

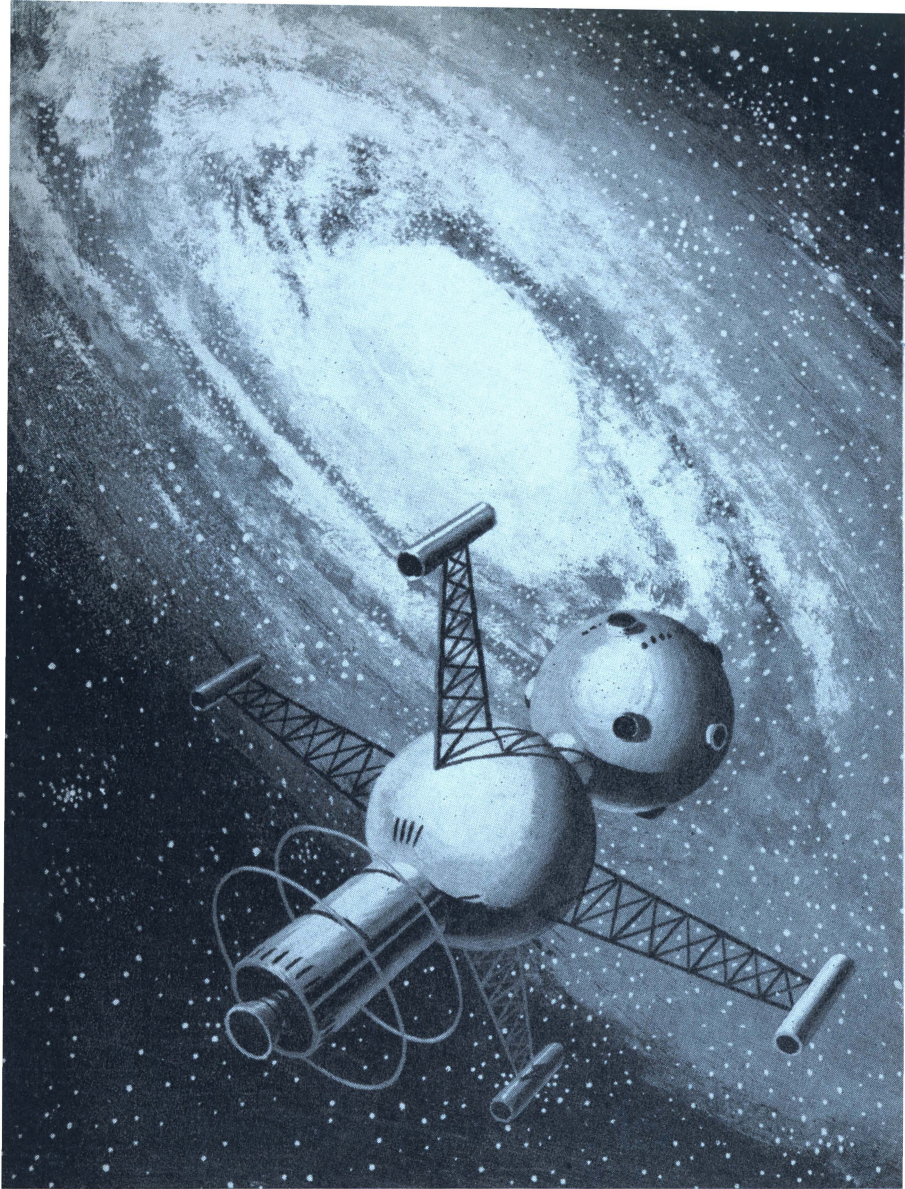
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# WORLDS of SCIENCE FICTION

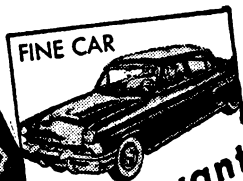
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# WORLDS of SCIENCE FICTION

FEBRUARY 1955

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*Illustrating the story, "Seller of the Sky"*

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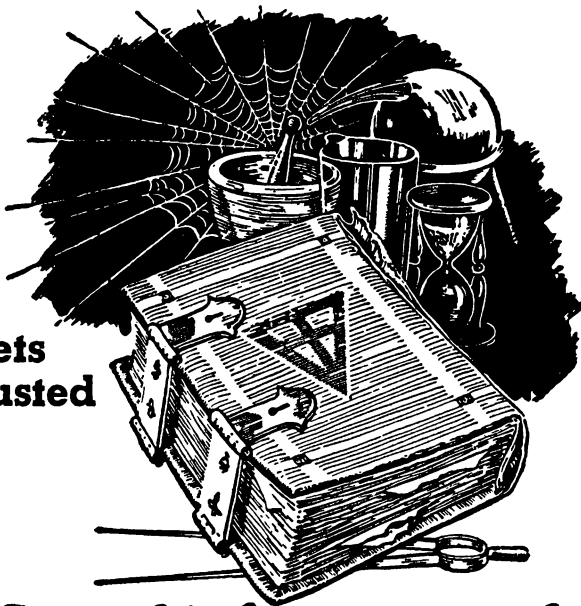
### COVER PICTORIAL:

The Great Nebula in Andromeda, M31

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## A CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

**THE OTHER DAY** somebody who has never read a science fiction magazine asked me that old dog-eared question: "Just *what* is science fiction?" Well, I've been hearing it ever since volume one, number one, and better men than I am have either been reluctant to answer it or have replied in some vague general way. I can't do it "in ten words or less", either. But I do like to think of it as perhaps the only form of fiction I know of which doesn't have to follow the rules laid down for writing other types of fiction. I think science fiction *should* be a medium of *entertainment* which advances, worthwhile ideas and thoughts on the philosophy, inventions, conventions and shenanigans of Mankind. I believe that a science fiction theme or premise should be simple and clearly plotted and convincingly told in a straightforward

manner. And I often wonder why so many authors (some of them pretty experienced fellows, too) have to throw everything but the kitchen sink into the pot and make a soup you have a heck of a time identifying.

I have just finished reading a rather lengthy yarn with several rather far-fetched theories in one field, two or three political premises stirred up with them, and then a bunch of characters, none clearly definable, trying to juggle the whole mess. Now, I'm not saying the juggling couldn't be done artistically and entertainingly. My argument is purely that if you are going to handle all that stuff you gotta have elbow room in which to do it. Namely—in *novel* room, and then you have to be careful. But in a short story or novelette, stick to *one good* idea and work it out clearly and emphatically. If it is a new extrapolation of cybernetics, let it be that; *not* also an introduction to new political theories, Oriental religious tenets or goldfish mutations. It makes a story easier to write and the chances are that a story that's easy to write is also easy to read.

Another thing about science fiction that should be cleared up is that so many non-readers never become readers because they think it heavy "science stuff" and therefore difficult to read. Or they aren't interested in juvenile "space opera" and never bother to find out that good science fiction is not that at all. And while we're on the subject, let's see how a recent issue of "The Literary Supplement" of *The Times* of London regards science fiction. The issue I received

(gratis) is fat, fat, fat, consisting mostly of a huge section devoted to "American Writing Today" and all the paid advertisements of American book publishers. This particular section is a rather exhausting survey and critique of American literature in all its forms and phases. Somewhere in the back part of the issue is an essay on science fiction entitled "Escaping into Space". I found it interesting, for several reasons, and I wish you folks who love science fiction could read it (also for several reasons). It is precisely written; much of it is good, much of it is rather stuffy, a great part of it erroneous or uninformed. It is unsigned. However, to quote a few snatches:

"The world of science fiction is essentially that of the adventure story, and the adventure story pure and simple has never held a very notable place in the history of literature."

I could certainly argue this point, citing many wonderful American adventure classics that, to my warped way of thinking, have become a *notable* part of American literature. I could also argue the point about science fiction being "essentially" an adventure story. But you can, too. So I won't do it here. But let's continue:

"Science fiction is one of the natural phenomena of a country so preoccupied with the material aspects of life, so predominantly "gadget-minded" (it is remarkable how many science fiction stories revolve around mysterious, incomprehensible gadgets and the problems they pose); yet it does to some extent echo the gradual development

and change of direction of the American national conscience during the past thirty years. In the early days, these stories were pure adventure-tales: pioneers shot off into space, landed on distant worlds and found enough thrills and horrific aborigines there to titillate the most jaded reader's palate. They were very much an extension of the hero-cult common to all books written for juvenile readers the world over. But this era is now somewhat contemptuously dismissed as the bug-eyed monster phase and science fiction has made efforts to grow up. Those early writers who have not drifted off into other fields have set about improving the standard of their original, rather crude tales and some are even striving to give their work a deeper significance".

I agree that America is "gadget-minded", but that isn't the reason for science fiction. If only *one half* of the gadget-minded people in this country read science fiction, a dozen different science fiction magazines wouldn't have folded in the past year. Publishing a science fiction magazine, contrary to what this British writer thinks, is no gravy train. The audience is small, and not as he (or she?) states:

"Broadly speaking, science fiction can be placed in the same class as the ever-popular Western and appeals to the same type of public".

I like westerns too, but—oh boy!—what a difference in the audience!

"If science fiction does much to illustrate the development of a national neurosis, it also expresses man's pioneering spirit, his cease-

(Continued on page 94)

*The Lut and the Snorap were philosophical engineers of high and ancient orders; and they were very wise in the ways of all types of life. However, they were now experiencing something new—the struggle for existence of two human beings . . .*

# The Odd Ones

BY GORDON DICKSON

*Illustrated by Ed Emsch*





**S** AID THE Snorap, sitting down with a thump, "This I do not understand."

"They are young," replied the Lut, settling on his haunches beside the Snorap. "Young and stupid."

"I agree they are young," said the Snorap. "I am not yet convinced they are stupid. But how can they expect to persist?"

*Persist*, of course, was not exactly the word the Snorap used. It was something with more scope than the mere idea of persisting. It dealt with continuing to survive, and a social and racial sense as well as maintaining a present effort. However, the Lut understood.

They were of different races these two; but equally old and experienced in the ways of the universe. Both had evolved to cope with the varying conditions to be

found in space and on many different worlds, and though the end product of each race's evolution had resulted in some difference, in essence they were similar. Neither of them, for example, required an atmosphere; and they could fuel their bodies with almost any chemical compound which would give off energy in the process of being broken down into its component parts. At a pinch, they could even get by on solar radiation, though this was an unsatisfying form of diet. Fleshed and muscled to meet truly fantastic gravities, pressures, and temperature extremes, they were at home just about anywhere.

These were the common points. In appearance each race had settled on a form of its own. The Snorap strongly resembled a very fat and sleepy lizard about ten feet in length—a sort of unterrifying, overstuffed dragon of the kind who would prefer a pleasant nap in a soft chair to eating maidens, any day in the week. His hide was heavy and dark and ridged like armor-plating.

The Lut, on the other hand, was built more on the model of an Earthly tiger, except that he was longer—being fully as long as the Snorap—and thicker, with an almost perfectly round body, rather like a big sewer main. He was tailless, his head was big and flat of face, and he possessed an enormous jaw which could crunch boulders like hard candy. His eyes had a fierce green glint to them and he was covered with very fine, but incredibly tough, small glassy scales which would have permitted him to take an acid shower every morning and never notice it at all. But



in spite of his appearance, he was just as civilized, just as intelligent, and just as much a gentleman as the Snorap; which put them both, as a matter of fact, several notches above the two humans they were watching, in all those respects.

The two aliens were philosophical engineers, an occupation it is hard to explain in human terms. It might be attempted by saying that every living being, no matter how far down the intelligence scale it may be, has a sort of inherent philosophy of survival. When the philosophies of all life forms on one world balance nicely, there is no problem. When they fall out of balance with one another, the philosophical engineer moves in, hoping to correct the situation and incidentally, gain new knowledge.

These two, the Snorap and the Lut, had discovered this world they were on to be a new one, not heretofore checked, and they had just spent the last eighty years or so in going over it. Their own ship—which was more of a space-sled than a ship, being completely open, except for an energy shield for meteor protection—was clear on the other side of the planet, they having wandered away from it completely in the past half-century of philosophy-testing. Now they had just stumbled on a pair of human immigrants. These soft little bipeds were a new experience to the Snorap and the Lut, neither of their races having encountered the type before; and they sat in the obscurity of the vegetation that hemmed the little clearing where the human ship had landed, conversing in something that was not verbal speech, sign language, nor

telepathy, but a mixture of all three—and they marveled.

“I do not understand it,” repeated the Snorap. “I literally fail to comprehend. They will most certainly perish.”

“Undoubtedly,” replied the Lut, blinking his green eyes. “They believe in their machines, I think.” He indicated the domed metal hut and the low hydroponics tank-building, like the top half of a loaf of bread cut off and set close to the ground, and the small ship beyond, from which the two human figures were laboring to extract the motors for their power plant. The planet was at the hot end of its summer and the temperature was above a hundred and forty degrees fahrenheit, a fact the Snorap and the Lut did not even notice. The humans sweated in conditioned clothing and face masks.

“But that is no way to meet the challenge of environment,” said the Snorap, quite honestly distressed. “No way at all. Suppose the machines fail? They will shrivel in the sun or congeal in the cold.”

“I give them four months,” said the Lut, snapping his heavy jaws closed.

“I’m afraid so,” said the Snorap. “Their home world must be badly out of balance if they take the easy way of machines instead of trying to adapt. There can be no endurance, no philosophical strength in such creatures. Their original planet must be *very* badly off. I wonder where it is?”

“When the machines break down, they will have to leave,” said the Lut. “We will follow.”

And with entirely inhuman patience, the two settled themselves

in the shadow and shelter of the vegetation to wait.

**WHAT ARE** they doing now?" asked the Lut.

He had been napping for the past two weeks; leaving the Snorap to observe. The Snorap, who slept only during the process of regrowing a lost limb, was quite obviously fascinated.

"They've been getting ready for winter," he answered.

"Oh, winter," said the Lut, getting up and stretching himself like the big cat he somewhat resembled. "That's right."

The planet they were on did not tilt on its axis, but had an orbit that carried it quite well out from its sun during the shorter part of the year. The result was a brief, but very severe winter. The temperature had, in fact, fallen a good hundred degrees since they had first sighted the human clearing; but neither the Snorap nor the Lut paid any attention to this, a difference so minor hardly registered on their senses.

Under a heavy, gray sky, the humans were working feverishly to bank up the living dome, the hydroponics tank-building and the ship. They had set up the ship's motors in a little structure off to one side, with a thick pipe-like affair running from it to the dome and off to the hydroponics building. The Lut cocked his eye at the banks of earth.

"Why?" he asked.

"Insulation, I would imagine," replied the Snorap.

"It won't work," said the Lut. "The blizzards will blow it away."

"Not if it freezes first," said the Snorap. "They *are* ingenious."

"Now I suppose they'll go inside and hole up until the warmth comes," said the Lut. "An underground sort of existence." He looked across the chill earth to where the two humans were laboring with hand shovels to pile the crumbly brown soil of the planet against the side of the motor-building. "How do you tell them apart?"

"They are almost identical, aren't they?" said the Snorap. "However, if you take the trouble to figure it out, you'll notice one has a slightly greater mass than the other. I call them the Greater Biped Colonist and the Lesser Biped Colonist. Great and Less for short. That's Great going around the corner of the motor building right now. And Less is still digging."

"I wonder why there are two of them?" said the Lut thoughtfully.

"There are two of us," said the Snorap.

"Of course," said the Lut, "but there's reason for that. We're different life forms. Our senses and abilities complement each other. But these two are exact duplicates. Doesn't make sense."

"Nonsense," retorted the Snorap. "There could be all sorts of possible explanations. For instance one might be a spare."

"A spare?"

"What's so fantastic about that?" said the Snorap. "Consider how fragile they are; and how far they are, undoubtedly, from their home world."

"All the same," said the Lut, snapping his big jaws shut, "I cannot agree with such a hypothesis. It is immoral in the extreme."

"I merely offered it as one possible explanation of why there were two of them," replied the Snorap, glancing at his friend and companion. "While you've been napping I've devoted a lot of time to close observation of them. Do you know what I deduce?"

"Don't ask rhetorical questions," grumbled the Lut.

"They haven't been civilized for more than eight or ten thousand years."

"What? Ridiculous!" snorted the Lut. "Obviously they're young; but eight to ten thousand is utterly fantastic."

"Not when you stop to consider this philosophical imbalance that has driven them to the production of machines for any and every possible use. That in itself is the worst possible danger signal. Undoubtedly it has sapped all of their moral fiber."

"I might point out," said the Lut, "that, to migrate to a world like this when you are like that, takes a certain amount of moral fiber."

"Ah, but there we come to another question," persisted the Snorap, interlocking the big, blunt claws of his forepaws together like a pedantic old man. "What reason can they have for coming here? They show no intellectual interest in the planet. Their senses are obviously very limited. They seem to have no purpose in being here other than to exist."

"Under great difficulties," said the Lut.

"Granted," answered the Snorap, "under great difficulties. Which merely confirms my belief in their unbalance."

The Lut was by nature a contrary creature; and in addition he was always snappish after a nap.

"And I," he retorted, "prefer to assume that there may be some good reason which you and I are too dull-witted to understand."

"My dear fellow—" protested the Snorap, aghast.

"Why not?" The Lut sat down rather complacently. "Simply because you and I know and understand the philosophies of some hundreds of thousands of different intelligent life forms, it does not necessarily follow that we will be able to know and understand this one. Now does it?"

"No, but—but—" the Snorap was actually floundering in the sea of the Lut's sophisticated argument.

"You will have to admit," said the Lut, "that there is room for reasonable doubt. Let us clarify the argument. You say that machines have sapped their moral fiber. Therefore, it is clear that without their machines they will show no instinct or capability for survival. Is this not so?"

"Exactly," said the Snorap, sternly.

"And I," went on the Lut, "disagree. I do not understand, any more than you do, what they are doing here, why there are two of them, or what their philosophy of life is. But I claim that no members of a race which has made a migration to a world where conditions are so inhospitable to them, as this one, can be lacking in moral fiber. Now, I propose that we abandon our work on this planet temporarily, and observe these two instead—until we come to a conclusion."

"And if I should turn out to be right," countered the Snorap, stiffly, "do you agree to locating their home planet and doing a thorough job of philosophical re-balancing on this race?"

"I do," replied the Lut. "But what if I should turn out to be right. What concession will you make?"

"Concession?" said the Snorap, blinking.

"Certainly," said the Lut. "It's only fair that I should stand to gain something as well. If I am right, do you agree to introducing ourselves to them; and introducing them to the fact that many other intelligent races exist, of radically different philosophies?"

"I do," said the Snorap. He turned his heavy lizard-like muzzle to the sky. "And here comes the winter to seal the bargain and administer the first environmental test to our subjects."

From the dark sky, a first few snowflakes were falling. Around the buildings, Great and Less, the two odd little bipeds, tamped their last shovels-full of earth into place; and went inside the domed living quarters. The day wore on and darkness came swiftly. The ground was covered now with snow and the air was thick with swirling flakes.

The wind rose to a banshee roar, tugging and tearing at the buildings and the freezing earth banked up around their perimeters.

**T**WO WEEKS later, by the planet's local time, the snow ceased blowing, the distant winter sun came out, and the temperature

dropped sharply to about eighty degrees below zero fahrenheit. Behind the denuded branches of the vegetation surrounding the clearing, but almost as well shielded by their twisted tangle as they had been when leaves sprouted from the black limbs, the Snorap and Lut sat in the snow, watching the dome.

"What are they doing in there?" the Lut kept asking. The Snorap's sense of hearing was more adaptable than that of the tigerish alien; and he had been keeping his companion posted on what went on out of their sight.

"They're talking," replied the Snorap.

"Still?" said the Lut, registering astonishment. "How can a strictly verbal language contain enough concepts to permit of prolonged discussion?"

"I don't understand it myself," answered the Snorap. He had been trying to learn the biped language from what he could overhear. "A lot of their talk doesn't make sense."

"Multi-purpose expressions?" said the Lut, who ordinarily was something of a linguist himself.

"—No—" replied the Snorap.

"Dropped metaphors?" persisted the Lut, thinking of a little known race on the fringe of the Magellenic cloud.

"No," said the Snorap.

"Elided constantal hyperbo—"

"No!" said the Snorap, thoroughly exasperated. "It just doesn't make sense. The language is simple enough, it's the way they use it. They call each other by so many different names I don't know which is which any more—"

(Inside the dome, Great had just addressed Less as a tin-headed idiot.)

"Utter, utter, *utter* illogic and confusion!" stormed the Snorap.

"Take a rest," suggested the Lut. "Forget about them for a while and let's have a talk about relative gravitic strains in a forty-body system."

Gravitic strains were the Snorap's hobby at the present and had been for the past two hundred years. Grumblingly, he allowed himself to be persuaded. He and the Lut withdrew their attention from the clearing.

Great and Less grew sleepy and went to bed.

Unnoticed by human or alien, a pipe in the hydroponics building that was too close to the deadly cold of the outer wall, burst. Liquid sprayed from it onto the floor of the building; and gradually, but with an inexorable steadiness, the level of the nutrient fluid in the planting tanks began to go down.

"I blame myself," said the Snorap, miserably. "I blame myself."

"What for?" snapped the Lut. "We aren't here to protect them. We're waiting around to see if they have any moral fiber. I should think you'd be pleased by the whole thing."

"Pleased!" said the Snorap.

They had just been watching Great and Less as they struggled in temperatures that were now below the hundred-below-zero mark, to transfer what could be salvaged from the hydroponics building to their living-dome. Helmeted and bundled in heavy suits, they had been losing ground in their salvage effort. Finally, in desperation they

had cut down on clothing and had substituted improvised face masks. This permitted them to carry more on each trip, but rendered them more vulnerable to the cold. Less had collapsed twice before giving up; and Great had finished the job alone. Apparently he had a touch of frostbite in his lungs, though. Less was doing what their meager stock of medical equipment permitted, to mend the condition.

The Snorap, sitting with the Lut in the shelter of a drift, had suffered for the bipeds as he watched them work. The truth of the matter was that the Snorap balanced a tendency toward gloomy judgments with a very soft heart indeed.

"Are you convinced now?" asked the Lut.

The Snorap shook himself back into a less emotional frame of mind.

"No," he said. "No. They didn't sit down and fold their hands when their machine failed, true. But we—I—am concerned with a matter of proper racial philosophy. What strength have these creatures aside from the strength of their machines and their own strength to make more? What else have they? Here we have only one machine that has failed. What if they all failed? What if the *idea* of machines failed? They must prove that it is more than their pride in their ability to build that has given them reason to think that they can successfully dare strange worlds."

"Humph!" said the Lut.

"But a race cannot *grow* without a proper philosophy, you know that," said the Snorap, almost pleading with him.

"Well—" growled the Lut. "I think I'll go for a walk. Need some

exercise." He turned and loped off into the snow. When he reached a level spot out of sight of the Snorap he turned on the speed, and the barren winter plains were treated to the sight of him burning up his ill-humor at the rate of better than a hundred miles an hour. For the Lut was in a bad temper and did not quite like to ask himself why.

The Snorap, left alone, looked doubtfully at the buildings in the clearing.

"I don't think I'm too hard on them," he said. "I don't *think* I am—"

**T**HE SHORT winter wore itself out; and spring came in with a rush. The snow disappeared; and the ground around the buildings became brown mud. Great, fully recovered, and Less could be seen daily extending the clearing in the direction of a stream that ran from the hills west of their buildings down onto the plain below.

"Now, what's the point of that?" the Lut asked the Snorap.

"I'm not sure," answered the Snorap. "It has something to do with the hydroponics building."

They both turned to look at the corpse of that ill-fated piece of bipped machinery. The hydroponics tank-building had been, indeed, a little miracle of compact and efficient mechanical engineering. Single parts and sections had had numbers of different functions. The result was that by bad luck, when that single pipe had burst, it had started off a chain of breakdowns; which, in the incredible cold of the winter, had ended by destroying the

building's use completely. Neither the Snorap nor the Lut could see what good might be gotten out of it now.

They found out a few days later, when Great and Less began to plant in the muddy soil the seeds and shoots from the vegetable things they had saved. The soil itself they treated with chemicals and other necessary ingredients from the ruined building.

"Very clever," approved the Lut. He turned to the Snorap. "How do you like that?"

"Very good," said the Snorap. "But may I point out that if they are to prove themselves by doing without their machines, they'll have to do without all of them?"

"You might give them credit for this anyway," said the Lut.

"I do," the Snorap answered. "It is, truthfully, a very creditable step and one I had never expected from them."

"If the crops prosper, they can extend their planting," the Lut pointed out.

"That is true."

"—And with the long summer they have on this world they can probably get in two or three crops before the next winter."

"The possibility," said the Snorap politely, "had not entirely escaped my notice."

The year warmed gradually. For a matter of weeks there was anxiousness in human and alien hearts alike, until the first shoots of the planted things began to show their heads above the brown soil.

"Beautiful," said the Snorap, one dark night, looking over the field with the Lut. He bent down to

touch the soft firmness of a soft green spear-tip. His night vision, like the Lut's was fully equal to the task of appreciating it in full color, although the humans would hardly have been able to see their hands before their faces. "Here indeed is beauty, and strength and purpose. In alien soil it fights as valiantly toward the light of a strange sun as ever it fought for the light of its native star from the womb of its natural earth."

"It and the bipeds are probably sons of the same mother world," remarked the Lut.

"Almost undoubtedly," answered the Snorap, abandoning the plant and straightening up. "But there are good and bad on all worlds, as you well know, my friend."

The ice-green eyes of the Lut softened to turquoise.

"Except on Lut," he said.

"And Snorap," added the Snorap. "And some few others where the creatures have grown older and attained wisdom . . ." His words trailed off; and they stood together in silence for a moment, each thinking of the world that was his home. "I will go home one of these days," said the Lut.

"I, too," answered the Snorap. He paused, looking off toward the eastern horizon, beyond which he could sense the approaching dawn. "What drives us, Lut? All the many myriadillions of us; all so different in so many ways and alike in one. What is this inescapable concomitant of intelligence, that a thinking being should be always hungry for the new and always wistful for the past?"

"I do not know," replied the Lut, "it is beyond philosophy."

"So many things," said the Snorap, "are beyond philosophy—"

They were feeling the weight of the universe as all thinking beings do, when they open their souls to the unknown. In their hearts they stood with bowed heads before the Mother of all Mysteries, the great and final *Why?* which is never answered, but merely moved back a step by those who win knowledge. The mood lasted for perhaps the space of five minutes; and then they had come back to their ordinary selves again.

"I gave them four months," said the Lut. "That time is up already."

"And I at least," said the Snorap, "am no closer to understanding their basic philosophy, if, truly, it is not that the machine is the answer to all problems."

"They have a strong will toward survival."

"I must admit it," replied the Snorap. "But that by itself is pure animal, non-thinking animal. And while we do not condemn the animal, we do not reach out our hands to him in friendship as you want us to do with these bipeds."

"I have a hunch," said the Lut.

"Real or wishful?" asked the Snorap. They were talking about a subconscious reasoning process that both knew to exist, but both instinctively distrusted.

"I don't know," said the Lut. "But their pattern of living is at odds with the conditions here. I foresee trouble."

**S**UMMER approached. The earth dried under a swelling sun and thrust forth the fruit of the bipeds' planting. Great and Less har-



vested feverishly under a cloudless sky, while the south winds that blew steadily now, grew stronger and warmer, day by day.

Finally the crops were all in and the ground re-planted. From the wreckage of the hydroponics building they had constructed a granery; and this was stocked with all that they had brought in. With the strengthening winds and the heat came dust storms blown up over the empty plains and carried up the slopes into the shallow hills where Great and Less had built. Behind the screen of the new-grown vegetation behind the clearing, the Lut and the Snorap watched an area in which the humans were seldom seen. Heat as fierce in its own way as the cold of the winter past, held them virtual prisoners in the dome.

"It is not good for them," the Snorap informed the Lut.

"Why?" asked the Lut. An eighty mile-an-hour gale was sand-blasting away at his scales, without apparently affecting them, beyond polishing them up so that they shone more brightly.

"The wind. The sound of the wind," said the Snorap. "And the fact that they cannot go outside. They are often nervous and angry at one another without reason."

"The season will pass," said the Lut indifferently. "One day the winds will start to drop; and then it will be fall."

—And, of course, eventually it happened. The bipeds came forth at last into a temperature of a little over a hundred degrees. The wind had dropped steadily for nearly a week. Now it shifted suddenly to the north—and the rains came.

Gently at first; and then with increasing violence, they poured down on the dusty earth. The ground puffed, soaked, and steamed in the short intervals of sunshine. And after several weeks the two went out to examine the fields they had planted for the second growing season.

They found a muddy desert.

With time growing short before the winter, they had to break into the stored treasure of the granery and gamble that one more crop could be gotten in before the frost came.

"Do you think they'll have time?" the Lut asked Snorap.

"I don't know," replied the Snorap. "Theoretically they should. But will these crops grow as fast as those planted at the start of the summer?"

"Hum," said the Lut, thoughtfully. "Well, they've got an even chance, anyway."

Over the months, the Lut and the Snorap had grown sensitive to small changes in the two bipeds. But they were not perceptive enough to sense that the constant struggle for existence had strained the nerves of both humans to the breaking point. Indeed, they were living together now, through this second planting, like two caged animals, avoiding each other as much as possible for fear that a chance word would bring them into open conflict. This, the two aliens did not sense. Only the physical elements got through to them.

"Their mass has gone down," the Lut remarked critically to the Snorap one afternoon in late summer as the two sat watching the

bowed figures readying the clearing for the approaching winter.

"Possibly they do not have enough food," answered the Snorap.

"I don't think that's it," said the Lut thoughtfully. "More likely it is overexertion. They are exercising themselves for long hours these last few weeks."

"They talk less," said the Snorap.

"And they do not laugh," added the Lut, who had finally gotten around to mastering the biped language and was able to grasp the difference between laughter and speech. "But maybe when the crop starts to show itself above ground they will cheer up."

"The visual emergence of new life into the world always has a stimulating effect," said the Snorap. "For those capable of understanding, it connotes the ever-fresh wonder of existence renewed."

"I was thinking more," said the Lut, "of what those crops mean to them in terms of food through the winter."

"That, of course, too," agreed the Snorap, a little miffed at being interrupted in his philosophizing.

But the first sight of the second crop pushing its way through the brown soil did have the good effect the Lut had anticipated. The two bipeds relaxed and fell once more into an easy, happy relationship between themselves. This second harvest came more slowly, indeed, but the growth was strong and hardy; and the yield, if anything, a shade heavier.

But now, with the ripening of the planted things, the native life of the planet came to prey upon the growing fields. Where they had

been during the sterile winter, and through the fresh spring and the blasting heat of mid-summer, it was impossible to tell. It seemed vaguely to Great and Less that they had noticed some native life around before, but never paid a great deal of attention to it. The smallest came first—insects of all sizes and tiny animals; and the two bipeds, working late, dug a deep moat around their planted ground and filled it with water diverted from the stream beyond the fields. After these came larger animals; and for a few nights one or the other was always on duty all night long with a missile-hurling device that the Lut and the Snorap recognised as a weapon—for the larger animals came only in the hours of darkness when the bipeds were not visible in the fields.

This last fact finally struck home to the mind of Great, and the Lut and the Snorap saw him out in the fields one day, setting posts about their perimeters. On each post was a short, thick tube and from each post to the next ran what looked like heavy black rope. That night they went forth to investigate after dark.

"Cable," said the Snorap, picking up a section of it, "designed to conduct some form of energy. Come to think of it, I did notice Less working around the power-house; but I was so interested in what Great was doing out here, I didn't pay much attention. Now I wonder—"

At that moment, at the furthest end of the field, one of the tubes atop a post seemed suddenly to explode and throw out colored balls of fire at a great rate. It was, in

fact, nothing more than a self-refueling roman candle, although that particular comparison did not occur to either the Snorap nor the Lut, in spite of the fact that they understood the nature of the thing almost instantly. Hardly had the pyrotechnics of the first ceased, when the next one up the border of the field burst out and lit up its own section. The Lut and the Snorap drew back into the darkness.

"There!" said the Lut in triumph. "You see the difference? The biped does not depend on the machine. It is a tool that he uses as he sees fit."

The Snorap turned his heavy head and looked at his companion.

"Well?" demanded the Lut. "You must admit that I'm right. Listen!" The sensitive hearing of the two ranged out into the darkness behind them. "The wild ones are frightened and drawing away."

"I admit it," said the Snorap ponderously. "But all through this business you have made it a practise to misunderstand me. It is not how the biped uses the tool that is important. It is whether he can lay aside the tool. It is whether he can attempt something where the tool will not aid him. It is his ability to conceive of meeting a problem without tools. When he shows evidence of that, and only then will I be willing and proud to face him and call him brother."

The Lut's eyes glowed with green anger.

"You are being unfair," he said. "The centuries past have taught me your nature. You mistrust your own softness of emotion which kindles an instinctive fellow feeling

between you and the bipeds. In your efforts to be impartial you lean over backwards and place the benefit of the doubt against them."

There was enough truth in this to make the Snorap wince inwardly.

"After all those same centuries," he retorted bitterly, "must we descend to personal criticism?"

"Truth is truth!" said the Lut. And his great jaws rang shut together. "Your conclusions are your own."

"And I stand by them!" said the Snorap.

"And I by mine!"

For a moment they stood facing each other. Then the Snorap turned away and headed back to the shelter of their accustomed vegetation. The Lut stood watching him go for a minute; then he also turned and headed out away from the clearing, to run the plains and think himself back to reasonableness.

In the dome, the two exhausted humans slept their first good night of sleep in weeks.

Two days later they began their harvesting. By the end of the first day they had gathered in the produce of perhaps a fifth of their fields. And on the second day of harvesting, Less staggered suddenly and sat down. Watching in a mutual silence from which the old friendly warmth was still missing, the Lut and the Snorap saw Great break off his own work and run to the fallen biped.

"For God's sake, don't quit now!" they heard him say.

"I can't," said Less, looking up

from the ground. "I can't do any more."

"We've got to get this stuff in!" cried Great, helplessly.

"One day—" Less forced the words through worn lips "let's take one day off. I can't go any more, I tell you!"

"Something may go wrong—"

Less stirred and weakly rose; then turned toward the dome.

"The weather's good. The gadget you made will keep the beasts out. There's no point to killing ourselves. I've got to get some sleep."

For a long moment Great stood watching the other biped move slowly off toward the dome. Suddenly, he cursed. He threw down the tool he was holding and followed.

The Snorap and the Lut turned to look at each other.

"They are giving up," said the Snorap. "They are leaving the machine to guard the field."

The Lut faced him.

"I don't blame them," he said.

"To me," replied the Snorap, "they are failures."

They stood looking at each other.

"I think," said the Lut at last, "I think that we no longer possess the mutual understanding necessary to our partnership."

The Snorap bowed his head.

"I cannot disagree," he said.

There was pain in both of them.

"Our association in the past has been a long and good one," said the Lut. "I will remember it."

"Nor will I forget," said the Snorap. He paused. "I will wait here a little while yet to see the end of this."

"I will wait also, then," the Lut answered.

They stood facing each other. Suddenly, the Snorap raised his head and tilted it, listening to the southward. After a second the Lut's head followed suit.

"—And the end comes now," said the Snorap.

**T**HERE ARE monsters on all young worlds. The creature that came northward over the plains, migrating with the seasons from tropics to temperate zone, was a proof of that statement. Vegetarian but vast, in size and strength beyond all natural enemies of his world, his body was all head, horns and stomach, balanced on four pillar-like legs; and he followed the comfortable temperatures of cool autumns northward, gleaning the land as he went.

From far out on the dark plains, he had scented the bipeds' crops. But because he stood at that time up to his tremendous midlegs in soft second growth grass, he had not turned immediately but had continued to feed where he was. When dawn came he had slept, standing with rock-like motionlessness upon his pillar legs. But when the midday breeze brought a scent of the ripe growing stuff once more to his flaring nostrils, he had stirred out of his sleep and methodically began to feed toward the clearing.

The Lut looked at the Snorap and the Snorap looked away.

The beast came on toward the edge of the field, moving with inexorable ponderousness. Some fifty yards away impatience seemed to break through his normal calm, and abandoning his slow feeding

pace, he lifted his head and broke into a sudden trot toward the orderly rows of cultivation.

Still—amazingly—he made almost no sound with his feet. The vibration, rather than the noise of his swinging stride, quivered through the earth and was felt by the Snorap and the Lut. Nothing could have been more eerie than this huge monster, looming large even in comparison with the buildings in the clearing, running silently toward the deserted fields under the bright, cloudless sky of the afternoon.

In the dome, the vibration reached through the fogs of Great's sleep, and stirred him. He moved, groaned, and opened his eyes. He lay on his back, listening, with his eyes open.

The monster had reached the edge of the field. He slowed and halted, the burnt metal smell of the roman candle pots stirred his little brain to caution. Slowly he moved up the line of cable to the nearest one and sniffed at it, the sound of his heavy snuffling audible to the Snorap and Lut behind their screen of branches.

Suddenly he screamed—a fantastic sound that rolled and re-echoed between open earth and empty sky. And, lifting himself on his hind legs, he pounded with both forelegs on the post, driving it into the dusty ground. And, as if this action had set loose the fires of his rage, he began almost to dance on the remains of the heavy post, mashing it to matchstick wood.

From the dome, Great and Less came tumbling. Less, half asleep and reeling with fatigue, Great cursing and trying to arm the weap-

on he carried—the gun the Snorap and Lut had seen him use when he tried to drive away the night predators on the fields. Finally dropping on one knee he fired at the monster. A puff of dust rose from behind the creature's heavy shoulder, and it turned to charge the human.

Great had aimed instinctively for where the heart is on animals of his native world. But this creature now bearing down upon him had no heart—as Snorap and Lut could have told Great. His circulatory fluid was literally pumped through his body by little muscles lining his veins and arteries.

Great fired again—this time for the head. And the missile ricocheted from the heavy bone plates as from a granite boulder.

The Snorap made an unhappy sound.

The second shot had caused the monster to hesitate. Now, weaving its head back and forth, it caught sight of Less and turned after this new quarry. Less took one panic-stricken glance at the towering creature; and ran blindly into the open space that separated the clearing from the fields.

Great fired twice more before the gun jammed. By that time, the monster was upon Less. But, fantastically, because of its speed and huge bulk, it overran the fleeing biped, and Less stumbled and fell without being touched.

For perhaps two seconds, while the monster was slowing and turning, Great continued to wrestle with the weapon. Then, seizing it by the barrel and swinging it like a club, he ran forward toward the creature.

"What is this?" cried the Snorap.

The monster had wheeled now and stood confronting them both. Great passed the fallen Less, shouting "Get to the dome. Get to the dome! I'll hold him!"

The monster screamed his fury and turned to follow; and Great ran on, a living lure to give Less time to reach safety.

"No moral fiber, eh?" snarled the Lut, leaping to his feet. He started to spring from concealment, but the Snorap gripped him.

"I will go!" cried the Snorap. "I was wrong. It's my responsibility."

"But my pleasure!" growled the Lut. "You take care of the bipeds." He wrenched away, and was gone.

Great had succeeded in dodging the monster's first rush. He stood now, panting, as the titanic thing whirled to come back at him. Less, instead of running toward the dome, was running toward him. And at that moment, the Lut broke into the open.

He crossed the distance separating himself from the monster like one long flash of glittering light. Reaching up with a forelimb as he passed he dealt it a blow that staggered it. For a second it stood dazed; then it raised its head and screamed.

The Lut stood looking at it, from a few feet before it. His ice-green eyes caught the wild black ones of the creature and held them.

"Go away," said the Lut, very softly.

He was reaching out with his own mind to the mind of the creature, trying to impress it.

"Go away," repeated the Lut. "I do not want to hurt you."

The creature roared and shifted

uncertainly, feeling an uneasiness that it could not understand. For a moment it fought for decision—then it charged.

The Lut shot from the ground like a projectile and met it head to head. There was a sound like a tree breaking in a high wind. The heavy bone that had warded off the missile from Great's gun, gave like cardboard before the fantastic stuff of which the Lut's body was constructed. The creature tumbled backwards, lay for a moment, then slowly struggled to its feet and reeled off like something half-conscious. Its huge forehead was caved in and dark fluid dripped from it and dropped on the ground as it went.

"It will live," said the Lut, looking after it.

He turned to look at the bipeds. The Snorap had come up and Great, with Less shoved behind him, was frantically trying to unjam the gun and shoot at them.

"Put that thing away," said the Lut. "We're friends."

The man froze, his hands on the breech of his weapon. The Lut was forming the human words by swallowing air and forcing it back through his capable throat muscles; and the result was a deep, growling bass that did not at first identify itself with rational speech.

"I said we're friends," said the Lut. "We've been watching you for a year now. Besides, your weapon there can't hurt us." He turned to the Snorap. "Say something to reassure them that you're not a wild animal."

"I have been guilty of badly misjudging you," said the Snorap humbly to the humans. He was

talking by the same process and the humans looked from him to the Lut as if they suspected the latter of being a ventriloquist.

"Who—who are you?" asked Great at last.

"We," said the Lut, "are individual members of two old and respected races, from elsewhere than this system. You might refer to me as a Lut and to my friend as a Snorap. And you call yourselves —?"

The man laughed a little wildly. Exchanging introductions with two nightmare beings after a hair-breadth escape from death, has a tendency to make anyone a bit hysterical.

"We're humans," he said. "I'm Jos Parner. This is my wife, Gela."

"Wife?" said the Lut.

"Why yes," said Jos. "My wife."

"What is a wife?" asked the Lut.

"Why—a wife—" answered the human in astonishment. "I'm a man, she's a woman. Male—female —"

"You mean," demanded the Lut, "that your race is bisexual?"

"Of course," answered the man.

"Isn't everything? Aren't you—" He broke off and stared at them. "You mean it's not usual?"

The Lut turned his head slowly and looked at the Snorap, who sat down in the dust.

"I am an old fool," said the Snorap, penitently, "I am a senile old idiot who ought to have my brains examined. Sitting here engaged in high speculation about the source of their racial philosophy and questioning their moral basis, when all the time they were loving each other and complementing each other's character-traits right under my very nose. What else would be the basis of colonization in a bisexual race but the family unit? Where but in the urge to build a home would their drive lie? What would be their courage, but love transformed?" He sat with head hanging. "I am an old fool."

The Lut crossed over to him and hung his heavy head on the Snorap's shoulder.

"Friend of many years past and yet to come," he said. "We are old fools together." ●●●

**THE CYBER AND JUSTICE HOLMES**, by Frank Riley, is one of those completely enjoyable science fiction stories which transcends mere good fiction writing. The story of a venerable old judge, who faces displacement by the faster, more accurate Cybers, machines not prone to human frailties and emotions in their legal decisions, it delivers a kind of wonderful sentimental sock and philosophical tenet that make you feel glad inside!

**WAR VETERAN**, by Philip K. Dick, is a novelette about a withered old man who tossed a monkey wrench into an inter-planet war machine. For he was a veteran, and he should know, for he fought—not in past wars—but in the war to come! . . . Don't miss these and other fine stories and features in the March IF.

*No one took Old Arch seriously; he was just an ancient, broken-down wanderer who went about seeking alms and spreading tales of the great Outside. But sometimes children are curious and believing when adults are cynical and doubting . . .*

## **SELLER OF THE SKY**

**BY DAVE DRYFOOS**

**T**HERE HAVE always been the touched, the blessés, God's poor. Such a one was Old Arch. Archer Jakes, the Wanderer of the Plains.

They say he was born on Earth in 3042 and taken to Mazzeppa as a child. That he learned pilotage and mining. But that he was injured in a cave-in on Hurretni in 3068 or thereabouts, and then his wife died in a landing accident and his child was taken from him and adopted by people he never could find.

Those things are too far distant in

time and space to be verified now. But it is a fact that by 4000, when my grandfather Hockington Hammer was growing up in New Oshkosh, Old Arch was a familiar figure in all the Domed Cities of the Plains.

He looked ancient then, with his deformed back that people touched for luck, and his wild hair and beard, and ragged castoff clothing. On his back he carried a roll of cloth he called his bed, though it looked like no bed any City man had ever seen. In his right hand he carried a staff of wood, unless some-





one bought it from him and gave him a plastic rod in its place. And in his left he carried what he called a billy can, which was a food container with a loop of wire across the top for a handle, and the bottom blackened by what he said was fire.

It would have been like no fire any City man had ever seen. Even the water in the can would be poison to a City man. When he came in the airlocks the guards would make him throw it away.

"Why the lock?" he'd demand, coming into a City. "Why the lock and why the plastic bubble over

all and why the guards? There's no pollution. Am I not alive?"

The guards would touch his hump and make circular motions at the sides of their heads and raise their eyebrows as if to say, "Yes, you're alive. But are you not crazy?"

Still they would admit him, the only nonresident to walk between the Domed Cities of the Plains and enter all of them; the only man to pass unharmed through the camps of the Outsiders who lived in the open on the Plains at the heart of the North American Continent of Earth.

And Old Arch would go to the residence buildings and he'd knock on someone's door—any door, chosen at random—and he'd say, "Have you seen the sky and do you know it's blue? Have you felt the soft kiss of the breezes? I can show you where to breathe fresh air."

Maybe the people would say, "Phew! Does it smell like you, this fresh air?" and slam the door in his face.

Or maybe they'd say, "Come on around to the back, Old Man, and we'll find you something to eat."

Then Old Arch would shoulder his bed and pick up his billy can and his staff and walk down the stairs and go around to the back and walk up the stairs to the rear door.

It might be an hour before he appeared there—it might be two. When he did, the people would ask, "Why didn't you say something? You should have known they wouldn't let you in the elevator! And twenty flights down and twenty flights up again is too much for a man of your years."

Then, the next time he came they would do the same thing again.

In the kitchen he would refuse all the pills and potions and shots, and insist on bulky foods. These he would eat neatly, holding aside the long white hair around his mouth and brushing the crumbs from it often. What he couldn't eat right away would go into his blackened billy can.

The children would come before he finished—those of the household, and neighbor kids too. First they'd stand shyly and watch him from a doorway. Then they'd press closer.

By the time he got through they'd be fighting to sit on his lap.

The winner would climb up and sit there proudly. One of the losers, trying to prove he hadn't lost much, might wrinkle up his nose and say, "What's that awful stink, Old Man?"

And Arch would answer mildly, "It's only wood smoke, son."

Then the children would ask, "What's wood, please? And what's smoke?"

And he would tell them.

He would tell of the wind and the rain and the snow; of the cattalo herds that roamed to the west and the cities that lay to the east and the stars and the Moon that they never had seen. He would claim to have been in the endless forests and on the treeless plains and to have tasted the salt ocean and drunk of the freshwater lakes and rivers.

The children would have heard, in their lessons and from their elders, enough to know what he was talking about. Sometimes they would tire of it, and ask him to tell of the distant planets and their far-off suns. But this he would not do.

"You already hear too much about them," he'd say. "I want you to know Earth. Your own country. The one planet on which these plastic-covered cities are unnecessary, where you can actually go out and roll on the grass."

Then the children might ask, "What's grass?"

But their fathers would pointedly say, "What about the radioactivity, Old Man?"

"I'm alive," he'd reply. "There's no radioactivity out there."

But they'd say, "How can we be sure? There are individual differ-

ences of susceptibility. Probably you are unhurt by dosages that would kill any normal person."

And the mothers would say, "Eat some more, Old Man. Eat—and go. Bring our babies dreams, if you like, but don't try to tempt them Outside. Even if it isn't radioactive there, you've admitted it gets hot and it gets cold and the wind blows fiercely hard. Our babies were born under shelter, and under shelter they must stay, like us and our parents before us."

So Old Arch would brush off his whiskers one last time and maybe put on an old shirt the father dug up for him and then go out the back way. In spite of what might have been said, he would have to walk the twenty flights down to the ground because he wouldn't be invited to walk through the apartment to the front hall where the elevator was.

Sometimes people were hostile when he spoke to their children, and they would have him arrested. He was then bathed and barbered in the jail, and was given all new clothes. But they'd always burn his bed, and he'd have trouble getting a new one. And sometimes a jailor might covet the pocketknife he carried, or take away his billy can. On the whole I think he preferred not to go to jail except perhaps in winter, when it was cold outside the City.

There were always those ready to talk of asylums, and the need to put him away for his own good. But nobody was sure where his legal residence was, so he wasn't really eligible for public hospitalization.

He kept to his rounds. My grandfather remembers standing in his

mother's kitchen listening to Old Arch. It was like meeting one of Joseph's brethren and being told exactly what the coat looked like. Something exciting out of a dream from the remote past, when all the worlds had on them those bright moist diamonds Arch described as morning dew.

My grandfather wanted to see the morning dew, though he knew better than to say so.

Old Arch understood. He tried to make the thing possible. But an opportunity to see the morning dew was something he just couldn't give to my grandfather or anybody else.

So he decided to sell it.

He persuaded a charitable lithographer to make him a batch of stock certificates. They looked very authentic. Each said plainly it was good for one share of blue sky, though the fat half-draped woman portrayed in three colors stood outside a Domed City pointing not at the sky but at a distant river with forested hills behind it.

Arch sold his certificates for a stiff price; ten dollars apiece. He could do it because by this time his wanderings followed a fairly definite route. The people who hated or feared or despised him were pretty well eliminated from it, and most of his calls were at apartments where he was known and expected and even respected a little.

My grandfather's was one of these—or rather, my great-grandfather's. When Arch first brought his stock certificates my grandfather was a little fellow everybody called Ham, maybe seven years old. He had a sister named Annie who was five. He's given me a mental

picture of the two of them standing close together for reassurance, and from an open doorway shyly watching the old man eat and listening to him talk.

When my great-grandfather bought a ten dollar stock certificate in my grandfather's name, my grandfather took it as a promise. And his little sister Annie was so jealous that the next time Old Arch came around my great-grandfather had to buy a share for her.

**A**S THEY grew to be nine, ten, eleven, twelve, every winter when Old Arch would come around, my grandfather and his sister Annie would ask, "When are you going to take us to see the sky, Arch?" And he would say, "When you're older. When your folks say you can go." And, "When it's summer, and not too cold for these old bones."

But when my grandfather was fourteen he followed Old Arch out and down the stairs after the old man had paid his annual call, and he stopped him on a landing to ask, "Arch, have you ever taken anyone Outside?"

"No," Arch said, sighing. "People won't go."

"I'll go," said my grandfather, "and so will my sister Annie."

Arch looked at him and put a hand on him and said, "I don't want to come between any boy and his parents."

"Well," said my grandfather, "you sold them a share of sky for each of us. Do you really want us to have that, or do you just want to talk about it?"

"Of course I want you to. But I

can't take you Outside, boy."

My grandfather was disgusted. "There isn't any sky," he said sadly. "It's all talk. The certificates were just for begging."

"No," said Arch. "It's not all talk and I'm not a beggar. I'm a guide. But it's hard to see the sky right now because it's winter, and there are clouds all over."

"Let's see the clouds, then," my grandfather said stubbornly. "I've never seen a cloud."

The old man sat down on the stairs to consider the matter.

"I can't do this thing to your parents," he said at last.

"But you can do it to me and my sister," my grandfather charged wildly. "You can come to the house year after year after year, and tell us about the sky and the wind and the moon and the dew and the grass and the sun. You can even take money for our share of them. But when it comes time to produce—when we're old enough to go where these things are supposed to be—you think of excuses.

"I don't believe there are any such things," he shouted. "I think you're a liar. I think you ought to be arrested for gypping my dad on the stock deal, and I'm going to turn you in."

"Don't do that, boy," Arch said mildly.

"Then take us Outside—today!"

"It's winter, my boy. We'd freeze."

"You've said it's pretty in winter! You took the money for the certificate."

"I suppose you'll grow away from your parents soon anyhow; I suppose you have to . . . Get your warmest clothes and meet me at

emergency exit four."

My grandfather talked it over with his sister Annie and of course they didn't have any warm clothes, but they'd heard so often from Old Arch about the cold that they put on two sets of tights apiece, and two pairs of sox, and then they hunted for the emergency exit.

They'd never been there before. They didn't know anyone who had. The signs pointing to it were all worn and defaced.

And it was a long way to go. After a while Annie began to hang back.

"How do we know the exit will work?" she asked. "And how will we get back in if we ever do get out?"

"You don't have to come," my grandfather said. "But you'll have to find your own way home from here."

"I'll bet I could," she said. "But I'm not going to. I don't think Old Arch will even be at the exit."

But he was.

He looked at them carefully to see how they were dressed. "You mean trouble for me, girl," he told Annie. "They'll think I took you along to make love to."

She had just reached that betwixt and between stage where she was beginning to look like a woman but didn't yet think like one. "Pooh!" she said. "I can run faster and hit harder than you can, Arch. You don't worry me a bit."

Old Arch sighed and led them through the lock. They stepped out into a raging snowstorm, which soon draped a cloak of invisibility over them.

Neither my grandfather nor Annie had ever smelled fresh air be-

fore. It threatened to make them drunk. Their nostrils tingled and their eyes misted over and their breath steamed up like bathwater. For the first time in their lives, they shivered.

When the City was out of sight in the storm, they stopped for a moment in the ankle-deep snow and just listened. They held their breaths and heard silence for the first time in their lives.

Old Arch reached down and picked up some soft snow and threw it at them. They pelted him back, and then, because he was so old, attacked each other instead, shouting and throwing snowballs and running aimlessly.

Old Arch soon checked them. "Don't get lost," he said. "We're walking down hill. Don't forget that. We're going into a draw where there are some trees."

He coughed and drew his rags about him. "The city is up hill," he said. "If you keep walking around it you'll find a way in."

His tone was frightening. Annie clung to my grandfather and made him walk close to the old man. It was clear the old man didn't have enough clothes on. He staggered and leaned hard on my grandfather.

They kept moving down the slight grade. They saw no sky and little of anything else. The snow was like a miniature of the City's Dome, except that this dome floated over them as they walked. Its edges were only about fifty yards off.

"Where are the Outsiders?" my grandfather asked. "Aren't there people here?"

"They're miles away," Arch told him. "And indoors. Only fools and

youngsters are out in this blizzard.”

“Fools is right,” Annie said tartly. “There was supposed to be sky. And there isn’t.”

Old Arch staggered again. To my grandfather he said, “Could—could you carry my pack?”

My grandfather took it and they went on, stumbling blindly through knee-deep drifts, getting more and more chilled and less and less comfortable, ’til they came to a small clump of trees with a solidly frozen creek running through it.

Here Old Arch made a lean-to shelter of windfallen limbs. Annie and my grandfather helped as soon as they understood the design. Arch spread part of his bed over the lean-to, breaking the force of the wind, and put the rest inside. Just outside, on a place scraped bare of snow, he built the first wood fire my grandfather and Annie had ever seen.

He chipped ice from the creek and put it in his billy can and hung the can by its bail over the fire, and in due course they had a little hot tea.

The youngsters felt cold but happy. The old man shivered and coughed.

He’d kept moving till the tea was made. He sat still to drink it, and couldn’t get up.

“Go to bed,” Annie told him. “Ham will get on one side of you and I’ll get on the other. We’ll keep you warm.”

Old Arch tried to protest but was almost beyond speech. The youngsters didn’t know enough to brush the snow off him or themselves. They helped him roll up in his bedding and crawled under the lean-to after him. There they all lay

in a heap, getting colder and damper and more miserable, till finally my grandfather couldn’t stand it any more.

He got up and looked around. The inverted cup of visibility was smaller. Darkness fell like a dye-stuff, turning the white snow to gray, to black.

It was a bitter night. The first he’d ever had outdoors. It was the first Annie’d ever had. The first either had ever spent at the futile task of holding off death.

They knew Old Arch was dying. As the night wore on he sank into semi-consciousness. They hugged him and rubbed his lean old limbs.

Just before morning the snow stopped. The old man roused a little, became gradually aware of his surroundings.

“Go look at the sun,” he murmured. “Go see the sunrise.”

They went out to look. Neither had ever seen a sunrise before. It was mauve first, then red, then gold, then blue. Venus led the way, and the sun followed. The moon, deep in the west, was like a tombstone to the dead night.

A bird chirruped. A clot of snow fell from a tree with a soft ruffle of cottony drums.

My grandfather held his sister’s hand and looked and sniffed at the great Earth from which he’d been separated by the fear-inspired plastic over his City, so near, now, in the clear morning night. He climbed with Annie up the side of the draw and looked out over snow-covered plains stretching to a horizon farther away than the longest distance he’d ever imagined.

He went back and took Old Arch’s head up on his knees and

said, "Is it like this every day?"

And the old man said, "No, each day is different."

And my grandfather said, "Well, I've seen one, anyhow."

"That's what I've lived for," said Old Arch. And he smiled and stopped living.

Annie and my grandfather left him there and went back to the City and told the guards and their family. A burial party was sent out; guards, in their helmeted space-suits.

People heard about it and fol-

lowed. Everyone was curious because they'd all seen Old Arch and wondered about him.

Hundreds of people went out the gate—so many, the guards couldn't stop them. They saw the lean-to and the open fire and the woods and the snow and the frozen creek. They smelled the air and the smoke. They heard a bird. They tossed snowballs.

And then they went back and flung rocks through their City's Dome. ● ● ●

## WORTH CITING

TWO UNITED STATES icebreakers recently crushed their way through Arctic ice to find the fabled Northwest Passage, long a lure to adventurers and explorers. The two ships successfully plowed their way through ice that was often four to ten feet thick to find the water route which links the Atlantic Ocean with the Pacific Ocean across the top of the world. One ship crushed and blasted its way through McClure Strait, while the other fought its way through from the Arctic Ocean, skirting along its southern edge.

The Burton Island and the Northwind were both U.S. ships, but they were part of a joint United States-Canadian expedition conducting oceanographic and hydrographic studies in that area. The studies are part of a continuing research program to make the frozen wastes of the vast Arctic more accessible for military operations, and strengthening one of the most vital links in our combined continental defenses.

Helicopters and naval specialists in underwater demolition, known as "frogmen", were invaluable contributions of both nations. The helicopters spotted new routes through the ice, and the "frogmen" helped to check the depth of ice fields, tested various explosives for blasting through them, and tried out underwater cameras designed for use in Arctic waters.

Our citation this month goes to the governments of the United States and Canada, and to the men of the expedition, for this international defense venture in which they combined manpower, techniques, knowledge and equipment—with daring, courage and common spirit—to explore and strengthen this strategic Arctic area.

*Here is another look at the America of tomorrow—by a Wilkes College sophomore, winner of the 3rd prize in IF's College Science Fiction Contest . . . An America in which there is no more school, no more art, no more enterprise, no more intellectual pursuit—a nation of hedonists. And in such a land, how could there be malcontents?*

# Dreamtown

U. S. A.

BY LEO P. KELLEY

**T**HE GIRL'S body was small, slender, and perfectly proportioned. Her hair had been dyed platinum and was drawn back from her face by a mesh net which sparkled with red jewels. She stood in the middle of the room, head tilted back, eyes closed, moving in time to the music coming from an invisible transmitter. Her hands glided sinuously up and down either

side of her body. She seemed oblivious to the people circling the room enjoying Gil Patton's party. It was only when she heard Brant's voice that she opened her eyes.

"Lisa, you go for that stuff, I see," Brant called to her, referring to the music being piped into the room from one of Dreamtown's many Sensory Communications Centers.



"It's really out of this world, Brant, way out, all out!" Lisa replied. She came over and sat on the arm of the chair in which Brant sprawled.

"You can feel it way down here," she said, and placed her hand on the pit of her stomach.

"Wonder how we ever got kicks out of that old stuff that you couldn't *feel*?" Brant asked as he placed his arm about Lisa's waist. "Just *hearing* music doesn't give you any glow."

Brant slid farther down in the chair and stretched his legs out before him. The bluish light in the room glinted from the highly polished surface of his knee length boots. He wore loose-fitting yellow trousers and a black suede shirt split open almost to the waist, revealing his chest.

"Have you tried one of Gil's new pebbles?" he asked Lisa.

"No, what's new about them?" she asked. She wriggled into Brant's lap and rubbed her cheek against his chest.

"They're slaughter. Instead of just getting a deeper feeling from real experiences, you can sit back and imagine something—anything—and you can feel the sensations of your fantasy. You can feel all that way down here, too," he said, touching, in repetition of Lisa's gesture, the pit of her stomach.

"Get me one, Brant. Let's see what goes."

Brant lifted Lisa to her feet and rose from the chair. His boots clicked against the green metal floor as he pushed his way through the crowd of merry makers toward a transparent glass bubble which was suspended from the ceiling by



Illustrated by Leo Summers

a silver chain. He pushed back the dispenser on the bubble and a cylindrical pill rolled out onto his hand. He carried it back to where

Lisa sat swaying to the music which continued to fill the room.

"Here child. This will really give you a dream," he said as he handed her the pill.

Brant watched Lisa sink into the half coma that the sensation pills produced. He leaned over and kissed her shoulder. Then he straightened and moved across the room to where Gill Patton stood in front of a glass wall which afforded a panoramic view of the entire city.

"Good party, Gil," Brant said to his host.

"I hoped it wouldn't be sad. Anything clicking?"

Brant pointed to Lisa. "She is. Been trying your new pebbles."

"How's the Assistant Director of Sensory Communications doing these days?" Gil asked as they walked across the room to a plastic table on which rested bowls of red, green, and yellow liquors.

"Right and light. We've got a new show scheduled to go on the Distributor Cable in about another month. Runs twenty minutes two times a day. Morning and night. A serial about the Council."

Gil turned to Brant with a drink in his hand. "Thought nobody knew anything about the Council except that they run Dreamtown."

"No one does know very much about them. No one's ever seen them actually. But we've heard rumors that the Rebels have been influencing some of our citizens and word has come down to build this show for morale purposes."

"Why, that's crazy. Who'd want to go back to the way it was before? Those Rebels are out of their heads!"

Brant smiled. "Right man. But there are still some of them operating in the less populated areas. The Watchers brought in seven men and a woman last week from somewhere south of here. They found books in their hideout and even some paintings that one of the Rebels claimed to have done by hand."

Gil whistled through his teeth. "You'd think they'd get with it and come back here. What are they getting out of this rebellion?"

Brant reached over and touched Gil's arm.

"Just between us, friend. Before they psychwashed these Rebels they found out that they had been plotting with other Rebel groups to overthrow Dreamtown. The Council has every available Watcher on their trail."

"Couldn't ever happen, Brant. They don't have anything to fight with. Books. Pictures. They'll wise up and come over to us. Wait and see."

Brant shrugged. "They forget we're living in 2054 and the Big War's been over for nearly seventy years. They still think the old way was pretty good. But Gil, boy, we're getting serious. Let's stack it! The Watcher's will get them. It's not our problem."

The girl was gazing through one of the windows in the small farm-

*Announcement of the seven winners in IF's College Science Fiction Contest was made in the November issue. The stories winning the first and second prizes appeared in the December and January issues.*

house kitchen. A wild flower was pinned in her long, auburn hair and it matched, almost perfectly, the blue of her eyes. Even in slacks she was, not beautiful, but a wonderfully pretty girl of twenty four or five.

"I wonder when he'll be back, Dad. It's been almost two days and I—I'm worried."

"He had a long trip to make, Nancy. Longer than usual because he had to make a detour around Dreamtown in order to get down to Ben's group. It's all of forty miles south of here. Don't you worry. He'll be back soon."

The girl came away from the window and kissed Professor Alan Corbett on the forehead. "You're wonderful, Dad. So calm and sensible about things. I get scared though when I think of Dan going so close to Dreamtown. The Watchers patrol for miles around the city and they'd know Dan was a Rebel in a minute because of his clothes."

"Dan won't get caught, Nancy. You get busy now and make some coffee and stop worrying," Professor Corbett smiled. "And afterward we'll play a little gin rummy if you feel like it."

Nancy got up from the table and put the coffee pot on the stove. Her father turned back to the book lying open on the table before him.

"This is such a treasure, Nancy. I wonder if you fully realize it." It was a copy of the complete works of William Shakespeare. "There are only five copies of this still in existence to my knowledge; although there is a man in Ben's group who has been copying it by hand on paper they've stolen from Dreamtown. Only five copies. There might

be more, but we haven't been able to find them."

Nancy poured steaming coffee into her father's cup and then into her own. She sat across from him at the table and watched as he lovingly examined the book in his hands.

"Listen to this, Nancy."

Nancy listened to Professor Corbett's quiet voice.

"Is she kind as she is fair?  
For Beauty lives with kindness.  
Love doth to her eyes repair  
To help him of his blindness,  
And, being helped, inhabits  
there."

"It's beautiful, Dad."

Nancy watched her father as his eyes scanned the rest of the page. "You love books, don't you?" she asked softly.

Her father looked up and took off his glasses. "Yes, Nancy, I guess I do. Teaching in the University was the greatest thing in my life because I was able to spend so much time with books. And, you know, in a way, they weren't just books, they were like old friends. Socrates, Aristotle, Chaucer, Shakespeare—all the others. Every time I picked up one of those books it was like meeting old friends. And you never really get tired of old friends, you know. As the years go by they become dearer to you and you learn to appreciate their true value." Professor Corbett smiled a little sadly. "Nancy, it almost broke my heart when the Council abolished the schools and colleges and burned the books. That was the reason I joined the Rebels ever so long ago. And, of course, there were

many others who felt as I did.”

Nancy sipped the hot coffee and watched her father drift into his reverie about the old days before there had been a Council or Watchers and when Dreamtown had really been just what the name implied. A dream city of books and learning and hard working men and women trying to put a civilization back on its feet after the disastrous Big War. Nancy thought of the kind of dreams that were dreamed in the city now. Dreams of pleasure and sensation. Empty dreams. Vapid dreams.

“Do you know what the Council set up in place of the schools, Nancy? They built the biggest and brightest and most terrible playgrounds in the world. Children were taught to fight and to play; and the ones who fought hardest, regardless of rules, were considered the champions in each playground. They didn’t bother to learn anything; they just played . . .” His voice trailed off.

Nancy and her father drank their coffee in silence, each of them alone with their thoughts. Professor Corbett was back in his University classroom filled with the smell of chalk and the musty odor of books, and Nancy was out in the dark night somewhere with Dan, making the perilous journey to Ben’s Rebel group.

A sudden sound on the porch shocked both of them back to reality. Professor Corbett quickly dropped his book into a drawer of the table, rose and walked past Nancy who stared at the door with a mixture of hope and fear on her face. A soft knock sounded and, after a moment’s hesitation, Nan-

cy’s father unbolted and opened the door.

A tall young man wearing an old pair of blue jeans and a shirt from which most of the buttons were missing stood in the doorway.

“Dan!” Nancy shouted and ran across the room and into his arms.

His huge frame almost filled the doorway, as he bowed, his blonde head to murmur reassurances to Nancy, who cried with relief at having him safely back.

“I’m alright, darling,—but I’m afraid I’ve got bad news,” Dan said. He released Nancy, keeping one of her hands in his. When the three of them were seated Dan spoke.

“The Watchers must have gotten Ben and the others. The place was a shambles. Everything was destroyed. They probably took the group to Dreamtown. If they did, you know what that means.”

“Psychwashing,” Professor Corbett muttered. He dropped his head in his hands. “Then you couldn’t get the books?” he asked sadly.

“No. They had been burned. And so had Ben’s paintings. We can’t wait any longer, Alan. We’ve got to organize and we’ve got to raid Dreamtown. We can’t go on like this anymore!”

Nancy tightened her grip on Dan’s hand as Professor Corbett raised his head and nodded. “You’re right, Dan,” he said. “We can’t afford to wait any longer.”

**W**ITH A slight hum the large video panel in the ceiling of Brant’s apartment clicked on automatically. To the accompaniment of shrill laughter in the background, the announcer told Brant and the

other viewers that they were about to witness the next installment in the adventures of "The Pretty People." Brant stretched in his bed and groaned from the effects of the party the night before. He watched through half closed eyes as The Pretty People in their harlequin costumes chased each other about a meadow filled with artificial flowers. In spite of his discomfort Brant chuckled when Mannequina, with a violent blow, knocked Manequin from a large toadstool on which he had been seated. He laughed again as he watched Manequin roll down a hill and land in a giant mud puddle at the bottom.

Brant eased himself out of bed and walked unsteadily to the cubicle in one corner of the room, stepped in, and closed the plastic door behind him. He rubbed his eyes and stretched as the soothing vigoro-senso rays removed the last traces of the discomfort brought on by too much liquor and too many sensation pills.

Back in his room he switched on the dimensional theater set and watched the wall light up before him. Brant finished dressing to the sounds of laughter coming from The Pretty People on the ceiling video and the sighs and pleadings of two lovers in the dimensional theater set.

On his way to the door Brant selected one of the milder sensation pills from the bowl on the low table, swallowed it, and passed through the sliding door panel into the street.

He glanced at the gigantic clock which was suspended over the city like a cloud in the sky by thin steel cables. Each numeral on the huge

face of the clock was composed of a man and a woman locked in an ardent embrace.

Brant and several other people boarded one of the moving platforms as it stopped before them. The city sped by in a vari-colored blur. At the main Sensory Communications Building Brant got off. The building loomed massive before him, its rose plastic exterior warm looking in the sunlight. Brant, with another glance skyward at the clock, went inside.

He walked briskly down the jade hall and entered an office labeled Assistant Director of Sensory Communications.

Lisa, seated behind a desk, greeted him. "We've got sun this morning, Brant. Have a good time last night?"

"Had a ball, doll! You look great this morning," Brant said. "Benton in yet?"

"Waiting for you," Lisa replied. "Told me to send you right in."

Brant turned and entered the inner office of Axel Benton, Director of Sensory Communications for Dreamtown.

Benton looked up and frowned as Brant entered. "The show on the Council has to go on two weeks earlier," he fairly shouted at Brant. "The Minister of Entertainment called this morning and he's hot! Says the Council is having a fit about the increase in activity among the Rebels; and rumors have been leaking out that they're planning to destroy Dreamtown. So they want the show on sooner. Also, they want a half hour show instead of twenty minutes."

"Nobody cares what the Rebels are doing and it's crazy to think

they could destroy the city. So what's all the rush about?" Brant asked angrily.

"I figured you'd talk that way so I arranged a little session for you this morning that may bring you to your senses, bright boy Brant," Benton retorted. He barked into the intercom on the desk.

"Call downstairs and have them send up Jennings, Lisa," Benton ordered.

A few minutes later the door slid open and Jennings was led in by two of the Watchers. He was a middle aged man who wore spectacles instead of the contact lenses which nearly everyone in Dreamtown wore when they needed glasses. The two Watchers stepped aside. They were young men, neither looked more than twenty five, with eyes as brittle as glass. Their black leather pants and jackets fitted tightly and steel cleats on their heavy boots grated wickedly on the floor with each step they took. Their hands, in black leather gloves, rested casually on their hips close to the hypno ray guns fastened to their belts.

"Jennings," Benton began, "was found to be in possession of a book titled 'Principles of Human Knowledge' by George Berkeley. And Jennings, as you know Brant, was in a strategic control position here in the Center. He was in charge of show censorship for the whole Com center.

"What do you mean, *was* in charge?" Brant asked.

"Just that! He is no longer in charge. In fact, he is being taken now by these Watchers to the psych lab but I wanted you to realize the seriousness of this thing, Brant, so

I had him brought here first."

"He's going to be psychwashed?" Brant asked.

"Of course, you fool!"

"But why? Couldn't you just burn the book and throw him out?" Brant asked.

"I wouldn't expect you to understand," Benton sneered. "The book he had is one of the most dangerous books ever written. It is against every principle on which Dreamtown is founded and if Lisa hadn't found it in his office—"

"Lisa found it?" Brant asked.

"Yes, and like the smart girl she is, she reported him to the Watchers right away." Benton motioned to the two Watchers and they stiffened immediately, seized Jennings who stared silently before him, and half dragged him from the room.

"I never would have thought it of Jennings," Brant said softly.

"That's just it! We can't be too careful," Benton said.

"Are you sure he was a Rebel?" Brant asked.

Benton's fist made a crashing sound as he brought it down on the desk. "Idiot!" he screamed. "What else could he be? No one but a Rebel would read such trash! Now get out of here, Brant. I want the format for the Council show finished in two days or you're going to find yourself in real big trouble! Seeing Jennings should wake you up and start you moving!"

Brant rose. "I see what you mean. You'll have the format."

"Good! We're bringing out a new sensation pill in a few weeks and we'd like to coincide the opening of this show with the release of the pill. Big promotion and all that.

And, by the way, don't forget the show schedule for the annual Playground Festival."

Benton turned back to the work on his desk as Brant left the office.

**M**EN AND women were crowded into the smoke filled living room of Professor Corbett's farmhouse, and conversations were being carried on in hushed whispers. Nancy stood talking to Dan. Professor Corbett was near them busily engaged in conversation with two women and a man whose clothes looked as if they had seen many years of hard wear.

Dan left Nancy and walked to the center of the room. His voice rang out vibrant and clear as he called for the attention of the gathered crowd.

"I believe we are all here now. If everyone will sit down we'll begin the meeting."

When everyone was seated Dan nodded to Professor Corbett.

"You all know by now," Professor Corbett began, "that Ben's group was discovered and probably destroyed. We've been able to find no trace of them. Things have been going pretty badly for us, friends, and that is why we asked you all to make the effort to come here tonight. For many of you it's been hard; you've come a long way. But we have to make a stand and we must make that stand together."

Applause greeted Professor Corbett's introduction and, after hesitating a moment, he continued.

"It is likely that Ben and the others were taken to Dreamtown and psychwashed. In the past few days we have received no word

from Jennings either. It is possible that he has been found out and is unable to contact us. At any rate, we must operate on that assumption until we hear from him again.—If we do," he added solemnly.

Every eye in the group was fixed on Professor Corbett and every ear strained to hear each word he spoke.

"The Watchers have been patrolling an increasingly wider area around Dreamtown, which necessitates moving our outposts farther away. This will make communications between our groups more difficult, but it is a necessary maneuver. Another thing. Take your books and music and paintings and anything else which might give you away, and hide them in some safe place. It is most important that we preserve what we have left. It must not fall into the hands of the Watchers."

A woman in the group spoke. "We can't just keep running and hiding! We should do something!"

"That is exactly the reason I asked you here tonight," Professor Corbett replied. "Dan and I have formulated a plan and we submit it to you for your consideration, approval, and cooperation. Dan, will you explain what we have worked out?"

Dan rose and came to stand beside the Professor.

"First of all," he began, "we need four volunteers to go into Dreamtown, get jobs, and wait for the raid. These four people will have to be in strategic positions on the day we raid the city. Two of them will open the North gates of the city. One will dynamite the warehouses where the sensation

drugs are stored. And the fourth must in some way gain control of the Watcher's barracks and arsenal."

There was excitement on the faces of the people who listened to Dan's words. They began to see a ray of hope and a course of action, and they leaned eagerly forward as Dan continued speaking.

"Our first target when we raid the city, will be the Council Building. If we can get control of the Council we have the heart of the city in our hands."

Two men stood up. "We want to volunteer to go to Dreamtown," they said. A woman rose and joined them. "If you can use a woman, I'd like to go too." Two other men volunteered, and there was much excited discussion in the small room.

Dan held up his hands and asked for quiet. "Since four men have volunteered," he said to the woman, "we'd best use them. And now, if those four men will stay here with me, the rest of you can leave. You will be notified of details by runner, as in the past."

The group broke up into smaller groups. Some went into the kitchen, where Nancy had prepared a lunch for them. Others prepared to leave for their own outposts.

Professor Corbett was talking to an elderly man who had been a scientist in one of Dreamtown's first laboratories.

"It's a copy of a research project done by a colleague of mine on the Relativity Theory. An astute paper, I'd say. I've been saving it for you," Professor Corbett told the scientist. "I have it hidden with most of my other books up on the hillside by the

spring. Wait just a minute and I'll get it for you."

"Never mind, Dad," Nancy said. She had been passing and overheard her father's remark. "I'll get it. You stay here and talk. I know you're having more fun than you've had in months and I wouldn't see you spoil it for the world."

"But—," Professor Corbett tried to protest.

"Hush, now. Be back in a jiffy," Nancy said as she slipped out the door into the darkness outside.

Professor Corbett and the scientist continued talking. Others joined them and the discussion became heated. It touched on science, art, literature, and many other topics that had been important and common in the old days. A few minutes passed and Dan joined the group.

"Where's Nancy, Alan?" he asked.

Professor Corbett turned to Dan to explain Nancy's errand when the sound of a shrill scream from somewhere outside the house caused everyone to stiffen in fright.

"It's Nancy!" Dan shouted and sprang for the door. He wrenched it open and, as he did so, a burst of flame seared out of the blackness, missing him by inches. Another scream followed the first.

The people in the room were galvanized into action. Professor Corbett ran to a chest in a corner of the room. He unlocked it quickly and handed a ray gun to Dan. He distributed guns to most of the other men. The guns had been smuggled out of Dreamtown by Jennings and others over a period of years. Soon men were stationed at every window of the house firing



out into the blackness.

"It's the Watchers!" a woman shouted.

"Be careful of your fire," Dan yelled, "they've got Nancy!"

The firing continued, while Professor Corbett and some of the others struggled to smother a fire that had been started by a blast from a Watcher's ray gun.

"I'm going out after them!" Dan shouted.

Professor Corbett grabbed for Dan in an effort to stop him, but he was too late. The Professor left the others to battle the fire and raced after Dan.

As he stumbled along in the darkness, he could barely discern Dan's figure racing in the direction from which the shots had come. There was no firing now and the hillside was quiet. Dan had stopped, and Professor Corbett joined him in the darkness. Both men looked frantically in every direction.

"There's no trace of them. They got away, Alan. We held them off, but they've taken Nancy with them!"

Professor Corbett put his arm around Dan's shoulder. His eyes filled with tears and he gripped Dan tightly. For a few seconds neither of them spoke and then Professor Corbett turned to Dan.

"We'd better go back to the house."

The two men turned and walked slowly back to the farmhouse where the others still battled the fire.

Lisa and Brant walked down the street toward the Playground.

"Benton liked your script for the Council show, Brant," Lisa said as they walked along.

"It was a hard card to handle, I'll tell you," Brant said. "No one actually knows anything about the Council. We don't even know how many members there are. It was hard trying to get enough information to fill the show time, so I just reworked the old stories about the Council and added a few new ones."

Lisa slipped her arm through Brant's. "I'm proud of you, honey. It must have been good to set Benton hopping like that. What'd you put in it?"

"Just said the Council was Dreamtown's protector, provider and producer. Said the same thing twenty times in twenty different ways; but didn't answer any of the real questions about the Council."

"No one asks any questions, Brant. Who cares how many men are on the Council or how they operate? So long as we have our flip food and parties—who cares? You worry too much."

Brant laughed and patted Lisa's hand. "You're right. Jennings worried too much and look what happened to him!"

They continued down the street, standing aside once as a group of Watchers in semi-military formation passed them. As they turned a corner they saw the solid red wall that surrounded the Playground rising in the distance.

"Will you be able to get the information you want here, Brant?" Lisa asked.

"If they let us in," he replied.

"I've never been in the Playground before, have you?" Lisa asked.

"Once. A long time ago when it was first put into operation, but

they say things have changed a lot since then," Brant replied.

A watcher halted them as they approached the gate. Brant explained about coming to gather material for the forthcoming Playground Festival show and displayed his official Sensory Communications card. The Watcher directed them to wait and stepped into a booth at one side of the gate. Brant and Lisa saw him talking to someone on the video phone. A moment later he returned, unlocked the gate, and motioned them inside. Once in, they were met by another Watcher who led them down a long hall to a door at the far end. The silence of the hall was in direct contrast to the cacophony that met their ears as they stepped through the door into the Playground.

Children of both sexes and of every age and size filled the Playground. Nearly all were shouting at the tops of their voices. Scattered among the group were men and women dressed in the briefest of costumes. Some participated in the children's games, but most stood and watched, in rather stony silence, the activity before them.

From one of the small buildings within the Playground, a young man walked toward Lisa and Brant. The Watcher stepped aside as he approached.

"I am Kirk Rodson," the man said to Brant and Lisa. "Director of the Playground. Can I help you?"

Brant introduced himself and Lisa to the man, and explained their purpose in coming to the Playground.

"I see," Rodson said. "There's not much to tell. Children are

brought here immediately after birth and are cared for in our laboratories. Their instruction in walking and talking is accelerated by specially trained personnel. As soon as an infant learns to walk he is released into the Playground with the others for a specified time each day. He is fed a specially prepared diet. As he grows older, he is left in the Playground for increasingly longer periods of time in order that he may adjust to its demands."

"When do the children leave here?" Brant asked.

"The program of the Playground is arranged to accommodate children until they reach the age of eighteen," Rodson answered curtly.

"What generally becomes of the children then?" Lisa asked.

"Most of them become ordinary citizens. The best of the male group are trained as Watchers. The females usually join a breeder group. It is only the elect, with the highest qualifications, that can fill either of these positions."

"Who are those men and women out there with the children?" Brant asked, staring out into the crowded Playground.

"They are some of the older ones who work with the children. Those young men are joining the Watchers when they finish here."

Brant, Lisa, and Rodson watched as one of the leaders called sharply to a curly headed boy who had been playing with a pretty raven haired girl. The boy leaped to his feet at the sound of his name and raced to where the athletic young man stood. The man pointed to a group of two boys and a girl who were engaged in a tussle on the ground before him.

Brant and Lisa repressed their surprise as the boy quickly leaped into the melee and, by virtue of his superior strength and size, beat the two boys and the girl until they fled before his brutal blows. The boy stared after them a moment and then returned to the man whose directions he had followed. Rodson laughed a short harsh laugh as the man slapped the boy's face and sent him sprawling in the dust.

"These children must learn to be constantly on guard. The stronger the person, the better chance he has for survival," Rodson explained.

"It's a rather hard way to learn, isn't it?" Lisa asked.

Rodson stared icily at her for a moment before he answered. "Lessons learned the hard way are long-remembered," he said.

As Brant listened to Rodson talk about the Playground, the children, at shouted commands from their instructors, assembled in a rank and file in the center of the Playground.

"Listen!" Rodson ordered.

One of the briefly clad young women raised her arm. Music resembling a primitive rhythmical chant filled the air. The children sang as Brant and Lisa listened.

*We have fun.*

*We have sun.*

*We can fight.*

*We are right.*

*The Council leads us.*

*The Council feeds us.*

*Days of pleasure.*

*Full of treasure.*

*We are free!*

*We are free!*

As the song ended the children were dismissed by a wave of the

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song leader's hand, and they raced wildly to the bright red barracks surrounding the Playground. Several of the younger children were knocked to the ground in the stampede, but they immediately scrambled to their feet and joined the racing mob again.

Brant thanked Kirk Rodson and walked with him to the door where they parted. The Watcher led them down the silent hall and they were soon out on the street again.

"We have nothing to worry about if we train the kids that well," Lisa remarked.

"It's kind of hard on them at first, I guess," Brant observed.

"They get used to it though. And anyway, we need strong people for Dreamtown with some of those crazy Rebels still running around loose," Lisa said.

"We don't have to worry about them. After seeing those kids today, I don't think we have to worry about anything," Brant said as they walked down the street away from the Playground.

Professor Corbett, in response to a knock, opened the door of the cabin to which he had moved after the Watcher's attack on his farmhouse and greeted the man who stood outside.

"Jim. How are you?" the Professor asked as he motioned the young man to a chair.

"I passed your old place on my way here, Professor. It's a good thing you got out of there. The Watchers must have come back because the place has been burned to the ground."

"We figured they'd be back once they knew our location. This cabin

is in bad shape but we were lucky to find it. And it's isolated. Be hard to find, here in the middle of the woods. But now tell me Jim, what progress has been made?"

"We've gotten a lot done in two weeks, Professor. I've just come from Andy. He and his people have moved up to the summit of Thorny Mountain. Joe and Ed have been in Dreamtown for almost the whole two weeks and are working as laborers on the housing project in the West End. Bill got himself a job as a messenger for the video control office and Mike is working in the mess hall at the central headquarters of the Watchers."

"Fine, fine. That's wonderful," Professor Corbett exclaimed happily. He hesitated a moment.

"Mike," Jim said, "overheard one of the Watchers telling about the raid on your place. He said they've got Nancy in one of the Detention Plants near the Watcher's headquarters."

"Is—she all right, Jim? Could you find out if she's all right?" the Professor asked hurriedly.

"As far as we can tell, she's OK. They're holding her for questioning. They'll probably try to find out as much as they can about our plans before they—I mean—" Jim hesitated, embarrassed.

"I know, Jim. Wait a minute. I'll call Dan. He's upstairs taking a nap. He worked almost all night on the plans for the raid." Professor Corbett called up the steps to Dan, and within a few minutes he appeared, rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

"Jim," Dan said, "have they found Nancy? Is she all right?"

"She's being held for question-

ing, Dan," Jim replied.

Dan turned to Professor Corbett. "Alan, that means we've got to act fast. What's the report from the others?"

Jim outlined the progress that had been made since the night of the raid on the farmhouse. Together with Professor Corbett, they went over the details of the new outposts of the Rebel groups. They counted up the number of weapons possessed by each individual group, and checked and rechecked the positions that each group and each individual was to hold on the day of the raid.

Jim told Dan of the positions that the four volunteers had obtained within Dreamtown, and Dan wrote out detailed instructions for them to follow on the day of the raid.

"Get these instructions to Mike and the others within four days," Dan ordered. "Wednesday of next week."

"This whole thing," Professor Corbett said, "depends on our ability to coordinate our actions. If there is one slip anywhere along the line the whole thing will fall to pieces. Jim, you and the other runners have an important job on your hands. You've got to get this information to all the outposts and to the four men in the city by Monday. That will give everyone a day to prepare before Wednesday."

Jim took the sheets of paper from Dan, folded them, and placed them in the inside pocket of his jacket.

"What are your plans for getting Nancy out." Jim asked.

Dan answered him. "In Mike's instructions, I explained that he was to open the Detention Plant

and release Nancy and any of our other people that might be there. He'll tell them what they're to do. If he hears of anything happening before that time, we've got to depend on Mike to be able to save her."

"But if—," Jim began.

Professor Corbett held up his hand.

"We cannot afford to jeopardize the whole plan for anyone's sake." He looked down at the floor. "Not even for the sake of my daughter."

Dan placed his hand on the Professor's shoulder. "Nancy wouldn't want it any other way, Alan," he said.

"Mike will have to handle any emergency that arises. He's a good man and we can depend on him," Dan added.

"With the Playground Festival taking place next Wednesday it should be easier for us to get control of the city. The Council has sent word that every adult must attend the ceremonies. We'll have them all in one place and they'll be easy to control."

"I'll get going," Jim said. "Got to be in a lot of places between now and Monday." He stood up and the three men shook hands solemnly.

"Good luck, Jim," Professor Corbett said.

Jim laughed. "See you in Dreamtown, Professor!"

**G**IL PATTON and Brant showed their official cards to the Watcher behind the desk. Gil's civilian investigative status gained him immediate entrance, but there was some discussion concerning

Brant's right to attend. The matter was finally cleared up to the Watcher's satisfaction when Brant explained that Benton of the Sensory Com Center had arranged for him to attend.

The two men were ushered into a large chamber, at one end of which was an enormous metal desk almost the width of the room. Eight men were seated behind it. Brant recognized the leader of the Watchers and several other officials of the city. He and Gil took seats to one side of the room near the desk.

"They're going to reexamine some of the Rebels that have been captured recently," Gil said. "Should be amusing."

Brant nodded.

At a signal, a Watcher opened a door at one side of the room. A young girl and a man and woman, were led into the room. They were led to a spot to stand directly in front of the examiners.

"You are Rebels. Is that true?" barked the leader of the Watchers, who was conducting the examination.

None of the three answered.

"You have been planning to destroy the city of Dreamtown?" the man asked.

Again no one protested. He looked up.

"You deny these charges?" He paused and then directed his attention to the girl before him.

"Your name!"

"Nancy Corbett," the girl said.

"Perhaps you will tell us why your people are being so foolish."

Nancy smiled at the man, and spoke quietly. "We don't believe we are being foolish."

The man laughed aloud and the

others joined him. Brant turned to Gil. "She's not bad looking."

"Do your Rebels really believe you can destroy us?"

"We don't want to destroy you," Nancy replied. "We have no intentions of doing that. We believe you are making many mistakes here in Dreamtown and we believe things must be changed," she said.

"And how do you intend to do that?"

Nancy didn't answer.

The man stood up quickly and leaned across the desk. "Then you admit you are trying to destroy the way of life we have built up here," he shouted.

"No!" the man next to Nancy answered suddenly. "We've told you. We feel it is wrong and must be changed."

"We want things back the way they were before you came," the woman said.

"What do you mean?" the man roared again.

"We want to read books and we want to hear the old music again. We want to raise our children the way they should be raised."

"When we win we are going to rebuild the schools," Nancy said quickly.

"Silence!" the man thundered.

A man at the end of the desk rose.

"Didn't you always have enough to eat when you lived in Dreamtown?" he asked.

Again no one answered.

"Didn't you have enough to do for entertainment?" He looked from face to face before him.

"Didn't you enjoy yourselves here?" he asked.

Nancy stepped forward. "That's

just it! Here all we were able to do, all we were allowed to do, was enjoy ourselves. But only in your ways. Some of us felt there were better ways to enjoy ourselves than with parties and festivals and sensation pills."

"What ways?" the man asked quietly.

The man next to Nancy spoke. "We wanted time to think. Some of us wanted to paint or write books."

"We wanted to be with our children," the woman said.

"Surely you realize by now," the man continued from behind the desk, "how insignificant these things are in comparison to the progress we've made in Dreamtown. Paintings done by hand cannot equal our paintings that are done mechanically. And as for books. One must be alone to read books and we believe that people should be together and share with one another."

"That's just it," Nancy said. "Reading a book is sharing something! You share an experience with the man who wrote the book. You tell people about it, they read it, you discuss it. That's sharing."

Another man at the desk spoke. "You talk of experience. With our sensation pills you gain much greater and more vivid experience than you ever could from a book."

"But it's not real that way," Nancy said softly. "It's not natural either."

The leader of the Watchers resumed the examination, which consisted of the same questions and the same accusations repeated over and over again. The three Rebels stood awaiting whatever it was that to be

done to them, helpless to answer the charges, since there seemed to be no way for them to make themselves understood.

"What will they do with them?" Brant asked.

"Psychwash them probably. It's simple and there's never any trouble afterward." Gil answered.

The leader stood up and addressed the three individuals before him.

"We have decided that you are to be sent to the psych laboratories!"

The Rebel woman instinctively raised her hand to her mouth in fear. Nancy and the other man stiffened but their glances remained steady.

"We will give you a day to think about what is to happen to you. If, in that time, you decide to come to us with information concerning your Rebel groups—their whereabouts, their plans and so on, you may do so. Otherwise our plans for you will be carried out!"

He sat down. "Let me remind you that the fate of those who have been psychwashed is not very pleasant. They no longer think. They move when they are told to move. They do only what they are told to do. They don't read books and they don't paint pictures. They—"

"They are not very different from the rest of the people in Dreamtown, are they?" Nancy interrupted.

"Take them out of here!" the man screamed.

Nancy's remark created angry excitement among the examiners and as they discussed it among themselves Brant and Gil watched the three people being led swiftly from the room.

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THE CITY lay like a great carnival ground in the wilderness, illuminating the dark night. Dan and Professor Corbett lay on the ground, hidden behind the scrubby growth of bushes a few hundred yards from the wall of the city.

Dan looked at his watch and the luminous dial told him it was ten o'clock. The raid was scheduled for 10:20.

"I think we got all the patrols, Alan," Dan whispered, "but I warned the men to be careful anyway. We didn't have enough guns for everybody, but once we're in the city we can get them from the Watchers and from their arsenal."

Professor Corbett leaned toward Dan. "Let's go over the plan once more," he said.

Dan shifted his position. "We have thirty people down at the West End gate. They're coming in three minutes after we start. Bill and Ed will open this gate and at the same time Joe will dynamite the drug warehouses."

"Three of our men," the Professor said, "will head for the South gate as soon as we're in, and three others will open the East gate. If the surprise is great enough, they shouldn't have too hard a time overcoming the Watchers at the gates. They'll be too confused to know what hit them."

"Mike," Dan said, "will barricade the Watcher's barracks at 10:18, and then wait until he is joined by the group from the West. That will only take a few minutes and, once there, the group will split. Part will keep the Watcher's under control and the rest will invade the Detention Plant."

"Mike can pass out guns from

the Watcher's arsenal to our people in the Plant and direct them to the Playground. I'll head for the Playground as soon as we're in," the Professor continued, "and we'll take over there."

"You'll have the most men, Alan," Dan said. "I'm taking eight men and heading for the Council Building. We'll grab the Council and bring them to the Playground. Check, Alan?"

"Check!"

"It's 10:16. Pass the word along to watch for the first sign of the gates opening," Dan directed.

Silence fell as each man in Dan's group waited while the remaining minutes passed. Every eye was fixed on the city gates. 10:19. 10:20.

"Let's go!" Dan yelled at the top of his voice and leaped to his feet. The gigantic gates began to swing outward as the forty five men in Dan's group sprang to their feet and raced, shouting, toward the opening gate.

"This way!" a voice called shrilly.

"It's Ed!" Dan called to Professor Corbett who was running by his side. They reached Ed as the rest of the group entered the gate. Shots were being exchanged between the Rebels and the Watchers now.

"Where's Bill?" Dan yelled above the noise.

"They shot him," Ed answered. "Come on!"

Suddenly, a series of terrific explosions filled the night with screaming sound. The earth shook under their feet.

"The warehouses are gone!" Dan yelled. "I'm heading for the Council!"

The eight men Dan had selected

raced after him down the empty street of the city. The sound of firing, announcing the entry of the group at the East gate, met their ears.

As Dan's men careened around a corner they saw two Watchers sprinting toward them. One of the Rebels dropped to his knee, fired twice, and the two Watchers froze, in the typical macabre positions produced by a hypno-ray gun.

The group parted and made separate approaches to the Council Building.

Dan and four others stopped as they came in sight of the building. A group of Watchers stood, guns ready, peering up and down the deserted street.

"Let's go!" Dan yelled, and the Rebels sprang forward, dodging in and out of doorways for protection. The other Rebels appeared at the opposite end of the street. The Watchers, seeing themselves outnumbered, suddenly turned and fled up the steps of the Council Building.

"Stop!" Dan shouted. He fired a warning shot and the fleeing Watchers halted.

"They'll serve as shields," Dan muttered. "No telling what we'll run into inside."

The Rebels moved forward, with the Watchers preceding them at gunpoint. Inside, the hall was silent and they walked cautiously, alert for any sudden action.

"Don't turn around," Dan ordered the men in front of him. "Lead us to the quarters of the Council."

The tense group continued through halls and rooms resplendently furnished and decorated.



They stopped several yards from a steel door which faced them across a high ceilinged room.

"Go on!" Dan ordered.

"That's the Council's private apartment," one of the Watchers snapped.

"Open it!"

"No one's ever opened it. No one's ever been inside," the man answered.

Dan turned to one of his men. "Try to open that door, but be ready for anything!"

After some minutes, the man turned back to the group.

"There doesn't seem to be any way to get it open, Dan," the man said.

"Then we'll blast it open!"

But it was soon evident that their blasts had no effect on the massive structure. One of the Watchers sneered, when suddenly, without warning, the door slid aside into the wall.

"Keep an eye on them," Dan cautioned his men.

He moved cautiously as he neared the open door. There was no sound from within and so far as he could tell the room was empty. He stepped inside.

"Good evening!" a voice greeted him.

Dan started, and his eyes quickly searched the room for the source of the voice that had delivered this unusual greeting.

"Over here," the voice said. A grotesquely fat man wearing a red robe, heavy with gold brocade rose from a reclining chair and smiled at Dan.

"We've just—," Dan began but the fat man interrupted him.

"I know! I've been expecting you

for some time now. Have some grapes?" the man asked, indicating a bronze container on the table. "Or some wine?" he asked, proffering a silver decanter that stood beside the bronze dish of grapes.

"Where are the other members of the Council?" Dan demanded.

The man repressed a laugh. "There are no other members!"

"You mean you—!" Dan stopped in utter amazement as the truth began to become clear to him.

"Yes," the man replied calmly.

"But I don't understand. How did you do it?"

"Very simply. Are you sure you won't have some wine?" The man poured himself a goblet of wine. "When Dreamtown began to become what it is today, I saw a perfect opportunity to cash in, so to speak, on a good thing. The details aren't important. I started small, and after I had sufficient power, I set up this legend of the Council. It was a simple thing to dispose of the few who knew the truth. Once that was done, the secret was easy to keep. I am self sufficient here. There has been no need to leave my apartments or my gardens. I send my directives, my orders, my requests, through the transitab or over the intercom. Food is left in an anteroom adjoining my chambers. Hardly anyone ever questioned me except in the beginning, and then there were always the Watchers, so the questioning soon stopped. Now, is there anything else you would like to know?"

Dan turned and called to the others and they entered, their guns still trained on the Watchers. Dan explained what he had heard as they all listened in amazement.

"I don't believe it! It's a trick!" one of the Watchers blurted out.

The little man chuckled. "My boy, the trick is over. He told you the truth."

"We're leaving now, and we're taking you with us to the Playground," Dan said.

"My wine first," the man said and raised the goblet to his lips. "Yes, it's all over," he said softly and drained the goblet.

Instantly the man's body went limp and he slumped to the floor before the shocked eyes of the others in the room.

Dan rushed forward and examined the inert form on the floor. "He's dead! We'll have to leave him here. Lock the Watchers in that closet and let's go. We've got to get to the Playground."

They raced down the steps of the Council Building and headed toward the Playground. Occasionally they met a citizen of Dreamtown who fled before them in fear or merely stared in stupefied amazement.

The Playground gates were open and there were Rebels surrounding its walls, their guns trained on captured groups of Watchers who stood sullenly, staring for the most part, at the ground. A cheer went up from the Rebels as they saw Dan and the others approaching. The courtyard of the Playground was dotted with Rebels guarding the great crowd that filled the stands which had been erected for the Festival.

In the center of the courtyard was a platform on which stood Professor Corbett and some of the other Rebels. Dan yelled in delight

as he recognized Nancy standing beside her father.

In a great bound he was on the platform and Nancy was in his arms.

When he released her, he spoke quietly to Professor Corbett.

"Everything all right?" he asked.

"Yes. We lost some men, but everything went according to plan."

Dan turned to the shouting, fearful crowd before him in the stands. He raised his gun and fired three successive shots into the night air. The crowd quieted.

"We intend no harm," Dan began, "most of you have heard of us. They called us Rebels. We were. We once lived in Dreamtown. After the Big War we tried to build a new civilization, one founded in truth and dignity. At that time we all wanted the same thing. Then some people came and offered us toys instead of truth. Many of us took the toys. After the horrors of the Big War we wanted peace and contentment and pleasure. But we made a terrible mistake. We took these toys hoping they would give us the thing we looked for, and as years went by we forgot what we had set out to do. But some of us didn't forget. Some of us remembered. And we fled from Dreamtown, because the Council and the Watchers told us we were wrong to want those things. The Council no longer exists. There isn't time to explain it all to you now. You will be informed quickly and completely as soon as we are able to arrange it. One more thing. We do not come as conquerors, but as friends. We came back because we believed in Dreamtown, and wanted

*(Continued on page 73)*

*The Moon is green cheese and the stars are eyes*

*and we're all fleas on a big space animal!*

*But don't let it worry you—unless you take*

*the first trip out into space—all alone!*

# THE BIG LEAP

BY CHARLES E. FRITCH

**I**T DID not terrify Cantrell to know he was up so high and going so fast, going higher and faster than any human before him. He would be up even higher the next day, he remembered, going so high and so fast he would not come down again.

It would be a shame to leave Earth, he knew. There was security in her firmness, with no great space underfoot through which to drop down, down, down. Up here there was emptiness all around. Emptiness and, except for the dull throb of the rocket engines, silence. Out there—he looked up—there would

be a greater emptiness, a greater silence, an infinity of nothingness in all directions.

He felt suddenly cold at the thought, and then shame swept over him, forcing the paralysis aside. Fear of the unknown again, he thought distastefully. No matter how much the psychologists tried, they could not erase that icy prickling sensation that came with its contemplation. They were all children when it came to space, kids frightened by the dark alleys of the universe, fearing the bogey man that waited lurking in the velvet depths through which no one had

passed before. Probably they would find nothing out there to fear, nothing at all, and yet the feeling would go on and on, whenever men had to face the unknown, whenever they had to force themselves whistling past silent graveyards that contained only the fear of fear.

With swift precision he pressed studs on the control panel before him, and a bank of jets on the side of his rocket flared into sudden life, pushing, turning, pulsing flame into the thin air of the outside. His gyro-chair made an effortless compensation for the altered direction. The ship banked, leveled, then leaped forward on a new course. Cantrell smiled. He could handle the ship now as though it were a part of him. On the big leap he expected no trouble.

Not so the planners, who refused to leave the minutest stone unturned in their search for flaws in man or rocket. Physical checkups were made as often as twice a day. Psychiatrists had analyzed him constantly during the past six months, probing for any hidden factors that might make a space flight futile, fearing perhaps a mental return to the womb for a security that could not be found in untraveled space. We're all children when it comes to space, he reminded himself, and he laughed and wondered half-seriously if he were really as psychologically free as he thought he was—excepting his animal allergy of course, which was insignificant. There were many facets of the human mind the clinical instruments of psychology could never hope to touch; the mind was like an iceberg, and the submerged nine-tenths could hold a great many un-

fathomables hidden in the vast depths, subtle monstrosities waiting to spring out and claw at his sanity.

He smiled grimly, as he realized where his thoughts were leading him. To fear of the unknown again. Of course, it was only the intellectual contemplation of it, but the mere thought disturbed him, and he began to feel angry at himself for allowing the thoughts to exist at all.

Irritably he jabbed at the controls and felt the reassuring thrusts that drove him gently into the heavy-padded cushions of the seat. With a smile, this time of satisfaction, he watched the speedometer needle rise to a new height. Below him, Earth was an unfamiliar blur, and he touched off the braking rockets to look at it.

The landscape took on more familiar features, with its surface pockmarked by the ravages of wind and rain, its broad fields stretching out in all directions like the fur on some great animal. He failed to suppress a shudder of disgust at that last thought. He'd be glad to get off Earth, onto the moon where he would be alone for awhile and away from the unpleasantnesses of ordinary life. These past months, with Jarvis and his dogs, the psychiatrist's incessant questioning—

The radio said into his ears: "Okay, Cantrell, that's enough of a workout. Bring her in and report to HQ. Colonel Enders wants a word with you."

"Right," Cantrell said into a microphone. He switched off the radio and muttered: "Damn Colonel Enders. What's he want this time, to check the nipples on

my beer bottles?"

Angrily, he flipped the rocket into a soundless dive that reached screaming proportions as he entered heavier atmosphere. The outer metal glowed, and the temperature rose in the controlroom. He twisted the rocket onto a tail of flame and settled.

"And that's that—until tomorrow," he told himself.

He threw switches to inactivate the motors and looked out an observation window. A fast-moving jeep curved across the stretch of sand towards him. Behind the jeep a dog came running; at the sight of the animal, Cantrell felt nausea tug at him. He reached for the radio.

He said into it, "Control? Get that damned dog off the field."

"Sorry," Control said, "I'll contact the jeep. One of Captain Jarvis' dogs got loose, and—"

"I'm not interested in your excuses," Cantrell said angrily, "and I don't care if it does belong to Captain Jarvis. Get it off the field, or I'll blast it off!" Irritably, he cut communications.

He looked out the window. The jeep had stopped, and someone had gotten out and was walking back to collar the dog and return it. The jeep started up again.

Cantrell breathed a sigh of relief. He felt annoyed with himself, as he always did when something like this happened, but the self-condemnation failed to placate him. Damn it! Jarvis was a psychiatrist; the man knew how these things affected him. To make matters worse, it was Jarvis' dog. Probably trying another of his "experiments", Cantrell thought disgustedly.

He crawled out of the airlock and

down the long metal stairs to the ground. The jeep pulled up, and the khaki-clad driver said, "Sorry about the dog, sir, but—"

"Skip it," Cantrell snapped, climbing into the jeep. "Just take me to HQ."

The soldier nodded and spun the jeep around. They went flashing toward a fat clump of buildings that squatted alone at the edge of the landing field.

As Cantrell had expected, Captain Jarvis was with Colonel Enders in the latter's office.

"What was the idea of sending out that mongrel," Cantrell flared. "You know I'm allergic to animals."

"It was an accident. Besides, you're not allergic to anything," the psychiatrist said calmly, ignoring the insult to his pet. "You're rationalizing a pathological fear—"

"Now, see here—"

Captain Jarvis held up a placating hand "—or hatred, if you wish, of animals."

"Okay, okay, I don't like animals," Cantrell said. "We've been over that a dozen times. So what? I suppose you still think it has some bearing on my going to the moon and back?"

The psychiatrist shrugged. "Who knows? It might have."

Colonel Enders said, "I'm beginning to agree with Cantrell, Captain. We're not going to find anyone perfect, it seems, so we may as well take those with the best qualifications. Cantrell certainly isn't going to encounter animals in space, and there's no life on the moon; our foremost scientists assure us of that."

"But can you be sure," the psychiatrist wondered, "can they be sure, can anybody be sure? Scien-



tists don't have all the right answers about our Earth, much less the other planets; we know as much about Earth as a flea knows about the dog or the cat he's on."

Cantrell grimaced at the analogy. "That's why we're going up, to find a few answers. Anyway, tomorrow I'll be on my way because I've got the qualifications for it, animals or no animals. And if the moon has creatures on it that resemble dogs or cats or even fleas, I'll be mighty surprised. How about you, Colonel?"

"Don't drag me into your arguments, Cantrell," the Colonel sighed. "I'm a military man, not a scientist. Both the Earth and the moon may be green cheese for all I know. The main thing I'm interested in is that you get up there and back safely."

"I will," Cantrell promised.

"I hope you do," Captain Jarvis said earnestly. "I'm not trying to heap obstacles in your path, Cantrell. It's just that we know so little about anything that even an 'allergy' like yours might be a hazard. Suppose up there, for example, it suddenly took on cockeyed proportions and went to lesser animals; suppose a fly accidentally got aboard the rocket, you might even open a hatch to get away from it—and forget to put on your spacesuit."

"Thank the fates I'm not a military man, Jarvis, and can speak freely," Cantrell said dryly. "You already know I don't like you, and I'm beginning to like you even less."

"Come, come," Colonel Evans said hastily, "there's no point in arguing. We can't get perfection, I'm afraid. Cantrell here's the closest to our qualifications we could

get, physically and psychologically, consistent with the right background for the job. Tomorrow at noon the rocket's going to take off with Cantrell aboard, and then we'll know."

"Yes," the psychiatrist said steadily, "and then we'll know."

Cantrell turned to Colonel Evans. "Will that be all, Colonel?"

Evans glanced hastily at Jarvis and nodded. "That's it, I guess—until tomorrow at noon."

"Right," Cantrell said. "See you." And he went out.

Once outside in the warm afternoon sun he mentally damned Jarvis and Evans, classifying them both as incompetents who drew military salary for putting red-taped impediments in the way of progress; the rocket should have taken off months ago.

He shrugged, trying to content himself with the thought that tomorrow he'd be away from them, away floating in the pure emptiness of space. Even so, the mere thought of Jarvis irritated him, made his fingers itch for the man's throat; him and his talk of animal fears!

Okay, so he hated animals, well he had good reason to. Ever since that dog had attacked him when he was a child, he'd hated dogs; and then the hatred spread to other animals—why not, for they all were potentially dangerous—and sometimes it even made him sick to think of them. It made sense when you stopped to consider it carefully. He'd moved to the city, to the great steel canyons that imprisoned only specimens of humanity, and for years never saw an animal. Now, he was in the open again, in the great desert and the plains. But there

were no animals, only the dogs Captain Jarvis insisted on keeping.

"Nuts to Captain Jarvis," he said.

The next morning he felt the same way. He was called into HQ for last minute instructions that were the same as those laid out months ago. Cantrell knew them by memory, but the excitement of the impending blastoff prevented his being bored or even from being annoyed by the psychiatrist's inevitable presence. Now there was nothing to prevent the leap of the Earthbound into space; not even Jarvis could delay it now.

The jeep drove Jarvis, Evans and Cantrell to the waiting rocket. They got out.

Evans offered his hand. "Good-bye, Cantrell, come back in one piece."

"Sorry I was so hard on you, Cantrell," Jarvis said, extending his hand. "I hope you make it okay."

Cantrell nodded and took the man's hand. "Thanks. I expect to."

He climbed the ladder to the airlock door and stood there for a moment watching the jeep carry its passengers across the field to a safe distance. Then he went inside and strapped himself into the seat.

"Okay, Cantrell," Control said. "Blast off when ready."

"Right," Cantrell said into the radio. He closed the airlock door and checked pressure gauges. "In ten seconds," he said, activating the firing mechanism. Mentally he counted: ten, nine, eight, seven . . .

The rocket shuddered, and Cantrell found himself pressed suddenly into the seat. In the viewscreens Earth spun dizzily away from him. After a few minutes the push ceased

and weightlessness began.

"Everything okay, Cantrell?" the radio said, after awhile. It was Evans.

"Fine, Colonel," Cantrell said. "Not a dog or a cat in sight."

"Can you see Earth?"

Cantrell manipulated dials, activating the lower television eyes. "There she is," he said. "Looks real impressive. I can see nearly all of North America now and a good part of the Pacific. The land looks queer from up here,"—he frowned—"something like—" He broke off, staring. "Like—"

"Like what?" Jarvis' voice demanded suddenly. "It looks like what, Cantrell?"

Cantrell shook his head bewilderedly. "Nothing," he said uncertainly. He felt a sudden irritation that Jarvis couldn't let him alone even with so much of space intervening. "It looks like I'm going to make it to the moon, that's all."

"You were going to say something else, Cantrell, what?"

"Let him alone, Jarvis," Evans whispered; "he's got enough to worry about."

"That's right," Cantrell said irritably, "and I'm going to worry about it in silence." He reached for the radio switch.

"But, Cantrell—" Evans said. Then the radio went dead.

Cantrell grinned and watched Earth getting smaller below. The grin faded as he thought of his almost-spoken comparison of a few minutes before, of the land resembling the shriveled skin of an animal. Jarvis would have made much of that, of course, with his psychiatric rambings. Yet, the comparison was disturbing just the same. Why



did he torture himself?

He regarded Earth skeptically, hoping to subdue the irrational thoughts. Certainly the shape was not that of an animal. At least not an Earth animal. But then it wouldn't have to be, he reminded himself—and felt doubly irritated at the reminder. It looked very different from the globes he'd seen picturing the planet. It looked almost—*alive*. From this height, great forests resembled tiny hairs, mountain ridges and canyons were skin blemishes and pores; the great oceans looked like giant mouths, open and hungry.

Cantrell laughed nervously. It was ridiculous. Yet the more he looked, the more Earth receded below him, the more the resemblances increased. He stared at the planet. It was ridiculous, but there were even several portions below that looked like great eyes staring at him. As he watched, one blinked.

Cantrell screamed. The sound was shrill in the narrow control chamber. Then he cursed and felt ashamed.

"I'm going crazy," he told himself. His voice was hoarse. "Jarvis was right."

But the thought failed to help. The sudden feeling of terror was still with him, and he found himself trembling. It was only a cloud, he told himself, only a cloud passing over a section of land that from this distance looked like an eye. He tried to laugh away the fear, but the sound stuck in his throat. He felt his heart beating faster than it should.

"No," he said desperately, looking away, "no, I'm okay. My mind is clear, and I'm all right. It's just

being up here that gives a guy the jitters. Fear of the unknown. Things look different when you're not close to them. Got to calm down. Take it easy."

His hands trembled.

"Scientists don't have all the right answers even about our Earth here," Jarvis had said. "We know as much about Earth as a flea knows about the dog or the cat he's on."

The words echoed in Cantrell's memory, and he forced himself to look down at Earth. It was a planet, that was all, an inanimate mass and nothing more. ". . . as much as a flea knows . . ." But was it possible that a flea might not realize the animal he was on was an animal?

He had a headache, and he shook his head in an effort to clear it. His vision blurred, refocused with astounding clarity. Lines flowed together with sudden meaning. Before his gaze rivers became veins, eyes stared at him curiously, ocean-mouths yawned. The truth burst upon him then, with a sudden flash that drove his blood coursing through his body, with a realization that jerked him as though he had been struck with a whip. He laughed insanely at the thought, and the laughter exploded in the narrow cabin and flowed over him in torrents, echoing.

He was the only one in the world who could see things as they really were. He was as certain of that as he was of his own existence. He knew now, and his was the only knowledge: Earth was a space animal, the humans parasites like fleas on a cat or a dog. And the Earthlings didn't know, they didn't even suspect!

The radio buzzed. He pressed a button.

"Cantrell," Evans' harassed voice came. "This is an order: maintain contact at all times, until the moment you set foot back on Earth. Understand?"

Cantrell laughed with his strange secret knowledge. "I'm not coming back," he said happily. He was the only one who could escape this animal, the only one, and he felt elated at this, felt a sense of power he'd not known. "I'm not going to be a parasite crawling on the back of an animal." The thought sickened him, and he gagged.

"Cantrell!" It was Jarvis. "Cantrell, listen to me—"

"No," Cantrell said. "You listen to me."

And he told them about Earth being a space-animal. His mind rebelled at the thought, but he forced himself on for he wanted Jarvis to suffer down there, he wanted them all to suffer with the knowledge of what they were. Where was their pompous self-importance now, their flea's dream of conquering the universe?

"He's crazy," Evans whispered.

"Cantrell, listen to me," Jarvis said.

But Cantrell was staring in horrified fascination at Earth dwindling below, at the space-animal watching him. "No!" he cried. "No, it's too late." And he shut off the radio and ripped the wires from their moorings.

Ahead of him lay the moon. He switched screens to look at it. It was chalky and pockmarked, like the skin of a diseased animal. Great iridescent veins glowed through its body. From a crater bed a great

baleful eye regarded him.

Cantrell screamed again and frantically pressed studs on the control panel. The rocket shot flame from its side tubes and turned in a short arc, swinging the moon from sight. The forward viewscreens showed the stars now, and beyond them an infinite blackness.

"I'll be safe out there," Cantrell told himself.

The rocket leaped forward.

**YOU WERE** right," Evans said bitterly, putting down the radiophone with a gesture of helplessness. "Now, what do we do?"

Jarvis shrugged. "Start over," he said. "What else is there to do? Find someone else to pilot another rocket."

"Someone without Cantrell's hallucinations," Jarvis amended.

"And pray that they *were* hallucinations," Jarvis amended further.

Evans looked at him sharply. "What do you mean?"

Jarvis said calmly, "My favorite theme, Colonel—simply that we don't know much about this blob of matter we're on. One factor disturbs me: while Cantrell was afraid of animals, he never *imagined* he saw them. Outside of his one idiosyncrasy, he was a very sound person."

"What are you getting at?" Evans demanded irritably.

"That it's unfortunate Cantrell had this animal fear; it's much too easy to blame that for what he saw. As a psychiatrist, I suppose I should say that's the reason for it; I might be right. But it has also occurred to me I might be rationalizing." He

leaned forward, intensely serious. "Suppose, just suppose for a minute that maybe *we're* the ones who are wrong, that maybe we're really parasites on an alien organism, that maybe we're under a kind of mass auto-hypnosis to protect our pride, and that maybe space restores our sanity—for awhile anyway, until another form of insanity takes over."

"Anyone who supposed that would be crazy," Evans blurted.

"Perhaps," Jarvis admitted, "but who's to tell? I wonder, does the flea know the true nature of the dog, or does he think *he's* living on some kind of world built just for him?"

Evans sputtered, searching for words. Finally he managed, "See here, Captain, this is nonsense, and I order you to stop such talk immediately."

Jarvis sighed. "I hope so, Colonel, I really hope it is nonsense. Man is a proud animal; it's interesting to consider how such knowledge would affect him." He shrugged helplessly and turned to leave the room. "At any rate, the only way to find out is to send up another man in another rocket and hope he doesn't report the same thing; if he does, we'll just blame it on one of his psychological quirks, and try again. But for all we know about this universe, Earth might be a space-animal, a type of life so close to us and yet so alien we don't even recognize it—or don't want to!"

Colonel Evans wet his lips. "Do you—do you really believe that, Captain?"

Jarvis considered the question. "No," he said slowly. "No, I don't. But I *do* think it points up an important fact. When a man gets out there in space, cut off from everything he's ever known, allergies, idiosyncrasies, personal likes and dislikes—everything on a conscious *and* a subconscious level may take on an exaggerated importance."

"You make it a big problem," Evans said.

"It *is* a big problem," Jarvis sighed. "At any rate, I'm going to volunteer for the next flight. That's the least I can do for Cantrell." He went out.

The Colonel stared after him, puzzled and slightly indignant. He shook his head. The man was crazy. Earth an animal—the idea was preposterous. But the thought hammered at him, repeating. Jarvis was right, of course, when he said it was undoubtedly psychological. And yet suppose—just suppose. . . .

Trembling, he shook off the thought and looked out at the field, the buildings, the sky, Earth's pale satellite emerging from the sky like a child following in the wake of its mother. They say the moon came out of Earth, he thought suddenly, and the analogy struck home. The man in the moon looked down at him, and he turned hastily away.

The afternoon was warm, but Colonel Evans suddenly felt very cold. ● ● ●

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Compared with what we ought to be, we are only half awake. We are making use of only a small part of our mental and physical resources.

—Will James

# OUR TOWN

*The jets got all  
the young ones in Smoky  
Creek. Only the old  
folks were left—  
with their memories.  
And the jets—friendly  
or hostile—would  
never get them . . .*

BY JEROME BIXBY

A JET BOMBER and four fighters had appeared low over Bald Ridge, out of the east. They'd curved up as one to clear Lawson's Hill, their stubby wings almost brushing the treetops, their hiss and thunder rolling back and forth between the valley walls like a giant's derision; they'd dipped into the valley proper, obviously informed that Smoky Creek, Tennessee (population 123) had no anti-aircraft installations, and circled the town at about five hundred feet. They circled and looked down—broad slavick faces with curious expressions, seen through plexiglass, as if thinking: *So this is an American small town.*

Then they took altitude and got to work. The first bomb was aimed at the big concrete railway bridge spanning the upper end of the valley; that was the main objective of the attack. The bomb exploded four hundred yards north of the bridge, at about six hundred feet altitude—the ideal point from which to flatten Smoky Creek. Low altitude bombing can be tricky, of course, especially in mountain country. A-bombs were cheap though, turned out by the carload; not like 20 years before, when they were first developed. So it was likely the bombardier tripped a bomb over the town just for the hell of it.

The next bomb got the bridge. The next tore up a quarter mile of track. The next tore up a quarter mile of road. That was the mission. The bomber circled, while the fighters strafed Smoky Creek for good measure; and then they roared away past Lawson's Hill, over Bald Ridge, into the east to-



*Illustrated by Kelly Freas*

ward their invasion-coast base.

Everybody died. The bombs were midget A's, designed for tactical use; so Smoky Creek wasn't reduced to dust—just to sticks. There wasn't much heat from the bomb and there was hardly any residual radiation. But everybody in town died. Concussion. Smoky Creek had been comprised of one main street and three cross streets, and that's not much area—the wave had thumped down from right above, like a giant fist.

Everybody died, except twenty-one old men and women who had been off in the woods at the far end of the valley, on their annual Grandfolk's Picnic. They didn't die, except inside.

Three months later, an enemy jet came out of the sky and over the valley. A scoop arrangement under its belly was sniffing Tennessee and Alabama air for radioactive particles. It sniffed low over the town, and then again—a ruined town

might hide an underground lab and converter—and then it barrel-rolled and crashed. Nine rifle bullets had hit the motor; straight back through the jet intake, into the blades.

A year after that another jet came low over the town, and it crashed too. Only three bullets this time; but a jet motor's like a turbine—you get a blade or two, and it goes crazy.

Two years after that, Ben Bates (no longer Mayor Ben, because a mayor has to have a town; but still the man in charge) knocked off playing horseshoes in what had been the Town Hall. Now the building served as a recreation hall; there were horseshoe pits at one end of the long room, there were tables for checkers and cards, and a short tenpin alley along one wall. Three years ago the alley had been twice as long as it was now; but then there were young men around who could peg the length of it without tiring every time. Overhead the roof sagged, and in one place you could see quite a piece of sky—but under the hole the old men had rigged a slanted board watershed that led to a drainage ditch; and scattered through the room were a lot of supporting posts and timber braces. Actually the building was about as safe as it had ever been.

There were other buildings like it; buildings that the bomb hadn't pounded flat or made too risky. They were propped up and nailed together and buttressed and practically glued so they'd stay up. From outside you'd think they were going to crumble any minute—walls slanted all cockeyed, boards peeled off and hanging, and roofs buck-

ling in. But they were safe. Fixed up every which way—from the inside. All from the inside; not an inch of repair on the outside. It had to be that way, because the town had to look like a dead town.

After the men had finished propping, the women had come along with all the furniture and things they'd salvaged, and they swept and scrubbed and did a hundred jobs the men never would have thought of; and so the old people ended up with half a dozen buildings to live in, secretly and comfortably, in the town that had to look dead.

"Arthritis is bad," Ben Bates told his teammates and opponents. "Hell, I'm just giving away points. Maybe next week. I'll rest up, and kick you all around next week."

He lit a cigar, a big grey man with long legs and a good-humored mouth, and he watched Dan Paray throw one short; then he strolled over to kibitz at the checker game between Fat Sam Hogan and Windy Harris, at one of the tables near the door. Late morning sunlight slanted in through the window by the table and struck light off Windy's glasses as he leaned across the board, thumped a checker three times and said triumphantly, "King me, Sam. You're getting blind, I swear. Or dumber."

Behind his back Ben Bates heard a shoe ring against the stake; then he heard it spin off, and he grinned at Owen Urey's bullfrog cussing.

Tom Pace was saying urgently, "Look—look, Jim, damn it, you didn't no more shoot down that plane singlehanded than I did. We was all shooting. Godamighty—where you get off claiming *you*

brung it down?"

Ben turned and sat down at the table next to the checker game, and stretched his legs in the sunlight. He raised thick brows like clumps of steel-wool at Tom and at old Jim Liddel, who sat in his pillowed armchair like a thin, scowling, bald, muzzed spider.

"You keep talking so high and mighty," Tom said, "we'll carry you out o' here and take you and dump you in the creek. You can tell the fish about who got the plane."

"Still arguing over who planted the shot, huh," Ben grinned. "Regular feud, you two."

"Well, hell, Ben," Tom said, and bit down on his gums so his whiskers almost hid the end of his nose. "I just get filled up on this old windbag hollering how he—"

"You go call me a windbag once more, Tom Pace," Jim Liddel said, and he stirred his all but helpless body in the armchair, "you're gonna have a sore eye, you seventy year old whippersnapper. *I* brung it down."

"In a hog's behind, you brung it down, Mister Dan'l Boone!"

"It 'us just after I let loose it started smoking," old Jim snarled, "and nobody else was shooting right then! You're gonna get a sore eye, I swear—tobacco in it. I can spit to where you sit, and I can spit faster'n you can move, I bet, unless you're faster'n a fly, and you ain't. You just ask anybody who was there . . . it 'us just after I shot it started—"

Tom Pace thumped the table. "*I* was there, you old . . . now, now, Jim, don't spit, for God's sake! Hold on. What I mean, I was there too,

and maybe somebody's shot from a second or two before was what done the trick. Maybe even my shot! Takes a plane a while to know it's hurt, don't it? Ever think o' that?"

"Maybe," Ben Bates said. "Maybe, maybe. And maybe. Let it go, you two. It ain't important who done it; we oughta just be grateful we got it."

"Grateful *I* got it," Jim Liddel grunted.

Tom Pace said, "Now, looky here, Jim—" Ben Bates nudged Tom's leg under the table; and then slowly, fingering his jaw he said, "Well, now, Jim . . . I figure maybe you did, at that. Like you say, it smoked and crashed right after you shot, so I always kind o' figured it *was* you brought it down. But that's a hard thing to prove."

Jim snorted. "Can't prove it! But I got it, all right. A man knows when he sunk a shot."

"In a varmint, maybe," Tom Pace objected, "or a man. But you claiming to know where to hit a plane the worst?"

"We was *all* shooting at the front, up where they put the motor," Jim said nastily. "Don't know about planes, but I know my aim. I got it square-on."

"Well," Ben said, "why don't you just let it lay, eh, Tom? Jim's got a lot on his side." He looked sidewise at old Jim, and saw that Jim was still scowling at Tom. Old Jim was ninety eight, and some set in his notions.

"Mm. Hell," Tom said reluctantly, after a second, "I ain't saying you *didn't*, Jim. That ain't my intent. I just get burned when you yell you did, like no man dared say you was wrong. Sure, maybe you're

right. But ain't you willing to admit you might be wrong too?"

"No," Jim Liddel yelled, and from the checker table came Windy Harris's encouraging, "You tell 'em who got that plane, Jim!"

Ben Bates scraped an inch of ash off his cigar against the table-edge, sighed and got up. He looked down at the glowering pair and said, "Well, come the next plane, if there is one, we'll shove a rifle in your hand, Jim, and see how good your eye is. You too, Tom. Till that time, reckon this is no place for a reasoning man."

"Sit down, Ben Bates," old Jim snarled. "If you're a reasoning man, sit down. Be glad to talk to one, after Tom here goes away."

"You go to hell. *I* ain't going no place," Tom said, and he picked up the cards and started shuffling them in his stiff hands.

Ben sat down and stretched out his legs again.

After a second, old Jim said wistfully, "You know, I wish I *could* still handle a rifle, Ben. Or do anything but sit. No way for a man to live, to have dead legs and dying arms." He shifted in his cushions. "You know, I reckon when I start to really die—die all over—I'm gonna get up out o' this chair. I'll stand up, somehow, even if it kills me faster. A man oughta fall when he dies, like a tree, so they know he stood up in his time. A man oughtn'ta die sitting down."

"Sure, Jim," Ben said. "You're right about that."

"Never had a sick day in my life, until they dropped that bomb. Why, I could outpitch and outchop and outshoot any of you whipper-snappers, until they . . ." Old Jim

walloped the chair arm. "Damn, I made up for it, though! Didn't I? *They* put me in a chair, I sat in it and *I* got me an airplane, and that's more'n they could do to me, by golly, they couldn't kill me!"

"Sure, Jim," Ben said.

"And when my time comes, I'll be up and out o' this chair. Man oughta fall and make a noise when he dies."

"Sure, Jim," Ben said. "But that's a long ways off, ain't it?"

Jim closed his eyes, and his face looked like a skull. "You squirts always think a man lives forever."

**F**ROM OUTSIDE came the late morning sounds: the murmuring of Smoky Creek at the edge of town, under its cool tunnel of willows; the twittering of a flock of robins circling above; the constant soft rustle of the trees that crowded the green hills around. From the warehouse down by the tracks came the faint sounds of livestock—and the voices of the men whose job it was to look after them this week: to feed them, turn them out into the big pens for an hour's sunlight, then drive them back into the warehouse again.

Lucky the warehouse had stood the bomb—it was perfect for the use.

"Wonder how the war's going," Tom Pace said. He dropped some cards and bent painfully to retrieve them; his voice was muffled: "I just wonder how it's going, you know? Wonder who's killing more than who today.

"Maybe," Tom continued, coming up, "it's all over. Ain't seen no planes for couple years now. Maybe



somebody won."

Ben shrugged. "Who knows. Don't matter none to us. We're ready as we can be if another plane comes around. Other than that, it ain't our concern."

"Darn tootin'," Tom said, and pushed the cards together and started shuffling again.

Jim Liddel said, "War!" and looked like he'd bit into spoiled meat. "Never settled nothing . . . just makes the biggest dog top-dog for a while, so he can get his way. Man, I wish I could still lift a rifle, if an airyplane come around! I'd love to get me another one." He put his thin back against the cushions and pushed at the edge of the table with his hands. Jim's fingers didn't move so well any more; some were curled and some were straight out, and the joints were different sizes, and now they were trembling a little. "Sometimes when I think o' Johnny and Helen and all the kids—when I think o' that day, and those damn bombs, and that white tower o' smoke up over the town, I . . . oh, godamighty, I'd love to see another airyplane! I'd shout and yell and pray; I'd pray almighty God for you to get it!"

Ben pulled on his cigar with stiff lips, and said slowly, "Well, we might, Jim. We just might. Two out o' seven ain't bad." He puffed out smoke. "We been running in luck, so far, what with nobody ever coming back loaded for bear. Reckon that means the other five didn't see us, low as they was; probably didn't even know they was being shot at."

"They musta found bulletholes, though," Tom Pace said. "Afterwards. Not a chance we'd all

miss—" he bobbed his beard at old Jim—"specially with Dan'l Boone here plugging away. They'd know they was shot at, all right. Might even find rifle bullets."

"Maybe they did," Ben said. "Nobody ever come snooping back, though."

"Wouldn't know where to, would they?" Windy Harris said. He and Fat Sam Hogan had stopped playing checkers, and had been listening. "Smoky Creek looks dead as Sodom. Buildings all down, and stuff knee-deep in the streets. Bridge down, and the road out. And the valley is way the hell out o' the way . . . no call for them to suspect it more'n anyplace else. Less, even. They'd likely figure somebody took a potshot from a hill . . . and there's a pack o' hills between here'n outside.

"Looks like," Ben said. "We just got to keep it that way. We got a good plan: if the plane's up high, we just freeze under cover; if it comes down low a time or two, we figure we're likely spotted and start shooting. We shoot, and maybe it shoots too, and we pray."

"It's a good plan," Jim Liddel said, looking out the window. "We got two."

Windy Harris got up and stretched out his arms.

"Two ain't *enough*," old Jim said bitterly.

"Well," Windy said, "I hope we keep on getting 'em—them as sees us, anyway. Hope nobody *ever* knows we're here. It's peaceful here. Way off by ourselves, nothing to do but get up and go to bed, and do what we want in between." He sent tobacco juice into the cuspidor by the door. "Right now,

me, I guess I'll go fishing down by the creek—promised Maude I'd bring home a cat or two for supper. Anybody come along?"

Tom Pace shook his head, and old Jim looked like he'd like to go, if he only could—and Ben said, "Maybe I'll be down a little while later, Windy. Keep to the trees."

Windy left, and Tom Pace shuffled the cards and looked over at Jim Liddel. "You going to play with Ben and me, you old wind-bag, or you going to keep bragging so loud a man can't stand your company?"

"Why, you whippersnapper," Jim growled, "you just go ahead and run 'em. Reckon a reasoning man and a nitwit's about the best I can do right now."

Tom dealt out two cards, and said, "War!" without dealing out the rest. He looked at Ben, his eyes cloudy. "Got a cigar, Ben?"

Ben handed one over and held a match, and Tom got it going, puffing longer than he had to, like he didn't want to talk yet.

Then he said, "It didn't have to happen." He worked the cigar over to the corner of his mouth and settled it in the nest of stained whiskers there. "None of it had to happen—what happened here, and whatever happened outside the valley. It just didn't have to happen."

"'Course it didn't," Ben said. "Never has to. It just always does. Some people got reasons to let it happen, and some ain't got the sense not to."

Fat Sam Hogan said, "I don't figure there's anything in the world a man can't sit down and talk out, instead o' reaching for a gun. Don't

know why that oughtn'ta hold for countries."

Ben Bates looked at one of the two cards Tom Pace had dealt—his hole card. It was a four, and he lost interest. "Yup," he said, "it holds all right . . . they'll just both reach half the time anyway. One war on top of another. Even one right after this one, ten years or so, if this one's over. I just bet. Every country wants a piece out o' the next one's hide—or his poke—and they won't give an inch except in talk; they won't really buckle down to stop a war. Never. Not if they can't get what they want by talk." He looked at the card again, just in case—a four, sure enough. "Only time there's never a war is when everybody has what they want, or figure they can get it without killing somebody. But the second they see that's the only way, then it's war. War, war, war. It's a rotten way to run a world, killing to decide who's right or wrong . . . 'specially killing people who got damn little say about it. But I seen three-four wars now, and they don't look to stop soon, judging." He shook his head wonderingly. "Put half the money they spend on killing toward curing, instead, and helping them that wants, and finding out all about diseases and such . . . why, shucks, it'd be a brand-new world."

"I seen five," Jim Liddel said. "I seen wars come and go. I fought in one. Afterwards, every time, they say everything's fine. The war to save this or that's over, and things are fine. Then somebody wants something somebody else has, and they're at it again, like two bulls trying to hump the same heifer.

Bulls don't have enough sense to know there's enough cows to go around; but people ought. It's a big enough world." He worked those hands of his together until they were clasped, and he pushed them that way against the table-edge until the overgrown knuckles looked like chalk. "When I think o' that noise, and that cloud, . . . how we come running and screaming back here into all the dust and mess, and all them bodies . . . I . . . Ben, I . . ."

"You lost heavy, Jim," Ben said. He let smoke out of his lungs, and it curled off into the broad beam of sunlight that came through the window, and it looked like the smoke that had shadowed a murdered town. "Heavy. You lost heavier'n any of us."

"You can't count it," old Jim said, and the chalk was whiter. "We all lost the same; I just had more of it. Our kids and their kids—and *their* kids . . . lost heavy? What can a man lose more'n his life? . . . And if you're as old as us, what's your life except the family you made out o' your own flesh? What else's a man got when he's eighty or a hundred?"

Tom Pace said, "Ruth and Dave and their kids. I remember little Davey. He called me Tom Peach. I bought him a toy plane for his birthday. That was a couple days before the real planes come. I buried it with him . . . I think. I think it was him I put it with. It mighta been Joey . . . they looked alike."

"A man ain't nothing, when he's as old as us," Jim Liddel said, his skull sockets closed, "except what he done. *He* ain't much any more,

himself; he's mostly what he done with his life, whatever he done and left around that he can point to and say, 'I did that', that's all. And what's he got left if they take that away? We can't make it again. We made Smoky Creek; built it; wasn't a thing here that didn't come out o' us or ours. We made the valley, after God give it to us; wasn't a thing here we didn't let live or help live or make live. We made our families, and watched 'em fit into the town and the valley, like the valley fits into the world, and we watched 'em go on doing what we done before them: building and working and planting and raising families—going on, like people got to go on. That's the way it was. That's what we had. Until they dropped the bomb and killed it—killed all we done that made us men." Tears were squeezing out of the skull sockets, and Ben Bates caught Tom Pace's eye and looked away, out the window, at the green walls of the valley that was a coffin.

"I just wish an airyplane would come around again," old Jim said. "*I—just—wish*. You know, Ben?"

Ben tried to talk and had to clear his throat; he put out his cigar in the ashtray, as if that was what was wrong with his throat, and said, "I know, Jim. Sure. And maybe you'll get your wish." He pushed back his chair and tried to grin, but it came out sour. "Maybe you will, you old fire-eater—and what if one comes and we get spotted and it shoots us up or goes back and tells everybody we're here? That's one wish we don't want the good Lord to grant, ain't it? Ain't it, now?"

Jim didn't say anything.

Ben got up and said, "'Bout

noon. Guess I'll go home for a bite and then go down and fish with Windy."

Jim said, thinly, "I meant, I wish one would come and we'd *get* it."

"Well, maybe one will," Ben said, turning toward the door. "They built a slew o' them. And maybe *we* will, if it does."

**H**E STOPPED by the door of the Town Hall to listen carefully, his sharp old eyes half-shut. Behind him, at the far end of the room, somebody made a ringer, and Dave Mason said, "Nice, Owen," in his reedy voice. Ben listened and didn't hear what he was listening for. He stepped past the rifle that leaned beside the door and made his way to the end of the porch, walking close to the wall. The summer sun stood at noon, and the porch was in shadow; beyond, the street was a jumble of boards and broken glass, its canyon walls of leaning building-fronts and sagging porches, its caverns of empty windows and doorways shimmering in the heat. You couldn't see much dirt along the way; where the debris didn't come to your knees, it reached over your head.

At the end of the porch Ben stopped and listened again; heard nothing. He stepped down and walked as fast as he could—damn arthritis again—to the porch of the next building.

This had been Fat Sam Hogan's Hardware Store, and about all that was left of it was the porch; the rest was a twisted mess of wood that slumped away to the ground at the rear. The porch had been down too, right after the bombing

—but the old men, working at night, had raised it and braced it up. Something to walk under.

A Springfield stood, oiled and waiting, against the wall. Ben paused and touched the barrel—it was his own. Or rather it had once been his own; now it was the town's, strictly speaking, to be used by whoever was nearest it when the time came. It was a good gun, a straight-shooter, one of the best—which was why it was here instead of at his house. A man could get a better shot from here.

He went on, hugging the wall.

He passed a rifle wedged up between the fender and hood of Norm Henley's old Model A, and he remembered how the bomb had flipped the car right over on its top, and how the car must have protected Norm from the blast—just a little. Enough so they found him two blocks up the street, in front of his mashed house, trailing blood from every hole in him, to get to his family before he died.

Ben passed rifles leaned against walls and chairs on porches, rifles standing behind trees, leaned in the cracks between what buildings still stood to provide cracks, even old Jim's carbine lying under the ledge of the pump-trough in front of Mason's General Store. All of them in places where they were protected from rain or snow, but where they were easy to get at.

He passed sixteen rifles—walking, as everybody walked when they were out of doors, as close to the walls of the buildings as possible. When you had to cross open spaces you ran as fast as your seventy or eighty year old legs would take you—and if you couldn't run,

you walked real fast. And always you listened while you walked; particularly you listened before you went out. For planes. So you wouldn't be spotted from the air.

At the end of the porch of the last building on the street, Ben paused in the shade and looked out across the creek to where the first plane they'd shot down had crashed—the one Jim claimed to have got by his lonesome. They'd buried what they found of the pilot, and cleared away every last bolt and nut and scrap of aluminum, but the long scar in the ground remained. Ben looked at it, all broken up by rocks and flowers and bushes the old people had transplanted so it wouldn't show from the air; and he looked at the cemetery a hundred feet beyond at which the scar pointed like an arrow—the cemetery that wasn't a cemetery, because it didn't have headstones; just bodies. A town that was dead shouldn't have a lot of new graves—the dead don't bury themselves. A pilot might see a hundred graves he hadn't seen before and wonder—and strafe.

So Ben looked at the flat ground where those hundred bodies lay, with only small rocks the size of a man's fist with names scratched on them to mark who lay beneath; and he thought of his daughter May, and Owen Urey's son George who'd married May, and their three kids, and he remembered burying them there; he remembered their faces. The blood from eyes, nose, ears, mouth—*his* blood it was, part of it.

Then Ben looked up. "We ain't looking for trouble," he said to the empty blue bowl of sky. "But if you

do come, we're ready. Every day we're ready. If you stay up high, we'll hide. But if you come down low, we'll try to get you, you crazy murderers."

**HIS HOUSE** was only a few yards farther on; he got there by sticking under the trees, walking quickly from one to the next, his ears cocked for the jetsound that would flatten him against a trunk. Way off to his left, across a long flat of sunflowers and goldenrod, he saw Windy Harris down on the creekbank, by the bridge. He yelled, "They biting?"—and Windy's faint "Got two!" reminded him of all old Jim had said, and he shook his head. He left the trees and walked fast up his front path.

His house was in pretty good shape. All four houses on the outskirts had come off standing—his and Windy's and Jim's and Owen Urey's. They'd needed just a little bracing here and there, and they were fine—except Owen's. Owen had stomped around in his, and listened to the sounds of it, and said he didn't trust it—and sure enough, the first big storm it had gone down.

Now Ben and his wife Susan lived downstairs in his house; Joe Kincaid and his wife Anna lived on the second floor; and Tom Pace lived in the attic, claiming that climbing the stairs was good for his innards.

Anna Kincaid was sitting on the porch-swing, peeling potatoes. Ben said, "Afternoon, Anna," and saw her pale bright eyes flicker up at him, and that scared smile touched her mouth for just a second; then

she hunched her shoulders and kept on with the potatoes, like he wasn't even there.

Ben thought, *It must be lonely to be that way*—and he attracted her attention again, his voice a little louder: "Hope you're feeling fine, Anna."

Again the flicker of eyes. "Just fine, Ben, thanks," she said, almost in a whisper. "Peeling spuds."

"I see."

Her knife sped over a potato, removing a spiral of skin. She popped out an eye with a twist of the point. "Think Keith'll be back from the war today, Ben? It's been so long . . . I hate to think o' my boy fighting out there so long. Will they let him come home soon, Ben?"

"They will, Anna. I think they will, real soon. Maybe tomorrow."

"Will they?"

"Sure."

Keith Kincaid was under one of those fist-sized rocks, out in the cemetery that wasn't a cemetery—next to his wife, June Hogan, and their four kids. But Anna Kincaid didn't know that. Since the bomb, Anna hadn't known much of anything except what the old people told her, and they told her only things that would make her as happy as she could be: that Keith was in the Army, and June was off with the kids having a nice time in Knoxville; and that they'd all be back home in a day or so.

Anna never wondered about that "day or so"—she didn't remember much from day to day. Joe Kincaid sometimes said that helped a little, as much as anything could. He could tell her the same nice things every day, and her eyes

would light up all over again. He spent a lot of time with her, doing that. He was pretty good at it, too . . . Joe Kincaid had been Doctor Joe before the bomb. He still doctored some, when he could, but he was almost out of supplies; and what with his patients being so old, he mostly just prayed for them.

In the kitchen, Susan had lunch ready and waiting—some chicken from last night, green beans, boiled potatoes and a salad from the tiny gardens the women tended off in the weedy ground and around the bases of trees where they wouldn't be seen.

On the way in Ben had noticed that the woodbox was about empty—he'd have to bring home another bag of charcoal from the "general store"—which was Windy's barn, all braced up. Into it the old people had taken every bit of clothing, canned food, hardware, anything at all they could use in the way of housekeeping and everyday living, and there it all stood; when somebody needed something, they went and took it. Only the canned foods and tobacco and liquor were rationed. Every week or so, around midnight, Fat Sam Hogan and Dan Paray went into the big cave in Lawson's Hill, right near where the second plane had crashed, and set up a lot of small fires, back where the light wouldn't be seen; they made charcoal, and when it cooled they brought it down to the "store," for cooking and such—a charcoal fire doesn't give off much smoke.

Over coffee, Ben said, "Reckon I'll fish some this afternoon, honey. How's a cat or two for supper sound?"

"Why, goodness, Ben, not for to-

night," Susan smiled. "You know tonight's the Social; me and Anna are fixing a big dinner—steaks and all the trimmings."

"Mm," Ben said, draining his cup. "Forgot today was Sunday."

"We're going to have some music, and Owen Urey's going to read Shakespeare."

Ben pursed his lips, tasting the coffee. It was rationed to two cups a day; he always took his with his lunch, and sometimes he'd have sold a leg to dive into a full pot. "Well . . . I might as well fish anyway; take in some fun. Fish'll keep till tomorrow, won't it?"

"You can have it for breakfast." She sat down across the table and picked up the knitting she'd been on when Ben came home; he had a hunch it was something for his birthday, so he tried not to look interested; too early to tell what it was, anyway. "Ben," she said, "before you go—the curtain pole in the bay window come down when I was fixing the blankets over it for tonight. The socket's loose. You better fix it before you go. You'll maybe get home after Anna and me want to light the lamps, and we can't do it till it's fixed."

Ben said, "Sure, hon." He got the hammer and some nails from the toolbox and went into the parlor, and dragged the piano bench over in front of the bay window. The iron rod was leaning by the phonograph. He took it up with him on the chair and fitted the other end of it into the far socket, then fitted the near end into the loose socket, and drove nails around the base of the socket until the thing was solid as a rock. Then he got the blanket from the couch and

hung it down double over the rod, and fitted the buttonholes sewn all along its edge over the nails driven around the window casing, and patted it here and there until not a speck of light would escape when the lamps were lit.

He inspected the blankets draped over the other windows; they were all right. The parlor was pretty dark now, so he struck a match to the oil lamp on the mantle, just so Susan and Anna could see to set the table. When the others arrived, they'd light the other lamps; but not until; oil was precious. The only time anybody in town ever lit a lamp was on Social night: then the old people stayed up till around midnight for eats and entertainment; otherwise everybody got to bed at eight or so, and climbed out with the dawn.

He went back into the kitchen and put away the hammer, and said, "My second cup still hot, honey?"

She started to put down her knitting and get up, and he said, "Just asking," and pressed her shoulder till she sat again. He went around her and filled his cup at the stove.

"Ben," she said, when he sat down again, "I wish you'd take a look at the phonograph too. Last time the turntable made an awful lot of noise. . . . I wish it could sound better for tonight."

"I know, honey," Ben sighed. "That motor's going. There ain't much I can do about it, though. It's too old. I'm scared to take it apart; might not get it back together right. When it really quits, then I guess I'll fool around and see what I can do. Heck, it didn't sound too bad."

"It rattled during the soft parts of the music."

Ben shook his head. "If I try, I might ruin it for good." He smiled a little. "It's like us, Suse—too old to really fix up much; just got to keep cranking it, and let it go downhill at its own pace."

Susan folded her knitting and got up. She came around the table, and he put an arm around her waist and pulled her into the chair beside him.

"It'll go soon, won't it, Ben?" she said softly. "Then we won't have any music. It's a shame . . . we all like to listen so much. It's peaceful."

"I know." He moved his arm up and squeezed her thin shoulders. She put her head on his shoulder, and her grey hair tickled his cheek; he closed his eyes, and her hair was black and shining again, and he put his lips against it and thought he smelled a perfume they didn't even make any more.

After a moment he said, "We got so much else, though, Suse . . . we got peaceful music you can't play on a machine. Real peace. A funny kind of peace. In a funny-looking town, this one—a rag town. But it's ours, and it's quiet, and there's nothing to bother us—and just pray God we can keep it that way. Outside, the war's going on someplace, probably. People fighting each other over God knows what—if even He knows. Here, it's peaceful."

She moved her head on his shoulder. "Ben—will it ever come here, what's going on outside? Even the war, if it's still going on?"

"Well, we were talking about that this morning down at the hall,

Suse. I guess it won't. If rifles can stop it, it won't. If they see us from the air, we'll shoot at 'em; and if we get 'em we'll clean up the mess so if anybody comes looking for a missing plane, they won't give Smoky Creek a second look. That's the only way anything can come, honey—if they see us from the air. Nobody's going to come hiking over these mountains. There's noplac they'd want to get to, and it's sure no country for fighting."

"If the war is over, they'll likely be around to fix up the bridge and the road. Won't they?"

"Maybe so. Sooner or later."

"Oh, I hope they leave us alone."

"Don't worry, hon."

"Ben—about the phonograph—"

"Suse . . ." He turned his head to look at her eyes. "It's good for longer'n we are. That motor. So's the bridge, the way it is, and the road . . . we'll be gone first. Before they get around to fix 'em. Before the phonograph gives out. What we want is going to last us—and what we don't want will come too late to hurt us. *Nothing's* going to hurt our peace. I know that somehow. We got it, and it'll be like this for as long as we're here to enjoy it . . . I know."

"Ben—"

"If I want to go fishing," Ben said, and pressed her head against his shoulder again, "I go. If I want to relax with the men, I do it. If I want to just walk and breathe deep, I do it—keeping to the trees, o' course. If I want to just be with you, I do it. It's quiet. It's real quiet in our rag town. It's a world for old people. It's just the way we want it, to live like we want to live. We got enough gardens and live-



stock, and all the canned stuff in the store, to last us for a . . . for as long as we got. And no worries. About who's fighting who over what. About who won. About how the international mess is getting worse again, and we better make more bombs for the next one. About who's winning here and losing there and running neck-and-neck someplace else. We don't know any things like that, and we don't want to know. It don't matter none to us . . . we're too old, and we seen too much of it, and it's hurt us too bad, and we know it just don't matter at all."

"Ben . . . I got to crying today. About May and George and the children. I was crying, and thinking about that day . . ."

"So did I think. None of us ever forgets for a minute. For a second." His lips thinned. "That's part of why we do what we do. Rest is, we just want to be left alone."

They sat in silence for a moment, his arm around her shoulders, his other hand holding hers. Then he released her hand and thumped his own on the table, grinned at her and said, "Life goes on, now! Reck-on I'll go down and get that cat—or go walking—or just go soak in some sun. What time are the folks showing up for—"

Jetsound slammed across the peaceful valley.

**B**EN GOT up and walked as fast as he could to the door, picked up the rifle leaning there, cocked it. Looking toward town he saw that Tom Pace had been on his way home, and the sound had caught him between trees. Tom hesitated,

then turned and dived toward the tree he'd just left—because a rifle was there.

Ben saw men pour out of the doorways of the two habitable buildings on Main Street; they stuck close to the walls, under the porches, and they picked up rifles.

Motionless, hidden, in shadows, under trees, in doorways, behind knotholes, they waited. To see if the plane would buzz the town again.

It did.

It came down low over Main Street while the thunders of its first pass still echoed and rolled. Frightening birds out of trees, driving a hare frantically along the creek-bank, blotting out the murmur of the creek and the tree-sounds, driving away peace.

They saw the pilot peering through the plexiglass, down at the buildings . . . he was past the town in four winks; but in two they knew that he was curious, and would probably come back for a third look.

He circled wide off over the end of the valley, a vertical bank that brought a blinding flash of sunlight from one wing, and he came back.

Ben leveled his rifle and centered the nose of the plane in his sights. For some reason—probably because the valley walls crowded the town on both sides—the planes always lined up with Main Street when they flew low over the town.

The plane grew at startling speed in Ben's sights—it loomed, and the oval jet intake was a growling mouth—and he waited till it was about two seconds and a thousand feet from him; then he sent his bullet up into that mouth: a

bullet aimed by a man who'd handled a rifle for sixty years, who could pop the head off a squirrel at a hundred feet. A running squirrel.

That was the signal, Ben's shot.

From under the tree Tom Pace's rifle spoke.

The jet was past town then, and he wheeled to follow it with his eyes; its whining thunder lashed down and pressed his ears, lowering suddenly in pitch as it receded; and though he couldn't hear them for the thunder, he knew that nineteen rifles had roared before it completed its turn, each aimed head-on at the plane. Aimed by men and women who could shoot with Ben, and even outshoot him.

The plane coughed. Lurched. It had time to emit a fuzzy thread of black smoke before it nosed down and melted into the ground and became a long ugly smear of mounds and shreds and tatters of flame.

The sounds of the crash died. Ben heard men shouting; loudest of all was old Jim Liddel's, "Got him . . . by God, I prayed, and we got him!"

Behind him Susan was crying.

Ben saw men and women head for the crash-site; immediately they'd start to carry away what debris wasn't too hot to handle. Then they'd wait, and as soon as anything was cool enough it would be carried off and hidden.

And there'd be a burial tonight.

Ben saw that some of the men had carried old Jim's chair out onto the porch of the Town Hall; and he saw that Jim was half-standing out of his cushions, propped up on his fists and still shouting; and Ben

wondered if the Maker wasn't on the porch there with Jim, waiting for Jim to fall and make his noise.

He turned away—at seventy you don't want to see a man die—and went inside and put his rifle on the kitchen table. He crossed to the cabinet under the sink to get his reamer and oiling rag. Every rifle was taken care of that way. Right now Tom Pace and Dan Paray were hurrying around gathering rifles to clean them, load them. No rifle must miss fire, or throw a bullet an inch off aim—because that might be the rifle whose aim was right.

"Lucky we got that one," he said. "I think he saw us, Suse . . . he come in low and sudden, and I think he saw us."

"Was—was it one of theirs, Ben . . . or one of ours?"

"Don't know. I didn't even look. I can't tell 'em apart. Owen'll be around to tell me when they find out . . . but I reckon it was one of ours. If he saw us and didn't shoot, then I reckon it was one of ours. Like the last one."

"Oh, *Ben*," Susan said. "Ben, ain't it against God?"

Ben stood looking out the window over the sink; watching a cloud of yellow dust settle over the wreckage of the plane, and a cloud of black smoke rising from the wreckage to darken the yellow. He knew some of the men would be passing buckets from the well, and spading dirt on the flames where they weren't too hot to get to.

"That's the way it is," he said. "That's how we decided. God didn't stop the bomb dropping, Suse . . . for whatever reasons He

had. It don't seem He'd deny us the right to shoot rifles, for the reasons we got. If we get turned away at the Gates, we'll know we was wrong. But I don't think so."

Quiet was returning to the valley; the birds had already started singing again. You could hear the trees. From the direction of the creek came Windy Harris, running, and he broke the quiet with a shout as he saw Ben by the window: "Got it, huh, Ben?"

"Sure did," Ben said, and Windy ran on.

Ben looked toward the porch of the Town Hall. Old Jim had sunk back into his pillowed chair, and he was shaking his fist, and Ben could hear him yelling, "Got it . . . got it, we did!"

*He'll be around for a while yet, old Jim,* Ben thought, and turned back to the table. He sat down and

listened to the sounds of the valley, and his eyes were the eyes of the valley—they'd seen a lot, and understood enough of it.

"It don't matter whose it was," he said. "All of a cloth." He slid the reamer into the barrel of the rifle, and worked it. "The hell with the war. Even if it's over, the hell with it. With any war. Nothing's ever going to give us back what we lost. Let 'em stay away, all them that's to blame. Them and their planes and wars and bombs . . . they're *crazy!*" His lips curled as he worked the reamer. "Let 'em stay out o' what they left us for lives. Don't want to hear what they're doing, or *how*, or *why*, or *who* . . . don't want to hear about it. It'd be *crazy*. The hell with 'em. All o' them. *The hell with the whole Twentieth Century.*"

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## DREAMTOWN, U.S.A. (Continued from page 48)

to rebuild the life many of you may remember. It will be difficult at first. But time will teach us many things. Each of us has something to give the other. Go home now, and tomorrow we will begin again to find the dreams we first dreamed when we built Dreamtown."

The people sat in stunned silence for a moment. Then a cheer, lonely and overloud in the silence, went up from a man in the crowd. A woman ran from the crowd and seized a child from the group standing huddled to one side of the Playground square. The woman was followed by two other women who did the same thing, and soon

the silence was broken by the loud and excited talking of the great crowd of people.

"So much will have to be taught to these people," Professor Corbett whispered as he watched the people file out of the Playground.

Dan held Nancy in his arms as he spoke. "We must teach them to hold elections instead of blindly following self appointed leaders."

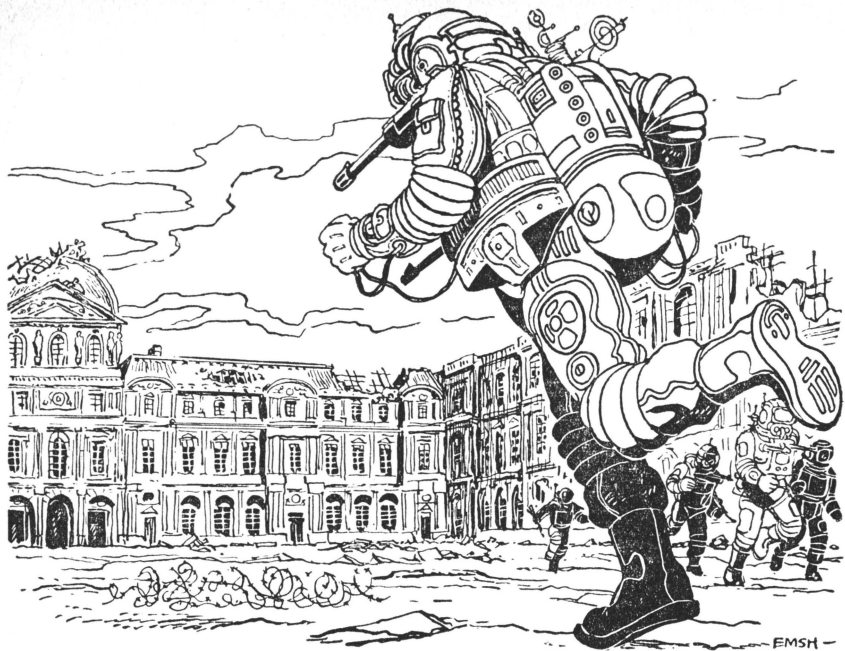
"We'll build schools and publishing houses again," Professor Corbett said happily.

"And baseball diamonds and football fields."

"There's such a long way to go."

"We'll begin tomorrow."

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*It was part of a picture in part of a building that had once been the Louvre. And somewhere back in his lost memory, it was also a name for "Whitey" . . .*

# THE LAST CRUSADE

BY GEORGE H. SMITH

*Illustrated by Ed Emsch*

**JULIUS CAESAR** named this place 'Lutetia Parisiorum', which means 'the mud town of the Parissii'. Later on people got around to calling it 'the city of light,'" Marty Coleman was saying.

"Well, Julius was sure as hell a lot closer to the truth than those others," I tell him. We was sitting in the mud in what's left of some big building and me and Joe White was listening to Marty, our Sergeant, talking like he always does. When I says the sergeant was talking I mean he was talking over the C.C., the Company Communication Circuit because what with having our mecho-armor on and the other side raising a little hell, we couldn't of heard him any other way.

"Yeah, I guess you're right, Ward. There isn't much light around here anymore," Coleman admitted.

"The only light you ever see around here these days is a flare or a rocket going over," White says in that funny flat voice of his.

From time to time Coleman would lift the headpiece of his armor above the pile of rubble in front of us and take a quick look out over the big open square toward where the enemy was holed up on the other side. About half the time he'd draw small arm or automatic fire.

"Those birds must have infra-red eyepieces too," he says as he sets down.

"Ah they ain't even got mecho-armor," I says.

"No, but they have body armor and helmets with quite a bit of stuff in them."

"I'll bet they ain't got anything

like we got." I was feeling pretty fine right then thinking how much better off we was than the poor joes in the infantry. We don't just fight in our suits, we live in 'em. They ain't only a mechanized suit of armor, they're our barracks, messroom and latrine and all radiation and rain proof. We got more fire power than a company of infantry and more radio equipment than a tank.

"You know there's lots worse ways of fighting a war," I says. "You climb into one of these babies and they seal you up like a sardine but at least you're warm and dry and you don't even have to use your own feet to walk. You got a nice little atomic power pack to move you around."

"You couldn't move the legs of one of these things if you had to," the Sergeant says.

"It . . . it just seems like a kind of funny way to fight a war," White says, talking like he always did, as though he had to hunt for every word before he said it.

"What's funny about it? They been fighting it this way for ten years, haven't they?" I demands.

"I guess so . . . I don't know . . ."

"Yeah, ten years. And the last five of it we've spent crawling back and forth in what used to be Paris," the sergeant was talking again. "Just think . . . in the old wars they used to call it Gay Paree."

"It's gay all right," I says, following a movement on my ground radar screen. A beep had shown up, indicating activity over where the enemy was. Their guns was silent now but across the mud pools came their voices, voices that from time to time cut in on our circuits and

competed with the voices of our own side.

Suddenly a girl was talking, a girl with a soft voice that was like warm lips against your ear. "Hello there, you fellows across the line. It's not much fun being here is it? Especially when you know that some non-draft back in the hometown walked off with your girl a long time ago.

"Honey Chile," the voice went on, "this is your old gal, Sally May, and I know how you all feel 'cause I used to be on the same side myself until I found out how things are over here in the Peoples Federal Democratic Eastern Republics . . ." The bleat of a code message cut through the syrupy tones, tore at our ears for a few moments and faded away. Slowly the sweet voice drifted back.

"Well, fellows, we're gonna play you some real homey music in a few minutes, but first we're gonna tell you all about our contest. We know you all Yankee boys like contests and this one is a real humdinger.

"This here contest is open to every GI over there in the mecho-units. And have we got prizes? why, honey, we sure have! Listen to this big first prize: \$100,000 dollars in gold! And then we have an expense paid vacation in the scenic Crimea and a brand new factory special Stalin sportscar. And fellows, get this: A TV appearance on a nationwide hookup with a dinner date afterwards with glamorous Sonia Nickolovich, the famous ballerina.

"Now I guess you boys are wonderin' what you gotta do to win these wonderful prizes. Well, this

is how easy it is. All you gotta do is write out a thousand word statement on 'How my mecho-armor works' and deliver it along with your armor to the nearest P.F.D.-E.R. army unit. Now . . . isn't that easy? And this contest is open to everyone but agents of the P.F.D.-E.R. and their relatives."

The soft voice faded away.

"Why . . . the dirty—What do they think we are?"

Just on general principles I sent a half-dozen 75 mm shells in the direction of their lines.

"I don't—think I—understand that at all. What are they trying to do?" White asks. "I thought the enemy was Reds."

"You're in pretty bad shape, ain't you buddy?" I laughs. "Can't you even remember who you're fighting?"

"Leave him alone, will you, Ward," the sergeant orders. "If you had been brain washed as many times as he has you'd have trouble remembering things too."

"Whatta ya mean?"

Sarge swung the big headpiece of his armor around and looked at White through his electric eyes. "How many times you been captured, Whitey?" he asks.

"I . . . I don't know, Sarge. I don't remember. Twice . . . I guess."

"That's two brain washings from the enemy and two rewashings from our own psycho units. Four electronic brain washings don't leave much in a man's brain."

"Well, I'll be damned. Which side was you on first, Whitey?" I asks.

"I don't know . . . I don't remember."

"Ah come on now, you must know. Was you a Russian or an American? Western Democratic Peoples Federal Republics or Peoples Federal Democratic Eastern Republics—which side?"

"I . . . don't know. All I know is that they ain't good and we got to fight them until we kill all of them."

"How do you know they ain't good?" I demands. "If you don't know which side you was on to start with, maybe you was shootin' at your own brothers this morning . . . or your mother."

"You better watch your mouth, Ward. There might be a Loyalty Officer tuned in on the band. You wouldn't want a probe, would you?" Coleman asks.

"Ah, they ain't listenin', Sarge. This guy gives me the willies. He don't know nothin' but how to run that damn armor and how to fight. He don't even know who he was to start with."

"I wish I did know . . . I wish I . . ."

"You know, Whitey, maybe you was a big shot on the other side. Maybe you was Joe Stalin's grandson or something.

"Remember!" an eager voice whispered in our ears. "*Remember what you are fighting for. In the WDPFR there are more washing machines than in any place else in the world!*"

I had to laugh. "You ever seen a washing machine, Sarge?" I asks.

Coleman was looking back toward our lines. "Yeah. There used to be a place called Brooklyn that was full of 'em. You know, there's something going on back there. The whole company seems to be moving up. And there's a big armored

crawler there with a smaller one parked beside it."

He sits back down with a clanking of armor. "Must be some big shots coming around to see how we're winning the war."

"I wish someone would use a can opener on me right now and take me out of this walking sardine can and plump me into a washing machine. I ain't been clean in five years," I says.

"Do they have washing machines on the other side?" Whitey wants to know.

"Naw. They ain't got nothin' like that, nothin' at all," I tells him. "Things like washing machines is reserved for us capitalists."

"If we got washing machines and they ain't, then what are we fighting for?" Whitey asks.

"You better ask the Sarge that. He's the intellectual around here. He reads all the comic books and things."

"Why do you think we're fighting, Whitey?" Coleman asks.

"Well, Sarge . . . I don't know. If I could just remember who I used to be, I'd know. Sometime I'm gonna remember. Every once in a while I can almost . . . but then I don't."

"Well, why do you *think* we're fighting?" I asks.

"Well . . . well . . . I guess it's that there's bad guys and good guys . . . just like in the comics or on the TV shows. We're the good guys and they're the bad guys. Is that right, Sarge?"

"I don't know, Whitey. That might be some of it but I kinda think that maybe it has something to do with when we won the last war or thought we won it. We

thought we had finished with the Nazi's but I guess maybe we got fooled. In Europe the Nazi's all turned Communist and in America the Commies all turned Nazi. Either way people like them have always got the jump on the joes in between. In Europe they pointed at them and called them Nazi's. In America they pointed at them and called them Reds. Pretty soon people didn't know the difference, except that it was better to be pointing than to be pointed at."

"Now, Sarge, you're the one that better be careful. You wouldn't want the Loyalty Officer to be hearing that sort of talk, would you?" I cuts in.

"Maybe you're right but I kinda think that that's why . . ."

**J**UST THEN the command circuit in our helmets opened up with orders for us to pull back and join the rest of the company. All the way back Whitey doesn't say anything so I figure he's trying to remember who he is. Well, we gets back to the command post without drawing more than a little small arms fire and a couple of rockets, but things is really popping there. The big crawler Coleman seen from our outpost is settin' there in the middle of the street and the whole company is gathered around it.

"What's goin' on?" I say as I sidle up beside Fred Dobshanski.

"Don't you guys know? There's a big drive comin' up. General Mac Williams is gonna talk to us himself."

Whitey was right beside me. He sure was a funny guy, always hang-

ing around and asking questions. Sometimes I used to wonder what he looked like. You get used to not seeing any of the guys when you're in the forward areas. Sometimes for weeks or months at a time a whole area will be contaminated with bacteria or radiation and you don't open your suit at all. Even if you're wounded the mecho-armor gives you a shot and takes you back to a field hospital . . . that is, if it's still working. So you get used to not knowing what the guys look like and not caring much. But with Whitey it was different. His voice had such a dull someplace-else sound to it that you got to wondering if there was really anyone in that suit of armor or not. You got to wondering if maybe it just walked around by itself.

"Mac Williams? Who's he?" Whitey asks as if in answer to my thoughts.

"Hell, don't you know anything?" Fred says.

"I guess I don't. I . . . I . . . don't even know who I was. I sorta wish I knew who I used to be."

"Mac Williams is Fightin' Joe Mac Williams. He's going to talk to us. Look . . . there he is now."

I adjusted my eyepieces for direct vision and sure enough on the kind of balcony on the back of this big armored crawler was a guy. I mean to tell you he sure looked like something too. He was in full battle armor with scarlet trimmings and gold rivets. He was wearing a mother-of-pearl plated helmet with three stars set in rubies. Even the twin machine guns that were fitted to his armor instead of the 75 recoilless and 40 mm we had on ours was plated to look like silver.



"Gosh! Imagine a General coming 'way up here in all this mud and stuff. That guy must really have guts!" someone mutters on the company circuit.

"Yeah. I bet he's only got one swimming pool in that land yacht of his."

"Shut up! What's the matter with you? That ain't no way to talk. You a sub or something?"

"Say, did you guys see what I saw through the windows of that crawler? Dames!"

"Dames?"

"Who you kiddin'?"

"So help me. There was two of them. Two big, tall, willowy, blond WAC Captains!"

"Them's the General's aides."

"Yeah? What do they aid him at?"

"Shut up you guys," the Captain's voice cuts in. "The General is going to speak."

Well then he starts right in telling us about the great crusade we're engaged upon and how civilization is at stake. And how proud the home folks is of us. Of course, he admits we haven't had any direct word from the States since last year when we had those big cobalt bomb raids, but he just knows that they all love us. Right when he starts I know we're in for trouble, 'cause when the brass start talking about crusades, a lot of joes is gonna get killed.

He goes on with this for half an hour, and all the time the TV cameras is grinding away from this other crawler that is filled with newsmen and video people. He mentions blood 16 times and that ain't good. Sweat he says 14 times and

guts an even dozen. When it really looks bad, though, is when he calls the Major and the Captain up and pins a medal on each of the medal racks that officers wear on the front of their armor. When they start passing out the medals ahead of time, brother, it ain't good, it ain't good at all.

When he gets through with all this, the old boy retires into his crawler.

"I guess he's going in to plan the battle," I says.

"Ha," says Sergeant Coleman's voice in my ear. "All the blood and guts in that speech wore him out so much he's got to retire to his bar for a few quick ones with them two aides of his."

"Now, Sarge," I says, "that ain't no way for a patriot to talk."

"My patriotism is at a very low ebb at the moment. Do you know what kind of a party we're going to have in the morning?"

"No," I says, "but I would be interested in finding out."

"You've seen that huge mile-long building that's across the square from us?"

"I've seen it and found little to like about it. The enemy has every kind of gun in there that's been invented."

"Well, the Captain says that that's it! Fighting Joe wants us to take it."

*"Remember boys, remember that the way of life in the W.D.P.F.R. is better. Remember what you're fighting for—hotdogs and new cars, electric refrigerators and apple pie, sweethearts and mother. Don't let mother down boys!"*

A voice that used to sell us bath soap is selling us war.

"That kind of sounds like we're getting ready to move in, don't it Sarge?" I says.

Sure enough a half hour later we starts to move up. The whole company of thirty men is on its way with the rest of the battalion close behind.

"Say, maybe there'll be some dames up ahead," Dobshanski is saying.

"What do you want with dames? You got the Waiting Wife and the Faithful Sweetheart on your TV, ain't you?" the Sergeant says.

"It ain't the same. It ain't the same at all," Dobshanski says.

I cuts in with, "Hey, did you guys hear what I heard? Pretty soon we won't really need women anymore. Those new suits of armor we're going to get have got Realie TV sets in 'em. When a gal comes on it's just like she was in the suit with you. Those suits is gonna take care of everything and I mean everything."

"Ah, who ya kiddin'? Who ya handin' that line to?"

"Him and his inside dope!"

Twenty minutes later we're in position among the wrecked buildings on our side of the square and several kinds of hell is traveling back and forth across it. As is usual, the enemy seems to have as good an idea as to what we're about as we have.

"Oh, brother," Coleman moans. "Did Mac Williams send them a copy of his orders as soon as he got through writing them?"

**H**EAVERY SHELLS and rockets is plowing up the already plowed up pavement all around us.

Geysers of mud and water are being lifted by shells on all sides. I sees a couple of guys go down and I stumbles over a tangled mess of armor and flesh as we break from cover and start across the hundred yards or so of the square.

Floater rockets are overhead, circling kind of lazy like and lighting up the whole company as pretty as a summer's day with big magnesium flares. It's real comfortin' to see guys on all sides of you, but not so comfortin' when you sees them fallin' right and left.

I know I'm running with the rest of the guys 'cause I can hear my power pack rev up and feel the steel legs of my suit pounding along through the mud. I can feel the suit automatically swerving to avoid shell holes and to throw off the enemy aim. Not that they're really aiming, they're just tossing everything they got into that square and bettin' on the law of averages. The whole length of the big marble building we're after is lit up now, but not with lights, it's lit up with gun flashes.

The company and battalion radio bands is a mess. Even the command circuit is filled with guys yellin' and screamin', but there don't seem to be much point to orders right now anyway. I keep on goin' cause I don't know what else to do. Once or twice I recognise Coleman and White by the numbers on their armor and I get one glimpse of Fred Dobshanski just as half a dozen 70 mm shells tear his armor and him apart.

Then I'm almost at the building, and I'm being hit by pointblank light machine-gun fire. I'm blazing back with my 40 and 75, pouring

tracers through the windows and being thankful my armor can take machine gun fire even at close range.

There's other guys all around me now and we're smashing through doors and crashing over window sills into the building. The place is full of enemy joes and they're hitting us with everything they can throw. I take a couple of 40 mm shells that knock me off my feet, but Whitey blasts the gun crew two seconds later. We fight our way up a pair of marble stairways and they're really pouring it on us from up above, when suddenly they take a notion to rush us and come rushing down the steps . . . about three hundred of them.

What we did to them ain't pretty. That light plastic battle armor of theirs don't even look like stopping our stuff; and packed together like they are on those steps, it's murder. A lot of them get to the bottom, but there ain't much left of them when they get there.

It's all over then. Guys are yelling for the Medic robot and for the Ammo robots and others are just slumped down in their suits waiting for something else to happen . . . and it ain't long in happening. It can't be more than ten minutes after we chased the last Red out the back of our objective before their heavy guns're trying to knock it down around our ears.

Armor or no armor, what's left of the battalion takes refuge in the cellars where a few hours before the Reds were playing possum from our guns. Coleman, Whitey and I find us a nice heavy beam and are standing under it. Coleman is talking, as usual, and Whitey is wonder-

ing who he is and I'm watching the Major and Captain take inventory. Our assets ain't what they used to be. There's about twenty guys left in our company and maybe about sixty-five in the whole battalion.

I guess that's why the Major ain't very friendly when some of the guys dig out a couple dozen women and children who've been hiding in the building.

"Well, I'll be damned! Look what's comin' in!" I says to Coleman. There's maybe twenty women and the rest is kids.

"Why do the kids always seem to outlast the rest of the people, Sarge?" I asks. "Every place we been in this town, there's always more kids left alive than older folks."

"I don't know, Ward. Maybe they make a smaller target."

They've already got the kids lined up and we've given 'em the candy bars wrapped in propaganda leaflets that we all carry. Like all foreigners, they ain't very polite or grateful. They can't even understand what I'm saying even when I turn up my outside amplifier full power.

"What's the matter with them punks? Don't they appreciate candy?" I asks the sergeant who is muttering to one of them in some of their own gibberish.

"They say the Russians didn't give them anything but lumps of sugar and we don't give them anything but candy. They'd like something else."

"Now ain't that just like people like them," I says to White. "No gratitude to us for liberating them or for feedin' 'em."

"I think I would know what it's

all about if I could just remember. You know, Sarge, for a few minutes, up' above there I almost remembered. Then the shelling started and . . . and . . . I don't know . . ." Whitey is still harping on his favorite subject so I turns back to the sergeant and the kids he's talkin' to.

"What's with these punks? What they got to complain about? If it wasn't for us they wouldn't have no country."

"They say that the Russians was about to take them away to a camp and make soldiers out of them and they're afraid we'll do the same."

"Well . . . what in hell do they want to do? Spend the rest of their lives hiding in a hole while we do their fighting?"

"This youngster says he doesn't want to be brain washed. He doesn't want to be a soldier."

"He's right," Whitey pipes up. "He don't want to be like me. You know, I had a dream . . . or did I remember? Anyway in this . . . dream . . . of mine, I remembered that I had been an important person like you said, Ward. But not on the enemy side. I knew something and wanted to tell it to the whole army but they didn't want me to. That's why they sent me to the psycho machines. That's why they made me like I am."

"What was it you knew, White?" the sergeant asks.

"I'm not sure. It was something . . . something about there not being any more Western Federation or any Eastern Republics . . . no more America . . . no more Russia . . . just two self-perpetuating armies . . . like hoards of maggots crawling across the corpse of Europe."

"That's a funny sort of dream . . . a very funny sort of dream," the sergeant says.

"Why would you have any sort of crazy dream like that?" I demands. "You know we hear broadcasts about how things are getting along so fine back home all the time."

"How long's it been since you got a letter, Ward?" Coleman asks.

"Letter? I don't remember. Who'd write to me anyway? What's the matter with them kids? Do they want the Russians to come back and rape their mothers and sisters?"

"I'll ask them," Sarge says, and starts gibbering again through his outside amplifier to a skinny brat that's doing the talking for all of them. Pretty quick the kid gabbles back just like he understood.

"He says that their mothers and sisters have been raped so many times by both sides that it don't make any difference anymore."

"They ain't got no grat . . ." I starts to say but the Major is yelling at the Captain so I stops to listen.

"Where are their men? Where are they hiding?" He shakes his fist under the noses of these French women and the Captain questions them.

"Why did they permit the Russians to hide out in this building? Don't they know that being here is collaborating with the enemy? Where are their men? I'll have them hung!" The Major is really hopping mad.

"I beg your pardon, sir." The Captain interrupts him. "This woman says that their men are on the second floor and . . ."

"Good! Send six men up there and hang every one of them."

"Sir, they say that the Russians have already hung them. As American collaborationists, sir!"

"What! Humph! Well . . . send some men up there to cut them down and hang them again. No! Wait, Captain! We'll wait until the TV cameras get here."

It was just then that the word came for us to pull back, for us to give up this building and fall back to our old positions.

"My God! What's the matter with them?" Whitey says. "After all the guys we lost taking this place, why do we have to give it up?"

"Maybe they want us to do it over again for the TV," the Sergeant says as we watch the other two companies pull out, herding the civilians before them.

"I don't want to go," Whitey says suddenly. "If I stay here I might remember."

"To hell with it, Whitey," Coleman tells him. "Maybe you wouldn't like it if you did remember. Maybe you're better off this way."

"I like it here. There used to be pictures up above . . . I found a piece of one during the fighting . . . it was . . . beautiful."

"Come on, Whitey! Let's get going! Don't you see what the Captain's doing?" I says. The others look and start moving fast. The Captain must have been mad about giving up our objective 'cause he'd set up a disruptor bomb on the floor and started a time fuse. Maybe you've never seen a disruptor bomb and maybe you wouldn't want to. In a way they're an improvement on the atomic bomb. They cause individual atomic explosions that

keep blasting for hours after you start them. When that bomb gets through, there won't be anything left.

Pretty quick we're out in the open and running as fast as our mechos legs can carry us. We're about halfway across the square when I see Whitey suddenly break away from Coleman and head back toward the building.

He gets there and is heading in the door just as the disruptor bomb lets loose. That building started doing a dance, a kind of strip tease I guess, 'cause it's shedding roof and walls right and left.

Later on, when we're back in our lines, I'm sitting beside Coleman while our mecho-armor is whipping up some X-rations for us.

"Why did he do it, Sarge? Why'd Whitey go back?"

"I don't know. There was something about that building that he thought he remembered. It reminded him of something. That picture he found kind of set him off. He said maybe it was the last one there was in the world."

"Did . . . did he remember who he was?"

"I guess at the last he did . . . or at least he remembered some thing."

"Did he remember his name?"

"I guess so."

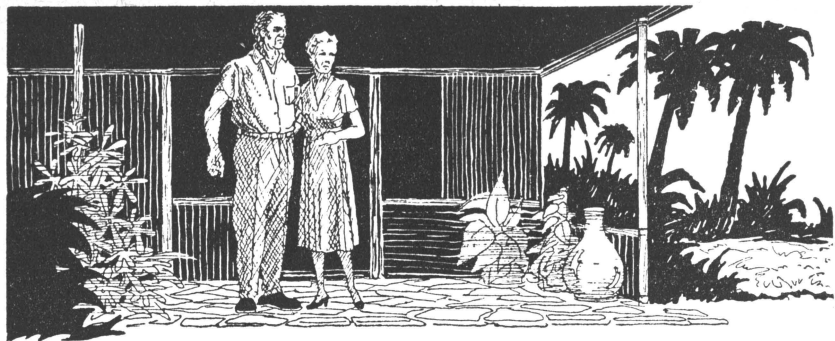
"Well, what was it?"

"He didn't tell me. Maybe his name was Man."

"Man? That's a funny name. Well . . . his name sure is mud now."

"Maybe the two names are the same, Ward," he says. The sergeant always was a funny guy.

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## A WITCH IN TIME

*If historians have ever pondered that eerie and magical transformation of Abigaile Goodyear, that "faire young maide" who aged so before the disbelieving eyes of gallows witnesses, mayhaps herein lies the answer . . .*

BY HERB WILLIAMS

*I saw this faire young maide, Abigaile Goodyear, standing yonder on ye gallows and shee saith againe and againe that she was no witch, although the jury had founde her guilty of . . . familiarity with Satan, the grand enemie of God & man; and that by his instigation and help . . . afflicted and done harm to the bodyes and estates of*

*sundry of his Majesties subjects . . .*

—WITCHCRAFT IN EARLY AMERICA  
VOLUME II, CHAPTER 4

NAT LYON looked nervously at the girl huddled in the corner of the time machine. There were white streaks down her face where recent tears had washed off the grime of several days spent in a



Illustrated by Kelly Freas

primitive jail.

Her almost jet black hair was a tangled mess, hanging in strings to her shoulders. He wrinkled his nose in distaste at the odor filling the small compartment. There was romance in history, he thought, when viewed in the abstract, but not when one faced history in the person of a female who had languished several days in an unsanitary prison.

"Pray, Sir," she asked slowly, and so softly he scarcely heard her, "Art thou the Lord? Or one of His Angels?"

Nat started to laugh, but she looked so pitiful he checked himself. "No, I'm a human being, just like yourself—except that I've never been accused of witchcraft!"

A look of fear crossed her face. "Verily, I testify unto thee that I am no witch, but have the fear of God before mine eyes." She was almost frantic in her statement. She cringed farther into the corner. Nat noticed the raw wounds on her wrists where the irons had chafed her.

"Sure, sure, I believe you," Nat said sharply. "They won't hang you now!" Then he added glumly, "But

they'll probably do worse to me if they find out what *I've* done!"

She looked up at him, wonder in her deep blue eyes, her long lashes blinking slowly. Even her bedraggled appearance and the dirt that literally covered her could not hide from Nat the beauty of her eyes. "Then perhaps thou art an emissary of the Evil One, though thou hast a kind look to thy features that seemeth not to come of the Devil."

This time Nat laughed. He had read the ancient records known as *books* but hearing someone talk in archaic *book* fashion was too much. "That was quite a speech, Pretty Eyes. But get it through your head that I'm a normal human who had a momentary lapse and did an abnormal thing. I used the paralysis ray on wide range, stopped the show and hauled you off the gallows. Right now we're in a time machine headed for . . . I'm not sure where."

The girl forgot her fear in momentary puzzlement. "Paralysis ray?" she repeated slowly, "Stop the show? Time machine?"

"Oh, skip it," he said. "What we need right now is a chance to get

you cleaned up—and I think I know just the place. There's a pretty beach in 18th century Mexico. It's warm, and there's a fresh water stream running into the ocean. You can wash off some of that prison grime."

The sun beat down on Nat's blonde head as he sat on a rock overlooking a river mouth and several miles of Mexican beach. Abby—he'd finally discovered that her name was Abigaile Goodyear—was behind a clump of bushes beside the stream, vainly trying to wash her voluminous clothing.

Now that the shock and humor had passed, Nat was deeply worried. He couldn't take Abby back to his own time and announce that he hadn't the heart to see her hanged, on the other hand, he simply could not take her back to 17th century New England to be hanged for witchcraft. If he dropped her off in any other time, they'd think she was insane.

Nat had been making a routine historical survey, part of the work on his thesis about life in 17th century New England. And on his first venture into time, he had ended up committing one of the most serious crimes possible in his society—Time Meddling.

Earlier in the day, just before leaving Earth University in the 25th century, tall, ascetic Anton Bor, Chief of the Time Inspection Corps, had impressed on him the penalties for Time Meddling. Fixing Nat with cold grey eyes, Bor had recited the familiar warning in calculated tones: "At no time, and under no circumstance, are people in past ages to know they are being

observed."

It was Nat's first solo adventure into time, and his indoctrination, as thorough as it was, had not prepared him for the shock he experienced a few hours later.

He had been completely unprepared for the scene that lay before his eyes as he came out of the thick woods into a clearing.

A gallows had been erected on a mound in the center of the cleared space and a large crowd had gathered to watch what seemed to be an execution.

Checking his invisibility shield, Nat moved closer.

A tall, gaunt man, with a look of righteous wrath on his face was reading from a scroll. Except for his clothing, the man looked exactly like Anton Bor, Chief of the TIC. Nat shook his head in disbelief, but strained his ears to hear what the man was reading.

". . . she was found guilty of felonies and witchcrafts whereof she stood indicted and sentence of death accordingly passed that she be hanged by the neck until she be dead . . ."

Nat tore his eyes from the man with the scroll and looked at the *witch*.

He gasped audibly at what he saw, so that several people nearby looked curiously around. Realizing his error, he stood completely still until the people he had disturbed turned their attention back to the gallows.

Again he looked at the woman. She was no half insane old hag, a busybody who had meddled her way into a witchcraft trial, but a bewildered, fearful young woman who couldn't have been more than



18 or 19 years old.

Her hands were tied behind her back, pulling her bulky dress tight across her bosom. Her tangled, matted, black hair, the dirt on her face, her wrinkled disheveled clothing could not hide a great natural beauty.

But what affected Nat most, was the look on her face. It was that of a frightened, helpless animal, cornered by a vicious, heartless predator.

The self-righteous bearing of the tall man, the lack of sympathy and idle curiosity mirrored in the faces of the crowd infuriated Nat.

Impulsively he had used his paralysis ray, an instrument that was designed only as a last resort when a time traveler needed to beat a quick retreat unnoticed. While the entire gathering was in a suspended state, he had carried Abby away from the gallows, and clocked away in the time machine.

Now, completely confused, he was sitting worriedly in the warm sunshine of 18th century Mexico, wondering what to do.

Abby's approach broke his reverie. She seemed almost lost in one of his spare one-piece coveralls. She was carrying her own garments, dripping wet, on her arm. In modesty she had put her own quaint shoes on again.

Her dark hair curled wetly about her shoulders, and the exertion of bathing and washing her clothing had left a becoming flush on her cheeks.

"Feel better, Abby?" he asked in a light-hearted manner he didn't feel.

"Verily, thou art a strange one," she answered, lowering her eyes in

an almost obsequious manner. "Though the way thou useth the diminutive of my name is pleasant to my ear."

"Well, your pretty face is pleasant to my eyes, but it's certainly gotten me into a lot of trouble," Nat answered gruffly.

She looked downcast. "Truly I'm contrite if I have caused thee trouble." The penitent look on her face melted Nat's irritability.

"Let's eat," he said quickly. "You must be hungry. And while you eat, I'll try to explain what happened and maybe figure out what to do."

A week passed, and Nat still was undecided. He was puzzled by a strange restlessness that nagged at him constantly.

That is, he was puzzled until the first time he kissed her.

The difference in their backgrounds was vast. They were separated by centuries of time. But now, thrown together, facing a common fear of the past and the future, there could be only one outcome.

At the end of the first week, they were sitting on opposite sides of a beach fire. A soft breeze, blowing off the water, added a chill to the evening air. Abby rose to put another log on the fire. Nat stood up quickly to help her.

"Let me lift that, Abby," he said with an air of protection. "It's pretty heavy."

"Please, no," she answered in her quaint way. "Tis nothing. I have lifted heavier burdens than this many times."

He put his hand on her wrist. It was the first time he had touched her since he had carried her from

the gallows. For the past week he had been so preoccupied he had hardly noticed her as she had gone quietly about their impromptu camp, cooking the wild game and fish he had caught with his paralysis ray.

The feel of her soft, warm wrist in his hand thrilled him. His voice suddenly left him, as he consciously realized for the first time how beautiful she was. Her fresh innocence, her complexion, freshly tanned by the Southern sun, seemed to fill his entire being. He drew her close, kissed her full lips.

Because of her Puritan heritage, she exhibited surprise.

"Verily, Nathaniel Lyon, my people would frown on an embrace like this." Then she whispered, "But I find it most pleasant, because I have grown so very fond of thee." With that she threw her arms around him and pressed her lips to his.

Time lost its meaning, and they stood for uncounted minutes. At last she shivered. "I feel a chill, dear Nat."

"No wonder, darling," he whispered. "We've been standing here so long the fire has gone out."

That night Nat made his decision. "I can't take you back to be hanged, Abby," he said tenderly. "But at the same time I can't go back to my own time, they'd do worse than that to me."

"I understand not this time travel," Abby said thoughtfully. "If thou canst send this device to any time of thy choosing, couldst thou not spend months, or even years away and *still* get back to your own time when thou art expected?"

"That's it, Abby, that's it!" Nat

shouted, jumping to his feet. "We'll stay away a lifetime. And when we take the machine back, they won't be able to do anything that matters because we'll have had our life together! Or better yet, we'll never go back at all!"

Suddenly he sobered, dropped back to the ground beside her, taking her hands in his. "That is, if you'll marry me, Abby darling."

"Why, Nathaniel," she answered without a flicker of a smile. "That was all settled when first I yielded to thy embrace."

Nat's mouth dropped open, then he laughed, as he remembered his studies of the customs and morals of Abby's time.

"Abby, verily thou art priceless," he said delightedly in her own speech.

She gave her opinion of him, silently . . . with her lips.

"Abby," Nat finally whispered, "I'm going to give you the best honeymoon a woman ever had."

"Honeymoon? Of a truth, I know not of what thou speakest."

Nat chuckled, then kissed the end of her pert nose. "You'll see, my love, you'll see. But first we have to make you Mrs. Nathaniel Lyon. There was a time, right after the Third World War, when marriage was easy, with no questions asked. So right now, it's off to the disorganized world of the late 20th century."

And so began one of the strangest honeymoons in the history of Earth's human race.

Nat and Abby were unseen observers when Pericles ruled Greece. They visited the court of Charlemagne, walked through the streets of Rome at the height of its splen-

dor, viewed the glories and wickedness of Babylon and Baghdad, watched the artisans of old Cathay.

But fate chose their honeymoon as the time of their undoing.

Nat had believed they would be safe for the rest of their lives. He knew that detection of the time machine was virtually impossible unless their full dimensional destination were known to the TIC . . . assuming that he had been missed in the 25th century, which he believed unlikely. Sealed chronometers, installed by the TIC, would give him away if he ever returned the time machine to base. But premature discovery need be the only worry now.

As he had explained to Abby, "The power plant in these things gives off traceable radiation, provided the tracer gets close enough. But right now, tracing us would be like looking for a needle in a haystack. All we've got to watch out for is another time machine with someone aboard who might have reason to be suspicious of us."

And it happened just that way as they sat watching the original first night of a Shakespeare play. Another time machine controlled by an Arts student from Earth University appeared in an adjoining balcony. Nat flicked his machine to full power—too late! The student, an acquaintance of Nat's, had nodded in recognition.

Clocking away, Nat couldn't avoid a glum comment. "Well, the TIC probably will be after us in full force now."

Abby studied Nat's face. "Darling," she said, "Let's settle down. Why need we travel at all?"

Her calm erased Nat's concern.

"We'll do it!" he exclaimed, confident again.

NAT PARKED his new model T Ford in the garage. He walked quickly into the kitchen, kissed his wife. It was no perfunctory peck so much the practice in the times in which they lived, but a tender, passionate embrace, as if it might be their last.

"Nat, there's been someone around the house today. I'm worried," Abby finally said.

The muscles in his stomach tightened. "Maybe they've traced us. What did he look like?"

"He was tall, severe, in fact he could almost pass for old Jonathan Borden, the man who was in charge of my execution, the man who read the charges against me."

"Anton Bor!" Nat said hoarsely. "The head man of the TIC!"

Abby threw her arms around Nat, buried her head in his shoulder. Her arms held him with desperation. "Oh darling, we've been so happy these past five years. They can't separate us. I'd rather die first!"

He tipped her head back, kissed the tears that had trickled down each cheek. "If they catch us, we'll probably both die. But at least we're ready for them."

He was interrupted by a knock on the door. Through the front curtains he glimpsed a car in front of the house. A hasty look out the back revealed another one parked in the alley.

"Quick, Abby, into the basement before they use a paralysis ray," he whispered. Aloud he shouted, "Just a moment!" to the person at the

front door.

With nervous fingers Nat unlocked a heavily reinforced door in the basement. He heard a crash upstairs as the front door was battered in. At almost the same instant he swung the door open and they stepped into the time machine. With movements they had practiced many times, he tripped the activating lever and the machine vanished, leaving the hiding place Nat had built around the machine after they had bought the house several years earlier.

They weren't a moment too soon, for both felt the slight tingling of a paralysis ray. Their departure had occurred just at the split second when one of Bor's TIC men had pushed the firing stud. Even so, it clouded Nat's vision, slowed his reflexes.

"Another second and they'd have had us, Abby," he said aloud, after he had returned to normal.

She pressed her lips to his. "I hated to leave 1925, but we can start over again wherever you say," Abby whispered.

The surf crashed and boomed on the coral reef. Nat lay in the shade of a cocoanut palm, watching the white clouds scudding by overhead.

Abby came walking down the beach towards him, tanned a deep brown from head to foot, dressed as the Polynesians had dressed before Captain Cook had discovered them.

"You're every bit as beautiful as the women described in the old tales of the South Sea Islands," Nat said as she sat down beside him.

"And you're as big a flatterer as

any sailor who ever told those stories," she answered, although she was pleased by his admiration. She lay back, stretched her hands over her head with a happy look on her face. "I'm 30 years old and don't compare to our young neighbors on the other islands."

Nat rolled over, putting an arm across her waist, kissed her tenderly. "I'm the luckiest man in the world," he whispered.

She looked up, her blue eyes serious. "You don't regret giving up all you had in your own time?"

"I didn't know what true happiness was," he answered firmly. "People in the 25th century are automatons, hemmed in by rules, regulations, regimented by necessity because there are so many billions on the planet."

He kissed her again, as the warm trade winds ruffled her dark hair—and they forgot about time.

But they didn't have real peace of mind. Fear of the TIC and the tenaciousness of Anton Bor was always present.

Nat and Abby had learned the language thoroughly through the time machine's hypno-translator, then picked an uninhabited little island in the atoll. After weeks of sun bathing, they had let themselves be discovered by the natives in their outrigger canoes.

The natives quietly accepted Nat and Abby as slightly different, but members of their informal society, for it was inconceivable to them that any but their own kind could be living on one of the atolls.

"This is a heavenly life," Abby sighed, stretching out on the sand one day. "Cocoanuts, breadfruit,

seafood, all for the taking. I'll hate to leave it."

"But I'm afraid we must," Nat said slowly, "And soon, too. We don't dare stay too long in one place."

From the islands, Nat and Abby drifted on from century to century, usually stopping in post-war periods when both governments and populations were preoccupied with constructive social progress.

It was during the American reconstruction period following World War III that they again were tracked down by the TIC.

Nat was an engineer, rebuilding shattered Seattle, when one day he spotted a tall, angular mechanic, newly hired on the project—and unmistakably Anton Bor!

Ten years before, Nat and Abby had cached the time machine a hundred miles away. Now, as they winged through the night in their private helicopter, Nat groaned at the futility of matching wits with scientists of century twenty-five.

"I don't understand it, Abby! There's atomic radiation lingering here from the war. We're working on a reactor for the city's power plant, yet Bor and his TIC manage to track us down."

"Perhaps, Dear Nat," Abby said, lapsing into her original old New England speech, as she often did when thinking deeply, "He followeth us by inductive methods rather than through his science."

There was a moment's silence. Nat broke it to say, "We've been doing the obvious. Well then, our next stop *must* be different!"

They cruised silently toward the hiding place of their time machine until they saw the faint glow of a

radioactive crater. A missile missing its target, had gouged a large hole in the mountainside. Nat had hidden the time machine in a cave as close as possible to the crater to lessen the chance of detection by the TIC or casual explorers.

"Just in case they *have* spotted our machine, and someone is waiting for us, we're going to take the last few miles on foot," Nat said, checking his paralysis gun.

He set the heli down in a clearing and they started cautiously forward on foot, working their way up the mountainside, with all the tension of a hunter stalking game.

A hundred yards from the cave entrance, they spotted a campfire. They approached stealthily, and finally were able to make out the shadowy form of an old man, apparently a war hermit who had set up a mountain retreat.

At the very outset of the Third World War, the expression "take to the hills" had become a reality to many. Afterwards, when a prostrated world had begun painful reconstruction, lone men and women, and sometimes couples, continued to roam through the forests and deserts of Earth. Fugitives from fear in the beginning, many had held to the nomadic existence, liking their new individuality.

"He may be a TIC agent in disguise," Nat whispered.

"Why not use thy paralysis ray now?" Abby whispered back, "And not take chances."

Nat nodded, and silently they crept forward. When they finally were in range, Nat raised his weapon and pressed the stud.

The hermit didn't move a muscle. The dancing flames of the fire

cast strange shadows over the camp site, reflecting off his shelter half, lighting the coffee pot sitting on a rock.

Swiftly, without fear of detection, Nat and Abby strode forward, towards the cave and their escape.

As they reached the entrance they heard a derisive laugh. Whirling sharply, they saw the "hermit" rising slowly to his feet, a late 20th century weapon in his hand.

Horror stricken, Nat glanced at the paralysis ray in his own hand, the thought flashing across his mind that the tiny atomic battery had given out.

"No, your weapon is still good! You just didn't count on our thoroughness!" the man laughed, using the vernacular of Nat's own time. "I've been waiting here a year, while Bor combed the whole area for you."

"Lord, Abby!" Nat gasped hoarsely. "They've developed a neutralizing field, something they were experimenting with when I left."

The agent laughed coarsely in agreement. "Just come away from the cave while I put in a call to Inspector Bor!"

They moved towards the fire, and it was then that the agent got a good look at Abby.

His eyes moved slowly from her head to her feet, taking in every detail of her full figure. "Some dish you have there Lyon. I'm beginning to understand why you checked out on us!"

Nat was surprised at the agent's obvious lechery. Such animal reaction had been largely overcome by the 24th century.

The agent snickered, recognizing Nat's surprise. "You asked for it, Lyon, when you tried to paralyze me! There's still a little problem to be solved in this matter of neutralizing a paralysis ray. Right now I'm morally drunk, haven't an inhibition in the world." He licked his lips. "Come here, girl. I want to see you close up—real close!"

Abby had drawn back, horrified, but now she leaned toward Nat and started talking in the ancient Greek they had learned during their honeymoon. "Let me try to seduce him, Nat. Maybe we can get away before Bor gets here!"

"What's she mumbling about?" the agent demanded suspiciously.

"She's talking Greek," Nat explained. "She doesn't understand the Anglo-oriental combination we speak in the 25th century."

The agent's eyes flitted back to Abby, noting her dark hair, her even features, moving hungrily over her figure again.

"Come here!" he ordered huskily, motioning with his hands.

Abby stepped hesitantly forward, a perfectly simulated look of puzzlement on her face. Nat stepped forward at the same time, hoping to get closer to the guard.

"Stay where you are," the agent snarled, waving his weapon at Nat.

Abby looked around at Nat with a cautioning expression on her face as the agent moved slowly towards her.

Careful to keep the gun pointed at Nat, the agent put out a hand, slid his arm around her waist.

Nat could tell by her quivering shoulders that Abby was revolted by the man's touch, although she managed a faint, inviting smile.

Nat was poised, ready to move in when the agent dropped his guard. Then he suddenly felt stark terror as he saw the man pull out a small paralysis gun.

"I think I'll immobilize you, Lyon, while I get better acquainted with your girl friend," he rasped.

Nat jumped, but the ray gun caught him in mid-air.

His thoughts as he regained consciousness later were an agony of confusion. Feeling the familiar sensation of a time machine in motion, he filled in the blank about what must have happened to Abby. Sick with resignation he opened his eyes, then sat up quickly, blinking in disbelief, for Abby was sitting at the controls of the machine.

Her blouse was soiled and ripped, her hair mussed and Nat thought he saw blood on her skirt. But she was humming a tune as she checked the dials.

"Abby," Nat cried. "Are you all right?"

Her smile said more than words. "You seem to forget, my dear husband," she said happily, coming over to him. "We tender New England pioneers learned a few things about self protection."

"What happened?"

Abby shuddered. "It wasn't pleasant, having that beast paw me, but my apparent willingness threw him off guard. About the time he started ripping my clothing off, I used the little dagger we picked up in Renaissance Italy." Suddenly a sob broke through her artificial gaiety and she was in Nat's arms, her control completely gone. Her body racked with sobs, tears streaming down her face.

"They're getting closer each time, Abby," Nat said reflectively. "Next time they probably will get us."

"But we're still together," Abby said fiercely. "And, if we're careful, they may never find us again."

Years passed. Nat and Abby's youthful happiness flowered into the contentment of those who have lived their allotted years in wisdom. Nat had retired many years before, and he and Abby were content with simple pleasures.

Evenings they sat together on the porch of their Florida cottage, enjoying the ocean breeze and each other's presence.

It was on such an evening that their world came to an end.

While they sat as usual, reminiscing, Nat wondered aloud if Anton Bor still lived. He scarcely had uttered the question before the grass on the lawn seemed to shimmer slightly, and a time machine materialized before their startled eyes. Its door burst open and three men sprang out with weapons ready.

After them came the halting, decrepit figure of an ancient Anton Bor, a paralysis gun wavering unsteadily in his shriveled hands.

The shock was so great that Nat and Abby sat completely unmoving and the full power of Bor's weapon caught them where they sat.

**N**AT AND ABBY stood before the Judgement Tribunal in the 25th century. Mere punishment had long since passed out of existence. A law breaker had his case reviewed by a board of psychiatrists, lawyers, sociologists, even historians. A person's past was laid bare, in an effort to find out *why* aber-

rant action had been taken.

The board recommended remedial action that varied greatly from case to case.

"We find you guilty," the spokesman finally stated, "of Time Meddling, an offence that can have the gravest consequences. In this case, our problem is two-fold. First, we must correct the original action. Second, we must do all in our power to discourage actions such as you have taken.

"With this in mind, you, personally, will see corrective measures carried out. Anton Bor, who worked so self-sacrificingly over so many years to bring this case to a close, will supervise the correction."

This time Nat was prepared. The scene was exactly as he remembered it. But now the gallows was empty, the spectators frozen statues.

"The paralysis ray's effects last for a little more than five minutes," Bor said with the coldness of a machine. "We have that much time to accomplish our job."

Bound and helpless, Nat heard Bor bark a command.

He saw an assistant pick up the paralysed form of his wife, dressed again in 17th century style, and walk out across the valley. He placed Abby on the gallows, put the rope around her neck and moved quickly back to the woods.

"Now we'll watch it," Bor said with cold finality. "I think my ancestor out there, Jonathan Borden would be proud of me," he added with a trace of smugness.

*"... as we watched, it seemed suddenly our vision blurred and there was the smell of brimstone in the air and when we could see again, there in the place of comely young Abigaile Goodyear, was a wrinkled gruesome crone, more like unto a spectre, with gray hair and wrinkled visage, whose true age could only be guessed at."*

—WITCHCRAFT IN EARLY AMERICA

VOLUME II, CHAPTER 4

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## A CHAT WITH THE EDITOR *(Continued from page 5)*

less quest for new worlds to conquer. This can only be regarded as admirable; the pity of it is that, in spite of the cosmic dimensions of the setting . . . the theme is fundamentally monotonous . . . while the human elements do not differ from those to be found in any average novel. Science fiction may stimulate our imaginations by postulating developments in the future, but it can add nothing to our knowledge or understanding of human nature and it is with the latter that all thinking men are chiefly concerned."

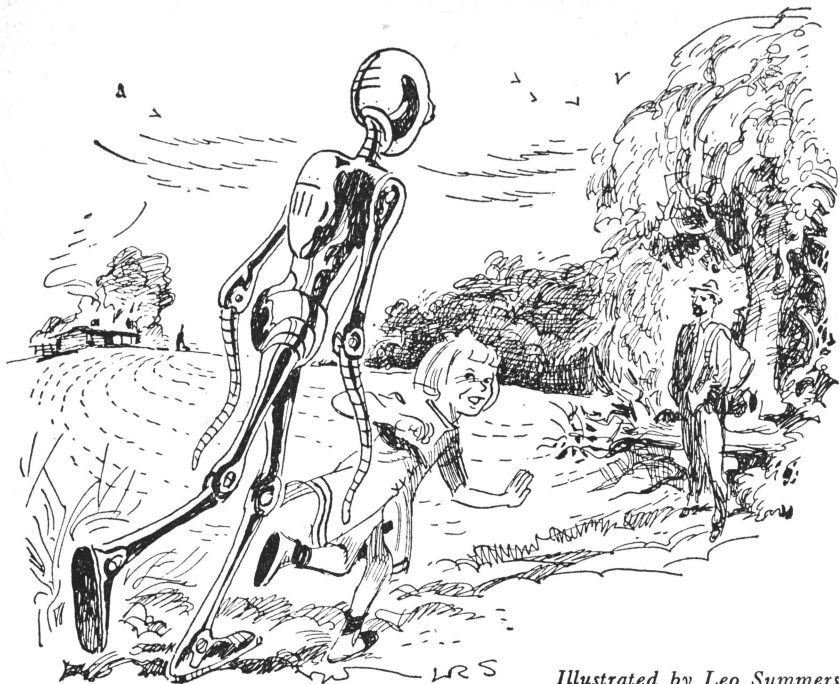
The really lamentable thing about science fiction is that lots of people—certainly including our quoted British writer—don't know much about it, don't know that science fiction can be wonderful reading about Mankind, chemistry, economics, cybernetics, semantics, philosophy, physics, history, politics, evolution, etcetera, etcetera, ad infinitum!—*Or*—that serious minded scientists, doctors, lawyers, engineers, students, politicians, people, etcetera, etcetera, ad infinitum, *do* read it! —jlk



# What Is Your Science I. Q.?

THIS LITTLE QUIZ seems to have caught on very well with science fiction readers, but now and then we get letters saying the questions are either too easy or too difficult. Counting five for each correct answer, see what *your* score is and then let us know whether it is "tough" or "tender" for your knowledge of things science-wise. Answers are on page 119.

1. When a circle of sunlight can be seen around the edge of the moon during an eclipse, it is known as an \_\_\_\_\_ eclipse.
2. What is the general term used when referring to all the isotopes of all the elements?
3. An astronomical unit is equal to \_\_\_\_\_ miles.
4. How long does an average radium atom take to decay?
5. A thermocouple is used to measure the \_\_\_\_\_ of a star.
6. Which is the brightest of the asteroids, the only one it might be possible to see with the naked eye?
7. The average sunshine energy received by a square mile of the Earth's surface is about \_\_\_\_\_ kilowatts.
8. Who was the first man to launch a liquid fuel rocket?
9. The \_\_\_\_\_ unit is used to express the length of light waves.
10. What have Neutrinos, Photons, and Gravitons in common?
11. Sunspots occur in \_\_\_\_\_ year cycles.
12. What is the name given to a luminous circle parallel to the horizon at the altitude of the sun?
13. Our galaxy measures an estimated \_\_\_\_\_ light years across.
14. The highest known speed of a star is that of a double star in the constellation Cygnus. What is its speed?
15. The pressure at the core of the Earth is estimated to equal about \_\_\_\_\_ pounds per square inch.
16. Who was the man who did most to promote the idea of the Martian "canals"?
17. Jet engine noise is measured at between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ decibels.
18. How much would a 150 pound Earthman weigh on Mars?
19. The Milky Way and the Andromeda Nebula are both \_\_\_\_\_, which are visible to the naked eye from the United States.
20. How many moons have been discovered, so far, in our solar system?



Illustrated by Leo Summers

# INHIBITION

*Regardless of scientific attainment, any culture is vulnerable to inhibition. And Saxon was a good agent; no culture nor individual would sway his loyal appraisal . . .*

BY JAMES CAUSEY

## PLANETFALL.

Here the forest was green and cool. A soft, damp wind promised rain. The colonists moved down the ramp, staring at the crew members piling crates of supplies in the meadow beyond.

Frowns. Then whispers.

Saxon glanced up. His nostrils flared. "Hurry," he told the crewmen, and came forward, beaming. He was tired. It showed in his feverish, too-bright smile as he said, "Afraid Engineering's a little behind schedule. They'll be here tomorrow morning to erect your city. Tonight you'll have to rough it."

Reactions varied. The women murmured and moved closer to their men. Some smiled. One man thoughtfully eyed the mounting pyramid of supplies.

"You're getting a choice world, Jarl," Saxon said, clapping him on the shoulder. "Survey spent thirty years here, balancing the ecology, wiping out the bugs and carnivores. Eden." Saxon tasted the word like wine.

Jarl Madsen's face was stone. "Aren't they all named Eden?"

From the forest came a chattering bark, like anthropomorphic laughter. Saxon shivered, remembering the thing that chattered, the three-inch fangs and the talons. "Hardly," he lied. "That, incidentally, was a Narl. Herbivore, very harmless."

Madsen walked past him, towards the supplies.

Saxon moved among the colonists, shaking hands, congratulating, speaking of green fields and good crops and a virgin planet where every man could carve an empire. These last moments were the worst, when you said goodbye,

knowing that thirty percent of them would be dead within the week. He saw Madsen opening a supply case. *Damn him! Just three more minutes!*

The last crew member dumped his load and hurried into the airlock. Saxon started casually after him, too late. Madsen stood there, his grin taut, nailed on.

"Primitive pre-fab shelters," he said thickly. "Axes and seeds! The city was a lie. We're on our own, is that it? *Why—*"

Saxon's palm flashed and Madsen fell writhing. There were shouts, hands clawing at him as he tore free, sprinting for the ship.

*Always running*, he thought bitterly. *I'm getting old.*

He walked through the silent corridors of the ship, a lonely figure in the black uniform of the Inhibition Corps, and once he stared through the porthole at Eden XXI, a mottled sphere receding into the star-frosted night. His mouth twisted. Conceive a colony in fear, breed it in terror. Watch it adapt, grow. If it grows too fast, hurt it. Hurt it with disease, famine, dictatorship. If it keeps growing—destroy it.

The captain came down the corridor and stood at respectful attention before the black uniform. "Stereo call, Commander. Prime Base."

Saxon slowly went to his cabin. The stereo panel was flashing steady crimson to designate top priority and he restrained a savage impulse to shut the thing off. He slumped in the control chair, and the tri-di image of a man at a desk slowly coalesced. It was a granite-featured

old man with eyes like blue ice, and Saxon's head snapped sharply erect. It was Primus Gant, Corps Director. At ninety parsecs Gant's features were slightly hazed, but his voice was clear, sharp as a sword.

"Report, Commander."

"My extrapolation went through an hour ago. Also my resignation."

Nothing moved in Gant's face or his eyes. Saxon said stiffly, "Planet-fall uneventful. Area inimical. Initial shock conception, probable God-betrayal mythology by fourth generation. Those things in the forest should get thirty percent of them the first week. Weaponless, they'll run. The two to one female ratio should make for an agricultural matriarchy by the sixth generation. Recommend intermittent check at that time." He took a slow angry breath. "Why didn't we give them weapons?"

Gant's smile was acid. "Because we haven't yet tried an agricultural matriarchy, Commander. Because the lower the initial survival factor, the slower the culture development. Getting squeamish?"

Saxon said doggedly, "They didn't have a chance."

"Neither did twenty million people on Earth in the last atomic war." The Director's voice was soft. "All colonists volunteer. Some have a vision. Others have a latent power drive that stasis can't satisfy. They're misfits regardless, potential threats to stasis. Remember your last leave, Commander? I believe you met my son."

Saxon nodded curtly. He remembered the Director's son as a quiet, soft-spoken youth with the yearning for far places in his eyes.

"I had hoped he would qualify

for the Corps." Gant looked suddenly old, tired. "Instead he's volunteering for Colonial Service. Did you ever lose a son, Commander?"

They stared at each other across the humming emptiness and Saxon finally whispered, "I'm sorry."

"Stasis is all we can afford," the Director said numbly. "Man can't have Utopia yet. Because he's still—Man. Perhaps he'll never have it. But by God he'll try! Resignation withdrawn?"

Saxon nodded. He could not speak.

"I'm glad. The ship's captain had orders to burn you down had you refused." Gant's face was wooden. "Inhibition agents never quit, they just die in harness. You'll take the lifeboat to Eden XI for sixth generation check. Good hunting, Commander."

The image faded. Saxon sat for a long time, staring into the darkness.

**E**DEN XI was three parsecs distant, near Algol. For the next ten hours Saxon paced the marvelously equipped lifeboat and absorbed data from the robot recorder. He stared at the hard crystal ache of the stars and thought of the Director's son. He thought about the shining cities of Earth, and about stasis.

Stasis meant—control.

It meant control of a billion people, a rigid planetary economy. It meant the Assassination branch of the Corps. Assassination (carefully contrived to appear accidental) took care of those few malcontents who were either too smart or too

stupid to sign up for colonization. It meant a gradual weeding out of the unsane, the power-mad, it meant learning the true meaning of sanity and peace and racial brotherhood.

And it meant the stagnation of science, a thick film of dust gathering on the textbooks of the military tactician, and warships rotting at anchor. It meant the white spire of the Stasis Administration Center at New Washington, and the words graven over the golden portals:

*Know thyself, Man. Or die!*

Was the dream worth it?

Or was Man doomed to die like a brawling ape, playing with lightning?

Saxon could not answer.

Meanwhile the colonies had to be inhibited. One interplanetary war could smash the fragile structure so painstakingly built over the last few hundred years. This was the turning point, the final crossroads of Man's destiny.

Saxon smiled bleakly.

Ultimately there would be a colony they could neither inhibit or destroy. The adaptive ultimate. That colony would be Man no longer, but Homo Superior.

But by then, it wouldn't matter.

The lifeboat came in on the night side of Eden XI, and hung above the blue mountains like a basking shark. Saxon checked his coordinates. This had been the original landing site, almost two hundred years ago. He switched the infra-view on maximum, and began to cruise in widening spirals. These sixth generation hops were usually routine. If nomadic, a few political shifts could help warp the culture

into a set pattern. A simple matter to play the visiting deity, pick one warped psychotic, and invest him with power. A dictatorship was by far the best way of inhibiting a young culture. Agricultural city-states were almost as easy. Designate a particular crop as sacred, kill the rotation program, impoverish the land, introduce serfdom.

By dawn, Saxon found what he was looking for. A row of cleared fields and a farmhouse. He reconnoitered a hundred miles farther and frowned. There was no clump of dwellings, no sign of a village trading community.

He brought the ship down in a forest three miles away from the farmhouse and camouflaged it to look like a great mossy boulder. He spent the entire morning testing the atmosphere and the soil with a savage patience. In the early years of the Corps, virus mutations had taken a fearful toll of intermittent spotters.

Finally he discarded his uniform and selected a pair of homespuns from the ship's wardrobe locker. Under the homespuns reposed his utility kit, a miniature arsenal.

Late that afternoon he emerged from the forest and stood at the edge of the cleared fields, a weatherbeaten itinerant, obviously willing to chop wood for a meal. Abruptly his jaw muscle twitched.

The scene was pastoral, perfect.

The man, plowing the south forty. The little girl, playing in the shadow of the sleepy farmhouse.

But no beast pulled that plow. A giant of a man with power and intelligence stamped on his bronze features pushed the plow by hand, in a die-straight furrow.

The little girl was blonde and elfin. She wore sandals, her tunic was brief and plain. She was playing follow-the-leader—

With a robot.

The robot was tall. The sun struck sparks from its steel carapace as it lumbered after the girl. Saxon stood frozen as she came flying towards him in a burst of tossing blond hair and laughter, as she saw him and came to a dead halt.

"Hello," Saxon said. He tried to smile.

"Hello." Her inflection was slurred. After six generations, naturally. Her blue eyes sparkled. "Foot-sore, stranger?"

The words had the cadence of a ritual greeting. Saxon stared at the robot and said carefully, "Yes."

"He's only a primer model," she said, following his gaze. "Next year when I'm twelve Father promised to install secondary circuits. My name's Veena. What's yours?"

Saxon introduced himself, as the giant at the plow came forward. His white smile was a benediction, his voice a lambent organ. "Welcome, rover. Haven't seen one of you in months. I'm Lang. Agricultural hobbyist. You'll stay?"

His tone was almost pleading. Saxon nodded inarticulately, followed them towards the farmhouse. His hands were shaking.

The interior of the house was—dimensionless.

For a moment Saxon thought he was still outside. A silver brook tinkled through the mossy carpet that was the floor. The south wall was a golden vista of ripe wheat rippling in the warm breeze that ruffled his hair. Birds twittered in the sun-flecked foliage overhead.

"Nice house," Saxon said numbly.

Lang's smile was different. "A bit pretentious, I'm afraid. Grandfather built it right after the landing. We've been too lazy to do much remodeling. A remarkable man, Grandfather."

That explained it, Saxon thought in relief. One titan in an infant colony, warping it into a Utopian mold, passing on the heritage of his genius. How long, he wondered coldly, before they built starships and returned to demolish the Earth which had exiled them?

"It must be wonderful to be a rover," Veena said wistfully. "Lang, can I go with him when he leaves?"

"You haven't completed Basic Ecology. Mentor's waiting for your afternoon session."

Veena pouted and went outside to her robot. Lang grinned. "The precocious brat's beginning to ask him questions he can't answer. Soon I'll have to install a few more circuits."

Saxon shivered. *Regardless of scientific attainment, any culture is vulnerable to inhibition.*

So said his agent's handbook.

Later he met Veena's mother, Merl, a handsome woman with calm gray eyes who served them dinner by firelight. It was a good dinner. These colonists seemed like good people. A shame they qualified for inhibition.

Gently, Saxon began to probe.

In only six generations the colonists has scattered throughout the entire hemisphere. Although the matrix of their culture seemed to be the individual family unit, they lived according to whim. Some lived in small communal groups. Some

lived alone. Some, by choice, were wanderers, rovers. They had science. Their philosophy seemed nebulous, based on a benevolent ecology, brotherhood with all living things.

Saxon frowned.

Six generations ago, the ecology on this world hardly had been benevolent for man. This area of the continent had been a steaming marsh, swarming with hungry saurians. Now it was all meadow and forest.

Saxon said thoughtfully, "Have you ever felt the need for organization? For a leader?"

He leaned back and waited for the seed to sprout. Two years ago on Eden VIII, near Rigel, he had said the same thing to a sixth generation shaman, and it took scarcely a month for the shaman to start an intra-tribal war.

But now the seed fell on sterile ground. Lang said, "I don't understand. Any problem which cannot be solved at family level is referred to the annual council."

"A leader." Saxon was patient. "One strong man to represent everybody. To settle all problems as he sees fit?"

"Remember, Father?" Veena prodded. "Those arboreal cannibals Grandfather used to mention? They had a nomadic tribal culture based on brute strength."

Lang nodded somberly. "Good analogy. The most favorable extrapolation indicated a racial life expectancy of only ten thousand years. Their emotional stability index was nil, they would eventually have destroyed themselves. The first generation decided it would be more merciful to exterminate them.

An unwise decision, I think."

He launched into a spirited ethnological discussion with Veena, and Saxon sat, numbly.

They had no emotional insecurity to feed, no power-hunger. No herd instinct to pervert, nothing to utilize as destruction potential.

No cultural weakness.

The room they gave him was small and comfortable. For a time he lay on the sleeping hammock, considering the situation. He was beginning to like them. That in itself, was dangerous.

The house was very still.

He got quietly out of the hammock and crept towards the door. He had to get back to the lifeboat, to feed facts into the monitor.

One thing disturbed him.

According to his agent's handbook, family-group anarchies didn't need inhibition.

He was halfway across the plowed field when Mentor's iron voice said, "Good evening."

Moonfire glimmered on metal. The robot stood impassively before him. Saxon said slowly, "I was just going for a walk."

"You are our guest: I shall walk with you."

"I prefer to walk alone."

"Guests prefer company. The house of Lang must observe the basic amenities."

Was there a hint of sardonicism in Mentor's voice?

They walked along the furrows, man and robot. Saxon felt beneath his shirt for the utility kit. He kept his voice level.

"Am I a prisoner?"

"You are a guest."

"Did Veena tell you I might try to escape?"

A pause, while relays clicked silently.

"That is classified information."

Saxon's fingers were steady as they touched his tiny blaster. Benevolent anarchy indeed! He said carefully, "Do the colonists resent their exile?"

Another pause. Mentor's voice was a flat drone. "The concept is meaningless, the question invalid."

*Like hell it is*, thought Saxon, and fired.

A cold blue wash of energy illuminated the robot. For a moment Saxon was blinded. When vision returned he saw Mentor standing immobile, unscathed.

"Please go back to bed," the robot said.

Saxon went back to bed.

**N**EXT MORNING Veena brought him breakfast. She seemed sad, withdrawn. "Lang and Merl went to visit Aunt Tarsi. She lives near the Equator. They won't be back till evening."

"How" Saxon had trouble breathing. "How did they go?"

"By transmitter, of course." She indicated a large shimmering platform in one corner. "Oh, I'm sorry. I forgot rovers hate the mention of any type of gadgetry." Her eyes grew impossibly earnest. "But we try to achieve some kind of balance, really. Once when I suggested that Father let Mentor help him plow the fields, he got furious."

Saxon restrained wild laughter. First the robot, invulnerable to atomic energy, now a matter transmitter.

Yet they plowed their own fields. "Veena," he said.

She looked up at him.

"Why did you tell Mentor to keep me here?"

She bowed her bright head. Her blue eyes were brimming.

"Why, Veena?"

"Because I like you," she sniffled. "I wanted you to s-stay." Abruptly she fled from the room.

He stood bleakly looking after her. After a time he went outside and struck across the field towards the forest.

This time the robot did not stop him.

*Do not allow the emotional charm of any culture, nor any individual of that culture, to sway your inhibition appraisal.*

In the narrow confines of the lifeboat he repeated the quotation grimly. Good inhibition agents are inflexible. He was a good agent.

For almost an hour he fed data into the monitor tapes. Then he touched a stud and closed his eyes, waiting for judgment.

"Agricultural family-group societies are normally stagnant," the monitor droned. "Such cultures, regardless of technological level, do not warrant inhibition of any type. Reference: twelfth generation check on Eden V."

The room spun. Saxon whispered, "But they have cybernetics, matter transmitters."

"Regardless of technological level." The monitor was adamant.

This was madness. Saxon wiped his forehead and said, "Assuming geographical isolation no barrier to united group action in the event of emergency."

"United action is incompatible with family-group."



"Assume and advise!"

Relays chattered. Abruptly the entire panel flashed crimson. The monitor spoke one word.

"Annihilation."

Saxon referred to his Inhibition handbook. He had never annihilated a culture before.

One hour later he went into the forest. Birds sang overhead. The sun dappled him in light and shadow. He stalked a small furry quadruped that squealed at him from a log and brought it down with his sonic pistol.

Back in the lifeboat he watched the animal regain consciousness in an air-tight tank, and very slowly he pulled a lever. A green vapor rolled into the tank. The quadruped screamed. The green vapor fed.

It was the penultimate in spore-dom, yet it was more than a spore. It had virus characteristics, and its propagation rate was almost mathematically impossible. There was no known defense, and once used, the entire planet was forever un-touchable. To Saxon's knowledge it had been utilized only once on Eden I.

At dusk, he took the lifeboat up fifty miles. He released the spores in a widening spiral, and finally jettisoned the tank. He went into an orbit at ten thousand miles, and waited.

It would take approximately a week.

It was a long week. Saxon slept little. He paced the cabin. He looked at the stars and thought about a blue-eyed waif with tears in her voice, begging him to stay.

After a week the life-boat came down at the edge of a grassy plain. Saxon took a sample of the con-

taminated atmosphere to determine propagation rate.

The atmosphere was pure.

Some freak of expansion. One uncontaminated spot in a hemisphere of death.

He selected another location. Then another. That evening he close the coordinates of his original landing site and tested the air again.

Finally he went outside the air-lock. He breathed deeply, and the air was fresh and sweet, it smelled of forest and cool streams and evening dew. In the blue dusk birds twittered. A small marsupial very much like a squirrel scampered to the safety of a tree and scolded him.

Saxon began walking.

At the edge of the forest he saw the familiar plowed field. The farmhouse was a friendly beacon in the twilight.

"Hello," Veena said. She stood at the edge of the forest. She was smiling. "Welcome home, rover."

For the next few days Saxon was the perfect guest. He argued philosophical abstractions with the family by firelight; by day he hiked in the woods with Veena and listened to Mentor give her lessons. He asked questions.

"Veena, do you know what a microorganism is?"

"Benevolent or malignant?"

"Malignant. A plague."

She pursed her lips. "Organic or cultural?"

"Organic of course."

"Bacteria." Veena shrugged.

"Quite a few of the first generation died immediately after the landing. Until they adapted. Until they analyzed the basic metabolism of the planet's dominant life-forms,

and constructed a neutralizer."

"A neutralizer?"

"A protective shell of ionized particles," she said patiently, "keyed to the individual body-chemistry."

"Classified information," Mentor droned.

Saxon licked his lips. "You mentioned cultural microorganisms?"

"Much more deadly. I call them that, but Lang says I'm being semantically unsound. War, for example. Racial inferiority. To date we haven't found a cure." She broke off, and her eyes were shining wet.

"But you don't have wars," Saxon said.

"No."

"Then?"

"We have a—ghetto," the girl said slowly. "I can't tell you about it. Perhaps soon—"

Abruptly she changed the subject.

Slowly, Saxon's defenses began to crumble.

To all intents he was now a member of Lang's household, Veena's adopted big brother.

Big brother—or pet?

It did not really matter.

**O**N THE fourth day he went back to the lifeboat. He remembered his graduation day, the crash of the Corps anthem, and the pledge. *I do faithfully swear to uphold the ideals of Man, to use this vested power for the absolute good of Earth. I will not shrink from any cup of duty, regardless of how bitter. I will guard stasis with my life, and the lives of innocent people if need be, people*

*whose only crime may be that they are potential threats to stasis—*

He tinkered with the ship's reactor for an hour. Then he ran.

Behind him the lifeboat dissolved in a white blossom of flame.

Farewell the cold stars and the ache and the loneliness. Farewell the destruction of newborn colonies to secure the rotting stagnancy of Earth.

He would have a great many bad nights, but he was used to bad nights. He thought of Veena and his stride quickened. She would be a beautiful woman.

They were waiting for him back at the farm house, Lang, Veena and Merl. They were staring at the dark pyre of smoke in the forest. Saxon took a deep breath and squared his shoulders. "I've got a confession to make—"

They weren't listening. Lang said quietly, "You were right, Veena. He may qualify."

"Come." Merl took her husband's arm. "Let's call the Council."

They went inside. Saxon looked at Veena. He moistened his lips. "You knew," he said.

She nodded. There was a queer adult maturity about her as she said, "Wait. They're calling an emergency Council meeting to decide if you're fit."

"Fit," Saxon said. Coldly, it seeped in. To survive? To be a playmate, a slave? "It's been a game," he said, grasping her shoulders. "You've known all along."

"They're taking the transmitter to the Landing Site now," she said. "Would you like to watch?"

Watch judgment of the outcasts on one of those who had marooned

them? Why not?

Lang and Merl were no longer in the house. Veena touched a silver stud in one corner, and one side of the room dissolved from a vista of golden wheat to a grassy amphitheatre. There were people assembled in the clearing. Lang and Merl stood on a mossy dais, making a speech.

He saw the ship.

It was a giant silver ovoid, fretted with strange vanes, pockmarked by the red cancer of rust. Towering forest patriarchs guarded that ship like a woodland shrine. A ship that had never been born on Earth. An alien ship.

Understanding came, and a quiet horror.

He lurched away from the screen, away from Veena. He was outside now, and running. He was a good Inhibition agent, he had been conditioned to the shock of alien concepts for half his lifetime, but the ground reeled beneath him as he ran and he could feel the hot trickle of blood where he had bitten through his lip to keep from screaming.

Aliens.

From *outside*.

Homo Superior, treating his ape-brother with an hospitable contempt. Playing their inscrutable game.

The lifeboat came down almost in front of him.

It came down with a whining snarl and settled into the plowed field. The airlock opened. Primus Gant stepped out. His blue eyes were very cold and he was smiling.

"Report, Commander."

Years of conditioned reflex brought him erect, made him

whisper, "Mission unsuccessful." He swayed, almost fell. Gant held him.

"Easy, lad. We got the blowup a few minutes ago. It took us awhile to home in on the distress transmitter in your utility kit." He chuckled at Saxon's blank stare. "Whenever an agent's ship is destroyed his utility belt automatically functions as a distress signal."

Saxon shook his head painfully. "You've been waiting?"

"We started ten days ago when your monitor gave out with the annihilation alarm." He eyed Saxon keenly. "Just how bad is it?"

Saxon told him. Gant's face turned a dirty white.

"Aliens," he said thickly. "They probably murdered the original colony. You've come through nicely, lad. It may mean promotion." He turned into the ship. "Come on."

"Wait." Saxon's voice was a dry whisper. "You're not going to—"

"Demolition," Gant said. "I've got a task force up there that can crack a planet. Let's go, Commander."

*I will not shrink from any cup of duty—*

"Please," Saxon said huskily. "I don't believe they're inimical to Man. They're altruists."

"So?"

"They're benevolent," Saxon pleaded. "Both races can live together!"

"Don't be a fool," Gant grunted, and turned into the airlock.

Saxon leapt.

One palm came down hard at the base of the Director's skull.

*(Continued on page 117)*



*Illustrated by Paul Orban*

## **The York Problem**

*Warfare, diplomacy, art, music, science, religion—have all failed to secure peace for the world. But still there is hope for Mankind. Another experiment remains: change the color line—and let's see what happens . . .*

**BY HERBERT D. KASTLE**

THEY SAT around the table, thirteen men dressed in the prescribed blue of their office. They spoke quietly, without tension, and they all seemed alike. Commissioner Dobu summed up this meeting of the Earth Council of Prevention and Correction of Non-Conformity.

"It is to be regretted," he said, "that the juvenile delinquency problem remains unsolved in York. It is also to be noted, and included in the local reports of the sector captains, that the problem has existed some six hundred years, since 3046, speaking in general figures. Therefore, the fault lies not with us—though this point is to be hinted at rather than stated per se, Peaceful Sirs."

The council members accepted his aside, with brief nods and briefer smiles, for the problem of York was nothing to smile at.

Dobu cleared his throat and continued. "Since the Federated Galactic Bill of Inherent Human Rights forbids psychiatric treatment or syndromic surgery against an individual's wishes, and since the people of York under the fanatic tutorship of their church masters consider psychiatry a sacrilege, there is no easy solution—no humane solution. But people who have refused all advice, aid and education for six hundred years no longer deserve humane treatment. Therefore, as we have done on so many other occasions, and as has been done by our predecessors, we present what we feel is the only solution. Namely, that York as a community, and the people of York as a whole, be eliminated in whatever manner the Federated Gal-

actic Council sees fit. Sterilization appears to be the method most suitable. But even euthanasia would not be out of order."

Mala Wang yawned as she read the commissioner's report. It was like all the others she'd sent to Galactic Council in the four years she'd been with the CPCNC. And nothing had ever happened; not unless you counted the Report-Received flashes.

She inserted a fresh strip into the feeder, worked the keys efficiently, and began sending. "Federated Galactic Council, Centauri Two, Code CPCNC-Earth. Most Peaceful Sirs: In the meeting of July, 3646, the problem of York, its adult inhabitants, and more particularly its juvenile delinquents . . ."

Some forty minutes later, she was finished. She shut off the feeder, opened the ejector, and waited. Before she'd finished buffing the nails on her left hand, the ejector began clicking. "Report Received" emerged on the tape. Mala shrugged and pushed back her chair, but another series of clicks stopped her.

"Urgently request operator stand by for results emergency session, Federated Galactic Council, being called at this time. Business: Continuing reports of CPCNC-Earth on York Sector."

Mala stared at the tape, and slowly her eyes grew wide and her lips parted. Then she threw the inter-departmental switch and rang Commissioner Dobu. As soon as Dobu's face materialized on the screen, she said, "Peaceful Sir! I've just received a message that indicates the Galactic Council is go-

ing to take action on your reports!"

A half-hour later, the Earth Council of Prevention and Correction of Non-Conformity was reconvened, waiting for the Galactic Council's decision. They were all wondering whether it would be sterilization or euthanasia.

**J**OHN STEVENS was irritable. He'd been that way for weeks now, or was it months? Anyway, life was getting to be a foul-blooded pain!

He saw the empty can, kicked it, watched it bounce along the cracked pavement. When it stopped bouncing, he was again faced with his problem: What to do on a hot July afternoon?

He considered going down to Frank's Vizio Palace, but decided against it. Not that he was afraid of the Sinais, but it was too hot to invade enemy territory alone. Besides, he had brained all this month's vizios and new ones wouldn't be in for at least a week. So he leaned against the tenement's warped wall and looked for more cans to kick. On a day like this, he thought, a kid could almost wish vacation was over and school back in operation.

Then he saw Pete Smith and waved a languid hand. "How's the pure-blood?" he asked.

"Living," Pete answered. "And I can see Mr. Aryan's doing all right for—"

Both froze as the patrol bubble turned the corner on racing treads and pulled up short. John considered making a run for it, but saw it was too late. Pete had arrived at the same conclusion.

"They picked our lips on the vocal-box," Pete whispered. "We're in trouble."

John didn't have a chance to answer. The two Blasts were out of their bubble and coming toward them. The tall one said mechanically, "Section twenty-seven, Earth Ordinances, using profane language on public lanes. Subsection twelve, covering classification of terms of racial-superiority as profanity due to its negation of established fact and the harmful effects—"

"Oh, shove it, Blast," Pete muttered. "We know the public scroll. So you picked us up on the box. So what?"

The CPCNC officer looked at him. "You people never will learn. Why don't you accept the status quo, learn to live like human beings?"

"That's what I always say," John murmured sarcastically.

The Blast stepped in and slapped him, hard. John rocked back on his heels, clenched his fists, but did nothing. The Blast slapped him again, not quite so hard but with a great deal more deliberation. John bit his lip and dropped his eyes.

"Yeah," he said. "Why don't we act like human beings!"

The second Blast, a shorter, heavier man, waved his companion away. "Easy, Farn. Don't let this Yorker get you." He turned to the two adolescents, something like pity in his brown eyes. "We'll let it pass, this time. But we've got you down on our photopads. The next offense means Re-education House."

Neither boy said a word, but John's cheek burned and something in his chest burned even more.

The conciliatory Blast hesitated; then said, "Why don't you boys come down to Composite Youth Center? We've got the latest vizios, athletic—"

"We're members of Race-Through-God," John said, a quiet satisfaction in his voice. "The scroll says we can't be forced to attend CYC. Our master told us that. We go to meetings regularly."

Farn, the Blast who had slapped John, whirled around and stamped back to the bubble. "C'mon, Stan!" he called. "This filthy slum sickens me!"

Stan nodded, but lowered his voice to a confidential murmur. "You'll never get out of York, be issued a space visa, or do anything worth while if you stick to the race-church stuff, boys. You don't know what the Galaxy is like—the planets, the beautiful cities. It's really something. Just sign up for CYC. After that, you can qualify for Integration and meet some really beautiful ladies."

"We got our own ladies," John said, sullen and irritated. And his emotions bothered him. He should be enraged, after the slaps and sacrilegious lecture; not irritated. "We don't want Integration."

Stan shrugged wearily. "All right. So you'll stick in this archaic hole, and eventually try to kill one of us, and end up on a euthanasia table. And one day the Galactic Council will get fed up and clean out the lot of you." He turned to the bubble, speaking over his shoulder. "Watch your steps. Any gang fights, stealing, or profanity will get you six months. The Blasts in Re-education won't slap—they'll use electros on your fannies!"

When the bubble went down the street and around the corner, Pete spat eloquently. John was still fighting his irritation, his vast sense of dissatisfaction, but he spat too, and said, "Man, I'd love to do a carve on all Outsiders!"

"John!" a shrill voice called. "John, you getting into trouble again?"

John turned light blue eyes to the left and looked at the ground floor window. "Oh, ease up, Ma! Can't an Aryan stand up to a foul-blood Outsider?"

"John!" the gray-haired, prematurely-old woman screeched. Her eyes darted up and down the street and her voice dropped to an intense whisper. "Don't you use those words in public! A profanity charge is all we need, what with your father drinking—"

John tried to interrupt, but she raised her voice again and shouted him down.

"Don't you go getting into trouble, bringing those Blasts around bothering God-fearing folk who want to be left alone! It's you kids that make it tough for the rest of us. That rabble would let us be if you—"

John rubbed his short-cropped blond hair in exasperation, and stalked to the corner. Pete followed, and they paused near the curb, ignoring the tirade which continued behind them. Finally, the woman stopped speaking and drew her head back inside the window.

The street was old, cracked in many places. But it didn't matter. The only traffic was the ramshackle public snake which ran once every half-hour, and an occasional transport, and the Blast bubbles which

were constantly on the prowl for profanity, theft, attacks on Outsiders, and juvenile delinquency.

"For once in a foul-blood lifetime," John exploded, "let's cut a different caper! I'm sick of fighting the Sinais and Albines and Sons of Musso. I want Upper City, where we can pick up some high loot."

Pete's thick jaw fell open and he stared at his blond, slender companion. "Upper City! But the Blasts—"

"It's a free Galaxy, ain't it?" John snapped. "We're allowed anywhere our disks take us, ain't we? So I want to travel Upper City."

"They'll watch us," Pete muttered. "Even if we could grab some loot, I don't like it there. My old man works as custodian in a food vendro. I went with him a few times and I didn't like it. The Outsiders look at us as if we smelled bad, and they don't sit near when we're on the snake. I tell you it's tough, John. Let's get a few of the boys and raid the Sons of Musso."

John hesitated, and then decided that as leader of the Adolphs he had to follow through on what he'd said. He moved into the street and walked casually to the snake stop. "If you're jetting out, okay. But I don't operate that way."

Pete didn't move. "You been there lately?" he jeered. "You know what it's like?"

John acted as if he were too disgusted to answer. He'd been to Upper City several times, but that was years ago, when he was a baby and his mother had gone against the Divine-Angel-Church master's wishes and had him inoculated against cancer. Everyone was doing it on the sly anyway, so she took him

for his three shots. Then she'd switched to the Race-Through-God sect, and it was like the other, only there the master let it be known he'd taken his anti-cancer shots like everyone else. But John didn't remember much of Upper City, except that the people had looked at them with amusement and some contempt. He'd wondered why they did, but when he asked his mother she'd said he'd find out for himself.

He had. The foul-blood trash! They had no pride. And they were all alike!

He searched for a disk as the snake appeared at the corner. The jointed series of cars moved slowly on its tractor-like treads, turbo exhaust filtering through the block-tube high on the engine. Each year it seemed to get slower, noisier, shabbier.

**J**OHAN STEPPED into car three as the snake stopped. He placed his disk in the slot, waited a moment, then moved inside as the Clear buzzer sounded. He'd tried to fake his disk a few times, cutting imitations from plastic cans, but the auto-guard was too damn smart. It always rang for the Blast each snake carried in a little booth hinged to the last car.

He found a seat near a window and glanced around. Not half-filled this early in the day. Later, when four o'clock came, it would be jammed. He turned to the window and watched the familiar shabby streets flow by. As they entered Sinai territory, he felt a tightening of the stomach muscles. But then he laughed and remembered he was on the snake, not invading. Never-



theless, when two big kids got on and took seats across the aisle, he knew a moment of fear. They were Sinais, all right. He'd seen the muscular one in a caper last winter. And they knew him for an Adolph.

They exchanged glares, and John kept his face tough. The muscular Sinai took out a knife, holding it low so no one but John could see and began to run his finger over the blade. John reached for his own sticker; then stopped. He grinned and whistled ONE GALAXY, ONE PEOPLE. The Sinais didn't like it. It was equivalent to calling them Outsiders. But their corner came along and they had to hop it. John turned back to the window. He'd get his sticker into that muscular one; see if he didn't!

"Your sister sleeps with Outsiders," a soft voice murmured.

John jerked around, and saw the three kids shuffling past his seat. They grinned at him and the soft-spoken one said, "You don't like it, Adolph? Step off at Benito Street and we'll have it out."

John controlled his rage. "Some other time," he said, voice calm. "I'm capering Upper City today. Maybe you boys would like to declare a truce and come along?"

They all stared at him. Then the one who did all the talking said, "Hell, he's a foul-blood liar!"

"Sure," John said as they slumped into seats. "Follow me to the Split and see."

"Okay," another Son of Musso said. "We will." And the three of them grinned at him.

John grinned back, but he felt far from Aryan inside. Now he wouldn't be able to jet out. Now

he'd really have to cross the Split.

He began to sweat, hoping the snake would break down along the route, that a Blast would stop him from crossing, that the Earth would blow up! Anything to keep from having to cross the Split. He knew now that he'd never meant to do it—just take a ride, kill some time, and bluff Pete when he got back.

Ten minutes later, the Last Corner sign lit up at car end. The three Sons of Musso strolled out into the street and waited, standing quietly under the eyes of the Blasts who were always around the dry river bed which separated York from Upper City.

This was the Split, and John had to leave the car. He came out, walked past the three kids toward the span, and stopped at the gate. "One to Upper City," he said, throat dry.

The Blast gave him a sharp look. "Why do you want to go there, boy?"

"Free Galaxy, ain't it?" John muttered.

The Blast shrugged, handed him a transfer disk, lifted the gate. John had a momentary surge of satisfaction as he heard the Sons of Musso talking excitedly behind him. It wasn't every day that a kid from York invaded Upper City. Then he was at the shiny new snake and his stomach tightened and he was sweating.

He kept walking, got on the fifth car, took a seat in the last row. He was the only passenger, but he'd seen others waiting in the cars he'd passed. Older folks. People who worked in Upper City, doing various menial tasks for the Outsiders.

When the Blast walked through on his way to the back-box, John ran to the port and looked out across the one-piece duralume span. The Sons of Musso were still there. Before he could make a decision, the snake eased forward fluidly and then hit high speed.

John Stevens was frightened, but he composed his features and returned to his seat. He sat straight and tried to remember what the master had said about maintaining dignity in front of Outsiders, showing them the stuff pure-bloods were made of. But the words fled his mind as he gazed out of the window.

Upper City was really something. Wide thoroughfares lacing over and under each other in stop-free throughways. Thousands—no, *millions* of private bubbles rolling along with gaily-dressed passengers! Low, square, bright-looking buildings. Trees and grass and flowers everywhere. And then, for one glorious moment, they were in Bunche Spaceport, the greatest on Earth!

John drank in the huge, upright needles that stood gleaming in the July sun, waiting to blast off for planets where even greater cities and spaceports were established. If only he, John Stevens of York, could get inside one of those ships and go—

Deep bitterness hit him, and all the irritation he'd felt for the past weeks was back. They don't let us do anything! he thought. They keep us poor; in dirt and ignorance! That's what the master had said. And he'd added that the Outsiders were afraid of Aryans. That's why they persecuted them.

John was seeing the full majesty

of Upper City now, the spacious walks and busy drives and sun-filled buildings. And he couldn't help wondering why his people refused Integration.

He suddenly realized that the car had filled with passengers, with Outsiders. He also realized that the twin seat next to his was just about the only one left in the jammed car. He felt his face stiffen, felt the hatred rise in his blood; and then the girl flounced up the aisle and hesitated, looking at him. She sat down.

Not more than sixteen, John thought. Just right for him. And she sure was cute. Lovely golden skin—

He stopped the thoughts there.

It wasn't right to think that way. The master at Race-Through-God wouldn't approve. Not that John attended church regularly, as he'd told the Blast back in York. But still, such thoughts weren't right. They smacked of Integration.

He kept his head still, but flicked his eyes around the crowded car. They'd made another stop, and now Outsiders were standing. They didn't seem to resent him, or, for that matter, pay him any particular attention. It was just that *he* felt different, and that made him angry, and that led to his standing up and moving to the port and getting off at the next corner—all this instead of being sensible and staying on the snake until it returned to the span and York.

But even as he stepped into the street, he was remembering how that girl had looked, with her big brown eyes and dark hair and golden skin.

He muttered, "Damned, non-

Aryan, foul-blood Outsiders!" Then walked quickly down the street when he realized he'd used terms of racial-superiority. Getting picked up here for profanity wouldn't be fun. He'd get six months in Re-education House for sure.

**I**T WAS a hot, bright day and Upper City was clean, fragrant and beautiful, but John Stevens wasn't enjoying himself. He was filled with nagging irritation, growing angrier by the second without knowing exactly why. He began to search the eyes of people passing by—well-dressed Outsiders in their one-piece coroplast suits, colors ranging through all the hues of the rainbow. He felt shabby in his old brown plasts. Those eyes seemed to be sneering at him. They seemed to be looking at him with disgust and contempt.

He was about to turn around and go back to the snake stop, about to obey the warning bell that had begun ringing in his brain, when it happened. It wasn't much, and yet it was the last straw—the one that broke the normal behavior patterns and left him at the mercy of his own emotions.

A young woman, sleek and well-groomed, was passing with a little boy of about five. The child stopped dead on seeing John. In spite of himself, John stopped too. The child stared at John, eyes wide and filled with wonder.

"Mommy!" he shrilled. "Mommy, look at him!"

The woman tried to hush her son, to drag him away, but the child eluded her grasp and danced back, still staring at John. "Look

at him, Mommy! What a funny color—"

John raised his hand as if to strike the child. He didn't mean it, not really, but he wanted to stop that high-pitched voice, stop those amazed eyes from examining him. The child screamed and ran to his mother. The mother shrank back, enfolding the little boy in her arms, and shouted, "Help! Help me, please!"

John turned and ran, almost into the arms of a tall Blast. He stopped, whirled around, and headed back past the woman and child. He cut left at the next corner, ran faster than ever before in his life, cut right, and left, and kept going until the breath rasped through his throat like liquified metal. But even as he ran, he was without fear. He was too angry now to be frightened. And it was anger such as he'd never before experienced. A sickening, confusing, red-hazed mélange of emotion that had about it a nightmare quality.

He had to slow down, and saw that it was all right. He'd lost that Blast, left the entire scene far behind. "Lousy foul-blooded Outsiders!" he panted, and at the same time knew that it wasn't just the Outsiders. It was his mother, and his father, and the slum, and the gangs, and the poverty. It was his life he hated, his life he raged at.

This then was the irritation he'd felt in the past weeks, now transformed by Upper City into a maniacal rage.

John Stevens was leader of the Adolphs. John Stevens wasn't even close to being the biggest or strongest boy in his crowd. But he was the smartest. And this raw, basic,

but still superior intellect worked against him as he stalked the wide avenues of Upper City.

A caper, he thought. He'd pull a big caper, return with loot, justify this visit, take out his anger on these people—these scum who had made his life so poor.

Or was it his mother and father who had made his life poor? Was it the masters who had done that? Why had he come here when it brought such confusion, such pain?

Another quick change of thought. He blocked everything from his mind but the red haze of rage; fed it, allowed it to grow to the point where it swallowed everything but his desire to strike back.

He didn't know where he was, where he was going, and he no longer saw the Outsiders. He had regained his wind now, and began walking quickly, almost running.

It was later, much later, when he finally found the right street, and the right vendro, and the focal point for his hatred. Clothing. New, bright, expensive coroplast suits. Eight hundred disks and up! More than his father made in three months. More than John Stevens had ever seen in a lump sum.

The street was quiet, empty of pedestrians. He walked past the vendro, casing it with eyes that saw nothing but inner hate. Something sane—something still resisting the never-before-experienced rage—cried out that he wasn't being smart, that he wasn't checking for Blasts, that he couldn't think straight enough for a caper, especially one in Upper City. But he was back at the vendro now, and he was going inside.

There was only the commersh,

and an old man magnetting dust from the floor. The commersh was an Outsider, naturally. But the old man was one of York's folk, and this made John Stevens lose whatever grain of caution he might have retained. His folk, slaving for these scum!

The commersh was moving toward him, face bland, only his dark eyes showing something other than serenity at seeing a kid from York. "Are you sure you have the right—" he began, and then gasped as John pulled his knife and snapped the eight-inch blade free of the haft.

John pressed the blade against the Outsider's stomach and said, "Five suits, the best, and I'm with you every foul-blood inch of the way!"

"Don't, son!" the old man said from the side. "Get out before—"

John half-turned his head, and then felt the numbness strike his body. He stood there, completely rigid for a moment, and then found he could breathe and move his lips and shift his eyes. The commersh stepped back, pressed a red button on the counter.

"You Yorkers must be insane," he said mildly. "Do you think we haven't got adequate protection against criminals of our own group, not to say such pitiful amateurs as you? I can paralyze a whole vendro full of people with this little ornament on my wrist." He showed John the metallic strap and small case. "It's six months Re-education House for you."

The old man shuffled closer, peered at John, said, "The Blasts will be here soon. You can talk. Tell me your name and I'll get

word to your folks and your master. Maybe they can help."

The rage was so strong now that John barely heard the old man. He was screaming inside, bellowing insane things that couldn't get through his rigid throat. But the words, "You can talk," penetrated, and he calmed himself.

He tried hard, and squeaking sounds came through his lips. He shaped the words, and then had nothing to say. There wasn't anything bad enough, anything that could hurt this Outsider, anything that could penetrate his shield of superiority.

And then he remembered the ancient word, the forbidden word, the cardinal sin that meant death if used. He'd heard it one night when his father had gotten hold of enough medicinal psychol for a long drunk, and had ranted and raved against the Outsiders.

"Nigger!" John screamed. "Niggers, all of you! Billions of foul-blood Niggers! Planets full of lousy Niggers! All alike! All brown! Only we are white! Only we are pure-bloods! Only we aren't Nig—"

The paralysis intensified, everything stopped, he couldn't breathe, he wanted desperately to breathe. And, more than that, in a final instant of clarity, he wanted to say that it was all a mistake—everything he'd said, everything he'd thought, everything he'd lived by. He too would be a golden brown, like the billions of others. It was his own folk who were the outsiders, but it wasn't their fault either. It was the fault of those few thousand who'd refused Integration when all the rest of Earth's population had decided on mixed breed-

ing as a solution to human conflict. And that was six hundred years ago, and the cults had formed in York, and no one knew how to break the pattern of hatred, envy and fear.

But he was falling into a long tube that had no light and had no end.

That girl on the snake, that lovely girl with the sweet smell and soft eyes and golden skin, that composite of all the white, black, brown, yellow and red races of Earth would never be his. The space ships and wonderful planets would never be his. *Never*, he thought, *because I am dead.*

He was wrong. He wasn't dead. He opened his eyes later and vomited and was then hauled to his feet and stripped and given fresh clothing. He was taken by two Outsiders—only he didn't think of them that way any more, only used the term because he had no others—was taken by them to a white room and pushed inside and left there alone as the port slid shut.

A voice spoke from the smooth white walls. "CPCNC-Earth urges you to accept psychiatric treatment."

"No," John said automatically. He didn't want his brain touched. There were stories told by the masters—

The voice spoke again. "Very well. You have used the term of utmost profanity to villify a citizen of Upper City. The Galactic Scroll calls for a penalty of death. However, because of your youth, and probable syndromic history, the sentence is reduced to ten years in Re-education House. Have you anything to say?"

John fought not to cry out. Ten years! That was worse than death! Six months was enough to break a man, and ten years would drive him mad.

He'd wanted to say he was ready for CYC. He'd wanted to say he was anxious for the time when he'd be eligible for Integration, when he'd be sent to another part of Earth and allowed to mingle with the golden-skinned people and so lose his hatreds, fears and tensions. But now he couldn't. Because it wasn't a matter of free choice any longer. It was an escape from terror, from ten years in hell.

Later, he was told that this room would be his home for the next ten years. He didn't answer the unseen voice, nor touch the food that was given him through the minor-port. He decided he would use the only means of escape men had ever found in Re-education House. He would starve himself to death.

He meant it.

**I**N THE council room not far away, the thirteen members of CPCNC-Earth were considerably more subdued. They'd had an hour of waiting, and an hour of thinking. Each was now wrestling with his conscience, wondering what portion of responsibility was his in the coming decision. Of course, everyone in the Galaxy agreed that York's eight hundred thousand residents had to be eliminated since they were incorrigible race-god fanatics. But now that the moment was almost at hand, sterilization seemed quite drastic, and euthanasia—

To a man, they looked up as

Mala entered the chamber. "Most Peaceful Sir," she began, stopping before Commissioner Dobu's chair. But Dobu snatched the transcription from her hand, mumbled over the code-identification and formal introductions, and read the meat of the report in a voice that trembled only slightly.

"After years of work, our scientists on Centauri Two have produced the answer to the York problem. Four million units, liquid, of a new geneological agent is en route to Earth, York Sector, for immediate administration to the white population. The effect produced by induction of this agent into the bloodstream will be an instantaneous change of pigmentation to accepted norm, and subsequent loss of racial tension. Change is permanent, and will be transmitted to offspring. Administration will be initiated by paralysis of entire white population, said method to be launched immediately. Shipment of geneological agent should arrive Bunche Spaceport, 22 hundred hours, day-this-report. Within five days after change of pigmentation, population of York is to be separated into family units and sent to as many different Galactic sectors as is possible. This order applies to all white residents, not excluding those found outside of York, or those in re-education institutions."

John Stevens didn't hear the shout that went up from thirteen relieved and delighted men. He was entering the second hour of his fast unto the death.

He couldn't know that he'd fail to complete a single day of it.

• • •

And Gant twisted. He palmed the younger man with two deft blows, throat and plexus. Saxon slumped, retching. Gant stood above him, his smile strained.

"Amateur," he panted. "I was instructing hand tactics before you were born." He took out his blaster. "They've infected you," he said compassionately. "I'm sorry, lad. You'll get a posthumous decoration."

The blaster came up, steadied. Then Gant stood very still, a white-haired statue.

Mentor came around the ship and helped Saxon to his feet.

"Destroying guests is forbidden," the robot clicked. "The concept is irrational."

**L**ATER, in the shadows of the farmhouse that was not a farmhouse, Saxon watched the scout disappear into the sky. He turned towards Veena. "You're letting him go?"

"Mentor—treated him," she said dreamily. "He'll report that you destroyed the colony, died in the process, and this planet is unfit for further colonization. Incidentally, the council voted in the affirmative. Otherwise you'd be with Gant."

Aliens, playing a game with their ape-brother. Recognizing him at first glance, speaking his language, making him feel wanted, at home.

*Why?*

He was afraid to ask the question.

"We're on a vacation," Veena said. "We've only been here for

one generation. We were due to return almost thirty years ago, but we found your colony."

"Did you—"

"Isolation," she murmured. "The ghetto. They're sick," she said. "Infected with the culture plague. We couldn't leave them and we couldn't help them." Her gaze was very steady. "Until you came."

It came to him. Man, clutching at the knees of Gods, envying, striving futilely, finally hating.

Only Man can help Man.

"It's not fair, Saxon breathed. He took Veena by the shoulders, made her look at him. "I'm happy here. You and Lang—Merl—I'm just beginning to learn! I'd hoped that in a few years—"

"We are not human," Veena said gently. "And our life span is four hundred of your years."

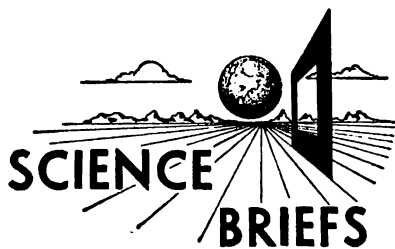
For the first time, he noticed the faint malformation of her ears, the subtle differences in facial bone structure. He glanced past her, saw Lang and Merl waiting in the doorway.

"It will mean months of study," she said. "You have so much to unlearn, to understand. They may reject you, sacrifice you. That will not matter. What does matter is your impact on their culture, what it will mean a thousand generations hence."

*Diseased apes, with a touch of Godhood, suffering from an infection that might be forever incurable. Why should he be the sacrifice? Who was he, to help them?*

Looking at Veena, he knew the answer.

• • •



**Tomorrow's menu** may consist of four week old meat, six month old bread and vegetables that are several years old. Scientists working in atomic laboratories forecast that atomic radiation will keep such foods unspoiled without the necessity of sub-zero freezing. They've preserved such foodstuffs successfully with radiation treatments. And though there are still drawbacks to using the technique commercially, they predict the day is coming.

**Another step** forward in the application of atomic energy is being made at the nuclear reactor pile at Harwell, England, where they are using atomic radiation to vulcanize rubber. Oxidation is not a factor in this process; energy alone is responsible for this faster change in the structure of the rubber.

**Students applying** for entrance to Universities may, in the future, be rated by the measurement of their body build as well as by intelligence tests, aptitude tests and entrance examinations. Called *somatyping*, this body build typing was recently used to study the relationship between physical configuration and mental ability in a group of Eng-

lish university students. Physical features, such as being muscled or fat or lean, were found to promote or handicap the efficiency of the mental equipment to a surprising degree. Such typing may give information on academic failure and allied problems of mental disturbance; and performance not only in school, but in industry, the armed forces and life itself may be predicted to some extent.

**Mineral fibers** may be used for aircraft wings and bodies in the near future. A technique developed at a Japanese University uses materials such as basalt and aqueous rock to form these mineral "threads". They are melted down and poured on a slit revolving disk. A fiber is formed through centrifugal force with the aid of a current of air. The addition of this fiber to cement makes it ten times stronger than steel. Further processing—into polyester resins—could make it usable in place of all types of light metals.

**Pianists may** soon be able to carry their instruments with them, with no more trouble than a bass player has. A stringless instrument which has an electronic tone production system and never needs tuning has been perfected. Used with ear-phones, no one but the player hears the music, but grand piano volume is attained by plugging the piano into a radio or TV set. The eighty pound unit has detachable, folding legs and can be carried quite easily in the back seat of a car.

**Man 5,000,000 years** from now, according to Dr. W. M. Krogman of the University of Pennsylvania, will



be the product of an evolution directed by the science of genetics. The brain will be highly improved so that each mind will be both a sending and receiving set of direct thought communication. The span of life will be between 120 and 160 years, and all of life will go at a much slower pace. Less muscular activity and a lessening of the oxygen in the atmosphere (which is going on even now) will make man burn up his food more slowly, in order to adapt to the change. Man will be a well adapted biped, with hands able to fashion more detailed intricate instruments of precision, and feet reduced to flat, more or less circular bases for legs which are no more than pedestals for the trunk and head.

**Ultrasonic waves** of a frequency of 1,000,000 cycles a second, fifty times higher than the highest audible pitch, are the latest idea for operations requiring precise surgery. The beam is sent through a salt solution in contact with both sound source and the brain tumor or diseased tissue. With a precision far beyond the surgeon's knife, it

destroys an area as small as one-twentieth of an inch in diameter without affecting tissue around, above or beyond the immediate spot. Depth of the tumor or cancerous tissue within the body or brain will not be of any consequence when the tool is perfected.

**Mars has long** been the planet most likely to bear life, but astronomers are now claiming that Venus is much more likely to be "life bearing". The thick cloud layer surrounding our sister planet has been shown to have the same optical properties as terrestrial clouds, hence it is probably condensed water vapor. If this is so, there should be water over the whole surface of the planet otherwise protruding rocks would soon absorb practically all the carbon dioxide. However this hasn't happened, for spectroscopic observations prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that carbon dioxide is extremely abundant in the atmosphere of Venus. This new picture of an ocean covered planet, makes life on Venus more plausible than ever before.

### WHAT IS YOUR SCIENCE I.Q.?

ANSWERS: 1—Annular. 2—Nuclides. 3—93 million. 4—15 centuries. 5—Heat. 6—Vesta. 7—3.5 million. 8—Dr. Robert Hutchings Goddard. 9—Angstrom. 10—All are sub-atomic particles. 11—Eleven. 12—Parahelic circle. 13—100,000. 14—1,500,000 miles an hour. 15—46,500,000. 16. Percival Lowell. 17—120, 140. 18—53 pounds. 19—Spiral Galaxies. 20—30.



# There IS a Time when Your Luck Will Change!

*"And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth . . ."*

—St. Luke 21:25, 26.

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continued from other side

# Man Will Fly to the Moon Soon!

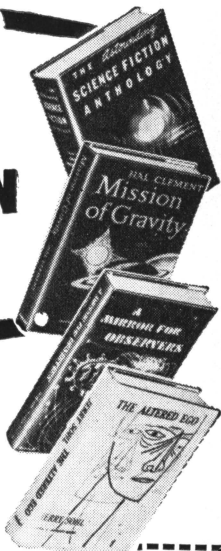
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