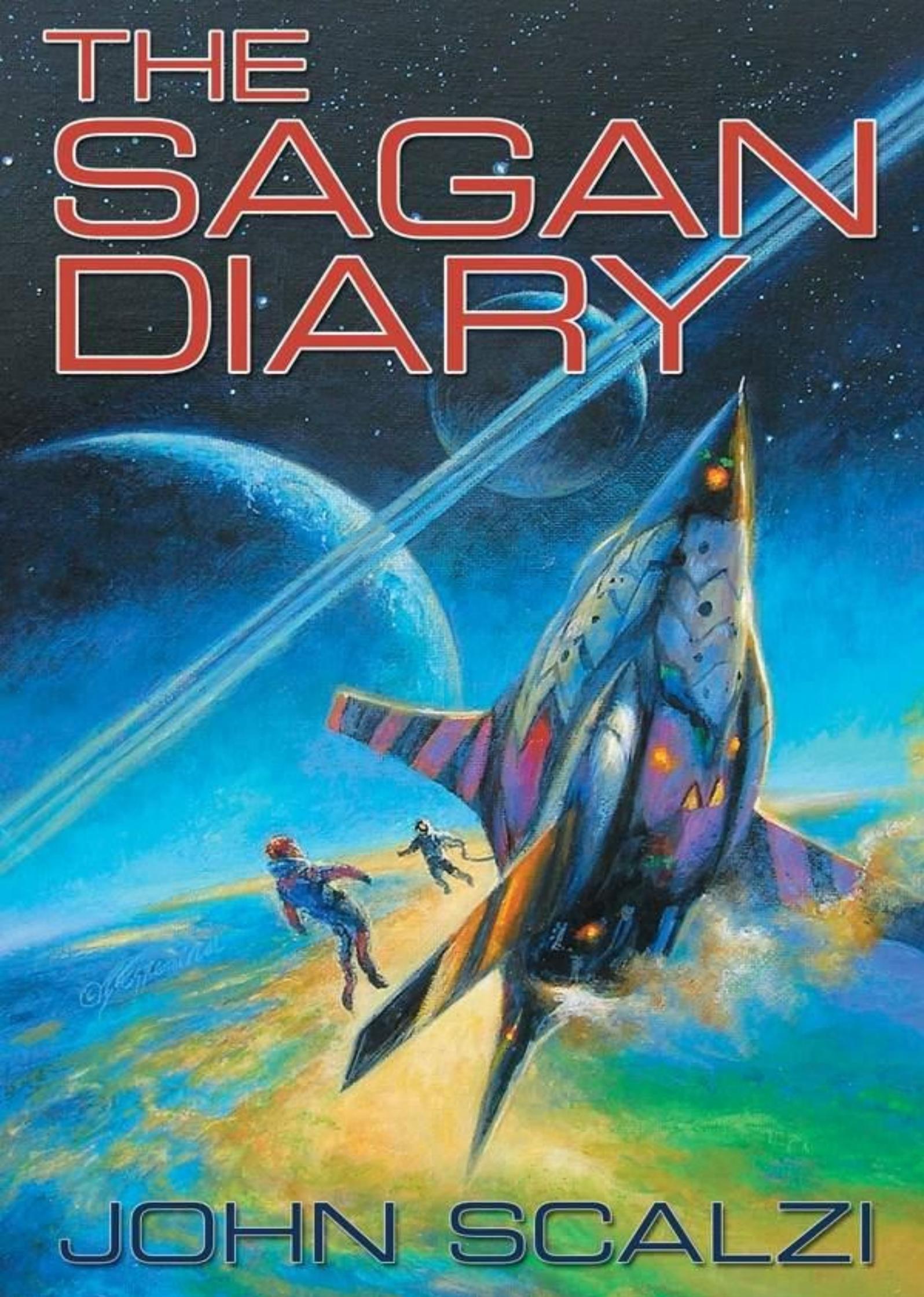
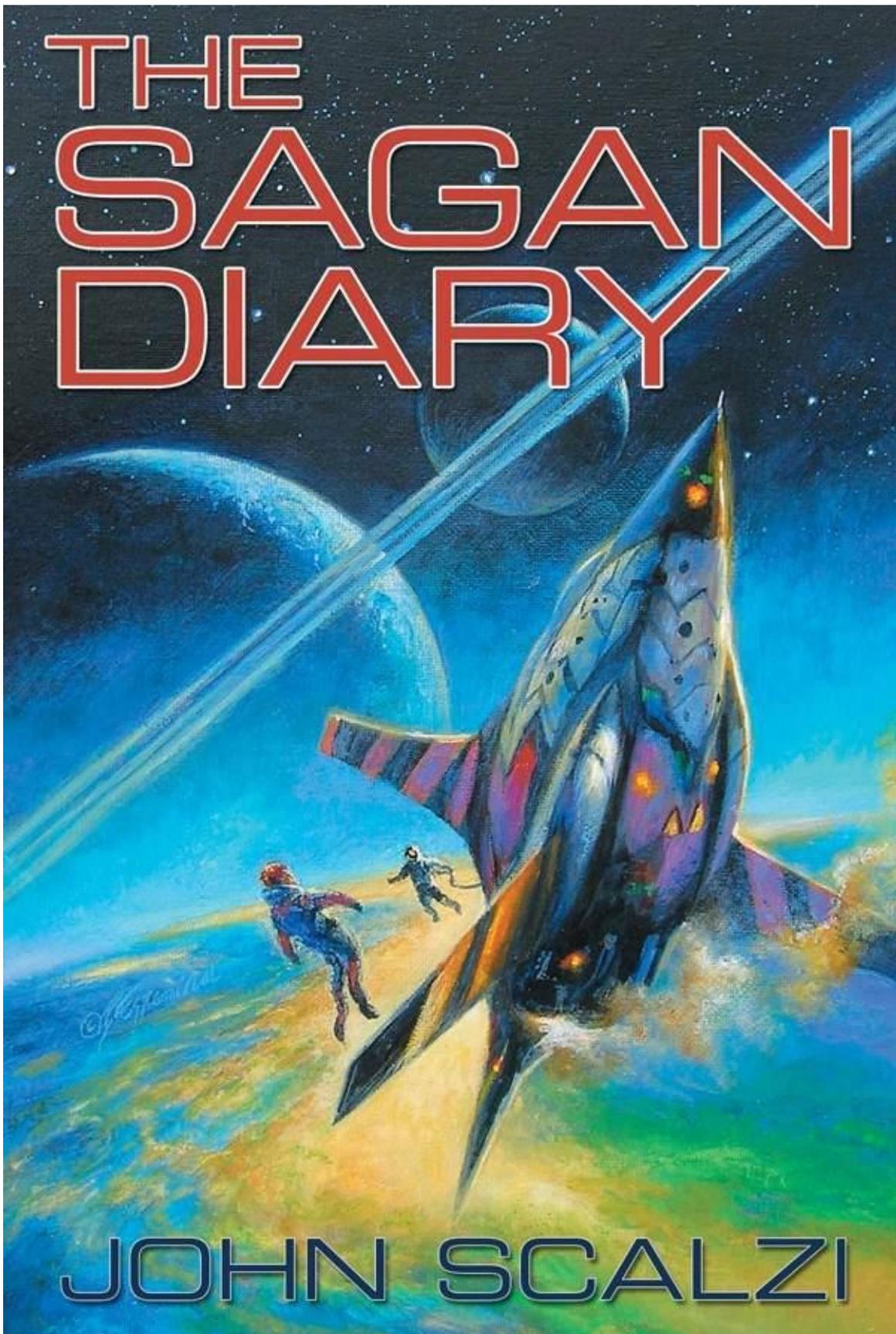


THE SAGAN DIARY



JOHN SCALZI

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John Scalzi

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For Kristine

COLONIAL DEFENSE FORCES
Internal Security Command
CDF Information Retrieval and Interpretation, 1st Platoon
Col. Michael Blauser, Cmdr

DATE:
241.12.12 SUSN
(see linked table for local equivalents)

FILE NUMBER:
ISC/IRI-003-4530/6(C)

FILE TITLE:
BrainPal Diary, CSF Lt. Jane Sagan (VI)
Phoenix Station, 241.12.07

FILE DESCRIPTION:
See attached note

AUTHOR:
CSF Lt. Jane Sagan (VI)

CLASSIFICATION:
Classified. Security Clearance Level 2 required.

REDACTION:
Lake-Williams algorithm for emotional feed processing.
Emotional feed available as separate file ISC/IRI-003-4530/6(c)(a)

RECORDED BY:
CSF Lt. Jane Sagan (VI)

FILED BY
Lt. Gretchen Schafer, Chief Analyst (SubSpec: Psych), CDF/IRI
CC: Col. Michael Blauser

**Preface Note to ISC/IRI-003-4530/6(c),
“The Sagan Diary”**

Col. Blausler:

As per your instruction in your memorandum of 341.10.07, we have begun processing the BrainPal memory stacks of Colonial Special Forces members who have left that service, whether by death or (rather more rarely) by discharge from service. In both cases BrainPal retrieval was initially via method previously established in our CDF BrainPal retrieval protocol, but per the new directive of 341.10.09 we abandoned physical retrieval of CSF BrainPals and instead began processing BrainPal memory transcriptions as provided by the Special Forces’ own IRI office.

Let me reiterate again here in this memorandum what I have expressed to you verbally, which is that processing CSF-provided transcriptions is a massively unsatisfactory solution. The first seven CSF memory stacks we processed were rich in information that we then placed into our analysis matrix, and which were beginning to yield intriguing results before we were ordered to remove the data from the matrix and delete all analyses featuring the data. Data from the CSF-provided transcriptions have been notably inferior, and while our own forensic scans can show no overt signs that the CSF is tampering with the data, it is my professional opinion that the transcription data have been redacted in some way. I have requested funds and clearance for a more thorough forensic scanning. That request has been in your queue for several days now; I would greatly appreciate a response to it in one way or another.

To give you a sample of the sort of “data” that we are limited to processing at the moment, I am submitting this file, which we have informally been calling “The Sagan Diary.” It is a transcription of a series of personal files from the BrainPal of former CSF Lieutenant Jane Sagan, who was discharged from service last week and (somewhat unusually) chose to settle on the established colony world of Huckleberry rather than on Monroe, the colony world set aside for retired Special Forces.

These diary pieces are taken from the last several days before Sagan transferred her consciousness from her Special Forces body to a standard human-template body. I don’t need to tell you that for IRI purposes, late-term BrainPal files are typically a gold mine of data, as service members reminisce on their time in service, in doing so refreshing critical data for analysis. Lt. Sagan in particular should be a potentially rich trove of data, as she was present at or participated in several key battles/engagements in the last few years, notably the 2nd Battle of Coral and the Anarkiq offensive; she being Special Forces, she undoubtedly participated in actions which are classified but which, (I would remind those in the Special Forces) we here at IRI are rated to know and view.

Instead, what we have to work with are data-poor bits in which Lt. Sagan thinks about what appears to be a romantic partner of some sort (Cursory investigation suggests a CDF Major, John Perry, who also mustered out of service on the same day and who was on the same shuttle to Huckleberry as Lt. Sagan, accompanied by an unrelated minor, Zoë Boutin. A number of data files for Perry and Boutin are marked

classified, which is why I note the investigation was “cursory.”). The diary files are of some anthropological interest, to be sure. It’s nice to know Lt. Sagan is in love; Major Perry seems like a lucky fellow. However, for *our* purposes these files are near useless. The only data of analytical note are Sagan’s notation of The Third Battle of Provence and the Special Forces retrieval of the *Baton Rouge*’s ill-fated Company D, about which of course we have a wealth of information, thanks to all the BrainPals that encounter sent our way, and a discussion of her relationship with prisoner of war named Cainen Suen Su, whose stay with and work for the CDF is classified but otherwise well-documented. Beyond this, the data are thin on the ground.

If I may be frank, Colonel, if the Special Forces are not going to allow us unimpeded access to the BrainPals of its fallen and retired soldiers, then I must question the utility of our processing the data from those BrainPals at all. We process thousands of BrainPals in a month, from regular CDF, and we barely have the staff to keep up with that; spinning our wheels processing bogus data from the Special Forces takes up time and processing power we don’t have from data which can be of actual use to us. Either we’re all working together here or we’re not.

Colonel, please read these “diaries” carefully; I’m sure you will come to the same conclusion we have down here in the processing labs. These diaries may be a window into Lt. Sagan’s soul, but what we really need is a window into Lt. Sagan’s history. I hope the rest of her life turns out the way she wants. Here in the labs, we need more data.

Sincerely,

Lt. Gretchen Schafer, Chief Analyst
(SubSpec: Psych), CDF/IRI



Words fail me.

There is a disconnect between my mind and my words, between what I think and what I say; not a disconnect in intent but in execution, between the flower of thought and the fruit of the mouth, between the initiation and the completion. I say what I mean but I do not say all that I mean.

I am not speaking to you now. These words do not pass my lips or pass out of my mind. I say them only to myself, forming them perfect and whole and interior, and leaving them on the shelf and closing the door behind me. Others may find these words in time but for now they face only toward me, whispering back my image with full description, golems who write the words of life on my forehead.

These words are my life. Representation of time and counterfeit of emotion, record of loss and celebration of gain. They are not my whole life; words fail me here as they fail anyone, entire worlds slipping through the spaces between words and letters as a life among stars is compressed into this small space. A short life to be sure; and yet long enough to be lost in translation.

But it is enough. Give us a few lines arranged just so and we see a face and more than a face. We see the life behind it; the terrors and ambivalence, the desire and aspiration—intention in a pattern, a person in a coincident assemblage of curves. This is that: A few lines to follow that in themselves mean little but build on themselves; a crystal lattice using absence to suggest presence, the implication of more pregnant in the gaps.

I wish I could show these words to you, you who know me only from outward expression. I wish I could fold these words, package them and present them with a flourish, a rare gift I made of myself to you. But these words do not bend—or rather they will not—or perhaps it is that I cannot find the strength to push them through the doors of my mouth and my mind. They are stubborn words and I fear what would happen if I let them go. They stay inside where you cannot come; they are meant for you, but not sent to you. Words fail me and I return the failure.

But these words exist. These words record, these words stand witness; these words speak, if only to an audience of one. These words are real and they are me, or who I believe I have been; incomplete but truthful, through a mirror darkly but reflecting all the same. I have no doubt that one day you will find these words and that you will find me inside them: a seed to plant in your mind, to become a vine to filigree

your memory of who I was and who I was to you. Words fail me but I will use them anyway. And in their failure and despite their failure I will live again and you will love me again, as you love me now.



You do not remember your birth but I remember mine. I remember the sudden shock of consciousness, awareness flinging itself at me and demanding to be embraced, and me not knowing enough to do anything other than embrace it back. I sometimes wonder if I had a choice, or if I could have known then what I know now, if I would have received its embrace or would have punched it in the throat, and sent it staggering away to pester someone else, to leave me alone in a newborn senescence from which I would not awake. But in this we are all alike, those who remember our birth and those who do not: None of us asked to be born.

I awoke in perfect awareness and to a voice in my head which spoke “You are Jane Sagan,” and with those words the electric pricking of context, describing the relationship of “you,” and of “are” and of “Jane” and of “Sagan”—putting together the words like pieces of spontaneously generated puzzle, and then clicking them into place so the puzzle made sense, even if we later discovered how much we really hated puzzles.

But the words were a lie. I wasn’t Jane Sagan at all; I was a changeling, a creature stolen to take the place of someone else. Someone I did not know nor would ever know, someone whose entire life had been set aside for the mere utility of her genes, everything she ever was reduced to a long chemical strand—adenine, thymine, cytosine and guanine—the abrupt tattoo of these four notes replacing a symphony of experience. She was dead but she would not be allowed to rest, because I was needed here.

I wonder if she was in this body before me, if before my consciousness was dropped in this head she waited sleeping, dreaming of her life before and dreaming of her life to come. I wonder if she’s dreaming still, housed in the interstices and the places in my mind I do not go. If she is here I wonder if she resents me for taking her place, or whether she is glad of the company, and enjoys the world through my eyes. I cannot tell.



But I dream of her. I dream she and I stand at her grave, standing apart with the headstone between us, close enough to touch although we never do. And she says “Talk to me” and I do, trying to explain a warrior’s life to a woman who never fought, ashamed that I have nothing to share with her but death, which she already knows more about than I.

But she smiles and I know that she doesn’t begrudge me that. I ask her to tell me about her and she does and speaks of home and children and of a life of connection, things I have not possessed in my own life but which she is happy to share. I wake up and her words dissipate, specifics evaporating and leaving behind a memory of comfort.

I dreamt of her before we met but I will not tell you that.



The name “Jane Sagan.” The name itself mere words: The first name bland and common, the second name for a scientist who hoped for a better universe than the one we live in. I wonder if he were alive what he would think of the woman who used it now, and the cosmos in which she finds herself; whether he could embrace one or both, see beauty in either, or only entropy and slight regard; a rebuke on his lips for this demon-haunted world.

If he demanded his name back it would not matter. The name was random first and last, provided from a list designed to make sure only one Special Forces soldier owned a name at a time. There would not be another Jane Sagan until I bled my life away in battle, the name floating up off my corpse like the spirit of a Buddhist, to be reincarnated on the Wheel of Suffering: returning but learning nothing, repeating the same lessons again and once more, its owners torn from life on different worlds but performing the same actions.

My name is random but I earned it in time. I became Jane Sagan not through the whim of convention but through breathing and moving and fighting and discovering love—each of these coring through the undifferentiated mass of my existence, paring away that which was not me, shedding what was not essential and sometimes what was, demanding I retrieve what I lost or accept its loss; the diminution of a self only recently defined and still defining itself.

I lost some of what I should have been and could have been for you. The parts of me that I lent others who then left me unwillingly or willingly, as they earned the names they had, even as those names lifted up from them, their purpose spent—those which they signified already fading against the violence of bone and metal.

They took part of me with them. I kept part of them with me, to become me in the fullness of time, some of who I could have been replaced by all that was left of them. If you looked you could have seen them in me: discrete objects breaking down, atoms that would not willingly cohere to the molecule, a colloidal suspension of memory and more than memory; part of me and held within me, bound by names they no longer claimed but becoming me, to be called by my name, “Jane Sagan.”

In the end I am who I am. I am what I have made myself and what has been made of me. Part of who I am is who you are too; I have given you me as well. I would take your name and hold it in me, and whisper my name in your ear.



I am not Death. I am killing; I am the verb, I am the action, I am the performance. I am the movement that cuts the spine; I am the mass which pulps the brain. I am the headsnap ejecting consciousness into the air.

I am not Death but she follows close behind, the noun, the pronouncement, the dénouement and the end. She looks for where I have gone next, and where she is needed, and sometimes where she is wanted; desired as the worlds for those whom I have visited narrow down to a point too heavy to be long borne.

I have wondered whether death collapses the point into nothingness or expands it into eternity, but I do not wonder long. Death follows me but I do not look back to her and I do not dwell on what she does. I am killing, I am the action, and I have a job to do.

I am connected to those I kill: a T-shaped joint where their lives intersect mine, the line of their lives terminating in the contact while mine continues on to the next orthogonal encounter, toward the promise and threat of becoming the terminating arm—of the moment when death no longer follows but stands pitilessly before me, expanding or contracting everything I ever was or will be for her own unknowable aims.

I am connected to those I kill and I long to know them. I long to look down their line to see what has led them to me; whether they chose this moment or had it chosen. If they had chosen it, whether it was love or honor or duty or something else that set their line toward mine; if they had it chosen why they chose to accept it, and whether they would have accepted the choice if they knew I was waiting for them, preparing their final moment, every possible future imploding toward the point of my knife, the grain of my bullet, the grip of my hand.

I am connected to those I kill and would look past them, down the line of their lives to the originating point, to the other T-joint where their lives intersect with another: to the creature who bore them—to the woman, the female, the she; the verb and action and performance to complement my own, she who is not birth but whose acts allowed it, as I am not death but whose acts permit it.

When she first held this child who would become what I would kill, did she look for me as I look for her? Did she see me across the line of a life yet unlived? I want to know how I would appear to her: the anti-mother to kill whom she had created, or perhaps a crossbeam with her, to support the entirety of a life, without whom that life

would be useless.

I do not flatter myself to suggest she would approve of what I represent, of what I would do, will do, have done, to the life she created and cherished. But I wonder if she would understand I am connected to her, through the one she bore. I stand facing her, staring across the chasm of time forded by this life between us.



The first thing I killed was unspeakable. Its species had a name for itself spoken like a hammer thumping onto meat; we could not have spoken it if we had tried.

We did not try. We called them for their language, for the percussive explosions which passed for their speech and filled the air when we fought them, like the beating of heavy skins. They were talking drums with weapons.

They were Thumpers and they were our enemy, our nemesis for the crime of landing on a world we said we owned and begging to differ with us on the matter. We sent emissaries to negotiate with them: 16th Brigade, Company D on the ship *Baton Rouge*. The negotiations did not go well. The *Baton Rouge* was made to fall into the atmosphere in a sparkling show, as metal and men tore into the sky and the sky tore back, shearing them down in layers that grew into conical sections of ash expanding behind their shrinking mass, ignored by the members of Company D on the skin of the world, who could not look up from their battle to see their friends' farewell.

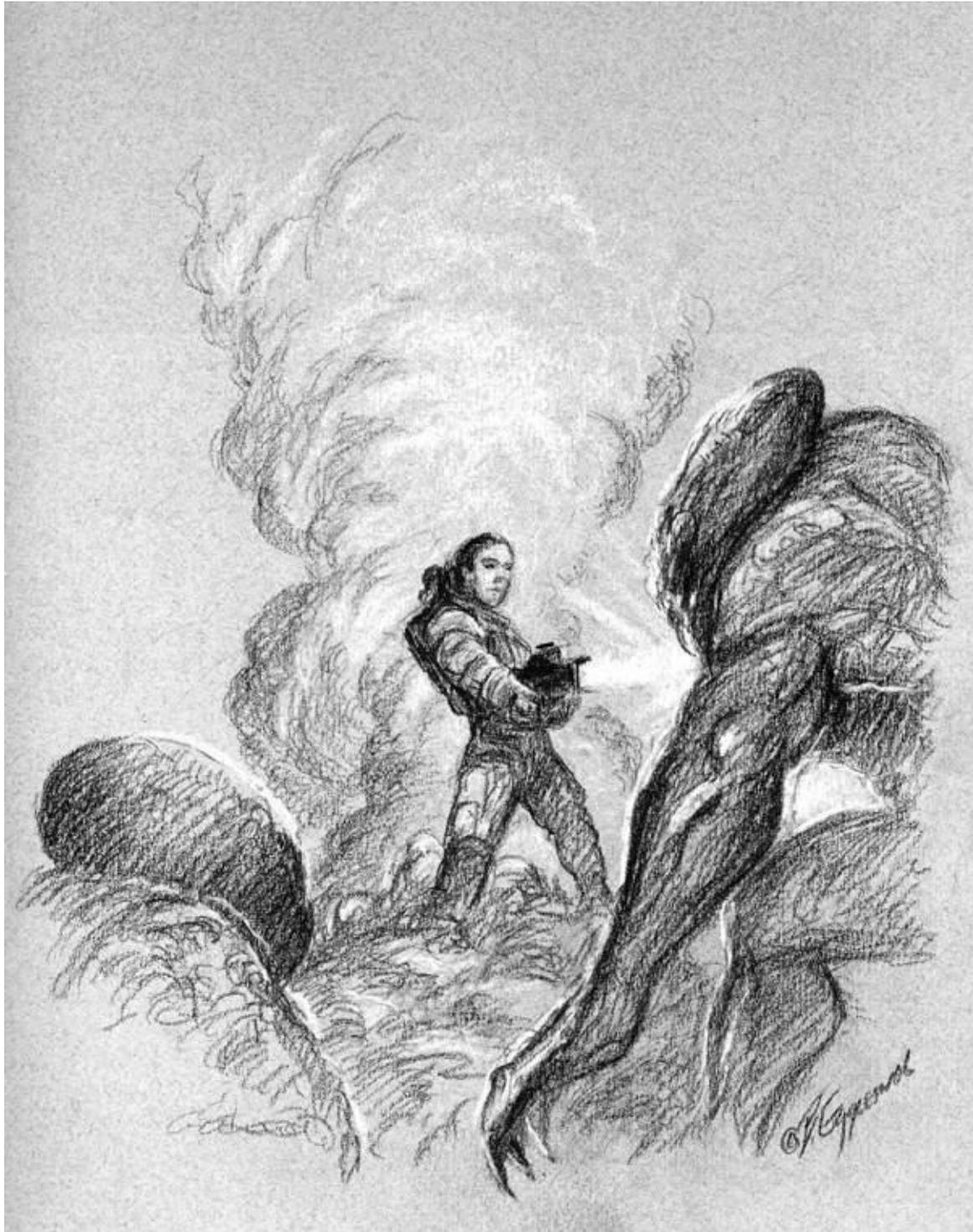
We felt Company D deserved its fate, the negotiations a lie and stupidly done at that; ham-handed arrogance that had gotten them stuck, and pleading for our help. We called them the "The Idiots"; we would have left them to die—an object lesson in incompetence—but we were not allowed a vote. We found ourselves on a world we should not have been on, to retrieve those who should not have needed retrieval, to kill those whose lives we should have not been made to take.

We would not complain about it. This was what we were bred to do. But it did not change the fact; my first mission was fighting someone else's battle, making it my own by necessity. There was not much of Company D to retrieve; just enough for someone above us to declare victory despite the dead we left behind.

I will not detail the battle. I am here and that is enough.

The first thing I killed danced when I killed it, the force of the bullet spreading across its surface even as the slug traveled through its mass. It danced and spun and twisted and fell, shedding blood in a spiraling helix, angular momentum and gravity bartering for its movement and gravity getting the better end of the deal. It fell and lay sodden and I moved on to the next, already the verb and the action, already movement and purpose. My body moved.

My mind stayed, and in quiet moments in the days that followed returned to the dance, to the spin and slide and the sound of mortality the thing thumped out as it fell. I returned to that sound and imagined what it said: a shout of pain, a brief tattoo of regrets, the name of a lover or a brother or perhaps a mother; a final call backward, a farewell to the one who had given it life or those who filled the life with joy, not to be seen again in the time that remained.



I have the moment recorded. If I chose I could open that moment again, find a translation and know for certain. I choose not to know. I had killed this thing. It deserved to have its final words fly past me, to find those for whom they were meant.



I think on what I owe those I kill. Clearly I do not owe them their lives, nor do I owe them individual memory; I have killed far too many to mark each with remembrance. My time with nearly all is too short to note much other than that they are dead and I am alive, even if it was a near thing on both counts.

I do not owe them guilt or regret. I have done what I have done. I know what I

have done well and what I have done poorly, and for whatever I might be judged, I know no one knows better than I for what things I should be called into account. I know my own measure and will not burden those whom I have killed. If they have souls let them go to where they are bound, without my pleas of forgiveness to chain them to me, and to this world.

What I owe those I kill is understanding. I owe them the courtesy of recognition; acknowledgement that they were something other than just another thing I had to kill on the way to other things I had to kill. I cannot know every creature I have killed; I cannot spare the memory for each of them entire. But I will not pretend they were not my equal. Their lives were their own, and in their way they loved and feared and wondered and hoped. They did not expect me to be the end of all of that.

I will not pretend that all there was to them was the flesh I wounded, the bones I shattered, the blood I made to spill. I will not pretend that it does not matter to them that their lives are at an end. I grieve the loss of those I love and I will not pretend that those I kill are not missed, were not loved, are not grieved.

Some would not choose to do this and I do not fault them. Each of us does what we can to accept ourselves and what we do. But to see those I kill as less than myself lessens myself. I do not have enough of myself to lose that way.

After my first mission I learned of the Thumpers: their culture and ways and world. I learned of their gods and demons, their myths and fables and stories, learned of their art and song and the dances they danced without a bullet to guide them. I became an expert on the creatures I had killed, and when I did the one I made to dance and die took its leave of me.

I learned of the next people I would kill before I killed them, as I have done every time since. It became my job, along with killing, to learn what I could about those we fought and killed, the better to fight them, and the better to kill them—my need to know and understand and recognize those whose lives I end turned to practical use.

It is good to be useful for more than just killing. It is better to know that in my way I honor those I kill, as I would hope they would honor me.



Let me speak your name. Let me feel the movement of my tongue within my mouth, of lips stretched and jaw pushed slightly forward, of the breath from my lungs shaped and formed into noise and phonemes and syllables and words; into proper nouns signifying you. Two names with marvelous utility: to recall you from memory, to bid for your attention, to speak your identity into the air and in doing so affirm you in your tangible skin, with vibration and waves and exhalation, with the intimacy of sound spoken aloud; with the pleasure that comes from the physical act of declaring you.

Let me speak your name and in speaking let me sing, a secret melody whose notes rise like birds and fall into your ears, to turn you toward me, with a smile that anticipates your own hidden song that choruses with my name. Let me speak your name so I may hear my name spoken to me from you.

You cannot imagine the sensuousness of speech, you who have spoken all your life, you who have mouthed words like bread, a staff of life common on your tongue. You cannot appreciate the luxury speech represents to those of us who have no time for it, we who speed our words, transmitting mind to mind without mediation, not even the briefest pause between mind and mouth to temper what we say or to soften sharp edges.

To speak without words is to speak fast and cheap, to not have to choose words either wisely or poorly but to send them all without discrimination—all content and no style, function over form, everything being what is said and nothing being how it is said. I talk to those I know, one mind to another, efficient and sure. We say what we need to say and then move on. Words do not mean to us what they mean to you and yours. We have other ways to share our emotions and our care and regard. Words do not carry that freight for us; they are light and fast and hollow. Sparrows with fragile bones.

Your words are not like this. Your words are filled, their hollows crammed with meaning, things unsaid nested within, jammed with implication. It is a wonder they do not drop to the floor the moment they leave your mouth. I marvel at what you say and even more how you say it, how your words shift their shape and contain their intent until they are inside me and unpack their contents, to leave me in awe of their economy. So much said with so little.

I cannot do this myself. We speak the same language but build our words differently. Mine are simple and deliberate, yours effortlessly complex. You are not aware of the miracles you make of your words. I cannot do this myself; I do not even try, save when I am speaking your name. With those few words I am your equal, filling the words with complexity and light. Stained glass shining from the inside.

You are so used to what you do with your words that you do not notice the effort I put into mine. I don't mind. Take for granted that your name flows from my lips. It is a gift to me that you expect it there. Let me speak your name and fulfill your expectation.



I was not always in love with the spoken word. Those of you born to speech do not know how you tax the patience of those of us born to thought—how our first thought in hearing one of you speak is to wonder at the extent of your damage, to be curious at what sort of trauma could result in such an obvious and slow moving thing such as stands before us. We listen with politeness and internal pity: You cannot be faulted for the deficiencies to which you are born, and we would not choose to point out that they exist.

We listen and wait for our turn to speak, and then speak as slowly as you have been afflicted to do so. We try to get done with it as quickly as possible, because we know how much your sort wish to speak again, straining to pass along information along with asides and anecdotes and digressions and irrelevancies, leaving us to filter what you mean from what you say (We are no less verbose but at least we are quicker, when we talk among ourselves through our thoughts). And when you are done, again we speak, briefly and with economy and to the point, speaking what need be said and ignoring that which does not. For our courtesy we are labeled arrogant and curt. It annoys us.

In time I came to appreciate the spoken word, with its implications and intimations and allusions, with its potential of saying more than mere words, its palette of meaning richer and wider than I first grasped. And with that appreciation came exasperation at those gifted with speaking, who could say so much with what they said and how they said it, and chose to say nothing of consequence; who opened their mouth and allowed banality to fall out and thud to the ground; who were unaware that they could do with their words with the barest minimum of effort what I with all my desire could accomplish only haltingly, if at all. It was like being starved and watching those at a feast ignore the best dishes to fill up on bread.

If I could have I would have pushed their faces into their words, to make them see the parody they made of them. But they would have only have been confused and I would only have been more exasperated. There is a saying along the lines of not trying to teach a pig to sing because it wastes your time and annoys the pig. I want you to know how many times I have stood in pig-filled rooms, and longed to annoy.

I did not. I sat and listened to them talk instead, and was amazed to discover more in their words: subtext and overtones, emotional resonances that even those speaking did not know were there, the rhythm and pattern and tone of their speech opening them wide to be read. Books whose messages are not in the text but the footnotes. A library of the human experience.

It took time to translate the language, and I do not imagine I have mastered it. It

will never be my native tongue. But I hear it well enough that in hearing it I see those who speak it anew, and once again I have pity for those who speak aloud. Not because they speak so slowly but because so many of them are deaf to all that they say. If they could hear what I hear they would be amazed.



My native tongue is not a tongue but the flash of neurons decoded and transmitted by machine instead of muscle. But it is my tongue nonetheless: my tongue, my map, my window, my apprehension of the world to myself. I am leaving it behind to be with you. I am an immigrant whose first language will not be simply unused but amputated, the parts of me I used to speak it left behind, no part of who I will be to speak it, even in the silence of my mind.

You do not know how this worries me. It is not that I am to be made to speak aloud a language I love and long to hear but which I speak imperfectly. In time I will speak it well enough. I worry that who I am is in how I know to speak; that I am shaped by my words and how I say them, and that in my deprivation, that which is me will diminish and become something other than what I am and what I am to you.

I am doing something new. I am holding myself in my mind—who I have been and who I am—wordless and silent; no description to resolve into a lexicon spoken or sent, a view of myself immune to travel or translation or amputation. When I move to your world my thoughts will be filled with myself; the measure of my character and deficiencies and desires held mute and in being mute held whole, so that when I am sent to you, I will be who I have been and who I am, so I can be who I will become with you.

I know you would not begrudge me this, that you would want me to think on myself if by doing so I believed that it would keep me myself. But you should know that as I hold myself in my thoughts, to will myself into being myself once more, the version of me I hold to myself holds you in her thoughts. She holds you wordlessly: who you have been and who you are, and who you will become with her. She holds you in her without words or speech and longs to speak your name.