

# Satanic Seduction

Britt could not believe that the girl, Kelly, could suddenly have turned into the most skilled seductress he had ever had the pleasure to enjoy. But even as his psychic mind urged caution, his body was responding.

Now they relaxed together beneath the night sky, Kelly curled under him like an infant returned to the fetal state. Above Britt's head, the humming of the power lines that crisscrossed the countryside seemed to flood Britt's spent body, seeping through him like a black fog, blocking out everything, even the will to resist.

Suddenly in the blackness there was an exploding, flashing light—and in that blinding instant, Britt knew he was in the hands of a force that could drag him to depths deeper than hell itself, and make him the slave of the very evil that he had set out to conquer.

*Britt St. Vincent had dared enter through the door of the unknown—and now he was about to pay the price. . . .*

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# THE MIND MASTERS #3

# The Door

by

## John F. Rossman



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TIMES MIRROR

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# 1

... high ... bodiless ... drifting inland ... we slowly slide down across Britain's somber southern seacoast ... London's lights are now flickering far below in this evening's early glow ... headlights streak the darkening streets like tiny shooting stars as Trafalgar Square fills with a smelly, swelling crush of commuter cars ... above it, we are drifting on again—like smoke ... suburban shop bells below ting a final time and fade into silence as the doors are locked against gathering shadows of this dying day ... soaring high again, we waft westward, as if linked somehow to the slowly sinking sun, who casts growing shadows on the summer-green fields gliding silently beneath ... now, below appears England's West Country ... the vast, flat, formless plains of Salisbury's misty marshy moor and the Avon River that drains this heart of ancient Arthurian England ... no trees cast long shadows here on this gently rolling rug of green, decaying, deserted desolation ... no trees ... no bushes—only the monolith monuments left by the long-dead druids stand up against this flood of fading sunlight and split its smooth gold flow with sharp black shadows: these are the strange silent slabs of Stonehenge, standing circled like stoic sentinels who await the start of an ancient mystic

ceremony.

The sun is sinking farther, faster, filling the streets of old Salisbury with a flood of dusty dusk. Alone ... all alone this small city stands here on the edge of the mysterious moon-scape of the moors. And tonight ... tonight Salisbury's an-cient odd-shaped buildings seem to huddle together against the mists that are beginning to creep toward them from the marshy moorland. The cottages crouch beneath their thick thatched roofs . . . roofs that overhang white plaster walls laced and braced by big black timbers . . . cottages constructed as if the original inhabitants of Salisbury had lived in con-stant fear of some enemy, unknown, unseen in the gathering

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fog that rises from the rotting ground like spirits deep from dark, damp graves.

Shadows grow faster, longer as our impersonal planet spins on in space and carries all the men and women of Salisbury toward darkness in the way that a dying dog carries hapless fleas with it into a cave. Suddenly, as the bottom of the sun just touches the horizon, a shadow shoots out from the disap-pearing town! A monstrous black shadow straight from the Middle Ages that rapidly slithers silent, snakelike up and down over the rooftops and out onto the moors: the stern shadow of Salisbury Cathedral's great granite steeple! En-gland's tallest spire sprouts heavenward here from this small city like a spiritual snorkel telling us today that those who la-bored on this tower so long ago felt strangely stifled, stran-gled by the unearthly moonlike moors that even in those old days were dominated by rumors about the lifeless ruins of pre-historic Stonehenge.

*Out!* Out slides the steeple's shadow—silent, swift—and suddenly strikes a small sedan parked on the soggy shoulder of a long-unused and death-quiet moorland road.

"What's that?" the young woman whispers, and pushes her-self up quickly from the body of the young man who lies beneath her on the back seat. Her naked breasts sway slowly just above his hot heaving chest. In the deepening dusk, the young man briefly watches while her full nipples become erect and firm again as they gently brush back and forth across the hair on his chest.

"Blimey, Liz!" he hisses. "It's nothing, I tell you!" His hands rise, and each strokes a heavy breast, while the young woman's head still glances from side to side out the car win-dows, searching for the unseen source of that sudden shadow. Satisfied that no one and nothing is around, she permits her-self to be drawn down again by the soft, insistent stroke of the young man's hot hands ... slowly down ... until once more she lies full on him and involuntarily feels the surge of pleasure as her vaginal muscles tighten around his hard penis, which she holds deep in her. A second pleasure surge is trig-gered by the touch of his left-hand index finger probing her anus. "Ummmmmm . . ." she murmurs as their open mouths meet, tongues thrusting in intercourse symbolic of that occurring between their heaving hips and tightening, 'twisting thighs.

"Didn't I tell you," the young man murmurs, "that it would be just as good with *you* on top?"

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"Um," she pleurably acknowledges, adding in a teasing tone, "maybe even a little bit *better*"

"Oooo!" she happily exclaims as her partner skillfully moves his finger, which has remained in her anus, massaging in a gentle circular motion.

"Well"—the young man's smile is unseen in the dark of the now total night—"it's certainly easier for *me*. Last time we did it in this car, I got the worst set of skin-burned knees you ever want to see."

"Still," the young woman sighs, "I feel so ... so *exposed*—like my bare bottom is sticking up above the windows and we're parked in the center of Salisbury Square outside the cathedral with half the town watching us."

The youth begins moving his pelvis slowly, taking pleasure from the tingling that is being broadcast up through his body from the tip of his penis buried deep in her moist, warm vagina. "Well," he says, "when I take delivery of the 'fuck-truck' custom van I ordered from the States, we'll be able to screw even in the square and no one will know."

"Unless the gas tank sloshes," she chides.

The gas tank of their current car is already quietly sloshing now with the stronger rhythm of their love. The insides of the windows mist and become opaque as the two young bodies radiate with hot streams of pleasure.

"What's that?"

"Blimey, Liz! Again?" He's chilled by the sudden lifting of her perspiring soft flesh from his chest. "What do you *think* you saw this time?" he asks with frustration toughening his voice.

"Didn't you see it, David? A flash of light—a bright flash of light!"

"... Yeah," the lad says, nodding his head. "I guess I saw something."

"You *did*!" the girl says breathlessly. "Aren't you scared or even *curious*?" she asks while peering down trying to see his face, which is submerged with her in the deep blackness of this night-flooded moor.

"No," he replies flatly. "It could have been anything—like the sweep of headlights from some other car coming over one of the mounds farther out on the moors ... or it could have been a flash from those damned high-voltage lines that they've been building around here. Could be anybody, really."

"But hardly anyone comes out here anymore after dark,"

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the girl whispers in tense tones that reveal her sudden fear, "after those ... those ..."

"Look," the lad reassures her, "those murders happened over on the other side of the moors . . . that's miles from here. Anyway, the car doors are locked, and my pistol is right here within reach on the floor." His right hand now

be-gins exerting pressure on the back of her soft, slender neck, forcing her slowly down until once again her warm belly touches his and her firm, full breasts are warm lumps com-pressed between their bodies.

"Tell me," he whispers in her ear. "What kind of light do you think you saw that should give you such a start?"

Liz relaxes under the gentle massage of his hand on her back. "Remember," she answers slowly, "that night at my parents' house when we were making love upstairs in my room with the lights out and my mother suddenly opened the door from the hall... remember how the light from the hall flashed in and then went away when she quickly closed the door again?"

"Yesss," her young lover answers softly, amused by the memory, "I remember ... and you know what? I think that tonight, for some reason, you're having delayed guilt feelings, which are sparking your imagination. There is no light out here on the moors."

Liz shakes her head. "No, David, don't make fun of me. I *did* see a flash of light—just as if someone were looking for us and had opened a door out here in the dark and then quickly closed it behind him."

"If someone's *coming*," jokes the young man gently, "it certainly isn't *us*." He searches out her mouth with his strong lips and begins the slow, steady movement of his penis. In his passion he is heedless of the fear of someone or something that crawls over the smooth, naked flesh of this girl.

"How silly, girl," he breathes in her ear. "Imagine ... a *door*!"

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"Damn! It's crazy," says Greg, picking up a cold chrome wrench. "It's bad enough that there should be this kind of blatant betting at all on a sanctioned grand prix race, but from what I hear of the odds being given, this is really in-sane! I mean, how could *anyone* be giving such favorable odds to independent drivers like—"

"Like *you*, oP teammate." Britt smiles as he kicks the fat black tire of the brutally sleek racing machine beside which he stands.

"*Natürlich*," agrees Karl, joining in Britt's chiding, but add-ing seriously, "Your performance at the Targa Florio and Nurburgring *were* of factory-team quality."

"And," adds John, turning smiling from his workbench at the opposite wall of this garage that is situated behind the pit area, making a sweeping gesture with his arm to include Britt and Karl, "you've got such a great team behind you, Greg. Don't worry—although no one seems to have fixed odds on you *yet*, I think it's going to happen ... maybe today. Only poor Britt, here," the bearded scientist continues, "will proba-bly be left off the list of favored independent drivers."

"Yeah," comments Britt with mock disappointment as he sits down on the low front fender of the white Porsche 917/30K on which Greg and Karl are working, "but remem-ber—if Hermann here," he says, patting the Porsche's plastic fender, "and I ever finish a race, we could *all* be in trouble." Britt's grin fades to sudden seriousness. "However, I agree with Greg." He pauses and glances quickly at his partner driver as the handsome young man kneels beside the race car while tightening a cylinder-head bolt on the engine. "I can't remember seeing betting as wide-open as this—or as illogi-cal—since I ran a Bronco in the first Stardust 500 at Las Vegas and nobody agreed on odds. The way whoever is han-dling the action in picking favorites here at Brands Hatch to-day seems to follow absolutely no pattern."

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"Ja." Karl nods as his huge strong hands easily seize another heavy cylinder head and lift it into position. Greg be-gins inserting the long bolts that will secure it in place, and Karl goes on: "There are other changes here, too. When I was mechanic for the Porsche team, we always favored rac-ing in England at the Silverstone track rather than here at Brands' Hatch because of poor paddock facilities and track conditions. Yet, today things seem to have even taken a turn for the *worse*. Look out there...." The nod of this tall, gaunt German orders the eyes of his teammates out of the open main garage door and toward the track that lies beyond the pits at the end of this row of garages. *BROWR! BROWR! BROWRRrrr!*—three powerful race cars blast sud-denly past on a practice lap for the race three days away from this Thursday afternoon. "Those new high-voltage transmission towers are dangerously close to the track at Druid's Turn over there," he says, pointing briefly with a greasy finger. "The management must be *verucht* for allow-ing such poles to be installed where a spinning car could so easily slam into them."

"I agree, Karl," says Britt seriously. "They must be mad. The hay bales around the base of those steel towers wouldn't even begin to stop one of our big Group 7 cars."

"Well," Greg interrupts, "if you two had been here this morning for the preliminary drivers' meeting, you would have heard a mighty loud protest from all the teams. In fact, our drivers' association filed a formal complaint with FIA in Paris and let the management know that none of our mem-bers will participate in races here after this one until those poles are moved to where we can't wrap ourselves around them in a spin."

Britt, his eyes still focused on the track, where colorful cars are buzzing past one by one like angry hornets, asks without turning toward Greg, "And what did the track's new management have to say about that ultimatum?"

Greg stands up and wipes his oil-slick hands on a red shop towel while replying. "Oh . . . not much, surprisingly. The management rep who was there just shrugged and said that the power lines were a government project which no one could do anythi—"

"Excuse me."

All four men's heads turn toward the open side door of the pit garage. A young woman in her early twenties is standing there softly silhouetted in the late-afternoon glow of today's

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setting sun. Her highlighted brown hair, cut shag short, moves gently in the almost imperceptible breeze and frames

her face and, cream-soft cheeks above which bright blue eyes sparkle darkly. Her full, soft lips part slightly, smiling. "Ex-cuse me," she repeats with girlish timidity as she reaches with her free left hand at the fluttering expanse of long, thin gypsy gown that the breeze blows tight around her smooth thighs.

"You are *certainly* excused, pretty lady," Britt replies with a pleased smile. "What can we do for you?"

"Well," she answers, and advances a step inside the door, "my name's Kelly Dale, and I'd like to ask each of you a few questions." She pauses only an eyeblink to glance down at the clipboard of papers she holds cradled in her right arm and pressed against the side of her breast. "It won't take long," she adds with a playful pleading arch of her elegant eye-brows.

Greg flicks his eyes up from their focus on the delicious outline of her breast's nipple that is pressed by the clipboard against the thin cotton dress. "Sure." He nods. "We've got a minute. By the way, I'm Greg Leland, lead driver, for this team." Without removing his eyes from hers, Greg nods toward Britt. "This is my driving teammate, Britt St. Vincent — behind me is Karl Krimmel, our chassis man, and over there at the workbench is John Hollender, our engine expert. Now ... what can we do for you?"

The slender fingers of this lovely young woman's left hand delicately pick up a pencil from behind the clipboard's spring, and she explains while smiling shyly: "I think I should tell you right now that I am *not* from the press." No one but Britt notices that Greg's chest deflates a tiny bit.

"So"—Britt shrugs, a teasing smile on his lips—"maybe we should tell you that we're *not*, really a racing team." Every-one laughs briefly, and Britt catches a nervous glance from Karl. *But it's the truth, young lady*, Britt's inner conscious-ness affirms during this fleeting instant. "Anyway," he adds aloud, "fire away with your questions."

"O.K." The girl nods happily. "Then I'll start with you. Let's see ... 'Britt St. Vincent,' " she repeats his name to her-self as she writes it on a form clipped to the board. Now her sparkling eyes skip back to Britt. "Where were you born, Mr. St. Vincent?"

"St. Louis, Missouri, in the good ol' U.S. of A. And call me 'Britt.'" The girl's lips part slightly as she prepares to ask the next question, but Britt raises his hand slightly, signaling

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that lie has something to add. "Your accent . . . it sounds familiar—and certainly not *British*."

Kelly smiles. "No ... I was born and raised in Shaker Heights, Ohio—but," she says quickly, before Britt can ask another question, *I'm* the one who's supposed to be getting the information here."

"Yes, Mr. St. Vincent," mugs Greg. He puts one foot up on the low, exposed side silver fuel cell of the partly disman-tled Porsche.

"Now, Britt," Kelly begins again, "*when* were you born? Please give me not only the date, but also the time of day if you know it."

"September 27, 1942," Britt answers. "And I'm pretty sure it was about eight in the morning."

"Thank you," answers Kelly with a warm smile as she turns to Greg.

Britt studies this beautiful young woman while she asks for similar information from Greg. *I wonder what this is all about? Mighty strange questions . . . I wonder what an Ohio girl is doing way over here in England at a road-racing cir-cuit ... she's obviously not a member of any of the teams, nor of the press ... and why is she dressed like a gypsy?*

"Well, I really want to thank all of you." Kelly smiles while replacing her pencil in the clipboard. She turns and starts toward the door. "You were the last team I had to contact," she says as she stops in the doorway and looks out into the rapidly encroaching dusk. She turns. "I had hoped to be finished before dark ... I've got a long way to go."

"Where are you headed?" asks Britt.

"Oh ... I'm staying near Salisbury. Do you know anyone going that way tonight?"

"You're in luck," Britt replies. "I was going that way my-self in a few minutes. Care to go along?"

"Oh," Kelly bubbles with enthusiastic innocence, "I'd really appreciate that!"

Britt turns to Greg and grins. "You see, partner, there are compensations for not being the *numero-uno* team driver." He glances at Karl. "I'm sure you fellows don't need me to help you button up my car for practice tomorrow, so we'll be leaving now." Britt rises from his perch on the Porsche and walks out the door, taking Kelly by the arm. He stops and smiles back at his teammates. "See you in the morning."

The track is ghostly quiet now. Britt's footsteps and the girl's crunch on bits of gravel that lie scattered on the broken

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blacktop. 'On either side of them, garages, whose open neon-lit main doors gape like mammoth jack-o'-lanterns, cast an unearthly blue glow on this alleyway between the squat build-ings. Inside each concrete-block garage, master mechanics hover over and crawl under their cars to translate into chassis changes those "feelings" their drivers had experienced during this just-ended day's practice.

"Here's my car," says Britt as they approach a sleek silver roadster that waits hi the shadows like a mechanical spirit.

"A Corvette," Kelly notes as Britt opens the door for her. "I knew a guy who had one of these when I was attending Kent State," she comments, and sits down on the low black bucket seat. Britt shuts the door firmly.

"Right," he replies while walking around to the driver's side. "It's a '67." Britt opens the driver's door and sits down. "Best year ever for the 'Vette." He leaves the door open and leans forward to search in the glow of the courtesy light for the correct key from the half-dozen in his well-worn leather key case. "Ah . . . here we are," he says, simulta-neously seizing a silver key and shutting the door.

*bbbrrrroom!*—the engine belches muffled power following Britt's first twist of the ignition key.

"I could have rented a newer one while here in England," Britt explains as he fastens his seatbelt, "but Detroit's sorcerer stylists worked their magic on the '68 and newer ones, making them bigger on the outside, cramped on the in-side, heavier, and altogether less fun to drive." Britt touches the throttle—*broOOM!*—and the eager engine instantly re-ponds. Kelly's eyes now move to the chrome shift lever that rises stiff and erect from the console beside her thigh. Britt's fingers wrap strongly—yet sensuously, to her—around the hard shaft that pulses with the throb of the machine's mechanical heart. Britt glances at her and she at him. "Ready, pretty lady?"

Kelly nods. "Ready."

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Great gnarled goblin's arms swoop swiftly overhead, grab-bing at Britt's machine as it speeds through the blackness of this narrow country lane, dodging right and left to follow the twisting tar road that threads between the close-crowding trees. Kelly sits slumped in her seat, her skull leaned back on the headrest and her eyes staring fixed and unfocused at the overhead blur of black branches that reflect eerily white in the stabbing light of the Corvette's halogen headlamps.

Britt casts a quick side glance at her motionless face, which is dimly lit by the glowing eyes of the instruments on the dashboard. "I can put the roof up if you'd like, Kelly."

A slow second ticks into eternity before she replies. "No ... no, thank you, Britt."

"You know," she slowly continues, speaking as if in a trance, "sitting here, looking up at these branches zipping overhead in the blackness, I feel ... I *imagine* I feel like Al-ice must have felt when she fell through the looking glass ... down ... down ... like a lost shooting star plummeting through bottomless space ... forever...."

Miles streak by. The Corvette's lights see like insect eyes through the blackness as the swift machine carries Britt and Kelly far beyond the wooded suburban byroads and onto the new needle-straight highway that stretches across the middle flatlands toward the moors and Wiltshire County.

"I noticed that you're left-handed," Britt says, breaking the long silence that has fallen between them.

Kelly rolls her head toward Britt without lifting it from the headrest.

"You must be creative," continues Britt while he watches the road streaking toward him out of the night ahead.

Kelly cocks a curious eyebrow.

"And *you* must be *psychic*," she replies.

Outwardly, Britt's affable expression remains fixed, but in the space of a nanosecond, his inner consciousness questions

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Kelly's comment: *Psychic! Of all the things she could have said, why did she say that? Does she know who I am, and why I'm here ... is she one of THEM?*

"Psychic?" repeats Britt as he peers straight ahead at the dim, spiritlike image of his own face floating in the void, a distorted reflection in the curved windshield. "Why do you say that?"

Kelly responds in dreamy tones that mask any evil in her outwardly innocent appearance. "Just teasing, Britt. You see, I noticed that when you were looking for the ignition key, you held the key case in your right hand and did the search-ing with your left."

Grinning, Britt glances at the girl. "You're quite observant, Kelly, but," he probes, forcing the answer that he *must* have, "why did you say I'm *psychic*?"

"Oh," she replies, returning the smile with genuine amuse-ment dancing in her lovely eyes, "that was just a mock put-down of your powers of deduction—you didn't have to be psychic to know I'm left-handed, after seeing me write, Al-though, since you're left-handed, too, the likelihood of your having actual psychic powers is high."

Britt is listening intently. His eyes are riveted ahead at the dark road over which they are speeding. "Dr. Ornstein's the-ory, I presume," he comments. "You see, I've got an interest in psychic science."

Kelly half-turns her body toward Britt. "Why, yes," she says. Interest and enthusiasm spark her words. "You really *are* interested in today's new psychic science, aren't you?"

Britt flicks a glance at the tachometer on the dash: *2800 rpms ... that's 70 miles per hour ... I'll hold it here ...* and at that same time that the motor monitor level of his consciousness takes note of the machine it is driving, Britt's upper level of Self activates the speech mechanism of the body it commands. "Let me put it this way, Kelly: I like what Gotthold Ephraim Lessing once said: 'If the Lord God held out to me in his right hand the whole of truth, and in his left hand only the urge to seek truth, I would reach for his left hand.'"

"*Beautiful*," whispers Kelly. She adds, a second later, in normal voice: "That's really beautiful—and it's exactly the way I feel about psychic science. I consider myself religious and God-loving, without finding any conflict between my in-terest in psi science and my theological beliefs."

"Right," responds Britt. "There is *no* conflict there. Anyone,

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in fact, who believes in a soul believes in life after death—in spirits. And as far as ESP, psychokinetics, and the other psi abilities go—they usurp no divine power. They are simply physical powers which all humans are born with, but

which centuries of superstitious civilizations have masked. Only to-day are we now rediscovering these powers by using that gift from the left hand of God—our *intellects*."

Britt pauses. Kelly thinks. Several silent seconds swish past with the rushing wind.

"However," Britt continues; his voice is introspective, soft, barely audible to Kelly over the wind's soft whistle and the muted throb of the powerful car's cast-iron heart, "well-in-tentioned but uninformed people still discuss psychic science in terms of belief. 'Do you *believe* in ESP?' How many times do you hear that question? Yet, the hard scientific facts being uncovered each day show that belief simply does *not* deter-mine the issue. These phenomena *exist*. You cannot take a *vote* on reality—it forces itself on you/Among scientists to-day there is a strong shift in attitude to acceptance of the psi sciences. This is a change akin to that which the thinkers of the Middle Ages made in accepting the fact that the world is round in spite of what some confused religious leaders claimed at that time."

"That change in attitude among scientists today," Kelly in-terjects, "was certainly evident when I heard Dr. Ornstein ad-dress the American Association for the Advancement of Science last February in San Francisco. He drew the *second-largest* crowd of the entire meeting when he spoke on the psychology of consciousness. He said research shows that the right side of the brain, which controls the *left* side of the body, seems to be primarily responsible for artistic behavior and spiritual behavior."

"Making us left-handers," concludes Britt, "more psychic."

"Right," responds Kelly, "but it shows that there is a physi-cal basis for psychic power." She tosses her head slightly and with a brush of her left hand smooths her windblown hair away from her face. The car rushes on through the deserted night.

Kelly begins to speak:

"Man has no body distinct from his  
soul; for that called body is a portion  
of soul

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discern'd by the five Senses,  
the chief inlets of the Soul in this age."

Well, Britt thinks, *if she's going to make a slip, she seems in the mood for it now. ... I'll keep leading her on and see what her story is.* "William Blake, isn't it?" he says. "From *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*,"

"That's *right*, Britt," she answers with a surprised smile dancing on her lips. "Although I'm a physics major at Kent State, I dabble in English lit, and I don't think I've heard anyone *ever* cite the correct reference to that poem outside of a classroom!"

Britt quickly glances at her, and in the eye-blink instant before refocusing on the dark, onrushing road ahead, he de-cides that she is either telling the truth or is an accomplished liar. *I'll give her a little bit of the truth about myself ... no more than she probably already knows if she's one of them.* "That poem," he explains quickly, "became a favorite of mine when I returned from Vietnam and for a while dis-played behavior that some people—including myself—thought was psychic behavior. That's why I'm a bit conver-sant on the subject of psychic science. It's become a hobby of mine. In fact, I was going toward Salisbury tonight just to see Stonehenge."

The young woman half-turns in her seat, an expression of intense interest on her face. "My gosh! You've got to tell me *all* about your psychic experiences."

Britt nods slowly without looking at her. "First," he says firmly, "let's hear you tell me what a physics major from Kent State is doing here in England, living in out-of-the-way Salisbury and dressed like a gypsy."

Kelly shrugs and sinks back in the black bucket seat. "There's nothing unusual, actually. To use a tired old phrase, I've ended up here temporarily on the way to 'finding my-self.' " The young woman smiles slightly, self-consciously, and although Britt turns not his eyes from the night ahead, he senses the smile. "You see, Britt, although I'm a physics ma-jor at the moment, I've got two strong minors in astronomy and biology. I think I want to pursue astrobiology studies most of all, but this spring when I told my role-conscious par-ents of my plans, they threatened to cut off my support. They think I should be a teacher and live near their estate in Shaker Heights. So"-she shrugs—"as soon as the spring

quarter ended, I took what money I had saved and grabbed a student charter flight to London without telling my\* parents. I wrote them only last week, telling them where I am."

Britt, listening in silence, nods as his strong, race-trained hands precisely aim the streaking Corvette's heavy steering wheel into the curve of the concrete off-ramp that leads to the road across the moors toward Salisbury.

"So," sighs Kelly, "here I am in England ... only it isn't quite how I figured it would be. When I landed in London, I discovered that the place was packed with students from ev-erywhere in the world—all of them looking for any job around and crowding the sidewalks for handouts. I spent the first week of this summer begging on the steps of the Church-hill memorial in the company of dozens of other hun-gry stu-dent travelers. Then this group of gypsies came along and recruited a half-dozen of us girls to help them during the sum-mer tourist season. It seems these gypsies do quite a business here every summer, selling astrological profiles to the tourists who come to see the ruins of Stonehenge. Horoscopes are big business, and growing bigger."

"So that," Britt interrupts, "is why you were asking us about our birth dates. Do you plan to sell horoscopes to the

drivers?"

"That's the plan, as far as I know," Kelly replies. "Racing drivers are known to be a superstitious bunch anyway . . . aren't you?" —

Britt glances at her and smiles, genuinely amused. "Oh, perhaps," he says, as his eyes, directed by his mid-level of consciousness, return to their job of guiding the machine. But Britt's uppermost conscious Self continues its intent focus on the story that the young woman is weaving.

Kelly shakes her head resignedly. "Business seemed good this year—I know / worked hard. I'll bet we plotted horoscopes for five thousand tourists and nearly every citizen of Salisbury. But now the summer's almost over . . . and so's the business. Why, when I woke up yesterday morning, I found myself alone again in the extra wagon in the gypsy camp where I and five other girls had been staying. New groups of girls have come and gone every week this summer, just disappearing and new ones arriving all the time. I'm the only one who has stayed so long. But I don't think there'll be any more girls right now—it looks to me like the gypsies are getting ready for something. Maybe they'll be leaving."

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"And what about *you*?" asks Britt. "Why are you still working for them?"

"Bramus, the head of the clan," Kelly explains, "said that it wasn't until after the other girls had left that he and his family hit on the idea of selling horoscopes to the drivers at Brands Hatch for this race. From what I've overheard, too, the gypsies are taking bets from gamblers all over Wiltshire County and even from big London bookies as to who will win the race. The gypsies are getting some good odds, too, because they are apparently favoring underdogs. Everybody thinks the gypsies are crazy." Kelly pauses before adding, "But from some of the predictions that I saw the gypsies make this summer in Salisbury, I think I'd bet *with* them rather than *against* them."

The Corvette purrs on for silent seconds, slipping sleekly through the summer mists of the moors. On either side of the car, starlight gives a gentle glow to mists that hang low over the marshy land like smoke over a death-quiet battlefield. Britt's brain is alive with electrochemical impulses as it works at computerlike nanosecond speed, chopping tiny ticks of the watch into a billion parts and making time a separate reality. An instant becomes an infinity. *Damn! So these gypsies are the ones behind the insane betting pattern on the race! I wonder what they know—or what they will do to make their bets pay off? . . . And this girl . . . I don't feel that she is any-thing more than what she says she is, but I'll have to check with Karl to make sure . . . must get all the information I can. Salisbury can't be far ahead, now. . . . What . . . ? What the hell is that?* Britt is suddenly distracted by the appearance in the sky of an unearthly blue glow, a series of thin threads of pale light that suddenly stretch in a line from horizon to horizon.

"Damn!" he roars aloud now as his eyes are blasted by a searing white light—blinded! Instincts react! Automatically Britt's foot hits hard on the brake pedal! He hears the squeal of the tires and Kelly's scream simultaneously as the car skids out of control toward the tall metal monster that suddenly looms from the gloom with its gargantuan arms drooping stiffly from square steel shoulders. The strange glowing blue threads are held in its clawed hands and link the fifty-foot creature to others of its kind which follow in a line that marches over the black horizon. This is the last thing Britt's mind records before his consciousness is catapulted into a warm, black void....

## 4

"The girl's dead."

"So's the lad," says the coroner, feeling for a pulse on the cold neck of the naked young man.

The footsteps of a plainclothes policeman smuck in the shallow muck of this seldom-used road as he walks toward the silent silver Corvette. He tugs his rumpled tan trenchcoat tightly about him and exhales hot breath that puffs the cool, damp air like smoke around the unlit pipe that he holds teeth-clenched in his partly opened mouth. "Damn nippy tonight!" he says, jamming his hands deep into his coat pockets.

"Yes, lieutenant," agrees Britt. "I'm freezing. And Miss Dale here is in near-shock from this whole thing. When can we continue on our way to Salisbury?"

Britt is leaning, arms folded, against the dew-damp fender of his mud-streaked machine. Its black-rayon roof is up now, shielding shivering Kelly from the crispness of this dank mid-night air.

"Terribly sorry, Mr. St. Vincent," the officer says, "that you had to wait so long until I and the coroner's team arrived from Scotland Yard." The short, thin detective strikes a match and holds it close above the battered bowl of his pipe. The explosion of tiny flame glints in his weary eyes, and the pipe tobacco takes on a warm red glow as he puffs. The match hisses now on the damp ground where it is tossed. "But I think, Mr. St. Vincent, you can appreciate the fright you gave the Wiltshire County constable when you almost ran him down on the road back there at the intersection." Britt sighs heavily. "Jesus Christ," he softly curses, and looks the man squarely in the eyes. "I didn't see him standing there in the dark of these moors. I was also distracted by the sudden appearance of that glow on those high-voltage power lines over there—and the good constable didn't have to blind me with that damn spotlight, either!" Britt snaps stiffly to his

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feet, propelled by a sudden surge of anger arising from remembering his brush with bodily death. "I almost stuffed this car into those damn fifty-foot power-line towers! This girl and I could have been *killed*!" he adds with a quick motion of his arm toward Kelly.



The Scotland Yard officer flinches at Britt's sudden move. "Now, see here, young man! We could still throw you and your gypsy friend into the lock-up for questioning! This is the third such murder like this out here, and tonight is the only time that we've ever found anyone near the scene! We cou—"

"Lieutenant!" a young man in a London bobbie's uniform calls out, and hurries over to the irate officer's side. "Sir, I think we may have found the murder weapon," he says, and holds out his handkerchief-draped hand on which rests a knife that gleams in the red-and-white glare of the spotlights and blinkers that beam in all directions from atop the cluster of black police cars.

Britt looks at the knife. A chill goes up his spine—a chill not related to the dampness of tonight's mists here on the lonely moors. For an instant Britt's eyes remain riveted on the shining blade. Deep in a median level of his dark subcon-scious Britt is aware of the tiny island of light created here by the investigating teams, of how small and weak this island is against the many miles of misty blackness that press in from the vast moors and down from the infinite dark dome of galactic space above. "It's an *athame*!" observes Britt, sounding curious and surprised.

"Oh?" says the lieutenant, arching a suspicious eyebrow and turning toward Britt. "Maybe you won't be leaving after all. Into witchcraft, are we? Was this butchery part of some ritual?"

Britt shakes his head slightly; a stab of pain bursts into his brain from the lump where he had hit his head on the steering wheel, knocking himself unconscious for several moments. "Look, lieutenant," he says wearily, with a disgusted downturn at the corner of his mouth, "you've checked out my story. You know we were at the track as late as six-thirty ... and we 'ran into' the constable over there at seven-forty-five. Now, that means we had to travel about sixty-five miles in just over an hour—that's pretty fast on these roads, and it certainly doesn't allow enough time for us to have already killed this couple before seven o'clock, when the constable discovered them. And as for my knowing that that is a

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witch's ceremonial knife, why, any one of the millions of people who today are deeply interested in psychic sciences and their history might know the same thing."

"Lieutenant Barnard!" calls another uniformed officer, who is kneeling at the edge of the island of light. "Come see this."

Impulsively, Britt follows along with the head investigator and subordinate officer now as they quickly jog to where the man kneels in the center of the muddy, unpaved road. Another junior officer focuses his flashlight on an object half-buried in the sticky mud. The men stare in silent puzzlement.

"I didn't know anyone still wore shoes like that," remarks one of the young uniformed officers.

The shoe is an old high-button type, sewn from black and tan leather.

"At last we have a solid clue!" the lieutenant softly exults as he squats down. "Here . . . let's see if we can get it out."

Britt's attention is suddenly distracted by a flash of light; he turns in time to see a police photographer toss a blackened flashbulb into the night beyond the murder site. The man has removed the tarpaulin cover from the corpse of the young woman. *My God ... that's as brutal as anything I saw in Vi-etnam*, Britt thinks..

The dead girl's plain but pretty peasant face wears an expression of utter terror. The flesh of her firm young breasts and thighs is smooth and white and dead-cold; yet, thin wisps of vaporous warmth still rise like a slowly escaping soul from the red gore where her belly had been. *Thats a skilled surgical incision if I ever saw one. Looks like some of her inner organs have been removed ... neatly done, too. Perhaps all of this really is only the work of some deranged coven of witches. Maybe there won't be any opportunity at all to use the Mero communicator to contact a spirit here.* Suddenly the image of the butchered body is burned into Britt's eyes by another flash of the camera. He blinks, turns his head, and sees Kelly; her face, behind the window glass, is twisted in horror and revulsion at the sight of the sacrificed woman. *I'd better get her out of here.... Barnard knows where he can find me if he wants to question me some more.* Britt walks past the small sedan and pauses. The back door is open. Sprawled on its back on the bloodstained seat is the naked body of the young man. Britt's eyes check over the body. *Hmmmm ... don't see a mark on him ... but there's something familiar about the way his eyes are bulging slightly from their sockets — OF COURSE! I know now!*

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Britt turns sharply and hurries to the waiting Corvette.

"C'mon, Kelly," he snaps, slamming the door. "Don't look at that."

*Brmmmmmm!* The engine bursts to life. Britt slams the stubby shift lever into gear; the machine accelerates rapidly

and disappears into the night.

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"Look there!" *snaps* Britt at the same second his right foot leaves the accelerator and presses down on the brake pedal.

Kelly—her senses already tense from the murder scene they've left only minutes ago and a mile behind—is instantly alert because of the sudden slowing of the speeding car. She shifts stiffly upright in her seat and leans forward to see what Britt is pointing to in the deep darkness beyond the left-front fender of their now unmoving machine.

Here, nearer to Salisbury, the flat moors become miles of small mounds. Legend says that these are the burial mounds of druids who dwelled here in times that today are only mysterious memories. Ahead, to the left, one mound far larger than all others looms blacker than the black of this night that floods over all England. From the mound's broad top thrust black, jagged teeth that are set in a circular pattern which resembles the mammoth jaw of a mythical monster. And the mists—like the breath from this colossal creature—ebb and flow . . . ebb and flow . . . very slow . . . around the mound.

For these are the slabs of Stonehenge. Huge, silent sentinels that watch mankind today with unseen eyes of another age. Their massive presence is something that Britt can feel even at this distance of about a hundred yards. While Britt and Kelly peer at this enigmatic monument from man's shadowy past, the Corvette sits unmoving like a thoroughbred stallion, its engine quietly burbling, breathing, waiting for the master's command to gallop again.

Britt breaks the moment's quiet. "Where's this gypsy wagon camp you're staying in?"

"It's just about a quarter-mile from here, Britt . . . over there." She nods toward the darkness ahead and slightly to the right. "Beyond that first series of low mounds out there on the moor."

Britt casts a quick glance in the direction of her nod. The moonless sky is brighter in that direction. *That must be the*

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*glow of Salisbury's lights, . . . but these ruins of Stonehenge were my real destination tonight.* "Kelly, do you mind if I stop and look around for a few minutes? You know, with my practice schedule back at Brands Hatch, I might not get another chance to see these famous ruins—and I certainly would hate to leave England without visiting them."

Kelly hesitates. "Well, I don't know... Oh, I guess so."

In the space of the fleeting few seconds in which Kelly replies, the analytical circuits of Britt's mind sift and resort, sift and resort the data they have compiled so far on this young woman: *She may or may not be my enemy ... don't know enough about her yet ... I'll play the game anyway—but carefully.*

"Look," Britt says quickly, "I know the stories about this place. I won't force you to go—especially after that scene we just left."

"Britt ... what kind of *monster* could have *done* that? It looked like some kind of ritual murder to me. You probably know that Stonehenge was where the ancient druids sacrificed young women during the summer solstice. It's right around that time of year now, you know."

*Solstice*, muses Britt's mind as his right hand reaches for the ignition key, *the time when the sun stands still.*

With a quick twist of his wrist, Britt kills the burbling engine; deafening silence crashes concussively into his ears like an invisible wave from the black ocean of space above. Instantly, now, Britt listens while his hearing adjusts to the quiet. "Strange," he murmurs, "I know these moors are dotted with marshes, yet I don't hear the croak of even a single frog or the chirping of any night insect." But almost before these words are out of his mouth, Britt becomes aware of the sound of Kelly's strangely strained breathing. "What's wrong?" he asks.

Kelly gulps a swallow of air and struggles to control her breath to reply. "It's passing, Britt . . . it's the silence, I think. Each time lately that the animals and insects of the moors are quiet like this, there has been a murder. This silence frightens me."

*I wonder if she's trying to keep me from going up there to the ruins.... If so, she's a pretty convincing actress.* "Come, Kelly," says Britt as he opens his door, "we've had one murder for tonight. The walk will do you some good."

Submerged in the unearthly silence of this night, they start up the gentle slope of the Stonehenge mound. Their footfalls

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are quiet, cushioned by the thick moss that covers the ground with a green, decaying blanket. The pupils of Britt's eyes wax wide in the darkness and are riveted ahead on the giant stone slabs, which jump in size with each step that brings Britt closer.

*Crunch!* The shattering sound of Britt's shoe on the first unseen stone step of Stonehenge stabs into his ears accompanied by the solid jolt that travels from his heel and up his spinal bones to his skull. Britt stops.

Slowly he reaches out his right hand and touches the mammoth monolith beside which he now stands. It is cold and damp and dead.

"So this is Stonehenge," he whispers hoarsely.

Kelly is almost invisible beside him as they stand in the darker-than-night shadow of this slab. Slowly Britt's eyes begin, to scan the area. The huge stone slabs stand like sentinels on the edge of a large circle. Some paired stones

bear on their tops a third horizontal slab and thereby form the mystical and mathematical symbol of pi. Britt's imagination first sees the upright columns as giant warriors of another world bearing a fallen fellow; now, in his imagination, the pi-grouped columns become colossal doorways. Britt smiles to himself, amused at the patterns his imagination sees in the stones. *Doorways to where? I wonder*, he thinks while his eyes look out between the upright slabs across the circle and see a single star staring back like an eye from outer space.

Britt turns to look back down the mound and across the moors. Kelly, too, looks to where he gazes. A few lights of ancient Salisbury are visible from this vantage on the mound. From here Britt can see how the threads of glowing blue power lines stretch through the skies, terminating in Salisbury but having their origin somewhere over the far horizon beyond the moors.

Britt hears Kelly inhale raggedly. She shivers.

"Strangely colder up here, isn't it?" he says, turning again toward her and the ruins. *She looks harmless enough ... but I must not let my guard down*. His eyes wander from the girl and back to the great stones. "I wonder how they did it," he says, thinking aloud. Britt steps cautiously through the doorway formed by the stones. Carefully Britt moves toward the open center of the circle. He constantly turns his head—as much to admire the perfect symmetry of this ancient architecture as to keep a wary eye out for any movement in

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the shadows of the surrounding circle of silent slabs, which scientists have named "trilithons."

He stops now, dead center in the circle of this great granite mystery. "You know ..." Britt begins, but quickly stops, as the sound of his own voice seems too loud amid the graveyard quiet here. Kelly starts walking slowly toward him as he speaks more quietly. "I don't think that anyone has yet figured out how the primitive Celtic tribes managed to move these multi-ton slabs here and arrange them at such precise intervals and in such a perfect circle."

"Nor," says the shadowy form of Kelly, "has anyone yet learned the secret of the ceremonies conducted here in ages past." The young woman is walking slowly, stiffly. Britt sees a strange dull glint in her black eyes as she nears; he tenses. "Human sacrifice" is all she says before she stops one step in front of Britt.

The blackness here at this moment in the center of the strange gathering of stones is a thick, almost tangible thing. "Walking through that doorway and into this silent circle," says Britt, "was like stepping off our earth and into space." Tonight's faint starlight provides only minimal illumination as Britt's eyes again scan the dark of the inner circle. "There," lie breathes, and the word becomes a visible mist from his mouth in the damp air. Kelly's hand, death cold, seizes his as he speaks. "I think I've spotted the altar! Let's take a look." His hand tightens on hers, and he tugs her with him. She seems genuinely frightened again.

*If I'm wrong about her, I'll try to make it up to her ... but I can't take a chance on being attacked or exposed like at the haunting site in Sicily or Germany last week. In any case, I have to check out this altar as long as I'm here to confirm firsthand Adam's prediction that this is where I am most likely to make contact with the haunting spirit of Stonehenge.*

They stop. Kelly's hand tightens on Britt's fingers. He and the girl are looking down at a cold coffin-sized slab of stone. Britt gently pulls his hand free and squats down on his heels for a closer look. *Damn! I don't feel any emanations from this stone ... wish Karl were here with his special gift ... can't even use my detector -without really giving away my own secret*. Britt reaches into the pocket of his racing-striped nylon windbreaker and removes a packet of wooden matches.

*Scratch!* Flame explodes from the match head as Britt flicks it across the surface of the altar stone. The ages-old

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dark stains that dance in the light of the flame are unmistakable: *Blood! And plenty of it ... good! Maybe I'll get lucky this time.*

Kelly kneels down quickly beside Britt. "The stories I've heard the gypsies tell about this place—and this stone—are awesome ... horrible."

Britt's brain records Kelly's words but pays little attention. For while his trained scientific eyes trace the pattern of ancient stains on this sacrificial stone, his mind's eye conjures up the ghostly images of many strong hands holding the prone naked body of a struggling young woman as a gleaming blade descends slowly to disappear into her breast's soft flesh and release a flood of warm red blood from her pounding heart.

Suddenly, from nowhere, a single short gust of cold wind explodes through the doorway formed by the stones behind the altar and blows out the match.

*Crackle*—a dry tiny sound is gone in an instant. "What's that?" cries Kelly softly. Britt has heard it too, and in the immeasurably small span of a nanosecond, his mental memory banks identify the noise.

"Sounds like a piece of paper rustled by that gust of wind," he explains aloud. He stands and strains to see in the direction from which the sound had come. "Sure—look over there," he says, and points into the gloom at the base of one of the upright slabs that form the strange doorway behind the altar. There, about ten feet away and faintly reflecting the dim starlight, lies what appears to be a piece of newspaper.

"Hmmm," Britt murmurs. He steps over toward the piece of paper, which lies in the dark shadow of the stone and trembles in the faint breeze like a fear-filled living thing as Britt approaches. He squats down, picks up the paper, and sits on his haunches examining it

Kelly grows curious as the seconds tick past and Britt continues to study the paper. "What is it?" she finally asks, walking to where he is. She looks over his shoulder.

Without glancing up from the paper on which his eyes are focused and feeding information to the analytical

circuits of his brain, Britt says, "This is a piece of computer printout paper. Can't imagine what it's doing here. It's new, unwrinkled, and unweathered. Doesn't look like a piece of rubbish that has blown here by chance. And look at this . . . this circular formation of dots. It's a computer portrayal of the layout of

Stonehenge." But even while Britt's mouth is speaking these words, his eyes are scanning the complicated formulas that are printed out beneath the representation of the Stonehenge formation. "These," he continues slowly, "look to me like formulas I have seen that astronomers use for determining and predicting the positions of stars and planets." Britt pauses. His thoughts are racing, and he absently whispers the mental question to which he already fears he knows the answer: "I wonder what this is doing here?"

The rhetorical nature of Britt's whispered words is missed by Kelly, who responds, "I don't know, myself ... but I *do* know of a retired college professor in Salisbury for whom I do housekeeping twice a week and who knows a good deal about this kind of thing—he taught astrophysics at Oxford for many years."

Britt stands quickly and begins folding the paper. "I would like to meet your friend—"

Suddenly, before the sentence is complete from Britt's mouth, a black figure materializes from the gloom behind the nearby cold stone column!

"Oh!" gasps Kelly.

A deep sepulchral voice grates out these words: "*That* is mine."

Britt's mind is racing toward a decision of action, but before he can react, Kelly speaks. "Mihkael?" is her quavering question.

*She's led me here! She's one of them!* Britt's thoughts flash with angry urgency, and his muscles surge to life.

"It's all right, Britt," sighs Kelly with an inflection of genuine relief that momentarily stops the almost pulled trigger of Britt's emotions and actions. "I know this man. He's Mihkael, one of the gypsy family with whom I live."

*Calump! Calump! Calump!* A pounding sound and rumble felt in the earth suddenly distracts all three persons. They turn toward the direction from which it approaches and see a figure mounted on a ghost-white galloping horse burst through the far corner of the sacred circle of Stonehenge. Hooves slash the air like swords as the horse thunders toward them.

Britt's mind reels, indecisive as thoughts flash through with Strobe-light speed: *Things aren't what they seem! Kelly's surprise seemed—felt—genuine..., I FEEL that ... but what's going on?*

"Anton!" Kelly exclaims again, bewilderment sounding in

her voice as the rider reins up a scant yard in front of them.

Even in tonight's dim starlight, Britt catches the hate that flashes from the eyes of the rider as he glances at Britt. But the gypsy horseman focuses on Britt for only an instant. "Mihkael," the horseman hisses toward the other gypsy. "The police are coming to our wagons!"

In a single swift motion the man on the ground grabs the paper from Britt and swings onto the horse, even as the animal's huge haunches uncoil and launch it away into the night.

## 6

"No, John." Britt breathes the words and watches them drift from Ms. mouth as thin silver vapor in the summer-morning chill before they disappear into the air. "No ... the body was not really mutilated, as the newspaper reports have been saying. No," he continues, shaking his head slightly, "I doubt that our own Dr. Webster himself back at Mero could have performed a neater bit of surgery."

The bluish light of a blinking neon bulb bathes Dr. John Hollender as he sits on the workbench stool listening to Britt tell the tale of last night's encounter with the murder on the moors. The scientist is leaning back casually on his elbows, which rest on the neatly arranged workbench. Outside the garage, the still morning air is already occasionally shattered by the ripping snarl of racing engines as mechanics in other garages begin tuning their cars for the practice that will begin today—Friday—as soon as the slowly climbing sun burns the morning mists from the track.

On the workbench behind Hollender, a spiderweb-thin white line dances on the green screen of an oscilloscope. An automatic test is in progress of the team's latest psychic-communication equipment that has been shipped from its secret home-base laboratories in the mountains of southern California.

John's lips are pursed, and his round head—too large for his slight body—nods while the brain inside assimilates and analyzes what Britt is reporting. "You know, Britt," he finally says, stroking his Solzhenitsyn-style beard, "this latest murder, as you describe it, appears to be exactly the same *modus operandi* that was reported in secret Scotland Yard files from the 1800's on the original Jack the Ripper murders. Even back then, the newspapers sensationalized the crimes as 'mutilation murders'—but the victims were, in fact, so carefully dissected that the prime suspect of the police at that time was

a brilliant young London surgeon who disappeared before an arrest could be made."

"Ja," agrees Karl in Teutonic tones, "he disappeared in 1888—the same year that the first series of crimes ceased!"

Britt, who is working on the opposite side of his racing machine from the big psychically gifted German, pauses and peers through the maze of fuel lines that is between them. "Have you been reading the file I've got on this one? Even I don't remember seeing that 1888 date in there."

Karl's glance catches Britt's eyes through the tubes. "No," he explains as he immediately returns to his work on the left-side manifold assembly. "I learned such details from Adam before we departed from Mero Institute."

"Adam?" Britt puzzles. He picks up his grease-blackened wrench again and begins securing the last of the stubborn bolts on the right-side exhaust manifold. Adam, the amazing Mero computer with almost human artificial intelligence, has been the subject of continuous speculation in the subliminal circuitry of Britt's brain. The mention now of "his" name brings up these thoughts from that level and moves them more to the upper awareness levels of consciousness: *There's something about that computer that I've been meaning to dis-cuss with Hollender . . . can't think of 'exactly what it is....* "O.K." says Britt, "from Adam's analysis we know that murders like this have occurred in this vicinity every twenty-eight years. Each series of murders has followed the same pattern—precisely five young women victims, and then nothing for twenty-eight years."

Britt has completed his installation of the manifold. He stands wiping his hands on a red shop towel. He walks towards the open main door of the garage and leans against the frame. Across the alleyway that separates the two rows of facing garages, the Ferrari team now lifts the main door of their garage. Inside wait two sleek machines. Blood-red, they sit side-by-side staring out with sightless eyes. Britt watches a low, blue Matra being pushed down the alleyway accompanied by a group of talkative, white-coveredalled mechanics who are passing a green bottle of wine among them. Britt smiles. He turns and stuffs the shop towel into the back pocket of his coveralls.

"From what I saw last night," he says as he slowly scratches his head, "it is possible that we are not dealing with a spirit at all. No spirit needs an *athame* to dissect a victim," he continues. "So, at first glance, it's difficult to explain the

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presence of that kiife without suspecting that perhaps the killings have all along been the work of a very alive witch or coven."

"A coven, more likely," speculates John, "considering the fact that several of the murder victims—like the one last night—have been in the company of strong young male companions who have also been neatly dispatched."

Britt turns quickly toward his friend. "Dispatched?" he says, grinning in spite of the seriousness of the current conversation. "Sounds like of Malibu John is going British on us," he chides. Even in the instant that he speaks, Britt feels good. He is reassured by this sudden surfacing of his sense of humor—humor that has seemed so much submerged since the strange psychic changes began in his head and he joined this Mero team.

"*Nein.*" The firm denial from Karl is accompanied by a definitive shake of his head. The German looks up from his work. "No," he repeats firmly as he again turns his eyes to the engine of the waiting Porsche. "I feel that we are\* dealing with something more than human here."

Britt walks briskly to the back of the garage toward the small refrigerator there, asking as he goes, "Is that your *opin-ion*, Karl? Or," he adds, referring to the special talents that have dictated Karl's presence on these missions for Mero, "do you *feel* that?"

Quietly—so quietly that Britt is uncertain whether the words are first spoken or projected into his brain—the German replies, "*I feel* that."

"Well," says John, pivoting on his workbench stool so that he faces the devices arrayed on the bench behind him, "I'm glad *you're* so certain, Karl. Personally, I think that right now, on the basis of what we know so far, we are going to find ourselves dealing with some kind of ritual sacrifices conducted by a very alive group—such as those gypsies whom Britt encountered at Stonehenge."

Britt has removed a half-gallon jug of cold apple juice from the refrigerator. He takes a swig from the bottle. "John, what's your theory on that computer printout that I found at the ruins?"

Hollender *has* already begun to tinker again with adjustments on the new communicator with which Britt may soon perform modern science's most astounding feat. "Of course, I would really like to have seen it myself," he says while his fingers, as trained in their delicate work as Karl's are for

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their heavy labor, seize a small screwdriver and begin turning a tiny adjusting screw. "But from your description, Britt, it seems to me that those gypsies are probably part of some computerized coven that is using the Stonehenge ruins for worship .ceremonies that involve human sacrifice."

"Or," Britt offers while placing the juice bottle back in the box, "there is of course the possibility that they are not gyp-sies at all." He turns and faces his friends. "The dead lad in the car had no marks on his body, but his eyeballs were bul-ging noticeably from their sockets in the manner that we now know from our past encounters with surgically converted psy-chic cyborgs is characteristic of death due to overpressure from a psychokinetic blast. Maybe those gypsies are not what they appear to be. They could be here for the same reason that *we* are. In which case, we could be in more danger from them than we are likely to encounter from a *spirit*." Britt shakes his head slowly. "I just get bad vibes when I think about the gypsies and this Professor Scire whom Kelly is tak-ing me to see tonight in Salisbury."

The three men slip into silence; each is preoccupied with Ms own—but similar—thoughts: that the team's true purpose here has somehow been discovered; that they are all again in mortal danger from mortals.

Suddenly a figure appears in the doorway—a humanlike silhouette except for a strangely shaped skull. Karl reacts quickly, rising to his full six-foot-seven-inch height, his huge, hard hands wrapping tight around the wrench with

which he was working. In this single same tick of the clock, Hollender's hand shoots toward the pistol-packed toolbox that rests ever-ready beside his bench; and the primitive warning circuitry of Britt's brain shouts "cyborg" through his consciousness as it responds to the unusual skull-shape and recalls the death dealing psychic creations he encountered in Washington and Sicily. But even before this internal alarm can fire the neural impulses to launch Britt's body into action, the higher information-analyzing circuitry of the living electrochemical computer in his skull has determined that the true interpretation of the strange, smooth, round shape of this shadowed figure's head is not due to any alteration by psychic surgery. *He's wearing a bowler hat!*

"Gentlemen," says the figure. "I did not intend to startle you. Please permit me to introduce myself," he continues in very British accents. "I am," he announces, and steps into the

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neon light of the garage, "William Strathmore of LMV Corporation."

"The big British aerospace firm?" asks Britt.

"Quite." The bowler head nods. "Actually, I am with the new automotive-products division of LMV. We are present here at the race to introduce our line of heavy-duty dampers—or, as you Americans say, 'shock absorbers.' You see," the man continues speaking, and Britt and the others feel their bodies relax as they prepare to listen to the coming sales pitch, "LMV intends to apply its aerospace expertise to the automotive market, bringing to the man on the street all the benefits he has paid for through the tax dollars that have been invested in aerospace technology."

Britt sits down on the exposed tire of the bodiless Porsche that he will soon be driving in this morning's practice. The gaunt, giant Karl folds his arms, and Hollender's hand continues the move it made, converting, however, the action into a camouflaged reach for a convenient cup of coffee that sits steaming beside the weapon-laden toolbox.

"All this morning," the salesman explains, "I have been visiting teams here at Brands for the race with the same offer; namely, if you agree to compete in this contest with our new dampers"—the man's hand slips out of sight into the inner jacket pocket of his proper dark business suit—"and place this decal on your vehicle, we will pay you one thousand pounds sterling."

"ShockStop," reads the red lettering on the foot-long yellow oval decal that the salesman has withdrawn from his pocket and unfolded for them to read.

"A thousand pounds—that's about twenty-five hundred dollars, isn't it," Britt states, lifting his eyebrows, appearing impressed at the offer and thereby adding another detail of support to the public pretense that he and his friends here are only of a small private racing team who, like others of their kind, follow the lucrative championship circus around the world, sharing by association in the glory of the glamorous factory teams, competing for the monetary crumbs the factory teams leave behind, and living on a shoestring from race to race. Britt glances quickly across the garage at Hollender, and then over his shoulder at Karl. "Sounds good to us," he replies, again focusing on the salesman in front of him. "What's in it for us if one of our cars finishes in a points position?"

"There is," the man responds, "a two-thousand dollar

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bonus for a first-place finish, fifteen hundred for second, and one thousand for third. Any of the next three positions will earn you five hundred dollars per car."

Hollender shifts position on Ms stool. "Sounds good to me, Britt."

"Ja, Ich auch." Karl nods. "Let us examine these new devices of yours."

"Right," replies the man with a polite, brisk snap of his head. He turns and disappears again around the left-side corner of the main garage door.

"How," asks Britt, turning toward Karl, "is this car coming along?"

"The engine is done," says the huge mechanic. "I was about to fit new brake pads before your practice run. It will be a simple matter to add these new shocks at the same time."

"Here we are, gentlemen."

Britt and his teammates turn to see the LMV Corporation representative walking toward them and pushing a small green two-wheeled dolly on which rest eight foot-long tube-like cartons. "ShockStop" is written in red lettering on the slick black boxes. Britt looks at them, and in the instant that he does, a shiver shoots up his spine and down his arms, to tingle for an eyeblink in the tips of his fingers; and a *feeling*—not physical like the chill, but just as cold—seeps through his psyche.

## 7

BRAMJ BRAM! BRAAMMM!

"Sounds good to me," Britt shouts; over the rambling idle or the powerful racing engine that throbs behind him as he sits in the sophisticated chassis of the thoroughbred Porsche.

Karl nods and rises from his kneeling position beside the engine. His trained ear, too, is satisfied with the snarl of the flat twelve-cylinder power plant. He takes one last look at the high-strung chrome-covered engine as it waits, locked in its chassis, for its chance to blast Britt and the car away from this starting line here at the side of Brands Hatch's famous Top Straight. Karl lowers the rear cowl of the car and covers the engine. Britt can feel the snaps lock into place. His mouth is dry, and he works his tongue around in it to begin the flow of saliva.

Britt glances around him as he sits in the rumbling racer, which waits on the paved apron at the side of the starting line. All up and down this outside edge of the track there is much activity. A dozen cars wait behind Britt for

their chance to establish a lap time that will determine their start-ing position on Sunday. A half-dozen men bend over each car, collaborating excitedly, tensely on the final tuning details. Special spectators with pit passes pinned proudly to their colored summer sport shirts stroll from car to car, and pit bunnies—petulant at the way they are ignored now for the machines—primp their hair styles, adjust their tight, scanty pants and halters, and cast glaring glances at each other. And the sounds, the *sounds* of it all—the engines, the talking, the public address system—all seem *good* to Britt. He savors the sounds, the sights, the smells, and the blue summer sky one last time before he slips on his helmet. Now he lifts the heavy, fully enclosed gold-plastic headpiece with the same studied slowness that the gladiators must have used in ancient Rome. The insulated shell slips snugly over his entire head and isolates him in a silent inner space. Like a computer

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switched on, Britt's mind immediately focuses on the dash-board gauges that will guide him and his small spaceship around this high-speed course.

Britt feels a tap on his helmet: Karl is giving Ms driver the traditional signal that all is ready. Britt turns to look over his left shoulder at the tall mechanic. He catches the glint of ex-citement in the otherwise stoic face of the tall German. Britt, too, shares Karl's feeling in his own pounding heart. During these moments before practice and a race, Britt, the racer, and Karl, the racing mechanic, can temporarily suppress the otherwise overriding fact of why they travel the world in the guise of a racing team.

Karl flashes a thumbs-up signal and pivots briskly even as Britt returns the sign.

Britt watches for several heartbeats as his friend walks away toward their assigned pit area farther down the side of the track. Greg and his car rest there now. Greg is sitting casually on an empty oil case; his white one-piece driving suit is ramped and sweat-stained, although the morning is still cool. Greg has turned in a qualifying lap of one minute and ten seconds. *Quite a change*, thinks Britt as his head turns away from the scene and back toward the sparse instrument panel of his Porsche, *from 1962, when I first became inter-ested in racing*. He smiles to himself as he recalls the fan-tasies he had back then while reading how movie actor Steve McQueen was racing here at Brands Hatch while in England filming *The War Lover*. McQueen had one of his first racing accidents in a Mini Cooper S here at this Brands Hatch track. The absolute lap record in 1962 was one minute and fifty-four seconds; today, Britt knows he must turn in at least a one-minute-and-fifteen-second lap in order even to get into the race. This small change in lap times has been accom-plished by quadrupling the horsepower of the machines, transforming the cars from delicate dancers, which achieved low lap times through precision handling, into thundering beasts, which rely on brutal acceleration and powerful brakes to achieve high speeds in short, bruising bursts between the corners and down the straights.

*Here we go*, Britt thinks to himself as a racetrack official steps to stand beside his panting Porsche. The man is balding, gray-haired. His crisp white slacks flap slightly in this morn-ing s gentle breeze. Cradled in the arm of his gold blazer is the furled green flag that he will shortly wave to signal Britt to begin his laps.

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He waits,...

*rrrrRRRRROWWWRRrrr!* A bright-orange streak flashes past in front of Britt's machine. Simultaneously, Britt feels his Porsche rock once, stiffly, buffeted by the blast of the wind's invisible energy, which expands from the wake of the speeding car. *Invisible energy*. The words and the concept come quickly to Britt's upper level of consciousness now, breaking his concentration. *Can't think of such things now . . . must concentrate on this . . . must concentrate*. Britt knows that the task he will have, scant seconds from now—to drive his *facing* machine at top qualifying speeds—is deadly business. Britt's will forces his brain to return to thoughts of the track as he waits for the official to see if any other cars are coming.

Brands Hatch is a very "tight" circuit. There are none of the 200-mile-per-hour straightaways of Le Mans, none of the sweeping bends of Spa Franchorchamps. There *are*, however, many tricky bends with different gradients and reverse cam-bers. To a driver being pushed fiercely along by a growling, howling eager engine, the turns come almost too quickly to cope with. The engine and the machine it shoves so fast seem to grow angrier as a race here wears on. With each succes-sive lap the driver knows that the panting, shrieking machine into which he is strapped is growing more wild at being asked to accelerate with all its might from one corner, only to be braked quickly for the next. This is a track that wears down that life-vital bond between a driver and his high-tuned car. The driver finds himself not only racing a ticking clock and other drivers, but also struggling with a rebellious, irrational machine whose furious frustration could any minute send them both smashing into the guardrail. Some say that is what happened to Stirling Moss in 1962 when he bored head-on at 110 mph into the embankment at Goodwood. Moss hovered near death for days, and only his tenaciousness held him back from slipping into the beyond—but his crushed body never permitted him to race again.

In the fashion of European racing tracks, the turns and straights of Brands Hatch have names related to their design or to features of the track or nearby countryside. There's Paddock Turn, a tight right-hander just past the paddock area and the starting line. The crush that occurs here when the close-packed avalanche of accelerating racing cars crams through this turn immediately after the start spells the end for many machines. And drivers find the fast left-right twist

of Kidney Bend an exhilarating high before they burst onto the sweeping Clearways Curve, whose rough surface makes their machines become unstable and deadly. But the turn that seems to be the sight of so many accidents and injuries is deadly Druid's.... *Druid's*—the word softly echoes through the inner solitude of Britt's mind as he sits here at the start-ing line staring from the cockpit of his impatiently trembling Porsche. The word triggers a shift in the scene in Britt's men-tal eye; from this bright morning-lit noise of the trackside here, back his mind's eye darts, through the paddock and down the access road some twenty-five yards, to the almost empty garage, where he conjures up the image of Dr. John Hollender still sitting under the light of a lonely neon bulb in the darkened garage as he fine-tunes the device that could in just a few hours from now be the key that unlocks the un-known and snatches this unsuspecting world away from the threat of psychic enslavement by military masters.

Suddenly—in the same manner that the eye of a frog, tuned by its tiny brain to the specific movement of edible in-sects, so that it automatically ignores all others and reacts only to the flit of a fly—Britt's eyes, which by unspoken com-mand have been oblivious of the cars zipping past on the track and of the milling crowd, now react to the movement to which Britt's brain has programmed them to respond; they send an impulse flashing down the electrochemical circuitry into his cortex. Without words, processing cognitive wholes, Britt's brain simply *knows* that the official is just beginning the move to wave Britt onto the track. In Britt's body, the automatic action preset by the programming of many years of racing is already in motion. His right foot stabs the accelerator pedal simultaneously with his left foot quickly, smoothly releasing the clutch. The circuitry of Britt's disci-plined mind is speeding so fast that for Mm time slows down. The explosively rapid acceleration of his Porsche is now for Britt a separate reality—a slow, smooth, steady gathering of speed that causes his eyeballs to grow heavy, like marble imi-tations as they press back into his skull under the force of the Porsche's brutal acceleration. To those looking on from trackside, Britt's machine is *rocketing* away from the start here on the Top Straight section, but Britt's trained racing driver's brain is exceeding even the nanosecond speed of elec-tronic computers so that everything is happening for him in a slow-motion sequence that allows adequate time to direct the body's hands and feet. This is the mental momentum that

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permits a driver to operate his machine safely at speeds far beyond what is normal for man. And yet, this mental speed is as delicate as the action of a gyroscope that guides a space satellite. Small things—a wheel-tossed stone *whacking* against the windscreen, or being unexpectedly passed by another car, or an errant movement of the needle on a vital gauge—can instantly shatter this concentration . . . with deadly results. But just now, in this tick of a second since the flagman sig-naled, Britt's brain has expanded its domain and adopted the steel and plastic of the Porsche as part of its body: the steer-ing wheel is a steel nerve stalk feeding information from wheels that have become hands and feet that feel every small stone in the tar of the track. The spinning engine is another heart that Britt's brain monitors, just like the pounding flesh in its other body's chest, and the air-sucking silver injector stacks now become living nostrils inhaling long, deep breaths.

It is only an eye blink now since Britt has left the starting line; his leather-gloved right hand tightens on the stubby shift lever, his left rises to the top of the fat black steering wheel, and Ms eyes watch both the rapidly rising tachometer needle and the fast-approaching Paddock Turn: 8500 . . . 9000 ... 9500 *rpms—shift!*

In perfectly timed unison Britt's left foot and right hand explode into action as the tach shows the engine reaching 9500 revolutions per minute. In goes the clutch pedal. *Snick!* clicks the shift lever into second gear, out comes the clutch pedal, and down stomps Britt's right foot again on the gas pedal.

*ROWR!* roars the engine with another burst of acceler-ation that shoves the car forward and pushes back on Britt's cheeks. He's accelerating through the Paddock Turn now, sawing the wheel and feathering the throttle to keep the ma-chine turning to the right as fast as possible without spinning from the centrifugal forces of nature that try to pull this liv-ing man-machine combination to the left. The car speeds through the turn, drifting out toward the "marbles"—bits of chewed-up track, small stones, and other debris that collect on the outside edge of such turns where they wait for an un-fortunate driver to swing too wide and skid on them. *Whack! Whack! Whack!* come the sounds of small stones being hurled by the tires against the inner fender as the Porsche just skirts the ragged edge of the marbles in a perfectly executed drift that uses as much track as possible to maintain speed for the coming charge up Pilgrim's Rise.

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. . . 9500! warns Britt's brain as it again triggers another set of the dozens of sets of hand-and-foot-coordinated moves that it will command for the many shift points on each lap of this twisty track. *Snick!* The shift lever moves into third gear, and the car hurls itself up the Pilgrim's Rise ... up toward dread Druid's Turn! Druid's is a sudden, vicious right-hand hairpin at the top of this hill. It's hard to see and almost im-possible to anticipate until it is suddenly there in front of your upward-rocketing machine. The hairpin hurls the road back down the hill, steeply down into a long left-hand turn that leads to the high-speed Bottom Straight. For the driver who fails to execute precisely the complicated move of touching the brakes, downshifting to second, and holding the steering wheel hard to the right through Druid's, the race can end right here—end tragically.

*Druid's!* The thought/word, like some magic incantation, breaks Britt's concentration as he hurries toward the hooking hilltop turn. *JEEZ!* Britt moves a split-second too late to slow adequately the thunderous momentum of his hurtling ma-chine. *Too fast! Too fast into this goddamn corner!* shouts his angry mind, even as its various command levels initiate in-stantaneous actions to correct the error. Like an out-of-con-trol comet, the white, blue-striped



Porsche sails past the apex of the turn and swings wildly outward toward the solid steel guardrail. "Come on, baby!" calls Britt aloud through clenched teeth as he quickly turns the wheels to the left, steering into the skid at the same time that he carefully feeds power to the rear wheels.

It's all over in an instant. The Porsche responds to his expert finesse and straightens to streak past the rail and leave just a kiss of white paint on the disappointed steel.

At these speeds there is no time to think about the near-ness of death. Already Britt is plunging down the hill, accel-erating faster and faster with a roar down toward the left turn to Bottom Straight.

His head—heavy because of the helmet around it—is pulled hard to the right and suddenly snapped back to the left by the force of his speed as he threads through S-shaped Kid-ney Bend. Quickly, he's onto Clearways, the big open curve that leads again to Top Straight and past the crowded start-ing line. Britt knows that when he passes that line this time the official's clocks will tick to life, timing his next lap to de-termine his position in Sunday's race. So now he is feeding the speed through Clearways, knowing that he must explode

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onto the straight in order to get the best start time on these laps. Clearways is rough-surfaced. Jarring jolts pound back through the steering and up Britt's arms to rattle his tight teeth. The Porsche's power is being unleashed; its brutal black tires are clawing the track surface.

*rrnrrowwwwWWWWWRRRR*—the howl of the animal engine fills Britt's head at this instant as he bursts out of Clearways. Speed! Speed! And more speed! Faster and faster! All things and everyone lining the sides of the straight melt to a colorful blur; only in focus is the distant but onrushing rail of Paddock Turn. Suddenly it's *herel* Brain, hands, feet, eyes, all flash into action, and the turn is gone, changing magically into Pilgrim's Rise that rockets Britt toward dreaded Druid's again!

*Druid's!* The word pierces Britt's concentration once more at a critical time.

*Clunk!* The jolt reaches Britt's hands on the steering wheel even at the instant that his brain's balance mechanism senses the sudden collapse of the left-front suspension. Adrenaline explodes through Britt's body, released by his brain *in* reac-tion to the death danger brought on by whatever it is that has just broken in the Porsche's front suspension. Britt's heart is thumping, pounding in his head. His hands tighten so hard on the wheel that the leather of his thin racing gloves stretches and splits across the back of his knuckles as he fights the leftward pull of the collapsed suspension! *Yorfre not going to kill me! Damn! Damn! Damn! You are not going to kill me!* The determined instinct of self-preservation boils out of Britt's brain. Blue smoke from the brake-locked tires billows up around his car, blocking out sight of the on-rushing barrier but not bothering Britt, who is already unsee-ing through a blind rage. *Goddamn! Goddamn! Goddamn! I won't hit that wall! I won't die now! I WONT!*

## 8

"Impossible," hisses Britt.

His hands tremble, not from fear of his brush with death only five minutes ago out there on the track, but rather from the lack of control he has over his muscles that are still awash in the energizing adrenaline that continues to course through his veins. He inhales. His breath is ragged. But Britt knows that slow, deep breaths will bring in the oxygen needed to metabolize away the residue of adrenaline and free his body from the influence of this powerful, primitive hor-mone that was instinctively released by his brain in the face of the death out there on the track.

"Yep . . . impossible," agrees Hollender. The Porsche, Britt, Karl, and Greg are again in their garage. The machine has been towed here, and Karl already has it up on jacks as he examines the dangling damaged parts of the left-front sus-pension.

The big main garage door to the alley is closed. Only muf-fled sounds of the racing activity outside reach the men in here beneath the bright neon lights.

"But we all saw it," comments Greg as he closely watches Karl carefully dismantling the damaged front suspension. They are waiting to learn just what happened out there on the track. Waiting to see what caused the suspension collapse. Waiting for some clue, some *physical* clue, that might also explain why Britt wasn't killed in what should—by all the laws of physics—have been a fatal accident.

Hollender is standing beside Britt, his left arm folded across his chest and his cupped left hand supporting the el-bow of his right arm. Hollender's right hand is thoughtfully stroking the new beard he has grown since the team left Mero Institute's secret mountaintop headquarters two months ago. "The way I see it as a physicist," he begins slowly, "there simply is no physical explanation for how you man-

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aged to stop this crippled machine before *it* smashed into that steel guardrail,"

Britt casts a quick glance at the scientist, but Britt, too, is intent on watching Karl.

Hollender looks on also. Still, his mind is working on the puzzle of Britt's brush with death. Hundreds of others wit-nessed it, too—drivers, mechanics, and spectators present for the practice; but few, if any, of them gave it much thought. In the distracting world of racing, this was just another un-usual occurrence to be talked about in the bar and

soon for-gotten. To the trained scientific mind of Hollender, however, the way the speeding, out-of-control car stopped short of certain disaster is a significant aberration that requires some explanation. He thinks out loud while watching Karl: "No, Britt, I had just arrived in our pit area from the garage here as you began that timed lap. Now, the suspension collapse occurred only about seventy-five yards from Druid's, and your speed going up Pilgrim's Rise at that point was a minimum of one hundred and twenty miles per hour. That means that even under ideal conditions your car would have required at least three hundred and fifty feet to stop."

Hollender's listening teammates can visualize the millions of electrochemical sparks that are flashing in the man's brain as it calculates. "But your suspension had collapsed and your brakes were locked. So, you should have hit that guardrail at between ninety and one hundred miles per hour. At that speed, I'm sure the low nose of this Porsche would have gone under the rail and you would have been decapitated."

"Cheery thought, John," chides Britt with a mock grin.

"*Sie mal an!*"

Karl's hoarse whisper pulls the others closer for a better look into the damaged left-front wheel well, where Karl has been working.

Like a surgeon removing a damaged bone from a human body, Karl withdraws an A-shaped piece of tubing from the wheel-well cavity.

"Look at this upper wishbone," he says in his deep guttural accent. The others crowd close around where he crouches, and bend to look over his shoulder. Steadying the suspension part on his left knee, Krimmel points with his grease-black left index finger toward the tip of the vital silver suspension part. "See here, how the mounting ring is worn completely through."

"Damn," exclaims Britt in a whisper. "That was a new

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part we put on right after that flaming finale we had last week at Niirburging."

Hollender's right hand reaches down slowly. Karl gives the part to him. Hollender holds the part close and shakes his head as he examines the point where the hardened metal has worn through. It is a critical point where the A-arm connects both to the shock absorber and to the monocoque frame of the Porsche. "Offhand," he continues while turning toward his workbench with the part, "I'd say that *this*, too, is impossible."

He stops at the workbench and pulls the chain to turn on the neon light above it. Reaching into his toolbox, he retrieves and places in his eye a magnifying monocle such as jewelers use to examine precious stones. Now he takes a small diamond-tipped probe from the box and carefully scratches the worn area of the suspension part.

"Hmmmmmm," he murmurs. "The hardness of this part seems to be within specifications. But *something* has certainly ground away the metal. Karl," he calls out, "bring me that shock absorber that you put—"

Even before the sentence is complete, Krimmel places the requested part on the workbench in front of John, who, along with the others, is reminded by this that Karl's experience as a Porsche-factory mechanic is not the only talent that dictated his presence on this unusual team.

"Thanks, Karl," John acknowledges. He sits down on his stool at the workbench and for several intense seconds closely and carefully studies the end bolt of the shock absorber. Now he takes the diamond-tipped probe and begins to scratch the smooth section of the bolt shaft below where the threading begins. "Look at this," he says, handing the magnifying lens to Britt and holding out the shock so he can see the end bolt clearly.

Britt bends over and studies the metal carefully. He straightens up and removes the monocle from his eye. "Not a scratch on it."

"Right, Britt. Not only that," Hollender adds, holding up the probe, "but the cutting edge of this diamond was actually dulled by that material. If you look at that end section again, you will also note what we all failed to see this morning."

This time it is Karl who takes the strange shock absorber in his hands. "*Ach so!* Of course! How stupid of me not to see that!"

Greg, standing beside the German, appears slightly puzzled.

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zled. "What is it, Karl? I don't see anything wrong with that shock."

Karl quickly picks up the A-arm from the bench and slips the bolt end of the shock into the worn ring to which it had been attached. "See," he says, holding the connection so that all can see, "the standard unthreaded section on an end bolt is one inch. This shock has only three-quarters of an inch, so that during flexing of the bushing under the weight of the car on the track, the threads can grind away at the A-arm connection. I should have noticed this discrepancy," he concludes bitterly.

"Hell," Britt contradicts, "I can hardly notice the difference even now. Don't blame yourself, Karl."

Greg speaks up again. "One thing we should do right away is warn others who agreed to use those shocks that they may be defective."

"Right," agrees Hollender. "Karl, start with the garages around us. Greg, you'd better head for the officials' control station at the track and alert them. They may want to red-flag practice, because somebody out there now might be equipped with ... Britt! What's wrong?"

Britt, who is standing beside John, is weaving and pale, looking as if he is about to collapse. "Nothing ... nothing," he weakly replies while shaking his head slightly to clear his vision. "I think the full emotional impact of that close call out there is just hitting me now.... I'm coming down off that adrenaline high."

The bearded scientist nods in agreement. "Emotions such as that and the hormones that fuel them are more powerful than drugs. You'd better go back there in the washroom and throw some cold water on your face while Greg and Karl are gone."

"We're off," says Greg as he and Karl head for the small side door of the garage.

Britt walks toward the tiny washroom, about fifteen feet away at the rear of the garage. As he walks, he unzips the top of his rumpled white driving suit, slips his athletic arms out, and lets the top of the one-piece outfit hang about his lean waist. Beneath the suit, his T-shirt is wet with perspiration in the armpits and in the center of his chest, where through the wet material one can see the matted mass of hair. John follows and leans in the door as Britt bends over the washbasin and cups his hands beneath the stream of cold water that flows down like liquid silver.

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"Ahhhh . . . feels good," sighs Britt, dousing his hot face with the water. The pounding pain in his head begins to fade almost immediately.

"It still puzzles me," says John in bemused tones, Britt looks up into the mirror and sees the reflection of Hollender leaning in the doorway, brow furrowed in thought. "You know, Britt, I heard a few murmurs from others at trackside out there when your car stopped without smacking into that barrier. There was just no logical way you should have been able to stop that quickly. It looked like some giant invisible hand had just reached out and slowed you.... I don't understand it."

Britt's left hand strikes out with the speed of a cobra and seizes the worn gray towel that hangs on a hook beside the washbasin. "Look," he snaps, and his voice, although muffled by the towel with which he is roughly rubbing his face, carries the venom of irritation. "I don't know how I stopped *either!* All I know is that I *did* and that I am here now!" Britt slaps the towel back onto the hook and glares at his friend. "Let's just drop the subject for a while."

"Britt," John replies softly but firmly, "I know how you feel ... but remember—I have to know as much as possible about whatever happens to you. The computers back at Mero are building quite a file on you. Dr. Webster feels the close observation of your behavior will provide clues to understanding psychic powers—clues that are as important as our general objective of trying to establish electronic contact with the Beyond before the Pentagon or the Russians succeed. We can help you understand what happened to you in Vietnam ... what you've become ..."

An eternity passes in an eye blink as Britt stares into John's face. Britt's mind, in one cognitive whole, recalls the mystic occurrence in the jungles of Vietnam, the horror of Gayle's death in the Pentagon labs, his own other-world battle at the Castle of Death in Sicily, and last week's encounter with the undead Death Master in Germany. Britt sighs deeply. "I'm sorry, John ... must be that residue of adrenaline still pumping through my veins."

Hollender nods. "Britt, last night while you were in Salis-bury, we received another shipment from Mero headquarters. We now have a completely new communicator."

Britt leans back against the edge of the washbasin and folds his arms across his chest. "Any trouble getting the thing through customs?"

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"No ... as usual, they thought the communicator was just what it looks like—an engine-tuning oscilloscope."

"*Freunden!*" Karl is calling as on the run he reenters the side door of the garage. He stops just inside the door and glances around before seeing Britt and Hollender at the back of the garage. Quickly he covers the twenty-five feet that separates him from them, explaining as he comes, "I have found something very strange. No other team here is using these shock absorbers. In fact, I quickly visited almost every garage here, and no one can even recall being approached by any representative."

"Hmmm," muses Britt. "Why should that guy lie to us ... and" why would—?"

Again they are interrupted as Greg steps through the side door. "O.K., guys, we're in *trouble*." Britt tenses as Greg explains. "When I told the officials at the timing station what was wrong, they red-flagged practice. The chief steward came running over to see why everything had been halted, and he became furious at my explanation. Seems he's a director of LMV Corporation, and he says that their new automotive di-vision doesn't even have *plans* to develop a shock absorber. He says that one more screw-up from us and we'll be dis-qualified from the race."

Britt, John, and Karl have all walked to meet Greg, and they stand silent now beside the crippled Porsche in the middle of the garage. "It looks," John says, breaking the thoughtful pause, "like somebody might indeed be on to us."

"Yep." Britt nods in agreement. "Looks like the supposed gypsies—or whoever else—might be trying to force our hand. LMV's corporate headquarters are only a few miles up the road toward London. Think I'll pay them a visit."

## 9

"Good morning." The receptionist smiles, showing delicious white teeth through her glistening moist lips. "Can I help you?"

"You certainly can, pretty lady. My name's Britt St. Vincent."

"I would never have guessed." The young woman behind the desk grins.

Instantly Britt realizes that his name is boldly embroidered in red over the breast pocket of the badge-emblazoned coveralls he still wears. He returns the smile, amused by this girl's quick sense of humor, which complements her

stunning good looks.

"I don't see any 'LMV Automotive Division' patches on your suit, Mr. St. Vincent," she teases, arching her delicate eyebrow.

"Well," he replies, "you almost did." He leans over her desk, appearing to sniff the scent of the single red carnation in the tall thin crystal vase that sits beside her IBM Executive typewriter, but actually to steal a close look at her legs: her short skirt, as she sits on the typing chair, is pulled high and tight around her full, firm, nylon-smooth thighs. Britt feels his heart give a sudden thud and his penis grow warm and hang heavier between his legs. *Jeez, he thinks as he stands up straight again, I'm homy as hell! It's been more than a week since I've slipped it between some smooth flesh like that.*

"Almost?"

"Yes, my dear," he explains, holding up the shock absorber that he has brought. "A representative of this company stopped at my garage over at Brands Hatch this morning and persuaded us to use this new LMV shock absorber on my Porsche. The shock is faulty. It damaged my car, and nearly killed me in the process."

"Oh," the receptionist replies with apparent genuineness. "You will probably want to go directly to Mr. Lambo's office

with that news. He's the managing director of this new division, and I'm certain that he would want to know what happened so that immediate corrections can be made." She pauses, looks down, and writes Britt's name on the register beside her desk pad. Now she hands Britt a white-plastic badge with black letters that read "Visitor."

"His suite," she says, pointing with her pencil, "is just beyond those doors and across the hall."

Britt turns around and walks toward a pair of imposing mahogany doors. Each door panel is about nine feet high and four feet wide. Small gold lettering on the dark-grained wood of the left door reads: executive suite.

The heavy right-side panel is precisely balanced and swings open easily at Britt's touch.

"Good morning," greets a massive gray-haired woman who sits behind a modern-style chrome-and-teak desk at the far side of this richly appointed waiting room. Britt almost loses his balance with his first step onto the plush gold carpeting here. The sounds of typewriters and footsteps on the tile hall outside are suddenly shut off as the massive door swings silently shut behind Britt.

"Is Mr. Lambo in?" he asks as he approaches this large woman. *She looks like a living Barbie-doll grandmother,* he thinks, noting her carefully coiffured hair, precision-applied, makeup, and severely tailored cream-colored suit.

The woman's smile is well-practiced and meaningless. "Mr. Lambo has someone with him at the moment. Perhaps someone else can help you." She obviously disapproves of the way Britt looks in his rumpled driving suit and holding the greasy shock absorber.

He takes the offensive. "Look, if Mr. Lambo doesn't see me, he's going to see my lawyers in regard to this defective part that damaged my car and almost killed me."

The woman's smile remains unaffected. "Oh, that is serious," she replies solicitously. "I'm sure Mr. Lambo won't be long. Perhaps you'd like to wash the grease from your hands, Mr. St. Vincent. You may leave the damper on that newspaper over there by the couch."

"Thank you," says Britt. "I think I'll do just that." He steps to the table by the couch, deposits the shock, and turns toward a door whose presence in the wood-paneled wall is revealed only by a slim silver handle. Portraits of top corporate officers hang on the wall. *At least I'll be able to recog-*

*nize Lambo ... think I'll leave the door open a crack in case he comes out while I'm in here.*

Britt adjusts the hot and cold water faucets to his liking while glancing frequently to the door that he has left open about two inches.

He is rinsing the soap from his hands as Lambo's door opens. *Damn!* Britt mentally exclaims as Lambo, in a dark-blue business suit, and another man, in a white lab gown, step into the waiting area. Neither man can see Britt, and they continue their conversation for several seconds. *That's him! Mihkael—the gypsy who claimed the computer printout sheet that I found last night at Stonehenge. What is he doing here, dressed like that, and talking to Lambo?* The erstwhile gypsy in the white lab gown carries a clipboard of papers. He seems to be upset with Lambo and is speaking sternly to the executive, Britt grows more curious. In another instant, the mysterious gypsy pivots sharply and walks quickly from the room.

"There's a Mr. St. Vincent here to see you," the secretary says to Lambo as the man prepares to return to his office. "It has to do with a defective part," she adds, nodding toward the shock absorber that lies on the table.

Britt has towed his hands and now steps into the room. Lambo's glance is nervous, and his face flinches once, twitching skin all the way back over his bald pate.

"Ah, Mr. St. Vincent," he says, extending his pale, thin hand. Britt shakes it, fighting a sudden impulse to crush these limp fingers in his own hand, which is so strong from the years of struggling with the heavy steering of powerful racing machines.

"My chief engineer was just telling me," Lambo begins, "about the problems that we discovered only this morning affecting that model of damper over there. We contacted our representative at the track via his pocket pager and told him to return all the units immediately."

*He's got a good story. It's obvious that they've prepared for me. But judging from his surprise when I stepped from*

that washroom, I don't think they were expecting me to be here already.

"Of course," Lambo continues, "we will cover the costs you incur in repairing your car. In addition, we are sending you a new set of Dunlops to replace those ruined in your skid."

"News travels fast, doesn't it?" says Britt sarcastically.

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"I know how upset you are, Mr. St. Vincent," Lambo continues, "but I believe we are doing everything we can to make it up to you. If you are not satisfied, then I suggest you seek legal redress. Now, please excuse me, but I have to make some important calls." The bald little man pivots and disappears into his office, shutting the door behind him.

"Good day, Mr. St. Vincent," says the secretary with arsenic-laden sweetness.

Britt ignores the tone; he has something else on his mind now as he turns and leaves the office.

Setting a smile on his face, Britt again approaches the desk of the sexy young receptionist. Purposefully he glances at her perfect breasts that are displayed in their braless beauty beneath her tight yellow sweater. She catches the glance, as he intended her to.

"I need some help, pretty lady," Britt smiles and stops beside her typewriter. "A guy I used to know came out of Lambo's office and got away before I could catch him—a man with dark curly hair and wearing a white lab gown."

Her smooth, summer-tan forehead wrinkles a bit. "Oh, yes," she recalls. "Mr. Arslanian."

"That's right!" Britt nods brightly. "What's he doing around here these days?"

Absently, the girl delicately scratches for an instant at her nipple, which responds to the brief touch by becoming erect and taut beneath the thin sweater. Britt is immediately aware of his own rapid reaction to this as pressure grows deep in his groin and high between his thighs.

"He's with New Directions," she replies.

It is Britt's turn to put on a puzzled expression. "New Directions? He wasn't with that outfit the last time I saw him. What is it?"

The girl's delicious mouth turns down slightly at one corner to express her disdain of New Directions. "It's another of those hotshot management-consulting groups that we've had in here ever since LMV went into bankruptcy a few months ago." She pauses before adding, "You do know of how the company went broke in developing that engine for your American jumbo jet, don't you?"

Britt nods. "Didn't the British government come along with a loan to bail out your company?"

"Yes, they did. But among the strings they attached to the money was that we listen to these management advisers they send around here. The only good thing I can see that they've

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done for the company is the establishment of this brand-new automotive division." She sighs. "But I don't know how long even this will last. It seems that there are more management consultants and former military men here than there are engineers."

## 10

"Yes, I recall the collapse of LMV," says Greg as he hands a self-locking wrench to Karl. All four team members are bathed in the golden warmth of the setting summer sun that streams in through the open main garage door. The snarling sounds of practicing race cars have faded with the fading daylight. In the garages up and down this area behind the pits, teams are now working on their cars, repairing damaged parts, replacing engines, and fine-tuning these precision machines to wring out of them that last spark of speed that might earn a higher place on the starting line at tomorrow's practice.

In this garage, Britt, Greg, and Karl are working on replacing the entire left-front suspension of Britt's Porsche. Hoi-lender is using an electronic oscilloscope to tune the ignition of\* Greg's car. "You know, John," Greg continues, glancing at the man, "I never can tell which are the communication devices from the labs and which are the genuine oscilloscopes. Anyway, as I was saying . . . I knew about some of the details of the collapse of LMV Corporation from Steve Barton, son of the then-president of LMV. Steve and I raced formula Fords together last season." Greg is sitting on the floor beside the damaged racer. His feet are beneath the machine, which is up on jackstands, and he is using a file to remove material from the place of the former weld so that a new A-arm can be positioned properly. He files with heavy, slow strokes as he speaks. "The way Steve explained it to me, the leadership of the then-ruling British Conservative party forced a vote through Parliament which censured Rhodesia's ruling Anglo minority for suppressing that nation's black majority. The vote was not popular with the British public, and the Conservatives' reason for pushing for the move was hard to understand, because it led—as they must have known it would—to the party being voted out in the next elections."

Greg has ground away all the old metal. He stands up and

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steps back as Britt kneels where Greg had been seated and positions the new A-arm in place.

*Whumph!* A large orange flame bursts to life on the tip of the welding torch in Karl's hands. He lowers his dark goggles and adjusts the torch's gas flow until the flame is a small, hard, hissing blue tip. Now he begins to weld the A-arm while Britt holds it in place.

Britt and Greg both turn their eyes away from the star-bright flame, and Greg continues. "But before those elections, Rhodesia responded to the censure by cutting off chromium ore from its mines. Without the chromium needed in making jet-engine blades, LMV fell behind on its deliveries to the U.S. and went bankrupt. In a final act before being ousted, the Conservative party proposed a plan for government financial backing of LMV—with many strings attached. This move was popular with the thousands of wage earners employed by LMV, and it passed easily."

*Pop!* sounds the torch as Karl turns off the valves feeding the flame. The A-arm is in place. Britt stands up and comments, "It sounds almost as if the *real* object of the Conservative party leaders all along was to gain government control of LMV for some unknown reason—even at the risk of their seats in Parliament."

"Agreed," says John, switching off his oscilloscope and looking over at Britt. "In fact," he adds, "it reminds me of the moves—of the old Nixon administration in provoking the Arab-Israeli war in order to bring about the oil embargo and force the U.S. environmental movement to give up its defense of Alaska and the California coastal waters from oil drilling."

"You know," Britt says as he wearily leans back against the side of his machine, "1984 is less than ten years away. Sometimes it seems like it's here already. I can remember reading Orwell's *1984* twenty years ago in high school. Do you remember how the book predicted that governments would regiment people by manipulating them with phony energy crises, peacetime rationing, limits on personal travel ... and thought police? Well, everybody out there," he says, nodding out the open garage door to the crowded alleyway where groups of car owners, drivers, accessories manufacturers' reps, and others who make up the colorful racing circus walk and talk in the gathering darkness, "knows that the energy crises, peacetime rationing, and travel limits have all come true and are with us now as part of our everyday life."

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But only we in this garage and the small secret groups whom we oppose out there know that advances in psychic science have brought the world to the brink of true *thought* police."

"*Mein Freund*," Karl counters in tolerant tones, "do not be so bitter. My life in Nazi Germany was hell, and I thought that freedom was dead then ... but the people eventually saw what was happening."

"Come on, Karl!" snaps Britt bitterly. "The people didn't have anything to do with the way that ended. Hitler simply screwed up the war, that's all. And anyway, the situation is not the same today in our struggle. There are no monstrous blitzkriegs, no inhuman genocide to stir the passion of opposition. There are only the most subtle and insidious moves—moves that arouse almost no one."

Britt pauses. "Look, Karl," he says apologetically, "I don't mean to sound so cynical. But you didn't exactly see the world leaping up in mortal alarm on Friday, May 12, 1972, when the Los Angeles *Times* broke the story of Jack Anderson's uncovering the Pentagon's secret Project Pandora file on the psychic warfare conducted by the Department of Defense and the Russian KGB. And where was the call for investigation when a frightened General Haig told the Senate Watergate Committee about the 'sinister forces' at work in the White House? Were the investigators so intent on the political ramifications of Watergate that they failed to link the Pentagon's psychic research to the increasingly erratic behavior of Nixon? Or was it simply too preposterous to think that psychic technology has become a reality?"

"All I'm saying, Karl, is that if we succeed in somehow saving mankind from psychic enslavement, it won't be because we will be propelled to that victory by groundswell support of the common man. In fact, when you come right down to it, all of us are in this for some reason other than pure altruism. Me, I want to find out what has happened to me to change me into what I've become. And you, Karl—you're here because your former friends thought you lost your mind when your ESP power began to manifest itself. Deep down, you want to prove those people wrong."

Britt turns his eyes on John. "For you, John, this project we're mixed up in now isn't any great humanitarian crusade. The intellectual and scientific challenge of establishing an electronic communication link with the spirit world is your motivation. And Greg here," Britt says, focusing on his driving partner. "Greg is probably the only one of us who has

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been completely frank from the start. He wants no part of the spirit world or psychic powers. He agreed to help provide our cover identity and make us appear legitimate as a racing team by being our number-one driver. But he agreed, not because he believed so deeply in what we are trying to accomplish, but because the job gives him the opportunity to make a reputation for himself on the international racing circuit."

Britt falls silent now. And his comrades here in the darkening garage are silent too, each with his own thoughts. The warm breeze of this early-summer evening breathes into the garage. Britt stands up and slowly stretches like the night-stalking lion waking. He walks to the wall and flips two switches; the neon lights hum and nicker on, and the garage door slowly closes. "O.K., you selfish egomaniacs"—he grins as they recover, blinking, from their moment's reverie—"now, here is what we get done tonight."

"Greg, you and John head into London. Hit the business sections of the libraries and find out everything you can about the recent activity of LMV Corporation. Get any information you can about this New Directions consulting firm."

"Karl, I want you to follow me to the gypsy camp. I'll be picking up Kelly so that she can introduce me to this professor she works for in Salisbury, but I want you to visit the camp after I leave, on the pretext of having your fortune told. Nose around. See if you can pick up anything with that special gift of yours."

# 11

The warm summer wind whips around Britt's face, tossing his hair and causing a tingling in his scalp. He's driving fast, headed at this moment across the moors once more toward Salisbury, where he will meet Kelly for dinner before they go to see the man she called Professor Scire.

Westward he roars into a sky still purple with fading rays of Friday's sun. Casually, his mind, which is thinking many things on its various conscious and subconscious levels, con-siders this everyday phenomenon of the sunset: *There was a time not long ago in human history when scientists would have scoffed at me, and civil authorities would have im-prisoned me for saying that this earth is turning around the sun.* For an instant now, Britt's mind's eye positions itself in outer space and views his body in the Corvette as an insignifi-cant speck driving westward at a mere eighty miles per hour toward a star from which the very planet on which he travels is spinning him away at one thousand miles per hour. *And for the time being today, some scientists still scoff and some civil leaders still publicly deride psychic science—for the time being, at least....*

Tonight's deep-purple heavens have melted into blackness now. Stars twinkle. Submerged in blackness above and all around him on the ground, Britt can easily picture himself streaking through the endless emptiness of space, speeding toward stars that are lifetimes away.

*Well, look at that.* Britt's upper level of environmental consciousness is alerted by its vision organs to a change in the surroundings: that dull blue glow of the power lines, which distracted Britt last night, has again appeared faintly in the sky. *I wonder what kind of voltage they are putting through those lines to make them leak electrical coronas like that... must be pretty high.*

The lines now parallel this deserted road on which Britt is traveling. The glow from the six thick wires that hang from

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the arms of each monstrous tower stretches beyond the low mounds of the empty moors and blends to become a single thread of luminescence that terminates in a larger glow now in sight on the horizon. *That's the light from Salisbury just ahead. . . . I should be there in about five minutes.*

*Oh, damn! Am I catching a cold from driving with the roof down?* Britt shakes his head. The tingling of his scalp has perceptibly increased, and is accompanied now by a slight buzzing in his ears, some hearing loss, and the feeling of light pressure, like that of congestion in the eustachian tubes of his ears. *Well, it's quite warm tonight, and I'm almost there, so I'm not going to stop to put up the roof.*

*I wonder why they need all this power in Salisbury,* Britt's mind questions as he now descends the last long, low mound that leads into town and toward the central square that lies beneath the giant steeple of the cathedral. From even this slight elevation on the mound Britt can see that glowing high-voltage wires form a gridwork across the little city. Strangely, in spite of all this electrical power, Britt sees only few streetlights, and everywhere homes and shops are dark.

*. . . brum, brum, brum!* The sound and the feel of cobble-stones beneath the Corvette's hard-racing tires thrums in Britt's ears and vibrates his fingers on the steering wheel. He slows the car almost to a crawl. The streets are narrow and dark. Buildings that were old when Shakespeare was born farther up this Avon River plain crowd so close to the lane that they seem to be leaning over it ... waiting. The patterns of black timbers and white plaster seem surreal in the glow of his car's headlights, and Britt muses that he can under-stand the mood that must have motivated gentle Mary Shel-ley, while residing up in Marlow, to create *Frankenstein*, her classic and visionary tale of mankind's eventual and now on-going progress in reengineering the human body. *If she only knew how much progress we've attained today,* thinks Britt. *With the stocks of new electronic artificial limbs being de-veloped by people like John Hill and Anthony Sword at Stan-ford Research Institute . . . limbs and parts that technically turn everyday men into creatures that were only a decade ago the subject of science fiction—cyborgs.*

A sudden chill runs up Britt's spine. *Cyborgs!* The memory of his death-dealing confrontation at the Pentagon's Harry Diamond Laboratories in Washington with the first gener-ation of psychic cyborgs crashes like a comet into his con-sci-ousness. He forces a mental change of subject. *Let's see*

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*... Kelly said to meet her in the town square near the Bloody Boar Inn....*

The street Britt is on leads directly into Salisbury's central square. Like the main squares of many small English cities, this is the gathering place of the people. Cars are parked in the center of the square, and churches and businesses ring the open area. Britt drives now past Salisbury Cathedral's great spire, which looms black like a shaft to the stars.

*Ah, good ... there's a parking place just across from the inn.* Britt begins to swing the Corvette into the empty slot:

*SCREEEECH!* The Corvette skids a bit sideways as Britt slams on the brakes to avoid hitting a battered old yellow "MG that has swiftly swung around the corner and darted for the same parking place. Only Britt's low speed prevented a crash, but now both cars are wedged in the opening so that neither can proceed forward.

*Where in the hell did he come from?*

Britt barely has thought the question when the driver of the other car uncoils himself from the low-slung seat of the

MG and with a powerful push propels himself out over the door. The big man lands solidly on his feet and smacks the Corvette's fender with a thick, work-hardened fist. Small splinters of fiberglass explode away from the impact as the madman shouts, with veins standing out on his powerful neck, "Oi 'ad me oi on 'is ploice first, ya so'-o'-a-bitch!"

Britt's own anger, which has grown hair-trigger taut of late, now fires. In a smooth, sudden motion that catches the other man by surprise, Britt reaches across the narrow Cor-vette and throws open the door, knocking the man off balance and providing Britt the second of time he needs to scramble out onto his feet.

Britt quickly crouches slightly and is ready. His heart thrums through his head, and liquorlike adrenaline juices pump power into his muscles. But, struggling to keep from being washed away in the flood of this primitive hormone, Britt's intellect focuses on the details of his opponent's appearance: *His movements are quick and -well-controlled, so I don't think he's-been drinking or is on drugs.... Yet his eyes/ Maybe he's insane!*

"Britt! Britt!"

Kelly's call reaches Britt's ears just as his body reacts to the blow directed at it by the driver. Britt's strong left hand and arm shoot up and out to parry the opponent's round-

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house right, and at the same second, Britt sends a quick kar-ate kick into the man's groin.

"AGGH!" The man folds forward fast and sags slowly down onto the cold cobblestones. "Oh! Aggg!" He almost chokes on the food being regurgitated by his shocked system. The man curls into a tight fetal position and rolls onto his side as saliva-slimy, half-digested food slides onto the stones from the pain-contorted corner of his mouth.

Kelly, who was running to the scene, now pushes past Britt and drops to her knees beside the wretched loser. "Garth! Garth, are you all right?" she cries, and gently lifts the man's head onto the softness of her thighs beneath the thin, flowing gypsy robe she wears.

Quickly Britt is kneeling beside her. "He'll be O.K., Kelly, I didn't hurt him badly."

The girl's eyes glare up at Britt.

"Look, lady," he says to her in a voice still tinged with tones of the anger that had boiled within him, "I let him down easy. It could have been worse."

"You *could* have not fought him at all!" she snaps.

"Now, what the hell do you expect? I peacefully drive into town for dinner with you, and as I pulled into a parking place, this madman appears from nowhere, punches in the fender of my car, curses me, and then takes a swing at me!"

The anger fades fast from Kelly's eyes. "Oh, I know, Britt," she apologizes. "I saw the whole thing from where I was standing in the doorway of the inn." She shakes her head slowly as if at a loss to comprehend what has happened. "I just don't know what's wrong, Britt. There have been so many incidents of violence like this lately here in what was once a peaceful town. Garth, for example," she adds, smoothing back some damp hair from the man's face, "is a good big bear of a guy who wouldn't hurt anyone. And yet, look what he's done."

Britt is looking at the man's perspiring face. "Well, there is something wrong with him. I could feel that just by looking at his eyes—they were like a madman's. But I don't think he is drunk or on drugs."

"Ohhhh," moans the unfortunate man, "where am Oi?" Slowly, painfully, he sits up. He shakes his head slightly and sees his car close by the Corvette. He notices the fiberglass splinters on the ground. "Did we have an accident?" he asks, looking at Britt. "Oi am sorry ... but Oi don't even remem-ber droiving 'ere."

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"Yeah." Britt nods. "Yeah, buddy," he affirms quietly, "Ve had a little accident. Don't worry about it. It's just a rented car, and there's not much damage. Are you all right?" Britt takes a firm hold of the man's forearms and helps him to stand. "I think you'd better head home and get some rest."

The brawny fellow is somewhat unsteady on his feet. "Yes," he meekly agrees, "yes, Oi think Oi'll do that."

Kelly assists the man to his car. The small engine bursts to life. Reverse gear whines as the machine backs up quickly. In another second the car swings away, and Britt returns to his Corvette. He drives into the parking space, gets out, takes Kelly by the arm, and walks quickly across the square. - "What's that humming?" he asks as they approach the door to the inn.

Kelly pauses while Britt waits, holding the door open for her. She listens. "Oh"—she nods, recognizing now the faint sound—"that is the hum that those high-voltage lines make when they are turned on at dusk." She steps into the dim, good-smelling inn.

"This is delicious," Britt remarks. He lifts another forkful of steaming kidney pie to his mouth and chews for several seconds while returning Kelly's pleasant smile. "Tell me," he says, wiping his mouth with the coarse red napkin from his lap, "about this Jekyll-and-Hyde behavior you've observed in the townspeople lately."

Kelly swallows, reaches for her glass of red wine, and sips before replying. "When I arrived here at the start of this summer, I got to meet a lot of the people while selling those astrological forecasts for the gypsies. Everyone here was just great. People were happy, friendly, outgoing. Then that awful Pennant Power Company came to town and announced its great plans to bring this new electrical service to Salisbury. The City Council was sold the pitch that the higher voltages would mean that the industry would locate here, and the people were told that they would not only find new jobs coming to them, but they could also soon have such modern conveniences as electric clothes dryers and other high-voltage appliances that the archaic electrical service that they had at the time could not handle."



Britt is puzzled. "You mean this whole complex gridwork of high-power lines that I see stretching across the miles of moors and stitching such an intricate pattern through this city was all done in just a couple of months?"

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"That's right, Britt. Up until just about two weeks ago, when the system became fully operational, this place was a beehive of activity. Every able-bodied man and woman in town was working on the project. There were even large contingents of Royal Air Force recruits working side-by-side with Salisbury residents in an effort to complete the system quickly."

"Air Force recruits!" Britt furrows his brow and takes a sip of wine, but Kelly just shrugs her shoulders and arches her eyebrows to indicate that although that was the case, she doesn't know what the military men were doing working on the project.

"People began changing," she continues, "almost as soon as the project was completed. I think it may have been the rapid change from full employment and prosperity back to the former way things were. People had spent most of their new wages on the appliances offered at a discount by the power company, so there was little money left when the jobs disappeared again after Pennant Power departed." She pauses and silently fingers her wineglass for several seconds. "Then, too, that is around the time that the murders started again after a lapse of twenty-eight years.... Oh," she says with sudden exasperation, and lifts her glass to her lips, "I don't even want to talk about it." She sips deeply of the wine.

Britt changes the subject. "What can you tell me about this Dr. Scire whom you will be taking me to meet after dinner?"

Kelly is still disturbed and doesn't want to talk. "There's not much more to tell you than that he is a former member of the Royal Astronomical Society and a former professor of astrophysics at Oxford, from which he was pensioned last year. His interest in Stonehenge is purely a personal hobby, as you've said it is with you, Britt. I'll let *him* tell you all about himself," she says. "He doesn't get many visitors, and is quite talkative."

Britt nods. // *you only knew the whole of it, pretty lady*, he thinks. "How did you meet him?" he asks.

Kelly smiles the first genuine smile she's shown since the incident on the square. "I remember," she begins, "I knocked on Ms door one morning to sell him a horoscope. He answered wearing a pink ruffled apron and holding a dustmop in his hand." Kelly almost laughs at the sight she sees again in her mind's eye. "He looked so cute. All portly, gray-haired, and distinguished—even right down to a brown vest and striped tie beneath his apron."

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"He told me that he knew enough about the stars, and didn't need my horoscope. It looked to me like a good chance to get out from under the complete domination that the gypsies were exercising over us girls, so I offered to come twice a week and do his housecleaning. He accepted on the spot. I could tell that he was lonely. He told me I could start immediately, and right away began leading me upstairs to what he said would be the main area I would have to clean—his top-floor observatory."

"Observatory?" repeats Britt, making a conversational question.

"Wait till you see it!" exclaims Kelly enthusiastically as she impulsively reaches out and touches Britt's hand.

Her touch is warm and soft and innocent. However, the wine and the trace of adrenaline still circulating in Britt's system from the fight outside are ignited by her hand, and he feels Ms penis begin to firm. "Go on," he says pleasantly, eager both to hear more and to distract his hungry body.

"We hit it off right away when I told him of my plans to transfer to Cal Tech for work on my doctorate in astrobiology." Kelly pauses. "When I got back to camp, however, the gypsy matriarch sure didn't like the news of my extra job," she adds with a slight frown. "But I must be doing something right for the gypsies, because I've been here all summer so far. Most girls, like the first group I arrived with, stay only about a week before moving on. They usually go singly, without a word to anyone—which isn't strange when you consider that most of the girls are either runaways or footloose college students from the States." Kelly thinks a moment. "Still, I really got along well with one of the girls who came in last week. I thought it strange that she didn't say good-bye. She even left behind a notebook of poems that she had written during her travels this summer and asked me to read. She really treasured that notebook. I don't know why she left with-, out it."

"What about this gypsy family you're staying with, Kelly?" Britt persists. "I'm curious to know more about them also."

Kelly glances at her watch and back at Britt. "There isn't much to add there, either." She thinks a moment. "One thing, though ... there are actually two families in the camp, and they don't really get along well together. The first family is an older couple and their two teenage sons. They have lived around on these moors for many years and followed a traditional gypsy life-style." Kelly grins. "You know—a little for-

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tune-telling, a little smuggling to procure for the townsfolk some of the harder-to-get items from the Continent. This family seems like a pleasant—although 'colorful'—group. The other family, however, scares me a bit, Britt. You met the two sons—Mihkael and Anton—at the ruins last night. Well, there is also their mother—the 'matriarch' I call her, because of the way all the others seem to obey her. Even I have seldom seen her, though. She appears barely old enough to have two sons in their mid-twenties. She is large and stunningly beautiful, but stays most of the time in her wagon."

Britt has another question: "Isn't it unusual for more than one family to share the same campsite while 'working' an area?"

"Yes," Kelly acknowledges. "When I and the other girls were recruited by the first family, they were alone there with only three wagons." Kelly glances again at her watch before continuing. "The second family arrived shortly after I went to work with the first family. They appeared along with the first work crew of Pennant Power Company. I guess they came to cash in on the money that the construction would be putting into the pockets of the folks around here. This family brought four wagons. Two of the wagons have been kept constantly locked, and the matriarch spends a great deal of time in the one locked wagon during the night. All of this new family seem strange ... at least, they have different cus-toms from the usual West European gypsies," Kelly suggests. "They are apparently just arrived from East Europe . . . Bul-garia, I'd guess from their accents." Again she glances at her watch. "We should be leaving now. I told Dr. Scire that we'd be at his home by nine o'clock."

## 12

Dew-damp cobblestones reflect the headlight beams of Britt's car like diamonds scattered on the floor of a black coal mine. The car is creeping very slowly, its engine merely murmuring. The narrow street here is lined with tall, ancient buildings that block out the sky and give Britt the feeling that he is indeed driving down a deep, dark mine shaft. Melan-choly pervades tonight's warm summer air, and thin mists drift along the curbs like weary spirits faintly visible in the white light of the headlamps.

"This is his house," Kelly says softly, almost whispering.

Britt steers close to the curb and switches off the ignition. The quiet rumble of the Corvette's throaty exhaust fades before the flood of silence and darkness that washes instantly over the couple. It seems strange to Britt that there are no lights or signs of life in any of the houses here except for a high, distant glow from some windows near the very top of Dr. Scire's tall residence.

The limestone steps up to the door are noticeably grooved from centuries of use. The house is huge and sounds hollow as Britt now knocks on the heavy dark-wood door.

Suddenly Britt is blinded, blinking in the explosion of light from the small bulb beside the door. In an instant, he can see again—see the wrinkled flesh of the face of Dr. Scire.

"Come in! Come in!" the old man says animatedly, and beckons Britt and Kelly inside with a flourish and a grin that removes the wrinkles from his kindly face. "I've been expect-ing you!"

As the door closes off the outside world behind him, Britt must at first squint to see in the dark interior of this house. The huge, high-ceilinged hallway here is lit only by a small dim dancing gas flame, which causes dark shadows to dart and leap from behind the dusty, sheet-covered furniture that lines the walls between which they are now walking. "Never did believe too much in electricity," says the surprisingly spry

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scientist as he leads the pair down the hallway. "I had some wiring installed several years ago when I retired . . . mainly to operate this elevator." He nods ahead toward the end of the corridor, where a wrought-iron cage waits. "And to provide some light and power for my telescope in my fifth-floor observatory."

*Clung!*

The elevator's iron door rings dully now as Dr. Scire opens it and beckons Britt and Kelly aboard. With a gentle lurch, the car begins a slow ascent. There is no enclosed shaft; the small car ascends silently upward into the dark, guided only by a single greasy rail. The dim light of the entry hall fades to almost complete blackness as the ceiling becomes the floor of the dark, deserted second floor. Britt glances up through the iron grate that comprises the roof of the elevator car. High above, on the fifth floor, is light.

"Watch your step, please," warns the old man as the eleva-tor jerks to a stop just inches from being level with the floor of this well-lit private observatory. Scire steps off and extends his hand to Kelly, who is less than agile in the long one-piece flowing gypsy robe she wears.

Britt follows them off and stands for several seconds sur-veying the scene. All four walls of the large room are win-dowed, although in small-paned glass that indicates how long ago this all was built. At this fifth-floor level the room is more than two stories above nearly every other structure in ancient Salisbury, except for the cathedral. Low bookcases, filled with rows of volumes and bulging with ragged files of papers, line all the walls beneath the windows. In the center of the room is a large telescope about ten feet long and two feet in diameter. Britt studies it a moment, estimating the mirror size inside at about eighteen inches.

"Built it myself," Scire comments proudly. "I spent the last five years before my retirement grinding the mirror. It is twenty inches in diameter—one-tenth the size of that at your Mount Palomar telescope in America, but more than adequate here in the clear skies of England's West Country to permit me to study even the great red spot on Jupiter. Why"—he grins—"three years ago, before your Explorer space probe flew past that planet, I presented a paper to the, Royal Academy in which I postulated that Jupiter's red spot is actually the eye of a colossal storm that has been raging for centuries. Now Explorer's photographs seem to confirm my theory."

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While the man was speaking, Britt has been studying the telescope. The flat roof just above it is designed to open. The telescope itself is mounted on a stainless-steel tube that re-sembles the type used in service stations to lift cars. A small seat attached to the telescope framework beside the eyepiece has a lever and some tubing protruding from

beneath it.

"A hand hydraulic pump," Scire explains. "Gives me very precise control in elevating my 'eye.' But, come...." He gestures Britt and Kelly toward a comfortable grouping of furniture bathed in the warm light of an incandescent lamp near the back corner of the room.

"I greatly like this room," comments Britt as he lowers himself into one of the soft overstuffed chairs. "The books ... the view ..."

Scire, who has not sat down and is searching for a book on the shelf beside the chairs, turns. "The *purpose*—that's what I find so attractive about this room."

"Yes"—Britt nods—"the *purpose*. The focus here is *out-ward*, toward the future, the unknown ... toward *knowledge*."

Scire has selected a volume from the shelf, and now sits down across from Britt. "Yes"—the old man sighs as he settles into the chair—"and it is fitting that it should be here in the West Country." He turns his head and looks out the windows, through the faint image of himself that is reflected in the glass and toward the mysterious moors on which lie the ruined records of England's primordial past. "This is King Arthur country," speaks Scire, staring. "Over in neighboring Somerset County lies the traditional tomb of this legendary leader of early England. Within the ruined walls of castles hereabout dance visions of Camelot." The old man's head turns quickly to Britt, his eyes a piercing pale "blue. "Kelly tells me that you are interested in Stonehenge, Mr. St. Vincent."

"That's right, professor," acknowledges Britt. "But," he adds quickly, "continue with what you were saying about King Arthur. I find it interesting."

The old scientist purses his lips and nods slightly. "And well you should," he murmurs. "And well you should.... You see Mr. St. Vincent—"

Britt halts him with a raised hand. "Please call me 'Britt.'"

"Fine ... fine, Britt." The scientist smiles. "As I was saying, just as science's study of the stars has found a link to ancient Stonehenge, so, too, does there appear to be a link

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between Stonehenge and King Arthur and Ms. fabulous knights of the round table."

"A link?" queries Britt. "What kind of link?"

Scire places the book flat on his lap and folds his arms comfortably across his chest. "In my studies of ancient astronomical history, I have read clay tablets from ancient Mesopotamia that were inscribed almost two centuries before Christ. Tablets that tell of a small meteor that swept across the skies in a northwesterly direction and gave off bits of shining metal that rained down on earth. Greek astronomers also recorded the same thing. Now ... if you plot a line from Mesopotamia to Greece, and extend it, you find your-self heading toward England." The man pauses and arches an eyebrow. "You also find that this is around the same time that the great and wise druids appeared among the otherwise primitive Britons. I think this and other evidence points to the fact that the druids were spacemen who crash-landed in England after their crippled spacecraft left a trail of debris across a swath of the earth."

"Professor," says Kelly somewhat quizzically as she lifts her feet from the floor and curls up her legs beside her in the deep chair, "you've never mentioned that to me before, "it's interesting, but it sounds like science fiction."

The professor smiles warmly at the young woman. "I as-sure you it is not fiction, Kelly. But even if it is speculation now ... how soon might it become proven *fact*?" Scire rests his elbows on the arms of the chair, touches the fingertips of his hands together, and his eyes focus on Kelly's soft, beautiful face. "Remember, dear, that Einstein's theory of relativity, which tells of time standing still and of people and planets shrinking at the speed of light, was once considered *fantasy*. Even today, although relativity is confirmed each day in the labs and the atomic bomb is a reality, the ordinary man in the street still thinks of relative time and such things as science fiction—not the science *fact* that they are."

The three are silent for a moment.

"But let time go on," Scire says, breaking the silence. "I first became interested in Stonehenge in 1963 when I was working at Oxford with a special team of visiting Bulgarian astronomers on unraveling ..."

*BULGARIAN! ... Bulgarian! ... Bulgarian! ...* The word echoes down the auditory nerveways of Britt's brain and triggers memory cells that launch a thought process the entirety of which occurs in the space between Scire's last

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word and what is coming next. *Kelly mentioned that the new gypsy family out there speaks with a Bulgarian accent. . . I'll request Adam to perform a rundown on known Bulgarian scientists.*

"... the phenomenon today known as the 'barycenter,'" Scire is continuing. "We've found, you see, that the moon does not revolve around the earth, as we have always supposed, but rather both the earth and moon, as they orbit the sun, are also revolving as a unit around a mysterious common center that is located a constant one thousand miles below the center of the earth and is always on the move, always on the side of our planet that is closest to the moon." Britt blinks suddenly several times.

"Is there anything wrong, Britt?" inquires Kelly.

"No ... no," he replies softly, even while his inner Self is asking: *What the hell is going on?* A strange image ... an image of disks—two revolving disks—dimly seen, had started to take shape in Britt's mind. Kelly's question has blown them away, like a puff of wind blows away smoke,

"Would you like a brandy?" Scire offers.

"No," declines Britt politely. "I'm fine. It was just a passing thing. Please go on."

"You're sure now?" the scientist solicits a confirming nod from Britt before continuing. "Good ... it was in 1963 that your American astronomer Gerald Hawkins first postulated that Stonehenge was an ancient observatory. Most of our colleagues thought his theories merely amusing, but I—living so close to Stonehenge—took the time to personally investigate Hawkins' work. I found Hawkins to be entirely accurate. The ancient druids who built Stonehenge were sophisticated astronomers. In fact, in his recent book, *Beyond Stonehenge*, Hawkins shows that the druids had detected and were able to predict a subtle fifty-six-year lunar cycle that none of us modern astronomers had even noticed until Hawkins mentioned it in this book."

*Fifty-six years.* Again Scire's words trigger a memory connection in Britt's mind, but before his brain can link this input to the information already stored on the chemical chains in its cells, that strange image again takes shape: the spinning disks! Disks that now appear as some sort of mechanical eyes! And with the image this time comes a faint feeling that quickly expands into an urgency. "I ... uh," Britt says as he stands abruptly. "I think we had better be leaving for now."

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"What's wrong, Britt?" asks Kelly as she rises and takes his arm.

"I ... don't ... know," is his faltering reply. The whirring wheels in his head are going faster, faster, pulsing, throbbing with each beat of his ever-faster-thumping heart.

Only dimly, as if in a dream, Britt sees himself shaking Scire's hand, apologizing, promising to return, walking toward the elevator, riding slowly down. The compelling urgency of leaving begins to fade from Britt's brain. As he stands at the open front door and says a final good-bye to Scire, Britt is at ease again. The whirring wheels are gone from his mind's eye.

Britt and Kelly walk to the Corvette. The night is dark and warm and very quiet—quiet except for the strange, low hum that almost hurts Britt's ears as he concentrates on it. "*Damn* those power lines!"

## B

Kelly has been strangely quiet during the drive back to the gypsy camp. *Hmmm, that's something I didn't notice when I left Kelly off here last night*, thinks Britt as he brakes the Corvette to a stop near the wagon in which Kelly stays. Britt's eyes remain riveted on a glowing thread of electrical line that droops down from the faintly visible transmission tower and like an unearthly vine attaches itself to the side of the wagon that sits directly across the semicircle of seven wagons that comprise this silent camp. The wagons appear to be the usual "old-country" rolling homes that have carried the rootless gypsies across many of this planet's continents. They are colorful, carved and painted with intricate designs. The colors—like the Scottish family tartans—indicate different clans and places of origin of the people who inhabit the wagon. Even here on the dark moor, lit only by starlight and the dim glow of the coronas of the wires, the patterns of flowers and animals skillfully cut into the glass of each wagon window glint like diamonds. These treasured windows are the pride and constitute the wealth of many gypsy families. Britt finds it strange now to notice that the wagon to which the glowing wire descends has no windows—none at all.

This wagon appears otherwise no different from the others that stand here in a semicircular ring, resting on their spoked wooden wheels. Last night, when Britt first dropped Kelly off here, he hurried away anxious to deliver the news of the murder to his teammates. Now, however, he takes a few seconds to study the campsite. The open end of the semicircle faces northeast toward the giant trilithons of Stonehenge, which rise almost invisibly over several small mounds about a quarter-mile away. And hulking transmission towers march like metal monsters in a straight line out from Salisbury and past this camp before they turn to parallel the road and the new superhighway that leads toward distant, sleeping London.

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*hmmmmmm ... mmmmmmm ... hnnnnnnnn ... mmmmm ...* The humming of the power lines is louder here almost directly beneath them; but it is the other sound that almost blends with the electric hum which now catches Britt's attention and brings his thoughts back from consideration of this strange camp. He turns toward Kelly, who sits close beside him in the Corvette's cockpit.

She is the source of this other sound. Slouched down, head back, and eyes closed, her lovely face is strangely rapturous. "... mmmmmmm ... mmmmmmm ..." Soft, low, throaty moans come slowly from her closed mouth. Her breathing is deep and slow and slightly ragged. Britt's eyes descend from her face. In the shadows of the cramped cockpit he can see her right hand slowly, rhythmically moving beneath the folds of the loose gypsy gown where it falls between her thighs.

"Mmmm ..." Her sensuous sound seems now to blend completely with the humming of the power lines, and together they flood Britt's brain and body with a rush of passion and an electric tingling that ignites the tip of his hardening penis and flames upward and outward to his finger-tips and toes and sends a warm, mind-numbing chill up his spine: *thrum ... thrum ... thrum*—Britt's whole being now pulses with the slow, heavy beat of his heart as his eyes fixate hypnotically on the young woman's sensuous self-manipulation and see her left hand slowly pull back the loose robe to expose her delicate fingers at work kneading and probing beneath the tangled pubic hair there in her groin. Slowly ... slowly her vaginal lips blossom pink and moist like a new, dew-damp flower. Her head languorously rolls toward Britt, and he sees the lips of her mouth part, moist and waiting, like the opening between her legs. His

consciousness numbed by the strangely hypnotic hum of the wires, and his body hot with the primitive, passionate pounding heartbeat, Britt watches as she slowly sits up, the gown slipping from her shoulders, her hands sliding free from the sleeves like ala-baster serpents, to cup her firm but heavy breasts and gently squeeze them so the erect tips of her nipples expand full and taut.

Drugged by passion and the hypnotizing hum of the wires, Britt watches in a trance as the naked young woman leans slowly toward him, lips parted, hands slowly reaching out. , His head pounding with the beat of his heart, Britt begins to lean toward her, his mouth opening, his hands lifting to touch her soft loveliness. Her hands drift out like smoke and enck-

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cle the hard, erect chrome gearshift lever that bulges from the console between the seats. Her fingers wrap delicately around it, caress and slowly stroke the shining silver metal as her open mouth descends and her soft tongue reaches out to touch the tip of the shaft, pausing for a sensuous instant be-fore her head bends lower and spills a cascade of warm brown hair around the console as she almost swallows the shiny shaft in her moist, warm mouth.

Sensuously, her bare body rises and turns full toward Britt. Lifting her lovely right leg over the console, she slides her naked knee between Britfs thighs and against the rock-hard root of his pounding penis. She kneels astride the console, legs spread over the glistening gear lever. Her eyes close, and slowly she lowers her moist vaginal lips onto the erect and saliva-slick shaft of the shift.

"Mmmmmmm," she moans as the thick steel stick pene-trates deeper and deeper. "Ahhhhh" is the soft sigh of plea-sure that seeps from her lips.

Every muscle in Britt's body is aching and taut. His head is as ready to explode as is the pressure in his throbbing penis; yet, deep within his being, Britt's Self struggles against the tidal wave of passion. *Unless I've completely misread Kelly, something is wrong here.* But the inner voice of warning grows fainter, barely audible above his body's passion-powered primitive pulse and the numbing hum of the wires.

Kelly's nipples pucker; she suddenly shivers with a wave of climactic passion, and dives, eyes closed, guided by animal in-stinct, down through Britt's arms. In an eye blink she's opened his zipper and freed his painfully hard penis. In movement meshing with hers, Britt leans over, smothering her naked back beneath his own heaving chest. His arms swiftly encircle her compact shape and seize handfuls of her hot buttocks. He feels his penis slide smoothly into the warm slackness of her mouth at the same instant that the index fin-ger of his right hand probes into the taut opening of her anus and begins to move forcefully in fast circular motions that immediately ignite her body to even higher reaches of plea-sure. Coiled and crushed beneath Britt, her body is now con-trolled only by her passion, which strains to lift and move her body around the steel shaft so hard in her vagina. Britt's powerful arms tighten, his mouth biting and sucking the flesh of her lovely back even as his finger moves harder and harder in her anus, and he can feel through the slick wall of intestine the hard shaft of steel moving slightly in and out of

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her vagina in time with the larger movement of her hot, slick mouth around his penis. Faster and faster her tongue mas-sages his organ. Sucking and biting. Britt's heart beats strobe-light-fast. Red visions of lava boil in his closed eyes. Tighter! Tighter! Tighter he crushes her body as his passion approaches its peak and explodes! explodes! Again and again it explodes, sending streams of hot pleasure coursing through his penis and into her mouth.

Now, Britt's sweaty head, turned sideways, rests on its cheek on her perspiration-damp back. He can hear her heart still pounding ... and the sound of her swallowing. With each swallow, the hot, soft inner flesh of her mouth massages his slowly shrinking penis and sends mild sensations of plea-sure burning through his spent, tingling body. Beneath him, she is relaxed, her body curled under his like an infant re-turned to the fetal state. The humming of the wires seems to flood Britt's spent body now. It is seeping through him like a black fog and blocking out everything. He seems to have no strength to resist. From the corner of his half-open eye he only vaguely sees the evilly smiling face of the gypsy Mihkael looking down on them like a giant man in the moon in this dark night sky.

Suddenly the face explodes in a pulse of white light! The grin fades, and anger boils as the eyes shift up from their fo-cus on Britt and dart hate at something approaching.

# 14

The flat, broad shark snout skims along the gray ground and closes in on its prey, which is also moving at top speed, straining to keep ahead of the gaping black mouth. "Tight line through Kidney ... Alder's Lola is closing fast on your left," says a familiar voice.

Britt's eyes blink open.

"Gauges O.K.," the voice adds.

With great effort, Britt lifts his head. The scene on the lit-tle television screen looks like a rerun of Kirk Douglas in *The Racers*, the black-and-white wide-angle view of the cock-pit from the tiny video camera built into the roll bar of Greg's Porsche shows Greg's arms sawing spasmodically at the steering wheel in a series of constant corrections to shep-herd the speeding machine through the sweeping curve.

"Clearways," Britt says as he recognizes the curve coming up on the screen.

"Right," John replies to Britt without removing his eyes from the two small monitors that sit in front of him on the motel desk beside the window.

With great effort Britt sits up and can see through that window out to the track about a hundred yards away. Here, from this fourth-floor height, Britt sees the two machines looking like silent slot cars as they race nose to tail. He eases his feet to the floor, but feels weak and sits on the edge of the bed watching Hollender at the monitor. Slowly, unsteadily now, he rises and walks over beside John just as he speaks into the microphone. "Alder's drafting you, Greg, and will probably try to slingshot past on the right at Paddock."

From the cool, detached vantage of this motel room, Britt's trained racing eye can see what neither John's technician's eye nor Greg's busy brain can recognize. In the split space of an instant, Britt's brain evaluates the situation: *Al-der's too anxious to pass and is overcooked because braking marker number six is coming fast!* Even in this instant, as his

brain is computing, Britt's hand is taking the microphone from John's hand to beam a message to Greg: "Ease left, but don't back off until marker number three ... then stand on those brakes!" he says rapidly.

On the left-hand screen, the two men watch: the tach needle on Greg's dash remains riveted on 9700, the car eases to the right, and the other screen, which carries the image of the rear-facing camera on Greg's Porsche, shows Alder's Lola move out of the vacuum drafting slot behind the Porsche and accelerate until it appears on the left-hand screen, passing Greg in a classic "slingshot" maneuver—but a maneuver ill-timed! The big white trackside boards are quickly calling off the braking distance to the coming corner: 6...5...4...3! Greg explodes into action! Limbs moving simultaneously, his right foot switches from accelerator pedal to brakes, left foot pushes in the clutch, left hand takes tighter hold on the brutally vibrating steering wheel as the right hand reaches to the gearshift lever and shoves it into the third-gear slot. Only three yards ahead, the Lola disappears in smoke that billows from its wheels as the driver locks his brakes, realizing that in his emotional rush to pass Greg he has miscalculated the nearness of Paddock Turn! The smoke explodes around Greg's hurtling machine, blocking view of the track. Instinctively his hands move, guided by his brain as it works in nanoseconds reconstructing a mental image of the turn and computing his position.

And he's through! The entire dangerous sequence has happened in a high-speed tick of the clock.

"Damn!" The word explodes from Britt's mouth in a tense breath, as the screen again shows the rush of the road and the cockpit of the Porsche. Both of Greg's hands are on the small flat wheel, his gloved fingers wrapped tightly around the thick padding of the rim. "He made it!" Britt can feel his heart pounding in his chest and sending strength back into his still-weak limbs.

"Yeah," John agrees, "but look at his vital signs."

Britt's eyes shift from the live action shown on the screens by the small video cameras on Greg's car to the dials and gauges below the screens. Here, information from the telemetry sensors built into Greg's driving suit and helmet tells a dangerous story: "His pulse is one-sixty," reads Hollender aloud, "blood pressure one-eighty over one-thirty ... respiration shallow." He punches the red button on the microphone.

"Back off, Greg! Readings here show overheating on number-ten cylinder!"

Britt scans the telemetry from the engine. "The engine looks fine, but his body is runnin' ragged."

Hollender does not turn around; he is intent on the gauges that show the state of the flesh-and-blood machine that temporarily houses Greg's spirit. The needles are dropping. Satisfied, John turns to Britt.

"You should have seen the readings I got on you last night, Britt, when Karl dragged you in here. In Greg's case at the moment, these kinds of deadly super highs can be more easily understood—after all, he is already hyped up out there, rock-eting around the track in one of those low-flying missiles you guys drive. And on top of that, he just had a close brush with death! The threat of dying sends the body into a frenzy that can push it beyond normal limits and cause it to perform superhuman feats in order to preserve its life. Even so, I'm bringing him in. I don't want to risk a coronary or a cerebral aneurism."

Something that John has just said strikes deep into Britt's consciousness, straining to reach and link with another bit of information buried deep in his subconscious. He cannot retrieve it right now. Britt walks back to the bed again. He is still feeling somewhat weak. "Tell me about Karl bringing me in last night.... I don't remember much of anything ... and I'd like to know what happened."

The two men see Karl's image appear briefly on the screen now, picked up by the forward-looking camera as Greg pulls the Porsche into the pits. The rear-facing camera is picking up the image of the dust cloud raised by Alder's Lola back at Paddock Turn. Now both screens go black, indicating that Greg has switched off the ignition.

John turns to Britt. "I'd like to know what happened, too, Britt. When Karl brought you in the room here last night, you looked like a zombie, or at least as if you were *drugged*. Your vital signs were so low that I don't know what\* was holding body and soul together—except your blockheaded stubbornness." John gets up from his chair, saying, "In fact, you still look a little pale. I'll fix you a cup of hot tea."

Britt is thinking while John walks over to the modern, mirror-walled washroom area, where on the wall above the imitation-marble counter sit a small electric glass teapot and complimentary individual servings of prepackaged tea mix provided by the trackside motel.

"Did you find any evidence that I had been drugged, John?"

The scientist shakes his head as he taps the tea mix from the foil bag into a plastic cup. He looks into the mirror at Britt's reflection. "No, Britt, none at all. I'm at a loss to explain your condition." The water, superheated quickly by the

electric pot, is already steaming. John pours the liquid into the cup and stirs the mixture as he walks back to Britt. "I'm also trying to figure out what was wrong with Karl," John adds, handing the steaming cup to Britt.

Britt blows on the hot tea and takes a careful sip. "What do you mean?"

The bearded man sits down again at the desk. "He and Greg should be here in a moment, and he can explain it better himself, Britt. All I could get from him was that he had some sort of vision of disks whirling in his head, and that he was compelled to drive to Stonehenge, where he found you"—in spite of the seriousness of the matter, John shakes his head in mock rue and smiles wryly—"you *and* Kelly and—"

*Click!*

Hollender stops his sentence, interrupted by the sound of the door lock turning. Karl and Greg step in quickly. Krim-mel's white coveralls are streaked with long black stripes of grease from his fingers. His hands, though wiped clean, are stained around the huge knuckles. Greg's bright-green Komex driving suit is spotted with perspiration beneath the armpits and in the center of his chest.

"Jeez!" Greg exclaims. "I could use a cup of that tea!" He heads for the wash counter as Karl quietly closes the door. The tall, rawboned German looks at Britt. "Are you feeling better now, *mein Freund*?"

"*Ja, mein Freund.*" Britt nods, with a small smile. • "But what about you? John was just starting to tell me that you had some problems last night, too."

Karl sits down on the edge of the small armchair beside the door. He leans forward, resting his elbows on his knees and studying his powerful work-hardened hands. Britt can see that his friend is upset by the recall of last night.

Britt tries to put him at ease. "Look, Karl, this isn't like when you first began experiencing your extrasensory reception. None of us here thinks you are losing your mind. In fact," he adds with an attempt at irony, "if people knew what we were really doing here, they'd think *all* of us crazy. In any

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case, Karl, I want to hear more about those whirling disks you saw in your mind's eye. You see, / had the same vision last night." Karl looks up quickly and quizzically at Britt, who goes on: "And the phenomenon was also accompanied by compulsive behavior that forced me to leave Dr. Scire's place and drive to Stonehenge. Come on, now ... tell me about all of what you learned last night at the gypsy camp—and why you returned when you found me."

Slowly Karl sits up and sinks back into the chair. His hands hang limply from his wrists, which rest on the arms of the chair. His eyes stare up past Britt and focus on the top of the far wall as he remembers.

"I went," he begins in low, heavily accented tones, "to the camp first, as you had directed. It appeared deserted but for two shopkeepers from Salisbury, who were also looking for the gypsies. The men asked me for a lift back to Salisbury, saying that that is where the gypsies must be. Since my assignment was to learn about the gypsies, and they were in the town, I agreed.

"On the short drive to town, the men confided that they were looking for sex at the camp. The gypsies had always provided that service with young girls they recruited from the streets of London. The camp was frequently raided by police, but after payment to the proper authorities, it was always business as usual, that is, until the second gypsy family arrived this summer. The young girls were still brought to the camp, but there was no sex—only selling of horoscopes.

"I attempted to get more information, but as we entered town, the men grew strangely quiet and remote. The entire town was also very quiet," Karl says, his eyes narrowing as he recalls the moment. "The only sound was the head-filling hum of the high-tension wires that lace through the town."

Britt, his strength returning as the warm tea courses through him, is alert and listening closely. "Where did you take the men, Karl?"

"I drove them to the main square in front of the cathedral."

"About what time was that?" Britt asks again.

Karl thinks for a second. "It was several moments past nine o'clock—I remember, because I glanced up at the tower clock and thought it strange that I did not hear the hourly chimes for which it is famous."

Britt nods. "You missed Kelly and me leaving the square •

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by only a few minutes as we went to Scire's. Did you stay in town?"

"Yes. I walked around the entire square and went into several pubs to see if I could find any of the missing gypsies, but they were nowhere in sight." Karl pauses. He shakes his head slightly. "*Aber*, what caused me to grow uneasy was the silence of the town and the behavior of the people. The pubs were very quiet. Men stood at the bars and stared silently into their mugs. Occasionally one or more of them would turn as I entered and glare at me with glassy eyes ... and *everywhere* that buzzing was in my head!" Karl's breathing has become shallower as he has grown more agitated while remembering last night. He realizes this now and pauses. "Ahhh," he sighs raggedly, forcing mental control on his body.

"It was then," he continues calmly, "when the buzzing of those power lines seemed to pervade every cell of my brain, that these images appeared—the whirling disks. And with them came the compulsion to go to Stonehenge."

The only sound now for several seconds in this motel room is the soft, silken rustle of the sleeve of Greg's driving suit as he lifts his arm to sip the steaming tea.

"I was on my way to Stonehenge," Karl continues. "As I approached the gypsy camp, my headlight beams swung through the camp and revealed your car there with the gypsy leaning over it. The whirling images in my mind and the compulsion faded immediately. I pulled up beside your car. The gypsy stopped whatever he was about to do, turned

quickly, and hurried into one of the wagons. I got out and found ..." Karl pauses.

Britt nods. "I know," he says softly. "At least, I think I know. I wonder what happened to me out there ... and," he adds, glancing at the German, "what happened to Karl. The odds against the two of us both receiving the same mental impressions are incalculable. And that *humming*! That sound from those wires seemed to slowly fill my head and flood out all conscious control I had over what I was doing. It was like a drug." Britt looks at John. "Do you think that was it? Could that be possible?"

Hollender purses his lips for a few seconds and stares blankly at Britt as he considers the question. "Yes," the scientist says finally. "Yes, that could be the cause of your behavior." Hollender pauses again and concentrates as he calls up from his memory a piece of research information. "As I re-

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call, Dr. Ross Adey and others at the UCLA School of Medicine demonstrated a few years ago that electrical fields caused by power lines and some types of heavy machinery can affect the brain and modify behavior." Hollender's voice rises slightly, and the speed of his speaking increases as the information flows more rapidly from his memory banks.

"Today, most people know from the publicity connected with biofeedback that our electrochemical human brain operates at electrical frequencies between two and fifteen hertz. The eight-hertz alpha frequency is the rhythm most people try to tune in on, because it is the wavelength on which we find our feelings of peace and tranquillity . . . but the studies on animals at UCLA showed that other wavelengths can modify behavior in less desirable ways. In fact," John adds as more information joins the stream which flows easily from his mind's memory, "similar tests were conducted in Germany in the mid-1960's on *human* volunteers. Subjects in those tests had their circadian rhythms—their twenty-four-hour 'mental clocks'—reset as much as thirty-six hours through manipulation of their electrical fields.

"The process by which outside electrical fields exert influence on human behavior is called 'entrainment'—that is, they couple their energy with that naturally present in the brain. In some instances, the artificial fields will complement each other and heighten brain activity. Other times, the outside electrical field may interfere and lower the brain activity, like a drug. The latter may be what happened to you, Britt."

Britt is concerned. "But why just me and Kelly, John? Shouldn't it have affected Karl also?"

"Perhaps." The bearded little scientist shrugs. "But the entrainment process is very complicated, involving changes in the distribution of electrical charges on the surface of the brain cells. Perhaps your brains are slightly different in their native frequency and so were affected differently by the field around the power lines. However," John adds ominously, "there is no question that this technology, like everything else, can be used in the wrong manner to control human behavior. As I recall, Dr. Adey innocently suggested that electric blankets could be built that emit electrical fields so that they not only keep a person warm but also put him to sleep."

Britt just sits, silent, thinking.

From the outside, faint sounds of the yowling race cars seep through the thick, sealed glass of this motel-room window. It is Greg who breaks the moment of reflection. "If you

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think *that's* a threat to mental freedom, ol' buddy," he says with a wry grin twisting the corner of his mouth, "listen to what we found out in London about the management-consulting firm named New Directions."

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"It seems," Greg continues, "from the information we found in the business section of the London library, that this country has for more than a decade been studying the brain waves of businessmen—especially top business leaders.

"The Burden Neurological Institute in Bristol has been a pioneer in this field." He walks over to the desk where John is sitting and picks up a folder that contains a dozen pages of Xerox copies. Greg leans back against the desk and glances over the first page. He looks up at Britt. "Most of the British business publications were fairly long-winded on the subject. But we did find some U.S. business publications that get right to the point. In June 1972, *Nation's Business*, which is published by the United States Chamber of Commerce, published a report on the British psychic work. The article carried the headline warning 'Careers Could Ride on Brain Waves.' It seems that Burden Institute, under the direction of Dr. Ray Cooper, has been using special models of electroencephalographs linked to computers to collect vast amounts of information about thought processes—especially the thought processes of business leaders. Some of the money for this project has been traced to the United States Air Force."

Britt's eyebrow arches. A memory quickly flashes in his eye. "You know, Kelly mentioned to me that the British Royal Air Force was involved in the construction of this supposedly *civilian* power-line project. If the military is in on this ..."

"We know." Greg nods. "And I think that Dr. Cooper feared the same thing. *Nation's Business* quotes him as saying, 'I wouldn't want this business with the EEG to go too far, because I think we should have a little bit of personal freedom to make our choices.'"

Britt smiles wryly. "A little bit of personal freedom," eh? I hope that's just a typical British understatement. But, go on—what else did you find?"



Greg flips several pages in the folder he holds in his hands. "Well ... the U.S. Chamber seems to have been staying on top of the developing research in this area. Earlier, in fact, in the April 1971 issue, they carried a report, 'Dollars May Flow from the Sixth Sense,' which described the Psi Communications Project conducted on businessmen by Professor John Mihalasky of Newark College of Engineering. Mihalasky took forty top company presidents and tested them on their business\* 'hunches.' It seems that those who had the best track record for improving their company profits—many doubled profits in just five years—showed high incidence of ESP. Nearly eighty percent of them said they believed in ESP, too. The research showed that the seat-of-the-pants 'feel' or judgment of many successful business leaders is actually *precognition*. The magazine cited an example involving an oil company that won some Alaskan oil-field leases based on a last-minute hunch by a chief executive officer."

"Oil companies," Britt murmurs. "It figures."

John, who has been lost in thought while Greg reported, now speaks up. "The whole subject, of course, is very fascinating from a purely scientific point of view. While doing this research last night, I was reminded of a story we were told in high school about the nineteenth-century German chemist Friedrich von Stradonitz. He was searching to discover the benzene molecule and had no luck until one night he dreamed of a snake biting its own tail. 'As though from a flash I awoke,' he said later. He spent the rest of the night working on a new hypothesis. When the molecule was finally seen under an electron microscope seventy years later, in 1945, it appeared exactly as Von Stradonitz's dream, intuition, ESP, or whatever you want to label it had foreseen."

Hollender loses the bemused look quickly now as he adds, "But one other disturbing thing we uncovered is that Rand Corporation back in Santa Monica has been working on some type of clairvoyant system code-named 'The Delphi Method.' Rand's record of work for the military establishment immediately makes this project suspect in my mind."

"It seems that England has today become a center for the use of psychic techniques in business and government. This New Directions firm is one of several specializing in using psychic science in management consulting. It also has done consulting work for the British military and has close ties with at least one Royal Air Force general. We left the library last night with a lot of questions."

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*Ring! Ring!* The telephone on the desk beside John interrupts the conversation.

"Maybe we'll get some answers now," he says as he reaches for the instrument. "We transmitted a request for information to Adam in which we described this gypsy Mihkael, as well as asking for anything that might be available on New Directions, Dr. Scire, and Kelly Dale."

The information, encoded to appear like a spare-parts-and-equipment report and sent over a standard briefcase-model facsimile transmitter, will come from the vast and ever-growing memory banks of Adam, Mero Institute's near-human central computer. From the institute's secret, protected peak in the San Gabriel Mountain Range of Southern California, Adam has access to worldwide information of all types. Telephone-line links permit his artificial intelligence to eavesdrop on the electronic conversations that occur constantly between the global network of computers which manage the world's banking and business activity; sensitive antennae on the mountaintop reap radio and television broadcasts from the embassies of the world as well as from the thousands of civilian and military satellites in space. Codes are cracked in seconds by Adam's steadily expanding brain.

*Ring! Ring!*

"Hollender here," says John, picking up the white-plastic telephone receiver.

"Yes, Mr. Hollender," says the voice of the desk clerk downstairs in the motel lobby. "There is a call for you from a Mr. Wharton of Quasar Garages in California.... One moment please."

*Thunk! Thunk!*—the latches of the briefcase sound loudly as Britt, who has walked over to the desk beside Hollender, opens the facsimile device and prepares it to receive the transmission that will soon come over the phone line.

"Hello, hello," says a faraway but familiar voice.

"Hi, Bart. How are you?" inquires John of Dr. Bartholomew Webster, founder and head of Mero Institute, who poses as the owner of this racing team. He is calling from garages that are maintained near the Ontario track in California as part of the cover for the team's operations.

To anyone listening in, this conversation sounds normal. "I'm fine, John. How are things going over there in England? From the list of spare parts you requested, it sounds as if one of the cars was involved in an accident. Is everyone O.K.?"

"Yes," replies John while he watches Britt ready the fac-

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simile machine beside the phone. "Britt's Porsche had a suspension failure that seems to have damaged the monocoque frame to the extent that the car will not be able to race Sunday."

Britt grins slightly to himself. Half-sitting, he leans against the desk and lets his eyes wander out the window toward the action taking place over on the track.

"But," continues Hollender, "Greg has done amazingly well. He's taken third starting position. Independent drivers hold the pole position and seven of the top ten starting slots. Things are really reversed around here."

"I know," Webster agrees. "The racing press here in the Los Angeles area has been reporting on the developments. Everyone's buzzing."

Britt's brain, as he watches out the window, is working on many things, and one of the seeming lesser subjects is

the topsy-turvy performances of the drivers here at Brands Hatch; but Britt's eyes, guided by some subconscious intuition, drift across the action on the track and settle on those power lines and transmission towers that curve close by dread Druid's Turn.

"Britt," says Hollender, glancing at the preoccupied driver, "we are just about ready for the transmission. Could you slip a form into the transceiver."

"Sure," says Britt as he turns toward the open briefcase. From the open upper section of the case he removes a file folder from which he takes a form boldly labeled "Inventory Update." He lifts the clear-plastic cover over the platen in the lower section of the case and winds the form onto it as one would wind a piece of paper into a typewriter.

"O.K., Bart," Hollender says into the phone he still holds to his ear. "We're ready on this end. Be talking to you later. Take care." John nods in reply to the parting words of Webster, which none of the others hear in the room, but which they all have heard before. John places the phone receiver into the cradle provided in the facsimile transceiver.

Now Britt hands him a small device that appears to be a pocket-size electronic calculator. Hollender takes a length of black-plastic-coated wire from his shirt pocket. He unwinds it. The wire is about eighteen inches long and has a terminal at one end, which he plugs into the calculator; a small suction-cup device at the other end is now stuck onto the telephone receiver.

During the ten seconds that Hollender was unraveling this

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wire, Britt turned over the device 'disguised as a calculator and opened the small door where the batteries should be. There, instead, he placed an audio tape cassette and then set the device back down on the desk beside the facsimile transceiver.

Hollender pushes a small black button that protrudes from the beige molded-plastic inner lining of the transceiver. He leans back against the straight back of the wooden chair and folds his arms across his chest. Britt, Greg, and Karl, too, wait and watch.

A small red light flickers on beside the black button, signaling that the transmission from Adam has begun. The platen of the transceiver begins to turn, spinning the form around and around as the scan arm creeps down the paper and creates words and letters in response to the musical computer tones being beamed across the ocean by Adam. The soft, subtle tones sound like those familiar notes one hears in the background on long-distance calls, the sounds made by telephone-company computers as they talk to each other around the world. But the tape in the small "calculator" moves spasmodically in response to subtleties in these special tones that are beyond the recognition of other computers. On and off ... on and off the tape obeys the commands.

Minutes pass; the soft sound of the platen motor and the quiet whirl and click of the tape become a hypnotic rhythm to the waiting, watching, thinking men.

*Ting!* The small sound of a tiny bell in the facsimile machine signals the end of the incoming transmission. Hollender hangs up the telephone.

Quickly, deftly, he removes the inventory form from the transceiver while Britt disconnects the calculator-type device from the phone and pushes the O button on the keyboard to rewind the tape. Greg and Karl move close to the desk so that they will be able to see the message that has been transmitted.

"Nine-eleven," says John as his eyes pick up the number that appears now in the column beneath the heading "Injections."

"Nine-one-one, it is," acknowledges Britt. He punches the command onto the keys of the small device he holds in his right hand, and can immediately feel its tiny electric motor hum to life. He sets the device down on the desk, where all can see the words that form on the liquid-crystal display where on an ordinary calculator only numbers would appear.

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"Positive identification," begins the message, "of gypsy suspect Mihkael as Dr. Mihkael Zenovanov, biophysicist, born in Bulgarian Balkan Peninsula. Educated at City of Moscow Engineering Institute. Announced as crew member of joint U.S.-Russian 1975 sky-lab mission but presumed dead after training mission aborted over the Black Sea in August 1974." For a second now, the stream of letters flowing across the tiny display segment completely stops. "End of reply re inquiry one," the letters flash now, and immediately words of the reply to the second part of Hollender's three-part question to the computer begin to move in lighted letters across the tiny display.

"Kelly Dale: born January 10, 1945, Shaker Heights, Ohio. Father: account executive with Westfield Advertising. No apparent government or defense contacts. Mother: former professor of anthropology, Kent State University, which daughter now attends as physics major." Again the lighted letters wink out. "End of message re inquiry two."

Suddenly the display letters snap back on in red!

"Uh-oh," murmurs John as all the men unconsciously crowd closer to the little unit and watch the words unfold: "Dangerous information! Erase tape immediately after end of following message." Again there is a slight pause before this next reply begins moving across the message display: "Dr. Lowell Scire: astrophysicist, born Sheffield, England, 1909. Educated at Oxford, Stanford ..."

*Stanford?* puzzles Britt's mind between the appearance of that school's name and the next word.

"... now senior British operative for Mero Institute."

"Damn!" John mutters an expression thought by all four of the men.

"End of transmission," read the letters on the display before fading for the last time.

Everyone had been intently watching the messages displayed on the unit. Now the men come slowly to life again.

Greg kneads the back of his neck, which had become slightly stiff from the rigid position he had been holding to see the message. Karl straightens up and stretches his huge form. Britt, who had been half-sitting on the edge of the desk, stands and inhales deeply. "Well," he says, "there's still work to be done today."

"Yep," agrees John. "First off, we have to get Greg's car in shape for the race before they close the track for the night. A few more practice laps to see if the suspension is re-

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ally right, and then one quick final fine-tune of the engine. Greg, Karl, and I can handle that," he says, turning toward

"And I had better get over to Scire's and see what is really going on there," states Britt. "I think I'd better take along me communicator and other equipment."

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"Yes ... Bart and I met during a symposium at Stanford in 1948," Scire is saying as he watches the setting sun from the windows of his private observatory,

"I still don't understand," Britt says, "why Dr. Webster didn't tell us that we would be meeting you here."

The old scientist turns to Britt, who stands near the center of the room. The man's elderly eyes focus for a second over Britt's shoulder on the huge tube of the telescope, which glows golden in the light of today's setting sun. "I don't think you and I *were* supposed to meet, Britt. I didn't even know who you were until about an hour ago, when a message came in from Bart," he says, nodding toward a familiar type of black briefcase and a small "calculator" on the cluttered old wooden desk in the far corner of this large, window-walled room.

Slowly Scire begins walking toward Britt while explaining. "There are agents such as myself scattered around the world." He stops in front of the comfortable couch beside which Britt stands, and beckons him to sit. Warily, with the slowness of age and psychological fatigue, Scire sinks down into the overstuffed chair opposite the couch. "Mero's agents like myself," he begins, looking not at Britt but at his beloved mechanical eye to the heavens, "are the plodders. Working in our slow scientific way, we feed much basic information to Mero headquarters, where it is synthesized into theories that must be tested." Scire's tired eyes now focus on Britt, who can see in them still a small sparkle of excitement. "You, Britt, however, have no time for theorizing!" He pauses.

He smiles. "In many ways, I envy you, young friend. The *world* is your laboratory! And the world depends on your work even more than on mine or Dr. Webster's. Britt, you remind me of myself some three and a half decades ago. Back then, the Nazi menace was threatening England and the world. We of the British scientific community had no time

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for laboratory testing of our theories. Our ideas were translated immediately into weapons and devices and tested in battle by the military. It was exciting . . . *satisfying!*"

There is a short silence before Britt replies. "But you know, Dr. Scire ... it is / who envy *you*. I long to return to the lab, where I could at least test some of my *own* theories. Not one piece of the equipment downstairs in my car is *my* design. It is all the work of other scientists. I like the atmosphere of labs and libraries, the conversations with colleagues." In the infinitely small span of a cosmic second, years of memories flash in a cognitive mass through Britt's mind: his days working on his doctorate at Stanford, the early days of psychic-warfare research at the Pentagon's Harry Diamond Laboratories ... and the face of his beloved Gayle— lovely, dead Gayle. Her image brings a sudden swell of sadness, which begins to bulge up from beneath Britt's carefully constructed mental barriers. He quickly forces the feeling back down by continuing. "I play this role for the Mero cause today because I am the only one who can do it at this time. Now, tell me, doctor ... tell me of your theories on Stonehenge."

Scire nods slightly and shows a small and somewhat sad smile. "Of course, Dr. St. Vincent. Please pardon an old man's mourning of a life nearly gone. We are both men of science, and we do what we must." He pauses. His eyes' line of sight drifts upward from Britt for several seconds. Scire purses his lips as he organizes his thoughts and words. Leveling his gaze again on Britt, he speaks. "I don't know, Dr. St. Vincent, if you've read the book *Aliens from Space*."

Britt shakes his head negatively. "No. Not yet. But it is on the required-reading list that Bart keeps updating for me and the team."

"Well," continues Scire, "the book is by Major Donald Keyhoe, the well-known former United States Marine Corps pilot and former head of public information for the Federal Aviation Administration. He is now the director of the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena. It is his writing and revelations on UFO's that has finally convinced me of the validity of my theory that the druids who built Stonehenge were not life forms that had evolved on this planet.

"Britt, as an astrophysicist I know that there is intelligent life in other solar systems and that some of the races are far more advanced than ours—as well as some that are still in

their stone age. *But,*" he adds with the gentle emphasis of an uplifted index finger, "I have always felt that there was something *different* about these spacemen/druids. Call it a scientific hunch or intuition, but they were different from life as we know it or expect it, even on other planets.

"In my every spare moment from teaching at Oxford, I came to my home here and threw myself into the study of the scientific secrets of Stonehenge. The more I unraveled, the more amazed I grew over what still waited to be un-raveled. Yet, none of my colleagues would listen to my discov-eries. No one listened until I traveled to Stanford University in your state of California, Britt, and met Bart during a symposium on biological molucules in interstellar space." Scire's eyes grow glassy. "I remember that Bart showed me an inscription on the back of the pocket watch he carried."

Britt knows the inscription well. "There is nothing so far revoved from us as to be beyond our reach, or so hidden that we cannot discover it." Britt flashes a fast grin. "Descartes," he says, giving the correct French pronunciation to the great philosopher's name. "Bart still carries that watch."

Scire smiles. "He would, the old miser." Slowly Scire's smile fades. "The only hard clue I've found that shows that the druids who built Stonehenge were, in fact, life from an-other world was the labrys that I found carved on one of the pillars there."

"Labrys?"

"Yes, Britt. That is the name for the symbol of the dou-ble-edged ax that has been found carved in many ancient structures; significantly, the structures showing the labrys all lie in a straight line from the area of ancient Mesopotamia to here, at Stonehenge. This is the path .of the meteor that the ancient astronomers described—the meteor that now seems to have been a disabled spacecraft.

"The 'debris' that the old watchers of the heavens reported falling from the 'meteor' was actually aliens abandoning the craft by beaming down to the surface of our planet. From what I can piece together, the ship was on an observation mission to chart the development of our human race. The ex-pedition was to have landed in Mesopotamia between the Ti-gris and Euphrates rivers, where mankind first evolved mod-em intelligence and social patterns.

"But something went awry with the spacecraft. The scien-tific crew 'bailed out' first. In each area where these alien scientists landed we find records of the sudden appearance of

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'kings' who possessed unusual powers and long lives—such as the Cretan king in Knossos who allegedly had the power to create gold. On the columns of the rains of his great palace you can still see the carved symbol of the labrys. I believe the symbol was a sign to any other members of the expedi-tion who might somehow find their way there.

"The aliens who beamed down over the Mediterranean region assumed human forms and went to great lengths to protect their secret. The labyrinths and mazes we find con-structed by these ancient rulers were structures designed to protect these secrets from all but the most intelligent of hu-mans. The word 'labyrinth,' in fact, is derived from 'labrys,' "

Scire stops and looks at Britt. "Can I offer you some sherry?"

"Thank you, but not right now, Dr. Scire."

"Well, I think I'll have a nip," the older man replies as he rises from his chair and walks about ten feet to the north wall. There, on the bookshelf below the windows that form the upper half of the four walls of this room, rests a crystal decanter of the dark liquid, and several glasses. The crystal clinks softly, musically, as Scire replaces the stopper in the decanter. He lifts the wine to his lips and sips. His eyes are focused out the window ... out into the blackness of the moors below ... out toward the silent slabs of Stonehenge. "It appears," he begins quietly, as if he were alone and think-ing aloud, "that the operating crew of the spacecraft rode the ship until it crash-landed here."

Although the back of Scire's gray-tweed suit is toward Britt, Britt can see the old man's face dimly reflected in the window glass like the face of a spirit peering in from the out-side.

"Stonehenge is a computer. In its silent, stony memory is the story of these spacemen . . . and their ultimate secret. Their ship finally crashed here and sank deep into the bogs on the moors. The onboard computers and energy-generation equipment were lost, but the technical members of the crew were able to erect those stones out there to record and preserve important pieces of information—celestial knowl-edge they would need to return to their own dimension. The stones are arranged in precise mathematical sequence. I have deciphered much of their story only after decades of work. Men like Gerald Hawkins, with their own increasingly sophis-ticated computers, may someday soon completely crack the final secret of Stonehenge."

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"What happened to these aliens?" asks Britt.

Scire slowly turns and explains as he walks thoughtfully to his chair, "Over the course of about two centuries, the druids one by one used Stonehenge to return whence they came. How they did it is a mystery to me ... a mystery that I call the Secret of the Door."

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"Britt, do you know what the sun is?" Scire asks rhetori-cally, and answers his own question: "The sun is a plasma-energy generator. I was thinking about plasma that morning on the moors when the sun silhouetted Stonehenge in my brain ... I was thinking about the power we scientists had unleashed on Hiroshima in the closing stages of the war. You see, Britt, although the concussive force of the atom bomb and its heat do destroy things, it is actually the *plasma energy* in that expanding fireball that blasts everything it touches."

Scire, warmed by the wine, relaxes in his chair, talking easily now about what he knows. "Lightning, too, is a good example of plasma energy. From Benjamin Franklin's famous experiment we know that lightning is electricity—electricity and gas—the *gas*, of course, being earth's charged atmo-sphere through which the electricity travels. Plasma is a gas that conducts electricity. Plasma is the most common form of matter in ours and all the galaxies

and universe. Plasma is the *fourth* state of matter of modern science." Scire falls silent and stares sternly at Britt for a second to impress on him the importance of what he says.

"The spacemen who crashed here possessed the technology to transform themselves and their spacecraft into plasma. The transformation required harnessing and controlling tremendous energy. When we add energy in the form of heat to ice, it, first melts into water and then becomes steam—which is a gas—and disappears. The spacemen and their craft traveled through space as a gas—as *plasma*. With tremendous but controlled energy, they would transform themselves and their spacecraft into plasma for intergalactic travel. They navigated the invisible stellar winds, gravitational tides, and magnetic currents of galactic space in the same manner that our early explorers like Magellan sailed the winds, tides, and currents of earth's oceans to travel from continent to conti-

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nent. Of *course*—"Scire grins—"the space travelers moved along much faster, at near the speed of light."

Scire pauses and shifts position in his creaky old overstuffed chair. "Traveling in plasma form, the spacemen were invulnerable to harm from most things, including the compression caused by speeds of near-light velocity. The only dangers they faced were the invisible black holes." Scire arches the bushy gray brow over his left eye. "Britt, do you know about black holes?"

Britt shrugs. "A bit. During my own years at Stanford I read up on the history of black holes in space from the time they were first theorized by the great physicists Oppenheimer and Snyder, until 1971, when the U.S. Explorer 42 satellite discovered the first black hole, Cygnus X-1, in the constellation of the Swan some three thousand light-years distant from here.

"The way I understood these phenomena, Dr. Scire, black holes are the remnants of collapsed stars, and the gravitational pull of black holes is such that they are cosmic whirlpools from which nothing—not even pure energy—can escape."

Scire's eyes sparkle gleefully. "You are right, Britt—to a point. I don't blame you for not being up-to-date on this subject, considering that black holes are, at best, tangential to your principal assignment!" Scire turns to a scattering of magazines on the table beside his chair. He quickly sorts through them: "For a quick updating, the May 1974 *National Geographic* has a good summary of black holes. But there is another magazine here that gives even more information in a brief form. Ah! Here we are!" He picks up a tattered magazine, turns to a paper-clipped page, and leans forward, handing it to Britt.

Britt's eyes quickly scan the cover: *Saturday Review/World*. October 23, 1973.

Scire continues. "Black holes pull everything into them—including light. But inside a black hole, fantastic changes take place. The gravity *pull* becomes a *push*, and time and space are *reversed*. Whatever or whoever is sucked into a black hole is pushed along what some say is an endless tunnel in time and space. A split-second is the equivalent of hundreds of years, and if anyone ever did get out of the hole, he would find that everything had changed by the time he escaped."

Scire nods toward the magazine in Britt's hand. "If you turn to page sixty-nine, you'll find a mention of Robert Hjell-

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ming, astrophysicist at the National Radio Astronomy Observatory in Green Belt, West Virginia. Bob suggests, and I agree, that black holes in our galaxy may be bridges, tunnels, funnels—whatever you want to label them—that emerge as white holes in other galaxies. Matter and energy that go down the black-hole whirlpool in our galaxy are spit out into some other galaxy through a 'white hole.' "

Britt's mind has been greatly stimulated by this concept, and is racing on with it. "In other words," he says, "it's like a cosmic recycling. That would explain the quasars and pulsars astronomers have discovered since 1960—they are *white holes*." Britt stops; a thin grin flashes across his lips. "Hah," he says with a touch of irony in his voice. "I wonder if that is what Arthur Clark was trying to say to us in that much-de-bated ending of the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*."

The, quizzical squint on Scire's face tells Britt that the scientist is not familiar with the movie. Britt explains: "The movie ended with the central character in a small spacecraft hurtling down some fantastic corridor in space. Then came a sequence during which the man ages rapidly before suddenly being reborn as an embryo in space.

"I can now see in that," Britt concludes, "that the hero was caught by the pull of a black hole, sucked into its 'tunnel,' where years passed in an eye blink, and was then expelled out a white hole to begin another life in a duplicate universe."

Scire nods; his eyes sparkle. "Perhaps, Britt. It's very possible that this writer Clark had intuitively reached the conclusions about black holes that astrophysicists are only now realizing. Artists' intuition has frequently scooped science, you know. Why, I remember when Albert Einstein and his friend Janos Plasch were discussing the connection between science and fiction. Einstein, as I recall, said, 'When I examine my own ways of thinking things through, I realize that my gift of fantasy has actually meant more than my gift for absorbing hard facts.'

"When you stop to think about Einstein's theory of relativity, Britt, you realize that few science-fiction writers would have been so foolish as to propose anything so fantastic as relativity, where people and planets can shrink to the size of atoms and stand almost still in time as they near the speed of light. Yet Einstein's theory of relativity has proven out. It is with us every day in the form of atomic power."

Both men are silent now, lost in thought. As men of science, they both immensely enjoy talking about the stimulat-

ing wonders that surround us all, wonders that remain invisible except to those who take the time to see them. But both men also know that as scientific soldiers in the Mere army, they cannot long luxuriate in intellectual discussion.

Britt is first to breach the silence. "Well, let's get back to what I first mentioned when I arrived here this evening. First, the gypsies obviously are not all gypsies. Second, from the attempt on my life, we must conclude that they know what my team really is about. Third, either they are in this area attempting to do something similar to what we plan, or there is some other significance to Stonehenge or Salisbury that isn't apparent to me yet."

"Britt, the evidence, of course, indicates that not all the gypsies are what they appear to be. But," Scire cautions, "I don't think that the attempt on your life necessarily indicates that they know you are working for Mero. They might be thinking that you are still working for the *Pentagon*." Scire watches Britt nod before he continues. "Finally, Britt, the only out-of-the-ordinary significance for Salisbury is, at the moment, the campaign visit that Prime Minister Heath will make here Sunday on his way to the race at Brands Hatch, where he is honorary chief steward. As for Stonehenge, I think we will both soon learn of the secret that I have long suspected. I have been spending the past year making holograms of Stonehenge. Only a week ago I air-shipped the plates to Mero. Adam has been analyzing them."

Britt is curious. "Holograms of Stonehenge? What can Adam learn from—?"

Scire suddenly holds up his arm, and Britt stops in mid-sentence. The old man has cocked his head slightly and is listening intently. Britt, too, strains to hear anything unusual, but there is only the small snapping sound from the embered logs glowing red in the fireplace.

Scire gradually relaxes. "I thought I heard someone calling. Did you hear anything?"

"No," Britt replies, shaking his head twice.

"Well, then," Scire says, "let me answer that question you didn't quite get to finish. The ideal way to have Adam work on the secret of Stonehenge is to transport him here. Since that is impossible, I struck on a way to send Stonehenge to him. Actually, I derived my idea after reading of the work of Dr. Ralph Wuerker of TRW and Dr. John Asmus of the University of California at San Diego. Trying to show how the eroding art treasures of Venice could be preserved for future

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generations, these men made holograms of sculptures and statues. Through holographic projection it was then possible to re-create actual three-dimensional images of the works that were completely lifelike and even showed parallax when they were observed by people. Museums are now developing the technology to send art shows around the world contained in small cartons as holograms. Imagine, Britt, even the sphinx can be copied by lasers on holographic plates and mailed to, say, a high school in Kansas, where the sphinx could be re-created in full-size, three-dimensional reality for a one-night show."

Britt's eyes reflect his grasp of what Scire says. "I suppose, then, doctor, that somewhere up on Mero's mountaintop in southern California a full-sized, three-dimensional ghost of Stonehenge has been floating around while Adam's electronic eye scans it."

"Precisely, Britt."

"But tell me—what is the secret that you want Adam to help uncover? What could it be that you can't analyze right here?"

Scire nibbles a bit at his lip and furrows his brow. He takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly before speaking. "It is the secret of plasma conversion ... of instantly becoming a spirit."

But Britt doesn't seem to hear Scire. He is listening to something else—something that Scire had heard just moments earlier.

"What do you hear, Britt?"

"I'm not certain."

A sound—a soft, slow pounding that can barely be heard—is echoing up the elevator shaft from the darkness of the hallway five floors below.

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The door opens slowly.

"Kelly!" Britt hisses in surprise as he quickly kneels beside the girl's bloody body, which lies slumped on the top step of Scire's small front porch.

"Help me get her in!" he calls to the older man, and slips his arms under her semiconscious form.

Britt hurries inside, carrying Kelly. Scire pauses on the porch for several seconds. The small pool of blood glistens black at his feet. He looks down at the lower portion of the door, which bears the ghastly prints where Kelly's bloody hand pounded feebly for the attention that came almost too late.

Scire is puzzled, and very worried. He glances quickly down the street, toward the town square. He notices that the glow there from the high-voltage lines is brighter tonight than he has ever seen it before. Quickly he steps inside, closing the door behind him.

*Thock!*

The sound of the heavy iron lock bolt sliding solidly into place echoes in the hallway.

Britt already has Kelly aboard the elevator. Scire scurries aboard, too, and slides the metal grid across. The elevator

begins its slow ascent....

"Put her over there on the couch," Scire directs as he again opens the gate at the fifth-floor observatory. He hurries to a closet in the corner and returns to the couch with a medical kit.

Britt is gently examining Kelly's blood-matted scalp. "She's got a hell of a lump beneath this gash. The cut itself isn't so bad, but I'm worried about the possibility of a skull fracture. Damn! Who the hell could have done this?"

Scire sits on the arm of the couch and watches Britt tend to Kelly's wound with antiseptics and astringents from the

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medical kit. "I have no idea, Britt. Things like this never happened in Salisbury until lately."

"Ohhhhh." Weakly, Kelly moans.

"Take it easy, pretty lady," cautions Britt. "You're safe now. Just lie quietly and look at my fingers." Britt extends the index finger of his right hand and holds it steady about a yard in front of Kelly's face. "Do you see that finger clearly?"

Kelly nods.

"Good," says Britt. "Now, follow my finger as I move it, and tell me if you can see it clearly at all times." Britt moves his finger and is internally satisfied and relieved as he watches Kelly's eyes following his movements. He looks up at Scire. "Looks like there's no concussion, so there's probably no fracture either." He looks down again at the girl. "Can you tell us what happened?"

Kelly inhales raggedly. Her tongue tip appears and rubs moisture across her dry lips. "It was Mort ... Mort Miller," she sobs hoarsely. Her eyes are staring up at the ceiling.

Britt shoots a glance at Scire. "Do you know this fellow Miller?"

"Very well indeed, Britt. He is one of the finest family men in these parts. It is incredible that he should do something like this."

Kelly's eyes squint from pain and puzzlement. "I... don't know what made him do it," she sobs. "I was just leaving the square to come here when he placed himself in my path. He"—Kelly swallows—"he had a hatchet in his hand and a wild look in his eyes. He swung ..." Kelly's hands involuntarily cover her fright-wide eyes as she suddenly relives her moment near death. Her hands, still pressed firmly against her face, slip from her eyes and distort her beauty as they move down her cheeks. "I ... I think I ducked back just as he swung." She looks right at Britt, tears rolling down from the corners of her eyes and dropping from her cheeks like silver pearls that disappear into the coarse brown cloth of the couch. "That's all I remember until I came partly to and crawled here. I thought you were never going to hear me knocking."

"Good thing you ducked, kid!" says Britt. "The hatchet struck you only a glancing blow. You've got a two-inch gash and a good lump, but otherwise seem O.K." He pauses. "What were you coming here for in the first place?"

"Oh, Britt!" Kelly cries and tries to sit up, but the pain in

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her head stops her short, and Britt's arm shoots out to catch her and let her gently back down onto the couch. She seizes his arm, and her glistening, fear-filled eyes lock onto Britt's. "Amanda is out there!"

"Slow down, Kelly," commands Britt gently. "Who's Amanda—and where is she?"

"On the moors! Amanda's on the *moors*!"

Britt's eyes meet Scire's for an instant before Kelly continues. "Amanda Burgus is a girl from here in Salisbury with whom I've become friendly. She and her boyfriend went out on the moors in his van tonight. I pleaded with them not to go. I ... I have this strange feeling—the same kind of feeling that I've had every time there's been a murder on the moors. Britt"—she again seizes his arm tightly—"I beg you to go out there and find them before something terrible happens."

"O.K.," says Britt comfortingly. "You just relax here, and I'll see what I can do."

Britt nods to Scire and rises. The two men walk to the corner of the room by the closet.

"Look," Britt whispers to the older scientist, "from what we've learned so far, Kelly is as much a victim of whatever's going on here as is anyone else. We trust her."

"I do too," Scire whispers. "I also know this Burgus girl and her boyfriend. Both are lifetime residents here, with family lines that go back to prehistoric Celtic days in this region. There is no reason to suspect them, either."

"Good," Britt comments. He looks over at Kelly, who is resting now with her eyes closed. "I've got my equipment in the car. My locator can pinpoint human-life energy that is *in* a body as well as that which is beyond the body stage. I'll find the kids first and send them back here before I head over to the ruins."

# 19

*This is a good spot.*

Britt stops. He's breathing somewhat hard from the climb up the black mound. The night is moonless and very black. Some summer mist is in the air and blocking out even the faint starlight. Below, a low ground fog creeps between the mounds of the moors. Even Britt's Corvette, parked below, is invisible beneath the slowly swirling fog. Britt turns and looks back at Salisbury. Although only a half-mile away, the town is barely visible. Almost all the lights

are out, and only a glow of the power lines provides a ghostly blue luminescence, which vaguely silhouettes the stolid shapes of the ancient town and the towering steeple.

Britt turns again toward the mammoth mysterious moors that stretch out before him.

*Snip!* He flicks on the small switch of his detector. He begins a scan of the blackness, holding the detector slightly away from his body and moving it slowly from left to right across the invisible horizon. Intently, he watches the small screen. Suddenly, eerie humanlike figures appear in a cluster, and he stops the scan. He holds the detector steady and studies the faint green images on the screen. *Judging from the direction, this must be the pickup from the bodies of the gypsies in their camp.*

Britt begins the scan again. *Jesus!* He stops the scan. His arm has moved only a few degrees to the right of straight ahead; the scanner is pointing directly at the giant ruins of Stonehenge that lie unseen in the mist about a half-mile from this mound. A small dot on the screen is pulsing, growing large, then small, large, then small.

*Its rhythm is almost in time with my pulse. I'm sure it must be the living trapped energy of at least one person who Was sacrificed there ages ago ... but I don't know why it doesn't show the characteristic aura outline of a human spirit. Damn! If I locate those kids quickly and get them*

❖

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*back to town, I can get over to the ruins with my communicator and try to establish contact.*

Britt continues his slow sweep of the mist-hidden moor.

*Good. There they are.*

Two human forms, intertwined in an obviously amorous embrace and moving in an easily recognized rhythm, have appeared on the scanner display. *Looks like they're about a thousand feet east of the ruins. Shouldn't take more than a few minutes to reach—*

"WHA—?" The exclamation bursts from Britt's mouth in response to a sudden star-brilliant explosion of silent light from amid the Stonehenge ruins. For the tiniest fraction of a second the moors are completely lit, as if a cosmic flashbulb had gone off. Britt blinks. The image of the moors has been seared into his retina by the light, and he sees the ruins and the mounds even with his eyes closed. Opening his eyes, he sees *three* human-energy images on the scanner display. They collide violently, and in an instant the two that Britt had originally detected are still and fading out. The third moves almost off the scanner range before it, too, stops. *What the hell's going on there?* And even as his upper-level conscious mind is asking the question, his near-subconscious levels are directing his body into action, to running down the slope and to the car....

Thoughts, questions, possibilities, and alternatives of alternatives dart through the living electrochemical computer in-side Britt's skull as he careens the Corvette wildly to the location pinpointed by the detector.

"AGH!" Britt cries in revulsion at the scene that suddenly bursts to light in the glare of Ms headlights. Here, just yards ahead on this muddy road, squats a madman garbed in strange clothes—men's formal garments of the 1890's. Wild eyes glare from above death-pale facial flesh, flesh whose bloodless whiteness contrasts with the red gore that his long-nailed fingers are cramming voraciously into the snarling mouth.

Britt's eyes and mind take in the whole picture in one split second. The creature squats only twenty feet from the van, whose double back doors are open, revealing in the headlight glare the naked, dead body of a young man and that of a young woman whose abdomen has been slit open and her liver removed. *He's eating her liver!* Britt realizes.

Reacting automatically, Britt floors the throttle of the power-

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erful Corvette. The mighty machine leaps at the monstrous creature.

*WHUMPCRACK!*

The knife-edged nose of the Corvette impacts in the creature's midsection just as it is beginning to rise. The dull thud is mixed with the sharp shattering of headlight glass and fiberglass. The body is tossed completely over Britt's cockpit as the Corvette flashes beneath. Bloody gore regurgitated by the madman splatters warmly on Britt's forehead. With a racer's skill, Britt jabs the brakes, keeping his foot hard on the floor-boarded throttle as he simultaneously turns the wheel to full left lock. Like a thoroughbred quarter horse wheeling around in response to a strong tug on the reins, the Corvette pivots 180 degrees on the brake-locked front wheels as the spinning rear wheels spit rocks and mud. In the space of an instant, the car is heading again for the creature, who has risen completely unharmed by the death-dealing impact!

He rises like a black cosmic cobra ready to strike. Britt recognizes the dull red glow igniting in its eyes, and quickly he opens the door and rolls out of the accelerating car.

Britt spins to the ground, turning in time to see the creature's eyes flash and unleash an invisible blast of psychokinetic energy, which catches the fast-moving car head-on, smashing it to an instant, shattering halt as effectively as a brick wall.

Britt blinks, and in this instant that his eyelids close, there appears that puzzling image again—wheels of a computer, spinning, stopping, starting! And a feeling floods into his body: *POWER!* It roars to his head and boils in Britt's brain.

The wild, deadly eyes of the madman now snap to Britt—but Britt is ready with power of his own. Simultaneously, two bolts of life-generated psychic energy leap from their eyes and collide in the chasm of night between Britt and his enemy. Like an earthquake and thunder, the force of the opposing energy waves snakes the moors!



Britt's self, strangely detached from the battle in which its animal brain and body are engaged, is already seeking the source of the obviously outside power that intervened in his body to counter the force of the creature that even now con-fronts him. *That vision again! It's more familiar this time, but I can't recognize it yet!*

The gaping eyes of the creature are locked madly on Britt's. They project utter evil, but also an unexpected hint of confusion, as if the once-human brain inside that crazed cranium is perplexed at having met its psychic match in Britt.

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Suddenly the figure whirls, and moving awkwardly, shuffles quickly away toward the granite tombstone slabs of Stone-benge.

Britt springs to his feet, but hesitates as his eyes again catch sight of the two bodies in the van. *Damn! I'll bet their spirits are ensnared here somewhere, following a violent death like this. . . . I must pursue that madman, so I don't have time to try the communicator on them, even though this "would be an ideal opportunity. I must release their spirits be-fore this mess is discovered and hauled away.*

Moving fast, Britt turns to the smashed Corvette. The de-tector, on the passenger seat, is covered with splinters from the broken windshield. He seizes it with his fingertips and blows off the splinters as he darts back to the rear of the van.

*Just as I thought.* The display screen of the scanner shows two ghostly human forms electromagnetically bound with the metal floor pan and right-rear door of the van. *Only one way to do this,* Britt thinks as he reaches into the van and pulls out the dead girl's blouse from beside her body. Britt spins it tightly like a towel and removes the gas-tank cap. Working quickly, he feeds the material down the filler pipe and pulls it out again. *Good! The end is wet with gas.* Britt inserts the opposite end deep down the pipe. He reaches into his pocket for a match.

*Snip!*

The tiny flame erupts smokily as Britt snaps the match across the match pack's striking surface.

*Fumph!*

The little flame explodes into a large dancing tongue when it touches the gas-soaked cloth.

*Now, if only this wreck of a car will start,* Britt thinks as he leaps into the Corvette and crunches the glass beneath him on the seat.

*Rmm—rmm—rumMMM!* The engine comes to life, and Britt slams the shift into first gear. The lone remaining head-light catches the fleeing figure of the creature.

"Comin' at ya, big boy!" says Britt through clenched teeth as the battered Corvette bounces over the soggy ground and rapidly closes the gap between Britt and the thing he pursues!

## 20

*Damn! He disappeared! I was only ten feet behind him when he went around this pillar ... Huh! What was that?*

The scraping sound of stone on stone catches Britt's sensi-tive hearing, which directs his eyes just in time to see a small movement of the stone altar slab on the ground.

*Must be something under that—perhaps a tunnel or a room.*

Britt's fingers claw at the cold, damp death stone. It moves.

*Here we go!* The stone rises like a trapdoor. Only a dim candle glow of illumination comes from below, but it is enough for Britt to make out stone steps that descend beneath this ancient enigma. Almost before Britt can scurry down the steps, the altar stone is closing above him.

*Thunk!* It settles solidly into place.

Now the silence fills Britt's ears like cotton. Complete silence. Britt can hear only the surging of his blood through arteries and veins within his neck and head.

Cautiously, catlike, Britt descends the remaining steps. They end in a small hallway hewn from solid granite beneath the ruins. Britt feels as if he is in a tomb. The dim passage is so narrow that his shoulders actually touch both walls. And he must walk with his six-foot-two frame hunched because of the low top of the tunnel.

*I'll be damned.* Britt stops as the tunnel opens into a larger chamber. The room is shaped like a pyramid. The walls gleam, reflecting the small flame of a candlelike lamp. *Those walls look like they're made of some kind of stainless steel; and,* Britt thinks as he stares at the body of the creature that rests on an elevated slab in the center of this chamber, *I'll bet I know why this room has a pyramidal shape.* Britt's brain recalls the fantastic secret of the pyramids, which he learned in his deadly encounter last week with Weissmann,

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the living Nazi mummy in the secret laboratories of Hitler's long-hidden Shamballah psychic-research center. ,

Cautiously Britt approaches the body. The eyes still stare widely, but without any glint of life. The corpselike flesh of the face is pale gray, creased, and taut; the macabre mouth is agape in a hideous grin. Blood and bits of liver, some dried and dark, some still sticky, are smeared on the lips and stain the awful teeth. Britt removes the detector from his pocket and aims it at the body.

*Hmmmm ... absolutely no sign of life ... strange ..., if this man -were using the power of the pyramidal antenna to preserve life in his body against natural death, then there should be some sign of his life energy in the body even*

now. Yet... I get no reading at all.

Britt scans the detector slowly around the chamber. Skulls and ancient body bones lie scattered on the floor along the walls. *It doesn't seem logical that the druids would construct a room like this for dumping the bodies of lowly sacrifice vic-tims. Dr. Scire is going to have to give me all the facts on these aliens when I return.*

Britt glances at his watch. The crystal is shattered, and the hands have stopped at 9:03 p.m. *Suppose I should return now, too . . . my communicator out there in the car was broken in the impact. . . . John will have to repair it before I can attempt to contact any spirits that are ensnared in that stone above me. Maybe Scire can shed some light on what I've found here.*

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*Now, what's wrong here?*

Britt brakes the battered Corvette to a stop. He has just started through the Salisbury main square on his way to Scire's and now finds his way blocked by a dozen burly townsmen.

Several of them approach with torches held in their hands.

*God! Look at their eyes!*

The flames of the fires glint glassily from the zombielike orbs in the heads of these men.

Britt tenses as one reaches for the door handle. "Now, wait a damn minute!" he warns, and seizes the man's cold hand. But even as Britt acts, another of the men reaches, across the cockpit, switches off the engine, and snatches the keys. The rumbling of the engine stops abruptly, and now Britt can hear the louder-than-ever humming of the glowing high-voltage lines overhead.

"Unngh!"

The humming wires are the last thing Britt hears.

## 22

"Ah ... Dr. St. Vincent. We have been expecting you."

Britt's eyes are opening to a blur—a blur of colors that pulses painfully with the beat of his heart. Out of the blur a face forms. A grinning face that seems strangely familiar.

"Permit me to introduce myself," the face says. To Britt's fuzzy perception at this second, the sound of the voice is out of synchronization with the face's lips. Britt's hand seeks out the source of the pain that pounds in the back of his skull.

"My name is Zenovanov."

The name strikes Britt's ears at the same instant that his fingers find the lump on his head and spark a red stab of pain. Britt winces.

"Dr. Mihkael Zenovanov," the voice repeats.

The man's face above Britt sharpens into focus. Britt shak-ily rises onto one elbow on the floor where he lies. Slowly he surmises his surroundings. This appears to be a narrow room. The feel in Britt's fingertips tells him the floor is covered by a firm, tightly woven carpet. A wooden table and chair, intri-cately carved and expertly painted in vivid colors of red and yellow, stand almost directly over him. Britt's brain puzzles for an instant at seeing the beams of this ceiling: they are thin and arch upward. But now he spies the key clue: *That's etched glass in the windows. . . . I'm in one of the gypsy wagons.*

*Oh, my God!* Cringing in the corner of the wagon, hands and feet tied, is Kelly, her lovely eyelashes wet and a glisten-ing tear trail on each soft, smooth cheek.

Zenovanov notices Britt staring at the girl. "We thought she was dead after we directed the attack on her," he says, also glancing at the young woman. "But then we found her wandering in the town square and calling your name." The

evil scientist looks down at Britt and grins. "The power / have over women gets the same results as yours, Dr. St. Vincent. But I must admit that it is not as personally satisfy-

ing. Here . . . let me help you up." Zenovanov points the black barrel of the Mauser automatic pistol he holds at Britt's head. He reaches down with his right hand.

Britt takes the man's lowered hand and finds that he really needs the assist. A yellow lightning bolt of pain blasts through Britt's eyes as he rises. The Bulgarian is slightly short-er than Britt, who looks him in the eye and says, "Dr. Zeno-vanov, tell me, did you study under Dr. Edward Naumov while you were at the City of Moscow Engineering Institute?"

Zenovanov nods slightly and replies through a crooked smile, "Very good ... very good indeed, Dr. St. Vincent." The man notices Britt's reaction at his being addressed as "doctor." "You see, I know as much about *you* as you *think* you know about me," the man continues. "I know, for exam-ple, that you no longer work for the Pentagon, but for some idealistic civilian group named, I believe, Mero Institute."

*So, he does know. ... I wonder how.*

Suddenly Britt notices Zenovanov adjusting a small hear-ing-aid-type device in his ear.

"So, you wonder how I know, eh, Dr. St. Vincent? Then I will show you before I kill you. Come."

With his extended right arm the man directs Britt toward the door in the narrow back wall of the wooden wagon, while still holding the pistol in his left hand. As Britt walks to the door and down the steps to the ground outside, he is aware of a feeling of strange weakness in his legs. Above, against tonight's black sky, the high-voltage wires hum and glow, lending a luster of moonlight to the scene here within this half-circle of silent wagons.

They walk toward the wagon to which that single strand of wires descends from the high-tension tower. As they walk, Zenovanov speaks. "To answer your question, St. Vincent ... although the good Dr. Naumov did spark my original interest in the scientific side of psychic phenomena, I was a computer scientist and was at the time more interested in correlations between the electronic brains which our technology was de-veloping and the electrochemical brain that each of us carries in his skull. In fact, my greatest inspiration came from the success of your United States Air Force and its bionic brain program in the early 1960's.

"I left the Moscow Engineering Institute and earned my doctorate in Kiev, at the Soviet Union's Institute of Cybernet-ics." They have reached the wagon. Zenovanov reaches up and puts his right hand on the handle of the small door and

pauses. "One of my first assignments in Kiev was to help de-velop the electronic replica of a human brain system, which guided Russia's automated lunar explorer." He opens the door and with a jerk of his head directs Britt up the steps. "After you, Dr. St. Vincent."

Britt's footsteps sound loud in this damp and quiet mid-night as he mounts the wooden steps and ducks through the low, narrow doorway.

"I'm impressed," Britt comments without turning to Zeno-vanov, who is entering behind him. Britt's eyes are carefully, curiously roaming over the compact but impressive computer before him. The machine fills the opposite wall of this wagon from floor to ceiling. In the blood-red glow of a single ceiling bulb, the computer is alive with electrical energy, and hun-dreds of tiny flashing lights of red and green and blue wink rapidly on and off in patterns and combinations like nerve synapses inside the human skull.

"Lupus here," Zenovanov states, "represents the world's most advanced artificial intelligence." The Bulgarian removes the small hearing-aid-type earpiece that Britt had noticed ear-lier. "Just as you were on the verge of recovering conscious-ness a few moments earlier, and your thoughts were unguarded, Lupus was able to read your mind and relay the information to me via this device," he explains, holding the earpiece in his fingertips for Britt to see. "That is how I learned of Mero Institute."

But rather than being astounded that this computer is tele-pathic, Britt discovers that the information falls into place to explain something that has been puzzling him. *Of course! That's it! Those images in my mind! It's been Adam, our own Mero computer, communicating with me. He has either been redesigned for this function or has evolved it on his own and come to my rescue several times now without my recognizing his role.*

A small red light flashes on the front of the Bulgarian computer. Zenovanov places the listening device in his ear again. Several seconds pass; the man grins. "So ... Mero, too, has a telepathic computer." He nods appreciatively and half-turns, pointing toward the crowded bulletin board on the Wagon wall behind him. "I had thought that Americans would have risen as a body and demanded controls on such com-puter technology after reading reports like this one here!"

Britt steps closer to the cluttered board and glances at the magazine page thumbtacked to the dark cork: "Time, July 1,

1974," reads the line at the bottom of the yellowed page. Britt's eyes flash to the headline: "Mind-Reading Computer."

"But then"—Zenovanov shrugs—"the American people don't seem to be upset at any of the reports they hear of the advances of psychic science. I recall that my colleagues at the Soviet Cybernetics Institute were literally amazed when there was no reaction in America when Jack Anderson revealed the secret of Project Pandora. You see, St. Vincent, I and my co-workers there were the ones who developed the tech-nology that permitted the KGB's psychic

assault on your American Moscow embassy. And we knew of the work going on in the Pentagon to develop psychic weaponry and establish psychic control over your government's civilian leadership. We admired the 'mood-master' device that the Pentagon and FBI used so successfully to provoke peaceful antiwar demonstrators to violence during the 1960's. And we thought that the whole secret program to control Nixon when he was in the White House was going to be exposed when General Haig told the Senate Watergate Committee about the 'sinister forces' at work in the Oval Office." The evil scientist smiles and shrugs. "But, again, we overestimated the American people."

Britt's eyes are ice-blue cold as he looks at Zenovanov. "Don't *underestimate* them, either, my friend. For more than two hundred years now, aggressors of all sizes and strengths have underestimated them—and have been proven *wrong*."

The grin fades quickly from Zenovanov's face. His lips become a hard thin line. "Let us—as you say—get down to business, Dr. St. Vincent. I want information. I can get the information two ways. I can either have Lupus here pull much of it from your mind, or you and I can have a pleasant chat while I show you some of the other things we do here." He pauses. "You cannot escape. Lupus would signal us even before you could translate your thoughts into action. Tell me what I want to know, and I will show you what we are about here. Perhaps when you have seen the progress we have made, you will consider joining us. And we can set the girl free. If you decide to continue to oppose us, however, you will die, and the girl . . . well, let me show you what we would have in store for *her*—it might help persuade you."

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"You know, *perhaps*, Dr. St. Vincent," Zenovanov says as the two leave the computer and begin walking to the next tightly locked wagon, "that it is unusual for a gypsy family, such as the one here originally, to share a campsite with another family, such as we pretend to be."

Britt nods, but Zenovanov does not look at him as he continues. "Only *money*—huge amounts of *money*—can persuade a stubborn gypsy family to make such an arrangement. So my team is helping this family here make those large, large amounts in today's lucrative white slave trade."

"The girls," Britt says. "The groups of young women you pick up in London—that's where they disappear to."

"Precisely," replies the man as he stops beside the wagon and reaches into his pocket for the key to the padlock that secures the door. "Most of them are transients from Europe and the U.S.—runaways, students traveling without escort or aim. They are untraceable." He puts the key in the heavy lock, pauses, and looks at Britt. "Kelly seemed like a good candidate for our little export business until she wrote her folks telling them where she was." The key turns in the lock, which clicks quietly open, "We couldn't let her go for fear that she might mention some of the girls she'd been here with . . . girls who have disappeared."

"So you decided to have her killed," says Britt.

Zenovanov pauses with his hand, on the door handle and grins at Britt. "Yes. And she *is* dead, you know. That villager will confess to the murder. The fact that her body will not be found now is only a minor complication, and one that is easily explained; many a body has disappeared in the quicksand of the moors." The door opens, and Britt is beckoned up the steps into the dark, unlit interior of the wagon.

It is warm inside, and soft sounds—familiar sounds, yet momentarily strange in this darkness—reach Britt's ears.

Zenovanov climbs in behind Britt and switches on a dim light.

Britt is stunned for several seconds by the scene that flashes into reality with the sudden light leaping from the bulb. Involuntarily, his heart beats harder in his chest and his penis twitches once and hangs heavily between his thighs from the extra quantity of warm blood that has just poured into it.

"These are the last group of girls with whom Kelly worked," Zenovanov explains, nodding toward the six naked females on the floor before them. "They are all nearly complete in their training and will be shipped tonight."

Britt's body is warmer, more tense as the primitive sex hormone is released into his blood and pumped through his system. He inhales deeply and forces mental control over his purely physical reaction to the sight on the floor in front of him. Each of the lovely young women is strapped to the floor by thick, dark-leather belts that are bolted to the floor. The girls are held facing the opposite wall on their knees and elbows by one strap, which goes up over the small of each back and is pulled tight to keep them from rising from their legs, which are folded beneath them so that their soft stomachs rest on the tops of their smooth thighs. In front, tight straps over upper forearms and wrists prevent the girls from rising off their elbows, and several of the girls, apparently exhausted, sag even lower, so that the tender nipples of their breasts rest on the rough wood of the floor.

Britt puzzles at the scene and looks closely to determine what this "training" is. In the shadows beneath and between each of the firm, tight pair of buttocks that faces him, Britt can see a strange device that rises at about a forty-five-degree angle from the floor. Each device is a small black metal box from which there extends a phallic-like hard-rubber rod. Each one is inserted into the captive vagina of the girl strapped above it. In front of each girl is a panel that instantly reminds Britt of the Skinner boxes from his college days of training rats. A clear-plastic tube extends from each panel and is intravenously connected to the left forearm of the girl facing it. Above where the tubes are attached to the panels are small digital displays. Two of the girls at the far end of the wagon have their eyes

intently focused on the numbers, and Britt can see that the girls are straining to do something by tightly contracting their abdomens and buttocks, which quiver with the effort.

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Zenovanov notices them, too. "Good." He grins. "They will bring a high price. Look," he says, pointing to the numbers lighted on the display before the girls. The number on the panel in front of the last girl changes from 2.01 to 2.50 even as he points, and as the number changes, a stream of thin, milky-white liquid surges briefly through the tube into the girl's arm. She quivers quickly and sags, relaxed and exhaust-ed, like the others. Both men watch the second girl as she continues to strain.

"You see," Zenovanov explains, "these girls are destined to be sold in Southeast Asia. Businessmen there find it fashion-able now to have at least one white Western 'housekeeper.' However, Western women have a serious sexual drawback: they don't really know how to give or get the maximum pleasure from intercourse ... especially by standards of the Eastern cultures. I think this is reflected in the high divorce rate in the West on grounds of 'irreconcilable differences' or 'incompatibility'—both of which are euphemisms for inadequate sexual relations." He stops and watches the last girl strain even harder. Her effort pushes the number to 2.60, which now brings a long stream of the white liquid into her arm. Exhausted, she lets her head sag to the floor between her strapped-down arms.

"Very good indeed," Zenovanov murmurs. Britt watches as the imitation rubber penis, glistening and slick from the girl's vaginal juices, retracts from her and waits motionless and poised beneath her pulsing vagina.

"You see, St. Vincent," the Bulgarian says, turning to face Britt, "Western women have never fully developed the use of the pubococcygeus muscle. The Puritan-approved 'missionary' position for intercourse has robbed them of the use of the PC muscle and the pleasure it brings to lovemaking for both the woman and her partner. Your own American sex researchers have recently shown the fallacy of female clitoral climax. The vagina has only a few nerve endings that are important in orgasm. The PC muscle, on the other hand, is rich in nerve endings, but cannot be brought fully into use when the woman is on her back during intercourse. In the East, however, intercourse is usually accomplished from the rear of the woman, permitting her to exercise natural control of the PC muscle, which in contraction not only gives her increased pleasure but also adds greatly to the pleasure of the man by providing resistance and actually forcing his penis out after each thrust."

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Zenovanov nods toward the panels that are in front of each girl, saying, "Those numbers indicate in kilos just how much pressure the girl is exerting to push out the simulated penis that is thrusting into her. When she reaches two kilos, she is rewarded with a rest and a mild shot of heroin that goes into her arm through that tube there. When she is consistently above the 2.2-kilo level, she is ready to go to our buyer."

Britt has been working hard, exercising his powerful self-control to avoid thinking direct thoughts about escape, re-venge, and ways to release Kelly and the girls here in this wagon. To confuse the telepathic computer, Britt has let his mind function without the programming direction of his self-consciousness. Thoughts, ideas, memories, fantasies, and facts have been rolling up randomly from his stream of consciousness like waves of frothy water rise in wild, scattered patterns from a river that is rushing over a bouldered bed. But the plan is there; the bits and pieces have all rolled past, and Britt knows that he can assemble them for instant action on a nanosecond's notice. With a steady eye, he looks at his enemy and asks, "Your buyer—he must be Eastern ... Oriental. Have you switched from allegiance to Russia to alignment with Communist China?"

Zenovanov's broad, flat teeth show as he grins. He glances down at the naked girl strapped to the floor at his feet and with the toe of his black boot touches the small switch on the box from which the simulated penis protrudes. Instantly it thrusts into the drugged girl's vagina, and instantly she reacts, her trim buttocks and belly contracting to force out the mechanical intrusion. Britt instinctively reacts.

"Hold it, St. Vincent!" The wide, black barrel of the Mauser swings directly toward Britt's heart. Zenovanov's eyes burn angrily into Britt's, revealing true evilness and hate. "You will die soon enough, St. Vincent." The scientist sneers. "But there is some information I want from you before you go with Miss Dale to meet my leader."

Britt knows that he must cooperate for the time being in order to learn the secret of what nation is actually responsible for the psychic technology he has already seen here—and to discover the true purpose of what they are doing.

"You should know from my switch from the Pentagon to Mero," says Britt with convincing inflection and manner,

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"that *psychic science* is my only allegiance. I could be of great value to *your* efforts."

"Perhaps." The other man shrugs. "Suppose you prove that by telling me how those devices we found in your car are de-signed to function. Let's return to the wagon where you awoke a few moments ago."

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Kelly, bound and gagged, lies curled and confused in the corner of the wagon, watching wide-eyed and puzzled as

Britt and the Bulgarian stand looking down at Britt's broken electronic devices on the table.

"The basic principal," Britt is saying, "is the same that was" employed by Dr. Pinneo at Stanford Research Institute in building his mind-reading computer, which was written up in the *Time* magazine article you showed me over in your com-puter wagon."

Britt reaches to pick up a pencil lying on the table beside his captured equipment, but his movement triggers a sudden response in the ever-cautious Zenovanov, who pulls back a step and points the death-dealing Mauser's mouth at Britt's heart.

"I'm only reaching for this pencil," Britt informs the suspicious man, and continues his move. Britt holds the yellow wooden pencil between the thumb and forefinger of his left hand now and taps the pink eraser on the tabletop as he explains: "We know that after a person learns to speak in words, his *thinking* also becomes verbal—the intellect becomes programmed to express its ideas in words. The intellect energy—the soul or spirit or whatever you want to label it—of the person initiates words and thoughts in the physical brain to which it is interfaced by giving out a special energy impulse on its discreet wavelength. The impulse from the spiritual, pure-energy intellect triggers specific impulses to be generated by the electrochemical physical brain it directs. The electrochemical impulses of the brain travel down the appropriate nerves—and out come words."

Zenovanov looks coldly at Britt. "You have told me nothing that we do not already know. Our computer here operates on these principles . . . except, where Pinneo's computer at Stanford uses a cap of electrodes attached directly to the skull of the human whose mind it is reading to pick up these

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impulses before they even become words, *our* computer has a sensitive electromagnetic reception system that permits it to pick up brain impulses on any wavelength for almost a quarter-mile around."

"Well," Britt clarifies, "what Mero has done is carry your work on Pinneo's principles several steps further. You see, even after the physical body dies, the pure spiritual energy—the intellect that survives—must continue to think in words. It has no other satisfactory abstract symbols for expressing thought. Therefore, the spirit energy continues to generate the source impulses that formerly triggered \* the physical brain, and through it, the body." Britt pauses. He can read in Zenovanov's eyes that the mind of this scientist not only understands what Britt has just said but now most probably already knows the rest of what Britt *will* say.

"We know," Britt continues nevertheless, "that all western languages are composed of about forty basic sounds that we call 'phonemes.' The intellect, working through the brain when a person is alive, commands the lungs and lips and mouth to form these sounds, linking them together in sequences that other intellects, which gather the sounds through their ears and brains, interpret as words and ideas. In some people who have defective myelin sheathing of the pyramidal nerves of the brain stem—where the spiritual energy of the intellect interfaces with the physical brain—the command impulses from the intellect 'leak out.' They are broadcast like other energy waves such as radio and television signals and can be picked up by still other people who have similar throw-back pyramidal nerves in the brain stem. This is the basis of telepathic power. All your computer does—with its supersensitive antenna system—is to pick up these signals even from brain stems that have the normal amount of myelin insulation."

Zenovanov nods. "Correct, doctor."

"Well, my friend," says Britt, "our communicator device here uses an even more sensitive *maser* tuner, which can pick up the waves of the intellectual energy." Britt points with the pencil in his hand to the communicator device on the table before them here in this cramped, damp wagon. The round oscilloscope screens on both the left- and right-hand sides of this tape-recorder-size device are laced with a webwork of thin cracks from the earlier collision. With the tip of the pink eraser on the pencil Britt touches the two-part black knob between the silent screens. "This is the tuning knob. Each hu-

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man spirit has its own wavelength on the vast electromagnetic spectrum—just like radio stations, TV stations, and so on. The large center section of this knob is like the UHF channel selector on a television set—except that this is a master tuner. It is used to tune in on the general wavelength of a signal from a spirit. The back part of the knob is for fine tuning. The fine tuning and subsequent communication with the spirit rely on the use of that headphone set there and re-citation of the phoneme scale of basic speech sounds."

The headphone set resembles that which switchboard operators use: one small ear plug and a thin tube for a micro-phone. Zenovanov watches as Britt puts it on. "I attach the pickups," Britt says, pointing to red and black wires that lead from the back of the communicator and have on their ends small one-inch-square steel plates, "to the object within which we think the spirit is ensnared."

The curious Zenovanov takes the pickup from the red wire in his fingers and examines it closely. "This resembles the electrode of an electrocardiograph or electroencephalograph," he comments.

Britt nods agreement. "Yes. That is exactly what they are in principle. You see, rather than listening in on the life energy of a human *body*, as doctors do with an encephalograph, when using this device we are listening in on a nonhuman 'body'—a stone, a wall, a gallows—whatever it is that has electromagnetically ensnared a human spirit."

Zenovanov's well-trained scientific mind follows, fascinated by what he is hearing.

"If," Britt goes on, "we have selected the right object, I will be able to locate the emanations from the spirit trapped in it as I turn the broad-tuning dial in the center. The emanations will appear both as a line on the right-side screen

of my oscilloscope and as random sounds in my earphone. I then begin reciting the phoneme sounds. My sound profile appears on the left screen, and I adjust the rear fine-tuning dial until the patterns on both the screens match."

Zenovanov's eyes narrow, and he fully understands. "So . . . when the line patterns match, you are on the same wave-length as the spirit. Ingenious! And"—he arches an eyebrow as he looks at Britt—"I suppose you are fluent in most of the western languages?"

Britt nods. "French, German, and Spanish. I can get by re-gardless of the nationality of the dead person." Britt glances

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at Kelly. Disappointment is prominent in her eyes as she re-turns his brief gaze.

"The spirit," the Bulgarian inquires, "how is it that a hu-man spirit comes to be ensnared in some *inanimate* object? And how can you talk to it without the emotional pull that most mediums rely on to recall a spirit from the beyond?"

Britt removes the headset while replying. "This is one of Mero's basic theories—and the reason why my team is here at Stonehenge. You see, when a person dies a normal death, there is no dramatic tearing of the spirit from a healthy, strong body, as there is during a violent death. In normal death, the separation is gradual, and the spirit slowly slips away into the next life."

Britt pauses and perches himself on the corner of the table. "However,, when a person dies suddenly and violently—such as in a car wreck or a murder ... or a sacrifice—then the healthy body and spirit instantaneously surge to their max-imum energy limits, generating all the electrochemical and electromagnetic energy they can in an effort to maintain their life unity. That split-second surge is *powerful*. It is strong enough to disturb the atomic structure and magnetic field of nearby objects—disturb them enough so that the magnetic fields of the spirit and the object it is affecting become Velded' together. The spirit remains ensnared there until that electromagnetic bond is broken."

"That bond," Zenovanov asks, "can it not be broken by many natural causes?"

"Right," Britt says. "The old stories and movies that depict spirits walking about on stormy nights are based on the ob-servations of some probably pretty terrified folk down through the ages. The lightning during a storm causes severe electromagnetic disturbances that can release earth-trapped spirits. Fires, too, are, as you know, often associated with hauntings. The fires that seem to start spontaneously are ac-tually the result of the trapped spirit laboriously focusing its earth-limited psychokinetic energy on nearby flammable ob-jects. Fire, of course, will release a spirit from ensnarement in flammable objects such as houses and wooden gallows."

Zenovanov has already put together a picture of the plan behind Britt's team's activity. "So, you use the cover identity of a racing team to investigate haunting sites and try to com-municate with spirits. But *why*? And why did you come all the way to Stonehenge for this work?"

Britt folds his arms and says, "Your government, the U.S.

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group inside the Pentagon, and groups of secret researchers all over the world are developing psychic weaponry that can easily lead to total enslavement of the human mind. Milita-rists such as you represent would conquer a battlefield you've never been able to wia—the human mind. You would be-come *mind masters*. But Mero Institute's Dr. Webster has dedicated himself and his labs to preventing this from occur-ring. With a staff of top scientists from many disciplines— and some from former Pentagon psychic programs, such as myself—he has been making good progress in discoveries of psychic principles. Webster has been able to defuse the poten-tial military abuse of these new technologies by using various means to make them public, even while he and his labs re-main secret. In addition to fronting organizations like my racing team, there are several small businesses which serve as outlets for the information; there is even a series of popular paperback psychic adventure novels that are written by one of Mero's multitalented biophysicists in which hard scientific facts about - today's growing body of psychic science are brought to the people. Webster feels—and evidence has shown him correct—that the abuse of psychic technology can be greatly reduced as the principles-become widely known as soon as possible and industry can devise beneficial daily use for them. As you know, when I was working on civilian pop-ulation control in the Pentagon's psychic program at the Harry Diamond Laboratories in Washington, a device was developed that could influence human emotional states. The military successfully used this 'mood master' during Nixon's reign in the late sixties to incite peaceful antiwar demonstra-tors to riot so they could be arrested and their cause discred-ited. The electronic 'mood master' could have been further developed for population control, except that the technol-ogy—much to the anger of the Pentagon—somehow became available to civilians and turned to good uses such as treat-ment of emotionally disturbed people. In fact, although I did not know about Mero at the time, it was the publication of the 'mood-master' technology in the September 1968 issue of *Macleans* magazine that led ..." Britt's voice falters, stran-gled by the emotion of the memory that he struggles to push back into that secret spot in his soul. "... uh ... led to my departure from the Harry Diamond Labs."

Britt must stop. The image of that once-loved face begins to form, and with it the pain of her death in the Pentagon labs. Britt's willpower surges. He focuses his attention hard

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on the rest of his reply to Zenovanov. "The Mero com-puter pinpointed a number of prime hauntings where a re-search team in the field could speed up the discovery process and stay ahead of military groups by learning psychic knowl-edge direct from humans in the afterlife who live by psychic means. Most of these haunting sites were in Europe, Asia, and South America. In the States, the sites were limited, be-cause few things last very long over there. Haunted houses are torn down, battlefields of the west and the Civil War have been plowed under, wrecked cars are

melted down. A com-puter analysis selected European sites that were most likely genuine hauntings and not the result of other natural phenom-ena. The computer selected a pattern of these 'hard' haunt-ing sites for the cover they could provide my field research team. The sites selected were located near international road-race courses. The road-racing cover identity seemed perfect, since it fitted with my well-established background as an amateur racing driver in SCCA competition."

Britt stops and looks at the gun in Zenovanov's hand. "Don't you think you can put that away now? I've told you what you wanted to know. I've shown that my allegiance is to psychic research and not to Mero Institute."

The Bulgarian shrugs. "That is not for me to decide. I must now take you and the girl to my superior. Come," he says with a brusque wave of the black gun barrel. "Help the girl to her feet. We will take your car to Wilton Castle on the western outskirts of Salisbury."

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"Yes — I recognize you," says Britt to the short smiling Oriental man standing before him. The stocky man wears a loose-fitting silken red robe. His closely cropped black hair is impeccably groomed and as slick as his manner. A ruby ring, with one of the largest stones Britt has ever seen, adorns the pudgy middle finger of the man's right hand as he extends it to Britt. "You are Whin Doc Hieu, the South Vietnamese senator who visited the States a while back to seek recon-struction aid after your surrender to North Vietnam."

The man's smile projects no pleasantness. His narrow black eyes reflect a serpentine coldness. "Yes." He nods and limply shakes Britt's hand. He turns and beckons Britt into the huge and elaborate main dining hall of this opulent castle. "And here," he says with a self-satisfied grin, "is what that military aid buys."

Britt's eyes scan the rich tapestries on the walls, the bril-liant paintings and gold decorations on the high-vaulted ceiling, and the silver platters of exotic foods that fill the table toward which they are walking. "Quite a bit different," he quips, "from the 'guns-and-butter' speech you gave to the American Congress when you asked for the funds."

They stop beside the laden table. Britt stands next to a wide lounge-type couch that is completely covered with red silken sheets that drape to the polished marble floor. On the opposite side of the table is a similar couch.

*This looks like I've stepped back in time and right into a Roman banquet*, he thinks as he fingers the silk gown that he was required to put on when he arrived at this castle. The material is smooth against his naked body beneath, and a hint of coolness caresses his thighs through the waist-to-hem slit up the front of the robe.

"This is just a little taste of what you can enjoy as a part of my organization," the senator says as he reaches down and pulls back the sheet on the couch.

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Britt inhales sharply as his body reacts to the stimulating sight he sees. The firm, naked buttocks and legs of a young woman lie exposed on the silk-covered upholstery. The girl's upper body slopes out of sight on an incline beneath the front section of the specially constructed couch. Large red-silk pil-lows lie tossed on the front section where Britt will lean.

"This," the senator says to the surprised Britt, "is an ar-rangement quite common in the sex dens of Southeast Asia." He quickly slaps the beautiful buttocks, and the girl spreads her legs, exposing the dark-red, glistening-slick, swollen vagina lips.

Britt's heart begins to pound. He can feel the veins swell in his forehead as his penis hardens and rises against the smooth silk of the robe he wears.

"Go ahead." The senator smiles. "You've seen how the girls are trained to do the work. Lie down, enter her. We will lie here and eat and talk ... and"—he nods at the huge pur-ple-velvet curtain toward which the couches face—"watch some entertainment while we talk."

Britt holds back, righting the animal instincts of his aroused body. "Kelly . . . ?" he asks. "Where is the girl I arrived With?"

The stocky senator is walking around the table toward his own couch. "You must not be so single-minded. As part of my organization, you can have your choice of hundreds of young women. But do not worry," he quickly adds, "neither of these girls is the one to which you refer. I will see that she is brought here shortly." He nods toward an Oriental steward who has been standing silently near one of the golden columns. The man bows slightly and quickly vanishes into the shadow.

"Watch," the senator says to Britt. "Here is how to enjoy yourself." He slaps the naked buttocks of the girl on his couch, and her thighs part in response. The man opens wide his robe, exposing his hard and redly erect penis with its testi-cles pulled taut against its root by the contracted skin of the scrotum. He kneels between the firm, young thighs and lowers the upper portion of his body onto the plush pillows. The robe covers both his body and the exposed part of the girl. Quickly the small man reaches down beneath his midsection and manipulates his penis into the girl. Smiling broadly now, he moves forward slightly as he slides deep into her. "Come, St. Vincent, you must not refuse my hospitality."

*There isn't any computer around here, so I can safely*

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*think about an escape for Kelly, myself ..., and hopefully, these girls.* Britt's eyes catch a glimpse of the almost unseen



armed guards in the shadows. *There's got to be a way.... I have to pretend to want to join his side while we talk ... have to learn as much as possible about his organization so that we can destroy it. Maybe by the time they bring Kelly here, I'll have gotten the information and formed a plan.*

Britt looks down at the waiting pleasure. Reluctantly he re-leases the animal instincts of his body from the bonds of his mental discipline that had momentarily held them in check. His penis becomes hard as Britt parts the robe and sees the dark-pink head pulsing smooth and tight with each rapid beat of his pounding heart. He lowers himself onto the girl; her vagina is warm and slick as he enters her. The young woman's well-trained muscles manipulate him in a uniquely pleasurable way as he lowers himself onto the pillows.

"Try the pheasant breasts," the senator says as he reaches for a roasted morsel.

Britt's body is alive with pleasure already, and the thought of this fine food further stimulates his physical senses.

The taste of this warm, sweet pheasant is so good *In* his mouth that some saliva even escapes from the corner of his lips as he chews.

"You have told us," the senator begins, "much about your-self and Mero. Now I will tell you something of who 'we' are and what we are doing here. I think you will see that we of-fer more opportunity for scientific challenge than does Mero." Hieu's eyes suddenly squeeze tightly shut. His body quivers, and Britt sees the man's buttocks contract beneath the silken robe.

"Ahhh," the South Vietnamese sighs, opening his eyes. "This one is very good. She knows how to bring a man al-most to the point of ejaculation, but then save him for more slow pleasure. I hope yours is as skillful."

Britt can barely nod to indicate that she is, because he must concentrate at this instant on containing the explosive heat of the hormones that are surging through his body as the girl beneath him tightens on his penis, forcing him almost out of her before releasing the pressure and letting him slide quickly back into her, igniting a hot flash of pleasure in the tip of his penis—a searing flame of pleasure that roars through his body, bringing him almost ... almost to ejacula-tion.

Britt follows the senator's lead and reaches for a golden

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goblet of burgundy. He drinks deeply. The wine, warm in Britt's belly, takes some of the sexual tension from his muscles.

The senator wipes Ms lips on the pillow beneath him, belches, and lets out a lengthy sigh. "You will become accus-tomed to this, my friend." He smiles at Britt. "Inside a skill-ful girl, you can last for hours.

"Now," he continues, "let me explain. As you may or may not have learned while working in the Pentagon, the principal reason that the United States became so deeply involved in the war in my country was the pressure by the oil companies to get control of the vast offshore oil fields that lie off our southern Vietnamese coast. I must admit that it is a tribute to the way your American system is supposed to work that political pressure from the young folk and people in general succeeded hi forcing the oil companies and their puppet pres-ident, Nixon, to practically abandon the war." Hieu takes an-other sip of wine as Britt notices his buttocks contract again. The girl beneath Britt, too, continues to work, sending long, slow streams of pleasure through his every muscle.

"When your government pulled out its troops and then its money," Hieu says, "we were approached secretly by a group of British generals. They were involved in Britain's equivalent of the Pentagon's Pandora Project—but their programs for gaining psychic control of the prime minister seemed to us to have more promise than the Pentagon's control program tar-geted on Nixon. Our decision to ally ourselves with the British plan was confirmed when General Haig—as you Americans say—blew the whistle to the Senate Watergate Committee about the 'sinister forces' at work in the White House. The British generals wanted the oil too, of course. The energy they could generate with it would play a vital part in their plans to gain gradual control of the entire nation by means of new psychic technology based on controlling electrical fields around people."

Britt interrupts, saying, "Yes ... my team had already ar-rived at the conclusion that the high-voltage wires strung around here had some role in the strange behavior of the people. But why here—why in Salisbury?"

"As you probably know," Hieu says, "Prime Minister Heath will be in Salisbury on Sunday to make a campaign appearance before traveling over to Brands Hatch to start the race. While in Salisbury, he will participate in a publicity stunt—he will submit himself to a psychic test at the hands

of a management-consulting firm we control. Such testing has become popular here in Britain for selecting business and gov-ernment leaders. We have taken advantage of this popularity to gain control of several major corporations in this country. But Sunday .... Sunday will be the start of the final phase of our program. For after Sunday, we will have control of the head of the government. Our first plans are to construct new electrical grid systems all across England by which to control the British populace."

"This control," Britt says. "I know the basics of it ... but how far have you carried it toward perfection?"

Hieu grins. "You are probably familiar with the work of Dr. Adey and others at UCLA ... but that is nothing com-pared to our progress. Tell me—did not you and your team wonder at how all those independent drivers at the racetrack were outperforming the factory drivers?"

Britt nods.

"That was merely our final test of the system," Hieu states, "a system which has evolved from scientific pursuit of the principles behind *astrology*" The glint of scientific curiosity in Britt's eyes delights the South Vietnamese official. Hieu is very familiar with Britt's training and experience; Britt's knowledge of psychic science and of the work of Mero Insti-tute and its arch enemies in the Pentagon is of great value. The wily senator is playing up to Britt's scientific

curiosity by offering bits of information. "The principal of astrology is the same as that observed by UCLA's Dr. Adey and others who have investigated the effect of electromagnetic fields on human behavior.

"The sun, the moon, and all the planets and stars, as everyone knows, emit electromagnetic gravitational fields. That is the reason why these objects in our solar system are important in human behavior. For when a child is born, at the precise second that its brain emerges from the shielding of the mother's body, it is *imprinted* by the milieu of planetary electromagnetic fields that strike it. While in the womb, the electromagnetic field of the child's brain is shielded and flexible, but the moment it leaves that shielding, the brain's electromagnetic pattern is imprinted and fixed forever by the influence of the planetary fields. Now, some of the planets are closer, some farther; the sun may be up, or it may be night and the moon present. So the pattern of the imprint varies with each individual and the location and precise second of his or her birth."

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Britt is breathing hard as the girl beneath him continues to keep his passion near the flash point. The silken robe is beginning to stick to his upper back, where some perspiration is appearing, but the material feels smooth and cool rubbing on his bare buttocks as he almost involuntarily contracts and relaxes them in automatic animal response to the feeling that radiates from the tip of his penis. He forces himself to think about what he is hearing. *I must keep my mind clear . . . must learn and remember all information for relay to Adam.* For the briefest instant, a section of Britt's Self puzzles over why he just now thought of the computer Adam rather than Dr. Webster, but there is no time to reflect as Britt's intellect struggles to stay in control against the primitive passion that flames within his body. "Those ancient astrologists," Britt says, attempting to focus his attention on the subject at hand, "amaze me that they could have recognized the influence of the planets on human behavior without having the benefit of any of our sophisticated computers."

Perspiration is beading, too, on the brow of the senator as he luxuriates in the pleasure boiling within his body. "Yes," he agrees. "They," he says, breathing short fast breaths, "accomplished amazing things. But remember, my friend: they may have had help from unearthly visitors." He pauses. His breathing, although still fast, is smoother now as he goes on. "In any case, not much improvement on the work of the ancients had been done since their day—until our work here. The majority of astrologists today still use the old and imprecise systems. But my associates and I, we have gone beyond that. With the information of modern astronomy, our computer can reconstruct in its tape banks any profile of the heavens at any point in time in the past. From these reconstructions it can pinpoint even the most subtle influence of any of the planets on a person at his or her instant of imprinting. Some astrologers can come close to this, but none of them are even remotely capable of performing the most delicate, complicated, and vital calculations of all—the precise space-time triangulation of the infant at the moment it emerges. Only our computer can construct the complete three-dimensional space-time model of the magnetic influence that sets the person's brain pattern at the moment of birth.

"Knowing what a person's basic pattern is, Dr. St. Vincent, we can modulate the electrical frequencies which are transmitted over our power-line gridwork in such a way that we can strongly influence the way the person behaves, acts, and

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reacts. In the case of a town like Salisbury, where most of the people have been born here in the same space-time location, we can control most of their behavior as a group."

Britt nods. "So that is why you had your girls collecting birth data on the people of Salisbury—but why did Kelly do the same with the drivers at Brands Hatch?"

Hieu grins. "The gypsy family whose hospitality and campground we have shared near Stonehenge asked us to do that so they could make money on the race wagering. We agreed, because it would provide a final test for our system before we use it on the prime minister."

The senator quickly turns his head toward the steward standing in the shadows and nods. "Now," he says looking again at Britt, "for the entertainment I promised." His black beady eyes snap toward the huge curtain, which parts swiftly and silently. Behind it is a solid screen of thick glass that reaches from the floor to the soaring ceiling. The only object in the room-size area walled off by this glass is a tan-leather-covered fixture that resembles an exercise horse such as gym-nasts perform on; but this horse is only about eighteen inches off the floor.

Kelly! Britt recognizes the terrified naked girl instantly as she darts from behind the right side of the open curtain and stumbles forward, falling to her knees against the glass. Her hands and cheek and breasts are pressed against the glass as she kneels sobbing in fright from something yet unseen behind the curtain.

*It's a test! Goddamn them! How could I hope that they would accept me only on my word that I'll come over to their side?*

Anger and hate mix with the potent passion already surging through Britt's body. *What are they going to do to her? Maybe nothing serious . . . I must wait and see.*

*Oh, God!* Britt's mind silently shouts at the sight of the large chimpanzee that scuttles menacingly into the open area behind where Kelly sags against the barrier.

Hieu looks across the table at his prisoner and guest. "Do not worry, Dr. St. Vincent. The barrier is clear lexan, two inches thick. It can withstand even machine-gun fire at point-blank range. The ape cannot get you."

The evil man knows well that Britt is anxious for Kelly and not himself. But Hieu is secure in his little game, knowing that the armed guard will quickly shoot Britt at any sign of an attempt to rescue Kelly from the fate that now ap-

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preaches her from behind. Britt sees the stocky little man let loose his passions: his body humps and lurches against the girl beneath him as he savors the feeling of her body and the erotic horror he is about to watch.

The ape stops about ten feet behind Kelly and excitedly sniffs the air as his eyes dart around the area.

*He's got a scent! They must have smeared Kelly in an ap-appropriate place with some excretions from a female chimpan-zee in heat.*

Although the human female body before him is not what he is accustomed to, the large male chimp is driven by the hormones released in his body by the scent. The animal's small, thick penis quickly rises, and the chimp rushes at Kelly, seizing her around the waist with hairy, brute arms more powerful than the strongest man's.

Paralyzed by shock, Kelly cannot resist. Her body falls limply forward, bending at the waist as the ape's hairy arms pull her back from the barrier. The simian thrusts his penis to her but cannot penetrate because of her larger human but-tocks. Britt's own body—flooded with sexual passion and surging with the hormones of many passions—for several sec-onds involuntarily imitates the ape and thrusts hard and deep into the girl beneath him, who responds with powerful con-tractions that send waves of steaming pleasure through Britt's veins and muscles.

Quickly the ape's limited intelligence recognizes what it must do. The animal drags Kelly to the leather horse and drapes her soft, yielding body over it.

"ARRRRGH!" The awful primordial cry erupts from Britt's throat, and with it wells up a lavalike blast of hot hate that blots out his vision and leaps from his eyes as an invisi-ble lightning bolt, smashing through the tough lexan barrier with such a mighty concussion that the entire castle shud-ders. Sharp shards of marble fall from the ornate ceiling like stalactites in a collapsing cave; a jagged piece drops point-first, to pierce the chest and crush to the floor in a bloody butchered heap the body of the guard.

The simian lies stunned, barely moving behind the blasted barrier. Sparks spurt from severed wires in the building's bro-ken walls, and tiny tongues of flame already lick hungrily at the rich tapestries. The castle is cracking and shuddering like a dying dinosaur. Hieu has been rolled from his couch by the mighty force of Britt's blast. The man rises, dazed, from the debris-littered floor. Half-naked, in panic pulling the silken

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robe about him, he runs for the door as smoke and flames devour the walls and huge hunks of the ceiling fall, exploding like bombs on the floor.

*CLUMPH!* One of the castle's mighty support columns crashes suddenly on the fleeing figure, crushing him with such impact that the blood from his flattened body is flung to splatter like thick red paint against the door.

The great hall is choked with rolling, roiling clouds of smoke and dust. Great slabs of wall and ceiling rain down like boulders amid the tongues of fire that are leaping every-where. The heat is intense on Britt's body as he pulls the girl from her place on the couch beneath him. Panic pulses in her eyes, and Britt slaps her face hard. "We're gonna get out of here! You help the other girl out of the couch over there, and then follow me! Understand?"

She nods and quickly half-crawls over the rubble to the other couch,

Britt ties his robe tightly around him and rapidly makes his way over the dusty debris to Kelly. "Come on, kid—I'm tak-ing you out of here," he says with gentle sternness as he kneels beside her.

Kelly's dazed eyes struggle to focus on his face. She smiles weakly as she recognizes him.

Britt scoops her in his strong arms and stands. *Damn! Get-ting out of here is easier said than done! Where the hell is OUT?*

The two terrified naked girls are working their way quickly toward the wreckage where Britt is standing. He scans the flame-filled hall for an escape route.

*The ape!* Britt glimpses the animal scurrying into the shad-ows. *His instincts are sharper than mine in this kind of situa-tion.* "Follow me!" he shouts over the sound of crashing stones and crackling flames.

The passageway they enter is dark and cold after the sear-ing heat they have just left. Their shadows dance on black-stone walls that sweat heavily and add to the odor of death and decay that already permeates the dying building.

Kelly is coughing from the smoke that rolls overhead like storm clouds. Britt's lungs sear from the acrid air. Suddenly ... *Fresh air! God, that smells good! Now, where are ... ?*

But even before Britt can finish his mental question, he recognizes that the passageway has led outside to the garden beside the crumbling castle. He glances up at the ballroom windows, where flames snap and sway inside like a demon

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dance and cast wild shadows into the night. The garden plants seem alive and caught up in the swaying frenzy of the flames.

Over the low front hedge Britt glimpses his battered Cor-vette parked at the edge of the long circular driveway. "Come on!" he snaps at the bewildered girls, and leads a sprint for the car.

Britt's mind is boiling with many thoughts that help propel his powerful thighs; the yards disappear in a seeming instant. Britt places the semiconscious Kelly in the black bucket seat and quickly reaches for the handle hidden beneath the deck behind her head. The deck lifts, exposing the folded black-canvas roof and Britt's brown suitcase. He

slides the suitcase out, lifts it over the fender, and lays it flat on the ground.

*Thunk! Thunk!* sound the latches.

"Here," he says quickly while pulling out two rumpled one-piece driving suits and tossing them to the naked girls standing beside him. "Put these on and get as far away from here as possible." He arches an eyebrow and looks hard into each girl's eyes. The flames reflected in his own eyes add to the impact of his words. "Get back to your own countries and families as fast as possible, and never mention what you've been through or what you've seen here tonight! Your lives won't be worth anything if you do. *Get going!*"

Before Britt kneels to take out slacks and a sweater for himself and another grease-stained driving suit for Kelly, the teary-eyed, terrified girls have stepped into the clothes, zipped them, and are running into the night toward the road.

*BLAMMMMM!* The sudden concussion of a mighty explosion slams Britt face-first into the fender of the Corvette just as he begins to rise! Dazed slightly, and tasting the warm saltiness of blood from his lip, he regains his balance and turns as he stands up. *Must have been the heating-oil tanks in the basement!* he thinks while watching the enormous building begin its death agony. It trembles like a living thing that has just sustained a mortal blow; and slowly now the tall turrets that guarded the front entryway begin to sag. As the sagging picks up speed, crashing stones rumble above the roar of the flames. All around, the high stone walls of the castle crumble, collapsing outward, flinging flaming timbers and huge hot stones into the night.

"Goddamn!" Britt hisses aloud as he watches a wave of hot half-ton stones crash into the base of one of the high-voltage transmission towers beside the castle. Like a giant ro-

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bot knight knocked off balance by bone-breaking boulders, the tall tower reels. The energy-packed power carried in its wires explodes like fireworks as the tossing cables touch together.

Suddenly the electrical sparks stop. The glowing corona that marks the path of the power lines from here to Stone-henge fades out completely.

*Good! Their system has shorted out! Perhaps I can get back to Salisbury and see if Scire is alive.* "Kelly," he says, gently shaking her soft shoulders. "Kelly."

Her eyelids flutter open, and immediately Britt sees the fear and confusion reflected there, along with the flames behind her. "Take it easy, pretty lady," he soothes firmly and fast. "You're O.K. now."

"Tell me ... the last time you saw Dr. Scire—was he alive?"

Kelly tries to reply, but her first attempt at speaking is thwarted by her dry lips and pounding heart. She swallows and nods. "Yes," she manages after a second swallow and a quick lick of her moist tongue across her lips. "He was alive and busy with a message that was coming in on some device he had. He didn't see me leave, and I'm sure no one else saw me leave his home."

"Good," says Britt. He lifts the suitcase, slides it back into the luggage area, and slams shut the deck. "With their power over the people back there temporarily out of commission," he goes on as he hurries around the front of the car and slips into the driver's seat, "we shouldn't have any trouble getting back to see what that message is."

*BRUM!* The engine bursts to life at the first twist of the ignition key.

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"I was surprised when I saw the van parked downstairs."

"Well, Britt," says John, "after what you've just told us, we were lucky that we arrived in Salisbury just as that power-line gridwork was shorted out."

"And this is why you risked coming here," muses Britt, looking at the small plastic bottle of white aspirinlike pills he holds in his hands.

Scire nods, saying, "When Dr. Hollender here told me what that was, I could understand why they risked bringing it to you here."

Britt continues to study the pills for several seconds. He is sitting in Scire's favorite overstuffed easy chair. Britt's face is blackened with sweaty streaks of soot from the fire from which he has just escaped. Kelly sits cross-legged on the floor at his feet, her head leaning wearily against his right knee. Karl is standing, arms folded, at the west-facing windows here in Scire's observatory; he is watching the horizon several miles away, where the flames from the castle light this black pre-dawn sky. Both Dr. Scire and Dr. Hollender are leaning, half-sitting, against the stainless-steel rail around the tele-scope and are looking at the pills held in Britt's fingertips.

"How do they work?" Britt asks softly, and switches the focus of his gaze from the pills to John Hollender.

"Basically," John begins, "they are what brain researchers call a 'chemical coping agent.' They can manipulate human behavior by chemical means."

"So?" Britt shrugs. "The world today has developed a whole raft of such chemicals—beginning with Miltowns, the first popular tranquilizer, some twenty years ago. What is so special about *these* pills?"

John's brow furrows, and he strokes his beard, his eyes reflecting his concern. "Britt, you know well, of course, that you are not only an *agent* for Mero"—he hesitates—"but also an *experiment* ... a walking, living, breathing phenom-

enon that I am not only supposed to assist but also sup-posed to observe and *test*."

There is a second's silence. Britt slowly grins. He looks down at Kelly, who returns his gaze with a puzzled expression.

For a fleeting instant Britt sees in this young woman's eyes the ghost of Gayle and all the love, all the loss, and the final feeling of satisfaction and peace he felt that day when he freed her soul from its enslavement in the Pentagon lab. All this wells up from Britt's inner Self before he can force it again into his secret memories. Britt looks at John. A small wry grin forms on Britt's face. "I know ... don't worry, John ... I walked into this arrangement with Dr. Webster with wide-open eyes in exchange for the knowledge and revenge he gave me."

Britt notices some of the tenseness relax out of John's body.

"Well, Britt," the bearded friend continues, "as a scientist yourself you know how we've correlated the displays of your psychic powers with extreme emotional states. Especially when you are faced with some life-threatening danger, your psychic powers manifest themselves in a manner that is essentially self-protective, but which also extends to others whom you regard highly. Karl, of course, owes his life to you and your powers during our encounter in Sicily. And now, Kelly too is in your debt.

"I have been feeding data on your manifestations to Adam. His analysis confirms what we have concluded from our firsthand observation: your psychic powers are linked to extreme emotional states. If we can superstimulate your emotions, we can unleash your psychic powers."

"And these little pills are going to help me do that?" says Britt, shaking the little plastic bottle several times and watching the pills bounce and rattle. He studies the pills in silence for a moment. "You know," he comments, looking up at John again, "I remember that right before I was brought into the Mero organization I read an article in the Los Angeles *Times* about how great progress was being made in un-locking the chemistry of behavior. I don't remember the is-sue, but it occurs to me now that the article was probably part of the Mero plan for making the public aware of important developments in psychic science."

Hollender nods. "It was the March 31, 1974, issue of the Sunday *Times*, Britt And, yes, & Mero operative played a

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part in bringing that research to print. The article focused on what brain researchers today label as man's 'emotional brain'—the region at the top of the brain stem that includes the hypothalamus and the pituitary. This is the part of man's brain where his primordial, animal-like lower brain stem and nervous system mate with his more recently evolved and civil-ized cerebrum and cerebellum.

"Deep in this inner 'emotional brain' are located all the primitive hormone-producing glands which turn on, increase, decrease, and turn off our base animal emotions, such as aggression, sex, and hunger." John pauses, puzzled by the grin that suddenly flashes to Britt's face.

"Whoever," Britt jokes, "called sex a 'base emotion' has probably not had a very happy sex life."

Even the stern-faced Karl turns and half-smiles mock dis-approval at his friend. Britt's comment, although barely humorous, has the effect he desired. It signals his teammates and friends that he holds them in no position of alienation over what he knows he will be asked to do with the small pills he has in his hand. Some of the tension melts from the room.

Hollender stands and, hands folded behind his back, paces thoughtfully to the window, stopping beside Karl and watching the distant flames for a moment. He turns slowly. "Britt ... do you recall that newspaper story about the work of Dr. John Hanley at UCLA's Brain Research Institute?" Britt nods.

Hollender continues. "Working with a computer, Hanley has been able to identify brain-wave patterns with specific types of abnormal behavior and show that the chemical state of the brain plays a major—and perhaps *causative*—role in disorders, such as schizophrenia, which formerly were thought to be caused by psychological problems. Based on such research, new drugs—pills like these—are already being readied to provide chemical cures for mental illnesses that were formerly relegated to psychologists.

"One of the biogenic amines that have been linked to anger and aggression is dopamine. The intense anger and schiz-ophrenic behavior of people who have 'freaked out' on am-phetamines are the result of the amphetamines causing the brain to produce way more than the normal amount of dop-amine, a chemical that the emotional brain normally pro-duces only in very small amounts."

Britt shifts uneasily in his chair. "Is there dopamine in

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these pills?" He looks intensely at John as the man nods affirm-atively. "So . . . I'm being asked to run the risk of becoming a schizophrenic?" Hollender nods solemnly again. "Tell me this, then, John—I know that many people, kids in particular, have become residents of mental hospitals because of drug-in-duced psychoses, but why haven't more of them been reported to exhibit psychic powers if dopamine is the key?"

John glances to his left and notices Karl watching him, too, waiting for his answer. "Britt ... dopamine by itself is not enough. There is another chemical agent in those pills that neutralizes gamma amina butyric acid—GABA. This brain substance was discovered back in 1950 by a City of Hope neurochemist, Dr. Eugene Roberts. GABA is produced by so-called 'command neurons,' and its major role is to inhibit certain types of behavior, such as predatory aggression. When GABA is neutralized, all the inhibitions that have been bred into the human psyche by centuries of civilization are erased. Without the interference of these learned inhibitions, the dopamine can sweep your brain back to the most primi-tive levels of emotional life and unleash whatever psychic powers lie buried in the human mind beneath the thin crust of civilization. Two pills should be plenty to do the job; don't take more than that

at once unless there is no hope of survival without extreme effort. Even if you survive the battle after taking more than two pills, there is a good chance that your mind may never be normal again."

Everyone is thinking. The room is silent, except for the quiet crackle of the embers glowing warm red in the fire- \* place.

"Britt," Kelly almost whispers. "Don't do it!" she says, her voice rising and carrying a plaintive tone as she sits up and looks at him. Fear and concern mask her face. Her delicate hand reaches out to touch Britt's.

Britt tenderly takes her soft, warm fingers. "Kelly ... those people out there ... you've seen—you've *experi-enced*—the evil they are capable of. I can't *not* try to stop them here and now."

"Then I'll go with you!"

"No." Britt shakes his head. He smiles slightly, looks lovingly at her. Now he glances to Hollender. "And just what is it that Mero wants me to accomplish?"

"Well," John begins, "we had thought that this murderous 'Jack the Ripper' was part of their organization. Webster's initial response to our communication of that information was

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to have you stop that monster first. But from what you tell us now, and what Dr. Scire here told us just before you returned, this creature is something quite different from the crew out there in the gypsy camp. I suppose they are out there breaking camp right now and preparing to return to the safety of their base."

"Speaking of base," interrupts Britt. "Is Greg minding the shop back at our garage?"

"Yes," Karl answers. "He will race. And we must soon be departing for the track ourselves. The sun will be up in about an hour, and we can't risk a more extensive blowing of the cover of our entire effort by not appearing for the race."

"My absence," Britt observes, "will of course be understandable, since my car was wrecked."

Karl nods.

"What it means, Britt," John says, "is that you will be on your own to destroy that Bulgarian crew before they can warn their compatriots of our secret. Try either to get the tapes and records of their mind-control program or to destroy them.

"If you do not show up at the track after the race, we will assume that you are dead, and we'll leave immediately before we are destroyed ourselves.

"Are you ready, Britt?"

Britt inhales slowly.

"Ready," he replies with a weary sigh.

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Britt lies buried beneath the cool premorning mists that are beginning to rise from these marshy moors in this hour of blackness. He lies here on his stomach behind a low rocky mound and squints through the ghostly vapors toward the dark shapes of the wagons in the gypsy encampment, just twenty-five yards ahead.

*Now I know what they mean when they say it's always darkest just before the dawn,* Britt thinks as he tries to discern the work being done by the black human shadows ahead in the gloom-shrouded camp. Suddenly they freeze! Now they scatter toward different wagons. *Something seems to have alerted them. I wonder what could ... DAMN! That telepathic computer! I forgot about it!* The shadowy figures quickly reappear and form a line facing in Britt's direction. *What the hell are those sticks they are carrying?*

*BLAM!* One of the sticks spits fire into the black night.

*Spirrrrr!* sounds the bullet as it rips past Britt's head.

*Blam! Crack! Crack! Blam!* A barrage of gunfire bursts forth, each shot lighting the night for an instant.

"AHHH!" Britt cries as a slug strikes a stone on the mound near his face and sends a sharp sliver of granite into the bridge of his nose near his right eye. Instinctively clutching at the small wound, Britt rolls down the side of the two-foot-high mound and into an ice-cold puddle of water. *Shit!* The sting of the freezing water instantly snaps Britt back from the shock of the painful, although small, wound.

*Those cocksuckin' bastards,* his mind shouts in anger as he reaches into his pocket for the plastic bottle. As he lies on his back here, the blood from his gash runs into his eye, burning and blurring his vision as his anger rises. *These fuckin' pills had better work!*

The drug's bitter taste is sweetened by the sticky blood from Britt's fingers. Instantly he feels the small puddle become the bottomless ocean into which he is sinking, sinking,

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sinking deep into the cold dark depths; but the water becomes suddenly warm, red-hot ... boiling! Two side-by-side glowing orbs appear above him through the swirling red water. Britt inhales sharply, deeply, seeming in an instant to suck in a volcano's heat that surges hot and hard through his muscles as the glowing globes assume the shape of a

gypsy's murderous eyes.

The knife flashes down, but even before it can slice through half the distance toward Britt's throat, the red power boiling in his blood explodes from his eyes, knocking the knife and arm aside and smashing into the hated face like a sledgehammer. The facial bones crack loudly, caving inward and spilling out the eyeballs and two great gobs of blackish blood that splash into the puddle only a second before the body also does; but Britt, quick as a cobra, has rolled from the puddle even before the body falls.

Rising on one knee, Britt glares at another of the gypsy group that is rushing at him only yards behind their leader. Hot hate from out of man's primordial past pulses from Britt's ember-red eyes with each beat of his pounding heart. The nearest onrushing gypsy is stopped as if struck by an in-visible high-speed battering ram with such fantastic force that the man's arms rip from the body's shoulders and spin crazily past Britt like bloody batons.

*Thud! Thud! Thud!* B itt's heart hammers and pulses out rapid-fire psychokinetic waves which rumble at his enemies, whose broken bodies fall before the ancient onslaught like mangled mannequins I

Britt rises from the slimy moorland like some mythical beast breathing cosmic fire that rakes the campsite, splinter-ing the wooden wagons one by one before his vengeful power focuses on one fleeing figure—Zenovanov.

The man is running toward the yet untouched wagon that houses the powerful computer.

*Die! You son-of-a-bitch!* The mental shout of hate echoes in the vastness of Britt's expanded mind and triggers a mas-sive pulse that flashes across the open ground and blasts the body like a bomb, splattering bones and blood in all direc-tions.

Even before the gory pieces of the body have hit the ground, Britt's fiery eyes dart to the computer wagon and un-leash a blast of such hate-powered intensity that it blinds him for an instant.

*BARRRRROOM!* Britt is suddenly staggered by a concus-

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sion caused from his blast unexpectedly striking an equally powerful invisible force. For an instant, much of the power fades from Britt's physically stunned body, and in that instant he is himself bowled over by a mighty blow. Catlike, he rolls with the impact and dodges behind a protective mound, just as another silent psychic blast strikes it like an artillery shell and sends large hunks of rock and dirt exploding into the darkness.

The shock cools Britt's psychokinetic powers. His intellect temporarily resumes some control from his primitive brain stem and assesses the situation. *The computer! Must have projective power too.* The electrochemical neurons in Britt's cortex are working at the same nanosecond speed as the cir-cuitry of his inhuman enemy in that wagon. *It must be oper-ating from standby battery power. My only chance to destroy it is to engage it in such a battle that its power source is weakened to the point that I can penetrate its protective field. Clumph!* Britt is suddenly showered with dirt and small stones as another powerful pulse from the computer pounds away at the mound. *A couple of more shots from that thing, and I've had it. . . . Only one way to go from here!* Britt digs for the bottle in his pocket. Lying on his back below the re-maining protection of the mound, he cannot see the number of pills he dumps into his hand and tosses immediately into his mouth. *Felt like four . . . guess this is it for me.* For the briefest instant, feelings of fear and sorrow well up in Britt's mind. Fear that if he survives, his intellect—his Self—will be trapped within a physical brain that has gone schizophrenic; and sorrow for all the happiness he had wanted from life as a young man, happiness that withered in Vietnam and spilled uselessly onto the floor from the bullet hole in Gayle's heart that night in the Pentagon lab. But these fleeting feelings fade fast as they are turned to ashes by the hormone-fired hell that flames up from his primordial soul, blocking out again his intellect and propelling Britt's body to twist to its feet.

He springs up, crouched, shoulders hunched, tendon-taut fingers curved like murderous claws. Veins stand out thick and blue on his forehead, his heart pounds like a powerful piston, and a sticky string of saliva stretches down from his wide-open mouth, through which streams of steamy air roar rapidly in and out to feed the furnace of his soaring metabol-ism.

For a second they face each other—the hell-hot electro-

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chemical machine of Britt's body and the cold electronic ma-chine in the wagon.

*BAROOM! BAROOM! BAROOM!* Thunderous rapid blasts of psychokinetic power hurled simultaneously by the combatants collide and rumble across the black mounds of the moors.

Like lava, wave after wave of this red-hot energy boiling from the chemical-hormonal reaction within Britt surges up from his depths and spews from his eyes.

Suddenly the wagon shudders. The killer animal within Britt knows its enemy is wearing down, and like a lion clos-ing in on his weakened prey, Britt begins a slow, relentless ap-proach to the wagon. *UNNNN . . .* The sounds fill Britt's head as he unleashes a mighty pulse. The wagon, only par-tially protected by the failing computer, is almost lifted off the ground by the impact.

Britt stops. His baleful eyes survey the silent splintered wagon. The door hangs open on broken hinges. Britt steps nearer and glares into the interior that is blacker than the dark that swirls around him.

*. . . beep . . . beep . . .* comes the soft and ever-fainter sound from the inner wagon; the sound is like that of a cardiac machine in a hospital monitoring the faint beats of a dying heart. Within the wagon's darkness, Britt sees a small red pinpoint of light pulsing slower and slower ... dimmer and dimmer....

Finally, pulsing no more.

"Britt!"

He whirls in the direction of the cry, and his heart leaps with a resurgence of the killing energy that still flows

through his body.

"*ARGHH!*" A flashbulb-fast blast of brilliant light from Stonehenge sears the silhouette of Kelly into his retinas. Britt blinks and suddenly sees two black shadows standing where only Kelly stood a split-second before. "AAAAHHH!" she shrieks in mortal terror, and shrinks from the menacing monster. "Help me, Britt!"

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For just the tiniest fraction of a second Britt hesitates, and in that instant of hesitation, the creature's death-yellow eyes flash.

Britt barely reacts in time. His countering blast impacts With the onrushing impulse, creating a concussion that sends Kelly sprawling like a tossed-aside doll, falling unconscious to the cold ground.

The Ripper's rotting jacket swings out from his mummified corpse as he pivots and flees toward the mammoth black monoliths of nearby Stonehenge.

Hot hormone streams surging through Britt's body launch him after the hideous horror, which moves with the same amazing speed it exhibited in their earlier encounter.

The heavy altar stone is slowly settling down into place again as Britt reaches the spot. With speed and strength akin to man's ape animal ancestors, Britt reaches swiftly down, and his hand's clawlike fingers hook under the stone's cold edge.

"*RAAAHHRRRR!*" Deep in Britt's boiling brain he feels great pleasure from the strength of his back and shoulder muscles as they swiftly tighten to yank the five-hundred-pound stone up from the ground and flip it backward against the nearby sandstone trilithon.

Dim light rises into this dying night from the exposed un-derground passageway. The killing instinct is still alive in Britt, who fearlessly pursues the prey into its dangerous lair. Quickly Britt leaps down the crumbly stone steps and rushes through the low, narrow, coffinlike confines of this buried tunnel, his fast-moving feet pounding toward the chamber, ready for a colossal confrontation.

Suddenly he stops....

The body of the Ripper lies again on the stone; the corpse is unmoving, unbreathing, even though Britt's own heart pounds and his lungs pump from the dash down here. Fear



slowly begins to circulate through Britt's bulging veins. *Damn! The hormones are wearing off! If he comes at me before . . .* Britt's thoughts stop abruptly, arrested in mid-sentence by. what his fingers in his coverall pocket tell him even before they bring out the bottle into the dim light of this pyramidal chamber. *Empty! Christ! I've had it! But why isn't he coming at me?*

Cautiously, sensing that something here is quite different than it was in the pyramidal chamber he encountered last week in the Nazi's secret psychic Shamballah labs, Britt ap-proaches the body on the elevated slab. In the dim and flick-ering light of the single sinewy flame, the bones of the dead who lie along the wall seem to be alive and moving. The teeth of the skulls are locked in rigid grins.

Britt feels cold as the perspiration cools on his body here in this stainless-steel cave. Standing now beside the corpse of the Ripper, Britt can feel the heat of his own flesh being drawn in by the cold of the slab. Arms folded for warmth, he bends over slightly to examine the body before him. *No sign of perspiration on it ... didn't really expect any; I guess the body probably has only a bare minimum of interstitial fluid to keep the cells alive*, he surmises, remembering how the evil Weissmann kept alive in Shamballah.

The scientific curiosity which has dictated that Britt risk his life for Mero now unfolds his arms; slowly he reaches down to touch the black threadbare suit of the 1890's-style clothes on this incredible corpse. Britt rubs a piece of the crumbly cuff between his thumb and forefinger; the cloth dis-integrates to dust under the slightest pressure. Britt lifts his hand a bit and looks at the black dust on his fingertips.

From the moment that the hormone began to wear off, the scientific analytical levels of Britt's brain have been working furiously to assemble information about the scene he sees here; and now something is stirring in the depths of his brain's electrochemical memory circuitry. *What was it that Scire was talking about? A "door"? A door. Of course!*

Carefully, Britt's right hand reaches out to the partially open mouth of the corpse. Lightly, he touches its gray, life-less lips. *Hmmm ... absolutely no reaction. Scire MUST be right about the "door," and I'll bet that Mero confirmed his theory in that message that came in.*

Britt pinches the lower lip right in its center. The pinched area comes away in Britt's fingers like damp, sticky clay. Britt flicks the flesh away and impulsively takes a firmer hold

on a larger section of the lip; swiftly he pulls it. The whole lower lip and flesh of the chin rip away like rotted gray liver and expose the bone beneath, and the grinning teeth.

*He's out there! I know it now!* Britt's mind is spinning. *Should I? Damn, yes! I've got to try it!* Motivated by the



ex-citement of scientific enthusiasm and the explorer's emotion of this ultimate adventure, Britt suddenly pushes the body of the Ripper from the slab; even before the corpse hits the stone floor, it becomes dust and bones.

"AGH!" The stench of rotten death instantly fills the chamber, choking Britt for an instant before his disciplined will takes over and forces his senses to ignore the stench and the taste of the dust from the corpse. *The Ripper can't return now; I hope that I'll be able to.*

Swiftly Britt heaves himself onto the slab. Even before he can lie completely down, he feels dizzy and hears a humming in his ears—the same kind of humming he heard when Dr. Weissmann put him in the pyramidal chamber in Shamballah. But this time the hum and the numb feeling are much stronger. Panic strikes Britt's physical brain as his pounding heart stops in mid-beat, and a wave of strangling suffocation smothers over him; he struggles to open his mouth, tries vainly to gulp even a tiny amount of air into his fiery, un-moving lungs. His body feels drugged; his mind strains hard to hold on, but it is being unstopably squeezed out of this body, which already it cannot feel or command anymore! Britt strains to keep his eyes open, but even though the lids are not yet completely shut, the dim light here in this chamber is fading as Britt sinks slowly ... slowly into a bottomless blackness....

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Sinking, sinking ... blacker and blacker, until the black-ness shows a small tongue of light, and Britt realizes that he is rising, rising above his body, which lies below, as if asleep, on the slab. The single flicker of light from the flame fades and is replaced by stars of the black predawn sky. Stone-henge slowly shrinks, as if disappearing down a cosmic drain, and Britt floats higher ... faster ... higher and faster, faster and higher. The earth below begins to shrink, rushing in from all sides; first the fog-blanketed moors, now Salisbury. All the towns of Wiltshire County. Now London. England and the oceans. The earth's horizon bends. The dark part of our planet retreats, and Britt is suddenly struck with the hot orange-red shaft of sunlight that breaks around the edge of his mortal home. Like a deep diver suddenly surfacing and in-haling sweet air again, Britt's bodiless spirit is filled with a feeling of freedom. His spirit swells with the awesome strains of mystic monumental music, and a feeling of exhilaration washes warmly through his being.

*My God!* The familiar expression springs from Britt's mind as a careless exclamation on the rushing stream of feeling he is experiencing, but the exclamation is halted before it begins, for now in Britt's earth-freed intellect, the word "God" has assumed the full magnificence of its meaning. For an eternity, the impact of the immensity and serenity of space washes over Britt's soul in wave after wave of peace, and he knows now with special insight the true meaning of the line from the *Desiderata* that tells man that "you are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars ... you have a right to be here."

A second ticks for a million years here, and a million years pass in a split-second. Time has little meaning in this realm of the spirit, but already in the second or the eternity that has passed since Britt left his body, he has remembered the urgency of his mission to end the evil of the spirit he pursued

through the door. And in this instant that he remembers, Ms all-seeing eyeless intellectual vision focuses on a fiery comet that is shooting out of sight into the deepest reaches of this endless universe. *There he goes!* Britt's intellect instinctively knows that the shooting star is the spirit of the Ripper.

Before Britt can even fully will it, he is himself shooting after his prey. He soars like a cosmic eagle, swooping right and left, up and down, in pursuit that speeds through solar systems and spans the gaps between galaxies. Stars and planets flash past, sway up and down, and pivot around as the chase goes on across the infinite. The exhilaration of this bodiless flight is like champagne to Britt's spirit, and he fights the urge to abandon his prey and enjoy the heady feeling of this experience: his intellect imagines itself indeed an eagle and thinks of the strong will that that bird must have to pursue its prey in the face of the temptations to abandon all to the beauty of soaring flight. Calling up all his willpower to back this intellectual trick, Britt becomes the hunter eagle. Somehow he can feel his near-speed-of-light velocity increase even more as he focuses his will on the comet-like spirit he pursues. And now, like a single-minded programmed missile, Britt begins to close in on the target of his growing speed. Pinpoints of light a million miles away expand to mammoth stars and shoot past in an instant. A speck of glowing dust mushrooms into a galaxy through which both Britt and his enemy plunge. Down endless black voids that end in an eye blink. Right and left. Up and down. Swooping through curves that encompass eternities of normal time, the chase goes on. The gaseous glowing, dancing tail caused by the Ripper's spirit exciting interstellar plasma as he flees is now almost within reach of Britt's own cometlike spirit. Britt is closing in ... closer ... closer ...

*What's that?* Britt's intellect is suddenly alert to a tug, a strong unseen pull that accelerates him even faster ahead. His mind sees and immediately understands the danger of the tiny speck of light so infinitely far ahead. Britt wills with all his intellectual energy to stop, but nothing can resist the terrible tug that draws him on.

Ahead, he sees the streaking spirit of the Ripper also start to swerve away from the danger, but the pull is too strong, and he, too, heads unwillingly for this speck of light that has already grown to the size of earth's sun as Britt's struggling spirit rushes toward it at the speed of light.

*A black hole! I knew it!* thinks Britt as the star looms

larger and the roar of its atomic fires fills Britt's being. The giant white star now looks like a mammoth teardrop lying on

its side. Attached to the pointed end of the teardrop shape is a pulsing, spinning, dull-red, doughnut-shaped ring of X-ray energy—the telltale mark of the rim of a black hole. It is a cosmic leech that is sucking the matter of this great star into its infinite depths.

*What chance do I have if even this star that is bigger than my entire native solar system cannot resist the pull?* Britt's hope sinks almost to despair. Already his spirit is beginning to arc in toward the edge of this galactic whirlpool.

*OOOOOOOAAAAHHHHHHHHhhhh!* Over the mo-lecular roar of the dying star Britt's spirit suddenly hears the cry of the soul he pursues as it is irretrievably caught in this monstrous maelstrom. Like a body bobbing in the strong death-drawn waters of a whirlpool, the silver speck of the Ripper's spirit spins only once quickly around the red edge of the hole and disappears.

*Oh, God! Please help me!* Britt instinctively pleads as his soul surges with its last desperate strength against the mighty force. The roaring of the star becomes the boiling of the roiling rim of the hole as Britt is drawn into it. The red glow radiates hellish heat! *No! No! Dear God, no!* Britt's soul strains to its limits in final resistance. *GOD! I don't care if I go—but there is so much to do!*

*AAAAHHHHHHHH!* Even as this hopeless cry bursts from Britt's spirit, he knows that his spontaneous prayer has been answered. He is suddenly tossed, tumbling, through space, away from the spinning storm. Like a speeding skier falling and cartwheeling down a steep icy slope, Britt spins on and on through space for a seemingly endless aeon, until at last he slows ... slows ... and stops.

Now... now he floats quietly in the void. ...

Britt's stunned thoughts arrange themselves and search for an explanation. And the answer slowly comes—comes from without and within his soul, filling up the void both around him and within him with a wonderful warmth.

For what seems an eternity, Britt basks in this vast tabernacle of womb-warm space. ... Gradually now, he begins to move. *There is much to be finished before I return here*, he thinks, and even as he does, his spirit is accelerating, until again it is rushing through the clouds of stars and planets like a comet, heading resolutely toward the tiniest of dim specks of light in this unimaginable vastness.

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The roaring-furnace-fire sound of the stars slowly fades, changing into a soft sobbing. The vastness of space closes in until it is now just a small chamber. The blackness mellows into a flickering orange glow as Britt's soul slowly slips back into his body. His eyes flutter and open, to feed into his again-body-bound intellect the sight of soft brown hair resting on his chest, the head of a weeping woman. Like an un-dead Romeo trying to comfort his weeping Juliet, Britt wants to enfold Kelly in his arms; but his arms will not move. Frustration flash-boils in Britt's spirit and surges out hot into his unresponding mechanical body, where it reignites the electro-chemical fires.

"Oh!" Kelly's head suddenly rises and pulls away as the first faltering heartbeat shudders through Britt's breast and into her ear.

She steps back in fear, but quickly it melts, and she leans down, looking through happy tear-filled eyes and touching Britt's cheeks with the palms of her gentle hands.

Her caress is soft and warm to Britt and elicits a deep, un-steady inhaling by his rewaking lungs. The cool air flows into his body like refreshing water. Energy spurts into his veins and streams through his arteries.

"Britt ... you're *alive!*" Kelly says, shaking her head slightly with joyful disbelief. Her tears fall salty and sweet onto Britt's dry lips, which slowly form a warm, loving smile; and as this feeling of love radiates out from his soul toward Kelly, his intellect suddenly links it to the feeling that flowed into him following his miraculous rescue from the black hole. Britt is amazed—stunned at this realization. *I was loved out there by something even as I now love Kelly!*

But there is no time for Britt to savor this sudden insight, for Kelly again sags sobbing to his chest. Britt sits up stiffly. Gently he eases her head into his lap as she sinks to her knees beside the slab on which he sits.

Britt slowly runs his fingers through her hair and massages her scalp.

Kelly's head rises. She looks at Britt through swollen wet eyes. "Oh, Britt ... Britt ... I thought you were dead ... and I wanted to be dead too." Her glistening eyes reflect the depths of despair to which her spirit has sunk. She opens her mouth to speak. Tears trickle down from her cheeks. Her words come slowly. "I ... I just don't know ... things have changed so fast for me." She shakes her head in a manner that states her confusion as she continues. "Even up until just a couple of days ago, when all this began to happen, I thought that it was just *me*—that I was just going through a stage of postadolescent confusion in which life seems temporarily meaningless and confining. But after what has happened to me—and what I've overheard from Dr. Scire and you ..." The words choke in her lovely throat and build up pressure there—emotional pressure from the confused whirlwind of thoughts that are roaring through her head louder and louder until they explode free. "Why are we spit out from the black bowels of nothingness and squeezed screaming into this ... this *world*, this state of existence we call 'life,' which gushes out gobs of mock love and laughter while gnawing the body and soul to the bone?" Eyes wet and wild, Kelly pulls back from Britt and kneels like the mad wife of Macbeth, staring at her hands, which she holds before her face. "Why were these bits and pieces of unknowing nothing called from the corners of time and assembled into me?" Her burning eyes bore back at Britt's. "What are these fires called 'emotions' which burn my heart? What is this back-breaking burden

called 'knowledge' and this confused, terrible torment called 'me'? Where did *I* come from?" Her voice is almost shrieking. "What do *I* consist of? Why am *I*? Where will the *I* of me go when this body dies? And, oh"—her hands fall limply onto Britt's lap, her face drops down onto her up-turned palms, and Britt can feel on his thighs the warmth of her breath and the tears that run through her fingers—"how long till I know?" She sobs softly. "How long?"

Britt remerqbers all in an instant when he felt this way af-ter the death of Gayle. For several seconds the silence in the chamber is punctuated only by Kelly's soft sobbing. Britt's mind retraces his entire emotional roller-coaster ride of the past months: the despair, the consuming revenge, and the hollow, uncaring feeling that it left behind when satisfied ... his mechanical activity of the past weeks, and finally—finally

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the incredible feeling of renewed faith and love that envel-oped him during the extracorporeal experience just passed. This great feeling rises again within him, bursting to be shared. Comfortingly, he massages Kelly's sob-racked back. The feelings well up irresistibly in his brain and burst forth in emotional whispered words. "Kelly," he begins softly, "you must know from the things you've seen that / was not in my body when you found me here . . . and I must tell you of the experience I had." He pauses,

"My soul rose from this place like an eagle that had been caged and suddenly escaped to return to its high mountain roost. Space was not alien. It was like returning to a home I had left as a small child and only vaguely remembered with good feelings. But it was more, too—I felt momentarily like a person who, while hiking in the mountains, suddenly discov-ers an incredibly beautiful vista. Do you know that feeling?"

The emotional intensity in Britt's whisper is beaming into Kelly's soul, rekindling her fire of human hope. Her sobbing ceases. She lifts her head and looks into the clear depths of his eyes.

"Do you know that feeling, Kelly—the *impact* it has on your spirit? The beauty takes your breath away! The gran-deur sweeps your spirit skyward in spontaneous, innate thanks and appreciation to the Power who made both the view and you and brought you together! You stand in awe of the vision for several long moments before you slowly recall the hard climb you made to reach the spot—and the hard trail you must still travel to get to where you are going."

"Britt," Kelly quietly asks, "do you think you were in heaven?"

Britt's answer comes quickly, flowing spontaneously from the revelation he has received. "No. I know now that the next life is not the final life. You know, there is nothing in Scripture that states explicitly that the very next life after that of this world is the final afterlife. The existence after our test here in this world is but the first of several steps in man's intellectual perfection. Beyond this bodily life lies another stage in our metamorphosis. Each step leads the willing intel-lect closer to a fuller understanding and appreciation of the Creator.

"The knowledge of science that you have heard Dr. Scire and me discussing does not destroy God—and only now do I see this myself; instead, it brings us closer to understanding His beauty and power. Those who condemn science fail to

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recognize that science consists merely in man using the intel-lectual talent God gave him to follow the trail of secrets of His power which leads us to Him. Those fearful and confused men who bum the books of science are ignoring the lesson of the Bible and burying in the field the most precious of the talents that God has given us to develop and bring us closer to Him—our *intellect*.

"Like children who learn to appreciate fully their father and his skills by imitating him in the workshop, so, too, do men learn to appreciate their Father through scientific imita-tion and understanding of the wonders He has created."

Kelly is calm. The majestic concept that was implanted in Britt's brain during his cosmic revelation has filled her spirit with the awe and simple mystery of human life. Britt takes her hands, and she rises to her feet as he stands up.

"Let's leave this place," says Britt. The dim light and op-pressive air of this tiny chamber have become repulsive to Britt's strengthening body. With Kelly trailing on his hand, he leads her down the dark, narrow corridor.

*Skrit! Skrit! Skrit!* Their feet grate grittily on the steep Stone steps that lead up to the rectangular opening where the sacrificial stone had been. The bright morning star, Venus, is twinkling above in this brightening sunrise sky.

"Ummmmmmmmmm." The pleasure sound escapes spon-taneously from Britt's throat at this instant as his face rises above the ground level and is struck by the warm golden shaft of sunlight that streams through the opening between the two ancient trilithons that for ages have guarded this un-derground entrance. Britt's lungs expand swiftly, inhaling the sweet morning air. A feeling flushes through him like the ex-ultation of a man reborn and rising from his grave into a bright new world.

Standing again on the outer surface of the earth, Britt turns and stoops to help Kelly up the last two steps. Her face, too, turns toward the life-giving sun, and Britt can see in her eyes the renewed sparkle of her spirit.

"Kelly," he speaks to her as she savors this wonderful sun-rise. "Kelly, would you consider working for Mero Institute?"

She turns her face toward Britt, her eyes narrowed and in-quisitive.

"Kelly, when the Scotland Yard officers arrive and try to sort out what has happened here, they are going to get a ter-ribly confused picture from the people of Salisbury. The situ-ation is going to help us in getting Dr. Scire away from here,

now that his secrecy may have been compromised. *You* can go with him."

"Hmmm." Kelly's expression changes to one of careful consideration. Her brow is wrinkled, and "lips purse as she thinks. "From what I've seen of this fantastic espionage you're involved in, your offer promises anything but security." She pauses. "Yet ... the field of psychic research is not *completely* alien to me. I've had a growing interest in it ever since my freshman year in college, when my anthropology professor told us that one of the greatest female scientists of all time—Margaret Mead—was a long-time member of the American Society for Psychical Research. I learned of the research with the Australian and South American aborigines which showed that psychic powers such as telepathy and psychokinesis are actually inborn powers of humans as well as of many animals and plants—but psychic powers which, as you indicated earlier, have atrophied in humans because of the influence of the rigid social structures *v/e* have evolved."

Britt smiles and nods. "You are right, of course. Even animals that have a long history of domestication by man lose their conscious ability to use the inborn telepathic skills which wild animals still display in their well-timed and life-vital herd responses to danger and enemies. But those skills are still there, Kelly, in *us* as well as in animals. Dr. Webster's new development of the hormone pills proves that. The pills take the user back to man's emotional, precivilized state and turn loose the buried psychic powers. It is a big step forward, but it also points all the more urgently to the need for Mero to prevent today's emerging psychic technology from being used to enslave people."

Kelly's warm right hand softly wraps around the strong fingers of Britt's left hand. She looks evenly into his eyes. "I think maybe I've found a purpose for my life."

The sun is rising higher over the horizon, bringing light and life to the wakening world. Its golden atomic fires now illuminate all of Britt and Kelly as they stand silently and look deep into each other's eyes.

"Come," says Britt softly.

## 13

"You went through the Door, Britt.

"Yes," Scire goes on, "it was just as I thought ... and just as Adam confirmed in that analysis of the holograms he transmitted to my home last night."

The old scientist is looking straight ahead as he speaks and watches the intruding surface of this narrow road that the British call Highway A303. He is sitting in the windowless back of the team's van with Britt, Kelly, and Dr. Hollender. Stonehenge is shrinking behind them as they approach Amesbury junction. The race has already started at Brands Hatch, which is still forty-five minutes away. There is urgent work to do before the race ends. Karl is at the wheel, driving the van like a racing machine. The speeding van bounds up and down and leans from side to side as Karl steers it expertly along the twisty, hilly country highway. Scire clutches in his lap a small box of treasures. "It's amazing." He smiles and shakes his head. "That computer quickly found in the holograms what I'd spent *years* trying to discover."

"The Door?" asks Britt.

"Yes," Scire replies, turning toward his Mero colleague. "The Door I speak of," he explains, looking toward Kelly, whose interest is reflected in her intense expression, "is like the 'window' in space that astronauts must hit and go through precisely in order either to escape from earth's gravity or to reenter its atmosphere without bouncing off like a stone skip-ping on water and being lost in space.

"You see, Kelly," he continues, now directing his remarks specifically toward this girl who will accompany him back to Mero Institute's hidden headquarters in the rugged San Gabriel Mountains of southern California, "Stonehenge was the computer that told the druids when the area of England in which they had crashed was in exact alignment with the astronomical Door through which they had entered in their

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plasma state and through which they had to thread precisely in order to leave again."

"What is it," asks Kelly, "that the Mero computer found which you had missed, Dr. Scire?"

The old man is pleased at Kelly's interest, and his brow wrinkles as his eyebrows arch and he smiles at his own failure. "Remember, Kelly, how you told me you felt this morning when you and Britt rose up from the underground chamber and stood in the sunlight that streamed through the 'doorway' formed by the two vertical trilithons with the horizontal slab on top?"

Kelly nods.

"Well, if you would have been aware of its significance, you would have noticed that the sun also cast through that doorway the shadow of the Heelstone, which stands about two hundred feet to the northeast of Stonehenge's ninety-seven-foot-diameter circle of trilithons. The axis of the circle points directly toward the spot where earth's sun rises on the morning of the summer solstice. The shadow of the Heelstone touches the sacrificial stone to indicate that the Door is open." Scire pauses and looks at Britt. "You must have laid down on the slab in the underground chamber just as the Heelstone shadow came on target. By the way, were you and Karl able to replace that sacrificial stone?"

"Yes," Britt says, "but what a hell of a job! Those pills gave me great physical strength in addition to releasing my psychic powers. I had tossed that five-hundred-pound sacrificial stone about ten feet with just a snap of my wrist."

"When I recovered from the impact of whatever hit me up on that mound," Kelly adds, "I would have never found you if I hadn't seen that passageway with the stone removed."

"I hope that stone," Scire says, "stays in place for the rest of time."

"How, exactly, did this 'door' and the Heelstone work, doctor?" asks Kelly.

"Well, as I said," he replies, settling back against the steel side of the speeding van, "it was the system that provided the stranded spacemen the way back to their own dimension. I don't know what method of selection they used, but each year the spacemen and women would choose one of their kind as the candidate to return through the Door. The Door was open only once a year, on the morning of the summer solstice, when the Heelstone's shadow touched the sacrificial stone. At the instant the shadow touched that stone, the

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spaceperson's spirit was released by plunging a knife into the heart of the human body it had assumed. The ancient writings that I have preserved on these microfiche," he adds, patting the small cardboard shoebox he cradles in his lap, "indicate that one spaceman, possibly the ship's captain, was elected to remain behind after the others, in order to perform similar releases for any others of the original expedition who might discover Stonehenge. It is likely that over many years most of them eventually wandered here from where they landed in other places on the earth. The fact that only one of them per year could be released, however, explains why these highly intelligent 'druids' ruled the Celtic tribes here for so long.

"In any case, those who eventually traced the path of their disabled spacecraft and found their way here immediately recognized Stonehenge for what it was, and they knew what to do. The captain's human body was preserved in a state of cosmic mummification for as long as he needed it, through the power focused on the underground slab by the pyramidal shape of the chamber."

"Cosmic mummification?" questions Kelly.

"I think Britt here," Scire says, casting a glance at Britt, "can tell you all about that. I didn't even know about the chamber beneath Stonehenge until he told me when you both returned this morning. But the information fits right in. And it fits into the growing general body of information that supports the theory that spacemen have visited our planet for thousands of years." Scire looks at Britt. "I was amazed to learn about the secrets of the pyramids when I received my copy of your report on the Shamballah investigation last week."

Kelly looks at Britt too, waiting for him to explain.

"There's no need right now," Britt says to her, "to go into detail about my report on Shamballah. It's enough to tell you that archaeologists have found that in the Egyptian pyramids—especially the Cheops pyramid—more than just bodies of ancient rulers are preserved. Some years ago they observed that even the garbage left behind in the burial chambers by robbers and archaeologists—things such as banana skins, apple cores, and the like—were not rotting inside the pyramid, but were being preserved, *mummified*. It has since been determined that the pyramids are in fact not burial monuments at all, but are cosmic antennae used to preserve the bodies of space visitors stranded on this planet

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during the many visits that have occurred over the aeons. The great power of the pharaohs derived—like that of the druids here—from the fact that they were extraterrestrial beings. The pyramids have been constructed on precise lines of latitude and longitude. Their alignment and size tune them to various cosmic resonations and are probably tailored to the individual characteristics of the person who was or is preserved in them. The pyramid shape draws in the cosmic wavelength to which it is tuned, and focuses the energy on the sarcophagus containing the body to be preserved." Britt pauses. He is slightly amused at the look on Kelly's face. Her lips are parted slightly and her jaw slackened a bit as she absorbs this fantastic but true information.

"You know, pretty lady," he says, "you are going to have to grow accustomed to conversations like this at Mero. Such things sound farfetched to the lay person, but everything has been thoroughly researched and documented. The things you have witnessed here are no more incredible than what you will be dealing with every day from now on. That chamber back at Stonehenge, for instance, kept in mummified, suspended animation the body of that spaceperson who stayed behind waiting for the others." Britt turns toward Scire. "Now it's your turn, doctor, to explain to me why all those skeletons were down there in that chamber—and *what* was that creature I confronted?"

Scire sits silent for several seconds. His body rocks gently with the swaying of the fast-moving van. He inhales deeply, and exhales slowly. "You see," the old scientist begins softly, "when the space visitors assumed human bodies, they also assumed the natural appetites of those bodies—including the sexual appetite. They mated with the primitive humans as well as with their own kind. The results of the matings with humans produced bastard offspring who were part human, part nonhuman.

"These bastard children whom they left behind possessed powers and intelligence beyond those of normal humans. From my research I have traced the lineage of some of Britain's greatest kings, generals, scholars, and scientists back to families descended from the druids' half-human offspring. These ancient scrolls on the microfiche here in this box document most of what I am telling you. I have gathered them from old families and record halls all over England. Most of the writing is in a Celtic tongue so old that it is indecipherable even by modern Celt scholars. Adam was largely

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responsible for the sense that I have made from them. Not only is the language no longer spoken, but the words cannot be taken literally, and these writings contain a *code*.

"The code tells the whole story of the crash of the space-craft. The writings were left behind to help direct other stranded space visitors of their kind to Stonehenge. But some of the half-human descendants were also able to decipher the code and learned of things which were not intended for them to know. I speculate that the first of these bastard children entered the secret chamber beneath Stonehenge with the intention of asking to be allowed to transport through the Door and into the fantastic world of plasma existence. Unfortunately, the person didn't know the proper method of reawakening the space visitor on the slab and probably tried to rouse him or her by shaking. The body was probably knocked off the slab and turned immediately to a dusty skeleton, just as the Ripper's body did, Britt, when you moved it. Not wanting to die when his or her mortal body died, that first half-human violator of the chamber lay down on the slab and entered the mummified state. The scene must have been repeated time and again as other of the half-human bastards deciphered the messages."

"Until," interrupts Britt, "this person who you feel certain is Jack the Ripper came along. What makes you so certain that this creature was indeed the Ripper and a descendant of the space visitors?"

"It fits the pattern, Britt. Scotland Yard's file on this criminal, whom they never caught, drew conclusions from the evidence at the murder scenes of the women back in the 1880's that the criminal was a man with unusual powers and intelligence, and that he was probably a member of the London aristocracy and a surgeon."

Scire purses his lips and thinks a moment. "The way I construct it," He begins, "based on the records in these writings here in my lap, the event that triggered the Ripper's rampage occurred in 1878—the year in which there was a rare total eclipse of the sun. During this eclipse, when the cosmic interference of the sun was completely blocked out, the spaceman side of the Ripper's intellect was able to make some kind of partial deciphering of scrolls that were handed down to him by his progenitors. One of the secrets contained in them was that which revealed that he could keep his human body eternally alive on earth and still occasionally enjoy the pleasures of plasma existence outside of the body. To do so, he had to

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return to the Stonehenge slab every fifty-six years at the time of the lunar cycle and undergo the mummification process for six days. Every twenty-eight years—including the time he spent on the slab—he had to enrich his body with heavy concentrations of red blood cells freshly taken from a female human body. Even while his own human body was undergoing the rejuvenation in the underground chamber, and his spirit was free in the plasma state, he had to return on each of the six days and consume fresh red blood cells—usually the liver from his victims, since this organ has by far the greatest concentration of the required cells."

"Well," says Dr. Hollender, "that explains the twenty-eight-year cycle of the Ripper-style murders here in England." Everyone sits silently thinking for a moment. "I wonder in what time frame, what kind of world and life, his spirit emerged after being sucked into that black hole."

Britt shifts uneasily, recalling the dread he felt when the pull of that galactic whirlpool first seized his own spirit. Kelly, who had been leaning against Britt, starts to sit up as he shifts, but she is suddenly thrown hard against him when Karl turns the speeding truck sharply off the highway and accelerates down the tree-shaded road that leads to Brands Hatch.

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The rumble of the huge jet's engines sounds like an avalanche in the mountains. The ground trembles beneath Britt's feet, and his conversation with Greg is halted by the roar. Black smoke hits the concrete deflector walls behind the aircraft and blasts skyward in oily clouds. Slowly the mammoth Pan American 747 begins to roll. The low chain-link fence on which Britt and Greg lean about a hundred yards from the runway tingles with the power being blasted out by the engines. The great white machine gathers speed; its size shrinks as it rolls away faster and faster. Now the nose wheels leave the ground, while the ponderous main body remains earthbound and the engines bellow and strain to lift the aluminum animal into the air.

The plane is small now, nearly a mile down the runway from the cargo-loading area where Britt and Greg stand. Neither man has yet spoken. Other jumbo jets are whining slowly down the taxi strip some fifty yards in front of the fence. The mammoth mechanical birds lumber along, wings wobbling as they roll on wheels while waiting to enter the element of the air for which they were created.

Over the silver fuselage of the American Airlines DC-10 that has rolled in front of them, Britt and Greg see the distant silhouette of the 747 arcing airborne into the orange afternoon sun.

Simultaneously, the two men turn from the runway scene before them and lean back against the fence while watching the loading of the old 707 freighter. This plane's aluminum skin is dirtier than the polished and painted hulls of the passenger liners. Patches here and there on the tubelike body and broad swept-back wings show where repairs have been made over the years.

"Hmmp." Britt chuckles. "Dr. Webster can't be accused of being a Hugh Hefner when it comes to chartering aircraft."

"What's all the rush, anyway?" asks Greg as he watches a forklift truck lift Britt's carefully crated Porsche into the

big open cargo door in the side of the aircraft. Dr. Hollender and Karl are up in the jetliner leaning out of the doorway and carefully directing the loading procedure with precise waves of their hands. "Looks like Kelly and Dr. Scire are getting a smooth ride aboard."

"Yes," Britt agrees with a concerned nod as he observes the operation. "There was a lot of space on either side of the cockpit when we removed the fuel cells. Karl lined the spaces with foam padding, too. Kelly is on the left and Scire on the right side. We'll let them out for a stretch once we're in the air."

"I'll bet Karl will hate to see those cars sold when we get back to Quasar Garage and good old southern California."

"True, Greg. He's worked with Porsches all his life. But he understands that the declining popularity and race schedule of Group-Seven-class racing doesn't leave us the range we need to travel the world under this cover identity."

"I'm looking forward myself to getting my hands on our new Formula Five Thousand cars," comments Greg. "It's one step closer to Formula One for me. When do we drive the cars?"

The Porsche in its wooden protective framework is now safely aboard the jet. "Come on," says Britt wearily as he bends over and picks up his brown-leather flight bag, "we'd better get up there ourselves." The football-field-size concrete loading area here at hectic Heathrow Airport is pocked with puddles from the frequent British rains that come and go between bouts of blue sky and searing sun. Britt looks down into a large puddle as he walks past: a film of oil around the edges of the puddle creates a free-form purple-and-red-streaked frame for the reflected picture of puffy white clouds in the blue summer sky. Britt's facile mind imagines that this is not a reflection, but that he is looking through our planet and seeing the airport sky in Australia. Britt walks several steps in silence before he replies to Greg's question about driving the cars. "Ontario racetrack has been rented for several days, starting tomorrow. We'll have to be out there in the morning getting things sorted out, because our first race is just ten days from now in Brasilia, the capital of Brazil."

*Thunk!* Greg's shoe hits hard and hollowly on the first step of the aluminum stairway that leads up to the forward passenger door just behind the cockpit of this workhorse 707.

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He speaks over his shoulder to Britt as they climb the steps: "You've got a lot to brief me on during the flight."

"Well," Britt says, "the new orders only came in while we were in the motel room waiting for you to finish the race. It would probably do you as well to read the file as to listen to me. Anyway," he adds as he reaches the top step and feels the tiredness in his legs, "I've been operating without rest for about two days. I plan to sleep during most of this flight, so I won't conk out at Ontario."

Britt steps into the darker interior of the plane after Greg. The front section has six rows of seats on either side of the narrow aisle. Back in the cavernous cargo section, ground crewmen are tying down the cars and equipment like moving men in a van padding and securing furniture. John and Karl are closely watching the work. One of the men walks to the gaping cargo door now and reaches up beside the opening to touch a black button; a high-pitched mechanical whine begins, and the broad, curved door slowly descends. As it closes, the airport sounds outside begin to fade. Britt and Greg stand aside, between the seats, as the work crew walks forward and begins exiting by the passenger door.

"Everything O.K. back there?"

Britt and Greg turn forward toward the cockpit door, where the first officer has appeared.

"Yes, fine," calls John from the midsection cargo area.

"Good," says the man, nodding his head with its gold-braided blue officer's cap. He turns halfway to his right and reaches for the black button beside the open door. A similar but smaller whine accompanies the closing of this smaller door. It locks into place, and the man secures the door with a single twist of the long red lever in the door's center. Again he turns to the Mero crew. "Please sit and buckle your seat-belts until we turn off the seatbelt sign. The new antihijacking regulations say that the door to our cockpit must remain locked while we are in flight. So if you want anything unusual before we land in Los Angeles, use the intercom phone up there on the wall." The man turns, steps through the small forward door, and closes it behind him.

*Click!* The lock latches softly.

"Need any help back there?" calls Greg to John and Karl.

"Not right now, Greg," John replies as he and Karl come forward to the last row of seats. "After we're airborne, though, you guys can give us a hand, letting Scire and the girl out for a stretch."

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John and Karl sit down. Both Britt and Greg, who are still standing, watch for a moment as the others buckle themselves in. Karl picks up a Thermos and a brown bag. The smell of warm coffee seems to fill the air instantly as soon as Karl unscrews the Thermos stopper.

"That smells good." Greg sighs as he settles in the seat beside Britt here in the first row.

Britt reaches down and unzips the left-hand pouch on the flight bag at his feet. "Here," he says, reaching in and retrieving a red Thermos bottle.

"Great," says Greg. He takes the bottle and unscrews the cap. "Looks like we've only one cup ... do you mind?"

Britt sags back in the soft seat. He shakes his head. "No. Go ahead. That stuff would only keep me awake." Britt's eyes burn for sleep. He massages them gently with his finger-tips, and the touch brings a flood of salty tears that wash over them, cooling the burning for a moment. "The folder with our next assignment and a description of the situation in Brasilia is in the right-hand pouch of my flight bag when you want to look at it."

"Well," says Greg as he balances the Thermos lid of steaming coffee while snapping his seatbelt with one hand, "I'm probably going to try to catch some shut-eye too, after I help John and Karl. Give me a quick rundown on the situation."

Britt opens his eyes and watches out the small window beside his right shoulder. The fueling crew is removing the large black hose from the tank on this wing. "It's an alert issued by Adam," Britt says as he begins the summary Greg has asked for.

"Adam?" Greg interrupts, turning to Britt. "Now *he's* issuing alerts, too? What's this I hear about you and Hollender suspecting that our computer has developed telepathic skills and communicated with you and Karl?"

"That telepathic thing, Greg," Britt answers as he rolls his resting head from the window toward Greg, "is something that is going to have to be looked at very closely when we get back to California. Right at the moment, we have no other explanation for the visions of whirling computer disks and the feelings that directed some of Karl's and my movements during this last assignment. We know, too, that telepathic computers are possible . . . but we are just going to have to see about our Adam." Britt pauses. He turns toward the window again and slowly yawns. "In any case," he begins, in

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words distorted by the lingering yawn, "Adam issued the alert about Brasilia following one of his routine programmed analyses of the information that he monitors daily from all over the world."

For several seconds Britt gathers his recall of the report while he watches the last of the ground-crew and service trucks packing up to leave the side of the plane. Like a drug, the need for sleep is slowing and confusing his thinking. "It seems that about six months ago Dr. Kim Sin, a North Korean disappeared on an expedition to the Jeruena River in the western half of Brazil's Mato Grosso. Then, about two months ago, Brazilian newspapers reported instances of violence involving the aboriginal Indian tribes in the Xingu reservation on the Mato Grosso plateau. The Indians were making wild, frenzied attacks on the small government administration settlements scattered around the immense reservation. Witnesses and survivors reported that the Indians were led in their attacks by tall, blond-haired, blue-eyed, and naked white women warriors."

"Kind of like the fabled Amazons, eh?" comments Greg.

Britt leans his head back in his seat. The weariness seeps through his body. His eyes close, and his brain conjures up a motion-picture scene of a tall nude woman warrior with soft white skin and piercing blue eyes charging in front of a group of shrieking brown savages, brandishing spears and sharp machetes. Her bare body is stunning—the beauty of her face, the full breasts, and smooth thighs as she runs.

He opens his eyes and sighs before continuing his briefing of Greg. "Blood tests on Indians killed in the attacks revealed no signs of drugs to explain the frenzied charges. The Brazilian government finally sent soldiers to protect the civilian employees at the settlements. The first attack against one of the fortified settlements was also the last. A rifle shot killed the Amazon woman leading the charge, and the Indians behind her instantly stopped their attack. They appeared confused, and when questioned, indicated that they had no idea how they got there or what they were doing. The last thing any of them could remember was the sudden appearance from the jungle around their camp of the Amazon woman. And in spite of her stunning beauty, the thing that the Indians recalled the most about her was her eyes. In fact, looking into her eyes was absolutely the *last* thing that most of them recalled."

"Hypnosis?" Greg offers.

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"No, Greg. According to research at Mero and other institutes, hypnosis doesn't work that way, especially on a large group. Anyway, about a month ago the democratic Brazilian government of President Odamil Furtado began to be rocked by strong protests from the left-wing radicals who are demanding close political and trade ties with Communist China. And within the past two weeks, three of Furtado's Senate supporters have been murdered. The men's naked, castrated bodies have each been dumped on the steps of the Senate plaza in the heart of Brasilia.

"On the surface, it might appear that these are just brutal political murders in a region of the world that is noted for such things. But autopsies on the bodies revealed that the men did not die of shock or loss of blood from the erode castrations. Inexplicable cerebral traumas have killed them. All the nerve endings in each victim's cortex had been fused together—and not by externally applied electrical shock, either, because no telltale burn marks were found on the skin surface of the skulls. What is really injuring the government in the eyes of the masses, however, is that each mutilated, murdered man has been found with a small doll strung around his neck. Red dolls wearing black caps—the macumba demon god Exu."

Britt shoots a glance at Greg, who is sipping the coffee. "You know, Greg, that demons are taken very seriously by most of the population there, who mix Catholicism and Afro-Brazilian worship of macumba and umbanda."

Greg cocks his head quizzically. "You mean, we are going down there to look into black magic? What happened to our scientific approach to psychic power?"

"No, Greg," Britt replies. He lets his heavy head rest back again against the soft seat. "There is, of course, psychic power involved in some so-called black magic. But we have another concern here. You see, the last victim was reportedly seen shortly before his death in the company of a beautiful white woman—a tall woman with blond hair and unusual blue eyes. The woman, in turn, was reportedly seen leaving the city in the company of an Oriental man. None of these incidents would be of special interest to Mero and our work if not for the fact that Adam's memory banks revealed that four years ago Dr. Kim Sin lectured at the Shanghai Futurology Institute on the subject of psychic population control. Further study into his background showed that his 1952 doctoral dissertation at



or an expedition to the Amazon River forests to discover the fabled Amazon women warriors. Kim Sin's theory, based on ancient Inca descriptions of clashes with the Amazons, was that the vaunted battle prowess of these women did not result from physical but rather *psychic* power over their op-ponents."

"Hmmm," muses Greg. "Interesting. I think I'll take a look at that report as soon as I can. You get your sleep. But take care," he jokes. "Remember what Hamlet warned about *dreams*"

The plane jerks and begins to vibrate slightly. Britt knows that the small onboard jet turbine providing power for the lights as they sit here is now being bled for compressed air to start the main engines. He closes his eyes and lets the sleep well up from his tired body and into his brain.

The plane begins to taxi. The lumbering sound and move-ment of its wheels along the irregular airport apron become in Britt's drifting inner eye the pounding of bare brown feet on sun-baked South American jungle soil. The whine of the flap drive is the high-pitched chant of unknown Indian words. As Britt's consciousness sinks further and further into the deep dark of sleep, it vaguely recognizes the gathering roar of backward-pushing pressure as the aircraft accelerates down the runway. Suddenly the plane and Britt's sleep-drugged spirit are free of the earth—climbing and climbing together into the clouds. The plane strives toward the westward-sinking sun, but Britt's spirit is held back, restrained by the burden of unknown danger that lies ahead.

Suddenly Britt is falling—falling through the sky, tumbling down toward the vast green ocean below. From horizon to horizon roll leafy, breeze-tossed waves of the earth's last unexplored wilderness—the steaming Amazon jungle, which controls an area larger than the continental United States.

Britt's fall abruptly ends in an instant of blackness—black-ness that now slowly softens into a fuzzy vision of the green world of the jungle floor. It's hot here . . . humid. The hum of insects and chirping of birds and monkeys drift into Britt's ears. He is lying on his back . . . feeling weak. Tall brown tree-trunk shafts shoot skyward into green clouds of leaves, Bright-yellow spears of sunlight stab down through the blue-sky spaces between the leaf-heavy trees. Suddenly Britt's blurry vision sees a wavy, flowing glow of gold. His eyes strain to focus. He recognizes hair blowing gently in the jun-gle breeze—blond hair that touches on a smooth shoulder of

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moist pink skin. From the shoulder a slender arm hangs down beside a firm, full breast whose luscious nude nipple protrudes puckered and erect. Britt's eyes trail down the per-fect body, down the smooth belly and into the golden mat of pubic hair, where his gaze pauses ... but pauses only for a second before a blinding flash turns his attention to the gleaming machete held by the slender fingers of this female hand.

Quickly Britt looks up at her eyes—icy blue eyes whose imponderable, passionless stare promises more danger than the sharp machete.

Britt tries to rise, and only now realizes that he is staked spread-eagle and naked in this jungle clearing. An electric pang of pain shoots up from his groin as the strong female fingers seize his scrotum. He sees the machete flash.

**JhROSSMANN**

Rossmann's theories on the physical bases of psychic powers were formed during his train-ing in psychology at St. Louis University, a medical center famous for its work in under-standing the human body. Today a respected business editor, Rossmann collected the facts of psychic science cited in his writings during his years of association with the worldwide *Los Angeles Times* network.

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