

# VANGUARD

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*Cover by ED EMMH illustrating S.O.S. PLANET UNKNOWN,  
Drawing for the TALES THEY TELL, by Kelly Froas.*

# FAREWELL PARTY

by

Richard Wilson

THE BLUE FELLOW didn't look particularly out of place at the cocktail party. He was properly dressed—tweed jacket, white shirt, tie, all that—but he *was* blue, of course. There were tan people, pasty-white ones, three Negroes, an Indian (Asian) and a Japanese.

It was a farewell party for Massiet of *France-Soir*. A hundred people were crowded into the two-room apartment between Park and Lexington in the Eighties. Lindley had been to fifty like it. There was Suzi, the *chanteuse*, who would be dashing back to the Shubert any minute in her waiting Cadillac for her final number. There was the artists' model with the black sheath gown which inadequately covered her breasts. Lindley tried to think of her name. There was the Japanese who smiled and half-bowed whenever anyone looked at him, still atoning for World War II. And there was the blue fellow.

Lindley forced his way with smiles and how-are-yous and pardon-mes from the hall to the bar. The white-jacketed man from the catering service put three cubes in

a glass and poured Scotch till Lindley said "Whoa," then added a courtesy of soda.

Lindley said "Thanks" and started to move away. The blue fellow was blocking his way.

"Sorry," Lindley said. "Oh, hello. Everything all right?"

The blue fellow was holding a glass whose ice had long since melted. He smiled as if to shrug and Lindley said, "Let me get you a fresh one."

He let Lindley hand his glass to the barman. He said nothing. He continued to smile, not as if he were enjoying himself, and not apologetically like the Japanese. It was a masking smile, Lindley thought, a desperate-almost smile.

On impulse he said to the bartender, "Make it a strong one—easy on the soda," and handed it to the blue fellow.

"Are you a friend of Massiet?" Lindley asked him.

The other nodded vigorously. He lifted his glass in salute but didn't drink.

The artists' model was working her way to the bar. She squeezed

past Lindley, saying, "Hello, stranger. Divorce yourself from that one, why don't you?"

Lindley was willing, but he'd better remember her name first. "See you later," he said to the girl. "Don't go 'way."

The blue fellow watched the girl go by. He said nothing but his eyes followed her with a sort of yearning appreciation.

"Definitely," Lindley said. He carried on, trying not to seem as if he were cross-examining the fellow. "Stacked, as we say. How do you say it?"

It seemed to him that the blue fellow understood English but couldn't speak it. But he must have a name. He could say that much.

"Look," Lindley said, "we haven't met. My name's Lindley. Jason Lindley. *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. What's yours?"

The other swirled his drink so that the ice tinkled. That was the only sound out of him.

The model—Lindley remembered now that her name was Naomi—made her way back from the bar. She eased past a man from Reuters who tried unsuccessfully to draw her into conversation and stopped next to Lindley. "Got a cigarette?" she asked him.

Lindley supplied a Lucky and Naomi bent enticingly over the match. "Ditch the blue boy," she said. She made a red circle of her mouth and blew smoke in his face. "Let's find a quiet corner and dis-

cuss the state of the world."

"Who is he?" Lindley asked her. "Do you know?"

She shrugged, apparently more for the purpose of wiggling the body than providing information. She was extremely physical. "I've found a place to sit down, believe it or not. Don't be too long." Naomi went back through the crowd.

Lindley regretfully transferred his gaze from her disappearing hips to the blue fellow's face.

"Are you in one of the shows?" he asked. The blue might be stage makeup. For instance the French singer, Suzi, was wearing the garish reds and greens which would soften when she was back under the Shubert's spotlights.

But the blue fellow's color didn't seem to be makeup and he made no answer to Lindley's question. His hair was also blue, and Lindley observed for the first time that his ears were pointed at the tops.

Massiet, the guest of honor, made his way through the crush, holding two empty glasses. You met everybody if you stood near the bar, Lindley thought.

"Oh, hello," Massiet said to Lindley. "How are you? Still Plain Dealing?"

"Not at the moment," Lindley said. "Introduce me to your friend."

"My friend?" Massiet looked at the blue fellow. "Oh, hello, *mon ami*. They taking care of you?"

The blue fellow raised the glass

Lindley had refilled for him. He smiled and took a swallow. Lindley noticed now that his teeth were odd, too. They weren't individual, with spaces between them, but seemed to be one complete fixture like an animal's hoof—or like the teeth in a drawing of a smiling girl, all of a piece.

Massiet had worked past them and was behind Lindley now, at the bar. Lindley said to him over his shoulder, "What's his name? Where's he from? Can't he say anything?"

"Who?" Massiet said. "Not so much ice. That's better. Oh, the blue one. I don't know. He drifted in. You know how people do." Massiet worked himself back past them. "Naomi was asking for you, Lindley." He winked. "Wish she'd ask for me."

"Look," Lindley said to the blue fellow. "I've got to go. I hate to be rude, but— Would you mind answering one question?"

The other smiled with his solid

teeth and shook his head. Lindley noticed his ears again. The hair that was growing out of them somehow reminded him of tiny wires, like an antenna.

"It'll sound ridiculous, I suppose," Lindley said, "but—are you an Earthman?"

The blue fellow continued to smile but his eyes were no longer focused on Lindley. It was as if he were seeing something that wasn't there. He looked down at his watch. Lindley had just enough of a glimpse of it to see that it didn't have a conventional 12-hour face. Was it 24? Or something else entirely? He couldn't tell.

The blue fellow turned away from Lindley and set his glass down. He found a chair and stood on it. He raised a hand and held it out, palm down, at chest level.

People said "Sh, sh" and turned to face him. The dozens of different conversations died away till the room was almost silent.

The blue fellow stood there,

*RICHARD WILSON published his first science-fiction story in 1940. His output since then has been relatively small (at least, as compared with such torrents of prose as his exact contemporary, C. M. Kornbluth). Despite the existence of a Wilson novel, "The Girls From Planet 5" (Ballantine Books), Wilson is primarily a minaturist; he delights in putting a blindingly high polish on an almost invisible fictional point, like a lapidary fanatically cutting facets in a grain of diamond dust. When it is successful, as it often is with Wilson, the method requires the reader to register every word, like poetry — and with similar rewards.*

looking across the room. But not at anyone, Lindley noticed. His gaze was on the far wall. He was smiling with a sort of urgency and holding out his hand. He turned the hand palm upward.

There was a tug at Lindley's elbow. It was Naomi.

"Hey," she said. "How about getting out of here?"

"Sh! He's going to say something. Finally."

"No he isn't," Naomi said. "Come on. I'm getting a headache from the smoke."

"Sure he is," Lindley said. "Wait just a minute."

The blue fellow was still standing on the chair, still smiling almost desperately, still gazing at the opposite wall. He gestured with his hand but spoke not a word.

Gradually the hubbub of conversation resumed as the guests turned away from him.

"You mean he isn't going to say anything?" Lindley asked.

"I told you. He never does."

"You sound as if you've seen him do this before."

"Sure I have. He goes to all the parties."

"I've never seen him," Lindley said.

"You and I don't always go to the same parties, more's the pity,"

she said. "He's a nut, that's all."

"I don't think he is. I think he actually is communicating in some way but that no one is able to, to—well, to *receive* him. I think he's an alien."

"Sure," Naomi said. "These parties are crawling with aliens. Cosmopolitan as hell."

"I don't mean a foreigner. I mean somebody not from Earth. How about that for a story?"

"Cut it out, Lind. You've been seeing too many horror movies." She began to fidget attractively. "Are you going to come on, or do I have to go home alone?"

"Well, if you put it that way—" He took a last look at the blue fellow. He was still standing on the chair in silence. By now no one was paying the slightest attention to him. "Maybe you're right," Lindley said. "After all, it is my day off."

He went out with Naomi. There probably wasn't any story, and if there was his paper could get it from the wire services. As Naomi put her arm through his and squeezed his hand in the elevator he thought with one last twinge of duty that there might possibly be a very big story. He shrugged and returned Naomi's squeeze.

Now, if it had been a blue girl...