

---

**S F COMMENTARY 43**

---

**THE  
TUCKER  
ISSUE**

---



S F COMMENTARY 43

August 1975

63 pages

<u>COVER</u>	
Helena and Kelvin Roberts	
<u>EDITORIAL</u> 4	
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	
A TOUCH O' TUCKER	
Ed Connor	5
<u>THE WRITER</u>	
BOB RUCKER	
interviewed by	
PAUL WALKER	7
<u>THE MYSTERIES</u>	
THE MYSTERIOUS WILSON TUCKER	
Lesleigh Luttrell	15
<u>THE SCIENCE FICTION</u>	
<u>HIDDEN HEROES:</u>	
THE SCIENCE FICTION NOVELS	
OF WILSON TUCKER	
Bruce Gillespie	26
<u>THE YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN</u>	
WHERE WE'RE ARRIVING	
Bruce Gillespie	52
<u>ICE AND IRON</u>	
TUCKER'S TWO FUTURES	
Hank and Lesleigh Luttrell	59
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>	
THE WORKS OF WILSON TUCKER	
Denny Lien	61

Edited, printed, and published by  
BRUCE GILLESPIE,  
GPO BOX 5195AA, MELBOURNE,  
VICTORIA 3001, AUSTRALIA  
(03) 347 8902

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Australia:

\$1 per copy; \$5 for 5.

Overseas:

Please do not send local cheques.

Send local cash,

International Money Order,

or cheque already converted

to Australian currency.

USA and Canada:

\$6 for 5.

UK:

£3 for 5.

Last stencil typed

29 April 1976.

For  
JACKIE FRANKE  
without whom...

SUBSCRIBERS AND LIBRARIANS:

This is the fabled Bob Tucker  
Issue, temporarily delayed. For  
accession purposes, this is the  
August issue, and should be  
placed before SFC 44/45 on the  
shelves. However, for subscrip-  
tion purposes, this is SFC 45,  
and subscription renewal notices  
will be sent out on that basis.

## EDITORIAL

No issue of S F Commentary has suffered more difficulties than the Bob Tucker Issue. If you are holding a copy in your hands (and, at the time of writing, there is no absolute guarantee that further difficulties do not await it), give thanks for your good fortune.

The Bob Tucker Issue, as the cover date shows, should have appeared in August 1975. S f readers in America and Australia had raised more than \$2000 to ensure that Bob Tucker could travel from USA to the World Convention held in Melbourne in August last year. I wanted very much to be able to hand a copy of SFC 43 to him there. It's the end of April 1976 as I type this, but keep remembering that it should be August 1975.

This Issue has been the victim of vaulting ambition. Lesleigh and I made plans to publish it in October 1974. Hank and Lesleigh had written their pieces by the end of 1974, and Jackie Franke contributed a cover. I kept making plans to write my piece about Tucker's s f, and kept putting off the actual work. Then came the advent of John Counsel. John is a printer who had great plans for producing SFC offset, cheaply and well. He also said that he could do it quickly. I began my Tucker piece in May 1975 and finished it in July, about two weeks before the issue was due to appear. John Counsel said he could do it, but couldn't. (The whole issue was typeset and illustrated; I don't know what has happened to the plates.) Aussiecon passed, with great enjoyment of Tucker's company, but no SFC 43 to give him.

And then came the real problems. I don't know why John Counsel never managed to print the Tucker Issue, but certainly he didn't. Also, we have never received back the artwork, including Jackie's cover, which was due to appear here. After an entire summer during which Carey Handfield and I attempted to retrieve material, I typed the stencils for this edition. Eventually, Helena and Kelvin Roberts were the source of the cover photo. Months went by, and now The Tucker Issue exists. I hope you enjoy its contents.

Each of the contributors has been introduced at the beginning of each section - but I do want to thank Carey in particular for his efforts to stave off the various catastrophes which have delayed this issue - and Lesleigh and Hank, who waited nearly two years to see their contributions in print - and Jackie Franke, who conducted the Tucker Fund, supplied a marvellous cover which doesn't appear here, and who is really responsible for everything - and Bob Tucker, who is worth all the trouble.

29.4.76



```

000 00 000 000 000 000 000
000 00 000 000 000 000 000
000 00 000 000 000 000 000

```

A TOUCH O' TUCKER

((EDITOR: Ed Connor lives in Peoria, Illinois, edits S F Echo (formerly called Moebius Trip) and, I'm told, is known for his fairly shy and retiring nature - in a literary field where we're all known for our shy dispositions. Apart from that, I know little about him, except that he has been a friend of Bob Tucker's for many years. Also, I'm glad to say, he's willing to do a favour at a moment's notice. This Introduction arrived back in my letterbox only a short time after I wrote asking for it some time in July 1975. Too bad that Ed, like everybody else, has had to wait so long to see this in print. I'm sure you would like to subscribe to Ed's magazine; his address is 1805 N Gale, Peoria, Illinois 61604, USA.))

A few short stories comprised Bob Tucker's earliest professionally published material. They were not necessarily the best of his production. By then, his longest-running fanzine of the 1930s, D'Journal, had been replaced by Le Zombie, in which his writing proclivity ran unchecked. By the immediate post-World War II days, Tucker had probably overcome any shortcomings in "book learning" occasioned by his early termination of formal education.

His friends (in and out of the s f field) were pleased at Tucker's small successes, but in the limited scope of the pulp magazine field, in the even further restricted genre of science fiction, his by-line was - and remained - one of the most obscure. Competition for sales found numerous writers who'd become veritable giants of the field in just the time since Bob's first yarn had seen print; he was just as far behind them, it seemed, as ever.

He kept at it, never stopping to this day.

And all the while he has been an s f fan, in the intimate sense of being involved in the camaraderie of the hooked addict. He's done an incredible amount of travelling since his long-ago departure from an orphanage; most of it, I dare say, has been go-



## INTRODUCTION

---

ing to and returning from conventions. He'll be in his element in Melbourne.

In spite of somewhat denigrating generalities that Tucker himself has applied to his short fiction, I happen to think that some of his best writing is short in length; it is not professional only in the sense that it was not done for pay. His material found its way regularly into many fan publications. The finest of it proves the worth of the author's striving to do his best - even if each particular factual article, or satire, or whatever, is "only" destined for printing in a fanzine.

For example: Bob very ably captured the aura of nostalgia tinging a bookperson's departing a well-used habitat; "Den's End", first published in 1944, has worn to perfection. And with his "A Chucklehead Has No Honour in His Own Country" (1967, in Dick Geis' Psychotic) he humorously - and neatly - pinned well-known s f critic Damon Knight to the board. (Knight had made a simple, but horrendous, blunder in asserting that s f writer Jerry Sohl had erred in having a character in one of his books see his reflection in a basin of water in a normally lighted room. "Impossible," crowed Damon. Tucker cheerfully - and brilliantly - made the critic look very foolish, helped immeasurably by the fact that anyone who could see could verify instantly the point in question.)

In his interview with Paul Walker, Tucker states that his two "worst" s f books are his first, The City in the Sea (1951) and To the Tombaugh Station (1960). Thankfully, he did not abandon the field after his initial s f sale. In the case of To the Tombaugh Station, it appears that at the time he may have been dissatisfied enough to devote all his efforts for years thereafter to his mystery/detective/suspense artistry. There was no more s f until 1970, when he scored again (after no little effort) with The Year of the Quiet Sun.

While several of his greatest successes were published before 1960, Tucker's writing has matured considerably in recent years. While the cynic might counter with "What is maturity?", I suggest that he compare early and late Tucker in search of subtleties - which should not be all that obscure - for himself.

What might Tucker do today with today's "new freedoms", as applied to such a novel as To the Tombaugh Station? In the only (out-of-print) existing version, the author delineates the inconveniences, etc, of a male being confined in a miserably small space capsule with an individual (female) whom he dislikes. No doubt Tucker would, if doing it over now, change it greatly, making it a different story (it would, beyond doubt, be better). Such a metamorphosis is, of course, extremely unlikely. While Bob has revised old tales for publishers in new editions, I don't think he'd want to plough over old ground on his own. Too many untried ideas await his pen; he has never gotten into the rut of repetitive s f hackwork, and such a condition seems quite unlikely for the future.

I know of no other fan who has remained in the element of fandom over such a long stretch of time who has consistently participated so actively. How many fans know or have known Tucker personally? The list is one that he could no longer compile for himself. It lengthens with every convention that he attends.

It is a fact that fandom's history would be much poorer with Tucker absent. Melbourne's 33rd World Science Fiction Convention will, in all likelihood, be considerably richer with him present.

Tucker himself claims that he is not a "pro", since he has never worked full-time at writing, and the major part of his income has been derived regularly from other work. This attitude is refreshing: a hallmark of a real professional, and I trust he'll forgive me for saying so.

---

Ed Connor July 1975

```

000 000 000 00000 0 0 000 0 0 000 000
000 000 000 000 0 0 000 0 0 000 000
000 000 000 000 0 0 000 0 0 000 000

```

INTERVIEWED BY

```

000 000 0 0 0 0 0 0 000 0 0 0 000 000
000 000 000 000 000 000 000 000 000
0 0 0 000 000 00000 0 0 000 0 0 000 000

```

EDITOR:

Paul Walker has had a long career of writing for fanzines. Several years ago he was best known for his reviews in Science Fiction Review and Luna, and recently he has published a number of interviews with science fiction writers. Paul has also sold several short stories. The following interview with Bob Tucker appeared first in S F Echo 22, April 1975, available from Edward C Connor, 1805 N Gale Ave, Peoria, Illinois 61604, USA and is copyright by Ed and the participants. Thank you, Paul Walker, Ed Connor, and Bob Tucker, for permission to reprint this interview.\*

## BOB TUCKER

All of my father's family are long dead, and on my mother's side only two aged aunts remain and I've already discovered their memories aren't too reliable. I was sixty last November, and my own memories of the early years are somewhat shaky.

Born November 23, 1914, on a farm near the village of Deer Creek, Illinois. My mother's family were farmers, although she had some connection with Illinois State University, at Normal, when she met and married my father at a date not known to me. I'm reasonably certain she was not an employee of the university, but I suspect she was an employee of some faculty member. Perhaps a maid or housekeeper. I don't know how nor when they met, nor when they were married. My mother died in 1921, when I was seven.

My father was a circus man, a bill-poster, a publicity agent, an advance man, and what was called a "twenty-four-hour" man in circus lingo. He travelled for several years with the big shows such as Barnum and Bailey, Ringling Brothers, Hagenback, and Miller's Wild West Show. Sometime prior to 1914 he left the road and settled in Bloomington, Illinois, where he became a stagehand in the local theatres. He stayed with the theatres and was stage manager of a vaudeville house when he retired about 1940. (Of course, vaudeville was also long gone but the theatre was still used for home talent shows, occasional touring companies, and the like.) He died in 1948.

My brother and I grew up in an orphanage. After my mother's death, my father kept the family (three children) together for a few years and then gave up the struggle. My brother and I were sent to an orphanage while my sister was placed with a grandmother. This happened about 1926. I ran away from the orphanage in 1930 because I simply couldn't stomach it any longer, and spent the summer of 1930 bumming around the country by freight train and by hitch-hiking, sometimes doing odd jobs and sometimes doing farm work for room and board. I was picked up by the police for vagrancy and sent home to my father sometime during 1930, and lived with him in a boarding-house for the next few years.



## THE WRITER

My schooling ended when I quit the orphanage, and I had not completed the eighth grade when I ran away. I've had no formal education since, nor have I attended trade schools, taken correspondence courses, etc. I've always been a greedy reader and prefer non-fiction to fiction except for science fiction. The education I have today can be termed half-taught, in that I soon learned - or realised - my shortcomings and began reading everything the local libraries could offer in an attempt to educate myself. I'm still reading for that knowledge, and to gain useful background materials for my novels. My favourite disciplines are archaeology and anthropology, geography, geology, and astronomy to a lesser extent. I believe in the Big Bang theory of the birth of the universe; it appears more logical to me than the steady state theory.

I taught myself spelling and the poor English I use because I wanted to be a writer, and I taught myself to type for the same reason. I've since learned that editors don't expect writers to know beans about spelling and grammar, and that they expect to rewrite every manuscript they accept. I've had my troubles with English majors in publishing houses who insist upon reworking my deathless prose over into the rigid forms they were taught at Bryn Mawr or wherever.

I bought a very-much-used typewriter in 1931 and wrote my first story, a war story, for Argosy - the old Argosy that existed in the 1930s. They rejected it, of course, because it was a terrible thing. I wrote war, adventure, mystery, and science fiction for the next ten years, and managed to make my first sale in 1941 to Fred Pohl. It was titled "Interstellar Way Station", it appeared in the May 1941 Super Science Novels Magazine, and I'm ashamed of it today because it was dreadful. I was then, and still am, a very poor writer of short stories. I can't decently plot nor construct them in the short space allowed, and I've managed to sell only one or two dozen (I haven't kept count) in these past forty years.

I fell into science fiction by accident. My father gave me (or perhaps I found) a copy of Weird Tales some actor had left behind in one of his theatres, about 1930 or 1931. Meanwhile, one of the other boarders in the rooming house gave me a closetful of old Argosys, and I discovered science fiction when I read the Ray Cummings serial, A Brand New World which, I think, was published in 1929. Science fiction has been my first choice ever since, with mystery and detective stories running a close second. I began buying Amazing Stories and Astounding Stories whenever I had a few coins to spare (food came first during the Depression of the 30s) and I believe I discovered Wonder Stories a year or so after that.

I got into fandom by reading the letters in the first two magazines, and by entering into correspondence with another young fan in Jersey City, I think I found his name and address in a 1931 issue, and I became fairly well known to other

fans at about that time because I received a sample copy of The Time Traveller about January 1932, and promptly subscribed to that. I was well hooked on fanzines that year, and published my first fanzine in December 1932 (The Planetoid).

My first marriage was in 1937 and I have two children by that marriage, a son and a daughter. It didn't last long, my wife deserted me and the two children in 1942 and I got a divorce and custody the same year. (She had her good reasons. I'm difficult to live with.) Those two children are married and have families of their own, of course; my eldest granddaughter is eighteen and I expect she will make me a great-grandfather before too long.

My second marriage was in 1953 and we're still together. We have three sons by this marriage, with the eldest twenty. My wife is a Traffic Assistant for General Telephone Company; among other things she teaches the new girls how to manipulate the switchboards. (Which are wonderfully complicated. I've studied them.)

I haven't had many jobs, unlike those writers who parade a long list of occupations, ranging from cowboy to short-order cook. First job was that of a delivery boy for a printing company about 1930 (possibly 1931) earning a dollar a day. And at about the same time my father started my apprenticeship on the stage and in the projection booth at one of his theatres. This has always been a moonlighting business; I spent the days delivering print-shop orders, and the nights in the theatre. With two exceptions noted below, I've stayed at the trade ever since. I lost my long-time projection job two years ago when the theatre installed automated machinery, and when I developed a cataract which made me temporarily blind. These two events happened a few months apart, but when I returned from the hospital and recuperation, the theatre refused to rehire me so, in that sense, I'm unemployed.

In another sense, I'm still working part-time. For about the last twenty-five years I've been the stage electrician at Illinois State University, at Normal, and still am. I work perhaps thirty or forty days a year at the University of Illinois (fifty miles away) whenever road shows are booked onto the campus. Other than that I'm unemployed, and spend my time writing novels.

The two exceptions to theatre work are as follows: In 1945 I quit a theatre to work for an advertising agency which wanted someone to write and edit house-organs, both for themselves and for their clients. I failed at the job and lasted barely three months. In 1946 I went to the Los Angeles World Convention, and afterward went around to a hiring hall which furnished electricians for the movie studios. They signed me on and sent me to work at the Twentieth Century Fox studios. I stayed there about five months and was laid off when movie production was completed for the year (about November 1946. Hundreds were laid off, an annual event.) I came back to Bloomington and back to the same old theatre jobs.



I won't complain about the loss of a steady job. I lasted about forty-one years in the trade and that was worthwhile.

And that's my status at the present time. I'm living in Jacksonville with my wife and my three sons; we moved here from Heyworth in June 1974 when the telephone company transferred her to a new job. The eldest son of this marriage is in his third year of college, a physics major, on some scholarship he wangled. I continue to work on the stage when the shows come along, and write the remainder of the time.

My present hobby is cooking. I'm quite enthused about it and the family endures it, complaining only at those times when something goes wrong and they get bellyaches. I'm fond of cigars and bourbon and, unlike everyone else I know, I had an absolutely enjoyable time in the hospital during my cataract surgery. It was a ball, and I'm trying to find a way to incorporate the entire episode into a novel, or write it up as a fact article for one of the men's magazines. I've had twenty-one novels published, and four others rejected. I'm working on one at the present time.

PAUL WALKER

The parts about your youth reminded me of the opening of Wild Talent, with that kid wandering alone in Chicago. Gone to the World's Fair, if I remember rightly; it's been (what?) fifteen years since I read it. I remember feeling for the kid when he sat down to breakfast and was given that sandwich, two slices of bread, one stale slice of meat between: "What do you want for nothing?"

I'd like to know about your beginnings as a writer. Your first attempts; the writers you most admired, imitated (?); the advice you received; your first successes. I'd like to know about why and when you began writing mysteries. And how you've fared in both. What are your work habits; do you outline, revise, and rewrite, etc?

TUCKER

Those opening pages of Wild Talent, in which the young Paul Breen wandered around Chicago, visited the World's Fair, and slept overnight in a cheap flophouse, were strictly autobiographical. I rode into Chicago on a freight train in the summer of either 1933 or 1934 (the Fair was open two years) and spent two or three days at the Fair, sleeping each night in some 25c or 35c "hotel" which offered a free breakfast the next morning. The vivid impressions of that visit have always stayed with me and I have used them to good advantage in Wild Talent. The fictional parts begin where the boy finds the wounded man in the alley.

I sometimes think I was born writing something or other. My grandmother, and my only two living aunts have all told me that I wrote newspapers

when I was visiting or staying with them in the very early years (I must have been between two and six years old). According to their descriptions (and memories), I went about the neighbourhood gathering news, then printed that news on crude newspaper format, and then tried to sell those papers back to the people who'd first given me the news. In the seventh grade of grammar school I habitually wrote fantastic stories for English class assignments. I didn't yet know the term "science fiction", but my stories were always about around-the-world flights in a matter of hours, and digging deep tunnels into the earth, or whatever. Also in that seventh grade I founded the school newspaper, and continued to write and edit it through the eighth grade. I've sometimes wondered if it is still being published?

My first attempt at pro writing was a war story for the old Argosy, in 1931. I know now it was a very bad story, and they quickly rejected it. I was reading all the copies of Argosy I could find in those days; I liked the fiction and its writers, although I remember only a handful of them today. I was very fond of George F Worts, of Ray Cummings and, if memory serves correctly, Richard Sale. (I think Richard Sale was writing for the 1930 Argosys.) I remember being impressed by Tiffany Thayer, and I now suspect this impression happened at a later date, because I once tried to write a book in his style and I wasn't in the book business until after 1945.

In the science fiction magazines, my favourites were Ross Rocklynne, Nat Schachner, Jack Williamson, Sprague de Camp, and Lloyd Eshbach. I don't know if I imitated any of them, or admired them to the degree where I attempted to write like them, but probably not; all my early stories were poor and none of these writers would be flattered to know I knowingly imitated them. As mentioned above, the only writer I knowingly imitated was Tiffany Thayer. I also discovered the H G Wells novels in the middle 1930s and was, of course, impressed by him and them.

In sum, I wrote and submitted my first story in 1931 but did not manage a sale until 1941. During that ten-year period I would guess that I wrote, submitted, and then destroyed after rejection perhaps one to two hundred stories: adventure, war, detective, science fiction. I received my first worthwhile advice from Fred Pohl in 1941 when he showed me how to revise a short story and submit it to him a second time. With that, I got an inkling of why all those stories had failed to sell in the previous ten years: I was constructing them wrongly, awkwardly, not getting the proper beginning, middle, and ending in their proper places; not allowing the background to develop as the characters moved through it; not saving a goody for the ending. I revised that 1941 story according to Fred's formula and sold it to him on the second submission. I think I was paid one-half cent a word, and it appeared in the May 1941 Super Science Novels Magazine.

But I can't successfully write short stories; I

don't feel comfortable with them, I dislike their shortness, I dislike the tight plotting and characterisation that must be packed into them because of their brevity, I dislike the total lack of room in which to work. (As noted before), I haven't kept a count but I probably haven't sold more than two dozen short stories in the forty-odd years I've been writing. Don Day's Index to Science Fiction 1926-1950 lists six stories and two "Probability Zero"s published up until the 1950 cutoff date, and that is a gauge of my non-productivity.

I began writing novels about 1944 because of the failure of my short stories. I don't recall the precise date the first novel was started, but 1944 is an educated guess because it was revised once, sold in 1945, revised again, and published in 1946. I've been a mystery fan as long as I've been a science fiction fan - since Argosy in the early 1930s, and I wrote a mystery novel to determine if my luck (and my skill) was any better in the novel field than in the short-story field. I don't know why I chose to write a mystery as the first novel, rather than science fiction, but it was probably because I was already aware of the market at that date: science fiction novels were few and far between whereas hundreds of mysteries appeared every year for the lending-library trade. Private-eye stories were quite popular in the 1940s, and so I wrote a private-eye story, a low-key and somewhat humorous private-eye story instead of the hardboiled kind which was so prevalent. At that time I had not read The Murder of Roger Ackroyd and I didn't realise what I was plotting in my first book; I realised only that I had a keen idea and somehow had to be found to make it work. I titled it The Chinese Babe.

The novel sold on its second submission, to Rinehart and Co in the summer of 1945. It was published in 1946 under the title The Chinese Doll and Tony Boucher paid me the highest compliment of my writing career: he wished he had written it, and complimented me in his reviews for having introduced a successful variation of the Roger Ackroyd theme.

The twenty-five novels I've written are roughly divided between mystery and science fiction. Of those, the four rejected novels were not total losses, in that I salvaged parts of them and incorporated those parts into other books which did sell. (The artillery barrage section in Jordan, appearing in This Witch, is an example of a part taken from a reject and incorporated into a sale.)

Until recently I've regarded writing as a hobby, or even a second occupation, and relegated it to my leisure hours. I was in the habit of writing after the end of my daily stint in the theatre, or on my days off, and as a result of that unhurried schedule I usually completed a book each eight or nine months. I would begin work in the late summer or early autumn after cool weather chased me indoors, and work on a book until the following spring or early summer; I kept no

schedule, working only when the mood struck me and the time was available. Lately I've devoted more time to writing now that an outside job no longer interferes, but I still don't maintain a schedule. I may work steadily for several days or weeks, eight to ten hours a day, and then drop off for one or two weeks and not type at all. I don't have a deadline sense, driving me to fill pages by the quota.

I start a book with the beginning and ending fixed firmly in mind, and a handful of notes beside me to guide me through the middle. Usually, two drafts complete the novel, although it is common to go back and revise individual pages here and there to make those pages fit the ending. With a firm idea of the first chapter in mind, plus handwritten notes, I write the chapter and reread it seeking flaws. Almost always that chapter is revised and a second (and final) draft is typed. Sometimes, but not often, a first draft will stand as written, subject only to revising individual pages to make those pages fit later developments. As the writing progresses, more and more ideas will occur for later chapters and those ideas are put down as handwritten or typed notes for embellishment when their times come. I like to finish a chapter completely (first, second, and/or final draft) before moving on to the next chapter.

I know that editors will always ask for further revisions, and I'm prepared for them; I keep all my notes until the book is actually in print so that I can revise at any time. Only once have I later regretted agreeing to a revision: a lady editor at Rinehart asked me to remove the cannibal scene from The Long, Loud Silence and I did, because I wanted publication. Reviewers and critics of all stripes later spotted the tame substitution and the more perceptive of them correctly guessed what had been deleted. The cannibalism would be acceptable today, but it was not in 1952.

With one exception, mystery and science fiction novels earn me about the same amount of money but over varying lengths of time. Mystery novels represent a larger initial income; the bulk of the earnings come in the first two years after publication and then the books go out of print. Science fiction novels earn me less money in those first few years but they have a greater staying power in the form of paperback reprints, and overseas sales. Several of my science fiction novels from the period 1951-58 have been reprinted in recent years, but the mystery novels have long since vanished from sight and are not likely to be reprinted. If I took the trouble to audit my accounts I would likely find that science fiction books have earned more over a twenty-year period than mystery novels have.

The exception mentioned above is Wild Talent (titled The Man From Tomorrow in one paperback edition). This book has been reprinted more often in more countries than any other five books of mine; it was first published in 1954 and



it has been in print continuously since that time, somewhere in the world. This one book has also earned me more than any other five books I've written, because of those continuous reprints and because it was sold to Hollywood - although it was never filmed.

WALKER

Are all your books under the "Wilson Tucker" name?

TUCKER

All my books were published under the Wilson Tucker name. Those early short stories in the 'forties were signed Bob Tucker because everyone in our field at that time knew me as Bob, but in 1946 the Rinehart editor wanted a better given name; she pointed out I wasn't another Bob Davis. Later short stories were also published as Wilson, I believe.

WALKER

You said your first sale was to Fred Pohl in 1941, from whom you received your first worthwhile advice that led to that first sale. Do you remember what that advice was?

TUCKER

Fred Pohl showed me how to properly construct a short story. The first one I submitted to him concerned a man, a young woman, and an alien who were brought together in a space station; it was really a refuelling depot for star ships traveling between Earth and the Alpha Centauri system and my mistake was to ram all the background into the first few pages before the characters were introduced and started moving around the station. Speaking as the omniscient author, I launched into a complete description of the station and its workings, its schedules, its booby traps, everything I thought the reader should know in advance before the people appeared. When the people did appear, they raced through the story with little or no attention to background detail and arrived at the climax rather empty-handed. Fred Pohl told me how to introduce first the one or two people who would be living the story, and then dribble in some of the technical background, and then introduce the woman along with still more background information, and finally let the three of them work through the story to its end by employing (or being thwarted by) the technical details I had originally crammed into the beginning.

It can be stated simply another way: if a character is walking down the street to mail a letter, don't describe the street and the mailbox before he leaves his house. Describe the scene as he passes through it and describe the mailbox as he nears it or actually drops in the letter. And at the same time make the descriptive passages so unobtrusive they can't be mistaken for lectures or travelogues.

That is sound construction advice but I lacked the wit to recognise it in time, despite several years of pulp reading. The writers I'd been reading knew the technique, of course, and used it so skilfully I was never aware of what they were doing. When my first turn came I made the stupid mistakes. The same technique applies to novels as well, and those novels which introduce the protagonist on the first page (and especially the first paragraph) read the best. I thank Fred for that.

Do you recall the ancient stories and serials of the 1930s in which some windy character (usually the Head Scientist) stopped the action cold by delivering a science lecture? Embedded in that lecture would be the facts a reader should know to understand something of importance to follow. Sometimes the writer was so unskilled he would use a shovel in this manner:

Professor Greenspoon adopted his best classroom manner. "As you all know," he enunciated, "there is nothing up there for a rocket to push against, so we must rely on..."

"Oh, no!" Harry groaned in an aside. "Not another lecture!"

That writer and those magazines needed Fred Pohl.

WALKER

As you have had to revise and rewrite so often, what is your procedure and philosophy of revision? Some writers, if not many, find it an impossible job; and I suppose most amateurs asked by an editor to revise their stories would not know how to begin. How do you do it?

TUCKER

I don't mind revisions (well, not too much!) where the editor has pointed up a real need for them, and has offered suggestions or an outline of what should happen during the revisions. I'd certainly be lost without suggestions or an outline, and I've been very fortunate in having a series of articulate editors who, after having spotted my wrong turn, supplied me with a full and lucid explanation of the error and how to correct it. Some of the letters from editors have run as many as four and five pages (typed, single-spaced) and those letters were gold mines. It is my habit to revise the manuscript by studying each paragraph of the letter and turning the novel in the direction indicated in that particular paragraph; the story will then flow in a new direction until I reach the point of objection in the next paragraph, and it will turn again. By the time I have covered the twenty-five or so paragraphs in the five-page letter, I will have a whole new ending to the novel. (This happened to This Witch, causing the entire last half of the novel to be rewritten in a new direction, but yet arriving at the desired ending.)



Sometimes, of course, the objections refer only to a person or place or thing, which can be corrected by revising a single page; sometimes I have fouled up my own time sequences, or inserted a wrong date or a wrong fact, and once I placed the wrong Roman legion marching down the Jordan valley. Some reader would have caught it, if the editor did not. That happened to me more than twenty years back when, through carelessness, I allowed the protagonist to drive across the Illinois River at St Louis. After the book was published, a loyal St Louis reader wrote in, asking whatever happened to the Mississippi River. A map, or an alert editor or copy reader, would have saved me that error. The best and only advice I can give a new writer faced with a demand for revision is to ask his editor for a bill of particulars, and be sure to say "please". And then make the revisions. If that writer is lucky he will get a long letter chock full of suggestions designed to save his story and save his sale.

## WALKER

I'd like to ask you for two case histories in detail. One of Wild Talent and the other of The Year of the Quiet Sun. Granted, much time passed between them, but I was struck by the enormous jump in quality, seriousness, in maturity between the two. I'd like to know about the origins of the ideas for both; the work you put in on them; their themes, etc, and what you think of them.

## TUCKER

Wild Talent: I seldom keep old manuscripts and the records for those manuscripts beyond a few years, so reconstructing the history of that book will be by guesswork. It was published in January 1954 and so I would think it was written during the winter of 1952-53 and delivered to the publisher in the spring of 1953. I wrote one book each winter for nearly twenty years and that book fits neatly into the schedule.

Unlike some of my other novels, it was never a short story or novelette. For a period of time during the very late forties or early fifties, the mundane world was interested in telepaths; I recall a few press mentions here and there, and once Newsweek launched a fishing expedition by reporting that both Soviet Russia and the Pentagon were conducting a secret telepath search against the day a new breed of spies would be needed. These may have sparked the idea for the book, or perhaps I'm putting the cart before the horse, in that I began seeing the press notices after the book was written. I once received a letter from a Newsweek editor commenting briefly on the book and I assumed it was a routine letter designed to make sure I really existed before they published a review, but no such review appeared.

In any event, something sparked the idea of a telepath working as a spy, in the mystery-novel sense rather than the science fiction sense. No

exotic aliens, no spaceships and star kingdoms, no overthrow of an empire, but rather a bread-and-butter story of an ordinary telepath working in ordinary Washington - the first of his kind. Because he would be the first of his kind in a square, mundane world, the plot invited trouble. The book was cast in a mystery-novel mould. I used my own youthful background as the protagonist's background: all of the details of riding a boxcar to Chicago, of the slum hotels and cheap-side restaurants, the all-night theatres for sleeping, and the World's Fair of 1933-34 were taken from life. You can easily determine where fictitious events were inserted: the finding of a wounded FBI agent in an alley, the naive letters mailed to Washington, the later induction into the Army and the discovery by fingerprints were interwoven fictions to move the boy into a man, and the man to Washington. By that point, the mystery-story technique had taken hold and the remainder of the novel followed formula, including that flashback (flashforward?) opening chapter in which the hero appears to be killed. It was really a chase story in which the chase has ended and the quarry apprehended by the first chapter. The remainder is his education and escape.

I thought then, and still think today, that if a telepath is discovered and put to work for the Pentagon (or any other US agency) his life will be miserable unless he is one of them in every philosophical respect, ie, if he is a super-patriotic, gung-ho, conservative citizen who believes in big government and the square military mind, he will get along splendidly because he will be among his brothers, but if he is other than that he will make the biggest mistake of his life in joining them. My protagonist soon realised he'd made a mistake, and the story was that much easier to write because of the mistake. Undoubtedly I had to rewrite parts of it, adding or subtracting pages or incidents because of things that happened later, but the only situation I now recall was the ending, the final chapter on the Florida beach.

I no longer remember the original ending, I don't remember what happened to whom, or why, but my Rinehart editor did ask for a new final chapter and it was supplied to her - the chapter you see in the book. Later, that chapter again had to be rewritten for the British edition (Michael Joseph, 1955). My editor in London was Clemence Dane, and she was dissatisfied with the ending because it appeared brief, sketchy to her eye. At her bidding I rewrote the chapter again and so the British edition is a few thousand words longer than the American ditto.

I was astonished many times on and after the book's publication. I had always regarded it as a competent but common novel, a run-of-the-mill work which would be read and dropped from print in the usual year or so. Just the opposite occurred. First I received a small avalanche of fan mail, something that had not happened after my previous novels appeared; this fan mail was

from strangers in the mundane world, and it continued for many years afterward whenever another reprint edition would appear.

Next, it got reprinted here and there all over the world and in many languages, including the proverbial Scandinavian. Japan, Israel, Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Argentina, Australia (as distinct from the Australian market mined by British publishing houses) - it seemed half the world wanted the book. Bantam Books published the first American paperback edition in 1955, and went back to press with a second hundred thousand copies after the first hundred thousand sold out. Tony Boucher told me at the time that it was the first time a science fiction novel had done that. Judging by the trickle of royalties still coming in, that book has remained in print, somewhere in the world, continuously since 1954. The book was also sold to the movies. It never appeared, although a screenplay was prepared and some few production plans were made. I've often speculated on that, on what postponed or cancelled the picture.

The Year of the Quiet Sun: This particular sun forced a break in my routine of one book each winter, because people kept rejecting it. It was written three times between 1966 and 1969. The first version was titled Cry Down the Quiet Sun and was completed in May 1967 after the usual eight or nine months' work. The editors at Doubleday rejected it. The following winter it was completely revised and rewritten in a somewhat different form and again submitted to Doubleday in 1968. They said they were sorry, but it would be best shelved and forgotten. The manuscript then went to Ace Books where Terry Carr was editing and he also rejected it, but he said that if I cared to give it one more try he would be pleased to read it again.

Meanwhile, I had become discouraged with the failures and had started work on a mystery-adventure novel using much the same background. I was reading everything I could find on the Dead Sea Scrolls and, by that time, I'd turned up so much information that I had enough for two or three novels. Quiet Sun made extensive use of two fictitious scrolls and, at the same time, employed some real ones for background information. The mystery novel, This Witch, relied on a real scroll to launch a treasure hunt.

I don't want to mislead you when I say I was using much the same background for both books. This Witch is set in Gaza, Israel, and Jordan a few years after the 1967 war when Nasser was still alive; Quiet Sun is set in Illinois in the near-future beginning in 1978. But both books are solidly based on certain scrolls, real and imaginary, and in both books the protagonist is propelled into motion by what his own researches into the scrolls revealed to him; there is also an interchange in which the protagonist in one book refers to a key scroll which moved the protagonist of the other book. (The fragmented scroll in This Witch which purports to reveal a

treasure of two hundred tons of gold is a real one; it has been deciphered and read but the Israeli authorities claim to disbelieve it.)

I was also discouraged by the times; in 1967 and 1968 the burnings of Watts, Chicago, Washington, and other cities was only a short time behind us and it was easy to imagine what could happen if the blacks continued to endure winters of discontent. I really expected them to continue, and it is surprising to me they didn't follow up the early gains of their guerrilla warfare; after the burning of Washington the politicians were so frightened of impending civil war they would have handed over the key to the White House - if it wasn't burned. I am also surprised that many other science fiction writers didn't employ the same events; I think the "riots" were the nearest we have come to civil war since 1861, yet our writers seem to have ignored events.

That's the backgrounding of The Year of the Quiet Sun. A new uprising, combined with newly discovered prophetic scrolls were too much temptation to resist, and one easily reinforced the other. I carried the story forward to what I considered one logical ending; other and equally logical endings could be written. Meanwhile, This Witch was completed and submitted to Doubleday, where it was conditionally accepted; they wanted the entire last half of the book rewritten in a new direction. And I had two books on my hands in need of major work.

I chose to work on Quiet Sun first because it was the more immediate, the more "dated" of the two, and because it was closer to my heart. Perhaps I was inspired - I don't know now - but I tackled it a third time in September 1969 and rewrote the story from the beginning; this third version is related to the first only in that a man goes forward in a time machine, and finds there a woman he knows. It was finished in December the same year, and Terry Carr contracted for it that same month - with the request that I make a few more minor revisions in the last chapter. I did, of course. If he had rejected it once more I would have thrown the manuscript away, finally convinced of its uselessness.

About three weeks later (12 January 1970) I began rewriting the latter half of This Witch and finished it at the end of March. It was accepted the following month and I heaved another great sigh of relief and thankfulness.

There isn't much more to add. I wrote a screenplay for Quiet Sun two years ago but it hasn't found a buyer anywhere. Both that book and This Witch are now reappearing here and there around the world in various reprint editions, with the mystery novel earning the better sales - which is to be expected. My mysteries have always sold better than my science fiction but, as I think I told you before, the science fiction offers a better return over a period of one or two decades because it is frequently reprinted in paperback where mysteries are not. Reviews on both books



are mixed, which is also to be expected. I sometimes think that if there are precisely one hundred thousand science fiction readers, half of them will like a book - any book by any writer - and the other half will not. In mystery novels the same does not apply, mostly because of a lack of a large mystery fandom with fanzines to provide a feedback. In mysteries, a writer must rely on newspaper reviewers (not critics) who are a very strange lot, provincial to a fault.

In England, a gentle lady reviewer strongly objected to the bloodshed in This Witch. In Indiana, another gentle lady reviewer recommended the book because it was set in "the Holy Land" where she had travelled extensively. And almost everywhere in the United States, several reviewers objected to Quiet Sun because the protagonist did not enter the first chapter carrying a large sign which read, "Look: I am black." But in Australia another reviewer realised that without being told, and wondered why his American counterparts were so blind.

WALKER

You've written mysteries and s f: do you prefer, however slightly, one genre to another? How would you compare them as fiction, as to how they appeal to people? What is the central appeal of a mystery as opposed to an s f book?

TUCKER

I prefer to write mysteries over science fiction, but the divisional line of preference is a very thin one. A mystery isn't as difficult to write because this world doesn't have to be described to the reader, and science lectures (however disguised) aren't necessary unless the story employs some technical gadget the reader might be ignorant of. I have used spy-in-the-sky satellites, and a proton magnetometer, and even a "foolproof" method of smuggling diamonds or dope into the United States in a coffin but, because these are mundane things a mystery reader is likely to read about in newspapers, it was only necessary to include a few paragraphs of explanation to make them work. No need to build a space station or a refuelling depot complete with booby traps just to move people through an adventure. A mystery novel is still easier when it is set in an ordinary American city, peopled with ordinary American characters using ordinary guns or knives or poisons; the writer need only be certain the gun he describes actually exists and will perform in the manner indicated, and the laws of that city and its state permit the detective to act in the way he does. I'm not suggesting that writing a mystery novel is easy. It is not. But writing a mystery novel is somewhat less work than writing a science fiction novel.

Other than that, I prefer mysteries because of the sheer fun of writing them, constructing and plotting them; they are exhilarating. If you have been a long and careful reader, you will have already noticed that many science fiction novels

are really mysteries set in alien landscapes. I think the mystery story is the basic one and is universally employed to spin out gothic, historical, adventure, and science fiction novels. Many of the charted "best-sellers" are mysteries in disguise. Consider the many wellknown science fiction novels of the past which were basically mysteries: a search for an answer to some mysterious event, the search being made in space, or a long ship, or on an alien planet. Clarke's 2001 is a mystery story.

I've learned that the hardcore readerships are direct opposites. Men predominate in the science fiction field; women rule in the mystery-reader world. Of course, there are large numbers of the opposite sex reading each, but the majority are as stated. I've had the opportunity to check two libraries over the past quarter-century, and both studies revealed the same results: women borrow mysteries; men borrow science fiction books - although in the last ten years or so the number of women checking out science fiction has been increasing.

The library nearest my recent Heyworth home uses a different system than is usually employed. Instead of a number being stamped on the card pocketed in the front of the book, the borrower writes his/her name on the card and deposits it at the check-out desk. While in Heyworth, I frequently checked those cards to determine who read my books. If there were thirty names written on a card in a mystery novel, one or two would be males. If there were thirty names written on a card in a science fiction novel, about half would be males - and, in that town, that half consisted of high-school students and their teachers. (I don't believe that sampling is a true one because there all the borrowers knew me or knew of me. This was curiosity to know what I was doing. The other library showing male-to-female ratios is more accurate.)

Writing science fiction is more demanding and a little less fun, unless I'm deliberately writing a fun book. I'm painfully aware of my lack of education in physics, astronomy, or whatever is required for the task at hand, and so I rely on pseudo-science which robs the reader. Whenever and wherever possible, I write a basic mystery novel placed in a science fiction setting. I feel safest when I employ only one science-fictional gadget: a time machine, perhaps, and then form the remainder in a mystery or an adventure mould. I once wrote an historical novel in this way, which came off rather well. I can do nothing but envy writers like Poul Anderson who have firm knowledge of science.

WALKER

I'd also like to know why you've remained in fandom. What "good" is fandom anyway? - to pose a rhetorical question.

(PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 63)



```

      0   000 000 0   000 0 000 0 0
      000 000 000 000 000 000 000 0
      000 000 000 000 000 000 000 0
      000 000 000 000 000 000 000 0

```

## THE MYSTERIOUS WILSON TUCKER

## EDITOR:

Lesleigh Luttrell's achievements within science fiction fandom are too many to remember, let alone list. With Hank, her husband, she is famous as co-editor of Starling, one of the very best fanzines since it was revived in 1969. Under her Official Editorship, APA-45 had the most successful four years of its run as one of the best-known amateur press associations. Lesleigh was the first winner of the Down Under Fan Fund, undertaking a very successful trip to Australia in 1972, and has done a great deal to make sure that DUFF has remained successful. Her most recent achievements include articles about subjects as diverse as Carl Barks and Dorothy Sayers, mainly for Starling, and the fact that she initiated and continues to be the Official Editor for the Cinema Amateur Press Association. Lesleigh and Hank live in Madison, Wisconsin, where Lesleigh is completing her PhD in physical anthropology at the University of Wisconsin, and Hank is publishing fanzines, writing reviews and fiction, and organising a new s f club. \*

\* WARNING: This article reveals the ends of some mystery novels. \*

Most people who are reading this article will have heard of Wilson Tucker, famous science fiction writer, author of such classics as The Long Loud Silence, The Lincoln Hunters, and The City in the Sea. Most of you have probably also heard of that legendary fan, Bob Tucker, editor of Le Zombie, fan writer, and famous connoisseur of Beam's Choice.

But fewer of you will be acquainted with the real Wilson Tucker. Hardly anyone knows that Wilson Tucker, the s f author, Bob Tucker, the fan, and Hoy Ping Pong are merely alter egos of that famous American mystery writer, Wilson Tucker. Mr Tucker is well known in mystery circles as the author of eleven novels in the mystery-detective genre published between 1946 and 1971. These novels cover the major facets of American mystery fiction - private detective, suspense, and spy novels, and several of them are minor classics. The fact that Mr Tucker has never won an Edgar only proves that mystery writers and fans can be as ignorant when it comes to giving out their awards as s f people are.

Unlike most other major American mystery writers - Edgar Allan Poe, Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, Mary Roberts Rinehart, etc - Mr Tucker is still alive. Thus he was able to explain to this writer just why he started writing mysteries. Mr Tucker stated that he had read and enjoyed many mysteries, especially of the Erle Stanley Gardner-A A Fair variety, before he decided to take quill in hand and write his first mystery novel, The Chinese Doll. To his surprise, he discovered that mystery editors were much more perceptive than s f editors and this novel sold the

second time out. Not only that, but mystery editors actually paid to print his stuff, something pretty rare in s f circles at the time, and as yet unheard of in fandom. So he kept writing mysteries for the money and, of course, for the satisfaction.

Mr Tucker says, "I've often said that I write science fiction for fun, and mysteries for money, but that is no longer true. Science fiction now pays as well as mysteries, except that one must wait a longer number of years for the totals to equal. And I have pure, sheer fun researching mysteries." It is probably a sign of these degenerate times that Tucker now gets paid more for writing that crazy Buck Rogers stuff which can't possibly be true, than for writing a nice, quiet, realistic story about a bloody murder. But it is true, since science fiction books now stay in print much longer, going through lots of paperback and foreign editions while mysteries no longer fare so well. At least we have Tucker's word that he will continue to write mysteries for the fun of it.

While the average mystery reader is sure to enjoy Wilson Tucker's works, they are unlikely to get as much out of them as do the s f fans who venture afield to read a Tucker mystery. For it is in his first mystery novel that Tucker invents the famous and much-imitated Tuckerisms. For the uninitiated, a Tuckerism is a veiled reference to some person or thing familiar to fans but not to mundanes, hidden somewhere in the body of a work of fiction. Surely this type of private joke is not unique to Tucker and his imitators. Ghu only knows how many theses are written by literature students every year about just this sort of thing in the work of more famous literary figures, such as Shakespeare, Dickens, and Spillane. But as far as fandom is concerned, Tucker invented Tuckerisms, and no one has ever come up with a better name for them.

What inspired Tucker to invent Tuckerisms, which have amused generations of fans? The instant of inspiration is hidden in the mists of the past, but Tucker explains that he started to use them mainly for his own amusement, and for the amusement of the fans who were Tuckerised. Being Tuckerised is a great honour, given to but few fans. But Mr Tucker is careful to point out that he tries not to use fannish names as the names of major characters, lest anyone get upset at an extended portrait of a character bearing their name. But this just adds to the fun, since it makes it that much more difficult to sort out all the Tuckerisms in a particular volume. The intrepid and knowledgeable reader will find that Tuckerisms add that much more to their enjoyment of Tucker's works.

It is possible to divide Wilson Tucker's mysteries into three distinct periods. It's not necessary to do so, of course, but did you ever read a literary article which didn't divide the subject's work up into periods? So, the three

periods are: the Early Period - the five novels written mainly in the mid- to late forties, featuring Tucker's private detective, Charles Horne; the Transitional Period - the three novels written in the late fifties and early sixties, which are ventures into other aspects of the mystery field; and the Modern Period, consisting of the three novels written in the late sixties and early seventies.

## THE EARLY PERIOD

### The Chinese Doll

The Chinese Doll, Tucker's first mystery novel, appeared in 1946 from Rinehart in a Murray Hill Mystery Edition and, later, as an attractive Dell paperback with that sure mark of a good mystery novel, a map on the back cover. This novel introduces the private detective, Charles Horne. Horne lives and works in the small Illinois town of Boone, which is obviously Bloomington where Tucker lived for a long time. Horne is based on Tucker himself, in appearance and other general characteristics. The first picture that the reader gets of Horne is this self-description that Horne ascribes to his new client: "He also thought I was a skinny, dumb-looking creature who might pass for a private detective in a custard-pie comedy, but he didn't say so with his lips."

Horne makes up in persistence and occasional flashes of intelligence for what he lacks in appearance. Most of Horne's remunerative cases do not come from clients who walk in off the street with a nice murder mystery or a little divorce work (which most fictional private detectives won't admit to accepting). Instead, Horne does most of his work for a Chicago insurance company, investigating local applicants and claims. In this respect, Horne is probably just a bit more realistic than most other fictional private detectives of the period, not that it makes any difference to the story.

This first book also introduces a few other regular characters, such as Lt Wiedenback, Horne's friendly enemy on the police force, and the romantic interest, Dr Elizabeth Saari. Curious to know why Tucker had chosen to make the lady a doctor, I asked him to explain. He claimed he did it only as a plot device. He also mentioned that the reason that Dr Saari is such a sympathetic character is that she is based on several women he liked at the time.

Since it was written in the 1940s, the use of a private detective as the main character puts The Chinese Doll in the mainstream of American detective fiction of that time. The novel also features murder, sex, and big-city vices like gambling. What sets it apart from most mystery fiction of the time is the setting - central Illinois - and the format - the book is done as a series of letters from Charles Horne to an estranged wife living in another city. Actually, the chapters resemble letters only in that they



begin with a date and a salutation and are written in the first person. The book includes dialogue, etc, just as if it were a more usual type of narrative.

The main plot device is not just the letters, but the fact that their recipient, Louise, is revealed at the end of the book to be the ringleader of the gangsters who have committed all the dastardly deeds in the book. Horne is a little slow to figure this out, but finally he does awaken to the fact when his wife is a little quick to send flowers to his hospital room after Horne has been incapacitated by a severe beating from some of the gangsters. Horne also seems a little thick-headed, in not knowing what type of person his wife really is.

Because the book is done as a series of letters to the real "villain", Anthony Boucher compared it favourably with Agatha Christie's classic The Murder of Roger Ackroyd. Boucher claimed that Tucker had done Christie one better, something that a lot of mystery writers at the time wanted to do. But the odd thing is that Tucker had no intention of doing so when he wrote The Chinese Doll and had, in fact, not even read The Murder of Roger Ackroyd. Even though Tucker hadn't been trying to do an Ackroyd-like book, he ended up with one which was somewhat like that Christie novel, although perhaps a bit fairer to the reader. On the other hand, it is not really an improvement on The Murder of Roger Ackroyd. The reader never really does get to know the true villain, Louise, through the body of the narrative in the way that the reader of The Murder of Roger Ackroyd comes to appreciate the character of that murderer. The prime fault of The Chinese Doll is that the reader never does learn very much about Louise, Horne's ex-wife. She is merely the recipient of his letters, and nothing we learn about Horne really prepares us to believe that he could have married such a conscienceless woman. This is the most unbelievable part of the book. It is easy to believe the parts about gambling dens on the edges of small Illinois towns, corrupt city governments, and the murder of people who know too much. But the characters are not completely believable.

The most unbelievable character is the first murder victim, Harry W Evans. It is almost impossible to reconcile the character we meet in Horne's office shortly before his murder, the associate of gamblers and the keeper of a Chinese mistress, with the man whose background Horne investigates in the book. For Harry Evans was a fan.

Horne, upset by the hit-and-run murder of Evans just as he walks out of Horne's office, decides to investigate his death. He contacts Evans' attorney to try to find out something about the man. He learns that Evans had three hobbies, "Collecting first editions of fantasy literature, dabbling in table-top photography, publishing a paper in some amateur journalism society." With this slender lead, Horne asks the local librarian

to help him get in touch with this amateur journalism society. Amazingly enough, she knows of several such groups and is able to pinpoint the correct one: "The third outfit, smallest of the three but the only one having international membership, specialised in fantasy and weird books." Of course it's an apa, but not only that, it's a Tuckerised version of FAPA. So, in order to learn more about Evans, Horne travels to Chicago to meet with one of the members, Joquel Kennedy.

This trip leads to the most entertaining chapters of the book. While looking for Kennedy's home, Horne runs across a large crowd in front of a store window, watching "Roboto - The Electric Man!" Horne and one other young man in the crowd aren't fooled, but while confiding to each other that it's a damned good act, Horne discovers that the other guy is Joquel Kennedy. After discussing the peculiarities of people who believe that "a real robot would be used in a drug store window selling hair oil", they go onto discuss Horne's real interest, the murder of Harry W Evans.

Kennedy is shocked by the murder and tells Horne that he knew Evans well, "But I've never met him in my life, if that's what you mean. We had an extensive correspondence, swapped a few books and things like that. Each of us always said we were going to run over and see the other, but we never got around to it." Which is as good an introduction to fandom as any private detective could want. Kennedy also shows Horne some fanzines, his own Le Zombi (a Tuckerism of Tucker's own fanzine) and Evans' Rosebud, explaining its connection with the Orson Welles movie and also that the word "has a slangy connotation among the membership". Horne later confides to Louise, "I didn't dare ask what the connotation was for fear he would tell me." (If you want to find out what connotation Rosebud has for fans, you'll just have to ask Tucker.)

This expose of fandom and FAPA isn't the only Tuckerism in The Chinese Doll. Practically every character has the name of a well-known fan of the time, as you will discover if you read the book with Harry Warner's history of early fandom, All Our Yesterdays, at your side. Joquel Kennedy and Evans are references to fans, as is Donny Thompson, the DA in Boone, Doc Burbee, the coroner (Tucker describes him as "addicted to gaily coloured bow ties of large dimensions and forever nagging them as though they were tight around his neck."), Rothman and Leibscher, the slightly comic detective team from the neighbouring city of Croyden (a disguised Peoria), and August Ashley, Evans' attorney. Even Saari and Wiedenbeck are the names of fans. It seems unlikely that Tucker could have sold The Chinese Doll if his publisher had known how many real people were mentioned in it. But sell it he did, to the delight of fandom.



To Keep or Kill

To Keep or Kill, the second in the Charles Horne series, appeared in 1947. Again most of the novel takes place in the town of Boone and environs, and again Dr Saari and Lt Wiedenbeck make appearances. By this time the Horne-Saari romance has advanced a bit, with Saari having an office across the hall from Horne and living in the same rooming house. Horne obviously likes Saari, but he can perhaps be accused of having less than honourable intentions toward her. It is hard to blame him for this, though, after his bad experience with Louise in the previous book. "He found Dr Saari to be an intelligent, attractive, chestnut-haired model with all the standard fixtures; about twenty-seven years old, and single. It pleased him." Fortunately Saari is a strong enough character to stand up to Horne, able to badger him about his health even while she worries about him. But she's not the only female character in this book with an interest in Horne.

To Keep or Kill begins with a bang, literally, as Horne witnesses a man being blown to kingdom come by a bomb planted in his car, a bomb which is powerful enough to knock out every window on the street and injure bystanders, including Horne. Such a bomb would be an almost unremarkable occurrence in these days of terrorists, but it was not so usual then, and several of the characters seem to think it may have been an A-bomb somehow reduced to an incredibly small size. (Who would have thought of such a thing, except a science fiction writer?) Fortunately for the plot, it turns out to be no such thing, but simply a more ordinary murder weapon. The victim happens to have a rather large policy with the insurance company that Horne sometimes works for, so he sets out to investigate the murder and subsequent insurance claim. He finds that the victim has left the proceeds of the policy to a local animal hospital. That doesn't seem so unusual to me, but it does to Horne and the police. From here on, though, the plot gets a little ridiculous.

It turns out to be insurance fraud all right, but a fraud rigged by the head of the insurance company and run by his daughter, Betty. She is an unusual redhead with ideas of her own about how a life of crime should be lived. She has been following Horne around Boone to make sure that he keeps out of the way, and when he starts to become dangerous to the plot, she pays the other conspirators to keep them from killing him. In other words, she buys him, as she tells Horne after he is kidnapped: "I bought you, Jack. Paid out good, hard-earned cash for you. My own money, too! I bought your life for my amusement. I liked you." This seems to have all the makings of a good pornography novel - a beautiful woman, a captive man, an isolated house - but since it's a mystery, Horne manages to avoid the questionable scenes by getting drunk whenever things start to get interesting.

Betty is a strong, cynical character. She tells Horne that her toughness is derived from her months in the army and her subsequent desertion: "That war was a racket. Why should I work like a bitch for fifty dollars a month when big men were getting fifty a minute?" A good question. Unfortunately, Tucker ruins a good character by giving her one quirk too many, the desire to have Horne for her very own. And, to make things come out even, Tucker has to kill her off at the end of the book by having her electrocuted accidentally. Too bad, since she had the brains to be a really decent villain. Even in death she can't escape her quirk though, as she leaves Horne her life savings, a room full of silver dollars. (Unfortunately, as we learn in the next book, the government doesn't let Horne keep any of it.)

Although there aren't many Tuckerisms in this book, Tucker does manage to slip in just a few, like Dr Lainy, the vet at Boone Animal Hospital, and E E Everetts, the crooked head of the insurance company. But even without the Tuckerisms and with the flawed characters, To Keep or Kill is still an entertaining book.

The Dove

The Dove, released in 1948 as a Murray Hill Mystery Edition, has a lead female who makes up for all the faults of To Keep or Kill's villainess. She is Leila Dove. Horne first runs into her in Boone, where she has been confined to the hospital after a train wreck (she has been riding the rods at the time). The Dove, as she signs herself, hires Horne to get her out of the hospital (where the evil Superintendent Hevelin has been trying to get her to pay the outrageous hospital bill - \$370 for a two-month stay!). She also wants him to accompany her to Hollywood. It seems that Leila Dove is actually a movie star, or was, having been a leading lady in over 100 silent eaters ("Western pitchers...Cowboy and Indian pitchers", for the uninformed). She tells Horne and Dr Saari (who is still interested enough in Horne to put him on a weight-gaining diet) that she needs to get back to Los Angeles to retrieve a large sum of money, all she has left in the world. She tells an almost unbelievable story about how she won the money from another silent star, Texas Tanner, in a poker game and hid it on the lot, but had never been able to go back for it. So she wants Horne to take her back for it. Horne takes the case, despite Leila's current lack of money, because he had been a great fan of hers. "That word fan goes hand-in-hand with another word: sap."

Despite the careful descriptions of locales around Los Angeles, it is in The Dove that Tucker makes his classic mistake. When Horne and Leila are on their way to LA, "They crossed the Illinois River at St Louis just before sunset." Of course, everyone knows that it is the Mississippi that one would cross when entering St Louis from the east. Tucker corrected this

mistake in his next book and since then he has probably been more careful than most writers in researching the area where his story is to be set.

Besides offering the pipe-smoking, tough-talking, delightful character of Leila Dove, The Dove also has a pretty interesting plot. Horne is suspicious about the real reason that Leila wants to return to LA, and what happened to the first private detective she hired, many years before, to help retrieve her money. He is suspicious of Texas Tanner, now a famous director who has a habit of making a brief appearance in every picture without saying a word as "homage to the silents". (He, like Leila, was forced to quit acting when talkies came in, because of his voice.) Horne doesn't like Leila's old boyfriend, Sully Wantozki, either. So he snoops around on his own, and discovers that his joking remark back in Boone that Leila must have a "skeleton buried somewhere" is truer than he thought - there really is a skeleton buried at her old home. He discovers that the reason Texas Tanner hates Leila is because he believes she has been blackmailing him with a pornographic movie taken at a wild Hollywood party back in the silent days. This must be some film, but again Tucker avoids a potentially pornographic situation by giving only tantalising hints about what sorts of embarrassing scenes feature Tanner and Leila in this movie. He learns that the blackmail payments were put into a copy of Darker Than You Think, by Jack Williams, in the public library (supposedly in 1924-28, long before the actual book by that title was published). And finally, he learns what really happened to the first private detective: he was murdered by Sully, the real blackmailer. Again it's hard to understand why Sully would do such a thing - blackmail his own girlfriend as well as Tanner, and murder to keep the secret. Tucker doesn't seem able yet to create a believable villain, except by telling the reader almost nothing about him and letting the reader imagine for himself the villainous character. But it's easy to forgive him this oversight in The Dove, when there are characters like Tanner, the Dove, and Horne to examine.

### The Stalking Man

The remaining two Charles Horne mysteries, The Stalking Man (1949) and Red Herring (1951), stick to the Midwest for their locales, but venture further afield than Boone.

The Stalking Man is something of a railroad mystery. The murder victim is a railroad agent, and he is killed when he falls under a train. Tucker is able to use some of his knowledge of railroad jargon and procedures, of railroad timetables and the hobos who ride the rods, to set the scene for this mystery. But he uses a lot more in putting this book together.

For one thing, he uses a pretty unusual murder

weapon. It takes the police a long time to figure out just how the murderer caused the agent to fall under the train (although the reader has known all along). Eventually the police figure that the murderer had entangled the victim's legs by wrapping a bola around them. Tucker introduces a new female character, a reporter for the Boone paper named Willie, who is hanging around the police station because her editor wants her to dig up some "jerk-stuff". This, she explains, is material guaranteed to cause the readers to "jerk their damned eyes right out of their heads" and ensure that they keep reading the paper.

Horne decides that the only way to solve the crime is to dig into the past of the victim. This digging takes him to Chicago and neighbouring Hammond, Indiana, to find out something about an old crime, the brutal murder of a theatre manager's wife. While in Hammond, Horne meets up with another lovable old character, Happy Harry, a retired postman living on a small inheritance, who spends all his money on travelling by train, ice cream, and books. At one point he tells Horne the way he decides what books to buy: "I look at page fifty. I read it. And if it sounds good, I buy it." Happy tells Horne a lot about the background of the victim, and decides to follow Horne around on his investigations in Chicago to learn how a detective works.

Remarkably enough, Horne solves the old murder, determining that the theatre manager had killed his own wife to keep her from telling the police that he had robbed his own movie theatre. Unfortunately, Horne also solves the murder in Boone. Happy is the murderer: he was the father of the murdered woman and he had always been convinced that the man he threw under the train, the man who had been arrested after the first crime but later released because of lack of evidence, had murdered his daughter. Horne proved him wrong, and then had to lead the police to him. Here Tucker had reversed himself and thrown most of his work into painting the character of the "villain". But it's hard to see Harry as a real villain. He is such an attractive character that, even while it is possible to believe that he could commit a murder, it's almost impossible not to wish he could have gotten away with it.

### Red Herring

Red Herring begins with the dedication, "For AB. Dedicated, with tongue in cheek, to a critic who abhors the lack of least-suspected-persons." AB is, of course, Anthony Brucher, and the dedication really is tongue in cheek, since the murderer in Red Herring is the most-suspected person.

This case gets Horne involved with some of the richer people, the Randolphs. It appears to start out as a gag, as the youngest Randolph, Lonna, hires Horne to help her brother disappear. Horne does it, with some misgivings which cause him to call Rothman (now admittedly living in Peoria) and have him follow the man.



Unfortunately, Horne's client is murdered the next night "as he sleeps in the Moffatt House hotel.

Solving this murder takes Horne to St Louis, where the other Randolph brother lives, but he too has mysteriously disappeared, along with \$10,000 that a sucker had paid him for a supposed copy of a first draft of the US Constitution. The police feel that either Lonna or the missing brother must be the murderer, but can't prove anything. Horne investigates by spending an evening with Lonna, but fortunately he falls back on his trick of passing out whenever it looks like anything the least bit objectionable might happen. So Red Herring manages to avoid any real sex scenes. As it turns out, Lonna has actually murdered both her brothers, as the reader has suspected all along. Horne manages to catch up with her when she disappears from town, by remembering she had gotten an advertisement for a riverboat cruise. This leads to another murder as Lonna throws an innocent bystander overboard into the paddle wheel, hoping that Horne will mistake the body for hers and believe that she has committed suicide. But she underestimates Horne, and he takes her back to Boone to face the police.

Again in Red Herring Tucker has put most of his efforts into creating the character of the murderer and this time he has succeeded quite well. He has taken time along the way to work out the interesting subplot of the fake Constitution (which turns out to be a copy of a genuine document that Lonna has in her possession) and to slip in a few Tuckerisms, like the private detective, Rothman, Donald Thompson, the alias used by the first murder victim when he registers at the Moffat House, and Woolston, the name of the crooked chemist who helped the eldest Randolph brother to sell the fake Constitution. There isn't much mystery about the book - the reader has probably known all along that Lonna was the real murderer, despite a few red herrings thrown in the path. But with the garnishments that Tucker adds to the book, the lack of a real mystery is hardly noticeable.

Red Herring is the last book to feature Charles Horne, et al, and marks the end of the Early Period. During these half dozen years, Tucker has created an entertaining series of books. They are tied together as a series, not only by having the same main character and other important continuing characters, but also by having a number of other points in common. The Tuckerisms are one thread which ties them together, as is the locale.

And there is one plot device which is repeated in some form or other in every single book. This is the idea of the detective helping his adversary to learn what he is up to without realising that he is doing so. This is the main plot device in the first book, as Horne continues to write letters to his wife describing his every movement, not realising until the

last part of the book that she is the ring-leader of the gangsters he is investigating. In To Keep or Kill, the chief bad guy is the head of the insurance company that Horne works for, so Horne is revealing his investigations to the villains in the reports he submits to his employer, as well as in his dealings with the disguised Betty, who follows him around town before deciding to "buy" him. In The Dove, Horne doesn't tell the blackmailer-murderer what he's up to, but Leila Dove does, since the true villain is her boyfriend, Sully. The Stalking Man not only learns of Horne's progress straight from the detective himself, but aids Horne in his investigation. And in Red Herring, Horne's employer again turns out to be the criminal that the police are looking for. This device is twisted and played on enough that it doesn't really get boring or repetitious, but it is repeated in every book.

During the Early Period, Wilson Tucker has turned out an interesting series of books which may be considered as regional examples of the 40s American private detective. Although Horne travels as far afield as Los Angeles, his investigations are centred in Boone, Illinois and neighbouring midwestern cities. Tucker's Horne series may not always be very realistic, and so may not meet with the approval of the modern reader who demands absolute realism (or what they think is realism) in their mystery novels. Tucker's early novels are not the complete puzzles preferred by other mystery readers, although they cannot be criticised as being unfair to the reader who likes to solve the mystery before the end of the book. They are a lot of fun for the reader who is willing to accept them on their own terms, and especially for the fan who is aware of the additional dimension added by the Tuckerisms.

\*\* \*\* \*

### THE TRANSITIONAL PERIOD

The five novels of the Early Period are held together, not only by common characters, setting, and plot devices, but also by a feeling that mysteries are fun. There is no readily identifiable thread holding the three novels of the transitional or middle period together, but one can see Tucker becoming more serious about his mystery writing during this period, as he explores different areas of the genre, and turns out some good books.

#### The Man in My Grave

The Man in My Grave, published in 1956, is my personal favourite among Tucker's mysteries. At first glance, it does not appear very different from the Charles Horne books, since it takes place in a small Illinois town - this time, Rocky Knoll - which is not far from Tucker's home town, Bloomington - and the lead character is a private detective of sorts. But I cannot see

Charles Horne investigating the type of crime which is featured in this book. For the first time, Tucker has gone to the annals of true crime for inspirations - the accounts of the nefarious deeds of Burke and Hare, the Scottish grave robbers and murderers. Tucker says that it is very likely that Anthony Boucher suggested this source to him. Wherever the original idea came from, Tucker turns it into an intriguing mystery novel.

The detective in The Man in My Grave is B G Brooks, who works for the Association of American Memorial Parks, investigating reports of illicit practices among undertakers. He returns to his home town of Rocky Knoll, ostensibly for personal reasons. He had left the town as a young man, and has had no contact with anyone there since. So he was rather surprised to see in a book of "uncommon epitaphs gathered from cemeteries across the country", the following entry from Rocky Knoll:

Here lies buried B G Brooks  
Dead as a doornail - of course.

Besides the fact that the epitaph doesn't rhyme, Brooks is intrigued to learn that the townspeople think he is dead. The whole thing proves to be mainly a device to get Brooks to Rocky Knoll, but the idea of an employee of an undertakers' union being interested in this kind of graveyard humour, and finding himself too involved with it for comfort, is an excellent touch. The explanation for the mistaken grave, when presented, is fairly trivial, but one is glad to learn that the tombstone had been intended originally for a Mr Eben Morse.

The real reason for Brooks' return to Rocky Knoll is to investigate reports that the local funeral parlour is selling bodies on the black market. Brooks explains the reason for such a ghoulish practice: "Medical schools exist in almost every state of the Union and the supply of cadavers seldom equals the demand. Especially since the war and the renaissance of higher education; medical students are constantly increasing in numbers and they must be served." Brooks certainly doesn't condemn the medical schools, and he reinforces the importance of human anatomy courses by asking one character, "Would you entrust your life to a surgeon who had never before operated on a human body?" Almost too ironically, it turns out that B G Brooks' grave is empty, the body which had been buried mistakenly as his having been snatched long before.

There isn't much real mystery about The Man in My Grave. Brooks finds out almost immediately that his suspicions concerning the local undertaker are justified, and the rest of the book is more or less a chase around the Illinois countryside, following bodies, digging up graves, and learning just who is involved in the "burking" organisation. Brooks himself is attacked by the "bad guys" but, unlike Horne in a similar situation, he defends himself and kills one of his

attackers with the pointed end of his umbrella.

The real mystery of the book is B G Brooks himself. He is an extremely attractive character - intelligent and sensitive. The female lead, Ellen Miller, who is young and adventurous and a strong character, almost falls in love with Brooks. But his age and the fact that she is engaged prevent this. It is easy to understand her fascination, though. Several passages are devoted to following Brooks' thoughts on a number of subjects, including his musings on the North Star and how it changes: "He didn't want to be alive twelve thousand years later, to lose his old friend and see a stranger take its place. It's hard to see this kind of man as involved in this odd sort of detective work, to think of him as a good detective and a man who is tough enough to kill an attacker and to catch several of the men he is after single-handedly. Still, it is nice to see Tucker presenting us with a detective who is more of a whole character than Horne was. Despite the flip parts of the book, and the sometimes unbelievable turns of plot, The Man in My Grave is a good example of a certain type of American private detective mystery, one with a main character who thinks about what he is doing and why.

Despite its serious aspects, The Man in My Grave does not ignore the prime attraction of Tucker's mysteries to s f fans, the Tuckerisms. Only The Chinese Doll has more. The inhabitants of Rocky Knoll include Sheriff Moffatt, deputy Grennell, Dr Burbee and Doc Barrett, the coroner. Barrett is described as "a tremendously large man, smoking a very black, very rank cigar". Tucker says this is his favourite Tuckerism, but it is also one that backfired on him, as the next time he saw Doc Barrett, he was treated to a face full of smoke from just such a cigar. Among the villains in the book are Abner Rotsler, head of Crawford mortuary, and Bloch, who runs the hotel in Rocky Knoll. "Bloch and Rotsler - that figured." And, in the nature of giving credit where credit is due, the story ends with this Tuckerism: "Ellen found him as he was leaving the H H Holmes Department Store (Big White Sale now going on!)."

### The Hired Target

The Hired Target (1957), originally titled Go Down in Silence, is really more of an adventure than a mystery. It appeared in only one edition, as half of an Ace double. The lead character is Clay Gordon, who is more of an anti-hero than Tucker's previous male leads. He shows up in Peoria, Illinois to ask an old friend for help. He is down on his luck after having been thrown out of Japan after some shady deals on the high seas. He is ready to take on any kind of a job that his friend, Anson Ford, has for him, no questions asked. The job turns out to be getting two women and a kid who are in the country illegally back to their home. The gangster husband of one woman is unwilling to take them back with



him because he fears the Feds are after him for his previous misdeeds, and he doesn't want to add "harbouring an illegal alien" to his record. Although the book begins in Illinois, the characters proceed south, so that Gordon can get them back to their island home in the Caribbean.

The characters, as well as the setting, are more exotic than in previous Tucker novels. The two women, Fugere Leotand and her sister Annette, are an alluring mixture of races. Both the southern US and the Caribbean figure prominently in the book. The main plot device is the double-cross. Ford arranges the death of the gangster employer; one of Ford's employees decides to follow Gordon to see if there is any money to be made out of the mysterious departure; Fugere doublecrosses her sister in an attempt to get the money the gangster must have left with his widow. Finally Gordon doublecrosses everyone, killing Fugere and Ford and leaving for the island paradise with Annette, her son, and her husband's money. It is not a pleasant story, but it fits into the tradition of the American hard-boiled detective story, and shows Tucker beginning to experiment with other aspects of the mystery genre. However, he can't resist falling back on that old plot device of having the "hero" unknowingly assist his foes in finding out his movements. Gordon is not aware until late in the book that Fugere is in cahoots with Ford and is relaying their every move to him.

Despite the unpleasant aspects of the book, Tucker manages to slip in a few Tuckerisms, such as having his car full of oddly assorted characters stop "in a small village named Heyworth to buy a bottle of milk". Heyworth, Illinois was Tucker's home for many years. In perhaps the most esoteric of the Tuckerisms, Tucker uses the following phrase in describing Gordon's murder of Ford: "It was but the work of a moment to pull the blade and wipe it on the victim's coat." This is a reference to Dean Grennell's favourite phrase, "it was but the work of a moment to wipe the blood from my blade". This was a catch phrase that Grennell had picked up from some pulp detective magazine to use as an example of the lurid, bloody prose typical of such publications, and it was often quoted in Grennell's Grue. While The Hired Target may be most notable for this fannish coup, it is important as a book wherein Tucker begins to experiment with different sorts of characters and settings.

### Last Stop

Last Stop (1963) is the most atypical of Tucker's mystery novels, because it started out as a straight novel, entitled Blue Island, Tuesday, written in 1948. It was later rewritten as a suspense novel and called Death of an Iron Horse. Doubleday bought it and retitled it. Tucker says, "Perhaps it would have sold ten more copies under my title." (It had only one US edition of 3000 or 4000 copies.)

This is the first novel for which Tucker did a lot of background reading. All his later novels were fairly heavily researched. Last Stop reflects Tucker's longstanding interest in railroads, also indicated in The Stalking Man. Tucker says of it, "It's about the last steam locomotive on a western railroad going to a watery grave when a swollen river takes out the bridge. The people on the train had to carry the story, but that locomotive was my secret hero."

Although No 484, the Lima Northern, may be the true hero of Last Stop, the book also features some very interesting human characters. The main character is Marin Davissey, a mysterious man who boards the train which is also carrying Arthur Lang, convicted of manslaughter in the death of his wife, Dora; Brace Tolley, the undersheriff, who resembles Harry Carey and who sits on the aisle so "No one would make the mistake of confusing policeman for prisoner and everyone would have the opportunity to notice the similarity to Harry Carey, if they had to wit. to see it"; and Gertrude Churchill, a reporter who is going along for the ride and hoping to get a confession from Lang.

The suspense of the novel depends on two factors - the torrential rain which threatens to close down the tracks and which eventually takes out a bridge as the train is crossing it, and the gradual revelation that Davissey knows too much about Lang and appears to have some kind of a grudge against him. It turns out that Davissey is Dora's roving father, and that he has boarded the train determined to kill Lang. Instead, he discovers he "lacked the immoral courage to kill a man", so he contents himself with getting acquainted with Gertrude and finally getting Lang to confess that he did murder his wife in cold blood.

As in most good suspense novels, atmosphere is the whole point of the book. Tucker does a good job of setting up an atmosphere of tension between Davissey and Lang, as well as producing a cozy picture of people riding the train to their various destinations, only to have their journey rudely and, in many cases, fatally interrupted by the train wreck. But Tucker was right - it should have been called, Death of an Iron Horse. Despite the bathos of the death of a small boy's mother and that of other characters, the most moving description of the train wreck is Davissey's view of the wrecked engine, "The locomotive was there, lying on its side like a dying giant."

Tucker can't resist interrupting the suspenseful tone of the book to slip in a few Tuckerisms. Dr Eney is mentioned as a former employee of Davissey. The little town where Lang lived and where Tolley is undersheriff features a fifty-cents-a-night Moffat House, and the train goes through the little town of Rosebud, while it is speeding to its death. It turns out that Lang has the same birthday as Tucker himself, November 23. And several remarks made by revellers at the party in the last coach may sound familiar to fans: "I had one but the wheel fell off and it died", and

It's interesting to note that Tucker himself was in a train wreck, though it was long after he had written Last Stop, and was not so serious. But still, the fan who has read or heard accounts of Tucker's own train wreck may find the following exchange from the last pages of the book amusing:

"I don't intend to sue," Martin told me.

The agent permitted himself a wry smile.

"Thank you Mr Davissey; you are one in four hundred."

\*\* \*\* \*

## THE MODERN PERIOD

The modern period consists of Tucker's three most recent books. These are basically of the spy-adventure type, and are mainly notable because of their well-researched backgrounds. They also prove that Tucker has learned a bit about writing, as these are well-written, well-plotted books. Perhaps they reflect the fact that Tucker is now writing mysteries as much for fun as for money.

### A Procession of the Damned

A Procession of the Damned (1965) is a spy novel. Tucker wrote the book as a spy novel because the market for such books was good at this time (and still is). The title is derived from the writings of Charles Fort. The main character, Ross, uses The Books of Charles Fort as a convenient place to hid some of his spy paraphenalia, and is struck by the phrase "a procession of the damned" which he encounters on one of the pages which has not been hollowed out. He also thinks it is an apt description of the cross-country chase the he takes part in during the last half of the book.

The story begins in Los Angeles, and the city doesn't seem to have changed a whole lot since Charles Horne visited there in 1948. Ross is there to meet up with a woman named Stone, who wants to hire him and his boat for a job. She sends him to Las Vegas to find out more about the job. Most of the descriptions of Las Vegas, the hotel, the casinos, the streets, the nightclubs, are taken directly from the descriptions of his own visit there which Tucker published in fanzines in 1963 and 1964. (Interested fans can see some of these pieces in The Really Incomplete Bob Tucker.) Even Ross' train ride to the city is taken from Tucker's own experiences. That just proves that Tucker writes stuff for fanzines that is good enough to be published professionally.

In Vegas Ross meets up with the rest of his "partners": Jolly, Stone's husband and part owner of The Bucket of Money; Irma Louise, Stone's daughter and Jolly's stepdaughter; and Ballard, a hypochondriac and Irma Louise's boyfriend.

Ballardi and Jolly describe their business as "finding things that people just left lying around". They want Ross' help in getting such things to people who are interested in buying them.

Also in Las Vegas, the reader learns that Ross is actually working for the government, which is very interested in recovering some of the things it had carelessly "left lying around" after World War II. Eventually the reader learns just what it is that Ballard and Jolly stole when they were in Europe after the War, and why the government is so anxious to get it back. Tucker's description of just how Ballard and Jolly operated after the War builds up an intricate background for the story. "The United States Military Supply Depot, Zwickburg Section, was a fairyland department store, a Sears, Roebuck and Montgomery Ward combine operating without fear of trust busters and tax snoopers, operating around the clock against little more than an outraged squawk from an occasional visiting Congressman."

The descriptions of Las Vegas are matched by the unreal trip across the country, along Route 66, to recover the mysterious stolen objects from their hiding-place at Ballard's boyhood home in Illinois. This trip is very reminiscent of the trip that Gordon, Annette, and Fugere took down Highway 51 in The Hired Target. Tucker allows himself only one Tuckerism in this book: the final destination of the "procession of the damned" is the little town of Rosebud, Illinois. It might restore your faith to learn that in Rosebud the government wins and the "bad guys" get their just deserts. Although Ross wonders if they really deserved what happens to them. But just this once, I won't give away the whole ending of the book.

Ross is the first really attractive lead character since B G Brooks. In fact, he is very similar to Brooks in being a loner mainly concerned with his job, but also a man who is very sensitive and liked by the female lead. Tucker points up this similarity between the two characters, by having Ross describe the changing of the Pole Star, much as Brooks had done several books previously.

### The Warlock

The Warlock (1967) is another Cold-War spy novel. This is Tucker's personal favourite of the mysteries he has written. He says that it was the most fun to write, as well as being his most successful mystery to date. This book takes the reader much farther afield than any previous Tucker novel. The main character is Anson Bolda, born in Poland of a peasant mother who was thought to be a witch, which makes Anson a warlock in the eyes of his peers. Because of the fortunes of war, Bolda finds himself with the US Army, and he is promptly hired when it is discovered that he speaks both Russian and Polish. He becomes an American citizen and a valuable employee of



NSA, the army intelligence service. His luck holds good for many years, but eventually he is captured by the Russians while installing a transmitter for a spy satellite, the Nark. Bolda confesses his crimes to save the life of his mother, who is still living in the Eastern Bloc, but after some years he is traded back to the West for a Russian spy.

Since he is no longer much good as a spy, Bolda is sent to investigate a relatively minor matter - why does a "nut book" writer have a teletype in his apartment? After roaming about eastern Europe for the first part of the book, the action now settles in St Louis, where the mysterious writer lives. Again Tucker moves his book back to the familiar midwestern territory. Charles Horne had been in St Louis several times, and Tucker has learned a bit about the city since his classic "Illinois River at St Louis" mistake. This time his descriptions of the city are very accurate. This adds to the book, especially for someone who is familiar with St Louis. Tucker chooses one of the quietest parts of the city, and yet one of the odder areas, for the residence of Victor Angoff, the writer with a teletype in his basement, and his mysterious companion, Karen Collins.

Bolda begins his job with a huge amount of "spy equipment" and several back-up agents, but his resources and support mysteriously disappear later in the book, and he finds himself in several very dangerous situations. It turns out that Bolda had actually been proving himself in this way, and he has been chosen for this extra-special assignment, chosen while still imprisoned in Russia, partly because his military records indicated that he was considered to be a warlock by his native people. Needless to say, Bolda passes the test successfully, and he ends up in a position most spies would envy.

### This Witch

The Warlock was followed by Tucker's most recent book, This Witch (1971), which wasn't nearly as successful. However, Tucker did enjoy writing the book because "Biblical archaeology is my special interest, and when I got into the history of the scrolls I was delighted. I found enough to background two books, This Witch and Quiet Sun."

This Witch is also a spy-adventure type of novel but, unlike any of Tucker's other mystery novels, it takes place entirely in an exotic setting, the Middle East, especially Israel. It is also the first novel to be written in the first person since The Chinese Doll. Tucker's main character is a sort of adventurer or soldier-of-fortune who works freelance for various governments on a variety of jobs. Westey Ross has been foreshadowed by Tucker's previous lead characters - Ross of A Procession of the Damned, B G Brooks, and even Charles Horne are very similar to this Ross. Ross is the self-assured man, who

knows his own abilities and those of his equipment. He is a man who knows what he is doing, doesn't particularly want anyone else to know about it, but is not entirely successful in concealing his actions.

In the process of his quest, he meets Kelly, an exotic woman of mysterious origins who seems to know more about Ross and what he is doing than is natural. He finds her when a merchant in a dusty desert town offers her for sale. Ross buys, knowing it is a con but determined to keep the girl away from the mercenary old man. In the process of "rescuing" Kelly, he spears an attacker through the shoulder with his specially constructed umbrella (B G Brooks had been able to kill an assailant with the ordinary kind). After this daring rescue, Kelly refuses to leave Ross, and accompanies him on his adventures in the rest of the book, offering help, physical comfort, and oddly phrased but accurate pictures of the future.

Perhaps the best parts of the book are the many interesting bits on the archaeology of the Middle East, such as Ross' description of the history of Jericho. But the plot is also an intriguing one. Ross is hired early in the book by the Israel Tourist Authority to find the treasure of Solomon, the gold hidden by the Jewish rebels before they were invaded by the Romans in 70 AD. The Dead Sea Scrolls have hinted at the whereabouts of this gold, and Ross is in a race with Palestine rebels who also want to get their hands on it. Ross has come to Israel with the intention of finding this treasure, which he had heard about on his wanderings throughout the world, and he is eventually successful in this venture, though not without suffering artillery attacks, wounds, wasted time, double agents, and vicious guerrillas before finding the treasure. In the process he falls in love with Kelly, who remains always an enigma.

Finally Ross learns something about Kelly, thanks to the Israeli agent he had dealt with. She is a witch from the Sudanese Islands. Ross learns from a book lent to him that such witches are hated and feared by the islanders, and so are given away by their parents. He also learns that not all men fear such witches: "Some men had mated with witches and profited thereby... But yet the witch paid an unhappy price for helping another, for listening to the secret winds and reading the webs of the future, for aiding the man who had tamed her. She paid, not the man - that was necessary to the male fantasy...for every favour, for every reading of the future, for every benefit given man for his welfare and profit, the witch paid with a day from the end of her life." Knowing this, and having many times offered Kelly her freedom to go, Ross decides to allow Kelly to go with him on his next adventure.

One reviewer claimed that the character of Kelly made This Witch a sexist book. Certainly the idea of allowing a woman to actually give up part of her time on earth to aid a man is troubling. Tucker himself points out how much this reeks of

male fantasy. Perhaps the important idea is that this is one of those rare fantasies and odd stories which is seemingly true.

Tucker has never used a female as his lead character, which is not too surprising in a genre which usually emphasises male detectives. But he has created a number of intriguing female characters. Tucker uses basically three types of female characters: the scheming, amoral female villain - Betty, Lonna Randolph, Fugere, and Stone; the exotic woman whom the hero inevitably falls in love with - Annette and Kelly as prime examples, while even Irma Louise has an exotic tone, and there are the oriental sisters of The Chinese Doll. These are basically stock figures from the genre, done with Tucker's own touches. But Tucker is at his best in painting the intelligent, generally capable female character, such as Elizabeth Saari, Leila Dove, Ellen Miller of The Man in My Grave, and Karen Collins of The Warlock. These women are able to combine elements of mystery and attractiveness with their other characteristics. These are strong, believable characters, the sort of female characters one likes to find in their genre fiction. Certainly it is not surprising that Tucker works with the other type of female characters, considering that they are common in the genre, and fun to do, but it would be nice to see him concentrate his efforts on the more elemental female characters.

\*\* \*\* \*

The transitional and modern periods contain books which are well researched and well written, books which emphasise character more, and rely less on plot devices. The background becomes as important as the plot. Tucker has obviously become a more mature writer, one who is willing to take more time with his books, probably because he enjoys the research. Certainly they reflect Wilson Tucker, the mystery writer, taking more pains with his art.

But the later books lack something. They are not as fun to read as the Charles Horne books,

in many ways, but especially to fans. The Tuckerisms have been disappearing slowly and I, for one, miss them. Certainly, the fan who picks up a recent Tucker mystery will be getting a good book for his money, even if he can't read it with the superior feeling of knowing something that most other readers don't. Still, Tuckerisms are fun, as was the not-entirely-serious attitude with which the early Tucker novels are permeated.

The Man in My Grave seems to me to be the book which comes closest to combining the two most enjoyable elements of the Tucker mysteries - the researched backgrounds and interesting characters and the fun. Perhaps my choice of this as my favourite Tucker mystery reflects my bias towards older mystery novels, particularly those with a true crime aspect, and away from the spy novel. But I think it is a book any fan would enjoy.

A science fiction fan who has never had the chance to read a Tucker mystery is missing something. He's missing finding out what kind of a mystery Wilson Tucker, the science fiction writer, can write. He's missing finding out what kind of a mystery writer Bob Tucker, the fan, is. But most of all, he's missing some very entertaining books.

Lesleigh Luttrell 1974

\* The Editor made a horrible mistake:

This is the paragraph that has been left out between the last two paragraphs on page 18. \*

This request takes Horne to Hollywood, paralleling Tucker's own trip there not long before. Tucker had gone to Los Angeles in 1946, and for some months worked as an electrician on 20th Century Fox's lot. So it is not surprising that Leila tells Horne that the only man she really trusted on the old film lot was an electrician. The descriptions of Los Angeles and of the film studio that Horne eventually explores, Foto-Film, are drawn directly from Tucker's own experiences there.



## THE SCIENCE FICTION

ooo ooo o o ooo ooo      ooo o o o o ooo ooo ooo o ooo  
ooo ooo o o ooo ooo      ooo ooo ooo ooo ooo  
ooo o o ooo ooo ooo      ooo o ooo ooo ooo ooo  
ooo o o ooo ooo ooo      ooo o ooo ooo ooo ooo

### HIDDEN HEROES:

The Science Fiction Novels  
of Wilson Tucker

((As I've mentioned several times within "Hidden Heroes", this article is designed as a long footnote - or pre-note - to the article I wrote in 1971 about Tucker's The Year of the Quiet Sun. It aims to show by what stages Wilson Tucker became the writer who was able to write Quiet Sun. It fulfils this aim by a method which some may think unnecessarily long-winded. If you think this, you are probably right; it's just my way of setting down, not only what is in the novels but, more importantly, what it is like to experience the novels. If you find this article unnecessarily worshipful to Tucker, again you are probably right. I wrote it during the three months preceding the World Convention held in Melbourne during August 1975, and hoped very much to give a copy of the SFC containing this article to Tucker when he was visiting Melbourne. A bit late, Bob, but here it is:))

"Bob Tucker is an honest man," writes Robert Bloch about his long-time friend and verbal duelling partner. "He has always gone his own way, governing his life pattern with the same quiet determination which marks his progress as a professional writer. He is neither a blatant exhibitionist nor a timid conformist" (quoted in Harry Warner Jr's All Our Yesterdays).

"Bob" Tucker is also Arthur Wilson Tucker, the author of nine science fiction novels and twelve mystery/adventure novels. Even the most careful readers tend to confuse the two figures. It's not difficult to see why.

"He has become a legend in his own time," writes Bloch. "It is impossible to imagine this curious microcosm, science fiction fandom, as it might have evolved without his influence." Bob Tucker, the fan, is so much of a legend that science fiction fans have raised a large sum of money to give him a trip to Australia. When most readers of S F Commentary hear the name of Tucker, they are more likely to think of the jovial dispenser of Beam's Choice and good cheer at conventions, or the witty, irreverent writer of articles for fanzines, than they are to think of the science fiction writer whose work (again in Bloch's words) "is to science fiction what Graham Greene's 'entertainments' are in relation to the average whodunit".

It's hard to find Wilson Tucker hiding behind the longer, leaner shadow of Bob Tucker. They are so much like each other. Bob Tucker is known as one of the most amiable figures in fandom. When I think of Wilson Tucker, I get the same impression. His books contain few villains, little violence, no explicit sex scenes, and little of the gnashing-of-teeth or adrenalin-powered supermen which spoil so much other science fiction. Tucker's novels and his characters are so disarmingly pleasant. Most confusingly, we keep finding Tucker himself (but Wilson or Bob?) right in the middle of the books:

(Benjamin Steward was) a lanky, slow-speaking and slow-moving individual (who) seemed colourless, almost useless... Steward's amiable face, like his clothing and manners... was nondescript. He and his habits belonged to no particular age, reflected no particular pattern in life... Benjamin Steward gave the appearance of being perpetually at peace with the world, seemingly unmoved by it or caring little or nothing for it... He was tall, appallingly thin, with unkempt hair and an unhurried metabolism. (The Lincoln Hunters)

Surely that's Tucker describing himself, much as he appears to other people. It's not the only such portrait. In Ice and Iron, a novel published sixteen years later, we meet:

Fisher Yann Highsmith (who) was too tall, too thin, and too long to cast a decent shadow before the sun... His two most persistent problems were getting his long legs and big feet in and out from under desks and workbenches and standing upright outdoors in gale winds off the glacier.

Or, in Time Bomb:

Danforth was taller, leaner, hardened. He wore his hair in a crew cut solely because of the ease in grooming it. His features were plain and undistinguished, a prime asset for a man who occasionally worked in plain clothes.

Tucker's main characters even have the same kind of tastes and ways of enjoying themselves. In The Lincoln Hunters: "Obeying an impulse, (Steward) sat down on the dew-wet grass and spread his hands, letting his fingers curl about the tufts of grass. The sod was cool and refreshing." In Time Bomb, Danforth experiences his most pleasurable moment when he is "sprawled on the bare wooden planking of the small dock... in a warm, lazy, and - for him - reckless mood. Stripped to his waist, and with trouser legs rolled up, he dangled bare feet in the water. An occasional motorboat or a swimmer near the far shore was the only visual reminder that an outside world existed. Danforth was at peace with himself."

Peace, self-contentment, the love of the countryside, the ability neither to give in to the world nor to push it around - all these are so often aspirations of Tucker's characters that it is easy to think of his novels as nine books featuring the one main character. Tucker is famous for his practice of "Tuckerisation", of giving to his characters the names of people who are known only inside the world of science fiction readers. We might suspect Tucker of reverse Tuckerisation; of taking the character of Bob Tucker and giving it different names in different novels. Appreciate the writer and you like the books.

However, most readers of Wilson Tucker have never

met Bob Tucker, the person. Yet even these readers will find at the centre of each of Wilson Tucker's novels an immensely likable figure with a life of his own. He is a casual, wise-cracking, relaxed figure who still has an intense interest in archaeology and nature and takes very seriously any task he sets himself. His conversation is light and rambling, yet he knows when to keep quiet. He is efficient and calm in a tight spot, yet makes too many mistakes for him ever to become a company executive. People notice him a crowd, yet he is unnecessarily modest. This figure of fiction, given such names as Danforth, Paul Breen, and Benjamin Steward, is as real and enjoyable to meet as a Pierre Bezuhov, a Leopold Bloom, or a Dorothea Brooke. When we know him, we feel that we have come a long way towards knowing the novelist.

Yet, even saying this, we must suspect the thought and look again at the books. Suppose that Bob Tucker had simply written about himself and his friends. Would the novels have become anything more than rollicking accounts of circumstantial adventures? Wouldn't they have bogged down in the trite, the sentimental, and the confessional? How do we account for the dark side of Tucker's books: the grim 1953 of Wild Talent, and the even grimmer accounts of the year 2000 in Time Bomb and The Year of the Quiet Sun; the enslaving logic of a Slater or Russell Gary's maniac challenge to a whole world; the anonymous deaths of such remarkable minor figures as Gregg Hodgkins or Major Moresby; the general theme of unfulfilled dreams? Surely these are more than the outpourings of a man saying merely, "Here am I; look at me"?

Can we become so interested in the surface features, especially the main characters, of Tucker's worlds, that we forget about the books? The "Tucker figure" is not the same in each book. The lively figure prancing in the foreground puts on different masks for each play. I want to look at those masks - but also I want to look at the scenery, examine the stories, and perhaps find quite different Tuckers. Perhaps Wilson Tucker is not just the amiable midwestern, quiet-speaking Everyman he makes himself out to be? Where do we find the Wilson Tucker, the novelist, the figure right off the stage, holding it in his hands, giving all of it life? I'm as interested to find out as you are, since "Hidden Heroes" is more of an exploration than an exposition.

## THE PRAIRIES OF HEAVEN

### 1951: The City in the Sea

The City in the Sea has never been thought much of a success by anybody, including the author. Yet it is nearly a quarter of a century old, and it is the beginning of Wilson Tucker's career in science fiction (five years after Tucker's first mystery novel). A pilgrimage must have a



beginning; Tucker's current position on his journey as a novelist is so distinguished that we might reasonably expect to find in his first novel some clues to his eventual success.

Readers of science fiction have forgotten the ambitiousness of The City in the Sea. Tucker attempted to rid himself of most of the then-current preconceptions about "the way an s f story oughta go". In 1951, most of the characters in s f were men. A woman might make an occasional appearance as a weeping heroine. In 1951, in The City in the Sea, all the characters, except one, are women. Not only that but, early in the novel, two of the women show that they are in love with each other. A lesbian love affair, in 1951, in a science fiction book? I don't believe it, either. 1951 was about the time when s f writers started to write plots like Minoan mazes, and took pride in perplexing readers. In 1951, Tucker makes quite a serious attempt to leave out the plot altogether. He's just not interested in shenangigans or melodramatics. I don't know how he ever sold the book and, to this day, I don't suppose he does either. Science fiction is not a field in which an author breaks the rules without getting hurt. At any rate, nobody seems to like the book, it's been out of print for years, and I guess I'm rather lucky to have a copy. And patience enough to discover that The City in the Sea is not completely worthless, after all.

If The City in the Sea has little "plot", it certainly has a pleasant enough story. At the beginning of the book, a man wanders into the army camp established by the colonists who control western Somerset. This is the eastern coastal region of a large continent (of a future, depopulated North American continent, as we discover later in the book). The man is something of an oddity in the camp, as all the troops are women. The visitor cannot speak. He is bronzed, well-muscled, and does not resist capture. He is certainly not one of those weak-kneed stripplings of men which the army left behind at home across the Atlantic.

Doctor Barra takes up the pleasurable task of performing a complete physiological examination of the captive but Captain Zee, the commanding officer, worries about his probable effect on morale. Any novelty can disturb morale, especially when the troops are stuck in a country where it rains most of the time and the sun rarely breaks through the clouds. "The sea was rough for swimming, the mountains hard to climb, there was little else to do but range the coast - one thousand, four hundred and sixty-two miles of it."

The City in the Sea is the story of people who find unexpected new directions for the paths of their lives. The troops have never imagined any possibility but returning from this rainy, miserable country east across the ocean to "home" - the England of the future. Now "Wolf" (the name given to the mute stranger) points westward,

across mountains thought uncrossable. He makes signs on a map to show that, somewhere out west, there is a "city in the sea". Although she remains cautious, Captain Zee cannot resist the bait. "The known was known," she tells Barra, "and under complete control. But now...a stray appears...and he carries a scar made by a weapon we've never dreamed of before." However, Zee is still primarily a military commander. She will not admit that she seeks adventure. Instead, she says, "For our own safety we have to find what - or who - is out there." We can almost follow the line of her thinking - a good thousand-mile hike will do wonders for morale and keep the troops fit. Like the viewpoints of many of Tucker's main characters, Captain Zee's is rather limited.

Zee might be a disciplinarian, but she is hardly another Patton, and she doesn't know her soldiers very well. "I've noticed some things, little things," says Zee to Barra, as the column tramps onward, led silently by Wolf. "The troops are imitating some of (Wolf's) habits and mannerisms. If it goes too far, it can lead to a serious breakdown in morale and discipline... Have you noticed that the troops fall to the ground and drink out of the streams now?" Zee is still so busy looking at the prim rule-book on the end of her nose that she cannot see the playground of the prairie which stretches away at her feet. The troops have discovered what is, to them, a heaven. Wolf has led them away from the drizzling coastal plain, along a previously unknown tunnel through the mountains, and outward and onward over the endless prairies. Zee is the last person to notice that people might need to change so that they can enjoy a new world.

Zee won't allow her conscious mind to deviate an inch from the true path of discipline and loyalty to the mother country. But even Zee, in one unconscious gesture, starts to free herself. "She took off her jacket to expose her shoulders to the warming rays of the sun, and noted with a small shock that most of the troops had done likewise." When Wolf deserts the group, inexplicably, for some time Zee discovers, almost with annoyance, that she is in love with the man. Even she realises, almost with surrender and enjoyment of the fact, that "she held but the vaguest of notions where they were going, had nothing more than a shimmering image of their goal, had no concrete plan of action or single direction of movement beyond movement..." She loses her sense of direction in order to find a direction.

The trouble with The City in the Sea is that it loses direction as well. Tucker allows form to follow content a bit too closely. Not long after it begins, the book holds but the vaguest of notions where it is going, shows no concrete plan of action, and proceeds in no single direction of movement beyond movement. Tucker sets out to tell the story of a quest but, instead, describes a static idyll, interrupted by episodic adventures. The reader can lose interest as easily as

if he were sat down to watch his neighbour's slides of a recent beach holiday.

When we read The City in the Sea, all we do is watch pale lantern-slides. We remain bystanders in the stalls, looking onto the screen of heaven. We are never inside the book; when he wrote The City in the Sea, Tucker did not seem to know how to take us there. Tucker tries to take us along for an enjoyable adventure, but he does not let us get to know the nice people whose company we are supposed to find so pleasurable. We look at these amiable people; we overhear conversations. "(Zee) tried to wipe tobacco smoke out of the air with her hand": a nice detail which shows that Tucker knows these people. For a moment, he shows Zee to us quite clearly. She stands before us... then retreats. She begins to give orders and organise the expedition. She disappears into the haze of undifferentiated chatter and peremptory adventures.

The City in the Sea lacks a centre because Tucker is so coy in the way he reveals Captain Zee to us. Soon after she has met the mysterious man from over the mountains, Zee notices that "Wolf had precious little fear and respect for anything, much less her... She didn't want any man her equal, much less her master." Without making an attempt to do anything much, Wolf provides a powerful stimulant. From stimulation, Zee proceeds to arousal, then attraction, shown in isolated sentences and incidents throughout the book. "Unable to untangle her chaotic thoughts or even understand a queer new emotion now playing havoc with her mental stability, she was woodenly plodding alongside the man a space later when she happened to glance down and discover she was still holding his arm. Zee hooked the fingers of both hands in her belt." Several chapters after that, she decides that she wants to follow the dolt.

If The City in the Sea is meant to be any particular type of book, it is meant to be a social comedy. It tells the story of how a group of nice, but fettered people find a better way to live. It does this by showing how one of these people, Captain Zee, puts up a brave, silly fight against liberation. The book is comic and social because, even in this first s f novel, Tucker knows how people talk to each other. Real people hold real conversations here - and sometimes I think that Tucker is the only s f writer we can say this about.

The City in the Sea tries to be an adventure story as well, although quite violent incidents pass over the reader like stray clouds. It tries to be a book of speculation about the future of a depopulated world, yet shows nothing about the transatlantic culture which has colonised the eastern edge of the North American continent. All we know is that women have assumed the power which men have traditionally assumed for themselves in our society until recent years. (Tucker's 1951 satire on reversed sex roles has its own point in 1975.) The City in the Sea tries

to be several different types of novel, but it cannot make itself into any one of them or harmonise the differences between them. We never really want to find out what happens next, or what this society is like. An adventure novel relies on tensions generated by compulsions (such as a chase or a quest) or impulses (such as pursuit). The people in The City in the Sea have set out on a quest, but they do not know their eventual destination and they don't care very much. The City in the Sea becomes a freize of short adventures, framed within a bucolic, relaxed landscape, decorated by nice, vaguely ludicrous people. No element is more important than another so, in the end, nothing is very important.

Why, after all, do we remember The City in the Sea? We don't remember so much the people, or the adventures, or even the magical end of the quest. Instead, we remember the "slowly twisting streams", the tall grass, the open prairie, and the "warming rays of the sun". Here we find the beginnings of an image which dominates the rest of Tucker's science fiction novels: the image of the wide, empty prairies, miraculously freed from the polluting influence of industrialised humans. This is the landscape where a person, or a small group of people, can settle down, build a settlement according to their own specifications, and live free from the influences of armies, corporations, and bureaucracies. The colours of this landscape glow more strongly in the book than even Zee's anxious, steadfast face, or Barra's ironical smile, or even the flight of the winged people. They are the colours of the landscape in which people should be allowed to live. In this first novel we find the questions which Tucker asks repeatedly in later novels: In what (physical) conditions can people best live? or, more generally: What is the best way to live?; What is of most worth in life?

## TEN YEARS IN HELL

### 1952: The Long, Loud Silence

At the beginning of The Long, Loud Silence, Corporal Russell Gary wakes up, puzzled, in a hotel room in a provincial American town. He explores the hotel and finds dead bodies sprawled behind half-opened doors. Nobody else is around. Small bomb craters mark the street outside, but the damage looks too superficial to have killed the town's inhabitants. In the street, Gary surprises a prowler - a girl. She fights him, surrenders to him, and spends the night with him. Russell Gary and Irma Sloane guess that the "bombs" did not contain explosives but the germs of some plague, dropped on the eastern states of USA by an unknown enemy. They take a car and soon find that few other people have survived the plague.

Russell Gary has only one idea in mind: he is a



Corporal in the US Army, and it is his duty to rejoin the Army. (Apart from anything else, he feels like a deserter.) He and Irma drive to the Mississippi River, looking for signs of remaining "civilisation". There it is over the river: the US Army, standing guard on the west bank of the Mississippi, preventing anyone crossing from east to west. They are not even interested in Army stragglers, not even Russell Gary. To them, he is just Contaminated - cast off, left on the wrong side of the river, to be forgotten about and guarded against. The Army has blown up all bridges across the river, placed trip wires underwater along the western shore, and now guards every possible point of crossover. Gary is warned back, and watches people being killed as they make the attempt to swim across.

Meanwhile, Gary has said a casual goodbye to Irma, the one person in this new world who might have helped him.

"Russell, you can't leave me."

"Watch me," he stated flatly.

"But Russell, what will I do?" She was frightened.

Gary brought his eyes from the opposite shore. "Irma, I don't care what you do. There's the car, take it. Can you shoot a gun? There's ammunition and food to last you awhile."

Like the Ancient Mariner, Gary has rejected the whole world in which he must now live. In particular, this incident is like the Mariner's shooting the albatross. Gary imagines that "normal America", left intact on the western shore of the Mississippi after the attack, lies on the horizon like a Celestial City. Gary feels that he has been left behind in a kind of hell. He won't even accept the companionship of Irma in this hell; she might tie him back in it. He refuses to admit that he cannot stage a resurrection; he cannot cross back from a geographical "after-life" to the life he wants.

Russell Gary prowls the river bank and discovers most of the traps that separate him from the other shore. For the moment, he can find no way over. He meets the easy-going, likable Jay Oliver. In turn, both of them meet Sally, who agrees to share their company (and beds) equally, although she likes Oliver better. As winter approaches, they hike towards the south, and settle on the shore of the Gulf. At this point, The Long, Loud Silence might have become another Earth Abides. (George Stewart's book was published at about the same time.) For the moment, we see the possibility that Gary and his friends might create a place of peace in what they still regard as hostile country.

The trio spent the mild winter months on a long, sparse sliver of land jutting out

in the sometimes blue, sometimes green waters of the Gulf; it was a sandy island lying like an outstretching finger offshore from the mainland of western Florida and reached only by a wooden causeway... The white sandy slope of the beach continued underwater, forcing them to walk out fifty or seventy-five feet to reach a depth fit for fishing. The sea was clear and unruffled and so transparent Gary could see his feet dug in on the bottom.

I would have thought that an ideal way to spend the rest of my life after surviving a national catastrophe: paddling, fishing, and enjoying the sights of the changing colours of the Gulf and the pleasant company. But it is not enough for Russell Gary: safety and comfort are merely diversions from his real aims. While Jay, Sally, and he are fishing quietly, he can think only about the river barrier. How long will the emergency last? Possibly more than a year? Could he crawl across under the water, following cables that connected the two sides of the river? On and on, day after day. Sally announces that she is expecting a baby; she wants it to be Jay's, even if it isn't. Gary gives Sally a little wooden link chain for Christmas, and leaves the two in their haven. Spring reaches the whole continent, and Gary begins his trek back to the bridge.

In The Long, Loud Silence, Russell Gary rides a slow pendulum across the land of the dead. The second stroke of the pendulum pushes him into the company of a trio of amateur desperadoes who are also trying to cross the river. He tells them how to cross the river - information exchanged for a shotgun. But there is no way to cross the river without being killed. As he calculated, Gary is left with the shotgun and two of the trio are left leaderless. Indirectly, Gary has committed his first murder.

Again rejected by the river's defences, and disappointed that the people on the other side do not rebuild the bridges, Gary finds himself in Wisconsin. One day it is autumn; the next day, the winter catches him without shelter or a home in the South. He sees two figures in the snow kill a boy; Gary kills the killers; the boy's rescued sister brings Gary back to her father's farm. It seems that Gary has found another haven. Will he stay there? What possible reason could he have for leaving?

The Hoffman family accepts Gary as a guardian. He does his job well. One night, a bell tinkles in the house, sounding an intruder alarm. Gary goes out to investigate. "Down the slope a dark bundle of nothing lay on the ground. As he watched, a slow movement of an arm and a hand seemed to detach itself from the shapeless man, seemed to reach out probing fingers for the wires he had strung there." Gary grabs a poker and sneaks up on the intruder. "Immediately afterward, Gary thought to dispose of the body." By this time, Gary has become so efficient a

killer that he does not need to see his victim clearly. An intruder is no longer a personal threat; an intruder is simply a "dark bundle of nothing", an arm and a detached hand, to be disposed of as efficiently as possible. Any stranger who meets Gary soon becomes just a body in the snow.

Gary throws the body on the ice in a creek, where the Hoffmans are unlikely to find it before the spring thaw, and returns to the house:

Just inside the yard gate he hurled himself to the frozen ground and aimed at the yawning door, seeking movement within. The man's voice was low, soothing. It went on and on without variation. Gary frowned, jumped forward and halted again, listening to the voice. The voice stopped and some instrument struck three tiny notes.

The notes stirred his memory and he climbed to his feet, swearing softly to himself. The radio was still on... There was nothing, no other than himself.

This is the turning point of the novel. Gary has adapted to his environment, if not to his fate. He feels nothing for his hosts, but he protects them while they feed him. He might have stayed there; possibly, eventually, he might have realised his good fortune and enjoyed the company of the few people left alive and willing to trust each other. However, earlier in the night he had discovered that Hoffmans' radio picks up stations from the western half of the USA. Gary returns to the house, having killed and expecting to kill again. A "low, soothing" voice reaches out to him. Gary prepares for action. He hears the "three tiny notes" over the radio. He begins to relax. The only stranger's voice he can accept is that broadcast voice from his dreamland over the river. Plenty of people over there; over here "there was nothing, no other than himself".

Gary goes some way towards recognising his position, but he does not make the same conclusion that we do. Gary does not realise that he is alone only because he has shut out, ruthlessly and efficiently, everybody who might have lived in his world. The voices from the radio are sirens' songs. He can no longer think of reconciling himself to this land. Lured by the syrupy sirens, he must set off for the river again. His mind will give him no further peace until he finds a way over.

This time, the swing of the pendulum actually propels him over the river. The world beyond the river rejects him. Gary is faced with the one possibility that he had never allowed himself to consider: that the people from the east side of the Mississippi really are carriers of plague, and that the authorities on the west side had been quite correct to quarantine half a continent. Forced to flee, Gary feels himself kicked out of heaven. He must cross back from west to east. "The real silence lay on the other side, a silence

so complete it was a tangible thing that could be held in the hand. A loud, hurtful silence... He had succeeded in crossing the forbidden river only to have his triumph hurled in his face, and now he was literally crawling back again with nothing left to him but his life, a naked and defenceless body returning to the dead silence."

In The Long, Loud Silence, Russell Gary keeps behaving in unexpected ways. He does not form a utopia in the wilderness, as we keep expecting. He does not have a mystical, Ancient Mariner vision when he lands back in his "own" territory. Now that he realises that he has "nothing left to him but his life", why won't he cut his emotional ties with the safe, civilised part of the continent? Why won't he accept the challenge of finding a new life in this empty land?

When looking at The Long, Loud Silence, I've used the terms "heaven" and "hell" as the two sides of the book's continental stage setting. I am not trying to get into theological arguments. I don't want to make speculations about the author's religious convictions or lack of them (my own feeling is that few s f writers other than Tucker have so little respect for religious trappings and dogma, and so much a religious respect for human values). "Heaven" and "hell" are convenient colloquial terms to describe the extremes of human experience. "Heaven", in Wilson Tucker's novels, is the way we would most like to live, and "hell" is the way we would most not like to live. These are the two poles that enclose the worlds of Tucker's novels. In The City in the Sea, Tucker draws a very sketchy, rather dull map of a heaven. In The Long, Loud Silence, Tucker paints a more detailed, ambiguous landscape of hell. The setting of The City in the Sea is a heaven because it is a nice place, a salubrious environment. The setting of The Long, Loud Silence could also be a pleasant environment. It is not a scene from a horror movie; it is potentially a scene from a nature movie. Only the people are gone, and this is what Gary hates. This landscape, which could be a paradise, is a hell only because Gary thinks of it as such. He declares a state of war between himself and the world he must live in. It's not surprising that the world takes up the challenge:

He had to find something to eat.

Three days without food were aching his stomach with pain, causing his guts to rumble and ache... The plain before him was clear white and bright with fresh-fallen snow. Nothing moved across his vision... The hillside was barren of life or movement as he emerged into the open, and he rose to his knees the better to search the field below and the rising slope of the hill behind him. A man had very nearly killed him there, three or four years before.

At the base of the hill Gary settled down against the white frozen ground, unmoving.



unlistening, his taut nostrils held to the wintry air. There was nothing, no one beside himself... The snowy plain remained empty and silent, dead. An old concrete highway crossed the middle of it, crumbling away.

As in all of Tucker's novels, only the ending gives full meaning to the rest of the book. At the beginning of The Long, Loud Silence, Gary seems to be just an ordinary sort of bloke who has been trapped by a catastrophe. However, the catastrophe offered him the chance to choose his own new world (which I take to be the overall theme of most of s f's "post-disaster" novels). This is the world that he chose. He has lost all those features which we call human. By the end of the novel, he lives quite alone, hunting food, killing all intruders, even other humans, which approach him. His reflexes have become like an animal's ("his taut nostrils held to the wintry air") and his mind as unsympathetic and opportunistic as a wolf's. Not only has he lost hope, but he cannot remember what hope is. The landscape itself is not hopeless; it is merely neutral. Humanity's concrete highways are crumbling, but "the plain before him was clear, white and bright with fresh-fallen snow". Other survivors might have found beauty here; Gary sees only his own hatred and isolation reflected back at him. Tucker himself has said that the original version of the novel finished with an episode of cannibalism. Compare such an ending with the current one. Who was the survivor?

The City in the Sea is a failure because, by and large, it describes only a heaven. The Long, Loud Silence is almost a failure because it describes only a hell. I think that Tucker set out to write a splendidly misanthropic novel (one in which he negates everything in the world which he finds valuable in life by showing a man who rejects those values), and his editors did not allow him to finish the job properly. Alternatively, we can become insensitive to the book because its author insists on banging our heads against a wall. On one level, The Long, Loud Silence is just a well-written adventure book; Gary captures Irma, Gary lets her go, troops fire on Gary at the river, Gary arranges to kill the oafish vagabond, kills an intruder here, escapes a mugging there. There are really too many scenes where nothing is happening except somebody hitting somebody else. Many pages of dialogue read like the script of your latest favourite combat television show ("They're waiting for us there." "Who is?" "I don't know. Honest I don't. The whole damned army, I guess. We're just supposed to deliver these trucks." "Why? What's in them?" "Some gold. Gold bricks." "You're lying." Etcetera.) One character even says, "Now don't get no funny notions." After ambling his way through his first s f novel, Tucker sets such a brisk pace in his second that the reader feels quite out of breath.

The Long, Loud Silence shows that there are two Wilson Tuckers. Wilson Tucker Number 1 is a

larger-than-life embodiment of Bob Tucker, the person. We read about the world as he experiences it; the people he knows, the places and landscapes he likes to watch, the ideas he thinks about. This Tucker can write a page of dialogue which makes the reader want to step into the page and yarn the night away with the characters. We get to know the American midwest as well as Tucker does. This Tucker tells us about life as he would like to live it, and about the people with whom he would like to live it.

Wilson Tucker Number 2 is a Science Fiction Writer, devoted to the world of telepathy, lightning chases, time machines, and dystopias. He gives shape to the worlds of our most violent, gaudy dreams. He knows his way around the actionscapes of the movies. He can write a thriller that makes us feel the knife in our own ribs. This is life as Tucker would not want to live it - which means that sometimes it is more accurate than the life of the novels of Tucker Number 1.

The two Tuckers do not always get along well with each other. In the early novels, they appear as opposites. The City in the Sea is the work of Tucker Number 1. So are (in general) The Time Masters, Time Bomb, and Ice and Iron. The Long, Loud Silence is a world of Tucker Number 2 (and so are the worlds of Wild Talent and To the Tom-baugh Station). The two Tuckers are reconciled only in The Lincoln Hunters and The Year of the Quiet Sun, which are Tucker's two most successful novels.

The Long, Loud Silence gives us too much of Tucker Number 2. Appalling catastrophe is followed by pages of uninteresting, comic-book dialogue, action adventure, and strategy planning. The book has so much grinding mechanism, so much happening just for the sake of happening. On other pages, we are encouraged to get to know people like Gary, Oliver, and the Hffmans. The Long, Loud Silence works because Gary is a walking metaphor. It would have been better if Gary had been a great person, instead of only a great monomaniac. We need to be able to see through and with Gary, as well as at him. Tucker could not, and would not let himself do that when he wrote The Long, Loud Silence. Perhaps he was afraid to live within and through the monster he had created. In this book, Tucker tries to write a genre thriller, yet break every rule in the genre. It is a daring book, pungent, cruel, and refreshing. It is also too oppressive to come quite alive. If it had been the novel that Tucker had set out to write, The Long, Loud Silence would have been a great novel indeed, and not merely a notable second novel.

\*\* \*\* \*

1953: The Time Masters

"Gilbert Nash waited motionless in the rainswept darkness, a tall and lonely figure unseen and unsuspected in the drenched night." Darkness, rain, a lonely figure, and the tang of suspenseful awareness - in one sentence, Wilson Tucker can blend all the flavours of The Time Masters. Here is our first meeting with Gilbert Nash, the man who might have overpowered the world, but who chooses to remain "unseen and unsuspected" for all of his long life.

Gilbert Nash works as a private detective in the city of Knoxville, Tennessee. One of his clients has been murdered, only a few days after he had visited Nash's office. During that visit, Gregg Hodgkins had told the long story of his mysterious marriage. Carolyn, his wife, had only just left him, after a relationship which Hodgkins had found very satisfying. A few days after Hodgkins has been found dead, Gilbert Nash waits near the house where the crime took place. He prepares to break in.

As he waits in the silence, Gilbert Nash thinks about his recently alive client. "Hodgkins had helped to build the means of manning a starship on the incredibly long flight to Tau Ceti... Hodgkins deserved at least a small monument for that feat, but he wouldn't get it. He would likely get no public recognition at all." Hodgkins had married a woman he loved but couldn't understand. After she leaves him, he realises that she had been retrieving scientific information from him during the whole time of their marriage. He had built a trap for himself, constructed from his own intelligence and passion. Now Nash wants to find Hodgkins' killer, as well as Carolyn Hodgkins, the widow. They could be the same person. But he cannot restore justice to the bewildered, anonymous man. "The obituary would prattle only of the commonplace, the small gravestone would remain blank but for name and appropriate dates." Gregg Hodgkins had been swept away in the river of time. Nash is left high and dry as impartial witness, as he has been throughout history.

But we, as readers, are allowed to be witnesses as well. We stand in the rain with Nash, and ponder the situation with him. As Nash breaks into the house, we move inside with him. Nash "put his weight to the door. It was solid and unyielding. He placed his hands against one corner of the plywood and pressed in, gently easing the nails free of their grip. When a small space had been opened he reached through and turned the knob from the inside. The door opened to him. He stepped silently into the dark kitchen and closed the door behind him, pushing the plywood back into place. The house smelled of stale cigars, of musty unclean odours."

We have felt the plywood under our fingers,

pressed it, reached in, and opened the door. The "blackened silence of the dead house" surrounds Nash and us. We listen with Nash's ears, feel with his fingers, and peer into the dark. A few paragraphs make the world of Gilbert Nash into our world. We are off on an adventure of exploration, of both a world and a person.

Nash can find no traces of Carolyn Hodgkins in the house, although she has lived here with her husband for many years. It is as if she had never stepped inside. Nash can find only the scattered remnants of Gregg Hodgkins' futile life, "a few books on the bedside table, a rundown alarm clock, a layer of dust". The police have already taken some artifacts. "Nash seated himself in one of the overstuffed chairs beside a cold fireplace, laced his fingers together beneath his chin and contemplated the empty darkness. The steady fall of rain was the only sound."

Throughout his books, Tucker goes to some trouble to avoid overt literary symbolism. Yet, in his unobtrusive, circumstantial way, he gives great intensity to this scene. Already we have found out that Gilbert Nash's most striking characteristic is his separation from the people among whom he lives. He lives in a small house on the outskirts of town; he sees few people, has no girlfriends, and borrows innumerable textbooks from the local library. The Secret Service wants to know why Nash has never been born, officially. An observer describes him as "constantly poised for flight...always alert for something." Now Nash has entered a true "heart of darkness". He can find no clues. Nobody knows he is here. The darkness and rain shut the world out, or him in. They are comfortable, impassive companions. But still within the silence Nash listens for the unexpected.

"He stiffened in the chair, chopping off his thoughts, as the minute sound carried to him from the kitchen door." The intruder's approach is betrayed by a series of minute sounds. The door closes; "soft, cautious footsteps" creep across the floor. Nash does not leap up in panic. He "relaxed in the chair with a self-satisfied grin and let the footsteps go their way." Now the scene has real suspense, because Nash has reacted in the way least appropriate to the heroes of thrillers. Like an Alfred Hitchcock, Tucker has snatched away a stereotyped experience and left in its place an experience filled with life.

The newcomer explores the house, every movement revealed by the sounds of stumbling:

"Hello."

Her gasp was almost a scream, half smothered and quickly choked off as she remembered where she was. Again her light stabbed out, spotlighting him in the chair.

"Better put that out," he advised her.  
"Neighbours might see it."



The light stayed on him a moment or two longer and blinked off. He could not see her at all in the new blackness, and knew that she could see him but dimly.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded in fright.

"Meditating."

Which only goes to show that a few carefully placed words can be more effective than all the melodramatic posing of all the tenth-rate "heroes" in science fiction. In a single moment, with the single word, "meditating", Gilbert Nash has frightened the woman intruder, begun to calm her fears, and has given himself the powerful role of a mystery man with a sense of humour.

"The room was enveloped in silence with the two people regarding one another as duelists, each struggling to see the other better in the almost nonexistent light. The rain was a background of continual sound to their duel." The verbal duel is fought out entirely in darkness. It is one of the great scenes in science fiction. Gilbert Nash has become a powerful, mysterious figure. His antagonist does not accept that he has power over her. She keeps trying to solve the situation. Gilbert wants to understand a woman who can challenge him so disturbingly. The girl is baffled by his indirect answers to her melodramatic questions and exclamations ("Don't move!" "But why not? I'm quite sure you are an attractive woman; you have an attractive voice, and I like the perfume.") Try as he might, Nash can find out little more about her than the bouquet of her perfume and the sound of her voice. In the dark, he holds out a hairpin to her. "Fashion it into the horns of a bull, hold it over the flame." Gilbert tries to push the situation off balance; he thinks that he has offered a dangerous challenge. The girl does not understand the challenge (and neither do we, until the last scene of the novel). Gilbert relaxes again. The girl in the dark is not Carolyn Hodgkins, as he had thought for a moment. He has not reached the end of his quest, but the girl's challenge offers him the possibility of a new quest. She refuses to shake hands with him before she leaves. "I'll find you," Nash called after her... "I shall always remember your voice, even when it has lost its overtones of fright... Oh, I'll find you."

Nash does find her again, of course. She is Shirley Hoffman, a staff member of the Secret Service force, and formally hired to keep track on Nash. The important sections of The Time Masters are, then, four long conversations: one between Nash and Gregg Hodgkins, two between Nash and Shirley Hoffman, and the final encounter between Nash and Carolyn Hodgkins. The rest of the novel is so much cement between the gold bricks. One of those gold bricks is the long encounter between Gilbert Nash and Shirley Hoffman.

When they meet again, and after they recognise

each other, Gilbert Nash and Shirley Hoffman share a meal at his house. He chooses the topics of conversation as if he were setting down the pieces of a jigsaw for her to solve. He sets Shirley Hoffman (and the reader) the task of completing the pattern of his own life. He chooses not to reveal it to anybody else. We guess the answers long before Shirley does, so we can take most interest in the progress of the encounter itself.

Nash describes himself to Shirley as an "ambulant armchair archaeologist": "I enjoy studying anything to do with people." As he rambles on about one of his great interests, the fertility rites of ancient Crete, Shirley exclaims, "You sound as though you were there." Gilbert deflects the implications of this suggestion, but he does not reject it outright. Shirley does not pick up some of the clues which we catch immediately. "It's a curious thing," says Nash, seemingly at random, "but do you know, you humans worship gold above knowledge?" If Shirley is only one of "you humans", who is Gilbert Nash?

Nash tells Shirley his own story in the third person. He tells her the legends of Gilgamesh, the "born adventurer" who sought immortality. His story, also giving details of a deluge, has survived on clay tablets. Nash talks around his subject and decorates the story until Shirley Hoffman begins to catch the drift of the story. "Did this adventurer, this Gilgamesh fellow, find his immortality?" Nash can only reply, "He found what he was searching for. But it was much too late to save his life." Perhaps Shirley has understood too much. We can almost hear the trace of wistfulness in Nash's voice.

At this point in The Time Masters, about halfway through, it has become a very strange book. Every new detail strikes us indirectly, at an oblique angle. The obvious creaking of the suspense-story mechanism has disappeared. Tucker has already revealed all the details of the "mystery". The novel's Prologue, and other hints, show us clearly that Gilbert Nash is the surviving Gilgamesh, the legendary figure whose exploits have been recorded for at least 6000 years. We can guess that Carolyn Hodgkins is another of the people from space, "shipwrecked" on earth in prehistoric times. We know that Nash has spent a long time searching for Carolyn, although we are not sure what is the relationship between them. We know that Carolyn "milked" her late husband's mind by telepathy so that she could find a way to ride the first starship from Earth, and so go home. We can already guess the action of the ending. So where has the suspense gone? What is the mystery still to be locked for and found?

We can guess that Gilbert Nash and Shirley Hoffman are already half in love with each other. However, the night's cosy dinner does not lead to any predictable ending. Shirley makes playful hints, to which Gilbert replies, "You'll also want to see my etchings... Honest, I do have

etchings, and you will want to see them." In the book-filled comfort of the library, Gilbert tells Shirley the story of his life. He offers her the lure of "two large loose-leaf volumes like scrapbooks and many folders and folios, all bound or wrapped in a sturdy material for maximum protection." The volumes contain Nash's life set out, illustrated by archaeological discoveries. Drawing in his lure, Nash introduces Shirley to his world and self.

She was not aware of the passage of time, nor of the room, nor consciously aware of one record after another dropping onto the turntable to play itself out. Occasionally she would glance up with a start, turn to look about her, to look for Nash. Sometimes he would be sitting in the chair behind her, concentrating on a book, or again he would be gone from the room altogether without her knowing that the door had opened or closed... She vaguely realised the unwanted flush long had left her face, realised there was no longer that burning, creeping sensation beneath the skin of her cheeks. Instead there was something else she couldn't immediately identify and it was not confined to her face. A hungry, yearning something that seemed akin to the ancient people who were but inked lines on paper, a something that seemed to search for an outlet still hidden in an unidentified vacuum.

This passage shows that Tucker is a kind of magician of thought. We watch the way in which the magic of the pictures in Nash's books seeps into Shirley's mind and takes away all the details of the "real world". Nash has made himself into a conjuror, a stage director, a choreographer. His silence and unobtrusive presence in the room let her sink into the world of the people on the pages. Soon she can forget about the room. Soon she feels herself in that world, and so much closer to the person of Nash himself than anyone else has reached before. But she has no ordinary words with which she might understand her new feelings and thoughts. All she can find for now is "a hungry, yearning something". Nash has given her a new direction for her life, one that has, as yet, only a hidden outlet. She has not yet found the centre piece for the jigsaw puzzle that Nash has set her.

Shirley wakes up from this dream world which has expanded suddenly to become her entire "real" world. She has sunk back through ten thousand years of history; she looks up and sees, for the first time, that history embodied in the quiet man before her. "Shirley Hoffman stood up...and stepped around the floor lamp to stand behind the second chair. Nash was deep in a printed page. Eagerly, boldly, she bent over him and locked his unsuspecting head in her arms. Then she kissed him, held him locked there for a racing eternity, unwilling to break the contact of their lips."

In a conventional mystery or science fiction

novel, that would have been the great moment of the book - heroine kisses hero. Instead, it is just a movement towards the solution of a more widespread puzzle. We see what leads Shirley toward that kiss - and suddenly we see what the kiss means to Gilbert Nash. Shirley has the last piece of her personal jigsaw puzzle - and sets down a whole new puzzle in front of Nash for him to solve. In her kiss, Shirley gives some of herself, her own mind, to Gilbert. Her kiss is, for him, a telepathic contact (a clue given early in the novel which has been easily forgotten until this moment). Nash finds the completely unexpected.

"So long!" Nash exclaimed, still astonished.  
"So incredibly long. I couldn't see the end at all."

Now there is the climax of the story, ambiguous and puzzling, but moving, because it introduces both Gilbert and Shirley to so many unexpected possibilities. "Gilbert Nash speculated on the woman sitting beside him. It may have been a fantasy - pure imagination - but he wondered if he was entertaining his own granddaughter, ever so many times removed." For what Gilbert finds in Shirley's mind is longevity - not the longevity of his own race, but certainly the long life-span that could be expected by "his own granddaughter, ever so many times removed". When he met Shirley for the first time, Gilbert realised that she might be someone who could understand his position, that at last he might be able to break out of the interpersonal cage he has placed around himself. When Shirley kisses him, he knows that he has found such a person. "So incredibly long. I couldn't see the end at all." What a marvellous line! The tone of it fits all of Tucker's most poignant novels. Gilbert Nash has waited about three hundred years (since his wife from the stars died in the Lisbon earthquake) for such a moment.

Slowly, Gilbert Nash shows Shirley why he is separated forever from the rest of Earth's people. He tells her the story of the may-fly. A may-fly lives its entire life in a day, while a human lives seventy years, while Gilgamesh has been alive already for at least ten thousand years. As he says to Shirley, "May not something else look down upon you, see you vanish in a few hours?" Long-lived as he is, he is still dying. The spaceship which was destroyed in the Earth's atmosphere contained the only source of the substance which can arrest his ageing. After ten thousand years, he has found that substance again, here in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. It is heavy water. The treatment is too late for Nash, and he has decided to finish his life on Earth. "Carolyn Hodgkins", however, is determined to go "home" to ensure her immortality (so she has worked out how to operate the newly built starship; so she has found heavy water at the nearby atomic energy establishment). After years of hiding from the world, waiting for an extended death, Gilbert Nash has found unexpected hope. "She was silent for a long while and he said nothing to break the



silence, allowing her the privacy of her thoughts. He sat with his back to the fire and listened to the quiet house, listened to the stillness of the night outside." Gilbert Nash and Shirley Hoffman do not need to touch each other again this night; they are committed to a silent, passionate, and intense love-making between harmonised minds.

Tucker is not finished with surprises, although he can present nothing which matches the surprises in the book's central scene. Shirley prepares to leave, and steps outside the door. "I'll wait for you - or I'd never get home. And I'll bet you that I'm late for work in the - Gilbert!" Shirley screamed his name and shrank back, blocking the doorway." The idyll has ended in a moment. Shirley finds on the path the dead body of Cumming, one of the government agents who have been following Nash. Nash guesses that Carolyn has killed the agent so that Nash will be blamed, arrested, and kept off her track. He disappears into the night, suddenly in pursuit of his quarry. The Time Masters picks up pace and loses momentum; the moment of meeting of minds has gone, and so has the real power of the book.

I have said already that the "suspense bits" of The Time Masters are so much mortar between the gold bricks. But the book contains too much mortar and too little gold. The Time Masters is the first science fiction novel in which Tucker begins to show his great strengths as a novelist. It is also a novel damned by its commitment to the rules of its genre.

That's a pity, because The Time Masters is not very good as a suspense novel. We are told all the conventional clues early in the novel. If Tucker had wanted to write a real thriller, think how he might have done it. He might have made us wait until the next-to-last line before we discovered that Gilbert Nash was Gilgamesh. The woman in the dark house should have turned out to be Carolyn Hodgkins. (When I read the novel for the first time, I was expecting Tucker to pull that trick.) If The Time Masters had been any sort of thriller at all, it would have turned up such "surprises".

Instead, the book has no real ending. It leaves the reader literally up in the air. Shirley Hoffman disappears altogether from the novel when Nash dashes off to pursue Carolyn. It is really a very odd book. If it has any conclusion at all, we don't discover it until we read the "sequel", Time Bomb. The Time Masters is a thriller without thrills, a suspense novel without much suspense or a cliffhanger ending. What does Wilson Tucker actually achieve in the book?

It's another case of the two Tuckers, this time both in the same book, and neither at peace with the other. Wilson Tucker Number 2 writes the book in the form of a thriller because he thinks that's how it should go. He includes dreary passages about the fumble-footed antics of the

security agents because he thinks such episodes would improve the story. He breaks up his splendid meditative scenes with melodramatic interludes because he thinks that's how a thriller works. He huffs and puffs and blows his own house down.

Wilson Tucker Number 1 is not the least interested in all these goings-on. He keeps trying to write a real novel - a moving book about the deepest relationships between people. In long passages, he succeeds very well, as I've tried to show. But the "action" always gets in the way. It's not the same type of writing as the best passages of the book. "A characteristic of (his) work," as Stanislaw Lem has written about an s f author with ambitions higher than Tucker's, "after its ambiguity of genre, is its tawdriness which is not without a certain charm, being reminiscent of the goods offered at country fairs by primitive craftsmen who are at once clever and naive, possessed of more talent than self-knowledge." In The Time Masters, Tucker creates a situation of great pathos: a man lives for ten thousand years, but can find few companions during all that time, and must hide himself from the may-fly world around him. Tucker reveals this situation with considerable skill, and points towards a new, rewarding path for the life of this man. But Tucker tries to write in all sorts of dissonant, extraneous elements. His writing has charm, wit, and precision. Yet he throws away the book for lack of self-knowledge. We can be glad that Tucker has improved a great deal since then. He has become far more than a "primitive craftsman", has written several novels of high quality and, in two novels at least, has reconciled the "two Tuckers". But more of that later; it's a pity that the whole of The Time Masters is so much less than several of its marvellous parts.

"THEY WERE ALL GOOD FRIENDS, PAUL, ALL GOOD FRIENDS"

1954: Wild Talent

During the late 1940s, Richard M Nixon received much praise in USA for his part in the interrogation and successful prosecution of Alger Hiss. Nixon and other members of the House Committee on Un-American Activities accused Hiss, among other things, of having Communist sympathies and acquaintances. During the 1952 Presidential election campaign, Dwight D Eisenhower, the Republican nominee, received standing applause from huge audiences for his promise to find and dismiss all "Communists" and their "sympathisers" currently holding public office.

Film clips of these and similar events appeared in Emile de Antonio's film, Milhouse: A White Comedy, which was shown again in Melbourne while I was preparing the notes for this article. As a cinema audience, we laughed nervously as we

watched the macabre catapult of public sympathy which projected Richard Nixon, Joseph McCarthy, and others into their chariot of anti-Communist vengeance. We saw the records of a long-ago public horror story - or so we hoped. McCarthyism now has the same Satanic ring to it as Hitlerism. It couldn't happen again, of course.

Wild Talent is a book about the McCarthy era, and I think that it shows clearly why McCarthyism happened, and why it could happen again. Certainly, Wild Talent is a book which shows vividly what happened to the USA between the end of World War Two and 1954, when the book was published. Of course, the blurb on my paperback edition says that Wild Talent is a novel about ESP, a "first-rat thriller" with "suspense, surprise, and fast readability". Perhaps the heavy disguise of science fiction's formulas saved Tucker himself from the public denigration which obliterated such figures as Dalton Trumbo, Pete Seeger, and the Weavers for many years. Wild Talent did escape the accusing finger of the House Unamerican Activities Committee, and today it remains a tense, claustrophobic view from inside the centre of a shut-in, blind era.

Paul Breen is an orphan who grows up in a small Illinois town. At the beginning of the novel, he is "thirteen years old, he had seven dollars and fifty cents tightly wrapped in a handkerchief stuffed down in his pocket, and he was going to the Fair... Chicago was a hundred and thirty miles away and the bus fare was quoted at more than two dollars. That was too much. Paul waited in the railroad yards for the freight train that passed through every morning just before noon." The "Fair" is the Chicago World's Fair. The year is 1934. Paul Breen's journey of self-discovery has begun. So has Wilson Tucker's attempt to explore the way in which a whole nation's thinking can become solidified, mechanised, and paranoid. For, as the first chapter shows (in a flash-forward sequence) Paul Breen will end his journey in 1953 when Colonel Johns, representing the uncontrolled hatred of a whole nation, points a pistol at him in a secluded room on a hidden country estate some miles from Washington.

The early chapters of Wild Talent are among the most vivid that Wilson Tucker has ever written. It's not difficult to see why. In his interview with Paul Walker (in this issue of SFC), Tucker admits that much of the first two chapters is autobiographical. We watch Paul's efforts to save the money he needs for his trip to Chicago, we travel with him, and we roam around downtown Chicago after the visit to the Fair. Chicago of the mid-1930s comes alive as we watch it through the eyes of a resourceful kid determined to explore as widely as seven dollars fifty cents will allow him.

He knew he was in the Loop as long as he stayed within the shadow or sound of the elevated trains... Supper was taken at a restaurant bearing a price sign on the

window. One of the dark and noisy streets beneath the elevated structure had many such eating places. Full meal, 35c. Complete dinner, 29c. All you can eat, 24c. Three-course dinner, 22c.

Paul Breen soon loses the illusions he had when he set out on his adventure. He eats at cheap places, watches peddlers selling trick paper clowns that seem to dance unsupported in the air, trudges past "drunken or sleeping men in all the darkened doorways, some of them lying flat on their backs or stomachs on the sidewalk." He sleeps at a flophouse, in a cubicle that "appeared to be constructed of nothing more than heavy paper", with doors "covered at the top with chicken-wire netting".

Worse still, Paul Breen stumbles on the scene of a man being murdered in a side street. The bullet-wounded man staggers and sinks to the ground as Paul runs towards him. "Get out of here, kid. Get going!" Just before Paul runs to find help, he realises that he knows the man's name (Mr Bixby, a Tuckerised name which appears in The Time Masters as well), his profession (Bixby is a secret agent from Washington), and exactly how he has been shot (by two men concealed behind an upstairs window). The experience of Bixby's death becomes Paul's experience; he feels a "black horror" which "seemed to dance and settle on the man's upturned face". Paul scuttles through Chicago's streets, tries to tell a stranger about the incident, is not believed, and eventually falls asleep. In the morning, he writes a note to Washington (anyone in Washington). It says, "I know who shot Mr Bixby." He posts the note, but does not attach his name or address.

Paul returns to the small Illinois town (presumably Bloomington, the setting for much of Tucker's life and many of his books) where he tries to forget about his adventure. He cannot tell anybody about it, and he can only wonder why so much information about the secret agent came to him in a moment. We meet Paul Breen next when he is "twenty years old", with "a satisfactory and comparatively easy job, and...earning thirty-seven dollars a week, when he made a shocking discovery about himself." While living a very ordinary life (he is an apprentice cinema projectionist, a job which the author himself held), Paul Breen discovers slowly that he has telepathic powers. He does not even know the word "telepathy" until he hears it while watching a Boris Karloff movie at the cinema where he works. When he was at school, he passed his subjects too easily for the comfort of his teachers or fellow students. The girl across the street no longer wants to go out with him. "He anticipated the girl's wishes a little too quickly for her serenity and comfort, saw through her subterfuges and evasions." After seven years, he begins to understand what happened to him in Chicago; he had read the mind of the agent.

However, Paul Breen does not realise that,



remarkable power though it is, telepathy hardly gives wisdom to its possessor. "...With startling naivete, he wrote a second letter - this one addressed to the Bureau pointing out that his first had been unaddressed... He mailed the note later on that week in Peoria, where he had gone with a couple of friends seeking a good time. And as before, the letter was well sprinkled with fingerprints. His new-found powers of clairvoyance and precognition were conspicuous by their absence."

I have said already that Wild Talent is one of the books of Wilson Tucker No 2, the Tucker who pays most attention to writing a "good thriller". Further, Wild Talent resembles The Long, Loud Silence closely because it is also about a season in hell. And, as in the earlier book, the main character pitches himself right into hell. "Magical" telepathic powers merely give Paul Breen the power to narrow the range of his own life, and nearly to destroy it. His road to hell is paved with every good intention. He is a nice, ordinary guy. He tries to be as helpful as possible. Military intelligence officers find him when he joins the army during World War Two. They question him, and give him a vague assignment. Before they release a projectile like Paul Breen, they want to find out the nature of the weapon.

At first, Paul knows only that he can read the minds of people he has actually met. He consents to talk to spies and to follow their minds as they set out for "enemy" countries. Paul is such a nice person - he is not even so impolite as to pry into people's minds for other than professional reasons. He is quite content to form part of a powerful spy ring whose only modern counterpart would be the CIA. Breen follows instructions because he is a loyal soldier. He falls straight into the post-1940s McCarthyist trap - if he fulfills his role, he is merely doing a good job and remains so much (unique) cannon fodder; if he questions his role at all, he can be called a traitor. Caught in this Catch 22 of an entire era, Breen becomes a long-distance killer who is more efficient and less discriminating than all the mythical "enemies" he is supposed to be fighting.

Wild Talent includes Tucker's only died-in-the-wool villain, Slater (unless we count Russell Gary). Slater uses Breen as part of the man-and-paper machine which is America's post-war bureaucracy. His mechanical, fastidious efficiency represents American xenophobia during the late 1940s and 1950s. When reading the book, try crossing out the word "Slater" when it appears, and write in "America". When he is within mind-shot of Breen, Slater manages successfully not to think about large areas of his life and work. Slater chooses Karen, an amenable young woman, to make Breen's life comfortable, but only so that Karen can discover as much as possible about Breen's private life. Slater attempts to buy Breen's loyalty by giving him his own expense account ("just like the Manhattan project").

Towards the end of the novel, Slater moves Breen to a fortified mansion in Maryland, outside Washington. The mansion has "bulletproof glass in the windows and a high stone wall around the estate". Snipers patrol the walls and all staff members act as spies on each other. Electronic bugs line each room. When everyone is on guard against The Enemy, each person is the other's enemy.

Wild Talent also includes several of Tucker's most likable characters (with such Tuckerised names as Carnell and Conklin). Conklin and Carnell become friendly with Breen, their "colleague"/captive, so Slater sends them overseas. They are killed before they can return to America. Paul falls in love with Karen, so she is sent away. An assassin nearly succeeds in killing Breen. The story hurtles towards the final encounter between the hero and the villain. The Enemy is really in the next room.

Paul Breen is the only character who is nobody's enemy, and so he is everybody's. "You will be the most hated man in the world," he is told near the beginning of the book. He need not have been anybody's enemy or friend. Paul Breen chooses to walk into Slater's trap, as surely as Slater sees a way to set it. When the Army discovers the sender of the mysterious Bixby telegrams, "Paul decided to tell them the truth and let the consequences come as they may." Paul is honest, upright and, in this situation, a fool. From the beginning of the novel, he loses his battle against the big battalions because he does not realise that the fight has begun. As soon as he shows that he can read the thoughts of other people, the Secret Service works out its plan to manipulate his ability and take away his freedom. "I believe that an older man in your place would never have permitted his discovery," says Conklin, trying to warn Paul of the danger to come. "'But I'd like to help,' Paul declared, 'Help what?' Conklin said flatly."

After he is wounded by the would-be assassins, Paul loses his powers for a week or so. What would you or I have done? Placed in a similar situation, I would have pretended to lose my powers completely. The Army would have booted me out, poor but free. If Slater had tried to kill me to prevent me giving away information, I would have used telekinetic power (as used, once, by Breen at the end of the book) to escape.

But Breen has one great handicap - his ludicrous sense of duty. Breen knows that Slater's purpose is "to remove or eliminate that which he can't fully control". Yet Breen agrees to form the central point of a "spynet supreme". In Slater we see a reflection of Joe McCarthy and that opportunistic steel trap, the young Richard Nixon. In Breen we find a reflection of all decent-living American patriots, from Dwight Eisenhower to the most enthusiastic of his supporters during the 1950s. Without Breen's complicity, Slater would have remained a nasty, minor spy with unfulfilled megalomaniacal ambitions.

Without Slater and the military machine, Breen would have stayed just the kid next door, the kind of bloke who does just a bit better than his friends and has strange, convenient premonitions from time to time.

The point of Wild Talent is that Paul Breen is the kid next door. He is not a literary descendant of the Saint or a forerunner of James Bond. He is no harassed, tweedy little Leamas, burdened by guilts which only self-sacrifice can alleviate. Tucker has taken an average midwestern country kid (at least partly himself), given him a few superpowers, and let him live out his rather badly directed life. Paul is the same type of person as the voters who kept on supporting the McCarthyites and Cold Warriors during the 1950s. But if we had been brought up in the America of that time, would we have acted differently? (In fact, we didn't; Australia had its equally dreary Menzies era).

But if Paul Breen is a real person, he will stand up and step out of the pages of the book. Certainly, Wild Talent is a thriller, a story with a heart-stopper surprise on every second page, clues which point towards a mysterious, rousing ending, lots of action, and a bit of sex; a story which is both surprising and inevitable, and which scampers through its escapades with lots of gusto. But if Paul Breen is one of the masks that hides the author's face, then Tucker cannot help showing the personal style of the man. In other words, Tucker cannot help writing a love story.

She was a blonde, natural blonde of a rather dark shade...she wore a magnificent bronzed tan... She said her name was Karen and that she did not mind in the least his awkward dancing or frequent missteps. Paul like that much of her...

Slowly, as though he were opening the door into a dark room, he inquired into her thoughts, seeking only to find the directions expected of him.

He fumbled, nearly stepped on her feet again, and stopped.

"I'm sorry - I really am. Are you sure you want to go on?"

Karen lifted her face. "I'm not complaining. Now let's try that last one again. Use the pressure of your hand on my back to guide me. Ready?"

Karen was an agent and had been planted on him.

Paul Breen has two obsessions - his own esp power, and women. The book implies that he knows equally little about both. In Washington, Karen seems to accept him instead of treating him as a freak. She puts up with even his inexperienced dancing. Paul enjoys the new experience, but he need not accept

any girl's affection at face value. He can peep inside her mind and find out what she really thinks about him. She is "an agent and had been planted on him". Such a consideration need not spoil the evening. Paul clowns his way through the awkward dances, and entertains Karen. She stays the night. Soon she moves in permanently, because she wants to. As soon as Slater finds out, he reassigns Karen to overseas duty. His action breaks into a loving relationship that is open, affectionate, and creative. During the last scene between them, Karen and Paul look over the recent pattern of their lives, and see how Slater has separated Paul from all the people who have shown him affection. Karen is the last to go. "They were all good friends, Paul, all good friends," says Karen. Perhaps more clearly than he does, she sees the whole depleted, sterile situation. Paul has met, known, and is leaving that scarcest of all people - a woman who can love him and understand him and his unique situation.

Karen is a marvellous person, someone we see created in front of us. But why does she not appear in the last part of the novel? Why does Tucker lead Paul Breen into falling in love with somebody else? To me, this is the real mystery about Wild Talent - and I'm not sure that Tucker realised that it is a mystery or that it needs to be solved.

Notice the way in which Martha Merrill makes her entrance into the novel:

And the other apartment?

There had been an odd something about the bedroom. Retracing his steps, he again crossed to the bedroom and poked about. And then he had it. Flinging open a closet door, he found an array of feminine clothing...

A "visitor" was already in residence.

...He heard water running in the bathroom of the connecting apartment. She was in... How did one invite a total stranger to dinner - and in the privacy of his rooms?... Paul walked across the room. He rapped on her door. The small moises from the other side stopped.

"Yes?" Her voice was soft. He liked it.

"I'm having dinner sent up for two. Join me?"

"Why, yes, thank you. I'll be there in just a moment." There seemed to be a smile in her voice.

There! See how simple it was? He waited. She moved about behind the door. He put his hands in his pockets and tried not to be nervous. She neared the door, paused with one hand on the knob. Paul saw the



knob turn and jerked his hands from his pockets. The door opened and the girl stepped through, smiling prettily. Paul stared at her.

He exclaimed, "Jehoshaphat!" A borrowed word.

Martha Merrill said, "Hello, Paul. You evidently remember me."

Nobody but Paul Breen (or, at least, nobody but a Tucker character) would see the situation in this way and act the way that Paul does. Each tense step, indicated by some sound, movement, or gesture, intensifies the situation for us as well as for Paul. We are inside Paul in his new room at his new "home", the prison-mansion in Maryland. He has found all the electronic bugs. He dare not dismantle them, but he notices a curious echo when he talks, as if some person is listening to the security agent who is listening to Breen (who, of course, has placed his telepathic "bug" on every person in the mansion he has passed). Paul stalks the room, looking for anything out of place. He crosses the bedroom and pokes about. He flings open a closet door and finds feminine clothing. This must be the clothes of his "visitor" - the well-paid lady, promised by Slater, who would cheer up his isolated nights.

Breen cannot accept the situation in an offhand way. He is not so accustomed to a wide variety of women that he can accept anyone automatically as a whore. He is shy. He cannot decide how to introduce himself. He orders dinner for two, in his apartment. He paces the floor, trying to work out the situation. The reader notices that Breen has stopped considering his esp talent for once. He has entered a situation that has forced him to fall back on his ordinary human faculties. He hears water running in the connecting apartment. How to invite her to dinner? What if...? Who is...? The woman herself resolves the situation. She pauses, one hand moving the other side of the knob of the door. Slowly, the knob turns, Paul jerks his hands from his pockets, and the girl enters.

Immediately, Paul Breen recognises the face in front of him. It is the face of the woman he least expected to see again - Martha Merrill. He caught one glimpse of Martha one day at the Washington government office where she was working as a telephonist. Paul had been so struck by the fact that he had asked about her name. The same day, she had disappeared from the office. Now she enters the apartment like some magic princess sprung up from a dark pool in the water. In fact, she is a magic princess, powerful, mysterious, devious, and describing to Paul unexpected plans for his future. Like him, she is a telepath. Unlike him, she can control her powers and has set out to find one of the world's few telepaths for a husband. At the end of the novel, after an exciting last-ditch shootout with the heavies, the magic princess (to change metaphors drastically) and the humble stable lad

escape into a happy-ever-after. For all its bleak tidings of great suffering, Wild Talent turns out to be a charming fairy-tale, after all.

All this is very peculiar. Karen was the agent planted by Slater, and his to take away. She can love Paul, but the story implies that she could never stay with him because she lacks his telepathic powers. She disappears at the appropriate time - the last of Paul's friends to be eradicated by Slater. She is the good, wholesome American girl whose purity is violated by the paranoids and the xenophobes. For people like her, the USA of 1953 had no fairy tales or last-ditch rescues. On the other hand, Martha Merrill gives Paul the freedom he cannot give himself. She rescues him from prison and takes him eventually to - literally - a desert island of the West Indies. As the enlightened alien, the foreigner, she is the only person strong enough to save the true native son from the fever that rots the homeland. Fortunately for Paul, he falls in love with her as well. Too bad for Karen.

But, if I may play being author for a moment - why didn't Paul escape from the Army early in the book? You know the formula: the Army would have chased the insidious telepath; Paul would have grabbed a gun, hidden in the backwoods, fought everybody single-handedly, and still married Karen at the end. I suppose every s f reader has read that book; it's usually called something like Paul Breen: Telepath, and appeared as one side of an Ace Double during the mid-1950s.

Then there could be Version II of Wild Talent itself. In this version, Paul would have waited nervously. The doorknob would have moved, the door opened, and in would have walked Karen. She would have been a telepath all along. She would have escaped miraculously from Slater's net and returned to her own true love. Another equally happy ending.

But, as in most of Tucker's books, the main character has two love stories in the one book. In each case, the main character can convince a pleasant, sexy woman to love him within a satisfactory relationship. Towards the end of the novel, she disappears, to be replaced by an enigmatic, powerful woman. No matter how ordinary or easy-going they might appear, Tucker's main characters cannot follow an easy path to love. In The Time Masters, Gilbert Nash leaves Shirley Hoffman high and dry at the end of the novel, and pursues the mysterious woman he hates. In The Long, Loud Silence Russell Gary cannot accept the paradise on the Gulf, the easy relationship which Sally offers. He waits ten years until he meets Irma Sloane again. In Wild Talent, Paul Breen loses Karen altogether. She is the epitome of the nice girl, the one you would most want to settle down with. She is the loser. He undergoes a metaphorical death and ascends into the arms of his telepathic angel.

I'm not sure that this reveals anything much about Bob Tucker, the person. But the pattern is quite clear in the novels of Wilson Tucker, the

novelist; the only relationship worth having is the one you must go through hell to reach. In the long run, the cuddly girl-next-door is the one least likely, even if she likes you. That makes life difficult for Tucker's main characters, and often nearly breaks the backs of his plots. Yet Paul Breen is another of the creations of Tucker Number 1, the man who writes about people he knows. If Paul Breen, like other Tucker characters, represents much of Bob Tucker, the person, then why must he go through all hell for the lady in the end? In other words, as Tucker becomes a better writer (and the structure of Wild Talent is quite an improvement on the previous books) he places more of himself into the books, yet makes them less and less wish fulfillments. In Wild Talent, the situation is a metaphor for its times. Paul Breen is himself a representative of all the Mr. Nice Guys of that era. Yet how can he also be a representative of Tucker himself, including the idiosyncratic double view of the heroines? There's a gap there somewhere. It's not until The Lincoln Hunters that we find a disappearance of the gap between the metaphors, the situations, and the people. At that point, Tucker becomes the artist which all his earlier books point towards.

## SMALL MATTERS

### 1955: Time Bomb

(Time Bomb is the first of Tucker's novels for which I must give away the ending in order to talk about the book at all. Apologies to readers who hate writers who give away the endings of novels.)

\*\* \*\* \*

Large matters do not initiate such events; small ones are the beginnings, and the small things are already in our daily lives.

I'm always interested in speculating about how or why a book was written. Not the Deep, Significant Reasons, but simply the first images or sounds or memories that might have provided minute starting points. I guess that Wilson Tucker found the starting point for Time Bomb in an image of the time bomb itself:

It was an unpainted metal cylinder, lying half buried in the muddy water of the pond, a nondescript broken thing with a skelter of dull black rods and broken wiring spilling out of its open end. It looked as if it had been simply thrown there. Patches of rust had long ago taken root on the exposed length of its body... The end had once been closed off, but now the lid or the top was missing... Danforth knew he had found it.

Ignoring the mud, he dropped to his knees to peer into the interior of the drum. He jerked up instantly in shock and found the boy watching him.

"I coulda told you that cat was there, mister."

What could be more nondescript than a dead, skinny cat found lying, skewered by a piece of wire, in the remains of a cylinder, in a muddy field? But nondescript relics, and objects considered valueless by other people, are the cornerstones of Tucker's novels. The more that such an object insists on its own unimportance, the more that it hides from the investigator, the more interesting it is likely to be. The simplest objects lead in the most unexpected directions.

Who made this humble time bomb? Probably this is the next question that Tucker asked himself when writing the book. What kind of person could invent such an object and let it crash into an anonymous field, to be found by just the right person?

He was a slow and plodding man, seemingly far older than his middle years. Contentedly he rocked on the porch, now and then absently stroking his hopelessly old-fashioned moustache and nodding at some inner memory, some private thought. The neighbourhood children sometimes laughed at him and his moustache, made fun of his plodding habits, but he pretended not to notice them...

(He lived in) a small white cottage off on a side street of a highway town. Not a bustling laboratory, not a gigantic factory, nor a government bureau. A peaceful town, an overlooked cottage, and a human being looked upon by the townspeople as an old man - a junkman...

No one in town had thought to describe the man's eyes... At first glance they were a startling blue if the man were angry or watery blue if he were aged - which he was not. Those neighbours of Theodore Mays hadn't been too observant. He was not old, but hurt; not aged or infirm, but bent... his body, even when reclining in the chair as now, was not crooked with years but with distress.

I've said before that, in his novels, Tucker is most concerned to ask such questions as: What is of most value? How best can we lead our lives? Theodore Mays is Tucker's idea of a good man. He is someone who can wait, contentedly rocking on the front porch of "a small white cottage off on a side street of a highway town". He does not call attention to himself, except for his reputation in the town as a harmless eccentric. In fact, he is a secret hero, overlooked by everybody. He is a person who has suffered and endured. "He was not old, but hurt; not aged or



infirm, but bent...not crooked with years but with distress."

Theodore Mays is a time traveller. In the year 2000, he invented a time machine. His two brothers attempted to travel backwards in time. They died in the attempt. Theodore Mays succeeded, but the experience of time travel has warped his body. Mays has travelled backwards from a horrifying future, one of "bloodshed, blackness and despair... Not long ago I saw New Year's Day in the twenty-first century...it wasn't celebrated." Mays has returned to assassinate the leader whose quarter-century rule has degraded life for most Americans. Mays builds time bombs - bombs which travel through time and space to assassinate groups of leaders of the Sons of America movement. Mays' final target is "Ben" himself.

All this is the seed of a good book, even if the seed idea is one of those zany, paranoid political notions so peculiar to science fiction. How best can Tucker make a novel, grow a tree, from this seed?

Firstly, attach an "if" to the original idea. Mays cannot succeed in assassinating Ben until he can find some way to place the "lure" near Ben to attract the homing device of the time bomb. Mays will succeed only if he finds such a person.

Secondly, give shape to the person to whom everything will happen. He must be someone who won't turn Mays into the police. In fact, let him be a policeman.

Lieutenant Danforth has no first name that we discover in the book. He is a bachelor or, more precisely, entirely a loner. Only his landlady knows what he is like when he is at home. Danforth is always alert, always on guard. He learns most when he stands still and looks around him. He listens to sounds which other people consider unimportant; he notices details of the weather, the shapes of houses, and the relationships between roads, railways, and sky. He works best in darkness and rainfall. "The darkness was desired and welcomed," we read in chapter 2. He goes to investigate the scene of a house which had just been destroyed by a bomb (killing several executive members of the Sons of America, including Danforth's boss, the chief of the Bomb Squad). Danforth notices that "the rain beat down on the rubble and steam rose from it". Danforth is the only person who notices the clue that "each of the six bombings had occurred at night, each was timed to one a week, and how he realised that each had happened on a rainy night. Only on rainy nights."

Rain is only one of the clues which tickle Danforth's preoccupied mind. More than anything else, Danforth is a detective. When he looks and listens, every detail of the landscape becomes a clue. He asks questions of the two people who were walking beside the governor's

mansion just before the house exploded. Red Boggs (yet another Tuckerised name) cannot give Danforth any useful information. Barbara, his fiancée, is more sensitive. "Lieutenant," she says, "have you ever heard the whisper of a boat moving through the water? A large boat skimming along the river? It was like that...just before bricks began falling in the streets." Danforth can only be puzzled. "Whispers. Night, rain, radiation, whispers", and so summarises the hushed, expectant tone of the whole book. But he has the clue he needs. The "whispering" is the simultaneous motion through space and time of the time bomb.

Danforth is not the sort of detective who relies on those mysterious, sourceless hunches which so afflict the heroes of many science fiction books. His great talent, shared by the author, is to see things just as they are, right in front of him. So much so that Time Bomb sometimes reads like a nouvelle vague French novel of the early 1960s. The police use a chrono-camera to take a photograph of the scene of the bombing just as it happened: "The dogs popped onto the screen. They ran for the house, furiously barking. They had almost reached it when the structure disintegrated." Such information yields no easy answers. Someone suggests that the dogs act out of "premonition". But they might have been barking at something in the air. Or they might have been just senseless puppets. Danforth needs more evidence to give meaning to the surrealistic time picture.

Small pieces of information and minute insights based on meticulous observation lead Danforth slowly and inevitably towards Theodore Mays. At times, Danforth does not seem even keen on solving the puzzle; he enjoys too much savouring the scent of newly uncovered information. The pace of the book follows the pace of the man. No melodramatic sudden revelations here; "Training and experience demanded that everything be neatly tied together, and now intuition insisted that these things he knew were tied - in some haphazard fashion."

Danforth claims nothing more for himself than his professional competence. "He was no rabid satellite, no politician's man." The politicians and the police department finally dismiss him for failing to prevent an unpreventable crime. Besides, anybody who's anybody is becoming one of Ben's Boys (in this respect, Time Bomb shows much the same political situation as we find in Wild Talent). Until he loses his job, Danforth insists that he is only a humble cop: "The professional face. The public has come to expect the stumbling, unimaginative policeman. The result of watching too many erroneous telecasts, movies and talking books. So to produce from them the desired responses, they are met with a stumbling, unimaginative face. That's mine. What lies behind yours?" Elsewhere in the novel, one character tells Danforth, "The only difference between you and the rest of these cops is that you are polite. So far, anyway."

Danforth's strength and his weakness is that he is a professional person as well as a professional face. He has no life other than his work. In many passages, he is stumbling and unimaginative. When presented with the same clues as Danforth receives, the reader outguesses the cop every time (or maybe we've just read more s f o books than he has). But his implacable sense of duty makes him into an unstoppable bloodhound. "Now I tell you," says Mr Ramsey, the Secret Police's resident telepath, talking about Danforth's dismissal, "that while I am personally sorry it happened, I think it will be to our advantage that it has... I think you will prove infinitely more valuable outside the police department, than in it." Danforth does not storm out of the police force in a huff, as I would have done in a similar situation. Given the chance to continue the case as an unofficial investigator, his only concern is to solve the case, and to keep flying the flag of his own personal integrity.

Integrity is the word which best summarises all of Tucker's main characters. Sometimes integrity is sour and destroys itself, as in Russell Gary (*The Long, Loud Silence*). Sometimes it is merely flamboyant and flinty (Kate Bristol in *To the Tombaugh Station*). It takes its most admirable, persistent form in the shapes of Lieutenant Danforth, Benjamin Steward (*The Lincoln Hunters*), and Brian Chaney and Arthur Saltus (*The Year of the Quiet Sun*). In the main characters of *The Time Masters* and *Ice and Iron*, this quality is transformed into an almost supernatural quality of creative stubbornness.

In Tucker's novels, integrity has nothing to do with egotism. When Mr Ramsey tells Danforth that his continued investigations might help to prevent civil war in America, Danforth cries out, "I'm not that big... I can't stop a revolution or a civil war!" Danforth knows his place in the world. He has the wisdom of modesty, the willingness to limit himself to the area that fits him. Mr Ramsey replies, "Large matters do not initiate such events; small ones are the beginnings and the small things are already in our daily lives." Surely this is Wilson Tucker's credo about reality and writing. The novel starts in small things, the bits and pieces wrapped in an old tank, lying in a field. It proceeds through small people. Seeds grow into caks; plants can push their way through concrete. "Just barely enough is enough," as Philip Dick once wrote. It's not a credo of reassurance; it is a statement of necessity. Push open a door too violently and it will slam back in your face; try to jump the walls of heaven and you will only fall back to earth, flat on your face.

Wilson Tucker does not say all this, of course. Tucker is more likely to support the sentiment behind Camus' statement, "As soon as a man, through lack of character, takes refuge in a doctrine...it multiplies like Reason itself, and assumes all the figures of the syllogism." The great strength of Tucker's writing is his refusal

to formulate abstractions to "explain" what happens there. (It is also its great weakness since, for so long, it deprived Tucker of the ability to gauge accurately the strengths and weaknesses of his writing.) Tucker's characters do not base their actions on reasons. They follow their inclinations and paths which seem necessary to them. They are good people because they are steadfast people. In Tucker's characters I admire most just this quality of steadfastness (perhaps because I have so little of it myself). Danforth expects only to do his job: he will follow the path to the time bombs until he can go no further. At the end of the trail he expects to arrest a man, prosecute him, and solve the crime. Too bad that such a solution will only aid the Sons of America movement. Too bad that he has an uneasy feeling because the trail to the quarry has become too easy to follow. Already he realises that the quarry has become the hunter. The fisherman has begun to reel in his catch.

Now we have the idea, the inventor, and the hunter. In an ordinary mystery novel, that would be enough. Solve the mystery and finish the story. But *Time Bomb* is a novel, not just a mystery story. It needs a dilemma as well, something to touch the heart, not just satisfy the curiosity.

From the large bottom drawer (Mays) removed a roll of wiring and two batteries, from another drawer a carton of rods. A dozen tiny transistors were carefully packed away in cotton padding. Mays selected two and laid them on the blueprint. From his pocket he pulled the tobacco can, emptied its contents in a drawer corner and slowly refilled it from a Mason jar containing dirt ... And finally he brought up a soldering iron, plugged it into a baseboard receptacle and handed the iron to the astonished Danforth.

"Pitch in," he ordered. "Follow the diagram. I'll look to the traps and find something to put in it."

"Me?" Danforth knew his mouth was hanging open.

"You." The moustache was quivering as though a laugh was concealed behind it...

"Do you know what I've done?" Danforth asked him. The initial shock of surprise had not yet worn away.

"I reckon I do. Where did she fall?"

"In a pasture pond - a few miles south of Springfield."

Which brings us right back to the fallen time bomb in the lonely field. Danforth has it with him in the back of his car when he visits Mays. The last thing he expects is to build and fire his own lure. Danforth's trail does not end with



Theodore Mays and a neat solution to the puzzle. It ends when he finds himself setting the bait to lure himself, a bait which points him towards his own destiny and death.

When Danforth meets Mays on the porch of the neat little house in the obscure street, he recognizes the bond between them. Danforth is the only person who discovers Mays' scheme, because he is the only person who has the temperament or ability to follow the clues to such a man. Mays is glad to accept and teach the kind of person who has the patience to find him. As Danforth and Mays confront each other, Mays skips one step ahead of his interrogator ("Are there any weapons in the house?" "No, sir." "None at all? Of any description?"). A time bomb leaves behind no evidence that it ever existed, so Danforth cannot arrest Mays immediately, as duty demands. "I fired (the bombs) with gladness in my heart," declares Mays, when Danforth accuses him of murder. Mays shouts out his hatred of "the blackest traitor this country ever knew" who "is on his way to the White House". Danforth is caught when Mays shows him the twists in his own body and describes the history of the next twenty-five years. For some time, Danforth has been able to ignore the world around him, a world in which most people have accepted the Hitlerian ravings of Ben's Boys. He has been so faithful to his job that the maniacs around him have expropriated his easy-going, rational world and have thrown him out.

Now Mays gives Danforth the chance to perform his last duty. Danforth will wrap rare earths around himself, as a homing device for the time bomb. At a political meeting, he will rush up to Ben and give a Judas kiss. As he embraces the demagogue, the time bomb will find its target and explode. The explosion will kill both Danforth and the blighted future which Mays has already lived through. Mays will ride the time bomb himself. Nobody will ever know who killed Ben, or how, or how that assassination changed history.

Nobody, of course, except Mr Ramsey (the telepath who follows Danforth's investigations) and Gilbert and Shirley Nash. I've mentioned already that Time Bomb is a kind of sequel to The Time Masters. Time Bomb has much the same serene surface and intense depths as has The Time Masters; it also proceeds in a series of conversations; and Gilbert Nash and Shirley Hoffman (now Shirley Nash) reappear. They are important people to Danforth, but not very important to the plot, which is why I haven't mentioned them before. Now twenty years "older" than they were in The Time Masters, and living quietly in the country, they have become accidental witnesses to Danforth's self-discovery and turning aside of history. In the magnificent last scene of the novel, the Nashes stand beside a "useless monument" set in the middle of a street, an epitaph "already marked for extinction, its valuable space needed for ever-increasing traffic". In the last line of the book, Nash says, "A man has the right to spend a few minutes with an old

friend." Danforth and Mays succeeded in their mission. The apocalypse did not arrive. Everybody (except, of course, the two martyrs) lived happily ever after.

But did they? Do they? The story of Danforth's fate is very moving and one of Tucker's finest achievements. I just can't believe that it solved anything. The situation is almost the reverse of that in Wild Talent. There, Paul Breen finds happiness for himself and the world jogs on, more or less on its normal, suicidal, homicidal, even keel. In Time Bomb, Danforth sacrifices himself, and the world improves. I don't believe it. The situation sounds almost as silly as something from A E Van Vogt. Remove the Sons of America and some equivalent of Republicans for Nixon would replace them. Liberate Portugal, but political catastrophe strikes Chile or the Philippines. Tucker is still cooking the experiments and twisting the equations to suit Tucker Number 2. The thriller-writer in Tucker must have his way; the book must have a neat conclusion, and a neat conclusion is just what is the least likely outcome. Meanwhile, the book slips out of control in another way: it's nice to meet the Nashes again, but they are so unnecessary to the whole book that I had to go to some trouble to drag them into the discussion at all. In this book, Tucker presents some of his finest characters, and presents some of his deepest insights about what it is to be human. But neither deep insights nor a good story do a good novel make. The struggle goes on; Time Bomb is the best of these novels so far, but it is still not wholly satisfying. Still we must wait until The Lincoln Hunters.

## SKY-GAZING

### 1958: The Lincoln Hunters

"Well, sir, if a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts; but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he will end in certainties."

\*\* \*\* \*

They were living now and he was among them.

\*\* \*\* \*

"It is like a tree whose trunk is embedded in the last twenty pages, and whose branches extend backward in time to the book's beginning." This is how I described The Year of the Quiet Sun in an article which I wrote four years ago. This current article is like a series of footnotes to the earlier piece, so I feel free to apply the same metaphor to The Lincoln Hunters. Published twelve years before The Year of the Quiet Sun, The Lincoln Hunters is much closer to it in quality than to Time Bomb, published three years earlier. Like The Year of the Quiet Sun, The

Lincoln Hunters is a sturdy tree of a book - solid, living, yet all one kind of thing. And we must know the ending (the tree trunk) in order to see the significance of the beginning.

### The foliage

Mr Peabody "ambled now across town in a warm, brilliant and sun-splashed morning, pleased with himself and pleased to be alive in the spring - the natural beginning of the new year. Peabody had long since passed the century mark... The younger generations...rode even the shortest distance...they clung to their dinky little electric cars, which were everywhere."

Mr Peabody lives about six hundred years in the future of our own. The day is pleasant over Greater Cleveland, people enjoy lives longer than our own, and Mr Peabody is a man with a mission, enjoying his walk in the sun. Of course, Mr Peabody is a rather old-fashioned gentleman, and he goes about his affairs in a roundabout way. He even walks, doffing his hat to passing motorists. But, like everybody else in this society, Mr Peabody is used to comfortable living. He is accustomed to people obeying him when he offers the correct amount of money:

"I am now interested in a matter of a lost speech," (Peabody) said. "Quite literally, the speech was lost to posterity... If it is possible, Mr Whittle, I would like to have that speech."

"My dear sir, nothing is impossible to the craftsmen here at T-R. Or almost nothing..."

Local research was T-R's secondary function, keyed to perfection. The Time Researchers had the answer to almost every question, and were as important to daily life as the news dispensers... Time Researchers served the world, for a fee, never declining a reasonable (and potentially profitable) request.

Finance, above all, plunged into its accustomed role with a quiet eagerness. Finance was already busy padding expenses.

The Time Researchers organisation reflects the political, social, and economic complexion of the era. Time Researchers has two functions: to gather detailed information about the past, and to send its people back into time to observe the events of history. Both activities yield a considerable profit. The organisation prides itself on satisfying its customers, especially rich, eccentric customers like Mr Peabody. Mr Peabody pays his money and T-R guarantees to record for him the "lost" speech (because never written down) which Abraham Lincoln is reported to have delivered in "Blomington-illinois" on May twenty-ninth, 1856.

For its part, T-R guarantees efficiency. "My

dear sir, nothing is impossible to the craftsmen here at T-R. Or almost nothing..." Immediately, the "great marble beehive" of Time Researchers begins work, reducing the whole of past time to a matter of "time-curves", "idiomatic tables", costumes, and background information. T-R is run by the fussy Whittle and "bright young men" who are "neat, clean" and wear "the immaculate white coveralls which were the uniforms of their profession". Vacuum drafts clean the T-R building. It's such a pity that all of T-R's employees must do their work so well because they endanger their own lives if they lose their jobs:

The government labour squads supplied the most efficient answer to the unemployment problem... A man or woman without a job - and without the prospects of obtaining one - was promptly conscripted into government service... For the females, conscription meant one thing or another, some pleasant and some otherwise. For the males, it meant the remainder of a lifetime of forced labour, doing those things the government wanted done at the least possible expense. It wasn't called slavery, because the New Constitution prohibited slavery... There were no parcels or pardons, no visitors, no mail.

These "bright young men" have good reason to stay neat and clean and brighten their helpful smiles. Slavery (given the euphemism of "unemployment") exists because it lets the whole society work better. You stay employed as long as nobody questions your efficiency or your loyalty, or as long as you pat the right boss on the shoulder. Get sacked and you disappear into limbo. The people who stay behind don't care much or can't allow themselves to care much. Their physical needs are provided for. Get bored and the government provides such elaborate diversions as the imitation park "equipped with a tiny artificial lake, facsimile swans, soft music emanating from concealed speakers in the shrubbery, and a romantic's idea of park benches."

The Catch-22 world of The Lincoln Hunters was created after a political event remembered as the Second Revolution. An Emperor has taken control of America and introduced anxious horrors into its life. "The Second Revolution," says Mr Peabody, "destroyed much that was noble and good in our heritage. Meaning no disrespect to the Emperor nor his ancestors, of course." "Of course," replies Mr Whittle. "I am sure the Emperor regrets these things." Later in the book, Evelyn warns, "Ben, you must be more careful. Mr Whittle is quick to notice disrespect." The state itself, of course, runs on money, not the loyalty of people. Sentimentality or cynicism - take your pick. A totalitarian regime runs on both. It cannot withstand any attacks from sceptics. The Emperor's world works because it challenges nobody to think, and expects everybody to trust the rulers; it tells people what to do and how to do it. It's a heaven on earth for most people - but if, like Benjamin Steward or Bobby Bloch,



you don't fit in, to hell with you.

### The branches

The Characters are the people which Time Researchers sends back in time to retrieve lost objects and information:

They were the anonymous people who did research in the field, more or less anonymously serving such clients as Amos Peabody. They were a tight, clannish group, and they belonged to a guild.

...The Characters were the runners, the legmen, the adventurers who performed the field work. They were jealously proud of their jobs. Among their number were actors and would-be actors, writers and artists, linguists and librarians, political hacks, students of the physical sciences, salesmen, sleight-of-hand artists, athletes, hunters and trackers, anachronistic soldiers of fortune, and bums. The Characters had but three things in common: a ready willingness to risk their lives for monetary reward, a certain sly talent for survival, and the ability in the field to pass as genuine characters - whatever the time or place.

Of course they are "jealously proud of their jobs"; they face the threat of the slave labour camps if they lose those jobs. But they are not people who fit easily into their society. They form a "tight, clannish group" of such thinking, unconventional people as actors, writers, artists, students, "sleight-of-hand artists", and unrepentant bums. All of them constantly risk dismissal. They guarantee their safety by doing their jobs well; they have learned "a certain sly talent for survival, and the ability in the field to pass as genuine characters." Most importantly, they are actors, able to imitate the people of the eras they visit, and can pretend to be servile at home.

Benjamin Steward is both the most reliable and the most detached of the Characters. He is a "lanky, slow-speaking and slow-moving individual". His "amiable face, like his clothing and his manners...was nondescript. He and his habits belonged to no particular age, reflected no particular pattern of life... Benjamin Steward gave the appearance of being perpetually at peace with the world, seemingly unmoved by it and caring little or nothing for it... He was tall, appallingly thin, with unkempt hair and an unhurried metabolism. He was somewhat out of step with (the) world, and admirably suited to his job... His voice hinted at sly mockery. It was difficult to judge the Characters correctly; they frequently behaved as if they belonged to another species - or to no species at all."

This is Evelyn's view of Benjamin Steward; she sees him as others see him and not, perhaps, quite how he sees himself. Benjamin Steward does

not fit within his own world. He is "lanky, slow-speaking and slow-moving" while his contemporaries are content, sleek, and slick. He is content to look nondescript while others around him strive after conventional styles in flamboyance. He looks "at peace with the world" while others reflect the vague anxiety caused by living in a totalitarian age. Mostly he is "out of step with the world" in an age which has striven to put everybody in step. He mocks people who expect deference.

Evelyn is half in love with Steward, but she does not claim to understand him. She watches him with the same detachment as he watches others. The job in hand is Lincoln's lost speech; Evelyn gives the instructions to him and tries to brush off his mocking asides "'('Maidens, like moths, are caught by my glare.' 'I am not a maiden, Benjamin.' 'Most surprising. Then beware of me.'"). Evelyn tries to keep the company flag flying and everything ship-shape. "I wish you luck, Benjamin. Remember our motto." "Our motto," says Benjamin, "is for the birds. But thanks, Evelyn." Even a simple aside like that might betray them. Benjamin chooses to take the risks, while Evelyn protects herself with the kow-towing excuses which are the standard language of the people of this era.

Benjamin Steward has asked Evelyn to marry him every year for the past six years. She keeps putting him off. Most of the time, Evelyn offers merely a formal brushoff. "I have thoroughly enjoyed our dates, as you call them, but I anticipate nothing beyond that." "Dating was fun," she thinks to herself, "but (Steward) was also the Character most frequently discussed in the higher echelons of the company, and that troubled her. She knew, if he did not, that his continued usefulness and future employment hung in a precarious balance; any day or any field trip could be his last."

Benjamin lacks other important pieces of information: "I've known you for six years and you have always been Evelyn - just Evelyn. Don't you have a family name?" At first Evelyn tells Benjamin that her full name is Evelyn Kung Fu-tza. She tells him that she would not want to marry a Character: the risks are too great. Suddenly Evelyn speaks with passion; for the first time in six years the two of them discuss the matter which is often on their minds. Benjamin pays more attention than usual; "he hadn't known this Evelyn at all."

"Evelyn Kung," he said pensively. "Maiden name."

"Yes Benjamin... I am a widow...."

"Evelyn - one of the Characters?"

..."My husband's name was Sam Wendy. I think you have already guessed that. We kept our marriage a secret; not even the

people at T-R knew. And I will be grateful, Benjamin, if you do not mention it now. It is over."

...For six years he had worked with Evelyn Kung, and for the last two of those adventurous years he had haphazardly courted her - never dreaming she was first Sam Wendy's wife and then his widow... He wondered if he could ever ask her out again? Could he knowingly date the widow of the man whose death was on his hands?

So who, really, are Benjamin Steward and Evelyn Kung? Benjamin Steward is a man who goes his own way but does his job to the best of his ability. He feels himself to be a one-time failure; he failed to rescue Sam Wendy from the Roman gladiators. Evelyn Kung is Sam Wendy's widow. She is somebody who might well hate Benjamin Steward, but she doesn't. She will not marry him, either. Benjamin Steward did not kill Sam Wendy, but the company did (it refused to spend extra money to rescue one of its Characters). Sam Wendy does not separate Benjamin and Wendy, although that's what they both think; they are separated by their perceptions of the world they share. Evelyn is willing to put up with the world's injustices; Benjamin is not. Benjamin has become a rebel without realising it. Already he has separated his affections from the twenty-first-century era to which he returns after each mission. Only the hope that he might marry Evelyn has kept him loyal. Now Evelyn has cut herself off from him, and so has separated Benjamin from his world. But where could somebody like Benjamin Steward find a better world to live?

#### Sliding down the trunk

(The time machine was a) thin bullet, manufactured of glass and steel (which) rested on a cushioned dais. This was the stepson of H G Wells's bicycle... The activating machinery was tightly packed beneath the webbed flooring - or most of it was. The leftovers were stuffed in at either end, just beyond reach of the head and toes. The conveyance resembled a peculiar vacuum table, bullet-shaped, filled to overflowing with its components. All in all, it was a deliberately designed, minimum-sized package built for just one purpose. Economic reasons and little else dictated the design.

The structure and purpose of Time Researchers is a model for those of the Emperor's era, and the time machine is a model for them both. "Manufactured of glass and steel", the time machine represents a traveller's dream which goes back to H G Wells. It contains mainly machinery and fits in a human passenger as almost an afterthought. "Economic reasons and little else dictated the design." It is, above all, well-designed, a bullet designed to penetrate the past, but gives no benefits to its builders other than

money and information. "There is no need to conceal the missile after you have vacated it," hears Benjamin Steward, as he inspects the vehicle, "this model will automatically maintain itself a millisecond out of phase for so long as the door is not locked from the inside." Every detail is pinned down; all problems, it seems, allowed for. Plug in the last piece of the machine - a person named Benjamin Steward - and off we go.

"Damn all engineers!" cries out Steward, as the time bullet lands back in 1856. The vehicle has landed underwater. The engineers, the smug paragons of efficiency, have made their first mistake. There are plenty more to come. Steward staggers out of the vehicle, tucks the "bullet" under some roots beside the creek where he has landed, and sets off across the grassy plain towards "Bloomington-illinois". He finds that it is not a primitive village, as T-R's information sources described it. It is a thriving frontier city and, as soon as he steps inside the place, somebody recognises Steward. He looks at a local newspaper and finds that he has been deposited one complete day later than scheduled. He is forced to carry out a survey expedition for a project that he has already undertaken! The T-R organisation has made a very serious mistake, one that poses unknown dangers. Worse still, Steward finds that the project team to arrive the day before has already muffed part of its assignment. "The single strand was as thin and as fine as silk thread. Many dozens of feet of it lay on the ground, hopelessly entangled with debris. It glittered in the sun... The wire was from a pocket recorder, the kind of recorder he and his crew would carry into the hall to capture Lincoln's speech... Something had gone (and still would go) ominously wrong."

After four hours, Steward returns from the preliminary survey. Accompanied by Dobbs, Bonner, and Bloch, he prepares for the major project. He has become worried by a sense of impending doom. The Time Researchers organisation is thunderstruck by their own mistakes, of course, and apologises. However, its technical mistakes look minor beside the personal problems for which Steward feels responsible. He feels the pain of emotional separation from Evelyn, and the reminder that he has already caused the "death" of a Character. One of his crew members faces disaster of a different kind.

"Now, what's with Bloch? What were you trying to tell us in there?"

"The labour squads seized his brother this morning," Dobbs answered quietly.

"Oh, hell!" Steward was thunderstruck.

Bobby Bloch, the Character, is close to losing his own job. He drinks too much; he fcols around on assignments; he's an erratic actor who could never fit within this conformist society. His brother, a person much like him, has now been sent to the slave-labour camps. Bloch disappears



from the building and is found, asleep, in the toilet. Steward feels responsibility because he asked that Bloch should be included on the trip. Now Bloch has turned into just another sign of doom.

At about this point in the book, the patterns become rather more complicated than in any of Tucker's previous novels. The formal pattern of the book is that Steward faces great danger from two sides. If he continues with his mission, he knows that at least some part of it will fail. Worse, any mistake of his could lead to Bobby Bloch's slavery. If he stays behind, he faces only the continued coolness from Evelyn and the possibility that he might lose his own job and freedom. The emotional pattern of the book is that Steward is scared silly of the second mission, but he wants very much to return to the era of USA, 1856. When he briefs the other members of the expedition, he can't help telling them about "sky-gazing". "Watch out for that sky - it'll send you." (I think I know just what he means; surely there is no dome of sky larger than the prairie sky of Tucker's area of Illinois.) Steward thinks of his first impressions of the prairie when he stepped from the bullet at the start of the first survey:

The sound of gently running water was his introduction to the world of 1856, and it was a pleasant sound. The crisp, almost cold spring air which followed was equally pleasant... The air was new; air he had not breathed before...

...Obeying an impulse, he sat down on the dew-wet grass and spread his hands, letting his fingers curl about the tufts of grass. The sod was cool and refreshing. He wished that he could fully recall a phrase which lingered on the rim of his mind - something about being homesick for dirt. He was that... A sigh of contentment escaped his lips. This was living.

This is what Benjamin Steward is really seeking - a way of living. Here is the heart of the book, hidden from the gleaming machines, artificial bird calls, economic parameters, and clean, white-coated men of the world of the next century. The Lincoln Hunters shows how Benjamin Steward reaches out for the life he really needs. Like many of Tucker's novels, it tells how a good man finds a true heaven. But, unlike those early books, it does not show a good man reaching that heaven by otherworldly means. First he must live the anonymous life to which he is committed, and live it in its truest, most fragile way. It is all very well to feel the sod and breathe in the pure air and fall in love with the world of 1856. But neither Steward nor the reader can expect to stay in it.

The second expedition goes well at first. The Characters saunter across the prairie and enter the bustling town of Bloomington, Illinois. "The downtown thoroughfares were congested with

excited, loud-talking men and not a few women... The noisy mobs surged to and fro along each downtown street, seemingly going nowhere - but determinedly going, nevertheless. Collectively, they were possessed of the notion that to remain still was to stagnate; they would miss the elusive excitement. Movement and disorder, motion and sound were the decrees of the day." Steward has entered a world which is quite the opposite from his own. His own era is one of stagnation, where nothing moves but the electric cars and the machines that power the air-conditioning. Nothing is loud or bustling; nobody is going anywhere. The twenty-fifth-century world is entirely safe - if you conform to the rules. The nineteenth-century world is exciting, but anything can go wrong.

The Lincoln Hunters breaks many of the patterns of Tucker's previous novels because it contains few scenes that are obviously more important than others. For the first time, Tucker gives significance to almost every word and page. Yet it is obvious that the author wants us to feel strongly that we are sitting in the front row of the first-floor auditorium of the Major's Hall in Bloomington, Illinois, in 1856. Abraham Lincoln's speech is a very important scene in the book:

Abraham Lincoln's eyes and spellbinding lips were alive in an otherwise worn and homely face. The eyes were feverish reflections of an inner turmoil, an immense unrest; and the mouth was not a part of his mundane body but instead a detached, verbal reproducer of some mighty battle being fought in a corner of his mind. Lincoln did not speak with the brilliant, rangy syntax of Herndon, nor did he rely on the rabble-rousing tactics of Lovejoy. His style, manner, and delivery were undisputably his own; his words and thoughts were simple ones, forcefully delivered.

Again, here is Tucker's idea of a good man. As we sit in the front row with Steward, we see before us the external evidence of a great mind and spirit, one whose values and presence impress Steward and the author. Here is Steward's new world in person - the "feverish reflections of an inner turmoil, an immense unrest" compared with the moral bankruptcy of Steward's era; "the mighty battle being fought in a corner of his mind" compared with the soft answers by which Steward's compatriots turn away the mechanical wrath of their government; the individual style compared with the collective; simple words and thoughts, forcefully delivered, compared with the stereotyped jargon of the Time Researchers. Lincoln represents justice, liberty, and that controlled passion which has no place in the cramped mechanoparadise of the twenty-fifth century.

Abraham Lincoln's speech works so powerfully on his listeners that even the official newspaper reporter puts down his pen to listen. That's why the speech was never recorded. Steward's pocket

recorder whirs away, but Steward has lost all interest in the job at hand. For the moment, he has become a citizen of Bloomington, totally committed to the "just cause" expounded by Lincoln. He is so attentive that he forgets to keep an eye on Bloch. Suddenly he remembers his task. He looks around briefly. No Bloch at the back of the hall. He looks back. His inattentive action must have caught Lincoln's notice. "He found Lincoln's eyes locked with his", just for a moment. After the meeting ends, Steward, Bonner, and Dobbs stumble outside with the rest of the crowd. Lincoln asks to speak to Steward, who gives a weak excuse for his inattention. Steward is "hooked" by the charismatic future president - but sometime during the meeting he has lost sight of Bloch, who has now disappeared from the building.

Bobby Bloch is, of course, a Tuckerism. Bloch, the person, has always been a great friend of Bob Tucker, the person. As far as I know, "Bloch", the character, does not resemble the real-life person at all. Nevertheless, Steward does resemble Tucker a lot. In The Lincoln Hunters, Benjamin Steward risks his own life in order to find his missing friend. This may be partly a tribute from one real-life friend to another - but certainly it springs up convincingly from the life of the whole novel. Steward must find Bloch to save his own neck - the Emperor's regime won't tolerate another expensive failure. Steward must find Bloch to salve his own conscience - he cannot face the mockery of another Character left for dead, like Sam Wendy. But, most importantly, Steward must find Bloch because, if he doesn't, the regime's time police will. Steward refuses to desert Bloch: "We'll carry Bobby, and that's that."

The second half of The Lincoln Hunters is a circular pilgrimage. Bobby Bloch is an infuriating person at the best of times, but now he has slipped the leash of good sense altogether. Obviously, he became drunk on the town's festive oversupply of whisky. But surely somebody has noticed him, especially as he quotes Shakespeare when drunk! Nobody has. The Characters return to their agreed rendezvous point, a hitching rail just outside town, but Bloch is not there. Bonner goes "home" in the time machine, taking with him a temporary covering story and the wire which was the original object of the expedition. Dobbs stays at the rendezvous, while Steward walks back into town:

He plodded the streets east and west, north and south. Setting caution aside, he explored the alleys. He stumbled across the vacant lots, looking under trees, probing the shrubbery, and inspecting the heaps of refuse which local citizens insisted on dumping on such lots. He poked among the stacks of lumber and piles of brick of half-completed buildings; rummaged through the incompleated houses, and pried into the seemingly deserted shacks which littered the town. Steward looked into the many

livery stables...walked out to the railway depot...found - and entered - two houses of ill repute...was quickly but politely ushered out of a gambling hall when it was discovered he had come only to gape, not to play... At this late hour he knew the business district of the town as thoroughly as a map maker.

This passage of prose shows how much Tucker has improved as a writer between all his earlier science fiction novels and The Lincoln Hunters. Here, Tucker brings to life all his themes in the pattern of objects and sentences, as well as bringing to life the objects themselves. Nothing is simply "stuck in" for decoration or verisimilitude, as happens in passages of the earlier books. Steward is seeking Bloch; the passage creates the rhythm of his panicked walking; we see that he is willing to go to any lengths to save his friend. Steward has pinned on himself the responsibility for finding Bloch, so the quest takes on the pattern of Steward's thoughts. In turn, this pattern shows Steward's deeper preoccupation: how to come to terms with the gap between the world he loves, this one of 1856, and the world to which he is bound? We trudge with Steward as he walks down every street in the town. He gets to know every inch - not just the Major's Hall, where the spectacular speech was given, but also "the vacant lots", "under trees", through "stacks of lumber and piles of brick of half-completed buildings". Steward would never see these in his own time, where all signs of construction have been hidden, or else nothing is being built. People don't walk anywhere in Steward's era (in the first chapter of the novel, Tucker goes to some lengths to tell us this, so that all the walking in the later parts of the book will have extra point), but Steward trudges onward. No horses left in the future, but Steward examines the livery stables, here in 1856. The "houses of ill repute" of 1856 have turned into the deadly game houses of the twenty-fifth century, where the losers risk their lives rather than their virtue. Here in 1856, all is construction and growth and left-over possibilities. Steward, still tied to his own time, can do nothing but examine it and trace out a map over its surface. He wants to become part of this life here; until he finishes his quest, he is like a perambulating ghost, getting to know this world, but still only as a "map maker".

Steward comes close to panic after he has searched the town. Time has nearly run out. When he made his first survey, he entered this world at dawn on the next day. Already the night is half over. "No field man was permitted to closely approach a previous target date covered by himself... Two like objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time. Two like objects, meeting in the field, did not collide. One simply cancelled out the other." Steward risks meeting himself and so cancelling out himself. As the night wears on, Steward looks in the face of his own imminent death, and not just at the probable fate of Bobby Bloch.



No luck in the town. Back to the hitching post. Dobbs goes home, prepared with a convincing tale that might still save Steward and Bloch from future punishment. Just before he leaves, Dobbs thinks of one last possibility: "Did you lock in the jail?" "Jehoshaphat, no!" Back to town. Bloch has been at the jail during the night, very drunk and quoting nothing but Shakespeare. He has departed already.

Steward gives up. He returns across his beloved prairie, beaten. The first signs of dawn are in the sky, so he has about ten minutes left before he goes home or cancels out himself. He takes a "last, lingering look at Mr Lincoln's marvellous sky. Earth, sky, sight, sound, smell - heady stuff. A world of fire and energy and force... a world of brawling and enthusiastic people... They made and unmade governors and presidents with gusto, elected and tumbled congressmen with relish and delight, supremely confident of themselves and their destinies... Steward stood erect on the creekbed, letting the water course over his knees. He sucked in a mouthful of cold morning air. Mr Lincoln's lucky world." Surely this is Tucker's eulogy to the world he loves best himself! More strongly than in any of his previous books, the author's spirit tumbles out in the words of the main character. Steward's decrepit world is not very different from Tucker's world of 1958; both worlds are mocked by Lincoln's land, still uncrushed by highways, railways, and conformity. Here is Tucker's prose poem about his own world which he can see disappearing around him. The people of the 1850s are so confident that not even the Civil War will be able to shatter that confidence. At this point in time, Steward has no confidence left, but only panic. But he can still take pleasure in what he thinks he has lost: a friend, a job, and "Mr Lincoln's marvellous sky".

At his lowest point of despair, Steward turns around, looks at this land for the last time, and sees "a solitary Indian grove with a column of smoke rising above the trees". It had been there when he had "landed" for the first time. A dog is barking madly in the distance. Steward leaps from the water, forgetting his shoes and socks. He runs towards the grove. There, sitting in a tree, completely drunk, telling stories to a tribe of Indians gathered below him, is the clownish figure of Bobby Bloch. Steward grabs Bloch and starts running with him towards the creek. "Miserably short of the goal, the Character suddenly realised he was done... A heavy, rocklike object fell into the waters of the creek with a resounding splash." Here is the other Steward, right on schedule. Steward lies down in the grass; "he closed his eyes and sobbed for breath, awaiting oblivion."

#### The other trunk

The Lincoln Hunters has the most satisfying ending of any science fiction novel I've read except, perhaps, that of The Year of the Quiet Sun. Steward does not disappear, of course.

The other Steward does; the Steward who has, in his own memory, already spent four hours surveying the town of Bloomington on the wrong day. "He was content to lie there, uncaring and unmoving." How better to appreciate the true sweetness of life than to have looked death right in the eye? How better to experience rebirth into a new world than to have died, literally, in the old one? Heaven and hell cannot be separated, as Tucker tried to do in previous novels; one is always part of the other; one can always turn into the other at any time; Steward must go through the one to reach the other.

I've said that The Lincoln Hunters is like a tree. Steward begins among the foliage, the people of his world. He is a man of his own world, although separated from it by temperament. He loves Evelyn, a woman who chooses consciously to stay "up there", seven hundred years in the future. Each person is a branch of the trunk of time; but the time machine allows people to slide back down the trunk. Nobody at Time Researchers realised that time might have more than one trunk, or even an infinite number. Since Tucker (wisely) provides no explanation for the "physics" of the book's ending, I assume that Steward No 1 still exists in his original world. Steward No 2 is here, forced onto another trunk, perhaps to help take the tree toward a finer future than he came from.

The ending is miraculous, yet quite correct. The book is always true to itself. Time Researchers itself gave Steward the chance to reach a better world. "The engineers at last possessed a kind of grim, demonstrable proof of their theories... They had no way of knowing the theory was only half right, that under a particular set of circumstances only one of the duplicates ceased to exist... Because of faulty planning, a shoot had gone askew; because a field man failed to observe the tolerance limits, a cancellation had been effected. A Character had finally, witlessly succeeded in erasing himself. Put that on the company books and raise the ante to the client." Not that Time Researchers would care much. The organisation has its tape of Lincoln's lost speech, a convincing story from Bonner and Dobbs, and it has lost no money. The secret triumph is all, and only, Steward's and Bloch's. Like Chaney, he is a "hidden hero", whose success can be known only to himself.

Here, at last, Tucker Number 1 and Tucker Number 2 are not in conflict. The craftsman has become an artist. Certainly, Steward is Tucker, in the sense that he represents everything which Tucker finds most valuable - the hidden hero, the modest man who endures all for duty or for the sake of a friend, the person who can relieve an intolerable situation with a quick joke, the person who seeks the simple, unaffected, harmonious life.

But Steward is also entirely a man of the novel; he does not step out of it and make awkward, uncharacteristic gestures, as do many of the

characters in Tucker's other s f novels. The novel wouldn't exist if Steward had not taken the trouble to be just himself; to endure through difficulties; to test his strength against time itself. Steward travels in a time machine which, again, is not just a gimmick but, as in The Year of the Quiet Sun, part of the metaphor itself. The "science fiction bit" is no longer tacked awkwardly onto the novel, as happens sometimes when Tucker gives superpowers to characters. The time machine allows Steward to face up to himself and to discover where his true values lie. "I am rich beyond the dreams of avarice," he says at the end of the novel, as he walks back toward Bloomington. The world ahead of him is dangerous and foolish, with a Civil War four years in the future. Yet Steward has a standing invitation to meet Abe Lincoln in his offices. Bloch plans to join the "Booth-Willoughby Players", who just happen to be passing through Bloomington.

And Evelyn? Well, Tucker has done it again, hasn't he? He's left the poor woman to get along by herself. There must be some dark secret here. Perhaps there's an entirely different essay still to be written about "The Science Fiction Novels of Wilson Tucker". Another time...

## EPILOGUE

1960: To the Tombaugh Station  
 1970: The Year of the Quiet Sun  
 1974: Ice and Iron

I've read To the Tombaugh Station for the first time only recently, so I have little to say about it for now. It struck me as a very skillful book, just as well-written as either The Lincoln Hunters or The Year of the Quiet Sun. It is the only Tucker s f novel where the characters travel out into space. However, it is as much of a social comedy as (although immeasurably better written than) The City in the Sea. Two characters, a man and a woman, are stuck in the small cabin of a space ship, there to fight the Battle of the Sexes. She is an insurance agent, trying to discover whether one of the employees of the space transport company was murdered and, if so, by whom. She thinks the ship's captain did it. He, the ship's captain, can't shake off the persistent nuisance of a woman. Their "duel" finishes in a crash landing of Aldissian irony. Read it if you can find a copy.

This whole article is a sort of footnote to my original remarks about The Year of the Quiet Sun. My mistake in that article was thinking that Tucker had always written so well. As I've tried to show here, Tucker went through a

long struggle before he could write satisfactory novels in which the suspense mechanism grew naturally out of the rest of the book. Apart from that, I did not realise how much of a struggle Tucker had to endure before he could finish the book itself. Rarely has time been better spent. An interesting point that strikes me now is that in The Year of the Quiet Sun, it is Saltus, rather than Chaney, who most resembles the traditional "Tucker character". Look back at the story and you will see that Saltus is the joky, Steward-type character who endures until the end in his own, anonymous way. By contrast, Chaney is a sombre figure, an escapist (literally), and a johnny-come-lately (by about half a century). But then, nobody in Tucker's earlier novels comes alive quite as vividly as Kathryn van Hise in The Year of the Quiet Sun.

Ice and Iron (Tucker's original edition, not the revised Ballantine edition) deserves a long review, and only lack of time has stopped me from adding my remarks to those of Hank and Lesleigh Luttrell in this issue of S F Commentary. Ice and Iron is another step forward from The Lincoln Hunters and The Year of the Quiet Sun. Highsmith is an undiluted Tucker character - a person whose main interest is in knowledge rather than action. He performs a remarkable feat: using the methods of archaeology, he manages to fit together a picture of the future which closely resembles the actual future which Tucker presents in accompanying isolated, impressionistic, flash-forward images. At the end of the novel, we know no more than Highsmith does, but Highsmith has constructed an accurate map of the future. This is more of a triumph of the imagination over adversity than we find in any other Tucker novel - after all, this "hero" is so "hidden" that he does not even know that he has succeeded! (From what I hear, the "improvements" to appear in the Ballantine edition will rob the book of this central point.)

Let Robert Bloch - the non-fictional one this time - have the last word:

Tucker offers, with disarming simplicity and direct narration, a clean and lucid narrative approach. He writes fluently and forthrightly, employing few polysyllables and avoiding terminological trickery in an effort to dazzle or display specious erudition. His characterisation is completely honest; his human beings are human throughout. Tucker's work is to science fiction what Graham Greene's "entertainments" are in relation to the average whodunit.

Tucker is best when he is true to himself and goes his own way. May he keep going; may his books keep improving. Science fiction has no writer like him.

Bruce Gillespie  
 July 1975



\*\*\*\*\*

BEG: This piece was written some time in September or October, 1971, and appeared first in S F Commentary 24, November 1971. Of all the articles that I have written, this is my favourite, not only because it is the article in which I came closest to expressing exactly what I intended when I began, but because readers of SFC seem to agree that it is the best thing I've written. Also, the article has made me a lot of good friends, including Bob Tucker himself. With this in mind, I have reprinted this article (with some amendments) as the centre of my own thoughts about Tucker's work. I hope that it wears well.

\*\*\*\*\*

ooo ooo o o ooo ooo      ooo o o o      ooo ooo ooo o ooo  
ooo ooo o o ooo ooo      ooo ooo ooo ooo ooo  
ooo o o ooo ooo ooo      ooo o ooo ooo o ooo

#### WHERE WE'RE ARRIVING

Last weekend was very pleasant. The sun took control of Melbourne's weather and, as happens here, summer came abruptly. (Some years we get spring as well, but not often.) As the temperature rose, the surfaces of cars and roads began to glitter. Moisture began to disappear from the ground and the leaves of the trees. The cat roamed in the garden instead of sleeping in the living room. Heated air muffled street sounds.

Our house, made of solid brick, stays cool for several days during a heat-wave. I closed down most of the blinds, opened some windows, and settled down to finish my review notes on The Year of the Quiet Sun, by Wilson Tucker. My parents had gone out, so there was no noise around the house. The sound of car tires subsided to a soft hiss. Bruce Gillespie was at peace (as Tucker might say).

During the previous two weeks, I had received the welcome and long-delayed news that S F Commentary 21 had arrived in USA, only four months after it was posted. (SFC 22 arrived in the same week, of course.) In one mail, I received letters from Damon Knight, L Sprague de Camp, and Brian Aldiss. A few days later I received very long letters from Philip Jose Farmer and Hank Davis. Very quickly I lost that familiar "why bother?" feeling. During the same fortnight I had rediscovered films after losing a lot of my enthusiasm during 1969 and 1970. (Elia Kazan's The Arrangement converted me back to film fandom.) At long last I had begun to write reviews again - perhaps there's a chance of finishing the Brian Aldiss critique, after all. Forty letters written within a few weeks. Mail flooding in (including 500 pages of APA-45)...

And, like Brian Chaney, I began to notice the effect of travelling by time machine.

At the end of 1968, the Education Department of Victoria sent me a letter, asking me to report to "Ararat High and Technical School" on the

first Tuesday of February, 1969. After a frantic month during which I arranged accommodation in Ararat (and typed all the stencils for S F Commentary Number 1), I arrived at the "Ararat High and Technical School". My arrival rather puzzled the administration. Halfway through the day I found out that the Ararat Technical School was now a separate institution within the same buildings, and they found out that the Education Department had sent me to the Technical School.

Things never picked up after that. They only got worse, so I shall draw a curtain over the two years that followed. Occasionally I peek behind that curtain, but usually I hope to take advantage of Freud's observation that we forget the most painful experiences of our lives. Like Philip Dick's electric ant, I've tried to snip 1969 and 1970 out of the ribbon of my life. But what happens if two years disappear so abruptly?

On the first day that I began my new job at Publications Branch, I stared unobtrusively (I hope) at one of the girls who joined the Branch at the same time. About two hours later I finally asked her if she attended Dip Ed tutorials with me in 1968. Cautious recognition followed. Since 1968 she had married, had taught in Technical Schools for two years and enjoyed it, and had entered the Branch to "try something new". She had cashed her two years well; she had changed, but almost imperceptibly, and for the better.

The time machine worked well, in this case.

Several weeks later, I was travelling home by tram (or "streetcar", if you prefer). As usual, I was reading vigorously (and, if you don't know what a vigorous reader looks like, observe me sometime). Appropriately enough, the book was some volume or another by Proust. I happened to glance up, possibly because some woman had nudged me, trying to make me stand up and let her have my seat (not on yer life, lady, not on Melbourne trams). A face was smiling guardedly at me, a face ringed by a beard which hadn't been there two years before. "My Ghawd," I said, or words to that effect. Perhaps I even said, "Hello." The inscrutable face belonged to one of my best friends at university. I lost track of him completely during 1969, mainly because neither he nor I is a particularly good letter writer. By the beginning of 1971 I had no idea where he lived, or how I could get in touch with him, provided I could be bothered. Only accident had made this friendship survive.

I met my friend a few times afterward, but we had very little to say to each other. He'd bought a lot of records in two years (mainly pop and blues, which he used to scorn) and I had bought a lot of records in two years (mainly classical, which I discovered only in 1968). So what? Neither of us had changed very much. The time loop had closed, the time machine had dumped us both in 1971, but we were still talking about the same subjects in the same way. In most encounters of this sort, the earlier and the later images overlap to form a stereoscopic picture that is more interesting than the two original images. The time machine did not work in this case because, in a way, no time had passed.

When I was at university, I met quite a few girls who were interesting, or attractive, or both. I met one of these girls more often than most. We might begin to talk about films (and I was really a film fan then), or some other subject of mutual interest. Sometimes the conversation would proceed to the point of "Have you seen? No? Well, you ought to see...", and only later would I hit myself over the head and realise that I should have asked if I could take her to see... But I was pain-



fully shy (or stupid) (or both) (and still am), and I didn't choose the right moment (and never do), and besides, I lived at Bacchus Marsh and I never stayed in town at nights anyway, and I didn't have a car (still don't) and... By the time I had debated all this inside my own head, I was sitting alone.

I saw her a few times after that. She worked during the summer vacation in a cafe in Melbourne and, the last time I spoke to her, she was going to do her MA. Exit me to Ararat; exit the lovely lady to the graves of academe.

I came into the Editor's office one Friday morning and found that he was talking to somebody who looked vaguely familiar. A few minutes later, I found out that the interviewee, who would begin work on the next Monday, was my wistful acquaintance of two years before. On the next Monday, I had a chance to talk to her...

...and I found that the time machine broke down altogether. I tried to place the new image over the old image, and the picture made no sense at all. She had started MA, but had dropped out, no reason given, and all questions evaded. She had taught for about a year, but had dropped out, no reasons given, and all questions evaded. Her manner is far more guarded than I remember. Lots of other details didn't match. It was like meeting a different person, a twin maybe. It seems that time has rasped her very badly while it has, in the long run, treated me well. My blank years may have been her life-time; but I don't know and I'm puzzled.

Three encounters; three skips in time; three effects of the time machine, or rather, the relationship between people's different time machines. The uninitiated might think that the time machine is science fiction's most fanciful and "impossible" invention; for me, the time machine is SF's most pervasive and coherent image, the point where the literary field comes closest to our own lives. Look what Wilson Tucker does with a simple time machine, for instance.

The Year of the Quiet Sun (by Wilson Tucker; Ace SF Special 94200; 1970; 252 pages; 75 cents) is about a time machine, and it is a time machine. Or, to choose another metaphor, it is like a tree whose trunk is embedded in the last twenty pages, and whose branches extend backward in time to the book's beginning. While we read the book, we slither down the branches toward the ground. We know that we are falling faster and faster, but we don't see the ground until we hit it. When we crack our skulls against the end of the book, we find an image of ourselves carved in the bark of the tree. Or, like Alice in Looking-Glass-Land, and like Brian Chaney in The Year of the Quiet Sun, we head forty years into the future in order to find out about ourselves in the present.

(Now, a warning. If you don't know The Year of the Quiet Sun, don't read on. Go away and read it quickly. Then come back to this article.)

Tucker writes most of the book from the viewpoint of Brian Chaney. He is the main branch of the living organism that is The Year of the Quiet Sun; he travels in its time machine, and is its time machine. The other "branches" are Kathryn van Hise (called Katrina during most of the book), Gilbert Seabrooke, Major William Moresby, and Arthur Saltus. The height of the tree stretches from 2000-and-something backwards to 7 June 1978, where the book begins.

On the book's first page, Brian Chaney sits on a Florida beach, recovering from his recent trip to Israel. He thinks about his past and present, and does not care much for either. Kathryn van Hise, from the "Bureau of Standards", walks up to him. "The leggy girl was both alpha and omega: the two embodied in the same compact bundle," writes Tucker, and few readers would guess that this is not merely an ordinary pop fiction cliché. However, if you have read to the end of the novel (and, as in many matters, you must know the end before you can see the significance of the beginning) you will realise that Tucker's first sentence is quite precise. Kathryn appears at the beginning

of Chaney's "new" life, and meets him at its end. The reader must also notice the reference to Revelation: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." (Rev 22: 13; RSV)

I've pulled down the blinds. The tired afternoon sunlight illuminates my book, touches my typewriter, and spreads a beam of heat over the wall opposite. The temperature inside my room rises into the middle 60s. I begin to wonder: if Tucker makes a religious reference so early in the book, does he have some religious or mythical framework for the whole book? Does Tucker want to give Kathryn van Hise the status of the angel in Revelation? If so, what is Brian Chaney's position? Is he a St John-figure? No, anything but. Tucker's book has none of the thunder-clap-and-umpteens-angels flavour of Revelation. Tucker's prophecy proceeds by means of tiny details and delicate steps.

From its beginning, its alpha, this book puzzles me greatly. Tucker announces that his simple words and sentences bear a huge weight of meaning. I must sift every sentence and weigh every word. "We have seen a sign, and his name is Bob Tucker." But The Year of the Quiet Sun does not read that way; it does not hit us over the head but insinuates its human meaning into us in a very quiet way.

I shake my head, give up these speculations, and get another cup of coffee.

During the first chapter, Tucker almost makes Chaney sound like a Campbell-hero. Kathryn wants him to join the "Bureau of Standards"; Brian objects to offices "cluttered with top-heavy bureaucrats speaking strange dialects". Kathryn tells him, "You were selected" (sounds more like a Van Vogt superman-story every minute). She offers him a bribe: the Bureau wants to make a physical survey of the future. Tucker writes that Chaney "felt as if he'd been hit". This sounds very familiar and hackneyed; like any time-travel book written during the early 1950s, in fact.

However, I had read the whole book when I read the first chapter again, so I knew that it got better. I realised that Tucker laughs at some of Chaney's opinions in this chapter, as well as supporting some of them. "When Chaney realised that the girl was coming at him, coming for him, he felt dismay and wished he'd had time to run for it." The contrast between Kathryn's beauty and her official position and manner disturbs Chaney. In the first chapter Tucker shows us (although the casual reader could be excused for missing the point) that Chaney will not face the consequences of his actions. Chaney has written a book which gives a complete, and controversial, translation of the first two scrolls of Qumran. However, he refuses to admit to himself that he is now a celebrity whom many people might hate. He spends so much energy escaping from this facet of his life that he nearly misses the new open door offered by Kathryn. As Tucker says in the last chapter, Chaney won't "open the doors" in front of him.

As soon as I began to look at the second chapter, I found that I could not write sensibly about the early part of the book without referring to the last few chapters. The Year of the Quiet Sun is so good because every section relates to every other part. As Tucker projects his time machine backwards and forwards in time, he ties time together into one knot. Or, as I've said before, he creates a time machine of his own. In one sense, the novel depends upon one sentence; in another sense, that sentence depends upon the rest of the book.

If you want to understand the book at all (on your second reading) you must know that by the end of the book Chaney has become stranded in the year 2000-and-something. (All clocks have stopped, so nobody knows what year it is.) In the first half of the book, Moresby, Saltus, and Chaney go forward two years and find that Chicago has split into a black section and a white section, divided by a fifteen-mile-long wall. Moresby then goes forward to 1999, where negro guerrillas kill him. Saltus reaches 2000, from which he barely escapes with his life. Chaney goes forward to 2000-plus, from which the Time Displacement Vehicle cannot push him backwards.

On the day before the three men carry out their missions, they gather beside the swimming pool inside Elwood Station. Saltus and Katrina swim in the pool. Chaney and Moresby sit separately by the side of the pool. Gilbert Seabrooke, the project's director, comes down to the side of the pool and sits beside Chaney. This is the first time that the two have met. Chaney makes a snap judgment: "Seabrooke's pipe jutted out straight to challenge the world. He was Establishment." As usual,



Chaney's snap judgment is liable to correction. At first, Seabrooke speaks in double talk: "I make it a practice to explore every possible avenue to attain whatever goal is in view." He regards himself as a "practitioner of science" battling it out with the Senate subcommittee in charge of the project's funds. However, although Seabrooke talks slyly, he fears the future more than Chaney does. Chaney, translator of the strange Eschatos, denies the disturbing pictures shown in the ancient manuscript. Seabrooke's views are consistent, and as hard-headed as possible without giving way to despair. By contrast, Chaney says, "I can predict the downfall of the United States," but adds airily, "I mean that all this will be dust in ten thousand years.." At the same time he reminds Seabrooke:

"...Worry about something worthwhile. Worry about our violent swing to the extreme right; worry about these hippy-hunts; worry about a President who can't control his own party, much less the country."

Chaney's two statements do not match up. His facts should show him clearly that by 1978 the United States is well on its way to disintegration. But he assures Seabrooke that USA might endure "at least as long as Jericho"!

Chaney does not have his mind fully on the problem. Out of the corner of his eye he watches Katrina and Saltus swimming in the pool. "Chaney looked at the woman's wet body and felt something more than a twinge of jealousy." Saltus claims all of Katrina's attention while Chaney tries to listen to Seabrooke. The project's head tells how nine men died when a TDV returned to its exact time of launching. "It was an incredible disaster, an incredible oversight, but it happened. Once." Chaney becomes suspicious, and questions Seabrooke's certainties, until finally the project head can say that "every phase of this operation has been researched so that nothing is left to chance."

Through Chaney's eyes, Tucker has already shown the reader that everything has been left to chance, among other things the "certainty" that the USA has a future. Nobody notices the one fact that eventually dooms the whole project: the fact that the TDV must have a power source at both ends of the "journey". Like the most important clue in a mystery novel, everybody knows all the relevant facts, but nobody can quite guess their meaning. Like any device, the time machine is no better than its builders. Tuckers shows us that the builders have committed hubris. They express certainty about matters which only time itself can reveal to them. Either they want the Answers (which a conservative extrapolation of the events in 1978 can give them) or they want to travel through time, and face the risks. Only one man proves equal to the task, but he cannot provide any Answers for the world of 1978. Having slipped through the net of time, he cannot wriggle back again.

In the pool scene, Tucker appeals to our own sense of remembered time. The sun shines, the pool sparkles, a beautiful woman and a lively man chase each other around the pool, Chaney looks on jealously and thinks nobody notices his discomfort, while Seabrooke spells out the end of the USA in matter-of-fact statements. This scene is not the calm before the storm, as I thought when I first read the book, but part of the storm itself.

The sounds of this scene echo throughout the rest of the book. When Moresby steps out into the embattled world of 1999, he notices that "the pool was drained, the bottom dry and littered with debris":

The next-to-last time he'd seen the pool... Katrina had played in the blue-green water wearing that ridiculous little suit, while Art had chased her like a hungry rooster, wanting to keep his hands on her body. A nice body, that. Art knew what he was doing. And Chaney sat on the sun deck, mooning over the woman - the civilian lacked the proper initiative; wouldn't fight for what he wanted.

Although Chaney had thought that nobody noticed him by the pool-side, Moresby had been watching him keenly. Major Moresby regards Chaney contemptuously as "civilian". When Moresby crosses twenty years of time, he must immediately call upon all his military skills. William Atheling has warned authors not to change viewpoints within a novel, but Tucker does so successfully. During this section, Tucker changes his viewpoint from that of Chaney to that of Moresby. However, he judges Moresby just as effectively as he sizes up Chaney during the rest of the book. Moresby can call on nothing but his military skills. He dares too much. As Moresby remembers the pool incident, he brushes off Chaney as a man without "the proper initiative". Moresby shows too much initiative, too much certainty in the face of the completely unknown. In the world of 1999 he dies for his efforts. Chaney loses a great deal in 1978, but he continues to live in the 21st century.

When Saltus emerges in the year 2000, he finds only an "eerie silence". (Another side track: When I read that phrase, I thought, "Aha! I've caught you now, Tucker! You've used a common cliché"; until I thought that maybe Tucker had tried to show that Saltus is the kind of person who would use that kind of cliché. However, I found it so hard to believe that an s f writer could be that

careful that I gave up the idea immediately.) The barracks have burned down, someone has taken supplies left for the time travellers, and bodies lie in the snow. Saltus sets out on his "survey" in a jaunty manner. Into the tape-recorder he gives Chaney some good-old-fashioned Republican American advice: "You'd damned well better shoot straight if you have to shoot at all. Remember something we taught you." When Saltus passes the swimming-pool it is:

Nearly empty: a half dozen long lumps huddled under the blanket of snow at the bottom, lumps the shape of men... Saltus turned away, expelling a breath of bitter disappointment; he wasn't sure what he had expected after so long a time, but certainly not that - not the bodies of station personnel dumped into an uncovered grave.

He remembered the beautiful image of Katrina in that pool - Katrina, nearly naked, scantily clad in that lovely, sexy swim suit - and himself chasing after her, wanting the feel of that wet and splendid body under his hands again and again... And Chaney! The poor out-gunned civilian sat up on the deck and burned with a green, sulphurous envy, wanting to but not daring to. Damn, but that was a day to be remembered!

Dead bodies in the pool replace the glittering water, the two swimmers, and their watchers. In the year 2000, Saltus only has the memory of Katrina, although in 1980 he finds out that he will marry her in the years between 1978 and 1980. He also remembers the "poor out-gunned civilian", still the man to whom he condescends. Saltus and Chaney form a firm friendship in the early part of the novel, but the soldier always presumes that he can kick around the scholar. In fact, the scholar outlives the soldier and, in a very ambiguous way, out-maneuvres him. By the end of the book, all the soldiers have killed each other. The only knowledge that remains rests within Chaney's head - his knowledge of the ways in which the ancient tribes of the Negev desert survived in the middle of desolation.

When Chaney emerges from the TDV, he finds that all the electric power is off. The station is in complete darkness. He explores a desolate world. A headstone rests in the ground. Its inscription reads, "A ditat Deus K". Someone has tied skulls to the station's gatepost, warning away all intruders. When Chaney looks at the swimming pool he sees

A few inches of dirty water...- residue from the rains - together with a poor collection of rusted and broken weapons and an appreciable amount of debris blown in by the wind: the pool had become a dumping ground for trash and armament. The sodden corpse of some small animal floated in a corner. A lonely place. Chaney very carefully put away the memory of the pool as he'd known it and backed away from the edge.

In this passage, Tucker shows his extraordinary attention to detail. Why had the pool "become a dumping ground for trash and armament"? Because the destruction of the whole world took place in the air around the pool. But even so much violence leaves few fragments. What is the "sodden corpse of some small animal" that "floated in a corner"? Might it not be the last remainder of the human bodies that lay in the pool when Saltus saw it? What is the "memory of the pool" that Chaney so carefully "puts away"? The same memory that Moresby and Saltus recalled with gusto. At this point, Chaney cannot face the memory of the steps he should have taken.

I could explore this book for several thousand words more. The Year of the Quiet Sun is a living, trustworthy book. Tucker has considered every line and detail; he has imagined every scene fully and weighed every word.

But where does he place the full weight of the book? Where does the time machine actually arrive?; what does lie at the base of the "tree"? I'll go back to the last meeting between Katrina and Chaney, and proceed from there. Compare the whole of the rest of the book with these lines:

He said: "When this survey is completed I want to leave..."

Quickly: "Is it because of something you found up there? Has something turned you away, Brian?"

"Ah - no more questions."

"But you leave me so unsatisfied!"

A moment of silence, and then... "Ask the others to be here at ten o'clock in the morning for a final briefing. We must evaluate these reports. The probe is scheduled for the day after tomorrow."

"Are you coming downstairs to see us off?"

"No, sir. I will wait for you here."



Again Tucker shows that he has learned a writing skill that evades nearly every other s f author - the ability to convey the greatest possible meaning in the smallest possible number of words. Of course there is something that Chaney found "up there" - he found out that Saltus marries Katrina sometime between 1978 and 1980. However, Chaney determined the direction of that future in 1978, as he sat by the pool-side while Saltus wooed Katrina. And shouldn't he have shown some reaction when Katrina cries out in deliberate ambiguity: "But you leave me so unsatisfied!"? Chaney misses the point of the conversation, although the reader does not. Because he misses the point of the conversation, he must go thirty or forty years into the future so that he can meet Katrina again. Chaney says only, "I wish you luck, and I'll think of you often in the tank." (Hell, what do you say in such a situation?) Katrina sees which future Chaney has chosen, or rather, failed to choose. She addresses him again as "Mr Chaney" instead of "Brian". She gives her farewell, "No, sir. I will wait for you here."

And when Brian Chaney steps out of the TDV in the year 2000-plus, he finds that Katrina has kept her word:

The aged woman was sitting in her accustomed chair to one side of the oversized steel table... As always, her clasped hands rested on the tabletop in repose. Chaney put the lantern on the table between them and the poor light fell on her face.

Katrina.

Her eyes were bright and alive, as sharply alert as he remembered them, but time had not been lenient with her... The skin was drawn tight over her cheekbones, pulled tight around her mouth and chin and appeared sallow in lantern light. The lustrous, lovely hair was entirely gray. Hard years, unhappy years, lean years...

Katrina waited on him. Chaney struggled for something to say, something that wouldn't sound foolish or melodramatic or carry a ring of false heartiness. She would despise him for that... He had left her here in this room only hours ago, left her with that sense of dry apprehension as he prepared himself for the third - now final - probe into the future. She had been sitting in the same chair in the same attitude of repose.

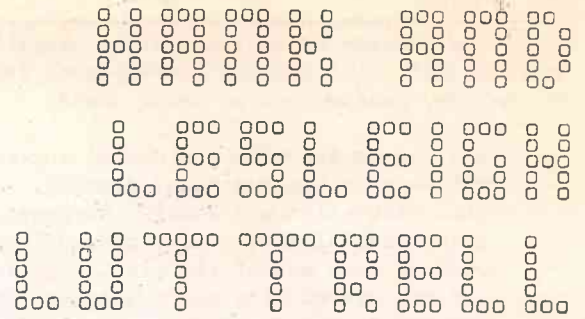
Chaney said: "I'm still in love with you, Katrina."

That last line is the most moving line in any recent science fiction novel - but not unless the reader has caught the meaning of the rest of the novel. Katrina has waited her entire life, she has endured the decline and fall of her world, she has brought up her two children under the worst possible conditions, and she has seen her husband die. No heat, light, or time remains in the station. From the past comes a man who might be a ghost; a man who lacks the experience of forty years' continuous disaster, a man who has not changed at all. But finally, thirty years too late, he does show that he has changed. Not much, but enough. He says the words he should have said in 1978; he realises the meaning of his time journey; for once, he observes carefully the scene in front of him, places his image-of-Katrina-past over the image of Katrina-present, makes the right judgment, and says the right words.

But, you might say, there are no time machines. That's part of the book's significance, as well. As Chaney explores the deserted station, he reflects that but for the time machine "he would have plodded along in his slow, myopic way until the future slammed into him - or he into it." That's us; we're the people unblessed by Time Displacement Vehicles, busily walking myopically towards the brick wall of the future. Isaac Asimov puts it more bluntly: the present world outlook reminds him of the tale of the man who fell off the Empire State Building; as he passed the tenth storey, he said, "Well, I've fallen ninety storeys and I'm all right so far." (F&SF, May 1969, page 99). But Tucker has not written the book in order to warn us about certainties that should strike the readers of any newspaper. He has written about time-travelling, rather than The Future; about saying and doing the right things and words at the right time. The Year of the Quiet Sun is about ourselves. That's all. ; That's enough.

Bruce Gillespie  
October 1971

PS: For a few 1975 thoughts about The Year of the Quiet Sun, see the last page of "Hidden Heroes", the previous article in this issue. For a few '75 thoughts about what the metaphor-contained-in-the-book has meant to me between 1971 and 1975... well, get me into a corner sometime at a party, and ask me to tell you about it. Others consult the I Ching; I keep reading Tucker.



## TUCKER'S TWO FUTURES

Hank and Lesleigh Luttrell review

### ICE AND IRON

by Wilson Tucker

Doubleday/Science Fiction Book Club

1974 :: 181 pages

Victor Gollancz :: 1974

181 pages :: £2.50

Ice and Iron is a challenging book. To some readers, it may seem to be a book without an ending. Certainly the book has no conventional ending where everything is explained down to the last detail, and everyone lives happily ever after. On the contrary, much is left unexplained, and the characters are left much as we found them at the beginning of the book. But this does not make Ice and Iron an incomplete novel. Wilson Tucker has succeeded in detailing a remarkable glimpse into two futures: the near future, in which even the most competent and resourceful characters are doomed to defeat by the advancing ice of a new glaciation; and a far distant future in which a typical cycle of human history repeats itself.

Tucker uses alternating chapters to explore the two futures. In the "Ice" segments, Fisher Yann Highsmith and a group of very stubborn men and women camp on the edge of an advancing glaciation, studying the incredible debris which the glacier seems to rain down on them. Invoking the ever-confounding Charles Fort, Tucker ties in the second, far distant future, where a primitive hunting culture is being conquered by a technologically superior culture.

One of the most striking things about Ice and Iron is the description of North America as the next glacial episode begins. Tucker uses the idea, held by many people, that we are not yet out of the "Ice Age", that the glaciers will come again to cover half of North America. Using only a few characters and a very limited situation, he manages to convey much of what his future glaciation might be like. Canada has joined the US and its people have been resettled on land purchased from Mexico. The land which makes up Canada today is almost completely covered by the ice. People have come to accept the new glaciation, although it is still an overwhelming experience for the main character when he sees the glacier for the first time. However, in the un-iced portions of the continent life goes on, people settle in their new homes, and they have "glow parties" to say farewell to the towns which are being abandoned to the ice. Tucker manages to convey the picture of a civilisation which



is in the process of decline, using parties and drugs to help blot out the ever-present reality of the ice, bearing down on their world.

Ice was destruction and death; the moving wall was an instrument of calamity. The real glaciation was a dark, burgeoning grey-black blanket of ice and mud and stone pushing down out of the Arctic refrigerator and overrunning the adjoining states. Uncounted villages and towns were ground beneath it while uncounted cities were standing empty, awaiting their turn.

While one can quibble with Tucker's picture of the physical changes wrought by the ice - for example, he ignores the plight of coastal cities finding themselves further and further inland as the sea level drops because of the amount of water tied up in the glaciers - his picture of the society facing this glaciation is frighteningly well done.

The most frightening part of the book is the realisation that such glaciation may very likely occur. There's no real reason to think that we are done with the Pleistocene Ice Age. Although modern geologists refer to the period we are now in as the Holocene, many think we are actually in an interglacial era and that the ice will begin spreading again. But perhaps that thought shouldn't be all that frightening. Homo sapiens is a product of the Pleistocene glaciation. Most current theories on the how and why of hominid evolution emphasise the importance of adaptation to the changing environment characteristic of the Pleistocene. Fluctuations in the environment were not confined to the northern areas which suffered under the advancing and retreating ice, but occurred also in the tropics, subject to alternating wet and dry periods. The tropics is where man first evolved, mainly in response to these fluctuations. Homo sapiens was the first primate to learn to live with the ice, as Neanderthal man was able to live in Europe during the last glacial advance. It was the stimulus of the changing environment characteristic of the Pleistocene that made us what we are today.

Another effective aspect of the novel is Tucker's reconstruction of the thoughts, actions, and goals of a number of primitive hunters, and their reactions to the advancement of a hostile group of women from the south, armed with a science as irresistible as the glacier itself. Just where the women are from, and how their advanced technology developed, and why their culture seems to have placed women in the role of soldier and explorer are never explained, since the viewpoint is always that of the primitive hunter. To the hunter, the situation is clear - the women are the enemy. To the reader, the pattern is also clear - it bears a striking similarity to the taking of this hemisphere by Europeans.

This novel is not a conventional science fiction adventure in which the hero fights to save the

world from a natural disaster, and pulls a magical solution out of a technological hat. Fisher Yann Highsmith and his associates are only observers, as is the rest of mankind, while the ice advances out of the north. Even Highsmith's social life reflects his helplessness, as he tries to express fondness for the librarian and finds that she has devoted herself to spending her life watching the ice grind down the land that once was her home.

The most dissatisfying aspect of this book is the incredible use of the theories of Charles Fort. It is remarkable that Highsmith is able to reconstruct as much as he does from the scattered artifacts and bodies. He is able to learn almost as much from this debris as does the reader from the "Iron" segments of the novel. Much is left to the reader's imagination - the eventual fall of current civilisation, the rise of the Amazonian group, the derivation of the hunters on the glacial plains of the future. Perhaps some readers will not enjoy doing so much work on their own, but Tucker gives a tantalising supply of clues with which to work. Still, the reader is left with the unpleasant feeling that things just don't stick together, that the two parts of the book cannot be reconciled. But Tucker has cautioned the reader with his opening quote from Robert Louis Stevenson: "Ice and iron cannot be welded."

Hank & Lesleigh Luttrell 1974

#### THE WORKS OF WILSON TUCKER

(continued from page 63)

- \*"Exit", Astonishing, April 1943
- "Probability Zero: Miraculous Fluid", Astonishing, April 1943
- \*"The Job is Ended", Other Worlds, November 1950
- \*"The Tourist Trade", Worlds Beyond, January 1951
- \*"My Brother's Wife", F&SF, February 1951
- \*"The Wayfaring Strangers", Fantastic Worlds (fanzine), Fall-Winter 1952
- "To a Ripe Old Age", F&SF, December 1952
- \*"Able to Zebra", F&SF, March 1953
- \*"The Mountaineer", Fiendetta (fanzine), December 1953 (as "Mountain Justice")
- \*"Home is Where the Wreck Is", Universe, May 1954
- \*"MCMLV", Universe, November 1954
- \*"The Street Walker", original in The Science Fiction Subtreasury
- "King of the Planet", Galaxy, October 1959
- "The Recon Man", If, January 1965
- "Time Exposures", Universe 1, edited by Terry Carr (New York: Ace, 1971, pb)

\* denotes story reprinted in The Science Fiction Subtreasury

#### NONFICTION

- "Why are Scientifilms So Bad?", Science Fiction Monthly 18, February 1957
- "The Fan: Myth and Reality", F&SF, February 1964; British edition, June 1964

00 000 000 000 0 0 0 0 000 000  
 00 0 000 000 000 000 000 000 000 000  
 00 000 000 000 000 000 000 000 000 000  
 00 000 0 0 0 0 000 000 0 000 000

## THE WORKS OF WILSON TUCKER

(EDITOR: About all I know of Denny Lien is that he is a librarian from Minneapolis, that he has been involved with MINNEAPA (the apa from Minneapolis), and that he was an able host at the "Minneapolis in '73" party which was held at Aussiecon, where I just did not get much time to talk to him. This very useful Bibliography is reprinted, with minor corrections, from The Really Incomplete Bob Tucker, edited by Dave Locke, published by Robert and Juanita Coulson, and instigated by Jackie Franke, in order to raise money for the Tucker Fund. Copies are available from Jackie Franke, Box 51-A, RR2, Beecher, Illinois 60401, USA (\$US1.50) or from Leigh Edmonds, PO Box 74, Balaclava, Victoria 3082, Australia (\$A1). Because of this project, and others like it, the Tucker Fund raised \$US2300 so that Bob could travel to Aussiecon. Thanks to Denny and the publishers of The Really Incomplete Bob Tucker for their permission to reprint this Bibliography.)

The following Bibliography attempts to list all professionally published science fiction by Wilson Tucker. Detective/suspense books are also included, but not detective/suspense short stories (mostly because I don't know of any). Professionally published nonfiction is represented by only two articles; I suspect this list could be expanded. With the exception of two stories later reprinted in The Science Fiction Subtreasury, Tucker material published in fanzines has not been included. If someone would care to lend me a few thousand fanzines for a few years I might make a stab at a supplement.

For books by Wilson Tucker, all editions for which information could be located were included. The order of books is chronological, as is the order of English-language editions of each book. Translations are listed separately. For short stories, original appearance and any known reprints are given; I do not, however, attempt to list editions beyond the first of any anthologies reprinting the story.

Note that many of Tucker's science fiction novels have a detective element, while some of his detective novels have a fantasy element (This Witch) or are of fannish interest for the Tuckerising therein. Note also that Charles Horne is a continuing character in the first five detective novels, while Gilbert Nash appears in both The Time Masters and Time Bomb.

Corrections and additions would be welcomed. They may be sent to Dennis K Lien, 2408 S Dupont Ave, Apt 1, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55405, USA.



# BIBLIOGRAPHY

## BOOKS - SCIENCE FICTION

### The City in the Sea

New York: Rinehart, 1951  
 Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1951  
 New York: Galaxy Novel No 11, 1952, pb  
 London: Nova Novel No 2, 1955, pb

### The Long, Loud Silence

New York: Rinehart, 1952  
 Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1952  
 Garden City: Doubleday/Science Fiction Book Club, 1953  
 London: J Lane/Science Fiction Club, 1953  
 London: British Publishers Guild, 1953, pb  
 New York: Dell, 1954, pb  
 London: Bodley Head, 1958  
 New York: Lancer, 1970, pb (revised edition)  
 Milan: Mondadori, 1954 (as Il Silenzio della Morte)  
 Tokyo: Kubo Shoten, 1968 (as America Metsubo)

### The Time Masters

New York: Rinehart, 1953  
 Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1953  
Startling Stories, January 1954 (abridged)  
 New York: New American Library/Signet, 1954, pb  
New Worlds (GB), September, October, November, 1955  
 Garden City: Doubleday/Science Fiction Book Club, 1971 (revised edition)  
 New York: Lancer, 1971, pb (revised edition)  
 London: Gollancz, 1973 (revised edition)  
 London: Panther, 1974, pb (revised edition)  
 Milan: Mondadori, 1954 (as Signori del Tempo)  
 Christiansfeld: Skrifola, 1958 (as Monden Fra i Gar)  
 Tokyo: Hayakawa Shobe, 1964, (as Toki no Shihaisha)

### Wild Talent

New York: Rinehart, 1954  
 Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1954  
 Garden City: Doubleday/Science Fiction Book Club, 1954  
 New York: Bantam, 1955, pb (as Man from Tomorrow)  
 London: Michael Joseph, 1955 (Novels of Tomorrow series)  
 London: Sidgwick & Jackson/Science Fiction Book Club, 1956  
 New York: Avon, 1966, pb  
 Milan: Mondadori, 1954 (as Tele-Homo Sapiens); reprinted 1964  
 Copenhagen: Aschehoug, 1955 (as Farligt Geni)  
 Tokyo: Gengen-sha, 1956 (as Mirai-Sekai Kara Kita Otoko)  
 Stockholm: Wennerberg, 1959 (as Spion fran Framtiden)  
 Tel Aviv: Maariv, 1960 (as Adam ha-Mahar)  
 Tokyo: Hayakawa Shobo, 1961 (as Chonoryoku Ejento)

### The Science Fiction Subtreasury

(Contains: "The Street Walker", "MCMLV", "Home is Where the Wreck Is", "My Brother's Wife", "Gentlemen - the Queen!", "The Job is

Ended", "Exit", "The Wayfaring Strangers", "Able to Zebra", "The Mountaineer")  
 New York: Rinehart, 1954  
 Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1954  
 New York: Bantam, 1955, pb (as Time-X)

### Time Bomb

New York: Rinehart, 1955  
 Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1955  
 Garden City: Doubleday/Science Fiction Book Club, 1955  
 New York: Avon, 1957, pb (as Tomorrow Plus X)  
 Christiansfeld: Nyt Dansk Forlag, 1958 (as Manden Fra i Morgen)  
 Tokyo: Tokyo Sogen Shinsha, 1965 (as Asu Plus X)

### The Lincoln Hunters

New York: Rinehart, 1958  
 Garden City: Doubleday/Science Fiction Book Club, 1955  
 New York: Ace Science Fiction Special, 1968, pb

### To the Tombaugh Station

New York: Ace, 1960, pb, b/w Earthman, Go Home!, by Poul Anderson  
Fantasy & Science Fiction, July 1960 (abridged);  
 British edition, November 1960

### The Year of the Quiet Sun

New York: Ace Science Fiction Special, 1970, pb  
 London: Robert Hale, 1971  
 London: Arrow, 1972, pb

### Ice and Iron

Garden City: Doubleday/Science Fiction Book Club, 1974  
 London: Gollancz, 1975  
 New York: Ballantine, 1975 (forthcoming, revised)

## BOOKS - DETECTIVE AND SUSPENSE

### The Chinese Doll

New York: Rinehart, 1946 (Murray Hill Mystery Edition)  
 Toronto: Oxford, 1946  
 New York: Walter J Black/Detective Book Club, 1947, with Two Clues by E S Gardner and Overdue for Death by Z H Ross  
 London: Cassell, 1948  
 New York: Dell, 1949, pb  
 Buenos Aires: Acme, 1950 (as La Muneca China)

### To Keep or Kill

New York: Rinehart, 1947 (Murray Hill Mystery Edition)  
 Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1947  
 London: Cassell, 1950  
 New York: Lion, 1950, pb, reissued 1956

### The Dove

New York: Rinehart, 1948 (Murray Hill Mystery Edition)  
 Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1948

London: Cassell, 1950

### The Stalking Man

New York: Rinehart, 1949 (Murray Hill Mystery Edition)

New York: Walter J Black/Detective Book Club, 1949, with Deadly Duo by Margery Allingham and The Gun in Daniel Webster's Bust by Margery Scharf

Cassell, 1951 (Crime Connoisseur Books edition)

### Red Herring

New York: Rinehart, 1951 (Murray Hill Mystery Edition)

Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1951

London: Cassell, 1953 (Crime Connoisseur Books edition)

### The Man in My Grave

New York: Rinehart, 1956

Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1956

New York: Walter J Black/Detective Book Club, 1956, with Burden of Proof by Victor Canning and Borrow the Night by Helen Nielsen

London: Macdonald and Co, 1958

### The Hired Target

New York: Ace, 1957, pb, b/w The Deadly Pawn by Harry Whittington

### Last Stop

Garden City: Doubleday/Crime Club, 1963

London: Robert Hale, 1965

London: Robert Hale, 1967

New York: Lancer, 1971, pb

### A Procession of the Damned

Garden City: Doubleday/Crime Club, 1965

Toronto: Doubleday, 1965

London: Robert Hale, 1967

New York: Lancer, 1971, pb

### The Warlock

Garden City: Doubleday/Crime Club, 1967

London: Robert Hale, 1968

New York: Avon, 1969, pb

Paris: Gallimard, 1968 (as Troc)

Assen, Netherlands: Born, 1968 (as De Behekste Spion)

### This Witch

Garden City: Doubleday/Crime Club, 1971

London: Gollancz, 1972

London: Panther, 1974

### SHORT STORIES - FIRST APPEARANCES

"Interstellar Way Station", Super Science, May 1941

"The Princess from Detroit", Future, June 1942

"Probability Zero: That Mysterious Bomb Raid", Astounding, July 1942

\*"Gentlemen - the Queen!", Science Fiction Quarterly, Fall 1942

"Prison Planet", Planet Stories, Fall 1942

(Please turn to page 60)

### BOB TUCKER INTERVIEWED BY PAUL WALKER

(continued from page 14)

#### TUCKER

I've stayed in fandom (my entry was circa 1931) because I thoroughly enjoy it, everything in it: the people, the fanzines, the conventions, and the long-term friends who have developed from what were only "people" in the beginning. I first became acquainted with Don Wollheim, as an example, about 1933-34, and met him the first time in 1939; since then we have remained in contact via fitful correspondence and infrequent meetings at conventions. We had an enjoyable talk at Toronto, together with his wife, and this kind of thing has been going on for about forty years. And at my last convention in Champaign, Illinois, a few months ago, I became acquainted with two brand-new people (to me) from Nashville who - I hope - remain friends for many years to come. It's a never-ending process and I remain in fandom because I like it.

I learned to write in fandom and for many years published there, taking a beating from critics who weren't bashful about discussing my shortcomings; of course, those critics helped me to do better, whether I fully realised it or not. In one large sense, publishing in fanzines was my writer's school and I would recommend it over any of those commercial mail-order schools. Fandom can be "good" for you if you want to write and publish, if you want to mix with peers, if you must display your ego or burst.

#### WALKER

Assuming you were asked to prepare a Viking Portable Wilson Tucker, what works would you select as your best, as your most representative? Also, please list those works you consider your worst.

#### THE DEFINITIVE TUCKER

My choices of best novels, in descending order:

- 1 The Lincoln Hunters
- 2 The Long, Loud Silence
- 3 The Warlock
- 4 The Year of the Quiet Sun
- 5 Wild Talent

The worst books, which are thankfully out of print:

- 1 The City in the Sea
- 2 To the Tombaugh Station

Paul Walker

Bob Tucker

1975



---

**S F COMMENTARY 43**

---

**THE  
TUCKER  
ISSUE**

---

