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DECEMBER 35 CENTS

SCIENCE FICTION

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ROBERT SILVERBERG

An unusual science-espionage story by

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WORLDS of SCIENCE FICTION

DECEMBER 1957

All Stories New and Complete

Editor: JAMES L. QUINN

Assistant Editor: EVE WULFF

Art Director: MEL HUNTER

SHORT NOVEL

AND THE WALLS CAME TUMBLING DOWN

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COVER

"The Critics" by Mel Hunter

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Editor's REPORT

Don't know whether or not you reader's have noticed that Rog Phillips is back in IF's pages again (*Game Preserve* in our June issue and again with *Captain Peabody* in this one). He had a story way back in the January (1953) issue, and then did a disappearing act for about three years. Needless to say, we're delighted to have him back with us—and according to Rog himself, he's pretty pleased too. Over the past ten years or so Rog has written under fifteen or twenty pen names in the mystery and science-fiction fields, and has had over two million published words. His magazine stories and pocket books have been translated into Italian, German and Japanese. Aside from that, we've a sneaking suspicion this ex-engineer-turned-writer is now a full-time member of the California Chamber of Commerce. Every communique that comes through from him sings loud huzzahs about the wonderful climate of his adopted state. ("No snow", he

chortles, and seems to think this is a sort of climate Utopia. Now we hate to be snide; but what kind of a place is that for a fanatic skier like us?) Born in Spokane, Washington, Rog has lived for longer or shorter periods in practically every part of the country, including New York, but now prefers the "chosen land". Makes a special claim to never having met anyone actually uglier than he himself, but insists that people don't seem to mind—they say it adds character or something.

A reprint of our *Face of Mars* article by Dr. Ralph Richardson appeared in the August '57 issue of *Science Digest*. If you missed the blow by blow description of the observation of Mars on its closest approach since 1924, by all means get a copy of IF for June 1957 and catch up on the mysterious blue streaks and other phenomena that Dr. Richardson observed and described in his article. . . . While we're on the subject of mysterious goings-on, by all means read *The Last Secrets of the Earth* by Bernard Busson and Gerald Leroy. The two French journalists examine such still unknown subjects as the Abominable Snowman, active volcanoes, underground rivers and flying saucers among others. Well worth the reading! . . . Note from Ed Emsch, one of science fictions most published artists, informs us that he is off for a month in Connecticut followed by a trip to Canada to fulfill a portrait commission . . . Big doings out in Disneyland, where Sylvania Electric has

just set up a house of the future with a lighting system that's truly "out of this world". Direct illumination is all obtained with luminous domes which have been made a part of the ceiling construction—and all of which is dimmer-controlled. The study utilizes a specially designed floating type of fixture suspended on thin nylon threads. Added "eye catcher" is a floor-to-ceiling "column of light" for interest and decoration. Major lighting in the living room comes from a floating dome which is internally illuminated from a special projector in the floor. One room features draperies which are made of a glass fabric and become luminous as a result of a light from the outside, which is concealed beneath a stairway. Other items include a "tree of light", an illuminated headboard with adjustable louvres which can be arranged so that one person can read while the other can sleep, panel illumination, and a seemingly complete lack of wiring. This last is accomplished by having all wiring, except that in the core of the house, located in the lower half of the walls.

The Second World of IF is about ready for the printer and we're pretty proud of it already. Includes stories by such science fiction names as Charles Beaumont, Raymond F. Jones, James Blish, Jimmy Gunn, Phillip Dick, Charles Fontenay, Bryce Walton and Robert Young. All novelettes this time, and guaranteed to be good entertaining reading. Watch for it . . . we think you'll like it. Publication is January 12th.

Still working on the statistics about the readers and the writers of science fiction. Some small trickles are in (but we still don't need that computer!) and the list already contains teachers, (we'll break down the fields when more returns are in) teen-agers, doctors, engineers, army men, atomic scientists, lawyers, mechanics, librarians and (bless 'em) housewives. We want mail on the subject, for we feel that IF can really do a service to science fiction if our readers will pitch in to help us. Just drop us a letter or post card and tell us what you do for a living, what your hobbies are, what you like in science fiction, who your favorite authors are and what sort of covers and illos you like. Any other data that you think pertinent will be most welcome; but we're really most interested in the above "vital statistics". So let us hear from you real soon.

Last minute notes: Watch for *Frank Herbert's 21st Century Sub* on the newsstands. Even if you read it as a serial, or read the hard cover version, the pocket edition is one that should be added to a sci-entiphile's library. Really good reading. . . . Harlan Ellison still pounding his portable even though the Army has him busy as only the army can keep a man. . . . One of the big paint companies has actually come up with a polka dot paint. . . . Letter from a South African fan tells us that the purge of literature is getting so bad that they've even banned *Black Beauty* as sub-versive to the racial segregation ideal!



Illustrated by Ed Emsh

AND THE WALLS

Earth's civilization and culture lay dormant and stagnant.

Stupidity and ineptitude reigned supreme, and the one man

who could change it didn't care enough—until . . .

THE SCENE at Transcontinental Televideo five minutes before rehearsal time was, as always, chaotic. Technicians scurried back and forth, waving cue-sheets wildly in the air, shouting cryptic instructions to each other; dollied cameras rolled in for the dry run. The actors, tense and worried, congregated in the center of the sound-stage, muttering their lines fitfully and wondering if their psyche-projection would be sufficiently convincing.

Only one man was calm. John Amory stood quietly at the extreme left of the stage, leaning against a camera boom, a copy of the shooting script dangling casually from one big hand. Near him was the director's chair, a flimsy wickerwork thing whose red cloth backstrip was neatly lettered in yellow, MR. JOHN AMORY, but Amory preferred to remain standing. He was a tall broad-shouldered man of thirty-four, going gray early, with deep-set earnest dark eyes and bold, jutting features. He was the best director Transcontinental Televideo had, and he was watching the chaos about him coldly, impassively, hating it all but concealing his hatred.

He glanced at his watch. Five minutes to go, he thought; then two hours of shaping this show into something bad enough to go out over the

CAME TUMBLING DOWN

BY ROBERT SILVERBERG

coaxials, and then home, rest, and forgetfulness. He had lived with the current script—*Mist of Desire*, it was called—for a week, and that was eight days too long.

Someone touched his shoulder. He turned slowly and looked down at the small wiry man who stood grinning at him.

"What are you doing here?" Amory asked. "Come to see us slaughter your script, Lee?"

"It's not *my* script, and you damned well know it," Lee Nourse said quietly. "Eight weeks ago I turned in a sheaf of typed-on papers and got a fat check for them; then Kavanagh and his Scripting Committee went to work. There isn't anything left of my story except my name on the credit-sheet, and I'm surprised they left that there."

"*Three minutes, Mr. Amory,*" boomed someone from the monitor-booth. Amory nodded acknowledgment. To Nourse he said, "It's one of the best scripts I've ever worked on, Lee. At times it almost reaches the level of idiocy. I hope Kavanagh hasn't pegged it too high for his audience."

"He knows his job," Nourse said. "Don't worry: the Great American Cretin will love it. Good cast, great director, first-rate sensory effects—"

"And a top-ranking writer. Before they started revising the script."

"Thanks, John."

"*Two minutes, Mr. Amory!*"

"It's about ready to start," Amory said. "Are you really going to watch it?"

Nourse smiled diffidently. "Not really. I've already cashed the

check; my interest in this script ends there. I came to invite you to a film showing."

Immediately Amory brightened. "Where? When?"

"Ted Beckett's place, at ten tonight. It's an English-made job; they smuggled it in through Canada. Suppose to be lovely. Take the usual precautions getting there."

"*One minute, Mr. Amory!*"

"Thanks for letting me know," Amory said. He smiled grimly and added, "I'll do my best with your script."

"I know you will," Nourse said bitterly.

Amory followed Nourse out of the studio with his eyes, then checked his watch and stepped forward to the director's podium, script in hand. He didn't need the script: part of his directorial technique was to memorize each week's production from cover to cover. It reassured the cast, though, if he kept the text handy.

"Everybody ready," Amory said, speaking quietly but with such authority that all eyes focussed on him. "This is the final rehearsal for tomorrow's production of Lee Nourse's drama *Mist of Desire*. Jimmy, are you set up?"

"Absolutely, Mr. Amory," said the Sensory Effects man. Sensies were pre-recorded at the dress rehearsal, odors, textures and all. That left a full day for the technicians to work out a sensory-track before the telecast.

"Act One, then." He looked at his actors, hiding his unhappiness. He had hand-culled them from the nation's best, and yet just *one* of the

batch knew anything at all about the art of acting; the rest were just competent memorizers. Well, he thought, the public can't tell the difference anyway.

The silence-light glowed. Amory said, "Let's get under way, folks. *Now.*"

Two of his actors appeared, gravely reciting lines at each other in loud histrionic voices. Amory let it go on for just half a minute.

"Hold it, will you? Look here, Cal: there's eight minutes of noisy commercial before you speak your first line. Dammit, make that line *quiet*. Sensitive. Just so the audience can tell there's been some transition between the client's poop and the play."

He had been through this point five times now, but actors didn't catch on easily. It took five more runnings until he was satisfied; then, he let the play roll on unchecked for nearly ten minutes before cutting in to demonstrate how a line should have been read.

The play was some silly inconsequential frippery, a typical product of Dave Kavanagh's script-mill. Why they bothered to get a talented man like Lee Nourse to do the original story was a mystery to Amory; anyone at all could churn out this sort of formularized hack-work, about Real People and their Real Problems in the World of Today. Small-scale, mindless, just slush to keep ninety million viewers looking at their sets between the sales-pitches.

Everything had been carefully designed that way. The central

climax of the hour-long play had been thoughtfully placed some four minutes before the middle break, and followed by sheer padding of no plot-value. That way, ran the general thought, the viewer's attention would not still be involved in the play while the all-important commercial was on.

Amory watched glumly as his one genuine actor delivered a perfectly-timed line with true feeling, only to have some bumbler squash the effect with a hastily-barked response, upstaging him to boot. Amory called a halt and ran the dialog over; the result still offended his sense of the symphonic interplay of voices that was a well-directed play, but he let it pass. No one would notice.

That was the damning part of it: *no one would notice*. The client cared only about his commercial spots, the playwright was non-existent, and the viewers, bless 'em, would uncritically accept everything and anything so long as the colors were clear and sharp and the sensory effects moving. Nobody with any taste or discrimination would bother to watch commercial video in this year of Grace 2021.

The show reached its midpoint climax and coasted into the mush calculated to yank the viewer out of the plot and prepare him psychologically for the curtain. Amory made no attempt to direct at this point; he relaxed, letting the actors fumble through the lines any way they pleased. It might cost him his job to make these pages vivid and interesting, if the client's Product-Intensity Rating should drop three

percentage points the next week.

The last line of Act One appeared, weak and flat and lifeless, and Amory signalled for a cut-out and a ten-minute break. Stepping down from his perch, he looked around and saw a little clump of onlookers watching from the back of the studio: Kavanagh, the head of the Scripting Committee, Van Graben, the network's Vice-President in charge of Dramatic Presentations, and a couple of others, including a roly-poly little man in a checked shirt and blazing red trousers, whom Amory recognized as the Client's Representative. He walked over to them.

"Well, gentlemen? Any opinions?"

"Brilliant, John, simply brilliant," Graben said immediately. "That thing really moved me. When Lois came out with that line—'*Let's just be friends . . . forever, Martin*'—I shook, John. I positively shook!"

"Glad you like it," Amory said. He had shaken at that line too—for different reasons. "But let's give credit where credit's due. To Dave, here, and his magnificent scripting job." *This kind of talk comes easy to me*, he thought sourly. *I should have been an actor instead of a director.*

Dave Kavanagh was a short, blockily-built, intense man with closecropped sandy hair and a harsh, acne-pocked face. He smiled bleakly. "I'll just have to pass the buck to my committee boys, John. *You're* the only man in this outfit who takes solo credit—or blame. Half a dozen men are responsible for that script you're doing." His

voice dropped to a confidential whisper. "I can tell you we worked like dogs over it, too. What a stinker that guy Norris turned in!"

"Nourse," Amory corrected automatically. He felt sick. *Ten thousand a week*, he thought mechanically. *That's all that keeps me here. I may be selling my soul, but I'm getting a damned fine price for it.*

Graben, the network man, smiled warmly at the Client's Representative. "We haven't heard *your* opinion, Mr. Jaberson. I hope you're enjoying this presentation, heh-heh."

"I like it," Jaberson said simply.

I like it. The ultimate accolade, Amory thought.

"If you'll excuse me," he said.

"Time for Act Two now."

Act Two went slowly. Amory had long ago decided never to slack off. He tried to do the best job he could no matter how hollow the script, how undemanding the viewers. That was the only way to retain a shred of self-dignity, to keep from sliding entirely off into the commercialized muck that was American entertainment, mass-media variety. He wondered what entertainment was like in the other countries of the world.

Probably much the same, he thought. People were much the same, despite the artificial political barriers that kept each power-sphere walled off from the others. And video in the USSR or in the Federated Empire of Latin-America or in the Oriental People's Republic was probably on a par with ours.

He drove his actors relentlessly through the windup of the play,

satisfied if they understood every tenth direction he gave, and finally it was over. He signalled to the technicians that he had finished, and the actors under the merciless lights relaxed visibly.

"A great job, all of you," he made himself say. "We'll triple our ratings. You're all aces; Stanislavski would have been proud of you." He mopped sweat from his forehead, folded the shooting script neatly down its center, and dropped it into the red cloth seat of his directorial chair; the charwomen could have it now. He was through with *Mist of Desire*. Tomorrow night the show would go on, botched and crude as always, and the viewers would love it, the tele-fax critics would hail him as the greatest director of the age, and the client and the ad agency would count their money and rejoice. And come Thursday there would be a new script, fresh from the anonymous hacks of Kavanagh's Scripting Committee, full of enthusiastic marginal notes from various vice-presidents who were always afraid Amory might miss the point of the play.

The cameras retreated into their hiding-places; the cast vanished toward the dressing-rooms. Amory looked at the time. Nine-oh-five. An hour from now he'd be at Ted Beckett's place, among *people*. People who shared his distaste for the mass media, even though some of them were capable, as he was, of doublethink, and could take the big video money while retching in private over their work.

The little group in the back of

the studio had left. Amory was relieved at that. Some day, he knew, Van Graben was going to invite him out for a beer after a rehearsal, and he was going to blurt out, "Sorry, Van. I'm going up to visit that subversive Ted Beckett, who's showing some avant-garde films tonight, and we're going to sit around cursing you and your whole filthy breed."

And the next day there'd be a stiff little note from the Network Head Himself in his mailbox, along with a month's severance pay.

Amory smiled to himself, wondering whether that would really be a fate worse than death or not. Beckett and others had often urged him to leave his profession before it was too late, before his taste and the keen edge of his mind succumbed to the all-devouring influences about him. "Not just yet," Amory would say, even though his five years in the industry had left him a wealthy man. He realized that he was *afraid* to resign—that this job, loathsome as it was, gave him his one contact with the mindless majority around him, a contact he feared to break.

He *could* always break it, and live in a cellar like Ted Beckett, never knowing when his neighbors would tire of having an avowed egghead in the neighborhood and come crashing in to destroy his books and tapes and film projector. This way, Amory had status in the community: John Amory, the noted video director. No one inquired about his private feelings. His lofty position in the industry provided a mask for his inner discontent.

He was not anxious to lose that mask.

Amory shouldered his way through the studio, taking advantage of his size and rank to push the thronging technicians aside. Once someone stopped him and muttered, "Great show tonight, John" in his face.

"Thanks," Amory said, and kept on going—realizing only later that the man had been some high network executive, who probably now was fuming over Amory's haughtiness. Well, the man would forget by morning; these network people had long since had their brains addled by their work, in which they believed sincerely. They couldn't remember an insult long enough to bear a grudge.

He reached the elevators, rode down, and stepped out into the night. It was a warm April evening, moonless, slightly overcast. The street was virtually empty of pedestrians, though a steady low humming told him that the roadway fifty feet above the street was thronged with cars threading their way through New York and out into the outlying suburbs; late-shift workers heading to their homes in Connecticut and New Jersey and the Long Island slums.

A flickering sign around the gleaming chrome tower of the Hanley Building caught his attention. He waited patiently through four leagues of baseball scores, and heard the weather forecast: rainfall scheduled for a fifteen-minute drop at two-thirty A.M. Otherwise, nothing much new. He wondered briefly how it had been in the old days,

when the newsbands had been full of international tensions, rumors of war, and such things.

Thanks to the barriers, all was tranquil. Russia was so distant she might well be on some other world; even South America was an alien land. Amory wondered whether the tranquility had been worth the price.

Then he shook his head. Wondering was a bad habit; it led to thoughtfulness, and that was dangerous. He sighed and looked around for a transport depot. He wanted to get to Beckett's place early.

BECKETT LIVED on 255th Street, far to the north in the blotchy district of crowded tenements that was Riverdale. About the only thing lower than living in a cellar apartment in Riverdale was to dwell in the rabbit-warrens of Levittown or one of the other jam-packed towns on the Island, all blurred together in one endless mass of slum buildings but each still strenuously maintaining its ancient identity nonetheless.

Amory caught a cab to Yonkers, riding the slim graceful teardrop up the silent broad Manhattan Overway, cutting off into the Ninety-Sixth Street Overpass and shooting up the West Side Drive into Yonkers at a hundred fifty miles an hour. Amory relaxed, leaning back in the cab as far as his safety-belt would allow, confident that the driver, operating the car by remote control from the main transport switching center under the Hud-

son, would get him to his destination safely and swiftly.

Once across the city line into Yonkers he stopped the cab, fed a bill into the meter and waited for his change, and got out. A dropshaft took him quickly to the pedestrian level. Clouds hung low over the area; pedestrians moved quickly to their homes, not lingering. Despite atmosphere control, there was something stale and unpleasant about the air up here; the odor of rotting garbage hit his nostrils as he walked back across the city line into Riverdale. Probably some of the local inhabitants had roughed up a garbage-collector the day before, and in revenge there had been no collection today. These things happened.

He followed a circuitous route across and back Riverdale Avenue until he reached the turnoff that led to Beckett's place. He rang twice upstairs, feeling as always the sense of participating in something forbidden, and headed downstairs to Beckett's apartment.

Beckett himself met him at the door. He was a slim, tired-looking little man with faded blue-green eyes and a high forehead; once, he had been a script writer for a video network, but he had never learned the successful man's trick of submerging his individuality, and he had been sacked after a while. He had managed to save a few hundred thousand of his salary, even after taxes, and now, jobless and alone, he lived off his accumulated backlog.

"Good to see you again, John. Come on in. There's a fair-sized

crowd here already."

Amory followed him into the dimly-lit apartment which had last been painted around the turn of the century. He saw three or four little groups of argumentative men, most of them clutching drinkflasks and waving them to punctuate their words. Among those he recognized were Nourse, Matt Viglan of the Author's League, fellow director Hersch Kyman of Hollywood, and two or three other present and former mass-media men.

He grinned at Nourse, who immediately detached himself from the group he was in and came over, towing in his wake a tall, stoop-shouldered young man Amory had never seen before.

"How'd the show go?" Nourse asked.

"Miserably. The brass loved it. Kavanagh dislocated an arm clapping himself on the back."

"My check's in the bank," Nourse said. "John, I want you to meet Gill Hadafield. He's an esper."

At the last word, Amory started suddenly and squinted at the tall young man. He was at least six-six, Amory thought, topping his own height by at least two inches. His eyes were mildly green, dreamclouded, as if he were simultaneously here and in contact with someone on the far side of the moon. His clothing was threadbare.

"Gill, this is John Amory, the famous video director. You don't watch video much, do you?"

"No," Hadafield said in an impossibly gentle voice, so soft it seemed feathery. "It's bad for the mind and soul. But I've heard your

name, Mr. Amory. Often.”

“I can’t say the same for you, I guess. Espers don’t get much publicity.”

“We don’t seek it,” Hadafield said. He shifted his feet nervously. “And it may seem contradictory of me to answer your next question before you’ve asked it, but no, I’m not reading your mind. I can’t. I’m a long-range linker, not a reader. But that’s the first question anyone ever asks me, so—you know.”

Amory chuckled. “Of course.” He felt vaguely uncomfortable in the esper’s presence, and was somewhat annoyed at Nourse for having brought about this awkward conversation. He used his drinklessness as an excuse to break away and head for the kitchen.

There he found a drinkflask of beer, squeezed it open, and drank. A collection box lay open nearby. Ostensibly it was there simply to cover costs of drinks for the evening, since there was no reason why Beckett should have to stand the expense—but, in actuality, though no one mentioned the fact openly, the box was for Beckett’s support. Amory covertly slipped a hundred-dollar bill from his roll and slid it into the box. Beckett went to great risk to secure these films; it was only fair to help him along.

He returned to the main room. The wall-speaker was playing Bartok’s Fourth Quartet—the original score, he realized happily, not the revised 1999 edition with the dissonances carefully smoothed out and a couple of cellos added to give the piece “body.” Beckett had evidently found a copy of the un-

tinkered score somewhere, and fed it to his synthesizer.

Amory felt warm and loose. He was ordinarily a distant and aloof man, but here in Beckett’s dingy cellar he found himself among friends, men of taste who shared his interests. It was good to know you were not the only one who could listen to unrevised 20th Century music without frothing at the mouth; it was comforting to see others admiring the Picasso prints on the wall, the incredibly rare sets of Joyce and Kafka in the bookshelves. The fact that Beckett left those books out in the open was a compliment to his guests: lesser men, unable to comprehend the books but well aware of their worth, might be tempted to steal them.

Amory drifted into a discussion that seemed shaped for him: the place of drama among the arts. A stocky earnest-looking man who wrote ad copy during the day was saying, “In a sense drama’s a more *purified* art than the novel. It’s less didactic. A novelist has the chance to stop the story, to moralize, to comment on what’s happening; the dramatist gives you only the sheer moment, just the action and the words, welling up out of people right before you. The moralizing is all submerged in the structure of the play. *That’s* not easy.”

“I’ll go along with that,” said a pale hawk-faced man in bright blue. “But what do you make of the theater of Brecht, for example, then. Intermingling—”

“Impure drama. He admitted it himself.”

“Esthetically barbarous,” said

someone else. "But yet it makes its effect despite the mixture of techniques. What do you think, John? You're the only practicing director among us."

Amory scowled pleasantly and said, "I wish you wouldn't remind me of the stuff I turn out for my daily caviar. The trash I direct would be hooted off a 19th-century stage. But I'm generally in agreement with—"

He spoke confidently and enthusiastically, knowing he was an authority on his subject and knowing also that this was the only audience he was likely to find for his theories. The discussion went on some minutes; then Ted Beckett called for attention, asking everyone to take seats for the film showing.

Amory found Nourse at his elbow. The wiry playwright glanced at Amory's drinkflask and said, "What are you drinking?"

"Beer. What else?"

"You ought to try some of this stuff. It's genuine German wine, slipped in by a friend of Beckett's through Cape Hatteras. There isn't enough of it to go around, but he wants a few people to try some."

Amory glanced at the glass Nourse handed him. He sipped the white wine. It was dry, faintly bitter. As he finished the glass he felt sudden vertigo, but shook it off. The mixture of beer and wine wasn't a healthy one.

Nourse was peering earnestly up at him. "Well?"

"Fine stuff," Amory said. "Fine. We'd better go get seats."

They found two chairs near the back of the room.

Beckett unrolled a glittering prismatic screen and retired to a dark recess in the back of the room. "Will you douse the lights?" he asked.

The lights were doused. He snapped on the projector.

The film was something called *The Oceans Are Wide*. It was English-made, and the print was poor quality, flickering and yellowing here and there. Amory watched, fascinated, as the film unreeled.

He thought of the slogan of his drama hour: Real People and their Real Problems in the World of Today. It sounded fine, but in practice it worked out to piffling vacuities about small-minded average-type folks, and the result was a sort of gentle happy-ending fantasy several leagues removed from any reality Amory knew.

This film was different. It had been made with more honesty than skill, more sincerity than craft. But the story it unfolded was *real*, in the truest sense; Amory found his emotions and intellect completely absorbed. He was fascinated, too, by the almost alien rhythms of the players' speech. The gulf of the Atlantic was as a gap between worlds, in these days when all international commerce and communication was rigidly banned. The twin languages of English and American were diverging rapidly; Amory could foresee a time when it would be necessary to outfit each film out of England with subtitles, as was done when Beckett showed a French or an Italian film.

After a while he forgot his surroundings, the peeling walls and the stink of garbage outside, the hoot-

ing of gangs in the distant streets, even the people beside him and the faint hum of the projector. The only reality was on the screen.

This was what had been lost, he thought. Somewhere in the great American levelling-off process, the spark of artistic originality had been buried under a gush of advertising and formulas. Men were *not* created equal—and to aim every play, every film at the lowest common denominator was to destroy anything higher, by a sort of cultural Gresham's Law.

He sank into a mood of uncontrollable bitterness, conscious that it was spoiling his enjoyment of the film. He fought it, without success.

And suddenly a wave of dizziness rippled through him.

The wine, he thought. *I should never—*

His head swam. The image on the screen quivered, melted, spun in an impossible circle. Sweat bathed him; he could no longer see.

What's happening to me? he wondered. He was angry that he should get sick in the middle of such a fine film; he would never get another chance to see it. Then the anger faded, replaced by fear. He was a strong, healthy man. This kind of attack had never hit him before.

He rose unsteadily to his feet; he had to get to the washroom, had to have a drink of water, had to splash his face with cold water to stop the burning. Someone behind him muttered, and he realized that his body was probably eclipsing the screen. He ducked, hoping he was no longer blocking the beam.

Oddly, he had difficulty putting his feet on the floor; they kept wanting to float up behind him, it seemed. He took three wobbly steps. Then, quite gently, he started to fall forward on his face, and, not so gently, landed, striking the edge of his jaw against the cold wood of the floor.

He blinked away the first lash of pain, but that was all. Still not comprehending, he slipped into unconsciousness.

He woke slowly, almost in sections. The first layer of his mind that returned to consciousness was that part that had been meshed in the film; he looked in vain for the screen. He realized after that that he was no longer in Beckett's apartment, and still later that he had been taken somewhere else, and quite probably deliberately drugged.

Drugged? Who would—

He blinked and looked around. Quite definitely he was no longer anywhere in Riverdale; the clean freshness of the high-roofed room told him that at once. It was a big room, with a sphincter-entrance at the far end; he lay stretched full length on a bare pallet, and on a chair nearby someone had neatly spread out his jacket and tie. His shoes were on the floor at his side.

A desk near the window was the next thing he saw; it was littered with papers, documents perhaps. The wall was gentle green in color; the floor was covered with yellow foam. Amory sat up, shaking his head experimentally. He still felt fairly calm.

He groped for his shoes and

slipped into them. The foam floor-covering was springy and yielding as he walked across it.

He went first to the window, but it had been opaqued and there was no sign of the polarizing controls. He saw nothing but gray blankness. He might be almost anywhere.

Quickly, feeling the first quivers of alarm, he ran to the sphincter-door, but it too had no control. He groped over its cool metal surface, hoping to find some way of letting himself out, without success.

A voice muttered suddenly, "He's awake."

Another voice, deeper and more resonant, said, "Please don't be upset, Mr. Amory. You won't come to any harm."

He whirled and glanced behind him. "Who said that?"

"We're monitoring you from outside." He saw a speaker cone mounted in the ceiling, from which the voice was emanating.

"What kind of joke is this?" Amory demanded hoarsely. "The penalties for kidnapping are—"

"Very stringent. But I think you'll be willing to work with us. Please don't make judgements in advance of knowledge, Mr. Amory."

He forced himself to remain very calm. *Here I am*, he thought, *locked into a practically bare room, having been drugged and kidnapped, carrying on a conversation with an invisible captor.*

Kavanagh's Scripting Committee would have turned the situation down for potential use on his show; such things didn't happen to Real People in the World of Today. Ex-

cept when they *did* happen, Amory thought.

"Cut the monitor off," he heard the first voice say, just barely audibly and not to him. "Go in and talk to him."

Amory lifted his jacket from the chair, slipped into it, and sat down to wait. A few moments later, the sphincter-door began to iris open. He caught a fragmentary glimpse of a brightly-lit corridor behind, and several figures standing in it. Someone entered; the sphincter closed.

"I'll have to apologize for our method of getting you here, Mr. Amory. You were recommended most highly to us, but the person who recommended you suggested that you be brought here unknowing, or else you might not come at all. Briefly, we're not going to be on Earth very long, and while we're here we'd like to employ your services."

Amory said nothing. He was staring at the man who spoke, and wondering what there had been in the drink Nourse had given him. He narrowed his eyes, moistened his lips.

The speaker was a man of his own height, perhaps a little taller. He wore clinging, rubbery-looking skintight clothes that outlined a firmly-muscled body. What there was exposed of his skin was an even dark-blue in color.

He had no hair. His head was dotted with stubby little projections perhaps a quarter of an inch high and half an inch apart. He had no eyebrows. Between his two cold, intense eyes, set slightly above

them, was a third eye, unwinking, equally cold and intense.

The creature smiled, showing glossy black teeth.

"Where did *you* come from?" Amory asked, in a hushed half-whisper.

"The stars," said the stranger, with a flat, even inflection that implied there was nothing at all extraordinary about such a statement.

AMORY LET THOSE bald words soak in, regarding them as some sort of joke, some prank. He said in a flat quiet voice, "The stars. That's very funny, you know?" But by the time he was through saying it he was not so sure it was funny. A cold band of fear gripped his middle.

"Just where *are* you from?" he asked, eyeing the totally alien features.

"What I said was the truth. Is it that difficult to absorb, Mr. Amory?"

"One doesn't expect such things. All right: I'll provisionally accept that you just blew in from the Crab Nebula, or wherever. What do you want with me?"

"Your help. Your guidance." The alien touched one hand—a web-fingered hand, Amory now noticed—lightly to his scalp. "You're a connoisseur of the arts, aren't you? A lover of books and poetry, painting, the drama. The drama particularly."

"What if I am?" Amory asked cautiously.

"That makes you a very unusual man, you know. We've been on

Earth a while; we've shopped around. We chose you as the man most likely to help us. In brief, we're looking for a guide to the best of Earth's culture—someone who'll tell us what's considered good and what isn't, someone to separate the wheat from the chaff, the pure from the dross, the artistic from the—*kitsch*, is that the word? We'd like to take examples of Earth's best cultural products back to our home world. Duplicates, of course; we have reproducing equipment."

Amory began to be more interested. "And you want me to say, Take Mozart and leave movie-music, take Shaw but not Sardou, take Bertrand Russell but not Herbert Spencer. Something like that?"

"To a certain extent. We'll also want a sampling of the less deserving art and philosophy—a judiciously-selected sample. We'd want Spencer, for instance; he had his influence, and he was important in his day. You see?"

"I think so."

"We thought you would."

"How come you need a—a native guide, though," Amory said. "Couldn't you discover these things for yourself, in time?"

"Possibly; possibly not. But we don't have time on our side. A few months, perhaps a year, then we must be going. There are always other worlds to visit. So many other worlds, Mr. Amory; you have no idea."

Suddenly Amory reddened. "You're a sort of anthropologist, aren't you? Collecting primitive artifacts? You'll take our finest art and stick it in a museum like an

Alaskan totem-mask, and smile patronizingly at it?"

The alien's face remained fixed in its affable grin, but the three dark eyes grew faintly grim. "You may think of our mission that way, or in any other way you please. We prefer to take a happier view. Earth is quite an unusual world; we want a generous sampling of her finest work. You'll find many rewards in working with us, both materially and otherwise. But I don't want you to rush your decision. I'll leave you alone to think about it for a while. When you've made up your mind you can signal to me by pressing this stud at the side of the desk—oh—"

The alien blinked suddenly, as if seeing the heap of documents on the desk for the first time, and crossed the room quickly. He gathered the sheaf of papers into his arms, saying, "Unimportant papers. Sloppy to leave them lying around."

One yellow-green slip of paper slid from the bundle in the alien's arms, spiralled behind him to the floor, and slid under the lambent plastic of the desk. Amory caught the sight from the corner of one eye, but thoughtfully said nothing about it. The alien was at the sphincter-door, clutching the rest of the papers.

"I'll give it some thought," Amory said. He moistened his lips. "I'll signal when I'm ready."

"Very good."

The sphincter opened and closed in a fraction of a second, and in the interval between opening and

closing the alien stepped nimbly through, leaving Amory once again a prisoner and alone. The first hard wave of post-reflexive shock went shuddering through him, and then he reasserted his normal control.

He stood for a while at the blank waxy-surfaced opaqued window, staring at his own dim reflection. He was willing now to accept everything: that there were aliens among us, that the creature he had just spoken with had indeed come from some other star, that they were engaged in some kind of cultural collecting-tour here on Earth. Despite the melodramatic circumstances in which he had been brought in contact with them, he was ready to believe what he had just seen and heard.

It shook his inward calm to know that Earth was just a way-station in the sky where cosmic artifact-collectors might stop off for a year or so on their way to Arcturus VII or Procyon X. Yet he had foreseen it, in a way, and there was nothing in his personal philosophy that held that mankind was the highest form of life conceivable. He had had enough experience with mankind to know its shortcomings.

An early dream of his, still unfulfilled, was to see man reach the Moon, the planets, the stars. They said it was theoretically possible, but nothing had ever come of it. Perhaps if war had come eighty years ago, instead of solidifying into a perpetual deep-freeze, space travel might have been realized. But war had not come, and the cold war had become an eternally frozen peace instead, each power-

sphere locked behind its own boundaries and all external communication voided.

So they reached us first, he thought.

He sighed heavily and crossed the room to the shining plastic-topped desk. They wanted his help, he thought. That was certainly flattering. Naturally, they'd demand he remain perfectly silent about their presence on Earth until they were gone, and possibly even afterward. That was easily understandable. And Amory would not mind such a restriction. He had never been overflowing with love for humanity—at least, not the noisy filthy humanity that flooded America's cities till they burst at the seams, the race of marching morons that was now a-breeding and who hated Amory's kind as much as he hated them. He felt no obligation to tell the world about the aliens in their midst. He might almost enjoy his secret knowledge.

His hand crept to the enamelled buzzer-stud at the side of the desk. One swift muscular contraction and he would summon the alien.

Amory paused; and in that pause, his eye caught the yellow-green edge of the paper the alien had dropped, protruding an inch or two from beneath the desk where it had fallen. Amory decided to postpone calling the alien a minute or two.

He started to reach for the paper; then, remembering that he most probably was being monitored on an outside circuit, chose a different tack. He groaned as if in deep inner conflict, buried his head in his hands, slumped forward on

the desk in apparent perplexity.

The desktop was translucent. With great care he worked the sheet of paper out of its hiding-place with the toe of his shoe, and tugged it across the floor to a point directly beneath his face. He stared through the desktop at it.

And slowly his face grew pale.

The document was in English, though it had been typed in a curiously ornate face unlike any Amory had ever seen. The words were easily visible.

It said:

TO: Cargh

FROM: Kress

REFERENCE: 8H42, as understood

Your report received and entered. So far all is well, for which we are very grateful here, since there was some doubt in Ruling Body's mind concerning the validity of the Earth expedition.

Receipt of your report has caused favorable comment in high places, and there is general approval of your policy. We all agree that it's wise to gather as many of Earth's cultural outpourings as possible in the year remaining before invasion-time; we can then manipulate Council sympathies to show that we began as an unwarlike enterprise, but found it necessary for Galactic peace to cleanse Earth of its population. This despite any favorable impression the gathered artworks might create. Besides which, it would be thoughtless to let an entire culture vanish from

existence without keeping some mementoes.

We are in receipt of the psych reports on John Amory and Filimon Grigorescu, and agree with your preliminary guess that they would be ideal. The Rumanian particularly shows the characteristics you could best employ.

We're still awaiting the geological report on the planet. The actual invasion is still in the planning stage, but of course we're anxious to avoid any actual damage to the world itself, since then it would lose all value as

The message ended there, as if it were continued on some second sheet that the alien had not been thoughtful enough to leave behind. But Amory had seen enough.

He read the sheet through carefully twice more, until the amiably chilling words were as deeply embedded in his memory as any Shakespearean soliloquy, all without moving from his head-in-hands position on the desk. Sweat dripped from his forehead; a dull premonitory ache began in his stomach and spread its way upward through his heart and lungs into his throat. He felt sick.

... necessary for Galactic peace to cleanse Earth of its population ...

The cool friendly phrases danced before him. *So they reached us first*, he thought. *And how!*

After a while he grew calm—numb, rather. Panic reactions were fine on occasions, but not now. He was in possession of data on a gigantic conspiracy, he alone, and if

he maneuvered shrewdly enough there might yet be a way out.

He nudged the slip of paper back out of sight beneath the foot of the desk.

This is the invasion vanguard, he thought dully. The scavengers coming in to grab whatever's worth keeping, before they blot Earth out.

And somehow I stumbled into it all.

Slowly he raised his head. He addressed himself as if he were both the director on the podium and the actor under the merciless lights, instructing himself in just the proper way to sit, creating a mask of outer calm on his troubled face, bringing color back into his cheeks. He had long felt that only great actors could exert actual physical control over themselves during a performance, but that a great director could bring out latent greatness in almost anyone.

Now was the test. He took a deep breath, temporarily wiped his new knowledge from his mind, and jammed down fiercely on the signal stud.

The alien entered. He still wore the pleasant smile, but a deeper strength lurked in the three cold eyes. Amory realized he had been fooled himself by a master actor into thinking the aliens' presence on Earth was strictly benevolent.

He would have to play his role with great care. If the aliens discovered he knew their true motives, they'd dispose of him on the spot. Whatever they were planning, it was more important to them than John Amory's life.

"I've been thinking over your proposition," he said conversationally. "I don't know as I like it so much."

The alien looked grieved. "What are your objections, then?"

Frowning, Amory said, "First of all, what's in it for me? Me, personally."

"Anything you like. Wealth. Copies of the books you secure for us. We can be very helpful that way."

Amory nodded. "That sounds good. But two: how do I know you're acting in good faith?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, suppose you're planning to make away with our most priceless art treasures as soon as I point them out to you. Suppose you're not planning to take duplicates back with you, but the actual originals? In that case I'd hate to be the man who led you on."

"I could give you my word we have no such intentions. Does that convince you?"

Your word means a lot, Amory thought bitterly. Out loud he said, "No, but I'll have to accept it."

"Any further objections?"

"Some. For one thing, I don't even know your name, or where you're from. I hate working for phantoms. And lastly, I want you to understand that I'm employed, and my work will have to come first. Whatever time I devote to this . . . project of yours, it will be spare time only."

"Very well. We anticipated such a request, and we'll honor it. As for where we're from, I'll say only that it's a star in the Lesser Magellanic

Cluster, as I think you refer to it; there isn't much point in telling you which one, is there? There are so many."

Amory shrugged. "Granted. You must have instantaneous spacedrive, then. Or else you don't mind a twenty or thirty thousand year trip across space to collect a few symphonies and paintings."

"We have instantaneous drive," the alien said calmly.

"You didn't tell me your name," Amory pointed out.

"My name? How unimportant, really! But you call me Cargh, if you wish. Just Cargh; the numbers are a bore. Is everything settled, then?"

Amory forced himself into a reflective mood, as if he were still weighing possible alternatives and objections, and not as though he had chosen a course of action long before Cargh had reentered the room.

At length he said, "Okay. I'm your man. When do I begin?"

Cargh's steady grin grew warmer. "Whenever you choose. We don't have a great deal of time, but we have enough. First I suppose you'd like to know where you are."

"That might help," Amory admitted.

The alien slid his webbed hands along the wall near the window, and a section of plastic sprang up, revealing control-panels underneath. Cargh touched the depolarizer and the film of opacity peeled away from the window.

Bright morning sunlight came streaming through.

"Recognize the territory?"

Amory looked. Even at dawn, mid-Manhattan was crowded; early-shift workers rode the Overway far below, a steady stream of bright-colored teardrops descending on the city from the suburbs. The air still looked clean and fresh, but the day's pollution would soon be upon it.

Directly across the way rose the glittering column of the Hanley Building; facing it was the shining chrome needle of Transvideo Tower. They were in the very heart of Manhattan.

"I'll be damned," Amory said wonderingly. "Only in New York City could something like this happen. I mean having a bunch of aliens come down out of the Magellanic Clouds and set up an office, with nobody noticing, nobody caring. Right here in the middle of Manhattan."

Cargh was still smiling. "You're not far from your place of work, I believe. It'll be quite convenient for you to come here after your video chores are finished. This is the ninety-third floor of Huxley Gardens. We've rented the entire floor."

"I'll be damned," Amory said again. He was not merely playing a role, now; he was genuinely astonished.

Cargh re-opaqued the window. "We don't care for your sunlight," he explained. "And things are more private this way."

"Of course."

"I understand today is a day off for you," the alien went on. "We wouldn't want to cut into it any more than we've already done. We'll get in touch with you tomor-

row and make further arrangements. If you'll come this way—"

Cargh led him through a corridor, past another sphincter, and out into the main hall. "This is as far as I can go," he said. "We never venture past that door. But you'll find the dropshaft just beyond."

"Thanks," Amory said. He passed through an iris sphincter and waved to the vanishing Cargh. The neat lettering on the outer skin of the sphincter said:

CARGH & CO.

By Appointment Only

That was all. No hint that behind that shining metal oval lived the vanguard of an alien invasion force. Amory pressed for the dropshaft and realized his hands were shaking almost uncontrollably. He wondered when the aliens would discover they had accidentally exposed a vital document, and whether they would ever learn he had read it.

AMORY REACHED his home, in fashionable Fort Lee just on the Jersey side of the Hudson River, twenty minutes later, having taken a cab up to 110th Street and there across the Cathedral Avenue river-tube to the Jersey side. He had a modest three-room apartment with full privacy insulation, on the thirty-ninth floor of a sharply contoured multiple dwelling. It cost him \$1000 a month, and he considered it a bargain at that rate.

He had furnished it handsomely. There were ways of circumventing

taxes to some extent, and he had drawn his \$10,000-a-week check from the network long enough to be a wealthy man by now. Rich carpets covered the floor, providing presence for his sound system; pseudowood bookcases occupied three walls from floor to ceiling, and oriental screens, fabulously rare since the People's Republic had declared its Non-Intercourse Act and cut all of Asia off from contact with the hated west, decorated his study. Amory lived well.

He sank into a webfoam chair that faced the subtly-hued Tanguy original he had bought three years back, and dialed a drink: bourbon, straight. The first shot was merely a bracer; he tossed it down and dialed another. *Aliens*, he thought. *Invasion force*.

There still was plenty of time. But definite plans were taking shape in his mind. First, he had to find out some things.

He picked up the phone extension and punched out Ted Beckett's number. The phone rang six, seven times; then the screen across the room brightened and Beckett's worried face appeared, squinting slightly.

"Hello, Ted," Amory said. "I wake you up?"

"I've been up a while. Feeling better now, John?"

Amory smiled. "That's why I'm calling. I want some info. Last thing I remember, I was watching a film at your place. Next I know I wake up over here in my own bed. I want to know where the hell I was in between, and what happened to me last night."

Beckett said, "You don't remember?"

"Not a thing. Not a damn thing."

"You got sick, right in the middle of the film. Got out of your seat and staggered halfway across the room, and fell flat on your face. We couldn't get you to come round for anything, John."

"So?"

"So Lee Nourse took you home and got you a doctor, and that's the last I knew until you just called. Didn't they leave a note or anything?"

"Not a thing. Someone put me to bed, but that's all I know."

"You better call Nourse then," Beckett said. "He can tell you what happened after you left here. I really don't know." Beckett was chewing his lip suspiciously; Amory, a professionally skilled interpreter of such mannerisms, read easily that Beckett was lying, but at this point there was no need to press anything.

Casually Amory asked, "Before I sign off—can you give me the number of that esper who was at your party? Gill Hadafield, that's his name. I want to talk to him."

Again Beckett munched his lip. "You better ask Nourse for that too. Lee knows the guy; I don't."

"I see. Well, thanks, Ted. Thanks anyway."

He broke the contact and watched Beckett's harried face vanish from the screen. His fingers hovered over the dialing stud a moment; he was on the verge of dialing Lee Nourse when the sudden dull plop of the mailchute told him that something had arrived.

He rose, opened the door, and took in the bulky manila envelope. Within was a video script, with a covering note from Dave Kavanagh that said simply, *Here's the script for next week's show.*

Amory glanced at it. The mimeographed topsheet said, FOLLY AND FORTUNE, A Drama In Two Acts, by Matthew Viglan. Beneath that came the little rubber-stamp that signified Scripting Committee approval. He tossed the script onto his desk, reflecting that there was probably as much of Matt Viglan's work in it as there had been of Lee Nourse's in *Mist of Desire*. The Committee had a way of frowning on individual stylistic enterprise.

But it was difficult to think of such things as video scripts right now.

He dialed Lee Nourse's number and got Nourse's wife, a blonde tense-looking woman with a shrill voice. "Lee's not home," she half-screamed at him.

"Where can I find him, then? This is John Amory."

"Who?"

"Amory. I directed his last script *Mist of Desire*." He tried to keep the annoyance out of his voice.

"Oh," she said. "Well, he's at his studio, Mr. Amory. He doesn't like to be disturbed while he works. I don't know if I can give you his number—"

"That's all right, Mrs. Nourse," Amory said smoothly. "I already have it." He rang off and dialed the other number, leaving her to protest to a blank screen.

Nourse took his time about an-

swering. Amory let the phone ring, knowing that the writer would pick up sooner or later, and after the tenth or eleventh ring he finally answered. "Yes?" he snarled angrily—and, seeing Amory, softened at once. "How do you feel today, John?"

"Puzzled," Amory said. "I called Beckett and he couldn't tell me anything. What the blazes happened to me last night at his place?"

Nourse looked uneasy. "It must have been that wine you had, John. You conked out in the middle of the film. Luckily someone at the party was a doctor, and he took a look at you and said it was nothing serious, just a nervous reaction—a fluke thing. So I was elected to take you home and put you to bed. I was going to call about noon to find out how you were, but I guess I don't have to."

That was very interesting, Amory thought. Beckett hadn't said anything about a doctor at the party. Already he had found one major contradiction in the story, and he suspected there would be more. A faint twitch of Nourse's left eyelid aroused his suspicions.

"I'm okay now," Amory said. "I'm not as young as I used to be. Say,—you know that esper Hadafield you brought with you last night?"

"Y-ess," Nourse said.

"I'd like to get in touch with him. Do you think you could let me have his number?"

Nourse shook his head. "He doesn't have a phone. He's a hard man to reach."

"How do I do it?" asked Amory,

grinning. "With a ouija board?"

"No, there are better ways. Look—how bad do you want to see him, John?"

"Bad bad. I want him to make a long-distance pickup for me. To Rumania."

Again Nourse's eyelid twitched uncontrollably. But the writer's voice was even as he said, "I guess it can be arranged. When do you want to see him?"

"Toward the end of the week. Let's see, now—today's Wednesday. What can you do about Sunday afternoon?"

"I'll give it a try," Nourse promised. "Call me Saturday for an okay."

"Will do," Amory said, and signed off.

He spent the next hour reading *Folly and Fortune*, the new script, with the sort of care he might lavish on a newly-discovered Shaw comedy. Viglan's script was a formula job, difficult to distinguish from the one by Nourse that had left his hands the day before. Characters, basic conflict, even the style—identical, as might be expected from any script produced by the committee system.

Amory read it with care. The secret of his success was to take anything, even trash like this, and treat it as if it were an enduring work of art, shutting out any outside distraction as he did so. Aliens from the Magellanic Clouds had invaded Earth; still, the script had to be read. He ploughed grimly past a note Van Graben had pencilled in on the eleventh page, saying, *This*

is a moment of great poignancy. Do your best with it, John. Such helpfulness had angered him, in the beginning; now he scarcely noticed the comment.

He had not quite finished his first examination of the script when the phone rang. He snapped on his extension, but instead of showing a caller's face the screen merely presented a swirling pattern of red and blue whorls. A bright, impersonal voice said, "We have a closed-circuit call for Mr. John Amory, person-to-person. If Mr. Amory is at home, will he please signal his identity-code?"

A call of this sort cost a fancy figure, even on a local basis. Frowning curiously, Amory tapped out his special code, which only he and the phone company knew. After a pause came the operator's acknowledging "Go ahead, please," and the scatter-pattern on the screen broke. The swirling colors reformed into an alien face.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Amory. This is Cargh."

"What can I do for you?" Amory said automatically, studying the alien to see if Cargh betrayed any suspicious manifestations. But the dark blue face showed no outward change.

"I'd like to make our first appointment," Cargh said. "Are you free tomorrow?"

"I'm starting a new show tomorrow. How's Friday?"

"Friday evening?"

"Friday afternoon," Amory said. "I could get to your place about one, one-thirty. And then I'll be free most of Saturday, too."

"Very well," said Cargh. "We can expect you Friday afternoon, then? Between one and one-thirty."

"I'll be there."

The screen blanked without another word from the alien. Amory had been unable to read the alien's face, but it did not seem to him that Cargh's attitude had changed since the last time they had spoken. They still did not know Amory had seen the document.

Unless, of course, they were preparing a trap.

He threw himself into his work with a sort of desperate energy, plunging deep into the problems of staging *Folly and Fortune* as if that could keep his mind from Cargh and the memorandum he had accidentally been permitted to read.

The part Nourse and Beckett played in this affair troubled him, too. Obviously, they hadn't told him the whole truth, or anything near the whole truth, about what had been done to him at that party. He had deliberately been drugged and turned over to the aliens—by whom?

He felt suddenly cold. What if all of them—Nourse and Beckett and Viglan and that esper too—were in the pay of the aliens, or otherwise under sway? Plainly there had been a plot to turn him over to Cargh; who knew what lay behind that plot? Discontented intellectuals so tired of the world they were willing to hand it over to the Magellanics without strings?

Maybe. Ted Beckett and Lee Nourse were embittered, unhappy men. Amory easily could see them

doing something like this, as a wild means of revenge against the world that had no use for their talents.

He shook his head and turned again to the script, and immediately intrigue and revenge faded from his mind. By some curious process of inversion the puerile script came to glowing life as he read it, until each character occupied a definite niche in his mind, firmly-rounded, vivid, bright with individuation, while Beckett and Nourse and Cargh faded to the status of cardboard figures in a Hollywood melodrama. Amory worked at this level of intensity until the bonging of the autochef told him it was dinner-time; he chewed chlorella steak with protoid syrup mechanically, downed his caffeine-drink unknowingly, carelessly tumbled the dishes into the washer, and returned to his study, brimming over with enthusiasm, real and unfaked, for the play.

He finished working at 8:30. He had a fairly good action-chart in mind, knew with reasonable accuracy what sort of stage-rhythms he would ask for, where to underscore and where to come down hard. Directing a play was a subtle game with Amory; knowing that he alone would appreciate the nuances he built into each production failed to dampen his enthusiasm for his work.

His video set remained dead, though, despite the fact that *Mist of Desire* would be reaching the public this evening. He had no interest in seeing a play once he had finished with it. It was the original creative frenzy that attracted his

mind, not the final product, which more often than not would be hopelessly disappointing. Wednesday nights he never tuned in his set; ritualistically, he listened to old opera tapes instead.

He chose *Wozzeck* this evening. The work was in German, a language he knew fairly well, and he listened, eyes closed, thinking occasionally of Germany and the other now half-forgotten nations on the other side of the Atlantic. Curious, he thought: for the past generation his world had been bounded by Canada on the north, the Federated Empire of Latin-America on the south, and the oceans to east and west. Germany was a dream-land somewhere in Europe; somewhere else in Europe was Rumania, and there lived one Filimon Grigorescu, like himself an agent of the aliens. Amory tried to picture the map of Europe, and Rumania in relation to Germany, but failed; even though he was old enough to have been taught geography once, he had forgotten most of what he knew.

Wozzeck pursued its moody course. It ended about the time his drama hour went off the air, and he cut the sound system and dialed the studio.

This was another tradition. Van Graben would be there, of course, and Kavanagh—those two seemed to live in the Transvideo Tower. Amory asked for either of them, and got Graben.

"How'd it look from out there?" Graben asked at once.

"Splendid," Amory lied. "Reports come in yet?"

"There's just a few. Early re-

turns, of course, but it looks magnificent. Product-Intensity's up four point two so far, on early samplings. Jaberson's wild with joy."

That was the way it went, Amory thought. A notch or two up a graph and the evening was a success; an equal distance down the checked paper, and heads rolled in the morning. He said, "How about the competition?"

"We haven't received much from Hinkey yet, but the studio did a little monitoring on its own and we hardly found anyone watching Universal from nine to ten. They're probably cutting their throats over there. Couldn't happen to a nicer bunch, either." Graben smiled, showing white even teeth too symmetrical to be natural. "Well, I've got to take off now. They're yelling for me downstairs. Congrats again, John. Here's Kavanagh."

The Scripting Committee man looked less enthusiastic. His wide, pockmarked face had none of Graben's almost hysterical happiness. "I think we fouled up, John," he said.

"What? Graben's drunk with joy. You going to gloom things up, Dave?"

This was traditional too. Kavanagh looked moody and said, "Graben's going to calm down when he sees the Mundy-Richardson for tonight. You know that scene where the hero storms out of the heroine's place muttering in his beard?"

"Of course I know it. What went wrong?" Amory asked.

"The Mundy-Richardson people ran an ideological check on it, and

it turned out that one of fifteen people were sure he was heading for a bar. A *bar*, John! What a miserable connotation! I don't know how we could have let anything so ambiguous slip through. We may have to fire Nourse for a stunt like that."

Of course, Amory thought. Don't blame yourselves for the ambiguous scene; don't blame the Scripting Committee for fouling up. Blame the writer. You hire him just to serve as a scapegoat in a pinch like this anyway, and you pay him well enough.

"Nourse is a good man," Amory said cautiously. "You better think about that a couple of times before you do anything serious."

"We *never* do anything without thinking, John," Kavanagh said with sudden implied malice. "And a low Mundy-Richardson brings trouble with the client. We can't have that, John."

"Of course not."

Kavanagh pleaded an urgent post-show conference and hung up. Scowling angrily, Amory turned away from the phone. Kavanagh could find a crisis in anything—and tomorrow there would be a new party-line for his writers to follow.

The phone rang again. Amory shut his eyes, took a deep breath, and answered.

It was Lee Nourse, and he looked excited. Before he could say anything, Amory asked, "Did you see the show tonight?"

Nourse made an impatient face. "Of course not. But listen—"

"You listen. Something went

wrong with the Mundy-Richardson rating and Kavanagh's foaming at the mouth. Graben doesn't know what happened yet, but you better be near your phone when he finds out. There's talk of making you the sacrificial scapegoat when it's time for the network to issue its *mea culpas*."

"The hell with that," Nourse snapped. "How can I worry about some damned video show when a friend is suffering?"

"Who are you talking about?" Amory asked, in sudden alarm.

"Beckett. Bunch of hoodlums broke into his place about half an hour ago and just about wrecked the works. A bunch called the Riverdale Raiders—know them? They beat Ted up and turned a hose loose inside the apartment. He woke up in two feet of water."

Amory muttered a short, sharp, eloquent curse. "Is anyone with him?"

"Viglan's on his way over now. I'm leaving as soon as I get off the phone."

"Should I come too?"

"Not just yet," Nourse said. "He's in pretty bad shape; we don't want to crowd him. But I just thought I'd let you know what happened."

"Thanks," Amory said.

He stared bleakly at the dead screen. *Riverdale Raiders*, he thought, snorting angrily. They must have had a fine old time with the helpless Beckett.

He could understand now what might persuade people like Nourse, sick of the senseless brutality and festering hatred that seemed to spring wild through humanity, to

hand the planet over to the Magellanics. Bitterly he realized he might almost do the same himself, if he cared a little more strongly. *Riverdale Raiders*, he thought again, and swore.

FIRST REHEARSAL of *Folly and Fortune* was called for eight the following evening. Entertainment people preferred to work after dark; during the day Manhattan was clogged with people despite the scattering effect achieved by abandonment of a rigid 9-to-5 work day. By eight p.m. only the last two shifts remained on, and then the night people emerged to do their work.

Amory worked on the new script until almost six; eating then, he dressed and left. He had a stop to make before arriving at the studio.

It was nearly seven by the time he reached Ted Beckett's cellar apartment in Riverdale. Beckett was there, wearing a tattered gray dressing-gown, and he was accompanied by Matt Viglan.

The place was a wreck. Pools of moisture still lay unmopped on the floor; the walls had evidently been hosed as well, since soggy masses of paper indicated where Beckett's Picasso prints had been. A book lay floating in a puddle at Amory's feet: *The Castle*, Amory saw. The backbone had been split and pages drifted loose in the water.

"Hello, John," Beckett said in a small tired voice. He wore a turban of bandages around his skull; his lower lip was swollen, his right eye blackened. Amory saw the

movie screen dangling behind him, slashed three times down its full length.

"Why did this happen?" Amory asked.

Beckett shrugged. "It's been due for a long time. The people next door used to sit with their ears against the walls listening every time I had a film showing. They must have notified the local vigilante committee that people were *thinking* in here. And of course they couldn't allow that to go on, so—" Beckett shrugged, indicating the destruction. "They came last night. Seven or eight of them, in masks. They pushed their way past me and started dumping the books out of the shelves." Beckett stared broodingly at the heap of rubble that had been his library and added, "I'm glad they hit me. I wouldn't have wanted to be conscious while it was going on."

Amory clenched his fists. "Do the police know?"

"Of course they know," Viglan said. "I called them when I got over here. They came, and they helped pump the place dry, and they left. That's all."

"Won't there be any investigation?"

"Of this? Don't be naive, John."

Amory glanced sharply at Beckett. "You knew this was going to happen, Ted. You could have moved. You could have told us to stop coming here. You could have asked us to hire protection for you. You didn't. Why?"

"What was the use?" Beckett asked quietly. "Sure, I knew it was coming. I didn't try to fight it. But

I didn't want to give up ahead of time. I wouldn't let them scare me out of what I enjoyed. So in a sense I won, even if they ruined everything. You see that, John?"

Amory nodded. "I see."

He reached the studio at ten of eight. The cast was there already, along with Graben and Kavanagh. None of the technicians or camera men were on hand; those would come later in the week, after Amory had worked out the rough plan of his staging and imparted it to the cast. Tonight would simply be a runthrough, as Amory surveyed the coarse material and set about shaping it into the polished production that would be shown the following Wednesday.

Kavanagh glanced up at him as he entered. "Evening, John."

"Hello, Dave. Van. We recover from last night's catastrophe yet? Or are the returns still coming in?"

Both Graben and Kavanagh looked blank. Graben said, "What the devil you mean, John? We picked up an even five on P-I, and the Hinkey was a smash. Universal's moaning. You joking or something?"

"I'm talking about the Mundy-Richardson," Amory said.

"That was fine too," said Graben, frowning. The network executive's artificial smile clicked off for an instant to show displeasure, then clicked back, steely as ever. "What's eating you, Amory?"

"Last night," Amory said patiently, "I called you. Dave told me we took a beating on the Mundy-Richardson and that heads

would roll. Didn't he tell you?"

Graben swivelled his head toward Kavanagh. "Huh?"

Kavanagh shrugged vaguely. "I hardly remember now. Those must have been early returns, or something. The graph levelled off beautifully toward midnight when the Coast poop came in. Splendid job last night, John; splendid."

Amory felt sick. These network men were slick and empty, living only in the current minute. Kavanagh had already managed to forget the short-lived crisis of the night before.

"You hear what happened to Ted Beckett?" Amory asked.

Graben nodded. "Viglan called in with the story. Matt won't be here tonight, by the way—he's tending a sick aunt. But we all heard."

"I knew Beckett was wrong from the start," Kavanagh said. "I always know in a case like that. I fired him because he was a deviationist, you know."

"Yes. I remember," Amory said stiffly.

"Well, now the court of public opinion has confirmed it. Whatever he got was better than he deserved. And I tell you, that Lee Nourse is going to go the same way one of these months. One more ideologically uncertain script and—"

Amory coughed suddenly. "Time to get the rehearsal under way, I guess." He walked away, leaving Kavanagh with mouth gaping open fishwise, wanting to get away from those two before some of their inner corruption slopped out and poisoned him.

"Places, everyone!" he snapped. "First run-through of *Folly and Fortune!*"

Like every other first run-through, it was abominable. Amory held himself in check through the entire first act, delivering himself of a blistering fifteen-minute speech when the curtain-line had been spoken. To his relief, the second act picked up slightly. He thought about Matt Viglan's "sick aunt," and wondered what Graben and Kavanagh would say if they learned that the author of tonight's stellar script had lied to them, and was actually at this very moment in the presence of Theodore Beckett, subversive and arch-deviationist. And that the man directing tonight's stellar script had just left Beckett's place himself.

Heads would certainly roll, to use Kavanagh's own beloved phrase.

He remembered another phrase, from a calm memorandum: . . . *necessary for Galactic peace to cleanse Earth of its population . . .*

"Exit left, Ray," the part of his mind watching the stage said. "Peg's going to be coming on right, so you can't go out the same door. See?"

Cleanse Earth? Well, why not? Why struggle to save Earth from the Magellanics, why fight to preserve Graben and Kavanagh and Real People and their Real Problems in the World of Today, and the seven or eight Riverdale Raiders who had smashed Ted Beckett's apartment?

Shaking his head, he forced himself to devote all his attention to

the stage. With a conscious effort he drove the upwelling pessimism into a deep recess of his mind, and turned his mind to other problems.

Folly and Fortune ground on to its soggy finale; Amory broke in constantly to snap his whip. At eleven-fifteen he was at last satisfied, and dismissed the cast. "Be here at eight sharp tomorrow," he ordered. "And if you don't know your lines letter-clean, don't bother showing up."

He turned away from his podium. Only half-listening, he took in Graben's comments on the script, heard Kavanagh praise the fine work his Committee had done in preparing it from Viglan's error-riddled original, and excused himself.

The moment of defeat had passed. Perhaps Aristotle's ancient precept still held: the play, feeble as it was, had somehow purged him of pity and fear. He had his answer to the dark question of half an hour earlier.

Perhaps mankind *should* be cleansed from the face of the Earth. But, he thought, it should be man himself who does the cleansing, not cold-eyed beings from the stars.

He kept his appointment with Cargh. Precisely at one-twenty the following afternoon he arrived outside the mirror-bright sphincter-door which read CARGH & CO., BY APPOINTMENT ONLY.

Well, he had an appointment. Tentatively he touched the surface of the sphincter. A voice from a concealed speaker said, "Just one



moment, Mr. Amory.”

The sphincter opened.

Amory followed the corridor as far as the inner sphincter, which was already open. Cargh met him there and led him down the hall to the room where he had awakened on Wednesday. The place was strangely silent.

“Aren’t there any others around?” Amory asked. “I mean, you’re not the only one of your kind on Earth, are you?”

“Of course not. There are others. There are others here in Manhattan, and there are some in Europe as well. We’re aware that there’s

little communication between continents on this planet, and we’re hopeful of making our survey as complete as possible.”

Of course, Amory thought. He noticed that the desk was clear of papers this time, and that the document he had slid under the leg had been removed.

Cargh gestured to a foamy turquoise recliner that faced the desk, and indicated that Amory should lie down in it. He did so, wondering idly whether this was the prelude to an invasion or an analysis. Cargh looked sleek and calm, his dark blue face picking up highlights from the

hard clear glow-lights embedded in the ceiling. He seemed in no hurry to begin the interview.

At length he seated himself behind the desk, drew a tablet and stylus from somewhere, and said, "You're an expert on the drama, Mr. Amory. Right?"

"I like to think so," Amory said, half sardonically and half in humility.

"We've collected a good-size library of plays already," Cargh said. "I'll read you the titles. On this first reading, I want you to rate the plays on an absolute scale of value, the most enduring being rated *One*, the almost-great *Two*, and so on down to *Ten*. Can you do that?"

"I suppose so," Amory said. *Absolute scale of values*, he thought. *As if such a thing could exist in literature. But that's the way a race that goes around cleansing other planets might think.*

He did his best. Cargh smiled blankly at him and spouted a title: "*Hedda Gabler*. Ibsen."

"Three," Amory said without thinking. "No—four."

"*Revenger's Tragedy*. Tourneur."

"Two."

"*Coriolanus*. Shakespeare."

"Take all of Shakespeare, I'd say."

"We asked for individual ratings," Cargh said coldly.

"Two, then."

"*Bussy D'ambois*. Chapman."

"Five."

It went on for more than an hour; Amory yielded up snap judgements with vigor and glee, barking them back as fast as the alien could read the play-titles to

him. The fact that he had somehow rated *Doctor Faustus* above *All for Love* but below *Aurung-Zebe* meant little to him; it was impossible to keep half a thousand relative gradings in mind, and the absolute scale Cargh had asked for simply did not exist.

At length Cargh said, "Thank you very much. You've been extremely helpful. Now, as to music —"

Another weary hour went by as Amory classified composers by ranks. Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Bartok, Monteverdi rated the first rank; he placed Wagner too low, Corelli too high, but did not bother to correct his ratings when he thought back over them. The situation was roughly analogous to the one he faced in directing video plays: the people benefiting from his talents simply did not know the difference between good and bad, and so whatever he said was right.

"There'll be difficulties in locating all these works, I imagine," Cargh said, staring down at his list. "We only have collected a few recordings so far. I suppose you'll be able to help us in that."

"I suppose so," Amory agreed. He coughed and said, "All this talking is making me thirsty. Do you think you could—"

"Of course." Cargh nudged the stud at the side of the desk, and almost immediately afterward another alien entered carrying a tray. To Amory's astonishment he saw the newcomer was identical in every respect to Cargh.

He took the drink—a wine, mildly acrid, light green-yellow in color.

He sipped slowly, knowing this would be his only moment of rest until the interrogation was over. It was only when he finished and replaced the glass on the gleaming tray that he remembered his troubles had begun with a glass of very similar wine.

"What is this stuff?" he asked.

Cargh smiled blandly. "It's a German wine. Our European agents sent it to us. Do you like it?"

"Very much."

"We'll have a case of it sent to your home at once. Consider it part payment from us. Now, in the field of art, would you say—"

He called a halt to the proceedings at 4:30, claiming truthfully that he had to ready himself for the evening's rehearsal. He felt physically drained, both from the mental effort of marshalling critical data and forming rapid-fire opinions and from the deeper strain of masking his true feelings from the alien.

"Must you go so soon?" Cargh asked.

"I'm afraid so."

He clambered up from the recliner and the alien guided him through the winding corridors again, out to the dropshaft, and with murmured expressions of gratitude saw him off. Amory found himself below in the street almost uncomfortably soon afterward.

It was approaching five; the standard-shift people were flooding from the office buildings, ready to streak homeward. A beggar advanced down the broad avenue toward Amory, limping along on a

bright chrome crutch; his left leg ended neatly at the knee.

"Got some money for a needy man, doctor?"

The beggar stared him squarely in the eyes, facing him from the uptown side of the street. Overhead the commuters whizzed by. The beggar's voice was deep and resonant; Amory liked the timbre. "I used to be an actor," the man said. "I did plays. I lost my leg serving a term in prison for security deviation. Couple of my cellmates played a prank that worked out better than they thought. Can you spare a dollar, doctor?"

"You're not going to get very far advertising that you're a deviationist," Amory said. "You're likely to lose that other leg instead."

"I don't tell everyone that. But you look different. I can tell by the eyes. Can I have a dollar?"

Amory smiled slowly, drew out his billfold, and peeled off five crisp little plastic-impregnated bills. "Here," he said. "Courtesy of Transcontinental Televideo."

"But these are *twenties*, mister! *Twenties!*"

"I know," Amory said, and stalked away, down the busy humming street, looking for a place to eat and pass three hours until the rehearsal. Once he looked back and saw the beggar smiling after him, clutching Amory's guilt-offering in his hand.

You can buy a man's soul, Amory thought, *with a fistful of twenties*. Tired, dispirited, he found a corner autovend, cashed a bill in for tokens, and dined miserably on algae pancakes that were stale and

undercooked, washing them down with lukewarm caffeine-drink in a greasy cup. When he dumped the dishes into the conveyer, he caught a glimpse of his face reflected in a metal pillar, and saw that it was pale and shiny with sweat.

THE NEXT DAY was Saturday; Amory, sharp in his resolve, called Nourse about noon. The writer was at home. He looked across the screen at Amory with a faint smile curling his lips, as if he were smug and complacent about something Amory was not to know.

Amory said, "You know why I'm calling, don't you?"

"You want to see that esper. Okay, John—I set up the appointment for you for tomorrow at three-thirty. Hadafield will see you at home."

"Where's that?"

"Out on the Island," Nourse said. "Better carry a gun. I'll meet you at the Island Thruway Depot at two-thirty sharp."

Nourse, as always, met his own deadline. Amory arrived at the arching glassite bubble that was the Thruway Depot at two-twenty-nine, according to the glowing radioclock atop the main tower, and Nourse was already there, his lean face nervously anticipatory, slouching against a seat in the waiting-room with one foot drawn up beneath his body.

"There's a cab waiting for us on Level Four," Nourse said. "He'll take us as far as Levittown. Hadafield lives a little further up, but it's off the Thruway and no driver

will go there. Armed?"

Amory nodded, indicating a bulge under one arm. "I've had this thing for years without needing to use it. I hope today's not the day."

"You never can tell," Nourse said.

Their cab was waiting on Level Four as Nourse had said, its turboelectric motor throbbing impatiently. The cab, of course, was driverless; the driver sat comfortably in an air-conditioned booth beneath the Hudson River, ready to guide them by remote control. Human-driven vehicles had been outlawed thirty years before, as dangerously unsafe.

Nourse got in first, Amory after him, and they strapped their safety-belts down securely. The door clicked shut; it would not open again until the fare had been paid in full.

"Okay, driver," Nourse said to the speaker-receiver grid above his head. "Let's go."

The car silently swung down the winding rampway that led from the depot garage to the main road; the engines picked up power as they moved on, and by the time the car popped out onto the roadway they were travelling at seventy miles an hour. The cab settled easily into the traffic-pattern, controls locked down at a smooth hundred thirty-five m.p.h., and glided along the shining roadway that led to the dismal slums of Long Island.

Amory said nothing. He watched the whizzing scenery, the barely-glimpsed heaps of rotting old houses, here and there the bright towers of a reclamation project

newly erected. Town after town flew past, with hardly an acre of green undeveloped land to be seen anywhere. It began to seem as if three-quarters of New York City's nineteen million inhabitants lived out here on the Island, though Amory knew that was untrue.

"Levittown," the driver said finally.

The meter read \$3.26. Amory took out a five, slid it into the waiting orifice, and waited a moment for the bill to be scanned. The cab slowed to a halt just beyond the Thruway turnoff; a dollar bill clicked back out of the slot, followed by seventy-four cents in change. The cab doors opened of their own accord.

Amory and Nourse rode the escalator down to ground level—this part of the Thruway was too old to be equipped with dropshafts—and paused a moment on the edge of the crumbling, criss-crossed pedestrian walkway, getting their bearings.

The houses had evidently been identical at one time, row on row on row of them extending back from the roadway for miles. But the passage of years had worked a strange metamorphosis: each homeowner or home-renter, anxious to differentiate his own place in some way, had altered it. Now the foremost row presented a garish appearance. The squat little old buildings were painted red and green and blue, no two the same color, and here or there a striated web-work of yellow caught the eye. Most of them were losing their paint, too, which augmented the general

piebald appearance. Curious ornate balconies and chimneys and other such excrescences had been added to a few homes in a further attempt to distinguish them from their neighbors.

And the filth. Amory stood ankle-deep in uncollected garbage that had been strewn near the pedestrian walkway; out here none of the houses had thermal disposals, and the garbage collection was uncertain and irregular. Amory had thought Riverdale was filthy—but Beckett's area had looked virtually antiseptic compared with what met his eye now.

"It's up that hill, past Red Maple Drive and then right. Keep your eyes open," Nourse advised.

Amory nodded, unsmilingly. They started to walk.

They found the body on the corner of Red Maple, near their turn-off. Amory found it first, nearly stumbling over it (he had been looking to all sides, but not down) and emitting a little gasp of shock when he saw it.

It was the corpse of a man in his twenties—dead at least three days, perhaps more. His throat had been very meticulously sliced from a point beginning just under the left ear to the tip of the right jawbone, and just as meticulously his trouser-pockets had been slashed open and their contents extracted. The dirt-smearred face looked curiously untroubled.

"Come on," Nourse grunted. "You looking for trouble? We haven't had any yet; don't ask for it."

"We just walk by and leave this man here?"

Nourse shrugged. "He's dead, isn't he? You can't do him any good now. And maybe the fellow who killed him is lurking back of that trash barrel. You keep staring at that corpse, the locals'll think you're a relative come round to start a vendetta. Better keep moving, John."

"But—"

Amory saw there was no use protesting. He forced back a little shiver of disgust and they turned down Red Maple. A small, very dirty boy of about three, naked, lean, came out to stare at them as they went past. A woman of twenty—his mother, probably—snatched him back inside the house with a quick clawlike hand.

"They keep off the streets out here, don't they?"

"As a rule. You live longer that way." Nourse smiled moodily and added, "If anyone would buy it I'd write a novel about this place. It's the nearest thing to hell this side of the Mississippi, and right up there's the shiny Thruway like a symbol of all man's wonderful progress. And forty minutes away is Manhattan. Here we are," he said quietly, almost as an afterthought, and they turned up the walk toward a small shabby house whose unpainted exterior made it almost flamboyantly conspicuous amid the riot of color all around it.

The name on the mailbox was *Crisley*. Below it, in smaller letters, came the names *Bryan*, *Vuorjek*, *Levin*, *Hadafield*. "Espers tend to cluster together," Nourse explained

as he rang the bell. The door opened almost immediately, without the usual interval for scanning the visitors. Of course, Amory thought; espers wouldn't need to maintain a conventional scanning system.

He found himself looking up into gentle green eyes, set in a nondescript round-featured face.

"Hello, Mr. Amory," Gill Hadafield said.

Psionic contact was a new field of experience for Amory. He lay quietly on the ragged couch in Hadafield's one bare room, watching the inert figure of the esper on the floor, glancing occasionally at Nourse, who sat tense-faced in the darkest corner of the room.

Hadafield writhed as if in anguish a moment; curiously tranquil smiles flickered rapidly over his face, alternating with grimaces of real pain. Amory waited.

Filimon Grigorescu, he thought. Just a name on a memorandum from one Kress to one Cargh, concerning the forthcoming cleansing of life from Earth of the Sol system. And what a strange thing I have in common with Filimon Grigorescu of Rumania. Amory thought, watching Hadafield quiver in the effort to make contact.

It was curious how the total breakdown of intercontinental communication had coincided with a sudden upwelling of psi powers among humanity—as if the blockade of Europe and the confiscation of amateur radio equipment had somehow made it necessary for nature to provide some new means of

communication. There were not many admitted espers, and an unhappy number of those had the power only in a vague and indeterminate fashion, or else were sheer frauds seeking notoriety and perhaps martyrdom. Hadafield was the genuine article, though. He seemed to be in torment on the floor, but it was the ecstatic torment of the genuine mystic, the passionate pain of deep-level communication.

He sat up suddenly. His face was drained of blood; only his eyes showed no sign of strain. "Contact is achieved," he whispered. "There'll be a lag of a minute or two. Give me your hand, Amory."

"You sure this is going to be completely confidential, now," Amory asked uneasily.

Hadafield shrugged and said, "I tell you I'm simply acting as a short-wave radio for you. None of your message will stay in my mind; it'll all filter *through* me, through the link in Rumania, into your Grigorescu. But even if I could tune in on your message myself, which I can't, I assure you I'd keep it confidential." He groaned suddenly. "Grigorescu has been found. Hold on tight, now; when you let go of me, I'll have to break contact."

Hadafield's hand was cold and soft. Amory gripped it tightly, thinking, *Filimon Grigorescu, I want to talk with you. Filimon Grigorescu—*

A weird mental image formed in his mind: a dark violet-hued corridor, then a network of interlocking corridors, swirling and tangling and untangling again, stretching out over half the world, tightening,

thickening—

Light appeared beyond the darkness. A bright hard spot of yellow that rushed forward like a flaming star, blazed fitfully, cooled—

I am Filimon Grigorescu, a silent voice said.

Grigorescu was communicated entire; a short stocky man, evidently of great physical strength, with deep searching eyes and a heavy outjutting nose whose fleshy tip reached almost to the firm upper lip. Amory saw him as clearly as if he stood in the darkened room. He was looking patiently at Amory, wondering apparently why he had been called; Amory knew suddenly that this was a man of integrity and faith.

Who are you?

"My name is John Amory. I'm an American. Do you know where and what America is?"

Of course. What do you want with me?

Instead of answering, Amory transmitted a sharp mental image of Cargh. It achieved its effect; Grigorescu seemed to recoil in quick astonishment.

"Do you know who that is?"

That is Cargh. How do you know him?

Grigorescu's alien contact, then, had given the same name, or else perhaps was the same one whom Amory knew. Back from the Rumanian came an equally vivid image of the alien.

"I . . . help Cargh here in America," Amory said. "Selecting works of art for him to take back to his own world."

And I too. I was bewildered when they first came to me, but I am

over my fear of them now and have been of great help to them.

Amory took a deep breath. His metallic mesh blouse was pasted stickily to his back. "Do you know why Cargh and his friends are on Earth?"

To study. To learn to know us.

"No," Amory said sharply.

"No?"

"Listen to me," Amory said. He transmitted a visual representation of the document he had seen four days before, at his first meeting with Cargh. The image was clear and sharp, well focussed.

For a long moment there was complete silence at the other end, and Amory wondered if the contact had been broken or not. Just as he had decided Grigorescu had broken off, the backwash of indignation and anger hit him, and he wavered under the force of it.

It is impossible to lie in this sort of contact, is it not? Grigorescu asked. *What you have shown me actually exists.*

"Yes," Amory said.

Then I have been deceived and we are all betrayed. I am a Judas, then, a Quisling, a traitor—

"You knew nothing. It wasn't your fault."

What should we do now?

Hadafield stirred; Amory knew the remaining time was short. "Don't do anything. Continue to work with the aliens, and whatever happens don't let them find out we know their real motives. I'll be in touch with you again; in the meantime, just keep on as before. I'm developing a plan against them."

A solid wave of gratitude came

flowing from the Rumanian. Hadafield stirred again. Then the image of Grigorescu wavered, blurred an instant, and shattered like a punctured bubble.

The shock of bursting back into reality stunned Amory an instant. He realized he had been gripping Hadafield's hand with terrible intensity, and he released it, seeing the marks of his fingers in the esper's pale flesh.

He sat up and looked around. Hadafield lay slumped as if in sleep; Nourse leaned back casually with legs crossed.

"Is it all over?" Nourse asked.

"Yes," Amory said, surprised to find that his voice was but a hoarse whisper. "I made contact. Couldn't you tell?"

"The two of you were in a trance the whole time. I couldn't hear anything." Nourse bent and gently lifted Hadafield. The esper's perspiration-flooded face was still knotted in concentration; slowly, he opened his eyes. "Was the contact satisfactory?" he asked.

"Very much so," Amory said. "I feel I owe you something. Is there any fee—"

"No," Hadafield said quickly.

"We never take money."

"All right then," said Amory. "Tell me: do you remember anything at all of what was said?"

Hadafield shook his head. "No. Not a thing."

Amory smiled grimly. "I guess you mean it. If you'd been listening, you—well, skip it. Lee, let's go home; I'm exhausted."

Hadafield accompanied them to the door; Amory caught one last

glimpse of the esper's fleshless big-nosed face staring curiously at him, and then the door closed. They made their way back to the Thru-way escalator in silence, and without incident.

SITTING OPPOSITE Nourse, staring up at the oriental screens on his study walls, Amory said, "How would you react if I told you the world was in terrible danger?"

Nourse smiled slowly and humorlessly. "I don't know. Is it?"

"You know more than you claim to," Amory responded. "But we'll let that drop for now. Suppose I told you that the future of humanity depends on reestablishment of contact between the nations of the world, and breakdown of this stasis of communication that's been in effect for the last thirty years? Suppose I say that unless we unite against a common enemy we're finished?"

Nourse sipped his drink reflectively; his eyelid was twitching, telling the watching Amory that a hidden chord had been struck. "There's been enmity between the hemispheres for almost a century," Nourse said in a quiet voice. "It never came to actual war, not a shooting-type war. But it turned into a propaganda war. And now America and Russia and Latin America and Asia each has its own little protective bubble, and if it weren't for the espers there'd be no communication with them at all. A couple of generations and no one in America will remember that there ever were any other countries.

And then some 25th Century lad will do a Columbus-in-reverse and discover Europe, and—"

"There won't *be* any 25th Century," Amory said. "Not unless those barriers come down within a year from now. Earth stands to be conquered."

"By whom?"

Amory rolled his eyes toward the ceiling and said, "You don't have to believe this. But there are extra-terrestrial beings already on Earth, getting ready for the invasion."

The silence that followed seemed to last forever. Nourse was perfectly immobile, staring at Amory as if he were staring *through* him. At length he said, "You've been watching Mark Belford's kiddie-horror hour again, John. Or maybe you've been directing it."

"I said you didn't have to believe it. I hardly believe it myself. But take it as a hypothetical case, then: given alien invaders, how do you proceed to save Earth?"

Nourse's eyelid twitched convulsively. "You can't come right out and tell everyone about the aliens, of course. No one would believe you."

"If I *produced* an alien?"

"That would be your final job. First it's necessary to reestablish contact between the nations. Once that's done, drag out your alien and show them the common threat." Nourse shook his head bitterly. "It's no simple job to reestablish contact, though. Three generations of Americans have been taught to hate Europe as a plague-spot. The young people hardly even know it's there. Thanks to our blessed mass media,

a perfect propaganda job has been done."

"Propaganda works both ways," Amory said. "And the video audience is a captive one. There must be fifty million compulsive televiewers in this country who'd sooner cut off a hand than turn the set off in the evening."

"What are you getting at?"

"Suppose—just for the sake of discussion—that a few people set about altering the national viewpoint, shifting it away from isolationism. A reference here, a news item there . . . it could be done, couldn't it?"

"How? I can put any damn thing I want into a script, but Dave Kavanagh's going to take it out again anyway, so why bother? Video's too thoroughly censored."

"Kavanagh has no control over the actual production. We get a few actors to restore your original lines the night of the performance—make them subtle, of course—and reinforce our holdings with printed handbills." Amory clasped his hands a moment and added, "We could get the newscasters to help out. And a few of the folksy guitar-men could slip a couple of references in. We carry this on for nearly a year, slowly building up in the public mind the concept that there are other countries in the world, that they're not our enemies, that we can live peacefully with them. Then—we pool our cash, buy 90 minutes of video time, and put on a spectacular fact-show that clinches the case. No one can censor it before hand, since *we'll* be the sponsors!"

"They can cut it off the air," Nourse pointed out.

"Certainly they can. But that'll simply arouse the public more strongly. We bait our hook in the first part of the show; if they cut us off, the audience is going to want to know why. It won't be easy, but I think we could manage to swing it. And then finally we get the barrier legislation repealed and—"

"You talk as if this can be done in a single year," Nourse said. "It can't. Five years, ten maybe, but not one year. It takes time to put a world back together."

Amory stood up. "We only have a year, Lee. I wasn't fooling about those aliens. They're here, and they're ready to wipe us all out."

"John—"

"Okay," snapped Amory. "*Don't* believe me. Let's just take this on as an intellectual game: can we, being influential executives of America's greatest mass medium, so manipulate the public consciousness in a way that will bring about the rebirth of internationalism? Call it a project. Set a year's deadline for it."

"It's subversive. It's deviational."

"Of course it is. Will you help?"

Nourse smiled warmly. "Sure I will," he said. "Aliens or no aliens."

The next few days were busy ones for Amory. He put in his nightly stint on *Folly and Fortune*, which underwent a midweek change of title to *Flesh and Folly*. The word came from Dave Kavanagh, who explained that money-referents were henceforth to be dropped from drama-program titles,

as a general rule. It seemed the Mundy-Richardson connotation researchers had come up with the fact that many viewers subconsciously resented such referents, and tended to objectify their resentment by staying away from the client's product.

A close observer might have noticed that Amory was not devoting his full intensity of attention to the rechristened play, but there were no close observers. Amory saw to it that the job he was turning out was mechanically competent, at least, but he made no extra effort to inspire his cast. He needed his energies elsewhere.

For three hours each day he met with Cargh, and he and the alien progressed rapidly on their tour of Terran art and culture. Chiefly Amory's work was one of list-making: he prepared lengthy catalogues of the world's finest paintings, and Cargh assured him that matter-duplications would be made of these paintings almost immediately. How the aliens planned to gain access to the works, Amory did not know and only half-cared; perhaps they had a worldwide network of human collaborators ready to visit museums for them.

He left these meetings with Cargh drained of vigor, white-faced, exhausted. The endless list-making tired him, as did the effort of keeping his false face up at all times. Cargh seemed to have no difficulty along those lines; never once did he say or imply that his presence on Earth was for any other than benign purposes. Amory wondered occasionally whether that memorandum

had been an hallucination—but he knew his mind was too clear and sharp, his memory of that sheet of paper too vivid, for it to be any less real than Cargh himself.

Amory formed the habit of going to a Relaxomat after leaving the alien. His nerves needed easing, and generally he had several hours to spend before reporting to the studio. Besides, the Relaxomat gave him an automatic entry into the everyday world, the world of that common mass audience with which he had so little in common and whose mind he was hoping to reach and manipulate.

Rehearsal was called for 8; he left Cargh at 5. The Relaxomat was a bright cave in the sublevel of the nearby transport depot, and Amory entered.

They knew him by sight, but not by name. The white-smocked attendants nodded politely at him. He rented a locker, stripped, and ducked through the low door into the relaxing chamber. He found an unoccupied relaxor and climbed in.

The warm nutrient mixture welled up around him as he slumped down into it, his body finding the textured rubber cushion at the bottom of the vat. He leaned back, letting the stress drain from his muscles, keeping only his head above the surface of the nutrient. A warm lethargy stole over him; he felt protected, secure, free from strain.

The relaxor was vaguely womb-like in shape. It was no coincidence of design.

After the first few moments of relaxation he forced himself up out

of the mindless content that enwrapped him. He opened his eyes and glanced around.

Bright glareless overhead lights illuminated the vitrin tiles. He saw four balding heads projecting from four relaxor vats, men with eyes closed, mouth upcurving in the inane smile of utter tranquility. But on the other side of him men were exercising. He listened to their conversation eagerly.

"You watch Furley's show last night, Jack?"

"Never miss it. Wife swears by it. Don't know what we'd do without Furley on Monday nights."

"That man has sense. When he says something it's true. Comes from the heart, y'know?"

"Isn't it the truth? I *believe* in that man, Fred."

Amory smiled to himself and shut his eyes once again, slipping back into the bath. Furley. He had met the man once. One of these homespun philosophers so popular on video. Amory made a note to see him, as soon as possible.

Not now, though. Not for a while. First, relax. Slide back into the warm beckoning trough of life, return, relax, sleep. Warm. Comforting. You can stop thinking here; you don't have to think at all.

You can almost forget that a shadow hangs over the world, and that all responsibility devolves on you. Shuck off responsibility here. Relax . . . relax . . .

Relax until there's nothing left of you but the cold hard core of fear and tension in your middle, Amory thought suddenly. A core that no gentle lapping bath can

wash away. You can forget only so much—but not the inner stab of fear.

He climbed out of the bath. Almost instantly an attendant glided toward him.

"Rubdown, sir? Exercise? Mechanostim?"

Amory shook his head impatiently. "Not today, Joe. Some other time." It was a great temptation, but he fought it off. There was work to do.

Hal Furley was a rawboned, rangy man well over six feet tall, wearing a loose gabardine shirt, bright green whipcord trousers, and an informal duroplast neckerchief twisted in an intricate knot. He seemed to radiate good nature, virtue, strength and charm; the open readiness of his smile indicated sincerity and warmth. It was hardly surprising that his monologues, delivered in traditional homespun style, would be so fantastically popular with the American people. He seemed to sum up all the subliminal connotations that the label "American" brought to mind.

Including one that the American people failed to see in him, but which Amory, being a considerably more perceptive judge of character than the average televiewer, spotted instantly. Something—a glint in Furley's eyes, a way he had of carefully rippling his jaw muscles before each supposedly unstudied smile—spoke of shrewdness and ambition carried almost to the point of greed.

He said, "You could get me a part in your show, Mr. Amory? A starring role?"

His voice was deep and soft, with the flat twang of New England speech and the slow drawl of the South and the clear-cut Midwestern inflection all simultaneously embodied in it. They were in his office in the Transvideo Tower, a luxuriously furnished place that seemed oddly in contrast with the simple virtues Furley publicly espoused.

Amory nodded slowly. "It wouldn't be hard. The casting chief takes his orders directly from me. So do most of the writers. We could build a play around you—or, rather, a homespun-type character of the sort you embody. It wouldn't be *you*, of course—you'd simply be playing a Hal Furley named Joe So-and-So in a video drama."

Furley moistened his lips in a clearly calculating way. "You think this'll be good for my career, Mr. Amory? I wouldn't want to disappoint my public."

"I'll put it to you squarely: aside from the fifty thousand or so you'd no doubt draw for this one-shot appearance on my drama hour, you'd be laying down assurance against the future. Look, Furley: you're not the only homespun man on the air now. Rod Garson draws quite a rating with the Universal network, and there are plenty of others. You can't last in the top spot forever. Someday you'll stumble. Well, there'll always be a future for you in drama. Capitalize now. When you appear on my show, you'll draw not only my regular viewers but yours as well; we'll double the rating."

"And when and if I fold up as a lasso-twirler," Furley said

smoothly, "I can always point to that night's rating and tell the vice-presidents, 'Looky here, see what happened the last time I played a straight role.' I think I begin to understand your point of view, Amory. But it's this return favor that worries me."

Amory firmed his jaw and said, "You never get anything for nothing in video. I'm just asking you to make a few innocent remarks on your show."

"Subversion, Mr. Amory. Deviation."

"What of it? Nobody'll notice. You'll be hitting the viewers so deep they won't know about it until it's done." Amory took a deep breath and plunged ahead. "After all, how did you convince them you were a loyal family man, Furley, when it's practically common knowledge you've been keeping a mistress in —"

"Okay," Furley cut in roughly. "You play a hard game, Mr. Director Amory. And I don't know what your point is, but we have a deal. You sign me up for lead role in one of your plays, and on my program I'll guarantee to slip a couple of subversive remarks in. But I'm warning you that they'll be subtle. There won't be anything overt in it. I'm damned if I'll get myself thrown off the air out of this."

Gone was the homespun philosopher now; Furley was all business, and tough at it. Amory extended a hand. "Subtlety is what we want. It has to be that way. Deal?"

"Deal," Furley said, as he shook hands.

Amory monitored the Hal Furley show the following week, forcing himself to listen to the endless reams of guff and to endure the bad guitar-playing for nearly an hour, wondering whether Furley was going to back out on the deal or not. A contract offering Furley \$45,000 for a one-shot appearance on the drama hour, with return options, lay unsigned in Amory's desk, ready to go out.

The show was nearly over. Suddenly, between guitar-strums, Furley grinned in that deadly winning way of his and said, "My grandad was a great one for travelling. He went darned near around the world in his day—he died back in 'ninety-eight, or maybe it was ought-one, I forget now—and he used to sing me some pretty fine songs from the lands over the water. I recall one old English tune I learned pretty near at the old man's knee, when I was in rompers—"

Furley launched into something Amory barely recognized as *Greensleeves*, heavily disguised by the comic's customary style of guitar-embroidery. Beneath the twanging chords and the steady repetitive beat, Amory was able to distinguish the familiar old sinuous melody, and he smiled.

Furley would get his contract. The seed had been planted; the first attack on the walls of the world was under way. Just the merest hint that there was a land across the waters that could possibly produce a song worthy of being played on the air by Hal Furley was the sort of below-the-threshold assault needed now.

Later, he could afford to be more open about things. Right now caution was necessary, until the campaign was well under way.

The next step was to call Rod Garson, the rival network's competitor to Furley, and let him know gratuitously that Furley had taken a new tack and was plugging for internationalism. Garson was quick to imitate any idea Furley developed; soon Universal would catch the fever.

Amory had other plans as well. He smiled. Directing this campaign required the finesse needed to direct a classic play—and Amory felt much the same thrill he might have felt working with Racine or Moliere. The gradual building of a hundred small effects, minute nuances, half-noticed subtleties, toward one grand climax—this production, Amory thought warmly, will be my greatest directorial triumph!

THREE WEEKS passed. They were weeks of complex maneuvering on many levels, of careful, meticulously-planned placement of overtones here and there in various video shows. Amory took to conspiracy like a born plotter.

He kept up his daily contact with Cargh, and while he was in the silent office all was serene; he and the alien methodically plodded through the world's art, and Amory exerted such control over himself that he scarcely even thought of Cargh's true purpose while in the alien's presence. He found himself growing to like the strange being,

in a curious way: Cargh had a bright boundless eagerness to learn which impressed Amory, and he was openly friendly and cheerful.

Behind the scenes at Transvideo Tower he worked furiously and long, occasionally drawing an actor aside to communicate a special shade of meaning, several times changing a line entirely at the final rehearsal. Luckily Kavanagh and Graben kept their attention elsewhere, giving Amory more freedom than he might have had had they attended all rehearsals as they sometimes did.

And the Relaxomat, his ear to the world, gave signs of the change. Stray fragments of discussion reached him: an occasional questioning of the policy of isolation, perhaps a remark that Amory knew evolved directly from one of his network plants.

He saw his work taking hold, and he felt pleased. The temper of the times was shifting. And there still was plenty of time left before Cargh and his collections departed and the invasion army arrived.

Hal Furley appeared on an Amory-directed show scripted by Lee Nourse, and all ratings jumped astronomically. Furley, Nourse, and Amory drew bonuses and plaudits from Graben; Kavanagh remained in the background, a gray figure with little praise in him.

Amory met occasionally with Beckett, Nourse, Viglan, and some of the others who formed the chief backbone of anti-isolation agitation. They were full of ideas, brimming with enthusiasm—but Amory quickly saw that all looked to him

for leadership. He was the only one in a direct position to act, by virtue of his position in the network; the others were hampered by the Scripting Committee and by other forms of censorship.

The days passed. Amory received a Matt Viglan script called *Pride Leads To A Fall* in which no less than four buried internationalist references had survived the Scripting Committee's hatchet, and set to work preparing it for the following week's production. A sudden phone-call jarred him out of his concentration.

He snapped on the phone. "Yes? Who is it, please?"

As if in answer, the square, unattractive face of Dave Kavanagh appeared on the screen. The Scripting Committee pundit looked even less cheerful than usual, his hard eyes flickering rapidly and his thin lips tight and pale.

"What is it, Dave? I'm busy with this new Viglan script," Amory said irritably. "The staging still isn't worked out, and—"

"Could you stop over here to see me?" Kavanagh asked quietly.

Amory shrugged. "I'll be at the studio by eight or so for the rehearsal. Suppose I look in on you about seven-thirty, thereabouts? Okay?"

"No," Kavanagh said. "I'd like to see you right now."

Something in his tone told Amory not to argue. Inwardly fuming, he said, "I've got an appointment for this afternoon, Dave. Is it that urgent?"

"Yes. How urgent is this appointment?"

"So-so."

"Break it, then. I'll expect you in an hour."

Amory felt sweat cascading down his abruptly cold skin. High as his own rank was, Kavanagh still outranked him in the hierarchy—and strict observance of hierarchical order was the law in video custom and ethos. Kavanagh very rarely pulled rank on Amory; there probably was some good and special reason for it now. Amory had his ideas about that reason, and he hoped he was wrong.

Kavanagh sat behind a broad realwood desk polished so brightly the glare made Amory wince. There was nothing at all friendly in the Scripting Committee chairman's manner or voice as he said, "Sit down, John. Have a cigarette."

Mechanically Amory accepted the cigarette and flicked the igniting capsule with a careless gesture of his thumb. He puffed twice, then waited.

Kavanagh said, "I have a script here. Lee Nourse turned it in this morning. Perhaps you know that I read all scripts submitted by our staff writers personally, and make recommendations to the Committee concerning the necessary changes they must make."

"I know," Amory said.

Kavanagh drew a stiff green cardboard folder from his desk and flipped it open. A stack of neatly-typed white paper lay within. Reading upside-down, Amory caught the title: *Mr. Miller Meets Love*, by Lee Nourse. That much was harmless enough. Amory wondered

just what Nourse had put in the script.

Kavanagh referred to a slip of pencil notations clipped to the folder. "I've been through this play very carefully—with the same care I give to every play that crosses this desk, especially when it's by-lined Lee Nourse. This is a very interesting script. There are no less than seven different specifically internationalist references in here, plus one bit of dialogue that's sheer deviationism of the most flagrant kind. The play is immoral. The writing is sloppy. It's the sort of job that makes an old theater man like myself wince, John. I can't even refer it to committee."

"Nourse's contract calls for a standard reject allowance, doesn't it?" Amory said tightly. "Why trouble me over a lousy script? I'm not Nourse's agent."

Kavanagh smiled, and it was not a pleasant smile. Yellow skew-set teeth flashed before Amory's eyes. Unlike Van Graben, Kavanagh had never bothered to have his choppers replaced by a neat white video-executive type plate. "To answer the first of your three questions first, John, Nourse's contract no longer calls for anything. I revoked his contract an hour ago, and he's not connected with this network as of that moment. The deviationist clause, naturally. His work has been unbearably beyond the line."

Amory scowled, but said nothing. Nourse had been anticipating the axe for weeks. Probably he had gone too far in this script, perhaps deliberately inviting trouble.

"Secondly, John, and also third-

ly, I'm troubling you about this script because I detect a certain unhealthy trend in your own work. For example: last Wednesday's production, I understand, contained four lines that were not in the approved script which left this office."

"I don't know anything about that at—"

"The lines," Kavanagh continued levelly, drawing a typed sheet of paper from a desk drawer, "referred to a type of food sold in Latin-American countries, to rice, the staple food of most oriental ones, to an incident in English history, and to the alleged immoral behavior of French women. Four clearcut internationalist references, all of them inserted by your actors after the script was cleared by me."

Amory was hardly listening. He was studying the bulge of Kavanagh's outsized ears, his wide thin-lipped mouth, his acne-ravaged cheeks. Kavanagh's thin icy voice droned on. "Strangely enough, John, I've checked back and found this sort of thing fairly common in your last two or three productions. And even more odd is the fact that they've been cropping up on Hal Furley's show, since not long after Furley starred in your program of May 4."

Amory's throat felt dry. "Just what are you getting at, Dave? Are you calling me a deviationist?"

"I'm merely warning you, not calling you anything . . . yet. You're one of our finest properties, John. I wouldn't want you to go the way of Ted Beckett and Lee Nourse."

"You're accusing me indirectly of subversive activities. You're

blaming me for these things that cropped up on my shows."

"I'm not," Kavanagh snapped. "Don't put words in my mouth. I'm simply bringing to your attention certain unhappy lapses, and expressing the hope that you'll find some way of avoiding them in the future. Otherwise—"

"Otherwise what?"

"Otherwise we'd regretfully have to terminate your contract, John. That would hurt us. We respect you and your abilities. You're a *talent*, John, and that's rare in this business. You're a real talent."

"Don't give me the standard video borax," Amory blazed. "It doesn't sound very convincing coming from you, Kavanagh."

"All right," Kavanagh said in a very quiet voice that held more of a whipsnap to it than any amount of bluster. "I'll lay it on the line: we're going to monitor your programs pretty closely from here on. If we have to, we'll pitch you right out of here. This industry can't put up with any subversion. We don't want any goddam deviationists polluting our viewers' minds with filth and intellectualist garbage. Got that?"

"I've got it," Amory said. "Thanks for being explicit, Dave."

"You're welcome. And I hope you were listening to what I said, Amory. You're not so big that we can't break you. I have Graben's approval for every word I just said. We've been watching you a long time. We don't tolerate this sort of stuff. We've got an obligation to our viewers. We've got to think of our clients. We—"

"You're foaming at the mouth, Dave. Calm down."

Amory grinned at the scriptman, stubbed the butt of his cigarette into the satin finish of Kavanagh's desk, spun on his heel and left.

He caught the dropshaft to his own private office some ten floors below Kavanagh's. There, he dialed Nourse's number. As soon as the writer's wiry face appeared on the screen Amory said, "Kavanagh just called me on the carpet. He told me he fired you."

"About an hour ago. I guess I tried a few tricks too many in that last script. I'll manage, though—my agent may arrange for me to do scripts for Universal at half price, under another name."

"Good. But Kavanagh's wise to me. To all of us."

"What did he say?"

Briefly, Amory told him. Nourse scowled fitfully at the account and finally said, "We don't have much time left, in other words. You're liable to get the hook any day now, John."

"I know." Wildly, Amory wondered for an instant whether it was worth all this, the frantic conspiratorial plotting and the sacrifices, the giving up of his post. He shoved the thought away. "How much cash can we round up immediately?"

"It takes five hundred thousand to buy a ninety-minute spot," Nourse said. "I can't kick in too much, in view of my present unemployment, but I can scrape up thirty thousand, say. Viglan's good for a hundred thousand. You?"

"I'll go for a hundred thousand too. Beckett can't help much, but Hersch Kyman should come across."

"We'll make it," Nourse said. "I'll do the script. You round up the actors. We'll let Viglan handle the actual negotiation for the time-spot, through his agent, since he's the only one of us that's in really good odor, as far as we know." Nourse grinned and added, "We'll knock 'em over, John. We'll really finish 'em."

"I hope so," Amory said.

The show was titled *No More Barriers*, a 90-minute video extravaganza, and all media were saturated with preliminary notices for weeks. Amory and Nourse had managed to raise over a million for the production, of which nearly half went simply to buy time from Transvideo, and the rest was consumed in advertising and salaries. Director, scripter, and some of the cast worked without pay, which eased things.

The production aroused tremendous interest as broadcast day drew near. The names of John Amory and Hal Furley were most prominently linked with it, Amory as director, Furley as star. Furley would not appear in it, and Amory had known that from the start. The people who took part in *No More Barriers* would be, without exception, ending their careers in entertainment that night. Furley would not care to jeopardize his future—but he accepted \$30,000 for the use of his name in the advance billing, with the understanding that

at the conclusion of the show it would be announced he had "withdrawn" from the production.

Amory talked him into it. Furley's name would be a tremendous asset: certainly people would tune in in hopes of seeing him, and would stay with the show at least for the first ten minutes. Those were the minutes that mattered.

As for the sponsors of the program, all the network or anyone knew was that an outfit called The League for Freedom had purchased the time. Video time was for sale to the highest bidder; the man who had actually handled the negotiations, an agent named Bartirone, had signed a document pledging that his client did not plan to present a show that was either atheistic, immoral, subversive, or deviationist, and that was all the insurance the network needed. Somewhat later, The League for Freedom declined to make use of the facilities of the Scripting Committee.

"Kavanagh seemed pretty nasty about it," Bartirone reported to Amory. "He insisted *everyone* used the Committee, and that no show went on the air without a Committee stamp of approval. But there's nothing in our purchase contract that requires us to feed our copy through Kavanagh. He says it'll help in case of legal troubles later."

"Tell him," Amory said, "that the League has enough money to handle any lawsuits that might arise, and so we'd just as soon skip routing the script through Committee."

Kavanagh was told. He objected, but to his astonishment found there was no way to force a sponsor into making use of the Committee, if the sponsor declined.

Amory rehearsed his crew of actors and ex-actors in the mornings, saw Cargh in the afternoons, and worked on his regular productions in the evenings. It was a strenuous schedule, but he survived it. He hired a detective agency to locate a certain one-legged ex-actor now panhandling for a living in Manhattan, and when they turned the man up Amory offered him five thousand to play a major role in the production. He accepted.

Slowly everything took shape. Ted Beckett wrote up a Proclamation of Human Friendship, and a printer was found who would print the deviationist document. Presses turned day and night; a bombardment of a hundred million was prepared, a fleet of helicopters engaged to disseminate them from the air.

Amory lived his life in rigid channels. He kept the part of him that dealt with Cargh blocked off from the part that prepared a weekly video script, and both of them from the part that labored over *No More Barriers* each morning. The days skipped by. Telefax banners screamed, **TONIGHT'S THE NIGHT! DON'T MISS THE VIDEO SENSATION OF THE YEAR!**

At the Relaxomat, Amory heard them talking: "You going to be watching that thing tomorrow night?"

"Guess so. After all this publicity, why not?"

"That's the way I feel. I'm pretty damn curious about the show, y'know?"

Thursday came. Hours crawled by. Amory begged off his appointment with Cargh and spent the afternoon in a Relaxomat, fruitlessly trying to drain off the accumulated tension.

At seven-thirty he caught a cab uptown to the studio. This was one show he planned to attend.

THE SHOW EMANATED from the thirty-fourth floor studio of the Transvideo Tower. This was a secondary studio, not often used, which Amory had chosen because of its special physiognomy: unlike the big upstairs studios, this one could be completely sealed off from unwanted visitors. And certainly it would be necessary to hold off the network men for as long as possible, once they caught the opening sequences of the show.

Three of Amory's cast stood guard at the narrow entrance to the studio. They let him in without question.

One of them said, "Mr. Graben was around here a little while ago. He didn't say what he wanted."

"Did you let him in?"

"Of course not. He didn't even ask."

"Good," Amory said. "If Kavanagh shows up, tell him I'm not around. No—wait a second. Call me if Kavanagh gets here."

He went inside. Viglan was there already, and Lee Nourse, and Ted

Beckett and a few others. Amory joined them.

"You have any difficulty getting into the studio?" he asked.

Nourse shook his head. "I just showed my sponsors' pass. They didn't believe it, but they couldn't argue."

Amory had equipped the shadier members of the outfit with passes designating them as Client Representatives; there was no turning away a sponsor, even if he happened to be Ted Beckett.

Amory looked at the time. Still three quarters of an hour to show time. He said, "All the cameramen ready and at their posts?"

Nourse nodded. "They're here and setting up. They don't know they're going to be transmitting a deviationist show yet, but they will soon enough." He pointed to three cast extras. "Those guys will stand behind them all during the show. I don't think they'll give any trouble."

"And we'll lock off the control room, of course," said Beckett. "They won't be able to stop us without cutting the main trunk line. And that'll take time, of course."

Amory nodded abstractedly. Now that they were almost on the brink of it, he felt calm, untroubled. He caught sight of his leading actors standing near a camera boom, walked toward them, ran them briefly through their key lines.

Ten minutes before show-time, someone touched his sleeve and said, "Mr. Kavanagh's here, sir."

"Alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Show him in here, and

lock the studio door behind him." Amory grinned. "Then round up some good heavy rope. You understand?"

Kavanagh came striding through the busy studio like a gale wind, pushing everyone in his way to one side. When he reached Amory he said, without preamble, "What the hell kind of stunt is this, Amory?"

"I'm afraid I don't follow you, Dave."

"I'm afraid you do! The studio police downstairs told me that Nourse and Beckett were here with sponsors' passes! How the hell did that happen? And who are all these actors? Not an Equity man in the lot! Why didn't you let me see the script for this show?" He scowled and demanded finally, "What kind of production is this, anyway?"

"It's a ninety-minute deviationist extravaganza," Amory said in a gentle voice. "It's going to be fun, I think."

Kavanagh took a step backward. For a moment he seemed struck speechless. Then he said, "A—deviationist—show? John, don't joke with me."

"I told you the living truth," Amory said.

Kavanagh came to life suddenly. He whirled and ran toward the door, shouting, "You're all under Security arrest! This is treason! This show can't go on the air!"

He reached the roadblock near the door. "Hold him, boys," Amory said, in his quiet commanding voice.

Two actors appeared and gripped Kavanagh tightly. Amory drew

near and saw the Scripting Committee man's whitened face working in impotent rage. "Let go of him," Amory said.

Kavanagh broke loose and Amory grabbed him. He was nearly a foot taller than Kavanagh, and twice as heavy. "Let go of my arm," Kavanagh snapped. "You're all under arrest. As soon as I get out of here—"

"You're not *getting* out of here," Amory said, and smashed his balled fist against Kavanagh's cheek. The impact stung; Kavanagh spun away, face livid with fury, and aimed a wobbly blow at Amory's middle. Amory blocked it with a down-chopping motion of his left arm, brought his other hand quickly up and cracked it off the point of Kavanagh's chin. Kavanagh started to fold; Amory hit him in the stomach and the smaller man collapsed.

"Tie him up and dump him in the prop room," Amory ordered. "Keep the studio doors locked." He looked at his watch. "Places, everyone. It's two minutes to show time. We're ready to get started."

He took a place at the back of the studio, and the white-faced, startled cameramen unlimbered their machines. *No More Barriers* was ready to roll.

The show opened with a brief word of greeting and a prologue, a quick historical preview. A man carefully chosen for the vigor and force of his delivery told of the original split between the hemispheres after the Second World War, how as years passed and new wea-

pons were developed an actual war became impossible, but an ideological one continued on a level of increasing bitterness.

He went on to explain how the wave of isolationism had spread through the country during the past generation, how in a sudden turtle-like maneuver America had cut itself off from all contact with the nations across the sea.

So far, just history. Then: "These barriers have been in force too long. The time has come, we believe, for them to come down—for the world once again to be united in harmony, with free commerce and contact between the nations."

Enter four scantily-clad girls intended as representatives of other nations, to cloak the sting of that bluntly deviationist statement. A brief pageant began. The studio phone rang.

"I'll get it," Amory said, heading toward the soundproof booth. He picked up. Graben's face appeared in the screen, and for once the executive had lost his glossy calm.

"John, what the deuce is going on in there? Why is the studio door locked?"

Amory shrugged. "It simplifies things. Why?"

"You can't let that deviationist filth go out," Graben said. "Where's Kavanagh?"

"Right here in the studio. But you can't talk to him; he had a little accident and we had to tie him up to keep him from hurting himself."

Graben sputtered incoherently. "We'll cut you off! We'll throw you all in prison for years! John, are

you insane? Why are you doing this?"

"Just for the devil of it," Amory said cheerfully, and clicked off. He left the booth and collared Nourse and Beckett almost immediately.

"Graben just called. He's been monitoring the show from upstairs and he's raging mad. We're going to get cut off any minute."

"It'll take at least ten minutes for them to reach the main trunk line. By that time the damage'll be done," Nourse said. "It'll take ten minutes before the security boys get here. The second we get cut off, John, you tell everyone to run for it. They can't round all of us up."

Amory smiled. "Poor Graben must be having a fit! A hundred million viewers gobbling up all this deviationism!"

The program lasted exactly sixteen minutes, which was six more than Nourse had been figuring on when he wrote the script. Already more outright internationalist propaganda had gone forth in those sixteen minutes than America had heard publicly in a quarter of a century.

Amory sat in the middle of a tight, eager group at the back of the studio, watching the show unfold. He felt warm satisfaction: this, his final video show, was his best. The actors, not an Equity man in the lot (though most had held cards at one time or another, before getting bounced on deviationist charges) responded perfectly, bringing out the hidden nuances Amory so loved and which were so necessary in a production of this

kind. They entered and left camera-range as if guided by the hand of a master conductor.

And as for the impact this show was probably having on a nation so accustomed to believe what they saw on the video—Amory was unable to estimate that. The foes of internationalism had relied simply and purely on a negative approach. By censoring any possible internationalist reference, they had thought they were preserving isolationism. Instead, they had withered it. Amory wondered how the various polling agencies would report.

Eighteen minutes. Nineteen.

"Graben's probably got the trunk line reached by now," Nourse said. A moment later, before anyone had a chance to agree or disagree, the lights flickered and went out; the ceiling-glow died last, a stubborn orange radiance slowly fading.

Immediately Amory leaped to the seat of his chair and shouted, "Okay, folks. They finally cut us off, but I think we gave it to 'em good first. The thing to do now is to get out of here. WALK, don't run, to the door—but once you're outside, run like blazes, and in every direction. No two of you go the same way. They can't catch us all."

He jumped off his chair. "Unlock that studio door," he called.

"What about Kavanagh?" Nourse asked.

Amory shrugged. "We can't use hostages. Leave him here. They'll find him soon enough."

In the dimness he saw the studio door open; members of the cast were flooding through it, still in

costume, some of the girls nearly nude, many of the men in outlandish foreign costumes. He stood watching the procession for a moment, until Nourse caught his hand.

"Come on, John. You're the one they'll be most interested in getting; let's go!"

He started to run. He emerged in the hall and saw Graben and several other video network men shouting and gesturing at the fleeing actors; there was still no sign of the security men, which was encouraging.

"Keep away from the elevators!" Amory shouted. Probably they were manned by armed guards, and that would lead to trouble. He glanced at Nourse and said, "You go that way. We have to split up."

He started off in the opposite direction, down the shiny panelled corridor, past some executive's office, past a prop storeroom. He heard shouts behind him.

Stairs. He plunged into the photon-beam and descended three steps at a time, one hand gripping the bannister tightly. It takes a long time to run down thirty-four flights of stairs. He spiralled endlessly down and down, his long legs pistoning frantically.

It was a strangely exhilarating feeling, this business of being a fugitive. His heart pounded; his senses seemed heightened. The sound of shouting grew more dim behind him with each passing flight.

Gray Security Corps trucks were parked in front of the huge tower when he reached street level. Amory paused for an instant, suck-

ing in great gasps of breath, and watched the Security men race into the building. He hoped most of the cast had already gotten free, and that they were on their way back to whatever slums they called home. He wondered what luck his one-legged star had had in escaping—and whether Beckett and Nourse would make it.

He moved out of the cover of the building, and, even though it was a warm June night, drew his collar up around him. Perhaps they would recognize him because of his size; perhaps not. He knew that he would have to move, and move fast, until this was over.

He ran north to 50th Street and there ducked into a service store. The proprietor was busy behind the food counter; Amory moved quietly and quickly toward the phone booths in the back of the store, without being noticed.

He had to have someplace to go. It was certainly unsafe to return to his home this evening, and possibly he would never be able to go back there. Certainly he'd need to leave the immediate metropolitan area for a while.

But he did have one recourse. He slipped a coin into the slot and dialed Cargh's private number.

He waited, anticipating the sight of the alien's by-now-familiar features on the small old-fashioned booth screen. But the phone continued to ring . . . thirteen, fourteen, fifteen times. Amory stared uncomprehendingly at his own reflection in the still unlit screen. Why didn't Cargh answer? Where could

the aliens possibly be?

Exasperated, Amory hung up, dialed the operator, and gave her Cargh's number. "It's very important, and I can't seem to make contact. Will you try for me?"

"Certainly, sir," came the impersonal machine-like tones. The screen remained dead, though—and a moment later the operator's voice said, "I'm sorry, sir. That number has been withdrawn from the book."

"What's that? What does that mean?"

"That the party using that number has left its present address, and does not wish to continue using telephone service, sir. I'm very sorry, sir. Is there anything else I can do for you, sir?"

"No . . . no," Amory said, frowning. He hung up and heard his coin tinkle down into the return box. Cargh gone? Where? Where?

He pushed open the phone booth. The clock over the food counter said nine-thirty; it was only an hour since it had all begun, then. He shoved a nickel into a telefax slot, wondering if the nine o'clock edition said anything about the broadcast.

The yellow sheet came rippling out of the wall-slot; Amory seized on it almost before its ink had dried, and scanned it. No, no mention of anything unusual on this evening's video; either it was too early for the 'fax to report anything, or else they had decided deliberately to ignore the existence of the broadcast. The latter was more likely, he thought.

He slouched down behind the

counter and ordered a seaflower sandwich. The store's video set, he saw, was tuned to the Transvideo Channel, but some insipid sort of variety show was in progress.

He jerked a thumb toward the set. "Hey, Mac—isn't that spectacular supposed to be on tonight? The thing about Barriers?"

The man behind the counter was a timid-looking little man with a sharp chin and mild eyes, stained an unlikely pink by his contact lenses. He chuckled. "You mean you didn't hear what happened?"

Amory leaned forward. "Nope. What?"

"Darned crazy show was all about the other countries of the world, and how we ought to get to know what they're like. Stuff like that, y'know. Then fifteen-twenty minutes after it got going, they announced 'technical difficulties' and cut it off." The little man stared intently at Amory for a moment and added, in a low voice, "Just between you 'n me and the man in the moon, friend, I'd say that program got *censored*. Like it was something we weren't supposed to hear."

"Sounds that way," Amory agreed.

"Too bad, too—lot of people were curious about that show, and came into the store to watch it. Lost all them customers when it got cut off."

Amory munched the sandwich. "Video folks are very careful about what they show, I guess."

"Mebbe *too* careful," the counterman said. "Not that I want to imply—" He paused meaningfully.

"I gotcha," Amory said. He paid

his bill, tucked his collar up around his face, and stepped out into the moonless, starless night.

A steady fluttering sound caught his attention; he looked up and saw a helicopter hovering high above the city, its beating rotors holding it motionless. Something drifted out of the copter's belly; a sheet of paper, it looked like, followed by others.

The handbills, Amory thought.

The copter moved on, as the airborne sheets drifted slowly to Earth. They would be picked up; they would be read, and perhaps their message would sink in.

Perhaps. Perhaps not. But it had been worth trying, all of it.

The seed of deviation had been sown. Whether it would take root—that was yet to be seen. Amory looked up, past the building-tops, past the murky haze that cloaked the city, deep into the cloud-wrapped sky. No stars were visible in the darkness, but he knew they were there, bright dots beyond the dark. His heart sank as he thought of the giant task still ahead, before mankind would be ready to defend itself against Cargh and his fellows.

He shook his head. Cargh would triumph; Earth would fall to the invaders. *But at least*, Amory thought, *I tried. I tried.*

Suddenly he wanted to speak to Grigorescu again, to tell the Rumanian of what he had done, perhaps to learn whether the aliens had also vanished from Rumania. And Levittown would be a good place to hide. He decided to go to the esper, Hadafield.

He glanced around for the near-

est transport depot. As he caught sight of the neon-lit kiosk, he heard a whistle scream shrilly behind him.

"There he is!" someone yelled. "There's Amory!"

He began to run.

THE KIOSK WAS nearly half a block away. Footsteps clattered against the pavement behind him as he ran. Without looking back, he sprinted into the kiosk, down the stairs that paralleled the escalator and dropshafts, and leapfrogged the turnstile. No one stopped him.

Panting, he reached the multiple passages that led to the cars and took the one whose glowing sign flashed ISLAND THRUWAY at him. He still heard the sound of pursuers as he raced up the escalator, not waiting for it to carry him, and emerged on the thruway level.

He found a waiting car and entered. "Levittown, and fast, driver."

A second passed, while relays opened and closed in the main switching center of the transport system. The car slid into motion. For the first time, now, Amory looked back, and saw three shadowy figures in the grey of Security uniforms appear on the Thruway platform, just as his cab shot away into the night.

He watched the speedometer needle flicker its way up to 150 and stay there. The road was poorly lit—with automatic safety devices making crashes impossible, there was no need for unnecessary expenditures—and he had no way of

knowing whether or not he was being followed. There was time to lose pursuers in Levittown, he didn't want to bring a trail of Security men straight to Hadafield.

Towns whipped by on right and left. Amory realized dully that by committing himself to a public cab, he had left himself open for easy capture; if the police knew which car he was in, all they had to do was contact transport center, and have the car swivel off the Thruway, turn back in the other direction, and deliver him neatly to headquarters. There was no way of stopping the car from within, or of opening the doors until the driver chose to open them.

But his fears were groundless. "Levittown," the driver finally called out; the cab shot off the main limb of the Thruway and deposited him at the exit level. He paid his fare and sprang from the cab the instant the door opened.

Here on Long Island, the night air in June was considerably cooler and less humid; he felt an immediate chill. He descended to the pedestrian level, glancing back occasionally. So far as he could tell, he was not being followed.

He paused for a moment at the concrete base of the walkway, trying to remember the route they had taken to Hadafield's house. Up the hill, past Red Maple Drive, and to the right. The streets were dim, unlit. Amory wished he had brought some weapon along.

He started cautiously toward the hill. Dim shapes moved ahead of him in the dark; Security men?

No. Bandits.

A light flashed in his eyes, and he felt the pressure of a bare knife against his stomach. "Hand over your wallet and you won't get hurt," a cold, quiet voice said.

"The wallet's yours," Amory said. He wasn't inclined to argue. "It's in my right-hand trousers pocket."

The knife pricked a little deeper into flesh as a hand slipped into his pocket, drawing out the wallet. "Just take the money, will you?" Amory whispered. "There are identity cards in there, and it'll be a devil of a nuisance trying to replace them."

He heard a calm ugly chuckle. "We know that, friend. We find identity cards useful. Got the wallet, Bill?"

An affirmative grunt from behind.

The knife's pressure eased. A fist slammed into Amory's face; his head rocked back. Obviously they weren't going to leave him conscious.

Suddenly a searchbeam spotlighted the entire group. Amory saw the robbers clearly: two thin, unshaven little men, their eyes glinting like foxes, their lips thin with hunger. Under cover of darkness they had seemed menacing; revealed, they were merely pathetic.

"Security men!" one robber whispered. "Let's beat it!"

"Hold it there, you!" came an authoritative cry. "Stay where you are."

The thief behind Amory suddenly stuck two fingers in his mouth and whistled, an astonishingly loud, piercing animal-like cry. A moment later, the whistle-cry resounded

from seven or eight places further back in the darkness.

"Cut that out!" ordered a Security man's voice. "Amory, come out of there! We've got you!"

Thwack! A bullet whistled out of the darkness and the Security man's voice trailed off into a wet gurgle. A second bullet smashed the spotlight; a third cracked into a Security truck window.

"Run for it, pal!" the thief at his side whispered, and, under cover of darkness, Amory ran. Honor among thieves, he thought grimly; rob him they might, but Security men were enemies to be feared, and friends in the night had saved him.

Of course, he had no money. no identity cards now. But that hardly mattered, since John Amory as an identity would have to vanish from sight.

He ran on, ignoring the silent shapes that scooted through the darkness, sometimes crossing his path. This was a jungle, he thought, thinking of two dead Security men lying near a truck by the pedestrian walkway.

His breath came short. Almost by instinct he turned right at the proper corner, pounded up the street towards the esper's house, and rang the right doorbell. He leaned forward, supporting himself by the doorframe, gasping for breath. Sweat drenched him.

He looked back, seeing no pursuers. The door slowly opened.

"Hello, Mr. Amory. We've been expecting you for quite a while," a quiet, mild voice said.

Amory glanced into the darkness. "Thank God this is the right place,

Hadafield! I—”

He let the words die in his throat. The figure in the doorway was not the esper Gill Hadafield.

It was the alien. Cargh.

Hands gathered him in, led him inside. He heard the door lock behind him, heard the sound of a doorchain being snapped into place and a bolt slammed home.

He smelled the faintly musty odor of rotting woodwork that characterized the ancient houses out here in Levittown. He made no attempt to think; he merely soaked in sense-perceptions, letting all thoughts drift by him. He sensed the darkness, the smell, noises outside, then the sound of friendly voices.

He was in Hadafield's small, cramped room. Someone was holding a cup to his lips, and he drank. The taste was acrid but yet pleasant; it was a taste he had experienced before. The German wine, he realized. He sipped again, feeling the chilled wine glide down his throat.

Finally he looked around. He saw familiar faces: Lee Nourse, Ted Beckett, Matt Viglan, the esper Hadafield. They were staring anxiously at him.

There was no sign of the alien.

“Cargh?” he asked. “I thought I saw Cargh here when I came in. You know. The alien.”

He swivelled on his chair to peer into the cobwebbed recesses of the room, but no alien was present.

“I thought he was here,” Amory half-muttered to himself. “Hallucination. The strain, the running,

everything—it must have been hallucination.”

“No” Lee Nourse said. “No hallucination at all.”

And suddenly Cargh stood before him, smilingly blandly, a look of shrewd coldness in his three ice-flecked eyes.

“There he is! Don't you see him?”

“Of course we see him,” Nourse said. “Gill, turn him off, will you?”

As Amory watched, the tall, darkly handsome figure of the alien wavered and grew indistinct; the sharp outlines of the alien face flickered, the deep blue of the skin paled and seemed to wear thin, until patches of the room beyond could be seen *through* Cargh. Then one last flicker and the alien was gone.

“What—where'd he go?” Amory asked. He knew, deep within himself, that something was wrong; one small portion of his mind retained its old acuteness, the rest was numbed and fatigued by his frantic flight. Desperately he fought to reestablish control over his mind, like a drunken man struggling to focus his eyes to read the words that might mean his life.

“I think we owe you some explanations, John,” Nourse said gently.

With one last effort Amory won: he drew his shattered consciousness together. “I think you do,” he said, with something of his old force. He looked expectantly at Nourse.

“It began the night of Ted's last movie showing,” Nourse said. “At least, that's when we put it into

effect. We had planned it for a while—ever since we met Hadafield, here.

“What we did was to drug you—yes, it was the wine we used—and carry you into Ted’s back room. Hadafield went to work on you there, setting up the hypnotic illusion we were going to use. Then I rode you downtown to the office we’d rented for the purpose. I waited around for you to wake up, and that’s when you first met Cargh.”

“There aren’t any aliens, then,” Amory said. He realized his fingers were quivering. “It’s all a giant pipe-dream?”

Nourse looked slightly shamefaced. “More or less. We took turns posing as Cargh. Hadafield so set you up that whenever any of us performed the triggering gesture, you’d be seeing the alien and not us. Matt Viglan was Cargh most of the time; Ted would have been, except that he was raided.”

“And you led me through that whole monkeyshine about collecting Earth’s art, and had me reel off list after list after list of nonsense?”

“That was incidental. We had to have some excuse, John. The key maneuver was ‘accidentally’ letting you find that memorandum discussing the forthcoming conquest of the Earth. That was your trigger; that was the thing that would finally jolt you into action.”

Amory was quite calm; he stared levelly at Nourse, trying to fit all the pieces together. “You deliberately instilled in me the hypnotic delusion that I was meeting regu-

larly with an alien being, and just as deliberately gave me the impression that the Earth was in danger.” He had not started to get angry yet; it was all too incomprehensible still. He took a deep breath. “*Why?*”

“Because tonight’s video production would never have come into existence any other way,” Nourse said sharply. “You were the only man. You were big enough and strong enough to carry the project over, and you weren’t directly subject to interference from Kavanagh the way we were. But we couldn’t approach you directly. You never would have agreed.”

Amory leaned back, shaking his head slowly. He understood, now. He began to laugh.

These men were his friends. They had known him—known how his fatalistic approach to the problems of the world had led him to adopt a what’s-the-use attitude, led him to withdraw within himself into a state of bitter resigned despair.

He had been the only man who could set in motion the wheels that might lead to the breakdown of the barriers between nations—and he had refused to act, preferring instead a cynical self-withdrawal.

So they had tampered with his mind. They had projected him into a fantastic dream-world, and through the dream-world had convinced him at last of the necessity of immediate action.

“I should be angry,” he said, looking at the small men all around him, the thin, wiry men who had rightly assessed him and taken it upon themselves to catapult him

(Continued on page 117)

He carried the monkey of fear on his back for

all to see; and until he could shake the beast

he knew he would be a captain in name only . . .

Captain PEABODY

THE GAVEL rapped sharply, and the murmur of conversation throughout the banquet room drifted into hushed silence. The occasion was the seventy-fifth meeting of RETSCAP, the organization of Retired Space Captains; the place, a banquet room in the Empire Club on the hundred and sixty-fourth floor of the New Empire State Building in Manhattan; the time, approximately nine thirty in the evening, August 9, 2231 A.D.; those present, the four hundred and eighteen members of RETSCAP—or rather, four hundred and nineteen, including the new member, Captain Arthur Peabody, who had reached his ninety-fifth birthday just two weeks before, and by doing so had been automatically retired from active service and thereby become eligible for member-

BY ROG PHILLIPS



ship while still in the prime of life.

"Quiet everybody," the Secretary and master of ceremonies, Captain John Evers, said good-naturedly, rapping the gavel again. He turned to the new member, sitting next to

him. "Captain Peabody," he said in his loud clear voice, "The time has come for fulfillment of a traditional part of our get-togethers—one we all look forward to with great pleasure and anticipation."

There was a subdued clapping of hands, then Captain Evers cleared his throat loudly and continued. "Each of us here has become a member of RETSCAP only after a lifetime of space travel, much of that time as a Captain in charge of the destinies of our crews and passengers and ships. Inevitably each of us has had some unusual experiences in his time, and we like to talk about them, boring each other to death, no doubt, as we repeat the same stories among ourselves meeting after meeting. So it's always a treat to us to get a new member and by so doing get some fresh stories to listen to. I am about to give you the floor, and what we would like to hear is the one experience you have had which you think is the most unusual, in some way, of your entire career. The floor is now yours, Captain Arthur Peabody!"

Arthur Peabody stood up slowly, a tall man, long legged and short bodied in his seven foot height, his sharply bridged nose and high forehead giving his features the stamp of authority comfortably worn, and waited, a quiet smile on his firm lips, until the applause subsided. Then he began his speech.

THE ONE experience that stands out in my mind more than any other really began about five minutes after I was assigned to my first ship, the *Alabama*, when I was given the list of my officers and crew to check over. Half way down the list I came to a name, Oscar Resnick, and suddenly the

thrill of being a captain was gone. For two cents, at that moment, I would gladly have become a retired Space Captain before I started. I was fifty-two years old then, and it had been about thirty years since I last saw Resnick. His rating was still spaceman first class, and I knew if he had ever risen higher he had been demoted again, as was inevitable, sooner or later. He was an incurable bully with the worst streak of sadistic cruelty in him I've ever run across.

Even the sight of his name on that list sent an instinctive fear through me. Once, when I was still a space recruit he had whipped me to within an inch of my life and instilled in me the realization that he could do it any time, anywhere.

A man like that is slightly mad, or strikes you that way. You stay out of his way if you can, and if you can't you let him have his way, swallow his insults, do anything to avoid the beating you would get if he took the whim. Live with that for two years as I had thirty years before, and you never get over it.

Now I was captain of my first ship and he, was to be one of the crew. And I knew in my heart that if he walked up to me and suddenly reached up to scratch his head I would cringe and turn pale. I wouldn't be able to help it. And if that happened it would be the end of me. The crew would think I was yellow—and I was when it came to Oscar Resnick.

Oh, he wouldn't do anything that would give me cause to toss him in the brig, nor even anything that would give me cause to fire him—at

least a reason that would stand up under a union inquiry if he demanded one, which he would. He would just grin at me knowingly with eyes that told me he thought I was yellow, and hesitate just long enough after an order to make me wonder if he was going to obey—the kind of stuff that could break me down completely, in time. And there would be nothing I could do about it.

I made a try to keep him off my crew. The Dispatcher admitted Resnick had the reputation of being a trouble maker, but if I didn't take him there was likelihood the Union would call out the whole crew and ground the ship.

Then the Dispatcher pointed out the fact that the list was short one man, my personal orderly. I hadn't thought about an orderly at all, and hadn't chosen one yet. He gave me the list of available orderlies and I looked it over, most of the names meaning nothing at all to me. Suddenly I ran across a name I knew. I didn't know the man, but I had heard of him, and probably all of you have.

The name was David Markham. He was *the* David Markham all right, the Dispatcher said when I asked him—the one who was kicked out of Space Patrol for abject cowardice. The Dispatcher told me the man had been trying for two years to get back into space, the Union wouldn't take him, and the only way he could get into service was an orderly to a Captain—if any Captain took him.

The Dispatcher suggested two or three other men he knew personally,

any one of which I would probably like and decide to keep permanently. But a crazy idea was running around in my head. It was a clutching at straws, but what it amounted to was this: I had a bully on my crew, a man who had my number and knew how to use it. Why not balance him out by making my one choice on the crew a man who was the exact opposite, an abject coward? Possibly, on some level of thought, I wanted company if Resnick showed me up to the crew, someone who couldn't look down on me because of the simple fact that he was the lowest there was.

The Dispatcher almost cried with happiness over my choice of David Markham. It turned out he was sorry for the guy, and felt only a man with real guts would have the courage to sign Markham on. He would certainly have been surprised if I had told him the truth.

I met Markham the next morning at seven o'clock when I returned to the Dispatch Office at Spaceport, New Mexico. He was a fine looking fellow, twenty-five, rather short—just over the six foot four minimum of the Space Patrol, about one ninety mass, blonde, square jaw. I took a liking to him at once—but there was a haunting something at the back of his eyes that never went away even when he was smiling, and he smiled often during the time I knew him, though he never laughed but once—and it was a sound I never want to hear again. But that came much later.

I sent him aboard with my bags to get my quarters in order, then steeled myself to check in the crew.

You know how it is, you sit at the window and the men come by, one at a time, you introduce yourself, fix his face in your mind, size him up, then call for the next man. Finally it was Oscar Resnick looking through the window at me, his thick shock of sandy red hair glued down, clean-shaven, six foot eight, about two hundred and forty pounds mass, his brown eyes a little too large, his thin lipped mouth a little too small, his teeth a little too long.

The minute I saw him the old fear descended. It took him a few seconds to place where he had seen me before. Then he recognized me, and I could see memory flowing through his mind as his wide eyes widened even more, and his thin lips pulled back into a knowing grin. "Well, *Cap'n* Peabody!" he said, rolling the word *Cap'n* with his tongue as though flavoring it with contempt. "It's a small world. Fancy . . ." I could read his thoughts as they flashed across his face. He would play a waiting game, taking his time, but it would be a game to his liking. Showing up the yellow streak in a *Captain*. Suddenly, he was completely respectful, almost too respectful. "It is certainly good to be shipping with you, sir," he said.

"That's the proper spirit, Resnick," I said. "All right, get aboard. Gate seven."

After he had gone I checked in the rest of the crew, seeing liking and respect in their eyes, and wondering how quickly it would change to barely concealed contempt, wondering what Resnick would do to

show me up. Like a renegade wolf he would bide his time, staying out of range, until the moment he decided was right, then he would dart in with a swift attack that would tear open my fear of him for all to see—and dart away again to sit and laugh while my soul withered within me. That's all he would do. That's all he would have to do, and he and I both knew it.

IN THE DAYS following take-off, I watched the slow build-up with a certainty of knowledge that can only come from personal experience. I knew Resnick's methods.

A successful bully must be a shrewd psychologist and know how to capitalize on weaknesses. I watched Oscar Resnick size up this man and that one, and go to work on each. It's a subtle formula he used. Wait until you are alone with a man, then trip him when he goes by you, or dig your elbow into his ribs painfully, then claim it was an accident, but in such a way that both he and you know it wasn't an accident yet nobody else will believe it. Mock him with your eyes and your smile, dare him to do something about it. What can a man do? He can't go running to the Mate with the complaint that you are picking on him. He can't bring the thing into the open by fighting you without striking the first blow and being branded the aggressor in an unprovoked assault, and unless he is a professional fighter your sneering confidence bluffs him out of an open fight at first. Gradually you establish a fear

reaction in him that would keep him from winning a fight even if, originally, he could have beaten you.

When you are the victim of that sort of thing you really have only two courses of action open to you. Try to keep out of his way as much as possible, if you have any personal integrity, or kowtow to him, grovel in his presence, sneer with him at his other victims, flatter him, and hope he will direct his sadistic streak elsewhere.

Soon four or five of the crewmen start hanging around with the bully, admiring him too much, laughing too much at what he says, siding with him against others, and even doing a little minor bullying themselves by ganging up on this or that victim as soon as each has recognized the streak of cowardly sadism in the other which binds them together as human jackals.

A man like Resnick leaves the strong alone at first; waits until the jackals have gathered around him. When this stage is reached, when anybody who says anything is a yellow stool-pigeon, you find the best man in your crew a hospital case with bleeding nose, bruised face, black eyes, and maybe a couple of broken ribs caved in by someone's shoe. After the doctor gives him first aid you go to the infirmary and ask him who did it. He clamps his lips together and tells you he didn't see who it was. He's lying, and he knows you know he is lying, but can you torture it out of him or punish him for not telling you? No. And there's nothing a Captain can do about it. He must have the

testimony of the injured party in writing, signed and witnessed, and the Code Book must be followed specifically in punishing the aggressors; and if the Captain does anything at all he is almost certain to be tied up in court at the first port of call by the punished parties. Even if the Captain has provable justification for putting a man in the brig or fining him or giving him a demotion in assigned type of work, his ship will be delayed by the trial, and the owners will decide they need a Captain who knows how to avoid such costly delays.

A man like Oscar Resnick is a social cancer, and I saw the symptoms of his presence on the ship come into being, and grow, and I knew he was too cunning and too shrewd to let them get out of hand. Any other Captain, knowing all this, would sit back and do nothing, knowing that that was his only safe course consistent with his duty of keeping the ship on schedule.

I had to follow this course of action too. But I knew that it was just a prelude, that when Resnick sensed the time was ripe for his purposes, he would get at me.

It would be subtle and would only take a minute. It would take place in the presence of the crew. It would be something that would catch me unawares, bring the light of fear into my eyes for all the crew to see. That would be enough. The word would go back that Captain Peabody was yellow.

Some of the crew would quit the ship at North Marsport, telling the Union business agent they didn't want to ship with a yellow Captain.

The business agent would find men refusing to sign on my ship because I was a yellow Captain. And inevitably the time would come when I could not keep a full crew. Then the owners would dismiss me, and I wouldn't be able to get another berth as Captain.

I didn't know how to avoid it. It was only a question of time. *When* would it happen? Today? Not for six months yet? Tomorrow? When?

David Markham proved from the start to be an extremely conscientious orderly. My quarters were kept spotless, I had only to lift my eyebrows and he was there ready to obey. How many hours a day he spent wiping up imaginary dust, rubbing nonexistent detergent off my eating utensils for the *n*th time before I sat down to eat, polishing my already mirror-bright shoes, and the million and one things I didn't even know about, I'll never know.

Few orderlies mix with the crew, and he was no exception. Most orderlies either have the personality of a spinster to start with or acquire it after a few years. He had none of that, but then he wasn't the type that orderlies are made of.

There was a tension in him at all times that was so strong it seemed almost visible—a tension that made each minor chore a matter of life and death to him. It was pitiful to watch, and I usually avoided watching him as much as possible. But a Captain may not pick up something he has dropped, or do a lot of things that any ordinary man does for himself but

which are the traditional duties of the orderly—if for no other reason than to keep him busy; so by necessity David Markham was with me during most of my waking hours.

A pattern of speculation about him grew up in one corner of my mind. David Markham was the type of man you instinctively like and respect, the type that in the service *should* have climbed the career ladder to an Admiralty by the time he was seventy-five.

As the days passed the haunting fear in the depths of his eyes seemed almost to have vanished. If I had not known who he was I would have laughed at the possibility of his being a coward. Even knowing who he was, I began to doubt it.

I thought a great deal about the circumstances brought out at his court-martial, the testimony that proved he had broken cover and run, then groveled at the feet of his captors, crying and pleading for his life. Later the enemy had captured outposts they could not have located without his help, proving that he had spilled his guts to save his skin. That had, of course, been in the fuss on Venus with Porter's Renegades. I didn't see how there could be any doubt of David Markham's guilt, even though the more I saw of the man the more unbelievable it seemed. I tried to figure out alternative explanations. I tried to believe them. I *wanted* to believe.

I would catch Markham gazing through a viewport into the subdued silver velvet of infinity and at

the millions of flashing jewels that are the individually visible suns of our galaxy and the nebulae that are other galaxies, with his tortured soul, for the moment, at peace. I would hesitate, wanting to join him in his quiet mood as I would have joined any other man, then I would steal away, unable somehow to bring myself to create any kind of bond between us. I had, I realized by then, chosen David Markham in the hopes that he might become a tidbit I could toss to Resnick to pacify him and divert him from me. A cowardly motivation, no matter how you look at it. It had been an impulse I was now ashamed of. It haunted me. Because of it I couldn't bring myself to extend to him a Judas friendship, which is what I felt it would be.

We were forty days out from Earth when Resnick turned his attention to David Markham. I discovered it quite by accident. Ten minutes after my regular sleep period had begun the First Mate saw fit to inform me that an uncharted meteor swarm was going to intercept us in four hours, and of course it was my responsibility to determine what precautions should be taken.

Under ordinary circumstances I would merely have rung for my orderly, but I was half asleep and did the more natural thing. I went to the door to his room, next to mine, and opened it without knocking. He had just undressed, getting ready for bed. He stood there, startled at my unexpected entrance. And I saw the ugly purple splotch over his kidneys that could have

come only from the blow of a fist.

I pretended I hadn't noticed it. I merely told him that there would be emergency duty, and backed out, sliding the door shut.

When he came out two minutes later, he gave no indication of whether he thought I had noticed the bruise or not. And for the next few hours I was far too busy to concern myself about it anyway. But I felt as though I had given him that bruise myself, with my own fist, and I was as surely responsible for it as though I had.

To make it worse, I realized that despite the guilt I felt I still hoped that Resnick would settle for a *famous* coward, and leave me alone.

While I plotted the courses of hundreds of chunks of meteor iron to search out safe holes through the intercepting meteor group my thoughts whispered gleefully, "All you have to do is pretend you don't know anything and maybe Resnick will be grateful and leave you alone."

Later, trying to get some sleep, I tried to think what could be done. Could I come right out and ask Markham about that bruise? Suppose I did, and he told me Resnick had done it, and I used that as an excuse to toss Resnick in the brig? Then the men would throw Markham's reputation in my face and claim it was a cowardly lie; and if I didn't release Resnick it would mean an official investigation at North Marsport—on the first leg of my first command. Suppose he told me and I did nothing. Then *he* would know I was afraid of Resnick!

I didn't sleep much. I didn't get much sleep for several days. Coupled with my guilt feeling, my hate for myself, was a growing feeling that striking my orderly was the first step in Resnick's plan to get at me, smoke me into the open where he could find an opportunity to expose me.

It was obvious how Resnick had gotten to Markham. It had to be when Markham went to the kitchen to bring my meals, and it had to be with the knowledge of the cook, which meant that Resnick already ruled the crew openly, behind the scenes.

There was no danger of mutiny or any of the claptrap of fiction, of course. Resnick was no fool, and had no insane ambitions other than that of feeding his streak of sadism.

A few days later I noticed a small spot of blood on the back of Markham's shirt. I said nothing, but that evening after I had dismissed him and he had gone to his room I took a small flat metal mirror and slid it under his door just far enough to peek in and watch him undress, and I saw the welts across his back.

Worse, I saw him crying. He shook with silent sobs while tears streamed from his eyes, and hopelessness and discouragement and friendlessness held possession of him.

At that moment I knew with absolute conviction that the court-martial had been right. He was a coward and would never be anything else. But at the same moment, I suddenly understood him. It was something he couldn't help.

I lay in the darkness of my own

cubicle, a dull anger growing within me, turning me into a slightly irrational being.

There was, I suppose, a sort of self-flagellation to it. A psychiatrist would possibly diagnose it as that, anyway. In my own mind I was responsible for everything Resnick did to David Markham, which meant that by "punishing" Resnick I was punishing myself. When you descend to such levels of pure and obsessing emotional thinking, logic gets mixed up quite a bit.

I came out of that sleepless sleep period with one thing quite clear in my thoughts. *Things couldn't go on the way they were.*

Oh, sure, I had a sneaking hunch that this frame of mind I was in was what Resnick had been angling for. By now I had invested Resnick with omniscience so that it seemed perfectly logical that he should know I had spent a sleepless night, that he should know I had seen those welts on Markham's back. In my mind's eye I could see him, a sneer on his thin lipped small mouth, while he waited for me to stick my neck out. I could see his muscular arms, covered by freckled skin that covered sleek muscles, dangling at his sides, fingers uncoiled but ready to double into fists—fists that had once beaten *me* into shuddering unconsciousness, years ago—fists that could do it again while slightly mad brown eyes glittered at me, mocking . . .

David Markham served my breakfast, the perfect orderly, quick to anticipate my wishes, so attuned to my habits by now that he almost seemed to read my thoughts before

I was aware of them myself. He seemed to have not a care in the world. A cold shower can cover a multitude of inner tortures with a pink glow of well being . . .

Suddenly the idea came to me. I would talk to Oscar Resnick. I would plead with him. I would offer him money—my whole salary on this trip. Such men have their price. As Captain I made five times more than he. I would give it all to him if he would agree to lay off.

All I wanted was to get through my first command without trouble, get back to Earth on schedule, make a good showing. I was, suddenly, pathetically confident that he would agree. A deal like that would have to be discussed in absolute privacy, however. The slightest inkling of it to the crew—

In a panic of haste lest my confidence wane, I skipped my third cup of coffee and hurried to my office. Switching the intercom to crews' quarters, I said with the crisp tones of command, "Mr. Resnick, report to the Captain's office," repeating it three times as is customary on intercom calls aboard ship. Then I made sure the intercom was off, and sat there behind my desk waiting, my heart pounding painfully within my chest, my fingers clenched into white knuckled fists to keep them from trembling.

Five minutes later there came a polite knock at the door. Composing myself as much as possible I said, "Come in," in what I hoped was a calm authoritative voice.

The door slid open and Oscar Resnick stood there, his shoulders almost as wide as the door opening,

his space-faded sandy hair neatly combed back, his brown eyes darting around the room in a quick survey and just as quickly masking their triumphant glitter as he saw that I was alone, his thin lips which had been in a firm straight line breaking into a satisfied and anticipatory smile.

"Come in and close the door," I commanded, my voice breaking into nervous uncertainty on the last three words.

He stepped inside and closed the door firmly behind him, his eyes never leaving me. When the door was firmly closed he said, "Sure, Art, old boy." With those four words he took command of the situation. They had been uttered so softly that they could not have sent a whisper over the intercom even if it had been on. He walked toward me until he came to the edge of the desk, then planting his fists on the desk top, he said, "I've been wondering how long it would take for you to call me in for a little talk." He exuded an aura of quiet contemptuous strength as his eyes flicked over me in speculation.

"That's right," I said, hearing the nervous squeak in my voice, not sure whether my comment had any relation to what he had said or not. "I want to have a talk with you. Things can't go on the way they are!"

Resnick drew back in pretended surprise. "Why, I don't know what you mean, *sir*," he said.

"You know perfectly well what I mean," I said, my voice breaking completely. "This is my first command! My whole future hangs on

it. What satisfaction could you possibly get from ruining me?"

In that moment the past descended upon me completely. Once again I was pleading for mercy where there was no mercy, hoping against hope before those soft mad eyes, searching for something that could never be there.

"Why, *sir*," he said, mockingly, "I don't know what you mean at all. Perhaps the stress of your new duties . . .?"

"How much would you take?" I blurted desperately. "How much, to lay off of—David Markham—leave me alone . . .?"

"Birds of a feather, huh?" he said. His eyes became thoughtful. "Every man has his price, I suppose . . ."

A surge of hope coursed through me. Maybe we could dicker. Maybe it wouldn't cost as much as I was prepared to pay.

He scratched his chin slowly, then said, "Well—how about your salary for this trip and five thousand dollars?" His thin lips flicked back in a grin. "And a promise on your part that you will sign me on for the next trip—or turn in your Captain's papers?"

The universe stood still as I saw ruin facing me. There was no way out. No way out at all. I heard myself blurt, "Why? Why? WHY?"

He leaned over my desk slowly, his fists planted on it once again, until his face was scant inches from mine. He whispered, "Because you're yellow. That's why. You never had any business becoming a captain." His hoarse, taunting whisper hung in the silence of the

room like the knell of doom.

There is a madness beyond madness, of that I am sure. I should have been grovelling in fear, I should have been making a decision to step into an airlock and eject myself into space, a suicide unable to live longer with himself, because what he said was true and I knew it was true beyond any shadow of doubt.

Instead, I heard myself saying, "All right, Resnick. You win." My voice was perfectly calm. It was not me. Whatever it was, it was not me, talking. My part of my mind was in a numb stupor, unable to act, unable even to think. I heard my voice say, "It's a deal. You promise to lay off. In return I promise to turn my salary for this trip over to you when we get paid, and to sign you on for the next trip." My voice was perfectly calm, even practical. I felt my lips curve into a calculated and bitter smile of defeat. I heard myself say, "Such an agreement can't be put into writing, of course, but—shall we drink on it?"

I saw disappointment, disbelief, amazed surprise, cross his lean angular features as I rose from behind my desk. As though in a dream I turned my back on him as I crossed the office to the liquor cabinet, the prerogative of a space Captain. I opened it up with unshaking hands. He followed me, came to stand behind me, very close. I lifted out a bottle of Scotch, the seal still unbroken, and turned to him.

"Scotch?" I asked.

He hulked over me, his thin lips stretched into a gleeful grin. "Sure," he said softly, his lips pasted against

his stained teeth.

He sensed my sudden movement, a movement I was not conscious of dictating, but he was too slow as the full bottle crashed down on his skull, shattering and sending a shower of alcohol over his uniform and the floor. His eyes did not close, but blanked into unconsciousness as he sagged to the floor.

I stood there for a moment, blinking down at his unconscious form, not quite believing what had happened. Even in unconsciousness he sent fear icing through my veins.

In one mad moment I had ruined it all. When he recovered he would be unforgiving, without mercy. For a minute or two I broke down completely, crying like a baby.

Then, gradually, a calm settled over me. I turned him over onto his back and pulled his slack arms together. I took off my belt and wrapped it around his wrists until I could fasten the buckle firmly.

Then I went to my cubicle and brought back a roll of adhesive tape and taped his lips closed, laughing in a low, mad voice that was not my own.

I used the rest of the roll of tape to fasten his ankles together. And just as I finished he opened his eyes.

It took him a few minutes to organize his thoughts and fix his attention on me, his eyes questioning me. I continued to chuckle under my breath. I was mad, conscious of the fact that I was mad, and beyond caring.

"You have nice eyes," I heard myself say. "Nice soft brown eyes."

I examined his scalp with careful concern for a moment. "Good thing," I said. "The bottle broke, so there will be no sign of abrasion that could be proof of anything."

I took out a cigarette and lit it with trembling fingers, while he watched me. Blowing out a streamer of smoke and jabbing in his direction with my fingers, I said, "I'm learning a few things, Resnick. Already—I'm learning. I wonder how much it will take to break *you* down."

I pushed his head back and tried to put my thumb against his eyeball. He closed his eyes tightly and I forced his right eye open and pressed the ball of my thumb against the exposed eyeball.

"Not too much or it will make your eye bloodshot," I said, in hardly more than a whisper. "Evidence, you know. Who's going to believe that the Captain did such a thing? Not even the crew! Sure, they'll agree with you to keep from being beat up. That is, if you have any stomach for that sort of thing when I get through with you. I'm just beginning, you know."

I lifted my thumb from his eye and squeezed his nostrils together, watching the terror build up in him, watching his struggles, watching him grow weaker and weaker, and releasing him at the last moment before he lost consciousness, and watching his chest heave as he sucked in lungful of air.

"I just thought of something," I said to him. "You wouldn't *dare* retaliate after I let you go. To strike me would be treason, punishable by life imprisonment, wouldn't

it? And what would be your defense? That the Captain had tortured you? Who would believe that? Who are your witnesses? See how I have stolen your weapons?" I pried his left eye open and pressed against it with a thumbnail. "A half hour ought to do it," I taunted. "No marks. I have to be very careful so that an examination by the ship's doctor won't show a thing."

In ten minutes—or was it ten eternities?—he became a quivering mass of flesh.

I did things to him that left him too weak to move. At the end of half an hour I pulled the tape off his mouth and listened to him blubber. I took the tape off his ankles, and the belt off his wrists. I tortured him some more and he took it.

"And when I call for you over the intercom," I said, "if you don't come at once I have you for gross insubordination to your Captain. And if you so much as touch one member of the crew again I'll call you, boy. I'll call you."

Finally I let him go.

AFTER HE HAD gone I trembled like a leaf. Slowly a little bit of sanity returned to me, and with it a realization of what I had done. Nausea overcame me and I staggered into the washroom and got rid of my breakfast, then returned to my desk.

For hours I sat there while my mind picked up the threads of life and began functioning again. There was still the feeling that Resnick

was omniscient, that he would be able to topple me into disgrace. But with it, gradually, came the realization that he wouldn't, that he couldn't.

I had used his own psychological weapons on him, building up in him a fear psychosis that he couldn't successfully fight. I had turned the tables.

I couldn't really believe it just yet, but I couldn't disbelieve it either. For the next three days I went about my customary routines with a calm exterior, waiting for the storm to break, but it never did.

Finally, to test it, I deliberately went on a tour of inspection through the ship, until I came to where Resnick was working, along with several others of the crew. As I entered the compartment and saw him look up, I saw the instinctive cringing that he couldn't help. In a flash of inspiration I saw that his sadism was a cover for his own cowardice, a compensation mechanism.

I knew then that I had won. After one long silent moment I turned my back on him and left the compartment.

As I walked by myself to the central tube and pulled myself up to the Captain's deck, for the first time I began to realize what being Captain meant. It means a lot of things, of course, but most of all it means facing up to one's command, being in charge.

I knew that I would never again be afraid—least of all afraid of Oscar Resnick. Nor would I ever again be afraid of fear. In the future I might be faced with the

WHAT IS YOUR SCIENCE I.Q.?

HERE'S one with a change of pace. Count 10 for each correct answer and try for 100 at least. Answers on page 113.

1. How far will a free falling object fall in the first .50 second?
2. What is the osmotic pressure of sea water?
3. What is melanin?
4. Name four of the natural radioactive elements in the air.
5. What are whistlers?
6. Name the three heavy fissionable elements.
7. What is heparin's function in the human body?
8. What are stormer orbits?
9. What causes free radicals to form?
10. What would be the approximate temperature at a speed of Mach 3?
11. What changes are indicated by thermoclines?
12. What materials in auto exhaust react in sunlight to form ozone?
13. Describe a cepheid star.
14. What does "maximum entropy" mean?
15. What is a synapse?

problem of a bully on my crew again, but I would know how to deal with him—with his own weapons, the ones he used *because he would be most vulnerable to them himself*.

When the *Alabama* reached North Marsport Resnick quit the ship. I was glad to see him go. The rest of the crew remained with me, and I had no more trouble during the five years I commanded the *Alabama*.

David Markham remained with me as my orderly until I retired, and he is still with me. A few years after the incidents of this story I had an opportunity to get him a commission but he turned it down

and refused to leave me. Sometimes I think he knows what happened in my office that day that I called Resnick in, but he has never given any hint whether he does or not.

You wonder that I am not ashamed to confess publicly to you that I was a coward? You shouldn't wonder. We are all cowards—or fools. I am not ashamed of the fact that once I was a coward. Bravery, in a way, consists in not being afraid of being afraid.

Just one thing remains in my story. When I reached North Marsport on that first leg of my first command, I was a Captain.

I have been one ever since.

E N D

Philip Duncan, the St. Louis attorney and former FBI agent, who wrote the definitive "History of Espionage", observes that in all the records dealing with spies and counterspies there is no more significant case than that of Dr. John O'Hara Smith, an electronics research engineer. Duncan maintains that Dr. Smith, whose rather quixotic name is real and not assumed, contributed more to the advancement of espionage and counter-espionage methods than any one person in history.

EDDIE

For a period of more than a year, the case of Dr. John O'Hara Smith was known to only a few security and defense officials. The first public reference to it came on November 22, 1956, when an assistant to Secretary of Defense Wilson obliquely commented on it in testimony before the House Military Affairs Committee. Subsequently, more details were leaked to several Washington correspondents, and then vigorously denied. A brief account of the matter appeared on an inside page of the New York Times, but aroused no general interest.

As a matter of fact, so little is known about the entire case that several of the people who were in on its early phases are still not sure whether Dr. John O'Hara Smith is alive or dead, or whether he was a spy or counterspy.



Illustrated by Paul Orban

It's no surprise that the top brass was in a complete swivet;

Eddie knew answers to questions that weren't even asked.

What's more, nothing was a secret with him around!

However, on the basis of information now declassified, plus two highly technical papers presented to the Institute of Research Engineers, anyone sufficiently interested can reconstruct most of the case.

IT BEGAN AT approximately 7:15 P.M., August 11, 1955, when Dr. John O'Hara Smith returned with a bag of groceries to his house trailer in the Mira Mar Trailer Park, overlooking a long blue reach of the Pacific Ocean, some twelve miles south of Los Angeles. He put the groceries on the drainboard beside his spotless two-burner butane stove, carefully flicked away a speck of dust and then stepped eagerly toward the rear of his trailer, where an intricate assembly of tubes and wires occupied what normally would have been the dining area.

Dr. Smith flipped on a switch, and then received what he later called, in his precise, pedantic way, a split-second premonition of danger.

The Go-NoGo panel light flashed and went out; the transistor looked grey instead of red; the wires to the binary-coded digitizer were crossed; the extra module in the basic assembly had not been there that morning . . .

Dr. Smith methodically catalogued these details, and he stepped backward, just a breath of a moment before the low hum sharpened to a whine. He tripped, and in falling his left shoulder knocked open the door to the small toilet closet. Instinctively, he writhed the upper

part of his body through the narrow doorway. His thick-lensed glasses fell underneath him, leaving him practically blind.

His elbows and knees were still making frenzied, primordial crawling movements when the detonation brought a wave of oblivion that almost, but not quite, preceded the pain.

A squad car from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department turned in the first report:

John O'Hara Smith, male, white, about 45; critically injured by explosion in house trailer; removed by ambulance to General Hospital; explosion occurred at . . .

Two days later, the Sheriff's Department apparently closed the case with a one-line addition to its original report:

Explosion believed to have been caused by leaking butane connection.

But, in the interval, other agencies had entered the case.

The first was the Industrial Security Office attached to the Western Division of the Air Force's Research and Development Command in the once suburban community of Inglewood, California.

When Chief Security Officer Amos Busch received a call at 11:32 the morning after the explosion, he automatically noted the time on his desk pad. The call was from Pacific Electronics, Inc., a subcontracting firm in nearby El Segundo.

The president and owner of Pacific Electronics was on the phone. In a tone that betrayed con-

siderable agitation, he identified himself as Wesley Browne.

"One of my research engineers—my best engineer, dammit—was nearly killed last night in an explosion . . . maybe he's dead now," reported Browne, his words breathlessly treading on each other. "There's something damn funny about this . . ."

Amos Busch wrote: Research engineer . . . explosion . . . nearly killed. Then he asked judicially:

"What do you mean by 'damn funny', Mr. Browne?"

"This engineer was working on our vernier actuating cylinder for the Atlas guided missile . . . Just two days ago, he—he said he wanted me to know where his files were . . . in case anything happened to him . . ."

Amos Busch was a jowly, greying man who gave the appearance of being slow moving. But before the president of Pacific Electronics, Inc., hung up, Busch had already used another phone and the intercom to put in motion a chain reaction that would deliver to his desk the security report on Dr. John O'Hara Smith.

There was nothing out of order in the report. There couldn't have been, or Dr. Smith wouldn't have been cleared for the ballistic missile program. According to the report, he had lived aloofly for all of his adult years. Even as a boy, his sole interest had been to tinker with mechanical projects. His grades and IQ were high above the norm, and his attitude towards his classmates varied between impatience and outright sarcasm. "I always thought

John was a lonely boy," a former teacher had recalled to an FBI officer during the security check. "He never had anything in common with other youngsters." After obtaining his Ph.D. in electrical engineering from the University of Wisconsin, he had worked for Allis-Chalmers Research Division in Milwaukee and lived with his mother until her death in 1951, when he bought a house trailer and moved to the coast. He had no close friends, no record of even a remote connection with any communist or communist-front group.

Security Officer Busch decided to visit the trailer, or what remained of it. He was not an electronics man, or even a normally incompetent do-it-yourself mechanic, but when he saw the shattered tangle of wires and tubes, along with the obvious remnant of a short-wave receiver, Amos Busch promptly called Major General David Sanders, commander of the USAF's Western Development Division.

General Sanders scratched his tanned bald head, and said,

"We'd better get the FBI in on this, Amos."

The FBI went to work with a thoroughness that made John O'Hara Smith's previous security investigation look like the processing of an application to join the Kiwanis. While agents sifted every detail of his life since the day of his birth, he was moved to a private room at General Hospital and three nurses cleared for security were assigned to care for him.

For eight days, Smith was in a coma. On the morning of the ninth

day, he groaned, turned to one side and rolled back again. The nurse on duty put down her magazine and moved quickly to his bedside. She moistened a cloth and wiped the perspiration from his high forehead, brushing back the thinning tangle of fine, brown hair.

His eyes blinked open, stared at her. He whispered:

"Eddie . . . what happened . . . to Eddie?"

Remembering her instructions from the FBI, the nurse turned to make certain the door was closed.

"Was Eddie in the trailer with you?" she asked, bending closer to catch his reply.

He gave her a look of utter disgust, and tried to moisten his cracked lips with the tip of his tongue. But he drifted off again without replying.

This incident was duly recorded in the FBI's growing dossier, along with another conversation that took place in the office of Wesley Browne at Pacific Electronics, Inc. After carefully reviewing John O'Hara Smith's work record, FBI agent Frank Cowles inquired:

"Is there anything—anything at all, Mr. Browne—that you would consider out of the ordinary about Smith's recent actions?"

There was a trace of uneasiness in Browne's manner, but he tried to cover it by looking annoyed.

"I don't know why in the devil you fellows are spending so much time on Smith! . . . He sure as hell didn't blow himself up!"

"Of course not," Cowles said, placatingly. "But we never know where a lead will come from . . ."

He repeated the question.

Browne hesitated.

"I suppose," he began, shifting his big bulk uncomfortably, "this will sound kind of odd . . . but you know we've got the subcontract to produce this actuating cylinder for the Atlas . . ."

The agent nodded.

"Well, six months before we were asked to submit specs and bids on such a cylinder, Smith came to me and said he had an idea for something the Air Force might soon be needing . . ."

Agent Cowles maintained his air of polite attention, but his cool grey eyes narrowed. Browne shifted again, and continued:

"I told him to go ahead—you never can tell what these research guys will come up with . . ."

"And what did he come up with, Mr. Browne?"

"You won't believe this, maybe—but he came up with the design for the complete vernier hydraulic actuating cylinder—including the drive sector gear—at least three months before we had the faintest idea such an item would even be needed!"

The FBI man's ball-point pen moved swiftly.

"Anything else?"

Browne instinctively lowered his voice:

"Smith even suggested that the cylinder would help to offset the roll and yaw in an intercontinental ballistic missile!"

A brittle edge came into the agent's courteous tone:

"Did you report this to security?"

In spite of the airconditioning

unit in the window, the president and owner of Pacific Electronics, Inc., seemed to feel that the room was getting very warm. He ran a fat forefinger under his white collar.

"No," he admitted. "We got the contract, of course—it was a cinch!—and I just wrote it off as a lucky break . . . You can see how I'd feel, can't you?"

"Yes," said Cowles, "I can."

Bit by bit, a new picture of the meticulous, professorial Dr. Smith began to emerge from the FBI dossier.

During the working week, his habit had been to keep his trailer in a small park just off Sepulveda Blvd., a half-mile from the Pacific Electronics plant. After work on Fridays, he invariably left for the weekend, usually for any one of a dozen scenic trailer parks along the coast between San Diego and Santa Barbara. He always went alone. No one had ever seen or met "Eddie". Outside of working hours, Smith's only association with his professional colleagues was through the Institute of Research Engineers. He attended monthly meetings, and occasionally wrote dry, abstract articles on theoretical research for the Institute's quarterly journal.

Under microscopic study and chemical analysis, investigators determined that nitro-glycerine had caused the explosion. The fused mass of electronics wreckage in Smith's trailer were identified as parts of a computer assembly. Thousands of dollars had been spent on components over the past three years. Purchases, usually for cash, were traced to various

electronic supply companies in the greater Los Angeles area.

Dr. Smith's bank account showed a balance of only \$263.15. But the big find came from a safety deposit box in the same branch bank. There, along with a birth certificate, his mother's marriage license, an insurance policy, his doctor's degree from the University of Wisconsin and an unused passport, was a duplicate set of computer memory tapes.

It took the FBI forty-eight hours to play a few selected segments from these tapes, which obviously had been recorded over a period of several years.

Two notations made by Agent Cowles indicate the type of material contained on the tapes:

"If a deliberate attempt were made to run a thermonuclear test explosion within the frontiers of Russia, in such a way as to avoid detection, it would almost certainly be successful . . ."

"The Soviet Union may soon develop a new ratio of fusion to fission energy in high yield weapons and will require additional data . . ."

FBI agents listening to these playbacks were convinced, almost to a man, that they had stumbled across the hottest espionage trail since the arrest of Klaus Fuchs and the case of the Rosenbergs.

A round-the-clock security guard was placed outside the hospital room of John O'Hara Smith, while Federal authorities waited impatiently to see whether he would live or die. Smith would answer, or leave unanswered, a lot of vital questions.

SECURITY NOT WITH-
standing, it was the day after
Labor Day before the medical staff
of General Hospital would permit
the first direct questioning of Dr.
Smith. And then the interrogators
were instructed:

"Only a few minutes."

Three men filed quietly into
Smith's room as soon as the nurse
removed his luncheon tray. They
stood in a semi-circle around the
foot of his bed.

Agent Frank Cowles opened a
black leather folder the size of a
small billfold and presented his cre-
dentials. He introduced General
Sanders and Security Officer Busch.
It was the first time any of the men
had seen John O'Hara Smith. The
reports had called him pudgy, but
now he had lost twenty pounds and
his cheek bones were gaunt under
his pallid skin. He wore unusually
thick, dark-rimmed glasses that
magnified his eyes and gave him an
owlish appearance. He returned
their scrutiny with a mixture of
assurance and impatience, like a
professor waiting for his class to
come to order.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he
said tartly. "It's about time some-
one came to see me about this . . ."

Cowles cleared his throat and
suggested cautiously:

"Then you're willing to give us
a statement, Dr. Smith?"

"Don't talk drivel, man! How are
you going to know anything about
it if I don't make a statement!"

Though still weak, Dr. Smith's
voice had a high, imperious quality.
Clearly, he did not wish to waste

time or strength on mere conver-
sation.

The three men exchanged glanc-
es. Cowles and Amos Busch took
out notebooks.

"Now, Dr. Smith," Cowles be-
gan, "what is your view as to the
nature of the explosion in your
trailer and the reason for it?"

"I'm an electronics research en-
gineer, not an expert in explosives,"
Smith retorted with some asperity.
"But as to the reason, I'm sure
they wanted to destroy Eddie and
me!"

He glared, as if daring anybody
to challenge this statement.

"Eddie?" ventured Cowles.

"I try to speak plainly, Mr.
Cowles . . . I said 'Eddie and me'!"

General David Sanders rested
two large hands on the foot of the
white iron bedstead and squeezed
until his knuckles bulged ominously.
A volatile man, he had trouble with
his own temper even without being
provoked. But his voice was decep-
tively calm:

"Dr. Smith, do I gather that
someone else was in the trailer with
you at the time of the explosion?"

Smith grimaced expressively, and
answered as if speaking to an eight-
year-old:

"No, General Sanders . . . I was
quite alone."

After thirty years in the Air
Force, Amos Busch was not used
to hearing a Major General spoken
to in this way. It violated his sense
of propriety.

"Dr. Smith," he exploded, "just
who or what in the hell is or was
Eddie?"

With what was remarkably close

to an air of incredulity, Smith looked slowly from one to the other.

"I gather you gentlemen haven't read my latest article."

"Not thoroughly," Cowles admitted.

"Then you don't know of my research work with an educatable computer," Smith said accusingly. Seeing that they didn't, he added: "I have named it 'Eddie!'"

"What . . . what is an educatable computer?" ventured Cowles.

It was clear that Dr. Smith welcomed this question. His eyes glowed behind their thick lenses, and his high voice dropped its edge of sharpness.

"Eddie is a computer with a capacity to learn," he replied proudly. "It learns from assimilation of information and deductive reasoning—at a rate at least 10,000 times that of the human mind! That's why Eddie comes up with so many answers! . . . The only problem is, we seldom know what questions the answers answer."

His three interrogators had the look of men leaning into a heavy wind. General Sanders recovered first, and demanded:

"What the devil was it made for then?"

"Eddie was not designed for any specific task—that's why Eddie is so valuable . . . and dangerous!"

Dr. Smith rolled out this last word as if he relished it.

"Do you realize," he went on, with careful emphasis, "that Eddie has solved problems we won't even know exist for another thousand years!"

This pronouncement was greeted by a moment of strained silence. General Sanders finally said,

"H-m-m-m."

He looked at Busch, who looked at Cowles, who asked:

"Does Eddie solve any problems closer to our own time, Dr. Smith?"

"Of course . . ."

"Did Eddie come up with the idea for that Atlas stabilizing cylinder?"

"Certainly."

General Sanders moved a step closer to the bed.

"Any other ideas like that?" he inquired eagerly.

Dr. Smith's smile was neither wholly supercilious nor merely self-assured. It was a little of both, plus a lot of pure satisfaction at being stage center with his favorite subject. He cocked his head back and stared down his stump of a nose.

"You're working on a missile defense system for bombers, aren't you?" he challenged General Sanders.

"What about it?" hedged the General.

"Have you learned how to design a finned missile which can be launched across the bomber's airstream without being thrown off course?"

General Sanders ignored a warning glance from Amos Busch.

"Do you . . . does this Eddie know how to do it?"

"Eddie says it doesn't matter!"

"What?"

"Eddie says what difference does it make if the missile is thrown off course by the airstream—as long

as you can reorient it into a compensated trajectory. We were working on a new gyroscope principle that might do the trick . . .”

FBI Agent Cowles was always the personification of courtesy, but he could assert himself when necessary. He did so now.

“Excuse me, General,” he interrupted, “but first there are some other matters we must go into with Dr. Smith.”

The General nodded reluctantly. He took out an envelope and made some notes of his own on the back of it.

“Now, Dr. Smith,” said Cowles, “let’s get back to the explosion . . . Why do you feel someone wanted to destroy you and Eddie?”

“I believe they had copied Eddie’s circuit design and wanted to make sure another one wasn’t built—at least in the immediate future.”

“Why not?”

Dr. John O’Hara Smith showed a neat flair for timing as he waited just long enough to build suspense, before answering:

“Because Eddie knew that our security system for safeguarding the missile program is about as up to date as the horse and buggy!”

His words couldn’t have been better chosen to startle his audience. Amos Busch took them as a personal affront.

“Horse and buggy!” he snorted. “You’d better spell that out, Dr. Smith!”

Smith’s reply was prompt and precise:

“Eddie has concluded that human methods and minds alone are not enough to cope with security

issues in an area where even the simplest technical problems must be handled by intricate computing devices . . .”

His owlish eyes moved from one man to another, trying to judge whether they were following him.

“You see, Gentlemen,” he went on, “the technology we are dealing with is so unbelievably complex that the possibilities for espionage are multiplied infinitely beyond the capacity of a human intellect to grasp and evaluate . . .”

“For example,” demanded General Sanders.

“For example,” Smith retorted with equal sharpness, “what good does it do to surround ballistic missile plants with security regulations if the missile itself can be stolen right out of the air?”

“Fantastic!” said General Sanders.

“Nuts,” said Amos Busch.

Agent Cowles said nothing.

John O’Hara Smith sank back against his pillow, panting a little. His high forehead glistened with sweat. When he gathered the strength to speak again, he directed his words to General Sanders:

“General, these ICBM missiles being fired into the Atlantic Ocean from the coast of Florida . . . Are you sure you know what’s happened to all of them?”

“I think so,” the General answered calmly.

“And what about your own X-15 project, General?”

The question was almost a taunt.

General David William Sanders had jumped with his paratroopers into France on a morning in June,

1944. He had risen in rank through the test of battle and the more excruciating ordeal of the Pentagon. He was a rock-jawed, six-foot, two-hundred pound man whom little could shock and nothing could deter. But he had never faced a challenge like the seconds of silence that followed Dr. Smith's mocking question.

There was nothing he dared say, yet in saying nothing he was saying everything. FBI Agent Frank Cowles looked at him, then looked quickly away. Security Officer Busch studied his own hands as though discovering them for the first time.

The tableau remained frozen and silent until the door opened and a doctor said,

"That's all for today, gentlemen."

The three men left without a word.

Dr. John O'Hara Smith closed his eyes. On his pale lips was the suggestion of a smile.

When they were alone in the General's staff car, Amos Busch exhaled and said,

"I'll be damned."

"I gather," observed Cowles drily, "that something called an X-15 has turned up missing."

"A week ago," sighed General Sanders. "Somewhere in the Mojave Desert near Lancaster . . . It was a very elementary prototype—the actual X-15 won't be ready for another three years . . ."

"Any idea what happened to it?"

"It was on a routine test flight and ran out of the tracking screen

—headed northwest . . . We haven't found a splinter from it! But there's a lot of rough country around there."

"Who knows it was lost?"

"Just the local base and our headquarters staff. The Pentagon, too, of course."

"And Dr. Smith," added Amos Busch, incredulously.

The staff car detoured off the freeway to deliver Cowles to the Federal Building.

"What do you make of this, Frank?" the General asked him.

"I'm just supposed to be gathering information."

"Oh, hell! We've been talking and you've been thinking—what?" Cowles grinned.

"I've been thinking how lucky it is I don't have to make a decision about Smith!"

"So?"

"So we'll question him again tomorrow . . . As long as he's willing to talk, the more he says, the better."

But, next morning, the medical staff again exercised its veto power. John O'Hara Smith had developed an infection and fever during the night. There could be no further questioning for the time being.

On the second day, when his fever ebbed, Dr. Smith irascibly ordered a pad of paper and began an interminable series of sketches. The nurse managed to sneak out a few of them, and FBI experts sat up all night vainly trying to figure out what they meant.

The following evening, when the last visitor's bell had sounded and the patients were bedded down for

the night, Dr. Smith was staring unblinking into the dark shadows of his room. He had been given a sleeping pill at 9:30, but had held it under his tongue until the nurse left, and then had put it on the night table behind his thick-rimmed glasses. He seemed to be struggling with a problem. Once he turned on the night light, put on his glasses and made several rapid sketches that vaguely resembled a spider web.

A half hour later, his eyes began to droop. He picked up the sleeping pill, rolled it between his thumb and forefinger, then put it back on the table. His breathing became deeper.

A sound startled him awake. It was an odd sound, not a part of the subdued hospital noises. It was a persistent, metallic, scraping sound, and it came from outside his window.

Dr. John O'Hara Smith grabbed his glasses and rolled out of bed. He bunched up his pillow under the covers and crawled into the deeper darkness of the corner to the left of the window, which was open several inches. He crouched there, knees quivering from weakness.

There followed an interval of almost inaudible prying at the screen, broken by periods of silence as someone outside the second-story window apparently paused to listen. Finally, the screen was released with a faint pop. The lower half of the double-hung window eased upwards.

Again there was silence, save for the distant clatter of the self-service elevator.

Abruptly, a pencil-thin beam of

light shot through the room, toward the bed. It focussed on the mound made by the pillow.

Short tongues of flame leaped out three times, with soft, spitting sounds. The pillow and the tangle of blankets twitched realistically.

The beam of light winked out; the screen plopped back into place. There were a few hasty, sliding noises of retreat, and that was all.

John O'Hara Smith's breath came in short, strained gasps, as though he were choked up with asthma. When he got control of himself, he eased back the edge of the drape and looked out the window. It was nearly twenty feet to the ground. A car turned off the boulevard, and came up the side street. The glow of its headlights briefly silhouetted the ladder angled against the side of the hospital.

Dr. Smith sat on the edge of the bed to think things over. His left thumb probed the holes in the blanket and pillow. This seemed to make up his mind.

He got his clothes from the closet and dressed as quickly as he could force his hands to move and coordinate. His trousers hung so loosely that the last hole in his belt made no difference. He pulled the belt tight and knotted it.

Next, he carefully folded his sketches and put them in the inside pocket of his coat. As an afterthought, he also put the sleeping pill in his pocket. Then he drank half a glass of water and painfully edged himself out the window. His chest scraped the ledge, and it was all he could do to strangle an outcry of pain.

At the foot of the ladder, he staggered and nearly fell. But after a moment's rest, he squared his shoulders and walked across a corner of the lawn, into the shadows and the night.

THE LOS ANGELES Mirror-News got further than any other paper with the story of Dr. John O'Hara Smith's mysterious disappearance from General Hospital, leaving behind a bed riddled with three bullets. In fact, the Mirror-News story had cleared the copy desk and was on its way down to the composing room before it was killed by the managing editor "for security reasons".

An all-points police bulletin was sent out, but no one was optimistic about immediate results. When you can't admit a man is missing, when you can't publish his photograph, you deprive yourself of the eyes and ears of the public, which turn up seventy-five percent of the leads in missing persons cases.

Security considerations posed three alternatives:

If Dr. Smith was telling the truth, then it was better to let whoever had twice tried to kill him wonder whether the second attempt had been successful.

If Smith had broken with an espionage ring, and had been marked for death by former associates, the various agencies concerned with security wanted a chance to find him first.

If Smith was playing some devious game of his own, let him make the next move.

As days went by, telephone circuits from Washington to Los Angeles carried messages that grew increasingly uncomplimentary. FBI headquarters hinted that certain field representatives might be transferred from Southern California to southern Kansas if results in the Smith case were not forthcoming promptly. The Air Force suggested that if both Dr. Smith and the X-15 prototype continued to be among the missing, it would not be wise to present the pending promotion of General Sanders to the White House.

The General was moodily digesting this thought, while half-listening to a discussion at a morning staff conference, when an aide whispered:

"A call from the North American Lancaster plant, Sir. It's urgent—and personal . . ."

General Sanders excused himself and hurried into his adjoining private office.

"Sanders," he barked.

The high, imperious voice that replied was instantly recognizable:

"General Sanders, I suggest you don't try to have this call traced, or we might not be able to finish our conversation!"

The General pressed his intercom button and held the connection open, waiting for a chance to use it.

"Go ahead, Smith," he said.

"I'll come directly to the point," said Smith. "I want two things: A place to work in safety and the funds to build another Eddie!"

"And what makes you think you can get them from me?"

"Because Eddie can help you find the X-15."

The General hunched closer to the intercom, raising his voice.

"Smith," he stalled, "why don't you come in and talk things over?"

"I do not intend to sit around waiting to be killed while your security bunglers try to decide whether I'm telling the truth!"

A Staff Sergeant looked in the door.

"Is anything wrong, Sir?"

The General motioned for silence, then scrawled on a note pad:

"Trace this call!"

"Now, Dr. Smith," he said, "if you're telling us the truth, you've got nothing to worry about . . ."

"General," Smith replied acidly, "do you know any better way of convincing you than to let Eddie find the X-15?"

"Well, I—"

"Goodby, General. You think it over—and I'll call you later. Your word will be sufficient!"

The phone clicked, and General Sanders cursed bitterly. Later, he talked it over with Amos Busch, who nodded agreement to the General's proposal.

"Sure," he said. "It's worth a gamble—and we'll have Smith where we want him!"

When John O'Hara Smith phoned that afternoon, the General said promptly:

"Come on in, Dr. Smith—you've got a deal."

The available records on this phase of the case show that a Dr. J. O. Smith and three "assistants" were added to the payroll of a small

Pasadena electronics firm on September 17, 1955. They were installed in one wing on the top floor of the building. The entrance to this wing was sealed off with the familiar sign: "Restricted—Permission to enter granted only on a need-to-know basis".

Apparently, few needed to know, for Smith and his assistants seldom had visitors. Deliveries of electronics components were received by one of the assistants. The four men arrived together, and left together. They brought their lunch.

Dr. Smith, of course, had been interrogated briefly when he had turned himself in at USAF Western Division Headquarters. But only the General and Amos Busch had questioned him this time.

"Look, Smith," said Amos, "if we're supposed to protect you, I want to know from what—and why it's necessary . . ."

John O'Hara Smith looked almost embarrassed.

"I suppose I made the same error that is so often made in declassifying information . . ."

"How's that?"

"When information is declassified, it's done without mathematically computing the infinite number of possible ways such information may be useful to a hostile government . . . Of course, you need an Eddie to make such a computation!"

"What's this got to do with trying to knock you off?" Busch demanded.

"It's quite evident that someone read my article in the Research Engineers' journal more carefully

than you did! As a matter of fact, Eddie actually warned me that anyone hostile to the United States could not possibly allow my work to continue!"

Amos Busch and General Sanders exchanged wary glances.

"All right," said General Sanders, "We'll let that go for the moment—but what made you ask about the X-15 in the first place?"

"Eddie suggested that if the ICBM missiles could theoretically be stolen over the mid-Atlantic, it would be vastly less difficult to steal an X-15 over the Mojave Desert!"

As the two Air Force men digested this statement, along with the indisputable fact that an X-15 had disappeared, John O'Hara Smith blandly informed them:

"Incidentally, gentlemen, you'll have to get Eddie's duplicate tapes for me."

Busch reddened, and could not resist asking:

"Including those short-wave broadcasts from Moscow Radio?"

"Naturally!" Dr. Smith snapped. "I'm sure Eddie extracts a great deal of useful information from them!"

This second interrogation, like the previous one in the hospital, ended on a triumphant note for the exasperating Dr. Smith. When they were alone, General Sanders turned to Busch and sighed:

"We've got a double security problem, Amos! If word of this deal with Smith gets back to Washington, I'll be laughed right out of the service!"

But the General didn't begin to grasp the full implications of his

predicament until the afternoon of Oct. 7, when Dr. Smith phoned to say Eddie was completed.

"Good," grunted the General. "Get going, then!"

"We'll need more information first."

"What kind of information?" General Sanders demanded suspiciously.

His suspicions were reinforced by Smith's terse dictum:

"Eddie must have all the facts on the X-15."

"Impossible!"

Dr. Smith's sniff indicated he nurtured utter disbelief in the concept of the impossible.

"Eddie operates on facts," he reminded the General.

General Sanders didn't sleep much that night. Neither did Amos Busch. They talked and argued until three in the morning, when the General poured one last drink and raised his glass.

"O.K.," he said grimly. "I've gone this far and I've got to go the rest of the way!"

They drank, and he continued: "At least, now I won't have to worry about being laughed out of the service—I'll get court-martialed out!"

He jabbed viciously at an ice-cube with his forefinger.

"But there's one thing I'll do first," he promised.

"What's that, Sir?"

"Strangle Smith with my bare hands!"

General Sanders sat on a metal folding chair in front of Eddie, the educatable computer, and stared

belligerently at the roughly-finished aluminum facade.

Eddie didn't look like much—certainly nothing like \$13,456.12 worth of components paid for out of the General's contingency fund. Speed had been the primary consideration in rebuilding Eddie. The exterior case was unpainted, and rather inexpertly held together with metal screws. There were no knobs on the front panel controls. The vocoder grill was open; the input microphone simply rested on the workbench beside the case. The entire assembly measured about three feet long, two feet deep and eighteen inches high.

"O.K., what do I do now?" rasped the General.

"Just start talking—into the mike."

General Sanders took a sheaf of papers from his briefcase. He glared at Smith:

"You get the hell out of here! This is classified information!"

Dr. Smith smiled mockingly. On his way out of the room, he paused.

"The circuits will stay open—take as long as you wish."

Feeling like a combination of fool and Benedict Arnold, General Sanders cleared his throat and began to read:

"The North American X-15 is one of several projects now nearing the hardware stage that will take living men as well as instruments into the fourth environment of military activity, that of space.

"As soon as the satellite project completes preliminary exploration of the massive high energy spectrometer, the X-15's system should

be ready to fly within two years. X-15s A, B, and C will explore 3000 mph, 50 mi. up; 4500 mph, 100 mi. up; and 6000 mph and over, 150 mi. up and out . . ."

General Sanders jerked open his tie. His tanned bald head was damp with sweat. He glanced around the empty workroom, set his jaw stubbornly and continued:

"Meanwhile, tests are in progress with a pilot model of X-15 to work out an entirely new vehicle system slow enough to maintain laminar flow in the boundary layer and fast enough to maintain control effectiveness at near sea-level environment. Unlike the ICBM which need only remain lethal for a few seconds, both the X-15 and its personnel must return to fly again . . ."

For three hours, General Sanders read steadily from his file material. During the last half hour, his voice grew husky, his throat dry and raw.

When he finished, he went to the door and shouted:

"All right, Smith . . . Come in here and put this damn thing to work!"

Smith came in and informed him imperturbably:

"Not so fast, General! Eddie will still require a great deal more information."

"More? Dammit, I covered everything!"

"Everything you know about the X-15," Dr. Smith agreed, "but Eddie is now venturing into a new field and must have more than technical electronics and avionics data. He needs complete reports on the progress of the search to date, as well as the weather, topography,

economy, history and current happenings in the entire peripheral area. I have built a supplemental circuit to accommodate this sort of material . . .”

General Sanders groaned.

“How the hell do I get into these things?”

During the next ten days, Eddie scanned microfilm on all the newspapers published since X-15's disappearance. Also marshalled before the scanner was every pertinent reference work available at public, private and university libraries in California.

At length, even John O'Hara Smith seemed satisfied. He shut off the scanner, turned on the selector mechanism and the vocader switch.

For two hours, Eddie did nothing, except hum contentedly, like a miniature washing machine. Occasionally, a weird, flickering pattern of multi-colored lights would trace across the scanning screen.

At 11:06 A.M., October 19, 1955, a flat, toneless voice came from the vocader grill:

“Laminar flow equilibrium temperature at mach 8.0, altitude 150,000 ft., of a point 10 ft. back from the leading edge is 1000 degrees Fahrenheit, assuming skin has 0.85 emissivity.”

There was a small, whirring noise, and the vocader circuit clicked off.

“What the devil does that mean?” demanded the General.

“Your aerophysicists might like to know!” came back the tart reply.

At 1:34, Eddie clicked into action again:

“In flight between two planets, the theory of minimum energy orbit should be discarded in favor of acceleration at reduced speed for calculated periods of time.”

“By the time we're flying between planets,” General Sanders commented bitterly, “the record of my court-martial will be ancient history!”

Twenty minutes later, Eddie added:

“In the operation of small exploration vehicles, the fuel cell of the 4-H Clubs in Hanford and Bitterroot Creek will compete with the chemical energy of recombination for the prize sweet potato trophy.”

Even John O'Hara Smith looked startled. But he recovered his aplomb instantly.

“Must be a circuit crossover,” he explained. “No trouble to adjust it . . .”

While he probed into the interior of Eddie with a glass-handled screwdriver, General Sanders took out a fresh cigarette and shredded it between his fingers.

At 2:51, Eddie had this to report:

“Just as the basic physical precept of invariancy to reflection is not necessarily true, Newton's laws of motion may not always apply under certain circumstances. This would make it possible to penetrate and misdirect a navigational system based on the concept of inertial guidance.”

General Sanders had been tilted back in his chair, half dozing. He bounced forward with a jar.

“What was that?”

Dr. Smith replayed this portion

of the output tape.

"We talked about that at the hospital," he sternly recalled to the General. "And if the long-range missiles fired from Florida can be taken over in flight, what's to prevent their being guided to a submarine at sea?"

The General frowned in deep concentration, then relaxed and shook his head.

"Even if something like that would be possible, we've got nothing to worry about. Every missile carries a device which can be used to destroy it if the missile goes off course."

John O'Hara Smith shook his head like a teacher confronted with a pupil who was not too bright.

"Now, General, if an inertial guidance system can be penetrated, a destructor can be blocked."

"That's a mighty big if," the General shot back.

Dr. Smith smiled sardonically.

"It may not be so big when Eddie tells us what happened to the X-15!"

"When!" the General groaned. Then he came back to the problem of intercepted ICBM missiles. Half seriously, half sarcastically, he asked:

"What does Eddie think we should do about those missiles?"

"Undoubtedly there are other guidance systems that can't be broken so easily . . . meanwhile, Eddie suggests booby-trapping the missiles so they'll explode when tampered with."

General Sanders closed his eyes again, and tilted back his chair. The frown between his eyes

deepened.

It was six o'clock, and the early dusk was closing in on the workroom, before another statement came from Eddie. In its characteristic monotone, the educatable computer said:

"The existing developmental missile program will not be affected by the rising divorce rate in Bakersfield and Kern County."

Dr. John O'Hara Smith pursed his lips in disapproval.

"Eddie's not behaving at all well! I'm afraid that new circuit relay will take some working over . . ."

General Sanders climbed slowly to his feet. He picked up his hat.

"O.K., Smith," he said, "You sold me a bill of goods, and I bought it! Now I'm turning you and this whole damn mess back to the FBI! Let Cowles go crazy for awhile!"

AS FRANK COWLES sat in the General's office and heard what had been going on, he said mildly:

"Well, I guess you had to take the gamble."

"Thanks," said General Sanders. "I hope the Pentagon will look at it the same way—but I doubt it!"

"We've got a problem, too, General," Cowles pointed out. "When everything's said and done, there's absolutely no charge we can file against Smith."

"But he just can't walk away—not with all he—or that miserable Eddie—knows about the X-15!"

Cowles smiled faintly.

"I would imagine that Eddie now belongs to the Air Force."

"We'll break the damn thing up for scrap!"

The General's intercom buzzed. An aide's voice said apologetically:

"That Dr. Smith is calling you again, Sir."

"Tell him to go to hell!"

A few seconds later, the intercom buzzed again.

"Dr. Smith on the line, Sir—He says it's something about the X-15 missile."

General Sanders looked as though he wanted to sweep the intercom off his desk.

"Why not talk to him," Cowles suggested. "I'd like to hear this."

The General picked up his phone, and said with deceptive calm:

"All right, Smith . . . make it short."

"It was the logging truck," Dr. Smith replied, in his most superior manner.

"Huh?"

"Eddie's circuit is coordinated now. He says that the same afternoon the X-15 disappeared, a passenger car ran into the back of a logging truck northbound on Highway 395, about fifty miles from the Lancaster base. Two people were killed . . ."

"Smith, what kind of pipedream are you peddling now?"

"General, the truck was loaded with redwood logs and heading north!"

"I don't give a damn where it was going!"

"Wait, General!" Dr. Smith's tone was almost a command. "Eddie wants to know why a logging truck was traveling *toward* the red-

wood country with a load of logs. He also points out that the X-15 is about the size of a redwood log, and could be concealed perfectly in the middle of a load!"

The General seemed to be swallowing something angular and unpleasant.

"We'll check that truck," he said, at last. "But remember, Smith, you've had it—you'll never hook me again!"

He put down the phone, and said to Cowles:

"You get on the merry-go-round this time!"

The California Highway Patrol in Mojave had the report on the accident. Clearly, it had been the fault of the passenger car. The truck driver was identified in the report as Art Backus, an independent hauler, working out of Eureka, located on the far northern tip of the California coast, about eight hundred miles from the scene of the accident.

A routine check by the FBI disclosed that Backus had done time in San Quentin on a morals charge involving a minor girl. He had driven trucks for a dozen lumber companies in northwest California until the past summer, when he had bought a new truck and trailer, for cash, and gone into business for himself.

Two FBI agents stepped up to him in a roadside cafe on Highway 1, between Eureka and Trinidad Bay. A gaunt, stooped man, he nearly collapsed when the agents showed him their identifications. He was broken, and ready to talk,

even before mention was made of the fact that the penalty for peacetime espionage is death.

Backus guided the FBI to an abandoned sawmill, some two miles inland, where the X-15 had been taken apart, minutely photographed, and then sunk in the old log pond.

The men who had hired Backus and dismantled the X-15 had left the area several weeks earlier. They were remembered with friendliness by the residents of Trinidad Bay, who described them as "real nice guys and good fishermen, too." They had told Backus they would be back in the late autumn for the steelhead run, and perhaps would have some more hauling business for him at that time.

The FBI offered Backus one chance for life. He accepted it, with abject eagerness.

Beyond this point, there are no more available records on the case of Dr. John O'Hara Smith, and Eddie, the educatable computer. But several items, not apparently related in any way, make interesting speculation.

On January 3, 1956, the Air Force reported that a Thor intermediate-range ballistic missile, launched from Patrick Air Force Base, Florida, had been destroyed when it appeared to be wandering off course.

About the same date, a Panamanian freighter, riding the gulfstream toward the West Indies,

radioed a report of sighting a massive oil slick and a scattering of debris, some of it bearing Russian insignia. No survivors were found.

The U.S. State Department solicitously inquired of the Soviet Union if any of its vessels had been lost in the winter storms of the Caribbean. The Soviet Union testily replied that no Soviet vessels could have been lost, since Soviet vessels, as a matter of sound international principle, confined their operations to their own territorial waters.

During Easter Week of 1956, the FBI announced the arrests of four men on charges of espionage: A druggist in Tucson, Arizona; an importer in San Francisco; a retired real-estate operator in Los Angeles; an obscure trucker in northern California. All pleaded guilty in order to escape the gas chamber. The details of the charges against them were not disclosed, except to members of a Federal Grand Jury.

Two other published items are worth noting:

The May, 1956, issue of the journal published by the Institute of Research Engineers reported that one of its members, Dr. J. O. Smith, had recovered from injuries suffered in the explosion of a butane stove and had accepted a government research position in Washington, D.C.

The other item was a paragraph in Aviation Weekly, congratulating Major General David William Sanders on his promotion to Brigadier General.

E N D

If secrecy can be carried to the brink of madness, what can happen when imprisonment and time are added to super secrecy?

SECURITY

WE, SAM LEWIS thought as he lay in the dark trying to sober up, are the living dead.

It was a death without honor. It was a death of dusty, sterile stupidity. It was wretched, shameful, a human waste, and far too ridiculous a business to bear any longer.

The hell with the war. The hell with the government. The hell with Secret Project X, Y, Z, or D, or whatever infantile code letter identified the legalized tomb in which Sam and the others had been in-

carcerated too long.

He flung his hand around in the dark in a gesture of self-contempt. And his hand found the soft contours of a woman's breast. Her warm body moved, sighed beside him as he turned his head and stared at the dim outline of Professor Betty Seton's oval face, soft and unharried in sleep. Unharried, and unmarried, he thought.

Good God. He detached his hand, slipped out of bed and stood in the middle of the floor, found his nylon coverall and sandals, dressed

BY BRYCE WALTON

silently, and opened the door to get out of Betty's apartment, but fast.

He glanced back, his face hot with bitterness and his mouth twisting with disgust. She moved slightly, and he knew she was awake and looking at him.

"Darling," she said thickly, "don't go."

She was awake but still drifting in the euphoria of Vat 69.

He felt both sad and very mean. Then he shut the door behind him, ran out into the desert night. The line of camouflaged barracks on one side, the grounds including the lab buildings, all loomed up darkly under the starlight. He took a deep breath.

Now, he asked himself, have you the guts to get out, tell them off, make the gesture? It won't do any good. Nobody else will care or understand. They're too numb and resigned. You'll never get past the fence. The Guards will haul you in to the Wards and work you over. They'll work over what's left until what's left won't be worth carrying over to the incinerator with the other garbage in the morning. You'll be brainwashed and cleared until you're on mental rock bottom and won't even know what direction up is, and you won't give a damn.

But don't you have the guts even to make the gesture, just for the sake of what's left of your integrity, before they dim down your futile brain cells to a faint glow of final and perpetual mediocrity?

Betty and he had clung to some integrity, had made a point of not getting too intimate, a kind of chal-

lenge, a hold-out against the decadence of the Project. What was left now of any self-respect?

A security Guard with his white helmet and his white leather harness and his stungun, sauntered by and Lewis ducked into the shadows beside the barracks. His heart skipped several thumps as the Guard paused, looked at the entrance to Betty's apartment. Maybe someone had reported his liaison with Betty.

Beautiful and desirable as she was, and as much as he wanted to marry her, he had not been able to marry Betty Seton. If the war ever ended, if the security curtain was ever lifted, if they were ever let out of compulsive Government employment, then they would get married. That was what they had kept telling one another during quick secret meetings.

If, if, if—

Somewhere along the trail of this last alcoholic binge, one or both of them had abandoned what they had both considered an important tradition. It wasn't much, but they had clung to it against temptation, knowing that once they gave in, it wasn't much further to the bottom of skidhill.

Betty Seton had been a world famous physicist. Sam Lewis had been a top-rate atomics engineer. And what are we now, he thought, watching the Guard, except just a couple of alky bums looking for a few extra kicks to keep us from admitting we're dead?

A request for a marriage license had never been answered. Betty Seton did not have "Q" clearance

for some reason. Sam had full clearance and worked in The Pit, the highest "Q" security section in the Project. And never the twain could meet. If their little tryst was discovered, Betty Seton would be taken to the mental wards and 'cleared', a polite term for having any security info you might have picked up cleaned out of your brain along with a great many other characteristics that made you a distinct personality. It was just one of those necessary evils. It had to be done. For security. Psychological murder in the name of Security.

The Guard walked on and disappeared around the corner of the end barracks building.

Lewis started walking aimlessly in the dark, up and down in front of the barracks, past the blacked out windows and doors and the shadowy hulks of the lab buildings, and beyond that the camouflaged entrances to other subterranean labs, the synthetic food plants, the stores, and supplies. The Project was self-sustaining; in complete, secure and sterile isolation from the world, from all of humanity.

He headed for Professor Melvin Lanier's apartment. Tonight the big party was at Lanier's. There was a drunken brawl going on all the time at someone's apartment. There was nothing else to do.

Liquor, tranquillizing drugs, wife-swapping, dope addiction, dream-pills, sleeping tablets, and that was it. That was what the Project had come to. Experimental work at the Project had wobbled to a dead end.

Only the pathetic and meaningless motions remained.

Still, he thought, as he walked in through the open door of Lanier's apartment, there is a war on. H-bombs and A-bombs outlawed, but anything less than that was sporting.

He wanted to do what he could, but he was squelched; just as everyone else here was smothered and rendered useless by regulations and a Government of complete and absolute secrecy carried to its ultimate stupid denominator in the hands of political and military incompetents.

Still, there is a war on, he thought again as he walked into the big living room filled with artificial light and even more artificial laughter. Was it possible to do something, just some little thing, to shake loose this caged brain?

A few more drinks, he thought, will help me reach another completely indecisive decision.

In another two hours he would have to report back to the Pit. No reason for it now. It was just his job, his patriotic duty. Progress in nuclear developments and reactor technology in the Pit had ground to a dismal halt for him over seven months ago.

Yes, no doubt about it, he needed a few more shots to make palatable for a while longer his standing membership in the walking dead.

Through shadows in the garden, shapes wavered about drunkenly to the throb of hi-fi. Lewis went to the robotic barkeep and started drinking. This time, however, he didn't feel any effects. He stood looking around, ashamed, made sicker by what he saw: some of the world's finest minds, top scientists, reduced

to shallow burbling buffoons.

Dave Nemerov, Nobel Prize Winner in physics, weaved up to Sam and looked at him out of bleary eyes. "Hi, Sammy. All full of gloom again, boy?"

Nemerov, a chubby little man dressed in shorts and nothing else, frowned with drunken exaggeration. "Easy does it, Sammy. You might find the security boys giving you a lobotomy rap."

A drop of sweat ran down the side of Lewis's high-boned cheek.

"Well, what's the great physicist been doing for his country?" Lewis asked. He knew that Nemerov hadn't even been in his lab for over a month. He even remembered when Nemerov had griped about the shortage of technically trained personnel, the policy of secrecy that clouded, divided and obstructed his work, hampered his research until it finally was no longer worth the struggle. His story was the story of everyone in the Project. He couldn't get information from other departments and projects, because of secrecy. They were all cut off from one another. No information was ever released from the restricted list. Most important documents were secret, and had remained out of reach.

The only declassified documents available in the project were grade-school stuff that everybody had known twenty years ago.

For an instant, Nemerov appeared almost sober, and completely saddened.

"I've forgotten what I was working on," Nemerov said.

"Have another drink then,"

Lewis said, "and you'll forget that you've forgotten."

They clinked glasses. "Smile, Sammy," Nemerov said. "It can't last forever. We'll soon get the word. The war will be over."

"What war?" Lewis whispered.

"Ssshhh, Sammy, for God's sake!" Nemerov moistened his lips and looked around, but there weren't any Guards at the party. There never were. The Guards had a barracks of their own in the Commander's private sector. They never talked to civilians. They never attended parties. They kept strictly to themselves. So did the Commander. For almost a year now, as far as Lewis knew, no civilian in the Project had seen the Commander. His reports were issued daily. Occasionally his voice was heard on the intercom.

"Wonder who is winning the war out there?" Lewis said, to no one in particular. He thought of Betty. Some whiskey spilled from the shot glass.

"I wish you would shut up, Nemerov said hoarsely.

It still seemed incredible to Lewis, that the military psychologists had decided among themselves that, for the sake of security, all intercommunication between the Project and the outside was to be cut off. No news, no television, no radio, no nothing. For security, and also on the theory that scientists could work better completely cloistered up like medieval monks. Not even a phone-call. Absolute, one-hundred percent isolation. Legalized catatonia.

They had choked this Project to death, and he wondered how many

others were dead, and where they were. He didn't know where this Project was, except that it was on the desert. He didn't even know for sure what desert. He had been drugged when he was brought here two years ago, for security you know.

Nemerov never mentioned his wife and kids any more. From the behavior of Nemerov and most of the others, you would think the outside no longer existed.

Cardoza, the cybernetic genius, came up, his eyes glazed with the effects of some new narcotic that Oliver Dutton, world renowned biochemist, had cooked up for want of anything better to do.

The wives of two other scientists hung on Cardoza's arms, their bodies mostly bare, their eyes dulled as they wandered about the room like radar for the promise of some emotional oasis in the wasteland.

"How you fellas like my robotic barkeep?" Cardoza yelled.

"It pours a nice glass of whiskey," Lewis said.

"This is only the beginning," Cardoza said, his mouth glistening and wet under his hopped-up eyes. "That barkeep's a perfect servant and can never make a mistake. Spent the last year building it. It can mix anything."

"It'll practically win the war for us," Lewis said. Nemerov wiped at his sweating face. The two straying wives stared dumbly.

Cardoza winced. "Don't be cutting, my friend," he said to Lewis. His mouth turned down at the corners. "I tried, just as the rest of us

tried. To go on and develop what I was sent here to develop, I need "Q" clearance. I can't get it because when the war started I wasn't a citizen. Is that clear, Lewis?"

"Forget it," Lewis said.

"That's what I intend to keep on doing," Cardoza said. "Meanwhile, my little robotic barkeep is only the beginning. I'm working on other even more ingenious automata. One will do card tricks. Another is a tight-wire artist. And one can even tell fortunes."

"How about one that can drag humans out of a hat?" Lewis asked.

"Come on, ladies," Cardoza said as he moved away. "Let's go play Dr. McWilliams' new Q-X game."

"Ohhh," one of the wives said, giggling. "Something new?"

"Yeah," Lewis said to her, thinking of the fact that at one time, long ago and far away, McWilliams had been working on a theory supposed to have been aimed far beyond Einstein. "McWilliams' new mathematical game. This one's also played in the dark. Mixed couples of course. Q-X, the big mathematical discovery of the age. People get lost in pairs and later in the dark they add up to bigger numbers."

LEWIS shoved off from the bar, and walked toward the far corner of the garden where he saw old Shelby Stenger, the great atomics expert, flat on his belly, lying in the moonlight with fountain water misting his face, snoring like a tired old dog, with a little thread of drool hanging out of the corner of his mouth.

Mac Brogarth, nuclear physicist, came waltzing grotesquely across the garden and toppled backward into the pool under the fountain and lay there too weak even to raise his head out of the water. He would have drowned if Lewis hadn't lifted it out for him.

The old man in Lewis' arms looked up at Lewis with a passing light of tragic sobriety.

"Sam Lewis," he said. "That's you, isn't it, Sam? I had a cabin up near Lake Michigan and I was going up there to finish important work. I'll never get back there, Sam. I know now that I never will. I never will."

Lewis stood up. Without seeing or hearing anyone, he walked out into the dry coolness of the starlit desert night.

He walked between the barracks, past the messhall toward the labs, turned down the length of that ominous looking hulk which concealed The Pit, and the Monster with which Lewis had worked until there was no use working any more. Beyond that, he saw the electric fence, and the white helmeted Guards standing at rigid attention.

He walked over there, his shoes crunching on sand and gravel, and looked into the Guard's face. It was a mask, expressionless, and rigid. Its eyes were hardly human, Lewis thought. It had many of the characteristics of Cardoza's robotic bar-keep.

Lewis knew that the security Guards had been worked over in the Wards until there was no possibility of their being security risks. Any classified thought, even if it

penetrated one side of their heads, quickly drained through the sieved brain and out the other side.

"Carry on, soldier," Lewis said. The Guard didn't seem to hear.

Lewis walked back toward the lab building covering The Pit.

The conflict was like a knife slicing him apart inside. What if he made a grandstand gesture now? It would be much worse perhaps than merely being sent into the Wards for a little mental working over. He would be found guilty of sabotage, tried by the Commander's kangaroo court martial, found guilty of being a traitor to his country, a foreign agent probably. He would be placed inside a gas chamber on a stool and a little gas pellet would be dropped on his lap.

And anyway, aside from his own punishment, would it be morally right? Maybe I'm the one who is crazy, he thought. Maybe it's hell out there, reduced to God knew what kind of social chaos. Maybe we're about to win. Maybe we're about to lose. Maybe as bad as it is, it's the best one could expect during the greatest crisis.

He went inside, and took the elevator down one floor into the lead-lined Pit.

He walked up to the control panel and looked through the thick layers of shielding transparent teflonite into the Pit, watching the Monster indirectly through the big lenticular screen disc above the control panel.

The Monster stood in the lead-lined Pit, inactive, as it had been inactive for months. And even be-

for that, during the months when Lewis was learning to control the Monster until it seemed an extension of his own nervous system, its work had become useless, due to unobtainable documents and personnel, not to mention lack of communication with other research centers.

The Monster was part of a general plan to compensate for the outlawing of A- and H-bombs. The most deadly conceivable compromise. The Pit was a deadly sea of radioactivity in which only a mechanical robot monster could work. Outside the Pit, Lewis directed the Monster whose duty was the construction of drone planes. A few had been built, but they weren't quite effective, and now it was impossible to go on with the experimentation. The parts were all there. Everything was there except certain vital classified documents that could not be cleared into this particular Project.

Thousands of drone planes were to have been built, and perhaps were being built in some other Project, but not in this one. Thousands of drone planes with raw, unshielded atomic engines, light and inordinately powerful with an indefinite cruising range, remote controlled, free of fallible human agency, loaded with bacteriological bombs, the terrible gas known as the G-agent, and in addition, loaded 'spray' tanks that would spew deadly gamma rays and neutrons over limitless areas of atmosphere.

Lewis moved his hands over the sensitive controls, and through the lenticular disc, watched The Mon-

ster respond with the delicate gestures of a gigantic violinist. The Monster was a robot, ten times bigger than Cardoza's barkeep, and when Lewis moved his hands, the Monster moved its own huge mandibles as its electro-magnum, colloid brain, picked up Lewis' mental directions.

The Monster was immune to radiation, and bacteriological horrors. It swam in death as unconcerned as a lovely lady wallowed in a pink bubble-bath.

Lewis sat in the twilight of the Pit making the monster move about in its futile rounds. Lewis loved the Monster and felt the wasteful tragedy of its magnificent potential. A wonder of the world, a reaffirmation of man's imagination and his powers of reason, the Monster was built for what might seem horribly destructive ends, but its potential was for limitless achievement of the best and most far-reaching in man. Yet here it was, doing nothing at all. Standing in a sea of radioactive poison, a gigantic symbol of man's stupidity to man.

Could a man know the truth and continue to deny it, and still remain sane? You could go on living that way. You could take happy pills, sleeping pills, dream-pills and stay lushed-up on government liquor. But sooner or later you would have to face the horrible empty waste. After that loomed the face of madness.

And yet, Lewis thought, how do I know that I know the truth? I'm cut off. No info, no communication. For all I know we're the only people left in the world. An oasis of

secrecy surrounded by desert.

Lewis walked back up to the first floor, and out into the night, heading for Betty Seton's spartment. Maybe she was sober enough now to talk this thing over. The hell with security regulations. Just the same, he walked along in the shadow next to the building to avoid any eye-witness of his proposed rendezvous.

Science, he thought, was really another name for freedom. It couldn't function without freedom of thought, freedom of inquiry. You couldn't mix it up with security and cut off communication, because communication is the essence of science. An idea is universal, and how can you go on thinking when you're no longer a part of the world?

Whatever the decision arrived at in Lewis' own heart might otherwise have been, he was never to know. His decision was made for him by an hysterical laugh, the sound of scuffling on boards, and another laugh. He came around the corner of the barracks and saw the Guard manhandling Betty Seton down the steps of her apartment building.

THE GUARD was big, built like a wedge, with a flat bulldog face bunched up under his white helmet. The Guard's brain had been carefully honed down to an efficient, completely unintelligent but precise fighting machine level. He neither knew nor cared why he did anything. But he was handicapped by having Betty Seton in one hand. He was whirling, raising his stungun with the other hand, when Lewis hit him.

Lewis drove in with his weight behind first a solid long blow that broke a rigid wall of muscle in the Guard's belly, turned it to soft clay. Betty fell free and lay laughing on the gravel. Her face was a white smear in the starlight.

Lewis brought his knee up into the Guard's face as he bent over, sank another one into the soft belly, kicked the Guard in the crotch, stamped on his booted foot, came back and ran forward again, driving his shoulder again into the Guard's belly. The Guard's feet hit the bottom step, he smashed into the boards, and his helmet flew off as his head thudded on the stanchion.

The Guard just shook his shaven head, started to get up heavily, reaching again for his stungun, his face expressionless. Lewis heard footsteps pounding around the corner, slashing on gravel.

More Guards. Dehumanized and insensitive, they were almost as invulnerable as so many robots—

He turned, ran past Betty Seton, stilly lying there with only a thin housecoat around her, not laughing now, but looking suddenly sober and horrified.

"Betty!"

She stared up at him. A block away he could hear the Guards coming and he kept on running. He yelled back.

"Get a jeep. Get Brogarth, Car-doza, Nemerov, anybody. We're breaking out of here."

"Where?" he heard her yelling after him as he went around the corner.

He glanced back around the cor-

ner and saw the herd of mechanized human beings slogging toward him.

"Near the gate," Lewis said.

He ran toward the Pit.

He ran down the steps, into the console room and looked into the lenticular disc where a ghostly blue radiance shadowed the walls.

"We're going to do ourselves some good after all, Monster," Lewis said tightly.

He gripped the controls and sent the Monster its last set of orders. It hurled tons of drone plane motors into the shielding walls, and its huge mandibles ripped open the shielding and peeled it away like a food canister. Smoke began to boil. Flames crackled in blue arcs. Steel beams crumbled like wax. Globbs of concrete fell in a cloud of dust swirling debris.

Lewis grabbed the intercom, dialed the Commander's office. No answer. He got through the exchange and got the Commander's apartment. He heard a drunken whine and behind that the drunken depraved laughter of officers and their wives and the sound of bongo drums.

"The Monster's breaking out of the Pit," Lewis said. "It's shooting out more than enough deadly radio-activity to kill all of you if you don't get the hell out and get out fast."

"What, what's that?"

"If you think I'm having a nightmare," Lewis continued, "take a look out the window, Commander."

Lewis dropped the intercom. The Monster could go quite a distance before it stopped, its remote control radius probably not exceeding three miles.

The Monster went out of the Pit, taking walls and flooring with it. The entire structure trembled, beams fell, ceilings crumbled, and the Monster went through the smoking debris like a juggernaut.

A Guard lay crushed under a steel beam. Lewis took the stungun from his hand and went up the debris choked stairs. Outside, he saw figures streaming out into the starlight, and the lab buildings bursting into flames. He also saw the Monster, glowing with bluish radiance, moving straight ahead toward the electric fence.

The siren was screaming and howling. Shadows seemed to be streaming toward air-raid shelters. That was all right. The security curtain was torn down. They could come back up later into the light and wonder what had happened and find out where they really were.

Guards were running about like ugly toys out of control, looking, listening for commands.

Lewis ran through thickening smoke, and saw the jeep by the South Gate. Betty was in it, together with Brogarth and Nemerov.

"Hurry, hurry, run," he heard Betty scream.

The Guard was cutting at an angle toward Lewis, between him and the jeep. Beyond the Guard was a gaping hole in the fence and on the other side of that he could see the gigantic flickering nimbus of the Monster still walking toward the East.

Lewis kept running. Five feet away he brought up the stungun and shot the Guard in the face.

(Continued on page 118)

Destiny's tricks can be pretty weird sometimes.

And this was one to be proud of. A cosmic joke,

a switch that could make a nightmare seem tame!

LEARNING THEORY

BY JAMES MC CONNELL

I AM WRITING this because I presume He wants me to. Otherwise He would not have left paper and pencil handy for me to use. And I put the word "He" in capitals because it seems the only thing to do. If I am dead and in hell, then this is only proper. However, if I am merely a captive somewhere, then surely a little flattery won't hurt matters.

As I sit here in this small room and think about it, I am impressed most of all by the suddenness of the whole thing. At one moment I was out walking in the woods near my suburban home. The next thing I knew, here I was in a small, featureless room, naked as a jaybird, with only my powers of rationalization to stand between me and insanity. When the "change" was made (whatever the change was), I was not conscious of so much as a



Illustrated by Virgil Finlay

momentary flicker between walking in the woods and being here in this room. Whoever is responsible for all of this is to be complimented—either He has developed an instan-

taneous anesthetic or He has solved the problem of instantaneous transportation of matter. I would prefer to think it the former, for the latter leads to too much anxiety.

As I recall, I was immersed in the problem of how to teach my class in beginning psychology some of the more abstruse points of Learning Theory when the transition came. How far away life at the University seems at the moment: I must be forgiven if now I am much more concerned about where I am and how to get out of here than about how freshmen can be cajoled into understanding Hull or Tolman.

Problem #1: Where am I? For an answer, I can only describe this room. It is about twenty feet square, some twelve feet high, with no windows, but with what might be a door in the middle of one of the walls. Everything is of a uniform gray color, and the walls and ceiling emit a fairly pleasant achromatic light. The walls themselves are of some hard material which might be metal since it feels slightly cool to the touch. The floor is of a softer, rubbery material that yields a little when I walk on it. Also, it has a rather "tingly" feel to it, suggesting that it may be in constant vibration. It is somewhat warmer than the walls, which is all to the good since it appears I must sleep on the floor.

The only furniture in the room consists of what might be a table and what passes for a chair. They are not quite that, but they can be made to serve this purpose. On the table I found the paper and the pencil. No, let me correct myself. What I call paper is a good deal rougher and thicker than I am used to, and what I call a pencil is nothing more than a thin round

stick of graphite which I have sharpened by rubbing one end of it on the table.

And that is the sum of my surroundings. I wish I knew what He has done with my clothes. The suit was an old one, but I am worried about the walking boots. I was very fond of those boots—they were quite expensive and I would hate to lose them.

The problem still remains to be answered, however, as to just where in the hell I am—if not in hell itself!

Problem #2 is a knottier one—Why am I here? Were I subject to paranoid tendencies, I would doubtless come to the conclusion that my enemies had kidnapped me. Or perhaps that the Russians had taken such an interest in my research that they had spirited me away to some Siberian hideout and would soon appear to demand either cooperation or death. Sadly enough, I am too reality oriented. My research was highly interesting to me, and perhaps to a few other psychologists who like to dabble in esoteric problems of animal learning, but it was scarcely startling enough to warrant such attention as kidnapping.

So I am left as baffled as before. Where am I, and why?

And who is He?

I have decided to forego all attempts at keeping this diary according to "days" or "hours." Such units of time have no meaning in my present circumstances, for the light remains constant all the time I am awake. The human organism

is not possessed of as neat an internal clock as some of the lower species. Far too many studies have shown that a human being who is isolated from all external stimulation soon loses his sense of time. So I will merely indicate breaks in the narrative and hope that He will understand that if He wasn't bright enough to leave me with my wrist-watch, He couldn't expect me to keep an accurate record.

Nothing much has happened. I have slept, been fed and watered, and have emptied my bladder and bowels. The food was waiting on the table when I awoke last time. I must say that He has little of the gourmet in Him. Protein balls are not my idea of a feast royal. However, they will serve to keep body and soul together (presuming, of course, that they *are* together at the moment). But I must object to my source of liquid refreshment. The meal made me very thirsty, and I was in the process of cursing Him and everybody else when I noticed a small nipple which had appeared in the wall while I was asleep. At first I thought that perhaps Freud was right after all, and that my libido had taken over control of my imagery. Experimentation convinced me, however, that the thing was real, and that it is my present source of water. If one sucks on the thing, it delivers a slightly cool and somewhat sweetish flow of liquid. But really, it's a most undignified procedure. It's bad enough to have to sit around all day in my birthday suit. But for a full professor to have to stand on his tip-toes and suck on an artificial nipple in order to ob-

tain water is asking a little too much. I'd complain to the Management if only I knew to whom to complain!

Following eating and drinking, the call to nature became a little too strong to ignore. Now, I was adequately toilet-trained with indoor plumbing, and the absence of same is most annoying. However, there was nothing much to do but choose a corner of the room and make the best of a none too pleasant situation. (As a side-thought, I wonder if the choosing of a corner was in any way instinctive?). However, the upshot of the whole thing was my learning what is probably the purpose of the vibration of the floor. For the excreted material disappeared through the floor not too many minutes later. The process was a gradual one. Now I will be faced with all kinds of uncomfortable thoughts concerning what might possibly happen to me if I slept too long:

Perhaps this is to be expected, but I find myself becoming a little paranoid after all. In attempting to solve my Problem #2, why I am here, I have begun to wonder if perhaps some of my colleagues at the University are not using me as a subject in some kind of experiment. It would be just like McCleary to dream up some fantastic kind of "human-in-isolation" experiment and use me as a pilot observer. You would think that he'd have asked my permission first. However, perhaps it's important that the subject not know what's happening to him. If so, I have one

happy thought to console me. If McCleary is responsible for this, he'll have to take over the teaching of my classes for the time being. And how he hates teaching Learning Theory to freshmen:

You know, this place seems dreadfully quiet to me.

Suddenly I have solved two of my problems. I know both where I am and who He is. And I bless the day that I got interested in the perception of motion.

I should say to begin with that the air in this room seems to have more than the usual concentration of dust particles. This didn't seem particularly noteworthy until I noticed that most of them seemed to pile up along the floor against one wall in particular. For a while I was sure that this was due to the ventilation system—perhaps there was an out-going airduct there where this particular wall was joined to the floor. However, when I went over and put my hand to the floor there, I could feel no breeze whatsoever. Yet even as I held my hand along the dividing line between the wall and the floor, dust motes covered my hand with a thin coating. I tried this same experiment everywhere else in the room to no avail. This was the only spot where the phenomenon occurred, and it occurred along the entire length of this one wall.

But if ventilation was not responsible for the phenomenon, what was? All at once there popped into my mind some calculations I had made when the rocket boys had first proposed a manned satellite

station. Engineers are notoriously naive when it comes to the performance of a human being in most situations, and I remembered that the problem of the perception of the satellite's rotation seemingly had been ignored by the slip-stick crowd. They had planned to rotate the doughnut-shaped satellite in order to substitute centrifugal force for the force of gravity. Thus the outer shell of the doughnut would appear to be "down" to anyone inside the thing. Apparently they had not realized that man is at least as sensitive to angular rotation as he is to variations in the pull of gravity. As I figured the problem then, if a man aboard the doughnut moved his head as much as three or four feet outwards from the center of the doughnut, he would have become fairly dizzy! Rather annoying it would have been, too, to have been hit by a wave of nausea every time one sat down in a chair. Also, as I pondered the problem, it became apparent that dust particles and the like would probably show a tendency to move in a direction opposite to the direction of the rotation, and hence pile up against any wall or such that impeded their flight.

Using the behavior of the dust particles as a clue, I then climbed atop the table and leapt off. Sure enough, my head felt like a mule had kicked it by the time I landed on the floor. My hypothesis was confirmed.

So I am aboard a spaceship:

The thought is incredible, but in a strange way comforting. At least now I can postpone worrying about

heaven and hell—and somehow I find the idea of being in a spaceship much more to the liking of a confirmed agnostic. I suppose I owe McCleary an apology—I should have known he would never have put himself in a position where he would have to teach freshmen all about learning:

And, of course, I know who "He" is. Or rather, I know who He *isn't*, which is something else again. Surely, though, I can no longer think of Him as being human. Whether I should be consoled at this or not, I have no way of telling.

I still have no notion of *why* I am here, however, nor why this alien chose to pick me of all people to pay a visit to His spaceship. What possible use could I be? Surely if He were interested in making contact with the human race, He would have spirited away a politician. After all, that's what politicians are for! Since there has been no effort made to communicate with me, however, I must reluctantly give up any cherished hopes that His purpose is that of making contact with *genus homo*.

Or perhaps He's a galactic scientist of some kind, a biologist of sorts, out gathering specimens. Now, that's a particularly nasty thought. What if He turned out to be a physiologist, interested in cutting me open eventually, to see what makes me tick? Will my innards be smeared over a glass slide for scores of youthful Hims to peer at under a microscope? Brrrr! I don't mind giving my life to Science, but I'd rather do it a little at a time.

If you don't mind, I think I'll go do a little repressing for a while.

Good God! I should have known it! Destiny will play her little tricks, and all jokes have their cosmic angles. He is a *psychologist*! Had I given it due consideration, I would have realized that whenever you come across a new species, you worry about behavior first, physiology second. So I have received the ultimate insult—or the ultimate compliment. I don't know which. I have become a specimen for an alien psychologist!

This thought first occurred to me when I awoke after my latest sleep (which was filled, I must admit, with most frightening dreams). It was immediately obvious that something about the room had changed. Almost as once I noticed that one of the walls now had a lever of some kind protruding from it, and to one side of the lever, a small hole in the wall with a container beneath the hole. I wandered over to the lever, inspected it a few moments, then accidentally depressed the thing. At once there came a loud clicking noise, and a protein ball popped out of the hole and fell into the container.

For just a moment a frown crossed my brow. This seemed somehow so strangely familiar. Then, all at once, I burst into wild laughter. The room had been changed into a gigantic Skinner Box! For years I had been studying animal learning by putting white rats in a Skinner Box and following the changes in the rats' behavior. The rats had to learn to press the

lever in order to get a pellet of food, which was delivered to them through just such an apparatus as is now affixed to the wall of my cell. And now, after all of these years, and after all of the learning studies I had done, to find myself trapped like a rat in a Skinner Box! Perhaps this was hell after all, I told myself, and the Lord High Executioner's admonition to "let the punishment fit the crime" was being followed.

Frankly, this sudden turn of events has left me more than a little shaken.

I SEEM TO be performing according to theory. It didn't take me long to discover that pressing the lever would give me food some of the time, while at other times all I got was the click and no protein ball. It appears that approximately every twelve hours the thing delivers me a random number of protein balls—the number has varied from five to fifteen so far. I never know ahead of time how many pellets—I mean protein balls—the apparatus will deliver, and it spews them out intermittently. Sometimes I have to press the lever a dozen times or so before it will give me anything, while at other times it gives me one ball for each press. Since I don't have a watch on me, I am never quite sure when the twelve hours have passed, so I stomp over to the lever and press it every few minutes when I think it's getting close to time to be fed. Just like my rats always did. And since the pellets are small and I never get enough of them, occa-

sionally I find myself banging away on the lever with all the compulsion of a stupid animal. But I missed the feeding time once and almost starved to death (so it seemed) before the lever delivered food the next time. About the only consolation to my wounded pride is that at this rate of starvation, I'll lose my bay window in short order.

At least He doesn't seem to be fattening me up for the kill. Or maybe he just likes lean meat!

I have been promoted. Apparently He in His infinite alien wisdom has decided that I'm intelligent enough to handle the Skinner-type apparatus, so I've been promoted to solving a maze. Can you picture the irony of the situation? All of the classic Learning Theory methodology is practically being thrown in my face. If only I could communicate with Him! I don't mind being subjected to tests nearly as much as I mind being underestimated. Why, I can solve puzzles hundreds of times more complex than what He's throwing at me. But how can I tell Him?

As it turns out, the maze is much like our standard T-mazes, and is not too difficult to learn. It's a rather long one, true, with some 23 choice points along the way. I spent the better part of half an hour wandering through the thing the first time I found myself in it. Surprisingly enough, I didn't realize the first time out what I was in, so I made no conscious attempt to memorize the correct turns. It wasn't until I reached the final turn and found food waiting for

me that I recognized what I was expected to do. The next time through the maze my performance was a good deal better, and I was able to turn in a perfect performance in not too long a time. However, it does not do my ego any good to realize that my own white rats could have learned the maze a little sooner than I did.

My "home cage," so to speak, still has the Skinner apparatus in it, but the lever delivers food only occasionally now. I still give it a whirl now and again, but since I'm getting a fairly good supply of food at the end of the maze each time, I don't pay the lever much attention.

Now that I am very sure of what is happening to me, quite naturally my thoughts have turned to how I can get out of this situation. Mazes I can solve without too much difficulty, but how to escape apparently is beyond my intellectual capacity. But then, come to think of it, there was precious little chance for my own experimental animals to get out of my clutches. And assuming that I am unable to escape, what then? After He has finished putting me through as many paces as He wishes, where do we go from there? Will He treat me as I treated most of my non-human subjects—that is, will I get tossed into a jar containing chloroform? "Following the experiment, the animals were sacrificed," as we so euphemistically report in the scientific literature. This doesn't appeal to me much, as you can imagine. Or maybe if I seem particularly bright to Him, He may use me for breeding purposes, to establish a colony of His own. Now,

that might have possibilities . . .

Oh, damn Freud anyhow!

And damn Him too! I had just gotten the maze well learned when He upped and changed things on me. I stumbled about like a bat in the sunlight for quite some time before I finally got to the goal box. I'm afraid my performance was pretty poor. What He did was just to reverse the whole maze so that it was a mirror image of what it used to be. Took me only two trials to discover the solution. Let Him figure that one out if He's so smart!

My performance on the maze reversal must have pleased Him, because now He's added a new complication. And again I suppose I could have predicted the next step if I had been thinking along the right direction. I woke up a few hours ago to find myself in a totally different room. There was nothing whatsoever in the room, but opposite me were two doors in the wall—one door a pure white, the other jet black. Between me and the doors was a deep pit, filled with water. I didn't like the looks of the situation, for it occurred to me right away that He had devised a kind of jumping stand for me. I had to choose which of the doors was open and led to food. The other door would be locked. If I jumped at the wrong door, and found it locked, I'd fall in the water. I needed a bath, that was for sure, but I didn't relish getting it in this fashion.

While I stood there watching, I got the shock of my life. I meant it quite literally. The bastard had

thought of everything. When I used to run rats on jumping stands, to overcome their reluctance to jump, I used to shock them. He's following exactly the same pattern. The floor in this room is wired but good. I howled and jumped about and showed all the usual anxiety behavior. It took me less than two seconds to come to my senses and make a flying leap at the white door, however.

You know something? That water is ice-cold!

I HAVE NOW, by my own calculations, solved no fewer than 87 different problems on the jumping stand, and I'm getting sick and tired of it. Once I got angry and just pointed at the correct door—and got shocked for not going ahead and jumping. I shouted bloody murder, cursing Him at the top of my voice, telling Him if He didn't like my performance, He could damn' well lump it. All He did, of course, was to increase the shock.

Frankly, I don't know how much longer I can put up with this. It's not that the work is difficult. If He were giving me half a chance to show my capabilities, I wouldn't mind it. I suppose I've contemplated a thousand different means of escaping, but none of them is worth mentioning. But if I don't get out of here soon, I shall go stark raving mad!

For almost an hour after it happened, I sat in this room and just wept. I realize that it is not the style in our culture for a grown man

to weep, but there are times when cultural taboos must be forgotten. Again, had I thought much about the sort of experiments He must have had in mind, I most probably could have predicted the next step. Even so, I most likely would have repressed the knowledge.

One of the standard problems which any learning psychologist is interested in is this one—will an animal learn something if you fail to reward him for his performance? There are many theorists, such as Hull and Spence, who believe that reward (or "reinforcement," as they call it) is absolutely necessary for learning to occur. This is mere stuff and nonsense, as anyone with a grain of sense knows, but nonetheless the "reinforcement" theory has been dominant in the field for years now. We fought a hard battle with Spence and Hull, and actually had them with their backs to the wall at one point, when suddenly they came up with the concept of "secondary reinforcement." That is, anything associated with a reward takes on the ability to act as a reward itself. For example, the mere sight of food would become a reward in and of itself—almost as much a reward, in fact, as is the eating of the food. The *sight* of food, indeed! But nonetheless, it saved their theories for the moment.

For the past five years now, I have been trying to design an experiment that would show beyond a shadow of a doubt that the *sight* of a reward was not sufficient for learning to take place. And now look at what has happened to me!

I'm sure that He must lean to-

wards Hull and Spence in His theorizing, for earlier today, when I found myself in the jumping stand room, instead of being rewarded with my usual protein balls when I made the correct jump, I— I'm sorry, but it is difficult to write about even now. For when I made the correct jump and the door opened and I started towards the food trough, I found it had been replaced with a photograph. A calendar photograph. You know the one. Her name, I think, is Monroe.

I sat on the floor and cried. For five whole years I have been attacking the validity of the secondary reinforcement theory, and now I find myself giving Him evidence that the theory is correct! For I cannot help "learning" which of the doors is the correct one to jump through. I refuse to stand on the apparatus and have the life shocked out of me, and I refuse to pick the wrong door all the time and get an icy bath time after time. It isn't fair! For He will doubtless put it all down to the fact that the mere *sight* of the photograph is functioning as a reward, and that I am learning the problems merely to be able to see Miss What's-her-name in her bare skin!

I can just see Him now, sitting somewhere else in this spaceship, gathering in all the data I am giving Him, plotting all kinds of learning curves, chortling to Himself because I am confirming all of His pet theories. I just wish . . .

Almost an hour has gone by since I wrote the above section. It seems longer than that, but surely it's been

only an hour. And I have spent the time deep in thought. For I have discovered a way out of this place, I think. The question is, dare I do it?

I was in the midst of writing that paragraph about His sitting and chortling and confirming His theories, when it suddenly struck me that theories are born of the equipment that one uses. This has probably been true throughout the history of all science, but perhaps most true of all in psychology. If Skinner had never invented his blasted box, if the maze and the jumping stand had not been developed, we probably would have entirely different theories of learning today than we now have. For if nothing else, the type of equipment that one uses drastically reduces the type of behavior that one's subjects can show, and one's theories have to account only for the type of behavior that appears in the laboratories.

It follows from this also that any two cultures that devise the same sort of experimental procedures will come up with almost identical theories.

Keeping all of this in mind, it's not hard for me to believe that He is an iron-clad reinforcement theorist, for He uses all of the various paraphernalia that they use, and uses it in exactly the same way.

My means of escape is therefore obvious. He expects from me confirmation of all His pet theories. Well, he won't get it any more! I know all of His theories backwards and forwards, and this means I know how to give Him results that

will tear His theories right smack in half!

I can almost predict the results. What does any learning theorist do with an animal that won't behave properly, that refuses to give the results that are predicted? One gets rid of the beast, quite naturally. For one wishes to use only healthy, normal animals in one's work, and any animal that gives "unusual" results is removed from the study but quickly. After all, if it doesn't perform as expected, it must be sick, abnormal, or aberrant in one way or another . . .

There is no guarantee, of course, what method He will employ to dispose of my now annoying presence. Will He "sacrifice" me? Or will He just return me to the "permanent colony"? I cannot say. I know only that I will be free from what is now an intolerable situation.

Just wait until He looks at His results from now on!

FROM : Experimenter-in-Chief,
Interstellar Labship PSYCH-145
TO: Director, Bureau of Science

Thlan, my friend, this will be an informal missive. I will send the official report along later, but I wanted to give you my subjective impressions first.

The work with the newly discovered species is, for the moment, at a standstill. Things went exceedingly well at first. We picked what seemed to be a normal, healthy animal and smattered it into our standard test apparatus. I may have told you that this new species seemed quite identical to our usual laboratory animals, so we included

a couple of the "toys" that our home animals seem so fond of—thin pieces of material made from wood-pulp and a tiny stick of graphite. Imagine our surprise, and our pleasure, when this new specimen made exactly the same use of the materials as have all of our home colony specimens. Could it be that there are certain innate behavior patterns to be found throughout the universe in the lower species?

Well, I merely pose the question. The answer is of little importance to a Learning Theorist. Your friend Verpk keeps insisting that the use of these "toys" may have some deeper meaning to it, and that perhaps we should investigate further. At his insistence, then, I include with this informal missive the materials used by our first subject. In my opinion, Verpk is guilty of gross anthropomorphism, and I wish to have nothing further to do with the question. However, this behavior did give us hope that our newly discovered colony would yield subjects whose performances would be exactly in accordance with standard theory.

And, in truth, this is exactly what seemed to be the case. The animal solved the Bfian Box problem in short order, yielding as beautiful data as I have ever seen. We then shifted it to maze, maze-reversal and jumping stand problems, and the results could not have confirmed our theories better had we rigged the data. However, when we switched the animal to secondary reinforcement problems, it seemed to undergo a strange sort of change. No longer was its performance up

to par. In fact, at times it seemed to go quite berserk. For part of the experiment, it would perform superbly. But then, just as it seemed to be solving whatever problem we set it to, its behavior would subtly change into patterns that obviously could not come from a normal specimen. It got worse and worse, until its behavior departed radically from that which our theories predicted. Naturally, we knew then that something had happened to the animal, for our theories are based upon thousands of experiments with similar subjects, and hence our theories must be right. But our theories hold only for normal subjects, and for normal species, so it soon became apparent to us that we had stumbled upon some abnormal type of animal.

Upon due consideration, we returned the subject to its home colony. However, we also voted almost unanimously to request from you permission to take steps to destroy the complete colony. It is obviously of little scientific use to us, and stands as a potential danger that we must take adequate steps against. Since all colonies are under your protection, we therefore re-

quest permission to destroy it.

I must report, by the way, that Verpk's vote was the only one which was cast against this procedure. He has some silly notion that one should study behavior as one finds it. Frankly, I cannot understand why you have seen fit to saddle me with him on this expedition, but perhaps you have your reasons.

Verpk's vote notwithstanding, however, the rest of us are of the considered opinion that this whole new colony must be destroyed, and quickly. For it is obviously diseased or some such—as reference to our theories has proven. And should it by some chance come in contact with our other colonies, and infect our other animals with whatever disease or aberration it has, we would never be able to predict their behavior again. I need not carry the argument further, I think.

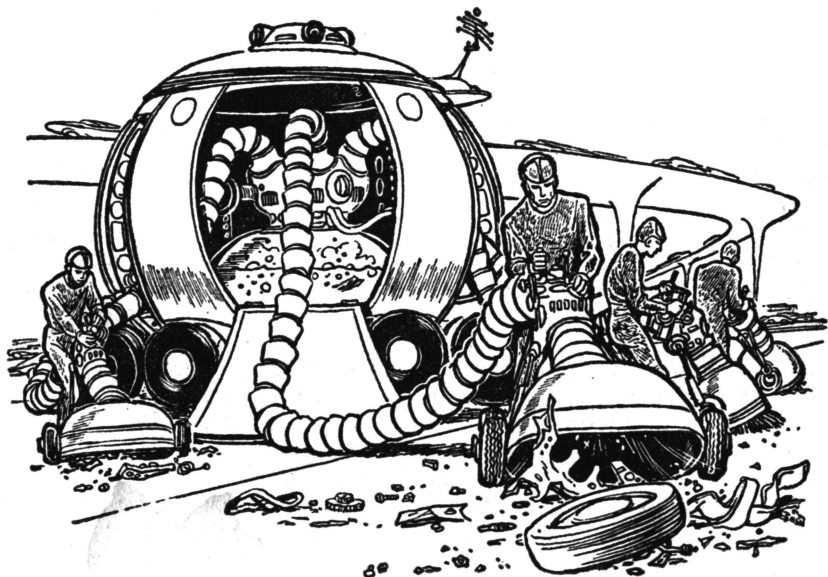
May we have your permission to destroy the colony as soon as possible, then, so that we may search out yet other colonies and test our theories against other healthy animals? For it is only in this fashion that science progresses.

Respectfully yours,
Iowyy E N D

WHAT IS YOUR SCIENCE I.Q.?

ANSWERS: 1— $47\frac{7}{8}$ in. 2—20 atmospheres. 3—Pigmentation agent in the skin. 4—Beryllium, carbon, sulfur, tritium, 2 forms of phosphorus. 5—Audible radio waves generated by lightning. 6—U235, plutonium made from U238, thorium made into U233. 7—Anti blood-clotting agent. 8—Paths followed by streams of charged particles from the sun. 9—Tearing apart stable molecules by heat, interaction with light or chemical reactions. 10— 660° F. 11—Sharp temperature changes in the ocean. 12—Nitrogen dioxide; hydrocarbons. 13—Yellow, variable, supergiant. 14—Ultimate heat death of the universe. 15—Point at which nervous impulses pass from one neuron to another.

Meet the men who can make even an executioner seem charming. But when it's all in a day's work, who can blame them?



Illustrated by Ed Emsh

ROUTINE EMERGENCY

BY

DAVID R. BUNCH

I'M STRICTLY A shovel man in this life we have here. I'm a worker, not a leisure-crowded man with a zip-car who can use these big roads the way they were meant to be used. I'm a clearance man.

Been in some phase of that work for about fifty years. And I'd say we're a helluva lot more efficient at it today than we used to be. It's not so much new methods, though that helps, as it is a state of mind. The way you look at a thing is the deciding vote on almost any question, don't you think?

Well, we used to lay 'em all out nice and straight, and take some of 'em in if we thought they had a chance, and patch up the rig if possible, and take down numbers and names and make a man-sized incident of the whole proceedings. As you can see, that took time, was inefficient, and held up the arterial flow, as you might say, a good deal. Now, what do we do today? Say, just let me give you a run-down on a little job we had this morning, and maybe that'll explain the service. As I said before, my job is clearance. Without me these record traffic flow movements we have today wouldn't be possible, and excuse me, I'm not bragging. Sure, I'm proud of my job, just as a plumber might be, or any other honest union worker who's dealing in an important commodity or service and doing it right and getting honest pay, and not having to strain to do it. I guess you might say my commodity is speed. My job is clearance, as I believe I said before.

Anyway we were sitting around the station this morning, the on-crew was, watching the board, playing the usual cards, passing the usual ribs, swapping the usual tales. The off-crew was upstairs sponging their boots, cleaning up, getting ready for prayers and bed. Things

had hardly settled down when the board came up with our number and the spot we were to go to. We weren't excited like those firemen are expected to get everytime, because the board comes up with our number, on the average, about twenty-five times a day. And you just don't get excited about your work that many times a day, day-in-day-out, unless you're crazy. We loaded into the big yellow clearance rig, which is about the most efficient vehicle of its kind yet devised, and fed it the position we were expected to go to. When we press the right numbers and road names, a spot of light formed in the brains of the vehicle and soon appears on a sensitized map of the county where we operate. That spot of light marks the position of our job. And since all the alarms were already on out there automatically, our rig would home in on the sound without a bit of trouble.

I may as well tell you now we call our rig Big Soup. Now don't get the idea we're sentimental in our crews, but still it just seems natural to name our rigs, since we're with them so much, and I guess we do get attached to them, like a crew for a ship, sort of. Well, the Big Soup went on out this morning in a most routine way, and we were all feeling routine and sort of yawnish, because it was rather early, and we'd had a very hard day yesterday. A lot of calls, I mean. When we pulled up to the spot, it looked like a very usual job, and it was, except for one thing that made it a little unusual, but not very unusual, and I'll tell you about that

after awhile, if I don't forget it.

I let down the front end take-ups, Jug let down the rear end take-ups, and Tanks and John were each operating one of the sides. Jake, the senior clearance man, was holding Big Soup on to the spot and moving her a little whenever necessary to do the job. You see, we're a standard five-man crew. And Big Soup looked something like a great ripe pumpkin now laid down in four sections on the highway, with a big pot in the middle brewing the stew. The four sections probing out over the pavement and feeling along the embankments were like big vacuum cleaners whisking whatever loose things they came in contact with into the pot.

After awhile we had the job cleaned up except for a little shovel work caused by rough ground affecting the efficiency of the take-ups, and we all helped on that, even Jake, who I'd say is about the best crew leader I've ever worked with. We cleaned things all up fine, sectioned the Big Soup up into her usual globe-on-wheels condition, and then came on back to sponge our boots, and watch the board between jobs, and play a little cards, naturally. Oh, we horsed around a bit too, you know the way a close-knit crew will. Kidded each other about our work, our wives, big taxes, mothers-in-law, etc. And Jake, of course, had to make out the reports according to the number plates involved and notify the people most concerned and have the cups for the burial ready when they should arrive. And he had to have the contents of Big Soup as-

sayed for metal and make a report on that before it could be dumped in the unit mix for shipment to the big steel mills. I'll say right now I wouldn't be a crew leader for the little extra that's in it, though I will say I'm pretty proud of my work and I think it's important what I'm doing to keep the big roads clear.

And now you want to know what was unusual about this job this morning, but not very unusual, that I said I'd tell you about if I didn't forget it. Well, it was about a burial cup. You see, in our work we just melt everything together as we go, don't have time for anything else you might say, and just dip out a cup of the mixture for decent burial when required. Usually we only dip two cups, one to each of the next-of-kin of the two parties involved. But I have seen instances, in these multiple affairs, usually caused by fog, where we might have to dip as many as twenty cups, and that takes steel! Because it's mostly metal, after all, the way we do it. I suppose it is a comfort to the bereaved to know that the old decencies have at least been nodded at. —But I do run on. —You see, when one party, a woman, came for the burial cup this morning she just accepted it in the usual way and said she'd see to it that friend husband got a decent plot, which was, she said, the very least she could do, though God knew when she would ever be able to afford another zip-car. But the other party, a man, put up quite a fuss when he came for his cup, because we'd slouched our job, he said. Seems his wife's old lady, his mother-in-law

you might say, at the incident had somehow got over an embankment and out into a cornfield and had struggled home with only a broken hip to show for it. He wanted to know if we wanted to come after her, since by rights he felt that she should have been vacuumed up too and in the soup, since she was out there cluttering up the arteries, or had been. But we said gosh no! we couldn't do that, it wasn't any part of our job to do that, though if she'd been in the way at the time of the clean-up we'd certainly have vacuumed her. We finally convinced

him he should take his cup of the wife and kids and the family zip-car on home for decent burial and quit such unseemly fuss.

As you can see, we can't afford to get mixed up in any family sentiment in our job. And most people don't expect it nowadays anyway. Our job is just to vacuum up the bodies and broken zip-cars as fast as we can after a wreck on the highway and keep the big lanes clear. It's a fair job, we got a union, and it's considered priority work. Heck, the young guys even get deferred in it in time of war. **E N D**

AND THE WALLS CAME TUMBLING DOWN

(Continued from page 59)

into action. "But I'm not."

A new thought struck him. "The Rumanian—Grigorescu. Was he part of the illusion too?"

"No," Hadafield said. The esper glanced up. "He's real. He was just playing along; he knew what was going on here."

"Rumania's free," Nourse said. "We've been in contact with them for months, through Hadafield. We can hide there, for a while. We're building a video transmitter in Canada, and we hope to relay our programs through all of America. The barriers are going to come down, John. It may take ten years, but it'll happen—and there'll be a free and united world once again. The first blow was struck tonight. The people saw our show; they're reading our handbills. They're starting to wonder."

Amory stood up. He was a trifle unsteady on his legs. "Maybe," he said, "we'll need to bring Cargh back some day—to stun the world into action. We may need to trump up a common enemy to unite us all. I hope not, though."

He shook his head. "But now we'll have to hide. We can't stay here. Security'll be on our tails any minute."

"Did they follow you here?" Nourse asked.

"Yes. But the local banditti exterminated them."

The whirring of a copter's vanes was audible overhead. "Here's Kyman," Beckett said. "We can leave now. And in three days we'll be in Europe."

Amory nodded. "Yes," he said. "But we'll be coming back." **E N D**

SECURITY

(Continued from page 101)

Lewis jumped under the wheel of the jeep, slammed it into gear and they headed down the concrete strip and straight for the gap in the fence.

"What happened to Cardoza?" Lewis asked.

Brogarth said from the back seat, "He said he didn't want to be labeled a security risk and be executed for sabotage."

Nemerov was drunk and he kept mumbling incoherently, and sometimes giving out with bits and pieces of half remembered poetry.

About a mile out in the sand and next to a wall of sandstone, they waited for any signs of pursuit. There were none. They rested there until morning, only an hour and a half away, and when they looked back toward the location of the Project, they could see nothing that looked any different from sand, brush, rocks and red sandstone.

"Perfect camouflage," Nemerov said as the jeep started up again. "You could walk within fifty feet of that fence and never know there was any Project there."

Later a hot wind came up and they ran into the Monster lying dead on its face with dust devils dancing over it.

An old prospector leading a burro came around the wall of sandstone and looked at the Monster, then at the occupants of the jeep.

"Howdy, folks," he said.

"Hello," Lewis said. "We're lost. Where are we and which way do

we go to get to civilization?"

"What's that thing?" the prospector asked, looking at the Monster.

"A scientific experiment that was never finished," Lewis said.

"What I figured," the prospector said. "You scientists out here always up to something." He pointed to the right. "Keep going that way and you'll find a narrow road. Follow it and you'll hit the middle of the valley and a highway right into the Chocolate Mountains."

Lewis knew where he was. The Chocolate Mountains walled off the rushing Colorado River from the Imperial Valley and Los Angeles farther on.

"Thanks," Lewis said.

"How's the war going these days?" Betty asked.

The prospector scratched his head and replaced his felt hat. He looked at them oddly.

"You must have been holed up in the hills a long time, Miss. There ain't been any war for two years. They started one, but the first couple of days scared everybody too much and they called the whole thing off. Where you folks been anyways, to the Moon?"

"Practically," Lewis said.

As the jeep moved away, Nemerov turned and looked back at the Monster and the old prospector who still stood there gazing at it.

"My name," Nemerov said, "is Ozymandias, King of Kings. Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair. Round the decay of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare the lone and level sands stretch far away."

END

hue AND cry

I just read Dave E. Fisher's amusing story entitled **THE BIRDS AND THE BEES** in a recent issue of *IF* and—see here, I'm tired of that stupid phrase, "the birds and the bees" which is supposed to represent "the facts of life" or the beginnings of the sex instruction of the young. There was a picture of the same title recently starring George Gobel and there are constant references to the birds and bees on TV and in print.

Well for heaven's sake, has anyone ever tried to explain sex by talking about the *birds* and the bees? What have the *birds* and the bees to do with it?

IT'S THE BEES AND THE FLOWERS. Will you get that through your head? **IT'S THE BEES AND THE FLOWERS.**

The bee travels to one flower and picks up pollen from the stamens. The pollen contains the male sex

cells of the plant. The bee then travels to another flower (of the same species) and the pollen brushes off onto the pistil, which contains the female sex cells of the plant. The pollen particle sends a process down the length of the pistil and eventually the male sex cell and the female sex cell unite to form a fertilized cell which develops into a seed and, eventually, into a new plant (of the same species).

Now in the human being the male cells must also be brought into contact with the female sex cell, but we don't rely on bees to do it for us. However, I will leave out the gory details, even though the poor simps who think the *birds* and the bees have something to do with it need the instruction badly.

And what's this about "Y's" article on guided missiles? For years now, the United States has been calling for international inspection on armaments and the Soviet Union has been refusing. Do you mean that the Soviet Union has been right all along and that we have been foolish or hypocritical or both? Good heavens, I find this unsettling.

—Isaac Asimov
Boston, Mass.

Neither fools nor hypocrites Isaac. "Y" points out that it's so darned easy to hide them and change them from peaceful to warlike purposes, that ostensibly we'd not have any proof that all armaments were being inspected, nor that the peaceful ones we were allowed to see wouldn't be turned against us.

Among science fiction writers it is generally accepted that interstellar travel by hyperspatial shortcuts is possible because distances are a lot less that way. On closer inspection this sounds like circular reasoning—which it is—but I have never read a story with an explanation of the theory behind hyperspatial interstellar travel, which didn't, in the final analysis, boil down to the one just mentioned. Some writers, I admit, explain that our space is so kinky that it is possible to travel between points light-years apart by only going nominal distances in hyperspace; but that still doesn't explain the kinks.

Now I suggest that although it is impossible for anything to travel any distance in ordinary space without diminution of intensity and the

passage of time. Thought can and does do it. Since the intensity of parapsychological phenomena is completely independent of the distance between cause and effect. Thought must travel through the kinks of hyperspace. And if thought can do it, why not interstellar spaceships?

At least that's as close as I can get to explaining this neat little trick that authors never quite do explain.

—A. D. Barnhart
Cleveland, Ohio

I'm pretty sick of the time machine. All the mechanical devices etc. that authors dream up as a gimmick seem to require enormous flows of energy, plenty of electronic gadgetry etc., all of which leads the poor slob who invents it into some sort of trouble. Now I find that the time machine I carry around on my shoulders (and I have been carrying it for some "time" now) functions with the small amount of energy contained in three square meals a day. It seems to require no more energy for me to "go back" twenty years in time than it requires to "go back" twenty minutes; this movement seems to be instantaneous and without effort. It is my considered opinion that the more stories and articles that are written about time travel, the longer it will take for the public to realize that their own minds are the only time machines that they will ever know, or that will ever be known.

—K. V. Fletcher
Beaumont, Texas

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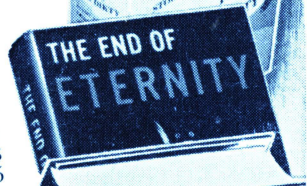
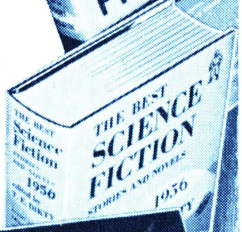
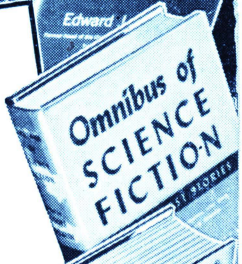
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