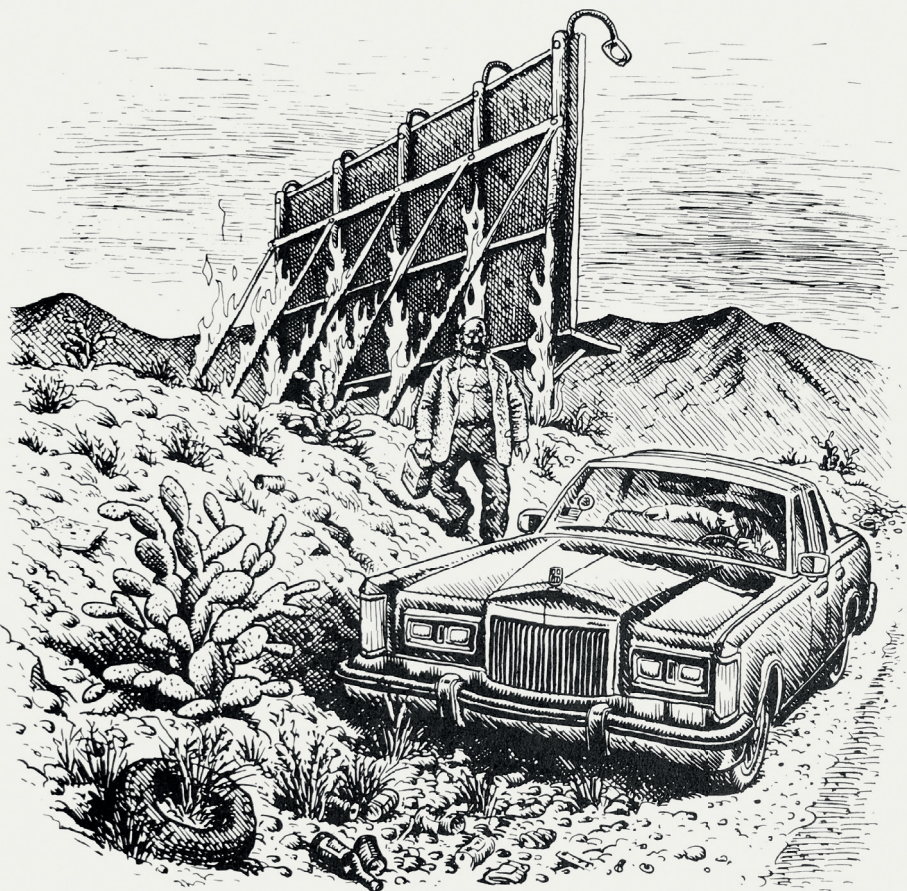




MODERN
CLASSICS

'Revolutionary ... An extravagant,
finely written tale of ecological
sabotage' *The New York Times*

Edward Abbey The Monkey Wrench Gang



PENGUIN BOOKS

The Monkey Wrench Gang

Edward Abbey was born in Pennsylvania in 1927 and became one of America's most prominent environmentalists and defenders of the country's wilderness. His other books include *The Brave Cowboy* (1956), *Desert Solitaire* (1968) and *Hayduke Lives!* (1989). He worked for many years as a ranger and fire lookout at different national parks. Edward Abbey died at his home in Arizona in 1989.

Eric Schlosser is a journalist and author whose books include *Fast Food Nation* (Penguin, 2001), *Reefer Madness* (Penguin, 2003) and *Command and Control* (Penguin, 2013).

The Monkey Wrench Gang

EDWARD ABBEY

With a Preface by Robert Redford
and an Introduction by Eric Schlosser



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Preface

One never knows what to expect from an author not yet met. Some of the most extravagant, proud prose can come from an artist buried in shyness and insecurity.

The only thing I knew about Edward Abbey before I met him in 1975 was that I liked his work, *Desert Solitaire* in particular. Before then I had only seen him at a distance during a launching of a book by Sierra Club Books that he had written the text for. It was in the heart of red rock country in Southeastern Utah. His face partially hidden under a warped straw hat. He never said a word.

The next occasion was an expedition down the Outlaw Trail. I had suggested to *National Geographic* that they record an amazing part of western history before it was gone, a trail that ran from Montana to Mexico that was for thirty years lawless and a safe haven for outlaws anywhere in the country. There were three waystations built along the trail by Butch Cassidy and the Wild Bunch: Hole in the Wall in Wyoming, Brown's Park at the head of the Green River on the Wyoming/Utah border and Robber's Roost in a red rock country maze in Southeastern Utah. *National Geographic* said they would do it only if I wrote it. I decided the only way was to make an adventure out of it and ride it like the outlaws did, by horse. I picked eight people to join me, the only requisite being a love of the west and an ability to ride horses and brave the raw elements.

I had reached Edward on a fire watch in Glacier National Park. That is where he hung out very often while writing – on a fire watch somewhere.

I reached him on a radio phone and asked him if he wanted to go. A bedroll and a few personal belongings would be all he would need. Not much to the conversation, he said okay.

I spent one month with him riding the country between Log Cabin, Wyoming, and Canyonlands in Southern Utah. I got to know him as well as one could, considering his reticence in opening up. Few words, but each carried weight. He was an odd mix of strong reserve, defiant stance and a childlike vulnerability, particularly when he smiled. He seemed larger in stature than he probably was because of his stone-like reserve and strong features. He seemed to carry the strength of someone who was that way from a hard life and hard labour rather than the artificial definition of the indoor fitness room. He had an awesome presence – as if he carried knowledge from some ancient source – and his stare suggested no suffering of fools. It wasn't long before this economy of movement and sound would render us all with care of what we said. And God forbid if it wasn't your truth. I liked him.

He seemed determined to have his way with a conversation. The amazing thing being that he would commit so little in having it. A simple defiant look that said, 'don't bullshit yourself or me'. One cold night in late October some 50 miles or so from any road, we stood around a fire, standing because it was warmer than sitting. We all had that paralysed stare that comes from looking at the flames too long. The talk had turned philosophical (one does tend to move in this direction when alone in a wilderness area). After some silence one of the party decided to take centre-stage and expound on his reverence of Carlos Castenada. He spoke at length, energized by what he thought was the quiet of respect. When he finished there was a great pause as all contemplated the wisdoms he had shared. Then simply, Ed said, still staring into the dying fire, 'I've always felt Carlos Castenada was full of shit.' Everyone then went to sleep.

After awhile the crust thawed a bit and we spoke more of writing, of books, of anarchy. I found his simplicity powerful and appealing. His words seemed to come in tight bundles, like a Hemingway sentence.

We spoke of doing *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and how I would treat it. He asked for nothing, expected nothing and wanted little. But what he wanted, as irreverent as it seemed, was to me quite moving. Yet he had a few contradictory habits. Riding a narrow part of the trail that would overlook a gorge, he would suddenly dismount and pry loose some giant boulder with his feet and send it arching into the deep space below. He seemed to delight in the delayed echo of the splash into the river. Without a word, back on the horse and we went on. As though someone had stopped simply to relieve himself by a tree.

Then, on the other hand, there was the coyote trickster who would turn left when you thought right or happy when things were sad – one night on Lake Powell, against flicking shadows from a fire below a large rock, came this amazing sound. A sound so sweet and pure it seemed angelic in an environment so harsh and barren. It was Edward standing alone at the water's edge playing the flute. Who knew?

There were many bonds formed by the end of a five-week-long adventure of riding the trail and recording what was left of that part of American history. Like many bonds formed in intimate situations against a backdrop of either fear, war or sporting contest, seldom do they last. Broken by distance or separate paths taken or by death.

I stayed friends with Edward until his death in 1989. Knowing he was dying in a hospital in Green River, Utah, he asked his two closest friends to help retrieve him and take him away and out, deep into the country he loved, and let him die there and bury him accordingly. No trace. No totem. No leaving. His wish was successful. One of the friends came to tell me the story because he knew I would appreciate knowing.

Edward Abbey was like stone.

An alliteration of stereotypical adjectives. Strong reserve. Stony stare. Strong resolve. Yes, all of that. He loved stone. He lived amongst the rocks, wrote about them and believed in enjoying them in their native state. But he was also a man of

great passion and love of the natural order. A kind of 'rage against the dying of the light'.

One wouldn't be prepared for the flow of feeling and child-like joy that would beam from his smile.

If I were to add a post-script to the exit of a man I admired and liked, I would request that no one even try to find him. He wouldn't like that.

ROBERT REDFORD

January 2004

Introduction

Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Barbie, Britney Spears; Ronald Reagan, Ronald McDonald, the Terminator, George W. Bush – viewed from overseas, American culture often seems like a series of extraordinary characters produced by some enormous, insidious machine. Linked by clever packaging and huge marketing budgets, they are predictable, inauthentic and hollow to the core. They are skilfully designed to sell things or to hide what's really being sold. They are pure surface and no soul, inflexible and impermeable, with all the charm of microwaveable plastic. But there's another American culture, dating back to the origins of the republic, that stands for an opposing set of values. It's a tradition of rebels and iconoclasts, of people who don't fit and don't follow, who won't smile and tell you to have a nice day. They're not cute, they don't think everything is okay, and they like to goad and irritate and provoke. Tom Paine set the standard for free-thinking, and without his *Common Sense* there'd be no USA today. John Brown and Kurt Cobain, Jack Kerouac and Abby Hoffman, Henry David Thoreau, Henry Miller and Malcolm X – they are just as American as the latest Disney cartoon or flag-waving Attorney General, yet they're fiery and passionate, embodying the spirit of rebellion. Edward Abbey was one of those Americans, the difficult, non-conformist kind, whose philosophy is beautifully expressed in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. 'I have sworn upon the altar of God,' its hero vows, paraphrasing Thomas Jefferson, 'eternal hostility against *every fucking form of tyranny*.'

Abbey liked to say that he was born on a farm in Home, Pennsylvania. But he wasn't. He was born in 1927 at a hospital in the town of Indiana, about a dozen miles away. He just liked the idea of an epic life beginning in a place called Home. It

sounded good. Abbey's mother was a schoolteacher, loving, cultivated and proper. His father was a working-class radical, a type uncommon in western Pennsylvania. Abbey later described him as 'anti-capitalistic, anti-religion, anti-prevailing opinion, anti-booze, anti-war, and anti-anyone who didn't agree with him.' One of his father's favourite sayings was 'resist much, obey little', a line from Walt Whitman that later became an epigraph in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. You can see the influence of Abbey's parents in his work, the civil and the uncivil, the passion for social justice, the erudition combined with an absence of anything effete. The family was poor and moved frequently during the early years of the Great Depression, before settling in Home when Abbey was nine years old. Despite the hardships of poverty, he had an idyllic childhood, roaming free and playing in the nearby woods with his sister and three brothers.

At the age of seventeen, Abbey spent a formative summer hitchhiking alone across the United States, as his father had once done, taking odd jobs along the way, sometimes riding the rails with hoboes, getting hassled by the police in Washington state and arrested for vagrancy in Flagstaff, Arizona. Like many of the Beats, he fell for life on the road, with its sense of limitless possibility. The desert landscape of the American Southwest left a powerful impression on him. After returning to Home, Abbey wrote about his exploits for the high-school paper, and for the rest of his life he'd do much the same thing, going to wild places where others rarely ventured and then spinning stories about what he saw there. He joined the army just as the Second World War was ending and spent a couple of years in Italy as a motorcycle cop, shooting rats, fighting boredom, chasing women, going AWOL for a couple of days in Milan, and generally enjoying his new role as a law-enforcement officer. 'Let's stop coddling criminals,' Abbey wrote to his mother. 'Let's put father in jail where he belongs.'

In 1948 Abbey enrolled at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque and started to explore the nearby mountains and

canyonlands. He became editor of the *Thunderbird*, a student magazine – and succeeded in getting it shut down by the president of the university. ‘Man will never be free until the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest,’ Abbey had put on the magazine’s cover, attributing François Diderot’s famous quote to Louisa May Alcott, the prim author of *Little Women*. Abbey wound up spending almost a decade at the University of New Mexico, earning an undergraduate degree and taking a while to complete a graduate degree in philosophy. His Master’s thesis was a study of Godwin, Proudhon, Kropotkin and Bakunin, among others, with the title ‘Anarchism and the Morality of Violence’. During the school year, Abbey taught classes and worked on his dissertation. During the summers, he took jobs as a forest ranger or a fire-spotter in national parks, using his time in the remote wilderness of the Southwest to read, write and sleep with young women.

Two of Abbey’s novels, *Jonathon Troy* and *The Brave Cowboy*, were published in the 1950s. The latter was made into a movie, *Lonely are the Brave*, starring Kirk Douglas. The film didn’t make Abbey rich, but he did hang around the set and make a brief appearance as an extra. His next novel, *Fire on the Mountain*, was written with Hollywood in mind, though it took almost twenty years to reach the screen. The protagonists of both novels were cowboys whose personal code of honour conflicts with the realities of the new West. During the 1960s, Abbey spent some time in Hoboken, New Jersey, across the Hudson River from Manhattan, employed as a technical writer for Western Electric, as a welfare case worker and as a creative-writing teacher at the New School. Financial success eluded him, as did approval from the New York literary elite. Abbey – who’d once started graduate school at Yale University but quit after only two weeks – held strongly ambivalent feelings about the East Coast establishment, resenting the label of ‘western’ writer and yet loving the cosmopolitan vitality of New York City.

Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness was Abbey’s first

bestseller, and it gained him much critical praise in 1968. Based on journals that he'd kept nearly a decade earlier as a ranger in Arches National Park, the book was strongly influenced by the work of Thoreau. 'I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately,' Thoreau had explained in *Walden*, 'to front only the essential facts of life.' For Abbey, the months spent alone in a small trailer in the Utah desert were an attempt to escape 'the clamor and filth and confusion . . . to confront, immediately and directly if it's possible, the bare bones of existence'. Other writers had celebrated the grandeur of the mountains and the sea; Abbey found himself drawn instead to the desert, to a world that was 'austere, utterly worthless, inviting not love but contemplation'. His uncompromising defence of America's wilderness struck a nerve at the height of the hippie counterculture, as the environmental movement grew and the war in Vietnam loomed as a perfect symbol of murderous, unchecked state power. 'A civilization which destroys what little remains of the wild, the spare, the original,' Abbey argued, 'is cutting itself off from its origins and betraying the principle of civilization itself.'

The success of *Desert Solitaire* brought Abbey teaching positions, first at the University of Utah, then at the University of Arizona, where he was given tenure. He continued to work as a park ranger, however, and to spend time in fire lookout towers, going back and forth between the wilderness and academia. He was an unconventional figure on campus: a tall, bearded, blue-eyed, hard-drinking professor dressed in workman's clothes, hiding his seriousness of purpose behind a smartass veneer. A writer's duty, Abbey believed, was 'to hate injustice, defy the powerful, and speak for the powerless'. While voicing scepticism about anyone's ability to teach someone else how to write, he tried to instil the proper values in students. On the first day of class Abbey would often share his four basic rules for aspiring novelists: 'Write right. Write good. Right wrong. Write on!'

In *Desert Solitaire* Abbey eloquently described what's worth saving – and in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* suggested how to do

it. For years Abbey and his friends had been performing small acts of industrial sabotage, torching billboards, pulling up survey stakes, tampering with the engines of bulldozers and earth-movers. *The Monkey Wrench Gang* was loosely inspired by those exploits, though Abbey later said that the names of his friends had been changed 'to protect the guilty'. Once again Thoreau served as a literary guide. 'Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine,' Thoreau proposed in his famous essay on civil disobedience. That's exactly what the protagonists of *The Monkey Wrench Gang* do, trying to launch a 'counter-industrial revolution' that will destroy 'the megamachine . . . [the] megalomaniacal megamachine' of American capitalism. The novel also has a strong cinematic quality, with a plot that borrows elements from films such as *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, as sympathetic outlaws are relentlessly pursued by the forces of law and order. The great dream of the book's monkey-wrenchers – to bring down the massive Glen Canyon dam – was shared by many other environmentalists. Built to generate electricity for the growing suburbs of the Southwest, the dam had submerged one of the most beautiful canyons in the United States, replacing it with an eerie man-made lake soon popular among jetskiers and the owners of large houseboats. Abbey was outraged that Lake Powell was named after John Wesley Powell, one of America's great conservationists and explorers. 'Where he and his brave men once lined the rapids and glided through silent canyons two thousand feet deep,' Abbey had written in *Desert Solitaire*, 'the motorboats now smoke and whine, now scumming the water with cigarette butts, beer cans, and oil, dragging the water-skiers on their endless rounds, clockwise.' Such a desecration, he felt, cried out for the use of explosives.

Published in 1975, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* soon became a bestseller and a critical success, turning Abbey into a literary celebrity. Environmentalists had long been disparaged as brie-eating, white-wine-drinking, upper-middle-class intellectuals. Abbey brought a new and radical sensibility to the movement.

He drank beer, liked guns, and could be funny as hell. Fed up with the timidity of mainstream environmental groups and inspired by Abbey's work, a group of activists founded Earth First!, vowing to monkey-wrench on behalf of the land. Although the film rights to *The Monkey Wrench Gang* were optioned in 1975, repeated efforts to make a movie based on the book went nowhere. The Beat poet Gary Snyder had a theory about why studio executives felt so nervous about the project: showing blood and gore and mass murder was perfectly acceptable in Hollywood – but the gleeful destruction of private property? That seemed dangerously un-American.

Like all great writers, Abbey was a deeply complex, often contradictory person. 'The real Edward Abbey is a shy, timid fellow,' he once admitted, 'but the character I create in my journalism is perhaps a person I would like to be: bold, brash, daring.' He was married five times, slept with countless young co-eds, and had five children, despite a fervent belief in zero population growth. 'How can I be true to just one woman,' he asked, 'without being untrue to all the rest?' Though a proud anarchist, he spent most of his life employed by federal agencies and state universities. Though a champion of the wilderness, he wound up settling in suburban Tucson, Arizona, amid the tract homes and strip malls he so despised. An outspoken opponent of gas-guzzling, air-polluting automobiles, he drove a red Cadillac convertible and enjoyed tossing empty beer cans out of the car. 'Why the fuck shouldn't I throw fucking beer cans along the fucking highways?,' a character in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* says. If you don't like roads, another suggests, 'litter the shit out of them.'

Though popular among members of the sixties counter-culture, Abbey clearly was of a different generation. He was a contemporary of Jack Kerouac and Hugh Hefner, not of the Beatles or the Rolling Stones. And he was never politically correct. *The Monkey Wrench Gang* contains disparaging jokes about Native Americans, Hindus and women. At one point, the phrase 'fucking fat Jewish bitch' is used as a term of endearment (two of Abbey's

wives were Jewish). His views on illegal immigration proved to be the source of much controversy. Among other things, he called illegals ‘hungry, ignorant, unskilled, and culturally-morally-genetically impoverished people.’ Many of his remarks were deliberately intended to shock and provoke. Abbey was well aware of his own faults and contradictions and enjoyed playing the curmudgeon. ‘I’m not going to toady to chickenshit liberalism, anymore; fuck it’, Abbey wrote in a letter, near the end of his life. ‘I’ve already been called fascist, racist, elitist, as well as communist, terrorist, misanthrope, bleeding heart, etc., so often it doesn’t bother me anymore.’

Abbey died in 1989 from internal bleeding most likely caused by years of heavy drinking. He was sixty-two and had written eight novels (including *Hayduke Lives!*, a sequel to *The Monkey Wrench Gang*) and published seven volumes of collected essays. Abbey had left detailed instructions about the funeral he wanted, which a group of his friends faithfully obeyed. Abbey’s body was carried in the bed of a pickup truck into an Arizona wilderness. He was wrapped in a sleeping bag and buried at one of his favourite spots, on federal property, in violation of the law. The location of his grave was kept secret, marked only by simple headstone that read ‘Edward Paul Abbey. 1927–1989. No Comment.’

Almost thirty years after *The Monkey Wrench Gang* first appeared in print, it remains a terrific read – funny, perceptive, brutally honest and extremely timely. The ‘expand-or-expire agro-industrial empire’ that Abbey long fought against has grown more powerful in recent years, threatening fragile ecosystems worldwide. In the United States, the administration of President George W. Bush has given one industry group after another control of the federal agencies created to regulate them. Timber companies now dictate how the nation’s forests are managed; coal companies decide what constitutes clean air; oil companies run the nation’s foreign policy. ‘Growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell,’ Abbey once said, and the

pathological mindset he warned against now threatens what's left of America's wilderness.

In response, a new set of radical environmentalists – directly inspired by *The Monkey Wrench Gang* – are waging war against the system. During the past two years, members of the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) have defaced twenty-five sport utility vehicles, a Burger King and a McDonald's in Richmond, Virginia; slashed tyres, cut engine hoses and poured sand in fuel tanks at a Wal-Mart construction site in Martinsville, Indiana; destroyed construction equipment belonging to the US Forest Service in the Jemez Mountains of New Mexico; set fire to two luxury homes in Superior Township, Michigan; firebombed a Hummer dealership in West Covina, California, destroying fifty of the vehicles; and burned down a 200-unit apartment complex under construction in San Diego. Members of the group sometimes leave behind a spray-painted, revolutionary slogan: 'Hayduke Lives!' The Earth Liberation Front has thus far caused about \$100 million in damage. Although ELF proudly targets property and not people, the FBI has labelled the organization America's top domestic terrorist threat. It's hard to say how Abbey would have felt about his latest followers; he advocated subversion and sabotage 'as a last resort when political means fail'.

As for Lake Powell, it is increasingly polluted with oil, toxic chemicals and other unpleasant things. More untreated human waste is dumped into it every year than into any other lake in the United States. And after years of severe drought Lake Powell's water level has dropped almost one hundred feet, reaching the lowest point since Glen Canyon was filled. Long submerged natural arches and sandstone bridges and Indian rock art have suddenly reappeared, along with an old Hollywood movie set. Used as a backdrop in *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, a Biblical epic shot in 1965, the set is a re-creation of ancient, decadent Babylon.

ERIC SCHLOSSER
January 2004

Suggested reading on Edward Abbey: James M. Cahalan, *Edward Abbey: A Life* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001); James R. Hepworth and Gregory McNamee, eds., *Resist Much, Obey Little: Remembering Edward Abbey* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996); Jack Loeffler, *Adventures with Ed: A Portrait of Abbey* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002).

The Monkey Wrench Gang

This book, though fictional in form, is based strictly on historical fact. Everything in it is real or actually happened. And it all began just one year from today.

E. A.
Wolf Hole, Arizona

IN MEMORIAM: *Ned Ludd*

. . . a lunatic living about 1779, who in a fit of rage smashed up two frames belonging to a Leicestershire ‘stockinger.’

—*The Oxford Universal Dictionary*

Down with all kings but King Ludd.

—Byron

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. . . but oh my desert
yours is the only death I cannot bear.
—Richard Shelton

Resist much. Obey little.
—Walt Whitman

Now. Or never.
—Thoreau

sabotage . . . *n.* [Fr. < *sabot*, wooden shoe + –AGE: from damage
done to machinery by sabots]. . . .

—*Webster's New World Dictionary*

PROLOGUE



The Aftermath

When a new bridge between two sovereign states of the United States has been completed, it is time for speech. For flags, bands and electronically amplified techno-industrial rhetoric. For the public address.

The people are waiting. The bridge, bedecked with bunting, streamers and Day-Glo banners, is ready. All wait for the official opening, the final oration, the slash of ribbon, the advancing limousines. No matter that in actual fact the bridge has already known heavy commercial use for six months.

Long files of automobiles stand at the approaches, strung out for a mile to the north and south and monitored by state police on motorcycles, sullen, heavy men creaking with leather, stiff in riot helmet, badge, gun, Mace, club, radio. The proud tough sensitive flunkies of the rich and powerful. Armed and dangerous.

The people wait. Sweltering in the glare, roasting in their cars bright as beetles under the soft roar of the sun. That desert sun of Utah-Arizona, the infernal flaming plasmic meatball in the sky. Five thousand people yawning in their cars, intimidated by the cops and bored to acedia by the chant of the politicians. Their squalling kids fight in the back seats, Frigid Queen ice cream drooling down chins and elbows, pooling Jackson Pollock schmierkunst on the monovalent radicals of the Vinylite seat covers. All endure though none can bear to listen to the high-decibel racket pouring from the public-address system.

The bridge itself is a simple, elegant and compact arch of steel,

concrete as a statement of fact, bearing on its back the incidental ribbon of asphalt, a walkway, railings, security lights. Four hundred feet long, it spans a gorge seven hundred feet deep: Glen Canyon. Flowing through the bottom of the gorge is the tame and domesticated Colorado River, released from the bowels of the adjacent Glen Canyon Dam. Formerly a golden-red, as the name implies, the river now runs cold, clear and green, the color of the glacier water.

Great river—greater dam. Seen from the bridge the dam presents a gray sheer concave face of concrete aggregate, impacable and mute. A gravity dam, eight hundred thousand tons of solidarity, counter-sunk in the sandstone Navajo formation, fifty million years emplaced, of the bedrock and canyon walls. A plug, a block, a fat wedge, the dam diverts through penstocks and turbines the force of the puzzled river.

What was once a mighty river. Now a ghost. Spirits of sea gulls and pelicans wing above the desiccated delta a thousand miles to seaward. Spirits of beaver nose upstream through the silt-gold surface. Great blue herons once descended, light as mosquitoes, long legs dangling, to the sandbars. Wood ibis croaked in the cottonwood. Deer walked the canyon shores. Snowy egrets in the tamarisk, plumes waving in the river breeze. . . .

The people wait. The speech goes on, many round mouths, one speech, and hardly a word intelligible. There seem to be spooks in the circuitry. The loudspeakers, black as charcoal, flaring from mounts on the gooseneck lampposts thirty feet above the roadway, are bellowing like Martians. A hash of sense, the squeak and gibber of technetronic poltergeists, strangled phrase and filbrillated paragraph, boom forth with the hollow roar, all the same, of AUTHORITY—

. . . this proud state of Utah [*bleeeeeeeep!*] glad to have this opportunity [*ronk!*] take part in opening of this magnificent bridge [*bleeeeeeeet!*] joining us to great state of Arizona, fastest growing [*yiiiiiiiiiiiiinnnnnnnnnnng!*] to help promote and assure continued growth and economic [*rawk! yawk! yiiiiinnng! niiinnnnnnng!*] could give me more pleasure, Governor, than this

significant occasion [*rawnk!*] of our two states [*blonk!*] by that great dam. . . .

Waiting, waiting. Far back in the line of cars, beyond reach of speech and out of sight of cop, a horn honks. And honks again. The sound of one horn, honking. A patrolman turns on his Harley hog, scowling, and cruises down the line. The honking stops.

The Indians also watch and wait. Gathered on an open hillside above the highway, on the reservation side of the river, an informal congregation of Ute, Paiute, Hopi and Navajo lounge about among their brand-new pickup trucks. The men and women drink Tokay, the swarms of children Pepsi-Cola, all munching on mayonnaise and Kleenex sandwiches of Wonder, Rainbo and Holsum Bread. Our noble red brethren eyeball the ceremony at the bridge, but their ears and hearts are with Merle Haggard, Johnny Paycheck and Tammy Wynette blaring from truck radios out of Station K-A-O-S—*Kaos!*—in Flagstaff, Arizona.

The citizens wait; the official voices drone on and on into the mikes, through the haunted wiring, out of the addled speakers. Thousands huddled in their idling automobiles, each yearning to be free and first across the arch of steel, that weightless-looking bridge which spans so gracefully the canyon gulf, the airy emptiness where swallows skate and plane.

Seven hundred feet down. It is difficult to fully grasp the meaning of such a fall. The river moves so far below, churning among its rocks, that the roar comes up sounding like a sigh. A breath of wind carries the sigh away.

The bridge stands clear and empty except for the cluster of notables at the center, the important people gathered around the microphones and a symbolic barrier of red, white and blue ribbon stretched across the bridge from rail to rail. The black Cadillacs are parked at either end of the bridge. Beyond the official cars, wooden barricades and motorcycle patrolmen keep the masses at bay.

Far beyond the dam, the reservoir, the river and the bridge, the town of Page, the highway, the Indians, the people and their leaders,

stretches the rosy desert. Hot out there, under the fierce July sun—the temperature at ground level must be close to 150 degrees Fahrenheit. All sensible creatures are shaded up or waiting out the day in cool burrows under the surface. No humans live in that pink wasteland. There is nothing to stay the eye from roving farther and farther, across league after league of rock and sand to the vertical façades of butte, mesa and plateau forming the skyline fifty miles away. Nothing grows out there but scattered clumps of blackbrush and cactus, with here and there a scrubby, twisted, anguished-looking juniper. And a little scurf pea, a little snakeweed. Nothing more. Nothing moves but one pale whirlwind, a tottering little tornado of dust which lurches into a stone pillar and collapses. Nothing observes the mishap but a vulture hovering on the thermals three thousand feet above.

The buzzard, if anyone were looking, appears to be alone in the immensity of the sky. But he is not. Beyond the range of even the sharpest human eyes but perceptible to one another, other vultures wait, soaring lazily on the air. If one descends, spotting below something dead or dying, the others come from all directions, out of nowhere, and gather with bowed heads and hooded eyes around the body of the loved one.

Back to the bridge: The united high-school marching bands of Kanab, Utah, and Page, Arizona, wilted but willing, now perform a spirited rendition of “Shall We Gather at the River?” followed by “The Stars and Stripes Forever.” Pause. Discreet applause, whistles, cheers. The weary multitude senses that the end is near, the bridge about to be opened. The governors of Arizona and Utah, cheerful bulky men in cowboy hats and pointy-toe boots, come forward again. Each brandishes a pair of giant golden scissors, flashing in the sunlight. Superfluous flashbulbs pop, TV cameras record history in the making. As they advance a workman dashes from among the onlookers, scuttles to the barrier ribbon and makes some kind of slight but doubtless important last-minute adjustment. He wears a yellow hard hat decorated with the emblematic decals of his class—American flag, skull and crossbones, the Iron Cross. Across the back of his filthy coveralls, in vivid lettering, is stitched the legend AMERICA: LOVE IT OR

LEAVE IT ALONE. Completing his task, he retires quickly back to the obscurity of the crowd where he belongs.

Climactic moment. The throng prepares to unleash a cheer or two. Drivers scramble into their cars. The sound of racing engines: motors revved, tachs up.

Final words. Quiet, please.

“Go ahead, old buddy. Cut the damn thing.”

“Me?”

“Both together, please.”

“I thought you said . . .”

“Okay, I gotcha. Stand back. Like this?”

Most of the crowd along the highway had only a poor view of what happened next. But the Indians up on the hillside saw it all clearly. Grandstand seats. They saw the puff of smoke, black, which issued from the ends of the cut ribbon. They saw the flurry of sparks which followed as the ribbon burned, like a fuse, across the bridge. And when the dignitaries hastily backed off the Indians saw the general eruption of unprogrammed fireworks which pursued them. From under the draperies of bunting came an outburst of Roman candles, flaming Catherine wheels, Chinese firecrackers and cherry bombs. As the bridge was cleared from end to end a rash of fireworks blazed up along the walkways. Rockets shot into the air and exploded, Silver Salutes, aerial bombs and M-80s blasted off. Whirling dervishes of smoke and fire took off and flew, strings of firecrackers leaped through the air like smoking whips, snapping and popping, lashing at the governors' heels. The crowd cheered, thinking this the high point of the ceremonies.

But it was not. Not the highest high point. Suddenly the center of the bridge rose up, as if punched from beneath, and broke in two along a jagged zigzag line. Through this absurd fissure, crooked as lightning, a sheet of red flame streamed skyward, followed at once by the sound of a great cough, a thunderous shuddering high-explosive cough that shook the monolithic sandstone of the canyon walls. The bridge parted like a flower, its separate divisions no longer joined by

any physical bond. Fragments and sections began to fold, sag, sink and fall, relaxing into the abyss. Loose objects—gilded scissors, a monkey wrench, a couple of empty Cadillacs—slid down the appalling gradient of the depressed roadway and launched themselves, turning slowly, into space. They took a long time going down and when they finally smashed on the rock and river far below, the sound of the impact, arriving much later, was barely heard by even the most attentive.

The bridge was gone. The wrinkled fragments at either end still clinging to their foundations in the bedrock dangled toward each other like pendant fingers, suggesting the thought but lacking the will to touch. As the compact plume of dust resulting from the catastrophe expanded upward over the rimrock, slabs of asphalt and cement and shreds and shards of steel and rebar continued to fall, in contrary motion from the sky, splashing seven hundred feet below into the stained but unhurried river.

On the Utah side of the canyon, a governor, a highway commissioner and two high-ranking officers of the Department of Public Safety strode through the crowd toward their remaining limousines. Stern-faced and furious, they conferred as they walked.

“This is their last stunt, Governor, I promise you.”

“Seems to me I heard that promise before, Crumbo.”

“I wasn’t on the case before, sir.”

“So what. What’re you doing now?”

“We’re on their tail, sir. We have a good idea who they are, how they operate and what they’re planning next.”

“But not where they are.”

“No sir, not at the moment. But we’re closing in.”

“And just what the hell are they planning next?”

“You won’t believe me.”

“Try me.”

Colonel Crumbo points a finger to the immediate east. Indicating *that thing*.

“The dam?”

“Yes sir.”

“Not the dam.”

“Yes sir, we have reason to think so.”

“*Not* Glen Canyon *Dam!*”

“I know it sounds crazy. But that’s what they’re after.”

Meanwhile, up in the sky, the lone visible vulture spirals in lazy circles higher and higher, contemplating the peaceful scene below. He looks down on the perfect dam. He sees downstream from the dam the living river and above it the blue impoundment, that placid reservoir where, like waterbugs, the cabin cruisers play. He sees, at this very moment, a pair of water skiers with tangled towlines about to drown beneath the waters. He sees the glint of metal and glass on the asphalt trail where endless jammed files of steaming automobiles creep home to Kanab, Page, Tuba City, Panguitch and points beyond. He notes in passing the dark gorge of the master canyon, the shattered stubs of a bridge, the tall yellow pillar of smoke and dust still rising, slowly, from the depths of the chasm.

Like a solitary smoke signal, like the silent symbol of calamity, like one huge inaudible and astonishing exclamation point signifying *surprise!* the dust plume hangs above the fruitless plain, pointing upward to heaven and downward to the scene of the primal split, the loss of connections, the place where not only space but time itself has come unglued. Has lapsed. Elapsed. Relapsed. Prolapsed. And then collapsed.

Under the vulture’s eye. Meaning nothing, nothing to eat. Under that ultimate farthest eye, the glimmer of plasma down the west, so far beyond all consequence of dust and blue, the same. . . .

I



Origins I: A. K. Sarvis, M.D.

Dr. Sarvis with his bald mottled dome and savage visage, grim and noble as Sibelius, was out night-riding on a routine neighborhood beautification project, burning billboards along the highway—U.S. 66, later to be devoured by the superstate's interstate autobahn. His procedure was simple, surgically deft. With a five-gallon can of gasoline he sloshed about the legs and support members of the selected target, then applied a match. Everyone should have a hobby.

In the lurid glare which followed he could be seen shambling back to the Lincoln Continental Mark IV parked nearby, empty gas can banging on his insouciant shanks. A tall and ponderous man, shaggy as a bear, he cast a most impressive shadow in the light of the flames, across the arid scene of broken whiskey bottles, prickly pear and buckhorn cholla, worn-out tires and strips of retread. In the fire's glare his little red eyes burned with a fierce red fire of their own, matching the candescent coal of the cigar in his teeth—three smoldering and fanatic red bulbs glowing through the dark. He paused to admire his work:

HOWDY PARDNER

WELCOME TO ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

HUB OF THE LAND OF ENCHANTMENT

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Headlights swept across him from the passing traffic. Derisive horns bellowed as sallow pimply youths with undescended testicles drove by in stripped-down zonked-up Mustangs, Impalas, Stringrays and Beetles, each with a lush-lashed truelove wedged hard overlapping-pelvis-style on the driver's lap, so that seen from the back through the rear window in silhouette against oncoming headlights the car appeared to be "operated" by a single occupant with— anomaly—two heads; other lovers screamed past jammed butt to groin on the buddy seats of 880-cc chopped Kawasaki motorbikes with cherry-bomb exhaust tubes—like hara-kiri, kamikaze, karate and the creeping kudzu vine, a gift from the friendly people who gave us (remember?) Pearl Harbor—which, blasting sparks and chips of cylinder wall, roared shattering like spastic technical demons through the once-wide stillness of Southwestern night.

No one ever stopped. Except the Highway Patrol arriving promptly fifteen minutes late, radioing the report of an inexplicable billboard fire to a casually scornful dispatcher at headquarters, then ejecting self from vehicle, extinguisher in gloved hand, to ply the flames for a while with little limp gushes of liquid sodium hydrochloride ("wetter than water" because it adheres better, like soapsuds) to the pyre. Futile if gallant efforts. Dehydrated by months, sometimes years of desert winds and thirsty desert air, the pine and paper of the noblest most magnificent of billboards yearned in every molecule for quick combustion, wrapped itself in fire with the mad lust, the rapt intensity, of lovers fecundating. All-cleansing fire, all-purifying flame, before which the asbestos-hearted plutonic pyromaniac can only genuflect and pray.

Doc Sarvis by this time had descended the crumbly bank of the roadside under a billowing glare from his handiwork, dumped his gas can into trunk of car, slammed the lid—where a bright and silver caduceus glisters in the firelight—and slumped down in the front seat beside his driver.

"Next?" she says.

He flipped away his cigar butt, out the open window into the ditch—the trace of burning arc remains for a moment in the night, a

retinal afterglow with rainbow-style trajectory, its terminal spatter of sparks the pot of gold—and unwrapped another Marsh-Wheeling, his famous surgeon's hand revealing not a twitch or tremor.

"Let's work the west side," he says.

The big car glided forward with murmurous motor, wheels crunching tin cans and plastic picnic plates on the berm, packed bearings sliding in the servile grease, the pistons, bathed in oil, slipping up and down in the firm but gentle grasp of cylinders, connecting rods to crankshaft, crankshaft to drive shaft through differential's scrotal housing via axle, all power to the wheels.

They progressed. That is to say, they advanced, in thoughtful silence, toward the jittery neon, the spastic anapestic rock, the apopleptic roll of Saturday night in Albuquerque, New Mexico. (To be an American for one Saturday night downtown you'd sell your immortal soul.) Down Glassy Gulch they drove toward the twenty-story towers of finance burning like blocks of radium under the illuminated smog.

"Abzug."

"Doc?"

"I love you, Abzug."

"I know, Doc."

Past a lit-up funeral parlor in territorial burnt-adobe brick: Strong-Thorne Mortuary—"Oh Death Where Is Thy Sting?" Dive! Beneath the overpass of the Sante Fe (Holy Faith) Railroad—"Go Santa Fe All the Way."

"Ah," sighed the doctor, "I like this. I like this. . . ."

"Yeah, but it interferes with my driving if you don't mind."

"El Mano Negro strikes again."

"Yeah, Doc, okay, but you're gonna get us in a wreck and my mother will sue."

"True," he says, "but it's worth it."

Beyond the prewar motels of stucco and Spanish tile at the city's western fringe, they drove out on a long low bridge.

"Stop here."

She stopped the car. Doc Sarvis gazed down at the river, the Rio

Grande, great river of New Mexico, its dark and complicated waters shining with cloud-reflected city light.

“My river,” he says.

“Our river.”

“Our river.”

“Let’s take that river trip.”

“Soon, soon.” He held up a finger. “Listen. . . .”

They listened. The river was mumbling something down below, something like a message: Come flow with me, Doctor, through the deserts of New Mexico, down through the canyons of Big Bend and on to the sea the Gulf the Caribbean, down where those young sireens weave their seaweed garlands for your hairless head, O Doc. Are you there? Doc?

“Drive on, Bonnie. This river aggravates my melancholia.”

“Not to mention your self-pity.”

“My sense of *déjà vu*.”

“Yeah.”

“*Mein Weltschmerz*.”

“Your *Welt-schmaltz*. You love it.”

“Well. . . .” He pulled out the lighter. “As to that, who can say?”

“Oh, Doc.” Watching the river, driving on, watching the road, she patted his knee. “Don’t think about all that anymore.”

Doc nodded, holding the red coil to his cigar. The glow of the lighter, the soft lights of the instrument panel, gave to his large and bony, bald but bearded head a hard-worn dignity. He looked like Jean Sibelius with eyebrows and whiskers, in the full vigor of his fruitful forties. Sibelius lived for ninety-two years. Doc had forty-two and a half to go.

Abzug loved him. Not much, perhaps, but enough. She was a tough piece out of the Bronx but could be sweet as *apfelstrudel* when necessary. That classic Abzug voice might rasp on the nerves at times, when her mood was querulous, but kisses or candy or con could usually mellow the harshest of her urban tones. Her tongue though adder-sharp was sweet (he thought) as Mogen David all the same.

His mother also loved him. Of course his mother had no choice. That's what she was paid for.

His wife had loved him, more than he deserved, more than realism required. Given sufficient time she might have outgrown it. The children were all grown up and a continent away.

Doc's nicer patients liked him but didn't always pay their bills. He had a few friends, some poker-playing cronies on the Democratic County Committee, some drinking companions from the Medical Arts Clinic, a couple of neighbors in the Heights. No one close. His few close friends were always sent away, it seemed, returning rarely, the bonds of their affection no stronger than the web of correspondence, which frays and fades.

He was therefore proud and grateful to have a nurse and buddy like Ms. Bonnie Abbzug at his side, this night, as the black automobile rose westward under the rosy smog-glow of the city's personal atmosphere, beyond the last of the Texaco, Arco and Gulf stations, past the final Wagon Wheel Bar, into the open desert. High on the western mesa near burnt-out volcanoes, under the blazing, dazzling, starry sky, they stopped among the undefended billboards at the highway's side. Time to choose another target.

Doc Sarvis and Bonnie Abbzug looked them over. So many, all so innocent and vulnerable, ranged along the roadway in serried ranks, clamoring for the eye. Hard to choose. Should it be the military?

THE MARINE CORPS BUILDS MEN

Why don't it build women? Bonnie asked. Or how about the truckers' editorial?

IF TRUCKS STOP AMERICA STOPS

Don't threaten *me*, you sons of bitches. He checked out the political:

WHAT'S WRONG WITH BEING RIGHT? JOIN THE JOHN BIRCH SOCIETY!

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But preferred the apolitical:

HAVE A NICE DAY
WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

Dr. Sarvis loved them all, but sensed a certain futility in his hobby. He carried on these days more from habit than conviction. There was a higher destiny calling to him and Ms. Abbzug. That beckoning finger in his dreams.

“Bonnie—?”

“Well?”

“What do you say?”

“You might as well knock over one more, Doc. We drove all this way. You won’t be happy if you don’t.”

“Good girl. Which one shall it be?”

Bonnie pointed. “I like that one.”

Doc said, “Exactly.” He climbed out of the car and stumbled to the back, through the tin-can tumbleweed community of the roadside ecology. He opened the trunk lid and removed, from among the golf clubs, the spare tire, the chain saw, the case of spray paint, the tire tools, the empty gas can, another gasoline can, full. Doc closed the lid. Across the length of his rear bumper a luminous sticker proclaimed in glowing red, white and blue, I AM PROUD TO BE AN ARMENIAN!

Doc’s car carried other hex signs—he was indeed a decalcomaniac—to ward off evil: the M.D.’s caduceus, American flag decals in each corner of the rear window, a gold-fringed flag dangling from the radio aerial, in one corner of the windshield a sticker which read “Member of A.B.L.E.—Americans for Better Law Enforcement,” and in the other corner the blue eagle of the National Rifle Association with the traditional adage, “Register Communists, Not Guns.”

Taking no chances, looking both ways, severe and sober as a judge, carrying his matches and his can of gasoline, Dr. Sarvis marched through the weeds, the broken bottles, the rags and beer cans of the ditch, all that tragic and abandoned trivia of the American road, and climbed the cutbank toward the object of his fierymania:

WONDER ENRICHED BREAD
HELPS BUILD STRONG BODIES
12 WAYS

Liars!

While down below his Bonnie waited at the wheel of the Lincoln, her engines running, ready for getaway. The trucks and cars howled by on the highway and their lights shone briefly on the girl's face, her violet eyes, her smile, and on Doc's other bumper sticker, the one that confronted the future: GOD BLESS AMERICA. LET'S SAVE SOME OF IT.

2



Origins II: George W. Hayduke

George Washington Hayduke, Vietnam, Special Forces, had a grudge. After two years in the jungle delivering Montagnard babies and dodging helicopters (for those boys up there fired their tumbling dumdums at thirty rounds per second at anything that moved: chickens, water buffalo, rice farmers, newspaper reporters, lost Americans, Green Beret medics—whatever breathed) and another year as a prisoner of the Vietcong, he returned to the American Southwest he had been remembering only to find it no longer what he remembered, no longer the clear and classical desert, the pellucid sky he roamed in dreams. Someone or something was changing things.

The city of Tucson from which he came, to which he returned, was ringed now with a circle of Titan ICBM bases. The open desert was being scraped bare of all vegetation, all life, by giant D-9 bulldozers reminding him of the Rome plows leveling Vietnam. These machine-made wastes grew up in tumbleweed and real-estate development, a squalid plague of future slums constructed of green two-by-fours, dry-wall fiberboard and prefab roofs that blew off in the first good wind. This in the home of free creatures: horned toads, desert rats, Gila monsters and coyotes. Even the sky, that dome of delirious blue which he once had thought was out of reach, was becoming a

dump for the gaseous garbage of the copper smelters, the filth that Kennecott, Anaconda, Phelps-Dodge and American Smelting & Refining Co. were pumping through stacks into the public sky. A smudge of poisoned air overhung his homeland.

Hayduke smelled something foul in all this. A smoldering bitterness warmed his heart and nerves; the slow fires of anger kept his cockles warm, his hackles rising. Hayduke *burned*. And he was not a patient man.

After a month with his parents, he raced off to a girl at Laguna Beach. Found, fought and lost her. He returned to the desert, heading north by east for the canyon country, the Arizona Strip and the wild lands beyond. There was one place he had to see and brood upon awhile before he could know what he had to do.

He had in mind Lee's Ferry, the Colorado River, the Grand Canyon.

Hayduke rumbled up the asphalt trail in his new secondhand jeep, one eye on the road and the other itching with hay fever; he was allergic to tumbleweed, that exotic vegetable from the steppes of Mongolia. He had bought the jeep, a sandstorm-blasted sun-bleached blue, in San Diego from a team of car dealers named Square Deal Andy and Top Dollar Johnny. The fuel pump had given out first, near Brawley, and at Yuma, limping off the freeway with a flat, he discovered that Square Deal had sold him (for only \$2795, it's true) a jeep without a jack. Small problems: he liked this machine; he was pleased with the handy extras—roll bars, auxiliary gas tank, mag rims and wide-tread tires, the Warn hubs and the Warn winch with 150-foot cable, the gimbal-mounted beer-can holder screwed to the dash, the free and natural paint job.

The desert eased his vague anger. Near the dirt road which turned off the highway and led east for ten miles to the volcanic ramparts of the Kofa Mountains, he stopped, well away from the traffic, and made himself a picnic lunch. He sat on warm rock in the blazing spring sun, eating pickle and cheese and ham in onion roll, washing it down with beer, and opened himself through pore and nerve ends to the sweet stillness of the Arizona desert. He gazed about and found

that he still remembered most of the scrubby little trees: the mesquite (great fuel for cooking and heating, beans for hard times, shade for survival), the green-barked paloverde with its leafless stems (the chlorophyll is in the bark), the subtle smoke tree floating like a mirage down in the sandy wash.

Hayduke proceeded. The hot fury of the wind at 65 mph whistled past his open window, strummed his sleeve, kissed his ear as he drove on and on, northeast toward the high country, the good country, God's country, Hayduke's country, by God. And it better stay that way. Or by God there'll be trouble.

Twenty-five years old, Hayduke is a short, broad, burly fellow, well-muscled, built like a wrestler. The face is hairy, very hairy, with a wide mouth and good teeth, big cheekbones and a thick shock of blue-black hair. A bit of Shawnee blood back in there, maybe, somewhere, way back in the gene pool. His hands are large and powerful, pale white under the black hair; he's been in the jungle and then in the hospital for a long time.

He drank another beer as he drove along. Two and a half six-packs to Lee's Ferry. Out there in the open Southwest, he and his friends measured highway distances in per-capita six-packs of beer. L.A. to Phoenix, four six-packs; Tucson to Flagstaff, three six-packs; Phoenix to New York, thirty-five six-packs. (Time is relative, said Heraclitus a long time ago, and distance a function of velocity. Since the ultimate goal of transport technology is the annihilation of space, the compression of all Being into one pure point, it follows that six-packs help. Speed is the ultimate drug and rockets run on alcohol. Hayduke had formulated this theory all by himself.)

He felt and shared in the exhilaration of the sun, the rush of alcohol through the bloodstream, the satisfaction in his jeep running full and cool and properly, tooling up the pike toward the red cliffs of the canyon country, the purple mesas, the cliff-rose and the blue birds. All the readings of his complicated nervous system indicated trouble. But then they always did. He was happy.

There was a special camp of the Special Forces. There was a spe-