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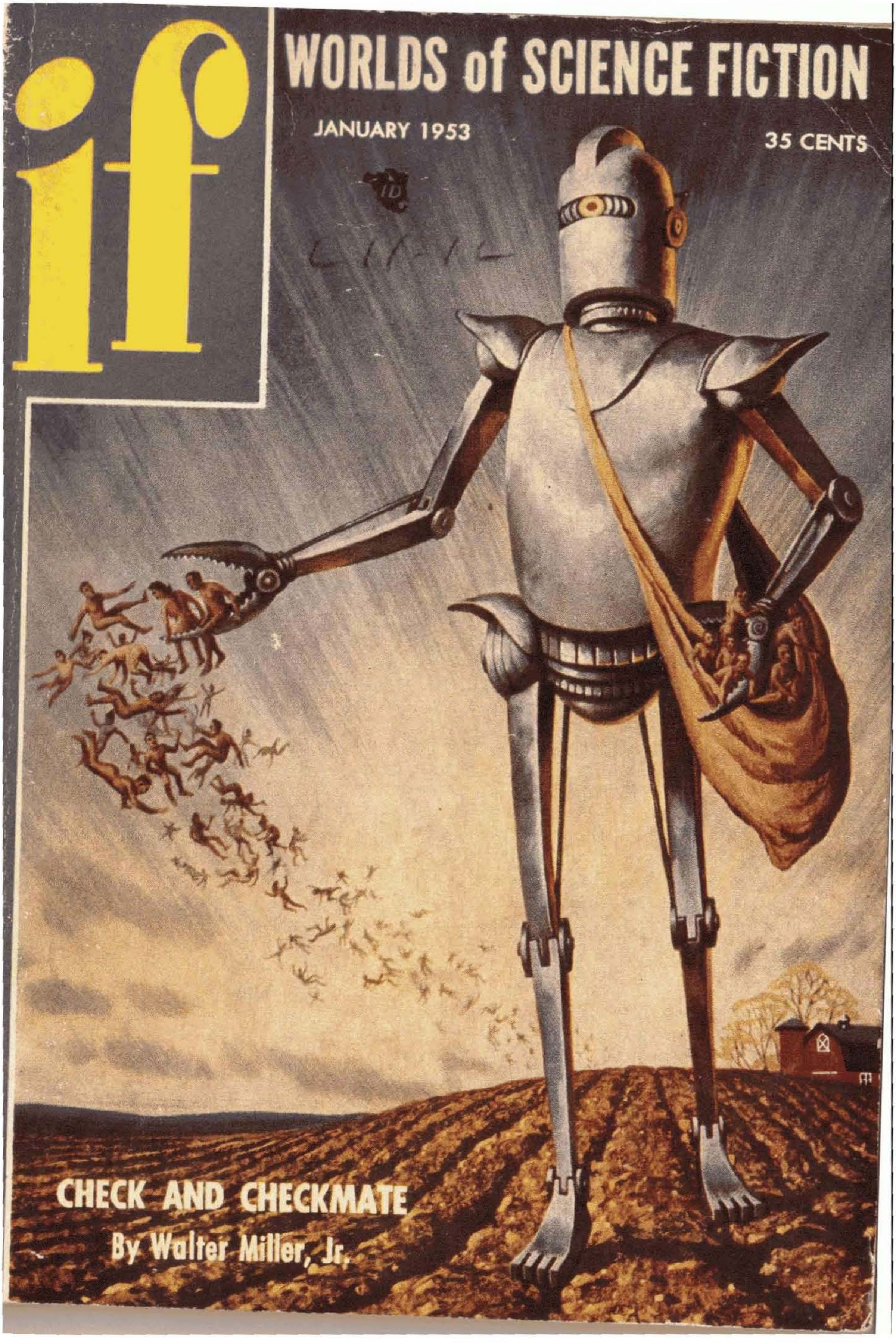
WORLDS of SCIENCE FICTION

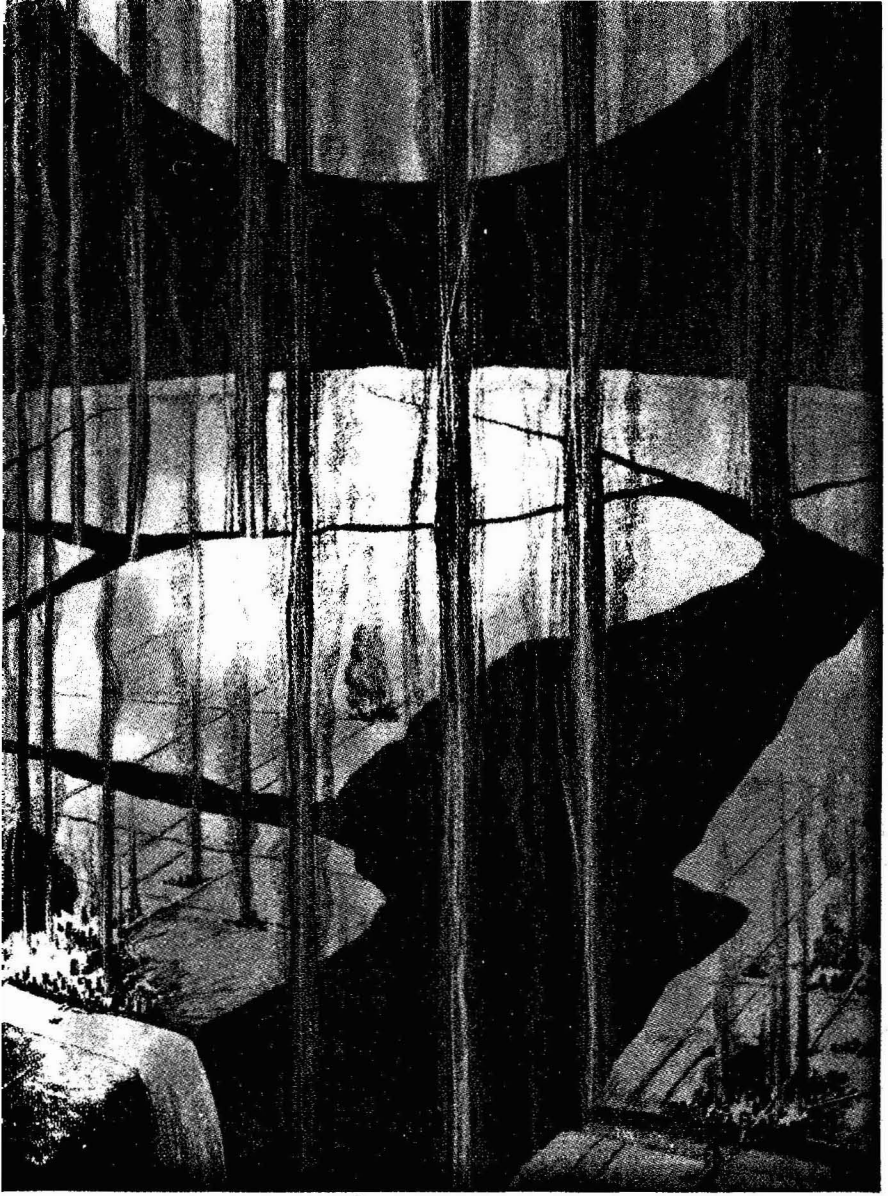
JANUARY 1953

35 CENTS



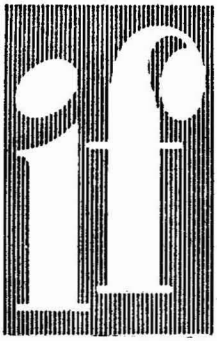
CHECK AND CHECKMATE

By Walter Miller, Jr.



American Museum of Natural History

EXPANDING SUN BURNS UP EARTH—Presented by the Hayden Planetarium as one of several astronomical catastrophies that could some day end life on the Earth, here is an artist's conception of what would happen to us under expanding energy of the Sun. For expiring energy of the Sun, see inside back cover.



WORLDS of SCIENCE FICTION

JANUARY 1953

All Stories New and Complete

Editor: JAMES L. QUINN

Art Director: HENRY BECKER

Cover by Anton Kurka, suggesting *The Ultimate Re-sowing of the Human Race—4000 AD*

SHORT NOVEL

NOVELETTES

SHORT STORIES

FEATURES

IF is published bi-monthly by Quinn Publishing Company, Inc. Volume 1, No. 6. Office of publication, 8 Lord Street, Buffalo, New York. Entered as Second Class Matter at Post Office, Buffalo, New York. Subscription $3.50 for 12 issues in U.S. and Possessions; Canada $4 for 12 issues; elsewhere $4.50. Allow four weeks for change of address. All stories appearing in this magazine are fiction; any similarity to actual persons is coincidental. Not responsible for unsolicited artwork or manuscripts. 35c a copy. Printed in U.S.A.

EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS OFFICES, KINGSTON, NEW YORK

Next issue on sale January 7th

A CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

WHEN WILL we have space travel?

The year 1952 seems to be open season on that question. It's been the subject of articles in newspapers and magazines; whole volumes have been devoted to it; it has been discussed over the radio and on your television screen. Many of the leading scientists in America have had a whack at it. The pretty solid concensus is that we *will* have space travel, but as to *when* there seems to be a difference of opinion. Some authorities put it at ten years, others at fifteen or twenty, and still others say longer.

The chances are that it will be longer—much longer. Probably not before the year 2000. Why? Because there are too many elements involved other than the purely physical scientific evolvement of ways and means. First, let's consider the "tractor force" which has moved mankind through the ages, that which will move him on to another planet: that of dire physical necessity, or the fundamental law of survival.

MAN HAS always moved—or explored—because he had to live. That's basic. Since the beginning of time, Man, singly at first and later in groups or nations, has ventured forth for the sustenance of life—food, clothing, raw materials, commercial intercourse, economic security—and he has accomplished it through free exploration or war. As Man progressed, by supplying himself with the basic requirements of life, he gave birth to thought—spiritual, cultural, philosophical, scientific, political, economical—which gave to the satisfaction of his animal hungers the veneer called civilization.

Today Mankind has multiplied and explored and warred until it populates, in an alleged civilized state of mind, practically every known part of Earth—at least those parts which are habitable—eating off it, living off it, thinking off it and deriving varying degrees of comfort therefrom. And despite the plundered condition of that Earth today, there are still millions of inhabitable miles, and still enough wherewithall to sustain the human race for at least another century. So, the all-compelling, motivating, driving force to push Man off the Earth, that of animal survival, is lacking—at least for the present.

A SECOND rather logical reason

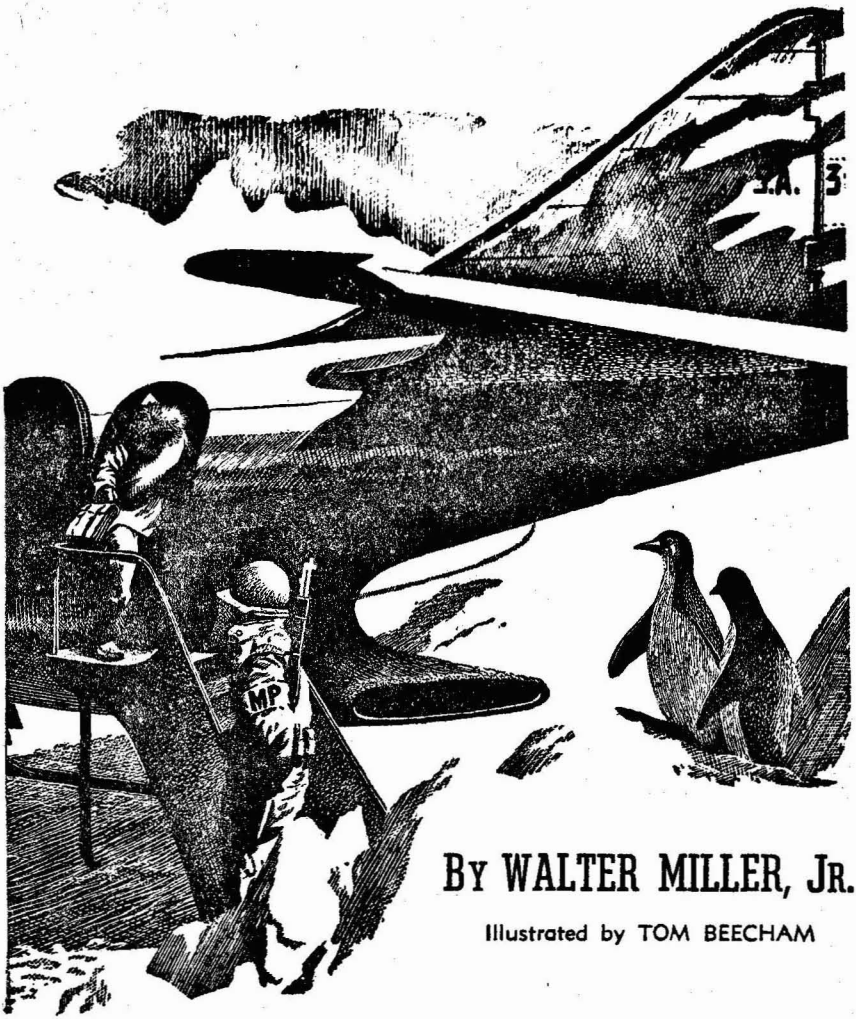
why we can't expect space travel before 2000 AD is universal political attitude. There's too much distrust, corruption, petty jealousy, narrow-mindedness and lack of unity in national intercourse today. Interspace travel is the invasion of one planet by another, and there's got to be at least a fundamental unity between the peoples of the earth if they are going to invade other worlds. It's too big a job for one guy to accomplish by himself in a dark room in his basement. Scientific experiments with rockets reaching toward space—propulsion, meteorological, survival — have been pressed for military purposes. Every major nation has its own rocket or guided missile project working night and day to get the jump on its fellow nations. The United States is the best equipped nation in the world to launch a space project, but the moment our enemies hear about it they're going to do everything in their power to knock it down. If our enemies got the jump, the United States would jolly well *have* to do the same thing. Perhaps space travel will be born during the next war—much as our rockets, jet propulsion and electronic discoveries came out of the Second World War. Perhaps the Third World War will be one to determine which nation is to be the first to enter space. When that great, great war is over, the victor, if there be such, will be the ruler of Earth; there will be no one to contest its right to the skies; and with what is learned and what is left, and with the cooperation of all, it can build ships to explore space and seek another planet. By that time it is very possible that such will be necessary—Earth having burned up the essentials of life.

ANOTHER delay, of course, is money. It has been estimated that the cost to establish space transportation, with outer planet contact, will cost billions of dollars. That's right—but how many of these astronomical denominations? The U. S. government is already 265 billions in the red, and to successfully establish space travel or planetary contact on any permanent basis will probably cost as much as the entire national budget for a year—how much is it running now?—fifty, sixty, seventy billions? Take that awesome mountain of cabbage and add to it the extra cost of the super-secrecy required today, the calculated costs of sabotage, the cost of another war—and there you have it.

YES, WE'LL HAVE space travel, but hardly before there is a basic necessity, a reasonable degree of world unity and a fabulous amount of money to back up the sweat and genius of science. Let's say, pretty soon. Perhaps fifty or sixty years. And that's a mighty short time away, almost infinitesimal, when you're setting up a million-year milestone in the whole history of mankind. —jlq

CHECK and CHECKMATE

Victory hinges not always on the mightiest sword, but often on lowly subterfuge. Here is a classic example, with the Western World as stooge!



BY WALTER MILLER, JR.

Illustrated by TOM BEECHAM

JOHN SMITH XVI, new President of the Western Federation of Autonomous States, had made a number of campaign promises that nobody really expected him to fulfill, for after all, the campaign and the election were only ceremonies, and the President—who had no real name of his own—had been trained for the executive post since birth. He had been elected by a popular vote of 603,217,954 to 130, the dissenters casting their negative by announcing that, for the sake of national unity, they refused to participate in any civilized activities during the President's term, whereupon they were admitted (volun-

tarily) to the camp for conscientious objectors.

But now, two weeks after his inauguration, he seemed ready to make good the first and perhaps most difficult promise of the lot: to confer by televiewphone with Ivan Ivanovitch the Ninth, the Peoplesfriend and Vicar of the Asian Proletarian League. The President apparently meant to keep to himself the secret of his success in the difficult task of arranging the interview in spite of the lack of any diplomatic contact between the nations, in spite of the Hell Wall, and the interference stations which made even radio communication impossible between the two halves of the globe. Someone had suggested that John Smith XVI had floated a note to Ivan IX in a bottle, and the suggestion, though ludicrous, seemed not at all unlikely.

John XVI seemed quite pleased with himself as he sat with his staff of Primary Stand-ins in the study of his presidential palace. His face, of course, was invisible behind the golden mask of the official helmet, the mask of tragedy with its expression of pathos symbolizing the self-immolation of public service—as well as protecting the President's own personal visage from public view, and hence from assassination in unmasked private life, for not only was he publicly nameless, but also publicly faceless and publicly unknown as an individual. But despite the invisibility of his expression, his contentment became apparent by a certain briskness of gesticulation and a certain smugness in his voice as he spoke to the nine Stand-ins who were also bodyguards, council-members, and advisors to the chief executive.

"Think of it, men," he sighed happily in his smooth tenor, slightly muffled by the mask. "Communication with the East—after forty years of the Big Silence. A great moment in history, perhaps the greatest since the last peace-effort."

The nine men nodded dutifully. The President looked around at them and chuckled.

" 'Peace-effort'," he echoed, spitting the words out distinctly as if they were a pair of phonetic specimens. "Do you remember what it used to be called—in the middle of the last century?"

A brief silence, then a Stand-in frowned thoughtfully. "Called it 'war', didn't they, John?"

"Precisely." The golden helmet nodded crisply. " 'War'—and now 'peace-effort'. Our semantics has progressed. Our present 'security-probe' was once called 'lynch'. 'Social-security' once meant a limited insurance plan, not connoting euthanasia and sterilization for the ellie-moes. And that word 'ellie-moe'— once eleemosynary—was once applied to institutions that took *care* of the handicapped."

He waited for the burst of laughter to subside. A Stand-in, still chuckling, spoke up.

"It's our institutions that have evolved, John."

"True enough," the President agreed. "But as they changed, most of them kept their own names. Like 'the Presidency'. It used to be rabble-chosen, as our ceremonies imply. Then the Qualifications Amendment that limited it to the psychologically fit. And then the

Education Amendment prescribed other qualifying rules. And the Genetic Amendment, and the Selection Amendment, and finally the seclusion and depersonalization. Until it gradually got out of the rabble's hands, except symbolically." He paused. "Still, it's good to keep the old names. As long as the names don't change, the rabble is happy, and say, 'We have preserved the Pan-American way of life'."

"While the rabble is really impotent," added a Stand-in.

"Don't say that!" John Smith XVI snapped irritably, sitting quickly erect on the self-conforming couch. "And if you believe it, you're a fool." His voice went sardonic. "Why don't you try abolishing me and find out?"

"Sorry, John. I didn't mean—"

THE PRESIDENT stood up and paced slowly toward the window where he stood gazing between the breeze-stirred drapes at the sun-swept city of Acapulco and at the breakers rolling toward the distant beach.

"No, my power is of the rabble," he confessed, "and I am their friend." He turned to look at them and laugh. "Should I build my power on men like you? Or the Secondary Stand-ins? Baa! For all your securities, you are still stooges. Of the rabble. Do you obey me because I control military force? Or because I control rabble? The latter I think. For despite precautions, military forces can be corrupted. Rabble cannot. They rule you through me, and I rule you through them. And I am their servant because I have to be. No tyrant can survive by oppression."

A gloomy hush followed his words. It was still fourteen minutes before time for the televiewphone contact with Ivan Ivanovitch IX. The President turned back to the "window". He stared "outside" until he grew tired of the view. He pressed a button on the wall. The window went black. He pressed another button, which brought another view: Pike's Peak at sunset. As the sky gathered gray twilight, he twisted a dial and ran the sun back up again.

The palace was built two hundred feet underground, and the study was a safe with walls of eight-inch steel. It lent a certain air of security.

The historic moment was approaching. The Stand-ins seemed nervous. What changes had occurred behind the Hell Wall, what new developments in science, what political mutations? Only rumors came from beyond the Wall, since the last big peace-effort which had ended in stalemate and total isolation. The intelligence service did the best that it could, but the picture was fuzzy and incomplete. There was still "communism", but the word's meaning had apparently changed. It was said that the third Ivan had been a crafty opportunist but also a wise man who, although he did nothing to abolish absolutism, effected a bloody reformation in which the hair-splitting Marxist dogmatics had been purged. He appointed the most pragmatic men he could find to succeed them, and set the whole continental regime on the road to a harsh but practical

utilitarian civilization.

A slogan had leaked across the Wall recently: "There is no God but a Practical Man; there is no Law but a Best Solution," and it seemed to affirm that the third Ivan's influence had continued after his passing—although the slogan itself was a dogma. And it might mean something quite non-literal to the people who spoke it. The rabble of the West were still stirred to deep emotion by a thing that began, "When in the course of human events—" and they saw nothing incongruous about Tertiary Stand-ins who quoted it in the name of the Federation's rule.

But the unknown factor that disturbed the President most was not the present Asian political or economic situation, but rather, the state of scientific development, particularly as it applied to military matters. The forty years of non-communication had not been spent in military stasis, at least not for the West. Sixty percent of the federal budget was still being spent for defense. Powerful new weapons were still being developed, and old ones pronounced obsolete. The seventh John Smith had even conspired to have a conspiracy against himself in Argentina, with resulting civil war, so that the weapons could be tested under actual battle conditions—for the region had been overpopulated anyway. The results had been comforting—but John the Sixteenth wanted to know more about what the enemy was doing.

THE HELL WALL—which was really only a globe-encircling belt of booby-trapped land and ocean, guarded from both sides—had its political advantages, of course. The mysterious doings of the enemy, real and imagined, were a constant and suspenseful threat that made it easy for the Smiths to keep the rabble in hand. But for all the present Smith knew, the threat might very well be real. He had to find out. It would also be a popular triumph he could toss to the rabble, bolstering his position with them, and thereby securing his hold on the Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Stand-ins, who were becoming a little too presumptious of late.

He had a plan in mind, vague, tentative, and subject to constant revision to suit events as they might begin to occur. He kept the plan's goal to himself, knowing that the Stand-ins would call it insane, dangerous, impossible.

"John! We're picking up their station!" a Stand-in called. "It's a minute before time!"

He left the window and walked calmly to the couch before the televiewphone, whose screen had come alive with the kaleidoscope patterns of the interference-station which sprang to life as soon as an enemy station tried to broadcast.

"Have the fools cut that scatter-station!" he barked angrily.

A Stand-in grabbed at a microphone, but before he made the call the interference stopped—a few seconds before the appointed time. The screen revealed an empty desk and a wall behind, with a flag of the Asian League. No one was in the picture, which was slightly blurred by several relay stations,

which had been set up on short notice for this one broadcast.

A wall-clock peeped the hour in a childish voice: "Sixteen o'clock, Thirdday, Smithweek, also Accident-Prevention Week and Probe-Subversives Week; Happy 2073! Peep!"

A man walked into the picture and sat down, facing John Smith XVI. A heavy-set man, clad in coveralls, and wearing a red rubber or plastic helmet-mask. The mask was the face of the first Soviet dictator, dead over a century ago. John's scalp bristled slightly beneath his own golden headdress. He tried to relax. The room was hushed. The opposing leaders stared at each other without speaking. Historic moment!

Ivan Ivanovitch slowly lifted his hand and waved it in greeting. John Smith returned the gesture, then summoned courage to speak first.

"You have translators at hand?"

"I need none," the red mask growled in the Western tongue. "You are unable to speak my tongue. We shall speak yours."

The President started. How could the Red know that he did not speak the Russo-Asian dialect?

"Very well." The President reached for a prepared text and began to read. "I requested this conference in the hope of establishing some form of contact between our peoples, through their duly constituted executive authorities. I hope that we can agree on a series of conferences, aimed eventually at a lessening of the tension between us. I do not propose that we alter our respective positions, nor to change our physical isolation from one another, except in the field of high-level diplomacy and . . ."

"Why?" grunted the Asian chieftain.

John Smith XVI hesitated. The gutteral monosyllable had been toneless and disinterested. The Red was going to draw him out, apparently. Very well, he would be frank —for a time.

"The answer should be evident, Peoplesfriend. I presume that your government spends a respectable sum for armaments. My government does likewise. The eventual aim should be economy . . ."

"Is this a disarmament proposal?"

The fellow was blunt. Smith cleared his throat. "Not at the present time, Peoplesfriend. I hoped that eventually we might be able to establish a mutual trust so that to some extent we could lessen the burden . . ."

"Stop talking Achesonian, President. What do you want?"

The President went rigid. "Very well," he said sarcastically, "I propose that we reduce military expenses by blowing the planet in half. The halves can circle each other as satellite twins, and we'll have achieved perfect isolation. It would seem more economical than the present course."

He apparently had sized-up the Peoplesfriend correctly. The man threw back his masked head and laughed uproariously.

"The Solomon solution! . . . ha ha! . . . Slice the baby in half!" the Stalin-mask chuckled. Then he paused to grow sober. "Too bad we can't do it, isn't it?"

JOHN SMITH sat stiffly waiting. Diplomacy was dead, and he had made a mistake in trying to be polite. Diplomats were dead, and the art forgotten. Poker-game protocol had to apply here, and it was really the only sensible way: for two opponents to try to cheat each other honestly and jovially. He was glad the Soviet Worker's Vicar had not responded to his first politeness.

"Anything else, Smith?"

"We can discuss agenda later. What about the continued conferences?"

"Suits me. I have nothing to lose. I am in a position to destroy you anyway, a position I have occupied for several years. I have not cared to do so, since you made no overt moves against us."

A brief silence. Bluff? Smith wondered. Certainly bluff. On the other hand, it would be interesting to see how far Ivan would brag.

"I gather your atomic research has made rapid strides, for you to make such a boast," Smith ventured.

"Not at all. In fact, my predecessor had it curtailed and limited to industrial applications. Our weapons program has become uni-directional, and extremely inexpensive. I'll tell you about it sometime."

Smith's flesh crawled. Something was wrong here. The Asian leader was too much at his ease. His words meant nothing, of course. It had to be lying noise; it could be nothing else. A meeting such as this was not meant to communicate truth, but to discern an opponent's attitude and to try to hide one's own.

"Let it suffice to say," the Red leader went on, "that we know more about you than you know about us. Our system has changed. A century ago, our continent suffered a blight of dogmatism and senseless butchery such as the world had never seen. Obviously, such conditions cannot endure. They did not. There was strong reaction and revolution within the framework of the old system. We have achieved a workable technological aristocratism, based on an empirical approach to problems. We realize that the final power is in the hands of the people—and I use that archaic word in preference to your 'rabble'—"

"Are you trying to convert me to something?" John Smith growled acidly.

"Not at all. I'm telling you our position." He paused for a moment, then inserted his fingertips under the edge of the mask. "Here is probably the best way to tell you."

The Red leader ripped off the mask, revealing an impassive Oriental face with deepset black eyes and a glowering frown. The President sucked in his breath. It was unthinkable, that a man should expose himself to . . . but then, that was what he was trying to prove wasn't it?

He kicked a foot-switch to kill the microphone circuit, and spoke quickly to the Stand-ins, knowing that the Asian could not see his lips move behind the golden mask.

"Is Security Section guarding against spy circuits?"

"Yes, John."

"Then quick, get out of the room, all of you! Join the Secondaries."

"But John, it'll leave you fin-

gered! If nine of us leave, they'll know that the remaining one is—"

"Get on your masks and get out! I'm going to take mine off."

"But John—!"

"Move, Subversive!"

"You don't need to curse," the Stand-in muttered. The nine men, out of the camera's field, donned golden helmets identical to Smith's, whistled six notes to the audio-combination, then slipped out the thick steel door as it clicked and came open.

The Red was jeering at him quietly. "Afraid to take off your mask, President? The rabble? Or your self-appointed Stand-ins? Which frightens you, President—"

John Smith plucked at a latch under his chin, and the golden headdress came apart down the sides. He lifted it off and laid it casually aside, revealing a hard, blocky face, slightly in need of a shave, with cool blue eyes and blond brows. His hair was graying slightly at the temples, with a forty-ish hairline.

THE RED nodded. "Greetings, human. I doubted that you would."

"Why not?" growled Smith.

"Because you fear your Stand-ins, as appointees, not subject to your 'rabble'. Our ruling clique selects its own members, but they are subject to popular approval or recall by referendum. I fear nothing from them."

"Let's not compare our domestic forms, Peoplesfriend."

"I wanted to point out," the Asian continued calmly, "that your system slipped into what it is without realizing it. A bad was allowed to grow worse. We, however were reacting against unreasonableness and stupidity within our own system. In the year 2001—"

"I am aware of your history before the Big Silence. May we discuss pertinent matters—?"

The Asian stared at him sharply. The frown grew deeper. The black eyes looked haughty. "If you *really* want to discuss something, John Smith, suppose we arrange a personal meeting in a non-walled, neutral region? Say, Antarctica?"

John Smith XVI, unaccustomed to dealing without a mask, let surprise fill his face before he caught himself. The Asian chuckled but said nothing. The President studied the border of the teleview screen for a moment.

"I shall have to consider your proposal," he said dully.

The Peoplesfriend nodded curtly, then suggested a time for the next interview. Smith revised it ahead to gain more time, and agreement was reached. The screen went blank; the interview was at an end. The Sixteenth Smith took a slow, worried breath, then slowly donned the mask of office again. He summoned the nine Primaries immediately.

"That was dangerous, John," one of them warned him as they entered. "You may regret it. They knew you were in here alone. We're not all identical from the neck-down you know. When we come out, they might compare—"

He cut the man off with a curt gesture. "No time. We're in a bad situation. Maybe worse than I guess." He began pacing the floor

and staring down at the metallifiber rug as he spoke. "He knows more about us than he should. It took me awhile to realize that he's speaking our latest language variations. A language changes idiom in forty years, and slang. He's got the latest phrases. 'Greetings, human' is one, like a rabbleman says when somebody softens up."

"Spies?"

"Maybe a whole network. I don't see how they could get them through the Wall, but—maybe it's not so hard. Antarctic's open, as he pointed out."

"What can we do about it, John?

Smith stopped pacing, popped his knuckles hard, stared at them. "Assemble Congress. Security-probe. It's the only answer. Let the 'Rabble's Parliament' run their own inquisition. They were always good at purging themselves. Start a big spy-scare, and keep it in the channels. I'll lead with a message to the rabble." He paused, the tragedy mask gaping at them. "You won't like this, but I'm having the Stand-ins probed too. The Presidency is not immune."

A muttering of indignation. Some of them went white. No one protested however.

"No witch-hunt in this group, however," he assured them. "I'll veto anything that looks unfair for the Primaries, but—" He paused and rang the word again. "—*but*—there will be no leniency tolerated from here on down. If Congress thinks it's found a spy, it can execute him on the spot—and I won't lift a finger. This has got to be rooted out and burned."

He began to pace again. He began barking crisp orders for specific details of the probe, or rather, for the campaign that would start the probe. The rabble were better at witch-hunts than a government was. Congress had not been assembled for fifteen years, since there had been nothing suspicious to investigate, but once it was called to duty, heads would roll—some of them literally. If some innocent people were hurt, the rabble could only blame themselves, for their own enthusiasm in ruthlessly searching out the underground enemy. Smith couldn't worry about that. If an Asian spy-system were operating in the continent, it had to be crushed quickly.

WHEN HE had outlined the propaganda and string-pulling plans for them, he turned to the other matter—the Red leader's boast of ability to conquer the West.

"It's probably foolish talk, but we don't know their present psychology. Double production on our most impressive weapons. Give the artificial-satellite program all the money it wants, and get them moving on it. I want a missile-launching site in space before the end of the year. Pay particular attention to depopulation weapons for use against industrial areas. We may have to strike in a hurry. We've been fools—coasting this way, feeling secure behind the Wall."

"You're *not* contemplating another peace-effort, John?" gasped an elderly Stand-in.

"I'm contemplating survival!"

the leader snapped. "I don't know that we're in serious danger, but if it takes a peace-effort to make sure, then we'll start one. So fast it'll knock out their industry before they know we've hit them." He stood frozen for a moment, the mask lifted proudly erect. "By Ike, I love the West! And it's not going to suffer any creeping eruption while I'm at its head!"

When the President had finished and was ready to leave, the others started donning their masks again.

"Just a minute," he grunted. "Number Six."

One of the men, about the President's size and build, looked up quickly. "Yes, John?"

"Your cloak is stained at the left shoulder. Grease?"

Six inspected it curiously, then nodded. "I was inspecting a machine shop, and—"

"Never mind. Trade cloaks with me."

"Why, if—" Six stopped. His face lost color. "But the others—might have—"

"Precisely."

Six unclasped it slowly and handed it to the Sixteenth Smith, accepting the President's in return. His face was set in rigid lines, but he made no further protest.

Masked and prepared, a Stand-in whistled a tune to the door, which had changed its combination since the last time. The tumblers clicked, and they walked out into a large auditorium containing two hundred Secondary Stand-ins, all wearing the official mask.

If a Secondary ever wanted to assassinate the President, one shot would give him a single chance in ten as they filed through the door.

"Mill about!" bellowed a Sergeant-at-Arms, and the two hundred began wandering among themselves in the big room, a queer porridge, stirred clumsily but violently. The Primaries and the President lost themselves in the throng. For ten minutes the room milled and circulated.

"Unmask!" bellowed the crier.

The two hundred and ten promptly removed their helmets and placed them on the floor. The President was unmasked and unknown—unmarked except by a certain physical peculiarity that could be checked only by a physician, in case the authenticity of the presidential person was challenged, as it frequently was.

Then the Secondaries went out to lose themselves in a larger throng of Tertiaries, and the group split randomly to take the various underground highways to their homes.

The President entered his house in the suburbs of Dia City, hugged the children, and kissed his wife.

John Smith was profoundly disturbed. During the years of the Big Silence, a feeling of uneasy security had evolved. The Federation had been in isolation too long, and the East had become a mysterious unknown. The Presidency had oscillated between suspicious unease and smug confidence, depending perhaps upon the personality of the particular president more than anything else. The mysteriousness of the foe had been used politically to good advantage by every president selected to office, and the Sixteenth Smith had intended to so use it. But now he vaguely regretted it.

THE TENURE of office was still four years, and he could not help feeling that if he had maintained the intercontinental silence, he would not have had to worry about the spy-matter. If the hemisphere had been infiltrated, the subversive work had not begun yesterday. It had probably been going on for years, during several administrations, and the plans of the East, if any, would perhaps not come to a climax for several more years. He felt himself in the position of a man who suffered no pain as yet, but learned that he had an incurable disease. Why did he have to find out?

But now that the danger was apparent, he had to go ahead and fight it instead of allowing it to pass on to the next John Smith.

He made a stirring speech to Congress when it convened. The cowled figures of the people's representatives sat like gloomy gray shadows in the tiers of seats around the great amphitheatre under the night sky; the symbolic torches threw fluttering black shadows among their ranks. The sight always made him shiver. Their cowls and robes had been affected during the last great peace-effort, at which time they had been impregnated with lead to protect against bomb-radiation, but the garb of office had endured for ceremonial reasons.

There was still a Senate and a House, the former acting chiefly as an investigating body, the latter serving a legislative function in accordance with the rabble-code, which no longer applied to the Executive, being chiefly concerned with matters of rabble morals and police-functions. Its duties could mostly be handled by mail and televiewphone voting, so that it seldom convened in the physical sense.

President John quoted freely from the Declaration of Independence, the Gettysburg Address, the MacArthur Speech to Congress, and the immortal words of the first John Smith in his *Shall We Submit?* which began: "If thy brother the son of thy mother, or thy son, or daughters, or thy wife, or thy friend whom thou lovest, would persuade thee secretly, saying, 'Let us go and serve strange gods', neither let thy eyes spare him nor conceal him, but thou shalt presently put him to death!"

The speech was televised to the rabble, and for that matter, one of the Stand-ins delivered the actual address to protect the President who was present on the platform among the ranks of Primaries and Secondaries, although not even these officials were aware of it. The address was honestly an emotional one, not bothering with any attempt at logical analysis. None was needed. Congress was always eager to investigate subversion. It was good political publicity, and about the only congressional activity that could command public attention and interest. The cheers were rousing and prolonged. When it was over, the Speaker and the President of the Senate both made brief addresses to set the machinery in motion.

JOHN SMITH watched the proceedings with deep satisfaction. But as time wore on, he began to

wonder how many spies were truly being apprehended. Among the many thousands who were brought to justice, only sixty-nine actually confessed to espionage, and over half of them, upon being subjected to psychiatric examination, proved to be neurotic publicity-seekers who would have confessed to anything sufficiently dramatic. Twenty-seven of them were psychiatrically cleared, but even so, their stories broke down when questioned under hypnosis or hypnotic drugs, except for seven who, although constantly maintaining their guilt, could not substantiate one another's claims, nor furnish any evidence which might lead to the discovery of a well-organized espionage network. John Smith was baffled.

He was particularly baffled by the disappearance of seventeen men in key positions, who, upon being mentioned as possible candidates for the probe, immediately vanished into thin air, leaving no trace. It seemed to Smith, upon reading the individual reports, that many of them would have been absolved before their cases got beyond the deputy level, so flimsy were the accusations made against them. But they had not waited to find out. Two were obviously guilty of *something*. One had murdered a deputy who came to question him, then fled in a private plane, last seen heading out to sea. He had apparently run out of fuel over the ocean and crashed. The second man, an ordnance officer at the proving ground, had spectacularly committed suicide by exploding an atomic artillery shell, vaporizing himself and certain key comrades including his superior officer.

Here, the President felt, was something really ominous. The disappearances and the suicides spelled careful discipline and planning. Their records had been impeccable. The accusations seemed absurd. If they were agents, they had done nothing but sit in their positions and wait for an appointed time. The possibilities were frightening, but evidence was inconclusive and led nowhere. Nevertheless, the house-cleaning continued.

On Fourthday of Traffic Safety Week, which was also Eat More Corn-Popsies Week, John Smith XVI conferred with Ivan Ivanovitch IX again at the appointed time. Contrary to all traditions, he again ordered the Stand-ins—temporarily eight in number, since Number Six had died mysteriously in the bathtub—to leave the study so that he might unmask. Promptly at sixteen o'clock the Asian's face—or rather his ceremonial mask—came on the screen. But seeing the Westerner's square-cut visage smiling at him sourly,he promptly removed the covering to reveal his Oriental face. The exchange of greetings was curt.

" I see by recent events," said Ivan, "that you are nervous on your throne. For the sake of your own people, let me warn you that we have no designs on your autonomy unless you become aggressive toward us. The real difficulty, as revealed by your purge, is that you feel insecure, and insecurity makes you unpredictable. I do not, of course, expect you to be trustworthy. But insecurity sometimes breeds inpulsiveness. If you are to

strike out blindly, perhaps the talks had best be broken off."

Smith XVI reddened angrily but held his temper. The man's presumption was intolerable. Further, he knew about the probe, knowledge which could only come from espionage.

"I have become aware," the President said firmly, "that you have managed to establish a spy-system on this continent. If you wish better relations, you will have the activity stop at once."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said the Peoplesfriend with a bland smile. "I might point out however that at least forty of your spies are either killed while trying to cross the Wall, or are apprehended after they manage to enter my regime."

"The accusation is too ridiculous to deny," Smith lied. "We have no desire to pry into your activities. We wish only to maintain the status quo."

The exchange continued, charges and countercharges and denials. Neither side expected truth or honesty, and the game was as old as civilization. Neither expected to be believed, although the press of both nations would heatedly condemn the other's lack of good faith. The ethical side of the affair was for the rabble to consider, for only the rabble cared about such things. The real task was to ferret out the enemy's attitudes and intentions without revealing one's own.

SMITH FELT that he had won a little, and lost a little too. He had found many hints of subversive activity, but had betrayed his own lack of certainty by reacting so swiftly to it. Ivan IX, on the other hand, seemed too much at ease, too secure, and even impertinent.

"At our last meeting," said the Asian, "I suggested a meeting between ourselves. Have you given thought to the matter?"

"I have given it thought," said the President, "and will agree to the proposal provided you come to this country. The meeting will be held at my capitol."

"Which you change at random intervals, I notice," purred Ivan with a bland smile. "For security reasons?"

"You could only know that by espionage!" Smith snapped.

"Your proposal of course is outrageous. The only sensible place for the meeting is in Singapore."

"That is out of the question. I must insist on the capitol of my government as the only acceptable meeting-place. My government in contacting yours put itself in the position of extending an invitation, a position from which we could not depart without loss of dignity."

"I suggest we delay the matter then," grunted the Peoplesfriend. "And talk about the agenda for such a meeting. What did you have in mind?"

"I have already stated our general aims as being a reduction of armament expenses, beneficial to both sides. I think you agree?"

"Not necessarily, since our budget is already rather low. However, make your specific proposals, and I shall consider them. Further economy, where not injurious to security, is always desirable."

"I propose, then, that we discuss a method whereby agreement might be reached on a plan to divulge the nature of our respective armaments, including number, nature, and purpose of each weapon-class, as a foundation for discussions relating to reductions."

Smith waited for a flat "no" to the suggestion. The Asian leader apparently knew a great deal more about the West's armaments than Smith knew about the East. The Peoplesfriend had nothing to gain by revealing the military strength of his own hemisphere. But he paused, watching Smith with an expressionless stare.

"I accept that for further consideration, at least," Ivan said at last.

John XVI hovered between elation and suspicion. Suspicion won. "Of course there must be some method to assure that accurate figures are divulged."

"That could probably be settled."

Again the President was shocked. It was all too easy. Something was rotten about the whole thing. The Peoplesfriend agreed too readily to things that seemed to be to his disadvantage. The discussion continued for several hours, during which both men presented viewpoints and postponed agreement until a later meeting.

"Stockpiles of fissionable material," said the President, "which could quickly be converted to weapons use should also be discussed."

Ivan frowned. "I mentioned before that we have no need of atomic armaments, nor any plans for building them. Our defense is secured by something entirely different, a weapon which serves an industrial function in time of peace, and a weapon which I might add was largely responsible for our abandoning Marxism. A single discovery, Andrei Sorkin's, made communist doctrine not only a wrong solution, but a wrong solution to a problem that had ceased to exist."

"What problem are you referring to?"

"The use of human beings as automatic devices in a corporate machine—the social-structure of industry, in which the worker was caught and bolted down and expected to perform a single, highly specialized task. That of course, is almost a definition of the word 'proletarian'. We no longer have a true proletariat. For that reason,we are no longer Marxist—although the name 'communist' has survived with its meaning changed."

The conference ended after setting the time for another meeting. John Smith XVI felt that he had been groping in the dark, because of the information-vacuum that kept him from even making a reasonable guess as to Ivan's real aims. He kept feeling vaguely that Ivan was just playing along, reacting according to the opportunity of the moment, not particularly caring what Smith did next. But leaders of states just did not proceed so carelessly—not unless they were fools, or unless they were supremely confident in the ultimate outcome.

THE INTELLIGENCE service analysis of his latest conversation with Ivan gave him something to

think about later however. Andrei Sorkin had been a physicist who had done considerable work in crystal-structure before the Big Silence had cut off knowledge of his activities from the West. Further, the Peoplesfriend's references to industrial usage, coupled with his remarks about specialized labor, seemed to suggest that the East had made great strides in servo-mechanisms and auto-control devices. But control devices were not weapons in themselves. Electronic rocket-pilots were not weapons unless there were rockets for them to fly. Automatic target-trackers were not weapons unless they guided a weapon to shoot at the target. It made little sense; he concluded that Ivan had not meant it to make much sense. Smith could only interpret it as meaning: "Our weapons are marvelously controlled; therefore we need fewer of them."

On the probe front, events were about as usual. The lists of suspects and convictions grew bulky enough to keep a large office staff busy with details. More sinister, in the President's judgment, was the small list of suspects who vanished or committed suicide at the slightest hint of suspicion. The list grew at a slow but steady pace. John assumed that these were certainly guilty. And thorough, searching inquiries into their past activities. were made. These post mortem probes revealed nothing. Their records were clean. Their families, friends, relatives, and even their ancestors were above suspicion. If they had sold out to the enemy, they had given him nothing in return for his wages except perhaps a promise to be fulfilled on a Deadline Day.

He called the Secretary of Defense and demanded a screening procedure be adopted for future personnel, a procedure which would be aimed at selecting men with fanatic loyalty, rather than merely guarding against treason.

"We seem to already have something," murmured the Secretary, a slender, graying gentleman with aristocratic features. "The incidents at the satellite-project seem to indicate that there's something they don't like about our ordinary testing methods."

"Eh? How do you mean?"

"Three men—volunteers for the project—vanished as soon as they found out that they had to submit to all the physicals, mental tests, and so forth. I don't know what they were afraid of. They were already on the reservation. Found out they'd have to be tested again, and vanished. One a known suicide, but the body's still in the river."

" 'Tested *again*'?" the President echoed.

"That's right, John. They'd gone through it before. This was just a recheck for this particular project. Of course, I don't *know* that they were agents."

"Mmm! So they can't stand a recheck. All right, recheck everybody."

"John! A third of the population works for the government!"

"I mean everybody connected with new projects, the most important installations. This might be a weapon for us."

When he received the Secretary's report a week later, John grinned happily. The rechecks had begun,

and the disappearances were mounting. But the grin faded when he read the rest of it. Two of the men had been caught attempting to escape. They had been lodged in a local jail to await transfer to the capitol. During the night, the jailer became aware of a blinding light from the cell-blocks and the stench of burnt organic matter. By the time he reached their cells, the men were gone, and there were only sickening fumes, charred ashes, and a pair of red-hot patches on the floor. Somehow they had gotten incendiary materials into their cells, and the cremation was complete—too complete to be credible.

Then the disappearances began to taper off—until finally, after a few weeks, they ceased completely. He wondered: were the culprits all ferretted out, or had some of them managed to get around the re-checks?

He had spoken to the Asian leader several times, and Ivan was growing curt, even bitingly nasty at times. The President hopefully interpreted it as a sign that his probe was successful enough to worry the Red. He tried to strengthen his position with respect to the proposed conferences, and made only minor concessions such as agreeing to a coastal city in Mexico as the site, rather than the shifting capitol. Ivan sneeringly made equally minute adjustments eastward from Singapore. There was apparently going to be a deadlock, and John was somehow not sorry.

Then the cold-eyed face on the screen did an abrupt about-face, and announced, "I propose that the delegates, including the leaders of both states, meet at a site of your selection in either of the neutral polar regions, not later than Seventhday of Veto Week—which, I think is your Fried Pie Week?—and come prepared to discuss and exchange information relating to size of armament-inventories and future plans. This is my last proposal."

THEY STARED at each other coldly. John started to utter a refusal, then paused. Seventhday of . . . it was one day before the satellite program began moving into space. If he could keep the Eastern Leader tied up for a few weeks afterwards—

"I'll consider your proposal and give you a reply tomorrow," he said bluntly.

The Peoplesfriend gave him a curt nod and clicked off the screen. John chuckled. The enemy's espionage program was evidently getting badly hurt. About one percent of the West's population had been executed, imprisoned, or shifted to other jobs as a result of the congressional probe. The one percent probably included quite a few guilty citizens.

"Rodner, I want a Strike-Day set, a full-scale blitz-operation readied as soon as possible," he told the defense-chief. "I know that a lot of your target information is forty years old, but work out the best plan you can. A depopulation strike, perhaps; there are only two opinions in the world, so 'world-opinion' is not one of the things we need to consider."

The Defense Secretary caught his

breath and sat stiffly erect. "War?" he gasped.

"Don't use that word."

"Sorry, peace-effort."

"No. At least I hope not. I want a gun aimed at them as a bargaining point. But I want it to be a damned *big* gun, and one that's capable of shattering every major city in the East on a few hours' notice. How effective could you make it—if you had to?"

The Secretary frowned doubtfully and tugged at his ear. "Well, John, our strategic command has kept a running plan in effect, revising it to allow for every tidbit of information we can get. Planning continental blitzes is a favorite pastime around high-level strategic commands; it keeps the boys in trim. A plan could probably be agreed upon in a very short time, but its nature would depend on your earliest deadline date."

"Two dates," grunted the tragedy-mask. "The first is Seventh-day, Fried Pie Week. I want a maximum possible effort readied by then, with a plan that allows for a possible stand-by at that date, and a continued build-up to a greater maximum—to be reached when the satellite station is in space and ready for battle. Include the station in the extended plan."

"This is a very dangerous business, John."

The mask whirled. "Do you presume to—?"

"No, Sir. The strike-effort will be prepared as soon as possible." He bowed slightly, then left the presidential study-vault.

Smith turned to gaze at his Stand-ins. "You will go," he said, "all of you, to the examining authorities for the standard loyalty tests and psych-phys rechecks."

The nine masked figures glanced at one another in surprise, then nodded. There were no protests. The following day he had only seven Stand-ins; Four and Eight had been trapped in a burning building on the outskirts of the rabble city, and their remains had not been found.

Smith kept a tight cork on his rage, but it seethed inside him and threatened to burn through as the time approached to speak again with Ivan Ivanovitch IX. The enemy's infiltration into the very ranks of the Presidency robbed him even of dignity. Furthermore, now that the two scoundrels were uncovered, and dead, he remembered a very unpleasant but significant fact: he had, even before his "election" by the rabble, discussed the televiewphone conferences with the Primaries. The idea of contacting Ivan had started, as most ideas start, from some small seed or other that could scarcely be remembered, some off-hand reference to the costly aspects of the Big Silence perhaps, and it had grown into the plan for contact. *But how* had the idea first come to him? Had one of the guilty Stand-ins perhaps planted the seed in his mind? *After* he proposed it, they had seemed demurring at first, but not too long.

Grimly, he realized that the idea might have originated on the far side of the Pacific.

"Who, pray, is the potter, and who the pot?" he grunted, glowering at the nearest Stand-in.

"I beg your pardon?" answered

the man, who could not see the glower for the mask.

"Khayyam, you fool!"

"Oh—"

"Sixteen o'clock!" cheeped the timepiece on the wall. *"Fifthday, Anti-Rabies Week, Practice-Eugenics Week; Happy 2073; Peep!"*

IVAN CAME on the screen, but John did not bother to remove his mask. He sat down quickly and began speaking before any greeting could be exchanged.

"I have decided to accept your last proposal. I specify the meeting place as the deserted weather station at the old settlement of Tharviana in the Byrd-Ellsworth Sector of Antarctica. Date to be Seventh-day of Fried Pie Week. Advance cadres of personnel from both sides should meet at the side two weeks earlier to make repairs and preparations. Do you agree?"

Ivan nodded impatiently, his dark eyes watching the President closely. Smith went on to suggest limits for the size of both cadres, their equipment, and the kind of transportation. Ivan made only one suggestion: that the details, such as permissible arms and standards of conduct, be left to the cadre commanders to settle between themselves before the leaders' parties arrived.

"Your continual espionage activities," Smith said coldly, "do not recommend your government as one to be trusted in the matter of agreements without guarantees. My cadre commander will be instructed as to details."

The Asian grunted. "You speak of trust, yet violate it in advance by preparing an assault against us."

They glared at each other. After a few more words, the conversation ended abruptly, and the matter was tentatively settled.

It was Antarctic Summer. The sun lay low in the north, but clouds threatened to obscure it, and a forbidding coastline hulked under the ugly sky. A small group of ships sulked to the east, and watched another group that sulked to the west. Two rows of buoys marked an ice-free strip across the choppy face of the sea.

A speck appeared in the north, grew larger, became a giant seaplane. It circled once, then swooped majestically down between the rows of buoys, its atomic-fired jets breathing heat over the water. It slid between streamers of spray until slowly it came to a coasting halt and rode on the rise and the fall of the sea. A section of its back rolled open. It pushed a helicopter up into view. The helicopter unfolded its rotors, spun them, then climbed lazily aloft like a beetle that had ridden the eagle. It soared, and travelled inland. The sea-plane taxied west to join one group of ships.

The helicopter landed near a long, windowless concrete building which lay in the shadow of an old control-tower's skeleton. The tower was twisted awry, and the concrete was pock-marked by shrapnel or bullets dating back to one of the peace-efforts. The President, two Stand-ins, and the pilot climbed from the helicopter. A small detachment of troops presented arms.

The cadre commander, a major general, approached the delegation formally, gave it a salute, and took the President's hand.

"The Peoplesfriend is already in the conference hall, Sir, with several of his aides. Do you wish to enter now, or—"

"Where are their troops?"

"Over there, Sir. As you know, we could not agree to completely disarm the site. Only inside the building itself."

"Any unpleasantness?"

"No, sir. Their men are well-disciplined."

"Then let's go and get started. I assume that you're in constant contact with the capitol?"

"Yes, Sir. Televiewphone relay chain all the way up."

John looked around. The Peoplesfriend's helicopter was parked not far away, and beyond it stood a platoon of the Peoplesfriend's troops, lightly armed as his own.

An Asian and a Western guard flanked the entrance to the building, but their only weapons were police-clubs. The party entered slowly and stood for a moment just inside the heavy door that swung closed behind them. John Smith removed his mask.

"Greetings, human."

THE DULL voice called it from the far end of the gloomy hall where Ivan Ivanovitch IX sat facing him, flanked by a pair of aides, at a long, plain table. John Smith XVI advanced with dignity toward him. Curt bows were exchanged, but no handshakes. The Western delegation took their seats.

John nudged the Stand-in on his right, who immediately opened a portfolio to extract a sheaf of papers.

"Would you care to exchange prepared statements to begin with?" Smith asked coolly.

"We have no—" The Peoplesfriend stopped, smirked coldly at his deputies but continued to frown. He peered thoughtfully at his huge knuckles for a moment, then nodded slowly. "A statement—*yes.*"

John slid a section of the sheaf of papers to the Peoplesfriend. The Red leader ignored them, spoke to a deputy curtly.

"Give me a sheet of paper."

The deputy fumbled in a thin briefcase, shook his head and muttered. Finally he found a dog-eared sheet with only a few lines typed across the top. He glanced questioningly at his leader. Ivan snatched it with a low grunt, tore off the good half, produced a stubby, gnawed pencil, and wrote slowly as if his hands were cramped with arthritis. John could see the big block-letters but not the words.

"My prepared statement," said the Peoplesfriend.

With that he pushed the scrap of paper across the table. John stared, and felt the blood leaving his face. The prepared statement said:

I VETO YOU.

"Is this a joke?" he growled, keeping his voice calm. "You cannot mean that you reject proposals before they are made? I fail to see the humor in—"

"There is no humor."

John pushed back his chair, glanced at his men. "Gentlemen, it would appear that we have come

to the bottom of the world for nothing. I think we had better retire to discuss—"

"Sit down," the Asian growled.

"Why—" The President stopped. One of the Red deputies had produced a gun. He sat, and stared coldly at the eastern leader. "Have your man dispose of that weapon. This is a conference table."

The Peoplesfriend grunted an order to the other deputy instead. "Search them."

"Stay back," Smith droned. "I can kill you all quite easily."

The deputy hesitated. The leader started laughing, then checked it. "May I ask how?"

John smiled. "Stay back, or you will find out too quickly." He unzipped his heavy Arctic clothing, removed a heavy container, shaped to conform to his chest, and laid it on the table. A cord ran from the container into his sleeve.

The Peoplesfriend laughed. "High explosives? You would not set them off. However—Jacob, let them keep their weapons. This will be over shortly."

They glared at each other for a moment.

"There is no conference?"

"There is no conference."

"Then why this farce?"

The eastern leader wore a tight smile. He glanced at his watch, began counting backwards: "Seven, six, five, four—"

When he reached zero, there was a long pause; then a sharp whistle from outside.

"Your men are now disarmed," said the Asian. "Your cadre commander is ours."

"Impossible! The recheck—"

"He joined us since the recheck. Further, three of your televiewphone stations in the relay chain are ours, and are relaying recorded broadcasts prepared especially for the purpose."

"I don't believe it!"

THE ASIAN shrugged. "In addition, your entire defense system will be in our hands within six days —while your nation imagines that we are here conferring on disarmament."

"Ridiculous!" the President sputtered. "No system of infiltration or subversion could—"

"Your people were not subverted, Smith. They were merely replaced by ours. Your two Stand-ins, for instance, the ones that died in the fire. They were not the original men."

"You could not possibly find exact doubles—" Something about the Asian's smile made his voice taper off.

He picked up the container of explosives and prepared to rise. "I am going to walk out. And you are going with me. We will return in a helicopter to my plane. Let me explain this mechanism. I have no control over the detonator, for it is not a suicide device. The detonator can be triggered only by either of two events."

"Which are?" The Peoplesfriend was smiling.

"The relay would be closed by a sudden drop in my arterial pressure. Or by an attempt to remove it without knowing how. I am going out, and you are going with me."

"Why?"

"Because I am about to reach in my pocket and produce a gun. Your deputy cannot shoot without blasting a fifty-foot crater where this building now rests." Gingerly, while he watched the wavering deputy, he made good the promise. He kept the snub-nosed automatic aimed at the easterner's belly.

But the Peoplesfriend continued to smile. "May I say something before we *go?*"

There was a sour mockery about it that made Smith pause. He nodded slowly.

"I hoped to keep you here alive, so that we would not have to destroy the whole mission, including the ships. Of course, when the building is blown up, your little fleet will see and hear and try to respond, and we shall have to destroy it before word can be gotten to your capital. Our plans included that possibility, but it is unfortunate."

"Our aircraft will—"

"You do not seem to realize the nature of our weapons yet. And there is no harm in telling you now, I suppose."

"Well?"

"We have a microscopic crystalline relay, so small that millions of them can be packed into a few cubic inches. The crystals are minute tetrahedrons, with each pointed corner an electrical contact. And there is a method for arranging them in circuits without individual attention to each connection. It involves certain techniques in electro-plating and the growing of crystals."

Smith glanced questioningly at one of his Stand-ins, a weapons expert. The man shook his head.

"I can see," he muttered, "how it might replace a lot of bulky circuit elements in some electronics work—particularly computers and servo-mechanisms—but—"

"Indeed," said Ivan, "We have built many so-called 'thinking-machines' no larger than a human brain."

"For self-piloting weapons, I suppose?" asked the Stand-in.

"For self-piloting weapons."

"I fail to see how this could do what you seem to think."

The Peoplesfriend snorted. "Jacob—?" He nodded to the deputy, who immediately fumbled in his pocket, found a penknife, opened it, and handed it to Ivan.

He laid his finger on the table. He cut it off at the second joint with the penknife. There was no blood. Flesh of soft plastic. Tendons of nylon. Bones of bakelite.

"Our leader," the robot said, "is still in Singapore."

The President looked at the robot and a great, weariness swept over him. Suddenly it all seemed futile—a senseless game, played by madmen, dancing over countless graves—playing tag among the tombstones.

Check and checkmate. But always there was a way out. Never a final move. Life eternal and with life, the eternal plotting and scheming. And never a final victor.

Almost regretfully, the President turned his mind back to the affair at hand.

THE END

No one knew, no one cared. For a great lethargy was overcoming the people and their only salvation was—

The LAST *Gentleman*

By Rory Magill

Illustrated by TED SPEICHER

THE EXPLOSION brought Jim Peters upright in bed. He sat there, leaning back on the heels of his hands, blinking stupidly at the wall. His vision cleared and he looked down at Myra, just stirring beside him. Myra opened her eyes.

Jim said, "Did you feel that?"

Myra yawned. "I thought I was dreaming. It was an explosion or something, wasn't it?"

Jim's lips set grimly. After ten years of cold war, there was only one appropriate observation, and he made it. "I guess maybe this is it."

As by common agreement, they got out of bed and pulled on their robes. They went downstairs and out into the warm summer night. Other people had come out of their homes also. Shadowy figures moved and collected in the darkness.

"Sounded right on top of us."

"I was looking out the window. Didn't see no flash."

"Must have been further away than it seemed."

This last was spoken hopefully, and reflected the mood of all the people. Maybe it wasn't the bomb after all.

Oddly, no one had thought to consult a radio. The thought struck them as a group and they broke into single and double units again —hurrying back into the houses. Lights began coming on here and there.

Jim Peters took Myra's hand, unconsciously, as they hurried up the porch steps. "Hugh would know," Jim said. "I kind of wish Hugh was here."

Myra laughed lightly—a calculated laugh, meant to disguise the gravity of this terrible thing. "That's not very patriotic, Jim. If

The fifth "one" exploded in the Mexican desert.

that was the bomb, Hugh will be kept busy making other bombs to send back to them."

"But he'd know. I'll bet he could tell just by the sound of it." Jim smiled quietly in the darkness—proudly. It wasn't everybody who had a genius for a brother. A nuclear scientist didn't happen in every family. Hugh was somebody to be proud of.

They turned on the radio and sat huddled in front of it. The tubes warmed with maddening slowness. Then there came the deliberately impersonal voice of the announcer:

"—on the strength of reports now in, it appears the enemy bungled badly. Instead of crippling the nation, they succeeded only in alerting it. The bombs—at this time there appear to have been five of them dropped—formed a straight north-south line across western United States. One detonated close to the Idaho-Utah line. The other four were placed at almost equidistant points to the south—the fifth bomb, according to first reports, exploding in a Mexican desert. We have been informed that Calas, Utah, a town of nine hundred persons, has been completely annihilated. For further reports, keep tuned to this station."

A dance band cut in. Jim got up from his chair. "They certainly did bungle," he said. "Imagine wasting four atom bombs like that."

Myra got up also. "Would you like some coffee?"

"That'd be a good idea. I don't feel like going back to bed. I want to listen for more reports."

But there were no more reports. An hour passed. Another and another. Jim spun the dials and got either silence or the cheerful blatherings of some inane disc jockey who prattled on as though nothing had happened.

Finally Jim snapped the set off. "Censorship," he said. "Now we're going to see what it's really like."

In the morning they gathered again in groups—the villagers in this little community of five hundred, and discussed the shape of things to come, as they visualized them.

"It'll take a little time to get into action," old Sam Bennett said. "Even expecting it, and with how fast things move these days—it'll take time."

"If they invade us—come down from the north—you think the government will let us know they're coming?"

"You can't tell. Censorship is a funny thing. In the last war, we knew more about what was going on in Europe than the people that lived there."

At that moment, old Mrs. Kendal fainted dead away and had to be carried home. Three men carried her and Tom Edwards was one of them. "Kind of heavy, ain't she?" Tom said. "I never thought Mary weighed much more than a hundred."

That night the village shook. In his home, Jim staggered against the wall. Myra fell to the floor. There were two tremors—the second worse than the first. Then things steadied away, and he helped Myra to her feet.

"But there wasn't any noise," Myra whispered. The whisper was loud in the silence.

"That was an earthquake," Jim said. "Nothing to worry about. Might be one of the bomb's after effects."

The quake did no great damage in the village, but it possibly contributed to old Mrs. Kendal's death. She passed on an hour later. "Poor old lady," a neighbor told Myra. "She was plain weary. That was what she said just before she closed her eyes. 'Hazel' she said, 'I'm just plumb tuckered.'"

The neighbor wiped her face with her apron and turned toward home. "Think I'll lie down for a spell. I'm tuckered myself. Can't take things like I used to."

NOW IT WAS a week after the earthquake—two weeks after the falling of the bombs, and the town went on living. But it was strange, very strange. Art Cordell voiced the general opinion when he said, "You know, we waited a long time for the thing to happen—we kind of visualized, maybe, how it'd be. But I didn't figure it'd be anything like this."

"Maybe there isn't any war," Jim said. "Washington hasn't said so."

"Censorship."

"But isn't that carrying censorship a little too far? The people ought to be told whether or not they're at war."

But the people didn't seem to care. A deadening lethargy had settled over them. A lethargy they felt and questioned in their own minds, but didn't talk about, much. Talking itself seemed to have become an effort.

This continued weariness—this dragging of one foot after another—was evidently the result of radiation from the bombs. What other place could it come from? The radiation got blamed for just about everything untoward that happened. It caused Jenkin's apples to fall before they were half-ripe. Something about it bent the young wheat to the ground where it mildewed and rotted.

Some even blamed the radiation for the premature birth of Jane Elman's baby, even though such things had happened before even gun powder was invented.

But it certainly was a strange war. Nothing came over the radio at all. Nobody seemed to care, really. Probably because they were just plain too tired. Jim Peters dragged himself to and from work in sort of a daze. Myra got her housework done, but it was a greater effort every day. All she could think of was the times she could drop on the lounge for a rest. She didn't care much whether a war was going on or not.

People had quit waiting for them to come down from the north. They knew that the places where the bombs had fallen were guarded like Fort Knox. Nobody got in or out.

Jim remembered the flash, the color, the rumors, the excitement of World War Two. The grim resolution of the people to buckle down and win it. Depots jammed. Kids going off to join.

But nobody went to join this war. That was funny. Somehow Jim hadn't thought of that before. None of the kids was being called up. Did they have enough men?

Washington didn't say. Washington didn't say anything.

And the people didn't seem to care. That was the strange thing, when you could get your tired mind to focus on it.

The people didn't care. They were too busily occupied with the grim business of putting one foot in front of the other.

Jim got home one evening to find Myra staring dully at a small handfull of ground meat. "That's a pound," she said.

Jim frowned. "What do you mean? That little bit?"

Myra nodded. "I asked for a pound of hamburger and Art put that much on the scale. In fact not even that much. It said a pound. I saw it. But there was such a little bit that he felt guilty and put some more on."

Jim turned away. "I'm not hungry anyhow," he said.

AT TEN that night, after they were in bed, a knock sounded on the door. They had been in bed three hours, because all they could think of as soon as they had eaten was getting into bed and staying there until the last possible minute on the following morning.

But the knock came and Jim went down. He called back upstairs with more life than he'd shown in a long time, "Myra—come down. It's Hugh. Hugh's come to see us."

And Myra came down quickly—something she hadn't done for a long time either.

Hugh seemed weary and drawn, but his smile was the same. Hugh hadn't changed a great deal from the gangling kid who never studied mathematics in school but always had the answers. It came natural to him.

During the coffee that Myra made, Hugh said, "Had quite a time getting here. Trains disrupted. All air lines grounded. But I wanted to see you again before—"

"Then there *is* a war," Jim said. "We've been kind of wondering out here. With the censorship we don't get any news and the people hereabouts have almost forgotten the bombs I guess."

Hugh stared into his coffee cup for a long time. "No—there isn't any war." Hugh grinned wryly. "I don't think anybody in the world has got enough energy left to fight one."

"There *was* one then? One that's over?" Jim felt suddenly like a fool, sitting here on a world that might have gone through a war stretching from pole to pole, and asking if it had happened as though he lived on Mars somewhere—out of touch. But that's the way it was.

"No there wasn't any war."

"You mean our government shot off those bombs themselves? You know I thought it was funny. Landing out in the desert that way like they did.

"Old Joe would have hit for Chicago or Detroit or New York. It was silly to say bombs dropped on the desert came from an enemy."

"No—the government didn't fire them."

Myra set her cup down. "Jim, stop asking Hugh so many questions. He's tired. He's come a long way. The questions can wait."

"Yes—I guess they can. We'll show you where your room is, Hugh."

As she opened the window of the spare bedroom, Myra stood for a moment looking out. "Moon's certainly pretty tonight. So big and yellow. Wish I wasn't too tired to enjoy it."

They went to bed then, in the quiet home under the big yellow moon over the quiet town. A moon over a quiet country—over a weary, waiting, world.

Jim didn't go to work the next day. He hadn't planned to stay away from work, but he and Myra awoke very late and it was then that he made up his mind. For a long time, they lay in bed, not even the thought of Hugh being around and all the things they wanted to talk about, could bring them out of bed until they felt guilty about not getting up.

Hugh was sitting on the front porch watching the still trees in the yard. There was a breeze blowing, but it wasn't enough to move the leaves. Every leaf hung straight down, not stirring, and the grass seemed matted and bent toward the earth.

Myra got breakfast. She dropped the skillet while transferring the eggs to a platter but she got her foot out of the way so no harm was done. After breakfast the men went back outside. Jim moved automatically toward a chair.

Then he stopped and frowned. He straightened deliberately. He turned and looked at his brother. He said, "Hugh. You're a man that knows. What's wrong? What did those bombs do to us? Tell me. I've got to know."

Hugh was silent for a time. Then he said, "Feel up to a walk?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

They went to the edge of town and out into a pasture and stopped finally by a brook where the water flowed sluggishly.

After a while, Hugh said, "I'm not supposed to tell anybody anything, but somehow it doesn't seem decent—keeping the truth from your own brother. And what difference does it make—really?"

"What's happened, Hugh."

"There weren't any bombs."

"No bombs."

"It happened this way. Long before this Earth was formed, a million light years out in space, a white dwarf died violently."

"You're talking in riddles."

Hugh looked up into the blue sky. "A dwarf star, Jim. So incredibly heavy, it would be hard for you to conceive of its weight. This star blew up—broke into five pieces and the five pieces followed each other through space. This world was formed in the meantime—maybe even this galaxy—we don't know. So the five pieces of heavy star had a rendezvous with a world unborn. The world was born and grew old and then the rendezvous was kept. Right on schedule. On some schedule so huge and ponderous we can't even begin to understand it."

"The five bombs."

"They hit the earth in a line and drove deep into the ground. But that was only the beginning. It all has to do with magnetism—the way they kept right on burrowing toward the center of our earth—

causing the earthquakes—causing apples to fall from trees." Hugh turned to glance at Jim. "Did you know you weigh around six hundred pounds now?"

"I haven't weighed myself lately."

"We checked and found out what the stuff was. We'd never seen anything like it before. That star was a real heavyweight. All the pieces are drawing together toward the center of earth. But they'll never get there."

"They won't."

"We're doomed, Jim. Earth is doomed. That's the why of this censorship. We didn't want panics—mass suicide—a world gone mad."

"How's it going to come?"

"If allowed to run its course, the world would come to a complete standstill. Nothing would grow. People would move slower and slower until they finally fell in their tracks and could not get up. Eternal night on one side of a dead planet—eternal day on the other."

"But it's not going to happen?"

Hugh's mind went off on another track. "You know, Jim—I've never been a religious man. In fact I've only had one concept of God. I believe that God—above all, is a gentleman."

Jim said nothing and after a moment, Hugh went on. "Do you know what they do when they execute a man by firing squad?"

"What do they do?"

"After the squad fires its volley, the Captain steps up to the fallen man and puts a bullet through his brain. The man is executed for a reason, but the bullet is an act of mercy—the act of a gentleman.

"We are being executed for a reason we can't understand, and the bullet has already been fired, Jim. Another ten hours—eleven hours."

"What bullet?"

"Look up there. See it? The Moon."

Jim looked dully into the sky. "It's bigger—a way bigger."

"Hurtling in toward us at ever increasing speed. When it hits—"

Jim looked at his brother with complete understanding at last. "When it hits—we won't be here any more."

"That's right. A quick, easy death for the world—from the bullet fired by the Last Gentleman."

They turned back toward the house. "Shall I tell Myra," Jim asked.

"What do you think you should do."

"No—no, we won't tell her. We've got ten hours."

"Yes—we've got ten hours."

"Let's go home and have some coffee."

THE END

It matters not whether you believe or disbelieve. Reality is not always based on logic; nor, particularly, are the laws of the universe . . .

Ye of Little Faith

By Rog Phillips

Illustrated by TOM BEECHAM

THE DISAPPEARANCE of John Henderson was most spectacular. It occurred while he was at the blackboard working an example in multiple integration for his ten o'clock class. The incompleted problem remained on the board for three days while the police worked on the case. It, a wrist watch and a sterling silver monogramed belt buckle, lying on the floor near where he had stood, were all the physical evidence they had to go on.

There was plenty of eye-witness evidence. The class consisted of forty-three pupils. They all had their eyes on him in varying degrees of attention when it happened. Their accounts of what happened all agreed in important details. Even as to what he had been saying.

In the reports that went into the police files he was quoted with a high degree of certainty as having said, "Integration always brings into the picture a constant which was not present. This constant of integration is, in a sense, a variable. But a different type of variable than the mathematical unknown. It might be said to be a logical variable—"

The students were in unanimous agreement and, at this point, Dr. Henderson came to an abrupt stop in his lecture. Suddenly, an expression of surprise appeared on his face. It was succeeded by an exclamation of triumph. And he simply vanished from the spot.

He didn't fade away, rise, drop into the floor, or take any time vanishing. He simply stopped being there.

The police searched his room in the nearby Vanderbilt Arms Hotel. They turned a portrait of the missing math professor to the newspapers to publish. Arbright

He just wasn't there any more.

University offered a reward of one hundred dollars to anyone who had seen him.

The police also found a savings pass book in his room. It had a balance of three thousand eight hundred and forty dollars, which had been built up to that figure by steady monthly deposits over a period of years. It also had a withdrawal of three hundred and twenty dollars two days before the disappearance. They were sure they were on the path to a motive. This avenue of exploration came to an abrupt end with the discovery that he had traded in his last year's car on a new one, and that sum had been necessary to complete the deal.

After the third day the blackboard had been erased and the classroom released for its regular classes. Police enthusiasm dropped to the norm of what they called legwork. Finding out who the missing man's acquaintances and friends were, calling on them and talking to them in the hopes of picking up something they could go on.

They passed Martin Grant by because they had heard from him in their initial work. In fact, he had been a little too present for their tastes.

After ten days they dropped the case from the active blotter. The University, seeing that there was little likelihood of having to shell out the reward money, increased it to five hundred dollars.

But Martin Grant continued to ponder over a conversation he himself had had with John Henderson during a dinner six weeks to the day before his old friend had vanished. He remembered his own words . . .

". . . and so you see, John, by following this trail, I've arrived at a theory that has to do with the basic nature of the universe—of all reality. Yet things don't behave as they would if my theory were operating."

John Henderson frowned into space, disturbed. Visibly disturbed. Martin watched him with a twinkle in his eyes.

"You must have gone off the track on it somewhere, Martin," John said suddenly, as though trying more to convince himself than his listener.

Martin shook his head with slow positiveness. "You followed every step. We spent four hours on it." He took pity on his friend. "Don't let it bother you. I regard it as just an intellectual curiosity. I've included it in my next book on that basis."

A new voice broke in. "What is it, Dad? One of your ten-thousand-word shaggy dog jokes?" This from Fred Grant, 16, student in the senior grade at the Hortense Bartholemew High School, and an only child of Martin Grant.

"A little more respect toward your father," Martin said with much sternness.

"Yes, Father."

"It was my *theory.*"

John Henderson said, "But, Martin, I don't know what to think now. Of course there must be some fallacy that I've missed. The way things stand though, I—" He chuckled uncomfortably. "I begin to doubt myself. I can't quite classi-

fy it as an intellectual curiosity."

"What else can you do with it?" Martin said. "I know your trouble. It's a common one. You have a tendency to believe things or disbelieve them. Now you've been presented with something your intellect demands that you believe, while your experience shouts, 'lie'."

"Is Fred able to understand it?" John asked, smiling at the youngster with fond and unconscious condescension.

"Not yet," Fred smiled. "I'm still in high school."

"And if you don't want to flunk out you'd better be off to bed at once," Martin told him.

"Yes, Father. Good night, Dr. Henderson."

Fred's departure left a vacuum in the conversation that took a minute to fill. John Henderson frowned himself back to where he had been before the boy had arrived. When he got there he frowned even more, because it was a state of mental confusion that seemed to have no way of being resolved.

"Maybe we can get at it this way," he said. "Let's postulate that your theory is the only logical basis on which reality can rest. B, quite obviously reality does not rest on this basis. We could make C, therefore, that reality doesn't rest on a logical basis. But that doesn't seem to satisfy me. Maybe C could be—no—" He glanced at his watch, lifted his eyebrows and stood up. "I really didn't know it was so late. I'll have to be going, Martin. An eight o'clock lecture in the morning."

Martin made a wry face. "You've awakened my own conscience. I have an hour or two of work yet before bedtime."

The two men went to the front door. John said, "Thank your wife again for me. Wonderful dinner. You're lucky, Martin, to have such a good cook."

THAT HAD BEEN six weeks before John Henderson vanished. Martin Grant mentioned this visit to Horace Smith, one of the teachers in his department, and got himself and his wife invited for dinner on the following Friday. Dinner over, the two professors retired to the library.

Two and a half hours later Horace had assimilated and grasped every detail of the theory. He then leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes, fingertips to temples, trying to find some flaw. Finally he shook his head. "It's no use," he said. "Your theory is logically inescapable. But—" He frowned. "Where does that place us? Probably where some schools of thought have always suspected we would wind up eventually. With the realization that the basic laws of the universe can't be reached by logic or even by experiment based upon logic."

"I wouldn't say that," Martin objected. "My theory is an intellectual curiosity, that's all. That's the way I present it in my latest book. By the way, it's coming out soon. Signed the contract a month ago." He pulled his thoughts back to the conversation. "After all, one must hold onto the pragmatic approach to reality. Here is a theory that logic says must be the only possible

way a universe can be constructed and operate. It's beautiful and logically complete, but not applicable. No pragmatic value."

"Congratulations on the book. But, damn it," Horace said, "it attacks my most basic faith. Logic. Reason."

"Faith?" Martin echoed, amused. "Yes, perhaps you're right. That's a word that's foreign to my thinking. Belief is so unnecessary."

"You don't mean that."

"But I do."

Horace pondered. "I can prove otherwise. You believe—as an example—that your wife is faithful to you." It was a statement rather than a question.

"As a matter of fact—I don't. I act upon the greater probability that she is. I don't hire detectives to follow her. Nor do I throw her into situations to test her faithfulness. I admit the possibility that she's unfaithful to me. If evidence came that she was, I might confront her with the evidence. Where does belief become necessary?"

"Do you believe your son will become a success in life?" Horace asked.

"No. I've done everything I could think of to increase the probability that he will. One of the things I've done is to instill in him the realization that belief is unnecessary in thinking. Surely, as a scientist, you realize that nothing we use in science finds its value or validity from human belief. If, tomorrow, evidence were brought forth that trigonometry is based on fallacy I'm sure that mathematicians would use that evidence to revise their entire field."

"But belief is instinctive; as instinctive as thought itself."

"I admit it's a natural way of thinking. It has to be weeded out."

"So you're sure you don't believe in anything," Horace said slyly.

"Such statements are verbal traps," Martin said. "They mean nothing. You want me to imply that I believe I believe nothing, and therefore I have at least one belief. But as a matter of fact I've built up a sort of mental mechanism for discovering beliefs in my thinking and dispelling them by going to the roots and showing myself why I believed. Belief springs up in the mind like weeds in a garden. Constant weeding is the only solution." He glanced at his watch and frowned uneasily. "Eleven o'clock. We'd better break this up and join the women. We'll have to get together again soon. By the way, do you and your wife play Canasta? My wife loves it."

They had been moving toward the door. Now they entered the living room, to find the two women playing the game.

"Time we were going, dear," Martin said. "And sometime soon make plans to have Horace and Ethel over for an evening of four-handed Canasta."

At the front door vows of an early reunion were repeated. But they were never to be fulfilled. On the following Tuesday Horace vanished.

THIS TIME there were no actual eye witnesses. The time was somewhere between seven and seven-ten Tuesday morning; the

place; Horace Smith's bathroom.

Ethel Smith was in the kitchen preparing breakfast. Horace was in the bathroom. He called out, "Ethel! I've got it!"

"What have you got?"

But even as Ethel called out, she heard the sound of the electric razor falling to the tile floor, and there was no answer from the bathroom. Nothing but silence and, as she described it later, a feeling that she was alone in the house.

At the time, however, she wasn't alarmed. She half expected some muttered profanity over the dropping of the razor. She didn't wait for it exactly. Instead, she picked up the spatula and expertly scooped the eggs onto their two plates and carried them to the breakfast nook. Next she poured the coffee. Then, placing some bread in the toaster, she started back to the stove, calling, "Come and get it, Horace!"

At the stove she started to pick up the aluminum dish containing the bacon. She paused and repeated her call. "Horace!"

It wasn't until then that it occurred to her the falling of the razor might have been an ominous sound. Her mind filled with worried images, she rushed out of the kitchen into the hall leading to the bathroom.

The door was locked.

"Horace!" she called. "Are you all right?" When there was no answer she pounded on the door. "Horace! Speak to me!"

After that she ran outside and around to the bathroom window. It was shut and locked, as she already knew. Not only that, it had been stuck for years.

With an urgency born of a realization that every second might mean the difference between life and death, she ran back into the house and called the fire department. Also the family doctor.

By nine-thirty the police had been called in. By eleven o'clock they had seen the parallel between this disappearance and that of John Henderson.

Martin Grant's first reaction was concern for Ethel. His second reaction was that, twice, he had presented his theory to someone and that person had vanished. His third was accompanied by a twinge of fear. He had just finished presenting his theory to the senior physics class!

This was followed by an amazing realization. He was conceding that there might be a connection between his theory and the disappearances. He laughed it off, but it returned. It disturbed him.

It continued to bother him on Wednesday, so he began to search his mind for reasons. Eventually he found them. There was a distinct analogy between a theory that didn't agree with observable reality, and a pair of disappearances which violated known methods of disappearing.

The analogy was so clear that he began to feel there might be a functional relation between the two. Of course, he concluded, it would be reasonably certain if a large number of the students in the senior group were to vanish also.

This intellectual conclusion became an anxiety neurosis.

So, on Wednesday—after he had

scanned the room anxiously to see how many students were absent and discovered to his intense relief that they were all there—he spent the full hour lecturing on the necessity—the *vital* necessity—of unbelief in all things, especially scientific theories.

But would it work? He vaguely remembered giving Horace a similar lecture.

Wednesday night just before retiring he had another disturbing thought. He had explained the theory to his son. But that had been weeks before, and Fred was steeped in the mechanism of unbelief. Good thing, or he might have been the first to disappear.

"What's the matter with you, Martin? Can't you even answer when—" The rest of what his wife was saying faded in the startled realization that he was eating dinner.

"Sorry, dear," he murmured. "I was thinking." He was trying to recall something that might tell him what day it was. It was obviously evening or they wouldn't be eating dinner. "Uh," he said casually, "what day is today?"

"Saturday," Fred said.

"Now Fred, don't tease your father about his absent-mindedness. This is Thursday."

Thursday! That was right. He had given the lecture on the necessity of unbelief today. There was tomorrow, when he could see if any of the class had disappeared yet. He couldn't be certain, of course. Just because a student didn't show up didn't mean he or she had vanished.

He fixed his eyes on Fred, across the table, and smiled. Fred, at least, was a source of comfort. He knew the theory and hadn't vanished.

"Dad," Fred said. "I've been wondering if you saw a point of similarity in the two disappearances?"

Martin thought, good heavens, does he have any inkling of what I've been thinking? Of course not! He's just fumbling. Better to discourage him. "Sorry, son. There aren't any similarities except accidental ones. I've had the confidence of the police on this. The cases are quite unrelated."

Fred refused to be sidetracked. "Dr. Henderson's face lit up as though a sudden idea had struck him. I talked with some of his students. That's what they all thought. And Horace Smith shouted to his wife, 'Ethel! I've got it!' The next instant in each case they vanished into thin air."

"But that doesn't mean a thing."

IN THE PRIVACY of his study Martin Grant allowed himself to become excited. Fred had unwittingly come upon the vital clue to the two disappearances.

"Let's be clear about this," he said to himself, drumming on his desk nervously with his fingers. "Undoubtedly there's a connection between the vanishing and my theory. Both Horace and John arrived at something I've missed. And since my theory is exhaustive it can't be there. It must be—yes—it *must* be that they went a step farther." He pondered this a moment and added grudgingly, "A step I have missed." Then even more grudgingly, "An obvious step."

Automatically he opened a drawer and brought out a sheet of paper and a pencil. He wrote:

The theory contains within itself the proof that the universe must, by logical necessity, be constructed according to said theory. But observation and experience say this is not true.

He frowned at what he had written. This was the conclusion to which he had led both men. It was the conclusion upon which he had rested. They, obviously, had not rested there. They had gone on.

Under what he had written he wrote *"Either:"* on the left hand margin. Two inches under it he wrote, *"Or:"* Then he frowned at them. Suddenly he began writing rapidly after the *Either: "The universe is not constructed according to logical necessity."*

He hesitated, studying what he had written. Then, pursing his lips, he slowly wrote after the *Or: "the observable universe is not the universe."*

He nodded to himself. That hit at the core of the matter. A was X. B was not X. Therefore B was not A. Even though A and B were both called universe.

The question was, then—did the universe-of-logical-necessity exist? If so, what relationship did it have to the observable universe which quite obviously did exist?

Was that the question, the answer to which, gained in a moment of insight, had caused two men to utterly vanish?

He sighed with real regret. There was no way of knowing. Possibly a mechanical brain of the most advanced type could come out with a comprehensive picture after solving thousands of successive equations. Knowledge of simple basics was a far cry from a fully expanded system.

He pushed the sheet of paper away with a show of irritation. He was missing something. He was on the wrong track. Neither John nor Horace had the mental equipment to make more than a simple step beyond what he had accomplished. That was certain. It was equally certain that he could and would make it.

A startled expression appeared on his face. "Oh good lord!" he groaned. "My book. I must do something about that the first thing tomorrow. I—" He opened the drawer of his desk and took out an oblong of paper, the check against advance royalties. "I'll return this and not let them publish it. First thing in the morning. And from now on I resolve not to think of my theory or what caused John and Horace to vanish."

Folding the check neatly, he stuck it in his billfold and then started to read a book that interested him. He became engrossed in it. Half an hour later he came to enough to realize he was on safe ground, sigh with relief, and sink back into the trains of thought of the book.

It was a nice feeling to know he was safe.

IT WAS FRIDAY. The sun was shining brightly and the monotony of the blue sky was relieved here and there by filmy white clouds that gave it a pleasing three-

dimensionalness.

But to Martin Grant there was something unreal about things. He decided it must be the light. Things stood out with too sharp clarity.

When he reached his office at the university he made arrangements for a substitute to take his ten o'clock class. Then he called the publishing company and made an appointment for ten-fifteen.

The hour from nine to ten seemed interminably long. He found it almost impossible to concentrate on such an unimportant subject as the application of tensor analysis to electronic circuits.

Ten o'clock came. He hurried to the parking lot and got in his car. It was real and comforting. But once again everything outside the windshield seemed too sharply defined.

He timed himself on the way across town to the publishing house. He would have to allow himself the same time to return for his eleven o'clock class. It took twelve minutes, plus another two to find a parking place. Two minutes from the car to the eleventh floor. He was frowning at his watch as he entered the publisher's office.

"Well well, Dr. Grant! Glad to see you. I suppose you're anxious to see your book ready for market. It's coming very well. Just came back from the typesetters and is going into its first printing right away."

"Huh?" Martin said, completing his mental arithmetic and jerking into an awareness of his surroundings. "Oh, hello Mr. Browne," he said. "I was just figuring my time. I have an eleven o'clock class. I can only stay twenty-seven minutes. That gives me a three minute margin of error for traffic delays."

"I see," the publisher said, a twinkle in his eye. "As I was just saying, your book—"

"Oh yes, my book," Martin interrupted. "Just a minute." He took out his billfold and extracted the check, handing it to Mr. Browne.

"What's this for?" Mr. Browne asked, unfolding it. "Oh, the advance royalty check. Is something wrong with it?"

"I'm returning it," Martin said. "I can't let you publish my book."

"Can't let me publish it!" Browne exclaimed. "Why not? Don't tell me it infringes on someone else's copyright!"

"No. Nothing like that. I've merely decided I don't want it published. I'm returning your check."

"Well now, look!" Browne said. "We're a business establishment. You signed a contract. We signed one too. It protects both of us against just this sort of thing, you know." He studied Martin thoughtfully. "Sit down and relax," he invited. "I'm human. Tell me why you don't want it published. Maybe I might agree with you. We have over a thousand dollars tied up already in typesetting, but—"

Martin took the seat and glanced nervously at his watch to make sure the twenty-seven minutes hadn't elapsed.

"I've just changed my mind," he said curtly. "There are certain things—I'm the head of a department, you know. I must watch my reputation. That's it, my reputation. On due reflection I believe the book might hurt my standing."

"In what way?" Browne asked.

"To tell you the truth, your other book did so well I didn't bother reading this one."

"There's a—" Martin brought himself up short. So Browne hadn't read it. So much the better. At least he wouldn't vanish. "I'm afraid," he added with a self-conscious chuckle that he hoped was genuine enough to pass, "the subject matter is a little too crackpottish in spots. That's the whole thing. It would reflect on my reputation."

"Maybe we could do a little editing on it," Browne said. "Cut out the parts you think crackpottish and substitute something else in those pages. I'll get the galleys and we can look at them."

"No!" Martin said. "No, I'm afraid we would have to cut out at least half of the book. No. The best thing is to forget it, but I'll make good your typesetting loss. I can pay you two hundred dollars right away and fifty dollars a month."

Browne lit a cigarette slowly, his eyes on Martin. "You're serious, aren't you," he said. "I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll let the whole thing ride for the present. Maybe later—"

"No!" Martin said. "It must never be published! It's very vital that it never be published."

"Okay," Browne said. "We won't publish it. We have the contract, but—we won't publish it."

"Thanks, very much," Martin said. "I must hurry back."

The publisher stared thoughtfully at the closed door after Martin had gone. He glanced down at the check.

LECTURE ROOM 304 was very large, capable of holding four hundred students in its successive tiers of seats, plus the teacher on his raised platform immediately in front of the large blackboard. In previous years there had been instances of students slipping out after roll call. In spite of everything, it had happened.

Therefore a new system had been inaugurated. Before roll call Martin marched to the back of the room to the only exit and locked it. Pocketing the key, he returned to his podium. It had been going on this way for two years, and was now automatic.

The day watchman, making his rounds, approached this door at precisely two thirty-four. He heard violent pounding. Along with the pounding there was a loud, hoarse voice, gasping, "Lemme out! Lemme out!"

The watchman consulted his clock—the one he used to make a record of his rounds—and determined that it was two thirty-four. He knew that it was Dr. Grant's senior theoretical physics lecture period. He recalled that a couple of years before Dr. Grant had had trouble with students slipping out after roll call. But it occurred to him that it was hardly possible to sneak out, even on Dr. Grant, absent-minded as he was, by pounding on the door and shouting, "Lemme out!" in a terrified tone of voice.

He therefore stopped and knocked on the door, calling, "What's going on in there?"

Whoever was doing the pounding and shouting evidently didn't

hear him. Waiting no longer, the day watchman used his master key on the door.

A smallish young man, later identified as Mark Smythe, attempted to run past him into the hall. The watchman blocked Mark's escape and looked toward the podium in an automatic appeal to Dr. Grant.

Dr. Grant was not there. The podium was unoccupied. So were all four hundred seats. There was, in fact, no one in room 304 except the one terrified student.

In due course the police arrived, along with the regents. By five o'clock it had become certain that the greatest mass disappearance of all times had occurred, with Mark Smythe as the sole witness.

He stuck to his story through repeated detailed questionings, and in the end the police were stuck with it.

According to Smythe, class had begun as usual. Dr. Grant had waited until one minute after the bell had sounded, then had marched back and locked the door, and returned to the front. He had rapidly scanned the room to see if there were any absences, quickly called half a dozen names he was uncertain of, and marked the attendance slip. The police found it still resting on the table where he had placed it.

Then he had begun his lecture by remarking that they were behind schedule and would have to catch up. He had been speaking less than five minutes when a student by the name of Marvin Green jumped to his feet in great excitement, waving his hand and shouting, "Dr. Grant! Dr. Grant!"

Dr. Grant had stopped his lecture and frowned darkly, then said, "If you will please take your seat—"

"But Dr. Grant!" Marvin Green had interrupted him excitedly. "I've got it! I've got it!"

What had happened then was impossible for the mind to accept. Marvin Green had simply ceased to be.

There had been a stunned silence. And in that silence, it went on. Student after student popping out of existence in what seemed to be a chain reaction.

He wasn't aware when Dr. Grant vanished. All he knew was that when at last he was alone he looked toward the podium and the professor was also gone.

He kept waiting to go himself. When he didn't, he lost the fear that had rooted him to the spot, and rushed to the exit where he at first tried to break down the door and make his escape, then subsided into pounding and shouting for help when he realized his physical strength was insufficient for the job.

Questioning didn't bring out any additional fact, nor alter any statement. There had been no sound to the vanishing, no movement of the person that could be considered significant, no flashes of light, no strange odors. Nothing.

FRED GRANT got the flash on his hot rod radio on the way home from high school.

At the end of the report Fred wrote down Mark Smythe's ad-

dress on a scrap of paper, and drove home to be with his mother. It was three days before he could get away.

On the morning of the third day, his aunt Emily arrived to take charge of things, and he was able to slip away. He drove immediately to Mark Smythe's address. It was one of the better class rooming houses near the campus. The landlady wasn't going to let him in nor announce him until he explained he was the son of the professor who had vanished. She immediately swung to the other extreme and didn't bother to find out if Mark wanted to see him.

"My father was your teacher," Fred said.

"Oh? Come on in."

There were tennis rackets. On the bookshelves there were tennis books. On a table there was a tennis trophy. Otherwise there was just a bed, a rug, and two or three chairs.

"I don't know what I can tell you more than I've already told the police and the reporters," Mark said apologetically. "I guess it's tough, losing your father . . ."

"Yeah," Fred agreed. "I wanted to ask you something though. Dad gave a lecture on his new theory a few days ago, didn't he?"

Mark looked at him blankly. Then, "Oh! I guess he did. As a matter of fact I didn't pay much attention to it." He grinned. Then he remembered he should be solemn and stopped grinning. "I—I sort of slipped by it. He made the mistake of telling us ahead of time it was off the course and no questions on it would be in the finals, so I more or less rested up during the period for a tennis match afterwards. Why?"

"Didn't you get any of what he said?" Fred persisted.

"Oh, a little," Mark admitted. "It was about some system of arriving at the basic laws of nature by pure logic, only what you arrived at didn't agree with facts. Some kind of intellectual curiosity." He thought a minute. "Oh," he said, "I see what you want. Didn't he leave any notes on it? It would be too bad if his theory was lost to the world now that—" He left the rest unsaid.

"Maybe you can remember something," Fred coaxed. "Anything. Did he talk about his theory again?"

"Next day he gave a lecture on the necessity of unbelief in modern science. It was pretty good. He overemphasized it, though. Some of the kids thought he was making a religion of unbelief."

"What did they say about his theory?" Fred asked quickly.

"Oh, they were quite impressed. Two of them live—lived here in the rooming house. They were up here that evening tossing it back and forth. I was too tired from the tag match. I let them talk."

"What did they think about it?"

Mark frowned in an effort to recall. "It had to do with this universe being basically illogical, or at least seeming to be, because it didn't agree with your father's theory. They started building up fantasies on it. One I remember was a good one."

"What was that?"

"I think it was Jimmy. He said

it would be funny if we were here because we believed this universe was the only real one. Something about inherited memory. Our coming from a long line of people who believed this was the only place, because all our ancestors who didn't believe it shot off into some other universe and had their children there. Utterly crazy. You know."

"Yeah, I know," Fred agreed. "You going to be around in case I want to see you again?"

"God! I hope so!" Mark said. "It makes me nervous."

"You're safe enough," Fred said. "Well—thanks. I'll be seeing you."

HE SMOOTHED out the crumpled sheet of paper and glanced at it.

"What do you hope to find, Fred," his mother asked.

"I don't know," he said. "Anything, I—maybe this is something. Look."

Together they read, "Either: the universe is not constructed according to logical necessity, Or: the observable universe is not the universe." There were doodlings along the right margin that meant nothing.

"What does it mean?" Mrs. Grant asked.

"Probably just something connected with his classes," Fred shrugged. He went on searching the waste basket, giving his mother no hint that he had already found what he was searching for.

From the position of the paper in the waste basket he felt reasonably sure it had been recently written. It was probably a voicing of thoughts gained from the disappearance of Horace and John, because up to that time his father had assumed his theory was just an intellectual curiosity.

His father couldn't have asked himself if the observable universe might not be the universe unless something had happened to raise a doubt, or suggest an alternative as a possibility.

Mrs. Grant's interest lessened. She wandered about the room, perhaps reliving memories. It gave Fred a chance to put the piece of paper in his pocket so that when he put everything back in the waste basket his mother would dismiss the whole search.

There was, of course, the file with the entire theory in it. He knew the theory by heart, however, and had no need of that file.

"I think I'll go out for a while, Mom," he said.

"All right, Fred," she said disinterestedly.

Outside he climbed behind the wheel of his hot rod and sat there, making no motion to start the motor. He was thinking.

Mark Smythe had said that he overheard two of his fellow classmen discussing the theory, one of them remarking that, "It would be funny if we were here just because we were descended from a long line of people who believed this was the only place."

Could that be the key?

Take gravitation, for instance. If it were something that some vital part of you had to believe, and that vital part didn't believe, would the

entire person go flying off into space?

What about inanimate matter? Did it have to believe too? And what about other forms of life?

Or was everything except human beings just part of the props?

He shook his head. That didn't seem like quite the right track. He took another.

The human mind builds up a picture of the outside universe through its senses. Sometimes its ideas are wrong. Right or wrong, inside everyone's mind is a universe, derived from the outside universe.

What if the outside universe were derived from something? Derived from what? The real, logically necessary universe? That could be. At least it seemed to have some value as a starting point.

He tried to reason from that point. Frustration grew in him. He wished he were older, had his university education behind him. There were so many things he couldn't begin to deal with.

Maybe he could take the entire problem to some of his father's friends. He shook his head over this thought. From all that had gone on it was too likely that the minute one of them discovered something that would be of help he would disappear before he could tell it!

That raised another point. Why didn't he himself vanish? What was there different about him?

A lot. His father had instilled in him a lot of the things he himself could only aspire to. Unbelief was the major thing. Or perhaps it was the other major thing, remembrance.

His father's voice came into consciousness, saying something he had said so many times it was grooved deeply in memory, even to the inflections of voice. *"All psychoses and mental troubles are caused by walled-off unpleasant memories. The child who trains himself to recall all unpleasant things and deliberately associate them with the feeling that they are valuable lessons, but harmless, will grow up in perfect balance."* . .

He smiled. He could let flow through consciousness, dozens of incidents he had taken up with his father.

He was definitely different than others around him. So different he had systematically disguised it by a front of accepted behavior—systematically and consciously, under his father's guidance.

There was a chance those differences made him safe. There was a chance those differences would make it possible for him to find out what caused the others to vanish, without he himself vanishing.

The other train of thought inserted itself into consciousness again. Was belief the key to the disappearances?

MARK SMYTHE hadn't paid attention when the theory was being explained. The others had undoubtedly lapped it up. The peculiar thing about the theory was that it was so logical and so inevitable that the mind tended to accept it, believe it to be true in spite of the evidence of the senses.

Let us suppose, Fred mused, that deep within the mind there is some

matrix of thought that ties the human to this universe. A matrix that could conceivably be altered, and when altered would automatically shift the person to another universe that the altered matrix fitted.

The subconscious usually took time to absorb and react. That was another thing his father had taught him to observe. Learn something, and it takes from days to months for it to become lodged in the subconscious and to rise into operation naturally from there.

John Henderson had taken six weeks to vanish after having learned the theory. It had taken Horace Smith three and a half days, but he had had the added factor of Dr. Henderson's disappearance to trigger reactions. The theoretical physics class had taken three days exactly, and its vanishing had been a sort of group action or chain reaction, with intensely emotional reaction after the first student had vanished before the eyes of the others.

His own father, originator of the theory, had probably fallen into the trap of starting to believe after Horace had vanished, so it became a greater probability that the disappearance was related to knowledge of the theory. Seeing the students vanish had probably set up an emotional state where complete belief was precipitated.

In the whole series the only improbable part was that so many students would react in the same short time. That was partly nullified by the fact that it was a special class, and only high I.Q. students with excellent records were accepted. They would tend to be somewhat identical in reaction times.

He straightened up and stared through the windshield at the dark street. So there it was, the probable mechanism of vanishment. A system was fed into the conscious mind. The conscious mind accepted it. In due time that system was transferred down into the matrix that held the person in this reality or universe. Once there, it made the whole person *transfer* to a system where the altered matrix fitted. It might not be the system pictured in his father's theory. It might be a compromise system.

Where and *when* probably had no meaning in relation to the two systems. That was why, when the shift came, the person vanished instantly without any strange manifestations of any kind.

Was it reversible? If so, then some of those who had vanished would reappear eventually.

A sudden, startling thought made Fred sit up straight, his eyes shining with excitement. So far he had been safe mainly because he habitually didn't attach belief to anything. His other facet of difference might be the means of his testing this without real danger of vanishing.

Could he dredge up from the deepest layers of unconscious thought, the threads leading directly to the matrix that held him in his surroundings and learn consciously what it was?

A thought. He reflected on it, then decided before he made any decisions he would explore the other avenue, the one the police had naturally thought of.

Was there some person or persons unknown in back of the disappearances? Some non-human, perhaps? It could fit into the same theory of disappearance. Another universe, beings in that universe. Beings who perhaps didn't want knowledge of their universe to become known on this side of the veil.

If so, why hadn't *they* snatched him too? Maybe they didn't know he knew about the theory. He'd never talked about it to anyone. But his father had drilled it into him as a supreme example of the reasons why belief in anything was a trap.

He shook his head. It didn't seem likely that the disappearances had been engineered by anyone. They smacked too much of an inner pattern, an inner mechanism.

So he came back to the other theory. What could he try to accomplish by exploring into his deepest substratum of thought? The ideal he could aim for would be conscious transfer into the other system with the assurance beforehand that he could transfer back again. If he could do that, and if he could find those who had vanished, maybe he could teach them how to return.

It was something that might take a long time, he realized. His first objective was to penetrate deeper into his mind than anyone had ever consciously gone before. That alone could take a lifetime. Or it might be accomplished overnight.

How would he begin? Where would be begin? he shrugged. It didn't matter. He would have to systematically extend his ability to be aware in every direction, physical and temporal, until he could be conscious of his individual blood cells if it were possible, and completely and vividly conscious, at will of every second of his past life. If that didn't lead him to his objective, it might at least point the way and increase his ability to reach his goal.

That evening, Fred arrived home to find a stranger seated in the library. There was the usual moment of clumsiness such encounters generate, but Fred's mother returned with a tea tray before self-introductions became necessary. She said, "Mr. Gaard, this is my son, Fred."

The man smiled easily as Mrs. Grant continued, speaking now to Fred. "This is Curt Gaard, Fred. I called on him today and what do you think I discovered. "He was a friend—a very old friend—of your father." Mrs. Grant stopped, a certain inward uncertainty showing through.

Fred stood mute, giving voice to none of the questions which sprang up in his mind. Curt Gaard, completely at ease, took up the lead. Even as a feeling of familiarity sprang into Fred's mind, Gaard said, "I *knew* your father—met him several times—but we weren't as close as your mother's words might imply."

Then Fred knew. He spoke suddenly. "You're a psychiatrist." The pieces fell into place. Fred's father had mentioned this man several times, and the boy knew he was not there by chance—that his mother had contacted the psychiatrist—this particular one because she too had remembered the acquaintanceship. For a moment, Fred was an-

noyed with his mother. Why on earth had she brought a psychiatrist into this? Then he softened as he realized she felt it to be to her son's best interests.

"Yes, I'm a psychiatrist," Gaard said. Then, as though he could read Fred's mind: "Your mother *did* send for me, but so far as I'm concerned, it's more than just a professional visit. I knew your father and liked him. I'd like to be your friend."

"You plan to psychoanalyze me?"

"Don't be so grim about it," Curt Gaard smiled. "Just let's make this a social visit. There will be plenty of time for other things later. Perhaps you can drop in at my office."

"Perhaps," Fred said, almost absently. A short time later he excused himself and went to his room.

MRS. GRANT?" Mr. Browne said, smiling at the woman behind the screen door. "I'm Mr. Browne the publisher."

"Browne?" she said. "Oh yes. My hus—husband has mentioned you."

"Favorably, I hope?" Browne was wondering if Dr. Grant had told her of his decision not to let the book be published.

"Oh yes, very favorably." She frowned. "Which reminds me. He received a check from you for the advance royalties. I'm sure he didn't cash it because there was no deposit at the bank that large. I can't find the check anywhere. He must have had it with him when—"

She had opened the screen door. Browne went in and followed her into the study. He looked around at the walls of books, almost feeling the presence of the man whose retreat this had been.

"That's what I've come here to see you about," Browne said. "You see, he called on me at my office the morning of the day he vanished."

"He did?"

"Yes. I'm going to be quite frank with you. He returned the check to me."

"Why? He said nothing to me about it."

"I rather imagine he didn't have time. I've waited, knowing you wouldn't care to discuss business so soon after—" He waited for her reaction. When she said nothing he continued. "He returned the check and said he didn't want the book published after all. I couldn't quite understand his reasons, but they are no longer valid as I see it."

"What were his reasons? This surprises me very much. Just the day before that he mentioned his book and expressed pleasure that it was being published."

"The reasons he gave were that the book contained some things that were—to use his own words—a trifle crackpottish. He thought they might reflect on him in some way."

"Oh my goodness. He was always doing something like that, Mr. Browne. He leaned over backwards. Scientific integrity was a fetish with him."

"I haven't read the book," Mr. Browne said. "The reader reported it was far better than Dr. Grant's first one. That was good enough for me. The reader is no longer with us." He frowned in irritation at the memory. "Left us without giving notice. But he was a good man. Ex-

cellent judgment. I'd like to go ahead with the book unless you object."

"I don't know," Mrs. Grant hesitated. "If he didn't want it published—"

"But he's gone now," Browne reminded her.

"I know, but—" She wept softly into a crumpled kerchief.

The publisher remained silent. After a moment she pulled herself together. "He was always so absent-minded. I was sure he had mislaid the check. Used it to scribble some problem on. He did that once several years ago."

Browne reached into his breast-pocket and brought out a long envelope and extended it toward her.

"I had another check made out for advance royalties," he said, "if you decide to let me go ahead with the book."

"I don't think I should, Mr. Browne." She withdrew the check from the envelope and looked at it, her eyebrows lifting at the size of the figure.

"It's substantially more than the original check," Browne said. "I thought perhaps you might be in need of money, and I feel confident the book will sell exceptionally well."

"It is a lot of money," Mrs. Grant said. "But I'm so confused. I wish I knew what to do."

Browne leaned forward. "Your husband was a great man. I feel it as an obligation on my part to make public his last work."

Mrs. Grant nodded slowly. "You may be right. I hadn't thought of it that way."

"And you can undoubtedly use the money," Browne added. "There'll be more. How much more depends on how the book sells. It may be a steady income for a few years."

"All right," Mrs. Grant said, making up her mind. "I'll let you publish it."

"Fine!" Mr. Browne said heartily. "I felt you would. And any time you need money just call me."

FRED'S BIRTHDAY came in February. He was seventeen now, and the knowledge filled him with dismay. It had been months since his father had vanished.

Or *had* his father vanished? Maybe his memory of those people vanishing was as wrong as his memory of which way his door opened! To check it he spent an afternoon in a newspaper office searching back papers until he found the accounts. He read them all carefully. They were as he remembered them.

And in him, slowly, grew the realization that he was going to use someone. He was going to choose someone and try to make that person disappear. More, he knew that that person was going to be Curt Gaard. He decided against calling and making an appointment. He would go to the man's office and put over the sixteen-year-old act.

With a great deal of shyness he confided to the receptionist that Curt was a very special friend of his mother's. She talked into the inter-office phone, did a lot of listening and yessing. Finally she told Fred that Dr. Gaard wanted him to wait a few moments. Then she

dialed an outside number. Fred listened to the clicks and knew it was his home phone. The psychiatrist was going to talk to his mother. He hadn't wanted that, but it wouldn't matter materially.

The wait lasted almost half an hour. Then, with heart pounding, Fred was walking toward the dark walnut door to the inner office. Inside, he caught a comprehensive glimpse of the rumored couch, luxurious desk and chairs, thick expensive rug, and an assortment of floor-lamps and oil paintings. Then the psychiatrist was upon him, heartily welcoming him.

There were time-marking conversational exchanges about school, the hot rod, and life in general. There was the pause while each sized the other up.

Then, "I'm glad you dropped in, Fred," Dr. Gaard smiled casually.

"I'm all mixed up," Fred said. "I know something's wrong with me. I wanted someone to talk to, now that Dad is gone. I thought of you. I didn't want to bother Mom. Do you really straighten out crazy people?"

"Not exactly," Curt chuckled. "A psychologist finds most of his patients among people who are just upset about things. They aren't insane. They just need someone who has experience to help them get their thoughts straightened out."

"Maybe that's all I need," Fred said. "I don't *think* I'm crazy."

"Of course you aren't. You're a very healthy-minded young man."

"I don't want Mom to know about this . . ."

Curt frowned, jotted something down on a notepad. It was, Fred guessed, a notation to call his mother and warn her to keep quiet.

"Don't worry about your mother. Now tell me, just what seems to be the trouble?" Curt smiled encouragingly.

"Are you married?" Fred asked with teen-age frankness.

"No," Curt smiled.

"Would you marry my mother?" Fred asked bluntly. "I would like for you to be my father."

Curt Gaard stared at him a moment. "I really believe you mean that," he said slowly. "You know, don't you, that it will be two years before she can be free to marry? Your father can't be declared legally, ah, departed, for two years."

"No. I didn't know," Fred said, real dismay on his face. He hadn't known about that. He thought rapidly. "Then can I come live with you? Just until Mom can marry you?" Inwardly he was enjoying this. And he hoped he wasn't overdoing it.

"We can't do that," Curt said. "I'll tell you what we can do, though. I'll invite myself out to dinner tomorrow evening. Don't say anything. I'll surprise your mother. And we'll see a lot of each other from now on. Okay?"

Fred nodded. It was definitely okay. He wanted to be present when Curt Gaard disappeared into thin air, and this way he had a chance.

HE LEFT Curt's office highly exhilarated, almost drunk with the emotion of things working right. It lasted until the following evening when the doctor showed up and he

and Fred's mother put on their little act. Then his emotions swung the other way. He experienced a reluctance to go through with his plans. There was too much that was likeable about the man. And his mother did like him.

"Poor Dad," Fred thought.

After dinner the next evening, Curt kept the conversation on Fred's father. It was, Fred sensed, the right time to bring up the theory. Curt would do anything to please him, to draw him out.

But he hesitated. Stretching elaborately, he said, "I'm sleepy. Why don't you and Mom play Canasta or something?"

"I'm going to be much too busy," his mother said. "I have to finish proofreading your father's book for the publisher. Mr. Browne is finally going to print it, and wants it back right away."

"When did that happen?" Fred demanded. "Can I read it?"

"You can read it when it comes out. Now you and Curt go into the study and leave me alone." She herded them out of the room.

This interlude had served to strengthen Fred's resolve. Alone with the psychiatrist, he let slip that he knew of a wonderful theory his father had originated, then tried to cover up.

Curt used flattery. Fred took his cue and slyly bragged that it was a theory few college professors could understand even, but he understood it.

More coaxing and he was ready to start in. But his conscience got the better of him. He balked, and even as he tried to squirm out of it he realized that it was too late. Dr. Gaard would never rest until the theory had been told.

"I'll tell you the next time you come," he suggested as a last retreat.

"Tonight," Curt said. "Even if it takes all night. You can miss school tomorrow." He winked. "I can okay it with the teacher."

"All right," Fred said in sudden crystalization of decision. "But only if you agree to master every step of it, stopping me until you have." Curt agreed. He started in.

After half an hour it settled into serious listening on Curt's part, and pertinent questions that made Fred realize he was dealing with a mind of more than average keenness.

Fred's mother wandered in occasionally, and out again, without being noticed by either of them.

An hour passed. Two. The final steps were drawing nearer. At times Curt was even anticipating some of them. It was midnight when it was finished. The mind of Curt Gaard held the entire pattern.

Fred couldn't take his eyes off the man's face. The face that was mirroring the rapid flow of thoughts as it reviewed and attacked every brick in the structure, finding it solid, and solidly cemented to its neighbors.

Then he saw a change come over the man's face. He had accepted the theory. Now he was trying to integrate it into the problem of Fred Grant. He hadn't yet seen the connection between the theory and the mysterious disappearances.

And perhaps he wouldn't. If he did he might go the final step and realize what was going to happen to him. Fred hoped that wouldn't

happen. He didn't want his victim to be conscious of being a victim.

"You *are* intelligent, Fred," Curt probed, "to be able to master such an advanced theory." He glanced at his watch. "It's getting pretty late. I'll tell you what. After school tomorrow drop down to my office. We'll come out for dinner here together."

"Say! That'd be swell!" Fred enthused. "I'll get right to bed so I can get enough sleep." He leaped up and called, "Mom! I'm going to bed now." He winked broadly at Curt to let him know he was getting out of his way so they could be alone together a few minutes.

And that was that. The dye was cast, and all that remained was to try and use it to make progress, rather than letting it be just another disappearance that pointed to nothing constructive.

There was no way of telling how fast it would work. The next afternoon and evening there was little to provide an indication, other than an occasional look that came over Curt for moments at a time.

A date was made for Saturday. It was to be a picnic in the country. That meant skipping Friday. Fred violently objected, but Curt and his mother overrode his objections. So in the end it had to be Saturday, unless Curt disappeared before then.

He didn't.

BUT TEN minutes before school was out Friday a note was brought into the classroom from the principle's office. Curt had called to ask Fred to come to his office directly from school.

Torn between excited anticipation that the psychiatrist had made an important discovery, and fear that the man would have vanished before he could get to him, Fred ran from the school building and caught the bus.

At Curt's office the receptionist smiled and told him to go right in. His sigh of relief was genuine. Curt was sitting at his desk.

"Come in, son," he said.

There were the amenities. "How did school go today?" "Okay." "Anything happen?" Fred waited impatiently. Then: "I've been thinking a lot about your father's theory, Fred, and I would like to ask a few questions—if it won't upset you."

"Of course not!" Fred said.

"Okay, here's a question," Curt said. "Or rather, a statement. You can answer yes or no. You believe the theory is at the root of the disappearances, that in some unknown fashion knowing the theory will cause a person to vanish."

So there it was. Fred debated rapidly in his mind. It might be better to admit it.

"Yes," he said.

"Hmm. Then let me ask you this. How do you account for the fact that you know it, and haven't disappeared?"

Fred decided to be completely truthful and see what happened. "It's because I don't let belief form a part of my thinking, sir. Dad instilled that in me. With those that disappeared, logic was their groundwork of belief."

"But you believe knowing the theory caused them to vanish?"

Fred smiled. "I see what you mean. No, I don't. It's just that no other alternative seems probable, so . . ."

"So you work with the one that does," Curt said, nodding. "All right, let's work with it for the moment. You have probably done some thinking on what mechanism might be involved in the process of vanishing. Would you care to tell me about it?"

"There's no reason why not, sir. It takes time for conscious beliefs to sink into the subconscious and integrate there. The time varies with the person and the emotions involved."

"That makes sense," Curt said, nodding.

"I postulated that down underneath even the subconscious, at the very roots of being, is what I named the basic thought matrix. In order for us to be here in this existence at all it must have a certain form. Change that form and, presto, the person slips out of this existence, perhaps into another."

"I see." Curt drummed his fingers on the desk for a long minute. "I see," he repeated. "Has it occurred to you that you have already rejected your theory? It's quite obvious you have, you know."

"How is it obvious?" Fred asked, wondering what Curt meant.

"Because you told me the theory. You wouldn't have, of course, if you believed it would cause me to vanish like the others."

Fred opened and closed his mouth several times, unable to cope with this. It was unexpected.

"We've gotten to the root of your trouble," Curt went on. "It was a real trouble, to you. In a few months you will look back on it and marvel at it. Right now it seems real. You feel that somewhere your father still exists. You would like to go to him, or perhaps bring him back. Believe me, such mysterious vanishings aren't uncommon. The history of the world is full of such incidents. In some cases whole groups have vanished. Authenticated cases. In southeast Asia the people of an entire city of over a million inhabitants vanished overnight. In the last century an entire trainload of people, including the train, vanished while going from one city to another a few miles away. And there have been vanishments with reappearances, too. In England there was an old woman who suddenly vanished before the eyes of her family. At the same instant she reappeared in a room in London, miles away, in front of other people. Did she know your father's theory? Did the train that vanished know that theory?" Curt was smiling. "No. You see, it's something unrelated to your father's theory."

Fred was nodding. "You may be right," he said. "I didn't know about those."

"You may go now, son," Curt said. "I'll be out around eleven o'clock in the morning."

Fred rose quickly. "Okay, Curt," he said. "I'll see you." He hurried out. It was too much of an effort to hide the sudden trembling. He hadn't known about other cases of vanishing. They provided data to expand the whole thing, while not in the slightest detracting from the validity of anything else.

And if the talk had been prolonged much more Curt would have inevitably tumbled to his motive for telling him the theory.

PROMPTLY AT eleven Curt arrived. Fred's mother had already prepared the large basket of food. There were ten minutes of last-minute bustle, then they were off, with Curt skillfully tooling his Cadillac in and out of traffic until they were on the open highway.

"I know just the place," he told them. "Woods, meadow, brook. Even a couple of cows." And he did. When they arrived shortly before twelve-thirty it was all that.

Fred relaxed as the car came to a stop. Every second of the trip he had been ready to seize the wheel and keep the car from crashing if Curt vanished.

"Still a little nervous?" Curt asked him as they got out.

"No. No, of course not!" Fred said.

Curt didn't pursue the subject. Instead, he became something utterly different than he had been before, a carefree thoroughly likeable man, full of humor.

Fred began to regret that he had chosen him as his victim. He began to hope that the process might not be automatic, that Curt wouldn't vanish. But he stayed close to him and listened to his every word and watched his face as much as he dared without staring, so that if the moment came he could get whatever there was to get of value from it.

For the first time in years his mother began to be carefree. She even joked back at Curt occasionally, something she had never done with Martin in Fred's memory. Her joking was clumsy and uncertain. Fred laughed uproariously to encourage her and to hide his uncomfortable feeling.

"Oh, I haven't felt so good in ages," she said when they were seated around the tablecloth spread with sandwiches and salads and cakes. "It's wonderful getting out like this. We'll have to do it often."

"We will," Curt said. "At least once a week."

Fred's mother picked up a sandwich. She started to raise it to her mouth. She was smiling at Curt and about to say something to him. Both Curt and Fred were watching her.

Abruptly she wasn't there. The sandwich seemed to remain stationary for a long second. Then it dropped to the tablecloth.

Curt was holding a paper cup filled with hot coffee. His hand constricted. The cup collapsed, spilling steaming coffee over his legs.

Fred stared at the space his mother had just occupied. Abruptly he squawked, "No!" He turned accusing eyes on Curt. "You told her!"

Something seemed to go out of the man. He seemed to become visibly smaller. "Yes," he whispered, "I told her."

Fred was crying. "But you shouldn't have," he sobbed. "I told you because I wanted you to vanish. I didn't want her to, and now she has. And nothing happened that I could use."

Curt blinked at him, absorbing this new bit of information. "You wanted *me* to vanish?" he echoed.

"Yes, I can see that now. I didn't know. It seemed too absurd. I thought you were just imagining things. Yes, I went out while you were at school and spent the whole morning teaching her every step. It was fairly easy. We had planned on coaxing you to explain it to her. Knowing it ahead of time she could pretend to grasp it that much more easily. We were planning on coaxing you into a more social relationship. Actually, she had already read the theory in your father's book she was reading for the publisher." A glassy look came into his eyes. "The book. If the theory is at the root of the disappearances the book shouldn't be published. Yes, by God. That's what your father was driving at. Your mother told me the publisher had told her your father tried to get him not to publish it."

"The book has the theory in it?" Fred said. "It mustn't get published. Why—thousands of people would read it and vanish. We've got to stop them!"

Curt was shaking his head in bewilderment. "But we can't be sure. It must be something else, though what I don't know."

"No," Fred said bitterly.

There was a long silence. Curt broke it by saying, "What did you expect to accomplish by my vanishing?"

Fred told him of Horace's shouting to his wife, "Ethel! I've got it!", and the others seeming to have a flash of divination or insight just before they vanished.

"I wanted," he explained dully, "to be with you when it happened, in the hopes I could get something more than I have to go on. In that way I might be able to find out something so I could bring my father back. And Mom." He began to cry.

"I see," Curt said, calm and a little subdued. "It's possible that may come. After what I've seen happen I can admit it as a possibility."

"Then you will make every effort to tell me?" Fred asked.

Curt smiled wryly. "You make it sound inevitable. But—yes, I will."

Fred's eyes were large and round. "I've got to find the mechanism. I've got to go where they've vanished to and show them how to get back!" He turned his eyes on Curt. "Don't you hate me?" he pleaded. "I'm just the same as a murderer!"

"No, my son," Curt said gently. "Wherever your father is, your mother is with him now. If—" A startled expression appeared on his face. "So *that's* it," he almost whispered.

"*What's* it?" Fred asked. "Tell me. Please tell me. I've got to know, you know. You promised!"

Curt frowned in a visible effort to jerk himself back. His eyes, holding a faraway look, rested on Fred's face, looked at it, and through it.

"You promised!" Fred screamed. "Tell me!"

Curt opened his mouth as though to speak. His lips smiled.

And—he was no longer there.

Fred was alone, with the picnic lunch on the white square of tablecloth, with the gleaming Cadillac a few yards away, with the two white and black spotted cows grazing a short distance away, with the noisy little brook nearby.

Alone. . .

HE BECAME aware of a police siren growing louder. He became aware he was behind a wheel, that there were cars in front of him veering wildly out of his way. The speedometer needle pointed at ninety.

How had he arrived here? He took his foot off the gas. He was driving a Cadillac. Curt's. But Curt was gone. That was it! He had started out to look for the police.

He pulled over to the side of the road as the police car came screaming up. Shakily he told them about the disappearances. Any doubts they might have had were held in reserve by the obvious sincerity of his grief.

He led them back to the picnic grove. The tablecloth with the food on it was still there, untouched. One of the cows was grazing beside it.

They listened while he told again of his mother and Curt vanishing before his eyes. Their reserved skepticism was thrust out of their minds when he identified himself as the son of Dr. Martin Grant, who had disappeared.

They used their car radio. In a surprisingly short time several other cars were coming through the gate into the pasture.

Fred, his mind paralyzed with grief, stood forlornly near the Cadillac. He answered the questions they put to him. He wasn't aware of the news cameras that took shots of him which were to appear in the evening papers all over the country.

Eventually it was over. The police gathered up the picnic lunch, his mother's purse, and everything else. A gray-haired man in a dark brown suit who introduced himself as Captain Waters told him to get into the Cadillac. "I'll drive," Waters said.

Entirely submissive, Fred obeyed. On the way into town Captain Waters said he would take Fred home if he wanted to go there, but it would be really better if he accepted an invitation to stay at the Waters home for a few days until things were straightened out.

"All right," Fred said.

Eternities later he was in a house with comfortable furnishings. A motherly old lady was hovering around him. Captain Waters was on the phone calling someone.

There was a steaming dinner on blue design Swedish dishes. Under coaxing Fred nibbled. Door chimes sounded. Captain Waters pushed back his chair and went away. He came back with another gray-haired man who pressed a thumb against Fred's cheek, listened to words Captain Waters was saying, then ordered Fred to roll up his sleeve.

He swabbed a spot with alcohol and inserted a hypo needle. Fred watched with listless eyes.

"Get him undressed and to bed," the doctor said. "Poor kid. Suffering from shock. Have to watch him the next few days . . ."

Shock . . . Fred tried to concentrate on the meaning of the word.

The bed was an enormous expanse of fresh smelling sheets and luxurious blankets. The pillows were mountainous . . . and so soft . . .

The sun was streaming in through open French doors, filtered through bronze screen doors. An

electric clock on the dresser pointed at eleven.

He lay there without moving, remembering everything that had happened the day before. And he had a feeling that, in his sleep, he had been doing a lot of thinking. Or was it dreaming?

"Poor boy," a melodious voice purred.

He opened his eyes. It was the motherly woman, with a tray of toast and eggs and steaming coffee. The sight of it made him aware that there was a huge emptiness in his stomach.

He ate, gratefully. Mrs. Waters busied herself about the room, humming soft tunes, smiling at him whenever he looked at her. When he had finished, she took the tray.

"You just relax and sleep some more," she said. "The bathroom is through that door over there. If you want me for anything just call. I'll hear you. And if you want to get up and wander about the house just do so." She departed, leaving the door part way open in invitation.

Fred sighed and closed his eyes. In that moment of relaxation the thinking he had done during the night rose into consciousness.

For he knew now what he had to do. There was no other avenue of exploration. It might not even be possible. But if it was possible he was going to do it.

He was going to vanish.

THERE ALONE lay the solution. He should have realized it. Once he vanished as had the others, he would have experience with the mystery. Personal experience. He would have all the data he required, instead of just data from the world he was in. If he had the ability to solve the problem of reappearance he would then be able to return, and go back again and show the others how to return.

The key to vanishing was belief, that quality of thought which his father had systematically weeded from his mind since earliest infancy. It might take time to overcome that, but it should be possible.

Already he believed some things. Or did he? Was it merely a realization that those things had a probability that approached certainty?

His patterns of thinking were too ingrained. His mind was too well integrated. If he became irritated the irritation immediately brought up the memories of the factors that made him react that way. If he became happy he consciously knew the pattern, stretching back to early infancy. It was ingrained within him.

He began to realize with a sinking sensation that he didn't actually know what belief was. If, in some way, it was present anywhere in his makeup, he didn't know how to recognize it.

His mental pattern was one of unbelief. Not disbelief, the believing that something isn't true; but unbelief, the using of something in the pragmatic sense for its workability.

He let his thoughts wander in the past. He could remember vaguely a moment when he had felt unreasoning terror, a sense of being lost. He could remember his father saying many times, "Belief is the lazy assuming that something is true. It

is or it isn't, and the fundamental postulate of inductive logic tells us that its truth or lack of it is forever beyond our reach. So why reach for it? Use a theory if it works for you. Discard it if it doesn't. Don't use it even to the point of absurdity while clinging to a belief that it's true.

It was that way with facts, too. Something that happened or seemed to happen, needed no tag of belief attached to it. If you saw it happen it didn't necessarily happen. There was such a thing as illusion. Accept it as though it had happened—until events pointed otherwise.

His playmates and teachers had been frankly skeptical of this point of view, doubting he could actually have attained it. They were quick to agree it was desirable. They just thought no one could use a thing without attaching a degree of belief or unbelief to it.

Now, what should he believe? As in the attempts to reach the basic matrix by conscious extension, he had to start somewhere.

It was midafternoon when Captain Waters entered the bedroom with a cheery, "Hello!"

"Hi," Fred said. He had been lying in bed with his eyes closed.

"Did I wake you?" Waters said. "Sorry." He grinned. "You can go back to sleep again. I'll drop in later."

Captain Waters ducked out. He started to close the door, then left it open. A few minutes later the rumble of his voice came from another part of the house. Fred tried to catch what he was saying, but couldn't.

Half an hour later he heard the front door chimes. The rumble of deep voices came again. The doctor appeared in the doorway.

"Well, well," he said, smiling. "I hear you had a very restful night. How do you feel today? Better?" He was advancing toward the bed as he talked. Setting his black bag down, he reached out and took Fred's pulse. "A little rapid," he said, putting his watch away. Reaching inside his coat, he took out a thermometer. He put it under Fred's tongue. "Had anything to eat or drink in the past fifteen minutes?" he asked. Fred shook his head.

The doctor stood quietly. After a while he lifted the thermometer, glanced at it, and put it away.

"Looks like you're going to be fit as a fiddle," he said. "I'll be back in a few minutes. Mrs. Waters told me on the way in she was pouring me a cup of coffee."

Fred remained motionless until the doctor had left the room. Then he slipped out of bed and went to the door. On the other side of it was a living room. A swinging door of the type that opens into kitchens was just swinging closed. No one was in sight. Quickly Fred stole across to the door. He put his ear close to it and listened.

"Dr. Harvey speaking," he heard the doctor say. "Connect me with thirteen please."

"Is he going to be all right?" Mrs. Waters' anxious voice sounded.

"I think so," the doctor said calmly. "Hello? Thirteen? Who's speaking? Oh, hello, Giles. Dr. Harvey. Do you have a vacancy? Observation, yes."

"Oh dear," Mrs. Waters said unhappily.

"It will be for the best," Captain Waters said. "They'll know how to take care of him."

Fred waited for no more. He went back to the bedroom. His clothes were in the closet. In seconds he had them on. He could tie his shoes and button up later.

He unfastened one of the screen doors and stepped out onto a flagstone path that wound around the corner of the house toward the front. There were people on the sidewalk, but none very near. It would be hours before dark, and there was no place to hide.

There were two cars parked at the curb. One was a police car, the other a black Chrysler sedan, probably the doctor's car. The police car had the key in the ignition. Fred didn't hesitate. He jerked open the door and slid behind the wheel. Mrs. Waters' anxious voice sounded, calling, "Fred! Where are you?" Then the starter was whirring. The motor caught.

As he shot away from the curb, Fred caught a glimpse in the rear view mirror of Captain Waters running down the walk from the house.

As he took the first corner, touching the siren button briefly, he wondered why he had run. It had been an impulse. Maybe it was the wrong one. Maybe he could accomplish what he had to do better in some kind of institution. Maybe not.

He compressed his lips grimly. The die was cast now. He would abandon the police car someplace, then slip quietly out of town on foot. He would be caught if he tried to go home. He had no money except a few dollars in change.

Maybe this was all part of the new pattern that seemed to possess him. He kept the siren going, not trusting his ability to avoid traffic. Its mad scream blended into his thoughts. He was the hunted. He was sane, but the truth would brand him as insane. Or was he sane? Had anyone vanished? Was his father at home, sitting in his chair in his study, expounding his theories to his colleagues? Was his mother at home, in the kitchen, preparing dinner?

His lip trembled. Homesickness welled up in him.

He was near a bus line that went to the outskirts of the city. He shut off the siren and slowed down. After a few blocks and two turns he felt safe in ditching the car. He pulled quietly to the curb. He tied his shoelaces, buttoned his shirt, combed his hair. Then he got out. No one paid any attention to him.

He walked to the corner. Two minutes later the bus stopped.

THE NIGHT sky was clear. The moon was a lesser sun whose light made things visible and somehow unreal and mysterious. In the ditch to the right of the road two bright points of light blinked on, held for a moment, and vanished. A cat.

A silent dog appeared out of the gloom, wagged its tail and half of its body in friendliness. "Nice doggy," Fred said nervously. It sniffed his trouser leg, lost interest, and moved off into the darkness.

It was after midnight. How long after, he didn't know. Once a police

car had come speeding by, its red lights ogling insanely, its spotlight weaving into the bushes at the side of the road. He had lain very still in the ditch until it passed. It hadn't slowed down. Later it had come back and he had again pressed his body into the earth beside the road.

Off to the right now he saw the silhouette of the giant tree that had been the landmark of the picnic spot. A few minutes later he could see the gate that led to the meadow.

He squeezed through it and picked out the path worn by the cars the day before. Some winged creature dipped down, shied away from him, and swept off into the darkness.

A soft gurgling sound became audible. The brook. The spot where his mother and Curt had vanished, was ahead.

He reached it. He wasn't quite sure until he studied the ground and went back in memory to check on little details. Then he was certain.

He had reached his goal.

He knew why he had come, of course. Here he was closer to his mother than anyplace else. Here, in some unguessed way, he might get to her.

What would he do when morning came? He sat down and pulled his knees up under his chin, wrapping his arms around them. Morning was far away. It might never come —for him. If and when it did he would cope with it. "Mom," he whispered. "Mom . . ."

Crrroak! The sound of the frog broke the silence. The croak of a frog that was part of the universe—the universe that was basically illogical. More . . .

Fred sobbed.

The universe was insane. Police looking for you. Doctors with their standards of sanity and insanity. Right now they were looking for him to protect him from himself. They didn't want to know why things were done. To them even the reason would be part of the insanity. They dealt in tags. Words. Their science was an illusion within an illusion. Meaningless inside a universe of meaninglessness.

Crrroak, the frog said cautiously. And a night creature came down on silent wings, to weave back into the darkness.

That was the reason for pragmatism. He could see it now. He had always thought his father made pragmatism his God because it was the intellectual thing to do. But now he could see the reason for it. Reality was a jungle in which Reason had to cope with Unreason, and there was no criterion except workability. Belief was an instinctive way of thought. It was like the appendix. Scientists claimed that long ago man ate tree bark. And the appendix had had a use. If so, that use was gone, but the appendix remained. Before surgery had become a common thing, thousands of people died from appendicitis. The organ that had once been necessary had become a hazard to living. Belief was something like that.

He jerked out of his thoughts to listen to a car on the road. It slowed down. It stopped by the gate. A car door slammed. A man appeared briefly in the light of the headlamps. Captain Waters—alone.

He loomed a moment later inside

the pasture in the light of a flashlight. He occasionally flashed it on his face so he would be recognizable.

Fred felt an impulse to slip away into the darkness. He hadn't been seen. Captain Waters was just hoping he might be here.

A stronger impulse made him remain as he was. The entire pattern of Captain Waters' approach indicated understanding—or at least the willingness to understand.

The bobbing flashlight came closer. It speared out and touched him; then abruptly went out. Footsteps approached. A dark form emerged from the gloom.

"Hello, Fred," Captain Waters said quietly. "I came to keep you company. I'll just sit quiet and not bother you."

"Okay," Fred said.

THERE WERE movements. A small flame illuminated Captain Waters' features as he lit his pipe. The flame went out. Then, only the occasional glow of the pipe, briefly illuminating the police Captain's face.

Crrroak! The frog greeted this newest arrival in his domain.

Fred could not think. He was too conscious of the man sitting near him. He fought down the impulse to jump up and run away into the darkness. He fought the desire to scream at the man to leave him alone.

Perhaps the police captain sensed this, or perhaps he could see Fred's expression when the coal in his pipe glowed brightest. "Tell you what," he said suddenly, "You maybe would feel better alone. I'll wait in the car. When you get ready you can come home. No more doctors. Mom gave me a good talking to. She wants you to come back."

Waters got up and walked away into the night. Minutes later there was the sound of a car door slamming shut. Fred was alone again.

Alone. It was a feeling, almost an emotion. Intellectually he knew that nearby was a frog. A block away across the meadow was the police captain sitting in his car.

Abruptly, without warning, a flash of insight spread through his entire mind. He knew suddenly what belief was. He knew it instinctively and without question.

And knowing it, he knew that his foundations of unbelief were a semantic illusion that had been built up within him. The panorama of his mind, his entire life, stood clearly before him.

The cute little tags of probability were superficial. They had a pragmatic value in keeping the mind open, but their function was to guide the judgment in tagging thoughts with belief or disbelief.

He retreated into his aloneness until there was nothing but himself. He marveled at the unfoldment of this new understanding. He could see things in this new light of understanding.

But then . . . A question loomed. If that were so, why hadn't he vanished like the others? Belief was an automatic process. Why hadn't it permeated to the basic matrix of his mind as it had with the others?

Was he, then, still on the wrong track?

But there *was* no other!

He saw the trap he had set for himself. He had believed with all his being that belief was the key he was searching for!

He had been on the wrong track. His beautiful theory of belief that spread downward into the subconscious, then down lower and lower into the basic matrix that held a person in this reality, was wrong. The evidence he had based it on was still there, but it was evidence of something else.

Of what?

The eastern horizon was suffused with light. It grew stronger, dimming the light of the moon.

From somewhere in the depths of his being rose a feeling that soon he would know, and when he did he would be close to crossing the threshold.

He unclasped his arms and straightened out his legs, feeling stabs of pain in his weary muscles. He got to his feet, tingling with weariness.

By the side of the road, he could see the police car he had stolen—infinite ages ago. He walked toward it, and when he reached it he climbed in and closed the door.

"Beautiful morning," Captain Waters said, starting the motor.

FRED AWOKE and opened his eyes. Across the room the French doors were open. Sunlight was filtering through the copper screens. A breeze was playing gently with the drapes. For a moment the flight, the long walk into the country, his rendezvous with Aloneness, Captain Water's coming to bring him back, all seemed the stuff of dreams. He had the feeling that he had never left this enormous bed.

Then it returned. Reality. The miracle of his reorientation to belief, the new vistas that went with it. The full realization of the true nature of the vanishments.

He became aware of a figure in the doorway, watching him. It was Mrs. Waters. "Awake?" she asked cheerfully.

"Yes," Fred said.

"Want some breakfast?"

He nodded. She went away.

He raised his head and looked about the room, at the homey touches, the family pictures on the dresser and the walls, the hand sewed knickknacks and frills. This was probably the Waters' own bedroom that they had given up for him.

He could vanish while Mrs. Waters was away. She would come in with the breakfast tray and find him gone.

When would the *moment of reorientation* come?

He frowned in thought. That had stirred up something about what he had dreamed, or thought, while he was asleep. Something that had the flavor of being very important.

"Here you are!" Mrs. Waters said, sweeping into the room with the tray and its Swedish design dishes and steaming coffee and hot cereal. As she bent over to set the tray on the bed, there came the sound of the front door opening. "There's Pa, home already." She smiled worriedly at Fred. "Will you be all right? I'll tell Pa to come in and keep you company while I fix his supper."

"Yes ma'am," Fred said, eyeing the food hungrily. "Only—" She was at the door. She stopped and looked around questioningly. "I—I think I'd like to be alone while I eat."

"All right," she said, and hurried away.

But Captain Waters had brushed in without giving her a chance to tell him to stay away. "Hello, son," he said warmly. "Have a good sleep?"

Mrs. Waters said, "You let him alone while he eats."

"It's all right," Fred said hastily.

"Sure it's all right," the police captain said. He sat down and took out his pipe. He concerned himself with filling it and lighting it, saying nothing.

Fred picked up a piece of golden toast and bit into one corner absently. The thoughts he had had during sleep were filtering into consciousness.

He recalled how his mother had looked. There had been a fleeting expression just before she had vanished. She had been going to say something. *She had changed her mind and had vanished instead!*

And Curt—he had had his reorientation at least several seconds before vanishing. He had had it, and then, with his new perspective, had said, "So *that's* it!"

It was as though the new orientation made everything else unimportant.

One common factor stood out in every case, those two he had personally witnessed, and the others he hadn't seen. One common factor. Vanishing, or whatever happened that produced the vanishing, had been an impulse.

There had been time for thought. For example, Curt might have considered the practicality of telling Fred what had happened to him. But he might have reflected that eventually Fred would discover what he had just discovered, so why bother?

In the office Curt had told him of a whole city of a million people vanishing, leaving empty houses and streets. Had the cause been the same? A true orientation?

Fred looked at Captain Waters, sitting quietly, puffing slowly on his pipe. With deliberation Waters uncrossed his legs and leaned forward. "You know, son, when you get around to it—that is, if you feel up to it sometime—I wish you'd tell me about it. What it is that's troubling you. I'll try to understand."

"You'll try—?" Fred echoed. And the police captain's words started a train of thought. The others—had the place they'd gone been a heaven or a hell? So many of them—. Fred started suddenly. "The book!" he cried.

"What book?"

"I've got to see the publisher about my father's book. It's very important."

"It can wait until you're feeling better," Waters said.

"No. I've got to see Mr. Browne!"

"Why?"

"I—I can't tell you."

"All right." Captain Waters gave in. "I'll take you down and bring you back."

It was half an hour later, in the reception room at the publishing company. Fred stared numbly at

the big poster on the wall advertising his father's book.

"Mr. Browne will see you," the receptionist said.

"Wait here," Fred told Captain Waters. "I want to talk to him alone." He went to the door and opened it, stepping inside and closing it behind him.

"Fred Grant?" Browne said, getting up from his desk and coming toward him, hand outstretched. "What can I do for you? Need some money?"

Fred was shaking his head. "I don't want any money," he said. "I want you to stop my father's book. You can't publish it."

"Now wait," Browne said. "We aren't going through that again, are we?"

"You can't!" Fred said. "People will read it and vanish!"

"Huh?"

"People will read it and vanish! You've got to believe me. *The cause of those disappearances is in that book!*"

Browne stared for a moment, then dragged over a notepad, wondering how his publicity boys had missed this one. He stood up and came around his desk. "You leave it to me," he said. "You won't have a thing to worry about. I'll take care of everything."

"Then you won't publish it?"

Browne was guiding him toward the door. "You leave it to me. Drop in again soon. If you need money just drop in any time and I'll fix you up."

Fred found himself outside the door, not quite sure what Mr. Browne had promised.

Inside, Browne went back to his desk, muttering, "What a killing! Have to tell Nichols about it tomorrow at lunch. That vanishing stuff is a terrific publicity angle."

"You still don't want to tell me what's troubling you?" Police Captain Waters said wistfully.

A frown crossed Fred's features and vanished into a smile. "Nothing's troubling me," he lied. "I'm all right. I'll be all right."

"You'll stay with us a while longer?"

"Sure. Sure. You make me feel—okay. I'm just going out for a ride. Be back for supper."

IT HAD been two months now since his mother and Curt had vanished. In that two months he had come to realize something. He didn't quite know how to express it even in his thoughts.

It wasn't that he didn't want to vanish. He would, some day. But he had given up trying. It was the wrong way. The others hadn't tried. It had just come to them out of a clear sky.

Some day it would come to him that way, and he would welcome it.

He drove downtown and parked. A block away was a show he wanted to see. He started toward it. Abruptly he stopped. In front of him was a bookstore. In its window was a large display, and every book had his father's picture on the front under the title THEORY FOR THE MILLIONS.

In back of the display was a large poster with a still larger picture, and the teaser—(DO YOU DARE READ THIS BOOK?)

Anger flamed in Fred's mind. The anger died as abruptly as it had come. It was replaced by a homesickness, a longing. Unconsciously his footsteps carried him into the store.

A man had the book in his hands.

"You aren't going to buy *that,* George," the woman beside him was saying.

"And why not?" the man asked, laughing. "I've never turned down a dare in my life!" He looked at the girl waiting on him. "Do you think I'll vanish, Miss?"

The clerk smiled. "I wouldn't know. I have strict orders not to read the book."

A solemn-faced man appeared out of nowhere and thrust a copy of the book at the clerk. "I want this, please," he said.

"I'll be with you in a moment, sir," the clerk said.

Others were waiting also.

Fred stumbled from the store, bumping into someone in the doorway as he went through, and too confused and frightened to stop and apologize. There was no way of stopping it. Maybe the police would become alarmed at the disappearances.

"What's wrong with me?" he mumbled, walking blindly in the crowds on the sidewalks. "Maybe I do lack the ability to believe. I *think* I believe. What have I missed?"

Only he, of all those who had learned the theory, had not vanished. Was faith, then, something so common, and yet impossible for he, himself, to reach?

Ahead was another bookstore. In its windows were the same displays.

He stopped. People were pushing through the doors. Inside they were picking up the book and looking for a clerk.

The clerks were smiling and saying things Fred couldn't hear, and wrapping the books and handing them to their new owners—people who would take them home and read—and vanish.

Into what? Something they would see, and smile at, and say, "Why, of course!" And with a simple acceptance they would enter it.

He watched them.

And from the depths of his being Fred longed to be one of them; to be able to go in and buy the book, and read it, and. . . .

On the other side of the window, in the store, a clerk was waiting on a customer. The customer turned to look at him, with his nose flattened against the glass. He didn't see them. In his eyes was a faraway look, a startled light.

"Why of course!" he said in quiet wonder.

There was just a little blur, where a nose had pressed against the window, and the customer frowned and said to the clerk, "That young man outside—he—he—"

"Three-fifty, please," the clerk said.

"Ah—oh. Oh, sure."

THE END

What is to be will be. Our only refuge lies in that which might not have been.

SUCCESS STORY

By Robert Turner

Illustrated by KELLY FREAS

December 8th, 1952, Two-Thirty A. M.

AFTER awhile the blinding light was like actual physical pressure against his tightly squinched eyes. He tried to burrow deeper into the protectively warm, cave-like place where he'd been safe from them for so long. But he couldn't escape them. Their hands, their big, red, hideously smooth hands had him, now. They were tugging and pulling at him with a strength impossible to fight. Still he struggled.

He tried to cry out but there was no sound from his constricted throat. There were only the frightening noises from outside, louder, now. He tried to twist and squirm against the hands dragging him toward that harsh, blinding light. He was too small, too weak, compared to them. He couldn't fight them off. He felt himself being stretched and strained and forced with cruel determination. He didn't want to go *out there.* He knew what was waiting for him *out there.* He *couldn't* go. Not *out there,* where . . .

When Jeff McKinney was three years old he tipped a pot of scalding water from the stove onto himself. He was badly burned and scarred. He hovered between life and death for several weeks. Jeff's father was out of work at the time and they were living in a cold water tenement. Something about the case caught a tabloid's attention and it was played up as a human interest sob story. It came to the attention of a wealthy man who volunteered to pay for plastic surgery. Then followed, long months of that kind of torture, but Jeff McKinney came out of it not too badly scarred. Not on the surface, anyhow. But his face had a strange hue. There was a frozen, mask-like cast to his features when he smiled.

He was eight when he saw his father killed. He was in the taxi the


KELLY FREAS-

older McKinney now drove for a living when the father stepped out of the driver's side onto a busy street without looking back first. The speeding truck took the car door and Jeff's father with it for half a block, wedged between front wheel and fender. Jeff never forgot the sound of that, and the screaming. Nor his shock when he suddenly realized that the screams were his own.

Jeff was a strange boy. He didn't have an average childhood. The poverty was more extreme after his father's death. He stayed home alone while his mother was out working at whatever job she could get, reading too much and thinking too much. Once, he looked at her with haunted eyes and said: "Mother, why is life so bad? Why are people even born into a world like this?"

What could she say to a question like that? She said: "Please, Jefferson! Please don't talk that way. Life isn't all bad. You'll see. Some day, in spite of everything, you'll be somebody and you'll be happy. The good times will come."

They did, of course. A few of them. There was the day he went upstate on an outing for underprivileged boys and went fishing for the first time. He caught a whopping trout and won a prize for it. That was nice; that was fun. That was when he was thirteen. That was the year the gang of kids caught him on the way home from school and beat him unconscious because he never laughed; because they couldn't *make* him laugh. The year before his mother died.

At the orphanage he didn't mingle much with the other boys. He spent most of his after-classes hours alone in the school's chemistry lab. He liked to tinker with chemicals. They were cold, emotionless, immune to joy and sadness, yet they had purpose. He played the cello, too, with haunting beauty, but not in the school band, only when he wanted to, when nobody was around and he could really feel the music.

Once, on the way home from his cello lesson in the music building, he saw some boys playing football on the orphanage athletic field. He was suddenly seized with a fierce determination to belong, to grab at some of the shouting, laughing happiness these boys seemed to have. He told them he wanted to join in and play, too. He didn't understand why they laughed so at this idea.

They stopped laughing, though, after the first time he ran with the ball, and they all piled up on him and he didn't get up. He lay there, looking so ghostly and breathing so harshly and with the trickle of blood coming out of his ears. But Jeff didn't know they had stopped laughing.

He recovered from that skull fracture, all right. Worse, though, than any of the unhappiness he suffered during his life, worse even than the shocks of his father's and mother's deaths, was the thing that happened to him when he was twenty and working at the laboratories of a big drug company.

He met and fell hopelessly in love with a girl named Nina, a girl a few years older than he was. They married and for the first few weeks Jeff McKinney had happiness he'd

never known before. Until he came home from work sick, one afternoon and saw Nina with the man from the apartment over them. She didn't whine and beg for forgiveness, Nina didn't. She stood boldly while the other man laughed and laughed and she screamed invective upon Jefferson McKinney, telling him what she really thought of him, a gloomy, puny weakling who couldn't even make a decent living, telling him that she was through with him.

A blank spot came into Jeff's life right them. When it was over, Nina and the other man were on the floor and there was blood on the kitchen carving knife in Jeff's hand.

They didn't find him for awhile. He changed his name and appearance and hid in the soiled seams and ragged fringes of society. He learned the anaesthetic powers of drugs and alcohol. He gave up trying to get anything out of this life. Then they finally picked him up, fished him from the river into which he'd jumped. There were days of torture after that, without the alcohol and drugs his wrecked system craved. Right there was the final hell that could have broken him completely. But it didn't. It was like the terrible crisis after a long illness. Things began to get better, to go to the other extreme after that.

A state psychiatrist brought Jeff's case to the attention of a noted criminal lawyer. Neither Nina nor her lover had died from their knife wounds. On the plea of the unwritten law, Jeff McKinney got off with a suspended sentence. The lawyer and psychiatrist learned of his interest and knowledge and talent for chemistry and got him another job in the experimental laboratory of a big university.

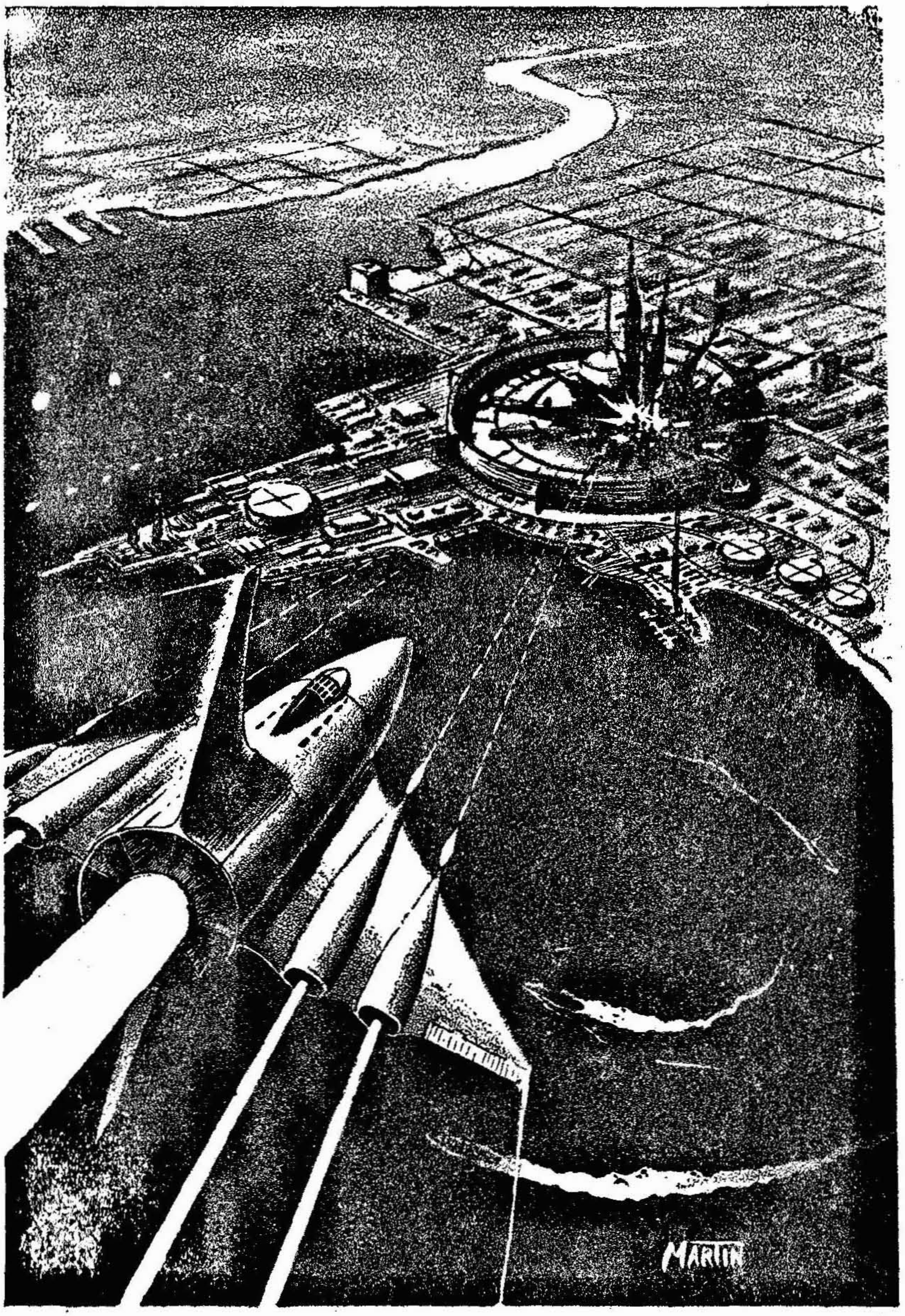
Later he married a girl named Elaine, who worked at the lab with him. They had two children, and lived in a small comfortable cottage just off the University campus. For several years, they had all they wanted of life—comfort, health, happiness. Jeff thought that life could never be more wonderful. All of his former, bitter, cynical views fell away from him. Hadn't he, with all odds against him, finally won out and acquired peace and contentment and a purpose in life? What was wrong with a world in which that could happen?

Then there was the topper. Jefferson McKinney discovered a new drug which would cure and eventually eliminate a disease that was one of the world's worst killers, the drug for which thousands of scientists had been seeking for years.

He was feted and honored, became a national hero. The story of his life and his discovery temporarily pushed even the doleful forecasts of an early Third War, the Big War, off the front pages. And Jeff was humbly proud and grateful that he had paid now the debt he owed to a society that could make a final victory, like his, possible.

In a zenith of almost holy happiness, he stood one evening on a lecture platform in a huge auditorium in a great city, before thousands of worshipping people to make a thank-you speech after being awarded a world prize for his great scientific discovery.

(Continued on page 94)



The Arrow *lanced down out of the night like a spear of flame, vengeful and deadly.*

The legends of Jaq Merril are legion—but legends. Hark, ye, then to the true story of the pirate benefactor of Mankind!

THE PEACEMAKER

By Alfred Coppel

Illustrated by BOB MARTIN

WE HUMANS are a strange breed, unique in the Universe. Of all the races met among the stars, only *homo sapiens* thrives on deliberate self-delusion. Perhaps this is the secret of our greatness, for we are great. In power, if not in supernal wisdom.

Legends, I think, are our strength. If one day a man stands on the rim of the Galaxy and looks out across the gulfs toward the seetee suns of Andromeda, it will be legends that drove him there.

They are odd things, these legends, peopled with unreal creatures, magnificent heroes and despicable villains. We stand for no nonsense where our mythology is concerned. A man becoming part of our folk-lore becomes a fey, one-dimensional, shadow-image of reality.

Jaq Merril—the Jaq Merril of the history books—is such an image. History, folklore's jade, has daubed Merril with the rouge of myth, and it does not become him.

The Peacemaker, the chronicles have named him, and that at least, is accurate in point of fact. But it was not through choice that he became the Peacemaker; and when his Peace descended over the worlds of space, Merril, the man, was finished. This I know, for I rode with him—his lieutenant in a dozen and more bloody fights that earned him his ironically pacific laurels.

Not many now living will remember the Wall Decade. History, ever pliable, is rewritten often, and facts are forgotten. When it was gone, the Wall Decade was remembered with shame and so was expunged from the record of time. But I remember it well. It was an era compounded of stupidity and grandeur, of brilliant discovery and grimy political maneuver. We, the

greedy men of space—and that includes Jaq Merril—saw it end with sorrow in our hearts, knowing that we had killed it.

If you will think back to the years immediately preceding the Age of Space, you may remember the Iron Curtain. Among the nations of the Earth a great schism had arisen, and a wall of ideas was built between east and west. Hydrogen bombs were stockpiled and armies marched and countermarched threateningly. Men lived with fear and hatred and distrust.

Then, suddenly, came the years of spaceflight and the expanding frontiers. Luna was passed. Mars and Venus and the Jovian Moons felt the tread of living beings for the first time since the dawn of time. The larger asteroids were taken and even the cold moonlets of Saturn and Uranus trembled under the blast of Terran rockets. But the Iron Curtain still existed. It was extended out into the gulf of space, an intangible wall of fear and suspicion. Thus was born the Wall Decade.

Jaq Merril was made for that epoch. Ever in human history there are those who profit from the stupidity of their fellows. Jaq Merril so profited. He dredged up the riches of space and took them for his own. And his weapon was man's fear of his brothers.

IT WAS in Yakki, down-canal from the Terran settlement at Canalopolis, that Merril's plan was born. His ship, the *Arrow*, stood on the red sands of Syrtis Major, waiting for a payload to the Outer System. It stood among a good many like it: the *Moonmaid*, the *Gay Lady*, the *Argonaut*, and my own vessel, the *Starhound*.

We, the captains, had gathered in the Spaceman's Rest—a tinkling gin-mill peopled with human wrecks and hungry-eyed, dusty-skinned women who had come out to Mars hoping for riches and had found only the same squalor they had left behind. I remember the look in Merril's eyes as he spoke of the treasures of space that would never be ours, of the gold and sapphires, the rubies and unearthly gems of fragile beauty and great price. All the riches of the worlds of space, passing through our hands and into the vaults of the stay-at-homes who owned our ships and our very lives. It seemed to me that Merril suffered as though from physical pain as he spoke of riches. He was nothing if not rapacious. Greedy, venal, ruthless. All of that.

"Five of us," he said in a hard voice, "Captains all—with ships and men. We carry the riches of the universe and let it slip through our fingers. What greater fools could there be?"

Oh, he was right enough. We had the power to command in our hands without the sense to grasp it firmly and take what we chose.

"And mark you, my friends," Merril said, "A wall has been built around Mars. A wall that weakens rather than strengthens. A wonderful, stupid, wall . . ." He laughed and glanced around the table at our faces, flushed with wine and greed. "With all space full of walls," he said softly, "Who could unite against us?"

The question struck home. I thought of the five ships standing out there on the rusty desert across the silted canal. Five tall ships—against the stars. We felt no kinship to those at home who clung to creature comforts while we bucketed among the stars risking our lives and more. We, the spacemen, had become a race apart from that of the home planet. And Merril saw this in our faces that night so long ago, and he knew that he had spoken our thoughts.

Thus was born the Compact.

Gods of space, but I must laugh when I read what history has recorded of the Compact.

"Merril, filled with the wonder of his great dream, spoke his mind to the Captains. He told them of the sorrow in his heart for his divided fellow men, and his face grew stern when he urged them to put aside ideology and prejudice and join with him in the Compact."

So speaks Quintus Bland, historian of the Age of Space. I imagine that I hear Merril's laughter even as I write. Oh, we put aside ideology and prejudice, all right! That night in Yakki the five Captains clasped hands over the formation of the first and only compact of space-piracy in history!

IT WAS an all or nothing venture. Our crews were told nothing, but their pockets were emptied and their pittances joined with ours. We loaded the five ships with supplies and thundered off into the cobalt Martian sky to seek a stronghold. We found one readily enough. The chronicles do not record it accurately. They say that the fleet of the Compact based itself on Eros. This is incorrect. We wanted no Base that would bring us so close to the home planet every year. The asteroid we chose was nameless, and remained so. We spoke of it seldom aspace, but it was ever in our minds. There was no space wall, there to divide us one from the other. It was a fortress against the rest of mankind, and in it we were brothers.

When we struck for the first time, it was not at a Russian missile post as the histories say. It was at the *Queen of Heaven,* an undefended and unsuspecting merchantman. The records of Earth say the *Queen* was lost in space between Uranus and Mars, and this is so. But she was listed lost only because no Russian or American patrol found her gutted hulk. I imagine that at this very moment she hangs out beyond Pluto, rounding the bend of the long ellipse we sent her on that day we stripped her bones.

She carried gold and precious stones—and more important yet, women being furloughed home after forced labor in the mines of Soviet Umbriel. The *Starhound* and the *Arrow* bracketed her a million miles above the plane of the ecliptic near Saturn's orbit, and killed her. We drew abreast of her and forced her valves. We boarded her and took what we chose. Then we slaughtered her men and sent them on their long voyage. That was the beginning.

The attack against Corfu was our next move. This is the battle that Celia Witmar Day has described in verse. Very bad verse.

"Corfu slumbered, gorged and proud—
While Arrow, Hound and Maid marshalled
Freedom's might above the tyrant's ground,
And rained down death—"

There is much more, of course. Brave phrases of emotion and fanciful unreality written by one who never saw the night of space agleam with stars.

There was no talk of tyranny or liberty aboard the *Hound* that day we leveled with the *Maid* and the *Arrow* a thousand miles over the Russian base of Corfu. There *was* talk of the bullion stored under the fortress' turrets.

Merril's face appeared in my visor screen, superimposed on the image of the grimy little asteroid floating darkly against the starfields.

"Their radar has picked us up by now, and they're wondering who we are," he said, "Take the *Hound* out on tangent left and join the *Maid*. Cover my attack and stand by to put a landing party aground."

I watched the image of the *Arrow*—a sliver of darkness against the crescent of Corfu—lancing down at the fortress. Her forward tubes were glowing with the familiar pre-discharge emanation.

Below us, confusion reigned. For the first time in memory an asteroid Base was under attack. Merril brought the *Arrow* in to within fifty miles and then unleashed the fury of his forward tubes. Hellfire coruscated over the steel turrets and stone walls of Corfu. It splashed like a liquid flame over men and metal and twisted the towers and buttresses into spidery tendrils of glowing thread. Corfu died without firing a shot.

We put a party from the *Hound* aground ten hours later. Even then, we had to wear insulated suits to walk in that still molten inferno. Charred bodies had become one with the stuff of the fortress, and nothing living was left within the keep. We looted Corfu's treasure and lifted into space heavy with gold.

Time passed in an orgy of looting for the men of the Compact. We grew rich and arrogant, for in space we were kings. Torn by suspicion of one another, America and Russia could do nothing against us. They had built an Iron Curtain in space, and it kept them divided and weak.

Endymion felt our blasts, and Clio. Then came Tethys, Rhea, Iapetus. We cared nothing for the flag these Bases flew. They were the gathering points for all the gold and treasure of space and we of the Compact took what we wished of it, leaving a trail of blood and rapine behind us. No nation claimed our loyalty; space was our mother and lust our father.

Thus, the Peacemakers.

FOR FIVE full years—the long years of the Outer Belt—the *Arrow*, the *Starhound*, the *Moonmaid*, the *Lady* and the *Argonaut* were the scourges of the spacelanes. No patrol could find us, and no defense could contain us. I recall how we laughed at the angry sputtering

of Earth's radio. Vast sums were spent in searches and new weapons to protect the meek and the mutually distrustful from Merril and the men of the Compact. Budgets, already strained to the breaking point by generations of the cold war, creaked and groaned as Russians and Americans spent furiously to build up their defenses against our depredations. But though we were few and they many—space was large and it hid us well.

And then one darkling day, Jaq Merril and I stood on the thin methane snow that carpeted our Base's landing ramp, waiting under our own blue-black sky for the return of the *Argonaut*. Merril had sent her sunward to strike at the mines of Loki, an asteroid where Russian *komisars* rolled in mountains of blood-red rubies.

We waited through the day and into the sable night, but the *Argonaut* did not return. For the first time since the formation of the Compact, we had lost a ship, and something like unease crept into our hearts. The carousal that night had no gaiety, and there was the sound of bereaved women weeping.

Merril could learn nothing of the *Argonaut's* fate. It was as though she had dropped through a hole in the fabric of space itself and vanished from the ken of men. To me he said: "I fear a new weapon." But to the rest, he kept his peace and let the work of the Compact continue. There was nothing else to be done. Our Wall Decade was waning, and when a man or a Compact outlives the age that gave him or it birth, there is nothing to do but go forward and meet the new day dawning.

So it was with the Compact. We lived on as we had lived before: looting and killing and draining the wealth of space into our coffers. But in the back of our minds a shadow was lurking.

On the next raid, the *Lady* was lost. I saw it happen, as did Merril. There was nothing we could do to help her, and she died, spilling men into the void as she ruptured in her last agony.

It was off Hyperion, whence we had come to loot the trove built there by the prospectors of the Saturnian Moons. And it was a trap.

The *Arrow*, the *Hound* and the *Lady* circled the moonlet, swinging inward to the attack. It was the *Lady* who was to put aground the raiding party, and her valves hung open while men readied the assault-boats. Our radar screens showed nothing of danger. There was only the bloated giant in the sky, a ringed monster of yellow gold against the starry velvet of space.

The *Lady* dropped her boats, the *Hound* and the *Arrow* hovering by to watch over their sister. And suddenly, the jagged moonscape below erupted—belching streaks of fire that sought us like probing fingers. I knew in one single instant of terror that this was the new weapon that had killed the *Argonaut*, for it sliced into the *Lady's* flanks as though the steelite hull were cheese.

She bulged, glowing like an ember. There was a sudden nimbus of snow about her as her air escaped and froze, and then she rolled into her death-dance, open from bow to stern, spilling scorched corpses

into the void.

The *Arrow* and the *Hound* drove off into space like furies leaving the spinning body of their sister ship behind, not waiting to watch her crash down onto the rocky face of Hyperion. And now the five of the Compact were only three, and again there was the sound of weeping among our women.

TWO MONTHS after that engagement, a single assault-boat returned to Base. It was the lone survivor of the *Lady's* landing party. By some miracle, the three men aboard had escaped the holocaust. They had landed and been captured and then they had fought their way free and into the void once more. They were half-dead from starvation and exposure, but they had brought word to Merril that the wall that had so long protected us was crumbling.

Merril sought me out, his lean hard face grim and set.

"There was a Russian among the Americans on Hyperion," he said.

"A prisoner?" It was my hope that spoke so, not my sure knowledge of what was to come.

Merril shook his head slowly. "A technician. They developed the beam that killed the *Argonaut* and the *Lady*—together." His voice was harsh and bleak. Then suddenly he laughed. "We've touched them," he said, "Touched them on their tender spot—their purses." He bowed low, filled with bitter mockery. "Behold the diplomats, the men who are accomplishing the impossible!"

And I knew that his words spelt doom. Doom for the Compact and for the Wall Decade that was our life.

Yet we did not stint. In that year we raided Dione, Io, Gannymede, and even the American naval Base on Callisto. We gutted six Russian and four American rockets filled with treasure. And we ventured sunward as far as the moons of Mars.

We dared battles with patrol ships and won. We killed the destroyer *Alexei Tolstoi* off Europa and we shattered an American monitor over Syrtis itself, and watched the wreckage rain down on Yakki, the place where the Compact was born.

And we lost the *Moonmaid.*

The radio told us the story. Other new weapons were being developed against us, and here and there American and Russian spacecraft were seen in company for the first time in the history of the Age of Space. Convoys were formed from ships of both flags to protect spatial commerce from the imagined "great fleet" of the Compact. None knew that only the *Arrow* and the *Starhound,* small ships, weary ships, were left to face the slowly combining might of Earth.

And then at last, the pickings—growing slimmer always—diminished to the vanishing point. Merril stood before us and gave the assembled crews their option.

"The treasure hunt is over," our captain told us, "And those who wish may withdraw now. Take your women and the space-boats and return to Mars. You have your shares, and you can live in comfort

wherever you may choose. If you wish it, go now."

Some few did go, but most remained. I watched Merril's face, and saw one last plan maturing there. Then he spoke again and we all understood. One last raid . . . to take Luna and command the world!

"Still the unity of Mankind was not secure, and Merril, filled with impatience for his great dream, decided on one final stroke. He would descend on Luna Base itself with his fleet, and commanding all Earth, he would drive men together—even though it might mean his own death. With this plan of self-immolation in his heart, the Peacemaker ordered his hosts and sought the pumice soil of the mother planet's moon. . ."

This is the way Quintus Bland, historian and scholar puts it down for posterity. I, one of "his hosts", would say it another way.

We had gutted the Solar System of its treasure and at last men were uniting against us. Our "fleet" was reduced to two small ships and a bare handful of men and women to fight them. Jaq Merril could see the handwriting on the wall and he knew that all must be gambled on one last throw of the dice. Only with Terra herself under our guns could we hope to continue sucking the juice of the worlds into our mouths. It was all or nothing, for we had grown used to our life and we could no longer change it to meet the demands of the dawning age of Soviet-American amity.

SIDE BY SIDE the *Arrow* and the *Hound* slanted sunward. Mars behind us, ahead lay the Earth-Moon system. Ten years had passed since any of us aboard the Compact ships had seen the home world, and though we no longer felt a part of it, the sight of the silvery cloud-flecked globe touched our hearts. Touched them as the sapphires of Mimas or the gold of Corfu touched them. We saw the planet that gave us birth and we were filled with hunger for it. To own it, command it, make it our own.

Luna's mountains were white and stark under our keels as Merril led us across the curve of the southern horizon, seeking to put us into position to attack the UN Moon Base in Clavius from the direction of the Moon's hidden face.

We swung low across unnamed mountain ranges and deep sheer valleys steeped in shadow. The voice of the ranger in the *Arrow* came softly through the open intercom into the tiny control room of the *Hound*. A woman's voice, tense with excitement, but disciplined and controlled.

"Range five hundred miles, four seventy five, four fifty—"

And then Merril's voice, calm and reassuring, giving heart to all the untried ones aboard with his steady conning commands.

"Four o'clock jet, easy, hold her. Drivers up one half standard. Steady goes. Meet her. Steady—"

Line astern now, the two ships flashing low across the jagged lunar landscape, and a world in the balance—

An alarm bell ringing suddenly, and my screen showing the fleeting outline of a Russian monitor above, running across our stern. My own voice, sharp with command:

"Gun pointer!"

"Here sir!"

"Get me that gunboat."

The *Hound's* turret wound about with agonizing slowness as the monitor reached for the sky, clawing for altitude and safety. And then there came a searing blast of fire and the fragments of the Russian gunboat raining down lazily, seeking their eternal rest in the pumice of Luna's hidden face.

But they had been warned at the UN Base. The monitor had left one dying shriek in the ether, and the waiting garrison had heard. Merril knew it, and so did I. We moved forward calmly, into the jaws of hell.

The *Arrow* attacked from ten o'clock, low on the horizon, the *Hound* from twelve o'clock high. We swept in over the batteries of pulsating projectors, raining down our bombs. The ground shuddered and shook with the fury of exploding uranium and the sky was laced with a net of fiery death. The *Hound* shrieked her protest as I swung her about for another attack.

There was a sickening swerve and the smell of ozone in my ship. Somewhere, deep within her, a woman screamed and I felt the deck under me give as one of the questing beams from the fortress below cut into the hull. Airtight doors slammed throughout the wounded vessel, and I drove her to the attack again, hard. The last of the bombs clattered out of the events, sending mushrooms of pumice miles into the black sky. One battery of guns below fell silent.

The *Arrow* vanished into the night above and as suddenly reappeared, her forward tubes spewing red fire onto the Base below. Then Merril pulled her up again and disappeared among the pale stars.

The *Hound's* hurt was mortal, I could feel her dying under my hands, and tears streaked my face. Below decks, she was a shambles where the cutting beam from the ground had torn part of her heart out. Still I fought her. There was no retreat from this last raid, nor did I wish any. There was a madness in us—a blood-lust as hot and demanding as ever our lust for gold and treasure might have been.

I lashed the face of the fortress with the *Hound's* forward tubes, frantically, filled with a hateful anguish. I felt my ship losing way, twisting and seeking rest on the jagged ground below, and thinking he had deserted us, I cursed Merril in an ecstacy of blind fury.

Again and again the *Hound* was hit. I knew then that Merril's plan had been madness, a last gesture of defiance to the new age of unity among men. The *Hound* fell at last, spitting fire and gall in a futile dance of death.

She struck on a high plateau, grinding into the pumice, rolling with macabre abandon across the face of the high tableland. Then at last she was still, hissing and groaning fitfully as she died, her buccaneering days gone forever.

I donned a suit and staggered, half dazed, out into the lunar night.

A half-dozen men and women from the crew had survived the impact and they stood by the wreckage, faces under the plastic helmets turned skyward. They were one and all stunned and bleeding from the violence of the *Hound's* end, but they looked neither back nor around them. Their eyes were filled with the insane glory of the drama being enacted in the sky.

The *Arrow* had returned. She lanced down out of the night like a spear of flame, vengeful and deadly. Straight into the mouth of the screaming guns she dove, death spilling from her tubes. She bathed the Moon Base in fire, searing the men within—Russian and American alike—into the brotherhood of death.

Miraculously, she pulled up out of her encircling net of flame. We watched in openmouthed wonder as she reached with sobbing heart for the sky just once again—and then, failing, crippled and dying, she hung above the crater's rim, framed with deadly beams from below, but radiant in her own right—gleaming in the light of the sun.

This was defeat. We knew it as we stood by the tangled pile of steelite that had been the *Hound* and watched the *Arrow* die. But nothing in this life that I have lived ever told me so grandly that the Wall Decade was ended—and our life of buccaneering with it—as the thing that happened next.

The *Arrow's* valve opened and a tiny figure stepped out—into space. I did not need to be told that Jaq Merril was coming to meet the men he had welded together against him.

Lazily, unreally, the tiny shape twisted over and over as it fell, until at last it vanished amid the raw welter of craters and ridges beyond the razor wall of Clavius . . .

I HAVE TOLD a true tale, though one that will not be believed. I have taken the Peacemaker of the histories and painted him *as he was.*

But men are ashamed, and the chronicles of history must be rewritten to hide their weaknesses, Jaq Merril has become a legend, and the man that I knew is forgotten.

Merril—pirate, fighter, grandiose dreamer. That was my captain. Not the colorless do-good creature of the legend. Merril fought for lust and greed, and these are the things that will one day take men to the stars. He knew this truth, of course, and that was the substance of his great dream. Because of it, there are no longer walls in space, and the men who united to fight the Peacemaker will one day rule the universe.

Meanwhile, chroniclers will write lies about him, and Jaq Merril's laughter will echo in some ghostly Valhalla beyond the farthest star.

THE END

I put my arms around her shoulders but there was no way I could comfort her.

There is a time for doing and a time for going home. But where is home in an ever-changing universe?

The STATUE

By Mari Wolf

Illustrated by BOB MARTIN

"LEWIS," Martha said. "I want to go home."

She didn't look at me. I followed her gaze to Earth, rising in the east.

It came up over the desert horizon, a clear, bright star at this distance. Right now it was the Morning Star. It wasn't long before dawn.

I looked back at Martha sitting quietly beside me with her shawl drawn tightly about her knees. She had waited to see it also, of course. It had become almost a ritual with us these last few years, staying up night after night to watch the earthrise.

She didn't say anything more. Even the gentle squeak of her rocking chair had fallen silent. Only her hands moved. I could see them trembling where they lay folded in her lap, trembling with emotion and tiredness and old age. I knew what she was thinking. After seventy years there can be no secrets.

We sat on the glassed-in veranda of our Martian home looking up at the Morning Star. To us it wasn't a point of light. It was the continents and oceans of Earth, the mountains and meadows and laughing streams of our childhood. We saw Earth still, though we had lived on Mars for almost sixty-six years.

"Lewis," Martha whispered softly. "It's very bright tonight, isn't it?"

"Yes," I said.

"It seems so near."

She sighed and drew the shawl higher about her waist.

"Only three months by rocket ship," she said. "We could be back home in three months, Lewis, if we went out on this week's run."

I nodded. For years we'd watched the rocket ships streak upward through the thin Martian at-

mosphere, and we'd envied the men who so casually travelled from world to world. But it had been a useless envy, something of which we rarely spoke.

Inside our veranda the air was cool and slightly moist. Earth air, perfumed with the scent of Earth roses. Yet we knew it was only illusion. Outside, just beyond the glass, the cold night air of Mars lay thin and alien and smelling of alkali. It seemed to me tonight that I could smell that ever-dry Martian dust, even here. I sighed, fumbling for my pipe.

"Lewis," Martha said, very softly.

"What is it?" I cupped my hands over the match flame.

"Nothing. It's just that I wish—I wish we *could* go home, right away. Home to Earth. I want to see it again, before we die."

"We'll go back," I said. "Next year for sure. We'll have enough money then."

She sighed. "Next year may be too late."

I looked over at her, startled. She'd never talked like that before. I started to protest, but the words died away before I could even speak them. She was right. Next year might indeed be too late.

Her work-coarsened hands were thin, too thin, and they never stopped shaking any more. Her body was a frail shadow of what it had once been. Even her voice was frail now.

She was old. We were both old. There wouldn't be many more Martian summers for us, nor many years of missing Earth.

"Why can't we go back this year, Lewis?"

She smiled at me almost apologetically. She knew the reason as well as I did.

"We can't," I said. "There's not enough money."

"There's enough for our tickets."

I'd explained all that to her before, too. Perhaps she'd forgotten. Lately I often had to explain things more than once.

"You can't buy passage unless you have enough extra for insurance, and travelers' checks, and passport tax. The company has to protect itself. Unless you're financially responsible, they won't take you on the ships."

She shook her head. "Sometimes I wonder if we'll ever have enough."

WE'D SAVED our money for years, but it was a pitifully small savings. We weren't rich people who could go down to the spaceport and buy passage on the rocket ships, no questions asked, no bond required. We were only farmers, eking our livelihood from the unproductive Martian soil, only two of the countless little people of the solar system. In all our lifetime we'd never been able to save enough to go home to Earth.

"One more year," I said. "If the crop prices stay up. . ."

She smiled, a sad little smile that didn't reach her eyes. "Yes, Lewis," she said. "One more year."

But I couldn't stop thinking of what she'd said earlier, nor stop seeing her thin, tired body. Neither of us was strong any more, but of the two I was far stronger than she.

When we'd left Earth she'd been as eager and graceful as a child. We hadn't been much past childhood then, either of us. . . .

"Sometimes I wonder why we ever came here," she said.

"It's been a good life."

She sighed. "I know. But now that it's nearly over, there's nothing to hold us here."

"No," I said. "There's not."

If we had had children it might have been different. As it was, we lived surrounded by the children and grandchildren of our friends. Our friends themselves were dead. One by one they had died, all of those who came with us on the first colonizing ship to Mars. All of those who came later, on the second and third ships. Their children were our neighbors now—and they were Martian born. It wasn't the same.

She leaned over and pressed my hand. "We'd better go in, Lewis," she said. "We need our sleep."

Her eyes were raised again to the green star that was Earth. Watching her, I knew that I loved her now as much as when we had been young together. More, really, for we had added years of shared memories. I wanted so much to give her what she longed for, what we both longed for. But I couldn't think of any way to do it. Not this year.

Once, almost seventy years before, I had smiled at the girl who had just promised to become my wife, and I'd said: "I'll give you the world, darling. All tied up in pink ribbons."

I didn't want to think about that now.

We got up and went into the house and shut the veranda door behind us.

I COULDN'T go to sleep. For hours I lay in bed staring up at the shadowed ceiling, trying to think of some way to raise the money. But there wasn't any way that I could see. It would be at least eight months before enough of the greenhouse crops were harvested.

What would happen, I wondered, if I went to the spaceport and asked for tickets? If I explained that we couldn't buy insurance, that we couldn't put up the bond guaranteeing we wouldn't become public charges back on Earth. . . . But all the time I wondered I knew the answer. Rules were rules. They wouldn't be broken especially not for two old farmers who had long outlived their usefulness and their time.

Martha sighed in her sleep and turned over. It was light enough now for me to see her face clearly. She was smiling. But a minute ago she had been crying, for the tears were still wet on her cheeks.

Perhaps she was dreaming of Earth again.

Suddenly, watching her, I didn't care if they laughed at me or lectured me on my responsibilities to the government as if I were a senile fool. I was going to the spaceport. I was going to find out if, somehow, we couldn't go back.

I got up and dressed and went out, walking softly so as not to awaken her. But even so she heard me and called out to me.

"Lewis. . . ."

I turned at the head of the stairs and looked back into the room.

"Don't get up, Martha," I said. "I'm going into town."

"All right, Lewis."

She relaxed, and a minute later she was asleep again. I tiptoed downstairs and out the front door to where the trike car was parked, and started for the village a mile to the west.

It was desert all the way. Dry, fine red sand that swirled upward in choking clouds, if you stepped off the pavement into it. The narrow road cut straight through it, linking the outlying district farms to the town. The farms themselves were planted in the desert. Small, glassed-in houses and barns, and large greenhouses roofed with even more glass, that sheltered the Earth plants and gave them Earth air to breathe.

WHEN I came to the second farmhouse John Emery hurried out to meet me.

"Morning, Lewis," he said. "Going to town?"

I shut off the motor and nodded. "I want to catch the early shuttle plane to the spaceport," I said. "I'm going to the city to buy some things. . ."

I had to lie about it. I didn't want anyone to know we were even thinking of leaving, at least not until we had our tickets in our hands.

"Oh," Emery said. "That's right. I suppose you'll be buying Martha an anniversary present."

I stared at him blankly. I couldn't think what anniversary he meant.

"You'll have been here thirty-five years next week," he said. "That's a long time, Lewis. . ."

Thirty-five years. It took me a minute to realize what he meant. He was right. That was how long we had been here, in Martian years.

The others, those who had been born here on Mars, always used the Martian seasons. We had too, once. But lately we forgot, and counted in Earth time. It seemed more natural.

"Wait a minute, Lewis," Emery said. "I'll ride into the village with you. There's plenty of time for you to make your plane."

I went up on his veranda and sat down and waited for him to get ready. I leaned back in the swing chair and rocked slowly back and forth, wondering idly how many times I'd sat here.

This was old Tom Emery's house. Or had been, until he died eight years ago. He'd built this swing chair the very first year we'd been on Mars.

Now it was young John's. Young? That showed how old we were getting. John was sixty-three, in Earth years. He'd been born that second winter, the month the parasites got into the greenhouses. . .

He came back out onto the veranda. "Well, I'm ready, Lewis," he said.

We went down to my trike car and got in.

"You and Martha ought to get out more," he said. "Jenny's been asking me why you don't come to call."

I shrugged. I couldn't tell him

we seldom went out because when we did we were always set apart and treated carefully, like children. He probably didn't even realize that it was so.

"Oh," I said. "We like it at home."

He smiled. "I suppose you do, after thirty-five years."

I started the motor quickly, and from then on concentrated on my driving. He didn't say anything more.

IT TOOK only a few minutes to get to the village, but even so I was tired. Lately it grew harder and harder to drive, to keep the trike car on the narrow strip of pavement. I was glad when we pulled up in the square and got out.

"I'll walk over to the plane with you," Emery said. "I've got plenty of time."

"All right."

"By the way, Lewis, Jenny and I and some of the neighbors thought we'd drop over on your anniversary."

"That's fine," I said, trying to sound enthusiastic. "Come on over."

"It's a big event," he said. "Deserves a celebration."

The shuttle plane was just landing. I hurried over to the ticket window, with him right beside me.

"I just wanted to be sure you'd be home," he said. "We wouldn't want you to miss your own party."

"Party?" I said. "But John—"

He wouldn't even let me finish protesting.

"Now don't ask any questions, Lewis. You wouldn't want to spoil the surprise, would you?"

He chuckled. "Your plane's loading now. You'd better be going. Thanks for the ride, Lewis."

I went across to the plane and got in. I hoped that somehow we wouldn't have to spend that Martian anniversary being congratulated and petted and babied. I didn't think Martha could stand it. But there wasn't any polite way to say no.

IT WASN'T a long trip to the spaceport. In less than an hour the plane dropped down to the air strip that flanked the rocket field. But it was like flying from one civilization to another.

The city was big, almost like an Earth city. There was lots of traffic, cars and copters and planes. All the bustle of the spaceways stations.

But although the city looked like Earth, it smelled as dry and alkaline as all the rest of Mars.

I found the ticket office easily enough and went in. The young clerk barely glanced up at me. "Yes?" he said.

"I want to inquire about tickets to Earth," I said.

My hands were sweating, and I could feel my heart pounding too fast against my ribs. But my voice sounded casual, just the way I wanted it to sound.

"Tickets?" the clerk said. "How many?"

"Two. How much would they cost? Everything included."

"Forty-two eighty," he said. His voice was still bored. "I could give them to you for the flight after next. Tourist class, of course . . ."

We didn't have that much. We were at least three hundred short.

"Isn't there any way," I said hesitantly, "that I could get them for less? I mean, we wouldn't need insurance, would we?"

He looked up at me for the first time, startled. "You don't mean you want them for yourself, do you?"

"Why yes. For me and my wife."

He shook his head. "I'm sorry," he said flatly. "But that would be impossible in any case. You're too old."

He turned away from me and bent over his desk work again.

The words hung in the air. Too old . . . too old . . . I clutched the edge of the desk and steadied myself and forced down the panic I could feel rising.

"Do you mean," I said slowly, "that you wouldn't sell us tickets even if we had the money?"

He glanced up again, obviously annoyed at my persistence. "That's right. No passengers over seventy carried without special visas. Medical precaution."

I just stood there. This couldn't be happening. Not after all our years of working and saving and planning for the future. Not go back. Not even next year. Stay here, because we were old and frail and the ships wouldn't be bothered with us anyway.

Martha. . . How could I tell her? How could I say, "We can't go home, Martha. They won't let us."

I couldn't say it. There had to be some other way.

"Pardon me," I said to the clerk, "but who should I see about getting a visa?"

He swept the stack of papers away with an impatient gesture and frowned up at me.

"Over at the colonial office, I suppose," he said. "But it won't do you any good."

I could read in his eyes what he thought of me. Of me and all the other farmers who lived in the outlying districts and raised crops and seldom came to the city. My clothes were old and provincial and out of style, and so was I, to him.

"I'll try it anyway," I said.

He started to say something, then bit it back and looked away from me again. I was keeping him from his work. I was just a rude old man interfering with the operation of the spaceways.

Slowly I let go of the desk and turned to leave. It was hard to walk. My knees were trembling, and my whole body shook. It was all I could do not to cry. It angered me, the quavering in my voice and the weakness in my legs.

I went out into the hall and looked for the directory that would point the way to the colonial office. It wasn't far off.

I walked out onto the edge of the field and past the Earth rocket, its silver nose pointed up at the sky. I couldn't bear to look at it for longer than a minute.

It was only a few hundred yards to the colonial office, but it seemed like miles.

THIS OFFICE was larger than the other, and much more comfortable. The man seated behind the desk seemed friendlier too.

"May I help you?" he asked.

"Yes," I said slowly. "The man

at the ticket office told me to come here. I wanted to see about getting a permit to go back to Earth . . ."

His smile faded. "For yourself?"

"Yes," I said woodenly. "For myself and my wife."

"Well, Mr. . . ."

"Farwell. Lewis Farwell."

"My name's Duane. Please sit down, won't you? . . . How old are you, Mr. Farwell?"

"Eighty-seven," I said. "In Earth years."

He frowned. "The regulations say no space travel for people past seventy, except in certain special cases . . ."

I looked down at my hands. They were shaking badly. I knew he could see them shake, and was judging me as old and weak and unable to stand the trip. He couldn't know why I was trembling.

"Please," I whispered. "It wouldn't matter if it hurt us. It's just that we want to see Earth again. It's been so long . . ."

"How long have you been here, Mr. Farwell?" It was merely politeness. There wasn't any promise in his voice.

"Sixty-five years." I looked up at him. "Isn't there some way—"

"Sixty-five years? But that means you must have come here on the first colonizing ship."

"Yes," I said. "We did."

"I can't believe it," he said slowly. "I can't believe I'm actually looking at one of the pioneers." He shook his head. "I didn't even know any of them were still on Mars."

"We're the last ones," I said. "That's the main reason we want to go back. It's awfully hard staying on when your friends are dead."

DUANE got up and crossed the room to the window and looked out over the rocket field.

"But what good would it do to go back, Mr. Farwell?" he asked. "Earth has changed very much in the last sixty-five years."

He was trying to soften the disappointment. But nothing could. If only I could make him realize that.

"I know it's changed," I said. "But it's *home.* Don't you see? We're Earthmen still. I guess that never changes. And now that we're old, we're aliens here."

"We're all aliens here, Mr. Farwell."

"No," I said desperately. "Maybe you are. Maybe a lot of the city people are. But our neighbors were born on Mars. To them Earth is a legend. A place where their ancestors once lived. It's not real to them. . . ."

He turned and crossed the room and came back to me. His smile was pitying. "If you went back," he said, "you'd find you were a Martian, too."

I couldn't reach him. He was friendly and pleasant and he was trying to make things easier, and it wasn't any use talking. I bent my head and choked back the sobs I could feel rising in my throat.

"You've lived a full life," Duane said. "You were one of the pioneers. I remember reading about your ship when I was a boy, and wishing I'd been born sooner so that I could have been on it."

Slowly I raised my head and looked up at him.

"Please," I said. "I know that. I'm glad we came here. If we had our lives to live over, we'd come

again. We'd go through all the hardships of those first few years, and enjoy them just as much. We'd be just as thrilled over proving that it's possible to farm a world like this, where it's always freezing and the air is thin and nothing will grow outside the greenhouses. You don't need to tell me what we've done, or what we've gotten out of it. We know. We've had a wonderful life here."

"But you still want to go back?"

"Yes," I said. "We still want to go back. We're tired of living in the past, with our friends dead and nothing to do except remember."

He looked at me for a long moment. Then he said slowly, "You realize, don't you, that if you went back to Earth you'd have to stay there? You couldn't return to Mars. . . ."

"I realize that," I said. "That's what we want. We want to die at home. On Earth."

FOR A LONG, long moment his eyes never left mine. Then, slowly, he sat down at his desk and reached for a pen.

"All right, Mr. Farwell," he said. "I'll give you a visa."

I couldn't believe it. I stared at him, sure that I'd misunderstood.

"Sixty-five years . . ." He shook his head. "I only hope I'm doing the right thing. I hope you won't regret this."

"We won't," I whispered.

Then I remembered that we were still short of money. That that was why I'd come to the spaceport originally. I was almost afraid to mention it, for fear I'd lose everything.

"Is there—is there some way we could be excused from the insurance?" I said. "So we could go back this year? We're three hundred short."

He smiled. It was a very reassuring smile. "You don't need to worry about the money," he said. "The colonial office can take care of that. After all, we owe your generation a great debt, Mr. Farwell. A passport tax and the fare to Earth are little enough to pay for a planet."

I didn't quite understand him, but that didn't matter. The only thing that mattered was that we were going home. Back to Earth. I could see Martha's face when I told her. I could see her tears of happiness . . .

There were tears on my own cheeks, but I wasn't ashamed of them now.

"Mr. Farwell," Duane said. "You go back home. The shuttle ship will be leaving in a few minutes."

"You mean that—" I started.

He nodded. "I'll get your tickets for you. On the first ship I can. Just leave it to me."

"It's too much trouble," I protested.

"No it's not." He smiled. "Besides, I'd like to bring them out to you. I'd like to see your farm, if I may."

Then I remembered what John Emery had said this morning about our anniversary. It would be a wonderful celebration, now that there was something to celebrate. We could even save our announcement that we were going home until then.

"Mr. Duane," I said. "Next week, on the tenth, we'll have been here thirty-five Martian years. Maybe you'd like to come out then. I guess our neighbors will be giving us a sort of party."

He laid the pen down and looked at me very intently. "They don't know you're planning to leave yet, do they?"

"No. We'll wait and tell them then."

Duane nodded slowly. "I'll be there," he promised.

MARTHA was out on the veranda again, looking down the road toward the village. All afternoon at least one of us had been out there watching for our guests, waiting for our anniversary celebration to begin.

"Do you see anyone yet?" I called.

"No," she said. "Not yet . . ."

I looked around the room hoping I'd find something left undone that I could work on, so I wouldn't have to sit and worry about the possibility of Duane's having forgotten us. But everything was ready. The extra chairs were out and the furniture all dusted, and Martha's cakes and cookies arranged on the table.

I couldn't sit still. Not today. I got up out of the chair and joined her on the veranda.

"I wonder what their surprise is . . ." she said. "Didn't John give you any hint at all?"

"No," I said. "But whatever it is, it can't be half as wonderful as ours."

She reached for my hand. "Lewis," she whispered. "I can hardly believe it, can you?"

"No," I said. "But it's true. We're really going."

I put my arm around her, and she rested her head against me.

"I'm so happy, Lewis."

Her cheeks were full of color once again, and her step had a spring to it that I hadn't seen for years. It was as if the years of waiting were falling away from both of us now.

"I wish they'd come," she said. "I can hardly wait to see their faces when we tell them."

It was getting late in the afternoon. Already the sun was dipping down toward the desert horizon. It was hard to wait. In some ways it was harder to be patient these last few hours than it had been during all those years we'd wanted to go back.

"Look," Martha said suddenly. "There's a car now."

Then I saw the car too, coming quickly toward us. It pulled up in front of the house and stopped and Duane stepped out.

"Well, hello there, Mr. Farwell," he called. "All ready for the trip?"

I nodded. Suddenly, now that he was here, I couldn't say anything at all.

He must have seen how excited we were. By the time he was inside the veranda door he'd reached into his wallet and pulled out a long envelope.

"Here's your schedule," he said. "Your tickets are all made out for next week's flight."

Martha's hand crept into mine. "You've been so kind," she whispered.

WE WENT into the house and smiled at each other while Duane admired the furniture and the farming district in general and our place in particular. We hardly heard what he was saying.

When the doorbell rang we stared at each other. For a minute I couldn't think who it might be. I'd forgotten our guests and their surprise party, even the anniversary itself had slipped my mind.

"Hello in there," John Emery called. "Come on out, you two."

Martha pressed my hand once more. Then she stepped to the door and opened it.

"Happy anniversary!"

We stood frozen. We'd expected only a few visitors, some of our nearest neighbors. But the yard was full of people. They crowded up our walk and in the road and more of them were still piling out of cars. It looked as if everyone in the district was along.

"Come on out," Emery called. "You too, Duane."

The two men smiled at each other knowingly, and for just a moment I had time to wonder why.

Then Martha clutched my arm. "You tell him, Lewis."

"John," I said. "We have a surprise for you too—"

He wouldn't let me finish. He took hold of my arm with one hand and Martha's with the other and drew us outside where everyone could see us.

"You can tell us later, Lewis," he said. "First we have a surprise for you!"

"But wait—"

They crowded in around us, laughing and waving and calling "Happy anniversary". We couldn't resist them. They swept us along with them down the walk and into one of the cars.

I looked around for Duane. He was in the back seat, smiling somewhat nervously. Perhaps he thought that this was normal farm life.

"Lewis," Martha said, "where are they taking us?"

"I don't know . . ."

The cars started, ours leading the way. It was a regular procession back to the village, with everyone laughing and calling to us and telling us how happy we were going to be with our surprise. Every time we tried to ask questions, John Emery interrupted.

"Just wait and see," he kept saying. "Wait and see . . ."

AT THE END of the village square they'd put up a platform. It wasn't very big, nor very well made, but it was strung with yards of bunting and a huge sign that said, "Happy Anniversary, Lewis and Martha."

We were pushed toward it, carried along by the swarm of people. There wasn't any way to resist. Martha clung to my arm, pressing close against me. She was trembling again.

"What does it mean, Lewis?"

"I wish I knew."

They pushed us right up onto the platform and John Emery followed us up and held out his hand to quiet the crowd. I put my arm around Martha and looked down at them. Hundreds of people. All in their best clothes. Our friends's children and grandchildren, and even great-

grandchildren.

"I won't make a speech," John Emery said when they were finally quiet. "You know why we're here today—all of you except Lewis and Martha know. It's an anniversary. A big anniversary. Thirty-five years today since our fathers—and you two—landed here on Mars . . ."

He paused. He didn't seem to know what to say next. Finally he turned and swept his arm past the platform to where a big canvas-covered object stood on the ground.

"Unveil it," he said.

The crowd grew absolutely quiet. A couple of boys stepped up and pulled the canvas off.

"There's your surprise," John Emery said softly.

It was a statue. A life-size statue carved from the dull red stone of Mars. Two figures, a man and a woman, dressed in farm clothes, standing side by side and looking out across the square toward the open desert.

They were very real, those figures. Real, and somehow familiar.

"Lewis," Martha whispered. "They're—they're us!"

She was right. It was a statue of us. Neither old nor young, but ageless. Two farmers, looking out forever across the endless Martian desert . . .

There was an inscription on the base, but I couldn't quite make it out. Martha could. She read it, slowly, while everyone in the crowd stood silent, listening.

"Lewis and Martha Farwell," she read. "The last of the pioneers—" Her voice broke. "Underneath," she whispered, "it says—the first Martians. And then it lists them—us . . ."

She read the list, all the names of our friends who had come out on that first ship. The names of men and women who had died, one by one, and left their farms to their children—to the same children who now crowded close about the platform and listened to her read, and smiled up at us.

She came to the end of the list and looked out at the crowd. "Thank you," she whispered.

They shouted then. They called out to us and pressed forward and held their babies up to see us.

I LOOKED out past the people, across the flat red desert to the horizon, toward the spot in the east where the Earth would rise, much later. The dry smell of Mars had never been stronger.

The first Martians . . .

They were so real, those carved figures. Lewis and Martha Farwell . . .

"Look at them, Lewis," Martha said softly. "They're cheering us. Us!"

She was smiling. There were tears in her eyes, but her smile was bright and proud and shining. Slowly she turned away from me and straightened, staring out over the heads of the crowd across the desert to the east. She stood with her head thrown back and her mouth smiling, and she was as proudly erect as the statue that was her likeness.

"Martha," I whispered. "How can we tell them goodbye?"

Then she turned to face me, and I could see the tears glistening in

her eyes. "We can't leave, Lewis. Not after this."

She was right, of course. We couldn't leave. We were symbols. The last of the pioneers. The first Martians. And they had carved their symbol in our image and made us a part of Mars forever.

I glanced down, along the rows of upturned, laughing faces, searching for Duane. He was easy to find. He was the only one who wasn't shouting. His eyes met mine, and I didn't have to say anything. He knew. He climbed up beside me on the platform.

I tried to speak, but I couldn't.

"Tell him, Lewis," Martha whispered. "Tell him we can't go."

Then she was crying. Her smile was gone and her proud look was gone and her hand crept into mine and trembled there. I put my arm around her shoulders, but there was no way I could comfort her.

"Now we'll never go," she sobbed. "We'll never get home . . ."

I don't think I had ever realized, until that moment, just how much it meant to her—getting home. Much more, perhaps, than it had ever meant to me.

The statues were only statues. They were carved from the stone of Mars. And Martha wanted Earth. We both wanted Earth. Home . . .

I looked away from her then, back to Duane. "No," I said. "We're still going. Only—" I broke off, hearing the shouting and the cheers and the children's laughter. "Only, how can we tell *them*?"

Duane smiled. "Don't try to, Mr. Farwell," he said softly. "Just wait and see."

He turned, nodded to where John Emery still stood at the edge of the platform. "All right, John."

Emery nodded too, and then he raised his hand. As he did so, the shouting stopped and the people stood suddenly quiet, still looking up at us.

"You all know that this is an anniversary," John Emery said. "And you all know something else that Lewis and Martha thought they'd kept as a surprise—that this is more than an anniversary. It's goodbye."

I stared at him. He knew. All of them knew. And then I looked at Duane and saw that he was smiling more than ever.

"They've lived here on Mars for thirty-five years," John Emery said. "And now they're going back to Earth."

Martha's hand tightened on mine. "Look, Lewis," she cried. "Look at them. They're not angry. They're—they're happy for us!"

John Emery turned to face us. "Surprised?" he said.

I nodded. Martha nodded too. Behind him, the people cheered again.

"I thought you would be," Emery said. Then, "I'm not very good at speeches, but I just wanted you to know how much we've enjoyed being your neighbors. Don't forget us when you get back to Earth."

IT WAS a long, long trip from Mars to Earth. Three months on the ship, thirty-five million miles. A trip we had dreamed about for so long, without any real hope of ever making it. But now it was over. We were back on Earth. Back

where we had started from.

"It's good to be alone, isn't it, Lewis?" Martha leaned back in her chair and smiled up at me.

I nodded. It did feel good to be here in the apartment, just the two of us, away from the crowds and the speeches and the official welcomes and the flashbulbs popping.

"I wish they wouldn't make such a fuss over us," she said. "I wish they'd leave us alone."

"You can't blame them," I said, although I couldn't help wishing the same thing. "We're celebrities. What was it that reporter said about us? That we're part of history . . ."

She sighed. She turned away from me and looked out the window again, past the buildings and the lighted traffic ramps and the throngs of people bustling by outside, people who couldn't see in through the one-way glass, people whom we couldn't hear because the room was soundproofed.

"Mars should be up by now," she said.

"It probably is." I looked out again, although I knew that we would see nothing. No stars. No planets. Not even the moon, except as a pale half disc peering through the haze. The lights from the city were too bright. The air held the light and reflected it down again, and the sky was a deep, dark blue with the buildings about us towering into it, outlined blackly against it. And we couldn't see the stars . . .

"Lewis," Martha said slowly. "I never thought it would have changed this much, did you?"

"No." I couldn't tell from her voice whether she liked the changes or not. Lately I couldn't tell much of anything from her voice. And nothing was the same as we had remembered it.

Even the Earth farms were mechanized now. Factory production lines for food, as well as for everything else. It was necessary, of course. We had heard all the reasons, all the theories, all the latest statistics.

"I guess I'll go to bed soon," Martha said. "I'm tired."

"It's the higher gravity." We'd both been tired since we got back to Earth. We had forgotten, over the years, what Earth gravity was like.

She hesitated. She smiled at me, but her eyes were worried. "Lewis—are you really glad we came back?"

It was the first time she had asked me that. And there was only one answer I could give her. The one she expected.

"Of course, Martha . . ."

She sighed again. She got up out of the chair and turned toward the bedroom door, and then she paused there by the window looking out at the deep blue sky.

"Are you really glad, Lewis?"

Then I knew. Or, at least, I hoped. "Why, Martha? Aren't you?"

For one long minute she stood beside me, looking up at the Mars we couldn't see. And then she turned to face me once again, and I could see the tears.

"Oh, Lewis, I want to go home!"

Full circle. We had both come full circle these last few hectic weeks on Earth.

"So do I, Martha."

"Do you, Lewis?" And then the

tiredness came back to her eyes and she looked away again. "But of course we can't."

Slowly I crossed over to the desk and opened the top drawer and took out the folder that Duane had given me, that last day at the spaceport, just before our ship to Earth had blasted off. Slowly I unfolded the paper that Duane had told me to keep in case we ever wanted it.

"Yes, we can, Martha. We can go back."

"What's that, Lewis?" And then she saw what it was. Her face came alive again, and her eyes were shining. "We're going home?" she whispered. "We're really going home?"

I looked down at the Earth-Mars half of the round trip ticket that Duane had given me, and I knew that this time she was right.

This time we'd really be going home.

THE END

SUCCESS STORY

(Continued from page 69)

But in the middle of his talk he broke off suddenly. A flash of blinding brilliance slashed through the windows. Horror painted his face. In a whisper, he cried: "No! No! It would make it all so senseless!" His eyes looked like the eyes of a man with flaming splinters jammed under his fingernails. His face seemed to pucker, and grow infantile. Then he screamed: "No! Leave me alone! I *told* you I didn't want to come *out here,* to be one of *you!* Damn you, why did you bring me *out here?* For—for *this? . . .*"

There were the shards of glass from the great auditorium windows, floating inward, turning lazily. There were the brick walls crumbling, tumbling inward, scattering through the air in the same seeming slow motion. The dust cloud and the sound, the flat blast-sound, came after that, as the entire building—perhaps the world—disintegrated in the eye-searing light . . .

December 8th, 1952, Two-Thirty A. M.

The flat of a rubber-gloved hand striking flesh made a splatting noise. A thin, breathless but concentrated crying followed. The doctor looked down at his charity clinic patient, the woman under the bright delivery room lights.

"Look at him—fighting like a little demon!" the doctor said. "Seemed almost as though he didn't want to come out and join us . . . What's the matter, son? This is a bright, new, wonderful world to be born into . . . What are you going to call the boy, Mrs. McKinney?"

The woman under the lights forced a tired smile. "Jeff. Jefferson McKinney. That's going to be his name," she whispered proudly.

The baby's terrified squalling subsided into fretful, whimpering resignation.

THE END

The atomic bomb meant, to most people, the end. To Henry Bemis it meant something far different —a thing to appreciate and enjoy.

Time Enough At Last

By Lynn Venable

FOR A LONG time, Henry Bemis had had an ambition. To read a book. Not just the title or the preface, or a page somewhere in the middle. He wanted to read the whole thing, all the way through from beginning to end. A simple ambition perhaps, but in the cluttered life of Henry Bemis, an impossibility.

Henry had no time of his own. There was his wife, Agnes who owned that part of it that his employer, Mr. Carsville, did not buy. Henry was allowed enough to get to and from work—that in itself being quite a concession on Agnes' part.

Also, nature had conspired against Henry by handing him with a pair of hopelessly myopic eyes. Poor Henry literally couldn't see his hand in front of his face. For a while, when he was very young, his parents had thought him an idiot. When they realized it was his eyes, they got glasses for him. He was never quite able to catch up. There was never enough time. It looked as though Henry's ambition would never be realized. Then something happened which changed all that.

Henry was down in the vault of the Eastside Bank & Trust when it happened. He had stolen a few moments from the duties of his teller's cage to try to read a few pages of the magazine he had bought that morning. He'd made an excuse to Mr. Carsville about needing bills in large denominations for a certain customer, and then, safe inside the dim recesses of the vault he had pulled from inside his coat the pocket size magazine.

He had just started a picture article cheerfully entitled "The New Weapons and What They'll Do To YOU", when all the noise in the world crashed in upon his eardrums. It seemed to be inside of him and outside of him all at once. Then the concrete floor was rising up at him and the ceiling came slanting down toward him, and for

a fleeting second Henry thought of a story he had started to read once called "The Pit and The Pendulum". He regretted in that insane moment that he had never had time to finish that story to see how it came out. Then all was darkness and quiet and unconsciousness.

WHEN HENRY came to, he knew that something was desperately wrong with the East-side Bank & Trust. The heavy steel door of the vault was buckled and twisted and the floor tilted up at a dizzy angle, while the ceiling dipped crazily toward it. Henry gingerly got to his feet, moving arms and legs experimentally. Assured that nothing was broken, he tenderly raised a hand to his eyes. His precious glasses were intact, thank God! He would never have been able to find his way out of the shattered vault without them.

He made a mental note to write Dr. Torrance to have a spare pair made and mailed to him. Blasted nuisance not having his prescription on file locally, but Henry trusted no-one but Dr. Torrance to grind those thick lenses into his own complicated prescription. Henry removed the heavy glasses from his face. Instantly the room dissolved into a neutral blur. Henry saw a pink splash that he knew was his hand, and a white blob come up to meet the pink as he withdrew his pocket handkerchief and carefully dusted the lenses. As he replaced the glasses, they slipped down on the bridge of his nose a little. He had been meaning to have them tightened for some time.

He suddenly realized, without the realization actually entering his conscious thoughts, that something momentous had happened, something worse than the boiler blowing up, something worse than a gas main exploding, something worse than anything that had ever happened before. He felt that way because it was so quiet. There was no whine of sirens, no shouting, no running, just an ominous and all pervading silence.

HENRY walked across the slanting floor. Slipping and stumbling on the uneven surface, he made his way to the elevator. The car lay crumpled at the foot of the shaft like a discarded accordian. There was something inside of it that Henry could not look at, something that had once been a person, or perhaps several people, it was impossible to tell now.

Feeling sick, Henry staggered toward the stairway. The steps were still there, but so jumbled and piled back upon one another that it was more like climbing the side of a mountain than mounting a stairway. It was quiet in the huge chamber that had been the lobby of the bank. It looked strangely cheerful with the sunlight shining through the girders where the ceiling had fallen. The dappled sunlight glinted across the silent lobby, and everywhere there were huddled lumps of unpleasantness that made Henry sick as he tried not to look at them.

"Mr. Carsville," he called. It was very quiet. Something had to be done, of course. This was terrible, right in the middle of a Monday,

too. Mr. Carsville would know what to do. He called again, more loudly, and his voice cracked hoarsely, "Mr. Carrrrsville!" And then he saw an arm and shoulder extending out from under a huge fallen block of marble ceiling. In the buttonhole was the white carnation Mr. Carsville had worn to work that morning, and on the third finger of that hand was a massive signet ring, also belonging to Mr. Carsville. Numbly, Henry realized that the rest of Mr. Carsville was under that block of marble.

Henry felt a pang of real sorrow. Mr. Carsville was gone, and so was the rest of the staff—Mr. Wilkinson and Mr. Emory and Mr. Prithard, and the same with Pete and Ralph and Jenkins and Hunter and Pat the guard and Willie the doorman. There was no one to say what was to be done about the Eastside Bank & Trust except Henry Bemis, and Henry wasn't worried about the bank, there was something he wanted to do.

He climbed carefully over piles of fallen masonry. Once he stepped down into something that crunched and squashed beneath his feet and he set his teeth on edge to keep from retching. The street was not much different from the inside, bright sunlight and so much concrete to crawl over, but the unpleasantness was much, much worse. Everywhere there were strange, motionless lumps that Henry could not look at.

Suddenly, he remembered Agnes. He should be trying to get to Agnes, shouldn't he? He remembered a poster he had seen that said, "In event of emergency do not use the telephone, your loved ones are as safe as you." He wondered about Agnes. He looked at the smashed automobiles, some with their four wheels pointing skyward like the stiffened legs of dead animals. He couldn't get to Agnes now anyway, if she was safe, then, she was safe, otherwise . . . of course, Henry knew Agnes wasn't safe. He had a feeling that there wasn't anyone safe for a long, long way, maybe not in the whole state or the whole country, or the whole world. No, that was a thought Henry didn't want to think, he forced it from his mind and turned his thoughts back to Agnes.

SHE HAD been a pretty good wife, now that it was all said and done. It wasn't exactly her fault if people didn't have time to read nowadays. It was just that there was the house, and the bank, and the yard. There were the Jones' for bridge and the Graysons' for canasta and charades with the Bryants. And the television, the television Agnes loved to watch, but would never watch alone. He never had time to read even a newspaper. He started thinking about last night, that business about the newspaper.

Henry had settled into his chair, quietly, afraid that a creaking spring might call to Agnes' attention the fact that he was momentarily unoccupied. He had unfolded the newspaper slowly and carefully, the sharp crackle of the paper would have been a clarion call to Agnes. He had glanced at the headlines of the first page. "Collapse Of

Conference Imminent." He didn't have time to read the article. He turned to the second page. "Solon Predicts War Only Days Away." He flipped through the pages faster, reading brief snatches here and there, afraid to spend too much time on any one item. On a back page was a brief article entitled, "Prehistoric Artifacts Unearthed In Yucatan". Henry smiled to himself and carefully folded the sheet of paper into fourths. That would be interesting, he would read all of it. Then it came, Agnes' voice. "Henrrreee!" And then she was upon him. She lightly flicked the paper out of his hands and into the fireplace. He saw the flames lick up and curl possessively around the unread article. Agnes continued, "Henry, tonight is the Jones' bridge night. They'll be here in thirty minutes and I'm not dressed yet, and here you are . . . *reading*." She had emphasized the last word as though it were an unclean act. "Hurry and shave, you know how smooth Jasper Jones' chin always looks, and then straighten up this room." She glanced regretfully toward the fireplace. "Oh dear, that paper, the television schedule . . . oh well, after the Jones leave there won't be time for anything but the late-late movie and . . . Don't just sit there, Henry, hurrreeee!"

Henry was hurrying now, but hurrying too much. He cut his leg on a twisted piece of metal that had once been an automobile fender. He thought about things like lockjaw and gangrene and his hand trembled as he tied his pocket-handkerchief around the wound. In his mind, he saw the fire again, licking across the face of last night's newspaper. He thought that now he would have time to read all the newspapers he wanted to, only now there wouldn't be any more. That heap of rubble across the street had been the Gazette Building. It was terrible to think there would never be another up to date newspaper. Agnes would have been very upset, no television schedule. But then, of course, no television. He wanted to laugh but he didn't. That wouldn't have been fitting, not at all.

He could see the building he was looking for now, but the silhouette was strangely changed. The great circular dome was now a ragged semi-circle, half of it gone, and one of the great wings of the building had fallen in upon itself. A sudden panic gripped Henry Bemis. What if they were all ruined, destroyed, every one of them? What if there wasn't a single one left? Tears of helplessness welled in his eyes as he painfully fought his way over and through the twisted fragments of the city.

HE THOUGHT of the building when it had been whole. He remembered the many nights he had paused outside its wide and welcoming doors. He thought of the warm nights when the doors had been thrown open and he could see the people inside, see them sitting at the plain wooden tables with the stacks of books beside them. He used to think then, what a wonderful thing a public library was, a place where anybody, anybody at all could go in and read.

He had been tempted to enter

many times. He had watched the people through the open doors, the man in greasy work clothes who sat near the door, night after night, laboriously studying, a technical journal perhaps, difficult for him, but promising a brighter future. There had been an aged, scholarly gentleman who sat on the other side of the door, leisurely paging, moving his lips a little as he did so, a man having little time left, but rich in time because he could do with it as he chose.

Henry had never gone in. He had started up the steps once, got almost to the door, but then he remembered Agnes, her questions and shouting, and he had turned away.

He was going in now though, almost crawling, his breath coming in stabbing gasps, his hands torn and bleeding. His trouser leg was sticky red where the wound in his leg had soaked through the handkerchief. It was throbbing badly but Henry didn't care. He had reached his destination.

Part of the inscription was still there, over the now doorless entrance. P-U-B--C L-I-B-R---. The rest had been torn away. The place was in shambles. The shelves were overturned, broken, smashed, tilted, their precious contents spilled in disorder upon the floor. A lot of the books, Henry noted gleefully, were still intact, still whole, still readable. He was literally knee deep in them, he wallowed in books. He picked one up. The title was "Collected Works of William Shakespeare." Yes, he must read that, sometime. He laid it aside carefully. He picked up another. Spinoza. He tossed it away, seized another, and another, and still another. Which to read first . . . there were so many.

He had been conducting himself a little like a starving man in a delicatessen—grabbing a little of this and a little of that in a frenzy of enjoyment.

But now he steadied away. From the pile about him, he selected one volume, sat comfortably down on an overturned shelf, and opened the book.

Henry Bemis smiled.

There was the rumble of complaining stone. Minute in comparison which the epic complaints following the fall of the bomb. This one occurred under one corner of the shelf upon which Henry sat. The shelf moved; threw him off balance. The glasses slipped from his nose and fell with a tinkle.

He bent down, clawing blindly and found, finally, their smashed remains. A minor, indirect destruction stemming from the sudden, wholesale smashing of a city. But the only one that greatly interested Henry Bemis.

He stared down at the blurred page before him.

He began to cry.

THE END

Personalities in Science

MICHAEL FARADAY

ACCORDING to Einstein, the history of physical science, has brought forth four *great* scientists —Galileo, Newton, Maxwell and Faraday—and Einstein is a man who should know.

Of these, Galileo and Newton are probably the most famous. Perhaps Maxwell wielded the most influence in his own time. But in the realm of things physical for the benefit of posterity, Faraday was by far the greatest.

Faraday was born in London in the year 1791—long before General Electric and Westinghouse began gleaning likely young men from colleges and placing them in shiny laboratories. His father was a blacksmith, who became an invalid and died in Michael's youth leaving the boy's mother with no alternative but to take in boarders for the support of her family.

They were deeply religious people, sober-minded and hardworking —traits which remained ingrained in Faraday until his death. He began showing his talents quite early when, by chance, he was thrown into contact with books. This came about in his thirteenth year when he got work in the rooms of one Masquerier, a French refugee fleeing the wrath of Napoleon. Faraday's jobs were to keep Masquerier's shoes shined and his rooms orderly. This gave the youth an opportunity to browse through the Frenchman's library. He practically memorized two encyclopedias on *electricity* and digested Marcet's *Conversations on Chemistry* in great gobs.

Now, young Faraday begged and borrowed, from his elder brother, the necessary admission fees to attend scientific lectures where ever and whenever he could find them. His activities are remindful of the present day teen-age fan who idolizes a current glamour personality, forms fan clubs and whatnot.

Faraday formed no clubs, but he was not backward in contacting his idols. He wrote a letter to no less an august personage than Sir Joseph Banks, the President of the Royal Society. Sir Joseph neglected to answer, but that is of no great importance. Later, he would have been glad to visit Faraday in person.

Young Faraday's persistence payed off, however, when he attended a lecture by the great Sir

Humphry Davy—with a pencil and a ream or two of notepaper under his arm. He took notes on Davy's lecture—386 pages of them. These, he had delivered to Davy along with a note stating that he, Faraday, wished to devote his life to science, and could Davy be of any assistance in the project.

Davy, one of the most eccentric geniuses who ever lived, was also a warm human being. Davy replied to Faraday in the formal, stilted manner of the day:

Sir:

I am far from displeased with the proof you have given me of your confidence, and which displays great zeal, power of memory, and attention. I am obliged to go out of town, and will not be settled in town until the end of January. I will then see you at any time you wish.

It would gratify me to be of any service to you. I wish it may be in my power.

I am, sir, your obedient, humble servant,

H. Davy

This was not at all unlike a science fiction fan getting an invitation to drop around from Ray Bradbury or Robert Heinlein. You may rest assured that Faraday took full advantage of it.

Davy *could* be of assistance, to the extent of getting Faraday a job as assistant in the laboratory of the Royal Institution. Thus did Davy, unknowingly, render his greatest service to humanity .

So, at the age of twenty-one, Faraday became established at the Institution and Davy, no doubt delighted that his casual favor to a letter-writing youth had paid off in such rich material, took Faraday on a tour of Europe—a grand tour, as Davy, the big name in the scientific fields of his time, did not travel without notice. Upon returning to England, Faraday became a lecturer in the Royal Institution, and was launched upon his life work.

THE SCIENTISTS of the time were engrossed in the mysteries of electricity. Faraday's keen mind cut like a knife into these mysteries. He suspected the close relationship between electricity and magnetism. None of the active scientists of the time had paid much attention to this avenue of research, although Orsted, the brilliant Swede, had experimented in that direction.

Orsted was the first to suggest that motion should be obtainable from the interaction of magnetism and electricity. Faraday drove relentlessly along these avenues, experimenting exhaustively, building upon the work of both Orsted and Ampère. Writing of his own work, Faraday said:

". . . so all the usual attractions and repulsions of the magnetic needle by the conjunctive wire are deceptions, the motions being not attractions nor repulsions . . . but the result of a force in the wire which, instead of bringing the pole of the needle nearer to, or further from the wire, endeavors to make it move around it in a never ending circle and motion while the battery remains in action."

From this statement of his observational results, Faraday invented the electric motor and established his immortality.

But all was not sweetness and light. Faraday's sense of personal triumph was dulled by a reversal upon the part of Humphry Davy. The trouble sprang from Faraday's inadvertent conflict with the work of Davy and Wollaston. Both these scientists were plodding along over the route Faraday covered with a speed which bespoke his genius.

When Faraday's name was proposed for membership in the Royal Society it was—ironically enough—Sir Humphry Davy who asked Faraday to withdraw. Faraday replied that it was beyond his power to withdraw, which was true, but Davy, as President of the august organization, had all the power he needed to block Faraday.

However, in the year 1824, Faraday was elected to the Society and stood at last, on par in all respects, with all the greats of his time.

He was fated to clash again with Davy, over the liquefaction of chlorine. Davy had discovered, beyond doubt, the knowledge that the solid substance obtained by exposing chlorine to low temperatures was *not* chlorine, but a combination of elements in which chlorine was no longer alone. Davy had not analyzed this combination however, and Faraday did. Also, he followed Davy's suggestion that heat, applied to the specimens, might bring interesting results.

Faraday applied the heat and came up with liquid chlorine. He then wrote a paper upon the experiment and the discovery—a paper which passed through Davy's hands as President of the Society. Davy blandly appended a few paragraphs, taking full credit for the results.

Faraday said nothing, biding his time. Later he wrote an account of all the investigators who had liquefied chlorine before either himself *or* Davy.

All semblance of cordiality between Davy and Faraday now ruptured completely. Hard times fell upon the Society, and Faraday became occupied with the necessity of struggling along upon less money than previously. But this did not slow down his productivity.

His papers on chemical investigations poured out in a broad stream. During the decade following 1820, when he made his great discovery relative to electro-magnetism, Faraday published little upon electricity, but his experiments went on. He made copious notes for current and future experience, indicating that while he concentrated upon chemical research, his heart had been given to the elusive witch of invisible power who mocked scientific brains with her vagaries.

He began exhaustive investigations into the possibility of converting magnetism into electricity. The epochal discovery of electro-magnetic induction was the result. This discovery served as a pivotal point in scientific progress.

This could have been enough for any man, but like a great scientist who came later, Thomas Alva Edison, Faraday felt a man's productivity should be terminated only by

(Continued on page 110)

In order to make Izaak Walton's sport complete, there must be an angler, a fish, and some bait. All three existed on Arz but there was a question as to which was which.

The Anglers of Arz

By Roger Dee

Illustrated by BOB MARTIN

THE THIRD night of the *Marco Four's* landfall on the moonless Altarian planet was a repetition of the two before it, a nine-hour intermission of drowsy, pastoral peace. Navigator Arthur Farrell—it was his turn to stand watch—was sitting at an open-side port with a magnoscanner ready; but in spite of his vigilance he had not exposed a film when the inevitable pre-dawn rainbow began to shimmer over the eastern ocean.

Sunrise brought him alert with a jerk, frowning at sight of two pinkish, bipedal Arzian fishermen posted on the tiny coral islet a quarter-mile offshore, their blank triangular faces turned stolidly toward the beach.

"They're at it again," Farrell called, and dropped to the mossy turf outside. "Roll out on the double! I'm going to magnofilm this!"

Stryker and Gibson came out of their sleeping cubicles reluctantly, belting on the loose shorts which all three wore in the balmy Arzian climate. Stryker blinked and yawned as he let himself through the port, his fringe of white hair tousled and his naked paunch sweating. He looked, Farrell thought for the thousandth time, more like a retired cook than like the veteran commander of a Terran Colonies expedition.

Gibson followed, stretching his powerfully-muscled body like a wrestler to throw off the effects of sleep. Gibson was linguist-ethnologist of the crew, a blocky man in his early thirties with thick black hair and heavy brows that shaded a square, humorless face.

"Any sign of the squids yet?" he asked.

"They won't show up until the dragons come," Farrell said. He adjusted the light filter of the mag-

noscanner and scowled at Stryker. "Lee, I wish you'd let me break up the show this time with a dis-beam. This butchery gets on my nerves."

Stryker shielded his eyes with his hands against the glare of sun on water. "You know I can't do that, Arthur. These Arzians may turn out to be Fifth Order beings or higher, and under Terran Regulations our tampering with what may be a basic culture-pattern would amount to armed invasion. We'll have to crack that cackle-and-grunt language of theirs and learn something of their mores before we can interfere."

Farrell turned an irritable stare on the incurious group of Arzians gathering, nets and fishing spears in hand, at the edge of the sheltering bramble forest.

"What stumps me is their motivation," he said. "Why do the fools go out to that islet every night, when they must know damned well what will happen next morning?"

Gibson answered him with an older problem, his square face puzzled. "For that matter, what became of the city I saw when we came in through the stratosphere? It must be a tremendous thing, yet we've searched the entire globe in the scouter and found nothing but water and a scattering of little islands like this one, all covered with bramble. It wasn't a city these pink fishers could have built, either. The architecture was beyond them by a million years."

STRYKER and Farrell traded baffled looks. The city had become something of a fixation with Gibson, and his dogged insistence—coupled with an irritating habit of being right—had worn their patience thin.

"There never was a city here, Gib," Stryker said. "You dozed off while we were making planetfall, that's all."

Gibson stiffened resentfully, but Farrell's voice cut his protest short. "Get set! Here they come!"

Out of the morning rainbow dropped a swarm of winged lizards, twenty feet in length and a glistening chlorophyll green in the early light. They stooped like hawks upon the islet offshore, burying the two Arzian fishers instantly under their snapping, threshing bodies. Then around the outcrop the sea boiled whitely, churned to foam by a sudden uprushing of black, octopoid shapes.

"The squids," Stryker grunted. "Right on schedule. Two seconds too late, as usual, to stop the slaughter."

A barrage of barbed tentacles lashed out of the foam and drove into the melee of winged lizards. The lizards took the air at once, leaving behind three of their number who disappeared under the surface like harpooned seals. No trace remained of the two Arzian natives.

"A neat example of dog eat dog," Farrell said, snapping off the magnoscanner. "Do any of those beauties look like city-builders, Gib?"

Chattering pink natives straggled past from the shelter of the thorn forest, ignoring the Earthmen, and lined the casting ledges along the beach to begin their day's fishing.

"Nothing we've seen yet could

There were two pinkish, bipedal fishermen on the tiny islet.

have built that city," Gibson said stubbornly. "But it's here somewhere, and I'm going to find it. Will either of you be using the scouter today?"

Stryker threw up his hands. "I've a mountain of data to collate, and Arthur is off duty after standing watch last night. Help yourself, but you won't find anything."

The scouter was a speeding dot on the horizon when Farrell crawled into his sleeping cubicle a short time later, leaving Stryker to mutter over his litter of notes. Sleep did not come to him at once; a vague sense of something overlooked prodded irritatingly at the back of his consciousness, but it was not until drowsiness had finally overtaken him that the discrepancy assumed definite form.

He recalled then that on the first day of the *Marco's* planetfall one of the pink fishers had fallen from a casting ledge into the water, and had all but drowned before his fellows pulled him out with extended spear-shafts. Which meant that the fishers could not swim, else some would surely have gone in after him.

And the Marco's crew had explored Arz exhaustively without finding any slightest trace of boats or of boat landings. The train of association completed itself with automatic logic, almost rousing Farrell out of his doze.

"I'll be damned," he muttered. "No boats, and they don't swim. *Then how the devil do they get out to that islet?*"

He fell asleep with the paradox unresolved.

STRYKER was still humped over his records when Farrell came out of his cubicle and broke a packaged meal from the food locker. The visicom over the control board hummed softly, its screen blank on open channel.

"Gibson found his lost city yet?" Farrell asked, and grinned when Stryker snorted.

"He's scouring the daylight side now," Stryker said. "Arthur, I'm going to ground Gib tomorrow, much as I dislike giving him a direct order. He's got that phantom city on the brain, and he lacks the imagination to understand how dangerous to our assignment an obsession of that sort can be."

Farrell shrugged. "I'd agree with you offhand if it weren't for Gib's bullheaded habit of being right. I hope he finds it soon, if it's here. I'll probably be standing his watch until he's satisfied."

Stryker looked relieved. "Would you mind taking it tonight? I'm completely bushed after today's logging."

Farrell waved a hand and took up his magnoscanner. It was dark outside already, the close, soft night of a moonless tropical world whose moist atmosphere absorbed even starlight. He dragged a chair to the open port and packed his pipe, settling himself comfortably while Stryker mixed a nightcap before turning in.

Later he remembered that Stryker dissolved a tablet in his glass, but at the moment it meant nothing. In a matter of minutes the older man's snoring drifted to him, a sound faintly irritating against the velvety hush outside.

Farrell lit his pipe and turned to the inconsistencies he had uncovered. The Arzians did not swim, and without boats . . .

It occurred to him then that there had been two of the pink fishers on the islet each morning, and the coincidence made him sit up suddenly, startled. Why two? Why not three or four, or only one?

He stepped out through the open lock and paced restlessly up and down on the springy turf, feeling the ocean breeze soft on his face. Three days of dull routine logwork had built up a need for physical action that chafed his temper; he was intrigued and at the same time annoyed by the enigmatic relation that linked the Arzian fishers to the dragons and squids, and his desire to understand that relation was aggravated by the knowledge that Arz could be a perfect world for Terran colonization. That is, he thought wryly, if Terran colonists could stomach the weird custom pursued by its natives of committing suicide in pairs.

He went over again the improbable drama of the past three mornings, and found it not too unnatural until he came to the motivation and the means of transportation that placed the Arzians in pairs on the islet, when his whole fabric of speculation fell into a tangled snarl of inconsistencies. He gave it up finally; how could any Earthman rationalize the outlandish compulsions that actuated so alien a race?

He went inside again, and the sound of Stryker's muffled snoring fanned his restlessness. He made his decision abruptly, laying aside the magnoscanner for a hand-flash and a pocket-sized audicom unit which he clipped to the belt of his shorts.

He did not choose a weapon because he saw no need for one. The torch would show him how the natives reached the outcrop, and if he should need help the audicom would summon Stryker. Investigating without Stryker's sanction was, strictly speaking, a breach of Terran Regulations, but—

"Damn Terran Regulations," he muttered. "I've got to *know.*"

Farrell snapped on the torch at the edge of the thorn forest and entered briskly, eager for action now that he had begun. Just inside the edge of the bramble he came upon a pair of Arzians curled up together on the mossy ground, sleeping soundly, their triangular faces wholly blank and unrevealing.

He worked deeper into the underbrush and found other sleeping couples, but nothing else. There were no humming insects, no twittering night-birds or scurrying rodents. He had worked his way close to the center of the island without further discovery and was on the point of turning back, disgusted, when something bulky and powerful seized him from behind.

A sharp sting burned his shoulder, wasp-like, and a sudden overwhelming lassitude swept him into a darkness deeper than the Arzian night. His last conscious thought was not of his own danger, but of Stryker—asleep and unprotected behind the *Marco's* open port. . . .

HE WAS standing erect when he woke, his back to the open sea and a prismatic glimmer of

early dawn rainbow shining on the water before him. For a moment he was totally disoriented; then from the corner of an eye he caught the pinkish blur of an Arzian fisher standing beside him, and cried out hoarsely in sudden panic when he tried to turn his head and could not.

He was on the coral outcropping offshore, and except for the involuntary muscles of balance and respiration his body was paralyzed.

The first red glow of sunrise blurred the reflected rainbow at his feet, but for some seconds his shuttling mind was too busy to consider the danger of predicament. *Whatever brought me here anesthetized me first,* he thought. *That sting in my shoulder was like a hypo needle.*

Panic seized him again when he remembered the green flying-lizards; more seconds passed before he gained control of himself, sweating with the effort. He had to get help. If he could switch on the audicom at his belt and call Stryker . . .

He bent every ounce of his will toward raising his right hand, and failed.

His arm was like a limb of lead, its inertia too great to budge. He relaxed the effort with a groan, sweating again when he saw a fiery half-disk of sun on the water, edges blurred and distorted by tiny surface ripples.

On shore he could see the *Marco Four* resting between thorn forest and beach, its silvered sides glistening with dew. The port was still open, and the empty carrier rack in the bow told him that Gibson had not yet returned with the scouter.

He grew aware then that sensation was returning to him slowly, that the cold surface of the audicom unit at his hip—unfelt before—was pressing against the inner curve of his elbow. He bent his will again toward motion; this time the arm tensed a little, enough to send hope flaring through him. If he could put pressure enough against the stud . . .

The tiny click of its engaging sent him faint with relief.

"Stryker!" he yelled. "Lee, roll out—*Stryker!*"

The audicom hummed gently, without answer.

He gathered himself for another shout, and recalled with a chill of horror the tablet Stryker had mixed into his nightcap the night before. Worn out by his work, Stryker had made certain that he would not be easily disturbed.

The flattened sun-disk on the water brightened and grew rounder. Above its reflected glare he caught a flicker of movement, a restless suggestion of flapping wings.

HE TRIED again. "Stryker, help me! I'm on the islet!"

The audicom crackled. The voice that answered was not Stryker's, but Gibson's.

"Farrell! What the devil are you doing on that butcher's block?"

Farrell fought down an insane desire to laugh. "Never mind that—get here fast, Gib! The flying-lizards—"

He broke off, seeing for the first time the octopods that ringed the outcrop just under the surface of the water, waiting with barbed ten-

tacles spread and yellow eyes studying him glassily. He heard the unmistakable flapping of wings behind and above him then, and thought with shock-born lucidity: *I wanted a backstage look at this show, and now I'm one of the cast.*

The scouter roared in from the west across the thorn forest, flashing so close above his head that he felt the wind of its passage. Almost instantly he heard the shrilling blast of its emergency bow jets as Gibson met the lizard swarm head on.

Gibson's voice came tinnily from the audicom. "Scattered them for the moment, Arthur—blinded the whole crew with the exhaust, I think. Stand fast, now. I'm going to pick you up."

The scouter settled on the outcrop beside Farrell, so close that the hot wash of its exhaust gases scorched his bare legs. Gibson put out thick brown arms and hauled him inside like a straw man, ignoring the native. The scouter darted for shore with Farrell lying across Gibson's knees in the cockpit, his head hanging half overside.

Farrell had a last dizzy glimpse of the islet against the rush of green water below, and felt his shaky laugh of relief stick in his throat. Two of the octopods were swimming strongly for shore, holding the rigid Arzian native carefully above water between them.

"Gib," Farrell croaked. "Gib, can you risk a look back? I think I've gone mad."

The scouter swerved briefly as Gibson looked back. "You're all right, Arthur. Just hang on tight. I'll explain everything when we get you safe in the *Marco.*"

Farrell forced himself to relax, more relieved than alarmed by the painful pricking of returning sensation. "I might have known it, damn you," he said. "You found your lost city, didn't you?"

Gibson sounded a little disgusted, as if he were still angry with himself over some private stupidity. "I'd have found it sooner if I'd had any brains. It was under water, of course."

IN THE *Marco Four,* Gibson routed Stryker out of his cubicle and mixed drinks around, leaving Farrell comfortably relaxed in the padded control chair. The paralysis was still wearing off slowly, easing Farrell's fear of being permanently disabled.

"We never saw the city from the scouter because we didn't go high enough," Gibson said. "I realized that finally, remembering how they used high-altitude blimps during the First Wars to spot submarines, and when I took the scouter up far enough there it was, at the ocean bottom—a city to compare with anything men ever built."

Stryker stared. "A marine city? What use would sea-creatures have for buildings?"

"None," Gibson said. "I think the city must have been built ages ago—by men or by a manlike race, judging from the architecture—and was submerged later by a sinking of land masses that killed off the original builders and left Arz nothing but an oversized archipelago. The squids took over then, and from all appearances they've developed a culture of their own."

"I don't see it," Stryker complained, shaking his head. "The pink fishers—"

"Are cattle, or less," Gibson finished. "The octopods are the dominant race, and they're so far above Fifth Order that we're completely out of bounds here. Under Terran Regulations we can't colonize Arz. It would be armed invasion."

"Invasion of a squid world?" Farrell protested, baffled. "Why should surface colonization conflict with an undersea culture, Gib? Why couldn't we share the planet?"

"Because the octopods own the islands too, and keep them policed," Gibson said patiently. "They even own the pink fishers. It was one of the squid-people, making a dry-land canvass of his preserve here to pick a couple of victims for this morning's show, that carried you off last night."

"Behold a familiar pattern shaping up," Stryker said. He laughed suddenly, a great irrepressible bellow of sound. "Arz is a squid's world, Arthur, don't you see? And like most civilized peoples, they're sportsmen. The flying-lizards are the game they hunt, and they raise the pink fishers for—"

Farrell swore in astonishment. "Then those poor devils are put out there deliberately, like worms on a hook—angling in reverse! No wonder I couldn't spot their motivation!"

Gibson got up and sealed the port, shutting out the soft morning breeze. "Colonization being out of the question, we may as well move on before the octopods get curious enough about us to make trouble. Do you feel up to the acceleration, Arthur?"

Farrell and Stryker looked at each other, grinning. Farrell said: "You don't think I want to stick here and be used for bait again, do you?"

He and Stryker were still grinning over it when Gibson, unamused, blasted the *Marco Four* free of Arz.

THE END

PERSONALITIES IN SCIENCE

(Continued from page 102)

death. He drove on and on with the heroic patience, triumphs, and disappointments which are the everyday lot of the inquiring mind.

Nor was he cut off early, as were so many of his brilliant contemporaries. He died quietly, at the age of seventy-five years, leaving behind a heritage for which the world will be forever grateful.

No conceivable force could penetrate Terri's shield. Yet he was defenseless.

NO SHIELD FROM THE DEAD

By Gordon R. Dickson

IT WAS A nice little party, but a bit obvious. Terri Mac saw through it before he had taken half a dozen steps into the apartment. A light flush staining his high cheekbones. "This is ridiculous," he said.

The light chatter ceased. Cocktail glasses were set down on various handy tables and ledges; and all faces in the room turned toward a man in his late fifties who sat propped up invalid-wise on pillows in a chair in a corner of the room.

"The Comptroller is perspicacious," said the old man, agreeably, waving one hand in a casual manner. "On your way, children."

And the people present smiled and nodded. Quite as if it were an ordinary leave-taking, they pushed past Terri Mac and filed out the door. Even the blonde, Terri had picked up at the embassy ball and who had brought him here, strolled off casually, but in a decidedly less drunken fashion than she had exhibited earlier in the evening.

"Sit down," said the old man. Terri Mac did so, gazing searchingly at the skinny frame and white eyebrows in an unsuccessful effort to connect him with something in memory. "This is ridiculous," he repeated.

"Really?" The old man smiled benignly. "And why so?"

"Why—" the situation was so obvious that Terri fumbled—a little at a loss for words. "Obviously you intend some form of coercion, or else you would have come to me along recognized channels. And any thought of coercion is obviously—well, ridiculous."

"Why?"

"Why? You senile old fool, don't you know that I'm shielded? Don't you know all government officials from the fifth class up wear complete personal shields that are not only crack-proof but contain all the necessary elements to support

life independently within the shield for more than twenty hours? Don't you know that I'll be missed in two hours at the most and tracked down in less than sixty minutes more? Are you crazy?"

The old man chuckled, rubbing dry hands together. He said. "I'm shielded too. You can't get at me. And now the room's shielded. You can't get out of it."

Terri stared at him. The initial shock was passing. His own statements anent the completeness of his protection had brought back confidence, and his natural coolness was returning. "What do you want?" he asked, eyeing the other narrowly.

"Pleasure of your company," said the old man. "There are some very strong connections between us. Yes, very strong. We must get to know each other personally."

IT OCCURRED to Terri that he had misinterpreted the situation. Relief came, mixed with a certain amount of chagrin at the way in which he allowed himself to show alarm. He had looked ridiculous. He leaned back in the chair and allowed a note of official hauteur and annoyance to creep into his voice. "I see," he said. "You want something?"

The old man nodded energetically.

"I do. Indeed I do."

"And you think you have some kind of a bargaining tool that is useful but might not be so if it became known to official channels."

"Well—" said the old man cautiously.

"Don't waste my time," interrupted Terri, harshly. "I'm not an ordinary politician. No man who works his way up to the fifth level of the government is. I didn't get to where I am today by pussy-footing around and I haven't the leisure to spend on people who do. Now *what* do you want?"

The other cackled. "Now, what do you think?" he said, putting one finger to his nose cunningly.

"You are old," Terri said. "And therefore cautious. Consequently you would not risk trying to force something from me, but are almost certainly trying to sell me something. Now what do I want? Not the usual things, certainly. Within my position I have all the material things a man could want; and within my shield I enjoy complete immunity. No one but the Central Bureau, itself, can crack this shield. And no one but they can prevent the conditioned reflex that stops my heart if for some reason the shield should be broached. I have a hold on every man beneath me that prevents him from knifing me in the back. There could be only one thing that I want that you could give me —" he leaned forward, staring into the deep-pouched eyes—"and that is a means of getting at the man above me. Am I right?"

"No," said the old man.

Terri stiffened.

"No?" he echoed in angry incredulity.

Their eyes locked. For a long time they held, and at last Terri looked away.

The old man sighed—sipped noisily from a drink on the table beside his chair.

"Wait!" said Terri. To his own

surprise, his voice was eager, even a little timorous in its hopefulness. "Wait. I've got it. There will be a test. There always is a test every time a man moves up. His superiors watch him when he doesn't suspect it. It will be that way for me when I am ready for the fourth level. And you have some kind of advance information. You know what the test will be. Maybe you know the man who will administer it. You want to sell me this information."

The other said nothing.

"Well," Terri spread his hands openly. "I am interested. I'll buy. What do you want. Money? A favor? Protection?"

"No."

"No?" Terri shouted, starting up from his chair. "What do you mean by no? Can't you say anything but 'no'?" A rage possessed him. He flung himself forward two furious steps to stand threateningly over the aged figure. "You doddering idiot! Say what you want, and quickly! My two hours are nearly up. I'll be missed. They'll be here in a few minutes—the Bureau Guards. They'll crack the room shield. They'll rescue me. And they'll take you into custody. To be questioned. To be executed. At my order. Do you understand? Your life depends on me."

After a little, the old man chuckled again. "Yes," he muttered, in a high-pitched old voice. "That's the way it'll be."

Terri stared at him. "You don't seem to understand. You're going to die."

"Oh yes," said the old man, nodding his head indulgently. "I'll die. But I'm an old man. I'd die anyway in a year or so—maybe in a day or so. But for you—for a young man like you—the up and coming young governmental with everything to lose—" he leered slyly at Terri. "Your death won't be so easy for you to take."

"I die?" echoed Terri, stupefied. "But I'm not going to die. They're coming to *rescue* me."

"Oh, are they?" said the old man, ironically.

"Of course!" said Terri. "Of course, why shouldn't they?"

The old man winked one faded eye portentously.

"Fine young man," he said. "Up and coming young man. Brilliant. Never a thought for the people he trampled on the way up the ladder. Dear me, no."

"What do you mean?" said Terri.

The old eyes, looking up suddenly, pierced him.

"Do you remember Kilaren?"

"K-Kilaren?"

"Kilaren," recited the old man as if quoting from a newspaper. "The beautiful young secretary of a provincial governor whose lecherous and unnatural pursuit drove her to suicide. So that one day to escape the governor, she jumped or fell from a high window. And the people of the province, who had for a long time heard ugly stories and rumors, finally mobbed the office and lynched the governor, hanging him from the same window from which the girl had jumped. They said that even the fall had not spoiled her beauty, but that was probably false." The old man's words dwindled away into silence.

"I what of it?" said Terri. "What's that to do with me?"

"Why, you were there. You were the governor's aide, and when the mob had gone home and feeling had slackened off, you stepped into the gap and seized up the reins of government, handling matters so skillfully that you were immediately promoted to an under-post at Government City."

"What of it?"

"Why it was all your doing," replied the other, in a mildly reproving voice, "the rumors, the stories, the mob, even the suicide. Poor Kilaren—a pitiful pawn in your ruthless game to eliminate the governor in your mad dash up the ladder."

"I never touched her!" cried Terri, his voice cracking. "I swear it."

"Who said you did? The type of mind that stoops to murder would never have gotten you this far. But you were the one who hired her, knowing the governor's tendencies. You were the one that gave her work that kept her, night after night, alone with the man. You preyed upon her fear of losing her job. You threw the sin in her face after she had committed it. You told her what she might have been, and what she was, and what she would be. You broke her, day after day. In the sterile privacy of the office you reviled her, scorned her, brought her to believe that she was what she was not, a creature of filth and dishonor. You blocked off all avenues of escape but the one that led through one high window. *You killed her!*"

"No!"

"Yes!"

TERRI brought his quivering hands together and clenched them in his lap. He stared at the old man. "Who are you?"

"I was a friend of hers. We lived in the same hotel-apartment. She had no family. I believe you knew that when you hired her."

"I see," said Terri. He drew a long, deep, shuddering breath, and leaned back in the chair. "So that's the story," he said, his voice strengthening, "I might have known it. Blackmail. There are always fools that want to try blackmail."

"No," said the old man. "Not Blackmail, Comptroller. I want your life."

Terri laughed shortly, contemptuously. "No knowledge that you have can threaten my life."

"They will come," said the old man, leaning wearily back against his cushions. "As you said, the Bureau Guards will come; and I think I shall kill myself when I hear them starting to crack the shield around this room. They will come in and find you with a dead man. What will you tell them, Terri?"

"Tell them? Anything I choose. They won't question *me*."

"No. The guards won't. But the Bureau will. How can they raise a man to the fourth level when there is a two-hour mystery in his background? They will want to know what you were doing here."

"I was kidnaped," said Terri.

"By whom? Can you prove it? And why?"

"I've been held a prisoner here."

"By a dead man? No, no, Terri.

The circumstances are suspicious. You walk away from the embassy under your own power. You disappear and are found in a shielded room with a man who has committed suicide. This must be explained, and in the end you will have to tell them the truth."

"And what if I do?" said Terri, truculently.

"But the truth is so fantastic, Terri. So uncheckable. I am dead, and I am the only one who could have supported your story. These people who were here when you came in are common actors. They have no idea why I wanted you decoyed here. These are my rooms. And there is no obvious connection between me and the dead Kilaren. And perhaps I will decide to live just long enough to denounce you as a traitor when they enter."

Ashen-faced, Terri stared.

"The Bureau will have to question you. They will clamp a block on your mind so that you can't operate the reflex that stops your heart. And they will question you over and over again, because the Bureau cannot afford to take chances. You will go into a private hell of your own, Terri Mac. You will tell the story of your own evil to that girl over and over again, pleading to be believed. And they will not believe you. And in the end they will kill you, just to be on the safe side. Because, you see, you *might* have been doing something traitorous in these two shielded hours."

Terri's head bobbed limply, like a drunken man's. He made one last effort. "Why?" he said. "Why do you do this? Your life. For a girl who was no connection to you?"

The old man folded his hands.

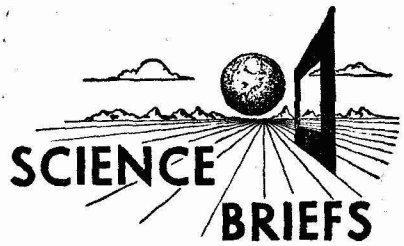
"I was a little like your governor," he said. "We all have our sins. I loved Kilaren and the shock of her death wrecked my health." He cocked his head suddenly on one side. "Listen," he said.

From beyond the closed door of the room, a high-pitched humming was barely audible. It grew in volume, going up the scale. Terri leaped to his feet; and for the space of a couple of seconds, he lunged first this way then that, like a wild animal beating against its trap. Then, as if all will had at last gone out of him, he stopped in the middle of the room and closed his eyes. For a fraction of a moment he stood there, before a faint convulsion seized him and he fell.

With a faint smile on his face, the old man reached out to a hidden switch and cut the shield about the room. Uniformed guards tumbled through the door, to pull up in dismay at the sight of the body on the floor.

"I'm sorry," said the old man, "I must have turned the shield on by mistake. I was trying to signal someone. The Comptroller seems to have had a heart attack."

THE END



Lunatic-Detector

THE ELECTROENCEPHALOGRAPH is now a familiar medical machine used widely in analyzing mental and physical illnesses. Essentially, it is nothing more than a very sensitive amplifier fitted with electrodes which, placed against the patient's skull, are capable of picking up the minute "brain-waves" to which the electrical activity of the brain constantly gives rise. These brain waves may be reproduced on an oscilloscope like that of a television tube, or they may be photographed, or they may be charted on graph paper.

Medical investigators admit the usefulness of the electroencephalograph but wonder why it can't be used as a "predictor" as well as an analyzer. Detailed study resulting from this suggestion has determined that, not only can the electroencephalograph analyze mental flaws, but it can also detect them in advance of their occurrence!

The uses of this, of course, suggest themselves automatically. How all-important it is to detect the beginnings of a mental crack-up in individuals who have great responsibility, particularly where lives of people are concerned! Think of what it would mean as a safety factor regarding bus drivers, engineers, airline pilots, executives, or any others who hold in their hands the lives and fortunes of hundreds of people at a time! Such persons should be exposed to encephalographic examination in order to sense or detect the slightest disturbance which might lead them to crack-up while on the job. It is not a matter of determining sanity or insanity; rather it is purely a matter of detecting strong emotional disturbances which, appearing clearly upon the encephalograph's screen, aid in the prediction of emotional behavior and, possibly, help avert terrible accidents or other tragedies.

Nereid, Satellite of Neptune

NEREID, THE second Moon of cold, remote Neptune, was discovered only two years ago but already astronomers have managed to plot out its not conventional orbit. The first Moon of Neptune, familiar old Triton, circles the planet at a reasonable distance of about two hundred and twenty thousand miles and in all other respects seems representative of the general system of satellites throughout the Solar System.

But Nereid is another matter. The orbit of this little moon approaches as close as a million miles to Neptune and recedes as far as six million miles! The orbit is three times as long as it is wide, giving an elliptical effect, much like that of a cometary orbit rather than a satellite's.

Triton is about the same size as our own Moon, but Nereid has to be different even here. It is only

about a fifteenth as massive as Luna. Nereid might be characterized as "a little squib rotating in a drunken orbit."

No technical reasons have yet been divined to account for this extreme eccentricity. The formation of such a perverse orbit may indicate that the satellite is a captured sub-planet or it may imply some possibility of collision. Any such theorization awaits much closer observation of the actual path, since Nereid takes not quite an Earth-year to circle its mother planet.

Chain Of Waves

CROWDED IN the back pages of newspapers all over the country, so obscure that most readers scarcely noticed it, was an important announcement, an announcement which shows just how far technology has jumped ahead. The micro-wave link between the East and West Coasts has been completed! The first means of communication to use it was the telephone, but the prime purpose of the relay link is, of course, television.

The micro-wave ultra-high-frequency radio relaying system is a miracle of applied electronics. All across the country, at intervals of about a hundred miles, are erected two-hundred-foot towers of concrete (to overcome line-of-sight problems) topped by large horn-shaped antennas. Each tower is a remotely controlled, automatically operated self-contained receiving and broadcasting station. A program originating in New York travels via these tight beams of high-frequency radio waves from tower to tower where, each time, it is picked up, amplified and rebroadcast, all in a fractional thousandth of a second!

The system is highly practical, because the high-frequency radio waves carrying the television impulses are not just broadcast in a circular pattern. Instead, the tremendously directional antennas, like gridded horns, about ten feet on a side, focus these beams into extremely narrow searchlights, sending them in a straight line to the next tower, where the process is repeated.

Some measure of the extreme directivity of the beams can be got from the fact that each tower broadcasts its beam with a power of only one-half watt!

When interplanetary travel is finally accomplished, it is a certainty that communication will take place through micro-waves. An ordinary beam traversing interplanetary space would spread out in far too random a manner, so that no transmitters conceivable could possibly supply the energy needed to travel millions of miles. But micro-waves using "micro-watts" of power *could* do this, and hence interplanetary communication over "tight-beam" systems is perfectly feasible. The step from spanning a country to spanning space is easy. The Signal Corps people who bounced radio waves off the Moon were using broad beams in comparison—which accounts for the enormous amount of power they had to use in the radar apparatus. But, given micro-waves with tight-beam antennas, they'll do the same thing on a flashlight cell's power!

—Charles Recour

THE Postman COMETH

LARGELY SUBJECTIVE

Dear Editor:

Your definition *(of science fiction)* as delivered to Marion Fried via the Chat with the Editor—I disagree with you. I think that the science fiction story IS a basic. It is distinctly different from any other type of fiction. To fit into your basic types, I would loosely put in the problem story. Real science fiction does contain a problem, a problem extrapolated from today's science. And when I say "science" I don't mean only physics or chemistry, but biology, botany, psychiatry, etc.

The story then is made up of resolving the problem, or the central character's seeing the problem and finding his place in it. It differs from the ordinary problem story *(example: detective "whodunit" story)* in that survival is a part of the story. That is, it moves from the philosophical to the actual (actual in relation to the characters) and has a life-or-death meaning.

If your definition of a science fiction story is something that is only a kind of *background* then I can expect IF to publish only those stories dealing with jungles and swords and mortgages altered semantically to "extraterrestrial fastnesses", "portable energy weapons", and "planetary rights".

I still think stf is written around a problem, an extrapolated problem. The best way to say it might be:

Science fiction is *"What would happen if—"*.

You MUST have the same beliefs in mind yourself, but got a little muddled semantically while trying to find a deft, one sentence meaning. You named the magazine IF. "If" is what makes science fiction possible. If there were no "If" there would be only ordinary things, no worlds to conquer, no atom to smash, no driving, overwhelming force that shouts down the blazing corridors of time or whispers in the deep of the night: "What would happen if—"

And never mind defining science fiction. Just keep serving it to us. It's largely subjective anyway . . .

—Dave Hammond
Runnemede, New Jersey

CAVE MAN ART

Dear sirs:

Ezra Shaw must have polished off a copy of the "Golden Bough" and decided, without further ado, to set up shop as an anthropologist. His explanation of the cave drawings is mistaken as it is common. Shaw represents the old Animal Magic theory as if it were an agreed upon fact, and actually it is nothing of the sort. At one time it was

supposed that all "uncivilized" art had to do with superstition. The western mind could not admit even the possibility of genuine art being produced outside of our own culture matrix.

Now we know enough about so-called primitive art to differentiate between types . . . Though there is "magic" art, it is almost without exception characterized by abstraction, symbolism, and other forms of distortion. Mysticism never expresses itself in realism. The realism of the cave paintings indicates an entirely different sort of mind than that which practices magic. The men who drew those pictures were realists.

It is not necessary to investigate other cultures to find the truth of the statement that religious art is always distortionistic. The history of art in our own culture bears this out fully. True, many artists who worked on religious projects were realistic in the extreme, but a study of their lives reveals that they themselves were far from "true believers". True religious art is characterized by the complex surrealism of Bosch or the elongated and warped figures of El Greco . . . or the African sculpture from which Picasso developed Cubism. Realism is typified by Thomas Eakins, the American who studied anatomy to the point of cutting up bodies. Religious artists are not interested in portraying things as they are, they wish to show what things MEAN.

That is what convinces me that the cave art had little or nothing to do with magic. Why did they work, way back in those days, at such great difficulty? Why does an artist of today go to such trouble to use only the best materials. To make the picture last, of course. The cave man has certainly been successful, if that was his aim. I realize that I am being just as dogmatic in my statements as the "magic" school of thought represented in Shaw's article, but I feel that while his position rests solely on prejudice, mine rests upon obvious observable fact which appears to hold true for all art known. What could be more obvious than that a superstitious painter would paint supernatural pictures, and that only a realist would strive for realism?

Our picture of these cave artists needs a good going over with the spotlight of factual analysis, and when, if ever, the results come in, I feel quite sure that those cave artists will be acknowledged as some of the LEAST superstitious people in the history of mankind.

—Ray Nelson,
Chicago, Ill.

MORE ON SHAW

Dear Sir:

While I am not qualified to criticize the whole article *(July Science Briefs)* . . . the presence of one paragraph which I know to be completely erroneous casts serious doubt upon the rest. Consider the following: "The statuary which is today produced by the witch doctors of many of the African and Pacific island tribes. . ." This statement contains serious distortions.

(1) In West Africa, most "statuary" is made by wood-carvers, iron-

workers, and brass-casters, none of whom are "witch doctors" in any sense of the term, and most of whom are *full-time* specialists in their trades—perhaps professions would be a better word.

(2) Throughout the Pacific, wood-carving, the dominant medium for statuary, is done mainly by part-time specialists, although nowhere in the Pacific is specialization as highly developed as it is in Africa.

(3) The term "witch doctor" is a term which is no longer part of the vocabulary of anyone with any anthropological training. Having, as it does, derogatory connotations, it is a decidedly misleading term to apply to the native religious specialists of Africa, the Pacific, or any other part of the primitive world.

The last point merits some amplification. First of all, while Africans usually believe in witches, those who are believed to be practicing witchcraft are almost invariably outside the conventional religious system of the community. In addition, most African religious cults have a degree of sophistication, and the belief systems a reasonable enough inner logic to permit them to be ranked with any of the pantheistic systems of the classical world. We would not apply the term "witch doctor" to priests of the classical pantheistic religions—or, for that matter, to priests of the Hindu cults—and there is no more reason to do so in the case of the African religious functionaries.

Regarding this "statuary," Shaw says: "Invariably obscene and repulsive, the images depicted have unusually fat bodies, with the sexual features exaggerated, and faces blank." This statement conforms exactly to a popular stereotype, and is completely false—and I say this in full realization of the fact that it is, in part at least, an aesthetic judgment. It is certainly not *invariably* true, and I doubt that it is true as a whole of more than a few isolated cases. I have seen some life-sized brass-cast heads from Nigeria which are of considerable age, and which rival in beauty and sensitivity of treatment the best of classic Greek sculpture. These are admittedly exceptional—they are not in conformity with the general tradition of West African Art. But the best of West African brass-casting and wood-carving is, by anyone's standards, artistry of a high order. The fact that the artistic conventions which it observes differ from our own should not blind us to the skill and artistry that can be found in primitive art.

I am, therefore, at a loss concerning the identity of the "authorities" whose judgment it is that ". . . these figurines are completely lacking in the qualities which make us rate the work of the cave man painters and draftsmen with the best that has ever been done." I'm sure that were Shaw to examine any significant quantity of African and Pacific art—with the eye of a critic rather than that of a layman—he would readily agree that his "authorities" had not done so themselves before forming their judgments.

—Edward E.LeClair, Jr.
Evanston, Illinois

American Museum of Natural History

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