

MR. MCGREGOR IN THE SUBURBS

by Steve B. Hackett

Mr. McGregor was busy describing his new backyard landscaping and tossing out ideas for a barbecue. It was time to break the news to him.

"Mr. McGregor," I said, "we're creating a new tech division, with you as interim president! We have a hot tip that lumbricus will be an indispensable component of the next generation of microchips."

"You bring the microchips and I'll supply the burgers," he replied, apparently unaware that the topic of

conversation had changed.

"And when the moment arrives," I continued, "we will be ready, with you at the helm. I've already ordered the earthworms--"

"Who said anything about earthworms?"

"--which will be delivered to your place on Saturday."

"My place!"

"We have only a few days in which to rip out your backyard."

He looked dismayed. I let him wrestle with his thoughts for a space of time.

"But my waterfall," he said.

"We'll leave it," I said.

He seemed satisfied.

Mr. McGregor's first night on the job did not go well. He rang my doorbell at two a.m., complaining that he could hear the earthworms murmuring from his bedroom and that he couldn't sleep. He stayed a month.

Afterward, all went smoothly, although of course I was the one who had to stay on top of things. One cold night,

I called Mr. McGregor to tell him he'd have to bring them indoors.

"And they'll need blankets," I added, as an afterthought.

"Individually?"

"Let's not spoil them."

At roundup, when Mr. McGregor herded our stock into his front yard, I was impressed by the manner in which his little charges responded to the quiet authority in his voice. Something of his old navy presence had surfaced.

"I'll buy the drinks when this is over," I said, and took my place at the rear, to keep an eye out for strays.

"Move 'em out," Mr. McGregor said.

Our progress the first day was better than expected. We very nearly reached the end of the block. While serving chili, Mr. McGregor dropped the ladle.

"Quiet!" I said. "You want to start a stampede?"

This broke the tension, after a long arduous day. We shared a good laugh.

unaware

