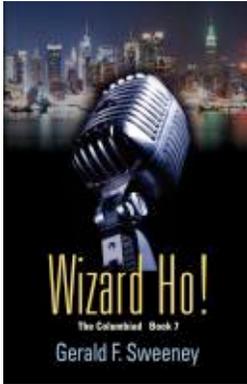




Wizard Ho!

The Columbiad Book 7

Gerald F. Sweeney



Wizard Ho!, the seventh and last novel in the Columbiad series, follows a merry band of Mahattanites in their search for a Wizard and his sidekick, Ripple, who operate a clandestine radio station that represents the embattled voice of the twentieth century intent on identifying the American soul. An interracial couple, Jim and Columbia Ruth, inspires a parade of dancers, musicians, videographers, writers and film buffs to find these radio mavericks.

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WIZARD HO!

By

Gerald F. Sweeney

O America, because you build for mankind, I build for you.

Walt Whitman

The Columbiad—Book 7 - A series of seven
stand-alone novels

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Chapter 1

(June, 1986)

“What if we could actually hear Jesus talking—you know, listen to him on the radio?”

“Make a mint. Like those broadcast evangelists.”

“Maybe we’d find out if God really died or just has Alzheimer’s.”

Jim had walked into the middle of a conversation. Entering the elevator, he winked at his friend, Carlos, the operator, and then nodded to the other residents. The guys from the penthouse were playing verbal volleyball with the latest network news.

“Myself, I’d like to hear Saint Paul read some of his letters on the air.”

“Or tune in to Moses and see if there’ve been any changes in the top ten.”

“If there are, I have a couple suggestions, along about number six.”

Carlos, never shy about criticizing his passengers, and subtly reminding everyone who was captain of his flying craft, said, “D’jou all better hope He has a good sense of humor.”

“You guys realize that someday people will be listening to what you’re saying right now.”

“Pray nobody ever hears what my partner called me this morning.”

Jim was familiar with these members of a gay collective that frolicked at the top of the building, and though he tried to piece together the context of the conversation, he couldn’t break the code before the passengers and their words tumbled out into the lobby.

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On his return trip from the deli, Jim asked Carlos what they had been talking about.

“It’s in all de papers. Dis guy gots a machine can bring back all de old talk people ever blabbed. Like a tape recorder dot has all de words in it ever made in the whole world.”

Jim said, “Sounds like the mind of God.”

“Den we’re in for it. ‘Cause now He’s gots all de evidence.”

Jim had heard about such a machine and wondered if this was the gadget that his radio friend, the Wizard, had been boasting about on air.

Earlier that morning, after making love, Jim and Ruth lounged for hours in their big bed as the sun poured into their Manhattan apartment. They played innumerable games. Ruth began fabricating outrageous stories, posing puzzles and fashioning rhymed gibberish, finally suggesting to Jim they share their overnight dreams.

“You first, Rose Bottom,” she said.

Jim said, “OK. I’m listening to a piano roll on the Aeolian, ragtime, and I’m pumping away on the pedals, when suddenly I’m cascading down the midway of some big ‘ole fair and there’s this splashy fountain and the music’s got the waterworks bouncing in time with the beat.”

Ruth said, “Sounds like Dancing Waters from the World’s Fair.”

Jim continued, “Then I take off with a roar and now I’m flying on top of a grand piano. I’m wearing aviator glasses and a leather helmet, and me and the keyboard are crooning old Hit Parade songs. We’re headed for a party at some kind of ice palace or crystal cave—maybe that was later. Anyway, I’m coming in for a landing; it’s a slippery runway; the piano is skidding out of control and now the keys are jumping up and down playing boogie-woogie and I’m dancing the Lindy Hop

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with an air sock. You're there all dressed up like my guardian angel, only your robes are tailored—more thirties-like, not so baggy like a Greek play, you know what I mean? Then we board the piano together and now we're flying through sunsets until we soft-land on an ice cream mountain where the rainbow people live, and we ask them for directions to the crystal cave, and they tell us. I distinctly remember this part. They said it's over there south of somewhere, past the rainbow and they pointed it out on a star map."

"Then what happened?"

"What do you suppose? I woke up sweet mouth from all that ice cream. So tell me yours."

Ruth said, "I'm in a red convertible and the top's down and I'm racing along some *grande corniche* thinking I own the wind. Sunshine's gotten into my body and I feel as clean as a soap commercial. I'm driving high above the seacoast and there are castles on the bluff, and higher up, the clouds are hung with Impressionist paintings and there's an artist with a white beard on scaffolding without any footings, touching up the sky with colors, adding highlights. Below the beaches have yellow umbrellas and the boats offshore are all flying Hermes scarves from their forestays. Then I'm naked on the sand and you come up and put an emerald necklace around my neck, emeralds as big as horse chestnuts and a beachfront band begins to play and we start dancing the Watusi."

"I never could do that one," he said.

"Don't worry. I'll teach you."

"That's it? Don't we fall into a hammock under a palm tree or something?"

"What are you doing? Trying to run my dream?"

They reluctantly rose from their bed and began drenching themselves in the steamy mist of their free-standing, oversize tub that bulged like a porcelain porker within the tiled division

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of their one bedroom. After washing each other in the warm streams pouring from the shower head, they stepped over the high chine and toweled each other off. Ruth stayed and creamed her brown body—nipples like chocolate kisses—with Parisian lotions, finally wrapping herself in a fluffy white robe. Jim’s older, paler corpus retreated from the moist heat.

After a resolution of their initial on-again, off-again romance, Jim and Ruth remained the same dedicated couple that had taken up residency four years ago in 1982. Though not married, they were deeply committed to one another. A distinct pairing, they thrived in their gentrified neighborhood where the 56-year-old white Jim nested with his 27-year-old black beauty. Actually more coffee-colored—with extra cream—than black.

Their romantic beginnings had been matched to Manhattan nightlife—the rialto ripple Gershwin called it—of saloons, festival halls and supper clubs like the Rainbow Room, the mid-century venues of Jim’s own youth where he courted Ruth in her time of indecision until she came to accept the reality and strength of their 30-year age difference. She, in turn, introduced him to health spas, dance clubs, new age restaurants and, best of all, to the practice of her younger generation to share their feelings with one another—until finally the powerful attraction felt by the pair mellowed into love. They had each found their mate—he late, she early.

After Jim left for the deli, Ruth stepped into the living room. Moving to the sounds of the stereo, Ruth flicked on a sassy number—*Antoinette*—from Joplin’s lost opera, then swung into her stretching exercises that seemed more like dancing than working out. The off-white room housed an urban awareness, filled as it was with overflowing bookshelves, dozens of portraits of family and friends, arranged around fluffy couches. An art glass collection sparkled colorfully through the windowpane of an old cabinet. Inconspicuous among the

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startling hues was a small bud vase, dull by comparison, fired in earth colors, one with a design of leaves woven into it, maybe ivy or aspen—Jim’s gift to Ruth on the night they first came together. Another cabinet underscored their considerable music library, governed on top by small busts of Ives and Copland. Along the walls were four paintings executed by artist friends or created in long-closed studios whose works had passed down through Jim’s family. Imposingly, parked four-square in one corner, stood a player piano framed in light oak with a winged eagle emblazoned on the stained glass panels that slid open to display the tracker mechanism used to manipulate the music rolls. Aside from its patriotic decoration, the pianola had an evocative history and its reputation included the audacious information that on occasion, it sometimes, without human intervention, played by itself.

On top of the piano poised Ruth’s most prized family possession, by far the most important artwork in the room, a portrait bust of her great-great-aunt, a favorite model of artists like LaFarge and the sculptor St. Gaudens, who had carved this particular piece, detailing the beauty of her Aunt Nettie, whose radiant image Ruth inherited. The small statue had passed down her line of the musically-inclined Morisong family. They had been encouraged after Emancipation to paddle their talents for playing the off-beat and bent rhythms of ragtime and jazz upriver to the big cities of the north. Prominent among Ruth’s wall hangings was a presentation easel containing a small brass oval against a cotton background, an emblem worn by an ancient family member on the streets of New Orleans, a slave badge with the inscription—*Musician*—a treasure passed on to Ruth from an uncle who had, only a few years earlier, introduced the Brooklyn mulatto to her heritage.

Columbia Ruth Morisong offered a brightness of mind that harmonized into a modern symmetry that comfortably inscribed

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the figure of Jim Mahoney into her equations. Jim, though generations off the land and distanced from Iowa's corn harvests, was structured by a rural midwestern family that had gravitated to the city. Now, fully urbanized, he had been on a lifelong search to find a woman with the kind of generous heart that Ruth presented to him. Their two families had risen from rows of cotton and corndirt to sire a pair of crossbred seekers of a muse that could provide them meaning in make-it-up-as-you-go-along New York.

When Jim returned from the deli, Ruth heard the elevator door clang. He was bringing in bagels thick-spread with scallion-shredded cream cheese to be consumed along with the tea she had begun brewing in their closet of a kitchen. At the table, they would be joined by another guest, a hefty copy of the *Sunday Times*. When he came through the door, she bounded across the Indian rugs, catching him by surprise and kissed him with lovemaking's bruised lips—seeking the last moist tasting of her spent passion. He dropped his bundles and enclosed her body. For a moment they surrendered once again.

"I'll never, never, never ever be the same," she said.

"Just think of tonight's possibilities."

"Who says we have to wait that long?"

He looked at her with affection, and she responded, "You have kind eyes."

She had a high singing voice, slightly strained, as if she were expressing herself from tip-toe. She stretched her nearly 5'4" curves up to greet his quickened breathing. His tall, thin body gathered her in. Since coming under Ruth's careful nutritional eye, he looked more like a trim swimmer than the prosperous burgher he once portrayed.

Jim replied, "All I know is I'm blest to be with you."

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She jumped up and straddled his hips, locking her legs around him and said, “In all the craziness around us, you’re my quiet center. I could never live without you.”

She was in full bloom, in love with a man who adored her and had brought her to fruition. She loved the excitement of the city and the exchange of rapport among their friends. Her rising career in magazine advertising afforded her the opportunity to live stylishly. New friends appeared at every turn and she was always quick to entertain those she sought to know better. She was part of an enlightened species of Manhattan women who moved confidently on various levels of urban existence—a knowledgeable fan of the arts; respected and admired by her social and business peers; and lifted by a buoyant existence—certain that Jim was the only one who understood her fully.

They could barely keep their hands off each other while they ate brunch. Afterwards, well past noon, they relaxed in the deep, comfortable recesses of their oversize sofas, cozily ensconced in their puffy cushions. The overflowing pile of magazines on the coffee table placed between the couches included *Foreign Affairs*, several old copies of the original *Vanity Fair*, *Musical Review*, and a display of publications in the fields in which they worked; Ruth was employed by a pharmaceutical trade publication and Jim for a photographic journal. As the couple relaxed and scanned sections of the newspaper, Ella’s renditions of Rodgers and Hart songs jump-pumped through the expensive speakers, until the ease of their sleepy afternoon was arrested by a compelling news story.

“Here it is. This is what the guys in the elevator were talking about. You’re going to like this,” he said. “A mystery from outer space.”

Jim’s intuitive eye had always been able to perceive a story that had strong enough legs to march up through the pages of a newspaper, edition after edition, before maneuvering itself onto

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the front page. When he first spotted the item, buried between the obits and the weather forecast, the story barely ran fifteen lines. Reading to Ruth, the article sketched out a rumor from the west that a radio technician had perfected a device so sensitive that it could reproduce the impulses of long-ago conversations drifting out in the stratosphere, a machine that could record voices from the past. The inventor maintained that sounds never disappeared; they just floated into thin air, and he had constructed a black box able to recapture these historical noises.

“It just goes out there in the ozone and snatches back the small talk of life on earth.”

The sky, according to the discoverer, was alive with the babble of voices, as well as some grunting effects and part singing. And just wait until he invaded the ionosphere. Most people, sensibly enough, thought it was a hoax perpetrated by some college station trying to replicate the notoriety of an ancient radio broadcast about an alien invasion.

Ruth said, “Talk radio’s gonna have a whole new meaning. Wonder if it really works? Think they’ll be able to pick up Caruso singing?”

“Who knows? What if we could hear Gottschalk playing his own piano pieces?”

In the days following, they watched the pages of the paper closely. On Monday, word circulated that the FCC had indeed received notification of spurious transmissions originating from an unidentified radio station, reports alleging that an unauthorized licensee had not only electronically plucked conversations from the atmosphere but gone ahead and aired the results. With the Feds involved, editors everywhere tuned in. The Commission promised to investigate the matter as soon as its lawyers located the appropriate code pertaining to these heavenly violations of dished dirt. When rumor that a broadcast from this rogue station included a conversation between well-

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known luminaries of the 1960s, the *Times* sent a top reporter west with the express mission of keel-hauling the inventive aerial pirate.

Each morning, as Jim and Ruth checked the story, it swelled in volume and import, slowly gaining its way forward through the pages. Later in the week, there were further confirmations that similar radio programs had been heard in a number of midwest and mountain states, on different days and at odd hours, their broadcast footprint trekking in an erratic pattern toward the Pacific Ocean.

Two more days and the story advanced again as correspondents from other major dailies picked their way along the trail of ethereal evidence. Editors were clamoring for copy and there was a run on radio manuals in neighborhood libraries as everyday borrowers began conversing in terms of ohms and watts. Interviews covering the science of sound transmission were conducted among experts who provided squiggly line illustrations that were featured in the science sections of newspapers and on public television. All the while, investigators continued the search for listeners. Scouring the western basin, firsthand reports finally emerged.

One listener said, "I heard it all right. Sounded familiar, those voices."

Another said, "Sounded like President Kennedy and that brother of his, what's his name, Bobby. You could hear all that 'pahk the cah' stuff."

A reporter from St. Louis finally secured a home taping of the program. Though hoax-toughened publishers exhibited skepticism, most dailies released the text after much soul-searching and coffee consumption within the confines of their editorial boardrooms, temporarily suspending their prejudice against broadcast media.

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The “proof” soon appeared, spread across the front page of the early edition:

The following is the text of a purported private conversation electronically captured between John and Robert Kennedy during the single term of the President’s administration.

John Kennedy—“How much longer are we going to stay in there? All we’re doing is propping up a cardboard puppet. State and CIA say they’re docile and will never mobilize into any kind of effective force. You sometimes get the idea that they’ll accept what’s dealt them. What the hell’s wrong with the Pentagon? They’re always telling us we shouldn’t fight a land war in Asia, let alone the jungle. For god’s sake, don’t they remember what happened to Stillwell? Now they’re saying we can’t hold the south unless we send in tens of thousands of troops. I sometimes think all they want to do is test their weapons and fire off a few rounds.”

Robert Kennedy—“But you can’t appear weak or the right wing will stomp all over you. Can we negotiate?”

John Kennedy—“My instincts say we’ve got to get out of there. After ’64, we’re pulling our advisors. I’m not going into competition with the French to see who can collect the most palm trees. It’s colonialism pure and simple and we’re not going to be part of it.” (Sound of dog barking and child running and wallpaper hangers at work.)

Cynicism lined up on both sides of the issue. Cantankerous commentators speculated that if real, the conversation had probably been taped in the White House long ago, perhaps snared surreptitiously by a powerful directional microphone. Listeners agreed that the voices resonated with the distinctive Boston diction of the Kennedy brothers. However, most specialists guessed that the tape was spliced together from

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previously gathered conversations, though on first hearing, the recording sounded seamless.

But no one ever discovered the identity of the station that produced the initial broadcast. Failing to pinpoint the signal source, the story began to fade, though the novelty of the subject was discussed in communication schools for years after. Discouraged historians stowed their listening sets and trudged back into their dark libraries, while disheartened headphone manufacturers, anticipating a bonanza, returned silently to their white noise rooms.

Jim and Ruth, however, not only believed in the device's existence, they guessed the name of the inventor and could likely identify the source of the broadcasts. The programs probably emanated from the Wizard or his sidekick, Ripple—on vacation in their mobile home, transmitting from random locations, grazing along the mountains between the Rockies and the coast. Most likely touring the national parks. Way out west like a Harris symphony.

Jim swore aloud that he would find the elusive Wizard, the brash announcer who for years had brought him the AM sounds of American classical music mixed with his distinct vision for the country's social and political solutions. It wasn't the first time that the Wizard and Ripple surprised their listeners by demonstrating strange electrical contraptions. One was a harmonium, an instrument that revolutionized moving pictures by making a single piano play like a full orchestra.

"I've made a decision," Jim said. "I'm going to try to find them. Search for them while I'm bouncing around the country. They've been hiding long enough. What do you say? It's not like we have to give up our jobs or anything. We're always riding planes. Want to get involved?"

"Not a chance. You're chasing rainbows. I don't have time—not with my schedule."

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“You’re leaving me in the lurch? What if Isabella had turned down Columbus?”

“It would have worked out somehow. Somebody else might have found Massachusetts before the pilgrims ruined it. Besides, you’re not ever going to find them.”

“I found you, didn’t I? That wasn’t easy. Maybe I can catch them before they sprinkle themselves with fairy dust and disappear,” Jim said.

“So what if you come across them? What are you going to say?—‘Hey Wiz! Can you show me a couple tricks?’—You care much more about their music than I do.”

“What’s this, a rebellion?”

“He’s an illusion—a voice in the night. I have enough trouble dealing with reality. I love you sweetpie, but I know the difference between folly and madness.”

“I have to do it. My insides are pushing me.”

She said, “You’ve fallen in love with an airwave. Cute. But a little weird, right?”

“I’m so connected to his voice I sometimes think it’s my own—like we’re singing the same song. I have to find him. Don’t you listen to your inner voice?”

She said, “Are you kidding? I have seven voices going in my head at once. Rivers of ya-da-dah—like Saturday night in a bad disco. My brain’s a zoo house. All those howling voices—my subconscious is on fire.”

“Maybe it’s just a fancy kind of intelligence.”

She said, “Not for me. The rattle in my head drives me up a wall, wakes me up in the middle of the night with alarm bells. I hate it because it’s all cerebral. What I need is to follow my instincts more—not only animal ones—more like when you’re faced with choices, and you have no evidence to guide you and you just follow a hunch, and get connected to the Force. That’s the voice I want to listen to.”

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“The Wiz is my Force. I’ve got to close the connection.”

In his quest, he also secretly hoped to uncover a missing part of his family’s history. Jim vowed he would locate the Wizard’s hideaway and hoped he could endure the pain to unearth his own lost father along the way. And hold onto Ruth who was the one person in his life that mattered to him—other than his children.

The Wizard had long functioned as Jim’s internal compass and prime teacher. “He keeps me sane and pokes me just before I fall into the swamp of not-caring. We all need a guide like him. He’s my beacon and more. My holy ghost who can talk to me in my own language. So, if I have to, I’ll find him myself.”

Jim’s relationship with the Wiz went back a long time. In his late teens, Jim discovered the old man’s radio station in Chicago. The young listener, open and impressionable, was startled by the originality of the Wizard’s programing and political views. Amazed that a patriotically-dipped, liberal Americanist actually existed on the radio, Jim reveled in the reality that here was somebody who collected and dispensed native classical music. Not only that but linked the music to his heroine Columbia’s nineteenth-century values—values that offered an alternative to blind nationalism. While many citizens chose to exude a muscled and heavy-handed international stance, the Wiz supported nuanced empathy abroad—combining a wish for peace with Columbia’s portrait as a bountiful provider for a hungry world, a world filled with helpless beings that were unable, because of fear or ignorance or injustice, to lead a sustainable life. The Wiz consistently appealed to a better, more gentle America, often citing Jefferson’s Declaration about the “authority the good people of these colonies” possessed to engage and act upon their ideals. And always energized by Kennedy’s belief: “I look forward to an America which will not be afraid of grace and beauty.”

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The Wiz had convinced Jim long ago to honor the historic image of Columbia as the true representative of America—that to understand her significance and disappearance was the key to knowing how far the country had slipped its moorings. There had once been a belief that the new found land was destined to be the world's provider and benefactor, and that Columbia had been instructed by the goodwill of the people to open her arms to the earth's hungry. How the nation was based on a code that honored the ability of women to care for the species. That a soft nature was her way.

In addition, Jim felt that the Wiz might lead him to some discovery about himself that would help tie up the loose ends of his life. He would go ahead with his quest, hoping to achieve other victories under the Wizard's banner. He had already succeeded once in meeting such a challenge. In the early eighties, he and Ruth had searched for and found a lost Scott Joplin opera that the Wiz had long sought. The couple had even discovered a missing silver necklace with an Irish engraving that the radio host was looking for, jewelry that the old codger had promised and neglected to deliver to the family of his best friend after his pal died.

Jim felt that through his own efforts, and maybe with the Wizard's help, he could find meaning to his own family's existence. It wouldn't be easy. The idea of a functioning family provided a shaky image to Jim because of his fatherless childhood, his quirky mother, and his inability to maintain the cohesion of his own family and children. Yet he persisted in yearning for a wider family—like the one he found in the mid-sixties when he stepped out of his car at the Holy Cross, Iowa church and viewed the cemetery stones that held the names of dozens of his ancestors, including his great-grandfather, Francis, and his great-great-grandfather—James the pioneer.

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Jim was convinced that somewhere along his family's immigrant and genealogical route, he could discover something new about himself. So he continued to pay attention to the Wiz and to ponder the idea of Columbia's protection of the host of European immigrants who sought a free and decent life. He believed that America was defined by its immigrants, not by the early arrivals who had come to think of the land as theirs.

"You should stop harping on the dead, Jim. Just live for now," Ruth advised.

"I know I should, but I need something from back then."

"We're all missing something, for god's sake,"

"But my needs are bigger than your needs."

"How can you say that when I come from slaves?"

"OK. Just say I left more behind than you did. I know I'm a fuss-budget."

"Whatever the hell that is," and she turned back to her computer.

Jim once worked for a short time on the Hill in D.C. and maintained a few friendships in a long-term Democratic office. He wanted to check if there was any inside gossip floating around the regulatory agencies regarding the heavenly voice-snatchers as a result of the publicity. His contact called back to say that the FCC gestapo was on the Wizard's tail, spurred on by an agitated FBI that feared the consequences of all that verbal contraband falling into commie hands.

"The FBI is afraid it'll unload the world's dirty laundry. Then what good are their files? They want to get their paws on the space machine before the sleaze tabloids do."

At the Hotel Russell, one of their favorite hangouts, Jim and Ruth were friendly with Joe the bartender, whose low-key style made them feel welcome. In the tradition of Manhattan's best

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barkeeps, Joe was never judgmental and knew how to slice and dice the sourness out of gossip with as much finesse as he knifed through his lemons and limes. Discreet but never obsequious, he was adept at delivering the street news of the city with humor, with an ear for rumors that anticipated new trends. Savvy bartenders liked to be the first ones in the know.

One of the pair would arrive first, usually Jim, seeing that Ruth was biologically conditioned to stretch every hour into eighty minutes, and as a consequence was invariably twenty minutes late. Joe would greet the early arrival, allowing the first comer a moment to adjust to the room, its light and atmosphere. When they came in together, Joe would chat casually with them, before checking if they wished service.

Uncharacteristically, Ruth arrived first one night and because she choose not to sit at this or any other bar alone, she selected a table close to Joe's narrow, mirrored kingdom with its sparkling garden of crystal flutes and tulips all in a glistening row. Joe waved off the waiter and came around to help Ruth settle in and guided her into one of the comfortable lounge chairs, chatted for a few moments, then retired while she took in the room. In a few moments he leaned over the bar and asked her if she cared for something.

"How about two aspirins and a glass of white?"

"How about one or the other?" Joe suggested. "They don't go very well together."

"OK. The aspirin, and a glass of water, please. Do you get extra pay for giving advice?"

"Not to worry, you'll pay," Joe teased her. "Who else but customers are gonna cough up the dough for my doctor degrees? You need a lot of diplomas when you work back here—one for hangovers and a few more in psychiatry."

"You should hang out a shingle. Rent an office."

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“Clients prefer to slouch at the bar. Easier for them to lay their heads down and cry. It’s like running the welfare office of a traveling circus in here. The whole world comes by to audition.”

With that, Jim walked in, a record album under his arm, and when he passed around his new Adams vinyl, a discussion about music ensued, which led to talk about the Wizard.

Joe asked, “Did you hear about his voice machine thing that taps into all the sky jabber?”

“Jim’s getting up a raiding party to go out and try to find him,” Ruth said.

“Count me in,” Joe answered. “I love the guy. Always talking about life back on the farm and playing Stephen Foster songs and hyping some old Iowa cereal queen.”

“I hear the Feds are trying to shut him down.”

“Come to remember,” Joe said, “I did hear one thing. A couple guys who work down in the federal building always stop in for a pop before they catch their train. And one of them said NASA wants to set up the Wizard’s machine on the moon to get a clearer signal.”

They swapped stories about their mutual radio pal, but Ruth, impatient as usual, sitting dressed in her business suit, was itching to get home and out of her street duds. Why don’t these two guys get up-to-date? Who cares about Columbia, even though it’s my name?

Columbia Ruth wasn’t interested in some midwestern harvest queen. She was more like the holy hoyden of rock and roll.

That night, the Wizard, figuratively lost in the stars from listening for extraterrestrial voices, introduced his Vox-Begone to his New York audience.

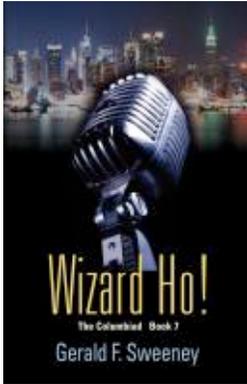
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“I’ve been scratching the sky with my Vox box, and I’ve tapped into something special. I’ve been reluctant to share this because I’m not sure it’s right to reveal a man’s prayers. Some decisions aren’t so easy, but here it is. I figure the date is June 5th, 1944, in England—the middle of the night:

(Voice of Eisenhower) “Oh, Lord, I hate to trust our fate in the weather, so I seek your wisdom. There are 175,000 men docked out there, heaving in a gale on 4,000 ships, ready to cross the Channel, waiting for my order, and I’m the one who has to decide if they should face the night and the far shore. Lord, help me make the decision. Our cause is great, but so are the risks. Grant that I make the right choice. With trust in You and the weatherman who says the storm will briefly clear, I think I’ll do it. I’ll walk over to the library and tell them. *OK. We’ll go.*”

The Wizard added, “Those were the three most important words of the twentieth century. Ike’s decision to begin the D-Day operation. In simple American. *OK. We’ll go.*”

Jim said. “I’m going too. I’m going to find you, you old duffer.”



Wizard Ho!, the seventh and last novel in the Columbiad series, follows a merry band of Mahattanites in their search for a Wizard and his sidekick, Ripple, who operate a clandestine radio station that represents the embattled voice of the twentieth century intent on identifying the American soul. An interracial couple, Jim and Columbia Ruth, inspires a parade of dancers, musicians, videographers, writers and film buffs to find these radio mavericks.

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