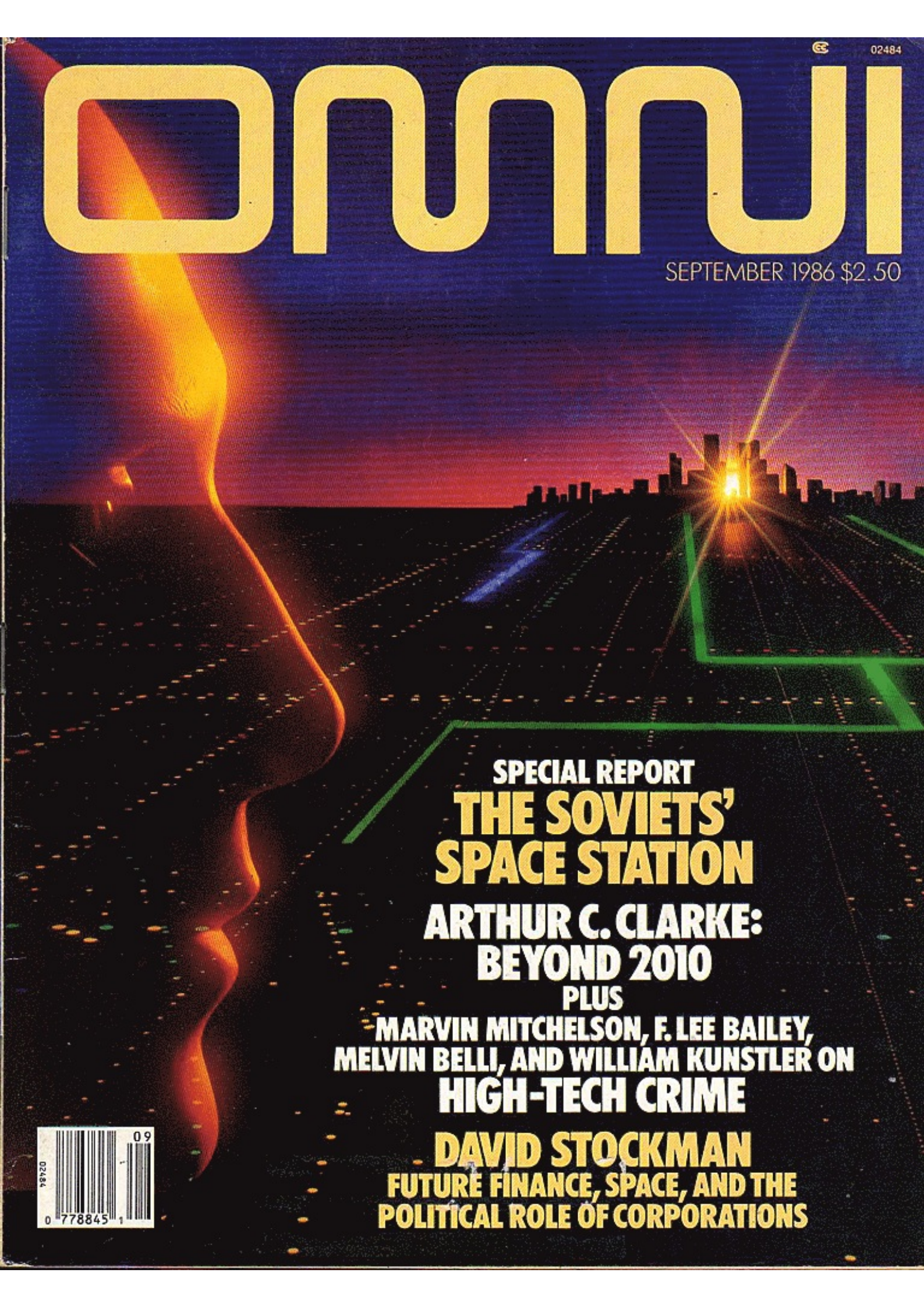


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**SPECIAL REPORT**  
**THE SOVIETS'**  
**SPACE STATION**

**ARTHUR C. CLARKE:**  
**BEYOND 2010**

**PLUS**

**MARVIN MITCHELSON, F. LEE BAILEY,**  
**MELVIN BELLI, AND WILLIAM KUNSTLER ON**  
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## LAST WORD

By Terry Runté

● *He possesses that elusive, nameless substance that no one talks about, thinks about, or even thinks about talking about. He has a major helping of the wrong stuff.* ●

*They say there's a demon in that wind tunnel, way back in there near the outside of the envelope. They say that if you get too close to him he'll muss up your hair and blow stuff in your eyes and whip your tie up over your shoulder where you'll forget about it, and people will point and laugh at you, and you won't know why. Someday I'm gonna go in there and wrestle with that demon and bring him outta that tunnel and let him go in my boss's office and blow all the papers outta his in box.—Michael "Mick" Haeger*

They call them the armchair aces, the wind warriors, the tunnel boys. They're the men who, day after boring day, sit in fake cockpits, or "mockpits," flying tiny model airplanes through the phony turbulence of The Tunnel. And if you hang out long enough at the pilots' lounges where the tunnel boys gather and fib about their exploits, you'll eventually hear about one "pilot" in particular, Michael "Mick" Haeger.

Haeger is more than just another wind-tunnel test pilot—he's the best. He has reached the top of the pyramid, the peak of Mount Everest, the spire of Notre-Dame, the pinnacle of the needle in downtown Seattle; he has, metaphorically speaking, sat on the top of any tall, pointy thing you can name. Haeger possesses that elusive, nameless substance that no one talks about, thinks about, or even thinks about talking about. This something, this *it*, involves stupidity . . . and much more. To reach this apex of idiocy requires more than mere daftness. Having one's nut loose simply will not do. Haeger is more than just another dolt. He is so dumb that when he climbs into his cockpit, he genuinely believes he's flying. In other words, he has *the wrong stuff*.

Recent advances in computerized flight simulation have made the experience of flight uncannily real—from the takeoff, to the flight itself, to the landing, and, yes, even to a crash. A genuine test pilot has to worry only about dying once, Haeger will tell you, but a wind-tunnel boy—he may have to die several times a day. And no one has "crashed" more times than Michael Haeger, a man who lives the life of a test pilot—up to a point.

On an average day he wakes up at 4:00 A.M., still drunk from the night before, in order to simulate a real test pilot's state of mind. For the same reason he has a breakfast of chewing tobacco and beer. Slipping on his flight jacket of simulated leather, he heads off to work.

Two hours later, reeling with nausea, his head throbbing, Mick is strapped into the cockpit of a Lockheed ultrastealth supersonic jump jet: an invisible jet fighter so advanced that it could take off and land vertically at 80 times the speed

of sound—if it existed. Which it doesn't. Haeger doesn't know that. You see, HE'S NEVER BEEN IN A REAL PLANE! He wouldn't know a jump-jet from a '52 Plymouth. When the console lights up and the flight display flickers on, he is convinced he is in a real cockpit.

But the feasibility of making such a plane is not on the flight engineers' minds. If they built such a plane, would anyone be dumb enough to climb into it, and what would happen to him if he did? To the first question Haeger stands as a mute answer. As for the second . . .

Haeger pokes at the buttons on the control panel until he hears the simulated roar of the plane's engines. He flips a few more controls, and the plane seems to shoot straight up. The mockpit hasn't moved more than a few feet, of course, but the video projection of the blue sky rushing up at him is so real that Haeger's convinced he's miles above the earth. He watches his altimeter spin, marking off the altitude until it tells him he has broken through the earth's atmosphere and is hurtling into space. The airspeed indicator on the "plane" says he is screaming through space at nearly twice the speed of sound. He begins to think about what happens to the human body at that speed—how the g's can stretch a man's face, pull back his jowls, compress his skull, and force the eyes deeper into the sockets. At the thought of all this, Haeger does what he is most famous for—he panics and passes out.

Out of control, the plane's "flight" degenerates into a slow tumble. But just as it reaches terminal speed Haeger comes to and in the nick of time pushes the button marked EJECT. Unfortunately, the plane is now upside down, eight feet above the ground.

For the tenth time the phone rings, and for the tenth time Haeger's wife, Marybell, picks it up. This is the most difficult part of the life of a simulator pilot's wife. There will be a simulated funeral, with a simulated pastor and a simulated 21-gun salute. Marybell, dry-eyed, will sob into a Kleenex, feigning grief. But first she must deal with the calls of fake condolence from Mick's fellow phony flyboys. And invariably the voice on the other end will have the same innuendo: "Uh, hello, Marybell, this is Karl [or Craig or Neil or—yes—Buzz]. Mick and I were real good buddies, and I . . . uh, was wonderin' that since Mick died a horrible simulated death and is burned beyond all recognition and stuff, are ya doin' anything tonight?" ☐

*Some folks say Terry Runté was the first man to break the sound barrier on Interstate 95 in a '65 Dart. Others say he's a humor writer with the wrong stuff. One thing's for sure; he wrote this stupid bio himself.*