Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

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Judgment, skill, and confidence are rare qualities in anyone, and their combination in a single person is even more exceptional. I have had the great fortune to have known two physicians who exemplify the finest ideals of the medical profession. To these two men, Dr. S. J. Panzarino and Dr. Francis Nance, this book is gratefully dedicated.

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## New New York New Orleans

My friend Bergmeier reads a lot. He tells me it's an active occupation, as opposed to my own. I watch television. It's apparently a passive thing; Bergmeier tells me it's sad the way I just sit in my living room and ask to be entertained. According to him it signifies some very, very deep need on my part. But book reading, you understand, is a whole lot different. It doesn't count that I'm watching "Elizabeth R." on the educational station and he's reading Rogue Photon with a naked woman copulating with a silver interstellar vehicle on the cover. Bergmeier says that the telling feature is that I am merely receptive, my mental tongue lolling from my mental mouth, while he is actively engaged in a creative pursuit, as much so as the author of his lurid tale. He is constructing entire galactic civilizations from the sparse building blocks of prose supplied by the writer. It doesn't take much imagination for me to conjure an image of Glenda Jackson when Channel 13 has done it already.

That's why civilization is crumbling, says Bergmeier. Movies and, especially, television, have robbed us of our imaginations. People die, people love, people commit felonies and misdemeanors in the modes they have learned from the silver screen. I made the mistake once of mentioning that books have always had the same effect--look at poor Don Quixote, why don't you? So Bergmeier just smiled like I imagine Bobby Fischer might; I mean, it was obvious that I had just stepped into a trap set down during the initial stages

of the Bergmeier-Chandless friendship. "So few people read, these days," he said, smiling sadly, shaking his head. "Nobody reads, except maybe what the disposable racks in Woolworth's tell us the new bestseller is. So the heroic, romantic behavior they emulate comes purely from sitting in the dark, staring at flickering images. What they learn from books is as the rustle of distant, cold galaxies compared to WABC-AM at full volume."

If he sounds bitter, it's because Bergmeier wanted to be a writer himself. Instead, he's a computer analyst. He analyzes programs, I guess; otherwise it would sound like he was some kind of shrink for the damned machines. I don't really know what he does, except that sometimes it has to do with figuring out the curves for interstate highway cloverleafs. I know he once began to write a novel about this guy who had the same job, and who discovered that it all fit into a secret Pentagon project to contact intelligent life on a far-distant star or something. The turnpikes spelled out some greeting, I suppose. Anyway, either some famous writer told Bergmeier that the idea had already been done (God forbid), or else it wasn't worth doing. I can't remember.

I tell you all this so you'll understand the framework of this history. So you can see how our personal relationship affected our actions, and so be less ready simply to dismiss the two of us as lunatics. How desperately, how hopelessly I pray that someone might believe me; then I would be fulfilled. Just one person. But then, fulfillment is rare in New York City. In fact, in our social circles, spiritual fulfillment ranks just below

leprosy and reactionary politics as the most fatal of all character flaws.

Let us go back in time, back a few weeks to the day when Bergmeier first noticed the strange happenings. That's what comes from reading so much, I never had the courage to say. Bergmeier won't say, "What the hell?" or anything like that. If he did, then he could come to a quick boil, cool down, and forget. Not Bergmeier. Something absolutely crazy occurs, and all he does is classify it as a strange happening. He'll simmer over one of those for weeks. A television person would know better. I'd let the "Six O'clock News" people worry about it; then I'd find out what it meant after the professionals had done all the work.

Let us go back. It was June 27 or 28, a Wednesday. I remember because I was going to get tickets for the Yankees-Orioles game, but I decided to watch it on television instead (well, it can't be "Elizabeth R." all the time). Bergmeier and I were walking across W. Eighth Street in the Village. That in itself is a pretty foolish occupation for a hot afternoon in New York. But we were making our slow progress through the mongrel hordes that occupied (in a military or chess sense) the sidewalks. Pedestrians in New York have curiously never learned to walk in a large crowd. Groups will stroll along the narrow sidewalks four-abreast, slowly, simultaneously staring at junk in storefronts and discussing maddeningly inane subjects culled from snobby articles in New York magazine. Bergmeier and I were behind one of these squads. Cyrus the Great should only have had such a phalanx. They were gawking stupidly at a bunch of cheap shoes in a store

window, but still stubbornly refusing to let my friend and me play through. Bergmeier indicated the street side, intending a quick outside flanking maneuver, but I have been too-well trained against passing on the right. The traffic on Eighth Street looked as if it were just waiting for some fool to step out into the street.

Suddenly I heard Bergmeier's disgusted whisper in my ear. He was more upset than usual. "No wonder," he said. "They're tourists."

"Aren't we all?" I asked philosophically. "Isn't everyone in New York a tourist of some kind? Doesn't everyone come to the Big Apple, looking for the streets paved with gold?"

"Some people are born here, you know," he said sullenly. "We natives don't take to you strangers so easily."

"Born here?" I said incredulously. "Bergmeier, that's unworthy of you. People born in New York City? Everyone knows the whole population is made up of continental refugees, stultified minds fleeing the tinsel and glitter of thousands of provincial highways and byways across this, our great nation." Perhaps, in retrospect, I'm adding somewhat of wit to my own speech, but let it pass.

"I'll bet I can pretty much narrow down the highways these rubes came from," said my friend.

I was curious. In my defense I must say that we had taken a long walk, and I had let down my guard. "How is that?" I asked innocently.

"They're all from New Orleans," said Bergmeier. "Tourists. Look at what they're carrying." I did look, but I couldn't recognize what he meant. The four people were sipping some

pinkish drink from a tall glass. I turned to Bergmeier and shrugged.

"They're Hurricanes," he said. "From Pat O'Brien's. They're famous in New Orleans. The glasses are shaped like hurricane lamps, whence the name. You see flocks of people visiting New Orleans walking up and down Bourbon Street carrying them. That's how you tell tourists from natives in New Orleans. Like no born-and-bred New Yorker would ever go into a Greenwich Village coffee house."

Now, it wasn't quite a strange happening yet. What I should have said then is, "What's in `em?" Bergmeier would gladly have spent an hour describing fruit punch and rum for me. We would have made our way across town, noticing women and bookstores and forever forgetting the vaguely distasteful tourists from New Orleans. No, like a fool I had to ask, "What are they doing here?" Bergmeier, of course, had no good answer, though he labored long in coming up with one. All that I succeeded in doing was fixing the event in his memory.

So much for the first incident of the strange happening. We parted soon after, each to seek his own way home. New Orleans, the lovely Crescent City, had been much in our conversation following the encounter with the Hurricanes; Bergmeier went on at great length, with a certain excited nostalgia that I was unwilling to interrupt. I had never seen the area, and Bergmeier's descriptions aroused my atrophied imagination. His recollections of New Orleans' singular cuisine particularly interested me, as I've always fancied myself a somewhat egalitarian gourmand and my previous experience

with New Orleans food consisted of an old song by Hank Williams called "Jambalaya."

So perhaps it was no coincidence that New Orleans should be occupying a place closer to the surface of my consciousness than usual, and that references to that city should be noticed when under normal circumstances they would carry no special meaning. Nevertheless I felt a strange chill, a sort of déjà vu, when I climbed out of the subway exit on my street and saw a young boy dressed warmly, as for a Halloween forage or a Thanksgiving parade. The boy was clutching his father's sleeve with one hand, and in the other he held a gold-colored New Orleans Saints football pennant.

Now, it was late June. The boy and his father were a bit overdressed for the season, and the Saints' souvenir was not only unpatriotic but hard to come by up here in damn-yankeeland. I thought to myself that New Orleans certainly seemed to have her share of admirers lately. I walked east on Seventy-seventh Street. I thought about the weird people one sees so often on the fabled sidewalks of New York: the filthy drunken men mumbling something like "sexile divots" at everyone who walked by, the sad old ladies on the subways carrying all their possessions in two or three decrepit shopping bags, the constant streams of lonely people projecting their chosen images for all they're worth. Sure, living in New York you get used to it all. You expect to see a strange old man or woman talking to herself every now and then. But generally the kids are all right. You don't see a lot of nutty kids; that's why the boy with the pennant affected me so strongly.

The next day, Thursday, I got a call from Bergmeier in the early afternoon. "Hey, Chandless," he said in his normal, unperturbed voice, "what's happening?"

"I don't know," I said. "I'm a little down today, and I don't know why."

"Bad vibrations," he said with mock seriousness.

"Shut up," I said. My seriousness was certified.

"What's wrong? You miss `Jeopardy?' `Hollywood Squares?' `Three on a Match,' for God's sake?"

"I don't know, but I don't feel like airy nonsense today," I said.

"All right," he said, and I could catch the implicit apology in his voice. "What I wanted to know was, do you remember yesterday afternoon, when we saw those people walking along Eighth Street with the Hurricanes?"

Of course I did; the New Orleans thing had been reinforced by the young boy with the pennant. I briefly told Bergmeier that story, and when I finished he was silent for a few seconds. "That makes it even worse," he said at last "I was going to say that I spotted three separate groups of touristy-looking folk after I left you, all walking along with genuine Pat O'Brien's Hurricanes."

"Maybe there's a convention of New Orleans people in town," I said.

"Yeah, maybe, but all these people look like tourists in New Orleans, not from New Orleans."

"Do you think they've noticed the difference?" I asked, too weary to get myself hooked into Bergmeier's June-July strange happening.

"Don't be foolish," he said. "This thing is for real. There's something strange happening."

"You're making a monkey out of a molehill," I told him. "If you see Jean Lafitte and his pirate band in Maxwell's Plum, then you can worry. If you see a levee alongside the East River, then you call me and we'll notify the authorities. You woke me up, Bergmeier. I intend to correct that. See you." Then I hung up, allowing myself to postpone worry over my rudeness until later. Bergmeier was a long-time close friend, and he had learned that he was on his own in the initial stages of his strange happenings. It was only later, when he had done all the research and easy stuff, that I always got inextricably involved. I knew that I had a rough week ahead of me, and I'd need all my strength. I went back to sleep.

It was dark outside when I awoke again. The clock said ten-fifteen. I cursed myself for wasting the day and, even worse, ruining my delicate schedule. Now, when my normal bedtime came at two-thirty, I would hardly be ready to go to sleep again. And if I tried staying up all night and all the following day in order to get realigned, I'd be in bad shape. In a foul and groggy mood, I called Bergmeier.

"Where have you been?" he asked.

"I'm sorry for the way I spoke to you this morning," I said. "I've been asleep all day. Just woke up about ten minutes ago."

"Hungry?"

"I'm not really sure. I forgot to check. Yes, I guess I am."

"You ought to be. So meet me in about half an hour. I've got more to tell you."

"The usual place?" I asked.

"Hurry up," he said briskly, and then all I could hear was dial tone. I went into the bathroom and brushed my teeth. I paused as I raised my hairbrush over my head; my hair had a certain rumpled quality to it. I saw in the mirror that my super-nap had accidentally given me the very mod look I had been trying to duplicate for months. With a disgusted shrug I tossed the brush back on its shelf. I changed into a fresh shirt, swapped my blue jeans for a pair of white (it was, after all, after six), and walked to the subway. I did not, in point of fact, hurry.

I arrived at Orgoglio's about forty minutes later. Bergmeier, of course, was waiting for me at our usual table, a pitcher only a third full of beer guarding my reserved seat. He pushed it aside to make room for me, and I sat down. "Good morning," I said. I still wasn't in such a terrific mood.

"Hi," he said. "Guess what happened."

"Something strange?"

"You're learning. This afternoon I counted no less than twenty-four people walking around the concrete canyons of New York with anomalous Hurricanes."

"Somebody's selling them here. Nathan's got a franchise or something."

"I asked some of the people where they got the Hurricanes. Everyone said, `Pat O'Brien's.' When I looked blank, they said, `You know, on St. Peter Street.'"

I felt a bit of an apprehensive chill. Bergmeier still had this failed novelist's melodramatic delivery, and I always fought it as best I could. It was my job as his best friend to act kind of

bored and unimpressed. But once in a while he got through and actually interested me. So I didn't say anything. I wanted to hear how it all came out.

"Well, there isn't any St. Peter Street in midtown Manhattan. But there is one in New Orleans, and Pat O'Brien's is on it." He paused pregnantly again, but I wouldn't buy it twice in a row.

"So what did you get out of it all?" I asked.

"I met this terrific girl with a Hurricane and long red hair. Tremendous." Failed novelists always have a thing for long red hair.

I signaled to Andrea, the waitress; while I waited for her to react I asked Bergmeier, "Did you ask the red-haired chick how she liked our fair city?"

He looked horrified. "No, no, I couldn't do that. It's not time. We've got something big going. We can't just jump into it. We can't interfere with the matrix of fantasy. We're not controlling the influences; right now, we're just as much the victims as the poor displaced New Orleanians."

"But you said they weren't New Orleanians. You said they were all tourists there, too."

"Look," he said, by way of avoiding the question. He held up a newspaper. In the dim light favored by Orgoglio's management I could barely make out the logo. I saw immediately that it wasn't a local paper. It was, in fact, the New Orleans States-Item.

"Great," I said, eagerly turning to see what kind of television programming New Orleans enjoyed. "Where did you get it?"

"The little stand on Sheridan Square," he said, and something frightened in his voice made me look up. "I asked for the Times, and the guy said he was all out. He handed me this paper; I remembered then that the other New Orleans newspaper is the Times-Picayune. So I said, `I meant the new york Times.' He told me that if I wanted an out-of-town paper I'd have to go up to Forty-second Street."

"That's weird," I said, watching Andrea closely. She was fun to watch; the main reason that Orgoglio's was our usual place had a great deal to do with the way Andrea's long legs cooperated with her marvelous fuselage. Three weeks previously she had been employed at the Nice Mess, and then that establishment had been our usual.

"Yeah," Bergmeier said softly. Now, you give Bergmeier a strange happening, and not only will he waste all his time and mine chasing down phantom mysteries, but he'll donate a nonstop commentary as well. This time he wasn't; he was just being very puzzled, staring into his beer like it was some great Asgardian well of truth. In about half an hour he got tired of the whole thing and went home, leaving me alone to smile and stammer at Andrea. I left about ten minutes after he did, for different reasons.

I was walking up Sixth Avenue toward Eighth Street when I heard the clopping of horse hooves. My first thought was, "If somebody's taking a ride in a Central Park hansom cab this far downtown, somebody's paying a lot of money for romance." My second thought, as the carriage pulled opposite me on the street, was, "I wonder if she's worth the investment." My third thought, as the carriage moved past

me, was, "That's a pretty ragged hansom cab." My fourth thought, as I read the sign on the back, See New Orleans' Famous French Quarter, was something quite a bit stronger than "Gosh!"

In situations like this, I suppose, one pauses to explain how the ground seemed to shake beneath one's feet, how the very heavens seemed to open and pour down a bitter confusion, and so forth. Well, you can imagine for yourself, the debilitating effects of television and movies notwithstanding. I stood on the sidewalk and stared. Motionless, with my mouth wide open, my arms sort of half-raised, gawky like a straw dummy, I didn't look the least bit unusual in that neighborhood. So I remained like that for an extended period. Finally I got myself together enough to proceed in a homeward direction. I didn't want to be in on a mystery at all; this was Bergmeier's strange happening, not mine, and I didn't take it as an act of kindness for him to share it with me.

The next day was Saturday. I had half-tilted my mental clock back toward my normal hours. I was up and about by two o'clock, and I called Bergmeier. My mad friend had suffered through this, even more than had I. His voice was subdued and weary. I truly felt sorry for him, but at the same time I was glad. I had a tiny suspicion that this was his final strange happening. Maybe we could take up skittles instead.

"What's wrong?" I asked him. "Is it getting worse?"

"Lots," he said. "Too much. I don't even want to talk about it."

"I doubt that. How about lunch at the usual? I have things to tell you, too. Maybe if we get it all set out in simple order, we can figure it out."

"I have it figured out," said Bergmeier quietly.

"You have? Then I'll see you in an hour. I want to hear this."

"No, you don't," said Bergmeier. Then there was a click, and in turn I hung up my receiver.

My only thought as I rode the subway downtown to meet Bergmeier was how placid everyone seemed. We were all living in the midst of some inexplicable grand joke, some cosmic AT&T foul-up, crossed wires in the universal switchboard that put a tattered overlay of a distant metropolis upon the grimy reality of New York City. If this had only happened somewhere else, Toledo, perhaps, or Grand Island, Nebraska, then it would have been terrifyingly evident. But New York can hide a sodom of sins among its trash-strewn avenues. And the people on the IRT had no idea of what was happening among them; no, not even when a smiling college-age couple got on the train at Fourteenth Street, the boy carrying a camera, the girl wearing sunglasses and sipping a Hurricane. Instead of riding down to Astor Place stop with them, I hurried through the closing doors and ran up the stairs to the street.

No one else noticed. No one, that is, except Bergmeier. And he was crazy. Where, then, did that leave me? Where did it put those poor people with the Hurricanes? You can't get to Basin, Rampart, Bourbon streets on the Lexington Avenue local.

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I was in quite an uneasy state when I finally got to Orgoglio's. Of course, Bergmeier was there. It was early; the place was pretty empty, and I saw that he had finally, after all these months, broken Andrea's first line of defense. She was sitting at his table, talking. One of her hands rested casually on the back of her chair, and Bergmeier was very, very carefully stroking her thumb. That was a classic and well-documented strategy, and I knew that my sudden arrival would ruin all his groundwork. I waited by the entrance until another customer called her away from Bergmeier's table. Then I sat down by him.

"I'm glad to see that you're making some progress through all this horror," I said.

"Why shouldn't I?" he asked, genuinely amused by my unaccustomed seriousness. "What horror do you mean? Are you referring to the New Orleans thing?"

I was exasperated, but I was also just a little afraid. "Yes, you uncool, less than hip mathematics major, I mean the New Orleans thing."

"Then listen. You've heard of a space-warp, of course?" I shook my head; no, I had never heard of a space-warp. Bergmeier took no notice. "Good," he said, "then you'll have little difficulty understanding the concept of a reality-warp."

"Bergmeier," I said, my anxiety not in the least relieved, "I could make some really pretty remarks right now. You've left yourself wide open. I mean, if you want to discuss `warped,' you've got to be ready for that kind of thing. Now, either you tell me what's going on, as well as your cheap-novel

befuddled brain is able, or I'm going home and watch Roller Derby in Spanish."

Bergmeier looked hurt. "I was serious. Somehow the very fabric of the universe has become, well..."

"Wrinkled?" I suggested. He brightened immediately.

"I think you've got it," he said in his best Professor Higgins voice, which is not all that good. "It's just that a little New Orleans has been spread onto New York. Or something."

"What are we going to do about it?" I asked, being one who always likes his cosmos orderly. Sugar cane waving in Shea Stadium may be picturesque to some, but there's a certain discipline lacking that upsets me.

"Do about it? Why, nothing. What can we do? When you invent a four-dimensional flatiron, then bother me. I would never have met Cassie if this hadn't happened."

"Cassie?" I asked, knowing full well that it was expected of me.

"The girl with the long red hair and the Hurricane."

"Oh," I said. I thought for a moment. I didn't like this at all. Here was Bergmeier, the Enigma King, abdicating and wiping the whole affair off on me. "Did you ask her what she thinks she's doing? Does she think this is New York or New Orleans?"

"Cassie's kind of spaced most of the time. I don't think she cares. But, Lord, does she do massage!"

I was pretty burned up. "See you," I said, rather brusquely. I didn't even wait to give Andrea my hopelessly winning smile. I just stalked out into the mostly New York afternoon.

I walked for a while, alone with my thoughts. Every few blocks I'd see someone staring at all the tall buildings, a half-finished Hurricane in his hand, and I'd get terribly depressed. I saw another of the French Quarter horse-drawn carriages. If I had had the money and the stomach, I'd have hired it just to hear the driver describing the sights of New Orleans while he drove around my dear old Greenwich Village. Or maybe he'd do it the other way around. I was getting confused, and that was a bad sign. There had to be someone, just a single soul in that horrible, laughable crisis who knew what was going on. I developed a very sick feeling indeed when I realized that the one person was probably me. Where could I turn?

Long red hair could make Bergmeier deny his own grandmother. He had hinted that the problem was all in my mind, a product of late-night movies. Too much John Payne, too much John Agar, far too much Virginia Mayo. I had let my weakened imagination have too much freedom. One can't rush into things like that; I should have begun slowly and built up to it. A few people with Hurricane glasses, some mixed-up folk that couldn't quite recall whether they were in Louisiana or New York, hints here, some minor indications there: Wasn't I over-reacting?

So I was left to my own devices, which were notoriously few and inferior in quality. I passed the fantastically fragrant coffee and tea emporium on Christopher Street, ignoring the display of New Orleans-style coffee-and-chicory mixtures in the window. Then I stopped in my favorite candy shop and treated myself to three French rolls. I ignored the large plate

of genuine Creole pralines. After a time I realized that I had been walking in circles, deliberately avoiding something. That was a foolish thing to do; walk in circles, I mean. It was proof that Bergmeier was right in saying that I was getting too carried away; and we both knew that Bergmeier wasn't right. It was becoming complex.

So I went to the river. There's a pier the city has made into a sort of public park. I liked to walk to the end and stare across the thick, oily water toward New Jersey. On good days, between the wisps of smog, you could see the other side, though it's not the sort of sight you carry always in your heart. On this day, however, I never got to my usual perch on the end of the dock. A large white sidewheeler steamboat was moored at the pier. It was beautiful. It was also not supposed to be there. I stared at the brightly painted boat for a long time. I got a sort of Mark Twainish feeling, which was quickly displaced by an honest and true fear. The name of the boat was painted in old-fashioned letters on its side, the S.S. President. While I stood gaping at the thing, wondering what it was doing in the Hudson, the filthiest waterway known to science, an old black man came up to me.

"Some boat, ain't she?" he said.

"Yup," I said. "I wonder what it's doing here."

The old man looked at me for a few seconds. "Tours," he said. "People pay money and go on it for tours."

That seemed reasonable. I said as much to him. He seized immediately on my interest. He was obviously an employee. "You want a tour? See the bayou country, the harbor, up and down the Mississippi. Saturday nights they have moonlight

cruises, real Dixieland jazz band. You bring your girl." He looked at me questioningly.

Well, what could I say? We don't really have bayous around New York, though parts of New Jersey might qualify under a relaxed interpretation. And we for sure don't have a Mississippi. I told the man I didn't have any spare change, turned, and headed back toward the subway.

If I were one of the super-competent heroes on a weekly series, rd pursue every last thread until I had my explanation. I'm not. If I were one of the ultra-macho protagonists of Bergmeier's action thrillers I'd kick the teeth out of anyone who might help me learn the truth. I'm not. I went home. On the way to the subway I saw a bus. It didn't say something like to abingdon sq or 34th st crosstown. No, it just said DESIRE. I guess the Streetcar Named Desire had been retired years ago; now they must have Buses Named Desire in New Orleans. I might have gotten on if I'd had exact change. No, I just went home.

The next few days were terrible. I doubted my sanity, and when that got boring I doubted Bergmeier's. Then I cursed the universe. It's really hard to do something like that and keep a straight face. And, finally, that's what rescued me. I couldn't help what was happening around me; I could only watch as more and more of my environment changed places with another, altogether charming environment. Here I had the best, the worst, and the middle of both worlds, on no regular schedule. I passed my crisis, one which I observed alone; no one else in the city but Bergmeier had even raised an eyebrow at these most unusual events. Bergmeier was too

busy or too afraid to look closer, and I ... well, all that I could think to do was dial 911 and make an anonymous call to the police.

I walked into Orgoglio's late one evening and, not much to my surprise, I saw Bergmeier. He glanced up and saw me. He jumped to his feet, grinning, and waved. "Come on, Chandless," he shouted. "You've gotten over that stupid mood, haven't you? You're going to give in to the whims of the world, like a good boy?" I nodded and joined him. He was having dinner, it seemed; that was something we never did in that place. All that it had on its menu was hamburgers, fried chicken, french fries, and rice pudding. We went to Orgoglio's for two reasons: the free peanuts they offered with the beer and, of course, Andrea.

"Allow me to order for you, poor illiterate soul," he said with his usual heartiness. So long unused to him--three or four days, now--I found it a bit annoying. But I consented. In a short while Andrea brought me my dinner. I was so taken by her charms, as it were, that I failed to notice what my first course was.

"What's that?" I asked in alarm, at last noting the lack of burgery-looking victuals.

"Oysters Rockefeller," said Bergmeier triumphantly. "Straight from Antoine's in the heart of the French Quarter to you, courtesy of the galactic reality-warp." I looked him straight in the eye. He smiled gently. "Listen, it won't be all bad," he said. "Try these. You won't believe it." I did, and I didn't. They were incredible. So was the tournedos marchand de vin. And the pommes de terre soufflées. And so forth. And

so on. When I finished an hour later, I was satiated. I was amazed. I was happy.

"Now," said Bergmeier, "isn't that worth a little disruption of reality?"

"I suppose I can adapt," I murmured, hoping to find another Oyster Rockefeller under a napkin or something. "Tell me, does that girl with the long red hair have a friend?"

Bergmeier dropped a few dollars on the table and took my arm. "Come on," he said, laughing. "New York's going to be one big VJ Day from now on." I was about to make an answer as we departed the mutating ambience of Orgoglio's. I was stopped by the scene on the sidewalk. When I had entered the restaurant, it had been nearly nine o'clock in the evening. Now, less than an hour later, it was early afternoon. We were pushed back against the front of the building by a huge mob of people, all carrying pillows and sweaters and portable radios and pennants. Some of the pennants said Tulane and some said LSU. "It's a big rivalry," said Bergmeier.

I felt a cold, empty place in my lower abdomen. "Not around Yankee Stadium," I said. "Not here, it isn't."

"It depends on what you mean by `here,'" said Bergmeier, with a rather wan smile.

"You know something?" I said, a little angrily. "I don't want to have to explain what I mean by `here.' That's not my responsibility."

"You'll just have to get used to it. Times are changing."

"Uh huh," I muttered, watching the hordes of excited Louisiana football fans stream by. I gestured to Bergmeier, and we went back into Orgoglio's, to give the world a chance

to settle itself. Inside, Orgoglio's was no longer nearly deserted, as it had been only two or three minutes before. Now, all the tables were crammed with people in bright, odd, purely Mardi Gras costumes. There were dozens of sequined kings and grotesque clowns and beautiful young women taking the opportunity to show off various body parts. Every person in the establishment was turned to watch an old black man performing on a stage which Orgoglio's had never before possessed. A sign on a chair identified the old man as Billy "Mr. Banjo" Lebeau, and he was frantically playing a tune I couldn't recognize.

"You don't hear that much any more," said Bergmeier, with a fond, nostalgic expression.

"That does it," I said. Bergmeier looked at me sharply. I don't have a reputation for making statements as vehement as that. He raised his eyebrows in question. "See you around," I said, and left Orgoglio's. The crowd of football fans had disappeared. I got on a good old New York bus and made my way uptown. I found my way to the train station and bought a ticket back to Ohio.

I had to sit in an ancient, creaky parlor car all the way, and for a while it was worth it. A few years of New York's tinsel and glitter gets to you, especially if you're from the wide open spaces. Like Cleveland. And there was a lovely young woman across the aisle from me, too. I always appreciate that kind of happy accident on a long journey. Lovely young women beat Newsweek all hollow.

"Hi," I said, long about Rochester.

"Hi," she said, with a smile. Ah hah.

"Going to Cleveland?" I asked. Bergmeier never tired of complaining about my technique. He claimed it lost us some of the greatest romances of western civilization. I never thought his thumb-stroking gambit was so terrific.

"No," she said. "Boston."

I shuddered. "Well, uh, one of us is going the wrong way." It was very late, or early, and I didn't relish getting off and waiting in the predawn upstate murk for a train in the other direction. But I was certain that I was right. I felt a little better, but I was sad to think of the lovely young etc. faced with the same dilemma.

"Not any more," she said. She hadn't stopped smiling. "Haven't you noticed? The way I see it, Boston stands a good chance of slipping in somewhere around Detroit, as well as where it usually is."

"I didn't think anyone else was watching," I said. I was very tired.

"Oh, sure," she said. "It's land of fun."

"Can I ask a stupid question?" I said. "A real dumb one? Without endangering our still-budding romance?" She just smiled. "What's going on?" I asked.

"I don't know," she said.

There was a short silence. I just wanted to get home.

"It's like, well, I don't know," she said. Right then I was sure she went to New York University. And that I was going to find out what was really happening, but it wouldn't do me any good. "It's like the whole country's gone psychotic," she said. I nodded, pretending to be a thoughtful audience. "I mean, we've shown some of the symptoms for a long time. I have

this professor, Man and Society Fifty-one A--that's sociology, you see--who says that there's no reason a whole country can't be analyzed like an individual. Like the United States is a patient, and if you know where to look, you can see real neurotic patterns. Every country has them. Just like people."

"And we're an collectively going schizo?"

The lovely y.w.'s smile widened. "Right! That's right! It's a neat theory. Only they don't have national psychiatrists."

"That's a shame," I said, yawning. None of this helped in the least. "What does the professor suggest?"

"Shock therapy," said the girl. "But that's silly. He's a nut, anyway." I nodded and settled back to get some sleep. Beyond the darkness that filled my window, my fellow man was slowly losing touch with reality. We had been for some time, only now we'd iced our last cookie.

I got to Cleveland several hours later. I awoke from my nap groggily; the lovely young woman was gone. I walked up the lamps from the basement of the Terminal Tower. I was in Cleveland, of sorts. I should have known better. I should have known when I was well off. After all, New Orleans is a lovely town, from the bits and scraps I'd experienced. It was certainly better than what I found instead of Cleveland. I'd like to head back to New York, but what we have here, I mean, sometimes they haven't even heard of trams.

But that's another story.

Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

## Contentment, Satisfaction, Cheer, Well-Being, Gladness, Joy, Comfort, and Not Having to Get Up Early Any More

For centuries the world had been run by the Representatives. This must sound wonderful. You know, an organization of devoted men, chosen by the population of the entire world on the basis of individual merit, working together for the betterment of mankind as a whole, rather than national interests. Well, it does sound wonderful. It wasn't wonderful, though. Still, at times, it was pretty good despite itself.

In the early days, there were six Representatives: the Representative of North America, one from South America, and Representatives of Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Pacific. In the beginning, it seemed a very logical and reasonable way of running things. There were the advantages of several different political systems, each of which had enjoyed popularity at one time or another: despotism, democracy, the benevolent monarchy, and so on. Eclecticism was the mood of the people, and the Representatives didn't see any reason to oppose the trend.

After some centuries of Representative rule, the then-current Representative of North America phoned the Representative of Asia, on the pretext of returning a friendly call. Sooner or later, though, their talk got around to the administrative problems of running continents.

"You know," said Tom, the Representative of North America, "sometimes it gets to be a pain in the neck,

handling all these `minority group members.' I'll bet they're worse than the original minorities ever were."

"I know just what you mean," said Denny, the Representative of Asia. "Only last month I had some guy dressed up like a monk or something who set himself on fire in downtown Kowloon. Now, we haven't had real Buddhist monks in five hundred years. This guy was a regular Fiver-dash-Jerry civil service man, probably from Trenton, New Jersey, or somewhere. But he really got into his job. He was supposed to give speeches, pray a lot, burn incense, chant, that kind of thing. There was nothing in the personnel specs about setting himself on fire."

"You just never know," said Tom. "The job gets to them sometimes. I have the same trouble every day with my people. And not just the ones you'd expect. I have to have a famous melting pot over here. All the slag rises to the top."

The Representative of Asia laughed. "Maybe we ought to get rid of these pretend minorities altogether. They're too much trouble."

"No," said Tom. "They serve a purpose. But it might help to kind of consolidate our efforts a little."

The Representative of Asia sounded suspicious. "What do you mean?" he asked.

Tom spoke in an unnaturally light tone. "Well," he said, "look at it this way. The more Representatives there are, the more our decisions get diluted, and the weaker our power is. It's like the old days, with a million rulers and a billion legislators. It's better now, but it's not perfect yet."

Denny's voice became a whisper. "I'll bet you've got some terrific idea to improve things."

"There's the whole area of the Pacific," said Tom. "Stan's running that show. But I keep finding myself beating my head against his stupid plans. I'll bet you do, too. Now, if there were someone else in his place, someone who understood me better--"

"You want to have Stan replaced, before the election."

"Yes," said Tom.

"Who? You wouldn't just say that if you didn't already have ideas."

"I don't want to put someone else in Stan's job," said the Representative of North America. "That would just prolong the trouble. I think we could do a better job ourselves."

"Squeeze him out, and move in ourselves."

"Now you got it," said Tom cheerfully. And that's how the six Representatives who ruled the world became five.

It was very easy to set a precedent in those days. There weren't dozens upon dozens of nations any more, each with its own peculiar ways. There was a loud cry of alarm and anger from the people of the Pacific territories when they learned that Stan had been retired to a nice ranch in California, and that Tom and Denny had divided his former domain. But the alarm and the anger did not last very long; most people in the Pacific territories couldn't tell the difference between Stan and either Tom or Denny in the first place. Things settled down, just as Tom knew they would, and everything got back to normal in a matter of weeks.

Several years later, the Representative of North America made a phone call to Chuck, the Representative of Europe. It was, in many respects, very similar to the phone call Tom had made to Denny, except that his new ideas were even more daring. "Listen," said Tom, "and I'm speaking frankly, honestly, and with a high regard for our constituents."

"Of course," said Chuck. "Aren't you always worrying about the voters? Don't you just stay up nights wondering if they still like you?"

"Shut up. I was thinking about what makes our continents run as smoothly as they do."

"Your continent, maybe," said Chuck. "My continent won't keep still long enough for me to tell it what to do."

"You're too kind," said Tom. "You have to be tough with the people."

"Easy for you to say," said Chuck. "You've got Americans. Just Americans. And Canadians. Even Stan could have dealt with them. Me, I've got Polish, German, Italian, French, Spanish, those damn inscrutable Finns, and God knows what all. And don't tell me about the withering of national identities, because you don't know what you're talking about. The countries may be gone, but the tempers aren't."

"All right, all right," said Tom. "Forget it. I was just thinking of a way that we could make things run a lot better, on a worldwide scale."

There was a short pause and a quiet laugh from Chuck. "We could turn the whole thing over to the prairie dogs, and let them have their shot at it."

"No," said Tom. "Not quite."

"Then I'll bet it's something really exciting and fun," said Chuck cynically. "If you give me a moment, I think I can get in the right ball park."

"Take all the time you want," said Tom.

"Does it have to do with, say, Ed or Nelson?"

Now Tom laughed. "Amazing," he said. "Now guess which one."

"Nelson in South America."

"No," said Tom. "How could you oversee anything in South America when you're sitting in Ponta do Sol?"

"All right," said Chuck. "Ed in Africa, and the same thing applies to you, sitting in your shuffleboard palace in Florida."

"Yes--Ed. Africa isn't a difficult place to govern any longer. Everything's the same, just the same as it is here, just the same as it is where you are. They have things in Africa that we need, we have things they need. The one thing that nobody needs is Ed."

"I've been saying that for years," said Chuck. "Now, are we just going to campaign for his removal or what?"

"Well, I've got a plan. I remember how well the operation against Stan went. I mean, not even Stan minded terribly much. He's very happy. He's playing shuffleboard, too, out in California. I visit him sometimes. He's getting good. I never saw anybody get topspin on one of those disks before. Anyway, I just thought he could use some company, and Ed doesn't seem to be doing much."

"That's his charm," said Chuck. "How do we do it? The same way you and Denny squeezed out Stan?"

"Pretty much," said Tom, pleased that Chuck was reacting so favorably.

So, in about six months, after a carefully drawn-up scheme of rumor, innuendo, planned dissatisfaction, false news leaks, skillfully aimed gossip, and character assassination, Tom and Chuck took over the governing of Africa, and Ed was retired to a nice ranch only a stone's throw from Stan. Denny didn't say anything; he was in no position to complain. But it was obvious that Nelson in South America was watching Tom with some nervousness.

The people of Africa were also a little more distraught than the citizens of the Pacific had been. Africa had long since lost its distinctive personality as a continent. There were no more desert nomadic tribes. There were no more vast savannahs, populated by fierce and beautiful beasts. There were few animals of any kind, in this once-rich continent overflowing with life. The Sahara had been made into a huge area virtually indistinguishable from Brooklyn or Queens; indeed, if you blindfolded someone from New York City and set him down anywhere in Africa, he would have a difficult time telling you where he was. The only giveaway might be the climate; a New Yorker would suspect that it was cooler in Africa in the summertime.

The government--meaning, of course, the Representatives--had hired a number of people to be Arabs, and a number of people to be goat or cow-herding tribesmen. But they never went so far as to maintain anything like the old society and culture. Music, sculpture, art, and the oral

literary tradition were dead and gratefully lost. These things just got in the way of making one's living.

The removal of Ed as Representative made the African people think that this, too, would cause a major disturbance in their lives. That was the reason for their outcry; they didn't have the time, the energy, or the interest for a major disturbance. But Tom and Chuck moved in quickly, splitting the continent between them, taking over the government immediately and suppressing any reactions that looked potentially dangerous. Like the people of the Pacific, the Africans were astonished at how little their private lives were changed. Once this fact was accepted, so were Tom and Chuck, and Ed was easily forgotten. The six Representatives were now four. Three confident Representatives, and one very, very fearful one.

The frightened Representative was Nelson, in South America, and he had every reason in the world to be afraid. After making two unprecedented power grabs in less than ten years, Tom was casting his eye around for more, and the logical choice was Nelson. One of the chief advantages to supplanting Nelson was that Tom needed the help of nobody. He didn't have to go to Chuck or Denny with his ideas. He had gained enough experience to plan the entire operation himself; in fact, the maneuver had been thought up, at least in some rough form, from the time of the first takeover in the Pacific. Tom had only waited until his own position of power was sufficiently well-grounded. According to population figures, Tom now governed as many people as Chuck, possibly even more; Tom had graciously allowed Chuck the

majority of Africa. Tom did not rule as many people as Denny, but his territory was richer in natural resources and all of that kind of thing, about which he knew little but about which his advisers were always very happy. Tom, Chuck, and Denny were about equal in power; Nelson was far, far behind. It hadn't yet occurred to Chuck and Denny that, should Tom replace Nelson single-handedly, the Representative of North America (and South America, and parts of Africa and the Pacific) would undeniably take a commanding lead.

Nelson tried to hint at this, in order to get help from Chuck and Denny. Neither Representative paid much attention. They always had problems of their own, and South America did not seem very important, even if Tom did succeed in grabbing it. After all, what would he get? A couple of dozen cities that could not be distinguished from Houston, Baltimore, Duluth, Vienna, Lisbon, Bratislava, Istanbul...

Tom had larger ideas. In only eight weeks, Nelson was living on a rather nice ranch-style home completely furnished with built-ins and two-and-a-half-car garage, not far from schools and shopping centers, between Ed's house and Stan's. And Tom had gotten himself some sunny new vacation homes in Brazil, a very pretty canal in Central America, and a staging point for future operations. Certainly he had no doubts that there would be future operations, even though Chuck and Denny thought that he had come to the end of his amusing games.

* * * *

Now, before the discussion of the rest of Tom's affairs begins, it's time to talk about the other great influence in the

lives of the people and the actions of the Representatives. This was TECT, the largest, most comprehensive, most versatile mechanical calculating device ever built. It had been in existence in one form or another for many years. Sometimes the electronic storage system was increased and made more efficient. Sometimes a technician would devise completely new techniques which would expand the powers of the gigantic computer beyond even what the Representatives could understand. TECT started off as a relatively small installation beneath the island of Malta. Other satellite units were added from time to time. After nearly a century, TECT was virtually autonomous, needing a minimum of human maintenance. Soon that minimum was reduced to zero. Meanwhile, TECT had become the repository and synthesizer of all human knowledge. Any book, newspaper, magazine, film, or sound recording that was in existence could be obtained from TECT. The computer--although "computer" is as poor a term for TECT as "star" is for Rigel, as far as conveying size is concerned--was provided with capabilities that allowed it to answer purely philosophical questions, using the vast resources at its command. By the time of Tom, Chuck, and Denny, there was no single human alive who comprehended all that TECT meant or all that TECT could do.

But there were a few folks around who had an idea.

Someone once came up with what he considered to be a cure for inflation. At least, he reasoned, inflation could be slowed down if everyone did away with money. The Representatives thought this over for a few years and decided to try it. No more currency was printed, only a small quantity

of coins of small denominations, for use in minor transactions. All other transfers of goods was controlled and remembered by TECT; if one bought an item, TECT would deduct the value of the property from the buyer's credit account, and add it to the seller's. Everyone had an official government ID card, and this was used to record every business transaction in the world; the card was placed in a small bookkeeping machine and the amount of the sale was registered. There were millions of these machines in the world, in every store, restaurant, official church, newsstand on every continent, and every machine was tied directly to TECT. TECT could handle it all easily; the shifting of credit happened instantaneously, and a good deal of fraud was ended by TECT's sure knowledge of everyone's current financial situation. The Representatives were very fond of the plan, and it worked very well indeed. The research team that put it into operation were rewarded with luxurious gifts and appliances, and generous gift certificates from the Representatives' own large chain of department stores.

Long before Tom first got the idea of removing Stan, almost every household in the world had its own tect, its own external terminal of the huge TECT buried beneath the ground. Now everyone had access to any information that he might want, except, of course, that information which had been classified for security reasons or which TECT might deem an infringement on another person's privacy. Books could be printed out on microfiche cards in a matter of seconds, and read on a built-in screen. Any music or film could be requested.

At the same time, the Representatives had an accurate and relatively inconspicuous way of keeping tabs on everyone on the planet; TECT remembered every request that was made of it, and sometimes this information could be very useful, too. It was impossible to purchase anything without TECT learning where one was, so fugitives from justice had a much more difficult time. The official ID card became the most valuable possession a person had: without it, he could not eat, he could not clothe himself, he could not rent lodgings, he would find it nearly impossible to find sexual gratification.

One of the reasons that the Representatives liked TECT so much was that the computer did much to make their own jobs easier. If everyone had a tect in his home, then there was a simple way of communicating with each constituent. An election could be held, with billions of individual voting machines; the vote would be made on the tect, and TECT would count the world-wide tally.

One of the reasons that Tom, Chuck, Denny, Nelson, Stan, and Ed had been Representatives for so long was that they controlled the computer technicians who wrote the programs that governed the counting of the votes. The Representatives lied.

Naturally, there were those who suspected, but they were powerless. TECT's records of past elections were altered to fit the Representatives' designs. And very little interest could be stirred among the populations to investigate; the angry few who demanded a recount found very few listeners.

Another great step forward was made when the discovery of matter teleportation was made. TECT could be used to move objects or people safely from one place to another--again, instantaneously. TECT had always been able to do this, from the days since it had ceased being just another huge computer; it was just that no one had realized the potential of the machine. It isn't necessary to go into what matter transmission did to the politics and economy of the world. Ordinarily, it might be assumed that the effect would be tremendous. But everything was already the same, so very few people noticed the difference. It speeded up the mail delivery, and you could get back and forth to the moon faster, but teletrans units were too expensive to install in the home. It was still cheaper to take the plane.

* * * *

So, against this background, Tom found himself master of quite a bit of the world. He ruled over more territory than anyone since Charles V of Spain and a lot of other places. But, naturally enough, Tom was not satisfied. One morning Denny awoke to find both Tom and Chuck in his bedroom, each holding a glass of water and a pill. Denny shrugged and accepted the pills, and when he awoke again, he was inside a lovely four-bedroom house from which he could hear the shuffleboard disks clacking at Stan's.

Of course, Chuck realized that he was in pretty unstable circumstances himself. What had happened to Stan, Ed, Nelson, and Denny could very well happen to him--could, ha. Would. There wasn't any doubt about it. The only question was when Tom would move. From the day that Chuck helped

Tom retire Denny, Chuck had hired a guard to watch while he slept. In Chuck's retinue, the Representative had an eccentric reputation, but he was just being careful. He ruled the world with Tom for many years. They used TECT and they used television, they used sports and popular entertainment media, they used sex and they used drugs, all to their benefit, all to keep their people happy. They became identified as a team--the Representatives, Tom and Chuck. The others were forgotten. Tom and Chuck, the Representatives. They were doing a good job. Nobody was bothered. It seemed that they might go on like that forever.

They might well have, except that after about twelve years Chuck let his guard down. Tom moved quickly; he had been watchful all during that time. Chuck excused himself to go to the lavatory, and the young woman he was dining with never saw him again. Chuck took up collecting shells in California, and Nelson paid him back a decades-old sock on the jaw that Chuck had completely forgotten about. Except for that, the five Representatives-in-Exile spent the rest of their days in friendly community activities, watched over by Tom and his associates.

Now, at last, Tom alone ruled the world. It was the first time that anyone had ever done that. It was certainly a noteworthy occasion, and to be sure, Tom received a great number of congratulatory telegrams and flowers subceived to his personal teletrans unit. In Europe, everyone missed Chuck. "What happened to old Chuck?" asked the Danish fishermen, the German industrialists, the Italian tenors, the British working stiffs, the Spanish dancers, the French chefs.

No one seemed to know. There were plenty of people in Europe who squinted one eye, shook one finger, and said, "I'll bet he's gone the same place as those others." Life went on, and by lunchtime Chuck had ceased to be a cause for concern.

In the United States and Canada, there was a certain pride involved in living under the Representative who seemed to have come out on top. No one had even been aware that there was any sort of power struggle, but if there was--and now it surely seemed that way--well, it was better to be in on the winning side. There wasn't anyone who could explain why, or how having been governed by Tom before anyone else had been would work to their benefit; and so by lunchtime Tom had ceased to be a topic of conversation.

During that time, Tom, the Representative of the world, was kept informed of how his coup had affected the voters. He was surprised and gratified that the transition was easy; he didn't have any need for the massive public relations job that he had planned. That was just as well. He could put the time and resources into other things; it seemed that the people loved him, or if not, they kept their mouths shut. Maybe they had him mixed up with someone else. In any event, it didn't make any difference. The regime replaced the old twelve-year Tom-and-Chuck routine without the slightest rough moment. Tom wondered in private: did those people, those ten billion people, did they ever wonder what happened to Chuck (let alone Denny, Nelson, and so on)? Did they have any idea what would happen if something accidental happened to Tom?

In the most private of these moments, Tom wondered what would happen if something accidental happened to Tom.

So, in Asia, in little islands in the ocean, in the frozen Greenland stations, in Cleveland, everyone accepted Tom as the boss. It wasn't much different than having a bunch of Representatives, after all; the only adjustment that people could make (although few did) was to realize that everyone else in the world had the same Representative. Was that so terrible?

About this time, Tom turned from the petty cares of his office to benevolence. It was a sudden and wonderful thing. One day he called in his secretary. "Miss Brant," he said, "today I am going to do these benevolent things. Take a memo." And he listed over two dozen charitable, praiseworthy acts which he, through the resources of his office, was easily able to accomplish. Nuns--that is, civil servants hired as nuns--in Africa were given clean linens. Sons of pseudo-Chicanos were given softballs and bats. A hospital in Lima, Peru, was begun and another in Lima, Ohio, torn down. Many other things happened that first day, and people all over the world were surprised and gratified.

The next morning, Tom anxiously waited for word to come into the Representative headquarters. He kept asking TECT, "How am I doing?" TECT kept responding, "Fine. Just fine." That wasn't what Tom was looking for. He called in Miss Brant. "How do you think I'm doing?" he asked.

"Fine," she said. Tom gave her another list of kindly deeds for that day. An hour later, Tom asked TECT, "How am I

doing? Break it down statistically. Print it out as a comparison with one year ago today."

TECT complied. The answer read:

23:48:13 30 August 1 YT OffRepl

OffNot/OffRep

**RepNA:
Popularity at highest level in twelve months. As of this date, one year ago, popularity of the Representative of North America was 8.37483+. Data received as of 23:47:54 30August 1 YT indicates popularity has risen to 8.84747+.

Tom looked at the figures silently. He had certainly worked hard at being liked. Apparently he was succeeding. Well, that was fine. Miss Brant was right. It was just fine. He stared at the figures on the tect's screen: 8.84747+. That meant that out of ten people there were 1.15253 who didn't like him. Tom ignored the percentage in the larger, positive figure who had been counted merely as "no opinion." He didn't ask TECT about that; it was a side to the question he didn't want to know more about. Instead, he gave the money to begin a subway system in Ljubljana, Yugoslavia.

Five hours later, the popularity index stood at 8.84751+. Tom was making progress.

There was a newspaper article the next morning, wondering why Tom was doing all of this. Had he been involved in some unspeakable horror, was he trying to channel the people's attention away from his evil nature? TECT reported all of this without interest, only because everything that directly mentioned the Representative was sorted, coded, and abridged for his benefit. Tom was very unhappy. He decided to take tect time and speak to the world again.

"My fellow humans," he said, wondering if that were any better than "Earthlings." His face was wan and lined, a testimonial to the skills of his wardrobe and make-up staff. He chewed on a thumbnail while he stood, uncomfortably, in front of a large globe. The room looked like some important office, but it was just a stage-set near his bathroom. "My fellow humans," he said, "I haven't done anything wrong. Look at me. It's Tom, you remember. I've been with you a long time. We've done a lot of things together, you and I, we've seen a lot of changes. Can it be that the people of the world, my people, my world, your world, too, are so starved for novelty that they have to attack me in this way?" In the hand that wasn't being bitten he waved the article. It was printed on a microfiche card, and impossible to see clearly. "I sure hate to think that. And I won't, because I know my people better. My staff keeps me posted."

Tom looked out at the audience, all the people in the world, all ten billion of them, and smiled sincerely. "I'm doing the best I can," he said. Then he walked out of the room.

The next morning the newspaper printed an article that defended Tom, but suggested that his henchmen and underlings were using their greater power to further their own ends. Tom shrugged; well, sure they were. His popularity index had held fast; he asked TECT about the trustworthy quotient of his henchmen and underlings, in the eyes of the constituents. This was quoted as 3.28537+. The juniors had messed up again; in a little while they would begin to affect Tom adversely as well. He went back on the air and explained that, if anything wrong happened, anywhere in the world, it could likely be traced to an honest mistake by one of the underlings and henchmen. "I have to admit that I am limited by the skill of these good men," he said. "I have to be dependent on somebody. Everybody has to be dependent on somebody." This time he didn't even smile. He just walked away.

"What is Tom going to do?" asked many millions of people. "It's true that the quality of our lives is higher than ever before, but he's prevented from raising it even further by those underlings and henchmen upon whom he depends." Millions of people were saying these very words, all over the world; millions of other people only shrugged. In California, five ex-Representatives were uneasy about their friend's predicament.

Everyone had made the reckoning without taking into account Tom's superior foresight. He called a meeting of technicians, technologists, scientists, researchers, savants, and stenographers to hear his views. His views were roundly applauded; then Tom asked for the views of the other people

present. Some of these ideas were rejected, others incorporated. Things moved along at an excellent pace, in a comfortable atmosphere of democratic fellowship, until the decision was made to build even more sophisticated capabilities into TECT.

Among Tom's own associates, his underlings and henchmen, there was a great amount of celebration. One might have thought that another habitable planet had been discovered, an event that occurred only once or twice a year. The underlings and the henchmen were sure that they would be given positions of greater responsibility, although those positions hadn't been in existence for many, many years. And along with those positions, they reasoned, must go greater privileges. But no one wanted to bring the matter up; certainly it was too early to approach Tom. He had earned a period of adjustment. So, by lunchtime, all of Tom's underlings and henchmen were trying to act naturally. They all sweated a lot and laughed nervously, but they pretended that it was natural. They never gave any thought to the possibility that the sole ruler of the world might not want a bunch of sweating, giggling apes as his subordinates. That kind of junior executive never considers the broad perspective; Tom was well aware of the situation.

"I am well aware of the situation," he said as he headed up his first staff meeting that afternoon. "I know what you must be thinking. That's how I got to be where I am today. And, first off, I'd like to thank each and every one of you." The henchmen and the underlings looked at each other and tried

to hide their smirks behind their hands. They waited to hear what Tom had planned for them.

Tom looked around the large, polished metal table. The men who sat listening to him had served him for a long time, relieving him of many irritating duties. Some of the men had been with him so long he had forgotten who they were and what they did. He glanced from face to face, and he couldn't suppress a shudder. "Who is responsible for this report?" he asked, holding up a thick notebook. "Number 18192-J-495?"

One of the men coughed softly and raised a hand. "My group," he said timidly.

"Fine," said Tom. "Fine work."

The man gave his Representative a short, tight smile.

"Have you read the report?" asked Tom.

"No, sir," said the man. "A résumé was due to be put on my desk this morning, but, well, with all the commotion and everything--"

Tom interrupted the underling with a gesture. "Just as well," he said. "You're out of a job. You saved yourself a lot of depressing reading. TECT has your job now. The report estimated that I didn't need any of you any more. TECT estimated that, too. I figured it out for myself, a while ago. So now you can go out and enjoy life. I alone will worry and cry over the pain of government. I, and TECT. You may go. Go out now; there's always a job for a henchman."

When Tom ordered the next day that the island of Java be cleared of its inhabitants, he received no opposition. The new adjunct to TECT was constructed there. It was completed

within the year, and TECT took on even more of Tom's troublesome duties.

Tom could go anywhere in the known universe, just by stepping through the portals of a TECT teletrans unit. He could summon up any fact or thought that had ever been recorded in human history. He could ask TECT, "Can we ever really `know' anything?" and the answer would come back instantaneously, in about three medium-sized paragraphs of colloquial language. But Tom suspected, he planned, that TECT could do more.

Meanwhile, all through Tom's domain, things were looking up. In the Pacific, Stan's old constituency, people moved over to make room for the former residents of Java. There wasn't a single relocation that caused any problems, either for the Javanese or their new hosts; this was because every place in the Pacific looked like every other place. The language was the same, the clothing was the same, the food was the same, the attitudes were the same. It made moving a lot easier and a lot less traumatic.

About this time a team of specialists compiled a report that stated that the settled worlds around the nearby stars were advanced enough to begin legitimate commerce with the mother world. They had products at last, things that Earth could use, and for which they could be given Earth-made goods; the economy was stimulated, and some megalomaniac thinkers began dreaming in terms of commercial domination of the stars. Not many, though.

In Africa, times were so good that the civil servants who lived their lives as poor nomadic tribespeople were given

promotions. Now they wore suits and ties and dresses shipped from New York, all five years behind the current style. The younger members of this civil service group were directed to complain about the loss of their national identity and their cultural heritage. But only on Monday through Friday, from nine until five.

The basic unit used in dwellings, the modular apartment, was standardized, so that a family could move their boxlike home to any continent, to any planet, and find a skeletal building that would accept it, barring the usual difficulties in finding vacancies. The manufacturers were informed by TECT that agreements had to be reached so that all products likely to be taken from one continent to another could be used in either place with equal facility. This was TECT's first major independent decision, and no one was more surprised than Tom himself; everyone in the world cheered the wisdom and good sense apparent in TECT's judgment.

Naturally, TECT could not be affected by praise or by threats. Therefore, it was unsound reasoning to think that TECT was encouraged by its first success. It was illogical to assume that TECT's next flurry of announcements was at all connected with the universal approbation which greeted the first one. Nevertheless, when TECT ordered the disbanding of the CAS police force, as the group had outlasted its usefulness, many people around the world were secretly pleased. TECT had won a great victory again, and many more supporters. Even the former CAS police were happy, because they never had anything to do, anyway. They were all

relocated and retrained, and many became productive members of society thereafter.

In Europe, people had begun to identify TECT with the memory of Chuck. It had been Tom and Chuck for so long; now, with prosperity growing, the Europeans wanted another team of leaders to look toward. Tom and TECT. The machine assumed a personality in the minds of the people, a personality that Tom had given up trying to explain away. There was no personality to TECT; there were only the effects caused by TECT's decisions. But if the people wanted to believe--well, whatever the people wanted was all right with Tom. Mostly.

On the moon, in plastic domes that tinted the sun green, the settlers and scientists were governed almost entirety by TECT, although they never realized it. All of their directives came through Tom's office, but originated with TECT; Tom had given the moon to the computer at an early stage. That colony had always been a headache for him.

And in the United States and Canada, where the citizens had known Tom longer than anyone else in the world, there was a growing feeling that the Western Hemisphere had displayed some kind of natural superiority; Tom's assumption of leadership was looked on as an odd kind of victory for North America. Tom told TECT to find some way of eliminating that attitude.

After several months of this, the strain was beginning to show on Tom. He made a public speech, and it was clear that this was not the same Tom who had broadcast baseball games with Chuck, had done kids' shows in the mornings,

had provided housewives over half the world with recipes for dinner each afternoon. He talked about how burdensome it was, to be the only Representative, but said that he was willing to accept the load. He knew it was best for mankind; he'd take the worry and the sorrow--after all, that was his job. And if no one ever showed any sign of appreciation--well, Tom could live without that. So what? he said. It was always like that at the top.

The responsibilities were tremendous. Everyone watching the speech on their tects could understand that. They felt a little guilty about not giving Tom the respect he was due. They didn't know exactly how to go about doing it; after all, they didn't even know where he was. They couldn't send him a card or a funny birthday note. But when the guilt passed, as it always did, rather quickly, the feeling remained that Tom was losing some of his sharpness.

A year later, Tom made another public address. "My fellow earthlings (he had tried to find a better word, but he had been unable to; also, he hadn't tried all that hard)," he said slowly, in a voice that filled his audience with surprise and concern, "I don't really have much to say to you. I mean, if you were doing anything important, go back to it. This isn't a major announcement or anything. I just wanted to talk to you. You know, it's a real headache keeping your lives in order for you. I hope you appreciate that. I have to admit that there are rough times. There sure are. I have to admit that.

"But being the Representative has its rewards, too. So in case you were worrying about me, you can just stop. I'm fine,

really. There are problems every morning that I have to wade into, but I knew that before I took the job. Somebody had to do it. Sometimes I hate getting up out of bed. Sometimes I can't sleep.

"So I just wanted you to know. It isn't all a bed of roses, but I think that together we'll all struggle through. Things aren't so bad for you, are they? That just shows that I'm doing my level best. So try to keep from hurting each other, and we'll all be happy. I'm as happy as I can be, under the circumstances. But don't worry about me. I'm fine. Good night."

Tom sighed softly and walked out of the room. He went to his bedroom, took two large blue capsules, and fell quickly asleep. He didn't communicate with another human being for months.

"Things would really be terrific," people said to each other after this speech, "if we had the old Tom back." TECT reported these conversations to Tom whenever he requested them, and he couldn't understand them. After all, he was getting older all the time.

Tom told TECT a lot of things now, because he was very lonely. Sometimes, he went on tect time to tell his people that they shouldn't worry about him, that although the responsibilities weighed heavily and all that, he was strong. But he would walk around his house complaining all the time. Miss Brant, his secretary, used to get tired of hearing about it.

"It's very lonely here," said Tom.

Miss Brant sighed. "So go out. Meet people."

Tom laughed softly. "I wish I could. Me? The Representative? I can't just go out. I have things to do."

"Then stay in," said Miss Brant. "You can have people brought in. You remember those parties Denny used to throw."

"I can't do that either."

"Then it's just too bad," said Miss Brant. She picked up her notebook and left Tom alone. He turned to TECT for consolation.

"Good old TECT," he whispered. "What do you think of me, huh? After all these years?"

The answer came across Tom's tect, flashing in green letters on the darker green screen.

09:25:42 16May 3 YTM OffRepl

OffNot/OffRep

**RepNa:
You're all right, I suppose.

"You've seen worse, right?" said Tom, pressing the glowing button that switched off the tect.

Tom had been the solitary ruler of the world for nearly two and a half years; he thought that it was about time that he started to give some thought to his future. After all, he couldn't depend on anyone when he got old; he had no family, no friends. It was beyond the realm of possibility that one of the henchmen or underlings would be so loyal; Tom

pictured his feeble, helpless old age, nothing left but his scrapbook of microfiche cards. He wondered why he had forsaken love.

Well, he answered himself, somebody had to. Somebody had to make the sacrifices. He was actually very proud of himself, but he had no illusions about what the people of the world would think of him ten, twenty years after he turned the governmental control over. They would remember him in much the way they remembered Stan, Ed, Nelson, Denny, and Chuck: on stamps every once in a while, in little plastic figures collected by the nostalgic, and very often by the wrong names.

"I've got a great deal for you," he said to TECT. The computer made no reply. It had heard the same thing from many, many people over the years. "How would you like to speed things up? Let's take a look at Operation Knee. I want the specs printed out, please. I also want an analysis of how things have changed since we first worked out the operation, and a projection of what the effects would be of activating the operation now instead of in seventeen years."

TECT produced everything that Tom asked for in a few moments. The Representative read through the original report, in which the eventual handling of all facets of government would be turned over to TECT. So much progress had been made during Tom's administration that TECT's analysis and projection showed that the public would be little disrupted by the changeover. Tom had mixed feelings about that.

"How do you feel about the moral implications of Operation Knee?" asked Tom.

**RepNA:
There aren't any.

"There must be," said Tom. "I can't understand you. There certainly were moral implications a few years ago. I find it hard to believe that they've disappeared."

**RepNA:
Twelve cc. of phosphoric colioate administered intramuscularly will make it much easier to believe.

"All right, all right," said Tom. He sighed. What was he but an extension of TECT already? What was he but an obstacle for TECT? He felt sorry for himself. He had an impulse to call in Miss Brant. He would explain what he contemplated doing, and get her reaction. Then TECT would see that there definitely were unfavorable moral connections, at least in the minds of the people at large; but TECT had made a careful analysis, and Tom realized that if Miss Brant came in and voiced her opinion, she might give Tom an unpleasant surprise. "Okay," he said to his tect. "Do it." He tossed the reports into a wastebasket.

The red Advise light flashed on the tect.

"What is it?" asked Tom irritably.

09:57:32 16May 3 YT ReplReq**

**RepNA:
Operating coded key phrase is needed.

"I don't remember what it is," said Tom.

**RepNA:
"Get thee hence."

"Sure," said Tom sourly. "`Get thee hence.'"

**RepNA:
Thank you. Operation Knee has begun.

"Fine," said Tom. Then he called in Miss Brant, after all.

* * * *

Clearing out his desk the next morning, Tom recalled all the wonderful times he had spent during his career. Many times he stopped his work and asked TECT to produce a printed record of some exploit or other, which already had faded from the ex-Representative's mind. Then Tom would return to his labor, packing shopping bags and liquor cartons with the junk that had accumulated since his first election.

Just before lunch, he was interrupted by Miss Brant. "What is it?" he asked.

"Well," said his former secretary, "the office staff wanted to present you with this." She handed him a small package, wrapped in brightly colored foil.

Tom was startled. "Did TECT tell you to do this?" he asked.

Miss Brant looked hurt. "Of course not," she said. "We just thought it would be nice. To thank you and all."

"Of course," said Tom absently, wondering how he could have grown to be so out of touch with people's feelings. He accepted the present with as much grace as he could summon. "I hope it isn't a tie," he said. "I won't be needing a tie where I'm going."

Both he and Miss Brant laughed. "No, it isn't a tie. Open it. We all chipped in."

Tom opened the package. Inside was a pen and pencil stand, with a little metal plaque glued on it that said To our Representative forever, from his gang down at the shop. Tom felt nothing as he looked at it. When he glanced back up at Miss Brant, he faked a choked voice and a slight sniff. "Thank them all," he said. "Do that for me." Then he waved and turned around, as though to hide a tear. He was relieved to hear the sound of his door closing again.

TECT had already reassigned Miss Brant and the others to new jobs. Tom wondered where his secretary would go, but he didn't wonder enough to ask her.

That afternoon he stepped through his teletrans unit and emerged into the harsh glare of the California sunlight. He carried a couple of suitcases with him; the rest of his belongings had already been sent ahead. There was a pleasant road through a grove of strange flowering trees. Tom walked slowly along the road toward the house that TECT had prepared for him. The house was pleasant enough

from the outside. Tom leaned against his white wooden fence for some time, thinking. Then he went inside.

The house smelled freshly painted and sounded empty. There were odd, uncomfortable echoes wherever he walked. He put his suitcases down in the largest of the three bedrooms. Then he went back to the living room. On the back of the front door, there was a piece of paper taped to the small diamond-shaped window. Tom shrugged and went to see what it was. It was a note from Nelson. It said:

> Hey, Tom!
> Glad you're here finally. When you're all settled in, come on over. We're eating here tonight. Denny and Ed are cooking (Ed's gotten a whole lot better). Don't worry about bringing anything.
> We'll work on your mood if you're depressed. Things aren't so unpleasant here.
> After dark, the game starts. Hundred credit minimums. You ought to clean up--you're a bluffer from `way back, ha-ha. No hard feelings. See you soon.
> Best,
> Nelson

Tom tore the note off the door and crumpled it, but he couldn't find a place to throw it. He stuffed it into a pocket and went outside. He had forgotten about the time difference; it was still a couple of hours before dinnertime. He began

walking slowly toward Nelson's house. As he walked, he imagined that he could feel the throbbing, buzzing, rumbling of TECT beneath his feet.

Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

## Strange Ragged Saintliness

I had the good fortune to be a childhood friend of Robert W. Hanson. Our scholastic careers in Cleveland and later at Yale were oddly parallel. Then something mystical happened. I came to New York and became a writer. He came to New York and, well, everyone knows what he became. First in the hearts of his countrymen, for one thing. I was in on a lot of the more unpleasant situations, the ones that Hanson's biographers tend to neglect. I can run through some of them now, without worrying that someone might accuse me of cheapening his reputation. The way he handled those times showed the insight and gentleness that marked his later career. But the happy ending we all know; right now maybe the introductory paragraphs of his life are more instructive to the rest of us.

* * * *

"Want to go to a convention?" I asked him one morning. This was about six months after we graduated from Yale. We were sharing an apartment in New York, on the Upper West Side near Central Park.

"One of your science fiction things?" he asked. He stared across our rather empty room, considering. He had been depressed all summer, and I figured the trip would do him good. "Where is it?"

"Springfield. It'll take a day or so each way, by bus or train. However you feel like going. I have friends we can stay with." Hanson hesitated, then agreed.

So we packed up and left. The convention itself was hardly memorable, except for the famous incident of Bob James and his girlfriend being arrested for nude bathing in the hotel pool. Poor Bob missed picking up a special fan award for his classic novel, The Lights of Mistraven. The plaque was subsequently lost, and Bob had to settle for a handwritten apology from the con committee. Hanson and I had decided to skip the rest of the con, though, and we only heard about it afterward.

On Saturday evening we made a remarkable discovery. We had spent most of the day poking around bookshops in Springfield. Earlier it had been very chilly, with a light hazy rain that had slowly but thoroughly soaked us. Now, though, the sky was clear, the stars shining brilliantly and strong, with not a quaver among them. Hanson was feeling better, and so was I. Rather than return to the con we kept walking, down a side street perpendicular to Springfield's main avenue. We walked for quite a long while. We came to a place where the sidewalk turned into a long series of steps, leading up a steep hill.

When we reached the top of the hill there was another stone staircase, going down at a right angle to the continuation of the sidewalk. The stairs were more irregular than the ones we had just climbed, and in the dark we might not have noticed them except for the iron handrail that stuck out a bit into our path. Without a second's hesitation Hanson started down. I followed. The way led back down the side of the hill, through a dense and dark growth of trees. Low branches hung down, spattering us with collected rain. For

the first few steps we couldn't see anything. Then, slowly, I made out lights shining through the trees below us.

"Hey, Sandy," said Hanson, "look at that!" I did look, and I listened, and I realized that at the bottom of the hill there was a pretty good-sized amusement park. It was kind of a strange feeling, emerging from that moist, earth-smelling tunnel into the bright glow and tinny racket of an amusement park. It was a pleasant shock, and exciting. I've always been a sucker for amusement parks.

"I'll bet that if the fans knew about this place, the convention would be deserted," I said.

"Good thing they don't know about it," said Hanson.

We wandered around, spending money a little too freely. I can't pass up a dart-throw or a baseball-pitch. I managed to win a kazoo and an orange plastic comb for about three dollars. Hanson watched me, smiling. I was glad we had come.

We bought some hamburgers and Cokes, and some cotton candy which stuck in pink balls in my mustache. We rode some of the rides, those that didn't look overly perilous. "It's sort of a shame," said Hanson. "A kid can come in here and do anything he wants, without a second thought. Me, I wonder what the ticketseller is thinking. Here I am, a grown man, acting like I was twelve years old. I shouldn't have to think that."

"You spend your entire childhood being too young for things," I said. "No matter what you want to do, it seems, they've got reasons why you have to wait. So when you finally do get to be old enough, you learn that you've gotten

too old for a lot of things. It doesn't seem fair. Things should get better."

Hanson sighed. "They do, Sandy. Better things come along to compensate."

"I've managed to sleep right through my prime," I said. "They can't come up with anything that will compensate for being too old to play for the Indians. When we were kids, we weren't into it. Then we were into it, and now we're out of it. Let's go do the miniature golf thing." I led Hanson up to the miniature golf course, and it turned out to be just the thing I needed to knock the growing depression out of me. I beat him by twelve strokes for eighteen holes. I even had a hole-in-one by chipping the ball into the mouth of a grotesque blue frog, and the ball came out its cloaca and right into the cup. Only in America.

Next to the golf course's fence was the parking lot. There was a large stone arch there, and Hanson spotted a group of younger kids sitting under it. Being Hanson, he wanted to go over and talk with them. I recaptured my youth one way, he had his own. I followed him.

"Hi," he said, sitting down among the children on the slick, wet stone. There was no reply. We all sat in silence for a very long time until one of the girls got tired of waiting for us to leave, and continued her interrupted conversation. She was about eleven or twelve years old, barefoot, dressed in blue jeans worn through at the knees, a man's tee shirt much too large for her, and a vinyl jacket.

"So I says to him," she said to the girl sitting next to her, "if you really liked me, you'd take me there. I know he's

seeing that Barbieri bitch, but he was making out like he didn't know what I was talking about."

The other girl snorted skeptically. "I don't know what the hell you're so mad about. He's a real loser, anyway."

"Eat it," said the first girl. Hanson caught my eye and smiled. He was amused by these school children and their make-believe problems. It just made me feel older. I mean, here they were, nearly midnight, just sitting around smoking and swearing and working out their pre-pubic crises. When I was eleven all I worried about were baseball cards and getting out of the sixth grade.

Hanson came over and sat by me. I was studying the other kids. There were about six or seven of them. Besides the two we were listening to, there were two more girls and two or three boys. The rest of the children looked like they were napping, stretched out on the wet ground, their heads propped up against the wall of the arch. "Things have changed, haven't they?" asked Hanson.

"Yeah," I said. "I'm not so crazy about it."

"But that's the greatest thing in the world. The Japanese have raised appreciation of change to an art."

"Wonderful," I said. "They're obsessed with death."

"A joyful sadness."

I nodded. "A sad joyfulness," I said. "That's really stupid, Hanson."

"`It withers imperceptibly in the world,
This flower-like human heart.'"

"That's very pretty," I said.

"But stupid, too."

I listened for a few seconds, hearing the chatter of the two girls and the distant, hollow sounds of the amusement park. "No, I won't go that far. It's just that hearts are withering a lot faster these days."

Hanson nodded. "Sure. Remember when we were kids in Cleveland? When we used to go out to Cedar Point?"

"Every summer."

"Sure," said Hanson. "My mother always used to tell me I couldn't go into the water right after eating. I'd get polio. When was the last time you thought about polio?"

"Little cardboard iron lung machines in the grocery stores. I never gave them a penny."

"Things change," Hanson said.

I stood up, holding a large pebble. I pitched it at the other side of the arch. In my regretful mind I was the baseball player I could never be. I was Robin Roberts, for the old Philadelphia Phillies. I sighed. "They wither," I said. I reached down to help Hanson up, but he gestured for me to wait. He still hadn't made the contact he wanted.

"Do you come here a lot?" he asked the two young girls. I groaned.

The first girl had the same reaction. "Go to hell, mister," she said, "or we'll chop you up." Then she turned back to her friend.

Hanson stood up and looked at me, embarrassed. I didn't say anything. We started to walk back toward the park, but Hanson stopped again. The other kids, none of them older than the two girls, were still lying quietly on the cold, wet ground. One of them seemed to be going into mild

convulsions, and Hanson's native concern made him try to help. The boy, no more than nine years old, was crying and vomiting. The two girls didn't appear to notice.

"What's wrong?" asked Hanson in a helpless voice. "Is there anything I can do?" The boy couldn't answer. Hanson looked up at me. "We ought to get somebody," he said.

The boy was in bad shape. He looked like an addict junk-sick in the morning, back before they found T-amine and the other treatments for the heroin habit. Hanson was trying in his unschooled way to make the boy comfortable. He cleaned the boy's face with a handkerchief. Then he spotted something and called out to me. I looked down at what he had discovered. A small round area on the boy's head had been shaved, and in the middle of the spot three wires poked out. "All right, Hanson," I said, "come on. You're out of your depth." He didn't understand, but I grabbed his arm and pulled him away. His outraged humanity made him argue, but I wouldn't be persuaded. We reported the kids to a uniformed guard in the amusement park and left. I don't know if anyone ever did anything for that boy.

Things change, all right. A while ago, they found T-amine. The UNESCO research team won a Nobel Prize for that, and they deserved much more. The crime rate went down almost immediately. A large segment of the population returned to productive society. All kinds of pleasant things happened. Only UNESCO couldn't solve the big problem: they had masked the symptoms, and left the disease untreated. Whatever it was in our culture that caused so many people to

become addicts was still there. Deprived of the escape of heroin, people sought other avenues of self-destruction.

They didn't have far to look. Never let it be said that our society falters when it has its own worst interests at heart. The knowledge had been there for years, the technology was well past the experimental stage; now, just when we needed a social disaster the least, we put it all together. We came up with the vice of the elite. Plugging.

It started among the rich kids, the same ones who would have been heroin users in an earlier incarnation. Instead of taking the cruise ship to the Bahamas over spring vacation, they went down to Puerto Rico and had their heads shaved.

They also had little wires implanted, reaching down into the dark recesses, the strange dungeons of their brains. Right into the hypothalamus, if they were lucky. The backstreet doctors who performed these illegal operations did not always take as much care as they could have. The margin for error for a successful implantation is, of course, very small and very critical. That was part of the challenge.

I've always hated challenges. I can't understand people who welcome them, just to test themselves. I consider a challenge an imposition. Oh, I usually meet them to the best of my ability, but I'm not fond of it. But there are people who seek the risk, the gamble, the lunacy of ESB. Electrical Stimulation of the Brain.

These bored, suicidal people are the pioneers of the twilight years of the Twentieth Century.

On the way home from Springfield I tried to tell Hanson what I knew about the pluggies. He had heard of them, of

course, but he had trouble believing they were real. He wouldn't accept that people would do that kind of thing to themselves, knowing the possible consequences.

"What do they get out of it?" he asked.

"Flashing lights," I said. "Pretty music. How do I know? They send little bits of electricity right into the pleasure centers of the brain. It's supposed to be terrific. I mean, it's pure pleasure. Pure pleasure. Better living from Reddi Kilowatt."

"It's sad," he said. "The best thing in the world is finding pleasure in little things."

"Ha," I said. "You mean serene contemplation?"

"Sure. Chemical and mechanical pleasures just can't equal it."

"Oh, yeah?" I said. He stared at me, a little angrily, I think. I just laughed and waved away his argument. I opened a book, and we didn't talk about the pluggies again for several days.

I knew the subject was in his thoughts, though, from the questions that he asked. He wanted to know where a pluggie got the ESB operation, how much it cost, and what the dangers were. He wanted to know why I knew so much about the problem, and he didn't. The answer to that was simple, but it's not the kind of thing you can tell even your best friend.

"We must have pluggies here in New York," he said at last, after days of avoiding the subject.

"Sure," I said. "Don't tell me you've never seen them lying on the ground in subway stations."

"You see a lot of people doing that in New York. How do you tell if they're pluggies?"

I shrugged. "If they have little wires poking out, that's a good sign."

"I mean it, Courane," he said angrily. "You can joke about it, if you want. Pretend it's somebody else's problem. But when somebody else accepts the problem, I'd think you'd at least try to help."

It was my turn to be embarrassed. "I'm sorry, Hanson," I said. "I'm really sorry. I didn't know it was getting to you like that."

"Apparently the sight of those poor people hasn't gotten to anybody else yet."

"Remember when we were in school? Junkies had been around for a long time. I mean decades. And we didn't have anything but stereotypes and contempt. It took an epidemic to make us realize that something had to be done."

"Yes, I remember," said Hanson impatiently. "And I don't want to wait for an epidemic of this plugging thing before we start looking for ways to fight it."

"The pluggies are as dependent on their meter men as the junkies were on their connections," I said.

"Tell me."

"Well, look," I said. "If you have three wires poking right down through your skull, you're not just going to clamp them up to any wall outlet, are you?"

Hanson frowned. "What do they do, then?"

"There is a complex set of equipment that they use. The jolts of current have to be controlled. The volts and amps

have to be measured. The jolts have to come at just the right intervals. So the pluggies have to know a local meter man with all the right gadgets. You don't get pluggies hiding in the bedrooms getting lit."

Hanson thought for a moment. "So somebody is getting a lot of money, renting time on the machines."

"Figures, doesn't it?" I asked. "The feeling is so intense that a pluggie will soon lose all concern for anything else. Nothing matters except getting lit again. There's nothing else in normal life that compares with it, so he won't bother with anything that doesn't seem to lead directly back to his meter man."

"How do they get the money, then?" asked Hanson.

"Well, they pretty much have to have some in the first place. The implantations run upwards of a thousand dollars, plus travel expenses. So these kids have access to money. And when those sources dry up, well, by then they won't have much longer anyway. If you hit the current more than once a week, you're dead in three months. Most pluggies get lit every day."

"What's the government doing about it?"

"Nothing. Passing laws."

"So where will I find them?" asked Hanson.

"Downtown. South of Houston Street. You can't miss them."

Hanson looked at me for several seconds. I knew just what he was thinking: If I knew all of this, how could I be so unconcerned? I don't know. There are people starving in Africa, and people starving in Asia, and people starving a

couple of blocks from here, and we haven't conquered cancer or mental illness or a lot of other things, and pretty soon you have to start picking and choosing. You have just so many tears. Hanson hated that argument.

He was convinced that good will and sympathy would see him through. This kind of ignorance may well work the most serious good in the world. I know that with my appreciation of the situation, I would never have attempted the things he did. He told me of these things often. At every opportunity I told him that he was crazy. I told him that he was looking to get a bullet through the base of his skull. I told him that he couldn't really help anybody.

That was my mistake. It became another damned challenge. (Once Suzy said the same things to him. We were having dinner at their place, and out of the blue she turned to Hanson. "Tell me the truth," she said. "What am I to you? A challenge? Are you just trying to turn this poor pluggie girl into a real lady?" Hanson only smiled, but I fidgeted in my seat. The thought had occurred to me, many times.)

One day, about a week later, Hanson came home very late. I was worried because I knew that he'd been hanging out in SoHo, and he wasn't the most inconspicuous guy I knew. I was almost ready to call the police when I heard his familiar fumbling at the locks. He came in, alternating between rage and exhilaration.

"What happened?" I asked.

"I finally got a pluggie to talk to me," he said.

"Wonderful," I said. "How much did it cost you?"

He ignored me, fortunately. "I guessed that if I just hung out long enough, they'd open up to me. As soon as I became a familiar face."

"I doubt that you've succeeded so fast," I said. "They probably think you're just a familiar-looking cop."

"Maybe not. I learned some interesting things. I met a girl."

It was Suzy, of course. Their first conversations were marked by a total lack of content. Suzy, naturally enough, didn't trust Hanson as far as she could holler; she answered his blunt questions with a mixture of ridicule and lies far too vicious for Hanson to appreciate. She was a weary person. She hadn't trusted anyone in a very long time, and in the context of her current surroundings she saw no good reason to trust my friend.

Hanson was intoxicated by the utterly sordid atmosphere. The air of menacing yet exquisitely pleasurable experiences excited him, though it was all the product of his ignorance and his imagination. Suzy was the only person there who had even spoken to him; she became a symbol, a focus for his enthusiastic but untrained energies.

"Where did you meet her?" I asked him the first evening.

"Down where you told me. Some street off Delancey, I think."

"What did you do, offer to buy her a Coke?" I was trying to discourage him, and my cruelty was entirely justified, I felt. He certainly wouldn't listen to reason. I was soon to learn that he wouldn't listen to anything else, either.

He blushed. "She was standing in a doorway. I walked by, and she asked me if I had the time."

I laughed. "She's a hooker," I said.

"Yes," said Hanson. "I know."

"So then how did you keep the conversation going?"

"Well, I asked her if she could tell me how I could get implanted."

I hit my forehead with my hand. "Terrific, Hanson. That's just the way to do it. `Implanted.' Did you really say that? Let me guess. She made some excuse, walked away, and then you came home."

"I thought that was a pretty good beginning."

I shook my head in disbelief. "If you ever get anyone else down there to talk to you, one single word, it will be cause for celebration."

He didn't think the situation was that bad and, of course, it wasn't, really. I coached him a little on current slang, as well as I could. He was determined to go back downtown the next day and find Suzy again. To consolidate his gains, as he put it.

He did just that. He found her the next day, and she started to run. He chased after her, and a huge black guy came out of a drugstore and worked Hanson over. Not too bad. Just enough to teach him that you don't chase screaming hookers down Delancey Street. He came home very subdued, but not the least dissuaded from his mission.

"I want you to think about this," I said. "If you go down there much more, looking for this poor girl, you're going to

have to patronize her or else her employer will persuade you to stop harassing her. You are harassing her, you know."

He was very depressed. And he was very determined. Today, when the news media remember Robert Wayne Hanson, they recall his integrity, his generosity, and his determination. They always say that he was an example every one of us can learn from. They never say that few of us have chosen to do so.

"I have to go back," he said.

"Hanson," I said, "there are other people worried about the pluggies. It's not as though you were the only one aware of the thing. It's just that you've only now found out about it all."

Hanson started pacing the floor impatiently. "I know that, Sandy," he said. "There are seminar groups that meet in school buildings. There are parents' organizations that write to congressmen. There are representatives of the police department who lecture to concerned citizens. We've got to stop that."

I was puzzled. "I don't have the faintest idea what you mean," I said.

"There are plenty of people worried about the problem. There isn't anybody worried about the victims."

I nodded. I knew that Hanson was going back downtown, uniquely worried about the victims. I respected him for that, I loved him for it; but I thought he was going about it all ass-end backwards.

The next night he came home about eight o'clock. I answered the doorbell and found a fairly startling sight.

Hanson stood there, supporting an unconscious young man. Hanson smiled nervously. "Look," he said, "there's a cab downstairs, and I didn't have the cash to pay the driver. Would you go take care of it? When you come back up, I want to talk to you."

"I'll just bet you do," I said, somewhat annoyed. When I returned, the pluggie was resting on our couch. Hanson was walking back and forth. "All right," I said. "What do you have in mind for our guest?"

"I thought he could stay here tonight. He was lying in a doorway. There was a layer of snow on him."

The kid's clothes were foul and stinking. I didn't even want to come near him. "It looks like he hasn't lit up in a few days," I said. "He'll be out of it for a while."

"I think he's been on the circuit for some time. He looks practically starved."

"Are we going to feed him? Nurse him back and everything?"

Hanson regarded me for a moment. He had a hurt expression. "We have to make a start, Sandy. Somebody sure does."

"He's in that twilight thing they fall into between times. He can't face the world without his brain tickled. It's a conditioned kind of catalepsy, I think. It'll wear off if he doesn't get lit. He ought to come out of it by morning."

Hanson perked up a little, taking this as a sign of my approval. It wasn't, but I had little choice. "I'll watch him tonight," he said.

"No need, I think. Physically he's all right now, except for his eating habits." For the rest of the evening I tried to work, but I couldn't concentrate. The kid just lay there, hiding within his coma. Hanson hovered over him, washing him, trying to get him to drink some soup, doing unimaginative nursing things like that. About midnight I said good night and went to bed. Hanson stayed in the living room.

In the morning I came out to see how he was doing. Hanson had fallen asleep in a chair. The pluggie was gone. So were two stereo speakers and our television. I woke Hanson and gave him some pretty red I told you so messages, but he didn't look very discouraged. He spent the day down in SoHo.

He came back very excited. A pluggie had come to him for help. Hanson told me the story; a young boy, maybe ten or eleven years old, a pluggie for just a few weeks, had become desperate. He had started to panic during the locked-in phase of his addiction.

"I want to get out," said the boy.

"I'll help you," said Hanson.

"How?" said the boy.

Hanson didn't have an answer. He had had so little success that he hadn't even thought that far ahead. But he knew that he couldn't tell the boy that. "Where are your parents?" he asked. The boy turned pale and shook his head. He wasn't going back there. Hanson was stumped. "I can do one of three things," he said. "I can let you go back on the street, and you know what'll happen to you. I can turn you over to the police. Or I can ask you to trust me as a minister of the church."

"Are you really a priest?" asked the boy. Well, Hanson hadn't been ordained yet, but the boy wouldn't understand the difference.

"Yes," said Hanson. "Where are your parents?" He persuaded the boy that Hanson would work as a go-between, seeing that the boy's parents wouldn't treat the youngster harshly. He gave the boy his word that things would turn out all right. The boy gave Hanson an address and a phone number; Hanson wanted the boy to come home with him, but the kid said he had a lot of things to take care of. They were going to meet at noon the next day.

"I can't tell you how happy this makes me," said Hanson.

"I'm glad for you," I said, and I was. Hanson went to the phone and dialed the number. The operator insisted that it didn't exist. Hanson grew worried. He checked the address, and it was made up, also. The next day, the boy never showed up.

A week later a prostitute came up to Hanson and asked him to get her off the street. She was a pluggie; like Suzy, her pimp had introduced her to getting lit and kept her working for him by controlling her current. Hanson promised to find her a job. He brought her home; he explained to me that it would be dangerous for her now in her old neighborhood. I gave up arguing with him after a while. To my total astonishment the girl was still there in the morning, and so were all our belongings. Two days later Hanson found her a job working in Woolworth's. A week later, while checking up on her, he learned that she had worked for three and a half days and then disappeared.

Now Hanson was becoming genuinely frustrated. It seemed that he was beginning to make a little progress, but for some reason the pluggies wouldn't completely accept him. Until they did, they couldn't really accept the help he offered, and he could only make a kind of well-meaning but incomplete effort.

"There's a huge difference between plugging and heroin addiction," he said. "There's a fundamental difference, and it makes my job tougher than you can imagine."

I turned away. "Oh, hell, Hanson," I said, "if you could hear yourself when you talk like that, you'd find out that you're every bit as bad as the ESB study groups you hate so much."

"What do you mean?"

"You told me that everybody's worried about the situation, and nobody's worried about the pluggies. You told me that you were going to change that. Now it turns out that you're fudging the problem yourself, making some kind of sweeping virtuous crusade out of it. You're not helping people. You're justifying your morality."

"All right," said Hanson. "Some kid with enough money flies down and has a cheap, fast implantation. If he makes out all right, no unforeseen brain damage, no cerebral inflammation, no trouble with the police, he still has the option of forgetting the whole thing. He'll go around with the little wires in his head, but he can always just let his hair grow over them. He still hasn't got lit that first time."

"I imagine a lot of pluggies are afraid," I said. "It may take them a while before they do get lit."

"Still, they've spent a lot of money getting wired. They'll try it once, just to see."

"A lot of addicts started by saying, `I'll try it once, just to see.' They thought they were too smart to get hooked."

"Sure," said Hanson. "And the junkies tried it once, and then again, because it felt so good. Maybe they knew the dangers involved, and tried to space it out. They didn't understand the treacherous things happening in their bodies. They didn't know that whatever their intellectual judgments, their bodies needed the junk in the metabolic cycle. But a pluggie doesn't need to get lit. He does it only because it does feel good, which is a vast understatement. Plugging is to shooting heroin as a tree is to a clothespin. So a decision to get lit again is made only on the basis of how the pluggie feels emotionally."

"Why shouldn't a pluggie get lit? Tell me why you think you have the right to tell him he can't."

Hanson frowned. "The point is," he said, "a pluggie can't stay lit all the time. He has to cool down sometime. And when he does, he's as good as dead."

"You can't take them all on your shoulders, Hanson," I said. I knew he was getting caught up in the fallacy of pity. He was going out to save everybody, all by himself.

The morning after that he slept late. When he awoke he came into the living room, where I was putting together a plastic model of a P-51 Mustang. "I'm going away for a while," he said.

I looked up at him. "Anyone I know?" I asked.

"No. I think I need a little vacation."

"By yourself?" He nodded. "Where?"

He hesitated. "Puerto Rico," he said. I stared, feeling a little lump growing in my stomach. There wasn't anything else for me to do.

He left a few days later, having made whatever arrangements were necessary through some contact he had met in SoHo. I never said a thing one way or the other, but my silence perhaps let him know how I felt. I went with him to the airport. He boarded the plane, stopping at the top of the movable stairs to turn and wave; I stood by the visitors' window after the aircraft began rolling toward the runway. Hanson had sure put some of his withering on my heart.

I got a postcard from Puerto Rico about a week later. That was about the worst thing Hanson could have done. His damned innocence sometimes made him do the crudest things possible. Anyway, he said that he had found what he had come for, and was flying back soon.

Well, to skip over some of the next few days, he did return. I met him at the airport; he got off the plane wearing a baseball cap. I knew why. When he got home he took it off to show me the bandage on his head. "It still hurts a little," he said. "The doctor said it will be all right in a couple of days."

"Terrific," I said, in a rather dull voice.

"It was pretty much what I expected," he said, going on as though he had done nothing more than smuggle in some liquor from the Caribbean. "This seedy old doctor, couldn't speak much English. I just pointed to my head and he smiled. I had another guy with me, somebody I was told to look up in

San Juan. He did the translating. It cost me about eight hundred dollars, and another couple of hundred for my `friend.' It wasn't bad; the doctor didn't even have to knock me out."

"And now you're all set for an exciting new adventure," I said.

"You'll have to help me," he said.

"Nope," I said. "I've had enough." There was a strained silence for a few moments. The result was that the next day I had the apartment all to myself. Hanson found a cheap place in SoHo.

He really went to work then. With his own little shaved circle on his head, Hanson was welcomed into the zombie world of the pluggies. He made rapid progress; soon he knew most of the SoHo pluggies by sight, and they knew him. They knew that he was a good man, an honest person, someone they could come to for help. And they did come to him. He always had a few worn-out pluggies sleeping on the floor of his place. He lived a meager life, after what he'd come to be used to; he got some money now and then from the pluggies who weren't completely withdrawn, some money from churches and people who knew what he was trying to do, and some money from me. I wasn't happy about the way he had gone about his work, but I was still his best friend, and I really knew that he was doing a courageous and valuable thing.

I found out after a time that his three little wires were only a disguise. He hadn't wanted to tell me, because he was afraid that eventually word would get back to the

underground, and his credibility would be shot. But I'm not all that stupid. I noticed that he never seemed the least bit dazed, the least bit sullen or aimless. I picked up hints from things that he said. Finally I confronted him. "You've never got lit, have you?" I asked.

"No," he said. "I won't, either. These wires aren't connected to anything." He had had a dummy implantation. The normal apparatus consists of a small electronic package which is cemented to the top of the skull, and a connecting extrusion of plasteel which digs down into the hypothalamus. In Hanson's case, the doctor had merely scraped his scalp and fixed the package into a socket which he dug into the bone of Hanson's skull. The long tail which delved into the brain matter had been broken off and discarded. Now Hanson could even clamp his three wires to a meter man's machine; it would have no effect on him at all.

He was somewhat disappointed that I had learned his secret. I assured him that he was in little danger; I had no plans to do much conversing with his plugging associates, and they had lost the desire and the aptitude to do much research themselves. I was happy, though; I could see what Hanson was doing, and it was a phenomenal thing. It was also very successful, in a modest way. He had become known as "the pluggie priest." This sort of offended his Congregationalist sensibilities, but he was proud of the label, anyway.

One day there was a knock on the door. Hanson was resting in his loft. There were three pluggies living there at the time. One sat in a catatonic stupor, hugging his knees;

the other two were sleeping and would not awaken for nine or ten hours. Hanson went to the door. It was Suzy.

"Hi," he said.

She looked past him, into the room. She spoke softly, uncomfortably. "Remember me?" she said.

"Suzy. Karate Oscar's woman."

"Not any more," she said. "Can I come in?" He nodded, and let her by.

"What's happening?" he asked.

"I'm tired," she said. "I heard you was helping pluggies that got tired."

"I try. I'm not doing all that well. A lot of people come here, and I do all I can. It's not enough. They sometimes go back."

"And sometimes they don't. I got a friend. Reenie. She told me to see you."

"Reenie's a good person. I got her a job with the city," said Hanson.

"Would you help me?" she asked. Hanson smiled.

Suzy was in better shape than the other pluggies who had come to Hanson's loft. She had been a prostitute first, rather than a pluggie who had taken to the life to pay for her electric bill. Her pimp had bound her to him by granting her time on his machine; he was shrewd enough not to let her get lit often enough to damage her commercial value. This was good for Suzy, but agonizing. Finally she couldn't take it any longer. She had to make a decision: Ether run away and go into the pluggie world completely, or run away and break free. Her friend had given her the word and she had come to

Hanson. He was amply rewarded by knowing that without him there would have been no choice.

Suzy soon got over her need to get lit. With time, the memory of the plugging sensations tended to fade. Just as one cannot recall great pain, one has difficulty conjuring up the utter pleasures of one's past. Suzy helped Hanson tend the others. She realized how fortunate she had been, never really reaching the true bottom, the complete hopelessness of some of the pluggies Hanson brought to the loft. She worked with him and respected him. She understood the difficulties and misunderstandings he faced every day. Soon she loved him.

On Hanson's part, he was much too busy to give Suzy more than her share of attention. To him, she was another of his patients, another reclamation job that seemed to be working. I visited often, bringing food, blankets, and money whenever I could. I saw that Hanson had become a hero to Suzy. I could also see that Hanson was submerging himself in his work to the exclusion of everything else. He was hiding.

"I'm a failure," he told me one afternoon.

"How can you say that?" I asked. "You've helped dozens of pluggies back out. You've gone out on your own and persuaded people to give them jobs. You've returned I don't know how many of those young kids to their parents. You've made a source of help where there wasn't the slightest interest before. You've made people conscious of a problem they were ignoring."

"I've helped dozens," he said. "I haven't helped thousands."

"It's the same old argument," I said wearily. "You can't take responsibility for the whole world. You can let other people take up some of the burden, you know. It's just a form of egotism to try to solve the whole thing yourself."

This upset him. He grew impatient. "I have lots of things to do today, Sandy," he said. "I've got lots of people to see. Maybe we can talk again another time." I only shrugged and went home.

Some time later Hanson was arrested for maintaining an establishment for the purposes of promoting plugging. There were several other charges, most of them equally as spurious, brought by neighbors in the community who didn't like the comings and goings of obvious pluggies near their apartments. Hanson was helpless. He had never even imagined that such a thing could be done. He was stunned. He didn't know what to do. They locked him up, and he spent eleven days in the Tombs until I made enough media clamor to get him out.

In the meantime, Suzy had come apart by herself. She couldn't bear the pressure of keeping things going without Hanson. She figured that she needed something; just once, she thought, just one more time. She went to a meter man and got lit. By the time Hanson got out of jail, she was in worse shape than when she had come to him for help.

"What do I do now?" he wanted to know. "What can I do for Suzy?"

"Do you feel responsible for her?" I asked.

"Yes."

"What about the others? They carted off seven or eight kids when they took you."

"I don't worry so much about them," he said. "I'm worried about Suzy. The other kids were sent to a hospital. Suzy's back on the street."

I was gladdened just a little by his words. It seemed to me that his grand idealism was crumbling under the attack of reality. And I was happy that he was finally learning that he was in love with Suzy. I had known that for weeks. "I wish I had heard that Suzy had gone back," I said regretfully. "I would have found her and looked after her while you were locked up."

"I can find her," said Hanson. It didn't take him long, either.

Well, that's mostly it. Hanson devoted much of his time to Suzy after that. In a few months she had recovered completely, and her life went on normally, without the least taint from her plugging days. Hanson told me that people first have to work out their own salvations. It used to sound selfish and cruel, he said, but you sure can't hope to guide others until you know where to go. This time I didn't give him any of that I told you so stuff.

Hanson was right about one thing. There's no way to equate plugging with old-fashioned heroin addiction. There's no T-amine for plugging. There isn't even a methadone analogue. But Hanson believed that there was something that worked. Something that could overcome whatever a person might fall into. We've heard this over and over for hundreds

of years. Every time, people react the same way: It's a heart-warming fantasy.

He was right about another thing, too. Things change. I mean, after all, these days, so many years later, who misses Robert W. Hanson?

I do.

# Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

## The Awesome Menace of the Polarizer

This is New Haven, Connecticut. It is a city not without its large share of New England charm, not without its proud heritage dating from more than a century before the American Revolution, a city not without ... fear!

New Haven has a large and beautiful central green, with its three white, steepled churches. The Elm City is the home of Yale University and the world-famous Peabody Museum. It is the home of Robert W. Hanson, whose fate is inextricably bound to that of Rod Marquand, who, in his secret guise of The Iguana, is in actuality a super-powered battler against crime and iniquity.

What strange destinies have drawn these two men, so disparate in their goals and accomplishments, together in a weird struggle against the massed forces of evil? Let us go back in time, back just a few days, to New York City, to the office of the principal of a great metropolitan high school....

* * * *

"Rod, I'm going to send you to the dispensary, and then we'll send you home for the day. You're obviously in no condition to stay in school. While the nurse is looking at you, I'll call your parents and let them know that you're on your way. I wish you'd tell me what happened. You know, protecting whoever did this to you can only make things worse for yourself, and will end in the same thing happening to someone else. When it does, he may not get off as lightly as you."

Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

Young Rod Marquand, straight-A scholar and star athlete, nodded silently. He couldn't tell Principal Woodcotte the truth: that during the lunch recess he had intercepted a call by Safety Director Madison and had hurried to a location on the far West Side. There, on the lonely rooftop of the riverfront warehouse, he had battled his oldest enemy. The Polarizer, whom Rod had believed to be still safely salted away in a Federal penitentiary. The Polarizer had managed to develop a unique new weapon, an improvement on his earlier wrist-ionizer. Rod, The Iguana, had been defeated, although the Tactical Police Force arrived before The Polarizer could seriously injure him or, worse, remove his mask. After the battle, Rod returned to school to protect his normal identity. But he was wounded badly on the face and body, and still reeling from the effects of The Polarizer's de-molecularizer.

"Yes, sir. It was only some envious members of that Ethnic Group, out for some fun at my expense. I'm positive that they wouldn't bother someone less popular. Thank you for letting me go home; I don't feel very well right now. But when you talk to my parents, please don't tell them how badly I feel. They're both aged and infirm, and the worry might be bad for their health."

"Rod, you're amazing. You've just been roughed-up by a gang of young hoods, and you're concerned only with your parents' feelings. I certainly wish more of my students here were like you."

"May I go now, sir?"

"Certainly, Rod. Go down to see the nurse and she'll give you the yellow slip to go home. Here, let me write you a hall pass."

* * * *

Hanson rode his bicycle down the hill from the Chem Lab. It had rained during the afternoon and he discovered that his hand brakes wouldn't work. He built speed down the long hill, shooting past the Pregnant Oyster and through the light at Grove Street. He zipped around the corner and coasted by the cemetery.

He pedaled on for several blocks until he came to the driveway of his apartment building. He parked the bike in the back, taking his lab manual and notebook out of the basket. They were spotted with water, soaked in stripes from the wet wire pannier.

Hanson walked around to the front of the building, in order to check his mailbox. There wasn't any mail, but he did see a small, shiny brass plaque screwed to the wall of the entry hall. He was certain that he had never seen one there before. It read:

THIS BUILDING

houses the apartment used by

ROBERT WAYNE HANSON

during his years at

Yale University

1966-1970

Hanson laughed to himself. "Those bastards at YBC, I'll bet," he thought. The idea struck him as pretty funny, although the engraved plaque must have cost someone a good bit. He took out his handkerchief and polished the metal. Still smiling, he went down the corridor to his rooms.

Inside, he put his books on his desk and stretched out on the couch. He had nothing to do until dinnertime, and he felt like taking a nap. He was startled to see that the Miro print that he had put on the living room wall above the couch was missing. In its place was another brass plaque, much larger than the other. This one said:

THIS ROOM

was the home of

ROBERT WAYNE HANSON

during the years

1966-1970

Hanson didn't laugh. The concept of the joke still amused him, but he was a little upset that someone had come into his apartment without his permission, removed his favorite print, and permanently mounted a large and altogether unattractive sign on his wall.

"That Benarcek and his preppie sense of humor. There'll probably be pig entrails in the bathtub." Hanson frowned and closed his eyes. He would put off thinking about the Miro print until he had a chance to talk to Justin and the rest of the clowns at the radio station.

* * * *

Rod worried all the way home on the subway. The Polarizer had beaten him badly, and, though the Crimemaster had been fooled by Rod's display of sheer will-power, Rod knew that he had nearly been killed. Only the fact that The Iguana's electromagnetic webrope had jammed the de-molecularizer in time had saved Rod's life. But Rod was certain that The Polarizer would not be satisfied with a private victory; even now the King of Evil would be plotting an even more ignominious and public end of The Iguana. Rod was sure that an invitation to the trap would not be long in coming.

There was only one thing to do. He had to get help from someone. But who? Who was the leading physicist in the country? And, moreover, could Rod trust him with the secret of his dual identity? He couldn't face The Polarizer again without something to neutralize the effects of the Valence Wizard's uncanny weapons.

"Fortunately," Rod thought, "spring vacation begins tomorrow. I can get help and be back before school starts again. Also, fortunately. Dad is aware of my secret. He can make up some excuse for my absence that will satisfy Mom and the guys." Mr. Marquand had dramatically discovered Rod's concealed role as The Iguana several weeks previously. Rod had just been severely beaten by Kobol, the cybernetic

man-thing programmed to pulverize Manhattan by Diabor The Devastator. Mr. Marquand came upon his son's twisted and inert body by accident that evening, as he walked along Bleecker Street. Many other passers-by had avoided the boy, but Mr. Marquand knelt and lifted off the fearsome mask. He gasped when he recognized his son, and, hailing a cab, took him home. He hid the costume of The Iguana to protect the already shattered nerves of his wife. Soon Rod's athletic young body recovered completely, in time to defeat Kobol and wreck the insane plans of Diabor The Devastator.

Safe in his family's Chelsea apartment, Rod studied the piles of scientific journals to which he subscribed. After much deliberation, he came to the conclusion that there was only one man who could possibly aid him in his effort to save humanity from the megalomaniac scheme of The Polarizer: Dr. Waters, head of the plasmonics department at Ivy University. Rod called the Port Authority information number, and prepared for his trip to New Aulis in the morning.

* * * *

Spring vacation! Hanson was grateful down through his very bones. He hadn't needed a vacation this much in years. He had two long papers to write, but he already had them pretty well thought out, so that he could spend the time just lying around his parents' home in Cleveland.

His father met him at Hopkins Airport, asking him the same questions as always: how was he getting along, did he need anything, had he knocked up any Vassar girls ha ha. His mother would ask him about the food, of course. Everything

was always the same, which is the reason that he wanted to come home for the rest.

Everything was always the same, except for the bronze inscription bolted to the porch of the house on E. 147th Street. Hanson dropped his suitcase when he saw it. He walked up to the porch and read it:

THIS HOUSE

was the birthplace of

ROBERT WAYNE HANSON

november 15,1947

* * *

Marker donated by

The Cleveland Historical Society

"What's this, Dad? How long has this been here?"

"I don't know, Bobby. I never saw it before."

Hanson was getting confused. This was a bit too much for a silly joke by some of the guys at school. This unsightly testimonial on the front of his parents' house looked very expensive; when could it have been put there? Neither of his parents had ever seen it before, and were sure that no one had put it there that morning. Hanson idly wondered if there

were a little marker now in the delivery room at St. Ann's Hospital.

On a whim he called the Cleveland Historical Society. A female voice answered his questions, and transferred him to the Bureau of Landmarks and Monuments. A helpful clerk in the department informed him that the plaque had been put on the house over eight years ago.

"But I was only twelve years old then," protested Hanson.

"Yes, sir. Our records show that the house at that address was declared a local landmark, and funds were appropriated for the plaque."

"In the first place, we've lived there for over twenty years, and we've never seen that thing before. And even if it were there, which is impossible, why would the Historical Society put up markers for me?"

"I don't understand, I'm afraid. We have the records right here in our files. You must have overlooked the plaque all this time. Perhaps it was behind a bush which you've recently removed."

"But it's for me! I'm Robert W. Hanson, and I haven't done anything!"

"What was that?"

"I said, I'm Robert Hanson."

The voice sounded annoyed and impatient. "I see. A joke. You're Robert Wayne Hanson. And I'm Margaret Chase Smith. Good afternoon."

* * * *

"Mr. Marquand?"

"Yes, sir?"

"I'm Dr. Waters. I hope your trip out from New York was pleasant."

"Yes, sir. Very much so. I caught up on some thin-film abstracts that I've been wanting to get to. I'd like to thank you for taking time out to see me. You have no idea how serious my problem is."

The physicist, surprisingly young and athletic for one of his intellectual attainments, smiled. "I'm always glad to help along a struggling scholar. Are you planning to apply to old Ivy?"

"Oh, I've already been accepted by Yale, Harvard, and Princeton," said Rod shyly, "but I think that I'm going to turn them all down and go to Cambridge. I'll get to do some travelling that way, too."

"Very interesting. Now, as to your problem..."

Rod nodded, rising and coming closer to Dr. Waters' desk.

"I must be sure, first of all," he said, "it is vital that we are completely alone. Is there any way for anyone to overhear our conversation?"

Dr. Waters looked amused. "This is somewhat more melodramatic than the usual confrontation with undergraduates. But, all right, just a moment." He pressed a button on the intercom on his desk. "Miss Clement, please see that we're not interrupted for any reason. Thank you."

"Fine," said Rod. "Now you will understand my need for secrecy. First, I must reveal to you that I am, in actuality, The Iguana."

"What!" exclaimed Dr. Waters. "You! A mere lad! If what you say is true, I'm utterly amazed. From the motion pictures

I had estimated that The Iguana must be a marvelously trained adult with years of academic and athletic experience behind him."

Rod opened his suitcase, removing his brightly colored costume. "I anticipated your doubts; they're quite reasonable, actually. Watch." He uncoiled his electromagnetic webrope; then he pointed at a bird flying past Dr. Waters' open window. Rod threw the weighted end of the webrope expertly, catching the helpless bird within the coils. He pulled the bird into the room, disconnected the webrope, and freed the bird once more.

"Yes," said Dr. Waters, "I can see that you are, indeed, the famous Iguana. You have my respect, young man, although I don't understand why you insist on tackling such dangerous assignments instead of contenting yourself with more normal pursuits."

Rod just smiled, folding the webrope compactly into its place in his costume's belt.

"And I don't understand why you decided to reveal your identity to me. That could have been a dangerous move."

"I looked into your background first," Rod said. "You are the pre-eminent and most respected man in your field, and I need someone of your caliber to advise me."

"I see," said Dr. Waters, sitting back and making a steeple of his two forefingers. "I am, of course, flattered. But do go on with your story."

"Yes, sir. I must explain to you how my webrope works. A few months ago I stumbled onto the basic principles of magnetism, the subatomic binding force which holds all things

together. Of course, as you know, magnetism is an oversimplified term to use to describe the actual mysterious play of electrical forces within the atom. But, in any event, I have learned how it is possible to align the electrons of the surface shells of any group of atoms, so that the molecule will be irresistibly and permanently attracted to the magnetic center. This center is, of course, my webrope. It is activated by a certain frequency of radio waves transmitted by this sending device on my belt. When it is operating, the webrope will adhere with all the strength of the limitless power of the atom to whatever it touches. When I shut off the transmitter, the webrope drops off, and the object falls loose, totally unharmed."

"That's utterly fantastic!" cried Dr. Waters. "What a boon to mankind that discovery will be when you decide to publish it."

"Yes," said Rod somberly. "Since the initial breakthrough, I have refined the mechanism even further. These controls over here permit me to throw the webrope as a thin but incredibly strong line, or as an inescapable net, as I choose. I have employed the same principles in these patches on my gloves and boots, so that I may, with some difficulty, climb vertical walls and stand upon ceilings."

"And, with all this, you need me? That seems unlikely."

"You are being modest," said Rod. "I am faced with a desperate battle, the most dangerous since the beginning of my career as a defender of Freedom. I must face The Polarizer, who, since our last encounter, has developed a weapon that I am powerless to analyze, much less defeat.

Your resources here, in the Department of Plasmonics, and your own superior knowledge, may be all that stands between civilization as we know it and abject slavery under that maniacal monster, The Polarizer."

The professor rose from his desk, his face flushed and his voice shaking with rage. "`Maniac'?! `Monster,' am I? Because I recognize my manifest destiny, my fate, my right to rule the world? I, Dr. Bertram Waters, The Polarizer, I will rule, for the simple reason that no one can stop me!" He laughed, pushing back his chair. He came around his desk, but Rod had already reached for his webrope. The Polarizer shook his head.

"Flee, you idiot. Flee before I de-molecularize you on the spot. Now we both know each other's true identities; but it will do you no good at all, while I can play with you through the avenue of those whom you are so weak as to love! Go! We shall meet again soon--for the final time!"

Rod fumbled his suitcase closed, knowing that he was helplessly off-guard. He hurried from the office with the demented laughter of The Polarizer ringing in his ears. He had nowhere else to turn; the regular law-enforcement authorities were no match at all for The Polarizer's overwhelming might. He knew that he must defeat the madman himself.

* * * *

Bob Hanson walked through the garden, along the winding paths that he had known so well as a child. At the far end of the garden was the goldfish pond. He had always loved the pool; it had been the first place that he had ever seen live fish. When he had first started school he used to climb up on the stone pedestal and look into the water. His mother had

told him that the bits of yellow and orange were the fish; the sudden splashes he knew to be frogs. In those days the garden and the pond were places warm with their own childhood holiness, and the feeling still hung over them, so that this visit, his first in several years, took on the significance of a pilgrimage.

Hanson paused to read the familiar words on the stone pedestal. The words were cast on a bronze slab, and told of the deaths by fire of scores of children and teachers early in the century. The new school that had been built on the site had been named Memorial, and this is where Hanson had begun his education.

The pedestal was larger than it had been years ago, but the plaque was still stuck on low, so that he could hardly read it without stooping. Above it was another that said:

Memorial School

ROBERT W. HANSON

attended this school and doubtless

formulated here those ideals

which guided his later career

* * *

"We Must All Make Sacrifices"

Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

* * *

Plaque presented by the

Cleveland Board of Education

Hanson frowned, his mind moving rapidly to no purpose, like a rat in a solutionless maze. It had been nine years since he had graduated from the elementary school; he saw that a new wing had been added. He went up the front steps and, although the children were on vacation, the doors were open and the teachers appeared to be at work. He walked through the dim, drafty halls, remembering how the rooms had seemed to him then. He marveled at the change in scale: the auditorium used to seem so immense!

Here was Room 111. Old Miss Hatterley, third grade. Miss Hatterley had taught him about Sacagawea and how to do book reports. She had probably already retired. In the room, of course, was a bronze marker proclaiming that Robert Wayne Hanson had sat in one of these tiny chairs and learned to spell.

Room 216. Mrs. Loveness. He had had a secret crush on her when he was nine years old. Fractions and Peru. Another plaque on the wall.

"Excuse me, but there's not supposed to be anyone but teachers here today. If you're visiting, you can check in at the principal's office."

"I'm sorry," said Hanson, a bit startled. "I used to go to school here. I'm home from college this week and I thought I'd look around."

"I see," said the teacher, a young woman not much older than Hanson himself. "I went here, too. Perhaps we were here at the same time. I'm Robin Leonard, kindergarten and first grade."

Hanson took her hand and smiled. "I'm Bob Hanson. I'm a senior at Yale."

Miss Leonard looked at him strangely. "The Robert Hanson went to this school, too, you know. And he went to Yale. What a funny coincidence."

"The Robert Hanson? You know, until a short while ago I had always thought of myself as the Robert Hanson. I've never heard of any other."

The young teacher was faintly shocked. "That is unusual. After all, you went to school here. This is Robert W. Hanson Memorial School. It was nice meeting you, Mr., er, Hanson. If you want to look around any more, perhaps you'd better see Mr. Ladely in his office on the first floor."

Hanson nodded absently. He was beginning to get frightened. Robert W. Hanson Memorial School?

* * * *

Rod Marquand was half-crazed with fear. How could he protect all of his friends and relatives against the senseless attacks of the murderous Polarizer? There were too many people, too many opportunities. The only thing to do was to meet The Polarizer first, and defeat him. Rod's superior intellect had enabled him to beat enemy after enemy, each

aided by superscientific gadgetry and superhuman powers. But none of them posed the threat represented by The Polarizer.

And the mad Doctor Waters could follow his every move, choosing Rod's unguarded moments for his attack.

Rod worked for hours on end, not stopping for food or rest. His father told Rod's friends and his mother that he had a great deal of schoolwork to make up, but even Mr. Marquand did not realize the extent of the danger. Rod sweated and cursed over the problem, but at last, nearing the point of exhaustion, he found an answer.

The Interstitial Molecular Insulationizer.

This electromagnetic device would serve to insulate the single-molecule surface layers of all objects within its effective operating radius. Thus, theoretically. The Polarizer's ionizing de-molecularizer would not be able to penetrate the zone of protection, and the weapon's awesome potential for destruction would be nullified.

Just as Rod was putting the final chromium touches to his jury-rigged working model, his father ran into his workroom.

"Rod! The Polarizer has jammed all radio and television networks and is broadcasting a message. He is challenging you to a battle-to-the-death under The Clock at the Biltmore. You can't meet him, son! He sounds serious!"

Rod gazed at his father tiredly. "He is, Dad. This is it, I'm afraid. This is a battle that is larger than you can know. This is a battle to save everything that we've worked for since our ancestors left their trees to the apes. But I think I have it." He showed the machine to his father.

"What is it, son?"

"An electromagnetic Interstitial Molecular Insulationizer. Now, how do I get in touch with The Polarizer?"

His father frowned. "He doesn't want an answer, fearing that he may be tricked. He just expects you to show up at noon tomorrow."

"All right," said Rod resolutely, "then noon it will be. Wake me at eleven."

"I see you brought one of your little Radio Shack toys," said The Polarizer with a sneer. "I suppose you think that piece of junk will save your scaly hide."

"Yes," said The Iguana sternly, "and if you don't surrender now, and agree to return to prison to finish out your sentence, I'll be forced to use it."

"I don't think so!" laughed the Fiend of Crime, firing a burst from his wrist-ionizer at Rod's machine. The IMI began to haze over with a rainbow aura of free ions, and before it could be activated the Insulationizer was destroyed.

"Damn it," growled Rod. He knew that now he was in for a tough time.

Just then, fortunately for him, a man walked into the lobby of the New Biltmore, standing between the two costumed duelers, apparently unaware of the significance of the combat.

"I'm supposed to meet this cheese from Smith here," said the intruder. "You haven't seen her, have you?"

"Hanson!" screamed The Polarizer. "How did you get here? Get out! Get out of here before you're hurt! I worked too hard, for too many years for you to lose it for me now."

Rod took advantage of the interruption to do some quick thinking. The de-molecularizer could easily nullify the effects of The Iguana's webrope under normal circumstances. "If only ... I can ... jam ... the circuitbreakers ... overload ... it might be enough..."

Rod aimed the webrope well. He flung it out, covering The Polarizer's wrist-ionizers and the de-molecularizer as well. The Polarizer grinned evilly. "That didn't help you before, and it won't help you now," he said. Meanwhile, Hanson fell back, astonished, hiding behind a stuffed plush couch.

Rod held the circuitbreakers in place, oblivious to the painful current that ran through his fingers. The weapons of the two masked men sparked under the strains put upon them. A weird, low humming filled the room.

"My God, what's that?" thought Rod. "It doesn't seem to be my circuitry. Perhaps The Polarizer is in more trouble than he thought." The Iguana glanced at his adversary. The Polarizer's face was hidden to a large extent by his grotesque mask, but Rod could see the frown of concentration and concern.

The humming sound grew louder.

"It's him!" shouted The Polarizer. "It's Hanson! Turn it off! I didn't keep his brain alive for fifteen years to have it end like this! Turn it off before--"

"Aaarrgghh!" Rod was thrown back against the wall of the lobby by a tremendous explosion. He hit the wall heavily, hurting his shoulder and falling to the floor. He couldn't focus his eyes through the smoke, and he lost consciousness.

When he awoke, he saw that the hotel lobby was entirely demolished. The body of Hanson was lying in bits all over the ruined carpet. No sign of The Polarizer could be seen. Apparently he had been buried under the tons of rubble. Rod examined himself gingerly. His uniform had been tattered by the blast, but outside of some very painful burns and bruises, he seemed to be uninjured. He heard the sounds of footsteps--no doubt the police. He decided to leave the mopping up to them, and fled the scene.

* * * *

"How do you feel?" asked his father.

"All right, I guess. Relieved, too, that the threat of The Polarizer is finished for good. Say, what's wrong with Mom?" Mrs. Marquand was sprawled on the family's living room floor, evidently unconscious.

"You see, the police decided to televise the entire conflict. We watched it all, right there on Channel 9. After the explosion, when they moved in for a close-up of you, we saw that your mask had been torn off. Your mother recognized you then. She went into a state of shock, I believe. We both thought that you were dead."

"Well, I'm all right now," said Rod, "but don't you think that we ought to call an ambulance for Mom?"

"Good thinking, son. But tell me, what exactly happened?"

"I think that I have a pretty clear picture. That young man that interrupted us--"

"Hanson?" asked his father, dialing the phone.

"Yes. He wasn't a real human being."

"What? Not a real person? Why, how could that be?"

"He was an MIS, or Modular Identity Synthecator. He was, in other words, an android."

"Android?"

"Right, Dad. Like a robot, only more lifelike. The Polarizer had built a perfect replica of a human being, and housed within it an actual, living human brain."

"The brain of Robert W. Hanson!"

"Exactly. The Polarizer--who was, incidentally, Dr. Waters of the famous Ivy Plasmonics Laboratory--had built the android and controlled him through Hanson's brain, feeding the mind with a consistent but false set of surrogate memories. Apparently Hanson was to play a part in The Polarizer's scheme of world conquest. It is merely a strange coincidence that the android happened by at just that time."

"It is ironic, at that. The Polarizer, defeated by his own demonic creation," said Mr. Marquand, holding the limp form of his wife.

"It just occurred to me that Dr. Waters may have been the very person who stole Robert Hanson's body from the catafalque, as the corpse rested in state fifteen years ago. That would fit in with The Polarizer's last comments. What a genius, to have kept the brain alive all that time. If only he had tamed that genius to work for the cause of justice."

"Yes," said Mr. Marquand. "But what caused the explosion?"

"I believe I have the answer. As I was building up the power in my belt-transformer, the frequency from the transmitter shifted just slightly. It's possible that the frequency was precisely that which could cause a feedback

reaction in the sensitive system of the MIS; thus, the android's own power supply shorted and caused the whole thing to explode."

"How fortunate for all of us."

"Yes," agreed Rod solemnly. "And now, I guess my career as The Iguana has ended at the same time as that of The Polarizer."

"Yes, son. And I can't say that I'm sorry. It's good to have you back."

"It's good to be back, Dad," said Rod, peeking through the blinds to see if the ambulance had arrived yet.

* * * *

The announcer's voice droned on, carried by all television networks simultaneously. "...filing past. The coffin is, of course, closed. Within are gathered the pieces of the artificial body used by the late Dr. Bertram Waters, The Polarizer, to sustain the mind and brain of Robert Wayne Hanson. We are honoring the great man who died fifteen years ago, on May 19, 2008: Robert Hanson, who died again just a matter of days ago. He was a superior man whose first eulogic honors were interrupted by the mad designs of a master criminal.

"Robert Wayne Hanson rests in state, and we mourn his passing anew. What he might have accomplished had he been given Dr. Waters' second chance at life is left to speculation, but--"

Across the country, in hundreds of thousands of homes, hundreds of thousands of unshaven men called into their kitchens, asking, "Baby, who the hell was this Robert Hanson?"

Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

## Heartstop

In the nearby towns, places like Indian Bog and Leeper, they still talk about "the Gremmage murders." In the town of Gremmage itself, though, they don't talk about them at all. Those murders happened a long time ago, and there are always new people and new things happening in Gremmage.

This is despite the fact that Gremmage has to be one of the most neglectable places in all of Pennsylvania, if not the country. There isn't even a good-sized shopping center to drive around in. When a man wants to teach his daughter how to park her Mustang, he has to take her five, ten miles away just to find the right kind of yellow lines. And that's today. It was even worse fifteen years ago.

Now there's an interstate highway that skirts the town; there's an exit, but it's diabolically placed, about thirty yards on the far side of an overpass, so you can't see it coming. Between the overpass and the exit there is a small green sign that says Gremmage, with an arrow. Of course, at interstate speeds, you have maybe a squint and a half from the time you leave the shade of the overpass until you're to the sign. If you read the thing, before you finish the two syllables and pointer you've passed the exit. And there's a bush growing up in front of the green sign, and it doesn't look like the highway people are going to do anything about trimming it. So either you know where you're going and look for the exit, or you get off completely by accident and stupidity. In either case, you deserve what you get.

But, again, that's today. Fifteen years ago, a traveler didn't even have that obscure green sign. A weary salesman could only stop along the narrow blacktop road and try to get information from a farmer. "Yeah," the farmer would say, "there's a town a ways from here, maybe seven or eight miles. I can never remember the name of it, though. You just go on here `til you come to it." The farmer would pause, relishing the bewildered, unhappy look on the salesman's face. "You'll recognize the town," the farmer would say slowly. "There's a cannon on the square. These here farms don't have no cannons, nohow." The farmer wouldn't grin until the salesman had climbed back into his dusty car and driven off toward Gremmage.

At least the information was accurate. Fifteen years ago, Gremmage was about seven or eight miles from a lot of farms. And the salesman wouldn't have any trouble at all, once he located the town. Fifteen years ago, before the interstate, there weren't any motels, no Holidays Inn, no Qualities Court, no Howards Johnson. So the poor salesman would be little cheered by the sight of the meager row of shops along Ridge Street. Particularly if it was after six o'clock (three o'clock on Saturdays); then there wouldn't be a single store open, where he could even find out about hotel rooms. Except the diner, of course. Mrs. Perkins' diner was pretty dependable. So that's where the salesman ended up, out of desperation.

There was a slight haze of burnt grease in the diner, but otherwise it seemed like a pleasant enough place. Mrs. Perkins didn't have the time to bother much with decorations.

The result was an establishment that was plain without being sterile. The atmosphere was purely hick town (no, not rural. Really and truly hick). The salesman, after too many hours on the road, found it nearly refreshing. Almost.

"Can I take your order, sir?" asked the waitress. The salesman looked up tiredly. The girl was young, high school age, probably working part-time in the diner to earn money for movie magazines.

"Can I see a menu?" asked the salesman. The girl nodded and reached past the salesman to pull the menu from its place behind the napkin container. There was nothing listed on it that could set Mrs. Perkins' diner apart from any of several thousand like it anywhere in America. That was one of its charms. It was almost a reflex action for the salesman to order the baked meat loaf, mashed potatoes, green beans, and coffee. He always studied the menu, and he always ordered the same thing. His wife, back home in Stroudsburg, always ordered eggplant Parmesan. His son always ordered cheeseburgers. But there was some kind of exotic, wistful hope that someday someone would come up with something tremendously exciting on his menu. The salesman always wondered, if that were ever to happen, whether or not he'd order it.

Some minutes later, the waitress brought the meat loaf dinner. The salesman muttered a thank you. The waitress did not go away. She stood by his booth; the salesman wondered what he had done wrong. "You're new in town, aren't you?" she asked.

He just looked at her. He didn't say anything.

"The reason I say that, I know just about everybody in Gremmage," she said. "It's not that big of a town."

"No," said the salesman, chewing his food slowly, "no, it's not."

"Are you from New York?" she asked.

"Stroudsburg."

"Oh." She fidgeted nervously. The salesman was sure that she was going to ask him for something. She was pretty enough, he guessed, in a way that would be immature whatever her age. Her hair was a dull carrot color, tied into two short braids. Her face was so lacking in memorable features as to be indescribable. She spoke in a low, husky voice which the salesman found vaguely unpleasant. "Do you have business here in Gremmage?" she asked.

"No, none at all. I was just seeing the sights." The girl stared for a moment, then laughed. The salesman smiled. "I was wondering, though," he said, "if there was a hotel around here. I don't feel much like driving any more tonight."

"No," said the waitress. "No hotels. But if you go over to Aunt Rozji's, she'll probably have a guest room vacant. She usually does."

"Is she your aunt?"

The waitress shook her head. "We all call her that. She's old enough to be anybody's aunt."

"All right," said the salesman, "I'll try that. Can you give me directions? Maybe I can drop you somewhere."

"No, that's okay," said the girl. "Thank you. I don't get off here for a while yet. But if you want to wait a few minutes, Old Man Durfee comes in every night about now. He could

take you over there. Aunt Rozji doesn't like to rent her rooms to just anyone, you see. But if Old Man Durfee took you over there, and if you told her that I sent you, why, I guess it would be all right."

"Old Man Durfee, huh?"

"Yes," said the waitress. "Why don't you have a piece of pie while you're waiting?"

"A piece of pie, then," said the salesman, sighing. "While I'm waiting for Old Man Durfee. Who'll take me to Aunt Rozji. This is a very folksy town you have here."

The waitress smiled. "Thank you. It's not very big, though."

"No," he muttered, "it's not very big." She went back behind the counter and brought him a piece of apple pie and some more coffee.

"Do you want your check now, Mr., uh, Mr.--"

"Newby," said the salesman. "My name's Newby."

"Well," said the waitress, "my name's Lauren. Do you want anything else?"

"Like Bacall, right?" asked Newby.

"Sort of," she said. "Only my last name's Kromberger." She put the check down by his plate and went away again, this time disappearing into the kitchen. Newby ate his dessert slowly, wondering if he could leave the diner and drive off without looking like a fool. He had gone through a complex set of arrangements with the girl; he would be too embarrassed now to tell her just to forget the whole thing. He sneered at his own idiocy. He would never see Lauren Kromberger again. What possible difference could it make,

what she thought of him? He ought to pay his check and leave without a word. But, truthfully, he didn't feel like driving any more. He might as well wait for this Old Man Durfee. Anyway, Newby was getting curious about him.

The salesman had finished his pie and was just taking the last lukewarm gulp of coffee when the door swung open. An incredibly broken-down man came into the diner. Newby had no doubt this was Old Man Durfee, he who would be Newby's guide through the shaded, crickety roads of Gremmage to the mysterious rooming house of Aunt Rozji. If the old man were any indication, Newby thought, maybe the weary traveler would be better advised to toss a brick through a plate-glass window and accept a night's lodging from the county.

Old Man Durfee was probably not all that old. To Newby, he seemed to be in his early fifties. His hair was long, hanging in greasy curls behind his ears and over his collar. The man's face was lined deeply, and the growth of stubble and the cracked, swollen lips gave him an appearance which was at the same time both repellent and pitiable. His eyes were nearly closed by the heavy pouches which limited them, and he gazed at Newby briefly through red, watery slits. He wore a faded plaid shirt and a pair of ancient corduroy trousers, which were much too short for him. He had no socks, and his sharp, filthy ankles hung between the torn cuffs of the pants and his decaying slippers. He carried a dirty blue towel. He looked at Newby again and mumbled something; then he took a seat at the counter. After a few seconds he stood and shuffled slowly to one of the booths. Newby watched him

without emotion. Old Man Durfee sat in the booth, then rose one more time and moved around to the opposite seat.

"You know," said Newby, "if you sit in that other booth behind you, and I go to the counter, and you come here, we'll have mate in three moves."

"I couldn't find the right place," said Old Man Durfee.

"A lot of us have that trouble," said Newby.

"I have a regular place. I come in every night, and sit in the same place. Sometimes I forget which it is, though."

"Well, good night," said Newby, getting up to go. Just then, Lauren the waitress returned.

"Do you play chess?" she asked. "I heard you speaking just now."

"Yeah," said Newby. "I carry a little magnetic board with me when I travel. There's nothing else to do." For some reason, Lauren giggled. Newby shrugged and headed for the door. "I'd like to play," said Old Man Durfee. Newby stopped suddenly, halfway to the door. The drunk's voice had been loud, clear, and authoritative. "I used to be pretty good."

"I have to go," said Newby, not turning around.

"You had time for the pie," said Lauren. "You can stay for a game. Old Man Durfee just lives to play chess. I wish I knew how. Besides, he's going to take you over to Aunt Rozji's, isn't he?"

The salesman turned around and went back to his booth. "Okay," he said. "I suppose the fates are conspiring against me."

Lauren frowned slightly. "You don't have to, if you don't want to," she said. "I just think it would be nice."

# Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

"Daviolsokoff vs. Drean," said Old Man Durfee. "Copenhagen, 1926. Remember the second game? The Forgotten Rook. A real masterpiece."

"Were you there?" asked Newby.

Old Man Durfee stared for a moment, his red eyes narrowing even more. He coughed, and the wet, thick sound disgusted Newby. "No," said the drunk. "I read about it. I just read about it, that's all."

"What difference does it make?" asked Lauren.

"I just want to know what I'm up against," said Newby. "I've heard about chess hustlers before, you know. I know how you small town types are always gunning for people like me."

"We don't get many people like you," said Old Man Durfee.

"This town isn't so big," said Lauren.

"No, it's not," said Newby. "I wish it was. Then we could all go bowling or something."

"They have bowling hustlers, too," said Lauren. The salesman just nodded.

"I just like to read about chess," said Old Man Durfee. "I don't get to play very often. I read, though. I've read just about every word on chess there is in town."

"It's not a very big town," said Newby sarcastically.

"No, it's not," said Lauren.

There was an uncomfortable silence. Newby toyed with the dishes and objects on the table top. He was very aware of a low mechanical humming from the kitchen, and of a flickering tube in the fluorescent lights. "Well," he thought, "I'll just get up, say goodbye, and duck out. This is infantile. It's turning

into a scene from Marty, for Pete's sake." He didn't leave, though. A minute later, the door of the diner opened again, and an old woman came in.

"Aunt Rozji!" cried Lauren. "What an incredible coincidence!"

Newby just snorted and turned to observe the woman. She was very old. Her steps were tiny and so obviously painful that Newby wondered why she didn't spend her days on a cranked-up hospital bed. She was thin, gaunt; cracked leather shrunken on a frame of spun glass; mere purposeless tufts of white hair; erratic motions so bizarre that gestures could not be distinguished from involuntary spasms; a complex bed of wrinkles and lines that led the observer's eye away from hers--Newby knew that he might never learn the color of her irises; a black dress that drooped between knee and ankle, decorated with pink and green floral specks, and a pair of huge, square, black shoes. She moved slowly, bent over, squeezed closer to the moist earth every hour. She wouldn't die for a while, though; like a battered wreck of a car, she wouldn't be worth trading in. While she could perform the slightest function in the world, she would be kept around.

"We were just talking about you, dear," said Old Man Durfee, rising from the booth and helping her to take a seat.

"Were you?" she said. Her voice was cracked, as dry as the old drunk's was saturated. She spoke in a heavy European accent, some strange Slavic influence. "I was thinking about you, too. I came down."

Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

"She doesn't come in very often," said Lauren to Newby. "She's a little frail to be making the walk from her house."

"I'm amazed that she came at all," said Newby.

"And surprised that she arrived just as we finished speaking of her, eh?" said Old Man Durfee. The drunk didn't wait for Newby's reaction. He turned back to Aunt Rozji. "This young man plays chess, dear."

"Chess?" said Aunt Rozji, turning to peer around the corner of her booth. "You play chess? Then you came to the right place. Young Durfee plays chess. Did he tell you?"

"Yes," said Newby, sighing, realizing that the final nail had been driven in place, the last brick cemented to wall him up for the night in Gremmage.

"He needs a place to stay tonight," said Lauren. "We've already set up a game for him with Old Man Durfee, but he has to be back on the road in the morning. I thought maybe you could rent him a guest room for the night."

"Rent?" said Aunt Rozji. "Shueblik, if he wants to play Young Durfee, I won't ask him to pay."

"That's very kind," said Newby. "But I'd be happy to."

"No, no, no," said Aunt Rozji. "You give me happiness by playing Young Durfee. It has been such a long time."

"I'm glad I drove through, then," said the salesman. "It sounds like you haven't had a chess-playing stranger in quite a while."

"That's true," said Lauren. "But the other travelers find something else to do."

"Gremmage has a lot to offer," said Old Man Durfee.

"For such a small town," said Lauren.

"No," said Aunt Rozji, "it's not a very big town. But it tailors itself, you will find. It fills your needs. Tonight, it is chess. Young Lauren, find us the board."

The waitress bent down behind the counter for a few seconds. Newby sipped some of the stale water from the glass by his dishes. He heard a rattling of silverware and the heavy sliding of bottles. He wondered what sort of an opponent Old Man Durfee would be. He didn't especially care.

"I found it!" said Lauren. She waved a flimsy cardboard chessboard, with squares colored black and orange. It had been a long time since Newby had seen a chessboard with orange squares.

"The pieces?" asked Aunt Rozji.

"They're here, too," said Lauren. She held up a grease-stained paper sack.

"Fine," said Old Man Durfee.

"Fine," said Newby. "Should you go get Mrs. Perkins? Maybe she'll want to watch this battle of the century."

"No," said Lauren. "She has to get ready for breakfast in the morning. She's a busy little bee."

"I wonder what she does for fun around here," said Newby idly.

"She takes mambo lessons," said the waitress. "Over at the Y." Newby winced.

"Well, then," said Old Man Durfee, as Lauren opened the cheap board on the counter and everyone else took seats, "I think you should have white."

"Thank you," said Newby.

"Not at all," said the drunk. "I do have the home court advantage, so to speak."

"We're all rooting for Young Durfee," said Aunt Rozji. "It's nothing against you, you understand."

"Sure," said Newby. "He's the hometown boy." Old Man Durfee snickered.

The two men wordlessly arranged their pieces. Newby just wanted to get the game over with as quickly as possible, drive Aunt Rozji back to her house, get a good night's sleep, and flee the entire town at first light. This was not his idea of the most entertaining way of spending an evening.

"Your move?" asked Old Man Durfee.

Newby exhaled heavily, reached out, and moved his pawn to Queen Four.

"Ah, the Queen's Gambit, an excellent choice," said the drunk. "A conservative opening. The king-side openings lead to more spectacular games. You've taken the opportunity of seizing the center of the board, a good strategic idea, backing up your threat with immediate protection from your queen. You are trying to tempt me into surrendering a defensive position in exchange for the pawn which you shall move to Queen's Bishop Four. Shall I take it? Let us see!" The old man moved his own pawn to Queen Four, and smiled at Newby.

"Playing with Old Man Durfee is fun," said Lauren. "He knows so much about the game. I can learn a lot just from watching."

Newby only nodded. The drunk was a little strange; the salesman wondered just how much about chess Old Man

Durfee really knew. Newby decided to move off the usual opening routines. He posted his knight at King's Bishop Three.

"Wonderful, wonderful!" cried Old Man Durfee. "You see, Aunt Rozji, you see, Miss Kromberger, how his knight defends the original pawn move, while itself strains forward to the attack. A most practical move, and one I entirely expected. The pawn allurement I spoke of will no doubt have to be postponed through this development. I can find no fault with Mr. Newby's play. I shall make it myself." Old Man Durfee moved his knight to King's Bishop Three.

"An axis of symmetry forms through the middle of the board," whispered Lauren.

"Are you afraid, Young Durfee?" asked Aunt Rozji. "Is that why you mimic each of your opponent's moves? That cannot be wise. Do not forget that he has the advantage of the first play."

"Then watch," said Old Man Durfee, laughing gently.

"For Pete's sake," thought Newby. Without hesitation, he moved a pawn to King Three.

"Good God, man!" cried the drunk. "What have you done?"

"I've moved," said Newby.

"Yes," said Old Man Durfee, "but are you sure?"

"Is something wrong?" asked Lauren.

"Terribly," said the drunk. "Our friend has blundered badly. He has as good as lost the game, here on the third move."

"Perhaps you should allow him to retract his move," said Aunt Rozji mildly.

"All right, then," said Old Man Durfee.

Newby smiled. "Can I have a Coke?" he asked. Lauren nodded and went to fetch it. "My move will stand," he said. The drunk shrugged.

"I can see that Mr. Newby has bottled up one of his bishops," said Aunt Rozji. "That can't be a good idea."

"No, it isn't," said Old Man Durfee. "Besides, he has moved a pawn instead of developing a piece. That will hurt him later on." He moved his own pawn to King Three.

"Now, why in heaven's name did you do that, too?" asked Lauren.

The drunk made a funny expression. "Charity," he said. Aunt Rozji laughed.

Newby still said nothing. He was making the preparatory moves of the Colle system, and apparently the drunk didn't recognize them. Old Man Durfee would be in for a surprise. Newby quickly made his next play, bishop to Queen Three.

"All right, I suppose," said Old Man Durfee. "Now watch. I move a pawn to Queen's Bishop Four. See how it opens up my pieces? That's very important. Your men are all hemmed in."

"What did you say your name was?" asked Aunt Rozji.

"Newby," said the salesman.

"Where did you say you were from?"

"Stroudsburg." Newby moved a pawn to Queen's Bishop Three.

Old Man Durfee jumped to his feet and began wildly pacing about the diner. Newby wondered how such a dissipated, worn-out person as had entered the place could have become so animated. "I give up!" shouted the drunk. "I try to help

him a little. I don't take advantage of his stupidity. But does he learn? No. Does he do anything about the idiocy of his position? No. All right, Newby. You asked for it." Old Man Durfee sat down again. He considered the board for a minute, then made his play, the other knight to Bishop Three.

"Oho," said Lauren. "Things are beginning to pile up there in the middle."

"Ah, Young Newby," said Aunt Rozji, "that lead pawn of yours is attracting a lot of attention."

"And it's not even such a big piece," said Lauren.

"No," said Newby, "no, it's not." He took his queen's knight and put it in front of his queen, at Queen Two.

"That's stupid," said Aunt Rozji. "I hope you don't mind me speaking frankly. You are not a fit opponent."

"I won't say anything," said Old Man Durfee. Newby smiled coldly. The drunk played his bishop to King Two.

"I castle king-side," said Newby.

"It doesn't take much skill to do that," said Old Man Durfee scornfully. "Observe how easily I remove your one threatening piece." He moved his pawn at Bishop Four ahead one square, attacking Newby's bishop.

"I retreat," said Newby. He moved the bishop back a square, until it stood in front of the other, unmoved bishop.

"When is somebody going to kill another piece?" asked Lauren.

"Wait," said Aunt Rozji. "All in good time."

"Pawn to Queen's Knight Four," said the drunk. "Notice now how I open up the bishop, and threaten with an advance of my queen-side pawns."

"I see," said Newby. He moved the pawn at King Three ahead to King Four. He swung around on the stool. This was the key move in the old system he was playing. Now, at last, Old Man Durfee must be seeing the trouble he was in. All the restrained force of the white position was now set loose. It was a simple, deceptive line of play, and one very familiar to experts in the 1920s and `30s. But it had lost favor since then; Newby had guessed correctly that Old Man Durfee lacked the sophistication to understand this line of attack.

"Ah, well," said the drunk. He gazed up at Newby, his eyes suddenly bleary again, his voice thick and barely intelligible. "I don' know, now. Lemme see."

"Something wrong, Young Durfee?" asked Aunt Rozji.

"I don' know, now." The drunk shook out his filthy blue towel and folded it up again.

"You can't let that pawn move forward again," said Lauren. "It would chase your knight away, cost you a turn, and ruin your center position."

"You don't have much choice," said Aunt Rozji.

"Right, right, I know," said Old Man Durfee. "Okay, you bastard, I'll take the pawn. I still don't see what it'll get you." He took the pawn with the queen's pawn.

"Ah," said Lauren, sighing, "first blood!"

Newby recaptured the pawn with the knight from Queen Two. At once, Newby's pieces commanded the center of the board. His position, previously cramped and unpromising, was now obviously superior to black's.

"I castle," said Old Man Durfee.

"Are you worried now?" asked Lauren.

"Everybody castles," said the drunk with some irritation.

"Don't worry, Young Durfee, we won't abandon you," said Aunt Rozji.

"Queen to King Two," said Newby.

"Don't rush," said Old Man Durfee. "We have all night." The drunk studied the board. "All right, now. Cautiously. You have me, if I let you get away with it. I see your plan. Is it not as follows: your knight takes mine, I take back with my bishop, then you move your queen forward to King Four? You'll checkmate me on the next move, taking my rook pawn with your queen. If I rush to do something about that threat, you win the isolated knight on the other side of the board. That's what you're after, isn't it? I protect that knight, ruining your scheme. I move bishop to Knight Two."

"Well done, Young Durfee!"

"We're with you," said Lauren.

"A partisan crowd," said Newby.

"We have to be," said Aunt Rozji.

"There's little enough else to do," said Lauren.

"All right," said Newby, "the knight at Bishop Three up to Knight Five."

"I have to save the pawn," said Old Man Durfee, looking around helplessly. He moved the threatened pawn forward to King's Rook Three.

"We understand," said Aunt Rozji.

"It's a cardinal rule, never to move those protective pawns in front of your king, unless you have to," said Lauren. "But, as you say, you'll lose it otherwise: knight takes knight, check. Bishop takes knight. Knight takes pawn. And you're

also attacking that offensive knight, so I suppose it's the only move you have."

"How have you allowed yourself to get into this untenable defensive position?" asked Aunt Rozji.

"Knight takes knight," said Newby. "Check."

"He proceeds anyway," said Lauren, astounded.

"As do I," said Old Man Durfee. "Bishop takes knight."

"Queen to King Four," said Newby.

"It's as you foresaw," said Lauren. "If he slides his queen down, he'll have you mated on the next move. You saw it coming. Why didn't you plan a better defense?"

"My hands were tied," said Old Man Durfee. "I can only create an escape route." He moved the knight pawn to Knight Three.

"You're stalling," said Lauren.

"I think that's enough for tonight, don't you?" asked Aunt Rozji. Newby realized that for some time, her words had been spoken without a trace of accent. Now, though, she sounded like a recent immigrant from Czechoslovakia.

"If you say so," said Old Man Durfee.

"Why don't we play on?" asked Newby. "The end can't be too far away."

Lauren looked irritated. "I think we need an official referee here," she said. "How about Aunt Rozji?"

"She's not the most impartial judge I could ask for," said Newby.

"It's okay with me," said Old Man Durfee.

"I'll bet," said Newby. "All right. Aunt Rozji, you can be referee."

The old woman smiled, a narrow, quivering expression. "Good, good. We stop, then. Tomorrow morning, we finish."

"We finish fast," said Newby. "I have to be on the road early."

"Nine o'clock, here?" said Aunt Rozji. Lauren, Newby, and Old Man Durfee nodded.

"Can I drive you anywhere?" asked Newby.

"No," said Lauren. "My daddy comes to meet me."

"I'll find my own way," said Old Man Durfee. "Do you have maybe a quarter, though? I need another quarter for a pint of Thunderbird."

"Here," said Newby, giving the old drunk the money. Newby shook his head as Old Man Durfee shuffled out of the diner. The salesman took Aunt Rozji's arm and led her out to his car. The old woman said little as they drove to her house. The narrow, red brick-paved streets were dark; slender wells of light beamed down from streetlamps, but otherwise there was only the occasional floating yellow from a porch light or a distant pair of rat eyes on the back end of a car. Trees grew dense and tall. The air was warm and moist, and pleasant-smelling. Newby enjoyed the low thrumming sound of the tires on the street.

"Pull up here," said Aunt Rozji at last. "I suppose you'll want to get right to sleep."

"Yes, I guess so. I have a little work to do first, but I can look forward to another day of driving tomorrow."

"After your tournament is completed, of course."

Newby pulled out the ignition key and shrugged. "Oh, yeah. Sure," he said. They went slowly up the flagstone walk

to the huge, dim house. The front door was open. They went inside; the salesman was given an impression of old furnishings, polished dark wood paneling, hundreds of china figurines, fat chairs and sofas, final boredom. He carried his suitcase up the stairway, at the top of which Aunt Rozji said he'd find his room and the bathroom. She was too old to climb the steps herself, and she apologized. Newby called down that the room was fine, said good night, and stretched out on the bed for a few minutes' rest. He was asleep instantly.

Newby dozed fitfully; he had planned to sort out the brightly colored cloth samples in his case before he went to sleep. The case rested at the foot of the bed. The salesman's legs were bent to avoid the samples which were stacked on the folded comforter, with the suitcase tight behind his knees. He was cramped and uncomfortable, but he had not meant to fall asleep. He had only removed his shirt and tie; he had not even slipped out of his shoes.

After a few minutes he began to dream. They were strange visions, dreams of a kind he had never had before. He was used to sleeping in a different bed every night, awakening in odd, unknown towns that he might never see again. It wasn't that he was isolated and alone that caused his dreams. It was something else.

For a time he dreamed of shapes, just meaningless shapes. Great, looming blocks, towering cylinders, stacks of rectangular solids in unattractive olive greens and dark browns. Then the shapes began to be located, to find a setting. Spaces formed among them and remained constant.

The shapes were on a large plain. The shapes became buildings, trees, parked automobiles. It was still dark, midnight, no light but the dream light of Newby's tired imagination.

Newby became part of his dream. Before, he had only viewed the nightmarish setting. Now he himself walked through it. The ominous shapes-become-buildings were vast, ancient houses, lined one after the other along a narrow, brick-paved street. Each house was set well back from the sidewalk. The front doors sparkled with crystal, rainbow flickers, gleams reflected from an unreal source. The windows on the first floor were invariably dark, shaded, inviolable. Windows on the second story were drawn up tight, also, but lamps were lit behind the drapes. Shadows whipped along the vertical folds of the curtains, as furtive strangers rushed about the interior rooms on secret errands. Newby walked past each house, examining every one as he strolled, feeling a peculiar sense of uneasiness. The insects chorused like massed rattlesnakes. A pair of nighthawks swooped the star-glittered sky. Newby was frightened by the moon.

"Hi." Immediately, with a shock of dream intensity, the scene became particular, real, a little more tangible and a little less lonely. The salesman looked down. He saw a young girl, perhaps ten or eleven years old. She was wearing a white blouse, a plaid blazer from a parochial school, and a gray felt skirt with rustling crinolines beneath. There was a pink poodle cut out and fixed to the skirt. "Hi," she said again.

"Hello," said Newby.

"You know why I'm out so late?" she asked.

"No. Of course not."

"My name is Theresa Muldower."

"Why are you out so late," asked Newby.

"Because of the Russians." She looked up at Newby with a curious expression. "I hate the Russians, don't you?"

"Sure," said Newby.

"I hate the Russians so much, the only thing in the whole world I hate more is polio."

"Me too."

"My daddy's finishing up the fallout shelter tonight. We're going to have a party in it. Only he thought he'd have it done by now. I'm usually sent to bed at nine or ten. Ten on Fridays and Saturdays. But we're all waiting for him to finish the fallout shelter. Mom says she can just see how the Russians are going to H-bomb us all tonight, and we won't get to have our party. Daddy says it's okay with him, as long as the fallout shelter's finished. Do you have a fallout shelter?"

"Not yet," said Newby.

"You don't have much time," said Theresa. "You ought to get one. Before the Russians H-bomb us."

"If I built a fallout shelter," said Newby, "and if the Russians H-bombed us, I'd be all alone in there and I'd get polio."

"From a rusty nail."

"Yes," said Newby. "From a rusty nail."

They walked past some more houses. After a while a voice somewhere ahead of them called Theresa's name. "I have to go," she said.

"Is that your parents?"

"No," she said. "I don't know who it is." Newby watched her uninterestedly, as she skipped away ahead of him. Somewhere down the block, in a black tangle of shadows, he saw someone gesture to her. He stopped on the sidewalk and watched. The person held out its hand; Theresa took it. The street was lit by fire. Orange sparks first, then ribbons of flame spat outward from the girl's body. Newby didn't want to move, but in the dream he was suddenly right there, beside her, watching, saying nothing, doing nothing, watching Aunt Rozji and Old Man Durfee. The fiery light made gruesome, disgusting masks of their faces. They nodded silent greeting to him. Theresa looked wildly around her. She strained her arms toward Newby. The salesman could only observe. Fire spurted from her eyes and ears. Trickles of flame dribbled from her nostrils. She rolled on the ground in the pain of nightmares. When she tried to scream, only a fine gray ash came out of her mouth. She writhed. The flames from her eyes grew smaller. Her motions became convulsive, slowed, then stopped. Aunt Rozji and Old Man Durfee each took one of Newby's hands. The three stepped over the unmarked corpse of Theresa Muldower and walked along the cavernous street, beneath the arching trees, past the ramparts of houses.

"And you have come from the east?" said Aunt Rozji, in a hollow, distant voice.

"Yes," said Newby.

"Knowledge in the east," said Old Man Durfee.

"And you travel into the west?" said Aunt Rozji.

"Yes," said Newby.

"Death in the west," said Old Man Durfee.

"And you bring with you?" asked Aunt Rozji.

"Fear," said Old Man Durfee. "Pain. Desire for cleansing."

"Expiation," said Newby.

"There is no expiation short of death," said Old Man Durfee.

"And there is no death," said Aunt Rozji. "No death, no death, three times, as the figures of art, as the candles, the scepters, the chalked arribles, the incense, the passes of hand, the laden words, as all these are used up, death is forgotten. Without death, there is no redemption."

"Without redemption," said Old Man Durfee, "there is fear."

"There is pain," said Aunt Rozji.

The two old people still held Newby's hands; with their free hands they touched his head. Throbbing agony grew in his temples. He could not breathe. His body began to sweat and shake. His chest was crippled with stabbing pains. His legs would not hold him. He fell. He awoke.

The suitcase had fallen on the floor; perhaps it was that noise that had roused Newby. Whatever it had been, he was grateful. He still felt his heart beating rapidly. His hands were moist with the dampness of terror. That child! He was afraid and repulsed to think that his own mind could invent such a hideous thing. He scooped up the cloth samples, intending to arrange them in their proper groups; instead, he quickly grew bored and shoved them all into the case. He undressed slowly, trying not to think about his nightmare. He went to the bathroom and brushed his teeth with the chlorophyll

toothpaste his wife had bought. He remembered how much he hated to bring it with him. Everything in the world was being colored, scented, or flavored with chlorophyll these days. He didn't notice any difference. It was only an advertising fad. He hated to be conned by advertising. After his brief toilet, he returned to his room, pulled back the bedspread, and went back to sleep. He had no more unusual dreams that night.

In the morning he was awakened by Aunt Rozji, calling up the stairs to him. "Good day, Young Newby," she said. "It is morning. Have you rested?"

"Yes," he said, rubbing his eyes regretfully. "More or less."

"Good, then," she said. "It is time to renew your combat."

"Oh, yes. I was trying to forget."

"That is very gracious of you," she said. "But do not worry about besting our local champion. We are good sportsmen in Gremmage."

Newby dressed quickly and came downstairs with his suitcase. Aunt Rozji was ready to go. She told the salesman that breakfast could be taken at the diner. Together they went out to his car.

It wasn't there. From Aunt Rozji's porch, Newby could see the place along the tree lawn where he had left it. An empty space, now, between a black Studebaker and a red and white Dodge. He felt an anger growing, an ugly feeling, a sickness in his stomach. "My car's gone," he said through clenched teeth.

"Your car?" asked Aunt Rozji.

"It's gone, damn it."

"Are you sure you left it here?"

"You know damn well where I left it," he said. "You were with me."

"Perhaps someone took it by mistake," she said. Newby didn't answer. "Well, I suppose you ought to tell the police."

"You have police in this idiotic town?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "Even towns as small as this sometimes have crime."

"So what do I do now?"

"You must walk with me to the diner. The police department won't be open for another forty-five minutes. We can have breakfast first. Perhaps the others will have something to suggest."

"What happens if you have an emergency after the police go home for the night?" asked Newby.

Aunt Rozji looked at him in surprise. "Why, we all chip in," she said. "We all work together. That is how we shall find your car." A while later they arrived at the diner on Ridge Street. Newby was out of breath, but the old woman seemed in good shape.

"Good morning," said Lauren cheerfully.

"Young Newby's car has been stolen," said Aunt Rozji.

"Stolen?" said Old Man Durfee, already studying the final position of the chess game from the day before.

"You know," said Newby. "Unauthorized theft or something."

"I don't think I'm in as much difficulty as we believed last evening," said Old Man Durfee.

"That's certainly good news," said Lauren.

"I don't give a damn about that," said Newby. "I have work to do. I want my car."

"Sit down," said the waitress. "Have some coffee. Do you want a muffin? French toast?"

"Don't you have to go to school?" asked Newby.

"No," she said. "This isn't such a big town."

"It really isn't," said Old Man Durfee.

"Whose move is it?" asked Aunt Rozji. "I forget."

"Mine," said Old Man Durfee.

"No," said Newby, "I think it's mine. You moved that pawn to Knight Three."

"Yes," said Old Man Durfee, "you're right. I'm sorry. What's your move?"

"It's obvious," said Newby. "I'm going to call the cops and see if they've recovered my car. Then I'm going to leave this nuthouse as fast as I can."

"Can I move for you?" asked Lauren.

"You don't know how to play, remember?" said Newby. "Here. I'll take your king pawn with the knight. Now I'm attacking both your queen and the rook guarding your king."

"That's very true," said Old Man Durfee slowly.

"`Don't be cruel, to a heart that's true,'" sang Lauren.

"Will you be quiet?" asked the drunk.

"`Don't be cruel,'" she sang.

"All right," said Old Man Durfee, "before I take your knight, I wonder if you'd do something for me. I had these made up last night. Would you go through these two pages? It's sort of a little quiz. It won't take you very long. I think the results may surprise you. Maybe you ought to do it before you try

talking with the police." The old man handed Newby two pages, covered with questions in blurry mimeograph ink.

"What is this?" asked the salesman.

"Here," said Lauren, "you can use my ballpoint."

Newby read the first multiple-choice question: What is today's date? The answers were a) March 8, 1956; b) September 12, 1954; c) June 26, 1959; d) August 30, 1957. Newby had some difficulty deciding which answer was appropriate. The trouble bothered him. He hesitated a few seconds, then checked a. The second question was: What was yesterday's date? The possibilities were a) May 21, 1955; b) January 2, 1951; c) November 15, 1957; d) April 28, 1958. More confused, he checked c. There were a few more questions in a similar mode, requiring him to decide what the date of a week from Friday would be, and so on. He did the best he could.

The second page asked questions of a more concrete nature. Where are you? a) in a town in Colorado; b) in a suburb of Dallas; c) in a European nation that has not existed since the end of the First World War; d) in the garment district. Newby checked b, hoping that it was the closest to the truth. He really wasn't certain. The next question asked him the same thing, and presented him with even more baffling choices. By the time he completed the two pages, he was very uncomfortable. He was beginning to feel a little unreal, a bit lightheaded, dreamlike.

"Do you feel like you've been pushed into a different world?" asked Lauren.

"Sort of," said Newby sadly. "What's going on?"

## Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

"You see," said Old Man Durfee with a kindly smile, "you really can't trust yourself any longer. You've lost a little of the real you. It's nothing important, but we thought you ought to know."

"It happens sometimes," said Aunt Rozji.

"You have to learn to relax," said Lauren. "Things that are important in a big town like Stroudsburg, just don't seem so vital here."

"This isn't such a big town," said Old Man Durfee.

"No," said Newby, "no, it's not."

"Now," said the drunk, "I suppose I have to take your other knight with the bishop pawn. I do so."

Newby glanced over the quiz sheets again. He wondered if he ought to change a few of his answers. Who is President of the United States? a) Harry S. Truman; b) Everett Dirksen; c) Dwight David Eisenhower; d) John F. Kennedy. He had originally checked Truman, but on second thought erased that and marked c. "I like Ike," he thought. "I really do." Have the Russians orbited their first Sputnik yet? That was no. Have the quiz show scandals been exposed? No, but interesting. Maybe it was yes, come to think about it. He decided to leave that question and come back to it. What kind of a day was it? Newby marked A day like all days, filled with those events which alter and illuminate our time.

"None of this makes any sense at all," he said.

"What difference does that make?" asked Aunt Rozji. "What has reality ever done for you?"

"Good morning, everybody," said a newcomer.

"Morning, Bob," said Lauren. The waitress turned to Newby. "This is Bob Latcher, the shoe repairman. Bob, this is Mr. Newby, a visitor to our town."

"Morning, Mr. Newby," said Latcher. "Sad to have you here today, of all days. Have you heard the news?"

"About Mr. Newby's car?" asked Old Man Durfee.

"No," said Latcher. "About that Muldower girl." Newby started, then struggled to catch his breath.

"Theresa?" asked Lauren. "What about her?"

"They found her near her house," said Latcher. "She was done in all peculiar. She was all burnt up from the inside. She looked fine on the outside, excepting that she was dead. But when they touched her, her body all collapsed, like a puffed-up popover. Just powdered into ashes."

"That's odd," said Lauren. Newby buried his head in his hands.

"Want breakfast, Bob?" asked the waitress.

"No," said Latcher, "I just came in to see if I could find Larry Muldower. I wanted to tell him how sorry I was. About his daughter and all."

"He's probably in his new fallout shelter," said Newby in a strangled voice.

"Yeah, that's right," said Latcher. "Thanks." The man waved and left.

"Sad about the little girl, isn't it?" asked Old Man Durfee.

"It just goes to show you," said Aunt Rozji. "Some people just shouldn't go walking around late at night." She smiled at Newby.

"`Like a puffed-up popover,'" said Lauren. "What a typically rural use of simile."

"Hick," said Newby, "not rural."

"I think we ought to try to make this chess match a little more interesting," said Aunt Rozji.

"I find it fascinating," said Newby.

"A little more interesting," said Old Man Durfee.

"Will you take a check?" asked Newby.

Aunt Rozji and the drunk laughed. "No," said the old woman, "I don't mean that way. The way I see it, Young Newby has mate in no more than seven moves. Now, don't look so glum, Young Durfee. We can't always emerge victorious. But I wonder if our handsome visitor would be interested in giving you another chance in this game. A sort of handicap."

"I don't think so," said Newby. "I just want to get going."

"If it's your car that you're so worried about," said Lauren, "you might as well take it easy. I suppose the police are going to be occupied all day with old Theresa Popover."

"Don't be cruel, Young Lauren," said Aunt Rozji.

"Are you going to play, or aren't you?" asked the drunk.

"He has to," said the old woman. Newby nodded. "Well, then. Here is what I say, in my capacity as omnipotent referee. From now on, every time you take an opponent's piece, your own piece that did the capturing will change to the type of the captured enemy. Including pawns. So if you take your opponent's queen with a pawn, you'll have two queens."

"That's ridiculous," said Newby. "You just can't change the rules of chess like that."

"She can," said Lauren. "You agreed to abide by her decisions."

"She's like the inscrutable forces of nature," said Old Man Durfee, evidently enjoying Newby's uneasiness.

The salesman shook his head, but said nothing more. He looked at the position of the chess pieces. Aunt Rozji was correct; as things stood, he could finish off Old Man Durfee in just a few more moves. But now the situation had been changed. In a legitimate game, the thing for him to do would be queen takes knight pawn, check. Newby chewed his lip. If he were to do that, under Aunt Rozji's arbitrary rule change, he would capture the pawn, but his queen would be demoted to that level. He would lose his most potent weapon. The entire strategy of his game would have to be altered. The thing to do, apparently, was work with the pawns, promoting them by successfully capturing higher-ranking enemy pieces. The more he looked at the board, the more confused he became. "All right," he said at last. "I don't even care anymore."

"You ought to," said Lauren. "This is an important game."

"How is it important?" asked Newby.

"It's very symbolic," said Aunt Rozji.

"It's the forces of simple life here in rural America against the snares and wiles of corporate industry," said Old Man Durfee.

Newby stared at them. They smiled back. "Do I look like a shifty-eyed con man?"

"You are a salesman," said Aunt Rozji.

"You are from Stroudsburg," said Lauren.

"The big time," said Old Man Durfee.

Newby sighed. They were really out to get him. He laughed bitterly, and moved his queen bishop from its original square down to King's Rook Six, capturing the old drunk's pawn there.

"Why did you do that?" asked Lauren. "You lost your bishop, you know. It turned into a pawn, now."

"I know," said Newby. "Sometimes a pawn can be more useful than a piece. I'm going to beat you at your own game."

Aunt Rozji made a cackling sound. "I ought to warn you," she said, "I haven't decided yet whether I'll change the rule about normal pawn promotion. If you move that pawn ahead two squares, you may or may not get the queen you're after."

"I'll chance it," said Newby.

Old Man Durfee picked up the rook which guarded his castled long. "Here," he said. "This rook will stop you." He moved it forward a square, so that Newby's pawn couldn't advance without inviting capture.

Newby didn't hesitate. "I wasn't planning that at all," he said. He swept his queen down and captured the knight pawn. He turned the queen upside-down to indicate that it was now a pawn, standing on the square next to the bishop-turned-pawn of the previous move. Together the two pawns stared straight at the drunk's suddenly vulnerable king.

"The position isn't as bad as it looks," said Old Man Durfee.

"That's good," said Lauren. "It certainly looks bad."

"I've got this bishop tying him up," said the drunk.

Aunt Rozji stood up from her stool. "I think it's time we recessed for lunch."

"Lunch?" asked Newby. "It isn't even ten o'clock yet."

"Lunch," said the old woman. "I think Young Durfee could use the opportunity to study the game, and you might find it comforting to report the theft of your car. Perhaps the police have solved the untidy mystery of little Miss Popover's death. I think that I am in need of a nap, in any event. Young Lauren will stay here, guarding the game and making certain that no pieces are inadvertently moved."

"I surely will, Aunt Rozji," said the waitress.

Newby realized that argument was futile. He shrugged and stood up. "What time should I come back?" he asked.

"Oh," said the old woman lazily, "perhaps three o'clock."

"She does like her naps," said Old Man Durfee.

The day was sunny and warm. Newby felt a shock of heat as he left the diner; rippling waves floated in the air above the black asphalt of Ridge Street. The temperature would get even higher by afternoon. Newby had no idea what to do for the next five hours. He supposed that he ought to walk into the center of town to the police department. After that, he could kill time browsing through the poor collection of stores. Get a haircut. Sit on the square and read magazines. Find the library. Maybe just get on a bus and leave.

The town was much like many others he had seen in the last four years, during which he had been a salesman for the Jennings Fabric Corporation. He knew without looking what sort of things would be in the windows of each shop: the faded cardboard signs of beautiful women with bright yellow

poodle cuts in the beauty parlor, the brassy saxophones on stands in the display of the music store, the barbecue sets and the taped-up sign--Tulip Sundae 35¢--in the five and dime. It made him feel better, somehow. The odd assortment of people in the diner didn't seem to be typical. The impulse to run away grew; he could easily give up his car as lost, take the insurance money, buy another. The company would give him a week off without pay. His suitcase was in the diner, now, but he could tell them the samples had been in the trunk of the Packard. He might even be reimbursed for his personal things. "No," he thought, "I'm letting that dream spook me. I won't let myself be manipulated like this. I just have to settle down."

He strolled past the store windows, bored, still a little sleepy. He came to the police department, the last building before the square. He went up the granite steps and opened the door. There didn't seem to be anyone inside. He sat on a bench under an old framed photograph of Eisenhower, wearing his army uniform. Newby waited. A clock on one wall moved past ten-thirty. Then to eleven o'clock. Finally, a police officer appeared from the back of the building. He nodded to Newby.

"I want to report a stolen car," said the salesman.

"In a minute, buddy," said the policeman. "We have a real emergency today."

"The Muldower girl?"

The policeman stared at Newby for a moment. "Yeah," he said slowly. "What do you know about it?"

"Nothing. Just what this guy Latcher told me in the diner."

The other man nodded. "All right, then. Your car's going to have to wait."

Newby stood and stretched. "Do you know how she died?" he asked.

"Yeah," said the policeman. "The coroner said it was some kind of stroke. I ain't never seen nothing like that, though."

"It was magic," said Newby.

"You're nuts," said the other man.

"What time should I come in to check on the car?"

"We'll be tied up all day," said the officer. "Come in tomorrow morning." Newby nodded, but inside he was annoyed. Another night, another day in the town. He'd have to call his wife, have her get in touch with the Jennings people, have her send him some money.

The salesman left the police station and walked into the small parklike square. Narrow gravel paths ran straight as a surveyor's transit could make them, among huge elms and oaks, diagonally from northeast to southwest, from northwest to southeast. At the center, where the paths intersected, there was the promised cannon and a pyramid of cannon balls. The end of the cannon's barrel was stuffed with paper cups and broken glass. There was a drinking fountain next to it, with a step for little children to use. A tiny trickle of water ran from the rusty fixture. No amount of handle turning could make the trickle run harder. The fountain was impossible to drink from. It made Newby very thirsty.

Old Man Durfee walked toward him along a gravel path. The drunk didn't seem to notice Newby. The old man moved in wide, sweeping curves, stumbling, talking to himself. He

still carried his filthy blue towel, looped through the binder's twine that served him as a belt. Old Man Durfee passed Newby by the drinking fountain and continued across the square. The salesman watched him; several yards away, the drunk left the path and walked toward a broad, shady tree. Aunt Rozji stepped out from behind it. The two grasped hands and sat down, slowly, painfully. Newby watched them curiously. The two old people chatted. The drunk no longer seemed as inebriated, the old woman no longer as decrepit.

After a few minutes a middle-aged homemaker passed by, pulling a two-wheeled shopping cart filled with bags of groceries. Aunt Rozji raised a hand and waved to the woman. Newby moved closer.

"Hello, Aunt Rozji," said the woman pleasantly.

"Good morning, Mrs. Siebern," said the old woman. "How are you today?"

"Healthy, thank God," said Mrs. Siebern. "The last couple of days I haven't been so well."

"But today you feel fine?" asked Old Man Durfee.

Mrs. Siebern scowled at the drunk. "Yes," she said, her tone more disapproving. She turned back to Aunt Rozji. "How is your sister these days?"

"Fine," said Aunt Rozji. "She doesn't complain, the dear. Onyuish is three years younger than I, you know. But she has such troubles with her back."

"Well," said Mrs. Siebern, "have a good day. I have to get home. Eddie bought one of those power lawn mowers and he stayed home from work just to tinker with it. I want to get back before he cuts off both of his feet." The woman turned

her back to the old people sitting on the ground; Aunt Rozji gestured to Newby. The salesman was surprised that the old woman had been aware of his presence. Her motions indicated that she wanted Newby to engage Mrs. Siebern in conversation. He hurried to catch up to the woman.

"Excuse me," he said nervously. "I'm just passing through this town, and it looks like I'll have to stay here the night. I was wondering if you could tell me if there are any good hotels in the area?"

Mrs. Siebern shaded her eyes and looked at him for a few seconds. "Well," she said slowly, "Aunt Rozji has some nice rooms for travelers, but she's particular about her guests. You'd have to speak to her. Here, let me--" She turned around to introduce Newby to Aunt Rozji, but the old woman and the drunk had risen and moved one to each side of Mrs. Siebern. Now they took her arms and led her from the gravel path. Old Man Durfee looked back at Newby and winked. He signaled that the salesman should follow them. Newby did.

"Here," said Aunt Rozji, "let's sit here under this mighty oak, eh?"

"I really have to get back to my Eddie," said Mrs. Siebern.

"Oh, he's old enough to handle a grasscutter, dear," said Old Man Durfee.

"It's television's fault," said Aunt Rozji. "All the husbands on those comedy shows look so stupid. All except Robert Young, and he's just fatuous. Your husband will be all right."

"Take this, Newby," said Old Man Durfee, handing the salesman an ancient, leather-bound book. "Follow along. Read the part that's underlined."

"This oak, all like oaks, oak trees blended in universal commune," chanted Aunt Rozji. "Pillar of sacred wood, leaf-secret bower, shelter us, cloak us, hide us now."

"This oak, our strength," said Old Man Durfee. "This oak, our weapon, this oak, our souls."

"This oak, its roots to the very earth's heart delving," read Newby haltingly. "Now, its limbs, our hands, delve this woman's spirit fire."

Newby glanced up. Mrs. Siebern's face bore an expression of surprise; then her features slackened, twisted again, seemed to contort with utter agony. Like Theresa Muldower, she tried to shriek, tossing her head wildly, kicking and thrashing. Her voice was stopped; from her mouth came only a blue, cold mist. Her eyes turned white, her lids drooped and were sealed shut with ice. Her blood froze where it ran down her chin. Old Man Durfee and Aunt Rozji held the woman tightly as she shook in the last stages of her ice-death. Her skin was tinged blue, her muscles chiseled in hard ridges beneath. The two old people eased the corpse gently to the ground, but even so, Mrs. Siebern's frozen right foot snapped off with a gentle tinkling sound. A blue-white powder lay about the stump, dusting the rich green grass with what had been flesh, bone, blood, all living.

"Quick now, Young Newby," said Aunt Rozji. "We must finish."

The salesman looked at the book. He had the next speech, too. "Weakness, weariness, done to an end," he said. "Misery is now no longer, as acorn's shell is by the oaken shaft blasted."

As in the dream of the night before, the drunk grasped one of Newby's arms, and the old woman took the other. They walked away from the corpse quickly, back the way Newby had come. When they arrived at the police station, he stopped. "I have to go in," he said. "I have to report my car."

"You've already done that," said Old Man Durfee. But neither of the old people tried to stop him. Newby ran up the steps and into the station. He woke up on the bench. The clock said it was almost two.

"Another dream," he thought. He was too unnerved, though, to do the proper thing; he didn't have any intention of walking through the square to see whether Mrs. Siebern really rested there, cold, dead, and blue. Instead, Newby headed back toward the diner.

He met Lauren on the way. "Hello," he said. "I thought you were supposed to be guarding the chess pieces."

"Oh," she said, pouting, "I always get stuck with dumb jobs like that. Nobody would want to mess with the game, anyway. I wish one of these days they'd let me help in the bigger jobs."

"Like Theresa Muldower?" he asked. "Like Mrs. Siebern?"

"Mrs. Siebern?" said Lauren. "Well, they finally did it. I'm glad. Her husband teaches chemistry, you know. Gave me a C+ last year. You know, you look a lot like Howard Keel."

"Howard Keel?"

"He's my second-favorite actor."

Newby laughed. "I suppose I ought to be flattered. Who's first on the list?"

"James Dean, of course," she said. "I send him birthday cards and everything."

Newby took a deep breath. "He's dead, you know," he said finally.

Lauren shook her head. "I don't believe it. In New York, even Stroudsburg, you believe those things. Here you don't have to. It doesn't make any difference what happens here, and what happens out there doesn't have any effect on us. I can believe what I want. This isn't such a big town, you know."

"Yes, I know."

"`Don't be cruel,'" she sang.

"We should be getting back soon," said Newby. "It's almost three."

"You're not going to let that old nosebleed wino and Madame Ooglepuss boss you around, are you?" asked Lauren.

Newby waved a hand. "I thought you were on their side."

"That was until I realized how much you look like Howard Keel. `To a heart that's true.'"

"I always get Howard Keel mixed up with Phil Gatelin," he said.

"They're nothing alike," she said.

"And neither am I."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Lauren. They pushed open the door to the diner and stepped into the frigid blast of the air conditioning. Newby was stunned to see another Lauren Kromberger still sitting on one of the stools by the counter.

"What's going on?" screamed Newby.

The Lauren at the counter looked up and gasped. She went behind the counter and came back with a broken bottle, which she waved at the first Lauren menacingly. "It's just part of your dream," said the Lauren with the bottle. "Sometimes you have to shake them off like this. They're like nightmare hangovers." The armed Lauren took a few steps toward the Lauren that stood next to Newby. The salesman watched, mystified. The girl he had come into the diner with shrugged and leered at him, then began to fade and waver. In a minute she was completely gone. The waitress put down the broken bottle and sighed. "Did they get somebody else?" she asked.

"Who?"

"I don't know," she said. "You were the one out there. I've just been sitting in here the whole time."

"I mean, did who get somebody else."

"Aunt Rozji and Old Man Durfee, of course. Wait a minute." She picked up the bottle and started moving toward Newby. "Maybe you're part of my dream." Newby didn't fade. Lauren smiled and sat down again, patting the stool next to hers. "Come on," she said. "They'll be back any minute."

"They got Mrs. Siebern," he said.

"Oh. That's all right, I guess."

"What importance does this chess game have?" he asked.

"None, really," she said. "I mean, it won't go into Chess Review or anything, if that's what you're asking. I doubt if anyone else in town will even find out who won. You won't have any trouble finding other people to play you. You're really very good, you know."

"I don't want other people to play," he said impatiently. "I just want to go home already."

"You'll have to learn how to relax," she said smiling. "You have a really neurotic thing about getting away."

"I've seen some strange things in the last day," he said.

"How do you know they're real?"

Newby was annoyed. "If they're not, then I must be pretty sick."

The waitress nodded. "That's right. But there's a good chance that what you've seen is real. In which case, you're certainly not reacting with the proper horror, the essential dismay."

"My emotions seem to have been blunted," said Newby. "I think it's Aunt Rozji's doing. If she can perform her hideous tricks, she can just as easily hypnotize me into not running into the street screaming. Besides, they're only dreams."

"Old Mr. Latcher didn't think Theresa Popover was a dream," said Lauren. "And wait until they find Mrs. Siebern on the square."

Newby looked at her closely. "I never told you that's where they got her."

Lauren smiled once more. "See? It may all be a dream. But if it's not, then you have to worry. Your emotional reactions have been dulled. You admitted that yourself. Psychiatrists call that `planed-down affect,' in their peculiar jargon. That, coupled with the difficulty you had on the little quiz this morning, would indicate that you're well into advanced schizophrenia."

"Then I am imagining all this?" he asked, not especially concerned.

"No," she said. "You're schizophrenic only if all this is real."

"Never mind," he said. "Can I have a Coke?"

Lauren brought him the soft drink. He sipped it, trying to make sense of her words. What did he know about schizophrenia? Very little, actually. Just some things he'd picked up from watching television. Medic. The business about the split personality. He thought his brother-in-law might be like that. But why would Newby's symptoms wait until just now, here, in the tiny village so far from anything, before they became noticeable? If he were going insane, how could he just calmly discuss the matter with the waitress? How did she know so much about what he was feeling?

How much of what had happened had been only dreams? Might he still be asleep?

He swallowed some more of the Coke and picked up one of the discarded chess pieces, his demoted bishop. It felt heavy in his hand, in a way that dream objects never do. "This is one sure way to get locked up," he thought. "All I have to do is ask a doctor if I'm just dreaming. They'll never see me in Stroudsburg again."

"Is there a phone I can use?" he asked.

"Over there," she said. "By the jukebox."

He went to the phone, fished some change from his pocket, and dialed the operator. He got the number of the Green & Greene Bus Company, and gave them a call.

"Good afternoon, Green & Greene," said the girl who answered. "Can we help you?"

"Yes," said Newby. "I was wondering if you could tell me if there's a bus from Gremmage to Harrisburg?"

"No, I'm afraid not," said the girl. "You'd have to get the bus to Oil City, change there for Pittsburgh, and change again for Harrisburg."

"Fine," said Newby. "When is the next Oil City bus?"

"Oh, I'm sorry," she said, her voice conveying true concern and pity. "You just missed it this morning. There won't be another one for a while. They only run once a week."

"I see," said Newby. "What do people do if they have to go somewhere?"

"They drive, mostly," said the girl. "That's why there aren't more buses. It all works out, don't you see?"

"Yeah," he said. Then he hung up. It had been a long-shot, anyway. He went back to the counter.

"Do you think you can beat Old Man Durfee?" asked Lauren.

"No," said Newby. "I don't think I want to."

"That's wise," she said. "There's a lot more to him than most people would suspect."

"Is he, uh, going steady with Aunt Rozji?"

Lauren giggled. "No," she said, "they're just good friends."

"She'd make `December Bride' look like cradle-robbing."

"They do some of that, too," said Lauren. "Only in the wintertime, though. Propitiating the frost nixies, and all that."

"Hello, hello!" cried Old Man Durfee. Newby turned around to see the drunk holding the door open for Aunt Rozji.

"Hello," said Newby.

Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

"Talking about us, were you?" asked the old woman, as she hobbled across the floor to the counter.

"More or less," said Lauren.

"I don't know anyone else in town to talk about," said Newby.

"Small men talk about people," said Old Man Durfee. "Medium men talk about things. Big men talk about ideas."

"Well, we were discussing some ideas, too," said Lauren.

"That's all right, child," said Aunt Rozji. "Don't let that old wetbrain bother you. He doesn't talk about anything."

Old Man Durfee took his place on the stool. "Well," he said, "might as well get going with this again. Whose move was it? Mine?"

"Yes," said Newby, "it's yours. Fire away."

"That was last night," said Aunt Rozji. "Today is a day for ice." Newby only nodded.

"`The old hooty owl hooty-hoots to the dove,'" sang Lauren.

"Owls are birds of death to some folk," said Aunt Rozji, smiling. "And doves, well, you know. The soul, in some symbologies. So you have a specter of destruction tempting the immortal soul. It happens all the time."

"`Tammy, Tammy, Tammy's in love,'" sang Lauren.

Old Man Durfee looked up. "Yes, that's the way it always starts," he said.

"Are you ready to move yet?" asked Newby.

"`Hooty-hoot,'" said Lauren. "That's dumb."

"Hey, everybody," called a stranger.

"Hey, Ronnie," said Lauren. "That's Ronnie Glanowsky. He has a Shell station out on Logan Road."

"Hey," said Glanowsky, "have you heard about poor old Mrs. Siebern?"

"Aw, she wasn't so old," said Newby.

Glanowsky studied the salesman's face for a few seconds. "I don't believe we've met," he said.

"My name's Newby," said the salesman. "I'm just passing through."

"You know Mrs. Siebern?" asked Glanowsky.

"No," said Newby cautiously. "I was just being gallant."

Glanowsky shrugged. "Anyway, they found her lying in the square. She's dead. Just keeled right over." At the word "keel," Lauren jabbed Newby's arm; he looked at her, and she made a kissing sound. He blushed and turned away.

"What happened to her?" asked the drunk.

"They figure she had some kind of attack," said Glanowsky.

"Well, goodbye," said Aunt Rozji.

"Goodbye," said Glanowsky. He hurried out.

"Did he come in here just to tell us that?" asked Newby.

"Probably," said Old Man Durfee. "He does that a lot. Anyway, he knows we like to keep informed."

Newby shook his head. "I really thought it was all a dream."

"It was," said Aunt Rozji. "But that's no reason that it can't be real, too."

"Watch this," said Old Man Durfee. He removed Newby's queen pawn on the fourth rank and set down his knight.

Then, according to Aunt Rozji's rule, he took the knight off the board and replaced it with a pawn.

"I don't understand," said Lauren.

"Well," said Old Man Durfee jovially, "I certainly won't explain it now."

"Another rule change!" cried Aunt Rozji. "Another rule change! This ought to liven up the match."

"I can hardly wait to hear," said the drunk.

"From now on," said the old woman slowly, "whenever you move a rook, the next piece on the rank or file along which the rook traveled will be `destroyed.' That goes whether the victim piece is friend or foe. So be careful."

"How about kings?" asked Newby.

"Hmm," muttered Aunt Rozji. "You're right. Kings will be immune, but if there's a piece beyond the king, it will be taken off the board instead."

"Terrific," said Newby.

"It's your move," said the drunk.

"I move the rook pawn to Rook Seven," said Newby. "Check."

"I take the pawn with my rook," said Old Man Durfee.

"The rook becomes a pawn," said Lauren.

"That's right," said Newby. "What about the rook, though? Does it destroy anything on the line it just moved?"

"No, I don't think so," said Aunt Rozji. "That power stops at the end of the board. If this were a cylindrical board you were playing on, the ray would go all the way around and catch the other rook pawn."

"All right," said Newby. He was getting more and more annoyed; neither the game itself nor his opponent seemed to have much grounding in rationality. The referee served no purpose at all, other than to try to aid the drunken old man. The waitress winked at Newby every time he glanced at her. Now the pieces in the game were adopting odd powers. And every minute he felt more trapped.

"Why don't you just try to get away?" asked Lauren.

"I don't know," said Newby. "I honestly admit that I don't know."

"That's a sure sign of something," said Old Man Durfee. "You ought to be running scared by now. Maybe we're having more of an effect on you than you think."

"Maybe he has a crush on Young Lauren," said Aunt Rozji.

"It could be a real Liz-Eddie-Debbie case," said the waitress. "You could leave your plain but nice wife to have a mad affair with me. What does your wife do?"

Newby scowled. "She's what we call in Stroudsburg a `homemaker.'"

"See?" said Lauren.

"No," said Newby.

"All right," said the girl. "I was only kidding, anyway. I don't have any interest in you at all. You don't even look like Howard Keel."

"What was all the flirting for, then?" he asked.

"Part of the scheme," she said. "To make you stay here. We needed someone to--"

"Easy, there, youngster," said Old Man Durfee. "You'd better watch your tongue, or you'll end up looking like a pail full of rising dough."

"I want to know what she means," said Newby.

"I guess it's all right to tell him," said Aunt Rozji. "We needed someone in town to look suspicious for us. We have dark deeds planned."

"More?" asked the salesman.

"What do you mean, `more'?" asked Old Man Durfee. "We haven't done anything."

"Except the eleven-year-old popover and the middle-aged Wifesicle," said Newby.

"We didn't have anything to do with them," said the old woman. "We've been too busy planning our job. We're going to knock over the Shell station. Ronnie Glanowsky's in on it too. It's his station."

"All the rest has been my imagination?" asked Newby.

"Sure," said the old drunk.

"But now we can't use you," said Aunt Rozji. "Now that your car's been stolen, and you'll be around for a while. You'll be too well known. We wanted a stranger to pin the rap on. We like you too much for that."

"I'm glad," said Newby. "Can we knock off this game, then?"

"For now, I suppose," said Old Man Durfee. "We can finish it in the morning."

"Yeah," said Newby. "Sure."

Old Man Durfee waved to Newby; Aunt Rozji smiled, and wiggled her fingers to indicate that the salesman should run

along. He did so gratefully. The chess game, for all intents and purposes, was over. That marked some kind of turning point in the day's events. It meant that, for good or evil, the old people had taken their fill of him. Was he now expendable, in a way Theresa Muldower and Mrs. Siebern had been? Could he expect to find an unnatural death, now that they had moved on to other projects?

"That's not true, what they said about the gas station," said Lauren. She startled Newby. He had thought that he was walking alone, down Ridge Street toward Aunt Rozji's house.

"I'm glad to hear it," he said. "Two falling-apart people like them are in no condition to heist a gas station."

"They know it too," said Lauren. "That's why they had Ronnie Glanowsky in on it. But he wanted too big of a cut, for one thing. And, besides, they couldn't get together on where they'd run for their getaway. The old man wanted Jamaica, and Aunt Rozji wanted swinging Acapulco."

"There's a basic difference in attitudes, there," said Newby.

"I suppose." They walked along a little more, neither having much to say. They turned down Aunt Rozji's street "Why are you going back?" she asked.

"I don't know," said Newby. "I don't have anywhere else to go. I'll call the police in the morning. If they don't have my car, I'll try hitching out of town."

"Oh. Be careful."

"I'm usually careful," he said.

"You came into the diner, didn't you?"

"Yeah. That was a mistake. Look, do you think I'm in any danger from them? Now that my part is over with?"

Lauren grabbed his arm; they stopped beneath a peeling sycamore, and she looked up frightened. "Don't think your part is over," she whispered.

"What?" he said. She had spoken too low for him to understand.

"I said, you're still in it. In fact, your big moment is still coming up." She saw his anxious expression and smiled. "Don't be too worried, though. You won't be hurt." She waved and started walking back in the direction they had come.

"That sounded more like the dream Lauren," he thought. "The one the real Lauren chased away with the broken bottle. I like the dream better, I think." He went up the stairs to Aunt Rozji's front door. It wasn't locked, and he went inside.

"Hello," said a man in a dark suit. "You must be Mr. Newby."

"That's right," said the salesman warily.

"Well," said the man, "my name is Greg Rembrick. I'm a Young Christians' Outdoor Health leader here in town. Me and the YCOH teens were hoping that you'd play an active part in our monthly group session this afternoon. Aunt Rozji told me that she thought you'd be happy to oblige, but I can understand that this comes at awfully short notice. So if you'd like to back out, we can just get on with the meeting."

"You're holding a meeting here now?" asked Newby.

"Yes," said Rembrick, smiling. "Aunt Rozji has been so kind to us, ever since our community social center teen canteen burnt to the ground last year. A strange fire it was, too."

"The others?"

"Oh, they're all out now, gathering different sorts of local leaves for our scrapbook. They'll be back in, uh," he glanced at his watch, "about ten minutes."

"What sort of thing will I have to do?" asked Newby.

Rembrick indicated that they should sit. The salesman took a place on one of the old woman's sofas, facing the youth leader. "Nothing difficult," said Rembrick. "We just need to have an outside adult read a short speech during our devotional fellowship nondenominational brotherhood council prayer-circle union of love."

"I see," said Newby. "I guess that would be all right."

"Fine," said Rembrick, smiling and nodding eagerly. "Fine. Thank you very much. The teens will be so happy." The two men chatted briefly, and after a couple of minutes the younger members of the group began joining them. Not long afterward, Mr. Rembrick announced that everyone was present. He had them all stand in a circle with himself in the center. They joined hands and sang a hymn, then closed their eyes and bowed their heads, while he recited a short invocation.

"Just read those words now, if you please, Mr. Newby," said Rembrick.

"Those words?" asked the salesman. Newby saw the words written in the air in terrifying green flames. He heard no reply from the other man. Newby stood and walked slowly toward the fiery letters. He stopped a few feet from them, and began reading slowly. "As earth the father water holds," he said in a low voice, "so air may fire in its cool embrace retain. Here the yearning mind of man entails the pinnacle of knowledge, the

pit of wisdom's horror." With a sudden flicker, the words changed. Newby glanced at Rembrick and the youth group; they had all fallen to their knees, their faces contorted in strange ecstasy. He continued. "Let the vast wheeling of the universe transform their knotted bowels. Let the great sky drama of blazing suns blast their hearts, shrivel lungs and steal breath, poach brains in boiling blood. Let heaven's yawning emptiness draw up their sensibilities, let the pendant mass of all the spheres and orbs crush their bones to sacrificial powder." Newby read the last of the flickering words, and they disappeared. Rembrick and his young charges were quite still upon the carpet of the parlor, their faces stretched in the extremities of suffering. As he watched, they screamed soundlessly. A blackness escaped their mouths and cloaked their heads, a dark fog in which Newby thought he could see the stark, unwinking stars of night. The blackness quickly vanished, and the salesman knew they were all grotesquely dead.

Chimes rang. There was someone at Aunt Rozji's door. Newby panicked for a moment, then fought for control. He knew that the authorities had not been able to find any element of criminal activity in the deaths of the Muldower girl or Mrs. Siebern. What could anyone say about the corpses on Aunt Rozji's floor? It could only be some kind of poisoning. Perhaps it was something they had eaten together. Newby took a deep breath, then went to answer the door.

"Hi," said Lauren. "Are you done yet?"

Newby nodded. "Just finished up a few seconds before you rang. Now what?"

"What do you mean?" she said, walking past him into the parlor.

"Well, what do we do with the bodies?"

"`We'?"

"What do I do with the bodies?"

Lauren shook her head sadly. "Don't you learn anything? What happened to Miss Popover? What did they do with Mrs. Siebern? They just left them there. We'll just leave these here for the police to find."

"I don't know what I'd do without you," said Newby scornfully.

"Look, fella," she said angrily, "I'm really glad this thing is wrapping up to a close. It hasn't been so much fun, you know. You're not the neatest guy around. I did it because I have to. I can think of better ways of spending a lifetime."

"Like what?"

"Like bombing around," she said. "Trying on gloves at Sears. Anything."

"You don't have any junior murderers' league or something?"

"The sarc remark," she said. "The emblem of the stunted intellect."

"I'm doing my best," said Newby.

"How do you feel that you've changed?" asked Lauren. "You are no longer able to state with any assurance what the correct date is. You are frequently unable to recall where you are, geographically speaking. Your emotions are not appropriate to the situation. You are rapidly exhibiting signs

of sociopathic behavior. Have you detected any further deviation in your outlook since this afternoon?"

"I don't know," he said.

"Well, I think you may soon discover that you are no longer able to discern right from wrong. How do you feel about what you just did to Mr. Rembrick and the kids?"

"Nothing," said Newby. "I don't feel anything at all."

"Do you think you would have felt nothing, say, a week ago?"

"I can't say," he muttered. He stared at the misshapen bodies. He still didn't feel anything.

"With Miss Popover, you were merely a witness. With Mrs. Siebern, you helped out. Here, you were on your own. Aunt Rozji and Old Man Durfee have managed to destroy the very last shred of your old self, without your even guessing what was happening. You don't know when you are, where you are, now you don't even know what or who you are. You've become a complete non-being, a blank, ready to be stamped with the first identity that is chosen for you."

"That's ridiculous," said Newby.

Lauren smiled; the expression frightened the salesman. "Do you know what?" she asked. "If Old Man Durfee gave you his quiz again, right now, you wouldn't even know how to hold the pencil."

"Sure, I would."

"You show typical ambivalent notions, common in even mild cases of schizophrenia. Sometimes you want to run away, but you never do. Sometimes you defend those two old monsters, but you know you hate them."

"What about you?" asked Newby.

"Do you mean, how do I feel about them?" she said. "Or how do you feel about me?"

"I don't know."

"Of course you don't. You're not supposed to. That's the whole point. You've been worn down."

Newby collapsed on a sofa. He rubbed his eyes. He felt nothing. He was not afraid. He was not disgusted. He was not at all anxious to leave. He knew that it would be a tremendous effort to plan anything. "What happens now?" he asked.

"More of the same, I'm afraid," said Old Man Durfee. Newby looked up; the drunk and the old woman had come in.

"Why do you always seem to appear while I'm sitting with my eyes closed?" he asked.

"Why do you always seem to have your eyes closed when we arrive?" asked Aunt Rozji, busily examining the bodies on her floor. "Young Lauren, would you be so kind as to call the police?" Newby laughed.

"Are you amused, Newby?" asked Old Man Durfee.

"No," said the salesman. "It just seems like you're going to try to use me as a scapegoat now."

"That's an idea," said Aunt Rozji, raising an eyebrow.

"`Hooty-hoot,'" said Lauren. "`The old owl of doom hooty-hoots to the dove.'" She dialed the phone and spoke to the police officer who answered.

"Ask them about my car," said Newby.

"I have some interesting statistics," said Old Man Durfee. "I took the trouble of digging these up this afternoon. It

seems that for every hundred thousand persons in the United States, there are some two hundred ninety people with schizophrenia of one form or another. Of course, `schizophrenia' takes in a large number of different disorders. But of those nearly three hundred suffering souls, only half are being treated. That leaves another hundred fifty maniacs per hundred thousand running around loose."

"Should I turn myself in?" asked Newby skeptically.

"You already have," said Aunt Rozji. "We'll take care of you."

"You already have," said Newby to himself.

"If you went into a hospital," said Lauren, hanging up the telephone, "you'd probably be locked up for quite a while."

"Thirteen years is the average," said the drunk.

"Thirteen years," said Aunt Rozji gently. "Just think of it."

"Some murderers get out in less time," said Newby.

"We don't like to talk about that," said the old man.

Aunt Rozji sat down next to Newby, and took his hands in hers. Her old skin was rough, with sharp, hard points of callus that stabbed Newby's fingers. He felt a general anxiety, without specific cause. He wanted to stay and find a secure home, or go and discover his lost identity, or something; he wasn't sure. It was the uncertainty, rather than the unusual events and the piling up of dead persons that upset him. "You may well be the victim of simple schizophrenia," said the old woman. "It has taken these somewhat bizarre happenings to point it out to you. You thought you were well-adjusted and normal. It must be quite a blow to your stability to find out that you're not."

"What happened to your accent?" he asked. "What happened to Old Man Durfee's drunken wino ways?"

"Most simple schizophrenics never realize they're ill," said Aunt Rozji. "They seem to be merely a bit antisocial. They become vagrants, like Young Durfee, although his case is quite a bit different. Perhaps your brain will turn even stranger, leading to hebephrenia, characterized by inappropriate foolishness and giggling, or, at other times, unexplained weeping. What about hallucinations? Have you been troubled by them?"

"So far, they've been rather nice," said Newby. "I haven't actually been convinced that I've had hallucinations, you see. I'm more or less taking the word of Lauren for that."

"She ought to know," said Old Man Durfee. "She's been a hallucination often enough herself."

"Thank God you're not paranoid," said the old woman. "You're not catatonic, either. You've a lot to be thankful for."

"I am," said Newby.

The chimes rang again. Lauren answered the door; it was the police. They came in and stood around the corpses on the carpet. Newby was surprised by their reaction. Many of the police officers gasped in horror, or ran back outside, sickened. The salesman had thought that a policeman would see many such sights in the course of his career. He was amazed that they would be so affected.

"Who found these individuals?" asked a sergeant.

"He did," said Old Man Durfee, pointing to Newby.

The sergeant nodded. "I suppose they couldn't go undiscovered for very long," he said. "This isn't such a big town."

"No, it isn't," said Old Man Durfee.

"There doesn't seem to be any indication of foul play," said the sergeant. "I won't have to question you, in that case. But the final word will have to come from the coroner."

"In just a few seconds," said a small, gray man who was busily prodding the dead bodies. "Ah. Their bones are shattered from within, as though they fell from an enormous height. But there are no outward signs at all. A most curious case."

"There have been a number of them of late," said the sergeant with a rueful smile.

"I judge that they all died from some manner of apoplexy," said the coroner.

"All?" asked Aunt Rozji. "At the same time? What a strange coincidence."

"There have been quite a few of those, too," said Old Man Durfee.

"Well," said the sergeant, "I want to thank you people for your help. We'll have somebody come by in the morning to collect these jokers. I'll just ask that you not move any of the individuals here in the meantime. We'll want to get plaster molds and things like that. Clues. You understand."

"Certainly," said Old Man Durfee. The sergeant waved and followed the coroner to the door. After the police had gone, Lauren turned to Aunt Rozji.

"Why do they need clues, if they all died of apoplexy?" she asked.

"To help find a cure for apoplexy, I guess," said Aunt Rozji. "The police department has become much more scientifically minded since I was a girl."

"Now we can relax," said the old drunk.

There was an immediate hush in the dim house. In the sudden silence, Newby wondered what he had been listening to in the minutes previously: clocks in the parlor ticking, electric hum of kitchen appliances, wood creaking in the humid heat, restless tapping of fingers and shoes, noise from the street, neighbors mowing lawns, airplanes, all these sounds died together. It was perfectly still, a waiting moment, an interval, a preparation.

"Ah," said Aunt Rozji, "you will be happy to learn that everything that concerns you is now in its absolute final stage."

"That cheers me up considerably," said Newby.

"I took the liberty of ending our little contest," said Old Man Durfee. "With Aunt Rozji's help, of course." The drunk smiled roguishly at her, and the old woman laughed.

"May I inquire as to the results?" asked Newby.

"I won," said Old Man Durfee. "The enmity between us is ended. Aunt Rozji took over your moves and, with the aid of a few more spontaneous alterations of the rules, I was able to checkmate your harried king in splendid style."

"Well," said Newby, somewhat bored, "let me congratulate you. How was this marvelous stratagem wrought?"

"First of all," said Aunt Rozji, "I added a condition that no piece could be moved unless the nearest pawn of the same color could make a congruent move at the same time, legally. So each player would then be moving two pieces per turn, his desired piece, plus the nearest pawn."

"As you can imagine," said Old Man Durfee, "this cuts down somewhat on the number of available moves each player has to choose from. As it developed, I was better able to visualize the situation."

"Better than Aunt Rozji, at least," said Newby.

"Well, we all agreed to bow to her judgments. Then, finally, I was given the weapon to break your position. Aunt Rozji declared that the queen was to be given a new power. She called it the `H-bomb capability.'"

Lauren laughed. "For an immigrant, she certainly has a way with words," she said.

Old Man Durfee gave the girl a disapproving look. "In any event," he said, "at any one time during the game, the queen could be placed on any vacant square on the board. All pieces, friend and foe alike, on the eight adjacent squares are considered `destroyed,' and removed from the game, except the kings. You can see what terrible havoc this piece can wreak on any well-defended position. And, you may recall, you no longer had your queen. Well, given this instrument, it was no great trouble to bring your tattered army to its knees."

"It doesn't sound like you have much to be proud of," said Newby. "It didn't end up to be much like chess."

"The rules are always arbitrary," said Aunt Rozji. "It's just that you're used to them being arbitrary the same way each time."

"I'm sorry," said Newby.

"That's all right," said Old Man Durfee.

"Well," said Aunt Rozji, standing and stretching her thin, spotted arms, "let's get going, Young Newby. Your epiphany awaits."

"What?" said Newby. "I thought it was all over. You said yourself that I was pretty much depersonalized. How can a diluted being like me have an epiphany?"

"You'll see," said Lauren, tugging at Newby's hand. "Come on." The four people walked to the door and out onto the porch. It was getting cooler outside, although the humidity was still uncomfortable. A fresh breeze brushed through the dense leaves around Aunt Rozji's house.

"Where are we going?" asked Newby. "Back to the diner?"

"You'll see," said Lauren.

"The diner's played its part," said Old Man Durfee. "It doesn't make any real difference where we go now. Just start walking."

Aunt Rozji took the salesman's arm. With a shock, Newby waited for Old Man Durfee to take the other; that was how it began, both for Theresa Popover and Mrs. Siebern. Greg Rembrick and the YCOH teens had all joined hands before Newby had killed them. He was relieved to see that the old drunk had fallen back to speak softly with Lauren. He turned his attention to the doddering woman at his side.

"I wonder if you've noticed this interesting fact," she said. "After each of the introductory interludes, you seemed to awaken as from a nap. The episodes seemed to you like dreams. To a large extent they were. To that same extent, you are now."

"This is a dream?" asked Newby, not sure what she meant.

"Well, partly so," she said. "Can you think of any difference between the affair of the Young Christian Outdoor Health group and the earlier encounters?"

"Well," said Newby slowly, "I was on my own with the last one. I didn't see you or Old Man Durfee until the whole thing was over. In fact, I saw Lauren before you came in."

"That's true. And you ought to be congratulated. You handled the matter with precision, taste, and dispatch. But now you're such a formless person. It is indeed a great waste. You have little effect on the world, you know."

Newby laughed sadly. "When have I ever had any effect?"

"That's just it," said Aunt Rozji. "We're trying to change that for you."

"I appreciate it."

"Now, think again," she said. "What other differences can you find?"

"I give up," said Newby.

"Well, you've never roused from the Young Christian Outdoor Health dream. Everything's continued in an unbroken line since then."

"Yes," cried Newby, "that's true! I knew there was something wrong."

Aunt Rozji stopped on the sidewalk and stroked the salesman's arm. "Because we love you, Young Newby," she said, "and because Young Durfee conquered you at chess, we're going to help you. It is in our power to leave you as you are, a breathing cipher. We have done it before. But we have taken a special interest in you. We will push you that final step."

It was very dark. Newby couldn't decide whether night had swiftly fallen, or if the blackness were some artificial trick of his dream. A round yellow moon hung in the sky, huge, far too big, as if it were resting on the horizon instead of staring down from the summit of the sky. Newby glanced at the moon and felt an unpleasant chill. The cold yellow light seeped through his eyes into his veins. He had to look away.

He heard the ragged scraws of the evening's birds, as they fought over insects. He heard the cicadas shrilling at him. There was no way that he could interpret their warning. He walked on. Aunt Rozji and Old Man Durfee were silent. Lauren was humming "Volare." Newby walked past the sealed houses, each flashing tiny lights from the crystal faces mounted in windows and doors. The houses presented no threat tonight, though. Newby could sense that they were merely curious observers. The solitary figures that glided within them were almost as powerless as he. They watched, but they could be of no help, either. The great buildings seemed to roll past, one by one. Newby was aware that he was walking down a steep, shaded hill. The street was no longer paved with red brick, but instead was covered with a black material imbedded with diamond points of light. The

minute beams from the blacktop tried to communicate, but he would not understand.

He looked back at the houses, his only and impotent allies. They were gone. They had become massive abstract shapes, black solids blocking sharp-edged swaths of the night sky. He walked past towering cubes and rectangular pyramids. The moon's light colored them unpleasant shades of dark yellow-green. The trees were gone too. The insects and birds were gone. All sound was gone. Lauren and the old people were gone.

Newby moved through a flat landscape; the ground was hard beneath his feet, level, without rock or curb or root. The vast shapes dwindled in number as he passed, until at last he could see only one, far ahead of him on the moonlit plain. He hurried toward it. It was the only clue to where he was, how he might get out, who he might be. He ran, and he seemed to run for hours, but the black bulk in the distance did not come closer. After a time, the moon settled below the horizon, leaving Newby to the pale light of the stars. The monstrous shape became a black patch on the black shade of night. He ran, and he was amazed that he did not grow tired.

When at last he reached the gigantic green-black thing he saw that it was not a smooth façade, as the other shapes had been. Bits of starlight caught in grooves and pits on the object's face. Although the block rose hundreds of feet above his head, all the peculiar hollows were within easy reach. Newby stretched his hand out and felt one of the markings; his fingers traced a letter A. He explored further; all of the carvings proved to be letters. He could not read the entire

inscription at once. He had to search out its meaning, letter by letter, word by word. He raised himself up and deciphered the first word. "This," he said aloud. The next word. "World," he said. He was able to read them more quickly. "This world," he said, "this island of stone. This trimmed and dressed block of marbled mud. This hanging ball in space, this single monument to me. I am alone. I, this block of stone. I, this captive world. I read these words. I become these words. I become this mighty pedestal of stone, whose function is to give form to these words. I become this reckless celestial sphere, whose function alone is to support this mighty pedestal of stone. I am here, alone, and my function is to read these words." Newby paused, his voice becoming hoarse. He looked back at the letters he had already traced. Their indentations into the rock had filled with a spectral lumination. He could easily read them, now; the words yet ahead, though, were still hidden in the darkness.

He continued. "If any doubt my existence, let him doubt himself. If any question my purpose, let him question himself." Newby felt suddenly afraid. His throat felt dry, his blood rushed, roaring, in his ears. He could not stop. "As the words, the rock, the world careen through the empty night, let him who reads these words shake within himself, like a long-dead leaf rattles withered in the winter storm." Newby felt his mind coming loose, his personality falling from its anchored place in the intangible secret place of his soul. There were no more words. Newby stepped back and stared at the steady radiation that outlined the letters. He took a few more paces away from the immense stone thing; he turned

and saw himself still standing by the rock face, his hands plunged to the wrists in the cold white flames.

"Hey!" cried Newby. He wanted to run. He wanted to escape, back across the plain, through the jumbled mountains of stone, until they became houses again; he wanted to run toward the single mighty tower and his silent image. He did neither. He stood and watched, as the other Newby fell to his knees and began to pray. The other Newby worshiped the terrible pillar of stone, and the glowing letters carved in its side. The other Newby shrieked incoherent words; he waved his arms slowly above his head, then folded his hands in a submissive attitude of adoration. "Don't put your hands together!" shouted Newby, horrified. It was too late. The other Newby jerked violently, as though he were pulled about by invisible wires. The man's skin seemed to shatter and flake away. Newby stared as his double began to crumble, bits of formerly vibrant flesh falling to the ground and degenerating to powder. A gust of wind puffed the dust, all that remained of the other Newby, away in a misty cloud of gray.

"Good God, what's going on?" said Newby, his eyes filling with tears.

"You've molted yourself," said the voice of Aunt Rozji. "You've left your dream self, like an insect abandons its dead, husky skin."

Newby turned to find her. The empty plain was gone. The towers of stone were gone. He was back in Aunt Rozji's parlor. "I don't understand," he said.

"That's a very good sign," said Old Man Durfee. "If you did understand, we'd have more of a job to do. You're one of us,

now, in a way. You're a real Gremmager. You're ready to find a job here, find a place to live, a new wife, perhaps. You're ready to help us whenever another stranger comes to visit."

"We'll let you know if we ever need you," said Aunt Rozji.

"You're not schizo, anymore," said Lauren, walking over to hug him. "You're just, well, plain. You don't have to worry about anything ever again."

"Good," he said.

"It's not everyone that can kill his own dream self," said Old Man Durfee. "Some of us don't even have one."

"Don't be pompous, Young Durfee," said the old woman. She turned again to Newby. "You're completely assimilated now. You're very lucky. This town is very selective about whom it chooses."

"It can afford to be," said Old Man Durfee.

"Because it's not such a big town," said Lauren.

"Hooty-hoot," said Newby. "Hooty-hoot."

Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

## Timmy Was Eight

Hanson Park. The green darkness of summer; globes of light on the streetlamps illuminating patches of grass, shining on disconnected bits of path. Traffic noises from the park's crossroad, hidden behind the trees. A stifled cry from the bushes; groans that stop suddenly; wet sucking sounds.

There, behind the shrubbery: in the middle of red, wet bones, pools of dark and steaming liquid, strings and lumps of flesh, there in the middle of the corpse (could you call it a corpse? At what point in the butchery did it become just a horrible pile of unrelated tissues, bones, and blood?)--there was the alien.

White, perfectly white, gleaming in the light of the streetlamps. Protected by the same monomolecular skin that shielded it from the burning cold of the methane snow fields on its distant home. The intense heat of Earth's night was held away, with just a bony sheath protruding through the invisible skin to accomplish the terrible feasting. The blood splatters smeared on the skin then disappeared.

It was a large, amorphous creature. It gathered itself into billows and ripples of motion as it fed, spreading out over the sodden red grass or contracting into a sphere. The tip of the sheath secreted a powerful enzyme which dissolved the tissue; the semi-solid mass was drawn up the sheath, through the invisible shell, and into the creature.

* * * *

## Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

Timmy was eight. He lived with his parents in a three-story house on Parkside Avenue. This evening he sat with his mother on the couch, watching television. At nine o'clock his mother told him that he had to go to bed. He didn't want to. He could remember all the times that he had been allowed to stay up late; he used to brag to his friends whenever he saw a late TV program. When he was younger his mother had told him that if he wasn't in bed at the right time, the men would come in a van and take him back to the factory.

Timmy's father sat in an easy chair on the other side of the room. He had a little folding table in front of him; while he watched television he played solitaire. He usually drank beer from about nine o'clock until the end of the Johnny Carson show, and said nothing the entire evening. He was waiting for Timmy to go to bed so that he could get the first bottle.

"I want you in bed before the next program starts," said Timmy's mother.

Timmy sat where he was, unconcerned. He watched the commercial, a station break, and two more commercials. Just before the end of the third commercial he jumped off the couch and ran upstairs.

* * * *

The grinding of heels on gravel. Voices from the other side of the bushes, people walking by on the path. The alien did not hear them, but its own senses were adequate. It flattened out on the ground, a large, thin, brightly bleached section of the grass. On its own world there were no colors; there was the uninterrupted white of the day, and the starless black of the silent, lifeless night. The alien was invisible against the

snows of its home, and it had no way of knowing that it was terrifyingly conspicuous in the park.

After a while it contracted once more. It pushed out two thin lateral flaps; it could glide gracefully on the scant breezes of its home world, but on Earth the harsher winds carried it about uncontrollably. From a distance it might have looked like a large section of newspaper twirling over the park grounds, over the sidewalk, across the street.

* * * *

The hall was safe. The dark brown carpeting felt good beneath his feet; it also kept him safe, all the way up the stairs to the bathroom and beyond. As long as he was on the carpeting, the monsters couldn't get him. The agreement had been that he was fair game as soon as he lifted both feet at once.

The bathroom was all right, too, as long as the light was on. The usual procedure was to stand in the hall and reach around the corner into the bathroom with his right hand. When he had turned on the light switch he could go in and safely brush his teeth. The bathroom was easy: he never felt afraid in the bathroom.

When he left the bathroom, he was still safe on the carpet. The hall went along further, all the way past his parents' bedroom to his own. Sometimes he was afraid in the dark hall, even though he knew he was still protected by the carpet. Sometimes he would flick on the light in his parents' room as he went by; he would come back out to turn it off after he put on the light in his own room.

* * * *

# Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

It swung wildly on the currents of air. It had no emotions, no fear or curiosity, only hunger. It had been interrupted during its last feeding, and now it sought another meal. The wind whipped it around, above the parked cars, the litter baskets, and signs. It crashed into the building across from the park. At the moment of impact it contracted defensively into a ball and fell; then it flattened out to land unseen on the methane snow that should have covered the ground.

It was caught by a strong updraft. Again it projected its two white wings and soared upward, along the face of the building. On the third floor a window was open; the alien followed the draft into the room.

One of its strange senses informed it that the room had recently contained a being like the one it had partially eaten in the park. Everything in the room was tinged with traces of the human's presence. The alien crawled from object to object; it rolled about the room seeking the best place to lie in wait. At last it found the spot that most strongly held the peculiar record of human use recognized by the alien's senses. It climbed up the short distance and waited.

* * * *

Timmy stood for a moment at the threshold of his room. At their other house the closet had been next to his bed; the monsters had been closer, but so had the light switch. He could reach out from under the protective covers and turn off the light: the only danger was in not jerking his arm back under the sheet quickly enough. But in the new house the light switch was here, by the door, all the way across the room from his bed. He had worked out a deal which allowed

him safe passage to his bed until the count of ten. Even though he counted very slowly (he was usually in bed and covered by "three"), he was still afraid. He was never sure that he could trust his monsters.

He took a deep breath. He turned off the light and hurried across the room to his bed.

He grabbed the sheet.

The sheet was moving...

It felt--

Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

## Live, from Berchtesgaden

"In Düsseldorf, as in certain other Rhinish Hauptstädten, there is a large yellow-brick building very close to the railroad terminal. I am told that a great many good German Bürger make their periodic, Kaabic journey to this yellow institution; inside one is confronted by a bewildering array of charming and less charming photos, blurrily enticing Kodachromes of Mädchen that may be rung up in the manner to which one has become accustomed.

"It is sometimes difficult for the uninitiated to know how to react to this. Europe, by its very nature, is like this, in all ways and throughout its continental extent. The pure geographic propinquity of nations lulls the tourist's sense of culture. How easy it is to cross a border and find oneself immediately in an entirely different milieu of mores and folkways. It is necessary to change your ethics at the booth while you change your pounds sterling or kronor.

"Do you have inhibitions? Lose them, or be unhappy, for sooner or later you will have one or another offended. No matter how grotesque the practice, how bestial the behavior, if you live Continental long enough you will find the neighborhood where it is merely comme il faut. For some, it is not the superficiality of `When in Rome ...' but a matter of survival."

* * * *

"Mein Herr Doktor, how is it that she speaks so? What language is it?"

Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

"It is English she speaks, Frau Kämmer. She is delirious; oftentimes they will babble so in another language. But it is strange that she is so coherent. It is almost as if she recites."

"Aber, Herr Freischütz, my Gretchen knows no English. It cannot be English that she speaks."

"Far away now, beyond the political and other walls that we have built, beneath the impossible burden of years, look: Unter den Linden. Berlin! The mention of that brightest and most sophisticated of capitals did not always carry with it the indelible tinge of guilt, the subtlest pricks of fear. Unter den Linden: no other avenue in metropolitan Europe quite held the imagination of the literate world to such a degree; no other city's showplace was ever so rich with the modish, the absolute dernier cri. The broad, shaded way runs from the former Royal Palace down to the Vopos at Checkpoint Charlie. As in any large city, the Unter den Linden of old was frequented by the ubiquitous Strassendirnen; but, whether or not it was merely the effect of the reflection of old Berlin's loveliness, these easier matches did not offend the grace and charm of the street. It was only after the war that Berlin learned shame.

"This shame was not previously totally unknown. It was, however, unnecessary. Beginning with Carolus Magnus, or Charlemagne, the Germans began their expansion eastward--the notorious Drang nach Osten--late in the eighth century. To this day the land to the west of the River Elbe is known as the `old Germany,' and the land east, the `new Germany.' Thus, historical precedent has given way to shame; the shame is shared by those who know the old Germany, for

these are immersed in the most ancient of traditions. The new Germany is comparatively younger, but no one, not the oldest Weisskopf, is able to remember the initial annexation. Whatever shame is felt, therefore, is hereditary in nature. It is false shame."

* * * *

"Guten Nachmittag, Herr Doktor."

"Ja, und auch Ihnen."

"Wie geht es Ihnen?"

"Sehr gut, danke. Ihre Tochter hat gut geschlafen. Wie geht's Ihnen?"

"Ach, comme çi, comme ça. Pas mal."

* * * *

"Where is Germany? Do you find Germany in the thousands of Volkswagens on the American highways? Is Germany to be found by searching amongst the sausages and waltzes and Buddenbrooks of the world? Where is Germany? What, now, is Germany?

"Germany has traded Weltschmerz for ethischer Fortschritt. The sensuousness of the Italians, the chauvinism of the French, the snobbery of the British, the unbridled passions of the Danish and the Swedes, the inscrutability of the Finnish, all these are as nothing compared to the sincerity of the German concern for morality. `May God punish the sinful French' is a slogan for the masses; it is also, perhaps, an indication of the direction the German Weltanschauung has taken. It is no longer permissible to allow the nationalities of our continent to squander their precious energies in lustful abandon. It is time for a cleansing.

"But does this mean, I hear you ask, does this mean that a new wave of Puritanism must o'ersweep us, one and all? No, I reply, for extremism does not fit in with our own and exquisitely German idea of Weltpolitik.

"We cannot yet look for Germany in those isolated and expensive places in the sun. The specter of doom rises, and falls, and rises again: such is the natural course of events. It must rise once more like the Unterseeboot, to an economic and social periscope depth. There must be some effectual Curt Jurgens at the helm, and the tubes must be kept cleared for action. `Bearing zero five four, two thousand yards ... Mark!' This must be the watchword. `Torpedoes' ... Los! Must be the countersign."

* * * *

"What is she saying? Does she still go on in English?"

"Yes, Nurse. But she becomes less coherent. What is this inflammatory rhetoric? Such pseudo-poetry! Ah, such a strange coma."

"Herr Doktor, can nothing be done? She rambles on so; the other patients complain of the constant disturbance."

"Naja, then. Give her ein Glas Schnaps."

* * * *

"There is no hiding this shame. It hides im Bahnhof, it lurks im Postamt, there is no peeling it from your shaking shoulders. `Ich bekenne mich die Anklage, "nicht schuldig.'" How many of us stop our laughter when we buy soap, when we touch the lampshade? When the SS and the SA march away, whose minds do they take with them, even now? `Wenn wir fahren gegen England!"

"`Isn't the Jew a human being too? Of course he is; none of us ever doubted it,' wrote Joseph Goebbels. `All we doubt is that he is a decent human being.'

"Ich bekenne mich die Anklage, `nicht schuldig.'

"`But in all, we can say that we fulfilled this heaviest of tasks in love to our people. And we suffered no harm in our essence, in our soul, in our character....' Heinrich Himmler wrote that.

* * * *

"`Paragraph 1: Jews may receive only those first names which are listed in the directives of the Ministry of the Interior concerning the use of first names.

"`Paragraph 2: If Jews should bear first names other than those permitted to Jews according to Par. 1, they must, as of January 1, 1939, adopt an additional name. For males, that name shall be Israel, for females Sara.'

"`On May 11, another transport of Jews (1,000 pieces) arrived in Minsk from Vienna, and was taken from the station directly to the above-mentioned ditch....'

"Ich bekenne mich...

"I plead `not guilty.'"

"Ah, Frau Kämmer, so good of you to come. I must speak to you about your daughter. Gretchen is a tragic case. Her coma is now nearly a year. She takes little food, she is wasting away; she is but a human skeleton. But, you know, she never ceases to talk. Her voice is anguished, Frau Kämmer, so that it pains one to listen. But what she says? Still delirium.

"But now, our country is at war. We march against the czar. Our Wilhelm takes us against the Russians, and today we are at war also with the French. There has been a general call for doctors, and I must now tell you that the sanatorium is closing. Your Gretchen may be taken home; I had been already considering that recommendation. It may do her more good than this close but impersonal attention..."

* * * *

"Why am I here? I can't remember my husband here.

"As I recall, we were driving to Mainz. Our little brown VW. We pronounced it fow-vay in Germany. Driving along the Autobahn. I remember this Mercedes. We had the temerity to pass this black Mercedes. In our little VW.

"This feeling of twisting...

"Here...

"Ich..."

* * * *

"How is she today?"

"Better, poor thing. She's just wasted away from being in that awful hospital. She sounds like she's just out of her head, pure and simple."

"And now, what with the war..."

* * * *

"It is interesting to leaf through the documents that were discovered following the surrender. For instance, this communication: `We started with three and a half million Jews here. Of that number, only a few work companies remain. Everybody else has--let us say--emigrated.'

Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

"Where are all those soldiers now? Sousaphone players in the Bratwurst Festival?

"How can I say that I am not guilty?

"I cannot listen anymore. I cannot listen to the charges.

"Please, stop."

"Mama, does Gretchen know the news?"

"No, Liebchen, she cannot understand."

"Will you tell her about the Lusitania?"

"Nein, sie würde es nicht verstehen."

* * * *

"We must keep to ourselves. Everyone--the Russians, the French, the English, especially the Americans--they all watch. They hope to catch us, like little boys stealing the pfennigs from Mama's purse.

"We are here. We know what we have done; it is only left to atone for our deeds, or to justify them.

"We cannot know which course is the more horrible."

* * * *

"Ernst. My husband's name is Ernst. He was born near Gelnhausen. We met in New York, during the Depression. But I can't remember..."

* * * *

"Have you heard enough? Then consider the Sonderkommando.

"Little wooden and concrete block outhouses. Signs indicated that they were baths. How thoughtful of the German High Command. The inmates were gathered together; those who could play musical instruments were commandeered to play cheerful tunes from The Merry Widow. Everyone watched

as the band played; soon everyone would have their turn for the delousing.

"They got a couple of thousand in one of those buildings. They got their money's worth out of the hydrogen cyanide.

"Twenty minutes later, after the spasms had stopped, they called in the Sonderkommando. They were male Jews who were promised immunity from execution for their services. They went into the gas chambers and pulled the tangled corpses apart with hooks. They hosed down the walls, cleaning off the blood and fouler material. They extracted the gold teeth of their kinsmen. A week later, they were gassed, too.

"You've heard it before, don't kid yourself.

"It is said that God appeared to Paul Joseph Goebbels dressed in a leather corset, tightly laced high-heeled hip boots, and brandishing a riding crop. To this day the breezes, according to the neighborhood fools around Bayreuth, to this day you may hear gentle whisperings, wind whistles of the Horst Wessel, and you know that it's just a matter of time before die Fahne is again hoch.

"After reading about Argentine political murders, can you spare some outrage for the merry pranks of forty years past?

"Picture: It is night. The darkness is made more complete by the storm clouds which obscure the moon and stars. There is nothing to be seen but the light of a small lantern shining through the window of a farmhouse, about a hundred yards away. It is early December near Metz; it is very cold. There is ice on the Moselle, whose banks curve away about three kilometers beyond the farm. The German patrol halts on the

rutted dirt road. Two of the six soldiers are sent up to the farmhouse. They knock loudly on the door. There is a long pause before the door is opened; then the light spills out through the narrow crack. Someone inside the house gasps, someone cries, another curses softly. The Germans force their way into the house. Sometimes in this situation there are shots, sounds of breaking glass, objects falling to the floor. At last one vert-de-gris comes to the door. He calls the other four, who still stand in the road, slapping their gloved hands and stamping their jackbooted feet.

"The six Germans are named Gerd, Thomas, Heinrich, Karl, Sigmund, and Gottlob. Their job is to stay in the farmhouse and guard it against the Allies. All over Europe there are similar pockets of Deutschland; this is how the war was fought, from farmhouses. Sometimes they are attacked by Burt Lancaster. Generally Heinrich, stranded hundreds of kilometers from the collaborating dévoreuses of Paris, goes mad and shoots a couple of his mates, or dies of lockjaw. In the end the Allies arrive in force, and the Boche are made to abandon the house, throwing their Lugers on a pile and crying `Kamerad!"

"And so, these days, as you take your Polaroid Swinger shots of the Kölner Dom, you will meet a man. He is selling green and yellow balloons, ice cream and peanuts, plastic novelties. You speak to him in your halting German, `Bitte, können Sie mir sagen, wie komme ich zur Bedürfnisanstalt?' He smiles at you and answers in flawless English, `The public lavatory that you seek is located there, built into the side of

the Victory Monument. My name is Sigmund. You must be Americans. How charming; I was a Stormtrooper, myself.'

"This never happens. If you ask a German student about the Nazizeit, he says, `Terrible. Simply terrible. It is frightening to believe that an entire nation could be so deluded. It was all like a monstrous dream.' A dream.

"`Yes,' you say, `but what did your father do during the war?'

"His eyes shift nervously, his tongue licks his full, Aryan lips, and he coughs. `My father? Oh, during the war he was taking care of some mining interests in South America. We lived in São Paulo then; we never had any actual contact with the Reich.'

"So much for atrocities.

"You must be the conscience for your family: your daughter is busy with ecology, and your husband leads the commuters' fight with the Long Island Railroad. You must keep these memories alive, before you are seduced away by the plight of the American Indian."

"We have shown the way. It is always Germany that develops, nicht wahr, it is always Germany that knows its resources, that knows what to do with its people."

"Ach, what is it now, Herr Müller? In what new and resourceful way are we now superior?"

"You have right, Frau Kämmer, in calling us resourceful. For, indeed, we are the practical nation. How did they fight wars? How did the human race battle previously? Why, by loosing various missiles at the enemy, and hoping that the paths of the projectiles and the opposing soldiery might

intersect. Ah, look at the probability. Very low, n'est-çe pas? What we have done, what the German Command has done, April 22, 1915, at Ypres, is to harness the potential of the very air as a weapon! The atmosphere has become our ally, spreading our new and tiny globules of death. We use gas. The new aircraft dispense thick yellow clouds, and the French are overcome, they are disabled, or they die."

"Perhaps we could drop from those same aircraft a sort of jellied petroleum product. It could be ignited, and those same foes would then have something to contend with, eh?"

"You do not know what you ask, Frau Kämmer. There are still conventions. We do have several sorts of gas, thanks to the Krupps of Essen and to the Interessen Gemeinschaft with their famous German professors. We have such variety; `poison gas' is then a misnomer. We should refer, rather, to `chemical warfare.' That is better, it is more gemütlich. We have the gas chemicals, and also the liquid chemicals which act in much the same way. Of our asphyxiating substances we have had success with simple chlorine, phosgene, chloropicrin, and others. We have produced lachrymators, vesicant or blistering compounds, sternutatory or sneezing compounds, and toxic compounds such as prussic acid. We have been disappointed so far with the arsenic compounds. Major V. Lefebure documents all this in his jocularly titled volume, The Riddle of the Rhine. He discusses the new developments in mustard gas and states that `these inherent possibilities of organic chemistry, flexibility in research and production, make chemical warfare the most important war problem in the future reconstruction of the world.'"

"I couldn't agree more. Though we win, I would still see those canisters thrown into the sea."

"Yes, and how goes your daughter, Frau Kämmer?"

"My daughter? Gutrune? Why, she begins to go to school soon. It is very kind of you to ask after her."

"I am sorry. I meant to inquire about your other."

"My other? Perhaps you mean Gretchen? Ah, she sleeps. We have little to do with her these days. She needs such little attention. She is so thin, she looks like a skeleton. And her eyes! Sometimes they open, and stare ... We do not go into her room often these days."

* * * *

"I don't have any idea how I came here. I mean, I don't even know where I am. No one talks to me. They treat me like I'm not here at all. I'm paralyzed in this bed: I must have been in an accident, the way they shake their heads when they think I won't notice. Am I disfigured, startlingly mangled now?

"I don't know how I got here. I don't even remember who I am! Oh, my God. Who am I? What a dumb-ass question.

"Okay, don't panic. I'm Gretchen Weinraub.

"I'm on vacation. I'm in Europe. Our first trip back to Europe! We're in Germany, visiting Munich, just finished in Heidelberg and Stuttgart. Going on to Nuremberg next. Ernst and our grandson, Stevie. Where are they? I haven't seen them at all.

"How long have I been here?

"This isn't a hospital. I remember a doctor looking at me a few times, but he seemed old and worried, dressed in a

funny-smelling old dark suit. The ceiling above me is pointed, as if I were stuck up under the eaves. The mattress I'm lying on is very soft and comfortable. The bed is piled up with lovely hand-sewn quilts: it must be winter.

"It was July in Munich.

"Where am I? What happened?

"Where's Ernst?"

* * * *

"Weh, how she tosses and turns tonight. She is troubled."

"Mama, do you think she has dreams all this time? Her long sleep, is it like we have every night?"

"A full year. I pray the good Lord that it has been peaceful for her."

"Oh, Mama! A full year of nightmare! Oh, how horrible it would be! To be chased, or lost, or falling for a year--"

"Schweigst du, little one. God in Heaven watches her."

"Does God understand what she says?"

"Yes, Liebchen, God understands what everyone says. Our Gretchen mutters still in English, but she says yet those German words."

"You can understand them, Mama?"

"Yes, but such silly words they are! `Geheime Staatspolizei ...' What good are secret police, police that you can't even find when you need them? A `Gestapo'?"

"Are we winning, Mama?"

"Yes, of course we are. God knows who's been good and who's been bad."

"Has Daddy been good?"

"Yes, dear. He was wounded in the chest just last week. He will win the Iron Cross, Second Class, he thinks. I hope that he does. That will show that landlord of ours in München."

"Does Gretchen know?"

"No, Liebchen. Poor, poor Gretchen knows nothing of our great struggle."

"Will you be here when I die too, Mama?"

"Hush, now, Liebchen. Sit down. Watch the war."

* * * *

"I could have taken any of several tacks in doing this. Should I instead have stayed only with the contrite and apologetic? Would it have been better, or even believable, to try to persuade that things weren't really all that bad? Can you believe the canard that seventy-five million Germans were only carrying out their instructions and today can't even recall that they did? No. The question is too big. There are too many angles, and the extenuating circumstances are too difficult to explain.

"The apology must suffice. A necessary prologue, perhaps, for one in my position; but enough. Also, denn. `Hier steche ich.'

"I borrow those words, of course, from Martin Luther. He knew how it felt to have the responsibility of putting the abstract feelings of a nation, a world, into coherent form. It is for me, having attempted the apology with all the conscience that I can muster, to say, `Here we are.' I am supposed to point into the shadows, into our nation's superstitious submind, beckoning, saying to my fellows, `Come out! It is

over. Abierunt ad plures. They are dead, they are dead.' They are the memories, the guilt-demons that take on almost hallucinatory presence.

"And they should be dead. Why are we guilty no longer? Walk among us now. O felix culpa! Have the vanquished ever found such prosperity in defeat? To despair of forgiveness from God is the gravest of sins: why then should we bear the enmity of nations beyond the reasonable limit? The Führer was a captain who saw himself sinking and, in his perverse logic, thought it necessary to take his ship with him. Of course, the Heimatland suffered, but it was cleansed in its own Iron and Blood.

"No more brownshirts, blackshirts put away, too, with the photos of polished Mussolini, farewell Ade Polenland, ade weisse Hand; fest ist der Tritt, fest ist der Tritt up the steps into the attic, packed away in the trunks with the Hitler Youth badges, die Jugend marschiert, thirty, count `em, thirty extermination camps, hundreds of thousands of cheering people.

"Speak of this amazing recovery of the divided German republic. It is remarkable; it would not have been possible, ironically, without Hitler's terrible and unifying nationalistic zeal. The extremities which are his epitaph are the product of his absolute power. But today, and all that counts is today, our country is in a far stronger economic position than before the war. You may go into the Sowjet zone, if you wish, and cluck your tongue at the difference.

"The continued animosity of our former enemies grows a bit silly. Certainly we erred; we have learned from our

mistakes. Not, I might add, like more than one of our accusers, to whom the term `genocide' seems, to them, inapplicable because they lack the publicity that attended our Treblinkas and Buchenwalds. I fall into the tu quoque fallacy: you without sin, you be the first to cast the stone.

"We have a land. It is our Vaterland; that term cannot be discredited. If you insist on pulling open your older wounds, we insist on reacting with natural pride in our homes, ourselves, and our accomplishments.

"We still live."

* * * *

"Gretchen? We once had a daughter named Gretchen, but last spring we lost her."

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry. Did she ever regain consciousness?"

"Oh, no. You misunderstand. We have no idea if she is still alive. You see, as time passed we saw less and less of her. She did not produce in us such a great amount of interest. We dusted her features often, and changed the flowers in the vase monthly, but otherwise we rarely thought of her. Then, one day, she was gone."

"But after so long a confinement to her bed, and in her starved condition, surely she couldn't have gone off by herself?"

"We think so, too. Perhaps we merely mislaid her. I remember one time, when we had taken her outside for the fresher air, we couldn't for the life of us recall where we had put her. We have recently written to the Gastwirt at the inn at

St. Blasien, to see if we inadvertently left her in our rooms. But, personally, I don't think we even took her along."

* * * *

"I can't remember who I am.

"Sometimes, like last night, I think I'm still Gretchen Kämmer. Sometimes I'm Gretchen Weinraub. Right now, I don't have any name at all.

"I can't remember where I'm from, or where I am now.

"I remember getting here, or there, in a brown Volkswagen. It was the car we rented in Hamburg. I don't remember who the others who make up the `we' are.

"For some reason I feel absolutely no desire to know, I feel no horror at being totally lost. It's rather warm and soft, like anesthesia. The only reasonable thing now, I guess, is to start again somewhere. I don't know which way to head, and I suppose I'll make mistakes I've made before. I forget...

"And I cannot yet forgive, but I forget."

Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

## The Mothers' March on Ecstasy

Hello, my name is Dr. Davis, and I'm here to tell you about the time there was a happiness all around. You couldn't get anywhere; I mean, the dancers in the streets filled the avenues all day, all night. When you tried to push your way through them (there were still a few of us who had to get somewhere) they smiled at you and offered you their flower. You could only smile back, because if you attempted to say anything they would dance away. Dance the night away, under the mad moon of love.

When it all started I was living in Queens. Each morning I would get up and brush my teeth, pick up my notebook and table of logarithms from their place on the television, and take the subway to the laboratory on Manhattan's upper West Side. But as the joy spread, from person to person like an epidemic of the crabs, we scientists found that more and more of those systems that we had come to depend on were going wrong. Why had we never considered and instituted back-up, fail-safe systems? (Wagner, my companion, suggested that we would never admit that the back-up systems might be more reliable than the originals.) In any event, when the conductors and engineers and transit police and repairmen found the subway cars too limiting for the expression of their happiness, the trains ceased to run. Wherever they were abandoned they remained, blocking the dark visceral tubes of the city. The next trains to pass by would have to stop there, of course, and so they collected in

huge strings under the boroughs, good only as a breeding ground for the fabled alligators and giant Sumatran rats.

Well, so far, no problem. I walked. I walked through Queens to the Queensboro Bridge, crossed it, went up First Avenue to 72nd Street, turned west there through the park (Central Park was filled with dancing Puerto Rican softball teams) to Central Park West, uptown to 86th Street, west on 86th to Amsterdam, and uptown again to the secret location of the lab.

There was a spareness to the laboratory that I always found offensive. I had rented a storefront on Amsterdam about two months before the onset of the happiness, intending to work on a cure for something. I recall distinctly my elation in finding a place so congenial and so precisely what I had had in mind. I turned to Wagner and handed him the key. "Go," I said, "and find for us those supplies of which we will have need. Do not pay too dearly, neither shall you `cut corners' so that the difference will fall to your own purse."

"You may trust me, Master," he said. I did, too. We had an understanding.

Well, you can imagine my chagrin when, upon arriving at the lab the following morning, I found the entire wall space within covered with 1 x 8 white pine shelves, and on the shelves hundreds and hundreds of little bottles of chemicals. Calcium carbonate. Manganese dioxide. Copper sulfate. Little bottles with powder-blue labels and white plastic twist-off caps. In one corner was a monstrous pile of microscope slides, cloudy with previous use, unwashed and crusty. In an

old liquor carton were thousands of rubber stoppers, some with one hole, some with two holes, and some with no holes at all. Wagner had not bought any glassware to use them in.

"I ran out of funds," he said.

You may picture my pique. I hit him across the face, and he whimpered his apology. I sat down on the stool that he had thoughtfully purchased for me. No worktable. The very first thing that he should have acquired. I couldn't even begin without a slate-topped worktable. No Bunsen burner. No lens paper. No asbestos pad. No test-tube brush. I was helpless.

"What are we going to do, Master?" asked Wagner.

"Oh, shut up and let me think," I said. I regret those tones that I used on poor, faithful Wagner. But things are different now. He is gone, lost forever, and all that I have left is the knowledge of my responsibility for his lostness. This fearful weight bears me down, forces the very lifebreath of life from me, and I can never ease the pain. Oh, that I could enjoy anew the conscienceless freedom of those long-dead days. But I am sure that it is impossible. I am not a scientist now. (Perhaps you have noticed from the loveliness of the words that I have become a poet. It happened overnight. I had nothing to do with it. Fate, I suppose.) And so an entire lifetime's training and desire are made meaningless. I might as well retire; go learn to play shuffleboard with the others who discovered that they are no longer short-order cooks, bank guards, scissor sharpeners. Ah, the futility of striving. All that we can ask for is to be happy, eh?

And they were, and where did it get them? People just don't know when they're well off. There always has to be

something wrong, the serpent in the garden, that sort of thing. At first, when the signs pointed to nothing in particular, I thought it was all very charming. Men and women frolicking in the streets, everybody smiling and emptying wastepaper baskets from their office windows, cars playfully aiming themselves at each other and steering away at the last moment like the Dodgem at Euclid Beach Park when I was a tad. But it couldn't just stay that way, could it? No, not with people the way they are. Larger doses of joy were required. The search for outlets became frantic; people expended enormous amounts of energy, exhausting themselves and their city to show how happy they were. No one (except the scientists, who were immune) slept, or ate, or cried. Early on, singing was the rage. Then skipping down the sidewalk and walking barefoot through the Park Avenue fountains. Then nudity, though never any sort of overt sexual contact. For some unknown reason the abandonment of sorrow brought with it a rebirth of chastity. A sort of forced innocence that turned my stomach. Wagner agreed.

And, finally, dancing. Everybody danced, except us scientists, who continued to work. When things definitely began to look bad we pooled our resources and wrote papers. My friend Larry did a paper on the effect of eight million people dancing on the already overstressed geological formations on which Manhattan rests. He orchestrated a somber score, to coin a phrase: the island sinking beneath the waves, the city sitting like the cracked skin on a chocolate pudding, the people dancing their cares away, the night away, beneath a lunatic moon. It was then that we organized

ourselves, made over our already overtaxed fraternity of learning into the ragged irregular army of good-cause mendicants it is today.

Thanks to my years of experience in observation I could tell that the reveling multitudes were not really happy. There were moments when an individual had to catch his breath. Then, for just a few seconds, I imagine that he asked himself, "Hey, precisely what are we celebrating?" But then he'd look around and see everyone else dancing away to some hypothetical inner beat, and he'd find it again and smile and begin twisting. I didn't mind the inconvenience they were causing me as much as I was saddened by the overwhelming display of mass delusion. Several times I caught the arm of one of them and said, "You're not truly happy. You millions of people are just fooling yourselves. Come on back to the real thing. Come on back to life." But I never got anywhere that way. It was as though I had lost touch somehow with my fellow man, as though some impervious wall had been built, shutting me out from the companionship of my race because of an unknown arbitrary standard that I failed in my innocent desire for progress (not necessarily technological, though of course that was the channel through which most of my work had always been done, but social and spiritual as well. Knowledge for its own sake was not, in my youth, the hollow mockery of a goal that it has become today) to recognize, the fools. And now I had no one at all to turn to: about this time Wagner was due for his two weeks' vacation, which he spent in the Catskills. When he returned he was a changed man.

Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

"Master!" he shouted, slamming the screen door like I've told him a thousand times not to do. "Master, come see! I've taken myself a bride!" It was then that I realized that poor, stupid Wagner never understood exactly what sort of relationship we had. He dragged his new wife into the lab, where I was busily preparing my pencils for the day's work. The girl, to give her her due, was pretty, though not what I would call especially attractive. She smiled shyly; I asked her what her name was, and when she said "Linda" I could see Wagner's surprised reaction. Later I learned that Wagner had met her in a dancing class at the resort where he had spent his vacation. "Linda" loved to dance, as did almost everyone at that time. Wagner, though not a scientist, had been immune to the epidemic through his innate lack of empathy. But evidently "Linda" was a fine teacher, because I saw my former assistant only twice more, the last time frugging his heart out in front of a warehouse on Washington Street. I don't suppose I'll ever forget him. I've kept his room just the way it was, and his dish in the kitchen...

After nearly a half-century of scientific endeavor, during which I made it a conscious practice to ignore all "artistic" events, I find it remarkable how quickly I am able to master this business of writing. Who knows where I might have gone had I taken it up instead of the worthwhile pursuits. I admit, Wagner used to come to me in the middle of the afternoon, when our favorite radio programs interrupted the workday, and tell me how much he admired my turns of phrase, my bons mots, the precision of my language. But naturally I discredited all this because he slept curled behind my knees.

It is logical to assume, however, that someone such as I, who was prepared for life in the old days, when, despite a lesser quantity of knowledge being loose in the world, one was expected to have a mastery over a far greater percentage of it, might gain through that mastery an ability to learn new things in alien fields at a faster rate than someone who is expert within only one area, no matter how abstruse that may be. I applaud myself here not out of egoism, as I am sure that it must seem, but rather to indicate to the reader the qualities residing within me from earliest youth which enabled me to meet the crisis about which I am presently writing, and to face the facts of that crisis with the proper mixture of respect and sureness that would best promote those positive results that were, at the time, so desperately awaited by an unknowing world. My sentences lengthen.

I was talking about Wagner, and the change in our relationship that occurred during the crisis. No, actually, before that I was talking about the laboratory itself, and I hadn't really finished describing it. As I said, there were all these shelves of chemicals, most of which I could see would be totally useless for any sort of experiment that I would be interested in. I considered selling them back to the store (Wagner had gotten a good price from Schubert's Bike and Hobby), but the salesman wouldn't hear of it. I phoned in an ad to the Village Voice, and only the outbreak of happiness prevented it from being answered. But, at the same time, that inconvenience enabled me to stock the lab by appropriating the necessary equipment from high schools in

the neighborhood. Looking back, that time was about the happiest of my life. So early in the episode I had yet no idea of the scope and potential for disruption possessed by an epidemic of joy. I was not concerned and, indeed, at first I gave no thought to looking for a cure. I was still intending to direct my energies into more rewarding areas: dexterity equivalencies, a cure for menstruation, acupuncture research.

We made up long lists, Wagner and I did, lists of materials that we wanted to get. We paged through the Turtox catalogue, our eyes blurry with tears like children looking through the Sears Christmas issue. "Look!" I would say, pointing to a bottle of Rana pipiens. I hadn't taken one of those apart since high school. The nostalgia and the abstract drive to do research made me giddy. Wagner couldn't appreciate the subtlety of my feelings, but I'm sure that somewhere beneath his hunched back he had something of the same excitement. It was like setting up a new project, a new office, beginning a new job: buying pencils and pads and rulers and gummed reinforcements that you know you'll never use. "Why don't we get a preserved sand shark?" I said, mostly to myself. "I could practice on it, couldn't I?" $300 autoclaves. $300 microtomes. Delicate pH meters that would frustrate me with their fussiness. Racks of test tubes with colored liquids in them. Cages and cages of rabbits and monkeys to poke things into.

I turned the pages of the big red book, and every new thing that I saw I wanted. Wagner sat in a corner with a yellow legal-sized pad. I'd call out to him, "Chart. Male urogenital system." And I'd give him the order number and

the price and he'd write it down. He filled up page after page of that pad, and my dreams of the perfectly equipped laboratory became more and more grandiose. After a while I stopped, when I came to the catalogue's index, and I was instantly sad when I realized that I could never have any of it.

Could I have that reaction again? Could I ever feel that way, could I know that longing for facilities, now that I am a writer and no more any sort of technologist? I have a copy of an Edmunds Scientific catalogue, and I have not opened it once. It tortures me, where it sits on the bottom of one of my desk drawers; I know it's there, but I rarely acknowledge it. I'm afraid to look, to open the cover and turn the title page and then the contents page and look right at a Van de Graaf generator and feel nothing, no stirring in my mental loins. I don't want to find out, but I know that someday I will have to.

If only the infection of joy had been the genuine emotion, my work would have been simpler. Instead of trying to find the antidote I could have gladly worked to understand why certain of us were left unaffected. If that happiness had been the pure and untainted thing that humanity has been awaiting for centuries, I would have jealously wanted to join in the celebration. But it did not take long to see that they were all fools, all deluding themselves with artificial and unclean substitutes. They were soiling themselves, but from the inside; whether or not the process was voluntary was irrelevant. In fact, knowing that most, if not all, of the victims were unwilling made the situation that much more desperate. Morons and proto-rational types alike were stricken, and it

was my sacred trust to release them from the slavery of what they pitifully identified as happiness.

"I do not understand, Master," said Wagner in one of his characteristic attempts to share my success. "Why should you change them? They say that they are happy."

"You fool," I said, looking up from my frog, "haven't you learned that all self-destructive persons claim that they're happy? That's part of it. Don't you remember Rita?"

Wagner seemed to wilt. His face contorted; he frowned and his eyes twitched at the corners when he recalled Rita, his first love who had been sacrificed on the altar of Science. "Master, you are cruel," he said softly, turning away and walking across the laboratory, dragging his dead left leg behind. I went back to my frog, jumping when Wagner slammed the screen door on his way out. I cursed under my breath, but my sense of humor rescued me (and, probably, saved Wagner's life) and I broke into a fit of maniacal laughter.

I needed a subject. My experimentation could go on only so far in theory, as I worked isolated in my Manhattan study. A constant flow of animals passed through my lab, taking up temporary residence in one of the dozen cages that I kept beneath the cot in the back. Mice and gerbils seemed to be the easiest to get, for these small rodents were what Wagner most frequently brought back from his forays to pet shops around town. Once I had a small armadillo, and I was almost sorry to have to use it, it was so cute. I fed it lettuce. I gave it a humorous name, like Eratosthenes or something. It was the only thing that I had ever loved.

The animals lived in the cages until I decided that they were acclimated. I devised an arbitrary scale of noises to indicate what level of at-homeness they had achieved. The less they squeaked, the less alienated I believed them to be. This is why I never used dogs or cats, although the pet stores must have been crowded with them. They don't squeak the same way. After a few days of good food and companionship the rodents would make little noise. The next stage was comfort, and then actual happiness. The little things would sit in a corner of their cage with a placid smile on their thin lips. Some would whistle, others would push vegetable fragments and newspaper shreds around in a primitive house-cleaning activity. I noticed that the happier mice would nod to me when I happened to catch their eye. I have never felt any guilt or sadness about "sacrificing" them at this most contented stage, because I always knew that the future of the human race and my own selfish aggrandizement depended on that step. The frogs were forgotten. I lifted the chosen mouse from his cage and carried him to the drawing board that served me as a worktable. There wasn't a single corner of his mousy self that I didn't explore, and I never learned a thing. But I didn't give up. I did it again and again. Never learned anything, though.

So I needed a live human. Wagner was horrified. I told him that it was for Science, and his pedestrian fears were immediately quelled. "For Science, eh, Master?" he said in his peculiarly thick voice. "Science, eh? For Science, then, all right. If it is for Science you shall have your human subject."

He grinned at me strangely and hurried out. He did not return for several hours, and then alone.

"Where is he?" I shouted. "Where is my subject?"

Wagner laughed mirthlessly. "I could not find one," he said.

My anger was uncontrollable. "There are eight million of them out there!" I said. I grabbed his arm and dragged him to the door. I opened the screen and pointed. "Look, you fool! Any one. Any one of them!" He just laughed and I grew more furious. I raised my hand to strike him and he cowered, still laughing. I did not hit him, but instead merely threw the forceps that I was holding. They hit his massive chest and fell to the sawdust-covered floor. "Don't you understand, you monster?" I said. "For the good of humanity!"

Wagner laughed again. "They're happy," he said. I turned away in frustration.

"Get out," I said. "Get out of my clean lab. Go home to that `wife' of yours." Wagner laughed, and I shuddered to hear it. He did leave, slamming the screen door, and I never saw him again until that time before the warehouse. Perhaps a kind word...

But no. It was hopeless. My heart was broken, but involved in my work as I was, I never noticed. Or else it is only now, now that I can no longer hope to regain the scientific objectivity that I prized for so many years, now that I am that which I vilified for most of my life--a poet--that I see things in their broader perspective. I certainly haven't gained anything by this new-found ability.

# Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

I didn't know what to do. My friend Larry and my other associates were as puzzled in their labs as I, and could offer little help. I was on my own. Absently I took out one of my last frogs and set it on the drawing board. It was a female, and I really didn't feel like flushing the eggs when I got to that point. I sometimes think about what my life would have been like had that Rana been a male. Perhaps my life would have been different. I think about that sometimes, about the different roads I might have taken. Maybe I would have ended up an entirely different person. Who can say? I think about that sometimes.

Suddenly I jumped from my seat, leaving the poor frog where she lay, pinned out against the board like some hapless target in a circus knife-thrower's act. I put on a long gray overcoat and a tan slouch hat, pulled down over my forehead to shroud my eyes in shadow. I looked like Der Wand'rer or one of those fellows who exposes himself to little girls in playgrounds. Then I went out in search of my subject.

I was still locking the outside door to the lab when a lovely young lady danced by on the sidewalk. I grabbed her arm and she barely noticed, so happy was she. "Let me take care of that for you," I said, and she smiled without comprehension. I unlocked the door again with one hand, still holding her arm tightly in the other. Then I steered her into the lab.

I removed my coat and hat. "Make yourself at home," I said, trying to appear cheerful. She ignored me, dancing to the buried music in her head. "Tell me, how did it all start?" She said nothing. "How does it actually feel? Do you ever get dizzy, nauseous, thirsty, cold?" Silence.

Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

Perhaps already I was beginning to lose that sense of devotion to method, that necessary coolness of intellect that is essential to valid appraisal. It had to begin somewhere. But why? Fifty years in the field, all to be brought to nothing within a week. To wake up in the morning and suddenly be a whole new person, one who is basically weaker and completely useless (by the old standards), is a terrifying thing. Even worse is this consuming and hopeless yearning for the old self. To be a scientist--and one of the best of the lot--and then to abandon, nay, misplace (as the procedure was totally involuntary and darkened with mystery) that carefully cultured turn of mind and find oneself fit only for the stringing together of pretty words, that is a nightmare from which I can never wake.

My subject avoided me. It wasn't a conscious thing, I suppose. She was preoccupied with her happiness, and unaware of her environment. She looked as though she hadn't been eating regularly; she certainly had totally forsaken bathing. I decided that she would have to be treated and acclimated in much the same way as my mice and gerbils. But I didn't understand the danger.

I found myself cutting up frogs or clams and humming to myself. Old half-remembered show tunes would pop up in my mind when I watched the girl (whom I named Mary and clothed in my overcoat so her lovely body wouldn't distract me) move around the lab, curiously picking up knives or mice or bottles of chemicals from the shelves. Sometimes when she was asleep I used to look at her or feel the fine hair along

her arms, tickling her, I guess, because she'd smile in her dreams or even wake up and touch me.

After a few days of this seductive madness, I was saved by a visit from my friend Larry. He was accompanied by a tall, slender young woman wearing Larry's overcoat. "This is Janice," said Larry. The young woman smiled. Her eyes were glazed with a kind of joyful fever that had become far too familiar to me. I was beginning to find that same quality attractive in my own specimen, Mary. My friend gave Janice a little shove, sending her off in the general direction of Mary. The two young women bumped about my laboratory for several minutes before their paths intersected. When at last this lucky event occurred, they smiled at each other and wandered off to find the bathroom.

"I see that your research has taken a path similar to my own," I said.

"No doubt," said Larry grimly.

"I have begun training my subject," I said, wishing to impress my friend. Within the scientific community, that is a worthy goal, and one not frequently attained. I was to fail again. "She obeys simple commands," I said, "and is beginning to understand the meanings of `yes' and `no.'"

"But not the difference between `right' and `wrong,'" said my friend.

"No," I said. "That's scheduled for, let me see, next April." I was naturally somewhat deflated by Larry's lack of enthusiasm, but I attributed his attitude to the probability that Janice had obtained for him already those results. I indicated that Larry should join me for a glass of claret, and

he muttered his gratitude. While pouring the wine, I hummed a catchy little tune, remembered from my childhood, from some otherwise insipid musical show. My friend reacted violently. He grabbed my arm, splashing the wine in colorful blotches onto my white lab coat.

"What is that?" he cried, half rising from his seat, further decanting the red fluid into my lap.

"It's cheap wine," I said, annoyed.

"No, not that!"

"The song, you mean? A pleasant number, whose lyrics I have quite forgotten. Would you rather hear something else instead?"

Larry released his grip on my wrist and seated himself once more. He sighed. "Dr. Davis," he said, "I want you to consider your behavior, as objectively as possible. You are humming a tune. Does that indicate anything to your admirably well-trained scientific sensibilities?"

"No," I said.

"Had you in the past been in the habit of humming such tunes?"

"No," I said. But I began to get a glimmer of what my friend was trying to say, obviously with difficulty in sparing my feelings. With a sudden rage I turned and looked for Mary, my human subject. She and her new friend, Janice, were emerging from the curtained-off lavatory. They were both smiling and humming to themselves. "And to think," I said in a low voice, "how much pleasure I took, merely from watering the rodents with her at my side. I ought to have been warned."

Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

"Do not blame yourself," said my friend Larry. "It is indeed an insidious menace."

"The Devil himself must lend them aid," I said.

My friend Larry merely stared for a few seconds. He shook his head at last. "`The Devil'?" he said. "I think maybe you'd better go lie down for a while."

I could feel the blood rushing into my face. I had committed a kind of absurdity before a fellow member of the scientific community. "Forgive me," I said with some embarrassment. "I have noted a certain lack of concretism in my speech and thoughts. But, even you must admit, why, the behavior of the overwhelming masses of people in the world today must fairly reek of the diabolic."

"Of the inane," said my friend. "And in that respect I see little difference with their actions in times past."

At this point I considered that my friend Larry was trying to be a bit too technologically cynical. There was every possibility that he was covering up some inner rot of his own. "I have never seen one of those `happy' people foraging for food. I cannot conceive of how they continue their existence."

"Mostly they eat out, I suppose," said my friend.

I was struck by the patent lunacy of this idea. "Then how," I said slowly, pompously, full of the tingling anticipation of utter triumph, "how do they manage to pay for their meals?"

He only shook his head mournfully. "They're all on welfare, I think," he said.

I was stunned. My victory crumbled, but I scarcely noticed amid the terror of the situation. "But that's ... that's..."

Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

My friend Larry finished the awful sentence for me. "It's a form of creeping socialism," he said.

With what devastating horror I heard those words may well be imagined. My friend Larry concerned himself with the sudden paleness of my complexion and the unshakeable torpor into which I then fell. He carried me over to my cot and covered me with several unpleasant army-surplus blankets, as we had been instructed to do during innumerable poolside courses in first aid. With the passage of time, the shock began to lessen; at last, I was able to move my lips in a crude approximation of speech. I could convey my wishes to my friend, futile as those meager needs were. The same impulse which had sent the world into an interminable plague of joy now plunged me into deepest despair. My talk of devils and deities was, perhaps, well founded, worse luck. And to top it, these eternal powers were enemies of free enterprise.

My friend Larry disagrees, of course. He spends a good deal of time arguing with me, claiming in his snide way that I am mad to insist on supernatural beings. I, though, can see the larger picture; it is a nightmarish landscape indeed, done up in shades of Red. My friend is blind to it entirely; he is merely an unwitting pawn. It seems that I, alone (now that my specimen, Mary, has been transferred to several hundred neatly labeled microscope slides), maintain the battle against the cruelty and injustice of the universe. It is a lonely fight. And I'll need funds to carry on my great work. Those funds will have to come from you. So give, and give generously, when I, the Ecstasy Volunteer, knock on your door.

Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

B.K.A. The Master

Roland woke up one morning and felt like he'd lost something. He thought, "Well, yeah, if I lost something, I'll get another one." He was only sixteen, and he lived on 5th Street between Avenues B and C, and he didn't have much that he could lose.

He got dressed and went into the kitchen. His mother had already gone to work, his brother Roberto and his two sisters were already out. Roland took a box of cereal out of the refrigerator and poured himself a bowlful. He didn't put milk on it; he carried the bowl back into the living room and put on the television. As he watched TV, he ate handfuls of the cereal. And he felt uncomfortable, nervous, just a little edgy. After he finished eating he took the bowl and put it in the small, foul-smelling sink in the kitchen. Then he put on his denim jacket and went out. The jacket had its sleeves removed, and on the back a girl had embroidered the words Emperors of 5th Street. Among the words was a kind of yin-yang symbol made up of a black fist and a white fist.

It was late in September, and the weather was beautiful. The air was clear and the sky a deep blue. Roland felt better outside. The feeling that had bothered him disappeared. He walked west along 5th Street. No one else was around; some of his gang might have gone to school, some others might still be asleep or hung over or nodded out. It was too late in the morning for the old men who sat out all night, and too early for the old women who sat out all afternoon. A few stray

dogs loped along the sidewalk, sniffing at garbage cans. When they passed Roland, the dogs gave him a kind of uninterested, sideways look. They had nothing to fear from Roland. He wasn't very much better off than they; after all, he didn't even know where the rest of his gang was.

The Empire State Building looked bright and steel gray in the early sunlight. It looked clean. It made the morning feel even sharper and healthier. It was while looking at the building that Roland heard the voice. "Roland?" it said. The voice was masculine and deep, yet a little hesitant.

Roland stopped where he was on the sidewalk. The voice was obviously coming from the inside. He didn't even look around. Roland was suddenly scared. His throat and mouth were dry. He could hear the blood rushing in his ears. He felt a little lightheaded. This hadn't happened to him in a couple of months; the trouble was that this time he was completely straight. He had laid off the drugs since he had started raising pigeons. He was putting all of his drug money into the birds. That was why the voice bothered Roland so much; he didn't have an easy explanation for it.

"Roland?" asked the voice. "You have to fight for us, and for yourself."

"Hey, man," said Roland, rubbing his forehead with his sweating hands, "I ain't gonna fight nobody. What is this?"

"You will have to be strong, Roland," said the voice. "You are not a hero, and you are not bold, but you will have to learn what is right."

"You want to leave me alone, man?" said Roland hoarsely.

The voice did not come back. Roland waited, his ears ringing. He gave a nervous belch. Then he tried to forget the incident. He walked on along the street The feeling of loss that he had had when he woke up grew on him almost overwhelmingly, then faded slowly. By the time that he reached 2nd Avenue he felt normal, but a little frightened.

Roland turned uptown on 2nd and walked a few blocks to the pet shop. This was where he spent most of his time when he wasn't at home or with the Emperors. The store was small, even by the standards of the neighborhood. There was a small front window, mostly boarded over, with a green sign that still advertised a shoe repair store that had been by no means the last tenant. The front door was an unpainted sheet of galvanized steel, covered with a lot of spray-painted or felt-tipped graffiti. The door was propped open at an angle with a wooden case and a brick. Over the door was a piece of cardboard, on which the owner had painted in crude letters, Palomas blancas y de color.

Roland went into the store and was greeted by Moss, the owner. Moss wasn't Spanish, but his sign was for the benefit of his customers, most of whom were. "Hey, Roland," said Moss, looking up from his labor, stacking sacks of feed against one dark wall.

"Hey, man," said Roland. The boy sat down and watched. Sometimes Roland just watched like that for a couple of hours, without ever again saying another word. He liked to be in the shop, to see the birds that Moss had, and to see the customers. A lot of Roland's friends had their own pigeon flocks, and the store was a good meeting place for them.

Then, too, sometimes Roland got an idea about who might be trying to rustle away some of his own flock, just by listening to the conversations between Moss and a stranger.

Moss stocked a few puppies, mostly German shepherds that were bought and trained as guard dogs. He also sold a steady supply of roosters to his Spanish clientele; these birds were pitted against each other in cock fights. The fact that the sport was illegal never hurt his sales. But his chief stock in trade was pigeons. Moss had almost a hundred different birds in his shop each day. His business was brisk and his turnover was rapid. The birds were of many different breeds and colors. Some of them sold for two dollars. Others went as high as fifty. On a good day, Moss could take in almost five hundred dollars above his costs; this was in a neighborhood in which the large majority of the residents were on welfare. Moss only shrugged when a new customer mentioned that fact. Welfare people were entitled to hobbies too, as far as he was concerned.

"Hey, Roland," called Moss, "you got any new birds for me today?"

"No, man," said Roland. "I ain't pushed up my birds yet today."

* * * *

Roland stood in a huge cavern. Light spilled down in arrow-straight, arrow-sharp beams from a ceiling too far above his head to be seen. The walls of the chamber were likewise at a great distance, and shrouded in darkness. There was a single shaft of light illuminating a kind of table about thirty yards away. Roland walked toward it. As he got closer,

he saw that it was an altar, made of stone cut from the same rock that formed the rough floor. There was nothing on the altar but the light.

"No," said the voice inside him. "You must avoid light. You must avoid anything that seems holy. You must learn these things quickly. Go into the shadows."

Roland stopped and looked around him. He had no desire to leave the light, spacious area and walk into the cold and evil darkness. But he did as his voice ordered. When he left the light, the sense of loss that filled him lessened somewhat.

Roland felt the touch of something on his back. It was warm and wet, and as the thing moved slowly toward his head, it left a gritty trail on his skin. Roland could not make a sound. He discovered that he couldn't move, either. The voice encouraged him to fight. All that he wanted to do, really, was scream. If he could scream, it might make things better....

* * * *

Roland walked out of the pet store without saying anything to Moss, who was still busy stacking the sacks of feed. The day had not changed. Roland almost expected the sky to have blackened; no, the sun still shone brightly. Roland wondered what had happened to him. Maybe he had just fallen asleep in the store and dreamed. He knew that he was just trying to tell himself that, so that he wouldn't worry. But he knew very well that it wouldn't work. It was fine for now, but it wouldn't help when the thing happened the next time. And somehow Roland was very, very certain that it would happen again.

Still, there didn't seem to be anything that he could do about the situation. He laughed softly when he pictured himself going up to a cop and saying, "Hey, man, you know, I'm seeing things." He'd end up in Bellevue for an hour, and the doctors wouldn't listen to him or give him anything. If he looked like he could get home on his own, he'd be kicked out.

So Roland walked by the deserted apartment houses, abandoned alike by disgusted tenants and landlords who couldn't afford either repairs or taxes. He headed back to his own building, putting the voice and the dream out of his mind; that was a valuable talent to have in Roland's neighborhood. He thought about other things. He thought about his birds.

When Roland got back to his building, he climbed up the stairs past his own floor, and went onto the roof. He had built a coop for his pigeons there, conforming to the city health department's rules. They didn't mind people keeping pigeons in the city, as long as their more or less arbitrary conditions were met. They reasoned, if that is quite the correct term, that a pigeon fancier wouldn't allow diseased birds in his flock, risking his own birds. Therefore, the flocks were on the whole healthier birds than the street pigeons, and less of a hazard to people. No one considered that most of the pigeon-keepers were ignorant about pigeon diseases and their symptoms.

Roland's coop sat in the middle of the roof. He had built it out of new two-by-fours and chicken wire. It was four feet high and five feet on each side. He had put in a solid steel

door and four locks. That was two locks more than Roland's mother had on their own front door downstairs.

The cooing of the birds calmed Roland. Here, he was the Master. These were his birds. They obeyed him. Their gentle noises seemed almost like murmured worship to him. He felt a strong attachment to his flock, the bonds that held a Master to his vassals.

Roland looked up into the blue sky. He saw a pigeon fly overhead, a stray. There went an opportunity to enlarge the flock. Roland shrugged. There would be many more.

He opened the door of the coop and went in, bending low through the small door. Inside, he took a broom handle and started to push some of the birds to the opening. The older birds, who had been trained over a period of time, did not resist. They flew out and circled the building about twenty feet above the rooftop. The other pigeons followed them, around the black and sooty roof in a constant circle. Roland left the coop and stood beneath his flock, making a slow circle with his broomstick. The pigeons followed his lead; when he pulled the stick down sharply, the pigeons flew toward the ground. When he changed directions, the pigeon flock followed him.

"I'm the Master!" shouted Roland. His birds gave him a pure elation that nothing else had ever matched. It was a feeling of control, a feeling that he could repeat any time that he wanted, without being dependent on money to buy it, without knowing that sooner or later he would crash from drug-induced heights. There was so little in his life that he

could control. "Hey, birds! I'm your Master!" And they flew obediently above him.

He saw a stray pigeon flying nearby and directed his flock to intercept it. The stray merged with the flock; Roland had a new bird. Sometimes he got the bird of a richer pigeon breeder, one of the more expensive birds, one that would bring upwards of fifty dollars at Moss's shop. It did not happen often; but it happened to Roland, and it happened to Frodo, down the block, whose flock was larger than Roland's, and it happened to the old Ukrainian couple on 6th Street. They always sold the birds to Moss. Roland sometimes killed them, because he knew that the rich guys always wrung the necks of the cheap birds they acquired by accident. The rich guys hated the poor pigeon-raisers, and killing their stray birds was the only thing the rich guys could do to hurt people like Roland. It wasn't much, but killing the occasional expensive bird was the only thing that Roland could do to hurt the rich guys. Roland wondered if they ever noticed.

"You stupid birds!" he shouted. The sense of loss from before had been replaced by a feeling of completeness. It was Roland's soul that was flying so freely above him. A great, beating, living soul. Sure, it had to be cooped up for most of the day. But everyone else's was cooped up all the time, anyway. Roland's soul got to fly around. "I'm your Master!" he cried.

* * * *

The light from the sun died a few feet from the cave's entrance. Roland sat in the dimness, on the floor of the cave, in a stinking, muddy area near one wall. The stone of the wall

was wet, and the dripping of the moisture made a loud, irritating sound in the stillness of the afternoon. As Roland sat, waiting, afraid, he felt large, slow, heavy insects crawling across his legs and his hands. He was too frightened to move.

Beyond the edge of the cave was a forest. The trees seemed cool and clean, their leaves were dark green and healthy. A gentle breeze rustled the boughs; birds chirped among the branches.

Roland raised himself up on his knees to look out. As he did so, an unseen vermin fell into the muck with a sickening noise.

"Don't go out there," said the voice in his head. "There is only evil out there. Stay here. Stay where you are safe."

Roland still could not answer. He felt another thing crawling slowly up his arm; he shook the arm and flung the creature against the wall of the cave. He heard it hit with a cracking sound. How could the cave be safer than the wholesome forest outside? Why did the voice urge him to choose darkness and corruption over light and purity?

"Who decides which is purity?" asked the voice. "You must fight. You must fight in a way that is new to you. There is nothing to hit or to kill except within your mind, and there you will find only ideas. Some of your ideas must die, or you will be lost. Here you are safe. You are doing well."

* * * *

The broom handle pointed waveringly at the sky. The pigeons flew around, making Roland dizzy with their passage. He was afraid, more afraid than he had ever been, straight or stoned. But the flight of his pigeons reassured him a little. His

life was so small, so meager, that it didn't pay any evil force to try to tear control away from him; and if Roland thought about the possibility of insanity, he had only to concentrate on those pitiable limits of his world, and everything quickly regained its proper perspective.

"It is a matter of definition," whispered the deep voice. "What is right is wrong. You cannot trust yourself to decide. But I will help you. You have won two battles, and you are closer to victory. You do not know what is happening within you, and there is no way that you can learn; you must have faith, which is always good. Faith is the connecting link. Faith is the sword you will use to win your life."

The pigeons flew around and around. Roland did not want to listen to the voice. He had not acted on faith, in either of the two dreamlike situations; he had been paralyzed with horror. Now, though, he was again the Master of the pigeons. He ordered them, and they obeyed. He was Master of the birds. He was Master of all birds, of all things that they might see from the air. He was Master of all.

He brought down the stick quickly, and the birds dove in a tight, steep plummet toward the rooftops. He raised the stick, and the pigeons climbed upward again. How could the Master be the pawn in some meaningless struggle? The Master used others; he would not be used himself.

"You do not understand," said the voice. The voice was correct, but the voice did not comprehend that Roland did not need such understanding. And he did not want it.

He brought the birds down and the leaders of the flock went docilely back into the coop. Roland recognized his birds,

and he saw that they had brought in three strays. One of the strays was a white pigeon, a dove. The other two were plain street birds. He took the dove and examined it; it didn't seem to be in bad physical shape. He put the bird down and picked up one of the others; he checked it too for any gross signs of disease. There were none. Roland quickly wrung the bird's neck, killing it soundlessly. The boy was fond of his flock, but with two new strays and a money bird, Roland could afford to bring down a pigeon to his mother for supper. He carried the dead bird and the dove downstairs. He left the dead pigeon outside his apartment door. He carried the dove in both hands, down the rest of the flights, outside, and along the street to Moss's pet store.

"Hey, man," said Roland when he walked into the shop, "I got you a bird."

Moss looked up and rubbed his neck. "What you got, Roland?"

"Here," said Roland, giving Moss the white pigeon. He thought about where the dove might have come from; perhaps from the flock of a rich breeder. The rich guys hated it a lot when they got one of the cheap birds mixed into their flocks. They always wrung the plain birds' necks immediately. Roland might have killed the dove, except that it wouldn't have hurt the rich guys any, and Moss gave twice as much for a dove as for a plain bird.

"Great," said Moss tiredly. "Here's your four bucks. This little goody will be dead by midnight. One of your mama's will make a love potion out of it."

"My ma would use it to find her slippers," said Roland. "It's easy. You kill a white dove, pray a little, burn a candle, and look under the couch."

"Never fails," said Moss.

"Nope," said Roland, folding the money and walking out of the store. He stopped in a bodega and bought a few things. The next day, he would have to buy a bag of feed, maybe three dollars' worth; another good bird, or two plain ones, would take care of that.

"You have to be ready," said the voice, as Roland walked slowly back to his mother's apartment. Roland was learning to ignore the voice. He stopped by one of the gutted buildings, where the doorways on the ground floor had been blocked by sheets of steel. He took out a felt-tip marker and wrote on the metal, Roland Is The Master. On another wall he wrote, The Master I and Emperors of 5th Street.

"You must prepare yourself," said the voice. Roland did not even flinch when the words whispered through his mind.

* * * *

Roland was inside a large, rotting house. It was twilight, and the only light to see by came through the cracked windows of the ancient mansion. The parlor in which he stood was once stylish and richly appointed, but now the furniture had completely fallen apart and the fabric coverings were grossly spotted with fungus and stains. The dust everywhere was thick and black. The odor in the room was almost suffocating. Roland thought that he would have to leave the chamber or risk getting ill. He wandered slowly through the

room, in a kind of dreamlike trance, touching nothing, seeing everything, fearing what yet hadn't materialized.

Beyond the parlor was a narrow hallway. The choking smell of the room seemed to concentrate itself in the passage. Roland put a hand over his mouth and stumbled on, but he was almost overcome. At the end of the passage were three doors. Behind two of them were rooms in much the same condition as the parlor, their distinctive elements long ago vanished into decay, their few pieces of decoration or furnishing ruined and eaten by the most filthy contamination.

Behind the third door, however, was a room very much unlike its neighbors. Lights of burning kerosene were mounted on the walls, so the place at least had a more cheerful atmosphere. The wallpaper was not moldy or peeling, and at Roland's touch it was dry and clean. The furniture itself was polished and in fine repair. There was a canopy bed, a large, round table, four chairs, a bureau and mirror, and a long, low cedar chest. No evidence of the dust that had come to fill the other rooms in the years of disuse was apparent in this room. That aspect, the condition of the furniture, and the fact of the burning lights led Roland to guess that someone, however eccentric, had used this chamber regularly and recently.

"This is Hell," said the voice. "Go back outside, where you are safe, where your soul does not risk defilement, as it surely does here."

Roland, for the first time, was able to answer his secret director. "How is it," he asked, "that you are always leading me away from places that look pretty fine to me, man, and

making me hang around in garbage? If I want to hang around in garbage, man, there's plenty of that without even leaving my block. You don't have to go through all this stuff, man."

"Quickly," urged the voice. "Do you not see how Satan may make Hell appear pleasant, and may make the most sacred spots appear filthy, for his own purposes? To him, and to you, white is black, clean is an abomination, day is night, pure is defiled. Now, as before, you must leave before it is too late."

Roland shrugged. He didn't want to be there at all. He left the pleasant room and went back into the corridor, where the obscene smell nearly made him vomit.

With unnatural suddenness, particularly under the circumstances, Roland became extremely sleepy. It came on him like a wave of sea water at the beach; he reeled backward, putting out one hand to steady himself, recoiling at the touch of the damp, disintegrating wallpaper. "I got to crash, man," he said.

"Certainly," said the voice. "This is the attack for this occasion. I was expecting it."

"Well, dig it. I'll see you tomorrow." And Roland turned to go back into the brightly lit room.

"No!" cried the voice. "You can't go back in there."

"I got to sleep, man," said Roland, a note of anger in his voice. "They got a bed in here. You want that I should just curl up in the hallway? In one of your other rooms? Man, you must be the toilet-cleaner for the universe." And the boy went back into the room, sighing at the relief from the smell

outside. He went straight to the bed, pulled back the covers, climbed in, and was immediately, completely asleep.

"No!" shouted the voice, but it did no good. The voice sounded full of despair and pity.

* * * *

Roland was eating supper with his mother, his two sisters, and Roberto, his brother. The pigeon had been disjointed and fried, and Roland's mother had made a rice and pepper dish to go along with it. Everyone drank Dr. Pepper, a treat that Roland had brought home. The spirits of the family were high; they were generally happy, even though their income was low. They had enough, and they didn't feel like worrying about the rest.

While Roland was lifting a forkful of the rice, his inner voice spoke to him. This time the voice sounded different; the very oddness of the voice chilled Roland, long before the significance of the words began to take on meaning. "You have made a great mistake," said the voice. "There are times in the lives of men when they are called upon; sometimes they are called by conflicting interests, and a choice must be made. You have been called in such a way. You have made an incorrect decision."

"Look," thought Roland, "so let me take it over again."

"You have forsaken the more troublesome path of good and chosen the easy highway of evil," said the voice with finality. "There is nothing more to be said about the matter. There are no second chances. Many men, the majority of people, choose comfort over principles. I had thought that

you were different, that given a chance, you might develop into a moral standard for all men and all time."

"I'm sitting here, eating one of my own pigeons," said Roland contemptuously. "I live in a rundown little apartment. I ain't never going to do anything in my whole life except hold stupid jobs. And you want to make me into I don't know what. Man, you don't know what is."

"You have had your chance, and you have failed. There is nothing but pity in my heart for you."

"Look, man," thought Roland. "I never asked you for nothing. You never told me what was going on. I never knew what the big stink was about. And now you're going to come on like I knocked over a gas station or something. Hey, man. You want to go down to juvenile court or something?"

There was no word from the voice. Its silence intensified the same feeling of loss that Roland had experienced earlier. The feeling grew and grew, until Roland couldn't sit at the table any longer. "Come on," he said to Roberto. "Let's check the birds."

"You stay until you finish eating," said Roland's mother. The two boys ignored the order and went up to the roof.

When Roland and Roberto reached the pigeon coop, there was bad news. The coop was empty. The door was locked, and there didn't seem to be any sign that someone had forced it open; still, inside, every bird was gone. It was very quiet, and in the evening warmth the silence was heavy.

"Wow," said Roberto.

"Yeah," said Roland. He was furious, but for the moment he was helpless. "Come on."

"Hey, Rollie," said the younger brother, "where we going?" Roland didn't answer; the Master had responsibilities to his flock, too.

The two boys went back downstairs and out into the street. A little while later, they were at Moss's shop. "Hey, man," said Moss.

"Yeah," said Roland, seething. "Anybody buy that white pigeon I brung in?"

Moss laughed. "Yeah, right after you left. This guy that has this classy bunch of birds over on the corner of 5th and B came in. He said one of his pigeons had been ripped off. He was real mad. He said it was guys like you that cost him a lot of money. So I sold him the dove to replace it. Got ten bucks for the bird. He said it looked just like the one that was missing. I didn't want to say anything, so I says they all look alike. He just nodded. When he was going out, he asked my old lady where the bird came from. She's not too swift, I think she told him."

"It fits, man," said Roland. "The bastard ripped off my whole flock."

"Your whole flock?" asked Moss. He stared; Roland and Roberto left the store. Roland knew what he had to do.

Fifteen minutes later the two brothers were stepping across the rooftops toward the coop of the rich guy. Roberto carried some rags soaked in gasoline. Roland carried some broken table legs and a box of matches. They arrived on the guy's roof. There was a coop there, all right, larger than the city allowed. Most of the birds were white pigeons; Roland recognized his own flock mixed among them. "You know," he

said to his brother, "you send up one, two, maybe three good homing pigeons, and they mix with a flock, man, they can bring that whole flock back with them. These guys are really something." The two began shoving the rags and the wood through the holes in the chicken wire.

"Some of them is yours," said Roberto. Roland didn't answer. He lit the fire; in a few moments the blaze grew and spread through the din of the fire and the crazed noises of the dying birds.

"We got to stop this kind of stealing," said Roland.

"But the birds didn't do anything to deserve that," said Roberto, as they turned and hurried from the roof. The fire would be discovered soon.

"I ain't doing it to the birds, man," said Roland with some annoyance. "I'm doing it to the rich bastard."

"It has begun," said the deep, sad voice within him. Roland only shrugged.

The next day, he bought a couple of birds from Moss and started over. He had to train them from scratch; he had a lot of work to do. While he stood on the rooftop, the voice within him spoke. "Aren't you concerned?" it asked wonderingly. "Your failure and your choice of evil has cost you your soul. How can you go on, knowing this?"

"I don't know nothing," said Roland through clenched teeth. "You never told me nothing, nobody never told me nothing. I can't lose nothing like that. Maybe I was ripped off, but it sure wasn't my fault."

"I told you what you had to do, and you didn't listen," said the voice. "Now, and for the rest of your life, and for the rest of eternity, you must live with the result."

"Up yours, man," said Roland. He moved his broom handle in a circle, and his tiny flock of pigeons flew around him. He didn't feel like The Master anymore. He didn't feel like he controlled anything. It was not his soul flying in the air any longer; maybe the voice was right. Maybe he had lost his soul. But if he had, it was in the most crookedly rigged lottery he had ever seen.

"Satan does not care about that," said the voice. "He has your soul."

"Well, then," said Roland, taking a deep breath and staring at his birds in the sky, "if he don't care, man, why should I?" Roland saw that his puny flock had already incorporated a new stray. It was just as he had felt the morning before: if he had lost something, well, he'd just get something new. He had things to do.

Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

## Sand and Stones

He stood white, like a spot favored by God in the dull gray landscape. He moved over the colorless plain; sometimes the ground was stony and sometimes sandy. When he moved over the stones they clicked and rattled against each other. When he moved over sand there was a rustling sound that soon grew monotonous. When he didn't move he heard nothing at all. There was absolutely nothing to see that was larger than the small stones beneath him: there were no rocks or boulders to attract his eye, no wind-built dunes of sand, no ridges or mounds to bring the horizon closer, no ravines to provide a momentary diversion.

He looked as drab as the desert. He suspected that the effect was intentional. The whiteness of his Havoc suit was a cold white, without a gleam, not the least brightness to contrast with his surroundings. If he looked down beyond his feet, studying closely the shadowed boundary where the dead ground began, he could sense that his scuffed boots were slowly turning the same and eternal shade of gray. The grayness itself seemed to him to grow and live in a strange, predatory way; the very quality of color was an enemy here, and soon the boots would shade into the sand, and then his uniform trousers, his tunic...

And wasn't that what they expected him to feel?

There was nothing interesting in where he was, what he was doing, or even what he was himself. His huge kep held the most potential for amusement, but he had trained himself

to resist it. In appearance it was uninvolving: it was the same flat white as his uniform and constructed of a smooth material whose texture was neither coarse nor slick. The corners of the pack were carefully designed, so there were no sudden, sharp angles nor beguiling curves. The kep measured six feet in height, four across, and, when fully packed, two feet thick. As he wore it, it rose a foot above his head and extended down nearly to his feet. It spread out on either side of his narrow shoulders, so that he looked as though he were mounted to a block like a rare insect. It was filled with his equipment, but the Forces technologists had circumvented the weight situation so that as long as an item was packed away in its proper place it contributed nothing to his burden. He carried only the weight of the kep's outer shell.

Soon his arms grew tired from holding the mover. The weariness was a change, and he welcomed it as an alternative to total boredom. The mover, like his killer, was a metal bar that measured four inches by four inches by three feet. Like everything else within his pack, it was colored the uniform flat white. The mover was made of a heavy metallic substance, and served to pull him along wherever he pointed it. His speed was regulated by the obliqueness of the angle at which he held it; he did not dare change speeds unnecessarily, for they were surely observing him and would find such a change to be a symptom of weakness. Now he held the mover perpendicular to the ground, and he came to rest.

He paused for only the time necessary for one deep breath, for he was required to repack each piece of

equipment immediately when he ceased using it. First he stood the mover carefully upright on one of its flat ends. Then he unbuckled the kep's straps on his chest and around his waist, shrugging out of the harness and gently lowering the pack to the ground. On the back of the kep was a color lock: five panels that changed hue in response to varying amounts of electric current. He tuned each to the proper shade of the proper color, taking a good deal of time, for the panels did not have a large tolerance for error. His hours of practice with the kep's lock enabled him to open it on the first attempt. He drew another deep breath, knowing that he was doing well in the eyes of the Havoc Forces' evaluation personnel.

Beneath the stiff flap of the kep his equipment was packed with regulationary order, arranged on a stacked series of trays. He removed the topmost tray, containing a transceiver module that would not operate wherever it was that he was, a copy of the Forces' standard manual on alien linguistics and emergency protocol methods, several boxes of condoms, an eight-foot banner celebrating the five hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Havoc Forces, with two collapsible poles, guy wires, and six stakes, and a marker buoy with two dye capsules. He placed the tray on the ground according to the instructions he had received during his training period.

He pulled apart the magnetic seams of the kep to remove the second tray. This tray held his entertainment rations, which he knew from the reports of previous candidates to be the most dangerous material that he carried. Even the briefest of glances at the contents of the second tray during his time in the field would be rated an Error. He had received

his rations only minutes before lifting out to the exercise, and had not had time to examine them. He was certain that his curiosity was a carefully metered variable, and that a large section of his final report would concern his attitude toward these potential distractions. He remembered that the tray held several popular novels (two of them openly seditious), lifelike sensuals of nude women and men and other organisms, programs of several types of music, a variety of narcotics and hallucinogens, and even an illegal intercranial stimulator. With an expression empty of interest he placed the tray on the ground, adjacent to the first and at the proper angle.

He parted the seams farther and removed the third tray, which contained a chronometer, an empty canteen for use in some emergency when he would need an empty canteen, a white metal bar with a beacon at one end and a siren at the other, his personal toilet articles (which he knew also to be an Error even to touch), his Book of Reward, a bundle of personal message plasties and a bundle of the official sort, and an alto recorder that he didn't yet know how to play. The third tray joined the first two, in exactly the proper place in the formation.

In the fourth tray were many cellophane packets. Some of the packets contained white lozenges about the size of a thumbnail; these were food. Others contained white pills about half that size, and were water. There were enough of both to last him many months. When he placed the fourth tray on the ground, it formed the last side of a regular

pentagon consisting of the four trays and the base of the kep. The pentagon was the symbol of the Havoc Forces.

He peeled the sides of the kep away to allow him access to the bottom tray. It was divided into two identical parts, each with a lid and a three-panel color lock. He opened one of the two boxes and placed the mover inside. It would not function while it was within the correct section of the correct tray. Then he relocked the box and pressed the seams together around the fifth tray. He replaced the fourth tray and then the third, fitting together the sides of the kep from the bottom upward. He realized that he must do something meaningful, no matter how trivial, in order to justify his rest to the evaluation staff. Therefore he removed the chronometer from the third tray and studied it briefly, fearing to take too much time and thus commit an Error. Six days, he thought. I have been here for six days.

The second tray and then the first were restacked within the kep, and the sides rejoined tightly around them. He pulled the flap over and down and relocked it. I must show them how efficient I can be, he thought as he walked around the kep and strapped on the harness. I will walk until I am completely exhausted, and they will see that it is so. Then I will stop and eat, combining a rest period with an eating period. After that I will be allowed to take out the mover once again. He began walking across the silent plain. It was much more difficult than traveling with the mover: his feet sank in the gray sand or he slipped on the unsure footing of the gray stones. His legs ached, but he knew that it was not yet time to stop. His chest pained him with each breath, but he was

sure that he was not yet exhausted. He kept going, and the sun stayed high overhead, as it had been for six days, a dull patch of lighter cloud in the grayness of the sky. Even the minimal pleasure of watching the shadows lengthen was denied him.

He walked for many miles, although there were no landmarks that he could use to judge the distance, and nothing moved on the ground or in the sky to indicate the passage of time. His body was filled with pain, but as long as he could take another step he did so, proud that the evaluation personnel were surely impressed with his extra effort. As the fatigue grew within him his thoughts, too, turned gray; inside and out he was becoming more and more a suitable addition to the scene.

The clicking of the loose stones roused him. The sound was originating from a point some yards ahead of him. It clearly indicated the presence of something else moving in his vicinity. He worked to clear his vision.

There was another man moving over the gravel, suited in a uniform and kep exactly like his but colored a dull, dark red. The other man had already sighted him and balanced his mover on the ground.

The man in white felt his throat grow dry with fear. He knew that his weariness gave the other a definite advantage. Perhaps it was a mistake to walk so far that he was now weakened. Perhaps the evaluating staff wasn't impressed, after all. It occurred to him that his trek might even be an Error, and a fatal Error at that.

He knew that as far as time was concerned, he had the edge on the man in red, who was required to pack his mover away before he could begin any offensive activity. The man in white forced himself to move slowly, as he had been trained, avoiding the panic reaction that would only waste time and energy. He unfastened the two straps and lowered the kep to the ground. The man in red was doing the same. Don't watch him, thought the man in white, it will only waste time.

He could barely control his anxiety as he set the five panels of the color lock; this was probably the most critical operation. Here was the greatest chance for a mistake in judgment, which could only prove deadly under the circumstances. But once again he opened the kep on the first try. He began to feel confident, because even if his adversary had done the same, the man in red still had an extra lock to open in order to store away the mover.

The thought that his enemy had several extra steps to complete permitted the man in white to operate under less tension. He set the trays on the ground in their proper formation, and all the while he felt more secure. If I had been using my mover, he thought, this would have been a closer contest. But then I wouldn't be as tired as I am now.

He opened the box in the fifth tray and removed the white metal bar. Then using the mover exclusively, he thought, why, it must be an Error. The man in red used his, and now--

Even as he held the bar out at arm's length he knew what he had done. His arms weakened and his legs felt numb: it wasn't the killer. He had opened the wrong box and taken out his mover instead of his killer. He was already moving toward

his enemy, and the stones beneath him knocked against each other. The sound made the man in red look up, confused. The man in white turned the mover to the vertical position and ran back to his kep. His vision was blurred with tears. All that he could do now was to follow the procedures, although the man in red would have him easily. The man in white put away his mover, hoping that some time-consuming disaster would stall his enemy. He tried to open the box that housed his killer, but he had difficulty with the color lock. He adjusted the middle panel twice before the box would open, all the time expecting to die with the next breath. Nothing happened. Maybe, he thought, maybe...

He hid behind the kep, though he knew that it could not provide protection from the killer of the man in red. But what was delaying his opponent? The man in white took out his killer and moved around the kep.

The enemy in red, his kep, and all his equipment had disappeared.

Obviously, this had been the test. The actual problem programmed for him by the evaluation personnel had occurred, and he had made an Error. How many Errors was he allowed? Perhaps he had already proved himself unacceptable to the Havoc Forces. He didn't know what to do, now. How could he possibly recoup his losses? No more grand schemes, he thought. He packed the killer and took out a food and a water lozenge from the fourth tray. After the meal and a short rest period he opened the box that contained the mover, which he balanced beside him on the ground. Then he repacked the kep, stacking the fourth and third trays and

sealing the sides of the kep around them. He glanced at the chronometer: six days. One more to go. He finished packing and hoisted the kep onto his back and fastened the straps. Holding the mover at one end with both hands, he pointed it in the direction that he had been heading before the meeting with the man in red.

As he moved the ground changed beneath him from stones to sand, from sand to stones. He held the mover out at arm's length, and soon his muscles began to ache, but he did not stop. At first his mind was troubled, then it was too spent even to worry, and then, at last, his thoughts were a solid, cold, gray fog. He moved and he breathed, but that was all that he did. When he came to the moraine he stopped. The mound of boulders was frighteningly out of place on the plain, but he had no more curiosity. Having stopped, it was necessary to pack the mover. Then he had to make some meaningful response to the presence of the pile of rocks. Deep within his drowsing consciousness he was glad that he had discovered the moraine, because it might mean that his test had not ended with his Error. There might still be hope.

Once more he broke down his kep, and stored away the mover. His blunted faculties could see but one significant operation: he took out his killer and held it toward the large gray rocks. It was a senseless action, and of course nothing happened. After a short while he packed the killer away and reformed the kep. He set out on foot again.

When he couldn't walk any farther he stopped, took off the kep, and slept. When he awoke he resumed his journey, moving and walking until his chronometer indicated that the

seventh day was nearly over. He was relieved, but he did not know how long he would have to wait. His instructions made it clear that his actual testing might go on beyond the end of the seventh day. His behavior while he waited would also be observed. If he passed the test, he would be picked up--eventually. He waited.

And, far away, on the monitor screens of the evaluation staff of the Havoc Forces, he looked like a small gray lump. He was so small and gray that he blended right into the gray of the landscape, and he could not be seen at all.

Dirty Tricks
by George Alec Effinger

## Chase Our Blues Away

Wacky Mouse had a deeply ingrained sense of responsibility. He was intense, sincere, and sensitive, but that proved to be not enough. Wacky Mouse loved us, but he couldn't help us when we needed him most, and so he's gone. Our street is quiet now, no one roaming up the block from Lake Shore Boulevard to Westropp, drawing us laughing from our homes with accordion music. We sit in our living rooms and think, wishing that Wacky Mouse would come back. We know that he never will, that both he and we ruined that. There is nothing left now for us to share but arguments; he failed, and so he couldn't stay among us.

Wacky Mouse used to come to us every summer for as long as I can remember. No one on the street can recall a year when he didn't visit, and those recollections go back well before the Depression. So we knew that Wacky Mouse himself was very old (if, in fact, it was always the same Wacky Mouse every year. Some people have suggested that this wasn't so. I don't remember any clue that there might have been more than one). He was short; I remember that he didn't stand as high as my waist even when I was in elementary school, so Wacky Mouse must have been less than two feet tall. He was made in the style of his contemporaries: Mickey, Mighty, Ignatz. He wore tight blue shorts and a thin gray shirt or sweater. He didn't have hands, exactly. Like Mickey, he had four fingers clothed in what appeared to be white gloves but which were actually unremovable. He walked on tan ellipsoids

that were more foot than shoe. His head was thin and pointed, accentuating the rodent association. His eyes were 1930s style, black ovals with wedges of white intruding along the lower left side of each. He had a nose like a black Ping-Pong ball and huge, stiff black ears.

Wacky Mouse used to sit with us against the backstop in the schoolyard. The backstop was old, too, made out of wood and covered with peeling green paint. Wacky Mouse told us about before they built the backstop, when boys and girls playing kickball would let the volleyball roll past them all sometimes and into 149th Street. Of course, if Wacky Mouse were there it had to be summer vacation, and no crossing guard could get the ball for them. Wacky Mouse would do it, skipping across the sidewalk, leaping the tree lawn, somersaulting over the red brick street, coming to a stop where the ball rested against the opposite curb. He would do tricks, like pretending that the ball was stuck fast to the ground, or "accidentally" kicking it out of reach every time he stooped to pick it up. We would watch and laugh until it hurt, but whoever was on base would make up a rule about stealing while the ball wasn't on the pitcher's mound, and if we wanted to stop him we could appoint our own catcher. The bickering would grow until no one was watching Wacky Mouse any more. He would pick up the ball sadly, knowing how kids were, and he'd walk back and tell us that we had agreed before that there would be no base stealing. Usually the kid on base would get mad and quit. Sometimes that was me.

Wacky Mouse was the sort of person that you could tell your problems to. He listened to all of us, no matter how old

we were. When we had fights about paying the penalties in Monopoly, he taught us to put it all in a pool for the first player to land on Free Parking. When we were older he helped us through first-year French, his squeaky voice doing horrible things to the diphthongs. He advised us about baseball, cars, and teenage drinking. About girls he told us, chuckling, "Just wait a while." He'd have gladly helped our parents with their problems, too, but the adults on the street didn't trust him. I asked my mother to invite him to supper once when I was about eight years old. The affair was ghastly; Wacky Mouse's tiny body was lost in his chair as we sat at the table. He tried to talk with my father, but Dad just stared at his plate in embarrassment. My mother left the table at every opportunity, to "check on things" in the kitchen. At last Wacky Mouse tried to save the evening by doing his famous milk bit, urging me to drink plenty of it just as he did. He held his white-fingered hand out and said "Heeeere it comes!" just the way he does in all of his cartoons, but no glass of milk appeared. About seven-thirty my father told him that I had to go to bed, which wasn't true. Dad shook hands with Wacky Mouse at the door and gravely told him to come back again. Wacky Mouse never did. I suppose he had dinner with every family on the block; it must have gone the same in the rest of the homes, too, because we never talked about it.

Isn't it a shame the way our silly lives change? You hear often enough someone bemoaning the loss of the childlike innocence or whatever, but that's not quite it. The friends I had back then weren't so unblemished. The only thing that I have lost in getting older is my youth. The feeling that, if not

tomorrow, then as well next week. No deadlines of any importance, and all of forever to go before we had to be home. Wacky Mouse, where are you now? A wetbrain in one of the closet-sized rooms of the Greenwich Hotel? How do you hide that famous two-foot mouse figure, sitting in Nedick's dunking doughnuts?

Wacky Mouse came close to personifying the Zeitgeist of 147th Street. No one ever moved out of a house on 147th Street between Westropp and the Boulevard. Even though Wacky Mouse caused the adults great concern when he appeared during the summer months, he held them together with a special sense of magic that no one could want to lose. Wacky Mouse, though available to everyone all year long on the screen at the Commodore, was peculiarly ours. We shared in this special favor, children and adults, and although we never discussed it with our parents I know that they, too, had the same warm feeling of belonging. There was a clannishness among the children from 147th Street that no one else--bully, parent, or teacher--could compete with. For years we matured in a private realm of security.

Wacky Mouse grew to be more than a familiar cartoon character and then more than just a friend. Thinking about it now, years later, I can see that Wacky Mouse was the sort of myth figure so important to young children. He was our own Br'er Rabbit or Mister Toad. But beyond that he fulfilled the proto-religious longings we all felt as our awareness of the scope of life grew.

We spent a good deal of time trying to decide exactly what part Wacky Mouse played in our lives. The clearest example

of this that I can recall happened when I was in sixth grade, eleven years old. Bobby Hanson, my best friend, and I were walking through the school's garden. We stopped by the goldfish pond, as we did every afternoon after school. Sure enough, in a little while we heard the plop of a frog jumping into the water. We both smiled.

"I have a poem," said Bobby.

"Really?" I said.

"Yes, a haiku. `How many splashes/of Basho's frog have you heard?/Are you still asleep?'"

"That's pretty," I said. "Who's Basho?"

"A friend of Wacky Mouse," said Bobby. "Wacky Mouse told me about him last summer."

"I think Wacky Mouse would like the poem. Are you going to tell it to him next summer?"

"Sure," said Bobby, "if I still remember it."

We talked about our cartoon friend for a while as we watched the goldfish swimming in the pool. Bobby said that he thought Wacky Mouse was much more complex than we realized.

"Sometimes Wacky Mouse seems to me to be a manifestation of Will," said Bobby. "Pure Idea, in a form that we can relate to without fear but with respect."

"Like a burning bush," I said.

"Right. If Wacky Mouse had come to us as another kid, we'd never listen to him."

"But as Will he'd be incomplete. Mere Will isn't enough to effect itself on the physical plane."

"That's true. And Wacky Mouse is unusually successful in his teaching. So apart from the essentially creative but powerless aspect he has a subsidiary self that carries out that will. This is the Wacky Mouse most familiar to us, because he must thoroughly understand our motivations in order to encourage us along the lines he thinks best."

"So we have two Wacky Mice," I said, laughing, "and nobody else even has one."

"No," said Bobby quietly, "I think we have three."

"What is the other one?"

"This is purely subjective, you understand," said Bobby, staring across the garden toward the playground, "but I feel that there is a third part of his personality that communicates the humanized Agent's conception of the Will's desire. Just as the Agent takes the purely abstract thought from the Will and makes it concrete, this third Function must take that concretization and make it human, tailoring it for each of us individually."

"That sounds like a suspiciously metaphysical process," I said doubtfully.

"There's no way of proving it, but there must be an interceding factor."

"The Dove Descending," I said. Bobby grinned at my understanding.

This is the way we all theorized about Wacky Mouse's purpose and origin. Of course, we were much too shy to ask him directly, but I feel certain that he was aware of our questions and secretly pleased. Sometimes he would catch

one of us staring at him wonderingly, and he would laugh and take us all to the School Store to buy us milk.

This is how we thought of Wacky Mouse in the days of our artlessness. Those warm moments couldn't last forever, of course; if we had a special shell of warmth, then we had a special difficulty in hatching into the adult world. After the failures that everyone accepts in maturing--beyond the failures of one's self, the failure of faith, of politics, of education--we were compelled to deal with Wacky Mouse's continued role in our individual lives. How were we to relate to him after the summer sandbox days?

One afternoon in August a couple of years after my discussion with Bobby Hanson I was playing softball in the playground. I was sitting against the backstop waiting for my turn to bat. For some reason I was paying little attention to the game; instead, I was watching some primary kids on the swings all the way across the schoolyard and some of the first-semester sixth-graders playing First Bounce or Fly against the red brick wall of the school. When the kid before me in the line-up struck out, however, I didn't need to be called. As I walked to the plate Wacky Mouse put his arm around me. It was thin and uncomfortably bristled as it circled my legs behind my knees. I bent down to hear his whispered plan.

"Bunt," he said seriously. There were two out and the bases were loaded.

"Bunt?" I asked him. I wanted to hit a grand slam.

"Yes," he said, looking up and doing his Saturday-matinee smile (dissolve to: Continental Productions presents Wacky Mouse in ...), "they sure won't be expecting it!"

I was disappointed, but I wouldn't argue. As I stood there beside home plate, before I shouldered the bat, I wished that I had a large glass of milk. I stared across the schoolyard. I saw that two big kids were trying to get the ball away from the sixth-graders playing First Bounce or Fly.

The first pitch bounced between the pitcher and the plate. I settled myself back in the batter's box, waving the bat tentatively toward the pitcher, pointing it out over center field where the big kids had taken the rubber ball from the sixth-graders. The big kids were throwing the ball high up on the school building. It came down too hard for the sixth-graders to catch and bounced too high for all but the two big kids. The sixth-graders stood around helplessly, shouting, "Hey, c'mon, give it back!"

I bunted the next pitch toward the pitcher, who grabbed the ball and tagged the runner from third, who was too confused to run. I didn't even go down to first base. I grabbed my glove from the girl who played right field and I took her place. As I trotted out I noticed that the two big kids had left the sixth-graders and were heading for our diamond. They walked between me and the kid playing center field. I felt cold with worry.

"Hey, we gonna play?" asked one of the big kids.

"There's two of us. One on each team," said the other.

"We gonna let these big kids play?" someone shouted.

"No," came the answer from several frightened kids.

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"They're gonna take the ball away," said Bobby Hanson.

Wacky Mouse stood completely still. He didn't say anything; these kids were strangers. I figured that they came from the parochial school. Whenever we had any trouble with kids we didn't know, we assumed that they came from St. Jerome's. So far the big kids hadn't noticed Wacky Mouse. One of them went up to the girl who held the bat. He took it from her.

"Let us hit some, okay? We just want to hit a couple," he said.

"They're gonna take the bat away," said one of us.

"He's gonna hit the ball and we won't be able to find it," I said.

Wacky Mouse did a strange thing. He smiled his famous smile and, waving his arms and gesturing comically, he walked toward the big kid with the bat. The kid didn't see him yet, but the other one holding the softball on the pitcher's "mound" stared in amazement. Wacky Mouse got very close to the batter, then pantomimed slipping and falling on a banana peel. The big kid heard him and turned around. "Oh, my God," he whispered. Wacky Mouse was still clowning, looking for the imaginary banana peel and dusting himself off. He turned around and bent over. The big kid grinned and aimed a kick, just as Wacky Mouse intended. "Wacky Mouse, look out!" we all shouted.

The big kid looked bewildered. He hesitated. Wacky Mouse stood up straight and smiled. We knew what was coming. So did the big kids. Wacky Mouse looked around at all of us, and his expression made us all happy again. "Heeeere it comes!"

we screamed with him. He held out his hand, but again no glass of milk appeared. The big kid laughed and swung the baseball bat at Wacky Mouse, hitting him across the chest and knocking him down.

We all gasped in horror. The big kids were frightened, too. They dropped the bat and ball and ran from the playground. We went to see about Wacky Mouse, but before we reached him he was up and dusting himself off again. He was doing somersaults and making funny faces, but we didn't laugh. He tried even harder to make us smile, but we couldn't anymore. We didn't blame Wacky Mouse for not chasing the big kids away. It wasn't that, exactly; we knew that it wasn't his job to guard us all the time. But suddenly we sensed that the real crises of life needed more than his simple approach. For a few more days we all showed up at the schoolyard, but it wasn't the same. The older ones of us stopped coming soonest, and in a short while everyone was avoiding the playground. Wacky Mouse was gone well before school began in September.

Wacky Mouse, dearest of memories, now that I'm out of college I'd like to meet you again sometime. Take you uptown for a drink. Buy you dinner and talk about what we've been doing. I always wanted to ask you what happened to that straw boater you used to wear in your earliest pictures, making you look like the rodents' Maurice Chevalier. Wacky Mouse, you know you made us glad. We laughed so hard our stomachs ached. We waited all year for the summer, when you'd come and we could forget about Miss Warren and the condors of Peru. Now it hurts to see your films at the

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Commodore. Come back, Wacky Mouse. The sun is always bright when you're in town.