

THE REPLOIDS

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No one knew exactly how long it had been going on. Not long. Two days, two weeks; it couldn't have been much longer than that, Cheyney reasoned. Not that it mattered. It was just that people got to watch a little more of the show with the added thrill of knowing the show was real. When the United States - the whole world - found out about the Reploids, it was pretty spectacular. just as well, maybe. These days, unless it's spectacular, a thing can go on damned near forever. It is neither believed nor disbelieved. It is simply part of the weird Godhead mantra that made up the accelerating flow of events and experience as the century neared its end. It's harder to get peoples' attention. It takes machine-guns in a crowded airport or a live grenade rolled up the aisle of a bus load of nuns stopped at a roadblock in some Central American country overgrown with guns and greenery. The Reploids became national - and international - news on the morning of November 30, 1989, after what happened during the first two chaotic minutes of the Tonight Show taping in Beautiful Downtown Burbank, California, the night before.

The floor manager watched intently as the red sweep secondhand moved upward toward the twelve. The studio audience clockwatched as intently as the floor manager. When the red sweep secondhand crossed the twelve, it would be five o'clock and taping of the umpty-umptyth Tonight Show would commence.

As the red secondhand passed the eight, the audience stirred and muttered with its own peculiar sort of stage fright. After all, they represented America, didn't they? Yes!

"Let's have it quiet, people, please," the floor manager said pleasantly, and the audience quieted like obedient children. Doc Severinsen's drummer ran off a fast little riff on his snare and then held his sticks easily between thumbs and fingers, wrists loose, watching the floor manager instead of the clock, as the show - people always did. For crew and performers, the floor manager was the clock. When the secondhand passed the ten, the floor manager counted down aloud to four, and then held up three fingers, two fingers, one finger ... and then a clenched fist from which one finger

pointed dramatically at the audience. An APPLAUSE sign lit up, but the studio audience was primed to whoop it up; it would have made no difference if it had been written in Sanskrit.

So things started off just as they were supposed to start off: dead on time. This was not so surprising; there were crewmembers on the Tonight Show who, had they been LAPD officers, could have retired with full benefits. The Doc Severinsen band, one of the best showbands in the world, launched into the familiar theme: Ta-da-da-Da-da ... and the large, rolling voice of Ed

McMahon cried enthusiastically: "From Los Angeles, entertainment capital of the world, it's The Tonight Show, live, with Johnny Carson! Tonight, Johnny's guests are actress Cybill Shepherd of Moonlighting!" Excited applause from the audience. "Magician Doug Henning!" Even louder applause from the audience. "Pee Wee Herman!" A fresh wave of applause, this time including hoots of joy from Pee Wee's rooting section. "From Germany, the Flying Schnauzers, the world's only canine acrobats!" Increased applause, with a mixture of laughter from the audience. "Not to mention Doc Severinsen, the world's only Flying Bandleader, and his canine band!"

The band members not playing horns obediently barked. The audience laughed harder, applauded harder.

In the control room of Studio C, no one was laughing.

A man in a loud sport-coat with a shock of curly black hair was standing in the wings, idly snapping his fingers and looking across the stage at Ed, but that was all.

The director signaled for Number Two Cam's medium shot on Ed for the umpty-umptyeth time, and there was Ed on the ON SCREEN monitors. He barely heard someone mutter, "Where the hell is he?" before Ed's rolling tones announced, also for the umpty-umptyeth time: "And now heeere's JOHNNY!"

Wild applause from the audience.

“Camera Three,” the director snapped.

“But there’s only that-”

“Camera Three, goddammit!”

Camera Three came up on the ON SCREEN monitor, showing every TV director’s private nightmare, a dimly empty stage ... and then someone, some stranger, was striding confidently into that empty space, just as if he had every right in the world to be there, filling it with unquestionable presence, charm, and authority. But, whoever he was, he was most definitely not Johnny Carson. Nor was it any of the other familiar faces TV and studio audiences had grown used to during Johnny’s absences. This man was taller than Johnny, and instead of the familiar silver hair, there was a luxuriant cap of almost Pan-like black curls. The stranger’s hair was so black that in places it seemed to glow almost blue, like Superman’s hair in the comic-books. The sport-coat he wore was not quite loud enough to put him in the Pleesda-Meetcha-Is-This-The-Missus? car salesman category, but Carson would not have touched it with a twelve-foot pole.

The audience applause continued, but it first seemed to grow slightly bewildered, and then clearly began to thin.

“What the fuck’s going on?” someone in the control room asked. The director simply watched, mesmerized.

Instead of the familiar swing of the invisible golf-club, punctuated by a drum-riff and high-spirited hoots of approval from the studio audience, this dark-haired, broad-shouldered, loud-jacketed, unknown gentleman began to move his hands up and down, eyes flicking rhythmically from his moving palms to a spot just above his head - he was miming a juggler with a lot of fragile items in the air, and doing it with the easy grace of the long-time showman. It was only something in his face, something as subtle as a shadow, that told you the objects were eggs or something, and would break if

dropped. It was, in fact, very like the way Johnny's eyes followed the invisible ball down the invisible fairway, registering one that had been righteously stroked ... unless, of course, he chose to vary the act, which he could and did do from time to time, and without even breathing hard.

He made a business of dropping the last egg, or whatever the fragile object was, and his eyes followed it to the floor with exaggerated dismay. Then, for a moment, he froze. Then he glanced toward Cam Three Left ... toward Doc and the orchestra, in other words.

After repeated viewings of the videotape, Dave Cheyney came to what seemed to him to be an irrefutable conclusion, although many of his colleagues - including his partner - questioned it.

"He was waiting for a sting," Cheyney said. "Look, you can see it on his face. It's as old as burlesque."

His partner, Pete Jacoby, said, "I thought burlesque was where the girl with the heroin habit took off her clothes while the guy with the heroin habit played the trumpet."

Cheyney gestured at him impatiently. "Think of the lady that used to play the piano in the silent movies, then. Or the one that used to do schmaltz on the organ during the radio soaps."

Jacoby looked at him, wide-eyed. "Mid they have those things when you were a kid, daddy?" he asked in a falsetto voice.

"Will you for once be serious?" Cheyney asked him. "Because this is a serious thing we got here, I think."

"What we got here is very simple. We got a nut."

"No," Cheyney said, and hit rewind on the VCR again with one hand while he lit a fresh cigarette with the other. "What we got is a seasoned performer who's mad as hell because the guy on the snare dropped his cue." He paused thoughtfully and added: "Christ,

Johnny does it all the time. And if the guy who was supposed to lay in the sting dropped his cue, I think he'd look the same way.

By then it didn't matter. The stranger who wasn't Johnny Carson had time to recover, to look at a flabbergasted Ed McMahon and say, "The moon must be full tonight, Ed - do you think - " And that was when the NBC security guards came out and grabbed him.

"Hey! What the fuck do you think you're - "

But by then they had dragged him away.

In the control room of Studio C, there was total silence. The audience monitors picked up the same silence. Camera Four was swung toward the audience, and showed a picture of one hundred and fifty stunned, silent faces. Camera Two, the one medium-close on Ed McMahon, showed a man who looked almost cosmically befuddled.

The director took a package of Winstons from his breast pocket, took one out, put it in his mouth, took it out again and reversed it so the filter was facing away from him, and abruptly bit the cigarette in two. He threw the filtered half in one direction and spat the unfiltered half in another.

"Get up a show from the library with Rickles," he said. "No Joan Rivers. And if I see Totie Fields, someone's going to get fired." Then he strode away, head down. He shoved a chair with such violence on his way out of the control room that it struck the wall, rebounded, nearly fractured the skull of a white-faced intern from USC, and fell on its side.

One of the PA's told the intern in a low voice, "Don't worry; that's just Fred's way of committing honorable seppuku."

The man who was not Johnny Carson was taken, bellowing loudly not about his lawyer but his team of lawyers, to the Burbank Police Station. In Burbank, as in Beverly Hills and Hollywood Heights, there

is a wing of the police station which is known simply as “special security functions.” This may cover many aspects of the sometimes crazed world of Tinsel-Town law enforcement. The cops don’t like it, the cops don’t respect it ... but they ride with it. You don’t shit where you eat. Rule One.

“Special security functions” might be the place to which a coke-snorting movie-star whose last picture grossed seventy million dollars might be conveyed; the place to which the battered wife of an extremely powerful film producer might be taken; it was the place to which the man with the dark crop of curls was taken.

The man who showed up in Johnny Carson’s place on the stage of Studio C on the afternoon of November 29th identified himself as Ed Paladin, speaking the name with the air of one who expects everyone who hears it to fall on his or her knees and, perhaps, genuflect. His California driver’s license, Blue Cross - Blue Shield card, Amex and Diners’ Club cards, also identified him as Edward Paladin.

His trip from Studio C ended, at least temporarily, in a room in the Burbank PD’s “special security” area. The room was panelled with tough plastic that almost did look like mahogany and furnished with a low, round couch and tasteful chairs. There was a cigarette box on the glass-topped coffee table filled with Dunhills, and the magazines included Fortune and Variety and Vogue and Billboard and GQ. The wall-to-wall carpet wasn’t really ankle-deep but looked it, and there was a CableView guide on top of the large-screen TV. There was a bar (now locked), and a very nice neo-Jackson Pollock painting on one of the walls. The walls, however, were of drilled cork, and the mirror above the bar was a little bit too large and a little bit too shiny to be anything but a piece of one-way glass.

The man who called himself Ed Paladin stuck his hands in his just-too-loud sport-coat pockets, looked around disgustedly, and said: “An interrogation room by any other name is still an interrogation room.”

Detective 1st Grade Richard Cheyney looked at him calmly for a moment. When he spoke, it was in the soft and polite voice that had earned him the only halfkidding nickname "Detective to the Stars." Part of the reason he spoke this way was because he genuinely liked and respected show people. Part of the reason was because he didn't trust them. Half the time they were lying they didn't know it.

"Could you tell us, please, Mr Paladin, how you got on the set of The Tonight Show, and where Johnny Carson is?"

"Who's Johnny Carson?"

Pete Jacoby - who wanted to be Henny Youngman when he grew up, Cheyney often thought - gave Cheyney a momentary dry look every bit as good as a Jack Benny deadpan. Then he looked back at Edward Paladin and said, "Johnny Carson's the guy who used to be Mr Ed. You know, the talking horse? I mean, a lot of people know about Mr Ed, the famous talking horse, but an awful lot of people don't know that he went to Geneva to have a species-change operation and when he came back he was-"

Cheyney often allowed Jacoby his routines (there was really no other word for them, and Cheyney remembered one occasion when Jacoby had gotten a man charged with beating his wife and infant son to death laughing so hard that tears of mirth rather than remorse were rolling down his cheeks as he signed the confession that was going to put the bastard in jail for the rest of his life), but he wasn't going to tonight. He didn't have to see the flame under his ass; he could feel it, and it was being turned up. Pete was maybe a little slow on the uptake about some things, and maybe that was why he wasn't going to make Detective 1st for another two or three years ... if he ever did.

Some ten years ago a really awful thing had happened in a little nothing town called Chowchilla. Two people (they had walked on two legs, anyway, if you could believe the newsfilm) had hijacked a busload of kids, buried them alive, and then had demanded a huge sum of money. Otherwise, they said, those kiddies could just stay

where they were and swap baseball trading cards until their air ran out. That one had ended happily, but it could have been a nightmare. And God knew Johnny Carson was no busload of schoolkids, but the case had the same kind of fruitcake appeal: here was that rare event about which both the Los Angeles Times-Mirror and The National Enquirer would hobnob on their front pages. What Pete didn't understand was that something extremely rare had happened to them: in the world of day-to-day police work, a world where almost everything came in shades of gray, they had suddenly been placed in a situation of stark and simple contrasts: produce within twenty-four hours, thirty-six at the outside, or watch the Feds come in ... and kiss your ass goodbye.

Things happened so rapidly that even later he wasn't completely sure, but he believed both of them had been going on the unspoken presumption, even then, that Carson had been kidnapped and this guy was part of it.

"We're going to do it by the numbers, Mr Paladin," Cheyney said, and although he was speaking to the man glaring up at him from one of the chairs (he had refused the sofa at once), his eyes flicked briefly to Pete. They had been partners for nearly twelve years, and a glance was all it took.

No more Comedy Store routines, Pete.

Message received.

"First comes the Miranda Warning," Cheyney said pleasantly. "I am required to inform you that you are in the custody of the Burbank City Police. Although not required to do so immediately, I'll add that a preliminary charge of trespassing-

"Trespassing!" An angry flush burst over Paladin's face.

"-on property both owned and leased by the National Broadcasting Company has been lodged against you. I am Detective 1st Grade

Richard Cheyney. This man with me is my partner, Detective 2nd Grade Peter Jacoby. We'd like to interview you."

"Fucking interrogate me is what you mean."

"I only have one question, as far as interrogation goes," Cheyney said. "Otherwise, I only want to interview you at this time. In other words, I have one question relevant to the charge which has been lodged; the rest deal with other matters."

"Well, what's the fucking question?"

"That wouldn't be going by the numbers," Jacoby said.

Cheyney said: "I am required to tell you that you have the right-

"To have my lawyer here, you bet," Paladin said. "And I just decided that before I answer a single fucking question, and that includes where I went to lunch today and what I had, he's going to be in here. Albert K. Dellums."

He spoke this name as if it should rock both detectives back on their heels, but Cheyney had never heard of it and could tell by Pete's expression that he hadn't either.

Whatever sort of crazy this Ed Paladin might turn out to be, he was no dullard. He saw the quick glances which passed between the two detectives and read them easily. You know him? Cheyney's eyes asked Jacoby's, and Jacoby's replied, Never heard of him in my life.

For the first time an expression of perplexity - it was not fear, not yet - crossed Mr Edward Paladin's face.

"Al Dellums," he said, raising his voice like some Americans overseas who seem to believe they can make the waiter understand if they only speak loudly enough and slowly enough. "Al Dellums of Dellums, Carthage, Stoneham, and Tayloe. I guess I shouldn't be all that surprised that you haven't heard of him. He's only one of the

most important, well-known lawyers in the country.” Paladin shot the left cuff of his just-slightly-too-loud sport-coat and glanced at his watch. “If you reach him at home, gentlemen, he’ll be pissed. If you have to call his club - and I think this is his club-night - he’s going to be pissed like a bear.”

Cheyney was not impressed by bluster. If you could sell it at a quarter a pound, he never would have had to turn his hand at another day’s work. But even a quick peck had been enough to show him that the watch Paladin was wearing was not just a Rolex but a Rolex Midnight Star. It might be an imitation, of course, but his gut told him it was genuine. Part of it was his clear impression that Paladin wasn’t trying to make an impression - he’d wanted to see what time it was, no more or less than that. And if the watch was the McCoy ... well, there were cabin-cruisers you could buy for less. What was a man who could afford a Rolex Midnight Star doing mixed up in something weird like this?

Now he was the one who must have been showing perplexity clear enough for Paladin to read it, because the man smiled - a humorless skinning-back of the lips from the capped teeth. “The air-conditioning in here’s pretty nice,” he said, crossing his legs and flicking the crease absently. “You guys want to enjoy it while you can. It’s pretty muggy walking a beat out in Watts, even this time of year.”

In a harsh and abrupt tone utterly unlike his bright pitter-patter Comedy Store voice, Jacoby said: “Shut your mouth, jag-off.”

Paladin jerked around and stared at him, eyes wide. And again Cheyney would have sworn it had been years since anyone had spoken to this man in that way. Years since anyone would have dared.

“What did you say?”

“I said shut your mouth when Detective Cheyney is talking to you. Give me your lawyer’s number. I’ll see that he is called. In the meantime, I think you need to take a few seconds to pull your head

out of your ass and look around and see exactly where you are and exactly how serious the trouble is that you are in. I think you need to reflect on the fact that, while only one charge has been lodged against you, you could be facing enough to put you in the slam well into the next century ... and you could be facing them before the sun comes up tomorrow morning.”

Jacoby smiled. It wasn't his howaya-folks-anyone-here-from-Duluth Comedy Store smile, either. Like Paladin's, it was a brief pull of the lips, no more.

“You're right - the air-conditioning in here isn't halfbad. Also, the TV works and for a wonder the people on it don't look like they're seasick. The coffee's good - perked, not instant. Now, if you want to make another two or three wisecracks, you can wait for your legal talent in a holding cell on the fifth floor. On Five, the only entertainment consists of kids crying for their mommies and winos puking on their sneakers. I don't know who you think you are and I don't care, because as far as I'm concerned, you're nobody. I never saw you before in my life, never heard of you before in my life, and if you push me enough I'll widen the crack in your ass for you.”

“That's enough,” Cheyney said quietly.

“I'll retool it so you could drive a Ryder van up there, Mister Paladin - you understand me? Can you grok that?”

Now Paladin's eyes were all but hanging from their sockets on stalks. His mouth was open. Then, without speaking, he removed his wallet from his coat pocket (some kind of lizard-skin, Cheyney thought, two months' salary ... maybe three). He found his lawyer's card (the home number was jotted on the back, Cheyney noted it was most definitely not part of the printed matter on the front) and handed it to Jacoby. His fingers now showed the first observable tremor.

“Pete?”

Jacoby looked at him and Cheyney saw it was no act; Paladin had actually succeeded in pissing his easy-going partner off. No mean feat.

“Make the call yourself.”

“Okay.” Jacoby left.

Cheyney looked at Paladin and was suddenly amazed to find himself feeling sorry for the man. Before he had looked perplexed; now he looked both stunned and frightened, like a man who wakes from a nightmare only to discover the nightmare is still going on.

“Watch closely,” Cheyney said after the door had closed, “and I’ll show you one of the mysteries of the West. West LA, that is.”

He moved the neo-Pollock and revealed not a safe but a toggle switch. He flicked it, then let the painting slide back into place.

“That’s one-way glass,” Cheyney said, cocking a thumb at the too-large mirror over the bar.

“I am not terribly surprised to hear that,” Paladin said, and Cheyney reflected that, while the man might have some of the shitty egocentric habits of the Veddy Rich and Well-Known in LA, he was also a near-superb actor: only a man as experienced as he was himself could have told how really close Paladin was to the ragged edge of tears.

But not of guilt, that was what was so puzzling, so goddamn-maddening.

Of perplexity.

He felt that absurd sense of sorrow again, absurd because it presupposed the man’s innocence: he did not want to be Edward Paladin’s nightmare, did not want to be the heavy in a Kafka novel

where suddenly nobody knows where they are, or why they are there.

“I can’t do anything about the glass,” Cheyney said. He came back and sat down across the coffee table from Paladin, “but I’ve just killed the sound. So it’s you talking to me and vice-versa.” He took a pack of Kents from his breast pocket, stuck one in the corner of his mouth, then offered the pack to Paladin. “Smoke?”

Paladin picked up the pack, looked it over, and smiled. “Even my old brand. I haven’t smoked one since night Yul Brynner died, Mr Cheyney. I don’t think ant to start again now.”

Cheyney put the pack back into his pocket. “Can we talk?” he asked.

Paladin rolled his eyes. “Oh my God, it’s Joan Raiford.”

“Who?”

“Joan Raiford. You know, “I took Elizabeth Taylor to Marine World and when she saw Shamu the Whale she asked me if it came with vegetables?” I repeat, Detective Cheyney: grow up. I have no reason in the world to believe that switch is anything but a dummy. My God, how innocent do you think I am?”

Joan Raiford? Is that what he really said?, Joan Raiford?

“What’s the matter?” Paladin asked pleasantly. He crossed his legs the other way. “Did you perhaps think you saw a clear path? Me breaking down, maybe saying I’d tell everything, everything, just don’t let ‘em fry me, copper?”

With all the force of personality he could muster, Cheyney said: “I believe things are very wrong here, Mr Paladin. You’ve got them wrong and I’ve got them wrong. When your lawyer gets here, maybe we can sort them out and maybe we can’t. Most likely we can’t. So listen to me, and for God’s sake use your brain. I gave you the Miranda Warning. You said you wanted your lawyer present. If there

was a tape turning, I've buggered my own case. Your lawyer would have to say just one word - enticement - and you'd walk free, whatever has happened to Carson. And I could go to work as a security guard in one of those flea-bitten little towns down by the border."

"You say that," Paladin said, "but I'm no lawyer.

But ... Convince me, his eyes said. Yeah, let's talk about this, lees see if we can't get together, because you're right, something is weird. So ... convince me.

"Is your mother alive?" Cheyney asked abruptly.

"What - yes, but what does that have to-

"You talk to me or I'm going to personally take two CHP motorcycle cops and the three of us are going to rape your mother tomorrow!" Cheyney screamed. "I'm personally going to take her up the ass! Then we're going to cut off her tits and leave them on the front lawn! So you better talk!"

Paladin's face was as white as milk: a white so white it is nearly blue.

"Now are you convinced?" Cheyney asked softly. "I'm not crazy. I'm not going to rape your mother. But with a statement like that on a reel of tape, you could say you were the guy on the grassy knoll in Dallas and the Burbank police wouldn't produce the tape. I want to talk to you, man. What's going on here?"

Paladin shook his head dully and said, "I don't know."

In the room behind the one-way glass, Jacoby joined Lieutenant McEachern, Ed McMahan (still looking stunned), and a cluster of technical people at a bank of high-tech equipment. The LAPD chief of police and the mayor were rumored to be racing each other to Burbank.

“He’s talking?” Jacoby asked.

“I think he’s going to,” McEachern said. His eyes had moved toward Jacoby once, quickly, when he came in. Now they were centered only on the window. The men seated on the other side, Cheyney smoking, relaxed, Paladin tense but trying to control it, looked slightly lowish through the one-way glass. The sound of their voices was clear and undistorted through the overhead speakers - a top-of-the-line Bose in each corner.

Without taking his eyes off the men, McEachern said: “You get his lawyer?”

Jacoby said: “The home number on the card belongs to a cleaning woman named Howlanda Moore.”

McEachern flicked him another fast glance.

“Black, from the sound, delta Mississippi at a guess. Kids yelling and fighting in the background. She didn’t quite say I’se gwine whup you if you don’t quit!, but it was close. She’s had the number three years. I re-dialed twice.

“Jesus,” McEachern, said. “Try the office number?”

“Yeah,” Jacoby replied. “Got a recording. You think ConTel’s a good buy, Loot?”

McEachern flicked his gray eyes in Jacoby’s direction again.

“The number on the front of the card is that of a fairly large stock brokerage,” Jacoby said quietly. “I looked under lawyers in the Yellow Pages. Found no Albert K. Dellums. Closest is an Albert Dillon, no middle initial. No law firm like the one on the card.”

“Jesus please us,” McEachern said, and then the door banged open and a little man with the face of a monkey barged in. The mayor had apparently won the race to Burbank.

“What’s going on here?” he said to McEachern.

“I don’t know,” McEachern said.

“All right,” Paladin said wearily. “Let’s talk about it. I feel, Detective Cheyney, like a man who had just spent two hours or so on some disorienting amusement park ride. Or like someone slipped some LSD into my drink. Since we’re not on the record, what was your one interrogatory? Let’s start with that.”

“All right,” Cheyney said. “How did you get into the broadcast complex, and how did you get into Studio C?”

“Those are two questions.”

“I apologize.”

Paladin smiled faintly.

“I got on the property and into the studio,” he said, “the same way I’ve been getting on the property and into the studio for over twenty years. My pass. Plus the fact that I know every security guard in the place. Shit, I’ve been there longer than most of them.”

“May I see that pass?” Cheyney asked. His voice was quiet, but a large pulse beat in his throat.

Paladin looked at him warily for a moment, then pulled out the lizard-skin wallet again. After a moment of rifling, he tossed a perfectly correct NBC Performer’s Pass onto the coffee table.

Correct, that was, in every way but one.

Cheyney crushed out his smoke, picked it up, and looked at it. The pass was laminated. In the corner was the NBC peacock, something only long-timers had on their cards. The face in the photo was the face of Edward Paladin. Height and weight were correct. No space for eye-color, hair-color, or age, of course; when you were dealing with ego. Walk softly, stranger, for here there be tygers.

The only problem with the pass was that it was salmon pink.

NBC Performer's Passes were bright red.

Cheyney had seen something else while Paladin was looking for his pass. "Could you put a one-dollar bill from your wallet on the coffee table there?" he asked softly.

"Why?"

"I'll show you in a moment," Cheyney said. "A five or a ten would do as well."

Paladin studied him, then opened his wallet again. He took back his pass, replaced it, and carefully took out a one-dollar bill. He turned it so it faced Cheyney. Cheyney took his own wallet (a scuffed old Lord Buxton with its seams unravelling; he should replace it but found it easier to think of than to do) from his jacket pocket, and removed a dollar bill of his own. He put it next to Paladin's, and then turned them both around so Paladin could see them right-side-up-so Paladin could study them.

Which Paladin did, silently, for almost a full minute. His face slowly flushed dark red ... and then the color slipped from it a little at a time. He'd probably meant to bellow **WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON HERE?** Cheyney thought later, but what came out was a breathless little gasp: -what-

"I don't know," Cheyney said.

On the right was Cheyney's one, gray-green, not brand-new by any means, but new enough so that it did not yet have that ruffled, limp, shopworn look of a bill which has changed hands many times. Big number 1's at the top corners, smaller 1's at the bottom corners. **FEDERAL RESERVE NOTE** in small caps between the top 1's and **THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA** in larger ones. The letter A in a seal to the left of Washington, along with the assurance that **THIS NOTE IS LEGAL TENDER, FOR ALL DEBTS, PUBLIC AND**

PRIVATE. It was a series 1985 bill, the signature that of James A. Baker III.

Paladin's one was not the same at all.

The 1's in the four corners were the same; THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA was the same; the assurance that the bill could be used to pay all public and private debts was the same.

But Paladin's one was a bright blue.

Instead of FEDERAL RESERVE NOTE it said CURRENCY OF GOVERNMENT.

Instead of the letter A was the letter F.

But most of all it was the picture of the man on the bill that drew Cheyney's attention, just as the picture of the man on Cheyney's bill drew Paladin's.

Cheyney's gray-green one showed George Washington.

Paladin's blue one showed James Madison.