



• *Fremont, California (UPI)*—A truck driver involved in a freeway accident went to a hospital to have a gash in his leg treated, then returned to look after his truck. When Bob Murdoch, of Gardena, arrived back at the site, he found a large number of additional wrecks, including four highway patrol cars which were hit while officers were trying to untangle the snarl. While surveying the chaos, another truck piled into the wreckage, and its load of canned pears completely buried Murdoch. He was taken back to the hospital.

One of the secret terrifying visions we all have when whistling along the freeways of our brave new world is the subterranean conviction that one day we will be in the middle of a grinding, crashing maelstrom of destruction which, like the chain reaction of an atomic explosion, will spread across the country from freeway to turnpike, from toll road to connecting-by-pass, resulting in the greatest mass automobile crash in the history of the world, involving over six and a half million vehicles. And then, after the roar subsides, a crate of eggs will lay you low. What Murdoch felt in those crucial milliseconds, seeing those canned pears descending on him, was not recorded, but I guarantee you, we will have felt it.

I, personally, came within maybe five inches of being the first victim in just such a fiasco. It was a typical summer day on the New Jersey Turnpike, which is just about as desperate a turnpike as you can find anywhere. Just before you hit the Lincoln Tunnel exit, in the vicinity of the colorful hamlet of Secaucus, the Jersey Turnpike is at its best—bellowing trucks, gimpy '49 Dodges filled with dock workers and a general God-awful motley collection of vehicles lurching along at twice the speed they were designed for. The whole caravan is snaking through a fetid atmosphere produced by surrounding garbage dumps and refineries belching a hellish combination of vapors into the sky—all laced together by the trail-

ing kerosine streaks of 747s twenty feet overhead as they grope their way along the Newark Airport approach.

There I was, in the midst of this uproar, when for some reason traffic completely stopped up ahead. A solid wall of simmering iron stretched from my front grille to the horizon. "Well," I figured, "What the hell—might as well sit here and relax. There's nothing I can do." Remember, I am the last car in line. I turn up the radio to try and drown out the jet whines and the diesel roars all around me when, with an acquired instinct that all Twentieth Century men have, I glance in my rearview mirror. Son of a bitch! I see some clown in one of those look-alike foreign shoeboxes barreling right at me, coming full bore just like there isn't another car for miles around. I can even see the look on the dildock's face. He's just squatting there, gazing around with that fat, dumb, happy look that hard-core "economy" car owners specialize in. And like most of his brethren, he has plastered his bumpers with stickers proclaiming his various humanity-loving, poetic philosophies: "NADER FOR PRESIDENT," "MAILER FOR MAYOR," the whole puerile lot. At a glance, I knew there was no way he could stop. And since I was maybe two feet behind the car ahead of me, I was going nowhere, except maybe through the windshield after I pulled my seat belts out by the roots. I knew my

Twentieth Century man fears a more sinister device than any that humanity has previously known . . . the giant machine in the night

time had come. Murdoch, I know how you felt . . . *outraged.*

Suddenly, through his thick, horn-rimmed glasses, the boob became aware that there was a wall of unyielding metal approaching very rapidly just over his bow. His eyeballs rolled. His hands clenched the wheel like an F-111 pilot about to go into a terminal nose-dive. He shifted down in his seat, and from my vantage point directly ahead, I could see across the rapidly diminishing space between us that his benumbed mind was fearfully searching for a solution. Finally, his foot discovered the brake pedal, and pressed it flat to the floor. The car lurched from side to side in the lane, its wee tires smoking, and still he roared toward me. "Damn," I thought. "When this guy clobbers me, I'm gonna hit the guy ahead—they're gonna feel this wreck all the way to Trenton!" Closer and closer he came. And then . . . a miracle happened. Just before he slammed into me, the whole mass of metal ahead of

JEAN SHEPHERD (CONTINUED)

me began to roll. I had just enough room to whip out of the lane. Dildock naturally plowed right on, and behind me I heard WHAP-O! as he hit the poor throg who had been ahead of me. For what seemed like the next ten minutes I could hear cars crashing and banging far ahead. I just pulled off to the side and waited while the ambulances, fire trucks and arc welders descended on the scene to untangle the mess. Murdoch, I know . . . we all do.

The only other time I ever came close to anything like that was a scary night on the Indiana prairies. I was driving along happy as a clam—or at least as dumb as a clam—not a worry on my mind, radio playing, not a car in sight anywhere. It was maybe 3:00 A.M., and I was coming home from a spectacularly successful date, just-sitting there with lipstick all over me, feeling comfortably, sensationally spent, when I came to this railroad crossing that I had driven over every single day for my whole life. It had an automatic gate, the kind with flashes that go off like fireworks, bells ringing, gates that slam down over the road, the works.

This night the lights are dark, the gates are up, the night is silent; obviously nothing coming down those old tracks. No sooner had I got my front wheels on the first rail when . . . Whaaa! There is a blast on a diesel horn so loud the fillings in my teeth popped out like beebies. I got one flashing sight of a gigantic searchlight coming right at me at maybe 400 miles an hour. I floored the accelerator, and that diesel streamliner roared past my rear bumper so close she almost peeled off my bumper guards. For maybe fifteen seconds I felt the car being sucked into the train like a fishing canoe full of natives in a tidal wave, and then she fought clear. Let's face it, little exciting, zingy moments like that just didn't happen to guys before our century came along. The giant machine in the night.

There are even more terrifying fears, subtler, more sinister, than any of these. As the engines of progress proliferate, there is less and less use for Man himself. Now, this particular terror is felt more by some than by others. It is not universally felt as yet, but I think in time we all will feel it. Even the Archie Bunkers of the world will begin to get the idea . . . and what happened to David Huffstetler could happen to any of us. His little news item was one of the saddest things I've come across in a long time, and says more about our life than any fifty contemporary novels or plays could ever do.

Green River, Wyoming (AP)—A 25-year-old man shot and killed himself after leaving a note saying that his car had stalled in frigid weather and no motorists would stop to help him, police say. "I have been waiting eleven hours for someone to stop," said the note found next to the body of David Huffstetler on the verge of Interstate 80. "I can't stand the cold any longer and they just keep passing by."