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WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION

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By ROBERT SILVERBERG

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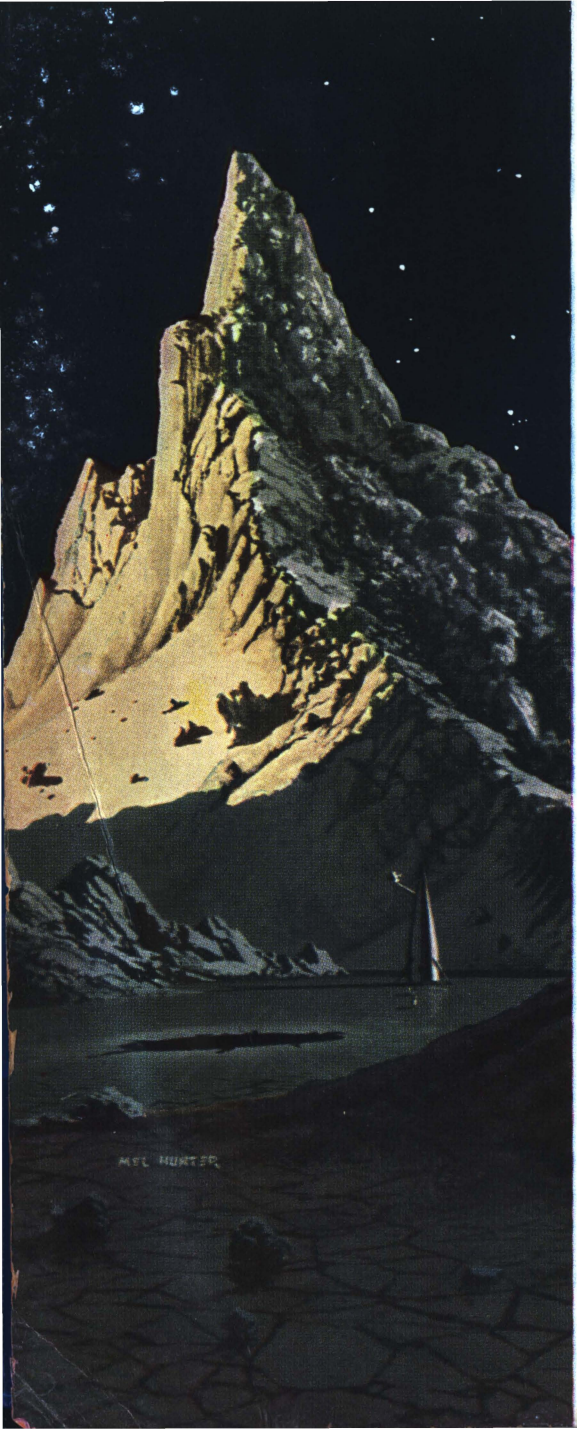

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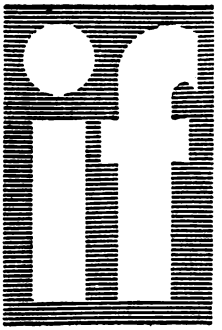

WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION

AUGUST 1958

All Stories New and Complete

Editor: JAMES L. QUINN

Assist. Editor: ELAINE WILBER

NOVELETTES

SHORT STORIES

FEATURES

COVER

"Get a Horse" by Ed Emsh

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THE WAGES

BY ROBERT

Escape lay two thousand frightening miles ahead of them—a lonely, cowering band of loyalists led by a renegade. En route, some must die, while one *man must try another road . . .*

OF DEATH

SILVERBERG

MACINTYRE stopped at the intersection of Lincoln Boulevard and Jefferson Street, looking in all directions for the Truthmen. The wind was from the north. It was past the hour of sundown, and two of the moons were in the bleak twilight sky.

His eye fell involuntarily on the street-sign. *Independence Avenue,* it said, in neat yellow script. Macintyre still thought of it as Jefferson Street, although it was nearly two years since the split-up with Earth.

Half a block to the north a gray-clad figure appeared, carrying a

swinging torch to light his way through the gathering gloom. Macintyre recognized the figure as one of Lumley's Truthmen, out on a prowl in search of enemies of the state. Macintyre stared bitterly at the chunky advancing figure; then, realizing his danger, he hurried down the street he still called Jefferson Street.

He moved silently and swiftly. He was used to running. It had been a hard life, these two years since the Decree of Separation. Macintyre had surprised himself then by remaining loyal to the mother world. In the succeeding two years he had continued to surprise himself by surviving Lumley's persecution of the dwindling Loyalists.

He reached the alleyway between Numbers 322 and 324 Jefferson, glanced round once to make sure the coast was clear, and ducked through. He scaled a low fence, trotted over a much-trampled backyard garden, and slipped into a beckoning opening in the ground. Instantly the door closed behind him, and a familiar voice said, "We were worried about you. You're a half hour late."

"Couldn't help it," Macintyre said. He was hoarse; he poured himself a glass of water from the tap in the corner. Familiar faces surrounded him: nine frightened men. All the Loyalists left in Maynard City. *There are so few of us left, Macintyre thought. And is it worth it, all the running and hiding?*

It was a strange group, these remnants of the Loyalist Party. Norman Maynard, great-great-great-grandson of the man who had discovered this world—Norman Maynard, a ratty-looking little man with ulcers. Vitello, once a dramatist, who now looked like a ragpicker. Christie, once Professor of Terran History at Maynard University, enamored of his own textbooks and unable to relinquish loyalty to the mother world. Bryson. Hallert. Fugitives.

"Well?" Maynard demanded. "What did you find out? Did you see the proclamation? Is it true?"

Macintyre nodded. "I saw the proclamation. It's posted in half a dozen places downtown. Everything we were told is true."

He crossed the room and sat down on the battered old couch. He stared at his too-thin, too-sensitive hands. "According to the proclamation, every citizen of the Free World of Maynard must carry with him at all times a card declaring he has sworn the Oath of Allegiance to the Republic. Without taking the oath you can't hold citizenship. And then at the bottom of the proclamation it says that for the duration of the emergency jury trial is suspended and all non-citizens are under automatic sentence of death." Macintyre looked up. "That's all there is. Either get yourselves a card or be ready to run, and run fast."

The room was very quiet. Finally Vitello said, "What do we do now?"

"What do you think we do?" Hallert demanded. He was a thin watery-eyed man who had been Secretary of Outworld Relations in the last Loyalist cabinet. "Either we

go down to the post office and swear allegiance to Lumley, or we stay here and wait for them to flush us out. It can't take long. Either way our course is pretty simple."

"We could call Ritterheim and accept his offer," said Christie in a mild voice.

Nine pairs of eyes focussed suddenly on the ex-Professor of Terran History. Macintyre felt a muscle in his cheek begin to twitch. He had been thinking along the same lines himself, ever since he had seen the proclamations posted in Government Square. Ritterheim was their only hope. Ritterheim was their sole chance.

But there were uncomfortable truths to be faced if they were to accept Ritterheim's offer. And it was not easy for a man to face those truths.

Macintyre's mind drifted back to the day—was it only three days ago?—when the radio set in the corner of their hideout had come bleeping to life. Bryson, the electronics technician who had built the set during the days when there still was some talk of a Loyalist counter-revolution and hence some need of communication between the bands of fugitives, sprang to the controls.

The call had come via subradio from the neighboring world of Haxley—a world staunchly Loyalist, one which had flatly refused to take part in the Separatist uprising. Charles Ritterheim, Haxley Minister of Foreign Affairs, was calling. He had learned that the Separatist government on Maynard was soon to publish a declaration prescribing the death penalty for any remaining Loyalists. Would they, Ritterheim wanted to know, care to flee to Haxley and take sanctuary there?

"How would we get there?" Bryson asked.

"There's a ship of ours ready to leave Maynard now," Ritterheim said. "A mercantile ship. We're putting down at Dillard Spaceport on the 19th of the month. If there happened to be a dozen or so Loyalists in the area at that time, we might look the other way."

"But Dillard's two thousand miles from here," Bryson objected. "Couldn't you arrange a landing somewhere closer to us? The dangers of a continental crossing—"

"I'm sorry. But we're booked in at Dillard. I'm afraid that a landing anywhere else would be construed as an act of war by the Maynard government, and we're not anxious to go to war with your friend Lumley just yet. Well? Will your group be at Dillard on the 19th?"

"I—don't know. There are so many aspects we have to consider—"

"Very well," Ritterheim said, a trifle coldly. "Consider them. Our offer still goes, if you're interested. Call me back within a week or else forget about it."

BRYSON had discussed the conversation with them. For two days and two nights the group had considered it; on a purely theoretical level, of course, since no official word had come down about a death penalty for Loyalist beliefs. Finally Macintyre had volunteered to leave the shelter and try to discover if

any such proclamation had been made.

It had.

The choices were clear-cut now.

They could abandon the last shred of loyalty to Earth, admit that Lumley's government was *de jure* as well as *de facto* in control of Maynard, and swear allegiance. Of the thirty million people of Maynard, all but a few hundred had done so. Lumley promised immediate amnesty for any recusants who swore allegiance.

Or they could take the opposite stand, and remain in hiding, surreptitiously writing and spreading pamphlets opposing the Separatist movement, urging a return to affiliation with Earth. But that was the way of martyrdom.

Ritterheim offered a third alternative—flight. They could take sanctuary on Haxley and wait there for the inevitable moment when the forces of Earth would exact vengeance on Lumley for his treason against the mother world.

Round and round and round the discussion went, as it had almost constantly since the moment Ritterheim's call had come through. Macintyre watched silently, feeling curiously detached from himself. He flexed his fingers. He wished he could sculpt this group, mold its confusions in living plastic, express in tangible form the cross-currents of bewilderment and cowardice that his nine comrades were creating. But it was more than a year since he had last worked at his art; these troubled times had no use for poets or painters or sculptors.

Naturally, none of the group advanced the suggestion that they give up and swear the Oath. They were too deeply committed for that; this was the hard core of the Loyalist movement, and for them there was no turning back.

But yet it was hard for them to accept Ritterheim's offer. Macintyre listened as the stale, insincere arguments were advanced one by one: that it was cowardly to flee, that our work demanded that we stay here and continue the fight on the home world, that it would be betraying our ideals—

Finally Macintyre grew tired. Putting some edge in his voice for the first time in weeks, he said, "Gentlemen, may I speak?"

Startled by the authority in his voice, they grew quiet. Macintyre looked around at them.

"We've been discussing this matter for three days, friends. At least, *you* have. I've just been listening. But now I want to talk.

"The prevailing sentiment among you seems to be that we should turn down Ritterheim's offer, stay here, and go gloriously to our deaths whenever Lumley's Truthmen happen to stumble over our little hideout. You, Hallert, and Maynard over there—you've been holding out for martyrdom, haven't you? You think it's noble. Do you mind if I tell you what's really on your minds?"

"Hold on, there, Macintyre," Maynard broke in roughly. "If you think—"

"I don't think anything. Shut up and listen." Macintyre locked his hands together. "You're picking martyrdom because it's the easy way

out. We can't go back; we're too far out on the limb to turn around and swear allegiance to Lumley. It sounds paradoxical, but doing that requires *real* courage, the kind none of us has. The courage to admit we might have been wrong all along."

"Are you suggesting, Tom, that Lumley's right and we're wrong?" Christie asked.

"Of course not. I'm just as firmly pro-Earth as any of you. What I'm saying is that none of us, myself included, would ever have the guts to *admit* Lumley was right, if we ever began thinking so. Okay. So the only paths open for us are staying on Maynard, which means inevitable execution, or fleeing to Haxley, which means we may live to fight some other day. And you all seem to be holding out for staying here and going gloriously to the gas chamber. How damned brave!"

Macintyre stared bitterly at the nine puzzled faces and felt a current of excitement welling up inside him. He had never spoken this way before, never felt the urge to get up on his back legs and tell people what lay behind their pretences.

Only now his life was at stake, his and all theirs—and he didn't intend to give it up easily.

"You know why you're all so keen on letting Lumley execute you?" he asked. "Not because you feel your mission is here on Maynard. No. The gas chamber is an easy way out, a *noble* way out. It's an end to struggle, and it's a praiseworthy end in the eyes of others. It's a way of giving up.

"So you want to turn down Ritterheim. That's interesting. Tell me this: suppose Ritterheim offered to put a ship down in our back yard and take us all away to Haxley? Would you turn him down then? Like hell you would! You'd scramble aboard that ship so fast—"

Hallert was white-faced. He seemed ready to explode. Macintyre stood up and pointed. "I'm almost done. I just want to say one more thing. The reason you all want to turn Ritterheim down—me, too, I feel that way—is that you all want to stay here in this cozy cellar until you're caught. You know that Dillard Spaceport is two thousand miles from here, and you're scared stiff of making the trek. It takes courage to run halfway across a continent, even if you're only running away."

He sat down and looked at his hands again. They were trembling. His face was flushed. No one was saying anything. After a while he looked up at them. One minute went by, and another, and still no one spoke.

"I take it from your silence that you agree with me. I expected it. Hell, I'm enough like you to know what's in your minds—only I threw it out in the open to show you."

"You know we'd never survive a trip across the continent," Vitello said reproachfully. "We're soft, Tom. We can't kill men. We can't lie very well. We can't fight back. We wouldn't get more than ten miles before they found us out. Isn't it better to stay here and try to spread our pamphlets than to go to certain death on the trek to Dillard?"

"We could make it," Macintyre

said. "Even a bunch of soft-headed arty types like ourselves. All we need is a guide. A shepherd, you might say. Someone to keep the wolves away—a strong man."

"Are you suggesting yourself?" Bryson asked.

Macintyre blinked. "Are you kidding? I'm no tougher than any of you, despite my size and the way I just spoke. No. I've got a man in mind, though. His name is Wallace. He'll take us to Dillard for a fee, and he'll see to it we get there alive."

Vitello's sensitive features wrinkled in distaste. "A mercenary, you mean?"

Macintyre nodded. "Call him that, if you like. He isn't a pleasant sort. But he'll get us there. Anybody interested in the deal?"

FOR THE SECOND time that day, Macintyre left the shelter of the hideout—this time bearing the task of locating Wallace and offering him the job.

They had been unwilling, at first, just as Macintyre himself had been unwilling to bring the matter up. Wallace was known by name and by reputation to most of them. He was a freebooter, a footloose member of the mercenary class that had sprung up on Maynard during its three centuries of existence as a Terran colony. He had the reputation of being willing to do anything—for a price.

But as Macintyre had won his inward battle, so did he convince his friends that hiring Wallace was essential to their survival. They were surely doomed if they remained in Maynard City; just as surely, they would never reach Dillard Spaceport alive on their own exertions. With Wallace, they stood a chance.

Macintyre headed northward to the bar where Wallace spent much of his free time. All three of Maynard's moons had risen, now, and the streets were uncomfortably bright. Macintyre's throat felt dry. There was a bounty of $100 on his head—no fortune, but enough to make it worthwhile for someone recognizing him to turn him in to the Truthmen.

He paused outside the bar, peering in. He made out Wallace's face; the mercenary was sitting alone, near the back. Macintyre shattered the photonic beam and stepped through the opening door.

It seemed to him that the hum of conversation in the bar dropped off perceptibly as he came in. For a moment he heard no sound but the raucous wailing of the musicbox; then the interrupted conversations were resumed. Macintyre made his way toward the back, toward Wallace.

"Mind if I sit down here?" he asked.

The mercenary looked up. He was a broad-faced man, heavy-bearded, with deepset dark eyes and a thick sprawling nose. A pale scar lanced diagonally across his left cheek, beginning at the tip of the jawbone and terminating a fraction of an inch from his eyeball.

"You better have a good reason for it," Wallace growled.

"I do." Macintyre slipped into the seat. "You know who I am?"

"I know your politics, friend. Not your name. What are you drinking?"

"Ale," Macintyre said. Wallace ordered a mug. Macintyre stared closely at the other's seamed face. "My name is Tom Macintyre," he said slowly. "That bit of information is worth a hundred dollars to you, cash on the line, if you feel like yelling for a Truthman."

"I've been thinking that very thing, Mr. Macintyre. I don't know what you want with me, but it better be worth more than the price on your head."

"It is." Macintyre took a deep sip. The ale was cold, dark, and potent. "I've got a job for you. It involves acting as a sort of guide for ten Loyalists, including myself. We have to be at Dillard Spaceport by the 19th of the month."

Wallace nodded. "Dillard's a couple of thousand miles from here. And today's the 8th."

"There's plenty of time, if we leave immediately," Macintyre said. "Interested?"

"Maybe."

"How much would it be worth to you?"

Smiling, the mercenary said, "I could sell the lot of you to the Truthmen for a thousand dollars. You better outbid that by plenty."

Macintyre moistened his lips. "Two thousand five hundred is what we offer. How does that sound?"

"In cash?"

"In cash. One thousand down immediately, fifteen hundred more when and if we reach Dillard safely and on time. I'm talking in hard money, Galactic crown pieces, not Lumley scrip."

Wallace looked thoughtful. He intertwined thick, stubby fingers, coughed, scowled. "I don't know how much I like doing business with Loyalists. How come you need a guide, anyway? Can't you find your way to Dillard by yourselves?"

Macintyre went red; he felt his cheeks steaming. With an effort, he forced the words out: "We don't think we can make it ourselves. It's a dangerous trip. We're peaceful men. We—" He stopped. He heard voices just behind his back.

"That's Macintyre," someone said, in a dull menacing tone. "Go get a Truthman. We'll split."

Macintyre half-rose; Wallace's hand shot out, caught his wrist, dragged him back down into his seat. From somewhere a gleaming little needlegun appeared in the mercenary's hand. Quietly Wallace said, "You stay right here and let the Truthmen alone, chum. You're making a big mistake. This man's name isn't Macintyre. It's Smith. Theodore H. Smith. And he's a very good friend of mine."

Instantly tension subsided in the bar; the would-be informer tossed a surly look at Wallace and vanished into the crowd. Wallace smiled coldly at Macintyre.

"Don't let these ruffians upset you, Mr.—ah—*Smith*. I can understand how someone of your delicate sensibilities can get ruffled by talk like that." Wallace grinned savagely. "Back to business, now. One thousand now, one and a half later. I think I'll accept, Mr. Smith. It ought to be a very amusing trip."

THEY LEFT in the cold gray hours just before dawn, after Bryson had put through a call to Haxley to let Ritterheim know they were accepting the offer of sanctuary. It was at that vague time when the moons had set and the sun was still below the horizon, when a ghostly pale light illuminated the rain-washed streets.

Macintyre felt a dull sense of regret as the little party of eleven set out. Up ahead of them, swaggering a little, Wallace led the way; in his pocket were ten crown pieces, each of them worth ten eagles—one thousand dollars of their money. Fifteen hundred more awaited him at completion of the journey.

To be reduced to this, Macintyre thought—to hiring a man like Wallace, a paid killer, a man with the morals of a snake and the muscles of an ape—that hurt more than anything. There he was, and on him their lives depended.

It was all part of the pattern, the pattern that had begun when Claude Lumley first appeared on the Maynard political scene. Before Lumley, all had been well. Maynard was one of the eighty-six Earth-type worlds strung through the galaxy. It corresponded to Earth-norm within two decimal places. It had a population of thirty million Terran-descended settlers. And until Lumley, it had been unquestioningly loyal to the mother world.

The ties had been mild ones. Earth required that a Resident Adviser live on a colony world and aid in planetary administration; that a token sum be paid in taxes to the mother world each year; that the colony grant certain trifling trade privileges to Earth. At one time the relationship had been of great significance to Earth, but the centuries had passed, and the colonies had evolved into self sufficiency, while Earth herself no longer had need of the sort of socio-cultural stimulus colonizing afforded. The relationship became one of purely symbolic value, a gesture of gratitude toward the world that had first sent its peoples forth to the worlds of the galaxy.

As a symbol, it was a loved thing. No one grudged the pittance paid in taxes, and no one objected to the presence of a Resident Adviser so long as he performed a purely ceremonial function. The peoples of the colony worlds maintained a warm and pleasant mock-subservience toward the mother world. One took for granted the fact that a certain amount of respect was due the parent planet.

Until Lumley. The ambitious young politician had been swept into the Chancellorship of Maynard by a landslide vote—and had promptly announced that he intended to discontinue paying the tithe to Earth.

Resident Adviser Humphries had objected on grounds of tradition, and Lumley had seized his chance. Ordering Humphries back to Earth on charges of wanton interference with local sovereignty of Maynard, Lumley declared the planet a Free World, owing no further allegiance to Earth, setting forth in his Decree of Separation the doctrine that the tie with Earth was a potentially unhealthy one that

should be severed before it became diseased.

There was an immediate uproar of protest from the people of Maynard—but a surprising volume of agreeing voices was audible. Slowly the force of opinion swung toward Lumley. Earth herself made no comment on Lumley's rash decree, and many on Maynard took Earth's silence for assent. The Separatists were a minority one day, a roaring majority the next.

There were those who objected, Macintyre among them. The artists, the poets, the sculptors, the teachers—gentle people, most of them, who valued the old traditions and were not anxious to see them die. They proclaimed continuing loyalty to Earth, and urged Lumley to retract his decree.

It was only natural that Lumley should regard these protests as direct attacks on his regime. He initiated a campaign to bring about 100% acceptance of the Decree of Separation, and when more than three-fifths of the population had sworn allegiance to the new government he pushed through the first of the anti-Loyalist laws.

It became punishable by $500 fine and thirty days' imprisonment to publicly advocate restoration of the relationship with Earth. Most of the wavering Loyalists yielded and took the Oath; others went defiantly to prison, emerging with their opinions unchanged.

Gradually the anti-Loyalist laws became more stringent, and the Loyalist numbers dropped away. Two years after his accession, Lumley dared to make Loyalism punishable by death—but by that time only a few hundred remained on all of Maynard, and those few remained well hidden.

And it had come to this, now, Macintyre thought. The last few of us in the capital city of Maynard, fleeing desperately to another world, being shepherded to safety by a ruthless killer who laughs at our ideals but who willingly takes our money.

He wiped rain from his face and brows and glanced up ahead. Wallace set a steady pace, down the Old River Road that led out of Maynard City via the South Bridge. He was a big man, this Wallace, broad-shouldered and heavy-muscled, but Macintyre knew he himself was just as big, perhaps even an inch taller, five pounds heavier. Bigger on the outside, that was.

Wallace carried less of a load, though. He was not weighted down with things like scruples or ethics or second thoughts. And that was why, thought Macintyre with a trace of bitterness, Wallace was leading the party and he was slinking along in the rear.

It was two thousand miles southeast to Dillard, second largest city of the planet. Maynard City was located in the heart of the broad western plain of Continent One; Dillard lay in fertile farmland beyond the great mountain-range that divided the continent.

There were regular commercial flights to Dillard each day—but for the ten of them, such a flight would be the prelude to immediate arrest. Lumley screened the airports closely.

Instead they would have to make the trek overland. Wallace had planned their trip for them during the night, working out a detailed schedule that would bring them to Dillard in time to meet the Haxley spaceship on the 19th. They would take one means of transportation and another, assume false identities, and with Wallace's help they would lie and bribe their way across the continent.

They could never have managed the trip alone. Macintyre glared resentfully at Wallace's broad back, and stepped up his pace.

THE PLAN called for them to proceed on foot over the South Bridge and out of the city; at this hour, it was not likely that the bridge would be guarded. They moved along silently through the steady rain, over the bridge, into the brown farmlands that lay just to the southeast of the capital.

"All right," Wallace said gruffly. "Now the legwork begins." He pointed to the swiftly-flowing, turbulent waters of the Stinnis River. "We'll advance on foot five miles along the river, and pick up the riverboat at the town at the bend. From there it's up the river to Collins' Ford, and then overland due south sixteen miles. Just remember that you're soldier-mercenaries on your way east to seek a living in Dillard Province, and leave the rest to me."

The idea of posing as a soldier amused Macintyre in a dark way. Ten years before he had been one of the officers of a pacifist movement in the mountain town of Hollister; they had drawn up petitions, published muzzy pamphlets, and made much noise about disbanding the standing army maintained by the Maynard administration. After a while they had all lost interest in the campaign. Macintyre, seeking a career in the plastic arts, drifted off to Maynard City to study sculpture in the atelier of a famous Terran artist newly emigrated. And a decade later the ex-pacifist was pretending to be a soldier, to save his own skin.

At the village of Lester Falls, they boarded a small early-morning river-packet bound eastward on the Stinnis. They boarded the vessel without incident.

As he stood staring out over the rail, Hallert edged up to him. The watery-eyed little man looked frightened half to death; he had said nothing on the march out of Maynard City.

"How's your stomach?" Macintyre asked.

"I can manage. Do you think there'll be any trouble?"

"What kind of trouble?"

"Truthmen trouble," Hallert whispered. "I saw Wallace talking to someone in an Army uniform."

"So what? Probably an old buddy of his."

"I don't like it," Hallert whispered. "Suppose he's selling us out? He's already got a thousand of our money; if he turns us in he gets another thousand—"

Annoyed Macintyre snapped, "I don't give two hoots what you think, Hallert! If you think Wallace is going to turn us in, jump overboard

and finish the rest of the trip by yourself."

"You know I can't do that."

"Then keep shut," Macintyre said gloomily. "We're paying Wallace to do a job. We might as well assume he's halfway trustworthy."

They stayed that night in a cheap dreary hotel in the mining town of Collins' Ford, the ten of them crammed into two smoky rooms at a dollar apiece. It was a mercenaries' hostelry; for half the night Macintyre lay awake, listening to the raucous, uninhibited laughter from below.

Wallace woke him with a shove in the ribs, just before dawn. The mercenary was bleary-eyed and dirty. He smelled of beer.

"We're pulling out now," Wallace said. "There's an 0700 train going south."

"Do we have time to wash?"

Wallace glared at him half in amusement and half in scorn. "You're a soldier, Macintyre. Washing's for civilians. And the more filth and stubble you have on that pretty face of yours, the less chance there is somebody's going to recognize you. Come on, now."

The monorail station was just outside town, perhaps half an hour's walk from the hotel. Feeling drab and dirty, Macintyre let himself be hustled from the hotel and out onto the road with his companions. He touched his cheeks: a wiry stubble was growing there. This was the first day of his adult life on which he had gone without shaving and it annoyed him.

The sun was nearly up by the time they arrived at the depot. There was a long line waiting for tickets at the tube-mouth. Evidently trains did not run frequently out here in the flatlands. Macintyre noticed half a dozen gray uniforms in the long line, and went pale.

He nudged Wallace. "Truthmen."

"I see them. So what?"

"Aren't you afraid that—I mean—they might—" He stopped, abashed.

"They won't do anything unless you give the show away," Wallace grunted. "Keep to yourselves, don't look for trouble, and remember who you're supposed to be in case anybody asks you."

They joined the line. Fare was twenty units apiece; Macintyre drew one of his remaining dollars from his pocket and idly fondled the small yellow coin. He had been fairly well-to-do before Lumley; now, after contributing two hundred and fifty dollars towards Wallace's hire, he was down to sixty dollars and a few units in change.

Suddenly he saw a familiar face in the line ahead of him—Roy Charters, a short, bouncy man, a confirmed Loyalist and in the old days a generous patron of the arts. Now Charters was shabby, his hair uncombed. It was more than a year since Macintyre had seen him. He lifted his arm, waved, started to call out Charters' name.

Instantly Wallace seized his wrist and dug his nails in hard. "What do you think you're doing?" he whispered furiously. "You want to get us all killed?"

"I saw someone I knew," Macin-

tyre said shamefacedly. He glanced at his companions. "It was Roy Charters," he explained to Vitello. "He's standing near the front of the line."

"Who's this Charters?" Wallace asked suspiciously.

Briefly, Macintyre told him. Wallace frowned. "Loyalist, eh? Point him out to me."

Macintyre pointed him out.

Wallace squinted and nodded. "Okay. See that you keep away from him. It's too early in the trip to get into trouble."

Macintyre shrugged angrily and turned away. The line crawled forward; at last it was his turn. He gave his destination, scooped up his ticket and his eighty units change, and shuffled inside the station, toward the great single rail along which the train was due to come rocketing in the next ten minutes. He noticed an ominous little group of Truthmen standing near the edge of the track. Lumley's special police corps, grimly fanatical men.

The Truthmen boarded the same car as they did. Wallace seemed undisturbed; there were eighty or ninety people in the car, and there was no reason to suspect they were being followed.

Wallace curled up comfortably in the corner of their section of the car, took out a pocketknife, and began whittling and singing. Macintyre stared moodily out the window. Bryson and Vitello broke into a salty argument over the girls of Collins' Ford; Hallert and Maynard played cards. It looked convincing enough: a group of unshaven, overhung mercenaries en route to a new job. Macintyre eyed the reflection of the Truthmen in his window. They showed no overt interest in the doings of the noisy group opposite them.

The warning light blinked, the departure hum sounded, and the train shot away from the Collins' Ford station. Their destination was Abramville, sixteen miles southward on the north bank of the Hastings River. The trip would take just eight minutes.

Despite the presence of the Truthmen, it looked to be a placid hop. But abruptly the door between compartments slid open and a small round figure advanced uncertainly from the next car. Macintyre stiffened. It was Charters.

He paused at the front of the car, looking around as if in search of someone. Then his eyes came to rest on Macintyre; he smiled, his face lit up, he pointed. He began to say something.

Began. But before he got a word out, Wallace was on his feet, letting shavings and whittling alike go tumbling to the floor. The big man crossed the car to where Charters stood, threw his arms around the other, and with a jovial pseudo-drunken outburst drowned out anything Charters might have been about to say.

Macintyre saw Charters draw back in surprise. He heard Wallace's booming voice: "Well, if it isn't old Joe Taylor! Haven't seen you since those days in Palmerston, Joe! Come on over and meet the boys!"

Charters went very pale. He drew away from Wallace, only to be

playfully tugged across the car. Macintyre noticed that the Truthmen were watching the scene with considerable interest.

Macintyre heard Charters' thin protest: "I'm afraid I don't understand. My name isn't—"

It was drowned out by a drunken burst of song. Holding Charters firmly with one arm wrapped around his shoulders, Wallace reeled across the car, staggering past the suddenly silent group of Loyalists. Macintyre heard Charters murmur as they went past, "If you don't let go of me I'm going to notify the—"

And then they were gone, disappearing into the washroom at the far end of the car. A minute passed, two; the sound of drunken singing was audible from behind the closed door. The Truthmen lost interest; self-consciously, the Loyalists returned to their conversation and their cardgames.

Several minutes went by; the car roared into the Abramville station. Still neither Wallace nor Charters emerged from the washroom. Macintyre drummed impatiently on the windowledge, wondering what was going on in there.

The main door of the car swung open; the Abramville passengers filed out. Macintyre noticed that the Truthmen were remaining on the train. Shrugging, he said, in the rough voice he was trying to cultivate, "Those guys must've passed out in there. You make sure the train don't leave. I'll take a peek inside."

But there was no need for that. Wallace appeared suddenly and gestured for them to get off the train. They made it just in time; Hallert was the last one off, and hardly had he come through the hatch when the monorail car went swooshing off southward.

Macintyre turned to Wallace. "What was *that* all about? And where's Charters?"

"Tell you about it sometime," Wallace murmured. "Let's go hire a riverboat."

They found a pier and after some haggling Wallace made a deal with a sleazy old bargeman to take them fourteen miles upstream to the township of Miller Bridge. When the deal was closed, Wallace led them up the embankment to a cheap eatery where they breakfasted. On the way down toward the river again, Macintyre said a second time, "Would you mind explaining what took place aboard the train?"

"It won't interest you."

"It does. I want to know why you dragged Charters off to the washroom. I hadn't seen that man in a year, and now I may never see him again. I—"

"Stop asking me questions! And don't worry yourself over Charters."

Something in the mercenary's tone enraged Macintyre. It was Charters who had contributed most of the money Macintyre had needed to complete his statuary grouping, *Sons of Earth,* that had had the place of honor in Maynard Park until Lumley's hammermen smashed it to sand.

"But what did—"

Wallace's jaw-muscles flickered a moment. "Look, Macintyre, if I'd

let that fellow talk to you those Truthmen would be dragging us away to the Abramville hoosegow right now. You know what a Judas ram is?"

"What does that have to do with it?"

"Plenty. Those Truthboys knew Charters; I could tell by the way they tried to look bored when he came in. If I had let him wave hello to you, we'd all be finished. So I made sure he wouldn't give the show away. It was him or us, and I said I'd get you to Dillard. I'd handle you the same way if necessary."

Macintyre felt cold. Obstinately he persisted: "What did you do to him?"

"I got him in the washroom and asked him where he was getting off. He said Donovan. I happened to have overheard those Truthmen when they bought their tickets, and they were going to Donovan too. So they would have interrogated your pal Charters the second they got him alone, and ten minutes after that there'd be a three-province alarm out for us." Wallace took a deep breath. "I'm violating my Oath by helping you—so I'm subject to the same penalties you are. I don't want to get caught, and I knew if I left Charters alone I'd get caught. So I opened the washroom window and pitched him out. He's lying someplace near the track, nine miles back."

They reached the waterfront. "Come on," Wallace said, before Macintyre could manage to speak. "There's our boat. Let's get moving."

AS THEY passed upriver, past the shipping towns and into the gathering uplands that led to the mountains, Wallace's calm, self-assured words echoed over and over: *I opened the washroom window and pitched him out.*

Just like that. It made sense, Macintyre thought numbly, on an abstract, utterly and remorselessly logical plane. The death of one man had temporarily insured the continued survival of eleven others. The survival of that one man would have meant death for all twelve. So poor Charters had to die.

Maybe it made sense logically. But for half a day Macintyre trembled at the thought that Wallace had been able so coldly to weigh one life against eleven, and then to kill. It was a pure calculus of survival. Macintyre realized for the first time how utterly alien Wallace was, how far from the set of specifications Macintyre had always thought applied to the class *"human being."*

Macintyre did not tell the others what Wallace had done. He felt responsible for having brought the mercenary to the group; and in an obscure way it was almost as if he had killed Charters himself. He penned the guilt within himself.

The 10th passed, and the 11th; they travelled by rented car overland toward the town of Hollister, the last town of any importance before they hit the mountain path. They reached Hollister on the 12th, half a day ahead of schedule. At this rate they would certainly reach Dillard—and safety—by the deadline of the 19th.

The day was warm and bright; Maynard's temperate zone was in its early summer season now. The seasons slipped by slowly on Maynard. It was a pleasant world. He would regret leaving Maynard behind for the less moderate world of Haxley.

His feelings toward Wallace subsided slowly. He, of all the group, was the only one who seemed ever willing to speak to the mercenary. The others regarded him as an unavoidable evil, a kind of talking pack-animal. Macintyre wondered how they would feel toward Wallace if they were to learn of the incident aboard the monorail.

The morning they left Hollister and rode mountainward, Macintyre found himself at Wallace's side in the truck they had rented.

He said, "You think we're going to make it?"

"Probably. It's easier than I thought it would be. Like taking money for doing nothing. Twenty-five hundred for a trip to Dillard! Brother, that's work I like!"

"You won't get much more," Macintyre said. "There aren't many of us left."

"That's true enough. I'm surprised that ten of you lasted as long as you did. You Loyalists are stupid bastards. Ten grown men afraid of their shadows. Like that meeting in the monorail. As soon as Charters sang out, 'Well, if it isn't Tom Macintyre,' that would have been the end. But—"

"I wish you hadn't brought that up," Macintyre said, as the truck went jouncing up into the heavily-wooded foothills. The sun was coming down stronger.

"Why? Still can't understand it, can you?"

"I can—*almost* see it," Macintyre admitted. "Dammit, Wallace, how could you coldbloodedly—"

Wallace laughed. "Cold blood? Hell, Macintyre, I just like to stay alive."

"And you'd do anything to stay alive?"

"Wouldn't you?"

Stumped, Macintyre looked away. After a moment he said, "Let me set up a hypothetical situation. We cross the mountains and we come into a town where the people are on the lookout for Loyalists. Somehow they find out that—say, Hallert—has Loyalist leanings. They suspect the rest of us, but they're not sure. Okay. Tell me, Wallace: how would you get us out of that town safely?"

The mercenary frowned. "As long as we're playing games, Macintyre, let me suggest a better one. You put yourself in my shoes and tell me what I'd be likely to do."

"Don't you see, that's just what I *can't* do? Suppose I had to take charge of the party—what would I do? I don't know. I'd guess we'd all be finished."

"Not *all*," Wallace said. "Just Hallert."

"How would you save the rest of us?"

"I'd go to the mayor of that town. I'd tell him honestly enough that we'd picked up a Loyalist in our wanderings. I'd ask him if he'd be good enough to take him off our hands."

"You'd sacrifice Hallert?"

Wallace smiled grimly. "When your leg's caught in a trap, Macintyre, and you hear the hounds coming after you, the only thing you can do is cut your leg off and crawl away. There isn't any time to think about whether you're being fair to your leg."

Macintyre stared quietly at the road a long moment, wondering what had shaped this man, what had stripped all humanity away from him. They had been born on the same planet, they both came from pure Terran-descended stock —but yet, thought Macintyre, comparing the mercenary's short, strong hands with his own tapering fingers, there was as much difference between the two of them as if they hailed from opposite ends of the galaxy.

CROSSING the mountains took three full days, and Macintyre was so concerned with the sheer physical problem of getting across that he let his mind move away from Wallace. It was tough, hard work crossing those mountains. There was no time for theoreticizing.

The weather dipped coldly as they ascended; the mountains were jagged ruffles in the planet's skin, seven thousand feet high at their heights. Macintyre was a warm-weather man and he felt the cold. Wallace did not seem to mind. They rode in open trucks, part of a supplies convoy crossing to the eastern provinces. Wallace had bought them into the convoy cheap, on a food-work exchange.

Each night they helped to make camp, fumbling with the tents and struggling with the chores. Wallace obviously was keeping tight rein on his patience as the well-meaning ex-sculptors and ex-professors tried manfully to look like tough mercenaries. One of the truckdrivers wandered over once on the first night and stood by, grinning, while Hallert and Macintyre puzzled out the technique of putting up a folding tentpole. The truckman snorted goodhumoredly.

"No wonder you're heading east for work!"

Macintyre looked up. "What's that?"

"I said it's small wonder you're out of work. If you two are any samples, you're the damndest bunch of amateur mercenaries this side of Blue Ocean."

Sudden rage thundered through Macintyre. Before he had time to consider he had brought his fist up and connected solidly with the man's chin. The impact bent one of his knuckles and sent pain shooting up his arm. The trucker took an uncertain step backward, wobbled, tried to muster his strength for a counterattack. Trembling from strain, Macintyre readied himself for a second punch.

Wallace leapt between them. The mercenary grabbed the burly trucker firmly and propelled him toward the truck; turning to Macintyre he said, "What was that all about?"

"He didn't like the way we were putting up the tent. He made some remarks." Macintyre looked at his hand. The knuckle of his middle

finger was swelling, and the whole hand felt numb. "That's the first time I ever hit a man," he said. "And I didn't stop to think. I just swung."

He rubbed his aching hand. "I *had* to do it, though. No hire-soldier would take that sort of stuff from a trucker."

Wallace smiled slowly—and it seemed to the startled Macintyre that there was real friendliness in the mercenary's eyes for the first time. "You know," Wallace said, "I think you're beginning to understand."

The rest of the mountain trip was without incident, and Macintyre was greatly relieved when, on the afternoon of the 14th, they came down out of the Webster Hills that marked the extreme easternmost border of the continental divide, and said curt goodbyes to the trucking caravan. They had been on the road five days now. Filthy, ragged, unshaven, they looked not even remotely like the band of mild Loyalists that had set out from Maynard City early on the morning of the 9th.

Now they were in the flatlands of Webster Province, the mercantile center of the continent; six hundred miles from Dillard Spaceport. Wallace's itinerary was drawn up to skirt the provincial capital, Webster. It was in Webster that Claude Lumley had been born, it was Webster that had started him on the road to power by electing him as their Assembly representative, and in Webster anti-Loyalist feeling was at an almost hysterical peak. Only a madman would risk a passage through the city.

Instead they doubled back on their tracks, detouring north-northwest toward the small river town of Lorris, where they could pick up a boat travelling downriver toward the distant southern coast. It was forty miles to Lorris, and they reached it near nightfall. Wallace knew a good cheap hotel.

It was a rickety relic of the earliest settlement days, with flickering lumipanels casting an ugly gray light and dirty non-opaquing windows. Macintyre didn't care. He was tired and dirty, and any place would do.

The hotel had a bar, and they sat up drinking a while. Wallace was as boisterous as ever, but Macintyre, sitting by his side, noticed that the mercenary had had a total of just three beers during the evening. It was a point worth noting. Wallace always *seemed* to be drinking, and made a great show of being drunk; but in actuality he drank very little, and was always fully aware, fully on guard.

Shortly past midnight the group headed for their rooms. Macintyre was the last to leave the bar. As he started out into the dingy corridor, he felt a hand gently touch his shoulder and pull him back.

He turned. It was the barkeep-proprietor, a faded balding man of sixty or so. Whispering, the man said, "Come back and have one last drink with me, friend."

Macintyre frowned. The others were gone; throughout the trip he had followed a policy of staying close to the group. "I'm pretty

tanked," he said. "Think I'll get some sleep, if y'don't mind."

"No." The barkeep tugged insistently. "Come back. Let me tell you some things you might want to know."

Macintyre went. As soon as he had recrossed the threshold, the old man spun and shut the bar door firmly; then he looked up at Macintyre, bloodshot old eyes looking at gentle young ones, and said, "You're a Loyalist, aren't you? You and the bunch you came with."

Macintyre stiffened. "You're drunk, old man! I'm a free soldier. And—"

"Stop pretending," said the old one softly. "It doesn't come natural to you; you don't fool me. I won't turn you in. I want to warn you."

"Warn me of what?"

"That man Wallace. Get quit of him. He's deadly."

Macintyre drew the old man down next to him at one of the tables and said, "What do you know about Wallace?"

"He came through Lorris about two months ago with a party of five. Loyalists. They were paying him to get them to the coast—I guess they figured on taking a boat over to Ludlow Island and hide out. Only when they got to Dillard he collected his fee from them and sold 'em all to the Truthmen."

Macintyre felt the blood drain from his face. "Where'd you hear that?"

"Never you mind. But when I saw that same ugly fellow come through here again, and ten fellows with him, I knew he was pulling the same thing all over again. Watch for yourselves, friend. You're in rough hands."

"How am I supposed to believe this?"

The barkeep smiled indifferently. "I don't give a damn if you believe me. I'm trying to help you." His face darkened. "I know what you boys are going through. I'd be with you myself, except—well, I'm not young, and the hotel doesn't bring in much. When they came around asking me to sign the Oath I signed. But I keep a little globe of Earth upstairs." He rose. "It's getting late. You never know who's listening."

Macintyre nodded. "Thanks," he said shakily.

He had no chance to discuss this new information with the others until the morning of the 17th, when they were a hundred and fifty miles from Dillard. They stopped in a small town called Fleury. Wallace left them while he went into town to make arrangements for covering the remaining distance.

Macintyre told the group what the innkeeper had said, adding, "I guess it's my fault for having got us into this."

Hallert looked up owlishly. "How sure are you that the old man was telling the truth?"

"You can't be sure of anything. But I'm willing to believe that Wallace came this way once before and sold his clients to the Truthmen at the end of the trip. Let's assume that it's so. What do we do?"

"We could go up to him and ask him just what his intentions are when we reach Dillard," Bryson said.

The suggestion was so naive that Macintyre laughed. "And I guess we could get him to promise he won't hand us in, I suppose. Sorry, Mark. It won't go."

"Then what *do* we do?" Hallert asked desperately. "Just ride along and hand over our money and let him sell us to the Truthmen?"

"We go to Dillard by ourselves, now," suggested Vitello. "We haven't had any trouble so far, and we're practically there. If we hurry, before Wallace comes back from town—"

"Don't be a fool," Hallert snapped pettishly. "If he finds us gone he'll wire ahead to Dillard and notify the authorities. No, that won't work either. But suppose we—"

Macintyre listened impatiently. All they did was talk, he thought, and kick feeble suggestions around, none of them daring to approach the concrete. There was only one solution. He knew what it was.

Fifteen minutes more of discussion followed. It developed that the prevailing sentiment of the group was, Wait and See. Wallace's return ended the discussion. He had engaged three trucks to see them down the road toward Dillard, and they left.

Macintyre was seated near Wallace. He stared covertly at the mercenary as they pulled out of Fleury; the man seemed to take on more awesomely monstrous characteristics each day, as they saw more and more of him in action. Yet he had the knack of seeming good company, cheerful, quick-witted, bawdy of tongue, and Macintyre found himself forgetting that this was the man who had killed Charters and had sold five earlier Loyalists to the Truthmen. Who perhaps was going to do the same to them.

Macintyre stared at the yellow and purple splotches of shrubbery flanking the road. "You're almost safe," Wallace said. "Weren't you silly to hire me? You can see how easy it was."

"Easy for you, maybe. We'd never have made it."

Wallace nodded. "I guess you're right. You wouldn't have gotten through. You wouldn't have the guts."

Macintyre tensed, and forced himself to subside. Wallace grinned. "Easy, there. Don't go picking fights with me."

"Then don't make yourself any more offensive than you have to be," Macintyre snapped.

"There we go, there we go!" Wallace crowed. "Spoken like a man—for the first time in your spineless life! This trip has almost been the making of you, Macintyre."

Macintyre turned. "You enjoy taunting us, don't you? Because we're not coldblooded. You love to tell us that we think too much, that we stall instead of acting. I guess it never occurs to you that there are such things as moral codes, and ethical choices for a man to make. Eh?"

Wallace looked curiously serious. "What gives you that idea?"

"The way you act. The way you think. The way you pushed that harmless man off the train." ***The way you sold those five to the***

Truthmen, he added, silently. "Ruthlessness is a way of life with you, isn't it?"

"It's a way of staying alive," Wallace admitted. "It's a hard world. It's a hard universe, brother. And the universe doesn't give a damn about you or me or Claude Lumley. You have to take care of yourself."

"Which means killing anyone who gets in your way," Macintyre said.

"It may look that way to you, but that's because you don't understand. Look, Macintyre: when I was very young I sat down and worked out my idea of the way the world worked. I figured out what I wanted out of life. I figured out what I had to do to get it. And I've been doing it ever since. I have my own code. I know my limits and I stick to them. And I guess to you I look like an ape, eh?"

Macintyre was silent. He stared at the bouncing road and tried to piece his thoughts together. "I—had a philosophy too," he said after a while. "I thought it worked. It didn't include killing people or betraying ideals. And—and—"

"And it ended up bringing you here, a miserable fugitive who has to hire a nursemaid to get you off the planet." With elaborate deliberateness Wallace spat; the stream landed an inch from Macintyre's boots. "Go ahead," Wallace urged. "Stand up and pitch me off the truck. You're big—just as big as I am. But you won't fight."

"No," Macintyre said, moving his feet. "I won't. I'm a human being."

Wallace merely laughed.

THE NEXT DAY was the 18th, and they approached the outskirts of Dillard now. Macintyre's mind dwelled only on the day to come. Tomorrow. They would pay Wallace the $1500 they owed him, and they would leave for Haxley that night. Or would they? Would Wallace pocket his cash and phone the Truthmen?

Tomorrow was hazed round with doubts. But slowly, out of the haze, the answer presented itself, and Macintyre found himself unable to deny its validity.

The evidence showed that Wallace would betray them. Every sign of his character showed that, and the words of the innkeeper in Lorris. There was always the chance that he had no such intention, of course; but the cloud of doubt could not be dispelled. Macintyre knew he could take no chance.

No. Wallace was confident; *too* confident.

He looked at the whiteness of his hands. Yellowish, now, from callus. He wondered if he had the strength to kill.

They stopped that night at Brownston, twenty miles from the spaceport. They would be in plenty of time for their rendezvous with Ritterheim the next day, if—

The Loyalists buzzed with nervous tension. *Like so many little bees,* Macintyre thought.

He stood before a mirror, staring at the thin high-bridged nose, the soft eyes. Was this a killer's face? He took a deep breath.

Wallace had been necessary to the success of their journey. But the journey was over. Wallace had

to be discarded, before he wrecked the entire crossing at the final moment.

Macintyre's hand gripped the knife. It felt cold and strange. He tiptoed from his room, down the hall, toward the room where Wallace and Bryson were booked.

He pushed open the door. They were asleep: the small man on a cot, Wallace on the bed. Macintyre felt almost calm. He crossed the room and stood over the slumbering Wallace.

So he's human after all, Macintyre thought. *He doesn't have an automatic danger-alarm built into his skull to wake him up.*

Macintyre unsheathed the knife and gently touched Wallace's shoulder. The mercenary grunted sleepily, opened one eye, and said, "What do you want, Macintyre?"

"I wanted to ask you about those five Loyalists you sold to the Truthmen last month."

"Huh? You having a nightmare, Macintyre?"

"Maybe I am. But tell me the truth or I'll cut you open, Wallace. I'm not kidding."

Wallace grunted. "Go back to sleep, will you?"

"Answer me!"

"What if I told you I did sell them? What if I told you I was going to do the same to you?" Wallace sat up suddenly in the bed. "If I told you that, Mac, *what could you do about it?*"

"This," Macintyre said, and brought the knife upward from his hip. Wallace saw it at the last moment; his reflexes asserted themselves, and he tried to block the blow, to seize Macintyre's arm. But the effort failed. The knife plunged; Wallace sank back. In an indistinct voice he muttered, "I guess I underestimated you, Mac."

And then the room was quiet.

Macintyre stood alone, holding the bloody knife. He heard the door open; he turned, saw them filing in, Hallert and Vitello and the rest. He forced himself to grin.

"He meant to turn us in," Macintyre said.

He saw them looking blankly at him, then to the knife, then to the body on the bed. Nobody was speaking.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "He would have turned us in. We're safe, now. We can go to Dillard in the morning."

But he saw that they did not understand. There was blank horror in their eyes, and he realized that he had never belonged with them at all. He was not their kind. He had pretended to be their kind, had fooled himself into thinking it, but he was not.

He looked toward the bed; his eyes, grown accustomed to the dark, sought the dead man's face. Wallace was smiling. Wallace had understood. The mercenary had had a code, and he had lived by it and died by it. Wallace had been a killer and a cheat and a traitor, but he had been a superb killer, a splendid cheat. They had hired him to do a job, and he had done it with magnificent competence.

You have to respect him for it, Macintyre thought leadenly. He let the knife drop.

Wallace had dealt out death; the

wages of death is death. It was simple, neat, valid. But now something new was arising.

Macintyre looked at the nine awed statues. "There's a spaceship leaving for Haxley tomorrow," he said quietly. "It's blasting out of Dillard Spaceport. I want you all to make sure you're on it. You need to be. This isn't any world for you."

"And what are you going to do?" Maynard asked, in a hoarse, frightened voice.

"I'm going to stay here on your grandad's world," Macintyre said. "I made this trip for nothing. I'm not really a Loyalist, you know. I decided that last night. You people are, because you don't have the courage to step forward and change things. You don't like Lumley, so you hide in cellars and wait for him to come kill you.

"I guess I'm not like that. I just found that out, tonight. What I want to stay here and do is to keep an eye on Lumley, to work for the sort of planet *I* want."

Macintyre took a deep breath. He expected a reaction, the revolt of strained nerves, but he was calm. "The way to fight Lumley is to fight him out in the open. So I'll take the Oath of Allegiance first, and be a legal citizen again. And then I can try to do something."

He walked to the door. It was almost morning, and the sun was coming over the Eastern Ocean toward them, brightening the sky. "You know what I'm going to do now?" he asked. "I'm going to walk into town and wait for the post office to open. And then I'm going to take the Oath. And none of you will ever understand why, will you?"

He glanced at the man on the bed. "So long, Wallace. It's too bad we couldn't have known each other under different circumstances."

He opened the door and looked back at Maynard and Hallert and the others—white, dumfounded men. He smiled at them, but they did not smile back. He turned, closing the door carefully behind him, and started down the road, on the long walk toward the post office in Dillard. **END**

The Lemmings sought the end of the Universe. Naturally, they died as they found it . . .

THE SKY IS BURNING

BY

HARLAN ELLISON

Illustrated by Paul Orban

THEY CAME flaming down out of a blind sky, and the first day ten thousand died. The screams rang in our heads, and the women ran to the hills to escape the sound of it. But there was no escape for them—nor for any of us! The sky was aflame with death, and the terrible, unbelievable part of it was —the death, the dying was not us!

It started late in the evening. The first one appeared as a cosmic spark struck in the night. Then, almost before the first had faded back into the dusk, there was another, and then another, and soon the sky was a jeweler's pad, twinkling with unnameable diamonds.

I looked up from the Observatory roof, and saw them all, tiny pinpoints of brilliance, cascading down like raindrops of fire. And somehow, before any of it was explained, I knew: this was something important. Not important the way five extra inches of plastichrome on the tail-fins of a new copter are important . . . not important the way a war is important . . . but important the way the creation of the universe had been important, the way the death of it would be. And I knew it was happening all over Earth.

There could be no doubt of that. All across the horizon, as far as I could see, they were falling and burning and burning. The sky was not brighter appreciably, but it was as though a million new stars had been hurled up there to live for a brief microsecond.

Even as I watched, Portales called to me from below. "Frank! Frank, come down here! This is fantastic!"

I swung down the catwalk into the telescope dome and saw him hunched over the refraction eyepiece. He was pounding his fist against the side of the vernier adjustment box. It was a pounding of futility and strangeness. A pounding without meaning behind it. "Look at this, Frank. Will you take a look at this?" His voice was a rising inflection of disbelief.

I nudged him aside and slid into the bucket. The scope was trained on Mars. The Martian sky was burning, too. The same pinpoints of light, the same intense pyrotechnics spiraling down. We had alloted the evening to a study of the red planet, for it was clear in that direction, and I saw it all very sharply, as brightnesses and darkness again, all across the face of the planet.

"Call Bikel at Wilson," I told Portales. "Ask him about Venus."

Behind me I heard Portales dialing the closed circuit number, and I half-listened to his conversation with Aaron Bikel at Mt. Wilson. I could see the flickering reflections of the vid-screen on the phone as they washed across the burnished side of the scope. But I didn't turn around; I knew what the answer would be.

Finally, he hung up, and the colors died: "The same," he said sharply, as though defying me to come up with an answer. I didn't bother snapping back at him. He had been bucking for my job as Director of the Observatory for nearly three years now, and I was accustomed to his antagonisms—desperately as I had to machinate occasionally to keep him in his place.

I watched for a while longer, then left the dome.

I went downstairs and tuned in my short-wave radio, trying to find out what Tokyo or Heidelburg or Johannesburg had to say. I wasn't able to catch any mention of the

phenomena during the short time I fiddled with the sweep, but I was certain they were seeing it the same everywhere else.

Then I went back to the Dome, to change the settings on the scope.

After an argument with Portales, I beamed the scope down till it was sharp to just inside the atmospheric blanket. I tipped in the sweeper and tried a fast scan of the sky, but continued to miss the bursts of light at the moment of their explosion. So I cut in the photo mechanism and set a wide angle to it. Then I cut off the sweep and started clicking them off. I reasoned that the frequency of the lights would inevitably bring one into photo focus.

Then I went downstairs, back to the short-wave. I spent two hours with it and managed to pick up a news broadcast from Switzerland. I had been right, of course.

Portales rang me after two hours and said we had a full reel of photos, and should he have them developed. This was too big to trust to his adolescent whims, and rather than have him fog up a valuable photo, I told him to leave them in the container, and I'd be right up, to handle it myself.

When the photos came out of the solution, I had to finger through thirty or forty of empty space before I caught ten that had what I wanted.

They were not meteorites.

On the contrary.

Each of the flames in the sky was a creature. A living creature. But not human. Far from it.

THE PHOTOS told what they looked like, but not till the Project Snatch ship went up and sucked one off the sky did we realize how large they were, that they glowed with an inner light of their own and—that they were telepathic.

From what I can gather, it was no problem capturing one. The ship opened its cargo hatch and turned on the sucking mechanisms used to drag in flotsam from space. The creature, however, could have stopped itself from being dragged into the ship, merely by placing one of its seven-taloned hands on either side of the hatch, and resisting the sucker. But it was interested, as we learned later; it had been five thousand years, and they had not known we had come so far, and the creature was interested. So it came along.

When they called me in, along with five hundred-odd other scientists (and Portales managed to wangle himself a place in the complement), we went to the Smithsonian, where they had had him installed, and marveled—just stood and marveled.

He—or she, we never knew—resembled the Egyptian god Ra. It had the head of a hawk, or what appeared to be a hawk, with great slitted eyes of green in which flecks of crimson and amber and black danced. Its body was thin to the point of emaciation, but humanoid with two arms and two legs. There were bends and joints on the body where no such bends and joints existed on a human, but there was a definite chest cavity, and obvious

buttocks, knees, and chin. The creature was a pale, milky-white, except on the hawk's-crest which was a brilliant blue, fading down into white. Its beak was light blue, also blending into the paleness of its flesh. It had seven toes to the foot, seven talons to the hand.

The God Ra. God of the Sun. God of light.

The creature glowed from within with a pale, but distinct aura that surrounded it like a halo. We stood there, looking up at it in the glass cage. There was nothing to say; there it was, the first creature from another world. We might be going out into space in a few years—farther, that is, than the Moon, which we had reached in 1960, or Mars that we had circumnavigated in 1966—but for now, as far as we knew, the Universe was wide and without end, and out there we would find unbelievable creatures to rival any imagining. But this was the first.

We stared up at it. The Being was thirteen feet tall.

Portales was whispering something to Karl Leus from Caltech. I snorted to myself at the way he never gave up; for sheer guff and grab I had to hand it to him. He was a pusher all right. Leus wasn't impressed. It was apparent he wasn't interested in what Portales had to say, but he had been a Nobel Prize winner in '63 and he felt obligated to be polite to even obnoxious pushers like my assistant.

The army man—whatever his name was—was standing on a platform near the high, huge glass case in which the creature stood, unmoving, but watching us.

They had put food of all sorts through a feeder slot, but it was apparent the creature would not touch it. It merely stared down, silent as though amused, and unmoving as though uncaring.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, may I have your attention!" the Army man caroled at us. A slow silence, indicative of our disrespect for him and his security measures that had caused us such grief getting into this meeting, fell through the groups of men and women at the foot of the case.

"We have called you here—" pompous ass with his *we,* as if he were the government incarnate, "to try and solve the mystery of who this being is, and what he has come to Earth to find out. We detect in this creature a great menace to—" and he went on and on, bleating and parodying all the previous scare warnings we had had about every nation on Earth. He could not have realized how we scoffed at him, and wanted to hoot him off the platform. This creature was no menace. Had we not captured him, her, it—the being would have burnt to a cinder like its fellows, falling into our atmosphere.

So we listened to him to the end. Then we moved in closer and stared at the creature. It opened its beak in what was uncommonly like a smile, and I felt a shiver run through me. The sort of shiver I get when I hear deeply emotional music, or the sort of shiver I get when making love. It was a basic trembling in the fibers of my body.

I can't explain it, but it was a prelude to something. I paused in my thinking, just ceased my existence if *Cogito Ergo Sum* is the true test of existence. I stopped thinking and allowed myself to sniff of that strangeness; to savor the odor of space and faraway worlds, and one world in particular.

A world where the winds are so strong that the inhabitants have hooks on their feet with which they dig into the firm green soil to maintain their footing. A world where colors riot among the foliage one season, and the next are the pale white of a maggot's flesh. A world where the triple moons swim through azure skies, and sing in their passage, playing on a lute of invisible strings, the seas and the deserts as accompaniests. A world of wonder, older than Man and older than the memory of the Forever.

I realized abruptly, as my mind began to function once more, that I had been listening to the creature. Ithk was the creature's—name?—denomination? — gender? — something. It was one of five hundred hundred-thousand like itself, who had come to the system of Sol.

Come? No, perhaps that was the wrong word. They had *been* . . .

Not by rockets, nothing that crude. Nor space-warp, nor even mental power. But a leap from their world—what was that name? Something the human tongue could not form, the human mind could not conceive?—to this world in seconds. Not instantaneous, for that would have involved machinery of some sort, or the expansion of mental power. It was beyond that, and above that. It was an *essence* of travel. But they had come. They had come across the mega-galaxies, hundreds of thousands of light-years . . . incalculable distances from there to here, and Ithk was one of them.

Then he began to talk to some of us.

Not all of us there, for I could tell some were not receiving him. I don't attribute it to good or bad in any of us, nor intelligence, nor even sensitivity. Perhaps it was whim on Ithk's part, or the way he wanted to do it out of necessity. But whatever it was, he spoke to only some of us there. I could see Portales was receiving nothing, though old Karl Leus's face was in a state of rapture, and I knew he had the message himself.

For the creature was speaking in our minds telepathically. It did not amaze me, or confound me, nor even shock me. It seemed right. It seemed to go with Ithk's size and look, its aura and arrival.

And it spoke to us.

And when it was done, some of us crawled up on the platform and released the bolts that held the case of glass shut; though we all knew Ithk could have left it at any second had it desired. But Ithk had been interested in knowing—before it burned itself out as its fellows had done—and it had found out about us little Earth people. It had satisfied its curiosity, on this instant's stopover before it went to hurtling, flaming destruction. It had been curious . . . for the last time Ithk's people had come here,

Earth had been without creatures who went into space. Even as pitifully short a distance into space as we could venture.

But now the stopover was finished, and Ithk had a short journey to complete. It had come an unimaginably long way, for a purpose, and though this had been interesting, Ithk was anxious to join his fellows.

So we unbolted the cage—which had never *really* confined a creature that could *be* out of it at will—and Ithk was there! not there. Gone!

The sky was still flaming.

One more pinpoint came into being suddenly, slipped down in a violent rush through the atmosphere, and burned itself out like a wasting torch. Ithk was gone.

Then we left.

Karl Leus leaped from the thirty-second story of a building in Washington that evening. Nine others died that day. And though I was not ready for that, there was a deadness in me. A feeling of waste and futility and hopelessness. I went back to the Observatory, and tried to drive the memory of what Ithk had said from my mind and my soul. If I had been as deeply perceptive as Leus or any of the other nine, I might have gone immediately. But I am not in their category. They realized the full depth of what it had said and, so perceiving, they had taken their lives. I can understand their doing it.

Portales came to me when he heard about it.

"They just—just *killed* themselves!" he babbled.

"Yes, they killed themselves," I answered wearily, staring at the flaming, burning sky from the Observatory catwalk. It always seemed to be night now. Always night with light.

"But *why?* Why would they do it?"

I spoke to hear my thoughts. For I knew what was coming. "Because of what the creature said."

"What it said?"

"What it told us, and what it did not tell us."

"It *spoke* to you?"

"To some of us. To Leus and the nine and others. I heard it."

"But why didn't *I* hear it? I was right there!"

I shrugged. He had not heard, that was all.

"Well, what did it say? Tell me," he demanded.

I turned to him, and looked at him. Would it affect him? No, I rather thought not. And that was good. Good for him, and good for others like him. For without them, Man would cease to exist. I told him.

"The lemmings," I said. "You know the lemmings. For no reason, for some deep instinctual surging, they follow each other, and periodically throw themselves off the cliffs. They follow one another down to destruction. A racial trait. It was that way with the creature and his people. They came across the mega-galaxies to kill themselves here. To commit mass suicide in our solar system. To burn up in the atmosphere of Mars and Mercury and Venus and Earth, and to die,

that's all. Just to die."

His face was stunned. I could see he comprehended that. But what did it matter? That was not what had made Leus and the nine other scientists kill themselves, that was not what filled me with such a feeling of frustration. The drive of one race was not the drive of another.

"But—but—I don't underst—"

I cut him off.

"That was what Ithk said."

"But why did they come *here* to die?" he asked, confused. "Why *here* and not some other solar system or galaxy?"

That was what Ithk had said. That was what we had wondered in our minds—damn us for asking—and in its simple way, Ithk had answered.

"Because," I explained slowly, softly, "this is the end of the Universe."

His face did not register comprehension. I could see it was a concept he could not grasp. That the solar system, Earth's system, the backyard of Earth to be precise, was the end of the Universe. Like the flat world over which Columbus would have sailed, into nothingness. This was the end of it all. Out there, in the other direction, lay a known Universe, with an end to it . . . but they—Ithk's people—ruled it. It was theirs, and would always be theirs. For they had racial memory burnt into each embryo child born to their race, so they would never stagnate. After every lemming race, a new generation was born, that would live for thousands of years, and advance. They would go on till they came here to flame out in our atmosphere. But they would rule what they had while they had it.

So to us, to the driving, unquenchably curious, seeking and roaming Earthman, whose life was tied up with wanting to know, *needing* to know, there was left nothing. Ashes. The dust of our own system. And after that, nothing.

We were at a dead end. There could be no wandering among the stars. It was not that we couldn't go. We could. But we would be tolerated. It was *their* Universe, and this, our Earth, was the dead end.

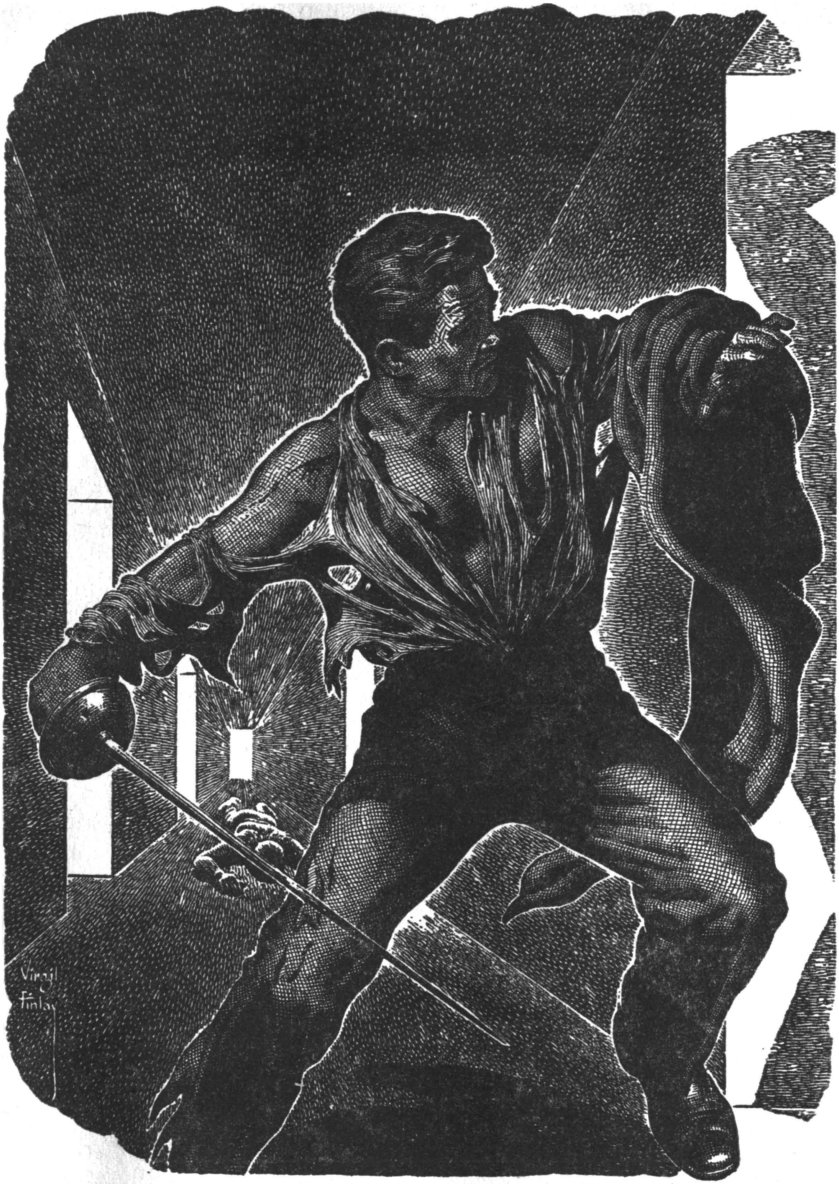
Ithk had not known what it was doing when it said that to us. It had meant no evil, but it had doomed some of us. Those of us who dreamed. Those of us who wanted more than what Portales wanted.

I turned away from him and looked up.

The sky was burning.

I held very tightly to the bottle of sleeping tablets in my pocket. So much light up there. **END**

Thinking machines, more than any other invention of mankind, can aid the creation of a workable and understandable environment by checking man's ideas, by saving him millions of trials and errors, and by speeding up immeasurably the acquisition of new facts —*John H. Toll*



Illustrated by Virgil Finlay

The Zades had their sample Earthling. What would eventually happen to the whole depended on what happened to the specimen. It was as simple as that!

SPECIMEN

BY CHARLES V. DE VET

AS OFFICIAL reporter on the project I was in Srtes' office when they brought the alien in. He was as tall as an average Zade, of pretty much the same color, and would have been able to pass as one of us except that he had no vestigial wings. It gave his shoulders an odd, flat, appearance, and somehow added to the abrupt awkwardness of every movement of his body. He might have had wires rather than muscles beneath his soft dark skin.

There were other, minor differences, of course. Hair grew not only on his head, but also on his body. Coarse, black hair. It could be seen on his hands and the exposed portions of his arms, and on his chest where his blouse was open at the neck. His eyes were brown and set wide apart, with long hairs on the lid edges. His nose had no hard upper ridge. The bone was covered only by the same flesh as the rest of his face.

He was accompanied by a Commander Leik, captain of the space ship that had brought him from Earth. When they entered Srtes rose and set the scroll he had been studying to one side. "I welcome you back," he

said to Leik, touching his cheek with the greeting finger of his left hand.

Leik respectfully returned the gesture. "I am once more content," he replied.

"Has he been instructed in our language?" Srtes asked, after the brief formalities were over. He indicated the Earth native.

"He has become quite adept during the eight great tides since we left his world," the Commander answered.

"It is well." Srtes turned and eyed the Earth man searchingly.

The alien returned the gaze, not defiantly, yet not at all subservientl-y. I could tell that he was ill at ease. A fine sprinkling of perspiration dotted his forehead, and he breathed slowly and deeply, as though carefully timing each inhalation and exhalation.

"Do you have a name?" Srtes asked him.

He made a nodding motion with his head. "John Wilson," he said. The words were clear enough, but spoken with a slurred, soft-palate, sound.

"You have two names?" The hairlines above Srtes' eyes raised slightly.

"It is the custom on their world," Leik supplied. "The surname has a clan connotation."

"You understand your purpose here?" Srtes asked the outworlder.

"Yes." He added nothing to the reply.

"You are aware that there are no restrictions on the study we may make of you?"

"Yes."

"Even that we may dissect you, or kill you, if we so desire?"

The alien's complexion changed subtly, becoming slightly lighter, and his lips pressed firmly together. He made the bobbing motion with his head again.

"His nodding signifies an affirmative reply," Leik interjected. "He volunteered to come with us, so he is quite familiar with the conditions."

"Volunteered?"

"It is strange," Leik agreed. "Yet when I offered to leave one of our men in return for a specimen of their race—so that mutual study might be made—I was firmly refused. It seems their culture has some absurd belief in inherent rights of its individual members. I was saved the inconvenience of abducting the necessary specimen when this one volunteered."

Srtes had difficulty grasping the concept. His forehead creased in concentration for a moment before he said, "Perhaps it would be better if I read the report first. In the meantime, please escort him to our physiologists on the ground floor. They can begin their study immediately."

FOR seventeen days they examined the alien. As expected, they learned quickly that his body was intrinsically weak. His vital organs had no protective walls of cartilage, and he was extremely vulnerable to the thrust of any sharp or pointed weapon.

Our first opinion was that he would prove an innocuous foe.

However, as the tests continued, we began to have some doubts. Physically he was quite powerful. His reflexes were sharp, and he showed an aptness at learning that surprised us. And his intelligence was above average.

The twentieth day I was ordered to report to Srtes' office. I found the other seven members of the council already conferring with Srtes when I entered.

"We have been unable to arrive at any definite conclusion thus far," Srtes was saying. "Therefore it becomes necessary to try him in the Big Run." He paused and frowned in annoyance as I made some slight disturbance. Hurriedly I took my place. I moved among these men only by sufferance.

"One of the crewmen on the space ship that brought him here," Srtes resumed, "a Zade named Ctvar, clashed with the alien several times during the voyage. He was restrained from violence by the captain. This Ctvar should prove an apt instrument for driving our hostage to the proper desperation for the Big Run."

Srtes switched on the large visi-screen that blanketed the front wall of his office. "The alien has been wandering through the streets for the past several hours," he said. "If we are fortunate, Ctvar should put in his appearance soon."

The visi-screen flickered once, cleared, and exposed an outside street. At the far end the alien—John Wilson, as he called himself—walked slowly, with his head down, and his hands in the pockets of the outlandish jacket he had brought with him. He proceeded aimlessly, with a peculiar, jerky, movement of his limbs. Perhaps he was lonesome for his home world, and uncertain of what awaited him.

A party of Zade men left a drinking place just ahead of him. They were quarreling—without any particular rancor—and one of them was loudly keening a verse of hunting song. At their forefront strode a burly Zade with a bush of red-orange hair.

"The big one is the crewman I mentioned," Srtes pointed out.

The burly Zade spied the alien and a pleased burst of laughter rumbled up from his chest. "Our unwinged friend from Earth!" he shouted. It was a deadly insult.

As the alien stopped uncertainly, Ctvar and his friends crowded around him. "Are all Earthlings wingless freaks?" one of them asked in a loud voice. The others laughed.

I expected the alien to show some fight, but he only stood silently.

The party of Zades showed their contempt by increasing the tempo of their insults. Still the Earthling did nothing.

Finally Ctvar became disgusted with the other's spinelessness and spat in his face, at the same time reaching out to grab him.

I heard several gasps from those around me as the alien moved. His actions the next moment were almost too swift for us to follow. He spread his legs slightly, as Ctvar reached for him, and swung his right fist. An instant later Ctvar lay on the ground. One leg made a continuous kicking motion, but it

was only a reflex action. Ctvar had been knocked unconscious!

The shouting of the other Zades quieted to an ugly murmur, and they surged forward. The Earthling set his back against the building behind him and struck out at his attackers, but they overwhelmed him by sheer numbers and dragged him to the ground.

They beat him and stamped several times on his body before a squad of sentinels appeared and broke them up.

"A fine start," Srtes said.

"Unless he is already dead."

"I don't believe he is," Srtes answered. "But if he is no more hardy than that, there will be no necessity for us to learn more."

The Earthling proved to be much hardier. And more stubborn.

The sentinels, of course, gave him no further help. They would not have stopped the fight, except that they had orders from Srtes to save our visitor from any disabling injury, if at all possible.

The Earthling lay on the ground for only a short while before he pulled himself to a sitting position. His face was bruised, blood ran from his nose, and one eye was swollen and closed. With the other he followed the progress of Ctvar and his party as they went on to the next drinking place.

When he climbed to his feet his left leg buckled but he limped about on it for a few minutes until he could walk. He strode purposefully toward the drinking place Ctvar's party had entered, and pushed his way inside.

Someone behind me muttered angrily. There was no pick-up in the drinking place and we could only watch the exterior of the building.

We did not have long to wait. The sound of commotion inside reached us soon after the alien entered. A short time later he tumbled out through the doorway. His body was limp as it landed in the dirt street. He lay motionless. A few minutes later we caught another view of Ctvar. He and two of his friends were carried from the drinking place.

The alien did not recover so quickly this time. His first movement was a slow rocking of his head. At each motion a low groan came from his lips. He made several attempts to regain his feet, but his legs would not hold him. At last he began crawling toward his room a few blocks away. He left a small trail of blood behind him.

It took him almost an hour of crawling, between rests, to reach his room.

I left Srtes' office with the council members. There would be little to observe for some days, and that little I could watch on the screen in my own cubicle.

ALL the next day the alien lay on his sleeping rug. He rose only in response to his nature calls, and once to fix himself a bowl of porridge. However, the following afternoon, though he was obviously still not at all physically fit, he dressed and left his room.

It took me a few minutes after

he reached the street to realize that he was heading for the Building Administrates. Undoubtedly to complain to Srtes of the treatment he had received at the hands of Ctvar and his party. And just when I was beginning to have some small amount of respect for the outworlder.

I switched hurriedly to Srtes and informed him of the imminent visit. At the same time I requested permission to cover the interview. The request was granted.

Srtes' visitor surprised us by making no complaint against Ctvar, and requesting no protection.

He declined the hassocks Srtes offered him, and stood with his hands clasped behind his back. "I've heard nothing from you for some time now," he said. "Does that mean your examiners are finished with me?"

"That is correct," Srtes answered courteously.

"What comes next?" he asked.

"Next?" Srtes repeated. "Why, that is your own decision. My interest in you ceased the day our study was complete. You are free now to do as you wish."

The alien thought that over for a time. "You do not intend to return me to Earth?" he asked.

"Is there any reason why you should expect us to?" Srtes replied.

"To me it seems there is," he said. "I fulfilled my part of the contract. Shouldn't I expect you, as a fair return, to see that I got back to Earth?"

Srtes' expression betrayed a mild irritation. "We had no contract," he said. "You were given to us to do with as we wished. Now that our study is completed, we owe you nothing."

"I expected as much," the alien said, almost without interest. "Will you tell me then, what I can do to help myself? I presume you do not intend to furnish me with food and shelter indefinitely."

"You will be permitted to keep your room until you find new quarters. The rest is your own responsibility."

He considered that for a long moment. "Do you have any suggestions as to how I might go about earning my living?" he asked.

"If you have any serviceable skill, you will probably be able to find employment for it. If not—" Srtes shrugged.

"How would I know what skills would be useful here? I know practically nothing about you."

"I'm afraid that's your own problem," Srtes said. "If you are unable to adapt, you will not survive. It is the natural law."

The alien's eyes narrowed. He seemed to be holding in check a cold anger. "Tell me," he said. "Do you consider yourselves just?"

Srtes' hair bristled until his head appeared twice its normal size. He half rose from his hassock, then slowly resumed his seat. I admired his self-restraint.

"We consider ourselves extremely fair," he said carefully. "Only the strong have the right to survive, and the fact that they do survive proves their strength. What you are determines your end. We are demanding nothing more from you

than we expect from our own citizens. Weaklings and inefficients are perishing every day on the ragged confines of our civilization. In simple justice I can offer you nothing more."

The Earthling's shoulders had gradually drooped as Srtes spoke. "Yours is a harsh philosophy," he mumbled at the end.

"It is our means of being certain that we maintain our race's fitness," Srtes explained patiently. "On this world only the strong and their progeny survive. As long as that natural struggle continues the strength of each generation will become greater."

The alien seemed to recognize Srtes' sincerity. He rose tiredly. "Thanks, for the explanation at least," he said, as he left the office.

THE NEXT step would be mine. During the rest of the afternoon, as I watched on the visiscreen, the Earthling kept to his room. Most of the day he lay on his sleeping rug, with his eyes wide open, staring at the ceiling. The rest of the time he paced aimlessly. The next morning he ate the last of his porridge, and as the day progressed I recognized that much of his unrest must be prompted by hunger. Yet his battered body needed the rest he was giving it.

He napped shortly after dusk, but only for a short time. When he awoke he put on his jacket and went outside. On the screen I followed his forlorn wanderings about the city.

After several hours he stopped and leaned against a wooden building. The night breeze had risen to its near-gale intensity by this time, and he pulled his jacket closer about him. It was only a few degrees below freezing, and he should have been warm enough, but I understood his race was unable to withstand any great degree of cold. And he was sore and hungry.

I received my call from Srtes then. He and the council had decided that the alien had reached the proper depth of misery and hopelessness. I was to contact him —and set him for the Big Run.

I found him still leaning against the same wooden building. He looked up at me from under his heavy brows as I neared him. I kept a safe distance between us. I remembered Ctvar. "Will you allow me to buy you something to eat?" I asked, deciding to use a direct approach.

I liked the way he did not ask any questions. He merely regarded me for a moment longer, then made his nodding motion.

All through the meal in the public eating place he remained silent. He ate hungrily but without haste and only when he'd finished did he speak again. "Why?" he asked.

"I do not understand what you mean," I evaded.

"I haven't learned much about you Zades since I've been here," he said, "but I have learned that you do nothing out of kindness. What do you want from me?"

I forced myself to smile. "You are right, of course," I said. "I do want something from you. Informa-

tion about your world. In return for your cooperation I will see that you continue to be well fed."

"I thought Srtes was through with me," he said.

"My interest is strictly personal," I answered. "I am what you would call a reporter. We give out our news on disseminators similar to your television."

I had caught his interest. I suppose he was eager to learn anything that he might use to make his way. "I've seen no signs of television," he said.

"This is one of our smaller cities," I improvised quickly. "There are only a few receiving sets here. Most of them are in the main halls of the various clans."

The explanation satisfied him. "Just what do you want to know?" he asked.

"Anything about your Earth that you think might be of interest to my listeners."

"Couldn't you get that from Srtes and his staff?"

"Their supply of information is limited. You should be able to give me much more."

He was actually eager to talk. It probably relieved his homesickness. We returned to his room, and our conversation took up most of the rest of the night. Toward morning he began questioning me.

"I've given you all the information you asked for," he said. "Now I'd like some in return. Can you suggest any way I can make a living on this world of yours?"

I thought for a moment. "You might be able to introduce some product of your civilization's technology that would be useful here. Not knowing your world, I couldn't suggest just what."

"I should be able to come up with something," he said thoughtfully. "Would I be allowed to manufacture and sell it if I did?"

"If you can demonstrate that you can do it better than anyone else, you will be given an exclusive right to control both its construction and distribution."

"Does that apply to every function of your society?" he asked.

"This world belongs to those who can prove their strength," I answered.

"That's a bit different than on Earth," he said. "We have always held that competition makes for the best results."

I had become quite interested in the discussion, and found myself giving a rather lengthy explanation of that part of our society's functioning. "Competition is very real here, even though it is less tangible than yours. The fact that a producer of a product or service may be displaced by anyone demonstrating a better or more efficient product or method, acts as a spur to best efforts. The price is set by the state, with the prices of competing bidders in mind. Under our system time and energy is not wasted making inferior goods, or those already in adequate supply. The purchasers, also, are never exposed to an inferior article."

I was becoming quite drowsy by this time and left after I'd answered a few more of his questions. I felt affection toward the Earthling. He was direct and honest. Be-

neath his placid manner he had a pride as fierce as any Zade. Tomorrow would be the crucial day for him.

LATE the next afternoon I bought a packet of food and brought it to the outworlder's room. "Did you have trouble with a Zade named Ctvar?" I asked him, immediately on entering.

"Yes, I did," he answered. "Why?"

"His clansmen have been pouring into the city all day. I just learned that they are looking for you."

His eyes widened slightly. "Isn't Ctvar able to handle his own trouble?"

"Ctvar is dead."

He seemed unable at first to find the words to speak. At last he said, "It happened in a fight that he started. Why should they seek revenge?"

"They would be poor clan brothers if they did not avenge him," I answered.

"Won't your sentinels do anything to stop them?" he asked.

"They won't help you," I answered. "You make no contribution to the state that would entitle you to their protection."

"Don't you have laws against this sort of thing?"

"An undetermined number of persons wish you dead. You, and perhaps I, want you to live. The majority is against us."

"But I'm at least entitled to a trial."

I puzzled over his meaning of the word, but could find no sure answer. "I don't know what the purpose of a trial would be," I said. "But it could change nothing. You have the ill will of many citizens."

He stared at the floor without any further questions.

Against the strong logic of my reasoning I felt a strong empathy toward him. He had conducted himself well on this world that must seem very strange to him. I offered what consolation I could. "There is this possibility," I said. "A majority is not always reckoned by numbers. If you can collect superior strength to your side—either by getting others to help you, or by your own ingenuity—and whip Ctvar's clan, the law will do nothing to punish you. You may even kill them with impunity, except for the revenge of the other clansmen."

"That's a small hope."

"It is," I agreed, belatedly recalling to mind my mission. I was probably this minute under disapproving observation. "You can't hope to fight them all," I continued. "That is why I would earnestly suggest that you run."

"To where would I run?"

"I gave that a good deal of thought on my way here," I said. "There's a space ship—on a meadow outside the walls, on the far side of the city—that you might be able to reach. You could take it and flee to your own world, probably the only place where you'd be safe."

"I wouldn't know how to operate it."

"The ship is very nearly automatic. Look," I said. I took a sheet of velum, and a stylus, and drew

three circles with smaller circles beneath them. "These represent the dials on the ship's control panel. The bubbles in the first dial must be set in this order—you'd better memorize them—blue-blue-yellow-blue-yellow. That's the range for your Earth. You'll have to shrink the last yellow bubble to about three-quarter size. That will give you a safety leeway. The ship will take itself in on motors from there.

"This second dial starts the ship. You merely squeeze the knob beneath it. The third dial is for stopping. As you are about to land, the tighter you grip the knob, the slower the ship will settle. You shouldn't have any trouble manipulating it."

His spirits seemed to revive somewhat. "It's worth a try," he said. "I have nothing to lose."

"It's only a few hours to nightfall," I told him. "That will be the best time to try getting through the city. I'd suggest you eat a good meal, and fix yourself a lunch to take along. Then nap if you can."

I was back in Srtes' office, watching the big screen, with the eight council members, when the alien started out. That was shortly after dusk. It is never completely dark on Zade.

He was shrewd enough to leave his room the back way, I observed. There was no rear door, but he let himself down from the balcony, dropping the last few feet to the ground.

"He is wearing a sword, I see," a white haired councilor remarked.

"Yes," Srtes answered. "He was given it when they were testing his weapons adaptability. But the fool filed it down until it is hardly thicker than a reed. It will be a poor weapon."

The alien hugged the wall of the house, and after glancing into the opening between it and the next, scurried quickly across. Two buildings farther on the rear court ended, and he had to go around to the front. When he reached the yellow pedestrian walk he did not turn, as we might have expected, but went on across a second courtyard.

"He realizes that the normally travelled yellow walks would not be very safe," Srtes said. "I wonder how long it will take him to solve the enigma of the others."

At the next white street he turned to his right. When he reached the end and learned that he had gone up a blind alley he retraced his steps and went across to a perpendicular blue street. He seemed a bit nervous now.

A third of the way down the blue walk he ran into the invisible electric shock wall, and staggered backward. The lunch packet that he carried fell from his hand, and he was obviously too stunned to remember to pick it up as he started back.

He had retreated only a short way before he paused and stood considering his situation. After a minute he returned and examined the buildings at each side of the electrified area. He must have found that the conduction outlets did not extend to the ground, for soon he began crawling forward on his hands and knees.

"A point for the alien," I heard

Srtes murmur. I detected a hint of admiration in his voice.

The alien kept his caution, for when the ground caved beneath his hand, at the end of the third street, he did not fall into the trap. He simply rolled back and lay quietly for a moment. Another decision.

He was equal to it. Rising to his feet, he took a short run and leaped for the balcony on the nearest building. From there it was an easy matter to reach the roof. Observing carefully below before each venture, he leaped from roof to roof until he reached the end of the street.

We lost him for a short time then. He had gone down into the last house. A few minutes later when a guard in front of the door stumbled abruptly backward and disappeared inside.

Another moment passed and the guard reappeared. He walked briskly up two streets before we became aware of what had happened. The alien had changed to the guard's clothes!

That would not take him far, of course. At the beginning of the third street he was stopped by two sentries. When they demanded a password, he whipped his sword out from beneath his cloak and ran the nearest through. The second shouted for help and drew his own sword. He offered only a moment of resistance. We saw then the alien's reason for grinding down the long sword. He handled it almost like a whip, and the sentry was unable to parry his swift thrusts.

As I noted the councilors' exchange of wondering glances I understood that a new weapons concept had been born.

When the second sentry fell, the alien sprinted into the house, and reappeared a minute later on the roof. Soon he was a block away from the scene of the fight.

The sentries at the second intersection had run back in answer to the shout for help, and the alien was able to cross the street unmolested. Once again he took to the roof, and when he came down again he had reached the Building Administrates. He was directly below us!

We followed him on the screen as he ran down the stairs to the basement. A sound from the front of the building attracted our attention and we switched back. Two sentinels had not been caught off guard. They had spotted him entering Administrates and were following closely.

We switched back to the fugitive, and just in time. He had dragged himself almost all the way under the bottom ramp of the stairs. Soon he had disappeared entirely. Now the sentinals were looking about in a confused way.

I heard Srtes beside me sigh heavily as he rose to his feet. "Do you realize," he asked no one in particular, "that he is already halfway through? All our calculations pointed to the odds being heavily against his reaching this far."

"The sentinels will find him in a few minutes," one of the councilors said reassuringly.

"Of course they will!" Srtes replied angrily. "But he was not supposed to be able to get this far."

THE ALIEN stayed beneath the ramp only until his pursuers ran past. Immediately after, he reappeared and strode without hesitation toward the nearest air vent. The screen stuck when he gripped its spokes and tried to turn it, but he exerted his strength and it gave slowly. He pulled it from its frame and let it rest on the floor.

Pushing his feet through the vent opening, still clutching the screen, he let himself down. Soon his feet came to rest on the inside ledge of the air tunnel and he balanced there as he screwed the screen back into place. He had vanished by the time the sentinels came running back.

"By the great hound of Hagras!" a councilor exclaimed. "Is there no end to the creature's ingenuity?"

None of us paid any attention to him; we were too busy watching the scene below. Only Srtes spoke. "Will the fools have brains enough to look for him down there?" he muttered. The excitement of the chase had obviously gripped him also. He clicked on a control button that split the screen into two scenes, and we were able to watch the activity above, as well as in the tunnels below.

We had no trouble following the flight of the alien. The lining of the tunnels had been prepared with a luminous coating that gave enough light for us to see the inside clearly.

As we watched, the alien stumbled and fell to the floor. He lay for a long moment, too weary to rise. By this time he must be exhausted. His stamina had already proven greater than we had anticipated.

He rose again and walked doggedly on, searching absent-mindedly in his pockets as he went. I knew he must be hungry and thirsty. He was probably only now remembering the packet he had lost early in his flight. But he did not slow his steady progress forward.

On the right half of the screen we noted that the captain of the sentinels had evidently figured out what had happened. Up ahead his men were hurrying into the numerous branches of the air tunnel and blocking every passage. As they had probably been ordered, they began walking slowly back. We kept our attention on the one who would intercept the fugitive.

The alien stopped occasionally and stood listening. Once he paused longer than usual. Was his hearing that good, I wondered, or was he just being cautious? After a minute he moved forward again, until only a fairly long bend in the tunnel branch separated him from the oncoming sentinel.

This time he did hear his interceptor. He ran quickly back, keeping a close observation on the wall to his left as he went. Soon he found the hiding place he sought. Probably he had noted it in passing before, and had kept it in mind for an emergency of this kind.

Where he stopped a connection in the sheet metal lining the tunnel had come loose and a dark space gaped open. He crawled inside.

The man was stupid, I thought, if he expected the sentinel to pass without noticing the hiding place.

The sentinel was not stupid. But then, we soon found out, neither

was the alien.

When the sentinel came to the opening he paused and jabbed tentatively into the dark cavity with the long sword that he carried in his hand. An instant later he stumbled forward, his knees gave beneath him, and he sagged to the floor.

After a moment the alien emerged. A portion of his cloak was wrapped around one hand, his sword in the other. We understood then what had happened. He had grasped the sentinel's sword in his padded hand and jerked him forward, at the same time thrusting out with his own weapon. The sentinel had been wounded critically.

However, the alien himself had not escaped unscathed. As he unbuttoned his jacket we could see a large spot of blood on the lighter surface of his blouse. He took a white cloth from a rear pocket of his trousers and pressed it between his jacket and the wound. When he went on this time he was very weary, obviously dredging up the last dregs of his strength.

In the short pause from action of the screen I looked around me. I was the only one in the room still sitting. The others had been unable to keep their seats during the excitement of watching the flight of the fighting alien. Some stood tensely or leaned against the walls, others paced restlessly, and one knelt on his hassock.

I returned my attention to the outside half of the screen. The captain of the sentinels was letting gas into the tunnel!

I felt a pang of regret. This was the beginning of the end. I wondered then if the alien did not have some inkling by this time that there was more to this than a mere seeking of revenge by Ctvar's kinsmen.

He went on only a few strides farther before he detected the gas. Even then his ingenuity did not desert him. As he stood with his nostrils spread a noise above him caused him to look up. He spied a metal covered opening into the tunnel directly over his head. A dozen sentinels, I saw with a side glance, were grouped around it.

After only a brief hesitation the alien returned to the Zade he had wounded a few minutes before. The man had ceased to move. Evidently he was dead.

The alien tossed the dead sentinel across his shoulders and carried him to the spot beneath the metal cover. Here he reached up and tapped sharply. The cover moved back cautiously, and the alien rammed the corpse upward, head foremost.

The body struck the cover and knocked it aside. The alien shoved it a bit higher, and it quivered as the swords above pierced it.

He dropped the dead carcass and sprinted forward. He had bought all the time he could, and there was nothing for him to do now except try to reach the end of the tunnel before the gas overcame him. His head was held high as he ran—he had deduced that they had to use a heavier-than-air gas. He did not have far to go.

He reached the end of the tunnel and stumbled onto a conduit leading from the main air compressor.

For a short time he lay sprawled across the metal duct, too exhausted to move. Finally he raised his head and looked wearily about him. He spied a vent opening on a level with his head, and with a determined effort he removed the screen and climbed through. Utter fatigue showed in line of his body.

Outside he stood for several minutes, drawing clean air deep into his lungs. There were no sentries here. They had not expected him to get this far. But they would come, soon after they failed to flush him from the tunnel.

The alien looked about, then headed unerringly toward the sand banked against the wall of the pumping station. He dug until he had made a long hollow then let his weary body fall into the shallow place and began piling sand over his legs. When he had covered all of himself except one arm, he burrowed it down until he was completely hidden from sight.

"How can such a man be stopped?" Srtes asked. His face was drawn and gray, as though he had suffered some great defeat.

THE ALIEN must have dropped off to sleep for he stayed in the sand for several hours, and did not emerge until shortly before daylight. Evidently he had first made an opening through which to observe, for there were no guards about when he stood up and shook the sand from his body.

He must also have studied all his surroundings. He had reached the city's end. The wall ahead of him was without a gate. He had been sent on a foredoomed errand. Though I had been acting under orders, I felt a kind of shame at the part I had played in the deception.

Even then, however, he was not defeated. He struck out without delay to his right where there were few sentries, using his rooftop technique when needed, and reached a side gate within an hour. He dispatched the final sentry by dropping on him from a convenient balcony—he was probably too exhausted to risk a fight—and let himself out through the gate.

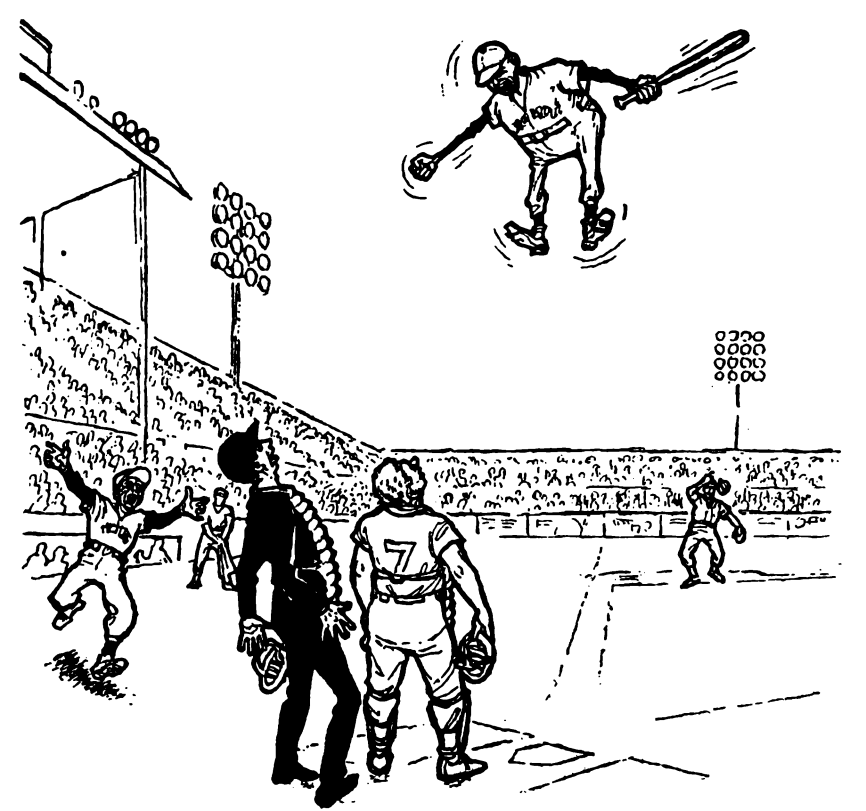
He walked with jaded steps back the way he had come, skirting the outside wall closely. At last he reached the meadow for which he had started seven hours earlier.

He must have guessed before this that the story of the waiting space ship was a hoax. But, giving the last of his strength, and hoping against hope, he had fought his way there. When the first rays of the morning sun showed him that the meadow was bare and empty his raw courage deserted him. He fell face forward on the red sand.

"I suggest we conclude our project with a final vote before we leave," Srtes said, a few minutes after we watched the alien come to the end of his resources. "I am certain no one of you can have any doubts as to what our decision must be." His passive face betrayed no emotion.

"Our plan, decided on soon after we learned of the Humans' existence," Srtes' voice droned on, "was to make an early contact. If the

(Continued on page 69)

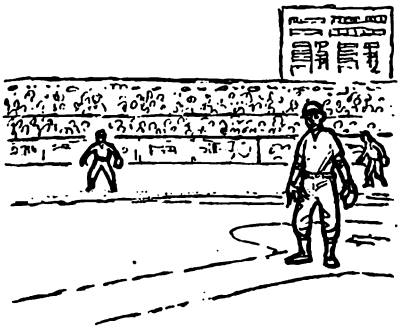


WHO'S ON FIRST?

BY LLOYD BIGGLE, JR.

Illustrated by Ed Emsh

Every manager dreams of a miracle team . . . Well, Pops finally got his hands on one and baseball was never the same again!



Priority Rating: Routine.
From: Jard Killil, Minister of Juvenile Affairs
To: All Planetary Police Organizations
All Interplanetary Patrol Units, Sectors 1247; 2162; 889; 1719
Subject: Juvenile detention escapee Muko Zilo

All law enforcement agencies are hereby informed of the escape of Muko Zilo from the Juvenile Rehabilitation Center on Philey, Raff III, Sector 1311. Escapee is presumed to have fled the planet in a stolen space yacht, Stellar Class II, range unlimited. His probable destination is unknown.

Escapee is not considered dangerous. He possesses low-grade intelligence and has no psi *ability higher than Class F.*

Kindly notify Philoy JRC immediately upon detention.

THE MAJOR league baseball season of 1998 was only two weeks old, and Manager Pops Poppinger wished it was over and done with. Since opening day his Pirates had managed to lose fourteen games while winning none, and Pops had only the Baseball Managers' Tenure Act of 1993 to thank for the fact that he was still gainfully employed. As a matter of fact, he had that same Act to thank for his regular paychecks during the 1996 and 1997 seasons.

"But it can't last," he muttered. "Congress will repeal the thing, and cite me as the reason."

He strode through the locker room without a glance at his lounging ballplayers, entered his private office, and slammed the door. If a *Do Not Disturb* sign had been available, he would have hung it out. He did not want to talk to anyone, especially to anyone wearing the uniform of the Pirates.

He dropped an armful of newspapers on his desk, tilted back in his chair until he could get his size thirteen feet in a comfortable position, and opened the top paper to the sports pages. The headline made him wince. "WHEN IS A PIRATE?" it demanded.

"In the venerable days of yore," the article said, "when professional baseball organizations found it necessary to attach themselves to some unfortunate city in the mistaken belief that civic loyalty would induce the population to attend games in person and pay for the privilege, the fair city of Pittsburg spawned the baseball Pirates. The record book says, if you care to believe it, that back in the sixties the Pirates won five consecutive world championships.

"Those days of myth and fable are far behind us. The Pirates wouldn't know how to take a game as a gift. They amply demonstrated this yesterday, when their opposition was stricken with paralytic generosity. The Dodgers committed six errors and presented the Pirates with nine unearned runs. But the Pirates lost, twenty-seven to nine."

Pops carefully folded the paper, and tossed it over his shoulder. "Bah!" he said, striking a match. He puffed deeply. "Let 'em rave. I ain't got any ballplayers, but I got lots of tenure." He reached for another paper. "PIRATES STILL IN REVERSE," a headline said. Pops tossed that one aside without reading it.

A knock rattled the door, and Dipsey Marlow, the Pirates' third-base coach, opened it a crack and stuck in his large, grinning face.

"Scram!" Pops snapped.

"Some kid here to see you, Pops."

"Tell him I got a bat boy."

"Oh, he's older than that—I think. He's got a letter for you."

Pops straightened up, and grinned. "From Congress?"

"It's from Pete Holloway."

"Send him in."

The kid shuffled in awkwardly. He was not taller than five-feet-five, and he looked just about five-feet-five wide. He was not fat—in fact, there was an unhealthy thinness about his freckled face, and his overly large ears gave his features a whimsical grotesqueness. His was the original square build. He was

shaped like a box, and he moved like one. He dragged to a stop in front of Pops' desk, fumbled through four pockets, and came up with a letter.

"Mr. Poppinger?"

The high, squeeky voice made Pops' ears ring. "I'm ashamed to admit it," he said. "But I am."

"Mr. Holloway told me to give this to you."

"The last I heard of Pete Holloway, he was lost in the woods up in Maine."

"He still is, sir. I mean, he still lives in Maine."

"You came clear out here to California just to give me this?"

"Yes, sir."

Pops took the envelope, and ripped it open.

"Dear Pops," he read. "This here kid Zile is the most gawdawful ballplayer I ever see on two legs. He is also the luckiest man south of the north pole. Put him out in center with a rocking chair and a bottle of beer and every ball hit to the outfield will drop right in his lap. He'll even catch some of them. Sign him, and you'll win the pennant. Yours, Pete. P.S. He is also lucky with the bat."

Pops scratched his head, and squinted unbelievingly at Zile. "What d'ya play?"

"Outfield," Zile said, and quickly corrected himself. "Outfield, sir."

"Where in the outfield?"

"Anywhere, sir. Just so it's the outfield, sir."

Pops wasn't certain whether he should throw him out, or go along with the gag. "I got three outfielders that get by. How about second or short? Between first and third I got nothing but grass."

"Oh, no sir. Mr. Holloway had me play short, and I made nine errors in one inning. Then he moved me to the outfield."

"I'm surprised he didn't kill you," Pops said. "But you played for Pete?"

"Yes, sir. Last summer, sir. I went to see him a week ago to find out when I could start playing again, and he said he thought you could use me, because your season started before his did."

"What'd you bat?"

"Six forty, sir."

Pops winced. "What'd you field?"

"A thousand, sir. In the outfield. It was—zero, in the infield."

Pops got up slowly. "Son, Pete Holloway is an old friend of mine, and he never gave me a bad tip yet. I'll give you a tryout."

"That's very kind of you, sir."

"The name is Pops. And it ain't kind of me, after what happened yesterday."

POPS was standing in the corner of the dugout with Ed Schwartz, the club secretary, when the new Pirate walked out onto the field. Pops took one look, clapped his hand to his forehead, and gasped. "My God!"

"Okay," Ed said. "You told me you wanted to use him. I told you I'd find him a uniform. I didn't guarantee to find him one that fit. He just isn't made the way our uniforms are made, and if I were you I'd make sure I wanted to keep

him before I called the tailor."

Pops walked over to the third-base coaching box, where Dipsey Marlow was standing watching batting practice. The Brooklyn dugout had just gotten its first incredulous look at Zilo, and Pops waited until the uproar faded somewhat before he spoke.

"Think Pete is pulling my leg?" he said.

"It wouldn't be like Pete, but it's possible."

"The way things is going, he ought to know better. I'll look him up when the season is over, and shoot him."

Dipsey grinned happily. He seemed rather pleased with himself, in spite of yesterday's loss. As third-base coach he'd been the loneliest man in the western hemisphere for seven straight days while the Pirates were being shut out without a man reaching third. Even if the Pirates were losing, he liked to have some traffic to direct.

"You got nothing to lose but ball games," he said.

Zilo had taken his place in the batter's box. He cut on the first pitch, and the ball dribbled weakly out towards the pitcher's mound.

"Like swatting flies," Dipsey said.

Zilo poked two more lazy ground balls back at the pitcher, and lifted a pop fly to the third baseman. Apparently satisfied, he borrowed a glove and wandered out to left field. He dropped a couple of balls that were hit right at him, and if a ball wasn't hit right at him he couldn't get near it.

"It's a joke," Pops said. "Pete must have seen him catch one. That's what he means by him being lucky."

Dipsey walked out to left field to talk with Zilo. He came back looking foolish. "The kid says it's all right—he's just testing the atmosphere, or something like that. It'll be different when the game starts."

"He says he hit six forty," Pops said dreamily.

"You going to use him?"

"Sure I'll use him. If I'm gonna shoot Pete, I gotta have a reason that'll stand up in court. As soon as we get ten runs behind, in he goes."

Pops headed back towards the dugout, and the tourists that were trickling into the grandstand lifted a lusty chorus of boos. Pops scowled, and ducked into the dugout out of sight. The dratted tourists were ruining the game. There had been a time when a manager could concentrate on what he was doing, but how was he supposed to concentrate with a mob of howling spectators literally hanging over his shoulder and shouting advice and comments into his ear? It got on the players' nerves, too. There was the Giants' Red Cowan, who'd been a good pitcher until they opened the games to tourists. The noise rattled him so he had to retire. And now so many tourists were showing up that they were talking about enlarging the stands.

"Why can't they stay home and see it on TV, like everybody else?" Pops growled.

"Because they pay money, that's why," Ed Schwartz said. "There's

a novelty or something in seeing a ball game in the flesh, and it's getting so some of these tourists are planning their vacations just so they can do that. Bill Willard—you know, the L.A. Times man—he was saying about half of these tourists come to California just to see a few National League games. The American League is getting the same treatment over in Arizona. And it's getting more profitable every year."

"I don't mind their watching," Pops said, "if only they'd keep their mouths shut. When I first came up, there was never anyone around during a game except the TV men, and they never shouted. Even the newspaper men watched on TV. Now they camp here during the season, and you can't go out after the morning paper without finding one on the steps waiting for an interview."

"You might as well get used to it. They're even talking about putting up some hotels for the tourists, so they won't have to commute from Fresno to see the games."

Pops sat down and borrowed Ed's pen to make out his lineup. Ed looked over his shoulder, and said, "How come you're not using that new guy?"

"I'm saving him," Pops said, "until we get far enough behind."

"You mean until the second inning," Ed said, and ducked as Pops fired a catcher's mask.

The game started off in a way sadly familiar to Pops. The Dodgers scored three runs in the first inning, and were threatening to blast the Pirates clear out of the league. With the bases loaded and one out, the Pirate third baseman managed to hang onto a sizzling line drive and turn it into a double play. Pops sank back and breathed easier, but not for long. Lefty Effinger, the Pirate pitcher, spent the afternoon falling out of one hole into another. In nine innings he gave up a total of seventeen hits, but a miraculous series of picked-off runners, overrun bases and double plays kept the Dodgers shut out after those first three runs.

In the meantime, Dodger pitcher Rube Ruster was having one of his good days. He gave up a scratch single in the second and a walk in the fourth, and by the ninth inning he had fanned twelve, to the general amusement of the hooting, jeering tourists.

The last of the ninth opened with Ruster striking out the first two Pirates on six pitches, and the Pirates in the dugout started sneaking off to the dressing room. Then first baseman Sam Lyle ducked away from an inside pitch. It hit his bat, and blooped out over the infield for a single. Pops called for the hit-and-run, and the next batter bounced a perfect double-play ball at the Dodger shortstop. The shortstop threw the ball into right field, and the runners got to second and third. Ruster paced angrily about the mound, and then walked the next batter on four pitches.

Pops jumped out of the dugout, and called time. He searched the bench, and saw Zilo looking at him expectantly from the far end. "Hit six forty, did he?" Pops muttered,

and yelled, "Zilo!"

Zilo bounced up, beaming. "Yes, sir?"

"Get out there and hit!"

"Yes, sir!"

He shuffled out towards the plate, and the uproar the tourists sent up when they saw him rocked the grandstand. From the third-base coaching box, Dipsey Marlow called time again, and hurried over to the dugout.

"You off your rocker? We got a chance to win this one."

"I know."

"Then let's get that thing out of there, and use a left hander."

"Look," Pops said. "You know derned well the way Ruster is pitching we're lucky to get a foul off of him. That hit was luck, and the error was luck, and the base on balls happened only because Ruster got mad. He'll cool off, now, and the only thing that keeps this going is luck. Pete says the kid's lucky. I want some of that luck."

Marlow turned on his heel, and went back to his coaching box.

Ruster coiled up and shot a bullet at home plate. Zilo swatted at it awkwardly—and popped it up.

The second baseman backed up three steps, waved the rest of the infield away, and got ready to end the game. The Pirate baserunners, running furiously with two out, came down the stretch from third in a mournful procession. Zilo loped along the base path, watching the Dodger second baseman and the ball.

The ball reached the top of its arc, and suddenly seemed to carry. The second baseman backed confidently into position, changed his mind, and backed up again. Suddenly he whirled and raced towards center field with his eyes on the misbehaving ball. The centerfielder had already trotted in towards the infield, and he picked up speed and came on at a rush. The second baseman leaped for the ball. The centerfielder dove for it. Neither man touched it, and they went down in a heap as the ball frolicked away.

The lumbering Zilo crossed home plate before the startled rightfielder could get to the ball. The Pirates had won, four to three, and they hoisted Zilo to their shoulders and bore him off to the dressing room.

Pops went over to the Dodger dugout to claim the ball. When he came back, he found Dipsey Marlow still standing in his third-base coaching box, staring vacantly towards the outfield.

"Luck," Pops said, and gently led him away.

RODNEY WILKS, the Pirates' brisk little president, flew over from L. A. that evening and threw a victory celebration in the ultra-modern building that housed the National League Offices. All the Pirates were there, and those that had families brought them. Women and children congregated in one room and the men in another. Champagne and milk shakes flowed freely in both rooms.

National League President Edgar Rysdale looked in on the party briefly, beaming approval. A team in a slump was bad for all the

teams—bad for the league. When the race was a good one, fans frequently paid a double TV fee, watching two games at once, or, if they had only one set, switching back and forth. If one team was floundering, National League fans would watch only one game—or none. They might even patronize the American League. So President Rysdale was not unhappy, and neither were the other owners, who stopped by to sample the champagne and talk shop with Wilks.

Even Fred Carter, the Dodger Manager, did not seem mournful, though Zilo's freak pop fly had ruined a nine-game winning streak for him. He backed Pops into a corner, and said with a grin, "I been watching pop flies for thirty-five years, and I never saw one act like that."

Pops shrugged. "I been watching baseball forty-five years, and I see something new seven times a week."

"Just the same, the next time that kid comes up, I pass out the butterfly nets. He don't look like a hitter. Where'd you get him?"

"Pete Holloway sent him out."

Carter arched his eyebrows. "He must have something, then."

"Pete says he ain't got a thing except luck."

"Ain't that enough? Think I'll go over and watch the Reds and the Giants. Want to come?"

"Nope. Now that I finally won one, I'm gonna get some sleep tonight."

Pops saw Ed Schwartz talking with Zilo, and he wandered over to see what line the club secretary might be handing out. Ed was talking about the old days, and Zilo was listening intently, his eyes sparkling.

"Each team had its own city," Ed said, "and its own ball park. Think of the waste that involved. There were always four parks that weren't in use, and more when day and night games were mixed up. Then there was all that traveling expense. Our hotel bill for the season used to look like the national debt, and the train and plane fares weren't any better. It was rough on the players, too, with all that traveling, and getting traded just as they got settled somewhere, or maybe trying to keep up one home during baseball season, and another one between seasons. Putting the entire league in one place solved everything. The climate is wonderful, and we almost never have a game postponed because of bad weather. We have two fields, and they're used twice a day, for two afternoon and two night games. Each club has its own little community where its personnel lives. Baseball, California, is growing, boy, and lots of players are settling here permanently and buying their own homes. You'll want to, too. It's a wonderful place."

"It's a soft place for club secretaries," Pops growled. "Ed used to have to worry about baggage, train schedules, hotel reservations, and a million and one other things. Now all he has to do is get the equipment moved a couple of hundred yards from one park to the other, now and then, and he gripes about it. Has he stopped talking long

enough to get you settled?"

"Oh, yes, sir," Zilo said. "I'm rooming with Jerry Fargo."

"All right. Come out early tomorrow. You gotta learn to catch a fly ball without getting hit on the head."

Dipsey Marlow nudged Pops' arm, and pulled him aside. "Going to play him tomorrow?"

"Might. We could use a little luck every day."

"I been listening to the big boys. Know what they're going to do? Put up a flock of temporary stands at World Series time. They think they might get fifteen thousand people out here for every game."

"That's their business," Pops said.

"Just tell me why anyone wants to take a trip and pay a stiff price to see a ball game, when he can sit at home in his easy chair and see it for fifty cents?"

"People are funny," Pops said. "Sometimes almost as funny as ball players."

President Wilks came over and placed a full glass in Pops' hand. Pops sipped the champagne, and grimaced. "It's all right, I guess. But it'll never take the place of beer."

"Finish in first division," Wilks said, "and I'll buy you enough beer to take you through the off season."

Pops grinned. "How about putting that in my contract?"

"I'll take care of it first thing in the morning." He grinned and prodded Pops in the ribs, but behind the grin his expression was anxious. "Do you think we have a chance?"

"Too early to say. Sure, we only won one out of fifteen, but we're only ten games out of first. If we snap out of it—well, the season's got a long way to go."

"I hope you snap out of it," Wilks said. "Managers have tenure, but presidents haven't."

Pops found a bottle of beer to kill the taste of the champagne, and he made a quiet exit after instructing Marlow to get the players home to bed at a reasonable hour. The National League's two playing fields were a blaze of light, and the shouts of the two crowds intermingled. There seemed to be a lot of tourists on hand. Pops walked slowly back to Pirateville, grumbling to himself.

He passed the mansion which had been designed for the manager, and which he had turned over to Dipsey Marlow, who needed space for his eight kids. Pops lived in a smaller house a short distance down the street. His middle-aged daughter Marge kept house for him, and she was already in bed when he got home. She didn't like baseball.

Priority Rating: Routine.
From: Jard Killil, Minister of Juvenile Affairs
To: All Planetary Police Organizations, Sectors 1247; 2162; 889; 1719.

All Interplanetary Patrol Units, Sectors 1247; 2162; 889; 1719.
Subject: Juvenile Detention Escapee Muko Zilo.
Reference: Previous memorandum 13B927D8.

Information indicates that an unidentified ship, possibly that of Es-

capee Zilo, traveled on a course roughly parallel to Trade Route 79B, which would take it into or through your sectors. Because of the time elapsed since his escape, it is assumed that Zilo has found an effective planetary hiding place. Immediate investigation requested. Escapee is not—repeat not—dangerous.

Notify Philoy JRC immediately upon detention.

POPS OPENED a three-game series against the Cubs with Zilo in left field. He figured the youngster would do the least damage there, since he was pitching Simp Simpson, his best right hander, and the Cubs had seven left-handed batters in their lineup. His strategy seemed to be sound. In the first six innings only two balls were hit to left. One was a line drive single, which Zilo bobbled for an error as the runner reached second. The other was a foul fly on which Zilo seemed about to make a miraculous catch until his feet got tangled up and spilled him. At the plate he waved his bat futilely and struck out twice while the Cubs were taking a five-run lead.

In the last of the sixth the Pirates got men on first and second, and it was Zilo's turn to bat. Dipsey Marlow called time, and as the tourists hooted he strode back to the dugout. "Take him out," he said.

"Why?" Pops said. "He's still batting .333. That's better than anyone else on this team."

"You gotta understand this luck thing. Yesterday it was luck to put him in. Today it's luck to take him out. I found a spider in my locker, today, and that means . . ."

"Hit and run on the first pitch," Pops said.

Zilo fanned the air lustily, and dribbled a grounder down to the first baseman. As he reached for the ball, it took an unaccountable eight-foot bounce over his head, and rolled into the outfield, picking up speed. Zilo pulled up at first, breathing heavily, and the two runners scored.

Sam Lyle followed with a lazy fly ball to right. Zilo moved off first base, and halted to watch the progress of the ball. The right fielder seemed to be having difficulties. He wandered about shading his eyes, backed up, finally lost the ball in the sun. The center fielder had come over fast, and he shouted the right fielder away, backed up slowly, and finally turned in disgust to watch the ball drop over the fence. Lyle trailed the floundering Zilo around the bases, and the score was five to four.

Three fast outs later, Dipsey Marlow returned to the dugout and squeezed in beside Pops. "I take it back," he said. "I won't argue with you again the rest of the season. But that spider of mine . . ."

Pops cupped his hands, and shouted. "Let's *hold* 'em, now! Let's *win* this one!"

". . . this spider of mine was in my sweat shirt, and my old mother always used to say spider in your clothes means money . . ."

"We got two hundred twenty-four games to go," Pops said. "Get

to work, and pick us off a sign or two."

Zilo came up again in the eighth, and got a rally started with a pop fly that three infielders chased futilely. He got to second on a ground ball that took a bad hop, and scored on a soft line drive that curved sharply and landed between the outfielders. Two more runs scored on hits that were just about as unlikely, and the Pirates took a two-run lead into the ninth.

The Cubs came back with a vengence. The first two batters lashed out sizzling singles. Pops prodded his bullpen into action, and went out to talk to Simpson. They stood looking down on the next Cub batter, the burly catcher Bugs Rice.

"Don't let him pull one," Pops said.

"He won't pull one," Simp said determinedly, through clenched teeth.

Rice did not pull one. He didn't have to. He unloaded on the first pitch, and drove it far, far away into left field, the opposite field. Pops sat down with the crack of the bat, and covered his face with his hands.

Suddenly the men on the bench broke into excited cheers, and there was a scattering of applause from the tourists. Pops looked up, saw runners on second and third, saw the scoreboard registering one out.

"What happened?" he yelled.

"Zilo caught it," Dipsey Marlow said. "Took so much time getting the ball back to the infield that the runners had time to touch up and advance, but he caught it."

"He didn't. I know a homerun when I see one, and that ball was gone. I can tell by the way it sounds, and I can tell by the way it leaves the bat. I heard that one, and I saw it go. It should have cleared the fence by twenty feet."

"Your eyes aren't as young as they used to be. Zilo caught it back by the fence."

Pops shook his head. He huddled down in a corner of the dugout while Simpson fanned one batter and got another on a tap to the infield, and the Pirates had won two in a row.

THAT WAS the beginning. The Pirates pushed their winning streak to twelve, lost one, won eight more. They were twenty and fifteen, and in fourth place. Zilo became something of a national sensation, and he kept his batting average around the .450 mark. He even got another home run, on a ball to the outfield that took crazy bounces in nineteen directions while Zilo lumbered around the bases. The rest of the team took courage and started playing baseball.

But not even Zilo could carry the Pirates above fourth place. Pops' pitching staff was a haphazard assortment of aching, overage veterans and unpredictable, inexperienced youths. On one day they would be unhittable; on the next they would be massacred, and Pops found to his sorrow that not even luck can overcome a nineteen-run lead. Still, the season drifted along with the Pirates holding desperately to fourth, and Pops began to

think they might even stay there, if the luck held out.

Then Zilo sprained his ankle. The trainer outfitted him with crutches and applied every known remedy, and a few unknown ones that Zilo suggested, but the ankle failed to respond.

"It beats me," the trainer said to Pops. "Things that should make it better seem to make it worse."

"How long will he be out?" Pops said gloomily.

"I won't even guess. The way things are going, it'll last him a lifetime."

Pops breathed a profane farewell to first division.

Zilo attended the games in his street clothes, hobbling on his crutches to the far end of the dugout where he watched the games with silent concentration. Oddly enough, for a time the Pirates' luck continued. Ground balls took freakish bounces, fly balls responded to unlikely air currents, and on some days opposition pitchers suffered such a loss of control that they would occasionally wander in and stare at home plate, as though to assure themselves that it was still there. Ollie Richards, the Reds' ace, and one of the best control pitchers in either league, walked ten men in one inning, and left the game on the short end of a six to three score without having given up a hit.

Zilo's broad, good-natured face took on an unhealthy pallor. Wrinkles furrowed his brow, and his eyes held a tense, haunted look. The Pirates' luck began to fade, and he grew increasingly irritable and despondent. On the day they slipped to fifth place, he sought out Pops.

Pops was feeling despondent enough himself, that afternoon. The Pirates' pitching had collapsed, and for the first time in a month he was back in second division. He hurried through the dressing room towards his office, and Zilo placed a large hand on his arm.

"Could I speak with you, sir?"

"Sure," Pops said. "Come along."

Pops held the door as Zilo swung through on his crutches. He pulled out a chair for him, and got him seated, and settled back with his own feet propped up on his desk. "Ankle any better?"

"I'm afraid not, sir."

"Takes time, sometimes."

"Sir," Zilo said, "I know I'm not a good ballplayer. Like they say, I'm just lucky. Maybe this will be the only season I'll play."

"Wouldn't say that," Pops said. "You're young. Luck has took a lot of men a long way in baseball."

"Anyway, sir, I like to play, even if I'm not good. And I'd like to have us win the pennant and play in the World Series."

"Wouldn't mind having another winner myself, before I retire."

"What I'd like to do, sir, is go home for awhile. I think I could get my ankle fixed up there, and I'd like to bring back some friends who could help us."

Pops was amused. "Ballplayers?"

"I think they'd be better than I am, sir. Or luckier, maybe. Do you —would you give them a trial?"

"I'll give anyone a trial," Pops said seriously. "Mostly shortstops and second basemen and pitchers, but I'll have a look at anybody."

Zilo pushed himself erect on his crutches. "I'll get back as soon as I can."

"All right. But leave a little of that luck here, will you?"

Zilo turned, and looked at Pops strangely. "I wish I could, sir. I really wish I could."

Ed Schwartz took Zilo in to L.A., and put him on a plane. For Maine. And at Baseball, Cal., the Pirates won two more games, and went into a cataclysmic slump. They lost ten straight, and slipped to sixth place. Pops put through a phone call to the Maine address Zilo had given him, and was informed there wasn't such a place. Then he called Pete Holloway.

"I wondered what was happening to you," Pete said. "I haven't seen the kid. He showed up here last summer and played a little sandlot ball for me. He never told me where he came from, but I don't think it was Maine. If he shows up again, I'll get in touch with you."

"Thanks," Pops said, and hung up.

Ed Schwartz sat eyeing him solemnly. "I suppose I better get a detective on it."

"Detectives," Pops said, and wearily headed for the field and another Pirate beating.

Two more weeks went by. The detectives traced Zilo to Maine, where he seemed to have vanished completely. The Pirates continued to lose, and tottered on the brink of last place.

Then Pops received an airmail letter from Zilo—from Brazil.

"I got lost," he wrote plaintively. "Our plane crashed in the jungle, and they won't let us leave the country."

Pops called President Wilks into conference, and President Wilks got on the phone to Washington. He knew enough of the right people to make the necessary arrangements and keep the matter out of the papers. Zilo was flown back on a chartered plane, and he brought four friends with him.

Ed Schwartz met them in L.A., and rushed them out to Baseball in President Wilks' own plane. They arrived during the fourth inning of another Pirate massacre.

"How's the ankle?" Pops demanded.

Zilo beamed. "Just fine!"

"Get in there, then."

Zilo got his friends seated on the bench, and went out to loft a long fly ball over the fence for a home run. The Pirates came to life. Everyone hit, and a ten to nothing drubbing was transformed like magic into a twenty-five to twelve victory.

After the game, Zilo introduced his friends—John Smith, Sam Jones, Robert White and William Anderson. Smith and Jones, Zilo said, were infielders. White and Anderson were pitchers.

Ed Schwartz had already taken in their proportions with a groan, and gone to work on the uniform problem. Their builds were similar to Zilo's, but there was much more of them. They were all about six feet six, and they towered over Pops, answered his questions politely, and showed a child-like interest in all that went on about them.

Pops called one of his catchers

over, and introduced him to White and Anderson. "See what they got," he said.

He took Smith and Jones out for a little infield practice, and watched goggle-eyed as they covered ground like jet-propelled gazelles and made breath-taking leaps to pull down line drives.

The catcher returned, drew Pops aside, and said awesomely, "They got curves that break three feet. They got sliders that do a little loop-the-loop and cross the plate twice. They got fast balls that I'm scared to catch. They got pitches that change speed four times between the mound and the plate. If you're figuring on pitching those guys, you can get yourself another catcher."

Pops turned the ceremony of signing them over to Ed Schwartz, handed releases to four players who weren't worth the space they were taking up on the bench, and went home to his first good night's sleep in more than a month.

Priority Rating: Urgent.
From: Jard Killil, Minister of Juvenile Affairs
To: All Planetary Police Organizations
All Inter-planetary Patrol Units
Subject: Juvenile detention escapees

All law enforcement agencies are hereby informed of the escape of four inmates of the Juvenile Rehabilitation Center on Philoy, Raff III, Sector 1311. Best information is that they have left Philoy. Escapees have high psi *ratings, and may use them dangerously.*

Kindly give this matter top-priority attention, and notify Philoy JRC immediately upon detention.

POPS STARTED Anderson the next day, against the Braves. The Pirates bounced forty hits over and through and around the infield, and scored thirty-five runs. Anderson pitched a no-hit game, and struck out twenty-seven. White duplicated the performance on the following day. Thereafter Pops worked them into his regular pitching rotation. He wasn't sure whether they hypnotized everyone on the field, or just the ball, but as Dipsey Marlow put it, they made the ball do everything but stop and back up.

Pops' regular pitchers suddenly began to look like champions with Smith and Jones playing behind them. In spite of their awkward builds, they ranged about the infield with all of the agility of jack rabbits. No one ever measured exactly how high they went up after line drives, but one sports writer claimed they were a hazard to air traffic, and should be licensed as aircraft. They sped far into the outfield after fly balls. Jones playing second, made more catches in right field than the right fielder, and it was not an unusual sight to see Jones and Smith both out in center field contesting the right to a descending ball while the center fielder made a hasty retreat. And both swung murderous bats.

The Pirates had won fifty-seven games in a row and rewritten the record book when Zilo timidly

knocked on the door of Pops' office. He was carrying a newspaper, and he looked disturbed.

"Sir," he said anxiously, "it says here that we're ruining baseball."

Pops chuckled. "They always say that when one team starts to pull away."

"But—is it true?"

"Well, now—if we kept on winning the way we are now, we wouldn't do the game any good. People like to see a close race, and if one team wins too much, or loses too much, a lot of people stop watching the games. And that ain't good. But don't let it worry you. We'll do our best to go on winning, and we're still going to drop a few, one of these days, and things will be back to normal. Your friends been playing over their heads and we've been luckier than usual. That can't last forever."

"I see," Zilo said thoughtfully.

That evening Pops ruefully wished he'd kept his mouth shut. Talking about a slump when you're winning . . .

Anderson got knocked out in the first inning, and lost his first game. White failed the next day, and the Pirates dropped five straight. Then they got off on another winning streak, but the talk about their ruining the game had quieted down. Pops never bothered to remind Zilo how right he'd been. He wasn't going to open his big mouth and jinx the team again.

"Those baseball players of yours," his daughter said to him one evening. "You know—the funny-looking ones."

"Sure I know," Pops said. "What about 'em?"

"They're supposed to be pretty good, aren't they?"

Pops grinned wickedly. "Pretty fair," he said. It would have been a waste of time referring Marge to the record book—or what was left of it, now.

"I was over at the bowling alley with Ruth Wavel, and they were there bowling. They had everybody excited."

"How'd they do?"

"I guess they must be pretty good at that, too. They knocked all the pins over."

Pops grinned again. Marge's idea of a sport was crossword puzzles, and she could go through an entire season without seeing a single game. The thought of Marge as a bowling critic—or any other kind of sports critic—amused him. "Nothing unusual about that," he said. "Happens all the time."

She seemed surprised. "Does it? The people there thought it was something special."

"How many times did they knock all the pins down?"

"I didn't count them. They knocked them all down every time. All evening. It was the first time they'd ever played, too."

"Natural athletic ability," Pops muttered. He was thinking that they'd never played baseball before, either, except that Zilo told him he'd been coaching them. The more he thought about it, the odder it seemed, but he was not one to argue with no-hit games, and home runs, and sensational fielding plays. No manager would argue with those.

To all ships of the Space Navy Sectors 2161, 2162, 2163. General Alert. Five escapees Juvenile Rehabilitation Center Philoy Raff III piloting stolen space yacht Stellar Class II. Range unlimited. Have been traced through Sector 2162. Destination unsurveyed quadrant C97. Contact Base Headquarters Sector 2162 for patrol assignments. Acknowledge Zan First Admiral.

THE SEASON leveled out into a five-team race for first place. The Pirates stayed in first or second, playing either with unbelievable brilliance or with incredible ineptness. Pops took the race stoically and shrugged off the tourist hysteria that enveloped Baseball, Cal. He was doing so much better that he had imagined in his wildest moments of pre-season optimism that it really didn't matter where he finished. He was a cinch to be Manager of the Year. He might add a pennant and a World Series, or he might not. But a smart manager quits when he's ahead—especially when he's well along in his sixties. Pops called a news conference, and announced his retirement at the end of the season.

"Before or after the World Series?" a reporter called.

"No comment," Pops said.

The club owners erected their World Series stands early, and the tourists jammed them—fifteen or twenty thousand for every game. Pops wondered where they came from. National League President Rysdale wandered about smiling fondly over the daily television receipts, and President Wilks sent Pops a load of beer that half-filled his basement.

Over in Baseball, Arizona, the American League officials were glum. The Senators had opened up a fifteen-game lead, and nobody cared any longer what happened in the American League.

"Three weeks to go," Pops told his team. "What d'ya say we wrap this thing up?"

"Right!" Zilo said happily.

"Right!" Smith, Jones, Anderson and White chorused.

The Pirates started on another winning streak.

To all ships of the Space Navy patrolling unsurveyed Quadrant C97. Prepare landing parties for planetary search. This message your authorization to investigate any planet with civilization at level 10 or below. Contact with civilizations higher than level 10 forbidden. Space intelligence agents will be furnished each ship to handle high-civilization planets. Acknowledge. Zan First Admiral.

When the last week of the season opened, the Pirates were in first place, five games ahead of the Dodgers. A provident schedule put the Dodgers and the Pirates in a three-game series. With twenty-two howling tourists in the stands and half of Earth's population watching on TV, White and Anderson put together no-hit games and the Pirate batters demolished the Dodger pitching staff. The Pirates took all three games.

President Wilks threw another

champagne party, and the sports writers backed Pops into a corner and fired questions.

"How about that retirement, Pops. Still going through with it?"

"I've gone through with it."

"Is it true that Dipsey Marlow will take your place?"

"That's up to the front office. They ain't asked my opinion."

"What if they did ask your opinion?"

"I'd faint."

"Who'll start the series? Anderson or White?"

"I'll flip a coin," Pops said. "It don't matter."

"Going to give the Senators a sporting chance, eh?"

"No comment," Pops said.

President Wilks and League President Rysdale carried him away from the reporters and into the league offices.

"We have a proposal from the American League," Rysdale said. "We'd like to know what you think of it, and what you think the players would think of it. They'd like to split up the series, and play part of the games here, and part in Arizona. They think it would stir up more local interest."

"I wouldn't like it," Pops said. "What's wrong with the way it is now? Here one year, there the next year. What do they want to do—travel back and forth between each game?"

"We'd start out with four games here, and then play five in Arizona, if one team hasn't won seven by then. And if we needed to we'd come back here for the last four. Next year we'd start out with four in Arizona. It used to be done that way, years ago."

"I like it better the way it is. I think the players would, too. One ball park is just like another, so why change around?"

"They think we would draw more tourists that way than we would playing in one place. As far as we're concerned, we're drawing capacity crowds now. It might make a difference in Arizona, because they haven't got so many population centers over there."

"They just thought of it because it's in California this year," Pops said. "Next year they'd want to change back."

"That's a thought," Rysdale said. "I think I'll tell them it's too late to change, but we might consider it for next year."

"Good," Pops said. "Next year you can play it in Brazil, for all I care."

In the hallway Pops encountered half-a-dozen of his players, crowding around infielder Jones. "What's up?" he asked Dipsey Marlow.

"Just some horsing around. They were practicing high jumps, and Jones just cleared eight feet."

"So?"

"That's a world record by some ten inches. I just looked it up."

To Jard Killil, Minister of Juvenile Affairs: Space ship presumed that of JRC Escapees found down in jungle unsurveyed quadrant C97. Planet has type 17D civilization. Intelligence agents call situation critical. Am taking no action pending receipt of further instructions. Requesting Ministry take charge and

assume responsibility. Zan First Admiral.

POPS RETIRED early the night before the series opened, having ordered all of his players to do the same. Marge was out somewhere, but Pops left the night light on, and went off to bed. He didn't sleep, but he was relaxing comfortably when she came in an hour later.

She marched straight through the house and into his bedroom. "Those ballplayers of yours—the funny looking ones—they were at the bowling alley!"

Pops took a deep breath. "They were, eh?"

"They'd been drinking!"

Pops sat up and reached for his shoes. "You don't say."

"And they were bowling, only—they weren't bowling. They'd pretend to throw the ball but they wouldn't throw it, and then the pins would fall down anyway. The manager was mad."

"No doubt," Pops said, pulling on his trousers.

"They wouldn't tell anyone how they did it, but everytime they waved the ball all the pins would fall down. They'd been drinking."

"Maybe that's how they did it," Pops said, slipping into his shirt.

"How?"

"By drinking."

He headed for the bowling alley on the dead run. The place was crowded with players from other teams. American and National League, and quite a few sports writers were around. The writers headed for Pops, and he shoved them aside and found the manager.

"Who was it?" he demanded.

"Those four squares of yours. Jones, Smith, Anderson, White."

"Zilo?"

"No. Zilo wasn't here."

"Did they make trouble?"

"Not the way you mean. They didn't get rough, though I had a hard time getting them away from the alleys. They left maybe ten minutes ago."

"Thanks," Pops said.

"When you find them, ask them how they pulled that gag with the pins. They were too drunk to tell me."

"I got some other things to ask them," Pops said.

He fought his way to a phone booth, and called Ed Schwartz.

"I got you," Ed said. "They may be back at their rooms by now, but we won't take any chances. Don't worry about a thing—I'll handle it."

"Sure. I won't worry about a thing."

He pushed out through the writers, and headed for Bachelor's Paradise, the house where the unmarried Pirates lived with a couple of solicitous houseboys to look after them. Ed Schwartz was already there. All the players were in bed—except Smith, Jones, Anderson, White and Zilo. The others knew nothing except that Zilo had been concerned about his friends' absence, and gone looking for them.

"You go on home," Ed said. "I'll find them."

Pops paced grimly back and forth, taking an occasional kick at

a piece of furniture. "You find them," he said, "and I'll fine them."

He went home to bed, but he did not sleep. Twice during the night he called Ed Schwartz, and Ed was out. He got ahold of him at breakfast time, and learned that no trace of the players had been found. The reporters had gotten ahold of the story, of course, and the headlines mocked Pops over his coffee.

PIRATE STARS MISSING!

Ed Schwartz had notified both President Wilks and President Rysdale, and President Rysdale had called in the F.B.I. The local police were out in full strength, President Wilks hired some private detectives, and by ten o'clock police in every city in the country were looking for the missing Pirates.

When Pops got over to the field for the late-morning workout there was still no word. He banned newsmen from the field and dressing room, told Lefty Effinger he might have to start, and went around trying to cheer up his players. The players remembered only too well their fourteen game losing streak at the beginning of the season, and the collapse that had followed Zilo's departure. Gloom hung thickly in the Pirates' dugout.

An hour before game time, Pops was called to the telephone. It was Ed Schwartz, in L.A. "I found them," he said. "They're already on their way back. They'll be there in plenty of time."

"Good," Pops said.

"Bad. They're still pretty high—all except Zilo. I don't know if you can use them, but that's your problem."

Pops slammed down the phone.

"Did they find 'em?" Dipsey Marlow said.

"Found 'em dead drunk."

Marlow rubbed his hands together. "Just let me at 'em. Ten minutes, and I'll have 'em dead sober."

"I dunno," Pops said. "Somehow, these guys are different."

They made it with time to spare, and Dipsey Marlow went to work enthusiastically. He started by shoving the recalcitrant players into a cold shower, fully dressed. Zilo stood anxiously looking on.

"I'm sorry," he said to Pops. "I'd have stopped them, but they went off without me. And they never had any of that alcohol before and they didn't know what it would do to them."

"That's all right," Pops said. "It wasn't your fault."

Zilo had tears in his eyes. "Do you think they can play?"

"Just leave 'em to me," Marlow said. "I'm just getting started."

They left them to him, and he came out later, looking frustrated. "I just don't know," he said. "They tell me they're all right, but I think they're still drunk."

"Can they play?" Pops asked.

"They can walk a straight line. I won't say how long a straight line. I suppose you got nothing to lose by playing them."

"There ain't nothing else I can do," Pops said. "I could start Effinger, but what could I use for infielders?"

THERE IS something about a World Series. Even Pops, who had seen every one for forty-five years as player, manager or spectator, felt a momentary thrill and a clutching emptiness in his stomach as he moved to the top step of the dugout and looked out across the sunlit field. The stands, permanent and temporary, stretched the full length of the foul lines, and they were jammed with tourists. The Standing Room Only signs were up in the box offices, but there really wasn't any of that.

Ed Schwartz stood at Pops' elbow, looking at the crowd. "There's something about a hot dog that's different when you buy it at a ball park," he said.

"Ptomaine," Pops growled.

Clutching his lineup, he strode towards home plate to meet the umpires and Senator Manager Bert Basom.

Basom grinned evilly. "Your men well rested? I hear they keep late hours."

"They're rested well enough."

A few minutes later, with the National Anthem played and the flag raised, Pops watched critically as Anderson took his last warm-up pitches. He warmed up lazily, as he always did, and if he was feeling any after-effects, it wasn't evident to Pops. Feeling better, he returned to the dugout.

But Anderson got off to a shaky start. The Senator's leadoff man clouted a tremendous drive back into left field, but Zilo made one of his sensational, lumbering catches. The second batter drove one back through the box. Jones started after it, got his feet tangled up, and fell headlong. Smith flashed over with unbelievable speed, gloved the ball, and threw to first—too late. Anderson settled down, then, and struck out the next two batters.

In the Pirates' half of the first, Zilo collected one of his lucky hits, and Smith followed him with a lazy fly ball that cleared the fence. The Pirates led, two to nothing.

Jones followed, and the first pitch was a called strike. Jones whirled on the umpire, towering over him, his big face livid with rage. His voice carried to the dugout over the noise of the crowd.

"You wouldn't know a strike zone if I measured it out for you!"

Pops started for home plate, and Jones saw him coming and meekly took his place in the batter's box. Pops called time, and went over to talks to Dipsey Marlow.

"Darned if I don't think he's still tight. Think I should lift him?"

"Let him bat," Marlow said. "Maybe he'll connect."

The pitcher wasted one, and followed it with a curve that cut the outside corner. "Strike two!" the umpire called.

Jones' outraged bellow rattled the center field fence. "What?" he shrieked. He moved back around the catcher.

The umpire gestured patiently to show where the ball had crossed the plate. Pops started out of the dugout again. The umpire said brusquely, "Play ball."

The pitcher wound up again, and as the ball sped platewards Jones suddenly leaped into the air —and stayed there. He hovered six

feet off the ground, and the ball crossed the plate far below his dangling feet. It was missed completely by the startled catcher and bounded back to the screen.

The umpire did not call the pitch. He took two steps forward, and stood looking up at Jones. The crowd came to its feet, and players from both teams edged out of their dugouts. A sudden, paralyzed hush gripped the field. The voices from around home plate carried far.

"Come down here," the umpire called.

"What'd you call that pitch? Strike, I suppose. Over the plate between my knees and armpits, wasn't it?"

"Come down here."

"You can't make me."

"Come down here."

"You show me where it says in the rules that I have to bat with both feet on the ground."

The umpire moved down the third base line, and summoned his colleagues in for a conference. Pops walked out to home plate, and Zilo followed him.

"Jones," Zilo said pleadingly.

"Go to hell," Jones said. "I know I'm right. I'm still in the batter's box."

"Please," Zilo said. "You'll spoil everything. You've already spoiled everything."

"So what? It's about time we showed them how this game should be played."

"I'm taking you out, Jones," Pops said. "I'm running in a pinch hitter. Get back to the dugout."

Jones shot up another four feet. "You can't make me."

The umpire returned. "I'm putting you out of the game," he said. "Leave the field immediately."

"I've already left the field."

Pops, Zilo and the umpire stood glaring up as Jones glared down. At that critical moment Smith took charge. He walked slowly out to home plate, soared over the heads of those on the ground, and gave Jones a healthy clout on the jaw. Jones descended heavily, and Smith calmly landed nearby, and dried his hands on his trousers.

Effective as his performance was, nobody noticed it. All eyes were on the sky, where a glistening tower of metal was dropping slowly down towards the outfield. It settled easily on the outfield grass, while the outfielders fled in panic.

The crowd murmured excitedly, and just as suddenly lapsed into silence again. A port opened in the side of the towering, needle-like object, and a landing ramp came down. The solitary figure that emerged did not use the ramp. He stepped off into mid-air, and drifted slowly towards the crowd at home plate. There he landed, a tremendous figure, square like Zilo and his friends, but a startling seven plus feet tall, trimly uniformed in a lustrous brown, with ribbons and metallic braid in abundance.

Zilo, Jones and Smith stood with their eyes downcast while the others stared. Anderson and White moved out of the Pirates' dugout and walked forward haltingly. The stranger spoke one crisp sentence, which nobody understood—nobody, that is, except Zilo, Jones, Smith, Anderson and White.

Smith and Jones lifted slowly, and floated out to the ship, where they disappeared through the port. Anderson and White turned, and trudged wearily across the infield, across the outfield, and mounted the ramp. Only Zilo lingered.

A few policemen moved nervously out of the stands, and surrounded the ship. The hush continued as the tourists stared and half of Earth's population watched on TV.

Pops looked at the ship, at the oversized stranger, at Zilo. Tears streaked Zilo's face.

"I'm sorry, Pops. I hoped we could finish it off for you. I really wanted to win this World Series. But I'm afraid we'll have to go."

Pops responded absently. "Go where?"

"Where I came from. It's another world."

"I see. Then—that's how come you guys played so well."

Zilo wiped his eyes, and blubbered miserably. His big, good-natured face was in the throes of torment. "The others did," he sobbed. "I'm only a class F telekinetic myself, and that isn't much where I come from. I guess you'd call me a moron. I did the best I could, but it was a terrible strain keeping the balls I hit away from the fielders, and stopping balls from going over the fence, and holding balls up until I could catch them. When I hurt my ankle I tried to help out from the bench, and it worked for awhile. Sometimes I could even control the ball enough to spoil a pitcher's control, but usually when the ball was thrown fast or hit fast I couldn't do anything with it, unless I was in the outfield and it had a long way to go. So I went back where I could get my ankle fixed, and I got the others. They're really good—all of them Class A. Anderson and White—those are just names I had them use—they could control the ball so well they could make it look like they were pitching. And no matter how hard the ball was hit they could control it, even when they were sitting on the bench."

Pops scratched his head, and said dazedly, "Make it *look* like they were pitching?"

"They just pretended to throw, and then they controlled the ball—well, mentally. Any good telekinetic could do it. They could have done it just as well sitting on the bench, or they could help out when one of our other pitchers was pitching. And Smith and Jones are levitators. They could cover the ground real fast, and go up as high as they wanted to. I had a terrible time keeping them from going too high and spoiling everything. When we hit the ball Anderson and White could make it go anywhere they wanted, and they could control balls the other team hit, and nothing could get past Smith and Jones unless we wanted it to. We won the pennant, and I hoped we would win this World Series, but they had to go and drink some of that alcohol, and I guess Jones would have spoiled it even if we hadn't been caught."

The stranger spoke another crisp sentence, and Zilo wiped the tears from his face and took Pops' hand. "Good by, Pops," he said. "It was

lots of fun. I really like baseball."

He walked slowly out to the ship, passed the police without a glance, and climbed the ramp.

Reporters were crowding out onto the field, and the stranger waved them back and spoke in English in a booming voice. "You shall have a complete explanation at the proper time. It is now my most unpleasant duty to call upon the man you call your president, to deliver the apologies of my government. Muke Zilo says he did the best he could. He did entirely too much."

He floated back to the ship. The ramp lifted, and the police scattered as the ship plummeted upwards. The umpire-in-chief shrugged his shoulders and gestured with his mask.

"Play ball!"

Pops beckoned to a pinch hitter, got a pitcher warming up to replace Anderson, and walked back to the dugout. "They been calling me a genius," he muttered to himself. "Manager of the year, they been calling me. And how could I lose?"

A sports writer leaned down out of the stands. "How about a statement, Pops?"

Pops spoke firmly. "You can say that the best decision I made this year was to retire."

An official statement was handed out in Washington before the game was over. That the Senators won the game, twenty-three to two, was irrelevant. No one cared, not even the ballplayers.

Priority Rating: Routine.
From: Jard Killil, Minister of Juvenile Affairs
To: Milz Woon, Minister of Justice
Subject: Escapees from the Juvenile Rehabilitation Center, Philoy, Raff III, Sector 1311.

A full report on the activity of these escapees has no doubt reached your desk. The consequences of their offence are so serious they have not yet been fully evaluated. Not only have they forced us into premature contact with a Type 17D civilization for which neither of us is prepared, but our best estimate is that they have destroyed a notable cultural institution of that civilization. They are juveniles, their only motive seems to be that they were enjoying themselves. Nevertheless they are old enough to know better. I favor a maximum penalty.

BASEBALL, as students of the game had frequently remarked down through the years, was essentially a game of records and statistics. The records were there for all to see—incredible records, with Jones and Smith tied with a hundred and forty-two home runs and batting in the vicinity of .600, with Anderson and White each hurling two dozen no-hit games, and with the strike outs, and the extra-base hits, and the double plays, and the games won, and the total bases, and the runs batted in, and the runs scored, and the multitudinous individual and team records that the Pirates had marked up during the season, the record book was permanently maimed.

It was not the beginning of the end. It was the end.

Who had done all this? Four kids, four rather naughty kids, who, according to the strange man from outer space, were not especially bright. Four kids from another world, who had entered into a game requiring the ultimate in skill and intelligence and training and practice, entered into it without ever playing it before, and made the best players Earth could offer look like a bunch of inept Little Leaguers.

The records could be thrown out, but they could not be forgotten. And it could not be forgotten that the four kids had made those records when they weren't half trying —because they didn't want to make Earth's ballplayers look too bad.

Supposing—just supposing—the people from outer space were to send a team made up of intelligent adults? No one cared to contemplate that possibility.

So it was the end. The Senators took the World Series in seven straight games, and nobody cared. The stands were empty, and so few people paid to see the games on TV that the series ended up a financial catastrophe. A committee met to decide what to do about the aliens' records, and reached no decision. Again, nobody cared. The various awards for the most valuable players and managers of the year and the various individual championships were never made. The oversight was not protested. People had other things on their minds.

And when a dozen TV comedy teams simultaneously resurrected an ancient, half-legendary, half-forgotten comedy sketch, they got no laughs whatsoever. The sketch was called, "Who's on First?" **END**

SPECIMEN

(Continued from page 45)

Humans proved a race whose physical and mental strength equaled or surpassed our own, prudence would indicate that we seek peace. If we found them weak, we would exterminate them, and take over their world. The dominant factor in our decision was to be our study of the specimen we brought back, and how he conducted himself in the Big Run. We have all seen the results of that experiment."

Srtes looked about the room. "All we all agreed that the only wise course—in view of our observations—is to do everything in our power to establish peaceful relations with the Earthmen?"

There was no dissenting vote.

"When our envoys leave for Earth an honored place will be made for our visitor," Srtes added.

The meeting was over, and the fateful decision had been made. For the next great tide much of my work would consist in reporting the tearing down of the Big Run.

The alien had believed it to be one of our cities. It was a great deal of work, constructing the Big Run to test one alien specimen, but the results had proven the effort warranted. Now it could be disposed of.

Perhaps this very day we would begin dismantling the giant testing maze. **END**

COMMANDER Losure gave orders to his navigator to bring the ship in on the satellite out of sight of the prying telescopes which no doubt existed on such an invitingly green planet. He was a cautious man and didn't intend to lose any more crew members if he could help it. He could tell by the unusually poor handling of the ship that the crew was still demoralized from the brush with the high I.Q. slugs on that last planet which they had approached so directly. They'd lost three men in that scrap, one of them a highly-valued anthropologist. There were only two more of those left in the freeze locker. Too bad it couldn't have been a radio operator, there were plenty of those on ice.

The computer classified it "rabbit" and Montresig was not one to argue, long ears or not!

Rabbits Have LONG Ears

BY LAWRENCE F. WILLARD

The Commander's thoughts were interrupted by his second officer who entered without the customary military burp.

"I'll forgive you this time, Montresig," said the Commander, "but we can't relax regulations now, can we. Anything new to report on this planet?"

"No, Your Loftiness," said Montresig, after giving a belated burp, "there's nothing to add to what we already know, but then we've just come to rest on this clinker of a moon. I don't imagine, however, that we've located our long lost ancestors or our mythical home planet. There doesn't seem to be a race in this galaxy that walks upright on two good legs with two arms, two

eyes, nose, mouth and other standard equipment."

"Could be we'll find one this time," said the Commander. "We know it's an oxygen planet, and that there are intelligent beings there, judging from the cities we can see and their use of radio."

'Maybe," grumbled Montresig, "but they won't be men. If they're not slugs they'll be talking fish or intellectual spiders, or something equally repulsive. And I can tell you one thing, whatever we find, if it has brains it will want to fight."

"Now Montresig, don't be bitter. We've only examined a couple hundred planets. There are many more and you know we'll have to take a look at as many as we can. I tell you, however, we won't take any more chances. Unless we find out they're pretty much like us we won't go near the damn planet."

"How do you propose to find that out, Your Loftiness? We can't see anything that small by telescope, we haven't learned much so far by listening to them, and it's pretty dangerous business using the dredge . . ."

"Ah, my dear Montresig, the crux of the matter is that we *can* tell about them, I believe, from listening to them. Judging from the reports I got from Communications, this is the talkingest planet in the galaxy. They are utilizing the entire radio spectrum we know and, I suspect, some portions of it we don't know. All they do is talk. There must be millions of individuals on that planet jabbering in a dozen different languages. Our language technicians have decoded two of the major tongues already and have fed the information to the main computer. All radio signals in those languages are now being fed directly to the computer and the information is being classified and cross-referenced."

Montresig's furry countenance brightened. "Then we won't have to send down the dredge?"

"I hope not, Montresig, I do not like to bring strange life forms aboard the ship. Remember planet 187 in the Dghorzid system?"

Montresig shuddered. "I'll never forget. When that monster materialized in the hold I snapped on the stasis field and it had no effect. I tried every last trick in the bag including seven kinds of poison gas. Luckily the dredge operator was able to catch him and throw him back where he came from but the hold was a shambles and two men had to have extensive repair work."

"Well," said the Commander, "I don't like the dredge at all, but I suppose it's better than landing and having to do battle with slugs. I swear I was certain there was no intelligent life on that planet. By the way, I'm having an anthropologist thawed out now, that leaves only one more in the freeze locker and we can't operate without one. Take care nothing happens to him, Montresig."

Commander Losure made the sign of dismissal and Montresig burped gracefully and withdrew. The Commander signaled communications. After a considerable delay a burp sounded from the speaker on the wall and a voice announced: "Troniff here. May I

serve Your Loftiness?"

"Troniff," said the Commander, "the delay is inexcusable. Does the computer have its belly full yet?"

"Your Loftiness, the reference tapes are full, but the machine is unable to present a full picture of the dominant life form. It appears, however, that they are much like us in general body shape. Unfortunately, we can get no reference point from which to judge their size. They are exceedingly ferocious and blood thirsty, and apparently war among themselves continuously."

"I'm tempted to leave now," said the Commander. "I'll have to use the dredge, I suppose . . . Are you sure it won't do some good to listen to their communications awhile longer?"

The speaker was silent for a moment, then Troniff spoke.

"I don't like to mention this, Your Loftiness, but my engineers have found several unidentified types of emission besides those carrying speech frequencies. They think that one particular type characterized by an extremely broad frequency range just might be transmission of visual images . . ."

"I don't believe it," said the Commander. "We've been trying to do that for hundreds of years without success and so far as we've been we've never found another race in the galaxy as far advanced technologically as ours. These people don't even have space flight."

"They have artificial satellites up," said Troniff, "We're monitoring signals from one, and from what I gather they're apt to have something up on this moon before long."

"Any chance of finding out how they transmit visual images—if they really do?"

"Not a chance," said Troniff. "My engineers can't even conceive of a device that could convert these signals into a picture."

"That's all, Troniff. Notify Montresig that he's to meet me immediately in the dredge room with the anthropologist and a dredge operator."

The commander sighed. What irony that the only truly peaceful race in the galaxy should be the only one to discover interstellar flight. For four thousand years the Kaar had had their ships and had colonized hundreds of planets until they had lost track of which one they started from. In all that time they had avoided planets with intelligent life, had never found any other ships in space. Now, thought the Commander, we have to go looking for trouble just to satisfy our curiosity as to where we started from.

Montresig introduced the newly-thawed anthropologist to him on the dredge room balcony and Commander Losure briefed him on the importance of his job.

"We don't believe this race has any connection with ours," said the Commander. "It's too savage. And yet, we haven't found another race as far advanced in science, nor one that appears to be so similar to ours. Our problem is to find out a little more about them, their physical size, whether it's safe to contact

them, which I personally doubt."

"Is it your intention to bring back one of these intelligent beings with the dredge?" asked the anthropologist.

"You know better than that, or maybe you don't." said the Commander. "Anyway, you should know that it is against our code of ethics to cause harm to any intelligent being. That dredge is set to reject any living creature capable of a high order of thought and that control is sealed against our use. The idea is to bring back artifacts that might tell us something about the people of the planet . . . maybe they have a written language and have something that approximates our scrolls, maybe they have drawings. I'd especially like to snag one of the visual image receptors our communications engineers think they have."

"The dredge operator is ready," said Montresig. "The computer controls have been switched to this balcony and the stasis beam has been checked."

COMMANDER Losure looked up at the dredge operator in his glassed-in booth high on the opposite wall of the hold. He gave a quick hand signal and transferred his attention to the floor of the vast hold below him. A shimmering mistiness began to form in the center of the floor. Commander Losure could feel the tension of his companions as they waited. It was a blind grab; the dredge operator had no way of knowing what would be scooped up at the end of his force beam. Slowly the mistiness grew more dense, darkening to an impenetrable cloud, and then vanished with an audible snap leaving a strange alien mechanism on the floor of the hold. It resembled a huge cylinder resting on tractor-like treads.

From the balcony the men scurrying across the floor seemed dwarfed by the object. Unheeding of any danger they swarmed over it, measuring, testing, amassing information to be fed to the computer.

"Holy Ghosts of My Departed Ancestors," gasped Montresig, "what is it?"

"You know as much about it as I do, my dear fellow," the Commander said. "As soon as the engineers get through poking at it we'll find out what the computer thinks it is."

"I'll bet it's a weapon of some sort," said Montresig. "They're almost always fighting down there according to the data we have and there's frequent mention of a device called a hydrogen bomb. If it's what I think it is I have no desire to visit them in person."

A figure detached itself from the group of men surrounding the hugh contrivance and came hurrying to the elevator entrance beneath the balcony. In a moment he appeared on the balcony, burped perfunctorily, and handed Commander Losure several sheets of script. The Commander read them into a microphone grill which was part of the remote panel feeding into the main computer. He waited until a red light glowed, indicating that the material had been integrated. He

pressed a stud and spoke into the microphone again. "Classify," he said.

"Information in storage banks reveals object to be a gun," said the loudspeaker. "Gun: an instrument variously known as revolver, heater, rod, betsy, automatic, typewriter, gat, which refer to. Carried by gunmen, cowboys, mobsters, killers, cons, doughboys, cops, G-men, marines, gangsters and kids, which refer to. Weapon fires projectile known as bullet, lead, shell, slug, which refer to. Solid projectile pierces body of individual causing serious injury and death. It is used with that intention. No information on size of instrument previous to captured speciman which is nearly fourteen zeng . . . about five and a quarter man-lengths . . . long. Sample excerpt demonstrating use: 'Blinky snapped the gun from his holster and fired from the hip. (sound of explosion) The big cowpoke grabbed at his chest and blood spurted between his fingers. With a look of surprise on his face he slumped to the barroom floor.' "

"What do you make of that?" asked the Commander.

"I'd have been suprised, too," said Montresig.

"They're bloodthirsty giants," said the anthropologist. "If that's a pocket weapon they'd be so big you couldn't get one into this hold.

"I don't believe it," said the Commander. "I think there's something wrong somewhere. Possibly guns come in various sizes. This could be a stationary weapon, perhaps, to blow buildings apart instead of people, though I can't figure out why anybody would want to. I'm going to send the dredge back once more to make sure we aren't being misled."

"I think you're wrong," said Montresig. "All evidence does point to a race of giants, evil creatures at best, even if maybe they do have two eyes, a nose and a mouth like us. Not that I don't think it's a good idea to send the dredge back," he added hastily at the sight of Commander Losure's glowering countenance.

The Commander signaled to the dredge operator again and they waited while he returned the gun to wherever he got it and fished for something else from the surface of the green planet.

The anthropologist cleared his throat. "You can't deny that the telescope shows us the most gigantic cities to be found anywhere in the galaxy."

"That doesn't necessarily mean that the inhabitants are physically large, only that there may be a lot of them," said the Commander.

"Or both."

Their attention turned to the floor of the hold as the opaque cloud rapidly grew darker and vanished again with a snap.

Montresig's reaction was the same as before.

"Great Shades of My Holy Ancestors," he said. "What is it?"

"It is assuredly an animal," said the Commander, "not unlike some we have on our own planet. I'll have the biologists and medics examine it." He turned to the anthropologist. "You go, too, Alfvis."

The animal, which had appeared

stunned when it first appeared, now began to turn around, making clicking noises on the floor. As the men approached it from all directions it looked about nervously, opened its mouth to show some glistening teeth and proceeded to make a long, harsh noise. Alfvis made the mistake of approaching too closely to the beast which wheeled and kicked him head over heels some distance away. Montresig touched a red button on the railing and stasis beams converged on the animal freezing it instantly. It toppled over and lay stiffly on the floor of the hold. Alfvis dragged himself to his feet and shouted up to the balcony. "Ask the computer about animals with long ears."

The Commander spoke into the microphone again. "Four-legged animal, long ears. Classify."

"Rabbit," said the computer. "An animal variously known as bunny, hare, coney, peter, uncle wiggly. Strong rear legs. Progresses over ground erratically. Consumes vegetation. Multiplies with great rapidity. Lays egg at Easter Time. It is generally considered timid and is hunted for food. Sample excerpt demonstrating relationship: 'Lon climbed over the stone wall and continued across the woodlot towards his cabin, the carcasses of three rabbits slung over his shoulder . . . there would be rabbit stew tonight.' "

"Holy Gods in Their Celestial Quarters," said Montresig. "Did you hear that? Is there any question in your mind now about the size and ferocity of these people?"

"Considerable," said the Commander. "That computer has made mistakes before, witness that last planet. Those were supposed to be garden snails, those slugs that gave us such a walloping. I don't think we get the right information through to it."

"But Your Loftiness," wailed Montresig, "everything adds up, you can see for yourself . . . their giant cities, their warring on each other, the information the computer gave us . . . it isn't safe to land on that planet."

"No, I suppose not," sighed the Commander. "But do you realize the implications? Here we have a highly advanced race just ready to take off into space . . . and according to our information they are savage war-making giants. If I bring that news back our Supreme Goodness is apt to issue orders to evacuate several hundred planets and move to some other galaxy—Let's try the dredge once more."

Commander signaled the dredge operator and waited a reasonable length of time before he was informed that something was wrong with it and that it would be some time before repairs could be made.

"I give up," said Commander Losure. "I have orders not to land on a questionable planet and I've learned my lesson. Either that computer has a few loose connections or those people are broadcasting pure nonsense. I just don't believe in giants, much less in scientific ones. Get ready to leave, Montresig, and see that you make an accurate written report of this whole situation."

"What do we do with the animal,

Your Loftiness?"

"The dredge is busted, so what do you think we can do with it? Heave it out the airlock. It can stay here on the moon until the first explorers come up from the planet, which won't be long, and they can have rabbit stew."

The great ship lifted from the dark moonscape, leaving behind the frozen form of the first earth being to have crossed space, a surprise for the crew of the first manned moon rocket, if not the makings of rabbit stew.

Somewhere, a million miles beyond the sun, the ship accelerated rapidly. The Commander looked up from his desk as Montresig entered smartly with a precision burp.

"Alfvis is back in the freeze locker and repairs are going forward on the dredge, but it'll be a long job."

"It doesn't matter," said the Commander. "We're going home. I'm committed to bringing back a report on this planet now, but I don't like it and will advise further study of it by other expeditions before any desperate measures are taken such as evacuating the galaxy."

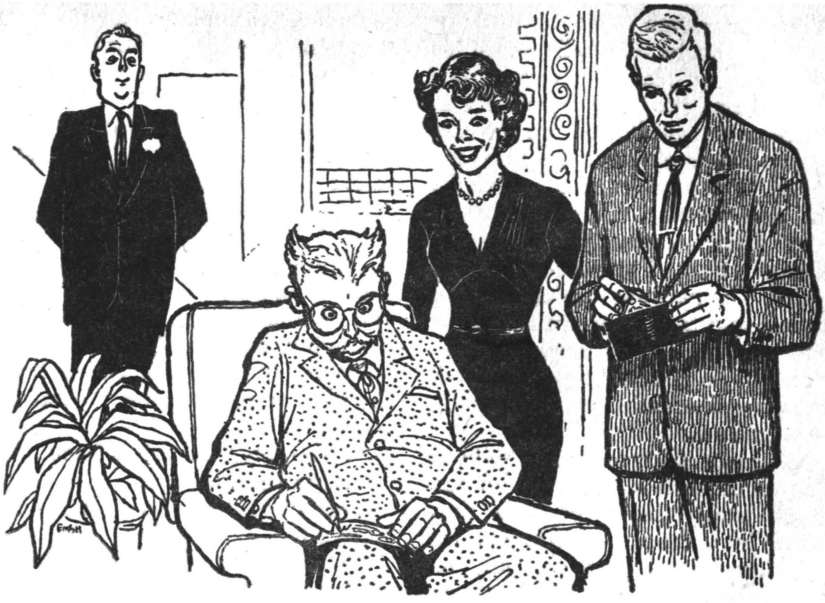
"It's funny about that rabbit," said Montresig. "I noticed as we shoved it out the lock that it had semi-circles of some hard metal, probably iron, nailed to its feet."

"That is peculiar," said the Commander. "Almost like the shoes we attach to the feests' hooves before the children ride them. Just for the fun of it, Montresig, why don't you give that information to the computer and see what it says?"

"Can't," said Montresig. "I wiped the memory tanks clean. I don't think it means much, anyway; a rabbit's a rabbit, shoes or no shoes."

The Commander nodded and Montresig burped and withdrew.

END



Illustrated by Ed Emsh

The Short Snorter

His saucer was parked in the woods, and Mr. Steariot (from Venus) was parked in the lobby . . .

THREE paths led through the woods away from the resort hotel, and of the three two were clearly marked: one with a sign that said it led to the lake, the other pointing toward the golf links. The third pathway was unmarked, and this was the one that inevitably the lovers and the honeymooners took —the path that Alice and Fred

BY CHARLES EINSTEIN

Daniels followed today.

The sun was unusually warm for this time of year, but only a few yards along the pathway Fred and Alice were swallowed up by the great and near-great trees of the forest. The sunlight was, except for an occasional patch of light here and there, warded away by the foliage above. The forest was very quiet. The pathway bridged a silent brook, and then, perhaps a third of a mile into the woods, turned abruptly to the left and the woods became even more dense, the pathway narrow.

Through the trees to the right at this point was a clearing, an unusual grassy circle perhaps sixty yards in diameter. It was not the clearing itself, however, but, instead, the glint of color in the sunlight that caused Fred and Alice to stop and look.

Alice said, "Fred, what *is* that?"

"Don't know," he said. "Something red. Let's look."

The two of them turned off the path and made their way through a dismal barrage of thicket to the clearing that lay beyond. When they got there, they saw the circular object—*vehicle* might be a better word. It was possibly fifteen yards in diameter. It seemed to be made of three rings, smaller ones bottom and top and the larger one ribbing the center, and to be constructed of some kind of plastic. Between the central and upper rings were set a series of small windows. The entire thing was painted a gaudy red.

"What do you think it is?" Fred said.

"A flying saucer," Alice said promptly. She laughed a little, but clutched at her husband's arm. "Isn't it?"

"I don't know."

"But what else would it be?"

"I don't know," Fred said again. "Let's look inside."

"Fred," Alice said, "You'd better not—"

"Don't be silly," he said, and walked resolutely up to the object and, standing on tiptoe, peered through one of the windows.

"What is it?" Alice called from the edge of the clearing. "What do you see?"

"It's empty," he called back.

"What's inside?"

Fred shook his head. "You won't believe it."

"What?"

"It's got a steering wheel," he called out hollowly. "And some dials."

"My goodness," Alice said. "Is it a real one?"

"How do I know?" he said, and rejoined her, casting a series of glances uncertainly over his shoulder at the bright red saucer behind him. "What do you suppose we ought to do?"

"Tell somebody," Alice said. "I suppose."

"Who do we tell?"

"I don't know. There must be *somebody—*"

They looked almost guiltily at each other. "Nobody'll believe us," Fred said.

"Why not?" Alice said. "It's *here,* isn't it?"

Fred stopped and thought. "Who knows how long it'll stay?"

They looked at each other again.

Then Alice said slowly, "If we went back and got the camera—"

Swiftly, they made their way back toward the hotel through the quiet forest. When they got there, they found Mr. Mason, the manager of the hotel, adjusting the badminton net in front of the main porch. Mr. Mason loosed a ready smile. "How's everything?" he said. "Find enough to do?"

"Yes, thank you," Fred said to him. "We were just walking through the woods. We came back for our camera. Then we're off again."

Mr. Mason nodded. "Find the saucer?"

Fred looked at him. "You mean the flying saucer?"

The manager nodded again. "I see you did find it. Good. Take a picture of it, by all means. I've already taken a whole batch myself."

"You have?" Fred said, frowning. "What's it all about?"

"It's a flying saucer," Mr. Mason said. "From Venus. Mr. Stearіot, who piloted it, is a guest here. I can introduce you to him if you like. He speaks excellent English."

[illegible]d Daniels said, "Wait a minute. You—"

"Oh, there's no point in it," Mr. Mason said in a weary tone of voice. "No point in it at all. I took pictures. I tried to get the Army up here. I wrote letters." He shrugged expressively. "It's a cynical age we live in, I guess. Everybody's very polite, but they make it clear they think it's just a gimmick I worked up to get the hotel publicity." He nodded seriously. "The whole trouble's with Mr. Stearіot. If he had a light bulb for a head, or seven legs, or talked funny, why, it'd be a different thing entirely. But he looks and acts just like you or I. Here I've got a legitimate flying saucer sitting on my property and you might as well try to tell them it's a—well, a flying saucer! For all they'll believe me. Now you two have seen it with your own eyes and you don't believe it either."

Fred swallowed and looked at Alice for a moment. Then he said, "What did you say his name was?"

"Mr. Stearіot," Mr. Mason said. "Actually, he's just as happy nobody believes he's from Venus. If they believed it, they'd probably lock him up in jail somewhere or impound his saucer. As it is, he says this is the first vacation he's had in years." Mr. Mason looked unhappily about him. "He's probably in the lounge now. Want to meet him?"

Fred said dazedly, "I—"

"Ah, come on," Mr. Mason said. "He won't bite you." He led the way up the steps of the porch and into the lounge and over to where a small, mustachioed man, wearing eyeglasses and appearing to be in his late forties, was working a crossword puzzle in the morning paper.

"Mr. Stearіot," Mr. Mason said, "I should like you to meet Mr. and Mrs. Daniels, also guests here. They have just seen your saucer."

"Charmed," Mr. Stearіot said, and got to his feet. He shook hands with Fred Daniels. "Are you here for a long stay, Mr. Daniels?"

"I'm not sure," Fred said, a little unhappily. "Mr. Mason told us you

were from Venus."

"I told them about you, Mr. Stearіot," Mr. Mason said. "Naturally, they don't believe it any more than anybody else."

"No reason why they should," Mr. Stearіot said amiably. "No reason in the world, if I may coin a phrase. Dr. Phelps at the Institute didn't believe it either."

Mr. Mason said, "Mr. Stearіot here had a long interview with Dr. Phelps of the Geophysical Institute at Princeton when he first arrived here on Earth with us."

"Oh," Fred said. He gazed uncomfortably at Mr. Stearіot. "We didn't mean to interrupt you."

"I was only doing the crossword puzzle," Mr. Stearіot said. "Do you know a two-letter word for sun-god?"

Alice said, "Is this your first trip here?"

"You mean here to the hotel," Mr. Stearіot said, "or to Earth?"

"Earth," Fred said, dismally.

"My second," Mr. Stearіot said. "First trip I wound up near Leningrad. Terrible time. I thought they'd talk English, but they don't, and they thought I was an American, and two of their officials got into the saucer with me, and the only way I could save myself was to take off with them. They're on Venus now."

"This accounts," Mr. Mason broke in, "for the way those two high Russian officials suddenly disappeared from sight three years ago. You remember? Everybody thought they'd been liquidated."

Fred Daniels looked around the room. A hollow, frightening feeling had come upon him. There were hundreds of questions he could have asked, and yet he wanted nothing so much as to be away from there.

His wife Alice, though, was constrained to learn more about Mr. Stearіot. She said, "Mr. Stearіot, may I ask you something?"

"By all means," Mr. Stearіot said, and blinked owlishly at her.

"Do you," Alice said to him, "carry any money?"

It was, Fred Daniels realized, a marvelous question. If there were sham here, this would be the quickest way to—

"Why, of course," Mr. Stearіot said, and reached for his wallet. "Let's see—health insurance—saucer driver's license—here, my dear. A five-djino bill." He extracted a yellow banknote and handed it to Alice. The banknote, slightly larger than an American dollar bill, was remarkably similar in other particulars. It had upon it a picture of a flying saucer, the figure 5, and spelled out, "FIVE DJINOS".

"Let me sign it for you," Mr. Stearіot said, taking out a pen. "You can have it for a souvenier."

"Like the short snorters in the war," Mr. Mason, the hotel manager, said. "You remember them, Mr. Daniels? Where people got famous signatures on five and ten and twenty-dollar bills and exchanged them and what not, and they called them short snorters?"

"I remember," Fred Daniels said. "Something like that."

"Five djinos on Venus," Mr. Stearіot said, signing his name with a flourish, "is worth about twenty

dollars here on Earth. No official rate of exchange, of course, but from what I've seen, that's about what I'd judge. Here you go." He handed the bill over.

"Well, wait, then," Fred Daniels said. "I ought to sign one of *our* bills for *you.*"

"Ah, no need for that," Mr. Stearіot said. "No doubt you need twenty dollars worse than I need five djinos."

"Don't be ridiculous," Fred said, a little stiffly; and, by now committed, he went into his wallet and came out with a twenty dollar bill. He signed his name to it, using Mr. Stearіot's fountain pen.

"Wonderful," Mr. Stearіot said. "How nice to have met you both."

"I feel very badly about this," Mr. Mason, the hotel manager, said to Fred and Alice. The three of them were on the porch outside. "This short snorter business always seems to happen whenever I introduce Mr. Stearіot to anyone. Dr. Phelps at the Institute gave him fifty dollars. Can you imagine that?"

"It's interesting in its way," Fred said. "It just occurred to me: Mr. Stearіot can spend Earth money here, but we can't spend Venus money."

"That's true," Mr. Mason said. "On the other hand, Mr. Stearіot has never once, to my knowledge, been the one to bring up the subject. I think it's quite painful to him, really. But the same thing inevitably occurs to everybody he meets. You know, let's see the color of your money. I guess people are pretty much the same everywhere —that is, everywhere on *Earth.* They judge everything in terms of money, including whether you've even been born on Earth! 'Let's see your money,' they say to Mr. Stearіot, and out he comes with one of those damn five-djino bills, and we're off."

"You know," Alice Daniels said thoughtfully, "in a way it's a lesson. Isn't it, Fred? I mean, everybody *is* money conscious. Maybe too much so. I'm not sorry it cost us twenty dollars to meet Mr. Stearіot."

"You may be right," Fred said to her. "You may be right. Who knows, some day this five-djino bill may be a very valuable—"

"There you go again," Alice cut in. "Always putting it in terms of money."

"But *you're* the one," Fred said, "who thought to ask him about it in the first place."

"Don't quarrel," Mr. Mason, the hotel manager, said to them. "After all, for you it's just a vacation. For me, I've got this man sitting in my lounge day in and day out doing crossword puzzles and trading short snorters with my guests. Nobody really believes he's from Venus—nobody important, anyway. It's a little frightening, when you're trying to run a happy hotel. Sometimes I wish he'd go back to whereever he came from."

"Well," Fred said, "he's bound to leave one of these days."

"Maybe," Mr. Mason said doubtfully. "Offhand, though, I'd say the way he's taking it in, he can't afford to." **END**

Pete never heard of that old adage about "What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander" . . .

The MARRYING MAN

BY

JOSEPH FARRELL

IT WASN'T that Pete Cooper didn't love his wives, or that he wanted to see them hurry on into the next world. He always felt real grief when he found himself a widower.

But a man must be practical. They were all healthy young women, or at least middle aged when he married them, good insurance risks, and no insurance agent was turning down the business when Pete asked for a policy that big, especially when Pete was putting the cash on the line to pay up the policy when he bought it.

That was the most sensible way for a man in the interstellar service to invest his money, Pete said. When he was out in space traveling at near light speed, and time slowed almost to a stop for him, the few months he spent on an expedition meant that nine years passed for a wife on Earth for a Centauri trip, and Sirius meant fifteen, and Altair twenty-five. So a man only saw his wife two or three times between trips, and maybe the last time he saw her he had to take her to the old ladies' home, and the next time he pulled into Earth the insurance company was waiting for him with a check. Safer than stocks, and there was always the possibility that the loving wife might come to an accidental end, which would sadden him, but it meant a double indemnity payment. That sort of satisfied a man's natural desire to have a little speculation attached to his investment.

Sally was the seventh. Pete sat fingering the check, feeling genuine sadness at his bereavement.

"Lovely girl," he told the insurance agent. "It makes a man feel empty to come home from the stars and find that his wife has gone to her reward."

The insurance man disguised a cynical smirk behind his sympathetic mask. "Yes . . . a wonderful woman. But it must happen to all of us."

He patted Pete's shoulder gently. Pete rose, folded the check carelessly and put it into a pocket. He shook the insurance agent's hand.

"You've been very kind. I'll take your card . . . in case I ever need another policy . . ."

Pete expected to need another policy before he left for his next trip. He felt unhappy about Sally's being gone, but a man mustn't give in to morbid self pity. And hadn't he heard somebody say that a man without a wife was like a spaceship without a motor?

He strolled about the city, unimpressed by the changes since his last visit. An interstellar man with as much service as Pete was beyond showing surprise at superficial differences. He was a little annoyed to find that the moving sidewalks were old-fashioned and had been torn out. People now wore little repulsor units on their belts.

Walking was tiresome. He stopped at a corner and watched the pedestrians as they whizzed by a few inches off the ground. At least they were clothed; the nudity of the previous century had been somewhat unnerving even to the blasé eyes of a time man. And he was glad to see that the women were back to wearing long, well groomed hair. That period when fashion had called for smoothly shaven heads hadn't suited his taste at all.

In fact, none of it seemed to appeal to him very much any more. That was sophistication, the price that must be paid by a man in the interstellar service, watching the centuries go by without belonging to any one of them. He watched a group of young people flit laughing by, felt an unreasoning irritation. They'd be gone and forgotten when he'd made a few more trips.

One of the young girls noticed him. She broke from the group and approached.

"You're an interstellar, aren't you? I hope you'll join me. I'm Nancy . . ."

Pete straightened up and looked her over. A little young, maybe nineteen, but that meant a lower premium. Nice blond hair, big waves of it that stayed in place even when she was moving fast, and even when she was standing still she seemed to moving. She was really alive, smiling and laughing and talking easily, and in a pleasant low voice. Really healthy—that slender but nicely rounded body was good for a hundred years.

But then, money isn't everything.

"A lovely name," he told her. "I like girls with old-fashioned names . . ."

Nancy, it seemed, wanted to interview a time man in connection with a thesis, and in this particular age there was no taboo against a young girl introducing herself to a strange man. Pete didn't mind at all being interviewed and having

dinner with her and seeing the town with her. And even when he had given her enough material for a dozen theses, she didn't seem in any hurry to break off their friendship.

PETE WAS spending half his waking hours with Nancy and the other half in the men's beauty parlor. Not that he was old—a little prematurely gray and somewhat wrinkled from the hard sun of space and the unkind atmospheres of alien planets. And he had his contact lenses changed—paper was scarce in this era and they were using finer print to stretch the supply. But he was still young. He studied the full length mirror and decided he'd pass for thirty-five. His actual age—that would be hard to guess. Someday he'd look into the company records and figure it out. But mentally, he told himself, I'm a young man, even though I walked through this city five hundred years ago.

A young man in love.

They knew in this era how to make it nice for young people in love, if you could afford one of the better places. Pete sat across the table from Nancy at a tiny table on a roof far above the city. The room was crowded, but some trick of design made it seem that they were alone together. There was real music played by real people. Some of the melodies were old ones that brought a mood of nostalgia to the time man, with memories of past loves. But then he looked across at Nancy, with her innocent laughing eyes, and the beauty of her brought a lump to his throat that drove out all the small loves of the past. This was it. This time he was really in love.

"Pete," she said, "don't you ever get tired of it? Of jumping through the ages, coming back to find your old friends gone, being a stranger in a strange world? For instance, how about me? You'll be back from Sirius or Altair some day, a year or two older, and I'll be an old woman? How does it really feel?"

Pete took her hands and stared earnestly into her eyes. She was more serious than he'd ever seen her as she gazed back at him.

"It's not the right way to live, Nancy. A man doesn't really live, in the real meaning of life. A man needs a woman, a wife he can come home to." He squeezed her hands gently. "Nancy, will you marry me?"

Her hands trembled in his grasp.

"I will, Pete—oh, Pete, I've been so hoping—and so afraid. But, Pete, your job . . .?"

He smiled reassuringly.

"I'm signed up for a trip, but it's only a short one—that planet of Proxima Centauri they just discovered is on the list for a complete survey. But I'll be back in—seven, eight years. Then we can really settle down."

She bent over the table and kissed him.

"I'll wait, Pete."

"No, Nancy. Now. We'll be married first; I'll still be here a couple of months, why waste them? I don't want to take any chances of losing you."

"I wanted to hear that, Pete."

Her eyes were shining with happiness. "About getting married now, I mean—there's no chance of your losing me."

Pete was serious about settling down after the short trip to Proxima. At least he was serious about it now. But after that trip was over . . .

He didn't think about that sort of thing any more. He had tried to puzzle it out a few times, how he could tell a girl he was making one more trip, and mean it, and then one more and then one more until a happy young girl was suddenly a disillusioned embittered old woman. There was a paradox of conscience here that he had given up trying to resolve. When he said he was making one more trip, he meant it. But at the same time he knew that when he came back he'd sign up for another. If he meant what he said when he said it, even though he knew he'd change his mind later—

His conscience was clear.

And of course a man must be practical. His earnings must be invested, and the future provided for. The honeymoon was still new when the insurance agent responded to Pete's call.

"I've always believed in insurance," he told Nancy. "Of course, no amount of money could console me if I came back and found that something had happened to you. But people must prepare for the unpleasant things in life."

"Of course," said Nancy, who never disagreed with her husband. "We have to be sensible about things. I might have an accident, and so might you. We have to face things like that."

The insurance man was a little dazed. He'd never sold a policy nearly as big as the amount Pete had named.

"Nobody's had an accident on an interstellar ship in hundreds of years," he assured Nancy. "The rate for your husband will be negligible—we expect him to be around for a real long time. Now, sir," he told Pete, "your best buy is our family special—the full value to be paid to the survivor. As I said, the cost for you is trivial, and for your wife . . ."

He thumbed his rate book nervously. Pete wrote a check to pay the policy in full, and the insurance man walked out in a trance, spending his commission.

And Nancy hadn't noticed that Pete's signature had gone on a guarantee that he wouldn't resign from the interstellar service for at least two hundred years, objective Earth time.

PETE FELT a little sad when his leave began to run out. They sat around evenings adoring each other, not too late, because Pete was a man who needed plenty of sleep or he felt irritable the next day. Nancy never took his bad days seriously. The laughing happiness of youth was still in her eyes, but there was a firmness behind it now, the maturity of a girl who knows how to become a woman.

He went down to the spaceport a few times to look over the ship he was signed up for, and took the routine physical. Doctors went over his mind and his body, probing with

needles and tubes and questions that were pointless.

"What do you think of the popular songs of today, Mr. Cooper?"

"What do you remember of your mother, Mr. Cooper?"

"Are you interested in girls, Mr. Cooper?"

"Do you have a close friendship with any of the other men in the crew, Mr. Cooper? . . ."

The routine this time seemed worse than ever. Actually he'd had worse ones, when the medical fashions of the time called for it, but somehow it seemed more annoying this time.

"Five hundred years," he told the doctor. "Five hundred years I've been living this life and I know more about it than you ever will. Captain Drago told me on the trip to Altair—no, Sirius it was, that I was the most devoted man in the service. Pete, he said, when you're aboard, I never worry about the engines, I'd rather have you sitting on them than anybody else. That's the way he talked—sitting on the engines, he called it . . ."

The doctor watched Pete thoughtfully and made notes on the paper before him. And the next day the mail brought the message that Peter Cooper, Master Engineman First Class, was retired from the service. There was a personal letter of congratulations from an undersecretary, and a notice that his pension would start the first of the following month.

"It's a mistake!" Pete told his wife angrily. "Something wrong! They didn't talk to Captain Drago like I told them, and—"

Nancy's eyes were indignant. She sent him steaming back with fire in his eyes, but he couldn't change the decision. He did get as far as the office of the doctor who had asked him all the fool questions, and he saw a paper he wasn't meant to see. It stunned him into temporary silence.

But it wasn't true! Positively not!

Definite signs of senility, the notes read. Irritable reaction to questioning. Mind wanders, fixes on irrelevancies. Preoccupation with casual remarks of associates . . .

And more. He didn't tell Nancy this, nor did he show her the reply he received to his protest.

"While a search of our records indicates a subjective—chronological age of approximately 48.6 years, physiological analysis puts the condition of your body at a much higher figure—it would be guesswork to try to name a figure. However, recent studies indicate that interstellar personnel with long terms of service tend to age at an increasingly rapid rate, due probably to psychological factors stemming from the knowledge of separation from the natal culture . . .

"We are sorry . . ."

He kept his hair dark and the wrinkles smoothed out and forced the tiredness from his bones. Other things were harder to fake, but Nancy wasn't a demanding wife. She thought he was about thirty-five, and she thought the blow of being dropped from the service had taken the life from him. She took his part firmly.

"It's nothing to be ashamed of,

Pete. Not one person in a thousand could pass the examination for the interstellar service—they're really tough. And we're together."

"What will we live on?" Pete demanded, knowing he was being too irritable, but unable to control it. He waved the pension check. "Can we live on that? A fine payment for my years of service."

Nancy looked dubiously at the check. "I thought it was a lot . . . but don't worry, Pete. You have a wife to stand by you."

WHEN PETE found out how his wife had gone about standing by him, he was almost shocked speechless. Almost.

"You signed up as my replacement on the Proxima expedition! But you can't! It's no job for a woman! And you're leaving me alone—for seven or eight years! They won't take you!"

"They already did." She smiled bravely at him. "As the wife of a retired serviceman I had preference. We need the extra money, Pete. And it won't be for long. When I come back, we'll still be young enough to enjoy life, darling. And they pay well—a few years of sacrifice now will make so much difference in our future . . ."

Pete closed his eyes and thought of how many times he had said the same words to starry eyed young women. It won't be long . . . we'll still be young . . . good pay . . .

Her loving lips tenderly brushed his dark hair.

On nice days, Pete sits in a rocking chair on the porch with the other old men. He doesn't bother to dye his hair any more and he reads now with a thick glass, complaining about the small type they use nowadays. The attendants laugh off his irritability, and some of the visitors who come to see the other old men don't mind listening to his stories about the interstellar service.

When it gets toward dusk, he looks into the sky sometimes as the stars appear. Centaurus isn't really there, not here in the northern hemisphere, but he looks anyway. Out there in space, his wife is doing a man's job. Wonderful woman, Elsie.

Not Elsie—Nancy. How could he have made that mistake. Nancy, a laughing young girl who had grown swiftly into a strong mature woman defending her man and her marriage vows.

He leans back and rocks faster then, a smile on his face. Sometimes the visitors see him and shake their heads sympathetically, and sometimes he sees them doing it, but it doesn't matter. They don't know. They don't know about his nest egg, that insurance policy he's going to collect some day now, because he's going to straighten them out down at the interstellar bureau. Captain Drago will straighten them out, and then he's going back into space and support his wife as a man should.

And sometimes the smile fades and a tear rolls down his cheeks when he thinks of Nancy growing old and passing away and the insurance man giving him a check and a few words of sympathy. But a man has to be practical about such things. **END**

Here's why you should ask for a "Feetch M-D" next time you get a can opener!

Illustrated by Paul Orban

THE SUPER OPENER

BY

MICHAEL ZUROY

"FEETCH!" grated Ogden Piltdon, president of the Piltdon Opener Company, slamming the drafting board with his hairy fist, "I want results!"

Heads lifted over boards. Kalvin Feetch shrunk visibly.

"As chief engineer you're not carrying the ball," Piltdon went on savagely. "The Piltdon Can-Opener is trailing the competition. Advertising and Sales are breaking their necks. It's Engineering that's

missing the boat!"

"But Mr. Piltdon," remonstrated Feetch unsteadily under his employer's glare, "don't you remember? I tried to . . ."

"For two years there hasn't been one lousy improvement in the Piltdon Can-Opener!" roared Mr. Piltdon. "Look at our competitors. The International rips apart cans in three and three-tenths seconds. Universal does it in four."

"But Mr. Piltdon—"

"The Minerva Mighty Midget does it in four point two two and plays Home Sweet Home in chimes. Our own Piltdon opener barely manages to open a can in eight point nine without chimes. Is this what I'm paying you for?"

Feetch adjusted his spectacles with shaking hands. "But Mr. Piltdon, our opener still has stability, solidity. It is built to last. It has dignity . . ."

"Dignity," pronounced Piltdon, "is for museums. Four months, Feetch! In four months I want a new can-opener that will be faster, lighter, stronger, flashier and more musical than any other on the market. I want it completely developed, engineered and tooled-up, ready for production. Otherwise, Feetch—"

Feetch's body twitched. "But Mr. Piltdon, four months is hardly time enough for development, even with an adequate staff. I've been trying to tell you for years that we're bound to fall behind because we don't have enough personnel to conduct research. Our men can barely keep up with production and maintenance. If you would let me put on a few draftsmen and . . ."

"Excuses," sneered Mr. Piltdon. "Your staff is more than adequate. I will not allow you to throw out my money. Four months, Feetch, no more!" Piltdon trudged out of the room, leaving behind him an oppressive silence.

How could you set a time limit on research and development? A designer had to dream at his board, investigate, search, build, test, compare, discard. He had always wanted to devote all his time to research, but Piltdon Opener had not given him that opportunity. Twenty-five years! thought Feetch. Twenty-five years of close supervision, dead-lines, production headaches, inadequate facilities and assistance. What had happened, to the proud dream he once had, the dream of exploring uncharted engineering regions, of unlimited time to investigate and develop?

Ah, well, thought Feetch straightening his thin shoulders, he had managed somehow to design a few good things during his twenty-five years with Piltdon. That was some satisfaction.

What now? He had to hang on to his job. Technical work was scarce. Since the early 1980's the schools had been turning out more technicians than industry could absorb. He was too old to compete in the employment market. He couldn't afford to lose any money. Jenny wasn't well.

How to meet this four month deadline? He would get right on it himself, of course; Hanson—good man—could work with him. He shook his head despairingly. Something would be sure to blow up.

Well, he had to start—

"Chief," said Hanson a few weeks later as they entered the lab, "I'm beginning to wonder if the answer is in the hand mechanical type at all."

"Got to be," answered Feetch tiredly. "We must work along classical can-opener lines. Departures, such as the thermal or motor-driven types, would be too expensive for mass production."

Three new models and a group of cans were waiting for them on the bench. They began testing, Hanson operating the openers and Feetch clocking. "Four point four," announced Feetch after the last test. "Good, but not good enough. Too bulky. Appearance unsatisfactory. Chimes tinny. We've made progress, but we've a long way to go."

The problem was tricky. It might seem that use of the proper gear ratios would give the required velocity, but there were too many other factors that negated this direct approach. The mechanism had to be compact and streamlined. Gear sizes had to be kept down. Can-top resistance, internal resistance, cutting tooth performance, handle size and moment, the minimum strength of a woman's hand were some of the variables that had to be balanced within rigid limits. Sector type cutters, traversing several arcs at the same time, had seemed to offer the answer for a while, but the adjusting mechanism necessary to compensate for variable can sizes had been too complex to be practical. There was the ever-present limit to production cost.

Hanson's eyes were upon him. "Chief," he said, "it's a rotten shame. Twenty-five years of your life you put in with Piltdon, and he'd fire you just like that if you don't do the impossible. The Piltdon Company is built upon your designs and you get handed this deal!"

"Well, well," said Feetch. "I drew my pay every week so I suppose I have no complaints. Although," a wistful note crept into his voice "I would have liked a little recognition. Piltdon is a household word, but who has heard of Feetch? Well,"—Feetch blew his nose—"how do we stand, Hanson?"

Hanson's bull-dog features drew into a scowl. "Piltdon ought to be rayed," he growled. "O.K., Chief. Eleven experimental models designed to date. Two more on the boards. Nine completed and tested, two in work. Best performance, four point four, but model otherwise unsatisfactory."

"Hello," said Feetch as an aproned machinist entered carrying a glistening mechanism. "Here's another model. Let's try it." The machinist departed and Hanson locked the opener on a can. "I hope——" he turned the handle, and stopped abruptly, staring down open-mouthed.

A cylinder of close-packed beans rested on the bench under the opener.

The can itself had disappeared.

"Chief," said Hanson. "Chief."

"Yes," said Feetch. "I see it too. Try another can."

"Vegetable soup or spinach?" inquired Hanson dreamily.

"Spinach, I think," said Feetch. "Where did the can go, do you suppose?"

The spinach can disappeared. Likewise several corn cans, sweet potato cans and corned-beef hash cans, leaving their contents intact. It was rather disconcerting.

"Dear, dear," said Feetch, regarding the piles of food on the bench. "There must be some explanation. I designed this opener with sixteen degree, twenty-two minute pressure angle modified involute gear teeth, seven degree, nineteen minute front clearance cutter angle and thirty-six degree, twelve minute back rake angle. I expected that such departures from the norm might achieve unconventional performance, but this—Dear, dear. Where do the cans go, I wonder?"

"What's the difference? Don't you see what you've got here? It's the answer! It's more than the answer! We can put this right into work and beat the dead-line."

Feetch shook his head. "No, Hanson. We're producing something we don't understand. What forces have we uncovered here? Where do the cans go? What makes them disappear? Are we dealing with a kinetic or a kinematic effect? What motions can we plot in the area of disappearance and what are their analytical mathematical formulae? What masses may be critical here? What transformations of energy are involved? No Hanson, we must learn a lot more."

"But Chief, your job."

"I'll risk that. Not a word to Piltdon."

Several days later, however, Piltdon himself charged into the drawing room and slapped Feetch heartily on the back, causing him to break a pencil point. "Feetch!" roared Piltdon. "Is this talk that's going around the plant true? Why didn't you tell me? Let's see it."

After Piltdon had seen it his eyes took on a feverish glint. "This," he exulted, "will make can-opener history. Instantaneous opening! Automatic disposal! Wait until Advertising and Sales get hold of this! We'll throttle our competitors! The Piltdon Super-Opener we'll call it."

"Mr. Piltdon—" said Feetch shakily.

Piltdon stared at his chief engineer sharply. "What's the matter, Feetch? The thing can be duplicated, can't it?"

"Yes sir. I've just finished checking that. But I'm in the midst of further investigation of the effect. There's more here than just a new type can-opener, sir. A whole new field of physics. New principles. This is big, Mr. Piltdon. I recommend that we delay production until further research can be completed. Hire a few top scientists and engineers. Find out where the cans go. Put out a scientific paper on the effect."

"Feetch," bit out Piltdon, his face growing hard. "Stow this hooey. I don't give a damn where the cans go. May I remind you that under our standard patent agreement, all rights to your invention belong to the company? As well as anything you may produce in the field within a year after leaving our employ? We have a good thing here, and I

don't want you holding it back. We're going into production immediately."

CLOSE, thought Feetch, wearily. It had been a man-killing job, and it had been close, but he'd made it. Beat the time limit by a half-day. The first tentative shipments of Piltdon Super-Openers had gone to distributors along the Eastern seaboard. The first advertisements blazed in selected media. The first reorders came back, and then: "It's a sell-out!" crowed Piltdon, waving a sheaf of telegrams. "Step up production! Let 'er rip!"

The Super-Openers rolled over the country. In a remarkably short time they appeared in millions of kitchens from coast-to-coast. Sales climbed to hundreds of thousands per day. Piltdon Opener went into peak production in three shifts, but was still unable to keep up with the demand. Construction was begun on a new plant, and additional plants were planned. Long lines waited in front of houseware stores. Department stores, lucky enough to have Super-Openers on hand, limited sales to one to a customer. Piltdon cancelled his advertising program. Newspapers, magazines, radio, television and word-of-mouth spread the fame of the opener so that advertising was unnecessary.

Meanwhile, of course, government scientists, research foundations, universities and independent investigators began to look into this new phenomonen. Receiving no satisfactory explanation from Piltdon, they set up their own research.

Far into the night burned the lights of countless laboratories. Noted physicists probed, measured, weighed, traced, X-rayed, dissolved, spun, peered at, photographed, magnetized, exploded, shattered and analyzed Super-Openers without achieving the glimmer of a satisfactory explanation. Competitors found the patent impossible to circumvent, for any departure from its exact specifications nullified the effect.

Piltdon, genial these days with success and acclaim, roared at Feetch: "I'm putting you in for a raise. Yes sir! To reward you for assisting me with my invention I'm raising your pay two hundred dollars a year. That's almost four dollars a week, man."

"Thank you, Mr. Piltdon." And still, thought Feetch wryly, he received no recognition. His name did not even appear on the patent. Well, well, that was the way it went. He must find his satisfaction in his work. And it had been interesting lately, the work he had been doing nights at home investigating what had been named the Piltdon Effect. It had been difficult, working alone and buying his own equipment. The oscillator and ultra microwave tracking unit had been particularly expensive. He was a fool, he supposed, to try independent research when so many huge scientific organizations were working on it. But he could no more keep away from it than he could stop eating.

He still didn't know where the cans went, but somehow he felt that he was close to the answer.

When he finally found the answer, it was too late. The Borenchuck incident was only hours away.

As soon as he could get hold of Piltdon, Feetch said trembling, "Sir, I think I know where those cans are going. I recommend—"

"Are you still worrying about that?" Piltdon roared jovially. "Leave that to the long-hairs. We're making money, that's all that counts, eh Feetch?"

That night, at six-ten p.m., the Borenchuck family of Selby, South Dakota, sat down to their evening meal. Just as they started in on the soup, a rain of empty tin cans clattered down, splashed into the soup, raised a welt on the forehead of Borenchuck senior, settled down to a gentle, steady klunk! klunk! klunk! and inexorably began to pile up on the dining-room floor. They seemed to materialize from a plane just below the ceiling. The police called the fire department and the fire department stared helplessly and recommended the sanitation department.

The incident made headlines in the local papers.

The next day other local papers in widely scattered locations reported similar incidents.

The following day, cans began falling on Chicago. St. Louis was next, and then over the entire nation the cans began to rain down. They fell outdoors and indoors, usually materializing at heights that were not dangerous. The deluge followed no pattern. Sometimes it would slacken, sometimes it would stop, sometimes begin heavily again. It fell in homes, on the streets, in theatres, trains, ships, universities and dog-food factories. No place was immune.

People took to wearing hats indoors and out, and the sale of helmets boomed.

All activity was seriously curtailed.

A state of national emergency was declared.

Government investigators went to work and soon confirmed what was generally suspected: these were the same cans that had been opened by the Piltdon Super-Opener.

Statisticians and mathematicians calculated the mean rate of can precipitation and estimated that if all the cans opened by Piltdon openers were to come back, the deluge should be over in fifteen point twenty-nine days.

Super-Opener sales of course immediately plummeted to zero and stayed there. Anti-Piltdon editorials appeared in the papers. Commentators accused Piltdon of deliberately hoaxing the public for his own gain. A Congressional investigation was demanded. Piltdon received threats of bodily injury. Lawsuits were filed against him. He barricaded himself in the plant, surrounded by bodyguards.

Livid with fury and apprehension, he screamed at Feetch, "This is your doing, you vandal! I'm a ruined man!" A falling can caught him neatly on the tip of his nose.

"But sir," trembled Feetch, dodging three spaghetti cans, "I tried to warn you."

"You're through, Feetch!" raved Piltdon. "Fired! Get out! But before you go, I want you to know that I've directed the blame where it belongs. I've just released to the press the truth about who created the Super-Opener. Now, get out!"

"Yes sir," said Feetch paling. "Then you don't want to hear about my discovery of a way to prevent the cans from coming back?"

Klunk! A barrage of cans hit the floor, and both men took refuge under Piltdon's huge desk. "No!" yelled Piltdon at Feetch's face which was inches away. "No, I—— What did you say?"

"A small design improvement sir, and the cans would disappear forever."

Klunk!

"Forever, Feetch?"

"Yes sir." Klunk! Klunk!

"You're positive, Feetch?" Piltdon's eyes glared into Feetch's.

"Sir, I never make careless claims."

"That's true," said Piltdon. His eyes grew dreamy. "It can be done," he mused. "The New Type Super-Opener. Free exchanges for the old. Cash guarantee that empty cans will never bother you. Take a licking at first, but then monopolize the market. All right, Feetch, I'll give you another chance. You'll turn over all the details to me. The patent on the improvement will naturally be mine. I'll get the credit for rectifying your blunder. Fine, fine. We'll work it out. Hop on production, at once, Feetch."

Feetch felt himself sag inwardly. "Mr. Piltdon," he said. "I'm asking only one favor. Let me work full time on research and development, especially on the Piltdon effect. Hire a couple of extra men to help with production. I assure you the company will benefit in the end."

"Damn it, no!" roared Piltdon. "How many times must I tell you? You got your job back, didn't you?"

The prospect of long years of heavy production schedules, restricted engineering and tight supervision suddenly made Kalvin Feetch feel very tired. Research, he thought. Development. What he had always wanted. Over the years he had waited, thinking that there would be opportunities later. But now he was growing older, and he felt that there might not be a later. Somehow he would manage to get along. Perhaps someone would give him a job working in the new field he had pioneered. With a sense of relief he realized that he had made his decision.

"Mr. Piltdon," Feetch said. "I—" klunk!— "resign."

Piltdon started, extreme astonishment crossing his face.

"No use," said Feetch. "Nothing you can say—" klunk! klunk! klunk!— "will make any difference now."

"But see here, the New Type Super-Opener . . . !"

"Will remain my secret. Good day."

"Feetch!" howled Piltdon. "I order you to remain!"

Feetch almost submitted from force of habit. He hesitated for a moment, then turned abruptly.

"Good-day," said Feetch firmly, sprinting through the falling cans to the door.

MONEY, Feetch decided after a while, was a good thing to have. His supply was running pretty low. He was not having any luck finding another job. Although the cans had stopped falling on the fifteenth day, as predicted by the statisticians, industry would not soon forget the inconvenience and losses caused by the deluge. It was not anxious to hire the man it regarded as responsible for the whole thing. "Feetch," the personnel man would read. "Kalvin Feetch." Then, looking up, "Not the Kalvin Feetch who—"

"Yes," Feetch would admit miserably.

"I am sorry, but—"

He did no better with research organizations. Typical was a letter from the Van Terrel Foundation: "—cannot accept your application inasmuch as we feel your premature application of your discovery to profit-making denotes a lack of scientific responsibility and ethics not desirable in a member of our organization—former employer states the decision was yours entirely. Unfavorable reference—"

Piltdon, Feetch thought, feeling a strange sensation deep within his chest that he had not the experience to recognize as the beginning of a slow anger, Piltdon was hitting low and getting away with it.

Of course, if he were to agree to reveal his latest discoveries to a research organization, he would undoubtedly get an appointment. But how could he? Everything patentable in his work would automatically revert to Piltdon under the one year clause in the company patent agreement. No, Feetch told himself, he was revealing nothing that Piltdon might grab. The anger began to mount.

But he was beginning to need money desperately. Jenny wasn't getting any better and medical bills were running high.

The phone rang. Feetch seized it and said to the image: "Absolutely not."

"I'll go up another ten dollars," grated the little Piltdon image. "Do you realize, man, this is the fourteenth raise I've offered you? A total increase of one hundred and twenty-six dollars? Be sensible, Feetch. I know you can't find work anywhere else."

"Thanks to you. Mr. Piltdon, I wouldn't work for you if—"

A barrage of rocks crashed against the heavy steel screening of the window. "What's going on!" yelled Piltdon. "Oh, I see. People throwing rocks at your house again? Oh, I know all about that, Feetch. I know that you are probably the most unpopular man alive to-day. I know about the rocks, the tomatoes, the rotten eggs, the sneaking out at night, the disguises you've had to use. Why don't you come back to us and change all that, Feetch? We'll put out the New Type Super-Opener and the world will soon forget about the old one."

"No," said Feetch. "People will forget anyway—I hope."

"If you won't think of yourself, at least think of your fellow workmen," begged Piltdon, his voice going blurry. "Do you realize that Piltdon Opener will soon be forced to close down, throwing all your

former associates out of work? Think of Hanson, Sanchez, Forbes. They have families too. Think of the men in the shop, the girls in the office, the salesmen on the road. All, all unemployed because of you. Think of that, Feetch."

Feetch blinked. This had not occurred to him.

Piltdon eyed him sharply, then smiled with a hint of triumph. "Think it over, Feetch."

Feetch sat, thinking it over. Was it right to let all these people lose their jobs? Frowning, he dialed Hanson's number.

"Chief," said Hanson, "Forget it. The boys are behind you one hundred per cent. We'll make out."

"But that's the trouble. I thought you'd feel like this, and I can't let you."

"You're beginning to weaken. Don't. Think, chief, think. The brain that figured the Super-Opener can solve this."

Feetch hung up. A glow of anger that had been building up in his chest grew warmer. He began pacing the floor. How he hated to do it. Think, Hanson had said. But he had. He's considered every angle, and there was no solution.

Feetch walked into the kitchen and carefully poured himself a drink of water. He drank the water slowly and placed the glass on the washstand with a tiny click. It was the tiny click that did it. Something about it touched off the growing rage. If Piltdon were there he would have punched him in the nose. The twenty-five years. The tricks. The threats.

Think? He'd figured the solution long ago, only he hadn't allowed himself to see it. Not lack of brains, lack of guts. Well, he thought grimly, dialing Piltdon's number, he was going through with it now. "Piltdon!" he barked. "Three p.m. tomorrow. My place. Be here. That's all." He hung up.

In the same grim mood the following morning, he placed a few more calls.

IN the same mood that afternoon he stood in the middle of his living-room and looked at his visitors: Piltdon, Williams, the Government man; Billings from the Van Terrel Foundation; Steiner of Westchester University; the members of the press.

"Gentlemen," he said. "I'll make it brief." He waved the papers in his hand. "Here is everything I know about what I call the Feetch Effect, including plans and specifications for the New Type Super-Opener. All of you have special reasons for being keenly interested in this information. I am now going to give a copy to each of you, providing one condition is met by Mr. Piltdon." He stared at Piltdon. "In short, I want fifty-one per cent of the stock of Piltdon Opener."

Piltdon leaped from his chair. "Outrageous!" He roared. "Ridiculous!"

"Fifty-one percent," said Feetch firmly. "Don't bother with any counterproposals or the interview is at an end."

"Gentlemen!" squawked Piltdon, "I appeal to you—"

"Stop bluffing," said Feetch cold-

ly "There's no other way out for you. Otherwise you're ruined. Here, sign this agreement."

Piltdon threw the paper to the floor and screamed: "Gentlemen, will you be a party to this?"

"Well," murmured the Government man, "I never did think Feetch got a fair shake."

"This information is important to science," said the Van Terrel man.

After Piltdon had signed, the papers were distributed.

Published in the newspapers the following day, Feetch's statement read, in part: "The motion in space and time of the singular curvilinear proportions of the original Super-Opener combined with the capacitor effect built up as it increased its frictional electro-static charge in inverse proportion to the cube root of the tolerance between the involute teeth caused an instantaneous disruption of what I call the Alpha multi-dimensional screen. The can, being metallic, dropped through, leaving its non-metallic contents behind. The disruption was instantly repaired by the stable nature of the screen.

"Beyond the screen is what I call Alpha space, a space apparently quite as extensive as our own universe. Unfortunately, as my investigations indicated, Alpha space seems to be thickly inhabited. These inhabitants, the nature of whom I have not yet ascertained, obviously resented the intrusion of the cans, developed a method of disrupting the screen from their side, and hurled the cans back at us.

"However, I have established the existence of other spaces up to Mu space, and suspect that others exist beyond that. Beta space, which is also adjacent to our own space, is devoid of any form of life. The New Type Super-Opener is designed to pass cans through the Beta screen. Beta space will safely absorb an infinite number of cans.

"I sincerely and humbly venture the opinion that we are on the threshold of tremendous and mighty discoveries. It is my belief that possibly an infinite number of universes exist in a type of laminated block separated by screens.

"Therefore, might it not be that an infinite number of laminated blocks exist—?"

"MR FEETCH—" said Piltdon.

Feetch looked up from his desk in the newly constructed Feetch Multi-Dimensional Development Division of the Piltdon Opener Company. "Piltdon, don't bother me about production. Production is your problem."

"But Mr. Feetch—"

"Get out," said Feetch.

Piltdon blanched and left.

"As I was saying, Hanson—" continued Feetch. **END**

The fullest use of science for human well-being will only be possible when our knowledge of material resources is supplemented with a genuine scientific knowledge of human needs. —*Lancelot Hogben*

About Science and Science Fiction

In response to numerous requests, the quiz this issue is re-titled and devoted to science fiction as well as science. We hope you find it a little more interesting. If not, blast us with a letter. Score 10 for each correct answer and 80 is pretty good. The answers are on page 119.

1. How many years ago was the cyclotron invented?
2. What science fiction writer "invented" the Mannschen Drive?
3. The *New York Times* once placed a cash value of $15,000,000,000 on the brain of a certain scientist. Who was he?
4. What associate professor of biochemistry wrote *The End* ———?
5. Plutonium is a natural element found in the earth. (True or false?)
6. What planet has an orbital velocity of 15 miles per second and an escape velocity of 3.1 miles per second?
7. In what novel is the slogan "Big Brother Is Watching You" used?
8. What is the scientific term for the bright streaks and areas on the sun?
9. What is a zwitterion?
10. Mercury is the ——— planet in the solar system.
11. Who is the author of *Islands in the Sky?* Of *Childhood's End?*
12. What is the name of the new common language of science and technology?

Stick to mink, girls—or rabbit! Even if you can get a luxurious O'Grady's Mole fur coat for free . . .

SISTER UNDER THE SKIN

Illustrated by Ed Emsh

BY BERTRAM CHANDLER

KENNEDY waited until the work of discharge was well under way, then went ashore. He could have left the ship earlier; he could, had he so wished it, have been the first to leave, but the other officers, his juniors, were all mar-

ried, and he was not; not any longer. Still, he reflected, he was lucky to have a home to go to. He was lucky to have a sister. It would be utterly grim to come in from Deep Space—especially after a voyage to a drab world like Beta Sextans III, known to spacemen as the Slag Heap—to spend one's leave in dreary hotel rooms. She was a good kid, Judith, he thought, even though she did marry that stuffed shirt of a Colonel.

The taxi was waiting for him at the foot of the gangway. Kennedy slung his bags into the passenger compartment, followed them. He sat back comfortably in his seat as the whirling vanes lifted him clear of the spaceport with its busy cranes and gantries and conveyor belts, the gleaming ships that looked like huge spinning tops scattered by some giant child.

"A good voyage, Mister?" asked the driver.

"No," said Kennedy. "Lousy. It's good to be back on Earth. I hope they send us somewhere better next trip."

"Where're you in from?" asked the driver. "It looked like metal you were discharging. Slabs and ingots . . ."

"Beta Sextans III," replied Kennedy. "The Slag Heap. Three months from Earth even with the Ehrenhaft Drive running flat out, and when you get there it's nothing but a big ball of rubble where it rains for three hundred and ninety days out of the four hundred that make its year. There's no surface vegetation except for a few things like Terran lichens. There're fungi in the caves and tunnels—that's where the natives live. They come out on fine days, I'm told——"

"What are they like?" asked the driver. "I've heard tales those extra-Terran women—I've often wished that I'd gone into Astronautics myself—"

"One trip to the Slag Heap would cure you of wishing," said Kennedy. "You've seen chimpanzees? Try to imagine albino chimpanzees that have a bath every six months. Oh, they're intelligent, up to a point. They work in the mines and the smelters, and get paid in gin and tobacco. The overseeing is done by Earthmen. The poor devils are out on a three-year contract."

"What do they *do?*"

"What can they do? They drink, they watch the films—ancient ones—and they drink. I've heard some of them have tried giving the native women—if you can call them that—a good wash and employing them as housekeepers, so there's been labor trouble, with floggings and shootings—"

"Sounds like a jolly place," said the driver. "It wouldn't do me. Come to think of it—when I pick you officers up at the spaceport you usually have bags and boxes full of souvenirs you've brought home with you. All *you* have is one grip and one suitcase. Looks like there aren't even any curios worth picking up on that world of yours."

"It's no world of mine, thank God," said Kennedy. "Oddly enough, I did strike something worth bringing home, though—"

Gently, the taxi dropped down to

the flat roof of the block in which Judith lived. Kennedy paid the driver, then carried his bags to the elevator. Seconds later he was walking along the passageway to his sister's suite. She opened the door as he approached it.

"Bill!" she cried, "it's good to see you back! Come in—your room's ready for you."

"It's good to see you again, Judith," he said, dropping his bags and hugging her. "It's good to have a home to come back to."

"It's good to have a big brother," she replied, leading him into the lounge.

"How's the Colonel?"

"I wish that you wouldn't keep referring to Jim as the Colonel," she objected.

"But he is so a Colonel," insisted Kennedy. "You could never take him for anything else. I shall be quite surprised if you don't snap to attention when he comes in tonight . . ."

"He'll not be coming in tonight," said Judith. "He's got a tour of garrison duty on the Moon. As a matter of fact I should have gone there with him—but I insisted on being home to welcome you in."

"You shouldn't have done that," said Kennedy.

"And why shouldn't I? You're my best big brother. Anyhow, I had to stay to see what you've brought me this time."

"Mercenary cat. I told you, before I left, what sort of a world Beta Sextans III is. Well—it is just that, and worse. A slag heap in a cold drizzle, crawling with butterfly brained apes . . ."

"I'm going to sulk," she said.

"Will you pour me another beer?"

"No."

"All right, all right—you've blackmailed me into it."

Kennedy got to his feet, opened his suitcase. He lifted out a civilian suit and then, carefully, a lustrous golden fur.

"But this is lovely!" cried Judith. She almost snatched it from him, held it against her cheek. "It's beautiful!"

"And it matches your hair," said Kennedy. "But look at it carefully. Look at the cunning way in which the animal was skinned . . ."

"Why spoil things?" asked his sister. "Women love fur—but they don't like to be reminded of the—preliminaries."

"Even so," insisted the spaceman, "it's interesting. You've seen tiger skins and bear skins, of course, to say nothing of that birix pelt I brought home from Spica II—Are you still using it as a bedside rug, by the way?"

"Yes. Well, as a matter of fact Jim got rather huffy when I refused to come to the Moon with him and said that he was going to have *some* home comforts, and took it with him."

"Trust the Colonel. Well—you can use this until he comes back. After that—have it made up. But we're wandering away from the point. The average pelt, as I said, has to be cut to remove it from the animal. *This*—well, it *may* have been cut, but I don't think so. It's just as though every morsel of flesh, every splinter of bone, was vapor-

ised and blown out—"

"Never mind the details. What was the animal, anyhow?"

"I can't remember the native name—and if I could I couldn't pronounce it. We call it O'Grady's Mole—O'Grady was one of the officers of the survey ship that made the first landing; he stumbled on a sort of colony of the things in one of the caves. As a matter of fact, they're supposed to be protected—"

"Won't you get into trouble for having this skin?"

"I could, I suppose. But I didn't kill the mole myself, and there's no law to stop the natives from doing it—after all, it's their world. All that can happen is a new Standing Order to the effect that personnel will not, repeat *not,* buy furs, pelts or skins from the aborigines of Beta Cygni III—"

"How did you get it, then?"

"Well, as I've already told you, the Slag Heap is a grim world. You're far better off staying aboard the ship—but, sooner or later, you have to go ashore for a breather or start climbing up the wall paper. You go ashore, and what's there to do?"

"Knowing you," she said, "I can guess."

"How right you are. (My glass is empty, by the way . . .) Well, there's a sort of village where the overseers and the clerical staff live. They have a couple of pubs. They're far from jolly places—you'd think that the boys in charge of the mines and the works would be pleased to see a few new faces, but they're not. They're a sullen crowd.

"Anyhow, this night in question, there were four of us from the ship at one end of the bar—the Old Man, the Second Pilot, the Doctor and myself—and a bunch of the locals at the other. Each party was keeping to itself. Suddenly there was a commotion at the door. We looked round. One of the natives was trying to force his way in, and two hairy faced, hairy chested overseers who looked just about as human as the natives were trying to keep him out.

"Well, it was none of our business. If we lived in Africa we'd take a dim view of baboons forcing their presence upon us while we were enjoying a quiet beer. We were ignoring the whole affair when the native, who seemed to know some English, started shouting out, 'Spacemen! Must see spacemen! Must see Captain!'

"This direct appeal to the Old Man had results.

"He said, in his best Control Room voice, 'Let him in.'

" 'He's not coming in here, Mister,' said the barman.

"The Old Man just *loves* being called *Mister.*

" 'My man,' he said, 'I would remind you that I, as Master of an interstellar ship, rank with, but not below, the Governor of a Third Grade Colony—'

"He was right, of course—and the bartender knew sufficient interstellar law to recognise it. He said, however, that he would send a report in to the Commission, and the Old Man said that there were many things that he could mention in *his* report, including miscegenation—

And this threat brought results.

"So they let the native in. He looked pitiful standing there under the glaring lights—a huge, shambling brute with filthy, matted white fur, almost human, but not quite; here, in this bar, an alien on his own world. In one big, gnarled hand he carried a limply hanging sack.

"I heard two of the overseers whispering together. 'Yes—That's him. Dangerous bastard—cause of all the trouble—' And, 'You can hardly blame him—Ken Slater shouldn't have taken *both* his women—' Then, 'Christ! Are you a monkey lover the same as these bloody spacemen?'

"The Old Man overheard this last. He said, 'We're not monkey lovers—but we believe in fair play.' To the native he said, 'What do you want?'

" 'Captain, sir,'—I wish that I could put the accent across properly; it was like a dog talking in broad Glaswegian—'do trade.'

" 'All right. What's in the bag?'

" 'This, Captain sir.'

"And so he pulled out, one by one, five of the pelts. The locals were furious. Nobody offered *them* bargains like that. And they were bargains, too. Do you know how much I paid for this?"

"No," said Judith. "But I can tell you that this pelt, on Earth, would take all of Jim's monthly pay, and yours too."

"I paid," Kennedy told her, "just one bottle of gin. That's all that any of us paid, except for the Old Man. He paid two—but he got two furs — I suppose you're going to have it made up into a coat?"

"Not yet, Bill. Not until Jim gets back from his tour of duty. I miss my bedside rug."

"As you please," he said. "It's your fur. And now, my dear sister, what about climbing into something glamorous and doing the rounds of the night spots with me?"

"As *you* please, Bill. But I know you, and know that you'd sooner spend your first night at home *at home*. I've got steak, and I'll do it the way you like, with lots of garlic. There's a bottle of Burgundy. There's a big hunk of that stinking English Stilton."

"You're an angel. Remind me to get you a pair of wings next trip." She refilled his glass. "It's a funny thing. I've often heard you and the Colonel grumbling about this apartment, complaining that it has no windows, no natural light—That, to a spaceman, is a point in its favour. We see enough of the sky and the stars. When we get home we like to forget about 'em."

THREE DAYS later Kennedy was told that all the cargo had been discharged from his ship and that Lloyd's Surveyor would be making the routine inspection of the hull. A Survey was a job for the ship's own Chief Officer, and not for the spaceport relieving staff. Judith accompanied him up to the roof, where the taxi was waiting for him.

"Pity it's such a dull day," said Kennedy. "Weather Control must have slipped up. You won't be able to get in your sunbathing."

"I'll manage," she said. "There's plenty to do about the house. Don't work too hard, Bill. Give me a ring when you're ready to come home."

He enjoyed the flight from the city to the spaceport. He looked down with pride at his gleaming ship as the helicopter drifted in to a landing. He climbed the ramp to the main airlock with a certain eagerness, whistled softly and happily as the elevator whisked him up to the Officers' flat. In his cabin he changed into protective clothing, then sat down to wait for the Surveyor and the Astronautical Superintendent.

The survey did not take long. No plates and no structural members were in need of renewal. Kennedy would have been free, then, but for the fact that it had been impossible during the forenoon—cabin stores were being loaded—to test the main airlock doors.

So Kennedy lunched on board, his only companion at table being the elderly, grounded ex Chief Officer who undertook relieving duties aboard the ships in port. The old man was not a brilliant conversationalist. Kennedy found him rather boring. After lunch—the survey of the airlock doors would not be for another hour or so—Kennedy retired to his cabin, lit his pipe and pulled from his bookcase a well-thumbed volume of Kipling.

He was reading happily when there was a knock at his door.

"Come in!" he said, rather testily. He finished reading the verse before looking up to see who his caller was.

"... *The Colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady,*
Sisters under their skins ..."

"What did you do with your skin?" asked a voice.

Kennedy looked up, saw that it was the ship's Surgeon.

"What brings *you* back, Doc?" he asked. "Loading's not started yet."

"Never mind the loading. What did you do with your skin?"

"My *skin?* Oh, you mean those pelts we got at Port Debenham—I took it home, of course. My sister has it now. What's the flap? Customs?"

"No, Bill, it's worse. Your sister hasn't had the skin made up into a coat, I hope. I tell you—once those skins get out into sunlight they're dangerous!"

"Why?" asked Kennedy.

"I'll tell you. It so happens that Marilyn—my wife—is allergic to fur, even to extra-Terran fur. As soon as I unpacked the thing she started to sneeze. She said that she appreciated such a lovely present, but that I, as a medical man, should have known that, as far as she was concerned, it was quite impossible.

"Well, I'm well in with the boys at the Department of Extra-Terran Biology, and I thought that they'd be glad of the pelt. The next morning I took it round to them. The following morning they rang me, saying that it was urgent that I come round to see them at once.

"I'll skip the biology of it all. I'll just tell you in words of one syllable what happened at the lab. They're a distrustful lot of beggars. They work on the assumption that

the average spaceman is an incompetent bungler. They assumed that nobody aboard the ship had the savvy to sterilize the furs. After taking samples to be checked for micro-organisms, they proceeded with the sterilization. They used all sorts of radiation, including ultra violet. When they were using the ultra violet the skin came to life—it tried to *eat* one of the lab technicians . . ."

"Impossible," said Kennedy.

"It's not impossible! Here's the way that they doped it out. O'Grady's Mole is as near as, dammit, immortal. When its body is worn out, it comes to the surface and dies. Flesh and bone are either absorbed into the skin or blow away as dust. Sooner or later the empty skin will be found by one of the aborigines, and used as rough clothing of a sort. Sooner or later the aborigine will be wearing the skin, on the surface of the planet, on one of the rare fine days. What happens then is simple—there'll be one aborigine less and one O'Grady's Mole the more.

"Anyhow, the flap was on. We got all the skins back but yours. The Captain's wife was lucky—she laid both her furs out on the flat roof to air. When we got there she was in hysterics. Two odd looking things, like three-quarter deflated balloons covered with golden fur, were flopping round the roof. They had once been Pekingese dogs—"

"I gave the skin to my sister," said Kennedy. "She's using it as a bedside rug for the time being. Luckily she lives in one of those inside, fully air-conditioned apartments. There's no danger."

"Even so," said the Doctor, "you'd better go to her straight away and get the skin back."

"I've got a Survey."

"Damn your Survey! Can't you see, Bill, that those natives hate the guts of all Earthmen? Selling the skins to us was a way to get revenge. There's no time to lose!"

"You're right," said Kennedy. "I'll ring Judith and tell her to lock the skin in a cupboard."

He went out to the wardroom to use the telephone. When he came back his face was pale.

He said, "She doesn't answer. But she's out shopping probably."

"We'd better hurry!"

They hurried.

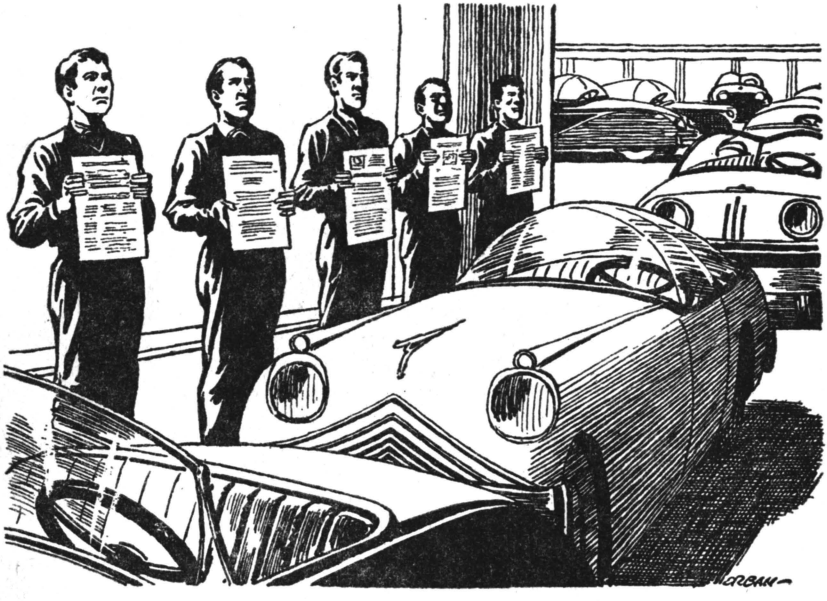
There was nobody in the flat—nobody human, that is.

There was a thing that shambled to meet them, walking clumsily on all fours, skidding on the polished floor.

Kennedy looked over the golden furred back of the brute to the open bedroom door, saw the articles of clothing scattered on the bed, saw the overturned sun ray lamp still burning. **END**

Scientific discoveries have been so closely linked to the ebb and flow of the events of history that it seems strange that histories have not been written with all the generals left out and the important inventors and scientists put in their places. —*C. C. Furnas*

Faint car never won fair lady! . . . Make your *car proud of you! . . . Grinning Gregory helps used people!*



Illustrated by Paul Orban

The Used People Lot

BY IRVING FANG

IT'S HAD it. Finished. Done. My wonderful red Thunderflash, I thought to myself, isn't worth the electricity to atomize it to Kingdom Come.

Ever since that drunk in his two-seat Charioteer plowed into the rear end with such force that even my radar repellant couldn't stop it, my Thunderflash had been out of kilter. The specialists my garage recommended worked over it for

two days, but couldn't get it to running the way it did new.

And what was I supposed to do for an automobile now? I had signed the customary 40-year pact for half my salary to pay for it. That meant I would still be shelling out by 2117.

Weeping over it wasn't going to do any good. It was stuck on the fifth level expressway and that was that. I levered myself out (at least the ejector still worked) then got behind the car and gave it a good old-fashioned push to get it on an off-ramp, out of the stream of traffic.

After I parked I remembered I was heading for a date with Jenny. I checked my wallet. No, not enough for a taxi there. I would just have to phone her to cancel the date.

Reluctantly I pushed the tip of my tongue against my tooth telephone.

"Operator," said the operator.

"Poplar 3104, please."

"Thank you. One moment. I'll ache it for you."

She dialed the number of the tooth telephone in Jenny's mouth, so the two fine wires sent gentle electric currents into the nerve. On the third ache Jenny clicked the receiver open with the tip of her tongue.

"Hello?"

"Jenny, this is Arnold. I won't be able to come over this evening."

"But we had a date," Jenny said in a petulant voice.

"I know, but my car broke down."

"Again?"

"Yes, honey."

"Why don't you do something about it?" Jenny complained.

"But baby, what can I do? I've been to the garage. I've been to the specialists. I'm so broke on account of these repair bills I've been living on macaroni concentrate for the last couple of weeks."

Jenny, my beautiful sweetheart, was distinctly unhappy. "Don't come to me with your troubles," she replied. "In fact, you don't have to come to me at all until you can come like a gentleman."

"Aw, listen just a minute, Jenny," I started to plead. But it was too late. Jenny had clicked off.

A fine thermokettle of fish! A month ago I had a shiny lifetime car and was romancing the best looking girl in town. Then one drunk comes along and my car is next to useless and my girl is mad at me.

Feeling in a distinctly blue mood I moved my tongue to the other side of my mouth and shoved on my tooth radio. I rolled the tongue over the bottom of the tooth until I got a program with some blues music. Just the way I felt. The blues. I sat in the front seat of my Thunderflash and listened to the music echoing against my tonsils.

After the song came the inevitable commercial. Only this was a new one. The announcer said:

"Here's some big, big, big news from Grinning Gregory, your largest volume dealer in lifetime cars. Gregory announced today that his used people lots are nearly empty. Yes, Grinning Gregory's used people lots are nearly empty. And that

means good, good, good news for you car owners with lifetime contracts who would like new cars.

"Grinning Gregory has added to his stocks of new Orions, Thunderflashes, Galaxies, Solars, Charioteers, Protons and Fords. For the first time in two years, yes, the first time in two years, he has more new cars than new people to sell them to.

"So he is offering a limited number of them to used people, you folks who have had cars, on his conveniently located used people lots. Come on down and let some of Grinning Gregory's new cars look you over. Be sure and bring photostats of your credit ratings and official car histories. Hurry, hurry, hurry and avoid the rush to Grinning Gregory's used people lots."

The commercial ended and was replaced by music.

Gosh, that was exciting news. Ever since the accident I had given up hope of ever owning a decent running car again, automobile prices and government restrictions being what they were.

I clicked on my tooth telephone and ached my garage mechanic to come by and pick up my car. Then I took my credit rating and official car history from the glove compartment and caught a helibus to the nearest of Grinning Gregory's used people lots.

A LOT of guys were already there before me, most of them in the same fix I was. They had been in accidents or they were divorced and their wives got custody of the car, although they still had to pay for it.

Some of them had been on the lot for some time and looked a little shopworn under the lights and fluttering pennants, but they hadn't found a car yet that would take them. We were all classified as used people, a lot less desirable than people who hadn't signed for cars yet.

One of Grinning Gregory's contract brokers lined us up in a row facing the path the cars would come by robot direction. The fellow to my right slicked his hair down neatly and began shining his shoetops on the backs of his trouser legs.

"Sure hope I get selected," he whispered nervously to me. "Boy, don't you sometimes wish you were living a couple of hundred years ago when cars were cheap enough so that people were doing the picking?"

"Not me," I told him. "Drive that junk? I'll admit you didn't have to swear but a couple of years of your life away. But look at all you get now in a car."

"Mmm, I suppose you're right," he said. "My Orion was stolen a year ago when I accidentally cut off the burglar photocell. The police never did find it and I've been trying ever since to get another one."

"This is the first time I've tried," I said. "My car . . ."

"Ssh," he interrupted. "Here they come."

A procession of new cars, led by a beautiful green Solar convertible, inched its way along the row of hopeful buyers, all of us with our credit ratings and car histories

pinned to our lapels.

Each car's robot mechanism recorded our statistics, took our pictures, noted our heights, weights and appearances, then began to correlate the data.

By government order the robot mechanism was directed to select its most promising future owner. A sobersides bank president, for example, might dearly love to change his big black Galaxy sedan for a low-slung Charioteer sports car, but sports cars were planned with crew-cutted college boys in mind, so the bank president would be likely to end up with another big Galaxy. Of course, the payment rate was fixed and the contracts were almost always for 40 years. A tie salesman might want a Galaxy to make an impression on his neighbors, but he'd probably wind up with a Proton or a Thunderflash like I had. I was a tie salesman.

The Solar came abreast of me. I stood straight and smiling as it began to note my statistics. It flashed a 23 when it was done.

Not so good. That put me in the 23 percentile rank of its desirability. The next car, a rhinestone Ford, gave me a 28. I was rated 22, 31, 14 (by a Galaxy), 27, 35 and 30 by the next six cars. That was the way it went for the whole procession. I received the highest rating, 58, from an experimental model Proton that was no longer in production, but I knew it was rating everybody higher and I was pretty gloomy.

Imagine my surprise when my name was called out as one of the possible choices. I went into the broker's office and was told the Proton would select me if I would get rid of all but ten years of my Thunderflash contract. That meant I had to find someone to take my car and 27 years of my contract, since I had been paying for three years of the 40. The price of the Proton, the broker told me, was scaled down to a 30-year contract because it was an off-model.

But who would take my heap with a 27-year contract attached to it? The broker said Grinning Gregory might go for five years, just out of the goodness of his big, big, big heart. I wouldn't get that kind of a deal anywhere else, the broker said.

Maybe I wouldn't, but that didn't do me much good. I needed someone to take 27 years.

Harry! Why didn't I think of Harry before? He didn't have a car yet. Skinflint Harry didn't want to sign the standard 40-year contract for a car and he had been shopping around for second-hand cars. Besides, good old Harry knew how crazy I was about Jenny. He had even taken her out a couple of times.

I gave Harry an ache on the telephone and told him I'd be right over. Then I ached the garage and the mechanic told me he could get my Thunderflash in pretty good running condition again, even though he couldn't promise anything permanent. I caught a helibus to my friend's apartment.

"Harry, old pal, I've got the chance of a lifetime for both of us."

Harry eyed me suspiciously. "How's that?" he asked.

"Well, here's the deal. You know my real fine Thunderflash? You

said it was a sharp car. It is. It's a first class car. But ever since that slight accident, I've had just a wee bit of trouble with it. Not much, you understand, but it's niggling enough to annoy my girl, Jenny. You remember Jenny, the girl you used to go with before I cut you out? Ha! Ha! Anyhow, Jenny wants me to get another car. A newer one."

"But how can you?" Harry asked. "You already have one."

"That's just it, old buddy," I replied. "Grinning Gregory has one of those experimental model Protons. It's a beauty, shimmering orange with purple wheels and bearskin upholstery. You'd love it. They'll let me have it on a 30-year contract if I can sell 27 years of my Thunderflash contract. So here's what I'm going to do for you, pal. I'll keep ten years of the contract and let you have the Thunderflash for the rest. You'll be getting a three-year-old car with 13 years of the contract taken care of. Now is that a deal or is that a deal!"

Harry wasn't convinced. "What's wrong with your car?"

"Oh, hardly anything."

"What's hardly anything?"

"Not even worth mentioning."

"What's not worth mentioning?"

"To tell the truth, the frame is just the least trifle out of line and every once in a great while it makes the rear wheel twist sideways."

"I don't know," said Harry.

"Good old cautious, hard-headed Harry," I told him. "You are getting the deal of a lifetime and doing a good, loyal friend a big favor besides."

"I still don't know, Arnold," said Harry.

"All right. When will you know?"

"Let me sleep on it tonight."

"OK, Harry."

I went home in high spirits. I knew Harry would come through for me and take that wreck off my hands. He always was a man with an eye out for a deal.

I slept late the next morning, but by afternoon I was over to the used people lot to tell them to hold the Proton for me for another day. Instead, they tapped me over the head with the news that someone came in that morning and bought it. And they didn't have another one like it that would accept me.

Another hope gone astray! I caught a helibus to the garage and picked up my Thunderflash after paying a whopping repair bill. I drove to Jenny's house to convince her it was just as good as new.

Jenny's mother met me at the door.

"Hello, Arnold," she said with the big smile of greeting she always gave me. "I'm glad to see you and I hope you'll keep dropping over to see me, but Jenny isn't here any more."

"Not here?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Where is she?"

"She eloped less than an hour ago. You remember the boy she used to go with, Harry? He came by in a beautiful new car. It was shimmering orange with purple wheels and bearskin upholstery and . . ." **END**

Health was no longer a problem for the aged. All they had to do was ban sex and tobacco to those over thirty-five . . .

THE DOWNHILL SIDE OF THIRTY

BY

VIRGIL F. SHOCKLEY

CHUCK DANE patted shaving lotion on his face, enjoying the second of vicious sting. He closed the medicine cabinet and stood for a minute examining himself in the fluorescent lighted mirror. He was lean and hard and, of course, tanned. A few grey hairs flecked the sideburns, but he didn't think that he looked thirty-five. And, damn it all to hell! he didn't feel thirty-five!

He opened the bathroom door, and hesitated. He dreaded to walk through the photoelectric beam and set off that odious disc! Sometimes he got down on hands and knees and crawled under. But he felt so damn silly!

Well, he couldn't stand there all day. It was Monday and they would expect him at the office.

He squared his shoulders and walked into the hall.

"Lung Cancer, Heart Attacks!
Heart Attacks, Lung Cancer!
Beware, old man, Be . . . ware!"

The tinkly message followed him up the hall. "I could jam the damn thing!" he thought, "but they'd only repair

it at daily Gov-Apts Inspection and report me again!"

He pushed his hands into his pants pockets and walked into the dining ell. He slouched in his chair, and watched Sally swish back and forth from the kitchen as she set the table. She was in blue nylon pajamas and fuzzy blue mules. Her red hair was tied up in a provocative pony tail.

She felt him watching her, gave him a devilish grin. "Sleep well last night, dear? In your own little bed?"

"You know damn well I didn't!" God, he wanted a cigarette. After two years he still wanted one! When would the hunger for them ever stop?

"You knew where I was sleeping. The door was unlocked!"

She came to him, suddenly compassionate, and sat on his lap. She pulled his head against her. He felt, on his face, the slickness of the nylon, and underneath her firm body. She whispered, "You know honey, no matter what the government says, I'm not made for sleeping alone!"

"And I'm thirty-five and not 'spose to!"

"Thirty-five and eighty-nine days! How well I know! The toast!"

She scooted off his lap and ran into the kitchen. How she managed to burn toast in an electronic toaster beat him. By sending it down twice, he suspected.

He picked up the paper by his plate and unfolded it. The first page, as usual, was devoted to the Propagandists. Headlines proclaimed: "375 died this weekend doing *you know what.*" The second line asked: "Will you be next?"

It made a good story because only three hundred deaths had been predicted. The bottom half of the page was filled with pictures of the victims and the spouses who "lead them on, knowing at the time that over forty percent of the heart attacks in men and women over thirty-five are brought on by sexual relations."

Sally was leaning over him, serving his plate with scrambled eggs and ham, but he tried to ignore her and turned to the next page. Here was an editorial by the Department of Health. He scanned it. Same old thing. Sex to be avoided like poison by all persons, male and female, over thirty-five years.

Chuck forked a piece of soya bread, and swabbed the last of ham grease and egg from his plate. He sat drinking his soya hot chocolate, and wanting a cigarette.

Sally finished eating, stretched, and the nylon threatened to rip. She went and got his suit coat and hat. At the door he tried to kiss her goodbye in his best "big brother" manner. But she clinched in close, and suddenly he didn't feel like a brother.

She whispered in his ear, "Come on back. I'll call and tell them you caught a virus!"

He almost took off his hat. Then he said, "You know it would show up in my weekly S-Count!" He shuddered just saying the words. God! how he hated that! He continued, "And if I slip once or twice on that, you know what they do."

Feeling sorry for her, he added half-heartedly, "But you're only thirty. And I wouldn't blame you . . . Lot of people do, you know."

She leaned back, still in his arms, and laughed up at him. "No, I'll wait and break you down!"

"Even knowing what they're likely to do?"

"But surely! Then at least the temptation wouldn't be so handy!"

He walked rapidly toward the office. Other groups walked along talking and laughing. Here and there someone called to him.

He came to U.S. 75, a deserted graying eight lane strip. As he started across, a bike came over the rise and he dived into the ditch. But it was only a Catholic priest pedalling furiously along on a girl's bicycle. Then there had been another clash! He climbed out of the ditch, and walked a ways down the highway. There it was. The priest was just climbing off the bike, and there was a motorcycle cop.

Chuck Dane walked up the highway to the scene and stood watching. The priest was kneeling, his black bag open, administering last rites to the two youths.

The cop, fat and redfaced, came over and stood beside Chuck. "Two less Teenagers!" he grinned.

"Dying, eh?" Chuck asked.

"Dying or dead! These damn kids!" He said it with just a tinge of envy.

The Father snapped his bag shut, and pedalled away. Chuck went over for a closer look. Both of the kids were on roller skates, the powered kind. Chuck Dane noted with satisfaction that they were Airex skates.

Both of the kids had on the regular uniform, black leather jackets, and leather belts eight inches wide. Mounted on the center front of the belts were the regulation three foot razor sharp spears. Only now there was not much of the spears to be seen. Because neither kid had chickened. The shorter boy had caught a spear in the lower chest, and the taller one caught it in the guts.

Funny, Chuck Dane thought, staring down at them. Even in this cotton batting, vacuum world of 1990 the Teenagers could find ways to kill each other off! He envied them their spirit!

He waved at the cop, who was calling in a report, and walked back up the highway. When he got to his usual place, he started to cross.

"Olá!"

In that frantic second, he saw only the black leather jacket bearing down upon him. And the bike with the spear mounted on the handlebars, the tip sparkling like a diamond in the sun. It swerved, and came straight for him. Chuck dived into the ditch, even as he felt it prick his coat.

The kid yelled, "Cock-a-doodle-do!" and pedalled on.

Chuck climbed up out of the ditch and ran across the highway. Then he straightened his clothing, dusted himself off. This was damn undignified! He hated the kid, wanted to kill him with his bare hands.

He walked along, thinking how

it had all come about. First it had been the highway death toll. When it had reached over two thousand on week days, and ten thousand on weekends, the government had stepped in. Their solution had been simple and foolproof. They simply taxed gas out of sight. Now the oil companies exported their total output, and were making more money than ever.

Then some fool in the A.M.A. had pointed out that almost as many people were dying of lung cancer as had previously fallen on the ribbons of death.

At first Congress had passed a bill to ban the manufacture of all cigarettes. But the black market flourished and the psychiatrists yelped. They yelped that the approach to the problem was all wrong, due to the fact that they hadn't been consulted. This was warping personalities and making martyrs out of cigarette users. The way to do it, they said, was to have tobacco products available, but to shame people into giving them up of their own free wills.

They theorized that a cigarette smoker is really a frustrated person unable to cope with the adult world. When he puts a cig between his lips he is really searching for his mother's nipple. Therefore, the thing to do is to force him to outgrow this, rather than take it forcibly away from him. Same way with a cigar smoker or pipe smoker.

The psychiatric lobby prevailed and the government repealed the tobacco bill. And replaced it with another. Now it was the law for all cigarettes, cigars and pipe tobacco to have an hallucination inducing drug, Xlene 91, in them. Also, as was compulsory, all cigars, pipes and cigarettes sported rubber filters shaped like nipples.

Then, Chuck Dane reminisced, with lung cancer dropping off steadily, they had started in to curb heart attacks. And taken away the only pleasure a guy had left!

He was in sight of his place of work now. A huge half-circle of plexiglass that was Airex Roller Skating Factory. Chuck thought as he entered the building, that four hours was a hell of a long working day, especially doing material control posting all that time. He hoped the bill to change working hours to three hours would pass soon. . .

AT TWO o'clock in the afternoon, Chuck lined up with the rest of the office force to walk single file past the hidden electronic camera. Out of habit, he held his right hand in salute position, palm toward the camera. These deals had been interesting when they first replaced the old style time clocks, now they were routine.

As the queue neared the door where the company's three psychiatrists stood, Chuck got more and more nervous. Suppose they could read his mind, or something!

Sure enough, Doctor Benton wiggled a finger for him to step out of line. He took him to one side, and peered into his face. Chuck tried to look into the green eyes, so calm and assured, but he had to look away.

"You okay, Dane?"

"Sure! Tired, that's all. Helluva long day!"

"Yes. Well, you come in and see me tomorrow. We'll have us a little talk."

Rapidly, Chuck left the building. He muttered, "Like hell we will, Headshrinker!"

Furtively, he left the usual road home, and walked into a corner drugstore. He stood around with his hands in his pockets, until all the other customers cleared out.

"Puffies," he said.

The big man behind the counter tried to hitch his belt over his paunch. "Sure you know what you're doin', Bud? Have to take your number you know."

Chuck didn't answer. He pulled his right hand out of his pocket and laid it palm up on the glass counter top. The man wrote down the id number and handed over the cigarettes.

Chuck walked on home, with the Puffies a guilty lump in his jacket pocket. He felt sure everybody he met knew what he was up to.

At home, Chuck stuck his head in the kitchen and said "Hi" to Sally. He resisted patting her. He went to the den and locked the door with trembling fingers, then sat at the desk and took out his knife. He cut off the realistic red nipples from all twenty cigarettes, and made a pyre of them in the middle of the glass top. Then he set fire to them, not minding the acrid smoke.

He put a cigarette to his lips. Still he hesitated, fearing the hallucinations, about which he had heard but never experienced.

Suddenly he grinned and leaned back, lit up and closed his eyes. The parade of pictures began in front of his eyeballs. First a picture of human lungs, and slowly the cancer virus invades them and eats them away. Then the parade of men and women clutching their chests, writhing in death throes. Chuck Dane smiled, enjoying each hallucination. Pretending that the unlucky victims were the Propagandists.

He lit another cigarette from the butt of the first one, and leaned back, feeling his lungs pleasantly saturated with smoke.

When ten cigarettes were snubbed in a row on the glass top of the desk, he stopped and mused. Now, he guessed he would die of cancer for sure. He wondered how long. . .

Then another thought hit him. With two temptations, he wondered why he had given in to the cigarette first.

He lit another Puffie and leaned back in the chair and closed his eyes. A perfect technicolor picture of Sally crossed his mind, swishing the pony tail provocatively. He got up. Left the den. Went to the kitchen and leaned in the door watching her.

Tomorrow was Tuesday. His day for S-Count. But he wouldn't submit to that again. Or have that little talk with Doctor Benton. Tomorrow, going to work, when he crossed U.S. 75 he would give some Teenager a hell of a thrill! But tonight . . . tonight . . .

"Come here, baby!" he whispered harshly. **END**

A built-in guidance system for tomorrows' highways was recently demonstrated at the General Motors Technical Center in Warren, Michigan, when an automobile was automatically guided along a one-mile check road. The combined electronic computer and servo mechanism, which controlled the car, followed a magnetic path produced by low frequency power in an electrical cable under the highway.

28,600,000 tons of dust of cosmic origin is suspended in the earth's atmosphere below the 60 mile level, according to a recent report of Dr. Hans Pettersson of the University of Hawaii. The dust, fine meteoric particles, which continuously sift earthward, is renewed every two years. This means that the earth is picking up 14,300,000 tons a year. To this tonnage is added another 620,000 tons of interplanetary dust which the earth collects each year in its journey around the sun. Dr. Pettersson took his samples by filtering large volumes of air through fine-pored filters at Mauna Loa Observatory on Hawaii at 11,000 feet and at Mt. Haleakala, on Maui, T. H., at 10,000 feet. The filters were analyzed for iron, cobalt and nickel content, and weight was estimated from the nickel content. Dr. Pettersson advises further experiments, as this tonnage is four times that of estimates previously made.

The Army Prosthetics Research Laboratory has announced a "cosmetic glove" to fit the mechanical hands of amputees. Complete with hair and fingernails, they are so lifelike they cannot be distinguished at a casual glance from a real hand. With today's mechanical hand developed to the point where it can be operated with a single cable at 80% efficiency, scientists at the APRL are now working on a sense of touch and feel—an extension of the nerves into the mechanical fingers!

Cleaner streets with nylon is a prediction of the DuPont Company. Scientific research is responsible for the use of nylon bristles, the same kind you have in your toothbrush, in brooms and brushes to clean the nation's streets. Tests prove that brooms with ordinary vegetable fibre bristles last 150-200 sweeping miles, while nylon-bristled street-brooms provide 4000 miles of sweeping. Bristles used in test brooms were 12 inches long, with a useful length of seven inches and a diameter the size of an ordinary lead pencil. Average wear was 600 miles to the inch.

A tiny, 3⅜ inch, 150-watt Tru-Flector lamp, smaller than any comparable projection lamp, has been announced by Sylvania Elec-

tric. In an eight-millimeter movie projector, it provides about the same screen brightness as the larger 500-watt type in wide use today. Its chief advantage, aside from economy, is that it requires less cooling and, consequently, is much quieter.

The Kilowatt Heat Barrier has been broken by a Detroit inventor, Glenn W. Watson, who has found a way to extract 9385 BTU'S from the Kilowatt. This is two and three quarters times the 80 year old figure of 3413 BTU'S. A combination of two basic electronic principles produces the new heat figure. Electronic steam radiator heat in one room and a bank of "hot wire" heat positioned in another room fifty feet away, produces the new figure results. The inventor declares 9385 BTU'S of heat were always present in the Kilowatt but man did not know how to extract it for use. He states that more went to waste by the ground wire than was utilized.

A "time clock" for atomic fallout has been developed at the Atomic Energy Project at University of California at Los Angeles. The device, which punches its own time clock, shows the precise time at which fallout arrives in areas up to 100 jiles from "ground zero". This information is vital to determine the amount of radiation-exposure people in this area may have received. The device operates when increased radiation intensity reaches a pre-set rate, shorting the electrical circuit, blowing a fuse and stopping the clock instantly, thus showing exact time of fallout arrival. Such a device will provide accurate data for effective treatment of victims, particularly in cases where time is the determining factor.

Polio shots for all children under five is strongly urged by the U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. According to 1957 figures, the highest attack rate, 5.7 per 100,000, was among children one year old. The next highest was 5.5 among two-year olds, and for children through four years of age the rate was 4.4. For children between the ages of 5 and 19 the average was 1.4.

Your editorial comments on what writers write about are interesting and somewhat accurate. The dream-expression aspect of a story shows up especially in fantasy, so that theoretically a story of that type expresses the conflicts that are in the writer, when such conflicts are strong at the time of writing. However, there is another aspect to conflict—getting conflict into a story when the writer isn't at war with something. That is, when the writer feels he has to have conflict to sell a story. A writer can get in a rut in that direction. For example, two stories of mine, *(Captain Peabody, Game Preserve)* have similarities on the symbolic level—two major ones, to be specific: (1) a group of people that are the helpless victims and (2) one act of extreme cruelty performed by an individual from noble motivations. In both cases the victim was helpless at the time, in both cases the person administering the cruelty was going against his nature. And also, in both cases, it was not so much a person that was attacked with such all-out swiftness and reluctance, but something present in the attacked person. In one it was mixed genes that could threaten the race, in the other it was a sadism that threatened everyone aboard ship. In fact, abstractly the two stories are so similar that they could be said to be significantly symptomatic—except for the fact that they were not written at the same time nor were they the only stories I wrote nor were they the only ones I sold. In going over the stories written during that year, they are the only two having those qualities. In fact, they seem to be the only two I've ever written having just those qualities. But in finding that out I've also found out that I have a most definite repugnance to conflict, and a general approach to it of stalling it off and making it swift, all-out, and getting it out of the way quickly, like taking medicine. In real life I'm the same way.

I still think *Game Preserve* one of the best stories I ever wrote, and very gentle in touch rather than sadistic. All those who have written to me directly seem to agree.

In answer to that letter (February IF) taking task with "one fourth of the population would be subnormal", the problem would be social as well as Mendelian, with so many social variables involved that not a priori argument from Mendel's laws alone could possibly be correct except by accident. One factor would be that very few normals would

marry subnormals. Another would be that renegade male normals might sire a large percentage of the offspring of subnormal females. But my "educated guess" that one fourth of the population would become subnormal without the preserves cannot be disproven, any more than it can be proven, from any knowledge we possess today.

—Rog Phillips
Berkeley, Calif.

Fascinating language, Interlingua—sounds like a kind of scramble of the "Romance" Languages. Would certainly like more information. Origin of the language, etc.—and, since I live in Mexico, I would be grateful for the addresses of stateside publishers of textbooks, if any, on the subject.

While we're about it, let me say that, yes, IF is a good magazine. Nice that you publish "unknowns" like Miguel Hidalgo. Too many science fiction magazines rely purely on established names, and while this is all well and good, even the best writers flub sometimes. Isn't it better to print something fresh by an "unknown" than a mediocre effort by a "name"? Incidentally, there seems to be a prevalence of science fiction titles down here. Maybe because there are so many "escapees" in Mexico.

—Jeanne Malone
Mexico, D. F.

You were absolutely right about Miguel Hidalgo. His story wasn't the best in the issue, but it was certainly a very fine story, and I hope the sale will inspire Miguel to write more stories. I hope I will be able to write that well when I am fifteen.

You weren't as absolutely right about *A Question of Identity* (April '58). I'm fairly sure that a more original story will come along during 1958. The idea of establishing what a man is was used (with a different twist—the missing link is found and no one knows whether to call them men or apes) in *You Shall Know Them*. The idea of rebuilding men has also been often used before. The originality of this story lies in the combination of ideas. The rest of the stories were also more or less lacking in originality, but they were all good. IF seems to be typed; in this issue five of seven stories dealt with extrapolated societies or extraterrestrial societies. If you must buy typed stories, why don't you spread them?

The new IF logo is much better.

—Leslie Gerber
Brooklyn, New York

About Science and Science Fiction

ANSWERS: 1—27 (1931). 2—Bertram Chandler. 3—Thomas A. Edison. 4—Isaac Asimov, *The End of Eternity*. 5—False; it is man-made. 6—Mars. 7—1984 by George Orwell. 8—Faculae. 9—An ion that is both positively and negatively charged. 10—Hottest. 11—Arthur C. Clarke wrote both. 12—Interlingua.

In the February '58 issue of IF, Ike Asimov wrote a good, humorous story. I thoroughly enjoyed it. However, he overlooks some things, probably on purpose; mainly that computors work many times faster than the human mind and with no possibility of mistakes (other than the human feeding wrong information into it).

In the story, they talked about breaking through on the "square root front", but the farthest a man (without a computer) has gone with the irrational square root of two is in the hundreds, while a computor has had it out in the thousands, without much human strain, and in a much shorter period of time!

Another thing in the story was the development of a manned missile to fight against a computor-controlled missile. It isn't practical because of the slow reaction time of humans compared to computors. The only way manned missiles could destroy one would be through overwhelming numbers. But then the loss of ships would nullify most of the advantage of getting five times as many and at one-tenth of the cost of the computor-manned missiles.

—William M. Noe II
South Pasadena, Calif.

When is science fiction not science fiction? When it's an historical novel of the future.

When is a science fiction story a bore? When a present-day dilemma (war, depression, bad television, book-burning) is propelled into the defenseless future, and then solved in a manner suitable to the author.

Is science fiction about science or is it just about tomorrowland? And if it's about tomorrowland, why, groan, can't we give tomorrowland another batch of troubles? Can't we assume that a lot of our troubles (inflation, Fuller Brush men, California tailpipes) will, like the snows of yesteryear, just fade away? Does shoving the clock ahead a couple of hundred years make a story a science fiction story? And why, oh, why, does the hero of the story always stop to reflect how much things have improved/deteriorated since the middle of the twentieth century? Why doesn't he think, just once, about the nineteenth century? Or the twenty-first? What is so uniquely interesting about the 1950s that all the people of the future hark back on it with nostalgia/horror?

The crux of a science fiction story, a real one, will always be a valid idea about science. Be it gadgets, be it medicine, be it sociology, be it economics, be it space travel, be it teleportation, time travel, or whatever. An adventure story without a new concept of some facet of science is not a science fiction story. So what if the action takes place on an unheard-of planet? Who cares if a man of conscience declaims Tom Paine on an unheard-of planet? We recognize all the old faces.

Science fiction writers who leave out the science: *Big brother is watching you!*

—Betty Herman
Chicago, Illinois

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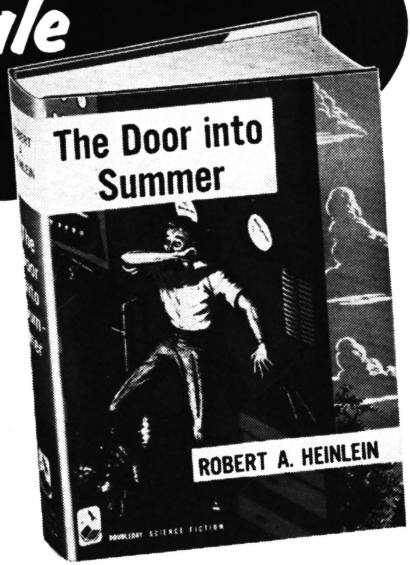

—*Continued from Back Cover*

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But there are other attractions in that world of 2000: its women in "sticktite" clothes they just throw away after wearing... its honeymoon trips to the moon... its remarkable new conveniences ...its brand new words of love and ways to live. No more menial labor. Robots take care of all that. Soon you're enjoying life as never before! You're glad to be out of that miserably backward world of the 20th century.

But unfortunately you *must* get back to the year 1970, to take care of one last urgent mission. You only hope that you can come back to the 21st century by taking "The Long Sleep" again. The big question is: Can it be done?

—Continued on other side

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