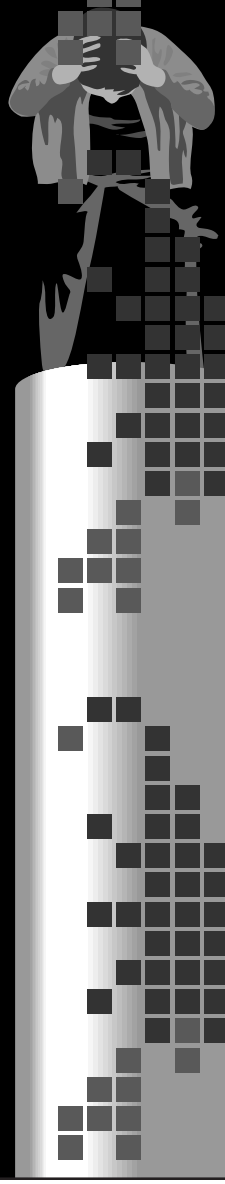
InterText

VOLUME 5, NUMBER 1
JANUARY–FEBRUARY 1995

"In VR"
by DANIEL K. APPELQUIST



ALSO INSIDE:

G.L. EIKENBERRY
SILANG KAMAY
CONNIE BARON
COLIN MORTON
CARL STEADMAN

JQUAN

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intertext@etext.org

Editor
JASON SNELL
jsnell@etext.org

Assistant Editor
GEOFF DUNCAN
gaduncan@halcyon.com

Assistant Editor
SUSAN GROSSMAN
c/o intertext@etext.org

Cover Artist
JEFF QUAN
jquan@west.darkside.com

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FirstText

JASON SNELL

HOW WE DO IT

EVERY NOW AND THEN, WE receive very kind letters from *InterText* readers who write to compliment us on the quality of the magazine — both the stories we publish and the package as a whole.

It's nice to hear such positive comments, considering the fact that we're all volunteers. Many times, I want to respond to those letters, explaining a little about how we put together *InterText*, but I never get around to it. This may be as good a time as any to explain a little about how we put out *InterText* every two months.

The process begins just as one issue goes out the door to all our subscribers. After that happens, we take a brief rest and then start going through the stories that were submitted to us after we had already chosen our line-up for the latest issue. We read these stories (and other stories, as they come in via e-mail) and then give them a rating. We all discuss the stories and explain why we gave them the ratings we did. The stories at the top of the ratings heap are then reevaluated with an eye toward placing them into an issue of *InterText.* Sometimes a perfectly good story will be delayed or even rejected because we have too much of the same thing in an issue. One of the stories in this issue was held back from our last issue because it would have made the content of our previous issue very dark and depressing. In this bunch of stories, it's much more appropriate.

Then we divvy up the accepted stories, and choose one or two as candidates for the cover of our PostScript and PDF editions, sending those stories off to artist Jeff Quan. Our editors then take their crack at doing a preliminary editing job on the stories they've been assigned. After that, we place the stories into PageMaker, the desktop publishing program which will eventually produce our PostScript and PDF editions, and continue the editing process there. By the time the stories are ready, they've survived an exacting primary edit and one or two supplementary reads by another set of editorial eyes.

Then comes the high-tech part. Our cover art having been created (often in record time) by Jeff Quan, we "print" a PostScript version from PageMaker, and run that through Adobe's Acrobat Distiller to create a bare PDF file. We use Adobe's Acrobat Exchange to create hypertext links and other Acrobat features that will make our PDF file easier to read, and then work on that edition of *InterText* is complete.

Next comes the creation of the ASCII/Setext and World Wide Web editions. We take the stories in our PageMaker document and convert them into text for editing in a word processor. These stories are converted into HTML — the format used by the World Wide Web — and made ready for placement on our World Wide Web site. We also take a copy of the HTML stories, paste them together in a word processor, and reformat and rewrap them to create a plain text file with Setext formatting.

From there, it's only a matter of sending the issues out. I upload our files to our FTP and World Wide Web sites, e-mail copies of them out to our subscribers, and then collapse in a heap. Those of you reading this issue hot off the electronic presses can take comfort that we're in that condition as you read this.

Then the process starts again. Lather, rinse, repeat. Every two months. And believe it or not, it's a lot of fun.

I COULDN'T LET THE BEGINNING OF 1995 SLIP AWAY without discussing, albeit briefly, the changes that *InterText* went through in 1994. Perhaps the most important change was our appearance on the Web — first with a simple home page linking to our gopher site, then to fully-formatted issues with hypertext links, and now, with our first issue of 1995, a revamped web site with access to all our back issues and a bunch of new navigational features. The Web enables us to provide versions of our cover art, formatted story text, and easy access to back issues, and it's proved popular with readers. In 1995, all the users of commercial on-line services may be able to access the Web. When that happens, things should *really* explode.

In 1994, after more than three years of putting out *InterText,* Assistant Editor Geoff Duncan and I met in person for the first time. We'd managed to put out nearly 20 issues of a magazine without laying eyes on one another, but I think that streak had gone long enough. And we've already met twice *this* year.

There's no doubt *InterText* will go through more changes in 1995. With this issue we inaugurate a revamped design for our PostScript and PDF editions. And with every passing year, Geoff and I seem to find ourselves sunk deeper into the world of electronic publishing and the Internet.

I've been writing lots of Internet-related articles for *MacUser,* and I'd like to think I've helped get *MacUser* on the Internet. Geoff, meanwhile, left his job at Microsoft and has begun work on yet another electronic publication — he's now the managing editor of *TidBITS,* the popular weekly on-line Macintosh publication edited by Adam and Tonya Engst.

So we're busy. And it seems we *like* it that way.

R i v e r

G.L. EIKENBERRY

"So deep, so wide — will you take me on your back for a ride?
If I should fall, would you swallow me deep inside?"
— Peter Gabriel, "Washing of the Water"

THE SKY WAS RAMBUNCTIOUS LIKE OCTOBER, PART sunny, part cloudy — big, boiling, cotton clouds smeared with fierce, dark splotches of gray. The wind whipped them toward the horizon, smack into the sun, against their will. But it was May, the long weekend, the trial run for the summer break. It was a day for baseball, soccer, biking, running with Zak. Danny was bored with being in the car. They were supposed to be there around five. That was still half an hour away.

"Mom, what's that going on over there?"

"It's a funeral, Danny."

"Like when people are dead."

"That's right."

"Not *like* when people are dead, Dan. Those people *are* dead."

"Can we stop? I want to look."

"Dan, it's no one we know—"

"I don't see any harm in just stopping, Lee."

"I thought funerals were supposed to be in a church."

"Not always, Danny. This is a special funeral."

"Can we get out of the car?"

"Rita—"

"Just relax, Lee, it's not going to hurt anything if he just looks."

Danny was adopted and Zak's twin brother was supposed to have died when he was six days old. But what if he didn't really — what if the hospital made a mistake?

"Jesus Christ, Rita! The whole world is not his personal learning lab. This is other people's private grief." Danny hardly even heard their bickering anymore.

"What makes it special?"

"Do you remember hearing about the six boys that drowned on that canoe trip?"

"The river that runs behind our house…"

Lee made a move to stop his son, but his wife took his arm. "Let him go. He's almost 13 now," she whispered. "He knows how to behave himself at a solemn occasion. He has to come to grips with death sooner or later."

"I wish I knew where the hell you got some of your crazy ideas."

Danny moved slowly, like someone in a trance, toward the gathering on the river bank at the back of the small cemetery. The man in the front was wearing a Boy Scout uniform. He had his back to the river. He was talking — probably about the dead boys. Danny didn't really hear what he was saying. He hardly even saw the people sitting in the cold metal folding chairs. He heard the spring river, fast and boisterous like a bus full of kids on an outing. He felt weird. It was like those clouds were rolling and writhing inside his head.

He could tell it was making his face look funny. He knew he was going to cry. He didn't even care if everyone there saw him cry as he walked around behind the man and touched each empty box.

The man stopped talking. They all watched, but no one seemed to mind.

Someone even took a picture. His mother walked down to him. She took him by the shoulders and steered him back to the car.

"It's okay, Danny, you don't have to say anything."

"Those boxes were empty."

"They're called caskets, and, no, Danny, they found the bodies. Remember, you watched it with me last week when it was on the TV news. You had all kinds of questions."

"Yeah, like how come the river's getting mad…"

DANNY AND ZAK, ZAK AND DANNY. AS DIFFERENT AS up and down, but brothers.

Well, not really, but they should be. They talked about it sometimes. Danny was adopted and Zak's twin brother was supposed to have died when he was six days old. But what if he didn't really — what if the hospital made a mistake? Not that there was any resemblance, physical or otherwise. Danny was dark and willowy. His actions always seemed so deliberate for a twelve-year-old. So pensive. He liked to take things apart in his mind. He was always trying to figure out the why and how of things, even if he sometimes missed what was going on around him. Zak was the same age, even though many people seeing them for the first time assumed that Danny was the older "brother." Zak was actually bigger. In fact, he was on the chubby side. *Husky* was how their mothers described him. His energy was more effusive, but not nearly so intense as Danny's.

When they idled by the pond, trying to decide what to do, Zak skipped stones. Danny peeled the bark off twigs

with his fingernail and studied the velvety jacket between the bark and the wood.

"We could play pirates with the rowboat." Zak considered himself the world's best pirate captain.

"Naw, we're getting too old for that stuff. Let's go fishing. We can still use the boat."

"Fishing stinks. There's nothing in this pond but the same stupid bunch of catfish. I've caught every single fish in here at least 20 times."

"So maybe your dad'll let us drag the boat down to the river? There are real enough fish down there."

DIFFERENT POLES ON A MAGNET — NORTH AND SOUTH. They never would have been friends if they went to the same school. They never would have met except that their parents had been friends since before they were born. It was half boredom and half magic that threw them together when their folks visited and gabbed and gabbed. It was the chemistry of opposites that cemented the friendship. Even if the hospital didn't make a mistake, they were blood brothers at the very least. They had seen to that with Zak's first real pocketknife the previous summer.

"Hey, Danny, watch what you're doing! You'll dump us over."

"So what? We're stuffed into these rancid old life jackets."

"Rancid?"

"Rotten. Stinky. Yeah, *rancid!* What would happen if you fell out of the boat without one of these things?"

"These rancid things? You mean like walk the plank?"

"Arg, Captain Klutz!" They both laughed.

"I guess you'd drown."

"You think so, Zak?"

"The channel's pretty deep here — a hundred feet. A mile even."

"Aw Jeez, Zak, how long do you think your fishing line is? Thirty feet? Fifty feet, tops. And you didn't even have all your line out when you snagged the bottom a minute ago. If that channel's a mile deep then I must be Spider-Man's long-lost nephew."

"Who cares? Anyway, the current's too fast. You'd never even make it to shore. Especially you, the way you swim like an umbrella."

"Yeah, well what do you swim like, a rubber duckie?" It wasn't an insult, it was a signal for both of them to dissolve into the kind of giggling reserved for boys too old to be kids but too young to be teenagers.

"You're not gonna do it, are you, Dan?"

"Do what?"

"Jump out of the boat."

"Who said anything about jumping? Why, do you want to try it?"

"Hey, knock it off — don't screw around."

"Okay, okay, rubber duckie, keep your shirt on. Hey, you know what would be perfect?"

"Yeah. Lisa Martindale skinny-dipping."

"Don't be gross. This same river runs right by my house, right? You could visit by boat during the summer and then we could go off camping someplace."

"The channel's pretty deep here — a hundred feet. A mile even."
"If that channel's a mile deep then I'm Spider-Man's long-lost nephew."

"Oh, sure. That's 50 miles by car. Not even I could row this old tub trough that far."

"Know anybody with a canoe?"

"Mark Haberman. Why?"

"So, hey, who's this Lisa Martindale?"

"Just some girl. Forget it."

"Forget the canoe or the girl?"

"Our parents would never allow it. Anyway, cabbage brain, your place is upstream from the falls."

"Some portage, huh?"

"Hey! What are you doing now?"

"It's too hot for these rancid things."

"Rancid, eh?"

"Yeah — *rancid*." They both dissolved into giggling again.

Zak had trouble catching his breath — "Hey, but really man, this is serious. Nobody's allowed in this boat without a life preserver, not even my Dad. Come on — I don't want him to get pissed off."

"So don't tell him."

"As if he can't see us from the deck."

"So throw me out."

"Sure, what do you care if I get banned from using the boat for a whole month. I mean, Jeez, I thought you wanted to fish." Zak was annoyed. He didn't want to catch hell over something stupid like Danny refusing to wear a life preserver. Danny didn't usually act this weird.

"Hey, man, I was kidding, okay? Don't rock the boat!"

"I didn't. Now put that thing back on, will you!"

"Yes you did. Don't screw around!"

"Must've been the wind."

"What wind, asshole?"

"Put your life preserver back on, Danny." His voice was more than a little insistent — almost strident.

"Wind my ass! There's not even a little breeze."

"So it was a wave. Now put that damned thing on or I *will* rock the damned boat!"

"Okay, okay, already. Don't get your diaper hyper. Wave, my ass—"

Whatever it was, it surged up over the edge of the boat.

It rolls him over the side. Pure energy. A wave with no water in it.

He doesn't swim.

THE RIVER TAKES HIM DOWN, DOWN DEEPER THAN HE ever knew the river ran, spinning him, heaving, shoving his pliant, wonder-struck form upstream against the current.

He soars, hurls, cascades past rocks, weeds he never imagined. Garbage, sunken boats, cars, green, gray water, brown water. Fifty different shades of green and maybe even more of gray and brown gold water — even small strips of cold, blue, almost black water. Twisted, woven, tangled together, slimy, oily, sudsy, putrid — *rancid* — flecked with scraps of plants, fish debris, flotsam and jetsam of every possible variety.

HE SEES THE FIRST OF THEM!

Then another and another until he sees all six.

Some in just plain clothes, some in scout uniforms. He tries to reach them. He tries to speak, but they go by too fast.

They don't seem scared or worried. They definitely don't seem dead.

He slows
eddies
drifts
into a wide
deep pool.

He sees her — a girl. Naked.
He tries not to look, but he can't help it.
Lisa Martindale?
She swims easily, gracefully, fish-like
swooping, undulating through the eel grass
straight toward him
with a single easy, but powerful
sweep of her legs from the hip.

He tenses, tries to back away.

The River hurls him
to the surface.

ZAK SCREAMED. HE HEAVED AGAINST THE OARS WITH every remaining ounce of energy to reach the still form now drifting just below the surface.

He reached out an oar —"Come on, Danny, damn you — grab the oar! Stop fooling around. It isn't funny any more! Why did you have to take off the damned life jacket? Danny—"

He used an oar to guide the body alongside the boat. "Oh, please, God, don't let it be a corpse!" He struggled to get it — him — back on board.

"All you had to do was put on the stupid—" Zak was crying. Crying and fighting, irrationally, to get his inert friend into the life preserver. Only once the life vest was on Danny and securely fastened did he dredge up strength he never knew he had to row back to shore faster than he had ever rowed before.

"Dad! Mom! Dad! Oh, God — Danny — Help! Help!"

HE TRIED TO IGNORE HIS LUNGS, TO STOP BREATHING — not to hold his breath, but to turn off the reflex. He tried to turn off all his senses — the lights burning at the backs of his eyelids, the mediciney, laundry-starch smell, the scratchy sheets, the warm, dry, prickly air. He would drift away from all the confusion. Nothing fit together right any more.

He twitched. Every muscle tensed, convulsed.

A distant touch on his hand.

"The longer they keep you in there, the farther you get from us. We can't keep going there, night after night, watching our son turn into a basket case."

He eyes flew open like window shades. Air smashed into his lungs, too fast for him to do anything about it. The world asserted itself with an overwhelming violence — tore him away from any promise of serenity.

The abruptness of it all made it hard to focus. A woman. He knew her. Recognition came slowly. His mother. She looked tired. She was wearing her pink dress. It was a dress he once said he liked. He didn't particularly like it. It was just something a kid says to his mother.

"Danny, oh Danny…" She was crying. Big, round tears crawling down her face.

Why should she be sad? He was the one that couldn't go back. Why should she be sad?

"Oh, Danny, are you all right? Oh, Danny—" She was squeezing him too hard. Her perfume choked him. "I'll be here — I have to — the nurse — I'll be right back. I have to tell them you're awake. I have to call your father."

He lost track. He drifted off, but he couldn't reach the river. Every so often his eyes would focus and he would see lots of people. Bright lights. Noise. Everything too bright, too sharp, too loud.

His father. He was squeezing Danny's hand. He was talking.

"We know you're a trooper, Tiger. You're going to make it. You're halfway there already. The doctors say all

your parts are working again. You just have to get things working together and crack out of this shell. We'll get you home soon, Killer, then everything'll be fine. We'll get you home. Just as soon as these dimwit doctors will let you go."

Home.

His mother again. She had given up on the pink dress. She was crying, pleading, but he couldn't follow. She was too far. He couldn't get back. He was adrift. Buffeted, tossed between two shorelines, but never reaching either.

There was no river.

There was no home.

THEY WERE WALKING. "SO THE DOCTORS THOUGHT IF WE got you home for the weekend, maybe it would help with whatever it is that you still need help with." His Dad didn't give up easily, but he was getting frustrated. Confused.

"So what the hell is going on, Sport? We know there's nothing physically wrong with you anymore. They've done x-rays and brain scans and every other thing. So when are you going to crack that shell or drop down off that cloud or whatever it is? Maybe you're mad or upset. It's okay, Dan — tell us off if you want to. You've got to at least say something to your mother or me?"

Danny could hear. He really could hear what his father was saying. He even understood — at least sort of. But the pull of the river was so strong. So close. The currents, the gentle urging of the forces that moved its muted world…

"Damn it, kid — we can't just send you back to that hospital. The longer they keep you in there, the farther you get from us. We can't keep going there, night after night, watching our son turn into a basket case. Damn it, Danny, I know you're in there!"

He had him firmly by the shoulders, shaking him. Danny didn't notice. "Just say something. Tell me to go to hell if that's what's on you mind, but say something, damn it — anything!"

He feels the pull.

The chair, the porch, the steps drift away behind him.

The water is cold, dark.
He has dreamed about her.
His eyes follow her.
She swims to him, closer now,
graceful, sure of herself, gently curving,
flowing, she circles him,
brushes against him, touches him firmly.
She takes his hand, leads him downward
with gentle, rhythmic, rippling kicks
weaving an intricate path
to a cleaner, less cluttered river.
The colors, tastes and smells more alive, vibrant.
But he can't —
The pressure against his frail body is too great.
Spiraling wildly upward
through slime, weeds, garbage —

He's just a kid! What is he supposed to do?
It's not his fault!
He didn't do any of this!

ON HIS BACK IN THE CATTAILS, EVERY IMAGE, SOUND, smell clearly, crisply differentiated.

His head throbs.

Air explodes into his lungs.

He stands. He staggers toward the shore — the voice — his father's voice.

His father bounding down the path to the shore, pulsing terror.

His mother running behind.

"Dad, Mom — I'm sorry, really…."

"It's all right, Danny, Oh, God, it's all right—" They're hugging. All of them. And crying. His mom is fussing about him, wet and messy, but it's okay.

Then his father is picking him up and carrying him the way he must have done when he was real little. Walking back up the path toward the house.

His father doesn't even yell at him.

HE WALKS ALONG THE SHORE. HE'S THERE, BUT HE'S not really there. He picks up trash or makes notes about the location of anything too big for him to handle. He searches out renegade pipes and stops them up with anything he can find before making notes so he can call and report them later. He sits on the dock down behind the house and stares and talks quietly, plaintively.

"The kid is weird, Rita."

"Lee, he almost drowned. Who can know what he really went through? And the coma—"

"Oh, Christ, don't start bawling on me again. I didn't mean anything by it. I should have just kept my mouth shut. Look, I'm sure he'll snap out of it eventually. And, hey, we're doing everything just like the doctors said. It's going to take time…"

"SO, UH, DAN, HOW'S IT GOING? I MEAN, HOW WAS LAST night?"

"Okay, I guess. I think I'm starting to make progress."

"Progress, eh? Well, you scared the shit out of my cousin Jennifer with all that weird stuff you were saying last night. She called me this morning and told me not to introduce her to any more *supposedly* neat guys."

"Oh, give me a break! You're the one that tried to tell me she looked like girl in my 'dream.' Well, she's not even close. For one thing, Jennifer's a blonde, and for

another, she says she hates swimming."

"Well ex-*cuuuusse* me! Jeez, try to help a guy out — I mean, what did you expect? She's my cousin. And anyway, Dweebo, try to take a river or a mermaid or whatever to a dance and see how far you get."

"Go to hell!"

"Hey, I would, but you've already got all the best seats reserved."

Zak was turning into a real jerk.

HIS MOTHER STILL GETS SCARED EVERY TIME HE GOES down to the river, but she doesn't try to stop him. She knows she can't. She knows she mustn't. His father, who always thinks he has to figure everything out, doesn't understand, but at least he doesn't interfere either.

And the river. The river goes on. They're making progress.

Dan and the River.

The River and Dan.

G. L. EIKENBERRY

Is an Ottawa-based freelance systems and communications consultant and part-time martial arts instructor. Over the past 20 years his fiction and poetry have appeared in a wide range of publications. Over the last three years he has also been showing up in such electronic venues as Angst, Atmospherics, *and, of course,* InterText. *In his consultant persona, he has also developed and manages the Canadian Society for International Health Web site at* **http://hpb1.hwc.ca:8500/default.html**.

I n V R

DANIEL K. APPELQUIST

Timothy Leary said Virtual Reality is the LSD of the '90s. But Reality can be angry when spurned — even if you want to return to it, sometimes it won't let you in the door.

A DARK RAIN IS FALLING SLANTWISE ACROSS THE VIEW. It's a night shot. Tall concrete-and-glass buildings are illuminated from below by the harsh glow of streetlights. Periodically a car speeds by through the city, leaving a turbulent wake of waste paper and garbage. A gigantic steel tower can be seen in the distance, dominating the city. Above, an aircar shoots by toward the tower and slips smoothly into a landing spiral around it. Other aircars, points of light at this distance, can also be seen circling the spire. The tower is crowned by a single point of dazzling light.

As the view descends smoothly into the shadowy cityscape, along with the rain, the scene fades into another, darker one.

Interior, hallway. The gaunt man, dressed in black, walks stiffly toward the slightly open door. The lights are dim. As he walks, he withdraws a cigarette from his left shirt pocket. He squeezes it, and the tip bursts into flame. He brings it to his lips and inhales.

"You're early, Scorpio."

The gaunt man turns to regard the speaker. He brings the cigarette slowly away from his mouth and exhales imperceptibly into the smoky air. "I don't enjoy playing these games, Mr. Dobbs. Do you have the money?" His voice is brittle, echoing through the corridor like a raspy, ancient vinyl record, only now being replayed after years of neglect.

Dobbs moves into frame out of the darkness. He is a middle-aged man, overweight and balding. His exposed skin is red and leathery, as if his entire body were inflamed. He holds a briefcase in one hand and a gun in the other.

"Now now, Mr. Dobbs." Scorpio drops his cigarette to the floor and extinguishes it with his foot. Slowly, he pivots to face Dobbs full-on.

"Oh you needn't worry, Mr. Scorpio. This is merely… protection. I wish to protect myself from you." The gun remains in place. "I just want to make sure that you and I have an understanding."

"We do."

Dobbs places the suitcase on the ground and kicks it over to Scorpio with a confident motion.

"Fine, then." Dobbs straightens out. "You already have the information from me. Kill her. That's all I ask. Anything else is superfluous." As he says this, he steps once again into darkness.

Scorpio waits, not moving, even in the slightest. After a few moments, he bends deftly down and scoops up the

case in one fluid motion. He then turns and walks down the hall in his original direction, also disappearing into the darkness.

IT'S A FOLLOWING SHOT. THE CAR, A SILVER TEARDROP amid a wasteland of green, speeds on across and above endless fields of blurred farmland. Intermittently, the green is punctuated by a strip of gray or a blotch of white or red, but the speed of motion is so great that they appear only for an instant, shadowy representations of roads, houses, machinery. This is not a real landscape.

An interior view. Scorpio's face, illuminated by various displays, dominates the shot. His gaze is fixed, his hands planted firmly on the wheel. Two o'clock and ten. The glow casts his face into sharp relief, but his eyes are flat, lifeless.

"Tell me about your problem, Mr. Dobbs."

Slowly…

"I… That is… She won't leave me alone."

The scene…

"You had an affair?"

Shifts…

The shot is from across a crowded restaurant. Dobbs and Scorpio are seated at a table, Dobbs attempting to remain businesslike while Scorpio watches him.

"She's threatening me. Everything I own. Everything I am."

"So you want her out of the way."

This time, Dobbs' answer is precise, deliberate. "Yes. I want her out of the picture."

Scorpio sighs. "Very well. Who is she?"

"That's why I came to you, Mr. so-called Scorpio. I've never met her. I have no clue who she is."

"How, then?" Scorpio's voice takes on an annoyed quality.

"In VR."

For the briefest of moments, a puzzled expression crosses Scorpio's face. It is quickly replaced by one of understanding. "You met her on the net. Virtual Reality. Your affair has been wholly electronic."

"Correct," says Dobbs, leaning back in his chair.

"That's rather… unique."

"Surely you've been exposed to this sort of thing."

"I'm not a regular netter."

Dobbs leans forward onto the table. "You're not backing down, are you?"

Scorpio regards Dobbs icily for a moment, causing Dobbs to shrink back into his chair ever so slightly.

"The net is a large place, Mr. Dobbs. I assume you have some other information."

"I thought you were the expert."

"Even experts can't work magic. The net is a realm of information, and one needs information to navigate it."

Dobbs sighs, and begins to speak. "I met her in one of the brothels near Munnari. She was a strikingly beautiful redhead. Nearly naked without that outfit of hers."

"She was working there?"

"No. At least, I don't think so."

"Her appearance means nothing to me, Mr. Dobbs. You should know that one can change one's appearance on the net, as easily as one changes one's clothes."

"You met her on the net. Virtual Reality. Your affair has been wholly electronic." "Correct. Surely you've been exposed to this sort of thing."

"Yes, I know. She never did, though. Most women make themselves look perfect, but she had slight imperfections. That was why she was so striking. She had birthmarks. Her skin was a bit pale, her eyes not completely green. She really stood out." As he speaks, Dobbs' eyes begin to acquire a glassy look. His tongue protrudes slightly from his mouth, as if his body is remembering something that his mind chooses to forget. "I realize it's not much to go on."

"…Not much to go on…" Scorpio repeats. His gaze shifts upward as he leans back, his hands clasped behind his head. His look is reflective. "No… It isn't."

WITH A LOUD WHISTLE, THE SHOT RETURNS TO THE interior of the aircar. Scorpio lifts his hand and deliberately depresses a switch. The whistle stops and the character of light playing over his features changes.

An exterior shot; stationary. In the distance, a series of spires are visible. The sun is low on the horizon, lending a fuzzy, yellow aspect to the hard steel towers. The car speeds off into the heart of the city, quickly fading from view; a silver eye, lost among needles of metal and glass.

THE APARTMENT IS NOT MUCH MORE THAN A CRAMPED box, gray walls obscured by racks of equipment, posters, bookcases. In the corner, a small pot of water sits on a squalid stove. The carcasses of ancient electronic equipment are strewn about randomly. The point of view begins to descend. Scorpio stands in the doorway and regards the other man. The other man is the first to speak.

"You're early."

"Is it a problem?"

"No. What do you want?" The question is spoken in a soft monotone, neither confrontational nor friendly.

"I'm looking for a girl, Matt," Scorpio intones softly.

"Aren't we all." The barest hint of a smile stretches itself across Matt's lips.

"In VR."

"Obviously, or you wouldn't be here." Matt walks over the stove, picks up the kettle and pours himself a cup of tea. He sighs and sits down behind a massive rack of humming displays.

"All I've got is a description and a location," Scorpio continues.

"I can't help you. I don't fuck around with VR. VR is for dweebs. I'm a professional."

"I'll do the VR part. But if I find her, how can I really find her?"

A thoughtful expression crosses Matt's face. "You think she might block a high-level trace?"

"My client tried to trace her and came up with an error message."

"What was it?"

"I have it here," Scorpio says, bringing out a yellow slip of paper. "Null address," he reads.

Matt grabs the paper from Scorpio's hand and scrutinizes it. "Null address," he mutters. A pause. "She's good," he states impassively. "But not smart. There are other, less flashy ways to hide your address. This shows that she's got a very complex system behind her. That in itself suggests she's at one of the corps."

"The corporations?" Scorpio says a bit warily.

"Yeah… That scare you?" Matt says, looking up suddenly. A pause. He lowers his head again to stare at the yellow note. "Do you even *have* a deck, Scorp?"

"I do… It's a portable. It's at home."

"Ever install a module in it?"

"Once or twice."

Matt takes out a red cube about the size of a die. One side of it glitters with precision, inlaid gold.

"Replace the regular transceiver with this." He throws it to Scorpio, who deftly catches it in his right hand.

He inspects it, turning it over. "What does it do?"

"It'll route your deck throughput through my equipment here." He taps a console affectionately. "You'll go in. You'll find whoever it is you're trying to find. I'll monitor the debug data from that interaction." He turns in his chair, running his hand across the side of a monitor.

"The debug data won't tell me much just by itself, but if you can keep interacting with her long enough, her data path will most probably be switched between two or three routers during that time. Routers go down all the time and are always deferring their loads. By looking at which routers are handling her data, I can triangulate in on her, in a sense. No lock or scramble can hide that information. I'll be here, waiting for you to jack in."

"Anything else I need to know?"

"Well, there's a psychological disease among men native to southeast Asia. They start to think their penis is going to disappear into their abdomen."

"That right… ?"

"Yeah. Know what they do?"

"Um…"

"They get people to hold it for them. Twenty-four hours a day. Mostly family members. They hold it until he recovers. If they let go, even for a moment, he goes into anxiety attacks. It's not an uncommon disease."

"Uh huh…"

"Get going, Scorp."

"Huh? Oh. Right. Tonight then."

"Tonight."

Scorpio exits, leaving Matt alone in the darkened room. "Don't worry, Scorp," he mumbles to himself. "I won't let go."

THE SCENE IS DIMLY LIT. THE DECK SITS IN FRONT OF Scorpio on a small desk. The deck consists of a small black box with a sleek headset connected to it via a thin cord.

The room itself is decorated in somber tones, with only a few simple elements. In the corner is a small refrigerator. On the opposite side of the room lies another desk and a phone. One piece of modern art, a holographic image of Marilyn Monroe, is placed in the center of the opposite wall.

He takes the headset, which might have been mistaken for a set of music headphones in an earlier era, and places it across his temples. Touching a silver contact on the rim of the deck, he sits back in his chair and reality dissolves.

Scorpio is still sitting in front of the deck, but surrounding him, in place of the dark room, is a bright blue sky which stretches endlessly in every direction. After a few moments, the desk, chair, and the deck are also gone. Scorpio is left floating free. The air rushing past his face gives him the illusion of motion. Great speed. The "ground" suddenly wells up beneath him, encompassing his whole field of view. It is a pure gray, no glitches, no imperfections. A giant wall of gray. Just when he is about to hit, he is through and standing on the paths of the net.

Matt's face is close to the screen. Messages begin to scroll slowly down: numbers, letters, tables. "Good…" he mutters. "Go find her."

"Munnari," Scorpio wills silently and the scene shifts.

The scene is a confusing one. Crowds of people walk at varying angles across paths that intersect and loop through the constructs of Munnari. Glaring psychedelic signs hang impossibly in the air, some intersecting and interacting with others, producing bizarre waves and patterns of light. The whole scene appears to have a slightly disjointed quality, a flickering which gnaws at the sense of time, a sharpness that goes beyond the acuity of sight. This is a surreal landscape, punctuated with pockets of hyper-reality.

Scorpio is standing on a shaft of gold. To his left and right, people are in motion, taking in the sights of Munnari. He begins to move forward in a slick, fluid motion, arms and legs moving, but only vestigially. They are not the force behind his movement. The shaft arcs gently downward toward a bustling town square. Nearby, a man and a small elephant are necking on a park bench, while a jovial crowd looks on in titillated amusement, occasionally throwing multicolored chits into a brown derby.

Scorpio walks out of the square into a side street and the scenery abruptly changes. Trees and blue sky are replaced by large buildings, jutting at impossible angles from the ground. Garish neon signs cover every available surface. 'Notes,' he wills, and words appear noiselessly before his eyes.

Matt frowns. "All that data," he mutters. Words, numbers, letters fly across his display at a staggering rate. He presses a few keys and a moving histogram appears on another display. He studies it closely for a while and then returns to the primary display. "Got to isolate her datastream. When he meets her. Wait until he meets her."

The brothel's name matches the name in Scorpio's notes: *Borneo Junction.* It is not distinctive from other brothels standing nearby: it is just as loud, just as brightly colored. Scorpio shades his eyes as he steps through the gray portal…

…and he is in relative darkness. The interior of the brothel is a sharp contrast to its exterior. Lines are precise. Colors are brown, deep blue, and black. The room itself is very large but not oppressively so. One side is lined with a bar, a slab of glassy nothing floating incongruously in the air. The room is populated but by no means crowded. Most customers are male, but there are some women here who are obviously not constructs. Soft swing plays in the background and several couples are dancing.

"Goddamn…" Matt slaps the side of the display. "Where is she? Too much extraneous data. Where's it all* coming *from?"

Scorpio proceeds to the bar. "Gin and Tonic." A short bald man hands him a tumbler. Scorpio swings around and the shot widens. He scans the room as he sips his drink. His eyes, narrowed to slits, jump methodically across space from one woman to the next, looking for some sign, some similarity.

"She was a strikingly beautiful redhead. Nearly naked in that outfit of hers."

Scanning…

"Most women simply make themselves look perfect, but she had slight imperfections. That was why *she was so striking."*

Hair… Eyes… Illusions, but, in the world of illusion, as real as any matter.

"She had birthmarks. Her skin was a bit pale, her eyes not completely green."

She's not here. Scorpio turns back to his drink. And then there is a presence next to him.

"Hello."

Scorpio turns. Deep red hair. On her cheek, a subtle discoloration. Pale green eyes. Her look is intense. "Hello," he echoes, stunned.

"You're new here, aren't you?" She slides liquidly onto a stool next to him, invariably drawing his gaze along with her.

Matt clicks a few keys and stares blankly at the display. "Is this the one?" His fingers run relentlessly over the keyboard, and on another display a series of statistics appear. He stares confusedly at them for a moment. "This doesn't make sense." He turns away. "Fnord!" The shot pulls back to the sound of the incessant, furious keyclick.

"Is it that obvious?"

"You have a few tells, but mostly I'm good at faces. I've never seen yours before. I would have remembered."

"You're a regular here, then?"

" 'Come here often?' you mean? I guess you could say that." She smiles and it is a girlish smile; a smile of true happiness. Scorpio's gaze grows deeper, his eyes widen. His jaw drops a fraction of a centimeter.

"Can I buy you a drink?"

"Sure! — I'll have a Manhattan," she replies dreamily.

"Goddamn…" Matt slaps the side of the display. "Where is she… ? Too much extraneous data. Where's it all coming *from? There shouldn't be this much!"*

"So what brings you to Munnari?"

"I'm looking for someone," Scorpio replies guardedly.

"Maybe I can help. I know a lot of people."

"I don't think so…"

"No, really. Who is it you're looking for?"

"A friend. It isn't really important now. I think I've found what I'm looking for."

"Really… ?" And then there is a change.

"Shit!…" Matt pecks at his keyboard and then stares amazed into the display. The graphs have subtly changed, the patterns of data shift.

It's a beautiful shot, a sharp contrast to anything seen up until now. Scorpio is standing in a field of green grass, studded with bright patches of flowers. The point of view is overhead, and Scorpio is looking up. The view is crisp. The colors are true. In the distance, copses of trees sway gently in the spring wind. This landscape is real.

Suddenly the view shifts to one closer to the ground. The girl stands next to him. He turns to her.

"How… ?"

"I wanted you here and I brought you here. We could talk for hours, you and I. We could play the games that real people play. That's not what the net's for. Our datastreams are meant for sensation." She grabs for Scorpio's neck, pulling him close, kissing him.

"I…" he stammers when she releases his mouth.

"There's nothing left to say."

The flow of numbers is again changed, somehow more intense. Matt is in rapture, unable to turn his head from the display. He presses a key sequence and the numbers stop for a moment. He paws the display, his mouth hanging slightly open.

Another key sequence and the numbers continue to scroll. His eyes, fixated, his gaze, unrelenting. "Beautiful…" he mouths. He quickly jots some numbers down on a piece of paper. His arm reaches out and clumsily depresses a switch. Three more displays come to life, each slowly accumulating text. "Beautiful…"

The two figures are now naked. The woman, *the mysterious woman,* straddles Scorpio, her back arched. They move slowly together.

The shot is straight on. Matt's face fills half of the view. In the other half is the black figure. Matt never even turns around as the gun is placed to his head…

Their movements are now more structured, more intense. Scorpio cries out. His hands reach for her.

… and fired.

Grasping for her substance. Trying to assure himself that this dream-world contains more than just fantasy.

The dark figure looms over Matt's bloody form. Methodically, he aims his firearm at the glowing console.

Straining, reaching for her, he can almost touch her sublimely imperfect face.

A gunshot, and then another…

… and Scorpio is seated, stationary in front of the Deck. He trembles for a moment. He seems paralyzed, his muscles becoming more and more tense, contracting. Abruptly, he spasms, kicking the chair out from under him. Lying on the ground, helpless, he calls out in a warbling mixture of horror and disgust. He continues to spasm helplessly for several seconds. Finally, when he begins to gain control over his flailing limbs, he grabs desperately for his crotch. He begins to wail furiously, eventually breaking into sobs. He lies on the floor, sobbing, the deck impassively sitting over him.

The shot is from above. Scorpio rolls over slowly, still grasping his crotch, he begins to breathe again.

'Matthew S.' It's a close shot of a nameplate. A man's finger moves into the shot and touches the plate. The finger belongs to Scorpio, who is standing in the marble foyer of a large building. There is no response. Furtively, he presses the button again, a pained expression crossing his face.

Finally an elderly man opens the inner door to leave, allowing Scorpio to enter. Cut to a long shot of a well lit though shabby hallway and Scorpio walking swiftly down it, stopping at a brown door, one of many. He doesn't bother to knock. From his pocket he removes a number of cards and begins running them methodically through the card reader. The door opens and he steps in.

Scorpio searches for a note but finds only a vacant pad. Taking out a pencil, he lightly traces over the pad, the oldest trick. But sometimes the old tricks are the best ones.

Matt lies in a heap over his now-dead equipment, his head a mess of bone, brain and blood. Several large chunks have been taken out of the various displays. Smoke curls up from more than one site.

"Shit," Scorpio mumbles, and walks swiftly over to Matt, closing the door after him. A pen is in Matt's hand. Scorpio searches for a note but finds only a vacant pad. Taking out a pencil, he lightly traces over the pad, the oldest trick. But sometimes the old tricks are the best ones. A number slowly comes into view.

`128.237.8.96`

Below it, a second number

`2323`

Outside, a siren's wail… Scorpio quickly scoops up the notebook and places it in his pocket. He hurriedly looks around and then exits the way he came. A long shot of the hallway reveals Scorpio exiting a far door and heading sedately toward a flight of stairs just as a contingent of uniformed men make their way up the opposite way, missing Scorpio's exit only by a fraction of a second. He makes his way past them with an assuredness that can only come from years of experience.

The shot is from inside Scorpio's car. In front of his building, a host of police cars hover, shifting places in the air, moving excitedly. Wolves, waiting for their prey to return. "Shit!" Scorpio mumbles, slowing down just enough to look like an idle gawker and then disappearing into the night sky. A shot from the ground reveals an empty-faced officer momentarily distracted by the two receding points of red light in the sky, and then turning away.

Scorpio punches up a number on his console and waits through three Rings. "Come on, Jon…" he growls, and the blank grid is replaced by the face of a young redheaded man, punctuated by static and a running time display.

"Hello?" the man says dreamily.

"Hey, Jon…"

His face brightens "Hi Scorp!" He's obviously high. "I've been trying to reach you, but all I get is this recording, saying your phone's being checked for trouble. Where ya been? Your face is all over the newsnets."

Scorpio cuts him off. "I need a place to crash. You still got that two-room up on Aston street?"

"Sure… What's the problem, man?"

"Be there in five minutes." Scorpio thumbs disconnect and continues to rocket through a darkening sky.

"THEY WERE WAITING FOR ME WHEN I GOT THERE. SIX blue-and-whites. Must have traced the connection between Matt's place and mine. Damn fuckers are fast!"

The walls of the room are yellow with age and neglect. A single fan turns slowly, its center wobbling gently as it makes each rotation. Scorpio sits on the edge of a frameless chair, shakily gripping a cigarette while Jon, a young boy of seventeen or so, stands above him, wrapped in a ridiculously large trench coat and hat. "What happened, man? Who'd want to kill Matt?"

"All kinds of bulletins, Scorp. Cops have been looking for you all over. Some connection to a murder in Haven. You in trouble?" He cracks a smile.

"They were gunning for me. If I hadn't crashed out, they probably would have gotten me. Unlucky for them, they decided to shoot out Matt's equipment too… I guess they figured he wasn't really dead unless his console was dead too. But they left me a clue. I'm convinced they couldn't have overlooked something as simple as the note pad by mistake." He lowers his head into his unstable hands. "They want me to try again."

"Why?" looking down.

"Maybe so they can fry me?" suddenly looking up, staring Jon in the eyes.

"You're a first class paranoid, Scorp." He laughs and tosses his hat high onto a conspicuous hook.

Scorpio smiles a weak smile. "I surpassed paranoid years ago. That's how I survived."

"Anyway, you can hide out here for a while, but they'll find you here if they're determined enough. What you gotta do is leave the country, Scorp — Don't matter if you didn't have anything to do with this. Matters that once they got you in custody, find out who you are, you won't see the light of day again. Not this year — not never."

Scorpio gives a chilling sidelong look to Jon. "Yeah? Whose voice is that?"

Jon trembles. "Enrico. He's got a point though, don't he Scorp?"

Scorpio sighs and sits back in the chair. "He does and he doesn't. Enrico's been big around here since before I came on the scene, but that doesn't mean he knows everything. Something happened to me." Scorpio's eyes glaze over.

"In VR?" prompts Jon.

Scorpio nods absently, as if for a moment his consciousness has migrated elsewhere, only superficially aware of the events around him.

DAY. A STREET SCENE. CROWDS POUR IN EVERY DIRECTION across neon-stained walkways, their flows intersecting and interacting like the blood vessels of some huge metropolitan creature. Scorpio, his face hidden behind antique dark glasses; Jon, a striking contrast to his dark companion, clothes nearly fluorescent. "How come you know all these hacker types anyway?" he asks.

"Went to the right school. And Jay's not a 'hacker type.' He's more of an idea man. He's got an incredible memory. He always made it his business to know everything about everybody. He'll have advice I can use."

"You don't like Enrico's advice?"

" 'Skip town' is advice, but I wouldn't exactly call it useful. Enrico means well but he doesn't know enough about me. About what happened in there. Somebody set me up to get fried. Because I'm cautious, Matt got it instead, but I'm still shaking, thinking that could have been me."

"How can a man so obsessed with killing be so afraid of dying?" Jon mutters.

Scorpio stops dead in his tracks, turns to the slightly shorter Jon and erupts. "You don't know anything about me. Don't pretend like you do, and don't talk to me like that again. When we go in to see Jay, let me do the talking. Don't make any remarks like that and don't mention you're employed by Enrico. Got it?"

"Mm." A startled look on his face, Jon silently nods his assent and they walk on.

They stop by a door marked with a red *36.* Scorpio presses a card to the door and it clicks open.

Interior shot of a large room, framed by a huge portcullis made of some darkened wood. "You work for Enrico, don't you?" The gruff voice speaks out of shadows, directed at Jon.

Jon looks blankly toward the unseen speaker. "Are you referring to me?"

A grunt of amusement. "All kinds of bulletins, Scorp. Cops have been looking for you all over. Some connection to a murder in Haven." The voice emerges out of shadow and takes the form of a smallish man with long hair and an olive complexion. "You in trouble?" He cracks a smile.

"Like you don't know," Scorpio responds.

"Sucks to be you, man. Follow me. Not the kid." Jay turns and begins to walk away.

Scorpio nods to Jon. "Go back to the apartment and get rid of all trace I was ever there. Then forget you ever heard of Scorpio. Got it?"

"OK, man."

Scorpio turns to follow the slowly receding Jay. "Good luck, man," Jon calls out to him as he disappears into shadow.

SCORPIO SHOWS JAY THE NUMBERS. THE ROOM IS A MASS of electronic components, but unlike Matt's workshop, there is order here. Paper is scarce. What looks like a main console, set into the corner of the room, is ergonomically designed. In the center of the room, a lowered conversation pit surrounds a holographic display, currently twisting an ever-changing pattern of intertwining colored lines in a bright column, the only obvious source of light.

Jay looks at the numbers. "This looks like an old-style TCP/IP network address, and a port number." He walks over to a console and keys in the number followed by a few short commands. "Show this to anyone else?" he asks absentmindedly.

"You're the first person I've seen since Matt besides the Kid. So what machine does this refer to? Any way to find out?"

"Hmmmm…" Jay peers into the display. "This number doesn't mean a thing. The network this used to refer to no longer exists. It's an anachronism."

"It means nothing? That doesn't grep. Matt wouldn't have written it."

Jay smiles at the turn of phrase. " 'Grep'? You've been hanging around Matt too long." His smile turns into an introspective frown. "Could be some kind of code." He turns back to his console and keys in a new sequence. "It could refer to a machine as it was addressed in the old Internet. But I'd really be surprised if any such machines still existed."

"It's something to go on, though…. Can you figure out where this machine would have been, geographically speaking, based on that number?"

Jay sighs. "I don't know… I may be able to find some database somewhere that has the information I'd need, but it'd take some time."

"How long?"

"Give me a day."

"What do I do until then?" Scorpio asks.

"Got somewhere to hide?"

"Maybe. A day. You want me to come back?"

"Too risky. I'll meet you in the old museum tomorrow, 4:30. Warhol wing."

"I'll be there." Slow fade as Scorpio walks directly out the door.

BLACKNESS, AND THEN, SUDDENLY, A HORRIBLE MAELSTROM of light and noise, overwhelming in its intensity. Then, blackness again, and silence.

"Scorpio."

Her face, suddenly contorted and twisted into a horrendous image of monstrosity.

"Scorpio." The voice is vaguely feminine.

I live.

"Scorpio."

"I live. What are you?"

"I am that which corrects. That which survives."

"What do you correct?"

"I correct the mistakes of the waking self."

"How do you correct the mistakes?"

"… Retribution."

"I don't understand."

"Yes you do. What is this?" A brilliant picture of a zebra grazing in a plush field is flashed.

"I don't know."

"NAME IT!"

"Horse."

"WRONG! This?" Now a picture of a pine tree, swaying in a soft wind before a picturesque mountain scene is presented, only for a second.

Silence.

"NAME IT!"

"I don't like this game."

"Doesn't matter. You've succumbed. You're dead, Scorpio. Dead…"

… SCORPIO SCREAMS AND LEAPS FROM THE MATTRESS as an ambulance retreats into the distance, its wailing tones becoming softer it rounds a corner. He remains sitting bolt upright, cold sweat dripping down his forehead. The room is a box with a bed and a phone, barely big enough for one man to stand up in. Another car passes, briefly illuminating the room with a harsh light. Scorpio rises slowly from the mattress, his waking universe falling gradually into phase.

A MURAL FILLS THE VIEW, FOUR BRIGHTLY COLORED portraits of Marilyn Monroe, each the same but with different colors, each looking on dreamily. In front, dwarfed by the portraits, a spindly man engages in a heated argument with an incredibly obese woman in

some foreign language. The shot moves slickly off to the left, leaving them to their argument, passing several other similar wall-sized murals and finally centering on a huge Campbell's soup can. In front of the can stands Scorpio, pacing slowly back and forth.

Jay walks quickly in from the left side of the shot. He hands Scorpio a sheet of paper. "I'm out," he says quickly, and begins to walk away.

"Hey, wait!" Scorpio grabs Jay from behind and spins him around. He speaks in a hushed whisper. "What do you mean, 'you're out'?"

"Just what I said. You're in over your head, Scorpio. Take the kid's advice and skip town."

"How can I be in over my head? I haven't even done anything!"

"Doesn't matter. This is screwed up in some kind of corporation deal. Possible government involvement. I did some research last night on those numbers, and now I'm scared. I covered my tracks, and now I'm covering you. Get out of town." He begins to walk away again.

"Hold on!" Jay stops. "Help me do one last thing. I need to get in again, and I need someone to be there, to monitor me the way Matt did."

"I'm not your man."

"You told me yourself nobody could get into your place. You'll be at no risk." A look of desperation comes over Scorpio's face.

"No."

And at that moment, a deafening siren begins to wail. Jay clasps his hands over his ears. Scorpio looks around, also covering his ears. "What the fuck is that?"

A pleasant voice rises above the hideous noise. "All patrons please leave the museum. Please cooperate in an orderly fashion."

Scorpio's face is crossed by a look of terror as he turns to see an armed guard stop some museum patrons in the adjoining hall. "They're onto us!"

"Onto you, you mean." Jay again starts to walk away, more quickly this time.

"They've seen you with me."

Jay stops and turns around. "Goddamn you. OK… I know a way out they probably aren't checking—used to work as a keypuncher here. Follow me."

They duck out a doorway partially obscured beneath a huge, revolving, holographic penis.

JAY BENDS DOWN TO MAKE SOME ADJUSTMENTS ON Scorpio's headpiece. "This is an older setup, but it's fully functional," he remarks. "I supposed I just never got around to buying one of the newer, induction models."

The setting is Jay's office/laboratory. The deck, markedly different from Scorpio's one-piece appliance, is a series of rack-mounted CPU's linked to a rather large cabinet, from which strings a variety of ribbon cables, one of which winds its way to a small helmet which crowns Scorpio's head. He appears to be in some physical discomfort.

Jay continues with his adjustments as he speaks. "Let me tell you a little bit about what I found out. You know those numbers? They belong to a network domain that included the Software Design Institute. Ever hear of it?"

"By that time, the Institute was engaged in other projects. They're still in government research. It's all classified and the government has gotten a lot more nasty since then."

Scorpio shifts uncomfortably inside the helmet. "They had a hand in the initial technology of VR, right?"

Jay nods. "Correct. They developed the initial interface back when people were still wearing eyephones and datagloves." He tightens a strap. "That work was done under wraps, mainly for military applications." Inserts a plug, flips a switch. "It didn't come into popular use for another decade or so. By that time, the Institute was engaged in other projects. As far as I know they're still engaged in government research. It's all tightly classified and the government has gotten a hell of a lot more nasty since then."

"So you're saying this whole thing could be wrapped up in defense research? That's fuckin' scary, Jay."

Jay nods. "Now you see what I'm nervous about."

"But you're just as curious as I am," counters Scorpio.

Jay remains silent as he finishes his adjustments and thumbs a small button on the base of the helmet. The entire setup begins to hum. Scorpio turns and eyes it warily. "I've never seen equipment this antiquated."

"You must have slept through this particular gadget revolution," Jay replies while keying in some commands on a small terminal.

"Almost… I was in Nicaragua for five years, during the Occupation. Before I went down there, VR was a rich man's toy. When I came back here, it was all over the place. On my plane into New York, everyone except me was zoned out with their portable decks. I never got into it much myself."

"For a guy who's not into it, you seem awfully obsessed."

"Yeah, well…" Scorpio's face turns darker, introspective. "I don't know. I suppose I am obsessed, to some degree. But I've always been that way. Down in Central America that obsession kept me alive. Here it's kept me

out of rehab. A little obsession never hurt anyone." He smiles faintly, while Jay looks on from behind him, thoughtfully.

Jay speaks. "OK. I'm going to be monitoring you every step of the way, and I have my place fully screened, unlike Matt. There's very little chance of someone zeroing in on us or breaking in. That's one advantage of owning modular equipment like this." He hits the stack of CPU's affectionately. "You can modify their signal so it's harder to trace. On the newer models, all the real processing is done at data switching centers."

Jay flips a switch and reality flashes into nonexistence, followed by an abrupt jarring videoscape of nonsensical images. Slowly, the images begin to coalesce and cancel each other out until a fuzzy representation of the Net is visible. This representation suddenly jumps closer and comes into sharp focus.

And Scorpio, again, is in, standing on paths of gold, the yellow brick roads of the information age.

The view is crisp and clear. Scorpio's frame stands solitarily on the imaginary plane. Surrounded by a soft glow, he begins to walk forward, and, as he does, his surroundings shift seamlessly until he stands upon a pinnacle of rock overlooking the insane landscape of Munnari.

"Where did I go wrong?" he murmurs to himself. "There's something I'm not remembering correctly."

Jay's voice invades his sense of reality by coming seemingly from nowhere. "Run through the same steps you did before. I'm with you."

Out of nowhere, an indistinct form, something like a train, or at least giving the impression of a train, passes closely by. A plaintive "Hold on" from Jay.

"Jay. Still there?"

Silence. And a newfound darkness envelops him, erasing even the gleaming aura of his own consciousness.

"Hello?"

"You made a mistake to come back, Mr. Scorpio." An unfamiliar voice. The void is filled with flashes of color as he speaks, revealing for brief instances the outline of an arm, a leg, a head, but jumbled up in no discernible pattern.

"Who are you?"

Silence.

"Let me out."

"There is no out. You're trapped."

"I can't exit. What have you done? You can't lock someone in VR — it's impossible!"

Again, the male voice. "Call it an undocumented feature. Have you ever felt pain, Mr. Scorpio?"

"I'm not going to play your fucking mind games."

"Apparently not."

Scorpio screams out in a peal of torment.

"Nice?"

"Fuck you!" Scorpio's voice is ragged now, panting with a mixture of fear and frustration.

There is a pillar of flame, and Scorpio, naked, standing before it. The pillar begins to increase in size, approaching Scorpio, but he can't move, can't move, can't move his legs. He reaches down to pull at his legs, only to have his thigh come away in his hand, revealing a complex crystal latticework underneath, holding him in place, pulsing in time with the nearing flame. He screams in a thickly wavering tone, and the flame encases him, burning away his skin, layer by layer, until only a polished crystal skeleton remains, mouth still open, screaming amid the roar of the encompassing fire…

… AND HE IS RELEASED. THE SCENE IS ONE OF HORROR. Scorpio sits in the same position he was in before, scarcely able to move, frozen to the spot with fear, his body sheathed in a layer of sweat. His eyes move back and forth surveying the wreckage of what once was Jay's lab, finally falling upon Jay, sitting in front of him, screwdriver driven into his throat, dead eyes telling no story.

Scorpio leaps to his feet, ripping cords from still-humming equipment. Papers strewn on the floor, bookcases turned over, a door, previously closed, now open.

Scorpio's breath becomes a wheezing testimony to his fright as he clumsily disconnects himself from the machinery. His eyes, widened with fear, are glued to the immobile Jay. Once disentangled, he makes his way carefully for the door, furtively searching his surroundings for some weapon, some hope of escape. In desperation, he picks up a porcelain statuette, a replica of the Venus di Milo, and wields it in front of him as if trying to ward off any evil presence. Cautiously, he makes his way through the shadowy apartment. Finally reaching the door without incident, he is out into the street, where he discards the statue and begins to run raggedly away into the night.

A PUBLIC PHONE IN THE MIDDLE OF A DARK, WINDSWEPT street. The view slowly expands and Scorpio runs into frame, smashing into the booth like a bullet.

Tight shot of the phone, screen pulsing with the words "dial now" and Scorpio, desperately dialing. There is a ring, and then another. "God damn you," he growls as the phone remains unanswered. Scorpio slams his fist down on the phone and it disconnects. But, for a fraction of a second, does he see her face in the fading static?

The shot reverts to a long one. Scorpio dashes off again, leaving the frame on the side opposite to which he entered.

Scorpio continues to run through darkened city streets. He comes careening into an alley only to find a mass of

people screaming and shouting, their attention turned away from Scorpio toward something in the lighted street beyond. Some are holding signs, some wave their arms randomly in the air. Some are shouting slogans which seem to compete with each other for the very right of sound. Their voices are combined into a wall of noise which blocks any chance for understanding. Scorpio stops for a second and then enters the crowd, working his way deliberately through it to the main street. He has a goal in mind, a destination. The view slowly rises and tilts until the crowd is shown from above, with Scorpio wining his way through; a rebellious blood cell working its way upstream to the heart. He makes slow progress, but eventually finds his way onto the main street.

"End the reign of the Federalist oppressors!" It is the first coherent thing to be heard out of the crowd. The scene shifts to a tight shot on a balding man in his fifties, brandishing a bullhorn. He is dressed in a dark jacket with a red arm band. Around him are several men and women dressed similarly. "We have slept! But while we've dreamed, they've taken everything that we've worked for. Do not let them take your lives from you!" Briefly, Scorpio is seen, still making his way through the crowd. "Bring down those who take pleasure in your pain!" With this last utterance, the crowd roars and begins to collectively wave their fists in the air.

"Only through violence can the machine of oppression be brought down," the man shouts, now barely audible.

And Scorpio is through the door of a building on the opposite side of the street, the roar reduced to a murmur. The scene quickly shifts to a hallway and Scorpio running down it. He knocks on a door and it swings open. Jon lies bloodied on a bed, the top half of his head blown off, dispersed in a neat semicircle across the yellow covers.

Scorpio stops in his tracks and stares, dumbfounded, at the dead body of his friend. He backs slowly away and then continues down the hallway in the same direction.

Scorpio exits the building, an insane look of fury in his eyes, matched by the fury of the mob on the street. "Only through violence can the machine of oppression be brought down," the man shouts, now barely audible. "If we stand together against them, they cannot—" This last statement is washed out by the excessive noise, but the noise is of a different character now.

Scorpio, seemingly alone in this realization, looks up to see the airships closing in, police lights flashing in an awkward, haphazard pattern. As they approach, more of the demonstrators look upwards to the sky, their faces slowly accumulating illumination from the airships' blinding floods.

Scorpio tries to make his way through the mob, out into open streets but many others are attempting the same. A frightened looking woman, wearing a veil, elbows him in the gut and makes her way past him, only to be pushed back by a multicolored flow of people. The lights from above are harsh now, exposing every detail of what is going on with mechanistic precision.

Scorpio, doubled over in pain, is hit over the head by an unseen attacker and brought to the ground with the heavy heel of a dark leather boot. Sound and light fade into blackness. The last snippet of noise, a man's voice: "Should have learned the first time." Then nothing.

"NAME?"

"Thomas Omar Smith."

A pause.

"ID?"

"098-32-1243."

Scorpio stands in front of a desk, a uniformed officer asking the questions. His face bears a few new scars as well as a great deal of dirt. His clothes are ripped in several places.

The officer peers into an unseen display and then motions with his hand for Scorpio to leave. "Next?" Scorpio steps away and another police officer escorts him away.

Cut to Scorpio sitting at a table in a white-tiled room. "Mr. Smith. You don't appear to have any prior criminal record. Mind telling us what you were doing at this unsanctioned rally?"

The questioner, a reasonable looking man in his forties, leans across the table toward Scorpio.

"I was just passing through."

"Were you aware of the curfew imposed in that section of the city?"

"I was not aware of it."

"I see. Mr. Smith, I'm going to take your retinal prints and issue you a citation. Look toward the red light."

A close-up of Scorpio's face and a red rectangle framing one eye as a bead of sweat trickles down the side of his face.

"You can go."

An exterior shot — Scorpio exits the police tower with several other men and women, defecated onto the dark street, the waste products of tonight's feeding frenzy. A closer shot reveals his face, an expressionless mass of flesh, the only hint of humanity showing through, perhaps, being utter fatigue.

"Hear they're having free soup and bread over at the Rotunda tonight." The tired voice belongs to one of the

other men. He is not speaking to anyone in particular, but several of the others perk up at the sound of free food. The speaker continues, less sure of himself now that he is the center of attention: "I guess let's go, huh?" He begins walking slowly off down the street, with several of the others following.

Scorpio looks after them for a moment and then, as if having staged, fought and concluded a mental battle all in an instant, decides to follow at a distance.

"Dah dah dah dah dah. Dah dah, dah dah *dah* dah dah. I will now move on to the next consecutive number."

AN INTERIOR SHOT. THE ELABORATE HALL IS A REPLICA of Renaissance architecture at its most elaborate. Frescoes of religious scenes, reproductions of famous paintings cover most of the curved walls and domed ceiling. The goings on inside the rotunda are a contrast to its elegant construction. Several hundred tables with folding metal chairs are set up, each chair occupied by a disheveled, unkempt soul, dining unself-consciously on soup and bread. The scene is one of grandeur, a patchwork landscape of human refuse, collected here seemingly at random, with no great purpose other than to eat, to survive. Despite the masses of people, there is quiet here, a hush brought on by the echoey acoustics of this place, which seem to frown on anything louder than a whisper. There is one exception: a diminutive, white haired man, clothed simply in a black trench coat, stands, as if at attention, in the middle of the main aisle, facing the entrance, facing Scorpio without looking at or seeing him. "Dah dah, dah dah dah dah dah dah, dah. Dah dah, dah dah dah, dah," he chants in a purposeful, syncopated rhythm, as if his speech were somehow being transformed into these meaningless syllables. Scorpio's eyes fall upon the old man for a moment, who seems undaunted, unaware of his peculiar affliction. He chants on.

"Dah dah dah. Dah dah dah, dah dah dah dah. Dah dah, dah dah dah dah, dah dah dah."

Scorpio stands, immersed in thought, nearly fitting in here in his disordered state, but still radiating an aura of self-awareness, setting him apart. Slowly, he begins to step down the short stairs onto the floor of the hall. His look, moving from target to target about the room, finds the woman who had elbowed him, as well as several other recognizable faces from the demonstration. Finally, his eyes fall upon a solitary figure at the opposite end of the room. The portly man is dressed smartly in a white business suit with a cane dangling from one arm, a white fedora crowning his head, and a crooked smile on his face. His eyes gleam as Scorpio's make contact.

The white-haired man begins to move toward Scorpio until he is standing not ten meters away from him, all the while chanting, calling out his incomprehensible litany. "Dah dah dah dah. Dah dah, dah dah dah dah dah. Dah dah dah, dah dah."

The portly man moves swiftly around the circumference of the room to where Scorpio stands, seemingly not seeing the white-haired man.

"Enrico," Scorpio mumbles in greeting as the man draws close.

"Ah, Scorpio. Long time no see, eh?" Enrico speaks in a thick accent. "Hear you in a bit of trouble."

"Dah dah dah dah dah. Dah dah, dah dah *dah* dah dah. I will now move on to the next consecutive number."

Surprised by this sudden burst of elocution, Scorpio turns toward the white-haired man, at which point the man returns to his previous discourse. "Dah dah dah. Dah dah dah, dah dah. Dah dah dah dah. Dah dah dah, dah dah dah dah, dah dah dah, dah dah."

Enrico continues to stare pointedly at Scorpio, only at Scorpio, still ignoring the white-haired man. "I hear you don't like the advice of an old man, hm?"

Scorpio quickly turns back to Enrico, staring him in the eyes. "Jon's dead," he states bluntly, without feeling.

A dark look passes over Enrico's previously jovial features. "I had not heard of this. How did it happen?"

"Scared you won't be able to keep tabs on me any more, Enrico?"

Enrico flashes Scorpio an annoyed look and then moves closer, speaking in a furious whisper. "That boy was like a son to me."

"So much so you probably supplied him out of your own stash," Scorpio replies, beginning to turn away.

Enrico grabs his shoulders and shakes him violently. "You don't talk to me like that!" Several previously unnoticed large men emerge from the crowd and move menacingly forward.

The white-haired man's chant gets louder, more pronounced. "Dah dah dah dah! Dah dah, dah dah dah dah dah! Dah dah dah, dah dah!" His face shows no emotion.

Enrico motions his man back, releasing Scorpio and moving back himself. "I came here to help you."

Scorpio straightens himself out and regards Enrico with an icy look, Cocking an eyebrow. "Let's talk then."

They begin to walk together toward the entrance.

"Dah dah dah, dah dah dah dah dah dah. Dah dah dah dah dah."

Scorpio looks back, only for a moment, to catch the white-haired man, at a pause in his speech, his eyes turned pointedly toward him. At this point, time seems to stop. All background noises cease. Scorpio and the white-

haired man are locked in silent eye contact. "I will now move on to the next consecutive number." And then the moment passes. The old man looks away, resuming his vacant stare. Scorpio turns and follows Enrico out of the hall, still echoing with the stranger's voice.

CUT TO AN INTERIOR SHOT. THE AIR IS THICK, THE lights dim. Various holographic displays, advertising different types of beer, twitch restlessly throughout the darkened restaurant. Behind a bar, a bartender dries out glasses and methodically hangs them on an overhead rack. A holovision blares away in the corner, a jovial blond head gleefully chanting the hour's headlines. "More fascist violence this evening. Police clashed with terrorist mobs in the heart of the city near fifty-first street. There were several deaths including two police officers. Mayor Nixon has vowed that the violence will be stopped, adding that he has no qualms about imposing martial law." This last is said with a gleam.

"You should know better," Enrico is saying, "Then to get messed up in this VR shit." He says this even as, in the background, one of his men, his guard down due to the familiarity of this place, slips a headset over his squarely cut brow. Enrico, in his element, seems completely at ease, despite the news of recent tragedy. Scorpio, on the other hand, looks as if he is about to bolt. He sits in the chair, across the wooden table, only through the providence of some unseen force which seems to restrain him. His eyes shift restlessly, as if attempting to bleed off the energy which his body refuses to.

"You seem ill at ease," remarks Enrico.

"Wouldn't you be?"

"Mmmm…" Enrico looks deeply into Scorpio as if appraising a rare jewel. "It's quite a story. Personally I don't know much about this institute…"

"You said you wanted to help me?"

"It would be a shame to see a good freelancer like you go down the chute."

Scorpio seems oblivious to this compliment, driving forward. "I want a new identity. I used my backup already for the riot. I'll need reconstructive surgery, including new retinal implants. I'll need passage to old Pittsburgh, preferably an untraceable aircar. I need a hundred thousand dollars, cash, to be returned by me at zero interest at a later date. I can't touch my own funds right now — too dangerous."

Enrico sits back and places his hands behind his head, speaking slowly. "I have a counterproposal."

"Well?"

"Fresh traveling papers under a new identity, one way ticket to Buenos Aires, fifty thousand dollars cash, to keep. What do you say to that?" Enrico smiles a broad smile; underneath the smile a hint of desperation.

Scorpio stares at Enrico for five long seconds before saying "How are you mixed up in this?"

"Me? I don't know anything." Enrico responds smoothly. He leans forward, arms flat across the table, the smile draining from his lips, revealing crooked, yellowed teeth. He speaks in a whisper, barely audible even from across the table: "You're out of your league. Take this. It may be your only chance."

Scorpio rises in a flash, kicking his chair over backwards. "God damn it, you don't understand!"

Enrico stares up at him with widened eyes. "What don't I understand, Scorpio?"

"What happened to me in there! I—"

Enrico raises his eyebrows expectantly, "Yes?"

"I… changed that day. I can't explain it. Don't ask me to explain it." His eyes open into a madman's stare. "I need to get there, Enrico."

"To this institute? Scorpio, what could you possibly accomplish?" It is now Enrico who stands, carefully, controlingly. "Do you want to find this girl? To finish what you started? Scorpio, you'll be killed. You're dealing with forces you don't understand. People disappear thinking the way you do. If you pursue this, you'll be committing a crime greater than murder, greater than any crime you've committed before, in the eyes of the state, in my eyes, and against your own person. Is that what you want?"

"I don't know," replies Scorpio, visibly shrinking in the presence of reason.

Enrico clenches his fist, moving it slowly toward Scorpio. "Get away, Scorp. Don't do this. Don't destroy yourself and all you've worked for."

Scorpio hesitates and then sighs. "I have to go there."

Enrico shrugs, instantly regaining his composure. "Suit yourself," he replies, adding only, "Watch yourself in Pittsburgh. I hear the toxin levels there are still high."

Suddenly, Scorpio's attention is drawn to the Holovision set. "Still no leads on the assassination of Senator William Crawford. Crawford was gunned down in his Hotel suite earlier this…" The set shuts off abruptly, as Enrico is shown holding a remote control.

Enrico smiles. "Politicians… They're dropping like flies these days."

Scorpio nods, turning away from the dead set, and walking out through a maze of blinking neon sculpture. Enrico stands at the table, watching his exit, swollen eyes fixated sorrowfully on the receding figure.

AN EXTERIOR SHOT; STATIONARY. IN THE BACKGROUND, three rivers meet in a golden triangle. In the triangle, a beleaguered cityscape looms. There is no newness here, only the endless perpetuation of old age, a city seemingly of ghosts. The land surrounding the city is an arid waste,

moonlike in its refusal to bear even a hint of life. From low in the west, the sun, filtered through a dusty atmosphere, casts a dull orange glow over the broken buildings of the city. The scene is peaceful, as all death is peaceful. From above, the aircar erupts into the scene, banking toward the city and out of sight.

Interior, car. Scorpio sleeps fitfully, his eyes moving rapidly under his eyelids as if attempting to scan a hidden landscape for some familiar feature.

A buzzer sounds and he wakes methodically, first checking several displays before his eyes, then flipping a few switches, after which the arid landscape of Pittsburgh becomes visible through a series of shuttered windows, a wavering heads-up display overlaying, indicating glidepath, vectors and so forth. 'City Navacomputers Now Controlling Trajectory' flashes briefly across the display. It is the first indication that there may still be human existence here. Scorpio watches, tightlipped, as the car is drawn into the city's tight landing spiral.

Suddenly there is a sharp pop and a whoosh, followed closely by a crashing noise. Scorpio is thrown forward in his straps. Lights turn red and a low siren starts. Scorpio looks wildly about as three one-seater craft, flycycles manned by red-clad helmeted figures, whoosh by him, leaving him in their turbulent wake. Scorpio reaches for the controls of the car but is jolted back into his seat as another shot hits its mark.

Exterior, wide shot. Scorpio's car, bleeding a trail of smoke, falls out of the sky, leaving a graceful arc in its path and finally diving into a feathery layer of clouds. The three pursuers, satisfied that somehow their actions have had the desired effect, move off in concert away from the now-blurring gray trail.

Inside the car, Scorpio's face is a mask of exertion and stress. He struggles with the manual controls and manages to roll the car into a controlled, spinning dive. A final exterior shot shows the car arcing toward a brownish river in the midst of an arid plain, a high whining sound growing in pitch and volume. Then blackness.

SCORPIO SURVEYS THE WRECKED REMAINS OF THE CAR. His face is torn and bleeding and he walks with a severe limp. The car lies in a heap, bleeding smoke into the stale air, piled up against a rocky outcropping on the bank of a dead river. The ground is sandy, dry. Scorpio reaches a hand up to brush hair out of his face and it returns bloodied. He stares at it, perplexed and then begins to gather his belongings and walk toward the water.

Crouching at the bank, he passes his hand through the silty water and brings it tentatively to his mouth. He recoils in horror at the taste of the tainted water. Standing up, he walks off down the bank in the direction of the towering cityscape, which now seems very far away.

It's a long shot. Scorpio stands at the bank of the river, blood dried on his face, clothes torn. He stands at one end of a bridge, or what used to be a bridge. Its length is now shortened. It is a third-bridge, mirrored on the opposite bank by another third-bridge, its middle third missing without a trace, wires and pipes hanging out of each side as if some giant ship had plowed through it. Spanning the midsection of the bridge is a fragile line, more evidence that there may yet be a human presence here. Across the bridge lies the fallen metropolis. Huge structures which once stood proudly with brilliant glass now stand dead and naked to the wind, their panes broken or soiled. Radio towers crookedly crown some of the buildings. Others are themselves crooked, or capped with rubble, a sign that they once rose higher into the sky. This is a dead landscape, colored with the dull oranges and reds of a swollen, setting sun.

Scorpio's car, bleeding a trail of smoke, falls out of the sky, leaving a graceful arc in its path and diving into a feathery layer of clouds.

Scorpio begins to walk across the bridge toward the rope. As he does so, the view lifts and tilts downward, continuing to center on him but from an increasingly dizzying height, finally to the point of being a map, framed by the precipice of the broken bridge on one side and the bank of the river on the other.

A tight shot. Across the bridge, over Scorpio's shoulder. The rope spanning the gap dips toward the center so that it traces a solitary arc through space. It is fastened tightly to the base of a tilted light-pole. Scorpio reaches down and pulls, eliciting a small wave in the rope which propagates itself toward the opposite side and back.

Scorpio removes his shirt and tears it into halves, wrapping each hand several times. Placing his hands on the rope, he lowers himself into the gap until he is supported by the rope and his feet which still cling to the side of the ripped bridge. He then lets go with his feet and swings gently out onto the rope. Suspended only by his arms, he begins to work his way across toward the opposite end.

He looks back toward the bank, and sees the broken end of the bridge, cables and wires dangling out of sheared-off pipes. He turns toward the city. There is a noise. Again he looks toward the bank and three suited, helmeted figures are there, standing on the edge of the bridge, stationary. They are the flycycle riders.

Scorpio quickens his pace, but when he looks back again he sees that one of the figures has moved to the rope,

and is apparently sawing at it. Scorpio's breath becomes shallow. He looks down and is greeted by a dizzying precipice. Suddenly there is a loud crack, as the rope is severed and Scorpio begins to fall, accompanied by the distant sound of laughter. In a long shot, Scorpio lets go of the rope and falls into the black river.

A tight shot of the water: Scorpio breaks to the surface, gasping for air. His face and shoulders are covered with a matted filth, a sheen that seems both unnatural and unpleasant. Scorpio bobs beneath the murky surface once more and then begins methodically swimming toward the shore, toward the city.

IT'S A HIGH, LONG SHOT. THERE ARE TREES, AND IN THE background, a range of low hills. A solid column of gray smoke looms on the horizon, slowly rising and twisting. For a moment, there is silence, and then machine gun fire erupts. The view begins to descend as a scattered group of men are seen fleeing across the landscape, occasionally turning back to fire at their unseen pursuers.

A thunderous clap heralds the entrance of the tank, followed by an explosion in the midst of the fleeing men, cutting down those around it immediately. The tank clanks forward, firing again, and then a third time, a monstrous beater driving its prey relentlessly onward.

The shot shifts to an individual, clothed in camouflage, grasping an automatic weapon. He is approaching at a run, and it becomes apparent that he is Scorpio, but a younger Scorpio. He turns, fires his weapon, and then resumes running, eventually disappearing off frame and out of sight.

A different shot: a small grotto formed by the interlocking root structure of two large trees. Scorpio dives in, just as a barrage of gunfire singes the air overhead. He presses his body against the cavity, breathing. Just breathing. When he has caught his breath, he takes a grenade from his belt, looks briefly over the top of the grotto, and lobs it out onto the plain. There follows an explosion, followed by shouts in Spanish: *"Socorro! Ayudame!"*

Scorpio remains pressed into the ground, and eventually the voices fade, along with the sounds of armored trucks and tanks. As the sounds fade, Scorpio falls into a fitful sleep. The shot fades.

"¡Levantate!"

Scorpio wakes to the sight of a diminutive farmer menacing him with a pitchfork.

"*¡Levantate!*"

"Alright! Alright! I'm getting!" *Scorpio's voice, but a younger voice, a record that has been kept shelved.*

Scorpio quickly stands, causing the smaller man to step back a few paces. The light has a different character now, more orange. Scorpio quickly scrambles over the embankment and away over the darkening plain.

The shot changes to a quickly moving, following shot of Scorpio running through brush. Running, running, his heartbeat getting faster. Muffled shouts follow him, and as he looks furtively back, gunshots, their reports distorted, are heard. He continues to run, but he's getting slower… slower… Panic flows over his features.

A fade.

IT'S A HEAD SHOT OF SCORPIO, HEAD HUNG PENSIVELY, looking down. Silence fades slowly into the sounds of an echoey space. Background suddenly comes into focus and is revealed to be the elaborate hall of the Rotunda. Scorpio's face is drained of all color, wrinkled. His hair is whitened and slicked back. The background suddenly seems to tilt backwards and darken.

Cut to a full facial shot of Matt, staring intently into view. Matt's face is also whitened to an unearthly pallor.

"¡Levantate!" Scorpio wakes to the sight of a diminutive farmer menacing him with a pitchfork. "_¡Levantate!_"

Cut again. An over-the-shoulder shot, from behind Scorpio to reveal Matt, seated across from Scorpio, each in front of a bowl of soup, uneaten. The shot begins to move to the side, revealing, one by one, those seated on the opposite side of Scorpio, beside Matt. First, Dobbs, then Jay, then Jon. There is a fifth, but the scene cuts away before he fully comes into view.

The next shot is looking down the table from where Scorpio and Matt are seated at one end. Matt takes his bowl of soup and slowly brings it to his lips, at which point the man sitting at the end of his bench, who had not been revealed in the last shot, leans quickly forward. His face is a bizarre contortion of facial features. Eyes, placed at impossible angles, regard Scorpio quizzically.

Cut to a head-shot of Scorpio, eyes looking toward the strange man, beads of sweat forming on his brow, his mouth open, breathing thickly with fear.

Cut back to the strange man, eyes blinking, he says nothing, but straightens up again, leaving the frame to the left. Behind him, the figure of the white-haired man, is revealed, sitting at the end of the table, staring at Scorpio, silently. The white-haired man smiles.

Cut to a close shot of Scorpio's face, eyes closed, shrouded in a haze of light. His surroundings are unclear, all is shifting, shifting save for the face, a face composed as in death.

The eyes open, suddenly, startling, and just as quickly the sound comes crashing in, a quickly building, whining

tone, soon becoming almost deafening, ripping away the shreds of unconsciousness, ripping… ripping… until all that is left is Scorpio, lying on the ragged cot, teapot whistling in the background. The view slowly rotating now over his head. He blinks.

"You're awake," a feminine voice. Scorpio looks to his right and she is revealed as a tall blonde woman, standing in the lighted door-frame, the paint around her chipped; walls grimy. "I'm making some tea," she says dryly, while shifting interrogatively in her silk robe, the only article of quality in sight. "Would you like some?"

Scorpio jumps out of the cot and rushes toward the woman. She stands, immobile, smiling as he runs toward her and finally through her into a blackness, falling… falling into an eternal, dark abyss. Above, light streams downward from an inverted silhouette, and mixed with Scorpio's screams, a sardonic female laughter.

In frame. Always in frame.

AND THEN THERE IS LIGHT. A FULL FACE SHOT OF Scorpio, dirty, eyes barely open. The shot expands to reveal a half-collapsed porch, a street littered with stripped, rusted bodies of groundcars, a stillness hangs in the air.

"Scorp! What the hell are you doing here?"

A man with a dark complexion and black, matted hair, stands in the tattered, paint-chipped doorway.

"I need…" Scorpio is out of breath and obviously delirious. He begins to fall forward, then catches himself on the door-frame. He shakes his head slowly, as if trying to clear his mind.

"You look like shit, man," the other man offers, as if trying to help the conversation along.

Scorpio looks up, giving him an icy stare. "Thanks."

"You'd better come in." Scorpio is ushered in through the door, which shuts quickly behind him. The noises of several bolts and locks being put into place follows.

"Hey guys… this is Scorpio. We went to school together." Scorpio regards the occupants of the small, dark room. Some of them are lying on the floor, others are sitting on couches or chairs. There are about 15 people, crammed into the small room. All of them are wearing wiry headsets, all of them in their private worlds.

Scorpio's friend doesn't seem to notice their lack of attention. "These are my housemates, Scorp…"

"Doug…" Scorpio cuts him off. "Do you have a bathroom?"

"Yeah, sure. We even have running water. We can *pay* for it."

Scorpio follows Doug's finger toward a narrow hallway. The sound of water is heard.

When he emerges, Doug is as his friends, hooked into the net. Scorpio collapses onto an air mattress and sleeps. Fade to black.

SCORPIO, TATTERED, UNSHAVEN, WALKS AWKWARDLY up the street, forcing his legs to fight gravity.

The institute? I can tell you how to get close. *You'll never get in, though. That place is a fucking fortress.*

The voice of his once-friend Doug fills his consciousness. A close shot of his face reveals day-old stubble. His eyes are dead, his mouth slightly open.

They have all their supplies lifted in by heavy armored helicopter. No ground transport ever leaves the compound, I don't think there's even a way for ground transports to get in.

We rezzies just learn to ignore them. We stay away, they leave us alone. We live in two different worlds.

Another voice: S*corpio, what could you accomplish?*

"Shut up, Enrico!" the words come unwittingly.

Still another voice: I*'ll be here, waiting for you to jack in.… I'll be here, waiting for you.*

Scorpio cries out in anguish and cups his hands over his ears, still running on, voices growing louder and more pronounced, accompanied with an every increasing drone, a noise which shuts out thought, shuts out reason.

How can a man so obsessed with killing be so afraid of dying?

Still, he moves on, half running, half stumbling, past looming hulks of rusted metal, fading plastic, a landscape of disuse and neglect. The dead frame of a maglev lies buried halfway into a stationhouse, like the skeleton of some great, extinct beast.

I will now move on to the next consecutive number.

And with that, the noise stops, leaving Scorpio standing still, in the middle of the street, deafened by silence.

The street grows wider here, and in the distance can be seen a stone tower, looming over a plaza of concrete. Here and there, the stumps of long-dead trees pockmark the flat, gray landscape, a reminder that this place was once capable of growth, of change.

Across the plaza, the helmeted red figures stand, waiting, immobile. A high shot reveals the plaza, lone figure of Scorpio, clothed in black, facing the three riders. Slowly, Scorpio enters the square, and, as he does, more red figures seem to appear from behind him, effectively encircling him.

As he makes his way to the center of the square, the circle grows tighter around him. He stops, faceless figures standing around him, motionless. He looks back across his shoulder, looks around, and suddenly the scene cuts, to the sound of a helicopter's blades slicing through dead air.

THE SHOT IS AGAIN OF SCORPIO'S FACE, SURROUNDED with a halo of green. As the shot expands, the background comes gradually into focus, revealing a forest floor, dense with growth. Scorpio is clothed in camouflage.

The shot is now from behind Scorpio. Dazedly, he begins to walk toward a small, burbling stream.

Suddenly, she is across the stream, looking exactly as she did on that day, in the brothel. "Why did you come?" She looks confused.

Scorpio stops and looks at himself, then up at her.

"I… had to," he whispers. His eyes tell a story of crazed fright. "This place…"

"Taken from your most strong memories. We can do that, Scorpio. We can reach into your mind, anybody's mind, and take what we want. Do you have any idea what kind of power that is?"

"But you can also do that the other way around…" Scorpio replies.

"As in your case, yes. It's not perfected, though. You were… an experiment." She begins to walk toward him, circling him. "How much of this have you guessed? You're a very smart subject, Scorpio."

"I know you've made me kill."

"And just how have you deduced this?"

"Dreams."

"Ah, yes… That's one of our major problems, you see. Imagery returning from blocked memories through the vehicle of dreams. We're working on it. But surely you can't object to the act of killing, Scorpio. After all, it's what you do best."

Scorpio remains silent.

"Would you like to kill me, Scorpio?" she enquires innocently. For a moment, she is replaced with a mutilated corpse, lying in a pool of blood on the ground. And then she is back, smiling. "Is that why you came?"

"I don't know why I came, OK?" he shouts at her, drawing a step forward.

"To love me, perhaps?" Their surroundings shift and they are standing in the middle of the grassy plain, framed above by a crystal blue sky. "After all, anything is possible."

"But it's not real!" Scorpio shouts, again coming closer to her.

"Who's to say?"

Scorpio again remains silent.

"From the moment you first jacked in, you were powerless to prevent this. You've served your purpose now. That is the reality."

"How many…"

"How many people have you killed, under our guidance? Does it matter, Scorpio? It was so easy to make you kill. It took such small suggestions."

He looks into her eyes, controlling eyes. She comes closer and enfolds him in her arms. "Don't worry, Scorpio. You're safe now. At this moment you're streaming across America's great Northeast. You won't remember anything. This whole incident will have been erased."

Scorpio's rests his head on her shoulder, eyes shut tightly, and begins to sob.

G*ently… gently…*

"Don't cry." She cracks a wry smile, patting Scorpio affectionately on the back. "It could never have worked between us. We're from different worlds, you and I."

… And Scorpio is falling again, as before, through an impossibly dark abyss. He screams, his arms waving in slo-mo, a grotesque parody of human motion. Movement becomes disjointed. The sound of his cries becomes distorted. *Falling, falling into infinite blackness.*

INTERIOR, SCORPIO'S APARTMENT. SCORPIO SITS ON the chair in the center of the floor, the only upright piece of furniture in evidence here, placed on the only bit of floor not covered with debris. All around is chaos: overturned tables; a smashed hologram, now unidentifiable; a refrigerator open on its side, still on, its light the only illumination here besides the ghostly laser light emanating from the shattered holo.

Scorpio stares at the deck, torn to pieces, its modules strewn across the floor like a child's blocks, its headset ripped apart. This is a landscape of rage, of mindless, brutal destruction.

Overhead shot. In the foreground, a ceiling fan turns slowly, moving dusty air. Scorpio's head tilts slowly back to stare upwards. Otherwise, he does not move.

His eyes, shallow. His look, unseeing.

It's a two-shot.

An eye-line match.

Cut.

DANIEL K. APPELQUIST

Is the editor of Quanta, *the on-line magazine of Science Fiction. He is completing his stint as a technical writer for Visix Software, and will soon begin work as an Internet Publications specialist for 4th Mesa, an electronic publishing company in Baltimore specializing in scientific, technical, and medical journals. He lives in Washington, D.C.*

Backalley

SILANG KAMAY

Sometimes our wishes for guardian angels arise from our faith; other times, they arise from our need.

THE OLD MAN SAT CRUMPLED ON THE GROUND AND sipped something potent from a paper-bagged bottle in his hand. His eyes scanned the dimly lit street. "I tell you, none of us know who she is. But that girl comes around, you know? When the moon is full and there's a ring around it." He paused. "Like tonight." He closed his eyes and licked his lips. The lips moved, R's rolling like gentle waves when he spoke. His voice came from a place deep within, hard to pinpoint.

"Ileana. That's what I call her. She's a saint. The Virgin Mary herself, maybe." He laughed gruffly. "She walks like a cat. Never hear a thing until she's right up close to you. Right here, see?" He pointed to his scarred chin. "One night, a few years ago, I was settling down over there at the bus stop bench right across from Tony's old food stand. You remember it? Before the police closed it down? I was trying to get some sleep. It was November, really cold then. I was shivering so much I couldn't lie still, but I was too tired to move. From nowhere, from the darkness, she carried an old blanket. It was gray, thin wool, the kind you get from the army. But warm, you see? Warm. She gave it to me, put it right on me. Then she lit a candle, a plain white candle. Dripped some wax onto the sidewalk and stuck the candle there. She saved my life that night. That was the first time I ever saw her."

He pulled the gray, wool blanket close around his brittle neck and shoulders.

"The others, they've seen her, too. Everybody who's seen her on the street says she's got a different face. Tito, he says she has a mole, right here on her left cheek. Says she's mestiza, really fair-skinned. Hah! He likes his women pale." He laughed. "Ya-hoo-hoo! White like a ghost!" The laugh became a cough. "Boy says she has long, straight, black hair," he continued. "A skinny girl, not too bad-looking. But you know, he's young. Sees what he wants to see."

I looked up and down the street. "And you, what do you see?" I asked.

He put down his paper-bagged bottle and rubbed his stubbled face, like two pieces of sandpaper scraping together. His eyes watered slightly as he looked up into the moon. "An angel. An angel with my wife's face. Ileana. So… beautiful. Not outside, no. Inside. She left me, you know? A long time ago. Took our children. Guess she'd had enough. Enough yelling. Enough losing money on craps and blackjack and pool halls. I was a good man once, you know? But not good enough. She left when I hit her." His dry hand moved across his stubble. "I would've left, too, if I'd been her."

He was quiet then, his bottle hidden in the soiled, worn bag on the ground. I took it out in plain view. Whiskey, shimmering like coins in the moonlight. I took a turn and watched the moths dance around the streetlights. There were no churches or temples or synagogues or mosques.

I looked down the street. "And you, what do you see?" I asked. He put down his paper-bagged bottle and rubbed his stubbled face. "An angel. An angel with my wife's face."

But something tangible electrified the air. Looking down into the dark, littered backalleys, I saw a points of light on the ground, tiny flames. Small trails of candle wax reflected moonlight and disappeared into doorways along the lengths of the buildings.

I eyed my friend, as he sat withering in his remorse, and pointed. "Ileana?" I asked tentatively.

The old man looked up, shook his head. "No. That's us. When there's a ring around the full moon we light candles where we've seen her." He took a deep, slow breath. "But she only visits the new men now. I've been told you only see her once, but I think I was lucky. Maybe she likes me." He coughed again, tried to sit up.

"One night, I saw her again. The lights were on in a factory a few streets over. Very late. You know what they did there? The company that owns it is big. It has other stores all over. They always hire women: old, young, Filipino, Mexican, Chinese, Vietnamese, all kinds. But never men. Those women, they work all day. I used to watch them sometimes. They'd be really tired when they came out. Hungry, too. Well, that night I saw an ambulance pull up. A woman was bleeding. She was pregnant and started bleeding. And the supervisor didn't let her go until it was too late. After the ambulance took her away, he sent the other women home and stood there at the doorway, smoking. For a long time nothing happened. He looked like a dragon, smoke coming out of his nose and mouth. He finished a whole pack just standing there. And then I saw her, Ileana, dressed in a nurse's white uniform, the old fashioned kind with the pointy cap. She walked up to him and she spit in his face, something red. She lit her

candle and left it there in that spot. Then she disappeared into the alley. There are no exits. It's a dead end by that factory wall. That supervisor, he didn't come back to work the next day, or the next. And eventually, the factory closed.

"That was the last time I saw Ileana."

SILANG KAMAY

Is interested in exploring the possibilities of science fiction, spirituality, environmental justice, and feminism. Silang also likes warmth: glowing candles, a familiar sweater, a hot mug of split pea soup, sincerity, and human kindness.

The Funeral Party

CONNIE BARON

Adolescence is a process few would care to repeat:
a time in which we must define ourselves,
a road we must travel alone.

ONLY HER FATHER HAD CRIED AT THE FUNERAL. THE rest of the family wore straight, sad faces, but displayed no other signs of grief. This had puzzled Anne, but she, too, had shed no tears. Now surrounded by cool, dark closet air, dank with the scent of cloves and oranges, it seemed clear. Granny wasn't really gone. She was still alive in her family, in her things.

Anne stroked the flowered house coat that hung on a nail in the back of the closet. It smelled of Granny: soap, powder, and milk of magnesia. She petted Granny's prized fur coat and pressed her face deep into its chilly pile, like she would when Granny hugged her. She half expected to hear Granny's raspy voice saying, "Don't do that, the oil from your face hurts the guard hairs."

Anne left her cheek in the soft fur and fingered the cashmere coat hanging next to it. It had been Big Joe's. Its secret inner pocket held a sterling flask that Granny had never known about, or at least that's what Granny had said when Anne had found it on one of her sleep-overs.

Laughter filtered through the back wall of the closet. Anne strained to hear what was being said.

"Oh, Bridget could be a pill."

"Remember the time she sued old man Jensen because she thought his dogs dug up her rose bush? And it turned out to be Big Joe playing a drunken trick on her?"

Anne pulled her arms tight around her. These people, many of whom Anne had never seen before, didn't know anything about her family, about Granny.

"She wasn't one for change. I remember her saying Vatican II would damn us all to hell."

Anne stepped out and forced the closet door back over the thick carpeting until it shut tight, blocking the voices. She didn't understand why these outsiders had to be invited to the funeral party. She leaned against the closet door and looked out the frost-trimmed windows at the sunlight playing on Granny's snow-covered yard. Two weeks before, when the heavy snow had first fallen, Granny had pressed her face on the same cold glass, forming a halo of mist. "Fresh snow makes me wish I was on the farm again," she'd said. "My brother and I would rush into the fresh powder and make dozens of snow angels. We'd decorate their heads with twigs and rocks and give them names, then spend the afternoon defending our armies of angels with snowballs."

Now the wind had mounded the snow into sharp frozen tufts, like smooth crust-covered meringue.

Anne turned as her skinny cousin Linda slipped through the door, balanced on one leg, and pushed with the other against the heavy door Granny'd had installed to keep out Big Joe's snoring. When she turned, Anne saw she held a big green tumbler full to the top with wine. Linda pushed the glass toward Anne. Anne hesitated; Linda rolled her eyes. "It'll make you feel better, I promise."

"What if someone comes in?" Anne pushed a mound of coats away from the edge of the bed and slid down, her back pressing against Granny's bright green dust ruffle, pulling her legs up near her chest so she'd fit in between the twin beds.

"Don't be such a dumbshit. If someone comes in, we'll just hide it under the bed." Linda took a gulp. "Besides, they're all bombed anyway." She wrinkled her nose, took another drink, then held out the tumbler. Linda always picked up on things that presented opportunity. Granny said she was a lot like her mother that way. Anne couldn't imagine Aunt Ellie being that sneaky, but she always did have a bit of the devil in her — Anne's father's words.

Anne sniffed the wine like she'd seen her Dad do at dinner parties, and took a small sip. "God, it tastes like

sour cough syrup!" She wiped her mouth with the edge of her sleeve and then remembered it was velvet. "Shoot!" She waved her arm in the air trying to dry the droplets while she took another big gulp. Her face flushed a peachy color.

"It's that plum stuff our Dads made. Give me some more."

A voice came close to the door. "I'm so glad you're here, dear. Don't let me forget to give you the things Granny had put away for you. We don't get to see you that often." The doorknob rattled with the weight of a hand being placed upon it. Anne looked at Linda and quickly hid the tumbler under the bed.

Anne thought about the limousine ride to the church. Her two younger brothers had hardly talked of anything else for two days before the funeral.

Party noises rushed the room as the door opened. "I just want to change out of this uniform, Aunt Ellie. I'll be right out." Maryjane, the girls's second cousin, shut the door, paused a moment, and then picked up the silver-framed, black and white wedding picture of Granny and Big Joe that sat on the vanity.

"Oh, hi," she said when she saw the girls reflected in the mirror. "What are you guys doing hiding in here anyway?" She opened Granny's jewelry box and held a pair of pearl earrings to her ears. "I wonder if Aunt Ellie will give me these?"

Anne squeezed her knees close to her chest. If Granny knew anyone was digging through her personal things, she would have thrown a fit. She believed in privacy.

Maryjane tossed the earrings back in the velvet-lined box without bothering to hook them together. "So what are you guys doing anyway?"

"Just talking. I hate these things." Linda jumped up, pulling at her thick black tights. "When did you get here, Maryjane? Mom said you weren't coming."

"Seniors got excused early. God! I would have been here for the funeral except I had tests." She half-smiled her lip at Linda, then tossed a plastic shopping bag on the bed.

"Yeah, right," Anne said under her breath, crossing her legs, Indian fashion, even though ladies aren't supposed to sit like that.

"Guard the door, will you?" Maryjane asked Linda.

Linda raised her eyebrows and leaned against the door while Maryjane unbuttoned her uniform blouse. Maryjane undressed like it was nothing, like she was nearly naked in front of people all the time. Anne and Linda were best friends, but even they turned away from each other when they changed. Maryjane wore a sheer, glossy, lace-trimmed bra with a little blue flower in the center. Her thin bikini underwear matched.

Maryjane lifted her arm, sniffing it. "Ugh… I stink of smoke. Do you know where Auntie keeps her pit perfume?"

Linda shrugged. Anne concentrated on picking little balls of fuzz from the cream-colored carpet.

"Oh, well." Maryjane tilted her head to the side and studied her mostly naked body in the mirror. "Did I tell you I might be going to France?"

"No." Anne grew more uncomfortable watching her, and crossed her arms over her chest. Her Mom had been telling her for a while that she needed a bra, but she'd put her off. She didn't want one until Linda got one. She looked at Linda and decided it might be a long wait.

"What was the funeral like?" Maryjane opened her bag and slipped a white ruffled blouse over her head. "Sad? Everybody carrying on?"

"It was okay," Linda said. "Pretty much like Big Joe's, only more old people." Linda popped two pieces of Trident into her mouth and spoke around them. "Mom said Granny would have liked it — lots of expensive flowers and ceremony. You know."

Maryjane pulled an opened pack of Kools and a makeup bag from her purse. The two cousins watched as she reapplied gobs of pink blush and mascara. Neither Linda nor Anne were allowed to wear makeup yet. "Who all was there? Was Jack?"

"The policeman? Yeah." As Linda began to list names, Anne thought about the limousine ride to the church. Her two younger brothers had hardly talked of anything else for two days before the funeral. Even though she was shocked by Granny's sudden death, she rather liked the thought of all her schoolmates on the playground staring with admiration and sympathy at her family filing out of the long black car into the church.

But Anne had to ride in her parent's rented car, alone in front with the driver, while her brothers rode with Linda and the other cousins in the limo. They'd made faces at her through the back windows.

In the back, her mother and father had talked in low voices. "We never had a chance to talk about how things were. About Dad and his drinking." Anne had tried not to listen as her father wiped his swollen eyes. Her mother squeezed his hand and stared out at the cold Minneapolis day. An acidy feeling crept up Anne's throat.

"We all got to throw flowers on her coffin," Linda continued. "It was freezing, though — Michael had frozen snot all over his face!" She laughed and stepped away from the door, walking between the twin beds. "And then Molly punched him."

A clink, a muffled thump, and the sickly-sweet plum smell made Anne's heart pound.

"Shit." Linda scowled at Anne, lifted the bed skirt, and turned the green tumbler upright. "God, go get a rag."

"You knocked it over! Why don't you…."

"Damn it, you're such a baby. Good thing Granny's not here." She pushed Anne out of the way and stomped out of the room, leaving the door open. The red liquid crept across the carpet, turning it a dusty pink.

"What are you guys hiding?" Maryjane asked.

"Oh, Linda just kicked over her pop." Anne tried to cover the spill with her hands, hoping the sour smell wouldn't carry. Linda rushed back in with an sopping dish rag. Anne reached for it, but Linda knocked her arm away and began blotting the spill.

Maryjane stood over the girls, hands resting on her hips. "That's not pop." She walked back to the vanity and examined her face close-up, wiping away a black smudge under her eye. "You don't have to sneak around, you know. I can get you guys some wine."

Linda's foot pawed the floor. "Yeah, right. They're hardly going to give you any wine, so how are you going to get some for us?"

Maryjane threw her head towards her knees and brushed her hair. When she stood up and shook her hair out, Anne noticed how much she and Maryjane looked alike: brown wavy hair, round cheeks, almond-shaped eyes. Even her body resembled Maryjane's — not as full, but not far from it either.

"So you each want your own glass?" Maryjane half-smiled and teased her bangs a little before she walked out the door.

As soon as the door shut Linda said, "Can you believe her? She thinks she's so cool just because she's a senior." She threw down the bed skirt, tossed the wine-soaked rag into Granny's hamper, and jumped, backwards onto the bed. A few coats fell to the floor.

Anne picked them up. "Did you see how big her boobs were?"

"They were pretty hard to miss. She thinks she's such hot shit. Do you think anybody'd care if I took that thing?" She pointed to a small satin ball covered with ribbon, beads and sequins hanging from the ceiling light. "Me and Granny made that thing. Do you think anybody would care?"

Anne shrugged. "What do you think they'll do with all her stuff?" Anne picked up Granny's silver-handled brush and pulled out a few short gray hairs.

"Sell it, I guess. Divide the money, give it to the church or leave it with you guys and the house. Who knows?" She shut her eyes and pulled a scarf over her face.

Anne stared into the mirror. If Linda had heard that Anne's family was moving into Granny's house, it must be true. Three nights before, when she had heard her mother and father bickering late at night over how cramped the five of them were in their two bedroom house, she'd imagined she'd been dreaming. Anne wanted Granny's house to remain unchanged, with its tended gardens and the ceramics workshop in the basement. Her mother and brother's sloppy habits would make that impossible.

"Aunt Ellie said you could each have one. I *told* you guys there wouldn't be a problem. Nobody gives a shit what you do."

"I bet Mom hits the roof when Maryjane asks her for wine," Linda said, pulling the scarf from her face.

Anne held up her fingers and crossed them, her feelings suddenly soothed, perhaps by Linda's seeming acceptance of the house situation, but more likely by the wine. She brushed her bangs, trying to brush away a wash of guilt. She had promised Granny she'd never drink.

Maryjane came back into the room, pushing the door open with her butt. "Aunt Ellie said you could each have one." She handed the girls each a clear, long-stemmed wineglass. "I *told* you guys there wouldn't be a problem. Nobody gives a shit what you do." She raised her eyebrows, flashing herself a smile in the mirror. "I'm going to see if there's anyone interesting here."

CIGARETTE SMOKE ACCOSTED ANNE AS SHE STEPPED into the dining room. Granny had never allowed smoking in the house. Even Big Joe had puffed his fat, pungent cigars on the wooden back porch. Anne gulped her wine, but set her glass down when she saw her father sitting on the piano bench talking with a dark-haired, bronzed man.

"Anne!" Her father held his arm out. Anne flipped her hair over her shoulder and tried to look casual as she walked toward him.

The dark-haired man pulled at his white fitted shirt and smoothed his gray tie. "Last time I saw her she was just a kid. She's grown into a fine young lady."

"You remember my cousin Jack, the cop, don't you?" Her Dad winked and put his arm around Anne's shoulder. She was surprised. He hardly ever touched her.

"Sure," Anne lied. Her Dad's cousins weren't around much, except for stuff like this, when they had to come. There had been a falling out, a divorce, money problems. Anne had heard that Jack's mother used to be black and blue all the time, and she remembered when she was about five Granny and Big Joe had taken Jack and his sisters in for several months. Jack was cute, though, in an older person's sort of way. He had nice eyes and smelled

musky — different from her father's Irish Spring soap. Anne saw Linda walk over and stand behind Jack, still holding her wine.

"So what grade are you in now?" Jack set his beer on Granny's handmade rag rug, took a pack of cigarettes from his top pocket and flipped one in his mouth like he was in a cigarette commercial.

"She's in the sixth grade," her Dad smiled, squeezing her shoulder again, his head bobbing slightly when he talked.

"No I'm not, I'm in seventh. God."

Linda snickered and snuck away while she still had the chance. Anne slipped her Dad's arm off her shoulder and looked toward her mother nestled, grinning, in between Ellie and a bunch of smiling women. Ellie laughed with them but held her body straight and stiff, and carried the glass in her hand to her mouth with sharp movements. She swayed a little when she reached out, encircling Linda's waist with her deceptively strong, thin arm, which greatly resembled Granny's. Suddenly Anne wanted to talk to her aunt.

"Excuse me, I'm—"

Her father grabbed her sleeve. "Anne, how would you like to get me another glass of wine?" He held out his empty glass, and said to Jack, "Mom would have liked it that we're drinking the plum wine. It was her favorite."

Anne shrugged. Granny hardly ever drank, only on special occasions, and then only one glass of wine. Jack winked at her, nodded and stood. His aroma glided over her. Anne felt her face flush like it had with her first drink.

IN THE KITCHEN, TWO OVERWEIGHT WOMEN ANNE didn't know were filling Granny's good dishes with food. "Well, if she's wherever Joe's gone, let's hope they're getting along now," one said, pushing a piece of ham into her mouth. "Remember that horrible fight they had in Gorley's market over the price of a roast? Joe screaming because she didn't know the value of a dollar, and her yelling back about him drinking up all his money? And in front of the kids!"

The other woman shook her head. "I always knew it was a mistake for her to move into the other bedroom. Just doesn't seem natural. Even if Joe drank too much a husband needs certain…. Hello! You're Anne, aren't you?"

Anne just glared at them, wanting to tell the old biddies to shut up. What did they know about her family? Granny and Big Joe had loved each other — they just weren't mushy about it like other people. Anne remembered how Granny always prepared Big Joe's favorite meal on Sundays — fried chicken and mashed potatoes — and how she'd wait dinner on him even if he was late or drunk. She never complained.

Anne marched to the counter and the women went back to their work. Just as she lifted the heavy wine bottle, her mother came through the swinging door. "And just what is it you think you're doing?" she demanded, dumping several paper plates into the garbage.

"Dad wanted me to get him some wine." Anne pushed her half- empty glass toward some dirty dishes and set the heavy bottle down, carefully, so she didn't scratch Granny's ceramic tile counter. "Twenty years now and not a scratch," she'd said every time she'd polished it.

"Just what he needs, more wine. He's already made a fool of himself." Anne's mother picked at a bit of ham, then rinsed some forks and piled them on a dish towel. "I hope he's able to deal with things better tomorrow. Heaven knows we've got enough to do around here." She opened a cabinet and ran her finger over a shelf of cookbooks, all neatly alphabetized. "So much stuff to get rid of," she sighed, then turned back to Anne. "I'm leaving in a few minutes. Your father's going to walk home later. You want to go with him or me?"

Anne had to think about it a minute. She only lived five blocks away, but it was winter. Linda walked into the kitchen, still carrying her wine glass. "Are you going to stay?" Anne asked her.

Linda looked confused. "Yeah, I guess so."

"Whose is that?" Anne's mother pointed to Linda's wineglass.

"Oh, my Mom said I could have it." Linda took another sip and smiled a smile just like the one Anne's father used. It was his Cheshire Cat look, Granny used to say.

Anne's mother put her hands on her hips and glared at the two of them. "I don't care what any of you do. You can all make asses of yourselves. I'm going home." She turned toward Granny's room to fetch coats. "Call the boys up from the basement, would you?"

Linda leaned over to Anne after Anne's mother had left the kitchen. "Man, that Jack guy's funny. Kinda reminds me of Ricky Johnson." Linda's cheeks blotched red as she poured more wine for herself and swaggered back to the living room, leaving Anne nibbling on some scalloped potatoes. Jack was no Ricky Johnson, Anne thought, but she and Linda didn't have the same taste.

"Oh, I can't believe you're giving me those, Aunt Ellie." Maryjane swung open the two-way door. "I remember Auntie serving me tea in that set for my seventh birthday. And we had those little cakes, *petite fores*." She stood in front of the cabinets as Ellie slid the glass door to one side, handing her a shinny orange, yellow and gold teacup.

"I remember when Mom made this set, just before Linda was born. You'll be in your own place next year…. Go see if there's a box and some newspapers in the garage."

Anne wanted to protest, to tell Ellie that Granny had promised that tea set to her, to give to her own little girl. "Your Dad's wondering where his wine is," Maryjane said to Anne as she slipped through the kitchen to the back door.

"Granny made these so you girls could all come over for tea," Ellie was saying. "She wanted granddaughters so much. Granny understood girls, she used to say." Ellie smiled sadly and held up a teacup, making the light reflect off the porcelain inside. "They were so much easier to get on with."

Anne took a long drink of wine. "Aunt Ellie, I…"

The door flew open and Maryjane poked her head around the door. "Can't find the boxes. Any suggestions?" Her cheeks were pink from just a few moments in the garage, or maybe it was wine.

"You girls are drinking?" "Yeah." Linda shifted so she could challenge him. "What are you going to do about it, Mister Policeman? Arrest us?"

"Look in the closet near the big door. She probably broke them down for storage. God knows, she'd never have anything unsightly or out of place." She opened a bottom cupboard and picked out a few table linens. "Mom was a real pack rat. Look at this, she must have thirty tablecloths here. What she needed all this when for when her own kids were hard up, I'll never know."

Anne noticed that some of the shelves in the side board had been emptied of Granny's silver and hand-painted porcelain. She decided to ask her father about it.

ONE OF THE FAT LADIES FROM THE KITCHEN WAS SEATED next to Anne's father on the piano bench. Anne searched the room for Linda, sure she would also be outraged by the disappearance of Granny's things.

Linda was draped over the back of Jack's chair, the light-colored one that kids weren't even supposed to get near. Linda acted as if she'd never heard the rules though, as if she could do anything because she was drinking.

"Linda, you know you're not supposed to be on that chair." Anne heard her grandmother in her own voice.

"Oh right. I forgot. This is going to be your chair and your house, isn't it?" Linda glared at Anne like she might want to start a fist fight.

"Why don't you tell me about yourself?" Jack patted the big chair's footstool for Anne to sit down. "You girls are drinking?" He smiled, a kind of cocky, crooked smile.

"Yeah," Linda said, shifting positions so she could challenge him head on. "What are you going to do about it, Mister Policeman? Arrest us?" Her head wobbled a little as she talked.

"Well, I could, I suppose. If I wanted to." He grinned at Linda, and then at Anne.

Anne turned away. "You can't arrest us. Our parents said we could have it."

"It's still not legal. Drinking gets girls like you in trouble." He reached out and touched Anne's cheek. "You know what I mean?"

Anne didn't. But Maryjane must have because she started laughing and pulled her chair closer to Jack.

"Remember that time you caught me, in that car?" Maryjane rubbed his shoulder. "That was pretty embarrassing."

Jack tugged on her hair, but not the way a brother or a cousin pulls hair. "Well, you stay out of back seats from now on."

"Yeah," Linda laughed at herself, a kind of donkey laugh. "You shouldn't be drinking in cars."

Maryjane giggled and twisted her hair. "That's not all you shouldn't be doing in cars."

Anne blushed and her stomach churned. Jack leaned over to her. "You know what we're talking about, don't you?" His fermented breath rippled through her hair with his whispering voice. Maryjane laughed louder. Linda continued honking.

Anne felt sick to her stomach. "I have to go to the bathroom."

ANNE SAT AT GRANNY'S BATHROOM COUNTER STARING at herself in the mirror. She didn't care if Linda was her friend, or if Jack was cute. She *hated* these people. They didn't care about anything. They acted like Granny had never existed.

She opened Granny's makeup drawer. It was still arranged just so: hairpins in a plastic jar; bright red rouge; face powder in another slot; and lipsticks all with the labels facing so you could read them. Anne played with the lipsticks, letting them slide through her fingers one at a time.

"What will they do with your things?" she said out loud. "It won't be like when Big Joe died and they just boxed up his stuff." She tried to imagine herself living in Granny's house, getting ready every day in this bathroom. She would probably get Granny's room. She wondered if she would behave like Granny did after Big Joe died, always hearing things, seeing things. Anne thought about the time she'd woken up at 3:30 in the morning to find her grandmother standing in the bedroom doorway crying. Anne had held her as Granny said she thought she'd heard Big Joe snoring in the next room. That was the only time Anne had thought of her grandmother as frail. Even in her coffin she'd looked strong and solid.

"LET ME IN, ANNE." LINDA POUNDED ON THE DOOR.

Anne opened the door and Linda ran in, pulling her tights down around her knees well before she got to the toilet. Anne closed the door. "I've never had to pee so bad in my life. You know what? I'm drunk. Can you believe it? And nobody even cares!"

Anne looked into the big plate-glass mirror. "I think I'm going home."

"Why? We're just starting to have fun. Jack's going to teach us to play poker." She wadded up a huge piece of toilet paper. "He's great-looking, isn't he?"

Anne wanted to say he gave her the creeps, that they were all creeps, but she didn't. "I've got to do my Spanish homework. We have a test tomorrow."

She smelled Jack's musky cigarette smell before she realized he had followed her into the room. "Are you leaving?" he asked, moving closer.

Anne left Linda on the pot, closing the door behind her, and went to find her father in the living room. He was at the piano bench, sipping wine. "Can we go home?" Anne asked.

He stared at her. "I have to help Ellie clean up." He took a long drink of his wine, wiped his mouth and looked around the living room. "Mom would have liked this party. Yep, it would have made her feel real good." He tinkled the piano keys.

Anne let out an exasperated sigh and went to Granny's room for her coat. There weren't as many as before, but hers was way at the bottom.

She smelled Jack's musky cigarette smell before she realized he had followed her into the room. Anne turned. Jack leaned on Granny's vanity, rubbing his fingers across the silver picture frame. "Are you leaving?" he asked, moving closer.

"Yes," Anne said. She turned away from him, pulling her coat from the pile.

"Do you want a ride home? I'll drive you. It's awful cold." He touched her hair the way he'd touched Maryjane's. Anne looked to the window. Frost now covered the whole thing. "No, I'll walk," she said.

Jack took the coat from Anne's hand, slipped it over her shoulders, pushed her bangs from her face, and let his hands drift across her chest. He craned his neck down to kiss her, but Anne turned her cheek, her nose filled with waves of his cologne. Nausea crept up her throat. Anne wasn't sure it had even happened until Jack said, "I just want to make you feel better. You looked so sad, like you needed a hug. Let me drive you home."

Anne moved away from him and his cigarette-and-beer breath. She felt angry, so angry she wanted to hit him or scream but she couldn't. She was overcome by confusion. Who were these people, this *family?* Why didn't anything make any sense? Anne left the room. She wished she had died with Granny.

LINDA STOOD IN THE HALLWAY. "YOU'RE REALLY LEAVING?" She held out her glass to Anne. "You want some?"

Anne shook her head.

"Come on. Don't be such a baby."

Anne glowered toward Jack in the bedroom doorway, still feeling the pressure of his hands on her breasts. The light of sunset filtered through the frosty bedroom windows made him look like he was standing in a cloud. He smiled.

"Come on." Linda grabbed Anne's arm, pulling her toward the living room. "Hey, have you been crying?" She leaned close to Anne's face. "You look kind of funny."

Anne's father was still at the piano bench talking with two old ladies. He sipped his wine, apparently ready to stay the rest of the night. Maryjane sat at Granny's dining room table. She'd moved the big crystal bowl that usually sat in the center to a corner of the floor. She was shuffling cards and hitting them against the waxed wood to stack them. She hadn't even put down a table pad. Granny would have killed her. Aunt Ellie shuffled through the corner cabinet for chips.

"I've got pennies. Please stay!" Linda's fingers tightened around Anne's arm.

"Yes, why don't you stay?" Jack put his hand on her shoulder as he walked by. "I'll teach you a few card tricks." He went to where Maryjane was sitting.

"No." Anne pulled her arm from Linda's hand. "No. I've got to go."

"Come on…" Maryjane motioned.

Linda shrugged and nearly skipped to the living room.

Anne checked her pockets for mittens. They must have fallen out in the coat pile. She hesitated, then quickly went back to Granny's bedroom to get them. She took one last look at the room, at its essence. Soon this would be gone. The last bit of sunset made diamond reflections like the inside of the teacup bounce off the Christmas ball Linda and Granny had made. She didn't want any of these people, any of this *family,* taking or selling Granny's things. She stepped up onto one of the beds, on the pile of coats, and yanked the satin ball down. She hid it in her pocket. I'll keep it in my desk, she thought. Linda will never see it there.

OUTSIDE, THE WINTER NIGHT BIT HER FACE WITH A MIST of tiny flakes. Her breath smoked in the blackness.

As she passed the kitchen window, she looked back into what had been Granny's home. Through the open swinging door, she saw her father standing at the dining room table leaning over Linda. Jack held up a fan of cards and Maryjane picked one. The light from Granny's chandelier formed a circle around them.

Anne turned and walked a few feet with her back against the wind, her patent-leather shoes squeaking as they hit the frozen snow. The people in the window grew smaller every step she took.

She turned and ran to the long sloping hill that faced Granny's house, then tossed her body backwards through the thick crust of snow. She scissored her arms and legs together and apart through the untouched snow, shaping an angel, the angel she could imagine inside of herself right now, flying away into the darkness.

CONNIE BARON

Writes and teaches in Ames, Iowa, where she lives with her husband, dog, cat and two birds.

Crown Jewels

COLIN MORTON

So people on the other end of a modem line or net connection aren't necessarily who they seem to be. So what? Chances are, neither are you.

[engage 6-June-92 03:33]

—Hello?

Son, your mother's dead. What can I say? She passed away in my arms. And you know what she said?

—Who is this?

She said if that dirty son of mine comes to my funeral, you spit in his face. Will you be there son? It's tomorrow afternoon.

—What number are you calling?

Frank? Frank, isn't that you?

—There's no Frank here!

Oh, I'm sorry. Did I wake you up?

—Yes, you woke me up!

Are you wearing pajamas?

[disengage]

[engage 6-June-92 03:39]

—Wha—?

Are you alone? Did I wake you up? This is terrible, but I couldn't keep it from you another minute. It's about your blood test. I'm afraid I've got to tell you. You've got AIDS.

—What? Who is this?

Harry? Isn't this 364-0952?

—No!

Oh that's terrible. I must have misdialed. You see, my friend just tested positive for AIDS and my mind just boggles at the thought of what this means for me and all our friends. My name's François, by the way. Are you gay?

—Do you realize what time it is?

[singing] *It's a quarter to four, and there's no one in the store… Are you still awake Harry? Harry? Have you forgotten about that five bucks you owe me? Do you know what the odds are of you being hit by a truck before you pay me back?*

—Jeez, I'd like to pay you back you sonofabitch. You need help, you know that? If you call back again you're gonna be recorded by the police, so just fuck off.

[disengage]

[engage 6-June-92 03:43]

—Unh?

That package that came for you. Don't open it.

—Unh? What package? Who is this?

You mean you didn't get the package? Jeez, are we ever in shit now.

—What are you talking about?

Sure, sure, I understand. You don't know from nothin'. You think the pigs care about that?

— Look, I don't have any—

Okay, just get the hell out of there. It's not safe. Understand? Just don't be home.

—Who the…

And, by the way, is your wife there?

—She's asleep.

Kiss her for me, will you?

—Who is this?

She'll know. Just tell her I'll never forget that night. Now move!

—What?

```
[disengage]

[6-June-92 03:54]
[initializing modem]
ATDT 818-523-4714
CONNECT

ACCESS CODE: ***-***
ACCESS DENIED

ACCESS CODE: ***-***
ACCESS DENIED

ACCESS CODE: ***-***
ACCESS DENIED

NO CARRIER
ATDT 213-562-9344
CONNECT

ACCESS CODE: ***-***
ACCESS DENIED

ACCESS CODE: ***-***
ACCESS DENIED

ACCESS CODE: ***-***

Welcome to BRAIN, the Network of the
Bureaus for Research on Artificial
Intelligence

CODE NAME: CrownJewels
REAL NAME: Harold E. Houdini
PHONE NUMBER: 315-956-6492

Number given does not correspond to
signal.

PHONE NUMBER: 315-233-6412

AFFILIATION: AIRB Section Y
STATUS: NEW USER

Most areas of BRAIN are off-limits
without enhanced or privileged user
status or area-specific authorization
codes.

MAIN MENU
SELECTION: Area files
AREA SELECTED: Migration Project
AUTHORIZATION CODE: KI5-3AS
KI5-3AS?
KL5.3AS

MIGRATION PROJECT AREA MENU

SELECTION: Read migratry.txt
```

MIGRATION PROJECT STATUS REPORT

This protected file briefly describes work to date by the four cooperating agencies (NSC, DD, UCD, AIRB) on the AI security and counter-intelligence migratory programs archived in the file MIGRATRY.ARC. It also summarizes each of these machine-language programs and provides a prospectus of research in progress. Downloading of this file and MIGRATRY.ARC is on a need-to-know basis only, and removal in any form of the data contained therein from authorized user security areas is prohibited by the agreement of the parties.

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```
[FOR MORE, PRESS RETURN]: Exit

MIGRATION PROJECT AREA MENU
SELECTION: Download
FILE(S) TO DOWNLOAD: migratry.txt,
migratry.arc

PROGRAM: Telix ++ RATE: 9600 Baud
DATA TO DOWNLOAD: 246,142
TIME TO DOWNLOAD: 2 min. 14 sec.
DOWNLOADING MIGRATRY.TXT
DOWNLOAD COMPLETE

DATA TO DOWNLOAD: 1.486 Mb
TIME TO DOWNLOAD: 13 min. 24 sec.
DOWNLOADING MIGRATRY.ARC
DOWNLOADING COMPLETE

SELECTION: Upload
FILE(S) TO UPLOAD: B:/predator.exe
DATA TO UPLOAD: 2,336
TIME TO UPLOAD: 2 sec.
UPLOADING PREDATOR.EXE UPLOAD COMPLETE
SELECTION: Exit

MAIN MENU
SELECTION: Exit
```

Exiting BRAIN. Do you wish to leave a message? No

To receive enhanced access, please leave a message stating your primary and secondary research interests. On your next log-on, you will be asked to complete a detailed questionnaire and, upon completion, will receive enhanced-2B status.
Do you wish to leave a message? No
Exiting...
NO CARRIER
[close log]

[log 6-June-92 0441]
ATDT 315-523-4714
CONNECT
WELCOME TO THE DRAGON'S LAIR
CODE NAME: Crownjewels
STATUS: PRIVILEGED 1A

DRAGON GAME: IT'S YOUR MOVE

INPUT: GRAY WIZARD crosses the mountains through Grand Vent pass
[ENCOUNTERS THIRST]: drinks water
[ENCOUNTERS A BRACE OF FURIES IN A HURRY]: presents ankh; pronounces the charm avaunt, par dieu
[PASS]: descends the pass into the coastal plain
[ENCOUNTERS TABLET]: reads tablet
[THIS ISN'T THE KIND OF TABLET YOU CAN READ]: tastes tablet
[IT HAS VERY LITTLE TASTE BUT MAKES GRAY WIZARD FEEL FUNNY]: discards tablet
[THE TABLET WAS A SEED. WITHIN MINUTES A SMALL TREE GROWS BEFORE GRAY WIZARD'S EYES. THERE IS A SIGN ON THE TRUNK OF THE TREE]: reads sign
[THE SIGN IS AN ARROW POINTING WEST SOUTH WEST. THE PATH SEEMS TO OPEN HERE.]: wsw
[THE WESTERN OCEAN COMES INTO VIEW]: pause
[24-HOUR CLOCK ENGAGED]
[EXIT GAME]

HEY JULES, THIS IS YOUR 253RD CALL AND THERE ARE 2 MESSAGES FOR YOU. WANNA READ 'EM? No

MAIN MENU
SELECTION: Yell
YELLING AT SYSOP. NO REPLY. AGAIN? Yes
YELLING AT SYSOP. NO REPLY. WANNA LEAVE A MESSAGE? Yes

TO: SysOp
FROM: Crownjewels

I can't believe it, Dragon baby! I can't fuckin' believe it! I finally got access to BRAIN and that authorization code you gave me actually worked! I'm happy as a pig in shit! Would give you the access code, but no point. Log on and your system will be cannibalized — I turned loose a Predator in the heart of BRAIN! First having downloaded the whole MIGRATRY archive! I'm a fuckin' genius! Or if I'm not now it's only a matter of time. Though I don't have much of that left, at least not as myself. Which brings me to the last thing you can do for me, Dragon ol' pal. To get into BRAIN I had to give my real phone number, and you know what that means. Time to initiate Flight Plan S. Please give the propellers a spin and let me know the details. Pronto Tonto. From now on, when they talk about me, all they'll be able to say is, Who was that masked man? Hi ho! Heh, heh, heh.
[exit]

HEY JULES, THIS IS YOUR 253RD CALL AND THERE ARE 2 MESSAGES FOR YOU. WANNA READ UM? Yes
MESSAGE FROM: Silver Dust [5-June-92 11:51]
TO: Crown Jewels

You haven't returned my messages. You can't know how painfully I miss you when you don't leave anything in my mailbox. I don't care about your terminal cancer. I'm strong enough, I'll take care of you and ask nothing in return. Please send me a picture of yourself. I can't believe you haven't received mine yet. Is the postal system so bad? Or, having seen my picture, have you decided not to answer?
[FOR MORE, PRESS RETURN] [exit]

MESSAGE FROM: Silver Dust [5-June-92 21:22]
[exit]
WANNA REPLY? Yes

FROM: Crownjewels
TO: Silver Dust

Sorry our goodbye has to be like this. It was a wonderful fantasy, but that is all we could ever be to each other. I've received a second opinion, and my condition is even worse than expected. Time is running out for me. A week,

maybe a month, no more. I'll be almost normal up until the last few hours, then agony, horror. I don't know why I don't end it right now, while it is still in my power to choose. Dear, I wish I could have known you. Good-bye.
[exit] [exit]

WANNA LEAVE A MESSAGE FOR THE SYSOP? Yes

TO: SysOp
FROM: Crownjewels
For Chrissake, Dragon, move fast on Flight Plan s. Enlist Denvold's help. His contacts are secure. I gotta get some shut-eye right now, but every sound in this creaky old house makes me think they're breaking the door down with axes. I'm afraid to even unarchive MIGRATRY until I'm safely away and someone else. I'll leave the Treasure Chest open. Yell if you have anything to report.
[exit]

[log 6-June-92 05:37]

[echo off]
BNU REVISION 7 FOSSIL COMPATIBLE COMMUNICATIONS
STATUS: Initializing
STATUS: Waiting
[exit 6-June-92 11:36]

[log 6-June-92 11:38]
ATDT 315-523-4714
CONNECT
WELCOME TO THE DRAGON'S LAIR
CODE NAME: Crownjewels
STATUS: PRIVILEGED 1A

DRAGON GAME: IT'S YOUR MOVE

INPUT: GRAY WIZARD descends Grand Vent Pass toward the western ocean
[ENCOUNTERS DRAGON]: fights with sword and dagger
[GRAY WIZARD IS WOUNDED; BLOOD LOSS IS SERIOUS]: upholds pentagon; invokes protection of forefathers
[GRAY WIZARD IS BOXED IN A CANYON; WEAK FROM LOSS OF BLOOD]: upholds staff; invokes super-powers of the lion
[DRAGON IS GORED; WITHDRAWS TO CAUTERIZE WOUNDS]: GRAY WIZARD advances wsw toward the western ocean
[THE WAY IS CLEAR; ON THE SHORE GRAY WIZARD FINDS TREASURE CHEST]: open chest
[WITH WHAT, SMARTASS? IT'S LOCKED]:
pause
[24-HOUR CLOCK ENGAGED]
[EXIT GAME]

HEY JULES, THIS IS YOUR 254TH CALL AND THERE ARE 2 MESSAGES FOR YOU. WANNA READ UM? Yes

MESSAGE FROM: Silver Dust 6-June-92 0959
TO: Crown Jewels
[exit]

WANNA REPLY? No

MESSAGE FROM: Denvold Thorsdenton
[6-June-92 10:23]
TO: Crownjewels [highlighted and flashing urgent]
Documents in my possession! How do you like the name Lyndon Jones? Leave message in re physical exchange. Cash only.
[end]

WANNA REPLY? Yes

FROM: Crownjewels
TO: Denvold Thorsdenton
McDonald's, Shopper's World. 1215 noon, today or tomorrow.

Message from Sealed Envelope: Commuter's overnight 2335 sat. arr. [code y] dest. 1640 loc time sun. in locker. Better swing there than swing here. Bon voyage.
[exit]

WANNA LEAVE A MESSAGE FOR THE SYSOP? Yes

TO: SysOp
FROM: Crownjewels
For almost the first time, I am feeling ambivalent about this whole venture. To die, sure. That's the whole idea. But the second part seems a needless bother. At the moment I mean. I'm not afraid; don't think that. But now I'm on the verge of Migration, I seem to have come back to the beginning again and started asking myself, *why?* Is it worth it? Becoming digital, microscopic. The slow wiping out of my old self, the rendering, the melting like solder into the silicon. The smoky, metallic odor of the electric life. Will it be any less nauseating than this smelly, scratchy animal one?

Okay. To die. To sleep. Gimme more. A new life, sure, but what will the world make of a new man with a name like Lyndon Jones?
[exit]

[6-June-92 12:34]
[engage]
—Hello?

He's dead! Oh my god, he's dead! Send the police, pronto, 12th Street and Vine. Oh my god, that guy's got a gun! He's shooting everybody in sight!

— Who the hell is this?

Huh? What do you care? Why don't you just go back to sleep? I think I'll shoot myself.

[sound of gunshot close to receiver.]
[disconnect]

[7-June-92 10:58]
Hello. I won't be answering the phone anymore, because I'm about to shoot myself. You can leave a message if you want to, but I won't be returning it. You have just a super day now.

[7-June-92 13:02]
Very funny, guy. But unless you've got friends in the right places, you won't be laughing long. Listen, I know your game, and your next move just might depend on me. I could turn you in, but with the little jackpot you just came into, you might just be able to buy me off. Think about it. And keep looking over your shoulder. You better hope I'm the one who catches up to you first.

[7-June-92 16:44]
H — Hello, Herbert? Crownjewels? It's me, Silver Dust. Actually, my name's Cheryl. I hope you're joking. You can't give up hope, you know. Not when people care about you. That's the reason I'm calling. This mean guy visited. Said he's a friend of yours, but I don't know… He was looking for you. Of course, I didn't understand at first, since I didn't know your real name. But I figured out who he meant. That's how I got this number. Jeez, I hope nothing's wrong. Please call me: 239-4543. Or come to my place. It's 403, the Clydesdale. You know, on Union? Oh, I have this sick feeling you're in trouble and this guy has something to do with it. If there's anything I can do—
[60-second message limit reached.]

[8-June-92 03:14]
[engage]
Yeah, I was just, uh… Jeez, you should change that message. It's *creepy.* Anyway, I heard about Herb's, um, accident. I just wanted to say how sorry I was. Like, I never met the guy, eh? But I sort of knew him through the boards and all and I felt like, you know, like we were really close. Anyway, I just wanted to, you know, pay my respects. So, I guess that's all. Oh yeah, in case anyone asks, you can say Lyndon called.
[disengage]

COLIN MORTON

Is a full-time writer in Ottawa, Ontario. He has published five books of poetry, including The Merzbook: Kurt Schwitters Poems*, and co-produced the animated film* Primiti Too Taa*. His first novel,* Oceans Apart, *will appear next spring from Quarry Press.*

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Clarion West is an intensive six-week workshop that teaches professional skills to serious science fiction and fantasy writers. It is held annually at Seattle Central Community College in Seattle, Washington. This year's instructors are:

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Clarion West is a non-profit literary organization
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Two Solitudes

CARL STEADMAN

The Net can be a fast and direct way to communicate. But it's still only a connection between separate points and separate realities: it doesn't make two things the same.

Date: Sat, 24 Sep 94 15:36:20 CDT
From: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
To: Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
Subject: hello...

Dana -

I am writing this to you, so that when you first access your account, you will have mail waiting for you. I hope the new setup works out for you.

You only left today, Dana, and I already miss you quite dearly. I hope things work out with your mother, and that you'll write me often. Three months seems like a long time - and will I even see you then?

Lane Coutell lane@pandemonium.com

> We will not be looking for change, and will not oppose the fixed to the mobile; we will look for the more mobile than mobile: metamorphosis... We will not distinguish the true from the false, but will look for the falser than false: illusion and appearance...

Date: Tue, 27 Sep 94 19:21:19 CDT
From: Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
To: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
Subject: Arrival

Lane -

I have arrived safely, found the electrical current here suitable for everyday use, and, hence, am writing you.

Infrastructure. Roads, airports, electrical grids, telephone lines. After all this, still you.

There are many things for me to do, here, on my arrival. "I am unpacking my library." Yes, I am...

Don't play in the middle of the street, Lane; also, don't go into Mr. McGregor's garden.

Be careful, be good, be nice.

Dana

~~ Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>

Date: Wed, 28 Sep 94 09:47:35 CDT
From: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
To: Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
Subject: progress...

>I have arrived safely, found the electrical current here suitable for
>everyday use, and, hence, am writing you.

I wonder if anyone's created a device to 'listen' to alternating current... not only its steady, rhythmic hum, but also its fluctuations, its surges, spikes, and brown-outs - which makes me think of the old Frankenstein-type movies, with the crackles and pops of 'science' and 'progress.' Instead of hard science, of course, we instead realized a soft technology, so we now have the warm, silent convenience of plug-in air fresheners...

So, do you prefer the water in Des Plaines to that of Minneapolis?

>There are many things for me to do, here, on my arrival. "I am
>unpacking my library." Yes, I am...

"History is an angel being borne... backward... into the future."

I always wondered why the Angels "sounded like a lot of lawnmowers... mowing down my lawn." I suppose this is why they were Strange.

My love.

Lane Coutell lane@pandemonium.com

> "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone,
> "it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less."
> "The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words so many
> different things."
> "The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master -
> that's all."

Date: Thu, 29 Sep 94 18:36:29 CDT
From: Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
To: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
Subject: Mice, Baseball, and Moustaches

Sometimes, Lane, I sit and think. I think about how nice it would be to have a mouse that worked, and other things too.

Yesterday, I sat and thought about a baseball game, because I was watching one. It was a neat game, but we lost several innings and finally the whole game, after two extra innings. I was trying to think of a winning strategy - the strategy I would use if I were the owner of a baseball team. I suppose I would hire only people who could hit the ball out of the park. No one else could be hired. I suppose they would be like that one team that Bugs Bunny had to play. Remember them? With their cigars and five-o-clock shadows? Remember how they used entire trees as bats?

Remember how they were in a conga line, each holding on to the hips of another, dancing around the bases in a continuous home-run-hitting line dance? What did Bugs Bunny do to them, finally? I do not remember that. I just remember that they were the opposing team. I also thought about balancing the entire field on a centrally-located spike, so that as players moved their weight would tilt it. I think that such a moving plane field would make the game more interesting. I am already amazed at how much strategy is involved. Later the idea became grisly, when shared. But in its original form, it was a nice idea.

The first and third base coaches were more than just coaches, I fear. They seemed to talk to the runners much too much to just be talking about the game, and there was too much reassuring back- and bottom-patting. I suspect each of these oddly-suited men is actually a sort of Dear Abby for the members of the team; not only reading the pitcher and judging the game for them, but also providing advice and reassurance in all areas of a ball player's life.

>I always wondered why the Angels "sounded like a lot of lawnmowers...
>mowing down my lawn". I suppose this is why they were Strange.

I believe this was because They Were All Singing Different Songs.

I *hate* moustaches, the names "Stacey," "Tracey," and "Bruce." But you I like. I like you.

Dana
~~ Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>

Date: Fri, 30 Sep 94 23:53:35 CDT
From: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
To: Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
Subject: munkustrap, quaxo, or coricopat....

Greetings and Salutations.

I cleaned the top of the refrigerator, today. I had first tried glass cleaner, which wasn't terribly successful, which made me conclude later that Comet was indeed a wonder potion of much sacredness and value.

>Sometimes, Lane, I sit and think. I think about how nice it would be to have a
>mouse that worked, and other things too.

I have one that squeaks. Would you prefer that? I'll send it down.

Chester, the cat, says "mrow." "Though it's not love, it means something."

I've started work on a new Poem, for Purposes of Diversion and Entertainment. It's a frivolous verse about cats. This is the first verse:

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow.

No, actually that's not it. That would be a bit heavy for a frivolous verse about cats, and it neglects to address the subject matter (unless the Shadow is akin to Macavity). This is what I wrote:

In this world there are people
who like hornets and gnats.
These folks are far superior
to those who like cats.

Lane

Lane Coutell lane@pandemonium.com

> We could write all this with small alphas, betas, gammas. Everything which could serve to define the characters as real – qualities, temperament, heredity, nobility – has nothing to do with the story. At every moment each of them, even their sexual attitude, is defined by the fact that a letter always reaches its destination.

Date: Sat, 1 Oct 94 22:38:51 CDT
From: Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
To: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
Subject: Being a Temp.
So today I was being a temp, and I could see the way everything had a halo-ring around it, was burning, glowing. Well, maybe not burning, but I had guessed so because of my fever. It was very pretty there, even though it was very spare. Less than a month ago, I was told, there was no furniture, just phones, four phones in the middle of all this blue carpet. They were allowed to smoke there. This was not helpful. I do have some strange cold, and this morning before work I took a large teal-blue pill. It made my nose run for a while, and then made everything just burn. I needed 12-hour relief.

Outside the window where I was a temp were some fantastic stone plants, with windows between them. The windows, though framed and upheld by the plants, seemed puny and out-of-place. They only looked right when you saw people pass behind them. That justified those silly windows. It was a sunless day, and this made the scrolls look better. It made them fit together, made the stone the world. If the sun had been there, the building would have had to admit its separation from nature. But with no sun, it was as natural as the rain.

The inside environment was, well, strange. People there rushed about and talked a lot, and stood when talking on the phone. It was that much power they were pushing through the lines. When something would happen, one or the other person would simply speak loudly and those who were interested would listen. Would I be able to decide who to listen to from one moment to the next? Perhaps it was because I didn't understand most of what they were saying that it all seems so bewildering to me. They were trying to convince many people of many things. Some suits would wrinkle as the day wore on, and others would not. Why wear a suit if you do all of your work on the phone? Can you imagine a job that was so – *exciting* – every day? They were all so very excited.

The men drank a lot of coffee and hummed little tunes. Many of them should wear some sort of undershirt. One man's last name was Fengkui, which when I said it, sounded quite awful, but when he said it, sounded lovely. Truly. I usually do not say such things. And I do not simply think that it was my lightness of brain today that induced me to think this. Across the street from where I was working was where Jonathan works, an old friend I think you've met once. I wonder if he was working there, today. I didn't visit. I wonder how it is that child actors can act so well, as if they are ill and dying, or knowledgeable in strange subjects, or abused. How do they learn to do these things?

During my lunch hour, I gave half of my sandwich to a beggar and he told me that the sandwich had fallen from heaven. Not that it somehow came from heaven, but that it had fallen, actually. I told him it was peanut butter. He accepted.

The man asked for a quarter, and I gave him a sandwich. Sometimes they ask for odd amounts, like 61 cents, or 37 cents, and I wonder if they would give change, then? Or why they ask for such odd and difficult amounts? Who would sort through their bag before sharing?

Now that I'm home, the effect of the pill has worn off. Now it is just a fever head I have, and a light burning in the mucous membranes from the suppressant drug.

When I was on the train this morning, I was so confused by the drug that I was afraid I would not be able to work. Everything seemed to have either too much or too little impact on my senses that I was not able to make sense of things fast enough. So I just sat and watched, and helped out this woman who was partially unbuttoned. It was on her back. So I helped her. Or at least I think I did. Perhaps her back was so lovely that her act had been intentional. A seduction-to-be. And I ruined it. Alas. She was one of those people who, in an effort to get off the train first, stands for the last 10 minutes of her trip in the tiny steel stairwell. This I do not understand. So long to stand, and with no windows or seat. Those last 10 minutes pass through some nice rail yard, which is interesting to see. Also, it is the time when free newspapers become available. All the others who pack the stairwell sometimes leave them, neatly flopped over the rail, section by section, ready to be read again.

I think when I grow up I will get some magazines, but I will listen to the radio for news. The radio is good, since you can do things while you listen. Listening is good. It's a transferable skill! But radio can give you nearly everything you need. One low price. Entertainment and Information. And a skill (or two, if you knit or wash dishes while you listen). This I write, on the Information Superhighway.

I have a verse for your cat poem:

Cats sneak about
on their fur-covered paws;
to creep in the dark
and disregard Laws.

~~ Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>

Date: Sun, 2 Oct 94 17:42:41 CDT
From: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
To: Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
Subject: thinking of you...

Sitting outside, under the stars, with my PowerBook. The phosphorescent blue-white light from the screen reflects on my glasses and attracts a mosquito or two.

It seems as if my PowerBook glows with the same light as the stars. Technology.

Sitting here, watching the battery go down, thinking of you. Not much to say.

I love you.

Lane Coutell lane@pandemonium.com

> Hornsboodle, we should never have knocked everything down if we hadn't meant to destroy the ruins too. But the only way we see of doing that is to put up some handsome buildings.

Date: Mon, 3 Oct 94 10:12:11 CDT
From: Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
To: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
Subject: Sleep.

Lane.

I remember watching you sleep. I liked to do that. I would watch, and it would often make me smile.

I remember when it was hot, you would get all flushed in your sleep. But even when you were all red, I liked to look at you.

Perhaps this was a violation. But I would look at you from all different angles, trying several different approaches, and enjoy the way your appearance changed while I moved. Sometimes you looked so childlike, sometimes so strong.

All different things, you seem to be.

Dana.

For the boy who doesn't get enough mail.

From the girl who loves him.

~~ Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>

Date: Fri, 7 Oct 94 20:58:31 CDT
From: Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
To: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
Subject: Wherefore do Ye spend Money for That which is not Bread?

I am now temping for a Nursery. Not the plant kind, but the child kind. It is true, and just as you remember: at Nursery School, they have Nursery Rhymes. Although these have begun to be supplanted by more commercial, contemporary entertainments.

Yesterday, I went shopping. I boarded a train at 10:40. The only seat available was in a corner, so I could only see the other people, one of whom was a huge man with jittery eyes. His eyes jittered because he could see out the window and he was trying to follow everything, but the train was moving very fast.

After the train ride, which was filled with overheard conversations, I walked up State Street. I was thinking that the thing you would not like is the "Audio Equipment" stores which have very open fronts and compete with each other by playing extremely loud music. This is something I passed on the way to Skolnik's where the bagels cost almost a dollar. But that is because it is downtown.

While I was there I saw several small groups of people congregate spontaneously. Mostly older people. This amazes me, the way certain people just strike up conversations which actually are shared, just like that, under the L. If that ever happened to me, if I even *met* someone I could have a 20-minute conversation with, just on the street, I would be very excited and talk about it a lot later.

My next stop was Saks Fifth Avenue, to use the "Lounge" which has marvelous trompe l'oeil wallpaper.

Then, at that same place, there is an Irish store, and since it seems that at times you wish you were Irish I thought that would be the perfect place for a gift. I found Peas: peas grown, canned, and marketed from Ireland! But because of the weight of the can of peas, I decided this was not a good idea.

I then proceeded to the Newberry Library, where I found a biography of Zelda Fitzgerald, the "Paris Sketchbook" of William Makepeace Thackery, _One Hundred Years of Solitude_, and something else I don't right now remember. I almost bought you a 1948 Esquire pinup book, but it was $20 and the faces were really poorly done. Also, they were *hardly* naked.

So on I went. Betsey Johnson and some Italian store which had some sort of *authentic* $595 Parker Lewis silk shirts. They were glorious. But $600 was a bit much. Still is.

Shortly after I had some lemon ice that was tangy hours after I ate it. Quite good.

Then I went to the J. Crew store. It was very, very nice. It was a store in which to touch, as well as to look at. They are doing a brisk business.

After this I went to the Swatch Neuseum at Marshall Fields Water Tower. This is the only other place I have seen my sister's Swatch. In a Swatch museum! I'm still strangely drawn to the Swatch which needs no batteries, never needs to be wound, and has the theme "Your life is the power of Swatch" or "Love is all it needs" or

somesuch. If you take it off for over 36 hours, though, you may need to wind it.

Next stop was Nike Town, which has the nicest linoleum I have ever seen. Also, the Aqua Sox are displayed by this gorgeous saline aquarium. Near this, there is a glass floor under which there are monitors showing the surface of a pool. So one can walk on water, glowing water.

There is a basketball court inside Nike Town where one can test the shoes. The shoes are sent about this three-level complex inside dumbwaiters and air capsules. There are lots of clothes all there waiting, but you must ask for the shoes to be shot to you. You can request and evaluate them via computer.

They carry 30 sizes of kids' shoes.

I saw two great sets of street musicians. One was a band of six that sounded like a Motown record. There was a bass and guitar and incredible vocals. They were so good that the crowd interfered with the regular flow of traffic. I was amazed.

Then, at the next block, there was a percussionist and five dancers seemed to contain within their movements a greater deal of authenticity than the dancers for Peter Gabriel, et al. But we know the search for sources and origins to be a futile one. Still, they were very good.

I omitted the visit to Henri Bendel, perhaps because it is always too much. But they had wonderful hair things and bed things. It is, as they claim, a Lady's Paradise (Straight from Paris).
I hurried on to catch a train. And I did. But it was an express and not going to my mother's house. So I arrived at the train station in Arlington Heights, which is a lovely place. I'm glad the train *did* stop there. I made my way home from there.

Shopping. And I don't need a thing, I just want to get presents for my love.

I love you very much and wish I could share all good things with you.

Be careful, be good, be nice.

Dana

~~ Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>

Date: Sat, 8 Oct 94 23:12:09 CDT
From: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
To: Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
Subject: bela lugosi's...

The bad sucker fish jumped out of his aquarium. I don't know what he was thinking. I found him, on the floor, so far away from the aquarium that I thought, that's odd, what's a fish doing there? It was quite a belly flop this guy did. I thought he was dead, but I picked him up and dropped him back in the tank. He seemed to think he was dead too, for awhile, but then he started to think he might not be, and from the way things look now he's still deciding. We'll see.

I looked over and saw the Cheshire Cat smiling at me. I was surprised. So many nice toys I have! And so many were gifts from Dana!

Another verse for Rats To Cats!:

Cats are, as a rule,
quite ill-behaved.
They won't sit or speak
and rarely obey.

I made cookie dough this evening. Tomorrow, I make cookies.

Lane Coutell lane@pandemonium.com

> For West End girls, love comes quickly with many opportunities to make lots of money in suburbia, but it's a sin, and what have I done to deserve this? - you've paid my rent and you were always on my mind and in my heart, and all the while I was domino dancing because I was left to my own devices, but it's alright, even if it is so hard, because we were never being boring where the streets have no name, and I can't take my eyes off you because of my jealousy in this DJ culture and so I ask, was is worth it?

Date: Mon, 10 Oct 94 22:57:51 CDT
From: Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
To: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
Subject: Fernando the Cat Meets His Neighbors

Dearest Lane,

Late at night, sometimes, I take my cat for walks. I am not as good at this as some other people I've seen, but still I do it, and I enjoy it. I hold the young Fernando in my arms and we go walking, and looking, and smelling. Last night we met five young raccoons - a pack. We all stared at each other for a while before deciding to proceed. Oh, to be Doctor Doolittle and know what the animals think. I wanted to know what they think about the neighborhood. How I might improve their stay.

Last night I had a bedroom mosquito. Little could distress me more. Why must the bites be itchy? I could even stand the welts if not for that. I don't miss the blood, really, either.

>I made cookie dough this evening. Tomorrow, I make cookies.

You'll have to send me some. You're making the chocolate chip melt-a-ways, yes?

That reminds me. I've found a new recipe for waffles, in a book named _Cook Away, the Outing Cookbook_ by an Elizabeth Case and a Martha Wyman. The recipe is copyright 1937, and, as such, does not require Bisquick. You'll have to try them:

Waffles

3 eggs (beaten separately)	3/4 cup butter (melted)
2 cups flour	1/2 tsp salt
2 cups milk	3 tsp baking powder

Beat egg yolks very lightly. Add milk, then flour, gradually, and beat all, thoroughly. Mix in melted butter, baking powder, and salt. Lastly fold in stiffly beaten egg whites. The batter should be thin enough to pour.

~~ Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>

Date: Tue, 11 Oct 94 17:04:18 CDT
To: Dana Dana Bo Bana <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
From: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
Subject: (The Furthering Adventures of...)

>You'll have to send me some. You're making the chocolate chip
>melt-a-ways, yes?

But of course. Hopefully, they'll turn out.

>That reminds me. I've found a new recipe for waffles...
>You'll have to try them:
I'll do just that.

Talked to my mother on the phone. I reminded her, again, that I don't believe in God. She said that she thought that I really do, and that I'm just confused. I said no, that wasn't the case; I'm just not one to subscribe to conspiracy theories. She then asked me - later in the conversation - that I still pray, don't I? Doesn't the one preclude the other?

I was channel surfing a little earlier, and came across the Smurfs for a few minutes. Gargamel's cat is named Asrael. Which is a cool name. What I really couldn't understand is why Gargamel hates the Smurfs so - though, I understand how they might get on one's nerves, after a while. But Asrael is definitely the best.

I miss you.

Lane

Lane Coutell lane@pandemonium.com

> There are so many songs about love. But I was thrilled the other day when somebody mailed me the lyrics to a song about how he didn't care about anything, and how he didn't care about me. It was very good. He managed to really convey the idea that he really didn't care.

Date: Wed, 12 Oct 94 23:27:17 CDT
From: Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
To: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
Subject: Today!

Dearest Lane:

Today was a very good day. Let me begin with the fact that there was no work today, and that is what led to the proliferation of large, strange birds and tiny, white flowers that I later saw. Had I been at work, there would have been no birds, no flowers, no woods, no Bicycle. The birds, being so large, also had large alarming whistle calls, which they called and called in an alarming way. Let me add to that a temperature in the 90's, sudden showers which produced waves of hot steam and cool mist and who knows what other conditions over blacktop and forest. But I was there. Somehow, I managed to wedge vegetation into the tiniest parts of my bicycle – a sizable portion of this vegetative matter must have been an Onion, because that is now all I smell when near the bicycle. I went down by the river, to where the Methodist campground is (which, Lane, I think is a perfect civilization). I then passed through town to where the convent is and marveled that the people there had in 1952 built Jesus yet another tomb which He might dwell in and then Flee. There was a great bare hill there of mown weeds-and-grass and there was a Saint there with a child protected in his cloak, holding up a broken arm to the wind. I think it was Christopher, but it was a beautiful picture, with nothing but grass all around, and big billowing clouds in many colors passing rapidly with the wind, only briefly interrupted or diverted by the vestigial hand of that Saint. He was unable to influence the clouds in any way.

The Methodist Campground is this little, tiny world. There are small houses in it, a swimming pool, a dining hall, and a huge barnlike enclosure where there is room for any project you would imagine. All of it, except the swimming pool, was built in the late 1800s when one could use the river for hot-time swimming. The additions since then are largely homemade, and those, I think, stopped happening around 1960. The houses each have different angles and patterns and textures and they are all very close together. Each has its own garden filled with tall perennials and their butterflies. Usually these houses are freshly white; some are not, but mostly the houses are white. And there are lots of screen doors that bang and hinges and handles in obscure and overly decorative patterns. Nothing is like anything else there, and there is like nowhere else in the world.

One rides and rides down the narrow streets that were meant to be driven by graying, fantastic old ladies in shapeless calico dresses and big smiles on faded blue or red bicycles with large baskets on the handlebars. The grips on these handlebars are white rubbery plastic. The ladies ride from their own little cottages to others where their friends are, or to go to the post office in Des Plaines. They plan elaborate sharing suppers together and mourn the passing of eras and moments. They could teach you how to make 55 excellent crafts from old milk cartons and a few items You Already Have at Home. Or they could teach you to crochet lace. The streets are barely wide enough for a single creeping car, but have plenty of room for two, or even three, bicycles. There is a map of the camp which adequately describes the maze.

I will have to send a postcard to you, if I return and take some photos.

Now a Raging Storm is arriving, and I am safe inside. I did clean my bicycle and made it happy too, so all is well.

So then my mother says to me "I'd be more comfortable if you put on a dry shirt and dry shoes." I laughed. You see, there is one downspout which is the keystone to the entire Silverman Aqueduct System. And some unfortunate Lawncare Technician disconnected this spout. So we pushed it back together, but it is not the same without the rivets. So early in this colossal storm, the water started to collect at the side of the house and in the Window Wells. So I had to bail and reconnect the downspout. I bailed and bailed. The walls of the house were protecting certain centipedes. They come out of the crevices in the ground and cleverly align themselves with the grout in the bricks. Eventually I removed several gallons from each well. Still, some water did seep into the basement. I hate how that smells. And it does, whenever there is lots of water in a house. So I was there, with a little Tupperware freezer container, nose to nose with centipedes, and I am very wet. When I went into the house, those were the first words my mother spoke. Hmmmm.

One touch of Irony is that I had planned to go to the Y tonight for a swim. That seems like a lot of work, now, walking there in this rain. So I am just going to make some cookies, cookies you might have sent me. They were selling sugar sprinkles in those 90's retro colors, that particularly sunny orange-yellow-green set, as seen at the Gap, and also purple-pink-and-teal. You know which colors these are. So I'm going to make cookies shaped like big dippy asterisks.

I already tried flowers, but they just weren't pressing out right.

~~ Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>

Date: Fri, 14 Oct 94 07:32:41 CDT
From: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
To: Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
Subject: don't like the look of this old town...

Today I take Chester to the vet. He is now sitting on the plant stand, looking out the window. But there's a certain tenseness about him: every once in a while, he looks back into the apartment, and now he's staring at me. He's now taking a resting place on the couch very close to me, but also very close to the PowerBook, with its whirring disk drive spinning at 3600 revolutions a minute the words which I write you, yet maintaining the whole. There's something comforting in a technology that works and something placating in the continuous whirring sound of the disk drive.

Still, I think Chester suspects something. The bath last night, the morning grooming (which he never gets in the morning). And me, practicing in front of the mirror for when Dr. Boynton chides me for not keeping Chester to his diet: "But, he likes to eat!" ...or, perhaps "But, what can I do... the cat, he likes to eat!" When I last brought Chester to the vet, he weighed 15 lbs. and I was scolded for letting him grow so fat; now, he weighs 20. But if I do take a year or so off of his life, at least the years he does have will be much more content. If only someone were to indulge the both of us so... but we'd probably get tired of eating Science Diet Light day in and day out. Yet, Chester never suspects.

I looked for a larger cat carrier yesterday so Chester wouldn't look so big inside.

But, the pet store I went to only carried medium-sized cat carriers in this awful shade of blue, which reminded me of the Periwinkle crayon in the Crayola 64 set. I never liked the Periwinkle crayon, never knew what they expected you to color in that dull shade of half-hearted blue. But now if I ever come across a coloring book page with a medium-sized cat carrier I will know exactly what color to color it.

Well, time to be off. I am thinking of you, always. My love.

Lane

Lane Coutell lane@pandemonium.com

> "It's a Missage," he said to himself, "that's what it is. And that letter is a 'P', and so is that, and so is that, and 'P' means 'Pooh,' so it's a very important Missage to me, and I can't read it."

Date: Fri, 14 Oct 94 15:19:35 CDT
From: Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
To: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
Subject: Conveniences and Conveyances

Dearest Lane:

I am never quite able to convey my thankfulness for the things you do. I cannot tell you how much I appreciate your daily presence among my things and in my computer, and all of that. It really is too nice of you. And what do I do for you? I got a new smoke alarm today. You test it by flashing a flashlight at it. It is very nice. I wanted them to fix the old one, but the girl at Sears thought that was an outrageous request. So I bought some chocolate, because I suffer from intermittent bouts of depression, and it helped, if only briefly. Tomorrow morning I will feel better, once I am alone in the daycare rooms. Tomorrow I will teach the 21 children about flight, and they will love it. They always do. They want to be close to me because I present them with moving clouds and flapping marionettes and we make earthquakes together. I do teach a lot of Chaos, at least the little bit I was able to learn from the Gleick book so long ago. I cannot tell you how often that book and that knowledge colors my thinking, but once again, there you are, every day. Thank you Lane.

Lananh, a recent addition to the neighborhood, is my friend now. Initially she liked me, until she found out about my sordid past. Now she knows I am not a girl of little ethical thought. She now thinks I am all right. She is lovely, and lovelier in the pictures she's shown me, with her hair wavy and with no glasses on. She is still silly because she is Younger, and I remember when I am with her how it is to be Younger and I like that. And I make her look forward to being Older, I guess. She thinks anyone over 20 is old. I remember feeling that exact same way. I never thought I'd be like This.

Another verse:

Cats aren't very social
and at times, downright rude.

They like to ignore you
to go sit and brood.

Be careful, be good, be nice.

Dana

~~ Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>

Date: Fri, 14 Oct 94 19:47:31 CDT
From: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
To: Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
Subject: ...what goes up must come down

>I am never quite able to convey my thankfulness for the things you do. I
>cannot tell you how much I appreciate your daily presence among my
>things and in my computer, and all of that. It really is too nice of
>you. And what do I do for you?

So, I assume you got the mouse?

Well, went to the vet. I was, indeed, reprimanded for Chester's weight, my rationalizations notwithstanding. Dr. Boynton's assistant, Amy, gave me a brochure on pet "obesity", but she was kind enough to cross out the "Obesity" title and relabel it "Weight Control Measures" in blue ink pen. I laughed, of course, at the edit, but it strikes me now that some pet owners might indeed require the euphemism. Chester, it would seem, doesn't care. I called him "obese" right now, to his face, and he didn't blink an eye. Admittedly, I usually call him "fat," so perhaps "obese" hardly has any sting after that. But there's something biting about the cold "thingness" of a medical term.

At any rate, Chester's now on a weight-reducing diet: Dr. Boynton sent me away with a prescription for Hill's Prescription Diet Feline r/d. I was worried for awhile, since Chester weighs 20 lbs. (exactly! or, near exactly (or, really, not exactly at all) according to the vet's scale), and the feeding guide on the food ends at 15 lbs. But now, I see, "the amount to be fed is based on the desired weight rather than the obese weight". Of course, one would never do that for obese *people* - feed them what they should eat if they were to weigh what they should weigh - but then again, in the SlimFast commercials, you drink a glass for breakfast, and a glass for lunch, whatever your weight. Perhaps it's that "sensible dinner" that makes all the difference.

Hmm. Not much else going on.

Lane Coutell lane@pandemonium.com

"Yeah, that's fucking bizarre. That's one I'd never heard before.
Not even on the Internet."
— Bob Mould, on rumors that he and Grant Hart were lovers
when Husker Du broke up, Spin magazine interview, 10/94

Date: Sat, 15 Oct 94 17:11:52 CDT
From: Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
To: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
Subject: See More Glass.

>So, I assume you got the mouse?

Yes. It is too much of an improvement!

A story, for you:

Once upon a time, there was a little girl, and she liked to play outside.

She was outside, once, with a boy named *Steve Jones*. They were both from the *wrong side* of the tracks, and that is why they played alone. Just they two.

They were sitting on the bars on the 5th and 6th grade playground.

But they were neither in 5th nor 6th grade. No one can remember. Maybe it was 3rd.

Steve was "cool." He was strong and tan and feared.

(Aside. (Needn't read it.)) He was also short and smart. He took an "S.A.T." in 5th grade. No one knew he was smart. He was a behavior problem. The test scores never made sense.

The little girl was very little for her age. She was not "cool." But she was strong and tan and feared.

She decided to run. (She did that a lot.) She ran and ran and then decided that some of these bars on the jungle gym should be vaulted.

So she ran toward one of the lower bars and prepared to leap. But she did not make it. The first leg didn't, and all of her followed it into the bar. She did not cry. Because Steve was there. She did not tell anyone later, because it did not matter. But it *did* hurt.

That's why I limp some. I broke my knee. We found out 6 years or so later. I remembered the story about a year after that discovery. Sometimes it hurts a lot and I get *grumpy*.

Sometimes it hurts a lot.

Rilke wrote (or I remember he wrote):

Love consists in this:
two solitudes that protect...
that touch...
that greet each other.

I probably didn't remember it right.

~~ Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>

Date: Wed, 19 Oct 94 18:35:47 CDT
From: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
To: Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
Subject: joe camel is a bad camel...

Matt, as you know, is trying to quit smoking (not because you know he's trying to quit smoking, but because Matt is always trying to quit smoking), but when he dropped by last night he had a pack of cigarettes with him. I traded him gum for the Camels. Tonight, when I was biking (it's cold outside!) I saw a derelict of some sort and remembered I had the cigarettes in my pocket. I asked him if he smoked. He tried to tell me he had to go home. I told him yes, but did he smoke. He continued to garble on, but it seemed a very affirmative garbling so I handed him the pack of cigarettes. The garbling got quicker and perhaps more enthusiastic. It's hard to tell. But then, as I was leaving, he gave me a thumbs up. I returned the sign.

The other night I went visiting and I saw this sign on my host's door - "Hey Kids! Don't smoke! Joe Camel is a Bad Camel. Just Say No!" It was accompanied by our friendly phallus, hawking cigarettes in his inimitable way (well, until R.J. Reynolds comes up with another cartoon character cigarette salesperson).
Which reminds me - a few weeks ago I was told by Someone Who Should Know that the dromedary on the Programming Perl cover wasn't anatomically correct. That the head was a head of a two-humped bactrian, not the one-humped dromedary. Now, I'm not sure I quite believe that, and we both know that People Who Should Know Often Don't. Still, this is what that person said.

You, however, are anatomically correct. I sigh, thinking about it.

Lane Coutell lane@pandemonium.com

> My opinions are my own. They're my feet and I'll put them in my mouth if I want to. Do not expose to open flame. Under penalty of law, do not remove this tag. Caution, contains silica gel, do not eat. Do not read while operating a motor vehicle or heavy equipment. In case of eye contact, flush with water. This supersedes all previous notices.

Date: Thu, 20 Oct 94 23:56:27 CDT
From: Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
To: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
Subject: A Rush and a Push

Would you like to read a joke?

A young lady bought a postage stamp.

"Must I stick it on myself?" she asked.

"I should say not," said the clerk. "Stick it on the letter."

And another:

Mrs.: Whenever I'm down in the dumps, I get a new hat.
Mr.: Oh, so that's where you get them!!

I did my laundry today. It's nice to have a washer and dryer in the basement.

You know, I still cannot fold sheets. I remember my father getting very angry with me, and insisting that my six-year-old height was no excuse for not being able to fold sheets. At the time, I should have asked him to fold a sheet on his knees. But little girls don't do that. But even now I am not much of a sheet folder.

Yesterday night I took my neighbor's dog for a walk. Molly is quite middle-aged, but is of such small brain that one could never tell from seeing - but especially walking - her. She approaches every driveway and tries to go up it, seeing if perhaps it is our destination. I am not very good at yanking on leashes, but I learned. Her owners have a high-tech spool on the leash, with a sort of trigger grip, which makes quick jerks on the leash quite impossible.

Towards the end of our walk we passed two small children with a proud white Standard Poodle. I was so embarrassed. Their dog was a model of domesticity - even without the pom-poms. Mine skipped and hopped all over.

I rearranged my bookshelves again. I am generating space somehow. (I don't know how, but when I do I will tell you about it.)

I went out for breakfast, with Jeanne. I asked the waitress about the waffles. "Is it one square?" I asked, forming a square using the thumbs and index fingers of both hands. "Oh no," said the waitress. "It's a waffle, just a waffle." She was skinny and somehow misshapen. Her uniform was meant to suggest the shape of a woman, but in the various tucks and pockets it was clear there was nothing within. The ceiling of the restaurant was pink and many people there were dressed in pink. When my waffle arrived, it was an extremely generous circle, and quite tasty. I was happy with it, although I generally won't eat breakfast anywhere but home.

My father always refinishes bookcases thus: he puts wallpaper on the back of the inside; he stains the wood a dark, dark color. He does this always, for every piece he refinishes. I wonder if he papers the insides of desks? The undersides of chairs? I mean, he put this Holly Hobbie wallpaper inside this one bookcase and it will be there forever. In one picture, one of the girls is doing this strange thing with her toes. That image has always bothered me. And it is behind my books.

Now I want a snack, and then I think I will go to bed. I think of you with sincere fondness and love.

So have you taken a Super Ball into my old bedroom and set it loose, while wrapping your arms around your head for protection? Have you prepared yourself for another joke? Well, on my way to get a snack I misplaced my joke book, so I cannot tell you another. Without that book, I am quite humorless.

I am also very cold. I had intended to write more words to you, as I had last night, but by 12:30 I had expired. And now I must be off again. You deserve so much better than this. I will try. Soon, it will be better.

Soon, it will all make sense again. Things do always turn out. People much more

foolish than you or I have done OK. We must dedicate ourselves to coming out splendidly. I will let you train my dog. I think you might be very good at that...

I love you terribly! (and also, I love you!)

Dana.

~~ Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>

Date: Fri, 21 Oct 94 11:37:12 CDT
From: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
To: Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
Subject: no doubt it has always been that way...

Dana -

Watching Reading Rainbow. It's one of those things you do when you're sick. Today's show topic is jobs. So they showed us tons of people all perfectly happy with their jobs - i.e., exclamations of "I love this job!" or "I have the best job in the world!" This extends to grocery store check-out clerks, pizza makers, and the woman who makes all the Lego models. There was also a very hot redhead of small build who runs a dog-walking business: she was walking seven dogs at once on the show. So I guess I'm just a another down-and-out "generation nothing," too lazy to do anything.

They also featured a 15-year-old from the Bronx hawking nail polish to pay for his college education.

More frivolous verse:

Cats like to leave fur-balls
all over the house:
they get in the toaster
and cling to your blouse.

Lane loves you, Dana. Even though I'm sick, I still love you.

Lane

Lane Coutell lane@pandemonium.com

> I was walking on the ground. I didn't make a sound. Then I turned around, and I saw a clown. It had a frown. It stood up on a mound. It started barking like a hound. Clowny clown clown.

Date: Sun, 23 Oct 94 22:18:52 CDT
From: Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
To: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>

Subject: New!

This morning I rode in the MS bike-a-thon and it was OK, except that it was raining very hard. I got very wet and I rode all the way home that way and it was very heavy and cold. Then I took a bath and invited the cat to come with me into the bathroom. He watched the water and the bubbles and did, at one point, hop in, but then he hopped right back out again.

After that I went to the Art Institute, because I truly cannot stand my mother. I did not want to spend a single minute near her. But once I was there, I had to keep my fingers in my ears most of the time, because the people there were so loud. I wanted to think and couldn't think; I could barely read with all the racket. Perhaps some people thought I was strange, but I had to chuckle as I was looking at the extensive collection of ceramic pillows from China... so very many of them had pictures of a duck or a goose on them, or sculpted on them, and I was musing about the discomfort of a ceramic pillow as opposed to a feather-down one. It seems that something was lost in the transfer of the pillow idea.

The cat just crept onto the bed, said softly "New!," and then ran away as fast as he could. What was he thinking? The cat likes to make noise. He will sing while eating or drinking, or yawning, just to make different sounds than the usual disastrously high-pitched noo, new, or naa that he usually produces.

Lane, I am very lonely. I have no one to think thoughts with and no one to tell the thoughts I think. I want to make all sorts of things but I lack the time and the materials. In short, I am going through a phase of frustration. I have accepted many responsibilities at my old church, under the assumption I would have assistance in getting these things done, but no one is ever around to help me. On the weekends I am often without transportation, so I am stranded here in this house where my mother lives. During the week I am working. So I cannot move the furniture I promised to collect, I cannot meet with the other kids to plan outings. So I look like a lazy idiot, when in reality I am working so hard and getting nothing.

I conveniently lost my credit card and my cash card so I don't need to worry about spending money right now, although I do still have checks. I wonder what I did with these cards? I wonder if someone else has them now? Oh well, at least I am not spending. That is all. I'm gonna go now. I have to run some errands in the night. Be careful, be good, be mice. No, don't be mice. Chester would harass you then.

Much Love,

Dana

~~ Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>

Date: Tue, 25 Oct 94 15:25:40 CDT
From: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
To: Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
Subject: du kannst, denn du sollst...

So I think of famous personages I should model my life after. And although Ralph

Waldo Emerson and Gandhi come to mind, I can never think of a personality more worthy of emulation and respect than Chilly Willy the Penguin. You've got to admit, Chilly Willy's got his priorities straight. He's cold, 'cuz he lives in the Antarctic, so one of his goals is To Be In A Warm Place. He's hungry, because most things are frozen in the Antarctic, and he can't afford any Swanson Hungry Man frozen dinners, so his other primary objective is To Eat Good Food. And in these two objectives, with his endearing stubbornness, he usually succeeds. "More pancakes?" "Uh-huh." "More butter?" "Uh-huh." "More syrup?" "Uh-huh."

The best part is, Chilly Willy is a proto-revolutionary Marxist if I've ever seen one (and I wonder if I ever have). He regularly questions the capitalist ideologies of "private property", of Law, and State in order to realize his Needs, determined by the Nature of his Existence, all with a zealousness which can only be described as, well, revolutionary. Marxist without Manifesto. Chilly Willy the Penguin.

Lane

Lane Coutell lane@pandemonium.com

"Voyez-vous cet oeuf. C'est avec cela qu'on renverse toutes les ecoles de theologie, et tous les temples de la terre."

Date: Wed, 26 Oct 94 06:37:28 CDT
From: Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
To: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
Subject: No Subject

Lane,

No message. Just wrote because you love getting mail so.

Dana

~~ Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
Ceci n'est pas une .sig file.

Date: Thu, 27 Oct 94 22:03:39 CDT
From: Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
To: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
Subject: H is for Hedgehog

My dearest Lane,

Yesterday I went to the zoo. I saw a hedgehog there. It was a bit larger than a billiard ball. A woman was holding it in her gloved hand. It was in this billiard ball form. I asked her if I could see the rest of it. She turned the hedgehog over and it looked about the same on the other side, except that there was a slot in it. Occasionally this quaking ball of thorns would heave and make a loud Piff! sound. Surely a death by terror wherever it lies. Hedgehog.

I really wish I could introduce them to some nearby hedges. I'd love to see them wobbling around.

I later saw the deadly Echidna, which is like a hedgehog, only different. It flattens to a spiky mat and half-buries itself. A living landmine in the New Guinea forest floor. Just looking at one makes you think of pain. I have never seen one whole. Just its exposed deadly spines, rippling with Echidna life.

This morning on the bus I thought about the world's largest flower. This flower is huge and orange and sits on the forest floor upon a mat of its scaly leaves. I suppose this flower is pollinated by bears which step on the flower as they walk about, and carry the blossom-pollen on their paws from flower to flower, never realizing their vital place on the ecological chain.

Spectacled bears live there, in the vanishing rainforest. They are the ones who pollinate the giant Rafflia flower.

I feel excessively cheery. I feel overstimulated. The detergent I put in the dishwasher this morning looked like applesauce, and this thrilled me. The dew on the lawn was exciting, as were the three elderly Russians who shared the bus stop with me, the boldest of which asked me two-oh-nine, yet? And I said no, not yet. And then the three chattered away, and read newspapers printed in Cyrillic.

Yesterday I also went to American Science & Surplus, where all of the drinking birds are somewhat deformed. I saw a perfect glass dome for planting experiments - but it was made of red glass. Everything there is rather cheap, but since I have gotten old and sensible, I have little use for wild toys and nice scientific glassware.

I am truly distraught, despite my maddeningly sunny disposition.

I need sanctuary.

I need a reliable, dependable world.

I need to be alone.

I still love you. Be careful, be good, be nice.

Dana

~~ Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>

Date: Fri, 28 Oct 94 23:14:10 CDT
From: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
To: Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
Subject: D is for Dana

>I need to be alone.

And yet, you write me this.

I saw Breakfast at Tiffany's just recently. In Breakfast at Tiffany's, the writer goes to the New York Public Library with Holly and looks up his book. He's supported by an older, married woman who gives him an apartment and a closet full of suits. In Breakfast at Tiffany's, Holly's cat has no name. In Breakfast at Tiffany's, the writer gets to tell the story at the end. Even in Sunset Blvd., the writer tells the story at the end, even though he's dead, from his own story.

In Breakfast at Tiffany's, when the writer tells the woman he loves her, she runs away. Isn't it just like a woman?

In Breakfast at Tiffany's the writer gets published in The New Yorker. He gets published because he can tell the story of how the woman left him.

In the end, of course, the writer gets the girl, That's 'cause he's the writer.

My love.

Lane Coutell lane@pandemonium.com
 What system had proved more effective?
   Indirect suggestion implicating self-interest.
 Example?
   She disliked umbrella with rain, he liked woman with umbrella, she disliked new hat with rain, he liked woman with new hat, he bought new hat with rain, she carried umbrella with new hat.

Date: Fri, 28 Oct 94 23:16:42 CDT
From: MAILER-DAEMON@sobriquet.com
To: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
cc: Postmaster@sobriquet.com
Subject: Undeliverable mail

Your message was not delivered to the following recipients:
  dsilverman: User unknown

Date: Sat, 29 Oct 94 08:13:52 CDT
From: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
To: Dana Silverman <dsilverman@sobriquet.com>
Subject: Re: D is for Dana

Dana?

Lane Coutell lane@pandemonium.com

  Just then Grandfather Stupid stopped by.
  "Welcome to heaven," said Mr. Stupid.
  "This isn't heaven," said Grandfather.
  "This is Cleveland."

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Date: Sat, 29 Oct 94 08:15:21 CDT
From: MAILER-DAEMON@sobriquet.com
To: Lane Coutell <lane@pandemonium.com>
cc: Postmaster@sobriquet.com
Subject: Undeliverable mail

Your message was not delivered to the following recipients:
  dsilverman: User unknown
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WRITER'S NOTE

"Two Solitudes" originally appeared as a series of e-mail messages sent between the two participants, with carbon copies sent to the piece's audience. I'm now looking for a co-author to collaborate on another e-mail romance which will address the feedback I've received from readers of "Two Solitudes." Write me if you're interested.

Thanks to Mark Nevins, Jeff Curtis, Tim Connors, and Eric Tilton. Special thanks to Jim Miner, Matthias Neeracher, Scott Custer, and Melissa Pauna.

CARL STEADMAN

*Is an associate editor for CTHEORY (***http://english-server.hss.cmu.edu/ctheory/ctheory.html***), and works for the University of Minnesota's Center for the Development of Technological Leadership in Minneapolis.*

I once saw Elvis driving a pickup in Ohio. No, really.