on Brad, I took aim and sent a round in the ape's direction.

"Didja get him?"

"Don't see him," I said. "But I think he just went to ground."

Wind sprayed grit into our faces.

"Anyway," I went on, "I can't tell you the times it's gone bad for me with the ladies. Mostly the limbs, y'know. Too much drinkin', or just a case of nerves. That what happened to you?"

"Naw." Bradley trained his rifle on the south wall, but had no target; his mouth was set grim.

"Guess I can't think of but one other thing that coulda happened," I said. "Maybe you was a little too excited to begin with."

"Yeah," he said sharply.

"And how'd she take that?"

He worried his lower lip. "She told me to clean off her dress," he said finally. "And everybody laughed."

"Everybody?"

"Clay and the rest."

"Damn, Bradley," I said. "I ain't gonna tell you not to go down with a crowd. I mean it happens that way sometimes. But it sure is a lot nicer to do it with just you and whoever."

"I ain't never gonna do it again," he said sullenly.

"Now I doubt that."

"I ain't!" He fired a round into nowhere and pretended to watch it travel.

"Why you feel that way?"

"I dunno."

"Talk to me, boy."

"I just don't know what to do," he said in a rush. "I mean I seen it, I seen guys hop on and it's over real quick, and the girl she acts like ain't nothin' happened. So what's the damn point?"

He fired a couple of more rounds. Some apes were dancing around a fire near the canyon mouth, but he hadn't been aiming that way.

"Listen up, son," I said. "Like I said, I ain't gonna tell you not to do what you been doin'. But I am gonna give you some advice. You listenin'?"

"Yes, sir." He rested the rifle across his knees and met my eyes in that steady, sober way of his mother's.

"All right." I leaned my rifle against my shoulder. "You find yourself a girl who wants to be with you, just you and nobody watchin', and then you take her somewhere nice, maybe up to that storage shack near Hobson's by the rear wall. Got a coupla boards missin', and if you look out, you can see the waterfall."

"Yeah, I know."

"All right. If you start gettin' too excited, you try to think 'bout somethin' else. Think 'bout your mama's duel or somethin' that don't have nothin' to do with the subject at hand. And then, when the time comes and she wants you in her, you go in slow, don't just jab it home, y'know. And when you're there, when you're in all the way, don't go crazy all at once. Just move your hips the tiniest bit, so little you barely feel you're movin', and then pull out maybe an inch and hold there, and then sink back in and pin her, grind into her, like all you want is to be right where you are or maybe more so. And y'know what that'll do?"

He was all eyes. "Un-uh?"

"No matter what happens after that," I told him, "like as not, you'll have been the first one to treat that little girl like you wanted to be all through her. Most guys, y'see, once they get in the saddle they don't think about what the girl's hopin' to feel. You do what I say, chances are she's gonna think you 'bout the best thing to come along since berries and cream."

"You swear?"

"You're hearin' the voice of experience," I said. "So take it to heart."

He mulled it over. "Y'know Sara Lee Hinton?"

"Oh, yeah!" I said. "Now that's the kinda girl you wanna be dealin' with, not an ol' plowhorse like Hazel." I mussed his hair. "But you ain't got a chance with Sara Lee."

"I do, too!" he said defiantly. "She told me so."

"Well, go to it then," I said. "And remember what I told you. You got it in mind?"

"Yeah," he said, and grinned.

I gave him a shove. "Let's do some shootin'."

Before long, the apes came out in force and took to dancing around their fires like black paper dolls brought to life. We fired round after round with no measureable result. Then as Brad fired, one of the apes did a dive and roll, and went out of sight. I'd seen that move many times; it was a part of their normal style of dancing. But I figured the boy could use another boost in confidence, and I gave him hug and shouted, "Goddamn! I believe you got him!"

*

IT WAS THREE NIGHTS LATER that Clay Fornoff turned Bad Man. Everyone had been expecting it since his trouble with Cindy Aldred, Hazel's big sister. Clay had been sweet-talking her, trying to persuade her to go out onto the flats with him . . . not that she needed much persuasion. Cindy's reputation was no better than her sister's. But even a girl like Cindy likes a little sweet talk, and she was playing hard to get when Clay lost his patience. He slapped her silly, dragged her into the bushes and had her rough and mean. The next day Cindy accused him, and he made no bones that he had done it. He could have suffered plenty, but Cindy must have been soft on him, or else he had something on her that stayed her anger. She asked for mercy, and so Clay was put on warning, which meant that we would all be watching him, that one more slip would buy him a one-way ticket onto the flats.

That night there was a full moon, a monstrous golden round that looked to be hovering just out of reach, and whose light made the canyon walls glow like they were made of light themselves. I was ambling along with Brad past Fornoff's, which had closed down a couple of hours earlier, taking the air, talking, when I heard something crash inside the store. In the corral a few doors down, the horses were milling, pushing against the fence. I shoved Brad behind me and eased around the corner of the store, holding my rifle at the ready. A shadow sprinted from the rear of the store and crossed the street to the corral, then ducked down so as to hide in the shadows. I aimed, held my breath, but before I could fire, Brad knocked the barrel off-line.

"It's Clay," he whispered.

"How the hell you know?"

"I just can tell!"

"That makes it worse. Stealin' from his daddy's store." I brought the rifle up again, but Brad caught hold of it. and begged me to hold back.

The shadow was duck-walking along beside the corral, and the horses, their eyes charged with moonlight, were moving in tight circles, bunched together, like eddies in a stream.

"Let go," I said to Brad. "I won't hurt him."

The shadow flattened against the wall of the dress shop next to the corral. I pushed Bradley back around the corner, aimed at the shadow and called out in a soft voice, "Don't you move now, Clay Fornoff!"

Clay didn't make a sound.

"Get out in the light where I can see you," I told him. "Or I'll kill you quick!"

After a second he did as I'd said. He was a muscular blond kid some five or six years older than Brad, and he was wearing a sheepskin coat that his daddy had bought him up in Windbroken. His mouth was full and petulant, his eyes set wide apart in a handsome

face, and in his hands were a shotgun and several boxes of shells. The wind lifted his long hair, drifted it across his eyes.

"What you plannin' to do with all the firepower?" I asked, walking out into the middle of the street.

He gave no reply, but stared daggers at Brad.

"I 'spect you oughta throw down the gun," I said.

He heaved it toward me.

"Shells, too. Just drop 'em, don't throw 'em."

When he had done what I asked, I walked over and gave him a cold eye. "I turn you in," I said, "they'll have you walkin' west without boots or blankets. And if you stick around, I'm bound to turn you in."

He wasn't afraid, I give him credit; he just stared at me.

"Lemme take a horse," he said.

I thought about that. If I were to tell old Fornoff what had happened, I figured he'd be glad to pay the price of the horse. "All right," I said. "Go ahead. And take the gun, too. Your daddy would want that. But I see you back here, I ain't gonna think twice 'bout how to handle it. Understand?"

All he did by way of thanking me was to grunt.

I kept him covered while he cut out a bay and saddled it. Brad hung back, acting like he was having no part of the matter, but saying nothing. I didn't blame him for not facing up to Clay; I would probably have done the same at his age.

Clay mounted up, pulled hard on the reins, causing the horse to rear. His head flew back, his hair whipping in the breeze, and the moon struck him full in the eyes, making it seem that wicked fires had suddenly been kindled there. For that split-second I could feel how it would be to give up on the law, to turn Bad Man, to take a long ride west of anywhere and hope you come to something, and if you didn't . . . Well, for the length of the ride at least you lived as wild and strong and uncaring as a tiger. But Clay spoiled the moment by cursing Brad. He wheeled the bay around, then, and spanked it into a gallop west, and in a second he was gone, with only a few puffs of frozen dust settling on the street to show he'd ever been.

Brad's chin was trembling. God only knows what part of life he had just watched riding out of sight. I patted him on the shoulder, but most of my thoughts were arrowing toward the next morning. It wasn't going to be easy to tell old Fornoff that his son had gone to the Devil for a shotgun and a couple of boxes of shells.

*

THE NIGHT BEFORE KIRI LEFT for Windbroken and her duel, a couple of months after Clay Fornoff had gone Bad, I tried to talk to her about the future, about when she planned to quit fighting, but she wouldn't have any part of it, and instead of gentling her as I'd intended, I just made her mad. We went to bed strangers, and the next morning she gave me a cold peck on the cheek and a perfunctory wave, and stalked out the door. I can't say I was angry at her . . . more frustrated. Sooner or later, I knew, she was going to be in for a bad time, and that meant bad times for me as well. And perhaps it was my frustration with this sense of imminent trouble that led me to seek out trouble on my own.

That same afternoon I dropped into Fornoff's to buy some seed. Fornoff and his wife were off somewhere, and Callie was the only one on duty. There were a few other customers, and she couldn't leave the counter to go in the back where the seed was stored, so I told her to send it over to the hydroponics building when she had time. She leaned forward, resting her elbows on the counter; her shirt belled, exposing the slopes of her breasts; every little move she made caused them to sway and signal that they were sweet and easy and free for the evening.

"What time you want 'em?" she asked.

"Any ol' time's fine," I said. "Whenever's convenient."

"Well, when do you need 'em?" She laid heavy emphasis on the word "need."

"Ain't nothin' urgent," I said. "But I would like 'em by tomorrow."

"Oh, we can manage that," said Callie, straightening. "I don't get 'round to it 'fore evenin', I'll walk 'em over myself after work."

"Whatever," I said, pretending that I hadn't picked up on the none-too-subtle undertone of the conversation; even after I had left the store, I kept up the pretense and pushed the matter from mind.

The main hydroponics shed was set directly behind the hospital, a long, low building of tin and structural plastic, so low that if you were standing up by my house, the hospital and a low ridge would have blocked it from view, even though it enclosed nearly a dozen acres. Inside, there was corn and tomatoes and lettuce and at the rear, next to the office—a little room with tin walls and a couple of pictures, a desk and a cot where I slept whenever Kiri was away—I'd erected some trellises and was growing grapes. I enjoyed the peace of the place and liked to walk up and down the aisles, checking the nutrients in the tanks, squeezing the tomatoes, petting the corn, generally just feeling at home and master of it all. The greenness of the leaves colored the air, creating a green shade under the ultraviolets, and the muted vibration of the generator created the rumor of a breeze that made all the plants whisper together. I spent a lot of time in the office reading, and that evening I was sitting at my desk with my feet up, reading

a book called *The Black Garden* written by a man from Windbroken, a fantasy about the world that used to be. I'd read it before, more than once, as had most other readers in the town. Books were expensive to make, and there weren't many of them. Most pretended to be histories, recounting the innumerable slaughters and betrayals and horrors that supposedly comprised our past, but this one was a refreshing change, featuring a number of color illustrations, several depicting a vast underground chamber floored with exotic plants and trees, threaded by canopied pathways, and the strange dark area that lay beyond it, a lightless cavern choked with black bushes and rife with secret doors that opened into little golden rooms where the inhabitants of the place explored the limits of pleasure. Their idea of pleasure, according to the author, was kind of nasty, but still it beat all to hell the stories of massacres and mass torture that you usually ran across in books. Anyway, I was leafing through the pages, wondering if what the author had written bore any relation to the truth and marvelling once again at the detail of the illustrations, when Callie poked her head in through the office door.

"Well, ain't you cozy?" she said, and came on in. "I left the seed out front." She glanced around the room, her eyes lingering on the cot. "Got yourself a regular home away from home here, don'tcha?"

"S'pose I do." I closed the book, looked at her; then, feeling antsy, I got to my feet and said, "I gotta check on somethin'."

I went out into the shed, fiddled with some dials on the wall, tapped them as if that were meaningful. At this point I wasn't sure I had the will or the need to get horizontal with Callie, but then she came out of the office, went strolling along an aisle, asking questions about the tanks and the pipes, touching leaves, and watching her, seeing her pretty and innocent-looking in the green darkness of my garden, I realized I didn't have a choice, that while she had not been foremost on my mind lately, I'd been thinking about her under the surface so to speak, and whenever a gap cleared in the cloudiness of my daily concerns with Kiri and Brad, there Callie would be. She walked off a ways, then turned back, face solemn, a hand toying with the top button of her shirt. I knew she was waiting for me to say or do something. I felt awkward and unsure, like I was Brad's age once again. Callie leaned against one of the tanks and sighed; the sigh seemed to drain off some of the tension.

"You look worried," she said. "You worryin' 'bout me?"

I couldn't deny it. I said, "Yeah," and by that admission I knew we would likely get past the worry. Which worried me still more. "It's Kiri, too," I went on. "I don't know ... I ..."

"You're feelin' guilty," she said, and ducked her head. "So am I." She glanced up at me. "I don't know what's happenin'. First off, I just wanted some fun ... That's all. And I

wouldn't have felt guilty 'bout that. Then I got to wantin' more, and that made me feel bad. But the worse I feel"—she flushed and did a half-turn away from me—"worse I feel, the more I want you." She let out another sigh. "Maybe we shouldn't do nothin', maybe we should just go our own ways."

I intended to say, "Maybe so," but what came out was, "I don't know 'bout you, but I don't think I could do it."

"Oh, sure you could," she said, downcast. "We both could."

I knew she meant what she was saying, but there was also a challenge in those words, a dare for me to prove what I had said, to prove that what I felt had the power of compulsion. I went over and put my hands on her waist; I could feel a pulse all through her. She looked up, holding my eyes, and I couldn't do anything else but kiss her.

There's a lot of false in everything that people do, particularly when it comes to the dealings between men and women. There's games played, lies traded, and fantasies given undue weight. But if those things are combined and cooked by the passage of time in just the right way, then a moment will arrive when everything that's false can get true in a flash, when the truest love can be made out of all that artifice, and once the games and the lies have been tempered into something solid and real, the process keeps on going, and you discover what worlds have changed, which lives have been diminished, which ones raised to glory. We can't know in advance what we make when we go to making love. If we could, maybe there would be a whole lot less of it made. But chances are, knowing in advance wouldn't change a thing, because those moments are so strong they can overwhelm most kinds of knowledge. Even knowing all I do now, I doubt I could have resisted the forces that drew Callie and me together.

We went into my office, and we lay down on the cot, and seeing her naked, I recognized that her sleek brown body was at home here among the growing things, that this was the place for us, surrounded by corn and green leaves and tomatoes bursting with juice, whereas Kiri's place was in that sad, barren little cabin up on the slope, with the apes howling above and a view of emptiness out the bedroom window. I felt that what Callie and me had was something growing and fresh, and that what I had with Kiri was dry and brittle and almost gone, and though it hurt me to think that, it pleased me to think it, too. I liked being with a woman who was gentle, who didn't force me to take what I wanted, one whose cries were soft and full of delight, not tormented and fierce. I liked the easy way she moved with me, the joyful greed with which she drew me in deep. I knew there were going to be trials ahead, but I wasn't ready to confront them. Kiri would be gone for ten days, and I wanted to relish each and every one.

There was a good deal of little girl in Callie. One minute she could be tender, all concern and care and thoughtfulness, and the next she might become petulant, stubborn, willful. That girlish side only came into play in good ways at the beginning—in bed, mostly—and it plumped up my ego to be able to feel paternal toward her, giving me a distant perspective on her that was as loving in its own fashion as the intimate perspective we shared when we lay tangled and sweaty on the cot in my office. And, too, she brought out the boy in me, a part of my character that I'd had to keep under wraps for the duration of my marriage. Love with Callie was a kind of golden fun, serious and committed, untainted with desperation. It wouldn't always be just fun; I was aware of that, and I was sure we would have our ups and downs. Yet I thought at the core of what we were was that tiger, that emblem of beauty and power, something that could be whirled away in the snow, but would always return to buck us up no matter how painful or difficult the circumstance. However, I had no idea of the difficulties that would arise when Kiri returned from Windbroken.

Once afternoon I came into the house whistling, direct from Callie's arms, and found Brad sitting in a straight-backed chair by the closed door of the bedroom. His somber look cut through my cheerful mood, and I asked why he was so low.

"Mama's home," he said.

That knocked me back a step. I covered my reaction and said, "That ain't nothin' to be all down in the mouth about, is it?"

"She lost." He said this in almost a questioning tone, as if he couldn't quite believe it.

There was nothing cheerful I could say to that. "She all right?"

"Got a cut on her arm is all. But that ain't what's bad."

"She's grievin', is she?"

He nodded.

"Well," I said. "Maybe we can nudge her out of it."

"I don't know," he said.

I ran my hands along my thighs as if pushing myself into shape, needing the feel of that solidity, because everything I had been anticipating had been thrown out of kilter. It seemed I could feel the weight of Kiri's despair through the wood of the door. I gave Bradley a distracted pat on the head and went on in. Kiri was sitting on the edge of the bed, bathed in the sunset that came russet through the shade, giving the air the color of old blood. Except for a bandage around her bicep, she was naked. She didn't move a muscle, eyes fixed on the floor. I sat beside her as close as I dared, hesitant to touch her; there had been times she'd been so lost in herself that she had lashed out at me when I startled her.

"Kiri," I said, and she shivered as if the sound had given her a chill.

Her face was drawn, cheeks hollowed, lips thinned. "I should have died," she said in a voice like ashes.

"We knew this time was coming."

She remained silent.

"Damn, Kiri," I said, feeling more guilt and self-recrimination than I had thought possible. "We'll get through this."

"I don't want that," she said, the words coming out slow and full of effort. "It's time."

"Bullshit! You ain't livin' up north no more."

Her skin was pebbled with the cold. I forced her to lie down and covered her with blankets. Then, knowing the sort of warming she most needed, I stripped and crawled in with her. I held her close and told her I didn't want to hear any more crap about it being her time, that here in Edgeville just because somebody lost a fight didn't mean they had to walk out into the Big Nothing and die. And I told her how Brad was relying on her, how we both were, feeling the bad place that the lie I'd been living made inside my chest. I doubt she heard me, or if she did, the words had no weight. Her head lolled to one side, and she stared at the wall, which grew redder and redder with the declining sun. I think she could have willed herself into dying right then, losing had made her so downhearted. I tried to love her, but she resisted that. I guess I was grateful not to have to lie in that way as well, and I just held onto her and talked until it got late, until I fell asleep talking, mumbling in her ear.

I had thought during the night that my attentions were doing Kiri some good, but if anything, her depression grew deeper. I spent day after day trying to persuade her of her worth, sparing time for little else, and achieved nothing. She would sit cross-legged by the window, staring out over the flats, and from time to time would give voice to savage-sounding chants. I feared for her. There was no way I could find to penetrate the hard shell of misery with which she had surrounded herself. Logic; pleading; anger. None of these tactics had the least effect. Her depression began to communicate to me. I felt heavy in my head, my thoughts were dulled and drooping, and I couldn't summon the energy for even the lightest work. Despite my concern for Kiri, I missed Callie—I needed her clean sweetness to counteract the despair that was poisoning me. I managed a couple of fleeting conversations with her during the second week after Kiri's return and told her I'd get out as soon as I could and asked her to take the late shift at the store, because it would be easier for me to get free after dark. And finally one night after Kiri had taken to chanting, I slipped out the door and hurried down through the town to Fornoff's.

I stood outside in the cold, waiting until the last few customers and then old Fornoff had gone, leaving Callie to close up. Just as she was about to lock the door, I darted inside, giving her a start. She had her hair up and was wearing a blue dress with a small check, and she looked so damn good, with her plush hips flaring from that narrow waist, I wanted to fall down and drown inside her. I tried to give her a hug, but she pushed me away. "Where the hell you been?" she said. "I been going crazy!"

"I told you," I said. "I had to . . ."

"I thought you was gonna tell her 'bout us?" she shrilled, moving deeper into the store.

"I'm gonna tell her!" I said, beginning to get angry. "But I can't right now. You know that."

She turned her back on me. "I don't mean nothin' to you. All that sweet talk was just . . . just talk."

"Goddammit!" I spun her around, catching her by the shoulders. "You think I been havin' a wonderful time this last week? I been livin' in hell up there! I wanna tell her, but I can't 'long as she's like she is now." It stung me to hear myself talking with such callousness about Kiri, but strong emotion was making me stupid. I gave Callie a shake. "You understand that, don'tcha?"

"No, I don't!" She pulled away and stalked off toward the storeroom. "Even if everything you say's true, I don't understand how anyone could be as peculiar as you say she is!"

"She ain't peculiar, she's just different!"

"Oh, well!" She shot me a scornful look. "I didn't know she was *differnt*. All I been hearin' 'til now is how she can't satisfy you no more."

"That don't mean she ain't good-hearted. And it don't mean she's peculiar. You know damn well I never said I didn't care 'bout her. I always said she was someone I respected, someone I loved. Not like I love you, I admit that. But it's love all the same. And if I have to kill her so we can get together, then it's sure as shit gonna kill whatever I feel for you." I came toward her. "You just don't understand 'bout Kiri."

"I don't wanna understand!"

"Where she comes from it's so bad, times get hard, they kill the weak ones for food, and when they feel they worthless, they'll take a walk out into nowhere so they won't be a burden. I know it's hard to understand what that kinda life does to you. I didn't understand for a long while myself."

Her chin quivered, and she looked away. "I'm scared," she said after a second. "I seen this before up in Windbroken, this exact same thing. 'Cept it was the woman who's mar-

ried. But it was the same. The man she loved, not her husband, this boy . . . When she couldn't leave her husband 'cause he was took ill, he like to gone crazy." Tears leaked from her eyes. "Just like I been doin'."

I started for her, but she backed into the dimly lit storeroom, holding up a hand to fend me off. "You keep away from me," she said. "I don't need no more pain than I got right now."

"Callie," I said, feeling helpless.

"Naw, I mean it." She kept on backing, beginning to sob. "I'm sorry for what I said about her, I truly am. I do feel bad for her. But I just can't keep on bein' self-sacrificin', You hear? I just can't. If it's gonna be over, I want it to be over now."

It was funny how everything we said and did in that dusty old store, in that unsteady lantern light, with the pot-bellied stove snapping in the background, seemed both ultimately false, like a scene from a bad play, and ultimately true at the same time. How it led us toward the one truth we were, how it commanded us to make every lying thing true. The things I said were things I couldn't keep from saying, even though some of them rang like tin to my ear.

"Damn, Callie," I said, moving after her into the storeroom. "You just gotta give it some time. I know it looks bad now, but believe me, it's gonna work out."

She fetched up against the wall next to a stack of bulging sacks of grain; the sacks were each stamped with fancy lettering and the picture of a rooster, and seemed to be leaking their faded colors up to stain the air the grainy brown of the burlap. A barrel full of shovels, blades up, to her right, and coils of rope on pegs above her. She let her head droop to one side as if she didn't want to see what would happen next.

"You believe me, don'tcha?" I said, coming up to her, losing the last of my reason in her smell of warmth and vanilla water, pulling her hips against mine.

"I want to," she said. "God knows, I want to."

Her breasts felt like the places where my hands had been formed, her mouth stopped my thirst. Berry lips and black eyes and brown skin all full of juice. I didn't know her, but I felt she knew me, and sometimes it seems that's the most of love, believing that the other sees you clear. I hitched up her skirt, muffling her protests with my mouth, and wrangled down the scrap of a thing that covered her heat, and then I lifted her up a bit and pushed inside, pinning her against the rough boards. She was like honey melting over me. I tangled a hand in her hair, yanking back her head and baring her neck. I kissed her throat and loved the simple sounds she made. In the dimness her dazed expression looked saintly, and her movements were frantic, her big rear end pounding the planking, one foot hooked behind my knee. "Oh, God! I love you, Bob," she

said. "I love you so much." The shovel blades were quivering in the barrel, the coils of rope were jiggling; a trowel suspended from a nail started to clank in rhythm with us. It was a cluttered act, bone-rattling and messy. Our teeth clicked together in a kiss, and my palm picked up splinters as I groped for purchase on the wall. But it was pure and urgent and the best thing that had happened to me in a long time. Callie began saying "love" every time I plunged into her as if I were dredging love up from the place it had been hiding. And she said other things, too—gushes of breath that might have been words in a strange windy language, a language whose passion made me feel twice the man I was and goaded me to drive harder into her. Then she was pushing at me, saying "Oh, God," her tone suddenly gone desperate, her expression no longer dazed, but horrorstruck, saying, "Stop it . . . stop!" and staring past my shoulder. "What is it?" I asked, trying to gentle her, but she shoved me hard and I slipped out of her. I turned, my cock waving stupidly in the air, and saw Kiri standing at the door in her black dueling clothes, her face stony with anger.

"Kiri," I said, trying to stuff myself back into my pants, feeling shame and fear and sorrow all at once.

She whirled on her heel and stalked toward the door.

"Kiri!" I stumbled after her, buttoning my pants. "Wait!"

I caught at her shoulder, spinning her half around, and before I could speak another word, she hit me three times, twice in the face, and the last—a blow delivered with the heel of her hand to the chest—taking my wind and sending me onto my back. Something black hovered over me as I lay curled on the floor, fighting to breathe, and when my vision cleared, I saw Kiri's dark face looming close.

"Can you hear me?" she asked in a voice empty as ashes.

I nodded.

"What I'm doing now," she said, "isn't because of this. It's because of who I am. You're not to blame yourself for what I do. Are you listening?"

Uncomprehending, I managed to gasp out, "Yes."

"Are you sure? What I'm going to do isn't because of you and . . . The girl." She made the "the girl" sound like "the worm" or "the rat."

"Wha . . ." I gagged, choked.

"But I will not forgive what you've done," she said, and struck me in the jaw, sending white lights shooting back through my eyes and into my skull. When I regained consciousness, she was gone.

*

IT TOOK ME MOST OF THAT NIGHT to discover that Kiri had left Edgeville, that she'd taken one of Marvin Blanks' horses and ridden out onto the flats. I knew she was gone for good. I would have ridden after her straightaway, but I didn't want to leave without telling Brad, and he was nowhere to be found. I decided I'd give him a couple of hours, and then I was going, no matter whether he had returned or not. I sat on the bed, with Callie beside me, and we waited, waited, each minute like a glass prison that lasted too long to be measured except by its weight and its silence. Callie had put on her riding clothes, and I'd quit trying to persuade her to stay behind. Her arguments were sound: it was as much her fault as mine, we were in this together, and so forth. I didn't want to go alone, anyhow. That was the main reason I'd left off arguing with her. The honorable reason, the reason I kept telling myself was the most important one, and maybe the one that had the most chance of working out to be true, of being the kind of hopeful lie that breeds a passionate truth, was that I needed to be honest with Brad about Callie, about everything that had happened, because that was the only way that any good could come of it for him, for Callie and me. Having her along was part of that honesty. To be considering all this at the time may appear self-absorbed, but I have always been a pragmatic soul, and though I cared about Kiri, I didn't expect to see her again; I knew that whenever she made a decision, she decided it to death, and by giving thought to Brad and Callie, I was hoping to salvage something of the mess I'd made. It might be that I didn't deserve anything good, but we were foolish people, not evil, and our lives were hard enough without demanding perfection of either ourselves or one another. Living on the Edge, You learned to make the best of things and not waste too much time in recriminations, and you left the indulgence of self-pity to those who could afford the luxury of being assholes.

Brad came home about an hour after first light, disheveled and sleepy-looking, his hair all stuck up in back. He stared at me, at my bruises, at Callie, and asked where his mama was.

"Let's go find her," I said. "I'll tell you what happened on the way."

He backed away from me, his pale face tightening just like Kiri's might have. "Where's she gone?"

"Listen to me, son," I said. "There'll be time later for you to get all over my butt if you want. But right now findin' your mama's what's important. I waited for you 'cause I knew you'd want to help. So let's just go now."

Callie eased back behind me as if Brad were hurting her with his stare.

"She's rode out," he said. "That it?"

I said, "Yeah."

"What'd you do?"

"Bradley," I said. "Ten seconds more, and I'm gone."

He peered at Callie and me fiercely, trying to see the rotten thing we'd done. "Hell, I reckon I don't need no explanation," he said.

*

I COULD WRITE VOLUMES about the first days of our ride; nothing much happened during them, but their emptiness was so profound that emptiness itself became intricate and topical, and the bleakness of the land, the frozen hardpan with its patches of dead nettles and silverweed, the mesas rising in the distance like black arks, became a commentary on our own bleakness. The mountains faded into smoky blue phantoms on the horizon, the sky was alternately bleached and clouded gray. Now and then I'd glance at Callie on my left, Brad on my right. With their dark hair flying in the wind and their grave expressions, they might have been family, and yet they never spoke a word one to the other, just maintained a remorseless concentration on the way ahead. By day we followed Kiri's sign, taking some hope from the fact that she wasn't trying to cover her tracks. Nights, we camped in the lee of boulders or a low hill, with wind ghosting from the dark side of forever, and our cooking fire the only light. Snow fell sometimes, and although most of it would melt by the time the sun was full up, what had collected in the hoofprints of the horses would last a while longer, and so in the mornings we would see a ghostly trail of white crescents leading back in the direction of home.

The first night out I let Brad vent his anger over what had happened, but it wasn't until the second night that I really talked with him about it. We were sitting watch together by the fire, our rifles beside us, and Callie was asleep beneath some blankets a few yards away, tucked between two boulders. Despite Kiri's parting gift of absolution, I took the blame for everything; but he told me that Kiri wouldn't have said what she had unless she'd meant it.

"She woulda gone ridin' sooner or later," he said. "She wanted you to know that. But that don't mean *I* forgive you."

"Whatever," I said. "But I 'spect you're liable to forgive me 'fore I forgive myself."

He just sniffed.

"I never told you I was perfect," I said. "Fact, ain't I always tellin' you how easy it is for men and women to screw each other up without meanin' harm to nobody? I thought you understood about all that."

'Understandin' ain't forgivin'.'

"That's true enough," I said.

He shifted so that the firelight shined up one side of his face, leaving the other side in inky shadow, as if his grim expression were being eclipsed. His lips parted, and I thought he was going to say something else, but he snapped his mouth shut.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Nothin'," he said.

"Might as well spit it out."

"All right." He glared at Callie. "She shouldn't oughta be here. I mean if we find mama, she ain't gonna want to see her with us."

"That may be," I said. "But Callie's got her own needs, and she needs to be here." Brad made to speak, but I cut him off. "You know damn well if your mama don't wanna be found, we ain't gonna find her. We all *hope* we find her, and we're gonna try hard. But if we don't, then it's important for every one of us that we did try. You may not like Callie, but you can't deny her that."

He gave a reluctant nod, but looked to be struggling over something else.

"Don't hold back now," I said.

"I thought ..." He turned away, probably to hide his face; there was a catch in his voice when he spoke again. "I don't understand why ... Why you and mama had to ... Why you ..."

"I can't tell you why this happened. Shit, I never even could figure out how things got started 'tween me and your mama. The two of us together never seemed to make any damn sense. We loved each other, but I think love was something that came from need, 'stead of the other way around."

Brad jerked his thumb toward Callie. "It make more sense with her?"

"It might have, bad as that may sound to you. But now ... now, I don't know. This all mighta killed it. Maybe that's how it should be. Anyhow, that ain't nothin' we have to deal with this minute."

The wind made a shivery moan down through the rocks, and the flames whipped sideways. Brad lowered his eyes, scooped up a handful of dust, let it sift through his fingers. "Don't guess there's any more to be said."

I let his words hang.

"I keep thinkin' 'bout mama out there," he said after a bit. "I keep seein' her like ... like this little black dot in the middle of nowhere." He tossed dust into the fire. "Y'figure anything lives out here?"

"Just us, now." I spat into the fire, making the embers sizzle. "Maybe a tiger or two what wanders out to die."

"What 'bout Bad Men?"

"Why'd they want to be way out here? It's more likely they're livin' north of Edgeville up in the hills."

"Clay told me he'd met somebody lived out here."

"Well, Clay wasn't no big authority now, was he?"

"He wasn't no liar, neither. He said this fella come in once in awhile to buy shells. Never bought nothin' but shells. The fella told him he lived out on the flats with a buncha other men. He wouldn't say why. He told Clay if he wanted to learn why, he'd have to come lookin' for 'em."

"He's just havin' some fun with Clay."

"Clay didn't think so."

"Then he was a fool."

Brad gave me a sharp look, and I had the feeling he was seeing me new. "He ain't a fool just 'cause you say he is."

"Naw," I said. "There's a hell of a lot more reason than that, and you know it."

He made a noise of displeasure and stared into the flames. I stared at them, too, fixing on the nest of embers, a hive of living orange jewels shifting bright to dark and back again as they were fanned by the wind. The glow from the fire carved a bright hollow between the two boulders where Callie was sleeping. I would have liked to have crawled under the blankets with her and taken whatever joy I could in the midst of that wasteland; but Kiri was too much on my mind. I wished I could have limited my vision of her to a black dot; instead, I pictured her hunkered down chanting in the darkness, making her mind get slower and slower, until it grew so slow she would just sit there and die.

I straightened and found Brad looking at me. He met my eyes, and after a long moment he slumped and let his head hang; from that exchange I knew we had been thinking pretty much the same thing. I put my hand on his arm; he tensed, but didn't shrug it off as he might have the night before. I saw how worn down and tired he was.

"Go on get some sleep," I told him.

He didn't argue, and before long he was curled up under his blankets, breathing deep and regular.

I lay back, too, but I wasn't sleepy. My mind was thrumming with the same vibration that underscored the silence, as if all the barriers between my thoughts and the dark emptiness had been destroyed, and I felt so alive that it seemed I was floating up a fraction of an inch off the ground and trembling all over. A few stars were showing as pale white points through thin clouds. I tried to make them into a constellation, but couldn't come up with a shape that would fit them; they might have been the stars of my life,

scattered from their familiar pattern, and I realized that even if we could find Kiri, I was never going to be able to put them back the way they had been. Life for me had been a kind of accommodation with questions that I'd been too cowardly or just too damn stupid to ask, and that was why it had been blown apart so easily. If Kiri hadn't been the victim of the piece, I thought, having it blown apart might have been a good result.

I made an effort to see what lay ahead for us. The way things stood, however, there was no figuring it out, and my thoughts kept drifting back to Kiri. I stared off beyond the fire, letting my mind empty, listening to the wind scattering grit across the stones. At last I grew drowsy, and just before I woke Callie to stand her watch, I could have sworn I saw one of the tiny pale stars dart off eastward and then plummet toward the horizon; but I didn't think much about it at the time.

*

FIVE DAYS OUT, AND NO SIGN OF KIRI. Her trail had vanished like smoke in a mirror, and I did not know what to do. Five days ride from Edgeville was considered an unofficial border between the known and unknown, and it was generally held that you would be risking everything by continuing past that limit. Nobody I'd ever met had taken up the challenge, except maybe for the man in the bubble car. We had enough supplies to keep going for a couple of more days, yet I felt we'd be wasting our time by doing so and I decided to bring the matter up that night.

We camped in a little depression among head-high boulders about fifty yards from the base of a hill that showed like a lizard's back against the stars, and as we sat around the fire, I made my speech about returning.

After I had done, Callie said with some force, "I ain't goin' back 'til we find her."

Brad made a noise of disgust. "You got nothin' to say about it," he told her. "Wasn't for you, wouldn't none of this happened."

"Don't you be gettin' on me!" she snapped. "There's a lot about all this you ain't got the brains to understand."

"I'll say whatever the hell I want," he came back.

"Both of you shut up," I said.

The fire popped and crackled; Brad and Callie sat scowling at the flames.

"We're not gonna argue about this," I said. "Everybody knows what happened, and we all got reason for being here. We started together and we're gonna finish together. Understand?"

"I understand," said Callie, and Brad muttered under his breath.

"Say it now," I told him. "Or keep it to yourself."

He shook his head. "Nothin'."

"We'll go on a couple of more days," I said after a pause. "If we ain't found her by then, there ain't gonna be no findin' her."

Brad's face worked, and once again he muttered something.

"What say?"

"Nothin'."

"Don't gimme that," I said. "Let's hear it. I don't want you pissin' and moanin' anymore. Let's get everything out in the open."

His cheekbones looked as if they were going to punch through the skin. "If you gave a damn about mama, you wouldn't stop 'til we found her. But all you wanna do is to get back home and crawl in bed with your whore!" He jumped to his feet. "Whyn't you just do that? Go on home! I don't need you, I'll find her myself."

A hot pressure had been building in my chest, and now it exploded. I launched myself at Brad, driving him back against one of the boulders and barring my forearm under his jaw. "You little shit!" I said. "Talk to me like that again, I'll break your goddamn neck."

He looked terrified, his eyes tearing, but all hell was loose in me and I couldn't stop yelling at him. Callie tried to pull me off him, but I shoved her aside.

"I'm sick'n tired of you remindin' me every damn minute 'bout what it is I done," I said to Brad. "I know it to the goddamn bone, y'hear? I don't need no fuckin' reminders!"

Suddenly I had a glimpse of myself bullying a thirteen-year-old. My anger drained away, replaced by shame. I let Brad go and stepped back, shaking with adrenaline. "I'm sorry," I said. But he was already sprinting off into the night and I doubt he heard me.

"He'll be back," said Callie from behind me. "It'll be all right."

I didn't want to hear that anything was all right, and I moved away from her; but she followed and pressed against my back, her arms linking around my waist. I didn't want tenderness, either; I pried her arms loose.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"What the hell you think?"

"I mean with us. I know you can't be lovin' to me with Bradley around. But it's more'n that."

"Maybe," I said. "I don't know."

I stepped away from the fire, moving off into the dark; the hardpan scrunched beneath my bootheels. The dark seemed to be pouring into my eyes. I felt that everything was hardening around me, locking me into a black mood, a black fate.

"You know what we need to do?" I said bitterly, not even looking at Callie. "We need

to just keep on ridin' . . . more'n a couple of days, I mean. We should just keep ridin' and ridin' 'til that's the only thing we can do, 'til we're nothin' but bones and saddles."

I guess I figured she would object to that, promote some more optimistic viewpoint, but she said nothing, and when I looked back at her, I saw that she was sitting by the fire with her knees drawn up, holding her head in her hands.

*

I'D EXPECTED MY MOOD WOULD LIFT with the morning, but it did not, and the weather seconded my gloom, blowing up to near a gale, driving curtains of snow into our faces and obscuring us one from another. I rode with a scarf knotted about my face, my collar up, my eyebrows frosted. My thoughts revolved in a dismal cycle . . . less thoughts, really, than recognitions of a new thing inside me, or rather the breaking of some old thing and the new absence that had replaced it, solid and foreboding as the shadowy granite of the hills. Something had changed in me forever. I tried to deny it, to reason with myself, saying that a flash of temper and a moment's bitterness couldn't have produced a marked effect. But then I thought that maybe the change had occurred days before, and that all my fit of temper had achieved was to clear away the last wreckage of my former self. I felt disconnected from Callie and Bradley. Emotionless and cold, colder than the snowy air. My whole life, I saw, was without coherence or structure. An aimless scattering of noises and heats and moments. Recognizing this, I felt to an extent liberated, and that puzzled me more. Maybe, I thought, this was how Bad Men really felt; maybe feeling this way was a stage in the making of a Bad Man. That notion neither cheered nor alarmed me. It had no color, no tonality. Just another icy recognition. Whenever Bradley or Callie drifted close, I saw in their faces the same hardbitten glumness, and whenever we made eye contact, there was no flash of hatred or love or warmth. I recalled what I'd said the night before about riding until we were nothing but bones and saddles, and I wondered now if that might not have been prophetic.

Toward mid-afternoon, the wind dropped off and the snow lightened. What I'd thought were snow peaks on the horizon proved to be clouds, but rocky brown hills burst from the hardpan, leaving a narrow channel between them along which we were passing. Though there was no sign of life other than patches of silverweed, though the landscape was leached and dead, I had a sense that we were moving into a less barren part of the flats. The sky brightened to a dirty white, the sun just perceptible, a tinny glare lowering in the west. I felt tense and expectant. Once I thought I spotted something moving along the crest of a hill. A tiger, maybe. I unsheathed my rifle and kept a closer watch, but no threat materialized.

That evening we camped in a small box canyon cut about a hundred yards back into the side of the hill. I did for the horses, while Bradley and Callie made a fire, and then, with full dark still half-an-hour off, not wanting any conversation, I went for a walk to the end of the canyon, passing between limestone walls barely wider than my armspan and rising thirty and forty feet overhead. A few thorny shrubs sprouted from the cliffs, and there was an inordinate amount of rubble underfoot as if the place had experienced a quake. In certain sections, the limestone was bubbled and several shades darker than the surrounding rock, a type of formation I'd never seen before. I poked around in the rubble, unearthing a spider or two, some twigs; then, just as I was about to head back to the campsite, I caught sight of something half-buried under some loose rock, something with a smooth unnatural-looking surface. I kicked the rocks aside, picked it up. It was roughly rectangular in shape, about three inches long and two wide, and weighed only a couple of ounces; it was slightly curved, covered with dust, and one edge was bubbled and dark like the limestone. I brushed away the dust, and in the ashen dusk I made out that its color was metallic gold. I turned it over. The inner surface was covered with padding.

It wasn't until a minute or so later, as I was digging through the rubble, looking for more pieces, that I put together the fragment in my hand with the golden helmet that the driver of the bubble car had worn. Even then I figured that I was leaping to a conclusion. But the next moment I uncovered something that substantiated my conclusion beyond a doubt. At first I thought it a root of some sort. A root with five withered, clawed projections. Then I realized it was a mummified hand. I straightened, suddenly anxious, suspicious of every skittering of wind, sickened by my discovery. At length I forced myself to start digging again. Before long I had uncovered most of a body. Shreds of bleached, pale red rags wrapping the desiccated flesh. Bigger fragments of the helmet. And most pertinently, a hole the size of my fist blown in the back of the skull; the edges of the bone frothed into a lace of tiny bubbles. Gingerly, I turned the body over. The neck snapped, the head broke away. I fought back the urge to puke and turned the head. Black slits of eyes sewn together by brittle eyebrows. It was the face of a thousand-year-old man. There was no exit wound in the front of the skull, which meant—as I'd assumed—that the wound could not have been made by a rifle, nor by any weapon with which I was familiar.

It's strange how I felt at that moment. I wasn't afraid, I was angry. Part of my anger was related to memories of that pitiful little man and his red car and his foolhardiness with the apes; but there was another part I didn't understand, a part that seemed to bear upon some vast injustice done me, one I could feel in my guts but couldn't name. I held

onto the anger. It was the first strong thing I'd felt all day, and I needed it to sustain me. I could understand why apes danced, why tigers howled. I wanted to dance myself, to howl, to throw some violent shape or sound at the sky and kill whatever was responsible for my confusion.

I think my mind went blank for awhile; at any rate, it seemed that a long time passed before I next had a coherent thought. I didn't know what to do. My instincts told me that we should head back to Edgeville, but when I tried to settle on that course, I had the sudden suspicion that Edgeville was more dangerous than the flats, that I was well out of there. I knew I had to tell Brad and Callie, of course. Nothing would be gained by hiding this from them. I just wasn't sure what it all meant, what anything meant. My picture of the world had changed. Everything that had seemed to make sense now seemed pitiful and pointless, thrown out of kilter by the last day's ride and my discovery of the body; I couldn't see anything in my past that had been done for a reason I could understand. I was sure of one thing, however, and though knowing it was not an occasion for joy, it gave me a measure of confidence to be sure of something. The flats were not empty. Something was living out there, something worse than Bad Men. And I knew we must be close to whatever it was. We might die if we were to stay, but I doubted now that it would be by starvation.

As I've said, I intended to tell Brad and Callie about the dead man, but I wasn't eager to do it. At the end of the canyon, the stone sloped up at a gentle incline, gentle enough so I could scramble up it, and after I had done this, I walked along the rim of the canyon wall until I could see the glow of our fire. I sat down, my feet dangling, and went with my thoughts, which were none of them of the happy variety. I still didn't know what course to follow, but the more I studied on it, the more I wanted to find out what had killed the man in the bubble car. It was a fool's mission. Yet I could not let go of the idea; my hold on it seemed unnaturally tenacious, as if it were something I'd waited all my life to pursue. At last I wore out on thinking and just sat there stargazing, watching a thin smoke rise from our fire.

I'm not sure when I first noticed that some of the stars were moving; I believe I registered the fact long before I began to be alarmed by it. There were three stars involved, and instead of falling or arcing across the sky, as would have been the case with meteors, they were darting in straight lines, hovering, then darting off again. What eventually alarmed me was that I realized they were coming closer, that they were following the line of the hills. And what put the fear of God into me was when one of them began to glow a pale green and from it a beam of emerald brilliance lanced down to touch the slopes and I heard a distant rumble. At that I jumped to my feet and raced along the rim

of the canyon, fear a cold knot in my groin, shouting to Brad and Callie, who peered up at me in confusion.

“Get the horses!” I yelled. “Bring ’em on up here! Now!”

They exchanged concerned glances.

“What’s the matter?” Brad called out.

I looked out across the flats; the three stars were getting very close.

“Now!” I shouted. “Hurry, damn it! Trouble’s comin’!”

That got them moving.

By the time they reached me with the horses, I could see that the three stars weren’t shaped like stars at all, but like the spearpoints the apes used: curved cylinders with a blunt tip at one end, thirty or forty feet long, with a slightly convex underside. I couldn’t make out any details, but I had no desire to stick around and observe. I swung onto my horse, reined it in, and said to Bradley and Callie, “Member that cave we spotted up top?”

“What are they?” asked Callie, staring at the three stars.

“We’ll find out later,” I said. “Come on! Head for the cave!”

It was a wild ride we had, plunging up the dark slope, with the horses sliding on gravel, nearly losing their footing, but at length we made it to the cave. The entrance was just wide enough for the horses, but it widened out inside and looked to extend pretty far back into the hill. We hobbled the horses deep in the cave, and then crept back to the entrance and lay flat. A couple of hundred feet below, those three glowing things were hovering over the canyon we had just vacated. It was an eerie thing to see, the way they drifted back and forth with a unsteady, vibrating motion, as if lighter than air and being trembled by an updraft. They were bigger than I’d judged, more like sixty feet long, and the white light appeared to be flowing across their surfaces—metal surfaces, I supposed—and was full of iridescent glimmers. The light was hard to look at close up; it made your eye want to slide off it. They made a high-pitched, quivering noise, something like a flute, but reedier. That sound wriggled into my spine and raised gooseflesh on my arms.

I was more frightened than I’d been in all my life. I shivered like a horse that has scented fire and stared with my eyes strained wide until I was poured so full of that strange glittering white light, all my thoughts were drowned. Then I yanked at Callie and Brad, and hauled them after me into the cave. We scuttled back deep into the darkness and sat down. The horses snorted and shifted about; their noises gave me comfort. Brad asked what we were going to do, and I said, what did he want to do? Throw rocks at the damn things? We’d just sit tight, I said, until our company had departed. I could barely

see him, even though he was a couple of feet away, but talking to him stiffened my spine some. Yet with half my mind I was praying for the things outside just to go away and leave us be. I could still hear their weird fluting, and I saw a faint white glow from the cave mouth.

Callie asked again what I thought they were. I said I reckoned they must be some sort of machines.

"I can see that," she said, exasperated. "But who you figger's flyin' 'em?"

I hadn't really had time to think about that until then, but still, it struck me as particularly stupid on my part that I hadn't already come up with the answer to her question.

"The Captains," I said. "Has to be them. Couldn't nobody else make a machine like that."

"Why'd they be chasin' us?" Brad asked.

"We don't know they are," said Callie. "They could just be after doin' their own business."

"Then why'd we run?"

I realized I hadn't told them about the dead man, and I decided that now wasn't the time—it would be too much bad news all at once.

"We did right to run," I said. "Believe me, we did right."

"Sides," said Callie, "we don't know for absolute sure it's the Captains. I mean what your pa says makes good sense, but we don't know for sure."

We were silent for a bit and finally Brad said, "You think mama run into them things."

I gave a sigh that in the enclosed space of the cave seemed as loud as one of the horses blowing out its breath. "I was watchin' 'em for a long time 'fore I hollered," I said. "From the way they're patrollin' the hills, I figger that's possible."

There followed another silence, and then he said, "Maybe after they gone, maybe we should try trackin' 'em."

I was about to say that we'd be doing good just to get shut of them, when the cave mouth was filled with an emerald flash, and I was flung back head over heels, and the next thing I knew I was lying in pitch-darkness with dirt and stone chips in my mouth, and my ears ringing. Some time later I felt Brad's hands on my chest, heard him say, "Dad?". Then I heard the horses whinnying, their hooves clattering as they tried break free of their hobbles. I wanted to sit up but was too woozy.

"Callie," I said.

"She's gone to see if there's a way out."

"Wha . . ." I broke off and spat dirt.

"The entrance is blocked. Must be a ton of rock come down over it."

"Shit!" I said, touching the back of my head; there was a lump coming. Patches of shiny blackness swam before my eyes. "The horses awright?"

"Just scared."

"Yeah," I said. "Me, too."

I sat up cautiously, groped for Brad, found his shoulder and gave it a squeeze. I couldn't think; I was so numb that I only felt the first trickles of fear. It was as if the explosion was still taking place in my skull, a dark cloud of smoke and splintered rock boiling up and whirling away the last of my good sense.

Seconds later Callie's voice called from a distance, telling us to come ahead, she'd found something.

Still dizzy, I let Brad take the lead, going in a crouch deeper into the hill, and after a minute I saw stars and a ragged oval of blue-dark sky.

Callie's voice came again, issuing from beyond the opening. "See it?"

"Almost there!" I told her.

The opening was set about six feet up in the wall, not too high and easily wide enough for a man to pass through, but no horse was ever going to leave the cave that way. Without the horses, I thought, we might as well have died in the explosion. However, when I pulled myself out into the chill air beside Callie and saw what she had found, I forgot all about our plight.

On this side of the hill, too, the hardpan flowed off toward the horizon. But there was one distinct difference. Below us, its rim no more than a few hundred yards from the base of the hill, lay a large crater, roughly circular and perhaps a mile in diameter, like a bowl brimful of golden light. Light so brilliant it obscured all but the deepest cuts and bulges in the crater's rock walls. It resembled a glowing golden sore on a cracked, stretched-tight hide. The three flying machines were flitting back and forth above it with the agitation of mites swarming above a dead squirrel, and as we watched they descended into the crater, vanishing beneath the rim. After they had gone out of view, none of us moved or said a thing. I can't speak for Brad or Callie, but for my part, though I'd already had my basic notion of how the world worked shaken considerable, the sight of the crater completely shattered all my old conceptions. Maybe it was simply the size of the thing that affected me . . . The size and the upward pour of light. Maybe all the little wrong bits that had come before had had the irritating effect of putting a few sand grains in my boots, and now this, this immense wrongness, had scraped the skin off my soles and left me unable to walk or do anything other than reckon with shock and bewilderment. Even a half hour earlier, I might—if asked—have given a fair approximation of

where I stood. With my son and my lover, six days out on the Flats from Edgeville, I would have said. In the heart of the wasteland where once the old world flourished, countless centuries after the disaster that ended it. I would have thought this a fine answer, and I would have been certain of my place and purpose. Now I felt I was in the company of strangers, in the midst of a great darkness with light below, a barren place of unrelieved abstraction that offered no clue as to its nature. Perhaps the depth of my reaction seems unreasonable. After all, we had long supposed that the Captains must have flying machines, and though I had never seen one, I shouldn't have been so thoroughly disconcerted by the sight. And I *had* seen craters before, albeit never one this big. But it was as if all the tidy structures of my life had been abolished, all rules of logic broken, and I could not come up with a new picture of the world that would fit inside my head. I realize now that this breakdown had been a long time coming, that what had provoked it had been working on me for days; but at the time it seemed sudden, catastrophic, totally disorienting.

It was Callie who broke the silence, saying we had to go down to the crater, we had no other choice. I am not clear how I responded; I recall saying something about the horses, about how even if we went down, we'd have to come back and shoot them, we couldn't leave them to die of thirst. There was a little more conversation, but I cannot recall it. Eventually we began picking our way down the slope, glancing up now and again to see that the crater had swelled and grown brighter, a vast golden pit into which we were preparing to descend.

We were, I'd estimate, about fifty feet from the base of the hill when a woman's voice hailed us from the darkness and ordered us to drop our rifles. I was so bewildered and startled, I obeyed without hesitation. I guess it seemed right given the circumstance that voices should issue from the dark and command us. I heard footsteps crunching nearby, caught sight of shadowy figures moving toward us through the rocks. Lots of them. Maybe thirty, maybe more. They assembled about us, some gaining detail against the nimbus of light shining up from the crater behind them, yet most of them remaining shadows, looking evil as crows in their slouch hats and long coats.

"Just who are you people?" asked another voice, this one a man's, deeper than the woman's, but softer and oddly familiar.

We gave our names, said we were from Edgeville.

"Bob Hillyard," said the voice musingly. "I'll be damned."

"That's his boy with him," said someone else. "And that girl there works for ol' Fornoff."

"Just who in creation are you?" I asked, not wanting to let on how intimidated I

was—I knew we had fallen in with Bad Men. I should have felt more afraid than I did, but I was still so confused, so daunted by the overall situation, the threat these men presented did not seem of moment.

“You know some of us,” said still another voice. “Leastways, I bet you know me.”

A match flared, caught on a twist of something in one of the figure’s hands, and as he moved nearer, holding the torch so that it shined up onto his face, making ghoulish shadows under the eyes, I saw it was Clay Fornoff. Heavier; chin covered with pale stubble; wearier-looking. But still with that petulant sneer stamped onto his face.

“Wasn’t for this man here, I’d never have taken the ride,” he said.

“’Spect you owe him one, don’tcha, Clay?” said somebody.

“You know I didn’t have no choice,” I told him.

“Don’t matter,” he said. “Turns out you did me a favor. But you didn’t have that in mind, didja now? You was just runnin’ me off to die.”

A huge shadow moved up beside Clay and nudged him aside.

“You got a score to settle,” he said to Clay in that soft voice, “deal with it later.” He moved full into the light of the torch, and I saw what I’d begun to suspect seconds before: it was Wall. A monstrous slab of a man with owl-tufted brows, a shaggy graying beard, thick lips and a bulging forehead, his face as expressionless as an idol’s. A waterfall of dark hair spilled from under his hat to his shoulders.

“Goddamn, Bob,” he said to me. “Man shoots as poorly as you got no business this far out on the flats.”

I’d always admired Wall, and that his most salient memory of me was my poor shooting eye made me feel stupid and childlike. Kind of like being dressed down by your boyhood hero.

“Ain’t like I wanna be here,” I said. “Just had somethin’ needed doin’.”

Wall studied Callie and Brad, who were gawping at him, apparently overwhelmed by the sight of this enormous man.

“Feelin’ confused, are ye?” he said with mild good humor, as if he were talking to children. “Seem like even simple things like right and left ain’t what they used to be?”

That struck me as odd, that he would offer such an accurate analysis of my mental condition and do it so casually, as if how I felt was something usual, something any fool could have predicted.

“What the hell you know about it?” I asked him.

“Hits ever’body the same,” he said. “The conditionin’ starts breakin’ down ’bout five days out. Time a man gets this far, he’s usually got more questions in him than answers. “Y’see”—he coughed, spat up a hocker and aimed it off to his right—“it ain’t only doc-

torin' you get at the hospitals. The Captains condition you to be happy with your lot. It's sorta like hypnotizin' ye. Takes a mighty strong reason for a man to break down the conditionin'. Seems powerful emotion's 'bout the only cure." He cocked his head, gave me a searching look. "What brings ye here?"

"My wife Kiri," I said, still trying to absorb what he had told us. "She lost a duel and come out here to die."

"Kiri," said Wall. "I remember her. She was a good fighter."

Bradley piped up, "We figger she's down in that hole."

Wall eyes flicked toward him. "She might be at that."

From the cautious flatness of his tone, I had the impression that if Kiri was down in the crater, it wasn't likely we were going to see her again.

"I don't get it," I said, and began talking fast to blot out the pictures I was conjuring of Kiri's fate. "What the hell's goin' on? What're the Captains doin' by givin' us this here conditionin'? How come . . ."

"Slow down there, man," Wall said, and put a hand on my shoulder; I was shocked into silence by the weight and solidity of it. "I ain't got time just now to be givin' a history lesson. Truth is, I don't know if I got much to teach ye, anyway. Far as we can prove, things're 'bout the way the Captains say they was. Though I got a suspicion that the folks who survived the bad time wasn't given a choice 'bout how they wanted to live, they was just put where they Captains wanted 'em and conditioned to accept it. But there's a coupla things differnt for certain sure. One is, they ain't our friends, they just playin' with us, tormentin' us. Hell, might be they could kill us all in a flash, they had a mind. But even if that's so, it'd ruin their game. So our job is to be dangerous for 'em, kill a few here and there, give 'em trouble. They enjoy that kinda trouble. Our aim is to get strong without 'em realizin' it, so the day'll come when we're strong enough to finish 'em. And that day ain't far off. But you got time to learn all 'bout that. What you need to unnerstan' is"—he spat again—"you're Bad Men now. You may not unnerstan' it this minute, but ye can't go back now your conditionin's broke. Ain't nothin' for ye back there. Your life is here now, and you gotta make the best of it. That means you're with us in ever'thing we do. We make a raid for supplies on Edgeville, you're part of it. There ain't no middle ground."

"If things is like you say," Callie asked, "whyn't you just tell it to the people back in Edgeville or Windbroken . . . Or wherever?"

"Someday maybe we will. But the way things is now, buncha Bad Men waltz into town and start goin' on 'bout how the Captains is enemies of mankind . . . Shit! How you think that'd set? Think they'd believe us? Naw, you gotta ride out way past gone onto the

flats 'fore you can hear the truth when it's told ye. But after you take that ride, you don't need to hear it more'n once." He sucked on a tooth, making a smacking noise. "Anyways, there's plenty of Bad Men ain't been brought into the fold. That's somepin' we need to take care of first, 'fore we go bringin' the word to Edgeville."

We stood there wrapped in the weighty stuff of all he had said. The desolation his words implied had slotted into a ready-made place inside my brain—it seemed something I had always known. But the fact that I was now a Bad Man, that was almost impossible to believe. The longer I had to digest what Wall had told us, the less like a Bad Man I felt. I had the sense we were stranded at the bottom of an empty well, and far above, invisible against the black circle of sky, strange, cruel faces were peering down at us, deciding which ones to pluck up and gut. I felt more abandoned than afraid: I could not not have felt more so had I woke up to find myself naked and alone in the middle of nowhere. If it had been left to me I would have sat down there on a rock and stayed sitting until I had gotten a better handle on how things were, but Bradley grabbed my arm and said, "We gotta go down there. We gotta find mama."

"Not tonight, boy," Wall said. "You try goin' down there tonight, you'd last 'bout as long as spit on a griddle. We'll be goin' down tomorrow night. We'll have a look 'round for her."

"I'm goin' with you," said Bradley.

"Listen, little man," Wall told him; despite its softness, his voice was so resonant, it might have issued from a cave. "You do what you told from now on. This ain't no fine time we're havin' here. This is desperate business. I admire you stickin' by your mama, I swear I do. And maybe we can help her. But ain't nobody gettin' in the way of what's gotta be done tomorrow night, so you might as well get used to it."

Bradley stood his ground but said nothing. After a second Clay Fornoff handed his torch to another man and came up beside Brad and slung an arm around his shoulder. "C'mon, kid," he said. "We'll getcha somethin' to eat."

I didn't much like Clay taking him under his wing, but I knew Brad didn't want to be with me, so I let them go off into the darkness without a squawk.

Wall moved a couple of steps closer; despite the cold, I smelled his gamey odor. Beneath those owlsh brows, his eyes were aglow with fierce red light from the torch. Generally I've found that people you haven't seen in a while shrink some from the image you hold of them in your mind. But not Wall. With that golden glare streaming up from the crater behind him, he still looked more monument than man. "Where'd you stake your horses at?" he asked.

I told him.

"Shitfire!" He slapped his hand against his thigh. Then he spoke to another man, instructing him to take a party up to the cave and see what could be done. When he turned back to me he let out a chuckle; he was missing a front tooth, and the gap was about the same size as the first joint of my thumb. "Perk up there, Bob," he said. "You look like you 'spectin' the devil to fly down your chimney. Believe me, you a damn sight better off'n you was 'fore you run into us."

I had no doubt this was the truth, but it didn't much gladden me to hear it.

"This your woman?" Wall asked me, jerking a thumb toward Callie.

Callie's eyes met mine, then ducked away, locking on the ground. I got something more than fear from that exchange, but I was too weary to want to understand what.

"Yeah," she said, beating me to it by a hair.

"We'll fix ya up with some blankets directly." Wall heaved a sigh and stared off toward the crater. "I'm mighty glad to see you out here, Bob. We been needin' more people to work in the gardens."

"Gardens?" I said dully.

"That's right. As I recall you had yourself some fine-looking tomatoes back in Edgeville."

"You growin' things out here?" I asked. "Where?"

"Somebody'll fill you in 'bout all that. Maybe in the mornin'." Wall took off his hat and did some reshaping of the brim, then jammed it back on. "Meantime you get some food in ye and try to sleep. Gonna be a big night tomorrow. Big night for ever'body in the whole damn world."

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AFTER WE HAD BEEN FED on jerky and dried fruit, Callie and I settled down in a nest made by three boulders a ways apart from the others. We spread a couple of blankets and pulled the rest up to our chins, sitting with our backs against one of the boulders, our hips and legs touching. Once I glanced over at her. Light from the crater outlined her profile and showed something of her grave expression. I had the idea she felt my eyes on her, but she gave no sign of noticing, so I tried to do as Wall suggested and sleep. Sleep would not come, however. I couldn't stop wondering what we had fallen into. Seeing so many Bad Men this far out, wall's talk of gardens, the fact they planned a raid or something like against the Captains—all that spoke to a complexity of life out here on the flats that I couldn't fathom. And I thought, too, about what Wall had told us about "conditioning." Strange as the idea seemed, it made sense. How else could you explain why people would be so stupid and docile as to swallow such swill as we had about our

ancestors choosing a pitiful, hardscrabble existence over a life of ease?

There was no use in studying on any of this, I realized; sooner or later I'd learn whatever there was to learn. But my mind kept on worrying at this or that item, and I knew I wasn't going to get any sleep.

Then Callie said, "I thought it had all gone, y'know. I thought all the bad times had wiped it away. But that ain't so. Everything's still there."

Her face was turned toward me, too shadowed to read.

When she had spoken I hadn't understood what she meant, but now I knew she had been talking about the two of us.

"I guess I wanna hear how it is with you," she said.

"I ain't been thinkin' about it," I told her. "I ain't had the time."

"Well, you got the time right now."

I didn't feel much like exercising my brain, but when I tried to think how I felt, it all came clear with hardly effort. It was as if I were looking down a tunnel that ran through time from the crater to Edgeville, and I saw Kiri riding the flats alone, I saw the hurt on Brad's face, I saw myself, and I saw Callie with rime on her hat brim and a stony expression, and then those images faded, and what I was looking at, it seemed, wasn't memory but truth, not the truth I believed, because that was just like everything else in my life, a kind of accomodation. No, this truth I was seeing was the truth behind that, the underpinnings of my existence, and I realized that the things I'd thought I felt for Callie were only things I'd wanted to feel, things I'd talked myself into feeling, but that was the way the brain worked, you bought into something and more often than not it came true without your noticing, and so, while I hadn't loved Callie—not like I thought I had, anyhow—sometime between all the trouble with Kiri and the end of our ride I had come to love her exactly like that, and I was always going to be ahead of myself in that fashion, I was always going to be wanting and hoping for and believing in things because they were what I thought I should want or hope for or believe . . . except now, because some trick of conditioning the Captains had played on me had worn off, right this minute, maybe for the first time ever, I had caught up with myself and could see exactly what I had become and what I believed in and what I loved. And there was Brad. And there was Callie. Beneath the flirty, pretty package, she was strong and flawed and sweet and needy, just like us all. But strong was most important. Strong was what I hadn't known about her. The strength it had taken for her, a girl from Windbroken who would dread the flats worse by far than any Edger, who had grown up fat and sassy in a softer world. The strength she'd had to summon to ride out into that world of less-than-death, and the reasons she had done it, for honor, for love of me and for the thing she didn't understand that made strength possible.

And Kiri was there, too, but different.

Like a picture hung in an old cobwebby room both of us had vacated years ago. Whatever lie we had believed into truth had been dead a long time, and Kiri had done what she had because of how she was, not because how I was or how she was to me. Recognizing that didn't make me feel any better, but at least all that old fire and smoke didn't prevent me from seeing what was of consequence now. I known all this for months, but I felt stupid for not having been able to accept any of it before, and I couldn't think of what to say, and all I managed was to repeat what Callie had said, telling her that everything was still there for me, too.

She moved into me a bit, and I put an arm around her, and then she let her head rest on my shoulder, and we sat that way for a few minutes—we were both, I suspect, feeling a little awkward, a little new to one another. Callie stretched herself and snuggled into me. Despite everything, despite fear and hard riding and all that had happened, having her there under my blanket gave me some confidence.

"You all right?" I asked her.

She said, "Just fine," then let out a dusty laugh.

"What's so funny?" I asked.

"I was goin' to say I wished we was home, but then I thought twice about it. Edgeville don't seem like home no more."

"Just a little of it would be all right," I said. "Maybe a wood stove and some kindling."

She made a noise of agreement and then fell silent. Big cold stars were dancing in the faraway black wild of the sky, so bright they looked to be shifting around like the ships the Captains flew, but I saw no fearful thing in them, only their glitter and the great identities they sketched in fire, the lady on the throne, the old hunter with his gemmy belt. What was it like, I wondered, to live among them, to be small and secretive with purple eyes. To be daunted by life and play with men and women as if they were dolls full of blood. Wall would probably understand them, I thought. For all his homespun ways, I had the notion he was as different from me as any Captain.

"And a bed," Carrie said out of the blue.

"Huh?"

"I was thinkin' a bed would be nice, too."

"Oh, yeah," I said. "Yeah, that'd be good." Then thinking she might have been hinting at something, I added, "I gotta tell ya, I ain't feelin' much like doin' anything tonight."

She picked herself up, gave me a look and laughed. "I swear you must think you're the greatest damn thing since vanilla ice cream. I'm so wore down, I doubt I could sit up straight let alone"—she sniffed—"*do anything*."

"I was only saying it in case you were ..."

"Just shut up, Bob!"

She settled back down next to me. I couldn't tell for certain, but I didn't believe she was really angry. After a couple of minutes she laid her head on my shoulder again, and a few seconds after that she took my hand beneath the blankets and put it up under her shirt. The warmth of her breast seemed to spread from my palm all through me, and its softness nearly caused me to faint. The feeling that held in my mind then had just a shade of lustfulness; most of what I felt was tender, trusted, loved. A feeling like that couldn't last for too long, not in that place, not at that moment, but for the time it did, it made the golden light spilling upward from the crater a fine place to rest my eyes, and pulled the starry void close around me like a good blanket, and spoke to me of something I could catch on my tongue and cradle in my hand and crush against my skin, but that I could have never put a name to.

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MORNINGS, KIRI TOLD ME ONCE, WERE LIES. It was only the nights that were true. She meant a sad, desolate thing by this, she meant that the brightness of things is illusion, and the blackness of them is where the truth would fit if we had courage enough to admit it. Yet when I thought of those words now, they meant something completely opposite, because the virtues she applied to night and morning had been all switched around for me.

At any rate, in the gray, blustery morning following that brilliant night, with big flakes falling from the sky, wall sent his second-in-command, a man named Coley, to fill us in. Coley was a tense sort, a little yappy dog to Wall's big placid one, scrawny and worried-looking, with a grizzled beard and sunken cheeks and a startling bit of color to his outfit, a bright red ribbon for a hatband. Though his anxious manner unnerved me—he was always fidgeting, glancing around as if concerned he might be caught at something—I related to him a damn sight better than I did Wall, mostly because Coley did not seem so all-fired sure of himself.

He told us they'd been planning this raid for years, and that the purpose of it was to steal a flying machine. A few years back one of the machines had crashed out on the flats; they had captured the sole survivor, whom they called Junior, and forced him to supply information about all manner of things; he was to be the pilot of the stolen machine once Wall's people succeeded in breaking into it. Problem was, the minute they started messing with it, there was a chance that an alarm would be sounded, and we might have to fight off the Captains for as long as it took to finish the job. Maybe an

hour, maybe more. There were, according to Coley, nearly five hundred men and women scattered about in the rocks, laying low, and he wasn't sure even that many would be enough to keep the Captains off, though Wall was of the opinion that our casualties would be light. Coley did not agree.

"It ain't the Captains worry me," he said. "It's who they got doin' their fightin' for 'em. Chance's are there'll be apes. Might even be some of our own people. They got ways of makin' a man do things against his will."

"What I don't get," Brad said, "is how you make this here Captain do what you want. Every time I talk to 'em, I get the feelin' things don't go how they like 'em, they're liable to keel over and die."

"That ain't quite the way of it," Coley told him. "They just don't think they can die is all. 'Cordin' to Junior, they make copies of themselves. Clones, he calls 'em. One dies, there's another waitin' to take his place who's got the same memories, same everything." He shook his head in wonderment. "Damndest thing I ever heard of. Anyhow, they got these collars. Metal collars that fit back of the neck and the head. I don't know how it works. But slap one on somebody, and they get downright suggestible. We picked some up from the crash, and we used one on Junior."

We all three nodded and said, "Huh" or something similar, as if we understood, but I doubt Brad or Callie understood Coley any better than I did.

A shout came from a man downslope, and Coley turned to it; but the shout must have been directed at someone else. The crater walls looked ashen, and the whole thing seemed more fearsome now than it had with light streaming up from it. Under the clouded sky the hardpan was a dirty yellow, like old bones.

"What is this place?" I asked. "What the hell are they doin' down there?"

"The Captains call it the Garden," Coley said. "Sometimes they use it for fightin'. Junior says they're all divided into clans up on the stations, and this here's where they settle clan disputes. Other times they use it for parties, and that's probably what's goin' on now. If it was a fight there'd be more ships. They like to watch fightin'." He worked up a good spit and let it fly. "That's how come they treasure us so much. They enjoy the way we fight."

I let that sink in for a few seconds, thinking about Kiri fitted with a collar. A break appeared in the clouds, and Coley peered up into the sky, looking more worried than ever. When I asked him what was wrong, he said, "I'm just hopin' the weather holds. We usually don't put so many people at risk. Then if the Captains drop a net, we don't get hurt so bad." He let out an long unsteady breath. "Course even if the weather does clear, chances are they ain't lookin' this way. They're pretty careless as regards security, and

they ain't very well armed. Not like you might expect, anyway. They didn't have many personal weapons up in the orbitals, and we don't believe they've collected any weapons from the shelters. Why would they bother? They don't think we can hurt them. All they've got are their ships, which are armed with mining lasers. And even if they did collect weapons from the shelters, they probably wouldn't know how to use 'em. They used to be technical, but they've forgotten most of what they know. Eventually I figger their ships'll break down, and they'll be stranded up there."

Callie asked what he meant by "shelters," and he told us that they were underground places where people had slept away the centuries, waiting for the Captains to wake them once things on the surface were back to something approaching normal. It was in those places that the Bad Men lived. Places fortified now against attack from the sky. But it was clear to me that neither Coley's faith in those fortifications nor in the raid was absolute. Though I didn't know him, I had the impression that his anxiety was abnormal, at least in its intensity, and when I tried to talk with him about Wall, I detected disapproval.

"He's brought people together," he said. "He's done a lot of good things." But I could tell his heart wasn't in the words.

Sleet began coming down, just spits of it, but enough so I could hear it hissing against the rocks.

"What's all this about?" I asked Coley; I gestured at the crater. "All this business here. I know you said it was to get a ship. But why bother if . . ."

"It's about killin'," said Wall's voice behind me; he was leaning up against a boulder, looking down at us in that glum, challenging way of his; his long hair lifted in the wind. "'Bout them killin' us all these years," he went on. "And now us evenin' things up a touch. 'Bout finding some new thing that'll let us kill even more of 'em."

"I realize that," I said. "But why not let well enough alone? Accordin' to what Coley says, we leave 'em be, sooner or later they ain't gonna be a problem."

"Is that what Mister Coley says?" Wall pinned him with a cold glare, but Coley didn't flinch from it; he made a gruff noise in his throat and turned back to me. "Y'see Coley's out here with us, don't ye? Don't that tell ye somethin'? He may believe what he told ye, but he ain't countin' on it to be true. He'd be crazy to count on it. S'pose they got more weapons than he figgers? Even if they don't, who knows what's in their minds? They might up and decide they're tired of games and kill us all. Nosir! Killin's the only way to deal with 'em."

"Ain't you worried they gonna strike back at you?" Callie asked him.

"Let 'em try! They might can pick off a few of us when we're out on the flats, but

we're dug in too deep for them to do any real damage."

"That's what you believe," I said. "But then you'd be crazy to count on it bein' true, wouldn't you?"

He tried the same stare on me that he'd tried on Coley, but for some reason I wasn't cowed by either it or his faulty logic. Coley, I noticed, seemed pleased by what I'd said.

"S'pose they got more weapons than what you figger?" I went on. "S'pose they got some'll dig you outta your holes? They might decide to kill us all. Who knows what they got in their minds?"

Wall gave a laugh. "You a clever talker, Bob, I'll hand you that. But ain't no point you goin' on like this. It's all been talked through and decided."

"How 'bout everyone back on the Edge?" Callie asked. "And Windbroken? And everywhere else? You talked it through with them, have you?"

"They ain't involved with us. Anyhow, the Captains got no reason to go hurtin' them for somethin' we done."

"No reason *you* know of, maybe," Callie said.

"Well," said Wall after a bit, looking off into the distance, "this is a real nice chat we're havin', but like I told ye, it comes a little late in the game. We'll be going down into the Garden at dusk." He cut his eyes toward me. "You come along with me if you want, Bob, and have a look for Kiri. But keep in mind she's not the main reason you're goin' to be there. Keepin' the Captains back from the ship is. That clear?"

Brad started to speak, but Wall cut him short.

"The boy and the woman can stay with the ship. We can use another coupla rifles case any of 'em break through."

I thought Brad was going to say something, but he just lowered his head; I guess he was wise enough to realize that Wall couldn't be swayed by argument.

"Keep your chin up," Wall told him. "Time'll come soon enough for ye to do some real killin'."

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THE THREE OF US SPENT THE REMAINDER of the afternoon huddled among the rocks. We talked some, more than we had recently at any rate, but it was for the most part anxious talk designed to stop us from fretting over what lay ahead, and never touched on the things we needed to talk about. Snow fell steadily, cappng the boulders in white, and as the sky darkened, golden light began to stream up from the crater once again. Then, as dusk began to accumulate, I caught sight of Coley and a couple of others leading a diminutive pale figure down the slope. It was a Captain, all right, but like none I'd seen before.

Dressed in rags; emaciated; scarred. As they drew near, I got to my feet—we all did—fascinated by the the proximity of this creature whom I had previously thought of in almost godlike terms. There was nothing godlike about him now. His nose was broken, squashed nearly flat, and his scalp was criss-crossed by ridged scars; one of his eyes was covered by a patch, and his other had a listless cast. The only qualities he retained similar to those curious entities I had spoken to in Edgeville were his pallor and his size. About his neck and cupping the back of his skull was a metal apparatus worked with intricate designs resembling those I'd seen on antique silver; its richness was incongruous in contrast to his sorry state. I had expected I might feel hatred on seeing him, or something allied, but I felt nothing apart from a dry curiosity; yet after he had passed I realized that my hands were shaking and my legs weak, as if strong emotion had occupied me without my knowing and left only these symptoms, and I stood there, as did Brad and Callie, watching until the Captain—Junior—had been reduced by distance to a tiny shadow crossing the hardpan toward the crater.

It was not long afterward that Wall came to collect me. Callie and Brad went off with a big, broad-beamed woman who reminded me some of Hazel Aldred, and Wall led me over to a group of men and women who were sitting and squatting at the edge of the hardpan, and gave me over to the care of a woman named Maddy, who fitted me out with a hunting knife and a pistol and an ammunition belt. She was on the stringy side, was Maddy, with dirty blonde hair tied back in a ponytail; but she had a pretty face made interesting and more than a little sexy by the lines left by hard weather and hard living, and she had a directness and good humor that put me somewhat at ease.

"I know a red-blooded sort like you's all bucked up and rarin' to go," she said, flashing a quick grin, "but you keep it holstered til I give you the word, y'hear?"

"I'll do my level best," I told her.

"We'll be goin' down soon," she said. "If there's an attack and things get confused, stick with me and chances are you'll be fine. We believe there's gonna be some of our own people down there. They'll be collared, and like as not they'll be comin' after us. If you gotta kill 'em, nobody's goin' to blame you for it. But if you can, aim at their legs. Maybe we can save one or two."

I nodded, looked out between boulders across the hardpan. A handful of Bad Men were visible as silhouettes at the rim of the crater, black stick figures blurred against the pour of golden light; I couldn't make out what they were doing. The thought of descending into that infernal light tuned my nerves a notch higher; I couldn't have worked up a spit even if the price of spit had suddenly gone sky-high.

"Ain't no point my tellin' you not to be afraid," Maddy said. "I 'spect we're all afraid."

But once we get down to business, you'll be all right."

"You sure 'bout that?" I said, trying to make it sound light; but I heard a quaver in my voice.

"You come all this way from the Edge, I guess I ain't worried 'bout you seizin' up on me."

"How bout Wall? You reckon he's afraid?"

She made a non-committal noise and glanced down at her hands; with her head lowered, a wisp of hair dangling down over her forehead, her expression contemplative, the crater light glowing on her face, eroding some of the lines there, I could see the girl she once had been.

"Probably not," she said. "He likes this kind of thing."

There was disapproval in her voice. This was the second time I'd detected a less than favorable feeling toward Wall, and I was about to see if I could learn where it came from, when Clay Fornoff hunkered down beside us.

"He all set?" he asked Maddy.

She said, "Yes." Then, following a pause, she asked how much longer before we started.

"Any minute now," Fornoff said.

I didn't really have anything to say, but I thought talking might ease my anxiety, and I asked him what sort of opposition we'd be facing aside from people wearing collars.

"What's the matter, *Bob*?" He made a sneering noise out of my name. "'Fraid you gonna wet yourself?"

"I was just makin' conversation."

"You wanna be friends, is that it?"

"I don't much care about that one way or another," I said.

His face tightened. "Just shut the hell up! I don't wanna hear another damn word from ya."

"Sure thing. I understand. I s'pose you don't want to hear nothin' 'bout your folks either, do ya?"

He let a few beats go by then said, "How they doin'?" But he kept his eyes trained on the crater.

I told him about his folks, his father's rheumatism, about the store and some of his old friends. When I had done he gave no sign that he had been in any way affected by the news from home. Maddy rolled her eyes and shot me an afflicted smile, as if to suggest that I wasn't the only one who considered Fornoff a pain in the ass. I'd been coming around 180 degrees in my attitude toward Bad Men, thinking of them more as heroes, rebels, and so forth; but now I told myself that some Bad Men were likely every

bit as rotten as what I'd once supposed. Or maybe it was just that I was part of a time with which Fornoff would never be able to reach an accomodation; he would never be able to see me without recalling the night when he had gone Bad, and thus he would always react to me with loathing that might have better been directed at himself.

Not long afterward I heard a shout, and before I could prepare myself, I was jogging alongside Maddy and Fornoff toward the crater, watching the chute of golden light jolt sideways with every step; a couple of minutes later I found myself in the company of several hundred others descending the crater wall on ropes. The three ships rested at the bottom of the crater on a smooth plastic floor, from beneath which arose the golden light. We paused beside one of them as Wall, with the help of two other men, worked feverishly at the smallest of the mining lasers that protruded from the prow. I saw that it was a modular unit that could be snapped into place. Once they had removed it, wall shrugged out of his coat and lashed the unit to his right arm with a complex arrangement of leather straps; the way it fitted, his fingers could reach a panel of studs set into the bottom, and I realized it must have been designed to be portable. Wall pressed a stud and a beam of ruby light scored a deep gouge in the rock face. On seeing this he laughed uproariously, and swung the thing, which must have weighed 70 or 80 pounds, in a celebratory circle above his head.

Beyond the ships, at the bottom of a gently declining ramp, lay the entrance to a vast circular chamber—I guessed it to be about a half-mile across—floored with exotic vegetation, some of the plants having striped stalks and huge rubbery leaves, unlike anything I'd ever seen; the domed ceiling was aglow with ultraviolet panels, the same sort of light I used to grow my peas and beans and tomatoes back in Edgeville, and the foliage was so dense that the four narrow paths leading away into it were entirely overgrown. Mists curled above the treetops, rising in wraithlike coils to the top of the ceiling, lending the space a primitive aspect like some long ago jungle, daunting in its silence and strangeness.

And yet the place was familiar.

I couldn't quite figure why at first; then I recalled that Wall had said the Captains called the crater the Garden, and I thought of the book I'd read and reread back in the hydroponics building, *The Black Garden*, and the illustrations it contained—this chamber was either the model for one of those illustrations or an exact copy of the model. Confused and frightened already, I can't begin to tell you the alarm this caused me. Added to everything that I previously had not understood but had managed to arrange in a makeshift frame of reference, this last incomprehensible thing, with its disturbing echoes of decadence, now succeeded in toppling that shaky structure, and I felt as

unsteady in my knowledge of what was as I had during our ride from Edgeville. I had an urge to tell someone about my sudden recognition, but then I realized that thanks to Junior, they must know far more than I did about the Garden, and of course damn near everybody knew about the book. But none of these rationalizations served to calm me, and I got to thinking what it meant that the Captains would give us these clues about their existence, what it said about their natures.

Approximately a hundred of us headed down each of the avenues, moving quietly, but at a good pace. Maddy, Clay Fornoff, and I were attached to a party led by Wall. Once beneath the canopy we were immersed in a green twilight; sweetish scents reminiscent of decay, but spicier, issued from the foliage and a humming sound rose from the polished stones beneath our feet—that sound, apart from the soft fall of our footsteps—was the only break in the silence. No rustlings or slitherings, no leaves sliding together. Every now and then we came to a section of the path where the stones had been replaced by a sheet of transparent paneling through which we could see down into a black space picked out here and there by golden lights, and once again I was reminded of *The Black Garden*, of what the book had related about a region of black foliage and secret rooms. Once we walked beneath a crystalline bubble the size of a small room suspended in the branches, furnished with cushions, and with a broad smear of what appeared to be dried blood marring its interior surface. Far too much blood to be the sign of anything other than a death. The sight harrowed me, and Maddy, after a quick glance at the bubble, fixed her eyes on the path and did not lift them again until it was well behind us.

No more than a fifty yards after we had passed beneath the bubble, we encountered the first of two side paths—the second lay barely another twenty-five yards farther along—and at each of these junctions we left a quarter of our number, who hid among the ferns that lined the way. I expected to be left with them, but I imagine Wall wanted to give me the best possible chance of locating Kiri, and though uneasy with the fact that I was moving deeper and deeper into this oppressive place, I was at the same time grateful for the opportunity. After about fifteen minutes we reached the far side of the chamber, a place where the path planed away into a well-lit tunnel that led downward at a precipitous angle. We proceeded along it until we came to another chamber, smaller than the first yet still quite large, perhaps a hundred yards in diameter, its walls covered with white shiny tiles, each bearing a red hieroglyph, and dominated by a grotesque fountain ringed by benches and banks of tree ferns, whose centerpiece, the life-sized statue of a naked crouching woman with her mouth stretched open in anguish, bled red water from a dozen gashes carved in the grayish white stone of her flesh. The statue was so real-looking, I could have sworn it was an actual person who had been magicked

into stone. Vines with serrated leaves climbed the walls and intertwined across the white tray of ultraviolet light that occupied the ceiling, casting spindly shadows.

On first glance I'd assumed the chamber to be untouched by age, but then I began to notice worn edges on the benches, corners missing from tiles, a chipped knuckle on the statue, and other such imperfections. The idea that the place was old made it seem even more horrid, speaking to a tradition of the perverse, and the longer I looked at the statue, the more certain I became that it had been rendered from life; there was too much detail to the face and the body, details such as scars and lines and the like, to make me think otherwise. I imagined the woman posing for some pallid little monster, growing weaker and weaker from her wounds, yet forced by some terrifying presence, some binding torment, to maintain her pose, and the anger that I had not been able to feel on seeing Junior now surfaced in me and swept away my fear. I grew cold and resolved, and I imagined myself joyfully blowing holes in the pulpy bodies of the Captains.

We crossed the chamber, progressing with more caution than before. Judging by the way Wall turned this way and that, searching for a means of egress—none was apparent—I had the notion that the existence of the chamber came as a surprise to him, that Junior must not have informed him of it. Unnerved by what this might mean, whether it was that the collars were not totally controlling and Junior had lied, or else that he had been so stupefied he had forgotten to mention the place, I put my hand on my pistol and turned to Maddy to see what her reaction might be to this turn of events; but as I did, a section of the wall opposite us slid back to reveal a wedge of darkness beyond, a void that the next moment was choked with emaciated men and women wearing metal collars like the one Junior had worn, dozens of them, all armed with knives and clubs, driven forward by white-furred apes that differed from the Edgeville apes by virtue of their barbaric clothing—leather harnesses and genital pouches. The most horrifying thing about their approach was that they—the men and women, not the apes—made no sound as they came; they might have been corpses reanimated by a spell.

I glanced back to the tunnel and saw that it was blocked with an equally savage-looking force; then the attackers were on us, chopping and slashing. There was no hope of aiming discriminately as Maddy had suggested. Everything became a chaos of gun shots and screams and snarling mouths, and we would have all died if it hadn't been for Wall. He swung his laser in sweeping arcs, cutting a swath in the ranks of our adversaries, and headed straight for the opening on the far side of the chamber and the darkness beyond it.

It was a matter of sheer luck that I was standing close to Wall when he made his charge. During the first thirty seconds of the attack I had emptied my pistol; I'm sure I hit something with every shot—it would have been nearly impossible not to do so—yet

I have no clear memory of what I hit. Faces, ape and human, reeled into view, visible for split-seconds between other faces, between bodies, and blood was everywhere, streaking flesh, matting fur, spraying into the air. I simply poked the barrel of my pistol forward and fired until the hammer clicked. Then as I went to reload, a club glanced off the point of my left shoulder, momentarily numbing my hand, and I dropped the pistol. Even with the ape stink thickening the air, I could smell my own fear, a yellow, sour reek, and while I didn't have the time to indulge that fear, I felt it weakening me, felt it urging me to flee. And I might have if I had seen a safe harbor. I drew my knife and slashed at an ape's hand that was grabbing for me, going off-balance and falling backward into Wall. He shoved me away, and inadvertently I went in a staggering run toward the opening from which the apes and their collared army had emerged, so that in effect I wound up guarding his flank, though it was Maddy, beside me, who did the lion's share of the guarding. She had managed to reload, and in the brief time it took to cross the remaining distance she shot four apes and two collared men, while Wall burned down countless others, the laser severing limbs and torsos.

When we reached the darkness beyond the doorway, wall turned back, continuing to fire into the melee, and shouted to us to search for a switch, a button, something that would close off the chamber. As I followed his order, my hands trembling, fumbling, groping at the wall, I saw that seven or eight of our group were pinned against the fountain, and before the wall slid shut to obscure my view, sealing us into the dark, I saw three fall, each killed by collared men and women. Many lay dead already, and many others, wounded, were trying to crawl away; but the apes were on them before they could get far, slicing with long-bladed knives at their necks. It appeared that the red water from the fountain had been splashed and puddled everywhere, and that the open-mouthed woman at the center of the fountain was screaming in a dozen voices, lamenting the carnage taking place around her.

The instant the chamber vanished from sight, isolating us in the dark, wall demanded to know who had found the control, and when a woman's voice answered, he had her lead him to it and burned it with the laser so that the door could not be opened again. He then asked us to speak our names so that he could determine how many had survived. Sixteen names were sounded. Clay Fornoff's was not among them. I tried to remember if I had seen him fall, but could not. The darkness seemed to deepen with this recognition. I could see nothing; even though I knew that the door to the chamber was within arm's reach, I felt as if I were standing at the center of a limitless void. It seemed strange that only now, now that I could not see it, did I have a powerful apprehension of the size of the place.

“All right,” Wall said. “We’re in the shit, and we can’t just stand around. Only way we’re going to get home is to find one of the little bastards and make him show us a safe passage. We know they’re in here somewhere. So let’s go find ‘em.”

He said this with such relish, such apparent delight, as if what had occurred was exactly what he’d been hoping for, that—dismayed and frightened as I was—I found it kind of off-putting. Maybe his words affected others the same, because he didn’t get much of a response.

“Do ye wanna die?” he asked us. “Or is it just you’re scared of the dark? Well, I can fix that!”

I felt him push past me, saw the ruby stalk of the laser swing out into the blackness. In an instant several fires sprouted in the dark. Bushes turned to torches by the laser, their light revealing an uneven terrain of moss or fungus or maybe even some sort of black grass, like a rug thrown over roomful of lumpy furniture. Bushes and hollows and low rises. Here and there, barely visible in the flickering light, thin seams of gold were laid in against the black ground, and once again recalling *The Black Garden*, I realized that these likely signalled the location of doorways into secret rooms. There were no signs of walls or a ceiling. Even with the light, we had no way to judge the actual size of the place; but the fires gave us heart, and without further discussion, we headed for the nearest of those gold seams. When we reached it Wall burned down the door and we poured inside. By chance more than by dint of courage, I was beside him as we entered, and I had a clear view of the opulent interior. A cavelike space of irregular dimensions, considerably higher than it was long or wide, with a terraced floor and slanted ceiling, a golden grotto draped in crimson silks, stalks of crystal sprouting from the floor and a miniature waterfall splashing down upon boulders that looked to be pure gold. Silk cushions were strewn everywhere. An aquarium was set into the wall, teeming with brightly colored fish as different from the drab brown trout and bottom feeders with which I was familiar as gems from common rocks; the ornament of the aquarium through the fish swam was a human spine and rib cage.

But what held my attention was the presence of three Captains lying on the cushions: two men and a woman, their pale, naked, hairless bodies almost childlike in appearance. There were also three collared woman, who had apparently been sexually engaged with the Captains, and showed bruises and other marks of ill use, and a collared man who was obviously dead; his chest and limbs were deeply gashed, and he was lying arms akimbo by a wall, as if he had been tossed aside. When we entered, one of the Captains, the larger of the two men, put a knife to the throat of a collared woman; the other two reached for what I assumed to be weapons—short metal tubes resting on the floor at

arm's reach; yet their movements were languid, casual, as if they were not really afraid of us. Or perhaps they were drugged. Whatever the case, they were overwhelmed before they could pick up the tubes and dragged from the room. The Captain holding the knife looked at me—directly at me, I'm sure of it—and smiling, slashed the woman's throat. She began to thrash about, clutching at the wound, and the Captain pushed her off to the side. He was still smiling. At me. The daft little shit was amused by my reaction. His androgynous features twisted with amusement. Something gave way inside me, some elemental restraint—I felt it as tangibly as I might have felt the parting of my tissues from a knife stroke—and I rushed at him, ignoring Wall's order to hold back. The Captain kind of waved the knife at me, but again he did not seem overly concerned with any threat I might pose. Even after I kicked the knife aside and yanked him to his feet, even after I grabbed him by the throat and shoved him back against the wall, he continued to regard me with that mild, dissipated smile and those wet purplish eyes that gave no hint of what might lie behind, as empty as the eyes of a fish. I had the notion that I was doing exactly as he expected, and that my predictable behavior was something that reinforced his feelings of superiority.

“Let him go,” said Wall from behind me.

“In a minute,” I said, tightening my grip on the Captain's throat. I was still full of loathing, but it was a colder emotion now, albeit no less manageable. I fixed my gaze on those inhuman eyes, wanting to learn if anything would surface in them at the end, and I plunged my knife hilt-deep into the top of his skull. His mouth popped open, the eyes bulged, and thick blood flowed down over his head like syrup over a scoop of vanilla. Spasms shook him, and a stream of his piss wetted my legs. Then it was over, and I let him fall. It looked for all the world as though his head had grown a bone handle. In some part of me that had been obscured by anger, I could feel a trivial current of revulsion, but most of what I felt at first was satisfaction, though not long afterward I began to shake with the aftershocks of my violent act.

I turned to Wall, who stood regarding me with a thoughtful expression. “You got two of 'em,” I said. “Two's enough.”

Behind him, they were trying to remove the collars from the surviving women. Neither was doing well; blood was leaking from their ears.

“There's more,” Wall said. “You gonna kill 'em all?”

The question did not seem in the least rhetorical, and I did not take it as such.

“Long as we're here,” I said.

But I did no further killing that night. The vengeful, outraged spirit that had moved me gradually eroded as we passed through the Black Garden, led by the two collared

Captains, our path lit by burning shrubs and doorways into golden light left open to reveal scenes of luxury and carnage, like a score of tiny stages mounted on the dark upon whose boards the same terrible play had been performed, and I only watched the others do the bloody work. The violence I'd committed had worked a change in me, or else had exposed some central weakness, and I grew disinterested in the outcome of our expedition. Maddy had to urge me along, or else I might have just stood there and waited for my end, displaying no more concern for my fate than the Captain that I'd killed; and I wondered if the fact that they had done so much violence was at the heart of their dismissive attitude toward life and death—but I don't believe that. To imbue them with human qualities would be assuming too much. They were no more human than the apes, and the apes, despite what I'd said long before to the man in the bubble car, which had been something I'd said mostly to impress him, were in no way human.

Apes came at us now and again as we went, singly sometimes and sometimes in small groups, flying at us from dark crannies, their knives flashing with reflected fire, and they succeeded in killing three of our people; but they were disorganized, without slaves to support them, and this gave us hope that the other three parties had done well, that the battle, if not yet finished, was on the verge of being won. We killed them all, and we also killed every Captain whom we came across.

Wall was in his element. He burned and burned, and when the laser gave out or broke or whatever it is that lasers do when they go wrong, he killed with his hands, in several instances literally tearing the heads off scrawny white necks. There was a joyful flair in the way he went about it, and I was not the only one who noticed this; I saw others staring at him with a confused mixture of awe and distaste as he carried out the business of slaughter. It was not that the Captains deserved any less, nor was it that vengeance was inappropriate to the moment. No, it was instead that Wall did not appear to be carrying out a vengeful process. Watching him was like watching a farmer scything wheat—here was a man engaged in his proper work and enjoying it immensely. The minor wounds he accumulated, the red stains that flowered on his rough shirt, his arms and face, gave him the look of an embattled hero, but the sort of hero, perhaps, whom we—who were ourselves the pitiful result of laws that heroes had written thousands of years before—no longer cared to exalt; and we moved ever more slowly in his wake, letting him run ahead of us, separating ourselves from him, as if this would lessen our complicity and devalue our support.

Still, we made no move to keep him from his pleasure. The things we found inside those golden rooms, the flayed bodies, bits of men and women used for ornament or more perverted purposes yet, the collared dead, the few that survived, shaking and

delirious, all this legislated against our reining Wall in, and we might have let him go on forever had there been a sufficient number of Captains and if there had been nothing else to capture our attention. But then there came two explosions, distant, the one following hard upon the other, and a ragged cheer went up.

"We got it!" Maddy said; she sounded happy yet bewildered, as if she couldn't quite accept some great good news, and when I asked what the explosions signified, she said, "The ship. They must have blown up the other two. They weren't supposed to do that until we had the ship."

"You mean they flew it away and all?" I said.

"I think so!" She gave my hand a squeeze. In the garish orange light of the burning, she looked like she was about to hop up and down from excitement. "I can't be sure 'til we see for ourselves, but I think so."

Wall was prevailed upon to break off his hunt, so we could determine what had happened, and with the two collared Captains still in the lead, we began to make our way back toward the crater.

But Wall was not yet finished with death.

As we came out from yet another hidden door into the chamber where we had been ambushed, we spotted an ape squatting by one of its fallen companions, rocking back and forth on its heels in an attitude that seemed to signal grief, though—again—I can't say for certain what the thing was doing there. Just as likely it had gone crazy over something I could never understand. Someone fired at it, and with a fierce scream, it scuttled off into the tunnel that angled up toward the crater.

Wall sprinted after it.

A handful of people, Maddy included, followed him at a good clip, but the rest of us, governed by a weary unanimity, kept plodding along, stepping between the bodies, friend and foe, that lay everywhere. I'd seen so much dying that night, you would have thought that the scene in the chamber would not have affected me, but it took me by storm. That red fountain and the woman of stone and the bloody hieroglyphs figuring the tiles, and now the bodies, more than a hundred of them, I reckoned, scattered about under benches, in the ferns, their pallor and the brightness of their blood accentuated by the glaring light—it was such a unity of awful place and terrible event, it struck deep, and I knew it would hurt me forever, like a work of art whose lines and colors match up perfectly with some circuit in your brain or some heretofore unmapped country in your soul, all the graceless attitudes of the dead's arms and legs and the humped bodies like archipelagoes in a sea of red.

I found Clay Fornoff lying under the lip of the fountain, his chest pierced innumer-

able times, eyes open, blond hair slick with blood. Something, an ape probably, had chewed away part of his cheek. Tears started from my eyes—I don't know why. Maybe because I couldn't disassociate Clay from Bradley, or maybe it was just death working its old sentimental trick on me, or maybe I'd hoped to reconcile with Clay and now that hope was gone I felt the loss. I don't know. It was no matter anymore, whatever the reason. Feeling as tired as I'd ever been, I kneeled beside him and collected his personals, his gun, a silver ring of Windbroken design, a leather wallet, and a whistle whittled out of some hard yellowish wood. I intended to give them to his folks if I ever saw them again, but I ended up keeping the whistle. I'd never figured Clay to be one for making whistles, and I suppose I wanted to keep that fact about him in mind.

I couldn't think of anything much to say over him, so I just bowed my head and let whatever I was feeling run out of me. I recall thinking I was glad I hadn't seen him die, and then wishing I had, and then wondering whether he had been brave or a fool or both. Then there was nothing left but silence. I closed his eyes and walked on up the tunnel.

Wall had caught up with the ape—or the ape had let him catch it—at the end of the tunnel, right where the canopy of foliage began, and he was fighting it hand to hand when I straggled up, while the remainder of those who had survived the ambush and the Garden stood in a semi-circle and watched. Without much enthusiasm, I thought. Their faces slack and exhausted-looking.

Wall had killed apes with his bare hands before; he was one of the few men alive strong enough to accomplish this, and under different circumstances it might have been incredible to see, like a scene out of a storybook, this giant locked up hard with a six-foot white-furred ape in a leather harness. But as things stood, realizing that this was just more of Wall's . . . I'm not sure what to call it, because it was more than him showing off. His folly, I guess. His making certain that the world stayed as violent and disgraceful as he needed it to be. Anyway, recognizing this, the sight of the two of them rolling about, tearing and biting, screaming, grunting, it did not seem vital or heroic to me, merely sad and depressing. To tell the truth, despite everything that had happened, I had a fleeting moment during which I found myself rooting for the ape; at least, I thought, it had displayed something akin to human emotion back in the chamber.

There came a point when, still grappling, they came to their feet and reeled off along the canopied pathway; mired in that green dimness they seemed even more creatures out of legend, the ape's small head with its bared fangs pressed close to the great shaggy bulk of Wall's head. Like insane lovers. Wall's arms locked behind the ape's back, his muscles bunched like coiled snakes, and the ape clawing at Wall's neck. Then Wall

heaved with all his might, at the same time twisting his upper body, a wrestler's quick move, lifting the ape and slinging him up and out higher than his head, its limbs flailing, to fetch up hard against a tree trunk. The ape was hurt bad. It came up into a crouch, but fell onto its side and made a mewling sound; it clawed frantically at its own back, as if trying to reach some unreachable wound. Finally it got to its feet, but it was an unsteady, feeble movement, like that of an old man who's mislaid his cane. It snarled at Wall, a grating noise that reminded me of a crotchety generator starting up. I could tell it wanted to charge him, that its ferocity was unimpaired, but it was out of juice, and so was waiting for Wall to come to it. And Wall would have done just that if Maddy, who was standing about ten feet away from me, hadn't taken her pistol and shot the ape twice in the chest.

Wall stared incredulously at the ape for a second, his chest heaving, watching it twitch and bleed among the ferns lining the path; then he spun about, and asked Maddy what the fuck she'd had in mind.

"We got better to do than watch you prove what a man you are." She looked drawn and on edge, and her pistol was still in hand, trained a little to the left of Wall.

"Who the hell put ye in charge?" he said.

"You want to argue 'bout it," she said, "we'll argue later. Right now we got to get movin'."

"Goddamn it!" Wall took a step toward her. With his hair falling wild about his shoulders and his coarse features stamped with sullen anger, he looked every inch an ogre, and he towered over Maddy. "I'm sick right down to the bone of your bullshit. There ain't a single damn thing we done, you ain't stood in the way of." He started toward her again, and Maddy let the pistol swing a few degrees to the right. Wall stopped his advance.

"You don't care who you kill, do you?" she said. "Can't be the ape, might as well be one of us."

Wall put his hands on his hips and glared at her. "Go on and shoot, if that's your pleasure."

"Nothin' 'bout this here is my pleasure," she said. "You know that. Just leave it alone, Wall. You've had your victory, you've got your ship. Let's go home."

"You hear this?" Walls said to the others, none of whom had changed their listless expressions and attitudes. "I mean have you been listenin' to her?"

"They're too damn tired to listen," Maddy told him. "Death and killin' makes people tired. That's somepin' you ain't figured out yet."

Wall kept staring at her for a few beats, then let out a forceful breath. "All right," he

said. "All right for now. But we're gonna settle this later."

And with that he strode off along the path, ripping away a big rubbery leaf that hung down in his face with a furious gesture; he quickly rounded a turn and went out of sight, like he didn't much care if any of us were to follow.

"Son of a bitch ain't gonna be happy til he gets every one of us dead," Maddy said, holstering her pistol; the lines around her mouth were etched sharp, and she looked years older than she had earlier in the evening. But then maybe we all did.

It wasn't my place to say anything, I suppose, but since Wall had been part of Edgeville for a time, I felt an old loyalty to him.

"He mighta got carried away some," I said. "But you can't deny he's done us all a world of good down there today."

Maddy dropped a little thong over the hammer of her pistol to keep it from bouncing out of the holster; she gave me a sharp look.

"You don't know nothin' 'bout Wall like you think you do," she told me in a weary tone. "But you stick around, you gonna find out way more'n you can stand."

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WHEN AT LAST WE REACHED THE SURFACE and took shelter among the rocks, we discovered that only about hundred and thirty of us had survived the Garden. Brad and Callie were fine, as were most of those who had stayed with the flying machines; there had been scant fighting in the crater. But of the nearly four hundred who had gone deep into the Garden, less than seventy had returned, along with a handful of men and women who'd been saved from the collars, and five Captains. Wall wanted to ride out immediately, to return to wherever it was they'd set out from; but Coley, Maddy, and others told him, Fine, go ahead, but we're going to wait a while and see if anyone else comes out. More than three hundred dead had shaken people's faith in Wall—that was a sight more than what you would call "light casualties," and resentment against him appeared to be running high, even though we'd managed to steal the flying machine. I had thought the argument between him and Maddy was personal, but it was now obvious that politics was involved.

After heated discussion, it was decided that Wall would take a group on ahead, and the rest of us would follow within the hour. But then they got to arguing about how many were to go with Wall and how many were to stay, and whether or not all the prisoners, who were sitting against boulders at the edge of the hardpan, should go with Wall's party. It was hard to credit that people who had so recently fought together could now be all snarled up in these petty matters, and after a few minutes of hanging about

the fringes of the argument, I gave up on them and went off and sat with Brad and Callie higher up among the boulders.

From the way everything looked, with that golden light still streaming up from the crater, and the moonstruck hardpan running flat and fissured to the mountains on the horizon, and cold stars glinting through thin scudding clouds, it appeared that nothing much could have happened down below the world; I would have expected some sign of what had transpired, colored smokes curling up, strange flickering radiances, a steam of dead souls rising from the deep, and there should have been scents of rot and corruption on the wind, not merely the cool, dry smell of desolation; but all was as peaceful and empty as before, and for some reason this lack of evidence that anything had occurred afflicted me and I began to remember the things I had witnessed and the things I had done. As each of them passed before my mind's eye, a new weight settled in my chest, making a pressure that hurt my heart and caused the flow of my thoughts to stick and swell in my head as if something had dammed them up. Brad asked me about Kiri, about Clay, and all I could do was shake my head and say I'd tell him later. Of course he must have known Clay was done for, seeing I had the man's possessions. But I didn't realize this at the time, because all my mind was turned inside.

I have no idea how much time had passed, but Wall, Maddy and the rest were still arguing down on the edge of the hardpan when the last survivors crawled up over the rim of the crater and came toward us at a sluggish pace, black and tiny and featureless against the golden light, like sick ants wandering away from a poisoned hole. They were strung out over about a dozen yards or so. Twenty, twenty-five of them. And as they drew near, the group who'd been arguing broke up and some went out to meet them. A couple looked to be wounded and were being supported by their companions. Brad got to his feet and moved a few feet downslope, staring out at them. I was so worn out, I couldn't think what might have caught his interest, and even when he started out across the hardpan all I said to Callie was, "Where the hell's he goin'?" But Callie, too, had gotten to her feet by then and was peering hard in the direction of the stragglers.

"Damn," she said. "I think . . ." She broke off and moved closer to the edge of the hardpan. I saw her Adam's apple working. "Bob, it's her," she said.

I stood and had a look for myself and saw a lean, dark woman stepping toward us; she was too far away for me to make out her features, but her quick stride and stiff posture, things I'd always taken for telltales of Kiri's rage, were thoroughly familiar.

What was passing through my mind as I walked out onto the hardpan toward Kiri was almost every emotion I've ever had, up to love and down to fear and all their lesser permutations. I'd like to believe that the main thing I felt was relief and happiness,

and I'm pretty sure that's the case, but I know that it was mixed in with a sizeable portion of worry about what would happen too all of us now. I had already given up on Kiri, You see; I had buried her and the past along with her, and it wasn't easy to recalibrate my heart and mind to her presence.

She had one of the Bad Men's coats draped over her shoulders and was naked underneath it; she hardly seemed to see Brad, who was hanging on her when I came up; her eyes were fixed on some point beyond us both, and though her gaze wavered and cut toward me, the only other sign of acknowledgement she gave was to tousle Brad's hair absently and say something in a croaky voice that might have been my name, but might also have been an involuntary noise. An old bruise was going yellow on one of her cheekbones, and when the wind feathered her hair, I saw the marks on her neck made by a collar; but otherwise she seemed fine, albeit distant . . . Though as it turned out, I mistook single-mindedness for abstraction.

As we reached the group of Bad Men waiting at the bottom of the slope, Kiri gave me a hard shove, sending me staggering, and although I hadn't felt her hand on my sheath, I saw my knife in her hand. Quick as a witch, before anybody could move, she was in among the Bad Men and had grabbed one of the seated Captains and dragged him upslope behind a boulder. Some made to go after her, but Wall blocked their way and said, "I were you, I wouldn't try to stop her."

Coley—I recognized him by the red ribbon on his hat—said something by way of disagreement, but there was not much point in arguing about this particular trouble. A high-pitched scream issued from back of the boulder; it faltered, but then kept on going higher and higher, lasting an unreasonable length of time. It broke off suddenly, as if the voice had been permanently stilled; but soon it started up again. And so it went for a goodly while. Starting and stopping, growing weaker but no less agonized. It was plain Kiri had found a way of engaging the Captain's interest in the matter of life and death.

When at last she stood up from behind the boulder, she was wild-eyed, covered with blood, her face so strained it appeared her cheekbones might punch through the skin. I caught sight of Brad standing off to the side near Callie. He looked like he was about to cry, and I understood that he must understand what I know for a while—that though we had found Kiri, she would never find us again. Whether it had been the lost duel or her troubles with me or everything since or a combination of all those things, she was gone into a distance where we could never travel, into the world that had bred her, a world whose laws would never again permit the enfeebling consolations of home and hearth.

We all watched her, standing in ragged ranks like a congregation stunned and disoriented by some terrible revelation from the pulpit, waiting for her to give some sign of what she might do next, but she remained motionless—she might have been a machine that had been switched off. The silence was so deep, I could hear the wind skittering gravel across the hardpan, and I had the notion that the night was hardening around us, sealing us inside the moment—it felt more like resolution than anything that had happened down in the crater. Like a violent signature in the corner of a painting of blood and degradation and loss. Finally Wall moved up beside her. He outweighed her by a couple of hundred pounds, but even so he was extremely cautious in his approach. He was talking to her, but I couldn't make out the words; from the sound of the fragments I was able to distinguish, however, I figured he was speaking in a northern tongue, one they shared. After a bit he took the knife from her hand and wiped it clean on his coat.

“Well then,” he said to us, without a trace of sarcasm and maybe with just a touch of regret. “I guess we can go now.”

*

IN THE END IT HAPPENED THAT Wall was proved both right and wrong. As he'd predicted, the Captains weren't able to root us out of the deep places where we hid, but they came damn close and many lives were lost. Eventually that time passed, and things returned to normal . . . at least as normal as normal gets out here in the Big Nothing. We live in strange subterranean labyrinth beneath a black mesa, a place of tunnels and storage chambers containing all manner of marvels, and machines whose purpose we may never determine, where once our ancestors slept and dreamed of a sweet untroubled world that would be born upon their waking. Bradley attends school, and though the subjects he studies are far removed from the rudimentary ones he studied back on the Edge, he remains nonetheless a schoolboy. I grow vegetables and fruits and wheat and such on the subsurface farms; Callie helps to administer stocks of food and weapons and so forth; Kiri trains our people in combat. So it would seem that very little has changed for us, but of course almost everything has.

When I finished the main body of this story, I showed it to Callie and after she had read it she asked why I'd called it “Human History,” because it dealt with such a brief period of time and ignored what we had learned of the world of our ancestors. And that's the truth, it does ignore all that. I've seen the paintings our ancestors created, I've read their books and listened to their music, I've experienced no end of their lofty thoughts and glorious expressions, and I admire them for the most part. But they don't counterbalance the mass slaughters, the barbarities, the unending tortures and tor-

ments, the vilenesses, the sicknesses, the tribal idiocies, the trillion rapes and humiliations that comprise the history of that world up until its mysterious ending (I doubt we'll ever learn what happened, unless the Captains decide to tell us). What the Captains did to us in the Black Garden pales by comparison to the nature of those ancient atrocities, even if you figure in seven hundred years of evil duplicity. And at any rate, to my mind the Captains are relics of that old world, and soon they'll be gone, relegated to that distant past. As will, I believe, men and women such as Wall and Kiri. And there we'll be, the whole human race freed from that tired old history, maybe not completely, but with a chance of doing something new, if we've got the heart to take it.

Back when I was living in Edgeville, I never thought much about God or religion. The Captains, I suppose, took the place of God, and having God available to talk with at any hour of the day or night caused me to think less than perhaps I should have about the mystery of life. But maybe that was a blessing in disguise, because when I look back at all the trouble caused by religion in the old world, I have to think that I'm better off the way I am. Once I found an ageworn Bible, and in the front was a picture of the God known as Jehovah, an old man with fierce eyes and cruel lips and a beard and tufted eyebrows. He looked a lot like Wall, and sometimes when I go outside and glance up into the stormy sky—the skies out here are rarely clear—I imagine I see that angry old bearded Jehovah face come boiling out of the snow clouds, and I wonder if Wall wasn't standing in for him, if he wasn't the kind of leader men once made in the image of their god—strong, blustery, bloody-minded men who knew only one way of achieving their goals. We need Wall and Kiri now, we need their violent hearts, their death-driven need to dominate; but it's clear—at least so it seems—that there'll soon come a time when we won't need them any longer, and maybe that's all we can hope for, that we'll learn to choose our leaders differently, that we won't end up apes or Captains.

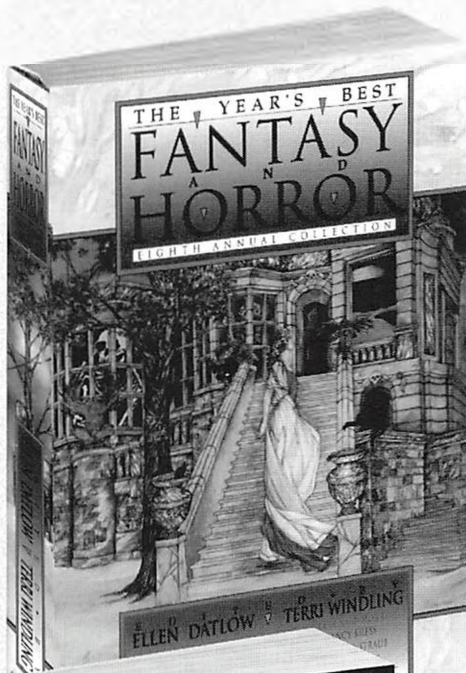
Old Hay forgot to tell me how to wind down a story, and I'm sure I'm going about it all wrong, trying to explain what I mean by "Human History," and how limiting the definition of that term to a period of a few weeks of happiness and a betrayal and a ride out onto the flats and a battle seems to incorporate all the essentials of the process, as well as to voice some faint hope that we can change. But it's my story, the only one I've got worth telling, so I'll just go ahead and do my worst and hope that having it finish wrong or awkwardly will suit the ungainly nature of the tale, its half-formed resolution, and the frayed endings and uncompleted gestures that make up most of the substance of our lives.

In the days and weeks that followed the battle, Callie and I drifted apart. This was chiefly due to Kiri's presence—we could not feel easy with her around, even though she

did not display the least interest in either one of us. I had an affair with Maddy, more of a healing than a passion. No hearts were broken, no souls transformed, but it was fine place to be for the time it lasted. Even in the midst of it I half hoped that Callie and I might get back together, but after Maddy and I went our separate ways, Callie remained aloof from me and I could not find it in myself to go to her. As had happened that night when Kiri had caught us at it in the store, I came to have a sense that the love we'd made back then had been childish, that the people we'd been were characters, part of a *Dramatis Personæ*, our desire a consummate fakery, emblematic of a need to be the center of attention of those around us, like actors in a pleasureable yet somehow despicable farce. And so we continued to deny what now seems inevitable.

I won't try to make any great dramatic presentation of how we did get back together, because it wasn't dramatic in the least. One night she walked into the little room I'd made for myself on one of the farms to sleep in when I didn't want to return to my regular quarters, and after some dodging around and a bit of inconsequential talk, we became lovers again. But the grave tenderness we expressed, touching each other carefully, treasuringly, like a blind man would touch the face of a statue, it was a far cry from the way it had been back in Edgeville, from our sweaty, joyful, self-deluding first time, and I recognized that whatever good had existed in our beginning had grown and flourished, and that's the wonder of it, that's the amazing thing, that despite the betrayals and failures and all the confused principles that contend in us, seed will sprout in this barren soil we call the human spirit and sometimes grow into something straight and green and true. As I lay with Callie that night, maybe it was wrong of me, but I couldn't feel sorry for anything that had happened, for any of us, not even for Kiri in the black wish of her sleep shaping herself into an arrow that one day would find an enemy's heart. It occurred to me that we were all becoming what we needed to be, what our beginnings had charged us to become: Kiri a death; Brad a man; Callie and I ordinary lovers, something we might once have taken for granted, but that now we both understood was more than we'd ever had the right to hope that we could come to be. It was a pure and powerful feeling to tear away the shreds and tatters of our old compulsions, and steep ourselves in the peace that we gave to one another, and know who we were and why, that Bad Men were mostly only good men gone over the edge to freedom, and that the past was just about done with dying, and the future was at hand. π

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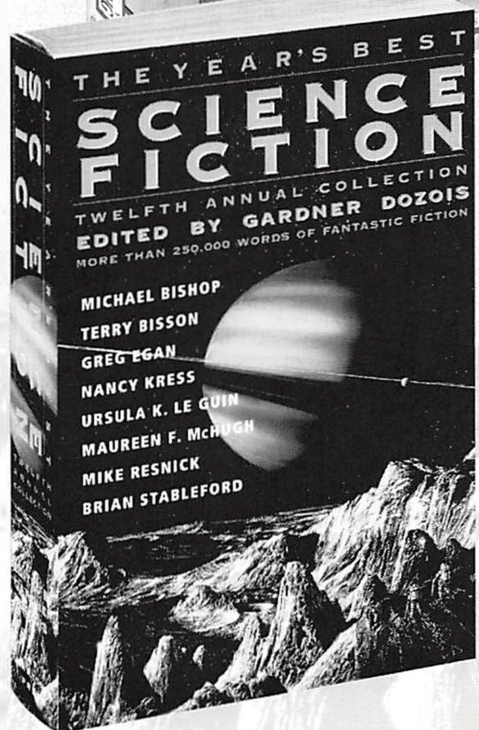
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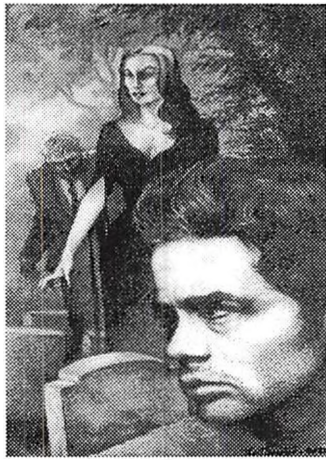
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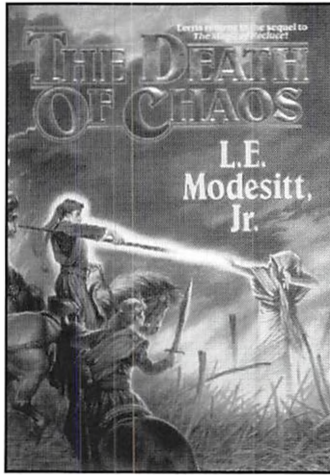
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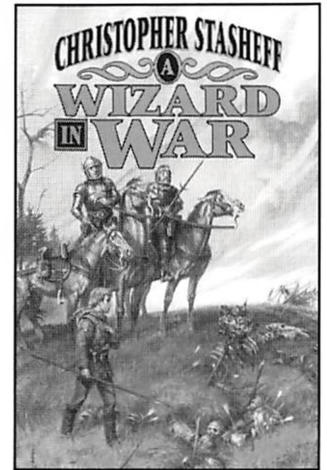
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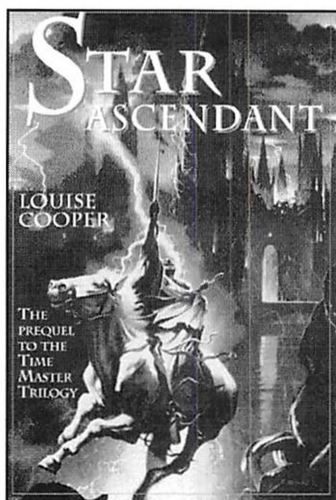
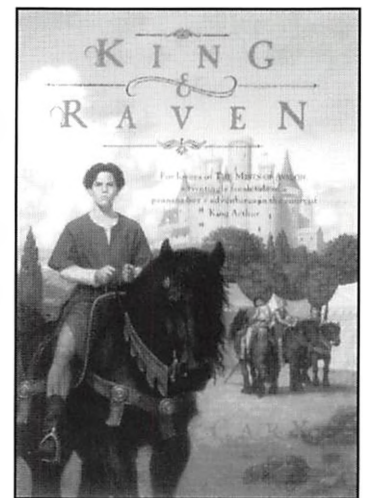


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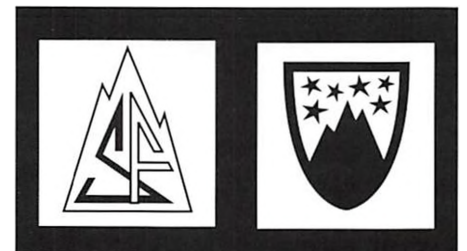
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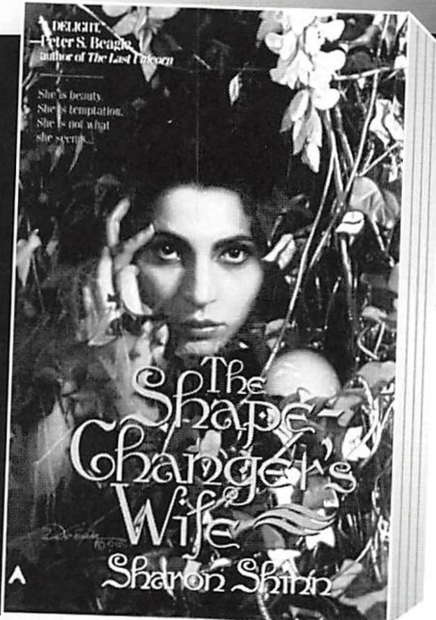


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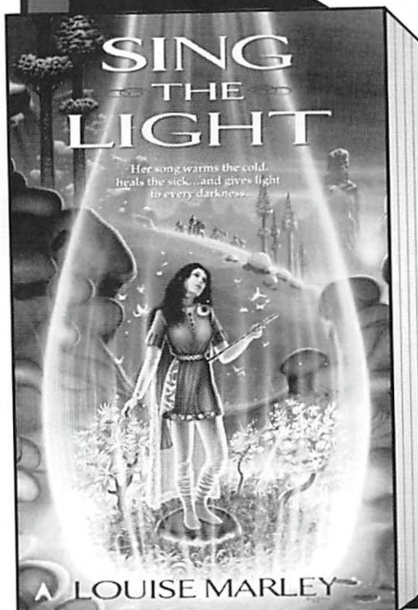
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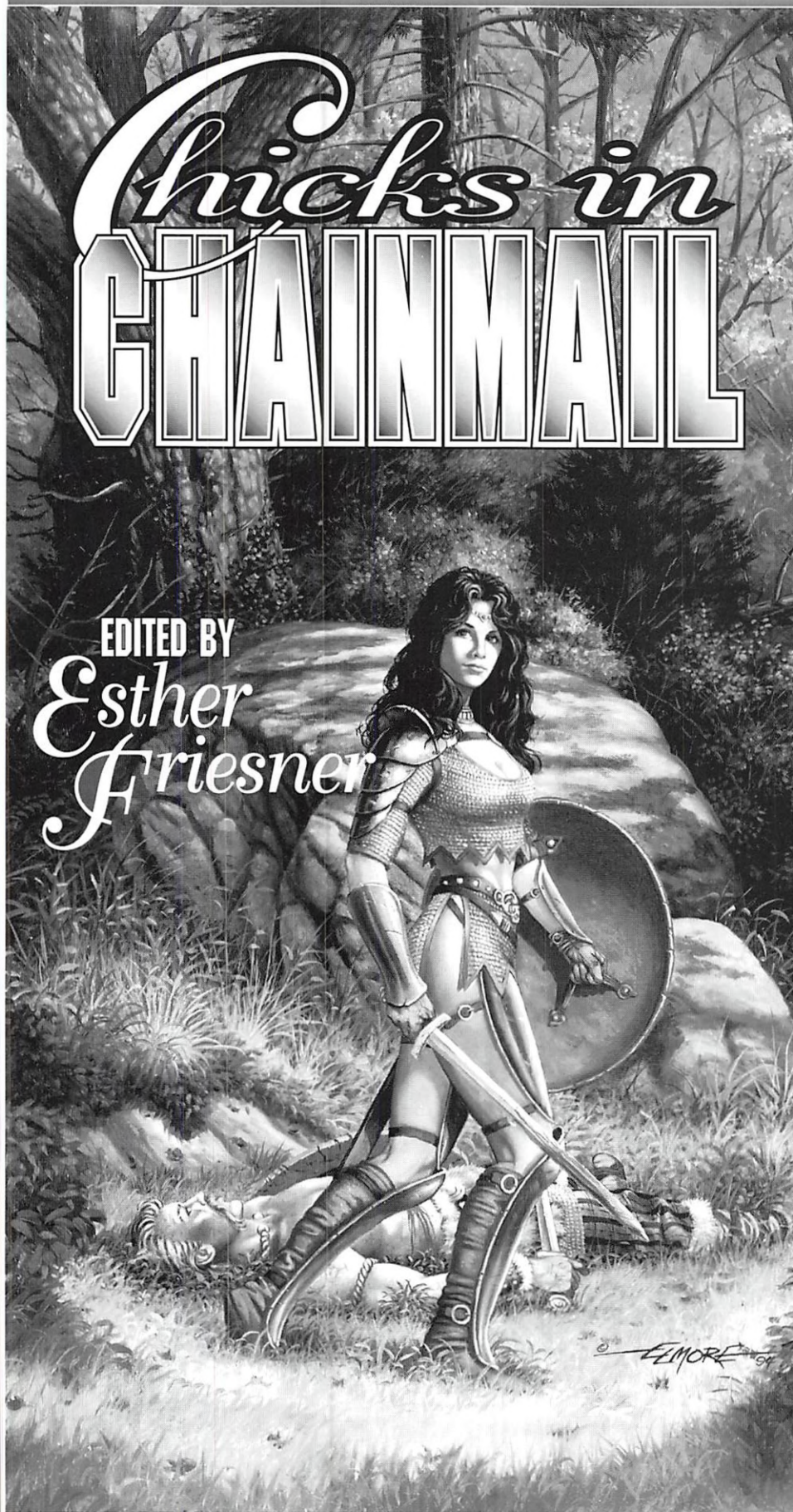
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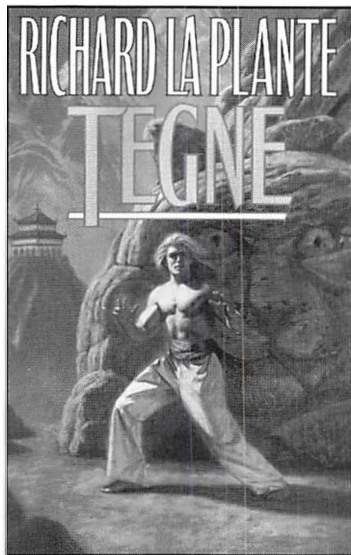
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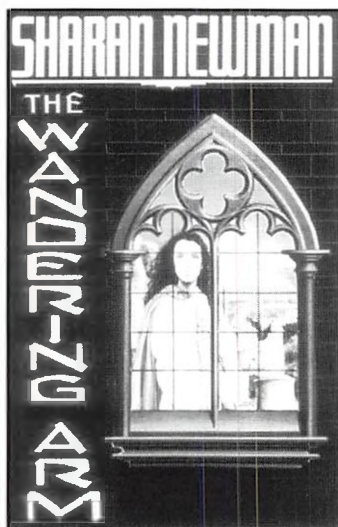
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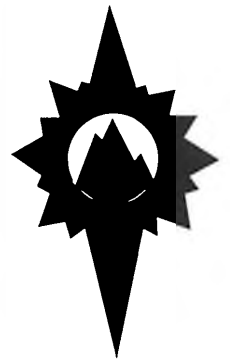
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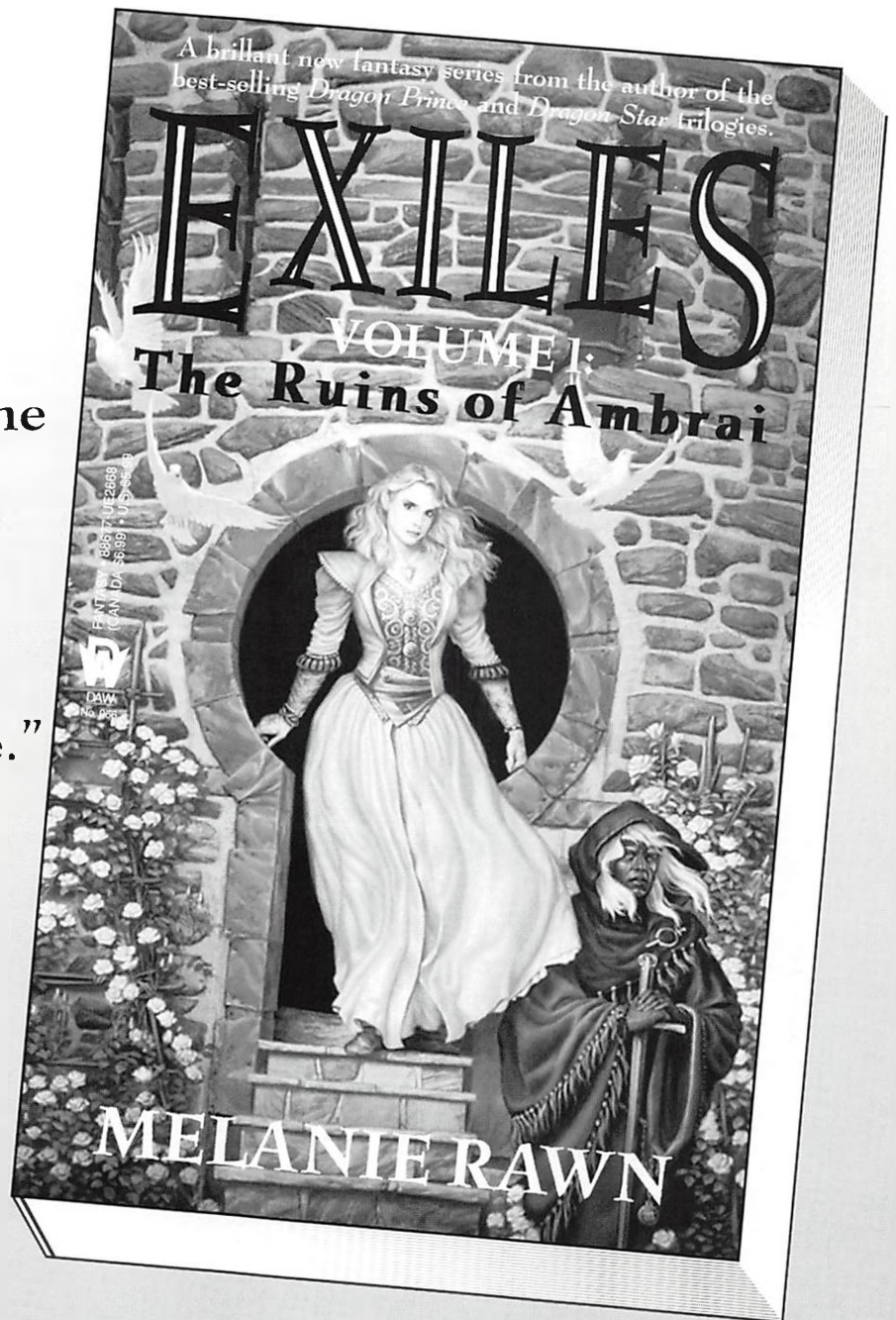
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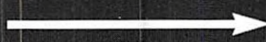
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