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FREE

Missile Defense Before and After 9-11

The Ultimate MacGuffin

Stuart Davis

Fatal Choice

By Richard Butler
Westview
200 pp., \$22.00, cloth

The New Nuclear Danger: George W. Bush's Military-Industrial Complex

Dr. Helen Caldicott
The New Press
224 pp., \$14.95, paper

An Evening with Dr. Helen Caldicott.

Ithaca College, 17 November 2002
A FreeAirProduction
CD, \$5.00

Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars, and the End of the Cold War

Frances FitzGerald
Simon and Schuster
592 pp., \$30.00, cloth

Weapons in Space

Karl Grossman
Open Media Pamphlet Series
80 pp., \$6.95, paper

When American Flight 77 hit the Pentagon at 9:43 that September morning, the crash interrupted a conference in Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's office on missile defense. (So *Newsweek* reported; other sources made it a routine intelligence briefing.) The subject was not dropped in the urgency of defending the homeland against airborne or pedestrian terrorists but only adjourned. Within weeks Congress voted to give the President most of the \$8.3 billion he had sought for this cause, and the business press had reason to celebrate "the Good News on Missile Defense" (*Business Week*) and to congratulate the nation on its good sense: since September 11, opined Rupert Murdoch's *Daily Standard* in late October, "in the two places where it matters most—Congress and the minds of the American people—support for missile defense has, if anything, increased."

The Bush administration needed no reinforcement, having never lost the faith. Defense strategists of the Perle-Rumsfeld-Cheney stamp have cherished Missile Defense (hereafter MD) ever since Reagan days, first as a counterforce to arms control negotiations and more lately as a tool for reinstating Cold War antagonisms in a unipolar world. Rumsfeld chaired two pro-MD panels before taking office, the first espousing the "rogue states" theory of nuclear conflict during the Clinton administration's lapse of confidence in MD and the second threatening a "space Pearl Harbor" if such initiatives waned. Bush campaigned on it; Powell promised to get on with it "as aggressively as possible" at his confirmation hearings; and in late 2001 Bush announced the country's withdrawal from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty between the U.S. and the Russians, long an article of international stability. The Defense Department's Nuclear Posture

Review of January 2002 made MD the centerpiece of and fig leaf for its radical redefinition of U.S. strategic forces as a New Age warfighting force. And when Bush announced the first "modest" deployment of ground-based interceptors in Alaska last December, he cited the 9-11 attacks as an example of the "unprecedented threats" that called for such a shield. Thus far the recent record.

"Modest" in cost and conception is something Missile Defense has never been, as Frances FitzGerald's dramatic and detailed history of "Star Wars"—the derisive sobriquet for MD, called the Strategic Defense Initiative under Ronald Reagan—makes clear, and modest it will never be, if Dr. Helen Caldicott's punchy new guidebook to nuclear threats old and new, of which MD is only one, proves reliable. (Her recorded talk at Ithaca College is even punchier in its language.) Americans have spent roughly eighty billion dollars on MD since 1983 without producing a "capable" weapons system, a remotely bat-

tle-worthy apparatus without the dismal history of operational tests, many of them botched or cooked, conveniently chronicled at the Union of Concerned Scientists' website. The cost to international stability and confidence, writes veteran disarmament negotiator Richard Butler, has been big and will get bigger; the "fatal choice" of his title, for the U.S., is or was between shoring up and extending existing arms-control law and sabotaging the whole structure with proliferative measures like, for example, MD. But this is what our masters are committed to doing, in the face of resistance both popular and governmental from our traditional enemies (France and the U.K.) as well as our new friends (Russia and China), and most everyone else. Further, Caldicott and Grossman contend, current MD plans are a means to another means, the weaponization and nuclearization of space, for the sake of exploiting the stars and ruling the world. Much of the world, predictably, fears this thing and hates us for trying to build it; what

drives it on into the new century?

The question gains piquancy from a fact emphasized by Caldicott's title and FitzGerald's narrative: so much of this has happened before, and if the first iteration bordered on farce, the new one brings tragedy much closer. Upon Ronald Reagan's jaw-dropping announcement of March 1983 that the U.S. would research and develop a shield against hostile nuclear missiles there followed a cycle of initiatives, hyperbolic projections, learned debates over the rival merits of unproven technologies, clashes in Congress, palace plots, treaty reinterpretations, and aborted international arms negotiations. Bush I maintained the Star Wars commitment without materially enlarging it; the Clintonites, after a few years of downsizing, yielded to the pressure of Republicans and scandals and funded a MD development whose deployment they left to the folks to come, and with their coming the cycle began anew.

Jack Sherman

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Letters

Realigning the World

A friend who formerly lived in Ithaca shared with us a letter he sent shortly before the U.S. invasion of Iraq to his 21-year-old son, who is studying at the London School of Economics.

Wesley,

I wanted to take time today to give you my best understanding of what is happening in the world right now, as we face imminent war with Iraq.

Your mother says that when you called yesterday, you told her that you are concerned that if we go to war for moral principles (to depose a dictator, a despot who does bad things) it raises questions of where we then draw the line. Many people have said the same thing—what makes this particular dictator different from others.

The answer that his is a rogue state that supports or might support terrorism, even al-Qaeda, does not differentiate very well—which is why people supporting peace seem to be warmongers regarding North Korea or other countries (if we bomb Iraq why don't we bomb North Korea, which is a more serious threat), and why so many leaders of other nations are asking for evidence of the imminence of the threat. Dick Cheney's reply that we can't be asked to wait until after they attack is persuasive only if the threat of attack is great and fairly immediate, or if that threat will increase fairly rapidly with time, making it imprudent to continue diplomatic processes. Our leadership has not convinced the world leaders of that premise, though I have little doubt that they believe it, even think they know it.

In fact, I don't think this war is about an imminent threat, though I think our leaders are convinced they will find biological and chemical weapons, and even evidence of a nuclear weapons program, when they go in, and that will justify their actions. Nor is this a war on moral principles, or a fight for oil, though both of those factors may motivate some people with influence. This is a war to realign the world. It is a flexing of the military muscle of a superpower determined to test its ability to shape the future of the world political structure—what many call the new world order.

The key leadership in the Bush administration—Dick Cheney above all, Rumsfeld, and Paul Wolfowitz, played a key role in the Reagan administration. They think that they won the cold war—won it after years of containment and conflict. They think that by standing tall, playing their strengths, they forced the dissolution of the Soviet Union. They think they did that by advising a President whom they see as an honest, moral man and who took most of their advice. They

see Bush as another such.

They would probably admit that the breaking up of the Soviet empire was largely a matter of the overextension of the Soviet sphere of influence far beyond a sustainable area, and the attempt of Russia to maintain a very large buffer against the West (and the East) by military force and dominance—which came to ultimate grief in the very part of the world where we are now carrying on our own adventures. But they think that they played their cards right in the face of that overextension, challenging, supporting rebel forces, supporting the reform movements within the Soviet Union, and bankrupting the Soviets by forcing impossible levels of military spending. I suspect that conviction is unshakeable.

They also had what they consider success in the Philippines, where they withdrew support from Marcos after years of propping up that dictatorship, gave limited support to Aquino, and ended up with some increase in democracy.

It is worth remembering that the cold war, which we see as the period of our containment of the Soviet Union, could reasonably be seen as a standoff, a period of mutual containment. Two superpowers were opposing each other, with a combination of the threat of ultimate force (nuclear devastation) and tactical battles. The US saw itself as the side of peace, freedom, and democracy, up against communism. My impression is that the leaders of the Soviet Union had fewer illusions—although they used the rhetoric of progress and social change, they acted as a power bloc.

With diplomacy and military support, our country supported nations that would align with us—pretty much regardless of issues such as justice or democracy, and we opposed elements that did not align clearly with us, regardless of their support for justice or democracy. It was not the pure and idealistic conflict that we thought it was. In a sense two superpowers (with a third contender, China, brokering between them) faced each other; the US with a strategy of alliances and the Soviet Union with a strategy of military dominance in their own sphere of influence and support for dissent, trying to establish a beachhead, in ours. From time to time, in Korea, in Viet Nam, in a few other places—it came to open shooting wars.

After half a century, the strategy of dominance could not hold together. And it collapsed during the Reagan administration. Reagan called the Soviet Union an evil empire—a position not that different from that of the US for half a century, but using more aggressive language because of the changing world situation. If you listen to Cheney, it is as if he thinks that Reagan stood up and told the simple truth, "the Soviet Union is an evil empire," and the empire collapsed. It did collapse, ending a long standoff

and mutual containment and leaving a world with one decisive superpower. As the Cheney-Wolfowitz guys see it, they won the cold war, by being the last one standing.

They believe that they are about to repeat those triumphs on a much larger scale. Dick Cheney, on Meet the Press (we sent you the tape) laid it all out quite clearly. He compared Bush to Reagan, even praising Bush for being sort of a cowboy. He said that he expects the Iraqi army to give little resistance to US forces, and he even suggested both that the Republican Guards might surrender rather than fight and that Saddam Hussein might be assassinated by his own forces. He clearly thinks that the war will not last long, that it will be acceptable in the level of civilian casualties and infrastructure damage, and that (he used these words) we will be greeted as liberators by the Iraqi people. A heady, highly optimistic appraisal—but unmistakably what he thinks.

But our leadership is not going to fight this war because they can win it. They are fighting it to realign the world.

First, they think they can realign the Middle East. They think by deposing Saddam they can create an opening toward the West. Iraq is a relatively well-educated nation, and has a history of ties to the first world nations. They want to combine a "model of democratic reform" in Iraq with a Palestinian state (to remove the most extreme provocation to constant war and bombings) and most probably a regime change in Saudi Arabia.

It is reasonable to think that Wahhabi dominance in Saudi Arabia is the root of much of the extremism in the Middle East. It is the result of a remarkable coincidence—the rise of a form of Islamic Puritanism in the 18th century, its alliances with the Saudi tribe, the Saudi tribe's rise to dominance in Saudi Arabia, and the discovery of oil there. The result is a regime which pays lip service to an extremely puritanical, fundamentalist religion and at the same time indulges in the greatest excesses. That hypocrisy stimulates extreme reactions. Osama Bin Laden is from the Saudi upper class; he is an ascetic rebel adhering to the religious beliefs his family professes but does not practice.

The present prince who leads the Saudi government is aged and dying. For years now there has been talk in the power circles about what will happen at his death. It could be a turn to the fundamentalist position, strongly anti-western. Indeed, that is the expected result unless some action intervenes. The pro-western elements in the country, and the "westernized" princes, want to see a shift toward a more moderate leader. They want it to be a Sunni leader, not a member of the Shiite branch of Islam. I think there is every reason to believe that the American leadership thinks or hopes that they can engineer a more pro-western government as a compromise on the part of the Saudi leadership to avoid a Shiite challenge.

So they think they will create a more democratic and pro-western government in Iraq, a more moderate and pro-western government in Saudi Arabia, and a Palestinian state. They believe this will make Israel more secure, stimulate (by example and encouragement, perhaps subversion) movements for change in places like Iran, and make it more difficult for Syria to play a role in supporting extreme elements. Cheney even thinks that a strong military stand by the US in Iraq will gain us support from the "Arab Street," because moderates will know they have a strong ally and can stand up to extremists.

This is a dramatic vision, and I think it is deeply held in this administration. It is underpinned by an absolute conviction that we are the good guys: a selfless nation, morally right, committed to democracy and freedom, transforming the world into our image. This

is an asset in terms of domestic politics—it fits well with the American self-image—but combined with a changed attitude toward other nations, foregoing long-term alliances for "coalitions of the willing" and caring less about world opinion, it is a liability internationally.

It happens against a new sense of the shape of the world. The United States is the remaining superpower, and the people who are crafting these strategies want to figure out how to avoid the emergence of a second. The candidates right now are two: China, and Islam. There are secondary possibilities—Japan, for instance, or even Europe, but the relevant one here is Islam. The fear is that the former Soviet Republics, with large Moslem populations, might align with Iran, maybe Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, etc and create a wealthy, populous, militarily capable bloc. The fear is that with time such an alliance might become more likely; the hope is to create a turn to the west in the Middle East that forestalls such an alliance.

All this is in the service of creating a world in which one superpower can prevent the emergence of others, enforce its vision of what the world should be like, and take military action when necessary to back up diplomatic and economic strength with violent power when necessary. As you have pointed out in our past conversations, the threat of violence has always been the underpinning of power in such a context. And that, of course, is another purpose of this war—to give a massive, stunning demonstration of capability—perhaps especially after the drawn-out process of Afghanistan and the difficulty of chasing Osama Bin Laden and his troops through mountains and caves.

One of the special dangers facing a nation with great military might is that those in the military (despite their rhetoric of peacekeeping) tend to want to use that might from time to time. Without being unduly cynical, officers in the military rise faster and do better when there are some conflicts, and the architects of strategies and weapons systems like to see them used and tested. Thus the power structure of the military tends to support military actions, and when policy makers choose that course they find support there. There is a major new development in American military force, right now, driven by two innovations—stealth delivery capability and precision delivery capability of powerful bombs. In WW II a B17 bomber would have had to drop 800 bombs to have a 90% probability of hitting a target half the size of a football field. Now one bomb has a 90% chance of hitting that same target. And stealth capabilities raise the odds of bombs getting through to their targets. With those capabilities comes a new strategy: massive parallel attacks, quickly destroying key parts of the enemy system and disabling effective response.

That strategy was used with restraint in the Gulf war in 1991. It will apparently be used without restraint this time, and knowledgeable people are expecting everyone to be shocked by the amount of destruction that will result. If you reflect on the rise in capabilities I just described, and notice that the US is talking about 3000 precision bombs in the first hours of the war, then the first wave of this war will unleash destructive power equivalent to B17's in WWII delivering 2.4 million bombs. And that is with regard to accuracy—the explosive power of individual weapons will be greater, though the amount of ineffective but destructive power turned loose in WWII will be reduced. The weapons will mostly destroy what they are intended to destroy. The military, and in particular the Air Force, has reorganized around this strategy, and they want to see it in action and show others what it can do.

This is the military side of the new world

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Marching On Third Avenue

Steve Coffman

Alternately we doze and chat with simpatico strangers across the aisle, Elon with his nine-year-old daughter Arianna, and in the next seat up Mary from England with her younger daughter Maya. Ours is last in the line of six buses from Ithaca, a winding peace caravan driving into the snowy predawn Poconos. While Elon and Arianna busily decorate their peace poster with hearts and moons and stars, Mary asks what we think it will be like, this huge non-march we're off to, her English accent already giving it a touch of international bonhomie.

We have reason to be uncertain. The long scheduled February 15th march has been disallowed by a court injunction: No marching. And by police order: No interfering with normal traffic or pedestrians. So what are we all going to do then? Also: No megaphones; No wooden sticks on signs or banners; No magic markers (potential instruments of graffiti secret code delivery to al-Qaeda or other evil-Hordes-of-Hell). Our government that so blithely speaks about democratizing Iraq (as though that were just a Quicky Lube oil change) is clearly less interested in protecting our own democracy. What's more, the city is even refusing to provide port-o-potties. Too dangerous! We're at Code Orange! Someone might hide a bomb in one! Drop a bio-load! Expel a chemical blast!

From Port Authority, Bobbie and I grab a subway to Grand Central Station where we put on our shabby-as-this-war garb. I slip over my head a large piece of uneven plastic sheeting with random duct tape on it, in mid-back the duct tape arranged into letters spelling "NO WAR." Bobbie puts on her protest poncho, too, a torn square of old paint-spattered bed sheet, WAR and POISON scrawled in drippy red marker, a Bushhead skull and crossbones and a few fashionably feathered twirls of plastic duct-taped on for good measure.

On New York subways I'm always astonished by the human mix, so various that it seems to obliterate distinctions of race, belief, and nationality right in front of my eyes, my urge to sort them out instantly arbitrary and absurd: Sri Lankan? Peruvian? Finnish? Mongolian? Cuban-Chinese? And at every stop the lineup changes: American? Visitor? Immigrant? Alien? Friend? Foe? What's-it-to-you-Buddy? Two stops up I'm still musing on our continuing American melting pot . . . when a bundled man in the corner seat next to me exits and I see a bulging shopping bag left under his seat. "Hey—your package!" I call after him, but he's already gone, doors closing, train jerking back into motion.

"An abandoned parcel!" a voice warns. Not sure what else to do, I carefully pull the bag out from under the seat to see what it is. Hesitantly unrolling its squashed down top, I can feel the body language of many people moving back.

Then another voice pipes in: "Hey, don't worry, it's OK—he's got his protective gear on!" whereupon the whole bomb scare suddenly defuses into a chorus of chortling laughter. Discovering the shopping bag is only garbage, I push it back under the seat, then wipe my hands off on my jeans. The shared laughter gives me confidence in my

ridiculous getup. I'd been somewhat uneasy, thinking that maybe I wouldn't see the Big Security Scare as being so transparently manipulative if I lived here where so much real damage had been done. But now, this burst of laughter assures me that, of course, plenty of New Yorkers see through the fear-mongering, and undoubtedly resent being used as point-victims for its endless promotion.

When we disembark at Lexington, I find that the plastic and duct tape outfit is actually a bit of a hit, prompting not only laughs but even a couple of crinkly pats on the back. Weirdly, we reemerge to daylight via a subterranean entrance to Bloomingdales where our bladders compel us to take advantage of what might well be this afternoon's last comfortable opportunity for relief.

In terms both of fashion and purpose what an incongruous metaphor we and Bloomingdales embody: Yates County us after eight hours of bus travel in our jeans and winter coats under our plastic-and-duct-tape costumes replete with anti-establishment messages in this quintessentially class-conscious bazaar of American consumer enticement and imperial opulence. I feel like a plumber's hand stuffed in a lace glove, so far beneath fashion as to almost be fashionable. How lush and immense Bloomingdales is, and how decorously well-hidden are its johns! Lost and dizzy in the maze of gorgeous goods, we wander from department to department, not in search of men's and women's sportswear, men's and women's evening clothes, men's and women's cosmetics or foundations, but simply of Men's and Women's Rooms.

When we finally ask for directions, a lovely cashmered woman spritzes a mist of heavenly perfume on Bobbie's wrist and conspiratorially whispers: "Perfume for peace. I'm for peace, too! Good luck at the rally."

"Mm, thank you," Bobbie says. "No one ever said that protesting means you can't smell good, right?"

"Sure, right. Hey, I love the outfits, too."

On the burgeoning streets our relief is short-lived. En route east toward First Avenue where the rally is to be, barricades and lines of police lead and funnel us across Third and Second Avenues until, like Kansas City cattle on their final boardwalk, they inexorably try to herd us into metal pens! Bobbie asks one of the phalanx of policemen what this exactly means. With terse politeness he explains that if we go forward we'll have to go into whichever pen is currently being filled. As soon as each pen is filled, it'll be closed and the next pen will be opened and filled, pen after pen until all the protesters are contained. Within the pens we could watch the rally on big screens—chant, sing, whatever. But once a pen was closed it was closed until the rally was over, and no one who got out would be allowed back in. If we didn't go into a pen now, we'd have to go back the way we came. No standing. No loitering. No walking in the streets. No protesting on the sidewalks.

Bobbie and I do not need to speak. Auschwitz stabs at the back of my mind, haunted by Jews being led orderly into special areas, then crammed into cattle cars. As we eddy our way back against the increasing flow of oncoming compatriots, I want to warn them; I can't believe they know what

they're headed for.

"Animals get herded into pens, not people!" Bobbie bursts out.

"I'm not getting into any pen, I know that!" I blurt. Equally stunned into dejection, we decide to get a coffee somewhere and try to think this out.

By the time we work ourselves back to Second Avenue, the sidewalk against us is packed with cheering, singing, sign-waving protesters hurrying toward the pens. Maybe we're overreacting. As all the coffee places we pass are almost as jammed as the pens themselves, we continue on to Third Avenue where the jam of people is thicker still. I've never seen so many people, and all of them here to protest this goddamn insane malignant pre-scripted war. Even if we just go home now, maybe that consolation is enough.

On the other side of Third Avenue, I see some young people with an enormous six-or-seven-foot-in-diameter GLOBE, so big that it's completely stopped all pedestrian traffic on that side of the avenue. Police are fussing all around them trying to get them going but its too crowded for them to maneuver the big unwieldy ball. They can't go forward or back and the side streets are all barricaded under police control. As we inch forward, the crowd continues to compact until we finally hear a police megaphone bark out: "ALL RIGHT! YOU, GLOBE PEOPLE—IN THE STREET! GLOBE PEOPLE ONLY! STAY AS NEAR THE CURB AS YOU CAN! EVERYBODY ELSE STAYS ON THE SIDEWALK! GLOBE PEOPLE ONLY! ANYONE ELSE IN THE STREET GETS ARRESTED!" A huge cheer goes up as the globe floats over the curb and into the street. Almost immediately people in front of it and behind it step over the curb, too. The police slide over to surrender a lane but try to hold the line. A second lane goes. I hear a distant chant arise, sweeping our way like a human wave at a football game. A third lane falls, the car and truck and bus traffic quickly being swallowed like whale food.

"Whose street? Whose street?" I think I hear.

"Our street! Our street!" the reply is clear. "WHOSE STREET? WHOSE STREET?" "OUR STREET! OUR STREET!"

"WHOSE STREET? WHOSE STREET?"

From sidewalk to sidewalk, from storefront to storefront with six lanes of traffic stopped in the middle, Third Avenue is being marched upon. "Like this from 45th Street to 79th!" a guy with a big radio yells. "Same on Second Ave.! Lexington, too!"

"OUR STREET! OUR STREET!" we all cheer.

It's clear we'll never make it back to First Avenue, never see the stage on the big screens, never hear the speeches. I don't mind at all. I've heard all these speakers before. Bishop Tutu, Julian Bond, Angela Davis, Susan Sarandon, the others. They're like old friends and seeing them would be good but this little "freedom to assemble" thing seems more important now. Like throwing tea into Boston Harbor. Best of all would be for us to pour onto First Avenue and free all our fellow protesters from their pens so they could march too! I know that won't happen, though. In fact, we're so thickly packed that each short block takes about half an hour to traverse. Just the same, it may not be John Philip Sousa but it sure as hell is a

march! For a few hours the oil consuming vehicles on Third Avenue have stopped to contemplate. City buses sit empty and at rest, their passengers either joining the march or catching another bus a block or two over. Frustrated car drivers have to wait it out until they can inch ahead to the first available cross street where the police open the barricades to let them pass. In the midst of our group a trapped cement truck moves in an almost other-worldly way, its revolving yellow cement-filled orb moving counter to and faster than its wheels; from his cab perch, the driver waves sympathetically—when the crowd cheers he honks along in Sousaphone-sounding solidarity.

As we struggle slowly onward we have ample time to talk with strangers. From Pennsylvania, Brooklyn, Amherst. Within our churning area we see Indians and Pakistanis. Korean drummers. Four black girls clapping rhythms. Jews and Palestinians arm in arm. Two PETA teens. Two white-haired women in fur coats. A small boy clinging to his father's neck looking backwards over his shoulder. Members of a Pipefitters Union. Vietnam Vets.

We also have ample time to study the signs and banners, puppets and effigies. About half the signs are mass-produced, half homemade. Some straightforward: "No Blood For Oil!" "No War In Iraq!" "Not In Our Name!" "Peace In The World or The World In Pieces!" Others sardonic: "What's Our Oil Doing Under Their Sand?" and "Bomb Texas, It's Got Oil!" A dopey picture of George Bush with his head split open like a coconut, captioned: "Empty Warhead Found In White House!" Our personal favorites being: "Asses Of Evil!" and "What Would Jesus Bomb?"

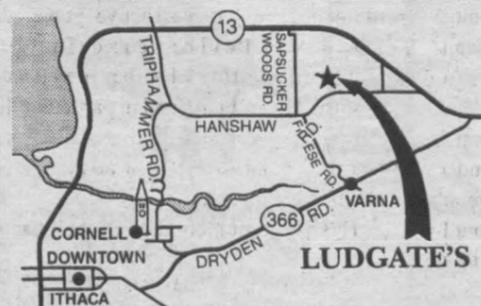
Though, for both of us, most powerful of all are the individual but thematically-connected placard cutouts that six young people are waving, each a different tortured cutout from Picasso's Guernica, like jigsaw pieces of the great anti-war masterpiece begging to be put back together into unfractured artistic unity.

By three o'clock or so, Bobbie and I are flagging and in need of every kind of relief. At 57th or 58th Street, we unplug ourselves from the electric stream and eventually find a small deli where we finally get a coffee and something to eat, discuss experiences with marchers at other tables, use the restrooms, decide against the subway and begin the long chilly walk back to Port Authority and our peacefully weary bus ride home.

Postscript: Two days later we hear that the Guernica group was among the few arrested on the march. Later we also hear that on the day Colin Powell made his war-pitch presentation at the UN, a tapestry reproduction of Guernica that hangs as artistic caveat outside of the Security Council was covered up for the occasion. Guernica—created in memory of a peaceful Basque village bombed by the Nazis for the sole purpose of stifling resistance against Franco's fascism—draped by a more message-and-media-palatable banner of cloudless, thoughtless sky blue.

WHOSE STREETS, DAMN IT? WHOSE STREETS?

Steve Coffman is a writer who lives on a farm in Yates County.



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Beyond the Hundredth Meridian

Chris Furst

I Should Be Extremely Happy in Your Company

By Brian Hall

Viking Press

448 pp., \$25.95, cloth

As we near the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark expedition, how do we look upon the leaders of the Corps of Discovery: as the plaster heroes of Manifest Destiny, as men of "undaunted courage" (from the title of Stephen Ambrose's book about the explorers), men to match the mountains, brave stalwarts who carried out Thomas Jefferson's vision of reaching the Pacific, or the advance party of a flood that would engulf Indian cultures? Layers of legend and romantic idealization have made it difficult for us to cut through the undergrowth of mythic language and see the captains as human beings. In contrast with earlier fictional treatments of Lewis and Clark, Brian Hall's novel is an imaginative act of recovery, rescuing the explorers from hagiography by concentrating on the fallible men who performed extraordinary things. That very fallibility opens up territory for Hall's exploration. This is not a revisionist history of the West, an effort to pull down icons or write a satire in the manner of *Little Big Man*. And while the book contains several comic moments, especially the scene in which Jefferson pedantically instructs Lewis to look for evidence of a mammoth, its depiction of Lewis's ultimately tragic fate is one of the finest character portraits in recent fiction. He is the real center of the book.

Lewis is a man who longs to escape. "[H]e spread out the maps again, and opened the books, and he lowered himself into them, going away." Immersion in distance is almost

a baptismal rite for Lewis. "Alone in his canvas cave in the cool late-winter night, he breathed down on the map spread open to him. A license, nay, a duty to run away." Even before the expedition, he often rises at half past four to hunt in the still-wild woods along the Potomac. But serving as Jefferson's secretary in Washington City requires Lewis to endure society and the torments of dinner table conversation. "[Jefferson] valued conversation above all, and Lewis lacked that sort of flair...When Lewis had one of his black fogs upon him, he felt doubly oppressed that he was not being a serviceable protégé to his patient mentor." Jefferson's choice of Lewis to lead the expedition accomplishes "a different and better birth" for the younger man and lifts the black fog of melancholy.

In the West, Lewis can leave behind the enclosed world of the East. "Lewis was forced to concede: this was a geography he did not understand. And its inhuman size had begun to—what was the word—oppress him? Perhaps even frighten." Remember that these explorers were men accustomed to judging distances in the humid East. A mountain that would seem ten miles away back East might take days to reach in the arid West. The sheer immensity of space is anodyne for Lewis. He is almost able to leave behind his own weather, his own internal sky, as he journeys westward.

The high point of the expedition for Lewis, and one of the best scenes in the novel, is the discovery of the Great Falls of the Missouri. "[D]oes *Homo louisianensis* somehow foreknow, in his marrowbones, where the Great Falls are, and in his selfish heart of hearts does he want to reach them not only first, but alone?" Going upriver the next day, Lewis discovers more falls after the first. After the second falls

[he] almost doubles back; his men will worry. He does turn. But as he turns, his upriver ear catches the whisper of another roar. Come! Come away! Lewis crosses the point of a hill where the river bends, the roar growing louder—and so discovers the third falls. Nearly as grand as the first, fifty feet high (more dead buffalo, pile on the banks), a quarter of a mile from side to side, pitching over a shelving rock with an edge as straight as art might make it. How to describe? (Alas, he must.) Perhaps: whereas the first falls, in its tumult and impetuosity, was an expression of sublimity and the ineffable, this one, falling in a single, even sheet, is a vision of ordered beauty. (Did he crib that from Burke?)"

The rapture of discovery draws him onward. "And now the trap is sprung. The river has led him to this spot, the buffalo has stepped forward to empty his gun. Does Lewis foreknow the encounter, and act his part?" A grizzly bear chases him into the river, but Lewis faces him with his espartoon, and the bear runs away. "The man stood his ground and said *Come on!* Death ran." He encounters an animal that seems "first a wolf, then some kind of tiger, its rippling coat a tawny yellow." He fires and the animal disappears. Walking on, three buffalo bulls confront him, yet they flee as well. "The sun is sinking, and he half believes if he spends the night on this enchanted plain, the sun will rise to disclose his gun and espartoon, the embers of his fire, but not a bit of him. His will have disappeared like that tiger, called away by the river-god and the bear-god, to join their conspiracy."

The expedition reaches the Pacific, but for Lewis "the hard part was over" and the terri-

ble letdown begins. Gloomy months spent in rainy winter quarters at Fort Clatsop sour him on humanity—the Indians beg and steal—and the rain never relents. "Lewis asks himself, months later, when the gleam came off the world." Lewis is a true melancholic, a man unprepared for the aftermath. Returning to the adulation of his countrymen, Lewis is never quite able to rejoin the human race. Appointed as governor of Louisiana Territory, a task for which he is temperamentally unsuited, he feels assailed by small men on the make. He is also a writer who cannot write. Despite his best intentions, he finds himself unable to write an account of the expedition.

While Lewis is depressed, Clark, by contrast, meets the world as it is. He is the ballast, the steadying force behind the expedition. Lewis is almost jealous of Clark's ease, his ability to accept what life hands him. Clark marries soon after their return, and Lewis becomes desperate to find a wife. Yet he speaks of women in the abstract—it's always "the ladies, the ladies," not a particular woman. To paraphrase a line from John Crowe Ransom, Lewis "cannot fathom or perform his own nature." Lewis's suicide takes on a tragic inevitability.

In a novel composed of many voices, Hall takes some of his greatest—and most successful—risks in rendering the language of Sacagawea's narrative. And while it is obvious that he has done a huge amount of research, he never allows it to overwhelm the narrative.

This is not just great historical fiction but great literary fiction as well. *I Should Be Extremely Happy in Your Company* is Brian Hall's third novel, and his best.

Chris Furst is the assistant editor of Cornell Alumni Magazine.

Realigning the World

continued from page 2

order. On the economic side it takes the shape you are well familiar with—the enforcement, in the name of financial stability and opportunity, of a series of measures which Thomas Friedman (who is pretty much a cheerleader for the process) calls the "Golden Straitjacket"—a combination of reforms and policies to favor international investment, without which no investment will be made. You will remember from John Gray's book on what he calls the delusions of global capitalism (*False Dawn*, and isn't he at LSE now?) some of the objections to that strategy. As you pointed out in a recent conversation, the emphasis on wide open free markets has shown some success in certain kinds of economies centered on small business, but it remains a Chicago School theory in a larger context. And cultural issues and values, and homogenization, and the failure to maintain a decent safety net (much less egalitarian distribution), and the lack of controls when things go wild (as in the Russian Mafia-style capitalism) are all serious concerns. With this process of globalization comes a decline in the sovereignty of individual nation states (by such means as international compacts to restrict the right of nations to impose environmental controls on international business). This powerful combination—promises of investment, threats of no investment, and the ultimate threat of military force—will reshape our world.

This process creates two different sets of problems. The first is whether the world it hopes to create is one we want, and how the people of the world can affect the shape of that emerging world, and that is a conversation you and I have been having for some time. It is the subject of much of your reading

and thinking, and will be the background of much of your life's work. You could not be better positioned to explore that question than you are at the London School of Economics, and I know you will continue to do so. In fact, I am confident that you will continue to do so with great independence and without accepting arguments from either side without testing them against your own (growing) knowledge and experience of the world.

The second set of problems deals with whether these assessments of risk and opportunity are realistic, and the possible dangers of miscalculation.

I saw one article in the *Financial Times* suggesting, more than half seriously, that the new alliance of France and Germany could be as important in the world as the previous one of Germany and Italy. I do not expect that to be true, but it is the other side of the "irrelevance of Europe" that the lecturers you have told us about are worrying over.

What is happening in the Far East suggests that the prospect of an unchallengeable superpower may be stimulating unrest rather than stability. What is happening in Korea could be seen as an isolated nation trying to insure its position within its region as unsailable, when it comes (as it might) to conflict with the US.

What are the dangers to the US domestically if the administration is wrong, perhaps radically wrong, about what will happen when they invade Iraq? What will be the cost if the result of this adventure is a long period of instability and ethnic conflict in Iraq? What if an occupying army is not greeted as a liberator but seen, at once or in time, as an oppressor? What if some other elements of this grand plan go awry? What if the Saudis turn toward the anti-western position? What if our involvement in Iraq stimulates action

against us elsewhere in the world?

The breadth and boldness of this strategy to realign the Middle East and the world is breathtaking. Is it breathtaking arrogance? It reminds me of the dimly remembered Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba—which was supposed to be greeted by defections in the Cuban armed forces, an uprising of the people, and the overthrow of Castro. It is fair to say that invasion (though it was pressed by a group of exiles pursuing self-interest) had many of the same "idealistic" motivations or rationalizations as this war and was a product of an earlier generation of quite similar thinking. The capacity of people driven by ideology to make mistakes of judgment is axiomatic.

I have deliberately tried to make these reflections dispassionate and fair. In fact, as one who lived through some enormous and tragic missteps by the US government, I think this administration is reckless. They are putting a lot of chips on one spin of the wheel, and for it to turn out well (for the US and for the world) they have to be right about a sequence of things—right about the Iraqi army, right about their ability to conclude this war quickly, right about the reaction of the people, right about the possibilities for stable government afterward.

Do you remember the work of Jonathon Demming, the business thinker who was the intellectual force behind the Total Quality Management movement and the Six Sigma Excellence approach of Jack Welch at General Electric? He pointed out that if you have a series of six steps in a process, and they are sequential, each building on the one before, it has a dramatic effect on performance. If you do the first two processes at 97 percent effectiveness, the next one at 95%, and the last three at 90%, your overall performance is .97 x .97 x .95 x .90 x .90 x .90,

which the last time I did the math came to .69! Under seventy percent, and nothing you did was less than 90 percent effective, and half of it was 95% or better. The same thing is true of the odds of success in a series of bets or ventures. Even if you rate the odds of these "bets" in the high 90th decile, they accumulate to significant, frightening risk.

There is no doubt now that the war will happen. We can only wait and watch the results.

Keep reading, keep thinking, keep talking to thoughtful people, and continue to say what you think is true and do what you believe is right.

—Gary (Esolen)
New Orleans

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Can We Talk About Iraq?

David Regenspan

Now that the war machine has been activated, it seems more important than ever that people on either side of the invasion question be able to have some sort of dialogue about the critically important alternatives open to us all, about decisions that can change the course of world history for better or worse. I for one feel quite impassioned about my stance concerning Iraq, but if I have no hope of communicating my reasons to those who do not agree with me, then what is the point of protest? Yet it feels as if a civil war has begun in America. We are polarized. On one side are those who are convinced that Bush's plans for Iraq are based on the desire for power, corporate domination and the flow of oil on terms generous to the West. On the other side are those who are equally convinced that, oil or no oil, Bush and his associates primarily want to end one of the most brutal regimes in world history and eliminate a potential source of weapons of mass destruction and support of terrorism. Side one feels that containment was working and that United Nations inspectors should have been given all the time and resources they required. Side two feels that Iraq has not been in compliance with United Nations resolutions for twelve long years, and that intervention was long overdue.

The issue of war is made vastly more complicated by the issue of political ideologies. The anti-interventionists frequently link saber-rattling to anti-democratic policies; they assume that a policy of war abroad goes hand-in-hand with a policy of repression at home. The pro-interventionists see security, not repression, behind the new restrictions on civil liberties, feeling they amount to a temporary aberration in American life that will be corrected once the threat has passed. The first side feels that terrorism will never end and that Bush's "war on terror" is an eternal war, the second that the war will indeed be won, starting with the defeat of Iraq.

One way or another, all Americans are involved in the decision to invade Iraq, if only because the invasion has been executed in their name. It would seem to be of critical importance, then, to be able to discuss the issue dispassionately and logically. As our daily experience suggests, however, that is very hard to do. Sadly, the discourse about Iraq is often conducted on the lowest possible levels. When I checked into one of the "moderated" discussion lists about Iraq on the *New York Times* website to gather a few comments, I saw more name-calling than discussion. I read that the anti-war people are "shameless in their hatred and wrong-headedness" or are "appeasers-morons" and "latter-day Nevilles" (as in Chamberlain). The pro-war people, meanwhile, are "barbarian lunatic righties" (one response to this comment: "Being called a barbarian by the likes of you is the highest compliment that I can imagine."). One sees such name-calling on the streets. When I marched in the January anti-war demonstration in Washington, D.C. (as I said to my spouse the other day, protest marching is starting to feel like a job), there was a group of counter-demonstrators waving signs that read "Commsies!" I felt like I was in a Vietnam-era time warp. One marcher responded helpfully that, yes, he was a Communist. Then he called the counter-protestors fascists. There was a lot of enlightenment to go around that day.

Name-calling is easy; that is why kids in the schoolyard do it. It is simple to hunker down with like-minded individuals and excoriate the other side. To view the opposing camp as a group of fiends or fools relieves one of the burden of evaluating and

reevaluating one's own position. Worse, once unbridled anger is unleashed it becomes hard to channel. On the pro-war side are the far-right Rush Limbaughs who denounce all protestors as traitors and go on to spew out their hatred of all things Muslim. On the anti-war side are those of the far left who use the Iraq issue to justify attacks on many far-flung aspects of American life and to make excuses for various thugs around the world because they are not "capitalists."

What segment of the population, then, might be expected to offer thoughtful comments on either side of the Iraq question? Writers, perhaps. Before the invasion began, I decided to ask the members of my online writers' community if they would care to describe their own thoughts and feelings. Only a small number responded (perhaps in itself an indication that there is a lot of dejection out there), but these few offered some interesting comments.

Here are some words from an anti-war woman who lives in England:

I feel completely powerless and unrepresented—I've listened to the arguments for war, analyzed the information available, looked at all the possible outcomes and I just can't go along with the idea that it's the only—or best—way to deal with the situation.

What makes me most angry—and depressed—is the obvious lack of intelligence in the pro-war arguments. I don't mean secret intelligence, I mean human, reasoned intelligence. There's such a dearth of insight, such a narrow view prevalent at the top of the US and British governments, that it frightens me. These men (and the odd woman) just don't seem to have the mental capacity or the greatness of mind to be able to see beyond their one point of view or this one course of action. The wider scenario is beyond their grasp, they not only don't get it, they can't even see it exists.

She goes on to say that she feels, though she is living in a democracy, that she is not represented, and that it feels futile to her to even follow the news.

An anti-war American woman speaks of her sense of profound fear:

I'm thinking we of the comfortable class—white and not dirt poor—had it so easy for the past fifty years, with nothing whatsoever happening that really had a serious negative effect on our daily lives, including Vietnam, that the pendulum is now swinging with a vengeance, and our children are going to have just the opposite. I believe nothing Bush says—absolutely nothing. I sold all our stocks in April 2000, and bought gold and US bonds, and have been very glad I did. Now I'm moving more heavily into gold, and thinking of turning some of it into metal I can hide under the house.

An anti-war American man expresses his sense of fear and powerlessness concerning what is happening on the home front. After first explaining that he is not afraid of terrorist attacks (because he is fatalistic about such matters) he dashes off an account of his concerns about the American government:

What I worry about the most is the government's mentality of, to be safer, let's do away with or start filing off as many of our peoples' rights as possible. Knee jerk reactions from our Federal gov is the thing that terrorizes me the most. During the great depression our then president FDR was offered dicta-

toral powers by congress to get us out of the depression. Thankfully FDR said HELL NO! The Depression was much worse than the local terrorism problem we have. Yet the FED is going all out and rights are starting to fray.

He adds that he finds heightened airport security humiliating and, speaking perhaps from personal experience, points out that people who have metal pins within them from surgery can find themselves strip-searched and x-rayed. These are the very people who are often in the hospital for x-rays; the writer expresses his outrage at the thought of being forced to be exposed to more radiation than is necessary.

In just three comments, we can see a broad spectrum of fear and rage concerning government lies and deceit, economic disaster, bodily violation and the perceived narrow-mindedness of leaders. There is a theme in common: a sense of victimization, of loss of control. I am being swept along, these writers are telling us. I can do nothing to stop it. Even my bodily integrity is at risk.

One might assume, then, that the pro-invasion writers would take a more positive tone. I was struck, however, by one pro-invasion response that was anything but sanguine (I should note that in my original question to the writers I had asked if they felt depressed, discouraged or powerless due to post-September 11 events):

Depressed? Discouraged? Or Powerless? Yes. Yes. And yes. Let's take depressed first. I'm depressed whenever I hear people, who I would otherwise regard as intelligent, rational human beings, say, 'Well I don't think war is right.' Or 'I don't want us in a war. My nephew is in the reserves.' Or 'We have always been this power hungry country who needs to own the oil wells.' This 'line of reasoning' depresses me greatly because it's not a line of reasoning. It's an emotional reaction used as a basis for uninformed opinion. Of course no one wants to go to war. What kind of person would actually want mayhem and killing and suffering in the world? Wait. I've thought of a few: How about Hitler, Stalin, Hussein? So other than those few, no thinking person wants to go to war. But the fact remains, we must. Even as our parents' generation looked into the gates of the concentration camps and saw the price of appeasement that came before 1941, we must look at the face of Saddam Hussein and see a man who wants to inflict harm and suffering in order to retain his own power. And a man who considers his mission from God to bring harm and suffering particularly to Americans and Jews. Am I discouraged? Very. I'm discouraged because these same anti-war people don't want to think.

They want to react. They don't have realistic alternatives to allowing the Iraqi dictator to run unchecked in his development and use of weapons. The solutions they offer sound as if they could have come from the world of 1939: Let him have this now; we can monitor him closely; we won't let it get out of hand; he'll be satisfied because this is all he wants.

Powerless? You bet. Because the viewpoint I've described is so closed, so myopic, and in some cases, only a matter of fashion. It sees the world through the lens of American culture. I actually had one of my 'reasonless friends' tell me that if we sat all the leaders down and let them talk in an open environment with understanding psychologists, they would come to the 'heart of

human understanding'. Another friend says that I obviously do not understand that 'those people' are different from us, they have a different government, and if they wanted to end it, they could, but it's not up to us. I'm powerless to sway them. I'm powerless in my reasoning with them. Their emotional trenches are deep and thorough; no reasoning will penetrate.

I wrote back to this woman thanking her for taking the time for a thoughtful response and pointing out that, if one changed only a few of her words, one could come up with a statement of how many anti-invasion people feel. In her reply she did not disagree. She added that the very same people with whom she argues are still her friends. She felt that her love for them transcended the great divide over the war question. She did not want to close the door on them.

I did not engage this person on the points with which I disagree (for instance, I do not think the World War II appeasement model pertains to the current situation), but I do think I understand what engenders her powerless feelings. She could not ignore the horrors of Saddam Hussein's Iraq, the atrocities that are well documented and that few deny. She feels that her concerns were not answered in her discussions with her anti-invasion friends. To her concerns about specifics, she got concerns about generalities in return. Yes, America may be concerned about oil or hypocritical in much of its foreign policy; yes, war is wrong and applied psychology might be of help. But what about the here and now? Here is a man who gassed and tortured his people and would no doubt have done much worse if he could. No matter what the inconsistencies or hypocrisies of the United States and its allies, why not get rid of a terrible dictator, even if we do not do it for all the right reasons?

So, what now? Is a productive debate about Iraq still possible? Can one side of the question fruitfully engage the other? Can intelligent people of good will on either side of the debate have an ongoing dialogue, even after an invasion has begun?

I do not pretend to know the answers to these questions. I do know, however, that no discussion is possible unless each side takes full responsibility for the ambiguities of its own position, and is willing to look into the darkest negative possibilities engendered by getting its own way.

I wrote most of this article before the invasion actually began. As I am writing these final words the tanks are rolling north through the desert and Baghdad is shrouded in the smoke of explosions and burning buildings. The first American and British casualty counts are hitting the news. There are "friendly fire" and "fratricide" incidents. After the first jubilant reports of Iraqis surrendering and citizens coming out to greet the Americans, the fog of war is thickening.

But the need to debate the war is more urgent than ever, because we can be certain that no outcome will provide unambiguous justification for either side of the issue. No question will be mooted. What happens with the peace will be critical, as will the question of further war with other countries (there is already some saber rattling about Iran). The polarization grows more extreme as one side screams of fascism and imperialism, the other declares all dissidents terrorists, and the powers that be in Washington do little to make the debate more intelligent. And so I repeat the question. What now?

—
David Regenspan a former congregational rabbi, is completing a novel about Jews and Muslims in medieval Spain, *City of Pomegranates*. He lives with his family in Ithaca.

Joel Ray

Part 2, conclusion from previous issue

Swimming to Nemaska

Water from this lake flows via the southern outlet, which quickly u-turns, into the trout river five miles away which then empties into the St. Lawrence. My imaginary paddle-to-the-sea bark, placed in the water here, will eventually end up in the Atlantic, after flowing past Montreal, Quebec City, and the Gaspé—and, it pleases me to think, conceivably back north and west through the Hudson Straits into Hudson Bay and James Bay (where there are Beluga whales), to float on water that has poured into the bay from the Rupert and all the other great west-flowing rivers that support the Cree. And as there is no inlet to this lake, the water that flows all those miles originates right here, in this ground. Some of it is underground water, as the lake is spring-fed, and some is water that flows down these hills.

I healed myself in this water. Learned here, at forty, finally how to breathe properly, and cured my back problem swimming. I don't recall the first plunge into the lake because they have all been the same elated casting-off, ten years and hundreds of headlong plunges into the soft caressing water. It is a kind of music, swimming; the world dissolves and it is all stroke and breathe, stroke and breathe, and the shore going by, or the shore receding as I head for the opposite side. I like being far from the land. Or in the water at night on my back looking at the Milky Way arching from shore to shore. Swimming along the shore I feel the sudden patches of cold as I pass over springs. On a boulder down at the little island the mergansers sometimes roost and they begin to flap their wings and cluck as I approach. They take to the water with me, heading in the opposite direction, though not too fast, keeping an eye on this strange water creature with swinging arms.

Water, However...

Today it is raining hard. The water gurgles, splashes, off the roof, through the gutters, down the driveway, under the camp, onto the deck, into the lake from a hundred rills and creeks. Here you begin to understand water and gravity, the idea of a watershed. In the spring you come here to deal with the water. Camps near shore are at the edge of a huge catch basin, and most of the work that goes on is in some way a fending off, coming to terms with, water: new roofs; stone sump pits; new stringers for the dock; new pilings for boathouse and camp; stone driveway; new pump; new piling for the sinking chimney; replacing of drain and septic lines; new septic field; reglazing of windows; painting; clearing of saplings, bushes, trees, to let the sun in; patching the boat-house roof; shoring up the corner of the shed where the spring runs from under the boulder at the bottom of the driveway and erodes the ground; new boards for the exposed deck. In the winter the ground freezes three or four feet down and the rocks heave in the spring. Camps that don't have deep footers tend to walk slowly toward the lake. The wind and waves and broken-up spring ice that pound down this bay tear at the big dock pilings, cages of tamarack and hemlock four-by-fours filled with rocks. The road washes out in places. Burrowing animals take up residence in the camp. The lake fills to overflowing and docks go under.

Rainwater, springwater, snow water, lake water, creek water, frost water, drinking water. Water freezing, thawing, pouring, gurgling, invading, dripping, splashing, condensing, heaving. A neighbor down the way took up arms against water by shoveling an outlet from the swamp on the hill created by

the beaver dam, because when it overflowed it ran directly into his living room at the bottom, his camp not set up on pilings but flush with the ground. We liked the new swamp habitat with its unusual birds and amphibians and other wildlife, but thinking of my own battles with water I kept still as he dug. He seems to have discouraged the beaver, for the swamp is now dry.

There are a few abandoned camps in the big bay, and you can see them sinking, tipping, the boathouses sinking fastest, the paint all gone, collapse coming soon.

One year you hope for a big snow winter so the ground won't freeze so far down and the rocks will heave less, and you get it, but your shed roof collapses from the weight of the snow. The next year, after the snow has been light, you see how the supports under the front porch roof have moved another half-inch away from the house wall. The marble rolls more quickly from the kitchen to the front door.

You hope for a big snow winter for insulation, and you get it, but from May to early July the biting blackflies which breed in running water are thick as smoke, hunting out every orifice and every fold of clothing for a way in.

You hope the jacking of the back wall of the bathroom, sinking all these years into the wet ground, has raised and leveled it successfully, but when you come in the spring the toilet is tipped over, seal unsealed, 4-inch pipe broken.

One of the waterlines is split; you've misplaced the screw to the footvalve; the pump switch has burned out.

In the spring you feel the grinding of time. Everything is scoured, gray, and soiled, and the weight of the melted snow has left every leaf and stick pressed flat. In the spring you can best imagine this land as it was before human settlement, only a hundred years or so ago.

The Cree are beginning to tell stories about floods now, that will be part of a new mythology for coming generations. I think I have problems with water.

Shock Therapy

During one of our talks a man comes to the locked restaurant door and knocks, and motions to be let in. J-P waves him away rather harshly. The man lingers, and J-P sees my puzzlement. I had passed the man on the road during one of my walks, and he had greeted me in an unusually friendly way. J-P says, "That man's not allowed in here. He is an alcoholic—you can see it in his movements. You have to be firm with him." Then, talking of this disastrous age-old symbiosis between whites and Indians, J-P recalls that in Chisasibi, since the building of the dams, the biggest problem has been alcohol, and hash and cocaine among the young people, brought, I presume, by the white dam workers. No alcohol is sold at the little store in Nemaska. There have been several thefts of beer from the Hydro installation here, he says—72 cases the last time.

J-P pauses for a bit, as if considering whether to tell me something, then says in a low voice that a nineteen-year-old hanged himself in the village two weeks ago.

The Innu man gave me a remarkable statistic which he took to be very hopeful for the future of the Cree—that 65% of the Cree alive now were under the age of twenty. They are studying, learning about the law like me, he said; they will be better able to deal with Quebec than their fathers and mothers. But it is the young people, already undergoing turbulent changes within, and feeling the external turbulence undermine the old communal stability that would steady them, who are having the most difficult time of it right now.

During the initial court case the anthropologist who testified for the government had said the dams would be a "salutary shock."

Salutary for whom? I'm reminded of my wife's story, from years ago when she was working in the medical school, about the doctor who burst into the office one day thrilled that the extremely painful symptoms of his patient's rare eye disease had returned. The anthropologist would now have his pathology to study.

Numerous pathologies. Minimata disease from the fish laced with mercury leached from the rock by the flooding, loss of power and control over the land, obesity and diabetes, animals leaving, depression, addiction, suicide. The Crees in Nemaska must be keeping close touch with Chisasibi, the site of the greatest upheaval, on the La Grande, where the symptoms are raging. Perhaps that's why so many in the village had taken the 200-mile trip north to the wedding. That was where Thomas had gone—I suppose, faced with the choice of entertaining a strange white man, even a friendly one, or celebrating the continuity of Cree life in Chisasibi, it was no contest. In the lounge during the power outage, I listened as the chief and J-P had a lively conversation about the young Nemaska dancers, who traveled around giving performances, and who had gone to dance at the wedding; the chief had said how very important the dancing was, as it diverted the young people from alcohol and drugs.

My son lost a friend of fourteen who had gassed himself in his father's car, and among young whites in the 1980s suicide seemed nearly an epidemic of disaffection, especially reflected in the anger of punk culture. But considering their longevity as a people there is something far more horrific about suicide among the Cree. Only if you could apprehend their lives as hunters, I think, understand with your body as well as your mind the breaking of their delicate web, and the *loss of use*, could you begin to plumb the despair. It troubles, embarrasses me, in my ignorance and safety, even trying to think about it. (J-P probably sensed that he was taking a risk by telling me. Perhaps he thought that if I appreciated the blues I would know what that suicide meant.)

But I do think, flipping this problem around, about black jazz musicians. As the founders of that great music and their immediate successors have passed on, over the last thirty years (to me, a hemorrhage of loss), I realize now that virtually none have committed violent suicide. Certainly many eased the pain of dealing with the white world through alcohol and drugs; some had fallen deeply into that pit, burned themselves up or overdosed; and some quit playing for a time. But I can't think of any who intentionally took their own lives. The reasons are surely the sustenance of the music, its expression of joy in being with each other, the deep pleasure they take in each other's gifts and presence, the almost religious obligation to pass the music on. And the still-abiding consciousness of having collectively endured the worst that other humans could do to you. One black writer calls suicide "sulking in the face of hope." The very idea must be a sacrilege if not a joke.

I think hopefully of the dancers, and of Freddie and the other tallymen, responsible for the land and animals; they function like jazz musicians in the community, are the keepers of tradition and protectors of the web. They will pass that along to their sons' and daughters. There are about three hundred of them in this land looking after the animals.

Out of the Bush

The Cree heard about the coming dams in 1971, the premier announcing to the province that he was going to embark on "the project of the century." They had to organize quickly, rounding up people from the bush as best they could, hiring a lawyer, going for an

injunction. In 1972 the hunters traveled to Montreal and stayed in hotels and ate tasteless city food while they waited to testify.

The Quebec lawyers spoke in French, which the hunters did not understand. Some of them spoke in their own language, which had to be translated into French, then into English. A Babel, mediated by lawyers, what could be worse? But Mr. Justice Malouf, a dark man whose origins were in the Middle East, listened intently during all those first days, and he understood the hunters, and decided in their favor. The three judges who overturned him, gatekeepers of the real power in Quebec, were working from paper—though it is unlikely they read the 10,000 pages of testimony, so quickly did they reverse the decision.

The hunters told the judge that to dam the La Grande would be to end their lives; that is my interpretation of what they said, which was more modest and precise but added up to the same thing. I am given to exaggeration, perhaps, but living in a society where you have to shout to make yourself heard over the roar of progress, I can't help it. The Cree inclination, rather, is not to speak beyond what they personally know. And when they say "the animals are going away," they expect the listener to understand what that means. They expect the listener to understand that a promise has been broken, a birthright withdrawn.

I wonder what would bring me home like that. What news from Ithaca would send me winging back from here ready to organize and fight, hire lawyers, raise hell? I try to think what would make my life intolerable there and cannot. The layers of comfort are so many and thick, and the dangers so few... We have come a long way from Conrad, writing about the paper-thin restraints of civilization, to our bitter jokes about fishing in the hatchery truck.

Now, with their coming together as a nation for the first time, to meet the threats of the dams and roads (and intensified mining and logging operations that are a result of Quebec's recently imposed land-use classifications; and the demands of new administrative responsibilities), there is a new self-consciousness entering the lives of the Cree. I wonder whether this is on balance a destructive process in itself, this transformation into the Cree Nation, when till just two or three decades ago—barely a single generation—they were people who walked along the land, usually in small family groups, gathering food. During lunch the second day the chief asked me whether I thought that joining the UN was a good idea; perhaps he had something like these very misgivings in mind. J-P had gleefully told me stories of how the Cree had used this new international status to their advantage, for example traveling to the Rio environmental conference where they spoke about the dams and embarrassed Quebec in the eyes of the world (including France, he said). But I have to tell the chief I can't answer his question. It is the most troubling one I was asked during my visit, far more than the questions about magnetic fields.

A New Road

On my walk today, as the rain diminishes, I discover that the new owner has bulldozed a road to the end of the lake through woods that had never been opened before, even by the loggers who stripped them in the last century. A road to reach the land which he intends to sell for new camps. He fancies himself a developer, hoping to make his first million on the lake. But already he is having trouble with the other camp owners. My next-door neighbor, who was in school with him when they were boys, angrily took him on for the damage the big dozer did to his driveway—they had quite a set-to up on the road one day, cursing and shouting at each other. My neighbor's family has had a camp

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here since the thirties, yet in talking to him I see he is fatalistic, if clear about the character of his old school chum, "Chuckie Fuckin' Elroy" he calls him (hah—King Charles!): "He's just out of the woods for a generation, and you mustn't tell him what he can't do; he'll just do it worse." Change is inevitable, he says, and there's nothing we can do about it. Live and let live, the motto of the north country—sometimes I despise it and some-

around. They were neither friendly nor hostile, just occupied with their doggy lives, indifferent to me. At home I can barely get to the end of my country-suburban street without being accosted—barking dogs at every other house, in pens, on leashes, in the front windows watching for intruders, and sometimes running loose. Talking to them only makes them angrier. They are nuclear-family dogs. I wonder about their owners, their fears

the blunt end, and it twitched for a few moments and died. I waved the maul threateningly at the dogs and ran a few steps toward them, yelling like a crazy man, and they took off. The next day when I went up to the road, after a night of bloody dreams, the fawn was gone. One of the dogs had been white, big and wolflike. He'd been in the dreams. It shook me now that I had run toward him and his hunting buddy, as they

ptarmigan. And so he knows when to let the land lie fallow for a year and to arrange for sharing of traplines. It is his garden, as Job Bearskin had called it in Richardson's book. He is a hunter in a garden.

But Freddie had written a poem called "A Wounded Hunter," which was about the drowning of the hills. I read it later that night, and, melancholy anyhow about leaving the next day, I felt the gloom deepen at his lament: "A wounded hunter will have no more the sound of the rapids... Looking back to his land where his joy was... A hunter that will be wounded for the rest of his life until he passes away." Now he is worried not only about the Rupert being dammed but about a new road from Chibougamau that would go right through his trapline—a road from the south that would carry more white men like the pilot fish and worse, bringing more drugs and alcohol and violence and despair in the wake of the dynamiting of the hills. So they would either be drowned or exploded...

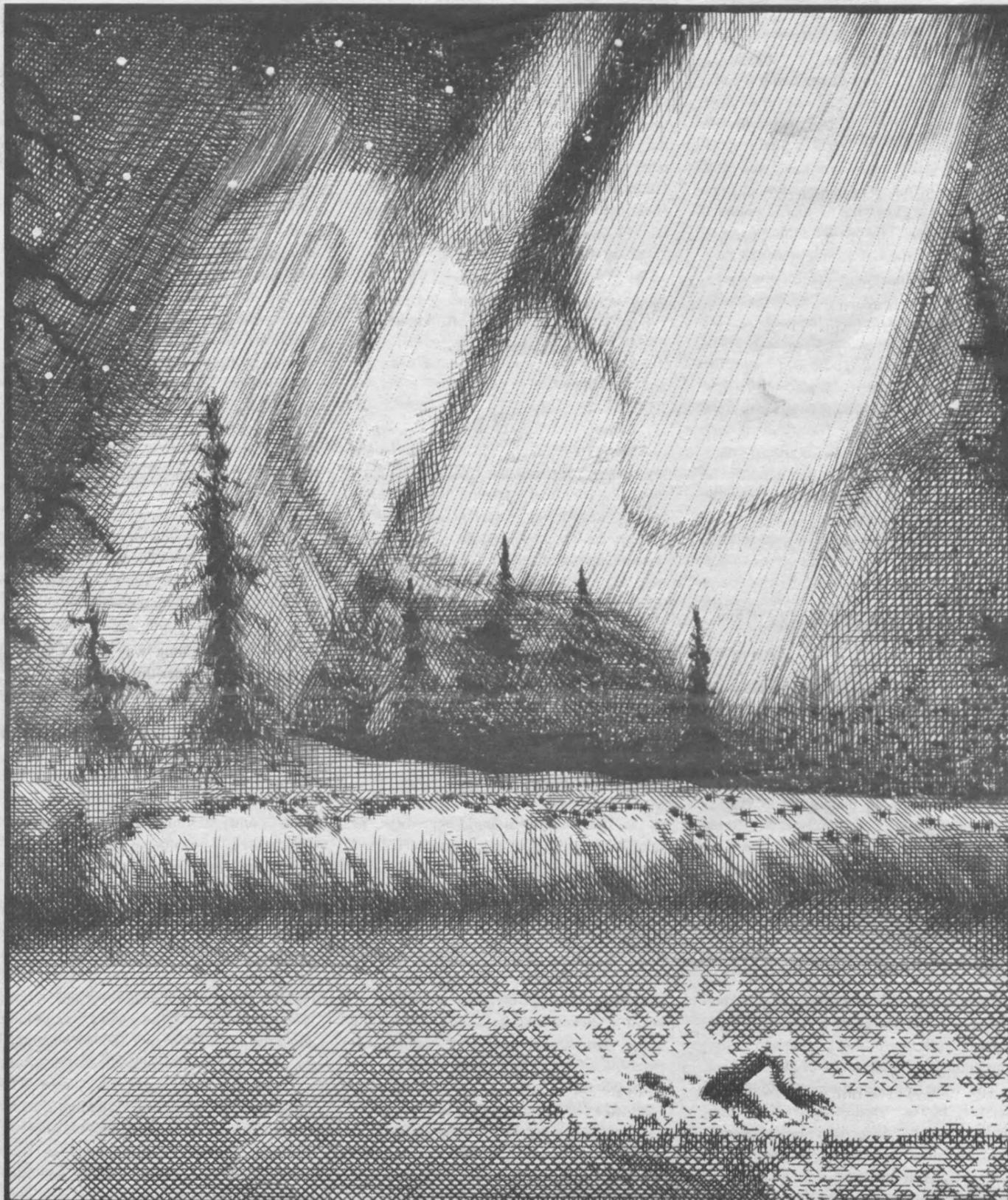
Freddie's big map of his trapline was given to him by Hydro, and it is a good one as maps go, topographic and so showing the twenty-six hills—just small rises but critical to both the animals and the hunters—and the various sources of water and the lay of the land. On this map the Rupert was of course the key feature—the big river entering the bottom of James Bay where the Nonsuch had berthed in 1668. I liked it that we were looking at the map by candlelight, which seemed appropriate to the land represented on the map, land undisturbed except for fire, and the soft tread of the Cree and the animals, for thousands of years, its thin earth—taiga, muskeg, over the deep rock—still pristine. And the candles and wavering shadows seemed appropriate to the living map, the one which is lit by the interior light of Freddie's mind. In order to see the land as it is, I would have to take the long walks over a winter with Freddie and Annie and their children. The map is shorthand, an aid to this short-breathed weak-legged whitefella who lives in a city. But more important the map, of a segment of the Rupert area called R-21, is a weapon in a war, enabling strangers ignorant of the land to negotiate it for hostile purposes. Still, Freddie seems proud to have it, as he says, spreading his large hands, "All this, here, is my trapline, the land and water and animals who are in my care."

The Long Way Around

In spring and fall, when there is no one here, I walk the edge of the lake on the paths between the camps that neighbors use to visit each other. These little paths make one big long path around the lake. If someone happens to be in residence I retreat up to the road and come back down to the next camp and proceed. I gain a sense of the lake's size and variation from walking the shoreline that is like no other—certainly not like being in a boat. The crests and folds, creek beds and big white pines and boulders and blueberry patches and animal scat and birdsong, the irregularity and the possibility of surprise and discovery as I walk, the ever-changing vistas over the water (perhaps one day I will see a deer swimming across the lake, as my daughter did), and the feeling of hiddenness there on the shore, in the trees, these are deep pleasures, both in the first encounter and later in familiarity.

Bruce Chatwin says that walking is not only a basic and necessary human rhythm, but a fundamental source of safety and security. Violence and disease, he writes, follow human settlement. His book has made me wonder whether because of their constant walking the Cree have different brains from ours.

Whether the human brain is "wired," in the current lingo, by the earliest accumulation of



Don Karr

times I see it as completely admirable. Obviously I won't be able to enlist my neighbor's help in removing the survey flags.

I walk down the new road and see the rivulets beginning to gouge and erode the steepest parts. I can imagine that in a few years it will be barely negotiable and the owner's plans for selling lots may well be thwarted simply by the lay of the land and the flow of water. He seems now, as I look at the deepening rivulets and think about the rocks thrusting up next spring in the hastily cleared roadbed, a mere oaf, and my hostility begins to wane. He is not after all a corporation or government but one man with a limited imagination, driven by the dream of money, who has probably miscalculated.

Dogs

There were many dogs in the village. All well fed and none restrained, and I felt no threat whatsoever from them as I walked

and their egos, their pride in owning such animals that are socially acceptable projections of their own aggressions. I know almost no one on my street; we don't meet over dogs.

Once in the late spring when I was alone at the lake, or thought I was, I heard a desperate squealing noise back up on the road, and discovered that a fawn had been attacked by two domestic dogs, let out by their owner, whoever he was, to roam and kill. They were skulking, bloody-muzzled, down the road, their tails down and heads low, and the fawn was lying in a ditch under some bushes, thrashing wildly, its hind leg chewed to pieces. Its mother was back in the woods somewhere. I'd left the .22 in Ithaca, so I ran back to get the maul I use for chopping wood. The fawn looked wide-eyed and hysterical at me as I took aim, its head swinging back and forth. No, no. But it was silent now, and I hit it twice in the head with

were probably still feeling the frenzy. Very stupid. On the next trip I brought the .22 back here where it belongs.

Tallyman

Weather is turning now, though with a low fire in the stone fireplace the camp is toasty tonight. Freddie and Annie's place during the power outage felt so safe and cozy with the candles lit. We sat close around the dining table as Freddie showed me his trapline boundaries on the Hydro map. Fifteen by twenty miles, five times the area of this lake and the surrounding woods, his to nurture and attend. He is the tallyman for several families, the man who keeps track of the animals each year and knows what he and the others can take without diminishing the numbers for the following years. Bear, caribou, beaver (Walter told me they count the pups by touch in their dens), moose, rabbit, lynx, fisher, marten, partridge, grouse,

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sensory experience. A recent piece I read about a child raised in complete silence and isolation for twelve years and who could not learn language as a result brings me back to Chatwin's theme: that the Australian aborigines created the world as they walked through it and named it. The naming was metaphor, and so the world is a poem of their making, threaded by songlines.

When people settle they become mired in abstraction. Most of my education and work life has been occupied in learning to manipulate counters for realities of which I have no direct knowledge. Perhaps the Cree are not inclined to speak beyond what they know because they have spent their lives walking.

But now they are a nation, with leaders who must speak for all—with all the future contention that implies. My room in Nemaska was in the small building that serves as the center of that nation for the entire Ungava peninsula, a region the size of western Europe, where now, after all the centuries of dispersal, they must gather periodically in council to determine their battle strategy, and to speculate about Hydro's next move, about the government's long-range intentions. We can imagine the suddenness of such a change in our own lives only in apocalyptic science fiction stories.

Or to turn it around: We are the Crees' "Alien."

Dictionary

In Ithaca I direct the writing and editing of definitions for an English dictionary that will go onto computers. Though I like my co-workers, who are all intelligent, good writers, and clever in coming up with somewhat "original" definitions that keep us clear of plagiarism, and though I have an aptitude for the work, it is highly derivative and seems the epitome of abstraction. At times I sit and look at a word—a noun such as "river" or "island," say—and the thing begins to pulse and change shape into something completely unrecognizable, or more often it simply goes dead, until I can't think what it could possibly mean—or indeed, what it is, these odd markings with their broken syllables. One of the writers, in order to stay sane (he too has these fits of unrecognition, occurring more frequently now that we are three years along), writes limericks about his words, on the back of the definition sheets.

The dictionary is like a crude map. Everyone in the office is aware of this to some degree, and one poet who works for us

grumbles that the work is "no true speech act" (though she writes the most elegant, frugal definitions of any of us). The dictionary concentrates words in a sort of pen, like the cows in the factory dairy. One of the writers has a fantasy of the definition sheets in the files bursting out at night, after we have gone home, to schmooze and party with each other.

When I return I will ask for discussions about the meanings of the words "primitive" and "civilize." And perhaps "wild" and "culture" and "cultivate." And "intelligence."

Everywhere and Nowhere

Back in 1984 when I was at camp I read a long, insinuating essay by George Trow which burst in my head like fireworks. He wrote that the modern world is this: responsible work done *somewhere* has given way, because of the power of money, to work done "nowhere" (or "anywhere") that is intended for "everywhere." He was of course engaged in the most rife of abstractions, but he is right. Our dictionary, bound for the everywhere of the computer, is a troubling example, though not so much as the dams and big powerlines, and so is most research at the university—intended not for specific improvement of a particular place or particular people but for anyone who can pay for it and make money off it. The result of such abstracted work, said Trow, is usually damage to specific places. And the people who do the work that damages those specific places do not have to live in them.

In big communities, said the poet William Carlos Williams, men are "theorists and outlaws." That applies not only to the power companies, big oil, agribusiness, biotech, the military, but to the research establishments that feed them. It was such "communities" that came up with the idea of "not in my back yard" as a condemnation of specific people *somewhere* who opposed technology said to be "needed" by people "everywhere." Trow was attempting to reinvest "not in my back yard" with its rightful, honorable meaning.

I wrote him to say thanks and he replied, asking if I had looked closely at my "interesting corner of New York." A few years later I wrote him that his piece had connected some things I had learned living in my interesting corner, mainly that the generation, transmission, and use of electricity are the chief means by which specific places are eliminated. I neglected to tell him that Hydro Quebec was a major force behind the Three Gorges dam on the Yangtze in China, which would displace a million people and destroy hundreds of villages, many of them ancient.

The most disturbing effect, though, has been on the back yard of personal and communal memory. Electricity has enabled a "broad-casting" everywhere technology that replaces private memory with highly selective versions of history shaped by money, so

that the stories of a family or community that would have been passed along through the generations become short-circuited by alien forms. Personal stories are crowded out by radio, television, films, the computer; people you don't know who are highly paid choose stories for you. Unless you repeat your own stories, or write them down at least, they die.

Unless you repeat the stories, you yourself forget them. I recall a labor historian, Herbert Guttman, saying at a writers' conference that the worst thing to happen to the labor movement was the loss of family and community stories from the first three or four decades of the century. Loss of a sense of what the parents and grandparents had sacrificed, and of what had been done to them by the state and the corporations and the police, and of how people had supported each other through very harsh times. Guttman's sorrow at this loss was palpable. (I thought immediately of his elegy when, later, I heard Mailer call the computer a "husking machine for culture.")

History

It is the story, written by men, of what people have done to each other.

After five thousand years, the Cree are now entering what we call history.

Arrival

After getting off the plane and retrieving my fishing rod from the baggage compartment (the Montreal attendant had called it a "deadly weapon" and so it had to be stowed), I waited for Thomas. He didn't come, and as the few other passengers dispersed I was the only one left in the little terminal except for the Hydro workers waiting to board for the flight south. I began to wonder what I would do if no one showed up. Then I heard a voice calling, mispronouncing my name closely enough to know it was me he was looking for, and a young Cree man told me he would drive me the few miles to the village. When we arrived, the chief met us and told me Thomas "took off" for the wedding in Chisasibi. He gave me a key and directed me to the Grand Council building, where, he said, J-P would give me a room. There I would wait to be contacted.

That brief anxiety of arrival seems now to have been an omen, for I feel as though in my brief presence in the village I was a leaf blowing across a field. What use have I been, with my little black box measuring the invisible white noise? But however perversely, however unwelcome the insight, this feeling helps me understand the resentment Quebeckers must feel toward these dark silent people who do not need them and who want to be left alone to follow their own way. I will write my report, and try not to speak beyond my knowledge, though perhaps I have become a part now of the new demands that force the Cree to speak beyond theirs.

The government's accusation that the Cree are "aristocrats" pleases me more and more for its unwitting truth. Indeed they are. I'm reminded of an acquaintance who lived in Montreal for a year and on her return sneered at the Quebeckers as "jumped-up peasants." She was an academic snob, but still, I like the shapeliness of these two bits of name-calling, as though the latter confirms the former.

A Leaf, a Stone

Perhaps I am a leaf. For fifteen years I had absorbed energy and purpose from the north country. I had belonged to a strong rural community—homesteaders, carpenters, musicians, farmers, small-business owners, and academics—and we had worked hard to preserve the openness and freedom of the place.

We held meetings, demonstrated, raised money, ran candidates for office, wrote, spoke on TV and radio, taught, and organized, often effectively, against damaging change such as new highways and bypasses, the power line, a nuclear plant proposed for the St. Lawrence, prisons, second-home development, military expansion—all of which the north country was vulnerable to because of its sparse population and political conservatism and rural diffidence. In the years just before we left, this camp had been a place of organizing for some of those efforts. Now, though the community I loved is still there, I am no longer a daily part of it, and when I come here it is mainly to gain refuge from Ithaca.

We had a big garden and went to country dances and visited our friends on their farms (pigs, cows, horses, sheep, chickens, peacocks, dogs and cats) and bought their homemade sausage and lamb and beef and eggs, and canoed the river and camped and hiked in the summers, and I ran a bookstore that gave the musicians a place to play and the activist community a place to meet, and we greeted the spring, when pheasants would come to peck in the garden as the bare ground appeared, with elation and thankfulness. There was a permanence about the north country that the fierce winters simply underscored. By contrast, Ithaca, dominated by the university, seems a way station for people headed elsewhere.

A few years after moving there, during a time when the novelty of the place had begun to wear thin, Vera and I were sitting here under the hemlocks one evening, listening as Paul sat on the dock playing Monk's song "Crepuscule with Nellie," and I was talking about the work I now did, and she said, gently, "I think you are blocked at the crossroads." A Brazilian, a singer who now lived with Paul outside of New York City, she had explained to me, the night before, after we had sung "Minha Saudade" together, what "saudade" meant, and she suffered from that melancholy homesickness worse than anyone I knew. She had made a little *candomblé* shrine in the woods at Paul's mother's place during their visit to the north country, and she asked me to write my name on a piece of paper, so she could present me to the gods for their intercession. They were different from the Christian God; they were gods who evolved with humans, and I liked that idea, though I was still skeptical in the usual way of overeducated whites. I wrote my name on the paper and thanked Vera and held her hand for a moment. Tomorrow morning, I said, let's get up at dawn. We'll watch the sun rise down at the end of the bay. It slants through the trees on the hill and shoots through the mist on the water like a bar of gold. Maybe the osprey will be hunting.

I had gone to Nemaska to see a community that was strong enough to absorb the worst and somehow remain the ancient stone that it was. Looking for miracles.

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RUSSIAN ARK (RUSSIA)

May 7 & 10
SONGS FROM THE SECOND FLOOR (SWEDEN)

The Ultimate MacGuffin

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There are differences, of course, and these introduce some necessary distinctions. From the first, the Reagan planners envisioned a space-based system comprising both kinetic interceptors like projectiles and directed-energy sources like lasers and particle beams that would shoot down enemy missiles in launch or boost phase or in mid-course trajectory or intercept them in terminal phase; it was from the first a "national" missile defense system promising protection to the continental U.S.—an "astrodome defense," in FitzGerald's words. The systems edging toward deployment in the nineties and the present decade are ground-based, targeting midcourse or terminal-phase missiles with kinetic projectiles alone, and although at least temporarily modest in scale, they are, because of their siting, no less "national" in principle than preceding plans; the ABM Treaty had to go because it prohibited such schemes.

Theatre defenses, in contrast, protect military assets abroad and have been in existence for decades—the Aegis arms aboard the cruiser Vincennes that shot down an Iranian passenger jet during the Iran-Iraq war and the Patriot missiles that were believed (falsely, as it turned out) to have killed so many Scuds during the Gulf War are examples—but these become strategic weapons when they are deployed against ballistic missiles, like the theatre defenses the U.S. is seeking to deploy in Japan, Korea, and perhaps Taiwan.

Yet these distinctions come to look arbitrary fast because both administrations, Reagan's and Bush's, have merged defenses of different types (and conveniently at different stages of realization) in "tiered" or "layered" combinations, and the Bush strategists, now released from the ABM treaty, have further obfuscated public awareness by fusing theatre and national defenses in one nominal program. So the grandiose scale of Reagan-era proposals, lost during the regimes of Bush I and Clinton, has returned in the strategic projections of Bush II—even while many of the technologies now contemplated are as iffy as the old ones. But that may not matter too much, because MD systems do most of their work in a kind of future tense, subjunctive mood, somewhere on the continuum between conception and deployment. Talk about (projection of, work on) such strategic weapons, being itself strategic, is therefore unstable as well as destabilizing, being calculated to darken counsel and enhance menace.

For who could keep his or her bearings in the alphabet salad or sandstorm of systems, each listed with its price tag and its principal contractors, in Helen Caldicott's sixth chapter? In addition to our old friend the Clinton-era Ground-Based Interceptor (GBI) with its Exoatmospheric Kill Vehicle (EKV), lower-tier interceptors are commissioned for all three armed services: the Patriot PAC-3 for the Army, a Naval Area Defense, and such gadgets as AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System, already operational) and J-STARS (Joint Surveillance and Target Attack Radar System) for the Air Force. Upper-tier defenses include THAAD (Theatre High Altitude Area Defense) and the NTW (Naval Theater Wide) system, exceeded in technological sophistication by Airborne and Space Based Lasers (ABL and SBL) and all notionally coordinated by Battle Management/Command, Control, and Communications (BM/C3) systems driven by computers that may react to real or perceived threats instantaneously, eliminating human intervention.

Of course these systems, in their turn, will require early warning of hostile launches by ground—and space-based sensors with names like BMEWS, SBIRS-High, and SBIRS-Low—and so it goes. The beneficiaries? They are Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Raytheon, TRW, United Technologies,

and Northrop Grumman, and here is Caldicott's thumbnail of "the Lockheed Martin Presidency":

A belligerent and ill-informed president sits in the White House (despite his perceived change of status since September 11, 2001), controlled by his corporate staff intent on extracting as much American tax money as they possibly can to build ever more exotic and dangerous weapons.

Not only for pecuniary and strategic but for environmental and medical reasons, which she presents with particular authority, "We are headed for a state of global disaster."

For Caldicott, pure collusion explains much of this administration's weapons splurge, but with MD there is mystification as well. Like the incoming bodies MD is supposed to stop, it has been a moving target, hard to track and easy to misidentify, breaking into decoys and surrogates that spoof our critical faculties. Insofar as MD is one thing, it is less like a missile than a "MacGuffin," Alfred Hitchcock's name for "the deliberately mysterious plot objective—the non-point" of a film, in his biographer's words: in his own, "the gimmick if you will, or the papers the spies are after." Does anyone remember what the uranium in the wine bottles in *Notorious* was for? Yes, but only because the picture appeared after Hiroshima and Nagasaki: if the U.S. had bombed the Japanese with marzipan, *Notorious* would still feature a brave girl and a dedicated man tragically divided in pursuit of an objective (what was it?) of overwhelming importance. Has anyone a clue about "the Process" in David Mamet's *Spanish Prisoner*? No, but the gimmick gives shape and force to a delicious intrigue while remaining, perhaps because remaining, perfectly opaque in itself. For our national and human story, MD is a similarly powerful source of motivation and mystery, but between fiction and history there is a small difference. Stories end, and we forget their pretexts. History goes on and has to absorb all the ruinous and unpredictable MacGuffins forced on its plots by statesman and scientist, emperor and clown. In fiction, MacGuffins evaporate rent-free; in history they drive deeper scripts with comic or devastating consequences.

Interestingly, there may have been a crossover; as FitzGerald reports, at least the packaging of Reagan's Star Wars may have come from the MacGuffin of another Hitch film. In *Torn Curtain* (1966), an American scientist played by Paul Newman pretends to defect to East Germany in order to learn from a Communist scientist the missing step in the development of the "Gamma Five" project. Gamma Five, as it happens, is "a defense weapon that will make all offensive weapons obsolete, and thereby abolish the terror of nuclear war," and, in a mad duel of blackboard-scribbling, Newman fools his German colleague into revealing the secret. What was all this about? How would it work? Who cares? Newman and his assistant-fiancée Julie Andrews bring the missing secret back to the West and live happily, etc.

But not, perhaps, without laying the eggs of Star Wars in the brain of film star Ronald Reagan, who seventeen years later called upon "the scientific community in this country, who gave us nuclear weapons... to give us the means of rendering these weapons impotent and obsolete." (It was the scientists, you see, who did it.) The Reagan of FitzGerald's study is an actor-narrator of rare skill and detachment willing to list any story given the right script, and *Star Wars*, whatever its real inspiration, provided the right script. FitzGerald's story begins with the visit, reported by an early biographer, of presidential candidate Reagan to NORAD headquarters at Cheyenne Mountain, Colorado, where

he discovered with dismay that "we have spent all that money and have all that equipment, and there is nothing we can do to prevent a nuclear missile from hitting us." The official version of the tale leads Reagan, "the dreamer, the nuclear abolitionist, the naive" (her words), straight from this epiphany to the Star Wars speech of March 1983, which took most military and civilian advisors by surprise and spurred the funding of SDI in 1985 and years following, then to the cultivation of almost-available technologies, and of course to the breakdown at Reykjavik of negotiations that would, but for Reagan's attachment to SDI, have resulted in treaty arrangements scheduling the elimination of all ballistic missiles (by one account) or of all strategic arms (by another). Despite these peripeties—so goes the received story—the ending was happy; Reagan's defense budget and his commitment to Star Wars spent the adversary into the ground and the Soviet empire (and the Cold War) just fell apart.

FitzGerald deconstructs every episode in this tale without losing respect for its formal appeal or its roots in American national ideology. The Sovs weren't spent down, only alarmed enough by the prospect of weapons in space to link their every disarmament proposal to U.S. adherence to the ABM treaty—until Gorbachev lost his fear of what he came to believe an impossible project. Consensus disintegrated at Reykjavik more through imprecision and bluff than from an American commitment to SDI, although that was an element. The necessary technologies were in no way available to the United States, despite the claims made for exotic gadgets like Dr. Edward Teller's X-ray laser, a "space-fed" radar, and an electromagnetic "rail gun" for shooting space projectiles, all of which proved worthless. At its best, Star Wars was "a program in search of technologies for an undesigned system at a price the nation might be willing to pay."

What was really going on in the early and middle Reagan years, she shows, was more complex, a kind of massive politics-driven rhetorical event that grew naturally out of the dynamics of Cold-War strategy. Campaigning in 1979-80 with no foreign policy but an archaic anti-communism, Reagan met up with the agenda of the Committee on the Present Danger, a caucus of hawks who perceived between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. a large window of missile vulnerability. Once in office, the Reaganites adopted yet more belligerent crisis rhetoric, achieved the largest peacetime arms buildup in American history, and continued to campaign on the Soviet threat in 1984.

Star Wars, as it happens, matured later rather than earlier in the conceptual arsenal of an administration peopled by "hard-line defense intellectuals" like Richard Perle and Fred Iklé and the national security advisor Richard Allen. FitzGerald shows that the initiative addressed at least three problems faced by the government: first, purely strategic puzzlement over how to make the MX missile, the next wonder weapon in the U.S. arsenal, "survivable" against a first strike from the enemy; second, how to complicate plans for the first Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, on the horizon in 1984; and finally, what to do about the nuclear Freeze, a broad-based peace movement with vast popular and international support, that had been gaining head from 1980 to 1984.

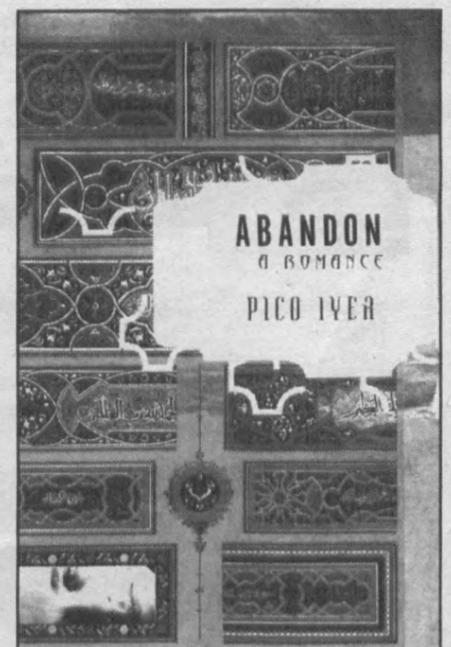
Leaving the ill-fated MX aside (but responding to the issue of survivability), Star Wars deflected and deferred START I and, FitzGerald suggests, succeeded in coöpting much of the popular support for the Freeze. But as the solution to a strategic problem or window of vulnerability, Star Wars was elegantly and symmetrically vacuous: "the solution did not exist, but, then, the problem did not either, so in that sense it was a perfect solution."

Such a thing is a hoax, but it gains ideological body—and MacGuffinish efficacy—when seen as an imaginary solution to real problems that have been systematically disguised. The real problem faced in 1983 by the nuclear powers was the existence of large arsenals of weapons whose use was morally lunatic but whose acquisition and maintenance by adversaries was to a point instrumentally rational. The baseline doctrine from which nuclear strategy started in those years was deterrence through the threat of massive retaliation that would result in Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD); it took shape in the sixties on the reliable assumption that nuclear war was unwinnable. MAD was not, FitzGerald rightly insists, an orthodoxy among defense planners ignored only by a few right-wing know-nothings; an alternative doctrine of "warfighting," according to which one adversary could win a nuclear war that was less than total, had always had proponents, and the situation addressed by MAD was unstable in its stability, given to "threat inflations" and to arms buildups of greater or lesser symmetry that could never reach closure, only reach toward it. What was different about the new Reaganite warfighters, it seems clear, was that they projected their own intentions on their adversary and then resorted to the fiction of a perfect missile shield as the only alternative—one which would, of course, have to prove invulnerable in order to be worth anything and which in its MacGuffinly way became for a time the dominant theme of striving and conflict.

Now go back to Cheyenne Mountain: what candidate for the presidency in 1980 could possibly have been unaware that, on the rules of the balance of terror, no superpower could or should do very much to "prevent a nuclear missile from hitting [it]"? What was the mindset or world view of those who insisted that nuclear security at the time lay not in a fairly even balance of offensive (and unthinkably destructive) weapons but a special set of defensive weapons magically exempt from the competition?

In fact, there were crucial cracks in the Star Wars rationale as it developed. Was the missile shield meant to shield populations (in which case it had to be total) or to shield other armaments (in which case partial coverage was O.K.)? Was it meant to protect the nation against a first strike only—or could it work against a "second" launched by the enemy in

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At once a romance and an intellectual detective story, *Abandon* hints at the possibility of transformation in love, spirituality and the clash of two world views.

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The Ultimate MacGuffin

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retaliation against a first one from the U.S., thus enabling a "third" (from the U.S.)? Or was it a gamble on catastrophe and not a defense at all that the Star Warriors really wanted? That is consistent with the world view on which FitzGerald thinks Star Wars was based. It comprised an evangelical Protestantism that remained middle America's core religion, with its apocalyptic thinking and its polarization of the world into forces of darkness and light, and an "imperial isolationism" that led American conservatives of a Midwestern strain to want to be both omnipotent and remote from the objects of their power. Such a contradiction, says FitzGerald, cried out for "some magical, or symbolic, thinking... [t]he idea of exerting power at a distance, or exerting power while remaining isolated."

Of course the answer was Star Wars, and its motives survive in our present-day unilateralists, some of whom have long histories. Even then it was Richard Perle, an assistant secretary of defense under Reagan, who rejoiced in the "Star Wars" epithet that stung his president: "Why not?" he asked. "It's a good movie. Besides, the good guys won." And even now the President has chosen to accompany his unfolding warfighting initiatives (the War on Terror, the revival of MD,

the assault on Iraq) with a speech demonizing adversaries as an "axis of evil"—just as Reagan anticipated his announcement of Star Wars by denouncing the communist bloc as an "evil empire" (in a speech to the National Association of Evangelicals in early March of 1983). Is there, for this persistent mentality, very much difference between a desire for universal domination and a nostalgia for the apocalyptic possibilities of the Cold War?

The MacGuffin of Missile Defense now serves both motives without contradiction. Caldicott argues that "first-strike winnable nuclear war is the real (secret?) agenda of Star Wars revitalization" but she also sees that it can create a new, consolidated adversary from Russia and China. Such a convergence becomes possible only on the half-suppressed principle that MD, whether a first-strike stalking horse or not, is everywhere and always an offensive weapon. In *Times* columnist Bill Keller's words, MD "is not about defense. It's about offense," and this needs to be thought through. Keller's China scenario is the most persuasive:

Taiwan decides to risk a climactic break with mainland China. The mainland responds with a military tantrum. America would like to defend the island democracy against the Communist giant—but we are backed down by hints

that Beijing cares enough about this issue to launch nuclear missiles.

To this point, "our" posture looks defensive (of an erstwhile ally) and "theirs" offensive (toward territory it considers historically Chinese). But strategy flips the valences:

If we have a sufficient insurance policy, a battery of anti-missile weapons sufficient (in theory) to neutralize China's two dozen nuclear missiles, we should feel much freer to go to war over Taiwan.

Freer, that is, to go to war with conventional or nuclear weapons, on the assumption that China "in theory" won't go nuclear. Getting this assumption wrong is of course the way to turn a diplomatic standoff or conventional war into a catastrophe. But the "in theory" is an important reservation, because that's exactly where deterrence lives in the logic of strategy. In the Taiwan scenario, U.S. strategists would be looking for a situation in which we would be able to deter China, credibly, from deterring us (with nuclear arms) from intervening. And had we got to that point, we might well succeed—but getting there is the whole nine yards. Weapons systems are built in real time even as they may exist "in theory." Beijing's prior awareness of our strategy would undoubtedly lead it to add dozens or hundreds of missiles to those two dozen it now has, and perhaps even a missile defense, without abandoning its designs on Taiwan. The U.S., in turn, would comparably increase its "defensive" weapons and its "offensive" weapons too, and the world would once again be in an proliferative arms race with a new propellant. It is not as though our masters are trying to prevent one. Seeking to persuade Putin to keep the ABM treaty while they broke it, they actually urged Russia to maintain large, war-worthy nuclear arsenals; trying to allay Chinese fears of MD, they said there would be no U.S. objection to its enlarging its arsenal or resuming nuclear tests. In the narrative-business of government, nuclear proliferation is a good story that leads to good business.

The kind of proliferation just described is "vertical," within a single nation's arsenal; Richard Butler's *Fatal Choice* shows how vertical proliferation and "horizontal" proliferation can trigger each other and how strategic prophecies can be relentlessly self-fulfilling. It also shows how hard it is to break the logic of MacGuffinism from outside of its own terms and how dispiriting the alternative can look and sound. Butler's story is in part a personal narrative of service to Australia and to international bodies, as a delegate to the Conference on Disarmament, as his country's ambassador to the United Nations, and as the executive chairman of the UN Special Commission for disarming Iraq between 1997 and 1998 (of whose last days his *The Greatest Threat*, also published in 2001, is a melancholy account). It is also a reasoned defense of what he calls "the nonproliferation regime," the tissue of international conventions established by the Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968, which Butler helped shepherd through its last two endangered renewals in 1995 and 2000. That regime is perennially threatened not only by the actions (or inaction) of its signatories but by its own contradictions, for it binds both nuclear and non-nuclear states to halting nuclear proliferation and also—this is a condition of its existence—binds the nuclear states to good-faith progress toward the elimination of their own weapons. That, of course, they have signally failed to make, so every multilateral renewal of the treaty seems to skate on a thinner layer of confidence—belied by big-power measures that Butler terms "counter-proliferative," by which he means the opposite of "anti-proliferative."

Creating an MD is a defensive counter-proliferative measure par excellence. "Proceeding with NMD would represent a major contradiction to the commitment the United States has made to work toward the elimination of nuclear weapons," Butler writes. "Instead, it would signal a determination to continue to rely on nuclear weapons into the indefinite future." He has particular contempt for the "rogue states" rationale served up by Rumsfeld and Bush—in which supposed horizontal proliferation drives the vertical kind; it not only insults his intelligence, but bottoms on all the assumptions that his book assails: that nuclear weapons, because they cannot be uninvented, cannot be restrained; that "human nature" (a concept that is "both the least precisely mapped and the most enduring of historicisms") will always cheat for narrow national advantage; that arms accords are a snare and a delusion; and that "the proliferation horse has bolted; indeed, it is halfway over the hill, and it is too late to take preventive action to stop it."

The only thing wrong with Butler's non-proliferation regime, considered as a solution to the problem of nuclear arms, is that (as Churchill said of democracy) it's the worst except for all the others, and Butler knows it. Premising that "the problem of nuclear weapons is nuclear weapons," he tries to extract these arms entirely from the bad matrix of strategic "solutions," but it must be admitted that non-proliferation requires at least as large an act of (abstract, good) faith, on the part of the non-nuclear powers, as its alternative entails the steady practice of bad faith by the nuclears. Butler's reasoning also calls for just the kind of muscular enforcement action the U.S. is now about to undertake in Iraq, and his thinking might lead him to favor a preemptive strike even if the smoking gun of WMD is not found, scientifically identified, and officially docketed. (He accepts the old report that Iraq may have tested a crude A-bomb in 1989 and the somewhat better attested story that Saddam was just six months away from exploding a nuclear device in January of 1991.) But "walking the hard yards" of disarmament, with an army and a navy if necessary, is the working diplomat's only alternative to "hunkering down to unilateral defense—the fatal choice."

Maybe the chance for that choice has passed, at least for the moment. Maybe the fighting faith necessary to break the MacGuffin's spell will come not from governments but from the people of the still (however marginally) democratic nations—those underwhelmed by the abstractions of arms control but able to respond to the imaginative challenge of what the U.S. government has in store for the world, as Caldicott and Grossman present it. For there is at least one more chapter to the story, one yet ulterior motive for MD, and here the MacGuffin takes flight for the stars—"in theory," still, but with a (literally) exorbitant sublimity.

It is not news that the military has always hoped to rule space and to rule from space. But it was not until the 1989 publication of John Collins' Congressionally commissioned *Military Space Forces: The Next Fifty Years*, copiously cited by Caldicott, that the practical details—of controlling near space from orbiting stations and rocket-powered battlewagons, of the relative advantages of directed-energy and biological weapons, of extraterrestrial mining and spaceborne warfighting—had been so concretely discussed outside a work of fiction or as explicitly proposed as a subject of competition.

U.S. space hegemony, Collins wrote, "could culminate in bloodless total victory, if lagging powers could neither cope nor catch up technologically." And it was not until 1997 that the U.S. Space Command, headquartered

UPCOMING EVENTS AT THE BOOKERY

Mary Beth Norton

Mary Beth Norton will read from *In the Devil's Snare*, her unique account of the events of the Salem witchcraft trials. Describing the situation from a seventeenth-century perspective, Norton examines the crucial turning points, the accusers, the confessors, the judges, and the accused, among whom were thirty-eight men.

Sunday, April 13th, 2:30pm at the Library



Steve Kress

Steve Kress will read his new multicolored and multicultural children's book *Saving Birds* which was written with Pete Salmansohn. The book focuses on the experiences and efforts of grownups and children, scientists and volunteers, working to save birds in very different corners for the world. The team also wrote *Project Puffin* and *Giving Back to the Earth*.

Sunday, April 27th, 2:30pm at the Library



Allison Lurie

Allison Lurie is the Pulitzer Prize winning local author of *Foreign Affairs*, *Imaginary Friends*, *Familiar Spirits: A Memoir of James Merrill and David Jackson* and many other books. She will read from *Boys and Girls Forever* and other recent work.

Sunday, May 11th, 2:30pm at the Library



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October Journal

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An Article

I took with me to Nemaska copies of an article I had written, a long review of the new edition of Richardson's book. Richardson had been quite friendly and interested, and had sent me striking photos he had taken of Job Bearskin and others when he was living with the Cree in the bush. I felt uncertain about giving the article to the Cree, for, in addressing an audience in New York about their struggle against the dams, and their long tenure on the land, I was presuming to encapsulate their lives in a foreign tongue, applying a foreign code of conscience. I hoped there was nothing grossly inaccurate in the piece, though certainly it would be no new experience to read lies about themselves. At least I could console myself that they were functional, innocent lies, if they were lies—that is, meant to move people to action, to help them think, in their luxury, about what subsistence means, and about the importance not of empty wilderness but wilderness with humans who knew how to live in it—and also that I had not done it for money. But I keep thinking about photographs and the idea of people's spirits being sucked from them into the camera. The media routinely do that to everyone they touch, though it no longer seems to bother anyone.

(But, ah, the Quebec lawyers insisted, you can get used to anything.) Still, when Freddie gave me a copy of his poem, I had something to reciprocate with. I left copies

with the Innu man and the chief, too, and one with Thomas, who visited me the morning I left. It cheered me that he had returned, and also that I had left something of myself in the village, and that in it I would be seen more or less clearly.

Today the weather is colder, and in searching the duffel for my heavy sweater, I realize I have left it in Nemaska, too, in my room in the Grand Council building. When friends come to visit here at the lake for a few days, they often leave items, as though saying they didn't want to leave, or assuring anyway that there would be a little P.S. to the visit coming to them in the mail. I will write to thank J-P when I return and send him a copy of my article on Roy, and ask that he send the sweater in return. It's odd to think of it sitting there in the drawer in the middle of the bush. Interesting too that I completely unpacked and put things in drawers when I was to be there only a few days.

Stories

I come here in the edge times, and take back stories of things seen to my family. That the blackberries were blooming, or the red trilliums, or that the black-and-white male merganser was here, soon to leave, or I tell them the story about the hooded merganser's mystifying confrontation with the beaver. Or about the lake literally covered with tree swallows for a very short period of time, and then they're gone. Or the hundreds of cedar waxwings perched on the iron railings of the bridge above the river, diving all around me in the evening air during an

insect hatch while I was fishing. The moment the coyote and I looked at each other. The tiny flycatcher that flew into the side of the boat, falling into the water and then resting (its eyes blinking) in my cupped hand after I scooped it out, until it revived and flew off. The in-between snowshoe hare, always here, it seems, to greet me in the spring and bid me adieu in the fall. The bear's den. The savaged fawn, swinging its head from side to side as I took aim to kill it with the maul. This year, though, I will tell them about the new road and the flags on the trees.

I can't remember now who told me the story about the beaver. It has become a legend in the Cree world, a story that a hunter told the people after returning from the bush. Soon after the damming of the La Grande he found a beaver lodge that was thirty feet high. It was surely the biggest lodge in all the Cree land, and it was empty. He had never seen such a lodge, and he realized, inspecting it closely, what had happened. As the waters rose, day after day and week after week, the beaver built higher and higher, trying to keep the living room above water, until finally the day came when it gave up.

Taps

Once for a few weeks, several summers ago, a man across the bay played "Taps" every evening as the sun was setting. We thought it strange, hearing those solemn opening notes, but the military association quickly gave way, as we listened that first night, to a sense of approaching peace and a

feeling of gratitude for the fullness of the day. After "Taps," as the stillness of evening deepened, came the solitary call of the hermit thrush up in the woods.

Divided

Today the wind is blowing the fog in dense swirls over the lake. The mice are settling in. I see an albino red squirrel in one of the hemlocks this morning, and wonder if he will inhabit the camp while I'm gone. The place is an absence, an emptiness for me during the winter. Sometimes the squirrels toss things about and I like the feeling that the place has been used while I was gone.

Well, I do not want to return to Ithaca to fish in the truck. But the boat is up, the glazing and painting done, the floors swept, the gutters cleared. The waterlines and pump are disconnected. The woodshed full for spring. The fishbones and guts and head are out in the woods for the raccoons, which I am hoping will come back with their new family in the spring. A Cooper's hawk settles heavily, its wings flapping, on a small bird near the edge of the shore. When I move near the window it sees me and takes off with the bird in its talons and flies through the woods to whatever cove it will feel safe in.

—
Joel Ray is a former editor of the Bookpress. He lives in Ithaca.

The Ultimate MacGuffin

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at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado, had the face to issue its Vision for 2020 in lurid comic-book form, with scarifying pictures showing space-governed wars on land, sea, and air and promoting the "full spectrum dominance" which the Space Command offers the nation by adding its power to those of the other armed services.

Caldicott and Grossman cite much language from the Space Command's Long Range Plan of 1998, written in an all-too-common dialect of strategySpeak, at once antiseptic and prurient, just holding back from the exertion of limitless violence that Collins' "total bloodless victory" pretends to forestall. The LRP is mostly about *looking and knowing*, occasionally about *holding power* just short of the fighting it promises. It anticipates "a seamlessly integrated force of theatre land, sea, air, and space capabilities" to enable "the combination of *worldwide situational awareness* and *precise application of force* from space" (all the italics are mine). Its inert noun phrases try (and fail) to buffer the actions they portray: by 2002, "a robust and fully integrated suite of space and terrestrial capabilities will provide dominant battlespace awareness enabling on-demand targeting and engagement of all ballistic and cruise missiles... and the ability to identify, track and hold at risk designated high value terrestrial targets." And the obsession with "seamless integration" (words curiously recurrent in documents like these) gives away the extreme fragmentation—of the means of making this fantasy real, of the earthly agents caught up in it—which it really implies.

These are the sex dreams of empire, and the object of their desire finally stands out in all its specular power—power applied at a distance, of course, in the phallic reveries of magical thought. (Caldicott is a fine gender critic as well as a superb polemicist; fastening on the phrase "hold at risk" at Ithaca College, she quotes a military strategist, "If he [the gendered adversary] values his grand-

ma, we'll target his grandma." "I am a grandmother," she cried: "How dare he talk like that?") But can such literally totalitarian dreams be realized? This is a question with which the MacGuffin wants to tease us, and it might better be avoided. But societies with the ingenuity and resources to put hundreds of thousands of bits of serious junk into near space, permanently or transiently, cannot be counted on not to be able to shoot some of those bits down or to shoot down from them. Perhaps they can be dissuaded from doing so by shame or fear or even inspiration—by the pediatrician-activist Caldicott, founder of Physicians for Social Responsibility and more recently of the Nuclear Policy Research Institute and a longtime speaker and writer on the medical and environmental threat of nuclear arms; by the investigative reporter Grossman, whose particular concern is the space program's nuclear threat to the planet; and by the redoubtable organizer Bruce Gagnon, whose influence in Caldicott's and Grossman's books is strong. Gagnon, who spoke at Cornell in October and whose *Global Network Against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space* is an excellent resource for organization and teaching, does not hesitate to appropriate the chiliastic language of space colonization for his own purposes; far from renouncing the whole space program as the military MacGuffin that it arguably is, he captures its story in another one, calling for "a global debate on what kind of seed we're going to carry on our inevitable journey into the heavens, the good seed of international cooperation or the bad seed of greed, environmental exploitation, and war."

Two more predictions are possible. First, space weapons, once on station below or beyond the moon's orbit, are remarkably vulnerable to the threat they pose to each other and to earthbound "assets" (ships, cities, grandmothers). A regime that depends on satellite communication and surveillance, on celestial threats and counterthreats, may come to look, even in the planning stage, like such a mass of vulnerabilities that it will fall

of its own weight before being built. (In prospect it certainly provides a dramatic image of imperial overreach.) In any case, space weapons, once realized in pictures like those of the U.S. Space Command, will lose the last shreds of the defensive disguises they have hitherto worn; it will be hard to "project" (in both the imaginative and the military senses) aggressive force into space without revealing it for what it is: aggressive, offensive force. To recur to one of the key narratives of Missile Defense, it is rather hard to go on talking like a Jedi while you're building the Death Star out there in the blue, for all the world to see. Maybe MD and its "seed" can bring us to the point where we can, at last, see the Empire and realize that it is us.

—
Stuart Davis is a Senior Lecturer in English at Cornell. References to further information sources can be found at <http://instruct1.cit.cornell.edu/~sad4/md/>.

Once Two Heroes

a novel
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The Bungee Jumper

Tom Eisner

There is something reassuring about honeysuckle bushes. They are among the first to come to life in the spring, and they never fail to bloom no matter how harsh the preceding winter. One takes delight each year in the early unfolding of their blossoms, and wonders what it is about their flowers, whether coloration, scent, or a combination of traits, that attracts the pollinator. Driven by curiosity, one takes a closer look, and finds that honeysuckles have an enemy, a little caterpillar that makes its living feeding on the leaves of the plants. One is reminded that the interaction of insects and plants is complex, and that plants derive both benefit and injury from insects.

Eager to learn more about the larva, one checks the entomological periodicals, only to find that the species has been largely ignored. This is surprising, because the animal is abundant and therefore ready-made for study. Why not look into the life of this insect? I found the prospects of becoming intimate with a caterpillar tempting, as did some of my student associates, and together we have begun to document this insect's remarkable activities, including its feeding behavior, architectural habits, and defensive strategies. The result is that the little denizen is no longer entirely shrouded in mystery. We learned early that the animal had a Latin name: *Ypsolotha dentella*. To us it became known as the bungee jumper.

Here is what we have learned so far about the animal. It is restricted in its diet and feeds only on honeysuckle. Like honeysuckle itself, it is a native of Europe. It makes its appearance in early April (right now, in fact, in your very own gardens!), feeding on young leaves at night. It hides in the daytime, usually in a loose silken retreat, which it spins between leaves near the growing tips of branches. By the end of May, virtually all have pupated. Their slender cocoons are well camouflaged among the surrounding leaves. The adults, irregularly patterned in brownish tones, appear fashioned to blend in with bark. Larvae are most easily spotted by the tell-tale feeding injuries they inflict on leaves. They are also given away by their tiny black fecal pellets, which may accumulate outside their retreats, unless blown away by the wind.

The larvae are neatly camouflaged. Predominantly green, they match the color of the leaves they eat. A reddish streak on their back is of the precise hue often manifested by the petioles of honeysuckle leaves.

Aside from camouflage and the benefit of the retreat, the larvae have two additional rather spectacular defenses—they wiggle and they bungee jump. Wiggling is an escape strategy they share with many small caterpillars, but *Ypsolotha* may hold the Guinness record for the "sport." Put a *Ypsolotha* larva on a smooth kitchen counter and touch it with a toothpick and you are in for a revelation. The larva instantly becomes a visual blur, as it propels itself at high speed over the counter, twisting and turning along an unpredictable path. The response may last only

seconds but may suffice for the larva to vanish from the site. Even the littlest *Ypsolotha* are programmed to wiggle when disturbed. Poke a larva while it is hidden in its retreat, and it will quickly wiggle away.

Bungee jumping is put into effect by the larvae when they have wiggled their way to the edge of a leaf. They then plunge into space, suspended by a silken thread that they squeeze from a tiny spigot that projects from just below the mouth. The spigot is the outer "faucet" of a pair of large tubular glands that take up a considerable portion of the body cavity of the animal. Bungee jumping does not require that the larvae take time to anchor the silken thread to the edge of the leaf before jumping. The silken thread is fastened to the retreat itself and the larva needs only let out

between its third pair of legs. When the larva completes its climb it relinquishes the package, leaving it stuck to the leaf margin the moment it is back on home base. By discarding the silk, the larva may be squandering a resource. Spiders are more conservation-oriented. When they take down their web, they eat it.

There are dozens of questions that remain unanswered about *Ypsolotha*. Several students have joined the project, and it looks as though there will be no shortage of problems to be solved. Lynn Fletcher, with the quiet persistence that is her mark, has video-taped the wiggling behavior and will try to see whether by analyzing the high-speed footage she might be able to decipher how various forces interact to effect the propulsion. Josh

there predators able to catch the larva? Our two Uruguayan collaborators, Carmen Rossini and Andrés González, as well as my wife Maria, may well look into some of these unknowns.

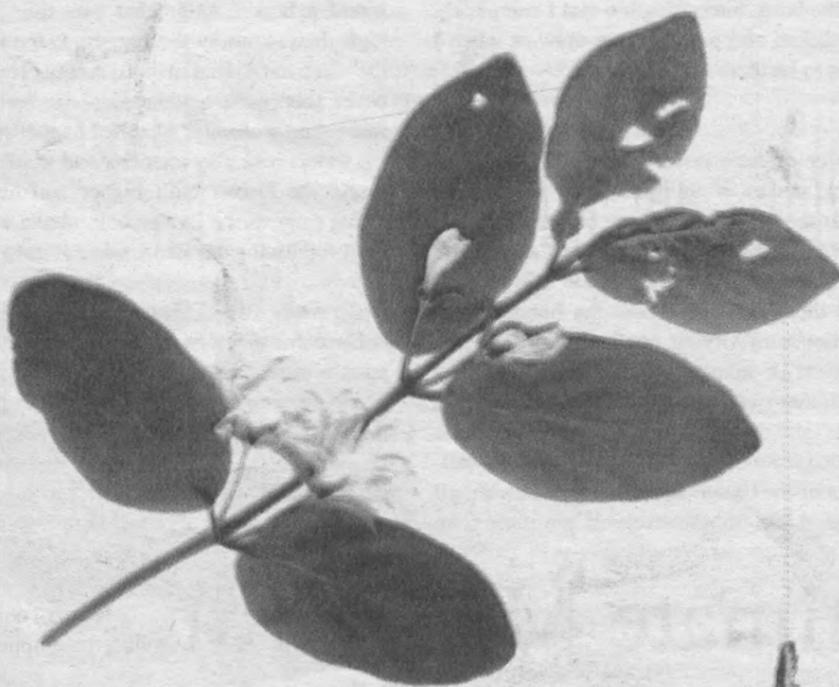
As with all research, one inevitably wonders whether a project, as conceived, is of sufficient importance to be of general interest. Does anyone really care about a caterpillar that is neither a pest nor a vector of disease? Does the fact that virtually nothing had been done with this animal mean that it had been judged to be worthless or uninteresting? I generally work on the assumption that if it is alive it is interesting, a view which as a naturalist I find easy to espouse and justify, but difficult to impart. Does *Ypsolotha* have general appeal?

The answer came to light from an unexpected quarter. *Ypsolotha*—I was told by my friend Jim McConkey—had been spotted by a poet, by a writer of immense talent who, having found himself eye to eye with the little larva, was moved to report on it in verse. Archie Ammons discovered *Ypsolotha* quite independently, and giving rein to his curiosity and genius for expression, took the animal to heart and wove an account of it into one of his narrations. Here, in the words of the great poet, is a poetic view of the bungee jumper:

".....there is a web-worm falls
sometimes aslant the honeysuckle hedge in spring
breeze or other dislocation and finds itself
asquirm dangerously dangled in the open air (I've
seen hornets trim those babies right out of the
air): this one I paused to view was wrestling
up the single thread of web, nipping and tucking,
reaching up for a hold on the tight and bringing
itself up till the bit length could be added
to the tiny cotton ball gathered at its
head: but this is mere mechanics: down its
back was a purplish streak exactly the color
of honeysucklebushlimbstems, the top part (buds)
of the stems: his feet, his laterals, were
exactly the color of the lateralhoneysucklebush
limbstems: while this waits explanation,
hold it a sufficient miracle, on which, tho,
I posit no faith of a kind but faith of another
kind: that is, maybe some spooky agency does
manage all..."

(from Part 11, *Garbage*, by A. R. Ammons, 1993. W. W. Norton, New York, pp. 71-72.)

Tom Eisner is a biologist at Cornell.



Tom Eisner

an additional length of strand to cover the stretch to the leaf edge. It is therefore securely connected to its home base at all times and free to wiggle away and take a bungee plunge at a moment's notice.

When they plunge, the larvae drop some 10 to 20 centimeters or more. In essence their plunging is another vanishing act, a trick which in combination with wiggling enables the larvae to avoid trouble by leaving the scene. When the larvae plunge, they drop virtually instantaneously. The rate at which they are able to produce silken strand—that is, convert liquid gland content into the solid thread they squeeze from the spigot—is therefore quite astounding.

The suspended larva does not remain hanging from its thread for long. Within minutes it begins the slow process of climbing up the cord to return to its retreat. To ascend, the larva pulls itself up along the cord, a few millimeters at a time, using its mouthparts to exert the pull and to tuck away the loops of slack reeled in as it proceeds upward. The process is very elegant. The entire cord is stuffed by the larva into a holding space

Ladau, our mathematical whiz, will also look into the escape behavior, and particularly into the trigger mechanism that initiates the wiggle. Alex Bezzerides, the indefatigable molecular naturalist, will look into the effectiveness of the various defensive strategies of *Ypsolotha*, following up on his discovery that the wiggle behavior is dramatically protective against jumping spiders.

But there is so much more that comes to mind. Exactly how far do the larvae drop, and how long do they remain suspended before they ascend again? How costly is the use of the silk? The thread is most likely made of protein, and its use must come at a price. And at what price comes the time invested in the suspension? How quickly do the larvae grow, and are they forced often enough to bungee jump to be slowed in their development? Does bungee jumping have an effect on the pupation process? The larvae build a cocoon of silk when they pupate. Does a high incidence of attack leave the larvae with an inadequate supply of silk for cocoon construction? And there are other questions. Are the defenses of *Ypsolotha* impregnable? Are

The Rape of Baghdad

The farther back she moves the further he swings.
At the edge of himself what he meets is uncannily familiar.
He keeps on touching her against the wall beneath the crucifix and candle
where the blue light from the silk lampshade is no light at all.

The candle-glass gutters red, flared white from its center.
Her firelight about, above, around him, astride
she swings her legs counterclockwise, keeps her feet off the ground.

All his knowledge of the past is paraphrase, a plausible fiction.
He moves back but is hanging, his one in her o.

—Mary Gilliland

**Alice
McDermott**

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