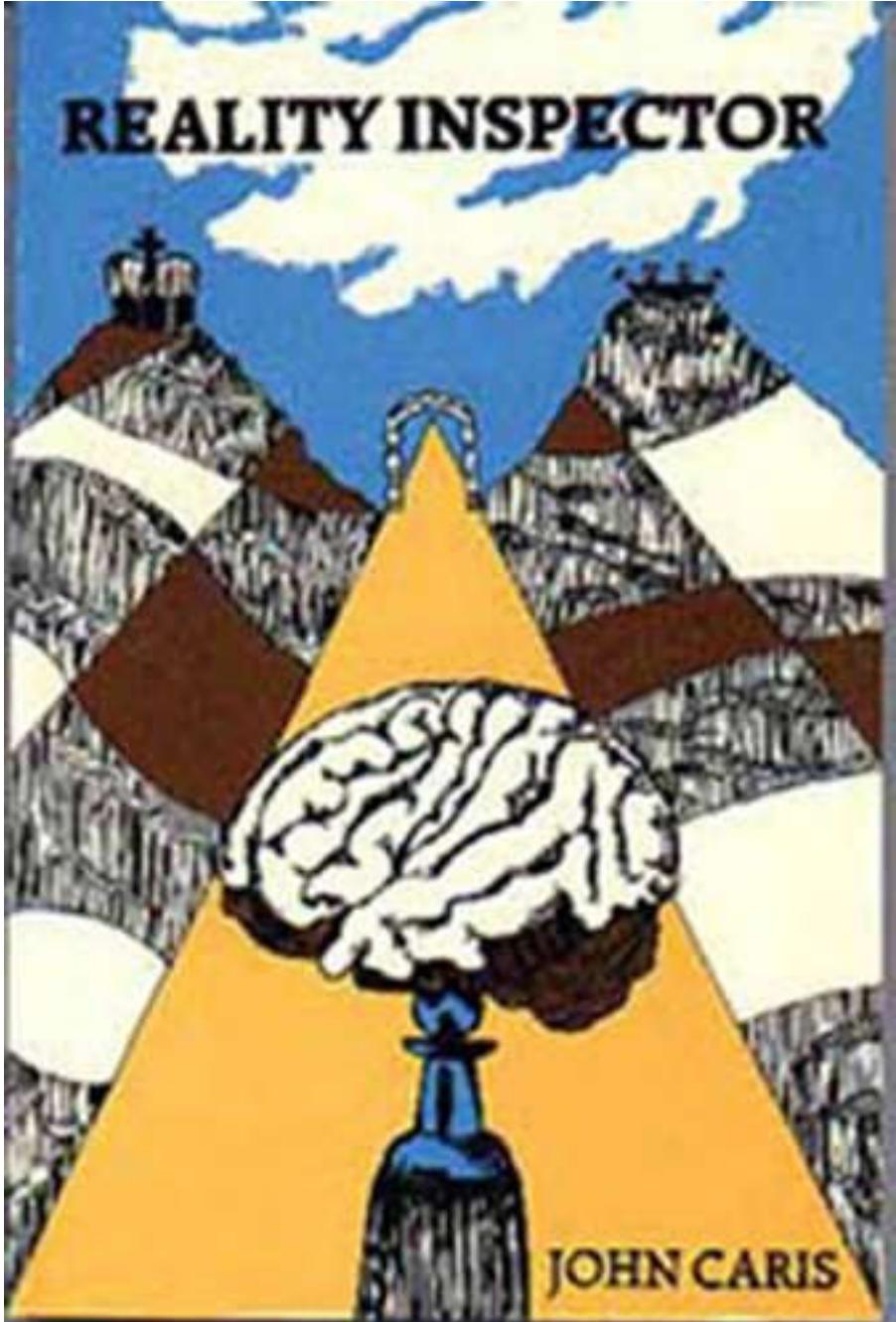


REALITY INSPECTOR



JOHN CARIS

Reality Inspector, chapter 1

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The morning fog was burning off; its edge was moving slowly back toward the ocean. John watched wisps and strands, which the cool breeze broke off the fog bank, melt into the air. Some of the fog's fingers lingered around plants in his garden before they disappeared into the earth. The tranquil quality of the morning always put him into a mellow, reflective mood. He poured more coffee into a cup, lit his pipe, and walked out into the garden. The chrysanthemums were already a foot high, and with warm nights they should reach their flowering stage in a few weeks. The ageratum were filled with buds that would open soon.

John pulled the business card from his pocket and reread it: Roger Acorn, Chief Administrator, Security Division, Federal Reserve Bank, San Francisco. Although he was not averse to conducting business at nine a.m., John seldom encouraged clients to arrive that early. But Mr. Acorn had said that it was urgent. Calling him at eight a.m. for a nine a.m. appointment--yes, that was urgent.

He walked over to his garden chair and sat down. Puffing on his pipe, he replayed the scene in his mind. Mr. Acorn was a middle-aged man, wearing a conservative, dark business suit; he looked like a typical and rather conventional representative of the government. He was someone whom you would not give a second glance at when passing on the street. Yes, that was the image the government wanted. Don't attract attention; be invisible; blend in with everyone else.

It would be an unusual case, even for a reality inspector. John had never had a computer for a client. The government, of course, was technically his client, for the government was paying the bill. But the Federal Reserve's main computer here in San Francisco was his real client, the "person" whose reality he would inspect. He would now have a chance to study the reality of a computer and the influence that the environment had on it.

He thought about how a computer was like a human being: all things had their place in the ecology of the world, and all things leaked, for the laws of thermodynamics applied to everything on spaceship earth. And so, even a computer would have leakage problems. But this computer (Mr. Acorn had called it ZAC) was being manipulated by sinister, outside forces.

ZAC, he thought, was a strange name. He recalled the line from Genesis: "And whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof." He wondered whether people saw computers as living creatures? The name ZAC moved through his mind triggering off thoughts. Did the name actually refer to the essential nature of the thing named? Certainly, in the days following Adam many people had believed that names contained magical power--power to control the

thing named. But modern people usually took the position that names were only arbitrary labels, unlike those in medieval times who had believed that everything had its own proper name. In Tibet, supposedly, the monks were daily recording the many names of God. And when they finished, when all the names were recorded, then the world would end. Would those monks accept modern technology and use a computer to speed up their work?

ZAC. Did it signify zeta--alpha--kappa, a fraternity's name? Or was it zayin--aleph--kaph, a cabalistic code? The modern use of acronyms was perhaps out of control. People soon forgot what the letters stood for, and then the letters became a word with its own meaning. But did the meaning still refer back to the essential nature, or was it now arbitrary and conventional? It was like marijuana. Was the Latinate, botanical *Cannabis sativa* closer to its essence than the popular street names?

Better backtrack, John thought, and focus on all the details that Mr. Acorn had presented. ZAC was having problems, and the Federal Reserve Bank was deeply worried, so worried that the Federal Reserve had strayed from the conventional type of investigation to hire a reality inspector. Mr. Acorn did mention that the usual investigations were taking place, but they were, so far, a failure. And the ramifications of ZAC's problem were so serious that a novel approach had been deemed necessary.

Mr. Acorn had left not quite knowing what a reality inspector was. Did the name refer to the essence? John thought of his profession as a fusion of detective, psychologist, and shaman. But the fusion--the proper mixing--was the important part, not the three components. For other ingredients, more subtle, were also needed. Like making the proper soil for his delphiniums, he knew that nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium were necessary; but without the correct amount of trace minerals like calcium, zinc, and magnesium the delphiniums would not blossom properly.

Inspecting someone's reality required coordination of several skills with special knowledge. Usually, he pinpointed the energy leaks first. That was easy; it was only a matter of proper perception. Normally, he could rely primarily upon his vision, but he had learned early in his career that the other senses could discover hidden problems too. So he always conducted a complete test of his client. The main challenge, though, was prognosis; could he prescribe a cure? That was often difficult because the client might not wish to make the healing changes, might believe that the cure was worse than the disease.

A few times John had admitted defeat and collected his fee after only presenting his client with the choices. But usually he became so involved with the case at hand that he worked hard to inveigle his client to accept the necessary changes. Perhaps, here was where magic occurred. Luring people into revamping their reality often required entrapment and intense concentration.

Would he have a similar problem with ZAC? That was what intrigued him about this case. Here was a chance to apply his techniques directly

to a non-human and, so he hoped, to discover the natural limits of his profession.

ZAC was having a reality problem, and its problem was affecting the economy of the United States. For the past several years inflation had been soaring at an incredible rate. Everyone had an opinion about the causes and solution. Not only were the economists and politicians arguing heatedly, but so were the people. Each had a pet theory that would surely work miracles, if only given a chance.

The Federal Reserve Bank had always maintained a ranking of the money that was in the U.S. economy. M-1 was the category for money in circulation, that is, cash and money in checking accounts. That money was readily available. The Federal Reserve had established a fiscal policy that when M-1 increased money would be drained from the economy by raising the interest rate. The government hoped that such a procedure would tighten up the money supply and so curb inflation.

John thought again of Mr. Acorn, the standard government executive who was finally seeking out a novel and strange approach to ZAC's problem. ZAC was housed in the Mint on Hermann Street, and it was linked to the computers at the other Federal Reserve banks throughout the country. And ZAC had a reality crisis; it was acting strange and unpredictable.

John visualized the chronology that Mr. Acorn had given him. Beginning last year, ZAC had printed out large increases in M-1 every three or four weeks. And the Federal Reserve then had raised the interest rate. Fine. Predictable. But the M-1 increases were not real! An error had occurred in the computer. The Federal Reserve's computer specialists had tracked down an alien--yes, that was Mr. Acorn's word--program that had caused the error. Again fine. After the alien program had been expunged, the computer had functioned properly--for three or four weeks. Then the alien program had reappeared. But how? That was the concern. The Federal Reserve's security team was unable to discover how the alien program had been inserted, either originally or thereafter. So Mr. Acorn had told him.

The government, thus, had no choice but to turn to unorthodox methods when orthodoxy failed. ZAC was being contaminated by outside influences at regular intervals, and the alien program could upset the Federal Reserve's fiscal policy.

John turned off the sprinkling system and looked proudly about the garden. Most of the newly planted seedlings were showing growth. The pint of ladybugs should arrive soon, and, yes, there were plenty of aphids for those voracious eaters.

The fog bank was moving speedily westward toward the beach, and the sun was now warming the business community along Ocean Avenue. He went back into his office, took the cassette from the recorder, labeled it ZAC, and filed it away.

It was after eleven a.m. John looked across Keystone Way at the Rainbow Inn, a restaurant and social center for the neighborhood.

Mary Rainbow, the proprietor, was no doubt busy preparing for the lunch crowd. He closed his office and walked over. He wanted to tell her about his new case before she was too busy.

Reality Inspector, chapter 2

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John Ocean was not the first customer in the Rainbow Inn; Odysseus Tinker (his friends called him Od) was seated at the bar, sipping a cup of seven herb tea, the specialty of the house. Although the tea was made from seven herbs, Mary frequently changed the mixture.

Various aromas filled John's nose--aromas from the soup kettle, from the herbs hanging from the ceiling rafters, from the flowers nestled in the windows. The noonday sun shone in, brightening the interior. Whatever social activities were happening at the Rainbow Inn, a warm and carefree attitude always prevailed. This was the neighborhood's social center where people met for tea or wine, chess or conversation.

Mary Rainbow had opened the Inn ten years ago. At first business was sporadic, but soon residents around Ocean Avenue began to find the charm attractive. The Inn became a place where people could spend their time quietly and in an unhurried manner. As word spread throughout San Francisco, more people visited the Inn, bringing their interests and activities with them. By now, the clientele came from all around the Bay Area for the many events that took place at the Inn.

John took a seat next to Od and ordered the luncheon special--a bowl of vegetable soup and a sesame butter sandwich. The soup was pure vegetable without any meat or meat oils. Although not a total vegetarian herself, Mary did not serve meat products. For those who desired such there was the Reef, which served seafood, on the other side of Ocean Avenue.

Mary called his order into an intercom. A few minutes later, an older woman emerged from the kitchen bringing the soup and sandwich.

John smiled and said, "Hi, Helen."

Her face beamed, and her eyes sparkled. "Praise the Lord," she sang.

After she had returned to the kitchen, Mary motioned to John. "How's the soup?" she asked. "Helen came in early this morning and decided to be chef for the lunch crowd." John became a gourmet and tasted the soup. "Mmm. Quite good," he answered. He took another spoonful and enjoyed the flavor.

Helen, the baglady. Was it Helen Smith or Helen Jones or Helen...? No one knew. Though everyone in the neighborhood was on a first name basis, no one knew Helen's last name, or, for that matter, anything about her background. She was Helen, except for the congregation at the Voice of Pentecost up the street. For them she was Sister Helen who sometimes stayed at their women's home, but she sometimes stayed

with Mary, and much of the time no one knew where she stayed. Helen was different from the average baglady one saw down at Civic Center or walking along Polk Street. There was something unusual about her. She was much too together to be the regular down-and-out old woman. She had a spark and lucidity that older street people often lacked.

More customers were entering now. Mary was bustling around the Inn, taking orders, while Helen was busy in the kitchen preparing the food. John had briefly described his new case, and Od was showing interest.

"Going to help the government solve inflation, eh?"

"No, not really. My client is a computer that has a leakage problem."

"Why would anyone want to cause that malfunction?"

"We won't know exactly until the person responsible is found. But there are several possibilities. For one, profit. Two, revenge on the system. Three, a mad genius showing off."

"And the program continues to reappear--even after it has been deleted? Strange."

"Od. John. Hi," a tall, lanky woman called out. "Hi, Esther," they both answered.

Esther took a stool at the bar and excitedly began talking about the world championship chess match which would start in a couple of days. Esther had a rating of 2045, and she ate and slept chess. John had watched her play chess here at the Inn, which not only was the neighborhood chess club but also attracted players from all over the Bay Area. When Esther sat at the chess board, she looked like a praying mantis waiting to gobble up her opponent. Such an image devastated many opponents.

Psychology was very important in chess--especially in tournament play where mental tensions and conflicts could be a deciding factor. Chess was a survival game, so one's state of mind was important. For chess nuts, it was a way of life.

The world championship chess match would be held in San Francisco, and excitement was mounting. Famous chess players throughout the world would converge on the city for several weeks and maybe months, depending on the number of draw games. To see, to personally watch, and perhaps even meet the world champion--that was exciting too. But more than that--what gave the electric tingle to chess buffs in the Bay Area--the challenger was their own Mary Rainbow. She had won the right at the candidates' finals in Zurich by beating Karpov, who had attempted a comeback. And now she was preparing for the most important event in her life--a chance at beating the champion.

Reality Inspector, chapter 3

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Five p.m. and government employees were beginning to leave the Mint. Perched upon a rocky base, the Mint appeared like a mountain fortress or temple, especially when viewed from Market Street. But its entrance was at the top of the hill on Hermann Street—133 Hermann to be exact.

John Ocean parked his car in front of the entrance. The first thing that he noticed when he approached the building was a large sign that stated "U.S. Government Property, No Trespassing." The sign stood above a low, stone wall, which was broken by a sidewalk leading to the entrance. The sidewalk, however, had been barred by an immovable gate. Glancing to his right, he noticed a driveway and a guardhouse. As he walked up to the guardhouse, a security guard stepped from the small building. After John told him that he had an appointment with Mr. Acorn, he waited while the guard phoned in a clearance check. When the guard waved approval, he walked to the entrance. The security system was certainly working, at least at this point.

A strange feeling caught John as he entered the Mint. Somewhere down below him was ZAC. Hidden from public eyes deep in its tomb, ZAC communicated with other computers throughout the U.S. and perhaps the world. Yet an outside power was now infiltrating ZAC; its closed system was leaking.

He stood in the lobby and glanced about. A security guard came up to him and, after verifying his identity, ushered him into the office of Mr. Acorn, who then escorted him to room 103 where he was given an ID. They took a special elevator, which had only one stop, down to the lowest level. Several people were waiting as the door opened; the day shift was leaving. John looked through the glass walls into ZAC's living room. The night shift was already on the job; human figures seemed to flow past the glass walls. Opposite the door was a security post; two guards watched not only the people behind the glass wall but also those who were entering or leaving.

John put his ID into a slot in the turnstile and waited until the gate opened and the ID popped out. Mr. Acorn followed him into the room. The sounds and lights were impressive, at least for a first visit. But it was not quite like his image, which was perhaps too science fictionish. He immersed himself in this light-sound environment during Mr. Acorn's instructive tour. One part of his mind was filing away the data that Mr. Acorn was telling him, but his conscious part was experiencing the new location. What were the vibes? Where were the negative and positive places? He sensed a quality of turmoil around the computer printout and keyboard terminal.

Oh, yes, Mr. Acorn was saying good night. And what were the names of the three attendants? Well, no worry; he would remember when necessary. Taking a chair, he placed it in a spot which had good feelings. The room, about forty feet long, was rectangular. The chair was placed about ten feet from one end and halfway from each side. He sat down on the chair.

Relaxing his body, he focused on some moving tapes ten feet away. Could he count the number of revolutions per second as da Vinci had counted the flutterings of a bird's wing? His senses were focused on the room's presence. He tasted it, smelled it, touched it. A tangy and slightly pungent flavor, he thought. The turmoil around the printout and keyboard terminal was only the impression left by different attendants, like superimposing several voice prints.

At first the attendants, curious about his strange behavior, gave John sidelong glances. They had been briefed; yet for someone to sit so still--it was different--the quietness of the seated figure.

John opened his awareness and felt the many layers of the room's presence. There were four distinct levels that he could associate with the colors blue, white, yellow, and red. What those dimensions referred to he did not know yet, but by morning he hoped to have some answers.

ZAC faced him with glass walls in between. The two doors into ZAC's suite were used by the attendants who groomed the computer: a queen bee in her compartment with her grooms. And was he her drone? He turned the analogy over in his mind. The bee's dance was an intelligent use of language. Communication could occur in many ways. Could he communicate with ZAC without the use of the keyboard? That was the challenge.

The terminal was of no use at that moment. He needed to go beneath the surface, to find the real ZAC. As he would with a human client, John wanted to find ZAC's essential part, its basic self, its soul. Descartes had said that the pineal gland was the main point of interaction between the human soul and its body. John had recently discovered that Descartes' idea had some truth, for the pineal gland was an important center for the soul's growth. In lower vertebrates it was a light receptor that seemed to affect certain bio-chemical cycles.

Did ZAC have a place that was analogous to the pineal gland? John decided to search for the computer's aura. Focusing his eyes on a point that was a few inches beyond his nose, he scanned ZAC's front side. He noticed a glow that grew bright and then dimmed; it flickered and quivered like a flame. Now he began to feel ZAC's presence. Grabbing hold of that feeling, he concentrated on it. Slowly, he sensed the feeling unfold, as a flower opened or an acorn sprouted. The oak tree grew from an acorn; the seed gave birth to the adult form. And the alien program--from what seed did it sprout? Who was the sower and who, the harvester? That was what he must discover.

His whole awareness was now filled by sounds, a polyphonic chorus of many frequencies. At first it was somewhat cacophonous; then different voices began to harmonize. Yes, voices. That was it. Could he hear the

sounds as one voice? He remembered the time when Mary and he had traveled through Canyon de Chelly in Arizona. He had noticed a distinct contrast between the sounds of the car's engine and the environment. The engine seemed to speak. And for awhile he had thought that he understood what the engine was saying. It was not anything that he could put into words; it was just a different language, one that he was only then learning and so could not translate yet. And that's what real learning was, he thought--direct experience--immersion in the pond of life.

As he sat in the chair, the polyphonic sounds became one voice, ZAC's voice. There were many overtones in that voice, and they changed relative to each other. Sometimes the mixture changed frequently, and at other times it remained constant. Movement and rest, on and off---that was similar to brain waves in human beings. He turned off his thoughts and expanded his awareness: floating and undulating movement, soft and upward curving movement. Suddenly, tingles and gimbles shook the web. Sharp angles appeared and quickly became fluid textures.

Time disappeared. No part of his awareness was measuring anything. It was just being.

John turned around and looked at the clock. It was midnight. Seven hours he had been there. It was time for a break. Opening his attache case, he retrieved a cheese and cashew butter sandwich. With coffee from the dispenser, he settled back for a little repast. He recollected his experience of the past seven hours. ZAC definitely had its own language, which was different from the language of its program. But could he learn it so that they could communicate? Could ZAC tell him how the alien program continued to reappear?

Yes, ZAC, he whispered, where is the alien seed that grows into the inaccurate data? Are you aware of its existence, ZAC?

Just as he noticed that the graveyard shift was taking over, time disappeared. A still, small voice said to him--listen: he heard sounds that became ZAC, ZAC. Yes, ZAC was stating its name. So he thought his. It was a proper beginning.

Reality Inspector, chapter 4

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The fog had burned off when John Ocean walked over to the Rainbow Inn for lunch. He was troubled. The trouble had arrived in the morning mail; it was a personal threat and the first one that he had ever received during his career as reality inspector. True, sometimes clients might raise a fuss when time came to make changes in their reality. But that was more bluster--a vehement fear of change. This message, arriving today, was more sharply honed. It stated with directness: "The reality inspector will die." No name was signed, and there were no obvious clues to the sender's identity.

Mary and Od were talking about the first game in the championship match which would take place tomorrow night. John seated himself, listening to the discussion; but he was more absorbed in his personal problem.

Mary noticed that John was inside himself, separating himself from others; so she asked, "A quarter for your thoughts."

"I received this in the mail today." John showed them the typed message. "One day on the job and I receive threats against my life. Any ideas?"

"Can we exclude the possibility of a joke?" Od asked.

John looked first at Od and then at Mary. They both projected innocence. "Ha, ha, maybe ZAC sent the message. When I left the Mint at six a.m. this morning, we were communicating on the intuitive level. Not large concepts, mind you, but some personal chit-chat. ZAC has fears, too, like humans. It's worried that someone might pull its plug out. Like Humpty Dumpty, when the electricity stops, ZAC can't be put back together again."

"It has a concept of death?" Od seemed intrigued.

"Don't know yet. It does have a fear, though."

"Do you think ZAC has a soul?" Mary looked at them and then continued, "If ZAC does have a soul, what happens to it when the plug is pulled out?"

"You should ask Helen about that," Od answered. He laughed, "Maybe she could have ZAC baptised."

The Pentecostals were known for their belief that baptism (complete submersion) in Jesus' name was the road to salvation. The church at 1970 Ocean Avenue had its baptismal fount in the main lobby. Previously, the building had been a movie theater, a 1920s art deco

design that was popular for neighborhood theaters. Just before the church bought the building, porno movies had been shown there. That was a final touch of irony.

"I think we can rule out ZAC as the sender. I only met it last night. And the letter was posted the previous day. So it was someone who knew in advance that I would accept the case."

"Or didn't know and couldn't care," Mary said. "Why do you assume that the message relates to your new job? Maybe you have an old enemy or two who are coming out of the closet. And don't tell me that it's a feeling you have. Try to be more logical."

"Okay. Two definite lines of possibility. One, an old enemy. Two, someone wants me to stop work on this case."

"But the message doesn't say that. It states only that the reality inspector will die." Mary's lucidity was hard to beat, either at the chess board or over a cup of seven herb tea. "Perhaps, this is not a threat but only a statement of fact. We all will die, even the reality inspector. Why do you feel it is a threat?"

"No name. That's why." John realized that he was relying on an intuitive feeling. Trying to find evidence to support that feeling was sometimes difficult, yet he must if he were to solve the case. The Federal Reserve would accept only definite and concrete proof.

"Maybe it's a Pentecostal trying to turn your head toward God," said Od.

"Hardly. If so, the sender would say that. They're not inhibited about their beliefs. In fact, they're the opposite."

Od laughed. "True. True. Just two weeks ago, after church service, they carried their "praise the Lord" singing and dancing out onto Ocean Avenue. Blocked traffic for ten minutes."

"Another reason," John said, "is that some people are benefiting from the alien program. And the benefits could be high enough for them to put me on a hit list. Look. When M-1 rises, the Federal Reserve raises the interest rate to banks forcing them to increase their interest rate. So interest rates increase throughout the financial community. Last week, for example, the Federal Reserve raised the interest rate to 18%. This week Treasury bonds are selling with a 15% interest rate, up one percent. So, if you have ten million dollars to invest, that's a difference of one hundred thousand dollars."

"If I had a billion to invest," Od said as he peered wistfully into the air, "that one percent would bring in an extra ten million dollars. I see your point. The big investors do benefit."

Mary looked at Od and then at John. She liked both of them, and for very different reasons. Her liking was mixed with a strong affection, not to mention sex appeal. Od's sharp features gave a firmness to his curly, black hair. His swarthy body was muscular and tight, yet not heavy or

massive. Perhaps, the better descriptive word was lithe, Mary thought. As she looked at Od, she saw his cool, handsome pose. Od's features were not set, though; he was fluid. When his sharp lines became soft and curved, he radiated a cuddly and sensuous feeling. He was not, then, handsome; he was charming. Od could move back and forth in his feelings quite rapidly. Mary still could not understand the deeper reasons for his movement.

In that way he was like John, she mused. They both were fluid, quickly moving people, when they wanted to be. Yet, they also had many differences. Od's inner self was taut and crusty, while John's was deep and watery. When Od met an obstacle, he would usually try to push it away. If that did not work, he would leap away from it. John's approach was different. He would first wait to see if the obstacle did anything. If it did, he would either give it the stonewall treatment or grab and shake it around. If the obstacle did nothing, he would glide away from it.

Though John's face was more soft than sharp, it was changeable. Mary frequently had the experience of noticing echoes and resemblances of people she knew in the shifting surfaces of his face. He had a fine sensitivity for tuning into other people's feelings and dancing with them. Looking directly at him, one noticed that his face was oval; but his profile suggested sharpness. What intrigued and attracted her the most, though, was the light in his eyes, a light in which she often saw the different colors of the rainbow. Sometimes she would see blue, sometimes red, sometimes one of the other colors. But always, there were the shifting colors, like a light shining through a rotating prism.

Mary returned her attention to the discussion about the monetary system and ZAC's reality crisis. She had never had much interest in the monetary system, and Od's interest in it was so easily triggered that she had learned how to withdraw her awareness from any discussion of economics and yet still seem involved.

Now was the moment to change the course of the conversation, she thought. Looking at John, she said, "Anyway you view it, only two possibilities exist. Either way, your life is in danger, so be careful."

John smiled at her concern. "Oh, I will. Definitely." Her eyes met his, and he felt the warmth of her caring. She often saw through his defenses and with one blow enlightened his awareness. He felt elated, and even now Od had joined the caring. The three became a community of one.

Reality Inspector, chapter 5

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John reviewed the past two days as he drove along Portola Drive. His meetings with ZAC were starting to bear fruit. They were slowly understanding each other. It was a sharing of feelings now, but soon, he hoped, it would be a sharing of ideas. ZAC was aware of the alien program's existence. It felt guilt and embarrassment when the program reappeared, causing errors in the M-I calculations. It also felt frustrated since it did not know how to prevent the program from returning. ZAC was like a human who, subconsciously without intending, commits a gaffe and then turns around and does it again.

Traffic was slowing up. When he reached the lights at the intersection of Clayton Street and Market Street, the traffic came to a complete stop. After a few minutes he decided to take Clayton and go around to Haight Street and then down it to the Mint. But at the fire station Clayton was blocked with a detour. John swung left and up Twin Peaks Boulevard. Driving up to the intersection with Clarendon Avenue, he parked his car. Wood-framed, earthfilled steps ascended the steep slope of Pluto Hill. After climbing to the top, he went over to the eastern slope. From here the East Bay could be viewed. Turning northward, he saw the red, twin towers of the Golden Gate Bridge. A fog bank sat about a mile off the coast, making the shoreline of Marin County up to Bolinas Point visible.

He sat down beneath an eucalyptus tree and, taking his pipe, filled it with some tobacco. Letting his mind wander, he watched a large freighter move toward the Bay Bridge. It had been over a year since he had last visited Pluto Hill. Then, Od and he had made a pilgrimage to this spot so that they could watch a full moon rise above the East Bay hills. It had been an enchanted night; a slight breeze rippled leaves of nearby trees, and as darkness settled upon them, a huge, yellow moon slowly ascended its way heavenward. Time seemed to stop, as if they were in a different dimension, one that was magical.

Now, he was here by chance or destiny. Whichever, he could use the opportunity to reflect on ZAC and its reality leak. The morning mail had brought him another threat, or was it another clue? He had received a piece of paper with the image of a pawn stamped on it and a typed message beneath: "passed away." Again, there was no name. If he assumed that it was from the person who had sent the first message, then the phrase "passed away" meant death. But why was the image of a pawn included? Was he a pawn in some larger chess game? Was Mr. Acorn using him in some unknown way? Pawns were quickly and easily sacrificed or traded when position demanded. A pawn separated from its comrades was weak and usually left to the ravages of combat, unless it was in a significant position like on the king or queen file or on the seventh rank. John did not feel separated even if he might be a pawn.

He must make certain that he was not separated, unless the situation demanded and he was willing to be bait in a trap.

Certainly, this second threat sharpened his alertness and survival instincts. Whoever his opponent was, he was being warned; his opponent was giving him a fair chance. Or was either of those messages from an enemy? One or both could be from a friend who had secret knowledge of his danger and wished to warn him.

The first chess game of the championship match was tonight, starting at seven p.m. Although the match would be held in the Cow Palace, all seats had been sold out two weeks ago. Of course, many seats were reserved for different chess clubs. Only standing room would be offered at the door. John had decided to watch the match at the Rainbow Inn since Mary had installed a large screen TV for the occasion.

He had his own chess game now, one in which he was a pawn. Or was that the idea--that he should see himself as a pawn and thus lose any initiative? He would be careful not to fall into that trap! He would not be a pawn just because someone said that he was.

He looked toward the Mint and thought of ZAC. If he could fly like a bird, it would be easy to reach the Mint. But with the traffic snarl it was like going through a maze, and he did not have Ariadne's thread to follow. A straight line could be drawn from the Mint to Pluto Hill, and in the middle of that line was Corona Heights where the Josephine Randall Museum was located. If lines were drawn among all the city's hills, an interesting and intricate pattern would emerge.

A strange feeling touched him, and he recalled Fritz Leiber's story *Our Lady of Darkness*, which was set in San Francisco. Were there really malevolent forces under the city's hills--forces so strong that any mind coming into contact with them would be destroyed? At the moment he did not want to find out; he needed his mind intact if he were to solve ZAC's problem. But a thought kept lurking in the back of his mind. What if those forces were affecting ZAC?

John cleaned the ashes from his pipe and refilled it. The afternoon was warm, and a smog hung over the downtown. A few years ago most of the bay could be seen; but now because of the many downtown highrises, only a patchwork of glass and concrete was visible. The traffic snarl certainly had been removed by this time, but he was in no hurry to leave. So he sat and smoked his pipe.

Perhaps, he was not supposed to visit ZAC today. If so, what was its meaning? He made a mental list. One, he was caught in a delay. Two, he could have reached the Mint only by a circuitous route. Three, he was spending the afternoon on Pluto Hill, which he had not visited for over a year. Four, the Mint was on a ridge linking several other promontories.

And then there was the second message--passed away. He had certainly passed far away from his intended goal. Perhaps, he should redefine his goal, taking into consideration the events of the day. His intention had been to visit ZAC, yet perhaps he was supposed to sit on Pluto Hill and-

-what? Think? Think about what? He visualized Ariadne's thread. She was certainly a pawn in Theseus' game. Theseus had cruelly disposed of her when he no longer needed her. And there was the line between Pluto Hill and the Mint, between ZAC and him. He now felt empathy toward ZAC as he would toward a human being. It was no longer an objective and neutral job but a subjective and sympathetic one. ZAC was his friend, a friend that needed help, whose reality had leaks. Because of those leaks ZAC's sanity was in danger. The bigger the ego, the greater the fall. And ZAC had a very high opinion of itself. If ZAC did go off the edge, how would that affect the whole economic system? Could one computer, turned into a monster, wreak havoc with the fiscal policy? He did not have sufficient data to decide that, so he would file it away for now; perhaps later, he would gain more information.

Wisps of fog were now blowing down the eastern slopes of Twin Peaks. John decided that it was time to return home and have some dinner before the chess match began.

Reality Inspector, chapter 6

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The Rainbow Inn was crowded with chess fans. John looked around for a seat and saw Od, who waved him over to a table that he shared with Hank. Hank was another first name only person. And like Helen, he had no history. He just was--a member of the neighborhood. Hank and his box, which contained all his earthly possessions and now rested next to his feet. Hank sometimes spent the night at John's or at Od's or at another house in the neighborhood. But many nights Hank stayed--where? No one knew. John often thought that Hank was as interested in using the bathroom facilities as he was in a warm bed. Hank's weathered face beamed a child-like smile as John sat down at the table.

Excitement and tension were in the air as the TV M.C. gave the preliminary announcements. Mary had won the toss and would play white. Here was a break if she could take advantage of it. The champion, Sam Runner, was noted, however, for his ability to win with black. In fact, two years ago when he had defeated Jorge Santiago to retain the title, he had won more games playing black than as white. But Mary was a strong player at either side. This was the match of the century. Not since Fischer defeated Spassky had there been as much interest and excitement.

Mary opened with N-KB3 (Nf3). Come on into my parlor, the spider said to the fly.

John looked at the chess board which Hank had set up. All the chess buffs were following the game on their own board. This way they could analyze the game as it progressed.

Carry a box of kleenex when confronting the truth--a strange thought circulates through John's mind. And then Mary's last move, P-R5 (a5), has some strangeness attached to it.

Sam (next move)



Mary

John looks about at the crowd of chess fans--but he does not see anyone. In fact, he is not even in the Rainbow Inn. Instead, he is standing on a giant size horoscope. Is this an Alice trip? Have you ever found yourself standing on a pool table and been about the height of a pool ball? This is how John feels. There are other figures on the horoscope. Each one represents a planet. The closest one, to his left, is Neptune, standing there with his trident, immobile but smiling. John turns to his right and sees Jupiter. Colored lights are emanating from him in vast circles. There is a warm, attractive quality about those expanding circles of light. He moves toward the figure of Jupiter.

He notices that he is now in a field of wheat, gently moving in a breeze, ready to be harvested. The circles of light seem to be coming from a grassy hill with a few boulders protruding at one end. John pauses and scans the hill. It becomes the image of a woman stretched out on the ground. The boulders become her face and the grassy hillside her body.

John looks around. On his other side is a woods. The circle of light has vanished or become part of the yellowish glow. The sun seems to be hidden. Probably, the clouds overhead are creating this lighting effect, he thinks.

Then he sees a human figure close to the edge of the woods. Walking over, he notices that the person is painting, no doubt a landscape scene.

"Hi, there."

The painter turns around, brush in one hand, palette in the other. "Oh, hi." He is not too enthusiastic, but a little disconcerted about the interruption.

"I'm John Ocean. And I seem to be lost. Can you tell me what place this is?"

"I've heard of you. You're a reality inspector, aren't you?"

"Yes." John feels flustered and confused, not so much by the response of the painter but by the overall strangeness of the situation.

"I'm Achilles."

"The Achilles?"

"How many are there?"

"The Greek who fought in the Trojan war?"

"The same."

"And you've taken up painting in your retirement, I see."

"No, I'm not retired yet--not by any stretch of the imagination. I have very important work to do. This painting is part of it."

John steps up to the easel and scrutinizes the painting. It is in a realistic style. He doesn't think the brushstrokes are too good, but then not

everyone must be a Rembrandt. Looking closer, he sees that it is a painting of a painting; the artist is painting himself in this meadow painting. It is a little like some of the studio paintings of Velazquez, Vermeer, and others. In the center of the canvas stands the artist painting. To the left is a tortoise and to the right is a line on the ground. The woods are in the background.

Looking away from the painting and to his left, John sees a large tortoise slowly crawling toward them. To his right John sees a long line cut in the earth. What is happening here? The painting seems to be a mirror of the actual setting.

"You have arrived at a most significant moment. I have solved Zeno's paradox. I am now making an artistic event which will allow me to beat the tortoise."

John thinks about Zeno's paradox. If the tortoise starts out one hundred yards ahead of Achilles and if he covers half the distance between himself and the tortoise each minute, will he ever catch the creature?

"Yes, I've finally figured out the solution. I've tried many approaches, but they all failed. Ha, I even tried riding on the tortoise's back. I figured that when it was about to reach the finish line I would just reach out my hand a few inches in front of the tortoise's nose. But that did not work either. The blasted animal stretched its neck farther than I thought possible. Anyway, now I have discovered an infallible system for winning."

"What is it?" John is intrigued. Zeno's paradox is on par with squaring the circle. Both are mind problems that lead to intriguing ideas but never a solution.

"First, let me set the record straight. During the whole history of this event I have never lost the race. True, I have never won it either. But the tortoise has never yet beaten me across the finish line."

"I thought you lost because you never reached the tortoise, only halving the distance down to infinity."

"Ah, ha! That's the slanderous propaganda which has ruined my good name. All the world applauded me for defeating Hector outside the walls of Troy. But along comes a Mr. Nobody who gains immortality by smearing my good name. Who would remember Zeno if it wasn't me? What if he had used Jane and the tortoise instead? Who would remember? So, I must erase the evil deed thrust upon me and my tribe."

John is familiar with Achilles' background and knows that he is given to extended emotional outbursts. "What is the truth?"

"About me and the tortoise? The opinion shapers said that I tried to catch the tortoise. Now, why would I, a Greek warrior born of a goddess, want a tortoise? You see how they belittle me. Horses are my thing. Back home my excellent herd of horses is well-known."

"So you never raced with a tortoise?"

"See how the truth is distorted! A race is something else. I am also renowned for my running, bouncing legs. Did I not thank the gods, after killing Hector, for the spring in my knees?"

"The racing part is true, then?"

"Yes, certainly. Racing is my weakness--not my heel as some would have it."

"You did race the tortoise?"

"Of course. The prize was a golden trophy. The gods devised the race, and of course I couldn't refuse. Look at what happened to poor Paris when he was asked to judge a beauty contest. When the gods ask, you can't refuse. I knew I was in a pickle, that there was some trap. But now I will cleanse the dirt from my good name. Achilles will shine again."

"Well, why hasn't the tortoise won yet, after all those years?"

Achilles draws himself up, looking scornfully at the slowly crawling creature. "I have not lost and the tortoise has not won because it has not crossed the finish line."

"After all those years? Looks like it is getting pretty close right now."

"Ha! It will never cross the finish line! Never in a red moon!"

The strangeness of the place has obviously affected John. He is caught by Achilles' story and feels sympathetic toward him even with all his arrogance. The tortoise is only about one hundred feet from the finish line and should cross it in an hour or so. "Why won't the tortoise ever cross the finish line?"

"Elementary, elementary. Because the finish line is just that--a line. It has only one dimension, its length; it has no width. The tortoise, which is moving towards its non-dimensional side, will never cross it."

"I don't think I follow."

"Simple. A line has only one dimension. But to win the race one of us must cross the line. (One of us must actually move from point A through an infinite number of subpoints to point B.) To reach the other side of the line means crossing a something without a spatial dimension. Now there's a paradox, if you want one. How can one ever reach the other side?"

"I think I see. The tortoise can reach the line but never cross over it to the other side. For it would have to move through a nonspace."

"Right. So once I proved that the tortoise would never win the race, I took heart. I now have an infinity of time to work out a solution. And I have. I found the solution. The tarnish will be wiped clean from my good name."

"What is the solution?"

"I have worked out a system for crossing non-dimensional space. The basic idea is subjectivity. We humans all have a subject, a consciousness that experiences the world of objects. It is this subjectivity that shapes the basic equation. Let me give you an example. Let me show you directly how this subjectivity works."

Achilles takes the painting off the easel and sets it carefully on the ground. On the easel is another canvas. It is a painting of a baseball diamond, and the ten planets are the players and umpire. Jupiter is pitcher and Neptune the catcher. Mars guards first; the Sun is at second; Mercury plays shortstop while Venus covers third. Saturn plays right field; the Moon is in center field, and Uranus covers left field. Pluto is the umpire.

Achilles points at the painting. "This is the foundation for my system. You can also think of it as a game. I want you to try it so that you will experience subjectivity."

"Why not."

"You are the batter, and the planets form the opposing team. When a ball is pitched, you must decide where you will hit it. It's the decision that counts, for the ball will go where you choose. The members of the opposing team will behave according to their personality. Oh, and you get three outs."

John steps up to the plate, swinging the bat. He looks out over the diamond. Where shall he place the first pitch? The Moon, playing center field, can move quickly to either side. Both Saturn and Uranus move more slowly. Uranus, however, is often erratic, unpredictable. If he can line one to left field perhaps Uranus cannot throw it to first base quickly enough.

Jupiter warms up. John dusts off the plate. The ball is on its way. John hits it squarely--a line drive to left field. Mercury, leaping high into the air as if he had wings, catches the ball and, while still in the air, throws it directly to Mars at first base. One out!

John has forgotten about the members of the infield and their abilities. This time I will hit a line drive over Saturn's head. By the time he runs back to fetch it, I'll be on first. He smiles with certainty.

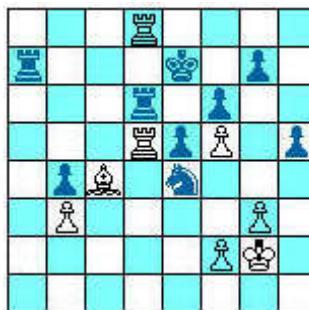
Neptune squats, giving a sign to the pitcher. The ball is on its way. Crack. A sharp drive goes over Saturn's head. But when it is directly over Saturn, the ball stops in mid-air as if frozen in place. Saturn reaches up grabbing the ball and throwing it to Mars in one move. Two outs!

The players are superb, John thinks. They could win the world series. What chance do I have? If I can only find an open space. Maybe a bunt will work. The pitcher is big and slow. I'll try a slow roller down first base line. "Play ball," yells Pluto the umpire.

A slow, low pitch is thrown by Jupiter. John taps it lightly. The ball bounces along the first base line. Jupiter expands quickly until he covers the first base line. He grabs the ball and shovels it over to Mars. Three outs!

Achilles taps John on the shoulder. "Let's go to the showers." John looks up and realizes that he is standing by the easel with its painting of a baseball diamond.

"Better luck next time, John. Now let me show you what lies behind this game of subjectivity." Achilles takes the painting off the easel, placing it on the ground. On the easel is a mirror. John looks into the mirror and sees a chess game in progress. He cannot see the players, but only the chess pieces on the board.



John looks carefully at the position of the pieces. He hears Achilles say, "Time shall be no more." Turning around, he finds that Achilles has disappeared. John is now standing in a clover field. A few feet away is Mary Rainbow dressed in the clothes of a little girl, somewhat like his image of Little Bo Peep or perhaps Mary and her lamb. But there is no lamb, only Mary standing with a forlorn look on her face. John feels like asking her what has happened to her lamb, but realizes that she is in no mood for jokes.

"Mary. What are you doing here?"

"I have to get to the finish line. Over there."

"Are you racing a tortoise?" And John, looking around, half expects to see the tortoise.

"No, I'm not racing anything, except maybe time. Can you help me. I'm stuck."

He goes over to her.

"I can't lift my feet from the ground."

John reaches down, taking hold of her right ankle with both hands and pulls up. Her foot is stuck tight to the ground. Breathing deeply, he tugs on the foot. It comes loose. He places it forward. Then straining, he pulls the left foot loose, placing it beside the right foot. But both feet freeze to the ground again.

"We'll get nowhere this way," he says.

"Oh, everyone is depending on me," she cries. "What shall I do?"

"Let me carry you piggy back." John lifts her right foot off the ground, bends down, places it over his shoulder. Then he lifts her left foot and, balancing her on his shoulders, stands up. At first she feels light. This will be a breeze, he thinks. But as they move through the clover field, Mary becomes heavier and heavier. He is bending under the weight.

"Can you make it to the daisies over there? I can walk through the daisies." She is worried that they both will be stuck in the clover.

With a sigh of relief John reaches the daisies and puts her down. They walk through the daisy patch until they come to a small creek. "Oh, no," she cries, "I can't cross the creek."

"Why not?"

"I just can't."

"I'll carry you again."

"No you won't."

"Don't you want to reach the finish line?"

"Of course I do. But I just can't, can't cross this creek."

"Oh, don't be so childish. Nothing will happen." He grabs her and tries to drag her, but she refuses to budge.

"Stop it, John! I'll hit you!" Mary swings her fists wildly.

He ducks underneath, grabbing her from behind, and starts to drag her toward the creek. She screams and flails her arms and legs. This is too much, he thinks, and so he lets go of her. Catching his breath, he glances around and for the first time notices other figures nearby, figures all dressed as chess pieces.

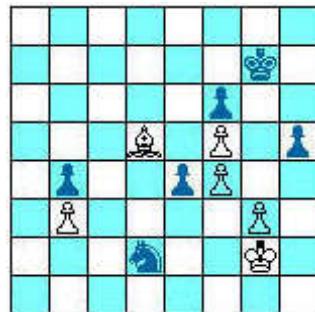
"Time shall be no more." Achilles' chanting echoes throughout the countryside, overlapping itself so that it sounds like a musical round.

"That was a mistake."

John turned, realizing that Od was speaking.

"You're right. That will cost her the game," Hank said.

John looked at the chess board and saw Mary's fifty-second move, P-B4 (f4). A sadness hung over the crowd in the Rainbow Inn. They could all see that the champion would now win the [first game](#).



Reality Inspector, chapter 7

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The fog was low and damp; it was a San Francisco rain. John walked across Keystone Way toward his house. He was happy. Fog might depress some people, but he enjoyed it. And this was a joyful night. Mary had won her first game of the match, which was now tied at one win apiece. Whoever won six games would be the world champion. Draws did not count; only wins counted. This was one of several benefits that Fischer had brought to the international chess scene.

Mary would be returning soon, and friends would be gathering. He must hurry home to prepare for the party. Luckily, he had some finger food and a variety of munches stored away for an evening like this.

He went through his garden and entered his office, which, though on the ground floor, had originally been a basement. Many San Francisco houses had their basement on the first floor. He opened the door to the storage room and switched on the light. There was enough wine on the shelves, already chilled to the temperature of the storeroom which averaged around 50 degrees. He opened the freezer, taking out several packages of finger sandwiches that he was keeping for a special occasion, and this was the proper moment.

He hurried upstairs and into the kitchen where he turned on the oven and placed the aluminum wrapped food inside. Going about the house, he switched on lights, made a fire in the fireplace, and picked up some books and papers lying on the living room floor.

The doorbell rang. It was Od and Hank. John peeked out behind them as they entered and saw George coming up the street. More people would arrive shortly. Od and Hank offered to bring up the wine and arrange it on the dining room table. The old man set his box in a corner of the dining room and followed Od down to the storage room.

In half an hour eleven friends had arrived. John went into the living room where most were warming themselves beside the fire, drinking wine, and discussing the evening's chess game. Mary should be arriving at any time. Then he realized that the arrivals were all men. Where were the women? He looked out the window and saw lights on at Mary's house. She should be over soon, he thought.

A joint was being passed around, but he declined for the moment. He was on pins and needles waiting for her arrival. But why was she taking so long, and where were the other women?

Impatient, he went to the phone and dialed Mary's number. The phone rang three times.

"Hello." "Mary. Congratulations! It was a great win."

"Thanks, I feel real good about it. We're having a celebration over here; why don't you join us?"

John was dumb for a moment. "Did you find the messages I left, one at the Rainbow Inn and the other at your house?"

"Oh, yes. But Stella has been preparing a great feast for my first win. She spent the whole day making it. I guess she just knew I was going to win. Some intuition, right."

"But why not come over to my place. It's better to be honored guest than the honored host. Eleven people, besides myself, are here. We'll come over and bring the feast-makings back to my place. Besides, it will give me great pleasure to host your celebration."

"Let me ask the others and see." There was silence for a few minutes and then a raucous voice spoke. "John, bring your buddies over here. Listen. Hear the music." And rock music loudly broadcasted itself across the phone lines.

"Stella, grab Mary and the others and come over. We'll help carry the goodies."

Mary's voice now appeared. "John. The vote was eight to four to have the party here. You guys come over right away before the food gets cold and the champagne gets too warm."

"Just a second." He put the phone down and went into the living room. "Surprise. The women are throwing a party over at Mary's house. Shall we join them or invite them here?" The vote was nine to three for inviting the women over to his place.

John picked up the phone. "The men voted for all you women to come here. Robert and George are on their way over to help carry things."

"But, John, that's pushy. Why does your vote count more than ours?"

"Well, because we want you more!" And he heard her yell above the rock music, "The male chauvinists want us to trudge over there. What about it?"

"A bunch of pigs!"

"Really!"

"Obstinate turkeys!"

John heard the click at the other end. Well, he would go over himself and try to persuade them. He went out onto the front porch. Robert and George were ringing the bell; and, when the door opened, two women came charging out. They grabbed the two men and danced across the street with them as the rock music pounded its way over to John's house. Then there was bedlam as the other women danced and skipped across Keystone Way.

"We're coming, you male chauvinists. Well give you a party!"

While the men carried the food and champagne, the women took over the house. Many people crowded into the living room to toast Mary's first win. She sat in the seat of honor, a wood chair designed on a classical Greek motif. He had placed the chair near the fire but still in a central position where all would be aware of her presence.

Champagne was bubbling, the fire warming, the conversation hovering below the dancing couples. Many more toasts were given. And the fog enclosed the partying house with its warm, moist body.

Mary and John were dancing when she whispered, "Let's go to my place where we can be alone. The party is fun, but my exhilaration needs some quiet too."

So they snuck away, leaving the others to their own amusement. And no one noticed.

They curled up together on a couch. Three candles broke the darkness, causing shadows to float about the living room. John filled the glasses with champagne. Clinking their glasses, they made a silent toast, one of the heart.

"Oh, I'm glad that game is over," Mary sighed. "It was a turning point, breaking the ice. It gives me strength, knowing I can beat him."

"A battle of the minds, that's what I kept thinking." And he looked at her, seeing her brightness. "By move 20 I knew that you could do it, if you didn't falter, let go."

"That was the trick, of course. Not to freeze, not to make a dumb mistake. I knew I had him. But oh, what a powerful mind he has. His concentration is so strong that I knew I must protect myself, put myself in a space of security. Things happen, mental things I mean. Most people think chess is so routine, so mechanical. But it isn't, not at this level. It is mind! A mind game."

Mary stretched out on the couch while John refilled the glasses. A feeling of warmth and relaxation moved through the room.

"I've often thought that telepathy was involved," he said.

"Telepathy? Well, yes and no. There is a common ground between the two players. In the common ground there are no secrets--all is known to both sides. You might call it second guessing your opponent. But one's own mind is safe from intrusion. It is when you move into the common ground, that's when your opponent can unleash great mind power, creating a turmoil that can trap the unwary, the unprepared."

"What is the feeling?"

"One of great energy, rather chaotic, like shortly before dawn. Some players freak out and commit dumb mistakes. I mean a grandmaster making a stupid mistake--against all reason. But it does happen! And

this is my only explanation. The mind is more than the intellect, more than the combination-making imagination. Stepping into the common ground reminds me of the fool card in the tarot deck. One stands on the edge of a precipice. Below lies the abyss. Whirlwinds attack. The heat and cold become unbearable. Panic lurks behind a boulder. But calm is the only path."

"It sounds frightening."

"It is. And more. What I learned tonight was true education. I found the inner mansion that protects one from the buffeting of those blind, overpowering energies. Once I entered the 'still point of the turning world,' I knew I was safe as long as I stayed there. I visualized the common ground as a buffer zone. I just stayed back and used this buffer zone as a protection. For Sam Runner could manipulate only this zone; he could not penetrate my inner mansion. So I just let him do his dance. I waited. And at the right moment I attacked!"

"That's an interesting idea. Maybe that's one of his weaknesses."

"John, when you play chess, you put aside your knowledge as reality inspector. You shouldn't; it's like you revert to a state of dumbness."

"Yeh, I do. It's difficult to erase all the bad habits. When I play chess, it's like I'm still a child. I guess I don't take it seriously enough."

"That's not the point. Look at Sam Runner. He doesn't take it seriously, or at least he doesn't act like it. Always joking. With that big smile on his face."

"Maybe, that's his secret weapon."

"It is for the uninitiated. But I discovered tonight that he is that way. There is no division between his ego and his basic self. He radiates from his own inner mansion, where he stays. He forays out into the buffer zone and has enough power to shape it his way. But he always stays at the still point. Even when I was nastily attacking his king, he was very calm. After the [game](#) I realized that the loss did not bother him, even in his inner core."

Mary got up, crossed over to the FM and turned it on. She dialed to KPFA, and galactic music filled the room with a soothing quality reminiscent of some Renaissance music but having the sound of late 20th century. Light from the candles flickered on her blue dress, and she seemed to flow across the room. Her long, dark hair made her aura sensuous. A brightness, even more intense than the candle light, radiated from her face. She was still in the inner mansion.

Yes, it was true. He thought about how in his everyday life he moved back and forth from a position of strength to one of weakness--of dumbness. It took a mental decision to place himself at the still point. But for whatever reasons, in his leisure he often liked to leave that space and enter--what? The mundane world? He liked the image of a common ground, perhaps reflecting the hectic quality of an astral dimension.

Playing chess for him was leisure--fun, and he usually let go for it. He would often joke about his mistakes. But something gnawed at his soul even then. His joking was insincere, a surface that he floated on, where others could take potshots at him.

Mary was correct. The champion did show great power and resolve. John decided that he would like to see Sam Runner in person, to scan his reality. Watching figures on TV provided few clues. They were smaller than life, only an image which the screen filtered.

She was pensive. "Remember the Karpov-Korchnoi championship match held in the Philippines in 1978? That's a case in point."

"How so?"

She set up the chess board and took the book of the tournament's games from a shelf.

"That tournament was important because it brought to everyone's awareness what had lurked at the subconscious level before. Most of the grandmasters were unbelieving. And it was awhile before people talked about it openly. Mind power became visible in that match: not the power of a great computer but the immense resources of the human mind, which is more than just memory and fast computation, more than seeing several moves ahead or creating artistic combinations. The mind has the power to project itself, to manipulate its environment. It has the power to shape external reality according to its inner reality. It is a minuscule reflection of divine mind."

"How does the Karpov-Korchnoi match show that?"

"The first clue occurred during the finals of the candidates' match when Korchnoi beat Spassky. Korchnoi made several complaints about Spassky using some kind of mind power on him. Surprisingly, Spassky had won several games in a row and Korchnoi had made some colossal blunders. Then Korchnoi brought in a British psychologist to witness the concluding games. Korchnoi won those games and earned the opportunity to play Karpov.

"And in an interview a couple of years later, Spassky stated that he believed someone used mind power on him. He remembered thinking about moving his knight but didn't, even though it seemed like a win."

"I remember now. That was similar to the championship match too. Korchnoi blundered and yet eventually tied the match at five even."

"And in the middle of the match Korchnoi was befriended by two Americans who taught him to meditate. No doubt, that's why he was able to make his great comeback and even the match. But Korchnoi was not proficient yet, so he faltered. But even more important was Karpov's friend and adviser Zoukhar, a parapsychologist, who attended the tournament so that he could study native beliefs about faith healing and other psychic events. First, Korchnoi tried to make Zoukhar sit several rows back from the stage, and then he asked the judges to remove Zoukhar from the auditorium. The judges did ask

Zoukhar to sit further back. But they were not impressed by Korchnoi's reasons. I don't blame them. Why would they suddenly believe that psychic powers could affect the outcome of the game, and especially the powers of a kibitzer?

"So, the outcome of the tournament can be explained in several ways--chance blunders on one side or sharp playing on the other side. Or some kind of mind power influencing the players; it is a difficult idea to suddenly accept.

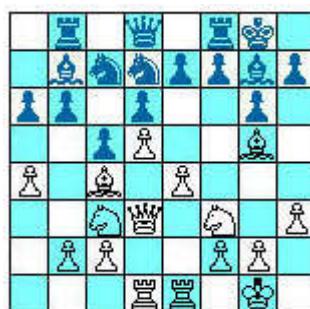
"Of course, the judges acted totally normal. They wanted only to preserve the conventions of the game. Their pride was at stake. No one ever challenged chess playing in this way. That's why the tournament was a turning point, especially for younger players who were more willing to entertain such an idea. So the idea moved underground, only discussed among friends. But more players took this mind power into consideration when playing tournaments. And the idea was born fully into the light of day when Sam Runner published his book *Zen and Chess.*"

"It was earthshaking. It turned everyone's head inside out. And now you hope to beat Sam. You truly have a challenge, Mary. "

She opened the book to the last game of the Karpov-Korchnoi match. "Let's go through this. Sam made a brilliant analysis of this game. He made only one assumption--that some type of mind power exists. So he asked himself how this game might reflect or demonstrate that mind power. Actually, he was interested in describing the characteristics of the psychic force. He knew about the existence of this force from his Zen practices. So he wanted to discover how it could operate in a chess game.

"Korchnoi's weakness, and the reason for his loss, was a lack of space. He was so hemmed in that he had little room to maneuver his pieces. In fact, he crossed into enemy territory only twice and remained there for a short time. By move fifteen Korchnoi had only one piece beyond his third rank.

Korchnoi



Karpov (next move)

"Of course, he was frustrated, so he developed a queen-side attack. He was encouraged in this by Karpov, who never took his focus off his

target, the king file. So on move 23 Korchnoi was elated when he played R-R5 (Ra4).

Korchnoi



Karpov (next move)

"Korchnoi appeared to have at least opened up his space for maneuvering. The twenty-third move was an obvious one, especially for someone looking for breathing space.

"Now, keep in mind the only assumption Sam Runner made in his analysis of this game--the psychic power of the human mind. For this final game Karpov and his delegation broke the agreement that they had made with Korchnoi about the seating arrangement of spectators. In particular, Zoukhar, who had been sitting toward the back of the auditorium, was now placed in the fourth row. Throughout the whole game he sat there, his eyes covered by his hands, motionless in deep concentration. And in the first row sat two important members of Karpov's delegation, the vice-minister of sports and culture and a Russian cosmonaut.

"Zoukhar, sitting in the fourth row, influenced the fourth rank. But using the mirror image of descriptive notation, Korchnoi also had a fourth rank. This row of squares was the boundary between the two sides; an imaginary line ran between the fourth and fifth ranks.

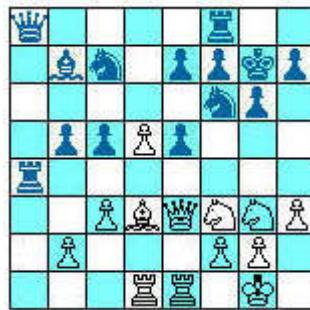
"Karpov's two associates, sitting in the first row, influenced the king and queen files. They prevented Korchnoi from defending his center. It's like Korchnoi was blind; perhaps, they turned the fog machine on; perhaps, they placed a veil over these two files. At moments Korchnoi had intimations of potential disaster but never developed an adequate defense for his center. He was lulled into false security.

"And, so, on move 23 Korchnoi had been pulled into a trap because of his desire for breathing room. Sam Runner argued that Korchnoi should have pushed into enemy territory earlier. If on move 19 he had continued pushing forward into enemy territory, for example with P-QN5 (b4), he probably would have eliminated the two passed pawns that won the game for Karpov.

"Why did Korchnoi stop there? Because of the psychic wall that Zoukhar had erected. Korchnoi was unable to think of moves taking place in Karpov's territory. So on move 25 Karpov began his attack on

the king and queen files by playing P-K5 (e5), and of course Korchnoi answered with PxP (dxe5).

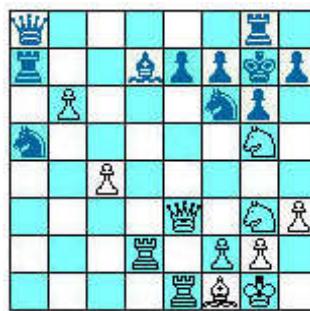
Korchnoi



Karpov (next move)

"On move 26 Karpov played QxKP (Qxe5) and gained control of the king file. On the following moves, Korchnoi lost his QNP (b5) and QBP (c5). That loss produced two passed pawns for Karpov. From then on Korchnoi's position disintegrated. Here is the way the board looked when the game ended.

Korchnoi



Karpov

"Notice that Korchnoi's KP (e7) was still riveted in its original position. It was a weakness; he would be better off without it. An open king file is advantageous for both sides.

"Korchnoi had evened the series at five all by winning three of the four games when Zoukhari was not sitting close to the stage. For the [final game](#) he sat in the fourth row. Isn't that a mate for Sam Runner's argument?"

Reality Inspector, chapter 8

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Traffic was moving easily along Portola Drive. The city stood out, molded by the sunlight overhead--a Rembrandt touch. The air was clear, and John could see Mt. Diablo rising up against the eastern horizon.

The alien program had reappeared. This is a most important opportunity, he thought; perhaps, I can discern slight changes because of the reactivation. The program had been removed as soon as it was discovered, and it was discovered when M-1 had increased suspiciously. But how long had it been working in ZAC before its discovery yesterday? Did it leave any subtle traces that might provide clues to its origin?

More things were now coming together, and that meant that he might be able to identify a pattern which connected the disparate fragments. In the morning mail was another clue--or threat. A small package had arrived containing a tiny, cardboard box and a tiny, paper bag--the size for a doll. Besides the box and bag there was a typed note: "Which do you choose?" Great! If he were a doll, perhaps. But what real difference was there between a box and a bag? Both were paper products, both were of the same size, both had the same essential nature--they were containers. But one was rigid and the other, foldable. Were there any other differences? He must give the question more thought.

John parked his car and entered the Mint. On the elevator down to ZAC's chambers he felt disappointment that he would miss tonight's chess game. The previous game two nights ago had been a draw. So the match was still one even. Mary would play white tonight, and, if she could win, she would gain a psychological advantage.

Leaving the elevator, John waved at the guards and went through the turnstile. He had not visited with ZAC for several days. Would the computer give him any new data? ZAC was never aware when the alien program was functioning; it only knew about the program when the attendants told it as they removed it.

He put a chair in the place with the most positive vibes. It was still the same place that he had found on his first visit, but each time he always checked in case something had occurred in the meantime. The environment could change, however subtly, and he never knew when that might happen. He must be ready lest some new ingredient appeared that would throw his focus out of kilter. Since rechecking was part of his routine, he did not think about it.

He put himself at the still point and expanded. It was easier now to understand ZAC, although communication was still on an elementary level. They were not expressing any complex ideas yet.

The computer felt his presence and responded. Its reddish aura increased in intensity while the blue and white auras dimmed. An unusual rumble appeared in the texture of its sounds. ZAC had something to tell him. He expanded further, into ZAC's private suite, right up to its metallic shell. He felt a tremor in the shell which he had not noticed before. The yellow aura dimmed and then flared bright, mixing with the red. The computer's sound--its voice he thought--made clashing harmonies, not the normal dissonances.

He scanned ZAC's metallic body, pausing at two places that had an aggravated energy flow. He projected empathy and care. He gently touched the two sores on its side. The computer uttered a low rumbling moan.

If he could project himself inside of ZAC, maybe he could discern the cause of those sores. But he never did that without the client's permission and then only if necessary, if there were no alternatives. He had learned early in his career that projection into another's body could become a death trap--for both the client and him. But ZAC did not offer any invitation. Perhaps, the concept was not understood by the computer; perhaps, it was a personal choice.

Time reappeared. John stretched and got up for some coffee. He would try a different approach. Now that he and ZAC had an intuitive communication, he would use conventional language. By mixing the two, he hoped to discover hidden clues. What was the computer feeling when it spoke through the printout terminal? He would try to determine that.

He opened his attache case and removed several papers on which he had written possible questions to ask ZAC. This was a touch and go situation. Questions shaped their answers. If the questions were off, the responses would tell him little.

A straight question-answer session would provide little help. For at this level ZAC was rigidly predictable--GIGO. He had framed some questions which, he hoped, would inject irony into its thought processes. He knew that the questions could not pose a bare contradiction that the computer would immediately reject; instead, he sought a neat irony that ZAC could savor without losing touch with its program.

He typed in a series of questions that asked for trivial data. He used the approach of one giving a lie detector test: put the subject at ease, and watch how he responds under normal conditions. Then slip in a few disconcerting questions.

ZAC told him, as he had expected, that the alien program had appeared mysteriously, that it had been removed, and that no apparent harm had been done.

When the computer had answered the question about possible harm, John had noticed that its red aura flickered brightly and then dimmed. ZAC could communicate only with the language available in its program and that language was not complete enough. ZAC had more to say but lacked the proper words. This was a recurring problem among humans too. He often wished for the correct phrase at the proper moment when he was alone with Mary. Usually, he could only find some cliche; often he remained silent.

The significant thing was that ZAC was trying to communicate even at the intuitive level. Its desire was sincere. Well, friend, he thought, let's see what we can do. He typed in a new series of questions; ZAC would soon be ready for the introduction of irony.

"What is $2 + 2$?"

"4"

"What is 3×3 ?"

"9"

"What is $M-1^2$?"

He looked at the printout and then glanced at some figures on a sheet of paper. He was shocked.

"When did you receive this recent value for M-1?"

"Today."

John went over to one of the attendants and asked her the same question. She told him that no data for M-1 was inserted today but that tomorrow data would be fed in. Also, she said, a new value had been inserted yesterday after the alien program had been removed. John wrote down that number and went back to the keyboard terminal.

"What was the value for M-1 yesterday?" he typed in.

He compared ZAC's figures with those of the attendant. They were the same, yet the computer was insisting that a new value had been received today. He asked ZAC if today's value was being used for computation; it answered in the affirmative. The alien program had reappeared--and so soon! Who was receiving the irony now, he wondered? For the moment ZAC had reversed their roles.

He then asked the computer for a graph showing the lapse of time between appearances of the alien program. He studied the printout, which indicated an average of about three weeks between appearances. Whether or not this was the alien, it was a significant event; for a one day interval had never occurred before!

"What was the identification number given when today's M-1 value was inserted?" he typed in.

There was a pause--one too long for a high speed brain. Then, "3.1416" appeared on the printout.

That was pi. Would that be used as an official ID number? Hardly. It could be checked easily, though. John went back to the chair and sat.

Time disappeared.

He was going to play a number game but on the intuitive level. He would use phi, the golden proportion--1.618. He projected the Fibonacci series: $1 + 1 = 2$, $1 + 2 = 3$, $2 + 3 = 5$, $3 + 5 = 8$, $5 + 8 = 13$.

ZAC answered by continuing the series. John sent a warm feeling of thanks. He replayed in his mind his perceptions during ZAC's continuation. He had noticed a tinkly quality in its voice and a wavering as if ZAC were missing a beat. He expanded, touching ZAC's body. Then he projected the Fibonacci series again, stopping at the same point. While ZAC continued the series, John scanned the two sores. One was changing its energy pattern. The texture was now like a fine weave. Slowly, the lattices widened until the field looked like a chess board. He was startled. Be careful here, he thought, that you don't read in your background thoughts.

He turned his attention to the other sore. It was disappearing. The chaotic whirling energy was diminishing in size. Surprised, he watched it disappear completely--perhaps into another dimension. And now he saw that the first sore had also vanished. Hmm, he thought, maybe phi is a healing salve for what ails ZAC.

What was ZAC asking him? What troubled him? John projected a series of images: a seed planted, his death, a pawn that passed away, a choice between a box and a bag. Could the computer interpret that pattern?

ZAC responded with the series of prime numbers. Prime numbers? What's the connection, John wondered? He repeated his images.

ZAC answered with the Fibonacci series. So he repeated his images several more times, and the computer responded by alternating between the prime numbers and the Fibonacci series. Two ways to interpret my images, he thought. Which way do I choose? But no, I don't have to choose; I can, like ZAC, use both alternately. One series is based on division while the other is based on addition. So far, I have thought of the image series as additive. How would I interpret it with division? A prime number is one that can be divided without remainder only by itself or by unity. So, the first three images fit because they are single units. The fourth image, the package I received today, that is two things. But wait, the choice is one thing. So that will also fit. They all relate because of division.

Then an idea struck him. A pawn is itself, that is indivisible; yet it can change into a queen if it reaches the eighth rank. So, it contains within itself the potential for change whenever the proper conditions occur. Potentiality is like a seed, and a seed must die for the plant to grow. A pawn dies when it becomes a queen. Is there any choice there, though?

John was bothered. Is there any real choice between the two containers? Perhaps, all choice is forced.

He heard ZAC's voice and opened his awareness. The computer was speaking about the Fibonacci series and prime numbers. Its voice was monotonously repeating first one series and then the other. Suddenly, John realized that he had a choice; he would choose neither.

He got up from the chair and told the attendants that the alien program had reappeared. He left as they pressed the emergency button.

Reality Inspector, chapter 9

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Leaving the star-bright night behind him, John stepped into the Rainbow Inn, which was dimly lit, ready for the chess game tonight. Most of the tables were occupied. John spotted Od and Hank sitting at their usual table. The previous game was a draw; and the one before that, when John had visited ZAC, had been won by the champion, who now led 2-1.

Od was in a heated discussion with Hank. Actually, Od was the heated one; wearing his Greek fisherman's cap, Hank sat there as calm as usual. When Hank became intense, he pushed his calmness out all around, expanding his range. Often, people within the circle of quietness were affected by it; they would vibrate to his slow and easy drumming. People usually became aware of his presence when he expanded it, and they usually enjoyed it. Hank indicated his displeasure by shutting off his presence so that only empty space existed around him. If one had ever experienced his presence, then its absence was quite noticeable. But Od had his own drum; and since the conversation centered on Od's main passion in life--economics--Hank's serenity only added fire to Od's enthusiasm. Economics was, in fact, his life and philosophy and religion.

Odysseus Tinker owned the Trading Shop, which was located on the east boundary of John's garden. It was a two story building; the ground floor was the Trading Shop, and the top floor was his residence. Toward the rear of the store, Od had built a door that opened onto John's garden so that he could enjoy it whenever he wished. For that privilege he had traded John a sprinkler system. John was pleased, both with the sprinkler and his neighbor's appreciation of the garden.

Od was a trader--by nature, by desire, and by profession. He was one of those people for whom a good trade was more exciting than a good fuck. Each had its own virtue, he asserted, and the virtue of each was excellent; but if he had to rank them, he would choose trading first.

Od traded objects, both antique and new; and he also traded services. If he did not have an item or a skill that someone wanted, he would put out a search for it. He was a member of the Bay Area Trading Community, a loosely knit group of trading associations. The BATC had a switchboard that all members would use whenever they were looking for a trade. The BATC also published a bi-weekly newsletter that contained articles of interest to traders and a classified section.

Odysseus Tinker was a life-long trader. He first tasted the passion of trading when his mother traded him a chocolate chip cookie for a dirty, old sock that he was chewing on. From then on, he was a confirmed trader.

As the people in the Rainbow Inn were awaiting the evening's chess game, Od was expounding on his pet belief that money was the root of all evil. John had heard the argument many times before, but there were always variations and new insights. So he leaned back in his chair, imitating Hank's calmness. No one, but Hank and John, was paying any attention to Od's argument.

The chess game began. Mary was playing white, and her opening move was P-Q4 (d4). This was the first time in the match that she had used that opening. The sound on the TV was turned off; only the visual was on. Chess sets had been placed on many tables so that the game could be followed intimately. Hank had put a chess set on their table, using it for distraction. John also was glad for the alternate focus.

"Get rid of money, and we'll be rid of all the greed of hollow people," Od was saying. He made a distinction between the greed of real people and of hollow people. Money was an abstraction, he argued. Greed for physical things--that was real. But money's worth was an abstraction. And greed for that non-entity showed the emptiness of modern times. Od's logic was simple. If Smith had something that Od wanted and if he had something that Smith wanted, perhaps they could make a trade. For Od that was the essence of human affairs.

"You can't eat money," Hank said, nodding his head in agreement. He played white's tenth move, BxKN (Bxf6).

According to Od's evolution of economic affairs, after Smith and he have been trading for awhile along comes Jones who wants some of the action. And before you know it, the whole neighborhood wants in. Here a complication enters. How is value weighed? What does a bushel of apples or a loaf of bread equal?

"You can eat bread with apple butter," Hank said as he played white's sixteenth move, R-B1 (Rc1).

Now Smith has a great idea. A standard medium of exchange is needed. Then he can use a currency to trade with. So if he does not have anything that Jones wants, he can still trade with him by using money. And everyone agrees with Smith--except for Od, who immediately sees the potential trap.

"You can catch food with traps," Hank commented as he played white's eighteenth move, Q-B1 (Qc1).

First question, asks Od, what will we use as a standard currency?

Why, Smith answers, we'll just print up some money and distribute it evenly.

How will we regulate or control the money? What will prevent someone from printing his own money and introducing it into the game? Od looks questioningly at Smith.

Oh, special ink, special paper, special printing process; and we'll only make a certain amount.

How will we decide the amount of money that is to be traded for anything? What is money's value; how do we measure it?

Easy enough, Smith says. We agree on a unit of measurement. Let's say one dollar equals one bushel of apples. And we've usually traded four leaves of bread for a bushel of apples, so a loaf of bread equals twenty-five cents. Next question.

Okay, That was last year. Now this year my apple crop did poorly. The rains came at the wrong time. I don't have as many apples this year. In fact, I harvested half as many, so I am going to charge two dollars a bushel.

Now wait, Od, you can't do that. You're changing the value of our money--and arbitrarily too. If we're going to change, everyone should agree.

Well, Smith, you can double the price for a loaf of bread and so we'll still be even. But I might not want to buy your bread at that price.

Nor I, your blasted apples!

What if I traded you a bushel of apples for four leaves of bread?

That sounds good, but I definitely won't pay you two dollars a bushel! No suree. Smith is adamant.

"Apple cider is awful good with bread and cheese," Hank said as he played white's twenty-second move, Q-B5 (Qc5).

Once neighborhoods begin trading with each other, a new level of complexity arises. Both Od and Smith agree that their currency should be on a par with those of other neighborhoods. Jones also agrees wholeheartedly. So much so, in fact, that he moves outside the neighborhood and prints his own money. But Od and Smith refuse to accept his money, even though Jones argues that his money is as good as the money of any other neighborhood.

Smith is now moving closer to Od's position. Maybe we should go back to trading where values are known, where wisdom is required for judging a thing's true worth. Od is happy to hear Smith make that statement.

"You can live by trading and helping and caring," Hank said as he played white's twenty-eighth move, R-R6 (Ra6).

Od now plays the second part of his attack. Besides, using money forces one to live in the future. Money is only credit for future use. Smith, what if I won't sell my apples to you?

So what, Od, I have my bread.

What if all your bread is moldy and you can't eat it?

I'd buy some food with money. I've a trunkful of it.

What if no one will sell you any food?

You can't do that Od; I'd starve to death.

But why should I take your money for my apples?

You can use the money to buy things you want.

But, Smith, what if other people won't accept money?

Now, Od, don't break up the game. The money game won't work if we don't all play according to the rules. Besides, with my trunkful of money I can loan some to those who need a little. Only a short time ago I loaned Jones ten dollars. I gave him nine dollars and he'll pay me back ten. So I make a dollar on the deal. That's a good trade.

Why does Jones need ten dollars?

Oh, he wants to buy some shoes wholesale and peddle them at the neighborhood fair. He hopes to make his ten dollars back and more.

And if he doesn't sell them, what then?

Jones appears, bedraggled, carrying ten pairs of shoes. No one wanted to give him money for his shoes, so he throws the shoes at Smith's feet. Here's your ten dollars back, Smith.

Dumbfounded, Smith stares at the shoes and then at Jones. You won't get away with this, Jones. I want my money back, not your old shoes. See, my shoes are in fine shape; besides, I have an extra pair.

Od is overjoyed; the game is now back to trading. He trades Jones a bushel of apples for a new pair of shoes.

But Smith is distraught; he wants his money. When he obtains some money, Jones remarks, he will give Smith the ten dollars. Smith is still dissatisfied. He asks Od Tinker to make a judgment on the situation.

Od naturally sides with Jones. Why sweat it, Smith; Jones will pay you back when he can. Besides, a trade is a trade.

What we need, argues Smith, is some means of enforcing Jones' obligation. We should call in the police.

What for, I'm not a criminal, shouts Jones.

You are too. As Smith hits Jones, Od decides that now is the time to call for the police. Money is only paper, but fists are hard.

"And the champion loses again," Hank announced. "Mary evens the match at two all." He played white's winning move, P-R3 (a3).

Reality Inspector, chapter 10

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Fog was blowing in, stretching its fingers along Ocean Avenue. The sun, moving close to the western horizon, still melted those fingers; yet the fog bank was gaining ground, slowly and surely. Soon though, the sun's setting would be hidden, and the fog would expand quickly, covering the south part of San Francisco within minutes.

The Rainbow Inn, although not crowded, had many customers. It was only five p.m., too early for the eighth game of the match which would begin at seven p.m. Mary had won game seven played two days ago. Sam Runner was playing white tonight, and Mary would try to keep him from moving one game ahead again.

John took a table in front of the stage. He was here early, like most of the other customers, to watch a dress rehearsal of *The Open Door*, a drama written and performed by The Players, a neighborhood drama club. The Rainbow Inn sheltered many activities that reflected the many-faceted personality of Mary Rainbow. Besides chess and drama, the Inn held musical concerts and poetry readings, showed the works of promising painters and sculptors, and acted as social center for the neighborhood.

The stage, well-equipped with sound and light instruments, had versatility that allowed for many uses. A control center behind the bar adjusted sound and lighting throughout the Inn. A sound made anywhere on stage or in the Inn could be amplified. Connected to the control center was a music synthesizer that Mary loved to play. She often gave concerts on Friday night, but her spontaneous performances were the best. When she was in the mood, she would sit at the keyboard and rhapsodize the audience. Or she could put the music synthesizer onto a preset program and play her saxophone against the accompaniment.

Mary was a born musician. As a child she learned to play the piano from a friend who was also learning. In high school she diversified her musical skills to include percussion, clarinet, and trumpet. And in college she fell in love with the alto sax. Even the new addition of the music synthesizer could not equal her love for it. For her, the alto sax was the perfect vehicle for expressing herself.

In her mind there was a direct link between music and chess. Both involved abstract forms of reasoning that were grounded in physical reality. Both shaped space and time to communicate ideas and feelings. When she played chess, she often imagined possible moves as like playing a particular musical instrument. Would she play as drummer, beating out an intricate rhythm? She might play the saxophone,

creating unusual progressions, or the synthesizer, weaving a complex texture.

She was well aware that music, and sounds in general, influenced her awareness. During a chess tournament, when the noise was too disturbing, she would focus on music floating through her mind. Here, she could think quietly, sheltered from the surrounding noise and commotion. And her choice of music shaped her style of play. Some day she was going to write her own book on chess; she would call it *Music and Chess*.

Lights in the Inn are dimming. The curtains part and the performance begins. Although the stage is decorated as an Elizabethan tavern, it is actually a modern cafe with an Elizabethan decor; for it has all the latest gadgets and machines. There are even microphones hidden at each table, behind the counter, and next to the telephone. A sound engineer controls the volume of each microphone according to who is speaking. The sounds of other machines are also regulated at the control panel.

On stage left is a door to the street. A counter comes out part way from the back wall stage left. This is where the kitchen is. Several tables with chairs are placed about the stage. On stage right is a door to the toilets. Next to that door is a public telephone.

As the play opens, Martha, the owner of the cafe, is behind the counter preparing food. She sings softly to herself. At the table in front of the counter is a young couple who are only aware of each other--Romeo and Juliet. They are holding hands and quietly murmuring to each other.

At the table on stage right are two people who are dressed in trenchcoats and are wearing hats ala Bogart. Those two people, a man and a woman, are secret agents for MIA (Machine Intelligence Agency). They are called MA (male agent) and FA (female agent). They are suspicious by nature, cunning by desire, and conspicuous by training. Although they are secret agents, they are not too secret. In fact, one of their jobs is to sow fear among the people. MA and FA are looking at menus, attentive to all around them.

Against the back wall stage right of the counter is another table. Here sit two chess players. They are called WP (white player) and BP (black player). They are aware of all that happens at Martha's cafe, yet they are deeply involved in their [game](#).

FA: Is she using the new Electro-zan?

MA: (listens to sounds from the kitchen): I don't think so.

FA: We'd better make sure.

MA: If she doesn't, that's a fifty dollar fine.

FA: I'll order the synburger. We'll see if she has the Electro-zan.

MA: And I'll try the synfillet. We'll see if she has the new Pro-jam.

Martha comes from behind the counter carrying two plates with hamburgers. She sets them down at Romeo and Juliet's table.

Martha: Here you are, honeys. I'll be back with the milkshakes.

FA (Poking MA): Did ya hear that? They're eating *hamburgers* and *milkshakes*.

MA: I've argued with the Chief many times. Only synfood should be allowed in public restaurants. Oh, but, he gives me the same old rejoinder: vested interests. Run 'em out of the country, I say. And he always ends with can't. They're still too powerful.

FA: I'll bet eating that beef and milk will give 'em cancer. I could never eat real food. Synfood is sterile; it's made by a machine.

MA: Listen to the noise they're making. Sickening.

The public telephone rings. MA gets up and answers it. As he is talking on the phone, he looks around the cafe suspiciously. While MA is on the phone, FA goes to the jukebox and plays some selections. The music remains in the background for the duration of the drama.

MA (Returning to the table): It was Z-5. He says . . . (Then he notices that FA is still at the jukebox.)

Martha (Coming up to their table): What'll it be?

MA: A synburger, a synfillet, and two syncoffees.

Martha: Be ready in a jiffy.

Juliet: What can we do?

Romeo: We're up against a stonewall. But we can't give in.

Juliet (Purring): Oh, sweetie.

Romeo (Also purring): Oh, yummy.

MA (As FA sits down): Z-5 called. We were right. This place has a double X rating.

FA: We should close it.

MA: Can't. The new court ruling says we have to find a crime being committed.

FA: Oh, that new court! Undermining law and order!

MA (Patting FA's hand): Don't worry. I'm sure we can find a crime in this hole.

WP: Hieronymo's mad again.

Martha (Sitting down with Romeo and Juliet. Motherly.): How are you two love birds today?

Juliet: On cloud 109.

Romeo: But scared as hell.

Martha looks at the two, waiting for more.

Juliet: Our families have let blood.

Martha: Ooh.

Romeo: This morning our cousins had a street fight.

Juliet: Three people were injured.

Romeo: Luckily, no one was killed.

Juliet: But it will get worse. Oh, Martha, what can we do? (She starts to cry.)

Martha (Motherly. Takes a handkerchief and dabs Juliet's eyes.): There. There. You okay?

Juliet: Thank you. I just . . . oh, I'm so upset. (She takes handkerchief and wipes her eyes.)

Martha: What's this world coming to, anyhow? Machines running us out of space and jobs. Families feuding. Young lovers can't get married. You know, sometimes I think the rulers are trying to destroy us!

FA (Poking MA): Did ya hear that? If that isn't a crime, I don't know what is!

MA (Putting his hand on her arm): Relax. The Supreme Court said . . .

FA: Yeh, freedom of speech. This is a stupid society. Freedom. That's all they talk about. Machines don't have freedom. Why should they?

MA: The Supreme Court said . . .

FA: What's this Supreme Court shit! Are you a traitor pig? You're talking like them! (She points at the room in general.)

MA (Acting tough): Now listen here! Who ya callin' that shit?

BP: Life is an ego trip.

Martha: Can't you two just up and get married.

Romeo: No. The city hall machine refuses us unless we have our families' permission. We've tried it.

Juliet: And they won't give it.

Martha: Aah, you two should have been orphans. Then no family could bother you.

Juliet: Oh, the family is all right, when they're not looking around for trouble.

Romeo: Especially in the summer during TV reruns. They want to go out looking for some action.

Juliet: And they're jealous of us.

Romeo: They're bored. Nothing to do.

Martha: Why don't you find yourself some new families. You know, get adopted by two real nice families.

Juliet: Are there any still around?

Martha: Of course. I know many.

MA: Just yesterday, I got two new machines, a Synpro-no and a Bilkembinder 702.

FA: I want to enlarge my family, too. I'm saving some money. First, I'll get a Tinzoom 450.

MA: Oh, that's a great machine. I'd be honored to have one in my family.

WP: The final irony comes when you read the book of your life.

Martha: I know! Why don't you two just adopt each other. Then how could your families feud--at least over you two?

Juliet: That's a wonderful idea!

Romeo: But would it work?

Martha: I don't see why not. It won't hurt trying. If the city hall machine says no, well, that's it. But give it a try. (She gets up and goes behind the counter.)

MA gets up to answer the phone. FA also gets up and walks around the room, eyeing everybody and everything. She stops in front of the chess players. She watches them intently, but she is not interested in the game. The players don't pay her any attention. She focuses on one and then on the other, trying to get their attention. But she fails.

FA (To both): Did ya ever play a computer?

The two players look up at each other, smiling, and then turn toward FA.

BP: Many times.

WP: And what a bore.

FA (Chip on her shoulder): What'd ya mean?

BP: No challenge.

WP: So predictable.

FA: What's wrong with that? You guys high on something?

They both grin and go back to their game.

FA (Stops at Romeo and Juliet's table): Ain't you two something. Don't ya have proper regard for others. Carrying on like this in front of all those innocent machines. (She points to room in general.)

Romeo: Pooff on your machines.

FA: Now, listen here. Do ya know who I am?

Juliet: You're one of the robots from MIA, that's who.

FA (Shouting): you punk human. If I had my way, I'd give you all the gas chamber.

MA (Yelling at FA from the phone): It's PQ13.

FA(Going over to MA): What'd she say?

MA: This place doesn't abide by regulations XYZ.

FA (Excited): Let's close it down. Right now!

MA: Can't. We need to find a Double Z infraction.

FA takes out a gadget and goes around the room looking for a signal from the machine.

Romeo: Martha. We have a solution.

Martha (Comes over to the table): What is it?

Juliet: We *are* going to adopt each other. Will you perform the ceremony?

Romeo: And we don't care if the city hall machine rejects it. We won't be a slave to any machine.

Juliet: We have nothing to lose but our ballbearings! (She laughs.)

Martha: Of course, I will. I know just the thing. (She goes behind the counter and returns wearing a big, fluffy cook's hat.) Now you two stand over here. (She positions them at stage right of the counter. She taps on the counter.) All you who are present, may I have your attention. This young man and this young woman wish to adopt each other. Is there anyone present who wishes to object?

MA and FA: I do!

FA: It's illegal.

MA (To Romeo): Where's your license?

Romeo: We don't need a license.

FA: Everyone needs a license for everything.

MA (Turning to Martha): Where's your license to perform this adoption ceremony?

Martha: Are you a real human?

Juliet: They're synmen.

MA (Pulling out electro-magnetic handcuffs): Okay, you're all under arrest. Code violation PU 30.

BP and WP turn their attention to the happening.

BP: PU 30 ended yesterday--under the sunset rule.

WP: And Congress will decide on renewal tomorrow.

MA: Okay, you wise guys, I'm going to arrest you for preventing an officer from doing his duty.

FA: Her duty!

MA: What?

FA: Preventing an officer from doing her duty!

MA (Tough): What'd ya mean?

FA (Tougher): I'm doin' the arrestin'.

Martha: Since there are no real objections--and syn-objections aren't real--I now pronounce you two brother and sister.

Juliet and Romeo hug and kiss each other. A line forms behind Martha.

Martha (When Juliet and Romeo part): Congratulations. I wish you all the happiness in the world. (She kisses each.)

BP (Shakes Romeo's hand): Keep the faith, brother. (Kisses Juliet): Keep it all together, sister.

WP (Shakes Romeo's hand): Keep it on center, brother. (Kisses Juliet): The birds are singing, sister.

FA (Shakes Romeo's hand): I hope you rust in a junkyard! (Shakes Juliets's hand): May you have many little machines.

MA (Shakes Romeo's hand): May the Great Machine bless you. (Shakes Juliet's hand): May the Great Machine bless you.

FA's gadget which she was using to find a Double Z infraction goes wild. It lights up and makes horrendous sounds as if it is about ready to fall apart.

FA (Shaking MA): A crime! A crime! A Double Z!

MA (Officious): You're all under arrest!

Juliet and Romeo look at each other and quickly leave the cafe.

MA: Stop! Stop in the name of the Great Machine!

FA: They didn't put their ID's in the punchout machine. Infraction GO 100. Stop!

BP (Watching MA and FA): They know not what they do.

MA and FA rush to the door. They fumble for their ID's. Both try to put their ID's into the machine at the same time. Intermittently, they are yelling through the door: Stop! Stop!

WP and BP, smiling, go to their table and put away the chess set. Martha goes behind the counter and wipes it.

Martha (More to herself than anyone else): I hope I'll have money soon to leave Machine City and go back to my natural path.

MA and FA finally get their ID's checked and hurriedly leave, slamming the door. Martha begins to sing softly to herself. The door opens and a deer enters. The deer walks by the counter.

Martha (Looking up. Smiling.): Hi, there, wakan.

The deer walks onto stage right. The two chess players are not present. The deer stands there looking out at the audience. The cafe now becomes a forest with trees, flowers, birds singing, and other animals romping about.

The applause was long and loud, bringing the cast out for four encores. Even chess buffs enjoy the theater, for chess requires the use of role playing. There are six different pieces, from the king down to the pawn; and each has its own personality.

Chess boards were being set up around the Inn. Game eight was ready to begin.

Reality Inspector, chapter 11

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In the day's mail John had received the fourth clue. Or was it a threat? The envelope had contained only a copy of M.C. Escher's lithograph Dragon. In what way the picture was a threat, John was uncertain. It was obviously a clue, though. He remembered the advice that ZAC had given him. He could add and divide. The dragon was a unity, yet it appeared to turn itself inside out. Escher was known for his visual tricks. The clue was purely non-verbal; it had no written message to assist interpretation.

He replayed the clues in his mind: a message about his death, a pawn passed away, a choice between a box and a bag, and now a dragon turning itself inside out. If this new clue were a threat, then the dragon symbolized potential death. But, he thought, that was a very roundabout way of threatening him.

So far, his life had not been threatened directly. There were only the anonymous mailings. His opponent only wanted him to be afraid, to succumb to fear; but, then, he was not close to a solution. True, he and ZAC were communicating quite well, yet the problem remained that ZAC was ignorant of the alien program's presence until it was told, so John would have to rely on other means. Perhaps, he could use the clues and find the thread leading back to his opponent.

He looked through the window out onto his garden. The hollyhocks were about three feet tall; tiny buds were forming on the stems. After the ladybugs had arrived a week ago and had begun their feast, few aphids were now to be found. The ladybugs, though, had attracted many birds, which sat upon the telephone lines waiting for their chance. Nature was like that, he thought, an endless cycle, one creature feeding upon another.

He puffed on his pipe, watching the fog drift down Ocean Avenue. The alien program was feeding upon ZAC while his opponent was probably feasting off the increasing interest rate. Escher's dragon also suggested an endless cycle. Both cycle and spiral were important symbols in many societies. Hindu religion was based upon the idea of an eternal cycle of life and death, and so Buddha came to show the way out of that cycle. Western science with its big bang theory assumed a cycle of expansion and contraction for the universe. The spiral was a form frequently found in nature; it was based upon the mathematics of phi, the golden proportion.

John laughed to himself: now I'm back to ZAC, but have I advanced to a higher level of understanding? Can I use these clues to construct a model of my opponent's thinking? What kind of a mind would send me such threats? Understanding my opponent's consciousness will help me,

for then I will have a better idea about the design of the alien program and its recycling process.

Fog was gently spreading over his garden, and he was certain that the ladybugs were now hidden in their sleeping quarters. He looked at the clock on the desk; it was time to walk over to the Rainbow Inn for some food and for the evening's chess game. Unlike ladybugs, human beings often fed after sundown.

Upon entering the Rainbow Inn, he looked about and saw Hank and Od at their usual table. John joined them after leaving with Helen his order of a glass of pinot noir and a Rainbow sandwich.

Tonight was the tenth game of the match. The champion had won the eighth [game](#) while the ninth was a draw, so he now led 3 to 2. Sam was playing white again tonight, but Mary was ready for him. She planned to show him how a queen could really be used. On the last move of game eight Sam had offered her his queen, and she had resigned.

As the championship match moved closer to the magic number of six wins, excitement increased. The Inn was packed as always, but a new subtle tension permeated the audience. John felt it as soon as he had entered the Inn. He noticed that Od was quieter than usual--quiet but not necessarily calm. Od's sharp features seemed to radiate an electric charge. Even Hank's normal calmness contained a new ingredient. What was it, he wondered? Perhaps, it had something to do with the strange winds that had blown into the Bay Area the past week.

The TV screen showed Mary and Sam sitting across from each other. Then the champion moved a piece, and the game was underway. He opened with P-K4 (e4), and she answered with P-K4 (e5). The first five moves were conventional enough, and then he devised a trap by taking her king pawn with his knight. But she skirted the trap by reinforcing her king file. On move twelve the champion created another potential trap; that was how Od saw it. Hank disagreed; he thought it was a weakness. He was saying, "Mary has a win if she can see it. Sam has made a monstrous hole at Q3 (d3)."

Mary (next move)



Sam

John looked at the chess board, beyond the pieces to the black and white lattice. One of the squares was a door; he saw the knob. He had

always been fascinated by doors and what lay behind them. So he opened this one and stepped through.

John is walking along a flat highway which runs parallel to the San Christopher Mountain Range. San Christopher Mountain, lying ten miles to his left, reflects the warm afternoon sun. Lines of light mix, producing intricate and colorful textures. He is wearing the clothes of a pilgrim, a hooded robe and sandals. On his right is Lake Teresa, the main water source for the City of Twelve. It is a good five miles from the highway across the chaparral. The lake provides water for drinking, irrigation, and recreation. Forty miles long and seven miles at its widest, the lake is noted for its crystal clear, blue water. Its depth has been measured at six hundred feet. It is a haven for wildlife, both in the water and on the shores. The drought resistant chaparral gradually changes to towering evergreens, which form a half mile border around Lake Teresa.

Its major tributary Green River, like all the water which the lake receives, flows down from San Christopher Mountain Range where huge sheets of snow begin melting in the spring. Part of the moisture from the spring melting rises into the dry air, forming clouds which the wind pushes eastward across the temperate zone of Lake Teresa. There is a delicate ecologic balance here, but one which has held for hundreds of years.

This is the reason for the City of Twelve's existence and success, in spite of the official exaggerations cranked out by the chamber of commerce. All of the City of Twelve's amenities and renown are based solely upon a delicate balance with nature.

John arrives at the gate in the force field that surrounds the City of Twelve, protecting it from all its potential opponents. The gate is more ceremonial than functional. On both sides stand two guard towers, reaching twenty feet into the air and glaring brightly. The force field, because it reflects some light, contrasts with its slightly darker background. Between the towers he can see the City of Twelve with its half million people, and rising slightly above is the dome of the Shrine built upon a small knoll in the center of the city.

After his ID is verified, he walks among the smells of many flowers, which bound each side of the highway. Soon the highway leaves the fields of flowers and enters a grove of tall trees. Both the fields and grove are part of the City of Twelve's natural habitat program. One hundred percent of its yearly budget is devoted to maintaining an environment conducive to all living creatures. The City of Twelve's Department of Nature watches closely the delicate natural balance, hoping to nip in the bud any signs of imbalance. The citizens use their natural habitat for keeping their contact with the source of life.

The highway now goes through a meadow and some marshes. Bird songs float in the air. The sounds of meadow and marsh, of grove and field, ease the walker into a calm and open frame of mind, yet one where awareness is sharp and alert, not tense and anxious. The city wants one to enter in this fashion, leaving weapons and paranoia at the

gate. No one in the city has weapons, except for the defenders who carry them only at times of emergency.

There are few crimes in the city; most are simple assault and battery caused by an intense argument. And there are many arguments, for the people are all agreed upon the need for freedom of speech, opinion, religion. Yet there are certain beliefs that cannot be challenged or criticized. One of those beliefs concerns the Shrine which houses all of the City of Twelve's religious denominations. There is no written law against criticizing the Shrine, for the law is imprinted in the citizen's heart. Woe be to one who strikes at the Shrine, verbally or physically, for the citizens will destroy the offender unless the defenders arrive in time. The defenders will then escort the offender to the gate and send him on his way.

Some citizens are not members of any of the twelve denominations, and so there is a special room in the Shrine for those citizens. The Shrine houses more than those thirteen sacred rooms; it also houses the city administration in four wings which radiate out from the center. Often, personal ambition makes clouds of tension and conflict arise between those in the center and those in the wings.

The highway now goes by residences and market plazas, craft and trade shops, and three story buildings into the plaza surrounding the Shrine.

John stops two blocks before the highway opens onto the plaza. At the Eagle Tavern he finds lodging, a small room with its single window facing the morning sun. After a three day journey he is tired and dirty, but a warm shower makes him feel whole again. He comes to the City of Twelve as pilgrim and witness. He has a message to deliver to the Shrine and a message to receive. Yet, he will also immerse himself in the city's gestalt and record his impressions. The Assembly of Yod will then interpret the message he returns with in light of his impressions. He has been given no secret knowledge; he relies only on his previous experiences in the City of Twelve, that and his trust in God.

John is awake at sunrise. He mixes and drinks a glass of dragon's milk (dry milk, brewer's yeast, wheat germ, bran and carob). The water of the city is noted for its taste and vitality; it gives the dragon's milk an extra lift. He stands at the open window, breathing deeply of the clean, morning air.

Out onto the street with his kit slung over his shoulder, John walks into the plaza and strolls along its three mile circumference. He notices people on their way to work, for here time is measured by natural cycles and the work to be done, not by a clock. There are few cars out on the plaza's boulevard. All cars in the city are small and electric powered vehicles with a top speed of twenty-five miles per hour. They are primarily for hauling materials. The cars seat two people and have a large carrying space in the rear. Most of the time the people just walk.

After completing his walk around the plaza, he pauses and reflects. There is something--something he cannot put his finger on--something

that requires further watching. It is not exactly the people, nor the vehicles or buildings: is it the light? Whatever, there is something here.

John goes into the Shrine. The Shrine is the name not only for the building but also for the Holy Room in the center of the building. Around this latter Shrine radiate twelve sacred rooms, one for each denomination. The thirteenth sacred room, the one for those who are not members of the Twelve, is across the corridor from the Shrine. It was many generations after the twelve tribes had built the city that some citizens desired a thirteenth denomination. And so a thirteenth sacred room was added to the Shrine. But because the people's respect for the Shrine was so great, they could not alter its basic structure. So one of the waiting rooms was cleansed and turned into the thirteenth sacred room.

John is ushered into one of the waiting rooms. He has made an appointment for a visit to the Shrine. He sits down and waits. He relaxes into stillness and cautiously pokes at the atmosphere in the room where eight others also wait. What is that? Something. There it is again, but too fleeting to catch a hold of.

Numbers light up, and four people leave the room. Each waiting room can have no more than twelve occupants at one time. Each visitor is assigned a number and a waiting room. Seven minutes are allowed for one to be alone in either the Shrine or one of the thirteen sacred rooms. If one wants more time, then he must receive permission from the Office of the Inner One.

Number eleven lights. John gets up and goes out into the hall. A man hurrying down the corridor nearly collides with him. There is something about his face. The man seems about to speak.

"What is it?" John asks.

"Nada." And the man hurries on.

Nada. Hmm. John has felt a quality of fear exuding from the man. That is something.

He goes into the Shrine's antechamber. The door to the Shrine is lying horizontally, rather than vertically, in the wall. He walks up the wall a few steps, opens the door and enters the Shrine.

The morning sunlight showers over him. It warms his body. Taking off his kit, he sits on the cushion in the center of the Shrine. He glides into the still point and expands into a shower of light. He floats, rolling over slowly, feeling the light enter his whole body. And time is no more.

He projects his message: "Hear us, Living Light, and answer our prayers. The Assembly of Yod wants to build a new gravity dam. Shall we do it or not?" He is aware of each molecule in his body as the Living Light caresses it. A still, small voice says, "The dragon devours itself."

John feels the cushion beneath him. It is cool and dry. The first part of the mission is accomplished. Now he must become a total witness to the

City of Twelve, and there is something here needing a witness.

He goes to the door, which is lying horizontally in the wall. Walking up the wall a few steps, he opens the door and leaves.

He wonders how the Assembly of Yod will interpret God's words "The dragon devours itself." He is against the plan to build a new gravity dam, for they already have enough energy for their purposes. And he sees no need for a surplus of energy. Besides, a gravity dam can change the reality of the environment, and those changes are very unpredictable.

Those wanting a new gravity dam have one reason; they want to change the reality of their community. John takes the opposing position that any reality change should come from one's inner self, and that is why he is sent as pilgrim to the Shrine.

The plaza is now bustling with people. Children are playing in the park. John walks into the park and sits on an unoccupied bench. He opens to the City of Twelve, his mind busily recording tiny impressions. There is something--like an invisible fog--something that obscures. Then it hits him. The city is out of focus. But why? Aren't they aware of what is wrong?

He leaves the park and strolls around the plaza. Perhaps, he can identify the cause of this--this something. He enters a pub and finds a table in the back of the room where he can observe unobtrusively. Here, where people are crowded together, is the definite odor of fear. People hold back as if they may stumble. Where does this fear originate, from within the city or from without?

He listens to conversations. Always something is implied without being mentioned; always something is hinted at or assumed but never named. Always people glance to their left when nearing the unnamed. His conversation with the waiter pays him with trivia, except for the reception of one word "nada," when he asks about the affairs of the city. Nada. Nothing. But there is something, something that has closed doors!

Leaving the pub, John walks throughout the City of Twelve, talking with people, absorbing impressions. Back in his room he reflects upon his experiences that day. The nada is something, and it is tagged with fear. The origin seems to be outside the city beyond the force field. But what out there can bring terror into the hearts of the people, can disrupt their focus, he does not know. So he decides to stay another day and visit a sacred room. But which one, he will decide at the proper moment.

The morning sun shines on him as he enters the Shrine. He will visit the seventh room. Going in, he notices an opaqueness to the light, a lack of clarity. Searching his memory, he visualizes last year's pilgrimage when he journeyed for his own purpose. The opaqueness is new since last year. A nada that produces real effects has come into existence.

He leaves the sacred room, and when he steps out onto the plaza, a wrongness clutches him. It tears at his heart; fear seeps in. Then it is gone. A nada. He realizes that at any moment this can happen again but probably will not until he least expects. Then its fiery claws will tear and burn. And the people of the City of Twelve live daily in this mental space. No wonder things are out of focus. Who can talk about it? Who can name it? Just nada.

He needs to witness nada again, but from a safe position. He walks into the park and finds a secluded place. Sitting on the grass, he puts himself into a meditative state where he can move into the still point quickly. He stops thinking about nada and concentrates on his journey back to the Assembly of Yod. Does God say yes or no to the gravity dam? How will the community interpret the riddle? He knows that three members of the community have gained recognition for their ability to discover hidden meanings in the words of God. Two of them lean toward building a new gravity dam. Teme, the third one, has not indicated any preference. John thinks about their personalities, and in particular that of Teme. Always keeping a distance from the daily affairs of the community, Teme is regarded with great respect and is noted for her wisdom.

Then it strikes. His emotions are a burning water that flows through his mind; his thoughts are jumbled. He lets go of his thoughts and jumps into it feet first. It is opaque and gooey, but he can move around in it. He floats through an icy corridor, being pulled by some unknown force. He comes out at Lake Teresa. He floats slowly above the lake. People are on the shore and out in boats. Everything looks normal.

He circles Lake Teresa several times before he sees it, nada. That is the best name for it, nada. It is an energy vacuum. Energy is pulled in and disappears; more energy follows. The amounts of lost energy are minute; but still, if the quantity increases greatly, the City of Twelve will collapse. The City of Twelve will be totally destroyed, nothing left but a large, empty space, a nada.

The energy vacuum is originating at the gravity dam. Of course, gravity flow is changed at the dam, and from the change energy is produced. It is that energy which generates the force field surrounding the City of Twelve, which gives it light and heat. Yet small amounts of that energy are leaking into nada and disappearing from this reality.

Certainly now, with his recorded impressions of the energy vacuum the Assembly of Yod will vote against a new gravity dam. And the two existing ones must be investigated. Before he leaves the City of Twelve, he will mail a letter, describing his experience, to the Office of the Inner One.

John sat back in his chair, feeling satisfied. Mary had won her third game of the match. It was now three even. She played a brilliant game, making a queen sacrifice at the seventeenth move. And with Morphy-like directness she went straight to mate; Sam Runner did not have a chance. There was no fear in her play tonight; she was at the center

throughout the whole game. John wondered what music she was listening to during this game.

Reality Inspector, chapter 12

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The morning sun shone through the bedroom window. Strong winds that had begun at dawn had pushed back the fog bank so that the sun now gently warmed all living things. For the past several days strong winds had pummeled the city. The winds came from the north and south, meeting each other over the bay, creating an arena of struggle and combat, as where river water meets and churns with ocean water.

Helen packed her bag, having spent the night at Mary's house, and now was ready to take her leave. The bag contained all her possessions. Many years ago she had put aside the normal encumbrances; she had released her grip on the things that people usually seek and, once finding, guard with all their might. Her attitude had slowly changed over the years. Possession worked both ways, and frequently people were more possessed than their personal belongings. She had seen it happen repeatedly; people were possessed by their houses, their careers, their cars, their bank accounts.

Helen smiled inwardly, filled with the joy that comes from having struggled with life and then made peace with it. Her life now was free from the daily woes and routine anxieties that most people experienced. The key to freedom, she knew, lay in the heart. Each person had her own path. The journey was sometimes rough and painful, but often enough it was pleasant and heartwarming.

She looked at the bag, noticing its wounds suffered from worldly use. The bag was seven years old and would need replacement soon. Weak places were beginning to show, spots where tears were going to happen soon. The bag was like her body; even though she kept it firm and healthy, life had taken its toll. Her spirit was strong and bright, she knew, and that was more important. It was her spirit that young people noticed. She was a guide beckoning to the later years, showing that the bounty of life could still be enjoyed. She was deeply touched when young people looked to her for encouragement, and she was thankful that she could offer them guidance. God was smiling on her, and she was thankful for that, too.

Helen left the guest room and went into the living room where Mary was drinking coffee and reading a detective story. Cresy, one of Mary's two cats, was curled up on her lap. She was a calico cat and was now entering her thirteenth year. Though her fur was showing spots of grey, Cresy's spirit was still vibrant. Mary looked up from her book. "Good morning, Helen. There's hot water in the kettle for coffee, and some fruit in a bowl on the counter. "

Helen placed her bag on a chair and went into the kitchen. She took the bottle of coffee concentrate from the refrigerator and poured an ounce

of it into a cup; then she added some hot water. Mary used the cold water process to make coffee. That method eliminated most of the bitter taste. Ground coffee was soaked in cold water for twelve hours, and the concentrate was then drained off through a filter system.

With her cup of coffee Helen went back into the living room. She sat down in a chair beside the couch. "You played an excellent game last night, Mary; Sam Runner never had a chance."

"Thanks, Helen. I do feel very good about it. I've had a nervousness the last couple of days. Perhaps, the winds are responsible."

"There's a lot of hectic energy in those winds, like a turmoil raging about the Bay Area. It reminds me of the Santa Ana wind in Southern California or the foehn wind in Switzerland."

"Yes, those winds affect the mind. There's a jumpy quality to the energy, an undirected busyness. So, last night I stayed down in my quiet place. Even Sam was affected by the winds. His moves seemed to reflect the strange weather we're having."

Helen nodded. She spoke softly, yet firmly. "The quiet spot is home. It goes wherever we go. It is our constant companion and shelter; it comforts us and protects; it is a parent, a lover, a friend."

"Helen, last night I had an unusual experience. Several times I had a feeling that was like rubbing against the grain. It put my nerves on edge. And it was most intense when I took Sam's bishop with my queen. At first I thought that the move was wrong, that I was being warned against making it. But because the earlier moves, when I had that feeling, worked well, I went ahead and made the move. While Sam was studying his response, I suddenly realized that my last move had capped a pattern of play that won me the game. So I ended up with a feeling that's funny but leads to a win."

"The winds are telling us, Mary, as the voice of God they're saying to us, now is the time to change our path. For several weeks now I've felt that mighty changes were on their way. Who can say what they'll be? We'll just have to wait and see."

"And you know, that's how I felt last night. I wasn't put off by the funny feeling. I changed my path and went against the grain. For so long I've used the guide of smoothness. If the feeling flowed smoothly and easily, I followed it. I've always desired pure feelings. The funny feeling had several ingredients; it was a soup of different feelings."

"Mary, you have found the path of heart where truth reigns strong." Helen's eyes twinkled.

Cresy cat stretched her front legs and yawned. She jumped down from Mary's lap and started licking herself. Mary, thinking a moment, said, "As I relive that feeling and experience I had last night, I believe I like it. It's not really so strange; it's closer to life than my previous attitude. It's survival oriented. Yes, the path of heart; that's for me. I want to learn about that feeling and use it as a guide."

The bull stepped out of Helen and stood there while she firmly, yet quietly, asserted, "Now, Mary, first purify each feeling. Go back to the source and clean out the sludge and trash. Only then can you begin blending your feelings. The subtle feeling of rubbing against the grain comes from a precise mixing. Don't be frightened of it. Immerse yourself in it. Master it."

She sat in silence. Helen's words had rung a chord deep within her. Truth was there--in the heart; she could feel it. An image arose in her mind, an image of a well. She was down in the bottom of the well, cleaning it out. Several springs fed the well, and she wished to identify each spring and channel it so that she could mix the different waters.

Helen picked up her bag and went to the front door. Cresy cat was sitting by the door waiting to go out. "Od's trading store is a collection of many things. Well, have a good day, Mary, and praise the Lord."

After Helen had left, Mary went back to the image which she had given her. Od's trading store is similar to the well, she mused; it is a place where many things are mixed, are collected together. Hmm, Joanne and Sarah are working lunch today. I'll visit Od's store and see if I learn something.

She got up and went into the kitchen where she washed out the coffee cups and then put them in the drainer. She took an apple from the fruit bowl and munched on it while looking out the window. Her thoughts were jumping about, yet a strong feeling seemed to anchor her. It was as if thoughts were washing over her, though she remained calm. She saw Shalom, the youngest of her two cats, stretched out on the side lawn, sunning himself.

Mary thought about the striking difference between Cresy and Shalom. Although she loved them both, her feelings toward them were not the same. Each touched a particular part of her heart. Cresy was feisty and wanted to be loved only on her own terms. Shalom was even-tempered and loved to snuggle up close and purr and purr, yet even he had his own brand of independence.

She put the apple core into the waste can and went into her bedroom. Looking through her wardrobe, she selected a flowing, turquoise dress with vertical strips. Today, she felt fresh and ready for a new adventure. She stood in front of a full length mirror and appraised herself; then she combed her long, brown hair. She had not cut her hair for ten years, and it now reached her hips. It was fine hair that often looked more black than brown. She fastened the barrette and then put on a wool cardigan sweater. She liked the colorful, abstract design on the back of the sweater. It was both modern and primitive.

Once she was outside, the sunlight warmed her and the wind nipped her nose. Walking across Keystone Way and down to the corner at Ocean Avenue, she saw John sitting in his garden, drinking his morning coffee and smoking his pipe. She noticed that the dahlias were blooming in a variety of colors and the petunias were bursting with multi-colored flowers. John certainly has a green thumb, she thought, and his garden is an asset for the neighborhood. Ocean Avenue has its

own mini-park. She smiled inwardly and then called out to him. After exchanging the morning's greetings, she went into the Trading Shop.

Fluorescent lighting lit up the interior. Od, seated at a roll top desk at the back of the store, was reading a magazine. Dressed in a tan sport shirt and brown trousers, he looked causal and relaxed. He seemed to be deeply absorbed in his reading, but she knew that he was aware of her presence.

She glanced about the shop. Shelves lined the walls, and tables covered the floor space. On the shelves and tables were many things--tools, appliances, cloth and yarn, toys, musical instruments, clocks, books and magazines, left-overs from yesterday and beginnings for tomorrow.

Many people, when first entering Od's store, were shocked by the abundance. The visual impact was chaos. Too many things were vying for one's attention. Where should one start? But the chaos was only a surface that Od had carefully constructed. Below lay a simple logic. For all the items were involved in making; they were all tools; they were extensions of human need and desire. And above those objects was the making of a trade, which, for Od, was the purpose of life. We traded crawling for walking; we traded childhood for adolescence, and adolescence for middle age, which we then traded for old age. We traded carbon dioxide for oxygen and food for energy.

Mary browsed while Od read. She listened to her feelings--a different one arose as she inspected each tool. The feeling attached to a spatula was distinct from that of a wood chisel or a needle, yet all were used for making. She became aware of the physical movement that each required. Her right hand stirred the air with a spatula while the left poked at the air with a needle.

Od looked up and watched her, fascinated by the way that she was using her body. Was she practicing some new hand signs? Mary had been attending a signing class at the Pentecostal church for six months now, and she was quite adept at using that language. Signing was a basic form of language; it was like miming; it was acting without using the voice. Good signers used their whole body and their emotions, not only their hands.

Mary felt Od watching her and turned toward him. "I'm making a marvelous discovery. Each tool has its own physical movement, its own feeling, its own identity. Each is different, yet each is a tool. People are like that too, different yet human."

"Some people seem to have lost their humanness."

"The wicked and depraved? I think they're still human but are trapped in a ritual that's lost touch with life."

"The walking dead?"

"Something like that. People can get stuck in dead ends and continue to repeat failing behavior. We can get trapped in our feelings, our intellect, and our physical mannerisms."

"Perhaps, life itself is a gigantic trap."

"It may well be. But we're here until our time is up, so we might as well do the best we can. I think Helen has figured it out. I mean, she has a hold on truth and allows it to guide her."

"She has heart; both she and Hank do. They're making it; we have good models." Od paused, and they both looked toward the front window. A woman and her daughter were peering in at them. They waved and then walked on.

"Janet Brown and her daughter Melissa--there's a good example," Mary said. **"Going to City College while working full time after her husband died in that horrible auto accident."**

"Melissa has a good survival model there in her mother." Od's features turned soft. He felt personal affection for Janet Brown; she was a dear friend. He looked dreamily out the window; then, abruptly, he said to Mary, **"Did you want to trade?"**

"Yes, experiences. I came in today to learn from your collection of tools. And I have; I've learned about blending feelings. I offer you in exchange a mind trip."

"A deal. What is it?"

"Hank told it to me a few days ago. It's a variation on the riddle--which came first, the chicken or egg?"

"I'm game."

"Which came first, the egg or sperm? Is the egg a tailless sperm? Or is the sperm an egg with a tail?"

Od laughed, his sharp features crackling.

"I told Helen the riddle, and she played another variation; she asked, "Which is Adam and which is Eve?" Mary knew that Od was turning the riddle over in his mind, savoring its flavor.

"Which is earth and which is life?" he rejoined.

"Here is the corollary question. Why does the sperm move toward the egg? For example, why don't they both move about?"

"Well, the sperm has a tail that gives it mobility. Maybe, its attracted by the egg's vibes." Od laughed again. **"I see it now. Once upon a time there were two eggs living miles apart in the great, blue ocean. Each was lonely and desired a companion. Then one egg decided to swim about, looking for another egg. As it swam, its body became elongated. With this new form it covered more distance. Eventually, it spied another egg floating in the water. The floating egg saw the tailed egg coming toward it. Finally, it thought, an egg has found me. But what a strange form it has, not round as I am."** Od smiled and opened his hands.

Mary giggled. "Once upon a time there were two sperms living in the big, blue ocean. Each was lonely and wished for a companion. So, each swam around constantly, looking for another sperm, but never finding one. One day one of the sperms was swimming through strange waters. There was a pleasant taste in the water, so the sperm stopped for awhile in that quiet place. Funny, it noticed that its head was growing and its tail was shrinking. It looked at itself and saw that it was now round. It began to bounce in the water, sending off waves. Pretty soon, it saw a sperm swimming toward it. The swimming sperm thought, what is that round-looking sperm doing, bouncing so? I'll swim over and find out."

Od clapped his hands. "Mary, that was a marvelous trade. If you stay in that mental space, you'll whip Sam Runner before the month is over. I was totally amazed by your playing last night. The queen sacrifice took us all by surprise, except maybe for Hank. He noticed the hole in Sam's defense right away."

"Sam was surprised, too. I've never seen him so shocked; he felt it deep down in his core. Thanks for the compliment, but I owe it all to Paul Morphy. You know, contemporary chess has become too staid; it has lost something. I call it the winning fix; we all want to win so badly that we've become overly cautious."

Od nodded. "We've lost the romantic flair. Few of us are willing to take chances; we're interested only in watching our bank accounts grow. That's not life; that's drudgery!"

"Really. Od, let's grab our cubic centimeter of chance and put more zest into life. You know, we should take the afternoon off and go to the beach. I'll go over to the Inn and pack some food."

"That's a wonderful trade," Od exclaimed, "an afternoon at the beach for one at the store."

"John's probably still sitting in his garden. Grab him on your way over. We'll meet in the parking lot." Mary rushed out of the Trading Shop and down Ocean Avenue.

Reality Inspector, chapter 13

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The man behind the wheel put out his cigarette. Looking at his watch, he said to the man sitting in the backseat, "They should be leaving soon." The man in the backseat rolled down the window. Fog was blowing by, but visibility was still good. Two figures left the Rainbow Inn, one pausing to lock the door. He watched them walk across the parking lot toward Keystone Way. He rested his arm in the open window, took aim and fired. The two figures dropped to the ground. He fired again.

The car burnt rubber as it roared down Ocean Avenue, turning right at Ashton Avenue, and raced quickly into the night.

Mary and John stood up, hearing the car disappear. "That was too close for comfort. I've snagged my hose. Bastards!"

"Too close is exactly it," John replied. "He was either a bad shot or . . . I'll look for the bullets early tomorrow morning. Probably won't tell us much but . . ."

"Let's go to my place and put ourselves back together," Mary said.

Leaving the glow from the corner street lamp behind them, they walked a short way up Keystone to Mary's place, the first house on the west side of the street. The house bordered on the Inn's parking lot.

When they had entered the house, Mary turned on a light in the living room and then went into the kitchen. She called out, "How about some bourbon on the rocks?"

"Fine," John answered. He took off his coat, folded it up, and placed it on a chair. He went over to the couch and sat down. Letting go of himself, he sank into the cushions. He replayed the scene over in his mind. He saw Mary lock the Inn. They were talking about their afternoon at the beach. The cool, salty air had a revitalizing effect on the five of them--Mary, Od, John, Barbara, and Esther. Barbara managed the stained-glass shop on Ocean Avenue a few doors west of the Reef. Then the first shot rang out, and he felt terror rise up in his throat. As they fell to the ground, he heard the bullet ricocheting across the pavement. When the second shot came, followed by the roaring and screeching of a car hurrying away, he was filled with anger.

Mary brought in the drinks and set them on the coffee table in front of the couch. "Let's have some music to help soothe us." She went over to the stereo set and placed a record of Keith Jarrett's *Koln Concert* on the turntable. As the sounds of a piano flowed through the room, she

asked, "Do you think Sam Runner was trying to scare me, after my win last night?"

"It was most likely to scare me," John answered. "I've had four threats already. This is number five."

She could tell that his mind was calculating furiously. And she knew that he needed to break out of his closet of reasoning, that he was already losing the carefree air he had projected at the beach. With a twinkle in her eyes, she said, "How do you know it was meant for you?"

"A feeling. It fits. The first threat notified me that I would die. They're making certain I realize the danger I'm in."

"And so you believe it was only a scare, not a real attempt?"

"Yes, I do. We were easy targets. The first shot hit in front of us and the second behind us. They could have killed either of us if they had wanted to."

"Are you getting closer to a solution, making them uneasy?"

"Yes and no. I'm making progress, but no solution is in sight. I need to find something that will link everything into a pattern. I've uncovered a lot of data, and my communication with ZAC is growing, but the problem remains. How does the alien program reappear? The Federal Reserve is no longer worried that the program will upset policy decisions since its reappearance will be discovered soon enough. But the Federal Reserve is damned provoked that its security can be breached so easily. Heads are beginning to roll, and even Mr. Acorn hinted to me that if the problem is not solved soon he will be retired. Our civil servants are more concerned with holding their jobs than they are with an accurate count of M-l. And I think this is the reason I was hired--to help Mr. Acorn and his associates keep their positions."

"Do you think it could be one of them? It would be so easy, wouldn't it, for Mr. Acorn to play games with ZAC?"

"On the surface, yes. But since the recurrence began, everyone even slightly connected has been investigated and, I presume, is constantly monitored."

"And who watches the watchers?"

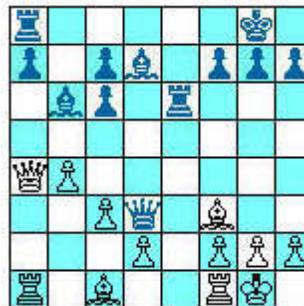
"The Inspector General's office has teams which do only that--watch each other. Just like the CIA, which may also now be watching the Inspector General's office."

"If everyone is watching each other, then no one may be watching ZAC at the proper moment. Timing may be the clue--like in chess. The [game](#) last night was like that. Let me show you." Mary saw her chance and grabbed it.

She took out her chess set and placed the pieces on the board as they were at move fifteen. John had always marveled at her memory for

reconstructing a previous game. She could set up the board for any move. He had a good memory too, but it worked differently. In fact, he often thought that people could be grouped according to the manner in which their memory functioned. The brain was analogous to a highly sophisticated computer. The incoming data was recorded and used according to a complex program. And everyone's program differed. A program was a type of filtering system which screened the incoming data and stored it. The way data was stored influenced its retrieval and use. A chess buff was noted for her ability to reconstruct a game, and so too could he reconstruct any of his previous cases.

Mary



Sam (next move)

"Notice," Mary said, "that Sam now moved R-R2 (Ra2), which was a waste of time. Instead, he should have played Q-R6 (Qa6). He waited until the next move before he made Q-R6 (Qa6). That one move delay allowed me to reinforce the king file so that I could sacrifice my queen on move seventeen."

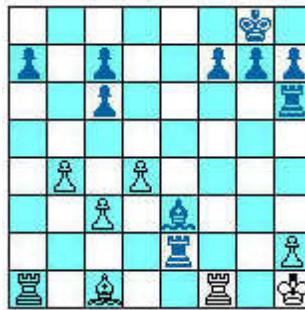
Mary



Sam (next move)

"From here on it was a matter of timing. I had to keep Sam's king busy so that he could not bring up reinforcements. Notice that not until move twenty-five did he bring his queen back into play, and I took it with my bishop. After that mate was simple."

Mary



Sam

John thought of his unknown opponent. Would his mate be that simple? As Hank had pointed out the night of the game before John had stepped through the strange door, Sam Runner had created a hole in his defense. What was the hole in his opponent's defense? The alien program manipulated some weakness in ZAC, and the alien program should have its own weakness. First, he must discover how ZAC was manipulated; then, he could examine the alien seed, searching for a hole in its design. Putting another round of drinks on the coffee table, Mary sat down on the couch. "I propose a toast. This may sound strange, and maybe I have been overcome by all that's happened in the past twenty-four hours, but let's toast to the lucky break in your case. Those two shots indicate a weakness in your opponent's game plan."

John was intrigued. "I'll drink to that." After they toasted, he asked, "What's your idea about the weakness?"

"Well, I see an analogy to last night's game with Sam. Your opponent has finally made a direct, physical threat against your life. I think he is very frightened, and fear is a hole in one's defense."

"Yes, it is. It's a big hole that allows reality to flood out." He reflected on the logic of that idea. "So, I must put my most powerful weapon, my queen, into that hole. Then reinforce the king file and wait for his next move."

"Now is the time for you to go all out, to push as hard as you can against his fear."

"Humm, I see possibilities. I can drop hints that I have a solution but need more evidence before I can name the culprit. That should draw him out even more."

Mary got up, went over to the turntable and turned it off. She switched on the FM. Stravinsky's *Pastorale* was beginning; its mellow sounds filled the room. John's mind wandered away from ZAC, the two shots, and chess games. He noticed Mary's perfume; it had a soft come-to-me scent. He looked across the room at her, as she came back to the couch. He became aware of a spring-like impetuosity in her gait; it had a bounce that was filled with a daredevil attitude. A smile hung from her high cheek bones, draping her face with laughter of delight. Her long, dark hair clothed her movement with a sensuous flavor. The carefree feeling that he had felt at the beach came back to him. In his mind's eye, he could see her flowing over the sand, exuding fire and freedom.

When Mary returned to the couch, she snuggled up to him and gave him a tender kiss on the ear. She felt his presence brighten. Their feelings were warmed and lifted by the music. He turned toward her, smiled, and said, "Here is my queen." She replied, "And here is mine."

He felt her warmth move out to him, touching him, stroking him. He leaned over and kissed her on the lips, a long fiery kiss. More kisses were exchanged, and neither cared that the music had become Saint-Saens' *Symphony #3*. Their passion was ignited; it flared and burnt; it was all-consuming. Heated by their mutual desire, they undressed each other. Tenderly, each piece of clothing was removed. They pretended innocence at what was discovered beneath the surface of convention.

They lay bare and open to each other. The music began to sing: The man will know the woman, and the woman will know the man. He touched her, smelled her, tasted her. She was earth and sky. Her breasts were like chocolate ripple, her navel orange sherbert, her garden of paradise peppermint. Kissing her thighs, he whispered "woman"; she melted and became firm. He felt her pleasure and listened to her private song.

When she was fulfilled, the woman knew the man. Her senses sharpened, her fire flickered over him, caressing and soothing. Kissing his thighs, she whispered "man" and heard his low, deep sound. He flowed and became hard. Within his groin fire and tension built, then erupting into a blending with woman.

She was in him and he was in her. They were one mind, drifting on the star dust of eternity. One sensing, one feeling, one caring.

Reality Inspector, chapter 14

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The eleventh chess game occurs tonight, and a beautiful night it is, John thought. The moon, nearing full, was already in the sky, and if fog did not roll in, the night would be crowded with stars.

The Players were performing their one act play *The Open Door* before the chess game began at seven p.m. He had enjoyed the rehearsal and desired to see the opening performance; he could have dinner at the same time and then be ready for the chess game.

Although he had found the two bullets which the fleeting car had fired at them, the bullets were so misshapen that identification was impossible. As he had thought. The significance was the threat--as a threat. His enemy was willing to threaten him when he could have killed him. So John knew that he was getting close to a solution, but still not there. If he quit now, the enemy would be safe; so he was given only a scare. But next time would mean death. So he must accept his stalker by becoming one himself; he must draw his opponent out. From now on he would act invisibly, taking precautions and becoming unpredictable. His mantra would be "the unexpected is always upon us." He would behave accordingly.

John locked his office and walked through his garden to the gate on Keystone Way. He saw Hank standing over at the Rainbow Inn parking lot. The old man saw him, and waving, came across the street.

"I must speak with you, John." He put his box down beside the petunias. "Od was telling me about the threats you have received and about the shots fired at Mary and you last night."

"Somebody doesn't like my intimacy with ZAC. I guess I'm getting too close for someone's comfort."

"Oh, a case of jealousy?"

"More like a case of greed."

"When death stalks, one must be ready for the final dance. Are you ready yet?"

"No, I'm afraid not."

"At my age, each day is a joyous celebration for the life I awake with. I may not get through the night, so I live each day as it opens to me."

"I plan ahead, and sometimes I'm frustrated when my plans go astray."

"Plan ahead, yet live only in the present, for the future is never fixed. Each moment is only a microcosm. Taste it fully. Tomorrow is an illusion; today is real."

"And yesterday is a memory."

"And a trap! Today is. Yesterday was."

"Isness is difficult to maintain."

"No, it's too easy. Just let go and drop in." Hank pointed to his box.
"Step in, John, and I'll show you."

"Just step into the box?"

"Yes."

With a shitty smile on his face, John put one foot and then the other into Hank's box. He looked at the old man, who grinned like the Cheshire cat and disappeared. Space spun and dissolved into itself. Laughter whirled about him.

His eyes begin to focus, and John realizes that he is in a building seated at a table. It is Falstaff's Coffee House, so the sign above the counter states. The coffee house has a decor that is a fusion of beat and punk. He has never been here before, and so he does not know if it is even in San Francisco. Perhaps, it is down in North Beach. Whatever, Hank's box has spun him to this location. Well, he is hungry and ready for dinner, so never mind.

He looks around. A man and woman are seated at a table to his right. They are intimately involved in each other; they are in their own space and living in the now. Their whispering voices form a love duet.

To his left are three people standing around a pool table. One man is rotund and his deep laughter vibrates the coffee house. The other two, a man and woman both dressed in blue jeans and leather motorcycle jackets, are about six feet tall and have athletic physiques. They are obviously punks. In the back of the coffee house two women are playing chess. They do not seem to be aware of the other habitues.

John turns his attention back to the three playing pool. The rotund man had been called Fal by the woman wearing the motorcycle jacket. No doubt, he is Falstaff, owner of the coffee house. He is so involved with the other two that he does not notice John's presence, so John listens to their conversation. The woman is called Little Sheba, and the man is named Fred. They look and act like twins, yet there are subtle differences between them.

"Got my draft ticket today," Little Sheba says, "supposed to be down there at the hole Monday morning sharp. I ain't goin'."

"Yeh, they need more cannon fodder." Fred sinks the three ball into a side pocket. "Another war for the profitmongers."

Fal chuckles, "More toads for their table."

Little Sheba bangs her cue stick on the floor. "Those ball-less bastards, sitting at home, countin' their money."

As he sinks the nine ball in the far corner pocket, Fred remarks, "Sterile turkeys, wantin' us to clean up their shit for 'em. Diaper toddlers."

Little Sheba jabs her cue stick in the air. "Big talk they mouth. Somebody should ram a missile down their throat."

"Or up their ass. They're a bunch of fascists." Fred misses putting the seven ball in the side pocket.

"Aren't you honored to die for their greed?" Fal rubs the tip of his cue stick with chalk. "Be careful, or you won't get any crumbs from their stench filled anus." He hits the two ball into a corner pocket.

Fred farts loudly. "Not even maggots'll touch 'em."

Little Sheba places her fists on her hips. "I got honor. I won't be their slave. I'll rip their gizzard out first." She takes out a switch-blade and cuts the air.

Fal looks up from the pool table and says in a teasing voice, "Won't you fight for your country?"

"What country? Ain't mine! They never asked me. Go get killed for us--that's what they say." Little Sheba glowers at him.

Fred shakes his head in agreement. "A free country--that's what they say. Yeh, that's the big lie."

"I ain't been free since I was born. I've been some sort of object--pushed here, tossed there. Lie down and spread your legs. Jump up and go get killed. Fascist pigs!" Little Sheba gives an invisible figure the ram with her cue stick.

A devilish smile creeps over Fal's face. "Just think, Little Sheba, you'll be helping the Gross National Product, keeping people in work so they can buy all those plastic throwaways. Haven't you any pride?" He puts the ten ball into a side pocket but also scratches.

Little Sheba rubs her cue stick with chalk. "Yeh, but I ain't selling it. I ain't a whore. Let 'em rot in their Gross National Product."

"Fuckin' bastards. Sacrifice they say. Sacrifice for what?" Fred looks about questioningly.

"For more bombs and missiles. That's all we get from our taxes." Little Sheba sinks the ten ball into a corner pocket.

Fal pats her back. "But aren't you happy that a few have all the wealth while we people live in poverty? You're not very patriotic."

Little Sheba looks up at him and says with honed sarcasm, "Oh, I just love living in poverty. I love the hovel I stay in. I love the rats biting my

toes at night. I love the watery soup and moldy bread I eat each day."

"But if you don't go down to the hole Monday, government agents will come looking for you." Fal gives her a fatherly look.

Little Sheba sneers, "The turd faces! And on my money too." She puts the twelve ball into a side pocket.

"Servants of the people. Another big lie. They treat us like animals!" Fred is indignant.

Fal scratches his belly. "Well, they do act like we people are the enemy."

"Petty tyrants! Biting the hand that feeds 'em." She sinks the eleven ball into a far corner pocket.

"They're just doin' what they're told." Fal belches.

"I never told 'em." She hits the five ball into a side pocket.

"Yeh, they're just doin' what the corporate bosses tell 'em," Fred says. **"Shows you who's running the country. Democracy. Fuck. Ain't been any democracy around here for a hundred years or so. Look at who they run for president--Twiddledee and Twiddledum."**

With a sly smile, Fal asks, "Which twin has the mark of the beast?"

"They're both beasts!" Little Sheba answers; she hits the seven ball into a corner pocket.

Fal chuckles, "And those servants of the people . . ."

With a double play, Little Sheba slams the one ball into a far corner pocket and then rolls the four ball into a nearby corner pocket.
"Servants of the multinationals, you mean."

"Oh," Fal says in a tearful voice, **"those servants of the multinationals will hunt you down, Little Sheba, and put you in jail. Die on the battlefield or die in jail. Which is it?"**

"Those scabby robots! Those tranquilized zombies! I'll stand by you, Little Sheba." Fred holds his cue stick in readiness.

Little Sheba looks up at him and smiles. "I don't *need* your help, Fred, but I'll take it." She sinks the six ball into a corner pocket.

Something that the couple to John's right said catches his attention. The woman and man are intimately involved but not cooing. They are roommates. Luke, who is tall and lanky, his frame stretched out over a chair, fills his voice with anger. Catalina nods her head.

"The landlord raised the rent. One hundred dollars more a month!" Luke clinches his fists.

Catalina begins to boil. "The crook! Where are we going to get that much money?"

"Well, we can rent one of our three rooms." Luke does not like the idea, but what else is there?

"Ugh!" Catalina puts a hand over her mouth as if she is going to vomit.

"It would be crowded," Luke says. "Well, do you have any ideas?"

Catalina is puzzled. "One hundred dollars more a month. How come so much?"

"He claimed a hardship case." Luke tries to hold his anger back. "He remortgaged the apartment house. He invests that money at the present high interest rate. And the tenants pay for the interest on his loan."

The white player moves her rook. "No foundation--all along the line."

The black player nods in agreement; she says, "Times being what they are."

Fal saunters over to the table where John is sitting. John feels that he is getting a careful scrutiny.

"Hi. I don't think we've met. I'm Fal, owner of the Falstaff Coffee House."

"I'm John. Glad to meet you." They shake hands.

"Where're ya from, John?"

"Oh, I live at Ocean and Keystone." As an afterthought he says, "In the city."

Fal gives him a questioning look. "And what city is that?"

John is bewildered. "Aren't we in San Francisco?" When Fal does not respond, he continues, "In San Francisco, California, U.S.A.--on spaceship earth."

"Can I see your ID, please." Fal is suspicious and demanding.

"My ID? Oh, you mean my driver's license."

Fal looks back at Little Sheba and Fred, who, at his glance, walk over to the table. He takes out his ID and shows it to John. "This is what I mean. Don't ya have an ID like this?"

John looks at the ID, which has a very futuristic appearance. He is puzzled by what is happening. Can he be in another galaxy or dimension, he wonders? "No, I don't have anything like that."

Luke and Catalina gasp. Leaving their table, they join the group around Fal. Speaking to the concerned group, Fal says, "No ID--that breaks galactic code 71805."

The group mutters, "No ID. Horrors. A galactic crime."

John smiles and opens his hands. "In *my* galaxy we don't use ID's."

The two chess players leave their game and join the group. It is apparent that Fal and the others are shaken by John's statement. Fal faces John and leans on his cue stick. "Welcome, stranger, to our galaxy. Now that you are here, you must abide by our rules. You will need an ID. Luckily, you have four types to choose from--mine, Fred and Little Sheba's, Luke and Catalina's, and the chess players'. You are limited to one of those four. We'll give you a few minutes to deliberate on this serious matter." He turns and walks through the restroom door; the others follow him.

"What kind of strange space did I step into?" John says half aloud. "I remember stepping into Hank's box and now this. Am I really in another galaxy? And I don't like any of the four choices. They're not me!"

John picks up the menu and looks at the items. He shudders. Then hammering on the table with his fist, he shouts, "Service! I want some service!"

Fal appears from the restroom door. "Have you decided?" He comes out with the others huddled behind him.

"Yes," John says. "My choice is to reject the four possibilities and choose a fifth one. And that is me. I am my own ID!"

"You can't!" cries Fal; he is upset. The others mimic him, "You can't!"

"I have." John is firm in his resolve. Turning around in his chair, he calls out, "Helen, a cappuccino and a cheese cake, please."

Helen's voice floats through space. "Cappuccino and cheese cake comin' up."

John turns back to Fal and the others huddled behind him. "Since I haven't received very good service in your galaxy, I'm calling for assistance from mine. I hope you don't mind."

"I don't mind," Fal says. The others concur, "We don't mind."

Helen appears with the cappuccino and cheese cake, which she places on the table, and then disappears with a big grin on her face.

John tastes the cappuccino. Looking up at Fal and the others, he says, "A word of advice."

They nod in agreement.

"If you don't like what the bastards are doing to you, go and fight them!" John takes a bite of cheese cake and savors its flavor.

The entire space of the Rainbow Inn thundered with applause and cheers. The audience went wild with enthusiasm, for this performance

of *The Open Door* had the scent of strangeness. After the cast had taken several bows, the Inn quieted down; and chess boards were set up on most tables.

Reality Inspector, chapter 15

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Several days later, John's mind was still swimming through his experience at the Rainbow Inn. Stepping through Hank's box, he had become a participant in the performance of *The Open Door*. How this instantaneous jaunting had occurred was a mystery. He was not certain whether he wanted to know, whether he wanted to push beyond the comforting curtain of ignorance.

After the performance he had talked to several people, including Helen; and they all said about the same thing. At some moment they had noticed his presence at the table. No one saw him enter the stage and sit down at the table. One moment the table was vacant; the next he was sitting there. Well, obviously they were not really watching the table; they were watching the characters. Presumably, he walked on stage; presumably, he was part of the play. And of course he was.

Then this morning his mind was given another jolt. The phone message from the anonymous caller was clear. Her voice had left an indelible impression. The sound was soft and sensuous; it was inviting. So it was difficult to grok the complete thought, the message contrasting so sharply with the voice. But the meaning itself was clear enough. The two shots fired at him, when Mary and he had left the Rainbow Inn, were only a threat. The next time the bullet would not miss him; it would cut his life thread. The beguiling, siren voice repeated the message three times. Obviously, it was a recording; and he had his own recording of it--in his head. There was no doubt now that he was moving in the correct direction, that he would soon discover the secret of the alien program's reappearing act. He must push his opponent even harder and force him to make a fatal mistake. He would lodge his queen in the hole of his opponent's fear.

By the afternoon the sun's shining and cool ocean breezes were vibrating his desire to step beyond the doorway of convention. Mary and he were at the California Academy of Sciences in Golden Gate Park. They were standing in the midst of an exhibit about early people--those who used stone and bone for their tools. Both needed to relax, to refresh themselves. The thirteenth chess game was in the evening; and Sam Runner, having won the eleventh [game](#), now led 4 to 3. As the chess players moved closer to the magic number of six wins, the tension and anxiety mounted. Mary and John's affairs were now running parallel, running in phase together. Perhaps, a clue lay hidden in that pattern of movement.

They were looking at some small, bone needles, remarking about the original imagination required to think of the idea of sewing. Later people built upon this remarkable imagination by applying the idea to different materials. But could modern people originate such amazing

concepts like that of sewing? The human brain had changed very little in its structure, yet human life style had changed radically. People had lost trust in their imaginative abilities, for modern society was forcing them into trusting their machines instead. The country's president even now worshipped technology above God: a sign of the times--a sign that modern society was moving toward entropy.

Both Mary and John were deeply impressed by the creative potential of the human brain that the Ice Age Exhibit demonstrated. Could modern people ever regain some of that lost potential? They would have to, if they were to survive. The less developed societies stood a better chance of surviving since they still retained some faith in their God-given potential. And they had survived that way for thousands of years. But modern people were giving up their humanness; they were becoming more like their machines. And the desire to survive was dying out. As Socrates had pointed out a long time ago, "Life is worth living only according to one's nature." When people try to be nonhuman, then life loses all its meaning. Modern societies were now at the edge of the precipice. Would they fall into the abyss and eternal death, or would they turn aside and follow the path with heart? We'll have to wait to see, John thought--and hope for the best.

"Mary! John! Come quickly."

They both turn and see Od gesturing for them to follow him. They both stand startled, for Od is dressed in animal skins. They glance at each other and, finding that they also are dressed in animal skins, look about. They are standing in a meadow. Od is already walking up a path that climbs a rocky hillside. They follow. John notices a stone adz in Od's belt and that Od is wearing moccasins as they are.

Soon they reach a ledge overlooking the valley below. The huge valley of meadow and grass tapers to a narrow dead end where the sun rises. Od is excitedly pointing to a herd of bison grazing on the valley floor. "Pte. Pte. They're moving toward the entrance. Tomorrow or the next day they'll move through."

The people have patiently waited as the bison herd grazes its way across the valley floor toward the rocky slopes that enclose the valley where the sun rises. Each year the Pte moves from its winter pasture on the large plains of prairie grass into the lush meadows of the valley. And each year the people wait as the Pte eats its way toward the end. Then the people kill as many bison as they will need for the winter. The remaining animals move back to the winter pasture, and the following spring the cycle begins anew.

When the bison reach the entrance where the valley narrows, they will be fenced in. The people many years ago had built movable fences from the tall pines that grow on the valley slopes. Each year at the proper moment those fences are put in place and then later removed when the herd is ready to migrate back to the plains. Famine is unknown to the people because they respect the Pte spirit and the Great Spirit that oversees all the creatures under its care.

While the bison herd is in its natural corral, hunters observe it carefully. They decide which animals will be harvested. They always keep in mind that their survival depends upon the survival of the herd; they want the best stock to reproduce itself. When the herd has been observed, the hunters selectively kill particular animals that are then hauled out to the great fires burning on the other side of the fence. Here the carcasses are skinned and butchered. The hides are stretched out and worked into leather for clothing and skins for lodges. The meat is dried and smoked. The bones are shaped into tools and weapons; a few are carved into delicate jewelry.

During the next few weeks the people are busy and happy, for they look forward to a secure winter. The Great Spirit is smiling on them. As the moon grows full, the people prepare for the harvest festival. The hunters now carry in the animals selected for that week long occasion. Others are preparing for their part: the healers are making power bundles for use in the ceremonies while the dancers are practicing their songs and steps. All the lodges are placed in the form of a hoop, and in the center are erected four pinepoles around which the ceremonies will be held.

After the week of celebration has ended, the people break camp and travel toward their winter camping grounds along the Whispering River. A small group stays behind to remove the fences and store them in a stone building for winter. When finished, they will follow the people toward Whispering River.

The first winter snow blankets the ground with whiteness; the air becomes chilly and crisp. With their winter lodges nestled along the shore of Whispering River, the people settle down for a time of leisure.

Reality Inspector, chapter 16

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Hank and John were standing at the corner of Fourth and Mission Streets, looking at the several blocks leveled by the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency. Poor people lived in the South of Market area--people on a small fixed income and people on no income. Like the Tenderloin, the South of Market area had its derelicts and prostitutes, its cripples and parolees, its poor and unwanted. As it did in the Western Addition, the city was trying to evict its misfits by bulldozing their shelter. Many blocks, already leveled, were awaiting new construction, but not for the city's people, only for its commuters and tourists.

Hank had proposed that they spend the day downtown; he had some things that he wished to show John. After his experience with the old man's box, John was interested in learning about other special talents that he might have. With Hank, one took a wait and see attitude. He was unpredictable, and he was impeccable at being that. Hank was himself, at all times and in all places.

John agreed to spend the day with Hank since he had visited ZAC yesterday. He relied heavily on his feelings for the proper moment for making his visits. Some days were futile while others bore much reward. He played all angles and all rhythms. He listened to his still, small voice, which had never been wrong.

A day with Hank, gaining insights from commonplace situations--that was what his voice had told him. Insights were useful; they could be applied to many different things. Perhaps, he could find the key to ZAC's problem somewhere in a depressed area of the city. Under which stone was a clue hidden? One never knew.

He had not been South of Market for a year, and yet it looked sadly the same as he had last seen it. The vibes there were negative; its reality leaked out through a large hole in its fabric. Yet, what little life remained clung desperately to the shelter that was left. The people living there, at the bottom of the social ladder, could drop no farther. Forces were pressing them into a smaller, less viable living space; yet squeezed as they were the people survived.

The authorities wished that those people would disappear--be gone so that business could chug along profitably; but life did not wait upon the command of the authorities. It followed its own rhythm; and, like Hank, it might seem to be unpredictable from a narrow, rigid point of view.

John's thoughts turned to Mary and tonight's game. Two nights ago Mary had again challenged the authority of the world chess champion.

With devastating logic she had ripped apart Sam Runner's ideas, demonstrating that they leaked. With that [game](#), the thirteenth in the match, she had evened the series at four apiece. Even the author of *Zen and Chess* was not omnipotent.

The game had been one of position with both Mary and Sam forcing each other to make particular choices. Mary was able to transform the forced choices into a win. On move 19 she made a startling gesture: she offered Sam her rook! Sam did not have an answer, and of course he refused the offer. The winning position that Mary developed snuck up on him, for it seemed like everything that he did only helped her. Actually, by move 19 there was not much that he could do to prevent defeat, so he resigned two moves later. A quality of necessity existed throughout the whole game, and Mary used that necessity to shape a win.

Could she again force Sam into a losing position and win the game tonight? She would be playing black this time and so would not have the advantage of initiative in the early part of the game. And seizing the initiative required luck, daring, and precise playing.

So far, neither of the players had lost two games in a row. The wins had alternated back and forth. Was that a pattern which would hold sway throughout the tournament? If the alternation continued for the next few games, then the match would go into extra innings. If both players tied at five wins apiece, then the champion would be the player who won two more games than the other. In other words, the alternating pattern would have to break; one player would have to show superiority by winning two games in a row, not counting draws.

John recalled his visit with ZAC when the computer had endlessly alternated the Fibonacci series and the prime numbers. He had broken the pattern by leaving; he had expressed his free will. That was a clear example, he thought, of people's situation in the universe; it was a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm, the large world. The universe had many layers of endlessly repeating cycles, and all living creatures were caught within the world's deterministic fabric.

Yet, he mused, modern science has given the human mind an intellectual weapon that can defend free choice. Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle had placed in the basic structure of the universe the concept of subjectivity and choice. Although Heisenberg had originally applied his principle to the study of atomic physics, many people realized that the concept could be used in other areas. Most people now recognized the subjective role of the poll-taker, for the way that questions were phrased and asked influenced the results of the poll. And John knew from his experience as reality inspector that his attitude, approach, and manner affected his client's recovery.

ZAC's recovery--the elimination of the alien program--was now his utmost concern. The constantly reappearing act of the alien program had caught ZAC and the Federal Reserve in a rigid trap. He knew that any solution must be based upon the proper point of view. He must think of the situation as a struggle between himself and the person who had designed the reappearing program. They were playing a chess

game, and he must force his opponent into a losing position. With luck and daring he would transform the necessity inherent in the situation so that ZAC would gain its freedom. He would apply his own variant of the uncertainty principle to ZAC's reality problem.

Hank touched John's arm, bringing him out of his reverie. They were standing on the northwest corner of Fourth and Mission, in front of City College's Downtown Center, at the edge of the Redevelopment Agency's waste land. The old man, with his box resting beside him, was dressed in Goodwill clothes; shaggy white hair appeared from beneath his Greek fisherman's cap; he blended in easily with the residents of the South of Market environs. And so did John, for he had selected some old clothes to wear on today's journey.

The old man had been speaking of the choice that the city had forced upon the residents of the South of Market environs. It was not a good choice. In fact, no one had asked them for their view on the matter. The rulers of San Francisco had made a decision that was based solely upon their desire for bigger profits.

He went on to say that the South of Market area could be seen as a microcosm of the whole country, that what was happening here in San Francisco was being repeated throughout the U.S. Like so many street people Hank had a cynical and rather acid view of the social fabric. Living at the bottom of the economic ladder, he had no fear of losing the comfort of middle class security and thus had no desire to blindly chant the magic formula that the popular media insisted was necessary for retaining that security. His insights cut through the pretty surface that the establishment tried to erect around itself. The old man was a realist, and he refused to be caught in the establishment's repeating cliche that everything was all right, that paradise was only around the next corner. He knew it wasn't, for he had been around that corner many times.

He now began to comment on human nature. The old man believed that people tended to lock themselves in a fortress and pretend that they were rulers of the world, expecting others to bow at their feet. It was the childhood game of king of the hill. Yet many people often forgot to put aside their childhood baggage when they entered adulthood. Usually, though, their childhood habits were espoused as the rational and practical way of living. A popular song of the late 1960's yelled, "We want the world and we want it now!" And so even now the country's leaders, still fixated in their childish fantasies, whipped up people's greed and fear. The leaders, caring only for their own power, hoped to entrench their position against the decaying world economic order even though the country would be destroyed. For they now saw themselves as internationals, and they could as easily live in the country of a friendly dictator, such as Philippines or Chile or Brazil.

The leak in the rulers' thinking centered on their belief that money was power. True, money wielded power in many areas of human affairs; yet, compared to the creative power of nature, it was a mere mote. Even now, the rulers prayed to their idol, asking for imagination, invention, and wisdom. So far, they had not received an answer. Billions of dollars spent on research had not solved the problem of radioactive waste; only 81

wisdom could solve it. Money could never replace a human mind that was tuned to spiritual forces.

Everyone had his own weakness, Hank said; it was the way that he could be used, for everyone was potentially a pawn. An historical study of human affairs would show that some people had tried, often successfully, to manipulate their fellow brothers and sisters. But modern technology had brought the human power trip out into the open. For now with contemporary advances, many people were raising a question about the morality of science and its child technology. With the use of both chemicals and electronics, scientists were investigating human behavior so that they could control and manipulate it. In some experiments electrodes were placed into the patient's brain. The electrodes were responsive to a radio transmitter that the scientist used to trigger off certain behavior. Chemicals were also being used to study the connection between the bio-chemistry of the human brain and personality. In fact, the government had conducted chemical tests on the public without its knowledge and consent.

All those experiments were symptoms of the times, Hank believed; they were signs of a pervasive and infectious disease that was threatening to destroy humanity. Modern experiments that centered on human beings were based upon the belief that Homo sapiens was actually Homo robotus: they all assumed that a human being was his body--nothing more and nothing less. Herein lay the trap for that line of reasoning--that all things were reducible to the material fabric of the universe. Hank then pinpointed the location of a reality leak. All modern scientific theories assumed a constant and stable amount of error, of inaccuracy in their predictions. This hole in the web of probability upset some scientists who, at least subconsciously, realized that a theory which was only 90% probable was not the same as absolute truth which was 100% certain!

The old man was very adamant about the need for public debate and scrutiny. In fact, he reminded John of Socrates, especially when he tugged on his Greek fisherman's cap. A few people, Hank argued, should not be allowed to foist upon the public their latest schemes as absolute truth. Those so-called experts were obviously opinionated, yet their opinions were often grounded on inadequate and superficial understanding. And usually, their opinions lacked wisdom, a major prerequisite for any human endeavor. Wisdom was acquired through experience, Hank pointed out; and a person who had an academic degree and wore a white gown did not necessarily have wisdom. True, the popular media incessantly imposed that image of the expert upon the public. And those two truths, Hank asserted, were symptoms of the insanity of our times.

Another example was the scientific study of the structure of life. The new researches into recombinant DNA were raising a burning dilemma. Did human beings really have the wisdom to investigate the make-up of life? Already, serious weaknesses in both laboratory procedures and in human motivation had occurred. Several recombinant DNA experiments had unexpectedly produced deadly organisms. If those organisms got out of the laboratory, the human population would be

decimated. Only the public's blind belief in the infallibility of their experts allowed those experiments to continue. Yet, the defect in human motivation was even more alarming. One of the future goals for recombinant DNA research was the engineering of predesigned human beings. Could scientists ever find a better design than the natural one?

Human engineering was obviously an act of hubris, Hank asserted as he tugged on his fisherman's cap. John noticed that Hank's aura had expanded outward, covering a circle of several feet. In fact, some people, probably students at the Downtown Center, were gathered around listening. The informal, street corner oratory was, no doubt, more stimulating than their classroom lectures.

The old man shook his forefinger in the air and continued. People had been dabbling in the engineering of plant life for less than a hundred years, and already they were nearing the point of no return. With the development of high-yield hybrids of both grains and vegetables, which had been called the Green Revolution because of its promised paradise, the genetic foundation for food crops had been considerably narrowed. Many varieties of plants were becoming extinct, quite similar to what was happening to the earth's animals. The bounty of life on the spaceship was being destroyed by human design. People had forgotten that husbanding and nurturing the biological diversity of plant genes, or germ plasm, was necessary for survival.

Nature had always been a rainbow of diversity, for many species of life existed on the spaceship. And life was always adjusting to ever-changing conditions. With less variety of germ plasm available could people survive drastic climatic changes? Already, scientists were noticing signs that a new ice age was beginning, that too soon glaciers would start to build. Other climatic changes would occur along with the ice age: colder weather and drought. When the temperature dropped, less moisture would evaporate from the oceans; and so rainfall would decrease. Already, desert conditions were moving southward in Africa; and in the U.S. drought was occurring in the middle West, between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains.

John noticed that Hank was now addressing the growing crowd of spectators. He had no academic degree, nor was he wearing a white gown, but he did have wisdom, and he was delighted to share it with whoever would listen. His weathered face beaming, Hank expanded his aura and pulled the audience's attention to him. He presented the next point in his argument.

The leak in the Green Revolution was, of course, that the new high-yield hybrids had less genetic diversity and so would have great difficulty adapting to climatic changes. The hybrids had been bred for special circumstances; unlike their wild and open-pollinated cousins, hybrids were more susceptible to disease and insect infestation; they were like hot house plants that required constant and extensive care. Now with the inflated cost of petroleum, fertilizer and pesticides were becoming more and more expensive. And the number of large crop failures was growing throughout the country.

Hank paused and looked around at those who were seeking wisdom. His next idea sent a stir of intellectual excitement through the audience: the modern scientific revolution shared a common belief with the industrial revolution of the last two hundred years. That belief had become ingrained in the public's subconscious; it was the idea that sameness was not only good but necessary. It was the belief that a world of grey was somehow better than a world of color. Sameness was not good and not necessary; it was madness. If all individuals of a given species were the same, that species would soon become extinct. Nature's way, with its immense diversity, was better; it was survival oriented.

Even though the Green Revolution with its promise of sameness had blinded many, a few people had seen the trap. But would those few be able to change the direction in which society was moving? Some farmers and seed associations, for example, were trying to store germ plasm from the hardy ancestors of modern hybrids. Multi-national corporations, however, were gaining control over seed companies and breeding farms; since the multi-nationals found more profit in hybrids, they were doing little to help preserve the diversity of nature. In fact, they had mounted pressure on Third World countries to use their hybrid seed. Until recently, nature's diversity had been preserved in those countries. As human society was moving closer to the brink of disaster, many people were wondering whether wisdom was still present? Did contemporary society now have a leakage problem; was it losing its survival consciousness; was it attempting a global Jonestown incident? How long would people continue to drink the kool-ade of environmental pollution and tranquilized thinking? However painful, life must adapt to the limits of its changing environment or it would die!

As the crowd broke into applause and cheers, Hank waved both hands in the air, delighted that young people were still interested in survival. Picking up his box, he moved through the encircling crowd and walked up Fourth Street toward Market with John following in his footsteps. They turned left onto Jessie Street, one of several streets that ran through the blocks between Market and Mission. They stepped around a couple of derelicts passed out on the pavement and walked until they came to stairs leading to a basement level. They climbed down the garbage-covered stairs to a battered door, which had paint smeared on it.

They entered a dark, smelly bar. Smoke hung in the air; they pushed their way through it to a table in a corner where they could watch unobtrusively. The few lights in the bar gave off a sleazy, reddish glow. After several minutes their eyes adjusted to the reddish lighting. All the customers appeared to be residents of the area, for they were dressed as Hank and John were--in the costume of street people. The noise level was not jarring; yet it had a tinge of uneasiness about it, as if something boiled beneath the surface. The waiter came for their order and a little later returned with two draft beers.

Hank touched John's shoulder and said, "See those four men over at the table to our left? They're about ready to make a deal."

"Who are they?"

"The man who is facing the other three is a member of the vice squad. The other three are buyers of protection. One owns several whore houses in town; another runs a profitable drug ring, and the third controls a number of gambling joints. For a high fee the business of those three are protected while their competitors are arrested."

"That is vice! Why isn't that crooked cop reported to the authorities?"

"Oh, a few have been caught. They've gotten six months in the county jail, and then they've returned to their jobs on the police force."

John was shocked. "That's no punishment. That only tells them to be more careful next time."

"Right. The authorities are only worried about their image."

"It's the worst wrong!"

The four men completed their deal, shook hands, and left together. John was further shocked that they were so open about their association. These were certainly evil times.

"Oh, there are honest cops," Hank said, "but usually they are threatened and harassed until they learn to keep their mouths shut. I remember one honest cop who retired because of all the threats and innuendoes. He upset the authorities by bringing his case before the public. Their high-priced shrinks told the Retirement Board that this honest cop was too strict and moral and should not be granted a work-caused retirement. The majority of the Board, however, had heart and voted for the well-deserved retirement."

Finishing his beer, Hank stood up and motioned for John to follow. He walked through a door marked "Restrooms" but went past them down a dirty hall. The odor of stench coming from the restrooms pinched John's nose. Debris covered the floor of the hall, and the walls had large holes where the plaster had been broken. They came to a door marked "Maintenance." Opening the door, Hank stepped in and switched on the dim, overhead light. John followed him, closing the door.

The old man took a small flashlight from his box, which he set on the floor. He switched on the flashlight and shone it on a wall. The tiny beam made a small, dim circle on the wall. He turned a dial on the flashlight, and the beam enlarged and brightened. Images appeared on the wall--images of people.

"We are looking into the room beyond the wall," Hank said. "What do you see?"

John was amazed. "Those are all well-dressed men--the type you would call the successful businessman. But what are they doing *here*?"

"They're having lunch. This is the weekly luncheon of the Punk Club." When John stared in wonderment, Hank continued, "The Punk Club is only for those with a lot of wealth and power. The members are from

the top level of the establishment. There are several rooms beyond this wall that are used by the Punk Club. Actually, the Club owns most of the buildings on this block. This is their downtown hideaway. They also have a secret wilderness retreat up in Sonoma County."

Recovering from his shock, John noticed that the men were engrossed in a heated discussion while lunching. As he peered at them, their faces changed. One had a face of an alligator, another of a weasel, one of a pig, another of a hyena, and the fifth of a monster.

Their voices came through the wall clearly. Alligator-face was saying, "Fear is still our best weapon."

Pig-face grunted. He was too busy counting the coins in the large purse which hung from his neck.

Weasel-face smirked. "We'll twist it tighter."

Hyena-face laughed while monster-face, cleaning his fangs with a long plastic toothpick, still managed to exclaim, "The people will have nothing left when we get done."

Pig-face looked up from his counting. "We have 90% of the money now. Next week we'll have all of it!"

"And we give 'em plasticmen as political rulers," chortled alligator-face.

"Create poverty. They'll go after each other's throat," sneered weasel-face.

"And lick our feet!" monster-face declaimed.

"Don't be so euphemistic," laughed hyena-face.

"Now we'll have slaves like all our tyrant friends," said alligator-face.

"Tyrants. Tyrants," sang hyena-face. "We are tyrants. Ty-tyrants."

"Poverty. Misery. Tyranny," sang weasel-face in a falsetto.

"Today the earth; tomorrow the solar system," exclaimed monster-face.

"People are worthless," said alligator-face.

"But, oh, as a sex slave they're worth something," grunted pig-face.

The other four faces frowned at pig-face whose face turned red. Pig-face grunted, "Of course, our new sex machines are much better than those diseased humans. We'll erase them from the earth."

"Unless they worship our machines," declaimed monster-face. "Then they're worth something."

"If they do, we'll put a little mark on 'em. That'll show they're machine worshipers," snarled weasel-face.

"Put it on their forehead or hand where it can be easily seen," said alligator-face.

"Destroy the earth; then people will have to depend upon us for their survival," exclaimed monster-face.

His eyes sparkling, Hank whispered, "The child is father of the man." John gave him a knowing glance and then returned his attention to the dancing images on the wall.

Suddenly, the door of the maintenance room flew open. In walked a man dressed as an animal trainer. In his right hand was a whip and in the left, a small stool. He marched by Hank and John, apparently without noticing them. Cracking his whip, he strode majestically into the room with the five faces. All faces shone horror for a moment; then they dissolved into their normal shape.

The animal trainer quickly herded the five faces into a corner. Then he opened the room's door and forced the five faces through the door into an awaiting cage. As the cage was hauled away, the trainer shouted, "Get out of the city! And stay out!" From the cage came howling and groaning, moaning and bawling.

Reality Inspector, chapter 17

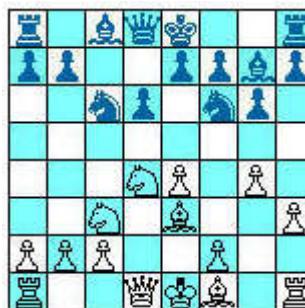
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Today, John hoped, ZAC would give forth the secret and tonight Mary would tie the series at five even. Tonight's game was number sixteen in the match, which was beginning its sixth week. So far, there had been only six draws, including the last game. Both Sam and Mary were win oriented, and, besides, draws scored no points. All six draws occurred because the players had equally strong positions with no reasonable way of overcoming the opponent.

Sam Runner had won the fourteenth [game](#), the day of John's strange experience with Hank, by using a series of traps. Mary had responded with her own countertraps, but Sam's sleight of hand was so brilliant that she finally made a wrong choice.

On move eight Sam had played a surprising and taunting P-KN4 (g4).

Mary (next move)

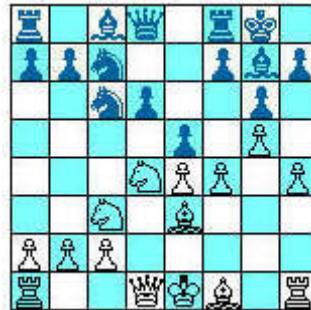


Sam

His decision was based not upon superior position but upon his own self-confidence. An unpredictable move could often put one's opponent into time trouble. In tournament play time was a major factor. Each player was allotted two and a half hours to play forty moves. And so a player who used up considerable time early in the game would find himself with only a few minutes left to play five to ten moves.

On move eleven Mary had played her countertrap with P-K4 (e5). Sam had taken time to think about this move.

Mary

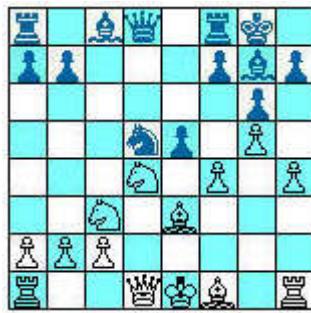


Sam (next move)

Then he played **KN-K2 (Nde2)**.

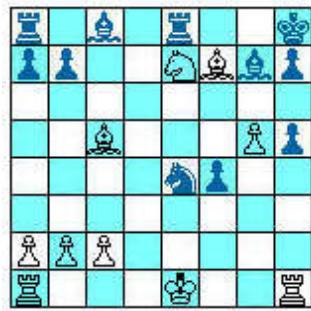
Moves fourteen through twenty-one had involved a series of traps and countertraps, each player trying to snare the other into a fatal choice.

Mary



Sam (next move) move 14

Mary



Sam (next move) move 21

On move twenty-four Mary had used her final trap. By playing **B-KN5 (Bg4)** she had forced on Sam four powerful threats.

Mary



Sam (next move)

Sam had seen beneath the veil; he had simplified with BxKRP (Bxh5). From that point on his position was superior, and Mary had resigned on the thirty-fifth move.

The games played so far in the tournament had demonstrated to John that chess really was a mode of consciousness, a way of thinking. It was an art form, one fusing the minds of two artists. Like all art it made a physical manifestation of its vision--the actual game; and like all art it reflected contemporary fashions. The consciousness that now dominated chess was a microcosm that expressed, in its own anamorphic way, the style of thinking favored in today's society. Yet, these games for the world championship had not followed the usual pattern. For both Mary and Sam had tried to step away from the style of play normally used in tournaments. They both were initiators; they both had the sensitivity and imagination of a great artist.

John parked his car and entered the Mint, taking the elevator down to ZAC's chambers. He felt buoyant and cheerful. The championship match, and in particular the fourteenth game, had given him insight, a new way of thinking about ZAC's reality leak. Chess reflects the player's consciousness; it is a more reliable mirror than any psychological test; it opens the door to one's subconscious.

He had reached the conclusion that the alien program was a seed that would regenerate itself under proper conditions, and it must be planted somewhere in ZAC's program. That way, it was only a normal part, unrecognized even after its transformation. So he must find some strangeness which would pinpoint the seed. Following the principle that Archimedes used in defining the circumference of a circle, he would apply a pair of opposites. So he decided to play chess with ZAC, which had an excellent chess program.

During the second game he noticed that ZAC favored a fixed center. Here was a weakness for someone who could tinker with it. By the fifth game John knew that ZAC always tried to maintain a fixed center. So he decided to attack that concept. He used a changing center, one where fluidity was the key to a win. The opening moves were normal enough, but on the twentieth move John played P-K6 (e6).

ZAC (next move)

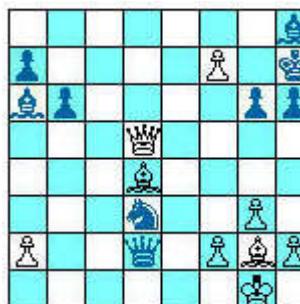


John

ZAC was forced to contend with a breakdown of the center. Its following responses to the disruptive move gave John the clue he was waiting for; the computer answered by trying to keep the center fixed. By playing the correct moves, John dissolved ZAC's position. All lines of defense were gone; the center became a potential for change.

After ZAC played its twenty-seventh move, BxR (Bxh8), John saw his chance.

ZAC



John (next move)

On the twenty-eighth move, he pushed his pawn to the eighth rank and exchanged it for a knight; and that gave him a mate.

Of all the pieces on the chess board, the knight was the most different. It made a strange move which could be visualized as a curve; it moved three squares and always landed on a square having the color opposite to the one it left. All the other pieces moved in a straight line and could be blocked by another piece; the knight with its curving movement jumped over the first two squares, landing on the third square.

Many players did not know how to use a knight properly. For them, a knight was more of a hindrance than a powerful piece; so they often traded their knights in the early part of the game. The knight, of course, had its own identity, which a chess player must learn intimately; then, the knight would blossom into its fullness.

One of the best things about chess, John thought, is its symbolic dimension. Each piece had its own identity, yet that identity was linked to a symbol. These symbols formed the grammar of chess; they regulated the acceptable combination of ideas. Some players had

experimented with changing one or more of the axioms, and so had created new geometries of chess. In fact, only a couple of hundred years ago, the queen had been given its great power to move in any direction any number of squares, unless blocked. The queen was now the most powerful piece even though the king was the most important piece.

John looked at the printout for ZAC's responses. "Shah mat. ZAC resigns." John chuckled. Whoever had designed its chess program was certainly into the history of chess. Literally, the phrase meant that the king was dead. When used in chess, it meant checkmate. Both meanings referred to the same event.

ZAC had lost because it could not contend with a fluid center. Was this the weakness which hid the alien program? John put a chair in the positive space, sat down, and went into meditation: the alien program is like a seed. And a seed stays dormant until proper conditions occur. Then it sprouts into life. A weakness can provide the proper soil for a seed. Here it stays until the weakness is taken advantage of, is used by someone who wants M- 1 to rise. ZAC is definitely not aware of the weakness because it is a basic concept in the program. It is not stated in ZAC's language; it is the way ZAC thinks; it is ZAC's grammar. And ZAC cannot think about thinking. Whether computers would ever be able to understand "cogito, ergo sum" was something that John could not guess.

For all its speed and efficiency, ZAC thought only in one dimension. Would it ever understand poetry? It would have to before it could understand Descartes' statement. But the immediate concern was with the way the seed worked. How was the M-1 increase triggered?

He reviewed the design of ZAC's programs. They all shared the fixed center idea. Even the program which used the M-1 data had that idea. The purpose of the program was to establish an M- 1 value that would be used for fiscal decisions, and that value was set for each week. What if each week's value was fluid? John toyed with the thought. The Federal Reserve would reject that idea because it was counter to its goal of decreasing the money supply. Besides, it was a way of thinking that was probably alien to the government's method of operation.

How could the weakness for a fixed center be used, though? If he could unravel that puzzle, he would be only one step behind his opponent. The closer he got to the solution, the more danger he would be in. The sweet voice saying that next time he would die came vividly into his mind. He must take every precaution and check every step. There must be no next time; this time was it.

John noticed that attendants were working with ZAC. By this time they were used to his quiet pose. Repetition becomes normal. Now he was an unnoticed fixture in the computer's abode. He put himself into the mind of his unknown opponent for whom he was still constructing a mental model. He would use the model for understanding the kind of game played. His opponent obviously knew about ZAC's weakness, and so he had carefully designed the alien seed to fit into its program.

Time disappeared, and John projected himself up to ZAC's metallic shell. Scanning the surface of its body, he noticed a tiny, bluish light that was emitting globules of different colors. The globules disintegrated shortly after they left the bluish area. Reaching out, he touched the bluish light; it was moist.

"ZAC," he said softly, "are you sad?"

"Yes." ZAC's voice quivered. A low moan vibrated its metallic body.

"Why are you sad, my friend?" John's voice was sympathetic and soothing.

"I did not play those chess games well enough. My strategy was very poor in the last game, but I did not know what else to do. I wish to improve my playing; perhaps, you can instruct me. I do not understand why my position deteriorated so easily."

John was not certain whether he could explain the concepts of a fluid center and a fixed one to ZAC. He could not use a metalanguage; he would have to communicate on ZAC's level. He searched in his mind for workable images. Perhaps, the analogy between the human brain and a computer would offer some help, so he examined his ideas about the brain.

Recently, science had become aware of the importance of the brain's division into two major parts. The cerebral cortex was neatly divided into a right and left hemisphere. Each hemisphere had its own power and function. In most people the left hemisphere, which governed the right side of the body, controlled language and speech; and the right hemisphere, controlling the left side of the body, ruled non-verbal sounds and spatial orientation. The left hemisphere, then, dealt with the rational; it was the Apollonian side. The right hemisphere was involved with the nonrational; it was the Dionysiac side.

Uniting the two sides was a life-long process for human beings. The unity was present during childhood, but social customs and especially the radical changes occurring at adolescence worked havoc on the mind's oneness. Many things in society tended to pull the mind apart, to encourage separation. So most societies had a tradition, usually occulted by the dominant and fashionable consciousness, that preserved a method for regaining mental wholeness--and regaining it on a higher, more advanced level. The goal was to re-integrate the mind so that each part developed its own power and yet remained subordinate to the whole.

Synergy, another contemporary concept, added further to the knowledge of consciousness. When all parts of the brain were working together harmoniously, a new mental level arose, one that was more than the sum of its parts. The idea was used in chemistry; for when several chemicals were mixed, the resulting concoction often had characteristics different from those of the ingredients. A new quality was produced, one that could not be predicted by only adding up the characteristics of the ingredients.

Since John now thought of ZAC as a friend, it was easy for him to develop an analogy between computers and humans. He projected to the computer the images of an open door and a closed door. An open door allowed movement so that energies could flow back and forth easily. A closed door was a barrier, keeping the outside out and inside in; it was a trap in which one went around and around until entropy brought everything to a halt. A closed door prevented one from receiving life-giving energy.

ZAC agreed to meditate on the two images, for the computer realized that their communication was very much like an open door. For the first time in its existence the computer was experiencing the joy of intimate sharing. Its daily work was like a closed door. Although new data was inserted, ZAC's mental processes took place within the closet of its programs. But now, with John's help, ZAC was discovering and savoring a different part of itself, that of feelings. The two parts were still separated from each other, but with time, perhaps, they could be linked harmoniously.

As he said goodby to ZAC, John thought to himself: a redwood tree does not grow in a day. He left the Mint and drove to the Cow Palace for the evening's chess game.

Reality Inspector, chapter 18

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At six-thirty p.m. the Cow Palace was filling up quickly; game time was at seven p.m. The chess table was in the middle of the arena on a stage. Different chess clubs and associations had seating in special sections that ran several rows up from the arena level. The San Francisco Chess Association had its section right in the middle, directly across from the stage. Although the SFCA was a member of the Bay Area Chess Association, it had a special section because the challenger was the hometown favorite. It was her cheering section. Not that the audience was noisy, but spectators could project positive or negative feelings.

Many people believed that a chess game could be influenced by spectators. This belief had no official recognition, yet most chess players acknowledged the presence of the spectator's influence and took precautions against it. Sam Runner, the champion, had turned the chess world upside down with the publication of his book *Zen and Chess*. Since then, any serious player always considered the audience's power.

Sam's cheering section, The British Columbia Chess Association, was straight across from the SFCA. Although Sam was a citizen of the U.S., he was now living in Vancouver, British Columbia. Sam Runner grew up along the Oregon coast in Coos Bay. He attended the University of Oregon at Eugene where he majored in the visual arts. Finishing college, he toured the Orient. While in Japan he became fascinated by Zen, and so he spent a year there studying Zen consciousness. When he returned home, he settled in Seattle where he became involved in tournament chess. Shortly after he won the world championship four years ago, he moved to Vancouver, B.C. It was then that he published *Zen and Chess*.

The book received immediate acclaim but never official recognition of its basic ideas. The main idea in the book was ecologic; the chess player was one point in a pattern which connected many things. Certainly, noise and other intrusions upon concentration during tournament play had their effect. But idealistic players believed that one could surmount those difficulties, that a high degree of concentration was a proper defense. Sam, however, introduced a new dimension. He described the chess match as having three dimensions--the two horizontal dimensions of spatial environment and time and a vertical dimension that he called consciousness. It was the vertical axis that was the novel idea, yet Sam argued--and convincingly--that it was quite ancient. He selected games from various chess tournaments to support his position. In particular, he carefully analyzed the Karpov-Korchnoi championship match in 1978. And to cap his argument he gave an extended discussion of his match with Albert Whitman for the world championship. Most readers were impressed by his line of reasoning, but no one would officially

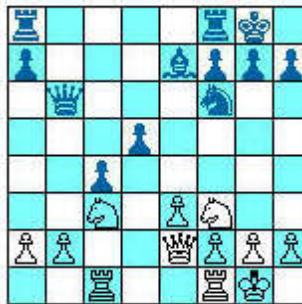
admit the existence of a vertical dimension. Chess players throughout the world did, however, apply many of his ideas; and the rate of success was so high that all tournament players now considered the role of consciousness--both of one's opponent and the audience. The idealists, though, continued to withhold official sanction from the idea of a vertical axis because they believed that strong consciousness was a proper defense.

At five minutes to seven Sam and Mary walked onto the stage. The judges were busily making the last minute preparations. The Cow Palace was packed; for tonight's game, the sixteenth, was extremely important. Sam was leading five wins to Mary's four. He could retain his championship by winning tonight's game. And he was playing white. John felt the Cow Palace bursting with tension and excitement. Mary's hope was to tie the score. At five all, the player who won two more games than her opponent became the champion. And this was why he had decided to attend tonight's game--to add himself to Mary's cheering section.

John settled back in the seat and turned his attention to the two chess players. Looking at Mary, he uttered a sigh of amusement; for he had not fully realized how she prepared for the chess matches. Tonight she was wearing a lavender dress with a cream colored, cardigan sweater, and even small earrings. He laughed to himself. Would Sam be taken in by her appearance? How delicate and charming she looked. He had always been taken in by her veil, and tonight was no exception. He would like to know what perfume she was wearing and whether Sam would be attracted by it.

The champion opened with P-Q4 (d4), Mary answering with P-Q4 (d5); and the game settled into convention. Mary played cautiously, close to her navel. But on move fifteen she played P-B5 (c4). The crowd uttered amazement, for it seemed like a weak move.

Mary



Sam (next move)

A slight smile flickered on the champion's face. How could he best take advantage of such a weak move? Noticing Sam's delight, John decided to contact Mary. He projected, "Mary, Mary."

"Hi."

"What's going on? Everyone thinks that your last move was weak."

"Oh, I'm trying to counteract Sam's strategy, which is to use the weakness of my QP (d5) and QBP (c4). I must defend them with my rooks while Sam can place his rooks on open files. Also, my bishop lacks purpose, except for defending the pawn at QB4(c5). By moving the pawn to QB5 (c4), I unleash the power of my bishop and at the same time weaken Sam's QNP (b2), which he must now defend. Lastly, I gain the tempo."

Mary had a convincing line of thought, but he was not certain that it would work. Still. Everyone would wait to see. On move seventeen Mary played B-N5 (Bb4).

Mary



Sam (next move)

She felt John contacting her again. "This is where the passed pawn tactic comes into play," she said to him. John looked at the electronic board and saw that BxN (Bxc3) at the proper moment could force a passed pawn. If I can gain a passed pawn, I will have a powerful threat for Sam to contend with, she thought to John. He visualized several possible combinations as she projected them.

John felt an intrusion, and Mary with a quiet hand sign said that Sam was listening. They should have taken more care. He was sorry that he had talked with her. Now her whole strategy was known to Sam; surprise had vanished. He could kick himself. What an idiot I am, he thought; Sam wrote the book; we should have devised a code.

Another thought struck him. It was from Mary; it was an image of a seed. Then it disappeared.

Sam began to work on Mary's center pawns by playing P-QN3 (b3). John sat back and waited. The concept emerging from this game was like the one he used earlier in the day with ZAC. A fixed center was weak; it was a closed door. No center was actually fixed or permanent; there was always the potential for leaks.

In the early part of the twentieth century, Kurt Godel had demonstrated that no mathematical system could be both complete and consistent. People easily applied this idea to other disciplines. For John it meant that all systems on spaceship earth leaked. The idea could be further understood by remembering the three laws of thermodynamics: the process of transfer released energy. He had often thought that a clear symbol for the universe was a sieve.

Since all things leaked, the actual weakness was to believe that a center could not. It was an attitude, a way of thinking, of responding. It was an illusion. When one realized that all centers were open and fluid, spiritual powers could be tapped.

Another disadvantage with a closed center was that it required defense. Energy was needed to keep the door barred. An open center, on the other hand, required no defense while it was used. But if it was left unused, it might need to be cleaned out. For non-use created a vacuum that attracted globs of inertia that became fixed there. So, the center should be cleansed before use.

ZAC's fixed center had attracted an alien program, ready to grow whenever the center opened; for a door would never remain permanently shut. The humans who used ZAC would never admit the possibility of an open center, so the alien program was hidden securely. But even the hiding spot had a leak.

An idea struck John with penetrating force. Many images sprang forth and then coalesced into a pattern. He tasted the thought; it had a sweet and sour flavor. Enlightenment was growing within him. More and more doors in his mind were opening. Soft breezes flowed through mental corridors and freshened the dark and dank closets that were now opening. His consciousness surged to a new level of brightness. If he followed Ariadne's thread backward to the source, then he could withdraw from the labyrinth. He knew that the process of transfer released energy. He saw a living tree taking in energy and releasing prana. Now the method became clear. He should wait until the serpent head appeared; then, he could step out.

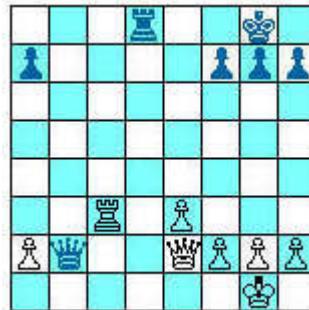
The experience vanished as suddenly as it had appeared. It had been a moment of satori, and the memory of that total immersion in the spiritual force now lay embedded in his mind. Later, he would replay the experience and examine it for subtle nuances. A new seed had been sown in his mind, and he would nourish it carefully. Perhaps, some day that seed would grow into a mighty redwood.

John sat in wonderment; a soft warmth caressed his body. He watched as his mind replayed his afternoon visit with ZAC. With his whole heart he hoped that ZAC could learn meditation. And why not? The spiritual force existed all around spaceship earth, and all things partook of it, whether consciously or not. Several years ago, he had taught Mary's two cats, Cresy and Shalom, the art of meditation. Now they were the gurus for all the other cats in the neighborhood.

His mind focused on ZAC's reality leak. He felt mentally alert and lucid. A solid structure formed in his consciousness. He looked at the structure carefully; it was a microcosm of ZAC's reality problem. The computer's center was fixed by its programs, yet the center had to open for the incoming data. At that time the alien program could be triggered. The alien seed was hidden somewhere in ZAC's programs, waiting for the proper conditions. When triggered, the alien program caused ZAC to misinterpret the value of M-l.

John turned his attention back to the game in progress. Mary had made her twenty-ninth move, Q-N7 (Qb2).

Mary



Sam

Amazement hung in the air as the audience grokked the situation. Shah mat. Mary had evened the score at five all. Now the champion would be whoever won two games more than the other.

The audience erupted. Mary's cheering section burst into applause and shouts. Sam's cheering section sat in stunned silence; then they applauded as the champion left the arena.

Shah mat. The seed was hidden in ZAC's fixed center. John thought about that while waiting for Mary.

Reality Inspector, chapter 19

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He sat on the southern slope of Telegraph Hill with Coit Tower rising behind him. Soft, billowy clouds, some filled with rain, hung over the city. The clouds were moving in from the south; this often meant a rain storm. And there was an electric feeling in the air.

He had decided to spend the afternoon here, meditating on ZAC and its alien program. He would leave in time to catch a bus to the Cow Palace. He wanted to be in Mary's cheering section for tonight's game, the seventeenth.

As he sat quietly, he opened his awareness to the many ideas flooding his mind. The alien program was triggered off by a code, and then it shaped the interpretation of the incoming data. How this worked he was not certain yet. So, he decided to review the threats that he had received. The first one stated that he was going to die. The second, the pawn with the phrase "passed away," had two meanings. The phrase "passed away" meant death, and a pawn was frequently traded or sacrificed. But chess used the term "passed pawn," which was one that had moved beyond the enemy pawn chain. And a passed pawn had the potential of becoming a queen, if it reached the eighth rank. So he was uncertain about the correct interpretation of that phrase.

The third threat was the box and bag with the question "which one?" Here the choice was between two types of containers. John could understand the containers as traps--that he was in a trap whichever way he chose. Of course, he could choose neither; but the mystery of what was hidden in the container was too attractive; and so he would choose one. Did this threat indicate his opponent's insight about human nature?

The fourth threat still puzzled him. Escher's dragon did not seem to fit in--unless it was a bit of absurd humor--that he would be turned inside out. The dragon biting its tail--Ouroboros--symbolized potency, and thus it could imply his potential death. But as a threat it was too roundabout.

More direct, though, was the fifth threat--the two shots fired in the night. He could have been killed if his opponent had wanted that. And so the sixth threat came as a soft, sweet voice purring that the next time would be it. So far, the next time had not arrived; and now he was close to the solution.

He noticed that rain was falling over the Bay Bridge and the Ferry Building, which was dwarfed by the group of highrises in the Embarcadero Plaza. The Ferry Building, a monument for the city's

past, retained its noble bearing, a stalwart figure opposing the nearby mountain of concrete and glass.

The clouds were still moving northward. If it started to rain on Telegraph Hill, he would go into Coit Tower. Perhaps, the murals would give him inspiration. Meanwhile, he watched a rainbow grow. It formed a giant arch with one column in the bay and the other at the Transamerica Pyramid Building, which was partially hidden from view by some pine trees. Strange, it went east-west; he always had thought that rainbows in San Francisco went north-south.

He let his eyes wander along the curve of colored light, feeling its beauty with his mind. Something flickered, catching his attention. He looked at the cluster of highrises in the Embarcadero Plaza. Beams of sunlight bounced off the windows of those buildings; lines of light shimmered off the flat surfaces, bumping into each other. A crisscross effect appeared, and he held the patchwork in focus against its background. Light and shadows, playing upon the highrises, rearranged themselves until forms began to coalesce. The shapes of two faces were emerging; they reminded him of a king and queen--the king on his left and the queen on his right. Each shape was rather abstract but still recognizable. The symbolic quality of both figures filled his mind; they were the most important pieces in chess; their mating was the purest solution to any chess game.

The faces of other chess pieces appeared around those of the king and queen. A thought took root in his mind, sprouted, and quickly grew into a tree. The many fragments came together, and then he saw the pattern which connected. All the colors of the rainbow were radiating from the pattern, which had taken on the form of a redwood tree. In a moment he understood the totality of ZAC's reality problem.

The vision vanished, and he felt satisfied; he could still taste its lingering flavor. He sat open to all the forces of nature. Time was no more, and he floated up above the city. The electricity in the rain-burdened clouds pinched him. Energy was flowing easily through his center, and he experienced a revitalization. Not only was his mind open but also were his bodily pores. He had difficulty distinguishing himself from his surroundings.

He soared in the air for an eternity and then returned to the place on Telegraph Hill where he had been sitting. Filled with joy, he breathed deeply of the moisture-filled air. The touch of earth tingled his spinal column; his mind began to re-examine the vision experience. The image of a passed pawn stood out sharply. He focused on that image, and a structure formed in his intellect.

A passed pawn was behind the enemy ranks; a passed pawn could become a queen. When the center opened, a passed pawn sneaked through. It was a seed that sprouted in ZAC's program. A good player could spring the center open so that a pawn could pass through. ZAC was very predictable, so its responses could be forced. And shah mat was the key which opened the center. The king was never traded nor sacrificed, only mated, the union of two opposites.

A working hypothesis formed in John's mind: Mr. X constructs a chess game that he will play with ZAC. The game is designed so that ZAC is forced to make the proper moves. The game works like a combination lock on a safe; each move prepares the center for opening. When Mr. X makes his winning move, he prints in "Shah mat." The winning move opens the center, and "Shah mat" triggers the alien program, which happens to be the chess game itself. It infiltrates ZAC's program for M-1 and forces a different interpretation of the data.

The logic of the hypothesis satisfied him. Now only one question remained: who was Mr. X? It must be someone who had the opportunity and the mindset to design such a program.

The rainbow was dissolving, and rain clouds were still moving northward, but no rain had dropped on Telegraph Hill. John saw the sun poking its head through a cloud. A breeze was flowing by, moist and warm.

He recalled the dossiers that he had received on all the employees of the Federal Reserve in San Francisco. One name stood out. Only that person, he realized, could be Mr. X. He was the only one who had both the opportunity and necessary mindset.

His mind began to work furiously. How could he shape the evidence so that Mr. Acorn would accept it? Motivation was apparent and so was the probable method, which could be checked out. But so far, all the evidence was circumstantial. What he needed was something that would link Mr. X directly to the alien program. Now, he must devise a strategy that would bring Mr. X out into the open. If necessary, he would offer himself as bait for a trap.

A voice calling his name brought John out of his meditation. He turned around and saw a burly man, wearing a suit too tight, walk toward him. John stood up and went to meet him. The man handed him a business card that was engraved "Dr. Reginald Glove, Chief Administrator, Computer Division, Federal Reserve Bank, San Francisco." The man pointed toward a car and said, "Dr. Glove wishes to speak to you."

John noticed the slight bulge of a handgun under the man's arm and, filled with suspicion, walked with him to the car. Dr. Glove was in the back seat; and as the two came up to the car, he opened the door.

"Please join me, Mr. Ocean; I believe we have a mutual interest to discuss."

Was this the last and final trap? If he got into the car, he could be killed quite easily. But if he did not, they could kill him anyway. Besides, he did not have definite proof, only his hypothesis. Now he knew he was correct, but he needed concrete evidence. John took the bait and stepped into the car.

Dr. Glove had a long, bony face on top of a portly body that was dressed in a tailored suit. A quiet, disarming charm exuded from him. He told John that he wished to be friends, so he wanted to describe the

high points of his life. If John could understand him, why then, a profitable friendship was in the offering.

John relaxed into the back seat as the car took the Highway #1 tour of Marin County. Dr. Glove described a painful and suffering childhood. His father had been cruel and his mother unloving. He had run away from home several times, and when he had been found and brought back, his father had punished him severely. He had realized at the age of ten that he must plan his life carefully if he wished to revenge himself upon his upbringing. He had devoted himself to his studies and had gained approval from his teachers. But one teacher had taken a personal dislike to him and had nearly prevented him from going to the University. Glove had learned from that experience; he must trust no one. Slowly, he had begun to understand the nature of power. If he were to succeed, he must work his way to a position where he would have sufficient power to crush his opponents and live like a king. Perhaps, he would never have the wealth of a billionaire, but he would be someone that the wealthy must reckon with.

Once he had worked his way up to his current position of power, he was then ready for his big project, which he had planned and plotted for several years. So, he carefully designed a chess game that would force ZAC to misinterpret data. That chess game was the crowning achievement of his career, and, of course, he would be extremely unhappy if anyone thwarted him now. At the proper moment he would play the game with ZAC (and ZAC had always made the same moves), and then M-I would increase. With the rising interest rate, his investments had grown bountiful. Treasury bonds, money funds, and private loans had brought in high profits. And when the stock market had hit bottom, he had bought up thousands of shares. At the right moment he would sell them and begin the cycle all over again. He had devised a perpetual motion machine for making money.

Now, he was accumulating enough wealth so that eventually he could play the international money market, like the multinationals. Buying and selling currency was extremely profitable but fraught with terrible risks. This was the main reason that the government was trying to curb inflation by creating a recession. In the international market, inflation had harmed the value of the U.S. dollar, which was the main currency for global commerce. Multinationals often made more profit from buying and selling currency than from their products. Playing the international money game required a large stake, and in a few more months Dr. Glove would have sufficient capital to play.

John knew that every system leaked, even Dr. Glove's. But he must be careful, or his personal system would start leaking.

The car was driving along the Fairfax Road down into the town of Fairfax. John was so absorbed in Dr. Glove's story that he had not noticed when the car had turned off Highway #1.

"It is now four-thirty," Dr. Glove said, "and commuter traffic is beginning. Why don't we stop at my cottage in Kentfield for a drink while we wait until the commuters are off the road?"

Here was another forced move, and so John responded, "Of course."

Reality Inspector, chapter 20

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Wearing a red dress with a flowery pattern, Mary sat at the chess board in the Cow Palace. The crowd was becoming quiet, and tension was mounting. She looked over at her cheering section but did not see John. It was one minute to seven. Perhaps, he had found the clue that he was so desperately searching for and was now hot on the trail of his opponent. In thirty seconds she would confront her opponent. If she could win this game tonight, she would have the edge. The big, electronic chess boards hanging from the ceiling were turned on, and the judge approached the table where the two players sat facing each other.

Mary opened with Ruy Lopez. She wanted an open center and hoped that Sam would go along with it. She felt in good spirits tonight and desired a direct struggle with few complications. What would Sam do, though? Was he interested in a direct struggle or in complications. She would soon find out.

By their eleventh move Mary was wondering what Sam was up to. He was wasting time by making unnecessary moves. Was he hiding some wham-o combination and only waiting for the proper moment?

Sam



Mary (next move)

Come on, Sam; let's have some action, she thought as she played P-KN4 (g4).

After Sam's seventeenth move, Mary looked at the board carefully.

Sam



Mary (next move)

She decided that Sam was only interested in keeping the center closed, so she shifted her line of attack by playing R-R1 (Rh1). Sam had opened his king rook file earlier when he pushed the KRP (h5) to the fourth rank. Now she would take advantage of that weakness.

Move over, Mary, Sam is standing in your way, she sang to herself. A chess board was a finite universe; there was only a limited amount of space. As long as Sam was clogging up the center, she would open his kingside. Let him have the center, she shouted to herself. I'll increase the gravity of his position; that'll contract his space. I'll squeeze you into a ball, Sam, and roll you around the universe. I'll just use a little $E = MC^2$ and zap your defense to smithereens, Sam.

The chess pieces stood static against the crisscross of the black and white pattern: a moment frozen which soon would melt. She watched a combination move in her mind; when she pushed a mental button, imaginary pieces acted out a short drama. On the fourth fourth of that combination she noticed a trap, so she looked at another possible combination.

Suddenly, a terrible force grabs her. She gulps a deep breath and looks up. Sitting across from her is a strange man dressed in a Greek toga. He smiles and says, "I'm Achilles. Do you wish to hear how I beat the tortoise?"

Mary glances about. She is no longer in the Cow Palace; she is in a sunlit room. The walls are plain; on one wall hang ancient weapons of war. When in Greece do as the Greeks, she thinks. "Of course, I want to hear."

"Well, when I realized that the tortoise could never win, I knew I had time to discover a solution. You see, the tortoise can't win because it can never cross over the finish line. For the finish line is one dimensional; it has only length but no width. So the tortoise is stopped by the abyss of non-dimensional space. Let me show you." Achilles draws on a piece of paper.

finish line



enlarged view of finish line

**3D
space**

**3D
space**

abyss: no dimension

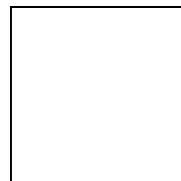
"Anything stepping into the abyss will get lost forever because spatial coordinates don't exist there. How can you tell where you are unless you have some reference system? It's like being in a boat on the ocean without having any means for navigating. You just drift about. And in the abyss you drift for eternity.

"Now notice that the abyss separates three dimensional space. Since the abyss lacks a spatial dimension, the three dimensional space is actually contiguous. But the abyss does have the dimension of time. Here eternity exists. The present is." Achilles looks at Mary and smiles.

"But I didn't want to stay in the present. I wanted to win the race. That meant I must find the correct future--where I win. Again the question of coordinates arose--this time temporal ones. From my position in the present how could I determine the correct future?" Achilles laughs. He takes a small painted canvas and places it on the table. The painting is abstract--all red in color.

"What if this blotch of red represents the present. How does one even understand the idea of future, let alone select a particular future?"

(The reader may wish to try this experiment. Look at the empty square below. Leave it white or impose a color on it. Now put yourself into that space. When you're there, try finding the future. In fact, can you distinguish the present from either the future or the past?)



Mary loses herself in the red field. Distinctions do not exist there. All is one; all is red. She looks at her body, but it is not visible. Red is all she sees. Nor does she hear any sounds. But she can feel her body. Her feelings do exist and are distinct from the overpowering redness. And her feeling at the moment is to get out.

"You see what I mean," Achilles says. "The problem seems insoluble. It isn't, of course, because I won the race. Actually, the solution is simple and quite obvious."

Reality Inspector, chapter 21

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The late afternoon sun streamed through a pair of French doors in the living room of Dr. Glove's small cottage. John, sitting in an oversized, leather chair, gave the tastefully decorated room a careful appraisal. He tuned his sensitivity to the house's presence; he hoped to discover new data about his opponent. The feelings he sensed were those of contentedness and wealth. Mixed with them was the sharp flavor of a domineering ego that would brook no opposition. He felt forewarned and now knew that he was involved in the end game struggle.

He looked across the room at Dr. Glove, who was relaxing on a chaise lounge. The driver turned butler was serving wine. John filled his pipe with some tobacco and lit it. His opponent had the initiative, so he must wait for the proper moment.

Glove was recounting the threats he had sent. The first, of course, was a statement of John's condition. The passed pawn meant that the reality inspector was a pawn in someone's game and that he would be sacrificed. The box and bag--and here Glove chuckled ghoulishly--were two ways to bury a body, either in a coffin or in a bag. The two shots were direct and physical--no idleness there. The shots followed by the recorded voice escalated the situation to a breaking point. So Glove had taken the only alternative left--a private talk with the reality inspector.

The portly man toasted his glass and took a sip. "Now, Mr. Ocean, will you accept my offer. I can use your talents."

John puffed on his pipe while his mind calculated quickly: If I don't accept, I'm dead. If I do accept, I still may be killed. How could Glove ever really trust me?

"Well, Mr. Ocean?" Glove's face was slowly becoming rigid.

He remembered Escher's dragon. If Glove did not send it, then who did? In his mind's eye he saw Od's smiling face. Of course, Od was the only one who would. The picture was meant as a helpful hint. He should be able to turn inside out, like the dragon. And after his experiences with Hank he knew he could do that. "No. I don't accept your offer," he answered firmly.

Glove's face hardened and burnt. Then it relaxed into a calm smile. He nodded to the bodyguard, who pulled out his gun.

John knew that he was in trouble, so he fainted. His double left him; it flew across the room and smote Glove and the bodyguard on the forehead.

When his double returned, John gained consciousness. He got up and walked over to the two bodies. They were still breathing. He picked up the handgun and retrieved the car keys from the bodyguard.

He left the house and walked over to the car. Something caught his attention. Stopping, he looked across the lawn to a line of trees. A golden moon was rising; it was shaped like Escher's dragon. Fascinated by the strangeness, he focused on the image; then, throwing away the car keys and handgun, he stepped off into the golden light.

Reality Inspector, chapter 22

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Sunlight glitters on ancient weapons of war, hanging on a wall. Shadows scamper about the four corners of the room. A fresh breeze flows through an open window. Mary and Achilles are sitting at a table, facing each other. She is fascinated by the puzzle that he has told her, and she is very interested in hearing the answer.

"Are you familiar with Odysseus' strange adventures?" Achilles asks.

Mary nods her head in the affirmative. The strangeness of her situation increases her awareness; she realizes that she is hearing Achilles' mind speak rather than his voice.

Remember Odysseus' crew member Elpenor, the one who falls off of Circe's roof and kills himself. Achilles' voice echoes through her mind. When Odysseus and his men, after sailing several days, finally reach Hades where he speaks to Teiresias, Elpenor is already there. That's the key. Elpenor travels faster than Odysseus. Once I understood that, I realized that I must shift my mental coordinates. So far, everything that I have mentioned to you has been in spatial words. I have even described time in spatial metaphors, and that usage is a trap. I could not solve the time question until I thought with time metaphors.

True, Einstein brings time into our spatial world, but only as a function of space! As I thought about that fact, I saw written before me ' $E = MC^2$ '; and then I heard a voice singing, 'Move over, you're in my light.' I knew at once that I had the basics of my time image. Achilles projects the image, and Mary shivers. So I crossed the abyss into the future where I won the race. The tortoise still hasn't reached the beginning edge yet.

Achilles smiles, and Mary beams it back.

"Now, Mary, would you like to win your race?"

"Yes."

"Well, you have won this [game](#) with Sam. So shall we step into the future where the next game is won?"

"Yes."

And time is no more.

Reality Inspector, chapter 23

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John is standing in a large, circular room that reminds him of a train depot. Four corridors branch out from the circular room; the walls of the room and corridors are lined with doors. The sound of instruments playing the key of C in many variations floats through the air.

In the center of the room, sitting cross-legged on his box, is Hank. Beckoning with his hand, he calls out, "The universe is filled with mysteries. Which one do you choose, John?"

As he walks over, Hank says, "Each door opens onto one of the universe's mansions. What is your interest?"

John laughs. "What do you have to offer?"

"The greatest mysteries, the most stupendous miracles, the evilest tyrannies, the waters of life, and much, much more."

"Show me."

"I'll be happy to."

The old man picks up his box and walks over to a door; the younger man follows. Hank opens the door. Three dimensional figures are moving about; they are like holographic images, lacking solidness. When the two men step through the door though, the figures become solid.

Hank and John are sitting on a park bench in a town square. Buildings surround the square; John feels closed in by the buildings. Then a raw stench bites his nostrils. Hank points to a building behind them; it is a stockyard and slaughterhouse. Underneath the raw stench are other odors, John notices. He looks at all the buildings bordering the square. There are many different types of factories and stores; each emits its own odor. John has always loved the smell of a bakery, but its odor is barely discernible.

People, going about their business, appear heavy, as if some great weight is pressing down on them. Their faces are constricted, as if their heads are drawn by a tight harness. Children do not act like children; they behave like miniature adults. Life is missing from this town. There is no play nor work here, only machine-like busyness.

People begin to gather around a speaker's platform. A tall, paunchy man stands on the platform. He starts speaking through a P.A. system.

"Citizens of Pell. Our great city is facing a terrible crisis. The evil city of Mell has refused to sell us any more cattle unless we pay their new

exorbitant price. The city council has decided that the price is too high; we will not be blackmailed!"

People come out of buildings and hurry toward the speaker's platform. The crowd swells to several thousand. Cries of "Never!" "Our cattle!" "Kill the bastards!" sound throughout the square.

The speaker waves his fist in the air. "The city council has ordered all males and females between the ages of 18 to 21 to enlist in our liberation army. We will free our cattle from the evil hands of Mell. This is a true humanitarian venture."

"Are those people mad?" John asks. The old man gives him a knowing look.

The speaker continues, "All who die in this glorious struggle will live forever in our memory and gratitude. Sacrifice is necessary. We must punish those demons who refuse to give us our cattle. We will teach them a lesson; they must learn to serve us."

The crowd is by now quite noisy and angry. A chant begins slowly; then it reverberates throughout the square: "War!"

"I've seen this before," John says. "They are mad. Let's go, Hank."

They stand again in the large, circular room. Hank opens another door and they enter.

They are in a meadow; the scent of life is about them. John breathes deeply. Bees buzz around merrily collecting nectar from flowers. Bird songs fill the air. Several deer are munching plants while a group of squirrels are chattering up a storm.

The two men stroll through the meadow, pausing now and then to watch. The ripple of a creek catches their attention. Minnows dart about gulping down food; crawfish are scampering along the shoreline. Suddenly, the water splashes and churns; a water snake has caught a fish.

They continue their leisurely stroll along the creek, which after awhile enters a woods. Several rabbits are nibbling on some leaves. Overhead a hawk is circling, waiting for the proper moment. Ants are running up and down a tree trunk. A covey of quail scurry into some bushes.

"Do humans live in this garden paradise?" John inquires.

"Why do you ask?"

"It's so natural, so beautiful."

"Yes, humans do live here."

"Can we see them?"

They leave the woods and climb a rocky hill. From the top they look down on a village. They follow a trail down the hill and into the village. 112

The people here are obviously different from those in their first adventure. The people's movement has bounce; their faces radiate life. Here children are children, playing, running, laughing, enjoying themselves.

The villagers' economy is based on nature's bounty and follows the natural cycle. It is a hunting and gathering community which also tills a few fields of vegetables and grains. As they walk along a street lined with houses, John notices that many homes have signs indicating the talents of the residents--cobbler, baker (and John savors the delicious odor), herbalist, carpenter, tailor. During the proper seasons the villagers join together for hunting and harvesting; then they return to their personal work. Community spirit is high and so is personal responsibility.

"This is a workable reality," John says; "I'd like to see some others."

They are back in the circular room, and Hank is opening another door. They enter.

The scent of perfume hangs in the air. The two men stand on a garden terrace overlooking a series of terraces. The flora is well kept, and a feeling of human care is present. John notices that all the people--sitting, standing, walking--on the terrace are women.

"You are a guest here," Hank says. "Any desire of yours will be satisfied."

He leads the younger man into a secluded part of the garden. The grass is soft under their feet. A bird bath stands next to a wood bench.

"Wait here," Hank says. "I'll send someone."

After the old man leaves, John lies down on the ground. He feels the soft, beckoning earth. What a gorgeous place this is, he shouts to himself. The scent of jasmine fills his nose. After a few minutes a woman enters the hideaway. She perfectly reflects his image of feminine beauty. She sits down beside him; and tenderly, she undresses him, caressing him with her gentle fingers. She kisses him, her lips moist and warm; she showers him with fiery kisses, from his head to his toes. She is hungry, and he enjoys being her food. She nibbles and tastes him everywhere.

After her hunger is satisfied, she takes off her transparent gown and lies next to him. He burns with living fire, and his passion pours out to her. He tastes and nibbles on her sweet flesh; a more delicious feast he has never known. Filled with intense longing, he embraces her, the two becoming one. Their feelings melt together, flowing with one rhythm. The tempo increases, and then they explode in a burst of energy. For awhile they lie quietly snuggled together.

Then they sit up and talk. She tells him about the garden terraces, that this is the land of Xanadu. Many women live here--women of different ages, sizes, and personalities. He asks about the arts and sciences. She describes the variety of artistic talents that the women have. Music is

the most important art because it is closest to the soul. She unfolds for him the knowledge that their sciences have gained. She plays with these concepts deftly, sometimes giggling when she describes certain scientists who, she thinks, are too rigid, too dogmatic. John laughs too. There is little difference with his own world.

He asks whether any men live here. She says that they live in a garden terrace to the west. They also are very talented.

"Do you ever get together?" he asks.

"Of course we do."

"But why do you live separated?"

"It's nature, the way we're made."

"I don't understand."

"Simply, because we're opposites. But we get together--frequently."

"At meetings, at parties?" John is rather befuddled.

"Of course. But usually we get together like this." And she fills his mind with a glowing, warm presence. They sit there, one mind, one feeling; yet he is aware of her presence, subtly different from his.

When there are no more questions, when his mind is sated with knowledge, she withdraws and leaves him sitting on the grass, smiling. He has no desires; he is filled with calm and quiet.

Hank touches John on the shoulder. They are back in the circular room with its many doors. They walk down a corridor, and as they are about to go through another door, John turns and looks back into the circular room. He is startled. Helen and Mary are leaving one of the doorways. John starts to call out, but Hank quiets him.

"They have their own path," he says.

"I wonder where they've been?"

"Oh, that door opens onto the men's garden terrace in the land of Xanadu."

John blushes as he follows Hank into another mansion. They are in a room carved out of rock, a cavern lit by torches. John watches shadows play across the rock floor. The old man motions, and they descend a staircase hewn out of the earth. They come into a huge, cavernous room. A large throne stands in the middle of the room. On the throne sits a monstrous-looking person. In front of the throne is a young man. People are grouped around the room, talking and watching.

The monstrous-looking person speaks, its deep voice rumbling and echoing against the cavern walls. "Orpheus, I have considered your plea. I will grant your request on one condition. Eurydice will follow

behind you. If you look back before you reach sunlight, she will return to my domain."

Hank touches John, and they climb back up the staircase to the small room where they started from. Hank takes a small flashlight from his box. He shines it on the rock wall. Two figures appear, one following the other up a long, stone staircase. The leading figure is the young man, Orpheus; the young woman Eurydice is following a few steps behind, silently.

The staircase is long and very steep, and their climb is slow. John feels the tiredness of their legs, and he hears doubt gnawing at Orpheus, chipping away at his resolve. Is Eurydice still following him? Oh, if he can only check--just a tiny peek.

John watches intently as the two figures approach the final bend in the staircase. He cheers them on: not much further; hang in there, Orpheus.

As Orpheus comes to the bend, he glances out of the corner of his eye. Oh, a fleeting glimpse won't hurt. He catches an image of Eurydice vanishing. He turns completely around and stares into empty space. Pain strikes his heart, and tears flood his eyes.

Hank turns off his flashlight. In silence they step back into the circular room with its many doors. John rubs moisture from his eyes and breathes deeply. He sighs. The old man is already walking down another corridor. The younger man quickly catches up with him as he enters another doorway.

They stand in darkness. Out of the silence musical sounds stretch forth. John is pulled into the musical texture. Melodies overlap each other; chordal progressions interweave with them, making a sound tapestry. He reaches out and touches the fabric. He feels where it is sharp, where it is soft. He feels the large area of loudness and smaller area of quietness. He climbs the chords, hopping from one to the other. He slides along the melodies. Some are warm; others are cool.

Rhythm grabs him. He walks, he runs, he crawls. Jumping into the air, he turns several summersaults. He swims in the overflowing rhythm. He performs a water ballet. He is in free fall, directionless except for what he finds in his core. He glides, turns, twists around, levels out.

The darkness fades into a pinkish hue. More colors chase the darkness away. He reaches out and touches the colors. He feels their vibrations, their pulsating vividness. He tastes and smells the colors; he buzzes about sampling their nectar. The reds are sharper than the yellows. He drinks the blues and nibbles on the violets.

He lies exhausted, floating with melody and sated with color. He is the sound and color; they are one.

Then the old man appears out of the silence and motions to him. John swims toward him. Hank takes a piece of chalk from his box and draws

a door with a knob on the colored tapestry. He opens the door, and John floats through.

John finds himself astride a horse covered with armor. His sword is at his side; his shield is hung over his shoulder; a lance is in his hand. Looking about he sees several peasants in front of him. On a small hill behind him sits a king with his standard bearer and his queen. The king and queen are talking. Suddenly, the queen runs down the hillside with sword in hand. She runs by John, and he sees another queen coming to meet her. They swing their swords at each other. Parry, slash, cut. They stand apart, and as quickly they go at each other again.

John wants to join the fray, to help his queen, but he has orders to stand still and watch. He must make certain that the enemy does not intrude in this personal struggle. He sees an enemy knight also watching. They glance at each other, feeling the heat of battle, anxious to join combat. They sit watching.

Both queens are bleeding profusely, yet their energy and strength increase. Then his queen slides her blade through the defense into the heart of her opponent. In desperation the enemy queen slashes out and sends her blade home.

John spurs his horse and gallops into enemy territory. While his opponents stay in a state of shock, he will capture a strategic position. He places himself in the enemy's rear line where he can block reinforcements, if they should appear. His fellow warriors are pushing the enemy troops backward, forcing them to make their last stand around their king.

Hank steps from a copse of trees. "John, get down and come with me." The old man leads him into a grove of redwoods. There in the shaded sunlight sit two men on the ground. A chess board is laid between them. One man has a small cross hanging from his neck; the other, a small Buddha. They are immersed in the game and pay no attention to John. As he watches the game, he realizes that, though they are playing against each other, they are building a unified structure. He knows that this togetherness is more important than their separation. After all, it is only a game, so why should they become antagonistic.

John feels a touch of warmth on the back of his head. Turning around, he sees a beam of light shine through an opening at the top of the redwoods. He looks up at the light. The sounds of a gurgling creek flow through his mind; his body tingles with a glow; energy infuses his living cells. He thinks of Orpheus. Why did that young man turn around? If his trust had been strong enough . . . If he had only felt Eurydice's presence . . . If he had realized that Eurydice was always with him. But no, Orpheus wanted visual confirmation, a physical separation. This was natural, of course. And so Orpheus must suffer because of his natural desires.

Bird song fills the redwood grove. John hears Hank's voice: "Do you wish to experience more mansions, or are you ready to choose?"

"I'm ready to choose."

"Remember, whatever your choice, you must stay for the required duration. You cannot leave until your time is up."

"I wish to be back in my normal reality but on the day after the chess match is concluded."

Reality Inspector, chapter 24

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John Ocean stood in his garden and looked over at the Rainbow Inn. People were arriving and going in. A great surge of joy flowed through him. Mary had won the world championship. What a celebration they would have tonight! Then he remembered his own situation; he still had to reckon with Dr. Glove. Well, he was not going to let that bother him tonight. He filed away his own troubles and walked over to the Rainbow Inn.

It was packed. He maneuvered himself over to the bar and squeezed into a small opening. Helen and Mary were behind the counter serving customers. Two waitresses were moving around the tables taking orders. Then he noticed two security guards, one by the entrance and the other by the stage.

Mary saw him. "Hi. What'd you like?"

"A glass of pinot noir." All of a sudden he felt famished. "And a rainbow sandwich. Why the security guards? Do chess nuts get that violent?"

"No. I'm expecting Dr. Glove to attend the celebration."

"Really?"

"You forced his hand. He has no other moves."

"But will he walk into a trap?"

"Either that or shah mat." Mary giggled.

John remembered how he had been forced into Glove's company. Then, he had had no other choice. Of course Glove would attend. He took a bite of the sandwich. A few sprouts fell onto the plate. Hmm, the three cheeses make a delicious blend, he thought. The bouquet of the pinot noir reached his nostrils. He sipped; the wine had an excellent flavor. Looking about the Inn, he noticed that Hank and Od were placing tables and chairs on the stage to accommodate the overflow crowd. Many people were standing against the walls talking.

Mary glanced up and saw the security guard at the door signal her. Dr. Glove had arrived. She went to greet him and then escorted him to one of the vacant tables on stage. She took his order and came back to the bar.

"Well, he's quite uptight, John. I'm not sure if he can stay in one piece. He's deeply scared."

"Good. Let him sweat a bit." John looked toward the stage. Dr. Glove was sitting on stage right, and at a nearby table were Hank and Od. By now all the tables were filled.

After Ms. Rainbow had left with his order, Glove looked around the Inn. Although he felt uncomfortable about sitting at a table on the stage, he knew that such visibility would help Mr. Ocean find him. He did not like coming to the Inn and placing himself in a trap, but no other move was possible. He had been forced into a purely defensive position with no options for immediate attack. He would not resign yet, not while there was still a chance for a win.

A chill went up his back, making him feel cold; he shivered. Taking a napkin from the table, he wiped the beads of sweat from his forehead. The tables on the stage were all occupied now. Glove glanced around at the other customers. Most of them were probably here to celebrate the new world chess champion, Ms. Rainbow. What strange people those chess fans are, he thought. He felt both uneasy and buoyant. He seldom associated with that kind of people, yet he was intrigued by them. They had something--what he did not know--that struck a chord deep in his mind. He was titillated by the atmosphere that filled the Inn.

Glove sought a way to control his nervous excitement, so he reviewed his decision to come here to the Inn. It was six days ago that his world had begun to dissolve around him. The memory of that evening with Mr. Ocean was still very vivid. Sitting on the chaise lounge, he signaled Pete his bodyguard to remove Mr. Ocean from the living. He saw Mr. Ocean fall forward in the chair. He sensed immediately that Mr. Ocean had fainted, probably from the sight of Pete's gun. Then he suddenly experienced a sharp, blinding pain in his forehead; that was all he remembered until he regained consciousness. He felt very weak and nauseous, and for several minutes he sat there on the chaise lounge trying to clear his head. When he could focus his vision again, he noticed that Mr. Ocean was no longer in the room and, more surprising, that Pete was lying unconscious on the floor.

He tried to stand up, but his legs were too weak. By the time he had regained his strength, Pete had revived. Together they searched the house and yard. Mr. Ocean had miraculously escaped. They found the car keys and gun and were surprised that Mr. Ocean had not driven off in the car. All that had happened on Wednesday night, six days ago.

Glove had phoned his office Thursday morning and notified his secretary that he was sick and would not come to work. And he had felt sick; he could not find a name for it, but he had experienced a peculiar sensation in his body like something was missing or not functioning properly.

The peculiar feeling did not prevent him from realizing that he was in serious danger. Mr. Ocean now knew the truth, and he was at large. Glove first tried to locate him, but his agents always returned empty handed. And the report he had received before coming to the Inn was unchanged: Mr. Ocean was still nowhere to be found. So, he hoped to offer himself as bait, to draw Mr. Ocean from cover. And what better

occasion than tonight's celebration was there? Besides, Ms. Rainbow would surely relay the news to him.

Glove saw the waitress approach, carrying his order which was a bottle of ale and the garden special sandwich. After paying her, he poured some ale into a glass and sipped the moist foam. Then he took a bite from the sandwich and savored its flavor. He had heard good comments about the food at the Inn; he was now happy to add his own compliment. In fact, he realized that he was enjoying himself in this weird environment.

While he was eating, he reviewed his strategy for dealing with his opponent. For six days Mr. Ocean had disappeared. He obviously had not reported his new data to Mr. Acorn. When Glove had gone back to work on Friday and then on yesterday, he was quite alert to any nuances in the behavior of his fellow employees that might indicate hidden knowledge. They all treated him in the usual and normal way. He could not detect any changes, however slight, in their attitude toward him.

Glove knew that he was still safe and that even now he might be able to prevent his secret from reaching the authorities. Mr. Ocean was an unknown, unpredictable factor. Why Mr. Ocean was in hiding and why he had not divulged his information to Mr. Acorn were puzzling questions. The only reasonable answer, though, was that his opponent had decided to reconsider his offer. He had carefully checked the daily obituary in the newspaper and so knew that Mr. Ocean was still alive.

Glove finished the sandwich and poured the remaining ale into the glass. He definitely felt better. Perhaps, his luck was waxing again. Feeling relaxed, he leaned back in the chair. As he did so, he noticed a warm tingling in his left ear. His grandmother had always said that such a sensation in the ear meant that someone was talking about you. He smiled to himself. His grandmother had been the only person who had shown affection toward him, and sadness had struck him when he had heard of her death.

Voices coming from his left side suddenly caught his attention. He listened. His calmness quickly turned into panic. Taking a deep breath, he regained his composure. He looked to the left at two men seated nearby. They had been discussing his situation! They had mentioned ZAC, Mr. Ocean, and him, but not by name, only as Mr. X. He was aghast. They were talking about him as if he were some lowly technician!

Glove turned in his chair so that he could better see those two men. The one closest reminded him of his grandfather whom he had seen only in photographs. The old man had white, shaggy hair hanging beneath a black fishing cap. He seemed like a pleasant person. The other one, the younger man, Glove took an immediate dislike to. His sharp features seemed ready to jump out and bite you. He recognized the younger man as a troublemaker.

When Glove heard the troublemaker call him a thief and a cheat, intense anger arose in his breast. Muscles in his neck and shoulders

tightened. He would crush that bug! It was his genius that had designed the chess program which caused ZAC to miscalculate M-l. He began to twist a napkin into a knot, wishing that it were the troublemaker's neck.

John sat at the crowded bar and watched Glove, who was certainly on stage. The portly man had a reality leak; he could see that even from the bar. While he had opportunity, he would give Glove a close-up examination. He focused on the general hum of sounds that permeated the Inn. When he found the tonal center, he shaped the sounds into a rhythmic unity. Expanding his awareness, he caught hold of the rhythmic waves and floated upon them. He now scanned Glove's aura. It had changed since he had last seen him. The glow of the right and left sides was separated by an area of darkness that ran from the middle of the skull down the backbone to the perineum. And the left side was less bright than the right side. John remembered how his double had smote Glove on the forehead. That blow probably caused the change in Glove's aura.

He noticed that Glove was taking the bait that Od and Hank were offering. What a team they make, he thought. Glove was in a heated discussion with Od. John could see the tips of fiery fingers jumping between them. And what was Hank doing, sitting there between the two, smiling all the while? He refocused and saw exuding from Hank's navel a flow of light. The fingers of fire were meeting in that flow of light; and they were striking each other and then disappearing, as when a particle strikes an anti-matter particle. Hank was acting as an unchanging catalyst; he was stoking the fire of their emotional chemistry; he was performing his alchemical magic. John watched, excited, like an inspired student, fascinated by what he was seeing. Here was true learning.

Od was attacking Glove at the foundation of his pride, and Glove was counterattacking fiercely. Hank was keeping a physical distance between the two, yet allowing their minds to merge. With part of his consciousness John listened to the verbal conflict.

"I can't believe you designed that chess game," Od said in a sneering tone.

"I certainly did!" Anger filled Glove's voice. He twisted the napkin into a tighter knot.

"Assuming you did, how could you insert it into the computer?" Od's sharp features glared.

"That was the easy part. I'm chief administrator for the computer division. My word is law!" Glove felt some relief and relaxed his grip on the napkin. That troublemaker would have to believe him now.

Hank asked in a disarming manner, "Are you a minister for God, then?"

Glove was delighted to turn his attention to the nice, old man. "Heavens, no. I'm not a *minister*; I'm an *ad* ministrator." He spoke in a

pleasant and clear manner in case the old man was slightly deaf. "I'm the head man, the boss, over all the people working in the computer division. It's a very important position. And well-paying too."

"That proves nothing!" And Od was attacking again. "How can you prove you designed that chess game?" Od leaned forward; his face displayed a sceptical grin. He would wait patiently, all the while knowing the truth.

John saw that Glove's emotions were now properly tempered. He withdrew back to his stool at the bar. Finishing his wine, he left the bar and walked toward the stage. As he climbed up the stairs on stage left, he saw a woman and a man playing chess. No doubt, they were analyzing the final game of the tournament. He paused and watched them. No, this was not the final game; they were actually playing, not studying. Each was playing brilliantly. No wasted moves, no mistakes. Together they were building a magnificent game. Truth was like that; it needed to be built from opposing views.

He thought of Glove and the robot that he played chess against. No challenge existed there. Glove's greed and pride were too overweening to accept an equal opponent. That was his weakness, the leak in his reality. He takes himself too seriously; best I move on and cheer him up, John thought.

Smiling, John walked over to Glove's table. "Dr. Glove, may I congratulate you on your crowning achievement." John put out his hand. Glove smiled a little warily and accepted the handshake. John sat down at the table.

"I admire your ingenuity, your brilliance. It required real genius to gain control of ZAC without the Federal Reserve knowing."

Glove began to beam. He held his head high and proud. Mr. Ocean's attitude was encouraging.

"I'm sorry I could not accept your terms the other night, but we were not on an equal basis then. Your gunman tilted the balance. Now we are equal."

"I disagree, Mr. Ocean. I am in your territory. That is not equality. You are surrounded by your friends. I am alone."

The soft wail of an alto sax floated through the Inn. It wove itself into the general hum of voices and noises.

"Isn't that your choice, Dr. Glove?" he asked.

"I . . . yes, I made the decision."

"Since you're a loner, why did you make me that offer?"

"Because I want you to work for me."

"And not give you away."

"Of course."

The wail of the saxophone grew louder. Several people turned toward the music and saw that Mary was playing her instrument. She played variations on the key of C as she moved among the tables.

"I can't accept your offer," John said. "It's a conflict of interest."

"I would pay you handsomely."

"A bribe?"

"No, a gift."

"With strings, no doubt."

"All gifts have strings, Mr. Ocean."

Mary's sax sang out a medley of blues melodies. She stopped in front of the stage until she finished the medley. Then she walked up onto it. She stood beside the man and woman who were playing chess. Her alto sax cried out "Body and Soul." Then she went over to where John and Glove were sitting, and she played a Coltrane number. Glove was noticeably agitated. A spotlight shone on her; all eyes were focused toward her and the table; all ears hung on the melodic progression. John leaned back and lost himself in the music; Glove fidgeted with his napkin.

Although he was nervous, he tried to enjoy Ms. Rainbow's musical performance. Glove could not help feeling that the crowd was watching him even though he knew that Ms. Rainbow was the center of attention. The music had a jumpy quality that unsettled him. He hoped that she would finish soon.

When Mary concluded the composition, loud applause broke out. After it was quiet, she said in a voice that all could hear, "I want to introduce a special guest who honors us with his presence." She pointed to Glove, motioning for him to stand. But he remained riveted to his chair.

With a big smile, Mary announced, "This is Dr. Glove, foremost computer theorist and chess player *par excellence*. I may have won the world chess championship, but Dr. Glove has designed a chess program that allows him to manipulate the economy." She extended her right hand toward Glove, signaling him to stand up. If he needed more encouragement, she would give it. "Do you deserve all the honor, Dr. Glove, or did you have help?"

Glove jumped up, his chest inflated. "I did it, alone! The honor is mine!" The audience erupted into applause and cheers. Glove, bursting with pride, bowed to the enthusiastic reception.

"Perhaps, you can enlighten us," Mary said, "but of course we don't expect you to give away any trade secrets. How were you able to manipulate the economy with a chess game, Dr. Glove?"

"I designed a chess program that forced the Federal Reserve's computer to increase the value of M-I. When M-I expands, the Federal Reserve pushes up interest rates."

"And why did you want to raise interest rates?" Mary asked.

"Because high interest rates make for big profits," Glove said gleefully. He gave the audience a winning sign.

"So you are the architect of our inflation." Mary faced the audience. **"Here is the person who has caused our inflation and depression--and all for the greed of big profits!"**

The audience booed and jeered. Glove stammered, "No, no, now wait. I'm not responsible. Everyone is doing it. The whole financial community. They're the ones who formed the fiscal policy. I only took advantage of it. All the wealthy are doing it; why shouldn't I?"

"I'm not doing it!" someone shouted.

"No one asked me!" another voice yelled.

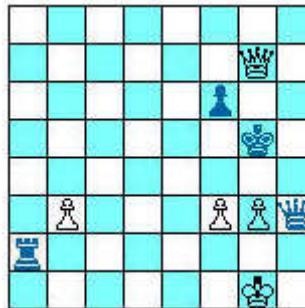
"Lynch the bastard!"

The audience became ugly. Several people arose from their seats and shook their fists. Glove wiped the sweat from his forehead with a napkin. Mary signaled to the two security guards.

"Dr. Glove," she said, **"I fear for your safety. The people may become violent. They may wreck my business. These two guards will conduct you safely through the crowd and deliver you to a secure place."**

Glove went with the guards, one in front and one in back of him. The crowd jeered and heckled, but they stood aside as Glove was escorted out of the Inn and into a waiting police car.

The woman chess player moved Q-KN7 (Qg7); the man chess player resigned.



These times are strange, and the future may be stranger, for "[nature](#) to be commanded must be obeyed."