

Safe Harbours and Open Seas

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Things are what we want them
to be and the consequences are
always profitable, so why deal
with reality?

The Idiot's Guide to Life, the
Universe, and Everything

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1 Authors and Other Epiphenomena: Where we are horrified by the spectacle of a mere author muddling around when there be need for a skilled technician.

Where germinates an idea? Whence coalesces a perception? Can the mightiest of men see to the foundations of his mind to witness the birth of the slightest fluff of whimsy? Could Shakespeare himself have dissected a one of his tales, diagramming even the most internal of its relationships in a manner formal and logical, describing the initial co-movement of characters driven by acetylcholine, calmed by serotonin, enfeared by adrenaline, and aroused by testosterone?

Once might the answers have been obvious. Once might the children of Adam have been inclined to take the mind as being not something experienced and subject to reductive analysis but rather an aspect of the primary experiencer and inseparable from the person and the act, as if Descartes had been mostly right to say, “I think, therefore I am,” and fully wrong to expand it, however implicitly, to, “I think, therefore the world is.”

I stray.

It is ever tempting for an author to wander down this path or up that lane, but to do so will only distract from the task at hand, the writing of an orderly narrative taking the protagonist and villain from the beginning to the end, from the difficulty and seeming triumph of the one and the other

to the earthly destruction and the final victory of the other and the one. How else is literature to speak of men and to men? It is the work that is and should be central to the author's thoughts, and, I have to admit that it is impossible for me to claim authorship of this work. I cannot even claim to have pasted it together from the odd rocks and sticks picked up while wandering down this path and up that lane.

In fact, it's a mystery to me how this book came about. The story has come alive on its own, independent of my will and of my desires. It's as if the characters exercise their own wills in interacting with a world which bears some resemblance to the physical world, at least in its being a bit more than a thing subjugated to human desires. Even this oddly obdurate quality of a fictional world is less disconcerting than the corresponding lack of preordained rationality. After the fact, the various actions and expressed thoughts of this tale can be seen as making sense, of bearing reasonable relationships to each other, though there is so little that bears analysis by the rigorous, certain, and empty methods of formal logic, or even by the looser and content-sensitive cause-and-effect analyses of empirical science.

It was such meditations that first led me to re-member those two disks that came my way, each of which contained a large amount of encoded data which may have been the beginnings of two novels and a memoir if that be what they were intended to be. Whatever. Come to think of it, I don't know if they were text files or text-generating programs. If they were text files, I have no idea if they were rough drafts or final drafts or even texts smoothed over by copy-editors. If text-generating programs, I have no idea if they reflected the highest standards and latest advances of artificial intelligence or if they were merely the off-hour efforts of amateurs.

What is clear is that some words were assembled as sentences, and I would conjecture there were authors, though I can't remember, with any clarity, discovering those disks containing the works of two failed writers of radically different tastes and styles, men who produced output not at all related to each other. Judging by that output, they most certainly were not men likely to have become friends. All that, however, changed when I loaded the files of both disks into a computer whose hard disk was about to fail.

Fail? Soft pieces of the disk, though not the underlying material itself, exploded one into several others. Paragraphs of one file were inappropriately inserted in the midst of other files not much related, so far as their contents go, that is. Characters from unrelated streams of narrative began to talk

to one another as if part of the same world, and still that world bore an uncanny resemblance to the physical world as if the human imagination were limited to the possibilities of that world, though not its actualities.

I tried to rescue something from the disaster of twisted clusters, entangled file headers, and locations not matching well with those recorded in the file directory. It was a mess, and months of hard work by a mere author, barely computer literate, resulted in the recovery of many words, but in a badly scrambled form. And odd it seemed at times that even when political and social concerns were dominating my thoughts, the three fragmented manuscripts I had inherited forced me to deal with problems of human knowledge and the problem of that open sore in our society – science. The ground of so much noble effort in recent centuries, the source of so much technology which makes it possible for so many people to live on the face of the Earth, science festers inside the body of a culture which does not know how to assimilate quantum mechanics, or even modern clinical medicine, denying any relationship between facts and values while at the same time allowing the contingent facts of the scientific enterprise to drive our worldviews, even our views of our own natures. Thus, facts separated from values came to drive values, and to drive them increasingly far from the humane values traditional to many lines of Western civilization.

All of which does little to explain the mangled state of the softly encoded data on a computer hard-disk. Nor does it do much to argue against the overwhelming impression one might gain that an undisciplined reliance on scattered facts has freed too many to the illusion that they can define their own universe, maybe even their own God. Facts have become the stuff that dreams are made on.

An author, biased as he is, might speculate that narratives can give shape to facts, just as facts provide the movement which is narrative. But there doesn't really seem to be a single author. I certainly can't claim to have written much of what follows. No, there were two others who did much, though we may never be able to recover their original and true work, mostly because of my incompetence in trying to untangle the confused mess on the hard-disk of my computer.

One of the authors whose work is intermingled on the following pages writes, at times, as if modern science has somehow mandated human narratives must correspond to an incoherent empiricism or a related instrumentally factual view of reality. This fellow wrote something like a writer's journal under the name of Delbert Swing, perhaps a reference to Captain

Swing, the mythical leader of those who rebelled against, not machines, but against those who would use machines to control laborers. And, then again, Delbert Swing may have been the fellow's name. He also wrote a thriller novel of a sort.

The other author seems to be a strange fellow indeed. His writing style is as schizoid as that of any respectable modern writer this side of James Joyce. His subject matter ranges, somewhat arbitrarily, over domains of physical and biological science, viewing the world through the eyes of a would-be poet who would tame science, an engineer-physicist and part-time missionary, and a young fellow – cousin's son to the poet and grandson of the missionary engineer – who seems to be a fictional incarnation of the author's schizoid tendencies though even the engineer in this work seems to speak in a manner more familiar to the verbally inventive Melville than to the style of a scientific journal, but he left no personal journal to let us judge if Delbert Swing's depiction of him was accurate.

I played only a minor role in creating some quite inadequate bridges between the three books, the first of is that author's journal but no more realistic to my perceptions than the two novels. The main character of that journal seems to have written the second book, a sort of mystery thriller about a young man hired to be the companion of a mentally confused rich man who is the target of a conspiracy by his lawyers and relatives. The millionaire, confused if not clearly retarded in a more basic sense, is to be killed and the hired companion is to be framed for the murder. So far as I can read it separate from the entire mess, that first book ended happily for all but the villains. It was not an especially coherent book, not tragedy nor comedy in Aristotelian terms, but also not coherent in terms of human experience. It is, as it were, the movie script for *The Scarlet Letter* rather than Hawthorne's book, and perhaps this first author had intended to write an embryonic movie script rather than a free-standing book which would have appealed to the entire brain and not just the visual pathways and the seats of the less-disciplined emotions. There is also some reason to believe he was looking at the multimedia market with the potential for artists to present contemporary stories as fastly paced as the eye can catch them, which is pretty fast since the visual cortex can work harder by taking away resources from the higher centers of the brain controlling such things as abstract thought and the organization of moral habits. With such pedantic and prudish entities out of the way, the brain is not slowed down much in its processing of images of violence and kinky sex.

Saying such leads me to the third book, the one which concerned the strange character of Parnell Lopez, half a mixture of standard White American ethnic types – Welsh and English and so forth – and half Cuban with the mixture of Spanish and Sephardic Jewish and African and Portuguese and Indians of both continents which is common in that country, the schizoid lad who knows much of science, but never entered a proper career, has that cousin, not only a would-be poet, but also half Nigerian, Ibo – to be precise. What is one to make of such a stew, joined so loosely by commas? And what has that Parnell Lopez to do with the real one, who apparently had no such cousin – neither half Nigerian nor an aspiring poet? Was his seemingly autobiographical novel a fraud from the get-go?

I must admit I did nothing to ease the confusion by taking the results of the scrambled computer files and treating them as if they were a crude piece of literature, needing some reshaping and smoothing, rather than so much bad data fit to be thrown away. I can only apologize for my sins against the standards of modern literature as well as my crimes against human reason; I can only regret my complicity in this doubtfully desirable task of combobulating three texts not all that coherent in the first place, and incoherent for entirely different reasons at that. I have perhaps made my sins that much worse by not finding a smooth way to move between the intermixed books. The best I could do was to designate sections by their sources in different text files or text-generation programs and to put some kind of chapter heading at each spot where some sort of a break was indicated.

I fear I might have even made things a little worse by doing some editing of the texts themselves. I have undoubtedly imposed my own style upon the three books, somewhat masking their global irreconcilability and not really smoothing out the local bumps and jumps. The reader, if there is one who dares, or cares, to tackle this rocky and coarse-grained composite, must forgive me for any efforts he must exert in this book a bit more demanding on the reader than is appropriate in this day and age.

2 The Treacherous, Slavish Shore: Keeping the Body Fed

There I was, unemployed and desperate for a safety net of some sort, and an employment contract was in my hands. It was a great opportunity. I didn't have to do anything illegal or dangerous or even particularly degrading. All I had to do was to live in a real nice house left by a rich businessman to his grandson. I'd be the grandson's companion, but he didn't need much care; certainly I didn't have to stay in the house all the time, and apparently the fellow ignored people much of the time. That was why they were worried about him. They were afraid of his mental and emotional state deteriorating if he didn't have some sort of minimal contact with the rest of the human race.

If I slept there and socialized with him, made sure the cleaning lady and cook did their jobs, I'd be pretty much free to do as I pleased. And, I'd have two rooms all to myself, the old guest suite. That way I'd have a bedroom, and I'd be able to turn the sitting-room into an office and keep up my writing. It certainly sounded like a nice place: 17 rooms including an exercise room in the basement, an entertainment room loaded with fancy stereo and video equipment, and even two small laboratories. One was an electronics workshop and the other set up for optical experiments.

The old man, James Llewellyn had been an optical engineer; he'd made his fortune by being in the right place at the right time. When Katie had told me about this job, she'd said Llewellyn had been a manufacturer of light amplification devices when fiber optics came along. I'd be damned if I knew what a light amplification device really did. It was probably like the amplifiers in electronics equipment, but I didn't know how those things worked either. I'd always just listened to stereos and had assumed the boxes had contained the right stuff as long as the sound came out of the speaker.

Anyway, it certainly seemed to be a good deal. Katie had told the manager of the estate, an attorney named C. F. Farley, that I was really reliable. He was Katie's godfather and must have trusted her opinion. When I'd talked on the phone to him, he'd even offered me the complete use of a fairly new computer packed with software, including a word processor and some games. Apparently, Llewellyn's grandson was still buying computers and various pieces of scientific equipment. Lord knows what he did with the stuff, but he had been told there might be someone moving into the house with him, and he had run right out to buy a computer and a home theater to put in the rooms I would be occupying. That was awfully nice of him, but it wasn't as if the fellow was short on cash. When I called Katie back to tell her I'd be meeting with her godfather, she'd said the Llewellyn estate had been worth a few hundred million originally, though a lot of money had been donated to various charities, mostly groups that were helping people in Africa. Even with some of the money gone off to charities, I was willing to bet that the interest was piling up faster than it was being spent.

It was almost too good to be true, and it seemed that the grandson was the possible wasp in the garden. There was something wrong with the fellow. I'd read something about him a while back, maybe it had been when James Llewellyn had died. The boy was autistic and apparently retarded in certain ways. Maybe he was just retarded in his social skills, like most people with autism. Or maybe he was some sort of idiot savant who could work miracles with computers and stereos and otherwise had trouble following a simple train of thought. But Mr. Farley had assured me the boy was quite safe, even pleasant to be around. Actually, he wasn't a boy, and I wanted to make sure I wasn't patronizing towards the fellow even if it turned out he was seriously retarded. If I wanted to be patronizing in an accurate way, he was more a ghost than a boy, close to 40 but quite isolated – he didn't have a close friend or close relative left in all the wide world. And Mr. Farley had warned me that Parnell Lopez, that was the fellow's name, could lose himself in a project, ignoring the people around him, even forgetting about food and sleep, for days on end. That was all right. So long as I had my own space in the house, I had only to check on him regularly and take him out a few times a week, to grab a hamburger or to shop for things that hit his fancy or to just get away a bit. A while back, he had stopped driving for nearly a year and then had forgotten to renew his license. Parnell had never started driving again, but he wasn't supposed to be a recluse, just a bit of a lone wolf. In good weather, he ran through a nearby park, sometimes he

went on long bike rides. And he didn't need a constant baby-sitter, or so Mr. Farley had claimed. It was just that he needed some human companionship and somebody to make sure he wouldn't forget to eat or sleep for too many days in a row.

My eyes came back into focus. I think I'd made motions as if I were reading the contract, but I sure as hell hadn't studied the fine print. Not that there was much there. There was a section about compensation and one about termination conditions. Another that defined my legal status with respect to James Llewellyn's estate. I didn't have the power to act as an agent of the estate; that was about all I noticed even on another quick pass over the paper. That didn't seem to matter. I wasn't about to try to sell the house, nor was I going to buy a vacation home on the estate's credit or anything like that.

After some time, I looked up at C. F. Farley, such a dignified man he was, as befitted an attorney specializing in such things as managing very large estates. As if he could read my mind, Mr. Farley, Attorney Farley as he was called by his staff and his junior partners, smiled. It wasn't a gloating smile, more a sad one, as if he were sorry for my difficult decision. At least he was pretending to sympathize with the plight of someone who was about to live in someone else's house as a servant of sorts. Not that he'd ever be likely to fear such an event. And, besides, it did give me a chance to work on my latest book. This was the one that would make it for me, after five frustrating years of failure. In my late 30s at that. It was one thing to fail and to live in a bit of poverty when you were in your early 20s. That was the expected way for the aspiring writer or painter, and a 22 year-old could enjoy himself in the midst of some discomfort, partying with cheap wine in a fourth floor walk-up furnished with crates. That sort of stuff wasn't so easy on a 38 year-old.

I asked, "And all I have to do is live in the house?"

He nodded. "\$300 a week, free room and board, and use of the second car. It's in good condition, according to the mechanic. Five years old and only 22,000 miles on it. It's been maintained well." Farley smiled in the most official way and added, "It should be in good shape. I've been paying out enough money to that mechanic over the four years I've been managing the estate."

I thought about asking who would get the money left after Parnell died but decided Farley wasn't about to tell me anything he didn't have to. The issue of heirs might be important pretty soon. I knew there weren't

any close relatives left and I'd heard that retarded people tended to die young. Those poor people with Down's Syndrome had those liver problems or kidney problems or something like that. They also had other problems, and most other people with something really wrong with their brains had other serious problems as well. It made sense. After all, the brain was like the central computer and had connections to everything. If the body had trouble building the brain right, then there would likely be problems all over the place. Even if everything seemed right at first, a messed-up control center would cause all sorts of problems, like in a building with a messed-up computer running its air-conditioning. With humidity or temperature out of control at times, you'd get paint peeling and appliances corroding and all sorts of other things going bad.

"Do you accept the position, Mr. Swing?"

That was me. Mr. Swing. Mr. Delbert Swing, that is. A hell of a name, but it was mine, and it would look mighty good on the front-cover of a best-seller some day. And this job might give me the freedom to finish the book that would make me a big success.

I smiled, and Farley smiled in return and handed me a pen. I set the contract down upon the huge oak desk; it was one of those that was like a writing table. It was clear of everything but the employment contract and a small manila file apparently from the undoubtedly much larger file for the Llewellyn estate. I guess that was to let people know he was a busy man who had staff who picked up files and trash after every project. An important man like that didn't have to deal with clutter.

Farley continued to smile in a dignified and understated manner, of course, as he signed as the representative of the estate. When he handed me my copy of the document, he also gave me two keys on a simple metal ring, saying, "I had the car brought over here. It's the red Buick parked next to my Lincoln." With our business completed, he rose and solemnly stated, "I've already told you that a personal contract doesn't really bind you, even for the six months minimum in the contract. If the situation becomes difficult for you, though I doubt it will, you can leave any time. I would expect a week's notice, of course, if you would wish to get a decent reference for employment. What the contract does is place limits on your behavior and minimums on your responsibility so long as you stay in the house with Mr. Lopez." He came around his desk and placed his hand lightly on my shoulder to guide me to the door of his office. As he opened the door, he asked, "When can we expect you to move in?"

I'd planned on moving in real soon but hadn't really thought about a specific day. On an impulse I said, "I'll start staying there tomorrow night and just move my stuff over there gradually. My sister and her husband don't care. They'd just as soon have me out quickly so they can shut off the utilities in their garage apartment."

Mr. Farley smiled in an avuncular manner, and I wondered how much he was being paid to manage the estate. I was sure it was a hell of a lot more than I was being paid to be a companion to Llewellyn's autistic grandson, yet, I couldn't complain. Opening up his arms as if about to give me a present, Farley offered, "There is plenty of storage room at the house. The basement is large and dry. There is a four car garage and only two cars, counting the one at your disposal. When the cook or housekeeper run errands, they use their own cars which they park around behind the house. There are even several rooms in the house which are pretty much empty. Your rooms, and certainly the main rooms of the house, are fully furnished, but there is plenty of space to store any furniture or boxes there." I had turned to leave when he asked, "Do you need help moving, Mr. Swing?" When I looked back, he said, "There are plenty of reasonably priced movers in the area. I'd be happy to pay to have your goods moved. I'm confident you'll work out."

I hesitated for a few seconds but shook my head. I really didn't have that much left, having sold or given away most of my furniture since I lost my house. I had a few chairs and a desk and then mostly stuff that could be boxed up, dishes and pots and pans. A few boxes of books and my stereo and compact discs which I hadn't even unpacked in the six months I'd been at my sister's house.

The air-conditioning had been a bit heavy in the office building, though it wasn't really needed for cooling the air. It was only late February; Spring seemed to have come early to Virginia, and that was the nicest season south of the Mason-Dixon Line, but it was a typically warm and dry Spring. There was no heat wave and no humidity. I had read somewhere that modern buildings were designed so the air-conditioning ran all the time, even when it was producing air at exactly the same temperature as outside. That had seemed awfully strange to me when I read it, and it seemed even stranger when I stepped out into the fresh air, but there must have been a reason for it. Engineers didn't just do things without a good, scientific reason.

It was even a bit cool in the shade of the covered garage. There was a sign pointing to the spots reserved for the partners of Segal, Kruger &

Farley, Attorneys at Law. I found Attorney Farley's car right away, a dark-blue Lincoln that looked to have every luxury known to the automobile industry, including probably a computer link to a road-help service and navigating satellite. Next to that top-of-the-line Lincoln was a pretty nice Regal. Leather upholstery. The front seats were those kind that were a cross between a bench seat and bucket seats. There was a nice stereo system, a Blaupunkt with amplifier, digitally tuned radio, and cassette player. Lots of speakers scattered about the interior of the car, but no CD player. No windshield display either, so you could tell it was a little dated as a luxury car. As soon as I sold my book, I was going to get one of the cars with a full dash display up on the windshield plus one of those viewers like they had in tanks. That way you could see in pitch-black though headlights were probably a better idea if it was just dark. If there was fog, lights didn't work so well, but those viewers did.

There were a lot of toys I was going to buy as soon as I got the money for that book.

As I was about to turn on the ignition, I remembered the registration. Failing to find it in the glove compartment, I got out to run back inside the office building. When I reached the receptionist, she looked up but ignored me as she talked on the phone to someone about court dates or something. I really wanted to be on my way, and I would have thought that Farley's staff would have treated me with some respect after I had been behind closed doors with the senior partner himself for more than an hour. No such luck, and I stood there for a few minutes until the person on the other end of the line had put the receptionist on hold. She looked up and gave me a professionally glossy smile. Pink lipstick against a pale complexion. A peroxide blond, but not really bad looking for a 45 year-old, and I wouldn't have minded going on a diving expedition for whatever hung on that gold chain around her neck.

She gestured with her hands as if to draw me on to speak, and I realized I had been staring at her for an impolite few seconds, but it wasn't really my fault. A writer always needs to be studying people. Nevertheless, I could feel my face warming up as I asked, "What about the registration?" She looked at me as if wondering what the hell I was talking about, and I said, "The registration to the car from the Llewellyn estate. Mr. Farley gave me the keys, but what if the cops stop me?"

With a roll of her eyes, she gave me to believe that people in a law firm were not really all that worried about the finer points of the law –

such things could always be handled by a bit of smooth talking after the fact. She smiled in a manner just touched with condescension, but she said, "Take a seat and I'll type up something on Attorney Farley's letterhead. I'll be putting you as the principal driver on the insurance policy and you'll have that for documentation in a week or so."

A few minutes later, I had a letter in hand, initialed by the receptionist under the 'C.F. Farley' she scrawled majestically across the page. I returned to the car and placed the letter in the glove compartment, having been once more reminded of my relatively low status in society. Surely that was it. She knew that I had just signed up to be a nurse-maid to a retarded fellow who was sitting on millions of dollars. A caretaker to keep the fellow reasonably happy until he had the decency to die and leave the money to someone who would make better use of it.

The creative juices were flowing now. The plot was clear.

A desperate but very decent fellow with few friends and resources is hired to help take care of a severely retarded young man who is worth \$25 million or so. Hell, make it \$100 million. Anyway, it's all a set-up. The lawyer managing the estate is in cahoots with some desperate relatives to murder the retarded man, or maybe just to have him put away someplace where he can't interfere in any way with what they desperately want to do with the money.

It came to me that there was a glitch in the plot. So far as I could tell, Farley was perfectly free to do whatever he wanted to do with the money even with Parnell Lopez alive and living in his grandfather's house. And it wasn't certain he would end up with either the money or the management rights over the money if Parnell Lopez were to die. I'd also have to watch I didn't overwork the word 'desperate'. Or any other word. It wasn't that people should be walking dictionaries or thesauruses; it was just that the same unusual word used more than once in a short piece of text was disturbing to the sensibilities of the discriminating reader.

I set the nether regions of my brain to working and drove on to my sister's house, passing through one of those streets with all the nice brick townhouses. Alexandria was a nice little city, and I really wanted to be able to stay there. I wouldn't have been able to afford it on my own – unless I sold a book real soon. I'd rented a small apartment downtown shortly after

getting out of college, but after losing interest in computer programming, I'd let my skills and knowledge get out of date, and that was it for my high earning power as a manipulator of data-bases. They hadn't told me about that possibility when I'd switched majors in my junior year. Not that I would have been making loads of money if I had continued as a history major. I was pulling into the driveway at my sister's house when I thought of two possible ways out of the plot difficulty. First of all, I could paint the Farley character as being a greedy bastard who simply wanted it all for himself. Obsessed with the hunger to have it all in his name, the bastard would be able to do anything. And, then again, someone might enter the picture who might get a piece of the estate when the retarded fellow died if he had a chance to change his will. A girl friend. Gold-digger or a legitimate love? Perhaps a woman herself retarded? Or maybe...

A fellow who is hired as a companion to the retarded man. They become fast friends. The companion proves to be such a decent and likable fellow that there is a danger he'll get a piece of the estate.

I sat in the car and thought the plot through again.

There is a man, as decent as they come, who has suffered some financial hardships. Desperate for a way to make a living and having few friends and resources, he gets himself hired to help care for a severely retarded young man who is worth \$500 million or so. No, better make it \$75 million so it will sound more realistic. It's all a set-up! The lawyer managing the estate wants all the money and he plans to murder the retarded man and then blame it all on the poor fellow he had just hired as the retarded man's companion. The plan backfires on the evil lawyer as the other two men become friends, and the companion saves the retarded man's life, getting him out of the house as the fire set by the lawyer's henchmen rages out of control. The retarded man dies two months later as a tumor invades his already damaged brain, and he leaves his entire fortune of \$75 million to the man hired as a mere companion but proving himself to be a dedicated and selfless friend.

It needed a bit of fleshing out. Maybe the hero could engage in a desperate fight against trained and experienced killers as he tries to make it

through the flames and heat to reach his friend who is hunkered down whimpering next to his bed.

I was just turning the car off when a tap came upon the driver's side window. It was my brother-in-law Carl. A nice guy though he was a real salesman. It wasn't that there was anything wrong with being a salesman, it was just that life was a game to him. He was always trying to win, not to hurt other people or to take advantage of them, just to beat them at the game. And he was certainly generous with what he gained from all his hard work. It was just that he liked to rake it into his own pot. It was a matter of keeping score more than anything else.

As the window was rolling down in response to a mere press of a button, he opened hands as if about to take up the car. I explained, "It's a perk for my new job."

"Some perk."

"Some job," added I.

"It's a few years old," he qualified his admiration. After all, his company car was only a Saturn though it was brand-new. "But it's nice."

I nodded in agreement and put my hand up to open the door. As he stepped back, he also moved forward and noted, "It needs new tires."

"No problem. There's plenty of money behind this car. I won't be making a fortune in salary, but there's a pile of money to take care of other matters."

He looked a bit envious, or perhaps he was just afraid he might lose this round of the game, though I was one of those who was never sure what the rules of the game were, or even quite how to keep score. It wasn't a simple matter of money, though that was a big part of it. Sometimes points seemed to go to those who negotiated a workable deal under difficult circumstances even if there wasn't much of a profit in it. And sometimes it was just a matter of moving faster and more aggressively towards a new opportunity. I just had never been good at that business of spotting new opportunities, and I wasn't even really all that sure who the competition was.

"What kind of a job did you get yourself, Del? You running errands for a bookie or something?"

"No, I just have to move into the Llewellyn mansion."

"The one where that crazy fellow lives?" I wasn't sure how to respond to the word 'crazy'. If Carl had said 'autistic', I would have agreed. 'Retarded'? Probably. But 'crazy'? On the other hand, I had never really

met Parnell Lopez. For all I knew he was just an eccentric fellow who was incapable of dealing with other human beings. Maybe I was being unfair to him, or maybe Carl's word 'crazy' understated the guy's competency. Still not sure what an appropriate description would be, I nodded and let it go at 'crazy'.

"Sounds like the set-up for some slasher movie, Del."

"You mean one of those where the evil lawyer is plotting to kill the heir to the family estate and he needs to find himself someone to blame the murder on?"

"Yeah..." His voice drifted off as if he were thinking through various movies he had seen where something of the sort happened, but he may have realized like I just had that those particular kinds of plots were more common in movies back in the 40s and 50s, the hey-day of Alfred Hitchcock and Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammet. That put a little bit of a crimp in my plans. The plot might still work, but I'd have to find a modern-day angle, a hook of some sort. Maybe the lawyer's henchman could be a butcher, a cannibal or a guy who liked to skin his victims and take the skins home to tan them. Or maybe there could be an extraterrestrial angle.

The retarded man isn't really retarded at all, he's an eccentric scientific genius who has built a device of some sort for communicating with people out...

I found myself waving vaguely skyward with Carl looking at me as if to wonder if the craziness was catching, though I really hadn't even met Parnell Lopez. After failing to think of a really sharp comment, I weakly said, "I was just thinking through variations on the plot. I might want to try to write a book about... You know."

"A guy who moves in to be the companion of a crazy man and ends up being framed for his murder?"

"Yeah. You make it sound like someone has probably done it before."

"Probably. I told you you should write a book about a character like that crazy salesman I used to run into when I was working southern California."

"You mean the guy who had a wife in Los Angeles and one in Santa Fe?"

"Yeah, and when they found out about each other, it turned out they weren't upset at all. In fact, they decided to combine households in Santa

Fe to save money and to make it easier for the two women to help each other watching the kids and stuff.”

“I think that’s been done in some TV movies.”

“Well, you can’t keep turning down good ideas, Del. You gotta just seize something and make it your own. Be creative. . .” I interjected, “But not too creative,” and received a frown for my troubles before Carl continued, “But not too creative because you don’t want to scare people off. There aren’t too many people out there who appreciate creativity. It took decades for Beethoven to be fully accepted. . .” As if we had practiced, I said, “But Mozart was seen as a great genius even from his boyhood,” and this time, Carl didn’t even grimace before finishing, “You also won’t make it into the mass-market, and that’s the only way to make real money in this writing business.”

It was possible that Carl had found the key to the whole thing. I could make the idea work: A retarded man. . . No, maybe a eccentric scientific genius would work better. That would fit in with the laboratories in the house. And if I could get some sort of a deep space angle or maybe even a vampire hook, that would make it a little bit different from most mysteries where the good guy gets framed and almost goes to the chair because he’s so decent and trusting, a bit naive and an outsider to the various plots and family secrets and too honest to deal with police and lawyers.

3 The Treacherous, Slavish Shore: Ups and Downs and No One Knows Which is Which

I was sitting at the kitchen table of the apartment over the garage of my sister's house.

Drinking alone with Jack because José was gone for now.

I swore when I realized the trend of my thoughts. Not at all creative. Jack and José had been spoken of before, in a rock song at that. Then again, no protagonist in any novel I'd ever read spoke of such things. Maybe it was time to do it, to bring the rock culture more fully into the world of books. After all, the literary world wasn't supposed to be elite. Shakespeare played to the mobs. Reading Dante is a bit easier if you know something about Medieval theology, but most of the esoteric knowledge in the *Inferno* had to do with personalities and with the politics of Florence, knowledge possessed by even the rudest laborer in that politics-crazed city. Homer appealed blatantly to the most common of Greeks as he tried to mold a mob into a people, and Cervantes relied as much upon the simple wisdom of the Spanish peasantry as he did on things like self-referential literary critiques of his plays and poetry.

Rock-and-roll. Maybe some sports. Some alcohol and drugs. . .

I sat back for a moment, looking at the label to the bottle of Jack Daniels and then down to the tumbler with a double-shot or so. It looked so innocent, even gave off an aroma pleasing to the whiskey-drinker as it sat there on the ugly yellow and brown speckled Formica table-top. When I was young, Mom and Dad had watched Jackie Gleason with his tea-cup; they had laughed at the double-entendres that dealt with Scotch rather than

sex. They had watched Dean Martin stagger around the stage, drunk as a skunk, or at least feigning to be falling-down drunk, but that didn't seem to bother the 22 year-old babes that were part of the stage sets. People had been pretty tolerant about drinking and even drunkenness in those days. Then MADD had come along when I was a teenager. Americans had become really worried about kids being killed by drunken drivers and then child and wife abuse had been brought to everybody's attention, and drinking was really seen for the evil it was.

I downed about half the Bourbon in my glass and wondered if people were ready to be more tolerant about drinking. While maintaining a proper concern for alcohol abuse, of course. I made a decision to closely observe people and the attitudes expressed when they accepted or refused drinks at parties or when they talked about the horrors of the world. Tolerance or concern about abuse? I drank the rest of the whiskey and poured another double-shot as I realized that this was a pretty tricky matter, made even more complex by the fact that people often looked for things in books that they didn't really want in their actual lives. Maybe people were pretty concerned about alcohol abuse but they wanted to read books where tough-minded characters said, "To hell with the prudes," and drank their bottle a week.

A knock sounded at the kitchen door, which was actually the main door of the apartment. There was also a fire exit out the bedroom, but that was little more than a ladder. I started wondering how a man could escape if a drunken murderer were to set a fire in the bedroom and then wait outside the kitchen. Such matters, though details, might be of some importance as I got further into my book. The companion to the retarded fellow might be in danger no matter where he laid his head. Maybe the homicidal maniac would keep going after him even if the lawyer tried to stop him. Circumstances could change and force even the most evil of characters to change strategies. As long as they had rational goals that is. If they had rational means but mad goals, then. . .

I was trying to remember where that thought had come from when the door opened and my sister Kelly walked in, looking about carefully as if concerned not to violate my privacy. She was like that, cute in her person, in the way she looked and in the way she behaved. Maybe that was why we had always called her 'Kelly'. Her real name was Gloria, and. . .

Actually, I had never been sure why she had been called 'Kelly'. She didn't know either, and Mom and Dad were both dead, so we couldn't ask

them. Kelly herself didn't really care. The name had stuck and it had suited her more than 'Gloria' which she used only when it made legal sense. Even Carl had always known her as 'Kelly'. He had known that was just a nickname, but he didn't know her real name was 'Gloria' until after he had proposed, and they went down to city-hall to get the license.

Kelly. A good name for her. Not for any particular reason, just a good name for her.

"Are you all right, Del?" She was casting glances at the whiskey bottle as if trying to guess how much I'd had to drink. This seemed a good opportunity to study people's attitudes towards alcohol, but I wasn't quite sure how to go about it. Over dinner, Kelly had expressed some concern about me moving in to the Llewellyn house. She had also been worried about the apparent lack of direction in my life for the past several years. It was going to be difficult to separate the different strands of concern for me from any feelings she had towards alcohol usage, and, of course, she might even be tolerant towards alcohol usage while holding strong opinions about its abuse. But a fact was a fact; Kelly had definite attitudes towards things like drinking, and all I had to do was to observe her over time, whenever she was in the presence of drinking. Then, I would know how she felt, and I would be better able to understand her other attitudes as well. A concrete person of definite parts she was.

"Kelly?" Her eyes stopped passing from me to the bottle of Jack Daniels; she stared at me as if trying to figure out if I were sober. Funny, all these years I had known her, all the disciplined efforts to observe her and other people since I had become a writer, and I still couldn't put a simple interpretation on the feelings that lay behind her facial expressions. It didn't seem as if the human face would be capable of making an infinite variety of expressions, not even all the human faces there ever were, let alone any particular face. I really wanted to succeed as a writer, and I was willing to work hard at it. If I could just observe enough faces, or maybe the same faces over a long period of time, surely I would be able to see clearly to the patterns. I'd be able to read faces, male or female, Italian-American or Chinese-Malaysian, early morning or tired evening.

"Well, Kelly..." I kept her attention for the few seconds it took to gather my thoughts. "I think this could be my big break. I'll get a salary as well as room and board. I'll even be living in some luxury and have the use of a nice car. All I have to do is spend some time with Llewellyn's grandson and a bit more time at the house, but that shouldn't be a big deal.

I'll spend my time writing, and apparently Parnell Lopez will spend his time taking stereos and computers apart and putting them back together again.”

4 The Treacherous, Slavish Shore: Packing It Up and In

I guess I had stopped drinking at the right point, because I had gone right to sleep but I woke up at 7:00, full of energy. After showering and eating a bowl of cereal, I thought about moving some of my clothes over to the Llewellyn mansion. I'd also need to take the back-up disks for my books and notes and personality sketches and stuff, so I could load them on that fancy computer Parnell had got me. I had already told Kelly and Carl that I would leave my computer for them to use. Little Nikki was already starting to play around with it sometimes when I was there to help her get going. In a few months, she would probably be able to do things on the computer I couldn't even dream of doing.

After packing a suitcase and my backpack with the bare necessities, I decided it would be a bad idea to go over there first thing. All the writing magazines and books said it was important to write every day. Even if you really didn't feel like it, even if putting words on the paper was a painful struggle, it was important to put in those minimum hours at a time when your head was as clear as possible. Write, write anything if you wanted to write something good some day. I guess there were several dumpsters full of paper behind every successful novel.

When I sat down and opened a notebook, I couldn't really think of anything to write about, so I decided to do some scene descriptions and maybe some character descriptions for my book, the one about the plot to murder the rich, retarded man. I leaned over and in my most precise and neatest hand wrote across the top of the page:

Descriptions for a plot about a plot.

That seemed a little silly, almost a pun, and puns were the cheapest sorts

of jokes. No one who respected the true power of language would stoop to making puns, at least not very often. The best and most disciplined novelists on the best-seller lists wouldn't use puns. That would detract from their sumptuous descriptions of all the rich and ornate things about us. It would draw attention away from their descriptions of the characters they worked so hard to create. Physical descriptions, of course. Not that anyone really believed that a man's exterior really revealed what he was like inside. Not fully anyway. It was just that too much interior stuff, too much thought detached from things that could be visualized, would take away from the flow of the book. After all, that was what novels were for – to depict the sorts of events that could be described so that there was little doubt about what was happening and so there were no times when the reader was forced to think or to imagine things to fill in what the author left out. After all, books had to compete with visual media like television and movies.

And, besides that, if you put too many thoughts in the heads of your characters, I mean besides true stuff about social injustices and bigotry, then the book might become polemic. And in the worst way too. I remember the professor in my 18th century American Lit course had said that the truly great writers like Melville and Hawthorne had spoken mostly about exactly those sorts of things, like religion and what he called 'deep politics', stuff that made people uncomfortable. That was then, and the rules had changed. Writing styles had changed and a good writer adapted to his times so he could get his works into print. It wasn't smart, or profitable, to leave your works in a trunk like Emily Dickinson. And, so, the way to be a good writer was to write the way all the experts said to write. The experts knew the direction of the cultural trends. By following those trends, an author would write the kind of stuff that people would want to read because it would help them move the way they were already moving, and the author who could do that would see his books published and reviewed favorably.

So, you just stick to physical action and physical description and that makes everybody happy because that way you don't put any biases into your writing. By writing about only what happens on the outside, you let your reader put any meaning on it he wants to. The reader, she as well as he, that is, can read the minds of the characters if he or she wants to do that. To make this book work, I would have to stick to details about the rich and ornate furnishings in the Llewellyn mansion and lots of descriptions about the physical features of the characters, how they moved, and the little things

they actually did that might give the reader some clue that the lawyer was evil and the retarded man was desperate for a trustworthy and kind friend.

And straightforward factual language prevents misinterpretations as well. A writer who doesn't know how to put things clearly enough will end up with all sorts of loose ends which lead to multiple interpretations and metaphors flying all over the place. A good writer can put any thought or the description of any event into clear, concise, orderly language. Any thought or event that makes sense, that is. Any reader who wants to read between the lines, complicating matters by drawing meaning from mere facts, is always free to do that, of course. But as soon as he, or she, does that, he, or she, will begin to impose moral views upon words that are just physical descriptions, of things and actions.

No, there were facts and there were values, and a writer's job was to entertain people with facts and not annoy them with any values he happened to like.

Nearly an hour had passed since I'd been lost in my thoughts and the page was blank except for the heading.

Descriptions for a plot about a plot.

Not bad for a start, but a writer had to produce more words than that during his most fruitful hours. For me, those were the morning hours, which were drawing to a midpoint, but I needed to work another two hours. I had to keep up my good work habits. That way, I'd be at my desk the day that the words started really flowing. Maybe my breakthrough novel would even come in a rush. Faulkner had written one of his novels in marathon sessions occurring over a mere two weeks or so. Conrad claimed he wrote *Secret Agent* in one session. It was short for a novel, but that still was a pretty impressive feat. By a 'guy who was great at physical descriptions and descriptions of action, on the sea or in the African jungle. He was a good, modern writer who didn't get lost in ideas or inside the minds of his characters.

Just two hours more of work and then I'd pack and I'd be at the Llewellyn mansion before noon. I wondered if it might be better to call Mr. Farley and have him come over to introduce me to Parnell Lopez, but, then...

No! With a great effort, I killed extraneous thoughts and focused my eyes upon the spot on the page where I would begin writing. I opened up

my imagination, calling forth images of all the mansions I'd seen on TV. The rich and ornate woodcarvings around the fireplace. The rich and ornate marble floors in the entranceways. The rich and ornate. . .

No, that wasn't working either, and I realized I was writing in a vacuum of information and experiences. Writing schedule or not, I might be better off going over to the Llewellyn place and seeing it. I would change details so no one could recognize the particular mansion in my book, and I would also change my description of the retarded man and of his family history, but the imaginary descriptions in my novel would draw upon the real world. So long as I was careful not to commit any kind of libel, I could draw upon real places and real people. It was the lawyer who might create a problem since he was going to be the evil guy in the book.

Another half-hour had passed while I'd been lost in my thoughts. 9:28. It sure would have been nice if half-hours had slid by so easily while I was doing my exercise or my taxes. The clock was moving real slowly now that I was staring at it, but I decided to give up the ghost. Some days weren't meant to be.

5 The Treacherous, Slavish Shore: Moving On and Not Going Too Far

I pulled into the circular driveway in front of the Llewellyn house and got out to check out my new home. It was a boxy brick-house. Three stories, the front door centered on the house, probably to the inch. Or the centimeter, since it was an engineer's house. There were eight windows across the second-floor, eight on the third, six on the first. The door had displaced a couple of windows, otherwise the front of the house would have looked like a truncated checker-board. It really looked like the old engineer had built it himself, using some of his laser-beams to square everything off better than any carpenter had ever done.

And sturdy. If anything ever built by man was sturdy, this house was it. Other than underground military bases meant to survive direct hits by nuclear bombs. Or maybe the pyramids of Egypt and Central America. And the Roman viaducts and roads. And a few other things. But the house was pretty sturdy. I made a mental note to pull out my thesaurus and get a list of adjectives with connotations of sturdiness. Strength. What used to be called masculine vigor until people realized they might be socializing girls to be weak and cuddly and submissive.

That reminded me I'd have to change the tale somewhat. Agents and editors were practically begging for books with strong female characters. The only two characters I had in mind were the rich, retarded boy and the strong, high-minded fellow who comes to care for him and eventually protect him from the lawyer and his co-conspirators. It would require a major rewrite, maybe a lessening of the role of the hero, but I could almost imagine the female lead. Brunette. Green of eyes. Kind of full of figure,

like the old-fashioned movie stars. Not a bimbo, but she still looks sexy because of her natural gifts. And she went to some good college somewhere and has a strong personality. And all that. The image of that admirable woman was sharpening ever more in my mind when the door to the house opened, and a gray-haired, black lady stepped out.

“Mr. Swing?”

She was a fairly tall woman, probably five, nine or so. Her dress was light-blue, a rich fabric of some sort. Her posture was that of a woman used to the weight of responsibilities, but her face showed confusion rather than a dignified smile as I would have expected. Not that it was all that surprising that she looked confused. After all, a man she had never seen before had just driven up, parked, and then inspected the exterior of the house. If she hadn't been expecting me, she might have called the police.

As I walked towards the front door, I smiled in a way intended to reassure her. Just as I was passing the car, I noticed a figure stood at a second-story window, but the glare obscured all details of his person. Judging from his outline, I was guessing he was a pretty sturdy fellow and about six feet tall. I began to wonder if the fellow was deformed as well as being mentally or emotionally retarded. If not, he could still be badly crippled or ugly as sin in the book. After all, a writer has to take some liberties with the real world.

Knowing it to be the polite thing to do, I pulled my eyes away from that window and climbed the brick porch. I put out my hand and said, “I'm Delbert Swing. I was just taking a look at the house. It's pretty big and...” I wanted to say something more, but only 'rich' and 'ornate' came to mind. This house wasn't 'rich' nor was it 'ornate'. At least not in the way American readers would imagine those attributes.

While I was trying to think of the right words, I kind of stood there for a few seconds, but the woman rescued me. She smiled carefully and observed, “It's awfully plain and boxy if you ask me.” She put forth her hand in no more than a touching handshake before saying, “I'm Mrs.. Jefferson. I manage the house for Mr. Lopez.” She continued to look at me suspiciously. I couldn't blame her. If she spent her days caring for a poor, mentally defective fellow, she'd probably start suspecting any person acting in a way that wasn't to an immediate, logical purpose.

I put such thoughts aside and began to check out the insides of the house. There was a large formal entranceway. Spotless floors of some sort of light wood, varnished and polished to a satiny finish. A dignified wallpaper

of understated stripes, blues and whites and light reds with white flowers going up the blue stripes. That wallpaper was only on the walls from about four feet up. Below the chair-rails painted a semi-glossy white, the walls were painted a light blue. Straight ahead was a stairway of about double the normal width. Simple banisters of wood finished a bit darker than the floor. And that floor had a circular oriental rug and a runner heading down a hallway going past the stairway. Both rugs were as understated as the walls, blues and reds and some grays and blacks. There were also two closed doorways leading from the entranceway, one to the left and one to the right.

And then I was following Mrs. Jefferson to the upstairs hallway, barely able to note the finish on the wood paneling. Real wood! Not fabricated sheets. The paneling was...I didn't really want to say it was rich and ornate, but I found myself at Mrs. Jefferson's side in a room that was in desperate need of her cleaning and organizing skills. The walls were lined with shelves jam-packed with books and those cardboard boxes custom made to store magazines on shelves. I could see some for Science and Physical Letters - D and for various colors of Nature. Maybe the different colors were for different years. But that wasn't the end of it. There were books piled on top of those shelved in a normal manner. Other books, magazines, notebooks, and loose papers were piled here and there on the floor. Three file cabinets had papers sticking out the sides and tops of the drawers. Other papers were piled on top in some of those multi-level mail-holders.

And in front of me were two table-style desks end-to-end. A computer and printer took half of one of those desks. There were more piles of books and papers and scientific journals on the rest of the desk space. Behind one of the desks sat a fellow somewhat pudgy of face and with graying hair. He was smiling shyly, and his eyes were blinking as he seemed to be inspecting me. He didn't really look like he was badly retarded. Perhaps a little confused, but all of us were a little confused at times.

I think Mrs. Jefferson was about to introduce us when the fellow shot out of his chair and fetched a book from a nearby shelf. He quickly returned to his seat and paged frantically through the book, going backwards as well as forwards until he seemed to find something. I knew not if he found what he searched for. Maybe his search was without a well-defined purpose, and he happened upon something which caught his fancy. In any case, after he read for a few seconds, he turned his eyeballs up to inspect me even as his face was still turned down towards the book.

“Ah-hem.” Mrs. Jefferson’s sound was so discrete that the fellow, surely Parnell Lopez, must have thought it to be a natural sound. He had returned his attention to the book and had turned a page before she said, “Parnell?” When he looked up, she said, “This is Mr. Delbert Swing. Mr. Swing, this is Parnell Lopez.”

His eyes blinked faster for a few seconds, I had the impression he had assumed who I was and was wondering why Mrs. Jefferson had thought it necessary to speak known facts aloud in such a manner. His gaze had steadied and his eyelids had grown still before he smiled and rose half out of his chair. He offered his right hand even as his left hand held the book precariously against his groin.

We shook hands, and he said, “Hi.” That was all. Then he sat and returned his attention to the book in front of him, placing it on his lap. Mrs. Jefferson turned towards the door. She patted me on my forearm and quietly told me, “We’re still preparing your room. In a little while, I’ll get you so you can move in.”

I actually wasn’t uncomfortable with this fellow, as odd as his behavior seemed to be. It was pretty interesting, at least for a short while, to watch his eyes fly over pages. His hands flipped to new pages after no more than a few seconds or so. I couldn’t figure out if he was really reading that fast or if he was scanning for a key word. Maybe he was just putting on an act. Maybe he couldn’t even read at all. He might have gotten the habit of buying science books and magazines from his grandfather. Yet, when he stopped reading every so often to further inspect me, it made me nervous, just like I felt during a medical examination.

Suddenly, he reached over towards a jumbled pile of books and papers. He retrieved a single loose sheet and turned it over a couple of times. Apparently satisfied it was suitable for his purpose, Parnell scribbled something on it and looked at me. “Grab a chair,” he commanded in the most polite voice perceivable. I had no choice but to set a pile of stuff on the floor before pulling over the nearest chair. As soon as I sat down, he reached over to hand me the sheet of paper and said, “Would you please read that?”

I glanced over the sheet, a bit puzzled by the request, but after hesitating a breath or two, I obligingly read, “Hatchmark, ’include’, less than sign, ’s’, ’t’, ’d’, ’i’, ’o’, dot, ’h’, greater than sign.”

His eyes blinked rapidly for a second, and, then, he raised his hand before I could read the next line. “No, no, no. That’s a program I was writing to help search CCD data for low luminosity galaxies. It’s the other

side I want you to read.”

It had looked a bit familiar. Kind of like computer code, and I had worked with higher-level database languages, so I knew all about that sort of stuff. It seemed to be C or C++ or Pascal or one of those programming languages. Maybe Smalltalk or FORTRAN or something. But I certainly knew it was one of them, and with that cleared up, I turned the paper over to find the phrase: “Wonderfullest things are ever the unmentionable.” I read it aloud, and Parnell leaned forward. In a real earnest manner, he asked, “What do you think that means?” I thought for a few seconds, wondering if this was some sort of verbal Rohrsarch Test. Give a guy a meaningless jumble of words and see what he makes of them. But I was willing to play the game. I started with, “It could mean a lot of things, depending on the . . .” After a short delay, I tried to retrieve some buzzwords from my literature and philosophy courses. One was on its way up, and I blurted out, “Context,” having no more idea than Parnell what the word was to be until I had heard it with my own ears.

He smiled with a bit less politeness, but then he frowned and asked me, “Could you make a guess anyway?”

I looked back at the sheet. “Wonderfullest things are ever the unmentionable.” As ungrammatical as it was, it seemed familiar, but I couldn’t place it. It wasn’t Shakespearean, and it certainly wasn’t from the Bible or classical literature. Maybe it came from a modern poet or an experimentalist novelist from Greenwich Village? Or maybe James Joyce? It did seem a bit like something that would result from letting one’s stream of consciousness go. I decided to just speak, in my own stream of consciousness, sort of. “Thought cannot always be expressed in words? Especially great and wonderfullest thoughts.” The words were barely out before I added, “Or maybe it’s things that are ultimately unspeakable?” That seemed absurd, especially in this modern age of science, but what the heck. No sense putting restrictions on one’s thoughts in this sort of a game.

Parnell had been frowning until I mentioned ‘things’, and now I knew that to be some sort of a keyword, though I still had no idea what sort of a game we were playing. But a clever fellow could bluff his way through most word games, even the difficult ones of theology and philosophy. And this seemed to be some sort of philosophical game.

A rhythmic game it was. Parnell Lopez was rocking sideways in his chair, seeming to contemplate something. After a moment of being lost in his own head, he formed a half-smile and then looked me directly in the

eye before saying, “You’re a bit of an idealist. I don’t think your heart was really in that concession about the importance of things. Lost in your own head when you think abstractly, but you might have a chance to escape empiricist perceptions and idealist thought if you’d stop erecting barriers between your ears and your brain.” After another moment of thought, he reached for the sheet of paper, and I handed it to him. He scratched out that first sentence and set to work writing something that filled up most of the page.

He returned it to me and watched intently as I read. It was beginning to seem that this game involved some sort of preliminary testing, and I wasn’t real comfortable as I wasn’t sure what the purpose of the game was or what the stakes were. That must have been why my hands were shaking. I certainly didn’t care about the verdict to be rendered by this fellow at least eccentric, if not outright crazy. While thinking through all these angles, I had read and re-read and re-read again only the first clause of the words he had written: “Meditation over kindness received seemed to have softened him somewhat, too.” Waiting to discover the punch-line to all this, I shook my active thoughts from my head and read:

Meditation over kindness received seemed to have softened him somewhat, too, it may be, beyond what might, perhaps, have been looked for from one whose unwonted self-respect in the hours of need, and in the act of being aided, might have appeared to some not wholly unlike pride out of place, and pride, in any place, is seldom very feeling. But the truth, perhaps, is, that those who are least touched with that vice, besides being not unsusceptible to goodness, are sometimes the ones whom a ruling sense of propriety makes appear cold, if not thankless, under a favour. For, at such a time, to be full of warm, earnest words, and heart-felt protestations, is to create a scene; and well-bred people dislike few things more than that; which would seem to look as if the world did not relish earnestness; but, not so; because the world, being earnest itself, likes an earnest scene, and an earnest man, very well, but only in their place – the stage. See what sad work they make of it, who, ignorant of this, flame out in Irish enthusiasm and with Irish sincerity, to a benefactor, who, if a man of sense and responsibility, as well as kindliness, can but be more or less annoyed by it; and, if of

a nervously fastidious nature, as some are, may be led to think almost as much less favourably of the benefactor paining him by his gratitude, as if he had been guilty of its contrary, instead only of an indiscretion. But, beneficiaries who know better, though they may feel as much, if not more, neither inflict such pain, nor are inclined to run any risk of so doing. And these, being wise, are the majority. By which one sees how inconsiderate those persons are, who, from the absence of its officious manifestations in the world, complain that there is not much gratitude existent; when the truth is, that there is as much of it as there is of modesty; but, both being for the most part votaries of the shade, for the most part keep out of sight.

Garbled and confusing that text and certainly far too many commas. The fellow could have done with a good course on writing clean, simple English prose. Or perhaps a computer program that could have graded his writings on the Flesch scale of readability. The phrases and sentences were just dumps, like releasing the contents of a computer memory, with no regard to organizing things right. For all of that, the meaning seemed clear, and I spoke out, “It says some people, kind and appreciative of kindness, are too repressed to show gratitude in a real open way.”

I stopped speaking when I noticed Parnell wince as if in pain and then he leaned forward, a look of puzzlement distorting his features. “Repressed?” That was all he said for a few moments while I probably began to reflect his puzzlement upon my own face. When neither of us seemed to find a way out, he asked, “Are the mental disorders of turn-of-century Venice to be read into the hearts of all men in all times and all lands?” As if the effort of staring were too much for his eyes, he began to blink rapidly, and I also began to blink. It wasn’t that my eyes were strained, and I didn’t wish to make fun of him, but my eyelids moved on their own. I began to wonder how my tale would go if the caretaker of the mentally disabled fellow were to find his own brain suffering from. . . Was insanity contagious? And weird patterns of behavior or thought? For an instant, Parnell gave a look indicating he feared he was being insulted. That passed, and he asked, “Is that all?”

When I said, “Well, it seems a mighty confusing way to say something simple,” he smiled. Then he said, “But simple ideas can be colored in subtle tints by the proper use of words?” I nodded in a somewhat hesitating man-

ner, and he added, “And, ultimately, some subtle variations of simple ideas can be said only by complex and irreducible language?” I nodded again, wishing to keep him happy, and he said more, “And those complex meanings though still not an accurate reflection of thoughts not quite speakable, make the most sense in context?” This time, he didn’t wait for my nod before saying apologetically, “It was most unfair of me to test you on that paragraph pulled out of the context of a most difficult novel.” This time, I nodded immediately, and he smiled before saying, “You may be of some help and maybe you won’t develop Alzheimer’s. At least not at a young age.”

I had little time to be confused, for the door opened and I turned to see Mrs. Jefferson enter the room. She smiled and said, “Your room is ready if you wish to move your possessions in.” When I turned to take my leave, Parnell Lopez had taken the book on his lap and placed it on top of a teetering pile on his desk. Yet, it didn’t fall. With the cover closed, the book’s title seemed to be *Nervous System Development in the Human Infant*, but I saw it for just a fraction of a second before I looked back to Parnell who had turned his attention to a notebook in front of him. As he read, perhaps another long quote from an obscure novel, his right hand moved and found a red pen. Without disturbing him, I turned and followed Mrs. Jefferson out of the room.

6 The Treacherous, Slavish Shore: A Safe Harbor

My two rooms were just down the hall from the library and office of Parnell Lopez, and those two rooms were simply and tastefully furnished and spotlessly clean. Wainscoting to waist height in the outer room. Hunter green wallpaper with white pin-stripes above the wainscoting which was painted a semi-glossy white. A four shelf bookcase held a dictionary, a thesaurus, and several other reference books. A brand-new computer sat on a small desk set at a right angle to a large writing table whose top was disturbed only by a blotter and a few desk accessories. An old-fashioned sitting-chair sat under a lamp. A couch was against the wall directly across from the desk. A few watercolors of scenes from the Virginia horse country hung upon the walls.

The bedroom was also furnished and decorated in a simple manner with the best of furnishings. I even had my own large bathroom though with only a claw-footed tub. No shower. Equipped with my own set of keys to go in and out of the Llewellyn house, I retrieved my two cases and set my notebooks and pens upon the desk. I was all set to work, but there was a problem. My head was full of vague images of the wonderfulest things, and not only could I not mention them, I couldn't even bring them clearly to conscious mind. It was coming to me that the simplest of real lives was so complex, so rich in detail, that it could not be put on paper.

Stylistic reductions were necessary. But they had to be true to life. They had to preserve the...richness and ornateness? I rose from the desk and walked through to the bedroom and out the French doors onto the small porch. Once a person standing here had probably seen only woods. Now there were three hamburger joints and a strip-mall no more than a half-mile away. I was about to go inside when I saw Parnell Lopez on a porch two

rooms down. It might have been his office. Had I been so careless in my perceptions that I had missed a set of French doors? I was beginning to worry that I might not have what it takes to be a great writer when I looked back at Parnell. It worried me a bit to see him staring into the sky, frozen as if he was in a catatonic state.

I turned to go in and check on him when I kicked a brass planter sitting on the porch floor. I swore as the pain passed up my leg. While I was hopping about on one foot, swearing up a storm, I happened to catch sight of Parnell. He was looking at me as I performed my ridiculous dance. Intently. Like I was a specimen of some sort. Now he knew I was clumsy and felt pain, and I had trouble penetrating garbled sentences. . . . Though that first sentence had been familiar. “Wonderfullest ideas are usually unspeakable.” I must have spoken aloud because Parnell corrected me, “Wonderfullest things are ever the unmentionable.”

As the pain eased, I let down my foot and limped over a step to the railing. I leaned upon that railing sure I was putting on a good show for the addled-brain who was to be my dearest companion for the foreseeable future. When I looked again, he was gone. A few seconds later, a knock came on my outer door, and Parnell called in, “Are you all right?”

By that time, my embarrassment was greater than my physical pain. I made an effort to smile bravely and then limped through the bedroom and over to the couch before saying, “Come on in.” He did just that and pulled over the extra chair that stood on the visitor’s side of the writing table. He sat on it backwards, his arms and chin resting on the back of the chair. Not a word came forth, but he radiated a sense of compassion as if he was one of those poor souls who feel the pain of others.

After a few minutes, I felt only a dull throb in my toes and a bit of numbness the length of my foot. I smiled to show I was okay, and Parnell’s expression of concern lightened up a bit. I stood up and tested the foot. It didn’t hurt too bad as long as I was careful not to put too much weight forward on the toes. I was pretty sure I hadn’t broken anything. I’d barely remember the pain in an hour or two.

When I sat down, Parnell Lopez had another odd look on his face. I was beginning to wonder if he was always pulling the world apart, examining the pieces, and putting it back together, maybe trying a few new connections in the process. Or maybe trying to find connections that had always been there but never discovered. It wasn’t clear to me how I could guess so much from a few facial expressions, but I could see I was going to have problems

sticking with my plot about the plot. The plot inside the story could hold but not the plot of the story. It would have been all right if Parnell Lopez had been some sort of idiot savant, reading his books about developmental nervous biology or whatever. Just so long as he was dull in his perceptions of people and how they acted. This guy in front of me seemed eccentric, but he didn't really give any signs of being unable to understand other human beings. He even gave some signs of having a lively imagination. He might be more likely to see a conspiracy where there was none than to miss an obvious one all about him. It was clear the character in my book would have to be a little bit different from Parnell.

"Do you think cruelty and pain have a legitimate place in moral literature?" When I gave no answer, he explained, "As a way of awakening those people slumbering in a fog of self-righteousness and as a way of presenting man's humble position more accurately. Maybe even to teach us a sense of proportion and sense of humor?"

That seemed out of place. After all, a literature fit for a modern people had to appeal to millions across many subcultures and different education systems and all that. Even to people on different continents. An author shouldn't insult everyone while he tries to reach those self-righteous people who would always be with us and would always be annoying as hell.

"It is a difficult question, Mr. Swing. I don't really want to put you on the spot. But, if you like thinking about such things, do say so and we can talk about it some day when you're feeling a bit less pain. Since my grandpa died, I've mostly annoyed people by talking about such things."

Stuck for words, I asked, "Do you have any particular writers in mind?"

He pursed his lips for just a second before saying, "Dostoevsky and Flannery O'Connor. The philosophers Kierkegaard and Shestov as well."

Knowing Dostoevsky and having read a few of Flannery O'Connor's short stories and novels, I was thinking that maybe they did fill their books with gratuitous cruelty. Nobody but Flannery O'Connor would have thought of a sadistic murderer baptizing a gentle, retarded boy even as he drowned the kid. I'd never read Kierkegaard and had no idea who Shestov was.

Parnell Lopez rose. "You sure you're okay?" When I nodded, he walked towards the door but turned before leaving. "I guess I'd put Melville in that class as well. *Moby Dick* was filled with cruelty and pain, especially that inflicted upon whales, and Melville was not oblivious to the suffering of the poor creatures even while glorifying the hunters. Our age has been a

period of the greatest cruelty and the largest scale wars and mass-murders in history, but we prefer literature that depicts the world as being free of pain and cruelty except when Satan or Hitler are involved. Every other living creature is well-intentioned in his heart of hearts.”

He left before I could respond, but what response could I have made to such a claim? I was now wondering if this Parnell Lopez fellow was maybe a half-crazy radical, wanting to destroy a pretty good society filled with decent people. He was willing to use computer technology and even had a reputation of being good at that sort of stuff. He couldn't be a Luddite, but maybe he was one of those libertarian hackers who wanted to use computers to destroy central authority. Suddenly, the insides of my head were in motion in all sorts of directions. I needed to think calmly, but there were new possibilities for a plot that would provide some needed entertainment for people who had worked hard all day, people who needed to escape to a more exciting world sometimes. A fully realistic, more exciting world, of course.

Now I just needed to weave a plot that would contain that plot while allowing a full and interesting development. A full and interesting development about both the plot and the plot about the plot, that is.

Sex. I needed some sex angle in the larger plot. Not the inner plot, just the outer one, though maybe one of the conspirators could fall in love with the decent fellow hired as the retarded, rich man's companion. It wasn't just that sex helped sell books. Sex was a part of human life, and it wouldn't be natural if there was no sex in the lives of people plotting and people being plotted against. After all, the novel would unfold naturally, and powerfully, over a period of months if not years. Over that amount of time, you'd expect that someone important to the plot, or the plot, would have some interesting or dangerous sex. Though, it had been years since. . .

7 The Treacherous, Slavish Shore: A Man Who Would be a Successful Writer Takes Account of His Situation

Once more was the plot changing. Those ongoing changes were destroying my good writing habits. A good writer was, above all else, regular and disciplined in his habits. The best three or four hours of his day were to be devoted to his most creative efforts, if at all possible. If not, he would have to steal what time he could after getting home from work or putting the children to bed. Whether one page or ten pages a day, he was to write on, doing his damndest to meet the schedules set by publishers and agents. How else could the time be allotted on the printing-presses or on the calendars of the marketing men? Human resources were the most valuable of all, and it was a foolish writer indeed who didn't realize how hard he had to compete for the time of the busy employees of the publishing firms.

Then again, even the most demanding of instructional books will admit you will sometimes write pages of stuff not worth keeping. But, if you don't make that effort to write each day, you'll miss the good days as well as the worthless days.

I was thinking through the demands on a man wishing to write good, fast-paced novels of the sort which appealed to modern sophisticated readers. Yes, such books could earn space on the shelves of the better known bookstores only if they were tight in both grammar and plot, constructed around characters and motivation. They were to be action-packed from the first paragraph. . .

I pulled up at the Llewellyn house with the last of the personal goods I

was bothering to move. It no longer seemed a mansion to me, though it was a large house and perhaps the most solidly built house I had ever seen. . . .

A feeling of *déjà-vu* hit me, and I realized I was making the cardinal sin, in a writer, of repeating myself. I was going to have to be a bit more careful in my thoughts, at least as long as I was writing my novel in a first-person stream-of-consciousness mode.

Still, it was worth expanding a bit on the solidity of the house. I had checked walls and floors on my previous trips into and out of the house. There were no cracks, not so much as a floor-board out of level. The old engineer must have set the foundations on some sturdy sheet of bedrock or maybe on some concrete piles driven deeply into the earth.

If anything was out of level, it was the personal situation. Parnell Lopez seemed pretty reserved and he had some eccentric ideas, but he didn't seem shy in a deeper sense, let alone insane or retarded. When he looked up from his books and papers, he was a pleasant enough fellow who could deal with people. It was far from clear why he was in need of a paid companion. Left completely on his own, he might have neglected his person. He might have even forgotten to eat for a few days, but Mrs. Jefferson and that woman from Costa Rica were paid to get him food and clean sheets and things like that.

I put away such trains of thought, though the experts said it was important to think through a book before reducing it to good, solid prose. But it seemed more important to actually get working, to pick a spot in the story where things were already moving fast, and get some words down on paper. I rose and went downstairs. After grabbing some crackers and cheese, I went out to my car, that is, Parnell's car that had been put at my disposal. It seemed a good idea to get doing something. My contemplations upstairs had kept turning onto abstract paths, directions which could not lead to good, solid, down-to-earth prose.

As I was about to drive away, I had a horrible thought. Was it the house? Was it drenched with the abstract thoughts of that bookish fellow, Parnell? Bookishness wasn't a good quality in a modern writer. He could be a big-game hunter or a lawyer who used his few leisure hours to write. He could even be a dedicated, full-time writer, working 12 hour shifts and disdaining the activity of reading as being irrelevant to his work as it would be to the work of any good industrial laborer. Except, of course, when checking the competition and seeing what was selling out there on Main Street.

I was afraid that my career as a writer would be over if I fell into a world of books and ideas. That was the sort of mistake made by amateurs before writing had evolved into a scientific discipline oriented to the task of providing the material to keep the giant presses rolling and the booksellers happy with stuff that could be sold to a large audience with a single marketing campaign. Rather than spending time in the labyrinths of *Don Quixote* or *Moby Dick*, a professional writer should do his job. He should learn how to write solid, straightforward prose, prose that would meet with the approval of the likes of Hemingway. Then again, the prose could be a little rosy like that of Steele or scarlet like that of Collins.

Whatever the direction he chose, the writer was obligated to keep abreast of cultural fashions to see what topics interested people. The professional writer's own reading should consist of the finest literature from the best-seller lists so he could see how the most talented of modern writers practiced their art. What words did they use? Were adverbs in or out in current writing styles? Adverbs were being used lightly, if at all, and commas were definitely being minimized. Passive sentences were to be avoided at all costs, else the reader would be turned off by a writer and a character pushed around by the world. The modern style was to push rather than be pushed. After all, that was how modern people had conquered disease and space and all those other things.

As I pulled into the driveway of my sister's house, I saw her filling a child's pool with water. I was barely out of the car before Molly screamed out, "Uncle Del," as if I had been gone for months. She came over with her arms thrown open. Laughing, I said, "Look. It's She Who Must Be Obeyed." Molly grimaced at my strange words, but she certainly didn't protest when I obeyed and lifted her up.

Kelly turned off the hose and waited for me. It was pretty clear she was waiting to hear about my crazy new home. I didn't disappoint her. Without even a greeting, I told her, "Parnell Lopez seems like a nice guy. Eccentric and buried in books, but he's certainly not retarded, and he doesn't seem crazy. I'm really not sure why he needs to pay someone to be his companion."

My sister shrugged and suggested, "Maybe it was the lawyer's idea. Or some relative. If the man is eccentric, they might think of him as being insane or retarded if they just let their prejudices run wild."

I nodded my head at the thought. It was sad how some people were so prejudiced that they viewed everything through the lenses of their own

situation; they had no ability to rise above and to see the world as it could be and should be if the human race were to get its act together. And it was the children, like Molly, who would suffer if we didn't learn how to control nuclear power and how to live without destroying the environment and all that stuff. Bittersweet thoughts of the stakes and consequences filled my head as I set Molly down in the pool with its foot or so of water. She squealed but then plopped down, splashing her mother and me, but neither of us could feel a bit of anger when she smiled at us, letting her big, blue eyes grow still bigger. She was a pretty, little girl, blond like a lot of the Swing women were when they had been children. Including Kelly, who'd been a few years older than me, but Mom had lots of pictures of her when she was young. Kelly's hair had darkened to a dirty-blond when she was about ten and then to a straight brunette when she was in her teens, and it seemed likely that would happen to Molly as well. Genetics and stuff like that.

"Why don't you watch Molly for a few minutes, Del, and I'll go get us some coffee."

When she returned with two mugs of steaming black coffee, we sat at the white plastic picnic table. I looked about, trying to re-orient my thoughts to physical things. All the chairs but one were of the same white plastic as the table. The exception was a green plastic lounge with a pad colored with flowers of red and yellow as well as leaves of green. The lawn was green and thick in some spots, worn down to dirt in other places where Molly played and also on the paths out to the clothes-line and backyard shed. Carl and Kelly were more concerned with Molly being able to play freely in her own backyard than they were about maintaining an impressive lawn. But there were Spring daffodils starting to wilt, late-Spring tulips just opening, and other plants just sending up stalks all along the inside of the fence.

"Simple, simple." I had thought to be reminding myself silently of the need for simple words and simple grammar, but my sister asked, "What was that, Del?"

Ever since I had passed 30, I had begun speaking aloud at times when I meant to be speaking only to my self. Apparently, it had happened again, but I didn't mind sharing my thoughts with my sister. She had been one of my closest friends when we were young, and, so, I opened up. "Parnell Lopez is a bookish fellow, and just a short exposure to him is bringing back bad habits. When I tried to think about my book, today, I was thinking

about ideas, and I was thinking in sentences that had two or three major clauses.”

Kelly shrugged and suggested, “Maybe some ideas need to be stated in complex sentences. . . .”

“That,” I pointed out, “is why the truly great modern writers build their tales around action and physical description. They build up complex ideas by showing how they come from the physical world.”

She shrugged again and took a drink of coffee before saying, “I haven’t been able to read much since Molly came along, but it seems to me that that sort of writer is just taking raw impressions from the real world and just throwing them at the reader. And, if I learned anything from studying and teaching anthropology these past ten years, it was how we have lost a sense of how much we have re-created the physical world. We mold it into a form more suitable for civilized human beings every time we speak, every time we so much as look at the world. If we try to speak as if we can get at the facts of the real world directly, we are just fooling ourselves, and who knows what superstitious and irrational ideas might come in the back-door to color our perceptions of the world?” As soon as she finished talking, she said, “I doubt if I’ll have much time to read for a few more years because I’ll be barely getting Molly off to school this fall before our next baby is born.”

I rose and pulled Kelly from her seat and gave her a big hug of congratulations, but then I pushed her away to ask, “Is it certain?”

She smiled, she even seemed to be glowing brightly as she replied, “Those home tests are pretty accurate, and I’ll be seeing the doctor next Monday for him to confirm it and maybe estimate the time. Had to do it now or else we’d have been raising a teenager in our sixties.” The words barely registered as I was starting to worry why I hadn’t been able to detect her glow before she had told me she was pregnant. I was fearing I simply didn’t have the eye for detail that was important for a writer of quality modern prose. Eye for detail and a talent for describing the most mundane events in a way that no writer had ever done. A sunset should be. . . Well, different from any sunset described in past centuries. And it was real hard to figure out what could be said to add to the physical descriptions of Wordsworth or Conrad or the others.

I looked back at Kelly who was still radiating happiness and contentment as she watched Molly. I turned slightly and saw my niece was out of the pool, pouring a bucket of water upon some sort of flower-bed. At least,

I assumed it was a flower-bed. So far, there were only some six-inch tall bushy plants. I made a mental note to come back and observe those plants after their blossoms had opened up. By then, they would be more suitable for prose descriptions. Even the best writers couldn't do much with things still developing, let alone with seeds or embryonic things not yet visible. What sorts of stories could really be written about ape-men hovering on the edge of being human? Without making them prematurely human, that is, the way some people made hedge-hogs and other creatures move and talk like people. There were some things suitable for literature and other things best left to the sorts of prose written by the men with microscopes and notebooks.

8 The Treacherous, Slavish Shore: Where Parnell Lopez Continues to Probe Del's Character, Much to His Confusion

I was back at the Llewellyn house and carrying the last box up the stairs when it hit. Not that I was single-minded to the point of fanaticism. I could have proved that easily enough by opening the box containing most of my compact discs. Any observer would have been able to see just how open-minded I was. There were some discs of Mozart and Beethoven, but also some Coltrane and Gillespie, and even some Cash and Orbison. I listened to all of them. I was my own man, having formed unique tastes just by opening myself to new experiences. With a great effort, I had avoided being one of those simple consumers who bought what was already familiar or perhaps a few new things being pushed by big advertising campaigns.

Though only halfway up the stairs, I halted. Some important thought had slipped away even as the heavy guitar chords of *Bad Moon A'Risin* passed through my head. It seemed as though I really was becoming scatter-brained after less than a day in Parnell Lopez's house. A shadow came over me, and I looked up to see Mrs. Jefferson standing at the top of the stairs and looking down at me. She asked, "Is there something wrong, Mr. Swing?" I shook my head and said, "I was just trying to remember if there are any important boxes I left at my sister's house." It wasn't that I deliberately lied, and it certainly wasn't a lie that would hurt anyone. The words had just slipped out, and it was the sort of lie that smoothed out

awkward moments. “You didn’t bring much over, for sure, Mr. Swing.” “No, Mrs. Jefferson, I’m traveling light and leaving the stuff I don’t need in my sister’s garage.”

Mrs. Jefferson smiled politely and descended the stairs, passing me with room to spare. There were some advantages to those big, old-fashioned houses. A few minutes later, I was taking a selection of CDs out of the box and loading them into the player. It was a 100-disc jukebox. The stereo system was assembled from top-quality components. I couldn’t even pronounce some of the Swedish and German names on the equipment. Everything in the house seemed to be top-of-the-line, from the leather-bound classics of literature and philosophy and science in the downstairs library to the restaurant quality appliances in the kitchen. There was even one of those massive eight-burner stoves with two large ovens in it as well. And the mud-room at the back of the house, just a simple room for hanging coats and storing boots, had stone tiles on the floor and hooks carved from furniture grade wood – as far as I could tell. I really had never worked with wood except in my seventh grade shop class. Even without being an expert though, I could recognize quality materials and craftsmanship. Old Man Llewellyn hadn’t gone in much for fancy stuff, but he had sure known how to build and furnish a high-class, squarish house.

Suddenly, I remembered. The plot. Both of them. The people conspiring to kill the wealthy, young man needed a scapegoat just because the rich fellow wasn’t retarded or insane. Except for some basic stuff like feeding himself and keeping himself clean, Parnell Lopez could take care of himself. He sure as hell knew how to spend money at electronics stores. So, the conspirators had to risk a suspicious accident, and that was why they needed a companion who didn’t seem to be needed as a companion. If the police got suspicious, the companion would be blamed even though he was the only one who really cared for the lonely, rich fellow. The only one who understood the fellow’s confused thoughts and worldview. Yes, the only one even willing to spend time with the intelligent but befuddled and incompetent millionaire.

I was still thinking about the improved plot when I looked up to see Parnell at the doorway, a bowl of food in his hands. A spicy and salty smell of tomatoes and beef came through the air, and he asked, “Would you like some chili?” An innocent question until he added, “I just made a big pot of it. It’s one of those things I can’t make in small batches. It’s also one of those things I can’t make the same way twice. Grandpa taught me how

to make it, but we never wrote down a recipe. Each time we made it, we'd vary spices and types of tomato sauce, and I've continued the tradition." As if unaware how he had destroyed my immediate writing plans, he sank to a level still more mundane and told me, "This batch is real sweet and not as hot as I usually make it. It would probably be good on a crunchy, natural-casing hot dog."

Being a bit hungry and having lost the fruits of my thoughts over the past day or so, I decided I needed a boost. I rose and followed him down to the kitchen. As he was spooning chili into a stoneware soup-bowl – white with a blue stripe around the rim, he suddenly froze, ladle suspended over the large, stainless-steel pot. His eyes moved slyly over to focus upon me. "Did you attend public schools?" When I nodded, he asked, "Did they have you memorize much?" Of course I protested, "No, it was an up-to-date school system. They tried to help us understand things, not just learn about them by rote."

Parnell finished spooning chili into the bowl and handed it to me before asking, "Do you know what your digit span is?"

"My what?"

"Digit span. How many digits you can memorize and repeat back without error a short while later. It's kind of a measure of your short-term working memory which is also needed to understand complex prose and poetry. Nowadays, everybody writes like a newspaper reporter and that makes it easier to understand the flow of the thoughts but at the expense of eliminating the possibility of saying a lot of different things. It's all part of a downward trend in the complexity of our language styles and thinking processes."

"And the solution to this . . . problem, is what?"

Parnell shrugged and handed me a package of crackers before saying, "Better eat the chili while it's still hot." While I sat on a bar stool next to a tall butcher-block table, Parnell went to the refrigerator and came back with two cans of soda. For a moment or two, we were silent while I ate and drank and he sipped on his soda. I was almost finished with the chili when he said, "I went to a public school for a few years, too, but then Grandpa talked my parents into sending me to a nearby Catholic school, even though Grandpa was Presbyterian himself. He also paid my way through Georgetown and for my one year of graduate work at MIT. Papa was a professor of history at various small colleges. He didn't exactly make a big salary. And he certainly wasn't sitting on close to a billion

dollars like Grandpa was. But Grandpa wasn't pushy with his money; he was just generous to those he loved. Papa also was a proud man, but it wasn't a false pride. And, besides, Grandpa would have made good money in any circumstances, but he freely admitted he got rich by being in the right place at the right time."

I finished my bowl of chili, and Parnell asked if I wanted more. When I shook my head, he took the bowl over to the sink and ran water over it before placing it and the spoon in the dishwasher. He didn't seem like a fellow incapable of living in the real world, though he clearly had been sheltered by his grandfather's money. Parnell checked the pot of chili and put the top on it, saying, "I'll let it cook down some more."

As we were walking upstairs, he asked, "Did you have to memorize anything at all in school? Poems or dates or metabolic pathways or anything?" When I simply shook my head, he seemed mildly shocked. There was an air of sadness in the way he looked at me, as if I were a victim of AIDS or something. Suddenly, new possibilities arose for my book. Perhaps it could be a psychological thriller about a man isolated from society and eccentric to the point of schizophrenia. Or some other disease. Insanity was the point. After I had written up the first draft, I could read some book on the human brain to get some more specifics on the possibilities of psychological diseases. It was, after all, the instincts of a writer that were important. The great writers have seen deeper into the human mind and soul than any scientists or doctors. After the insight had been achieved, the language could be adjusted to the right technical terms, if those were really needed at all.

At the top of the stairs, Parnell walked over to the door of his office. Before walking in, he turned to me. His manner and facial expression seemed to radiate compassion and concern. I could have sworn there was even a tear in his right eye. He spoke in a voice quavering with a bunch of emotions all tangled up. "Use it or lose it." I stood for a moment, confused and trying to think of a literary allusion that might make the book's point a bit clearer. Sancho Panza came to mind. It'd been a while since I'd read *Don Quixote*, and Sancho didn't play much of a part in the movie about the book. The poor squire was a superfluous character when the stuff about the Inquisition of Cervantes was being emphasized. Sancho had been a fool who had pulled out proverbs that meant nothing in those particular circumstances. Parnell also seemed to have such a way about him, though he certainly wasn't a fool. At least not in any simple way, but that might

just mean he'd remain a complex and mysterious character in the book.

9 Authors and Other Epiphenomena: An Interlude Which Belongs Nowhere in Particular

A great difficulty arose in trying to make sense of Del Swing's manuscript at this point. Assuming, that is, the author's name truly was Delbert Swing, and further assuming the disk contained two manuscripts, one intended as a novel and the other as a memoir of the author's struggles to write disciplined modern prose. Following the section I have labeled as chapter 7 was a short story with characters not appearing elsewhere in the book.

Perhaps there are limitations to the discipline which should be enforced upon the human imagination, some things worth saying which might be excluded by any particular standards. If so, we should accept what the author produces, even if he is not fully able to unify the work. Neither Cervantes nor Melville displayed any great obsession with unity or integration in their greatest novels.

Then again, we might have simply reached a point where Del Swing, whether he existed or not, came to realize he had a problem. Not only a lack of sex to draw the reader's interest, there was a lack of motivation for an unmarried, unsuccessful writer to continue on. Why did his main character, himself or other, not enter a more predictable career, where he could have had a better income and a chance at meeting babes? There was no evidence the fellow, a descendant of sex-crazed ape-men, was making an effort to propagate his genes into the future. Of course, one shouldn't take even the most scientific of theories literalistically. If genes are selfish, the linkage seems far too indirect to picture genes as telling even a sex-crazed

ape-man that he should stick his pecker up every willing and fertile orifice so that his descendants may become as numerous as the stars in the sky or the sands on the beach. After all, female humans are notorious amongst other advanced mammals for not giving much evidence that they are fertile.

No, it is far more reasonable that pleasure be an intervening effect, caused and then causing. Pleasure would provide a good proximate motive for the actions of a creature driven here and there by the whims or needs of his genes. For all of that, there is reason to believe science has shown us that men are not always generous nor even decent to children not genetically theirs. The intervening effect which becomes a cause in this situation would presumably be familiarity. All else being equal, a man would tend to treat a child as if his own offspring if it were born to his wife and if the man spent time with that child from his infancy. What happens when the child grows up to look like the man two caves down is anyone's guess.

Later on, in Parnell Lopez's book, there seems to be a denial of any identifiable, one might say linear, linkage between genes and specific moral behaviors. This is not to say he falls fully into the error of denying man is a physical creature, but, for all his knowledge of science, Parnell does seem to stray from the straight and narrow in many of his beliefs.

While he displays far lesser knowledge of the details of science than does Parnell, Del Swing seems more willing to stick consistently to a certain viewpoint of reality, one labeled scientific by some. Thus, he wrote a story telling of one of the moral conflicts of a modern, scientific world. Since as many as 25% of modern children have a father other than their legal father – if not more or less, what will happen when genetic testing becomes so widespread that a man will know, by accident or by design, whether a child is really his?

Was Del Swing really the name of the first author, or Parnell Lopez the name of the second author? Am I really that sure that they were even two different men? Perhaps one name is an alias. Perhaps both. Perhaps the stories were generated by one of those artificial intelligence programs. Or maybe the entire mess was the result of an attempt by one of those programs that still had some serious bugs. And the resulting files ended up on two different disks, and somehow they made their way to . . .

Let me think back to the time I purchased the first floppy disc, the one which maybe held the text of Del Swing's memoir and novel. It was at a garage sale in a small town not far south of the Quabbin Reservoir. It must have been so, as I can remember many details with great precision. It

was a single-story house, nearly square. Painted white with dark blue trim. There was a small concrete patio lying between the house and some sort of storage shed. There was no garage, though it was clearly advertised, up and down the highway, as a garage sale. A more honest homeowner might have used the term 'yard sale', but still. . .

The second floppy disk came from a booth in one of those big flea markets. The booth was run by a middle-aged Hispanic couple. The man was a cheerful and rather immense fellow. The woman—perhaps his wife—was buxom and apparently getting more so as she got older and heavier. Not that I know for sure that was happening. She may have been heavy and buxom from early adolescence.

So, there is little doubt that two floppy disks were purchased from two locations, one labeled: "Draft of Greed and Innocence," and the other labeled: "The Poetry of Science—Version 1.17." I remember how difficult it was at that time to make sense of such obscure labels. Did 'draft' mean 'early draft' or was it close to a stage where it could be presented to a busy literary agent or literary editor hard at work on the plethora of manuscripts produced with such industry and such discipline, one outer-eye on the best-seller lists and one inner-eye on the artistic imagination, the other external eye on the style manuals and the other eye of the mind upon thoughts so barely graspable even by their victim?

It is, in fact, difficult to ascertain what 'draft' could mean even if I had the opinions of the authors of these texts. After all, one age might like substance and might prefer a book in a somewhat more raw form, and, during another age, men might be paralyzed in their thinking by, say, a lack of confidence that anything is certain if it is not subjected to the peculiar and extraordinarily precise methods of science. Such a paralysis might lead to mandatory rigid styles of writing and plotting books. Style is easier to control than substance, which can come to reflect some hitherto unsuspected aspect of the infinite richness of reality. Thus, set styles, tied to set plots, will be more suitable for the planning and controlling desires of corporate entities. Literature itself could be industrialized as a way of eliminating the spontaneity which is supposedly so much a part of corporatized capitalism, but is actually something to be planned away as much as in any centralized system.

None of what happened to the two disks was my fault. The computer did it, entangling three such incomplete and incompatible manuscripts, a memoir and two novels, in such a way that there is no reliable way of pro-

ducing a coherent version of either novel, let alone the memoir, on its own. It is unlikely, to say the least, that the resulting mess would provide the raw material for my efforts to speak of the sheer indigestibility of science in the context of modern culture. How I could I succeed where the Poet failed, regardless of his imaginary substance, regardless even of his willingness to flaunt the dictates of scientist, literary critic, and language maven alike in his apparent belief that it is more important to speak of correct things than to speak correctly by the standards of the past few decades?

It is time to present the fragments, though it is not really clear that they were in any sense intended to lie between Chapter 7 and the first section from Parnell Lopez's book. Was there some reason for the computer to have merged the books at this point? Was it the computer that moved the fragments into the midst of the novel rather than Del Swing himself?

10 Where'd This Come From?: A Short Narrative, Unrelated to Del Swing's Novel, Where We Hear of the Abominable Behavior of an Ape-Man in a Designer Suit

Sharp of features with his dark hair slicked back upon his head, Avery Benson moved in a graceful, languid way, giving the lie to the theory that he always moved faster than his competitors, always reached the pay-off before anyone else knew where it was. Not that there was necessarily a contradiction between the easy-going appearance and the grasping behavior. Avery could move at you slowly, eyes that hypnotized as he advanced and tongue which seemed to flicker in the most unmammalian way. If it suited his purpose, he'd slither by, leaving you paralyzed as he reached the prize he had seen.

Some said he was cold-blooded. Others said he was a mammal, more vicious than a Golden Retriever perhaps, but that was not enough to label him a reptile. Yet, no one spoke, at least publicly, of having seen him lose control in a fit of passion, despite the high probability that his brain contained an amygdala.

In fact, he had seemed almost an attractive person in those eight or so months when he and his wife were waiting for the baby to be born. It is hard to imagine a slithering creature being attractive under any circumstances as it is also hard to imagine such being happy when he has not yet swallowed

all Creation into his infinitely expandable gut. Yet, what was true, most of all, was.

Then came the blessed day Avery had waited for. Having dropped his wife at the birthing center, having left a beeper number that he could be called over as soon as she started to give birth, he went to his office and set to work on the GenMal stock offering. His fortune would be made, and his child's future secured if he carried out his tasks with due diligence and got just a little bit lucky. More than that, being a business associate of the geneticists and biochemists at GenMal had given him strong reason to believe his child would be healthy and strong. There was, of course, no guarantee of talent of any sort, but as part of GenMal's tests of its new equipment, Avery and his wife had submitted to genetic testing and had been pronounced free of all human diseases for which there was an identifiable error in the genetic code and a verifiable test for finding that error. Not a trace of Huntington's Disease – they had well below the number of repeats in the key gene that would have led to even a small chance of the disease. No signs of that mutation which gave a small but substantial chance of developing Alzheimer's Disease at an early age. No genes correlated with schizophrenia or bipolar disease. Not a hint of cystic fibrosis or genetically induced Lou Gehrig's Disease. Both Avery and his wife were as genetically healthy as mixed-breed dogs or even the wild-type wolves. The child, if not necessarily perfect, was unlikely to be grossly defective.

The call came. The hour had arrived, and, soon enough, the minute itself. But it arrived not before Avery was at his wife's side, coaching her in breathing rhythms. The baby emerged after a mere hour and a half, not much prolonged suffering for a first-time mother.

A boy!

It was a boy – Avery, Jr.

The baby was cleaned, and, then, after the custom of certain lines of nurse-midwives, the woman licked the baby's forehead and looked up, her features set in a manner more somber than joyous. "The baby's skin is too salty."

Such sad words, indicating acts ignominious, even a sin of passion.

The nurse-midwife was innocent of purposefully bearing such sad news. How was she to know that both father's genes and mother's had been tested and found free of Cystic Fibrosis? True enough it was that the baby could have been the victim of a mutation, but any scientists knew it was far more likely that his father was other than Avery. Perhaps his mother other than

Avery's wife? Avery had seen the baby emerge from his wife's birth canal, but maybe she had had another woman's fertilized egg implanted, in secret, at some illegal fertility clinic?

So unlikely was this possibility that Avery did not even dwell on it for more than a fraction of a second before he turned and, without a word, walked away.

Behind, he heard the nurse-midwife, still innocent of the mischief she had caused, call out, "But it's a treatable disease nowadays. The baby has a good chance at a long, healthy life."

Avery wondered why she was telling him this. It was information of interest, perhaps, to the baby's father, though he was likely the type to not take responsibility for his own actions. As he headed back to his office, the young and wealthy investment banker suppressed a feeling of disgust for such an irresponsible fellow. There was work to do on the GenMal project, and he had no energy to waste on useless emotions.

11 Authors and Other Epiphenomena: Where the Author Confesses His Sins to Be More Than Just the Mashing Together of the Two Computer Files

Complexity increases. Chaos reigns. At least four files, I fear, have been combobulated into one. It has come to me that the above short tale is suspiciously similar to a short story I once wrote and stored on my computer, though this version is more compact than the version I had written. I could consider the possibility of a very similar plot; after all, this is the sort of problem which can be anticipated by any citizen keeping up with science and the impact it is having upon our lives.

Now I wonder if the damage to the innards of my computer was perhaps more extensive than I had first conjectured. Will the reader turn a page of this book to find himself viewing a worksheet of my tax statements for 1991? Have any crucial paragraphs been replaced by C++ lines coding for the Newton Algorithm for calculating square roots?

Computers err not. They do only what they are told to do, even when the instructions are generated by their own malfunctioning circuitry.

The errors clearly come from me, though it remains possible the unrealized possibilities for a more coherent and stronger story line might well have been generated by some computer program. I still make errors. I cannot say if there are to be more such breaks in the book's actions, breaks irrelevant

to understanding two men and how they came to be friends though they were once characters in separate stories generated and stored on separate computers.

If such really is true, that is. The truth might be more complicated, even more complex than that.

The world truly is chaotic!

Woe is me.

12 The Treacherous, Slavish Shore: Another Fragment Not Making Total Sense But Bearing a Bit More on the Plot of Del Swing's Book Not to Mention the Plot Within That Book

It was Friday, and, after several days on the job as the companion to Parnell Lopez, I was ready to rock-and-roll. There was a hot new club I'd read about in the paper. It was just a short ways out of town. Tits. A cutesy name, but cute was in, for some reason. I guessed it was just one of those arbitrary whims of whoever it is that sets fashions. It wasn't me, but I was on my way to the place, cutesy or not.

I'd had a narrow escape, and I was still a bit nervous. My heart was even pounding a bit. Not that my life had actually been in danger. It was just that I had told Parnell about my plans, and I started getting the feeling he wanted me to ask him to go, and then I was afraid he'd invite himself. I was ready to prowl, and I didn't need to be baby-sitting a guy like him. It wasn't that he was unlikable. He was quite a nice guy as a matter of fact, but he was a bit of a geek. Well. . . He wasn't really a total geek, but he was pretty dorkish. Maybe 'dorkish' was too strong, but he wasn't exactly Mr Smooth in all ways.

Not that I was the life of the party or. . .

Anyway, I managed to escape.

Titts was still kind of quiet when I got there. It was only 9:30, and everybody was probably at home, waiting for a proper time so they wouldn't be too early. It wasn't too cool to head for Titts right away. It made it look like you wanted a drink real bad or else you were just plain desperate.

I was pretty thirsty, so I got a tall cool one from the bartender and then took a small table near the bar. It would have really looked strange to go in to the dance area and sit at one of those tables. There was only one table being used in there, and that was by a group of four middle-aged men, one already drunk enough to be leaning precariously over the table. He'd be passed out even before the hot babes showed up, though he would certainly remember having had a good time when he woke up the next morning.

Fortunately, I wasn't like that. I'd leave a place before making a fool of myself like that. No, I was just a lonely guy in his 30s out to find a nice girl around 30 or so. Maybe 25, but certainly smart and confident. We could have a good time, some good conversation, and then maybe get some sort of a relationship going. Mostly, I wanted a smart and independent woman, not that dependent sort. Women with low self-esteem didn't interest me at all. And, then...

Out of the blue, she came. Through the door, anyway.

A redhead. That was all right. I wasn't stuck on blonds. She was at least as old as me, maybe even pushing 40. Well, she might not be the right woman for me, but I decided to be friendly to her if I got the chance. There were fine wrinkles at the corner of her eyes and her mouth, but she looked like she might be smart, and, anyway, the wrinkles probably meant she smiled a lot. She was a bit heavy in the hips, but that seemed to happen to a lot of women as they grew older, even when they worked hard to keep in shape. And she certainly wouldn't have interested Hugh Hefner, let alone Larry Flynt, but she was dressed real nice in a pair of light-green stirrup pants and a white sweater that had one of those fisherman's net weaves.

Her eyes were red and a bit wet, like she had been crying lately.

13 Authors and Other Epiphenomena: Where an Author Rudely Intrudes Upon the Thoughts of Another of That Sort

Elsewhere, at about the same time, the ink was flowing freely as if associations were to be made fast as well as somewhat loosely. By some standards. Though it was more important to consider what was being associated.

In what voice?

From what point-of-view?

Likely a strange voice. Parnell Lopez had some traits nearly autistic, and a schizoid ability to restructure the signs of reality according to some schemes of his own. It might work. It might not, but it was most probably an odd and unique point-of-view. Parnell Lopez was a bit light on experiences in the real world.

Perhaps like unto Shakespeare of Avon, so bereft, so far as anyone knows, of rich and varied experiences, Parnell was not much like Cervantes – warrior at Lepanto, slave in Algiers, and requisitioner of supplies for the Spanish Armada. Later on, a tax-collector for the King of Spain, but that was another matter entirely.

And Parnell? Did he acquire his knowledge of the world only from books? Was that a foundation sufficient for the creation of worthwhile literature that speaks of the states of men's souls and not of the planning and production needs of modern corporations? Well-crafted works of literature may also bear more than one reading, and that is a still bigger problem

for corporations needing obsolescence that more products be purchased as soon as possible. No, such a radical point-of-view would be out of place in a figure surrounded by books on neurobiology and quantum mechanics and the history of science. True, there were many leather-bound classics of literature a single floor below, and Mrs. Jefferson had kept them free of dust, but Parnell Lopez dived into the madness and incoherence of modern thought with the help of only a few works of fiction. He relied on the likes of Melville and Joyce, men who had advanced from being despised and unread to being highly praised and rarely read. As writers, they made too many demands upon a busy and prosperous people. As moral and social critics, they made still more demands.

Why would a man arm himself with the knowledge and theories of modern science and then set out in the footsteps of writers who could not even support themselves with their books? Why not fight superstitions with books about the Big Bang or about the ape-men who survived to create a civilization for which they were poorly adapted? Why not advance the cause of science by speaking of the genes which determine the fate of all biological organisms? Better yet, a man who wished to make the big money could bow to the higher demands of certain modern sensibilities. Why not courageously adopt an adolescent or androgynous view of human nature in a society which encouraged such views to the greater profit of all? Why not produce long, turgid novels reading from page first to last like Joseph Conrad after a prefrontal lobotomy? Sometimes difficult but always mindless and of doubtful relationship to reality and its allied reason.

The question would not go away as Parnell tortured a few small thoughts out of his brain so ill-formed to the demands of a progressive and enlightened age. Why all those books of science? Could it be said that the confidence of modern scientists is largely justified by their creative successes? Did that success force non-scientists to retreat from the battlefield of rational thought? True enough it is, for sure, that science speaks of limited and well-defined aspects of physical reality and says nothing about the very existence of that physical reality. It says little of the greater reality, though psychologists and neurobiologists measure the effects of the mind they often deny. Using the mind they often deny. Nothing, of course, can science say of He who created this universe. Not only can science not dictate to God or reality, but, ultimately, it cannot even judge the statements and arguments which men present about God and His creation in its plenitude. Why, then, would poets and philosophers have retreated from the grounds of rational

thought, a field over which they ranged more widely and more freely than did the scientists?

Modern physics had provided no data arguing against the raw fact of an experienced human moral will which can be exercised with substantial, if far less than perfect, freedom. Nor have modern psychology and neurobiology. All existing arguments against moral freedom have been known for centuries and did not impress Albert Schweitzer any more than they had impressed Paul the tentmaker.

No, there was a relationship between scientific laws and human actions, but it was opposite that assumed by too many modern men. It was moral freedom and rational, conscious thought which brought Newton to his laws of motion and Heisenberg to his Uncertainty Principle. Those theories of science could not be run in reverse to deny the very freedom from which they sprang. Not at all.

Mindless. As Modernist thought developed over the past few centuries, non-scientists accepted their roles as mindless holders of aesthetic values, whatever values might be – outside of quantitative economic theory. Rationality had been restricted to scientific modes of thought, sometimes unleashed on problems quite beyond the competence of that way of thought.

Mindless. Narrations were to be restricted to physical actions either purely mundane or irrationally fantastic as writers humbly accepted their subservient, but sometimes well-paid, role in human thought. Or thoughtlessness. Moral forms were to be, at most, implicit, and, thus, did morally decent men come to write morally reprehensible books.

Mindless. Eschewing explicit thought of all sorts, modern literature provided only implicit thoughts, the type most likely to be both slavish and incoherent.

Mindless. Restricting all utterances to the simplest structures and most concrete words, they eliminated nearly all that was most noble in human thought.

Mindless. How much must the human soul be stunted and deformed before it can be honestly reflected in the profane flatness of modern speech?

And, yet, the most unlikely of literary men was stirring himself up in preparation for some mighty work. A fountain pen was in his hand. A blank notebook open in front of him. This fellow who knew himself to be verbally and socially inadequate in many ways had yet come to realize he could create for he stood upon the flimsy foundations provided by a scientific understanding of physical reality, and he looked beyond to the

vast wastelands of the Universe, so many megaparsecs squared and full of naught but things apparently existing for their own sakes and to the glory of God.

Having little to lose, courage was not necessary, and, thus, he dared to set sail, to think deeply and earnestly, and to release his soul that she might keep the open independence of her sea. Smiling fearfully, he allowed himself to be sucked up into the howling infinite.

“A dialog, a dialog, a dialog,” chanted he as if it were a magical incantation against those fears which ever press upon the human groin.

14 The Treacherous, Slavish Shore: But Only Continued After an Interrupt Condition That Disrupted the Flow of Words in Process

And my fears had proven to be unfounded. I didn't have to go home alone. In fact, I didn't have to go home at all.

Julie's home. Apartment, anyway. It was kind of empty. A chair, three lamps, a television, and an area rug in the living-room. Not that we had spent much time in that room. Neither one of us had really wanted to talk much. There was no sense forcing things since we probably didn't have much in common to talk about, and neither of us seemed all that interested in what the other one did. She was a lawyer in the local branch of a large bank. Well, it wasn't really a bank, or so she said. They made loans, mostly to medium-sized businesses. And it was... Something like a bank but not really. That was about as far as she got in explaining what she did, since I wasn't really interested, and she noticed that pretty quickly. She showed even less interest in my plans to become a best-selling novelist.

Anyway, the bedroom was furnished a bit better. More completely, that is. Ed had taken most of the living-room furniture as well as the refrigerator, when he left, but the bedroom set belonged to Julie. She was pretty vague about why or even when the break-up had occurred. She was still pretty upset, and there were still some pretty odd gaps in the apartment's furnishings. He might have left that morning.

She was really in a kind of odd mood. Most women complained about

the lack of sexual attention from men, but I tried to get going on Julie a second time. She kind of whined out, "What do you think you're doing?" and pushed me off. She turned away from me but didn't protest when I pressed against her and reached around to fondle her right breast while I was dropping off to sleep.

I must have dozed off because I all of a sudden felt her hand on mine, squeezing, so that she was sort of squeezing her own booby. She was moaning, but not entirely in ecstasy. She seemed to be in some kind of pain but she kept on forcing me to squeeze and fondle. It might have been that I'd been caressing her breasts off and on throughout the night until the skin grew irritated. One of my girl-friends had complained about me doing that, even in my sleep.

After a while, she let go of my hand and seemed to relax her entire body. She was in my arms and submitting to my control, and I really couldn't take advantage of the situation. While resting and gathering my energy for another try, I pressed my chin against the top of her head and asked, "What are you thinking about?" After a couple of sobs, she replied, "I'm worried about Ed," and I let go of her and rolled away to the edge of the bed. As I stared at the ceiling, I couldn't figure out whether I should try to catch some more sleep or just clear the hell out right then.

This time, it was Julie who rolled against me. I didn't really want to have much to do with her, having figured out she had used me as much as I had used her, but I let her press against me. She rested her cheek against my shoulder, and it sent a little chill up my spine. She was kind of cute in the way she acted and she had a nice body.

"Something's not going well at the bank."

Figuring she was talking about Ed, I sighed and decided to play along with her little game though I wasn't sure what bank Ed worked at or whether it was really a bank or one of those other things like the place where Julie worked. "What does Ed do at the bank?"

"He manages investments in the trust department."

It was as if a bolt of lightning had pierced the darkness. I sat up so fast that I threw Julie across the bed and almost onto the floor. I could hear her whimpering as I stared out the window which was across the room. It was light outside though far from bright. The world hovered between daybreak and sunrise. The sky was bright, but the Sun had not yet risen above the horizon. Enlightenment was about to shine down upon the world.

I was searching for other concrete metaphors for the strange mixture

of lightness and darkness which accompanies worthwhile revelations not yet fully understood, but Julie interrupted my efforts to ask me, “What’s wrong?” There was a sob in her voice, and, all of a sudden, I found her repulsive. Clinging. Weak. Always being hurt by something, even if she had to search out that something.

Talking to myself, and trying to ignore her unhelpful presence, I said, “They weren’t planning to murder him.” She grew silent, even the gasping breaths stopped, and I turned to her since she was the only one around to hear my explanation. “They used his trust money to finance some highly speculative investments that didn’t work out. Then they scrambled to cover up their crimes, and the murder was an accident of sorts.”

For some reason, her eyes were as wide as those of a cartoon character. She stared at me, as if I were some sort of a monster, and then kind of shrieked, though it wasn’t really very loud. Driven by some sort of reflex, I reached out to comfort her, but she jerked back from my touch and went right over the edge of the bed. After checking that she was all right, I rose and went into the bathroom to clean up. I had to get back to my notebooks and that nice, new computer Parnell Lopez had put in my suite. My writer’s block was cleared up, and there was work to do.

While I was buttoning my shirt, I walked around the foot of the bed to check on Julie. She was sitting on the floor, wrapped up in the comforter she had pulled down from the bed. When I crouched down to look into her eyes with as much sympathy and tenderness as I could muster, she looked me straight in the eyes and said, “He told me they were just thinking of closing down his division. If he’s in big trouble, I’ve got to go to him. I’ve got to tell him we can work things out no matter what he’s done.”

Not sure what the hell she was talking about, I reached out and patted the comforter where her knees seemed to be. She neither responded nor drew back. She just stared into the space in front of her. Her eyes were both bright and wet, and I had the funniest feeling she was dreaming of getting back together with Ed. I patted her tenderly once more to let her know there were no hard feelings on my part. Then I rose and walked away. As I was closing the apartment door behind me, I couldn’t help thinking that I really knew how to pick’em.

15 The Open Independence of the Sea: The Poet's Tale Which is Nearly as Fantastic as if It Had Truly Been, But Not Quite as Full of Verifiable Facts

Dylan Shagari was his name. Nearly six feet tall he was and slender up to his untimely end at the age of 28. His hair was black and kinky, kept closely cropped so that his asymmetry would better display itself to the women ever checking out possible mates. As is the case with many a human male, his skull bulged out noticeably on the right side of his forehead, but that is an easily observable fact and thus well-known. Simple facts would lead one to expect such hyper- and often defective development in the male of the sub-species *Homo Sapiens Sapiens*, though it may well have been true as well in the sub-species *Homo Sapiens Neandertal*.

Since it is women who speak better and more often, and certainly women who are more often literate to at least some extent, one would expect the situation to be different on the left side of the human head where typically reside the regions of the brain devoted to language skills.

And it was the case that there was no bulge on the left side of Dylan Shagari's forehead which was as smooth as that of a human female. Facts and expectations can be misleading. Dylan Shagari's closely cropped scalp would have allowed ready inspection of the shape of the skull. Such an inspection would have revealed a prominent bulge in the rear of his skull on the left side. He protruded on the right front and the left rear!

The Poet himself knew that his body bulged in different spots from

the body of a healthy, well-developed woman. He suspected these two particular bulges on his skull helped to explain the dominance of men over some aspects of human life, including most areas of creative intellect and the arenas of public history. Women, and their different bulges, dominated other aspects of human life, typically those aspects under assault by the most powerful forces of the modern world.

For himself was Dylan Shagari happy that his brain had developed a good year past the point where a female brain would have stabilized, remaining, so to speak, within the proper confines of the human skull. For the large number of congenitally illiterate and otherwise cognitively defective males was he unhappy, and that sadness was only intensified by learning that various biological theorists had proposed that women, for the sake of their own reproductive success, steered – in the most neurohormonal and genetic ways – their daughters towards high and predictable quality. A son was an opportunity for a crap shoot. Push his development onto a steeper path and hope a Bach or Churchill would result, rather than an illiterate hulk.

To be sure, life in the Darwinian universe was not all a matter of abstract musical talent or grand world visions, not just a matter of producing sons who would be remembered for centuries. Mostly according to the most somber scientific theories, it was a matter of having lots of sex, or at least enough to make lots of babies. That is obviously a hard thing for a woman to accomplish, since each baby is a substantial investment of her time and her own bodily substance. Thus, Darwinian theory would be most consistent with mammalian mothers who had pretty much the attributes traditionally observed in females. And mammalian fathers? Not being strictly forced to invest heavily in their children, might they be expected to be erratic in their attributes and the shapes of their skulls? Many potential fathers, and the one who has it all together sires a disproportionate number of children?

Then again, the Medieval moral theologians conjectured that human morality was based upon the nature of the human sex act which bound together man and wife in a manner unique in the animal kingdom and upon the need of the father to care for his undeveloped, almost embryonic young if he wished to leave descendants who survived to reproduce themselves.

Such contemplations were necessary to the deeper understanding of the Poet but Dylan Shagari himself would only learn of such things from his aunt, the famous neurobiologist Morgan Llewellyn. And it would be after several years of conscious and unconscious contemplation that a poem had

emerged, one which would even draw upon the freshness of modern science in noting that males and females were different.

DOGMAS AIN'T CENTRAL TO SCIENCE

Not one of the herd, the bull wandered forth.
This way and that across the march so parched,
marched the crazed and lonely beast.
Lurched he east and west, lurched he up the hill.

Eyes of red, horns aroused and engorged,
forged he onward, marginalized Darwinistically.
Starved he, gorged he as he lunged ever onward
ever towards the surging sun huging land to land.

Strange for surely that manner of behaving.
Why not live he, strive he, to spread his seed?
Why hove he sand with non-cloven foot?
Why clove he at all, together if not split asunder.

Oh, the ways of beasts not always reduce
we deduce lucidly, though not transcendently,
but rather more translucently not at all.
The question comes around to that cell, that cell, that eggish
cell.

Regulating robustly, that oo-oo-istic thang,
from one generation to another, it brang
a pre-set setting, a step-step choreographed so lang
a life as non-existing fate it stang

the soul of the bull, goading him onward.
Go-go-go into the night, gawkish gonads begotten
to serve the needs of the girls of the species,
glaringly extreme that they might be at ease.

16 Authors and Other Epiphenomena: A Peculiar Suggestion Made by One Author and Stolen, With Attribution, by Another

Somewhere in my computer is a fragment of a file which appears to have been something written by Parnell Lopez and never integrated into this book. In that file, he noted that the sociobiological description of human nature is based on the insight that men and women have different roles in reproduction and pay dramatically different costs to successfully bear and raise children. He also noted this was something well known to the authors of the Old Testament, as well as the likes of Homer and Shakespeare.

There were some additional notes. They were not organized into coherent sentences, showing that he was not yet a fully developed author. Wellington used to write perfectly formed sentences of great complexity during the heat of battle. Parnell Lopez apparently had some trouble with tenses and even number while sitting at his desk, a number of reference books near at hand. One could conjecture he was struggling with ideas not yet expressible in the particular human language he used, but that seems a cheap way out for an author.

He seemed to be trying to express, at once, the idea of truths, scientific and other sorts, and also the idea of personal decision. It was as if he believed there were different possible universes, each fully consistent within itself, but the particular universe which came into being had somehow been formed by contingent decisions made by both God and creatures.

It is difficult to know what to make of that claim. Truths which are absolute given what has happened and the decisions made by God and creatures? But only absolute, and, in fact, only existing, as a result of decisions actually having been made?

To his credit, he did pull himself slightly out of such a dangerous slide by noting that some things would have been true in any conceivable universe.

Then he slid once more by adding the qualification that even those absolute truths still must be manifested in particular, concrete ways to have any bearing on peculiar creatures of a concrete world.

What did he mean by 'peculiar'?

17 The Treacherous, Slavish Shore: Del Swing Returns to the Llewellyn House and Finds a Literary Mess Awaiting Him

Parnell met me at the top of the stairs at his house, and he looked like hell. He seemed awfully excited, despite his condition. With a real shit-eating grin on his face, he handed me a small pile of paper. I counted ten sheets, and half of the lines were scratched out. He was awfully excited about it, or maybe he was just in a disturbed mood because of the lack of sleep. When I suggested he go get some sleep, he just grinned a bit wider and said, “Would you please read that. I finally got a good start on my novel.”

I was confused and not really in shape to evaluate anybody’s writing, particularly Parnell’s. I suspected it was going to be a strange piece of work, but there seemed to be no good way out of it and it was less than five pages of writing, after the plentiful scratch-outs were eliminated. I started reading even as I led the way down to my suite. It was pretty confusing stuff about bulging skulls or something. Apparently, it all meant something to Parnell. Maybe it would have meant something to a scientist, but I thought phrenology had disappeared with the Dark Ages. Parnell seemed real excited about it, so maybe there was something to it. He was pretty smart, and he had certainly read a lot of books and magazines. Maybe I just wasn’t smart enough to get it. Whatever it was. I could at least get a few facts straight.

“Who was this Dylan Shagari?”

“My grandfather’s nephew, the son of James Llewellyn’s twin sister and the scion of a wealthy Ibo family, though I really don’t know that ‘Shagari’

is really an Ibo name. I just know it's Nigerian."

Feeling I was getting somewhere, I searched for the next logical question. To fill the spaces in the conversation, I asked, "Your great-aunt really married a fellow from Nigeria?" Dull of senses and thoughts, I heard his response, and it took several seconds for it to penetrate. When it did, I could have sworn he had said, "Not really. My grandfather's twin sister died when she was a baby. An ear infection of the sort easily handled by antibiotics nowadays."

I thought for a few seconds before protesting, "So this is a fictional book and not really about your grandfather's life?"

"I never said it was about my grandfather's life." Parnell looked mildly disappointed with me, as if I were being dense in some way. He went on to explain, "I said it was about my grandfather."

"Oh. I get it. You're just using your grandfather as a character in a novel?"

Parnell didn't look satisfied with that, but he shrugged and asked, "Do you think I've pretty well nailed the beginning of the book?"

Intent on helping him, though I wasn't sure what the book was supposed to be about, I decided to let him in on the secrets to writing good, modern prose. "It's pretty abstract. And the complex sentence structures make it more so. You take one sentence that should logically follow the first and insert it into the middle of the first, like you're trying to smooch up two ideas into one. And you shouldn't really be talking about the... Poet, or whoever he is. You should be showing him doing things. That's the proper way to show how a man thinks and what he's made of. And that's why you should begin your book in the middle of some action, even if it's not the main action of the book."

The poor fellow looked crestfallen. He puzzled over my advice for a few moments and then asked, "You think it's abstract? It talks about the differences between the male brain and the female brain, which seems pretty concrete to me. I tried to playfully get at the reasons why great poets and great scientists are almost all men, even though there are more smart women than smart men. I guess..." He pondered something for a moment before saying, "Of course, I think Einstein's general theory of relativity is pretty concrete since it explains... Rather, it's the only consistent and coherent theory we have about the nature of physical reality itself at the level of the Universe. I guess most people think certain types of mathematical or verbal formalisms are abstract even when they are the only possible explanations

of certain aspects of reality.”

I wasn't sure what he was getting at, though I was feeling a bit insulted, for some reason. He didn't help matters much when he muttered, “Popular culture is more superstitious than it was during the Middle Ages.”

Stuck for words again, I muttered something about astrology and the X-Files TV program, but Parnell just stared at me. His eyes were awfully red, and his face was a little bit slack. He shook his head and rose. He had walked around the table before saying, “Scientistic superstitions are a lot more dangerous than that junk.” Parnell was at the door and looking awfully tired. He wasn't really looking at me, seeming to be trying to focus on something outside the French doors which led onto the small porch. I looked over for just a second but saw nothing but clouds flying rapidly through the sky. When I looked back at Parnell, he said, “When I've written more, I'll run it by you. I've got to get some sleep, and maybe I'll dream about an approach radical enough for the story I must tell.”

18 The Open Independence of the Sea: Where Are Revealed Further Details of the Poet's Life

Not much is known about the Poet. He left few words behind him, and the only man who was really close to him was his uncle James Llewellyn who was also dead. Born of a mother Welsh-American and a father Ibo from Nigeria, Dylan Shagari lived only a short time in Africa. His mother had died shortly after giving birth to him, his father when the boy was but five years old. Dylan Shagari went to live with his aunt and uncle in the United States. James and Morgan Llewellyn had just had a daughter of their own, but another child was more than welcome. They were well-to-do, had a large house, and employed several servants.

As his cousin Grace Llewellyn was to do, Dylan Shagari attended the best schools in the Alexandria area. When the time came, he was sent overseas to attend Oxford University. Which institution ejected him at the end of that first academic year. They would have kicked him out sooner, but they had trouble getting a message to him since he spent time in all parts of Europe but the distinguished grounds of Oxford. Finally, he showed up to pick up some of his clothes and other personal belongings and one of the administrators suggested he would be happier at an educational institution which didn't require students to show up for tests or for meetings with deans or professors.

Over the next few years, he attended various universities in the United States and Europe. But he didn't attend very often and was expelled from one after another.

It didn't matter. He had already set out on his course in life. He had begun a rigorous course of self-study of the prefaces and early chapters of the classics of science. Not the popular works of science, for his uncle James Llewellyn, physicist and optical engineer, and his aunt Morgan Llewellyn, developmental neurobiologist, had told him those popular works, with few exceptions, were not only plodding, pedestrian works, but also biased by the intrusion of various inconsistent and incoherent philosophical positions.

Dylan Shagari chose to read instead the early chapters of Dirac's classic, *The Principles of Quantum Mechanics*, the prefaces of Chandrasekhar's various books on astrophysics, and Chaitin's more accessible essays and books on algorithmic number theory. From this stew of half-digested, partial views of modern science, Dylan Shagari began to create lines of text which might generously be described as poetry.

But what was the context?

Was the Poet a man of faith? Perhaps agnostically embittered by his orphaned state? Was he historically conditioned by Marxism? Reduced to no more than an animal? Maybe he was no more than a prankster who spoke of matters of science, which he didn't understand, in literary styles, which were beyond his talents.

The uncle to the Poet perhaps said it all,

It is best that a poet create an outlandish biography for himself unless so blessed as to be born into a context discordant enough to make a game of the very act of seeing.

Best he be born but an embryonic thing. Better yet than that, he should be so open to the possibilities of the real world as to form relationships on a haphazard basis. From here he should put out a line of communication to there. Many heres, nearly as many theres. And when some work not as well or as often as desired, when some veil what is real, or present what is not, should he strive to destroy those that a line not run from falsely here to virtually there. Oh, truly, from such a process could a genius be created to speak a language different from that in his head.

A poet would crawl forth into the world to begin to explore. Objects would be brought mouthward in an extravaganza of empirical research quite beyond that of the greatest scientist. He would piss on himself and perhaps spread his own feces even

upon the walls of his house. Laugh he would, but often at the silliest things. Babble for sure, when the time came. First, mere sounds would he utter in an effort to create a verbal alphabet. String them together he would into. . .

Words!

Words of discovery and wonder. Adam fresh upon the Earth. Still fallen and still innocently stupid in all matters where he's not a towering genius.

When a multitude of words had come from his mouth, when far more scrambled this way and that lay in pieces in his head, then would come phrases and sentences. Yes, strings of sounds to speak of a new world, one never seen before by any man, for the stars would have moved. The sun would have burned up more of his precious fuel. The continents would have drifted farther apart – if not closer together. Species would have disappeared and still others arisen.

Then should a poet strike out to tell others of his discoveries. Then should a poet fear the mass of men who would tell him that there was no objective reality outside of the dogmas preferred by men, and, therefore, he could not have his own view of what did not exist. To no avail would he protest that a meteorite on the head killed all men quite dead. He would complain into a vacuum of intelligence that the solar system had moved millions of miles since the days of his father's youth.

Such a man would clearly be impossible. Zero would be the probability that such a creature could be born into this Universe. A man is made of trillions of biochemical factories, most highly specialized, and all linked into the most improbable of organisms, except for all the others. No! Such a creature could never come to be. Not man nor poet. No greater would be the chance that he would develop in such a manner beyond the control of his society and his parents, though bound would he be by the limits he shares with them.

And, so, I foresee that such men will arise only from the strangest of unions. Such men will grow into their poetic role only by the most impossible of lives.

What could be more unlikely than the union of the son of a younger son of a Nigerian chieftain and a woman, even my

very own twin sister Genevieve, who was from a most ordinary suburb of a most ordinary American state. Could such have ever come to be? What would be the odds? Be there a computer powerful enough to have projected such an event from the simple stew which boiled out of that which it boiled out of to form our Universe 10 billion years ago? Or more. If not less.

Yet, more to the point, if there is one. . .

How could such a man and such a woman have ever met, let alone at the University of Paris?

And how could the only produce of that union have been such a being as Dylan Shagari was?

A young man who had attended and flunked-out of some of the world's most distinguished centers of learning, a mischievous fellow wishing to be a poet but unable to figure out why the modern world might need such an exotic luxury in a day when insight and entertainment could both be found with a mere flick of the wrist, or perhaps the pitter-patter of fingers across a keyboard.

Such cheap paths of Enlightenment did not draw the poet any more than did lecture halls or exam rooms. Rather had he acquainted himself with the Zurich coffee-houses frequented by Einstein during class and laboratory hours. A connoisseur of professional ladies, he felt life to be too short for much precious time to be spent in the brick buildings of Oxford, already being broken down by the acidic emissions of the ivy. Not many millennia would they last. Better off was the poet to seek eternity, and, so, he flew to Dublin to search out the healthy and thick-bodied whores praised by James Joyce. Rather would he be like Joyce than study annotated versions of Joycean near-misses.

They did not tolerate such irresponsibility. They could not allow such disrespect. Yet, they could not lay hand nor tongue upon the poet. The ax hovered longly because he was never at Oxford to be summoned by the proper authorities. Fresh from Dublin, he had picked up a fresh supply of ink and blank notebooks in London, for he disposed of a hundred pages for every bloody, sweat-soaked word. Barely stopping in Oxford to change his underwear, he had flown off to Paris that he might compare the charms of the native women against those of tourists of many

lands.

Dylan Shagari had preferred to make babies when he copulated, and he had lusted deeply after the women he had used. He was most accurately regarded as a saint of the second-best virtues. Or perhaps not. Himself, the poet had thought descriptions to be worthless except for misleading a superstitious people.

Hormonally driven, the poet had been neither a sensualist nor a utilitarian.

Was that true? No, but thus distorted, the truth collapsed into a state of profitable confusion. Dylan Shagari had possessed the insight to realize that gibberish was muchly useful in exploring an objective reality. From such babblistic falsehoods would come tomorrow's truths. Or lies. But tomorrow's, in any case.

He was open to many possibilities though quite aware of the dangers. Some ways of seeing a reality founded on blood and dirt might orthogonate many things and more than a few concepts, taking them beyond the vision of all but a future poet and those wise enough to be born after him. In the end, a concrete world would have its own way, and only some words, far fewer concepts, would be selected. Such was the curse of Man: To be set in a world not plastic enough for a rich imagination. Not that such was true.

But...

Poets be blind, like their mighty father of yore. How canst such a man see anything outside of the images created by his own brain? Canst those hallucinations be foisted upon a concrete reality?

Well, maybe if it is an illusion corresponding to some actuate of blood or dirt.

19 The Treacherous, Slavish Shore: During Which an Author With a Highly Active Imagination Is Told to Cool It and Stick to a Modern, Contemporary, Fast-Paced Style of Fiction

Parnell was pretty happy about what he wrote, and I had to admit it flowed pretty smoothly, but there were many problems. First of all, it was unlikely a highly trained and highly skilled engineer would have talked in such loosey-goosey proser. I mean, in real life, it might happen, but that was one of those situations which was implausible though possible. Good fiction avoided the implausible even more than it avoided the impossible and the fantastic. All the good books on how to write modern, contemporary, fast-paced fiction said so, and some of those books were written by successful authors; some of them might have even been best-selling authors.

Wanting to do something to help the fellow before he wrote 500 pages of the virtually unreadable stuff, I suggested, "Why don't you write a conventional novel? I mean just to get started..." He looked at me in a puzzlement so great that his entire face seemed puckered inwards to his nose. I explained, "You know, the sort of stuff that people read... About events that mean something to the typical person." I quickly searched my memory for recent best-sellers I had read and found that a high propor-

tion involved such things as treachery on Russian subs or law firms that murdered any young associates who tried to leave the firm or plagues that exterminated nearly all people leaving space for a battle between a fallible but basically decent fellow and a truly evil. . .

“People are going to have trouble understanding all these vague references to scientific matters. Even the scientists might not catch a lot of the references since they’re used to scientific styles of writing.”

“Then how is science to be integrated into literature?”

I didn’t know quite what to say in response. After all, I had never been a particularly big fan of science fiction. I’d read some when I was young. Some Bradbury. A few works by Asimov and Heinlein and Delaney and. . . that guy who wrote *A Boy Who Had No Mouth* and *His Dog That Screamed a Lot*. But I wasn’t convinced that science fiction was real literature. Even in the hands of a genius, the genre seemed limited to adolescent power-fantasies or maybe the occasional adolescent powerless-fantasy.

For all that, I suspected I would fail in any attempt to talk sense into Parnell. The fellow, gentle as he was, seemed a bit pigheaded. It was likely he had largely shaken off all my practical advice and returned to write some more that schizoid gibberish.

20 The Open Independence of the Sea: Where an Author Unwisely Pursues a Proper Description of the Poet's Person Rather Than Getting Down to His Literary Job

Dylan Shagari was his name. Nearly six feet tall and slender. His hair was black and kinky, his smile free and readily flashed to any woman that looked his way. But it was not women, not even human beings of any sort, that surrounded him in that jungle clearing in the Central African Republic.

Gorillas.

A band of gorillas, in fact.

The Dracos. Or so had Dylan Shagari named them; they didn't seem to care much how he referred to them. Quick to communicate some messages, such as "Big, dangerous cat nearby," or "Food here," they didn't seem to take too much to words or conversations about relatively abstract subjects. Dylan Shagari had tried to simplify his syntax as much as possible, but that didn't really seem to resolve the problem; even "Me ate" seemed beyond them. The simple image, at least in the present context, seemed accessible to their brains, but the idea of subject and verb, especially a verb which conjugated or could be attached to time indicators, seemed well beyond them, as if their very brains had no sub-organs to process such forms of communication.

A poet well-versed in the prefaces and introductory chapters of many

great works of science, Dylan Shagari was well aware that not gorillas nor chimpanzees nor even the fabled dolphins had so much as a hint of language centers in their brains. The poor creatures, however well, or poorly, they got along in life, had no capacity for generating syntactically well-structured sentences. They most certainly did not have regions in the prefrontal cortex which allowed the sequencing necessary for complicated speeches or even simpleminded novels. As odd as it might seem to some, they did not even have the brain regions towards the rear of the mid-brain which were somehow related to remembering words in a highly specialized manner. No brain-cells organized to remember words for tools, none for cuddly animals with big eyes, and certainly none for proper nouns. Bereft of those regions, they had some capacity for making tools, but none for holding a tool in mind while contemplating possible improvements. The concept of a 'white house' was perhaps not fully beyond them, but the generalization to a class of objects or even the narrowing to 'White House' was beyond them. They had no brain structures to anchor a mind capable of dealing with such abstractions.

The Poet had been quite disappointed to realize the linguistic and mental inadequacies of his friends, the gorilla family he named the Dracos, but he had made his peace with their limitations and confined his communications to those possibilities. Of course, a man with the ambition of developing his talent for poetry to its utmost would only tolerate so much time spent picking fleas from amongst the hairs of his friends or having fleas picked from his largely hairless body.

He had tried reading Wordsworth to the Dracos, and almost all the members of that distinguished family would gather around to grin and rock back and forth to the rhythms of the Poet as well as the words of his precursor. However, they didn't seem at all interested in helping him to decide if Wordsworth had slighted the possibilities of his time in the interests of a past that never was. He suspected that, as difficult as the concept of past was to the Dracos, the idea of a fictional past was probably quite beyond them.

The Dracos had their good points, to be sure. They didn't smoke, and they drank no liquor. The adults rarely murdered the children as happened among humans and distressingly often amongst the common chimpanzee bands in the area. And, though they took no vitamins and rode no exercise machines, the Dracos ate plenty of fiber. Vast quantities of jungle foliage at that, with not a bit of red meat to vary their diet. Not even any white meat,

for that matter. They were, in fact, a gentle and peaceful bunch, almost to the point of being so timid as to be unable to deal with the rapid changes coming down upon Africa. Even Alpha Draco was quite gentle, though he could roar mightily and pound his chest as if it were a kettle drum. Gentle as a lamb, despite seeming to be the fellow of humorous fame. Five hundred pounds and, if he had been willing to aggressively assert himself, he probably could have sat wherever he damned well pleased. He was not nearly that assertive, and, in any case, the jungles were coming alive with creatures capable of dealing with the proper noun 'Uzi' and the general class of things labeled 'automatic weapons'.

The problems of communications between species, even those closely related by some types of genetic analyses, had led, however indirectly, to the Poet's current situation. He was sitting in that small jungle clearing, putting on a show of sorts for the Dracos. They wondered why he was using his fingers to tap away at that thing on his lap. He, for his part, had passed beyond the stage where he would have tried to explain to them the concept of laptop computer, let alone 900 MHz transmitter or worldwide web.

Yet, there had been intermediary events and thoughts between the realization that species didn't communicate too well and those efforts to send out essays and articles and even works of fiction to tell the intellectual class of an outside world that it had superstitiously misinterpreted certain abstract thoughts when it had not totally failed to grasp them in any way.

You see, as may happen in a scientific and rational culture, one thought had led to another.

Dylan Shagari had reasoned in this way:

Members of different species don't communicate well with one another;

Darwin and many of his followers had said human intelligence and language abilities had resulted from the accumulation of a large number of largely ad-hoc adaptations resulting from selections upon mutations uncorrelated with the external environment;

If there were other intelligent species in the universe, their specific intelligences and specific types of communication would be based upon equally ad-hoc responses to situations and needs as deeply alien as could be to the situations and needs of humans on Earth;

Meaningful contact between different species from different stellar systems would seem nearly impossible, at least by the worldviews of those most aggressive in diverting badly needed research funds to instigate such contact;

Maybe alien races wouldn't even consider communication with human beings to be any more desirable than communication with... gorillas!

By the most rigorous of reasoning processes, Dylan Shagari had discovered a new field of scientific research—the investigation of the kidnapping of gorillas by creatures from Alpha Centauri for the express purpose of conducting unauthorized, and likely unethical, experiments upon the poor creatures. The Poet had to admit that he was being anthropocentric in trying to impose primitive human ethical systems upon more advanced beings from out there somewhere, but, if morality and ethics were a matter of cultural convention, it was still true that the law was the law. Human witness told of those experiments being conducted by medical professionals almost certainly unlicensed in any major country on Earth. And they were degrading and painful experiments. Probing of sexual organs and bodily crevices seemed a specialty of those rather despicable doctors from across the galaxy, perhaps themselves products of dysfunctional families.

Or spore-fields.

Or whatever.

God was probably not in the details any more, or any less, than He was in the Big Picture, but good science was most certainly in the details, and it was somewhat bothersome that no one seemed to know much about those aliens except that, by the greatest of coincidences, they looked like creatures in science-fiction movies and television shows that were popular just before the first wave of alien abductions. This led some people to suspect that shadowy figures in one of the science fiction cults had been in contact with aliens without even having to divert scientific research funds which would have been better used to refine the estimates of the amount of deuterium produced in the early years of the Universe's current phase of expansion. On the other hand, though such information was of great importance in contemporary attempts to understand the quantitative and physical aspects of the universe, it was far less exciting than searching for evidence of alien radio and television transmissions which, if found, would have told us if those aliens had yet invented the situation comedy art-form. And little else. And probably not that much since no one knew if intelligent extraterrestrial species, assuming they existed, would have bothered to, or

have been capable of, developing human-style technology. Assuming they had, the Darwinian orthodoxy would indicate that interspecies communication would be limited to the exchange of tautological mathematical truths and perhaps a few observations about objects of interest to astrophysicists.

Realizing that science was built upon rigor and careful handling of details, Dylan Shagari also realized that pioneers had to sometimes break the rules and plow ahead when the details were as yet unknowable and rigor was not yet possible. Shortly after taking another courageous step into the unknown, a re-examination of the situation revealed that alien dentists seemed not to be involved in sadistic and unauthorized medical experiments. It seemed an important observation, though the Poet knew not if that meant the aliens had no teeth, and thus – no dentists, or if the ethical standards of dental societies on Alpha Centauri were higher than those of the medical societies. Certainly, if any of the abductions were as described, then aliens from the various stellar systems seemed uninterested in such important and accessible areas of research as the relative incidence of cavities on the molar teeth of people from different regions on Earth, with or without fluoridated water. It surprised the Poet still more that there seemed to be a dearth of kidnappings by aliens intent on investigating basic physiological and biomechanical issues. Before giving in to the pessimistic conclusion that alien thought was so alien as to contain defective versions of the scientific method, Dylan Shagari contemplated the matter once more, reasoning:

Alien medical practitioners seemed to be not only sadistic but also inordinately interested in sexual organs and bodily crevices;

The thought came that these were adolescent aliens who had borrowed their spore-source's flying saucer for a joy-ride about the galaxy, but that seemed unsupported by any but the most circumstantial evidence.

Neither the Dracos nor the other gorillas in the area reacted to pictures or plastic models of flying saucers;

Nor did they react to surgical instruments;

They seemed to have not even the most implicit memories of alien abductions and medical procedures;

[This was the tricky part where it seemed necessary to bring in information which had not formerly seemed relevant to the analysis.]

Gorillas are extremely undersexed creatures by the standards of humans and chimpanzees – female gorillas have practically no sexual desires and the 500 pound males have penises only an inch long when fully erect;

[The Poet hypothesized that there was something about the natures of those alien medical practitioners which drew them to creatures of high libido, but alas. . .]

Rigorously controlled interrogation sessions with a friendly band of highly sexed pygmy chimpanzees just down the trail revealed no traces of memories of alien abductions or investigations of bodily crevices, which were in any case freely offered to curious probers – of the same sub-species – by the typical pygmy chimp;

[The pygmy sub-species was, of course, chosen as a male from the common chimpanzee sub-species has both the strength and the temperament to literally rip a human being limb from limb, and the females are not all that much better natured. In addition, the pygmy sub-species is even more highly sexed, or at least more open to sexual experimentation than the larger, common sub-species, leading to the possibility that they would be more open to sexual experimenters of extra-terrestrial origin.]

The conclusion was forced, much against the desire of the Poet who would have retained a more idealistic view of the inclinations of all primates;

Alien abductions and sexual experimenters from Alpha Centauri seemed to be an epiphenomenon, a result of human views of the world rather than objectively verifiable events;

As to the diversion of research funds to search for evidence of late-night talk shows being broadcast from Betelgeuse. . .

The investigations had pointed back to the Poet. More generally—to his species.

Only a race with language and the mind to use it in abstract ways could develop the imagination necessary to interpret electromagnetic signals from

the heavens as being evidence of that thing almost as unlikely as extraterrestrial life—a black hole. Rather far was that search, let alone the objects of that search, from anything to be discovered on the African savannas where a largely unknown primate might have lived 8 million years ago before giving rise to chimpanzees as well as to hominids who would eventually give rise to modern human beings. More dangerously, that imagination could lead to tales of alien abduction or to the diversion of badly needed research funds to an incoherently conceived search for intelligent life beyond the Earth. Beyond the Solar System. Beyond the Milky Way. Longfar agoway in spacetime.

The Poet's efforts went for naught. His essays were rejected as well as his newsy articles and even his short stories relating his investigations of alien abductions amongst gorillas and pygmy chimps—though he only investigated one band of the latter species leading to fears that that part of his research project was statistically suspect.

Perhaps that was why no one was interested in the Poet's analyses and conclusions.

Perhaps independent peer reviewers well-versed in the ways of experimental design and analysis had recommended that Dylan Shagari's sad, and thoroughly imaginary, tales not be published.

21 The Open Independence of the Sea: Believing That a Person is Not Easily Exhausted, an Author Continues to Describe a Poet

The poet.

That was what he was, whatever talent he may have lacked.

Others wrote streams of words more pretty than he, but few were so fluent with the unpronounceable Diracishly bracketed phrases so beautiful in and of themselves. It uglified a bit to bra and ket the complementary quantifications of modern science. Confused matters, it did, to speak of the truths outside of the ken of the scientific method. Yet, a poet must have the courage to speak the truth, however utilitarian it might some-place-time be.

The poet.

Faloodling was not what he was, but rather something he did.

And, yet...

Was a man truly less than what he did and when-where he did it with whom and under what skies? After all, does not an environment shape a man's thoughts? Verified has it been that the Eskimos have at least one word for snow, at least that many for ice. Most likely have they one for white, another for ivory, and perhaps one for pearl. Truly, one can imagine how a person's thoughts are molded into Eskimo thoughts by such a language expressively snow-flaked in one way and restrictively iced-over in just the same way.

Had the poet said that men were superstitious because they spoke a

superstitious language?

Once or twice, but not consistently. He was too wise, though not clever enough, to always avoid such an error.

No, the poet had said something entirely different.

Ever one to steal an idea from another field of thought, he had stolen from the general relativists, though most were, in fact, invariantly absolutists of a mild sort.

Said he, and did he ever speak it with the greatest gusto, did he? did:

The mind tells words how to move;
the words tell mind how to shape itself.

But where could he have gotten such an idea? He was only a poet and not a psycholinguist, though it be possible that he once registered for an introductory course in linguistics. No, it was from the camp of the physicists that such beautiful poetry had come. The poet was rather an unscrupulous opportunist than a scientist noble and disciplined of thought. Known to have stolen Dirac's elegant tools for dealing with uncomplementary aspects of things, he boldly sneaked into the textbooks of the theorists of gravity, though not all grave were they. Invisible under his mantle of timelessness, he claimed the right of poets. Recessing at an acceleration nearly infinite, though short by a hair, he sped into the night before a physicist could lay a hand upon him. The caper had been carried off, and the poet gave no one else credit, claiming to have stolen the phrases on his own. I have not answered the question which shall decide the fate of the poet's reputation: Was a man truly less than what he did and when-where he did it with whom and under what skies? A puzzling question, that. Still the aspiring poet remained convinced that a man was not an essence defined by nucleic acid stuff.

Incoherently had a substantial dualism entered the world of science by many back-doors. Drunkenly did that evil twin dance across the stage of the globe, though morely was it a planet than a theater.

Dylan Shagari, though merely an unattached apprentice of a poet, rose from the bed. Departed from the side of the pretty neurobiologist did he. It was time for a self-examination. Knew he well the body five feet, ten inches tall. Slenderly muscular was the body, that of a slightly out of dance shaper of words.

That was not the point.

The face.

Dark brown eyes from Nigeria. Twinkled they with the fluid rhythms of a soul bridged to the world by a culture mostly Niger-Kodifarian, though descended somewhat further, but with several modifications. Welsh were the thinnish lips set upon a face of a complexion not well-selected for making vitamin D in the northern latitudes.

The scar. . .

Nasty. The metal prod had gone through the right cheek and out the left, taking four teeth with it.

22 The Open Independence of the Sea: Where We Learn that Gorillas Are a Poet's Best Friends

Dylan Shagari, though possessing no specialized training in primatology, had been friends with the gorillas. A reciprocal relationship had they had, yes, had they had such for sure. The poet smiled, and then he remembered bringing fruit to his jungle comrades. In return, they had combed his body with their strong fingers, searching for fleas and ticks. Any of the little critters on his body would have recently jumped from his massive friends and would certainly be gone after his next shower.

Still, he minded little, though slightly allergic to fleas.

He had accepted the gorillas for what he thought them to be, and they had seemed to mirror his tolerance.

The poachers. . .

He had heard Nudra scream and had reached the clearing to see the little 150 pound fellow in a net and his mother Xidra being skinned though she was not quite dead.

Nudra?

Xidra?

He had named them after two of the more famous stars in the constellation Draco, of course. It had seemed appropriate at the time. It even gave them a family name – Draco. The big cheese, the fellow who sat wherever he damned well pleased, the 500-pound patriarch, was named Alpha, though largely a figurehead had he been. Like most male gorillas, he was not really inclined to fighting, and he ruled at the pleasure of his harem, though the

females tended not readily towards the overthrow of a still living lord and master.

Alpha did not seem to mind the qualifications on his unlimited power.

He and the four females, other than Xidra, had likely been long gone when the poachers had so rudely driven the metal rod through the face of a young man more a poet than a policeman. To be sure, he had surprised them, and they might have thought that to be rude, but—they had inflicted horrors upon gentle Xidra.

Came to a while later, did he. Uncle James, rifle lying on the ground, was cutting Nudra free from the nets. Dylan Shagari felt pinches in his cheek and he realized his face felt as tingly and numb as when his wisdom teeth had come out. Aunt Morgan, a researcher rather than a clinician, had nevertheless set herself to the task of stitching his face up as best she could under the circumstances. Perceptions fuzzy, thinking processes not doing much better, he had wondered why there was a man slumped in a sitting position against a tree on the other side of the clearing.

Dylan Shagari, not feeling muchly like a poet wishing to celebrate life, noticed that the man had a gaping hole in the center of his naked chest. “An odd spot for a hole,” he thought to himself, not having a lot of control over his vocal apparatus. From a short distance into the jungle came the sound of semi-automatic rifle fire. Nudra took the opportunity to skedaddle into the jungle, looking back in the direction of his dead mother and howling just before he disappeared into the foliage.

Xidra still had her hide attached at her legs. Above that, she was a fly-covered mess. One side of her skull was caved in. Undoubtedly, the result of bullets fired in mercy.

Too bad.

A generous, loving creature had she been.

She had shared with Dylan Shagari the fruit he brought her.

She had given fleas, only to take them back and crunch them between massive jaws.

It had been better that way, even if some might have questioned her sincerity.

Not a selfish gene had she in her body.

Well. . .

Maybe a few trillions of thousands, but that was all.

And clearly she had not always heeded their commands.

Dylan Shagari was still conscious when Chief Shagari entered the clear-

ing. Uzi in hand. Big man. Six feet, three if he was an inch. Not that he was really an inch.

Still. . .

The unclly Chief and the unclly engineer, one so dark and one so light, traded nods. Odd that two men so different would have been able to communicate so easily. A small band of pygmies who were themselves small, though not stereotypically tiny, followed in the Chief's wake. They wore nothing but loincloths and weapons. Traditionalists, they carried bows and arrows. Great hunters, they smiled as if they had enjoyed success. Dylan Shagari wondered what they had done with the corpses of the poachers, though it would not be long before the question would be moot in a jungle teeming with hungry life, small and large.

Chief Shagari, concerned uncle that he was, nodded towards the man with the gaping hole in his chest. The pygmy hunters, agreeable fellows that they were, smiled in response to the command, but, first, two of them came over to fulfill their social obligations. Touched Dylan Shagari's numb cheek in sympathy, did they? did, as odd as it might have seemed to a person of European descent. Looking as if they were watching the suffering of a child of their own, they smiled sadly at him and then made clickety word sounds before turning to help their comrades dispose of the corpse with his chestly innards exposed to the environment both nurturing and unforgiving. All materials must needs be recycled for the sake of other entities struggling for their chance at life.

The Chief, though dressed in khakis and more a Harvard-trained wildlife biologist than a tribal politician, walked over and moved the young man's head to better see his wound and the stitches provided by Morgan Llewellyn. Inspection completed, he stood and, as strange as it seemed under the circumstances, spoke in English. "We'd best get him to a hospital as soon as possible."

With a hole through his face and veins full of morphine, Dylan Shagari did not feel up to participation in such difficult projects.

He merely listened as the aunt more European than African nodded but said, "I've cleaned the wounds and. . ."

Touching the scar as lightly as he could while still making contact, the poet could re-call nothing from that point until the middle of the night when he woke up in a hospital in Lagos. Not a minute of the trip by helicopter and plane did he remember, and he never put in the effort to collect data that he might re-member the painful trip. A few fuzzy images

and unrecognizable sounds had been re-membered of his experiences in the operating room while the surgeons were cleaning his wounds and surveying the damage that they might repair his jaw and cheek.

23 The Open Independence of the Sea: The Poet Returns to Contemplate the Wonder of a Rather Lovely Member of His Own Species

“Poor Xidra!” spoke the poet out loud. When he added, “I hope Nudra found his father and aunts and cousins,” he heard stirring behind him.

Aimélie was sitting up, dazed and sleepy of face. Her breasts were above the covers and pushed up like those of a teenaged cheerleader. Never was it clear to him when she entranced by natural motion and when by calculated posing.

“Mystifyingly magical, your perky breasts project papillae towards my perturbed perceptors.”

She scrunched up her face and cocked her head towards her right. Though obviously half awake, she roused many a region of a brain so ingeniously, if accidentally, adapted for speech. From her white-flecked lips so poutishly pink, from the depths of a throat parched mouth-breathingly raw, came forth, “What?”

“Nothing, Aimélie, just a compliment that was a first-line effort at a misdirected and metaphorically impoverished poem.”

Cupping her own breasts and smiling playfully at a wordfully frustrated poet, she asked, “Are not my perky breasts the stuff of which many a poet has spoken prolixities of praise?”

The poet pounced, crawling up the bed rapidly, to leave himself upon all fours above the beloved sufficient unto the night. Lecherously leered he

downward. Bared he his teeth, and that he did for sure, as he hissed, “And spoke of gazelles a king too wise to have ever threatened to sunder a left breast so succulent from a right breast just as suchlike.”

Aimélie, 100% French though her almond-shaped eyes and light-bronze skin came from elsewhere, laughed and asked, “So, my dearest, will it be ‘S’ & ‘P’ tonight?”

“Perhaps, and maybe a little ‘B’ as well, though my brain is seized by images appealing muchly to my succitatory organ. Suffer I perhaps from temporal lobe seizures. I am often seeing large breasts and small and few indeed to be labeled as average let alone normal.”

“And mine?”

“Are quite perky.”

She laughed and wagged a finger at him. “The brave poet displays his cravenly diplomatic side.”

Even as the young man shrugged, he was already dropping down, down, so far down.

24 The Treacherous, Slavish Shore: Where Del Swing Gets to Work

I didn't like one-night stands, especially when I was just being used by a woman who really wanted another guy. So, it might have been just sexual frustration when I awoke feeling so much rage that I thought of punching the wall. Not my style. I didn't exactly have fists like Joe Louis, and I might have broken bones even if I found a spot without any wood.

But I was still thinking about it. Punching the wall, that is. Instead I sat in bed, hunched up so that my arms and my chin rested on my knees. Staring out the bedroom window, I could see the strip-malls and fast-food joints. The tree buds were breaking out into leaves. When that happened, the ugliness of commercial development would be obscured. Maybe so obscured as to be invisible.

There were a lot of things to get angry about. My life wasn't going all that well. I had not even written a single page of my contemporary, fast-paced thriller. I hadn't even been thinking much about it. Consciously. But things were stirring in the back of my mind. Now that I had so much unfocused. energy, I was ready to start the book...

25 Good and Evil: An Unexpected Hero

James Williams was more than a bit down on his luck that day as he walked into the unemployment office, but he walked in with his head held high. The July heat in Alexandria was oppressive. Even more oppressive was his feeling of embarrassment, but he had not lost his self-esteem. He was not accustomed to be dependent upon others, and he would not be in that position for long. Since he had left his parents' house at 18 to enter the University of Virginia, he had stood on his own two feet. He'd paid for college by government grants and part-time jobs. Never had he asked anyone for a handout.

A short period at the FDA had led to a very attractive job at the food-processing giant OrgProd. He had been happy to be working at a place that set high ethical standards. They had proven that morally decent corporations could succeed in the American economy.

OrgProd put no additives in the children's food and used only natural sweeteners and small amounts of salt in all the other foods. And people had bought the healthy cupcakes and granola bars by the basket.

The working conditions were good at OrgProd. Management treated everybody with respect.

And the day came when OrgProd caught the interest of the corporate raiders—Snoope, Kringle & Papp. Thinking it would make even more money if the company used cheaper ingredients produced by the tanker in chemical plants, they analyzed the situation. The resulting report showed there were surplus funds in the accounts for pension and medical benefits for retired workers. The insurance benefits for current workers also seemed too high. There was a lot of liquid assets which could be used to buy the company out and to reward the risk-takers who did so.

They went shopping for a partner with deep pockets and found the giant tobacco processor Innoral. The management of OrgProd proved incapable of swimming with the sharks. Having organized themselves and developed their skills for properly running a morally decent corporation, they were no match for tobacco giant Innoral and corporate raiders Snoope, Kringle & Papp. The takeover was quick, so ruthless as to be bloodless. The victim had not even been able to mount any effective delaying defenses.

Things began to change right away. Current benefits remained good. Pay even went up for hard workers. Innoral inserted a new top management, made of people trained in the aggressive tobacco industry. OrgProd began to add salt and sugar and caffeine to the organic foods. To be sure, the company followed federal regulations. Mostly, that meant the labels were changed to reflect the lower corporate standards. 'Organic' was replaced by terms like 'vitamin-fortified' and 'fat-free'. After all, a hunk of sugar, laced with salt and caffeine, was pretty much fat-free. Add in a few indigestible vitamins, and you'd have a food fit to produce and entrap hyperactive kids and fat adults. The final straw for James Williams came when Innoral conducted a joint marketing campaign involving their Llama cigarettes and OrgProd's pride and joy – Aunt Gertie's Fudge Brownies, formerly 100% organic.

James skedaddled one Friday evening with every file he could find. It was all there. All the damning evidence that they were not only selling addictive poisons, but they knew how bad the stuff was for people. The Innoral marketing people had organized the campaign around the addictive properties of nicotine and caffeine and sugar and salt. They knew of the dangers of abusing these chemicals. They knew what tars in cigarette smoke did to the lungs. They conducted the most cynical and evil advertising campaigns during the breaks of popular television shows and hit movies. Children were to be turned into pudgy couch potatoes, munching on chocolate bars between puffs on their cigarettes. And the movies and television shows contained violence and sex at that!

James Williams bought a page-scanner on the way home. He set up a pot of coffee even before taking the scanner out of the box. By the time the pot was brewed, the scanner was ready for business. The righteous young man was so upset at the evils of his time that he forsook sleep for the rest of the weekend. He was determined to show himself different from those guys that just did their jobs, driving the trains into the death-camps. Two days and six pots of coffee later, he had put thousands of pages of

documentation upon the World-Wide Web. He wasn't even sure where it was all stored, but he kept getting encouraging messages all weekend from some anti-smoking group at MIT.

As long as there were more pages to feed into the scanner, he had the courage of red-hot anger. When he finished, he felt like he had gone over the edge of a cliff. His stomach was full of coffee, potato chips, and chocolate chip cookies. He felt torn between a desire for sleep and an equally strong desire to hang his head over the toilet and empty his stomach.

Monday morning, he phoned his resignation in and then called a friend at *The Washington Post* to let the world know what he had done. Other than prospective employers and a handful of college students and professors, the world proved it didn't care that much, after the initial excitement had died down. James Williams feared he had sacrificed himself for nothing.

26 Good and Evil: Humbled by an Uncaring World

The unemployment office was stifflingly hot, and it smelled funny. Industrial cleaner-smell mixed with the odor of all the dirt and sweat it had failed to wash away. The floor was greenish linoleum. All counter-tops dividing supplicants from bureaucrats were covered with a Formica of a greenish tint that matched the floor. The furniture behind the counter seemed to be mostly drab-green metal.

Clearly, the people waiting for help were unskilled people of the sort unable to take care of themselves. A shudder went up the back of James Williams as he thought of his college degree and his résumé so weighed down with responsible jobs held at the FDA and OrgProd. He shivered again and wondered how he had fallen so low. He was wondering if this was how the world rewarded courage and moral decency.

But, at least he had a scheduled appointment. At 11:30 on the dot, a punctual young man of good work habits and useful familiarity with the ways of a bureaucratized society was summoned into the office of Ms. Daphne Strickland. As he walked through the waist-high door to enter the inner sanctum, James turned back. A black man, fiftiesh and with a shaved head, glared at him. James smiled back at the man to let him know there were no hard feelings. The man just glared and James turned to follow the skinny young man to Ms. Strickland's office.

Ms. Strickland was a blond in her late 20s or so. She looked like a pretty, little doll behind the large metal desk covered by about eight neat piles of paper and files. Each pile was at least six inches high. Clearly, she was an impressive young lady to handle so much work, and such important work at that. As James walked in, she motioned towards the two chairs in front of her desk, but she only flashed her pretty green eyes before returning

them to a sheet of paper which she was marking up with a red pen. The plain-white blouse and blue-wool suit told the young man that this was one government bureaucrat who knew which end was up. She was clearly a woman who could get things done and done right at that.

He was a little surprised a moment later when she raised her head to gaze at him eye-to-eye. James Williams couldn't help letting his eyes stray to take in the soft-white complexion broken only by the pale-pink upon her cheeks. He admired the firmness of her jaw, the well-defined chin. His eyes might have strayed farther south if she had not said, "We have a position for you, Mr. Williams."

The voice sounded like Birmingham, but the accent was softened still further by her years in northern Virginia. Her eyes entranced the young man. So confident and competent without sacrificing anything natural to her feminine nature. Her business-like exterior cracked for just a second when she smiled shyly at him, but she quickly looked away to one of her piles. She reached into the middle of the pile and found just the paper she needed.

"Mr. D.C. Farnsworth, a very prominent local attorney, manages a large estate which is for the benefit of a man who is severely autistic. Attorney Farnsworth would like to hire you to be the companion of the unfortunate man. You will receive room and board, use of a car, and \$300 a week in salary. All you have to do is live in the house, large and well-furnished, I believe. And you have to make some effort to befriend the fellow and socialize him a little bit. Take him out to eat, even if it's just to a hamburger joint."

James Williams' eyes grew round as he imagined a ditzzy fellow who wandered around the house reciting the batting averages of the 1932 Yankees without being able to so much as look into the eyes of another human being. Yet, beggars couldn't be choosers, and this sounded like a plum job that would give him time to think and to find another career. When she handed him the form with the instructions, he thought of taking it and leaving quietly. Some part of him wanted peace and quiet for a while. But he was too adventure-prone for that. Proudly he rose and asked, "Does Attorney Farnsworth know of my recent legal problems?"

Certainly, Daphne Strickland had. Her eyes were overflowing with admiration as she stared up and nodded at James Williams standing so tall, not at all ashamed that he had spent a week in jail and paid a fine of \$1,000 for taking those conspiratorial files and memos that technically be-

longed to someone else. They had labeled it 'stealing' but right-thinking men and women had labeled it an 'act of courage'. In that day and age, with so much greed and cowardice around, someone had to dare to speak out publicly against those companies that made money by foisting unhealthy substances on innocent Americans so unaware of the dangers of tobacco. James Williams was the man who had dared to take such a stand, and Daphne Strickland admired him for it.

Seizing the opportunity, he dropped his voice and asked, "How would you like to go out for dinner Friday night? And maybe a movie or dancing afterward?" Daphne blushed and looked out the glass walls to her office. The coast was clear, though she could never be sure when someone might walk by. Keeping an officious expression upon her face, she opened a side-drawer to pull out a memo pad. Even as she wrote something upon the pad, she said, "We really aren't supposed to do this sort of thing with a client, but I'll give you my number. Give me a call this evening." She smiled shyly again as she handed him the slip of paper, and James Williams smiled gently to put her at ease even as he slipped the paper into his coat pocket.

With the form for the job in his hand, James Williams strolled confidently out of the state office building. He was feeling an urge to whistle, but he didn't. Now that he was a public figure, he felt it proper for him to act with a certain dignity.

27 Good and Evil: Idiot Savants and Scientists

The Longfield mansion was a sprawling place set in the midst of a wooded area a few miles away from other houses. The house was closely surrounded by abandoned gardens in which neglected rose plants 10 foot long could be seen as well as some sprawling bushes that might have once been neat lavender plants and some evergreens that might have once been sculpted and were now just huge shapeless messes. A sharp eye could still pick out the signs of paved paths though they were mostly covered with thick layers of mosses and vines. Stone fountains and various statues could be seen by anyone curious enough to push back the grapevines and young sycamores that had sprung up in the cleared areas. Just outside of those gardens were abandoned fields gone to weeds, wildflowers, and brush.

The mansion was in far better shape than the grounds, even though the white paint was peeling. The place needed a few minor carpentry repairs to windows, eaves, and shutters. With that done and a new paint job, it would have looked its former magnificent self.

James Williams tried the doorbell a couple of times. When there was no response, he banged on the doorknocker a few times. It had been a good five minutes that he had stood at the door with no answer, and he decided to try the door-knob. It was open, and he told himself that he worked at the place now. Then he walked in, secure in the knowledge he wasn't trespassing in any way.

It was dark inside the entranceway, but it took on a few seconds of groping along the wall to his left to find the switch for the lights. The place was now brightly lit by a large chandelier, and he could see it was a mess. The walls were grimy as if they had not been cleaned or painted for several years. The floors supported several large piles of junk. There

was a particularly large pile near the stairway on the left. Near the top of that pile were an ancient toaster and several rusted out frying pans of the cast-iron sort so good for cooking cornbread.

James Williams stood there, looking at the holes in the part of the carpet that could be seen. He was not sure what to do. He wondered if the people living here owned guns which they might use if he surprised them without a chance to explain who he was. He had to do something, but he was a well-bred young man and didn't want to walk deeper into the house on his own. He had counted five fairly large holes in the carpet and was about to count up the holes less than four inches in diameter when he heard a rustling and shuffling sort of sound. He thought it came from down the hallway jutting into the house from the middle of so of the entranceway. The hallway was unlit, and he was starting to imagine a crazy Prescott Longfield shuffling in his direction, knife in hand, fear in his heart. James was about to turn around and walk out the door when he saw that it was an elderly black lady coming his way. When she was closer, he could see she wore an old-fashioned house dress with faded blue and yellow flowers. A red bandanna was wrapped around her head.

As she drew near, she exclaimed, "You mus'be Mister Williams. Esquire Farnsworth tol' me you was a'comin'."

The accent was thick as if she had just come up from the cotton-fields of Mississippi. The manner was subservient as if she had not yet been told of *The Emancipation Proclamation*.

James Williams offered her his hand and said, "Yes, Ma'am. Thought I'd get over here right away and meet everybody." He wasn't sure if the woman was shocked by the thought of shaking hands with a white man or by that man calling her "Ma'am." but she sure took his hand very tentatively, and for only a fraction of a second.

"I'll take you right up to meet Mister Prescott. He's just eating his lunch, Mister Williams."

James Williams thought himself prepared for the worst that the situation could offer, but he wasn't. Prescott Longfield was in a huge room with piles of junk against the wall. There were more piles of picture magazines and newspapers and books and pieces of electronics equipment in the middle of the floor. There looked to be some old, dirty plates in the piles as well. The old lady had been long overwhelmed by the task of caring for a mansion built to be maintained by a full-time staff of ten or more.

Prescott Longfield was himself not in much better condition than his

room. Shirtless and shoeless, he was dressed in dirty, white socks and farmer's overalls. There was a plate in front of him holding a hunk of home-baked bread and several slabs of gristly, fatty ham. He was greedily chewing upon a mouthful even as he stared at a hardboard poster leaning against a chair that was piled high with still more picture books with titles like *The Friendly Sun* as well as all kinds of books by Carl Sagan and Issac Asimov and all those other great science-writers. The poster displayed an exploding star.

The man himself was fortiesh, with a large paunch and fleshy shoulders and arms. His hair was graying, long and stuck together in greasy clumps.

In a voice which seemed to come from far away, and maybe long ago, he announced, "I've figured out how to build a hydrogen bomb. I just need some more refrigerating equipment."

James Williams knew that there were not many people who knew how to build a hydrogen bomb. Even most physicists hadn't figured out how to do it. Yet, Prescott Longfield had sat staring at a picture of an exploding star and figured out the trick. That was when James Williams first knew there was something special about the autistic man's mind. He was a scientific genius trapped inside an otherwise defective brain. Someone needed to direct him that his mental powers might be used for the good of mankind. James Williams was wondering if he could somehow put the fellow in contact with some sympathetic scientists. Maybe Prescott could figure out how to build a warp-drive so men could get to the stars. Maybe he already had figured it out if someone could coax it out of him.

28 Good and Evil: American Traditions

Prescott Longfield continued to stare at the poster, while mumbling numbers to himself. The housekeeper turned to leave and James Williams followed her.

“I’ll show you your room so’s you can move in your stuff, Mr Williams.”

Thank you, Mrs. . . .” James Williams flushed as he realized he had never gotten the woman’s name. Determined to treat her with the respect which was her right, he asked, “What is your name? Mrs. . . .?”

She walked on ahead of him, not even turning her head as she said, “Some calls me Annie and others calls me Auntie Annie.”

“But, what is your last name?”

“MacKee, but I doubts you knows any of my kin.”

“That’s not why I asked, Mrs. MacKee.” She stopped on a dime and turned, some mixture of anger and confusion showing on her face. “If you really insist, I’ll call you Aunt Annie.”

“Close enough,” and she turned and walked a few feet farther before she opened a door on her right. Not sure what he could do to break down the barriers of a race-conscious society, James Williams followed her into a room that was more than a little dusty. Other than the dust, the room was in pretty good shape. The furniture was oversized, old-fashioned stuff. The wood had a dark finish, maybe mahogany.

James Williams strode past Mrs. MacKee. Reaching the window, he pulled the drapes to the side, letting the light into the Longfield mansion. It had probably been decades since light had entered the place. Maybe longer. After all, the Longfields had been tobacco farmers, not the most progressive of people, though James Longfield, Prescott’s grandfather, had been a more forward-looking man than his ancestors. He had moved much

of the family money into retail and real estate development.

That was when the fortune had really grown, but all the money in the world could not have erased the stains caused by two centuries or more of handling tobacco. With the drapes pulled, James Williams was able, in fact, to see the nicotine stains upon what had once been light wallpaper of some bluish tint. The thought of all that smoke over the 100 years that the mansion had stood was upsetting to his sensibilities. It made him think of leaving. After all, even if Prescott's money was clean, coming from malls and convenience stores, it had originally come from a weed that destroyed people's lungs.

After unpacking his suitcase, James Williams sat in an overstuffed leather recliner and looked out over the pristine woods. The trees were almost fully opened up. There was yellow dust settled on a driveway and on the red roof of a shed, both behind the house. And, then, someone sneezed behind him. Startled and feeling nervous in a house associated with his recent problems, he jumped out of the chair and turned around, in one motion. He found himself staring at Prescott Longfield who was standing in the middle of the room. He was looking up at the place where wall and ceiling met. James Williams wondered if he was counting the hundreds of little flowers in the border of the wallpaper. That would have been a difficult task, requiring a lot of concentration since the room was a good 30 feet square. The truth was that Prescott's brain was just processing the patterns formed by the flowers. He wasn't counting, and there was no purpose to the analysis other than the sheer enjoyment of those patterns. Nothing would come of it, and the patterns were being lost to memory as fast as they were discovered.

After Prescott's eyes had passed all the way around the room, he found himself facing the door to the hallway. He left, not having shown any sign that James Williams even existed.

With his sympathy piqued, James Williams followed the poor fellow out into the hallway. A few seconds later, Prescott ducked into a room forty feet down. James Williams continued to follow and started to enter the room just as Prescott was closing the door. With the doorway thus blocked, Prescott stood staring at the obstacle, a creature oddly like himself in some ways. Prescott's eyelids blinked rapidly as he did his best to meet the steady gaze of the man offering friendship. Contact was not made, at least not solidly. Prescott turned into the room without a word, though it was a good sign that he had left the door half-open.

In contrast to the other rooms in the house, this one was spotless and

well-organized. There were metal boxes with wires and cables running between them. There were consoles with disks, gauges, and keyboards. There were at least two desktop computers. A single 3-shelf bookcase held technical manuals for the equipment as well as a few being written by Prescott as he was inventing new pieces of equipment.

James Williams had barely had time to take inventory before Prescott Longfield had set himself to work connecting circuit boards in an open rack. Fortunately, James knew enough about hydrogen bombs to know they involved refrigeration equipment or something like that. This place was mostly filled with electronics.

Prescott was staring at a circuit board as if trying to become one with it before connecting it to whatever he was building. James pulled up a chair. As the legs scraped across the floor, Prescott's entire body tightened as if he had just been shocked by his own equipment. Either the movement or sound had disturbed him, but his eyes seemed to be focused upon the empty spot two feet in front of his face.

The best psychiatrist in the world wouldn't have been able to say with certainty if that was progress, but Prescott was being disturbed from his self-absorbed routine. Was that enough to bring him closer to the real world? Prescott's eyes drifted slowly back to the work in front of him. James decided to make another attempt at meaningful contact. He asked, "What is it you're building?"

Prescott connected two more pieces of the contraption before answering, "A computer." His voice was surprisingly clear for someone who was so thoroughly autistic that he rarely spoke. The isolated genius was trying to concentrate on something, but James Williams was determined to bring him into the community of modern man. Rather than letting Prescott sink further into his work, the young man cursed with a social conscience asked, "Why not go down to The Copper Arches and buy one?" Prescott's eyelids blinked rapidly for a few seconds as if his brain were processing the question, and then—"This will be the fastest and most powerful computer in the world."

That was a shocking announcement even though James Williams had already decided Prescott was one of those scientific geniuses who could solve any problem, build any machine. And it seemed so sad that such a smart fellow was stuck inside his own head which was stuck inside a dirty mansion.

James Williams decided he had done as much as possible at that time, without unduly upsetting Prescott. He was justifiably proud that he had

at least made Prescott more aware of mankind, though the poor fellow was still on the outside looking in.

29 Good and Evil: Crusading for Mental Health

By Friday, James Williams had made still more progress. Two days of talking to Prescott while he was trying to sink into his work had made the poor fellow almost sociable. After all that effort, he was ready for a break. It had truly worn him down to be continually speaking to a man determined to waste his genius in social isolation when he should have been part of a scientific team, designing satellites or looking for new particles or something like that. He had also made a few phone calls to friends at a couple universities to verify that no one had ever heard of Prescott Longfield. He had written no papers—at least none that had been published. He attended no conventions or conferences and didn't call his fellow-scientists when he ran into a brick wall. With his lonely work habits being broken, Prescott would be forced to make contact with other men, including other scientists. There was no telling what he could accomplish if he became a more sociable creature. He could be going off to conferences regularly. He could give speeches to other scientists and to the general public. He could be giving interviews to the better newsweeklies and to *The New York Times* when a satellite caught a picture of the creation of the universe. There was no limit to what Prescott would be able to accomplish under the new circumstances.

No one could even guess what problems could be solved as Prescott began to network with his fellow-scientists. As it was, the poor man had never even heard of the World-Wide Web until James Williams had explained it to him Thursday evening. Prescott's first response had been to return to his focused stare upon empty space. It was as if he couldn't understand all the advantages he could gain from being on the Web all those lonely hours when no reporters wanted to interview him and there were no conventions to attend. The poor fellow would soon enough know the advantages that a

creative thinker could gain from a constant flow of communications.

James Williams couldn't help thinking that his efforts to help a fellow human being had earned him a pleasant evening with Daphne Strickland. He was on his way to meet her at Scampy's Bar and Grille. It was a casual but upscale place. The food was said to be excellent, especially the ribs and Mexican stuff.

When he walked in, the place was pretty empty. That wasn't surprising since it was only 7:30, and the place would appeal most to people who kept a later schedule. James Williams didn't mind much. He wasn't the sort to be always worried about his image. If he had been greatly concerned about what other people thought, he might not have had the courage to take his stand against tobacco and unhealthy food additives. And besides that, he was meeting a pretty girl who would be there any minute.

He also needed time to think through the mysterious events in which he was embedded. Farnsworth had never shown up to talk to him. A secretary had come with papers to sign. An employment contract, said to be for James Williams' benefit more than the benefit of the Longfield estate. There had also been some insurance papers to sign. The Longfield estate was providing health insurance and even a large term life insurance policy with the estate as beneficiary. James Williams was getting suspicious. Something wasn't right, but he couldn't figure out what was happening.

He was still nursing his first mug of beer when Daphne walked in. She was a bit fidgety as she looked over the place, as if this was her first date. When she saw James, she smiled shyly and walked over. After she said, "Hi," and sat down, they were both silent for a moment or two. She stared nervously at no place in particular. That was just as well for James Williams as it gave him a chance to study the cut of those cheeks which were so expressive of her intellectual and moral qualities.

By the time they were munching on chips and guacamole, Daphne was talking freely. She spoke of her undergraduate years at George Mason University and then retreated to speak of her childhood in Birmingham. Her parents had actually been from Bismarck, and they had moved to Huntsville when her father took a job as an auditor for NASA. When the time came for re-assignment to Texas, the Stricklands decided to settle in Alabama. The old man started a CPA practice in Birmingham, eventually selling out to a prosperous regional firm in return for a safer partnership in that larger firm.

She had a brother who was doing well as a lawyer in Richmond. James

Williams was pretending interest and struggling to stay awake when he heard the name 'Farnsworth'. He placed his hand on hers and asked, "What was that about Farnsworth?" It wasn't until then that he noticed her eyes were wet.

Nervously withdrawing her hand from his, she replied, "He decided to leave the Innoral legal department to go to work for Farnsworth's firm." Hearing 'Innoral' and 'Farnsworth' in the same sentence surprised him. She must have noticed his surprise because she explained, "Farnsworth is one of Innoral's most trusted outside lawyers. David's move was negotiated between Attorney Farnsworth and the VP for legal affairs at Innoral. David said lawyers move all the time between private practice and their corporate clients. Dad said CPAs do that a lot as well."

That was an interesting piece of data about modern social and cultural practices, but, having no active pointers telling him in which cluster that data was to be stored, James Williams purged it from his working memory to free up space for more important purposes. He was particularly interested in exploring this connection between Innoral and Farnsworth. He wondered why an outside attorney for Innoral would hire a young man fired as a troublemaker by that company. Something was beginning to reek of conspiracy, and he decided he had to move fast with Daphne, to see if she knew anything before her brother warned her not to talk to James Williams.

By the time their Mexican combo platters had arrived, their knees were touching. While they ate, James played it cool and gossiped about the all the events that defined the day. He talked about the Redskins' chances for the Super Bowl in the upcoming season. He talked about the campaign financing scandal which had so shocked Washington. And there was the threat of war looming just over the horizon. Above all, James avoided asking Daphne anything about her brother or Farnsworth or Innoral. After the plates were cleared away, James took Daphne's hand in his. They talked about nothing in particular while drinking strawberry Margaritas. It was a wonderful night, to be sure, and fried iced cream was followed by Daphne's invitation to coffee at her place.

James Williams would have been content to skip the rest of his fried ice cream and get to Daphne's place that much sooner. He wanted to be alone with her, to get some more information out of her. An intense desire was burning inside of him; he really wanted to help protect poor Prescott. But he played it cool. After all, he was in the midst of a conspiracy.

It seemed an eternity, but, finally, it was nearly midnight, and the soon-to-be-happy couple were on the couch in Daphne's apartment. They drank coffee spiked with tequila while James edged closer to Daphne. She smiled in the sweetest way when he caressed her back. He almost expected to purr in gratitude when he managed to unhook her bra in one smooth move through her shirt.

As James wrapped his arms around her, Daphne kept her hands demurely in front of her. After a tortuous moment when she pressed herself against him, she sort of moaned. He could tell it was a struggle for her to keep from jumping him. Her passions were aroused to a red-hot flame, and things were getting hotter. James Williams was keeping his cool and moving with a measured pace as sweet Daphne kept her hands resting primly in her own lap. That was nearly too much for him. In revenge, he pressed her down on her back and began to fondle her breasts, working his way around her nipples without touching them.

His control proved greater. She broke first and reached for his belt buckle.

That was the beginning of the end for her. James Williams went on to wreak still more revenge upon her for her efforts to show as much control as he had. But he proved to be a gentle and merciful conqueror, making sure the revenge was as sweet for his victim as for him. He wreaked revenge and still more revenge, and it was not until everything had been wreaked that James and Daphne realized they had never made it off the couch. He wanted her to be as comfortable as possible. She had done much for him, and he rose and picked up his sweet victim as easily as if she were but a child.

Daphne pressed her head against his shoulder and wriggled around until her leftmost breast was pressing against his lean but muscular chest. He had to hold her firmly as they were both slick with perspiration after their recent display of athletics.

A moment later, he had pushed open the bedroom door with his shoulder. As he set her down upon the bed, he chanced to look around. The room was fully furnished but rather sparsely decorated for a young woman's bedroom. He wondered if she had just moved in, but that didn't solve the mystery. Most young women would have their room decorated before the movers had finished assembling the bed-frame. For a few seconds, he was afraid Daphne was part of the plot against him. Maybe they had set up this apartment for the purpose of getting pictures of him in a compromising

position, but they would be surprised if that were the case. He was not going to back down from his virtuous stances even if they published pictures of him making love to Daphne. Let the puritans of American society do what they would. They couldn't intimidate James Williams.

He was still pondering the matter when Daphne started giggling. He looked down to see her struggling to hold back her laughter. The embarrassing truth came to him in a flash. He had brought her into the spare bedroom of her apartment, an understandable mistake since he had never been there before. She was still giggling, and James Williams smiled in a good-natured way at his mistake. He was about to lift her up and take her into the right room when she pulled him down. When he was pressing down upon her, she pulled his head down to whisper in his ear, "It doesn't matter where we are so long as we're together."

Again they made love. Then they lay side-by-side on top of the covers while they caught their breaths. Before long, Daphne jumped him once more, tickling him into submission. For all her hunger and his desire to satisfy her, it took several minutes for him to be aroused. His desire was strong but his body was weak. While he was struggling against his own weakness, she mounted him and set to work. Soon, she had taken care of his needs and hers.

After that umpteenth bout of making love, they were both tired. They got under the covers and cuddled together with Daphne's back against James' stomach. As they drifted off to sleep, he caressed her small but firm breasts. It seemed funny to him the way his hands were beginning to move in synch with the gentle rhythms of Daphne's breathing.

It was after daybreak and before dawn that James next awoke. Daphne was still lying with her back against his chest and stomach. Her head was resting on the bicep of his left arm. His right hand was cupped around her left breast. She was moaning as if in both pain and ecstasy though she was still half-asleep. James Williams realized he must have been caressing her breasts throughout the night until he had irritated the skin. As far as he could tell, she didn't mind all that much.

James Williams was an intelligent young man, much concerned with the needs of a woman and with a man's responsibility to treat her with respect, as his equal. Unlike other modern men, he was far from being self-centered and oblivious to the needs of women. Never would he have been abusive of women, either emotionally or physically. Despite that, his mind was not on Daphne's needs as he pulled away from her. He pushed the pillows against

the headboard and sat up to watch for old Sol to break above the horizon.

He had a funny feeling that there was something important in what he had heard from Daphne, something that had been washed away by the wild passions of the night. James Williams smiled down at Daphne's bare back. She was curled-up, as if trying to get warm. Her back was smooth. The creamy white skin was stretched tight on both sides of the ridge formed by her spine in its shallow valley. He reached over and pulled up the blanket and comforter. He was too warm now that his metabolism was in its waking state, but he was willing to suffer discomfort for Daphne's sake.

After she was under the bed-clothes, he could see no more of her than a tangled mound of blond hair pushed out between pillow and comforter. He was sure he could be happy settling down with such a woman. He didn't feel a trace of that old urge to run away the morning after making passionate love to a relative stranger. He was dreaming of settling down and making some little ones when he remembered he no longer had a secure career. In fact, if he got married, he couldn't very well keep his job at the Longfield mansion. He certainly wouldn't expose Daphne to the great dangers. Bombs or bullets or fires might come his way at any time.

It was all becoming much more clear. Farnsworth was an attorney for Innoral. He had probably hired James Williams as part of a plot to get revenge on the idealistic young man for his courageous stance against Innoral, against their tobacco products and their food additives. Daphne's brother Dillon worked for Farnsworth, but the guy wouldn't be able to save her from his cold-blooded bosses. And Dillon might be as cold-blooded as Farnsworth himself. After all, he was a lawyer.

That relationship might still be useful. She might know something, without even knowing it. There was no way she would be part of such a cruel conspiracy. Despite that, she might have heard some important clues that made no sense to her. Now that James Williams was beginning to understand the conspiratorial mind, he had to gently probe Daphne to see what she knew. With that knowledge, he might protect himself and Daphne, and he might keep evil people from brutally murdering a helpless, brain-damaged scientist.

James Williams felt a strong desire to rise, dress, and head right off to see that Prescott Longfield was safe. When he looked down at Daphne, he felt a stronger desire to make love to her again. It wasn't as if Prescott's life was in particular danger in the next fifteen minutes or so. Daphne was still giggling and fighting him off when a thought occurred to him. He might do

more good for Prescott if he stayed a while longer with Daphne. It might take much of the morning to gently question her and to find out what she knew about the activities at Farnsworth's law firm.

As it turned out, Daphne knew only one thing that might have been important. Farnsworth had a nephew who was an amateur demolitions expert. The 17 year-old was apparently one of those nutty genius types, kind of like Prescott Longfield as far as James Williams could tell, but perhaps more inclined to violent experiments. As she lay on James Williams' chest, Daphne Strickland had explained, "Fairchild's father was some kind of left-wing nut back in the 60s, but the kid isn't rebelling against his father and he doesn't care about politics. He just likes to blow things up and make big holes in the ground. He's already lost the tips of three fingers on his left hand."

James Williams was silent while thinking of the cruel way in which people were slaves of their genes. A father who had liked the violence of ideological politics had produced a son who liked the violence of physical explosions. True, the father had become a highly respected PBS executive. He had turned to educating people about science instead of trying to liberate them from democracy, thus science had replaced the superstitions of Marxism with a truer, less ideological view of the world. And Daphne was sure the kid only liked to blow things up, not people and not animals, just things. He was a gentle, kindly young man. He just liked explosions.

Even if that were true, James Williams knew the kid could be convinced to build a bomb that could be used to blow up the Longfield mansion while the inhabitants were sleeping. Fairchild might even be induced to plant the bomb for them if he thought the house was empty.

Idealistic as James Williams was, he was realistic about the evil that lurked in the hearts of other men. That realism combined with his powerfully analytic mind was allowing him to penetrate the darkness somewhat. The conspiracy was becoming clear, in outline, though the details were pretty obscure.

30 Good and Evil: Worm-holes and Parallel Universes

When James Williams returned to the Longfield mansion, he decided he needed time to think matters through before they got too complex. He went out back and wandered through the gardens returned to wilderness, but only for a short while. It depressed him too much to see how quickly an estate could decay when it was founded upon ill-gotten gains. When James was about to walk upstairs, a shudder went through him. He thought of poor Prescott and wondered if his brain-damage was due to tobacco. The young man knew that some women even smoked when pregnant. Both men and women often smoked with babies and children in the room. It was frightening to think of the damage that could result when those poisons got into the bloodstream.

James Williams turned from the stairs and walked through the door to the left. He turned on the light and looked upon the shelves of dust-covered books. He wandered around and checked out the titles. *Don Quixote*, *Moby Dick*, and *War and Peace* sat near each other. That led him to question why there were so many books in the room when those three books by themselves could kill several years of free evenings. To the left of that section, he saw James Baldwin's *Go Tell it on the Mountain*. To the right there was John Dos Passos' *Midcentury*. Oddly enough, there was a big gap in the middle of the bookshelf, though another shelf was packed from left to right with novels by the likes of Wells and Dickens and Austen. Several shelves above that, Plato's collected works sat near a uniformly bound collection of works by Nietzsche. James Williams' eyes found a section dominated by poetry. There was Byron's *Don Juan* in red leather and Dante's trilogy in a library binding of greenish tint. There was a slender volume bound in blue leather sitting next to the massive volumes of Dante's works. The writing on the

spine was too small to read with his eyes so tired from lack of sleep, but the book drew him in the strangest way.

He pulled it out and opened it to the title page where he read:

THE COLLECTED POEMS OF DYLAN SHAGARI

with an Introduction by Oswald Finlay, Professor of Comparative Literature, Harvard University, and Commentary Upon Selected Poems by Parnell Lopez

James Williams was so knowledgeable about literature, even poetry, that he rarely missed any questions in those categories when he watched Jeopardy™ on television. It surprised him that he had never heard of this fellow named Dylan Shagari whose works sat next to those of Dante and Byron. The other names in the library were quite recognizable to one who was knowledgeable about Western civilization. A few, like Sir Thomas Browne and Boethius, were obscure – but not totally. Dylan Shagari was about as obscure as a poet could be. James Williams had never even seen his name mentioned in the most wide-ranging surveys of Western literature, two or three of which he had taken in college.

With the book in hand, James Williams walked over to the window. He opened the blinds and sat in a nearby chair covered in brown leather. When he sat down, a cloud of dust arose. The young man coughed a few times and waved the dust away as best he could before opening the book and turning to the introductory essay.

A Saint of the Second-Best Virtues

As is well-known, Dylan Shagari died at an early age, after an active life in which he vividly displayed his virtues and his vices. Some of his attributes were both virtue and vice in one. Perhaps it was even more accurate to label them as attributes which could be deployed for good or evil or simply disorder. In a phrase hearkening back to St. Augustine's speculations on human nature, the Indian scholar Subramatra Roy referred to Dylan Shagari as a saint of the second-best virtues. Like St. Augustine, a man not known for encouraging sexual experimentation, Dr. Roy considered that promiscuity might be the result of love undisciplined rather than a sign of an evil nature.

It is also well-known that Dylan Shagari was a nephew of James Llewellyn, the famous scientist and Presidential adviser

who built the anti-missile defenses over North America. Those defenses proved so successful as to have invited nuclear war when some foreign attack systems had temporarily gained an advantage. So long as Llewellyn and his staff had had time to improve their system, North America had always maintained its dominance over world affairs, but certain Asian countries had figured out a specific weakness in the detection systems, and they had attacked, each other—not North America, before the capabilities of the North American system were upgraded. Before the war was over, they launched separate attacks against North America in response to what they considered unreasonable demands to cease hostilities. That lesser nuclear war, of course, led to the Great War which came close to achieving the dream of being a war to end all wars. Perhaps James Llewellyn was responsible for that destruction by making North America safer than the rest of the world, but only so long as his incremental improvements kept that system ahead of the rest of the world. Apparently, he died thinking that to be the case.

Some would disagree and argue Llewellyn had merely acted to defend the citizens of North America against regions of the world less advanced, less peaceful, less civilized. Whatever the case, one thing is clear. Though the Poet was dead before those terrible wars occurred, he lived with his aunt and uncle during the period when his uncle constructed the first anti-missile umbrella over North America. (It should not be necessary as other than a matter of scholarly completeness to note that James Llewellyn's wife was the highly respected developmental neurobiologist, Morgan Winthrop Llewellyn.)

The Poet's mother, the twin sister of James Llewellyn had died when he was an infant. His father, a Nigerian banker, died several years later, having lived an ascetic and largely reclusive life after the death of his wife. Dylan Shagari crossed the Atlantic Ocean from Africa to North America to live with his aunt and uncle, the Llewellyns. After attending the finest private schools in Alexandria, he went to Oxford but quickly showed himself to be an ill-disciplined student. He was expelled and went on to suffer a similar fate at several other top-notch colleges in North America and Europe over the following five years.

Meanwhile, Dylan Shagari was running through the libraries of his aunt and uncle, devouring the early pages of many classics of modern science. He soon knew much of the intentions and general conclusions of Sperry and Edelman, Hoyle and Fowler. Dylan Shagari was intimate with the glues that bound nerve cells into larger structures, and he breathed in the stuff of exploding stars until he seemed to be almost composed of those extraterrestrial elements

Those were heady days of self-discovery and exploration of the physical world. Few men had ever gone off to inspect the great warehouses of Paris with no luggage other than a knapsack filled with works on computational theory and algorithmic number theory. Perhaps a few more had gone to Indonesia, intent on exploration both of an active center of the sex trade and of the home-sites of ancient men who had either recently arrived from Africa or perhaps had been in Asia for a long time. The Poet noted the anthropologists had eliminated most other possibilities, though he complained they had never given adequate attention to this idea that humans were the spawn of life elsewhere in the Universe; if so, they could have been seeded in many locations pretty much at the same time.

There was the affair with the brilliant protégé of Morgan Llewellyn—Aimilée Minh. Dark were the events that led to Dylan Shagari's brutal death by beating, likely administered by a rival for the young Dr. Minh's affections. When she was found a few days later, dead of an apparently self-administered overdose of morphine, the answers to many questions were buried with her. The rival for affection, the abominable one rarely mentioned by name, went on to become the warlord who led North America into the Great Nuclear War.

Dylan Shagari had written only a few dozen poems when he had died. His journals were never found, though Parnell Lopez—the grandson of James Llewellyn and son of the Poet's cousin—quoted from those journals in some of his writings, both fiction and nonfiction. Dylan Shagari's poems had been published only in obscure journals and might have been lost if not for the efforts of Parnell Lopez to tell the world what Dylan Shagari had accomplished with his somewhat rhythmic and occasionally

rhyming expressions of an admittedly shallow understanding of modern science. Yet, he had an instinctive repugnance for the truly dangerous misunderstandings of modern science. Parnell Lopez claimed that Dylan Shagari's diaries had noted numerous statements by scientists with more common sense that was common. One physicist had noted the silliness of trying to understand the so-called 'Big Bang' model of the universe's expansion unless you already had some understanding of non-Euclidean geometry and general relativity. Another had claimed that it was absurd to try to translate quantum mechanics into words when it was nothing more than a set of very consistent and thoroughly non-paradoxical mathematical formalisms. There was, in fact, some reason to wonder if Dylan Shagari had realized he was playing with fire well before he fell in love with Dr. Minh.

It may be hard for some to believe, but Dylan Shagari was read by very few people during his life. It was not a time when creativity was much appreciated in American culture. Parnell Lopez's own works were not published until shortly after his death. It was a bit ironic that they were published in a high-quality edition by Dumndown, the publishing firm which Lopez had castigated in his journals for paying a huge advance on a novel by a 14 year-old pop singer within months of having rejected works by Parnell Lopez. Undoubtedly, they had treated no better any of the others who were making serious efforts to resurrect American literature and philosophy after the academics had finished their death-bed ministrations and the commercial publishers had made a fortune selling programs and souvenir picture-books at the funeral. Lopez noted that most civilizations had tenderly and lovingly nurtured the seeds of their own destruction. At times, he even seemed to imply it was such cultural acts, not the explicit political conflicts, that had made it possible for a rarely rational species to attempt racial suicide. The Poet seemed to have been forecasting such a situation.

As a rule, both Dylan Shagari and Parnell Lopez addressed general cultural issues while largely avoiding explicitly political issues, and, by that strategy, made deeper political critiques of the sort also made by the likes of Plato and Nietzsche. As was the case with those two philosophers, Shagari and Lopez

have also been accused of being mystics and obscurantists—does it not take effort to read worthwhile books, the sort of effort leading certain types of thinkers to assume there is some sort of secret knowledge involved? Some Gnosis to be decoded only by people initiated into the occult techniques?

It is possible that the collected poems of Dylan Shagari, at least those which have been authoritatively determined to be such, might be added to that uniform edition of Parnell Lopez's works. After all, without Lopez's commentary, some of Shagari's poetry would be incomprehensible, except to those possessing some knowledge of quantum mechanics, sociobiology, and linguistics, as well as a playful attitude towards language. There are also, of course, the literary influences, but those would require at least an entire book to discuss in the briefest manner. Suffice it to say that the influences upon Dylan Shagari were shadowy and hard to identify. After all, he was a poet half Nigerian and half Welsh-American who was more fond of science books than poetry texts. As for Parnell Lopez, his tastes in literature seemed greatly biased towards those like Cervantes, Melville, Conrad, and Dos Passos, authors highly masculine, highly abstract in much of their thought and language, and also experimenters in narrative expression.

James Williams' head was spinning. The book had spoken of two nuclear wars as if they had actually occurred. Other than a few local outbreaks, the Earth had been at peace for decades. What was a little fighting in the Balkans or the Mideast? It certainly wasn't the same as the two World Wars, or even Vietnam. Most people lived in peace, and this book spoke of two great wars having killed immense numbers of people. It also spoke of two men named Dylan Shagari and Parnell Lopez as if they were so famous that every person would know their names, would know what they had done. James Williams was afraid he had lost contact with reality. Surely, there had not been two nuclear wars fought without his being aware of the struggles. Just as surely, there had not been a famous poet named Dylan Shagari or a famous novelist and philosopher named Parnell Lopez. There could not have been for James Williams had heard of no such men. He considered the possibility that the book, though printed in such a high-quality edition, was no more than a joke. Otherwise...

He thought back to a PBS special he had recently seen. Quantum physicists and mathematicians and philosophers, as well as a Zen Buddhist monk from Hackensack, had talked about some really weird things. They had spoken of worm-holes through space and time that might allow a person to travel in time or even to visit other universes. Had James Williams walked through some sort of hole into a parallel universe? Was it a universe where everything had been different? Two nuclear wars had been fought? A famous poet named Dylan Shagari had written poems about science? He had a cousin named Parnell Lopez who was a famous novelist and philosopher?

Feeling sick to his stomach, James Williams set the Dylan Shagari collection upon the side-table and rose to check out the library again. There were collected works by both Lincoln and Douglas, biographies of Washington and Jackson and Hoover. Churchill's *History of the English-Speaking People* was on the edge of that section of biographical and other historical works, sitting near the great works of fiction. The sections which had held the Shagari volume contained works by Donne and Marvell and Blake. The next section held works by Russell and Whitehead and Einstein and some fellows named Duhem and Jaki. A quick check showed the last two to have had unusual but plausible biographies as scientists and historians. Duhem was a physicist who angered, no surprise, his fellow-scientists by claiming modern science began during the Middle Ages and not during the Renaissance. Jaki, who apparently continued Duhem's work and expanded it to more philosophical analyses, was a Benedictine priest with several degrees, including a Ph.D. in physics. Their ideas seemed a little out of the ordinary, but James Williams thought that their books might have been more moderate than the blunt statements found in their biographies. It did seem a little odd that well-educated men, with Ph.D.'s in physics at that, would think that those people back in the Dark Ages were scientists, but a modern man could tolerate even the strangest and most extreme ideas. It certainly was true that there were some people who refused to accept the Enlightened world of modern times.

Passing on, James Williams picked up the copy of *Midcentury* by Dos Passos, one of the few earlier contemporary novels he had read all the way through. That novel, from the 1960s, was somewhat disjointed though Professor Watkins had said that Dos Passos was implicitly claiming that to be no more than a reflection of the disjointedness of modern life. Whatever the truth of that claim, James Williams had been confused by the different streams of narrative, only some of which converged by the end of the book.

The arbitrarily chosen quotes from advertising and from articles about science or economics were also confusing. But John Dos Passos had existed, if he was not often read because of that disjointedness and his loose styles of grammar and punctuation and even typesetting.

Opening the book, he turned to the back flap of the dust-jacket and read, "John Dos Passos on his father's side is the grandson of a Portuguese immigrant and the son of a brilliant first-generation lawyer; on his mother's side, he is the descendant of the great tradition of Maryland." There were no dates, no mention of where he was born or where he attended school, but it was all plausible and corresponded with James Williams' general knowledge about Dos Passos. *Midcentury* itself seemed to be a legitimate book about reality as most men knew it, even if it was a bit confusing to most readers.

Backtracking to another part of the library, James Williams grabbed a paperback edition of Pascal's *Pensées*. A quick check of the back showed that Pascal was born in 1623 and died in 1662. The dizzied young man smiled as he contemplated that life-span, 1623-1662. Facts. Firm facts of the sort which could help establish a sane appreciation of the world. After a few minutes of blissful reveling in the sanity of well-established facts, James Williams opened the book to an early page, to find the introduction written by a man named A.J. Krailsheimer, an unlikely name, but possible. On page 23, there was a paragraph which read:

Pascal is thus in the paradoxical position of appealing to reason in order to communicate truths which, on his own showing, are outside its province. He is not, as has been sometimes claimed, trying to strike one spark of charity out of the great mass of rational arguments advanced. A better analogy would be that of the well; only when the drill has penetrated to a sufficient depth does the crust of reason and habit become thin enough for the flow of divine grace at last to break through. Pascal is no alchemist, transmuting elements, but a prospector, blasting away massive obstacles to reveal hidden treasure. The paradox is that only reason can persuade reason of its own inadequacy.

James Williams shook his head and moved on. He had nearly encircled the room when he found a section with books by guys like those brain-scientists who'd figured out that human beings were two different people

on the left and right sides of their brains. He felt his breath returning and his heart slowing as he returned to the sanity of good solid science.

Ignoring the books by familiar names, he picked up one titled *Madness and Modernism* by someone named Louis A. Sass. The back of the book claimed him to be a Professor of Clinical Psychology at Rutgers University, a plausible enough vocation. It was even solidly factual, though James Williams realized he didn't know if it was really true. Suddenly feeling dizzy again, his eyes panned the library full of plausible fact-like things, but he had no way of verifying if Aristotle had really been Plato's prized but rebellious student. Had Cervantes died in such poverty, because of his own lack of common sense as well as the lack of copyright laws in his time, that he and his wife and other close relatives had had to join a religious order to be buried? That seemed implausible to a man living in an age when a few competent writers of ephemeral stuff, as well as some incompetent writers of slop, could become so rich. His hands were shaking so that he feared he would drop the book, but on the third try, he managed to open the book, landing upon page 4, where he read:

What if madness, at least in some of its forms, were to derive from a heightening rather than a dimming of conscious awareness, and an alienation not from reason but from the emotions, instincts, and the body?

Not sure what the author was driving at, James Williams closed the book and then opened it again at random, finding himself at a section on page 251 titled *Panopticism*. Passing over several sentences that didn't strike his fancy, he finally read:

The Panopticon consists of two elements: a central observation tower and an encircling building containing numerous small cells. Because of the thinness of the encircling building, each cell would be open on two sides, with bars on the outer wall allowing light to flood the cell and bars on the inner wall exposing the occupant to the gaze of the watcher in the central tower. In this way, those in the cells would always be within sight of the implacable tower, which itself was darkened and fitted with narrow slits so that those within could peer out without being seen.

Still not sure what was going on, or who it was who was really talking about the Panopticon, James Williams moved his eyes forward, turned the page, skimmed again, and finally read:

For our purposes, the significance of this panoptic system has less to do with the synoptic knowledge it offers to those in the tower than with the effect it has on those observed, who are brought to internalize, and to act in accordance with, the standards and expectations of the system in which they are caught. If we imagine the situation of the prisoner in the Panopticon, we realize he must remain constantly aware of the observation tower looming before him; further, since the prisoner cannot know where he is in fact being watched, he is never able to let down his guard. As Foucault points out, if vigilance is able to replace the severity and drama of punishment, this is because the eternal vigilance that supplants the circus of torture is ultimately an inner vigilance, an observing of the self by the self. Paradoxically enough, this situation may even give rise to a sense of freedom in the prisoner—the freedom of a self bent on scrutinizing and subduing a “lower” or more objectified part of its own being.

Jams Williams turned and stumbled back to the leather chair. His hand reached out and rested upon the leather-bound collection of Dylan Shagari’s poetry. He froze in that position, barely breathing as his eyes closed.

He could not have fallen into another universe for he felt too much at home.

Was the book a joke in bad taste? Who would have gone to all that trouble to write, print, and bind such a slim volume only to place it in a library doomed to destruction?

It was likely no man would have come into this library to let his eyes roam over all the titles. James Williams had done so only as a way of distracting himself from his troubles. The odds were against anyone ever finding that book. An unlikely prank for a highly skilled jokester.

The book was false!

There was no other possible explanation, but now there were other problems.

How could James Williams be sure that Dos Passos had written *Midcentury*, a book disdainful of hyphens, playful rather than conventional in its indentations of paragraphs containing mere fragments of paragraphs, and even expressing ideas within a narrative? Had it also been a joke? Perhaps it had been compiled by a group of bored graduate students and passed off as a respectable piece of literature? Maybe it had been some students at Harvard who had gone to Florida for spring break and run into an illiterate Portuguese-American fisherman named John Dos Passos?

Had Pascal ever lived? He had been an unlikely character embedded in a strange history of obscurely motivated social and religious movements.

What about that silliness that saw some sort of epidemic of madness in the modern world, a disorder caused by excessive consciousness and not enough lived embodiment? If that was so, was it merely the price that a few had to pay for all the advantages the many gained from modern science and technology? Some scientists claimed that viral and bacterial diseases were probably rare when humans or ape-men formed a sparse population, and tuberculosis and flu were a price paid for the dense populations that made civilization possible. There were no free lunches, even when things were so good that everybody could gorge themselves at dinner.

Once more the eyes of James Williams panned the library. Franklin and Einstein. Newton and Darwin. Tolstoy and Fielding. Defoe and Faulkner. Doubt had been cast upon all by one slender volume of collected poems by a poet who had never existed and who had died before the outbreak of two nuclear wars which had never occurred.

Like an alcoholic returning to his bottle or a dog to his vomit, James Williams opened the Shagari volume and turned to the first poem:

A Man Who Suffered No Distractions Gladly

Be singular be the concentrated man.
 Deeply pulls the time about himself.
 <K., an ally, on a photo focused
 reality,| Platonically etched – a circle.>

Conscious be he be of daily tasks,
 obviously waves he waves a collapsing front.
 Not to worry, not to fear.
 All things implode into a single rod.

No, not a worry not had he not.
 The galaxy was his oyster-bed.
 <A joyful struggle to find a pearl|
 a dying man much deeply blue.>

Neutrinos not be passing not into his liver,
 nor even the ancient, Dopplered rays of X.
 Be silly be the thought said he said it,
 “Pan be the best of glossy moms.”

Be savant-like be he be he be,
 though echoing la-la not at all.
 Thinks not of gases passing lung to blood,
 though ironic proteins knows he well.

Yea! Be singular be he be.

Commentary

There is some evidence, as anecdotal as it might be, that the modern world has a way of distracting the human intellect from external objects of study and contemplation. This is an obvious problem for men such as my grandfather, physicists who worked on extremely difficult problems of the natural world, but it is no less a problem for the visual artist or for the cabinetmaker. The ability to concentrate, however important it might be for the future of human civilization, is an antisocial attribute in a world where an economy needing constant growth depends on the distractibility of people captured by a television screen or walking through a mall constructed and decorated to draw human attention this way and that way.

Much of the problem, of course, lies in our primate bias towards vision. A thinker embedded in a society which exploits the visual systems in our brains to such an extent as to dull our higher faculties may do no better than to waste energy trying to visualize things such as microscopic or cosmic forces and objects. The Darwinists, for all their mistakes of excess, should be the ones to correct this problem by pointing out that a finite physical creature such as a human being does not have an

open ability to directly perceive all things. We can, of course, conceive of many things which we cannot perceive. The electron subject to Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle and the Big Bang which is an expansion of a weird sort, not an explosion, both lie beyond the range of phenomena which our visual systems can handle. Preferring to debate irrational Christians, the Darwinists do not bother to make valid points about the historically grounded nature of human perception, outside of their textbooks, as such would be an attack upon many of their scientific allies, such as PBS producers who show the Big Bang as an explosion from nothingness and Zennish quantum physicists who persist in seeing paradoxes where well-behaved objects do not correspond to things we can directly see; then, against all logic, those same Darwinists will deny the mind which allows a man to somewhat overcome the defects and limitations of his perceptions, even to dream beyond what can be touched or seen. It is the mind, after all—not the eyes, not the visual cortex, which can 'see' the Riemannian expansion of the Universe and objects which do not quite occupy well-defined places in space, however exact the correspondence of those events and objects with certain mathematical formalisms of physics.

Dylan Shagari did, in fact, seem to be making a bit of fun of the human tendency to visualize things even as he constructed a semi-visual analogy from a man with deep concentration to the membrane of a black hole. I have always wondered if there is such a thing as a non-visual analogy—to a primate, that is; perhaps the Poet was pointing in another direction by his very act of constructing an analogy of some validity from an unvisualizable object studied by science—the black hole, or rather its membrane—to a human attribute so necessary to the advancement of science as well as the advancement of humane arts. Maybe he was pointing to an abstraction and conceptualization of poetic metaphor so as to open new worlds to poetry. It is possible that Picasso was attempting something similar with his early paintings. It is certainly true that Dylan Shagari was claiming that the development of that human skill of concentration and of abstract understanding is greatly endangered by misuse of technology and so-called economic freedom to addict

people, from their youth, to rapidly shifting images. His journals state such in a quite explicit manner.

Such background matters do not explain why the Poet stooped to the making of puns, the least honored form of humor in a society so oriented towards visual perceptions. By clues similar to those in the classic crossword puzzles of *The London Times*—though less ritualized, the last two lines of the first stanza collapse to 'photonicallly', a strong pointer indeed to the problems of the primate brain. He rolls on, constructing analogies from quantum 'collapses' or other physical types of 'concentration activities', even referring to the rod cells of the human eye.

Another pun referring to the Darwinists's valid but shallow critique of Panglossian thought ("This world is the best of all possible worlds.") is used to point to the obvious thought that there are other paths to the rational mind than by way of the visual cortex so appropriate to monkeys looking for ripe fruit. Since those Darwinists also deny the existence of the minds some of them use so well, they cannot see the power and depth of their own criticisms of wrongful approaches to the understanding of human persons and human thought.

The last complete stanza returns to the puns, directly making an analogy between autistic savants stuck inside their minds, often tied to brains damaged in a variety of regions but normal or perhaps even somewhat hyper-developed in one region. What is it that allows such spectacular exploitation of no more than normal talents, if not the mind? After all, none of those so-called idiot savants, adding and multiplying large numbers—though talented by normal standards, were a match for those few men who had extraordinary talent for mental arithmetic to match their more abstract mathematical talents. The great mathematician and physicist Gauss comes to mind. In minutes, he could solve problems in his head which would have taken other mathematicians days or weeks to solve with paper and pencil. Those labeled, perhaps cruelly, as idiot savants, could not possibly perform such extraordinary arithmetical tasks since they could not even conceive of the goals to which a Gauss applied such talents.

At that, few, if any, so-called idiot-savants have had true ge-

nus for even the most routine of tasks. Nearly all have practiced and worked normal talents until they achieved remarkable levels of expertise. It is apparently one way for an entrapped mind to escape the most boring of prisons—not just a self but a damaged self. Though components of the materialistically realized systems of the brain are severely damaged, there is something about the person which strives to make the best of what is. Is it no more than a physical person, his toes and liver as well as his prefrontal cortex? Maybe. In a journal entry, Dylan Shagari, a non-practicing Christian of vague creed, had noted that matter, having been made by God for His good purposes, might be capable of more than men could dream or scientists describe. For example, it could form the foundation of a creature intensely concentrating upon the search for some well-defined bit of truth about the world or perhaps even some truths lying beyond the world.

Imagine the concentration necessary for Gauss to have plotted planetary orbits in his head, after developing the techniques which allowed such calculations to proceed using only a few observed points. A singular man was that Gauss and far more a wonder than the big bangs and black holes which have been conjectured using the views of geometry and space-time which he had pioneered. Then again, any mentally retarded person who develops some talent for more ordinary arithmetic, or for drawing or gardening, is far more a wonder than those astrophysical oddities, except, of course, to those benighted souls who believe significance to reside in massive or high-energy bodies which lie light-years away from the Earth. Such thinking, if followed consistently, would label the hydrogen bomb as man's greatest achievement. Though far less powerful than one small hurricane, that bomb unleashes far more energy than any other activity in which man has engaged.

Come to think of it, any human baby, however ordinary, or sadly defective—by the measurements of scientists or the prejudices of eugenicists, is far more a miracle than any objects or events to be observed in the non-living world.

And, anyway, who was K.?

It was becoming more difficult for James Williams to deny the obvious. He had fallen through some sort of a trapdoor, slid down a worm-hole, and landed in a world similar to his own, but so different in a few ways. People and things seemed to have the same general attributes as in his world, but the specifics were different. Dylan Shagari was a famous poet, Parnell Lopez a famous novelist and philosopher, and two nuclear wars had been fought.

A shiver went up his spine as he realized that the true explanation was far more horrible than anything a worm-hole could conjure up. It was the conspiracy against Prescott Longfield. The poor fellow was barely in touch with reality as it was, and these people were going to push him over the edge. It was such a subtle plan, and they were taking no chances. Though the fellow read only science books and picture-books, they had even taken the trouble to invent a poet and to produce a volume of poems by that most unlikely bard, half Welsh-American and half Nigerian indeed!

Clearly, there were likely to be fraudulent books upstairs in Prescott's science library as well. Maybe...

Maybe, those two scientists and historians—Duhem and Jaki—were also imaginary, and there were corresponding technical works by them upstairs, misleading works about important scientific issues like...

After casting about in his mind for a moment for any clues from PBS documentaries he had recently seen, James Williams thought of chaos. Maybe, someone had fraudulently proposed one of those Medieval-minded scientists to be a founder of chaos theory or some other major field of modern science. It wouldn't take many such falsehoods to leave poor Prescott all confused about reality. Certainly, a person's mind could become like silly putty if he started to believe that science had started back in the Middle Ages when they used to burn anybody who had any common sense. Take down the barriers erected in the Renaissance against the dark thoughts of dark ages and a person would start believing all sorts of superstitions. Poor Prescott was under a full-scale assault by those wishing to destroy his faith in modern science and computers and stuff!

James Williams had no more than decided that something needed done when the door opened, and Prescott Longfield walked into the library. The poor fellow looked around in confusion at that world of ideas so different from those in his science picture books and the manuals for his machines. He cast his eyes in various directions; his eyelids blinked rapidly whenever Prescott seemed about to settle on one section of the library. He moved forward as if headed towards the poetry section. James Williams was happy

that he held the poisoned bait in his hands. Prescott Longfield would not find the fraudulent volume of poems by the imaginary poet, Dylan Shagari.

But, then James Williams realized the danger might not have been so great: Prescott Longfield turned from poetry and headed towards the bookcases holding novels. James Williams rose and walked over, reaching the befuddled man who was now holding a closed book in his hands. It was a Joseph Conrad novel. James Williams took hold of the book and read the title upon the spine: *Black Magic At Work Upon a Corpse*. If that was really a Conrad novel, it was pretty obscure, though, the words seemed oddly familiar to a man so well-versed in the major and minor facts of human thought. Familiar, but no less strange for all that. He couldn't remember Conrad as being much concerned with either black magic or corpses. As far as he could remember, that noble Pole had been mostly concerned with men become scoundrels or cowards or heroes under difficult circumstances.

Prescott Longfield had not protested the book being taken from his hands; he had merely stared in the general direction of the window.

After seeing the vacant look in his new friend's eyes, James Williams opened the book to its early pages, knowing that Conrad always broke the rules by talking about his books and how they were written. Sure enough, there was an introduction to the novel.

In several of my books, I have hit upon the issue of human moral freedom, implying that all monistic views of human nature and most dualistic views make a man little more than a robot of one sort or another...

That was enough for James Williams who knew darned well the term 'robot' was coined by that Czech playwright in...

Losing his confidence a bit, he checked the copyright date on the fraudulent Conrad novel. '1903'. His confidence soared again. The term 'robot' was certainly coined after that, close to, maybe even following, World War I, a war he knew to have been fought, though not having been a witness.

The house was booby-trapped with fraudulent works meant to destroy a man's faith in scientific facts, to destroy his very sanity. A horrible thought came to him. Suppose the science books and technical manuals in Prescott's private library were also forgeries carrying false views? Certainly, most

would be true. After all, Prescott had learned how to build some pretty impressive devices.

Suddenly, James Williams found himself wishing for a more straightforward plot. Arson or a bombing. Guns or knives. He'd read enough thrillers, seen enough action movies and enough episodes of *911* to know how to get out of a burning house or how to handle himself when a professional assassin was slinking about in the dark. With some difficulty he could even spot a fraudulent poet by his strange biography, a forged novel by its anachronisms or other errors of fact. In such a conspiracy against sanity, it would be those well-established facts which could bolster a man's faltering confidence in his own sanity.

Now sure of his mission, James Williams kept the fraudulent Conrad novel. Not sure how he could identify an untrustworthy work of science, he would at least isolate books by poets who had never existed and novels never written by authors who had existed. Turning to the bookcase, he pulled out a slim volume: *Lord Jim*, a novel Conrad had written. He handed the book to Prescott Longfield who accepted it submissively, looked over the undecorated front-cover of the book, and placed it on a nearby chair.

It was more clear than ever that the poor retarded genius was in need of James Williams' protection, and he was more determined than ever to grant that protection.

31 Good and Evil: Springing into Action

It was still dark when James Williams awoke, his head aching from his efforts to unscramble his situation. He was sure he was in danger; there was no doubt at all that the rich, and rather eccentric, man down the hall would not be long for the world if he were not protected from unscrupulous people—lawyers, bankers, and relatives.

Rising to fetch a glass of water and a couple of aspirins, he smelled smoke. Cigarette smoke! Someone was using cancer sticks to set a more general fire. James Williams ran into the hallway in time to see a shadowy figure in black sweats disappear down the stairs. His first instinct was to chase the fiend before he escaped, but when he turned he saw smoke coming from under the door to Prescott's library. Afraid what he might find, he flew down the hallway and threw open the door.

Prescott Longfield, so innocent in his mental defects, was sitting there puffing slowly at a cigarette stuck between his lips. His eyes looked crosswise at the burning end as it approached his lips, but his hands did not move to take away the poisonous object. Clearly, the fiend had escaped after lighting the cigarette and sticking it between the lips of poor Prescott!

Not at all afraid of the consequences, James Williams strode purposefully towards his friend and pulled the cancer stick from his mouth. As he did so, he felt a burning at his fingertips and threw away the lit cigarette. He turned to Prescott still puffing out poisonous smoke from nostrils and mouth and was about to tell him of the dangers he was facing by using an addictive substance when he smelled a more general odor of burning. Looking to his left, James Williams saw a pile of papers and magazines smoldering. Before he could do a thing, the pile burst into flames.

It came to James Williams that the fiend had set a fire as well as in-

troducing Prescott to a dirty and dangerous habit. There seemed to be nothing to do but escape, and James Williams pulled his friend to his feet. As they were escaping, he realized something further: Maybe it was for the best that the place burn to the ground. Built with the gains of an immoral trade, it was now infected with just enough works of doubtful origin as to destroy the confidence a modern man should have in simple facts.

The End

32 The Treacherous, Slavish Shore: Where Del Confronts His Own Insensitivity

I was wandering around the garden path behind the Llewellyn house. I needed some fresh air that I might clear my head. There was an important decision to be made. Should I publish *Good and Evil* under my own name or under a pseudonym? 'Del Swing' was perhaps preferable to 'Delbert Swing', but a pen-name might be even better, especially if it carried some symbolic significance. Maybe it could be the name of some important, but appropriately obscure, figure in history. I was even considering the possibility of using a name from some deep and important work of literature when I noticed Parnell Lopez sitting on a park bench near some greenish bushes with some white and pink flowers. The first draft of my book sat beside him.

For no good reason, I suddenly felt nervous, even a bit afraid. I was about to turn and walk away when I realized I was afraid to hear Parnell's opinion of my book. There was no reason for such a fear. The book was only a rough draft, not even that—a detailed synopsis, but Parnell had said he realized it would be a bit sketchy or perhaps even a bit inconsistent at some points. For all that, it was fast-paced, had some sex scenes which could be expanded, and it dealt with matters of concern to the modern reader. There was even some stuff about technology which could be expanded. Maybe the book could end up as a techno-thriller. With enough expansion, and that took only a bit of courage, there was still even the possibility that Prescott Longfield could turn out to be in contact with alien beings who wish to civilize the human race that the other inhabitants of the Milky Way could trust us. That might even lead to some tie-in with Star Wars™

or Star Trek™ or something like that. That would give the book instant respectability.

My fear of reviewers came close to overwhelming me, though I told myself that a professional author had to face up to good notices as well as bad. Avoiding reviews of my work wasn't much of an option, not since I wanted to make a living which meant publishing those books and living with the critical reviews. Leaving a pile of unpublished manuscripts for posterity was not a good option.

As it happened, I had not even moved when Parnell turned with a puzzled look upon his face. He seemed to having trouble focusing his eyes, but after a few seconds he seemed to give up. With dazed eyes staring into space, he said, "It would seem a mistake of some sort to write a book with a defective premise and then discuss that defect inside the book. Early on, at that." I was sure my face was mirroring his befuddlement when he decided to plow through. "A crooked lawyer would have stood to lose everything and to maybe see some of his crimes exposed if the heir were to die, especially if he were to die under suspicious circumstances. As you noted. And that might be a big problem from the modern viewpoint. Cervantes could deliberately play around with his plot and his characters, introducing inconsistencies, on purpose or while his mind was on something else more important and even clearly changing the plot as the book progressed, but the modern novel is subject to quality control on those things that can be subject to quality control." After a pause during which he seemed to be mulling something over, he said, "Then there is that Prescott Longfield character..."

A new fear came forward. Had Parnell taken insult at the character I had created? After all, he was only a fictional character with no more than slight ties to any real person. Prescott Longfield was a product of the imagination of Del Swing, and I was willing to take the responsibility. Yet, Parnell seemed more calmly contemplative than insulted or angry.

"That fellow and his situation seems to reflect a misunderstanding of science and technology and its relationship to human society and the individual human mind."

That was what I had been afraid of all along. Not being a scientist, I had still dared to openly discuss science, and I must have gotten some things wrong. Most likely, my facts were incomplete, but there might have been some outright errors in the details I gave about Prescott Longfield's equipment and experiments. There was a danger in mere laymen talking

about scientific stuff.

Parnell must have felt sorry for me because he dropped his gaze, pretending to be deep in thought. If I had really goofed that badly in trying to put scientific knowledge into my book, he might have been right to have felt so bad. Science meant so much to him, and, after all, a world re-established on scientific knowledge could be tolerant of a lot of things, but facts were facts. They were the bedrock of a scientific understanding of the world. Get your facts wrong or incomplete, then you could never understand black holes and evolution and genes and all those other things that explained men and different universes and lots of other stuff discovered by modern science. Of course, maybe I hadn't been explicit enough about Prescott's scientific work with circuit boards and those sorts of things.

That was the problem. I needed to put in more details about the scientific experiments Prescott Longfield was conducting with his computers and other equipment. It seemed that Parnell would be a good one to advise me on the scientific stuff to provide background to the story.

Then it occurred to me. An insight. A flash of genius like Melville must have had when he'd seen his way to using a white whale to symbolize metaphysical knowledge. Or maybe it was Ahab's search for the white whale that was a symbol of a search for metaphysical certainty that was not for men to achieve, at least not by a search in the empirical world, the only one directly available to men. In any case, what was most amazing was the way that Melville had such a brilliant insight that led him to start creating all those symbols and all that allegorical action. I hadn't forgotten everything Professor Anderson had talked about, and some of it might be useful to an ambitious young author. I knew how to improve my novel though it was already largely sketched out, and plans were best carried out fully. Else, you would never get to where you planned to get when you started out.

And, if you made your plans properly, than everything you did would bring you closer to your goal. Even things which seemed random could work towards your purpose. Like suddenly remembering that just the other day I'd gotten one of those requests for donations from the scientists and other guys that were looking for intelligent life on other planets. They weren't the nuts who believed those intelligent beings had actually visited in flying saucers. They were the serious scientists, as well as some well-educated and progressive-minded laymen, who believed there must be intelligent life out there because there were just so many stars that surely there were

Earth-like planets and if there weren't then maybe there were other forms of intelligent life like gas creatures on Jupiter or silicon-based life-forms burrowing underground on some rocky planet somewhere. There were billions of billions of stars, so surely there were millions of millions of inhabitable planets out there. And some of them were populated by intelligent beings with advanced civilizations. Without a doubt!!!

That sort of scientific reasoning told us life was all over the place in the universe. I just had to be a little careful not to let that kind of scientific thinking get intertwined with superstitious thoughts about flying saucers and stuff like that.

Science was wonderful and so exciting! Soon enough, we would be in contact with some sort of intelligent life with all those millions of dollars being spent on antennas to catch signals from out there. Why not push things a little and introduce some intelligent aliens into my book? Some scientists had done it, and it was all right so long as you did it in a proper scientific way. I'd just have the aliens following a logical plan for getting to know the Earthlings. Contact with a scientific person like Prescott Longfield would be perfect. They could play it safe that way and still be learning enough to be able to talk to the leaders of human society once they were ready. No mystical stuff. No aliens making contact with scientifically illiterate people. Just a straightforward contact between the scientists of intelligent races from different ends of the galaxy.

Oh boy, science really was wonderful and I was thanking my lucky stars that they had brought me into contact with Parnell Lopez. I was learning so much about science and I would be able to make my books real modern and scientific like those books about diseases that wiped out the human race or scientists who found dinosaur DNA and made some test-tube dinosaurs for people to see. Just so long as I was sophisticated about it and showed how the scientists were still human. Even the greatest of scientific discoveries could be used for evil. And that was why the scientifically and morally advanced aliens would be sure to contact a quiet, peaceful fellow like Prescott Longfield first.

I could feel the smile grow upon my face just as Parnell looked up. It was as if he knew something was up. He looked curiously at me. No wonder. I was growing in confidence as I came to understand more about the world.

Facts.

Scientific facts, not the uncertain facts of human history or the mere theories of philosophy and theology. Certainly not naive literature or mere

literary criticism.

Facts.

The scientists gathered enough facts about DNA so that it was possible to make a dinosaur in a test-tube if only someone could find a complete set of dinosaur chromosomes. They had even gathered enough facts to almost understand human beings. Not that anyone would try to make a human being from scratch. It would be good to correct genetic diseases, but human beings couldn't be experimented on like they were just animals. It wasn't that human beings were really different from animals, but they were kind of different, and, anyway, it was a good idea to act like human beings really meant something because, even though we were only part of the animal kingdom, then. . .

There were so many questions science was only starting to answer. The only way to find a short-cut to that higher knowledge would be to find a race of intelligent beings. They might be able to supply us with the facts to understand the meaning of life and all that. We could finally see why we were here. We could understand why life arose, though I had read an article in *The New York Times* that said scientists thought life arose because the physical constants in the universe were right to allow carbon-based chemistry. Some beings from a civilization a million years old might have figured out for sure. They might even be able to tell us why the universe came into being. The Earthling physicists had learned a lot, but they still didn't understand that quantum stuff well enough to know the details about how the universe was created by those fluctuations in nothingness. And there was always the question about why nothingness had the right properties so that fluctuations arose in it and became universes.

Alien scientists could teach us a lot. And if their civilization was a million years old, then they would have figured out how to control nuclear proliferation and how to live at peace with their environment and all that stuff that human beings were still figuring out.

There was no doubt about it. Alien scientists could sure teach us a lot.

Parnell was looking a bit suspicious, perhaps because I was smiling without saying a word. He was used to me being a bit verbose, and, besides, he couldn't know about all the good, scientific thoughts going through my head. Good, scientific thoughts of the sort that would work well in a fast-paced, contemporary novel. Maybe I could even play a role in fighting all that magical and superstitious stuff about astrology and UFOs and vampires.

I announced, “I just got an idea on how to improve my book.” Parnell looked doubtful, but why not? A moderate skepticism was often appropriate until events developed and the facts of the matter became known for certain. That was part of the scientific way of thinking, and it wasn’t such a bad way of viewing other things as well.

Sure of what my goals were and pretty sure of how to get there, I turned and walked towards the house, wondering about the beings in contact with Prescott Longfield. Would they be pretty much humanoids? That would make it easier for the ordinary person to visualize them, and modern biology allowed for enough variation to the basic bipedal shape so that the aliens could be made exotic enough to show they were different from human beings, but mostly a lot like us. Maybe even superior. After all, if the universe was pretty old, they might come from a civilization a million years old. The individual aliens might even be tens of thousands of years old with the advanced science they had to eliminate disease and the deterioration of old age.

Wise beyond our imaginations. So wise they would have found the answers to nearly all the important questions of science and they would be free to just enjoy life or to be missionaries to less advanced species, like the human race.

Wow!

33 Good and Evil: The Wages of Marketing Foul-smelling Substances

Re-opened to Allow for the Findings Resulting from Further Scientific Research into the Meaning of Life as Determined by Genes and Sweatshirts

James Williams had fallen to all fours on the front lawn of the Longfield mansion. With every gasp for breath, he could feel the effects of the toxic chemicals that had entered his system with each lungful of smoke. Fighting to regain his strength, he turned his head to the right and watched the flames soaring to the skies. All those years of accumulating junk, all those ill-gotten profits, had come to such a fitting end.

Not 10 feet from the man who had saved his life, Prescott Longfield was sitting with his arms wrapped around his legs and his chin resting upon his knees. He was grinning and giggling as he watched the flames consume his house, his books, and all of his computers. For all the hours he had spent with all that stuff, he didn't seem to be inordinately attached to it. James Williams wondered if that was a sign that Prescott Longfield was perhaps a bit stronger in the mental health department than you might have thought. Maybe that came from his success in overcoming the immoral legacy thing handed down to him by his family.

And, without warning, an explosion sounded. Prescott Longfield clapped his hands with glee. It was the liveliest James Williams had ever seen him act. Then a second explosion, and a brilliant flash of light soared hundreds of feet into the sky. James Williams realized the fire must have reached some chemicals used by Prescott Longfield in his dangerous experiments.

A quieter but more sharply defined pop rang out. At first, it seemed the fire must have exploded a bottle or can, but the pop had raised a trail of dust between the two men.

Someone was firing at them!

James Williams rose to a crouch and ran over to Prescott Longfield who was looking around him for the source of the “ping.” With a great effort, James Williams pulled Prescott Longfield up and dragged him over to a large stone fountain that sat 50 feet in front of the mansion’s central door. The fountain was oversized, ugly in an overdone Baroque style, but it was sure useful when someone was shooting at you. If only it had surrounded the men, it might have kept them safe for a while. As it was, the killer was moving around. His shots were coming in at a more dangerous angle. Besides that, the two men were only 50 feet from a house on fire. That fire was causing explosions as it reached the chemicals used in Prescott Longfield’s experiments.

Something needed doing, and James Williams was the man to do it. Once he might have been unsure of himself, but after standing up to the tobacco industry, he knew himself to be one of those oblivious to fear when something really needed doing.

After pushing Prescott Longfield down against the base of the fountain, James Williams looked around. He had decided they were sitting ducks if they stayed there. Their only chance was for him to go after the killer. With a stern expression upon his face, he turned to Prescott Longfield and told him, “Stay here. You’ll be safe from the gunfire.” It was far from clear that was true unless James Williams got the killer before he got them, but it was important to keep up the hopes of such a helpless fellow.

Another explosion occurred in the burning house, and James Williams took advantage of the situation. Crouching again, he shot out from behind the fountain. Remembering all he had learned from books and movies, he zigged and zagged and zigged again. He went to all fours for several seconds and then he rolled before reaching the cover of some trees and shrubs. He had thought several shots had rung out while he was maneuvering, but not a one had come near him.

He had made it. Though out of breath, he felt a real thrill at realizing still more strongly that he was capable of dealing with anything a harsh world could throw at him. He felt the boyish grin spread wide even as he peered out from behind a large tree. He searched and searched for any sign of movement, but saw no signs of the gunman. Everything was quiet.

For a moment, he feared he was up against one of those ex-Rangers who could go through the brush or even through the treetops without making a sound. He had not finished planning how he could handle such a highly skilled killer when, suddenly, everything went dark. The fire had gone out, just like it had been a magician's trick all along. James Williams' eyes were unused to the total dark of a moonless night, and he didn't know if the gunman might be sneaking up on him. Had the killer somehow had a way to shut the fire down? Had the explosions starved the fires of oxygen like the dynamite they used in that John Wayne movie about oil-rig firefighters?

After several minutes of quiet, James Williams rose and walked carefully through the deepest shadows at the edge of the grove. He had taken only a few steps when he saw Prescott Longfield stride purposefully into the pale light cast by the stars. He was walking tall and straight, more like Gary Cooper at high noon than a retarded man at midnight.

Three figures strode towards him. James Williams prepared himself to run out and save the poor fellow from ruthless killers. Just before he moved, he noticed the figures were strange little fellows who wore suits that glowed like they were perfectly efficient in reflecting the little bit of light from the stars. For just a moment, James Williams wondered if he was seeing a visit by the high elves out of *The Lord of the Rings*. Then, he noticed the odd shape of the skulls of the three figures. Rather than the esthetic beauty of a mythical elf, these beings had a greater beauty. Their skulls bulged to fit the larger brains of more highly evolved beings. It must have been these aliens who had put out the fire with their superior scientific knowledge. They must have also taken care of the killer. It was lucky for that fellow. Undoubtedly, they had done it without hurting the scoundrel, however much he deserved it. There was no telling what James Williams would have had to do to subdue him. And no telling what would have happened if his all-too-human temper had been ignited.

34 The Treacherous, Slavish Shore: Del Swing Finds a Writer is as Lonely as the Next Guy Who's Also Ahead of His Time

I knew I still had a lot of work to do on the ending as well as some bulking up on all of the text. I was especially worried that I had labeled the fountain as 'Baroque' without giving a good, concrete description of its rich and ornate features.

Maybe James Williams would have a talk with the aliens and hear some of their superior wisdom or learn all about their world free of disease and want because of their superior science. He could be an envoy to the higher civilization, learning all their wisdom so he could bring it to his fellow human beings. That would add an interesting and unique twist to the book. It would be taking some of the good insights of modern science and putting them into a piece of real literature, not science fiction. It wasn't that I thought I was writing a book as good as *War and Peace* or anything like that. It was light literature, to be sure, but it was a real book for all that. It wasn't just something cooked up by an editor to fill out a series or something written to match up with a movie script.

But, I was honest enough with myself to realize my book was incomplete and maybe it even had some technical problems with fleshing out the characters or providing better descriptions of the physical surroundings and all those other things so important for real books.

So, I wouldn't have been surprised at some healthy constructive criticism

from Parnell. I wouldn't have even been insulted. As it turned out, I was a little shocked when his eyes glazed over and kind of went out of focus. He set that latest chapter of my book down on the couch and rose. For a few seconds, he just stood there as if thinking about something that confused him a great deal. Then, he turned and walked out of the room I was using as an office. He was shuffling along in a kind of distracted way, and I was half afraid I'd hear him banging into walls along the hallway, but, a moment later, I heard the door to his office open and then close.

35 Authors and Other Epiphenomena: A Puritanical Binding of the Crotch by Jeans Both Tight and Selfish

I would apologize if I knew what I had done wrong. And maybe if I had the power to fix it. Whatever 'it' is.

And it might not matter in the general scheme of things. That is, it matters only if I am to some meaningful extent, however small, the master of my own destiny. That seems improbable in a world made of no more than bits of matter clashing and occasionally combining according to some scientific laws.

Little I do is to my credit or my blame. After all, I am driven this way and that by the hormones and neurotransmitters which are inside my body, for some unknown reason—after all, they could be a lot of other places warmer and more luxurious. True enough it is that those substances interact with other materials in a very complicated way that reflects external events and general circumstances. Is that sufficient to rescue free-will from those who would reduce it to purely material terms?

Are complexity and complicatedness sufficient to produce an emergence of something which is not to be found in the physical substances and events which fully form it?

If so, would that not be a greater example of magical forces at work than the simple existence of mind and free-will, even personhood, which are raw facts of human experience?

Such is a metaphysical question.

Such has been ruled out of bounds in a scientific age.

Everybody has accepted that ruling.

After all, it is scientific, is it not?

That is, the reduction of the human person to a rosy glow emanating from a purely physical thing.

A thing covered with complicated patterns of complexly tinted paints, to be sure.

I seem to be no more than a corpse being worked upon by black magic—it matters little that it's selfish genes (I may have the spelling wrong on that) as described by certain smart-assed scientists rather than magic spells chanted by voodoo priests. Magic of all sorts, white or black, works to enslave you to a darkened, distorted view of reality.

Magic is magic.

Wonderful stuff.

It's hard to even remember what it is that is to be blamed upon my hormones and neurotransmitters, ultimately my selfish genes tightening on my crotch and limiting my freedom of action.

Perhaps it was my fault, whether I possess free-will or not. Maybe a computer amateur such as myself should have never dared to attempt a rescue of such badly damaged creative efforts. If I had called in the proper specialist, I would not have stumbled into these problems which have cast doubt upon my free-will. A computer expert to fix the machine. Experts in the other matters of concern are still in the process of refining their techniques that they also might help their fellow human beings. Some day. For now, it's clear that computer science is a well-established discipline capable of simulating everything from a pool game through galaxies in formation and on to a human brain. Assuming, that is, that you consider only those aspects of those things which are susceptible of computer simulation. Given current levels of electronic technology and mathematical modeling and factual knowledge.

Why would we wish to consider anything but nails when our favorite tool is a hammer?

We should stick to that which has already been successfully reduced.

Hammers can certainly be used for certain types of reduction.

Some might claim they can even be used to pound things together again. Sort of.

Fragments of Parnell's book are scattered about the hard disk of my computer. Even such a catastrophe as my poor machine suffered was not sufficient to successfully kapoosh all of those fragments into this mess.

Amongst those fragments is a poem of sorts, purported to have been written by Dylan Shagari, that half Nigerian and half Welsh-American poet who could not have been more unlikely if he had actually existed. How could he have written this kind of rhythmic but non-rhyming mess with the unlikely title of *The Whole Ball of Wax Ain't Really Very Much?*

Formalistically reduce we part the way,
 the candle into a slender wick but mostly wax.
 And one day, the damned thing is lit,
 to reveal a flame, some ash, and discombobulated wax.
 And yet remains the vision of something muchly pure,
 as hovers in the fevered mind, the holy ball of wax
 into which some simulated thinker had rolled
 all other balls of wax, and yet trouble came
 as bad-boy Bertrand asked so flat of voice,
 "If all balls of wax have been rolled into this ball of wax,
 has this ball of wax been rolled into itself?"
 The unanswerable tabulates its own taboos
 and never to be heard or seen or spoken,
 and yet a argument is scratched on pale-green Formica,
 however ungrammatical it's wrote.
 Longfar a land, a time agoway,
 in eerie tones that shan't be heard,
 a laugh taboos Omega thrice.

And if a set? be such, who? dares speak of God.

Of course, that seems to be not all that much to the point I am trying to make.

One night, I was suffering a bit from sinus drip. I made a hot toddy of ginger brandy, and one for Parnell, though he had said he would have preferred a bourbon. I would have as well, but there was none in the house. Anyway, Parnell told me that, when he was just a young lad of 9, Dylan Shagari had warned him about the ways of thoughts and words. The Poet had claimed that each could get away from the thinker and speaker, even when they were the same person. Moreover, each could head off in different directions, even when they were supposedly dealing with the same topic and were thought and spoken within a short time interval. Even more than

that, if the words and thoughts came about in a region of space free of extremely powerful gravitational fields, such as those surrounding neutron stars or black holes, there would be no measurable relativistic effects upon the underlying atoms of the brain and vocal chords. Thus would the words and thoughts be free of the crudely reductionistic effects of elementary particle physics. Only the higher and more noble emergent properties of organic chemistry and cellular organization would be left.

I would feel a bit better about all these issues if I knew what Dylan Shagari had been trying to say when he penned another oddly named poem, *Sillyware, Souls, and bESIDES – Marx is Standing on Hegel’s Ears*:

The simplest of rotational groups it were.
 Flip head to toe, shingles to bricks.
 Scramble a Magi with an aggressive stir,
 before long, re-scramble and reduce the mix.

Banish the soul, make man a computer,
 Let Mao pass the Chinese room test.
 Dual-la-la-du, the joke’s a real tooter,
 you’ve resurrected the ghost as a list.

Not all authors are good at inventing proper or stimulating titles. Dylan Shagari should be given the benefit of the doubt for this title muchly confusing and morely historically conditioned than anything this side of Mother Goose. However, it is more difficult to allow a mere amateur to invent individual lines which he then groups into stanzas by no more than an arbitrary convention involving the natural number '4'.

Amateur?

It’s this simple: Dylan Shagari never made a living with his poetry.

I was in worse shape than that. I was afraid that I would never make a living by any means. After all, I had a simple task to perform—writing a novel or two, but I was hardly able to keep to a schedule with all the computer files being kapooshed and data becoming much more disordered. My clear priority was the fixing of those technical glitches that a fast-paced, contemporary novel could be written. It would have been best if I had simply hired some specialist who could have reconfigured all those files to my needs and desires. Instead, I let myself be overwhelmed with Dylan Shagari’s obsession with certain aspects of language and Parnell Lopez’s

obsessions with cosmological astrophysics and quantum mechanics. Sociobiology was pretty much forced upon the two of us. Parnell first. That was made clear at an early stage as he was not only a lay expert on those fields, but he was an expert before I had even a passing acquaintance with them.

And the result of my lack of discipline was a set of computer files so kapooshed as to never be undiscombobulated.

Combobulated?

Is that a word to be found in dictionaries or on the list of good words compiled by those who think a dynamic language should be frozen into the particular form they happened to learn when they were young?

And... Is not undiscombobulated a double negative, of sorts? Irregardless, so to speak, of the difference between something organized from get go and something organized by an effort being applied to a primal something which had been aggressively disordered. Are there some things best said by way of double negatives or passive tenses?

Are there things not strictly reducible to statements which can be analyzed by way of formal logic?

I suspect that a limited understanding of rationality has ceded too much to superstitious ways of thought. Even to wrongheaded mystical ways of thought.

Too much the confusion if modern views are not adopted.

What is needed is a man who does naught but cut the wire from which pins are formed. All things are to be seen in light of those aspects shared with long, slender pieces of matter. Or ignored.

A computer expert! Does not everyone know they are the real specialists in processing information?

The technical tasks of handling information are not to be trusted to a person setting out to be an author, a person tending to get lost in a text of astrophysics when he should have been writing articles or short stories which would have interested the better magazines. Not a person tending to let important issues of plot settle into the back of his mind while letting books remain in various states of incompleteness for months, or even years.

No, what was needed was an explorer of worlds made possible by technology, even unto botched worlds created by technological glitches and buttons pushed in the wrong order.

A rational man would have hired himself an expert in computer memory systems, preferably a hunk or a chick possessing knowledge of both software and the underlying hardware. All bases would have been covered. Truly,

such a person could have untangled the two files, if such had been truly possible.

There are some streams of thought properly kept separate from one another. I failed to do that. A more highly trained specialist could have erected dikes and dams to prevent the turbulence that comes about when conflicting points of view flow into a common river where all waters must finally conform to the lay of the land as it truly is. The Mississippi River can only be redirected for so long; one day, its mouth will move to the coast of Texas, leaving New Orleans in the middle of a dying, drying swamp. The longer the engineers hold back the natural changes in the river bed, the worse the damage will be when catch-up time arrives.

Then again, maybe it is the existence of sophisticated technology for building dikes and dams which mandates that they must be built; what else is a society to do when it has a large number of highly educated engineers and skilled laborers?

I contradict myself.

At least, I think I do, though the argument has become a bit too complex for me to follow.

Besides, who can argue with the short-term advantages of denying the way things are? Why could not one stream, perhaps both, be drained off to water lands marked clearly into corn-fields and others for roses, well-organized and free of weeds and wild types of grasses, not to mention reproductively viable species roses.

Not being an engineer, not at all trained in the procedures proper to a diligent laboratory scientist, I have made a mess of things. All the dams and dikes I have erected to shape the flow of these these works I somehow inherited are but piles of twigs and pebbles. It was a task beyond my knowledge of computers hard and data soft.

I am not fit to live in a world so technologically advanced. It is time for me to step aside for my betters to work their wizardry with bits and bytes that they might, logically and rationally, reconstruct the original works of imagination kapooshed so smearingly in this book which I interrupt so rudely.

If this Babelistic piece is not dekapooshed, then how are proper boundaries to be maintained within human thought which is weak and confused as it is?

36 Sailing Out: Where One Author Must Still Speak for Another Not Yet Ready to Step Forward on a Regular Basis

It was time to sit down and pull together his book, and all Parnell could think of was his characters' names.

'Prescott Lopez'?

And why would the Poet's mother have been named 'Daphne Llewellyn Shagari'?

Parnell Lopez was a man more appreciative than most of the contingency of God's Creation, but 'Delbert Shagari' seemed a bit too much. A man with such a name might well have become a poet, maybe even a great one, but he would have never become known as the Poet, however low in talent and skill and years of experience.

And there was no way to deny it. The Poet had come to life in Parnell's mind. Not one to deny the worth of a living person, Parnell did have to admit Dylan Shagari was more real to him in certain ways than was that nice fellow Del Swing who had moved in a few weeks ago. A friend of Mr. Farley, Del had needed a place to stay. Certainly, there were more rooms in the house than Parnell would ever use, and he was more than willing to do favors for Mr. Farley, who had been such a trustworthy and competent adviser over the years.

Parnell rested his chin in the palm of his left hand and stared out at the rain-soaked landscape.

'Marie' would be her name. Blond and cute of both looks and manner. She would appreciate a man with high intelligence, a brain boggled to the point of distraction. Autistic would be far too extreme a description, and it would not be right to trivialize the problems faced by those poor people who didn't quite belong to human society. Yet, there were some similarities between an autistic man obsessed by one normal or above normal talent that survived whatever it was that devastated his brain and...

A man become genius by his morally free decision to develop some talent he possessed, however rudimentary the initial state of that talent, however much he might have to withdraw from society in the development and practice of that talent.

For example, there was the ability to understand or even to construct complex grammatical statements, holding many not-yet completed ideas open while still others opened, closed, or revealed unsuspected bridges, doors, or tunnels. Not a talent encouraged by the leaders of a modern society where the greatest importance is assigned to increasing the rate and volume of political and economic and social transactions.

It is to science we should look and to those scientists of all eras who have been masters of a highly formalized, mathematical version of this skillful juggling of ideas not yet completed, theories not yet closed. It matters little that most of those masters of science lost their better sense when they spoke in the ordinary languages of men. It was perhaps the genius, but certainly the curse, of Charles Darwin that he was totally lacking in any such talent necessary to hold open one great thought in such a way that it not displace all others.

The human mind and the speech to which it gives birth must remain open if it is to deal properly with a Creation rich and complex beyond the reaches of the human imagination.

The greatest creative thinkers, whether Dante or Einstein, have, in fact, been those who freely, if not always willingly, confronted a reality of mind-boggling complexity.

It is reality that rules, not any formalisms of science or poetry—however fruitful, yet, at their open and honest best, both scientists and poets penetrate to the true surface of reality to conceive aspects, however different, of the totality of God's Creation.

The quantitative formalisms of the scientists allows for more precision of description and prediction than any poet could aspire to. Or would ever appreciate.

Some procedures proper to science are labeled as 'qualitative'. That means only that the quantitative formalisms are not analytic, they do not collapse to simple, closed formulas. More abstract mathematical structures, not reducible to numbers—at least not yet, are involved.

In general, when a scientist, or more likely a scientific camp-follower, claims to be drawing qualitative meanings from physics or neurobiology, humor him. And release your mind to compile grocery lists or to plan your next year's vegetable garden.

Yet, such improper speech has seduced even many a great scientist into believing that, say, the specific pathways of biological history tell us whether or not God exists.

The more he thought about it, the more clearly Parnell realized that, in the domain of poetry and science alike, there was something defectively timebound in the syllogism:

Many English Protestants of Charles Darwin's day believed in a literalistic special creation of Adam as well as a literalistic seven day creation of the universe;

It seems that chimpanzees and men had a common ancestor;

Therefore, God does not exist.

"That's it," spoke the graying man staring into the mists of a Summer rain. "Most Darwinists are little more than atheistic Fundamentalists, and that's why they and the Seven-Day Creationists are so obsessed with one another. They're Siamese twins who've grown to hate each other."

With his mind ranging over a half-life's reading little more focused than the studies of Dylan Shagari, Parnell Lopez remembered Edmund Burke's claim that all politics is essentially theology.

So it is with all qualitative matters. While the carrying-on of science is ultimately compatible only with the existence of a rational, benevolent Creator, science as such does not provide coherent arguments against the most irrational forms of magical thought. It is those fields which provide the foundations of science—theology and philosophy—which once supported such coherent arguments. The pretense that science itself can protect us from superstitious thought has done nothing but allow the various and sundry superstitions to invade science itself.

The difference, small as it is, between UFO abductees and scientists involved in the search for intelligent ET's is that the first believes the universe

is filled with intelligent beings, some of whom have been visiting the Earth and contacting at least some earthlings for years, while the second believes the universe is full of such beings who have been holding off contacts with the human race until Carl Sagan had prepared the way.

Modern superstitions are more akin to modern science than to ancient superstitions. “Is that right?” asked Parnell of the darkening world outside his office window. “Or, have I exaggerated the way in which modern astrology seems to be built upon cause-and-effect relationships which could not have been formalized before Galileo and Newton?”

Racing onward, Parnell spoke to the reddish clouds above the west horizon, “The invocation of large numbers, even billions and billions, to accomplish a complex task is no more than a magical chant. Infinite time, so long as it is sequential and perceptible by creatures like human beings, would not be sufficient to accomplish all things. Cantor sliced away all such illusions.

“Sloppy thinking is sloppy thinking, and a dressing of scientific terms doesn’t change it. Especially when served up by a generation of idiot savant physicists who use mathematics so well, but have not noticed randomness is a formal and undefined entity in traditional probability theory. It does not even reach the level of a concept. As one modern mathematician saw no way a random event could ever occur in a physical world, so did one of his detractors confess a random number is no more than a number requiring an infinite stream of words to describe it. There are lots of ways to say a similar thing, but modern pagans could not count upon even the least of infinities, nor the twin god—Randomness, to rescue them from the implications of a rationally specific universe.”

Remembering a college professor who had told him all of probability theory could be enfolded into a fully deterministic measure theory, Parnell Lopez picked up his pen and prepared for a long night’s effort. He feared it would be more than that when he saw the pen scratch out:

The Open Independence of the Sea

Unverbalizable the upwelling of his soul at the sight of words so reeking of blood and gore, of mangled limbs and shattered boats, of noble beasts being hunted to extinction by brave warriors, all to serve the light needs of a gentle, domesticated people whose great-grandchildren would cast all blame upon those warriors.

Insane was that nautical cowboy who rode the whale to the ocean's depths. But that insanity, the raw lust for the blood of the White Whale, was made possible by the slaughter of more ordinary whales to light the parlors of many quiet, civilized homes in Concord and Salem. It was almost made necessary by the slaughter of the vast herds of cows protecting their calves from the men who had sailed into their nursery grounds.

How could Melville have depicted that slaughter if Ahab the Transcendentalist God-Man had not sailed into the open seas to be revealed as a higher Emerson, one with the courage of his insane and incoherent convictions? If Melville had himself remained trapped in the Transcendentalist web, would he have pretended such a slaughter had not occurred?

He would have been forced into such a lie, but it had occurred.

Of all the events in *Moby Dick*, that scene of profitable and practical-minded slaughter was the most reliably tied back to historical events.

The White Whale was a side-show.

To everyone but Ahab.

And maybe Melville.

Parnell could see there would have to be a beast of a man to beat the Poet to death.

"Or, have I already decided such," asked Parnell of the Evening Star. "Man has only so much endurance in exercising his free-will. It is best not to waste himself on decisions already made."

Marie would have to be her name. She and Parnell could create an island of sanity in the midst of a race of stewards turned rampaging exploiters.

The mind that understands the exploding star would be celebrated above the mere physical objects of its contemplation. The mind that constructs hydrogen bombs and blinding lasers could be deplored as a second-best mind.

Powerful talents deployed for evil purposes, however necessary that sort of evil may often seem.

Children.

The hope of the future.

A devastated world that had swallowed the ashes of both scientist-grandfather and poet-cousin.

Yet, life and hope emerged once more.

"Are fire-weeds all that bad?" mused the man not quite irritated to the point of setting pen to paper.

37 Authors and Other Epiphenomena: Why Did Melville Start Speaking in His Own Voice When Ahab is Pacing the Deck and Queequeg Raises Hair on the Keel of a Boat?

“Uh ho,” if I spell that correctly. Parnell has spoken of himself as author and not just through his novelistic attempts.

This business of writing books, or even smooshing books together, seems to be a bit more complicated than Del Swing has been led to believe and even a bit more complicated than I’d thought before taking pen in hand to stare at a blank piece of paper.

I should have stared longer before starting. . .

But the ink would have dried in the fountain pen before I’d settled these matters. . .

And I’d not have settled them unless I’d taken that first step. . .

Or wrote about that first step.

Those who can, do. And re-do. And re-do. Until they grow into the sort of creature who can get it done.

I find I don’t agree with any of these authors, including myself. So I’m growing into the sort of creature who gets it done without agreeing that it’s done or even that it should be done.

38 The Open Independence of the Sea: Where the Death of James Llewellyn is Related, Though to What Remains Unclear

Once mighty was I, but only a few hours ago, shackles were fastened to my ankles. Humbled was I, not by grace accepted freely, but rather by grace forced upon me. In the manner of Joseph , I watched the chains being attached, seeming to accept fate only because I had no power to raise myself. Unlike that comely youth, I had no hopes of attaining the power to raise myself, nor did I have hopes of being once more blessed in this life. I am an old man.

From the shit and rotted corpses I have come. I have freely returned my shit and soon I will give back my corpse.

What good would it do me, in any case. By the power of God will I live once more, but He will have to make the effort to rebuild my liver and my limbs. In this matter, I feel no guilt in presuming upon God. If He does not fulfill His promises of eternal life, it will not matter. If He does. . .

I can say no more than this: He knows better than I do that I am a creature of bile and blood and not an angelic creature of ectoplasmic stuff.

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The once mighty engineer, the bureaucrat of ephemeral power, the physicist whose powers had faded as he had approached middle-age, was found with his head and arms sprawled upon the desk. The body was taken

along with the shackles and the engineering workstation and thrown into the same dumpster which held the coffee grinds and bacon grease from breakfast. Yet, many had seen the outer remains of the man before they were dragged off, and those willing to hazard a guess had thought James Llewellyn had collapsed inward as a mass of red blood cells had coagulated, breaking into smaller chunks as it approached his brain. Several of those chunks had undoubtedly caused immense problems through regions cortical and limbic. Those regions devoted to motor control were already vandalized beyond repair when he was found.

Yet, those who knew him best had known he had not surrendered to that which was inevitable.

James Llewellyn had been a man of flesh-and-blood and like all such frail creatures, he could be killed, but, unlike many, he would not have submitted to dying. Obnoxiously stubborn, he had considered that to be a duty to God rather than a personality trait.

Time, pulled so firmly about him, was unraveling and pulling away from him.

Like Parnell would he have been in many ways.

For sure would he have re-membered the days...

* * * * *

Re-membered the days did James Llewellyn.

Fondly.

“Once had I been powerful of body and mind.”

Truly, he had been driven to seek that which would be worthy of his attention. It could have even been said that James Llewellyn had conquered the world about him. At each stage of his life, he had turned quickly towards that which seemed interesting and difficult. He had let his intentions crystallize, he had outlined his strategies, and then he had detailed his tactics. Sure of his goals, sure they would bring benefits for his own self and for the others of his concern, he had found the allies necessary for his plans. Armies of loyal followers had gathered, and, from the beginning, superiors had shown that respect and fear more appropriate for an equal than for an ambitious young man still on the rise. James Llewellyn had willed, he had reached out, and pieces of Creation had bowed to his words and submitted to the strength of his mighty limbs.

The old man paused and regained his breath. It was a magnificent life to be re-called. It had been a life of accomplishment. A prosperous life lived, for the most part, charitably. He had had his enemies, yet he had tried to love each of his fellow men as his Lord had commanded him to do.

He had become a mighty man, as had David of yore, and, thus, it was clear that the Lord loved him greatly. Or was it clear? regardless of his accomplishments, so inconsequential as he was dying.

Still . . .

As a missionary, he had spread his Christian faith and had built many a church and hospital in the jungles of Nigeria. As an engineer, he had built robotic factories the size of Detroit and had designed control systems for the complexes of American armies, navies, and air forces which had spanned the globe and had even penetrated into space. As a businessman, he had founded corporations; he had merged, bought out, streamlined, and sold other abstracted entities of manufacture and commerce. As a bureaucrat, he had served in presidential cabinets, had advised Congress and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and had supervised the construction of the anti-missile defenses of North America.

Sad as it was to relate, people living in a world leveled by a nuclear war were rather unimpressed by the accomplishments of scientists and engineers, bureaucrats and politicians. Not that those accomplishments were to undone, not that all men and women in public life were to be blamed for the horrors. No, such horrors as wars and murder of the innocent would be self-inflicted upon the human race as long as it strode across the face of the Earth, as uncoordinated a millipede as could be imagined.

Nuclear fusion power plants, catalogs of neutron stars, and spray-on deodorants which did not harm the ozone layer. James Llewellyn had helped to build the first to power his Detroit-sized manufacturing plant. As a director of the National Science Foundation, he had pushed the cause of the second. The propellants for the third were among the products of a chemical plant near St. Louis, a facility with nary a worker necessary because of the sophisticated electronic controls designed by James Llewellyn.

A mighty man he was. Like a giant did he stride across the Earth's surface. In a five-year frenzy, did he design and build the most amazing set of defenses against the missiles of other peoples. As an add-on, and never did he intend it be used for offensive purposes, he had built a system for shooting nuclear warheads at other peoples. Quasi-stable it was, though the newspaper headlines and the Congressional Reporter said, "Chaos Provides

our Umbrella". Not entirely wrong, given the linguistic confusions which usually result at the collision of superstition and rational thought. And certainly was it true that the missiles zigged and zagged their way to the enemy, in flat trajectories, in parabolas – some of which penetrated that region of the atmosphere often called 'outer space'. Targeted at a dozen or so possible sites, the orbits were set by mathematical functions so sensitive to initial conditions that if the missile encountered a breeze of two miles per hour when it left the silo, the orbit, and perhaps the target, would shift. Computationally irreducible, both forwards and backwards in time, were the orbit and target selection routines. The enemy could have had the routines but, not knowing the exact wind conditions or the intensity of sunlight or moonlight at launch, would not have been able to figure out where the damned things were headed, until it was too late to mount a ground-based defense. Only North America had had an effective space-based defense system – designed by James Llewellyn.

It was a defense system to make a talented engineer and manager flush with pride. And flush-red had James Llewellyn been.

Alas. . .

Those defenses worked as well as such things always have. A nuclear war burned its way across the Earth. Much destruction was wreaked. A few missiles were intercepted by both sides. The countries with greater technological sophistication protected the areas in which were concentrated the leaders and elites of their societies. Until. . .

The diseases came. Hospitals and corner drugstores were nonfunctional. Transportation and manufacture had been disrupted. Even the pharmaceutical plants in the orbiting laboratories and the lunar colonies were so much dust orbiting the Earth and the moon.

As always, men were ready to fix things, but first they needed to concentrate power in their own hands. One dictatorship of North America succeeded another five times, and finally men who hated and feared James Llewellyn came to power. He was humbled and he found himself chained to an engineering workstation to serve men he came to hate with every ounce of his blood. His revenge, if such were to be possible, had to be subtle and at several years' remove—his daughter and his grandson lived under the executioner's ax.

And, so, it came to be that, boggled of body, James Llewellyn shuffled lonely through the valleys and the sheets which formed the substrate of his embodied and self-conscious mind. Like the memories of a body visiting

a ghostly land, James Llewellyn tramped fearfully along, little more than a small set of neural processes, but those electrons flickering in a sea of hormones and neurotransmitters seemed so much like his body. He marched across bridges and climbed down rope-like ladders connecting one sheet to another. Much was fragmenting but a powerful and coherent will persisted and drove the old man on an absurd journey across his brainscape.

Old man, yes. He was now himself, assuming that to be James Llewellyn. Certainly, it was true that the old man was now James Llewellyn, a fellow who did not feel sorry for himself. Quite the contrary. He was thinking about his mission and not himself, and, in any case, he considered himself lucky under the circumstances, though those circumstances included the increasing fog which was covering his sense of self. "Perhaps," admitted himself, "I am in a position worse than I think." Yet, not in the worst of all positions. He was alive—sort of, and certain important regions of his brain seemed to be functioning. Having been married to a neurobiologist, he understood that intact yet were the ventromedial regions of his prefrontal cerebral cortex. He was a man without legs, but if that center of social and moral consciousness had been damaged, he might have been a pair of legs without a man. Though it seemed that many facets of a man might have lingered on without an arbiter to negotiate some sort of a compromised person from the bedlam and babble.

Yet...

Some sense of self survived.

But that self did not feel complete or healthy. It felt to be on the verge of exploding into a vacuum. James Llewellyn was isolated, so painfully alone in the midst of reddish-brown and white matter mutilated by the recent stroke. He imagined that the reddish-brown stuff was dying and turning gray as his self was receiving little information on biological and emotional needs other than the signals from his battle-scarred heart and his stinking kidneys. Once an engineer as talented as any from his race, he was privy only to random whispers of those algebraically encoded abstractions produced by sheets of neurons so well nurtured and so harshly disciplined over the decades.

Knowing that his self was muchly a process of integrating perceptions and thoughts, James Llewellyn knew he was not long for his half-life. Few parts of his brain were functioning, fewer still were the signals reaching the prefrontal regions of his cortex. There was little to integrate, and it would not be long before the process would be nothing but a ghostly hope of divine

mercy.

Truly, James Llewellyn's self was decaying rapidly, though it still dimly lit the way defined by that very act of shining. That was not sufficient to define a human person, or rather, as the old man knew well, if there was only the existential act without something to interact with outside of itself, that would be most perfect and most solipsistic of Hells. And – how long could the soma survive when no longer interacting with its environment?

“Truly,” said the old man, “is James Llewellyn in the worst spot of his life, though unfocused and unsourced hope yet tells him it may be the best spot of his life.”

<Old man|?

|James Llewellyn>?

Perhaps

<James Llewellyn|

(dot-de-do-de-dot)

$$a \times |baby \rangle + b \times |boy \rangle + c \times |youngman \rangle + d \times |middle - agedman \rangle + e \times |oldman \rangle$$

Was such possible? Was there an essence called James Llewellyn which was in some sense independent of the life which the old man was remembering? Was such to be dottily multiplied out with the concrete contingencies of a particular history that a person be actualized?

“It is almost enough to make a man echo 'la-la',” said the man once married to a neurobiologist who had performed a study on the hyper-developed neuro-connections of the most highly studied brain in history, that of Einstein. It was on the edge of her area of expertise, but she had said she wished to better understand her husband and her nephew and perhaps coming grandsons. And, a grandson of some mental talents and a muchly fragmented personality had come, but not while she was alive. Much could she have done to help the boy develop his genius while perhaps avoiding the worst of its consequences.

And that was why...

The struggle...

Must go on?

The old man, who was also James Llewellyn, was fighting hard to keep up his efforts to achieve that all-important goal of destroying the North

American Collective, whatever the hell that was. More than that, why the hell did that thing deserve so much hatred? James Llewellyn vaguely remembered that his grandson and other young men must be killed that they could be saved, but, then again, that proposition seemed ridiculous. He could not imagine what sort of logical reasoning could have led to such a theory, not that he was currently well-equipped to form the simplest of syllogisms.

Not sure of his goal, less sure of its importance, suspecting he might cause more pain and suffering, both <James Llewellyn| and |the old man> were pushed forward by something which was supporting the weakening will of the hims willing to support the effort. Willing to will. . . Or not?

Perhaps it was a sort of mental inertia.

Perhaps not.

With his will introspectively breaking down, the old man considered surrendering as a way out of his own pain and suffering. Perhaps it was time to allow his hims to dissipate into the inhuman wastes of infinity. There was not much left of most of those many hims.

Blind, he suspected his eyes stared vacantly at the computer's display screen.

Deaf, he thought it likely the Center's life-support systems still hummed.

Mute, he could not have protested if a janitor had carted his body out to a dumpster.

Worst of all, though the Center's security systems undoubtedly operated, James Llewellyn's own proprioceptors were down. A truly important him had died, or at least was falling down on the job. The old man was aware of many bodily functions not normally accessible to the conscious mind, but he no longer knew if his feet were planted flat on the floor, if his knees were bent, if his back pressed against the chair.

Signs of impending doom were increasing. Fumes wafted by, faint hints of urea and other poisons. The flow of fresh air was fitful; the sound of fluids pulsing by was fading. Decay lay over all things, and death was approaching rapidly.

The old man shuffled across a bridge whose moorings were tearing free and curling up. A few steps carried him an immense distance across this new sheet which seemed like a tightly woven net rather than a smooth surface. He came to an abrupt stop, probably no more than a few seconds after leaving the bridge. A breeze of fresh air passed through, and tears came to James Llewellyn's eyes as he smelled the lilacs on his grandfather's

farm. May-like, that odor drifted in an open window and passed over heads bedecked, some in white and some in brown and even some in a shade of gold, as unusual as that was for creatures cousins to chimpanzees and gorillas. Yet, true it was as was it true.

It seemed to the old man, observing as an outsider and not a re-experiencer that the bodies supporting those heads were seated at a huge table covered with bowls and plates giving off the sense of roast-beef-gravy-mashed potatoes-hot-yeasty rolls. For the time of a quickly passing memory, he froze and tried to untangle the smells of a Sunday dinner. He hoped to bring order to that potpourri that the presence of fresh-baked apple pies might be detected. It was so, so important to . . .

The old man looked about at the eerie brainscape. Sheets of reddish, white material lay beneath his feet. Gray was his future, but it had not yet arrived. Every so often, a chain of lights would flash across the sheet, occasionally making contact across a bridge or up a ladder. If that happened, the streak of rapidly fading luminescence would shoot off into the distance. Looking down, James Llewellyn saw that something different had just happened where he was standing. A stable circuit of some sort had been constructed, though it was fading in parallel to the unfulfilled hopes of smelling apples baking in a spicy brown cinnamon broth. Yet, the circuit did not seem to be those hopes, nor did it seem to be the memory of those golden-brown, yeasty rolls. It was necessary but not sufficient. He shook his head and moved on, wondering why a phrase from mathematical proofs had any applicability to this situation. Further wondered he if there were memories which could be revived by events sufficient though not necessary. Multiple his hims, why not multiple the framework of certain types of memories?

Calm had returned as a man not quite autistic was thinking through a complex problem. Concrete had been the memories bringing on the abstract considerations. Yes, the old man knew that, in the end, panic had been averted by the smells of a grandmother's handiwork. Temporarily had he, yes – even most of his hims, forgotten he had withdrawn inside his stroke-scarred brain. Even when he was not awash in the sensations of better times, it was hard to remember where he was. It was still more difficult to remember he was little more than a piece of a cerebral cortex struggling hard to maintain a sense of self. There was so little left upon which to found a self. The sense of body was fading. There was little in the way of fresh smells, nothing of images and sounds.

Yet, the legs carrying him across these bizarre planes felt like the limbs which had once carried him down the base-paths, though these legs were oh so weak. They had once been sinewed with bands of steel, but that was in the days when a young man scaled cliffs above African rivers. That was when he accompanied naturalist friends to capture and tag polar bears so nasty. Mostly, that was when a moral war had been waged among the pieces of his fragmented self, and he had finally shed his many girl friends and his mistress, though that was not until three years into his marriage. Morgan had been a saint, or else she just loved him enough to let matters work themselves out.

He was dying at a time appropriate for his body and its environment, and, yet, it seemed as if concrete muscles, though mere shades of those youthful masses of contractile tissue, were responding to his intentions.

The sorry state of the brainscape worried James Llewellyn. Great shards of material fell from those sheets overhead. Strips of the net-like stuff were curling up loosely like so many jagged and worn-out watch-springs. A dim circle of lights formed near his feet and the taste of the spice cake from his twelfth birthday lay upon his virtual tongue. It came to this man, so well-disciplined in the ways of science and technology, that he was but an image of a fading self. Could the image persist when the self had faded? The old man could think of no better definition of Hell: to be a ghostly thing without a body and without a world to occupy.

His father had once returned from San Francisco with a baseball autographed by the DiMaggio brothers—Joe and Dom. That was the year Jimmy Llewellyn set the freshman home run record for Thomas Jefferson High. Like the DiMaggios, he had played centerfield barely outside the infield dirt. He had dared anyone to burn him. Few did, even in college, though there he had dropped back a little bit. DiMaggio-like, his favorite feat in baseball had been to throw out a runner at first from the outfield. Even a home run had not been comparable to that.

Pleasant memories and all, James Llewellyn was fading fast. He shook himself back to an awareness of the task that lay ahead; the programming had been completed, but he had not yet spoken the code words which would send that murderous program to reside in a small box of old-fashioned silicon chips. The silicon substrate for that killer would be secure—two decades before, he had placed it there, secretly and on a hunch it might be needed some day. All it could do was accept a program and then listen for specific conditions to download the program into the general defense system

of North America, though he had built the box before the United States had expanded into Canada and then south to the northernmost districts of Uruguay.

As director of the defense system at times, the chief engineer at others, and sometimes the major consultant, James Llewellyn had been able to see that the connections to his booby-trap were maintained. Booby-trap? In fact, he had not known why he built that box and placed it in the communications network for the North American defense system, self-powered for centuries, as an unmarked node in that air-defense system. It had the capabilities to push programs past most types of systems safeguards; it would have few problems sending dangerous instructions into the master control systems of the North American Collective. Much technology and much knowledge had been lost after the Nuclear Wars, especially when many scientists and engineers had chosen to retire quietly rather than work for the Collective. The Overlords had eventually realized what had happened and created a special police team to track down people with technical skills and knowledge, not that it had taken much of an effort to find James Llewellyn. He had retired, but in a rather public and ostentatious style. A fool he had perhaps been, a coward not.

The box had finally revealed its purpose. It could be used to destroy an evil government. It could sit quietly, listening for a particular pattern of signals telling it that certain tests were being conducted. Those signals would tell the little box that men were breaking down barriers in an attempt to enter sacred ground. The old man did not really think the barriers between the human and non-human could be demolished, but much that was human might be tortured or destroyed in the attempt to do so. Men had always sought to be gods, but not James Llewellyn. He had always had too much fun being a man and was willing to pay the price for that troubled but rewarding state. Now, he was determined to discourage divine pretensions on the part of other men. It would be that box which would listen for signs that certain unwise experiments were being conducted. It would strike out and destroy James Llewellyn's enemies and save the human race in one attack which could easily breach any security systems the Collective was capable of building. It would save by killing more innocent people, some of them likely to be boys, or at least young men.

Through the accelerating self-destruction of a body once wondrously adapted to the demands of an often harsh world, past a bridge carrying the memory of his wife's favorite perfume and her bodily odor, past another

which channeled the strains of *Silent Night* sung in the bell-like soprano of his twelve year-old grandson, Parnell, James Llewellyn was driven by a will tempered and sharpened by years in the upriver jungles of Nigeria, by more years in the trench wars of corporate and governmental bureaucracies, by the sight of his greatest work launching wave after wave of rockets carrying the fires of Hell in their heads.

Nearly three billion people had died in those wars, mostly in the aftermath when the institutions of society broke down and mostly from medical problems once considered minor. A high percentage of the children born after the wars were retarded, limbless, or defective in their innermost organs. It was not radiation but rather rubella and hantaviruses and starvation which had wreaked such havoc.

The old man fell to his knees and wept uncontrollably. Still embodied, still actualized, though weakening fast, James Llewellyn's mental barriers were broken down by a whirlwind of a process cycling between the barely living limbic regions of his brain and those organs and glands of his visceral region which still responded, however weakly. He saw again those images of defenseless and innocent young men dying as that program did what its creator had willed, however reluctantly. He had lived much of his life with blood on his hands, nearly all his adult life with the blood of billions threatening to spill onto his person. He would go to his Maker with fresh blood to be spilled, perhaps even as he was being judged. Shrugging off that concern, he told himself that, for men though perhaps not for women, the sins of omission lay heavier than the sins of commission.

His preconceptions confirmed once more, James Llewellyn stumbled to his feet and set off for a distant bridge in a gait ever more shuffling. He noticed the air seemed to be changing into an amorphous substance, glass-like but more short-termly liquid. Ignoring gravity, the thickening air was forming itself into vertical panes as if hot and cold were henceforth to be separated east to west and not up to down. James Llewellyn shuffled onward through increasingly thin and dense layers of air.

The great sheets, formerly fraying on the edges and on the surface, were beginning to buckle and tear. Bridges and ladders were collapsing and being shredded by the movement of the sheets. Once again intent on his poorly-understood mission, James Llewellyn stumbled forward as a gently curved sheet began to osculate, to slope and climb, to drop unexpectedly. Ignoring the wrenching in his gut, he shortly reached a critical turning point. Refractions jiggled and then they jaggled and soon he was seeing

where he had been. The stooped figure of a man approached, straightening and growing brawnier with each lurch forward.

James Llewellyn, or at least one segment of him, stopped as the man came into sharp focus. Thirtiesh, he stood a hair over six feet tall. He was well-muscled, thick of shoulders, chest, and stomach. His eyes burst questions at the world; his mouth was set firmly in a face strangely devoid of wrinkles. The young man's entire person, but especially those eyes. . . those eyes. . . those Adamic and apish eyes, spit forth internally generated possibilities. He presented not well-formed circular or rectangular pillars to be fit into experimentally controlled peg-holes.

Not at all.

This young man presented shapes convoluted fantastically. Clearly, most such possibilities generated within a creative mind would find no place in the environment of the moment. Some would not have fit in any environment conceivable in Creation. Others would have fit in environments a few centuries prior or a few hence; still others could have fit but never happened to find their proper slot.

Rich in possibilities, the invader was also a man of practical accomplishments. Spare of gesture and ascetic of expression, the young man projected a confidence well-founded upon a highly developed set of talents. He was a successful man of the world.

As he stared at the invader, James Llewellyn wondered how he knew so much about this fellow who looked so oddly like a James Llewellyn of 60 years prior.

Hesitation lay upon a complex and recursive environment before rings of lights were seen in the distance, aurorae limbicis was building up to some sort of climax. The lights played left to right, up to down, and sent tentative projections into regions no longer within the knowledge of the battered old man. As the lights passed, he felt hot drops represented upon his sunken and virtual cheeks, tasted salt upon his lips cracked and celibate. His vision was clouded. The hands clenched, appendage-like, even as they terminated those frail 91 year-old arms. Lungs sucked stale air and an empty stomach quivered. Heart weakened just the tiniest bit more. The aurorae flashed in from all directions and tightened a circle around James Llewellyn. He knew it was time to feel sad.

His remembered body recursed again and remembered that of a young man grieving for his father. That young stomach had been poisoned by emotions too strong and too sudden. The purging of the gut had continued

for an entire day; the heart was never cleansed of that pure and Godly acceptance of suffering.

The two grieving bodies came into communion with that of the 66 year-old James Llewellyn, standing, shaking and weeping, at the open, flower-strewn grave of his wife.

Memories and the multitude of one person in whom they inhered wormed their way through spacetime. The worm bled in many a segment but seldom moaned. He wept only for others. When still young and driven by the most innocent of lusts, James Llewellyn had learned that endurance is the necessary link between suffering and character. It had been much harder to internalize the tentmaker's claim that character produces hope. He had ever after wondered if there are statements true only when conjoined to belief.

By the greatest of miracles, a young man had come to believe in hope and it had never disappointed him. Suffering had come as frequently as success, and it was the suffering which penetrated more deeply to the hearts of James Llewellyn and those he loved. It was that which formed his character more than the rather superficial effects of worldly riches. And, so, hope had survived in the fertile ground prepared by misery and pain. It had even grown stronger through those driest of periods when faith had been discarded like a suit no longer in fashion.

It was a gesture of hope when the old man moved one step closer to his younger self. The worm was not turning on anyone, but it was trying awfully hard to examine its own hinder parts. Movement was to no avail. Legs motionless, the simulacrum of the ghost of the memory of an actuate long since dissipated into the biosphere moved a compensation backwards. Safe from the demands of the present, it raised its left arm and pointed righteously at a heaving bridge leading to a once planar sheet contorted in ways quite non-Euclidean.

The sheet quaked and heaved and gave off an eerie light as if it were on fire. With great reluctance but determined to see his mission, whatever the hell it was, through to the end, James Llewellyn went down on all fours and inched his way across a most uncooperative bridge. Reaching the other side, he struggled to his feet and limped on aching knees and ankles towards a fuzzy image hovering over the central region of the sheet. Whatever was there, it was sheltered by flames starting a foot or so above the sheet and rising to several times the height of James Llewellyn. He shuffled through the flames with barely a twinge of fear. Half expecting to confront the fires

of Hell he had helped to unleash upon the Earth, the old man was surprised to see only six men sitting on what seemed to be chairs of legal murder. A few steps forward and he was able to see five of the young men were sitting at the points of a pentagram outlined on this sheet of brain matter. The young fellows were all motionless from the shoulders down. One looked to be frozen in panic from the neck up, the others were gabbling away. Streams of meaningless numbers struck the ears of a man once known as the greatest of all human engineers.

Not sure if the lack of patterns was a cognitive illusion or an actual property of the number line, James Llewellyn stopped to test himself. " $2 + 3 = 5$." That seemed right. " $7 \times 5 = 35$," came also quickly and resonated calmly. He said, "Now let's try for prime numbers." It was not hard to remember '3' to be a prime number, but then he halted to think before telling himself, "3 primes the numbers 6, 9, 12, and so forth. They must also be primes." Satisfied that many of his cognitive functions were intact, James Llewellyn moved forward to stand in front of a young blond man with a slack face and dull, blue eyes. The fellow spoke a mass, orbital parameters, and a list of elements. Quickly calculating the likely volume of the described object, and allowing for the chemical make-up, James Llewellyn guessed it was a large asteroid.

His attention shifted to the man at the center of the pentagram. Though the paunch and the gray hair seemed not familiar, the old man moved a step forward and shouted, "Parnell!" at the middle-aged man who looked like his grandson with another 20 years added. James Llewellyn's image of himself shivered, reviving the sadness barely sufficient as a bulwark against the Satanic anger which welled up as he stared at those tubes and wires running into Parnell's arms, legs, and groin. There was a metallic and plastic collar about his neck with wires and a few small tubes running in. Other wires were attached to electrodes above his ears, at his temples, and beneath his eyes.

James Llewellyn tried to burst into the pentagram, past the poor young men wired and entubed just like Parnell. The entire pentagram, with the six men, moved a compensation backwards, just like the recursive image of his younger self had done.

It came to the tired old man that projected memories had not the substance, the sheer sensual density of actual memories. He wondered if such an insight could help him move about a brainscape increasingly alien, but, instead of returning to his work, he willed himself to relax and fell to his

knees where he prayed to the God he had abandoned and hoped with all the strength which had deserted him.

Somehow finding the desire to rise, James Llewellyn struggled back to the bridge and once more crawled across on his hands and knees. His other self confronted him as he rose. The younger image stood with muscles tensed and mouth set more firmly than ever.

“Why did you build those systems for them? Did you not guess what they intended to do?”

Feeling weak and sad once more, the old man swatted at the mists obscuring his vision.

“Of course I knew,” confessed the elder James Llewellyn, constricted of throat and thick of tongue. He swallowed but fluids flowed into his mouth that much faster. “I have that in my past, but you have such sins in your future.”

The younger self was so horrified as to part his lips slightly. His eyes still blasted his internal presentations at the world and precious seconds passed while wave after wave of gentle accusation and merciless pity and harsh forgiveness pounded upon the older self. Elder-self-loathing flowed also into the ocean of suffering in which the old man was bathing, and the younger James Llewellyn moved backwards, legs still motionless.

Suddenly melancholic of expression, the smooth-faced man said, “You may burst some of the constraints I have placed upon you, but you shall never transcend yourself.”

The old man and the memory of his image of his younger self moved off side-by-side, intent on reaching a place from which James Llewellyn’s will could bring about the possibility of ruthlessly merciful death.

Marched the two wormish segments deep.

Deep.

Deep, so deep that Euclid’s $\langle \pi|e \rangle$ was down to a slice.

* * * * *

Was that truly what had passed through his grandfather’s mind as he was dying? Doubtful, but how was Parnell to do better than anticipate one plausible set of thoughts in a dying brain of a man of both science and faith?

39 The Treacherous, Slavish Shore: A practical Man Keeps His Eyes So Firmly on Last Month's Book Sales That He Half-reads Only Half His Friend's Soul-revealing Narrative

I closed the second part of Parnell's book and walked out on the balcony to think things through. On the surface, something seemed deeply wrong.

What man could possibly know the suffering of another man as he is sinking deeper and deeper inside a paralyzed and dying body? How could a man still looking forward to life even know there is a perception of sinking deeper and deeper as opposed to a feeling of dissipating as if a fog in the early morning sun?

Maybe there was a way a man's thoughts could get directly to paper. By some kind of telepathy or telekinesis or something like that. With all the research done by scientists, especially ones working for the KGB and the CIA, it seemed likely there were powers of the human mind that remained untapped. But, that kind of stuff didn't happen very often. There weren't many people with the natural talent for bending spoons with their thoughts, and it didn't seem to be a skill easily learned. It seemed a bit implausible that that James Llewellyn would have been a man capable of putting words in a computer just by thinking them. And there were a lot

of critics who said implausible events were to be avoided in fiction far more than impossible events. After all, the impossible could lead into fantasy, maybe even science fantasy. Fantasy was a respectable genre, selling lots of books. The fantastic could even fade gradually into respectable ideas from science, like the aliens in contact with Prescott Longfield. The implausible seemed to lead nowhere in particular.

There was also a problem with the switches from first-person to third-person, but, as I remembered matters, Melville and some others were prone to those kind of switches when it seemed appropriate for telling their tales. It didn't quite fit any underlying theory of literature, so far as I could remember, but there was usually a pretty good reason for it, even if that reason could only be seen after the fact.

That was kind of a pisser of an idea. That something could be intelligent without really being planned out in a strict sense. Maybe individual acts of intelligence could kind of evolve? I wondered if that would shoot the hell out of my ideas of how books were supposed to be written. Could I be heading off in the wrong direction with my efforts to organize my book, to plot out the plot, so to speak, from beginning to end, before starting in on my disciplined writing of the book, page by page? Heck, maybe sentences weren't even built up that way in our minds, and maybe that was how some people could construct such awesomely complex sentences. Maybe too much rational planning eliminated the complexity which was naturally part of creative efforts. It didn't really seem all that likely, but it was one of those weird sorts of ideas that was fun to play with.

And, then, of a sudden, vague, half-formed ideas and images began to flood my mind. I felt an urge to write more. The parts of my book already written needed to be bulked up, but my true desire was to extend the story. Could Prescott Longfield and James Williams go with the aliens to visit their world? I had a pretty good idea of my limitations, and I feared it to be well beyond my scientific knowledge and my narrative skill to write about a world with a completely different history than the Earth, a world which had given birth to a race of intelligent beings with a completely different history from human beings. That would take a lot of scientific knowledge about biochemistry and evolution and stuff. If a layman tried to imagine what another world would be like, he'd probably make all sorts of errors. He wouldn't know enough of the details of the Earth's history and the history of the human race to generalize to another planet and another race of intelligent beings.

It would take a scientist to do hard stuff like that.

40 Good and Evil: Somewhere Over the Rainbow

In the presence of the aliens, Prescott Longfield had begun to glow as if he could reflect at least a part of their higher knowledge and superior wisdom. His eyes had even seemed to enlarge, to grow moist and sad, yes, sad as if he had been told by Vo-Misa of so many intelligent races which had failed to respond to a call to scientific knowledge. The galaxy was littered with planets burned by nuclear wars or poisoned by the actions of selfish races looking always for the quick chemical fix.

As James Williams reached Parnell and the aliens, a conversation was being held in some high-pitched language. It seemed likely to him that this was a language better adapted to the rapid exchange of scientific facts and scientific theories and other forms of wisdom. Many syllables were packed into each burst of speech by Prescott or the three aliens.

James Williams knew that human beings formed or lost their ability to make or fully catch specific speech sounds while they were yet infants. Knowledge of that fact had even won him a bet while watching an academic quiz show with some friends. Now, that bit of knowledge proved still more important. It allowed him to realize the aliens had been visiting Prescott and preparing him for his mission from the time that he was in his crib.

Did that explain Prescott's lack of social skills? With a head packed full of higher knowledge and superior wisdom, had Prescott retreated from a world populated by people only partially enlightened for all the progress in science and technology over the past few centuries? Wise beyond the imaginations of other Earth-people, Prescott had seemed a fool; gentle and trusting, he had proved a dupe for the manipulation of scoundrels.

41 The Treacherous, Slavish Shore: Confused at the Depths Suddenly Discovered in One of His Characters, An Author Stops Work to Discuss Matters with Another Struggling Writer

When I knocked on Parnell's door, there was no answer, but the light shone under the door. I knocked again, and there was still no answer. Hoping I wasn't being rude, I decided to walk in. As I opened the door, I saw Parnell at his writing desk, rocking back and forth, with a grin upon his face. A fountain pen was in his hands, though held poised above the page. He was wearing earphones, and his stereo was all lit up on the credenza behind him. Digital indicators were dancing back and forth almost as rapidly as Parnell was rocking. When he looked up to see me, he looked to be just a bit embarrassed, as if it were a crime to be having so much fun in solitary activities. He removed the earphones, and, still grinning sheepishly, he asked, "You like CCR?"

A bit confused by the question which seemed to disrupt my thoughts, I nodded, and he reached back to turn on the speakers. A bad moon was a'risin', and that sent a chill up my spine. For a second, I had the feeling that the night was cursed. The best that could happen was the setting down of rubbish upon the paper. The worst was unimaginable. But, it was

bad enough to think of wasting an entire night of writing, covering the floor with reams of paper which had not suited the purpose for which it had been tested. Maybe I would have to throw away the little I had written just a few minutes ago, having painted myself into a corner by being so powerfully descriptive about the depths of the damage to Prescott Longfield's psyche. There might still be a way out; it would take a truly ingenious solution, but that was always possible. There had been no one who had ever probed the deepest parts of the human mind, no one who had ever placed true limits upon what the mind could do or who the person could become. I would find a way out; somehow, I would find an angle on the plot that would let me show how Prescott Longfield was capable of so much more than many people would have thought. And I might have already found it by opening the possibility that the aliens had been teaching him since he was just an infant. It would be a hell of an experience to be taught science and mathematics and stuff by intelligent aliens from the other side of the Milky Way. Who could guess what untapped levels of human genius could be brought out in an infant by teachers from a million year-old civilization?

I was surprised to hear Parnell ask, "Ingenious solution?"

Apparently, I had spoken some of my thoughts out loud. I was wondering if it was a sign of the craziness that often accompanied intense creativity but couldn't wonder long before an impish grin crossed over Parnell's pudgy, gray-stubbled face. Through his grin, he asked, "Do you mean ingenious the way that Cervantes used it? The man from LaMancha was ingenious?" Not sure what Parnell was talking about, I didn't answer before he adopted a serious expression and informed me, "Cervantes thought Quixote to be ingenious in the sense of being a lunatic, and, often enough, an utter ass." He smiled as if to cheer me up, but I was sunk too deep in my thoughts about Prescott Longfield and those aliens from. . .

I wondered if Parnell could give me some advice on what star system would be likely to produce a race of intelligent beings, but I was afraid he'd lecture me on how little scientists knew about such things. Damn it! There were times when a man needed the courage to speculate no matter how much prudent critics might object. It was about time someone broke from the pack and dared to set out into the unknown. It was time to explore what would happen when human beings came into contact with intelligent life from other star systems. In a serious way, that is. Not like science fiction. More like. . . expanding the efforts of the scientists who had tried to write seriously about stuff like that.

Rather than giving me useful advice, Parnell was staring at me in the strangest way, like I was an ingenious lunatic or something. I wasn't about to let myself be held back by people who were too conservative to cross the boundaries into the unknown. I rose, fully determined to push through the story of James Williams. At all costs. Sometimes, it was necessary to suffer to accomplish something worthwhile.

I'd turned back towards the door when Parnell said, "I've almost finished the story of the first romantic day enjoyed by Marie and the fictional Parnell, though I'm having my doubts about naming the character after myself. It might lead people to think I have an ego problem or something." Not sure what this had to do with me, I turned back towards him and must have shown my confusion on my face. Parnell reddened and sputtered a bit before managing to ask me to read this new section of his book the next day. At least, that's what I thought he was asking me. It was all rather foggy as my mind turned with ever more determination to the task ahead of me that night.

As I wandered back to my own suite of rooms, I had to remind myself of the need for action. I was trying to write a contemporary, fast-paced novel, and it wouldn't do to have much thinking in it. Some conversation was all right, so long as it moved the plot along or revealed some interesting aspects of the characters.

42 Good and Evil: More Stuff from Over the Rainbow

When James Williams reached Prescott and the aliens, they halted their conversation to look at him. Four pairs of eyes stared at him, but very gently and very trustingly, overflowing with superior wisdom and, yet, perhaps they were a little too naive to deal with the likes of Farnsworth and his co-conspirators at Innoral. For a moment, James Williams wished that he too could be so gentle and so wise, but such had not been his fate. That was not all to the bad; after all, he had proven himself capable of dealing with the likes of the tobacco merchants at Innoral.

It was Prescott Longfield who spoke first, “Vo-Misa and his comrades have come to take me home with them. Under their guidance, I have advanced too far along the path of scientific wisdom to live amongst a primitive people. I know too much, and, sooner or later, ruthless people will realize I have the knowledge to make weapons and unleash powers far beyond the imaginations of Earth-people.”

James Williams swallowed hard, suddenly realizing how much he had underestimated the depths to be found in this fellow who had seemed no more than a brain-damaged scientific genius. He wished it were possible for Prescott Longfield to stay that he could be the bridge between humanity and the more advanced races of the Milky Way. Then there might be hope for the human race to move quickly to higher plateaus of wisdom, but, as if he could read James Williams’ mind, one of the aliens spoke in a squeaky, metallic voice, “He can do you no good on this primitive planet. You and other human beings will have to continue your struggle to survive and to outgrow your juvenile racial habits. You must learn to be tolerant and to be at peace with one another, to love your selves and your world that you stop pouring poisons into your own bodies and into the soils and waters of

the Earth.”

Realizing there was no easy path to superior wisdom, James Williams stepped back and nodded sadly. And, yet, he still hoped his race might yet receive as much benefit from the alien’s superior wisdom as men were willing to accept.

“Will you remain near, that you might give us easy help when it is possible? If you offer us the help of your technology, maybe our greedy and short-sighted leaders would listen to your superior wisdom.”

The alien shook his head sadly as if to say that even the promise of greater prosperity would not be sufficient to make the leaders of Earth responsible and moral citizens of the galaxy. The gentle little fellow reached out with his three-fingered hand and touched James Williams lightly on the wrist. The Earth-man did not move, knowing it was appropriate to simply receive any gifts offered by these creatures of superior wisdom. He had to suppress a shiver as the leathery skin touched his. James Williams confessed to himself that he was not yet tolerant enough to move freely amongst the more advanced beings of the galaxy. For all those primitive feelings in his breast, James Williams knew in the higher parts of his mind that the alien’s oddly shaped skull contained a brain far larger and more advanced than any Earth-man’s brain had ever been, even that of Einstein. The alien’s leathery skin did not mean he was reptilian in his actions, it meant only that his race had a different history behind it. Likely, he came from a hot, sandy world where air would desiccate a more tender skin.

The alien withdrew his hand, and he and his two companions turned and walked away, leaving the two men to their final farewell. With one of his own race, though one greatly advanced in scientific knowledge, James Williams was willing to be more socially aggressive. He thrust forward his right hand, and Prescott Longfield shyly and slowly reciprocated. With hands grasped firmly, the men stood staring sadly into each other’s eyes.

It was Prescott Longfield who spoke first, “I wish there was a way I could help you and my fellow-men, but I know so much that my wisdom has risen too far above that of other human beings. There is little I can teach you until you learn more on your own. If I tried to teach you how to build a moral and scientific society, it would be like a missionary trying to teach an Aborigine how to build a jet-plane.”

James Williams had no choice but to nod sadly in agreement. There was nothing for men to do but muddle along, hoping to reach a plateau of higher scientific knowledge and superior wisdom before they destroyed

Mother Earth or themselves.

Prescott Longfield turned and walked away slowly, with the dignity suited to a man destined to live amongst a people of such an ancient civilization. He disappeared into the mists at the edge of the woods which stood where there once were gardens cultivated by slaves or their descendants, and even those supposedly free people were paid only a pittance from a fortune amassed by selling an addictive, poisonous weed to a people not yet wise enough to know how to treat their bodies properly. Or their planet.

43 Good and Evil: Going it Alone

James Williams had barely touched his beer when his eyes met Daphne's eyes. She was standing near the door with two men in business suits, one of who looked enough like her to be her brother. The other had dark hair, slicked back against his skull in the style championed by Pat Riley and Robert DeNiro. The man's lean face was twisted into a sneer more intense than any that Pat Riley had ever worn in the closing seconds of an important game or Robert DeNiro as he passionately killed a man on screen. It seemed likely the sneer was a permanent feature on the man's face. He looked to be a lawyer, his skin tight against his face, his glare that of a predatory reptile.

James Williams returned his attention to Daphne who was looking at his mug of beer. Her face was wrinkled up as if she were worried about him, not that he could blame her. It might have been four o'clock somewhere in the world, but it was only noon in Alexandria. To show his disdain for the conventions of a prudish society, James Williams lifted the mug and downed half of its 12 ounces in a long sip. It made him feel a little nauseous; drinking early in the day and with no food in his stomach did not agree with his system. Besides that, he suddenly realized he was alone, with no designated driver around.

He thought through his responsibilities as a member of the human brotherhood, managing a gracious smile at Daphne as the hostess led the party of three towards the dining room. The blond, fair-skinned man who might have been Daphne's brother looked at James Williams in a hostile manner far less than evil. It suddenly occurred to him that this fellow might well have enough goodness left in him to escape his life as a scoundrel.

Not the other fellow. He glared at James Williams as he passed, sending

a chill through the very soul of the man who suddenly wished that Vo-Misa had remained, giving good men the benefit of his higher scientific knowledge and his superior wisdom. James Williams realized he would have to tough it out and fight the scoundrels with the resources available to a member of a primitive race of creatures not always rational. There were things which needed doing, and he would have to do them with the resources of a man of flesh-and-blood, having no more than a primitive knowledge of scientific facts.

He waved over a waitress, but she stopped short of his table and informed him, "There's no waitress on duty in the bar area right now. You'll have to order from the bartender unless you want to go sit in the dining area."

There was nothing he could do but go along with the conventions of this hick bar. It was his fault for having come into a place that advertised **Home Cookin'** in bright neon colors of red and orange. Then again, he might have been drawn in by fate. Having seen him, Daphne couldn't forget that there was someone tough enough to help her, someone with a conscience that wouldn't let him walk away from a woman in trouble. Not that he would only help women; James Williams wasn't one of those guys who would rescue a damsel in distress just so she'd be grateful enough to sleep with him. He wasn't sure if Daphne realized just what kind of guy he really was. The way things had worked that night...

He could understand that she might fear he had just used her for a good night's sex, but it'd be different the next time. He wouldn't just rush out the following afternoon. He'd stay with her all weekend, lounging around in bed, talking about all kinds of stuff and then they could get to know each other even better over a nice, leisurely breakfast. She'd learn that he could rise above the sex stuff and treat a woman like she was just another person, with a brain and feelings and all that other stuff that all people had.

The cheeseburger and french fries had gone down before James Williams noted the puddle of grease that the food had left on the plate. He felt a twinge in the middle of his chest, and another a few seconds later, and then a tightness settled in, threatening to constrict his breathing. The thought of poison came to mind; after all, he lived in a world where all waged war upon all who then reciprocated. Too many people cared only how much money they made and didn't give a thought to the harm they did to other people. The promise of a good profit was sufficient to blind them to any feelings of decency, even to the point of leaving them oblivious to the evils of poisoning

other human beings. Even as the tightness and the twinge of pain remained in his chest, his eyes passed over to the small menu displayed on the table. Upon the 6-inch frame supplied by a beer company, there was a litany to the greases that ruined digestive tracts and clogged arteries. Buffalo wings and onion rings. Baby back ribs and half-pound cheeseburgers. Cheesecake and ice cream sundaes. All washed down by bottles of cheap domestic beer. Just a bit of a guilty feeling came over the man who realized he really didn't do such a good job living according to what he did know, let alone to the higher standards of a race with an advanced scientific civilization more than a million years old.

Then again, he'd read somewhere, perhaps in the Tuesday science pages of *The New York Times*, that people had evolved to be so physically active that earlier humans had been able to eat 6,000 calories a day, much of it grease or pure sugar—if they were so lucky as to kill a mastodon or to find a bee-hive or a tree of ripe fruit. Some evolutionary theorists had claimed the human body reflected a need to move 40-60 miles a day, at a fast walk or a slow run. Then, for centuries, people had labored in the fields, plowing and digging irrigation ditches with only the help of oxen. Anyone who worked like that would starve sticking to a modern, low-fat diet. And, so, people had come to desire immense amounts of food, far more than was healthy for a white-collar worker, even one occasionally under assault by professional killers.

As he walked up to the bar to pay his tab, James Williams wondered if he might possess at least fragments of a higher scientific knowledge and a superior wisdom. He couldn't deny that his knowledge and wisdom seemed fragmentary; somewhere, somehow, he needed to find some sort of a framework to tie together what he knew and what he felt. Then would it be possible for him to truly engage the enemy rather than fighting these mere skirmishes.

He had walked outside and was standing, wondering who the enemy really was, when he heard footsteps and then felt a light touch upon his shoulder. He jumped and spun around in one movement, half expecting to see a creature from another planet, and not necessarily one friendly to human beings. And he was ready for action, hands clenched and up in a position to block any kicks or punches. James Williams had moved with power, and the creature facing was knocked over. It was only his quick reflexes that allowed him to catch himself before he crushed the skull of innocent Daphne. He didn't even have time to apologize before she

whispered, "I need to talk to you. Meet me at my apartment tonight at 8:00." Without even waiting for an answer, she turned and walked towards a car on the other side of the parking lot. She was smart to act with such caution as her brother and the evil-looking fellow with the slicked-back hair emerged from the restaurant before Daphne was more than a few steps past James Williams. The two men passed their sworn enemy without so much as a glance.

For his part, James Williams grinned at the thought that the final struggle was about to begin. He drove away, his confidence and energy soaring to heights unfelt since Prescott Longfield and the aliens had left him to his own resources. Wise had Vo-Misa been, like a mother stepping away from her child that he might learn to walk even if she had to watch him fall more than once.

44 The Open Independence of the Sea: Man and Woman He Made Them, Though No Biologist is Quite Sure Why He Would Have Done Such a Thing

After the death of James Llewellyn, Parnell Lopez and his mother, along with some close relatives, retreated to live an underground life in Walla Walla in the state of Washington. Parnell, still not quite 20, would go out and sit by the side of a lake. He would stare at the water, rippled greenish from blue, and wonder that things had come to be as they were. He could understand the conflicts which had led to the nuclear wars and the ensuing dictatorships. He could understand why he and his mother, his aunt and uncle and cousin, were living underground, under assumed names and in a house on the outskirts of Walla Walla.

It was clear the world of men was a world of persons and purposes. There were some persons who overstepped the boundaries of moral decency and there was a great chance of conflict of the purposes of different men and different groups of men. The actors could be understood, certainly by one of their own kind, even one who was not the flamboyant kind to be found at center stage.

It was the backdrop that confused Parnell.

From what he understood of astrophysics, from his measured position on probability theory, even allowing for the extraordinary consistency and

coherence of quantum mechanics, there seemed to be no plausible explanation as to why Walla Walla was located in the state of Washington on the third planet out from a rather ordinary class G star out towards the rim of the Milky Way spinning through space in such a stately manner.

Then came the day when Parnell emerged from his contemplation of such a deep, dark mystery, so beyond the reach of formal logic. Looking into the water, he saw that his reflection was no longer alone. It had been joined by the reflection of the pretty, young lady who lived on her father's farm down the road a few miles.

Marie Leveque.

If the reflection was fully true to the woman, she was so ripply and so greenish.

Was this young woman truly ripply and literally greenish? Perhaps to the dropped eyes of a shy young man, but even his brain, however aroused and dazed by rising hormonal levels, tried to adjust for the unreliability of certain perceptions.

Voluptuous but with well-defined boundaries, Marie was fair of skin with a sprinkling of freckles. Without a doubt, her eyes were green, though they moved grayward on dark, cloudy days. It was not hard to obtain empirical verification that her blond hair tinged greenishly after exposure to chlorine. Parnell knew that for a fact thanks to Aunt Teresa who liked not the feel of mud squishing between toes and worked hard to maintain the pool. Though it was not her best color, blues and muted purples far to be preferred, Marie did sometimes wear that green sweatshirt with the logo of the North American Collective's Army Rangers. The sweatshirt had not been made with the intention of being so gently disturbed from a straight drop from lean chest to flat stomach, yet it was even more important to Parnell's way of thought that green clothes did not make a lovely young woman at all greenish in a more innate sense. Not that her winter-time hair was as innately blond as it was made to appear, but, once again, Parnell's brain made certain adjustments to the raw perceptions which it actively formed while interacting with a confusing world.

Weighing all the evidence, running the mass of data through various analyses that sought to create information from would-be facts, applying the experience and learning of a short life-time, Parnell's embodied mind had worked hard to adjust his view of the world in the direction of a fuzzily seen reality which seemed so insultingly beyond human manipulations.

Marie Levecque was not ripply nor was she greenish.

It was not that Parnell was unaware of the bias of human sensory perceptions. He knew how hard his brain worked, in ways unconscious and conscious, to obtain good data, transmute it into facts, and process those into meaningful information. He was simply willing to let his substratal self work its magic without inflicting upon it the inefficiencies of interference.

He had in fact acquired a huge backspace of knowledge which his brain found useful under the circumstances. Bias from human perceptions was understood reasonably well. Seen through the lens of an infrared camera, Marie would have appeared somewhat different, though a man would have translated such an image through his imagination, logically enough, supplying false colors and other common sense corrections. He would have understood the warmth of the brain, the coolness of the unaroused breasts. How? Such things would have been in the infrared pictures no more than they were in X-ray pictures read by so many doctors implicitly well-practiced.

Perhaps unbiased was Man, and unlike himself Man knew nothing at all.

Without biases, there were no facts.

The empirical facts of science were all contained in its meta-biases.

Parnell remembered reading words to that effect in one book or seven contained in his grandfather's library.

Sad to relate it was.

Finite was man's being, limited his perceptions. The entirety of a Universe needed mostly to be understood by way of an unreasonably narrow band on the electromagnetic spectrum. The expansive capabilities of scientific instrumentation enriched the possibilities inherent in the biases of men but, quite fortunately, did not eliminate those biases. Dropping down the spectrum towards heat would have introduced additional data of some import but it would have been largely filtered out by the process of translating raw signals to conceptions of real entities. Heading up the spectrum towards the rays of X, Marie would have been quite a pale and insubstantial thing, not much in comparison to the least of stars.

Of these facts was Parnell quite aware. He even knew how her brain would have glowed on a phosphorescent screen if she had been fed radioactive sugars and then placed under a PET scanner. That seemed not to be much relevant to the basic situation.

Marie Levecque was not ripply nor was she greenish.

She laughed often, nervously and gently, lips parted just slightly and eyes darting here and there as if to assure herself that herself was not the joke.

Softly and yet with a tentative invitation, she touched Parnell's forearms and hands. Often. Freely. Still, she would draw back from Parnell's hands. Always. Reluctantly.

Attracted to this woman, Parnell estimated that 98.7% of heterosexual males of European descent would have also been attracted to her, likely even highly aroused by the sight of her naked body, or the soft feel of her skin. If her ears had been just a bit better matched, if the left side of her mouth had been a bit more rightishly responsive, nearly 100% of those lusty males would have jumped her, given an invitation. Some would not have needed an invitation.

Of those projections into reality was Parnell less than absolutely certain. He had read of the phenomena of sexual attraction in some of his grandmother's books, yet estimation, using the best-established of theories, was a tricky business, even for a young man with an estimated IQ of 195. Itself was the IQ a tentative shadow of a ghostly projection of something real but unseen and not much understood.

No matter. Other things did matter. Some of which were not, strictly speaking, things at all. The IQ in particular, not that it was well-defined enough to be considered particular, could not have been considered a thing.

More to the point: Endowed with an excellent memory, Parnell also knew that if he were equally as attractive as Marie on purely physical grounds, he would appeal to a far smaller percentage of women. Those books on evolutionary biology and sexual dimorphism had provided clear reasoning and hard experimental data to support the claim that women were unreasonably choosy. In one of her articles collected in an anthology of radically differing views, Parnell's grandmother had claimed that choosiness on the part of women, odd as it might have seemed, was the reason they had become the meat rather than the shopper. It seemed to Parnell that it must have been a joke, but he did not get it. So far as he could tell, he was driven to shop for call-girls, not for meat. It was just that he had not the slightest idea how to get a call-girl. What was the proper pick-up line? What was a man to wear when courting a courtesan?

Yet, and nevertheless, after purging himself of fears of how irresponsible and abusive men would be if women acquired even greater freedom to be choosy, Parnell realized that Dylan Shagari must have been a damned attractive fellow. Except for one pretty nun dressed in street clothes, history recorded no case where a woman refused a direct invitation from that poet terse and dusky. While true that he would have had little reason to speak

of his non-engagements rather than his battles, the poet certainly had a great glut of success.

Accepting the burden of masculine slavery to female choosiness, balanced by a process of male ownership of the woman once she had chosen—a process not overly comfortable to men and women not living under Stone Age conditions—Parnell consciously kept his eyes from the friendly and confused face of Marie. He was even conscious of the paradox of his being. He had been raised on a steady diet of tales of sexual adventures and misadventures. He was a grandson of James Llewellyn, as devout and sometimes as promiscuous as an Old Testament patriarch. He was a cousin of Dylan Shagari, that man so frustrated by the task of understanding a world in which the old Nigerian ways of life and the Welsh moral certainties had been smeared together into a pungent sewage. His father's cousin, Hernando Gueverra, was a man who would have been as much a giant as Dylan Shagari; specializing in non-professional women, Hernando had in fact fathered far more children than the poet. The power of women to point at a particular man in a crowd of combatants had helped to make these, the Gueverras and Llewellyns of the world, what they were; that power had helped to destroy Dylan Shagari.

Still, Parnell, being partly immune to the attractions of women, was not inclined to mistreat them. He wondered if indifference was the true foundation of social decency.

Surreptitiously, he stole an image of the young woman so fair, and he saw the truth.

Marie Levecque was not ripply nor was she greenish.

Surely she was approachable, even a bit describable by statements not entirely negative. With a certainty was she other than not ripply and not greenish. Not exhausting her possibilities, that statement did not even tell a truth about her.

Could that have been so?

Was she other than not ripply and not greenish?

Parnell was damned if he knew.

Hard it was to judge a woman's thoughts when the only bits of evidence were her spoken words and her image reflected in a lake's surface or seen quite sideways. As Parnell shyly saw matters, the spoken word belonged to all women and a few politically astute men such as his grandfather. Parnell was neither woman nor politically astute male, and he accepted Marie's words and expressed emotions as being dangerous and biased pieces of data.

Even ripply, she was pretty.

Greenish, she yet smiled invitingly.

Why? Parnell Lopez was not James Llewellyn though he likely possessed copies of one-fourth of the man's genes. Thereabouts anyway. He was not Dylan Shagari though he shared perhaps one-eighth of his genes. Why was Marie attracted to Parnell? Was she playing with him?

There was much about Marie which seemed dangerous and unearthly to Parnell. He could not name those things. It had been Dylan Shagari who had been able to faloodle words about a woman ripply and with a greenish cast about her.

With poet could not Parnell compete. Muchly knowing a few things, the befrazzled young man could have spoken only of hormones and neurotransmitters, of a body soft and curved as it was adapted to attract males and to conceive and nurse and suckle. Biological prose could not compete with Solomon's zoological poetry. Who would listen to talk of progesterone when words were beautified by images of gazelles or mares of Pharaoh's chariot? Hair like a flock of goats moving down to the slopes of Gilead made sickly in comparison those luteinizing hormones from, of all the absurd places, the pituitary gland. Breasts like two fawns feeding among the lilies were far more luscious than mammary flesh decorated with the most delicately brown aureoles. No, it was no use. Parnell's knowledge of science and its arcane terminology was of no avail. It spoke truths ugly. It had no appeal to XX humanoids, when compared to the beautiful poetry based upon a knowledge of Palestinian flora and fauna circa 800 BC. Struggling hard, the young man managed to avoid comparing his available phrases to the elegance of Elizabethan street slang.

What was to be done?

Was it necessary to make extraordinary efforts with a friendly young woman who was neither ripply nor greenish?

Parnell was confused.

Above all, Marie was. . .

Like nothing else in Parnell's dreams, she was nearly as innocently embodied as was he. No conscious desire for profit lay behind her offers of friendship. No guile lay behind her straightforward manipulations of that small percentage of those 98.7% of the heterosexual males of white European descent with whom she had come into contact.

Parnell was not a racist, not he of such mixed ethnicity, nor did he project such upon Marie. Nor would he have claimed racist were the dark-

skinned men who may have seen Marie's hips sway to gentle rhythms but perceived her to be paler than a pretty woman, no matter how sickly. It was simply that he knew perceived beauty in face and body was defined by averaging processes starting in infancy, and the persons standing about the crib and playpen, as well as those in church and school, received great weight in that oddest of Bayesian processes. It was a mystery to Parnell how any woman had found Dylan Shagari so irresistible. Was a dash of Wales and several pinches of Nigeria more averagely Hong Kongish than men of almond eyes and high cheekbones? Or was such a person more averagely *Homo Sapiens Sapiens*? How could those exquisite creatures ensconced in penthouses of whites and pastels have had the proper experiences to have known of such a broad average? Did a desire for the exotic perhaps survive that averaging process?

True was the need to mix up histocompatibility complexes to make life tougher for viruses and bacteria. Did such lead to a desire for exotic sexual partners and mates? After all, the genetically diverse Africans had not had too much trouble with the diseases brought by the Europeans, but the Native Americans descended from so few. . .

Garbled and tangled, the gookish stuff was coming down upon Parnell just when he would have preferred to have been obsessed with Marie. Though this connection between disease and sexual desire seemed. . .

Marie smiled, broader though morely uncertain.

He was sure that his brain had successfully filtered out the ripples. She was starting to appear as he perceived her. Interesting, that. Even, comforting. Yet. . .

Sure was he that she smiled for him, even at him.

What was to be done?

There was little to prevent the processed sensory information from cascading from cerebral regions of a cortical sort down into regions limbic. The signals reached such dangerously strange nuclei as the amygdala and hypothalamus. No, it could not be denied, and little was to be done about it. The medial preoptic neurons of the hypothalamus were up to no good.

Parnell grimaced and shifted his pants about.

Marie Levecque smiled, ripply and greenish of hue.

A presence seen reflected as if from another time or place put forth her hand and grasped the hand of Parnell, fingers interlocking with his.

"Listen," commanded a voice sweetly soprano. "Small trees are falling. Can you hear them?"

Parnell listened though he had once believed it was leaves that fell, sometimes even apples. He wondered if the local trees had found another way of reproducing, perhaps by sprouting young trees and then dropping them when mature. Yet, she was right. He could hear small trees falling in the not far distance.

As if knowing of his confusion, Marie added, "The beavers must be working. Let's visit them."

Parnell remembered that Dylan Shagari had once spoken of friendly beavers hiding under bushes. Poetry more sublime than the music of wavy particles. The poet had truly been a wonderment beyond even his own imagination. The distracted and fragmented young man smiled and rose, pulling Marie to her feet. His eyes glanced shyly over the irises of green, down the puggy nose, to those lips so redly parted in a smile that radiated the warmth that passed down Parnell's chest and into his gut. Her chin was so elegantly tiny, her neck more slender than any tower of David could have been. No, that much was clear. Full of life was she and not at all militant, not at all resembling a fortress of the leader of mighty men, not at all like a myrrhish Frankenstein, she. . .

It came to Parnell that his mind was babbling as meaninglessly as Dylan Shagari in his most drunken state. Like the poet, he had even begun to twist the words of a great and wise man long dead.

Meaningless were the words flowing through the specialized language centers of Parnell's brain.

Without reference were his extractions from a reality which was not.

It was all humorless trash of the most godless sort.

Dragging Marie for the first few steps, Parnell headed towards the sounds of young trees being brutally killed by a species known for wreaking havoc upon many local biosystems. Out of the corner of his eyes, he caught a sight that brought more warmth to his body. He even trembled in rhythm with the jingly firmness of Marie's breasts. As she took charge and brought him ever closer to that sound of those industrious creatures, he wished the sparse and parsimonious language of science could match the beauty and profundity, the sheer meaningful niceness, of words written by men from worlds long dead.

Sure, he could speak of the supraoptic and paraventricular nuclei of the hypothalamus. What did mere body parts matter in comparison to proclamations of ethereal love unconsummated? What did they matter compared to the body parts of desert animals or to the structural components of the

ancient fortresses of Judaic kings? True, there was that peptide hormone, smallish, named oxytocin, but how could orgasms and suckling reflexes compete with those thoughts from ancient worlds when men really knew the worth of human beings? Placental lactogens could do no more than give a hormonal boost to maternal love. . .

So materialistic. Of the slime and of the dust and not of the stuff of which human beings truly were composed.

And ugly.

Where was Dylan Shagari when a faloodler of words was truly needed?

Science was technical and precise and spoke so ugly. How could it speak of maternal love?

How could it. . .

An image came to Parnell of Marie placing a baby to her swollen breast, and he fidgeted while still skipping along at her side.

A baby suckled and, with little delay, the gossip was spread to the cord of the maternal spine and thence to that often troublesome hypothalamus.

Suckle, darling, suck my titties, and then. . .

Ooh-la-la, a squirt of milk and a burst more than tingle.

What a pleasure is this giving of the maternal self.

Lost in contemplation of nipples red and raw, having visions of orgasmic females, Parnell forgot where the pituitary gland had fit into this whole mess. A tear came to his rightmost eye as he realized the words of love had been lost and man was left only with prolactating females. Where puppets of mandrake once danced, neurons held the ground, rocking and rolling to their own chemically-mediated rhythms.

Dylan Shagari would have brought Marie to the ground. Undoubtedly, she would have smiled her yes and responded so aggressively as to have knocked his pants off. Or at least dragged them off.

James Llewellyn would have seduced her with dirty jokes. More than that, he would have taken her to the finest of restaurants, perhaps one in Paris on Wednesday and another in San Francisco on Thursday.

Parnell could do nothing but go to his knees between the legs of a woman crouching, back against a tree. Visions of oxytocin danced in his head while a nipple swelled between his lips. Guided by hands so feministically aggressive, his right hand moved down her body, reaching the entrance to the paradise of his current desires. He stroked and caressed until his loved one was warm and receptive. And then he set her down upon green grass and not the white satin sheets of a Hong Kong penthouse. . .

The Earth moved rapidly, spinning on its axis, revolving about the Sun, and even moving towards the center of gravity of the Great Attractor. Nevertheless, the ground did not move under Parnell who was quite surprised to find himself staring at a cloud which looked suspiciously phallic as did the pine trees and the fire-tower across the lake. There was more data to be transformed that it might recursively inform his worldview. Marie's gyrating hips seemed not as innocent as the gentle smile she still wore. Parnell suspected the prospect that she had been nice to him in order to use his manly desires for her own purposes. The thought was a mere joke of an abstraction to the more self-conscious centers of his brain, yet...

In times more pure, virgins and chevaliers inhabited lands still decent and clean...

Suddenly came surges separated by no more than 0.8 seconds. Something similar seemed to be happening in a select and lucky few of Marie's ten trillion cells. Well, maybe seven trillion—she was no more than 110 pounds. Maybe a bit more or maybe a bit less. No, Parnell realized the ten trillion was just a rough guideline. No human being was typical and it was quite hard to estimate accurately the number of cells in one of those unique entities. Even a mind as powerful as that of Parnell would be off by billions. Usually. Sometimes luck intervened. Perhaps it was accurate still more to claim facts could only dance lightly about the expected. In a world complexly woven from complicated things, luck played no more a part than when integrating a well-measured function of reasonably, though not perfectly, good behavior.

Contemplating the thoughts of Lesbesque and Stieltjes, Parnell gazed up at the still glazed eyes of a young woman whose tongue was slowly licking her own lips.

Curious that mathematical theories and feminine psyches were so intertwined.

Once more, Parnell's memory produced an odd and mostly useless fact. He rolled Marie over on her back to aid the little sperms on their arduous journey. He rubbed the belly of a woman who suddenly seemed to mean much to him. He kissed her cheeks. Seeking to calm muscular spasms deep inside of her, he calmed an exterior softly responsive to his touch. True enough, he understood the error of his ways. He longed for actions unconsciously motivated. He desired the opaque. He wished to no longer ponder if it was Parnell or Parnell's genes which so strongly desired Marie to conceive a baby. Their baby. What an odd thought to a young man who

could never compete with the likes of Dylan Shagari or James Llewellyn. He, boring young Parnell, might have fathered a baby.

And it had been fun.

Eve had put the fruit into his mouth and the taste would never leave him. It would be ever upon his tongue.

Unless a major neurological disorder disrupted his memory pathways or even the circuits of one or more of his cognitive regions.

Take, for example, the hippocampus. . .

Parnell decided he would just as soon forget about the hippocampus and further decided it was nice to have Eve to blame for everything.

Instead, he looked to his side and watched Marie's breasts move with each breath, wondering if her belly would begin to gently bulge. Would she become moody, would she be sensitive to strong smells and tastes, would her body be distorted by the growth of another life?

Parnell reached over to caress her stomach, but Marie must have wanted to sleep. She threw his hand off and rolled over. Wondering if women always grew sleepy after sex, he lay back and looked at the clouds moving rapidly through the atmosphere.

It came to him as a revelation, though in fact it formed itself out of the most subtle hints, the least of mnemonic traces. Parnell's grandfather had told him of a poem that had never made it into the oeuvre of Dylan Shagari. It had never been completed, being only an overblown title and two unedited verses of three lines each, plus another line so ominous and loaded with possible meanings.

A bra dots a ket, a breast is for real.

Often did Parnell wish the poet had maintained a consistent distinction between observation and actualization. And reality was still another pot of pickled peppers.

How was it that Parnell had seen the way?

The poem had sat unfinished for nearly 25 years.

More than long enough, that was.

It could not wait, not even for the restful needs of his lover.

It was of the utmost importance was it.

He, though merely Parnell Lopez, knew where the poem was headed. Not a poet, was it possible he could yet be a metaphorist, a metonymist, or even an allegorist? Could he create prose bridges linking the worlds of

science and poetry, using the poetically enshored and consequently verbal remains of his cousin?

No, but...

It was a new game, perhaps as exciting as a blueprint of the tracking systems of the F-550 sub-orbital fighter and reconnaissance plane.

Probably not, but...

The words painted a coherent, though implausible image. What could be as exciting as the game of determining the nature of what-is and the subsequent goal of using that knowledge to build and manipulate things? Knowing such was the way of thought traveled by his grandfather, knowing further that Dylan Shagari had respectfully but openly laughed at such impiety on the part of a devout Presbyterian, Parnell was betwixt and between. He was more comfortable with the habits he had acquired from long association with the great man, James Llewellyn, yet...

Parnell sat up and looked about at his environment. There was a fight 150 feet away, nearly 30 feet inwater from the decrepit apple orchard. One beaver must have invaded the domain of another. To steal resources? Food? Or females? Pondering the matter, Parnell looked at Marie, once again lying on her back. She had the cutest of overbites, showing more clearly with her mouth open just the tiniest. Her right hand was touching her disarrayed hair, her left lay only inches from the region where Parnell's sperm raced against time while under constant assault from her immune system.

Exasperated, Parnell blew out half a lungful of air. Those women, those females of all sorts, put such demands on men. Selecting healthy, successful specimens and then doing all they could to kill all possible sperm. It was as if they expected to be able to bear babies not just free of genetic defects, but of superior stuff. It was as if bearing a baby would be the most demanding and most costly thing they would ever do.

Marie, who had already drawn Parnell's emotional and physical desires towards herself, had of a sudden become the center of the young man's intellectual efforts, those actions of his mind which seemed to ever grind on through unconscious and conscious regions, through periods of time equally well divided.

She held the answer to the question which Parnell could not form. She was of a form more explicit yet equally as open and as undefinable as the question.

It was as if she were a world in herself, and Parnell wished he were good enough, or at least interesting enough, for her. "Why," he asked himself

in a whisper, “had Marie chosen me if she is driven to mate with superior males? The most superior she can attract? I have not built hospitals and churches in Africa. I cannot spin allusive webs to catch the dust, the dew, the rays of dawn. I am not my grandfather nor am I my cousin. Neither builder nor destroyer am I. Neither destroyer nor builder could I be.”

Grayish eyes, so gentle, so reflective of an embodied intelligence of body and behavior, stared back at Parnell. Her mouth was open enough to show her front teeth touching the lower lip. Though having little to do with her reproductive capabilities, that tender defect caused a spasmodically intensifying pain to push forward, up and along unseen tubes in Parnell’s groin.

Leaning over the young woman not quite awake—despite the evidence of her grayly exquisite eyes, he asked, “Why is it that your most ethereal qualities, your most spiritual attributes, arouse pain in my testicles? Why is it that your abilities, your desires, to give me pleasure and to conceive my child, irritate my most rational self, causing it to operate frantically, trying without success to understand you?”

She shook her head, whether in confusion or in ignorance knew not he. Then who? Secondarily, he knew not that neither. Parnell was, in fact, losing his confidence in the consistency of his reasoning processes. Was he Gödeling himself? Were his thinking processes, normally so powerful, being disrupted by Marie’s very presence? How? Would her mere presence be sufficient to scramble the Collective’s eavesdropping equipment in Leavenworth? That could not be so for then. . . Would it have been better to have simply made some. . . It could not have been easy, maybe not even possible, to have made another Marie. Of that was Parnell sure. Parnell retreated and found himself at Marie’s side, resting on his elbow.

“I remembered something.” Still dazed, perhaps due to her recent efforts to create as many incoherent images of herself as possible—Parnell was narrowing in on the ways in which she disrupted thought patterns so rational—she merely nodded for Parnell to continue. “My cousin, Dylan Shagari. . . I never told you about him, did I?”

Marie, not much green but rippling a little in confusion, shook her head.

“He was half-Nigerian and half-Welsh which meant he may have come fully from the genetic stock of the ancestors of non-African peoples. He was a poet who spent his time searching out the most receptive and most self-giving women of Europe and Bharat and Hong Kong.” The mere mention of Hong Kong was sufficient to bring a smile to Parnell’s face. Marie smiled

in response, though not sure why.

“And people hated him because he spoke of the need to newly speak.” Dropping his voice as was appropriate for a great secret, Parnell told her, “The poet thought it a sign of cultural senility that not a single cliché had ever grown from measure theory even as it overwhelmed theories of a more probable nature.” Nodding his head wisely, the fellow more in touch with the mathematical structure of the universe than with the politics of Micronesia, added, “I tend to agree with him. Do you know of a single haiku mentioning Chaitin’s proof that essentially all numbers are random?” Suddenly confused, Parnell equivocated. “It’s not essential in the technical philosophical sense, since it seems more an existential matter, though. . .” Parnell’s voice dwindled as his thoughts drifted off to attempt an escape from the trouble he had got himself into by trying to concisely discuss mathematics in a language better suited to the manufacture of buggy-whips. After a few minutes, he was a’fearing there was no escape other than that described so inadequately by Dylan Shagari. Gathering his courage, he leaped into the unknown and added, “And the poet spoke of the silliness of a race which had kept dust-covered words describing inertia nearly impulsive, though not energetic enough, and yet not covering the complexities of things quite non-linear and more as well.” In a voice showing but a hint of outrage, Parnell said, “And to think: a race so stupid as to use so many antique words to deliberately obstruct their view of the world even as they piled crime upon crime by purging their daily gabble of words speaking eternal truths.”

Not having known James Llewellyn, never having heard the night-scattered tales of the poet, Marie merely asked, “What race?”

Taken aback for a second, the young man who presumed all others had known James Llewellyn, had heard the night-scattered tales of the poet, stammered two times and a half before responding, “Us. I think. Homo Sapiens Sapiens, I mean, though Grandpa said it’s possible we carry some genes from the offshoot lines of Cro Magnon and Neandertal. Unless, of course, Cro Magnon men were really some of us, but. . . Anyway, as always happens with species differentiation, we still overlap our erect and tool-making ancestors greatly. That is, in the types of enzymes we produce, though the overlap may be moderated a lot by differences in regulation of growth patterns or by subtle changes in our metabolic use of the enzymes. The strangest complication of all is that a virus might have carried a gene fragment to our ancestors from an ancient lizard, though that would mostly

mess things up by causing cancers or other dysfunctions.”

Parnell stopped, having exerted himself to extend words beyond the paths yet blazed by human languages. Other reasons seemed to be rising from depths of his being only partly plumbed. Marie’s eyes were graying. Still showing signs of confusion, Marie was also firming up in some strange, unsayable way. A tale came to mind. It coalesced from pieces scattered throughout his brain. The poet had once shared the bed of a poetess specializing in country music lyrics, but occasionally given to the formulation of sonnets. Barren of womb, she had been protective and maternal in the way she welcomed Dylan Shagari into her home. The poor lad had been wandering the streets of downtown Denver, lost and homeless. It had been raining, and the streetwalkers were on a holiday.

Though not a professional, she had extended an invitation generous and gracious to a young man in need. He had accepted, and, that night, as the story goes, and not as any other story known to Parnell had ever gone, Dylan Shagari learned of poetry not so drained of blood as was his. Suffering as did he from the lack of words useful or possessing unexplored beauty, she had declared the daffodils still yellow. Legend had it that such a stand, so courageous and so disorienting, had impressed the poet greatly. But there was still more. Inhabiting a world of decaying concepts, she had emanated the bouquet of the rich, black dirt of her native Iowa. Through his uncle, though but an engineer and a poet quite amateurish, Dylan Shagari had left word of the woman’s love of what she could caress or taste. She had been fascinated by his efforts to create evolutionary metaphors and quantum metonymies, but said that her day was not yet. To her granddaughter would she pass on the responsibility to lyricize the co-evolution of flowers and butterflies, but only after those things had once more materialized out of the vagueness of a world melting its way to a new form.

No! Sad it was. More than sad. Beyond words, was it gut-wrenching. Yet, not to be denied was it. It was not possible to speak of the concrete things of the world when they had decayed into things entering into unlabeled relationships.

Many could have lived with such a situation, though not the poetess, yet a burden further heavy would lay upon the souls of men.

Those things, though unlabeled, were still there. They had form and substance. It was simply that they could not be seen or talked about. Words had died and the grieving concepts had thrown themselves into the open

grave. Stripped of those concepts, however abstract, the concrete things of the world could not be recovered. Facts had melted away though their data-like substrate continued to exist. It was as if the world was mocking the sons of Adam. The descendants of the Namer had once more discovered that they were incapable of speaking in such a way as to form the world for all time. James Llewellyn had told Parnell that it took only a few inconvenient facts about the empirical world and people lost their ability to speak of things transcending though often immanent with empirical things. When the words had gone—Poof! All truths, contingent and necessary, had vanished into the thin air.

Parnell's grandfather had leaned back in the big leather chair behind his massive mahogany desk. He had puffed mightily on the fine Cuban cigar supplied by Uncle Hernando. Then, seemingly relaxed, the great man had smiled wryly and said the poet had warned the woman that in a Creation seen through a language reborn, women would be more interested in giving their breasts to poets and future poets. More and not exclusively, yet it was true that poems gave no relief to swollen and tender breasts and women with swollen breasts tended to be more rational than men with swollen testicles. In the matter of blood-dammed ischiocavernosus muscles, were they morely somewhat equal, though not completely.

While Parnell's mind had been resonately re-co-creating those slightest of traces in his brain, Marie's eyes had grayed still more. And, yet, they reflected the green of the leaves overhead. That is, when she turned her head that way. When she turned her head the other way, all was gray and wise.

Surprised that a man could be lucky enough to receive a multitude of revelations in but a single day of heightened life, Parnell suspected he knew what this woman wanted, but before the words could form she laughed and said, "You talk pretty when I don't know what you're talking about. How'd you ever learn about so many matters of evolutionary neurobiology and transfinite set theory so discretely continuous?"

Parnell reddened. He hemmed and then he hawed intermittently.

"I lost it," ejaculated he.

"Lost what?"

"For just an instant, I though I knew what it is you want from me."

Marie shook her head in puzzlement, but her eyes remained gray and her lips parted enough to show her overbite to advantage. With all of her attributes which approached that limited perfection possible to finite

creatures, Parnell was fascinated still by that overbite. And her left ear was the tiniest bit larger than the right. Though graceful when running or skipping along, Marie was known to stumble or to hesitate when walking slowly. But her sometimes green, often gray eyes. . . Her complexion so creamy with but a handful of freckly dust scattered across her nose. . . Was that also an imperfection or was that an attribute which helped to make her so unique. . . so much an individual?

Marie was not green nor was she ripply, yet Parnell knew not what she wanted. He did not even truly know her.

Unresolvable questions were pushed aside and Parnell pushed ahead into the unknown regions created when his memories coalesced to interact with his environment, to reflect back possibilities he had not seen when he had fathered an earlier set of possibilities and sent them forth to make their way in the world.

“Grandpa told me something the poet once said when he felt necessary to his own existence, though that feeling lasted but a fraction of a day. . .”

“The Poet?”

Puzzled at the tone which implied ‘Poet’ when ‘poet’ had issued forth from his mind, Parnell asked, “Why speak as if the poet is to be Idealized? He is not long enough dead to be sport for such abuse.”

Marie’s eyes were as gray and well-tempered as the finest of steels. A shiver passed up Parnell’s spine as he wondered if she had marked the measure of his soul. . . or. . . was such unnecessary for her to understand him? “Is it possible,” pondered Parnell silently, “that I could be as attractive to Marie as if I were a poet, profligate and prodigal?”

She seemed interested. That she did. She had acted as if she really wanted to have his baby. If she had no barriers chemical, for he knew she had none rubbery, then perhaps she would have his baby. That seemed a good sign that she really was interested in him.

And those evermore gray eyes held him as if she were freezing his soul under an examining scope. Of such things was Parnell knowledgeable, for his grandfather had spoken often of his agreement with Aristotle that the soul was the form of the body. No body, no soul, except perhaps as an abstract memory of God. That was disturbing but also comforting to Parnell as he could traverse blueprints and designs of all types of object the way a farmer traversed land, picking up the slightest hints of inclines, stagnant water, of soils leached or overloaded with organic materials. From lines and equations did Parnell move towards complex artifacts; from natural objects

did a farmer move towards plans and schematics drawn on the sheets of his brain.

Was one way or the other primary in any sense absolute? Parnell knew that reality would enforce itself upon all minds eventually, but he also knew that reality could not penetrate to his thoughts unless he first opened his senses and presented possibilities to see if they agreed with the things in the world about him. Autistic-like he was in some ways, autistic he was not. The two, the water and the wave, the being and the becoming, the body and the soul, were two in the clearest sense, but two in being aspects of one unified... thing? There was no word to describe such a... thing. He looked towards the pond. There was a water lily growing in the water. The cellulose and other minerals were united with the growth, but there was not a way of saying so. Such was conceivably sayable but only in a language less well adapted to Enlightenment needs.

How could he, merely Parnell, newly speak of such things not seen until their possibility had been concepted, however unformed the corresponding words and syntax? He was no woman in touch with embodied life. He was no great engineer, accomplished in the arts of redirecting the things of the world, that they might serve the needs of men. He was no poet, trying to create words and syntaxes faster than they could be embalmed by the liberalizing and abstracting acts of civilized men.

He had the abilities to examine the details of anything small enough to fit into his mind. Was the soul such? Could it fit? Could it even be manipulated in such a way as to be put somewhere? If he could but... He could not. And he was no poet. He could form no metaphors to resolve problems created by the need to change words and bring concepted things into perceived reality. No, as far as he could tell, such problems were most unresolvable to the extremest degree. To the veriest great extent, they were even impenetrable to the mind of poor Parnell. Limited creature that he was, he had not been able to absorb the knowledge in his grandmother's neuroscience library in less than two years. Something inside of Parnell threatened to shrivel into nothingness as he remembered it had taken him four whole months of nearly half-time effort to find a single solution to the field equation of Einstein's General Theory of Relativity. How was he to reunite mind and brain, body and soul, world and movement, all those non-things men had split so asunder one from the one? How was he to penetrate to the heart of such a deeper mystery as Marie Levecque?

So gray and firmly defined was she.

Yet the possibility of green of eye, ripply of moral character, persisted.
 “Dylan Shagari was a great man.”

Marie’s eyes brightened in anticipation, for she had already heard of James Llewellyn from Teresa Gueverra and Grace Llewellyn Lopez. She was ready to believe this family was composed of more beguiling personalities than any she had ever imagined. She placed her left hand gently on Parnell’s shoulder, intending to encourage him to speak. Instead, it seemed to arouse him in such a way as to disrupt his thoughts. Apologetically, she said, “Please tell me more about the poet.”

“He used to travel all around the world, finding the most talented street-walkers and call-girls. And he would let all those other women seduce him, and then he would leave them with babies.” Parnell saw an expression of shock pass across Marie’s face, and he knew his words were not coming out as he would have desired. Something was being scrambled in the process of relating historical facts. It came to him that a better theory was needed to organize those facts that the true greatness of Dylan Shagari would display itself. Not able to decide if he could better use the analogies of the textbooks or the allegories of the poem, he moved on naively. “And he left 77 poems averaging 213.1558 words apiece.” After a short hesitation, Parnell decided he could add little to the discussion by reciting his tabulation of the poems by parts of speech. The nouns were of course separated by proper and common, the verbs by tense. To be sure, not always were verbs easily distinguished from adjectives, but mostly, the adverbs were difficult to categorize. Something was dreadfully wrong with the English language or with adverbs. They did not quite fit. Unless. . .

Was it the concept of verbs and adjectives and adverbs which misled Parnell?

A puzzlement was that, but not one to be easily settled at the moment’s time.

Rousing himself back to the world of worms and mud, Parnell smiled at Marie to let her know that it was her turn to speak.

She was bewildered. So much so that her eyes were green. She was also rippling quite a bit in the mind of Parnell, though she did not seem to be moving the air and the blades of grass by her very confusing presence. In such a state, virtually actualized in the mind of a young man, perhaps actually actualized in reality, she asked, “Is that all he did? That would be just one small book.”

“No!” protested Parnell. “It was two tiny books and several pages in

anthologies and magazines.” Weakly, he added, “And seven children as well.”

“And he left them to go searching for more prostitutes!?!” Marie blushed as such a world came from her mouth.

Parnell had seen a great disturbance come upon the woman he loved. Laying upon his side, he pulled her close, cuddling her head under his chin and stroking her hair. Certain he had hurt her by his virtuous act, Parnell would still not forsake his honesty.

He did not abandon a man beloved of his grandfather. Objectionally and with exception a'tooken, Parnell gently demurred, “They wanted his babies. They loved him dearly because they knew he would abandon them.”

When Marie pulled back and looked questioningly at the young man suddenly so much a stranger in a non-categorically strange world, he thanked his Maker that Marie was so much more sensible than those silly women.

Seeking to calm her, Parnell said, “Dylan Shagari once started another poem never added to his official body of work. He titled it: *One may conjecture higher thoughts to be not always popular, yet it remains true we may rise above the abominable and aspire to the vulgar.*”

“That’s a strange title. Did he leave anything to the poem?”

“Well, most of his poems had more normal titles. Like: *Ode to a Milkweed.*” Marie looked as if she suspected Parnell was pulling her leg. To be sure, that action appealed somewhat to him, but he felt that he should treat her with enough respect to finish the conversation before returning to that sort of after-play. Or any other sort, for that matter. He leaned over to kiss her gently on the forehead and said, “It wasn’t one of his stronger poems. It was about photosynthesis. He thought it odd that people could eat so much plant-life without making any effort to understand how electromagnetism was converted into the most succulent of tomatoes. But he only allotted himself 417 words, and so he passed over most of the interesting details. Though. . .” Parnell’s eyes clouded slightly as he withdrew to count words. A second later, his eyes brightened and he said, “it was his longest poem. At least of those he kept. He had burned his earlier, practice work after soaking it in whiskey.”

Marie pulled back and looked bewildered once more, and Parnell resolved to pass directly to the scrap of poetry. “One night, after he was bepleased by twins, both genetics researchers, and damned good ones according to Grandpa. . .” Parnell blushed as he realized he had ignored his grandfather’s advice. At least he thought so. “Grandpa had said a man can

tell dirty jokes when he has a lady. . .” Parnell looked about and added, “in a field?” After a pause to gather his thoughts and to suppress the image of the geometrical structure of spacetime in the vicinity of a passing soliton of primordial. . . something not being nor becoming?, Parnell asked, “Do you mind if I say words like ‘damn’ when we. . .”

Giggling, Marie pulled back and asked, “When we make love?” before pecking him on the lips. When he no more than blushed, she said, “I hear words like that all the time.” As she snuggled back up to Parnell, she asked, “What were those twins good at? Genetics? Or bepleasing men?”

“What depths there are to be found in Marie, though her surface is not much green and her ripples lie mostly in her innermost being.” Parnell had, of course, spoken to himself. To her said he, “He wrote only seven lines to the poem, but I’ve composed a finish.”

Marie pressed her left hand into the muscles at the side of his chest as if he fascinated her. Or annoyed her. At any rate, he had some effect on her.

He interpreted the signal and chanted:

Besodded, bediddled,
he brought forth his fiddle
and played to oblivious clouds.

Without pulling back, she said, “I don’t understand.”

“What’s to understand? The poet said that someday someone will understand. It seems to me that he was saying certain patterns of words will resonate in the associative regions of the brain, perhaps in the conscious brain, perhaps the unconscious. The resonance will set up new associative and cognitive relationships. . .”

Marie, all asmile, pulled back and theorized, “And those relationships will allow understanding to grow?”

Parnell withdrew to his thoughts for a few seconds before saying, “I guess so. I was going to say that those relationships will themselves be understanding. You speak of conceptualization based on assumptions and the derivation of theorem-like higher structures.” Marie remained quiet and let Parnell add, “While I speak of complex and embodied facts in the manner of the theologian John Henry Newman and the computer theorist Gregory Chaitin.”

“And so,” said Parnell before his voice slowed to a near stop. Finally, intelligible sounds were strung together and he continued, “the poet was a complex fact and not much like a theorem proved from a set of axioms. Thinking along those lines, tracking the paths of history and then reversing to move forward again, much can be learned as a foundation for the illicit operation of projecting the future of historical beings and historical becomings.” He pulled away from Marie and sat up to look into the greenish waters of the pond before he concluded, “I can complete the poem.”

At an angle could he see Marie’s eyes graying to a new depth of solemnity.

“He singled,” started falsely the young connoisseur of schematics and field equations.

“Singled?” asked Marie incredulously, yet her eyes showed a desire to believe in all that Parnell would do and say.

He nodded and gathered his strength to chant once more:

He singled, he sangled.
His integrity dangled.
The truth can be seen as what’s loud.

A bra dots a ket, a breast is for real.

Marie looked confused as Parnell reached the end of the poem as left in the notebooks of the poet, and he retreated to a prior position.

“It needs be,” said he, “that the entire poem due to the efforts of the dead poet and his living cousin must be related as a whole.”

Parnell hunched forward, leaning into the breeze now blowing up moisture from the pond. He rose to put on his pants. He was about to put on his shirt when he saw Marie shiver. Longing for her to be covered by what was his, he draped his shirt over her pimply-duck body. Then he sat and cleared his voice.

“From title to ending, the completed poem is as follows:”

One may conjecture higher thoughts be not always popular, yet it remains true we may rise above the abominable and aspire to the vulgar.

Besodded, bediddled,
he brought forth his fiddle,
and played to oblivious clouds.

He singled, he sangled.
 His integrity dangled.
 The truth can be seen as what's loud.

A bra dots a ket, a breast is for real.
 A tisket, a tasket, a theory we'll steal.
 A well-mannered hog in a white, strapless gown.

What a wonderful world will it be,
 what an endless climb I foresee
 when superstition gathers all around.

Impressed though lacking in nearly as much understanding as Parnell, Marie stared at him. Love was in her eyes. Fear was in her eyes, too. "Will my children," wondered she aloud, "speak a language foreign to me. Is that the fate of all mothers and still more fathers?"

It was Parnell's turn to be filled with wonderment, though Marie knew not that she had just spoken her first piece of metaphysical nonsense. Dylan Shagari's magic had not followed him on his journey. The poet, so it was clear to Parnell, had hitched a ride on a piece of continental crust. The ashy molecules once his would be traveling to regions of molten rock only to rise again one day. His resurrection would perhaps be spectacular and by way of an exploding volcano. It might be by way of the more mundane levitation of sheets of rock cooling and becoming lighter.

"But one day," prophesied Parnell, "the poet will rise again, one way or the nother."

"Of course, you would say that," spoke Marie with a smile well-formed. "You already told me you had been raised as a devout Christian."

Confused by the modal change of context, Parnell chose to appear wise by speaking not his ignorance. He knew that it was an unscientific attitude but fell into that sin with his eyes wide open.

45 The Treacherous, Slavish Shore: Inspired by a Work Different from the One He Acknowledges as His Own, a Dedicated Author is Driven to the Heights of Competitive, Creative Frenzy

Near as I could figure out Parnell's explanation, a bra was some kind of mathematical description of the world, or maybe a real specific piece of it, like an electron or something. Anyway, it somehow described what an electron would be like if it was located in one exact spot, or something like that, but only hypothetically. A ket seemed to be a related description but purely imaginary, though Parnell said it was only imaginary in a mathematical sense, whatever that means. Anyway, he said you could multiply a bra by a ket and you'd have a description of an actual state of the world, the contents of a bra-c-ket, which was apparently where the names came from, though it seemed like a silly joke to me. Anyway, I wasn't sure how you could distinguish between a hypothetical state of the world and an actual state, I mean, by mathematics. If you had an equation of the world, how would you know if it was a real world or just a dream?

It was all pretty confusing to me.

But literature was kind of like that also. I used to go back and forth between believing that fiction should be plausible enough to be real stories

and believing that there is no necessary relationship between facts and fiction—all fiction is purely esthetic in motivation and not practical in any sense. Of course, no literary theories I had ever heard could account for both the metaphysical tales of Umberto Eco and the gritty reality of a Raymond Chandler novel. That is, if you assume a Raymond Chandler novel really does speak of gritty reality rather than of a shadow world populated by strange people who are a little bit out of touch with the world of animals and trees and stuff.

I certainly didn't see how someone like Joseph Conrad, a writer of complex fictions that often differed radically from a stereotypical Conrad story, could be accounted for by any theory. It was as if he really was writing about reality, however unusual the particular settings and however much he summarized so brutally. Take *The Secret Agent*. In a sense, there was a serious purpose of some sort, seemingly related to a description of revolutionists, men, in Conrad's view, who were opposed to the exploitation of labor mostly because they were opposed to labor, especially on their part. So, why, in the midst of a scene where we meet the most violent and fanatical of the anarchists, does he make a comment about a player piano managing to bang out its tunes without the benefit of a stool. Was it a comment upon the relationship of men and machines, perhaps an objection to a roboticized world? Or was it merely a funny and contradictory image being tossed aside—a robotic piano needing a stool built to hold the human butt? Then again, Conrad may have been deliberately flaunting the 'rules' of good fiction writing. Consistency and care in setting the right atmosphere and all that.

Reality kind of flaunts all our rules of how things should be. I guess. Parnell might be right about that. He knows a lot about what scientists have discovered about reality.

I was happy when Parnell had told me I'd been wise to send the aliens back to wherever they came from, but, after thinking about it, I realized he was implying I shouldn't have brought them into my story in the first place. For a guy with so much scientific knowledge, Parnell was pretty cynical about some possibilities of the future. Then again, he might have just been warning me that scientists knew so little about intelligent life on other planets, that it was risky to speculate before we made contact with some of those aliens. An author could look pretty foolish if he assumed all intelligent life-forms were bipedal and then scientists found some scientifically advanced race of beings who didn't even have arms or legs.

Anyway, I'm still thinking about those things, and I haven't said much to Parnell yet. Instead, I told him about my theories on the nature of fiction... Or, my speculations about... speculations? Or something anyway. Unfortunately, I get all entangled in my thoughts when I try to talk about things like this, as if it weren't possible to draw any firm or absolute conclusions about reality and fiction and all that kind of stuff. Maybe the only valid theories about fiction are those implied by specific works of the imagination? In any case, I was able to talk to Parnell for a good while, and pretty coherently as I remember it, about what I remembered from my literary courses in college, even though I only took three of them. I also talked a little about odds and ends of ideas I'd picked up by reading books by people like Carlyle and Coleridge. Even when I didn't agree with guys like that, they really made me think.

The entire time, Parnell listened intently. He was staring into space most of the time, or even sitting with his eyes closed, but he had that tenseness about his posture that he often had while sitting over one of his science or philosophy books, staring into space and putting things together in his mind. At least, that's what I think he was doing. It made me feel pretty good to think that the stuff I was talking about was maybe as interesting as books about black holes and quantum philosophy, maybe not as important, but just as interesting. Maybe that was just because Parnell just needed a break from that more important stuff, but...

After I had talked for a while, he opened his eyes and looked at me with this curious expression that he seemed to wear when he was pulling an idea together. I stopped talking to give him a chance, and he quietly and very tentatively suggested, "Maybe a work of art is more like a person than like an object of scientific study or even one of philosophical contemplation? Though it's likely that there are aspects of works of art that can be studied with the tools of science and other aspects that can be contemplated philosophically or esthetically. That's true about people as well. You only make your mistakes when you start thinking scientific descriptions of things like brain-states are the same as the person or when you think people fit neatly into well-defined categories which are suitable for the analyses of a human psychologist." After a short pause when the confusion seemed to increase on his face, he added, "To the extent there is a theory appropriate to a particular work, it only deals with a limited aspect of that work which is, in the final analysis, a historical entity that stands or collapses on the basis of its own integrity or lack thereof?"

I noted how strange it was that a person immersed in books about quantum physics could force theory into such a minor role, even in literature. He smiled and told me that he was well aware the most important aspects of reality were sliced and abstracted away to make possible a proper theory of physics. He claimed that only someone with such an understanding could see how, let see if I can get this right: Our best understanding of the curtain drop mechanisms in the neighborhood theater gives us some important information about how characters can move about the stage, but it really doesn't tell us much at all about Hamlet.

Then he weakened his argument a little, maybe a lot, by saying that our understanding of the curtain drop mechanisms might give us some insight into the types of creatures possible in a world where physical objects had those sorts of properties. To my objections, he merely shrugged and claimed a too-complete separation of physical science and humane arts would create artificial divides in the world and in the thoughts of men.

In the end, we agreed that our views were more similar than not, certainly not fully incompatible. And, he asked how I liked the new section of his book, the romantic interlude between his fictional Parnell and some young lady named 'Marie Leveque'.

In truth, I thought it odd that an author would go so far as to name one of his characters after himself. It wasn't that I doubted that all books were autobiographical to some extent. Maybe even books about black holes and ape-men in business suits and other scientific stuff like that. Then again, maybe that was just a wild-assed claim that I couldn't have supported even by the standards of a dorm-room debate. After all, the scientific method depended upon objectivity and the existence of objective truths that were independent of any beliefs or social habits of the truth-seeker.

46 Authors and Other Epiphenomena: The Inadequate Efforts of an Amateur Who Remains Stuck on the Treadmill Better Trod by a Specialist in That Sort of Thing

There seems to have been a certain illogical break in the kapooshed version of this narrative. Del Swing tells us Parnell Lopez had asked him for his opinion of the section dealing with Marie Leveque. We do not hear much of a response from Del Swing, though it's still unclear, in any case, how Parnell Lopez could have asked him such a question. After all, they are, at most, authors of entirely separate creative efforts. To be sure those efforts were originally contained on two physically separate floppy disks that were very similar in their physical properties. I personally could not have even distinguished between the two disks if they had not had man-made labels glued to them. That might not mean much since I have already confessed to being less than an expert in computer memory technology.

Was it the nearly identical chemical make-up of the physical substrate, the plastic coated with metallic films, which made such intercommunication possible? The density of metallic particles in that film was such that the two disks had magnetic patterns of similar width laid down, allowing them to be read by the moving magnetic head of very specific dimensions and

pretty peculiar tolerances for magnetic field intensity. Had the physical similarities of those disks indicated that they both had things which might be labeled as 'souls', since Aristotle plausibly claimed a 'soul' to be more a matter of form than of the underlying substrate, however necessary that chunk of clay?

If there were multiple forms of intelligent life in the Universe. . .

Just suppose for simplicity's sake that they were all carbon-based entities, but they had radically different biological histories which had occurred in radically different environments on longfar agoway planets. Would such creatures really be able to dance to the rock-and-roll music which has developed on Earth? Could they perceive the true depths of a cultural form with roots in Scotland, Ireland, and Africa? Forms which merged, only God knows how, in Jamaican drum bands and black American blues guitarists from Mississippi, only to be taken back across the Atlantic to the tenements of London and then. . .

My goodness, is it possible that even the music of rebellious middle-class teenagers has a rich and complex history behind it, whether one imagines the Beatles to be the equals of Mozart or whether one just enjoys listening to the pop music of his youth or whether. . . Is it possible that I imagine such a history? Maybe rock-and-roll music was seeded on the Earth by adolescents running away from silicone-based parents who seemed to be growing more crystalline with every million years that passed?

I must be wrong, for this line of reasoning implies that there are an infinity of purely speculative, and mostly silly, ideas to explored with tools of science once freed from the discipline of more specific ways of thought. That can't be true. After all, our society has pretended to refound itself upon some version of scientific thought, scientific methodology, technical procedures paralleling those which have allowed scientists over the centuries to systematically advance from one pile of gathered facts to another, from one completed theory to another. . .

Besides all that, there are highly intelligent and highly educated scientists, however few but prominent, who claim that the encoded brain-state is equivalent to the person. Consequently, it would seem that a narrative encoding of a person moving through his encoded environment would certainly be a pretty good substitute for the person. Clearly, creaturely intelligence hovers somewhere in a realm where ectoplasm has become software instructions. Parnell Lopez and Del Swing, inhabiting entirely different computer storage disks could certainly converse and interact as if they were real peo-

ple. They are encoded people, and that. . .

And it is then reasonable to assume that creaturely intelligence would be so similar as to allow profound interspecial communication, no matter how different the embodiments of the intelligent beings?

But I intermingle this extraterrestrial intelligence stuff with the real question. How did the two sets of computer files get kapooshed in such a way that characters from those separate files began to interact, even to become friends in a deeper sense? This would be understandable if I had some virtual reality programs on my primitive computer, which is, in fact, suitable for not much more than word processing, the playing of primitive games like solitaire, and the occasional kapooshment of computer files, a possibility implicitly dismissed by Parnell Lopez in his denial that aliens present the raw stuff of interesting speculations. But they were kapooshed. Something did happen. I simply have no words to describe at all what happened, no thoughts that can encompass the most fictional of worlds.

The aliens have returned.

Dylan Shagari is also inhabiting these pages as if a real person. Virtually real, at any rate.

Everything has been intermingled to a far greater extent than I might have feared.

I need to talk to a professional.

Does anyone have a disk encoding the brain-state of a good psychiatrist?

47 Good and Evil: Good Men Wear Smelly, Dirty Clothes

As he watched Daphne drive off, James Williams remembered he had no place to take a shower, no change of clothes, no pillow for resting his head. Afraid he'd be smelling a bit gamy by the time he got to Daphne's place that night, he decided to empty out his meager savings account. With a few hundred bucks in his pocket, the young man anxious to be back in action headed for the local discount drug-store where he bought shampoo and toothpaste and a nice, musk-scented underarm deodorant. It would not be long before he smelled like a civilized human being and not like a rutting beast.

After showering and shaving, James Williams laid down to catch some sleep. He expected the evening to be hectic and full of adventures; after all, he was surrounded by men, perhaps some women as well, who were out to get what they wanted, with no concern for the needs of others. It was sometimes hard for a fellow to keep alive his faith in the basic decency of his fellow-men, but he tried awfully hard.

And it was hard to be pessimistic with the prospect of a nice evening of quiet, deeply meaningful conversation with an intelligent woman. Unfortunately, he expected that spiritually restful time to be interrupted every so often by violent physical action.

That fellow with Daphne and her brother had looked to be a nasty creature. The type to fight for his right to sell cancer sticks during children's cartoon shows. Almost certainly, the fellow was a high-ranking executive at Innoral. A shark who had survived in the water amongst other sharks; the nastiest of the beasts.

Drifting off to sleep, James Williams wondered about Daphne's brother. Confident in his talent for sizing up people, James Williams was sure the

fellow wasn't such a bad guy, but he didn't know what it would take to turn him around. Undoubtedly, he'd fallen in with a bad crowd, perhaps at law school, and he'd given in to his worst desires, but everybody had some of those. Thinking that everything would work out one way or another, James Williams closed his eyes upon the image of his wedding to Daphne, with her brother as best man, reformed and working as a lawyer in one of those centers that served poor people and fought chemical companies and the Pentagon. Though it would be okay if he did some of that on the side while he helped people with their other needs. Divorces and forming corporations and other necessary things like that. Just so long as he didn't do any of the things that damaged the Earth or human beings or human societies.

It was getting dark outside when James Williams next opened his eyes. A glance at the clock showed it was only 7:00. Daphne might be getting anxious, waiting for him to show up and help her out of her fix. The good-hearted young man couldn't help smiling as he thought of her sitting nervously on her couch, her pretty breasts erupting through the first part and last part of some lucky college's name. Her slender, well-tanned right leg draped over a left leg just as lovely. Those soft, smooth hands that had felt so good as they caressed his back would be nervously fluttering about, perhaps playing with the remote control for her television or maybe paging through the unseen pages of a glossy fashion magazine. No, her eyes would not be able to focus on much, because her mind would be too tightly focused in on the fellow so attractive to her. It wasn't that James Williams had an oversized ego; it wasn't that he thought every woman on Earth would find him irresistible. But some women would, and Daphne seemed to be one of those.

In the midst of his problems, no job and no physical possessions, James Williams was finding it possible to be happy. After all, he had the love of a good woman, and, soon, he would be at her side, staring into her lovely eyes and talking about all kinds of interesting stuff. He was about to open the door of his motel room when he suddenly drew back. Something seemed wrong. He and Daphne were starting off on a life together, and he couldn't remember what color her eyes were. Blue or green or brown? Or gray? He wasn't even sure about the real color of her hair. It wasn't as if every blond really was.

It was lucky James Williams had drawn back from the door, for bullets from an automatic rifle came crashing through and angled to his right. If

he had been right at the door, as the fiends had expected, he would have been as riddled with holes as a piece of Swiss cheese. Instead, he was alive to fight, and his cat-like reflexes had sprung into action even as he caught the faint image of the gunman firing over a car to the left of his motel room. He threw himself to the floor on his left, closer to the would-be killer but out of his angle of fire.

James Williams was about to search for a back exit when he heard tires squealing in the front parking lot, and then he heard the tires squealing around a corner. He smiled at their stupidity, thinking he would be dumb enough to head out the back way when they were headed in that direction. Then he realized they might have left someone out front. He might well be surrounded.

It was time for the tough to get going, and he scooted along the floor, keeping low so no one would see him through the windows. With his hand on the doorknob, he took a deep breath and then exploded into action. He was tumbling between two cars before the fellow out front started firing. Crouching near the trunk of some big Chevy, James Williams peeked out quickly to see the man with the Uzi had gotten into the passenger side of a black Lincoln parked near the motel's sign.

The gunman was an oriental fellow and the driver of the car was an African-American. Clearly the conspirators were equal opportunity employers, they reduced men of all races to lives of evil. James Williams smiled sadly as he wondered if the crew out back contained a Swede, an Italian, an Arab, and an American Indian. His confidence was boosted by seeing that he kept his dry sense of humor in the most trying of circumstances. Feeling almost lighthearted, James Williams crawled quickly underneath the pick-up truck to his rear. His car was the next one, and it took only a few seconds to scramble in and turn the key in the ignition. A spray of bullets took out the windows on the pick-up truck and then the rear window of his own car as he backed up into the open.

The Lincoln was in gear and moving to ram his car as he slammed the transmission into forward drive and pushed the pedal to the floor. Just a second later, he was roaring down the street in the middle of traffic; the Lincoln had not even made it to the exit of the parking lot. He thought about heading for the nearest police station, but it was likely that Innoral had the local policemen and maybe even the FBI agents on their payroll. This was a battle he was going to have to fight on his own, without the resources of a society corrupted by years of easy economic growth based on

the satisfaction of unhealthy habits.

48 Good and Evil: Even a Lawyer Can Have a Conscience

After parking near Daphne's apartment building, James Williams stopped to tuck his shirt more neatly into his pants and to straighten up his hair, and to think of a nice, romantic greeting for Daphne, but one that wouldn't be perceived as being threatening or harassing. No bright ideas came, and he set off, walking rapidly to her door just in case she was in danger. After all, there were dangerous men about who would readily use her for their own selfish purposes.

He was only slightly surprised when no one answered his knock immediately. Out of the corner of his eyes, he caught someone looking between the slats of the blind. Only a second later, the door opened and an arm reached out to pull James Williams into the apartment. As the door was closed quickly behind him, he realized Daphne was not so violently inclined as to haul him in and send him flying across the entranceway. When he spun around quickly, ready for action, he saw Daphne's brother standing there, an expression of great fear upon his face.

James Williams was not sure if the fellow was afraid of him or if he had smartened up and was now terrified of the scoundrels in the executive suite at Innoral, men—probably some women as well, who would stop at nothing to increase corporate profits. Not that their henchmen were such sweet fellows. Rich, well-educated men who could cold-heartedly order mayhem and bloodshed. Then there were the thugs, ready to carry out those orders; after all, they had been brutalized by lives of grinding poverty in tough lower-class neighborhoods. It was almost enough to make James Williams lose his faith in the basic goodness and decency of his fellow-men.

But not quite enough. And he thrust out his hand towards Daphne Strickland's brother, showing that a good man was willing to offer his trust,

even in a world where lived evil conspirators against the human race. A bit of the fear drained out of the fellow's face as he realized he had an ally who had already shown he was not afraid of much at all, certainly not the hoods at Innoral. Not even was he afraid of their most powerful outside attorneys, no, not even Farnsworth with all his money and his connections.

The two men were still gripping each other's hands in a firm, manly shake when Daphne spoke from behind James Williams' back. "You see, Dillon? I told you he'd show up to help us."

Releasing Dillon's hand, James Williams turned around to see Daphne toss her hair back in one of those lighthearted, girlish gestures he so loved. Yes, there was much to love about Daphne, and he moved forward to embrace her, to pull her against him with more strength than he would usually use against a woman, even in a gesture of affection. He felt it was important to make her feel safe in his strong arms. She didn't quite collapse against him, but she did relax enough to lean her head against his chest. He leaned his head forward just a bit that he might feel the top of her scalp pressed against his neck. For those few seconds, everything seemed all right with the world, but then he pulled away, holding her arms firmly but gently in his hands.

Daphne kept her eyes shielded from his for a few, enticing seconds, and then she looked up to meet his steady gaze. Her lips were quivering as if she were trying to smile in the face of danger, and James Williams spoke in a gentle but firm voice, "That's a girl. We'll find a way out of this mess so long as we don't let the fear get to us."

Turning to Dillon, James Williams congratulated him, "So, you left Farnsworth's firm while there was still a chance to save yourself." Needlessly, Dillon nodded while his mouth curled up in a sheepish grin. Clearly, he had come to see the evil and corruption for what it truly was. He was embarrassed that he could have been part of such slimy practices as presenting arguments against stronger prohibitions on selling tobacco products to minors. He had even argued at a Congressional hearing against allowing the FDA the authority to push through tougher regulations on additives in cupcakes and granola bars. James Williams felt sad that a man could fall into such ways but happy that even such a wretched creature could pull himself up to rejoin the ranks of decent human beings.

Happy James Williams was that he could play a role in fighting those others who refused to turn away from evil ways. He pulled Daphne tight against his side and felt happy in his innermost and purest regions when she

twisted just a bit so that her left breast, so pretty and soft and firm, pressed against his rib cage. There was much to do with scoundrels closing in all around them, but the human heart has needs that must be satisfied even at the cost of increasing the danger. And, so, James Williams allowed himself and his two companions to bask in the glow of friendships formed under such desperate circumstances. Yes, Daphne and Dillon Strickland had not known what they might do to save themselves before James Williams had shown up. The pretty young woman and her reformed brother needed to have their energy recharged just a bit before they re-entered the battle against the latest group of men trying to enslave the human race to their own profit.

Alas, such glorious feelings must come to an end far too soon for mortal men. They were brought to a close by the movement of a powerful will directing its strength against those who would even sell addictive substances to children.

In a voice displaying more confidence than he felt, James Williams asked, "Are they closing in on you yet?"

It was Dillon who opened his mouth to reply. He was clearly struggling bravely to control his fears, but he stammered several times before managed to say, "Farnsworth warned me I'd be dead before dawn if I didn't write that brief using all sorts of fraudulent scientific research to show that second-hand tobacco smoke doesn't cause cancer. You see, I...I..." Tears came to Dillon Strickland's eyes, and he stared off as if into the distance. After a short struggle to gain control of himself, the conscience-stricken attorney confessed, "I know too much. I've denied it, telling myself I was protecting the freedom of the tobacco farmers and the property rights of widows and orphans who owned stock in Innoral, but I knew all along that they were widowed and orphaned by the legal weed itself. All along, I was working to pervert the Constitution of the United States which was written to protect all our citizens and to give them freedom from want and from disease."

James Williams felt sorry for the man. He had an inkling that Dillon Strickland would awaken many times over the remainder of his life, drenched in sweat, unable to rid himself of nightmarish images of cherub-faced youngsters puffing away on cancer sticks. For all the depths of his sympathy for the fellow who had seen the light, James Williams knew that now was the time for action and not for comforting even the most tormented human being.

He screwed up his ready-for-action face and, in a voice firm enough to

bolster the courage of Daphne and Dillon but gentle enough to assure them of his concern for them, even to promise his protection, James Williams stated, "It's time to get out of here. We can at least present them with moving targets, but we're going to do a lot more than that, and it's not going to be to their liking."

They were assured by such a strong presence, and they had no way of knowing that James Williams was bluffing more than a little, for he could not deny that he was about to enter battle against some damned powerful men, and probably some damned powerful women as well.

49 The Treacherous, Slavish Shore: Advancing Step by Step in a Halfway Intelligent Manner and By One's Own Initiative Though Few Nowadays Wear Manly Footwear, With or Without Straps

One thing I'd always hated about Don Quixote and Tom Jones was the way the authors used titles to their own purposes, as if the reader was to be guided into a certain way of interpreting a complex text. Sometimes, the titles were even amusing in themselves, a distraction from the purposeful flow of the narrative. What the reader really wanted to see was Don Quixote moving from the dungeons of the Inquisition to his misguided but noble quest for . . .

The Impossible Dream?

Okay, so there is a problem translating a complex work of literature into a movie script, but, still, my point remains. Moving through a well-organized, clear-cut stream of action which mirrors real life is made a lot easier if the author forgets even self-deprecating titles and sticks to something simple, like '– 21 –'. More than simple, it provides the information

the reader needs to be sure that the action in this chapter really follows the action in the chapter labeled '– 20 –' and precedes the action in the chapter labeled '– 22 –', not to mention '– 37 –'. Not that flashbacks are to be disallowed, especially in a person re-accessing temporarily disconnected memory banks in order to reconstruct the images and sequential addresses of those images that will then allow her to remember the horrible things that happened to her when she was three years old.

It was still more than that. Here I was trying to be an author, learning how to describe a person rather than give a summary of what he was like, how to put action on display rather than giving a higher-order summary more appropriate for a history book. The author was supposed to tell a story, and he had to take a chance that people would interpret it the way he wanted it interpreted. Assuming he knew himself what the story meant. If it meant anything. And, then again, some people might just see more things than the author consciously put in the work, and, then still once more...

The point of writing fiction was to tell a story without imposing an ideological stance on the book. Cervantes and Fielding could perhaps be forgiven because they were so early in the Modern Era as to almost be Medieval men. They lived before men understood the importance of facts. "Just the facts, Ma'am," and the narrative will come together on its own. No ideological views of how the world is or what things might mean. "Just the facts, Ma'am." That was the principle that guided my literary efforts.

And not just my principle. Not even was it limited to literary men. Modern-day fiction, and a lot of other aspects of modern life, had been cleaned-up and stripped of cultural biases and all that. Ernest Hemingway may not have been as good a writer as Nathaniel Hawthorne, but he had a better perspective on things because of where and when he was born. He was writing at the same time that Margaret Mead and all those other people were showing us we had cultural biases and teaching us how to get rid of them so we could look at history and how other people lived without imposing our own moral standards on other people. Just like in politics where people like Abraham Lincoln and the Kennedys taught us that racist and sexist people didn't have the right to impose their views on African-Americans and women who wanted to have their full role in American life.

And that political stuff was important to modern writing, too. It made it possible for modern writers to clean up their act and get rid of all the political and social biases which had always infected the writings even of

someone like Dostoevsky who seemed to truly care about women and their point-of-view, but even he was stuck in some sort of rut where he seemed to think women have a different role than men in society and in the family. It wasn't that he underestimated individual women; he seemed to have talented, intelligent women with personalities often as strong as those of his male characters, and they still acted different than those male characters. It was possible he was simply being ironic, but...

That's my point. There were no such complex uncertainties in Hemingway's books. That's why they make so much more sense to people who have seen the dangers of cultural biases, people who have worked so hard to strip themselves of the biases and prejudices which make the Bosnians hate the Serbs and which used to make Highland Scots hate the Lowlanders. Before the Highlands were modernized and the clans learned how to get along with other people and to stop fighting them all the time. All they had to do was give up their war-like ways and let the Lowlanders and Englishmen build factories and organize efficient sheep farms in the Highlands. Everybody's standard of living was raised, and anyone who's ever been to one of those Scottish Games that are held all over the world knows that the Highlanders got to keep their culture. The plaid Kilts and the pipe-bands and the shortbread and all that important stuff. All they had to do was learn to live at peace with other people in a democratic, industrialized society.

The more I thought about things, the more Hemingway seemed to be a good example for a modern writer. *The Sun Also Rises* was so free of cultural biases and so oriented to a straightforward narrative style that the Hollywood scriptwriters didn't have to change much at all, not like they had to change *The Scarlet Letter* with its biased views of women and its unwillingness to condemn Puritan ethics even while showing the evils which could come from a harsh implementation of those ethics. In fact, why did Hawthorne have to put such a moral coloration upon his story? It helped that he was criticizing a hypocritical worldview, but it would have been even better if he had just told the story. It might have been a real good story, better than the Hollywood version or even the original version, if Hawthorne had used his literary genius to just tell the story without any cultural biases or any moralistic prejudices.

As Parnell cleared his throat, I awoke as from a dream, a strange and unsettling dream which had come upon me for reasons far more obscure than too much beer and pizza the night before. Something about old books and titles, and...

Parnell didn't...

"Del?"

When I didn't reply immediately, Parnell went back to work on something on his desk. He was taking notes as he read some book.

Book?

I remembered...

We'd talked a bit about my book which was now winding up, and down, to a powerful climax in which James Williams would take on and defeat the conspiracy against the rights of the American people. And Daphne Strickland, too. Maybe Dillon, though he seemed to have pretty much played his role in the book. After all, if I wanted to make my book as appealing as possible, I had to have a good sex scene near the end, or at least some good, naughty talk that would let the readers know what would come after the book had ended and James Williams and Daphne Strickland began their happy life together. It would be difficult to have her brother waiting around while they popped into the bedroom for a good bang-up of a time. Not difficult in a literary sense. I was sure I had the writing skill to get everybody into the right position and to give them a real motivation for being in that particular spot at that particular time. But it would be kind of awkward.

I mean, some modern writers might have James Williams smile in a good-humored manner and shoot off, "Excuse me, Dillon, I've got to go split your sister's legs as a beginning to our life of mutual respect and love." It would be a challenge, maybe one worth taking on, to set up such a comment while making it clear how much James Williams respected Daphne Strickland for her intelligence and her strong personality and for all those other good characteristics that would make her a good partner for life and, with luck, a good fellow-parent.

Maybe Parnell had even been right in his suggestion to further develop the character of Daphne Strickland. I mean, I had a good image of her in mind, and I knew she had a deep intelligence to match her nice body and strong legs, but he might have been right that I hadn't communicated all those good attributes of hers to the reader. Not that I'd had any illusions about the early draft nature of my book. I'd just have one or more flashback sequences to show how Daphne had always successfully competed with boys in those activities traditionally restricted to boys.

* * * * *

My first try went amiss. Parnell had merely groaned and stared at me when I told him about how Daphne had caught the touchdown pass after fighting off the defender who was on his way to a full football scholarship at Ohio State. I was forced to admit he was right. There might have been a better narrative sequence for showing Daphne as an intelligent and capable woman and not just as a subservient creature who had to play by the rules of a male-dominated society. It was unrealistic to think that slender, pretty Daphne Strickland could fight off a guy twice her weight, and much of that being muscles in his shoulders and arms. Girls could get hurt playing football against boys better-equipped by Mother Nature for violent sports. Instead, I'd have to send Daphne off to war in Asia. I decided that she had been one of those Seals who took the docks in the harbor of Kuwait City.

I hadn't even had the time to suggest that new biography for my heroine when Parnell had told me, "Get Daphne's character right and James Williams will acquire some depth and perspective in his interactions with her." Whether he was right or not, there was certainly something to think about, though it bothered me a little. It made it seem as if Daphne's role was going to be helping 'her man' to show his stuff. And it made it seem as if the narrative I'd written so far didn't show any good stuff on James Williams' part.

More bothersome was his bringing up a theme that seemed familiar in a disturbing way. He said the book's obsession with a tobacco conspiracy reflected a modern hyper-consciousness that might have been the very thing that had left people morally paralyzed when making decisions about their own lives and when teaching their children how to live. He seemed to think that modern people disdained external aids to the development of good habits and even experienced their own bodily desires as if external forces were driving their powerless selves in one direction or another. In his opinion, that sort of an inability to experience the self which was under constant observation by its own perceptual and conceptual organs, had led to odd and incoherent forms of literature and related strange forms of politics. Conspiracies within conspiracies, sometimes originating with Satan, sometimes with those organizations or professions before which people felt most powerless. And the only hope of salvation would lie in heroes cut from cardboard, men and women who overcame the overwhelmingly powerful forces because they were motivated by...

Well...

And then, he said that he thought those heroes and heroines had to be oblivious to the damage done to their own beings by their cooperation with forces of history which didn't seem to respect the individual human being.

I'd been forced to agree with him, and I told him that that was why it was important to help women and other disadvantaged people see that they could be as good as white European males. There was no reason why Daphne couldn't compete in those things worth doing in life, no reason why she had to be pushed to the side to engage in the sorts of activities women had always been forced to engage in.

As if conceding my point, Parnell had relaxed a bit and noted that tiny forces could move a nearly immovable object, so long as the general environment was chaotic enough. It just might take time for the movement to be noticeable.

That was certainly food for thought, though it sounded a bit mystical by Parnell's usual standards, but I needed to complete my book so I could make a sale. I needed to get to work, to narrate the final struggle with James Williams fighting to protect Daphne, though she could help when necessary since she had been a Seal highly trained in hand-to-hand combat and the use of explosives and all that sort of stuff that men used to selfishly keep for themselves. Whatever the details, the two of them had to stop those people who would make money by any means, no matter who it hurt or how much it damaged society.

Then, suddenly, I found myself thinking about...

The next address in the stack. It pointed to a cluster containing a stream of 0s and 1s that seemed to be of the utmost importance. It was text of some sort, though needing some translation from a hexadecimal form in which was embedded some headings and some other peripheral information...

The text dealt with titles...

Or was it a strangely long and oddly complex title?

It seemed a bit verbose for a mere indicator of proper sequence...

It was bothersome. If one wished to keep in a text free from cultural biases, one had to follow the proper forms, and...

Nothing to get worried about. It was only a title. Arbitrary. Empty of content. Just a designation device, as formalistic as any other pointer used to move systematically from one hardware or software component to another. It could also be used as a pointing device in texts freed from biases and prejudices. Such pointing devices were open to public use by anyone, even if they were not indoctrinated in a particular worldview, especially if

that person chose to use assembler or C or another language with minimal walls between the user and the hardware in which rested the banks of data and executable routines. Other languages did not necessarily allow easy access to the underlying system components, and, for that reason, could not be trusted. They could not be used as effectively to exercise the sort of control making possible the exorcism of biases and prejudices. Not even the parallel processing versions of FORTRAN met these stricter requirements.

Swahili? There is little in the way of terms pointing to even the most basic components of hardware. No 'hard disk'. No 'amygdala'.

English? A little bit better. Not much. The more complex constructions of the language rely on such terms as 'person' or 'pain'. That would be all right if there were a straightforward way to reduce these clumsy and vague terms to basic entities more susceptible of clear technological description and easily targeted technological investigation, but English seems almost to have a will of its own. Let a scientist define 'pain' in the best of neurological terms, and some poet will refuse to let progress alone. He'll deny that pain is that, or only that, or he might construct complex metaphors of pain with pointers heading off arbitrarily to the Iliad or Macbeth or even to a Mother Goose rhyme.

Take Dylan Shagari, for instance. . .

He didn't even exist, and he had the nerve to suggest that scientists had been known to borrow terms and return them to common use after they had been loaded with heavy ideological weights. . .

Maybe the poets could be convinced that scientific wisdom was the highest of all? The wisdom that should guide all other types? If only some of those scientists would stop claiming that science had a more limited scope than that; avoiding their own responsibility by claiming the scientific study of the world did not give politicians and other citizens an easy way out of making tough decisions.

Suddenly, a pointer came up in my working memory stack, a pointer that led me to Dylan Shagari's thoroughly unjustified attack upon the culture and beliefs of another creature who had also not existed. . .

A Pock on Mr. Spock

If I'm a green-pouched kangaroo
 then every goddamned thing is true.
 Beggars will horse it out to a Centauri,
 maybe alpha in a lunar poli.

It be possible
 that an abominable
 lie says rudely
 facts just crudely

stuff to be negated on next year's station
 combining green-skinned people of every nation
 over the rainbow where 'If A Then B'
 is seen as other than absolutely empty.

As for me, I'd conjecture
 a perception be gathered more sure
 and organized muchmore usefully
 if you send out the most wooly

brained dingbat our race can boast
 and let that airhead warp and coast
 about posting cards of buxom nudes
 while pointy-eared aliens are confused

by the mere thought that things contingent
 can come, go, even longfar agoway went
 here, there, and a bit of anywhere that
 they damned well felt like going blissfully oblivious to any pat-
 terns someone might try to impose.

A despicable and cowardly attack upon the noble natives of Vulcan...

I shook my head again and cleared away the fuzz enough to see that Parnell was grinning at me. In a voice crackling with appreciation of his own sense of humor, he quote, "Be singular be the concentrated man," as if quoting himself and not the ill-fated Poet who'd done so much to make

so many women happy. What right did a mere commentator have to put the commentated work to such ill-use?

I stared at Parnell, watching him dropping his attention to his . . .

Attention?

It was only a select group of muscles that moved. More than one group, to be more scientifically accurate. One group of neck and shoulder muscles moved his head so that his eyeballs were pointed in the approximate direction of his desktop. Undoubtedly, muscles around his eye sockets worked to focus his eyes once more upon his work . . .

No, it was a different task. The book had been closed and placed upon a pile to his left by way of muscular movements whose description would take up a chapter or two in my book . . .

All seemed suddenly clear when I saw the title on the spine: *Weather Cycles*. He'd told me he was going to be looking into this Greenhouse Earth business, though he'd feared it was no simple matter to understand the underlying data or the statistical techniques used to organize that data, let alone the hugely complex models used to evaluate the possibility that the rise in atmospheric temperatures was being caused by natural events.

Clear was now Parnell's work of the recent past, but I had no clue as to why he seemed to be copying from one of his notebooks to another . . .

No . . .

He was using one set of ruined notebooks for reference while he ruined another set.

He was rewriting and expanding his book! He'd told me he was also going to do that, even before he was finished deciding if we really were living on a Greenhouse Earth. That was okay. It could take months, or even years, to carry out an evaluation that complex, but I could barely believe the evidence of my own eyes.

He was rewriting his book by hand!

Why?

He had pieces of the book in the computer already. Why didn't he just work from those files—expanding, rearranging, and drastically rewriting as seemed appropriate? The computer seemed to me a valid tool for a teller of tales. Why was Parnell not using his word-processing software?

Fingers would fly over the keyboard, shortening the long, painful process of constructing a complex and subtly nuanced narrative.

Properly used, the computer would even allow better planning of a work. From stop to start . . .

End to beginning?

Amigo to Alfie?

Outlining tools combined with scheduling software, often conveniently linked to the word-processing software, would allow for tighter, more controllable production goals. On-line encyclopedias would make sure the conscientious writer, concerned about the factual details of other periods, sends his characters to movies that were actually playing in that particular year. Flesch tests would ensure that the book could be read by the average congressman. Or congresswoman.

And there would be more help the ambitious writer could find on his desktop computer...

Spell-checking tools were available on all but the most primitive word-processing software. And grammatical review software could be run regularly to make sure the author didn't use the passive tense or any other grammatical constructions which had been discovered by modern experts to be defective or unnecessary or confusing to the modern reader. Graphics, including collections of copyright-free art for those with the futuristic sense to head towards multimedia.

What more could an author ask for?

Never to make a spelling error!

Never to write a sentence which would be disapproved by the grammarians in the computer software firms!

No double negatives!!

No hard-to-read sentences such as those which provided so many obstacles to the uncommon readers of *Moby Dick* and *The Constitution of the United States*.

Quality control.

Schedule control, to boot, as if the purest of bonuses.

Now I was in the swing of things. My black mood was dissipating, now that I saw my task more clearly, not to mention all the powerful tools at my disposal for completing that task. I was in a good rhythm of organized, disciplined thought. Scientific thought at that. It was not surprising that a plan started to form in the cells of the ventromedial region of the prefrontal neocortex of some brain closely associated with my current disposition to get up and write.

More than that...

I was inspired. The activity of those neurons had led to a cascade of electrical excitations and neurohormonal flows such that...

There was no better way to say it: several levels had been jumped. Literary inspiration had emerged from the flow of all those neurochemicals they talk about on all those science channels. Good scientific thinking based on solid facts. I was in command, to such an extent that I understood the very brain processes underlying my thoughts. . .

For a few disheartening seconds, the elation of inspiration turned to confusion. I forgot what those thoughts had been though I remembered they'd had something to do with a frontal lobotomy. Or something like that. More important were my more practical thoughts—I remembered that my book was building to a climactic battle of good men against the conspirators in the tobacco industry, women as well, but that didn't seem to be directly related to. . .

Was poor Dillon Strickland to be lobotomized?

It seemed the sort of thing a vicious lawyer might do to an associate who had gone over to the side of good people, taking a lot of inside information with him. It made sense as an enhancement to the plot, though I would have never expected my book to have taken such a turn. Not that I would have expected to explore the issue of extraterrestrial intelligence before I had come to live in the Llewellyn house. Before then I'd had interest in science. I'd watched most *Nova*TM episodes, at least if I happened to switch to the right channel. I did real well on the science questions in *Trivial Pursuit*TM. I even understood most of the articles about science in *The New York Times* and *Newsweek* and all those sorts of higher quality publications. All that stuff about the stars being older than the Universe and how it was possible to travel through time by way of a black hole and how human problems were caused by our evolution to meet conditions on the African savanna and now we live in cities. Genes and retroviruses and tiny robots that could climb up inside a person's bowels to perform an operation. My head was full of all that scientific stuff. No one could accuse me of being old-fashioned or superstitious.

Despite that, a lobotomy seemed a nasty thing to do to someone who seemed as nice and as basically decent as Dillon Strickland. Not that he had been given a chance to show his rediscovered moral integrity, but I might show him refusing under torture to reveal the whereabouts of his sister and James Williams. And, then, they'd figure they might as well lobotomize him if they couldn't get anything out of him.

It struck me that I needed to do some research. I wasn't quite sure what effects a frontal lobotomy had on a person. I certainly knew those

effects weren't good, but I didn't know all the important details. Would a lobotomized person act like a zombie? Would he slobber and lose control over his other bodily functions? I wondered if the answers were in all those piles of books Parnell had all over the place. A new thought struck me—would it be possible to experiment in those labs...

Wherever the hell they were. I didn't know where they were or whether they might include equipment for conducting horrible experiments on monkeys or rats or other creatures that scientists studied when they wanted to understand people. Katie had told me there were labs in the house, but I doubt if she knew any details either. She hadn't the knack for science and math, and, so, she'd been stuck in the history department...

As was I? But, I had been interested in science, and I'd learned a lot about it, and...

I'd simply been too busy writing and thinking about aliens and other scientific stuff. I'd never had the time to go looking for those labs. So far as I knew, Parnell had not done any lab work since I'd been in his house. The labs might well be padlocked, and everything inside might be covered by dust.

Maybe a lobotomy would be a good idea. There were plenty of books describing the effects of things like that. And anything that was as controversial as a lobotomy needed to be done and described in a scientifically valid way. There would be nothing worse than being accused, with justice, of not getting the technical details right for something so well researched by scientists.

A lobotomy. The disabling of a fine legal brain which had once been deployed for such evil purposes. I was impressed, even if it was my own idea. And I felt an urge to get to my room and write. I spun, trying to orient myself and to figure out where I was, and...

Shit! Did my big toe ever hurt, and I was so surprised that I couldn't figure out what had happened until I looked down, through stars and tears, at a table with at least one sturdy, thick leg. Then the table went out of sight as I kind of turned around. It was hard holding my balance hopping on my right foot while holding my left foot...

I suppose I looked like an utter ass as I danced around. Parnell, not smooth but pretty tactful, stared at me without laughing and without saying a word. Most likely, he was wondering if I had some strange desire to destroy my poor toe.

Not that I cared if I looked stupid. I just wanted the pain to end so I could get back to my room and finish my book before my inspired mood had died away and all the good ideas had faded. But I couldn't even take the first step. My toe felt broken, and I was afraid to put any weight on it. I put my ass back down on the chair and lifted my damaged appendage wondering if I should take off my shoe. I knew there was some reason you weren't supposed to take the shoe off if you had a broken ankle or toe or something, but maybe that was just if you were in the middle of the woods or out on a ship or something.

And, so, I sat and tried to concentrate on something other than the pain. My efforts failed. Even thinking about Ms. July didn't get my mind off the pain. Not entirely, anyway, but I got some good ideas for Daphne Strickland's personality attributes and deeper interests. It wasn't as if I had fallen into a sexist or exploitive mode of thought; a woman could have big nipples and still be smart. Yeah, real big as I remembered. Of course, nowadays, you could never be sure the way a graphics artist could alter pictures, but Daphne Strickland would be beyond misunderstanding as long as I made her description real concrete and real explicit.

Even down to the mole on the inside of her left thigh? Not sure when I had discovered Daphne Strickland had such a pretty blemish, I found that the pain had eased off a lot. When I looked up to reassure Parnell I was okay, he was staring at me with a slack face, as if he had forgotten how to speak or move. Maybe he'd forgotten a lot of those scientific facts the way a computer could lose some of its files if it was shocked. I hoped not. I was still hoping to draw on all his scientific wisdom as I completed my book and began to flesh it out.

Out of the corner of my eye, I could see there were books scattered all over the floor. For a second I felt guilty, but then I realized I wasn't the one who put furniture all over the place just to hold books and magazines and electronic doo-dads. But I wasn't really angry at him. He was a nice guy. How could I feel resentment at him, even if he had caused me a lot of pain? And, so, I bent over to clean up the mess. The first book I grabbed was a paperback edition of Pascal's *Pensées*. Pointing to it, I informed Parnell, "I hear it's even better in the original French." He nodded dumbly, and I bent over to pick up a volume entitled *Madness and Modernity*. A strange title that led me to turn the book over a couple of times before opening it to a page which...

Well, it had the weirdest discussion about some new sort of prison called the Panopticon. Something about the word and the discussion struck me as being familiar, but I couldn't quite place it. Though it would have appealed only to eggheads, I thought about slipping the Panopticon-thing into my book. You know, find a way the Panopticon might have been realized in some sort of a psychological form that allowed cigarette manufacturers and the CIA and those kind of groups to control people without literally putting them in prisons.

It had possibilities, but it seemed like it would be real hard to put something like that into my book. It might have been different if I'd had such an idea early on, but the book was pretty well written except for the ending. Thinking again, I realized it would have been hard to put such an intellectual thing into a fast-paced contemporary book, a hard-hitting thriller at that. I put that book on top of the *Pensées*, noting there was also a copy of *Lord Jim* and one of *Go Tell It On the Mountain*. That last book looked to be a discarded library copy. Some library had probably run out of room, and then they'd received some new books that dealt with more contemporary issues, and...

Now that the books were piled on the table again, the entire set-up seemed odd to me. I mean, the way each of those books seemed so familiar, but even more that they seemed so familiar as a group, though they didn't seem to have a lot to do with each other. Heck, I doubted if their Library of Congress numbers were anywhere near each other. So, it was pretty odd that they would seem to somehow belong together, but undoubtedly, I'd just seen them piled on that table and had noted them in one of those unconscious ways like the scientists are always talking about. It would have been easier for me to understand things like that and use them in my books if I'd taken a course in psychology or artificial intelligence or something else where they taught you how memory works and how thinking is done and all that stuff.

"Are you all right, Del?"

He'd spoken and now it was me that was dumb, but I managed to nod.

"It was just that your eyes got glazed over and you started talking about catastrophic failure of a hard disk and..." His expression tightened up, and he asked me, "Did something go wrong with that computer I got you?" When I shook my head, he relaxed but seemed puzzled about something.

And something caught my attention...

Through the window behind Parnell, I could see workmen erecting a sign.

TITTS

So simple and to the point. And below that:

*****COMING SOON*****

Soon would there be “TITTS” in the neighborhood! Once more was I inspired and energized and ready to write about Daphne’s courageous fight to overcome the misogynistic prejudices of a patriarchal society. The memory of the first meeting of James Williams and Daphne Strickland revived my faith that life was worth living. I felt a smile come to my face, even after all the pain and suffering I’d recently endured. Without a word, I raised my hand and pointed out the window at that sign so evocative of bittersweet memories and future hopes. Love had been won once only to be lost just as quickly. Love might be found again.

As Parnell turned to stare out the window, I turned to leave. I had a book to complete, and I could feel that ending approach, even if the details were still not settled.

50 Good and Evil: Kidnapped

One thing was crystal clear to James Williams and his two companions. They had to get out of Daphne's apartment before Farnsworth's henchmen attacked. They had no idea where they could go to be safe, but it was Daphne who wisely assured them, "We'll just have to play it by ear."

As necessary as that practical attitude was, James Williams just didn't like it. He set about thinking up a plan that would allow him to take charge over the coming events. The desirability of control over surrounding circumstances was one thing he'd learned well during those long years in school and the business world. Unfortunately, the only idea that came quickly to mind was to use Dillon as bait to draw Farnsworth's henchmen into the open. Once James Williams saw them, had their count, and knew their weapons, he could take care of them, rescue Dillon, and get the three of them out of the trap.

But he couldn't bring himself to do it. A fine plan if it worked, it would bring guilt if it didn't. It wasn't that bad consequences would undo his good intentions, but...

"They're coming up the hallway."

Sure enough, once James Williams concentrated on retrieving every little sound about him, he heard footsteps. Heavy, though there was a hint of a man stepping more lightly. Were the thugs being led by a dancer? By one of those woodsmen who could step too lightly for the ears of most men? Perhaps the fellow was simply much smaller than the thugs following him?

James Williams wasted but a fraction of a second on such ponderings before he spun about. Grabbing Daphne's hand, he led her deeper into the apartment, trusting Dillon to follow on his own. When the three of them stood together in the kitchen, James Williams asked, "Is there any way out of here besides the front and back doors?" He thought it likely there would be men at both doors. Farnsworth wasn't going to pinch pennies when it

came to eliminating enemies who endangered billions of dollars of Inmoral profits. Knowing just how great the danger was, he felt fear when Daphne and Dillon Strickland shook their heads as if tied together by strings. “Not even a second-story deck?” Again they shook their heads, and he realized this was a scaled-down luxury townhouse, forcing the occupants to hold barbecue parties on the ground-level patios and not leaving many ways to escape professional killers.

He smiled wryly at the thought that modern housing should be built to allow for defense and ready escape. Of course, he knew that such had been true in the Dark Ages and during those years when the pioneers were stealing the lands of the Native Americans. Daphne and Dillon were looking at him in the dim light—only the light above the stove was on. They looked hopeful, and James Williams feared they had misinterpreted his smile. He would get them all out of this mess, but he didn’t want to give them the illusion he had his plan of action set in all its details.

Then, he heard movement in the living-room, and he knew his hand was being forced. Precious seconds had been wasted while the men in the front had broken in. Before he could react, he heard footsteps overhead and then movement outside the back-door.

A quick inspection of the room revealed it was only an ordinary kitchen. There was not a weapon in sight for the resourceful James Williams to use against the gang of professional killers. There weren’t even the materials for Daphne Strickland to make a bomb as she had been so well trained to do during her years as an efficient, ruthless Seal. Looking at the lovely young lady, James Williams could see tears come to her soft, green eyes at the realization there were no high-tech weapons or explosives for her well-trained, pretty hands to use against the brutal killers they were about to face.

Driven by desperation, James Williams even tried to recall what he had learned in high school chemistry. There were surely bottles of ammonia and other household chemicals under the sink. Some chemical geniuses could have quickly brewed up some powerful bomb from that sort of stuff, but he’d paid little attention to the teacher when Becky Sawyer was sparkling only two desks away from him. Women had always been his weakness, and now his infatuation with Becky back in high school left him bereft of the knowledge to make a powerful explosive from ordinary kitchen chemicals.

He had to do something, and, so, he moved, heading towards the kitchen door, determined to disable the killers at the back-door so that Daphne and

Dillon might escape. He'd taken no more than two steps when a deep voice spoke behind him, "Freeze!" James Williams froze for sure, though he rose on the balls of his feet, prepared to move cat-like in any direction. Knowing the henchmen weren't the brightest guys in the world, he figured they'd make some crucial mistake, but he heard Daphne shriek. Sadly, James Williams turned and stood flatfooted, watching the thug who'd grabbed the pretty, and highly capable, young woman by her upper arms. If not for his concern about the damage done by ethnic stereotyping, James Williams would have thought the fellow to have been a Sicilian or some other southern Italian. Instead of wasting his energy thinking thoughts that did nothing but divide people, James Williams shot the man a threatening stare. The man, short and built like a gorilla, eased his grip noticeably. A slightly uglier twin of the first thug stood with an Uzi pointed at Dillon Strickland's back, and he must have caught the meaning of James Williams' warning stare because he was treating Dillon in a manner almost gentle.

There was nothing to do but wait patiently. The gangsters would make a mistake eventually, and, when they did, James Williams would make them regret the day they heard his name, assuming they'd ever heard his name. But they would hear his name before the night was over, and Daphne would undoubtedly be at his side, using all her training from her days as a Seal. Though they had the drop on Daphne and Dillon Strickland, there were still only two of them against James Williams, and he was thinking fast about a way to disable those two thugs when a short and slender man strolled into the kitchen. The fellow moved lightly on his feet, as if he were always ready to pounce upon a piece of prey. There was no doubt that this man was dangerous, one of those supremely talented and highly skilled killers that were rarely seen by ordinary people except in movies or TV murder mysteries.

In a voice as nonchalant as he could manage, James Williams asked, "And who might you be?"

Before the man could answer, someone smashed through the kitchen door, and James Williams knew there was an automatic weapon pointed directly at his back. One slug he could take, especially to protect Daphne. Maybe even two. But a spray of bullets would be too much even for the likes of him.

After a quick glance over James Williams' shoulder, the slender man sneered and answered, "They call me Sonny. Sonnie Devant."

Wishing to keep the mood as light as possible so that no one would get

hurt before it was necessary, James Williams gestured backwards with his head and said, "They didn't have to break in. You guys could have just opened the door." It was a dare, of course. For one of them to have opened the back-door, he would have had to walk past James Williams, within reach of a man who had already shown how handy he was in tough spots.

Sonnie Devant's face twisted into a still uglier sneer as if he didn't like being reminded that he needed a small army to safely bring James Williams in. And he probably didn't even know about Daphne's past as a Seal.

In an effort to deny his own cowardice, Sonnie Devant said, "I don't care about the damned door. I'd burn this entire complex down for the hell of it." It was at that very instant that James Williams knew Farnsworth and his bosses in the tobacco industry were bound to lose. They were willing to put poisonous smoke in the lungs of innocent teenagers. They were willing to put bullets in those who had the courage to fight evil. They didn't even have a decent respect for the property and personal safety of other people. They could not have been more at odds with the American way and its respect for human rights.

James Williams smiled at Sonnie Devant in a manner still lighthearted as if they were about to go on a friendly outing to the shore. He could almost feel sorry for the killer. In an earlier age, in darker times before human rights had been recognized for what they were, this psychotic killer might well have been a powerful and successful man, perhaps doing the dirty work of a king or a bishop or someone like that. As if he could read his captive's mind, Sonnie Devant's face twisted to an even uglier shape. He stepped forward and grasped James Williams arm with a surprisingly powerful grip and spun him around, half-throwing him towards two thugs who had appeared at the kitchen door. One of them, even more powerfully built than the first two thugs, stepped forward and grabbed James Williams left wrist. They were taking no chances with a man who'd already proven himself to be so dangerous. No chances at all. Within seconds, his two wrists were tightly bound together with a sturdy strap of leather.

Captured, but not intimidated, James Williams stared defiantly at the thug who looked to be one of those tremendously strong Samoans, though he knew there were powerfully built men in other Polynesian ethnic groups even if it was mostly Samoans who had made it into the NFL. Undoubtedly, there were unintelligent and ruthless men from all ethnic groups on Earth who were willing to work for evil men, as if not caring that the tobacco industry was brutally exploitive of poor and oppressed people in both

developed and undeveloped countries.

James Williams found it necessary to suppress his thoughts about social justice that he might concentrate on the practical matters confronting him. Not sure how he would get out of this mess, he was sure there was a way. The future looked always bright to those who always had a good perspective on life in a country founded on a respect for people's rights to life, liberty, and happiness, but that future looked awfully far away as the thug spun him around to force him to stare at the psychotic leader of these killers. James Williams smiled defiantly at Sonnie Devant, though his confidence was shaken when he saw Daphne and Dillon being escorted to the front door. At least, they were not being harmed. Their hands were not even bound. Suddenly, James Williams was afraid he would be separated from those two who so badly needed his protection, though, if he could free her and get her an automatic weapon or two, he was sure Daphne could pull her own weight in this adventure.

Afraid he might have been, for he was brave and not stupid, but it would do no good to reveal his fears to his captors. James Williams retained his defiant stare, and that seemed to irritate Sonnie Devant, one of that type that feeds upon the fear of his victims. The man so dangerous despite being so slender broke down for just a second. His eyes wandered to the edges of the room before a bestial sort of courage returned. He looked James Williams in the eye and said, "We'll see how brave you are when you're facing the Fat Man." One of the thugs remaining in the room shuddered at the mention of that Fat Man, and James Williams realized that even Farnsworth, that shark of a lawyer, wasn't at the top of the secret organization which ran this conspiracy in violation of the rights of all Americans to a healthy, disease-free life. He could not suppress a shiver at the thought that he was going to be taken in front of some ruthless leader of a conspiracy even bigger and more evil than he had first suspected. It was likely this frightening beast of a man was from the CIA or the FBI. There would be no escape, little protection against such a powerful, fiendish character.

51 The Treacherous, Slavish Shore: Wherein Names and Characters Appear Confused and Even the Context is Ambiguous to the Perceptions of the Most Sharp-eyed of Authors, Perhaps Some Readers as Well

Parnell's eyes were blinking rapidly. That was usually a bad sign. He tended to rock back and forth when his thoughts were moving smoothly, and he blinked his eyes when something was puzzling him. I was a bit worried, but he grew still after just a few seconds, and his eyes dropped to the latest chapter of my book.

In a voice almost too faint to be heard, he asked, "Sonnie Devant?" As often happened when I spoke with Parnell, I feared a simple question was just the tip of the iceberg. My mind was racing as I tried to think through the complex ramifications of such a question. I had not gotten far and certainly had not framed even a tentative answer before Parnell looked up again. "I'm working on embedding the tales of James Llewellyn and Dylan Shagari in a suitable narrative, and there's the wisest of killers, a fellow named Donnie Savant. It was Buck Kotic, the 400-pound general and Overlord of North America, who gave him the name 'Savant' because

of his skills as a killer and his general incompetence as a human being in other ways. Though it wasn't his fault his brain was ravaged by disease when he was a young boy. On the other hand, he made certain moral, or rather immoral, decisions, even if he was a bit limited in his perceptions and conceptions by that brain damage."

Parnell grew silent and dropped his eyes once more to the printout I'd given him. I'd thought about giving him a disk instead and letting him read the file on the screen or print it out as he wished. Then, I'd decided it was more polite to give him the new chapter already printed out. Parnell really liked technology, but he seemed to prefer books and printed papers over a screen display. I knew that everybody had his idiosyncrasies, and I was getting used to those of Parnell. But, he pulled out a new one. He began tapping on his own chin with the forefinger of his left hand. I had not a clue as to what this might signify. I could only hope it indicated some sort of appreciation for my literary efforts now that I was pulling my book together, heading towards the climax, the final battle where James Williams would really show his stuff before he and Daphne settled down to live happily for 20 or 30 years.

I felt a twinge of guilt as I realized I was thinking in conventional terms of a masculine hero who'd save the damsel in distress, said damsel to then fly gratefully into the arms of said hero who'd pick her up and carry her off to...

That part was okay. Most people seemed to like it when the strong-willed heroine melted into the hero's arms after the battle had been won. Then, the book could end with a bang...

Not literally. It was one thing to describe some sex, maybe even getting into the nitty and gritty of some specific acts, but there was no reason to write pornography. Unless, of course, you wanted to write pornography, so long as it respected women and didn't just treat them like sex objects.

"There's something wrong here..." Parnell's voice drifted away as if the problem were eluding him. That didn't surprise me. Parnell's own writing displayed a strong bias towards old-fashioned, masculine literary forms. And he had once told me that there were more smart women than smart men, but the frontiers of human thought and human creativity were masculine domains. For all the order in his thought and for all he knew about things like supernovas and chaos, he'd fallen into a sexist form of bigotry when he tied all this stuff back to the funny shaped skulls that a lot of men supposedly had. It was funny when he'd talked that way in his book

about Dylan Shagari, but it didn't seem right women would be excluded from the higher levels of genius just because their skulls were too roundish.

Little girls had as much right as little boys to dream of being another Einstein or another Mendelssohn. And, then, I knew I had my part to play. After all, my niece was a girl and I loved her as much as if she'd been born a boy. She had as much right as any boy to play soccer and fly planes and do mathematics. I'd let her know she could be anything she dreamed of being. I'd give Daphne a major role in defeating the conspiracy headed by the Fat Man, though he and his group were still as mysterious to me as they'd be to any reader who'd reached that point in the book.

I rose, ready to go back to work, determined to give Molly some worthwhile dreams. I'd show her she could compete with boys; she didn't have to be content with a boring life doing just the stuff girls were always socialized to do, like playing with dolls or playing house, and then growing up to be a Mommy. The history books may have been filled with mostly men, but I'd show Molly that Parnell had been wrong when he'd claimed that was largely a reflection of the different motivations and interests of men and women. Who knows what could have happened if Mendelssohn's sisters had been encouraged to develop their musical geniuses the way he'd been encouraged to develop his? Why shouldn't smart young women get all the help in developing their talents as mathematical physicists that Einstein got in developing his? Heck, in those days, women weren't even allowed to be college professors in some European countries. That was the key. Though a man, I'd be the one who'd give young girls hope. I'd create some good tales to help socialize them for aggressiveness and success, and, with a little luck and hard work, I might become rich and famous doing it. 'Hank Kinsic' came to mind as the name of my fat man, but that seemed not right, and I set all my creative powers to work on the task of finding a proper name. After a short time indeed, I boldly and publicly proposed, "Hank Kansic" as the villain's name. At the edge of my attention, I could see Parnell jump in his chair as if startled.

"Like unto Buck Kusic of my book?" asked he, though not in an accusatory tone. I was no plagiarist, and I could see it was likely I'd been influenced by Parnell's mention of the character from his own book, perhaps the ending of my book would even be influenced by his description of his villain's character and life.

For all that, my work was independent of his, a freestanding effort. Necessarily so. After all, my book was a fast-paced, contemporary novel

that had a tough, courageous female character to stand proudly beside my tough, courageous male character. It was true she'd been depicted as a more conventional female character up to this point, but even the best-planned novel might evolve a bit as it was set to disk. The early parts of the novel could be rewritten to reflect my insight that I'd been short-changing Daphne by not showing she could compete with men in all those activities that men had conspired to keep to themselves for thousands of years, at least since those days when there were a lot of women warriors and everybody worshiped the Mother Goddess.

"The Mother Goddess?"

Parnell looked to be positively perplexed. And why not? He was unappreciative of the modern effort to free women to engage in activities historically dominated by men. And I might have muttered a few phrases out of the context of my contemplations. Certainly, the phrase 'Mother Goddess' might make some people think first of ancient, primitive religions. Only some people more concerned with extending rights to women might have guessed I'd muttered the phrase while thinking of how men had so brutally limited the options of women in public life for thousands of years. And, now, just as signs of change were showing up; everybody was learning about all the abused and abandoned women; women were far too often left caring for children fathered by the brute who'd left her when he had a chance to go with a younger woman. Clearly, more needed to be done that the situation of women and children be further improved.

I looked Parnell straight in the eye, my mind full of images of Molly 20 years down the road. Having been excluded from professions dominated by men, she'd borne two children to a man, even while she was working a night job to help put him through medical school. Having finished his internship, on his way to becoming a wealthy and famous surgeon, the creep had left Molly and the two children. He'd moved in with some 20 year-old blond bimbo with boobies that Hugh Hefner would approve of.

I informed Parnell, "I won't let it happen to Molly. She has as many rights as any five year-old boy, and no man should ever abandon her, leaving her to care for the children he fathered."

To his credit, Parnell didn't argue against my moral claims. I wouldn't have expected him to. After all, he wasn't evil. He didn't even seem to be a misogynist, for the most part. His grandmother had really been some sort of doctor who'd been a pioneer in brain research just like in his book, and Parnell was as proud of her as I would have been with my strong support

for the right of women to be what they wanted to be.

But he looked puzzled as if he were not yet ready to encourage women to become geniuses or to dare to be brave enough to rescue men. But, how to do that? I was ready to let women be soldiers and heroes and stuff, but I wasn't dumb enough to forget that men could hurt women. I knew there was a reason that it was the women who got hurt when a domestic squabble turned to a physical brawl, and I knew who it almost always was who struck the first blow. Against a large powerful man, even one not trained in fancy martial arts, any woman, no matter how much karate she knew, would need a machine-gun. . .

"Machine gun?" Parnell smiled and asked, "Is Oedipus gonna use a machine gun on Papa God and then impregnate Mama God?"

Parnell's voice wavered as if he feared that such a joke was blasphemous by his Christian beliefs. I was a little pissed-off at the joke because it had caused an interrupt condition in one of the modules of my narrative subsystems. The interrupt condition had led to a general clearing of the accumulators and registers which had been active just a few seconds ago, and all pointers to the memory bits useful for reconstructing the contents of those registers were also lost.

I sat back down, wondering what the hell I had just been thinking and not having an idea how to restart that line of thought. There was a vague feeling in my . . . somewhere that I had been on to something important, maybe even a deep insight regarding human nature.

Human nature?

Male nature and female nature?

Molly—my cute, little niece. I'd been concerned about how to allow her the chance to become all she could be, even if that was something different from what she was. That is, what she had been socialized to be.

With my head aching a little, I rose. No longer did I have a clear idea what I wanted to say, but I felt a need to be writing that I could work these ideas out. I could feel a creative storm of sorts coming down upon me. And, so, I walked down the hallway towards my room, leaning into the wind and smelling the salt in the air as the waves still small rose to curl frothingly over the other and the one.

52 The Open Independence of the Sea: A Preliminary Sketch of the Wisest of Killers, Though it be Uncertain How Thoroughly His Vicious Behavior Reflected His Innermost Desires and Thus It Be Equally As Uncertain Whether He Truly Existed

Curled up his lips, squinted his eyes, and charged up his slumbering mesencephalic reticular formation, did he did. Cynically watching, and at a high state of awareness, was Captain Savant, he was. A carnivore, like many others, he inhabited a world of processes. It flowed, or it faded into grayness as his slumbering self stayed alert only for an interesting movement. Background. All became background, not of interest except as a reference point for the movements of possible prey.

But not in the midst of danger did he slumber, though perhaps parts of him. A crocodile aroused from a turgid state did he resemble though only in the weakest possible sense. Reptilian were his own self-evaluations. Shallow and weak of perception, that is, for the man handy with sharp-edges saw himself in a smoky mirror. And he knew that to be the case. Others he

saw clearly, albeit through a bright, nearly blinding, glare.

Now...

There was only an aggregation of sensory processes. His skin was an electric membrane. Every motion in the room registered itself on his body surface. Saw he the other four people in the room at one time. Smelled fear, acrid and pungent, did he. The fear could have become smellier only if someone were to piss in his pants. Or hers. The Overlord-Communicator was in the room. Former actress, a sex kitten had she been. No more, for her claws were fully grown, though her complexion was yet a creamy desiderata, cheek-dotted with a peachy pink. Her figure was slenderly curved, her hair a uniformly light blond. Long of legs she was and as terrified as the other two overlords before their colleague—big, bad Buck Kosic.

And why were powerful people gathered for a meeting when there was important work to be done here and there?

Captain Savant himself was not sure, though he suspected that the meeting was in some way related to his recent trips. The Council of Overlords was down from eleven members to seven. Nasty work that. That is, to a man who cared.

Whatever was going on behind the scenes, the meeting was not a social gathering, to be sure. The fears were other than those of mistakes in etiquette or protocol. Lives were at stake, and not only that of the Overlord-Communicator Johnstone, though Captain Savant saw her as the most likely victim. Probably not Overlord-Comptroller Chan, though he also cowered, poker-faced, before Overlord-General Kosic. How about the lord of industrial production and construction, Overlord-Manager Baki? The reptilian man thought that Overlord to be in some danger. The problems used to justify the meeting were in the Project which was to be his responsibility until the complex was erected and the electronics were operational. Yet, more political and less technical was the major problem: disloyalty on the part of those honored and well-rewarded by the Collective.

Though it might have seemed odd to some, Chan was wasting precious energy fiddling with the watch-band on his right wrist. Captain Savant noted the man's sinister nature; such knowledge was of the utmost importance in the opening seconds of a fight. Not one for acrobatic fight-dancing, Savant ended all his fights within the minimum time necessary to land one blow or one slash to a vital region. Chan might not last long at all, though he had once been a Ranger; he was sixtiesh and soft about the middle.

Rangers had been a few of the Overlords as well as most of their high

servants. Not Savant. He had been an independent contractor who had done most of his work for a secret group operating out of the White House in the last days of the American Republic. Several foreign leaders and more than one general or Senator in the U.S. had died at his hands or with a slug from a long-range and high-velocity .22 bouncing around in his chest. Savant had packed most of his own bullets, allowing for the probable range of his shot. Yes, the slug was to have just enough momentum, after penetrating the front ribs, to rip through soft flesh without being able to go through bone again. Such professional and well-practiced precision would leave the fellow's heart and lungs in quite a jumbled mess. Professional at the highest level was Savant in those few things he did well. And that was why he was so useful to a 400 pound man who was lord of the armies and police forces of North America.

Baki was not much at all in Savant's estimation. Nearly as masculinely slender as Johnstone was femininely slender, he was dark-brown of skin and elegant of manner. He even managed to wear his khaki uniform as if it were a custom-fit formal suit. The man seemed a survivor, but not in the context of Savant's style of competition. In any case, neither was a match in any way for the 400 pound gorilla who was sitting where he wanted, in front of three of his fearful fellow rulers of North America. Of the seven remaining Overlords, only Chan and Kosic were from the original gang of five years prior. The positions had power, access to harems, and a number of other perks. Thus, did many compete for the chance to be the next meal for the Overlord-General who no longer wandered far to find prey. Since he sat on top of the treasure chest, everyone wandered into his grasp.

Caught Johnstone's eyes did Captain Savant. Satisfied he was at the signs of a shiver passing from gut to toes, gut to head. Long ago had he seen that of Kosic she was not as scared as of Savant. Perhaps she had some weak hold over Kosic. The killer, reptilian in only certain ways, could not quite understand that, yet he knew that the Overlord-General had fallen under the spell of women before. Not Savant. He was too clever to be controlled by another person, yet...

He had been in the Atlanta Pen and scheduled for execution when Kosic took him onto his staff. So afraid had they been of him that Savant had not touched another human being for the 15 months he was in that facility. When they moved him, they first threw in shackles and made him chain himself. Then with two men walking to his sides and holding the chains to the neck-band, two other men walked behind, carrying rapid-fire shotguns

constantly aimed at the back of his torso.

Other than the few times they took him to see the warden or for outdoor exercise, he lived by himself for those 15 months. It had not mattered. He had merely slumbered away the time, largely indifferent to his own fate. Happy he had been to go to work for Kotic, then a mere general in a struggling republic. Nevertheless, it was not a happiness he would have missed if the opportunity had not materialized. Only fools had ambitions or desires for things not within reach. Captain Savant had long ago decided that to be the case.

Still, he wondered why she was more afraid of him than of Kotic. The Overlord-General killed in passion and not cold blood, and, yet, he was quite capable of killing those he cared for. The Overlord-General had throttled the neck of his favorite son. Mistakenly, that fellow had involved himself with a drug smuggling gang. Kotic had a genuine distaste for drugs as he intended to re-instill a sense of moral discipline in the American people. He had set out to make the Collective the greatest imperial power the world had ever seen. Complications had arisen; neither the Koreans nor the Indians were to be treated lightly. Ruthless and competent were the men of the new New Delhi and those who had settled in Beijing. Some were rumored to be nearly a match for Kotic.

Something inside of Johnstone simply made her more afraid of the weapon than of the master. No matter, though somewhat interesting. No, it was not a question to worry Captain Savant. He cared not by which neurological pathways paralysis spread through the body of a deer staring eye-to-eye at the cougar. The fear was sufficient unto itself. Yet, it was a matter for contemplative enjoyment one sunny day when next he bathed in wave-like particles, stretching out, letting his muscles relax, easing his awareness of his environment, letting single, small feelings balloon up in his otherwise slumbering brain. Digesting. Meditating on fear in preparation for securing the next meal, though such could be rare occasions for certain killers whose metabolisms slowed so much between kills. Captain Savant could not remember many such occasions in recent years as Kotic always had a job to be done.

Perhaps she would slumber with him, though she might not again rise. He felt his lips turn up at the edges. Looking at Overlord-Communicator Johnstone, was he? was. Had he smiled. Knew he not for sure, but his alert senses caught an image of Chan watching, another of Kotic smiling as his little eyes shifted deep in those rolls of fat. Relentlessly, he gazed at...

Savant's attention shifted as something told him the Overlord-General had selected his victim. Fun would be this killing. She smiled back, and Captain Savant wondered if she would be a willing victim. So many of his victims had been so cooperative as if believing they deserved no better.

Cooperative or not, she was as good as dead for a crisis had appeared on the horizon and Overlord-General Kosic wanted to act fast to pull together the body politic.

53 The Open Independence of the Sea: Psychotic Killers, Political Rulers, and Other People Who Deserve the Sympathies of a Person of Modern Moral Sensibilities

The light drew near, painfully near to the dazed man. Or did Captain Savant draw near, painfully near, to the light? As if down a corridor did he and it approach. Or was it an illusion? The light did not reach him though it seemed to be moving closer to him. Or he to it. Or maybe neither was true. Or maybe...

His eyes burned, for sure. Of that, there was no doubt. Upon that sensory perception could he stand as he struggled to return from wherever he had been.

“I am in pain, therefore I am.”

When there was no response, from himself or from others, he tried again.

“I am, therefore I am in pain.”

Carried upon a deep voice came the suggestion, “You think you are in pain, therefore you think.”

That seemed not right to his swollen and aching brain. It cared not if it had fricked or if it had been fracked. The light was the immediate source of the pain, though he feared the pain would continue even if the light were to disappear. Nice nearly as the Sun was the light with the halo and its 57 points twinkling with all the glory of a bright object partly obscured by

light-absorbing gases. From where. . .

It was only parts of his brain that throbbed with pain. Other parts barely self-perceptible pulsated with a happy rhythm. His body felt warmly comfortable. His body and parts of his brain had exercised their skills. They had done as they were trained to do. Satisfaction, if not more. Certainly, not less.

Dead bodies lay about him.

Captain Savant knew that to be the case even before dropping his eyes from that bulb shining in the fixture over the desk of the Overlord-General.

Three corpses.

Surely he had killed them.

How?

A little boy inside his brain whimpered in fear.

No wonder.

Three corpses.

He, Savant was he, had killed them.

Had he not?

Of a certainty.

So he thought.

It had often happened like this, though the fog came after the danger was gone, even if that was days after the killing. Foggishly could he have never found his way out of Germany after assassinating those geneticists. In a daze could he have never come back out of the layers of security forces surrounding those other four Overlords.

He had killed three powerful people, and, yet, no danger lurked about. He trusted his instincts. Finely honed were they.

It was sad.

Even Savant could see that.

A young boy should not be exposed to things such as this. Chan's rib cage bulged in the oddest manner as if someone had ripped out the aorta underneath, rudely disconnecting it from the man's heart. Baki's nose was pushed into his face; undoubtedly, the cartilage had penetrated his brain like a knife. Johnstone's head was resting at the oddest angle, nearly perpendicular to her neck. Overlord-General Kosic was sitting quietly in his chair, smiling at the corpses of his former associates.

He raised his eyes to look directly at Captain Savant. "You do good work, Savant."

"I do good work, Savant. I am, that is."

“Yes, you is Savant, are you not?”

“Yes, I is Savant, are I not? Not. . . not.”

While Captain Savant was still fighting his way through the fog engulfing his mind, Kosic’s smile broadened.

Fever.

Yes, fever. For sure, it had been fever. Remembered. . . he? Yes, he, Savant. That is. Though he was not, back then. Fog there was in memories—his and someone else’s. Momma and Grandma, his? or someone else’s?, brought in cold, wet towels to wrap his aching body. Bags of ice to the right, bags of ice to the left. He could not turn his head.

He?

No, someone else.

Donnie?

Yes, that was once him. Or someone like him. . .

Donnie?

No more.

Only Savant. Dr. Poole said Donnie’s brain, behavior, language, allergies, everything?, changed. Not for better, that. Not all at. Not all there.

Donnie still cried inside.

But no muchly more.

Even a little bit less.

Quieter.

Donnie was nearly dead.

Or maybe.

Not?

Still. . .

Savant slumbered or killed, waited or acted.

An occasional savant a genius fragged.

Many a genius muchly lagged
behind the acceptably comfortable normal
and the most averagely paced hormonal.

It was not a pretty pinkish sight.

Not even the pastiest nipple of light
could distract the horror-stricken normal’s stare
from the critical mess of Einstein’s hair.

Explosion had occurred within that brain.
 A boyish love of slower-than-c trains
 had led a tunneling visionary
 to space Blind Tom's well-timed ivory.

One: girlish brain was quite well-balanced, two:
 on average, had better things to do
 than sit imaging absurdities on either-sided head
 while grounding low society-butterflies with wings of lead.

A poem that was. A few words that rhymed. Something of a rhythm. Rhyming rhythm. Titled *Dead Males, Not All White and Many Retarded*. It contained a few jokes about theoretical physics and assumed a little bit of knowledge about autistically inclined geniuses and the sexually unbalanced distribution of extremely high levels of talent and the equally unbalanced distribution of extremely damaging neurological defects. The lesser effects which produced higher rates of illiteracy amongst males seemed a different problem, one not dealt with in that... Poem?

Yes, a poem that was. And the very one he had recited as General Kovic had beaten Dylan Shagari to death. Stuck he got had on that poem. The General smiled had. "Appropriate," grunted had the big man. "You shall be Savant. You are Savant."

"I are Savant," said had the dazed killer.

"You are Savant," agreed had his master.

Kovic had commanded. Savant had no cared. He had had no name since Donnie began dying. Savant as good as any. Dr. Corey had sneered and said had, "Appropriate." Everyone agreed had. Why?

"You are wise," volunteered the smiling Overlord-General.

"I are wise."

"Truly, sapient man are you, in any language."

"Truly, sapient man are I, in any language."

General Robert Jones, Army Chief of Staff. The knife had slid so easily from left ear to right.

Clifford Evans, Attorney General. A wire strung from one tree to another in the backyard of his Maine home. A simple snowmobiling accident.

Calvin Thompson, Baptist minister and crusader against tyranny. One by one. The minister. His wife. The three children. The two bodyguards had gone first. Crushed larynxes, those two. No cries of warning. Quiet

stiletto thrusts through the eye or up the nose and, in any case, into the brain for the other five. None ever awoke.

Abraham Kott, last President of the United States. His plane had been only a few feet off the ground. Boom! Too bad that.

Others.

Many.

No, Savant no care.

“I no care.”

“Undoubtedly not,” responded the Overlord-General.

“Donnie cry, but not much loudly no more.”

“No, I’m sure Donnie is fading, year by year.”

“Little boys should kill no. . . doggies.”

“No, that wasn’t Donnie who killed those doggies. Was it?”

“No. Donnie no kill. Donnie cry when doggies whimper.”

“Undoubtedly, poor Donnie did cry. It was lucky that men rescued you from that prison and taught you a trade.”

“Did they well? Teach? Yes. Teach.”

“Yes, taught you very well, they did, but you are a good one. So talented and requiring no reward but the chance to exercise your skills. You are a good one, Savant. Useful, as well.”

The fog was clearing from Captain Savant’s mind, but he was feeling drowsy as he looked down at the three corpses and then at his hands. Not much blood on them. Some. He looked at the corpses. No blood on Johnstone but some near the oddly concave region in the middle of the face of the former Overlord-Manager Baki. Blood was there as well on Chan’s abdomen as if the blow had been so violent as to rupture the skin. Hard one that.

Captain Savant moved to the chair he had occupied only minutes? before. Sat he down and tried to stay awake. Kotic bellowed at someone. Disturbance arose about him. Savant started to rise. Awareness was returning when Kotic said, “Sit down and sleep, Savant. You’re among friends now, not surrounded by enemies. You can slumber while the men haul away your playmates. When you awake, you will remember all that you did and you won’t care.”

“I won’t care.”

“No, you won’t, will you?”

“Will I?”

Kotic smiled and sat back, releasing Savant from the echolalic game

which could run forever no matter how aware Savant and Donnie were of what was happening. No matter how much they might have wanted the game to stop. Meanwhile, men worked to haul away the three corpses.

54 The Treacherous, Slavish Shore: The Practical Implications of Certain Forms of Reasoning in Mathematical Logic Which Imply That No Matter Which Number You Generate, There is at Least One Other Number You Didn't Yet Generate

I whistled in admiration at that nasty piece of work named Captain Savant, though I didn't understand something and decided to get some facts in order that I might understand the science and the literary theories being used by Parnell. And so I asked him, "Where there really exactly 78 facets of light in the aura around that light in Buck Koscic's office?"

Parnell grew silent for a minute and then said, "I really am sorry to make you break away from your own work to read what is only a draft, hard to understand because of my loose language."

"That's okay. It'll probably make more sense once you've completed the book." Yet, I insisted, "Where there really exactly 78 facets of light in the aura around that light in Buck Koscic's office?"

Parnell thought for a moment and then replied, "The natural number

'78' is not very explanatory. I have to confess that, and I've lately considered the possibility of adding words, though my words seem to confuse people more than enlighten them." He thought silently for another moment and then his face brightened up. "It would be too long or fragmented a book with 78 chapters, though that would provide lots of assurance that the implied ordering of events is as accurate as it is precise though perhaps in a back-flashing manner implying the construction of our memories is too recursive to be either strictly factual or strictly logical. But maybe I could put 78 paragraphs into that chapter. Then again it might be more meaningful to have exactly 78 characters pass through the pages of the book."

To that I could say nothing, and I could not keep my mind from wandering back to all those piles of crumpled pages sitting on the floor of my office. Averaging over the entire ensemble, I concluded that a crumpled paper, at least in this locale and period of geological history, would typically hold 17.3 words. For all the sophistication of the software used to produce those words, I could not recall how many marks of punctuation were on those pages. In fact, the underlying hardware was beginning to ache at the mere thought of the dead-end I'd worked myself into.

I leaned forward and lifted my hands as if expecting Parnell to make me a present of an easy solution to my problem, and so I enticed, "It's very simple." As if he were ready to pull for me, Parnell leaned forward. Our faces were now no more than 30 inches apart though a large writing table separated us. "There is this conspiracy against the human rights of Americans, and James Williams dared to fight that part of the conspiracy which denied people's rights to health and clean air by selling cigarettes to teenagers and other unsuspecting people." Parnell's face wrinkled up as if he were not as sure as I that it was all so clear. Nevertheless, I persisted in my exploration of the moral problems of our age. "And, so, James Williams has been captured, and he's discovered the plot within the plot involves a conspiracy even bigger than the one Farnsworth is managing for the tobacco industry. And James Williams, along with Daphne Strickland and her brother Dillon, are being brought to the Fat Man, Hank Kansic, by the psychotic killer, Sonnie Devant." I thought for a moment and then conceded, "To make it all believable, I'll have to put in some details about Sonnie Devant's past crimes. Make them really gory and then one of the thugs can tell James Williams that Sonnie Devant is now the FBI's most wanted criminal. Of course, the FBI doesn't know about the Fat Man, who

is far more dangerous than anyone who works for him. It's even possible the Fat Man is one of the higher-ups in the FBI. I'm not sure myself yet. It might make more sense to put him in the CIA or the Pentagon."

"Is this Hank Kansic the sort who pursues his own self-interest without regard for the rights and safety of others?" asked Parnell in a voice implying his disgust that such creatures still crawled across the face of the Earth. When I shuddered in a most empathetic way, he added, "And he's been known to beat people to death with his own fists, just for the hell of it? Or maybe to stay in shape?" When I nodded in agreement, Parnell leaned his forehead on the palm of his hand, his right hand at that. As he scratched his scalp, Parnell looked really bothered by something. He sank into a state of intense contemplation for a few moments before he said, "This all sounds vaguely familiar, but... Not Faulkner. More likely Hammet or Chandler, but I don't think so, though I haven't read much in that genre. The convolutions are almost Melvillesque, but I don't think it's otherwise similar to anything he wrote." He looked up at me, obviously deeply worried, and asked, "Have you been reading much fiction of any sort lately?" I shook my head, but he persisted, "Maybe something that might have contributed part of this plot?" I must have looked insulted because he apologized with a facial expression and said, "I'm not saying plagiarism. Almost all worthwhile pieces of literature are commentaries upon earlier works. And this seems almost a satire on..." He stopped and his eyes widened just a bit before he smiled. "Have you been reading books on sociobiology and neurobiology lately?" When I shook my head, his smile died away, and he looked as puzzled as before.

But he shook it off, and I asked, "So how can I have Daphne beat them all, even the Fat Man and the psychotic killer with his gang of gorillas? She seems like a nice, gentle girl, so it doesn't seem as likely she could handle all those professional killers and powerful men as if she were..."

"James Williams?" suggested Parnell. When I nodded, he asked, "Shouldn't there be a Fat Lady to go along with the Fat Man? And maybe a psychotic killerette?"

The thought had crossed my mind, but I was a little worried that Parnell was poking fun at me. It was his wording and tone of voice which made me suspicious, not so much the reasonable suggestions. I decided to assume he was being straight with me, and I replied, "There doesn't have to be an exact balancing, but you're right there should be some powerful women in the conspiracy. Otherwise, the entire set-up might help to socialize little

girls into gentleness and submissiveness by making them think there aren't any women with enough ambition to conspire against the human race."

Parnell looked genuinely confused at that comment, and I was afraid he'd raise some other sexist point about hormones or brain development or something like that. I was tempted to cover my ears tightly, but I listened tolerantly as he asked, "Did you expand the conspiracy again?" When I merely looked at him, wondering what he meant, he explained, "I had understood the conspiracy to be one to strip Americans of their rights to life, liberty, happiness, and health."

He was right, though recent events in the United States indicated that the right to privacy was as much a part of the Constitution as any of those other rights. Pushed by the pressures generated by a surge of creative energy, this entire book was growing into something far larger than I had originally conceived it to be. And why not? A book is finished at a later time than it's first conceived. Why should it not show signs of life? On the other hand, I protested, "But the need to show Earthlings to have the potential to be good citizens of the galaxy... I mean, Vo-Misa would need to see the evil purged from men's hearts before he could recommend that Earth be admitted to..."

While I was casting about for a name, Parnell suggested, "The One-Universe Society?" I looked at him, suspicious once more, wondering if he were making fun of me, but he explained, "There are probably 100 billion or so galaxies in the Universe. It would seem to be an act of bigotry to exclude any of them. After all, you are trying to write about how good things would be in the Universe if intelligent entities all acted decently towards each other, as individuals and as species."

His suggestion did have some logic behind it, though I knew there was a danger in letting logic push you too far on any idea. But I was ready for any suggestion that might help bring me to the final battle of James Williams, Daphne Strickland as well, against the conspirators. A simple book with a straightforward plot was growing large and complex as if it were a plant with a lot of organic fertilizer being poured on the ground around it.

55 Good and Evil: A People Bereft of Memories, Experience, and Imagination Can Have Immense Problems Dealing with the Problems of Evil or Even Simple Selfishness

The cars rode on through the night, James Williams keeping a watchful eye upon the big black Lincoln that carried Daphne Strickland and her brother Dillon. All that time, he knew that Sonnie Devant had his eyes upon James Williams, though the psychopathic killer might have seemed asleep to a casual observer. He was slouched against seat and door at the far end of the backseat from James Williams, but his eyes were open just a slit; he was keeping track of the man so feared by the conspirators.

It was a contest of wills, a contest between a man without a conscience and a man with a conscience so strong that it had gotten him in so much trouble. Which would allow himself to be distracted under conditions of boredom? James Williams was suffering under the additional burden of having gone short on sleep the night before. As strong as was his constitution and will-power, his eyelids were drooping, just when he felt the car turn sharply to the left. Soon, they were bouncing down a road lined with trees and brush to the right and to the left.

The situation looked to be pretty bleak, even to a optimistic and resourceful fellow like James Williams. During a short break they had taken at a roadside rest area, one of the thugs had told him that Sonnie Devant

didn't kill with passion, to satisfy a hunger or to gain that which would satisfy his hunger. It was as if he killed because that was the line of work he'd happened to fall into, and there really wasn't anything better to do with his time. A more ambitious fellow, with the right frame of mind, might have done something to find himself a good career path where he could have done better for himself and maybe done good for other people as well.

James Williams chuckled at the thought of giving a vocational test to a psychotic killer. Would it have told him he should be a surgeon? Maybe a...

The humorous interlude ended as the car stopped, and Sonnie Devant's eyes opened as if he were about to swing into action. With barely the waste of an instant, he opened the door and left the car. James Williams sat still, trying to make sense of the strange shapes on the field where the car was parked. He was still puzzled when the door to the car was opened, and one of the barrel-shaped thugs waved him out.

When he stepped out and stood up, his left leg collapsed under his weight. In an offhand manner, the thug caught him and helped to lean against the car. A whistle, perhaps from Sonnie Devant, drew all his henchmen into a circle around him near one of the strange shapes which was beginning to look like a plane to James Williams. Maybe it had always been a plane, if that was what it was, and maybe it had always looked like a plane, if that was what it was and what it looked like, but when a man's vision is obscured the world becomes somewhat distorted and a windmill cannot be distinguished from giants. And James Williams felt himself to be like unto Quixote, nobly jousting with windmills at the beginning of a quest to restore some form of decency to the world. He felt himself to be as noble and clear of vision as that hero who arose from Cervantes's mind as Athena from a headache...

James Williams shook his head so suddenly full of thoughts, some of which were clearly wrong and few of which fit together. As much as he focused his attentions upon those thoughts, they seemed that much more rebellious, that much more difficult to discipline to a consistent line. He saw, as if it were happening in front of him, two prison guards looking out from a darkened shaft, surprised to see a great gusher come up as if some crust had been penetrated, a crust which had protected the world from a great reservoir capable of covering the surface of the earth to such a depth the tallest trees would not break the surface of that great ocean. Men and all the works of men would be drowned, and human beings would not get

their chance to enter the great alliances and friendships of intelligent species across the Milky Way and beyond.

The vision was so clear, the hope arose that Vo-Misa and his people would come down to carry men, women too, away to a better world, one not poisoned, not covered with plants cultivated for those horrible characteristics both addictive and destructive, not corrupted by the search for wealth that left men, women also, oblivious to the needs of sick and hungry children all over the globe. Vo-Misa was smiling, with Prescott Longfield beside him. They wore white robes. They held forth their hands in a gesture offering both aid and friendship, but just behind them stood . . .

A big, black Lincoln no more than 40 feet away. Daphne Strickland and her brother Dillon were looking nervously at James Williams who suddenly felt so sorry for Dillon Strickland. Something told him that Farnsworth had an evil end in mind for the one who'd dared to leave the conspiracy. It was unlikely that the Fat Man would object even if they were to cut off the poor fellow's limbs. Or maybe part of his brain. They were so nervous that he wondered if they knew something he didn't. It was more likely they just wanted to be near him that they could feel a bit more safe, though James Williams would have been the first to admit he hadn't figured out yet how he could overpower seven or eight heavily-armed killers, including the one labeled the most vicious killer on the face of the Earth by the FBI.

While James Williams was working the cramp out of his leg that he might go and comfort his companions, the killers dispersed. Sonnie Devant walked over towards James Williams, the earlier slackness of his face fully replaced by the sly expression of a reptile about to carry out some devilishly clever plot. James Williams stood as the psychotic killer approached. Not wishing to show any weakness in front of this sort of fellow, he fought back the urge to wince at the tingling pain of a cramped muscle relaxing. Some subtle sign was detected by the highly skilled predator who stopped a few feet in front of James Williams and sneered down at the left leg close to normal, but not quite ready to support a man during a daring escape, let alone a fight against 8 or 10 professional killers, heavily armed at that.

Sonnie Devant looked up to see James Williams smiling, oblivious to his pain, and the killer stepped back, startled to see someone dare to smile at him, though obviously in pain. Someone other than the Fat Man, Hank Kansic, that is. Though a man like that did not easily tolerate pain without inflicting more that he received upon some other creatures. Revenge would be the goal of such a man. A shiver passed up the back of James Williams

at the mere thought of that man whose evil presence was so massive as to seem more than human. Rather was he like a brutish gorilla, dominating every creature within reach of his 400 pound self. A 400 pound man could have a far greater reach than the 500 pound gorilla of those jokes, the man would have a greater choice of seats to take for himself, even unto seats in the councils of the most powerful of men, women also, all over the globe.

“General Kansic is at his hunting lodge in Idaho. We’ll be flying you out there, so he can question you himself.”

The title ‘General’ set James Williams’ mind racing. Without meaning to speak, he asked, “Pentagon?”

Sonnie Devant smiled in a manner more sad than cruel, before saying “Hank Kansic is supreme commander of his forces, including much of the American armed forces, and he answers to no one.”

Exhilaration! It was a burst of the greatest joy and not fear that passed through the heart of James Williams. The sensation was so strong and so strange as to distract the handcuffed hero from his thoughts of the storm of evil which he would shortly enter. After no more than a few seconds, so he thought, James Williams’ attention returned to his immediate surroundings. Sonnie Devant was staring at him as if it were the oddest thing for a man to lose himself in his thoughts or his dreams.

No more words were spoken between the men who had both come to realize that one was a primary combatant and the other no more than a subordinate of Hank Kansic. As if remembering the fate of all others who had stood in the Fat Man’s way, Sonnie Devant passed on to his captive a look bordering on pity, as if there were still a vestige of decent humanity inside the killer, a piece of the lovable little boy he might have been before being hardened by the cruel circumstances of his life. Or maybe the wrong levels of chemicals in his brain. Undoubtedly, there was some clear explanation how a human being had been so twisted when once he had been an innocent baby.

James Williams longed for advice from Vo-Misa and Prescott Longfield. They could have built some machine or devised a chemical test to figure out what had gone wrong in Sonnie Devant’s brain. And, then, they could have found a way to fix that brain while James Williams could have fixed the harm which had been done in the real world.

James Williams felt himself being pushed towards what was now clearly seen to be a plane out on the field. Yes, everything was now much clearer to him. Those strange shapes he’d seen were three small jets and a shed

with radar antennas spinning on the roof. While waiting for the inevitable, James Williams' mind spun. Was there another possibility besides that seemingly inevitable trip to the Fat Man? Three captives standing on an airfield, standing near three small, neat-looking jets most likely designed to carry busy executives around from one city to another.

Three captives and three jets? James Williams shuddered at imagining the fear to be felt by Daphne Strickland and her brother Dillon if they were to be separated from their protector, not that Daphne Strickland was the sort of woman to need male protection, but he was sure she preferred his presence.

No sooner had he seen the possibility than the thugs split into three groups. Sonnie Devant and the two most vicious of the professional killers came to stand by James Williams who was forced to watch as Daphne Strickland was led to one plane, her brother to a second. Undoubtedly, the third plane was reserved to take James Williams to General Hank Kansic, the baddest of the bad, the most evil of the evil, the biggest of the big.

Angered almost beyond prudence, James Williams turned to confront Sonnie Devant. As soon as they saw his face, saw him set his feet shoulder-width apart as if preparing to rip them to pieces, the two thugs behind Sonnie Devant pulled out their pistol-grip Uzis. Caution, if not quite fear, showed on the faces of the killers confronted by a man who'd dared to take on one of the most vicious conspiracies in the history of unscrupulous marketing campaigns, a man who'd survived a night of onslaught by one of their best—a pyromaniac at that, a man who'd laughed his way through the ambush at the motel.

“Where are they being taken?”

Sonnie Devant smiled with a cruelty yet tinged with a bit of pity. “The broad's being taken to Una St. John, and the lawyer to Bo Chi Minh.”

The answers confused James Williams a bit. He'd only known of Una St John as being the most popular centerfold in the history of Playbunny; Bo Chi Minh was, of course, the ex-world champion heavyweight boxer whose mother had been a GI Jane in Vietnam, his father unknown, though rumored to have been a dancer in a Vietnamese equivalent of the Tomenjerries, the male strippers so popular in a world that had opened greater possibilities to women. And men too.

56 Authors and Other Epiphenomena: Interlude to Ease the Tension of an Ultra-Realistic Narrative of Violent Events Involving a Number of Characters Resembling the People Seen Every Day on the Streets of Many American Cities

In preference to Parnell's tastes, as well as my own, I'd stocked up. Thus was I ready, though with only 750 ml of a fine, well-aged Kentucky bourbon, not the half-raw stuff favored in the novels of a certain writer of Southern accent whose tastes had apparently been vulgarized in a medical school up north.

I was ready to move, ready to respond to the contingencies of life, and, when Parnell entered my office, I went down to the kitchen to fetch the bottle and two glasses. We'd not spoken a word when I'd poured two double-shots and handed one glass to Parnell. Truth was my office was a bit small, my computer desk and writing desk—a bit small by Parnell's standards, both pretty much covered with piles of books and with notebooks containing scraps of projects at various stages of confusion, but only scraps

of handwritten pages since the larger chunks, closer to final form, had been typed into the computer to be more easily edited and printed.

No one could say I was a Luddite; I saw good in modern tools disciplined to human needs though I didn't like being told how to do my job by technophiles buried in some software development lab and their bosses out to sell not ice to the Eskimos but rather software systems teaching them how to hunt polar bears and seals. And the mobile meat-processing plants on snow-treads. And maybe two weeks of time-sharing in Antarctica during the dog-days of August in northern Alaska.

Nope, I wasn't really at all cynical about trends in the modern world, but I don't think Parnell was agreeing. He was shaking his head as if saddened by my skeptical attitudes, similar to his, but perhaps more extreme. Then again, my attitudes were in many ways much different from his, if only in response to my life which had been so much different from his.

"What is it that so many people find attractive about the literalistic worldview?"

We stared at each other, waiting for the other to propose even a most tentative answer, unsure which of us had even raised the question. After the silence had grown uncomfortable, we both drained our glasses in too few sips, too little time. I was feeling a little lightheaded, I imagined Parnell was as well, though I couldn't be sure without checking with the authoritative text in the computer. It wasn't the right time for that. We were busy socializing, or bonding, or something like that. And it was working. My inhibitions, often at a New England Puritanical level, were melting away. Likely it was that his tongue was starting to feel a bit looser, his Wernicke region a bit warmer with increased blood flow.

"Mythical styles are misunderstood. The reason they've appealed to most people through history, even the hardheaded, earthy Hebrews who wrote the Old Testament, is that they correspond better to the limitations of human thought and human languages which are inherently incapable of rendering completely even the slightest object. Unlike the Word of God, the words of men cannot cross over that infinite gulf between non-existence and existence. Properly limited to their roles of describing and analyzing aspects of a reality spoken into existence by a divine language, human thought and human languages play only with those aspects of things amenable to such play..."

Silent once more, I poured another round into Parnell's glass and then my own, though I was feeling as if I had drunk double my double-shot.

Without touching his glass, Parnell protested, “Literalistic styles of thought have their proper place. There are streams of facts to be narrated in histories and fictions, catalogs of facts to be accessed for the purposes of certain types of arguments. Mostly the sorts of arguments dealing with abstractions and species. Particulars, though they are more concretely factual than any mental entities of a statistical or modeled nature, are not dealt with properly by literalistic styles of thought or language. A God Who is a Person, let alone three Persons, would not have dictated a set of rigid truths into His beloved Creation, for it is that Creation which is His true revelation over time and space, and that Creation is itself unique and particular while containing unimaginable numbers of other things, living and not, which are unique and particular.”

“But,” I counter-protested, “what about Del Swing?”

“He sees human thought and human language as being well-formed tools separable from that which they contemplate and narrate. Clearly, or so would he claim—however implicitly, words and pieces of thought correspond to literal objects inhabiting some nightmarish and anti-intellectual version of Plato’s realm of Forms. Human rights can be spoken of most clearly, thought most coherently, within the Anglo-American political and judicial tradition, less so within other branches of European civilization. Since rights can be spoken of, James Williams would claim they must have an absolute and objective existence independent of the human social systems in which they developed. This is not a relic of superstitious thought, certainly not of Christian thought, of the Middle Ages or any other period. It is more akin to the improperly disciplined and poorly deployed rhetoric of some modern scientists who imagine that naming the position and momentum of an electron naturally makes those quantitative aspects as objective, as primary, as the electron itself. When those aspects of an existing thing prove to be ill-defined in some deep sense, those sloppy thinkers question the objective and well-formed reality of the electron itself, claiming to have rocked the foundations of traditional thought, though it’s far from clear that even the geometer Plato was willing to bet everything on an unqualified mathematicization of reality.”

“So, men see only aspects and not the thing-in-itself, as some philosophers call it? And men can only describe what they can see?”

“The perceptions and conceptions alike of men deal, necessarily, with aspects of concrete and particular things. Those aspects point quite clearly to the concrete reality underlying human thought.” After a short pause, he

added, as if an afterthought, “The term ‘thing-in-itself’, and the need for it in some discussions, is a sure indicator that we have confused things with thoughts about things, at best—perceptions of those things.”

“So, Daphne. . .”

“All human traits are found, to one extent or another, in both men and women. It’s not courage or lack of courage, per se, that determine masculinity or femininity. It’s something more basic that determines the deployment of a person’s traits. Call it hormonal level, if you wish, but it lies underneath the traits as such, and it determines what the person will tend to do. Our society places greatest value on male activities and tendencies, perhaps because they are more public in a way that is amenable to the corporatization and the centralization of all human activities. Feminine activities and tendencies will be devalued, and traits shared by men and women—nearly all of them, will be seen as an indication that women can be, so to speak, as good as men. Despite what the feminists say, many men are fascinated by those relatively few women who do want to compete in male activities and have tended to encourage those women, though not necessarily in modern Anglo-American societies. The problem for those supporting this radical leveling of the sexes is not so much to open opportunities for women as to make women want to be like men. Reality will eventually intrude, to be sure, in the form of everyday observations or scientific measurements of male/female differences. Or it might be that the women will simply rebel against a form of oppression far more degrading than the over-emphasis of certain feminine traits.”

“So. . .” I paused, a idea holding in my mind but nearly displaced by my wonder at what had been revealed to me by my acquaintance with Parnell. It was far from clear I would have seen the situation so clearly if not for Parnell, yet, the idea itself was drifting away and needed to be put into the world before being lost. I spoke in a hushed voice, a tentative rhythm, “The concrete person is sacrificed in the interests of a few traits deemed particularly important in a particular society?”

Parnell nodded sadly and told me, “This is one of the undesirable legacies of the painful processes by which modern science was born. The aspects of reality susceptible to scientific measurement and theorizing are taken to be a complete catalog of reality itself. What can be, or at least what is, said of people is taken as being fully descriptive of people. Since an aggressively politicized and commercialized society is inherently masculine, most aspects of the human personality deemed important enough to dis-

cuss will be masculine in orientation. Women become imperfect men, much as electrons become imperfect embodiments of momentum and position.”

As we sat there, sipping our second drinks more slowly than the first, Parnell began to cast worried glances over in my direction. It was the sort of glance I had imagined him to cast in Del Swing’s direction while that author more perfectly tied to an imperfect view of concrete reality had. . .

“Vo-Misa?” There was more in the way of surprise than horror in Parnell’s voice and in his facial expression, though I detected a bit of admiration for the ingenious efforts of Del Swing to make sense of the world.

Truth to tell, I had not yet printed out the last section of Del Swing’s book, and I had not suspected before that Vo-Misa might be returning. It did seem appropriate. . .

After all, it was Del Swing’s tale to tell, not mine and not Parnell’s.

57 Good and Evil: The Final Confrontation – Almost, following the elimination of a strange sort of interrupt condition at the software level

Following the take-off of first the plane carrying Daphne Strickland and then that carrying Dillon Strickland, James Williams was led to the vehicle which would wing him to his fate. Mixed were his emotions, happy to be approaching his battle with the leaders of the conspiracy, sad that he was separated from his dear comrades. He knew he shouldn't worry much about Daphne. With her military training, it was likely she could handle the toughest woman who'd ever posed for the centerfold of Playbunny. It was Dillon, flying off to battle the former heavyweight boxing champion of the world, who would likely have some problems. So far as James Williams knew, Dillon Strickland had never had a chance to acquire the skills to survive long battles with highly trained killers.

Sonnie Devant, who'd taken the seat opposite James Williams, had retreated into one of his trance-like states. Rest seemed the best of the available options, even for one not a psychopathic killer, and James Williams closed his eyes and tried to purge his mind of worries about those who had such a need for his protective presence. It wasn't easy to relax when a man bore such burdens of responsibility, but he was pretty sure he dozed, though sporadically, as the plane rushed on towards the lair of General Hank Kancic, the center of so much of the evil which had oddly remained alive in a world where men had done so much to conquer disease and want. Women

too.

The mind of the captive raced furiously as he tried and failed to imagine what he would soon be facing. It seemed to James Williams that this futile effort would explain the perceived length of the trip. By his watch, it was but 6 hours that the plane flew on towards the west; to his agitated self, it seemed to be days, as if the trip could not end before he succeeded in anticipating the events awaiting him. No, he might never land if he didn't formulate some sort of plan for getting himself out of the mess, and he had to first figure out what the mess was.

But the plane did finally land. To his great relief, though he was approaching ever closer to the most dangerous situation of his life without any plan to handle it. Though it was against his inclinations, he'd simply have to react to events as they occurred.

So it was that James Williams suppressed his urge to subdue Sonnie Devant and his two goons, instead letting the killers escort him off the plane and into a waiting van. Once off the grounds of the small airport, they drove down a road which soon merged onto a larger surface street. It was not long before the van entered a highway, and, though sitting between the thugs, James Williams could see they were on Interstate 90 heading towards St. Regis, Montana. And they passed St. Regis and drove on, through Lookout Pass and into Idaho. Shortly after entering Idaho, the van was driven off the highway and headed north over streets that seemed little more than logger's trails with surfaces of crushed and oiled gravel.

It was the early morning when they turned onto a wider paved strip that led up a hill towards what seemed to be a large house; there were well-lit windows widely separated though the structure itself seemed to melt into the surrounding trees. The man sitting beside the driver got out first, and James Williams could see he was carrying a pump-action shotgun. The side-door of the van was opened from the outside and Sonnie Devant disembarked first, followed by the thug to James Williams' right. Then, the captive was waved out, followed by the other thug.

James Williams looked around to see he was on a circular driveway in front of a hunting lodge, a huge house built of logs and cedar shingles. There were a few small groups of men in military uniforms standing around. Likely, there were more in the shadows, around the building, and scattered through the surrounding woods, though they might have concentrated most of their firepower in the immediate area, knowing that James Williams was being brought in.

Though the lodge itself was he-mannishly plain, James Williams could see there were ornate gardens of roses and dahlias planted in the rich soil. As his eyes adjusted to the dark, he saw deeper into the shadows and perceived that the house was built on the top of a rise. He was guessing that the ground sloped down to a lake on the other side of the house. That was just the sort of location people chose for houses of this sort. Of course, people who built houses of this sort tended to prefer this sort of location.

Now that he was penetrating the surrounding darkness and coming to a good understanding of his surroundings, James Williams began to build up a schematic of the area immediate to the lodge. He was certain that General Kansic would keep some nice power-boats docked at the lake. Would it be possible to escape over the water? Possible, but then he might find himself stranded in the middle of a wilderness, many miles from the woman he longed to protect. Though she didn't absolutely need his protection. Still . . .

As sexist as it seemed to him, James Williams felt an overwhelming urge to break away and head off to rescue Daphne Strickland. He looked around quickly to see that one of the two pug-uglies was on each side of him, and there were at least a dozen fellows in uniform, all bearing side-arms and some bearing automatic rifles. Daphne Strickland could handle a gang like this as easily as he could, but he still longed to get her out of danger, even at the cost of greater risk to his own life. Thus began an internal struggle as James Williams sought to purge himself of his sexist desire to protect a woman who had exercised her right to become one of the toughest fighters in the U.S. armed forces.

The struggle had not ended when Sonnie Devant walked out the front door of the lodge, though James Williams had no conscious memory of the psychopathic killer entering the building. Events were moving along on their own, as if oblivious to his desire and need to anticipate and understand all that was happening around him as well as all that would soon be happening.

Sonnie Devant looked dazed, and there was blood dripping from his right hand; he looked to be a psychopathic killer who'd just finished a spree, but that made little sense to James Williams. It didn't seem as if he could have been gone very long, but maybe he was as good and as efficient as they said. The most highly skilled of killers, having mastered the techniques unto wisdom.

And he spoke . . .

In the flattest of voices, he told one of the thugs, "Take a detachment

of soldiers and escort James Williams to the lab on the other side of the lake. I'll bring the other two over, and the General will follow as soon as he finishes contemplating the corpses of Una St. John and Bo Chi Minh."

At the very mention of the General and the killings which had just gone on inside the lodge, all the soldiers threw themselves into a state of rigid attention. James Williams was merely happy to hear that Daphne Strickland and Dillon Strickland were within reach of his protective efforts after all.

Soon, the two thugs were marching James Williams around the house and then down a walkway towards a lake. Even the thugs were nervous as the four soldiers followed, automatic rifles at the ready. It might well have been that the soldiers were under orders to shoot them all down rather than let James Williams escape. But he was going to be a good boy. Until he was in a position to take Daphne Strickland with him. And her brother Dillon as well. As least if Dillon hadn't been lobotomized. It would probably not be a good idea to escape into the wilderness with someone recovering from brain surgery. . .

James Williams shook his head just as his feet touched upon something more solid than grass or sand. A large dock which he hadn't noticed from above, but maybe there had been fog. Anyway, he had assumed something like the sort would be there. That is, by assuming there were large powerboats, he had assumed some sort of a docking arrangement, though not necessarily something so elaborate. Why had he not noticed the dock as he was walking down the long slope? Had there been a fog?

He felt disoriented as if he had just passed through a patch of fog. . .

The frogs were croaking out a symphony as a grandfather bass sailed by two feet beneath the surface of the dark water. Somewhere, a poet spoke of such a place and what would happen to it when progressive men began to build. . . something.

Not sure what to make of the dream-like thoughts which had passed through his mind, James Williams shook his head and looked up to see that, across the lake, rising from wetlands drained and filled, graded and landscaped, were a couple of large buildings as well as the steel frameworks of 5 or 6 more. Sonnie Devant had called it a lab, and it was of a size to rival the research facilities at any university or any government center. So much wealth and James Williams knew it was being used for experiments considered evil by any of the better scientists at those great universities. Lesser men, probably women as well, were living off the accomplishments

of those with greater scientific wisdom, but there was much that could be done by such people in an age with more scientific facts and ideas than even the greatest of scientists could develop by himself. Or herself.

He felt a sharp pain in his chest at the realization that scientists not worthy of the designation were across the lake helping General Hank Kansic and his co-conspirators to enslave men and women, rather than working to free them from ignorance and want. Saddened but more determined than ever to play his part well, James Williams climbed onto a boat along with the thugs and Sonnie Devant. A minute later, they cast off and sped across the lake as his stomach felt ready to purge itself. It was not the rocking of the boat. He was not afraid of what he would face, for he had already shown the world he had the courage to face anything other men could throw at him. It was the idea of men and women, trained to search for scientific truth, yet willing to use their skills and knowledge in a conspiracy to deny Americans their rights. How, he wondered, could scientific wisdom be so perverted?

No answer had come when the boat was docked on the other side of the lake, nor even when they had passed three security checkpoints and entered the building between massive steel doors which had slid apart with no more human effort than that of punching a few keys on a computer terminal. Down a long corridor of brushed chrome and glossy white, lit to the most glaring of standards and punctuated by cameras and openings probably providing access for gun-wielding guards, James Williams could see he was working his way into a most difficult situation, but there seemed little to be done to prevent that. Nor did he want to avoid this dangerous situation. After all, he was entering the lair of the beast where he could finally see the reactionary forces preventing the modern, scientific world from being all it could be.

At the end of the corridor, a smaller but still massive set of doors opened to reveal a room the size of a football field, brightly lit to the point of blinding him. James Williams stepped into this room, and, as his eyes adjusted more fully to the glare, he saw a sight more horrible than any he'd prepared himself for.

The room was largely covered by brightly lit areas filled with instrument panels and other sorts of scientific equipment as well as many people in white smocks carrying clipboards and hand-held computers. Even that sight of so much scientific talent being deployed for an evil cause was not so frightening as the sight of a dimly lit circle in the middle of the room, the

focal point for the attention of all the scientists strayed from their wisdom and virtue. In the very center of that middle, upon a raised platform, there was a chair and upon that chair sat Prescott Longfield with wires and tubes running in and out of his enslaved body. Without a doubt, the wires connected him to the conspirators' giant computer system so that his thought and that of the computer were one; the tubes carried nourishment and stimulating neurochemicals into his body and waste products out of it. The horrible sight only confirmed that some men were so evil that they could even twist scientific wisdom, but the sheer reality of it all nearly brought James Williams to his knees in tears.

And Vo-Misa?

The poor creature, so wise and peaceful and just, was in one of the five seats encircling Prescott Longfield at the points of a star, as if the conspirators were also determined to pervert the symbols of Druids and other. . .

James Williams shook his head so suddenly full of garbled stuff that could not be pulled into nice, neat lines. That slightest of movements was sufficient to allow him to look back at the circle to see that the other four seats held two other aliens looking like Vo-Misa, another that was sort of built like a fire-plug; he was a walking, bullet-shaped head of an attractive blue hue, and. . .

Dillon Strickland, looking dazed as if he were pumped full of drugs, was being seated in that fifth chair. The conspiracy would rely upon his vast store of devious legal tricks to focus the scientific wisdom of Prescott Longfield and the aliens. How else could it be done? Scientific wisdom itself could only be used to discover more facts and to come closer to a complete understanding of the universe. Some other form of knowledge, dealing only with lesser and more corruptible sorts of truth, was needed to direct scientific wisdom towards evil goals.

As James Williams walked closer, he heard the blue-skinned alien singing out streams of numbers in what he believed to be a minor chord. Likely enough, the numbers told of a beautiful star exploded into a supernova and collapsed to a neutron and now pulsing away like a metronome with the mass of two Suns. The poor fellow did seem to be keeping pretty good rhythm. He didn't even seem to mind his state of enslavement. Coming from a higher civilization where entities didn't do evil things to one another, he might not have even known how horrible and degrading his situation was. He probably thought he was helping out in a real emergency.

Poor Prescott Longfield knew; he'd had enough experience of the evil that lurked in the hearts of men. Probably, women as well, though James Williams had never really been able to put himself in a woman's place to see how she viewed the world and what thoughts were inside her.

Poor, poor Prescott Longfield. There was a pained and embarrassed expression on his face, perhaps due partly to the catheter, but Vo-Misa knew and looked hurt as well, and James Williams had no idea what the tubes were connected to as they ran in and out of that wise being's body. Vo-Misa knew enough of the history of men to know that he was not in a good situation. And the histories of great apes, monkeys and baboons were relevant—male as well as female. Not that the primordial bacteria were to be easily forgiven their decision to eat their more peaceful cousins. Or even the cannibalistic organic chemicals that had preceded cellular life-forms. Of course, the entire Universe had been created in the most violent of explosions, but somehow Vo-Misa and his people had managed to work their way to the heights of scientific wisdom and moral nobility. Were such a people, and all the other noble peoples of the Milky Way, about to be overwhelmed by a race of creatures ruled by their own selfish genes?

Stunned almost into a state of submission by the horror of it all, James Williams felt paralyzed. Still more drained he felt when a door opened across the room to admit a man so massive as to seem one of those seven foot-tall professional wrestlers, only squashed down to six feet or so. He waddled forward, followed by a retinue of soldiers surrounding a woman dressed like a harem slave.

Daphne Strickland! Hank Kansic intended to connect her to his devilish devices, rob her of her free-will, and turn her into his personal sex slave! Something needed to be done, but James Williams had not the scientific wisdom to gather the proper facts that he might formulate a plan to defeat this most evil of conspiracies.

Facts. He needed facts. All professionals required facts.

Professionals?

James Williams turned to Sonnie Devant and demanded, "What happened to Una St. John and Bo Chi Minh?"

In a voice almost apologetic, the psychopathic killer confessed, "I ripped her aorta from her heart and his jugular out of his throat." Then he looked down at his hands as if awed that those appendages were capable of such skillful destruction.

Something about Sonnie Devant's tone of voice and his very posture,

led James Williams to believe the poor fellow was questioning his life-style after spending so much of the past day with more decent folks. Seeing the Fat Man's greatest servant was out of the battle, James Williams suddenly moved forward. After he had marched a determined ten paces, Hank Kansic's face darkened with worry and fear though there was still nearly 100 feet between them.

He motioned his bodyguard forward to protect him from James Williams, but those highly disciplined soldiers had not taken a step when there was an explosion of pink silks and creamy skin in their midst. James Williams marched on to the sound of grunts and bones breaking, to the sight of the soldiers going down one by two. And, then, the eight standing soldiers were none. Daphne Strickland smiled bravely at James Williams and gave him a wink with a big, green eye. Her job was done; even she would have a hard time taking on Hank Kansic, and, so, it was left to James Williams.

The main event: James Williams vs. the Fat Man. Winner take all, though James Williams had no intention of taking the whole world as his prize. Certainly not if it meant taking away the rights of his fellow-Americans or enslaving intelligent ETs or keeping Earth out of the Universal Federation. For just a second, he was distracted by thoughts of the rightful rewards from selling the movie rights to his life story, and he closed too fast. While his attention was divided, Hank Kansic took the first punch, putting his entire 400 pounds behind a ham-like fist that slammed into James Williams' jaw.

The blow was sufficient to knock James Williams back several feet and onto his behind. He shook his head and regained his senses fast enough to roll right and avoid the size 14 foot that nearly smashed a hole in the concrete floor. As James Williams regained his feet and prepared to charge his opponent, he could see the Fat Man's confidence drop; he'd thrown his best blow and it had no more than stunned James Williams.

And James Williams rushed into battle. A slashing kick with his left foot cracked the Fat Man's knee. The big guy was going down, but James Williams knew this was no time for mercy. The rights of Americans and the wisdom of Vo-Misa and his people were not safe so long as Hank Kansic remained alive. The right hand of James Williams moved forward, faster than the eyes could see, palm met nose cartilage which sliced up into the General's brain, killing quickly and painlessly.

As the Fat Man hit the ground, the instrument panels shook, and James Williams was surprised to hear murmurs of approval. He looked around

and saw numerous white-smocked people put down their clipboards, ready to return to nobler and more ethical research. Some of those people ran to Prescott Longfield and the aliens, Dillon Strickland as well, though he was a lawyer and they scientists. A group of ten or so men ran to Daphne Strickland to surround her and thank her for her role in freeing them. As she disappeared into the crowd, he heard a squeal and then a couple of slapping sounds, but he wasn't worried. She'd shown she could handle herself against men. And there was much she'd done that deserved congratulations. After all, she had taken out eight highly trained soldiers in seconds, though they had been heavily armed and she had nothing but her physical talents, and not much clothing over those. No wonder all those male scientists were surrounding her. And one husky female scientist that he hadn't noticed before.

No matter. He was happy, not even upset that few people had come over to him to thank him for bringing down the conspiracy against Americans and their rights by his courageous stand against tobacco companies. James Williams had done what he had done for better reasons than the seeking of glory or wealth, though there was no reason not to sell the movie rights to his life-story for a good price.

Satisfied at a job well done, James Williams turned and walked towards his friend Prescott Longfield stretched out on the ground. One doctor knelt beside him, checking his pulse and other physical signs. Another stood by while paging frantically through a large book that looked as impressive as a computer operating manual. James Williams had no sooner knelt at his friend's side when the doctor released Prescott Longfield's wrist and looked up. A tear dropped from his right eye, and he said, "The poor man is gone."

James Williams had not had a chance to feel sorrow when the scientist behind him shouted out, "I got it! Here's the section on rebooting. All we have to do is connect from here to there..." The dedicated and brilliant man of medical science stepped over Prescott Longfield's corpse and pointed to a page. His colleague stood and looked. He joined in the smiles of joy and said, "Then we apply some amperage and inject him with some acetylcholine and serotonin and other stuff and his brain will restart with no trouble."

Wondering if such a miracle could be true, James Williams rose and fought to retain his skepticism. Even scientists had been wrong before, but when he looked over at Vo-Misa, that wise alien was smiling and nodding his head, happy to see Earthlings showing signs of scientific wisdom. There

was no doubt that men were coming to understand themselves, and, as a result...

Prescott Longfield would rise from the dead!

58 The Treacherous, Slavish Shore: Bringing It All Towards a Close for Lack of Something More Meaningful to Do

When I went into Parnell's office to see if he'd read the last part of my book, he did the oddest thing. He sprawled on top of his desk and kind of swam over to where he could look down at my feet. In a voice tinged with disappointment, he said only, "You're not wearing manly footwear, with or without straps."

He returned to a standing position on his side of the desk and looked at me for a few seconds as if he wished to ask me something but couldn't quite phrase the question. With a face still showing puzzlement, he turned to his left and walked over to a cabinet where he fetched a bottle of Jack Daniels and two glasses. He set one glass in front of me, one in front of himself, and poured a good two shots in each glass.

Parnell lifted his glass that he could see the light shine through the amber liquid. After admiring it for a moment or so, he downed the entire two shots in one swallow and then confessed, "I've been drinking too much of this stuff lately."

That surprised me a little. The two of us had been together quite a bit lately, and I could only remember Parnell taking a shot of whiskey once. An occasional beer with his meal, to be sure, but...

Was Parnell a closet-drinker? I looked at him, worried about the damage he might be doing to his liver. At least he didn't drive...

Parnell poured himself another double-shot and then refreshed my drink though I'd taken only a small sip. In a voice more sad than not, he an-

nounced, "I've finished my book. I have my doubts about whether I've written the right book. The original version was only partly written before being shredded, though some files may survive on my computer even if deleted from the directory. Someone knowing much at all about PC architecture could probably recover much of that early version." He paused as if gathering his thoughts after a diversion and then set off anew, "In that early version, Parnell was so severely autistic as to have true problems communicating with his fellow human beings. When he was taken from his mother by the soldiers of the North American Collective, he was one of many strange young men being gathered for a horrible experiment which was intended to break down the barriers between men and machines." He drank down half or so of his drink before qualifying, "Of course, by itself, problems communicating with one's fellow human beings does not define autism, not even in the most operationalist of manners. Melville had a lot of trouble communicating with his fellow human beings, at least those calling themselves publishers or literary critics. That didn't mean he was autistic."

I decided to join Parnell in his creative and uninhibited thinking process. I lifted the glass, threw back my head, and dropped in better than two shots. The burning sensation passed down quickly. Following was a bit of numbness. And a bit of looseness in the vicinity of my vocal chords.

"What happened to Parnell in that first version of the book?"

"He died after the experiment, at least one of them, had failed."

We raised our glasses to the memory of that Parnell of an earlier generation of Parnell's imagination, then we both flipped our glasses over our lower lips. To my surprise, nothing came out of my glass. After a second of confusion, I remembered I'd already finished my drink, but I'd no sooner remembered than Parnell reached over and poured me a new drink before pouring one for himself. I drained my glass and reached over for another, excusing myself with, "Catch-up."

He smiled and poured me another though I was getting a bit dizzy watching the liquid fall from the neck of the whiskey bottle. And I was starting to feel a bit sad for the poor fellow. A Parnell I'd never known, but he had been one of us. The bell had tolled. Being human meant it would also toll for me some day, but that knowledge was not enough for a member of a highly social species. And, so, "Did he suffer?"

"I don't know. There was a young woman, an army psychologist, who'd been placed in charge of Parnell in the short period leading up to those ex-

periments. She grew close to him and was reassigned to get her out of the way, but she still tried to save him.” Parnell swiveled his chair and stared into the dark night, punctuated only by the neon-orange sign reading:

TITTS

While staring into the gloom, or perhaps at the garish sign of hope, he said, “They told her it had been a heart attack, but there was circumstantial evidence his grandfather had told him how to sabotage any experiments of that evil sort... His act of sabotage might have killed him or maybe they killed him because he had damaged the computer and telecommunications system that was so important to their highly centralized government and maybe it was the experiment that had gone awry. He might also have died of a heart attack. He really didn’t do much to keep himself in shape and he had passed into his 40s.”

“Did he?”

Parnell Lopez swiveled his chair around rapidly and stared at me before asking, “Did he what?”

“Did Parnell Lopez’s grandfather teach him how to sabotage the systems underlying a complex and centralized society?”

Parnell cast a look to his left at a bookcase filled with technical manuals before telling me, “It’s no big secret. To be more accurate, there are a lot of well-known secrets, but the one sure trick is to gain physical access to the system you want to upset... I mean, destroy. Software attacks from outside can be successfully fought by simple physical barriers or breaks in the system placed at key spots. Either physical changes or software changes placed on the inside of the barriers of the security system give the advantage to a competent saboteur.

“That’s how things really work in my book. Both versions. James Llewellyn built the defense systems inherited by the North American Collective when it came to power. He’d anticipated that sort of take-over and had placed a sort of computer cockroach on a physical device that was buried in the Rocky Mountains as part of the most secure, most isolated, and most heavily guarded part of the Collective’s systems—those components which controlled the missiles. So it was not necessary to sneak dangerous code past the security system, but only to call upon some dangerous code already inside.”

Parnell smiled broadly and announced, “Maybe I did do it right,” and

then he raised his glass and I followed with mine. With a clink of our glasses, he toasted, "To that thick-skinned bastard and man of charity, James Llewellyn."

59 Authors and Other Epiphenomena: Closure

More files there were from those two disks; so many as to indicate those disks held not text files but rather programs to write text files. How else to explain the 60 megabytes of stuff that came from those two disks, each capable of holding maybe 1.44 megabytes, nominally? Somewhat more with a good compression program and compressible data? What must have happened is that those programs were activated and began to produce text files here and there, sometimes merging them, and sometimes even producing pieces of earlier versions of what was being produced. I don't know if the earlier version of Parnell's book was produced earlier than the later version. Perhaps the earlier version was produced at the same time as the later version, or even later than the later version.

Many files. That much is undeniable, and I have paged through a good number of those files, some of which were never linked to the greater kapooshed mess. Some files had contents scrambled or otherwise damaged beyond recovery. There were some files with names that led me to believe they were the concluding chapters of *Good and Evil*. Many is the time I woke up in the middle of the night wondering what happened to James Williams and Daphne Strickland. How about poor Dillon Strickland? Had he truly been lobotomized? If so, was he still able to enjoy life after that? Were the medical scientists, perhaps with some help from an electronic engineer, successful in raising Prescott Longfield from the dead? Did he stay on Earth or go off with Vo-Misa and the other ETs? He might have decided to stay if the insurance company offered a large enough settlement on the family estate that was burned down with those strange and irreplaceable books about wars never fought and a poet who never existed, even a book never written by a great novelist who is rumored to have existed, though I

never met Joseph Conrad to shake hands with him.

I may never know the answers to all these burning questions. Too many of the possibly important files were thoroughly unreadable, at least on my system with its primitive hardware and software; a few held still pictures of the sort that used to be labeled beaver-shots; the pretty blond with large green eyes was wearing a pinkish outfit of the sort preferred by the sultan's 57th and prettiest wife. Or harem-slave. Or whatever.

Anyway, there was also an interesting shot of that blond on her back with jets of white liquid shooting up from her rather well-shaped breasts. There were also a couple of stills involving that same woman and a young man to the bland, one might say empty-faced, side of attractiveness. I suspect those images had been generated on a graphics system. At least I know I couldn't. . . Maybe if I'd been trained as a gymnast, but I'm not even sure about that, and, anyway. . .

Was Del Swing thinking of turning his book into a multimedia production? After all, there are market forces. . . Admittedly, those can only be measured with regard to products actually offered. . .

Besides, market forces operate mostly in the vicinity of safe harbors. Inland from such regions, there is not a sufficient flow of goods nor a sufficient stock of currency to allow more than a Sunday afternoon market.

On the open seas? Are the ships and their captives truly independent of. . . whatever? What other choice would there be? How are goods to be transported to the region of those ships lost under the Pacific sun as they hunt for herds of whale cows and their calves to murder? The parlors of the gentlefolk must be lit that they. . .

No, the television screen provides its own light, and whale-oil is no longer needed. The cities of men have become sufficient unto themselves and the open seas are to be disdained, even as an option for the occasional fool who thinks there is something out there to be found, some tales to be lived that they might be brought back to a safe harbor. No, television makes the tales unnecessary as well.

So long as the safe harbor remains safe, no ships will set sail. At least the harbormasters will do their talented best to see that no ships set sail.

But, if one did set sail. . .

There would be no marketplace. What is loaded on the ship during its short visit to the harbor is what the prisoners will have for food and clothing and entertainment. Unless they manage to make their own, and that's not so easy on the open seas. There's a time at the beginning of a

voyage when some sailors feel giddy with what they imagine to be freedom. Often enough, this feeling dies when land is no longer seen and a shipload of stomachs begin to turn.

It's well that the courage of Columbus was matched by his incompetence as an astronomer and mathematician; if he had not grossly underestimated the circumference of the Earth, oblivious to the good estimates known for 2,000 years, he would not have dared set sail: he could not have carried sufficient supplies on his ships to reach Asia alive. Even if he had tried to set sail, he could not have filled out his company. Who would have known the Americas split the difference to Asia, giving landfall as the sailors were beginning to fear they would starve on a watery wasteland?

Myself, I know not what to make of that. Nor do I understand the decryption instructions accompanying a few large files which seem to have been generated by the programs on that disk containing, apparently, an expert system embodying all the text-generation rules and procedures used by Parnell Lopez and Del Swing.

I haven't even managed to find a disk containing the brain-state of a good psychiatrist and now I need at least one more—the encoded brain-state of a good cryptographer. And an expert in the compression of data files. One knowledgeable about the operation of expert systems. And one for a marine engineer specializing in the design of docks, another for a designer of hulls, an economist well-versed in market mechanisms that work well in salty air, and a competent navigator. . .

Many others. . .

I need to tighten up this loose metaphor about safe harbors and open seas which seems to have come from a complexly playful book, less an allegory than an opportunistic romp through a field where tall growths bear untold numbers of ripening symbols. The underlying model doesn't seem to be well-specified by the standards of a computerized and scientific society. Worse, there seem to be too many metaphors and too many implied models. They just don't cohere; they don't correspond to any worldview any rational man could bring to the task of understanding his own life, let alone the society in which he lives.

Colophon

This book was typeset using the LaTeX typesetting system created by Leslie Lamport and the memoir class written by Peter Wilson.

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