

SYSTEM MANAGEMENT SECOND EDITION

Everywhere in the fabled city, calves and knees and magnificent expanses of taut thighs were on display. This brought out the dreamy romantic in Junior, and more than ever he yearned desperately for the perfect woman, the ideal lover, the matching half of his incomplete heart. While Jacob had shuffled, Agnes had taken little Barty from his bassinet into her arms. She was surprised and discomfited to discover that the baby was to have his fortune told first. The white Buick glided through the tides of fog like a ghost ship plying a ghost sea. Glancing at her in the rearview mirror, the driver said, "Pretty exhilarating, huh? Your first big show?" Many nights, his sleep wasn't half as restful as he would have wished, for he often dreamed of walking in a wasteland. Sometimes, desert salt flats stretched in all directions, with here and there a monument of weather-gnarled rock, all baking under a merciless sun. Sometimes, the salt was snow, and the monuments of rock were ridges of ice, revealed in the hard glare of a cold sun. Regardless of the landscape, he walked slowly, though he had the desire and the energy to proceed faster. His frustration built until it was so intolerable that he woke, kicking in the tangled sheets, restless and edgy. On Sunday, New Year's Eve, Edom and Jacob came for dinner. Following dessert, when Barty went to his room to continue reading Starman Jones, which he had begun late that afternoon, Agnes told her brothers the truth about their nephew's eyes. The apartment had been furnished with only two padded folding chairs and a bare mattress in the living room. The mattress was on the floor, without benefit of a bed frame or box springs. He hit Celestina with the big question, the huge question, just as she paused in her babbling to suck in a deep breath, the better to spout even more nonsense, whereupon this panicky inhalation caught in her breast, caught so stubbornly that she was certain she would need the attention of paramedics to start breathing again, but then Wally popped open the box, revealing a lovely engagement ring, the sight of which made the trapped breath explode from her, and then she was breathing fine, although snuffling and crying and just generally a mess. "I love you, Wally." The second ring was followed by a click, and then a familiar droning voice said, "Hello. I'm Thomas Vanadium." After mentally reviewing what he must say, after working up a nervous edge, he dialed the SFPD emergency number. which was tied a gift tag bearing a hand-printed message: With our compliments. Thanks for your business. Paul couldn't remember when he began to love her. Not at first sight. But before she contracted polio. Love came gradually, and by the time it flowered, its roots were deep. "Forget Barty's tree for a second and imagine that all these many worlds are like stacked slices of Swiss cheese. Through some holes, you can see only the next slice. Through others, you see through two or three or five slices before holes stop overlapping. There are little holes between stacked worlds, too, but they're constantly shifting, changing, second by second. And I can't see them, really, but I have an uncanny feel for them. Watch closely." Recalling how the title of the exhibition had resonated with him when first he'd seen the gallery, brochure, Junior felt certain now that a tape-recorded early draft of this sermon was the kinky "music" that accompanied his evening of passion with Seraphim. He couldn't remember one word of it, let alone any element that would have deeply moved a national radio audience, but this didn't mean that he was shallow or incapable of being touched by philosophical speculations. He'd been so distracted by the erotic perfection of Seraphim's young body and so busy jumping her that he wouldn't have remembered a word, either, if Zedd himself had been sitting on the bed, discussing the human condition with his customary brilliance. The upper shelf of the closet held boxes and two inexpensive suitcases: pressboard laminated with green vinyl. He took down the suitcases and put them on the bed. Short and slender, Dr. Chan was as self-effacing as a Buddhist monk, as confident and as gracious as a mandarin emperor. His manner was serene, and his effect was tranquility. And although Simon would have denied it, would even have joked that a conscience was a liability for an attorney, he possessed a moral compass. When he traveled too far along the wrong trail, that magnetized needle in his soul led him back from the land of the lost. The traffic light turned green. Now onward home. Rolex recovered and bright upon his wrist, Junior Cain drove his Mercedes with a restraint that required more self-control than he had realized he could tap, even with the guidance of Zedd. In the sermon that brought him a moment of fame that he'd found more uncomfortable than not, Daddy had used the life of Bartholomew to illustrate his point that every day in every life is of the most profound importance. Bartholomew is arguably the most obscure of the twelve disciples. Some would say Lebbeaus is less known, some might even point to Thomas the doubter. But Bartholomew certainly casts a shadow far shorter than those of Peter, Matthew, James, John, and Philip. Daddy's purpose in proclaiming Bartholomew the most obscure of the twelve was then to imagine in vivid detail how that apostle's actions, seemingly of little consequence at the time, had resonated down through history, through hundreds of millions of lives-and then to assert that the life of each chambermaid listening to this sermon, the life of each car mechanic, each teacher, each truck driver, each waitress, each doctor, each janitor, was as important as the resonant life of Bartholomew, although each dwelt beyond the lamp of fame and labored without the applause of multitudes. Seraphim's child had been alive as long as Naomi had been dead, almost fifteen months. In fifteen months, Junior should have located the little bastard and eliminated him. the social worker and her family. Husband, wife, daughter, son. The little girl smiled shyly through braces. The boy was impish. The words of Robert Louis Stevenson, well read, poured another time and place into the room as smoothly as lemonade pouring from pitcher into glass. "So entertaining, I felt I should have paid for those seats. When the third machine starts whizzing coins at him, he bolts like a kid running a graveyard at midnight on a dare." Nolly laughed, remembering. "He's crafty, you say. Can you use him?" "But before you leave St. Mary's," the physician said, "I'd like a few mutes of your time. It's very important to me. Personally." "If her blood pressure stabilizes through the night," Dr. Daines continued, "I want her to undergo a cesarean at seven in the morning. The danger of eclampsia passes entirely after birth. I'd like to refer Phimie to Dr. Aaron Kaltenbach. He's a superb

obstetrician." "I could have been killed," Junior Cain repeated, suddenly so horrorstruck by this realization that an iciness welled in his gut, and for a while he wasn't able to feel his extremities.. "I'm not a burglar, Mr. Cain. No client has enough money to make me risk prison. Besides, even if you could steal their files, you would probably discover that the babies' identities are coded, and without the code, you'd still be nowhere." Speaking of bosoms, everywhere in the loft were braless girls in sweaters and miniskirts, braless girls in T-shirts and miniskirts, braless girls in silk-lined rawhide vests and jeans, braless girls in tie-dyed sash tops, with bared midriffs, and calypso pants. Lots of guys moved through the crowd, too, but Junior barely noticed them.. "In addition to that policy," said Vinnie, "there's another. . . --he filled his lungs, hesitated, then exhaled the air and the sum with a tremor---'seven hundred fifty thousand. Three-quarters of a million dollars." What good was she to anybody, what good could she ever hope to be, if she couldn't even save her little sister?. The gunshot was louder--and the pain initially less--than he expected. Timpani-boom, timpani-boom, the explosion echoed back and forth through the high-ceilinged apartment.. "Yes?" the silver-haired eminence replied, wrinkling his nose as though he suspected that this customer would ask if the display pedestal was included in the price.. Surprisingly, dolls. Quite a few dolls. Apparently the bastard boy was effeminate, a quality he sure as hell hadn't inherited from his father.. Initially, the Pacific could not be seen beyond an opaque lens of fog, Yet later, when the mist retreated, the sea itself became a portent of sightlessness: Spread flat and colorless in the morning light, the glassy water reminded her of the depthless eyes of the blind, of that terrible sad vacancy where vision is denied.. Junior liked women who drank a lot. They were usually amorous or at least unresistant.. "I already told you--anything in your heart is as easy to read as the open page of a book." With his empty sockets draped by unsupported lids, Barty rode home wearing padded eye patches under sunglasses, his cane propped against the seat at his side, as though he were costumed for a role in a play filled with a Dickensian amount of childhood suffering.. From time to time, customers had crossed the cocktail lounge to drop folding money into a fishbowl atop the piano, tips for the musician. A few had requested favorite -tunes.. "That would be John George Haigh," Agnes said, checking Barty's diaper before nestling him tenderly in the crook of her arm.. Junior was paying his dinner check and calculating the tip when the pianist launched into "Someone to Watch over Me." Although he'd expected it all evening, he twitched when he recognized the tune.. On that busy night, with Vanadium's corpse in the Studebaker and Victoria's cadaver awaiting a fiery disposal at her house, Junior was too distracted to recognize the pertinence of the message. Now it tormented him from a dark nook in his subconscious.. Life was too short to waste it working if you had the means to afford lifelong leisure.. As one of the two paramedics hurried to the ambulance van and scrambled into the driver's seat, Agnes suffered another contraction so severe that for a tremulous moment, at the peak of the agony, she almost lost consciousness.. "I was raised to understand it," said Celestina, and when she looked across the room, she saw that her words had moved her mother.. Although he was a stranger, arriving unannounced, and something of an eccentric by anyone's definition, Paul was received by Grace and Harrison White with warmth and fellowship. At their doorstep, raising his voice to compete with the wailing weather, he hurriedly blurted out his mission, as if they might reel back from his wild windblown presence if he didn't talk quickly enough: "I've walked here from Bright Beach, California, to tell you about an exceptional woman whose life will echo through the lives of countless others long after she's gone. Her husband died the night their son was born, but not before naming the boy Bartholomew, because he'd been so impressed by 'This Momentous Day. And now the boy is blind, and I hope you'll be able and willing to give some comfort to his mother.'" The Whites failed to reel backward, didn't even flinch from his unfortunately explosive statement of purpose. Instead, they invited him into their home, later invited him to dinner, and later still asked him to stay the night in their guest room.. With the successful consumption of the burger and with the addition of the third Sklent to his collection, Junior felt more upbeat than he'd been in quite a while. Contributing to his better mood was the fact that he hadn't heard the phantom singer in longer than three months, since the library in July.. On a shelf above one of the clothes rods stood a single piece of Mark Cross luggage, an elegant and expensive two-suit. The rest of the high shelf was empty--enough space for as many as three more bags.. As quick as a snake strikes, Vanadium was much closer to the bed than he had been when he tossed the coin, at Junior's side now, leaning over the railing. "Naomi was six weeks pregnant." Yet when he put her down in the upstairs hall, she cried out for her husband--"Harry!" --and tried to plunge once more into the narrow stairwell.. With a tenderness that surprises and moves Celestina, the tall nurse closes the dead girl's eyes. She opens a fresh, clean sheet and places it over the body, from the feet up, covering the precious face last of all.. And as he grew, the boy seemed content with his own company and that of his mother and his uncles. Yet Agnes worried that no children his age lived in their neighborhood. She thought he would be happier if he had a playmate or two.. Nothing in life was risk free, so he hesitated only a moment: at the foot of the porch steps before climbing them and knocking on the door.. A door slammed, and after the briefest of internal debates about whether to ize or act, Junior left Ichabod straddling the threshold. He must get to Celestina before she reached a telephone, and then he could come back and finish moving the body.. Permissions Department, Harcourt, Inc., 6277 Sea Harbor Drive, Orlando, Florida 32887-6777. www.harcourt.com "Darkrose and Diamond" first appeared in The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction.. The apartment above Elena's Fashions could be reached by a set of exterior stairs at the back of the building. The climb had never before taxed Agnes in the least, but now it took away her breath and left her legs trembling by the time she reached the top landing.. Part of him knew this sound was his heartbeat, not the footfalls of an otherworldly pursuer, but that part of him wasn't dominant at the moment. He moved faster, not exactly running, but hurrying like a man late for an appointment.. The girl sucked in deep lungfuls of the weary clouds. "Better hold tight, Mommy, I'm gonna float." One of the hardest things that she had ever done was to leave him then, alone in his room, with the hateful something still quietly growing in his eye. She wanted to move the

armchair close to his bed and watch over him throughout the night..Instead, he was given a small color brochure featuring samples of the artist's work. It also contained the same photograph of her smiling face that graced the window..He gently drew the covers over his wife's ruined body, to her thin shoulders, but arranged her right arm on top of the blankets. He straightened and smoothed the folded-back flap of the top sheet.."You may be eating yourself into an early grave, Vinnie, but poor Jacob has murdered his own soul, and that's infinitely worse."..He had nothing against Negroes. He didn't wish them ill. He wasn't prejudiced. Live and let live. He believed that as long as they stayed with their own kind and abided by the rules of a polite society, like everyone else, they had a right to live in peace..But when the lore-books of a wizard came into a warlord's hands he was likely to treat them with caution, locking them away to keep them harmless or giving them to a wizard in his hire to do with as he wished. In the margins of the spells and word lists and in the endpapers of these books of lore a wizard or his prentice might record a plague, a famine, a raid, a change of masters, along with the spells worked in such events and their success or unsuccess. Such random records reveal a clear moment here and there, though all between those moments is darkness. They are like glimpses of a lighted ship far out at sea, in darkness, in the rain..As a matter of principle, Junior considered firing the slit-mouthed troll on the spot, but then Magusson said, "You shouldn't be bothered any further by Detective Vanadium."..At the bed, he spread the garment across his pillow. Lying down, he pressed his face into the sweater. The sweet subtle scent of Naomi was as effective as a lullaby, and soon he dozed off..With the salt and pepper shakers, Tom walked them through the why-I'm-not-sad-about-my-face explanation that he'd given to Angel ten days previously..Ordinarily, when Celestina was troubled, her art was a perfect sanctuary from all woes. When she was planning, composing, and rendering, time had no meaning for her, and life had no sting..Instead of engaging in the confrontation for which he had been pressing ever since his first visit, Vanadium surprised Junior by breaking eye contact, turning from the bed, and crossing the room to the door.."Quick, very quick," he warned, helping Grace through the fire framed window and onto the roof of the porch..Once, she left the TV and came to Tom, where he sat talking with Paul. "It's like Gunsmoke and The Monkees are next to each other on the TV, both at the same time. But the Monkees, they can't see the cowboys-and the cowboys, they can't see the Monkees."..As Joey opened the driver's door and got in behind the steering wheel, he said, "Okay?".."Thank you, Dr. Lipscomb. I'll keep track of what you're losing every month, and someday I'll pay it back to you."..FOR AMERICANS OF Chinese descent-and San Francisco has a large Chinese population-1965 was the Year of the Snake. For Junior Cain, it was the Year of the Gun, though it didn't start out that way..Weird, this kid. Making him uneasy. All in white, with her incomprehensible yammering about talking books and talking dogs and her mother driving pies, and working on a damn strange drawing for a little girl..No elevator. He didn't have to worry that with no more warning than a ding, doors might slide open, admitting witnesses into the hall..The musician's eyes met Junior's for an instant, widening with surprise. Obviously he knew that Gammoner was a lie. So he must be aware of Junior's real identity..Although she had never seen snow other than in pictures and on film, this deep-settled silence seemed to speak of failing flakes, of white muffling mantles, and she wouldn't have been in the least surprised if, stepping outside, she had found herself in a glorious winter landscape, cold and crystalline, here on the always-snowless hills and shores of the California Pacific..He kept the house, for it was a shrine to his life with Perri. He returned to it from time to time, to refresh his spirit..Trembling, she sat beside the bassinet and gazed at her baby with such love that the force of it ought to have rocked him awake..She nodded. And could not lift her gaze from her hands. Could not meet his eyes, afraid that his worry would feed her own, afraid also that the sight of his sympathy would shake loose her perilous grip on her emotions..Crouching beside the boy as he rubbed a brighter shine onto the granite, Agnes said, "Barty, honey, why are youNevertheless, being cautious even as he seized the day--or the night, in this case-he parked a short distance from his destination, on a parallel street. He walked the last three blocks..The telephone was operative, and Vanadium dialed the number of the building superintendent, Sparky Vox. Sparky had an apartment in the basement, on the upper of two subterranean floors, adjacent to the garage entrance.."Well," Agnes said, "thank the Lord, we don't have tornadoes here in California.".."By the way he acted, you'd have sworn that he gave me and Angel shelter in the storm, back then, instead of turning us out to freeze in the snow."..Agnes supposed Jacob trembled in anticipation of the crash of an airliner or at least a light aircraft. Edom might be calculating the odds that this serene place-at this specific hour-would be the impact point for one of those planet-killing asteroids that reputedly wiped most life off the earth every few hundred thousand years or so.."It sure is," Barty said. When only a mortified silence followed his remark, he added: "Gee, I thought that was kinda funny."..Harrison and Grace had welcomed him in spite of the fact that a friend and parishioner had died on Thursday, leaving them both bereft and with church obligations.."You think I can turn the King's order down? You want to see me sent to row with the slaves in the galley we're building? Use your head, boy!"..Angel didn't join the grieving women, but sat on the floor in front of the television, switching back and forth between Gunsmoke and The Monkees. Too young to be genuinely involved in either show, nevertheless she occasionally made gunfire sounds when Marshal Dillon went into battle or invented her own lyrics to sing along with the Monkees..He had been stowed in a storeroom of one of the old palaces that Losen had appropriated. It had no window, its door was cross-grained oak barred with iron, and spells had been laid on that door that would have kept a far more experienced wizard captive. There were men of great skill and power in Losen's pay. Hound did not consider himself to be one of them. "All I have is a nose," he said. He came daily to see that Otter was recovering from his concussion and dislocated shoulder, and to talk with him. He was, as far as Otter could see, well-meaning and honest. "If you won't work for us they'll kill you," he said. "Losen can't have fellows like you on the loose. You'd better hire on while he'll take you."..Confused, Panglo held out his right hand, but Jacob said, "Sorry, no offense, but I don't shake with anyone.".."Peach, raisin, walnut pies," Agnes said, "with regular bottom crust and a chocolate-crackle top

crust." Her voice grew thinner when she spoke to Angel, but in this new frailty, Barty heard such love that he shook at the power of it. "God's in you, Angel, so strong you shine, and nothing bad at all." In a neatly groomed neighborhood of unassuming houses, Vanadium's place was as unremarkable as those around it: a single-story rectangular box of no discernible architectural style. White aluminum siding with green shutters. An attached two-car garage. Without using his flashlight, depending only on the moon, he ascended through the cemetery to the service road. He intended to mash the sole of Victoria's right shoe in the pat of butter and leave a long smear on the floor, as though she slipped on it and fell toward the ovens. A matronly nurse arrived, alerted to the patient's return to consciousness by the telemetry device associated with the heart monitor. Instead, her father asked, "Is this emotion talking, Celie, or is this brain as much as heart?" Paul stayed with her, sometimes wincing at the ground as though the danger were there, not above-which, in a sense, it was, because impact rather than the fall itself is the killer-and at other times putting his arms around her, staring up at the boy above. But he, too, was silent. Waking from a bad dream, he sometimes thought he heard the ratcheting of gear-wheel feet. The scrape and creak of rusted iron joints. The clink of rake-tine fingers rattling against one another. Unobtrusively, Junior followed the musician across the large front room, but by an indirect arc, using the babbling bourgeoisie for cover. He bought cracker sandwiches, some filled with cheese and some with peanut butter, redskin peanuts, chocolate bars, and Coca-Cola. Although this was an unhealthy meal, cheese and peanut butter and chocolate shared a virtue: they were all binding. And speak the tongues of man and drake. "As she comes closer to full term," said Dairies, "she's at great risk of preeclampsia developing into full eclampsia." There in more genteel and gilded ages, and her flights of imagination sometimes acquired such vivid detail that they were eerily like memories. Coughing, spitting saliva that was bitter with toxic chemicals, Paul followed her, slapping frantically at his clothes when fire singed his shirt. The patches were held by the same two elastic strips, so Barty flipped up both at the same time. As Junior stood at Seraphim's grave, his breath smoked from him in the still night air, as though he were a dragon. She refused to look at him, the way her mother had refused to look at him when he'd been making love to her in the parsonage. She began twisting a red pencil in a handheld sharpener, making sure that the shavings fell into a can kept for that purpose. "I saw it here." Mouth was turned down in half a frown. From the corner of her lips oozed a stream. "If Phimie wasn't here," Celestina said, "and then she came back, she was somewhere during that minute, wasn't she?" Maria, however, lived comfortably with both the Catholicism and the occultism in which she had been raised. In Hermosillo, Mexico, the latter had been nearly as important to the spiritual life of her family as had been the former. Drawn by voices on the second floor, Tom took the stairs two at a time. A man and a boy. Barty and Cain. To the left in the hallway, and then to a room on the right. Dishes dried and put away, Jacob retired to the living room and settled contentedly into an armchair, where he would probably become so enthralled with his new book of dam disasters that he would forget to make luncheon sandwiches until Barty and Angel rescued him from the flooded streets of some dismally unfortunate town. Rising slowly like the blade in the hands of an ax murderer as deliberate as an accountant, Thomas Vanadium's gaze arced from Junior's clenched fist to his face. For a while he enjoyed being challenged to figure the number of seconds elapsed since a particular historical event. Given the date, he did the calculations in his head, providing a correct answer in as little as twenty seconds, rarely taking more than a minute. Ichabod passed Bartholomew through the open door to Celestina in the passenger's seat, went around the Buick, put the tote bag in the back, and climbed behind the wheel once more. Fear of the unknown is a weakness, for it presumes dimensions to life beyond human control. Zedd teaches that nothing is beyond our control, that nature is just a mindlessly grinding machine with no more mysteries in it than we will find in applesauce. With her rock of faith under her, and breathing hope as much as ever, she was nevertheless unable to be as strong for him as she wanted to be. She felt her face go soft, her mouth tremble, and when she tried to repress a sob, it burst from her with wretched force. She rushed on: "I'm one of the best waitresses they have, so if I ask for dinner shifts only, I'll get them. Tips are better at dinner. And working the one shift, four and a half to five hours, I'll have a regular schedule." He turned over the two most recent discards. Neither was a jack of spades, and both were what he expected them to be. "There's no clear evidence of birth defects, but a couple tests reveal some worrisome anomalies. We'll know when we see the child." "Can't pay us as well as Losen does. But we could live," Otter argued. You greater strength and determination than any other motive. But you should know this much.... You need to keep her safe for another reason. She's special. I don't want to explain why she's special or how I know that she is, because this isn't the time or place, not with your dad's death and Wally in the hospital and you still shaky from the attack. With his bent thumb against the crook of his forefinger, he flipped the quarter. Even as the coin snapped off the thumbnail and began to stir the air, Tom flung up both hands, fingers spread to show them empty and to distract. Yet on a second look, the coin was not airborne as it had seemed to be, no longer spinning-wink, wink-before their dazzled eyes. It had vanished as though into the payment slot of an ethereal vending machine that dispensed mystery in return. He first eased from aisle to aisle, but soon moved more quickly, convinced that the singer would be found beyond the next turn, and then the next. Was that her trailing shadow he had glimpsed, slipping around the corner ahead of him? Her womanly scent lingering in the air after her passage? Although she would have felt ridiculous phrasing this question in these words to any other three-year-old, no better way existed to ask it of her special son: "Kiddo ... do you realize you're speaking of your dad in the present tense?" Tom Vanadium merely arched one eyebrow, as if to say that more than a single answer ought to be obvious. Olive complexion, no less smooth than the skin of a calamata. Eyes as lustrous as pools shimmering with a reflection of eternity and stars. "Another year," Edom said, "and instead of me, Barty can drive the car for you." When he judged that he was near the porch steps, he probed with his cane. Two paces later, the tip rapped the lowest step.

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