True Names
Vernor Vinge

Vernor Vinge is one of the masters of hard science fiction who has moved to the forefront of the field in recent years. He is also, of all hard SF writers, the one who has been often concerned over the years with computers and advances in computer technology. In contrast to William Gibson, who invented an image so popular and potent that it has been imposed on the real world of computers, Vinge is the writer who understands the technology and most accurately forecast and described in his SF the world of personal computer communication. "True Names" is perhaps his most important story.

In the once-upon-a-time days of the First Age of Magic, the prudent sorcerer regarded his own true name as his most valued possession but also the greatest threat to his continued good health, for-the stories go-once an enemy, even a weak unskilled enemy, learned the sorcerer's true name, then routine and widely known spells could destroy or enslave even the most powerful. As times passed, and we graduated to the Age of Reason and thence to the first and second industrial revolutions, such notions were discredited. Now it seems that the Wheel has turned full circle (even if there never really was a First Age) and we are back to worrying about true names again:

The first hint Mr. Slippery had that his own True Name might be known and, for that matter, known to the Great Enemy-came with the appearance of two black Lincolns humming up the long dirt driveway that stretched through the dripping pine forest down to Road 29. Roger Pollack was in his garden weeding, had been there nearly the whole morning, enjoying the barely perceptible drizzle and the overcast, and trying to find the initiative to go inside and do work that actually makes money. He looked up the moment the intruders turned, wheels squealing, into his driveway. Thirty seconds passed, the cars came out of the third-generation forest to pull up beside and behind Pollack's Honda. Four heavy-set men and a hard-looking female piled out, started purposefully across his well-tended cabbage patch, crushing tender young plants with a disregard which told Roger that this was no social call.

Pollack looked wildly around, considered making a break for the woods, but the others had spread out and he was grabbed and frog-marched back to his house. (Fortunately the door had been left unlocked. Roger had the feeling that they might have knocked it down rather than ask him for the key.) He was shoved abruptly into a chair. Two of the heaviest and least collegiate-looking of his visitors stood on either side of him. Pollack's protests-now just being voiced-brought no response. The women and an older man poked around among his sets. "Hey, I remember this, Al: it's the script for 1965. See?" The woman spoke as she flipped through the holo-scenes that decorated the interior wall.

The older man nodded. "I told you. He's written more popular games than any three men and even more than some agencies. Roger Pollack is something of a genius. "

They're novels, damn you, not games! Old irritation flashed unbidden into
Roger's mind. Aloud. "Yeah, but most of my fans aren't as persistent as you all."

"Most of your fans don't know that you are a criminal, Mr. Pollack."

"Criminal? I'm no criminal-but I do know my rights. You FBI types must identify yourselves, give me a phone call, and—"

The woman smiled for the first time. It was not a nice smile. She was about thirty-five, hatchet-faced, her hair drawn back in the single braid favored by military types. Even so it could have been a nicer smile. Pollack felt a chill start up his spine. "Perhaps that would be true, if we *were* the FBI or if you were *not* the scum you are. But this is a Welfare Department bust,