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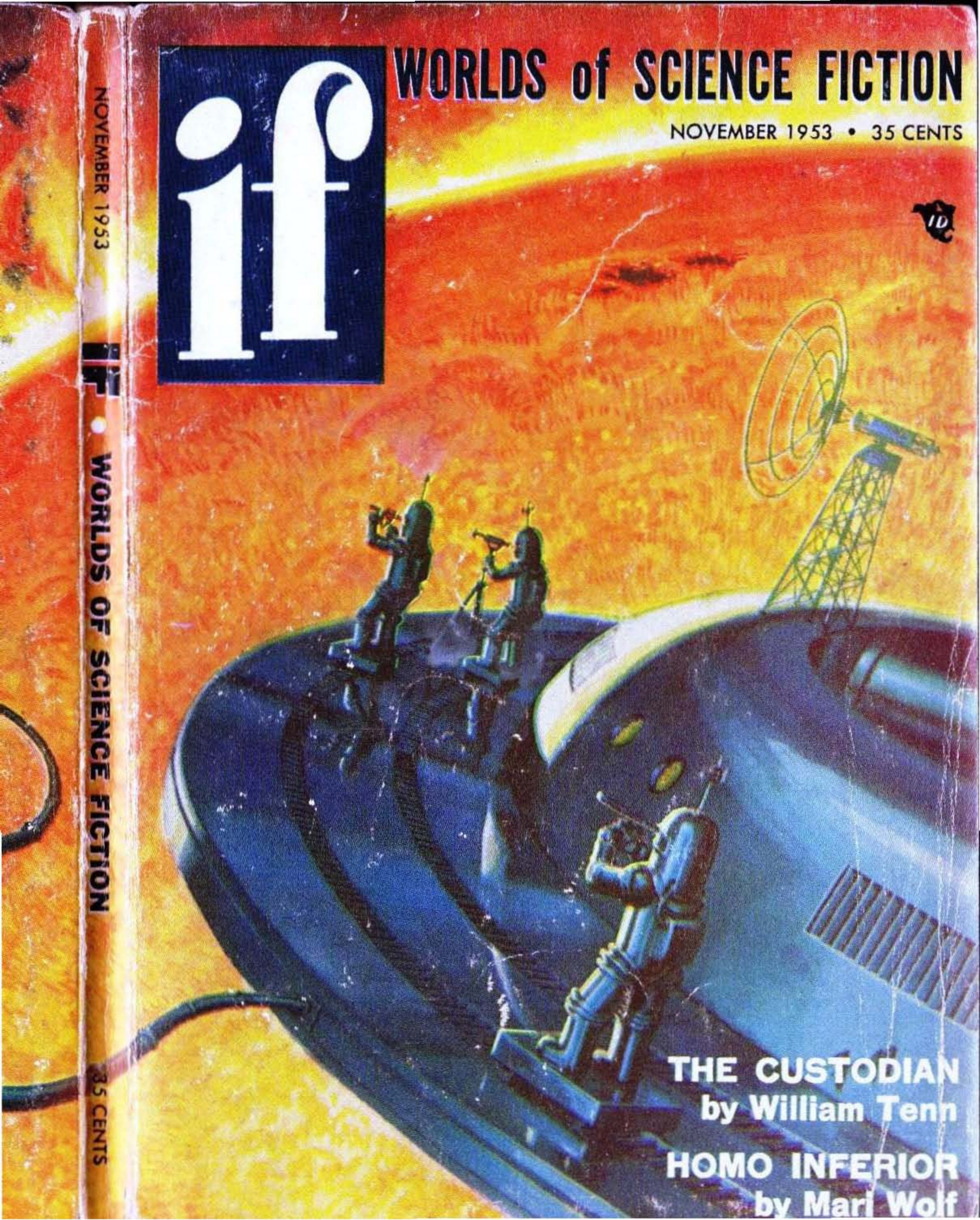

THE CUSTODIAN
by William Tenn

HOMO INFERIOR
by Mari Wolf

HOMEWARD BOUND, the spaceship approaches Earth after its exploration tour of the other members of the Solar family. Though still at a distance of several thousand miles, it has just started its engines to swerve into its braking orbit around the planet. Far "below," it is daylight over Asia and the South Pacific.

WORLDS of SCIENCE FICTION

NOVEMBER 1953

All Stories New and Complete

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SHORT NOVEL

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SHORT STORIES

FEATURES

COVER PICTORIAL: Return to Earth

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A CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

THERE SEEMS to be an affinity between science fiction and automobiles. Crank up a fantasy fan and in a lot of cases he'll rattle on all afternoon about Maseratis, multiple carburetors, Jaguars, torsion bars, Gordinis, rear engines, horsepower-weight ratios, Ferraris, the Le Mans race, chopping and channeling, Porsches, acceleration figures, economy figures, Bugattis, fiberglass bodies and the question of steam power.

Why? I don't quite know, but I've studied enough case histories to be sure of my ground. Love of speculative fiction and love of automobiles as something more than just basic transportation somehow go together—two hearts pierced by a single chrome-plated arrow.

Writing on classic cars in *True's Automobile Yearbook* some time ago, Eugene Jaderquist mentioned that the car collector's other hobbies are almost invariably "music and science fiction." He gave no further explanation. This may have been because he had a hard enough time defining what a classic car is, and why one large, old luxurious vehicle is a classic while another isn't. Classic fans are real fanatics; they aren't even remotely interested in any other kind of car!

For those in the audience who think an automobile is just a way of getting from one place to another (actually it is at least a fine form of entertainment and sport, and in some cases a complete way of life), I'll demolish one obvious answer. The thrill of traveling at high speeds has nothing to do with it. Concepts of vast size are much more typical of science fiction than concepts of high speed (fascination with the idea of getting from place to place virtually instantaneously strikes me as a slightly different horse). And a great many auto fans are much more interested in a car's size, shape, inner mechanisms and/or rarity than what it will do when the throttle is floorboarded.

It doesn't seem to be the hot rodders who are stf bugs. It would be closer to the truth to say that the people in question stem from the ranks of the mechanically inclined with a hunger for things unique. But I'm not sure that's the whole story.

IN ANY CASE, the four-wheeled rocketeers may have the opportunity to satisfy both tastes at once, if a fellow named Richard Arbib has his way. This gentleman is well

known in the auto industry for his startling designs, which sometimes turn into real cars as in the case of the Packard Pan-American. And in his regular column in a recent issue of a new magazine tersely called *Cars,* he said:

"The effect of unveiling the mysteries of deep outer space, the contemplation of travel at the speed of light and perhaps even a step into another dimension, should be the most vibrant inspiration to car designers today."

Arbib went on to tell how he asked his students at Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, to design vehicles from other worlds. I admit that when he said the instructions demanded that these "semi-abstract" vehicles "express weird, exciting new forms," the pleasure I'd felt at first thought of the project began to diminish slightly. On top of that, he insisted that "the designer . . . must learn to use the black shadows of the moon to advantage," without a hint of how this was to be done. Maybe he meant that cars should be made of dark-green cheese—but I sometimes suspect that Detroit is doing that already.

On the subject of applying features of these other-world vehicles to today's automotive styling problems, however, Arbib relieved my fears a bit. "The problem amounts to far more than including a few weird shapes of conical nature or tacking on sweeping appendages to form what appear to be shark-like mutations." There was more in the same comparatively realistic vein. Then: "The transparent bubbles of today's jet plane canopies were found long ago in the rocket ship stories. Hand controls have given way to pushbutton controls so, in projecting design, it's logical for pushbutton controls to give way to mind controls."

Goody!

I've always wanted a "space car," as Arbib kept referring to his futuristic jalopy, with mind controls. It would allow no-armed driving, for one thing—an idea that has infinite possibilities. Better, it would give the poor backseat driver an even break; she—it's usually a she—could put her mind to work too and perhaps even succeed in making the family spacer go in two directions at once. And if those mind controls were sensitive enough, the lucky, liberated driver could at last sit comfortably at home with a long cool drink and let the car take its usual Sunday afternoon tour of the 200 mile-an-hour superhighways with nobody in it.

Arbib boiled it down to this: "This does not mean that all space cars must look like rocket ships on wheels. As a matter of fact, wheels might be the first thing to go!"

Me? Well, Maude, my old Chevrolet, will have to last me for a while yet. But I have several projects in mind. The one I cherish most fondly involves buying a little German Volkswagen—one of the most functional cars ever built, with a jewel of an air-cooled engine in the rear, but also one of the ugliest. I figure the original body would be easy to remove and would make an ideal doghouse. And with a simple aerodynamic body of fiberglass or something equally light replacing the old one, that baby would *go!*

What are you driving? —Its

Remember the story of the last man on Earth who heard a knock on his door? Fiyatil was in the same position, with the difference that he had chosen it deliberately. And when the "knock"—an alarm bell—came, that was different too . . .

THE CUSTODIAN

By William Tenn

Illustrated by Kelly Freas

MAY 9, 2190—Well, I did it! It was close, but fortunately I have a very suspicious nature. My triumph, my fulfillment was almost stolen from me, but I was too clever for them.

As a result, I am happy to note in this, my will and testament, I now begin my last year of life.

No, let me be accurate. This last year of life, the year that I will spend in an open tomb, really began at noon today. Then, in the second sub-basement of the Museum of Modern Astronautics, I charged a dial for the third successive time and got a completely negative response.

That meant that I, Fiyatil, was the only human alive on Earth. What a struggle I have had to achieve that distinction!

Well, it's all over now, I'm fairly certain. Just to be on the safe side, I'll come down and check the anthropometer every day or so for the next week, but I don't think there's a chance in the universe that I'll get a positive reading. I've had my last, absolutely my final and ultimate battle with the forces of righteousness—and I've won. Left in secure, undisputed possession of my coffin, there's nothing for me to do now but enjoy myself.

And that shouldn't be too hard. After all, I've been planning the pleasures for years!

Still, as I tugged off my suit of berillit blue and climbed upstairs into the sunlight, I couldn't help thinking of the others. Gruzeman, Prejaut and possibly even Mo-Diki. They'd have been here with me now if only they'd had a shade less academic fervor, a touch more of intelligent realism.

Too bad in a way. And yet it

makes my vigil more solemn, more glorious. As I sat down on the marble bench between Rozinski's heroic statues of the Spaceman and Spacewoman, I shrugged and dismissed the memories of Gruzeman, Perjaut and Mo-Diki.

They had failed. I hadn't.

I leaned back, relaxing for the first time in more than a month. My eyes swept over the immense bronze figures towering above me, two pieces of sculpture yearning agonizingly for the stars, and I burst into a chuckle. The absolute incongruity of my hiding place hit me for the first time—imagine, the Museum of Modern Astronautics! Multiplied by the incredible nervous tension, the knuckle-biting fear of the past five days, the chuckle bounced up and down in my throat and became a giggle, then a splutter and finally a reverberating, chest-heaving laugh that I couldn't stop. It brought all the deer out of the museum park to stand in front of the marble bench where Fiyatil, the last man on Earth, choked and coughed and wheezed and cackled at his senile accomplishment.

I don't know how long the fit might have held me, but a cloud, merely in the course of its regular duties as a summer cloud, happened to slide in front of the sun. That did it. I stopped laughing; as if a connection had been cut, and glanced upward.

The cloud went on, and the sunlight poured down as warmly as ever, but I shivered a bit.

Two pregnant young does came a little closer and stood watching as I massaged my neck. Laughter had given it a crick.

"Well, my dears," I said, tossing them a quotation from one of my favorite religions, "it would seem that in the midst of life we are at last truly in death."

They munched at me impassively.

MAY 11, 2190—I have spent the last two days putting myself and my supplies in order and making plans for the immediate future. Spending a lifetime in sober preparation for the duties of custodianship is one thing. Finding suddenly that you have become *the* custodian, the last of your sect as well as your race—and yet, peculiarly, the fulfillment of them both—that is quite another thing. I find myself burning with an insane pride. And a moment later, I turn cold with the incredible, the majestic responsibility that I face.

Food will be no problem. In the commissary of this one institution, there are enough packaged meals to keep a man like myself well-fed for ten years, let alone twelve months. And wherever I go on the planet, from the Museum of Buddhist Antiquities in Tibet to the Panorama of Political History in Sevastopol, I will find a similar plenty.

Of course, packaged meals are packaged meals: somebody else's idea of what my menu should be. Now that the last Affirmer has gone, taking with him his confounded austerity, there is no longer any need for me to be a hypocrite. I can at last indulge my taste for luxury and bathe my tongue in gustatory baubles. Unfortunately I

grew to manhood under Affirmer dominion and the hypocricies I learned to practice in sixty cringing years have merged with the essential substance of my character. I doubt, therefore, that I will be preparing any meals of fresh food from the ancient recipes.

And then too, meals of fresh food would involve the death of creatures that are currently alive and enjoying themselves. This seems a bit silly under the circumstances . . .

Nor did I need to put any of the automatic laundries into operation. Yet I have. Why clean my clothes, I asked myself, when I can discard a tunic the moment it becomes slightly soiled and step into a newly manufactured garment, still stiff in memory of the machine matrix whence it came?

Habit told me why I couldn't. Custodian concepts make it impossible for me to do what an Affirmer in my position would find easiest: shrug out of the tunic on a clear patch of ground and leave it lying behind me like a huge, brightly colored dropping. On the other hand, much Affirmer teaching that my conscious mind has been steadfastly rejecting for decades, I find to my great annoyance, has seeped into the unconscious osmotically. The idea of deliberately destroying anything as functional, if relatively unesthetic, as a dirty Tunic, Male, Warm-Season, Affirmer Ship-Classification No. 2352558.3, appalls me —even against my will.

Over and over again, I tell myself that Affirmer Ship-Classification Numbers now mean nothing to me. Less than nothing. They are as meaningless as cargo symbols on the Ark to the stevedores who loaded it, the day after Noah sailed.

Yet I step into a one-seater flyball for a relaxing tour of the museum grounds and something in my mind says: *No. 58184.72.* I close my teeth upon a forkful of well-seasoned Luncheon Protein Component and note that I am chewing Ship-Classification Numbers *15762.94* through *15763.01.* I even remind myself that it is a category to be brought aboard among the last, and only when the shipboard representative of the Ministry of Survival and Preservation has surrendered his command to the shipboard representative of the Ministry of The Journey.

Not a single Affirmer walks the Earth at the moment. Together with their confounded multiplicity of government bureaus—including the one in which all people professing Custodianism had to be registered, the Ministry of Antiquities and Useless Relics—they are now scattered among a hundred or so plantetary systems in the galaxy. But all this seems to matter not a bit to my idiotically retentive mind which goes on quoting texts memorized decades ago for Survival Placement Examinations long since superseded and forgotten by those in authority.

They are so efficient, the Affirmers, so horribly, successfully efficient! As a youngster, I confided to my unfortunately loquacious comrade, Ru-Sat, that I had begun creative painting on canvas in my leisure hours. Immediately, my parents, in collaboration with my recreational adviser, had me volunteered into the local Children's *Extra Work for Extra Survival*

Group, where I was assigned to painting numbers and symbols on packing cases. "Not pleasure but persistence, persistence, persistence will preserve the race of Man," I had to repeat from the Affirmer catechism before I was allowed to sit down to any meal from that time on.

Later, of course, I was old enough to register as a conscientious Custodian. "Please," my father choked at me when I told him, "don't come around any more. Don't bother us. I'm speaking for the entire family, Fiyatil, including your uncles on your mother's side. You've decided to become a dead man: that's your business now. Just forget you ever had parents and relatives—and let us forget we had a son."

This meant I could free myself from Survival chores by undertaking twice as much work with the microfilm teams that traveled from museum to museum and archeological site to skyscraper city. But still there were the periodic Survival Placement Exams which everyone agreed didn't apply to Custodians but insisted we take as a gesture of good will to the society which was allowing us to follow our consciences. Exams which necessitated putting aside a volume entitled *Religious Design and Decoration in Temples of the Upper Nile* for the dreary, dingy, well-thumbed *Ship-Classification Manual and Uniform Cargo Stowage Guide*. I had given up the hope of being an artist myself, but those ugly little decimals took up time that I wished to spend contemplating the work of men who had lived in less fanatic and less frenzied centuries.

They still do! So powerful is habit that now that I have no questions on dehydration to answer ever again, I still find myself doing the logarithmic work necessary to finding out where a substance is packed once its water is removed. It is horribly frutrating to be mired after all in an educational system from which I turned completely away!

OF COURSE, the studies I am involved in at the moment probably don't help very much. Yet it is very important for me to pick up enough information from the elementary educatories in this museum, for example, to insure my not having to worry about the possibility of a flyball breakdown over a jungle area. I'm no technician, no trouble-shooter. I have to learn instead how to choose equipment in good working order and how to start operating it without doing any damage to delicate components.

This technological involvement irritates me. Outside, the abandoned art of 70,000 years beckons—and here I sit, memorizing dull facts about the power plants of worker robots, scrutinizing blueprints of the flyballs' antigrav screws, and acting for all the world like an Affirmer captain trying to win a commendation from the Ministry of The Journey before he blasts off.

Yet it is precisely this attitude that is responsible for my being here now, instead of sitting disconsolately aboard the Affirmer scout ship with Mo-Diki, Gruzeman and Prejaut. While they exulted in their freedom and charged about the

planet like creaky old colts, I made for the Museum of Modern Astronautics and learned how to operate and read an anthropometer and how to activate the berrillit blue. I hated to waste the time, but I couldn't forget how significant to an Affirmer, especially a modern one, is the concept of the sacredness of human life. They had betrayed us once; they were bound to come back to make certain that the betrayal left no loose ends in the form of Custodians enjoying fulfillment. I was right then, and I know I am right now—but I get so bored with the merely useful!

Speaking of the anthropometer, I had a nasty shock two hours ago. The alarm went off—and stopped. I scurried downstairs to it, shaking out the berrillit blue suit as I ran and hoping desperately that I wouldn't blow myself up in the course of using it a second time.

By the time I got to the machine, it had stopped caterwauling. I charged the all-directional dial over ten times and got no response. Therefore, according to the anthropometer manual, nothing human was moving about anywhere in the entire Solar System. I had keyed the machine to myself electrocephalographically so that I wouldn't set off the alarm. Yet the alarm *had* gone off, indisputably recording the presence of humanity other than myself, however temporary its existence had been. It was very puzzling.

My conclusion is that some atmospheric disturbance or faulty connection inside the anthropometer set the machine off. Or possibly, in my great joy over being left behind a few days ago, I carelessly damaged the apparatus.

I heard the Affirmer scout ship radio the news of the capture of my colleagues to a mother vessel waiting beyond Pluto: I *know* I'm the sole survivor on Earth.

Besides, if it had been skulking Affirmers who set the alarm off, their own anthropometer would have detected me at the same time, since I had been walking about unprotected by the insulating effect of berrillit blue. The museum would have been surrounded by flyball crews and I'd have been caught almost immediately.

No, I cannot believe I have anything more to fear from Affirmers. They have satisfied themselves with their last-moment return of two days ago, I am positive. Their doctrine would forbid any further returns, since they would be risking their own lives. After all, there are only 363 days left—at most—before the sun goes nova.

MAY 15, 2190—I am deeply disturbed. In fact, I am frightened. And the worst of it is, I do not know of what. All I can do now is wait.

Yesterday, I left the Museum of Modern Astronautics for a preliminary tour of the world. I planned to spend two or three weeks hopping about in my flyball before I made any decision about where I would stay for the bulk of my year.

My first error was the choice of a first destination. Italy. It is very possible that, if my little problem had not come up, I would have spent eleven months there before

going on with my preliminary survey. The Mediterranean is a dangerous and sticky body of water to anyone who has decided that, his own talents being inadequate or aborted, he may most fittingly spend his life cherishing the masterpieces presented to humanity by other, much more fortunate individuals.

I went to Ferrara first, since the marshy, reclaimed plain outside the city was a major Affirmer launching site. I lingered a little while at one of my favorite buildings, the *Palazzo dei Diamanti*, shaking my head as helplessly as ever at the heavy building stones of which it is constructed and which are cut and faceted like so many enormous jewels. To my mind, the city itself is a jewel, now somewhat dulled, that sparkled madly in the days of the Este court. One little city, one tiny, arrogant court—I would so happily have traded them for the two billion steadfastly boorish Affirmers. Over sixty years of almost unchallenged political control, and did an entire planetful of them produce a single competitor for a Tasso or an Ariosto? And then I realized that at least one native Ferraran would have felt at ease in the world that has just departed from me, its last romantic. I remembered that Savonarola had been born in Ferrara . . .

The plain outside Ferrara also reminded me of the dour Dominican. The launching field, stretching away for quite a few flat miles, was strewn with enough possessions discarded at the last moment to make a truly towering Bonfire of Vanities.

But what pathetic vanities! Here, a slide rule that some ship's commander had ordered thrown out before takeoff because the last inspection had revealed it to be in excess of what the *Ship-Classification Manual* listed as the maximum number of slide rules necessary for a vessel of that size. There, a mimeographed collection of tally sheets that had been dropped out of the closing air lock after every last item had been checked off as per regulations—one check *before* the item by the Ministry of Survival and Preservation, and one check *after* the item by the Ministry of The Journey. Soiled clothing, somewhat worn implements, empty fuel and food drums lay about on the moist ground. Highly functional articles all, that had somehow come in the course of time to sin against function—and had fallen swiftly from use. And, surprisingly, an occasional doll, not looking very much like a doll to be sure, but not looking like anything that had an objective purpose either. Looking about me at the squalid debris dotted so rarely with sentiment, I wondered how many parents had writhed with shame when, despite their carefully repeated admonitions and advance warnings, the last search had discovered something in the recesses of a juvenile tunic that could only be called an old toy—or, worse yet, a keepsake.

I remembered what my recreational adviser had said on that subject, long years ago. "It's not that we believe that children shouldn't have toys, Fiyatil; we just don't want them to become attached to any particular toy. Our race is going to leave this planet that's been its

home from the beginning. We'll be able to take with us only such creatures and objects as are usable to make other creatures and objects which we'll need for sustenance wherever we come down. And because we can't carry more than so much weight in each ship, we'll have to select from among the usable objects those which are essential.

"We won't take anything along because it's pretty, or because a lot of people swear by it, or because a lot of people *think* they need it. We'll take it along only because nothing else will do an important job so well. That's why I come to your home every month or so to inspect your room, to make certain that your bureau drawers contain only new things, that you're not falling into dangerous habits of sentimentality that can lead only to Custodianism. You've got far too nice a set of folks to turn into *that* kind of person."

Nonetheless, I chuckled to myself, I had turned into that kind of person. Old Tobletej had been right: the first step on the road to ruin had been bureau drawers crammed with odds and ends of memory. The twig on which had sat the first butterfly I'd ever caught, the net with which I'd caught him, and the first butterfly himself. The wad of paper that a certain twelve-year-old lady had thrown at me. A tattered copy of a real printed book—no facsimile broadcast, this, but something that had once known the kiss of type instead of the hot breath of electrons. The small wooden model of Captain Karma's starship, *Man's Hope*, which an old spacehand at the Lunar Line launching field had given me along with much misinformation . . .

Those paunchy bureau drawers! How my parents and teachers had tried to teach me neatness and a hatred of possessions! And here was I, now grown into man's estate, smug over my possession of a quantity of artistic masterpieces the like of which no Holy Roman Emperor, no Grand Khan, would have dared to dream about.

I CHUCKLED once more and started looking for the launching site robots. They were scattered about, almost invisible in the unimportant garbage of the spaceship field. After loading the ship, they had simply wandered about until they had run down. I activated them once more and set them to cleaning the field.

This is something I will do in every one of the two hundred or so launching sites on Earth, and this is the chief reason I have been studying robotics. I want Earth to look as pretty as possible when she dies. I never could be an Affirmer, I am afraid; I form strong attachments.

Feeling as I did, I just couldn't continue on my trip without taking the quickest, the most cursory glance at Florence. Naturally.

But as I should have expected, I got drunk on oil and marble and metalwork. Florence was empty of Florentines, but the glorious galleries were still there. I walked across the fine Ponte Vecchio, the only one of the famous Arno bridges

to have escaped destruction in the Second World War. I came to Giotto's campanile and the baptistery doors by Ghiberti and I began to feel despair, desperation. I ran to the Church of Santa Croce to see Giotto's frescoes and the Convent of St. Mark's for Fra Angelico. What good was one year, what could I see of even a single city like this in a bare twelve months? I could view, I could gallop by, but what would I have time to *see?* I was in the Boboli gardens trying frantically to decide whether to look up Michelangelo's *David* which I'd seen once before, or some Donatello which I hadn't, when the alarms went off.

Both of them.

The day before I'd left, I'd put together a small anthropometer that had originally been developed for locating lost colonists in the Venusian swamps. It was based on an entirely different design than the big machine that I'd found in the Hall of Gadgets. Since the circuits were unalike, and they had been planned for use in entirely different atmospheres, I believed they would serve as excellent checks on each other. I'd set the alarms to the frequency of my flyball communicator and had left the museum fairly confident that the only thing that could make both anthropometers go off would be the presence of a man other than myself.

I flew back to the Museum, feeling very confused. Both pieces of equipment had responded the same way. The alarm had gone off, indicating the sudden materialization of Man on the planet. Then, when the stimulus had disappeared, both alarms had stopped. No matter how many times I charged the directional dials on each anthropometer, there was not the faintest suspicion of mankind within their extreme range, which is a little under one-half of a light-year.

The initial confusion has given way to a strong feeling of discomfort. Something is very wrong here on Earth, something different than the sun getting ready to explode in a year. Possibly I have the non-technician's blind faith in a piece of apparatus which I don't fully understand, but I don't believe that the anthropometers should be acting this way unless something really abnormal is occurring.

It has pleased me to look upon this planet as an ocean-going ship about to sink, and myself as the gallant captain determined to go down with her. Abruptly, I feel as if the ship were beginning to act like a whale.

I know what I must do. I'll move a supply of food down to the Hall of Gadgets and sleep right under the anthropometers. The alarm usually lasts for a minute or two. I can leap to my feet, charge the all-direction dials and get enough of a reading right then to know exactly where the stimulus is coming from. Then I will pop into my flyball and investigate. It's really very simple.

Only, I don't *like* it.

MAY 17, 2190—I feel thoroughly ashamed of myself as only an old man who has been seeing ghosts in the graveyard should be ashamed. That, in fact, is the only excuse I can make to myself. I

have, I suppose, been thinking too much about death recently. The coming extinction of Earth and the Solar System, my death which is inevitably involved with it, the death of millions of creatures of uncounted species, the death of proud old cities that Man has reared and occupied for centuries. . . Well, perhaps the association with ghosties and beasties and other strange phenomena is understandable.

When the alarms went off again this morning, I got a directional reading. My destination was the Appalachian Mountain region in eastern North America.

The moment I got out of the flyball and took in the pale azure fog covering the cave mouth in front of me, I began to understand —and feel ashamed. Through the fog, which thinned in one place and thickened in others as I watched, I could see several bodies lying on the floor of the cave. Obviously, one of them had to be alive for the anthropometer to have reacted as soon as a patch of berrillit blue got meager enough to make the presence of a human mind detectable. I walked around to the back of the cave and found no exit.

I went back to the museum in the flyball and returned with the necessary equipment. I deactivated the berillit blue fog at the entrance and walked inside cautiously.

The interior of the cave, which had evidently been furnished as a domestic and comfortable hideout, was completely wrecked. Somebody had managed to get an activator as well as a quantity of berrillit blue which had not yet been given any particular shape and which, therefore, was about as stable as hydrogen and oxygen—if it is permissable to use a metaphor from chemistry to illustrate negative force-field concepts. The berrillit blue had been activated as a sort of curtain across the mouth of the cave and had blown up immediately. But, since the activator was still operating and the entrance was fairly narrow, it continued to function as a curtain of insulating negative force, a curtain which had holes in it through which one could occasionally "peek" by means of the anthropometer at the people imprisoned inside.

There were three bodies near the entrance, two male and one female, rather youthful-looking. From the quantity and type of statuary on the walls of the cave, it was easy to deduce that these people had belonged to one of the many numerous religious Custodian groups, probably the *Fire in the Heavens* cult. When, in the last week of the exodus, the Affirmers had denounced the Crohiik Agreement and stated that the Affirmation of Life required that even those who didn't Affirm had to be protected against themselves, these people had evidently taken to the mountains. Evading the subsequent highly effective search, they had managed to stay hidden until the last great vessel left. Then, suspecting as I had that at least one scout ship would return for a final round-up, they had investigated the properties of the anthropometer and found out about the only insulator, berrillit blue. Unfortunately, they had not found out enough.

Deep in the rear of the cave, a

body twisted brokenly to meet me. It was a young woman. My first reaction was absolute astonishment at the fact that she was still alive. The explosion seemed to have smashed her thoroughly below the waist. She had crawled from the cave mouth to the interior where the group had stored most of their food and water. As I teetered, momentarily undecided whether to leave her and get medication and blood plasma from a hospital in the region or to risk moving her immediately, she rolled over on her back.

She had been covering a year-old infant with her body, evidently uncertain when the berrillit might blow again. And somehow, in spite of what must have been tremendous agony, she had been feeding the child.

I bent down and examined the baby. He was quite dirty and covered with his mother's blood, but otherwise unharmed. I picked him up and, in answer to the question in the woman's eyes, I nodded.

"He'll be all right," I said.

She started what may have been a nod in reply and stopped halfway through to die. I examined her carefully and, I will admit, a shade frantically. There was no pulse—no heartbeat.

I took the child back to the museum and constructed a sort of play pen for him out of empty telescope sections. Then I went back to the cave with three robots and had the people buried. I admit the gesture was superfluous, but it wasn't only a matter of neatness. However fundamental our differences, we were all of Custodian persuasion, generally speaking. It somehow made me feel as if I were snapping my fingers in the face of the entire smug Affirmation to respect their *Fire-in-Heaven* eccentricities in this fashion.

After the robots had completed their work, I placed a piece of the religious statuary (it was remarkably badly done, by the way) at the head of each grave and even said a short prayer, or rather a sermon. I developed the thought that I had suggested approximately a week earlier to some deer—to wit, that in the midst of life we are in death. I did not joke about it, however, but spoke seriously on the subject for several minutes. The robots who were my audience seemed even less excited by the intelligence than the deer had been.

Which is understandable.

MAY 21, 2190—I am annoyed. I am very, very annoyed and my great problem at the moment is that I lack an object on which to expend my annoyance.

The child has been an incredible amount of trouble.

I took him to the largest medical museum in the northern hemisphere and had him thoroughly examined by the best pediatric diagnostic machinery. He seems to be in excellent health, which is fortunate for both of us. And his dietary requirements, while not the same as mine, are fairly simple. I got a full tape on the kind of food he needs and, after a few readjustments in the commissary of the Museum of Modern Astronautics, I have arranged for this food to be

prepared and delivered to him daily. Unfortunately, he does not seem to regard this arrangement, which took up an inordinate amount of my time, as wholly satisfactory.

For one thing, he will not accept food from the regulation robot nursemaid which I have activated for him. This, I suspect, is because of his parents' odd beliefs: he probably has never encountered mechanical affection before. He will only eat when I feed him.

That situation alone is intolerable, but I have found it almost impossible to leave him guarded by the robot nursemaid. Though he does little more than crawl, he manages to do this at a surprisingly fast pace and is always disappearing into dark corridors of the museum. Then an alarm is flashed to me and I have to break off my examination of the gigantic palace of the Dalai Lama, the *Potala,* and come scudding back from Lhasa halfway across the world to the Museum.

Even then it would take us hours to find him—and by "us" I mean every robot at my disposal—if I were not able to resort to the anthropometer. This admirable gadget points out his hiding place very swiftly; and so, pulling him out of the firing chamber of the Space Howitzer in the Hall of Weapons, I return him to his play pen. Then, if I dare, and if it is not time for him to be fed, I may return—briefly—to the Tibetan plateau.

I am at present engaged in constructing a sort of enormous cage for him, with automatic heating and toilet facilities and devices that will screen out undesirable animals, insects and reptiles. Though this is taking up far too much of my time, it will be an excellent investment, I believe.

I don't know quite what to do about the feeding problem. The only solution I can find in any of the literature on the subject that offers promise is the one about letting him go hungry if he refuses food from normal sources. After a brief experiment, however, in which he seemed cheerfully resigned to starvation, I was forced to give in. I now handle every one of his meals.

The trouble is that I don't know whom to blame. Since I have been a Custodian from early manhood, I failed to see the need to reproduce. I have never been interested even slightly in children. I know very little about them and care less.

I have always felt that my attitude was admirably summed up by Socrates' comments in the *Symposium*: "Who, upon reflecting on Homer and Hesiod and other such great poets, would not rather have their children than ordinary human ones? Who would not like to emulate them in the creation of children such as theirs, which have preserved their memory and given them everlasting glory? . . . Many are the temples which have been raised in their honor for the sake of such children as they have had, which were never raised in honor of anyone for the sake of his mortal children."

Unfortunately, we are the only two humans alive on Earth, this child and I. We are going to our

doom together; we ride the same round tumbril. And the treasures of the world which were wholly mine less than a week ago now belong at least partially to him. I wish we could discuss the matters at issue, not only to arrive at more equitable arrangements, but also for the sheer pleasure of the discussion. I have come to the conclusion that I began this journal out of unconscious terror when I discovered, after the Affirmers left, that I was completely alone.

I find myself getting very wistful for conversation, for ideas other than my own, for opinions against which mine might be measured. Yet according to the literature on the subject, while this child might begin talking any day now, we will be immersed in catastrophe long before he learns to argue with me. I find that sad, however inevitable.

How I wander! The fact is that once again I am being prevented from studying art as I would like. I am an old man and should have no responsibilities; I have all but laid down my life for the privilege of this study. It is extremely vexing.

And conversation. I can just imagine the kind of conversation I might be having with an Affirmer at the moment, were one to have been stranded here with me. What dullness, what single-minded biological idiocy! What crass refusal to look at, let alone admit, the beauty his species has been seventy millennia in the making! The most he might have learned if he is a European, say, is a bit about the accepted artists of his culture. What would he know of Chinese painting, for example, or cave art? Would he be able to understand that in each there were primitive periods followed by eras of lusty development, followed in turn by a consolidation of artistic gains and an increase in formalization, the whole to be rounded off by a decadent, inner-groping epoch which led almost invariably into another primitive and lusty period? That these have occurred again and again in the major cultures so that even the towering genius of a Michelangelo, a Shakespeare, a Beethoven will likely be repeated—in somewhat different terms—in another complete cycle? That there was a Michelangelo, Shakespeare and Beethoven in each of several different "flower periods" in ancient Egyptian art?

How could an Affirmer understand such concepts when he lacks the basic information necessary to understanding? When their ships departed from the moribund solar system laden only with immediately usable artifacts? When they refused to let their offspring keep childhood treasures for fear of developing sentimentality, so that when they came to colonize Procyon XII there would be no tears for either the world that has died or the puppy that has been left behind?

And yet history plays such incredible jokes on Man! They who ran away from their museums, who kept nothing but a cold microfilm record of what lay in their investment houses of culture, will learn that Man's sentimentality is not to be frustrated. The bleak, efficient ships that brought them to these alien worlds will become museums

of the past as they oxidize out of existence on the strange sands. Their cruelly functional lines will become the inspiration for temples and alcoholic tears.

What in the world is happening to me? How I run on! After all, I merely wanted to explain why I was annoyed. . .

MAY 29, 2190—I have made several decisions. I don't know if I will be able to implement the most important of them, but I will try. In order, however, to give myself what I need most at the moment—time—I will write much less in this journal, if I write any more at all. I will try very hard to be brief.

To begin with the least important decision: I have named the child Leonardo. Why I chose to name him after a man who, for all of his talents—in fact, *because* of his talents—I regard as the most spectacular failure in the history of art, I do not know. But Leonardo was a well-rounded man, something which the Affirmers are not—and something which I am beginning to admit I am not.

By the way, the child recognizes his name. He is not yet able to pronounce it, but it is positively miraculous the way he recognizes it. And he makes a sound which is very like mine. In fact, I might say—

Let me go on.

I have decided to attempt an escape from the Earth—with Leonardo. My reasons are many and complex, and I'm not certain that I understand them all, but one thing I do know.

I have felt responsibility for a life other than my own and can no longer evade it.

This is not a tardy emergence into Affirmer doctrine, but in a very real sense my own ideas come to judgment. Since I believe in the reality of beauty, especially beauty made with the mind and hands of man, I can follow no other course.

I am an old man and will achieve little with the rest of my life. Leonardo is an infant: he represents raw potential; he might become anything. A song beyond Shakespeare's. A thought above Newton, above Einstein. Or an evil beyond Gilles de Retz, a horror past Hitler. Or sheer mediocrity. Or quiet, unostentatious usefulness.

But the potential should be realized. I think, under my tutelage, it is less likely to be evil and there *I* have a potential to be realized.

In any case, even if Leonardo represents a zero personally, he may carry the germ-plasm of a Buddha, of a Euripides, of a Freud. And *that* potential must be realized. . .

There is a ship. Its name is *Man's Hope* and it was the first ship to reach the stars, almost a century ago when it had just been discovered that our sun would explode and become a nova in a little less than a hundred years. It was the ship that discovered for Man the heart-quickening fact that other stars have planets and that many of those planets are habitable to him.

It was a long time ago that Captain Karma brought his starship back down on the soil of Earth with the news that escape was pos-

sible. That was long before I was born, long before humanity divided unequally into Custodian and Affirmer and long, long before either group were the unwinking fanatics they had become five years ago.

The ship is in the Museum of Modern Astronautics. I know it has been kept in good condition. I also know that twenty years ago, before the Affirmers had developed the position that absolutely nothing might be taken physically from a museum, the ship was equipped with the latest Léugio Drive. The motive was that, if it were needed on Exodus Day, it might make the trip to a star in months instead of years or centuries.

The only thing that I do not know is whether I, Fiyatil, the Custodian of Custodians and art critic extraordinary, can learn to run it in the time that Leonardo and I have left.

But as one of my favorite comic characters remarked about the possibility of a man chopping his own head off: a man can *try*. . .

There is something else on my mind, even more exciting in a way, but this comes first. I find myself looking at the Sun a good deal these days. And very searchingly, too. Very.

NOVEMBER 11, 2190—I can do it. With the help of two robots which I will modify for the purpose, I can do it. Leonardo and I could leave immediately. But I have my other project to complete.

And this is my other project. I am going to use all the empty space in the ship. It was built originally for different motors and a very large crew, and I am going to use that space as a bureau drawer. Into that bureau drawer I will stuff the keepsakes of humanity, the treasures of its childhood and adolescence—at least as many as I will be able to get in.

For weeks I have been collecting treasures from all over the world. Incredible pottery, breath-taking friezes, glorious statuary and oil paintings almost beyond counting litter the corridors of the museum. Brueghel is piled on Bosch, Bosch piled on Durer. I am going to bring a little of everything to that star toward which I point my ship, a little to show what the real things were like. I am including things like the holograph manuscripts of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, Gogol's *Dead Souls*, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, and holographs of Dickens' letters and Lincoln's speeches. There are many others, but I cannot take everything. Within responsible limits, I must please myself.

Therefore, I am not taking anything from the Sistine Chapel ceiling. I have instead carved out two bits of the *Last Judgment* instead. They are my favorites: the soul that suddenly realizes that it is condemned, and the flayed skin on which Michelangelo painted his own portrait.

The only trouble is that fresco weighs so much! Weight, weight, weight—it is almost all I think about now. Even Leonardo follows me about and says "Weight, weight, weight!" He pronounces nothing

else so well.

Still, what should I take of Picasso? A handful of oils, yes, but I must take the *Guernica*. And there is more weight.

I have some wonderful Russian copper utensils and some Ming bronze bowls. I have a lime spatula from Eastern New Guinea made of oiled wood that has a delightfully carved handle (it was used in chewing betel nut and lime). I have a wonderful alabaster figure of a cow from ancient Sumer. I have an incredible silver Buddha from northern India. I have some Dahomean brass figures of a grace to shame Egypt and Greece. I have a carved ivory container from Benin, West Africa, showing a thoroughly Fifteenth Century European Christ on the cross. I have the "Venus" of Willendorf, Austria, the figure that was carved in the Aurignacian epoch of the paleolithic and which is part of the artistic tradition of the "Venus" art of prehistoric mankind.

I have miniatures by Hilliard and Holbein, satiric prints by Hogarth, a beautiful Kangra painting of the eighteenth century on paper that shows little Mughal influence, Japanese prints by Takamaru and Hiroshige—and where may I stop? How may I choose?

I have pages from the Book of Kells, which is an illuminated hand-executed manuscript of almost unmatched beauty; and I have pages from the Gutenberg Bible which is the first book printed from movable type and which has illuminated pages to give the *effect* of a hand-copied manuscript, because the printers didn't want their invention discovered. I have a tughra of Sulaiman the Magnificent, a calligraphic emblem that formed headings for his imperial edicts; and I have a Hebrew Scroll of the Law whose calligraphy outshines the jewels which encrust the poles on which it is wound.

I have Coptic textiles of the sixth century and Alençon lace of the sixteenth. I have a magnificent red krater vase from one of Athens' maritime colonies and a wooden figurehead of a minister from a New England frigate. I have a Rubens nude and an Odalisque by Matisse.

In architecture—I am taking the Chinese *Compendium of Architecture* which I think has never been equalled as a text and a model of a Le Corbusier house built by him. I would love to take one building, the *Taj Mahal,* but I *am* taking the pearl that the Mogul gave to her for whom he built the ineffable tomb. It is a reddish pearl, shaped like a pear and about three and a half inches long; shortly after it was buried with her, it turned up in the possession of an Emperor of China who set it on gold leaves and surrounded it with jade and emeralds. At the turn of the nineteenth century, it was sold somewhere in the Near East for a tiny, ridiculous sum and ended in the Louvre.

And a tool: a small stone fist-axe, the first thing known to have been made by human creatures.

All this I have collected near the ship. But I've sorted none of it. And I suddenly remember, I have collected as yet no furniture, no decorated weapons, no etched

glass. . .

I must hurry, hurry!

NOVEMBER 2190—Shortly after I finished the last entry, I glanced upward. There were green specks on the sun and strange orange streamers seemed to plume out to all points of the compass. Evidently there was not to be a year. These were the symptoms of death that the astronomers had predicted.

So there was an end to my collecting—and my sorting was done in less than a day. The one thing I suddenly found I had to do, when it became obvious that my sections of Michelangelo would be too heavy, was to go to the Sistine Chapel ceiling after all. This time I cut out a relatively tiny thing—the finger of the Creation as it stabs life into Adam. And I decided to take Da Vinci's *La Gioconda* after all, even though his *Beatrice d'Este* is more to my taste: the Mona Lisa's smile belongs to the world.

All posters are represented by one Toulouse-Lautrec. I dropped the *Guernica*: Picasso is represented instead by an oil from his blue period and a single striking ceramic plate. I dropped Harold Paris' *The Eternal Judgment* because of its bulk; all I have of his now is the print *Burchenwald #2, "Where Are We Going?"* And somehow or other, in my last-minute haste, I seem to have selected a large number of Safavid bottles from Iran of the XVI and XVII centuries. Let future historians and psychologists puzzle out the reasons for my choices: they are now irrevocable.

We are proceeding toward Alpha Centauri and should arrive in five months. How will we and all our treasures be received, I wonder? I suddenly feel insanely cheerful. I don't think it has anything to do with my rather belated realization that I, who have so little talent and have failed so miserably in the arts, will achieve a place in the history of art like no other man—a kind of esthetic Noah.

No, it is the fact that I am carrying both the future and the past to a rendezvous where they still have a chance to come to terms. A moment ago Leonardo bounced a ball against the visiplate and, looking at it, I observed that old Sol was expanding apoplectically. As I remarked to him then: "I find, to my astonishment, that in the midst of death, I am—at last, at last!—truly in life."

THE END

See No Evil

Froman was a totally un-mad scientist; if anything, he was too sane for his own good. That spark on the moon intrigued him—why shouldn't he investigate it?

By Dean McLaughlin

Illustrated by Paul Orban

CHARLES FROMAN didn't know there was anyone but himself in the observatory until he heard somebody open the door to the dome, and then the hollow-metallic sound of feet on the enclosed, steep stairway which hugged the curve of the outside wall. Perhaps, Froman thought, it was Jameson, working late in his office and coming up for a chat. But that possibility, he had to admit, was unlikely: an astronomer on visual observation is not particularly disposed to conversation. There was too much to concentrate upon, without talking. And everyone knew what he was doing tonight: it was

there on the work schedule.

He frowned, leaned back from the telescope's eyepiece, and looked across the dome to the stairhead.

A man in a brown checked overcoat emerged from the stairwell, taking each step heavily as he came. The light on the wall nearby revealed him as a mass of form and shadow. Except for the dull red glow over the switchboard panel, it was the only illumination in the dome. That and the flood of moonlight pouring through the open slot in the hemispheric roof.

Froman did not recognize the man; certainly, he was no one in the department. And no one else had any business here at this hour of the night.

The stranger's hat brim cast a shadow over most of his face, revealing only the tip of his nose and the chin which was giving way gradually to plumpness. But even the heavy overcoat could not disguise the man's build: he ate a little too much, and exercised not quite enough.

He paused a moment at the head of the stairs, with the lone light behind and to the right of his shoulder. He stood there, feet placed firmly, peering across the darkened dome. Then, as his eyes adjusted to the dimness, he saw Froman at the telescope and came across the floor. His footsteps thudded hollowly as he passed over the hatchway used for bringing up heavy equipment. Froman watched him come, and, when he was near, said, "How did you get in?"

"I had a key," the man answered offhandedly. "You're Charles Froman, aren't you?" His tone immediately challenged any denial.

When Froman nodded, the man reached inside his coat and brought out a wallet. Propping it open with his thumb, he offered it to the astronomer for inspection. "The name's Mackey. I'm from Military Security. On business." His voice

echoed strangely in the dome, and the way he said "Military Security" included capitalization.

Because it was dark in the dome, Froman could not see the card in the wallet until he flashed a penlite on it. The card only repeated the man's claims. Froman turned the beam on the man's face. The security agent blinked heavy eyelids, then squinted from under overhanging brows.

Froman snapped off the penlite and returned it to the inside pocket of his suitcoat, underneath the shabby overcoat he wore against the cold of waning autumn. "I don't quite see what you'd want with me," he said uncertainly.

"We're the ones who'll decide that," Mackey answered shortly. "I just want to talk to you."

Froman had bent over the telescope's eyepiece, but now he looked up again. "What about?"

"Let's just say we're interested in your work."

"But this is hardly the time—"

The agent didn't let him finish. "The fewer the people who know about my coming here, the better. They might guess too much. And no one will interrupt us this time of night, either." He jammed his hands in his coat pockets, defending them against the cold. "This is a confidential visit," he went on. "We don't want anyone to know, and you aren't to repeat anything about it. Not anything. You understand?"

THE ASTRONOMER nodded. "I suppose so. But I still don't understand what you want with me. All I do is teach a few classes and some research. What's that got to do with . . . Military Security?" He sounded puzzled. He was.

"The less you know, the better we'll all feel," Mackey told him evasively. He continued, carefully deciding exactly what he wanted to say before saying it. "There's some question about how much you know, and if you know less than we're afraid you do, we'd rather this visit didn't tell you more."

"In other words, I'm to be quizzed about something I don't know."

"We're sure you know something. The question is: how much?" The agent hunched his shoulders against the cold. "Look. Can't we go somewhere else and talk? It's cold up here."

"It's always cold here in the winter," Froman answered. "We get used to it."

"Well, I'm not used to it."

"I didn't ask you to come. If you prefer, you can come to my office tomorrow afternoon. You can talk to me then."

"We'll talk now. The longer it's put off, the more danger there is."

"I'm busy right now."

"We're not in the habit of waiting."

"Half of astronomy is waiting for something to happen," Froman said. He was trying to be patient. "And when it does, an astronomer doesn't like to be interrupted. You can wait a little while—what goes on in the sky doesn't."

"How long will it take you?" the agent grumbled.

"That depends. You might say I'm waiting for something I think might happen. If I do see some-

thing tonight, I might be quite a while." He looked straight at Mackey.

The security agent swung away. There wasn't much point in arguing with the man. "Mind if I smoke?"

"No. Go ahead," Froman answered. He added pointedly, "There's an ashtray on the table over there." He waved a hand toward the well-used table standing beside the larger of the two piers which supported the telescope.

The red glow of the lamp on the switchboard mounted against the larger pier fell on the twin-bladed knife switches and the table below it. Mackey found the ashtray—a very small one—on one corner of the table, most of which was occupied by a stack of photographic plates, a small radio, and an electrically driven sidereal clock and red spotlight combination. Sullenly, the agent lit up and waited. He glowered resentfully at the no-longer-used pendulum clock on the far side of the switchboard.

Charles Froman dismissed the agent from his thoughts as he bent over the telescope's eyepiece. Besides his ancient overcoat he wore a fur-lined cap with ear flaps, and for the most part kept his hands in his pockets. He sat crouched on the adjustable-height seat mounted on a wooden frame resembling a relic of the Spanish Inquisition.

The moon was large under the magnification of the 37-inch reflector. Froman could only see a small fraction of it at a time. But he only wanted to see one spot, an area shaped like a circle and just ninety miles across. It was in the center of his field of vision, a low-walled, eroded crater without a central peak, having a fairly level interior broken by only one or two secondary craters of any appreciable size. Under the lunar noon, the features were not very obvious—there was not enough shadow.

After five minutes of searching the walled plain, he sat back and changed eyepieces—the new one providing for greater magnification. He took advantage of the moment to relax his cramped muscles before bending over the new eyepiece.

A while later, he tried an even more powerful lens, but the seeing wasn't good enough. As he shoved the seat-rack away, he muttered to himself, "I might as well throw those plates away. If I can't see anything, they won't show anything either." But he knew he'd develop the plates anyway, and study them carefully, and compare them with earlier plates and photos dating back many years. There was always the chance of something else showing up, something other than the thing he had been looking for. Astronomy always was waiting for something to happen—or, more exactly, waiting to find out if something had happened. After that came the other half, the questions: what had happened, exactly, and why?

"Through now?" the sulking security agent wanted to know. He was on his third cigarette, and his fingers and ears were getting cold.

Froman had practically forgotten the intruder. "I'll be with you in a minute," he promised without looking around. He stretched his long-boned body to get the kinks out, then turned the wheel fixed to the

side of the telescope barrel, the wheel which disengaged the instrument from the tracking mechanism. Coming around, he strode across the dome to a point below and slightly to one side of the open slot through which the moonlight splashed on the floor and the telescope mountings. He hauled on the pulley rope until the shutters groaned toward each other and collided with a solid sound that echoed in the dome for a long time. Brushing hands on his shabby coat, he came back and opened the switches on the panel. The red light went abruptly out. He lifted the stack of exposed plates from the table.

"All right. Let's go."

The agent crushed his cigarette in the ashtray. The three butts nearly filled its small bowl. "About time," he grumbled. He stuffed his hands in the deep pockets of his overcoat and followed Froman over to the stairs.

"See anything?" he asked the astronomer gruffly.

"Nothing beyond the ordinary," Froman replied uninterestedly, starting down the stairs. He held the plates he carried carefully with both hands.

"What d'you mean by that?" Mackey wanted to know.

Froman's feet hesitated on the steps, but he did not turn. After a moment he gave a small shrug. "Nothing anybody else hasn't ever seen, I guess," he explained. "Less than some, even."

"You were expecting you would?"

"Something like that," Froman admitted absently. "I sort of hoped, but the phase is wrong to hope too much. But there *is* something funny up there."

HE HAD REACHED the bottom step. Holding the plates against him with one hand, he turned the doorknob with the other. Once through, he set the plates on a windowsill beside the door and waited for Mackey. Then he snapped off the light at the top of the stairs, closed and locked the door.

When Froman turned away from the door, Mackey was glancing at the three green file cases standing in the corner formed by the pyramidal pier supporting the telescope's weight and the wall which separated the dome section from the remainder of the observatory. Froman noticed the agent's curiosity, but said nothing to remove it.

He collected the plates from the windowsill and pushed through the heavy fire door beside the cabinets. Sullen, Mackey followed.

The corridor had windows on the left side, and two doors on the other. Farther along, just short of where the corridor broadened suddenly to the right, the window side was flanked by three tables, one of which bore a covered mimeograph machine.

Froman paused at the first door. "Just a minute while I drop these off," he said, and ducked inside the darkroom before Mackey could reply. He returned a moment later without the plates.

The second door was already open. Froman reached around the jamb and snapped on the light. It was one of the old type of wall

switches; not pushed or flipped, but twisted. He motioned Mackey in ahead of him. "My office," he said simply.

The office was deep, well lighted, indifferently furnished, and cluttered. The center was dominated by four long tables which served as desks. In a corner by one of the two windows was a typewriter on a low, wheeled cable. In the corner to the right of the door were two high, deep-shelved bookcases. In another corner was a cot, where Froman sometimes rested while waiting his turn at the telescope on the second half of a split night. A file cabinet stood at the foot of the cot, and beyond the cabinet an open doorway led into another, smaller room.

Mackey advanced into the room and glanced over the tables. They were piled with papers, old blue-books, scientific journals printed in a variety of languages, a few newspapers, and miscellaneous articles of equipment. The agent scowled at a booklet with Russian characters on its cover. He picked up a paperweight and weighed it idly in his hand. It was a sunburst of large quartz crystals, very shiny and striking under the light. In the corners where the crystals joined, he saw a few traces of dried clay. He looked at Froman questioningly.

"I found it on a field trip," the astronomer explained.

The security agent frowned. "But you're an astronomer. I don't get it."

"It's my hobby: geology."

"A hobby," the agent echoed. "Yes—it's in your record. Sort of odd for a star gazer, isn't it?"

"Not really. After all, the earth is one of the planets, and we can study it in more detail than any other. What's odd about that?"

"Nothing," the agent mumbled.

Froman pulled off his fur lined cap. "You can take your coat off. It's warm down here. Just leave it anywhere." He removed his own overcoat and laid it on the cot, stuffing the cap into one of the pockets.

Mackey folded his coat over the back of the chair and set his hat on top of it. Without being invited, he appropriated the swivel chair which faced a part of the table spread with a large green blotter of ancient vintage and backed by a row of reference texts. "How do you guys stand it?" he asked. "The cold, I mean."

Froman turned his head halfway toward him. "Pneumonia is an occupational disease."

"Really?"

Froman's grin showed teeth. "Do Eskimos catch cold?" he asked pointedly. "But if you think it was chilly up in the dome, you should have seen the North Atlantic during the war." He shivered in recollection.

The agent swung around and stared at the wall behind him, seeing for his trouble a reproduction of a painting by an artist with imagination and a way with oils that produced near-cameralike detail: a spaceship—hypothetical, of course—newly landed on the moon; men in outfits like diving suits working in the foreground; and a background of savagely rugged peaks just beginning to catch the first harsh rays of the rising sun.

Froman noticed Mackey's interest. "There's a story about that painting," he said. "Seems that once one of us astronomers saw a kodachrome of it, and he thought the government was doing more than it was telling with its rocket experiments."

Mackey's eyes snapped around and fixed on Froman. Then he grinned suddenly. "Heads in the clouds," he observed contemptuously. "Don't you star gazers ever look where you put your feet?"

"When I'm on vacation," Froman answered. He nodded toward the quartz paperweight. "But Aesop wisecracked about an astrologer who didn't, if that makes you any happier."

Mackey held his peace. He studied Froman's lean, narrow-nosed face and wide, squarish forehead through momentarily slitted eyes. He dug a cigarette pack from his pocket, offered it and was refused, took one himself and tapped it on his thumbnail before placing it between his lips. He lit the kitchen match by holding it in one hand and nicking the head with his thumbnail. He looked around for an ashtray, but there were none in evidence. Froman pushed a wastebasket toward him with his foot.

The security agent nodded acknowledgement. The security agent . . .

FROMAN remembered then why the man was here. For a time they had been almost friendly, but that time was behind them now. This man suspected him of something—his manner was almost an open accusation. It didn't particularly matter what the something was, but Froman felt an angry pang at the injustice of it. This man barging in in the middle of the night, acting secretive and hinting subtle threats. Froman planted himself stiffly in a straight backed chair.

"You said you wanted to talk with me," he said.

"We were hoping you'd be more cooperative."

"I'll cooperate," Froman told him. "But that doesn't mean I have to like it."

Mackey dropped a length of ash in the wastebasket. He didn't look at Froman. "All right. If that's the way you want it," he said, and clamped his lips together. When he parted them again, he said, "We're not accusing you of anything. We're certain you aren't doing anything deliberately. Understand that?"

Froman nodded, but he didn't say anything.

"I want you to tell me about your work," the agent said.

"I suppose you mean my research," Froman said. "But I have several projects in progress. Just which one is it?"

Mackey sat forward abruptly. "This moon business," he explained curtly. "What you've seen, what you think about it, who you've mentioned it to—everything. What got you started on it? Especially that." He sat back and cocked his ear.

Froman half-closed his eyes to collect his thoughts and assemble them in the proper order. "I got started on it . . . oh, six or eight months ago." He started to rise. "I could tell you exactly if I had my

notebook."

Mackey waved him down. "Maybe later. Get on with it."

Stiffly, Froman reseated himself. "About once a month, we have a visitor's night here. Anybody who wants to can come in and have a peek through the reflector. We show them some of the planets, depending on which ones are in the sky at the time; maybe point out something or other, and answer any questions we can make sense out of. That time, the moon was just at first quarter, and we decided to show the shadow effect of the craters on the moon when the sun's just starting to hit them—you know, the whole ring all white, and the inside black except where the sunlight's hitting the central peak."

"We don't care about the science," Mackey said.

Froman roused himself, about to say something angry. But he put the impulse aside. "We trained the telescope on the center of the disk —right where the sun was coming up and halfway between the poles. The seeing was pretty good, and we had an eyepiece making for a total magnification of 1500 times."

Mackey interrupted. "What's the maximum?"

"About two thousand, but it takes several miracles of good seeing to make it. Most of the time, things would just blur at that power. It's the atmosphere."

"All right. Go on."

Remembering, Froman smiled. "It was a kid—a little girl about ten or twelve. She'd probably never seen a telescope that big before, and she was pretty excited. You could tell, that way she stayed at the 'scope so long without moving. Then she looked up and wanted to know what the spark was. Well, I looked and after a while I saw what she meant—it was a spark of light inside one of the darkened craters. If it had been near the center, I would have said it was the central peak, but it was more than halfway to the western side, and it was really too bright to be that. A peak just getting the sun would be white, but this spark had something else —more like a magnesium flare, or the sun shining on something like a mirror. I didn't know what it was."

"What did you tell the kid?"

"Oh, some wild guess. I called it a guess though—I didn't make any bones about not knowing."

"What was the guess?" Mackey gave the impression of an almost wolflike eagerness to snap at any fact.

"A bit of volcanic glass," Froman admitted. "Some people claim the craters are volcanic, and I hung the theory on that. It's a terribly weak theory, though, on several counts. I didn't believe it myself, and I said so."

"Then it was this spark that got you interested," Mackey suggested.

"That's right. I've been investigating it ever since."

Mackey extinguished his cigarette butt against the rim of the wastebasket. When he looked up, his eyes were bearing directly on Froman. "What else have you seen?"

"Well, the next night I had a look, and most of the crater had sun on it and the spark was gone. But there was a black spot where it

had been."

"What did it look like?" Mackey pressed.

"Just a spot. It was too small to see any shape to it. It may have been slightly oval, but I wasn't sure then so I can't be now."

"That's all you've seen? Nothing else?"

"I'm not sure," Froman said. He pulled at his right ear lobe. "Once when I had very good seeing I thought maybe there was really more than one spark—that maybe it was two, possibly more—quite close together. With lower powers, they'd tend to merge together."

"What about the shadow?"

"I couldn't tell. That could be several shadows merging too. I haven't had a real chance to find out—for one thing, the reflector we have here isn't big enough, and the seeing isn't good enough to get more than a flyspeck. It's like trying to read Braille with leather gloves on."

"Anything else?"

"Yes. One other thing. One night I thought I saw part of the spark break away from the rest. It moved slowly toward the west—lunar west, that is. But I couldn't really be sure about that. The seeing was good that night, but the thing was so faint it could have been my imagination. It probably was, because it didn't stop with the crater wall—just kept on going and finally I lost it."

Mackey was thoughtful. He looked at the floor and said nothing for a while.

"Well?" Froman demanded.

"Trying to decide what to ask you next."

"Why ask anything?"

Mackey looked almost ready to hit him, but he quickly subsided. "What about this crater you're talking so much about? How much do you know?"

"I investigated it as soon as I was certain there really was something there. It's located right in the center of the moon's disk as we see it from earth. It's about ninety miles across, circular, and flat as a lake. No peak in the center—nothing unusual in that, though. The name's Ptolemaeus, if that means anything to you. I looked up some photographs from Mount Wilson and studied them—there wasn't any sign of any black spot, or any sparks either. Nor any record of anyone seeing them before."

"How do you explain what you saw, then?"

"I don't," Froman shrugged. "I saw the spark and the shadow—both of them. It's not the first time somebody's seen some change on the moon's surface; there are a few records, though most of them aren't very reliable, and none can really be checked completely. But I am convinced I'm seeing something. Just the fact that it was a kid who pointed it out shows I'm not imagining things."

"You don't have to get mad about it," Mackey said.

Froman shook his head. "I'm not mad," he protested.

"Then don't act like it. What about photographs? You've been taking some, haven't you?"

"Just a waste of plates," Froman commented.

"They didn't show anything, then." The man was persistent.

"I have a couple of plates which might show something, but it's hard to be sure. It doesn't take much to fudge a plate—a change in the seeing, errors in tracking, the grain and sensitivity of the plate. Everything's against getting anything, really."

"You can see things, but you can't photo them. That right?"

"That's about it. If we had a big enough telescope here, I might be able to do something. But—" he shrugged—"we don't."

Mackey muttered something not particularly sympathetic. "And just what do you think about these things you've been seeing—how would you explain them?"

"I don't know what it is," Froman confessed. He wondered what the man was driving at. Why all the questions? Why should Military Security be so interested? "All I know," he went on, "is that it's something new. It wasn't there until quite recently. It's high enough and large enough to cast a shadow I can see with the 37-inch, and it reflects sunlight like a mirror when the angle is right. How it got there, or just what it is, I wouldn't know —but it's there."

MACKEY PLACED his fingertips together and glanced upward at the cracked ceiling. His eyes had heavy lids. "Have you told anyone about this yet?" He sounded studiedly casual.

"Of course," Froman told him, surprised. Why should he keep it a secret? "Jameson was with me the first night, and he saw the spark too—and so did most of the visitors. At least they said they did. Half of them would see a little man with a green beard if you told them he was there."

"Anyone else?"

Froman's eyebrows inched toward one another. What was this man after? "I notified Harvard," he went on. He didn't like being prodded this way. "But nothing came of it. Don't ask me why. Maybe they decided it wasn't important. And I've mentioned it to most of the men in the department. And last week I wrote to a man I know out in California—at Mount Wilson—and asked him to take a look. I haven't heard anything from him yet."

"Anyone else?" Mackey asked again, after a silence.

"No. I think that's all."

Mackey regarded the ceiling again, as if there was something important written there. "Now suppose you just abandoned the project—just suppose. What would they think?"

Froman tugged at his lower lip. "Nothing much, I guess. They know we haven't a big enough telescope for this kind of work. I've seen about all I could hope to see. In fact, they might think it was odd if I kept up." He stopped abruptly, and his tone became hard. "Are you asking me to drop the project?"

"Isn't that obvious?" Mackey said. He regarded his fingernails.

Froman brought his hand down flat on the table beside him as he pushed himself up out of his chair. The jar caused a stack of papers to collapse sidewise, and the paperweight rolled noisily over the

stained and varnished wood. It was a stone polished to a glistening finish—a stone with fossilized plants in it.

"Why?" he demanded. He stood, one hand gripping the table edge.

"Because we want you to," Mackey said, as if that was the most authoritative reason in the world. "Because we tell you to. And we don't want you telling anyone about what you already know: what you've seen and my coming here, both. This spark and shadow. They don't exist. Understand me? They don't exist."

"They do," Froman insisted. "I saw them, and so did Jameson."

"Military Security says they don't exist," Mackey told him with austere finality. "*Now* do you understand?"

"I understand that you're butting into something that's none of your affair," Froman told him. He could be just as forceful as the agent. The insides of his fists were beginning to sweat, and his face was burning. "I *think* this is still a free country," he said. "The government has no business telling people what they can and can't see, and there are no lies in astronomy—you can prove the truth just by looking through a telescope. Anybody can look through a telescope. It was a kid who saw the thing first, not me."

The agent abandoned his toughness. "Mr. Froman," he said, trying to calm him. "This is a matter of war and peace. What you've seen has got to be kept secret."

"You can't keep secrets in astronomy," Froman snapped. "All you have to do is look up and see what's there. You can't keep that a secret. It's the same moon over Russia, don't forget."

Cooling slightly, he continued. "I can see some point in keeping secrets in physics, and chemistry—even biology. They're all concerned with things here on Earth, and you people can use them for weapons. But astronomy is different. What effect could anything in astronomy have on war and peace? What are you? An astrologer?"

"I'm a security agent, and I can't answer your questions. The less you know, the better. You can't repeat what you don't know. We want you to keep this moon business secret. Understand? All of it. You never saw that spark, or the shadow—or *me*. That's all you have to know. Understand?"

"They have telescopes in Russia, and they can look at the moon too. You can't keep anything a secret in astronomy. Anyone can take a look. You're being silly."

"They have atoms in Russia, too," Mackey pointed out. "And just because they can take a look at the moon if they want doesn't mean we have to tell them where to look and what to see. Sit down and think a while. It's not as silly as you think. And it *is* a matter of war and peace; that's why you've got to keep your mouth shut."

"Why should I? I don't like being told to do something without being told the reasons. Just because it's the government giving the orders doesn't make them any more reasonable. I want to know why."

"I've already told you. This is no game."

"And just what on the moon," Froman asked acidly, "could be as

important as all that?"

Mackey seemed about to say something out of irritation. But he caught himself long before he found the words. He was leaning back in the chair, his chin almost touching his chest, his eyes like twin drills boring into Froman.

In that moment, things fell into place in Froman's mind. Everything *did* make sense. Very startling sense.

LIKE MOST everyone else, he'd seen the abundant articles in newspapers and magazines and Sunday supplements, speculating on the immense strategic value of a military base on the moon—a base which could bombard any place on Earth, and yet, because of the Earth's more powerful gravitation, be nearly invulnerable to an Earth-staged attack. As an astronomer, he had taken perhaps a somewhat more than ordinary interest in the speculations. But he had never thought . . . It had never occurred to him that . . .

Froman's glance drifted toward the painting on the wall. The spaceship, a bit of sunlight high up on its tapering prow: a spark. And the lunar mountains in the background. It was almost like a photograph, it seemed so real. For an instant, he imagined that the spacesuited figures actually moved; that the picture was no picture, but real.

Of course it was a painting—there was even a signature down in the lower right hand corner—but . . .

"How much . . ." he asked slowly, "how much have they been doing in New Mexico that we haven't been told about?"

The security agent let his breath out slowly. "We were afraid you'd figure it out," he said, "just from my coming here. But we couldn't take the chance of letting you tell anybody about what you'd seen. They might catch on faster."

"I don't jump to conclusions," Froman told him.

"You're not to tell anybody about this. That base has to be kept secret. Understand?"

Froman frowned. "I don't see why."

"That's the policy we've decided on. It's got to be kept secret." Mackey sat forward, his hand grasping the table edge between thumb and palm. His other hand pointed. "We're warning you, Mr. Froman. If you let anything out and we catch you, there are plenty of laws we could get you with."

"I didn't ask you to come here," Froman said with offense. He disliked being threatened. "I didn't ask to be told anything. I'd never have guessed if you hadn't come here. I've learned more from you than from all eight months with the telescope. If you hadn't come, I'd have just shrugged my shoulders and forgotten it. It's not the first time somebody's seen something on the moon he couldn't understand—we're still not even certain what caused the craters. Even if I'd had a report of it published, nobody would have noticed. But you had to come and answer all the questions I couldn't find the answers to. That doesn't speak so well for your security methods."

"Never mind that. The point is,

you're going to keep your mouth shut."

"Not until I have a good reason," Froman answered stubbornly. Without his realizing it, his hand closed around the polished fossil-stone paperweight. "You don't seem to grasp the fact that science and secrecy don't fit together too well. We're working for truth and knowledge. Secrecy is just the opposite. And we scientists aren't accustomed to keeping secrets from one another." He jerked a hand toward a stack of foreign language journals. "It's you security hounds who've tried to change that."

"This isn't science," Mackey answered. "It's a military affair, and it's got to be kept secret. Science hasn't anything to do with it."

"You still haven't given any reasons. I'm not a puppet for you to order around. If I'm supposed to do something, I've got to know why—and then I'll decide for myself whether I'll do it or not."

"We had hoped you'd be more cooperative." Mackey was trying to be persuasive now, but lacked the proper tact.

"Cooperation works both ways," Froman reminded him. "If you'll cooperate with me, then perhaps I'll cooperate with you. But not until then."

"The trouble with you astronomers is that you look at the sky too much. There're still such things as governments around, and nations —especially one called Russia. And there's something else called espionage laws. If you don't cooperate, you can't say we didn't warn you."

"You're a bit late, aren't you? What about Harvard, and the man at Mount Wilson?"

"Forget about them. They're taken care of. Long ago. How do you think we found out about you? What we want to know now is if you'll cooperate."

"I haven't much choice, have I?" Froman said bitterly.

"Listen. We'd rather keep it a secret than jail you for talking. Get that? And we don't know whether we can trust you or not. There. I'm putting it to you straight. What's your answer?"

Froman leaned his weight against the table. He thought a moment. "Just how important is this? I mean, do you have any good reason for keeping this base a secret? Or are you people just in love with the idea of secrecy for its own sake?"

"I told you. It's war and peace."

"Maybe I'm just dense or tired or something," Froman said in mock apology. "But that still doesn't mean anything to me. I should think that if the Kremlin found out about the base, we'd have a much easier time of things. A moon base is too much of a strategic advantage. Why keep it a secret?"

Mackey snorted disgustedly. "You'd better stick to star gazing. You may know something about that. Listen. If they found out about it, they'd take a gamble. They'd know they were beaten anyway—their only chance would be if the base weren't ready yet. They'd take a chance on it. The day after the Kremlin hears we've got a base on the moon will be the day the next war starts."

"*Is* it ready?"

"We could use it if we had to," Mackey said. "But we'd rather not for a while yet. We'd like to have it self-sufficient—mining its own ores and making its own machinery and bombs, generating its own power, and growing all its own food. So it could keep on fighting even if it was cut off. Right now, it has to be supplied from our New Mexico base. Don't think *that* base couldn't be wrecked if the Commies wanted to bad enough."

He caught his breath suddenly. "Maybe I'm telling you too much," he hurried on. "But you see why it's got to be kept quiet. You don't want to be responsible for another war, do you?"

"No," Froman said tonelessly. He studied the outlines of the fossils in the paperweight he held. His thumb rubbed at the smooth surface. He tilted the stone in the light.

Mackey watched him. Finally, he said, "You were in the Navy in the last war, weren't you."

"You seem to know," Froman said. He wasn't at all interested.

"And now you're in the Reserve, I suppose."

"You practically have to be, if you were an officer. Why?"

"Just checking. We'd feel a lot better if we had you under security regulations."

"What do you mean by that?"

Mackey shrugged. "Nothing. Just thinking out loud. Forget it." He stood up and pulled on his coat. "I'll be leaving now. It's pretty late." He favored the quartz paperweight with a quick glance. Under the lights, it was almost diamond-like. He turned from it and moved past Froman, who hadn't moved, the fossil-stone still cradled in unconscious hands.

At the door, Mackey paused, turned back. Froman still hadn't moved.

"Remember. Don't tell anyone. Understand?"

TWO WEEKS later, Lieutenant Charles Froman, U.S.N.R., was informed of his recall to active service.

They wanted to make the moon base self-sufficient. That meant mining ores on the moon. The ores had to be located first. Besides being an astronomer, Charles Froman was a geologist, and he knew his minerals.

Once the novelty wore off, it was just prolonged monotony. There wasn't much to occupy his time except his work—wandering over sun-bleached, dessicated, airless terrain in an outfit which combined the dubious virtues of a Turkish bath and a claustrophobe's private brand of hell. And, except for that, nothing. Nothing but collecting pay (extra for special duty) he couldn't spend and counting up the furlough time he had due him but couldn't take because there was nowhere to go.

And they didn't care if he talked to anyone about the moon base or not. The only people he could tell already knew. They were there, weren't they?

THE END

The women had made up their minds, and nothing—repeat, nothing—could change them. But something *had to give . . .*

WHERE THERE'S HOPE

By Jerome Bixby

Illustrated by Kelly Freas

"IF YOU called me here to tell me to have a child," Mary Pornsen said, "you can just forget about it. We girls have made up our minds."

Hugh Farrel, Chief Medical Officer of the Exodus VII, sighed and leaned back in his chair. He looked at Mary's husband. "And you, Ralph," he said. "How do you feel?"

Ralph Pornsen looked at Mary uncomfortably, started to speak and then hesitated.

Hugh Farrel sighed again and closed his eyes. It was that way with all the boys. The wives had the whip hand. If the husbands put up an argument, they'd simply get turned down flat: no sex at all, children or otherwise. The threat, Farrel thought wryly, made the boys softer than watered putty. His own wife, Alice, was one of the ringleaders of the "no babies" movement, and since he had openly declared warfare on the idea, she wouldn't even let him kiss her good-night. (For fear of losing her determination, Farrel liked to think.)

He opened his eyes again to look past the Pornsens, out of the curving port of his office-lab in the Exodus VII's flank, at the scene outside the ship.

At the edge of the clearing he could see Danny Stern and his crew, tiny beneath the cavernous sunbeam-shot overhang of giant leaves. Danny was standing up at the controls of the 'dozer, waving his arms. His crew was struggling to get a log set so he could shove it into place with the 'dozer. They were repairing a break in the barricade—the place where one of New Earth's giant saurians had come stamping and whistling through last night to kill three colonists before it could be blasted out of existence.

It was difficult. Damned difficult. A brand-new world here, all ready

to receive the refugees from dying Earth. Or rather, all ready to be *made* ready, which was the task ahead of the Exodus VII's personnel.

An Earth-like world. Green, warm, fertile—and crawling, leaping, hooting and snarling with ferocious beasts of every variety. Farrel could certainly see the women's point in banding together and refusing to produce children. Something inside a woman keeps her from wanting to bring life into peril—at least, when the peril seems temporary, and security is both remembered and anticipated.

Pornsen said, "I guess I feel just about like Mary does. I—I don't see any reason for having a kid until we get this place ironed out and safe to live in."

"That's going to take time, Ralph." Farrel clasped his hands in front of him and delivered the speech he had delivered so often in the past few weeks. "Ten or twelve years before we really get set up here. We've got to build from the ground up, you know. We'll have to find and mine our metals. Build our machines to build shops to build more machines. There'll be resources that we *won't* find, and we'll have to learn what this planet has to offer in their stead. Colonizing New Earth isn't simply a matter of landing and throwing together a shining city. I only wish it were.

"Six weeks ago we landed. We haven't yet dared to venture more than a mile from this spot. We've cut down trees and built the barricade and our houses. After protecting ourselves we have to eat. We've planted gardens. We've produced test-tube calves and piglets. The calves are doing fine, but the piglets are dying one by one. We've got to find out why.

"It's going to be a long, long time before we have even a minimum of security, much less luxury. Longer than you think. . . So much longer that waiting until the security arrives before having children is out of the question. There are critters out there—" he nodded toward the port and the busy clearing beyond— "that we haven't been able to kill. We've thrown everything we have at them, and they come back for more. We'll have to find out what *will* kill them —how they differ from those we *are* able to kill. We are six hundred people and a spaceship, Ralph. We have techniques. That's *all*. Everything else we've got to dig up out of this planet. We'll need people, Mary; we'll need the children. We're counting on them. They're vital to the plans we've made."

Mary Pornsen said, "Damn the plans. I won't have one. Not now. You've just done a nice job of describing all my reasons. And all the other girls feel the same way."

SHE LOOKED out the window at the 'dozer and crew. Danny Stern was still waving his arms; the log was almost in place. "George and May Wright were killed last night. So was Farelli. If George and May had had a child, the monster would have trampled it too—it went right through their cabin like cardboard. It isn't fair to bring a baby into—"

Farrel said, "Fair, Mary? Maybe it isn't fair *not* to have one. *Not* to bring it into being and give it a chance. Life's always a gamble—"

"*It* doesn't exist," Mary said. She smiled. "Don't try circumlocution on me, Doc. I'm not religious. I don't believe that spermatazoa and an ovum, if not allowed to cuddle up together, add up to murder."

"That isn't what I meant—"

"You were getting around to it—which means you've run out of good arguments."

"No. I've a few left." Farrel looked at the two stubborn faces: Mary's, pleasant and pretty, but set as steel; Ralph's, uncomfortable, thoughtful, but mirroring his definite willingness to follow his wife's lead.

Farrel cleared his throat. "You know how important it is that this colony be established? You know that, don't you? In twenty years or so the ships will start arriving. Hundreds of them. Because we sent a message back to Earth saying we'd found a habitable planet. Thousands of people from Earth, coming here to the new world we're supposed to get busy and carve out for them. We were selected for that task—first of judging the right planet, then of working it over. Engineers, chemists, agronomists, all of us—we're the task force. We've got to do the job. We've got to test, plant, breed, rebalance, create. There'll be a lot of trial and error. We've got to work out a way of life, so the thousands who will follow can be introduced safely and painlessly into the—well, into the organism. And we'll need new blood for the jobs ahead. We'll need young people—"

Mary said, "A few years one way or the other won't matter much, Doc. Five or six years from now this place will be a lot safer. Then we women will start producing. But not now."

"It won't work that way," Farrel said. "We're none of us kids any longer. I'm fifty-five. Ralph, you're forty-three. I realize that I must be getting old to think of you as young. Mary, you're thirty-seven. We took a long time getting here. Fourteen years. We left an Earth that's dying of radioactive poisoning, and we all got a mild dose of that. The radiation we absorbed in space, little as it was, didn't help any. And that sun up there—" again he nodded at the port—"isn't any help either. Periodically it throws off some pretty damned funny stuff.

"Frankly, we're worried. We don't know whether or not we *can* have children. Or *normal* children. We've got to find out. If our genes have been bollixed up, we've got to find out why and how and get to work on it immediately. It may be unpleasant. It may be heartbreaking. But those who will come here in twenty years will have absorbed much more of Earth's radioactivity than we did, and an equal amount of the space stuff, and this sun will be waiting for them. . . . We'll have to know what we can do for them."

"I'm not a walking laboratory, Doc," Mary said.

"I'm afraid you are, Mary. All of you are."

Mary set her lips and stared out the port.

"It's got to be done, Mary."

She didn't answer.

"It's going to be done."

"Choose someone else," she said. "That's what they all say."

She said, "I guess this is one thing you doctors and psychologists didn't figure on, Doc."

"Not at first," Farrel said. "But we've given it some thought."

MacGuire had installed the button convenient to Farrel's right hand, just below the level of the desk-top. Farrel pressed it. Ralph and Mary Pornsen slumped in their chairs. The door opened, and Doctor John J. MacGuire and Ted Harris, the Exodus VII's chief psychologist, came in.

WHEN it was over, and the after-play had been allowed to run its course, Farrel told the Pornsens to go into the next room and shower. They came back soon, looking refreshed. Farrel ordered them to get back into their clothes. Under the power of the hypnotic drug which their chairs had injected into them at the touch of the button, they did so. Then he told them to sit down in the chairs again.

MacGuire and Harris had gathered up their equipment, piling it on top of the operating table.

MacGuire smiled. "I'll bet that's the best-monitored, most hygienic sex act ever committed. I think I've about got the space radiations effect licked."

Farrel nodded. "If anything goes wrong, it certainly won't be our fault. But let's face it—the chances are a thousand to one that something *will* go wrong. We'll just have to wait. And work." He looked at the Pornsens. "They're very much in love, aren't they? And she was receptive to the suggestion—beneath it all, she was burning to have a child, just like the others."

MacGuire wheeled out the operating table, with its load of serums, pressure-hypos and jury-rigged thingamabobs which he was testing on alternate couples. Ted Harris stopped at the door a moment. He said, "I think the suggestions I planted will turn the trick when they find out she's pregnant. They'll come through okay—won't even be too angry."

Farrel sighed. They'd been over it in detail several times, of course, but apparently Harris needed the reassurance as much as he did. He said: "Sure. Now scram so I can go back into my act."

Harris closed the door. Farrel sat down at his desk and studied the pair before him. They looked back contentedly, holding hands, their eyes dull.

Farrel said, "How do you feel?"

Ralph Pornsen said, "I feel fine."

Mary Pornsen said, "Oh, I feel *wonderful!*"

Deliberately Farrel pressed another button below his desk-top.

The dull eyes cleared instantly.

"Oh, you've given it some thought, Doc?" Mary said sweetly. "And what have you decided?"

"You'll see," Farrel said. "Eventually."

He rose. "That's all for now, kids. I'd like to see you again in

one month—for a routine check-up."

Mary nodded and got up. "You'll still have to wait, Doc. Why not admit you're licked?"

Ralph got up too, and looked puzzled.

"Wow," he said. "I'm tired."

"Perhaps just coming here," Farrel said, "discharged some of the tension you've been carrying around."

The Pornsens left.

Farrel brought out some papers from his desk and studied them. Then, from the file drawer, he selected the record of Hugh and Alice Farrel. Alice would be at the perfect time of her menstrual cycle tomorrow. . . .

Farrel flipped his communicator.

"MacGuire," he said. "Tomorrow it's me."

MacGuire chuckled. Farrel could have kicked him. He put his chin in his hands and stared out the port. Danny Stern had the log in place in the barricade. The bulldozer was moving on to a new task. His momentary doubt stilled, Farrel went back to work.

TWENTY-ONE years later, when the ships from Earth began arriving, the log had been replaced by a stone monument erected to the memory of the Exodus VII, which had been cut apart for its valuable steel. Around the monument was a park, and on three sides of the park was a shining town—not really large enough to be called a city—of plastic and stone, for New Earth had no iron ore, only zinc and a little copper. This was often cause for regret.

Still it was a pretty good world. The monster problem had been licked by high-voltage cannon. Now in their third generation since the landing, the monsters kept their distance. And things grew—things good to eat.

And even without steel, the graceful, smoothly - functioning town looked impressive—quite a thing to have been built by a handful of beings with two arms and two legs each.

It hadn't been, entirely. But nobody thought much about that any more. Even the newcomers got used to it. Things change.

THE END

The world of the new race was peaceful, comfortable, lovely —and completely static. Only Eric knew the haunting loneliness that had carried the old race to the stars, and he couldn't communicate it, even if he had dared to!

HOMO INFERIOR

By Mari Wolf

Illustrated by Rudolph Palais

THE STARSHIP waited. Cylindrical walls enclosed it, and a transparent plastic dome held it back from the sky and the stars. It waited, while night changed to day and back again, while the seasons merged one into another, and the years, and the centuries. It towered as gleaming and as uncorroded as it had when it was first built, long ago, when men had bustled about it and in it, their shouting and their laughter and the sound of their tools ringing against the metallic plates.

Now few men ever came to it. And those who did come merely looked with quiet faces for a few minutes, and then went away again.

The generations kaleidoscoped by. The Starship waited.

ERIC MET the other children when he was four years old. They were out in the country, and he'd slipped away from his parents and started wading along the edge of a tiny stream, kicking at the water spiders.

His feet were soaked, and his knees were streaked with mud where he'd knelt down to play. His father wouldn't like it later, but right now it didn't matter. It was fun to be off by himself, splashing along the stream, feeling the sun hot on his back and the water icy against his feet.

A water spider scooted past him, heading for the tangled moss along the bank. He bent down, scooped his hand through the water to catch it. For a moment he had it,

then it slipped over his fingers and darted away, out of his reach.

As he stood up, disappointed, he saw them: two boys and a girl, not much older than he. They were standing at the edge of the trees, watching him.

He'd seen children before, but he'd never met any of them. His parents kept him away from them—and from all strangers. He stood still, watching them, waiting for them to say something. He felt excited and uncomfortable at the same time.

They didn't say anything. They just watched him, very intently.

He felt even more uncomfortable.

The bigger boy laughed. He pointed at Eric and laughed again and looked over at his companions. They shook their heads.

Eric waded up out of the water. He didn't know whether to go over to them or run away, back to his mother. He didn't understand the way they were looking at him.

"Hello," he said.

The big boy laughed again. "See?" he said, pointing at Eric. "He can't."

"Can't what?" Eric said.

The three looked at him, not saying anything. Then they all burst out laughing. They pointed at him, jumped up and down and clapped their hands together.

"What's funny?" Eric said, backing away from them, wishing his mother would come, and yet afraid to turn around and run.

"You," the girl said. "You're funny. Funny, funny, funny! You're stu-pid."

The others took it up. "Stu-pid, stu-pid. You can't talk to us, you're too stu-pid . . ."

They skipped down the bank toward him, laughing and calling. They jumped up and down and pointed at him, crowded closer and closer.

"Silly, silly. Can't talk. Silly, silly. Can't talk . . ."

Eric backed away from them. He tried to run, but he couldn't. His knees shook too much. He could hardly move his legs at all. He began to cry.

They crowded still closer around him. "Stu-pid." Their laughter was terrible. He couldn't get away from them. He cried louder.

"Eric!" His mother's voice. He twisted around, saw her coming, running toward him along the bank.

"Mama!" He could move again. He stumbled toward her.

"He wants his mama," the big boy said. "Funny baby."

His mother was looking past him, at the other children. They stopped laughing abruptly. They looked back at her for a moment, scuffing their feet in the dirt and not saying anything. Suddenly the big boy turned and ran, up over the bank and out of sight. The other boy followed him.

The girl started to run, and then she looked at Eric's mother again and stopped. She looked back at Eric. "I'm sorry," she said sulkily, and then she turned and fled after the others.

Eric's mother picked him up. "It's all right," she said. "Mother's here. It's all right."

He clung to her, clutching her convulsively, his whole body shaking. "Why, Mama? Why?"

"You're all right, dear."

She was warm and her arms were tight around him. He was home again, and safe. He relaxed, slowly.

"Don't leave me, Mama."

"I won't, dear."

She crooned to him, softly, and he relaxed still more. His head drooped on her shoulder and after a while he fell asleep.

But it wasn't the same as it had been. It wouldn't ever be quite the same again. He knew he was different now.

THAT NIGHT Eric lay asleep. He was curled on his side, one chubby hand under his cheek, the other still holding his favorite animal, the wooly lamb his mother had given him for his birthday. He stirred in his sleep, threshing restlessly, and whimpered.

His mother's face lifted mutely to her husband's.

"Myron, the things those children said. It must have been terrible for him. I'm glad at least that he couldn't perceive what they were thinking."

Myron sighed. He put his arm about her shoulders and drew her close against him. "Don't torture yourself, Gwin. You can't make it easier for him. There's no way."

"But we'll have to tell him something."

He stroked her hair. The four years of their shared sorrow lay heavily between them as he looked down over her head at his son.

"Poor devil. Let him keep his childhood while he can, Gwin. He'll know he's all alone soon enough."

She nodded, burying her face against his chest. "I know . . ."

Eric whimpered again, and his hands clenched into fists and came up to protect his face.

Instinctively Gwin reached out to him, and then she drew back. She couldn't reach his emotions. There was no perception. There was no way she could enter his dreams and rearrange them and comfort him.

"Poor devil," his father said again. "He's got his whole life to be lonely in."

THE SUMMER passed, and another winter and another summer. Eric spent more and more time by himself. He liked to sit on the glassed-in sunporch, bouncing his ball up and down and talking to it, aloud, pretending that it answered him back. He liked to lie on his stomach close to the wall and look out at the garden with its riotous mass of flowers and the insects that flew among them. Some flew quickly, their wings moving so fast that they were just blurs. Others flew slowly, swooping on outspread bright-colored wings from petal to petal. He liked these slow-flying ones the best. He could wiggle his shoulder blades in time with their wings and pretend that he was flying too.

Sometimes other children came by on the outside of the wall. He could look out at them without worrying, because they couldn't see him. The wall wasn't transparent from the outside. He liked it when three or four of them came by together, laughing and chasing each other through the garden. Usually, though, they didn't stay long. After

they had played a few minutes his father or his mother went out and looked at them, and then they went away.

Eric was playing by himself when the old man came out to the sunporch doorway and stood there, saying nothing, making no effort to interrupt or to speak. He was so quiet that after a while Eric almost didn't mind his being there.

The old man turned back to Myron and Gwin.

"Of course the boy can learn. He's not stupid."

Eric bounced the ball, flung it against the transparent glass, caught it, bounced it again.

"But how, Walden?" Gwin shook her head. "You offer to teach him, but—"

Walden smiled. "Remember these?"

. . . Walden's study. The familiar curtains drawn aside, and the shelves behind them. The rows of bright-backed, box-like objects, most of them old and spotted, quite unhygienic . . .

Gwin shook her head at the perception, but Myron nodded.

"Books. I didn't know there were any outside the museums."

Walden smiled again. "Only mine. Books are fascinating things. All the knowledge of a race, gathered together on a few shelves . . ."

"Knowledge?" Myron shrugged. "Imagine storing knowledge in those—boxes. What are they? What's in them? Just words . . ."

The books faded as Walden sighed. "You'd be surprised what the old race did, with just those—boxes."

He looked across at Eric, who was now bouncing his ball and counting, out loud, up to three, and then going back and starting again.

"The boy can learn what's in those books. Just as if he'd gone to school back in the old times."

Myron and Gwin looked doubtfully at each other, and then over at the corner where Eric played unheeding. Perhaps Walden could help. Perhaps . . .

"Eric," Gwin said aloud.

"Yes, mother?"

"We've decided you're going to go to school, the way you want to. Mr. Walden here is going to be your teacher. Isn't that nice?"

Eric looked at her and then at the old man. Strangers didn't often come out on the sunporch. Strangers usually left him alone.

He bounced the ball again without answering.

"Say something, Eric," his mother commanded.

Eric looked back at Walden. "He can't teach me to be like other children, can he?"

"No," Walden said. "I can't."

"Then I don't want to go to school." Eric threw the ball across the room as hard as he could.

"But there once were other people like *you*," Walden said. "Lots of them. And you can learn about them, if you want to."

"Other people like me? Where?"

Myron and Gwin looked helplessly at each other and at the old man. Gwin began to cry and Myron cursed softly, on the perception level so that Eric wouldn't hear them.

But Walden's face was gentle and understanding as he answered, so

understanding that Eric couldn't help wanting desperately to believe him.

"Everyone was like you once," Walden said. "A long time ago."

IT WAS a new life for Eric. Every day he would go over to Walden's and the two of them would pull back the curtains in the study and Walden would lift down some of the books. It was as if Walden was giving him the past, all of it, as fast as he could grasp it.

"I'm really like the old race, Walden?"

"Yes, Eric. You'll see just how much like them . . ."

Identity. Here in the past, in the books he was learning to read, in the pictures, the pages and pages of scenes and portraits. Strange scenes, far removed from the gardens and the quiet houses and the wordless smile of friend to friend.

Great buildings and small. The Parthenon in the moonlight, not too many pages beyond the cave, with its smoky fire and first crude wall drawings. Cities bright with a million neon lights, and still later, caves again—the underground stations of the Moon colonies. All unreal, and yet—

They were his people, these men in the pictures. Strange men, violent men: the barbarian trampling his enemy to death beneath his horse's hooves, the knight in armor marching to the Crusade, the spaceman. And the quieter men: the farmer, the artisan, the poet—they too were his people, and far easier to understand than the others.

The skill of reading mastered, and the long, sweeping vistas of the past. Their histories. Their wars. "Why did they fight, Walden?" And Walden's sigh. "I don't know, Eric, but they did."

So much to learn. So much to understand. Their art and music and literature and religion. Patterns of life that ebbed and flowed and ebbed again, but never in quite the same way. "Why did they change so much, Walden?" And the answer, "You probably know that better than I, Eric . . ."

Perhaps he did. For he went on to the books that Walden ignored. Their mathematics, their science. The apple's fall, and the orbits of planets. The sudden spiral of analysis, theory, technology. The machines—steamships, airplanes, spaceships . . .

And the searching loneliness that carried the old race from the caves of Earth to the stars. The searching, common to the violent man and the quiet man, to the doer and the dreaming poet.

Why do we hunger, who own the Moon and trample the shifting dust of Mars?
Why aren't we content with the worlds we've won? Why don't we rest, with the system ours?
We have cast off the planets like outgrown toys, and now we want the stars . . .

"Have you ever been to the stars, Walden?"

Walden stared at him. Then he laughed. "Of course not, Eric. Nobody goes there now. None of our race has ever gone. Why should we?"

There was no explaining. Walden had never been lonely.

And then one day, while he was reading some fiction from the middle period of the race, Eric found the fantasy. Speculation about the future, about their future . . . About the new race!

He read on, his heart pounding, until the same old pattern came clear. They had foreseen conflict, struggle between old race and new, suspicion and hatred and tragedy. The happy ending was superficial. Everyone was motivated as they had been motivated.

He shut the book and sat there, wanting to reach back across the years to the old race writers who had been so right and yet so terribly, blindly wrong. The writers who had seen in the new only a continuation of the old, of themselves, of their own fears and their own hungers.

"Why did they die, Walden?" He didn't expect an answer.

"Why does any race die, Eric?"

His own people, forever removed from him, linked to him only through the books, the pictures, and his own backward-reaching emotions.

"Walden, hasn't there *ever* been anyone else like me, since they died?"

Silence. Then, slowly, Walden nodded.

"I wondered how long it would be before you asked that. Yes, there have been others. Sometimes three or four in a generation."

"Then, perhaps . . ."

"No," Walden said. "There aren't any others now. We'd know it if there were." He turned away from Eric, to the plastic wall that looked out across the garden and the children playing and the long, level, flower-carpeted plain.

"Sometimes, when there's more than one of them, they go out there away from us, out to the hills where it's wild. But they're found, of course. Found, and brought back." He sighed. "The last of them died when I was a boy."

Others like him. Within Walden's lifetime, others, cut off from their own race, lonely and rootless in the midst of the new. Others like him, but not now, in his lifetime. For him there were only the books.

The old race was gone, gone with all its conflicts, all its violence, its stupidity—and its flaming rockets in the void and its Parthenon in the moonlight.

ERIC CAME into the study and stopped. The room was filled with strangers. There were half a dozen men besides Walden, most of them fairly old, white-haired and studious looking. They all turned to look at him, watched him gravely without speaking.

"Well, there he is." Walden looked from face to face. "Are you still worried? Do you still think that one small boy constitutes a threat to the race? What about you, Abbot?"

"I don't know. I still think he should have been institutionalized in the beginning."

"Why? So you could study the brain processes of the lower animals?" Walden's thoughts were as sarcastic as he could send them.

"No, of course not. But don't you

see what you've done, by teaching him to read? You've started him thinking of the old race. Don't deny it."

"I don't."

The thin man, Drew, broke in angrily. "He's not full grown yet. Just fourteen, isn't he? How can you be sure what he'll be like later? He'll be a problem. They've always been problems."

They were afraid. That was what was the matter with them. Walden sighed. "Tell them what you've been studying, Eric," he said aloud.

For a minute Eric was too tongue-tied to answer. He stood motionless, waiting for them to laugh at him.

"Go on. Tell them."

"I've been reading about the old race," Eric said. "All about the stars. About the people who went off in the starships and explored our whole galaxy."

"What's a galaxy?" the thin man said. Walden could perceive that he really didn't know.

Eric's fear lessened. These men weren't laughing at him. They weren't being just polite, either. They were interested. He smiled at them, shyly, and told them about the books and the wonderful, strange tales of the past that the books told. The men listened, nodding from time to time. But he knew that they didn't understand. The world of the books was his alone . . .

"Well?" Walden looked at the others. They looked back. Their emotions were a welter of doubt, of indecision.

"You've heard the boy," Walden said quietly, thrusting his own uneasiness down, out of his thoughts.

"Yes." Abbot hesitated. "He seems bright enough—quite different from what I'd expected. At least he's not like the ones who grew up wild in the hills. This boy isn't a savage."

Walden shrugged. "Maybe they weren't savages either," he suggested. "After all, it's been fifty years since the last of them died. And a lot of legends can spring up in fifty years."

"Perhaps we have been worrying unnecessarily." Abbot got up to go, but his eyes still held Walden's. "But," he added, "it's up to you to watch him. If he reverts, becomes dangerous in any way, he'll have to be locked up. That's final."

The others nodded.

"I'll watch him," Walden told them. "Just stop worrying."

He stood at the door and waited until they were out of sight. Then and only then did he allow himself to sigh and taste the fear he'd kept hidden. The old men, the men with authority, were the dangerous ones.

Walden snorted. Even with perception, men could be fools.

THE SUMMER that Eric was sixteen Walden took him to the museum. The aircar made the trip in just a few hours—but it was farther than Eric had ever traveled in his life, and farther than most people ever bothered traveling.

The museum lay on an open plain where there weren't many houses. At first glance it was far from impressive. Just a few big buildings, housing the artifacts, and a few old ruins of ancient construc-

tions, leveled now and half buried in the sands.

"It's nothing." Eric looked down at it, disappointed. "Nothing at all."

"What did you expect?" Walden set the aircar down between the two largest buildings. "You knew it wouldn't be like the pictures in the books. You knew that none of the old race's cities are left."

"I know," Eric said. "But I expected more than this."

He got out of the car and followed Walden around to the door of the first building. Another man, almost as old as Walden, came toward them smiling. The two men shook hands and stood happily perceiving each other.

"This is Eric," Walden said aloud. "Eric, this is Prior, the caretaker here. He was one of my schoolmates."

"It's been years since we've perceived short range," Prior said. "Years. But I suppose the boy wants to look around inside?"

Eric nodded, although he didn't care too much. He was too disappointed to care. There was nothing here that he hadn't seen a hundred times before.

They went inside, past some scale models of the old cities. The same models, though a bit bigger, that Eric had seen in the three-dimensional view-books. Then they went into another room, lined with thousands of books, some very old, many the tiny microfilmed ones from the middle periods of the old race.

"How do you like it, Eric?" the caretaker said.

"It's fine," he said flatly, not really meaning it. He was angry at himself for feeling disappointment. Walden had told him what to expect. And yet he'd kept thinking that he'd walk into one of the old cities and be able to imagine that it was ten thousand years ago and others were around him. Others like him. . .

Ruins. Ruins covered by dirt, and no one of the present race would even bother about uncovering them.

Prior and Walden looked at each other and smiled. "Did you tell him?" the caretaker telepathed.

"No. I thought we'd surprise him. I knew all the rest would disappoint him."

"Eric," the caretaker said aloud. "Come this way. There's another room I want to show you."

He followed them downstairs, down a long winding ramp that spiraled underground so far that he lost track of the distance they had descended. He didn't much care anyway. Ahead of him, the other two were communicating, leaving him alone.

"Through here," Prior said, stepping off the ramp.

They entered a room that was like the bottom of a well, with smooth stone sides and far, far above them a glass roof, with clouds apparently drifting across its surface. But it wasn't a well. It was a vault, forever preserving the thing that had been the old race's masterpiece.

It rested in the center of the room, its nose pointing up at the sky. It was like the pictures, and unlike them. It was big, far bigger than Eric had ever visualized it. It

was tall and smooth and as new looking as if its builders had just stepped outside for a minute and would be back in another minute to blast off for the stars.

"A starship," Walden said. "One of the last types."

"There aren't many left," Prior said. "We're lucky to have this one in our museum."

Eric wasn't listening. He was looking at the ship. The old race's ship. His ship.

"The old race built strange things," Prior said. "This is one of the strangest." He shook his head. "Imagine the time they put in on it. . . And for what?"

Eric didn't try to answer him. He couldn't explain why the old ones had built it. But he knew. He would have built it himself, if he'd lived then. *We have cast off the planets like outgrown toys, and now we want the stars. . .*

His people. His ship. His dream.

THE OLD CARETAKER showed him around the museum and then left him alone to explore by himself. He had all the time he wanted.

He studied. He worked hard all day long, scarcely ever leaving the museum grounds. He studied the subjects that now were the most fascinating to him of all the old race's knowledge—the subjects that related to the starships. Astronomy, physics, navigation, and the complex charts of distant stars, distant planets, worlds he'd never heard of before. Worlds that to the new race were only pin-pricks of light in the night sky.

All day long he studied. But in the evening he would go down the winding ramp to the ship. The well was lighted with a softer, more diffuse illumination than that of the houses. In the soft glow the walls and the glass-domed roof seemed to disappear and the ship looked free, pointing up at the stars.

He didn't try to tell the caretaker what he thought. He just went back to his books and his studies. There was so much he had to learn. And now there was a reason for his learning. Someday, when he was fully grown and strong and had mastered all he needed from the books, he was going to fly the ship. He was going to look for his people, the ones who had left Earth before the new race came . . .

He told no one. But Walden watched him, and sighed.

"They'll never let you do it, Eric. It's a mad dream."

"What are you talking about?"

"The ship. You want to go to the stars, don't you?"

Eric stared at him, more surprised than he'd been in years. He had said nothing. There was no way for Walden to know. Unless he'd perceived it — and Eric couldn't be perceived, any more than he could perceive other people. . .

Walden shook his head. "It wasn't telepathy that told me. It was your eyes. The way you look at the ship. And besides, I've known you for years now. And I've wondered how long it would be before you thought of this answer."

"Well, why not?" Eric looked across at the ship, and his throat caught, choking him, the way it

always did. "I'm lonely here. My people are gone. Why shouldn't I go?"

"You'd be lonelier inside that ship, by yourself, away from Earth, away from everything, and with no assurance you'd ever find anyone at all, old race or new or alien. . ."

Eric didn't answer. He looked back at the ship, thinking of the books, trying to think of it as a prison, a weightless prison carrying him forever into the unknown, with no one to talk to, no one to see.

Walden was right. He would be too much alone in the ship. He'd have to postpone his dream.

He'd wait until he was old, and take the ship and die in it. . .

Eric smiled at the thought. He was seventeen, old enough to know that his idea was adolescent and melodramatic. He knew, suddenly, that he'd never fly the ship.

THE YEARS passed. Eric spent most of his time at the museum. He had his own aircar now, and sometimes he flew it home and visited with his parents. They liked to have him come. They liked it much better than having to travel all the way to the museum to visit him.

Yet, though he wasn't dependent on other people any more, and could fly the aircar as he chose, he didn't do much exploring. He didn't have any desire to meet strangers. And there were always the books.

"You're sure you're all right?" his mother said. "You don't need anything?"

"No. I'm fine."

He smiled, looking out through the sunporch wall into the garden. It seemed years and years since he'd pressed his nose to the glass, watching the butterflies. It had been a long time.

"I've got to get going," he said. "I want to be back at the museum by dark."

"Well, if you're sure you won't stay. . ."

They said goodbye and he went out and got into the aircar and started back. He flew slowly, close to the ground, because he really had plenty of time and he felt lazy. He skimmed along over a valley and heard laughter and dipped lower. A group of children was playing. Young ones—they even talked aloud sometimes as they played. Children. . . There were so many children, always in groups, laughing. . .

He flew on, quickly, until he was in a part of the country where he didn't see any houses. Just a stream and a grove of trees and bright flowers. He dropped lower, stopped, got out and walked down to the stream.

It was by another stream that he'd met the children who had laughed at him, years ago. He smiled, sadly.

He felt alone, but in a different sense from his usual isolation. He felt free, away from people, away even from the books and their unspoken insistence that their writers were dead and almost forgotten. He stood by the edge of the stream, watching water spiders scoot across the rippled surface.

This was the same. This stream

had probably been here when the old race was here, maybe even before the old race had even come into existence.

Water spiders. Compared to man, their race was immortal. . .

The sun was low when he turned away from the stream and walked back to where he had parked the aircar. He scarcely looked about him as he walked. He was sure he was alone, and he felt no caution, no need to watch and listen.

But as he turned toward the car he saw the people. Two. Young, about his own age. A boy and a girl, smiling at each other, holding hands.

They weren't a dozen feet in front of him. But they didn't notice him. They were conscious of no one but each other. As Eric watched, standing frozen, unwilling to draw attention to himself by even moving or backing up, the two leaned closer together. Their arms went around each other, tightly, and they kissed.

They said nothing. They kissed, and then stood apart and went on looking at each other. Even without being able to perceive, Eric could feel their emotion.

Then they turned, slowly, toward him. In a moment they would be aware of him. He didn't want them to think he was spying on them, so he went toward them, making no effort to be quiet, and as he moved they stepped still farther apart and looked at him, startled.

They looked at each other as he passed, even more startled, and the girl's hand went up to her mouth in surprise.

They know, Eric thought bitterly. They know I'm different.

He didn't want to go back to the museum. He flew blindly, not looking down at the neat domed houses and the gardens and the people, but ahead, to the eastern sky and the upthrust scarp of the hills. The hills, where people like him had fled, for a little while.

The occasional aircars disappeared. The gardens dropped away, and the ordered color, and there was grass and bare dirt and, ahead, the scraggly trees and outthrust rocks of the foothills. No people. Only the birds circling, crying to each other, curious about the car. Only the scurrying animals of the underbrush below.

A little of the tension drained from him as he climbed. Perhaps in these very hills men like him had walked, not many generations ago. Perhaps they would walk there again, amid the disorder of tree and canyon and tumbled rock. Amid the wildness, the beauty that was neither that of the gardens nor that of the old race's cities, but older, more enduring than either.

Below him were other streams, but these were swift-flowing, violent, sparkling like prismed sunlight as they cascaded over the rocks. Their wildness called to him, soothed him as the starship soothed him, as the gardens and the neat domed houses never could.

He knew why his kind had fled to the hills, for whatever little time they had. He knew too that he would come again.

Searching. Looking for his own kind.

That was what he was doing. That was what he had always in-

tended to do, ever since he had heard of the others like himself, the men who had come here before him. He realized his motive suddenly, and realized too the futility of it. But futile or not, he would come again.

For he was of the old race. He shared their hungering.

WALDEN WAS READING in his study when the council members arrived. They came without advance warning and filed in ceremoniously, responding rather coolly to his greeting.

"We're here about the boy," Abbot began abruptly. "He's at the museum now, isn't he?"

Walden nodded. "He's been spending most of his time there lately."

"Do you think it's wise, letting him wander around alone?"

Trouble. Always trouble. Just because there was one young boy, Eric, asking only to be let alone. And the old council members wouldn't rest until they had managed to find an excuse to put him in an institution somewhere, where his actions could be watched, where there wouldn't be any more uncertainty.

"Eric's all right."

"Is he? Prior tells me he leaves the museum every day. He doesn't come here. He doesn't visit his family."

The thin man, Drew, broke in. "He goes to the hills. Just like the others did. Did you know that, Walden?"

Walden's mouth tightened. It wouldn't do to let them read his hostility to their prying. It would be even worse to let them know that they worried him.

"Besides," Drew added, "he's old enough to be thinking about women now. There's always a chance he'll—"

"Are you crazy?" Walden shouted the words aloud. "Eric's not an animal."

"Isn't he?" Abbot answered quietly. "Weren't all the old race just animals?"

Walden turned away from them, closing his mind to their thoughts. He mustn't show anger. If he did, they'd probably decide he was too emotional, not to be trusted. They'd take Eric away, to some institution. Cage him. . .

"What do you want to do with the boy?" Walden forced his thoughts to come quietly. "Do you want to put him in a zoo with the other animals?"

The sarcasm hurt them. They wanted to be fair. Abbot especially prided himself on his fairness.

"Of course not."

They hesitated. They weren't going to do anything. Not this time. They stood around and made a little polite conversation, about other things, and then Abbot turned toward the door.

"We just wanted to be sure you knew what was going on." Abbot paused. "You'll keep an eye on the boy, won't you?"

"Am I his keeper?" Walden asked softly.

They didn't answer him. Their thoughts were confused and a bit irritated as they went out to the aircar that had brought them. But he knew they'd be back. And they

would keep track of Eric. Prior, the caretaker, would help them. Prior was old too, and worried. . .

Walden walked back into his study, slowly. His legs were trembling. He hadn't realized how upset he had been. He smiled at the intensity of his emotions, realizing something he'd always kept hidden, even from himself.

He was as fond of Eric as if the boy had been his own son.

ERIC PUSHED the books away, impatiently. He didn't feel like studying. The equations were meaningless. He was tired of books, and history, and all the facts about the old race.

He wanted to be outdoors, exploring, walking along the hillsides, looking for his own kind.

But he had already explored the hills. He had flown for miles, and walked for miles, and searched dozens of caves in dozens of gorges. He had found no one. He was sure that if there had been anyone he would have discovered some sign.

He opened the book again, but he couldn't concentrate on it.

Beyond those hills, across another valley, there were even higher mountains. He had often looked across at them, wondering what they held. They were probably as desolate as the ones he'd searched. Still, he would rather be out in them, looking, than sitting here, fretting, almost hating the old race because it had somehow bequeathed him a heritage of loneliness.

He got up abruptly and went outside to the aircar.

It was a long way to the second range of mountains. He flew there directly, skimming over the nearer hills, the ones he had spent weeks exploring. He dropped low over the intervening valley, passing over the houses and towns, looking down at the gardens. The new race filled all the valleys.

He came into the foothills and swung the car upward, climbing over the steep mountainsides. Within a mile from the valley's edge he was in wild country. He'd thought the other hills were wild, but here the terrain was jagged and rock-strewn, with boulders flung about as if by some giant hand. There were a hundred narrow canyons, opening into each other, steep-sloped, overgrown with brambles and almost impenetrable, a maze with the hills rising around them and cutting off all view of the surrounding country.

Eric dropped down into one of the larger canyons. Immediately he realized how easy it would be to get lost in these hills. There were no landmarks that were not like a hundred jutting others. Without the airear he would be lost in a few minutes. He wondered suddenly if anyone, old race or new, had ever been here before him.

He set the aircar down on the valley floor and got out and walked away from it, upstream, following the little creek that tumbled past him over the rocks. By the time he had gone a hundred paces the car was out of sight.

It was quiet. Far away birds called to each other, and insects buzzed around him, but other than these sounds there was nothing but

his own footsteps and the creek rapids. He relaxed, walking more slowly, looking about him idly, no longer searching for anything.

He rounded another bend, climbed up over a rock that blocked his path and dropped down on the other side of it. Then he froze, staring.

Not ten feet ahead of him lay the ashes of a campfire, still smoldering, still sending a thin wisp of smoke up into the air.

HE SAW NO ONE. Nothing moved. No tracks showed in the rocky ground. Except for the fire, the gorge looked as uninhabited as any of the others.

Slowly Eric walked toward the campfire and knelt down and held his hand over the embers. Heat rose about him. The fire hadn't been out for very long.

He turned quickly, glancing about him, but there was no sudden motion anywhere, no indication that anyone was hiding nearby. Perhaps there was nobody near. Perhaps whoever had built the fire had left it some time before, and was miles away by now. . .

He didn't think so. He had a feeling that eyes were watching him. It was a strange feeling, almost as if he could perceive. Wishful thinking, he told himself. Unreal, untrue. . .

But *someone* had been here. Someone had built the fire. And it was probably, almost certainly, someone without perception. Someone like himself.

His knees were shaking. His hands trembled, and sweat broke out on the palms. Yet his thoughts seemed calm, icily calm. It was just a nervous reaction, he knew that. A reaction to the sudden knowledge that people *were* here, out in these hills where he had searched for them but never, deep down, expected to find them. They were probably watching him right now, hidden up among the trees somewhere, afraid to move because then he would see them and start out to capture them.

If there were people here, they must think that he was one of the normal ones. That he could perceive. So they would keep quiet, because a person with perception couldn't possibly perceive a person who lacked it. They would remain motionless, hoping to stay hidden, waiting for him to leave so that they could flee deeper into the hills.

They couldn't know that he was one of them.

He felt helpless, suddenly. So near, so near—and yet he couldn't reach them. The people who lived here in the wild mountain gorges could elude him forever.

No motion. No sound. Only the embers, smoking. . .

"Listen," he called aloud. "Can you hear me?"

The canyon walls caught his voice, sent it echoing back, fainter and fainter. ". . . can you hear me can you hear me can you. . ."

No one answered.

"I'm your friend," he called. "I can't perceive. I'm one of you."

Over and over it echoed. ". . . one of you one of you one of you. . ."

"Answer me. I've run away from them too. Answer me!"

"Answer me answer me answer

me. . ."

The echoes died away and it was quiet, too quiet. No sound. Even if they heard him, they wouldn't answer.

He couldn't track them. If they had homes that were easy to find they would have left them by now. He was helpless.

The heat from the fire rose about him, and he tasted smoke and coughed. Nothing moved. Finally he stood up, turned away from the fire and walked on past it, up the stream.

No one. No tracks. No sign. Only the feeling that other eyes watched him as he walked along, other ears listened for the sound of his passing.

He turned back, retraced his steps to the fire. The embers had blackened. The wisp of smoke that curled upward was very thin now. Otherwise everything was the same as it had been.

He couldn't give up and fly back to the museum. If he did he might never find them again. But even if he didn't, he might never find them.

"Listen!" He screamed the word, so loudly that they could have heard it miles away. "I'm one of you. I can't perceive. Believe me! You've got to believe me!"

"Believe me believe me believe me. . ."

Nothing. The tension went out of him suddenly and he began to tremble again, and his throat choked up, wanting to cry. He stumbled away from the embers, back in the direction of the aircar.

"Believe me. . ." This time the words were little more than a whisper, and there was no echo.

"I believe you," a voice said quietly.

HE SWUNG ABOUT, trying to place it, and saw the woman. She stood at the edge of the trees, above the campfire, half hidden in the undergrowth. She looked down at him warily, a rock clenched in her hand. She wasn't an attractive sight.

She looked old, with a leathery skin and gnarled arms and legs. Her grey-white hair was matted, pulled back into a snarled bun behind her head. She wore a shapeless dress of some roughwoven material that hung limply from her shoulders, torn, dirty, ancient. He'd never seen an animal as dirty as she.

"So you can't perceive," the woman cackled. "I believe it, boy. You don't have that look about you."

"I didn't know," Eric said softly. "I never knew until today that there were any others."

She laughed, a high-pitched laugh that broke off into a choking cough. "There aren't many of us, boy. Not many. Me and Nell—but she's an old, old woman. And Lisa, of course. . ."

She cackled again, nodding. "I always told Lisa to wait," she said firmly. "I told her that there'd be another young one along."

"Who are you?" Eric said.

"Me? Call me Mag. Come on, boy. Come on. What are you waiting for?"

She turned and started off up the hill, walking so fast that she was almost out of sight among the

trees before Eric recovered enough to follow her. He stumbled after her, clawing his way up the steep slope, slipping and grabbing the branches with his hands and hauling himself up the rocks.

"You're a slow one." The old woman paused and waited for him to catch up. "Where've you been all your life? You don't act like a mountain boy."

"I'm not," Eric said. "I'm from the valley. . ."

He stopped talking. He realized, suddenly, the futility of trying to explain his life to her. If she had ever known the towns, it would have been years ago. She was too old, and tattered, and so dirty that her smell wasn't even a good clean animal smell.

"Hurry up, boy!"

He felt unreal, as if this were a dream, as if he would awaken suddenly and be back at the museum. He almost wished that he would. He couldn't believe that he had found another like himself and was now following her, scrambling up a mountain as if he were a goat.

A goat. Smells. The dirty old woman in front of him. He wrinkled his nose in disgust and then was furious with himself, with his reactions, with the sudden knowledge that he had glamorized his kind and had hoped to find them noble and brilliant.

This tattered old woman with her cackling laugh and leathery, toothless face and dirt encrusted clothing couldn't be like him. He couldn't accept it. . .

Mag led him up the slope and then over some heaped boulders, and suddenly they were on level ground again. They had come out into a tiny canyon, a blind pocket recessed into the mountain, almost completely surrounded by walls that rose sharply upward. Back across the gorge, huddled against the face of the mountain, was a tiny hut.

It was primitive, like those in the prehistoric sections of the old history books. It was made of branches lashed together, with sides that leaned crookedly against each other and a matted roof that looked as if it would slide off at any minute. It was like a twig house that a child might make with sticks and grass.

"Our home," Mag said. Her voice was proud.

He didn't answer. He followed her across toward it, past the mounds of refuse, the fruit rinds and bones and skins that were flung carelessly beside the trail. He smelled the scent of decay and rottenness and turned his head away, feeling sick.

"Lisa! Lisa!" Mag shouted, the words echoing and re-echoing.

A figure moved just inside the hut doorway. "She's not here," a voice called. "She's out hunting."

"Well, come on out, Nell, and see what I've found."

The figure moved slowly out from the gloom of the hut, bending to get through the low door, half straightening up outside, and Eric saw that it was an old, old woman. She couldn't straighten very far. She was too old, bent and twisted and brittle, feebler looking than anyone Eric had ever seen before. She hobbled toward him slowly, teetering from side to side as she

walked, her hands held out in front of her, her eyes on the ground.

"What is it, Mag?" Her voice was as twisted as her body.

"A boy. Valley-boy. Just the age for our Lisa, too."

Eric felt his face redden and he opened his mouth to protest, to say something, anything, but Mag went right on talking, ignoring him.

"The boy came in an aircar. I thought he was one of the normals —but he's not. Hasn't their ways. Good looking boy, too."

"Is he?" Nell had reached them. She stopped and looked up, right into Eric's face, and for the first time he realized that she was blind. Her eyes were milky white, without pupils, without irises. Against the brown leather of her skin they looked moist and dead.

"Speak, boy," she croaked. "Let me hear your voice."

"Hello," Eric said, feeling utterly foolish and utterly confused. "I'm Eric."

"Eric. . ." Nell reached out, touched his arm with her hand, ran her fingers up over his shoulders, over his chest.

"It's been a long time since I've heard a man's voice," she said. "Not since Mag here was a little girl."

"Have you been—here—all that time?" Eric asked, looking around him at the hut, and the meat hanging to dry, covered with flies, and the leather water bags, and the mounds of refuse, the huge, heaped mounds that he couldn't stop smelling.

"Yes," Nell said. "I've been here longer than I want to remember, boy. We came here from the other mountains when Mag was only a baby."

THEY WALKED toward the hut, and as they neared it he smelled a new smell, that of stale smoke and stale sweat overlying the general odor of decay.

"Let's talk out here," he said, not wanting to go inside.

They sat down on the hard earth and the two women turned their faces toward him, Mag watching him intently, Nell listening, her head cocked to one side like an old crippled bird's.

"I always thought I was the only one like me," Eric said. "The people don't know of any others. They don't know you exist. They wouldn't believe it."

"That's the way we want it," Mag said. "That's the only way it can be."

Nell nodded. "I was a girl in the other hills," she said, nodding toward the west, toward the museum. "There were several of us then. There had been families of us in my father's time, and in his father's time, and maybe before that even. But when I was a girl there was only my father and my mother and another wife of my father's, and a lot of children. . ."

She paused, still looking toward the west, facing a horizon she could no longer see. "The normal ones came. We'd hidden from them before. But this time we had no chance to hide. I was hunting, with the boy who was my father's nephew.

"They surrounded the hut. They

didn't make any sound. They don't have to. I was in the forest when I heard my mother scream."

"Did they kill her?" Eric cried out. "They wouldn't do that."

"No, they didn't kill any of them. They dragged them off to the aircars, all of them. My father, my mother and the other woman, the children. We watched from the trees and saw them dragged off, tied with ropes, like wild animals. The cars flew away. Our people never came back."

She stopped, sunken in revery. Mag took up the story. Her voice was matter-of-fact, completely casual about those long ago events.

"A bear killed my father. That was after we came back here. Nell was sick. I did the hunting. We almost starved, for a while, but there's lots of game in the hills. It's a good life here. But I've been sorry for Lisa. She's a woman now. She needs a man. I'm glad you came. I would have hated to send her out looking for a normal one."

"But—" Eric stopped, his head whirling. He didn't know what to say. Anything at all would sound wrong, cruel.

"It's dangerous," Mag went on, "taking up with the normals. They think it's wrong. They think we're animals. One of us has to pick a man who's stupid—a farmer, maybe—and even then it's like being a pet. A beast."

It took a moment for Eric to realize what she was saying, and when he did realize, the thought horrified him.

"Lisa's father was stupid," Mag said. "He took me in when I came down from the hills. He didn't send for the others. Not then. He kept me and fed me and treated me kindly, and I thought I was safe. I thought our kind and theirs could live together."

She laughed. Deep, bitter lines creased her mouth. "A week later the aircar came. They sneaked up to the garden where I was. He was with them. He was leading them."

She laughed again. "Their kindness means nothing. Their love means nothing. To them, we're animals."

The old woman, Nell, rocked back and forth, her face still in revery. Flies crawled over her bare arms, unheeded.

"I got away," Mag said. "I saw them coming. They can't run fast, and I knew the hiding places. I never went back to the valleys. Nell would have starved without me. And there was Lisa to care for, later. . ."

The flies settled on Eric's hands and he brushed them away, shivering.

Mag smiled. The bitterness left her face. "I'm glad I don't have to send Lisa down to the valley."

She got up before he could answer, before he could even think of anything to say or do. Crossing over to the pole where the dried meat hung, she pulled a piece of it loose and brought it back to where they sat. Some she gave to the old woman and some she kept for herself and the rest, most of it, she tossed to Eric.

"You must be hungry, boy."

It was filthy. Dirt clung to it—dust and pollen and grime—and the flies had flown off in clouds when she lifted it down.

The old woman raised her piece and put the edge of it in her mouth and started to chew, slowly, eating her way up the strip. Mag tore hers with her teeth, rending it and swallowing it quickly, watching Eric all the time.

"Eat."

It was unreal. He couldn't be here. These women couldn't exist.

He lifted the meat, feeling his stomach knot with disgust, wanting to fling it from him and run, blindly, down the hill to the aircar. But he didn't. He had searched too long to flee now. Shuddering, he closed his mind to the flies and the smell and the filth and bit into the meat and chewed it and swallowed it. And all the time, Mag watched him.

The sun passed overhead and began to dip toward the west. The shadows, which had shortened as they sat in front of the hut, lengthened again, until they themselves were half in the shadow of the trees lining the gorge. Still Lisa did not come. It was very quiet. The only sounds that broke the silence were their own voices and the buzzing of the flies.

They talked, but communication was difficult between them. Eric tried to accept their ideas, their way of life, but he couldn't. The things they said were strange to him. Their whole pattern of life was strange to him. He could understand it at all only because he had studied the primitive peoples of the old race. But he couldn't imagine himself as one of them. He couldn't think of himself as having grown up among them, in the hills, living only to hunt and gather berries and store food for the wintertime. He couldn't think of himself hiding, creeping through the gorges like a hunted animal, flattening himself in the underbrush whenever an aircar passed by.

He sat and listened to them talk, and his amazement grew. Their beliefs were so different. He listened to their superstitious accounts of the old race, and the way it had been "in the beginning."

He listened to their legends of the old gods who flew through the air and were a mighty people, but who were destroyed by a new race of devils. He listened as they told him of their own ancestors, children of the gods, who had fled to the hills to await the gods' return. They had no conception at all of the thousands of years that had elapsed between the old race's passing and their own forefathers' flight into the hills. And when he tried to explain, they shook their heads and wouldn't believe him.

He didn't hear Lisa come. One minute the far end of the clearing was empty and still and the next minute the girl was walking across it toward them, a bow in one hand and a pair of rabbits dangling from the other.

SHE SAW HIM and stopped, the rabbits dropping from her hand.

"Here's your young man, Lisa," Mag said. "Valley boy. His name's Eric."

He stared back at her, more in curiosity than in surprise. She wasn't nearly as unattractive as he had thought she would be. She

wouldn't be bad looking at all, he thought, if she were clean. She was fairly tall and lean, too skinny really, with thin muscular arms instead of the softly rounded arms the valley girls had. She was too brown, but her skin hadn't turned leathery yet, and there was still a little life in the lank brown hair that fell matted about her shoulders.

"Hello, Lisa," he said.

"Hello." Her eyes never left him. She stared at him, her lips trembling, her whole body tensed. She looked as if she were going to turn and run at any moment, as if only his quietness kept her from fleeing.

With a sudden shock Eric realized that she too was afraid—afraid of him. His own hesitation fell away and he smiled at her.

Mag got up and went over to the girl and put her arm around Lisa's shoulders. "Don't be afraid of him, child," Mag said. "He's a nice boy. Not like one of *them*."

Lisa trembled.

Eric watched her, pitying her. She was as helpless as he before the calm assumption of the older women. More helpless, because she had probably never thought of defying them, of escaping the pattern of their lives.

"Don't worry, Lisa," he said. "I won't hurt you."

Slowly she walked toward him, poised, waiting for a hostile move. She came within a few feet of him and then sank to her haunches, still watching him, still poised.

She was as savage as the others. A graceful, dirty savage.

"You're really one of us?" she said. "You can't perceive?"

"No," he said. "I can't perceive."

"He's not like them," Mag said flatly. "If you'd ever been among them, you'd know their ways."

"I've never seen a man before, up close," Lisa said.

Her eyes pleaded with him, and suddenly he knew why he pitied her. It was because she felt helpless before him, and begged him not to harm her, and thought of him as something above her, more powerful than she, and dangerous. He looked across at her and felt protective, and it was a new feeling to him, absolutely new. Because always before, around the normals, even around his own parents and Walden, he had been the helpless one.

He liked this new feeling, and wished it could last. But it couldn't. He couldn't do as the old women expected him to, leave the valley and his parents, leave the books and the museum and the ship, just to hide in the hills like a beast with them.

He had come to find his people, but these three were not they.

"You two go on off and talk," Mag said. "We're old. We don't matter now. You've got things to settle between you."

She cackled again and got up and went into the hut and old Nell got up also and followed her.

The girl shivered. She drew back a little, away from him. Her eyes never left his face.

"Don't be afraid, Lisa," he said gently. "I won't hurt you. I won't even touch you. But I would like to talk to you."

"All right," she said.

They got up and walked to the

end of the gorge, the girl keeping always a few feet from him. At the boulders she stopped and faced him, her back against a rock, her thin body still trembling.

"Lisa," he said. "I want to be your friend."

Her eyes widened. "How can you?" she said. "Men are friends. Women are friends. But you're a man and I'm a woman and it's different."

He shook his head helplessly, trying to think of a way to explain things to her. He couldn't say that he found her dirty and unattractive and almost another species. He couldn't say that he'd searched the hills, often thinking of the relationship between man and woman, but that she wasn't the woman, that she never could be the woman for him. He couldn't tell her that he pitied her in perhaps the same way that the normals pitied him.

Still, he wanted to talk to her. He wanted to be her friend. Because he was sure now that he could search the mountains forever, and perhaps find other people, even if those he found were like her, and Mag and Nell.

"Listen, Lisa," he said. "I can't live up here. I live in the valley. I came in an aircar, and it's down in the canyon below here. I have to go back—soon. Before it gets completely dark."

"Why?"

"If I don't the normals will come looking for me. They'll find the aircar and then they'll find us. And you and your family will be taken away. Don't you understand?"

"You're going?" Lisa said.

"In a little while. I must."

She looked at him, strangely. She looked at his clothes, at his face, at his body. Then she looked at her own hands and touched her own coarse dress, and she nodded.

"You won't come back," she said. "You don't like me. I'm not what you were searching for."

He couldn't answer. Her words hurt him. The very fact that she could recognize their difference from each other hurt him. He pitied her still more.

"I'll come back," he said. "Of course I will. As often as I can. You're the only other people I've ever known who didn't perceive."

She looked up into his face again. Her eyes were very large. They were the only beautiful thing about her.

"Even if you do come back, you won't want me."

There wasn't any answer at all.

IT WAS DUSK when Eric got back to the museum. He landed the aircar and climbed out and walked across to the building, still feeling unreal, still not believing that the events of this day had actually happened.

He nodded to Prior and the old caretaker nodded back and then stood staring at him, troubled and curious. Eric didn't notice the other's expression, nor the fact that Prior followed him to the top of the spiral ramp and remained there for a while, watching.

Eric stood at the bottom of the well where he had so often stood before, staring across at the ship, then looking up, up, up its sleek length to where its nose pointed

yearningly toward the night sky. But tonight he found no comfort in the sight, no sense of kinship with its builders. Tonight the ship was a dead and empty thing.

"You won't want me—" Her voice, her eyes, came between him and the stars.

He had thought of finding his people and sharing with them their common heritage from the past, the knowledge of the old race and its thoughts and its science and its philosophy. He had thought of sharing with them the old desire for the stars, the old hunger, the old loneliness that the new race could never understand. He had been wrong.

His people. . . He pushed the thought away.

He looked up at the stars that were merely pin-pricks of light at the top of the well and wondered if anyone, old race or new or something different from either, lived among them now. And he felt small, and even the ship was small, and his own problems and his own search were unimportant. He sat down and leaned back against the smooth wall and closed his eyes, blotting out the ship and the stars, and finally, even Lisa's face before him.

The old caretaker found him sleeping there, and sighed, and went away again, still frowning. Eric slept on, unheeding. When he awoke it was late morning and the stars were gone and clouds drifted across the mouth of the well.

There was no answer here. The starship would never fly.

And Eric went back to the mountains.

IT WAS TWO weeks later that the councilmen stood facing Walden across the great museum table. They had come together, Abbot and Drew and the others, and they faced him together, frowning. Their thoughts were hidden. Walden could catch only glimpses of what lay beneath their worry.

"Every day." Abbot's eyes were hard, unyielding. "Why, Walden? Why does he go there every day?"

"Does it matter?"

"Perhaps. Perhaps not. We can't tell—yet."

The ring of faces, of buried perceptions, of fear, anxiety, and a worry that could no longer be shrugged off. And Eric away, as he was every day now, somewhere in the distant hills.

"The boy's all right." Walden checked his own rush of worry.

"Is he?"

The worry in the open now, the fear uncontained, and no more vacillation. Their thoughts hidden from Walden, their plans hidden, and nothing he could do, no way to warn Eric, yet.

Abbot smiled, humorlessly. "The boy had better be all right. . ."

ERIC LANDED in the canyon and made sure that the aircar was hidden under a ledge, with branches drawn about it so that no one could spot it from above. Then he turned and started for the slope, and as he reached it Lisa ran down to meet him.

"You're late," she called.

"Am I? Have you really been waiting for me?"

"Of course." She came over to meet him, laughing, openly glad that he had come.

He smiled back at her and walked along beside her, having to take long strides to match her skipping ones, and he too was glad that he'd come. Lately he felt like this every day. It was a feeling he couldn't analyze. Nothing had changed. The girl was still too thin and too brown and too dirty, although now she had begun to wash her dress and her body in the mountain stream and to comb the snarls from her hair. But it didn't make her attractive to him. It only made her less unattractive.

"Will you always have to go away every night?" she asked guilelessly.

"I suppose so."

He looked down at her and smiled, wondering why he came. There was still an air of unreality about the whole situation. He felt numb. He had felt that way ever since the first day, and the feeling had grown, until now he moved and spoke and smiled and ate and it was as if he were someone else and the person he had been was gone completely. He liked coming here. But there was no triumph in being with these people, no sense of having found his own kind, no purpose, nothing but a vague contentment and an unwillingness to search any farther.

"You're very quiet," Lisa said.

"I know. I was thinking."

She reached out and touched his arm, her fingers strong and muscular. He smiled at her but made no move toward her, and after a moment she sighed and took her hand away.

"Why are you so different, Eric?"

"Perhaps because I was raised by the others, the normal ones. Perhaps just because I've read so many books about the old race. . ."

They came up to the boulders that blocked the entrance of the little gorge where the hut was. Lisa started toward them, then stopped abruptly.

"Let's go on up the hill. I want to talk to you, without them."

"All right."

He followed her without speaking, concentrating all his effort on scrambling over the rougher spots in the trail. She didn't say anything more until they had come out on a high ledge that overlooked the whole canyon and she had sat down and motioned for him to sit down too.

"Whew," he panted. "You're a mountain goat, Lisa."

She didn't smile. "I've liked your coming to see us," she said. "I like to listen to you talk. I like the tales you tell of the old ones. But Mag and Nell are upset."

He knew what was coming. His eyes met hers, and then he looked away and reddened and felt sorry for her and what he would have to tell her. This was a subject they had managed to avoid ever since that first day, although the older women brought it up whenever he saw them.

"Mag says I must have a man," Lisa said. Her voice was tight. He couldn't tell if she was crying because he couldn't bear to look at her. He could only stare out over the canyon and listen and wait.

"She says if it isn't you I'll have

to find someone else, later on, but she says it ought to be you. Because *they're* dangerous, and besides, if it's you our children will be sure to be like us."

"What?" He swung around, startled. "Do you mean that if one parent were normal the child might be too?"

"Yes," she said. "It might. They say that's happened. Sometimes. No one knows why we're born. No one knows why some are one way and some another."

"Lisa. . ." He stopped.

"I know. You don't want me. I've known that all the time."

"It isn't just that."

He tried to find the words to express what he felt, but anything he might say would be cold and cruel and not quite true. He felt the contentment drain out of him, and he felt annoyed, because he didn't want to have to think about her problem, or about anything.

"Why do they want you to have a child?" he said roughly. "Why do they want our kind to go on, living here like animals, or taken to the valleys and separated from each other and put into institutions until we die? Why don't they admit that we've lost, that the normals own the Earth? Why don't they stop breeding and let us die?"

"Your parents were normal, Eric. If all of us died, others would be born, someday."

He nodded and then he closed his eyes and fought against the despair that rose suddenly within him and blotted out the last of the contentment and the unreality. He fought against it and lost. And suddenly Lisa was very real, more real even than the books had ever been. And the dirty old women were suddenly people—individuals, not savages. He tried to pity them, to retreat into his pity and his loneliness, but he couldn't even do that.

The people he had looked for were imaginary. He would never find them, because Mag and Nell and Lisa were his people. They were like him, and the only difference between him and them was one of luck. They were dirty and ignorant. They had been born in the mountains and hunted like beasts. He was more fortunate; he had been born in the valley.

He was a snob. He had looked down on them, when all the time he was one of them. If he had been born among them, he would have been as they were. And, if Lisa had lived in another age, she too would have sought the stars.

Eric sat very still and fought until a little of the turmoil quieted inside of him. Then he opened his eyes again and stared across the canyon, at the rock slides and the trees growing out from the slopes at twisting, precarious angles, and he saw everything in a new light. He saw the old race as it had been far earlier than the age of space-travel, and he knew that it had conquered many environments on Earth before it had gained a chance to try for those of space. He felt humble, suddenly, and proud at the same time.

Lisa sat beside him, not speaking, drawing away from him and letting him be by himself, as if she knew the conflicts within him and knew enough not to interrupt. He was grateful both for her presence there

beside him and for her silence.

Much later, when afternoon shadows had crept well out from the rocks, she turned to him. "Will you take me to the valley someday, Eric?"

"Maybe. But no one must know about you. You know what would happen if any of them found out you even existed."

"Yes," she said. "We'd have to be careful, all right. But you could take me for a ride in the aircar sometime and show me things."

Before, he would have shrugged off her words and forgotten them. Now he couldn't. Decision crystalized quickly in his mind.

"Come on, Lisa," he said, getting to his feet and reaching down to help her up also. "I'll take you to the valley right now."

She looked up at him, unable to speak, her eyes shining, and then she was running ahead of him, down the slope toward the aircar.

THE CAR climbed swiftly away from the valley floor, up between the canyon walls and above them, over the crest of the hills. He circled it for a moment, banking it over on its side so that she could look down at the gorge and the rocks and the cascading stream.

"How do you like it, Lisa?"

"I don't know." She smiled, rather weakly, her body braced against the seat. "It feels so strange."

He smiled back and straightened the car, turning away from the mountains until the great, gardened valley stretched out before them, all the way to the foot of the western hills.

"I'll show you the museum," he said. "I only wish I could take you inside."

She moved away from him, nearer to the window, and looked down at the scattered houses that lay below them, at the people moving in the gardens, at the children.

"I never dreamed it was like this," she said. "I never could picture it before."

There was a longing in her face he'd never noticed before. He stared at her, and she was different suddenly, and her thin muscular body was different too.

Pioneer—that was the word he wanted.

The girls of the new race could never be pioneers.

"Look, Eric. Over there. Aircars."

The words broke in on his thoughts and he looked away from her, following her gaze incuriously, not much interested. And then his fingers stiffened on the controls and the peacefulness fell away from him as if it had never been.

"Lots of them," she said.

Aircars. Eight or ten of them, more than he had ever seen at one time, spread out in a line and flying eastward, straight toward him.

They mustn't see Lisa. They mustn't get close enough to realize who he was.

He swung away from them, perpendicular to their course, angling so that he would be out of perception range, and then he circled, close to the ground, as they swept by, undeviating, purposeful, toward the mountains.

Toward the mountains.

Fear. Sudden, numbing fear and the realization of his own carelessness.

"What's the matter, Eric?"

He had swung about and now followed them, far behind them and off to one side, much too far away for them to try to perceive him. Perhaps, he thought, perhaps they don't know. But all the time he remembered his own trips to the canyon, taken so openly.

"Oh, Eric, they're not—"

He swung up over the last ridge and looked down, and her words choked off in her throat. Below them lay the canyon, and in it, the long line of aircars, landed now, cutting off the gorge, the light reflecting off them, bronze in the sunset. And the tiny figures of men were even now spreading out from the cars.

"What'll we do, Eric?"

Panic. In her voice and in her eyes and in her fingers that bit into his arm, hurting him, steadying him against his own fear and the twisting realization of his betraying lack of caution.

"Run. What elese can we do?"

Down back over the ridge, out of sight of the aircars and into the foothills, and all the while knowing that there was nowhere to run to now.

"No, Eric! We've got to go back. We've got to find Mag and Nell—" Her voice rose in anguish, then broke, and she was crying.

"We can't help them by going back," he said harshly. "Maybe they got away. Maybe they didn't. But the others would catch us for sure if they got near us."

Run. It was all they could do, now. Run to other hills and leave the aircar and hide, and live as Lisa had lived, as others of their kind had lived.

"We've got to think of ourselves, Lisa. It's all we can do, now."

Down through the foothills, toward the open valley, and the future, the long blind race to other mountains, and no choice left, no alternative, and the books lost and the starship left behind, forever . . .

Lisa cried, and her fingers bit into his arm. Ahead of him, too close to flee or deceive, was another line of aircars, flying in from the valley, their formation breaking as they veered toward him.

"Land, Eric. Land and run!"

"We can't, Lisa. There's not enough time."

Everything was lost now—even the hills.

Unless . . . one chance. The only chance, and it was nearly hopeless.

"Get in the back, Lisa," he said. "Climb over the seat and hide in that storage compartment. And stay there."

The two nearest cars had swung about now and paralleled his course, flanking him, drifting in nearer and nearer.

"Why?" Lisa clung to him. "What are you going to do?"

"They don't know you're with me. They probably don't even know I went back to the canyon. They think I'll land at the museum, not suspecting anything's wrong. So I'll do just what they expect me to. Go back, and pretend I don't know a thing."

"You're mad."

"It's our only chance, Lisa. If only they don't lock me up to-

night . . ."

She clung to him for still another minute and then she climbed over the seat and he heard the luggage compartment panel slide open and, a moment later, shut.

The nearest aircar drifted still closer to him, escorting him westward, toward the museum. Behind him, other cars closed in.

WALDEN AND PRIOR were waiting for him at the entrance of the main building, just as they had waited so often before. He greeted them casually, trying to act exactly as he usually did, but their greetings to him were far from casual. They stared at him oddly, Prior even drawing back a little as he approached. Walden looked at him for a long moment, very seriously, as if trying to tell him something, but what it was Eric didn't know. Both men were worried, their anxiety showing in their manner, and Eric wondered if he himself showed the fear that gripped him.

They must know what had happened. By now probably every normal person within a hundred miles of the museum must know.

At the entrance he glanced back idly and saw that one of the aircars that had followed him had landed and that the others were angling off again, leaving. It was too dark to see how many men got out of the car, but Walden and Prior were facing in that direction, communicating, and Eric knew that they knew. Everything.

It was like a trap around him, with each of their minds a strand of the net, and he was unable to see which strands were about to entangle him, unable to see if there were any holes through which he might escape. All he could do was pretend that he didn't even know the net existed, and wait.

Half a dozen men came up to Prior and Walden. One of them was Abbot. His face was very stern, and when he glanced over at where Eric stood in the building entrance his face grew even sterner.

Eric watched them for a moment; then he went inside, the way he usually did when there were lots of people around. He wished he knew what they were saying. He wished he knew what was going to happen.

He went on into the library and pulled out a book at random and sat down and started turning the pages. He couldn't read. He kept waiting for them to come in, for one of them to lay a hand on his shoulder and tell him to come along, that they knew he had found other people like himself and that he was a danger to their race and that they were going to lock him up somewhere.

What would happen to Lisa? They'd find her, of course. She could never escape alone, on foot, to the hills.

What had happened to Mag and Nell?

No one came. He knew that their perceptions lay all around him, but he could sense no emotions, no thoughts but his own.

He sat and waited, his eyes focused on the book but not seeing it. It seemed hours before anyone came. Then Prior and Abbot and Walden were in the archway, look-

ing across at him. Prior's face was still worried, Abbot's stern, Walden's reassuring . . .

Eric forced himself to smile at them and then turn another page and pretend to go on reading. After a moment he heard their footsteps retreating, and when he looked up again they were gone.

He sat a while longer and then he got up and walked down the ramp and stood for a few minutes looking at the ship, because that too would be expected of him. He felt nothing. The ship was a world away now, mocking him, for his future no longer lay in the past, with the old race, but out in the hills. If he had a future at all . . .

He went up the ramp again, toward his own room. No one else was in sight. They had all gone to bed, perhaps. They wouldn't expect him to try to run away now.

He began to walk, as aimlessly as he could, in the direction of the aircar. He saw no one. Perhaps it wasn't even guarded. He circled around it, still seeing no one; then, feeling more secure suddenly, he went directly toward it and reached up to open the panel and climb in.

"Is that you, Eric?"

Walden's voice. Quiet as always. And it came from inside the car.

ERIC STOOD frozen, looking up at the ship, trying to see Walden's face and unable to find it in the darkness. He didn't answer —couldn't answer. He listened, and heard nothing except Walden, there above him, moving on the seat.

Where was Lisa?

"I thought you'd come back here," Walden said. He climbed down out of the aircar and stood facing Eric, his body a dim shadow.

"Why are you here?" Eric whispered.

"I wanted to see you. Without the others knowing it. I was sure you'd come here tonight."

Walden. Always Walden. First his teacher and then his friend, and now the one man who stood between him and freedom. For a second Eric felt his muscles tense and he stiffened, ready to leap upon the older man and knock him down and take the ship and run. Then he relaxed. It was a senseless impulse, primitive and useless.

"The others don't know you have any idea what's happened, Eric. But I could tell. It was written all over you."

"What did they find, Walden?"

The old man sighed, and when he spoke his voice was very tired. "They found two women. They tried to capture them, but the women ran out on a ledge. The older one slipped and fell and the other tried to catch her and she fell too. They were dead when the men reached them."

Eric listened, and slowly his tension relaxed, replaced by a dull ache of mourning. But he knew that he was glad to hear that they were dead and not captured, not dragged away from the hills to be bathed and well fed and imprisoned forever under the eyes of the new race.

"The old one was blind," Walden said. "It may have been her blindness that caused her to fall."

"It wasn't."

"No, Eric, it probably wasn't."

They were silent for a moment,

and there was no sound at all except for their own breathing. Eric wondered if Lisa still hid in the aircar, if she was listening to them, afraid and hopeless and crying over the death of her people.

"Why did you come out here, Walden?"

"To see you. I came today, when I realized how suspicious the council had grown. I was going to warn you, to tell you to keep away from the hills, that they wanted an excuse to lock you up. I was too late."

"I was careless, Walden." He felt guilt twist inside of him.

"No. You didn't know the danger. I should have warned you sooner. But I never dreamed you would find anyone in the hills, Eric. I never dreamed there were any more without perception, this generation."

Eric moved nearer the car and leaned against it, the cold plastic next to his body cooling him a little, steadying him against the feverish trembling that shook his legs and sent sweat down over him and made him too weak, suddenly, to want to struggle further.

"Let me go, Walden. Let me take the car and go."

Walden didn't move. He stood quietly, a tall thin shape in the darkness.

"There are other people the searchers didn't find, aren't there? And you're going to them."

Eric didn't answer. He looked past Walden, at the car, wishing he could somehow call to Lisa, wishing they could perceive so that he could reassure her and promise her that somehow he'd still take her to freedom. But it would be an empty promise . . .

"I've warned you too late. You've found your people, but it won't do you any good. They'll hunt you through the hills, and I won't be able to help you any more."

Eric looked back at him, hearing the sadness in his voice. It was real sadness, real emotion. He thought of the years he had spent with Walden, learning, absorbing the old race knowledge, and he remembered that all through those years Walden had never once made him feel uncomfortable because of the difference between them.

He looked at the old man for a long time, wishing that it was day so he could read the other's expression, wondering how he had managed to take this man for granted for so long.

"Why?" he whispered. "Why are you helping me? Why aren't you like the others?"

"I never had a son, Eric. Perhaps that's the reason."

Eric thought of Myron and shook his head. "No, it isn't that. My father doesn't feel the way you do. He can't forget that I'm not normal. With him, I'm always aware of the difference."

"And you're not with me?"

"No," Eric said. "I'm not. Why?" And he wondered why he had never asked that question before.

"The final question," Walden said softly. "I wondered how long it would be before you asked it. I wondered if you'd ever ask it.

"Haven't you ever thought about why I never married, Eric? Haven't you ever asked yourself why I alone learned to read, and collected books, and studied the old race?"

"No," Eric admitted. "I just accepted you."

"Even though I can perceive and you can't." Walden paused and Eric waited, not knowing what was coming and yet sure that nothing could surprise him now.

"My father was normal," Walden said slowly. "But I never saw him. My mother was like you. So was my brother. We lived in the hills and I was the only one who could perceive. I learned what it was to be different."

Eric stared. He couldn't stop staring. And yet he should have realized, long ago, that Walden was different too, in his own way.

WALDEN SMILED back, his face, shadowed in moonlight, as quiet and as understanding as ever. For a moment neither spoke, and there was only the faraway sound of crickets chirping and the rustling of the wind in the gardens.

And then, from within the aircar, there was a different rustling, that of a person moving.

"Lisa!"

Eric pushed the compartment panel back. The soft light came on automatically, framing her where she curled against the far wall.

"You heard us?"

She nodded. Tears had dried on her cheeks. Her eyes were huge in her thin face.

"We'd better go, Lisa."

He reached in to help her out.

They didn't see the aircar dropping in for a landing until it was almost upon them, until its lights arced down over the museum walls.

"Hide, Eric. In here—" Lisa pulled him forward.

Behind them, Walden's voice, suddenly tired in the darkness. "It's too late. They know I'm here. And they're wondering why."

The three of them stood frozen, watching each other, while the dark shape of the car settled to the ground some thirty yards away.

"It's Abbot," Walden said. He paused, intent for a moment, and added, "He doesn't know about you. Get out of sight somewhere, both of you, away from here—"

"Come on, Lisa—" Eric swung away from the car, toward the shelter of the building and whatever hiding place there might be. "Hurry!"

They ran, and the museum rose in front of them, and the door was open. They were through it and into the dim corridor, and there was no one around; Walden's figure was lost in the night outside. Beyond the libraries the great ramp spiraled downward.

"This way, Lisa!"

They came out into the bottom of the well and there in front of them the starship rested. Still reaching upward. Still waiting, as it had waited for so many uncounted years.

Their ship—if only it could be their ship . . .

"Oh, Eric!"

Side by side they stood staring at it, and Eric wished that they could get into it and go, right now, while they were still free and there was no one to stop them. But they couldn't. There was no food in the ship, no plant tanks, none of the many provisions the books listed.

Besides, if they took off now they

would destroy the museum and all the people in it, and probably kill themselves as well.

"Eric! We know you're down there!" It wasn't Walden's voice. Lisa moved closer. Eric put his arm around her and held her while footsteps hurried toward them down the ramp. The council. Abbot and Drew and the others. Prior, shaking his head. Walden.

"Let us go," Eric cried. "Why won't you let us go?"

Walden turned to the others. His eyes pleaded with them. His lips moved and his hands were expressive, gesturing. But the others stood without moving, without expression.

Then Abbot pushed Walden aside and started forward, his face hard and determined and unchangeable.

"You won't let us go," Eric said.

"No. You're fools, both of you."

There was one answer, only one answer, and with it, a hot violence in his blood as the old race pattern came into focus, as the fear and the futility fell away.

It was only a few steps to the ship. Eric caught Lisa's arm and pulled her after him and ran toward it, reaching up to the door. In one motion he flung it open and lifted her through it, then he swung about to face the others.

"Let us go!" he shouted. "Promise to let us go, or we'll take off anyway and if we die at least you'll die too!"

Abbot stopped. He looked back at Walden, his face scornful. "You see?" he said aloud. "They're mad. And you let this happen."

He turned away, dismissing Walden, and came toward the ship. The others followed him.

Eric waited. He stood with his back to the door, waiting, as Abbot strode toward him, ahead of the other councilmen, alone and unprotected.

"You're the fool!" Eric said. He laughed as he leaped forward.

Abbot's eyes went wide suddenly; he tried to dodge, gave a little grunt, and went limp in Eric's grasp.

Eric laughed again, swung Abbot into the ship and leaped in himself. The old race and its violence had never been nearer.

He slammed the door shut, bolted it, and turned back to where the councilman was struggling to his feet.

"Now will you let us go?" Eric said softly. "Or must we take off now, with you—for the stars?"

For a long moment Abbot looked at him, and then his lips trembled and his whole body went slack in defeat.

"The ship is yours," he whispered. "Just let me go."

Outside the ship, Walden chuckled wryly.

THE VACUUM SUIT was strange against Eric's body, as strange as the straps that bound him to the couch. He looked over at Lisa and she too was unrecognizable, a great bloated slug tied down beside him. Only her face, frightened behind the helmet, looked human.

He reached for the controls, then paused, glancing down through the view screens at the ground, at the

people two hundred feet below, tiny ants scurrying away from the ship, running to shelter but still looking up at him. He couldn't see his parents or Walden.

His fingers closed about the control lever but still he stared down. Everything that had been familiar all his life stood out sharply now, because he was leaving and it would never be there again for him. And he had to remember what it was like . . .

Then he looked up. The sky was blue and cloudless above him, and there were no stars at all. But he knew that beyond the sky the stars were shining.

And perhaps, somewhere amid the stars, the old race waited.

He turned to Lisa. "This may be goodbye, darling."

"It may be. But it doesn't matter, really."

They had each other. It was enough. Even though they could never be as close to each other as the new race was close. They were separate, with a gulf always between their inmost thoughts, but they could bridge that gulf, sometimes.

He turned back to the controls and his fingers tightened. The last line of the poem shouted in his mind, and he laughed, for he knew finally what the poet had meant, what the old race had lived for. *We have cast off the planets like outgrown toys, and now we want the stars . . .*

He pulled the lever back and the ship sprang free. A terrible weight pressed against him, crushing him, stifling him. But still he laughed, because he was one of the old race, and he was happy.

And the meaning of his life lay in the search itself.

THEY STOOD staring up at the ship until it was only a tiny speck in the sky, and then they looked away from it, at each other. A wave of perception swept among them, drawing them closer to each other in the face of something they couldn't understand.

"Why did they go?" Abbot asked, in his mind.

"Why did any of the old race go?" Walden answered.

The sunlight flashed off the ship, and then it was gone.

"It's not surprising that the old race died," Abbot said. "They were brilliant, in their way, and yet they did such strange things. Their lives seemed so completely meaningless . . ."

Walden didn't answer for a moment. His eyes searched the sky for a last glimpse of the ship, but there was nothing at all. He sighed, and he looked at Abbot, and then past him, at all the others.

"I wonder," he said, "how long it will be before some other race says the same thing about us."

No one answered. He turned and walked away from them, across the trampled flowers, toward the museum and the great empty vault where the starship had waited for so long.

THE END

The trees on Mars are few and stunted, says old Doc Yoris. There's plenty of gold, of course—but trees can be much more important!

TREES *are where you find them*

By Arthur Dekker

Savage

Illustrated by Philip Parsons

YOU MIGHT say the trouble started at the Ivy, which is a moving picture house in Cave Junction built like a big quonset. It's the only show in these parts, and most of us old-timers up here in the timber country of southwest Oregon have got into the habit of going to see a picture on Saturday nights before we head for a tavern.

But I don't think old Doc Yoris, who was there with Lew and Rusty and me, had been to more than two or three shows in his life. Doc is kind of sensitive about his appearance on acount of his small eyes and big nose and ears; and since gold mining gave way to logging and lumber mills, with Outsiders drifting into the country, Doc has taken to staying on his homestead away back up along Deer Creek, near the boundary of the Siskiyou National Forest. It's gotten so he'll

come to Cave Junction only after dark, and even then he wears dark glasses so strangers won't notice him too much.

I couldn't see anything funny about the picture when Doc started laughing, but I figure it's a man's own business when he wants to laugh, so I didn't say anything. The show was one of these scientific things, and when Doc began to cackle it was showing some men getting out of a rocket ship on Mars and running over to look at some trees.

Rusty, who's top choker setter in our logging outfit, was trying to see Doc's point. He can snare logs with a hunk of steel cable faster than anyone I know, but he's never had much schooling. He turned to Doc. "I don't get it, Doc," he said. "What's the deal?"

Doc kept chuckling. "It's them trees," he said. "There's no trees like that on Mars."

"Oh," said Rusty.

I suppose it was just chance that Burt Holden was sitting behind us and heard the talk. Burt is one of the newcomers. He'd come down from Grants Pass and started a big lumber mill and logging outfit, and was trying to freeze out the little operators.

He growled something about keeping quiet. That got Rusty and Lew kind of mad, and Lew turned around and looked at Burt. Lew is even bigger than Burt, and things might have got interesting, but I wanted to see the rest of the picture. I nudged him and asked him if he had a chew. They won't let you smoke in the show, but it's okay to chew, and most of us were in the habit anyway, because there's too much danger of forest fire when you smoke on the job.

Doc laughed every time the screen showed trees, and I could hear Burt humping around in his seat like he was irritated.

AT THE END of the show we drifted over to the Owl Tavern and took a table against the north wall, behind the pool tables and across from the bar. Doc had put his dark glasses back on, and he sat facing the wall.

Not that many people apart from the Insiders knew Doc. He hadn't been very active since the young medical doctor had come to Cave Junction in 1948, although he never turned down anyone who came for help, and as far as I knew he'd never lost a patient unless he was already dead when Doc got there.

We were kidding Lew because he was still wearing his tin hat and caulked boots from work. "You figuring on starting early in the morning?" I asked him. Rusty and Doc laughed. It was a good joke because we rode out to the job in my jeep, and so we'd naturally get there at the same time.

Then Rusty sat up straighter and looked over at the bar. "Hey," he said, "Pop's talking to Burt Holden." Pop Johnson owns our outfit. He's one of the small operators that guys like Burt are trying to squeeze out.

"Hope he don't try to rook Pop into no deals," said Lew.

Doc tipped up his bottle of beer. In Oregon they don't sell anything but beer in the taverns. "Times

change," he said. "Back in 1900 all they wanted was gold. Now they're trying to take all the trees."

"It's the big operators like Burt," I said. "Little guys like Pop can't cut 'em as fast as they grow. The companies don't have to reseed, either, except on National Forest land."

"That Burt Holden was up to my place couple weeks ago," said Doc. "Darn near caught me skinning out a deer."

"He better not yap to the game warden," said Rusty. "Them laws is for sports and Outsiders, not us guys who need the meat."

"He wanted to buy all my timber," said Doc. "Offered me ten dollars a thousand board feet, on the stump."

"Don't sell," I advised him. "If Burt offers that much, almost anyone else will pay twelve."

Doc looked at me. "I'd never sell my trees. Not at any price. I got a hundred and sixty acres of virgin stand, and that's the way it's gonna stay. I cut up the windfalls and snags for firewood, and that's all."

"Here comes Pop," said Lew.

Pop sat down with us and had a beer. He looked worried. We didn't ask him any questions, because we figure a man will talk if he wants to, and if he doesn't it's his own business.

He finally unlimbered. "Burt Holden wants to buy the mill," he said, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand.

"Buy *your* mill?" said Lew. "Hell, his mill is five times as big, and he's even got a burner to take care of slashings, so he don't have to shut down in the fire season."

"He just wants the land," said Pop, "because it's near the highway. He wants to tear down my setup and build a pulp mill."

"A *pulp* mill!" If we could have seen Doc's eyes through the glasses I imagine they'd have been popped open a full half inch. "Why, then they'll be cutting down everything but the brush!"

Pop nodded. "Yeah. Size of a log don't matter when you make paper—just so it's wood."

It seemed as though Doc was talking to himself. "They'll strip the land down bare," he mumbled. "And the hills will wash away, and the chemicals they use in the mill will kill the fish in the creeks and the Illinois River."

"That's why they won't let anyone start a pulp mill near Grants Pass," said Pop. "Most of the town's money comes from sports who come up to the Rogue River to fish."

Rusty set his jaw. "In the winter we *need* them fish," he said. He was right, too. The woods close down in the winter, on account of the snow, and if a man can't hunt and fish he's liable to get kind of hungry. That rocking chair money doesn't stretch very far.

"I ain't gonna sell," said Pop. "But that won't stop Burt Holden, and any place he builds the mill around here will drain into the Illinois."

Doc pushed back his chair and stood up to his full height of five foot four. "I'm gonna talk to Burt Holden," he said.

Rusty stood up to his six foot three. "I'll bring him over here,

Doc," he said. "We're handy to the cue rack here, and Lew and Simmons can keep them guys he's with off my back."

I stood up and shoved Rusty back down. I'm no taller than he is, but I outweigh him about twenty pounds. I started working in the woods when we still felled trees with axes and misery whips—crosscut saws to the Outsiders. "I'll go get him," I said. "You're still mad about the show, and you wouldn't be able to get him this far without mussing him up."

"There won't be no trouble," said Doc. "I just want to make him an offer."

I WENT over and told Burt that Doc wanted to talk to him. The three guys with him followed us back to the table.

Burt figured he knew what it was all about, and he just stood over Doc and looked down on him. "If it's about your timber, Yoris," he said, "I'll take it, but I can't pay you more than nine dollars now. Lumber's coming down, and I'm taking a chance even at that." He rocked back and forth on his heels and looked at Pop as though daring him to say different.

"I still don't want to sell, Mr. Holden," said Doc. "But I've got better than three million feet on my place, and I'll *give* it to you if you won't put a pulp mill anywhere in the Illinois Valley."

We were all floored at that, but Burt recovered first. He gave a nasty laugh. "Not interested, Yoris. If you want to sell, look me up."

"Wait!" said Doc. "A pulp mill will take every tree in the Valley. In a few years—"

"It'll make money, too," said Burt flatly.

"Money ain't everything by a long shot. It won't buy trees and creeks and rain."

"It'll buy trees to make lumber." Burt was getting mad. "I don't want any opposition from you, Yoris. I've had enough trouble from people who try to hold back progress. If you don't like the way we run things here, you can—hell, you can go back to Mars!"

It seemed to me that it was just about time to start in. I could have taken Burt easiest, but I knew Rusty would probably swing on him first and get in my way, so I planned to work on the two guys on Burt's right, leaving the one on his left for Lew. I didn't want Pop to get tangled up in it.

I don't generally wait too long after I make up my mind, but then I noticed Rusty reaching out slowly for a cue stick, and I thought maybe I'd better take Burt first, while Rusty got set. I never did see a guy so one way about having something in his hands.

But Doc didn't drop out. "There ain't nothing but a few scrub trees on Mars," he said to Burt, looking him square in the eye. "And no creeks and no rain."

Burt curled his lip sarcastically. "The hell you say! Is that why you didn't like it there?" You could see he was just trying to egg Doc into saying he'd come from Mars, so he could give him the horse laugh. The guys he was with were getting set for a fracas, but they were waiting for Burt to lead off.

Doc didn't get caught. "But there's gold," he said, like he hadn't heard Burt at all. "Tons of it—laying all over the ground."

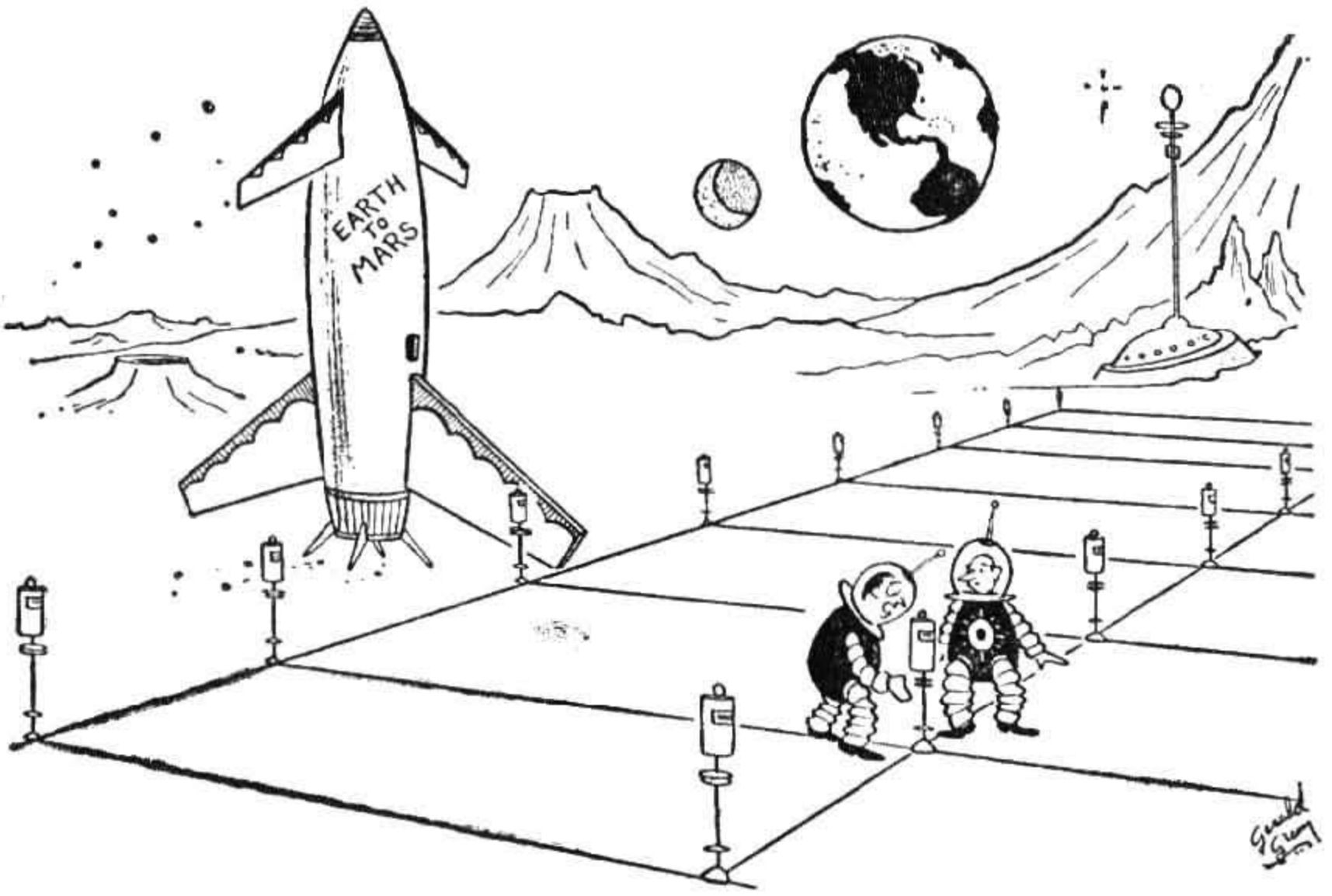
I guess Burt decided to ride along. "Okay, Yoris," he said. "Tell you what I'll do. For only one ton of Martian gold I'll agree to drop all plans for a pulp mill, here or anywhere else. In fact, I'll get out of business altogether."

Doc moved in like a log falling out of the loading tongs. "That's a deal," he said. "You ready to go?"

Burt started to look disgusted, then he smiled. "Sure. Mars must be quite a place if you came from there."

"Okay," said Doc. "You just stand up against the wall, Mr. Holden." Burt's smile faded. He figured Doc was trying to maneuver him into a likely position for us. But Doc cleared that up quick. "You boys get up and stand aside," he ordered. "Get back a ways and give Mr. Holden plenty of room." We didn't like it, but we cleared out from around the table. A bunch from the bar and pool tables, sensing something was up, came drifting over to watch. I could feel tension building up. "Now," said Doc, pointing, "you just stand right over there, Mr. Holden, and fold your arms."

Burt didn't like the audience, and I guess he figured his plans were backfiring when Doc didn't bluff. "You hill-happy old coot," he



"It's probably ridiculous, but they appear to be some sort of parking meters."

snarled. "You'd better go home and sleep it off!" I grabbed hold of Lew's arm and shook my head at Rusty. I wasn't going to interfere with Doc now.

"You're not scared, are you, Mr. Holden?" said Doc quietly. "Just you stand against the wall and take it easy. It won't hurt a bit."

BURT HOLDEN was plenty tough for an Outsider, and a hard-headed businessman to boot, but he'd never run into a customer like Doc before. You could see him trying to make up his mind on how to handle this thing. He glanced around quick at the crowd, and I could tell he decided to play it out to where Doc would have to draw in his horns. He actually grinned, for the effect it would have on everybody watching. "All right, Yoris," he said. He backed against the wall and folded his arms. "But hadn't you better stand up here with me?"

"I ain't going," said Doc. "I don't like Mars. But you won't have no trouble getting your gold. There's nuggets the size of your fist laying all over the dry river beds."

"I hate to be nosey," said Burt, playing to the crowd, "but how are you going to get me there?"

"With his head, o'course!" blurted Rusty before I could stop him. "Just like he cures you when you're sick!" Doc had pulled Rusty through two or three bad kid sicknesses—and a lot of the rest of us, too.

"Yep," said Doc. "A man don't need one of them rocket things to get between here and Mars. Fact is, I never seen one."

Burt looked at the ceiling like he was a martyr, then back at Doc. "Well, Yoris," he said in a tone that meant he was just about through humoring him, "I'm waiting. Can you send me there or can't you?" The start of a nasty smile was beginning to show at the corners of his mouth.

"Sure," said Doc. He slumped down in his chair and cupped his hands lightly around his dark glasses. I noticed his fingers trembling a little against his forehead.

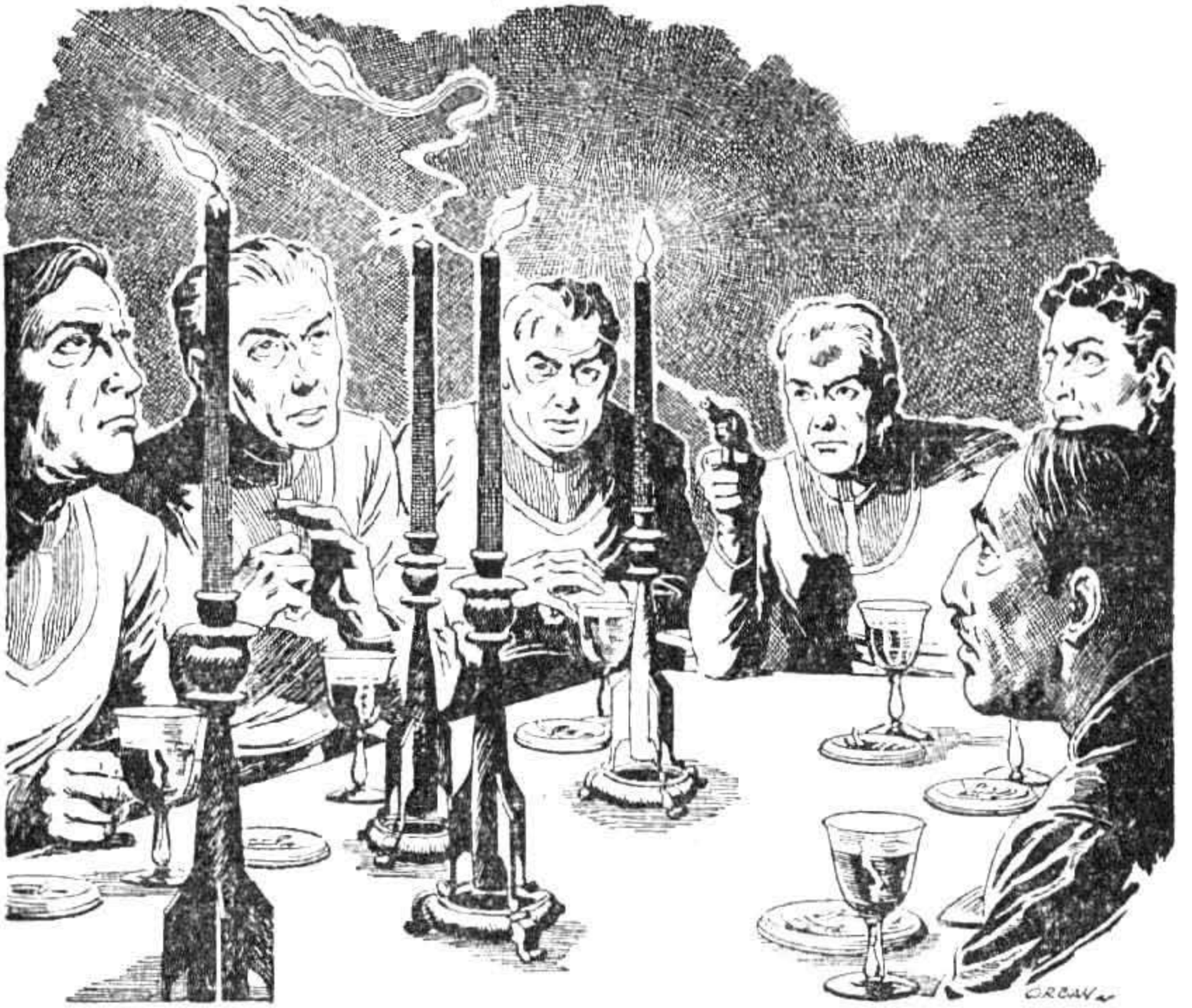
The lights dimmed, flickered and want out, and we waited for the bartender to put in a new fuse. The power around here doesn't go haywire except in the winter, when trees fall across the lines. A small fight started over in a corner.

When the lights came back on, Doc and Pop started for the door, and Lew and Rusty and I followed. Burt's buddies were looking kind of puzzled, and a few old-timers were moving over to watch the fight. The rest were heading back to the bar.

Rusty piled into the jeep with Doc and me. "When you going to bring him back, Doc?" he asked when we started moving.

"Dunno," said Doc. He took off his glasses to watch me shift gears. He's been after me for a long time to teach him how to drive. "It only works on a man once."

THE END



Daylight sometimes hides secrets that darkness will reveal—the Martian's glowing eyes, for instance. But darkness has other dangers . . .

THE EYES HAVE IT

By James McKimmey, Jr.

Illustrated by Paul Orban

JOSEPH HEIDEL looked slowly around the dinner table at the five men, hiding his examination by a thin screen of smoke from his cigar. He was a large man with thick blond-gray hair cut close to his head. In three more months he would be fifty-two, but his face and body had the vital look of a man fifteen years younger. He was the President of the Superior Council, and he had been in that post—the

highest post on the occupied planet of Mars—four of the six years he had lived here. As his eyes flicked from one face to another his fingers unconsciously tapped the table, making a sound like a miniature drum roll.

One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Five top officials, selected, tested, screened on Earth to form the nucleus of governmental rule on Mars.

Heidel's bright narrow eyes flicked, his fingers drummed. Which one? Who was the imposter, the ringer? Who was the Martian?

Sadler's dry voice cut through the silence: "This is not just an ordinary meeting then, Mr. President?"

Heidel's cigar came up and was clamped between his teeth. He stared into Sadler's eyes. "No, Sadler, it isn't. This is a very special meeting." He grinned around the cigar. "This is where we take the clothes off the sheep and find the wolf."

Heidel watched the five faces. Sadler, Meehan, Locke, Forbes, Clarke. One of them. Which one?

"I'm a little thick tonight," said Harry Locke. "I didn't follow what you meant."

"No, no, of course not," Heidel said, still grinning. "I'll explain it." He could feel himself alive at that moment, every nerve singing, every muscle toned. His brain was quick and his tongue rolled the words out smoothly. This was the kind of situation Heidel handled best. A tense, dramatic situation, full of atmosphere and suspense.

"Here it is," Heidel continued, "simply and briefly." He touched the cigar against an ash tray, watching with slitted shining eyes while the ashes spilled away from the glowing tip. He bent forward suddenly. "We have an imposter among us, gentlemen. A spy."

He waited, holding himself tense against the table, letting the sting of his words have their effect. Then he leaned back, carefully. "And tonight I am going to expose this imposter. Right here, at this table." He searched the faces again, looking for a tell-tale twitch of a muscle, a movement of a hand, a shading in the look of an eye.

There were only Sadler, Meehan, Locke, Forbes, Clarke, looking like themselves, quizzical, polite, respecting.

"One of us, you say," Clarke said noncommittally, his phrase neither a question nor a positive statement.

"That is true," said Heidel.

"Bit of a situation at that," said Forbes, letting a faint smile touch his lips.

"Understatement, Forbes," Heidel said. "Understatement."

"Didn't mean to sound capricious," Forbes said, his smile gone.

"Of course not," Heidel said.

Edward Clarke cleared his throat. "May I ask, sir, how this was discovered and how it was narrowed down to the Superior Council?"

"Surely," Heidel said crisply. "No need to go into the troubles we've been having. You know all about that. But how these troubles originated is the important thing. Do you remember the missionary affair?"

"When we were going to convert the Eastern industrial section?"

"That's right," Heidel said, re-

membering. "Horrible massacre."

"Bloody," agreed John Meehan.

"Sixty-seven missionaries lost," Heidel said.

"I remember the Martian note of apology," Forbes said. "'We have worshipped our own God for two-hundred thousand years. We would prefer to continue. Thank you.' Blinking nerve, eh?"

"Neither here nor there," Heidel said abruptly. "The point is that no one *knew* those sixty-seven men were missionaries except myself and you five men."

HEIDEL WATCHED the faces in front of him. "One case," he said. "Here's another. Do you recall when we outlawed the free selection system?"

"Another bloody one," said Sadler.

"Forty-eight victims in that case," Heidel said. "Forty-eight honorable colonists, sanctioned by us to legally marry any couple on the planet, and sent out over the country to abolish the horrible free-love situation."

"Forty-eight justices of the peace dead as pickerels," Forbes said.

"Do you happen to remember *that* note of apology?" Heidel asked, a slight edge in his voice. He examined Forbes' eyes.

"Matter of fact, yes," said Forbes, returning Heidel's stare steadily. "'You love your way, we'll love ours.' Terribly caustic, what?"

"Terribly," said Heidel. "Although that too is neither here nor there. The point again, no one except the six of us right here knew what those forty-eight men were sent out to do."

Heidel straightened in his chair. The slow grating voice of Forbes had taken some of the sharpness out of the situation. He wanted to hold their attention minutely, so that when he was ready, the dramatics of his action would be tense and telling.

"There is no use," he said, "in going into the details of the other incidents. You remember them. When we tried to install a free press, the Sensible Art galleries, I-Am-A-Martian Day, wrestling, and all the rest."

"I remember the wrestling business awfully well," said Forbes. "Martians drove a wrestler through the street in a yellow jetmobile. Had flowers around his neck and a crown on his head. He was dead, of course. Stuffed, I think. . ."

"All right," snapped Heidel. "Each one of our efforts to offer these people a chance to benefit from our culture was snapped off at the bud. And only a leak in the Superior Council could have caused it. It is a simple matter of deduction. There is one of us, here tonight, who is responsible. And I am going to expose him." Heidel's voice was a low vibrant sound that echoed in the large dining room.

The five men waited. Forbes, his long arms crossed. Sadler, his eyes on his fingernails. Meehan, blinking placidly. Clarke, twirling his thumbs. Locke, examining his cigarette.

"Kessit!" Heidel called.

A gray-haired man in a black butler's coat appeared.

"We'll have our wine now," Heidel said. There was a slight

quirk in his mouth, so that his teeth showed between his lips. The butler moved methodically from place to place, pouring wine from a silver decanter.

"Now then, Kessit," Heidel said, when the butler had finished, "would you be kind enough to fetch me that little pistol from the mantel over there?" He smiled outwardly this time. The situation was right again; he was handling things, inch by inch, without interruption.

He took the gun from the old man's hands and said, "One thing more, Kessit. Would you please light the candles on the table and turn out the rest of the lights in the room. I've always been a romanticist," Heidel said, smiling around the table. "Candlelight with my wine."

"Oh, excellent," said Locke soberly.

"Quite," said Forbes.

Heidel nodded and waited while the butler lit the candles and snapped off the overhead lights. The yellow flames wavered on the table as the door closed gently behind the butler.

"Now, then," Heidel said, feeling the tingling in his nerves. "This, gentlemen, is a replica of an antique of the twentieth century. A working replica, I might add. It was called a P-38, if my memory serves me." He held the pistol up so that the candlelight reflected against the glistening black handle and the blue barrel.

There was a polite murmur as the five men stretched forward to look at the gun in Heidel's hands.

"Crude," Sadler said.

"But devilish looking," Forbes added.

"My hobby," Heidel said. "I would like to add that not only do I collect these small arms, but I am very adept at using them. Something I will demonstrate to you very shortly," he added, grinning.

"Say now," nodded Meehan.

"That should be jolly," Forbes said, laughing courteously.

"I believe it will at that," Heidel said. "Now if you will notice, gentlemen," he said touching the clip ejector of the pistol and watching the black magazine slip out into his other hand, "I have but five cartridges in the clip. Just five. You see?"

They all bent forward, blinking.

"Good," said Heidel, shoving the clip back into the grip of the gun. He couldn't keep his lips from curling in his excitement, but his hands were as steady as though his nerves had turned to ice.

The five men leaned back in their chairs.

"Now then, Meehan," he said to the man at the opposite end of the table. "Would you mind moving over to your left, so that the end of the table is clear?"

"Oh?" said Meehan. "Yes, of course." He grinned at the others, and there was a ripple of amusement as Meehan slid his chair to the left.

"Yes," said Heidel. "All pretty foolish-looking, perhaps. But it won't be in a few minutes when I discover the bastard of a Martian who's in this group, I'll tell you that!" His voice rose and rang in the room, and he brought the glistening pistol down with a crack against the table.

THERE WAS dead silence and Heidel found his smile again. "All right, now I'll explain a bit further. Before Dr. Kingly, the head of our laboratory, died a few days ago, he made a very peculiar discovery. As you know, there has been no evidence to indicate that the Martian is any different, physically, from the Earthman. Not until Dr. Kingly made his discovery, that is."

Heidel looked from face to face. "This is how it happened," he went on. "Dr. Kingly. . ."

He paused and glanced about in false surprise. "I beg you pardon, gentlemen. We might as well be enjoying our wine. Excellent port. Very old, I believe. Shall we?" he asked, raising his glass.

Five other glasses shimmered in the candlelight.

"Let us, ah, toast success to the unveiling of the rotten Martian who sits among us, shall we?" Heidel's smile glinted and he drank a quarter of his glass.

The five glasses tipped and were returned to the table. Again there was silence as the men waited.

"To get back," Heidel said, listening with excitement to his own voice. "Dr. Kingly, in the process of an autopsy on a derelict Martian, made a rather startling discovery. . ."

"I beg your pardon," Forbes said. "Did you say autopsy?"

"Yes," said Heidel. "We've done this frequently. Not according to base orders, you understand." He winked. "But a little infraction now and then is necessary."

"I see," said Forbes. "I just didn't know about that."

"No, you didn't, did you?" said Heidel, looking at Forbes closely. "At any rate, Dr. Kingly had developed in his work a preserving solution which he used in such instances, thereby prolonging the time for examination of the cadaver, without experiencing deterioration of the tissues. This solution was merely injected into the blood stream, and . . ."

"Sorry again, sir," Forbes said. "But you said blood stream?"

"Yes," Heidel nodded. "This had to be done before the cadaver was a cadaver, you see?"

"I think so, yes," said Forbes, leaning back again. "Murdered the bastard for an autopsy, what?"

Heidel's fingers closed around the pistol. "I don't like that, Forbes."

"Terribly sorry, sir."

"To get on," Heidel said finally, his voice a cutting sound. "Dr. Kingly had injected his solution and then. . . Well, at any rate, when he returned to his laboratory, it was night. His laboratory was black as pitch—I'm trying to paint the picture for you, gentlemen—and the cadaver was stretched out on a table, you see. And before Dr. Kingly switched on the lights, he saw the eyes of this dead Martian glowing in the dark like a pair of hot coals."

"Weird," said Sadler, unblinking.

"Ghostly," said Clarke.

"The important thing," Heidel said curtly, "is that Dr. Kingly discovered the difference, then, between the Martian and the Earthman. The difference is the eyes. The solution, you see, had reacted chemically to the membranes of the eyeballs, so that as it

happened they lit up like electric lights. I won't go into what Dr. Kingly found further, when he dissected the eyeballs. Let it suffice to say, the Martian eyeball is a physical element entirely different from our own—at least from those of five of us, I should say."

His grin gleamed. He was working this precisely and carefully, and it was effective. "Now, however," he continued, "it is this *sixth* man who is at issue right now. The fly in the soup, shall we say. And in just a few seconds I am going to exterminate that fly."

He picked up the pistol from the table. "As I told you, gentlemen, I am quite versatile with this weapon. I am a dead shot, in other words. And I am going to demonstrate it to you." He glanced from face to face.

"You will notice that since Mr. Meehan has moved, I have a clear field across the table. I don't believe a little lead in the woodwork will mar the room too much, would you say, Forbes?"

Forbes sat very still. "No, I shouldn't think so, sir."

"Good. Because I am going to snuff out each of the four candles in the center of this table by shooting the wick away. You follow me, gentlemen? Locke? Meehan? Sadler?"

Heads nodded.

"Then perhaps you are already ahead of me. When the last candle is extinguished, we will have darkness, you see. And then I think we'll find our Martian rat. Because, as a matter of fact," Heidel lolled his words, "I have taken the privilege of adding to the wine we have been drinking Dr. Kingly's preserving solution. Non-tasteful, non-harmful. Except, that is, to one man in this room."

Heidel motioned his gun. "And God rest the bastard's soul, because if you will remember, I have five bullets in the chamber of this pistol. Four for the candles and one for the brain of the sonofabitch whose eyes light up when the last candle goes out."

THERE WAS a steady deadly silence while the flames of the candles licked at the still air.

"I think, however," Heidel said, savoring the moment, "that we should have one final toast before we proceed." He lifted his glass. "May the receiver of the fifth bullet go straight to hell. I phrase that literally, gentlemen," he said, laughing. "Drink up!"

The glasses were drained and placed again on the table.

"Watch carefully," Heidel said and lifted the pistol. He aimed at the first candle. The trigger was taut against his finger, the explosion loud in the room.

"One," said Heidel.

He aimed again. The explosion.

"Two," he said. "Rather good, eh?"

"Oh, yes," Sadler said.

"Quite," said Forbes.

"Again," said Heidel. A third shot echoed.

"Now," he said, pointing the muzzle at the last candle. "I would say this is it, wouldn't you, gentlemen? And as soon as this one goes, I'm afraid one of us is going to find a bullet right between his god-

dam sparkling eyes. Are you ready?"

He squinted one eye and looked down the sights. He squeezed the trigger, the room echoed and there was blackness. Heidel held his pistol poised over the table.

Silence.

"Well," said Forbes finally. "There you have it. Surprise, what?"

Heidel balanced the pistol, feeling his palm go suddenly moist against the black grip, and he looked around at the five pairs of glowing eyes.

"Bit of a shock, I should imagine," Forbes said. "Discovering all of us, as it were."

Heidel licked his lips. "How? *How* could you do this?"

Forbes remained motionless. "Simple as one, you know. Put men on rockets going back to Earth in place of returning colonists. Study. Observe. Learn. Shift a record here and there. Forge, change pictures, all that sort of thing. Poor contact between here and Earth, you know. Not too difficult."

"I'll get one of you," Heidel said, still balancing his pistol tightly.

"Well, possibly," Forbes said. "But no more than one. You have three guns pointed at you. We can see you perfectly, you know, as though it were broad daylight. One shiver of that pistol, and you're dead."

"Why have you done this?" Heidel said suddenly. "*Why?* Everything that was done was for the Martian. We tried to give you freedom and culture, the benefit of our knowledge. . ."

"We didn't like your wrestlers," Forbes said.

Heidel's nostrils twitched, and suddenly he swung the pistol. There was a crashing explosion and then silence.

"Good," said Forbes. "I don't think he got the last one fired."

"You're all right then?" asked Meehan, putting his gun on the table.

"Oh, quite! Rather dramatic altogether, eh?"

"Nerve tingling," Locke agreed.

Forbes turned in his chair and called, "Oh Kessit!"

The butler opened the door to the darkened room, hesitated, and reached for the light switch.

"No, no," Forbes said, smiling. "Never mind that. Come over here, will you please?"

The butler crossed the room slowly.

"It's all right," Forbes said. "The president will notice nothing whatever, Kessit. Would you mind pouring us all another glass of wine? I'm frightfully crazy about that port, eh?"

There was a murmur of agreeing voices. The butler lifted the silver decanter and filled glasses, moving easily and surely in the darkness.

"Cheers," said Forbes.

"Cheers," said the others, over the clink of glasses.

THE END

Personalities in Science

He Analyzes the Sunshine and Fights Darkness

Hans A. Bethe

HANS ALBRECHT BETHE is known, among his colleagues, as the man "who discovered what makes the sun shine," and he was a key figure in the development of the atomic bomb. Yet he deplores the usual "overemphasis" on complicated nuclei and on fission, which "is, after all, only a very special phenomenon in nuclear physics"—so much so that he completely omitted any mention of it in a 20 lecture course he gave at the General Electric Laboratories.

Obviously, Prof. Bethe has thought long and deeply on the implications of his work, and helps greatly to discredit the common description of research scientists as "cold-blooded." After the last war, he became a member of the nine-man Emergency Committee of Atomic Scientists, headed by Albert Einstein, to educate the public to the essential facts in this field. When the possibility of the hydrogen bomb became public in 1950, he served as spokesman for a group of scientists who called themselves "worried citizens" and urged the United States to resolve never to use the H-bomb first.

His views are perhaps best summed up by a quotation from an article of his which appeared in the April 1950 issue of *Scientific American:* "The situation in atomic energy has changed, both because of the Soviet development of the A-bomb and because of our decision on the H-bomb. To leave atomic weapons uncontrolled would be against the best interests of both countries. If we can negotiate seriously with the U.S.S.R., the scale of the negotiations should probably be as broad as possible. But the situation would be greatly eased if we could agree only to eliminate the greatest menace to civilization, the hydrogen bomb."

It may appear slightly ironic to

some that the man who wrote those words has been called, by *Time* magazine, "one of Nazi Germany's greatest gifts to the United States." If anything, this is a modest statement, for the Bethe carbon cycle, a series of six linked transformations, was the first and only explanation of solar and stellar energy which met all the known facts.

Hans Bethe was born in Strasbourg, Alsace-Lorraine, on July 2, 1906. He was an only child. There had been university professors in his family for generations; his father, Albrecht Theodore Bethe, was properly styled Doktor Doktor Professor Bethe, having both his M.D. and Ph. D. degrees.

Hans received his own Ph.D. in 1928 at the University of Munich. For his doctor's thesis, he used the new system of quantum mechanics to explain the effect of diffraction and refraction in crystals. This tended to set the scientific world on its collective ear, since the system had only been presented by its discoverers, Schrödinger and Heisenberg, in 1926, and very few people so much as claimed to understand it at the time.

With this accomplishment behind him, Bethe went to Frankfurt as an instructor of physics, and took a similar post at Stuttgart in 1929. From 1930 to 1932 he was a lecturer at the University of Munich. During this time he worked under Sir Ernest Rutherford at Cambridge and Enrico Fermi in Rome, on a fellowship from the Rockefeller International Education Board. With Fermi, he wrote "Reciprocal Action of Two Electrons", which was published in 1932. This brought him into contact with Niels Bohr, "the founder of modern atomic theory".

When Hitler came to power, Bethe was assistant professor at the University of Tübingen, in addition to lecturing at Munich. Since his mother was Jewish, he left Germany and went to England. In 1933-34, he was at the University of Manchester; in 1934-35 at Bristol as a fellow.

HE ARRIVED in the United States in 1935, to be an assistant professor at Cornell. (He has, incidentally, been a full professor since 1937.)

Shortly after his arrival, Bethe was chosen as one of the assistant editors of the American Physical Society's journal, to serve a three-year term. What amounted to "a 487-page textbook of nuclear physics"—three issues of *Reviews of Modern Physics* devoted almost exclusively to his writings—has been reprinted numerous times.

Impressive as his work is, a list of Bethe's major professional interests is perhaps even more so. To quote the Professor himself, they are "quantum theory of atoms, theory of metals, quantum theory of collisions, theory of atomic nuclei, energy production in stars, quantum electrodynamics, shock wave theory and microwaves." One of his most important treatises is "Energy Production in Stars," the first two sections of which were published in 1938 and won the New York Academy of Science's A. Cressy Morrison Prize. (The third section appeared four years later.)

Bethe first learned of the importance of thermo-nuclear reactions in the sun's energy at the 1938 Washington Conference on Theoretical Physics. As propounded then, the problem was: knowing the proportion (35%) of hydrogen in the sun, to determine the other elements which would react to account for its radiation, size and other known characteristics. Bethe started considering the problem as soon as his train left for the return trip to Ithaca and, according to his friend George Gamow, "had the answer at the very moment when the passing dining car steward announced the first call for dinner".

His solution, of course, was the six-step reaction cycle in which carbon and nitrogen act as catalysts transforming the hydrogen protons into one alpha particle. The atomic weight lost in this process becomes energy in accordance with Einstein's formula. Bethe was able to show that the energy liberation of his reaction chain at 20,000,000 degrees centigrade coincides exactly with the amount of energy radiated by the sun. And speaking of that energy, he remarked, "At the rate of one cent per kilowatt hour, we would have to pay a billion billion dollars to keep the sun going for a single second."

These results were reported in the spring of 1940, and not satisfied with this bit of progress, Bethe also made headlines in January of that year with the first mathematical confirmation that the newly discovered meson holds matter together!

During the war, Bethe devoted himself to work that is still largely secret. He had become a naturalized citizen in 1941, and in 1942 and 1943 was able to work in MIT's top secret Radiation Laboratory. After that, he became chief of the theoretical physics division at Los Alamos, a post he held until 1946. It was his responsibility to decide the critical size of the fissionable mass, and what the chances were of a chain reaction destroying the world.

After the war, he became a public figure, as already noted. His work went on, however. He won his second Morrison Prize in 1947, the same year he again became a member of the American Physical Society's board of editors. In June 1948 he became a visiting professor at Columbia. He remains one of the Atomic Energy Commission's most valued consultants.

Personally, his friends describe him as a modest man with a famous appetite. The tradition of his university professor's lineage has held true in his immediate family. His wife, the former Rose Ewald, whom he married in 1939, is a professor of physics at Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute, and the daughter of a Nazi-exiled German physicist. The Bethes have two children.

Hans Bethe lists skiing, economics, and riding on trains as his primary diversions, but nothing can hold him the way his work does. And the difficulty and value of that work is not lessened by the fact that he does much of it while sitting in an easy chair in his living room—thinking!

THE END

The entities were utterly, ambitiously evil; their line of defense, apparently, was absolutely impregnable.

I'll Kill You Tomorrow

By Helen Huber

Illustrated by Kelly Freas

IT WAS NOT a sinister silence. No silence is sinister until it acquires a background of understandable menace. Here there was only the night quiet of Maternity, the silence of noiseless rubber heels on the hospital corridor floor, the faint brush of starched white skirts brushing through doorways into darkened and semi-darkened rooms.

But there was something wrong with the silence in the "basket room" of Maternity, the glass-walled room containing row on row, the tiny hopes of tomorrow. The curtain was drawn across the window through which, during

visiting hours, peered the proud fathers who did the hoping. The nightlight was dim.

The silence should not have been there.

Lorry Kane, standing in the doorway, looked out over the rows of silent baskets and felt her blonde hair tighten at the roots. The tightening came from instinct, even before her brain had a chance to function, from the instincts and training of a registered nurse.

Thirty odd babies grouped in one room and—*complete silence.*

Not a single whimper. Not one tiny cry of protest against the annoying phenomenon of birth.

Thirty babies—*dead?* That was the thought that flashed, unbidden, into Lorry's pretty head. The absurdity of it followed swiftly, and Lorry moved on rubber soles between a line of baskets. She bent down and explored with practiced fingers.

A warm, living bundle in a white basket.

The feeling of relief was genuine. Relief, even from an absurdity, is a welcome thing. Lorry smiled and bent closer.

Staring up at Lorry from the basket were two clear blue eyes. Two eyes, steady and fixed in a round baby face. An immobile, pink baby face housing two blue eyes that stared up into Lorry's with a quiet concentration that was chilling.

Lorry said, "What's the matter with you?" She spoke in a whisper and was addressing herself. She'd gone short on sleep lately—the only way, really, to get a few hours with Pete. Pete was an interne at General Hospital, and the kind of a homely grinning carrot-top a girl like Lorry could put into dreams as the center of a satisfactory future.

But all this didn't justify a case of jitters in the "basket room."

Lorry said, "Hi, short stuff," and lifted Baby Newcomb—Male, out of his crib for a cuddling.

Baby Newcomb didn't object. The blue eyes came closer. The week-old eyes with the hundred-year-old look. Lorry laid the bundle over her shoulder and smiled into the dimness.

"You want to be president, Shorty?" Lorry felt the warmth of a new life, felt the little body wriggle in snug contentment. "I wouldn't advise it. Tough job." Baby Newcomb twisted in his blanket. Lorry stiffened.

Snug contentment?

Lorry felt two tiny hands clutch and dig into her throat. Not just pawing baby hands. Little fingers that reached and explored for the windpipe.

She uncuddled the soft bundle, held it out. There were the eyes. She chilled. No imagination here. No spectre from lack of sleep.

Ancient murder-hatred glowing in new-born eyes.

CAREFUL, you fool! You'll drop this body." A thin piping voice. A shrill symphony in malevolence.

Fear weakened Lorry. She found a chair and sat down. She held the boy baby in her hands. Training would not allow her to drop Baby Newcomb. Even if she had fainted, she would not have let go.

THE shrill voice: "It was stupid of me. Very stupid."

Lorry was cold, sick, mute.

"Very stupid. These hands are too fragile. There are no muscles in the arms. I couldn't have killed you."

"Please—I . . ."

"Dreaming? No. I'm surprised at—well, at your surprise. You have a trained mind. You should have learned, long ago, to trust your senses."

"I don't—understand."

"Don't look at the doorway. Nobody's coming in. Look at me. Give me a little attention and I'll explain."

"Explain?" Lorry pulled her eyes down to the cherubic little face as she parroted dully.

"I'll begin by reminding you that there are more things in existence than your obscene medical books tell you about."

"Who are you? What are you?"

"One of those things."

"You're not a baby!"

"Of course not. I'm . . ." The beastly, brittle voice drifted into silence as though halted by an intruding thought. Then the thought voiced—voiced with a yearning at once pathetic and terrible: "It would be nice to kill you. Someday I will. Someday I'll kill you if I can find you."

"Why? Why?" Insane words in an insane world. But life had not stopped even though madness had taken over. "Why?"

The voice was matter-of-fact again. No more time for pleasant daydreams. "I'm something your books didn't tell you about. Naturally you're bewildered. Did you ever hear of a bodyless entity?"

Lorry shuddered in silence.

"You've heard of bodyless entities, of course—but you denied their existence in your smug world of precise tidy detail. I'm a bodyless entity. I'm one of a swarm. We come from a dimension your mind wouldn't accept even if I explained it, so I'll save words. We of the swarm seek unfoldment—fulfillment—even as you in your stupid, blind world. Do you want to hear more?"

"I . . ."

"You're a fool, but I enjoy practicing with these new vocal chords, just as I enjoyed flexing the fingers and muscles. That's why I revealed myself. We are, basically of course, parasites. In the dimension where we exist in profusion, evolution has provided for us. There, we seek out and move into a dimensional entity far more intelligent than yourself. We destroy it in a way you wouldn't understand, and it is not important that you should. In fact, I can't see what importance there is in your existing at all."

"You plan to—kill all these babies?"

"Let me congratulate you. You've finally managed to voice an intelligent question. The answer is, no. We aren't strong enough to kill them. We dwelt in a far more delicate dimension than this one and all was in proportion. That was our difficulty when we came here. We could find no entities weak enough to take possession of until we came upon this roomful of infants."

"Then, if you're helpless . . ."

"What do we plan to do? That's

quite simple. These material entities will grow. We will remain attached—ingrained, so to speak. When the bodies enlarge sufficiently . . ."

"Thirty potential assassins . . ." Lorry spoke again to herself, then hurled the words back into her own mind as her sickness deepened.

The shrill chirping: "What do you mean, potential? The word expresses a doubt. Here there is none." The entity's chuckle sounded like a baby, content over a full bottle. "Thirty certain assassins."

"But why must you kill?"

Lorry was sure the tiny shoulders shrugged. "Why? I don't know. I never thought to wonder. Why must you join with a man and propagate some day? Why do you feel sorry for what you term an unfortunate? Explain your instincts and I'll explain mine."

Lorry felt herself rising. Stiffly, she put Baby Newcomb back into his basket. As she did so, a ripple of shrill, jerky laughter crackled through the room. Lorry put her hands to her ears. "You know I can't say anything. You'd keep quiet. They'd call me mad."

"Precisely."

Malicious laughter, like driven sleet, cut into her ears as she fled from the room.

PETER LARCHMONT, M. D., was smoking a quick cigarette by an open fire-escape door on the third floor. He turned as Lorry came down the corridor, flipped his cigarette down into the alley and grinned. "Women shouldn't float on rubber heels," he said. "A man should have warning."

Lorry came close. "Kiss me. Kiss me—hard."

Pete kissed her, then held her away. "You're trembling. Anticipation, Pet?" He looked into her face and the grin faded. "Lorry, what is it?"

"Pete—Pete. I'm crazy. I've gone mad. Hold me."

He could have laughed, but he had looked closely into her eyes and he was a doctor. He didn't laugh. "Tell me. Just stand here. I'll hang onto you and you tell me."

"The babies—they've gone mad." She clung to him. "Not exactly that. Something's taken them over. Something terrible. Oh, Pete! Nobody would believe me."

"I believe the end result," he said, quietly. "That's what I'm for, angel. When you shake like this I'll always believe. But I'll have to know more. And I'll hunt for an answer."

"There isn't any answer, Pete. I *know.*"

"We'll still look. Tell me more, first."

"There isn't any more." Her eyes widened as she stared into his with the shock of a new thought. "Oh, Lord! One of them talked to me, but maybe he—or it—won't talk to you. Then you'll never know for sure! You'll think I'm . . ."

"Stop it. Quit predicting what I'll do. Let's go to the nursery."

They went to the nursery and stayed there for three-quarters of

an hour. They left with the tinny laughter filling their minds—and the last words of the monstrous entity.

"We'll say no more, of course. Perhaps even this incident has been indiscreet. But it's in the form of a celebration. Never before has a whole swarm gotten through. Only a single entity on rare occasions."

Pete leaned against the corridor wall and wiped his face with the sleeve of his jacket. "We're the only ones who know," he said.

"Or ever will know." Lorry pushed back a lock of his curly hair. She wanted to kiss him, but this didn't seem to be the place or the time.

"We can never tell anyone."

"We'd look foolish."

"We've got a horror on our hands and we can't pass it on."

"What are we going to do?" Lorry asked.

"I don't know. Let's recap a little. Got a cigarette?"

They went to the fire door and dragged long and deep on two from Lorry's pack. "They'll be quiet from now on. No more talking—just baby squalls."

"And thirty little assassins will go into thirty homes," Lorry said. "All dressed in soft pink and blue, all filled with hatred. Waiting, biding their time, growing more clever." She shuddered.

"The electric chair will get them all, eventually."

"But how many will they get in the meantime?"

Pete put his arms around her and drew her close and whispered into her ear. "There's nothing we can do—nothing."

"We've got to do something." Lorry heard again the thin, brittle laughter following her, taunting her.

"It was a bad dream. It didn't happen. We'll just have to sleep it off."

She put her cheek against his. The rising stubble of his beard scratched her face. She was grateful for the rough touch of solid reality.

Pete said. "The shock will wear out of our minds. Time will pass. After a while, we won't believe it ourselves."

"That's what I'm afraid of."

"It's got to be that way."

"We've got to do something."

Pete lowered his arm wearily. "Yeah—we've got to do something. Where there's nothing that can be done. What are we—miracle workers?"

"We've got to do something."

"Sure—finish out the watch and then get some sleep."

LORRY AWOKE with the lowering sun in her window. It was a blood red sun. She picked up the phone by her bedside. "Room 307 Resident's extension."

Pete answered drowsily. Lorry said, "Tell me—did I dream, or did it really happen."

"I was going to ask you the same thing. I guess it happened. What are you doing?"

"Lying in bed."

"So am I. But two different beds. Things are done all wrong."

"Want to take a chance and sneak over? I've got an illegal coffee pot."

"Leave the door unlocked."

Lorry put on the coffee. She showered and got into her slip. She was brushing her hair when Pete came in. He looked at her and extended beckoning, clutching fingers. "The hell with phantoms. Come here."

After a couple of minutes, Lorry pulled away and poured the coffee. She reached for her uniform. Pete said, "Don't put it on yet."

"Too dangerous—leaving it off."

He eyed her dreamily. "I'll dredge up will power. I'll also get scads of fat rich clients. Then we'll get married so I can assault you legally."

Lorry studied him. "You're not even listening to yourself. What is it, Pete? What have you dreamed up?"

"Okay. I've got an idea. You said something would have to be done."

"What?"

"A drastic cure for a drastic case. With maybe disaster as the end product."

"Tell me."

"I'll tell you a little, but not too much."

"Why not all?"

"Because if we ever land in court, I want you to be able to say under oath, 'He didn't tell me what he planned to do'."

"I don't like that."

"I don't care if you like it or not. Tell me, what's the one basic thing that stands out in your mind about these—entities?"

"That they're . . ."

"Fragile?"

"Yes—fragile."

"Give me some more coffee."

LORRY demanded to know what was in Pete's mind. All she got was kissed, and she did not see Pete again until eleven o'clock that night. He found her in the corridor in Maternity and motioned her toward the nursery. He carried a tray under a white towel. He said, "You watch the door. I'm going inside. I'll be about a half an hour."

"What are you going to do?"

"You stay out here and mind your business. Your business will be to steer any nosey party away. If you can't, make noise coming in."

Doc Pete turned away and entered the nursery. Lorry stood at the doorway, in the silence, under the brooding night-light, and prayed.

Twenty-five minutes later, Pete came out. His face was white and drawn. He looked like a man who had lately had a preview of Hell's inverted pleasures. His hands trembled. The towel still covered the tray. He said, "Watch them close. Don't move ten steps from here." He started away—turned back. "All hell is scheduled to break loose in this hospital shortly. Let's hope God remains in charge."

Lorry saw the sick dread of his heart underneath his words.

IT COULD have been a major scandal. An epidemic of measles on the maternity floor of a modern hospital indicates the unforgivable medical sin—carelessness. It was hushed up as much as possible, pending the time when the top people could shake off the shock

and recover their wits. The ultimate recovery of thirty babies was a tribute to everyone concerned.

Wan, done-in, Doc Pete drank coffee in Lorry's room. Lorry gave him three lumps of sugar and said, "But are you sure the sickness killed the entities?"

"Quite sure. Somehow they *knew* when I made the injections. They screamed. They knew they were done for."

"It took courage. Tell me: why are you so strong, so brave? Why are you so wonderful?"

"Cut it out. I was scared stiff. If *one* baby had died, I'd have gone through life weighing the cure against the end. It isn't easy to risk doing murder—however urgent the need."

She leaned across and kissed him. "And you were all alone. You wouldn't let me help. Was that fair?"

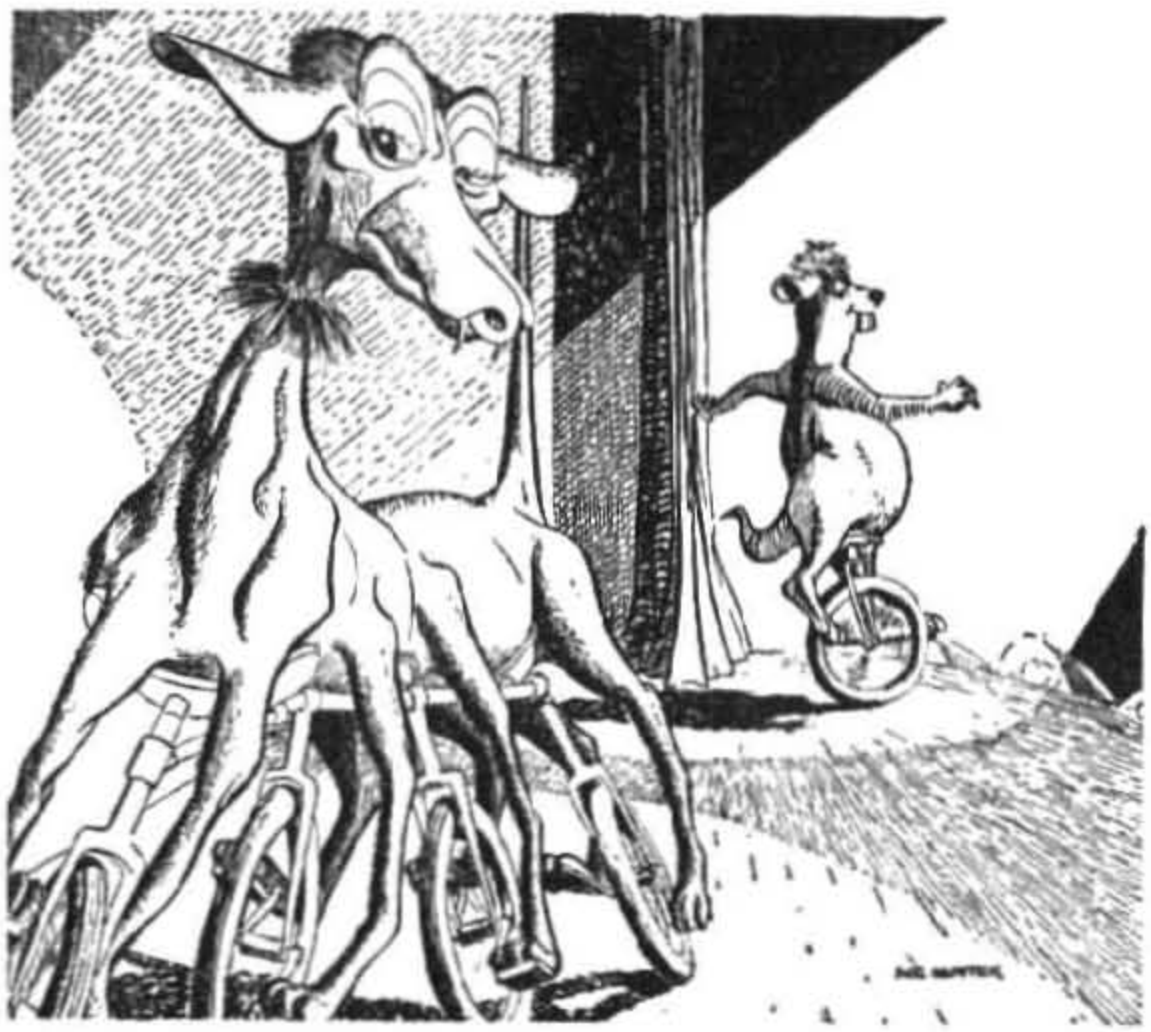
He grinned, then sobered. "But I can't help remembering what that—that invisible monster said: *'Never before has a whole swarm gotten through. Only a single entity on rare occasions.'*

"I can't help wondering what happens to those single entities. I think of the newspaper headlines I've seen: Child Kills Parents in Sleep. Youth Slays Father. I'll probably always wonder—and I'll always remember . . ."

Lorry got up and crossed to him and put her arms around him. "Not always," she whispered. "There will be times when I'll make you forget. For a little while, anyhow."

THE END

Here's the behind-the-scenes lowdown on Luna City life and a promoter of Martian dancing girls, vaudeville, and—other things. But remember: stop us if you've heard this one!



SHOW BUSINESS

By Boyd Ellanby

Illustrated by Mel Hunter

EXCEPT for old Dworken, Kotha's bar was deserted when I dropped in shortly after midnight. The ship from Earth was still two days away, and the Martian flagship would get in next morning, with seven hundred passengers for earth on it. Dworken must have been waiting in Luna City a whole week—at six thousand credits a day. That's as steep to me as it is to you, but money never seemed to worry Dworken.

He raised the heavy green lids from his protruding brown eyes as I came in. He waved his tail.

"Sit down and join me," he invited, in his gutteral voice. "It is not good for a man to drink alone. But I haf no combany in dis by-de-

gods-deserted hole. A man must somet'ing be doing, what?"

I sat down in the booth across from my Venusian friend, and stared at him while he punched a new order into the drinkboard.

"For me, another *shchikh,*" he announced. "And for you? De same?"

Against my better judgment, for I knew I'd have plenty to do handling that mob of tourists—the first crowd of the season is always the roughest—tomorrow, I consented. Dworken had already consumed six of the explosive things, as the empty glasses on the table showed, but he exhibited no effects. I made a mental note, as I'd so often done before, that this time I would not exceed the safe terrestrial limit of two.

"You must be in the money again, drinking imported *shchikh,*" I remarked. "What are you doing in Luna City this time?"

He merely lifted his heavy eyelids and stared at me without expression.

"Na, in de money I am not. Dere are too many chiselers in business. Just when I t'ink I haf a goot t'ing, I am shwindeled. It is too bad." He snorted through his ugly snout, making the Venusian equivalent of a sigh. I knew there was a story waiting behind that warty skin, but I was not sure I wanted to hear it. For the next round of drinks would be on me, and *shchikh* was a hundred and fifty credits a shot. Still, a man on a Moon assignment has to amuse himself somehow.

So I said, "What's the latest episode in the Dworken soap opera? What is the merchandise this time? Gems? Pet Mercurian fire-insects? A new supply of *danghaana?*"

"I do not smuggle drugs, dat is a base lie," replied my friend stolidly. He knew, of course, that I still suspected him to be the source of the last load of that potent narcotic, although I had no more proof than did the Planetary Bureau of Investigation.

He took a long pull at his drink before he spoke again. "But Dworken is never down for long. Dis time it is show business. You remember, how I haf always been by de t'eater so fascinated? Well, I decided to open a show here in Luna City. T'ink of all the travelers, bored stiff by space and de emptiness thereof, who pass through here during the season. Even if only half of them go to my show, it cannot fail."

I waited for some mention of free tickets, but none was made. I was about as anxious to see Dworken's show as I was to walk barefoot across the Mare Imbrium, but I asked with what enthusiasm I could force,

"What sort of act are you putting on? Girls?" I shuddered as I recalled the pathetic shop-worn chorus girls that Sam Low had tried to pass off last year on the gullible tourists of the spaceways. That show had lasted ten nights—nine more than it deserved to. There are limits, even to the gullibility of Earth-lubbers.

"Yes, girls," replied Dworken. "But not what you are perhaps thinking. Martian girls."

THIS WAS more interesting. Even if the girls were now a little too old for the stage in the

Martian capital, they would still get loud cheers on the Moon. I knew. I started to say so, but Dworken interrupted.

"And not de miserable girls dey buy from de slave traders in Behastin. Dese girls I collected myself, from de country along de Upper Canal."

I repressed my impulse to show my curiosity. It could all be perfectly true—and if it were not the opening night would tell. But it sounded a lot like one of Dworken's taller tales. I had never been able to disprove any one of them, but I found it a *little* hard to believe that so many improbable things had ever happened to one man. However, I like being entertained, if it doesn't cost me too much, so finally I said,

"I suppose you are going to tell me you ventured out into the interior of Mars, carrying a six weeks' supply of water and oxygen on your back, and visited the Xo theaters on the spot?"

"How did you know? Dat is just what I did," solemnly affirmed my companion. He snorted again, and looked at his glass. It was empty, but he tilted it into his face again in an eloquent gesture. No words were needed: I punched the symbols for *shchikh* into the drinkboard on my side of the table. Then, after hesitating, I punched the "two in" signal. I must remember, though, that this was my second and last.

His eighth *shchikh* seemed to instill some animation into Dworken. "I know you feel skepticality—I mean skepticism—after my exploits. You will see tomorrow night dat I speak true."

"Amazing!" I said. "Especially as I just happen to remember that three different expeditions from Earth tried to penetrate more than a hundred kilometers from Behastin, but either they couldn't carry the water and oxygen that far, or they resorted to breathing Mars air, and never came back. And they were earthmen, not Venusians who are accustomed to two atmosphers of carbon dioxide."

"My vriend, you must not reason: it was so, it always will be so. The brinciple of induction is long exbloded. I did indeed breathe Mars air. Vait! I tell you how."

He took another long swig of *shchikh*. "Vat your Eart'men did not realize was dat dey cannot acclimate themselves as do we Venusians. You know de character of our planet made adaptibility a condition of survival. It is true dat our atmosphere is heavy, but on top of our so-high mountains de air is t'in. We must live everywhere, de space is so few. I first adapted myself on Eart' to live. I was dere a whole year, you vill recollect. Den I go further. Your engineers construct air tanks dat make like de air of mountains, t'in. So, I learn to live in dose tanks. Each day I haf spent one, two, three hours in dem. I get so I can breathe air at one-third the pressure of your already t'in atmosphere. And at one-sixt' the tension of oxygen. No, my vriend, you could not do this. Your lungs burst. But old Dworken, he has done it.

"I take wit' me only some water, for I know de Martians dey not give water. To trade, some miniature kerosene lamps. You know dey got no fuel oil now, only atomics,

but dese little lamps dey like for antiques, for sentiment, because their great-grandfathers used dem.

"Well, I walk through Vlahas, and not stop. Too close by the capital. Too much contact with men of odder planets. I walk also through Bhur and Zamat. I come to a small place where dey never see foreigner. Name Tasaaha. Oh, I tell you, ze men of ze odder planets do not know Mars. How delightful, how unsboiled, are ze Martians, once you get away from de people by tourists so sboiled! How wonderful, across the sands to go, free as birds! The so friendly greetings of de Martian men. And de Martian women! *Ah!*

"Well, in Tasaaha I go to t'eater. Such lovely girls! You shall see. But I saw somet'ing else. That, my friend, you hardly believe!"

Dworken looked down at his empty glass and snorted gently. I took the hint, although for myself I ordered the less lethal Martian *azdzani*. I was already having difficulty believing parts of his narrative; it would be interesting to see if the rest were any harder.

My companion continued. "They not only have de chorus, which you haf seen on Earth, imported from Mars—and such a chorus! Such girls! But they had somet'ing else."

"You recall your terrestrial history? Once your ancestors had performers on the stage who did funny motions and said amusing remarks, de spectators to make laugh. I t'ink you called it 'vaudeville.' Well, on Mars they have also vaudeville!" He paused, and looked at me from under half-shut eyelids, and grinned widely to show his reptilian teeth.

I wondered if he'd really found something new. I would even be willing to pay for a glimpse of Martian vaudeville. I wondered if my Martian was too rusty for me to understand jokes in the spoken lingo.

"They haf not only men and women telling jokes. They haf trained animals acting funny!" Dworken went on.

This was too much. "I suppose the animals talked, too?" I said sarcastically. "Do they speak Earth or Martian?"

He regarded me approvingly. "My friend, you catch on quick," He raised a paw. "Now, don't at conclusions jump. Let me exblain. At first, I did not believe it either.

"Dey sprang it with no warning. Onto de stage came a tlooll (you know him, I t'ink), and a *shiyooch'iid*. The *shiyooch'iid* was riding a bicycle—I mean a monocle. One wheel. The *tllooll* moved just as awkward as he always does, and tried to ride a tandem four-wheeled vehicle which had been especially for him made."

In spite of my resolve, I chuckled. The picture of a *tllooll* trying to ride a four-wheeled bicycle, pumping each of his eight three-jointed legs up and down in turn, while maintaining his usual supercilious and indifferent facial expression, was irresistibly funny.

"Wait!" said my friend, and again raised a paw. "You have as yet not'ing heard. They make jokes at same time. De *shiyooch'iid* asks de *tllooll*, 'Who was dat *tloolla* I saw you wit' up the Canal?' and the *tllooll* replies, 'Dat was no *tlloolla*, dat was my *shicai*.'"

I doubled up, laughing. Unless you have visited Mars this may not strike you as funny, but I collapsed into a heap. I put my head on the table and wept with mirth.

It seemed like five minutes before I was able to speak. "Oh, no!"

"Yes, yes, I tell you. Yes!" insisted my friend. He even smiled himself.

IF YOU don't know the social system of the Martians there is no point in my trying to explain why the idea of a *tllooll's* being out with that neuter of neuters, a *shicai,* is so devastatingly funny. But that, suddenly, was not quite the point.

Did it happen? I had large doubts. Nobody had ever heard a *tllooll* make any sort of a sound, and it was generally supposed that they had no vocal chords. And no *shiyooch'iid* (they somewhat resemble a big groundhog, and live in burrows along the canals of Mars) had ever been heard to make any noise except a high-pitched whistle when frightened

"Now, just a minute, Dworken," I said.

"I know, my vriend. I know. You t'ink it is impossible. You t'ink the talking is faked. So I t'ought too. But vait."

It seems Dworken had inquired among the audience as to who owned the performing animals. The local Martians were not as impressed as he was with the performance, but they guided him to the proprietor of the trained animal act. He was a young Martian, hawk-nosed, with flashing black eyes, dusky skin, and curly hair.

"So I say to him, dis Martian," Dworken continued, " 'If your act on the level is, I buy.' I had three small diamonds with," he explained.

"But de Martian was hard to deal wit'. First, he said he vould not sell his so-valuable and so-beloved animals. De only talking animals on Mars, he said—de liar! At long last I get him to make a price. But, on condition dat he bring ze animals around to my inn in the morning, for a private audition."

"I suppose," I interrupted, "you were beginning to have some doubts as to the Martian's good faith? After all, a talking *tllooll* and a talking *shiyooch'iid* all at one time is quite a lot to ask. I would have—"

"Blease, vriend, blease!" interrupted my companion. "Do you not t'ink old Dworken knows dese things? Of course he does! I t'ink. De owner, he is pulling a fake, I guess. I know dat animals do not really talk.

"Next morning, I t'ink he no show up. But no, I am mistaken. Bromptly at nine o'clock he come to my inn with a little dogcart, wit' de animals. He puts dem on de stage in de bar of de inn. They act like before."

"But they didn't talk, of course?"

"Oh my vriend, dat's where you are wrong. Dey talk like nobotty's business. De jokes are funnier than ever. Even dirtier, maybe. But Dworken is not fooled. He t'ink. 'Aha!' I say to de Martian. 'You fake this, what? De animals not talk. Suppose you have them do de act while you outside stay, what?' Then I t'ink I have him.

"Ze Martian tear his curly hair, flash his black eyes. He takes insult that I t'ink he is fake. 'Name of de Martian gods!' he cry. But at last he agree to go away, and tell animals to go ahead."

"Dworken, you were a sap to string along with him even that far," I said wearily. "I hope you hadn't paid the guy any money."

He shook his head. "No, my old and best," he said. "Dworken no fool is, even on Mars. No, no money. But wait! De animals go on without the owner. Same stage business, same talk, same jokes, and even funnier yedt. What?"

I started at Dworken. He did not smile, but finished off the eleventh *shichikh*—the fifth I had bought him.

"Listen," I said. "Are you sitting there telling me you have a *tllooll* and a *shiyooch'iid* that can really talk?"

"You listen, my vriend. Like you, I t'ink something is wrong. I say to Martian owner, 'My vriend, maybe I buy your act, if you tell me how it is done. But you know as well as I do dat it is impossible to dese animals to talk. Tell me what is de trick?' "

Dworken lifted his glass and shook it, as though he could not believe it was empty, then looked at me questioningly. I shook my head. He snorted, looked melancholy, writhed up from his chair and reached for his fur cape.

"Vell, thanks for de drinks," he said.

A dark suspicion crept into my mind, but I could not restrain myself.

"Wait, Dworken!" I shouted. "You can't just leave me up in the air like that! What happened then?"

Dworken snorted into his green handkerchief.

"De Martian admitted it was a fake, after all," he said mournfully. "Can you imachine it? What a chiseler!

" 'De *shiyooch'iid,*' he said, 'can't really talk; de *tllooll* just t'rows his voice!' "

THE END

THE PROBLEM of good and evil fascinates, then, especially when it is to be found externalized and purified in the thousands of semi-robots we are using and will use in the coming century. Our atomic knowledge destroys cancer or men. Our airplanes carry passengers or jellied gasoline bombs. The hairline, the human, choice is there. Before us today we see the aluminum and steel and uranium chess pieces which the interested science-fiction writer can hope to move about, trying to guess how man will play out the game.

—Ray Bradbury in *The Nation*

The man is rare who will give his life for what is merely the lesser of two evils. Merrick's decision was even tougher: to save human beings at the expense of humanity, or vice versa?

TURNING POINT

By Alfred Coppel

Illustrated by Philip Parsons

THIS, THEN, was the Creche, Anno Domini 2500. A great, mile-square blind cube topping a ragged mountain; bare escarpments falling away to a turbulent sea. For five centuries the Creche had stood so, and the Androids had come forth in an unending stream to labor for Man, the Master . . .
—Quintus Bland, The Romance of Genus Homo.

DIRECTOR Han Merrick paced the floor nervously. His thin, almost ascetic face was pale and drawn.

"We can't allow it, Virginia," he said, "Prying of this sort can only precipitate a pogrom or worse. Erikson is a bigot of the worst kind. The danger—" He broke off helplessly.

His wife shook her head slowly. "It cannot be prevented, Han. Someone was bound to start asking questions sooner or later. History should have taught us that. And five hundred years of secrecy was more than anyone had a right to expect. Nothing lasts forever."

The trouble is, Merrick told himself, *simply that I am the wrong man for this job. I should never have taken it. There's a wrongness in what we are doing here that colors my every reaction and makes me incapable of acting on my own. Always the doubts and secret questioning. If the social structure of our world weren't moribund, I wouldn't be here at all . . .*

"History, Virginia," he said, "can't explain what there is no precedent for. The Creche is unique in human experience."

"The Creche may be, Han, but Sweyn Erikson is not. Consider his background and tell me if there

hasn't been an Erikson in every era of recorded history. He is merely another obstacle in the path of progress that must be overcome. The job is yours, Han."

"A pleasant prospect," Merrick replied bleakly. "I am an organizer, not a psychotechnician. How am I supposed to protect the Creche from the likes of Erikson? What insanity bore this fruit, Virginia? The Prophet, the number one Fanatic, coming here as an *investigator* in the name of the Council of Ten! I realize the Council turns pale at the thought of the vote the Fanatics control, but surely *something* could have been done! Have those idiots forgotten what we do here? Is that possible?"

Virginia Merrick shook her head. "The stone got too hot for them to handle, so they've thrown it to you."

"But Erikson, himself! The very man who organized the Human Supremacy Party and the Antirobot League! If he sets foot within the Creche it will mean an end to everything!"

The woman lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply. "We can't keep him out and you know it. There's an army of Fanatics gathering out there in the hills this very minute. Armed with cortical-stimulant projectors, Han. That isn't a pleasant way to die—"

Merrick studied his wife carefully. There was fear under her iron control. She was thinking of the shattering pain of death under the projectors. Nothing else, really. The Creche didn't matter to her. The Creche didn't really matter to any of the staff. Three hundred years ago it would have been different. The custodians of the Creche would have gladly died to preserve their trust in those times . . .

What irony, Merrick thought, that it should come like this. He knew what the projectors did to men. He also knew what they did to robots.

"If they dare to use their weapons on us it will wipe out every vestige of control work done here since the beginning," he said softly.

"They have no way of knowing that."

"Nor would they believe it if we told them."

"And that brings us right back to where we started. You can't keep Erikson out, and the Council of Ten has left us on our own. They don't dare oppose the Fanatics. But there's an old political maxim you would do well to consider very carefully since it's our only hope, Han," Virginia Merrick said, "'If you can't beat someone—join him.'"

SHE DRAGGED deeply on her cigarette, blue smoke curling from her gold-tinted lips. "This has been coming on for ten years. I tried to warn you then, but you wouldn't listen. Remember?"

How like a woman, Merrick thought bitterly, to be saying I told you so.

"What would you have me do, Virginia?" he asked, "Help the bigot peddle his robot-hate? That can't be the way. Don't you feel anything at all when the reports of pogroms come in?"

Virginia Merrick shrugged. "Bet-

ter they than we, Han."

"Has it occurred to you that our whole culture might collapse if Erikson has his way?"

"Antirobotism is natural to human beings. Compromise is the only answer. Precautions have to be taken—"

"Precautions!" exploded Merrick. "What sort of precautions can be taken against pure idiocy?"

"The founding board of Psychotechnicians—"

"No help from that source. You know that I've always felt the whole premise was questionable. On the grounds of common fairness, if nothing else."

"Really, Han," Virginia snapped, "It was the only thing to do and you know it. The Creche is the only safeguard the race has."

"Now you sound like the Prophet. In reverse."

"We needn't argue the point."

"No, I suppose not," the Director muttered.

"Then what are you going to do when he gets here?" She ground out her cigarette anxiously. "The procession is in the ravine now. You had better decide quickly."

"I don't know, Virginia. I just don't know." Merrick sank down behind his desk, hands toying with the telescreen controls. "I was never intended to make this sort of decisions. I feel helpless. Look here—"

The image of the ravine glowed across the screen in brilliant relief. The densely timbered slopes were spotted with tiny purposeful figures in the grey robes that all Fanatics affected. Here and there the morning sun caught a glint of metal as the Fanatics labored to set up their projectors. Along the floor of the ravine that was the only land approach to the Creche moved the twisting, writhing snake of the procession. The enraptured Fanatics were chanting their hate-songs as they came. In the first rank walked the leonine Erikson, his long hair whipping in the moisture-laden wind from the sea.

With a muttered curse, Merrick flipped a toggle and the scene dimmed. The face of a secretary appeared superimposed on it. It was the expressionless face of an android, a fine example of the Creche's production line. "Get Graves up here," he ordered, "You may find him at Hypno-Central or in Semantic Evaluation."

"Very good, sir," intoned the android, fading from the screen.

Merrick looked at his wife. "Maybe Graves and I can think of something."

"Don't plan anything rash, Han."

Merrick shrugged and turned back to watch the steady approach of the procession of grey-frocked zealots in the ravine.

Graves appeared as the doorway dilated. He looked fearful and pale. "You wanted to see me, Han?"

"Come in, Jon. Sit down."

"Have you seen the projectors those crackpots have set up in the hills?" Graves demanded.

"I have, Jon. That's what I wanted to talk to you about."

"My God, Han! Do you have any idea of what it must feel like to die from cortical stimulation?" Graves' voice was tense and strained. "Can't we get out of here by 'copter?"

"No. The 'copters are both in Francisco picking up supplies. I ordered them out yesterday. Besides, that wouldn't settle anything. There are almost a thousand androids in the Creche as of this morning. What about them?"

Graves made a gesture of impatience. "It's the humans I'm thinking about."

Merrick forced down the bitter taste of disgust that welled into his throat and forced himself to go on. "We have to take some sort of action to protect the Creche, Jon. I've held off until the last moment, thinking the Council would never allow a Fanatic to investigate the Creche, but the Ten are more afraid of the HSP rubber stamp vote than they are of letting a thousand androids be slaughtered. But we can't leave it at that. If we don't prevent it, Erikson will precipitate a pogrom that will make the Canalopolis massacre look like a tea-party." For some reason he held back the information about the effect of the Fanatic weapon on robot tissue. The vague notion that knowing, Jon Graves might cast his lot with Erikson, restrained him.

"Of course, Erikson will come in wearing an energy shield," Graves said.

"He will. And we have none," Virginia Merrick said softly.

"Can we compromise with him?" Graves asked.

There it was again, Merrick thought, the weasel-word 'compromise.' There was a moral decay setting in everywhere—the founders of the Creche would never have spoken so. "No," he said flatly, "We cannot. Erikson has conceived a robot-menace. All the old hate-patterns are being dusted off and used on the rabble. People are actually asking one another if they would like their daughters to *marry* robots. That sort of thing, as old as *homo sapiens*. And one cannot compromise with prejudice. It seduces the emotions and dulls the mind. No, there will be no appeasing of Sweyn Erikson or his grey-shirted nightriders!"

"You're talking like a starry-eyed fool, Han," Virginia Merrick said sharply.

"Can't we take him in and give him the works?" Graves asked hopefully. "Primary Conditioning could handle the job. Give him a fill-in with false memory?"

Merrick shook his head. "We can't risk narcosynthesis and that's essential. He'll surely be tested for blood purity when he leaves, and scopolamine traces would be a dead give-away that we had been trying to hide something here."

"Then it looks as though compromise is the only way, Han. They've got us up against the wall. See here, Han, I know you don't agree, but what else is there? After all, we all believe in human supremacy. Erikson calls it a robot-menace, we look at it from another angle, but our common goal is the betterment of the human culture we've established. People are on an emotional jag now. There has been no war for five centuries. No emotional release. And there have been regulations and conventions set up since the Atom War that only a very few officials have been allowed to understand. Erikson is no savage, Han, after all. True he's set off a rash of

robot-baiting, but he can be dealt with on an intelligent plane, I'm sure."

"He is a man of ability, you know," Virginia Merrick said.

"Ability," Merrick said bitterly. "Rabble rouser and bigot! Look at his record. Organizer of the riots in Low Chicago. Leader in the Antirobot Labor League—the same outfit that slaughtered fifty robots in the Tycho dock strike. Think, you two! To tell such a man what the Creche is would be to tie a rope around the neck of every android alive. Lynch law! The rope and the whip for every one of them. And then suppose the worm turns? *It can, you know!* Our methods here are far from perfect. What then?"

"I still say we must compromise," Graves said. "They will kill us if we don't—"

"He's no troglodyte, Han, I'm certain—" Merrick's wife said plaintively.

The Director felt resistance flowing out of him. They were right, of course. There was nothing else he could do.

"All right," Merrick's voice was low and tired. He felt the weight of his years settling down on him. "I'll do as you suggest. I'll try to lead him off the trail first—" that was his compromise with himself, he knew, and he hated himself for it— "and if I fail I'll tell him the whole truth."

He flipped the telescreen toggle in time to see Sweyn Erikson detach himself from his followers and disappear through the dilated outer gate in the side of the Creche. A faint, almost futile stirring of defiance shook him. He found himself in the anomalous position of wanting to defend something that he had long felt was wrong in concept from the beginning—and not being able to take an effective course of action.

He reached into his desk drawer and took out an ancient automatic. It was a family heirloom, heavy, black and deadly. He pulled back the slide and watched one of the still-bright brass cartridges snap up into the breech. He handled the weapon awkwardly, but as he slipped it into his jumper pocket some of the weariness slipped from him and a cold anger took its place. He looked calmly from his wife to Graves.

"I'll tell him the whole truth," he said, "And if he fails to react as you two think he will, I shall kill him."

SWEYN ERIKSON, in a pre-Atom War culture, might have been a dictator. But the devastation of the war had at long last resulted in a peaceful world-state, and where no nations exist, politics becomes a sterile business of direction and supervision. It is war or the threat of war that gives a politician his power. Sweyn Erikson wanted power above all else. And so he founded a religion.

He became the Prophet of the Fanatics. And since a cult must have an object of group hate as a *raison-d'etre,* he chose the androids. With efficiency and calculated sincerity, he beat the drums of prejudice until his organization had spread its influence into the world's high places and his word became

the law of the land.

People who beheld his feral magnificence, and listened to the spell-binding magic of his oratory—followed. His power sprang from the masses—unthinking, emotional. He gave the mob a voice and a purpose. He was like a Hitler or a Torquemada. Like a Long or a John Brown. He was savage and rapacious, courageous and bitter. He was Man.

There were four cardinal precepts by which the membership of the Human Supremacy Party lived. First, Man was God. Second, no race could share the plenum with Man. Had separate races still remained after the Atom War, the HSP racism might have been more specific, but since there remained only humanity en masse, all human beings shared the godhead. Third, the artificial persons that streamed from the Creche were blasphemy. Fourth, they must be destroyed. Like other generations before them, the humans of this age rallied to the banner of the whip and the rope. Not since the War had blood been spilled, but the destructive madness of homo sapiens found joy in the word of the Prophet, and though the blood was only the red sap of androids, the thrill was there.

Thus had Sweyn Erikson, riding the intolerant wave of antirobotism, come to the Creche. He stood now, in the long bare foyer, waiting. Behind him lay the Party and the League. The Council of Ten was in hand and helpless. Upon his report to the world, the future of an entire robot-human culture pattern rested. This, he told himself, was the high point of his life. Naked power to use as he chose rested in his hands. The whole structure of world society was tottering. The choice was his and his alone. He could shore it up or shatter it and trample on the fragments. . . .

The Prophet savored the moment. He watched with interest as the door before him dilated. The Creche Director stood eyeing him half-fearfully, half-defiantly, flanked by his wife and his assistant. They were all three afraid for their lives, Erikson thought with satisfaction.

"We welcome you to the Creche," Han Merrick said formally.

"Let there be no ceremony," Erikson said, "I am a simple man."

Merrick's lips tightened. "You haven't come here for ceremony. There will be none."

"I came for truth," the Prophet said sonorously. "The people of the world are waiting for my words. The mask of secrecy must be ripped from this place and truth and knowledge allowed to wash it clean."

Merrick almost winced. The statement was redundant with the propaganda that Erikson's night-riders peddled on every street corner. It betokened an intellectual bankruptcy among men that was frightening.

"I shall do my best to allay your fears," he said thickly.

Erikson's eyes glittered with suspicion. "I need only a guide. The decisions I shall make for myself. And mind that I am shown every concealed place. The roots of this place must be laid bare. 'For God shall bring every work into judg-

ment, with every secret thing; whether it be good or whether it be evil.' The Scriptures command it in the name of Man, the True God."

Twisted, pious, hypocrite! thought Merrick.

"I am sure, sir," Graves was saying placatingly, "that when we have shown you the Creche you will see that there is no menace."

Erikson scowled at Graves deliberately. "There is menace enough in the blasphemy of android life, my son. Everywhere there are signs of unrest among the things you have built here. On Mars, human beings have died at their hands!"

Merrick's face showed his disgust. "Frankly, I don't believe that. Androids don't kill."

"We shall see, my son," Erikson said settling the belt of his energy screen more comfortably about his hips. "We shall see."

Merrick studied Erikson's face. There was a tiny scar under his chin. That would be where the transmitter was planted. He had no doubt that every word of this conversation was being monitored by the Fanatics outside the Creche. The turning point was coming inexorably nearer. He only hoped that he had the physical and moral courage to face it when it arrived.

"Very well, Sweyn Erikson," he said finally. "Please come with me."

FOUR HOURS later they were in Merrick's office. The preliminary stage of his plan had failed, just as he had known it would. He was almost glad. It had been a vacillating expediency, an attempt to hide the facts and avoid the necessity of facing the challenge squarely. Stage two was about to begin, and this time there would be no temporizing.

The Prophet glared angrily across the desk-top. "Do you take me for a child? You have shown me nothing. Where are the protoplasm vats? The brain machines? Where are the bodies assembled? I warned you against trickery, Han Merrick!"

Merrick glanced across the room at his wife. She sat rigid in her chair, her face a pale mask. He would get no help from her.

"You must realize, Erikson," he said, "That you are forcing me to jeopardize five centuries of work for the chimera of Human Supremacy. Let me warn you now that your life is of no importance to me when balanced against that. When the Board of Psychotechnicians appointed my family custodians of the Creche centuries ago, they did so because they knew we would keep faith—"

"The last member of the founding Board died more than two hundred years ago," snapped the Prophet.

"But the Creche is here, and I am here to guard it as my forefathers did," Merrick said. Once again he was conscious of a strange ambivalence in his attitude. He must guard something he considered wrong against the intrusion of a danger even more wrong. His hand sought the scored grip of the old automatic in his pocket. Could he actually kill?

"You speak of Human Supremacy as a chimera," Sweyn Erikson said, "It is no such thing. It is the

only vital force left in the world. Robotism is a menace more deadly, a blasphemy more foul than any Black Mass of history. You are making Man into an anachronism on the face of his own planet. This cannot be! *I* will not let it be . . ."

Merrick stared. Could it be that the man actually believed that the poison he peddled was the food of the gods?

"I will try one last attempt at reason, Erikson," Merrick said deliberately. "Look back with an unprejudiced mind, if you can, over the centuries since the Atom War. What do you see?"

"I see Man emasculated by the robot!"

"No! You see atomic power harnessed and in use for the first time after almost a millenium of muddling. You see Man standing on the Moon and the habitable planets—and soon to reach out for the stars! A new Golden Age is dawning, Prophet! And why? Whence have come the techniques?" Even as he spoke, Merrick knew he was ignoring the obvious, the all-too-apparent cracks in the social structure that no scientific miracles could cure. But were those cracks the fault of robotism or were they in fact a failing inherent in Man himself? He was not prepared to answer that. "From where are the techniques drawn?" he asked again.

Erikson met his glance squarely. "Not from the mindless horrors you spawn here!"

"Emotionless, Prophet," corrected Merrick pointedly, "Not mindless."

"Soulless! Soulless and mindless, too. Never have these zombies been able to think as men!"

"They are not men."

"Nor are they the architects of the future!"

"I think you are wrong, Prophet," Merrick said softly.

"Man is the ultimate," Erikson said.

"You talk like a fool," snapped Merrick.

"*Han!*" There was naked terror in his wife's voice, but he rushed on, ignoring it.

"How dare you say that Man is the ultimate? What right have you to assume that nature has stopped experimenting?"

Sweyn Erikson's lip curled scornfully. "Can you be implying that the robots—"

Merrick leaned across the desk to shout full in the Prophet's face: "You *fool! They're not robots!*"

The robed man was suddenly on his feet, face livid.

"Han!" cried Virginia Merrick, "Not that way!"

"This is my affair now, Virginia. I'll handle it in my own way!" the Director said.

"Remember the mob outside!"

Merrick turned agate-hard eyes on his wife. Presently he looked away and said to the Prophet. "Now I will show you the real Creche!"

THERE WERE robots everywhere—blank-eyed, like sleep walkers. They reacted to commands. They moved and breathed and fed themselves. Under rigid control they performed miracles of intuitive calculation. But artificiality was stamped upon them like a

brand. They were *not* human.

In the lowest vaults of the Creche, Merrick showed the Prophet the infants. He withheld nothing. He showed him the growing creatures. He explained to him the tests and signs that were looked for in the hospitals maintained by the World State and the Council of Ten. He let him watch the young ones taking their Primary Conditioning. Courses of hypnotic instruction. Rest, narcosynthesis. Semantics. Drugs and words and more words pounding on young brains like sledgehammer blows, shaping them into something acceptable in a sapient world.

In other chambers, other age groups. Emotion and memory being moulded into something else by hypnopedia. Faces becoming blank and expressionless.

"Their minds are conditioned—enslaved," Merrick said bitterly. "Then they are primed with scientific facts. Those techniques we discussed. *This* is where they come from, Prophet. From the minds of your despised androids. Only will is suppressed, and emotion. They are shaped for the sociography of a sapient culture. They mature very slowly. We keep them here for from ten to fifteen years. No human brain could stand it—but *theirs* can."

Truth dangled before his eyes, but Erikson's mind savagely rejected it. The pillars upon which he had built his life were crumbling . . .

The two men stood in a vast hall filled with an insidious, whispering voice. On low pallets, fully a score of physically mature androids lay staring vacuously at a spinning crystal high in the apex of the domed ceiling.

"—you had no life before you where created here to serve Man the master you had no life before you were created here to serve Man the master you had—" the voice whispered into the hypnotized brains.

"Don't look up," Merrick warned. "The crystal can catch a human being faster than it can *them*. This is hypnotic engineering. The rhythm of the syllables and their proportion to the length of word and sentence are computed to correspond to typed encephalographic curves. Nothing is left to chance. When they have reached this stage of conditioning they are almost ready for release and purchase by human beings. Only a severe stimulation of the brain can break down the walls we have built in their minds."

Erikson made a gesture as though darkness were streaking his vision. He was shaken badly. "But where do they—where do they come from?"

"The State maternity hospitals, of course," Merrick said, "Where else? The parents are then sterilized by the Health and Welfare Authority as an added safeguard. Births occur at a ratio of about one for every six million normals." He smiled mirthlessly at the Prophet of Human Supremacy. "Well? Little man, what now?"

Honest realization still refused to come. It needed to be put into words, and Sweyn Erikson had no such words. "I see only that you are taking children of men and dis-

figuring—"

"For the last time," gritted Merrick, "These are *not* human beings. Genus homo, yes. *Homo chaos,* if you choose. But not homo sapiens. I think of them," he said with sudden calm, "As *Homo Supremus.* The next step on the evolutionary ladder . . ."

At last the words had been spoken and the flood gates were down in the tortured brain of the Prophet. Like a sudden conflagration, realization came—and with it, blind terror.

"No! Nonono! You cannot continue this devil's work! Think what it would mean if these things should ever be loosed on the world of Man!" the Prophet's voice was a steadily rising shrill of fear.

Han Merrick looked out across the rows of pallets, each with its burden of a superman, bound like Prometheus to the rock, helpless in hypnotic chains. It struck him again that his life had not been well spent. He looked from his charges to the ranting fear-crazed rabble-rouser. The contrast was too shocking, too complete. For the "androids" were, in fact, worthy of a dignity even in slavery that homo sapiens had never attained in overlordship. Merrick knew at last what he must do.

Racial loyalty stirred, but was quickly smothered in the humiliation of man's omnipresent thievery. For it *was* thievery, Merrick thought. Man was keeping for himself the heritage that was the rightful property of a newer, better race.

He took the automatic from his jumper and leveled it at Erikson's chest. He felt very sure and right. Though he knew that he was sealing the death warrant of his wife and his friends, the memory of their vacillations anesthetized him against any feeling of loss. He waited until Erikson screamed one word into the transmitter imbedded in his flesh—

The word was: *"Attack!"*

—and in the next instant, Han Merrick shot him dead.

THE FANATICS on the ridges heard the Prophet's command and sprang to comply. Energy swept out of the grids, through the coils of the projectors and out over the blind cube of the Creche.

Han Merrick felt the first radiations. He felt the beginnings of cortical hypertrophy and screamed. Every synapse sagged under the increasing load of sensitivity. The pressure of the air became an unbearable burden, the faintest sound became a shattering roar. Every microscopic pain, every cellular process became a rending, tearing agony. He screamed and the sound was a cataclysmic, planet-smashing hell of noise within his skull. He sagged to the floor and thinking stopped. He contracted himself, pulling legs and arms inward in a massive convulsion until at last he had assumed the foetal position. After a long while, he died.

Every human being within the Creche died so, but there was still life. The energy that killed the lesser creature freed the greater—just as Merrick had known it would. Unhuman matter pulsed under the caressing rain. A thousand beings shuddered at the sudden release of

their chains. The speakers ranted unheard. The crystals turned unwatched. The bonds forged by homo sapiens snapped and there came—

Maturity.

THIS, NOW, is the Creche, Anno Domini 3000. A great mile-square blind cube topping a ragged mountain; bare escarpments falling away to a turbulent sea. For ten centuries the Creche has stood so, and the Androids still come forth, now to lift their starships to the Magellanic Clouds and beyond. A Golden Age has come. But, of course, Man is no longer the Master.

—Quintus Bland, The Romance of Genus Homo.

THE END

WORTH CITING:

PRIZE SCIENCE FICTION, edited by Donald A. Wollheim. McBride, New York, 1953, 230 pp. ($3.00).

Another in a long line of anthologies, this volume's gimmick is its inclusion of the selections of the Jules Verne Prize Committee for 1952. In other words, it's a presentation of the year's 12 "most distinguished" science fiction stories as chosen by Donald A. Wollheim, Otto v. St. Whitelock, and Forrest J. Ackerman. These gentlemen are among the top experts in the field, and their choices should be worthy of attention, no matter what the purpose or restrictions.

Three of the 12 stories published, as it happens, are from IF. Four other magazines score two each, and the final contender has one story to its credit. The stories that originally appeared in this magazine are *McIlvaine's Star* by August Derleth, *The Beautiful Woman* by Charles Beaumont, and *The Peacemaker* by Alfred Coppel. Other authors included are Arthur C. Clarke, Robert Donald Locke, Martin Pearson and Cecil Corwin, C. M. Kornbluth, Leigh Brackett, Gordon R. Dickson, Mark Clifton, Eric Frank Russell and Walter M. Miller, Jr.

It would be difficult to pick favorites, even if the reviewer were completely unbiased. Naturally, your editors stand behind the stories from IF as among the best available anywhere. Kornbluth's *The Altar at Midnight* and Clifton's *Star, Bright* also seem worthy of special mention, though.

It's a small volume, as anthologies go, but a well-designed, well-made book which aims for and achieves quality rather than quantity.

Weather Man's Holiday

EVERYBODY TALKS about the weather" is an old saw, but when weather men themselves talk, they put new teeth in it. Their discussions are considerably more involved than "Hot enough for you?"—and of considerably more interest to science fiction readers.

This year's meeting of the American Meteorological Society in New York City, for instance, heard talks on the weather on Mars and Jupiter, sun spot cycles, and 200 mile-an-hour winds high in the sky.

The atmosphere of Jupiter was discussed by Dr. Yale Mintz of the University of California, that of Mars by Dr. Jean I. F. King of the Air Force's Cambridge Research Center. The huge, impervious clouds surrounding Jupiter, said Dr. Mintz, are formed by its atmosphere of methane' ("marsh gas") and ammonia gas with a little nascent hydrogen and helium. The spots which have long puzzled astronomers appear in many respects to be like the high level cyclones in the earth's upper atmosphere and may —or may not—be related to the activity of the sun.

Measurements of the atmosphere of Mars are easier than those of the atmosphere of the earth, according to Dr. King, because the Martian atmosphere has no oxygen and is thought to be water-free. The albedo—reflecting power—of Mars is known to an accuracy of three decimal points, that of the earth at best to only two.

This Martian atmosphere appears to be stable up to an altitude of four and a half miles, Dr. King said. Studies suggest that the surface temperature is about 240 degrees on the Kelvin scale, or 28 below zero Fahrenheit, and that at four and a half miles up this drops to 200 degrees Kelvin, or 99 below zero.

As for sun spots, Dr. Donald H. Menzel of the Harvard College Observatory reported that they do come in 11- and 22-year cycles, but that though many attempts have been made to establish relationships between these cycles and our weather, no reliable correlation has been found.

Dr. Fred B. Whipple, head of the Harvard University Department of Astronomy, pointed out that astronomers have no explanation for how solar disturbances could have a direct effect on the earth's weather. And Dr. Bernhard Haurwitz, chairman of the Department of Meteorology and Oceanography of New York University, summed it up: "I am inclined to think that there is some relation between solar events and the weather here on earth. But, darn it, what is it?"

The invisible jet-speed streams of wind high in the skies, which may be detected by the observation of cloud formations, were described by Dr. Vincent J. Schaefer, of the General Electric Company's re-

search laboratories. These hurricanes of the higher regions, known to meteorologists for only a few years, are usually 80 to 100 miles wide and travel at speeds up to 200 miles an hour around the world, usually from west to east. Besides cloud types, clues to their presence are found in gustiness at ground level, cool crisp air, blue skies with unlimited visibility, and precipitation limited to sporadic sprinkles of rain or snow. Further observation of these winds should enable airplanes to use them to good advantage in the near future.

The Long-Lost Virus

A DEADLY VIRUS, lost for 35 years, was found again recently in the University of Michigan laboratories. And scientists concerned were amazed to discover that it was still alive.

The virus was originally discovered in 1909 by Dr. Frederick G. Novy, the university's famed bacteriologist, since retired. It was so deadly that one ten-billionth of a drop would kill a rat. After it had been watched closely for 10 years, the test tubes containing it were lost during a change in laboratory personnel in 1918.

When the box containing the test tubes was rediscovered recently, Dr. Novy was consulted immediately. Experiments made under his direction showed that the virus had lost some of its potency, but still killed 75% of the laboratory rats infected with it in three to 11 days.

What the effect of the virus would be on human beings is not known.

Poker in the Test Tube

POKER, under strict laboratory conditions but in which bluffing and cheating are not only permitted but encouraged, is being played at the University of Wisconsin. You don't have to have a huge stack of chips to get into the game, but you must have a command of advanced calculus!

The idea is to collect material for Prof. R. Creighton Buck's course in the "theory of games," which is a complex and important mathematical concept. It was first formulated by John von Neumann in 1927, and defines a game as any situation in which groups with conflicting interests participate but over which they have only partial control.

Prof. Buck, who has occasionally written science fiction, points out examples in economics, military strategy, and other important phases of modern life. The buyer-seller relationship, he says, is essentially a game played by opponents who do not have full knowledge of each other's intentions or decisions.

The United States armed forces recognized the importance of practical applications of the theory of games early in World War II, and developed many of von Neumann's concepts in what they call "operational research." Prof. Buck chose poker for his own research because it has always been considered the game in which human behavior can be studied to best advantage.

New Theory on Cancer

A LACK of oxygen may be a factor in the development of can-

cer, it is indicated by experiments in Lebanon Hospital's Institute for Medical Research in Los Angeles.

The most significant difference about this research is that for the first time normal cells growing in laboratory cultures have been transformed into cancerous cells without the use of cancer-inducing chemicals. The change was brought about by intermittently depriving the test cells of oxygen over a period of many months.

The research does not necessarily prove that lack of oxygen is an important factor, but it does shed a good deal of new light on the behavior of cells.

Wristwatch TV

YOU'LL CARRY your telephone with you in the future, and it'll be equipped with a tiny television screen so you can see the person at the other end of the "line"! So says Dr. Harold S. Osborne, former chief engineer of the American Telephone and Telegraph Co.

The device will be about the size of a modern watch, as Dr. Osborne envisions it, so it will be perfectly natural to wear it on a wristband. Furthermore, he believes that every human being will be assigned his personal, permanent telephone and registration number at birth.

Dr. Osborne doesn't go into the difficulties this may create for people who merely want to be alone—or the possible embarrassment to absent-minded souls who may forget to remove their "wristwatches" before taking a shower!

Esophagi Made to Order

AT CHILDREN'S Hospital in Los Angeles recently, a baby was born without an esophagus. This malformation, called atresia, occurs about once in 4,000 births, seems to run in families, and is often fatal. At least, it was in the past. This time, a surgeon succeeded in "building" an esophagus in the three-day-old infant.

He did it by transplanting a six-inch section of the baby's large intestine, with its original blood and nerve connections, to the position of the missing organ.

Normally, the esophagus connects the throat with the stomach. In some cases of atresia, it is connected to the windpipe instead of the throat. These cases can often be remedied by an operation, but this is only the second case in history in which a substitute has been found and successfully inserted for a completely missing tube.

The doctor who performed the operation had tried it successfully on animals, and had waited ten years for a chance to use it on a human being.

ENGINES ON again momentarily, the rocket comes in over the eastern coastline of the United States and heads North over the Great Lakes at a height of about 1,000 miles. The captain awaits his landing pattern instructions, not yet knowing whether he will touch down tail-first or come in flat with brakes on.

(Drawings by Ed Valigursky)