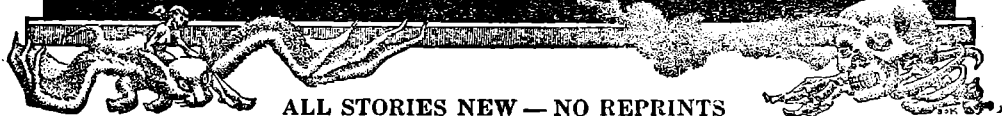


Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

JANUARY, 1950

Cover by Matt Fox

LONG NOVELETTE

- BLACK HARVEST OF MORAINE** Arthur J. Burks 4
When the ice-age retreated, who could know the forces it left behind to plague and outwit men of the scientific age?

SHORT STORIES

- THE ORMOLU CLOCK** August Derleth 22
Hatcher felt nothing in his past could account for the mystery; but could a clock have a past?
- IN THAT SAME MOMENT** Manly Wade Wellman 27
Conquered time is your doormat, your toy, your pocket piece. . . .
- THE SMILING FACE** Mary Elizabeth Counselman 33
The deep Brazilian jungle had swallowed up the woman he loved and the man he hated—the crippled explorer could only wait.
- THE URBANITE** Ewen Whyte 43
The terrible, meaningless scream and cry of the City, its endless vibrations, at last have brought forth upon itself this ultimate inevitable product of itself.
- THE MYSTERIOUS MISS MALTA** Stanton A. Coblentz 50
Auction sales fascinate a lot of folks; who can resist the "Going, going, gone!"—even to death?
- THE LAST TRAIN** Fredric Brown 59
There comes a time in every man's life when he decides to break with the past—how complete the break depends on the man and the state of the world!
- THE MASK OF DON ALFREDO** Mal Bissell 62
Of the husband and wife, one had died fifty years ago, one only last night. But which. . . . ?
- OUTSIDE OF TIME** Carroll John Daly 68
Let it be said everlastingly that the "impossible" of today may well be the commonplace of tomorrow.
- THE FAMILY** Margaret St. Clair 77
. . . flooded by an emotion, even more poignant because he could not be sure if it were anguish or bliss.
- THE CACTUS** Mildred Johnson 80
The police rout something from another universe, another stratum of existence; the law command the supernatural?
- DARK ROSALEEN** Seabury Quinn 86
Was he flesh and blood—an artist's concrete conception of something abstract, tenuous, allegorical?
- THE EYRIE** 93

VERSE

- SEA KING'S DAUGHTER** Dorothy Quick 49
- THE VISION** Leah Bodine Drake 67

Published bi-monthly by Weird Tales, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y. Reentered as second-class matter January 26, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription rates: One year in the United States and possessions, \$1.50. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession.

Copyright, 1949, by Weird Tales. Copyright in Great Britain.
Title registered in U. S. Patent Office.

178
Vol. 42, No. 2

The Urbanite

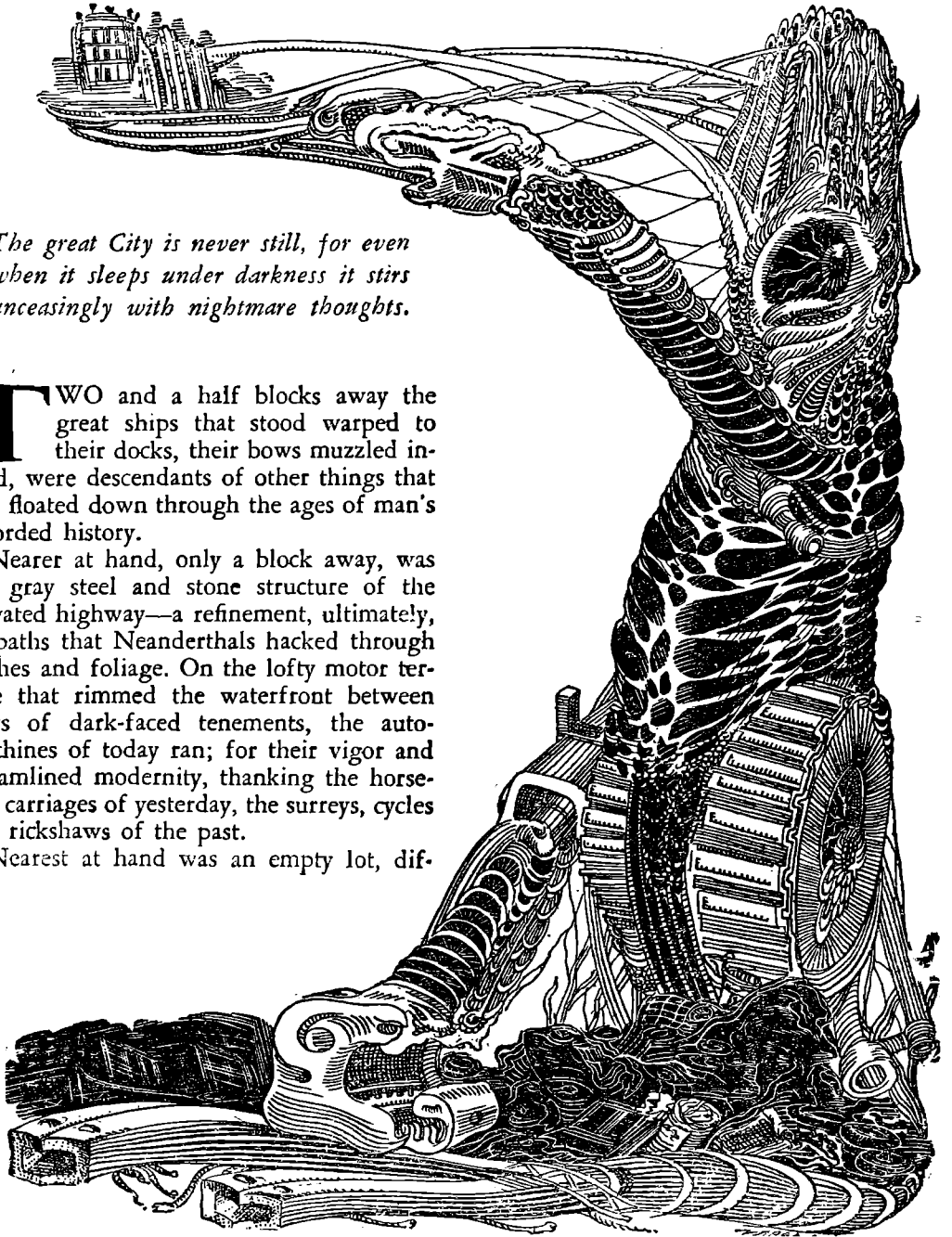
BY EWEN WHYTE

The great City is never still, for even when it sleeps under darkness it stirs unceasingly with nightmare thoughts.

TWO and a half blocks away the great ships that stood warped to their docks, their bows muzzled inland, were descendants of other things that had floated down through the ages of man's recorded history.

Nearer at hand, only a block away, was the gray steel and stone structure of the elevated highway—a refinement, ultimately, of paths that Neanderthals hacked through bushes and foliage. On the lofty motor terrace that rimmed the waterfront between rows of dark-faced tenements, the automachines of today ran; for their vigor and streamlined modernity, thanking the horseless carriages of yesterday, the surreys, cycles and rickshaws of the past.

Nearest at hand was an empty lot, dif-



Heading by Vincent Napoli

ferent as is a city empty lot from any other such, for it is never empty, having a strange and heterogeneous collection of junk bearing testimony to the mechanical genius of an age that takes so much for granted. Metal parts from the metal monsters that ran by on the network of streets and the elevated highway, fenders and wheels and spark-plugs, discarded parts of all sorts; and other things—barrels and barrel staves, bottles and cans; the residue of garbage now surviving its kerosene and flame ordeal with a smoldering, pungent smoke.

Sitting in the lot, his back against a discarded packing case, was Happy Charlie taking the sun here as it filtered down through the soot and smoke haze and mist of the city to brown-leather his face, instead of at Bermuda or Marseilles or Carmel, because he was just Happy Charlie—a bum.

But Charlie, who got his other appellation of "Happy" possibly because of his long sad horse's face, was as those others in their flowered trunks on their yachts and their beaches; just as the ships, land-warped in the river nearby or plying its turgid currents and the cars that whooshed by on the elevated highway itself belonged to other, earlier things.

He was the same as those flowered pantied, over-rich—though they would have laughed largely at this.

BUT go back, skeptics, go back only a few hundreds of thousands of years to the wetness and warmth of the Then, to the shallow lagoons and pools along the coasts of first-formed seas to the slime and the sub-life that slowly came from that slime, that became jelly wherever there was a little pool or a tide or a shallow sea, and on to the vertebrates.

Happy Charlie was no different, for he had come from the same beginnings. That his chronically whiskey breath was tolerated around the place next door where it said with big orange letters, peeling now from the weather, "Steaks & Chops—Wines & Liquors," because he ran occasional errands for Mr. Rostelli who ran the restaurant, made him basically no different from the biggest, toughest trucker who thumped his ham hand on the counter for quick service,

or the boss of the truckers or the owner of the whole chain who was worth a million and might—or could if he wanted to—sail his own yacht on the river that sent its damp, dank smells up these narrow, cobblestone streets to mix with the odors of inland machines and the people who worked them and lived by them in a great concentrate known as a city.

Happy Charlie in his most sober moment never concerned himself with his origins. He was neither interested in biogenesis nor would recognize the word if he came upon it written, instead of the rightful trade name, on a can of his favorite beer. That the living matter of which he was such an insignificant molecule but present-day offshoot had been originally brought to the earth from some other planet by meteorites or was an emergent from a complex of physical-chemical processes was one of several such worries he had never had.

There! Rostelli was calling him. Happy Charlie reluctantly lurched to his feet muttering under his breath. The sun had lulled him back to a happier day when he'd been a rail bird at local trotteries with an occasional winner keeping him away from the ignominy of honest work. But these errands kept him in sustenance, in hamburg and spud and best of all, in beer or something stronger.

As Charlie rambled towards the door and went under the neon bars that advertised "Rostelli's Restaurant—*Q-u-i-c-k Service*," there was nothing about him to suggest that he was the refinement of countless centuries of growth, starting with the amoeba and the one-celled animal of the pre-Cambrian era.

H EAT lay across the city, keeping haze and soot and smell down, fresh air and breeze out, like a wool buffer. The machines that ran the city were overheated and grew balky. People brawled and cursed and were tired by their own anger. Their sweat seared them and mingled with the filth that lay across windows and window ledges, tables and walls and floors. Cars and trains surged and rumbled in and out on the street arteries that led here and there. People walked the boiling streets and didn't need the every-season's newspaper gimmick

of the reporter frying an egg on the downtown sidewalk, for the fire of the pavement could be felt through the thickest shoe leather.

But there was no end to it. The lifts went up and the lifts came down; elevator boys and bus drivers and subway trainmen were replaced, but their machines kept moving. And the people themselves, the last one at any hour of day or night, never disappeared around the corner. There was always another person, another train, another car, and the gaseous, acrid effluvium mixed and settled on dry throats and streets and empty lots and huge hotels alike.

Happy Charlie ran his errand—at a slow, snail's pace—returned to Rostelli's and had a cold beer leaning against the extra-strong bar that the proprietor had had built in because "these truckers are big, strong guys. They got big heavy feet and arms."

By and by Happy Charlie took himself out back to the empty lot again. They had long ago stopped wondering about him. Where other people avoided the terrible scorch and burn of the afternoon heat, Charlie's old, bent frame soaked it up and his face and wrinkled arms, bared to the elbow, grew browner and browner like well-used saddle leather.

Occasionally he would poke through the junk yard with a stick, worrying the metal parts that collected there, salvaging a piece here and there and occasionally selling it for a few pennies. Most of the time, though, Happy Charlie just sat, his bloodshot whiskey eyes half shut, his mouth open a bit, perhaps to breathe better the stale second-hand air that lived poorly over the city, exhaled by a million motors, by a million human lungs.

As noted, Happy Charlie's mind, sober or otherwise—mainly otherwise—was not concerned with the vitalistic or mechanistic theories of human origin, including his own. But through a state of almost chronic alcoholic befuddlement—don't they say liquor, too much and too long, does something to the brain?—Happy Charlie did think of old days in his own life. It took him occasionally and was a laugh-provoking thought, that when he'd been younger, much younger, oh, just a kid, he'd had a chance

to go to a camp sponsored by some charitable group. As an indigent even then, he'd qualified—quite despite himself—and was on the verge of being sent to some wooded, far-away spot where, as the uplifted counselors for the project described in glowing terms, "Birds sang and brooks babbled and God's good clean earth set everything at rights."

It had been a close call, but Happy Charlie had beaten the rap. To be sure, it took some explaining at the neighborhood settlement house. A fat woman there had argued with the then-youngster, Happy Charlie, but at the end, she had shaken her head and he had won.

"Well, if you don't *want* to go, there are plenty of others who'll be glad to take your place," she had sighed. "You don't know what you're missing, young man!"

BUT then, advance courses in psychology and something-or-other had prompted her to say importantly and to impress him, for there was no one else: "I guess you're just one of those chronic urbanites—" and then talking down to him condescendingly as she dismissed him at one and the same time, "—one of those who *comes* from the city and just *likes* to live in the city!"

The word "urbanite" was a big, new thing, and she had called him it. The word drove Happy Charlie for his first and last time into the public library. He had looked it up. It was probably the biggest, most unusual word he knew, but he'd never forgotten it. That's what he was—an urbanite, one who is a product of, who lives in, who *likes* to live in a city. It made laughter to himself often to think of this, and Happy Charlie's open mouth formed a smile even now back in the lot, and the cars on the elevated highway a block away did the laughing for him with their whoosh and scream of tires on the hot cobblestones, whispering, grinding and screeching that *they*, like him, belonged here in this place of built-up steel and concrete and cement, with black fronts for the poor and marble fronts for the rich and brownstone anywhere where age still stood and the bright young college-trained surveyors had not yet ripped

out with their plumb-lines and maps to build newer things higher.

Whaddya know? There'd been a car hop the highway just here not too long ago. Landed right in this empty lot whose far end dwelled forever in shadow under the extended apron of the elevated highway. Damn auto jumped right over the wall, it did, and landed down there with its three broken people all screaming and their dreadful harmony made into a quartet by the soon-siren of the ambulance coming to see what could be done after such a dreadful mistake.

Happy Charlie, from his siesta spot at this end of the lot, had been first over to the smashed, over-turned car at the other end. He'd been there before the faces appeared on the express highway, others who'd stopped and looked over. Well . . . well, those things happen. It's the way of Life, and Happy Charlie had considerable of the philosopher in him though he might be unaware of it. It was a nice job of demolishing automobile, and the noise of the people who'd mislaid their auto soon died away as they were hauled and hoisted and lifted out of the wreckage into the white-sided, almost clean-looking ambulance. Left behind was a car there was no use hauling away and fixing up.

NIGHTS since then people plucked at it and they took tires and any parts they could take away. Maybe insurance folks came—Happy Charlie didn't know. He lost track with errands for Rostelli and drinks of beer and whiskey. The twisted frame was left and what remained recognizable of the broken car body; a little more glass sprinkled around the half-earth, rocks and junk heaps of the yard made no difference. It was hardly noticeable.

Happy Charlie's reveries were broken into by the harsh voice of Rostelli. Again? Another errand? He got up, slower this time, stretching his sun-stiffened frame out. His way of life had caused him to forswear many of the emotions, but deep inside, if you dug beneath the leathery skin and the old sinews, the rheumy bones, there was a hate smoldering for Rostelli that came from fear. He felt the same way about some of the truckers. Rostelli used him and paid

little for it, knowing he owned this derelict by means of occasional meals and much more than occasional drinks, without which Happy Charlie could not survive, and for which he would do the interminable odd jobs and run the errands that a wise-faced, sharp-minded high schooler would charge the restaurant proprietor a fat something to do.

But Rostelli and some of the other truckers—there was one giant man, in particular—had a contempt for Happy Charlie they were free to express when the opportunity presented itself. Happy Charlie knew it intuitively as that superiority that otherwise inferior people feel for subordinates. Happy Charlie was "an old bum." He was "an old drunk, no-good sot," a "vag," a "bum," and other assorted and pungent terms of the waterfront, of a low-life restaurant, of the trucking world, of circles where strong, explosive men move, and, with the hint of their own limitations, take that fleeting knowledge out on the nearest weak thing.

Rostelli, who'd had a hard day and suffered from the heat, sent him off with a cuff, and a trucker who'd wandered in to spend a few hours before taking off on his night run, roared with laughter and threw a potato chip at old Happy Charlie as he lurched off on his ordered quest.

HAPPY CHARLIE made better time than usual but was greeted only with Rostelli's bad temper and another sneer from the big trucker. Old Charlie's request for another beer got him shoved out the door of the restaurant. Oh well—and he settled himself in the sun again. Times were good, times were bad. That was the way things seemed to go. To him it mattered not. In moments like these came feelings of delicious superiority. Rostelli worried about business slowing up. Not so many of the longshoremen, the truckers, the laborers came in, and not so early did they come and not so long did they stay nor so much money did they spend as once upon a time. And the boisterous, cursing thick and muscle-armed men themselves with their shouting and noise making. They had their own worries locked up too. "Did you hear?"

Ace Company laid off fifteen last week! Hear there's gonna be more . . ." and so on.

Maybe they'd get to realize *his* way was the best, and Happy Charlie settled himself contentedly on the other side of a pile of debris, chuckling at his own thoughts of himself, pleased at his smartness, and after looking furtively this way and that, reaching into the piles to fetch out a bottle. Warm to be sure, even in its shadowed hiding place, dust and plaster and dirt-covered, but inside when it was uncorked, the liquid was wonderful.

He ah'd and smacked his lips as the last two inches of the bottle burned down his throat and hit his stomach with that impact that raw whiskey always has. He settled himself lazily in the sun. It was still stronger and hotter than ever even now in the late afternoon; they'd have to call louder to make him hear them here. Rostelli and that big trucker could bump their heads together for all he cared!

The warmth from within and the heat from without met. His eyelids were at half-mast and his body felt luxurious resting in the fold of a rusted fender with his head against a barrel's back. The pile ahead, directly ahead there was what was left of the car that had jumped a week ago. Imagine a car jumping like people do!

The heat sent shimmers of itself from the ground upward when new waves of burning hotness came down from the airless heavens. The shimmering gave to the junkpile a strange appearance as though it moved, as though the steel frame at its core was in slight motion, like railroad tracks in the distance on a scorching day.

Happy Charlie stirred comfortably in his cocoon of splendid warmth. As his eyelids sank lower, his mouth opened more, and the scene took on the early visitations of dream-provoked unreality, but he was not sleeping, did not intend to. For it was too good to feel the heat and hear the sound of the cars whooshing by, occasional noise from the river as one of the great liners whistled so that none would be unaware of its great bulk and importance. A tenement radio blared blastically before being turned down. The words were "Heat spell . . .

temperature setting record," and Happy Charlie lay there lolling, enjoying every moment of it.

The not-empty lot and its junk made his home. He felt familiar here, secure. There was no reason to think or be aware of anything else.

BUT as Happy Charlie lay there, and as Rostelli and the big trucker griped to each other back in the dark coolness of the restaurant, an epoch was being marked here near the river wharves and the elevated highway in the heart of the great city. It was as with those long-ago small pools and lagoons, the rain-filled trenches and swamp places.

But then there was no one to Know, but only hundreds upon hundreds of centuries later, the eye to look backward and reconstruct. Or if there had been life *preceding* life and a brain, would it have been cognizant of what was happening anymore than was Happy Charlie now filled with his whiskey and the heat of the day, lying with his arms and fingers against orange rind and discarded paper parcels, in dirt and wood and nails and the overflow of civilization which must always find its way to places like these?

Charlie *saw*, but he did not *believe*. He did not believe because he could not know, nor could any great scholar in fancy clothes and with fancy language know. For it was at this extraordinary and so-right moment—just now—for all this to change from nothingness to somethingness. The particles of the city-raped air, the particles from blast furnaces, the shavings from steel and iron, chips from concrete and macadam, chunks of tar and the smell from these; exhaust from all the machines, the molecules of structural things—millions upon millions of them all together, and the people, numbers beyond counting, breathing in and out the already effluvious mass, warming with their grime-coated noses and throats and lungs, warming and nurturing and expelling for another to breathe in. And here, all here, concentrated under this sky in this heat, recipient—*the pile at the far end of the lot*. Moving, Happy Charlie! *Moving*. Not heat shimmers, but *moving*, the steel gathering

to itself other qualities—the scrap, the exudate of countless eons of human progress.

Charlie saw these things in motion. He saw them moving, gathering themselves with a sinuous purposefulness, but he did not believe—being a human; he *could* not believe.

In his ear at last was the far-away but shrill sound of Rostelli calling him. The bellow grew louder and louder. He bestirred himself automatically even as his mind tried to cope with this new thing. As he rose to his feet to walk back to the restaurant in obedience, the full terrible and fatal weight of what he saw now came upon him, cutting the heat and whiskey-induced fogginess from his brain as a scalpel cuts flesh, and for a fleeting second, Happy Charlie with all his humbleness of intellect knew a moment of sheer terror unsurpassed by any man for thousands of years. . . .

ROSTELLI drummed on the counter. He was alone in his restaurant with the big trucker. They had been deploring the times, keeping civility between each other by directing their bitterness and hatred towards a common cause. Now, it was Happy Charlie.

"Where's that drunken bum!" Rostelli snarled and went to the window again to holler out of it.

The trucker, from the depths of his peanut-brain, thumped his great hands against fat thighs and said, "You gotta treat one of him like a kid. You treat 'em good, they treat you bad. Gotta show 'em who's boss!"

Rostelli shook his head angrily.

"By God, I will! Get my hands on his old skinny neck . . . I'll twist his head off!"

The trucker roared with laughter. He was well along on beers now; they had inflamed his head with delicious thoughts of violence.

Rostelli bellowed out the window again, and then finally . . . finally, after a long wait, the trucker cocked his head.

"Here's someone comin'. Guess you finally woke up that dead-beat, Rostelli!"

It had been a poor day, and there was no money in the till. The proprietor's hands gripped and ungripped with the desire to take his wrath out on something tangible.

The cheap wire-netting door of the restaurant slammed open.

"And I've told him not to bang that door thataway!" Rostelli muttered under his breath.

They looked towards the entrance past the four or five tables set around the room, the booths at one side, the fire-engine red juke box, and they waited in the semi-darkness for Happy Charlie.

But it was not Happy Charlie. The trucker's eyes narrowed and Rostelli blinked. There was for both of them no more words and a countable number of breaths, for *he*—you say *he*, oh, so loosely—was not of their experience or ken.

The limbs were iron and steel, but not as in the figure of speech. The thighs and legs were of metal, of cement. The trunk was something else. There was no man here; in fact, only a *thing*, but men must describe everything else through their own eyes. It must either be a man, an animal, and inanimate objects don't *move*!

THIS incredible birth had taken place this late afternoon. From the dirt eddies, from the dust lying thick across the metropolis, from the impregnated air, the noise, the endless vibrations; from all these this obscene thing had come. Out of the hate from the man-curses dying in mid-air, conceived by their hate and wicked yearnings; born of the sperm of the city, of the thoughts and people and machines too close-packed here—this new life, this urbanite had come.

The trucker rose from his place by the bar, his eyes opened wider than they had for twenty years; his great hands held wide as though to shape a question mark, to help his brain and eyes realize they saw and knew it couldn't be.

The face of the thing? There was no face; instead, a brickish structure, but men have to see faces or make them up in things that move. Even animals have faces.

The trucker had a moment, and then he was spread-eagled against the extra-strong bar which had been built for the likes of him—spread-eagled and then squashed by the intruder in a methodical way with one, two, three, four pistonlike sweeps of a steel and cement thing where arms grow on men.

Rostelli thought of a prayer word but never got it out. He, too, was caught in the corner of the room, noting with a supreme irrelevance before his own doom fell upon him that in the other massive, pistonlike appendage, the *thing* held an arm clenched in chrome and aluminum fingers—an arm unmistakable because of its brown, leathery skin drawn tightly over skinny bones.

And then Rostelli died as the trucker had

died and Happy Charlie before them, by the hand—and of course the concrete and steel thing was *not* a hand—of one who'd grown from the very things that men build and command in cities . . . the machines and the metals mixed with the exhaust that comes from hate and hope and hurry, all put together *just right, precisely*, this one day in all of history to create something, not of this millenium but of the next.
