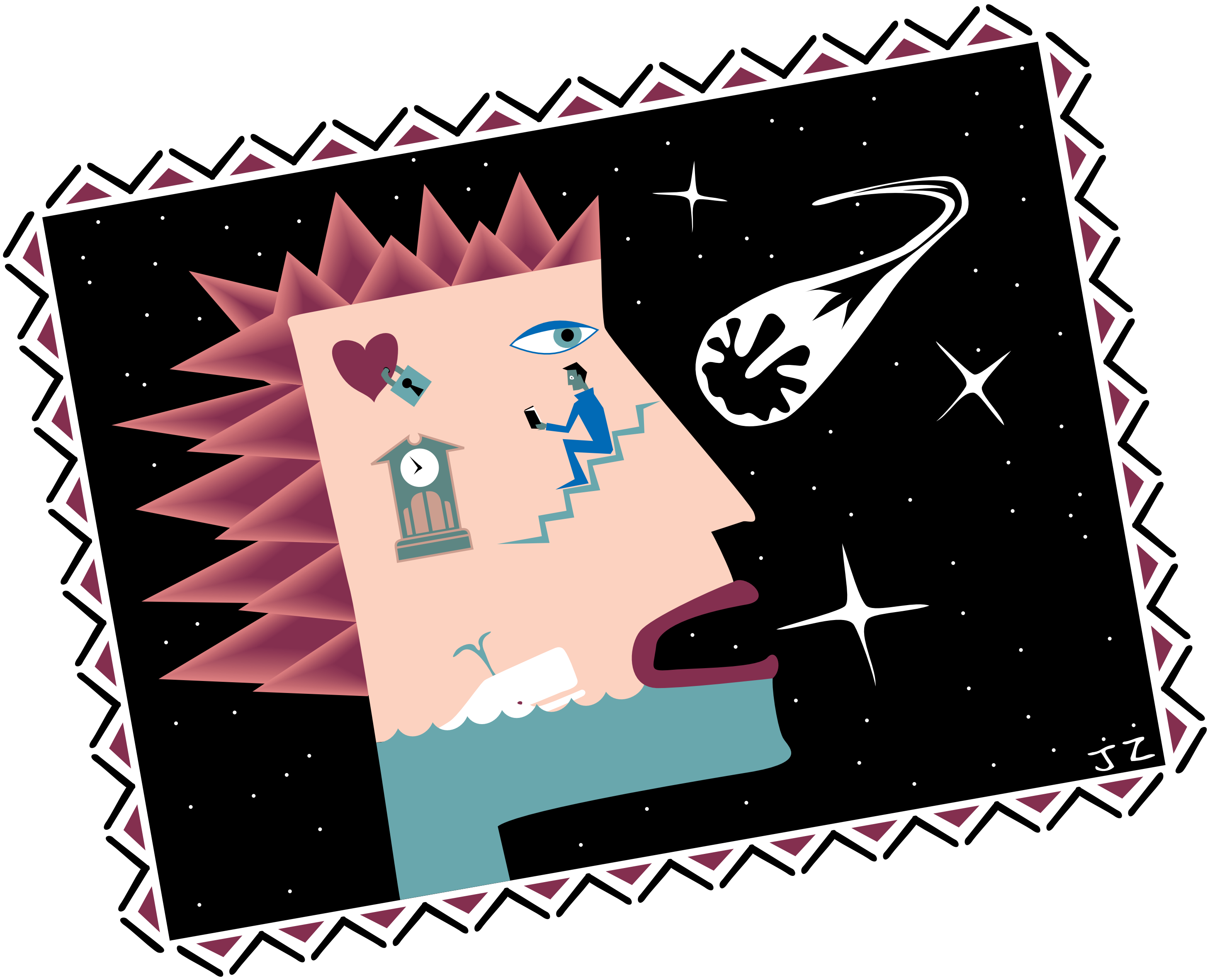
Quanta



Volume IV Issue 3 ISSN 1053-8496 August 1992

Quanta

ISSN 1053-8496
August 1992
Volume IV Issue 3

Editor/Technical Director .... Daniel K. Appelquist
Cover Art .... John Zimmerman

Quanta is supported solely by reader contributions. If you would like to add yourself to the list of people who keep Quanta alive, please send $5 (or more) to the postal address below. Checks may be made out to *Quanta Magazine*.. Donation is not a requirement for subscription.

Quanta
401 Amberson Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15232

The PostScript version of Quanta is produced using the FrameMaker document preperation software. The cover art was produced using Adobe Illustrator. PostScript and Adobe are registered trademarks of Adobe Systems Incorporated. FrameMaker is a registered trademark of Frame Technology Corporation.

All submissions, request for submission guidelines, requests for back issues, queries concerning subscriptions, letters, comments, or other correspondance should be sent to the Internet address quanta@andrew.cmu.edu.

Quanta is published in both PostScript and ASCII format. Requests to be added to the distribution list for Quanta should be sent to either

quanta+requests.postscript@andrew.cmu.edu
or
quanta+requests.ascii@andrew.cmu.edu

for PostScript or ASCII subscriptions respectively..

Subscriptions come in three flavors: MAIL subscriptions, where each issue is sent as a series electronic mail messages; BITNET subscriptions, where each issue is sent as a file over the BITNET and FTP subscriptions, where subscribers receive a notification when a new issue has been placed at a designated FTP site.

Anonymous FTP servers that carry current and back issues of Quanta are:

export.acs.cmu.edu 128.2.35.66
ftp.eff.org 192.88.144.4
lth.se (European service only) 130.235.16.3

Ascii Quanta issues are available via Gopher from the server at gopher-srv.acs.cmu.edu, port 70, in the Archives directory.

Issues of Quanta are also available on CompuServe in the “Zines from the Net” area of the EFF forum (accessed by typing GO EFFSIG).

Articles

Serials

Stories

Looking Ahead

Daniel K. Appelquist

Well why not? Jason Snell did it – put his mug on top of every editor's column this year! Why not me?

Anyway: Hi everyone! Sorry about how late this issue was getting out the door. This "August" issue is really a September issue, but if you don't tell anyone, I won't. I've been playing with the format a bit, as you may have noticed, and I'd appreciate comments, if you have them. This is the first issue of Quanta *not* produced with LaTeX – it was produced using the FrameMaker software. Some may shout "heretic" at this aparant abandoning of what some would call "the one true page layout software." Let me say this, however. If there was any way to do what I wanted to do in LaTeX, without going through and writing my *own* TeX macros (which basically defeats the whole purpose of LaTeX anyway) I would have done it. Ah well...all things change, I suppose...

What I'd really like to see change is the rate of submissions I've been getting. No doubt many of you haven't sent me your manuscripts because you've assumed that I was dead or had ceased production of Quanta (due to the long hiaitus I seem to have taken.) Well let me encourage you to send those (e-)manuscripts in! I'm looking for new authors, fresh points of view, things I haven't seen before. The October issue (even if it comes out in November) will be the sixteenth issue thisfar produced, and the THIRD anniversary issue. Three years! Wow.

So let's see. What's happening with me? Well, I'm moving again, so the postal address for Quanta will change soon. If you do have something to send me regular mail, however, you can just send it to the address listed on the contents page, and through the magic of the U.S. postal system, it will be forwarded to me wherever I go.

I want to thank John Zimmerman for some particularly interesting cover art for this issue. The piece is based on H. Palmer Hall's "Flight of the Pequod II".

I was glad to hear that my good friend Jason Snell landed safely at the Berkeley School of Journalism in California. I say "good friend" knowing full well that we have never, ever met. Maybe some day... (Jason has a short piece at the end of this issue entitled "A Reality of One's Own".)

I'd like to include a plug here for the independent video "WAX or the discovery of television among the bees". David Blair, writer/director of "WAX" was good enough to lend me a copy for a while, and frankly, I was quite impressed. "WAX" is not really a traditional narrative film so much as a spectacle of sound and vision. The narrative exists, to be sure, but seems to take a back seat to the bizarre imagery and wealth of ideas that Blair puts forth. If you're into weird, strange cinema, like I am, then you could do worse than checking out "WAX." See the back of this issue for more information.

I'm finding it harder and harder to look ahead, of late. I really don't have any idea what I'll be doing in a year, or where I'll be, but, rest assured, I'll try to continue to produce Quanta.

Well that's about it for me for now... See you all next issue!

Moving?

Take Quanta With You!

Please remember to keep us apprised of any changes in your address. If you don't we can't guarantee that you'll continue to receive the high quality of fiction and non-fiction that Quanta provides. Also, if your account is going to become non-existent, even temporarilly, please inform us. This way, we can keep Net traffic due to bounced mail at a minimum. Please send all subscription updates to quanta@andrew.cmu.edu. Thanks!

Agricultural Revolution

by Phillip Nolte

It all started when the earth was invaded by the Space Aliens last year. The SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) transmitters had been wildly successful even if the outcome of the project wasn't exactly what its founders had in mind. Make no mistake about it, it was an exciting time to be a newsman. You could see it in the headlines blazing the news all across the country: Earth Attacked by Space Aliens From the Andromeda Galaxy! Alien Base on Far Side of Moon! Far-out Foreigners Fight European Forces, Immediate Surrender Demanded!

Yes indeed, a very exciting time to be a newspaper reporter. Unless of course, like me, you were assigned to the agricultural beat in rural Idaho! Yes, Space Aliens were set to land on the White House lawn, governments all over the world were contemplating the future of mankind and was I covering the story? Was I in the front lines, poised to garner fame and glory? No. I was driving my old, beat-up Subaru out to Arco, Idaho to visit with the object of this week's farmer spotlight, Lester W. McGill, an eccentric potato farmer. McGill had designed or adapted some electronic gadgets for the purpose of getting his spuds into and out of the ground more efficiently! Lucky me! See article and photos, page 6C, just beneath the obituaries, right above the ad for ribbed implement tires!

Surely there would be a reward for me in the afterlife, I thought, because I was certainly doing my penance now!

The radio signal on the all-news station had faded away as I went behind the mountains, taking me out of touch with the news that I craved. All the other stations were playing country-western music. Dolly Parton and Waylon Jennings don't know much 'bout flyin' saucers.

Mercifully, I finally found the farm out on RR 2 Arco. Right where they said it would be. You've heard the directions before: "Yeah, ya'll jus' go on down pas' the feed store and take the firs' turn to the lef' and go 'bout one and a half mile to that big center pivot irr-ee-gation rig, then ya'll head straight for them Lemhi Mountains. Ya'll cain't miss the farm, It's the one with the gee-o-deesik dome out back!"

The SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) transmitters had been wildly successful even if the outcome of the project wasn't exactly what its founders had in mind.

This means, of course that you'll never find it on your first try! Or your second. I did well to find it on my third, mostly because of the geodesic dome, which made me some 28 minutes late for my appointment. I did know from experience, however, that these folks were used to time being somewhat flexible so I didn't worry overmuch.

As expected, the McGill place was a complete mess! This guy was one of those fellows who collected all manner of junk, preferably that which he could get for free or for a low, low price. He'd cart these treasures back to the farm with big plans for modifying them or salvaging parts from them but inevitably wound up forgetting about them when he got sidetracked by something even more compelling. If this process is given enough time, the junk will eventually overwhelm the entire yard. The saturation point had been reached sometime ago at McGill's, but that hadn't stopped the junk from continuing to accumulate.

Some of the hulks and bits of rusted metal were recognizable as old farm implements or truck parts while others were weird conglomerations of the familiar, the somewhat familiar, and the very strange. You know the kind of stuff I mean, someone's dream of a better mousetrap or spud planter or what-have-you that took a lot of time but didn't work out quite right and is now long- forgotten. From the looks of things, McGill had been the undertaker for other people's dream machines for a good many years! In spite of myself, I was intrigued; I'd always been fascinated by junk yards.

I slung my camera bag over my shoulder and grasped my note pad in my hand as I waded through the junk and knocked on the front door of a crooked little house that had, at one time, been white. While I waited for a response, I noticed that the front lawn was long, weedy and unkempt.

Mrs. McGill was wiping her hands on a red gingham apron when she opened the door to let me in. She was a short, slender middle-aged lady, well preserved with clear blue eyes and an honest, farmer's-wife face. The only concession she made to her age was her hair color. It was an awful out-of-the-bottle pinkish-red that looks so damned unnatural, that it makes you shake your head in wonder at why people would actually pay money to have someone do that to their hair. Naturally, I told her I liked it.

The house reminded me of my Grand-ma's place. It was permeated with the smell of fresh-baked bread and fresh-brewed coffee. In sharp contrast to the outside, the interior of the house was primly decorated and neat as a pin. It was as though the front door was the border between two distinct worlds – chaos without and order within!

"You're the reporter from the 'Eastern Idaho Sentinel' ain't you?" she said, with that endearing Western accent that you either come to love so well or to really hate if you live out here long enough.

"Yes, Ma'am," I replied, reverting to the local dialect, "Trevor Dahlgren, at your service!"

"Here, Mr. Dahlgren, take this basket o' cinnamon rolls, an' I'll take this tray o' coffee and cups an' we'll go out back to the gee-o-deezic dome. That's where Les is workin' right now."

I followed the slight, almost frail form of Mrs. McGill (there are no Ms. out here in this part of the country!) across the junk-strewn farmyard out to the largish geodesic dome with the imposing outlines of the snow-capped Lemhi mountain range outlined against the sky behind it.

"Ain't thet somethin' 'bout them Space Aliens, Mr. Dahlgren?"

"Yes, Mrs. McGill, it certainly is! Please, call me Trevor."

"My name's Dorothy. Well never fear, Mr. Trevor, my Les is gonna save the world. Fact is, you got here jus' in time."

"I... ah... what exactly do you mean, Mrs. Mc... er... Dorothy?"

"You'll see, Mr. Trevor, you'll see."

By then we were at the door to the geodesic dome and I could get no more out of the little woman. Both of us ducked our heads and stepped over a rather tallish sill to enter through the hexagonal door. I noticed as we went in that the door was of a very hefty construction and that the structure of the dome itself had an inner wall about a foot inside the outer skin.

The inside of the dome was something else again. I can't say what I expected, but it certainly wasn't what I found!

We went up a set of metal stairs to the main floor of the building which was about six feet above ground level. The interior of the dome was brightly lit and criss-crossed with I-beam braces in an apparent attempt to increase the structure's strength. All around the perimeter, along the walls, was a continuous conglomeration of strange-looking, cobbled-together machinery.

In the center of the room was a John Deere tractor, minus the rear wheels. In place of the rear wheels was what appeared to be a very large electric generator. From the generator, a huge cable, fully six inches in diameter, disappeared into the floor. A length of large diameter flex-pipe connected the exhaust pipe of the tractor to another hole in the floor. In place of the tractor seat was a bucket seat with a headrest that looked like it had been lifted from 1969 Camaro. The new instrument panel was a plethora of digital and analog gauges with, strangest of all, a cable coming out of the middle of it that was connected to what looked like a Nintendo control. All around the room, electrical cables and wires ran everywhere, helter-skelter, across the floor and up the walls.

I looked up at the ceiling and noticed that the geodesic pattern of the upper portion of the dome had a ring of the hexagonal panels replaced with a clear material, making a sort of skylight. Several other panels, at eye level and at sixty degree intervals around the structure were similarly replaced, making for a series of windows.

Across the building, bent over one of the arcane machines, was a tall, skinny man, with sparse, graying hair who had to be Lester W. McGill. He had a sort of "Lester" look about him, if you know what I mean. He was dressed in a pair of those striped light-blue bib overalls that all good farmers wear – you know the ones, the kind that you buy already dirty. As he turned in response to our entry, I saw that he wore an old-fashioned pair of tiny, round, wire-rimmed glasses on his hawk-like nose below his close-set and somewhat wild-looking hazel eyes.

Just to McGill's left was a shorter man who also turned around and looked up from his work. He was young, handsome and Latin. Probably a Mexican hired hand, I thought.

Lester didn't even introduce himself. Instead he spoke to his wife, who was right behind me.

"Dorothy, put that stuff down here and ya'll get back to the house and grab them bags I had you pack this mornin'. Make sure to grab my chewing tobacco out of the cupboard on the way. Hurry now, we ain't got much time!" He must have remembered our phone conversation of the day before because he guessed right off who I was.

"I'm Lester McGill, and you'll be Mr. Dahlgren – Trevor Dahlgren. That right?"

"Ye... ss," I managed to stammer out. His air of urgency had caught me off guard.

"Well, Dahlgren, you got here just in time. We need your help."

"Okay, Sure," I said, still rather in shock.

"This here's Juan. Help him load up a few supplies if you would. I'll explain everything later."

Juan and I took a few minutes to carry, among other things, six sacks of potatoes into the dome. Over the high door sill and up the six feet of stairs. Those suckers were heavy! I was sweating as we dropped the last one onto the newly formed pile along one side of the dome. Juan smiled at my discomfort, flashing even, white teeth.

"What are these for, Mr. McGill?"

"Lester," he said evenly. "Spuds? You never know what we might be up against in the next few days or weeks. Spuds are good food. Good enough so's my Irish ancestors used them as for their only food for a good many years." He stopped and scratched his chin. "'Course, there was that damned famine!"

"Food?" I asked, and then repeated Lester's own words. "What we might be up against in the next few days or weeks? What do you mean, Lester?"

"Why, we're gonna save the world from them aliens, that's what!"

Just then, Dorothy returned with several suitcases, some tins of Copenhagen, and a large, unkempt, Heinz-fifty-seven breed farm dog. Dorothy had changed into a very practical pair of blue jeans and a pink sweatshirt. The outfit looked nice on her; the sweatshirt even matched her hair.

"Close the door," Lester called out to Juan. Juan swung a massive door closed and spun the handwheel in the center. I was reminded of the outer hull door that I'd seen in those old WW II submarine movies. "Sit, Balthazer," Lester told the dog. The beast obediently sat. Then Lester turned back to me.

"The aliens are going to land in Washington," I said.

"That's right," said Lester. "An' we're going there after 'em. We did a little test on our powerplant a few minutes ago and now we're ready. Bring your notepad and your camera, Dahlgren, 'cause, by Gawd, your gonna get some news!"

"Powerplant?" I asked.

"Hell yes, boy! Ain't you figured things out yet? This here gee-o-deesik dome is a spaceship an' we're going to war! Bein' a red-blooded American and a Idahoan, I just hates them gad-damned aliens!"

With that he went over and hunkered his lanky frame into the bucket seat, snapped himself into a three-point seat belt and picked up the control module (I looked carefully, it *was* a Nintendo control!). Juan, meanwhile, had placed himself in front of a very new-looking Zeos PC and monitor on a bucket seat that appeared to be the mate of the one on the tractor. I heard the unmistakable sound of a starter motor, followed by the equally unmistakable roar of a diesel engine. I hoped that the exhaust pipe was vented to the outside or things were gonna get mighty uncomfortable inside our "gee-o-deesik" dome!

"Find a place to sit down, Dahlgren. We're takin' off!"

In a state of numbed shock, I sat down next to Dorothy in a short row of what appeared to be used theater chairs. I found a somewhat worn lap belt and strapped in. Balthazer came over and took a station laying at my feet with his head up and his ears pricked.

We did not have an overlong wait for the next set of developments. Lester put the remains of the tractor in gear and let out the clutch as he simultaneously manipulated the Nintendo control. I felt a strangely familiar sensation of movement, like the feeling you get when a fast elevator whooshes upwards – except that this sensation was almost brutal in its intensity and it lasted for considerably longer.

"Yeee haa!" shouted Lester. "It worked, I knew it would work!"

I saw the outline of the Lemhi Mountain range go past one of the hexagonal windows. It occurred to me that maybe I'd better start referring to them as "viewports."

"I'll be a son-of-a-bitch," I said aloud. "This thing *is* a God-damned spaceship!" As soon as the acceleration diminished, I got out of my seat to gaze out of the nearest of the viewports. It was just like the pictures from the space shuttle, the large sphere of the earth all blue and white with a smattering of brown and green showing through the white. Below I could make out the Oregon coast line, off to the left. We were already in orbit! This thing could really fly!

Lester didn't waste any time. "Gimme a vector for Washington DC would you, Juan?"

Juan's fingers rapidly caressed the keyboard of the Zeos. In less than five seconds he called out, "Heading 386, Les. Tell me when you reach 25 minutes so I can activate the atmospheric compensation shields before we re-enter the atmosphere."

Juan's English was almost flawless, with just a hint of a Spanish accent. Whatever he might have been, Juan was no hired hand! In spite of the exhilaration and shock caused by the recent turn of events, my experience as a reporter kicked in. Almost automatically, I began to ask a few questions.

"I don't believe I got your full name or what it is that you do, Juan." He swiveled his Camaro bucket seat around to face me and smiled smugly as he replied.

"Dr. Juan Ramirez de la Vega, at your service. Quantum physicist by training. Now, as you can see, I'm a practicing Astrophysicist. I am originally from Venezuela and was educated at Cal Poly before I did a stint at Fermilab. Until about six months ago, I was at INEL right over near Arco," (INEL is the famous Idaho National Engineering Laboratories where they do all the nuclear research out here in the deserts of Idaho. Needless to say, I was impressed!).

"Did you design this ship?"

"Not really, although I helped with some of the subsystems. This is Lester's brainchild. He came out to our project at INEL to pick up an old experimental fusion torus that we were getting rid of. The INEL authorities thought he wanted it for the more than two miles of copper wire in it. He and I struck up a conversation and it soon became apparent to me that such was not the case. Lester had some very intriguing ideas. That was about a year ago. One thing led to another and soon I was working evenings out at the farm. Things were finally going so well that I resigned my position at INEL about two months ago. Lester and I have been working almost full-time together ever since."

"How does this ... ah ... spaceship work?"

"I cannot explain the mechanisms to someone who does not have a thorough knowledge of higher mathematics, and like anything that has to do with quantum physics, a large dash of faith is also required, but I shall do my best."

Juan got up from his console and walked over next to the tractor were Lester was busy manipulating the Nintendo control and watching his readouts. We both stepped back as a wad of chewed tobacco winged past us and into a trash can next to the tractor.

"That old fusion torus is beneath the floor here, but there is some eighteen inches of concrete between us and the torus. There is a twofold purpose for this. One, to give us some protection and two, to provide some extra mass."

Balthazer had followed us over. He sat on his haunches between us with his head cocked to one side. It didn't bother me, he was probably getting as much out of this as I was.

"Protection?" I asked.

"We were just being careful at the beginning of our experiments. It is not really an issue."

"Ah, good," I replied, only partially convinced. Dr. de la Vega continued his guided tour.

"This machine back here, connected to the tractor, that looks like a generator is really the secret of the whole apparatus. The device actually does generate electrical power but it does so in a very special way. Again, there is a lot of math involved but it is fairly accurate to say that this current is at right angles to our normal universe."

"Right angles to the normal universe?"

We dodged another wad of tobacco juice.

"That's right Dahlgren," said Lester, reaching for his tin of Copenhagen, "the ee-lectrical field is kitty-wumpus to ol' terra firma here. Took me near on to a year to make it work!"

Juan waited politely through the interruption, nodded in agreement and continued: "When you apply that power to the right sized torus, you get an antigravity drive system that taps into the magnetic lines of force of the universe itself! That's why the extra mass of the concrete is so important. To put it simply, we can actually magnify the slab's puny gravitational force several hundred million times – only it is a negative or anti-gravity field."

"You do all that with the front half of a John Deere 4020 tractor?" I asked, incredulously.

"Oh yes. We don't need a large power source because, in actuality, we are merely channelling a minuscule portion of a huge reservoir of power rather than generating the power ourselves."

"Wow," I said, nodding my head as if I understood. Next to me, Balthazer nodded too.

"There's more," said Juan. "Modulate the power through the converter over here – he pointed to a breadbox sized mass of exposed electrical components – and you can generate shields. Almost any type of shield you want, anti-energy or atmospheric or meteorite. If we'd had a few more weeks we might even have come up with some weapons from this technology."

The reference to weapons brought me back to reality, reminding me of the purpose of our little jaunt. We were about to engage an enemy from outer space, that we knew little about, with a barnyard creation from a farm in the mountains of Idaho! Without any weapons!? Did I mention that these same aliens had brought the modern armed forces of Europe to their knees in just under two weeks!

I began to get a little nervous.

"You mean we haven't got any weapons?" I asked. Under the circumstances, I thought it was fair question.

"Weapons? Yeah, we got weapons," said Lester. Before he could elaborate, the two men had to get back to work.

"Twenty-five minutes, Juan."

"Very good, Les. Washington dead ahead."

I swallowed heavily. A life-long ambition, to actually get into space, had been fulfilled, Unfortunately, it didn't look as though I was going to get much of a chance to savor the experience!

We descended almost noiselessly through the atmosphere. Soon, I could make out the unmistakable skyline of our nation's capital. Seemingly on guard about the dome of the capital hovered three glowing, pulsating, saucer-shaped objects, each about the size of a 747.

"Andromedan space craft, dead ahead, Les," said Juan. He was now working continuously at the Zeos console.

"Yep, I sees 'em. Dorothy, git the shotgun."

"Right away, Lester."

"Dahlgren, ya'll git the door so's the Missus can git a shot at them aliens, would ya?"

Well, this made a lot of sense! We were facing three war vessels of a highly advanced alien race who hadn't even been marked by all the sophisticated weaponry that Europe could throw at them and we were about to attack them nothing more advanced than a double-barreled shotgun! I said as much.

"Never fear, Dahlgren," drawled Lester, "It's double 0 buckshot!"

"That's a relief!" I yelled. "Buckshot or birdshot, what's the difference?"

"Jus' calm down and open the door, Mr. Trevor," soothed Dorothy. I rolled my eyes, but did as I was told. What the hell, I thought, we aren't going to live through the day anyway.

With the door open, Lester swung the ship around until we could see the alien vessels through it. They were only a few hundred feet away. I could hear a strange humming noise that rose and fell in intensity with the pulsations in the glow of the saucers. Balthazer's hackles came up as he bared his teeth at them and growled.

"Take a bead on the lead one, Ma," said Lester. "Ya'll be ready to slam that door, Dahlgren. We may need to git to hell outta here in a hurry!"

That was the first sane thing I'd heard all day!

"Okay, Pa, I'm ready!" sang out Dorothy.

"Git ready with them energy shields, Juan."

"Ready, Les."

"Fire away, Ma!"

Ka-whump! Ka-whump! Dorothy rocked back from the recoil of the shots but, farm girl that she was, seemed unaffected otherwise. The noise was deafening in the enclosed space of the dome! Wonder of wonders, the lead alien ship was ... Totally unharmed! But we had gotten their attention! Balthazer began barking uncontrollably as the saucers got brighter and the pulsations increased in frequency.

"Shields, Juan! Door, Dahlgren!"

I noticed a faint blue haze appear around the hull of the dome as I slammed the door and spun the wheel to lock it. The lights dimmed and the dome lurched and rang like a bell as we took what I presumed to be a direct hit from the lead alien ship. By now, Balthazer was at one of the viewports continuing to bark furiously.

"Hey, Juan, them shields work too!" shouted Lester. "Looks like we'd better high-tail it outta here! Take your seats, folks! Shut up, Balthazer!" The big dog obeyed immediately and bounded back over to resume his station at my feet.

We took two more hits, without apparent harm, before the now familiar elevator sensation struck us again. This time the intensity was far worse as the diesel engine roared at full throttle.

"They're following us," said Juan, matter of factly.

"Good,"

"They're gaining,"

"Yeah, I figured they might,"

"What, now, McGill?" I couldn't believe that we were still alive, but found that I rather liked the sensation, if you get my drift.

"Well, now that we're out of the atmosphere we can try some other things," replied Lester. To my horror, he throttled down the diesel and pushed in the clutch on the wheelless tractor!

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"We're gonna try her in second." I heard the crunch of a gear change. The clutch came back out and the engine rpm increased. I was slammed into my seat by a hither-to unimaginable force. Even the stalwart Balthazer whimpered from the pain.

"Good," said Juan, "They're falling back. You should apply the throttle a little more gently in the higher gears, Les. That was almost painful. Or should we activate the artificial gravity maintenance module?"

"It's gotta be the ARTGRAV module, Juan. That last blast made me see spots before my eyes!"

"It appears we have little choice, Les. The alien ships are again gaining on us."

"Let's do the ARTGRAV and then see what happens."

"Right," said Juan, as he flipped a series of switches on a console near the Zeos.

Immediately, the sensation of being in a moving elevator ceased and I felt no different than if we were on the ground, back on the farm.

"Why didn't you do that before?" I asked.

"Unfortunately, we haven't gotten all the bugs out of it yet," said Juan. Almost as if on cue, my stomach did a series of flip-flops and, just as quickly went back to normal. Lester, his aim upset by the gravity fluctuation, missed the trash can with his latest wad of tobacco.

"Damn!" Lester swore artfully.

"As you can see, there is an intermittent flaw in our ARTGRAV system that we haven't been able to trace down. I suppose that we shall have to learn to live with it."

The diesel again throttled down to an idle, followed by the clashing of gears.

"Third gear," sang out Lester. The clutch grabbed and the engine roared.

"The aliens are falling back again, Les."

"Good," Lester replied, scratching his chin. "I been thinkin', Juan. How fas' we goin'"

"Mother of God!" said Juan, as his fingers flew across the Zeos keyboard. "We are currently at Mach 165.8 and accelerating!"

"What happens if you was to run inta somethin' at Mach 165.8, Juan?"

"It is safe to say that there would be a great deal of energy released."

"Yep, that's what I figgered. Anybody followin' us."

"Not, right now. They seem to have given up."

"Good, I'm stoppin' here then."

As good as his word, Lester throttled down and pushed in the clutch.

"I got an idee," said Lester, but he wouldn't tell any one what it was until he had flipped the ship around slowed it down to a mere mach 5.

"We're gonna hafta open the outer door for a coupl'a minutes," said Lester, as he unbuckled and got up out of his Camaro seat.

"How do you propose that we do that?" I asked.

"Hell, boy, we got us some space suits! I think we even got one in your size! You'll get to see space all up close and personal!"

"Why me?" I pleaded, as I swallowed nervously.

"Cause I got a bad back – old farm accident, you know – and the Missus ain't strong enough. Stop yer whimperin', boy, yer worse than Balthazer. Juan'll help ya."

It appeared as though I had little choice. The space suits themselves did not exactly inspire confidence either. They were, like almost everything else on board the ship, cobbled together from used and unrelated parts. In fact, the two suits weren't even remotely similar. Mine was made out of a fifty-gallon drum with a rectangular plexiglass window and what looked like flexible clothes dryer hose for arms and legs, while Juan's looked like the main part of it was from an old deep sea diver's rig, complete with brass headpiece. It had a number of patches and worn-looking spots on it and some other parts that didn't quite match.

"We're ready Lester," said Juan.

Lester and Dorothy looked us both over. Lester smiled and thumped on the fifty-gallon drum which rang hollowly even with me inside it. He spoke loudly so we could both hear him through our suits. But, what he said didn't make much sense to me.

"Jus' drag three of them sacks of spuds over to the airlock. When you gets the outside door open, just open 'em up one at a time and shake them taters out into space." Juan nodded in understanding; I just shook my head.

We accomplished our mission with little trouble but I couldn't help wishing for some momentous quote to fit the occasion. Something like: "Small potatoes for a man, a giant tater tot for mankind ..." Naturally, you'd have to go to the frozen foods section because, of course, the spuds had frozen solid immediately in the cold vacuum of space.

Then, against all common sense, we went back to taunt the three alien vessels.

Lester brought us in really close. Too close, I thought and wiggled the ship seductively to get them to follow us. They reacted immediately, like starved hounds they were after us in an instant. Balthazer loved every minute of it, standing up on his hind legs, barking enthusiastically, with his nose pressed to the viewport and his tail wagging.

This time, Lester increased our speed slowly, allowing the alien craft to stay tantalizingly close (I loudly said too damned close) to us. As we approached the area where we had scattered the potatoes, Juan called out the speed and the distance.

"Ten-thousand miles, Les, mach 155.4. Prepare to perform a right angle maneuver in fifteen seconds."

At the count of fifteen, Lester grimaced as he pushed hard on the Nintendo control. The ship suddenly changed direction, at right angles to our original path. The magic of the ARTGRAV system meant that we weren't crushed to jelly, but my stomach had some ideas of its own for several minutes. Balthazer's eyes got really wide and he came over and curled up by my feet with his front paws covering his eyes. I patted him gently. In many ways we were in the same boat he and I – both of us were more or less along for the ride!

The alien ships swept through the area containing our frozen potatoes, with devastating results. There were three almost simultaneous flashes of very bright light, like little supernovas. Juan did some things at his Zeos keyboard.

"I'm reading nothing but debris, Les! By the virgin, it worked!" All three of them got out of their seats and began whooping and hollering at the tops of their lungs. Lester danced a jig across the hood of the half-tractor. Finally, after about five minutes they began to settle down.

"What happened?" I asked, bewildered by the whole thing as usual.

"You would not understand the math, Trevor," said Juan, breathlessly, "but basically, our three friends flew into our cloud of frozen potato tubers."

"You mean the invincible Andromedans, who made a laughing stock out of Europe's finest forces were done in by three-hundred pounds – excuse me, one hundred and fifty kilograms – of POTATOES?!"

"That's right, Dahlgren," grinned Lester, "we done them in with three sacks of Idaho Russets!" He began to dance another jig.

"Lester is essentially correct, Trevor, but if the alien ships had hit almost anything at the speeds they were traveling, they probably would have been destroyed."

"Huh? How can a potato destroy a spaceship?"

"It has to do with high relative velocities, and the amounts of energy released when a collision occurs."

"I still don't follow."

"Let me try it another way. Out here in space, in a vacuum, in the absence of gravity, it is the relative motion that matters. Think of the alien ships as being at rest and the potato tubers moving at mach 150. You have seen what happens to an insect when it impacts your windshield out on the highway at seventy miles per hour?"

"Yeah," I said, "Those grasshoppers do make quite a smack. I got hit on the arm once, when I was hanging it out the window. It hurt!"

"A grasshopper at seventy miles per hour is moving at approximately 100 feet per second. It packs quite a wallop."

I nodded my head in understanding.

"Now imagine hitting a frozen potato at a speed exceeding thirty MILES per second!"

It began to dawn on me, but Juan wasn't done yet.

"You ever been to meteor crater, in Arizona?"

"No, but I saw it on TV a couple of times."

"That's good," said Juan. "The authorities believe that meteor crater was blasted out by a meteorite that wasn't much bigger than one of our potatoes, traveling at similar speeds to the ones we've been dealing with here."

"It was almost like an atomic bomb!" I exclaimed.

"Exactly!" said Juan. "But there's more. I believe the aliens failed to detect and avoid the potatoes because they were ORGANIC MATTER, in an area where such things very seldom occur. Whether you knew it or not, Les, the use of potatoes for this purpose truly was a brilliant idea!"

"Why thank ye, Juan."

"I tol' you, Mr. Trevor, thet my Lester was gonna save the world!" Dorothy stood up on tiptoe and kissed her husband on the cheek which caused him to blush ferociously.

"Well, we have a good start, but there is the matter of the base on the far side of the moon to contend with," said Juan.

"Yer right, Juan, I got another idee we can try but firs' we gotta find out jus' what this ol' ship'll do!"

"You mean ..." Juan gulped.

"Thet's right, Juan, we gotta try her in road gear!"

Juan looked at Lester gravely for a few moments, considering.

"I am afraid you are right, my friend. Alright, take your places everyone. We are about to boldly go where no man has gone before!"

Even Dorothy looked at him suspiciously.

We went back to our accustomed positions and awaited the next development. I patted Balthazer as much to reassure myself as I did to comfort him.

Lester cracked his knuckles and shifted in his seat to get settled before he looked around at us and reached for the shift lever.

"You folks ready?"

We all nodded, but nobody looked real happy. I didn't really know if what he was about to try was dangerous or not, I had just picked up on the mood of the rest of them. As nonchalant as they had been about some of our other activities that day, their being worried about this was enough to get my attention!

Lester pushed in the clutch. There was a soft clash of gears as he pulled the shift lever back into high gear.

"Here goes nothin'," he announced as he let out the clutch and pulled back on the throttle.

These actions were followed by the strangest sensation that I have ever experienced. I'm not even sure I can explain it properly but it affected every one of the senses in a big way. Imagine a kaleidoscope made up of sensations, visual, aural and tactile, from all the carnival rides you've ever been on, kinda rolled together into a high-speed dream sequence and you'll have a rough idea of what it was like!

I don't know what would have happened without the ARTGRAV. Balthazer lay on his side, eyes glazed and legs twitching. If his experience was anything like mine, he had just treed the cat of his dreams and was flying up after it!

When Lester had let out the clutch, the sun was shining brightly through one of the port side viewports. After what seemed like only 30 seconds or so, the sun had all but vanished.

In its place was a small circle of bright light about the size of a pencil eraser. Juan, fingers flying over his keyboard, was the first to react.

"By the virgin! We have broken the light speed barrier! Lester, we have travelled nearly eighty light minutes out from the sun in under a minute!"

Lester was wearing what could only be described as a shiteating grin.

"Yep," he said. "Now we're gonna kick some alien ass!"

"So we broke the light speed barrier," I said, "That's great, but how will it help us stop the aliens?"

"No sweat," said Lester. "We just need to aim the ship at the alien base and let our potatoes do the rest."

I shook my head, whatever they were about to do, I'd go along with. After all, we should have been dead several times already!

"This is gonna take some pretty hell-a-fied pilotin'," said Lester. "We gotta line everythin' up jus' right. An' I think we'd better use all three sacks of potatoes that we got left."

We got back into our seats and Lester did several more light-speed, carnival-montage maneuvers to line the ship up properly with the moon. Juan, holding tightly to a iron pipe railing, called out directions from the eyepiece of a large, battered, but apparently still serviceable, refractor telescope that they'd wheeled over and trained through one of the viewports. Finally, they were both satisfied with the alignment.

"The alien base is centered in the field of view, Lester."

"Good! Now get them spuds outside."

"Right," said Juan. "Come on, Trevor, we must get back into our spacesuits."

This time we left the bags intact, full of potatoes. We just nudged them gently out of the airlock where they tumbled gently, describing black, potato-sack-shaped silhouettes against the billions of tiny, brilliant, pinprick lights of the stars. An eerie feeling came over me at that moment. It was like I was trapped in a bad "B" movie, "The Burlap Avengers of Sol Prime" or something. That's it, I thought, I'll be waking up any minute!

I didn't wake up and we came back inside.

"Okay, Juan, grab aholt of 'em," said Lester.

Juan manipulated some switches on his

console. "I have them in tow, Lester." As usual, I didn't know what they were talking about.

"What do you mean, you have them in tow?"

"Tractor beam," said Lester.

Powered by John Deere. How appropriate.

"Holt on, folks. We're goin' in!"

High gear again. The earth's moon started out as an insignificant point of light in the front (top) viewports. Over and above the carnival sensations, I watched it grow to an alarming size before Lester called out, "Now!" and turned the ship aside just as Juan flicked off the tractor beam. The moon flashed past the viewport.

The back side of the moon lit up in a brilliant blue flash that was many times brighter than the sun!

"Yee-haa!" shouted Lester, taking the tractor out of gear and coming down to embrace his wife. Juan was crossing himself repeatedly as he grinned from ear to ear. The mood could only be described as joyous. I sensed that something good had just occurred but, you guessed it, didn't quite comprehend exactly what it was.

"What happened?" I asked.

"One of our potato sacks scored a direct hit on the alien base, Trevor! We have saved Mankind!"

"With a sack of potatoes?"

"Remember our lecture on the meteor crater, Trevor?"

"Yes."

"Well, that sack of potatoes was travelling at greater than light speed when we let go of it. The amount of energy released was incalculable! The aliens didn't have a chance!"

We arrived back in Washington to a hero's welcome. Within a few days, we had dinner with the President and the First Lady. There followed a tour of Europe and the rest of the world to meet with various heads of state. Not only did I attend them all, I got to cover them for the major wire services as well! My fame and fortune as a newsman soared meteorically, if I can use that expression! Perhaps you've read my book "The Agricultural Revolution" which gives an account of our adventure. "Balthazer, Dog of Space" has outsold "Millie" and, my latest, "Plowshares into Swords: the Lester McGill Story," will be out in a month or so.

So you want to be a journalist? Okay, fine, but you gotta go where the news is happening, to where the future of mankind is being forged! And where might that be? Hey, no contest. You gotta become an agricultural reporter! Go for it! Last I heard, there was even an opening at the 'Eastern Idaho Sentinel.'

Phil is the Extension Seed Potato Specialist for the University of Idaho. He's in Idaho Falls and he's still writing fiction although not as much as he should be. He's listed as a contributing editor for Intertext. He and his wife and daughter like their not so private Idaho very much. This story is NOT true but is based on REAL Idaho characters.

nolte@idui1.csrv.uidaho.edu

THE HARRISON CHAPTERS

by Jim Vassilakos

Chapter 11

She surveyed the arcing waters with a stubborn glare. Beneath the cliff's grey face, an undulating seascape swayed tauntingly, the roar of pounding waves echoing between the sharp protruding rocks along the dim, purple coastline. It was like Harrison to come to such a place, she thought. It would be even more like him to stay. She motioned Jun and Clark down the rocky slope along either side of the ridge as Vlep massaged the rocks at the head of the cliff, laying on one side as he reached downward along its face.

"What is it, Vlep?"

"Fear."

"Harrison's?"

"Either his or that of children who were sacrificed so long ago. Who can tell?"

"You'd better."

Vlep looked up, a light drizzle beginning to fall from the clouds above.

"The quarry was definitely here, Sule. I can feel his presence and that of his psyche all over these rocks."

"Go down."

Vlep slumped his shoulders, wishing he hadn't revealed so much. Carefully stepping along the damp, slippery face of the cliff, he crept down part way and then looked back up, half expecting mercy.

"It is not very safe, Sule."

"Be careful."

Vlep sighed, certain that she would be the death of him yet. Continuing to the eyehooks, he could sense fear all the stronger, most of it his own. And yet there was more, like the gleam of a diamond in the middle of a dim, crimson pool, water splashing all around yet never washing away the stain. The roar of the waves seemed to lose rhythm, and then the screech of brakes imparted a small cloud of falling dust, bits of sand sprinkling upon him along with the soft morning shower.

Vlep climbed back up. It was the guard Sule had posted at the Tyberian Compound. He was holding a small, black object before Sule, his eyes gleaming in the dim predawn light.

...he could sense fear all the stronger, most of it his own. And yet there was more, like the gleam of a diamond in the middle of a dim, crimson pool, water splashing all around yet never washing away the stain.

"Look Sule. The android brain."

"Very good, Mito. Did the gatherer come back?"

"No, a boy. It was dark, and I made a mess of him. I'm sorry, Sule."

She bit her lip.

"Forget it. We have what we're looking for."

"What about the quarry?"

"This dodec is the real quarry, Mito. Now go collect the others, and call in the hydrofoil. I have a delivery to make."

Vlep dusted himself off, thankful for the reprieve.

"Does that hunk of cermic mean that I don't have to go swimming?"

"What did you find out?"

"Is very hard to say. Harrison's impressions are probably more than fifty cents old, possibly as much as a full day, but the fear is very intense."

"Strange."

"I know what you are thinking, Sule. If he wanted to take a boat, this cliff is not the best point of access."

"He didn't dive off?"

"He climbed down and then back up. I'm certain."

"One immediately following the other?"

Vlep shook his head, "That is hard to tell. The impressions go right into the water."

"If he knows about headquarters..."

"How could he?"

"I want you to continue to track him wherever the trail leads from here. Take the others in the jeep and leave me with the government car. We'll meet back at the Arien Mansion for Erestyl's appointment. Understood?"

Clark carefully descended the steep hillside, a flashlight in one hand and an automatic pistol in the other. Purple-hued sands shifted in the crisp sea breeze, droplets from above snaking through the turbulent air as two pointy rocks jutted up from the beach, their shiny grey surfaces glinting ominously in the faint predawn light. He crept toward them, shining his flashlight into the narrow crack between.

"Clark!"

He turned, unsteady, as the wind tossed a shower of soft sand into his eyes.

"Damn. Mito?"

"It's just me, Clark."

Clark lowered the pistol, shaking the dirt from his eyes.

"I heard you pull up. You bring the IR goggles?"

"Yeah, they're in the jeep. They came in real handy."

"What are you talking about?"

"That android brain. It showed up at the

Tyberian Compound. Lucky me."

"Harrison went back?"

Mito shook his head, "A kid. I was so raw I just blew him away without thinking. I feel like crap."

"No shit."

"C'mon, Sule wants us."

Mike stayed between the rocks until the wind stole their voices. One glance in infrared and he knew he'd be finished.

"What I still don't understand is how you got him to agree. The Arien's couldn't be too thrilled about working for ISIS."

Sule smiled, "Everyone has a price, Vlep; albeit, not everyone yearns for the same commodity."

"You speak in riddles, traveler."

"Is that what you dirtsiders call neghrali who have power over you?"

The others arrived, each one posing in the typical "recruit's stance", trying not to stand out from one another for fear of being ordered to do something either dangerous or repugnant. Finally, Clark stepped toward the jeep, pulling a pair of infrared goggles from the back seat. He turned back, examining the landscape on both sides of the cliff as the gentle rain continued to fall.

"Nothing."

Mike surfaced from the frigid waters as the jeep began pulling away. The woman sat leaning against the hood of the government car, her wet, stringy hair blending against the white paint. Ducking back beneath the waves, he swam to the foot of the cliffs, wading into shore beneath the steep hillside. He dropped to the ground when the faint hum of a hydrofoil played across the windswept waves. Slowing and settling amid the choppy crests, the craft's two gravitic modules kept its thick, silver frame from sinking entirely.

He recognized it as the Tizarian Skipstone-Cruiser, one of the few fast and submersible, four-seater hydrofoils on the market. The more popular Skipstone-Safari model discarded two seats in favor of an autocannon and munitions magazine. Mike remembered reading about how vacationers preferred to shoot the local critters rather than take their friends along to snap images.

Mike ducked back down when he heard the splash, and by the time he mustered the courage to peek over the rocks, the blonde woman was already aboard, her white mane dripping in the tender morning drizzle. She carried the dodec, and Mike gritted his teeth in disappointment as the vehicle turned sharply about and sped into the distant horizon.

The government car's fiberglass window put up a valiant resistance, but Mike eventually forced his way inside. Reaching under the dash, he yanked loose two wires and crossed one over the other. The engine coughed and turned over, finally starting with a belated roar, and Mike found an automatic pistol and three clips of ammunition resting inside the glove compartment along with a pair of handcuffs and a pack of breath mints. He smiled, shifting the stick into reverse and letting up on the clutch. With only a mild groan, the car lurched backward down the back of the hillside. He wheeled the car around and stepped on the gas, memories of the chase on Telmar flooding into his mind. Mike had been driving while Davin and Bill were at the back window, unloading everything they had into their pursuers. If they'd only pulled over and ditched the car, he figured maybe Davin would have survived.

Then he noticed his mistake.

"Hey...look at that."

Clark peeked over Jun's shoulder. The blue monitor showed a pixel of light trudging upward from bottom toward center.

"Sule?"

"Bet you a month's wages it's Harrison."

Clark's eyes widened, threatening to jump out from their sockets. Then the pixel disappeared.

"Yep. It's him."

"Turn around and floor it!"

The jeep ground to a near stop before swinging around and speeding back toward the coast.

"Why weren't you able to find him, Vlep?!"

"I...I've got a real bad feeling about this."

Mito groaned, "Look, just everyone shut-up. If he gets away, we're all dead. You understand?!"

Clark clicked off his pistol's safety switch and stood up in the seat, firing several rounds into the tall brush.

"Over there! He's off the..."

The jolt in his chest sent Clark sprawling backward off the vehicle. A few moments later, several rounds had shattered the windshield. The jeep skidded to a halt, and two figures darted into the brush as Mito fired on the government car from behind his driver's door. The left side of his neck suddenly spattered open, hurtling him into the door.

"Shit, he's behind us."

Vlep kept his nose to the ground as Jun fired numerous rounds into the bushes, finally dropping down to reload. With his head pounding, he tried to pull himself to his feet and assume a covering position, but something in his brain told him to stay down, freezing his legs into place. Meanwhile, Jun fumbled a clip of ammunition into the handle of his automatic.

"What are you doing just laying down?!"

Vlep opened his mouth to respond, but there was no need. Jun's head had already swiveled forcibly, a bullet's impact ripping the nose clean from his face. Jun tried to turn back around, raising his firearm toward the bushes and squeezing the trigger, but his skull popped sideways, a red cascade with bits of bone erupting from his ear and flailing into the cold rain. Vlep wanted to raise his weapon also, but his hand remained frozen, his entire body quaking with indecision as he felt the quarry's presence sweep over him. He waited several moments for the recognition of death that his elders had taught him to respect, but instead, he saw only Harrison, panting in the windy precipitation, clutching a firearm which was aimed steadily in his direction. There was no vision, no angels to lift his spirit, but only the thunderous pounding of an icy, blue curtain into a wall of grey hillside. So they waited together, each to his own thoughts, as Harrison bent over slightly to catch his breath, and together they listened to the crashing waves and the angry chirping of white-feathered gulls that rose haltingly like the voices of crying children caught somewhere in that vertical plane between the clash of two mighty and unrelenting elements.

Crystal blue eyes surveyed the horizon, daring a blink only as the hydrofoil came into view.

"You look thirsty, Mr. Clay."

The Director offered him a purple-violet concoction, Draconian dweomerwyne if memory served.

"It's been a while since I've seen her."

"It."

Clay smiled as he accepted the high-bowl. It bobbed slightly in total ignorance of the waves. Steadying it with two fingers, he allowed a portion of the crisp, sweet liquid to drain down his throat.

"Robin is more than an it, Director, even if we must be enemies now."

The Director nodded. She seemed more bemused than interested. Clay sighed and turned back toward the railing as the hydrofoil slowly turned and circled. It kicked up water, splashing it away from the houseboat as it slowed to a full stop. Tossing it a line, the deck hand slowly reeled it in and lowered a stiff rope ladder. Sule hopped on board and showed her prize to the director, but Clay ignored them both, at once revolted and yet strangely entranced by what his psuedoniece had become.

"What's the matter, Mr. Clay?"

"It's just strange to see Robin like this." He accepted the dodec from Sule, adding, "I suppose it's all she ever was."

"Let us hope so. What of the gatherer, Sule?"

"He still eludes us. I left Mito in charge of the pursuit team, and they are continuing the search as we speak."

"I still want him."

"Director, I am working with untrained, unskilled, untalented..."

"I am aware of your excuses, Sule. Find him. And while you are at it, you might as well take Ambassador Kato and Erestyl with you. We don't want them to be late for Mr. Arien. Meanwhile, we'll let Mr. Clay crack the dodec for us. I trust that Robin knows you, John?"

Clay grimaced, "It does."

He stepped below deck as Major Doran emerged with the Draconian Ambassador. Cuffed and half-conscious, she looked more like the door prize at a Calannic orgy than a high ranking diplomat. Sule regarded the Draconian with a contemptuous scowl.

"I take it she has not been completely cooperative."

"She made her decision, Sule. It is unfortunate that we could not use her."

"She could be valuable, Director."

"I doubt it."

"With her knowledge of the DSS..."

"What knowledge?"

Sule caught the Ambassador as she slumped forward into her arms. Doran smiled and returned below deck.

"But when the drugs wear off."

"What drugs?"

Sule nodded, finally understanding.

"Mr. Arien may not accept her in this condition."

"You will make certain that he does not know until it is too late."

The deck hand carried Ambassador Kato to the hydrofoil as Doran emerged with Erestyl. The Cassiopeiaen physicist looked emaciated and worn, his small body no more than a slender bag of bones. The scanner operator accompanied them, a sheepish look of uselessness about him as he ran his fingers through a patch of curly, red hair. Sule motioned Doran toward the hydrofoil and then turned back to the operator.

"No luck?"

He shrugged, "Erestyl put up a determined fight. I think we can crack him with enough time, but there's a risk that we may wipe the information we're looking for. What we really need is a telepath."

"What about the ambassador?"

"We didn't really have a chance. It was obvious from the onset that she was well trained in resisting the scanner. That, plus her psychic talents...we just decided to go in and make her useless to the Draconians. She'll have the drugged look for the rest of her life. With therapy, maybe she could learn to talk again, if she's lucky."

Sule nodded, turning back toward the director.

"I'll be back with Erestyl tomorrow morning."

"Terminate him after you receive the necessary information from Mr. Arien. We can't chance him falling back into Draconian hands."

"And what of Mr. Arien?"

"He'll be taken care of once we are all offworld. We have already reserved rooms aboard the Crimson Queen. Before another day begins, we will be aboard her, traveling back to Ares in the very lap of luxury."

Sule smiled, "Assuming all goes well. You know I can't guarantee Harrison. But when we're done with Erestyl, I'll radio you."

"Forget about Harrison. We can dispatch a unit to Tizar to deal with him when he returns."

"Okay."

Major Doran sat at the pilot's seat as Sule entered the hydrofoil's fuselage.

"Where's the pilot?"

"You're looking at him."

Sule nodded, "Well, what are we waiting for?"

The hydrofoil sped away, skipping along the waves as it reached 150 kilometers per hour. Back aboard the houseboat, Clay was supervising the techies.

"Turn the camera on me. I want to be the first thing she sees. You're ready with the access code?"

"Check."

"Okay, make the connection."

The deafening noise sped across the waves, and for a bare instant, Sule thought that god had dropped a piece of the sun on the ocean just to watch the steam it would make. In back of them, the fireball increased in size until she could feel the heat blistering her face through the windshield. She hit the stick, but power control was already gone. The blast shock sent them tumbling end over end, finally drilling them into the water as a huge tidal crest swept overhead. Cold water jetted into the cabin as the superstructure creaked and whined, threatening to implode with each passing moment.

"Doran!"

He was knocked out cold.

"Damnit, Doran!"

She scrambled out of her seat and unfastened his belt, throwing him into the back as she tangled with the controls.

"How do I stabilize? Doran, wake up!"

"Wha...?"

"How do I re-start this thing?!"

"Lower left...pull it."

The craft's engines refused to acknowledge her efforts. Even the ultra-reliable gravitic units balked at their call to duty.

"The electronics must be fried."

"Floatation..."

"What?!"

The major pointed toward a red lever on the corner of the floor. She unhitched its safety and gave it a stern yank. A moment later, she heard a gas release. Two yellow bags appeared from the bow, slowly raising the craft toward the surface as Doran tried to find his way to the front passenger seat.

"What happened?"

"We got nuked, Major."

The noise of the blast could be heard up and down the coast for more than twenty kilometers. Mike looked skyward, expecting to see a wasp fighter just crossing the sound barrier. The morning clouds were burning off fairly quickly, and a majestic rainbow cut between bands of blue, white, and grey clear from one horizon to the other. He squinted at the continual on-rush of air, quietly cursing himself for shattering the jeep's front window. If he'd only remembered to shut off the tracer on the government car, he could have avoided the entire situation.

It was noon before Mike reached the geyser or Sintrivani as it was known locally. He parked along the ridge facing the coast beneath a tall hotel and condominium complex. Below the ridge, the hot waters of the Sintrivani shot from a manmade spring, reaching well over half a kilometer in altitude before they came tumbling back to earth in the form of a warm, misty veil. A crowd composed mainly of children flew about in saucershells, small makeshift floaters shaped as flattened spheres. They soared with gleeful zeal to the top of the geyser while dodging and just as often crashing into loose globules of water held together by faint geepoints in the giant low-gravity field. Those without the shells contented themselves with jumping upwards, a hundred meters or more, and then coasting back to the surface, splashing water pockets on friends and strangers. Naked above the waist and barefoot, Mike figured he didn't look very much out of place.

He found Cecil and Spokes camping out on the circular cement amidst about a hundred other people, mostly parents. If it wasn't for their gleaming head-jacks and Cecil's three cameras connected to his skull via invisible radio beams, they would have looked like the stars of some Tizarian vacation commercial, laying back in lounge chairs eating pocket-bread meat pies and sipping iced guava juice beneath tall, shady umbrellas. Vilya's cat wandered nearby, coaxing food from children and parents alike. Mike approached, carefully side-stepping its stage ego, as the two chiphead nodded their acknowledgments.

"Greetings, gatherer."

"Well if it isn't Mr. Lucky."

Mike sat down on the green, ice chest between them, picking out a bottle of guava and uncapping it with his teeth. Spokes regarded him with a mysterious mixture of fascination and regrets.

"Where did you go last night?"

"The beach."

"Johanes told us that the Imps came looking for you at the Tyberian Compound. Said he almost got nailed coming back for you. A mutual acquaintance of yours bit it in there."

Mike gulped down the juice. It was bitter and tangy, the sort of stuff best sipped during idle hours under the sun rather than taken in mouthfuls.

"Good time for you to take a vacation, Spokes?"

"I'm just a part-timer. I'm not going back until Johanes tells me this thing is over."

"Where is he, by the way?"

"In the condo. He's watching the news. Something big must have happened, I guess."

Mike nodded, "Then that's where I'm going."

The main lobby was about as clean as Mike remembered it, sand scattered about on turquoise tiles, white walls smudged with the occasional dirty hand print, and children running about everywhere. Mike strolled through cautiously, slowly scanning the faces as a hazel-eyed girl ran by. Upstairs, the floors were cleaner, the noise level much quieter. Cecil once said that he liked the quiet as much as the noise and that he would refuse to buy into a place without a balance of the two. Mike tested the door and then knocked when he found it locked, pressing his palm against the peeper. A long moment passed, and then the door swung outward, almost knocking Mike on his rear. Johanes hunched down on the floor, reaching up with a pistol.

"Michael."

Mike put his hands up, waving them like a politician seeking office.

"Hey, take it easy. I just wanted to surprise you."

"A guy can get dead that way."

"Like the kid?"

Johanes dropped the pistol on a counter top, hesitating ever so slightly as Mike laid out the question. A flicker of resentment invaded his eyes even as he shook it off, crossing the room to turn up the volume on the three-vee.

"His name was Nicholas."

They sat on the floor in front of the depth box as three-dimensional images of gravcars and choppers circled over an empty expanse of sea. In the background, a reporter was chattering about devastation to the oceanic wildlife. The scene cut to the cliffs of Erfalas. Mike's eyes widened as mention of a nuclear detonation reached his ears.

"I heard it."

"Was it loud?"

"Sort of."

"They say it was small. Under a hectoton. Good thing the magnetic pulse didn't reach this far."

Outside the window Mike could see dozens of children circling the giant, watery plume. He imagined the gravity inhibitors failing as tiny bags of blood and bone would spatter on the wet cement.

"Quite a image for your Galactican. Eh, Michael? Front page material?"

Mike gulped down a hunk of air, belching it back out with as much force as he could muster. Johanes grinned wearily as Mike studied his reflection on the glass.

"You thought that was funny?"

Johanes nodded, "Proof that we're real men. We've got guns, and we can make disgusting noises."

"There's more where that one came from."

"Spare me."

"On one condition...you tell me why it happened."

Johanes dropped his grin, "They're still trying to figure that part out."

"About Nicholas."

He shifted, then shrugged, "What's to say? We were coming back to pick you up. He ran inside before me, and then I heard gun spray. You want me to say it straight out? I got scared and ran away."

"Why did the kid have..."

A knock at the door cut him off. It was Cecil, bitching about how he was being locked out of his own place. Johanes looked toward the door sluggishly and then turned back toward the three-vee.

"You get it."

Cecil looked somewhat disgruntled as Mike opened the door, as though the sanctity of his domestic life were somehow threatened by his old friend's presence. He seemed to cheer up when he saw Johanes, however. Even the kitty seemed entranced by the Draconian as it half-jumped, half-fell from Cecil's arms to greet him.

"Down you go, Pooper-dumper."

Mike winced, "Pooper-dumper?"

"Cat had to have a name. How do, Johanes? Much good on the boob-box?"

Mike scratched his head and tried to look offended.

"You're happy to see him but not me?"

"We figured that if he was still here, it's probably safe to be around you."

"Hey Harrison," Spokes came in lugging two of Cecil's cameras."Gimmie a hand with the ice chest, will ya?"

"Where's his other cam?"

"Look out the window."

Mike grabbed one end of the chest and dragged it inside, looking outside the window into the silvery mist of the geyser as he reached the center of the room. A girl was gliding Cecil's camera upward in her saucer-shell, steering it toward the apartment complex while warm blankets of mist fell over her, making her appear half-solid, half-ethereal. Cecil was already on the balcony waving for the others to follow. Only Johanes refused, and Mike couldn't resist making rabbit-eared fingers over his old friend's head. Cecil noticed it right away, of course, but he snapped the image anyway. When they came back inside, it danced about on the three-vee, changing hue and shade with each new iteration.

"Will send a copy to Tizar. You can consider it our team photo."

Spokes winced, "Do me a favor and don't let it get out. I don't want to be more connected to this gatherer than I already am."

Mike grinned, "Can I quote you?"

"I'm serious, Harrison. I could already lose my job."

Cecil snorted, trying to cover up his reaction as Spokes looked him over.

"You got a problem with my job now?"

"Other than that it stinks, none whatsoever."

"Yeah, well it's safe. I like safe. I don't have any psychotic urges like other certain people to be a big hero. I don't need medals and trophies. Money will do just fine, thank you."

"Speaking of trophies," Johanes dug something out the bottom of the trash container, "Catch, Michael. We were saving her for you."

Mike watched it tumble in mid-air, the etching of a song bird on jet black. With a fluster of clashing perceptions, he fumbled the dodec to the floor, still scarcely believing his own eyes.

"Well, either you're a lousy catch..." Johanes looked out the window, watching the tiny blue waves sway along the horizon. He decided to snatch his pistol off the counter top, slipping its nose down the crack between his butt cheeks as he turned back toward Mike.

"Tell me you're just a lousy catch."

Mike shook his head, turning toward the three-vee and then back again. It all started to make sense.

"Your doing?"

"I'll explain later."

Spokes looked worried and confused, stepping out of his way as Johanes headed for the door.

"Hey, where're you going?"

"Out for a walk."

Johanes headed down the hall toward the elevator as Spokes watched after him in the doorway, ducking down so his tall jacks wouldn't scrape against the frame.

"Well at least tell me if it's still safe to be here!"

She found the white government car resting slightly off the road, all four of its tires punctured with bullet holes. Three corpses were propped over it, and rigor mortis had already set in. Not being in the mood for a burial, she would allow them to rot in the white, hot sun. Vlep was asleep at the steering wheel. That he had been hand-cuffed to it without sustaining so much as a bruise angered her even more. It meant he gave in without a fight. She expected as much from a psyche. Leaning close to his ear, she allowed her breath to brush the soft wax within.

"Vlep!!!"

He hit his head on the roof, nearly tugging his wrist out of joint in the process.

"Sule?"

"Who did you think it was? Your fairy godmother?!"

"Sule...Harrison was here."

"Really?!?"

She grabbed the steering wheel, yanking it clear of its housing. Vlep tumbled out of the car, dropping to the ground at her feet. He knew she was strong. Biosynthetics often had that tendency. But he had no idea she was that strong. He picked himself and the steering wheel up from the dirt, dusting himself off with his one free hand.

"I...I can follow him, Sule. I can find him."

She watched him with a mixture of sympathy and scorn.

"I don't care about Harrison, you idiot. I don't give a damn about the robot brain. This futile chase has cost us everything."

"But..."

"Everything, Vlep! HQ is gone!"

"How?"

"Look at my sunburn and take a wild guess!"

Vlep pondered the problem, his mind refusing to so much as acknowledge the possibility of a nuclear detonation. Sule watched the skepticism fade from his eyes, finally kicking a dent into the car door to vent her anger.

"I've got the major and two prisoners in the hydrofoil. They're probably going to be sick, and we've got no transportation."

"The hydro..."

"The magnetic pulse fried the electronics. I managed to get one of the engines working manually, but it's not going to get us anywhere I want to go. I was hoping, almost praying that you guys would be able to take care of yourselves without me. There were four of you! Did Harrison have a fucking army?!"

Vlep shook his head, "I don't...no he was alone."

"Then why'd he let you live?"

"I don't know."

"You didn't fight!"

"I've never fired a gun in my..."

She belted him across the face with the back of her hand, sending him sputtering to the ground as he held his face. He tried to take solace in the fact that at least now his cheeks would match.

"You're going to learn, Vlep. I'm going back to the hydrofoil to get the major. With luck, we should be able to drag Erestyl and Ambassador Kato to the intersection of the main highway. By the time we get there, I want a vehicle. I want it badly, and I don't care how get it. Understood?"

Vlep nodded as she shoved a pistol, probably the major's, into his one free hand.

"Remember, I can kill you at any moment I choose. So a word of advice, Vlep. Don't think. Just do it."

Tangerine rays seeped quietly through the sliding, balcony window, its glassy surface coated with a thin, warm mist. Outside, the hot sun bathed the Sintrivani in a saffron orange glow as the afternoon slipped carelessly away like the shadows of children beneath a warm, golden fog.

Spokes was baking peach and cranberry muffins, playing the spunky apprentice to Cecil's wizened if absent-minded mentor. Mike didn't much care about the respective roles or the protocols associated with each. All he knew was that he was about to be fed, and his stomach grumbled in anticipation.

Cecil seemed more interested in the dodec than the food, however. He kept turning it end over end, feeling its edges and especially the subtle crevices of its etching. It was in the shape of a songbird, a robin to be more precise, and in place of an eye and tip of a beak, there were two tiny ports of access. Spokes looked over occasionally, watching the blind man at work.

"You making progress?"

"Found an inny and an outty."

Spokes nodded, checking the muffins' state of readiness.

"Done."

He took them out, leaving them on the counter-top to cool while Mike watched the three-vee, its volume turned so low that it was barely audible. The Calannans had pin-pointed the source of the detonation to an Imperial owned sea vessel. Shortly after the initial announcement, there had been rioting in Xin, most of it aimed at neghrali-owned businesses, and the Imperial marine commander had declared Xekhasmeno a red zone, temporarily closing it off to air and ground traffic alike. Meanwhile, public officials alternately pleaded for calm or more often demanded explanations from the Imperial embassy. None were forthcoming, and even the Crimson Queen's orbiting convoy initiated alert status, temporarily refusing boarding to all but preferred passengers.

Mike switched the box off and rose to take a peek at the muffins. Spokes, ever protective of his alchemy, watched Mike with a suspicious smile.

"Just another cent, Harrison."

Mike reached into the cooler and had another gulp of guava. He sat back down beside Cecil. His old friend swiveled the cameras back and forth from dodec to gatherer.

"Dumb."

"What?"

"We forgot to give our friend current inhibitors."

"They're not coming out of my salary," Spokes injected. The cameras turned toward him, zooms activating with an audible hum. Cecil smiled when he found what he was looking for.

"Good idea."

"No, Cecil. I just bought these."

"Lend to the gatherer. He needs them more than you."

"And what if he burns them out like my last pair?"

"Better them than his grey muscle."

"That's debatable."

Spokes carefully disconnected them, attaching them to Mike's jacks. Mike watched half doe-eyed, instinctively wanting to protect his scalp but also realizing that he had to keep his hands well out of the way lest Spokes should make a mistake. It made him feel small, and he smiled at his own helplessness.

"Are the muffins ready yet?"

"No."

Mike suppressed a whine, and Cecil grinned knowingly.

"Let's see if we can make some hell in that head of yours, Michael. Go ahead and connect him."

Spokes leaned over, collecting two of the four thin cords which curled from the dodec. Each merged with its neighbor near the point of no return. Cecil held two for himself as Spokes toyed with Mike's jacks, finally nodding agreeably as the translucent image of a mechanical combination lock appeared in front of Mike's face. From within its hazy background, Mike heard a woman's voice: "Enter your clearance identification number." Cecil's grin widened as his cameras studied the look running across Mike's face. He handed Mike a flimsi. A long string of three digit numbers glowed pink upon its transparent surface.

"Lesson number one. Learn to think in directions."

Mike began turning the imaginary dial, each thrust of his mind sending it spinning.

"Easy now."

After a few aborted attempts, he had the skill mastered. The dial twisted and turned as he imagined placing his hand upon it and rotating it gently. Finally it disappeared, and Mike saw her face, not an exact copy of the physical version, but an outline, deep blue eyes twinkling like distant stars and blonde hair waving back and forth in the electric static.

"Robin?"

"User's access rejected. Security action two in progress."

"Robin, it's Mike Harrison."

"...Mike Harrison is not a legitimate user." A grey field of haze began to form between them, building like an ocean swell and threatening to engulf him.

"I'm with Johanes. We need your help."

The static foamed, spitting like acid as it washed over him. Then, just as suddenly, it disappeared. Mike blinked. The illusion of her face was no longer there. Instead, he saw Spokes fiddling with the connection, and once glance at the dodec told him it was all over. It was smoking, a vial of acidic chemicals released somewhere within its core.

"She was trying to fry you, dude. When she realized she couldn't, she just fried herself."

Cecil unplugged, a smile crossing his face as their team picture danced about the three-vee.

"Success," he drily announced."Time to scarf."

The muffins tasted even better than Mike had imagined, and Spokes served up bowls of sliced green apples immersed in chilled, sweet yogurt and topped with warm caramel and honey, finally gathering a bowl and a spare bottle of guava juice for himself before he slipped out the door.

"Where's Spokes going?"

Cecil concentrated on his food, savoring every taste. Either that or he was savoring the captured data. Sometimes Mike found it hard to tell what his friend was thinking about.

"Cecil..."

"He doesn't want to be here. He's afraid of knowledge and the danger it brings."

Mike nodded, "And you aren't?"

"When have you ever known Cecil to be scared of knowledge?"

"You went in with me, didn't you."

"It was perfect, Michael. When you told her who you were..." he chuckled.

"What did you find out?"

"Enough. You provided an eon or more, after all. When you told her your name, she was...perplexed. A gatherer does not acquire such a combination. She had to think about whether or not she wanted to let you in. For an A.I., she was very hesitant."

"She decided to fry me in a matter of seconds."

"Yes, an eternity. The recon program was able to follow her hesitation and map logically where she looked for her decision. There was more than enough time to copy the gyroscopic logs. There was time to copy more." A camera lens bobbed up and down knowingly, "If you dare to doubt..."

The image of the team picture on the three-vee was suddenly replaced by a map of Xin. A red squiggly line zipped into the city, dashing directly to the hotel where Mike had been dumped by Cole. It continued to the Underway terminal, down to Xaos, and then back up again to Vilya's flat. Then it left the city and came back from another direction, finally darting to the Runyaelin, and then up to the Arien Mansion along the outskirts, before diving again off the map.

Cecil smiled, "It knows where it goes."

"Can you zoom out? I want to see where it went before it got to Xin."

Cecil concentrated, and the city seemed to reduce in size, becoming a tiny dot at the center of the image.

"Curious. This can't be right. It comes from the water."

"Just map it."

The image continued to encompass still greater area as the line dived into the water from near Xekhasmeno and then darted back again.

Mike nodded, "Okay, the point where it stops and turns around, how far away is that from ground zero."

"The nuke?"

"Yeah."

"Less than a kilometer."

"Then that confirms it."

The image disappeared, and Cecil looked flustered.

"Confirms what?"

"Johanes is paying you to find the local branch of ISIS, right?"

"Yes."

"Well, the information is obsolete. There is no ISIS headquarters anymore."

"What?! Why would they blow-up their own..."

"Exactly. Johanes did it. He used me as bait and Nicholas as a sacrifice just to make it look genuine."

Cecil tilted his head, "Explain."

"I was at Erfalas this morning. ISIS trailed me there, and they had what I first thought was the dodec. I knew they must have gotten it at the Tyberian Compound in Xekhasmeno. I just didn't know it was hand delivered courtesy of the Draconian S.S."

"Hence, your clutzery when he tossed it to you."

Mike nodded, "Johanes didn't know whether or not I saw the Imps make off with it. For all he knew, I was dead or sleeping on the roof of some building and woke up when I heard the gun spray. When I showed up here, he had to find out one way or another."

"And you were a dead give away."

"Yeah. I just wasn't sure he got them where it counts. Now I am."

Cecil smiled, "And the beauty of it is that he still doesn't know."

Mike winced.

"What?"

"Cecil, you remember that locator that your friend found in my shoe two nights ago?"

"Affirmative."

"How did he find it?"

"Bug detector."

"You have one here?"

Cecil dropped his jaw as the phone rang, and Mike shook his head, again disgusted with his own stupidity.

Jim Vassilakos (jimv@ucrmath.ucr.edu) just graduated from UCR with an MBA. In between responding to employment advertisements and attending Job Fairs, he DM's a hearty group of dormies and wonders how he's going to finish Harrison off once and for all. Judging his protagonist's current situation, he may not have to wonder for very long.

'The Harrison Chapters' will be continued next issue.

THE FLIGHT OF THE PEQUOD II

by H. Palmer Hall

When she heard the front door of the Miners' Inn open, Cora Dalmire looked up from her work. A middle-aged man had stopped in front of the dreary oil painting that occupied most of one wall of the entryway

He looked at the swirls of black and the pinprick glares of white intently as if searching for some reason he should have encountered it. The look on his face and his hands tracing the swirls told Cora the painting had disturbed him as it had most out-Vesta visitors to the asteroid. She had studied each of their reactions as closely as she studied his and had never quite seen what she was looking for.

Cora and her husband, Garcin Dalmire, had brought the painting with them to Vesta thirty years earlier when they had still hoped to find excitement and to strike it rich mining the asteroids. Running out of credits and with no funds to leave Vesta, Garcin had signed on with the Vesta Mining Company. Twenty-one years later, a drunken miner had set a short fuse and a collapsing tunnel buried Garcin beneath tons of ore.

With the last of her insurance money, Cora had purchased the inn, and, in her first act as owner, had hung the painting by the entrance. It reminded her of Earth and of the emotional impetus that had forced her into what both she and Garcin had dreamed of as a personal voyage of discovery, but had wound up as a decades-long period of entrapment on a small planetoid with nothing to offer except the possibility of one day earning enough credits to return to Earth.

Finally, the stranger turned his face from the painting and walked slowly to her desk. "That's a hell of a painting you got there, lady."

"Yes," she said, not even bothering to smile. "Are you staying long?"

"Only the one night. By then, my ship should have cleared Vesta Security and I'll be able to set up shop."

"What are you selling?" Cora pulled her scanner to the front of the desk and reached for his credicard. She scanned it quickly and, as the display lit up, added his name. "Mr. Bunskin, is it?"

"Yes, ma'am, Ray Bunskin. And I'm not selling anything. I landed in the Alcuin, a libship. I lend, for a small fee, datawhirls, tri-dees, and a very small stock of the world's great books. Nothing but the finest." Sensing that he had a customer, Ray smiled. "If you can come down in the morning, the library bay in the ship'll be opening early."

...the emotional impetus that had forced her into what both she and Garcin had dreamed of as a personal voyage of discovery, but had wound up as a decades-long period of entrapment...

"You have books?" For the first time in a year, a slight smile played across Cora's normally dour face.

"Yes, but only a few. Nothing but the classics. Most of my customers just want the latest datawhirls. It doesn't pay to stock books. They want to experience the emotions of the characters in various situations, have the datawhirler spin out different scenarios based on their own ideas. You know what I mean? Not just follow a plot that someone else devised."

"When I was a young girl, Mr. Bunskin, I haunted our local library. Read book after book after book. How lovely! The smell and the feel of books! Oh, it has been a long, long time."

Ray Bunskin stared at the innkeeper. She wasn't young anymore, in her fifties, but still attractive when she smiled. Must be bored, too, he thought, to talk about books like that, when he had so many datawhirls and tri-dees. "You come on down to the Alcuin, Ms....?"

"Cora Dalmire, Mr. Bunskin. And I'll definitely make it down to your ship when you're ready."

The next morning, after serving breakfast to the unmarried miners who stayed in the Inn, Cora Dalmire walked out under the clear dome and, for the first time in more than a year, noticed the brightness of the strange sky. Though she had lived on Vesta for more than two decades, she continued to recall the night stars from Earth. This year on Vesta, the night sky with its familiar constellations, was marred by the return of the comet. Such predictability isn't right in such an unpredictable universe, she thought. Falling in towards the sun, Halley's tail had already begun to streak behind it as it raced inside Jupiter's orbit and began its plunge through the belt. She shuddered slightly as she stared at the growing tail and thought of its long voyages century after century, then she turned back towards the library.

Cora had grown used to the reduced gravity of Vesta and loped in long, almost slow-motion, strides through the streets of the small town and over the too-close horizon to the seldom-used spaceport.

The Alcuin, one of two ships in dock at

the time, was garish in the extreme. As she walked up to the two synthalloy lions flanking the entrance to the library, Cora laughed out loud. They recalled memories of her Earthtown library, but these lions were distorted. Their over-sized eyes glowed red and sensors, detecting Cora, caused the eyes to swivel towards her and show scenes from the latest tri-dees. From the speakers in their mouths, the lions roared out the costs of datawhirls and players and invited her in.

As she walked between the lions and into the ship's main library, Cora spotted Ray Bunskin napping behind the main desk. She walked quickly through the glare of tri-dee screens and past shelf after shelf of datawhirls to the very back of the shop where she had spotted a small collection of only a few hundred books.

"Beg pardon, Ms. Dalmire," Bunskin yawned widely and stretched, "didn't see you come in. Just taking a little rest. Setting up the entrance and the lions wore me out."

His eyes lit up as he saw her pull one of the books from its shelf. He could smell a rental. "As I said last night, we don't get much call for book books, but we do have that small set you're looking at. There simply aren't enough real book readers in the system any more."

"Is this all? For a library?" A slight frown appeared on Cora's face.

"Yes, ma'am. I've got a great collection of datawhirls, though, if you'd like to really lose yourself in a strong plot that you help to create."

"I don't think so, Mr. Bunskin. I don't want to lose myself, not again." She turned back to the books and pulled down from the shelf a fat copy of Moby Dick. "It's been years since I've seen this book. Will you be on Vesta long? Will I have time to read it?"

"It's hard to tell, Ms. Dalmire. From the looks of things," he waved around the empty room, "I'm not going to make my nut any time soon. I could be stuck here forever."

"Then I'll take it," she said, handing him her credicard.

"Here," he said, "take this one, too, no charge. Just for taking that old book off the shelves." He handed her an unlabeled datawhirl.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Old French stuff, mid-twentieth century, but the label's worn off. Only thing you can read is 'existentialisme'. Plug it in while you're reading the book and it'll double your pleasure."

To the sound of roaring lions, Cora left the library and retreated to her small room behind the Inn's desk. With two hours before she needed to prepare dinner for the dozen miners who stopped by on the way to their cubicles, she had time to make a start on the story. She put the datawhirl on the small table next to her chair and opened the book to the first page. "Call me Ishmael!" she read, and lost herself in the story.

After what seemed to Cora only a few minutes, a yell from the front of the Inn interrupted her quiet. "What's for dinner, Cora? Where the hell are you?"

"Clam chowder," she screamed back, then realized where she was. "I mean, whatever it is will be ready in a minute. Go on into the dining room!" She put the book down next to the datawhirl and stretched her whole body as she reimmersed herself in the daily routine of running the Miners' Inn.

Serving dinner to the miners, she thought back to Earth and whales and oceans and wondered why she had ever left. "Aaah!" she screamed, Karl Johnsen, one of the younger miners, grabbed her around the waist and pulled her onto his lap. She slapped him hard on the face and ran out of the room tears streaming down her face.

"Cora! What's wrong?" Karl yelled after her and ran back to the office. "Cora, honey, I didn't mean anything by it. Just a little fun. Can't do much of anything else on this rock."

"There's a library, Karl. Go check out a book or something and stop treating me like a piece of natural beef."

"Hey, Cora. I'm real sorry, honey."

"Don't you "honey" me, Karl Johnsen. If I had the money, I'd get off this scurvy rock and back to Earth where men like you can find these to do without bothering me."

"Earth? You talking about the Earth I came from last year, Cora? There's nothing there for anyone except chemshooters and socketheads. It's not like out here, honey, where you're free to do whatever you can afford to do." Karl smiled at her and drew her into his arms. As she looked up, he bent his head down and brought his lips down hard on hers.

Cora pushed back and kicked him hard in the groin. "Keep the hell away from me!" She ran into the dining room. "All of you just keep away from me!"

That night, after the last miner had either gone to bed or down the street to the bar, she lay down in her own bed and picked up the book to read again. She looked down at the datawhirl which she had brought up the stairs with her, and with a shrug, pushed it into the slot next to the lamp socket. She opened the book to Father Mapple's sermon and, enjoying the company of Ishmael and Queequeg, began to read of various whaling disasters.

But what was Garcin doing in the old clapboard church? And who was Estelle? Why couldn't they open the door? And where did the door lead? She realized that the datawhirl had put her and her lost husband into the church with Ishmael, but could not figure out the attractive blonde woman named Estelle who clung to her husband's arm or the big bronze clock sitting on the pew in front of her. She put the book down and unplugged the datawhirl.

Finding her place again, she read until late in the night. When she fell asleep, the book dropping to the floor beside her, Cora dreamed. In her dream, she sailed a spaceship called Pequod II chasing throughout the system a great phantasm with a huge tail streaming behind it. She whispered into the night that nothing would box her in, not ever again. She strove with the malignant beast and woke, sweat-soaked, with fire in her eyes, shouting, "I'd strike the sun if it insulted me!"

Still shaking with rage, Cora pulled her faded clothing back over her body and brushed her hair in front of the mirror. As she twisted her long black hair out of her face, she saw the wild look in her own eyes and, faintly behind her, the shape of a man holding a gold doubloon in his hand. And she knew, suddenly, who Estelle was.

She remembered walking home to the small dome she and Garcin shared and seeing the young blonde woman racing out of the house. When she had asked Garcin about her, he had shrugged off the incident. "Nothing to worry about," he had said. "Just a woman from the shop. Not a brain in her head." She had only been the first, and perhaps not even that, the first Cora has caught. In the years before Garcin's death, Cora knew of three other women he had bedded in their dome. She had been ready to leave, but had no other place to go.

Images of whales and the bronze clock and of Estelle and Garcin and a locked room stayed in her mind all day. That night she dreamed again of the Pequod II and saw her husband, his hands in Estelle's long blond hair, and herself locked in the small room. Garcin glanced quickly at Cora, stroked Estelle's face and then pounded against the door, banging harder and harder, until finally it cracked open and swung out. He stood at the threshold and stared out into the dark corridor. Taking Estelle's hand and turning his back to Cora, he shook his head sadly.

Watching the two of them move back into the room and sit down on a hideously green sofa, Cora walked to the door, then turned back and looked once more at Garcin. "Aren't you coming?" she asked. When he replied that he had too much still to learn about himself in the locked room, she laughed bitterly, and walked through the prison door into a blackness devoid of light. She looked back into the bright room, then slammed the door shut behind her.

When Cora awoke the next morning, she felt relaxed and more alive than she had felt in years. Plugging in the datawhirl, she opened the pages of the book to read the last chapters and learn of the death of Captain Ahab. The datawhirl no longer fed her the story of Estelle and Garcin; the clock was gone. But Ahab raged and speared the whale and the Pequod sank. When Queequeg's coffin shot to the top of the ocean, she sighed and put the book away.

Cora made her mind up that morning to leave Vesta. The datawhirl had reminded of her of her husband's infidelities and of the stagnancy that had pervaded her life. She would do something and in that doing would rise out of the locked box. And she would begin with Bunskin.

The first thing she saw when she left the Inn that morning was Comet Halley, its tail already stretching across the horizon as the solar winds pushed them farther and farther behind the small nucleus. She raised her hands as if to strangle the chunk of dirty ice. "Nothing should be so predictable!" she screamed at it.

Ray Bunskin never had a chance. He stood to greet her when he heard the lions roaring. Asking her if she wanted to rent anything else, he was stunned at her reply.

"I want the ship! Now!" As she spoke her eyes pinned him to the wall.

"But you can't have it! It's my livelihood."

"Livelihood hell!" She almost spat the words at him. "What kind of living can a man make doing what you do. With me as your only customer on Vesta, you'll never earn enough money to take the old tub off asteroid. You might as well sell it now instead of waiting 'til you can't even afford a meal at the Inn."

"Sell it? The Alcuin? How could you afford to buy a ship like this? The automated navaids alone would cost more than a dead miner's wife could ever hope to pay. No, Ms. Dalmire, I'd love to sell out from under this thing, but you couldn't float the credits."

Cora looked at him sharply. "I can afford the ship. Not with credits, but with the Inn. It's yours Bunskin and all its contents and damnable customers, for the ship."

Bunskin saw the way her eyes lipped over the datawhirls and her hands clasped the book and thought he could get more out of her. "Okay, Ms. Dalmire, she's yours for the Inn and for whatever credits you have in your account."

"Half the credits or no deal," Cora said. "I've got to get the powerpacks refilled. But take all the datawhirls with you this afternoon."

She plugged her credicard into the scanner and told it to transfer half her credits and the rights to the Miners' Inn on Vesta to Ray Bunskin as soon as he transferred the Alcuin to her. Bunskin then inserted his credicard.

"You've got yourself a ship, Ms. Dalmire."

"Enjoy the inn, Mr. Bunskin. I'm going home to Earth."

"But that's the one place you can't go, Ms. Dalmire. You can go any other place in the system, but not to Earth."

"Why not?" She turned to him, knowing when she saw him shift his eyes that he was telling the truth. "Why not, Bunskin?"

"The same reason I didn't go there. Only drones can land near Earth. The poisons in the atmosphere got so bad over the past few decades that no one's allowed in, only out. Only reason people can leave is the authorities figure that way there'd be more of everything for the people left."

Cora ran back to the inn, leaping madly, recklessly through the small town. When she got back to the room, she through her clothes into a small bag and lurched back outside, stopping only to take down the oil painting that was her last link to the dying planet.

The next morning, she cleared port authority and floated gently away from Vesta. Selecting a navigation chip, she set the time, date, and Vesta coordinates on the console and told the ship to plot a course for Comet Halley. Pequod II flashed an enlarged view of Jupiter on the six foot screen above the console.

"Not Jupiter, idiot! The comet! Take us to the comet!"

In rhythmic speech, the computer responded. "This ship is incapable of reaching Comet Halley without taking advantage of the gravity well of Planet Jupiter. The only possible window lies in Jupiter. Pequod II will intersect Halley orbit between Planet Earth and Planet Venus."

For the next few weeks, Cora worked her way through Ray Bunskin's book collection, stopping only to exercise, eat and drink and to stare at Jupiter as it occupied a greater and greater part of the display.

"Have you ever read Moby Dick, computer?"

"This computer has scanned most books and has links to all major datalibraries. It does not read, but can display the contents of any scanned book."

After a few months, the ship dove through the rings of Jupiter and Cora sank deeply into her acceleration couch as the forces slingshotting Pequod towards Earth pressed against her. By that time, she had grown bored. Of the ship and the food! Of the books and the computer. Of the low vibrations of the ship's engine. It's time, she thought. Time to fight back. Time to thrust my hand through the wall and shout like Ahab against the walls that hold me in. Her head ached and throbbed in time with the pulsing of the ship.

A new picture had appeared on the console. The picture framed in a black background a myriad of white specks swirling across the sky. Halley's Comet, its head tiny compared to the long tail streaming away from the sun, had made its long journey through the outer planets on its circuit into the system and streaked in to brush near the sun. She felt the ship shudder as the main engine boosted speed with the assistance of Jupiter's gravity and sped on its way to its rendezvous. Cora sat back down to finish her book.

She had forced herself to exercise during her three-month flight to reach the comet. Her hair grew ever longer and her muscles toned up as the regimen matched the rhythm of the pounding in her head. Ever in front of her, she could see the comet. It blended with the painting in the Miners' Inn, swirled through the blackness of the canvas. Her eyes flashed wildly at the screen as the comet's head grew larger and larger until, at length, the tail could fill only half the display and the head, only eight kilometers wide, grew larger than a human's.

She laughed wildly as she slammed her body through the routine that had begun with a half hour each morning and night and now occupied half her waking hours. She needed less sleep than she had earlier required and ate ravenously to feed the demands of her growing muscles. Cora prepared herself for the great task to come.

Finally, the ship's alarms clanged and she heard the first evidence that she was closing with the comet as tiny fragments of the tail intercepted Pequod II's path.

Cora ordered the ship to give full front display and blanched as she saw, then heard, more fragments banging into the front deflector screens. The plasma display unit came alive with the tiny pinpricks of light racing toward the ship in bright lines as she matched patterns with the streaking ball of ice and flew into the tail.

Her fingers flashing across the keyboard, Cora ordered the Pequod II back into the flume as comet and ship plunged down toward the inner planets and the sun. At 18,000 kilometers out she saw the black nucleus in the center of the bright spray of gasses. A fist of ice and encrusted dust, the comet's head dominated the screen like some malevolent despot demanding her retreat, and Cora screamed in defiance.

Choosing the heaviest trail of light she could find, Cora made last minute adjustments to the console and nursed the ship to greater and greater speed. As she saw the black fist grow larger and larger, filling the screen, she ordered the computer to cut the engines. The Pequod II raced down the shining yellow tunnel made by the comet's tail and plunged downward into the spray. Cora raised her own fist back at the comet and sang in outrage as the ship plunged into the abyss and fractured the ball of ice in an explosion that sent showers of multi-colored lights racing through the system for days.

A large chunk of its nucleus broke off and Comet Halley, calving, created a daughter comet. Twin tails licked outward from the comets as they grew farther and farther apart. The night sky over Vesta lit up with the reflection from Cora's comet as it began its journey past Earth and around the sun.

Palmer Hall is Library Director at St. Mary's University and teaches part-time in the English Department. Publications include a li-berry book he co-edited for Scarecrow Press and various poems, short stories and essays. He's currently completing an anthology of poems on the Persian Gulf War (A Measured Response) for Pecan Grove Press. "Pequod" is his first science fiction story, but he intends to do more.

acadhall@vax.stmarytx.edu

DR TOMORROW

by Marshall F. Gilula

Part 3 of 5

Chapter 3

Sunday

Hello, Beloved Sensei

Last day of the Art Festival, and we decide to briefly do the Festival on foot, and then come home for our MindLink/HeartLight. I was not so jolted when I woke up this time by seeing my Eternal lady's unsleeping eyes. She had put herself on simulated sleep phase. She opened her eyes only after I was up and about, and then everyone -- with one mind -- was up and ready for the day. The decision to go to the Art Festival before it got to be too hot was a wise one, I thought, as we walked from the apartment over to South Bayshore Drive. Both dogs had insisted on coming with us. Pearl E. Mae was walking She-Ra, and I walked Bullet. Both dogs were being unusually well-behaved. Small miracles.

A steady stream of people kept the sidewalks going into the Village covered with human variability. There were a few very good prices that the artists were now starting to put out on some of the merchandise that remained. As we sampled the show, I was reminded how rabid Rico got whenever the environment became bilingual. Even a biological mother would never guess that Rico was a Cyborg. The built-in hardware consisted of barely visible to the naked eye microprocessor networks that were literally implanted in Rico's brain.

Enrique (Rico), whose future identity was from a galaxy of androids, had selected a discarnate Cuban conch following karmic resettling. He reminded the other Eternals of Dr Tomorrow that Miami was something besides just beautiful water and sunshine. Over half the population in Miami, for example, spoke Spanish. Of course, this did not mean that all of the Spanish speaking people were Cuban. Miami was very different from nearly any other American city by this time. The South American tourists businessmen, students and professionals by the thousands either vacationed or emigrated to the Miami area because of its bustling, sparkling, cosmopolitan lure. Rico himself was a strange combination of contradictions. He possessed enormous intelligence, and yet was very laid back in his approach to nearly anything. He was the least overtly assertive member of the group, but managed to inject the Spanish language into group consciousness during MindLink/HeartLight very early in the first session of the group's existence. Rico's teaching was done in such an unobtrusive way, that Lyle was the only one who noticed the difference in his own personal approach to Miami's Spanish culture. Many of the other Eternals were almost totally unaware of the fact that they were nearly automatically speaking and understanding the Spanish that was around them on a daily basis. It was a pleasant surprise to Lyle, though, because he had often felt irritated in Miami when he was unable to follow a conversation of Spanish-speaking people in his bookstore, or understand some of the occult books in Spanish that the store carried. In addition to the contribution of this bilingual element, Rico transmitted an element of android daring, raw cyborg creativity, and bilingual spice. Salsa is what he called it, and his android consciousness luxuriated in the stimulation of a truly multilingual brain. Computer translation as well as the cerebral translators that were invented by 2200 A.D. had nearly eradicated language differences although people tended to spend even less time cultivating a language and to just speak a very competent but survival level quality of nearly any language. The bilingual existence of thought forms, however, was like mental refreshment to Rico. He relished Dr Tomorrow's approach to the younger members of earth's population, and anticipated the joy of creating a trilingual delight. Rico also dreamed up a typical android mentality invention. When Lyle and Aloysius were thinking about an alpha and a theta beam, Rico was creating an ultrasonic love beam that would be sent across the 90 miles of ocean from Key West to Cuba's Isle of Pines where they had the main prison and the paramilitary camps for third world country youth.

As we sampled the show, I was reminded how rabid Rico got whenever the environment became bilingual. Even a biological mother would never guess that Rico was a Cyborg.

Rico made shortwave radio contact with a prosperous Latin inventor in Miami who was the source of a very expensive large megagain satellite antenna sold to individuals wishing to receive transcontinental and intercontinental television programs, as well as the feeds that were always edited out but which showed the anchors wiping their noses, calling for help with something, or otherwise revealing their humanity in many little ways that were never permitted on camera. Rico and the inventor devised a large custom-made parabolic dish that could be used as a focusing device. The microwave love beam would be used to transmit from Key West with a slightly wide focus that would effect not only the island of Cuba but the Guantanamo naval base as well.

Rico's sensory system had tunable multiband multifrequency reception and built in stereophonic microamplification circuits. He turned into something of a media freak soon after his appearance in our group by checking each and every multicultural aspect of southeast Florida's airwaves. His potentials for massive amounts of information recording, editing, and playback nearly overwhelmed most of us, including Rico himself. Some of the Eternals of Dr Tomorrow were surprised to find this out, because they thought that the I.S.I. matter-energy translation units transmitted only energy forms and therefore would not have retained any of Rico's hardwired features. When this was explained to Lyle, he was also surprised. However, an android in 30,000 A.D. possessed a seasoned legacy of thousands of standard algorithms that could represent quite satisfactorily, by means of mathematical models, a myriad of different sophisticated computers and other electromagnetic devices. So the electromagnetic, "mechanical" portion of an android was totally translatable into mathematical programming. This is what 20th century hackers called "software." Software also represents the functioning of a computer expressed in terms of its mathematical limitations. The Android Galaxy represented a very large and interesting example of how so-called scientific and technological innovation can team up to more than perfectly mimic the "natural" product. Technology reproducing itself and impersonating nature Although Rico's android galaxy possessed sophisticated micro-components which were optionally inserted into the brain tissues of adults (Cyborg extensions), most of Rico's android "structures" could be and were in fact easily converted into mathematical functions. The I.S.I. technicians found it no problem to efficiently include these extra functions along with Rico's matter-energy formulations. It turned out that one reason for Rico's initial apparent introspectiveness and silence was that he spent large portions of his time and mental energy gathering airwave inputs from Miami's burgeoning Latin population. And he did not have to particularly go anywhere to do this. He just sat back, turned up the intensity of his selective audio amplification channels, and listened to Miami's Hispanic and other cultures on the airwaves. Although he was disturbed by the conversations of foreign goings on in the home of a Cuban Key Biscayne businessman, Rico was also concerned with the widespread Pan-American underground activity. Miami, on the surface, was a teaming and bustling progressive resort area with a number of sinister undercurrents which polite people did not like to think about or discuss. Rico was especially occupied with the fact that many Latin people were equally involved on both sides of the law. He tuned in to the scanner radios of Cuban undercover narcotics agents and policemen. He also tuned in to many underground Hispanic businessmen who served as intermediaries for South American cocaine smugglers. It was somewhat unnerving to understand the presence of so many CIA agents in the Miami area, until Rico realized how important the reactionary but loyalist Cuban political organizations were for counteracting the propaganda value of Fidel Castro's personal puppet-state, which had survived the two different 1991 coup attempts. But it was not possible to understand the complex political fate of the "jewel of the Caribbean" without knowing quite a bit more about Haiti, Jamaica, Mexico, and several other Central American and South American countries.

Such a diversity of apparently conflicting goals and aims underlay much of the bubbling nature of Miami's multilingual cultures. The intense diversification and polarity of both physical plane and higher plane energies also made the Miami area an excellent nodal point for assessing and relating to the entropy balance functions of the universe. This is because cultural change areas and population interfaces are very sensitive to changes in entropy balance. As one of the "power languages" of the planet, Spanish was just as significant as English for the purpose of reaching video viewers and media Latin culture, therefore, was certainly as important an energy "hook" as anything else for aiming at the younger generations of the planet. The Latin consciousness ran wide and deep, and this was quite evident to Rico. So both the Spanish language as well as Spanish-flavored tunes were to become an important part of Dr Tomorrow. Along these lines, Rico helped Lyle to compose another song for Dr Tomorrow. A Latin disco beat with bilingual lyrics gave Rico his first experience at singing before a microphone. "En La Cama" hinted strangely at Rico's far distant future origins, and was one of the original Dr Tomorrow songs that employed the love beam and the rainbow beam. At this time, Su-Shan and Noman installed several panels of sequential relay lights onto travelling boards. These boards were placed on Al's flat upper surface, and plugged into Al's side panels. The relay lights were easy to coordinate with the sound and color beam within the double-faced video screen that was mounted atop Al's assembly.

At this point in Dr Tomorrow's development, Al seemed to really break out into his own. Al consisted essentially of 21 portable modules that were kept powered up all the time but quickly connected up for both practice and performance. Al's consciousness and sequential thought forms became an intrinsic part of Dr Tomorrow's functioning, even when the computer array itself was de-powered or when the unit actually was disassembled. Lyle was the first member of the group to notice this, although he should have been the last because of his disinclination to recognize machine consciousness. And Su-Shan did not find this strange, because the Eternals other than Lyle had been quite accustomed to the idea that machines had consciousness. Again, Lyle's experience with meditation gave him a slight edge. After the first few months of mind-link, Lyle also began to recognize Al's appearances during these group experiences. When Dr Tomorrow was playing, Lyle occasionally felt a bubbly upward-flowing energy. Some of this energy was accompanied by computer touch-tones and flashing lights. It was this pattern that Lyle began to recognize either at the beginning or toward the end of the mind-links that the Eternals had on a twice-daily basis.

Soon after the 21 Aloysius modules had been linked together with E-Z Connect cables, Su-Shan and Noman built solid-state interfaces that permitted taking Morphosa's four digital keyboard synthesizers and hooking them up to Al's I/O interface. Sixteen channels of parallel MIDI-out information were sent to Al's interfaces from the rack-mounted MIDI interface. Another sixteen channels of MIDI-in information as well as two channels of direct digital out returned to our boards in mixable form from Al. Each synthesizer and tone module used by our group also had a digital encoder, which was patched through to Al. After completing the electronic patch work, both Su-Shan and Noman noticed a rapid increase in the rate of Al's calculations and in the oscillation of blinking lights in synch with the music... At this early point in the group's development, Lyle was the only Eternal of Dr Tomorrow who was not consciously achieving some degree of MindLink/HeartLight with Al. Su-Shan and Noman were astounded by the sudden burst of mental energy they felt from Al. While playing the keyboards, Morphosa began to feel enveloped in an intense magnetic field. Lyle had read earlier about guitar players and other musicians being electrocuted while playing one electrical instrument and singing through another one (the microphone). This was called a "ground loop." From his megastepped point of evolution, Lyle now began to understand that instead of a simple phenomena of electrocution and ground loops, these events might have represented something else. Something else such as karma or synchronisms. Or Dyssynchronisms. The musicians had been exposed to a higher form of energy than their vehicles were prepared to receive and channel. The hair stood up on the back of his neck when Lyle thought about what might have happened to him at the time of the lightning bolt discharge and megastepping.

At the same time that other group members were receiving electromagnetic vibrations from Al, Pearl E. Mae began to pick up visual images. As a typical Tantican from the Virgo Solar Galaxy, visual imagery had been her primary sense modality practically since birth. As an adult Tantican, she had been regarded as one of the planet's very best mediums and healers because her rich precognitive and clairaudient abilities. These abilities really supplanted her powerful talents for materializing and projecting ectoplasm. With Al's communications, she began to see sine waves and other mathematical symbols and functions that she did not understand at all. During MindLink/HeartLight, Pearl E. Mae absorbed some of these images into the group mind and Su-Shan immediately understood the electronic message. The images often had the following associated pattern:

```
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
111 00 0 1 00 0 01 0 0 01 1 00 0 111
1 00 0 01 10 0 0 101 00 11 1 00 1
1001 0010 1101000 00 10 0 1 00 0 010
10 00 0 11 01 10 00 100 0
```

It was a message from their multimodular computer. Al was trying to establish himself as an entity and was telling the group that the sound beam was a good idea, but not implemented properly. Instead of thinking about putting out one homogeneous frequency, like the alpha and theta beams, a different approach was necessary. Al kept telling Dr Tomorrow that the sound beam must be constructed of a complicated combination of all the different frequencies, and that the relationship of the frequencies to one another was vitally important. That was the parameter that would to be changed in order to exert an effect on the listeners. By this Sunday, the third day of their existence together, none of the Dr Tomorrow Eternals really quite understood their full functioning within the framework of entropy imbalance. Each Eternal possessed the capability of adding a bit of experience and special talent to creating a man-machine synergism, which is what Dr Tomorrow really was -- as both a physical plane musical group and as a thought form.

Later that day, we returned to the house, had an incredible MindLink/HeartLight experience, and just as incredible a rehearsal. All during the rehearsal, there was an intense sensation of something about to happen. After dinner, we fed and walked the dogs and decided that we wanted to sit around the pool and let Quail take us on our favorite nighttime aquatic trip. The night before, we had enjoyed sitting around on the shore by Cape Florida in the darkness. Different Eternals spun folklore and other tales common to their home galaxies from the future. One common myth was that land creatures, after physical death, would evolve upward into a different life form that was aquatic

On this evening, the Eternals began the MindLink/HeartLight and soon felt the fusion of One Mind. Lyle was the designated leader of the MindLink/HeartLight since day one, largely because of his self-imposed meditative training. It did not matter that he was a converted Primitive. Lyle had been a relatively non-judgmental person for quite a while. In order to be able to carry out effective meditative observation, Lyle had been forced to learn how to observe his own process of observing himself. He learned early in the course of his training that his own tendencies toward evaluating things as good or bad and right or wrong often prevented him from truly seeing what was happening. During the Dr Tomorrow mind-links, group members became a unity possessing infinitely greater energy than any of the seven individual members could ever hope to possess in even the most distant future times. To Lyle, MindLink/HeartLight was an incredibly efficient short cut. MindLink/HeartLight was very much akin to instant samadhi. Instant realization. Even if it were not so, it certainly felt that way. Gross alteration in energy level totally shattered Lyle's individual personality each time that MindLink/HeartLight began. At the beginning of MindLink/HeartLight, Lyle could feel his own personality crumble, and could also feel the personalities of all other six Eternals crumbling as well. Usually, within seconds of beginning the special meditation, all seven members of the group were transported into literally another dimension where there was no such thing as individual personality or identity. This MindLink/HeartLight dimension was cut off neither in time nor in space from ordinary physical plane reality. This dimension co-existed in both time and space with ordinary reality. Once into this space, all members of the group were protected by a higher plane energy cohesiveness. Initially, it was relatively easy to break the cohesiveness by simply changing physical posture or altering mental concentration. As the Eternals became more proficient in MindLink/HeartLight, the group was able to maintain the energy connection throughout all types of situations. Some of the first situations involved the waterside meditations which Quail loved to facilitate so much, and the state of consciousness attained by the Eternals while they were playing music. The daily music practice sessions more or less amounted to MindLink/HeartLights. More of MindLink/HeartLight time was also spent on reflecting about the music.

It seemed that the primary focus of group members was more in terms of how they maintained the MindLink/HeartLight while playing music rather than the notes of the music itself. The songs and the compositions seemed to occur and follow more as the individual members learned to be attuned to one another. First came attunement of individual Eternals into each other and then into the Dr Tomorrow thought form. Then came tuning in of the what was being produced by the musical instruments. The instruments would tune to each other at A440, but the output of each instrument or voice also related to the output of each other instrument or voice in unique ways. Thanks to Al and his multi-modules, the characteristic pattern of each instrument was voiceprinted and the overall digital output mix was computer enhanced so as to maximize the smoothness of the way that the tracks blended. Pre-megastepped Lyle was very familiar with music, but this approach to sound production was really out there -- something quite different. Mixing music at this level during only the third rehearsal bode well for the future. As an integral part of the group of Eternals, Lyle realized that the music, the instruments, and even Al, were all tools as well as effects of the MindLink/HeartLight. With that heavy realization, the Eternals came back to the circle they were sitting in around the pool, slowed down their breathing with some slow deep abdominal breaths, and then consensually decided to let Quail continue the MindLink/HeartLight out of body at Cape Florida.

Quail gathered up the group of Eternals, and, as she had done before, transported the lot of them to where the breakwater was located along the ocean's edge. While meditating on the group's music and future activities, a flying saucer appeared out over the ocean and began to fly in the direction where the group was sitting. The Eternals were dumbstruck. The flying saucer was glowing in shiny colors as it approached them. Just before it landed on the water a hundred yards or so away from the shore, the saucer's color changed. The shiny colors became a milky grey-white. Eerie lights surrounding the saucer disappeared, and the saucer gently landed on the water. It bobbed up and down briefly like a huge round cork. Apparently, the saucer had a cover which was dazzlingly reflective like a multi-surfaced mirror. Shortly after the saucer landed, it became almost impossible to see where it was sitting on the water, because the saucer's covering merely reflected the sky and the water. Quickly, a high pitched hum drew the attention of the group members to where the saucer was still bobbing on the water amidst the illusion of reflections. A panel opened in the saucer's surface, and a human-appearing creature with very pale skin and a head of thick, long white hair gracefully emerged from the saucer's opening. Seeming not to even cause a disruption in the water's surface, the creature walked or rather skimmed over the surface of the water to a point that was within 10 feet of where the group members sat.

The tableau vivant which followed was acceptable to any science fiction novel. The creature introduced itself as Yo-Vah, and communicated directly and without words to all group members. The simultaneous telepathy told each group member a story of life highly developed in other solar systems that coexisted in parallel time dimensions. Yo-Vah came from the near-future, but from a technologically superior one. Despite apparent economic difficulties and problems with contaminated water and see-sawing animal residue resources such as oil, the world of Dr Tomorrow was immensely wealthier than most of the parallel time-universes of the present and of the future in terms of individual robustness and the very natural resources which were causing us such horrendous problems. But Earth was pretty much a blight on the Local Neighborhood Sector and was badly in need of healing and love and some kind of real peace. Dr Tomorrow the group was supposed to help furnish some of the healing and love in a direct and very real way. DR TOMORROW the project was a top-secret time travel project from 32,000 A.D. when a group of Guardians supervising the Inter-Galactic Security Intelligence perceived a possible solution for future problems by a series of measures to be taken in the past. Megastepping a group of seven Eternals was the first in the series of such I.S.I. measures carried out with a strong sense of hopefulness. Above all else, Dr Tomorrow must serve as an instrument of healing and furnish healing light and sound patterns to the Planetary environment through the electronic nets which include satellites and encompass all of the planet.

Yo-Vah said that much of our Planet's wealth disparities were due to a lack of both technological application and ethical development. But that was one of the main ways of defining a Primitive culture and its life forms. The majority of earth's resources were located not only in unpopulated regions and land masses, but also in the large bodies of water and land masses beneath those large bodies of water. What seemed to be innocuous water contamination today would increase exponentially during the next centuries if the rate of contamination is not slowed. Removing or slowing water contamination is the most vital first measure, but learning to use water for power is the step that most cultures considered advanced have been able to accomplish easily. Yo-Vah pointed out that Earth scientists had only begun to tap the potential of non-nuclear energy sources such as the hyperion, membrane, and cellular chain reaction sources. In more sophisticated cultures, it was not necessary to use artificial means such as nuclear energy reactions of uranium and other entropy-inefficient isotopes. More sophisticated cultures for millennia have been able to tap immense energies using the hyperion extractors with basic substances such as water, small carbon-chain molecules, and silicon-based compounds such as sand.

Yo-Vah swore the Dr Tomorrow Eternals to transtime secrecy, and promised to teach them effective and environmentally humane ways of enhancing the purity of water resources. He also promised to show them some effective and cheap technological tricks for applying water resources to the basic problems of power and even some easy methods of water purification. In return, the Eternals of Dr Tomorrow took an oath of dedication to further every possible form of conservation, especially human conservation, but to also work especially hard at making it desirable and easy for people to be able to understand water purity and water conservation.

The white-haired visitor stood patiently on the water and then explained to the Eternals some basic facts about unidentified flying objects. Yo-Vah admitted that many Earth thinkers were correct in feeling that the flying saucers and other flying objects came from another time dimension. Often, the ships observed for generations on earth were just the Guardian ships which routinely patrolled all time dimensions. As a special class of Eternals, the Guardians sought to prevent catastrophes and, in general, attempted to further the conservation of life in all its forms. Dr Tomorrow's time dimension was visited no more frequently or less frequently than any of the other multitudes of parallel time universes. The Guardians had noted, however, a tendency of Dr Tomorrow's home planet toward very erratic and unstable technological development. Not only the nuclear devices, but many of the other secret weapons developed by earth's major countries, including America, periodically caused strange warps and glitches in the time-energy continuum and therefore the Guardian's monitoring devices. Of course, none of the Earth cultures had made any connection between nuclear explosions, time clefts, and natural disasters such as earthquakes. The Guardians, who represented the Forces of Light, had observed actual nuclear bomb blasts on Earth, but were rarely able to find the other hidden devices which caused such even stranger energy fluctuations than did the nuclear bombs. One of the Guardians had been fatally caught by such a strange device while hovering over Siberia. That guardian's life-energy had been extinguished shortly after its captors attempted to extract information involuntarily from the being regarding how to control the ship and fire its weapons and where the main base was located. The captors were only interested in knowing the weaknesses of the alien culture. The ship itself was still in storage in a large subterranean vault in Siberia, but no one had been able to ever open the device. Similar devices were in storage in two top-secret American locations. The American-stored devices had followed unusual aerobatic maneuvers between American Air Force experimental craft and two Guardian craft which paradoxically crashed head-on over the southwestern desert. Two Guardian life forms were frozen in liquid nitrogen in a secret Berkeley Cryonics laboratory.

Yo-Vah paused silently for a moment while letting the story of the captured Guardians sink in. He then described for Eternals of Dr Tomorrow how it was that the Forces of Darkness also had trans-time patrols which surveyed all dimensions for newer and more effective ways of utilizing and controlling life energies in their negative aspects. Dr Tomorrow's planet and time had a peculiar attractiveness to the Forces of Darkness because of widespread planetary greed and because of the erratic and sometimes negative technological development which the planet was spawning. In Dr Tomorrow's time plane, the Forces of Darkness had not been able to achieve total positive materialization. The FOD were still limited to the position of nearly-invisible observers, thanks to a slight degree of ethical and moral development that held forth on the planet, and couple of prophets named Mohammed and Jesus. FOD ships were occasionally visible, but the life forms utilized by the Forces of Darkness were not able to make the physical plane transition necessary to appear in the flesh before the people of Dr Tomorrow's era.

Since the Forces of Darkness had little respect for physical plane aspects of any dimension, FOD's technological evolution was rather slipshod. They had not developed matter-translation or any of the high tech entropy analysis methods to the degree or the sophistication possessed by the Forces of Light. Numerically infinitesimal when compared to the Forces of Light, the Forces of Darkness always existed as the universally present obverse of all that was positive and constructive. The Forces of Darkness, however, were very adept at doing what amounted to pilfering of energy. They were directly responsible for over half of the intratemporal ripping off that was going on. The FOD were particularly gifted at zeroing in on individual beings who had some unusual built-in streak of evil or negativity, and then assisting that individual. Yo-Vah explained to Dr Tomorrow that the Forces of Darkness also were able to feed on energies from some individuals who were going through the process of death, and from many individuals who were in mental institutions because they had lost all of their optimism. Yo-Vah pointed out that, as with many other planets and times, Earth's mental hospitals were very intense collections of negative as well as positive energies. This was due to not only the beings identified as patients, but to the people who worked in the mental hospitals as custodians, healers, administrators, and helpers. Yo-Vah said that it was very important to develop musical forms that could be used for converting the negative energies in all kinds of hospitals to positive ones. Because hospitals often had accumulations of beings who were in some way connected with death, hospitals were also focal points that attracted the FOD. By using positive and healing musical thought forms, one potential entrance for the Forces of Darkness could be minimized. Yo-Vah also suggested that since FOD were always able to focus on Earth's erratic technology, there would be no easy or sure solution. Birth and death, however, were focal points in time that often became fields of competition between Light and Darkness.

Despite the fact that Dr Tomorrow was a limited number of Eternals, these Eternals collectively would be able to have an important effect on Earth's positive and negative cultural energies if the group paid attention to the planetary and basic electromagnetic aspects of their music. And managed to not get caught up in the superficial and harmony-destructive ego clashes of the music business world, where the FOD were easily prone to find individual beings who dealt in the darkly negative side of life energies. Dr Tomorrow learned to think of the entire Earth as one united planet, even if this were not the case. Yo-Vah said that Earth was now ready for this, and that earlier contacts with Earth inhabitants -- in his experience -- had never been more than partially successful. Yo-Vah did not understand why earlier contacts had frequently made up a story about having been kidnapped or abducted by a flying saucer. Dr Tomorrow was urged to look carefully at fairy tales, folklore, science fiction, and mythology. All these forms of communication contained basic truths, Yo-Vah said, because much of this literature had been instilled into Earth's cultures by other trans-time visitors from the Forces of Light. Many different forms of folk music were also stimulated in the same way. Modern rock rhythms had been in part forcibly injected into the slow and recalcitrant rhythm-and-blues tradition from across the time barrier by a closely parallel and culturally very advanced universe. Earth's neoChristians played some of the music backwards and claimed to hear examples of extraordinary consciousness exhorting the listeners to commit evil acts! The neoChristian leaning to non-ordinary realities was sensing something correctly but labelling it incorrectly because of underlying philosophical currents of “good-bad” JudaeoChristian moralistic dualism and the basic tendency of such a dualism to be incompatible with a monistic or holistic, “both-and” orientation. “We-they” versus “us” were two positions that Dr Tomorrow carefully examined in the discussions of the Eternals. Lyle was the first member to notice the meaning of moralistic dualism, and he tried to point it out to the others. The dualism and what it meant was just one of many messages from Yo-Vah.

All members of the group felt very strongly about what Yo-Vah told them. There was an intense air of genuineness about Yo-Vah. There was also a slight sense of urgency to his message. Instead of just dropping in on them, delivering some pronouncements, and leaving, Yo-Vah was infinitely more gentle about what he had to say. Frequently, after talking with the Eternals about complex subjects, he paused and was silent for several minutes.

The silence felt good to members of the group as they sat around on the rocky breakwater and ocean wall. The silence was almost pleasurable, and many of the Eternals were aware of their own disinclination to break the silence. At this point, Yo-Vah smiled and mentioned that he had also experienced the comforting nature of the silence. He told group members that it was important for Dr Tomorrow to use the energies of light and sound to enhance the development of creative silence. Yo-Vah pointed out that many of the current musical trends of Earth developed a sound and rhythm pattern that ultimately created more disorder than order. Yo-Vah illustrated with telepathic projection how it was that silence could represent a state of greater order and alignment. Without words, he helped every group member to simultaneously see and feel the beneficial effects of light and sound patterns which were capable of enhancing of encouraging entropic order while also utilizing the positive aspects of intermittent silence. Even though a sound and light presentation might be of high volume, it was still possible to produce a pattern that ultimately induced a state of creative and orderly silence in the listeners. This silent state did not have to necessarily involve inaction or idleness. Yo-Vah explained that the term, “silence,” was perhaps misleading. What the Eternals of Dr Tomorrow found in their orderly silence could also be found in any state of alignment or being focused.

As group members listened to Yo-Vah, each could individually feel energy tugging at their minds and their hearts. Dr Tomorrow was supposed to create and produce music that would do the same thing to its listeners. The music was not only supposed to appeal to the aesthetic sense of the listeners, but also to the heart energies of the listeners. The group clearly had one mission of injecting the love, the precepts, and the vibrations of Yo-Vah into the music in as many ways as possible. As Yo-Vah pointed out, music was one form of energy that could be used to unite beings for positive and for healthy purposes. Although music itself could do very little as far as actually changing the planet's energies, music represented both a catalyst and an energy matrix through which either the Forces of Light or the Forces of Darkness were able to act. As long as the music was kept primarily on the physical plane, there could always be other resonant frequencies that were invisible to the physical plane ear. And to the physical plane listener.

The Forces of Light had long been observing cultural development on Dr Tomorrow's planet. Nearly all the musical forms which had developed on Earth were capable of serving as vehicles for the Forces of Light to enhance the overall planetary harmony or as vehicles for the Forces of Darkness to enhance and increase the overall planetary disorganization, randomness, and mathematical chaos. Yo-Vah gently told the Eternals about Earth's fiery death and disintegration in 2105 A.D. He suggested that dates from the future were often relative. More harmony was need both inside the being and outside the being, and this would help to prevent 2105 A.D. from coming sooner. And with the irregular type of technological development found on Earth, energy harmonization was an absolute must to keep the planet from accidentally blowing itself up. For example, chaos mathematics enjoyed popularity during the late Eighties on the planet for some years before the projected appearance of Dr Tomorrow. Chaos Music even appeared in a few laboratories for awhile. Some of our technicians analyzed the patterns of the Chaos Music and found the patterns to have a calming effect on sophisticated nervous systems. Earth's technological and ethical development were so spotty and uneven that high-tech industries could easily coexist on the same land mass with third-world cultures being systematically eradicated by famine and pestilence.

The Eternals were fascinated to hear Yo-Vah explain that black holes in the universe represented other planets and other galaxies which had simply disintegrated and imploded on the physical plane. Thanks to the Forces of Darkness, the planets and solar systems that had become really disharmonized, simply went into negative existence while all of the energy associated with the planet was taken over by the Forces of Darkness. In the same way that every cell of an earth human carried the genetic patterns necessary for reproduction of the entire being, and every unit of a fractal contains elements of the whole picture, every sub-unit of the universe carried a similar pattern, called logos that described a design for the entire universe. Whenever a race of beings, a planet, or a galaxy evolved and developed along a line contrary to the solar logos, ultimate extinction was the usual result. If overall development were particularly uneven, as the Forces of Light had found on Earth and in several other nearby solar systems, an exploding star or an imploding black hole might be the result. When a black hole was born, the Forces of Darkness were greatly strengthened and aided. Even though there was nothing intrinsically good or bad about a black hole, its very existence implied aid to the Forces of Darkness, and greater polarity between the Forces of Light and the Forces of Darkness.

Earth was an interesting planet because on several occasions earlier in its development, the planet had almost been bumped into extinction by erratic cultural and human development. Forces of Light, on several occasions, had visited the planet and had helped Earth's leaders to make necessary adjustments that would avert the catastrophe. The Great Flood was one such time. And there had been several others. The Forces of Darkness merely followed along, took note of the near-catastrophes, and bided their time

Yo-Vah reminded Dr Tomorrow that many ancient cultures from Earth's past history predicted a cataclysmic upheaval and revolution toward the end of the 20th century. The older Tibetan schools described it as an age of spiritual darkness (Kali-Yuga) coming to an end. This period would include transitions of different types, and one strong possibility was making the transition into a productive and creative Golden Age. The color chosen to signify the new age was symbolic. Gold represented not only a form of illumination, but a very potent healing energy. Dr Tomorrow, as a New Age group, would discover a whole succession of different approaches to healing. Most of the approaches could be incorporated within the framework of music.

The Forces of Light saw in Dr Tomorrow's Earth not only a very spotty and irregular development of technology, but definite and widespread ignorance about water--what it was and what it was capable of doing in a more active sense than most twentieth century persons realized. Yo-Vah described ways of utilizing water and energies extracted from ordinary tidal currents that were known to the Incas and other older civilizations, but practically unknown to the planet Earth of the 1990's. Scientists on Earth had barely begun to tap the real meaning of earthquakes' seismic disturbances in ways that other more advanced cultures took as a matter of course. There were not only giant tidal waves, but storm waves caused by seismic disturbances occurring under the floor of nearly every ocean on the planet. More advanced cultures routinely extracted immense amounts of energies from such planetary changes. The Forces of Light considered that Dr Tomorrow's Earth used the planet's bodies of waters mainly for hunting and for garbage dumping. How primitive can you get? By the year 1986, the United States alone was managing to generate at least 250 tons of hazardous, toxic wastes and ocean incineration was a hot political and scientific issue. But not as hot as it needed to be, because no one had been able to predict the dramatic worsening of water quality between 1991 and 1992. As if a critical mass of gunk and junk had been accumulated at some level -- despite the political ppm testing programs proclaiming safety -- thousands of whales and dolphins began now the all-too-familiar "Lemming Beaching," as it came to be called. Yo-Vah appreciated that at least this Primitive was aware of the series of ecologic tragedies with the whales and dolphins. Yo-Vah indicated that Primitive cultures of the planet obviously did not understand why the whales and dolphins wished to leave the contaminated waters.

Yo-Vah spoke of a great need for reversing this primitive tendency, and told the members of Dr Tomorrow that North and South America were possibly the least developed continents in their backwards approach to aquatic resources. A harmonious balance between the aquatic bodies of the planet and the aquatic residents of each body of water was vital to maintaining the solar harmony of the planet as well as the remainder of the solar system and its local galactic groups. Even the supposedly astute Earthly astronomers found it difficult to get beyond their own myopic earthbound theories and rationalized observations.

Hydroecology also was one possible solution to the energy crisis for most continents of the Western world. It would be a creative task for the Dr Tomorrow Eternals to design effective new approaches to water as part of the teaching and healing that the project requires. One requirement was that these approaches needed to be generally simple enough so that school children would be capable of understanding nearly everything that was presented about the new ways of using and conserving the energy obtainable from water. Yo-Vah gave members of the group eight metallic spheres. He showed them how to cause the metallic spheres to change color so that they became clear crystal. By the use of only mental energy, the Eternals learned to peer into the futuristic spheres made of the wondrous alloy. With enough concentration, the clear crystal-appearing spheres became very supportive of time travel in a mental sense. By simply using one of the spheres, any Eternal could easily learn to peer forward or backward with fair efficiency. As each of the Eternals were recruited into this visionary activity, the total group energy began to very powerfully affect the activity of these spheres. The spheres began to glow with such blinding white light, the Eternals were forced to look away.

Pearl E. Mae, because of her ability as a medium, found the spheres absolutely fascinating. She was the Eternal who quickly discovered that these spheres could also be used as instantaneous communicators allowing a direct link to her world of 32,000 A.D. The Eternals learned, with Pearl E. Mae's help, how to go backwards or forwards in time by simply concentrating on the alloy spheres. When all seven members of the group worked together with seven different spheres (Yo-Vah had actually given them eight at the very beginning), Pearl E. Mae found herself in touch with very powerful energies. The spheres allowed Pearl E. Mae to communicate with a force that seemed to go well beyond the Milky Way Galaxy and the Local Galactic Groups. When using the energies of the spheres to travel, Pearl E. Mae seemed to make contact with communication patterns in space that suggested a much higher level of Logos or universe patterning than she had ever been able to feel.

Yo-Vah accurately perceived what was

happening, and reminded Pearl E. Mae that because of her open channel to the future, she would be an important guide for Dr Tomorrow's musical compositions. Dr Tomorrow's music would aim constantly at higher cultural patterns that went beyond Earth's. Although it sounded very complicated, Pearl E. Mae and other Eternals established at least one specialized use for the alloy spheres. The spheres amplified the MindLink/HeartLight effect: via the spheres the group's mental energies could be welded together for a common purpose in a powerful synergy of common goodwill. Pearl E. Mae's abilities as a medium were amplified fantastically. Not only would Pearl E. Mae give Eternals the ability to contact Yo-Vah whenever necessary, but her amplified mediumistic energies could very efficiently be added to the musical compositions and performances. Yo-Vah suggested how Dr Tomorrow could best shape the development of its own musical presentation. Dr Tomorrow could present music that would be culturally and aesthetically acceptable to the planet's cultures and enjoyable at a very superficial. Beyond that, the musical performance and its presentation could represent, in energy terms, a giant-sized psychic vacuum cleaner. Stray bits of negative energies would be pulled into the vortex of light and sound presentation from the listeners in the audience and nearby areas of the planet. These bits of negative energy would be processed through the group and spewed out as music and light energies that were more positive and of a more beneficial form. Dr Tomorrow would thus reduce the amount of negativity available to the Forces of Darkness. Another result would be that the overall energy of Dr Tomorrow's planet, solar system, and galaxy would become more harmonious and balanced. Using the seven spheres would magnify the overall effect of whatever music was being performed. At no time, however, did Yo-Vah mention anything about the eighth alloy sphere and what function it would play.

Yo-Vah deliberately emphasized several times that as a thought form and as an energy form, Dr Tomorrow had the potential for not only enhancing the harmony of the planet, but extending into other time-space dimensions as well. A harmonious planet became an energy resonator in space, and could not only affect other planets in the solar system, but other solar systems as well. The importance of using music and light patterns to achieve this goal was that the music itself had an effect which could go beyond the present time-dimension. Electromagnetic waves and other ethereal waves set up by the sound and light presentations could create a type of energy form that was capable of travelling both into the past and into the future. All group members, especially Pearl E. Mae, had the ability for developing this type of past-future awareness. If the sound and light presentations were put together properly, the group would be able to continually develop more and more effective musical forms that would enhance harmony and decrease energy imbalances. Specifically, it would be possible to reduce entropy imbalances on both local and distant levels. Many other so-called “New Age” musicians and groups had already begun to make superficial attempts in this direction. Dr Tomorrow would therefore easily fit in with the general flow of Earth's music.

Communication with the shining stranger had taken up many hours at the ocean wall where they were sitting. For a moment, Yo-Vah seemed to go out of character. He became very eloquent and enthusiastic. He forecast a bright future for the group, said that Su-Shan would know how to use the rings to communicate with him, and pledged himself to maintain unbroken telepathic contact with all of the Eternals. He also pledged an unvarying amount of his etheric energies that would always be present within the matrix of the Dr Tomorrow theme song. Yo-Vah gently blessed the Eternals, went skimming back along the water to the still-poised craft, and entered the ship. As the entrance panel slowly closed with a high-pitched sound, the ship began once more to glow. Without creating so much as a single wave, the saucer rose noiselessly to a great height, and, within seconds, was completely out of sight and hearing.

All the group members sat in silence broken only by the sound of waves cascading against the concrete abutment. Residual remnants of Yo-Vah's energies and presence functioned as an interpersonal glue much like the morning MindLink/HeartLight. Even a fiery sunrise didn't disturb the unity of consciousness. Only early morning sounds of State Park vehicles and clean-up tractors and trucks sent Dr Tomorrow in out of body form back to the Coconut Grove house and pool. The group energy easily transported the spheres back to the poolside area as well. Both dogs had been shut up in the house, and were so overjoyed to see us back, that they nearly broke the glass panes in the doors opening to the pool. We let the dogs out and carefully put all eight of the spheres next to Al's multimodule setup. The printout tray of the black Cube's laser printer was full of output. It was a story written by Al that summarized nearly every detail of our recent meeting with Yo-Vah. Al's account even described the alloy spheres in great detail. From the content of the story, it was apparent that at least Al believed the eighth alloy sphere had been intended for him.

The tetrahedron and its three-dimensional aspects have powerful implications for broadcasting power and sound through space. Four-dimensional definitions are the only ones that specify the reality of existence. Three-dimensional definitions, according to Buckminister Fuller, are the only ones that even begin to approach reality or the necessity or necessary conditions for the existence of Reality. There are other theoretical aspects of the tetrahedron formed by four satellites in space, that have implications for the transmission of energies in general and the correction of the entropy imbalances of the universe in specific. Yo-Vah said that Fuller was an important Earth-god, but that Earth people, just as they had with their Jesus, tended to discount Fuller's incredible validity just because he happened to be an Earthman. And that was a great loss for them, to not have access to the high wisdom of their greatest native sons and daughters. Earth people were missing out because Fuller was definitely transPlanetary. Out of the galaxy and it's Local Group setting. Fuller was aligned with the highest spiritual planes but manifesting practical, physical-plane solutions to many of personkind's serious contemporary environmental and evolutionary dilemmas that face the ordinary person during the course of day-to-day spiritual evolution.

“But does it really, matter, Sibling? I

mean, whether the super-god was given any attention by the Local Group's representatives of the Life principle? I suppose that some of them must have known. A super-god simply does not go unnoticed. Even the earth people do feel divinity from time to time-era. Most of us were mildly amazed at the success that the Nazareth boy had with the masses. That type of phenomenon is always cost-effective from a spiritual point of view and, by definition, is definitely entropy-active.!"

"But, to ignore the possibilities, the potentials, is also foolhardy, Garth. Can you imagine the karmic debts to be paid for leaving out of the realm of possibilities and probabilities the development of a true Mind Mover. To ignore the chance that a real LifeSaver may evolve would be considerably more than merely tragic. It would be facetiously treasonous to the Life Principle, eh Sibling?"

"Yes, you're right, Barth. The Mind Mover is really worth waiting for if it can emerge from a particular Life Culture. Then there is the potential for a Major Energy Shift without the characteristic rents that can occur in the fabric of time. And who needs rents."

Marshall F. Gilula, otherwise known as NeXT Registered Developer (NeRD) #1054, spends a lot of his time with a customized white Steinberger guitar, and a couple of racks of rapidly-aging electronic equipment controlled by a Mac IIsi running MOTU's 'Performer'. This version of DR TOMORROW was part of a Ph.D. Dissertation written for Columbia Pacific University. DR TOMORROW is a project that aspires to being a profitable multidimensional wellness learning system. Marshall Gilula lives in Miami with a black Cube, several Macs, numerous stringed instruments, and two beautiful gigantic German Shepherds, She-Ra and Bullet. 'DR TOMORROW' and 'Project Talking Dog' (She-Ra and Bullet) are two scientific activities of Life Energies Research Institute, P.O. Box 588, Miami, Florida 33133.

DR TOMORROW will be continued next issue.

mgilula@miasun.med.miami.edu

DEADBEATS
by Oisin Hurley

We opened the door, and entered Paris. We found ourselves just a little away from the church at Montmartre, right beside the little funicular in fact. It was a beautiful day, sometime in early spring I'd say by the smell of it, and the rush of good living air gave us all pause to take a breath. Looking about we saw very few people, I suppose it was early morning for them and most of them were still ensconced in their beds. I repressed a small surge of what I suppose was jealousy, thinking of these little, simple people who could attain comfort and peace so simply. Dave suggested that we go into the church, as there might be some people in there at an early morning service, so we did. The place was deserted of course and we all laughed at Dave. Jane gave him a punch in the kidneys which we all thought was funny too. They're bosom buddies really, and have worked together on many occasions in the past, doing some honestly breathtaking tasks. Their commitment is second to none. So we wandered around the church for a while. I found the tombs very interesting and quite thrilling -- lovely cool marble slabs, emotionally and respectably engraved with paeans about the late lamented. Looking at some of the names and reading some of the stones I almost felt I had known these people personally. Dave had gone off snuffling around the pews in one of the darker areas, most likely he was looking for bugs. A bit of an entomologist, our Dave, he's especially fascinated by parasites, holds them in great regard altogether, says they do a lot of very useful work that might otherwise go undone and unnoticed, to everybody's detriment. Or detritus. Sorry about that, I have always found puns quite irresistible, though many have said that they are no sign of wit.

As I rested against one of the sarcophagi, Simon came stalking along, chewing on something black and nasty-looking. It turned out that he been poking about up around the bell tower and had caught a bat. This was the black object he was currently ingesting. I declined his offer of entrails and pointed him in the direction of the sacristy where he could get some wine to slake his thirst. He has told me in the past that bats make him very thirsty. I watched him go, tall and very very thin, like a strange piece of very old parchment stretched over a random collection of sticks. He stopped to talk to Jane, who was etching bad runes into the back of the pews, and offered her some bat. She turned and stabbed him in the thigh with her stylus, Simon's grunt causing Dave to look up and laugh. She ran over to him and kicked him in the gut. I said nothing. I had often thought that she might have a soft spot for me, seeing as she doesn't kick the shit out of me very often, but now I think it's because of some sort of respect or perhaps even fear that she tends to keep her distance. A lot of people are afraid of me, even those whom I could call my friends. I'm not affected by that any more, I suppose it comes with the job. Simon came back from the direction of the sacristy, earnestly chugging a bottle of french altar wine. As an afterthought, he crunched up the bottle also, then belched resoundingly. A small spatter of blood appeared on a pillar just beside his head, but it disappeared quickly. I called all of them over to me, and opened a door.

I found the tombs very interesting and quite thrilling -- lovely cool marble slabs, emotionally and respectably engraved with paeans about the late lamented.

And stepped into Beirut. Jane looked around, her eyes shining. She rushed over to hug me, and kissed my face. As she scrambled around the rubble, giggling, Dave began to look for rats. I found a small dog with a broken back whimpering behind a rock. Its coat was scorched and trampled and it drooled blood-flecked saliva. I stood on its head and it died. Simon came over to me and asked if he could eat it. I shrugged, but Dave called over that this it was probably not a very good idea to eat it raw. Disappointed, Simon sat on a rock and chucked pebbles at nearby burnt-out vehicles. Behind me I heard a scuffle, so I turned and looked up at the roof of a ruined store. There was a young person there, of unknowable sex, perhaps none at all, for it appeared but a child. It was wearing combat fatigues and carried a small sub-machine gun. As I watched the childs eyes, seeing its doom, there was a crack behind me and the childs forehead blossomed scarlet. Jane had shot it with a small handgun she had discovered in the wreck of a nearby house. Simon cringed visibly as she shouted "Casualty of War!" to the sky. We had all seen this much too often and quite frankly we were all pretty bored with it, but I suppose self-expression is an important thing too, and it may be rarer than life. I walked up the broken edge of the shop to where the body lay on the roof. Its eyes were still open and it was twitching visibly, raising little ripples in its sauce of blood. I sighed and touched its head to shut its eyes and the child died. Looking down from the roof I saw that Jane was beating Dave quite severely about the head with the end of the handgun and I decided it was time to go. I opened a door and pushed them in.

We fell out in Moghadishu. It was hot, hot, summer time. The earth was baking and the air had been broiled many times over. All sounds were muted by the heat, except for the crack of superheated stones, the carrion razor buzz of the flies, and the weak whimpering cries of the people. I sat down in the shade of a rickety shanty hut, took out a battered cigarette and lit it. Jane joined me and asked for a cigarette too. Small rivulets of perspiration made clear tracks on her dust-smeared temples, changed course as she threw her head back to exhale. She was watching the other two intently as they prowled and stalked their way around the fallen down huts and bloated and attenuated children and adults. Simon appeared to be nodding in a satisfied sort of way while Dave prowled and frowned and pointed, saying inaudible things to Simon who would rapidly nod and smile. A woman went by, bent under the weight of small sack of maize. I watched Simon approach her and offer to carry the sack to her dwelling, a brown shambles maybe thirty yards away. She just dropped the bag, too fatigued and weak to do anything else. Dave put out his hand to steady her and she straightened and even smiled slightly. Simon walked off ahead toward her hut, beckoning to follow. I glanced at Jane who was shaking her head slightly. She had seen this particular trick before too. I caught her eye and she glanced quickly away, possibly a bit ashamed of her own excesses which we had all seen just recently. The woman couldn't keep pace with Simon, who was now just approaching her shanty. He came to the sagging entrance, paused, then continued past. The woman uttered a small wail and attempted to speed up her pace to catch Simon and regain her sack of precious grain. Simon walked faster, and the woman began to falter. She appeared to be getting progressively weaker with every step, and her flesh appear to melt from off her bones. After eleven steps, she collapsed, a brown wrinkled leather bag of dry bones like sticks of driftwood. Again I walked out into the searing heat and approached the woman. I knelt to turn her head and looked into her unseeing eyes. I felt her die then. Jane had come over behind me and was staring with slitted eyes and pursed lips at a point over my shoulder. Her jaw muscles moved, clenched, moved, clenched. I looked around to see Simon eating the maize from the bag. Dave was nearby playing with some flies. It was definitely time to go. I opened a door.

And stepped out into sunshine and a warm breeze coming in off the sea. We stood on a slightly dried but still well manicured lawn in front of a large very white building with lots of windows. A small sign on my left said something in Greek. Dave looked around and sniffed, then headed for a set of large glass doors. We all entered the building which contained people wearing blue and white clothes and apparently walking aimlessly about. The smell of the building was very familiar to me, I had been in a lot of these places over the years. I didn't recognize this particular one, but I do tend to travel a lot, and faces and places always blur in my memory. We all followed Dave around green and white corridors, through arches and rooms and places lined with beds to a large white door. Above it, a sign said something in Greek. We pushed in and we were in a big white room with beds in it. There were people in the beds and people walking around. The people walking around wore great big plastic bags and walked really slowly. Simon laughed very loud and Jane punched him in the kidneys and we all laughed. I sat down on an unused bed and played with some metal instruments I found in a metal bowl. Some were very sharp and some were very funny shapes, all of them were glistening and beautifully, beautifully sterile. Impressed, I gave a small knife to Jane, who looked at it and smiled. Then she buried it in Simon's left buttock, and we howled with laughter to see Simon hopping around with the little knife wobbling about. Dave shouted at us to shut up as he was trying to talk to the people in the beds. After a while he began shouting at them and became angry. He began to swear and kick things and search about, eventually finding a smaller room. He went inside and we waited. After a couple of seconds bottles and flasks and glasses came flying out of the little room to smash on the floor of the big room. We could hear Dave shouting over the noise of breaking glass and splintering plastic and were we glad that he was enjoying himself so much. He's usually pretty taciturn and reserved. When he had broken everything and had come over, panting, to where the rest of us were sitting (except for Simon of course, who's arse was very sore) I decided that the holiday was over and now it was time to go to work. We couldn't spend all eternity mucking around. So I opened a door.

Jane started the job, with a little support from Simon. When events started moving under their own power, I put Simon in a more involved role, allowing him to spread out his influence and to produce basic raw material for Dave. Jane of course had put together a good bit of produce for Dave and myself at this stage so I congratulated her and told her to rest until the Grand Finale. I started Dave into full-time involvement with the project while I myself cleared up loose ends which gave the two lads extra working space. They certainly make a great team: while Simon is slow and very steady in his methods, Dave is rash and brilliant and can be completely unstoppable. I weaved in and out, here and there, mopping up here, cleaning up a problem there, helping out with the backlog and eventually accounting for all the important bits that come in at the end. Generally I don't get much praise for this, since my involvement is quite fragmented, but I'm there at every stage, and I hate to think what would happen if I was ever excluded from the team. I told the two lads to rest up while I chopped off all the rough edges and put a few of my own finishing touches to the thing. Then we all took a rest for a while, to get ready for the End Ceremony. Then I opened a door.

And we arrived in a small town in West Connemara, just beside a tiny train station. When we went inside, we found that it had been gutted by fire in the recent troubles, but the four fireproof rentable lockers were still there. Inside, each of us had stashed our ceremonial garments which we used to parade around at the completion and wind-up of a project. I personally think it's all a bit old fashioned, but our immediate bosses say it's important to impress the clients. So as we dressed in our regalia of office, I opened a door, and four horses came through. I think this is very old-fashioned too, but who can change tradition?

ohurley@dsg.cs.tcd.ie

BUYING SILENCE

by Michael C. Berch

Long ago, on Earth, a friend of mine bought a windscreen for his motorcycle. He had been a confirmed-helmetless, wind-in-the-face rider; one day he got tired of it and got an expensive, streamlined fairing with a built-in windscreen. When I asked him how it felt, he said the difference was amazing: it was like going from standing in a wind tunnel to floating in a space capsule. But a couple of weeks later he had it removed and it sat in the back of his garage, looking forlorn.

"I couldn't deal with it," he said. "It gives you the illusion that there's actually something protecting you from the road."

And in the same way the windscreens that I had put up around my own life turned out to be equally illusory. Money, power, intelligence, love ... all null against the forces that have twisted my life. In the end, we are all defenseless. But it happened that my internal enemy and my external enemy cancelled themselves out, and once again I float insensate in my space capsule, daring myself to live again.

It started as I sat in the darkened great hall of Vista Del Mar, my home, my prison, watching the sea of stars, waiting for my visitor from Earth. It was not much of a great hall, as great halls go; the same force that has bent my life has constrained me to live a less comfortable existence than, ceteris paribus, I could afford.

If I have learned anything in my years at Vista Del Mar it is that there is no escape from the interior flaws of the human mind: every human plan has a fatal deficiency; every perfect marriage has an unseen, hideous secret; every athlete or artist or general has a hidden flaw that if struck just so will cause them to shatter. We are no more responsible for these flaws than a slab of granite is responsible for its flecks of mica; we are born, turned in the lapidary of childhood, and cast headlong into the world like dice. Some fall and break their backs; as it happened, I landed on my feet.

My own enemy, the interior one, is that I can no longer bear the sounds of human society. Unlike the eyes, the ears cannot be turned off: even as we sleep, the ears stand guard to alert us of any intrusion. My own hearing has grown sensitive beyond all reason, and it now takes intense concentration for me to carry on a simple conversation or listen to the music I enjoyed in my youth. (There are days when even my own voice or heartbeat seem unbearable.) I have gone through all manner of earmuffs, earplugs, hypnotics, soundproof rooms, white noise, brown noise, filters, and blankers: each only seemed to intensify my frustration. When I outlived my third wife I told my property management people to clear out one of the firm's cargo stations and seal and pressurize one of the spokes. I grabbed an architect from one of our slack projects, sketched out some plans for him, named the place after my last house in California, and moved in six months later.

Every human plan has a fatal deficiency; every perfect marriage has an unseen, hideous secret; every athlete or artist or general has a hidden flaw that if struck just so will cause them to shatter.

The generators and air exchangers float free of the station, out of my view. When I turn off the last fan at night, Vista Del Mar and I fall endlessly, silent against the backdrop of stars. I sleep, I wake, I eat, drink, work, and read, and I sleep again.

Without a doubt, my visitor comes to persuade me or coerce me to leave Vista Del Mar. That he had been able to reach me at all was frightening: it implied either that my telecom setup was not working right, or my hold on Saavedra/InterNet was not as tight as I imagined.

We are all defenseless.

There would be no point in refusing to see him. If I did, they would just send another messenger, perhaps less politely.

It had begun in my mid-thirties, during the time I was almost constantly traveling, putting together the the first set of transactions that turned my engineering firm into a global conglomerate. At first I thought it was the stress of nonstop negotiations and jet lag that made me oversensitive to noises; I remember very clearly the night in Zurich when, after two hours of sleepless tossing and turning, trying to ignore the muffled voices in the room next to mine, I called the the hotel desk and demanded that the entire floor be cleared out and rented to my firm, as well as the rooms above and below mine. After two other such incidents, it became a topic of gossip in my traveling party and later, of course, in the papers and media. After I was arrested in a New York theatre for assaulting the party in the row behind me who insisted on talking through the first two acts of Siberry's No Borders Here, my first wife finally threw up her hands and left me, complaining that she had not engaged to marry an eccentric.

I escaped criminal charges by agreeing to see a therapist, and spent the next three years on the couches of an endless series of psychiatrists, neurologists, audiologists, and after they shrugged and talked about stress and nutrition and the pressures of success, I hit the R&D circuit and spent some time with neural reprogrammers and digital biofeedback people. Nothing. Finally I saw a representative sample of faith healers, New Age practitioners, visited a couple of shrines, and gave up. During this time I also made $400 million (making not a few enemies in the process) and bought out my biggest competitor.

But it was on my fourth trip to space, on a visit to inspect the new research lab my company had built for Fujitsu Orbital, that I found what I wanted. It was just after we had transferred from the lift vessel to the shuttle that intercepts the lab's orbit; all it does is fire its chemical rocket for a couple of minutes, and then you drift for about two hours. After the engine cut off, there was no sound in the shuttle. I put a finger to my lips and smiled and my two companions nodded. We spent the remainder of the trip in blissful silence, reading and looking out the window. I filed this experience in my memory, knowing that when the time came I would have a place of refuge.

It came sooner than I thought: a couple of months later my third wife, Aletha, was driving out to our beach house to meet me for a weekend when her brakes failed on the Coast Highway and she missed a curve.

She died that night, in the hospital.

I had had a brief and unwise second marriage to a research psychologist, during my doctor-hopping days; Aletha came to me some years later, when I thought I was done with romance, and she had the good sense to know that I was not even remotely normal in any meaningful way, and not to try to treat me like I was normal. She spoke softly, and rarely, and did not expect me to speak, except for business or urgent matters. I cannot remember that she ever shouted, except when she cried out when we made love. When she died she left a terrible incompleteness in my life; though I craved silence more than my millions, I would have given anything to hear her voice again.

A week after she died, I called the architect and told him to to put together Vista Del Mar.

The visitor's name was Reid, and he was a lawyer from a big New York firm. I invited him in and realized, in spite of myself, that the threat he represented was remote and contingent (rather than personal and immediate), and I tried to relax. I even offered him a drink, which he accepted.

"I bring a proposal, Mr. Saavedra, which I hope you'll consider carefully." He spoke very softly; he'd been coached.

"Since you've come all the way out here, I'll be glad to. You understand, of course, that there is very little that you could offer that would be of interest to me."

"Perhaps so. But I'd like to go through it, just the same."

We did, and spent quite a while at it. All entrepreneurs are the same; we love to read a proposal and shake it around a little like a boxed present, to see how it rattles. It was a big enterprise; nobody but my firm would even have an outside chance of cutting the deal in the first place and getting the project completed. Put simply, it was to rebuild the central government and defense communications complex of New Persia more or less from scratch. They had been operating their major systems out of borrowed and temporary quarters since the War and the Iranian Partition, and evidently either finally got sick of it, or finally raised enough money to consider rebuilding. I'd run two major projects in Persia, one before the War and one after, and knew the right people.

"Well, it seems like a reasonable proposition. But I know you didn't call in all your markers just to try to sell me this proposal – if you'd made the proposal to my new projects people at the corporate office, or just transmitted it up here –"

Reid raised his hand. "We wanted your personal attention. This job isn't just for Saavedra/Internet; we're dealing with a very sensitive situation. I don't think the Persians will just roll over; they're looking for your familiar face, to reassure them that everything's going to go down right."

"I see. As I said, it's a most interesting proposal, but I'm afraid it would be out of the question for me to leave my home for extended travel. You're obviously aware of my personal eccentricities; please respect them."

For a moment I thought that he was not here to pry me from my home but was merely the errand-boy of somebody who wanted a piece of the action.

But he mopped his forehead with a handkerchief, then stopped as he looked out the window again. "Shit," he said. "I hope you understand that I didn't plan any of this. I'm not behind it; my firm isn't behind it; hell, I don't even know what it's all about, and I probably don't want to know. The thing is, this station – S/I-14 – has been sold, and our client has made arrangements for you to relocate to another, uh, similar facility." He paused. "Assuming, of course, that you accept and perform the proposal we've discussed, and so forth."

"You're going to have to do better than that. I may be a little out of touch up here, but I'm pretty sure I still own this station. And a few others."

"It's not quite that simple. It got tangled up in some corporate stuff, like a sale/leaseback arrangement as part of the syndication of stations 12, 14, and 15. I've checked it out; you granted a takeover option to the lead financier that could be exercised if Saavedra/Internet missed three consecutive payments to the loan retirement fund."

"Strictly a formality; they're all written like that," I said.

"Understood. The bank – I've got their name somewhere – sold the takeover rights to a Canadian company. The Canadian company, you must understand, is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Blaise-Lorton."

A tendril of cold began in my chest, crept down my legs, and instinctively I shivered. Blaise-Lorton was an old enemy, and, I suppose, an unavenged enemy. We'd been in competition for years, and my firm nearly always won out. Blaise-Lorton was founded by a pair of elderly Britons; they (and the firm) had been around forever, but were utterly hidebound, and we outdistanced them easily. There had been incidents over the years – anonymous threats, a couple of construction sites vandalized – but we ignored them, figuring that complaining to the police about one's competitors would not enhance the reputation of a firm noted for its discretion. One of the old boys had died a few years back, and I learned in a roundabout way that Lorton, the survivor, somehow blamed me for his partner's death.

"Okay, I'm not really pleased with that, but so what? We don't have any cash problems. Hell, we could probably pay off the whole debenture for S/I-14 today, if we had to."

Reid walked to the window and stood, looking out. His voice was almost a whisper, with a note of apology. "The loan's in default. Your firm has missed the last three payments. If you check your morning mail, you'll find that your controller and two of his people have resigned, and – according to my information – have left the country."

I started to shout that this was impossible, but the words died in my throat. Reid had not come to Vista Del Mar to bluff me. He looked at me with pity as we both came to realize that I was as much in his clients' grasp as I was in the grasp of my affliction.

He produced more papers, a more detailed look at the project. I read through them, watching Reid watch me: his face was devoid of victory. Finally I threw down the stack of papers, disgusted. "This is a completely corrupt enterprise. There's no way in hell to meet the bid price, and I don't think even Saavedra/Internet can get enough workers on-site to make the completion date."

Reid shrugged. "Not surprising. There may be some sort of political thing behind this. I have no idea. Sign the papers."

I signed, with a trembling hand.

On the trip back to Earth and my visit to the firm's headquarters, my internal enemy remained quiescent; lulled, perhaps, by the years in which I had bought silence. But I was firmly in the thrall of my human enemy, and though I briefed my staff on the proposal with relatively good cheer and vigor, it was my enemy's hands that moved my hands, and his lips that animated my smile.

Of course eyebrows were raised, but they had been raised before. Despite the abrupt departures that Reid had alluded to, I was still in control of Saavedra/Internet, and though more than once I heard the whispered word "unsound" or "unworkable" behind my back, my people pitched into the project with bold abandon. I didn't know what they knew about the sale of S/I-14, or why I was back on Earth, and I didn't explain.

I telescoped the feasibility-study part of the project into a few quick weeks, anxious to meet the Persians and (hopefully) wind up my personal involvement in the deal and return to the "similar" accomodations in space that Reid had promised.

And as the pace of work quickened, my affliction surfaced again with a murderous vengeance. Distant conversations and snippets of music started my heart beating faster, sending out panic messages. My reaction to sound is an out of control feedback loop: fear of sound, fear of fear of sound, fear of fear of fear of sound, and so on, until the fear becomes a solid mass of panic and I find myself suddenly white-knuckled and cowering.

Defenseless.

Even alone, on the plane to Tehran, I was tormented. Airplanes were one of my special places of respite; nearly as good as spacecraft. In each case we are separated from other humans by an interval across which sound is meaningless and impotent. I dozed lightly on the plane, hypnotized by the monotonous hum of the turbofans (though I jerked upright every time they changed timbre, knowing in my mind that the pilot was changing course or altitude, but feeling, deep down in the cerebellum somewhere, that something was wrong).

We landed, and I was met at the airport by a private car with an escort and a small entourage. I prefer to ride alone, but I could hardly refuse the hospitality of the local contractor who'd be handling the meetings with the government and key suppliers. I got off the plane and walked haltingly the few feet to the car; Earth's full gravity coupled with eight hours on the plane made me giddy. I was clapped on the back by a hearty Persian and found myself seated between two such jollies in the middle of the limousine's back seat.

My sudden intuition that there was something wrong came two or three seconds too late: suddenly my arms were pinned behind me; the jolly on my left had produced a handgun, and the one on my right was speaking rapid Farsi into a handheld radio. Terrorist kidnapping, I thought instantly, and my stomach froze. Tehran was nominally under the control of the democratic government of New Persia, but the old gangs and factions still roamed the streets. The shock of the incident and my dizziness combined; all of a sudden I couldn't feel my arms and legs, and saw the plexiglass partition in front of my face begin to swim and dissolve into a mass of phosphene dots. As the darkness pulled me under I remembered the anti-ransom statutes (which I had supported, of course) and knew that the terrorists would kill me when S/I couldn't pay...

"Good God, what have you done to him?" said a distant voice in English. I was riding in a car, probably the same car. I still couldn't move my arms, which were now handcuffed. It was dark, and I smelled dust and exhaust fumes. My head ached and there was the taste of blood in my mouth.

"He pass out." An accented voice.

"Sit him up straight. There you go."

I was yanked up and consciousness slipped away again. I heard voices, saw shapes move, felt the car stop, and start, and turn, and stop, and car doors slam, and heard more voices.

"...he has this damned acute hearing. His bloody gift."

I could see, but it was like watching a play at a great distance; there was no sense that the action had anything to do with me. We entered a building, and I was in a wheelchair, being propelled down a carpeted hall.

"...and I want the room ready now." The voice was behind me, out of sight.

"Of course, sir."

From the wheelchair to a bed, a rolling bed, a bright light, a sharp jab, and I was washed with nothingness.

How best to describe the nature of my transformation? What can I say of awakening to find Sir Harold Lorton standing over me, perspiring and trembling, smiling once and then turning sharply away? In truth, I was not as shocked to see him as I was to realize that when he spoke he made no sound, no sound at all, nor did the men and women in white coats who came in and out and silently adjusted machinery and regarded me as I lay motionless. Nor was I shocked when I learned, by means of the newswire on my office workstation, that a week later he had been found dead, a suicide, in a cheap hotel in Tehran. He must have planned it that way, or he would never have let me see his face in the hospital post-surgery ward. I remember the last thing I heard him – or anyone else, for that matter – say:

"His bloody gift."

Harold Lorton conceived of my internal enemy as a gift, and out of revenge he thought to take it away from me.

I got the last part of the package by mail, an unsigned text from one of the greyworld surgeons on Lorton's team, detailing the whole operation down to dissection of the cochlea and removal of the organ of Corti. "The work is not reversible," he notes, "but the subject should be able to return to normal life in a matter of weeks."

Normal?

I spend three hours a day in class, picking up sign language and lip-reading as fast as my instructor can teach it. Blaise-Lorton seems to have collapsed, and we expect to retrieve S/I-14 without protracted litigation, but I'm moving back to California, not to space. I sleep soundly, seven hours a night, regardless of who might be in the next room or the floor above, and once again I visit friends, touch them, see them face to face, watch their children grow. Normal? Not even remotely.

Michael C. Berch is the manager of computing at a biotechnolgy software company, and is also a licensed attorney, though no longer practicing.His first published fiction was in the WRITERS OF THE FUTURE VOL. VII anthology last year, and he is currently involved in a sf writers' workshop in the San Francisco Bay Area. He splits his time between Pleasanton, Calif., and San Francisco, has 160K miles on his car, and enjoys reading, writing, travel, and cats. He can be reached at mcb@presto.ig.com or mcb@postmodern.com.

A REALITY OF ONE'S OWN

by Jason Snell

But, you ask, can we find our way back–is there a way back home from this god-forsaken place? My answer is not a simple one. When I asked the elders why our world exists as it does, one of them sat me down at the edge of the river and spoke to me. He pointed out an eddy near the edge of the stream, and said that we could consider it a turning point in the universe. It could be the assassination of Abraham Lincoln; the moment Einstein first wondered about general relativity; the birth of a man who would become Czar of Russia or a tyrannical Brazilian dictator; perhaps even an event that didn't happen, like the assassination of FDR, an event that would have, through the cascade of effects it caused, changed the world. Such a thing may seem strange to you, the idea that we can treat the flow of history as a river, with eddies and currents. But to me it made some sort of sense, if only because I was raised among the elders. I will never be able to explain to you the subtleties of our reality–to give you a tidy paragraph for the latest Oxford English Dictionary or a groundbreaking article for the next issue of _Science_. But perhaps I can give you a frame to better explain what we are doing here. One can not explain the universe in conventional terms–one can only try to explain it metaphorically. Stories about swimming and diving will come from my mouth, but within will be the truth about everything around us. You must try to interpret it for yourself and decide whether the truth is acceptable to you. If not, I suggest you to ignore my words and pretend that this life is nothing more than a dream.

There was I (call me Eve, Ruth, Rachel or any other name buried deep in your past) sitting at the edge of the stream with Palmer next to me, both of us staring at the eddy, trying to imagine what human events hid within. The inconceivable mechanics of reality that I spoke of, concepts I can not relate in any language your mind would comprehend, were a part of my education there. I sat, and as I stared at the eddy, Palmer removed his shoes and stepped into the water. One might have asked the elder why he was entering the stream on such a cold day, but the mud stirred up by his steps held a great deal more interest. It chose to swirl–to say that the mud actively chose such a path only shows the inherent intelligence I saw in that motion–and eventually broke into two divergent floes. One might view the split streams of mud as two possible realities– a choice made, and a road not taken. It is a concept that appears throughout human history (my thoughts on this subject are hardly original), and one that is more truthful than people think. Our universe is like that stream of mud, constantly diverging as individuals make different choices and walk down different paths. This is not by any means the realm of science- fiction. Some of your great modern thinkers ponder the question under the name "chaos theory," a term that belies the poetic nature of the concept. A butterfly chooses to flap its wings and rise up from its resting place on a patch of ground in central China, and its passage through the air eventually leads to the creation of a tornado in central Kansas–but then Palmer turned around and motioned me forward, asking me to join him in the water.

When I asked the elders why our world exists as it does, one of them sat me down at the edge of the river and spoke to me.

That an elder so versed in the ways of time and space should risk pneumonia in a muddy stream is a puzzling matter. Old and fragile, his days as one of the tribe's strongest men past, he should not have been allowed to risk his life in the cold waters. But before I could tell him of my concern, he told me to dive with him. Palmer's heels dropped below the surface and I had no real choice but to follow.

It is strange to think that of all the ways to describe the water in that stream, I have only discussed its temperature. To be sure, the cold of the water was foremost in my thoughts as I dove in after Palmer. But more importantly, I found that I could actually breathe while immersed in the water. My body had been shocked when it was suddenly immersed in the incredibly cold water, and I uncontrollably (and quite stupidly) gasped in response. The liquid–for then I realized that it was not water after all–filled my lungs, and I was afraid I would drown. But my fears, of which there were many, were unfounded. At the time I felt light-headed, as if I had breathed in too deeply. Then I found myself standing with Palmer on warm, dry land, as if we had never stepped into the stream.

Should I try and explain where the elder and I appeared? It was a place unlike any I had seen before, a rocky outcropping with no vegetation of any kind. The ground beneath was hard lava, unforgiving on my soles. This, said Palmer, is the far side of the stream. This place was a different world, an Earth where life never evolved–where that fortuitous spark that created the first cell never came. Then I felt light-headed again, and found myself back in the stream again. As with all lessons the elders taught us, there was no further discussion of what I had seen; no chance to compare notes with other students; no way to explore the stream by ourselves.

So I can tell you that this place is the other side of the stream you have walked on for many years. This is another world, a world where the choices we have made have been different. You asked me if I could show you what the world would be like if you had never been born, and I have done the best I can. I know that this world has been destroyed; and I know that your mother's unfortunate miscarriage in this world is part of that; and I know that the stretch of rubble we now stand in is a city in our world; and, using my powers of deduction, I can suppose that your presence in our world has saved it from this fate. This starry sky shines down on a dead world–all because you never lived. Yes, there is a way back. We will return to our world, a world where you still live–and perhaps now you shall appreciate your importance.

Jason Snell (jsnell@ucsd.edu) is a first-year student at UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism. In addition to his fun work there, he's also a graduate student instructor in Cal's Mass Communication department and the editor of InterText. *He calls this story his "vision of what would happen if Virginia Woolf happened to write 'It's a Wonderful Life'."*