WORLDS OF
IF
SCIENCE FICTION
combined with
WORLDS OF TOMORROW
FEBRUARY 1968
60c

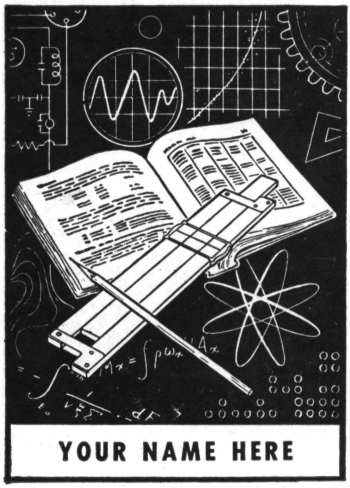
SLOWBOAT CARGO
A World at the End of the Universe
Receives a Deadly Gift from Earth!

LARRY NIVEN'S
THRILLING NEW
SCIENCE-FICTION NOVEL

THE PETRIFIED WORLD
by ROBERT SHECKLEY

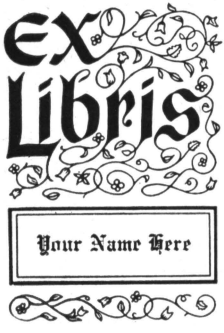
The BEMs in your neighborhood

won't run off with your books if you put inside the front cover of each book... a gummed bookplate with your name printed on it!

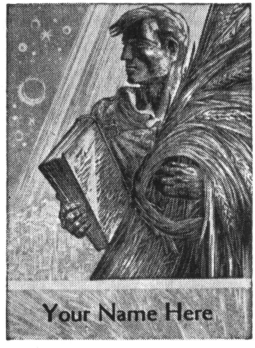


No. GF-614 by Emsh

No. GF-612 by Emsh



No. GM-12 by Cullen Rapp



No. GX-57 by Lynd Ward

FINAGLE SAYS—

The umpteenth corollary of Finagle's General Law of Dynamic Negatives says:

"No books are ever lost by loaning except ones you particularly want to keep."

100 for $5; 200, $7.50; 300, $10 with owner's name imprinted

All Postpaid. Add state sales tax, if any.

ACTUAL SIZE, all designs, 3x4 inches

The designs shown above are the only ones we offer!

Order from Galaxy 421 Hudson Street, New York 14, N.Y.

FEBRUARY, 1968
Vol. 18, No. 2
ISSUE 123

WORLDS OF IF SCIENCE FICTION

ALL NEW STORIES

Frederik Pohl, Editor
Judy-Lynn Benjamin, Associate Editor

Robert M. Guinn, Publisher
Mavis Fisher, Circulation Director

Cover by BODÉ from THE PETRIFIED WORLD

IF published monthly by Galaxy Publishing Corporation. Robert M. Guinn, President, Vol. 18, No. 2. Main Office: 421 Hudson Street, New York, 10014. 60c per copy. Subscription 12 issues $6.00 in the United States, Canada, Mexico, South America and Central America and U.S. Possessions, elsewhere $7.00. Second-class postage paid at New York, New York, and at additional mailing offices.

Printed in the U.S.A. by the Guinn Company, New York, N.Y. 10014

The Day We Launched The Moonship

A few hours ago (as this is written) we struggled up out of a sound sleep at the unearthly hour of 4:30 in the morning, drove thirty miles along what used to be the rattlesnake barrens of Cape Canaveral and is now the world's first and largest spaceport and watched the launching of that (literally) howling success, Saturn V.

By the time you read this it will all be ancient history, of course. But now it's still fresh in our mind, every minute of it, from the first graying of dawn over the Atlantic to the babble of excited mutual congratulations, German accents praising Texas drawls, in the coffeeshops of the Cocoa Beach motels when everyone gathered for a late, and very joyous, breakfast. Everything worked. The whole drama of the situation was that there was no drama. The beast rose up and flew with as little unexpected event as you might find in the takeoff of the shuttle flight from New York to Boston, every hour on the hour. As little as you might find when you get into your car to go to the grocery.

It's still a pretty expensive, inherently wasteful, process, this business of throwing a couple thousand pounds of metal into orbit by exploding gases under it. There ought to be better ways. Probably there are, and we'll find them.

But meanwhile Wernher von Braun and his boys have provided us with this one way of getting to the Moon that has the advantage of being ready right now — and workable on schedule, on demand, no problems.

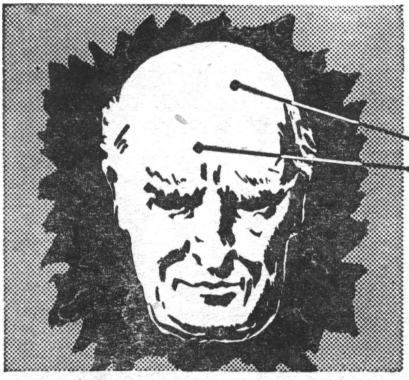
Of course, we science-fiction types always knew it would work out this way, and no doubt for most of us the big question has not been so much "Can we travel in space?" as it has been "What the dickens is taking us so long?"

A couple of decades from now we, or our children, will remember with amusement and even incredulity how people used to throw away 95% of a spaceship to get 5% into a parking orbit. That vast noise that broke glass, shattered nerves, was heard 800 miles away will be recalled as a symptom of incredibly poor efficiency. By then no doubt we'll have reusable launch vehicles, like the Douglas Hyperion, and better ways of applying power, and Earth-Lunar commutation tickets. (Just as we now have commuters from New York to Los Angeles — in energy terms, a more expensive trip.)

But that's a couple decades from now.

Right now we've got *a* moonship . . . and it works!

— THE EDITOR



STRANGE things happen here!

The Dark Continents of Your Mind

DO YOU struggle for balance? Are you forever trying to maintain *energy*, *enthusiasm* and the *will to do?* Do your personality and power of accomplishment ebb and flow—like a stream controlled by some unseen valve? Deep within you are minute organisms. From their function spring your emotions. They govern your *creative ideas* and *moods*—yes, even your enjoyment of life. Once they were thought to be the mysterious seat of the soul—and to be left unexplored. Now cast aside superstition and learn to direct intelligently these *powers of self.*

Accept This Free Book

Let the Rosicrucians, an age-old fraternity of thinking men and women (not a religion), point out how you may fashion life as you want it—by making the fullest use of these little-understood *natural faculties* which you possess. This is a challenge to make the most of your heritage as a human. Write for the Free Book, "The Mastery of Life," Address: Scribe V.B.K.

The ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC)
San Jose, California 95114 U.S.A.

Scribe: V.B.K.
The Rosicrucians (AMORC)
San Jose, California 95114, U.S.A.

Please send copy of booklet, "The Mastery of Life" which I shall read as directed.

Name_____

Address_____

City_____

State_____

Please Include Your Zip Code

SLOWBOAT CARGO

by LARRY NIVEN

The ramrobot had been on its way from Earth for decades — and now it was changing a world overnight!

Illustrated by ADKINS

I

A ramrobot had been the first to see Mount Lookitthat. Ramrobots had been first visitors to all the settled worlds. The interstellar ramscoop robots, with an unrestricted fuel supply culled from interstellar hydrogen, could travel between stars at speeds approaching that of light. Long ago the UN had sent ramrobots to nearby stars to search out habitable planets.

It was a peculiarity of the first ramrobots that they were not choosy. The Procyon ramrobot, for instance, had landed on We Made It in spring. Had it landed in summer or winter, when the planet's axis points through its sun, it would have sensed the

fifteen-hundred-mile-per-hour winds. The Sirius ramrobot had searched out the two narrow habitable bands on Jinx, but had not been programmed to report the planet's other peculiarities. And the Tau Ceti ramrobot, Interstellar Ramscoop Robot No. 4, had landed on Mount Lookitthat.

Only the Plateau on Mount Lookitthat was habitable. The rest of the planet was an eternal, searing black calm, useless for any purpose. The Plateau was smaller than any region a colony project would settle by choice. But Interstellar Ramscoop Robot #4 had found a habitable point, and that was all it knew.

The colony slowboats which followed the ramrobots had not been built to make round trips. Their passengers had to stay, always. And so Mount Lookitthat was settled, more than three hundred years ago.

A flock of police cars fanned out behind the fleeing man. He could hear them buzzing like summer bumblebees. Now, too late, they were using all their power. In the air this pushed them to one hundred miles per hour: fast enough for transportation in as small a region as Mount Lookitthat, but, just this once, not fast enough-to win a race. The running man was only yards from the edge.

Spurts of dust erupted ahead of the fugitive. At last the Implementation police had decided to risk damaging the body. The man hit the dust like a puppet thrown in anger, turned over hugging one knee. Then he was scrambling for the cliff's sharp edge on the other knee and two hands. He jerked once more, but kept moving. At the very edge he looked up to see a circling car coming right at him from the blue void beyond . . . .

With the tip of his tongue held firmly between his teeth, Jesus Pietro Castro aimed his car at the enraged, agonized, bearded face. An inch too low and he'd hit the cliff; an inch too high and he'd miss the man, miss his chance to knock him back onto the Plateau. He pushed two fan throttles forward —

Too late. The man was gone.

Later, they stood at the edge and looked down.

Often Jesus Pietro had watched groups of children standing fearful and excited at the void edge, looking down toward the hidden roots of Mount Lookitthat, daring each other to go closer — and closer. As a child he had done the same. The wonder of that view had never left him.

Forty miles below, beneath a swirling sea of white mist, was the true surface of Mount Lookitthat, the planet. The great plateau on Mount Lookitthat, the mountain, had a surface less than half the size of California. All the rest of the world's surface was a black oven, hot enough to melt lead, at the bottom of an atmosphere sixty times as thick as Earth's.

Matthew Keller had committed, deliberately, one of the worst of possible crimes. He had crawled off the edge of the Plateau, taking with him his eyes, his liver and kidneys, his miles of blood tubing and all twelve of his glands . . . taking everything

that could have gone into the Hospital's organ banks to save the lives of those whose bodies were failing. Even his worth as fertilizer, not inconsiderable on a three-hundred-year-old colony world, was now nil. Only the water in him would some day return to the upper world, to fall as rain on the lakes and rivers and as snow on the great northern glacier. Already, perhaps, he was dry and flaming in the awful heat forty miles below.

Or had he stopped falling, even yet?

Jesus Pietro, Head of Implementation, stepped back with an effort. The formless mist sometimes brought strange hallucinations and stranger thoughts — like that odd member of the Rorschach inkblot set, the one sheet of cardboard which is blank. Jesus Pietro had caught himself thinking that when his time came, if it ever came, this was the way he would like to go. And that was treason.

The major met his eye with a curious reluctance.

"Major," said Jesus Pietro, "why did that man escape you?"

The major spread his hands. "He lost himself in the trees for several minutes. When he broke for the edge it took my men a few minutes to spot him."

"How did he reach the trees? No, don't tell me how he broke loose. Tell me why your cars didn't catch him before he reached the grove."

The major hesitated a split second too long. Jesus Pietro said, "You were playing with him. He couldn't reach his friends and he couldn't remain hidden anywhere. So you decided to have a little harmless fun."

The major dropped his eyes.

"You will take his place," said Jesus Pietro.

The playground was grass and trees, swings and teeter-totters and a slow, skeletal merry-go-round. The school surrounded it on three sides, a one-story building of architectural coral, painted white. The fourth side, protected by a high fence of tame vine growing on wooden stakes, was the edge of Gamma Plateau, a steep cliff overlooking Lake Davidson on Delta Plateau.

Matthew Leigh Keller sat beneath a watershed tree and brooded. Other children played all around him, but they ignored Matt. So did two teachers on monitor duty. People usually ignored Matt when he wanted to be alone.

Uncle Matt was gone. Gone to a fate so horrible that the adults wouldn't even talk about it.

Implementation police had come to the house at sunset yesterday. They had left with Matt's big, comfortable uncle. Knowing that they were taking him to the Hospital, Matt had tried to stop those towering, uniformed men; but they'd been gentle and superior and firm, and an eight-year-old boy had not slowed them down at all.

One day soon his uncle's trial and conviction would be announced on the colonist teedee programs, along with the charges and the record of his execution. But that didn't matter. That was just cleaning up. Uncle Matt would not be back.

A sting in his eyes warned Matt that he was going to cry.

Harold Lillard stopped his aimless running around when he realized that he was alone. He didn't like to be alone. Harold was ten, big for his age, and he needed others around him. Preferably smaller others, children who could be dominated. Looking rather helplessly around him, he spotted a small form under a tree near the playground's edge. Small enough. Far enough from the playground monitors.

He started over.

Under the tree, Matt looked up at him.

Harold lost interest. He wandered away with a vacant expression, moving more or less toward the teeter-totters.

II

Interstellar ramscoop robot #143 left Juno at the end of a linear accelerator. Coasting toward insterstellar space, she looked like a huge metal insect, makeshift and hastily built. Yet, except for the contents of her cargo pod, she was identical to the last forty of her predecessors. Her nose was the ramscoop generator, a massive, heavily armored cylinder with a large orifice in the center. Along the sides were two big fusion motors, aimed ten degrees outward, mounted on oddly jointed metal structures like the folded legs of a praying mantis. The hull was small, containing only a computer and an insystem fuel tank.

Juno was invisible behind her when the fusion motors fired. Immediately the cable at her tail began to unroll. The cable was thirty miles long and was made of braided Sinclair molecule chain. Trailing at the end was a lead capsule as heavy as the ramrobot itself.

Identical cargo pods had been going to the stars for centuries. But this one was special.

Like Ramrobots #141 and #142, already moving toward Jinx and Wunderland . . . like Ramrobot #144, not yet built . . . ramrobot #143 carried the seeds of revolution. The revolution was already in process on Earth. On Earth it was quiet, orderly. It would not be so on Mount Lookitthat.

The medical revolution which began with the beginning of the twentieth century had warped all human society for five hundred years. America had adjusted to Eli Whitney's cotton gin in less than half that time. As with the gin, the effects would never quite die out. But already society was swinging back to what had once been normal. Slowly — but there was motion.

In Brazil a small but growing alliance agitated for the abolition of the death penalty for habitual traffic offenders. They would be opposed, but they would win.

On twin spears of actinic light the ramrobot approached Pluto's orbit. Pluto and Neptune were both on the far side of the sun, and there were no ships nearby to be harmed by magnetic effects.

The ramscoop generator came on.

The conical field formed rather slowly, but when it had stopped oscil-

lating it was two hundred miles across. The ship began to drag a little, a very little, as the cone scooped up interstellar dust and hydrogen. She was still accelerating. Her insystem tank was idle now, and would be for the next twelve years. Her food would be the thin stuff she scooped out between the stars.

In nearby space the magnetic effects would have been deadly. Nothing with a notochord could live within three hundred miles of the storm of electromagnetic effects that was a working ramscoop generator. For hundreds of years men had been trying to build a magnetic shield efficient enough to let men ride the ramrobots. They said it couldn't be done, and they were right. A ramrobot could carry seeds and frozen fertile animal eggs, provided they were heavily shielded and were carried a good distance behind the ramscoop generator. Men must ride the slowboats, carrying their own fuel, traveling at less than half the speed of light.

For ramrobot #143, speed built up rapidly over the years. The sun became a bright star, then a dim orange spark. The drag on the ramscoop became a fearsome thing, but it was more than compensated by the increase in hydrogen pouring into the fusion motor. The telescopes orbiting in Neptune's Trojan points occasionally picked up the ramrobot's steady fusion light, a tiny fierce blue-white point against Tau Ceti's yellow.

The universe shifted and changed. Ahead and behind the ramrobot, the stars crept together, until Sol and Tau Ceti were less than a light-year apart. Now Sol was dying-ember red, and Tau Ceti showed brilliant white. The pair of red dwarves known as L726-8, almost in the ramrobot's path, had become warm yellow. And all the stars in all the heavens had a crushed look, as if somebody heavy had sat down on the universe.

Ramrobot #143 reached the halfway point, 5.95 light-years as measured relative to Sol, and kept going. Turnover was light-years off, since the ramscoop would slow the ship throughout the voyage.

But a relay clicked in the ramrobot's computer. It was message time. The ramscoop flickered out, and the light died in the motors, as Ramrobot #143 poured all her stored power into a maser beam. For an hour the beam went out, straight ahead, reaching toward the system of Tau Ceti. Then the ramrobot was accelerating again, following close behind her own beam, but with the beam drawing steadily ahead.

A line of fifteen-year-old boys had formed at the door of the medcheck station, each holding a conical bottle filled with clear yellowish fluid. One by one they handed their specimen bottles to the hard-faced, masculine-looking nurse, then stepped aside to wait for new orders.

Matt Keller was third from the end. As the boy in front of him stepped aside, and the nurse raised one hand without looking up from her typewriter, Matt examined his bottle critically. "Doesn't look so good," he said.

The nurse looked up in furious impatience. A colonist brat, wasting *her* time!

"I better run it through again," Matt decided aloud. And he drank it.

"It was apple juice," he said later that night. "I almost got caught sneaking it into the medcheck station. But you really should have seen her face. She turned the damnedest color."

"But why?" his father asked in honest bewilderment. "Why antagonize Miss Prynn? You *know* she's part crew. And these medical health records go straight to the Hospital!"

"*I* think it was funny," Jeanne announced. She was Matt's sister, a year younger than Matt, and she always sided with him.

Matt's grin seemed to slip from his face, leaving something dark, something older than his years. "One for Uncle Matt."

Mr. Keller glared at Jeanne, then at the boy. "You keep thinking like that, Matthew, and you'll end up in the Hospital, just like he did! Why can't you leave well enough alone?"

His father's evident concern penetrated Matt's mood. "Don't worry, Genghis," he said easily. "Miss Prynn's probably forgotten all about it. I'm lucky that way."

"Nonsense. If she doesn't report you it'll be through sheer kindness."

"Fat chance of *that*."

In a small recuperation room in the treatment section of the Hospital, Jesus Pietro Castro sat up for the first time in four days. His operation had been simple, though major; he now had a new left lung. He had also received a peremptory order from Millard Parlette, who was pure crew. He was to give up smoking immediately.

He could feel the pull of the internal surgical adhesive as he sat up to deal with four days of paperwork. The stack of forms his aide was setting on the bedside table looked disproportionately thick. He sighed, picked up a pen and went to work.

Fifteen minutes later he wrinkled his nose at some petty complaint — a practical joke — and started to crumple the paper. He unfolded it and looked again. He asked, "Matthew Leigh Keller?"

"Convicted of treason," Major Jansen said instantly. Six years ago. He escaped over the edge of Alpha Plateau, the void edge. The records say he went into the organ banks."

But he hadn't, Jesus Pietro remembered suddenly. Major Jansen's predecessor had gone instead. Yet Keller had died . . . . "What's he doing playing practical jokes in a colonist medcheck station?"

After a moment of cogitation Major Jansen said, He had a nephew, same name."

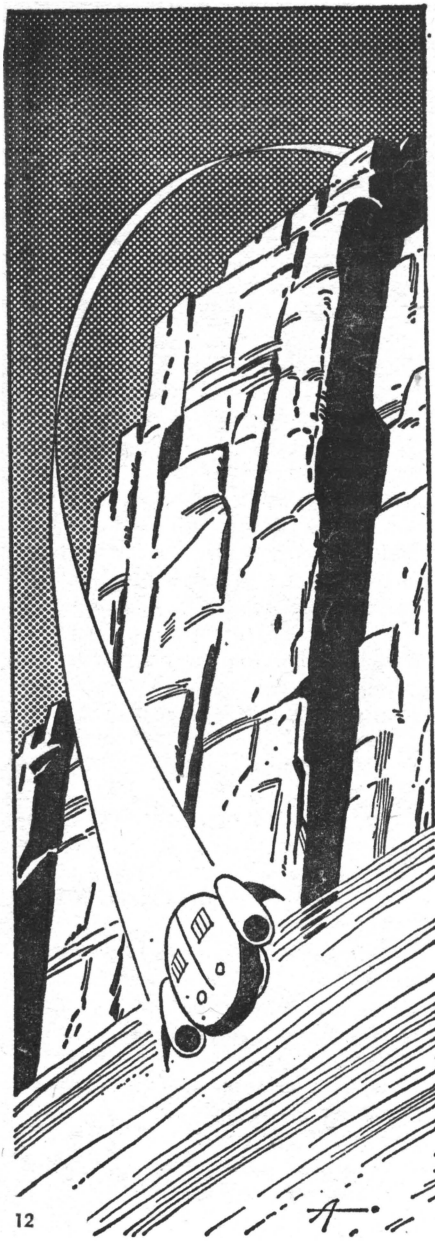
"Nephew about fifteen now?"

"Perhaps. I'll check."

Keller's nephew, said Jesus Pietro to himself. *I could follow standard practice and send him a reprimand.*

No. Let him think he'd got away with it. Give him room to move around in and one day he'd replace the body his uncle stole.

Jesus Pietro smiled. He started to chuckle, but pain stabbed him in the ribs and he had to desist.



The snout projecting from the ramscoop generator was no longer bright and shiny. Its surface was a montage of big and little pits, craterlets left by interstellar dust grains pushing their way through the ramscoop field. There was pitting everywhere, on the fusion motors, on the hull, even on the cargo pod thirty miles behind. The ship looked pebble-finished.

The damage was all superficial. More than a century had passed since the rugged ramscoop design had suffered its last major change.

Now, eight and a half years beyond Juno, the ramscoop field died for the second time. The fusion flames became two actinic blue candles generating a twentieth of a gee. Slowly the cargo spool rewound until the cargo pod was locked in its socket.

The machine seemed to hesitate . . . and then its two cylindrical motors rose from the hull on their praying-mantis legs. For seconds they remained at right angles to the hull. Then, slowly, the legs contracted. But now the motors pointed forward.

A U-shaped bar swung the cargo pod around until it also pointed forward. Slowly the spool unwound to its full length.

The ramscoop went on again. The motors roared their full strength, and now they fired their long streams of fusing hydrogen and fused helium through the ramscoop itself.

Eight point three light-years from Sol, almost directly between Sol and Tau Ceti, lie the twin red dwarf stars L726-8. Their main distinction is that they're the stars of smallest mass known to man. Yet they are

heavy enough to have collected a faint envelope of gas. The ramrobot braked heavily as her ramscoop plowed through the fringes of that envelope.

She continued braking. The universe stretched out again, the stars resumed their normal shapes and colors. Eleven point nine light-years from Sol, one hundred million miles above the star Tau Ceti, the machine came to an effective stop. Her ramscoop went permanently off. A variety of senses began searching the sky. They stopped. Locked.

Again she moved. She must reach her destination on the remaining fuel.

Tau Ceti is a G8 star, about 400° cooler than Sol and only 45% as strong in its output of light. The world of Mount Lookitthat orbits sixty-seven million miles away, a moonless world in a nearly circular path.

The ramrobot moved in on Mount Lookitthat, the world. She moved cautiously, for there were failsafe factors in her computer program. Her senses probed.

Surface temperature: 600° F., with little variation. Atmosphere: opaque, dense, poisonous near the surface. Diameter: 7650 miles.

Something came over the horizon. In visible light it seemed an island in a sea of fog. A topography like a flight of broad, very shallow steps, flat plateaus separated by sheer cliffs. But Ramrobot #143 sensed more than visible light. There was Earthlike temperature, breathable air at an Earthlike pressure . . . .

And there were two radio homing signals.

The signals settled it. Ramrobot #143 didn't even have to decide which to answer, for they were coming from only a quarter of a mile apart. They came, in fact, from Mount Lookitthat's two slowboats, and the distance between them was bridged by the sprawling structure of the Hospital, so that the spacecraft were no longer spacecraft but odd looking towers in a sort of bungalow-castle. But the ramrobot didn't know that, and didn't need to.

There were signals. Ramrobot #143 started down.

The floor vibrated gently against the soles of his feet, and from all around came muted, steady thunder. Jesus Pietro Castro strode down the twisting, intermeshing, labyrinthine passages of the Hopsital.

Though he was in a tearing hurry, it never occurred to him to run. He was not in the gymnasium, after all. Instead he moved like an elephant, who cannot run but who can walk fast enough to trample a running man. His head was down, his stride was as long as his legs could reach. His eyes looked ominously out from under prominent brow ridges and bushy white eyebrows. His bandit's mustache and his full head of hair were also white and bushy, forming a startling contrast to his swarthy skin. Implementation police sprang to attention as he passed, snapping out of his way with the speed of pedestrians dodging a bus. Was it his rank they feared, or his massive, unstoppable bulk? Perhaps even they didn't know.

At the great stone arch which was

the main entrance to the Hospital, Jesus Pietro looked up to see a sparkling blue-white star overhead. Even as he found it it winked out. Moments later the all-pervading thunder died away.

A Jeep was waiting for him. If he'd had to call for one, someone would have been very sorry. He got in, and the Implementation chauffeur took off at once, without waiting for orders. The Hospital fell behind, with its walls and its surrounding wasteland of defenses.

The ramrobot package was floating down on its parachutes.

Other cars were in flight, erratically shifting course as their drivers tried to guess where the white dot would come down. It would be near the Hospital, of course. The ramrobot would have aimed for one or another of the ships; and the Hospital had grown like something living, like a growth of architectural coral, between the two former spacecraft.

But the wind was strong today.

Jesus Pietro frowned. The parachute would be blown over the edge of the cliff. It would end, not on Alpha Plateau, where the crew built their homes and where no colonist could be tolerated, but in the colonist regions beyond.

It did. The cars swooped after it like a flock of geese, following it over the four-hundred-foot cliff that separated Alpha Plateau from Beta Plateau, where forests of fruit trees alternated with fields of grain and vegetables and meadows where cattle grazed. There were no homes on Beta, for the crew did not like colonists so close. But colonists worked there and often they played there.

Jesus Pietro picked up his phone. "Orders," he said. "Ramrobot package forty-three is landing in Beta, sector . . . twenty-two or thereabouts. Send four squads in after us. Do not under any circumstances interfere with cars or crew, but arrest any colonist you find within half a mile of the package. Hold them for questioning only. And get out here fast."

The package skimmed over half an acre of citrus trees and came down at the far edge.

It was a grove of lemon and orange trees. One of the later ramrobot packages had carried the grove's genetically altered ancestors, along with other miracles of terrestrial biological engineering. These trees would not harbor any parasites at all. They would grow anywhere. They would not compete for growth with other, similarly altered citrus trees. Their fruit remained precisely ripe for ten months out of the year, and when they dropped the fruit to release the seeds it was at staggered intervals, so that at any time five trees out of six held ripe fruit.

In their grim need for sunlight the trees had spread their leaves and branches into an opaque curtain, so that being in the grove was like being in a virgin forest. Mushrooms grew here, imported unchanged from Earth.

Polly had already picked a couple of dozen. If anyone had asked, she had gone into the citrus woods to pick mushrooms.

By the time her hypothetical questioner arrived, she would have hidden her camera.

Considering that the tending season was a month away, a remarkable number of colonists were aboard on Beta Plateau. In woods, on the plains, climbing cliffs for exercise . . . hundreds of men and women were on excursions and picnics. An alert Implementation officer would have found their distribution improbably even. Too many would have been recognized as Sons of Earth.

But the ramrobot package chose to land in Polly's area.

She was near the edge of the woods when she heard the thump. She moved swiftly but quietly in that direction. With her black hair and darkly tanned skin she was nearly invisible in the forest dusk. She crawled between two tree trunks, moved behind another and peered out.

A large cylindrical object lay on the grass beyond. A string of five parachutes writhed away before the wind.

So that's what they look like, she thought. It seemed so small to have come so far . . . but it must be only a tiny portion of the total ramrobot. The major portion would be on its way home.

But it was the package that counted. The contents of a ramrobot package were never trivial. For six months, ever since the maser message arrived, the Sons of Earth had been planning to capture ramrobot capsule #143. At worst they could ransom it to the crew. At best, it might be something to fight with.

She almost stepped out of the woods before she saw the cars.

At least thirty of them, landing all around the ramrobot package. She stayed hidden.

His soldiers would not have recognized Jesus Pietro Castro's behavior now, but they would have understood it. All but two or three of the men and women around him were purebred crew. Their chauffeurs, including his own, had prudently stayed in their cars. Jesus Pietro Castro was obsequious, deferential and very careful not to joggle an elbow or to step on a toe or even to find himself in somebody's path.

As a result his vision was blocked when Millard Parlette, a lineal descendant of the first Captain of the *Planck*, opened the capsule and reached in. He did see what the ancient held up to the sunlight, the better to examine it.

It was a rectangular solid with rounded edges, and it had been packed in a resilient material which was now disintegrating. The bottom half was metal. The top was a remote descendant of glass, hard as the cheaper steel alloys, more transparent than a window pane. And in the top half floated — something shapeless.

Jesus Pietro felt his mouth fall open. He looked harder. His eyelids squinted, his pupils dilated. Yes, he knew what this was. It was what the maser message had promised six months ago.

A great gift, and a great danger.

"This must be our most carefully guarded secret," Millard Parlette was saying in a voice like a squeaky door. "No word must ever leak out. If the colonists saw this they'd blow it out of all proportion. We'll have to

tell Castro to — Castro! Where the Mist Demons is Castro?"

"Here I am, sir."

Polly fitted the camera back in its case and began to work her way deeper into the woods. She'd taken several pictures, and two were telescopic shots of the thing in the glass case. Her eyes hadn't seen it clearly, but the film would show it in detail.

She went up a tree with the camera about her neck. The leaves and branches tried to push her back, but she fought through, deeper and deeper into the protecting leaves. When she stopped there was hardly a square inch of her that didn't feel the gentle pressure. It was dark as the caves of Pluto.

In a few minutes the police would be all through here. They would wait only until the crew was gone before converging on this area. It was not enough that Polly be invisible. There must be enough leaves to block any infrared light leaving her body.

She could hardly blame herself for losing the capsule. The Sons of Earth had been unable to translate the maser message, but the crew had. They knew the capsule's worth. But so did Polly — now. When the eighteen thousand colonists of Mount Lookitthat knew what was in that capsule . . . .

Night came. The Implementation police had collected all the colonists they could find. None of them had seen the capsule after it came down, and all would be released after questioning. Now the police spread out with infrared detectors. There were several spots of random heat in Polly's grove, and all were sprayed with sonic stunners. Polly never knew she'd been hit. When she woke next morning she was relieved to find herself still in her perch. She waited until high noon, then moved toward the Beta-Gamma Bridge with her camera hidden under the mushrooms.

III

From the bell tower of Campbelltown came four thunderous ringing notes. The sonic wave fronts marched out of town in order, crossing fields and roads, diminishing as they came. They overran the mine with hardly a pause. But men looked up, lowering their tools.

Matt smiled for the first time that day. Already he could taste cold beer.

The bicycle ride from the mine was all downhill. He reached Cziller's as the place was beginning to fill up. He ordered a pitcher, as usual, and downed the first glass without drawing breath. A kind of bliss settled on him, and he poured his second glass carefully down the side to avoid a head. He sat sipping it while more and more freed workmen poured into the taproom.

Tomorrow was Saturday. For two days and three nights he could forget the undependable little beasties who earned him his living.

Presently an elbow hit him in the neck. He ignored it: a habit his ancestors had brought from crowded Earth and retained. But the second time the elbow poked him he had the glass to his lips. With beer dripping

wetly down his neck, he turned to deliver a mild reproof.

"Sorry," said a short, dark man with straight black hair. He had a thin, expressionless face and the air of a tired clerk. Matt looked more closely.

"Hood," he said.

"Yes, my name is Hood. But I don't recognize you." The man put a question in his voice.

Matt grinned, for he liked flamboyant gestures. He wrapped his fingers in his collar and pulled his shirt open to the waist. "Try again," he invited.

The clerkish type shied back, and then his eyes caught the tiny scar on Matt's chest.

"Keller."

"Right," said Matt, and zipped his shirt up.

"Keller. I'll be d-damned," said Hood. You could tell somehow that he saved such words for emergencies. "It's been at least seven years. What have you been doing lately?"

"Grab that seat." Hood saw his opportunity and was into the stool next to Matt before he occupant was fully out of it. "I've been playing nursemaid to mining worms. And you?"

Hood's smile suddenly died. "Er — you don't still hold that scar against me, do you?"

"No!" Matt said with explosive sincerity. "That whole thing was my fault. Anyway it was a long time ago."

It was. Matt had been in the eighth grade that fall day when Hood came into Matt's classroom to borrow the pencil sharpener. It was the first time he'd ever seen Hood — a boy about Matt's size, though obviously a year older, an undersized, very nervous upper classman. Unfortunately the teacher was out of the room. Hood had marched the full length of the room, not looking at anyone, sharpened his pencil, and turned to find his escape blocked by a mob of yelling, bounding eighth graders. To Hood, a new arrival at the school, they must have looked like a horde of cannibals. And in the forefront was Matt, using a chair in the style of an animal trainer.

Exit Hood, running, wild with terror. He had left the sharpened point of his pencil in Matt's chest.

It was one of the few times Matt had acted the bully. To him the scar was a badge of shame.

"Good," said Hood, his relief showing. "So you're a miner now?"

"Right, and regretting it every waking hour. I rue the day Earth sent us those little snakes.""

"It must be better than digging the holes yourself."

"Think so? Are you ready for a lecture?"

"Just a second." Hood drained his glass in a heroic gesture. "Ready."

"A mining worm is five inches long and a quarter inch in diameter, mutated from an earthworm. Its grinding orifice is rimmed with little diamond teeth. It ingests metal ores for pleasure, but for food it has to be supplied with blocks of synthetic stuff which is different for each breed of worm — and there's a breed for every metal. This makes things complicated. We've got six breeds out at the mine site, and I've got to see

that each breed always has a food block within reach."

"It doesn't sound too complicated. Can't they find their own food?"

"In theory, sure. In practice, not always. But that's not all. What breaks down the ores is a bacterium in the worm's stomach. Then the worm drops metal grains around its food block, and we sweep it up. Now, that bacterium dies very easily. If the bacterium dies, so does the worm, because there's metal ore blocking his intestines. Then the other worms eat his body to recover the ore. Only, five times out of six it's the wrong ore."

"The worms can't tell each other apart?"

"Flaming right they can't. They eat the wrong metals, they eat the wrong worms, they eat the wrong food blocks, and when they do everything right they still die in ten days. They were built that way because their teeth wear out so fast. They're supposed to breed like mad to compensate, but the plain truth is they don't have time when they're on the job. We have to keep going back to the crew for more."

"So they've got you by the gonads."

"Sure. They charge what they like."

"Could they be putting the wrong chemical cues in some of the food blocks?"

Matt looked up, startled. "I'll bet that's just what they're doing! Or too little of the right cues; that'd save them money at the same time. They won't let us grow our own, of course. The — "

Matt swallowed the word. After all, he hadn't seen Hood in years. The crew didn't like being called names.

"Time for dinner," said Hood.

They finished the beer and went to the town's one restaurant. Hood wanted to know what had happened to his old school friends — or schoolmates; Hood had not made friends easily. Matt, who knew in many cases, obliged. They talked shop, both professions. Hood was teaching school on Delta. To Matt's surprise, the introverted boy had become an entertaining storyteller. He had kept his dry, precise tone, and it only made his jokes funnier. They were both fairly good at their jobs, and both making enough money to live on. There was no real poverty anywhere on the Plateau. It was not the colonists' money the crew wanted, as Hood pointed out over the meat course.

"I know where there's a party," Hood said over coffee.

"Are we invited?"

"Yes."

Matt had nothing planned for the night, but he wanted reassurance. "Party crashers welcome?"

"In your case, party crashers solicited. You'll like Harry Kane. He's the host."

"I'm sold."

The sun dipped below the edge of Gamma Plateau as they rode up. They left their bicycles in back of the house. As they walked around to the front the sun showed again, a glowing red half-disk above the eternal sea of cloud beyond the void edge. Harry Kane's house was just forty

yards from the edge. They stopped a moment to watch the sunset fade, then turned toward the house.

It was a great sprawling bungalow, laid out in a rough cross, with the bulging walls typical of architectural coral. No attempt had been made to disguise its origin. Matt had never before seen a house which was not painted, but he had to admire the effect. The remnants of the shaping balloon, which gave all architectural coral buildings their telltale bulge, had been carefully scraped away. The exposed walls had been polished to a shining pink sheen. Even after sunset the house glowed softly.

As if it were *proud* of its thoroughly colonist origin.

Architectural coral was another gift of the ramrobots. A genetic manipulation of ordinary sea coral, it was the cheapest building material known. The only real cost was in the plastic balloon which guided the growth of the coral and which enclosed the coral's special airborne food. All colonists lived in buildings of coral. Not many would have built in stone or wood or brick even were it allowed. But most attempted to make their dwellings look somewhat like those on Alpha Plateau. With paint, with wood and metal and false stone sidings, with powered sandpaper disks to flatten the inevitable bulges, they tried to imitate the crew.

In daylight or darkness, Harry Kane's house was flagrantly atypical.

The noise hit them as they opened the door. Matt stood still while his ears adjusted to the noise level — a survival trait his ancestors had developed when Earth's population numbered nineteen billion, even as it did that night, eleven point nine light-years away. During the last four centuries, a man of Earth might as well have been stone deaf if he could not carry on a conversation with a thousand drunks bellowing in his ears. Matt's people had kept some of their habits too. The great living room was jammed, and the few chairs were largely being ignored.

The room *was* big, and the bar across from the entrance was enormous. Matt shouted, "Harry Kane must do a lot of entertaining."

"He does! Come with me, we'll meet him!"

Matt caught snatches of conversation as they pushed their way across the room. The party hadn't been going long, he gathered, and several people knew practically nobody; but they all had drinks. They were of all ages, all professions. Hood had spoken true. If a party crasher weren't welcome, he'd never know it, because no one would recognize him as one.

The walls were like the outside, a glowing coral pink. The floor, covered with a hairy-looking wall-to-wall rug of mutated grass, was flat except at the walls; no doubt it had been sanded flat after the house was finished and the forming balloon removed. But Matt knew that beneath the rug was not tiles or hardwood, but the ever-present pink coral.

They reached the bar, no more jostled than need be. Hood leaned across the bar as far as he could, which because of his height was not far, and called, "Harry! Two vodka

sodas, and I'd like you to meet — Dammit, Keller, what's your first name?"

"Matt."

"Matt Keller. We've known each other since grade school."

"Pleasure, Matt," said Harry Kane, and reached over to shake hands. "Glad to see you here, Jay." Harry was almost Matt's height, and considerably broader, and his wide face was dominated by a shapeless nose and an even wider grin. He looked exactly like a bartender. He poured the vodka-sodas into glasses in which water had been pre-frozen. He handed them across. "Enjoy yourselves," he said, and moved down the bar to serve two newcomers.

Hood said, "Harry believes the best way to meet everyone right away is to play bartender for the first couple of hours. Afterward he turns the job over to a volunteer."

"Good thinking," said Matt. "Is your name Jay?"

"Short for Jayhawk. Jayhawk Hood. One of my ancestors was from Kansas. The jayhawk was a symbolic Kansas bird."

"Crazy, isn't it, that we needed eight years to learn each others' first names?"

At that moment a fragment of the crowd noticed Hood and swept down upon them. Hood had barely time to grin in answer before they were in the midst of introductions. Matt was relieved. He was sure he had seen Harry Kane pass something to "Jay" Hood along with his drink. Manners kept him from asking questions, but it stuck in his curiosity, and he wanted to forget it.

The newcomers were four men and a woman. As an individual Matt remembered only the woman.

Her name was Laney Mattson. She was around twenty-six years old, five years older than Matt. In bare feet he would have topped her by a scant half inch. But she was wearing double-spikes, and her piled confection of auburn hair made her even taller. Not merely tall, she was big, with wide pronounced hips and deep breasts behind an "M" neckline. She looked prettier than she was, Matt thought; she used cosmetics well. And there was a booming exuberance in her every act, an enjoyment as big as herself.

The men were her age and over, in their late twenties. Any of the four would have looked normal dancing with Laney. They were huge. Matt retained of them only a composite impression of a resonant voice and an enveloping handclasp and a great handsome face smiling down from the pink ceiling. Yet he liked them all. He just couldn't tell them apart.

Hood surprised him again. Talking along in his dry voice, keeping it raised to an audible bellow, not straining his neck to look anyone in the face, Hood somehow kept control of the conversation. It was he who guided the talk to school days. One of the tall men was moved to speak of a simple trick he'd used to rewire his school's teaching teedee, so that for one day he and his classmates had watched their lessons both upside down and inside out. Matt found himself telling of the specimen bottle of apple juice he'd sneaked into

the Gamma medcheck station, and what he did with it. Someone who'd been listening politely from the edge of the circle mentioned that once he'd stolen a car from a picnicking crew family on Beta Plateau. He'd set the autopilot to circle a constant thousand feet beyond the void edge. It had stayed up for five days before dropping into the mist, with scores of Implementation police watching.

Matt watched Jay Hood and Laney as they talked. Laney had a long arm draped over Hood's shoulders, and the top of his head reached her chin. They were both talking at once, trampling the tail ends of each others' sentences, racing pellmell through memories and anecdotes and jokes they'd been saving, sharing them with the group but talking for each other.

It wasn't love, Matt decided, hough it was like love. It was an mmense satisfaction Hood and Laney elt at knowing each other. Satisaction and pride. It made Matt feel onely.

Gradually Matt became aware that aney was wearing a hearing aid.

It was so small and so cunningly colored as to be nearly invisible within her ear. Truthfully, Matt couldn't swear that it was there.

If Laney needed a hearing aid, it was too bad she couldn't hide it better. For centuries more civilized peoples had been wearing specks of laminated plastic buried in the skin above the mastoid bone. Such things did not exist on Mount Lookitthat. A crew, now, would have had his ears replaced from the organ banks . . . .

Glasses went empty, and one of Laney's big escorts came back with replacements. The little group grew and shrank and split into other groups with the eternal capriciousness of the cocktail party. For a moment Matt and Jay Hood were left standing alone in a forest of backs and elbows. Hood said, "Want to meet a beautiful girl?"

Hood turned to lead the way, and Matt caught a flash of the same odd coloring in his ear that he had noticed in Laney's. Since when had Hood become hard of hearing? It might have been imagination, aided by vodka-sodas. For one thing, the tiny instruments seemed too deeply embedded to be removed.

But an item that size could have been just what Harry Kane passed to Jay Hood along with his drink.

IV

"It's the easiest way to conduct a raid, sir." Jesus Pietro sat deferentially forward in his chair, hands folded on his desk, the very image of the highly intelligent man dedicated solely to his work. "We'll pick them up outside the house. If they stop coming out, we'll know they've caught on. Then we'll go into the house itself."

Behind the mask of deference, Jesus Pietro was annoyed. For the first time in four years he had planned a major raid on the Sons of Earth, and Millard Parlette had picked that night to visit the Hospital. Why tonight? He came only once in two months, thank the Mist Demons. A visit from a crew always upset Jesus Pietro's men.

At least Parlette had come to him. Once Parlette had summoned him to his own house, and that had been bad. Here, Jesus Pietro was in his element. His office was practically an extension of his personality. The desk had the shape of a boomerang, enclosing him in an obtuse angle for more available working space. He had three guests' chairs of varying degrees of comfort, for crew and Hospital personnel and colonist. The office was big and square, but there was a slight curve to the back wall. Where the other walls were cream colored, easy on the eye, the back wall was smoothly polished dark metal.

It was part of the outer hull of the *Planck*. Jesus Pietro's office was right up against the source of half the spiritual strength of Mount Lookitthat, and half the electrical power too: the ship that had brought men to this world. Sitting at his desk, Jesus Pietro felt the power at his back.

"Our only problem," he continued smoothly, "is that not all of Kane's guests are involved in the conspiracy. At least half will be deadheads invited for camouflage. Telling them apart will take time."

"I see that," said the old man. His voice squeaked. He wore the tall, skeletal look of a Don Quixote, but his eyes held no madness. They were sane and alert. For nearly two hundred years the Hospital had kept his body, brain and mind functioning. Probably even he did not know how much of him had been borrowed from colonists convicted of major crimes. "Why tonight?" he asked.

"Why not, sir?" Jesus Pierto saw what he was driving at, and his mind raced. Millard Parlette was nobody's fool. The ancient was one of the few crew willing to accept any kind of responsibility. Most of the thirty thousand crew on Mount Lookitthat preferred to devise ever more complex forms of playing: sports, styles of dress which changed according to half a dozen complex, fluctuating sets of rules, rigid and ridiculous social forms. Parlette preferred to work — sometimes. He had chosen to rule the Hospital. He was competent and quick; though he appeared rarely, he always seemed to know what was happening; and he was difficult to lie to.

Now he said, "Yesterday the ramrobot capsule. Last night your men were scouring the area for spies. Tonight you plan a major raid for the first time in four years. Do you think someone slipped through your fingers?"

"No, sir!" But that would not satisfy Parlette. "But in this instance I can afford to cover my bet even when it's a sure thing. If a colonist had news of the ramrobot package, he'd be at Kane's place tonight though demons bar the way.""

"I don't approve of gambling," said Parlette. Jesus Pietro uneasily searched his mind for a suitable answer. "And you have chosen not to gamble. Very good, Castro. Now. What has been done with the ramrobot capsule?"

"I think the organ bank people have it unpacked, sir. And the . . . contents stored. Would you like to see?"

"Yes."

Jesus Pietro Castro, Head of Im-

plementation, the only armed authority on an entire world, rose hastily to his feet to act as guide. If they hurried, he might get away in time to supervise the raid. But there was no polite way to make a crew hurry.

Hood had spoken true. Polly Tournquist was beautiful. She was also small and dark and quiet, and Matt definitely wanted to know her better. Polly had long, soft hair the color of a starless night, direct brown eyes, and a smile that came through even when she was trying to look serious. She looked like someone with a secret, Matt thought. She didn't talk; she listened.

"Parapsychological abilities are not a myth," Hood was insisting. "When the *Planck* left Earth there were all kinds of psionics devices for amplifying them. Telepathy had gotten almost dependable. They — "

"What's 'almost dependable?' "

"Dependable enough so there were specially trained people to read dolphin minds. Enough so telepaths were called as expert witnesses in murder trials. Enough — "

"All right, all right," said Matt. It was the first time tonight that he had seen Hood worked up. Matt gathered from the attitudes of others that Hood rode this hobby horse often. He asked, "Where are they now, these witches of yours?"

"They aren't witches! Look, Kell — Look, Matt. Every one of those psi powers was tied up a little bit with telepathy. They proved that. Now, do you know how they tested our ancestors before they sent them into space for a long one-way trip?"

Someone played straight man. "They had to orbit Earth for awhile."

"Yes. Four candidates in a ferry boat, orbiting for one month. No telepath could take that."

Polly Tournquist was following the debate like a spectator at a tennis match, swinging her shoulders to face whoever was speaking. Her grin widened; her hair swung gently, hypnotically; she was altogether a pleasure to watch. She knew Matt was watching. Occasionally her eyes would flick toward him as if inviting him to share the joke.

"Why not, if he's got company?"

"The wrong company. Anywhere on Earth a latent telepath is surrounded by tens of thousands of minds. In space he has *three*. And he can't get away from any of them for a single hour, for a full month."

"How do you know all this, Jay? Books? You damn sure don't have anyone to experiment on."

Polly's eyes sparkled as she followed the debate. The lobes of Hood's ears were turning red. Polly's raven hair swung wide . . . and when it uncovered her right ear for an instant, she was almost certainly wearing a tiny, almost invisible hearing aid.

So she *did* have a secret. And, finally, Matt thought he knew what it was.

Three hundred years ago the *Planck* had come to Mount Lookitthat, with six crew members to guard fifty passengers in suspended animation. The story was in all the history tapes, of how the circular flying wing had dipped into the atmosphere and flown for hours above impenetrable mists which the instruments showed to be poisonous and deadly hot. And then a great mass had come over the horizon, a vertical flat-topped mountain forty miles high and hundreds of miles long. It was like a new continent rearing over the impalpable white sea. The crew had gaped, wordless, until Captain Parlette had said, "Lookitthat!"

Unwritten, but thoroughly known, was the story of the landing. The passengers had been wakened one at a time, to find themselves living in an instant dictatorship. Those who fought the idea, and they were few, died. When the *Arthur Clarke* came down forty years later, the pattern was repeated. The situation had not changed but for population growth, not in the last three hundred years.

From the beginning there had been a revolutionary group. Its name had changed several times, and Matt had no idea what it was now. He had never known a revolutionary. He had no particular desire to be one. They accomplished nothing except to fill the Hospital's organ banks. How could they, when the crew controlled every weapon and every watt of power on Mount Lookitthat?

If this was a nest of rebels then they had worked out a good cover. Many of the merrymakers had no hearing aids, and these seemed to be the ones who didn't know anyone here. Like Matt himself. In the midst of a reasonably genuine open-house brawl, certain people listened to voices only they could hear.

Matt let his imagination play. They'd have an escape hatch some-

where, those of the inner circle, and if the police showed they would use it during a perfectly genuine panic. Matt and his brethren of the outer circle would be expendable . . . .

"But why should *all* of these occult powers be connected to mind reading? Does that make sense to you, Jay?"

"Certainly. Don't you see that telepathy is a survival trait? When human beings evolved psi powers, they must have evolved telepathy first. All the others came later, because they're less likely to get you out of a bad situation . . . ."

Matt dismissed the idea of leaving. Safer? Sure. But here he had, for a time, escaped from his persnickety mining forms and their venal crewish growers and the multiple other problems that made his life what it was. And his curiosity bump itched madly. He wanted to know how they thought, how they worked, how they protected themselves, what they had in mind. He wanted to know . . . .

He wanted to know Polly Tournquist. Now more than ever. She was small and lovely and delicate looking, and every man who had ever looked at her must have wanted to protect her. What was such a girl doing throwing her life away? Really, that was all she was doing. Sooner or later the organ banks would run short of healthy livers or live skin or lengths of large intestine, at a time when there was a dearth of crime on the Plateau. Then Implementation would throw a raid, and Polly would be stripped down to her component parts.

Matt had a sudden urge to talk her out of it, get her to leave here with him and move to another part of the Plateau. Would they be able to hide out in a region so limited?

Possibly not, but —

But she didn't even know he'd guessed. If she found out, he could die for his knowledge. He'd have to put a failsafe on his mouth.

It spoiled things. If Matt could have played the observer, the man who watched and said nothing . . . . But he wasn't an observer. He was involved now. He knew Jay and liked him; he'd liked Laney Mattson and Harry Kane at sight, and he could have fallen in love with Polly Tournquist. These people were putting their lives on the line. And his, too! And he could do nothing about it.

The middle-aged man with the brush cut was still at it. "Jay," he said with a poor imitation of patience, "you're trying to tell us that Earth had psi powers under good control when the founding fathers left. Well, what have they done since? They've made all *kinds* of progress in biological engineering. Their ships improve constantly. Now the ram-robots go home all by themselves. But what have they done about psi powers? Nothing. Just nothing. And why?"

"Because — "

"Because it's all superstition. Witchcraft, Myths."

Oh, shut up, Matt thought. It was all cover for what was really going on; and he wasn't a part of that. He dropped back out of the circle, hoping nobody would notice him . . .

except Polly. Nobody did. He eased toward the bar for a refill.

Harry Kane was gone, replaced by a kid somewhat younger than Matt, one who wouldn't last another half hour if he kept sampling his own wares. When Matt tasted his drink it was mostly vodka. And when he turned around, there was Polly, laughing at his puckered face.

The half-dozen suspects were deeply asleep along one wall of the patrol wagon. A white-garbed Implementation medic looked up as Jesus Pietro entered. "Oh, there you are, sir. I think these three must be deadheads. The others had mechanisms in their ears."

The night outside was as black as always on moonless Mount Lookitthat. Jesus Pietro had left Millard Parlette standing before the glass wall of the organ banks, contemplating . . . whatever he might be contemplating. Eternal life? Not likely. Even Millard Parlette, one hundred and ninety years old, would die when his central nervous system wore out. You couldn't transplant brains without transplanting memories. What *had* Parlette been thinking? His expression had been very odd.

Jesus Pietro took a suspect's head in his hands and rolled it to look in the ears. The body rolled too, limply, passively. "I don't see anything."

"When we tried to remove the mechanism it evaporated. So did the old woman's. This girl still has hers."

"Good." He bent to look. Far down in the left ear, too deep for fingers to reach it, was something colored dead black with a rim of fleshy pink. He said, "Get a microphone."

The man made a call. Jesus Pietro waited impatiently for someone to bring a mike. Someone eventually did. Jesus Pietro held it against the girl's head and turned the sound up high.

Rustling sounds came in an amplified crackle.

"Tape it on," said Jesus Pietro. The medic stretched the girl on her side and taped the mike against her head. The thunder of rustling stopped, and the interior of the wagon was full of the deep drumbeat sound of her arteries.

"How long since anybody left the meeting?"

"That was these two, sir. About twenty minutes."

The door in back opened to admit two men and two women, unconscious, on stretchers. One man had a hearing aid.

"Obviously they don't have a signal to show they're clear," said Jesus Pietro. "Foolish." Now, if he'd been running the Sons of Earth . . . .

Come to think of it, he might send out decoys, expendable members. If the first few didn't come back, he'd send out more, at random intervals, while the leaders escaped.

Escaped where? His men had found no exit routes; the sonics reported no tunnels underground.

It was seconds before Jesus Pietro noticed that the mike was speaking. The sounds were that low. Quickly he put his ear to the loudspeaker.

"Stay until you feel like leaving, then leave. Remember, this is an

ordinary party, open-house style. However, those of you who have nothing important to say should be gone by midnight. Those who wish to speak to me shuld use the usual channels. Remember not to try to remove the earpieces; they will disintegrate of themselves at six o'clock. Now enjoy yourselves!"

"What'd he say?" asked the music.

"Nothing important. I wish I could be sure that was Kane." Jesus Pietro nodded briefly at the medic and the two cops. "Keep it up," he said, and stepped out into the night.

V

"Why'd you leave? It was just getting interesting."

"No, it wasn't, and my glass was empty, and anyway I was hoping you'd follow."

Polly laughed. "You must believe in miracles."

"True. Why'd *you* leave?"

Embedded in wall-to-wall humanity, drowned in a waterfall of human voices, Polly and Matt nevertheless had a sort of privacy. Manners and lack of interest would prevent anyone from actually listening to them. Hence nobody could hear them; for how could anyone concentrate on two conversations at once? They might have been in a room by themselves, a room with yielding walls and unyielding elbows, a room as small and private as a phone booth.

"I think Jay's bugs on psi powers," said Polly. She had not answered his question, which was fine by Matt. He'd expected to escape unnoticed from Hood's debate. He was lucky that way. But Polly coming to join him was new and different, and he enjoyed guessing at her motives.

"He talks like that all the time?"

"Yes. He thinks if we could only — " She stopped. Girl with a secret. "Forget Jay. Tell me about yourself."

So he talked of mining worms and home life and the school in sector nine, Gamma Plateau; and he mentioned Uncle Matt, who died for being a rebel, but she ignored the bait. And Polly talked about growing up a hundred miles away, near the Colony University, and she described her job at the Delta Retransmitting Power Station, but she never mentioned her hearing aid.

"You look like a girl with a secret," Matt said. "I think it must be the smile."

She moved closer to him, which was very close, and lowered her voice. "Can you keep a secret?"

Matt smiled with one side of his mouth to show that he knew what was coming. She said it anyway. "So can I."

And that was that. But she didn't move away. They smiled at each other from a distance of a couple of inches, nose to nose, momentarily content with a silence which, to an earlier man, would have sounded like the center of an air raid. She was lovely, Polly. Her face was a lure and a danger; her figure, small and lithe and woman shaped, rippled with a dancer's grace beneath her loose green jumper. For the moment Matt looked silently into her eyes and felt very good. The moment passed, and they talked small talk.

The flow of the crowd carried them half across the room. Once they pushed back to the bar for refills, then let the crowd carry them again. In the continuous roar there was something hypnotic, something that might have explained why the crowded-room drinking bout was more than half a thousand years old; for monotonous background noise has long been in hypnosis. Time ceased to exist. But there came a moment when Matt knew that he would ask Polly to go home with him, and she would accept.

He didn't get the chance.

Something changed in Polly's face. She seemed to be listening to someting only she could hear. The hearing aid? He was ready to pretend he hadn't noticed, but he didn't get that chance either. For suddenly Polly was moving away, disappearing into the crowd, not as if she were in any hurry, but as if she remembered something she ought to do, some niggling detail she might as well take care of now. Matt tried to follow her, but the sea of humanity closed behind her.

The hearing aid, he told himself. *It called her.* But he stayed by the bar, resisting the pressure that would have borne him away. He was getting very drunk now and glad of it. He didn't believe it had been the hearing aid. The whole thing was too familiar. Too many girls had lost interest in him just as suddenly as Polly had. He was more than disappointed. It *hurt*. The vodka helped to kill the pain.

About ten-thirty he went around to the other side of the bar. The kid playing bartender was happily drunk and glad to give up his place. Matt was gravely drunk. He dispensed drinks with dignity, being polite but not obsequious. The crowd was thinning now. This was bedtime for most of Mount Lookitthat. By now the sidewalks in most towns would have been rolled up and put away till dawn. These revolutionists must be a late-rising group. Matt served drinks automatically, but he wasn't having any more himself.

The vodka began to run low. And there wasn't anything but vodka, vodka converted from sugar and water and air by one of Earth's educated bacteria. Let it run out, Matt thought viciously. He could watch the riot.

He served somebody a vodka-grapefruit, as requested. But the hand with the drink did not vanish to make room for someone else. Slowly Matt realized that the hand belonged to Laney Mattson. "Hi," he said.

"Hi. Want a stand-in?"

"Guess so."

Somebody changed places with him — one of Laney's tall escorts — and Laney led him through the thinning ranks to a miraculously unoccupied sofa. Matt sank deep into it. The room would start to whirl if he closed his eyes.

"Do you always get this looped?"

"No. Something bugging me."

"Tell me?"

He turned to look at her. Somehow his vodka-blurred eyes saw past Laney's makeup, saw that her mouth was too wide and her green eyes were strangely large. But she wore a

slight smile of sympathetic curiosity.

"Ever see a twenty-one-year-old virgin male?" He squinted to try to read her reaction.

The corners of Laney's mouth twisted strangely. "No." She was trying not to laugh, he realized. He turned away.

She asked, "Lack of interest?"

"No! Hellno."

"Then what?"

"She forgets me." Matt felt himself sobering with time and the effort of answering. "All of a sudden, the girl I'm chasing just — " he gestured a little wildly — "forgets I'm around. I don't know why."

"Stand up."

"Humph?"

He felt her hand on his arm, pulling. He stood up. The room spun, and he realized that he wasn't sobering; he'd just felt steadier sitting down. He followed the pull of her arm, relieved that he didn't fall down. The next thing he knew, everything was pitch black.

"Where are we?"

No answer. He felt hands pull his shirt apart, hands with small sharp nails which caught in his chest hair. Then his pants dropped. "So this is it," he said, in a tone of vast surprise. It sounded so damn silly that he wanted to cringe.

"Don't panic," said Laney. "Mist Demons, you're nervous! Come here. Don't trip over anything."

He managed to walk out of his pants without falling. His knees bumped something. "Fall face down," Laney commanded, and he did. He was face down on an airfoam mattress, rigidly tense. Hands that were stronger than they ought to be dug into the muscles of his neck and shoulders, kneading them like dough. It felt wonderful. He lay there with his arms out like a swan diver, going utterly limp as knuckles ran down the sides of his vertebrae, as slender fingers pulled each separate tendon into a new shape.

When he was good and ready he turned over and reached out.

To his left was a stack of photos a foot high. Before him, three photos, obviously candid shots. Jesus Pietro spread them out and looked them over. He wrote a name under one of them. The others rang no bell, so he shuffled them and put them on the big stack. Then he stood up and stretched.

"Match these with the suspects we've already collected," he told an aide. The man saluted, picked up the stack and left the flying office, moving toward the patrol wagons. Jesus Pietro followed him out.

Almost half of Harry Kane's guests were now in patrol wagons. The photographs had been taken as they entered the front door earlier tonight. Jesus Pietro, with the phenomenal memory, had identified a good number of them.

The night was cool and dark. A stiff breeze blew across the Plateau, carrying a smell of rain.

Rain.

Jesus Pietro looked up to see that half the sky was raggedly blotted out. He could imagine trying to conduct a raid in a pouring rainstorm. He didn't like the idea.

Back in his office, he turned the

intercom to all-channel. "Now hear this," he said conversationally. "Phase two is on. Now."

"Is everyone that nervous?" Laney chuckled softly. Now she could laugh, all she wanted, if she wanted. "Not that nervous. I think everyone must be a little afraid the first time."

"You?"

"Sure. But Ben handled it right. Good man, Ben."

"Where is he now?" Matt felt a mild gratitude toward Ben.

"He's — he's gone." Her tone told him to *drop* it. Matt guessed he'd been caught wearing a hearing aid or something.

"Mind if I turn on a light?"

"If you can find a switch," said Laney, "you can turn it on."

She didn't expect him to, not in pitch blackness in a strange room, but he did. He felt incredibly sober, and incredibly peaceful. He ran his eyes over her lying next to him, seeing the angled ruin of her sculptured hairdo, remembering the touch of smooth warm skin, knowing he could touch her again at will. It was a power he'd never felt before. He said, "Very nice."

"Makeup smeared over forgettable face."

"Unforgettable face." It was true, now. "No makeup over unforgettable body."

"I should wear a mask, no clothes."

"You'd get more attention than you'd like."

She laughed hugely, and he rested his ear over her navel to enjoy the earthquake ripple of abdominal muscles.

The rain came suddenly, beating against the thick coral walls. They stopped talking to listen. Suddenly Laney dug her fingers into his arm and whispered. "Raid."

She means Rain, Matt thought, turning to look at her. She was terrified, her eyes and nostrils and mouth all distended. She meant Raid!

"You've got a way out, don't you?"

Laney shook her head. She was listening to unheard voices through the hearing aid.

"But you must have a way out. Don't worry, I don't want to know about it. I'm in no danger." Laney looked startled, and he said, "Sure, I noticed the hearing aids. But it's none of my business."

"Yes it is, Matt. You were invited here so we could get a look at you. All of us bring outsiders occasionally. Some get invited to join."

"Oh."

"I told the truth. There's no way out. Implementation has ways of finding tunnels. But there is a hiding place."

"Good."

"We can't reach it. Implementation is already in the house. They've filled it with sleepy gas. It should be seeping around the door any minute."

"The windows?"

"They'll be waiting for us."

"We can *try*."

"Okay." She was on her feet and getting into her dress. Nothing else. Matt wasted not even that much time. He swung a great marble ash tray against a window and followed it through, thanking the Mist Demons

that Mount Lookitthat couldn't make unbreakable glass.

Two pairs of hands closed on his arms before his feet cleared the window. Matt kicked out and heard somebody say *Whuff!* In the corner of his eye Laney cleared the window and was running. Good, he'd hold their attention for her. He jerked at the grip on his arms. A meaty hand weighing a full ton smashed across his jaw. His knees buckled. A light shone in his eyes, and he shrank back.

The light passed. Matt made one last frantic attempt to jerk loose and felt one arm come free. He swung it full around. The elbow smacked solidly into yielding meat and bone: an unmistakable, unforgettable sensation. And he was free, and he was running.

Just once in his life he had hit someone like that. From the feel of it he must have smashed the man's nose all over his face. If Implementation caught him now . . .!

Wet, slippery, treacherous grass underfoot. Once he stepped on a smooth wet rock and went skidding across the grass on cheek and shoulder. Twice a spotlight found him, and each time he hit the grass and lay where he was, looking back to see where the light went. When it pointed elsewhere he ran again. The rain must have blurred the lights and the eyes behind him; the rain and the luck of Matt Keller. Lightning flickered about him, but whether it helped or hurt him he couldn't begin to say.

Even when he was sure he was free, he continued to run.

VI

Finished.

Millard Parlette pushed his chair back and viewed the typewriter with satisfaction. His speech lay on his desk, last page on top, back-to-front. He picked up the stack of paper with long, knobby fingers and quickly shuffled it into correct order.

Record it now?

No Tomorrow morning. Sleep on it tonight, see if I've left anything out. I don't have to deliver it until day after tomorrow. Plenty of time to record the speech in his own voice, then play it over and over until he'd learned it by heart.

But it had to go over. The crew had to be made to understand the issues. For too long they had lived the lives of a divinely ordained ruling class. If they couldn't adapt —

Even his own descendants . . . they didn't talk politics often; and when they did, Millard Parlette noticed that they talked in terms, not of Power, but of Rights. And the Parlettes were not typical. By now Millard Parlette could claim a veritable army of children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and so forth; yet he made every effort to see them all as often as possible. Those who had succumbed to the prevalent crewish tastes — to eldritch styles of dress, elegantly worded slander and all the other games the crew used to cloak their humdrum reality — had done so in spite of Millard Parlette. The average crew was utterly dependant on the fact that he was a crew.

And if the power balance should shift?

They'd be lost. For a time they'd be living in a false universe, under wrong assumptions; and in that time they would be destroyed.

What chance . . . what chance that they would listen to an old man from a dead generation?

No. He was just tired. Millard Parlette dropped the speech on his desk, stood up and left the study. At least he would force them to listen. By order of the Council, at two o'clock Sunday every pure-blooded crew on the planet would be in front of his teevee set. If he could put across . . . he must.

They had to understand the mixed blessing of Ramrobot #143.

Rain filled the coral house with an incessant drumming. Only Implementation police moved within and without. The last unconscious colonist was on his way out the door on a stretcher as Major Jansen entered.

He found Jesus Pietro lounging in an easy chair in the living room. He put the handful of photos beside him.

"What's this supposed to be?"

"These are the ones we haven't caught yet, sir."

Jesus Pietro pulled himself erect, conscious once again of his soaked uniform. "How did they get past you?"

"I can't imagine, sir. Nobody escaped after he was spotted."

"No secret tunnels. The echo sounders would have found them. Mpf." Jesus Pietro shuffled rapidly through the photos. Most had names beneath the faces, names Jesus Pietro had remembered and jotted down earlier tonight. "This is the core," he said. "We'll wipe out this branch of the Sons of Earth if we can find these. Where are they?"

The aide was silent. He knew the question was rhetorical. The Head was leaning back with his eyes on the ceiling.

Where were they?

There were no tunnels out. They had not left underground.

They hadn't run away. They would have been stopped, or if not stopped, seen. Unless there were traitors in Implementation. But there weren't. Period.

Could they have reached the void edge? No, that was better guarded than the rest of the grounds. Rebels had a deplorable tendency to go off the edge when cornered.

An aircar? Colonists wouldn't have an aircar, not legally, and none had been reported stolen recently. But Jesus Pietro had always been convinced that at least one crew was involved in the Sons of Earth. He had no proof, no suspect; but his studies of history showed that a revolution always moves down from the top of a society's structure.

A crew might have supplied them with an escape car. They'd have been seen but not stopped. No Implementation officer would halt a car . . . . "Jansen, find out if any cars were sighted during the raid. If there were, let me know when, how many, and descriptions."

Major Jansen left without showing his surprise at the peculiar order he'd just received.

An officer had found the housecleaner nest, a niche in the south wall, near the floor. The man reached in and carefully removed two unconscious adult housecleaners and four pups, put them on the floor, reached in to remove the nest and the food dish. The niche would have to be searched.

Jesus Pietro's clothes dried slowly, in wrinkles. He sat with his eyes closed and his hands folded on his belly. Presently he opened his eyes, sighed and frowned slightly.

Jesus Pietro, this is a very strange house.

Yes. Almost garishly colonist. (Overtones of disgust.)

Jesus Pietro looked at the pink coral walls, the flat-sanded floor which curved up at the edge of the rug to join the walls. Not a bad effect, if a woman were living here. But Harry Kane was a bachelor.

How much would you say a house like this cost?"

Oh, about a thousand stars, not including furnishings. Furnishings would cost twice that. Rugs, ninety stars if you bought one and let it spread. Two housecleaners, mated, fifty stars.

And how much to put a basement under such a house?

Mist Demons, what an idea! Basements have to be dug by hand, by human beings! It'd cost twenty thousand stars easily. You could build a *school* for that. Who would ever think of digging a basement under an architectural coral house?

Who indeed?

Jesus Pietro stepped briskly to the door. "Major Jansen!"

The sequel was likely to be messy. Jesus Pietro retired to the flying office while a team went in with an echo sounder. Yes, there was a large open space under the house. Major Chin wanted to find the entrance, but that might take all night, and the sounds might warn the colonists. Jesus Pietro sat firmly on his curiosity and ordered explosives.

It was messy. The rebels had put together some ingenious devices from materials anyone would have considered harmless. Two men died before sleepy gas grenades could be used.

When all was quiet, Jesus Pietro followed the demolition teams into the basement.

They found one of the unconscious rebels leaning on a deadman switch. They traced the leads to a homemade bomb big enough to blow house and basement to bits. While they disconnected the bomb, Jesus Pietro studied the man, making a mental note to ask him if he'd chickened out. He'd found that they often did.

Behind one wall was a car, a three-year-old four-seater model with a bad scrape on the ground-effect skirt. Jesus Pietro could see no way to get it out of the basement, and neither could anyone else. The house must have been formed over it. Of course, thought Jesus Pietro; they dug the basement, then grew the house over it. He had his men cut away the wall so that the car could be removed later, if it was thought worthwhile. They'd practically have to remove the house.

There was a flight of steps with a

trapdoor at the top. Jesus Pietro, examining the small bomb under the trapdoor, congratulated himself (pointedly, in Major Chin's hearing) on not allowing Major Chin to search for the entrance. He might have found it. Someone removed the bomb and opened the trapdoor. Above was the living room. An asymmetrical section of mutated grass rug had reluctantly torn away and come up with the door. When the door was lowered it would grow back within twenty minutes.

After the dead and unconscious had been filed away in patrol wagons, Jesus Pietro walked among them, comparing the faces with his final stack of photos. He was elated. With the exception of one man, he had collected Harry Kane and his entire guest list. The organ banks would be supplied for years. Not only would the crew have a full supply, which they always did anyway, but there would be spare parts for exceptional servants of the regime, *i.e.*, for civil servants such as Jesus Pietro and his men. Even the colonists would benefit. It was not at all unusual for the Hospital to treat a sick but deserving colonist, if the medical supplies could stand it. The Hospital treated everyone they could. It reminded the colonists that the crew ruled in their name, and had their interests at heart.

And the Sons of Earth was dead. All but one man, and from his picture he wasn't old enough to be dangerous.

Nonetheless Jesus Pietro had his picture tacked to the Hospital bulletin boards and sent a copy to the newscast station with the warning that he was wanted for questioning.

It was not until dawn, when he was settling down to sleep, that he remembered who belonged to that face. Matthew Keller's nephew, six years older than when he'd pulled that cider trick.

He looked just like his uncle.

The rain stopped shortly before dawn, but Matt didn't know it. Sheltered from the rain by a cliff and by a thick clump of watershed trees, he slept on.

The cliff was the Beta-Gamma cliff. He'd fetched up against it sometime last night, dizzy and bruised and wet and winded. He could have collapsed there or tried running parallel to the cliff. He chose to collapse. If Implementation had found him he'd never have wakened, and he knew it as he went to sleep. He had been too exhausted to care.

He woke about ten with a ferocious headache. Every separate muscle hurt from running and from sleeping on bare ground. His tongue felt like the entire Implementation police force had marched over it in sweat socks. He stayed on his back, looking up into the dark trees his ancestors had called pines and tried to remember.

So much to begin and end in one night.

The people seemed to crowd around him. Hood, Laney, the four tall men, the kid who drank behind the bar, the laughing man who stole crew cars, Polly, Harry Kane and a forest of anonymous elbows and shouting voices.

All gone. The man whose scar he wore. The woman who'd left him flat. The genial mastermind-bartender. And Laney! How could he have lost Laney? . . . They were gone. Over the next few years they might reappear in the form of eyes, lengths of artery and vein, grafts of hair-bearing scalp . . . .

By now the police would be looking for Matt himself.

He sat up, and every muscle screamed. He was naked. Implementation must have found his clothes in Laney's room. Could they match the clothes to him? And if they couldn't, they'd still wonder how a man came to be wandering stark naked in open countryside. On the pedwalks of Earth there were licensed nudists, and on Wunderland you didn't need a license; but on the Plateau there was no substitute for clothing.

He couldn't turn himself in. By now he'd never prove he wasn't a rebel. He'd have to get clothes somehow and hope they weren't looking for him already.

He surged to his feet, and it hit him again. Laney, Laney in the dark, Laney looking at him in the lamplit bed. Polly, the girl with the secret. Hood, first name Jayhawk. A wave of sickness caught him, and he doubled over, retching. He stopped the spasms by sheer will power. His skull was a throbbing drum. He straightened and walked to the edge of the watershed forest.

To right and left the watershed trees stretched along the base of the Beta-Gamma cliff. Beta Plateau above him, unreachable except by the bridge, which must be miles to the left. Before him, a wide meadow with a few grazing goats. Beyond houses. Houses in all directions, thickly clustered. His own was perhaps four miles away. He'd never reach it without being stopped.

How about Harry's house? Laney had said there was a hiding place. And the ones who left before the raid . . . some of them might have returned. They could help him.

But would they?

He'd have to try it. He might reach Harry's house, crawling through the grass. The luck of Matt Keller might hold that far. He'd never reach his own.

His luck held: the strange luck that seemed to hide Matt Keller when he didn't want to be noticed. He reached the house two hours later. His knees and belly were green and itchy from the grass.

The grounds about the house were solidly spread with wheel tracks. All of Implementation must have been in on the raid. Matt saw no guards, but he went carefully in case they were inside. Implementation guards or rebel guards, he could still be shot. Though a guard might hesitate to shoot him; he'd want to ask questions first. Like: "Where's your pants, buddy?"

Nobody was inside. A dead or sleeping family of housecleaners lay against one wall, beneath their looted nest. Dead, probably, or drugged. Housecleaners hated light; they did their work at night. The rug showed a gaping hole that reached down through indoor grass and architectural

coral to a well furnished hole in the ground. The living room walls were spotted with explosion marks and mercy-bullet streaks. So was the basement, when Matt climbed down to look.

The basement was empty of men and nearly empty of equipment. Scars showed where heavy machinery had stood, more scars where it had been torn loose or burned loose. There were doors, four of them, all crude looking and all burned open. One led to a kitchen; two opened on empty storerooms. One whole wall lay on its side, but the piece of equipment beyond was intact. The hole left by the fallen wall might have been big enough to remove it; but certainly the hole in the living room floor was not.

It was a car, a flying car of the type used by all crew families. Matt had never before seen one close up. There it was beyond the broken wall, with no possible way to get it out. What in blazes had Harry Kane wanted with a car that couldn't be flown?

Perhaps this was what had brought on the raid. Cars were strictly denied to colonists. The military uses of a flying car are obvious. But why wasn't its theft noticed earlier? The car must have been here when the house was built.

Dimly Matt remembered a story he'd heard last night. Something about a stolen car set to circle the Plateau until the fuel ran out. No doubt the car had fallen in the mist, watched by furious, impotent crew. But — suppose he'd heard only the official version? Suppose the fuel had not run out; suppose the car had dipped into the mist, circled below the Plateau, and come up where Harry Kane could bury it in a hidden basement?

Probably he'd never know.

The showers were still running. Matt was shivering badly when he stepped in. The hot water thawed him instantly. He let the water pour heavily down on the back of his neck, washing the grass stains and dirt and old sweat from him as it ran in streams to his feet. Life was bearable. With all its horrors and all its failures, life was bearable where there were hot showers.

He thought of something then, and metaphorically his ears pricked up.

The raid had been *so* big. Implementation had grabbed everyone at the party. From the number of tracks. It was likely they had taken even those who had left early, putting them to sleep one by one and two by two as they turned toward home. They must have returned to the Hospital with close to two hundred prisoners.

Some were innocent. Matt *knew* that. And Implementation was usually fair about convictions. Trials were always closed, and only the results were ever published, but Implementation usually preferred not to convict the innocent. Suspects *had* returned from the Hospital.

But that wouldn't take long. The police could simply release everyone without a hearing aid, with notations to keep an eye on them in future. He who wore a hearing aid was guilty.


ADKINS

But it would take time to reduce around a hundred convicted rebels to their component parts.

The odds were that Laney, Hood, and Polly were still alive. Certainly they could not *all* be dead by this time.

Matt stepped out of the shower and began looking for clothes. He found a closet which must have belonged to Harry Kane, for the shorts were too wide and the shirts were too short. He dressed anyway, pulling shirt and shorts into a million wrinkles with the belt. At a distance he'd pass.

The clothes problem was as nothing, now. The problem he faced was much worse.

He had no idea how long it took to take a man apart and store him away; though he could guess that it would take a long time to do it right. He didn't know whether Implementation, in the person of the dread Castro, would want to question the rebels first. But he did know that every minute he waited reduced the odds that each of the partygoers was still alive. Right now the odds were good.

Matt Keller would go through life knowing that he had passed up his chance to save them.

But, he reminded himself, it wasn't really a chance. He had no way to reach Alpha Plateau without being shot. He'd have to cross two guarded bridges.

The noonday sun shown through clean air on a clean, ordered world . . . in contrast to the gutted coral shell behind him. Matt hesitated on the doorstep, then resolutely turned back to the jagged hole in Harry Kane's living room. Ht must *know* that it was impossible. The basement was the heart of the rebel stronghold — a heart which had failed. If Implementation had overlooked a single weapon —

There were no weapons in the car, but he found an interesting assortment of scars. Ripped upholstery showed bolts attached to the exposed metal walls; but the bolts had been cut or torn out. Matt found six places which must have been gun mounts. A bin in back might have held makeshift hand grenades. Or sandwiches; Matt couldn't tell. Implementation had taken anything that might have been a weapon, but they didn't seem to have harmed the car. Presumably they would come back and dig it out some day, if they thought it worth the effort.

He got in and looked at the dashboard, but it didn't tell him anything. He'd never seen a car dashboard. There had been a cover over it, padlocked, but the padlock lay broken on the floor and the cover was loose. Harry's padlock? Or the original owners?

He sat in the unfamiliar vehicle, unwilling to leave because leaving would mean giving up. When he noticed a button labeled "Start", he pushed it. He never heard the purr of the motor starting.

The blast made him spasm like a galvanized frog. It came all in one burst, like the sound of a gunshot as heard by a fly sitting in the barrel. Harry must have set something to blow up the house! But no, he was

still alive. And there was daylight pouring in on him.

Daylight.

Four feet of earth had disappeared from above him. A wall of the house was in his field of vision. It leaned. Harry Kane must have been a genius with shaped-charge explosives. Or known one. Come to that, Matt could have done the job for him. The mining worms didn't do *all* his work.

Daylight. And the motor was running. He could hear an almost soundless hum, now that his ears had recovered from the blast. If he flew the car straight up . . . .

He'd have had to cross two guarded bridges to reach Alpha Plateau. Now he could fly there, if he could learn to fly before the car killed him.

Or, he could go home. He wouldn't be noticed, despite his ill-fitting clothes. Colonists tended to mind their own business, leaving it to the crew and Implementation to maintain order. He'd change clothes, burn these, and who would know or ask where he'd been over the weekend?

Matt sighed and examined the dashboard again. He couldn't quit now. Later, maybe, when he crashed the car, or when they stopped him in the air. Not now. The blast that had freed his path was an omen, one he couldn't ignore.

Let's see. Four levers set at zero. "Fans. 1-2, 1-3, 2-4, 3-4." Why would those little levers be set to control the fans in pairs? He pulled one toward him. Nothing.

A small bar with three notches. "Neutral. Ground. Air." Set on Neutral. He moved it to Ground. Nothing. If he'd had the "Ground altitude" set for the number of inches he wanted, the fans would have started. But he didn't know that. He tried Air.

The car tried to flop over on its back.

He was in the air before he had it quite figured out. In desperation he pulled all the Fan throttles full out and tried to keep the car from rolling over by pushing each one in a little at a time. The ground dwindled until the sheep of Beta Plateau were white flecks and the houses of Gamma were tiny squares. Finally the car began to settle down.

Not that he could relax for a moment.

Fans number 1, 2, 3, 4 were left front, right front, left rear, right rear. Dropping lever 1-2 dropped the front of the car; 3-4, the back; 1-3, the left side; 2-4, the right side. He had the car upright, and he began to think he had the knack of it.

But how to go forward?

There were Attitude and Rotation dials, but they didn't do anything. He didn't dare touch the switch with the complicated three-syllable word on it. But . . . suppose he tilted the car forward? Depress the 1-2 throttle.

He did, just a little. The car rotated slowly forward. Then faster! He pulled the lever out hard. The rotation slowed and stopped when the Plateau stood before his face like a vertical wall. Before the wall could strike him in the face he got the car righted, waited until his nerves stopped jumping, then tried it again.

This time he pushed the 1-2 lever in a little, waited three seconds, pulled it out hard. It worked, after a fashion. The car began to move forward with its nose dipped.

Luckily he was facing Alpha Plateau. Otherwise he would have had to fly backward, and that would have made him conspicuous. He didn't know how to turn around.

He was going pretty fast. He went even faster when he found a knob labeled "Slats". The car also started to drop. Matt remembered the Venetian-blind arrangements under the four fans. He left the slats where they were, leveled the car's attitude. It must have been right, because the car kept moving forward.

It was hardly wobbling at all.

And Matt was faced with the most spectacular view he had ever known.

The fields and woods-orchards of Beta rolled beneath. Alpha Plateau was quite visible at this height. The Alpha-Beta cliff was a crooked line with a wide river following the bottom. The Long Fall. The river showed flashes of blue within the steep channel it had carved for itself. Cliff and river terminated at the void edge to the left; and the murmur of the river's fall came through the cockpit plastic. To the right was a land of endless jagged, tilted plains, softening and blurring in the blue distance.

Soon he would cross the cliff and turn toward the Hospital. Matt didn't know just what it looked like, but he was sure he'd recognize the huge hollow cylinders of the spacecraft. A few cars hovered over Beta, none very close, and a great many more showed like black midges over Alpha. They wouldn't bother him. He hadn't decided how close he would get to the Hospital before landing; even crew might not be permitted within a certain distance. Other than that he should be fairly safe from recognition. A car was a car, and only crew flew cars. Anyone who saw him would assume he was a crew.

It was a natural mistake. Matt never did realize just where he went wrong. He had fine judgment and good balance, and he was flying the car as well as was humanly possible. If someone had told him a ten-year-old crew child could do it better, he would have been hurt.

But a ten-year-old crew child would never have lifted a car without flipping the "Gyroscope" switch.

VII

As usual, but much later than usual, Jesus Pietro had breakfast in bed. As usual, Major Jansen sat nearby, drinking coffee, ready to run errands and answer questions.

"Did you get the prisoners put away all right?"

"Yes, sir, in the Vivarium. All but three. We didn't have room for them all."

"And they're in the organ banks?"

"Yes, sir."

Jesus Pietro swallowed a grapefruit slice. "Let's hope they didn't know anything important. What about the deadheads?"

"We separated out the ones without ear mikes and turned them loose. Fortunately we finished before six o'clock, when the mikes evaporated."

"Evaporated, forsooth! Nothing left?"

"Doctor Gospin took samples of the air. He may find residues."

"It's not important. A nice trick, though, considering their resources," said Jesus Pietro.

After five minutes of uninterrupted munching and sipping sounds, he abruptly wanted to know: "What about Keller?"

"Who, sir?"

"The one that got away."

And after three phone calls Major Jansen was able to say, "No reports from the colonist areas. Nobody's volunteered to turn him in. He hasn't tried to go home, or to contact any relative or anyone he knows professionally. None of the police in on the raid recognize his face. None will admit that someone got past him."

More silence, while Jesus Pietro finished his coffee. Then: "See to it that the prisoners are brought to my office one at a time. I want to know if anyone saw the landing yesterday."

"One of the girls was carrying photos, sir. Of package number three. They must have been taken with a scopic lens."

"Oh?" For a moment Jesus Pietro's thoughts showed clear behind a glass skull. Millard Parlette! If he found out — "I don't know why you couldn't tell me that before. Treat it as confidential. Now get on with it. No, wait a minute," he called as Jansen turned to the door. "One more thing. There may be basements that we don't know about. Detail a couple of echo-sounder teams for a house-to-house search on Delta and Eta Plateaus."

"Yes sir. And is this priority?"

"No, no, no. The vivarium's two deep already. Tell them to take their time."

The phone stopped Major Jansen from leaving. He picked it up, listened, then demanded, "Well, why call here? Hold on." With a touch of derision he reported, "A car approaching, sir, being flown in a reckless manner. Naturally they had to call you personally."

"Now why the — Mph. Could it be the same make as the car in Kane's basement?"

"I'll ask." He did. "It is, sir."

"I should have known there'd be a way to get it out of the basement. Tell them to bring it down."

Geologists (*don't* let's have a hard time about that word) believed that Mount Lookitthat was geologically recent. A few hundreds of thousands of years ago, part of the planet's skin had turned molten. Possibly a convection current in the interior had carried more than ordinarily hot magma up to melt the surface; possibly an asteroid had died a violent, fiery death. A slow extrusion had followed, with viscous magma rising and cooling and rising and cooling until a plateau with fluted sides and an approximately flat top stood forty miles above the surface.

It had to be recent. Such a preposterous anomaly could not long resist the erosion of Mount Lookitthat's atmosphere.

And because it was recent, the surface was jagged. Generally the northern end was higher, high

enough to hold a permanent sliding glacier, and too high and too cold for comfort. Generally rivers and streams ran south, to join either the Muddy or the Long Fall, both of which had carved deep canyons for themselves through the southland. Both canyons ended in spectacular waterfalls, the tallest in the known universe. Generally the rivers ran south; but there were exceptions, for the surface of Mount Lookitthat was striated, differentiated, a maze of plateaus divided by cliffs and chasms.

Some plateaus were flat; some of the cliffs were straight and vertical. Most of these were in the south. In the north the surface was all tilted blocks and strange lakes with deep pointed bottoms, and the land would have been cruel to a mountain goat. Nonetheless these regions would be settled someday, just as the Rocky Mountains of Earth were now part of suburbia.

The slowboats had landed in the south, on the highest plateau around. The colonists had been forced to settle lower down. Though they were the more numerous, they covered less territory, for the crew had cars, and flying cars can make a distant mountain home satisfactory where bicycles will not. Yet Alpha Plateau was Crew Plateau, and for many it was better to live elbow to elbow with one's peers than out in the boondocks in splendid isolation.

So Alpha Plateau was crowded.

What Matt saw below him was all houses. They varied enormously in size, in color, in style, in building material. To Matt, who had lived out his life in architectural coral, the dwellings looked like sheer havoc, like debris from the explosion of a time machine. There was even a clump of deserted, crumbling coral bungalows, each far bigger than a colonist's home. Two or three were as large as Matt's old grade school. When architectural coral first came to the Plateau the crew had reserved it for their own use. Later it had gone permanently out of style.

None of the nearby buildings seemed to be more than two stories tall. Someday there would be skyscrapers, if the crew kept breeding . . . . But in the distance two squat towers rose from a shapeless construction in stone and metal. The Hospital, without a doubt. And straight ahead.

Matt was beginning to feel the strain of flying. He had to divide his attention between the dashboard, the ground and the Hospital ahead. It was coming closer; and he was beginning to appreciate its size.

Each of the empty slowboats had been built to house six crew in adequate comfort and fifty colonists in stasis. Each slowboat also included a cargo hold, two water-fueled reaction motors and a water fuel tank. And all of this had to be fitted into a hollow double-walled cylinder the shape of a beer can from which the top and bottom have been removed with a can opener. The slowboats had been circular flying wings. In transit between worlds they had spun on their axes to provide centrifugal gravity, and the empty space inside the inner hull, now occupied only by two intersecting tailfins, had once held two throwaway hydrogen balloons.

They were big. Since Matt could not see the inner emptiness which the crew called the Attic, they looked far bigger. Yet they were swamped by the haphazard-looking stone construction of the Hospital. Most of it was two stories high, but there were towers which climbed halfway up the ships' hulls. Some would be power stations, others — he couldn't guess. Flat barren rock surrounded the Hospital in a half-mile circle, rock as naked as the Plateau had been before the slowboats brought a carefully selected ecology. From the edge of the perimeter a thin tongue of forest reached across the rock to touch the Hospital.

All else had been cleared away. Why, Matt wondered, had Implementation left that one stretch of trees?

A wave of numbness hit him and passed, followed by a surge of panic. A sonic stun beam! For the first time he looked behind him. Twenty to thirty Implementation police cars were scattered in his wake.

It hit him again, glancingly. Matt shoved the 1-3 throttle all the way in. The car dipped left, tilted forty-five degrees or more before he moved to steady it. He shot away to the left, gathering speed toward the void edge of Alpha Plateau.

The numbness reached him and locked its teeth. They had been trying to force him to land; now they wanted him to crash before he could go over the edge. His sight blurred; he couldn't move. The car dropped, sliding across space toward the ground and toward the void.

The numbness ebbed. He tried to move his hands and got nothing but a twitch. Then the sonic found him again, but with lessened intensity. He thought he knew why. He was outracing the police because they did not care to sacrifice altitude for speed, to risk striking the lip of the void edge. That was a game for the desperate.

Through blurred eyes he saw the dark cliff-edge come up at him. He missed it by yards. He could move again, jerkily, and he turned his head to see the cars dropping after him. They must know they'd lost him, but they wanted to see him fall.

How far down was the mist? He'd never known. Miles, certainly. Tens of miles? They'd hover above him until he disappeared behind the mist. He couldn't go back to the Plateau; they'd stun him, wait, and scrape up what was left after the crash. There was only one direction he could go now.

Matt flipped the car over on its back.

The police followed him down until their ears began to pop. Then they hovered, waiting. It was minutes before the fugitive car faded from sight, upside down all the way, a receding blurred dark mote trailing a hairline of shadow through the mist, flickering at the edge of human vision. Gone.

"Hell of a way to go," someone said. It went over the intercom, and there were grunts of agreement.

The police turned for home, which was now far above them. They knew perfectly well that their cars were not airtight. Almost, but not quite. Even in recent years men had taken their

cars below the Plateau, to prove their courage and to gauge what level they could reach before the air turned poisonous. That level was far above the mist. Someone named Greeley had even tried the daredevil stunt of dropping his car with the fans set to idle, falling as far as he could before the poison mist could leak into his cabin. He had dropped four miles, with the hot, noxious gasses whistling around the door, before he had to stop. He was lucky enough to get back up before he passed out. The Hospital had had to replace his lungs. On Alpha Plateau he was still a kind of hero.

Even Greeley would never have flipped his car over and bored for the bottom. Nobody would, not if he knew anything about cars. It might come apart in the air!

But that wouldn't occur to Matt. He knew little about machinery. Earth's strange pets were necessities, but machinery was a luxury. Colonists needed cheap houses and hardy fruit trees and rugs which did not have to be made by hand. They did not need powered dishwashers, refrigerators, razors or cars. Complex machinery had to be made by other machines, and the crew was wary of passing machines to colonists. Such machinery as there was was publicly owned. The most complex vehicle Matt knew was a bicycle. A car wasn't meant to fly without gyroscopes, but Matt had done it.

He had to get down to the mist to hide himself from the police. The faster he fell, the further he'd leave them behind.

At first the seat pressed against him with the full force of the fans; about one and a half Mount Lookit-that gravitities. The wind rose to a scream, even through the soundproofing. Air held him back, harder and harder, until it compensated for the work of the fans; and then he was in free fall. And still he fell faster! Now the air began to cancel gravity, and Matt tried to fall to the roof. He had suspected that he was making the car do something unusual, but he didn't know how unusual. When the wind resistance started to pull him out of his seat he snatched at the arms and looked frantically for something to hold him down. He found the seat belts. Not only did they hold him down, once he managed to get them fastened. They reassured him. Obviously they were meant for just this purpose.

It was getting dark. Even the sky beneath his feet was darkening; and the police cars were not to be seen. Very well. Matt pushed the fan throttles down to the Idle notches.

The blood rushing to his head threatened to choke him. He turned the car rightside up. Pressure jammed him deep in his seat with a force no man had felt since the brute-force chemical rockets; but he could stand it now. What he couldn't endure was the heat. And the pain in his ears. And the taste of the air.

He pulled the throttles out again. He wanted to stop fast.

Come to that, would he know when he stopped? This around him was not a wispy kind of mist, but a dark blur giving no indication of his velocity. From above the mist was

white; from below, black. Being lost down here would be horrible. At least he knew which way was up. It was fractionally lighter in that direction.

The air tasted like flaming molasses.

He had the throttles all the way out. Still the gas crept in. Matt pulled his shirt over his mouth and tried to breathe through that. No good. Something like a black wall emerged from the mist-blur, and he tilted the car in time to avoid crashing against the side of Mount Lookitthat. He stayed near the black wall, watching it rush past him. He'd be harder to see in the shadow of the void edge.

The mist disappeared. He shot upward through sparkling sunlight. When he thought he was good and clear of the foul mist, and when he couldn't stand to breathe hot poison for another second, he put the window down. The car whipped to the side and tried to turn over. A hurricane roared through the cabin. It was hot and thick and soupy, that hurricane, but it could be breathed.

He saw the edge of the Plateau above him, and he pushed the throttles in a little to slow down. His stomach turned a filp-flop. For the first time since he'd gotten into the car, he had time to be sick. His stomach tried to turn over, his head was splitting from the sudden changes in pressure, and the Implementation sonics were having their revenge in twitching, jerking muscles. He kept the car more or less upright until the edge of the Plateau came level with him. There was a stone wall along the edge here. He eased the car sideways, eased it back when he was over the wall, tilted it by guess and hope until he was motionless in the air, then let it drop.

The car fell about four feet. Matt opened the door but stopped himself from getting out. What he really wanted to do was faint; but he'd left the fans idling. He found the "Neutral . . . Ground . . . Air" toggle and shoved it forward without much care. He was tired and sick and he wanted to lie down.

The toggle fell in the "Ground" slot.

Mat stumbled out the door . . . stumbled because the car was rising. It rose four inches off the ground and began to slide. During his experimenting Matt must have set the ground altitude, so that the car was now a ground-effect vehicle. It slid away from him as he tried to reach for it. He watched on hands and knees as it glided away across the uneven ground, bounced against the wall and away, against the wall and away. It circled the end of the wall and went over the edge.

Matt flopped on his back and closed his eyes. He didn't care if he never saw a car again.

The motion sickness, the sonic aftereffects, the poisoned air he'd breathed, the pressure changes . . . they gripped him hard, and he wanted to die. Then, by stages, they began to let go. Nobody found him there. A house was nearby, but it had a vacant look. After some time Matt sat up and took stock of himself.

His throat hurt. There was a strange, unpleasant taste in his mouth.

He was still on Alpha Plateau.

Only crew would go to the trouble of building walls along a void edge. So he was committed. Without a car he could no more leave Alpha Plateau than he could have arrived here in the first place.

But the house was architectural coral. Bigger than anything he was used to, it was still coral. Which meant that it should have been deserted about forty years.

He'd have to risk it. He needed cover. There were no trees nearby, and trees were dangerous to hide in; they would probably be fruit trees, and someone might come applepicking. Matt got up and moved toward the house.

VIII

The Hospital was the control nexus of a world. It was not a large world, and the settled region totalled a mere 20,0 0 square miles; but that region needed a lot of control. It also required considerable electricity, enormous quantities of water to be moved up from the Long Fall River, and a deal of medical attention. The Hospital was big and complex and diversified. Two fifty-six-man spacecraft were its east and west corners. Since the spacecraft were hollow cylinders with the airlocks opening to the inside (to the Attic, as that inner space had been called when the rotating ships were between stars and the ship's axis was Up), the corridors in that region were twisted and mazelike and hard to navigate.

So the young man in Jesus Pietro's office had no idea where he was. Even if he'd managed to leave the office unguarded he'd have been hopelessly lost. And he knew it. That was all to the good.

"You were on the dead-man switch," said Jesus Pietro.

The man nodded. His sandy hair was cut in the old Belter style, copied from the even older Mohawk. There were shadows under his eyes as if from lack of sleep, and the lie was borne out by a slump of utter depression; though he had been sleeping since his capture in Harry Kane's basement.

"You funked it," Jesus Pietro accused. "You arranged to fall across the switch so that it wouldn't go off."

The man looked up. Naked rage was in his face. He made no move, for there was nothing he could do.

"Don't be ashamed. The dead man switch is an old trick. It almost never gets used in practice. The man in charge is too likely to change his mind at the last second. It's a — "

"I fully expected to wake up dead!" the man shouted.

" — natural reaction. It takes a psychotic to commit suicide. No, don't tell me all about it. I'm not interested. I want to hear about the car in your basement."

"You think I'm a coward, do you?"

"That's an ugly word."

"*I* stole that car."

"Did you?" The skeptical tone was genuine. Jesus Pietro did not believe him. "Then perhaps you can tell me why the theft went unnoticed."

The man told him. He talked eargerly, demanding that Jesus Pietro recognize his courage. Why not?

There was nobody left to betray. He would live as long as Jesus Pietro Castro was interested in him, and for three minutes longer. The organ bank operating room was three minutes' walk away. Jesus Pietro listened politely. Yes, he remembered the car that had tauntingly circled the Plateau for five days. The young crew owner had given him hell for letting it happen. The man had even suggested — demanded — that one of Castro's men drop on the car from above, climb into the cockpit and bring it back. Jesus Pietro's patience had given out, and he had risked his life by politely offering to help the young man perform the feat.

"So we buried it at the same time we built the basement," the prisoner finished. "Then we let the house grow over it. We had great plans." He sagged into his former position of despair, but went on talking, mumbling. "There were gun mounts. Bins for bombs. We stole a sonic stunner and mounted it in the rear window. Now nobody'll ever use them."

"The car was used."

"What?"

"This afternoon. Keller escaped us last night. He returned to Kane's home this morning, took the car and flew it nearly to the Hospital before we stopped him. The Mist Demons know what he thought he was doing."

"Great. 'The last flight of — ' We never got around to naming it. Our air force. Our glorious air force. Who did you say?"

"Keller. Matthew Leigh Keller."

"I don't know him. What would he be doing with my car?"

"Don"t play games. You are not protecting anyone. We drove him off the edge. Five ten, age twenty-one, hair brown, eyes blue — '"

"I tell you I never met him."

"Good-by." Jesus Pietro pushed a button under his desk. The door opened.

"Wait a minute. Now, wait — "

Lying, Jesus Pietro thought, after the man was gone. Probably lied about the car too. Somewhere in the vivarium the man who really took the car waited to be questioned. If it was stolen. It could equally well have been supplied by a crew member, by Jesus Pietro's hypothetical traitor.

He had often wondered why the crew would not supply him with truth drugs. They would have been easy to manufacture from instructions in the ship's libraries. Millard Parlette, in a mellow mood, had once tried to explain. "We own their bodies," he had said. "We take them apart on the slightest pretext, and if they manage to die a natural death we get them anyway, what we can save. Aren't the poor bastards at least entitled to the privacy of their own minds?"

It seemed a peculiar bleeding-heart attitude, coming from a man whose very life depended on the organ banks. But others apparently felt the same. If Jesus Pietro wanted his questions answered, he must depend on his own empirical brand of psychology.

Polly Tournquist. Age: twenty. Height: five one. Weight: seventy-five. She wore a crumpled

party dress in the colonist style. In Jesus Pietro's eyes it did nothing for her. She was small and brown and, compared to most of the women Jesus Pietro met socially, muscular. They were work muscles, not tennis muscles. Traces of callous marred her hands. Her hair, worn straight back, had a slight natural curl to it but no trace of style.

Had she been raised as crew girls were raised, had she access to cosmetics available on Alpha Plateau, she would have known how to be beautiful. Then she wouldn't have been bad at all, once the callous left her hands and cosmetic treatment smoothed her skin. But, like most colonists, she had aged faster than a crew.

She was only a young colonist girl, like a thousand other young colonist girls Jesus Pietro had seen.

She bore his silent stare for a full minute then snapped, "Well?"

"Well? You're Polly Tournquist, aren't you?"

"Of course."

"You had a handful of films on you when you were picked up last night. How did you get them?"

"I prefer not to say."

"Eventually I think you will. Meanwhile, what would you like to talk about?"

Polly looked bewildered. "Are you serious?"

"I am serious. I've interviewed six people today. The organ banks are full, and the day is ending. I'm in no hurry. Do you know what those films of yours imply?"

She nodded warily. "I think so. Especially after the raid."

"Oh, you saw the point, did you?"

"It's clear you have no more use for the Sons of Earth. We've always been some danger to you — "

"You flatter yourselves."

"But you've never had a real try at wiping us out. Not till now. Because we serve as a recruiting center for your damned organ banks!"

"You amaze me. Did you know this when you joined?"

"I was fairly sure of it."

"Then why join?"

She spread her hands. "Why does anybody join? I couldn't stand the way things are now. Castro, what happens to your body when you die?"

"Cremated. I'm an old man."

"You're a crew. They'd cremate you anyway. Only colonists go into the banks."

"I'm half crew," said Jesus Pietro. His desire to talk was genuine, and there was no need for reticence with a girl who was, to all intents and purposes, dead. "When my — you might say — pseudo-father reached the age of seventy he was old enough to need injections of testosterone. Except that he chose a different way to get them."

The girl looked bewildered, then horrified.

"I see you understand. Shortly afterward his wife, my mother, became pregnant. I must admit they raised me almost as a crew. I love them both. I don't know who my father was. He may have been a rebel, or a thief."

"To you there's no difference, I suppose." The girl's tone was savage.

"No. Back to the Sons of Earth,"

Jesus Pietro said briskly. "You're quite right. We don't need them any more, not as a recruiting center nor for any other purpose. Yours was the biggest rebel group on Mount Lookitthat. We'll take the others as they come."

"I *don't* understand. The organ banks are obsolete now, aren't they? Why not publish the news? There'd be a worldwide celebration!"

"That's just why we *don't* broadcast the news. Your kind of sloppy thinking! No, the organ banks are not obsolete. It's just that we'll need a smaller supply of raw material. And as a means of punishment for crimes the banks are as important as ever!"

"You son of a bitch," said Polly. Her color was high, and her voice held an icy, half-controlled fury. "So we might get *upppity* if we thought we were being killed to no *purpose*!"

"You will not be dying to no purpose," Jesus Pietro explained patiently. "That has not been necessary since the first kidney transplant between identical twins. It has not been necessary since Landsteiner classified the primary blood types in 1900. What do you know about the car in Kane's basement?"

"I prefer not to say."

"You're being very difficult."

The girl smiled for the first time. "I've heard that."

His reaction took Jesus Pietro by surprise. A flash of admiration, followed by a hot flood of lust. Suddenly the bedraggled colonist girl was the only girl in the universe.

Jesus Pietro held his face like frozen stone while the flood receded. It took several seconds.

"What about Matthew Leigh Keller?"

"Who? I mean — "

"You prefer not to say. Miss Tournquist, you probably know that there are no truth drugs on this world. In the ships' libraries are instructions for making scopolamine, but no crew will authorize me to use them. Hence I have developed different methods." He saw her stiffen. "No. no. There will be no pain. They'd put *me* in the organ banks if I used torture. I'm only going to give you a nice rest."

"I think I know what you mean. Castro, what are you made of? You're half colonist yourself. What makes you side with the crew?"

"There must be law and order, Miss Tourniquist. On all of Mount Lookitthat there is only one force for law and order, and that force is the crew." Jesus Pietro pushed the call button.

He did not relax until she was gone, and then he found himself shaken. Had she noticed that flash of desire? What an embarrassing thing to happen! But she must have assumed he was only angry. Of course she had.

Polly was in the maze of corridors when she suddenly remembered Matt Keller. Her regal dignity, assumed for the benefit of the pair of Implementation police who were her escorts, softened in thought. Why would Jesus Pietro be interested in Matt? He wasn't even a member. Did it mean that he had escaped?

Odd, about that night. She'd liked Matt. He'd interested her. And then, suddenly — It must have looked to him as if she'd brushed him off. Well, it didn't matter now. But Implementation should have turned him loose. He was nothing but a deadhead.

Castro., Why had he told her all that? Was it part of the coffin cure? Well, she'd hold out as long as possible. Let Castro worry about who might know the truth of ramrobot #143. She had told nobody.

The crew girl looked about her in pleased wonder, at the curving walls and ceiling with their peeled, discolored paint, at the spiral stairs, at the matted, withered brown rug which had been indoor grass. She watched the dust puff out from her falling feet, and she ran her hands over the coral walls where the paint had fallen away. Her new, brightly dyed falling jumper seemed to glow in the gloom of the deserted house.

"It's very odd," she said. Her crewish accent was strange and lilting.

The man lifted an arm from around her waist to wave it about him. "They live just like this," he said in the same accent. "Just like this. You can see their houses from your car on the way to the lake."

Matt smiled as he watched them walk up the stairs. He had never seen a two-story coral house; the balloons were too hard to blow, and the second floor tended to sag unless you maintained two distinct pressures. Why didn't they come to Delta Plateau, if they wanted to see how colonists lived?

But why should they? Surely their own lives were more interesting.

What strange people they were. It was hard to understand them, not only because of the lilt but because certain words meant the wrong things. Their faces were alien, with flared nostrils and high, prominent cheekbones. Against the people Matt had known, they seemed fragile, undermuscled, but graceful and beautiful to the point where Matt wondered about the man's manhood. They walked like they owned the world.

The deserted house had proved a disappointment. He'd thought all was lost when the crew couple came strolling in, pointing and staring as if they were in a museum. But with luck they would be up there for some time.

Matt moved very quietly from the darkness of a now doorless closet, picked up their picnic basket.

There was a place where he could hide, a place he should have thought of before.

He climbed over the low stone wall with the picnic basket in one hand. There was a three-foot granite lip on the void side. Matt settled himself cross-legged against the stone wall, with his head an inch below the top and his toes a foot from the forty-mile drop to hell. He opened the picnic basket.

There was more than enough for two. He ate it all, eggs and sandwiches and squeezebags of custard and a thermos of soup and a handful of olives. Afterward he kicked the basket and the scraps of plastic wrap into the void. His eyes followed them down. Consider the following:

Anyone can see infinity by looking up on a clear night. But only on the small world of Mount Lookitthat can you see infinity by looking down.

No, it's not really infinity. Neither is the night sky, really. You can see a few nearby galaxies; but even if the universe turns out to be finite, you see a very little distance into it. Matt could see apparent infinity by looking straight down.

He could see the picnic basket falling. Smaller. Gone.

The plastic wrap. Fluttering down. Gone.

Then, nothing but the white mist.

IX

On a far distant day they would call the phenomenon "Plateau trance." It was a form of autohypnosis well known to Plateau citizens of both social classes, differing from other forms only in that nearly anyone could fall into such a state by accident. In this respect Plateau trance compares to ancient, badly authenticated cases of "highway hypnosis," or to more recent studies of "the far look," a form of religious trance endemic to the Belt of Sol. "The far look" comes to a miner who spends too many minutes staring at a single star in the background of naked space. "Plateau trance" starts with a long, dreamy look down into the void mist.

For a good eight hours Matt had not had a chance to relax. He would not get a chance tonight, and he didn't want to dwell on that now. Here was his chance. He relaxed.

He came out of it with a niggling suspicion that time had passed. He was lying on his side, his face over the edge, staring down into unfathomable darkness. It was night. And he felt wonderful.

Until he remembered.

He got up and climbed carefully over the wall. It would not do to slip, three feet from the edge, and he was often clumsy when he felt this nervous. Now his stomach seemed to have been replaced by a plastic demonstration model from a biology class. There was a jerkiness in his limbs.

He walked a little way from the wall and stopped. Which way was the Hospital?

Come now, he thought. This is ridiculous.

Well, there was a swelling hill to his left. Light glowed faintly along its rim. He'd try that.

The grass and the earth beneath it ended as he reached the top. Now there was stone beneath his bare feet, stone and rock dust untouched by three hundred years of the colony planting program. He stood at the crest of the hill looking down on the Hospital. It was half a mile away and blazed with light. Behind and to either side were other lights, the lights of houses, none within half a mile of the Hospital. Against their general glow he saw the black tongue of forest he'd noticed that morning.

In a direction not quite opposite to the dark, sprawling line of trees, a straighter line of light ran from the Hospital to a cluster of buildings at the perimeter of the bare region. A supply road.

He could reach the trees by moving along the edge of town. The trees would give him cover until he reached the wall . . . but it seemed a poor risk. Why would Implementation leave that one line of cover across a bare, flat protective field? That strip of forest must be loaded with detection equipment.

He started across the rock on his belly.

He stopped frequently. It was tiring, moving like this. Worse than that, what was he going to do when he got inside? The Hospital was big, and he knew nothing about the interior. The lighted windows bothered him. Didn't the Hospital ever sleep? The stars shone bright and cold. Each time he stopped to rest, the Hospital was a little closer.

So was the wall that surrounded it. It leaned outward, and on this side there was no break at all.

He was a hundred yards from the wall when he found the wire. There were big metal pegs to hold it off the ground, pegs a foot high and thirty yards apart, driven into the rock. The wire itself was bare coppery metal strung taut a few inches off the ground. Matt had not touched it. He crossed it very carefully, staying low but not touching the wire at any time.

Faintly there came the sound of alarm bells ringing inside the wall. Matt stopped where he was. Then he turned and was over the wire in one leap. When he hit the ground he didn't move. His eyes were closed tight. He felt the faint touch of numbness which meant a sonic beam. Evidently he was out of range.

He risked a look behind him. Four searchlights hunted him across the bare rock. The wall was lousy with police.

He turned away, afraid they'd see his face shining. There were whirring sounds. Mercy-bullets falling all around him, slivers of glassy chemical which dissolved in blood. They weren't as accurate as lead pellets, but one must find him soon.

A light pinned him. And another, and a third.

From the wall came a voice. "Cease fire." The whir of anesthetic slivers ended. The voice spoke again, bored, authoritative, tremendously amplified. "Stand up, you. You may as well walk, but we'll carry you if we have to."

Matt wanted to burrow like a rabbit. But even a rabbit wouldn't have made headway in the pitted, dusty stone. He stood up with his hands in the air.

There was no sound, no motion.

One of the lights swung away from him. Then the others. They moved in random arcs for awhile, crossing the protective rock field with swooping blobs of light. Then, one by one, they went out.

The amplified voice spoke again. It sounded faintly puzzled. "What set off the alarms?"

Another voice, barely audible in the quiet night. "Don't know, sir."

"Maybe a rabbit. All right, break it up."

The figures on the wall disappeared. Matt was left standing all alone with his hands in the air. After awhile he put them down and walked away.

The man was tall and thin, with a long face and a short mouth and no expression. His Implementation police uniform could not have been cleaner nor better pressed if he'd donned it a moment ago for the first time. He sat beside the door, bored and used to it, a man who had spent half his life sitting and waiting.

Every fifteen minutes or so he would get up to look at the coffin.

Seemingly the coffin had been built for Gilgamesh or Paul Bunyan. It was oak, at least on the outside. The eight gauge dials along one edge appeared to have been pirated from somewhere else and attached to the coffin by a carpenter of only moderate skill. The long-headed man would stand up, go to the coffin, stand over the dials for a minute. Something could go wrong, after all. Then he would have to act in a hurry. But nothing ever did, and he would return to his chair and wait some more.

Problem:

Polly Tournquist's mind holds information you need. How to get it?

The mind is the body. The body is the mind.

Drugs would interfere with her metabolism. They might harm her. You'd be willing to risk it, but you're not allowed drugs anyway.

Torture? You could damage a few fingernails, bend a few bones. But it wouldn't stop there. Pain affects the adrenal glands, and the adrenal glands affect everything. Sustained pain can have a savage, even permanent effect on a body needed for medical supplies. Besides, torture is unethical.

Friendly persuasion? You could offer her a deal. Her life, and resettlement in some other region of the Plateau, for anything you want to know. You'd like that, and the organ banks are full . . . . But she won't deal. You've seen them before. You can tell.

So you give her a nice rest.

Polly Tournquist was a soul alone in space. Less than that; for there was nothing around her that could have been identified as "space." No heat, no cold, no pressure, no light, no darkness, no hunger, no thirst, no sound.

She had tried to concentrate on the sound of her heartbeat, but even that had disappeared. It was too regular. Her mind had edited it out. Similarly with the darkness behind her closed, bandaged eyelids: the darkness was uniform, and she no longer sensed it. She could strain her muscles against the soft, swaddling bandages that bound her, but she sensed no result, for the slack was small fractions of an inch. Her mouth was partly open; she could neither open it further, nor close it on the foam rubber mouthpiece. She could not bite her tongue, nor find it. In no way could she produce the sensation of pain. The ineffable peace of the coffin cure wrapped her in its tender folds and carried her, screaming silently, into nothingness.

What happened?

He sat at the edge of the grass on the hill above the Hospital. His eyes were fixed on its blazing windows. His fist beat against his knee.

What happened? They had me. They had me!

He had walked away. Bewildered, helpless, beaten, he had waited for the magnified voice to shout its orders. And nothing happened. It was as if they had forgotten him. He had walked away with the feel of death at his back, waiting for the numbness of a sonic stun beam or the prick of a mercy-bullet or the roar of the officer's voice.

Gradually, against all reason, he had sensed that they were not going to come for him.

And then he ran.

His lungs had stopped their tortured laboring many minutes ago, but his brain still spun. Perhaps it would never stop. He had run until he collapsed, here at the top of the hill, but the fear that drove him was not the fear of the organ banks. He had fled from an impossible thing, from a universe without reason. How could he have walked away from that plain of death with no eye to watch him? It smacked of magic, and he was afraid.

Something had suspended the ordinary laws of the universe to save his life. He had never heard of anything that could do that . . . except the Mist Demons. And the Mist Demons were a myth. They had told him so, when he was old enough. The Mist Demons were a tale to frighten children, like the reverse of a Santa Claus. The old wives who found powerful beings in the mist beyond the edge of the world had followed a tradition older than history, perhaps as old as Man. But nobody believed in the Mist Demons.

They were like the Belt miners' Church of Finagle, whose prophet was Murphy. A half bitter joke. Something to swear by.

They had me and they let me go. Why?

Could they have had a purpose? Was there some reason the Hospital should let a colonist sneak to its very walls, then let him go free?

Could the organ banks be full? But there must be *some*place they could keep a prisoner until there was room.

But if they thought he was a crew! Yes, that was it! A human figure on Alpha Plateau — of *course* they'd assume he was crew. But so what? Surely someone would have come to question him.

Matt began pacing a tight circle at the top of the low hill. His head whirled. He'd walked to certain death and been turned loose. By whom? Why? And what did he do next? Go back and give them another chance? Walk to the Alpha-Beta bridge and hope nobody would see him sneaking across? Fly down the cliff, vigorously flapping his arms?

The awful thing was that he didn't know it wouldn't work. Magic, magic.

Hood had talked about magic.

No, he hadn't. He'd practically turned purple denying that magic was involved. He'd been talking about — psychic powers. And Matt had been so involved in watching Polly that he couldn't remember anything he'd said.

It was very bad luck. Because this was his only out. He had to assume that he had a psychic power, though he had not the remotest idea what that implied. At least it put a name to what had happened.

"I've got a psychic power," Matt announced. His voice rang with queer precision in the quiet night.

Fine. So? If Hood had gone into detail on the nature of psychic powers, Matt couldn't remember. But he could fairly well drop the idea of flying down the Alpha-Beta cliff. Whatever else was true of Man's unexplored mental powers, they must be consistent. Matt could remember the feeling that he wouldn't be noticed if he didn't want to be, but he had never flown, nor even dreamed of flying.

He ought to talk to Hood.

But Hood was in the Hospital. He might be dead already.

Well . . . .

Matt had been eleven years old when Genghis, or Dad, brought two charms home for gifts. They were model cars, just the right size for charm bracelets, and they glowed in the dark. Matt and Jeanne had loved them at sight and forever.

One night they had left the charms in a closet for several hours, thinking they would grow brighter when they "got used to the dark." When Jeanne opened the closet they had lost all their glow.

Jeanne was near tears. Matt's reaction was different. If darkness robbed the charms of their powers —

He hung them next to a light bulb for an hour. When he turned off the light they glowed like little blue lamps . . . .

A tide of small, loosely packed

clouds was spreading across the stars. In all directions the town lights had gone out; all but the lights of the Hospital. The Plateau slept in a profound silence.

Well . . . he'd tried to sneak into the Hospital. He'd been caught. But when he stood up in the glare of spotlight, they couldn't see him. The why of it was just as magical as before, but he thought he was beginning to see the how of it.

He'd have to risk it. Matt began to walk.

He'd never planned for it to go this far. If only he'd been stopped before it was too late . . . . But it *was* too late, and he had the sense to know it.

Strictly speaking, he should have been wearing something bright. A blue shirt with a tangerine sweater, iridescent green pants, a scarlet cape with an "S" enclosed in a yellow triangle. And . . . rimmed glasses? It had been a long time since grade school. Never mind; he'd have to go as he was.

A good thing he liked flamboyant gestures.

He skirted the edge of the bare region until he reached the houses. Presently he was walking through dark streets. The houses were fascinating and strange. He would have enjoyed seeing them by daylight. What manner of people lived in them? Colorful, idle, happy, eternally young and healthy. He would certainly have liked to be one of them now.

But he noticed a peculiar thing about the houses. Heterogeneous as they were in form, color, style, building material, they had one thing in common. Always they faced away from the Hospital.

As if the Hospital inspired them with fear. Or guilt.

There were lights ahead. Matt walked faster. He had been walking for half an hour now. Yes, there was the supply road, lit bright as day by two close-spaced lines of street lamps. A broken white line ran down the curving middle.

Matt stepped out to the white line and began following it toward the Hospital.

Again his shoulders were unnaturally rigid, as with the fear of death from behind. But the danger was all before him. The organ banks were the most humiliating imaginable form of death. Yet Matt feared something that was much worse.

Men had been released from the Hospital to tell of their trials. Not many, but they could talk. Matt could guess a little of what waited for him.

They would see him, they would fire mercy-bullets into him, they would carry him on a stretcher into the Hospital. When he woke he would be taken to his first and last interview with the dread Castro. The Head's burning eyes would look into his, and he would rumble, "Keller, eh? Yes, we had to take your uncle apart. Well, Keller? You walked up here like you thought you were a crew with an appointment. What did you think it was you were doing, Keller?"

And what was he going to say to that?

X

Asleep, Jesus Pietro looked ten years older. His defenses — his straight back, tight muscles, and controled features — were relaxed. His startling pale eyes were closed. His carefully combed white hair was messy, showing the bare scalp over which it had been carefully combed. He slept alone, separated from his wife by a door which was never locked. Sometimes he thrashed in his sleep, and sometimes, ridden by insomnia, he stared at the ceiling with his arms folded and muttered to himself; which was why Nadia slept next door. But tonight he lay quiet.

He could have looked thirty again, with help. Inside his aging skin he was in good physical shape. He had good wind, thanks partly to his borrowed lung; his muscles were hard beneath loose wrinkles and deposits of fat, and his digestion was good. His teeth, all transplants, were perfect. Give him new skin, new scalp, a new liver, replace a number of sphincter and other autonomic muscles . . . .

But that would take a special order from the crew congress. It would be a kind of testimonial, and he would accept it if it were offered, but he wasn't going to fight for it. Transplants and the giving of transplants were the right of the crew and their most powerful reward. And Jesus Pietro was . . . not squeamish, but somehow reluctant to exchange parts of himself for parts of some stranger. It would be like losing part of his ego. Only the fear of death had made him accept a new lung, years ago.

He slept quietly for some time.

And things began to add up.

Polly Tournquist's films; someone *had* slipped through his net, night before last. Keller's getaway last night. A gnawing suspicion, only an intuition as yet, that ramrobot package #143 was even more important than anyone had guessed. Wrinkled, uncomfortable sheets. His blankets, which were a trifle too heavy. The fact that he had forgotten to brush his teeth. A mental picture of Keller diving head-down for the mist . . . it kept coming back to haunt him. Faint noises from outside, from the wall, noises already an hour old, noises which hadn't awakened him but which were still unexplained. His twinges of lust for the girl in the coffin cure, and the guilt which followed. His temptation to see that ancient brainwashing technique for his own private purposes, to make the rebel girl love him for a time. *Adultery!* More guilt.

Temptations. Escaped prisoners. Hot, wrinkled bedclothes.

No use. He was awake.

He lay rigidly on his back, arms folded, glaring into the dark. No use fighting it. Last night had fouled up his internal clock; he'd eaten breakfast at twelve-thirty. *Why did he keep thinking of Keller?*

(Head down over the mist, with the fans pushing hard on the seat of his pants. Hell above and Heaven below, going up into the unknown; lost forever, destroyed utterly. The dream of the Hindu, realized in physical form. The peace of total dissolution.)

Jesus Pietro rolled over and turned on the phone.

A strange voice said, "Hospital — sir."

"Who is this?"

"Master Sergeant Leonard V. Watts, sir. Night duty."

"What's happening at the Hospital, Master Sergeant?" It was not an unusual question. Jesus Pietro had asked it scores of times at early morning hours during the last ten years.

Watts' voice was crisp. "Let me see. You left at seven, sir. At seven-thirty Major Jansen ordered the release of the deadheads we picked up last night, the ones without ear mikes. Major Jansen left at nine. At ten-thirty Sergeant Helios reported that all the deadheads had been returned to their homes. Mmmm . . ." Shuffling of papers in the background. "All but two of the prisoners questioned today have been executed and stored away. The medical-supplies section informs us that the banks will be unable to handle new material until further notice. Do you want the list of executions, sir?"

"No."

"Coffin cure proceeding satisfactorily. No adverse medical reactions from suspect. Grounds reports a false alarm at twelve oh eight, caused by a rabbit blundering into the electric eye barrier. No evidence of anything moving on the grounds."

"Then how do they know it was a rabbit??"

"Shall I ask, sir?"

"No. They guessed, of course. Good night." Jesus Pietro turned on his back and waited for sleep.

His thoughts drifted . . . .

He and Nadia hadn't been getting together much lately. Shouldn't he

start taking testosterone shots A transplant wouldn't be necessary; many glands were not put in suspended animation, but were kept running, as it were, with a complex and exact food/blood supply and a system for extracting the hormones. He could put up with the inconvenience of shots.

Though his father hadn't.

A younger Jesus Pietro had spent much time wondering about his own conception. Why had the old man insisted that the doctors connect the *vas deferens* during his gonad transplant? An older Jesus Pietro thought he knew. Even sixty years ago, despite the centuries-old tradition of large families, the Plateau had been mostly uninhabited. Breeding must have seemed a duty to Haneth Castro, as it had to all his ancestors. Besides . . . how must the old man have felt, knowing that at last he could no longer sire children?

An older Jesus Pietro thought he knew.

His thoughts were wandering far, blurred with impending sleep. Jesus Pietro turned on his side, drowsily comfortable.

Rabbit?

Why not? From the woods.

Jesus Pietro turned on his other side.

What was a rabbit doing in the trapped woods?

What was anything bigger than a field mouse doing in the woods?

What was a rabbit doing on Alpha plateau? What would it eat?

Jesus Pietro cursed and reached for the phone. To Master Sergeant Watts he said, "Take an order. Tomorrow I want the woods searched thoroughly and then deloused. If they find anything as big as a rat I want to know about it."

"Yes, sir."

"That alarm tonight. What sector?"

"Let me see. Where the — ah. Sector six, sir."

"Six? That's nowhere *near* the woods."

"No, sir."

And that was that. "Good night, Master Seregant," said Jesus Pietro, and hung up. Tomorrow they'd search the woods. Implementation was becoming decidedly slack, Jesus Pietro decided. He'd have to do something about it.

The wall slanted outward, twelve feet of concrete cross-laced with barbed wire. The gate slanted too, at the same angle, perhaps twelve degrees from vertical. Solid cast iron it was, built to slide into the concrete wall, which was twelve feet thick. The gate was closed. Lights from inside lit the upper edges of wall and gate and tinged the sky above.

Matt stood under the wall, looking up. He couldn't climb over. If they saw him they'd open the gate for him . . . but they *mustn't* see him.

They hadn't yet. The train of logic had worked. If something that glows in the dark stops glowing when it's been in the dark too long, hang it near a light. If a car goes up when it's rightside up, it'll go down *fast* when it's upside down. If the cops see you when you're hiding, but don't when you're not, they'll ignore you completely when you walk up

the middle of a well lighted road.

But logic ended here.

Whatever had helped him wasn't helping him now.

Matt turned his back on the wall. He stood beneath the overhanging iron gate, his eyes following the straight line of the road to where its lights ended. Most of the houses were dark now. The land was black all the way to the starry horizon. On his right the stars were blurred along that line, and Matt knew he was seeing the top of the void mist.

The impulse that came then was one he never managed to explain, even to himself.

He cleared his throat. "Something is helping me," he said in an almost normal voice. "I know that. I need help to get through this gate. I have to get into the Hospital."

Noises came from inside the wall, the faintest of sounds: regular footsteps, distant voices. They were the business of the Hospital, and had nothing to do with Matt.

Outside the wall, nothing changed.

"Get me in there," he pleaded, to himself or to something outside himself. He didn't know which. He knew nothing.

On the Plateau there was no religion.

But suddenly Matt knew that there was just one way to get inside.

He stepped off the access road and began hunting. Presently he found a discarded chunk of concrete, dirty and uneven. He carried it back and began pounding it against the iron gate.

CLANG! CLANG! CLANG!

A head appeared on the wall. "*Stop* that, you half-witted excuse for a colonist bastard!"

"Let me in."

The head remained. "You *are* a colonist."

"Right."

"Don't move! Don't you move a muscle!" The man fumbled with something on the other side of the wall. Both hands appeared, one holding a gun, the other a telephone receiver. "Hello? Hello? Answer the phone, dammit! Watts? Hobart. A fool of a colonist just came walking up to the gate and started pounding on it. *Yes*, a *real* colonist! What do I do with him? All right, I'll ask."

The head looked down. You want to walk or be carried?"

"I'll walk," said Matt.

"He says he'll walk. Why should he get his choice? Oh. I guess it's easier at that. Sorry, Watts, I'm a little shook. This never happened to me before."

The gateman hung up. His head and gun continued to peer down at Matt. After a moment the gate slid back into the wall.

"Come on through," said the gateman. "Fold your hands behind your neck."

Matt did. A gatehouse had been built against the wall on the inside. The gateman came down a short flight of steps. "Stay ahead of me," he ordered. "Start walking. That's the front entrance, where all the lights are. See? Walk toward that."

It would have been hard to miss the front entrance. The great square bronze door topped a flight of broad, shallow steps flanked by Doric pillars. The steps and the pillars were

either marble or some plastic substitute.

"Stop looking back at me," snapped the gateman. His voice shook.

When they reached the door the gateman produced a whistle and blew into it. There was no sound, but the door opened. Matt went through.

Once inside, the gateman seemed to relax. "What were you doing out there?" he asked.

Matt's fear was returning. He was *here*. These corridors were the Hospital. He hadn't thought past this moment. Deliberately so; for if he had, he would have run. The walls around him were concrete, with a few metal grills at floor level and four rows of fluorescent tubing in the ceiling. There were doors, all closed. An unfamiliar odor tinged the air, or a combination of odors.

"I said, 'What were — '"

"Find out at the trial!"

"Don't bite my head off. What trial? I found you on Alpha Plateau. That makes you guilty. They'll put you in the vivarium till they need you, and then they'll pour antifreeze in you and cart you away. You'll never wake up." It sounded as if the gateman was smacking his lips.

Matt's head jerked around, with the terror showing in his eyes. The gateman jumped back at the sudden move. His gun steadied. It was a mercy-bullet pistol, with a tiny aperture in the nose and a CO_2 cartridge doubling as handle. For a frozen moment Matt knew he was about to shoot.

They'd carry his unconscious body to the vivarium, whatever that was. He wouldn't wake up there. They'd take him apart while he was sleeping. His last living moment dragged out and out . . . .

The gun lowered. Matt shrank back from the gateman's expression. The gateman had gone mad. His wild eyes looked about him in horror, at the walls, at the doors, at the mercy-bullet gun in his hand, at everything but Matt. Abruptly he turned and ran.

Matt heard his wail drifting back. "Mist Demons! I'm supposed to be on the *gate*!"

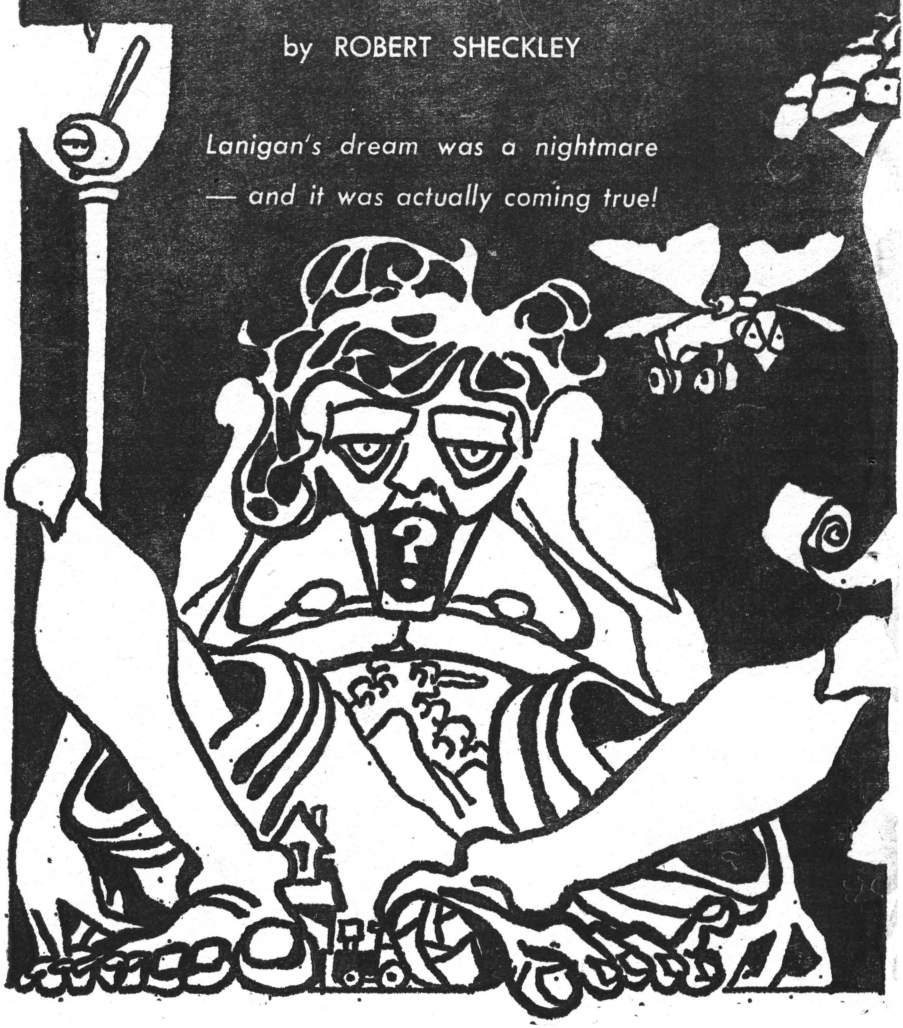
And Matt was free in the Hospital.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE PETRIFIED WORLD

by ROBERT SHECKLEY

Lanigan's dream was a nightmare — and it was actually coming true!



Lanigan dreamed the dream again and managed to wake himself with a hoarse cry. He sat upright in bed and glared around him into the violet darkness. His teeth clenched and his lips were pulled back into a spastic grin. Beside him he felt his wife, Estelle, stir and sit up. Lanigan didn't look at her. Still caught in his dream, he waited for tangible proofs of the world.

A chair slowly drifted across his field of vision and fetched up against the wall with a quiet thump. Lanigan's face relaxed slightly. Then Estelle's hand was on his arm — a touch meant to be soothing, but which burned like lye.

"Here," she said. "Drink this."

"No," Lanigan said. "I'm all right now."

"Drink it anyhow."

"No, really. I really am all right."

For now he was completely out of the grip of the nightmare. He was himself again, and the world was its habitual self. That was very precious to Lanigan; he didn't want to let go of it just now, not even for the soothing release of a sedative. "Was it the same dream?" Estelle asked him.

"Yes, just the same . . . . I don't want to talk about it."

"All right," Estelle said. (She is humoring me, Lanigan thought. I frighten her. I frighten myself.)

She asked, "Hon, what time is it?"

Lanigan looked at his watch. "Six-fifteen." But as he said it, the hour hand jumped convulsively forward. "No, it's five to seven."

"Can you get back to sleep?"

"I don't think so," Lanigan said. "I think I'll stay up."

"Fine, dear," Estelle said. She yawned, closed her eyes, opened them again and asked, "Hon, don't you think it might be a good idea if you called — "

"I have an appointment with him for twelve-ten," Lanigan said.

"That's fine," Estelle said. She closed her eyes again. Sleep came over her while Lanigan watched. Her auburn hair turned a faint blue, and she sighed once, heavily.

Lanigan got out of bed and dressed. He was, for the most part, a large man, unusually easy to recognize. His features were curiously distinct. He had a rash on his neck. He was in no other way outstanding, except that he had a recurring dream which was driving him insane.

He spent the next few hours on his front porch watching stars go nova in the dawn sky.

Later, he went out for a stroll. As luck would have it, he ran into George Torstein just two blocks from his house. Several months ago, in an incautious moment, he had told Torstein about his dream. Torstein was a bluff, hearty fellow, a great believer in self-help, discipline, practicality, common sense and other dull virtues. His hard-headed, no-nonsense attitude had come as a momentary relief to Lanigan. But now it acted as an abrasive. Men like Torstein were undoubtedly the salt of the earth and the backbone of the country; but for Lanigan, wrestling with the impalpable and losing, Torstein had grown from a nuisance into a horror.

"Well, Tom, how's the boy?" Torstein greeted him.

"Fine," Lanigan said, "just fine." He nodded pleasantly and began to walk away under a melting green sky. But one did not escape from Torstein so easily.

"Tom, boy, I've been thinking about your problem," Torstein said. "I've been quite disturbed about you."

"Well, that's very nice of you," Lanigan said. "But really, you shouldn't concern yourself —"

"I do it because I want to," Torstein said, speaking the simple, deplorable truth. "I take an interest in people, Tom. Always have, ever since I was a kid. And you and I've been friends and neighbors for a long time."

"That's true enough," Lanigan said numbly. (The worst thing about needing help was having to accept it.)

"Well, Tom, I think what would really help you would be a little vacation."

Torstein had a simple prescription for everything. Since he practiced soul-doctoring without a license, he was always careful to prescribe a drug you could buy over the counter.

"I really can't afford a vacation this month," Lanigan said. (The sky was ochre and pink now; three pines had withered; an aged oak had turned into a youthful cactus.)

Torstein laughed heartily. "Boy, you can't afford *not* to take a vacation just now! Did you ever consider that?"

"No, I guess not."

"Well, *consider* it! You're tired, tense, all keyed-up. You've been working too hard."

"I've been on leave of absence all week," Lanigan said. He glanced at his watch. The gold case had turned to lead, but the time seemed accurate enough. Nearly two hours had passed since he had begun this conversation.

"It isn't good enough," Torstein was saying. "You've stayed right here in town, right close to your work. You need to get in touch with nature. Tom, when was the last time you went camping?"

"Camping? I don't think I've ever gone camping."

"There, you see! Boy, you've got to put yourself back in touch with real things. Not streets and buildings, but mountains and rivers."

Lanigan looked at his watch again and was relieved to see it turn back to gold. He was glad; he had paid sixty dollars for that case.

"Trees and lakes," Torstein was rhapsodizing. "The feel of grass growing under your feet, the sight of tall black mountains marching across a golden sky — "

Lanigan shook his head. "I've been in the country, George. It doesn't do anything for me."

Torstein was obstinate. "You must get away from artificialities."

"It all seems equally artificial," Lanigan said. "Trees or buildings — what's the difference?"

"Men make buildings," Torstein intoned rather piously, "but God makes trees."

Lanigan had his doubts about both propositions, but he wasn't going to tell them to Torstein. "You might have something there," he said. "I'll think about it."

"You do that," Torstein said. "It happens I know the perfect place. It's in Maine, Tom, and it's right near this little lake — "

Torstein was a master of the interminable description. Luckily for Lanigan, there was a diversion. Across the street, a house burst into flames.

"Hey, whose house is that?" Lanigan asked.

"Makelby's," Torstein said. "That's his third fire this month."

"Maybe we ought to give the alarm."

"You're right, I'll do it myself," Torstein said. "Remember what I told you about that place in Maine, Tom."

Torstein turned to go, and something rather humorous happened. As he stepped over the pavement, the concrete liquified under his left foot. Caught unawares, Torstein went in ankle-deep. His forward motion pitched him head-first into the street.

Tom hurried to help him out before the concrete hardened again. "Are you all right?" he asked.

"Twisted my damned ankle," Torstein muttered. "It's okay, I can walk."

He limped off to report the fire. Lanigan stayed and watched. He judged the fire had been caused by spontaneous combustion. In a few minutes, as he had expected, it put itself out by spontaneous decombustion.

One shouldn't be pleased by another man's misfortunes; but Lanigan couldn't help chuckling about Torstein's twisted ankle. Not even the sudden appearance of flood waters on Main Street could mar his good spirits. He beamed at something like a steamboat with yellow stacks that went by in the sky.

Then he remembered his dream, and the panic began again. He walked quickly to the doctor's office.

Dr. Sampson's office was small and dark this week. The old gray sofa was gone; in its place were two Louis Quinze chairs and a hammock. The worn carpet had finally rewoven itself, and there was a cigarette burn on the puce ceiling. But the portrait of Andretti was in its usual place on the wall, and the big free-form ash try was scrupulously clean.

The inner door opened, and Dr. Sampson's head popped out. "Hi," he said. "Won't be a minute." His head popped back in again.

Sampson was as good as his word. It took him exactly three seconds by Lanigan's watch to do whatever he had to do. One second later Lanigan was stretched out on the leather couch with a fresh paper doily under his head. And Dr. Sampson was saying, "Well, Tom, how have things been going?"

"The same," Lanigan said. "Worse."

"The dream?"

Lanigan nodded.

"Let's just run through it again."

"I'd rather not," Lanigan said.

"Afraid?"

"More afraid than ever."

"Even now?"

"Yes. Especially now."

There was a moment of therapeutic silence. Then Dr. Sampson said, "You've spoken before of your fear of this dream; but you've never told me *why* you fear it so."

"Well . . . . It sounds so silly."

Sampson's face was serious, quiet, composed: the face of a man who found nothing silly, who was constitutionally incapable of finding anything silly. It was a pose, perhaps, but one which Lanigan found reassuring.

"All right, I'll tell you," Lanigan said abruptly, Then he stopped.

"Go on," Dr. Sampson said.

"Well, it's because I believe that somehow, in some way I don't understand . . . ."

"Yes, go on," Sampson said.

"Well, that somehow the world of my dream is becoming the real world." He stopped again, then went on with a rush. "And that some day I am going to wake up and find myself *in* that world. And then that world will have become the real one and this world will be the dream."

He turned to see how this mad revelation had affected Sampson. If the doctor was disturbed, he didn't show it. He was quietly lighting his pipe with the smouldering tip of his left forefinger. He blew out his forefinger and said, "Yes, please go on."

"Go on? But that's it, that's the whole thing!"

A spot the size of a quarter appeared on Sampson's mauve carpet. It darkened, thickened, grew into a small fruit tree. Sampson picked one of the purple pods, sniffed it, then set it down on his desk. He looked at Lanigan sternly, sadly.

"You've told me about your dream-world before, Tom."

Lanigan nodded.

"We have discussed it, traced its origins, analyzed its meaning for you. In past months we have learn-

ed, I believe, why you *need* to cripple yourself with this nightmare fear."

Lanigan nodded unhappily.

"Yet you refuse the insights," Sampson said. "You forget each time that your dream-world is a *dream,* nothing but a dream, operated by arbitrary dream-laws which you have invented to satisfy your psychic needs."

"I wish I could believe that," Lanigan said. "The trouble is my dream-world is so damnably reasonable."

"Not at all," Sampson said. "It is just that your delusion is hermetic, self-enclosed and self-sustaining. A man's actions are based upon certain assumptions about the nature of the world. Grant his assumptions, and his behavior is entirely reasonable. But to change those assumptions, those fundamental axioms, is nearly impossible. For example, how do you prove to a man that he is not being controlled by a secret radio which only he can hear?"

"I see the problem," Lanigan muttered. "And that's me?"

"Yes, Tom. That, in effect, is you. You want me to prove to you that this world is real, and that the world of your dream is false. You propose to give up your fantasy if I supply you with the necessary proofs."

"Yes, exactly!" Lanigan cried.

"But you see, I can't supply them," Sampson said. "The nature of the world is apparent, but unprovable."

Lanigan thought for a while. Then he said, "Look, Doc, I'm not as sick as the guy with the secret radio, am I?"

"No, you're not. You're more reasonable, more rational. You have doubts about the reality of the world; but luckily, you also have doubts about the validity of your delusion."

"Then give it a try," Lanigan said. "I understand your problem; but I swear to you, I'll accept anything I can possibly bring myself to accept."

"It's not my field, really," Sampson said. "This sort of thing calls for a metaphysician. I don't think I'd be very skilled at it . . . ."

"Give it a try," Lanigan pleaded.

"All right, here goes." Sampson's forehead wrinkled and shed as he concentrated. Then he said, "It seems to me that we inspect the world through our senses, and therefore we must in the final analysis accept the testimony of those senses."

Lanigan nodded, and the doctor went on.

"So, we know that a thing exists because our senses tell us it exists. How do we check the accuracy of our observations? By comparing them with the sensory impressions of other men. We know that our senses don't lie when other men's senses agree upon the existence of the thing in question."

Lanigan thought about this, then said, "Therefore, the real world is simply what most men think it is."

Sampson twisted his mouth and said, "I told you that metaphysics

was not my forte. Still, I think it is an acceptable demonstration."

"Yes . . . . But Doc, suppose *all* of those observers are wrong? For example, suppose there are many worlds and many realities, not just one? Suppose this is simply one arbitrary existence out of an infinity of existences? Or suppose that the nature of reality itself is capable of change, and that somehow I am able to perceive that change?"

Sampson sighed, found a little green bat fluttering inside his jacket and absentmindedly crushed it with a ruler.

"There you are," he said. "I can't disprove a single one of your suppositions. I think, Tom, that we had better run through the entire dream."

Lanigan grimaced. "I really would rather not. I have a feeling . . . ."

"I know you do," Sampson said, smiling faintly. "But this will prove or disprove it once and for all, won't it?"

"I guess so," Lanigan said. He took courage — unwisely — and said, "Well, the way it begins, the way my dream starts — "

Even as he spoke the horror came over him. He felt dizzy, sick, terrified. He tries to rise from the couch. The doctor's face ballooned over him. He saw a glint of metal, heard Sampson saying, "Just try to relax . . . brief seizure . . . try to think of something pleasant."

Then either Lanigan or the world or both passed out.

Lanigan and/or the world came back to consciousness. Time may or may not have passed. Anything might or might not have happened. Lanigan sat up and looked at Sampson.

"How do you feel now?" Sampson asked.

"I'm all right," Lanigan said. "What happened?"

"You had a bad moment. Take it easy for a bit."

Lanigan leaned back and tried to calm himself. The doctor was sitting at his desk, writing notes. Lanigan counted to twenty with his eyes closed, then opened them cautiously. Sampson was still writing notes.

Lanigan looked around the room, counted the five pictures on the wall, re-counted them, looked at the green carpet, frowned at it, closed his eyes again. This time he counted to fifty.

"Well, care to talk about it now?" Sampson asked, shutting a notebook.

"No, not just now," Lanigan said. (Five paintings, green carpet.)

"Just as you please," the doctor said. "I think that our time is just about up. But if you'd care to lie down in the anteroom — "

"No, thanks, I'll go home," Lanigan said.

He stood up, walked across the green carpet to the door, looked back at the five-paintings and at the doctor, who smiled at him encouragingly. Then Lanigan went through the door and into the anteroom, through the anteroom to the outer door and through that and down the corridor to the stairs and down the stairs to the street.

He walked and looked at the trees, on which green leaves moved faintly and predictably in a faint

breeze. There was traffic, which moved soberly down one side of the street and up the other. The sky was an unchanging blue, and had obviously been so for quite some time.

Dream? He pinched himself. A dream pinch? He did not awaken. He shouted. An imaginary shout? He did not waken.

He was in the street of the world of his nightmare.

The street at first seemed like any normal city street. There were paving stones, cars, people, buildings, a sky overhead, a sun in the sky. All perfectly normal. Except that *nothing was happening.*

The pavement never once yielded beneath his feet. Over there was the First National City Bank; it had been here yesterday, which was bad enough; but worse it would be there without fail tomorrow, and the day after that, and the year after that. The First National City Bank (Founded 1892) was grotesquely devoid of possibilities. It would never become a tomb, an airplane, the bones of a prehistoric monster. Sullenly it would remain a building of concrete and steel, madly persisting in its fixity until men with tools came and tediously tore it down.

Lanigan walked through this petrified world, under a blue sky that oozed a sly white around the edges, teasingly promising something that was never delivered. Traffic moved implacably to the right, people crossed at crossings, clocks were within minutes of agreement.

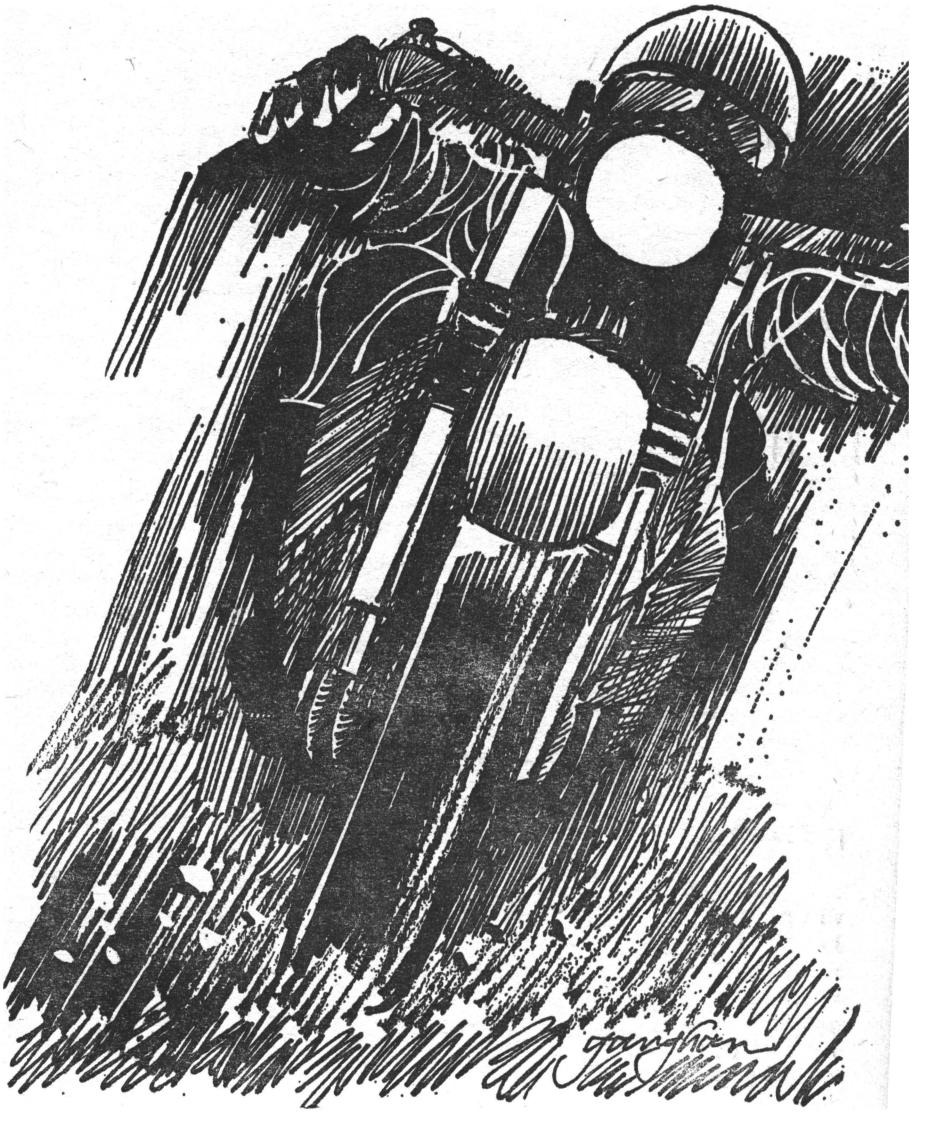
Somewhere between the town lay countryside; but Lanigan knew that the grass did not grow under one's feet; it simply lay still, growing no doubt, but imperceptibly, unusable to the senses. And the mountains were still tall and black, but they were giants stopped in mid-stride. They would never march against a golden (or purple or green) sky.

The essence of life, Dr. Sampson had once said, is change. The essence of death is immobility. Even a corpse has a vestige of life about it as long as its flesh rots, as long as maggots still feast on its blind eyes and blowflies suck the juices from the burst intestines.

Lanigan looked around at the corpse of the world and perceived that it was dead.

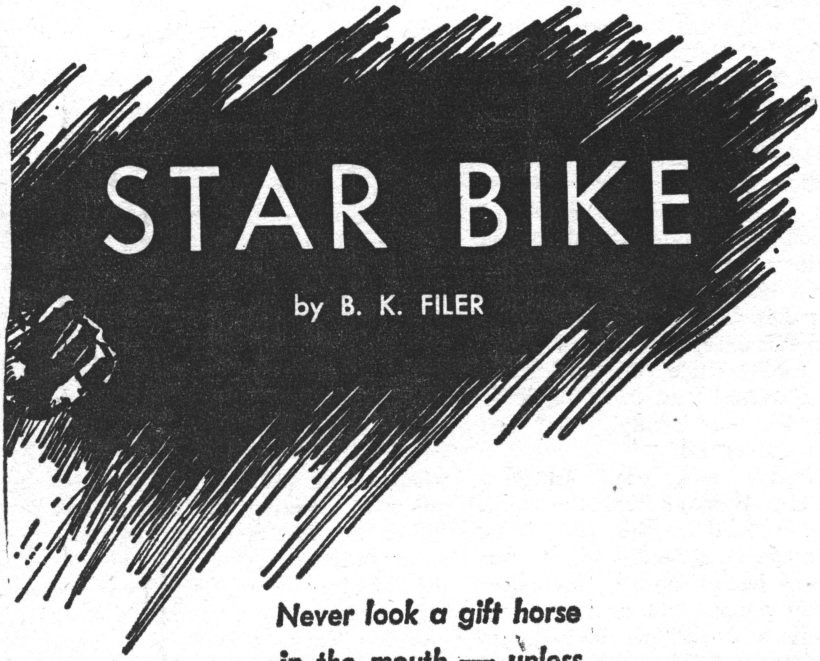
He screamed. He screamed while people gathered around and looked at him (but didn't do anything or become anything), and then a policeman came as he was supposed to (but the sun didn't change shape once), and then an ambulance came down the invariant street (but without trumpets, minus strumpets, on four wheels instead of a pleasing three or twenty-five) and the ambulance men brought him to a building which was exactly where they expected to find it, and there was a great deal of talk by people who stood untransformed, asking questions in a room with relentlessly white walls.

And there was evening and there was morning, and it was the first day. END



STAR BIKE

by B. K. FILER



Never look a gift horse in the mouth — unless the gift is from an alien!

I

Ed Lamb downshifted for the hard left-hander, and the old Norton's voice surged from a baritone whoop to a piercing contralto shriek. He banked through the corner, hung so far over that a footpeg rasped the road and sent up a spray of sparks. When the front end began to go, Ed swallowed his buck-toothed grin and eased off the throttle.

Damn, he thought as the bike wobbled back upright, there's just too much weight on the back. He bowled up Old Halifax Road at a reduced, almost legal, speed. Wouldn't be too smart to drop it now, not with a gas-welding outfit strapped on behind, no sir. He had a momentary, adrenalitic vision of the two tanks bursting, an explosion, his head flying off.

Bluejays scolded noisily from the hemlocks on either hand. Mingled

with the reek of hot oil was the pungency of pitch and the generalized, leafy aroma of damp woods. Ed swept through this aerial liquor at fifty, let it ram down his lungs and felt absolutely high. The thought pleased him.

Even the economics of it pleased him. You don't hit the roadhouses too often on a mechanic's pay. Ed Lamb at thirty was the archetype mechanic: medium height, stocky and a little stoop-shouldered. Hanging between his brown brushcut and a strong chin was a face in no way remarkable except for its nearly constant, toothy smile. Ed liked roadhouses, women and cycle races — which he occasionally won. And everyone liked Ed.

Yesterday he'd been asked a favor. He'd been out here after work, buzzing around on this same beat-up Norton, supposedly to practice but really just off on a joyride, when this guy popped out of the woods by Braun's Creek and hailed him.

"Afternoon," Ed said as he killed the idling engine.

"Hello. Glad you stopped. We're in an awful jam."

"Oh?" Ed looked with frank wonder at the man before him. He wore a milky plastic coverall, and his face was baby smooth, almost featureless. His eyes seemed unfocused.

"Yes, we've crashed back in there."

"Ed laughed. "Boy, that's some accent. American?"

"American — yes. Well, we've ruptured our rel tank and have no power now, absolutely none, so . . ."

"Your what?"

"Tank, just a tank. We need a fusor."

"Gaww-dam, but I hardly read you, friend. Y'better show me."

So the stranger led him through the woods to a barn-sized machine and another oddly clad man, both of whom were sitting awkwardly in a clearing.

The men were friendly enough, Ed discovered, quite ready and even eager to shoot the breeze. In the course of easy conversation, their accents seemed to diminish until Ed began to hear the huffy vowels of his own Nova Scotian neighbors.

It turned out that Ralph and Dirk were American astronauts who'd crash landed their vehicle when a tank seam or something let go upon entering the atmosphere. Would Ed help them out, get them an oxy-acetylene torch, perhaps do the job for them? They'd pay — oh, Ed didn't care. Always glad to give the Yanks a hand. And sure, he could understand the secrecy. Wouldn't do to have the Chinese dropping in for a few photos, hell no. Anything y'want, fellas, be back tomorrow. Damn, but there's a couple of swell guys.

So today Ed found himself back on the secondary — a laughable euphemism for dirt — road that followed Braun's Creek. Half a mile along it he spotted Dirk sitting on a guardrail.

"Hi. Got the torch I see."

"Nothing to it," puffed Ed as he heaved the heavily laden bike back on its stand. They went through the woods to the fallen ship. Piled

outside were a dozen heavy looking cubes, perhaps two feet on a side.

"Cleaning house?"

"Hardly," Dirk chuckled. "Had to get those out of the tank before you welded it up. They're, uh, flammable."

"Thanks for that," Ed replied, grinning at the other's heavily implied understatement. But he was looking with mild concern at the Yank flier.

"What's the matter?"

"Well, maybe I'm blind or hung over but your face has changed." He frowned. "And you look . . . smaller somehow than yesterday."

Dirk laughed nervously. "Hell, Ed, it's just the shoes. Different shoes." He bent over, way over, to point to his silvery plastic boots. When he stood up from the awkward movement, he seemed a fraction taller. But Ed couldn't be sure and besides; the whole thing was ridiculous.

"Oof," grunted Ralph a few minutes later as he and Ed hauled the tanks inside the ship. "Quite the antiques, these, eh?" They led him along a catwalk past several carefully closed hatches — security y'know — to an unadorned space rather reminiscent of a boiler room. It was dominated by a massive cubic tank, down whose near corner ran a long jagged crack.

"That's it."

"No problem. What metal you got there?" asked Ed, sorting through his welding rods.

"Cobalt-chrome."

"You're kidding. Hell, I haven't got any rods like that."

"Uh-oh. How about flux, got that? Maybe I can dig up a chunk of the alloy to make the bead."

It wasn't as neat a job as Ed Lamb would have liked, but then one doesn't normally melt down a hatch hinge for bead material. And however unprofessional it may have looked, he philosophized, it was tight. He was sure of that.

"Thanks a million, Ed," said Ralph with honest feeling. "You've really pulled us out of a hole."

"Sure did," said the other flier. "Listen, Ed, take something for it, will you? We've no money aboard, but how about some tools? Here, look." Dirk opened a panel in the wall, exposing an array of well used, well kept hand tools, a few cans of oil and some plasticky-looking rags. Ed Lamb's mechanic's eyes lit up. One adjustable diameter pin spanner in there was just, well, just beautiful.

But he couldn't take it. No sir, this had started out as a favor, and it would end one.

"Nice of you but thanks anyway, guys. I've got most of that stuff as it is."

"Aw, c'mon, take something," Ralph implored.

"Well, okay." The Norton needed oil, so Ed scooped up one of the cans. "Forty weight?"

"Is that all you're taking? Hard Man Lamb, they must call you," sighed Dirk. "But it's universal viscosity. I'm sure it's okay for the bike, if that's what you're thinking."

"Good. Say, are you guys leaving

right away? I'd kinda like to see this crate take off."

"Not too soon," Ralph answered quickly. "After dark."

"Oh. Well then, guess I'll shove off. Give me a hand with the tanks?"

As the big motorcycle crackled out of sight, the two fliers turned back to their machine. In the course of the walk back, each grew shorter by a foot and thinner by sixty pounds. What had been passably adult human heads became beautifully sculptured childlike things, hairless and golden-eyed. Shimmering faintly, their clothing metamorphosed along with them.

The Vegan that was Dirk sighed and dropped tiredly into the skipper's hammock as his partner activated the navigational holograph.

"*That* was rough," Dirk subvocalized.

"And how. But I don't think he knew. A little suspicious perhaps, that's all. I'm going to transluce us. Ready?"

"Ready," answered the pilot, and the bulkheads turned to misty glass. "He wasn't unintelligent by any means, you know. Surprising that they could come so far without hitting on either time technology or interpretational hypnosis."

"Isn't it?" said the navigator. "But it seems like a good culture, and I'm glad we stumbled on it. Let's record it with Council for a tech assist in a few hundred generations."

"Few hundred? I wonder," said the Dirk-Vegan thoughtfully. "Maybe." He turned to his controls. "I've got the rel field up. Let's warp straight for home and get a decent job done on that tank."

"Right. Listen, you've got me worried now," Ralph said. "I don't know if we should let him have that lubricant. Maybe he should've taken something else."

"We'll see," was the thoughtful reply. "Keep them on the monitor. We can always patch it up. Here we go."

The Vegan ship flickered from translucence to nothing at all.

Ed Lamb hadn't raced the Norton much that year. People were winning rough-country contests on lighter, more modern bikes with yammering little two-stroke engines. But the Big Black Bus was a whale of a lot more fun to ride, and one bright race-day morning he decided what the hell, let's just write this one off to good times.

It was a typical wildcat race. Drop a fivespot in the kitty, fellas, start right here and yonder's where to aim. A dozen battered bikes lined up between a boulder and a tree, filling the air with unbelievable noises and tear-jerking exhaust smoke. Oh, but those two-strokes lay down a screen. 'Yonder' today happened to be up a wooded mountainside toward an unseen hut six miles away. Ten minutes before the man said *Go,* Ed emptied a two-quart can of funny-feeling yellow oil into his crankcase.

It took him about half a mile to feel the difference. Going up a dry wash, he broke traction on some loose gravel and nearly dropped the

bike. He blasted his way out with way too much throttle cracked on, expecting the old engine to clatter horribly in protest. But it didn't, it just hurled Ed up the embankment as if he were shot from a bow.

So Ed did it again, next chance he got, and then again. He could *not* get that engine to break up. No more torque than usual, possibly less, but the cast iron behemoth wound up like an F-86. Ed Lamb won the race.

II

Stu McNair loved Bonneville. One of the reasons he kept his job with Castone was that they sent him along to Bonnie with the sales boys every year as tech advisor. It was a fringe benefit most chemical engineers don't have, and Stu enjoyed it to the hilt. He'd hand out Castone's racing oil to anyone who'd use it, hitch a few fast rides, talk with the drivers and generally have a good time. And of course he watched 'em *go*.

He was bulling with Greg Randall, who drove the California Dream, when Ed Lamb's name came up.

"Never heard of him." Stu McNair shrugged.

"Private builder, no sponsor, no dough to speak of," said Greg as he pulled thoughtfully on his cigarette. "Got this thing he calls the Canadian Express, and it goes like a bat out of hell."

"Really? What's he use for power?" They paused to watch a red Ferrari Special accelerate across the salt, miles distant. The rasp of the engine reached them long after it had passed the second marker. Stu stretched his long angular arms overhead, accidentally brushing the tent fly, and recoiled. It sizzled from the relentless Utah sun.

"An old Norton twin, I hear," answered Greg. "Don't know what he's done to it, but they say it'll rev something out of this world."

"What're his times?"

"Over three hundred, on local strips."

"Oh, come off it."

"No, that's the story. And he's been telling people he can do twice that out here. I tell you, Stu, get your oil in that guy's engine, and you've got some real publicity. If it isn't a fraud, that is."

Later that day Stu found Ed Lamb crouched by the tailgate of his dusty pickup. He introduced himself and offered the mechanic a cigarette.

"I'm from Castone. How about some oil for that monster?"

"Nope. Thanks though."

"What're you running now?"

"Uh — Dunol," answered Ed, laying down a socket wrench and standing. "Whew, hot, eh?" He smiled calmly and wiped his sweating forehead on a sleeve. Stu McNair immediately liked him.

"Hear you bike goes real well."

"Not bad. I've had to modify the suspension a whole lot for the flats, though. Salt's roughter'n it looks. Now I can't get the silly fairing back on."

"Let me give you a hand."

So they became friends. It was

an easy sort of thing with no commercial overtones at all, unlike most of those at Bonnie.

"So you won't let me in on your secret," Stu asked two nights later. "You'd better, y'know."

"How come?"

"'Cause your performances are too good not to be phony. In this business sponsors like, well, like my illustrious employers foot most of the bill, and they're sore losers. Unless you can give a better reason than witchcraft, they'll usually trump up a disqualification."

"Haven't won anything yet," Ed reminded him. "But how'll they nail me?" He slid off the tailgate and shoved his hands in his hip pockets. Rocking back on his heels he watched the flawless desert sky ease toward black, twilight a mere line of gold on the horizon.

Stu laughed quietly. "Don't know how, but they'll manage. And you've got the public to contend with too. People get mad. 'What I don't understand doesn't exist,' that sort of thing. Must admit I'm a little peeved myself, pal. Just what in hell *does* make you go so fast?"

"All right," conceded the stocky Canadian after a pause. "It'd almost be a relief to have someone else know. Bring the light." He led the lanky engineer over to the recumbent motorcycle. "S'right up your alley anyway, Stu. Oil." Ed withdrew the dipstick from the Norton's oil-tank. "Here, feel the end of this."

"Why, it's — it's absolutely weird." In the glow of a gas lantern, Stu McNair stroked his finger down the greasy metal rod. His hand wasn't even a blur. First it was midway, near a scribed oil level mark — then it was at the end. His arm tingled.

Four hours later Stu wore a haggard look, and his eyes were red from too much microscope. He and Ed were in his room at the Landspeed Motel. Both were tired and a little high. A dozen beer cans filled the wastebasket.

"Don't understand," Stu muttered to himself for the hundredth time.

"Well, give up then," Ed Lamb said, slouching a little deeper into his chair. "I did, long ago. Gift horse in'a mouts — mouth. Damn. Listen, pal, I've got to drive tomorrow. Goin' back for some sleep." He stood up.

"Okay. Yeah, get enough sleep, you'll need your reflexes. And Ed, keep the lid on it tomorrow."

Huh?"

"I mean it. Seeing this weird yellow stuff convinces me you can rev up past a hundred grand, but don't do it. In the first place, you'll never keep that bike on the ground, and — "

"Aw — "

"And in the second, people won't believe it. Damn it all, this gunk isn't even *possible*. And for heaven's sake *don't* repeat that wild suspicion of yours about two outworlders and their spaceship. You'll get laughed right into a nuthouse."

"Sure, sure. Get some sleep yourself, eh? G'night."

But the gangling engineer didn't. He spent the night finishing off his eyes on the scope, his lungs on ciga-

rettes and his disposition on a long-chain molecule whose shape was so ambivalent that he simply couldn't sort it out.

Around five in the morning, there was a sound from the only lighted window at Landspeed Motel. It was a sigh. It was a sigh of amazement that edged on horror. Then the light went out, and Stu McNair's bleary eyes closed as the sun's opened.

III

At quarter of two in the afternoon, Ed Lamb climbed into his leathers and cinched up his helmet. He'd clocked about two-seventy that morning, more than fast enough to qualify. His gaze wandered from the vantage point of the warm-up pit across a hundred yards of salt to the starting line and then beyond. He always expected the noise to be deafening but it never was. In the woods it would have been, of course — ah, the woods, their brief image reminded Ed he hadn't been home in a month — but not out here. Out here it was so wide open, so flat, so positively *out* of doors that the sounds got lost. Half a dozen savagely tuned engines must be running now, on the move or on the sidelines, but they were no more offensive than half a dozen crickets on a warm night. Except maybe that guy up on the line, starting his run. It was Greg Randall in the Dream.

The California Dream was a jet-powered three-wheeler, technically a motorcycle, and it *did* make noise. A flag fell, and the four-ton machine vanished down the flats like a dropped stone. Now there's competition, Ed thought. No half-hearted efforts were going to beat *that*.

"You're next, Lamb. Good luck," said an armbanded official as he passed by with a clipboard. A small crowd gathered around Ed now.

They were quieter than a usual starter's crowd. For one thing there was no coterie of backers to cheer. A few words of encouragement and a couple of noncommittal pats on the back were Ed's portion. He rolled the bike up to the line.

Nobody knew him, really. Name Edward J. Lamb — Canadian — motorcycle — unlimited — fast qualifier. That's all. Except that the poverty-stricken, ill-prepared machine always seemed to go a hell of a lot faster than it should.

Well, today we'll see. A few suspicious eyes probed under the fairing as Ed paused to kick the bike to life. Hidden rockets? No, just a huge gas tank and an elderly English motorcycle engine. The head had obviously been modified. Huge intake tract for what must be a tremendous rate of flow, they supposed. Bigger valves for the same reason, probably, and maybe a wild cam. But it wasn't enough.

Every critical eye said the same thing. Don't know how or why it works, buddy, but it isn't enough. Not enough to go as fast as all that. Not enough to beat me. You've got to be cheating somehow, and I don't like it. I don't like it at all.

Ed sensed their hostility up on the line. Beneath him the bike vi-

brated quietly at idle. Quietly and innocently. And it sounded so innocent and seemed so small that he felt exposed and defenseless from all those cynical eyes. As the starter approached, the crowd backed off. Ed crouched low in the saddle and blipped the throttle.

Across his handlebars lay a worldful of salt. Red pennants marched into the distance like soldiers, two by two, marking a long, clean path which came to a point like distant railroad tracks. A mountain in the background, black. Above it the sky, white.

"Ten seconds," said the flagman who stood a few paces away. "On your mark." The man stared intently at a stopwatch in his left hand and held a large flag upraised in his right. Ed eased the Norton's engine up off idle and held it there. The sun soaked into his leathers.

"Get set."

Back in the Castone booth Stu McNair stood on a wooden camp table, binoculars to eyes. The makeshift vantage point plus his own prodigious height gave him a good view of the start. The big man's face was ashen.

You'll give it all, won't you, he thought. Sure you will. Open her up. And that old engine'll spin today, fantastically fast. Yeah, go on and blip it, warm it up. But Ed, old man, do you know what you've got there? A fast way to die. One way or another. To tell you the truth I hope you break your neck on the salt right now, I really do. At least it would save you from being chewed up by this crowd later. Who says they don't still burn witches?

Oil films that shift time indeed! Lubricants that induce relativistic, inertialess progression, ha! Molecules that weave and boil into the next second *now?* Nobody's ready for that, my friend, not yet anyway. There's the ten-second mark. On your mark, Ed. Get set.

"Go!" The flag dropped.

Ed let out the clutch too fast. Easy, no wheelspin, lunkhead, he thought. You'll get there. He shifted twice, then once again. The engine chuffed out a string of blunt monsyllabic D's: duh, duh, duh.

And then P's: papapapapa. Markers dropped more quickly astern.

And then T's. They unwound behind Ed like tiny little knots on a long long string. The salt that had been so smooth at one hundred miles an hour became rougher at two.

One long howling Z turned every head on the flats. The frequency was startlingly high. Ed's handlebars chattered and bucked in his white fists. An inch above his head boiled a torrent of air that just waited to rip it off. Some bullets didn't go this fast.

E wailed the engine: eeeeeeeee. Higher than any soprano could sing, higher than any violin. Seven fifty at least, Ed thought in the tiny fraction of his brain not completely blotted by sound.

Four miles away Stu McNair agreed. At least seven fifty. I don't know how he's keeping it on the ground, but it doesn't matter because the whole business is impossible. He put down his binoculars. Physically impossible.

"You were right, Skipper," said the Ralph-Vegan, looking up from his temporal monitor. "They can't handle the implications of that lubricant. Time technology is indigestibly alien to them."

"All right," answered the other. "I'll branch us back to just after he repaired our tank, and we'll patch things up."

"No, ah, don't take that. It's machine oil, no good for your bike, if that's what you're thinking. Wrong viscosity and everything."

"Hell, Dirk, I really don't need any of this, and . . ."

"Here," laughed the astronaut. "The decision's killing you. *I* know what you'd like, even if you won't admit it. Adjustable-diameter pin spanner. Yeah, that one."

"Well, I've got to admit — thanks." Ed grinned and dropped the beautiful tool in his pocket. "Thanks a lot. You're a couple of real good — "

"Aw," said Ralph, waving Ed quiet and blushing. "Let's give you a hand with your tanks there."

"Swell. Say, are you guys leaving right away? I'd kinda like to see this crate take off."

"No, not too soon," Ralph answered quickly. "After dark."

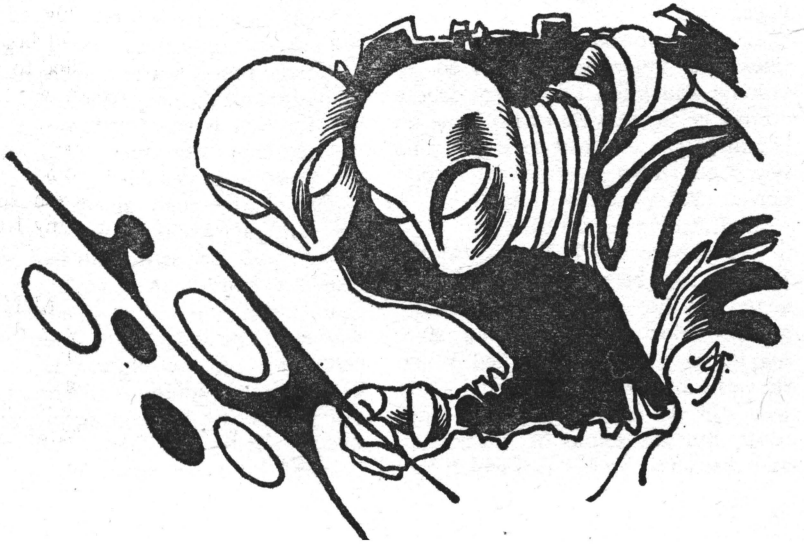
"Oh. Well, guess I'll shove off then. S'long."

"Good luck."

As the big motorcycle crackled out of sight, the two fliers turned back to their machine.

"That ought to do it. I think this'll work out much better," said Ralph.

"We'll see," was the thoughtful reply. END



The Courteous of Ghoor

by ROBERT LORY

He was courteous, thoughtful, affable — and totally dangerous!

Archie Pholpher was reflecting on the sad lot of thirty-five-year-old advertising account executives when the sensation in his inner ear began.

Exactly one-sixteenth of a second later the tingle had increased in volume and pitch to a point where Archie became aware of it. When an eighth of a second had passed, Archie began to frown over his afternoon coffee. After another eighth of a second Archie screamed.

At the scream's beginning Archie Pholper had been sitting on a hard chair in the coffee room in the ground floor of the Madison Avenue building where he worked. When the scream ended — abruptly — he was still sitting on the same hard chair, but the sound of the scream and the sound in his ear which had caused the scream had been replaced by the pounding of surf.

Archie and the chair were on a white-sandy beach. Odd, Archie thought. Not so much the beach, nor the sharp up-jutting rocks upon which the foamy water crashed about a hundred yards away. What was odd was the sky. It was bright orange.

"Excellent! You managed to bring the chair with you."

The chair tipped quietly over in the sand as Archie jumped at the raspy voice. The man who had been standing behind him replaced the chair upright and looked evenly at Archie. "You must have been concentrating on the chair," he said, his voice sounding as if he were just recovering from a severe bout with laryngitis.

"No, I wasn't concentrating on

— " Archie stopped, his thoughts suddenly focusing on his immediate surroundings and the strange man before him. Taller than Archie by two hands, he wore a white toga-like robe, in contrast to which his skin looked dark red, almost purple. He was old, too, in a well preserved, antique sort of way. At least eighty, Archie figured.

"Almost three hundred of your years," the old man supplied. "I am Turnal, Courteous of Ghoor." He smiled, not unpleasantly, as he answered Archie's unvoiced question.

"Yes," he went on, "I have the ability to read what you call your thoughts. And although you hear the sound of my voice, my meaning is being translated for you telepathically. As for the thought now beginning to take shape within you, let me assure you that you are not dead but very much alive."

Archie said uncertainly, "My idea of Hell would be something like this. Alone on a desolate beach, with nothing to break the continuing boredom. With maybe just a chair . . . ."

"This is not the Hell of your mythology, Mr. Pholpher, though your idea of its content I find most interesting. This is in fact the sphere and domain of Ghoor, upon which I hold the office of Courteous."

"Another planet? I'm not on Earth?" Archie asked, disbelieving. Yet the orange sky made it hard to disbelieve.

"On Ghoor, Earth is not very well known. Its very existence is known to few within the entire Wahr Federation. You are the first Earthman — indeed the first Outsider — to penetrate the Impervious Veil for more than five hundred of your years. And on your first try you brought a chair with you!"

Archie looked at the chair and then at the orange sky. "But how? I mean, how did I bring the chair — and me — to here?"

"Long ago in your civilization a man with your name said that if he had the place to stand he could move your entire planet with a lever. This is the principle you used — with my help. The lever in this instance is not what you might conceptualize as physical, although the psychic and the physical are not as mutally exclusive as you suppose. Actually, it's a simple matter of coordinating — "

Turnal's raspy voice halted. He was looking skyward, listening intently. Above the sea's horizon Archie saw a flash, a silvery reflection. Turnal saw it, too. "You must go back now, quickly! Sit in the chair and concentrate!"

Archie sat unsurely. "Concentrate . . . on what?"

"Where you were, on Earth! Quickly — I'll help."

Archie did as directed. Into his mind came the coffee room, his table, the copy of the *Wall Street Journal* he'd glanced through when he'd first sat down, the cup of hot, welcome coffee after an early afternoon's heated discussion with a displeased client, the sugar he'd taken — two spoons' full, even though he knew he should be counting calories and shouldn't have —

And then the spoon and the sugar took on unnatural lines — or natural, perhaps. The white sugar was coming apart, breaking into blues and reds and yellows which in turn were separating into greens and oranges and purples, all in forms of grains or spots or lines. Lines. That's what they were, really, the sugar was really nothing more . . . and all were converging and —

There was a sound, a tingle in Archie's inner ear. It was getting higher and higher and louder and — a scream formed in Archie's mouth. It came out as he crashed onto the tile floor of the coffee room.

"Sir, is something wrong?"

Archie's eyes opened and peered into the anxious face of the waitress standing by the side of his table. He looked down as his hand felt the area of the floor around his aching buttocks.

"I forgot," he said simply. "I forgot to bring the blasted chair back with me."

"You've done very well, Archimedes," Turnal said with admiration. "I didn't think your first solo flight would come off half so well."

Archie kicked a pile of white sand into the air. "I did it, sure. But I don't understand it. I don't even know for sure what a coordinate is. And I don't much care for the Archimedes name, even though I was born with it."

"Very well, Archie," Turnal rasped. "As for knowing what coordinates are in essence, it's not really necessary that you do understand it all. The important thing is that you can see them, concentrate upon them and utilize them to move things. After all, you don't have to know the electronics of your Earth television in order to switch on a receiver."

True, Archie reflected. And it was also true that he could see and use the multicolored shapes that Turnal called coordinates. He'd proved that during the past four days, during which Turnal had assisted him in moving to and from the sandy beach on Ghoor one desk from his apartment, a Pontiac from a used car lot, the arch at Washington Square and even a group of humans — a psychedelic seminar of Villagers, who upon return reported the wildest LSD trip ever taken.

He'd been uneasy about soloing, but things had gone well. He could now control the tingling sensation in his ears, so the pain element of "shifting" — Turnal's name for the moving process — was gone. He'd visualized (or mentalized or whatever) the on-Ghoor coordinates so many times with Turnal's help that they came easy, even when concentrating on the large solo target he'd chosen.

He had supposed that moving the 400,000 square foot New York Public Library, even at night when only the guards were inside, would be difficult. It wasn't, although the shift back had to be made twice. The first time the northeast corner of the building was misplaced, extending slightly onto Forty-Second Street and almost causing an early-morning traffic accident. Luckily, the driver

and the eleven other people who witnessed the happening were natives of the city. Since the event had nothing to do with them personally they did not attempt to investigate further.

Archie could do it, all right. That wasn't what was bothering him. Something else was.

"You want to know why," Turnal said matter-of-factly.

Archie nodded. "I suppose that's it. I mean, it's been a lot of fun and all, the most fun I've had in years, but — "

"Developing your skill, Mr. Pholper," Turnal said sternly, "is *not* a matter of recreation for me nor for you. The purpose behind your training is deadly serious. You were chosen among all Earthlings to do an all-important job. And now you are ready."

"What . . . job? Archie asked warily.

The Courteous of Ghoor spoke less sternly. "You remember how your namesake — the Greek, I believe he was — framed his important concept? He said that if he had the proper leverage he could move your entire planet. That is precisely the job you must do."

"The planet? *Earth*?" Archie was astounded. "But why? And how? And why me?"

"The how is simple. You can do it, just as you shifted the place of many books. A little more effort, perhaps, may be needed, but you have the tools. As for the why — the reason is to save your planet. It must be moved from your solar system, and soon. Your sun is about to blow. A nova, in your understanding, is what will result. While one star more or less exploding in the universe is an unimportant event in the scheme of things, to you and your fellow Earth people it is of the utmost seriousness."

Archie agreed, his mouth wide open.

"The only solution is to move Earth out of your system. We've chosen coordinates around a sun similiar to yours within our Federated Systems. You'll have to learn the coordinates prior to the shift."

"But — " Archie began, still not fully comprehending. "To move the whole world. Won't that shake everybody up some?"

"Of course. Psychologically," Turnal said. "But the shake-up won't compare with the one they'll get when your sun explodes. It is, after all, for their own good you're doing this."

Archie thought for a moment. "But why me? You or one of your people could do it — or couldn't you?"

"Yes, we — " Turnal's eyes shot skyward. "Quick! To the rocks," he rasped. *"Run!"*

Following Turnal, who seemed spry for a man his age, Archie had just about reached the up-jutting rocks on the beach when he spotted the reason for their running. A silver-blue glint in the sky flashed high over the calm sea. A space vehicle of some kind. It appeared to be getting larger, therefore nearer.

"Wahr patrol ship," Turnal puffed

when they had gained the shadowy concealment of a horizontal rough outcrop of the rock. "They mustn't spot you, or they'll know later that Ghoor helped move you."

"You mean you shouldn't be helping?" Archie asked.

"Absolutely not," Turnal whispered. "You asked if I or my people could move your planet into its new coordinates. Yes, I could, as could many on Ghoor. We could do it in the ability sense, but not in a moral sense. The Wahr Federation of Spheres would consider such an act by us as illegal."

A humming sound had grown while Turnal had been speaking. Now the old man put one finger to his lips, while pointing upward with his other hand. The patrol ship must be directly over their place of concealment, Archie concluded.

Moments later the humming sound had been reduced to silence. As Turnal led Archie from the rocks he explained, "They've sensed your breaking through the Impervious Veil, put there centuries ago to keep out space explorers from other systems. Luckily, they haven't yet been able to localize you. But we must act swiftly."

Something was still bothering Archie, he didn't know precisely what. "You say that your moving us would be immoral. But surely it can't be immoral for your people to try and save ours."

"Morals and the law and their relationships are involved subjects, their intricacies not always similar among different peoples. What's important is that we *cannot* move you. Within the Federation, illegalities are punished severely."

"You would be punished?"

"Not just me," Turnal said in a fatherly tone. "I am by appointment Courteous of all Ghoor. I act in my dealings with you not as an individual but in my official capacity by direction of our Council. All Ghoor would be punished."

"What about Earth, then?" Archie asked. "Will my people be punished for breaking Federation law? If we enter the Veil — "

Turnal grinned, his teeth sparkling in the sunlight. "Ah, but you are not members of the Federation, and thus not subject to its law. But time moves swiftly. I must give you your new coordinates."

Archie drummed nervous fingers on the top of his desk.

It was mid-morning, a Tuesday, the day, and approaching the time Turnal had given him for the shift. There was a problem, however. Archie was getting cold feet.

The whole world. Plus the atmosphere, of course. If only he could leave the smog behind, he thought, almost jokingly. But it was no time to joke. *The whole world.*

Could he do it? Sure, he had the coordinates and the skill. Turnal had said he'd been chosen specifically among Earthmen because of his peculiar mix of imagination, stick-to-itiveness and confidence in himself. But . . . .

Earth weighed so much. To lift all that, think of it! But he couldn't have *lifted* the New York Public Library either. That had gone

smoothly enough. And Turnal was so confident. But suppose something went wrong. Sure, he had the coordinates, but . . . .

Suppose one of those was just a *little* off?

Archie stopped drumming. Just a little off, he thought — like when he returned the library the first time. Coordinates were just colors to him, but colors have shades. A slight error in visualization — if that, again, was the right word — and . . . *the whole world.*

No, he couldn't do it. Not without making sure first.

But how to do that? He couldn't go himself in advance and check up on it. If there was just space out there he'd have no place to stand while checking. He couldn't even breathe. And he certainly couldn't get a space capsule for the purpose. They don't give those things to advertising people who might like a morning jaunt in space.

No, he couldn't go, not physically.

But mentally?

If —

He'd moved a building. He had not had to move the *entire* foundation and landscape with it. He'd moved a desk and a chair. It hadn't mattered that they were *in* buildings at the time. His mind — or his viewer-something, the thing that was part of his mind that framed the coordinates — if he could concentrate on shifting just that and not the rest of him . . . .

The whole world!

He folded his hands in his lap and inhaled slowly. His pulse pounded in his head, refusing to be quieted. Colors blended, changed, elongated, separated and crystallized until —

They were right. Now —

No, too much. *Not all this, but* — That?

No. *No!* There, right there —

THAT!

Archie saw. Not with eyes, but with . . . he didn't know what. His eyes never could have pierced the distances from the landing coordinates this his "sight" took him. But he saw nonetheless and, seeing, switched back to the coordinates of his office. He felt, rather than saw, his hands trembling when he opened his eyes.

The ships! God, there must have been a thousand dark red space ships surrounding the coordinates where Earth was due to be shifted.

The Federation had found out. Archie had to reach Turnal.

They were waiting for him on the beach under the orange sky. Twenty to thirty men of clear green skin dressed in brilliant blue uniforms. They were human types, physically strong, Archie concluded from the grips of the two who held him.

"Stay, Outsider!" an authoritative voice commanded. "Do not shift back. You will not be harmed."

The two men holding Archie immediately released him, and he turned to face a young man whose uniform style separated him above the others. "You are to be congratulated on your mastery of movement," the leader said. "I am Sparik, Commander Fourth Class in the Wahr Feder-

ation Arm of Enforcement. There are things I must know from you."

Archie's face reddened. "Here's your first bit of knowledge. Your ships will have a long wait. I'm wise to your stake-out. I'm not about to bring my planet inside your precious Veil so you can burn it to a crisp with your weapons. We'll take our chances with our sun!"

The muscles of Sparik's face tightened. "You were going to bring your planet inside Federation territory? At the suggestion of the Courteous of Ghoor, I suppose."

Archie said nothing. They had promised not to harm *him,* but Turnal was another matter.

"We know Turnal has been meeting an Outsider on this beach. Now we know who, and I've a good idea as to why. Let me ask you this. You say you saw ships near the place you were to move your planet to. How you were able to see these is beyond my comprehension, but were those ships red in color?"

"You know they were!"

Sparik nodded. "Correction: I *thought* they were. Outsider, I would inform you that all official Federation ships are blue. Of the twelve planets within our System, only one identifies its military ships with red. That planet is Ghoor."

Archie's mouth shot open. "That's — impossible!"

"Only too possible, I'm afraid," Sparik said. "Ghoor has a history of warfare. The Federation, a thousand years and more ago, was first formed as a league of protection against the planet on which you now stand. Ghoor was defeated and its people accepted the ultimatum that they would confine their warlike activity to their own planet or — if attacked — to those outside the System. Some five hundred years ago, Ghoor discovered a legal technicality. They shifted a planet from outside the Veil to a point inside their own field of domain. They then destroyed it as a trespasser in an orgy of flame."

"That's what they were going to do — to us?" Archie asked quietly.

"Precisely."

Archie sputtered, "But why — why have me do it? Why didn't *they* — "

"They were forbidden to shift any other planet inside the Veil. However, they obviously discovered another technicality. If *you,* a member of the outside planet, did the shifting . . . ."

"But couldn't you — the Federation — protect us?"

"You are not members of the Federation," Sparik said.

"That was the reason Turnal gave me for an Earthman making the shift," Archie said. "As non-members, he said, we would not be subject to its laws."

"Nor its protection," Sparik added soberly. "We shall, however, amend the laws to prohibit in the future what you've experienced. You may return to your home now."

Archie's face paled. "My home — Earth. Turnal said our sun — "

Sparik smiled. "Whatever Turnal said may safely be discounted. His office in the Ghoor Council should have indicated that."

"You mean his office as Courteous?"

"Of course. A Courteous is what you might call the . . . official liar of the council. Of Federation spheres, only Ghoor has one."

"I wish — " Archie said — "I wish there were some way I could get even."

Sparik smiled again. "Yes. The Federation would be better without Ghoor. I, too, wish you might find the way.

The way. Archie thought about that moments later as he sat in his Madison Avenue office. Sparik's choice of words had been strange. He did not say he wished Archie would find *a* way. He said *the* way. Which meant that Sparik knew of a way and hoped that Archie would find it.

But why couldn't Sparik simply have told —

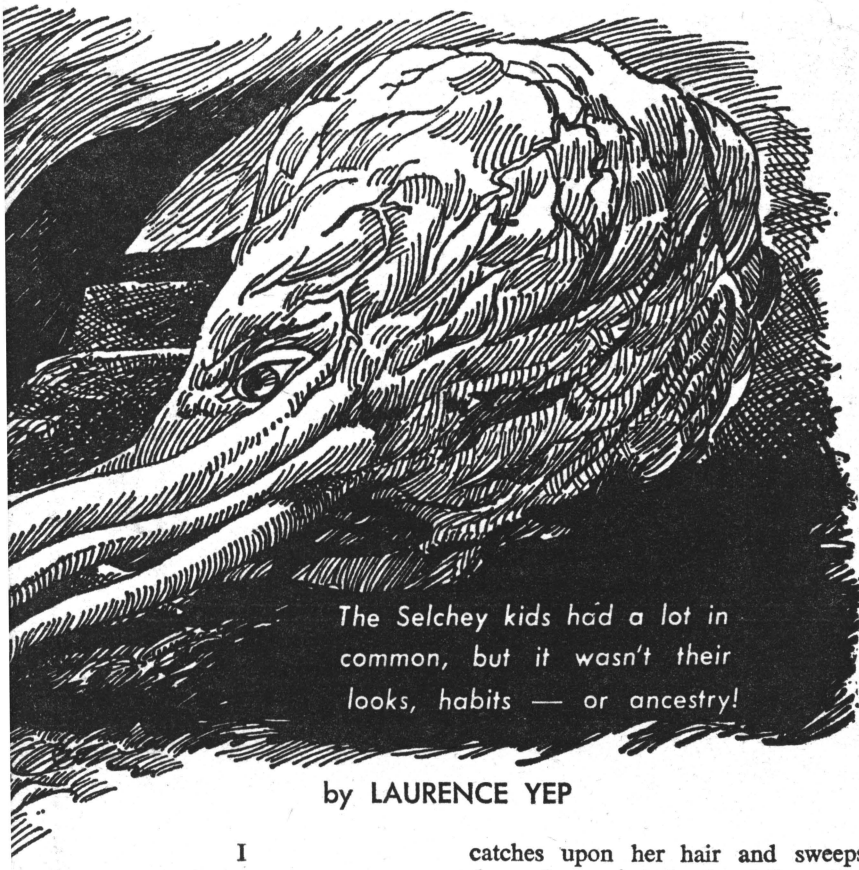
Of course. Sparik was of the Federation. He could not suggest the way. But Archie was not subject to Federation law. He could do — what?

And then Archie knew.

He laughed out loud at the simplicity of the method. Then he folded his hands and closed his eyes.

Concentrating on the two sets of coordinates, he shifted the entire planet Ghoor to the place where the big guns of the dark red ships waited. END


THE SELCHEY KIDS
gaughan



by LAURENCE YEP

I

Light stirs on the waters; gold ribbons cross the wrinkled water's back. In the dim awakening of the sun, the silhouetted V of a bird cra-a-cks the sky with a call. The ocean foams as their lips suck the rim of the beach. Sand grips my back like a myriad of stars moving down my spine. The sun comes up on tiptoe beneath the sun-burnt clouds and wine-stained sky. For us. Light catches upon her hair and sweeps down the myriad clouds of fiery tips. Green eyes flaked with gold rim the universe and content rests leisurely in the quiet curve of her lips. I am satisfied.

Lecher, she flashed at me.

"What?" I said, tightening my arm about Pryn's waist.

You heard me, she frowned. *Your lust would get an elephant in heat.*

I laughed because that's the only

thing to do when a telepath catches you. "You could tell me to take my arm away from you," I said.

She smiled and eased her shoulder even tighter against my side. *I like it, and even if I didn't,, you are much too strong to argue with. I like you even if you are an English major.*

I grunted and kissed her. "You be the brains, and I'll be the muscle." With my free hand, I felt the little gold ring and wondered how to propose. Meanwhile the girl, who had earned a Ph.D. in marine biology when she was twenty-two, leaned her head against my shoulder with a comfortable little sigh.

For a man with a bachelor's in English I suppose I should have come back with some witty repartee; but sitting on the beach with the invalided sun slowly limping into the sky and a girl fitted nicely into your arms, you don't want words.

"Shut up," I said. I felt Pryn's arm holding me closer, and we huddled together, watching the blond-maned sun trail its colored cloak across the waters.

As we walked down the stairs to the lab, I held her hand, listening to the Kids splashing happily in their tank. I've never quite gotten over the thrill of the contact. Not that I haven't held hands with other girls. Pryn needs the physical contact to permit exact communication and in the meantime, all the gentle warmth that's in her sits quietly in your soul until her words flash like liquid fire spiraling down my spine.

AN IF FIRST

In each issue, *IF* publishes at least one "First" story by someone who has never had a story published professionally before. This month's "First" author is Laurence Yep, a young San Franciscan who is a graduate of St. Mary's Chinese School and St. Ignatius High School and is now a sophomore at Marquette University. A National Merit Finalist and winner of the Bausch & Lomb Science Award and the Bank of America Certificate in Classics, 19-year-old Laurence Yep is clearly headed for great things!

"What're we going to do today?" I asked Pryn.

She stopped me on the stairs. *I can see why you're named Deucalien.*

I squeezed her hand. "The name's Duke." And in the staccato bursts of fire that signifies laughter I asked, "All right, why?"

Because you're always so curious, like Prometheus, your ancestor. She patted my head. *But thinking should be left to the people with Ph.D.'s.*

I grabbed her by her slim waist and lifted her up with her legs giving little kicking protests. "Some day you're going to be Mrs. Duke Selchey, and then what are you going to do?"

Educate you, ditch-digger.

I put her down, and she slipped an arm through mine. *And get your name changed legally.*

As we stepped into the room with technicians running about their tasks, the oscilloscope wrinkled its green face at us as the speaker rasped.

"Brood-love, male, female, statement."

That's the Kids' way of saying hello. Ollie and Ossie, the Kids' Christian names, have about ten words that they can say, and combinations of these widen their vocabulary. "Brood-love" best translates that ambiguous bond of mutual danger, feeding, birth, death and procreation that exists between us. It's pretty ambiguous but they wouldn't even know that much if it weren't for Pryn and her telepathy.

"Kids, get up here, will you?" Noe called out from the walkway over the tank. I looked at the tall man, fighting a losing battle with his hairline. The pouch like a pregnant guppy, peeping over the belt of his shorts. The hair on his legs is thin, starved on the fatty tissues there. His thick glasses keep sliding down his nose like a two-legged mischievous insect. But he's the father of our small family and the patriarch of all the newcomers to the Institute. Noe's a good man, if you don't take him too seriously. *E.g.*, Noe insists that Pryn and I are the Kids even though the rest of the Institute gives that name to Ollie and Ossie. But Noe being the patriarch of the institute, proxy father, we accept his white man's burden. After all, we of the Institute are all Selchey's kids.

Noe's father, after a fashion. He and my father were alike physically. That's what Noe remembers, and I suppose he's right. My own memory of John Gunnar is colored by time and several hundred feet of water. He remains a hearty laugh, bursting from the obscure, glaring heights with a pair of thick glasses shining like twin moons. I guess Noe treats me the way my father would; expressing unscientific affection awkwardly in scientific terms.

"Where were you Kids?" Noe asked.

"For a swim, Uncle Noe," smiled Pryn.

"Good, because I want to tell the dolphins that we're going out to the deep sea today," Noe said. Pryn slipped off her sandals and took off her lab coat, looking trim and delicate in her bathing suit. I followed with more dignity — Pryn claims it's just clumsiness.

I squinted in the water for the Kids. Someone shoved hard from behind, and I tumbled about in the water, waving my arms like some ungainly bird to regain my balance. I waved my fist at Ossie, the male of the Kids, who only gave that chittering cry that might be a laugh or a cluck of sympathy. I can't tell which with that eternal smile hung on his face.

Pryn swam up beside Ossie, placing a hand upon his head to give Noe's orders. I watched Pryn and admired her slim curves outlined by the light from the window in the front of the tank. Ollie nudged me from the side and I stroked her side affectionately. You get to adopt a paternal attitude toward the Kids after a while.

When Pryn had finished, she gave one last pat to Ossie and nodded toward me. With a last stroke I swam to Pryn's side, and we surfaced to

face Noe, who was squatting on the walk over the tank.

"Get into your suits, Kids. I want to have as much daylight as possible," Noe said.

I trembled slightly in the locker room as the wet suit clung to my body like a flailed ray fish. I hate the idea of going into the water where I can't see the floor beneath, and going back to the City, the progenitrix of all my phobias, doesn't help them any.

I remember that day that slashed my life and left me dangling by the threads. I was just thirteen when California slipped from the continent's side to repopulate itself with fishes. I know that we were having a big campaign about how we were number one in population, and maybe some fertility god was slighted at the lack of credit. I couldn't really tell you. All I know is that everything was knocked off the shelf like brittle china when the Flood hit.

II

I was in a school that lay at the feet of one of these steep hills that pimple the City — to be more precise, I was in the play court of our school running an errand for the teacher. The ground under me wobbled, and my eyes felt ready to crawl from my head as if I, and not the ground, were in a seizure. I laid my body next to the ground, feeling the deep throbs of its heart, and clung to the earth that was determined to shake me off its back.

A thin, black weed spread hair-thin roots on the back of the school building. The roots expanded, and parts of the wall fell, exposing the school's trembling internals. I covered my head and huddled into a small ball, hoping that whoever the destroyer was he would miss me.

Glass tinkled on the pavement as the bell shorted and began ringing wildly. Concrete thudded as someone screamed. Then the voice became the joined shrillings of children that the falling building quickly out-shouted. Then, except for the bell, there was quiet from the remains of the building.

I coughed in the thick dust that powdered the sun and wondered at the silence. A mountain of rubble quivered where the school had stood. Here and there, tall fingers of crooked steel gestured warningly. I crawled toward the pile of my school, splashing through a puddle that slowly extended arms from the lavatory. I sat on a large section of concrete, one hand touching the door of the lavatory that was still above the rubble.

I was alone in the tawdry slate-gray sky with the dust of the fallen masonry in my nose, smoke irritating my eyes from the fires in the neighboring buildings.

People shouted in the streets, some for help, others for a certain person, always with a lost-dog appeal. Then in the sudden second of guillotined time, the screaming reverted to one word: tidal wave. The shaking of the ground grew stronger as Neptune reared fear.

I clung to the door that lay against the rubble as I saw the glass

wall of the wave towering over me, its green crystal face etched with lines and grooves like the bole of a tree. And frozen in that face were chairs and a tree limb and one man's hand held vaguely out in greeting to someone.

I screwed my eyes tight into my face and buried my head into the door as the wave swept its skirts over me. The weight of ages pressed me into the board, and I knew how Jesus and St. Christopher and all the scapegoats felt. I held my breath as the ocean surrounded me, feeling the stale air inside me kicking its way out and seeing small bubbles escape from my mouth like exclamations. I was isolated in a dim, dirty world in which I couldn't breathe, catching vague glimpses of stilled forms being twirled like trinkets by the water and the ghostly mouths of the houses open in silent cries.

Suddenly my head and body burst into the open air, and I gasped for breath, letting my head rise a little. Small waves came sweeping in, gently toying with my door. I pressed my head against the door until it bumped and poked at the belly of the hill.

Someone tried to pull me off my door, but I clung on tightly, so that they dragged me, door and all, onto the hill. I let go then. I still don't know who carried me up the hill. I was laid down on the top of the hill, coughing and sobbing as my lungs tried to readjust to breathing air. I was in a little green park, lying in the grass with the sun like a cheap bulb glaring in the sky.

People around me formed wet-sullen mobs about the two houses still standing on the hill top. An owner of one house opened his door and took in as many people as he could, but a fight broke out when he tried to turn the rest away. The fire and blood pounded in the mob. When the madness finally left, both houses were burning and everyone who could still stand was looking sadly at the flames.

I kept away from the mob, walking to the opposite end of the hill which was now an island. I huddled on the spot, looking out toward where our house should be, under the water, wondering why I was the only one left in an ugly, confusing world and wishing I wasn't. Family, friends and even identity were lost in barely half an hour. I decided then that I wouldn't worry about friends or attachments or other natural things that could be so easily broken.

I went to an aunt in the Midwest where they don't have hills, or the ocean — just little lakes doing imitations, no surf at night, no seagulls shrieking or foghorns belching and no fog — just an insipid cloud layer. I hated every moment of it.

I grew up among the corn and wheat fields like a strong weed. Aunt Gila tried but a weekend movie and apple pies aren't really that stimulating. Hot meals are nice, but man does not live by bread alone.

When Aunt Gila died, I bummed around for a while, picking up my B.A. in English along the way. I tried writing but after the first dozen rejection slips I let that slide

away from me the way the City and my parents had.

Finally I decided to go back toward the Ocean and home. Sometimes I hitchhiked and where I did not pick up a ride, I worked until I had enough to go on. Sometimes I even walked; but by hook or by crook I traveled toward home, California or bust, until I reached New Milpitas, land's end.

There's not much left of the state now. The Sierras still left part of themselves hanging like a scar on the western side of the states, and there's a series of islands left from the City which did not collapse like the rest of the state. But few of them are occupied. So New Milpitas supplies the few people that are left in the state, and New Milpitas was where I stopped.

What few fishing boats there were weren't interested in going out to the "Deep Ocean" that was the City. And nothing, not even a Phi Beta Kappa key, kids, will charter a boat out in New Milpitas. You need the root of all evil to grease the wheels that make the world spin its topsy-turvy way.

All day I would sit on the splintered wharf and ask, "What was I?" Then answer: by my nature I am 1) a substance, 2) living, 3) sentiment, 4) rational and I belong to the species of Man. I know that much, thanks to old Perphyry, but what else am I? Not even a binary number on a magnetic bit because all the computers that held my old life are full fathom five. Once I thought I could be a teacher or a writer, but these were winter skins that could never hold on my slick, wet non-past. I have no identity, only the inheritance of my humanity.

I was sitting on the wharf one day, watching the sun wash the cold off the water's shoulders and letting these words worm inside my mind in an endless tape. A girl arching twin quills of water behind her, waving like an albino peacock, swam before me. Her head dotted the golden scales rippling on the belly of the sea, and her white arms flashed as she swam.

Bitterness held the tear ducts of my eyes and twisted until I almost cried. Suicide seemed the best thing, and I looked to a peak on an island across from me. I would look down at the tinted pane of glass with the boats like snails and worms streaking little trails of slime behind them. From those Olympian heights, with arms crossed, I would dedicate my death to the frigidity of the world order and the fragility of existence and then leap gracefully off my island.

I debated whether dawn or dusk would be more appropriate symbolically when a hand touched my arm. Golden warmth sheathed my soul and content, that was almost near; but I fought the alien touch, welcomed the warmth and no more, preserving my remaining identity.

I could feel your emotions even from where I was, I heard my mind say.

I turned to see the girl, kneeling beside me, green eyes searching my face, drops of water streaking down like tears.

"What?" I asked, wrinkling my forehead in surprise.

Death is waste, death is the end of change and change is the purpose of man. She paused, then, *It's not natural.*

"Go join the Salvation Army," I said. Her nails bit into my arm, making slender crescents of blood. Angry fire burst through every nerve in my body and died down.

I'm sorry, the words came. She released my arm and placed her hand in her lap.

I picked up her hand and turned it over to examine the palm and fingers. She tried to pull away but I gripped her wrist tightly.

"Why did you come?" I asked angrily. "Why?"

We stared at each other, listening to the waters suck at the concrete legs of the wharf. I found myself resting on her green eyes, floating gently on the golden flakes. She shrugged and took my hand.

You felt so sad, she said. *I had to come.*

"And do you know why?" I asked with a half-smile.

She looked at me and nodded, which annoyed me. If anyone should know my problems, it should be me.

"Then tell me," I said. She shook her head, droplets gently falling.

That's for you to find out.

I looked out toward where the City should lay, watching a tubby fishing boat chug out into the deep, and I knew . . .

. . . the salt oceans charting across the rocks while father stood encased in the solid crystal water with his big boots like an old skin still clinging, red in hand, contented; and mother's face turned toward the sun with her green sunglasses like insect eyes outstaring her admirers; and me inside my sand forts and castles.

"What's that?" I asked, pointing at a clear shape with wet strings of flesh dangling from it. Fascinated by its foreign beauty, yet afraid of its death, I shuffled toward it timidly.

"A squid, dear," my mother said; and trembling, I kicked sand over it to hide it from my sight, and laughter fell from her white throat like spring blossoms: White, pure, and gentle, as a memory should be.

You were from the city. Why don't you stay with us for a while. Her hand covered the memories for now like the tide and the buried heap.

"You're from the city too?" I asked. Few survived that June morning, and even fewer mention it. Some experiences like the Flood become more vivid than life, a historical fact that dominates your life unforgettably forever. Talking only strengthens the holds that the memory has on you.

I and Uncle Noe belonged to the Marine Institute. We were on an expedition along the coast in our ship when the Flood came.

"Did you know a Dr. Gunnar and his wife?" I demanded.

Yes, she exclaimed. Dr. Gunnar's the big man that looks like Uncle Noe. And Mrs. Gunnar — I used to think she was the most beautiful woman in the world.

The pleasure was a fireball bursting in me, comforting my mind in the soothing magma. Coincidences are funny, but they're good to have.

"They were my parents," I said.

Then you're Duke, she said with a smile. *Do you remember Pryn?*

I remembered the tall seventeen-year-old with legs tanned so that she looked like she stepped from a copper penny. Even despite the distaste I felt for girls before the Flood I had to admire her swimming.

"Yes," I said and smiled for the first time.

She took my hand and pulled me up. "You can't very well refuse my invitation now. We must be the only family that you have."

I looked out at the world with my ready-made identity. "Let's go."

And that was how the Prodigal returned to the Marine Institute and met Noe Selchey, father figure, last surviving director and thus the manipulator of vast reserves stored away in Eastern banks, and heartache to the insurance companies.

We called our island Parnassus because in the prediluvian days that was the name of the street at the top of the hill. When the bulldozers buried the street sign and threw up a tower of steel and glass that smiled like a surgeon's needle, we kept the name.

I came back to my home to work and forget; but of course there was no forgetting so close to home. The happiness that was my mother and father drowned, the screams of my friends being crushed moved dreamily in the giant, silent world of the ocean like memories. But if the ache of remembering remained, something else balanced the other side of living, and she was Pryn.

III

When he had rolled the Kids out to the pier and left them to the technicians to lower into the ocean beside the Institute's boat, I led her out to the end of the dock. She sat down on one of the pilings, idly drawing designs on the wharf with her finger which she had dipped in a nearby puddle. I took her hand and felt gold fire like fine thread weaving a cocoon inside my body.

I licked my lips. "Pryn, I know that you're several years older than me — "

Four years. Her hand tensed in mine. *I think I know what you want to ask and the answer is no.*

"At least think about it tonight," I said.

You're a dear sweet boy —

"Boy!" I spluttered.

Yes, you're a boy in many ways, and I love you for them. She touched my cheek with soft finger tips. *I love you even more than I love Uncle Noe; but for several reasons — including biological — I can never marry you.*

"I hate to be crude, but — "

Then we'll stop right here and be good . . . friends. She smiled and kissed me, then walked swiftly away toward the ship, sandals slapping the pier and my mind.

As I climbed to the bridge of our boat, Noe turned toward me. He adjusted his glasses which had slip-

ped down his nose once more.

"Duke, I wish I'd been able to rear you with Pryn."

I shrugged as I sat down in a chair. "You couldn't know that there would be other survivors."

Noe nodded to one of the workers who tossed off the mooring ropes. He gunned the motor, and the ship shook itself, trembled in the cold waters, mumbling sleepily. Then the ship rumbled "John Henry" and "Ole Man River" to itself and then stumbled through the ocean, trailing white ribbons across its full-crested bow and down its forty-foot length. Pryn was looking out a window, watching the water collapse as I took the gold ring and saw it flash in the air as it joined so many other memories. I hate you, ocean, you weak synonym for ocean!

"It was most shoddy," Noe was shouting over the roar of the engines, "not to have investigated. You see, you're very special, Duke."

"Well, I'm here anyway."

"Yes, but where is here?" twinkled Noe.

"Do you want a metaphysical or geological answer?"

He laughed. "No, I mean who are you really, Duke?"

"Philosophy was the last thing I expected of you, Noe."

"It is and always will be," he said. "You should know better than to take the obvious interpretation of reality. Very poor scientific method."

"I take it that you want another answer that I can't really give."

"What you'll be getting today should give you the answer but remember — " he wagged a finger at me — "this principle of re-interpretation applies to even greater things. Remember when Lovisier once said: 'The Obvious is always the Least.' "

"Sure, Noe," I said and waited for him to quote from Newton and Fermi . . . but the experiment must have been important for Noe to break from his usual habits.

"I want you to get a tape from the old Institute building. It's in the basement in a room where the records of our secret projects were kept. It doubled as our future shelter and came equipped with an airlock. I've shown Pryn an old blueprint where it is."

"And I'm the pack-mule?" I asked.

"No, you're the protection. There is no telling what may be left from the aquarium." Noe cut the engine, and we coasted. "The tape you will bring back should teach two things." And he paused as he waited for me to supply them.

"I can only think of one," I said. "The principle of re-interpretation."

He smiled happily. "You'll be a scientist yet, Duke. Yes, it's a direct application. The other things which I felt should be revealed to you only after I could be sure you could stand the shock. You will know *who* you are, Duke."

"That must be some tape," I grinned.

"It's an oral report from John Gunnar, a good subordinate."

"Then we'd better be going," I said to Pryn who nodded and left.

"Duke," Noe said before I left.

"Be careful, boy." And he did a strange thing, giving me a clumsy hug, slipping into an awkward smile. Then he turned away quickly.

Pryn was waiting for me on the deck of the ship. I felt her hand on my shoulder. *I'm sorry, Duke. I didn't mean to hurt you.*

"I wish I'd never met you on that wharf," I said and tried to shrug off her hand. "Anyway, it's time for me to be moving on. I've been getting restless lately."

I understand, she said.

I turned away from her then because I was tired of her being able to understand what I couldn't. I strapped my wrist light on, then my breather, which is a miracle product Noe and the Institute's technicians. They're essentially an air-recycling helmet with portable communicators. A special attachment lets you translate the Kids' chatter into human speech, and an adapter which you hit with your chin lets you speak dolphin language. Unfortunately the breather can't communicate inflections or tones. Still you get so that you recognize different voices. I taped some poison-tipped spears to the back of the breather and picked up my spear gun.

Pryn tapped my shoulder, and I held up the okay sign.

White bullets, sides slick with silver shroud of water leapt in the air. Pryn slid over the side, and I followed with a clumsy jump. It was quiet underneath without complications, just sleep. Not even any dangerous currents any more since the oceanographical change.

Pryn put a hand on the Kids' heads and gave them instructions on how to get to the Institute. The Kids shot through the water, delighting in the wallless world, while we older folk followed at a more sedate pace, swimming close to the surface.

No one bothered to dynamite those parts of the City that are navigation hazards so Noe had to step over one of the suburban areas where there is enough clearance. If he went further north and east the hotels and business offices would have spitted the ship with their spires. Only the buildings near the Fault collapsed; the others held up remarkably well, long enough to let their occupants drown.

Pryn stopped me on the border of the business district. *We go for six blocks and make a right, then go down.* I nodded my understanding. She removed her hand as we swam to join the Kids, who were circling lazily before the hedge of buildings while the grown-ups talked.

Tht buildings were silent, hidden in the dark, tall stone giants mired in the mud like the fingers of a swallowed giant. In the silent offices, over the rotting carpets, up and down the empty elevator shafts, fish swim. Crabs scuttle along the sidewalks and floors where heels once clicked. And I return.

I snapped on my wrist light when I had estimated the distance covered at six hundred yards. Pryn snapped hers on, and we flippered down into the dark, silent city.

We fell like angels through the dark fluid night, legs pumping and

flippers gently pushing at the water, watching the huddled shapes of the city grow shoulders and heads and teeth. My heart smashed inside my head, veins threatening to burst as we entered the City.

Two bullet shapes shot past us as the Kids raced each other toward the floor of the City.

I chinned the Dolphin transmit and braked. "Here-statement." I waited until the two shapes raced back to us before I continued down. I flashed my light on one of the side windows and read the flaking gold letters of a Dr. Roeke, D.D.S., and wondered if his skull lay somewhere in the mud below. I felt alien in this new dimension as we wandered down, conscious that I was an experimental probing of mankind, descending like an actor in the City's dreamed musings.

I remember a park that my parents took me to once, filled with giant sequoias and redwoods that drape years about themselves like moss. I felt alone, terribly alone. In daylight they seemed to sleep, but at night in the snicker of the sly moon, they move and stomp and whisper about the number of insects this year — and I knew they were talking about me. But in my home town there is only an expectant dimness, covered with slime and mud.

You're afraid, Pryn said as she touched my shoulder.

I shook my head, and she knew that I lied. She shrugged, and we swam on, over the park with its flower beds and benches, where the sunlight seemed to wait forever for you on the grass but the grass was gone and the trees dead in the salt water. Then down below I saw the U-shaped buildings of the Institute.

We paused above the center plaza with its red tiles now coated with ocean droppings, and the fountain with its twisted whales, non-functional, submerged in the element it once played with.

I chinned Dolphin transmit. "Stop-statement."

"Here-question," asked Ossie twisting his body about the middle to point at the Institute.

"Affirmative-statement," I said.

Together with Pryn I swam toward the Institute. The doors were stiff, refusing to swing in so I shot a belt through the door. Loading the spear gun, I held it in my left hand while I cracked some of the pieces from the hole in the glass. I swore as I cut my hand on the glass, and Pryn tried to stop the blood that ribboned the water. In my wrist light, aimed casually inside, a dark blur stirred. I shoved Pryn roughly against the wall, shielding her with my body as a giant shape smashed through the glass, tossing shards everywhere. Flashing in my light as it turned for another pass, I could see the shark's teeth. I shot a belt that arched over his back. Then it was charging, and I dropped the spear gun as I twisted my body, dodging and squirming around its teeth.

"Danger-statement," I shouted to the Kids as I pulled a spare spear from my back. The teeth came terribly close to my hand as I twisted out of the way. I jabbed with the spear, but the water robbed my blows

of any force. Death is a pantomime beneath the water, fought in a dream ballet; and out of the dream a gray bullet crashed into the shark's side.

"Kill-statement," said Ossie.

The shark rolled away, righting itself with a flip of its tail. Then another gray bullet slammed into its side, and the shark rolled away again, biting in vain at the gray blur. The Kids circled the shark slowly almost lazily. Ossie broke from the circle, smashing into the shark once more.

The shark tried to run away but the Kids, ramming its side one after another, herded it back toward the Institute. The shark circled warily, trying to keep track of both the Kids. Pryn joined my side with the gun that I had dropped. She pulled one of the spears from my back and aimed carefully.

I touched her arm. *I won't hit the Kids,* she assured me, and I let her go. I don't argue with Pryn. I was humbled long ago.

With a cry of *Kill,* Ossie detached himself from the circle and smashed into the shark's blind side. The shark rolled, righting itself again, and paused momentarily to glare about, belly exposed. Pryn fired. I watched the poison-tipped spear lodge in the shark's belly. The shark rolled in the water. It might have been internal hemorrhaging caused by the Kids that finally reached the shark's brain or the fast-acting poison, but after convulsing in the water, the shark went limp and floated gently to the floor of the plaza. The kids still circled over the shark. Then Ossie broke from the circle and cautiously nudged it.

Satisfied, the Kids came swimming to us then. Pryn touched both of them, and they chattered pleasantly.

I chinned Dolphin-transmit and said, "Brood-live," caressing their sides.

"What's happening down there," Noe crackled his voice robbed of inflection. "'I heard you shout and the dolphins cry Kill. Is everyone all right?"

"I just cut my hand, Noe," I said.

"Well, be careful, it might draw predatory fish," he said.

I smiled and took the gun from Pryn, using it as a battering ram to enlarge the hole that the shark had made. Then I loaded the gun and told the Kids to stay put. Twisting my body through the hole, I flashed my beam around the room.

"Noe, how many teeth does a shark have?"

"It depends upon the species, why?"

"'Scientific curiosity," I said and then waved for Pryn to join me. She twisted through the door and together we flippered through the lobby where they had once kept the alligators in a pit. I held the gun ready as I flashed my light about the different corners, but there were only the leering shadows.

IV

Idly I read the headings over the tanks in the corridors. The railings that had prevented the children from standing too close displayed shoulders of red rust. Salt water ate at the titles on the tanks. A shape

blurred to my right; and I raised the gun in my right hand until my left caught a sea horse in its beam.

Pryn stopped before a door. A skeleton lay before it, tattered rags clinging to its white-ridged chest. I opened it hesitantly and flashed my light around in the darkness below. I swam over the skeleton in front of the door and down the stairs. The touch of a gently current told me that Pryn was swimming beside me.

We were in a large room, filled with shelves that reached upward for ten feet. The fragments of books and bound papers rotted on the shelves. Pryn beamed her light at a door in the rear wall, and we flippered to it.

I gave her the gun, and she covered me while I strained at the wheel, turning the rusting inner parts. With a last screech, the tumblers clicked, and the door opened with a clang as the water pushed me into the lock with it. I held myself off the wall when Pryn bumped against me as the water pulled her into the small room too. I waited until the room was almost filled before I pressed a button in front of me. The outer door slowly closed behind us, creaking mechanically. It lent my weight to it and with a final shove the outer door closed. Almost immediately a pump chuckled somewhere, and the water level began lowering. When I heard a soft hiss of air being pumped in, I let the breather hang down my back and took the gun from Pryn.

As soon as all the water had been pumped out except for a thin film, the inner door slid open. There was an electric light in the doorway which activated the room lights as I stepped through.

"They must have a small generator in here." I sniffed at the air. "And a re-cycling plant for the air. Noe wasn't kidding when he said that they were prepared for anything.

Pryn took my hand. *For almost everything.*

"Who expected the Flood?" I said as she drew her hand out of mine.

Pryn held up a finger for me to wait and, slipping out of her flippers, went into the next room. I looked about the small room and its filing cabinets around the walls. There were two desks in the room with typewriters and by one a small tape recorder.

I went over to one filing cabinet and slid out one drawer, leaving a little puddle in the room where the water trailed down my legs. I slipped off my flippers and took an armful of folders over to the desks.

Idly I flipped through the folders skimming over the titles which Pryn would have explained to me if she had been around. Then one caught my eye: "Experimental Crossbreeding No. 57."

My father had been a geneticist, Noe had told me, one of the best — naturally. But slowly as I read, the words burned themselves into my mind. I shivered in my wet suit.

"Reports on radiation-treated dolphin cells . . . successful fertilization . . . in tube . . . growth encouraging . . . in artificial womb . . . perfectly

formed fetus . . . birth soon . . . Will it be an idiot? . . . normal birth successful delivery . . . success after so many failures? . . . Infant responds to stimuli . . . tests indicate astonishing intelligence for age level, but can we measure by human standards? . . . As cranial capacity of dolphins is greater than man . . . Outwardly shaped like homo sapiens, but what is dolphinus sapiens? . . . Christened . . . "

A hand touched my shoulder at the moment. *What are you doing?* Pryn asked.

I gave the folder over to Pryn. "Do you know what they were doing at the Institute before the Flood?" Words rushed out without consideration now. "They were making test-tube babies, babies of a different species!"

Pryn took my hand and looked at me quietly. *Noe had told me about it. Does it mean that much?*

"Yes!" I grabbed her and shook her. "The report said that thing was growing with a high intelligence and — "

The words trailed off my tongue like beads of water I looked about at the room, which suddenly seemed very small and very menacing.

"Let's get out of here fast," I said, pulling her toward the open airlock. She pulled back.

Does that make the creature a monster? she demanded, squeezing my hand.

"It's an alien. Its ancestors were dolphins."

Like Ollie and Ossie?

"They're different," I said feeling exasperation form ribs about my chest, imagining the alien creature listening on the other side of the walls. "They don't masquerade like men. This thing . . . it walks like a man, talks like them for all we know. Its genes were sculpted and molded. It's not natural."

"What if it died in the Flood?" asked Pryn.

"Fine. It's dead." I stopped dragging her across the floor and looked at her instead.

And if it lived?, she asked, her hand tightening.

"Then," I said quietly, "I'll have to kill it. We can't allow it to live."

We? shrieked Pryn and ran for airlock as I stared at her, the tumblers of the ridiculous logic slowly clicked to constrict my panicked mind in their cold mechanical touch.

"Pryn, no?" I said desperately as the door slid shut. I ran for the door and pushed the button for the door to open, which it would after it had cycled Pryn. I tried to open the door with my hands but found no opening as water slowly danced into the other room. I banged savagely on the door and shouted, "I'm sorry, Pryn."

My fists slid down the smooth surface, and I turned back toward the desks. There was a tape on one that Pryn must have placed there. I listened to the lock recycling, then threaded the tape through the tape recorder. I sat down in the chair and smiled at my father's voice despite what had happened.

"Report for the Board of Directors upon Crossbreeding Experiment No. 103. The infant, named Deuca-

lion or Duke, has responded to all tests successfully. There is every indication that the experiment will be as successful as No. 57. The infant will not have to be destroyed as were the others."

The words trickled down my mind from my icicle spine as the magnetic tape went on with the dead man's thoughts.

"Using Director Noe Selchey's spermatazoa and a dolphin ovum carefully developed by radiation as in experiment No. 57, the fertilized egg was — "

I left my father talking so calmly about the intelligence of his adopted son. To be conceived out of wedlock is one thing but to be conceived mechanically in a test tube is another. I have passions and blood inside me . . . and now I find that the passions and blood spring from a cold marble top under the glare of bright surgical lights.

I grabbed my gun and entered the airlock, putting on my flippers and waiting impatiently during the recycling process. "Pryn," I shouted once but the thick shelter walls kept her name in with me. I swam out of the lock; and the small, memory-filled room where my identity stalked me in the dark waters. I swam up the stairs and over the skeleton at the doorway.

"Pryn," I shouted down the long corridors and snapped on my wrist light. Then it came like a hammer smashing into my mind like a pick.

"Kill-statement." Emotions rolled on green-oiled feet like those huge waves of the Flood. Fear. Revulsion. Then my soul crashed to the floor and my spine was ripped from my body. Contact, flesh to flesh. Blackness.

"Kill-question?" came a faint voice like Ollie's dipped in static.

"Affirmation-statement," said Ollie. I cursed the darkness and the mechanical reproduction that robbed voices of meaning.

I chinned Dolphin-transmit and shouted, "What's happening?" Then in silence I swore at the complex question.

I chinned Dolphin-transmit again and asked. "Danger-questions?"

"Kill-statement," came Ossie's cry.

"Brood-love (meaning one of us four), danger-question?" I asked.

"Kill-statement," was Ollie's only answer.

I swam down the corridors, ignoring any of the shapes that might linger in the shadows. I charged across the lobby and stared at the gaping hole where the door had been and the crushed masonry like a mound of skulls set upon the steps, I looked through the door and saw a large blot, fifteen feet high, in the distance. Its jelly-like sac was translucent and wrinkled with three clumps of tentacles set evenly on the sides. Near the top of the sac was a large eye. In one of the clumps of tentacles was a dark, pale slash that was Pryn.

"Kill-statement," cried Ossie and smashed into the creature's side. The creature whirled, its bulk too big for the Kids to move. Ossie darted away to circle above.

"Kill-statement," shouted Ollie and dove down, smashing into the creature's blind side; and the crea-

ture whirled frantically, trying to seize one of its tormentors.

"What's happening down there, Duke?" demanded Noe.

"Some monster's got Pryn," I said and raised my gun to fire.

"Kill-statement," chorused two shapes darting out of the night of the ocean to thud into the body flailing awkwardly at them.

"Does it resemble an octopus and does it have three bunches of arms on the sides?

"Yeah, and it looks as big as Alcatraz Island. Are you finished playing twenty questions?" I sighted at the shape, not wanting to hit Pyrn when it whirled. Two bullets like extensions of my eyes came smashing into the pale white flesh of the creature.

"Don't shoot," said Noe urgently. "It's your brother."

"I don't see any family resemblance," I said and swam closer to make sure my shot would be true.

"Kill-statement," cried the Kids and smashed down in a sheathing of small bubbles. The creature whirled again, raising small, obscuring clouds of muck.

"You're not completely human, Duke," said Noe.

"I heard the tape," I said and caught the sob almost coming out of my throat.

"I have no children," Noe went on, "and well, you know almost all of the rest. But I also provided irradiated spermatazoa for several other fertilizations. That's a fertilized octopus ovum."

"What experiment is he?" I demanded as the dirt clouds settled.

"Pryn is No. 57. Her success encouraged us. You're No. 103. Number 203 is your brother," said Noe. "From his size he grew since the Flood. Don't kill him, Duke. He's your flesh and blood."

I laughed harshly at that.

"Kill-statement," chorused the Kids again. And suddenly, over Noe's commands and the Kids' cries, revulsion, not the sick, twisted feeling of my half-heritage, but revulsion at the slick, strange creature in my arm-extensions. Then pain at the bullet creatures that whirled out of night and smashed into me. Hate for all the smooth-skinned creatures. Kill. From the mud and slime, I whirled but the elusive creatures darted away. Kill.

I raised my gun and fired. I watched the spear shoot straight for the Eye that watched in curiosity. Like Cain I watched the blood spurt from the wound I had made in my brother. Blood plumed out. Pain. I grasped my head with my free hand and hunched over. Pain. Red Pain. My life. Tender isolation. Abundant small smooth-skin creatures to feed me. The isolation broken. Hatred at the invaders. My lovely, lonely life in the darkness now flowing out of me. Pain.

The creature's sac swelled, and on a jet of water it shot deep into the blackness of the City; but it still held Pryn.

I tasted the blood oozing from the lips I had bit.

"Hurt-statement," said Ossie swimming toward me.

"Brood-love, danger, statement," I said chinning dolphin-transmit.

"Kill-question?" asked Ollie.

"Affirmative-statement," I said quietly, feeling the last vestiges of the alien thought-patterns leave my mind like memories.

"'You can't kill your own brother," pleaded Noe.

"Will you show some feeling, you fish?" I shouted.

"I am very broken up about it," said Noe, but the breather robbed it of any emotion.

"Then do something about it," I said and sat before Ollie's dorsal fin and we swam after Pryn.

"I can't do anything," replied Noe and he paused. "I love you all."

"Shut up!" I shouted to Noe.

Up ahead, dim in the light was a white sac. I shut my mind to the pain flowing from it like its blood. Then suddenly it swelled its cheeks as we neared and shot over the park toward the tall stalks of stone and steel. In my light we passed small streamers of blood, like ribbons tossed away and floating gently down.

On the edge of the business district it paused, then shot ahead to smash into a building, lodging for a moment in the hole it had made, then gently eased down the side of the building, the white cheek of Pryn held out free and safe from the building. We shot down toward the creature as it slumped limp upon the sidewalk. The Kids circled warily while I swam to the still form of Pryn. I felt her heart and its beating, then turned toward the creature.

The creature idly waved a clump of tentacles at me. All the turbulent thoughts of my ancestry and its tumbled away into the creature's mind. *Kill,* came the thought, tinged with regret. I placed a spear into my gun and swam toward it. *Pain. Kill. Stop.*

The creature opened its mouth below its eye. Inside the slit, a pink mouth showed, and a small row of white teeth.

Kill, came the plea. I squeezed the trigger and watched the spear enter and sink into the soft skin. The flap closed over the spear, sucking at the shaft. The creature convulsed. Flesh-to-flesh, question?

Hesitantly I reached a hand toward its skin. My own flesh felt as if it was crawling back up my arm, but I touched him.

Brood-love question? came the trembling thought, edged with black isolation, as the blood slowly extended feelers into the dark sea.

"Affirmation, brother," I said and the flicker of light died and the creature was still.

"Danger-statement," said Ossie.

"Negation-statement," I said and lifted my hand from my brother's puckered flesh.

"What's happening," asked Noe.

"I'm just cleaning up your messes," I said quietly. "Lower a hook."

"What for?" demanded Noe.

"So I can bury my brother," I snapped and then went to Pryn and swam up to the surface where the sunlight was still playing. Then with Ollie and Ossie's help I brought my brother up to fill the deck of the ship. I'd bury my brother on the land where he could be eaten by worms and enjoy his heritage.

V

I looked out at the light that flaked off from the sun, shrugging off Noe's questions and clumsy apologies. It seems that the Kids are my step-brother and step-sister on my mother's side, thank God. I laughed at the irony and then shuddered. I fought the urge of my hands to claw at my flesh, to pick out each atom of dolphin. I envied my brother who had taken death so calmly in the end, after the pain of living had been too great.

"Duke?" Pryn called, stirring at my feet. I stopped thinking about my new identity and took her groping hand from my ankle and treasured it between my half-human hands.

"I'm here," I said. And I shook in the wind that blew from the bay. I looked at the shattered eye, lid stopped from closing by the spear. A little red stream trickled down like the tears from mine. I wish I couldn't see.

What was that? she asked.

"Not what. Who," corrected. "It's my brother."

No, and I saw the horror in her face and felt her hand shrink for a second from mine. I knew how Pryn felt to be condemned for her ancestry. I laughed quietly, because what did that make me — who could neither be one way or the other?

"And I'm the same as he. I can't even claim your pure ancestry." I raised my head to the bloody-eyed sun and shook the tears from my eyes. "Why did you ever come to me on the wharf?"

What? Then her hand tightened on mine as she realized what I intended. *No,* she commanded as I raised the spear gun slowly to aim at my head.

"You can't stop me this time like you did before. I have better reasons now," I said quietly and pulled the trigger. Her hand grabbed at my arm but too late. I smiled triumphantly as the pain shelved my mind into a deep, dark secret folder and filed under B for Black. The Selchey Boys together.

My mind exists no more. Sense, pain, worry have been dropped away. Loneliness deeper than the shell my brother possessed in the Institute possesses me now. Waste and I feel regret. Eye, I will eyes for my regret and they open, to Pryn, shining like the sun over me.

Cold flowed into me. The darkness retreats, and the sadness mellows, hammers into images to be known and used later. I felt her arm sheltering me in its curves. Softly the barriers of my mind slip one by one before her; and I know, not loneliness, but a total new world, a world that belongs to Pryn, and I relax.

I felt the bandage on my head. "I'm not dead?" I asked stupidly.

She tapped a finger against my forehead. *Too dense,* she said and smiled. And I knew that she had been in time after all.

"All right," I said. I had come two thousand miles to find myself in the City and on the City I would build something new. The search begun on a wet hilltop; in the middle of the Flood the searcher is found. The symbols are calmed, not dead.

The cycle on the wharf at New Milpitas has neared its origin and terminal. Bye-bye, baby brother.

Man lives in the context of nature. He plays by the rule of the game but unlike other creatures, he can manipulate the game by changing the rules. Each alternation requires man to adjust again to the new game and on and on, ad infinitum. I've forgiven Noe because I understand the lonely man who hid in science, the way my brother hid in the Institute.

We won't be going back to the Institute for a while. Noe gave me the boat to use for our honeymoon but first we'll go to New Milpitas so I can make an honest woman of Pryn. She just pinched me for that . . . so here we go.

Noe won't have to do any more changing. I made him promise that if there are any new species created, Pryn and I will do it. Pryn's genes were completely re-constructed, as were mine. And if it's a matter of fertility, remember that fertility was never a problem on my side.

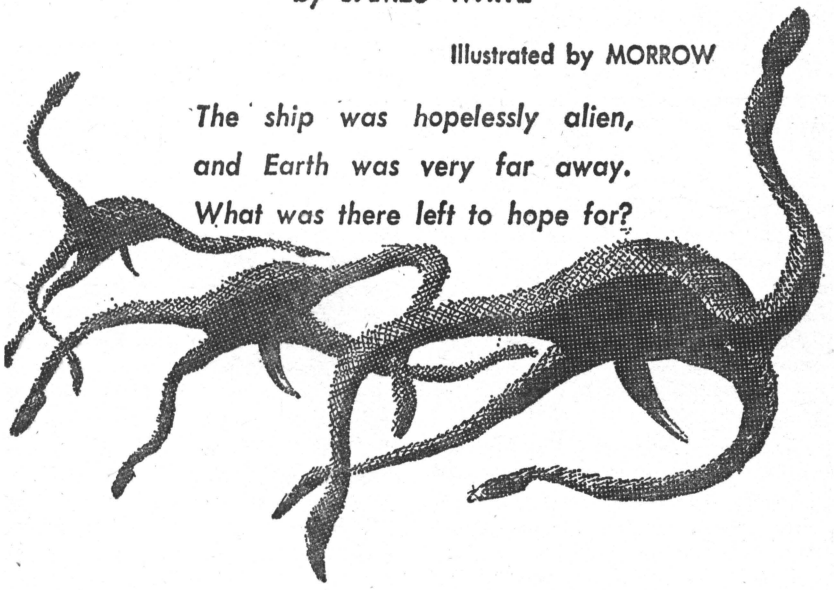
END

All Judgment Fled

by JAMES WHITE

Illustrated by MORROW

The ship was hopelessly alien, and Earth was very far away. What was there left to hope for?



WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

In the Spring of 1978 an alien spaceship enters the Solar System and takes up a near-circular orbit some sixty million miles from the Sun. Every major telescope, both astronomical and radio, which can be brought to bear is directed at the Ship, which neither signals nor replies in any delectable fashion to the signals being directed toward it. The Jupiter Probe, an unmanned observation satellite then on its way to the Jovian system, is sacrificed in an attempt to gather information on

the intruder. As a result there is relayed back to Earth a series of low-definition pictures of a vessel which is half a mile long and shaped like a blunt torpedo with a pattern of bulges encircling its mid-section.

The Ship orbits silently and, some think, implacably, like some vast battleship cruising off the coast of a tiny, backward island. Inevitably there are natives who want an even closer look; and two small, sophisticated dugout canoes are modified and readied for launching.

Choosing the men for the Prometheus Project is no easy task. If the human race is to derive the maximum benefit from this first contact with a highly advanced alien culture — always assuming, of course, that the extra-terrestrial crew is friendly — the six men must represent the widest possible spread of the social and physical sciences. In addition they must be capable of surviving the longest and most hazardous journey in human history and of asking the right questions at the end of it.

And so, despite the hundreds of eminent and respected scientists who volunteer for the trip, the final decision lies with the space medics. They insist on sending six men unknown in the higher scientific circles and respected only by their friends — four experienced astronauts and two who are still under training. These six will, it is thought, stand a fairly good chance of bringing home the bacon.

It is perhaps significant that none of the men chosen to crew the two P-ships are married.

In P-Two there is McCULLOUGH, a doctor and nominally a lieutenant colonel who has been undergoing training for MOL service, and veteran pilots Captain BERRYMAN and Major WALTERS. P-One's crew consists of Colonel MORRISON, the leader of the expedition, and Major DREW, both of whom are trained astronauts. The third man is Captain HOLLIS, a physicist engaged on ion-drive research. On Earth the project is headed by General BRADY.

During the voyage they are given lectures every day in the hope of preparing them for the widest possible contact with the aliens. There is no time to feel bored or even lonely. With the help of the two pilots McCULLOUGH finds himself adapting to the cramped living conditions. But the atmosphere in P-One is not quite so pleasant, and McCULLOUGH is requested by MORRISON to undertake an extended period of EVA involving a fifty-mile trip to the other ship in order to treat the physicist HOLLIS. On the P-One he becomes disoriented and is nearly lost.

When they eventually reach the Ship everything they do, say or see is relayed back to Prometheus Control, who in turn relay it to all the radio networks of the world. Practically every adult member of the human race is listening, and the excitement is intense. General BRADY tries to direct operations from Earth but does little more than worry out loud.

But the P-ship men need no reminding of the importance of what

they are about to do. They approach the Ship cautiously but openly, advertising their presence continuously with radio signals and flares. After nearly a day of this MORRISON, realizing that the aliens either can't or won't answer, orders WALTERS and McCULLOUGH to board the Ship.

The two men are able to operate one of the airlock actuators and spend several hours investigating the lock chamber, still without any reaction from the Ship's crew. They gain some valuable data on the aliens and their planet of origin. In an attempt to obtain a sample of the Ship's atmosphere they close the lock's outer seal and open the entrance to the corridor. WALTERS risks taking a look along the corridor and is attacked by a dimly seen, tentacled alien and has his spacesuit slashed. McCULLOUGH is sure that the alien atmosphere of the Ship will kill him, but discovers that the air is breathable.

WALTERS is moved back to the P-ships, which have now been joined together, in a borrowed spacesuit. He will not be able to leave his command module until they return home or until another suit is sent out to them, because they do not carry spares.

BRADY blames MORRISON and the others for mishandling the situation, and after a bitter argument it is decided that they will risk further offending the aliens by making one more visit to the Ship — HOLLIS insists that he can learn the operating principles of the vessel's propulsion system from a close study of its generating equipment, and that in any case the expedition has come too far just to turn and go home again. The result is a running fight with the alien crew members in which one of the extra-terrestrials is killed and the spacesuits of MORRISON, DREW and BERRYMAN are damaged beyond repair, which means that three men are now marooned aboard the alien ship.

Public reaction to the fight is both violent and confused. Because of the blow-by-blow radio coverage everyone at home feels personal involvment with the situation, and they have their own ideas how it should be handled. BRADY reflects the wildly vacillating public opinion so closely that at one point he threatens not to let the men have supplies or spare spacesuits unless they behave properly, but at the same time he can't or won't give clear-cut instructions on how they should handle the situation. McCULLOUGH loses his temper and tells the general that because he does not know what to do himself he is making scapegoats of the people at the Ship. He adds that as the men on the spot are experts, the only experts, on alien contact they should not have to give too much weight to the opinions of people sitting at desks sixty million miles away. He decides that it might be a good idea not to tell BRADY everything that happens . . .

During the five weeks it takes for the high-G supply rocket to reach them, McCULLOUGH, HOLLIS and the three marooned men

explore as much as possible of the alien ship. McCULLOUGH has performed an autopsy on the alien they killed and in addition much valuable technical information is passed to WALTERS for relaying home. MORRISON and a number of aliens are killed. The aliens are vicious, insensate killers who ignore all attempts at establishing communications. McCULLOUGH forms a theory about them and their ship — he thinks they may be the descendants of lab animals who have escaped and overrun the Ship, killing its crew and leaving the vessel to operate under automatic control. But this theory, he realizes, is in part merely an excuse to decrease the guilt he feels for the mess they have all made of the situation, and an equally feasible explanation might be that the Ship's crew or their descendants have devolved into savagery for some reason which is not yet clear and that they are not wholly responsible for their actions.

BRADY begins to suspect that certain things are being kept from him and brings psychological pressure to bear on WALTERS, who is now isolated on P-One while he mans the two-way radio link between the Ship and Earth. This angers McCULLOUGH and the marooned men even more because physically and emotionally they are all in poor shape.

On the Ship they uncover evidence which supports McCULLOUGH'S theory regarding the non-intelligence of the creatures infesting the vessel — a block of wrecked cages containing food and water-dispensing machinery — and the absence of intelligent extra-terrestrials, when suddenly they hear alien voices blaring at them from loudspeakers. Simultaneously a message reaches them from WALTERS to say that the vessel's propulsors are beginning to glow.

The Ship is leaving!

XV

For the first few seconds McCullough's feeling was one of outrage rather than fear. This was going too far, he thought; being marooned on the Ship, running short of water, under nearly constant attack by aliens, the deaths of Colonel Morrison and Drew. This was piling on the agony and taking misfortune to ridiculous extremes. The Ship *couldn't* be leaving!

But Berryman kept babbling on about Walters and the glow emanating from the interior of the transparent generator blisters and the interference which was being picked up by P-Two's radio, all of which indicated a steady build-up of power within the Ship. Then there was the constant gabbling of the Twos, the chiming, the alien voices and moaning sound pouring out of the wall speaker. If the Ship was leaving McCullough would be expected to do something about it, react in some fashion, make decisions, give orders now.

He couldn't.

The problem was too big and complicated for quick decisions and inspired leadership — at least, so far as he was concerned. He had to

put it into some sort of order in his mind, take time to consider the events in consecutive fashion and break the problem down, even though they might have no time at all. He must go back past Berryman's arrival to the time when Drew was alive.

McCullough's mind came to a sudden halt at that point and ground into reverse. Drew might very well be still alive. Now that he had time to think about it the more likely it became. He pointed at the mesh and at Drew and tried to speak.

What he wanted to say was that the mesh was electrified and they should stay clear of it, and that Drew's weapon had touched it while the haft was in contact with the floor, so that the flash had been a short along the shaft of the spear. He wanted to tell them that in his opinion the mesh was not too highly charged — the way he saw it there should be just enough kick in it to keep the captive animals under control — and in any case Drew had been wearing his suit gauntlets which would give him added protection. Considering the gauntlets and the fact that the discharge had gone through the weapon and not by way of Drew's body, he tried to say, there was a good chance that prompt resuscitation measures would save him. But all he could do was stammer and point. He could not make them understand or even hold their attention.

Hollis shouted something at him, but a chime from the speaker a few inches from McCullough's ear kept him from hearing what the physicist had said. But Berryman was closer to Hollis and replied. Hollis pulled Drew's weapon out of the air and added it to the one already in his hand, shouted something at McCullough, then launched himself back in the direction from which they had just come. Berryman looked from the physicist's fast disappearing feet to McCullough and back again, waved and followed.

It had been impossible to hear what either of them had been saying over the cacophony of chimes, moaning, squabbling Twos and the alien duet.

McCullough could understand Hollis running away. The physicist was wearing one of the two remaining undamaged spacesuits, and there was a chance that he could make it to the airlock and to the P-ships in time. But why was the pilot running away? Surely Berryman did not think that he could take Hollis's suit away from him, after fighting him for it and knocking him unconscious? The only result of such a fight would be another ruptured spacesuit.

Not knowing what to think and feeling bitterly disappointed in both of them, McCullough opened his visor and dived slowly toward Drew. In the weightless condition and with an electrified mesh just a few feet away there was only one method of resuscitation possible. McCullough did his best to ignore the alien voices rattling at him from the speaker, the gobbles and wheeping sounds coming from the Twos and the all-pervading moaning and

chiming. He concentrated instead on administering the Kiss of Life to the dead or unconscious Drew.

But finding Drew's mouth was like ducking for apples in a tub of water at Halloween. The pilot's head kept bobbing away and rolling flabbily about inside his helmet. Finally, by sliding one hand carefully into the helmet and supporting the back of Drew's neck with his fingers, McCullough was able to press the other's face forward into the visor opening.

Results came quickly after that. Gasping and choking and struggling like a drowning man, Drew began to come to. He flung one arm around McCullough's neck so tightly that the doctor thought his helmet would come off and possibly his head as well. He was able to hold Drew clear of the electrified mesh until the pilot settled down, then he detached the arm from around his neck.

For some reason McCullough was feeling unusually well disposed toward the pilot. Possibly this was because he might have been instrumental in saving the other's life and this made him feel a vaguely God-like possessiveness and concern for this life he might have saved. As well, there was the fact that Drew would be the only company available if the other two did not come back. And after everything the pilot had been through he did not want to add to Drew's troubles by telling him that the Ship was leaving, even though every instinct he possessed seemed to be urging him to get to the nearest airlock and jump for the P-ships while he had the chance. Drew was mumbling something at him, looking very awkward and embarrassed.

Obviously the chimes and alien voices were some kind of pre-take-off warning. While they continued, which they were, there was still a chance for him to leave the Ship.

"I can't hear you," he said hurriedly to the pilot. "But there's no need to thank me. You probably wouldn't have died anyway."

"You mustn't think I meant it personally," Drew broke in, speaking loudly but with his awkwardness still very much in evidence. "It was just that your hand and your mouth . . . I mean, there was a girl at home who . . . who . . . . For a minute I thought . . . . Damnit, Doc, I don't want you thinking I'm some kind of pervert or anything!"

Get out of here! screamed a voice in McCullough's mind, while another pointed out the ridiculous, almost insane humor of the situation and urged him to laugh — while yet another voice, calmer and more clinical, reminded him that so far as Drew was concerned this was a very serious matter and he should avoid hurting the pilot's feelings.

"The thought," said McCullough with the ring of absolute truth and sincerity in his voice, "never entered my mind. But if you look in the enclosure you'll see the Twos are beginning to lose interest in their feeding. We had better leave before they see us."

"What hapened to my spear?" said Drew. "Where are Hollis and Berryman? It is very bad tactics to

split up our force like this, sir!"

Drew was his old self again, obviously, and McCullough felt less hesitation about passing on the bad news of the Ship leaving and the desertion of Hollis and Berryman. But he was saved the trouble. Berryman was with them again, hanging onto the wall-net and trying to talk and catch his breath at the same time.

He was giving Drew a startled, I-I-didn't-expect-to-see-you-alive-again sort of look while he spoke to McCullough. He said, "Sorry for leaving you . . . without permission . . . just now. I got excited and took off . . . without thinking. When you gave Captain Hollis the idea for . . . for shorting the generator with the metal spears . . . he told me he needed help. He still does, inside the blister. You have the only other working spacesuit, sir. We haven't much time . . . . "

Until then McCullough had not been aware that he had given an idea to anyone. But he realized at once what Hollis was try to do because they had discussed just this eventuality several times. In general, that was. He would have to wait until they reached the generator blister to see what particular form of sabotage the physicist had been able to devise.

On the way they surprised a not quite fully grown Two at an intersection. Being unarmed, Drew and Berryman grabbed two tentacles each, twisted their feet into the wall-net and swung it hard and repeatedly against a projecting bracket until its carapace split and it stopped moving. Berryman looked slightly sick; and Drew, who had devised this particular method of unarmed combat, muttered something about neatness and dispatch.

McCullough wondered why such complimentary terms were used to describe such a vicious and despicable act. But with every wall-speaker erupting chimes and a continuous alien gabble and with the knowledge that all around them the generators which could whisk them away to some alien solar system building up to full power, it was impossible to behave in an ethical and moral manner. It was impossible, McCullough thought cynically, because so very few human beings were capable of such behavior in the present circumstances, and if enough people considered it impossible so it was.

For four frightened astronauts read fifty million Frenchmen who could not be wrong, and for fifty million Frenchmen read the whole human race . . . .

For a moment the thought came to him of traveling an unguessable number of light-years to another solar system, of seeing an alien world and its culture and having contact with true, extra-terrestrial intelligences — even if only briefly, as an animal they might consider of too little interest or importance to keep alive. The idea of not helping the physicist, of ordering Hollis to cease attempting to sabotage the generator, came. And was hurriedly rejected. The sudden, awful wonder of his original thought was quickly overwhelmed by fear.

They passed quickly through the lock chamber and the inter-hull space where their first major brush with the Twos had occurred, and on to the lock which gave access to the generator blister. Hollis' legs showed in the transparent panel of the inner seal.

As McCullough was joining him, Berryman placed his antenna against the bulkhead and said, "Walters is pulling away under steering power, Doctor. Hollis says there are likely to be gravitational side effects if the Ship generators reach full power. He says the P-ships might be sucked in and suggested that Walters move out to at least five miles, so that someone would be able to tell Earth what happened to the rest of us . . . ."

Listening to him, McCullough wondered: if the sabotage attempt was unsuccessful, and if he wasn't killed by it, and if he could get to an airlock in time, would he be able to launch himself toward Walters and the P-ships — even if the alien vessel was already moving away? Angrily, he wondered why he had not simply broken away from Drew and Berryman on the way here and used a lock chamber to leave the Ship. He had thought about it — but had not seriously considered doing it.

There was no shame attached to admitting that one was a coward, he thought cynically, just as long as one did not prove it.

Inside the blister it was deathly quiet. The interference in their suit radios was so bad that they had to switch off and communicate by touching helmets. Hollis's voice came to him with a booming, indistinct quality about it, but McCullough could make it out.

The physicist said, "I'm assuming that for faster-than-light travel all of the Ship's generators must be in balenced operation, and that one malfunctioning generator will cause the others to cut out and immobilize the vessel. I know enough about the power supply lines — which inside the blister are not insulated, as you can see — to blow this generator. But the result might be catastrophic for the Ship and would certainly be fatal for anyone in the immediate vicinity, which is us.

"So instead of shorting the main power supply," Hollis went on, "I propose grounding the relatively much lower control and input balancing system — those lopsided, figure-of-eight thingummies with the blue ceramic end pieces which are, I'm fairly sure, somewhat analogous to the grid of an old-fashioned radio tube. There are one of the things attached to every major piece of equipment in the blister, and I've picked out what I think are two of the most vital sections of the generators. This is what we must do . . . ."

A lopsided, figure-of-eight thingummy, thought McCullough, and wondered whatever had become of the precise and rarefied language of science in which Hollis was usually so bewilderingly fluent. He would pull the physicist's leg about it — afterward. If there was an opportunity afterward.

They planned a simultaneous, double act of sabotage. The generators had been building up to their full operating potential for nearly twenty minutes; there could not be very much time left to do something. The visual effects from some of the gadgetry around him were becoming quite flamboyant. As McCullough crawled toward his assigned position, sheets of slow pink lightning curled and rippled silently all around him. His spear acquired a pale blue corona, and his hair kept rising and discharging against the inside of his helmet. Every few yards magnetic eddies tugged at his weapon or the metal parts of his suit, seeking to dislodge him from the insulated catwalk and draw him into a premature act of sabotage that would certainly kill him and quite possibly wreck the whole Ship.

For reasons which were both selfish and altruistic McCullough did not want that to happen. He wanted his own skin and the Ship to suffer the minimum of damage. He realized suddenly that although he was terribly afraid for his own immediate safety he was furiously angry about the things they had done and were doing on the Ship. From the very beginning they had no control of the situation. It had been a stupid if well-intentioned muddle. And while they had changed their minds several times when new data became available they had not really used their brains. They had been panicked into things. They had not allowed themselves time to think. And when threatened with danger they thought only of survival.

All things considered, as a sampling of the species Homo so-called Sapiens they had not made a good showing.

Suddenly McCullough was in position, looking across at Hollis, who was making slow, pushing motions with one hand. The physicist was reminding him that they did not have to throw the weapons, merely launch them slowly and accurately. While he watched Hollis held up three fingers. The silence was incredible. McCullough was holding his breath, but his pulse was thunderous and he could almost hear himself sweating. Hollis showed two fingers, one finger, then a balled fist. McCullough gently launched his spear at the target that had been assigned to him.

The weapon which had once served as part of P-Two's launcher tube was just long enough to make contact with both the figure-of-eight grid and a nearby metal bulkhead, and for the first few seconds of its travel it looked as if it would do so. But then it wobbled suddenly as one of the magnetic eddies caught it, swinging it off course. One end touched the grid, and the other swung toward a fat, coppery spiral with a bright blue halo flickering around it. McCullough gripped the catwalk tightly and managed to get his eyes closed just in time.

Even with the filtering effects of tightly closed eyelids the flash was blinding. Every nerve in his body received a jolt that was neither pleasure, pain, pressure, heat or cold but was much worse than anything

he had ever felt before in all his life. He stiffened so violently that he bounced away from the catwalk. He felt something tugging at one boot and the fear of being drawn in and electrocuted overcame his shocked paralysis. He pulled both knees up and made frantic swimming motions in an attempt to get away. But the tugging persisted. McCullough blinked furiously to dissolve the blotches covering his field of vision and saw that Hollis was griping his boot and was towing him toward the safety of his airlock.

By the time he was through, his eyes were almost back to normal. He could see that the interior of the generator blister was again dull and lifeless. There were no chimes reverberating along the corridors. The alien voices were silent.

With the interference gone, Walters was trying to contact them, saying that he had seen a flash or an explosion and were any of them alive. As soon as he had his visor open Drew began advising him strongly to establish a base in the adjacent lock chamber with a view to discouraging any alien repair crew sent to rebuild the sabotaged generator.

But McCullough's mind was still on an earlier train of thought. Bitterly, he said, "We're nothing but a bunch of stupid, well-intentioned bunglers! Surely, as intelligent beings, we could have evaluated and entered a strange situation — even an alien stress situation — without making it so much worse that . . . that . . . . "

He left the sentence dangling, then went on furiously, "We *know* there are intelligent aliens on this ship. Damnit, we've heard them *talking!* To them we must look like a race of juvenile delinquents or worse. We must get out, leave the Ship at once. I'll request the next supply rocket to carry spacesuits and food only. With the water supply we've discovered this will mean that we can leave shortly after it arrives."

"And our intelligent, extra-terrestrial crew, what about them?" Hollis broke in scathingly. "They have not shown themselves up to now — at least we're fairly sure they haven't. Why not? Are they in some kind of trouble, or are there too few of them to risk it? Are we going to leave them to do the best they can with a Two-infested crippled Ship?"

"We aren't delinquents and we're not stupid!" Berryman said angrily. "If your e-ts are as intelligent as you say, Doctor, they will realize that everything we did came about as a result of the local situation and scientific curiosity allied to normal survival instincts! If they can't understand anything as simple as that then they're stupid, too stupid to have built this Ship! But they did build it and so . . . . "

"Kill every bloody one of them!" yelled Drew. "Wipe the buggers out!"

It was Walters who had the last word. Deafeningly, apologetically, with his volume of his transmitter turned right up he said, *"I will set up to re-broadcast your last words as the Ship carried you out of the Solar System to some dire, extra-ter-*

restrial fate. This spirited exchange of ideas is being overheard by all the world.

"I don't think the general will approve of some of the *language* . . ."

XVI

On Earth there was only one subject which, day by day and hour by hour, merited serious discussion and that was the War on the Ship.

In this war there were no neutrals and no unaligned powers, even though the people who made up the nations and even the individual families were aligned several different ways at the same time. Everyone knew about the war, of course. There were very few who did not find it interesting, at least, while others found it so all-absorbing and exciting that they were quite willing to argue and demonstrate and burn embassy buildings over it. But the majority of people were simply worried about the safety of the men on the Ship and concerned over the many things they seemed to be doing wrong.

Everything the men said or did was, from someone's point of view, wrong.

Those scientists who thought of their specialties as being "hard" insisted that more Ship time be devoted to gathering detailed information or structural methods and design philosophy, the operating principles and distribution of the vessel's power sources and more, much more, data on what everyone so loosely referred to as the hyper-drive generators and the ship's central control system. Then the scientists who were less hard — although not quite as soft as the Psychology crowd — wanted more time spent in gathering information on extra-terrestrial biology and metabolism, environmental factors and e-t life-support systems. *They* wanted autopsies performed on specimens other than the Two. But it was the psychologists and their equally "soft" relatives in sociology and anthropology who seemed to be the least demanding and at the same time the most positive in their recommendations.

For the psychologists were having a long succession of field days. Not only were minor and major Ship incidents studied and evaluated and discussed at great length, every single recorded word and inflexion was subjected to a most rigorous analysis. So much so that on one occasion a short, odd-sounding laugh from Walters threw one group of space medics into a near panic for three days until they discovered that the high, uneven pitch of the pilot's voice, so suggestive of hysteria and imminent crackup, was due to natural distortion in the incoming signal.

Despite the dropping of an occasional brick the psychologist's picture of conditions on the Ship, the interaction of the characters involved, the general emotional and moral climate and the unique environmental pressures to which the men were being subjected, was reasonably complete and accurate and their recommendations sound.

At least, the psychologists considered them so . . . .

The majority of these psychological discussions were broadcast on radio and TV, of course, as was practically everything pertaining to the Ship. But there was one group whose recommendations, by their very nature, could not be made public — even, and especially, if their recommendations were to be adopted.

This group suggested that since the emotional situation arising out of the environmental conditions on the Ship was known in broad outline and the psychological makeup of the men currently inhabiting it was available in great detail, it should be possible to devise certain stimuli which would return a large measure of control to the Prometheus authorities instead of allowing it to remain in the hands and ethically confused minds of men who were too close to their problem to have a balanced appreciation of it. They insisted that the problem was basically one of psychological maladjustment and was solely their responsibility. And as they were the people who would have to solve it they did not think it fair that they should have this responsibility without also being given a measure of control over the situation.

They also mentioned the fact that the position of the Sun with respect to Earth and the P-ships would very shortly make direct communication impossible. Outgoing messages, which hitherto had been receivable only by the P-ships, as well as incoming signals would have to be relayed through the Russian circum-Venus station. The Russians were being very generous with their facilities. But they would know every word that passed in each direction and would undoubtedly use the information gained to their own advantage, to complicate an already over-complicated political situation. For this reason alone a decision on recommendations should be taken as soon as possible.

Then for the younger, less emotionally mature the Ship had replaced all the variations of Cowboys and Indians. Day after day all over the world, Walters had his suit slashed by the first Two, Colonel Morrison met his grisly death and McCullough, who was a difficult and unsatisfactory character for children to portray, moved around doing nothing, apparently, but change his mind.

Between the children and the eggheads lay the tremendous multitude who were only moderately adult and whose intelligence was average. These were the people who listened avidly to what they referred to as the War News and who greedily absorbed every fact and speculation that came from the more well informed commentators on the radio and TV — even though many of them must have been aware that the commentators could not possibly be more well informed than their listeners.

They watched closely while the latest photographs and sketches — tidied up and dramatized a little for TV presentation — were discussed

by panels of scientists from every field of knowledge and every degree of eminense. They listened to so many analyses, theories and predictions, they were exposed to so many different opinions and viewpoints and ethical yardsticks in so short a space of time, that they were forced either to choose sides, or to make up their own minds as to what was right or wrong or politically expedient.

Some of them reacted by breaking windows and overturning cars, or agitated for the Twos to be brought under the protection of the UNO or the USPAC or started funds for sending comforts for the troops, well aware of the utterly fantastic cost of sending even an ounce of comfort to those fifty-million-miles-distant warriors. But there were others, not a great number to begin with, who went through the intensely uncomfortable business of thinking for themselves . . . until the realization came that their world had changed, that it was no longer *the* world but just *a* world, with all that that implied.

But this small but rapidly growing faction was only one of the many pressure groups who felt they had a say in the control Prometheus.

The original idea in making every phase of the project open to the public had been to arouse interest in spaceflight generally and to gain the support of the voters for the enormous cost of the hardware — in short, a large-scale PR job. It was a noble project which had, unfortunately, to be paid for by people who were not all noble. But now Prometheus had gone sour. Its Ship-side personnel seemed to be devolving into vicious and sadistic killers, while back at home nobility was breaking out in some of the most unlikely places.

On Earth as well as on the Ship, Prometheus was getting out of control.

" . . . *While you were hunting for Ship water and hamstringing that generator,*" General Brady's voice rattled at them, "*you had to be rough on the aliens and their equipment. We aren't entirely blaming you for this, but we think you are exercising far too much initiative. Public opinion is hardening against you and against Prometheus as a whole, even though the majority are still being thrilled by the 'war' and the exploits of their scientists heroes. But this is a temporary, unstable, even sick, reaction. There is a steady growing body of opinion which is openly critical of your behavior. It accuses you, and through you us, of behaving like barbarians! It insists that you are doing little more than looting the Ship of its scientific booty.*

"*This has got to stop!*"

A radio from one of the damaged suits floated near the outer wall of the lock chamber, attached to the plating by its antenna lead. The natural distortion caused by the helmmet phones being overloaded so as to act as loudspeakers was increased by the anger in General Brady's voice, which carried clearly over fifty million miles.

". . . *We have begun the count-*

down for a multiple launch — three high-acceleration vehicles containing food and extra spacesuits only. Until they arrive seven weeks from now you will sit tight and do nothing! Your only activity will be collecting and storing Ship water for the return trip.

"Establish a base in one of the lock chambers close to the P-ships and defend it if necessary, but not by taking the offensive! Try using your ingenuity to avoid killing Twos now, and do not molest them or injure them in any way even if they begin repairing the generator! Quite a few of us here are far from convinced that the Two life-form is in fact the non-intelligent animal you say it is. Exploration of the Ship will cease forthwith and you will cease trying to experiment with its power and control systems. Neither will you endanger yourselves, and quite possibly the future of our society, by attempting to communicate with the intelligent aliens who may be on the Ship . . . ."

Berryman reached out quickly and turned the volume down to a whisper. He looked from McCullough to Drew and Hollis and then back again. His smile was all too plainly forced as he said, "Considering all that the general has just said, the action we are contemplating is tantamount to mutiny."

Hollis said, "I agree." They both looked and sounded frightened, as if they were having second thoughts.

"He doesn't know what he's talking about," said Drew angrily. "Either that or he doesn't believe what we've told him!"

And there is a really uncomfortable idea, thought McCoullough, then went on quickly, "These orders are harsh, inflexible and ill-considered. In a short time they will, like the earlier ones, be amended and qualified. We'll still be forbidden to kill Twos — unless circumstances make it absolutely necessary. Exploration will be allowed — within certain limits which will not be clearly defined. It will be suggested that we obtain further data on the hyperdrive generators — if this can be done without upsetting the aliens, or without running *too* great a risk of upsetting the aliens. Gradually the orders will contain so many qualifiers we will be back in square one, but with our self-confidence reduced and our tempers drastically shortened."

Cynically, McCullough went on, "Instead of being heroes it seems we are to become scapegoats — at least, that is the way it looks to me. But this means that we will have to be allowed some freedom of action. Otherwise they would not be able to blame us for everything that is happening."

"In other words," said Drew grimly, "if we can't please anyone we can at least try to please ourselves."

Hollis said doubtfully, "He wasn't at all sympathetic about our troubles. And it is only three days since the colonel died, and he didn't mention him at all. But suggesting that we will be held responsible for everything is going too far, don't you think?"

"Perhaps," said McCullough. "But you agree that if *we* are too


U.S.A.

close to the problem, *they* are much too far away?"

The three men nodded in turn, and suddenly Berryman laughed. He said, "This must be the first mutiny in history where the captain is the ringleader!"

He broke off as the quality of the whisper coming from the phones altered. At McCullough's nod he turned up the volume again.

" . . . *And he has no real appreciation of the harm his anger and hostility toward you can cause,*" said a low, sympathetic, female voice. It went on, "*In terms of physical distance alone you must feel cut off, separated, even rejected by your friends and perhaps even your race. In a very real sense you have withdrawn from reality, you have lost touch with the world and life as it should be lived. The psychic disturbance, the emotional dislocations, the constant and cumulative frustration of even the simplest natural urges — even the act of eating and drinking is artificial and unnatural where you are concerned — is more than enough without adding the terrible responsibility of First Contact.*

"*I don't mean to suggest that any of you have reached the point of major instability,*" she went on warmly, "*or that you are not quite sane. I do suggest, however, that your judgment and reactions are seriously affected by your present situation and may no longer be entirely trustworthy. This is what is bothering the general, too, because he is being held responsible for everything that you people think to do, and every minority group in the world is trying to pressure him into taking fifty mutually exclusive courses of action! We all admit he's a genius where astronautics hardware and logistics are concerned, but let's face it, fellows, he is no psychologist . . .*"

McCullough switched off the radio feeling angry and a little frightened. What idiot had been responsible for turning a woman psychologist loose on the Prometheus Control transmitter? Previously there had been no mention whatsoever of the mental effects of separation in time and space from the world of normal existence. When such effects had become manifest they had been ignored — the P-ship personnel had been treated as if they were on an extended EVA and their distance was five hundred miles from home rather than fifty million.

Emotionally they had been made to feel very close to home. Continuous radio contact plus the knowledge that practically everyone in the world was sharing their experiences and feeling concern for them were just two of the factors aimed at achieving this, and there were probably others which only the space medics knew about. But whoever had allowed a psychologist ignorant of these factors, especially such a disturbingly female one as this, to talk to them and cause them to question their own sanity was either stupid or criminally irresponsible.

"Walters is listening," said McCullough. "He can tell us if she says anything really important. Right now I'd like you to listen to this

tape again. I have another theory."

For several minutes the sounds of their dash from the Twos' enclosure to the generator blister filled the lock chamber. McCullough asked them to pay particular attention to the two alien voices. When the playback was complete he said, "In my opinion the first voice is a recording transmitted in conjunction with the warning chimes. Each group of word-sounds is identical in tone, volume and length of transmission. The second voice is none of these things. Its overall tone is different, volume and inflexion vary enormously; and the message transmitted by the first voice is repeated, after a fashion, by the second. Perhaps I should say that the message is not so much repeated as parodied by the second voice.

"I feel that certain words are repeated too often for it to be an intelligent communication. It is as if one word in a sentence was repeated twenty times and sung in different keys. Many of the sounds seem to be sheer organic noise and sense-free — you have heard them.

"My new theory," McCullough went on, looking at the three men in turn, "is supported by all the facts. Briefly it is that the alien crew have no effective control of their vessel, that its operation is almost entirely automatic and that the experimental animals have overrun the ship. The second alien voice belongs to one of the crew, or perhaps a descendant of the original crew, and it is an intelligent being. However, it is not at present a rational being.

While he had been talking McCullough found that his finger had instinctively gone to the suit radio switch. There was some vague idea in his mind of putting in a full report to Control and shifting responsibility by calling Earth for a second opinion. But Brady's opinions would not be helpful, McCullough knew from short and bitter experience, and he himself had insisted many times that the people on the Ship were better informed on all aspects of the situation and should therefore make their own decisions. He could have Walters send a full report, or even a slightly edited report, later.

Firmly McCullough took his hand and mind off the radio.

XVII

Joined by their command module airlocks the two P-ships were positioned a few yards above the generator blister so that Walters would be able to detect any attempt to repair the human-inflicted damage. The arrival of an alien repair crew was not considered likely, but the presence of Walters on watch meant that everyone else would be gainfully employed inside the Ship on what McCullough referred to as wide-angle cultural contact and Drew, with more honesty, called an offensive patrol.

Their real purpose, no matter what they chose to call it or how much double-thinking they did around it, was to kill Twos. They would also hunt down and exterminate any other alien life-form which might prove dangerous to the intelli-

gent extra-terrestrials on the Ship or themselves.

"Thanks to the doctor we know all their vital spots," Drew said as they were preparing to leave their hull lock chamber, "and provided we keep cool and pause for the necessary instant to take proper aim, killing the beasts will be relatively easy. But we should not take on more than one of them at a time unless we have the advantage of a solid defensive position. This isn't very sporting since there are four of us, but we cannot afford casualities."

McCullough was listening to Drew but thinking about Walters. One did not have to be a psychologist to know that the pilot was close to the breaking point. Even though he was in the least physical danger of all, Walters was in one respect absorbing more punishment than any of them. Prometheus Control, General Brady and assorted space medical people were continually hammering at him, he being the only member of the expedition they could talk to with any chance of getting an immediate reply. And because he was the only one available, Brady was being much tougher on Walters than the situation really warranted. The general was trying to get through to McCullough and the others, but all the anger and recriminations and outright threats sounded as if they were being directed at Walters alone.

McCullough no longer communicated direct with the general — he was usually too busy in the Ship and Walters was in a position to pass on any new or constructive suggestions if there were any. This was, he knew, very unfair to the pilot since he frequently had to wait days for the chance to do so, days during which he could never be sure whether the other men in the ship were alive or dead. When, at the conclusion of a particularly bad session with Brady, one of the cosmonauts on the circum-Venus station, which was now relaying all transmissions added a few words wishing him luck, Walters's reaction was both revealing and quite unexpected in a grown man.

The pilot needed company. McCullough or Hollis, the only two who had operational spacesuits, should have visited him more often. But somehow there was never time. Something was always happening in the Ship . . . .

The doctor became aware suddenly that the lock entrance was open and Drew was beside it, saying ". . . And remember, this is not a game. If anyone feels like treating it as one they should remind themselves that the nearest hospital is sixty million miles away."

On the way to the animal enclosure they encountered — singly — three of the tentacled aliens and killed them. Since it was now generally accepted that the Twos were non-intelligent lab animals the job had been performed with efficiency and, McCullough noted, quite a lot of enthusiasm. Drew had noticed it, too, and he kept repeating his warnings about thinking of the operation as a game until they reached the cages, and would probably have continued if McCullough had not cut him short.

"I agree with Drew," he said firmly. "We must be entirely cold-blooded about this. But before we put our plan into effect I would like to gain a better idea of their physical capabilities. To begin with, how did they break out?"

It was between meal-times for the e-ts so they had a chance to search the area thoroughly.

The animals' quarters occupied a cylindrical volume of space roughly eighty yards in length and twenty in diameter. It was divided into pens of various sizes by heavy wire mesh stretched between a framework of tubing, so that the caged animals were always in sight of anyone in the four personnel corridors which ran fore and aft along the sides of the enclosure.

It seemed that the food and water dispensers also differed in size and complexity and were fitted to the common wall between two cages so as to serve both. Some of the cages were still occupied by drifting, desiccated carcasses whose edible parts were missing.

From the condition of the bodies, the damage to large areas of the restraining mesh and the condition of the food dispensers, they were able to obtain a fairly good idea of what had happened.

One or more of the dispensers had failed. Whether the failure was due to a design fault or the rough eating habits of the animals concerned was impossible to say. But the result was an attack on the wire mesh, a successful attack in most cases, which had forced an opening into the operating dispensers in adjacent cages or into enclosures containing smaller edible life-forms. The transfer of animals between cages had so increased the demand on the remaining dispensers that they, too, had broken down until only a few machines were still operating. An attempt had been made to control the mass breakout by electrification of sections of the wire mesh, but this had been a hasty, jury-rigged installation which had also totally broken down in several places.

Judging by the condition of the bodies, the majority of the other animals had been unable to defend themselves against the terrible horn and tentacles of the Twos, although a small number must have escaped through gaps torn in the mesh. Otherwise there would have been only one species infesting the Ship. But there was one large, caterpillar-like animal who had never had a chance. All McCullough could tell from its remains was that it had no skeleton to speak of, its body being surrounded by great bands of muscle. Its head section, which was heavily boned, contained four manipulators or feelers of some kind in addition to the usual sensory equipment. Its hide was pale gray and very smooth, like that of a walrus.

In a nearby enclosure, however, the Twos had met something which even they could not stand against. For a long time McCullough and the others stared at the drifting Two carcasses, stripped of all edible tissue so that little more than the bony carapace remained, and at the cluster of tiny holes punched through the half-inch thick shell.

It was Berryman who spoke first.

"And now," he said gravely, "we are looking for an emotionally disturbed alien with a machine-gun . . . ."

But they all had far too much to do before the Twos began arriving for lunch to give this new development the discussion it deserved.

The first step was to disconnect the wiring from the electrified sections of mesh — during a battle with the Twos would not be a good time to be accidentally electrocuted. Then from the small or more damaged food dispensers they stripped lengths of cable and metal piping and threaded these into the torn sections of mesh, repairing and reinforcing their cage's sides and barring its severely warped doors. They did not make any provision for evacuation if their plan went wrong, although it was obvious that they were all thinking about it while they worked and talked loudly about the probable effects of shutting off the Ship's animals from what must be the only source of food and water.

All the other dispensers had been wrecked, accidentally by the Twos or deliberately by the men.

"Poisoning them would be safer," said Berryman when their cage had been made as secure as possible, "if we knew what was toxic to them. And if we had some of it."

"Too slow," said McCullough.

"Six inches of cold aluminum alloy," said Drew, "is toxic to everything."

"Company," said Hollis.

Three of the tentacled e-ts and a pair of the white-furred flying carpets had arrived and were heading toward their cage. It became a civil war almost at once.

As soon as the furry Type Three came within striking distance a Two lashed out with its tentacle, the bony tip ripping a six-inch gash in the white fur. While the Three flapped helplessly in the center of the corridor the Two steadied itself against the mesh and launched a second and more deadly attack, this time criss-crossing the pelt with deep and visibly widening channels which oozed bright red. The Three began to undulate rapidly until it was fluttering like a thick, bloody flag in a high wind. Then suddenly it was just a tattered, lifeless rag; and its attacker, a very messy eater, began to feed.

Meanwhile the second Two was not having things all its own way. Somehow the furry animal had managed both to evade its attacker's tentacles and to attach itself to the Two's unprotected back where those four deadly weapons could not be brought to bear. At first McCullough thought he was seeing the e-t version of the old adage about holding a tiger by the tail, but then he saw that the furry body of the Three was squeezing down and between the roots of the threshing tentacles where the Two's eyes were situated, blinding it, and then extending further onto and across the underbelly until it blocked the breathing apertures.

When the Two was dead the furry animal did not try to eat it, but instead undulated over to the mesh. Possibly it was a vegetarian.

During the fight the unoccupied Two had attacked the mesh, probing

and worrying and slapping at it with horn and tentacles, then bouncing back to the corridor wall net to hurl itself carapace first like a living cannonball against the wire. McCullough had wondered how the animals had been able to break out of their cages in the first place, since the security arrangements had seemed adequate for such a relatively small life-form, but as the mesh twanged and bulged inward under the onslaught of this single, angry specimen he was no longer puzzled. Finally the Two, tired of beating its head against the mesh, insinuated couple of feet of one of its tentacles in an attempt to pull the wire apart.

Immediately Drew gripped the tentacle, planted both feet firmly against the mesh and pulled the Two hard against the wire while the spear in his other hand drove forward in a single, twisting, lethal stab. The beast's tentacles thrashed briefly and were still, then there was another Two charging the mesh, and another.

The dispenser began making soft, chuffing sounds. It emitted a slow, untidy jet of water from a spigot, which had had its teat chewed off, and a series of gray round objects of the size and shape of a large orange. They had the consistency of porridge, Berryman reported when one of them hit the side of his head, and added that the smell and taste — it had splattered forward onto his nose and lips — were not entirely unpleasant.

They became too busy to talk shortly after that, and the job of killing Twos was not as easy as Drew had made it appear.

They were badly hampered by weightlessness, which forced them either to hold onto a Two or to twist their feet through the mesh to use their spears effectively. But very often the Twos presented far too many tentacles, and anchoring themselves by twisting a foot into the mesh was asking to have it smashed by the hard tip of a tentacle or impaled on a horn. Without some form of support their aim suffered and most of the force behind their thrusts was expended on getting through the mesh, so that what little remained was enough only to push the Twos away and inflict superficial injuries if any. The reaction from such a lunge sent the men spinning helplessly so that they were in as much danger from the spears of their friends as from the horns of the Twos.

"This is a stupid plan," gasped McCullough as he knocked away a spear which was coming at his face.

"Since it was your plan," said Berryman from the other side of the cage, "I must decline to comment."

"Hold still, everyone," said Drew. "I want to try something . . . ."

During the few minutes pause while he explained and demonstrated his idea the mesh, particularly the places which had been patched and reinforced, took a savage beating. Reinforcing cable stretched and snapped, lengths of piping buckled and began slipping out of position and it would be only a matter of time before the Twos were inside the cage with them.

Following Drew's instructions they

launched themselves like ungainly swordfish from the panel of the dispenser, arms extended stiffly before them and hands gripping their weapons. They jumped in unison so as to minimize the danger of spearing each other, the idea being to aim themselves in the general direction of their target and at the last moment guide the tip of their spears through the mesh. The creatures possessed enough weight and inertia not to be pushed away before a deep wound was inflicted and, since the combined length of arms and spear was much greater than that of the e-t's horn or tentacles, there would be little danger of retaliation.

It worked.

After the first few abortive attempts it became a drill. They each chose a target, kicked themselves away from the food dispenser cabinet, and the three targets died. But there were always more to take their places, squeezing tentacles through the wire, jabbing with that long, obscene horn and gobbling like frantic turkeys. For McCullough it became a continuing nightmare of killing the same Two over and over again. He had lost count of the times they had launched themselves from the dispenser, now slippery with a scummy mixture of food, water and e-t blood, to dive through air that was like a thick soup of the same recipe, to kill that Two once again.

A number of the white-furred Threes had squeezed between the Twos and were clinging to the wire and absorbing — McCullough could not see exactly how — the streamers and gobbets of water and food drifting toward them. There were even two of them inside the cage, having wriggled through a loosened patch, flapping and undulating through the air like great furry stingrays. All the men had been careful not to kill the type Three aliens. After seeing how one of them had dealt with a Two, they considered them allies rather than enemies. As well, not killing them introduced a certain amount of discrimination into the exercise so that they could think of it as being something less than a brutal, bloody massacre.

McCullough tried to think of other things; the slaughter proceeded.

Between meal times the animal enclosure had been surprisingly clean, so that the dispenser cabinet must also fulfill the duty of a waste-disposal unit. But while the waste water and food would no doubt be reprocessed, the material which could not be reclaimed would be pumped to the outer hull and disposed of, which meant that the plumbing associated with the waste-disposal system would be metal piping which, because it did not have to carry an electrical current, would not have to be insulated at any point between the dispenser and the hull outlet. As soon as this was all over they would be able to hook onto it with antennae and contact Walters.

He felt rather pleased with himself for being able to reason things out like this while engaged in the not quite routine job of killing Twos. Then suddenly there were no more targets. The still-living Twos were retreating along the corridors,

dragging the bodies of their dead friends with them when they could so that they would not go hungry, and the dispenser, which had ceased producing half an hour since, went dramatically into reverse.

Heavy protective panels slid aside to reveal large openings covered with safety grills. Drifting food, water and other debris moved toward the openings, picking up speed as they went. So great was the force of suction that the air made a high-pitched whistle as it went through the grill and within a few minutes the cage was clear. But there was more to come. From the eight corners of the enclosure a thin, foaming, sharp-smelling liquid spurted out immediately followed by eight high-pressure sprays of water. By the time the dispenser had shut itself off the men and the two furry Threes inside the cage were like the air, clean, fresh and slightly damp.

Outside the cage dead Twos drifted and spun slowly, stiff-tentacled, like fossilized starfish. Above, below and all around them the mesh was thick with them, as if it was some kind of alien flypaper which had not been changed for too long a time.

Berryman linked his antenna to the dispenser plumbing and made contact with Walters. He tried to speak but obviously could not get a word in edgewise. Watching, McCullough saw him close his eyes tightly as if there was something he did not want to see, something much worse than the ghastly spectacle all around them. Finally he spoke.

"We're in trouble," he said dully. "Walters is . . . upset. Brady has been working on him again, and that girl. She sounds like a nice girl, he says, but she confuses him. The first supply rocket is off course. She didn't actually tell him that we were bad boys and if we didn't start doing as we were told again the other two might miss as well. It was just that public opinion was touchy, and it was difficult to make promises when the men at the Ship kept messing things up. He says she mentioned some very personal stuff, material he never expected to hear mentioned, privileged information. He's thinking of all the people who have heard everything she said — the men on the Venus station and all their people in Russia. Everybody will soon know. He's very unhappy about it."

Berryman stopped and took a deep breath. Fatigue and tension made it into a tremendous, ludicrous yawn, but nobody laughed. He went on, "So he blabbed everything to Bardy. Your new theory, our plans, everything. He says he couldn't help it. He says he wants to be a *good* boy again so's they'll let him go home . . . ."

XVIII

For three days they barricaded themselves inside the dispenser cage during mealtimes and killed Twos. As expected, the number of e-t casualties diminished sharply each day. This was, of course, due to the fact of there being ample food available outside the cage in the form of previously slain animals.

On the fourth day they tried a different approach.

A series of food caches were built up in compartments opening off the corridors leading from the enclosure to one of the hull airlocks. By this time they had discovered how to turn off the food dispensers at will and they had towed the dead e-ts to the nearest lock and dumped them into space, so that the Twos which remained in the Ship were becoming very hungry.

The operation of placing a trail of food between the enclosure and the lock chamber, during the few minutes before mealtimes when it would have its maximum effect, was a dangerous one but well worth the risks. The end result was a lock chamber crowded with Twos fighting over a small food cache so fiercely that they were usually oblivious of the fact that they had suddenly been sealed in and Hollis or McCullough were outside the hull opening the compartment to space.

They bagged as many as six Twos at a time that way.

On the ninth day McCullough decided that their original purpose of drastically reducing the numbers of Twos roaming the Ship had been accomplished and they could all return to more constructive forms of activity.

The decision on what to do about Walters was not so easily taken, and McCullough could not put off making it any longer.

Punishment or retribution of any kind was ruled out, of course, since that would involve varying degrees of criticism or rejection by his friends. Alone as he had been on the P-ship for weeks on end, the pilot was particularly sensitive to this form of punishment, and he had already soaked up more than enough of it from General Brady. Dirty fighting and psychological warfare, so far as McCullough was concerned, were becoming synonymous.

"I should have come to see you sooner," he told Walters as he opened his visor after passing through the inner seal. He waved vaguely toward the port and the frigid, decompressed Twos drifting outside and added, "we were very busy."

"Yes," said the pilot, smiling. "I took some very good pictures of the spring cleaning."

Walters's voice was quiet and pleasant, his features relaxed and his hands and fingers yellow and bloodless so tightly was he gripping the sides of his couch.

Awkwardly, McCullough said, "I won't say that we don't blame you, not again. Telling the truth too often can make it sound like a lie. And, well, don't worry if it happens to you again. You are aware of what they are trying to do to you so it won't be so easy for them next time, and they might even change their approach — "

"They have," said Walters. "Just before you arrived that girl told me they would not divert the other supply rockets no matter what fool stunt we pulled or how much trouble we caused them. Obviously this news is supposed to make us all break down and weep out of sheer gratitude that mamma still loves us even when we've been naughty.

"I wish I hadn't read so many psychology books," he ended bitterly. "It has made me cynical."

McCullough laughed. He said, "Cynicism is a very good defense, also a little sympathy for the enemy — Brady, that is, not the Twos. And a good, hefty shot of megalomania might help as well. You start by doubting everything they tell you and questioning all their motives, at the same time trying to appreciate the general's position, but not to the extent that you fail to realize the true importance of the part we have to play in all this. So you doubt Brady, you feel sorry for him and, in your quiet, respectful fashion, you also feel superior to him. Get the idea?"

"Of late," said Walters doubtfully, "I have become much less quiet and respectful."

"That is because you haven't been feeling superior enough," said McCullough drily. He went on, "We are the experts in this particular situation. It is ridiculous to expect us to obey people who know less about it than we do — people who, if they were to regain complete control over us, are under so much pressure from so many different directions that they are incapable of giving proper orders anyway."

McCullough waited then, without appearing to wait, wondering if the pilot would seize the bait or even if he was aware of it. He was and he did.

"You mentioned them regaining complete control over us," said Walters quickly. "Other than the control, which is as you know far from complete, imposed by service discipline and the habit of obedience, how can they influence us?"

"This is rather awkward for me," said McCullough, preparing to slide imperceptibly from questionable, rule-of-thumb psychology into outright fiction, "because I didn't want to talk about this until I was surer of my facts. But it seems to me that we may have been the subjects of a form of conditioning which was designed to support and guide us as well as furnishing Prometheus with a large measure of control. By this I mean that it was subtle enough not to interfere with mentation and at the same time leave us unaware that we were being helped and controlled. How exactly this conditioning was implanted I don't know, although I suspect that the hours we spent listening to canned lectures in the simulator may have had something to do with it, but the method used to reinforce the conditioning and at the same time control us is, I'm fairly sure, the radio transmissions from the Cape.

"The mechanics of the process," McCullough went on seriously, "might involve the use of certain key words and phrases but would, I'm pretty sure, be more likely to depend on the tonal quality of voice used — they could heterodyne their AF with sub- or ultra-sonics to obtain a kind of subliminal effect on the audio frequency. But for various reasons the conditioning broke down or was considerably weakened and they lost a large measure of their control over us."

Natural radio interference with the signal could have been one factor, McCullough went on to explain, and the constant relaying of transmissions through the suit radios had probably attenuated the effect even more. It was not surprising, therefore, that the men who had Control's orders relayed to them from the P-ship had been able to exercise discretion in the matter of obeying orders while Walters, who was in direct radio contact, had never had a chance of resisting them.

"That makes me feel much better," said the pilot when McCullough had finished talking. "It even gives me an excuse for future misdemeanors, if any. But surely Brady's psychological weapon is two-edged. It caused to be made public information which he would have preferred to remain secret, namely the extermination — massacre, he calls it — of the Twos. Rather than risk the chance of the listening world hearing something even more unpleasant, he might leave me alone."

"I doubt it," said McCullough.

"But if he goes on," said Walters angrily, "it means he is pushing a psychological abort button! He will be softening us up until, instead of being able to think and carry out complex technical activities, we'll be just so many jellies unable to think or act at all much less obey orders. Is he trying to wreck the Project? Isn't it also possible that he could push a button and ignite our return fuel supply? Was provision made for this in case the e-ts turned out to be baddies and threatened the security of the world?

"All of a sudden I don't trust Brady, and I dislike being treated like part of the hardware."

He broke off as he became aware of McCullough's expression, then said quickly, "I don't really believe any of that, but there is an easy way to deal with the possibilility. Next time we're in contact I'll tell the listening world that if there is an unexplained explosion out here it will have been caused by Brady." He laughed suddenly. "But your real danger is me! With this information and all the spare time at my disposal I might analyze and reproduce this conditioning effect. *My* word would be law then, and I could wrap you all around my little finger!"

"As I said," McCullough smiled as he turned to go, "a *little* megalomania is a good thing."

On the way back to the Ship, McCullough found himself questioning some of his own motives. He had been telling lies to the pilot, suggesting that Walters had not been really responsible for his apparent treachery by blaming everything on a form of conditioning which might not even be workable, but not solely as an act of kindness. McCullough himself needed support and reassurance. He wanted as many people on his side as possible, which meant that he could not risk Walters going over to Brady. If the pilot sided actively with Control instead of the men in the Ship, McCullough could not bear to think of the consequences. In the frighteningly simple world of emotional relationships and physical survival, Walters's friendship could only

be assured if he was to become completely and utterly hostile to the general.

And so McCullough himself was guilty of pressing psychological push-buttons and treating a human being as part of the hardware. Worse, he was pressing them without fully understanding what he was doing or what the end result might be. Worst of all was the fact that what he was doing did not trouble McCullough's conscience as much or as often as it should.

His conscience seemed to be developing thick and widespread callouses. He wondered how long it would be before he became completely de-civilized.

Progress within the Ship during the next few days was erratic. Berryman came out in a livid, itching rash which lasted for one whole day and caused McCullough to have horrible visions of everyone going down with the e-t equivalent of bubonic plague carried by dead Twos, before it faded completely. It was only then that Hollis, Drew and Berryman admitted smugly to eating a few ounces of alien porridge every day for the past week. McCullough warned them of the possibility of dangerous long-term cumulative effects — the fact that Berryman's allergy symptoms had cleared up in so short a time did not necessarily mean that the food was completely non-toxic. But then McCullough realized that he was beginning to sound like General Brady and that the three men were expecting compliments instead of criticism, so he added gravely that the cumulative effect of the toxine would probably take the form of a long, wasting, ultimately fatal disease indistinguishable from old age.

Spurred on by this act of moral cowardice they immediately announced plans for domesticating the Threes.

They did it by first using the porridge to gain their trust, punishment to teach them not to wrap their furry bodies around a human being's head — although there was no real danger here as they could be peeled off easily with human fingers, and the punishment was very light — and petting, particularly when it took the form of combing their fur with stiffened fingers. Several of the Threes became attached, literally, to Berryman and Drew, and Hollis and McCullough began picking out Threes and trying to make friends with them.

Their fur was pleasant to touch and they seemed very friendly and demonstrative — just like dogs, in fact. McCullough suspected that, like dogs, the scratching gave them pleasure because it helped dislodge parasites, and he began to wonder about the habits of alien fleas. Also like dogs they were useful as well as friendly. They could sense Twos at a distance, and this early warning system saved lives many times over.

Despite the three successful operations in the enclosure and the subsequent strategy which had lured a large number of the beasts into lock chambers and the vacuum of space, their movements within the Ship were still being badly hampered by Twos.

Mean, vicious and very hungry Twos.

By following the supply ducting back from the food dispensers they had found the compartment — whose doors, fortunately, had remained Two-proof — where the food was processed for distribution to the various cages. Their first act had been to shut off the food supply, which had been accomplished with very little damage to processing equipment, with the idea of forcing the remaining Twos to kill each other off for food. But this had turned out to be a very slow business and, while they occasionally came on an animal which had been killed and eaten by its own species, there were indications that the surviving Twos — their numbers were estimated at not over twenty — preferred human beings as food.

The investigation was proceeding, McCullough told himself, but an unbiased, hypothetical observer would have said that the humans were being hunted all over the Ship.

XIX

They investigated, or were forced to take cover near, the area of the Power Room. This was the compartment where all the heavy power cables for the generators and the Ship lighting supplies had their origin, and they spent two days in the area without being able to find a way in. So far as they could see the compartment was heavily shielded and sealed tightly against all intruders, including members of the Ship's crew.

As the work of charting the vessel's interior continued, other blank areas appeared, compartments which were completely sealed off against everyone and everything.

"Like it says in my car instruction booklet," said Hollis, trying manfully to hide his disappointment, "repair or maintenance should be handled only by a qualified mechanic or service station . . . ."

One of the compartments which they entered easily contained large quantities of food and liquids other than water in what was obviously weightless packaging. This time it was the Threes rather than the men who acted, quite happily, as guinea-pigs — McCullough wanted to dispell a lingering doubt which was troubling him that the containers might hold paint instead of soup. But it was the labelling system used to identify the containers which caused most of the discussion.

It was Hollis who tried finally to sum up.

"We agree that the line of characters overprinted on the label is some kind of service routing and identification code or serial number. We think it is a number rather than a word because of the repetition of certain characters and because similar combinations were found on Ship sub-assemblies and structural details. Markings incorporated in the label itself, which are similar to those found near airlock controls and service panels, are words identifying its contents with possibly the addition of some purely advertising material. The pictorial content of some of the labels are confusing, but then an illustration of a slice of bacon would not give an alien very much information about a pig. We must

assume that the containers hold some kind of edible animal or vegetable tissue, although their is a faint possibility that — "

" — the labels," Berryman said, grinning, "may carry a picture of the chef."

Hollis ignored him and continued, "The fact that the whole compartment is below-average Ship temperature, and that many of the storage cabinets are additionally refrigerated, supports the food theory. But the part which puzzles me is the picture of the Three on the door of that big refrigerated cabinet, and the tools or eating utensils and assorted collection of small packages inside it which also carry picture of a Three. Is the Three, or certain parts of it, perhaps, some kind of delicacy?"

Drew shook his head. He said, "In our house we didn't keep the caviar in the cutlery drawer."

McCullough had been thinking hard while the physicist had been talking. He said suddenly, "The delicacies are too small, some of them, and too carefully wrapped to be food, I think, and the utensils are very sharp and their packaging also bears the emblem of a somewhat stylized Three. To me this suggests . . . well, what animal do you associate with medicine and errands of mercy?"

Hollis said, "A red — but no, that isn't an animal. A snake! The staff and coiled serpents of Aesculepius. Or . . . or do you mean a St. Bernard?"

McCullough nodded and Berryman began stroking the Three which was wrapped around his hips and thighs

"Nice doggie," he said happily.

But the great majority of the compartments they examined were puzzling without being informative. They were large compartments containing eight, twelve and sometimes sixteen big, hollow cylinders of some kind of plastic material supported along the center of the room by taut but flexible cables. The cylinders were just over three yards in length and were encircled at intervals of a foot or so by wide, flexible bands of rubbery materials which compressed the soft, hollow tube and made it look a little like a caterpillar. The material of the cylinder was thickly padded on the inside.

The compartments were fitted with lighting fixtures, cabinets and various enigmatic items whose general design and coloring were less ultilitarian than anything previously met with in the Ship. Invariably, one of the cabinets bore the picture of a stylized Three on its door, and in some of them the contents showed signs of having been used. In some of the compartments there were pictures on the walls — large, fuzzy pictures which seemed to show trees growing horizontally with branches doubling as extra roots, or things which looked like heaps of varicolored spaghetti, or illustrations, sometimes covering most of the wall, of something resembling marble or coarse-grained wood.

Sometimes a thorough search of these compartments brought to light mislaid or discarded books, diagrams and photographs. None of the books were illustrated; the diagrams were

purely technical; and the photographs were even more confusing since they pictured things or people or events which were completely alien.

"I wish," said Hollis bitterly as he turned one of the photographs, playing cards or beer mats over and over in a vain attempt to find a viewpoint which made sense, "that they had been a little more untidy. You can find out an awful lot about a person from the contents of his wastepaper basket."

"If these cylinders are some kind of tubular hammock," said Berryman to McCullough, "and I don't see what else they can be, the only e-t they will fit is that big caterpillar we found half-eaten in the animal enclosure. But what really bothers me is the number of these dormitory compartments and the number of hammocks in each one. What *was* this ship? A troop transport? Some kind of colonization project which went wrong?"

"Maybe a big ship needs a crew to match," Drew put in quickly. "But where the blazes are they?"

McCullough shook his head. He said, "My theory is that it was, and is, a very small crew. If there had been a large number of them when the Twos broke out, we would have found traces of them — carcasses, bones, unedible remnants. How that particular caterpillar happened to be in that cage I don't know, but — "

"Suppose it wasn't intelligent," Hollis broke in, "but a species physically resembling the intelligent e-t life-form. Before we sent a man into space we tested apes and monkeys because their metabolism and — "

"For God's sake," said McCullough irritably, "the situation is complicated enough as it is! My idea is this. The dormitories were used by the people who built the Ship, who left when the job was finished. Possibly the compartments will be used for colonists or passengers on a later trip, but not this time. This trip the Ship was, is, on her maiden voyage."

"And since control seems to be largely automatic," Berryman added, "the crew could be very small indeed.

"I want you all to listen to this tape," he said, then added apologetically, "again."

They listened again to the gobbling of Twos in the enclosure, the chiming and moaning and the two alien voices. Like the Twos they could disregard one of the voices and its accompanying chimes since this was almost certainly some kind of pre-takeoff recorded warning sequence. The moaning could have been caused by machinery, perhaps malfunctioning equipment of some kind, except that no machine should ever make a noise like that. Hollis and Berryman suggested that it might be music of some kind being played in the second voice's quarters. The sound could have been made by a number of wind instruments, but the tonal range and scale were crazy.

So, in all probability, was the alien.

"I'm beginning to think there is only one intelligent e-t left on the Ship," McCullough said as they prepared to leave the compartment, "and

that one is in very poor shape physically and mentally. But to help it we need more information about its world and its society, its relations with its fellows or with members of the opposite sex or sexes if there are more than two, and as much data as we can possibly obtain on its own personal background. Somewhere in the Ship there must be family photographs . . . ."

"Psycho-therapy is a chancy business," said Berryman quietly, "even with human beings. Trying it on an emotionally disturbed alien seems . . . seems . . . ."

"Foolhardy," said Hollis.

Drew did not say anything. Since the time McCullough had revived him with the Kiss of Life he had never disagreed with the doctor. But occasionally, as now, his face became more than usually expressionless.

To make successful contact with it, McCullough told himself firmly, they would have to see that it was capable of rational behavior and show that they themselves were friendly towards it. Clearing the Ship of the majority of its Twos should prove their good intentions, but only if the being was sane enough to appreciate and understand what they were doing. And it possessed, or had possessed, a weapon. Why then did it not come out of hiding and help them exterminate the Twos?

They needed more information. The trouble was they had to fight for every single datum, and it could only be a matter of time before some perhaps unimportant scrap of information cost someone his life.

But the material they were sending back to Control was valuable. The reports and photographs of alien food labels and pictures and text would send language experts the world over into multilingual paroxysms of joy, not to mention the methods used to make friends with the Three life-form and their subsequent activities together. There was also a steady flow of information on Ship equipment and control systems which would be non-objectionable so far as Brady was concerned.

They could not, of course, tell him everything. Some of their troubles they had to keep to themselves.

Hollis took to crying in his sleep, during the rare occasions when he was able to get any. Drew collected and trained more Three pets than was really necessary for self-protection. When he moved he was surrounded by a flapping phalanx of Threes, and prior to going to sleep he stroked and patted them until they had him enclosed in a thick, furry cocoon. Berryman and McCullough watched each other covertly and talked about their physical and psychological problems both as individuals and as a group, the meanings behind the nightmares to which everyone was subject, and their past lives public and private — all with a simulated objectivity which fooled neither of them. Each was waiting for the other one to break, and each gained strength because the break did not come.

The times they each woke up struggling and screaming did not count, of course, because they all did that.

Walters, too, was unhappy. Cut

GRANT MORRISON

off from home except by voice contact with Prometheus Control, all of whom now sounded more nervous and insincere while talking to him than he felt while talking to them, it was obvious that the pilot was desperately concerned for the safety of his friends — his only friends — on the Ship. During their infrequent radio contacts — it was just not possible these days for McCullough to visit him — the strain in his voice was an almost tangible thing.

The general and Tokyo Rose were beginning to worry him again. They were suggesting that the facts supporting McCullough's theory about the Ship's builders using the dormitory compartments would also support his own, perhaps more logical theory, that the tubular hammocks were meant to contain a couple of Twos and that it was the Twos who were the crew of the ship all the time. Walters did not want to bother the doctor with this kind of talk, but sometimes the general made it sound very believable.

Walters was beginning to actively hate the general, and it showed in his voice.

XX

Then one day they were forced to take cover in a room which was more thoroughly furnished, in the esthetic as well as the structural sense, than any they had encountered before. The room contained just two tubular hammocks, its cabinets and fixtures were much less utilitarian than usual, and there were a great many pictures on the walls. And softly, in the background, there was the moaning, whistling sound which they had heard only once before but could never forget.

But in this compartment the structural skeleton did not show, and the metal bones and circulatory system were too well concealed by paneling for them to hook up a suit-radio antenna to a section of plumbing which would allow contact with Walters. As a result McCullough could not tell the pilot of the tremendous discovery they had made or bring him into the discussion which followed it.

"Crew quarters, no doubt about it," Hollis said, waving his arms in excitement. "But I don't think this room is only for sleeping in — its furniture is too diversified, there are too many pictures. Crowding a bedroom with pictures is in questionable taste . . . ."

"So," said Berryman, "is having twin beds."

"Be serious a minute," said Hollis. "The point I'm trying to make is that there is more than enough space in the Ship for crew members to have different rooms for sleeping, eating, recreation and so on while this compartment — a surprisingly small room in a very large ship — appears to combine the functions of all three. I may be jumping to conclusions here, but it suggests to me that they prefer small, confined, cozy living quarters. This place looks like . . . like an illustrated nest or . . . I give up."

Berryman said, "I am only an amateur psychologist — a gifted amateur, naturally — but I'm in-

clined to agree with that. The question is if the crew prefers to live in cozy little rooms inside a great big ship — and with wild Twos roaming the corridors, who could blame them? — why aren't they at home, do you suppose?"

From the door's transparent panel Drew, who was keeping watch, said, "The Twos are beginning to leave. A Three just went by, one of the carpets we haven't made friends with yet, and they took off after it. Can I close the door?"

"Not yet," said McCullough.

He had been too busy with his camera to join in the discussion, and his mind had been vainly trying to emulate the instrument by absorbing everything he could see at once. But he was not so wildly excited and curious as to forget caution or his own fairly well supported theory of the e-t crew-member being mentally disturbed and in possession of a projectile-firing weapon.

They might be in much more danger from the intelligent alien than from the hungry Twos. McCullough had ordered the sliding door to be kept partly open in case they should have to leave in a hurry.

McCullough cleared his throat and said, "At the risk of sounding like General Brady, I suggest that the mass of important new data which has been made available should be very carefully considered before we make a move toward communicating with one of the crew."

With the exception of Drew they all returned to the study of the room's fittings. They reminded each other several times that they were examining what were almost certainly personal effects which should be treated with great care. Sometimes they laughed for no apparent reason or shouted in excitement or spoke in guilty whispers in case someone or something overheard them.

As well as the medicine cabinet with its Three symbol, there were wall racks to which were clipped surprisingly Earthlike spools of tape or film. Another cabinet held books which were not illustrated, much to the men's disappointment, and yet another contained flexible plastic tubes full of liquid and semi-liquid substances which smelled to high heaven.

"Probably booze or beauty cream," said Berryman as he wriggled out of an alien bed. He had been investigating the interiors of both hammocks. When his legs were clear he added. "They're almost comfortable if it wasn't for the dampness and smell. When you push against the inside the padding secretes something which smells like . . . like . . . . It's a damp smell, not altogether unpleasant."

McCullough investigated with eye and nose, finding that he had to push away several of the Threes to do so. But the animals were wriggling and flapping around only one one of the hammocks. He was reminded suddenly of dogs excited by the scent of their master or by the clothing or personal possessions of their master. One of these beds had been occupied recently, he felt sure, or the Threes would not be so excited. He turned back to look again at those enigmatic pictures.

Most of them showed pallid, leafless vegetation set against a dark, mottled background or one that resembled rough-grained wood. While there was a definite feeling of depth to the pictures, there was no middle distance or horizon, and McCullough assumed that they were some kind of still life studies. But there were two pictures which had everything — size, perspective and almost photographic detail. One of them showed the plant or thing or whatever it was that they had at first mistaken for a multicolored pile of spaghetti, with trees in the foreground and clouds behind to give a true indication of its tremendous size. Another showed trees with strange leaves on them, thick, wirey undergrowth harboring a running Two and a dazzlingly bright sky. A great many questions regarding the Two life-form were answered by that picture.

The e-t stag at bay, he thought drily.

He could now tell General Brady that the Twos were, in fact, animals and not intelligent beings. While this knowledge would be a load off everyone's mind it still meant that McCullough was faced with the problem of making contact with the intelligent-extra-terrestrial on the Ship, and all at once he was most horribly afraid and unsure of himself. He did not want the responsibility and he could not make the decision which was being forced on him — at least, not right now.

In a couple of hours, perhaps. Or days . . . .

Right now he wanted to slap an indefinite Hold on everything. He wanted time to look at all the evidence old and new, and discuss it quietly and in the greatest possible detail. This time he could not afford to push the wrong psychological button, for he was so firmly convinced that there was only one intelligent extraterrestrial left in the Ship and that physically and emotionally it was not in good shape.

It took a tremendous effort for him to make his voice sound firm and steady when he spoke.

"Everybody out," he said. "We must report this to Brady and decide on our next move. This time we can't afford to make a mistake. Collect your Threes and let's go. Quickly!"

But the Threes did not want to leave. It took more than ten minutes coaxing and petting to make them leave the vicinity of that one cylindrical hammock. Meanwhile Drew reported Twos beginning to gather a little way along the corridor and asked permission to close the door. Berryman, his Threes covering his body like a form-fitting fur coat, continued to look around.

Suddenly he called, "Over here!"

The pilot had opened what he thought was the door of a recessed cupboard — there were a number of them in the room — and found himself looking along a short stretch of corridor. There was another door containing a large transparent panel at the other end, and beyond that another room which was in darkness except for the myriads of indicator lights burning like regimented stars on the facing wall. As

they watched, a black shadow began to occlude some of the stars.

"Outside!" shouted McCullough again. "Quickly, and make sure the door is closed properly behind us!"

"But there's dozens of them out here," said Drew angrily. "Some thing is biting them. I've never heard Twos make a noise like this before."

"Get out of here!"

When the entrance to the alien crew's compartment was safely closed behind him McCullough tried to explain why he had insisted on them leaving a relatively safe position for their present highly dangerous one. But they were all too angry to talk, and there were so many Twos in the corridor that they couldn't risk taking their eyes off them to even look at him. Probably they were hating him for being stupid or a coward, or both. But McCullough, while scared stiff of meeting the alien face to face, had been even more afraid of another possibility.

He had suddenly thought of the animal enclosure with its half-eaten body of the other crew member, and he had had a picture of what the Twos would do if they broke into that last compartment.

He wondered if the alien had considered his reaction cowardly, always supposing that the being was capable of reasoning at all. But even if grief over the loss of what was very probably its mate, and loneliness and fear inside this vast, Two-infested ship — and possibly physical injuries as well — had driven it insane or close to insanity, a cowardly reaction might actually be reassuring to it. There was nobody who helped a coward like an even greater coward. But he could not cure the alien, or communicate with it, by running away all the time.

On Earth psychiatric treatment of seriously disturbed patients — "insane" was not considered a nice word — had had only limited success. So what chance had a doctor who was not even a psychologist of curing a patient whose archetypal images were out of this world, whose phallic symbols were unrecognizable and whose culture contained in all probability a welter of psychological theories even more complex and mutually contradictory than those current on Earth? There might be some relatively simple form of therapy possible, of course. The e-t equivalent of the snake pit, where the patient cured itself with just a little unskilled help and a lot of symapthy.

But that was asking for two much. Right now McCullough needed specialist advice and assistance, from Earth.

"Back to the hull lock chamber," he said. "We have to contact Walters, and Brady. Hurry it up!"

The Twos attacked while he was speaking, filling the corridor with colliding, cartwheeling bodies and slashing, horn-tipped tentacles.

In the confusion Drew and Hollis got three of them and Berryman one before they were able to pull clear of the melee. McCullough seriously wounded a couple of them and lost contact with his Three after the furry creature had started to strangle

another Two which had been trying to swarm onto his back. But suddenly it was with him again, flapping along behind him as they retreated along the corridor. He reached back, caught it and pulled it onto his shoulders like a great, furry cape.

Suddenly they were trapped. Another group of Twos came boiling out of an intersection ahead of them, bouncing off the wall-netting and each other like outsize, tentacled molecules illustrating the Brownian movement of gases.

Berryman shouted, "In here!"

He was holding open the sliding door into a large dormitory compartment. They went through it backward, spears jabbing at full extension, fighting off Twos. Seconds after they had slid it shut, the door bulged alarmingly as several Twos charged it together, but it did not come off its runners. Drew and Berryman were able to get their spears through the warped outsides of the door and stab attacking Twos with comparative safety. They killed four of the animals — without, however, seriously discouraging the attack. Hollis and McCullough, meanwhile, made a quick check of the compartment. Their most important discoveries were another exit and, floating in one of the corners, a thick, illustrated magazine.

The color reproduction and values were strange and the printed characters even stranger, not to mention the raised, embossed pattern on the bottom outside corner of each page which allowed them to be turned by alien digits terminating in osseous material. But somehow it still managed to look like a copy of an illustrated magazine that might have been picked up anywhere on Earth. McCullough longed for time to examine it and discuss it at length with the others. He wanted to photograph it page by page and have Walters transmit the pictures to Earth and have everyone there discuss it and offer specialist advice.

But behind him the Twos were battering their way through the warped sliding door. McCullough folded the magazine carefully and wedged it between his air-tanks and his back, then led the way out of the other exit and along the corridor.

They continued to duck in and out of compartments, some of which were large, inter-connected dormitories with several exits, and for several minutes they completely lost the Twos. By then they were completely lost themselves.

"Berryman," said McCullough, steadying himself against a hammock as he tried to catch his mental and physical breath. "Check the plumbing with a view to contacting Walters. Hollis, help him. While you're doing so try to think of a quick way of repairing the sabotaged generator. I'll begin taping a report for the general while you two try to contact P-One."

But the Twos battered down the door a few minutes later, and they were forced to move again.

Drew swore horribly and said that he did not know what had got into them. Normally ferocious and blindly antagonistic, they were now literally killing themselves, cracking open their bony carapaces against

the metal doors and running onto each other's horns in their attempts to get at the humans. It was as if some dreadful hysteria had them in its grip and the grip was tightening by the minute.

Some very special kind of killing instinct was being aroused, McCullough told himself as the men were forced to flee once again. It had to be a very deep-rooted instinct because these Twos were almost certaintly second or third generation.

The report was finally completed during a lull while the Twos, who were still in the grip of the conditioning which made them visit the food dispensers at mealtimes, were absent. Berryman identified a section of plumbing belonging to the hydraulic system actuating the hull cargo locks and said that it should make a very good link with their ship. The pilot quickly connected his suit radio antenna, said that someone was already talking at the other end and turned up the volume.

Tinny, distorted and furiously angry, Brady's voice rattled at them:

". . . What you said was bad enough. Thoughtless, irresponsible, downright criminal considering the political situation here — and I'm disregarding the tone, which was insubordinate to the point of mutiny! But those pictures, that cold-blooded slaughter of what are almost certainly intelligent beings — you've been secretive, McCullough is afraid even to talk to me, and no wonder! Killing Twos has been reduced to a fine art, and judging by those pictures . . . ."

"Walters!" began McCullough.

". . . enjoying practicing that art! You act like barbarians instead of so-called reasoning beings! And you can't even claim the excuse of honest insanity, because your actions are too cold-blooded and carefully thought out. Moral cowardice, which is not an excuse, and megalomania is what ails you all! You made a mistake, McCullough, made a mistake with the Twos at the onset and will slaughter every last one of them rather than admit it! I want to talk to you, Doctor. I know you're afraid to listen but . . . . ."

"Turn him down, Walters, I want to talk to you!"

". . . all things being equal the simple rather than the complicated explanation is usually the true one! Try THIS theory, Doctor. It was evolved by people here who know their stuff and it, also, fits the facts. The Ship dormitory accommodation was meant for its large complement of Twos. It may have been a colonization project, a troop transport or it may simply have needed a very large crew. A couple of Twos could squeeze into those hammocks, you know — have you considered that? Then something happened during the early part of the trip, after the course had already been set for this solar system.

Whatever catastrophe that occurred, it was almost certainly nonphysical. The end result was a process of cultural devolution which brought the crew close to the level of animals. They broke into, not out of, the animal cages in search of food and eventually sank to practic-

ing cannibalism. But they did not forget all their early training — or their ancestors' early training — because they reacted violently toward anyone who appeared to threaten their Ship.

"I can even make a prediction based on this theory, McCullough. It is this. The closer you approach the Ship's control center — which the Twos must regard as some sort of mystic shrine or taboo area by now, since they know it is vital to the Ship without understanding why — the more their antagonism towards you will increase."

Berryman, Hollis and Drew were staring at him, faces chalk white and reflecting the same horrible fear and guilt and confusion that was gripping McCullough. He couldn't be so *wrong*, he told himself desperately. He didn't have to listen to all of this!

". . . beyond appeals to reason. The world is judging us, your country and everyone in it by your actions. But you don't care about that, do you? Well, we don't care about you! Believe me, if we directed the two remaining supply rockets off course we would not be too strongly criticized for doing so. We're ashamed of you, McCullough, and the rest of your murdering pack. You're little more than mad dogs! You sicken and disgust us!"

Brady's voice began to fade as Walters on P-One reduced the volume.

But not soon enough.

". . . nobody here wants you, d'you understand that? We don't want to see you back!"

XXI

Mental anguish could take many forms, McCullough thought sickly, ranging from simple worry over a possible future unpleasantness to the deep grief at the loss of a dear one. But those were clean, uncomplicated emotions, whatever their degree of intensity. *This* was the twisting, almost physical pain of betrayal by a trusted friend who turns suddenly into an enemy raised to the nth power. For it was not only their personal friends at Prometheus who had betrayed and rejected them, it was their whole lousy race!

From the shocked, angry faces all around him McCullough knew that only two reactions were possible. Anger and counterattack . . . or extreme, soul-destroying guilt and despair.

But they had come through too much together on the Ship, they had overcome too many purely physical dangers, for them to die of a collective broken heart. He told himself that this was so, but he was not sure that he could believe himself. He could not be sure of anything any more.

A metallic crash from the door told of the Twos, even more angry probably because the food dispensers were no longer giving food, beginning to return from "lunch." He wondered suddenly if intelligent beings could sink so low as to eat animal's food, and thought that they might if something had happened to the crew water and food supply. But Brady's theory was too simple, surely. There were facts that it did not explain.

And one fact in particular was deafeningly obvious.

"I'm not a psychologist," said McCullough quietly, trying to control his relief and excitement, "but it seems to me that the last thing an intelligent person would forget is how to open and close a door."

He turned to the radio and went on quickly, "So you showed him pictures of us dumping Twos into space. But I can guess at some of the things he said to make you do it, so don't worry. Just link me with the transmitter, Walters. There is something I want to say to him."

He had begun by speaking quietly to the pilot, and his voice was still soft. But the anger that had crept into it when he spoke to the general made it unrecognizable even to himself.

"We feel sorry for you, General Brady," he said. "We feel sorry for *all* you people. It would be a lie to say that we don't feel angry and disgusted with you as well, but we do feel sorry. The harsh facts of contact with an extra-terrestrial culture are being brought home to you, to *all* of you. You are all frightened. The implications are only now beginning to dawn on you. And you feel guilty and ashamed because things may not have been handled right. It is a very uncomfortable time for all of you, and your feelings and qualms of conscience do you credit. But you, General, and all of you, are so uncomfortable that you want to avoid both the responsibility and the guilt by passing it onto us. Then, presumably, you will bury and forget the whole thing by disowning us!

"There is nothing original about this course," McCullough went on. "It is a clear case of your eyes and your hands scandalizing you, and you then quote the highest possible Authority regarding your subsequent action in the matter. If your right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out. If your right hand scandalize thee, cut it off and cast it from thee, and so on. But if you were thinking straight you would realize that this is not a true analogy. We are not just your hands and eyes, we are a cross section of all the people of Earth. *That* is what's really bothering you, and you know it! What we feel toward the aliens is what you would feel in the same circumstances; our thoughts would be your thoughts, our actions and reactions yours as well. You know this is true, but you don't want to face up to it. Instead you are making us the scapegoats.

"We are doing the best we can with the situation here," he continued more quietly. "We are better qualified to understand it, since we are on the spot, and we are convinced that we are doing the right thing. A tape containing much valuable new information has been prepared. This will be placed in a Two-proof storage cabinet and played back to you while we head for the hull to repair the damaged generator. While this is being done, Twos permitting, we shall make contact with the surviving intelligent members, or more likely member, of the Ship's crew.

"In the meantime, General, lay off Walters! What you're doing to him is criminal and stupid. He is not re-

sponsible for our actions inside the Ship. He is all alone, cut off from radio contact with us for days on end, not knowing whether we are alive or dead and now believing that *you* don't care what happens to him. If you can't appreciate his position ask your space medics — he must be clinging to sanity by his fingernails!

"You might also consider *our* position. There are only two functioning spacesuits left to us, we're constantly under attack or being forced to hide from Twos, and some of us haven't slept for three days. Now you have turned against us and are threatening to turn the supply vehicles off course. This isn't fair. We're a long way from home, and you've literally got us outnumbered billions to one. If those replacement suits don't arrive we can never leave this Ship — "

McCullough broke off. He was beginning to whine, and the realization made him angry. He could see the weary despair in the expressions of the others as they watched him, and hear the Twos stepping up their attack on the door. But this was not the reason why he raised his voice.

"If you maroon us here, either by accident or design, there is something you should bear in mind. We have lived on e-t food and recycled water since the last supply vehicle went wide. The food is palatable if one is hungry enough, and the taste of the water is due to us thinking too much about its original source. So we can stay here if necessary. We can go back with the Ship to its home planet and . . . and see things that nobody in all of human history has seen before.

"So you can't reject us, General," he ended furiously. "Or cast us off or do anything at all to us . . . because we damn well *quit*!"

A few minutes later they left by the other exit, moving in what they hoped was the direction of the hull and the generator blister. From the suit radios of Berryman and Hollis, McCullough's voice came as a tinny, stereophonic duet as they monitored the tape transmission. Should it cease that would mean that the storage cabinet containing the linked radio and recorder was not as Two-proof as they had hoped.

". . . already, treated design and structural philosophy in detail," the voice was saying, *"and our deductions regarding the home planet's gravity, atmospheric conditions and environment have been supported by pictures on living quarters walls and in illustrated literature. Regarding these living quarters, however . . . ."*

"Which way?" said Berryman. "I don't know whether we're headed forward, outboard or aft."

McCullough could hear the Twos breaking their way out of the compartment they had just vacated — the things were like extra-terrestrial bloodhounds! He said, "Right, I think."

". . . construction personnel lived on board and vacated their quarters, which are rather stark, when the project was complete. The large number of empty storage compartments, living quarters and, most of all, the fact that entry hatches and lighting circuits tend to be on local rather than centralized control, and that there are

no indications of permanent communications lines between compartments, makes us sure that they were used only by the construction gang.

"The strongest probability is that the large size of the Ship was dictated by the operating requirements of its hyperdrive generators and that in this, its first flight, it has been operating as an interstellar probe containing automatic guidance and sensory equipment and a number of animals being tested for survival in space conditions, together with a small crew who were little more than intelligent specimens undergoing the same testing. Indications are that the 'crew' have virtually no control over the operation of the Ship, and that initially they numbered only two...."

They were in a long corridor which seemed to be going in the wrong direction. Every Two in the Ship seemed to be after them, but just out of sight.

. . . We assumed the Two life-form to be unintelligent because they showed no indication of possessing an organized language, no manual dexterity in opening and closing doors or operating light switches and no inclination to communicate. Here we must mention our belief that an intelligent species making contact for the first time would make allowances for a certain amount of to them unconventional behavior and would not react with such continual and violent hostility. In the light of this assumption we will consider the situation in the animal enclosure . . . ."

"If we were moving outboard there should be more intersections," said Hollis." "One at every deck level."

The Twos were in sight behind them again, boiling along the corridor like tumbleweeds in a hurricane, bouncing from wall-net to wall-net as their tentacles hurled them on. Unlike the humans they did not worry about hurting themselves or protecting the two remaining usable spacesuits, so they were gaining steadily.

"Obvious that the Twos broke out and virtually exterminated all other animal life-forms with the exception of the Threes which, although non-hostile where we and the intelligent e-t life-form are concerned, can defend themselves against the Twos. The Twos bred unrestrained, living off the automatic food dispensers and any other experimental animal which had escaped the initial slaughter, their numbers controlled by their habit of fighting and eating each other.

"One of the half-eaten carcasses in the animal enclosure belonged to a large, caterpillar-like life-form which was quite obviously unsuited to the cage in which it was found. Around it were the bodies of Twos which, in addition to being cannibalized, showed numerous punctured wounds in musculature and bone structure, of the kind made by a solid projectile-firing weapon.

"It is now obvious that this caterpillar life-form, which later data proves to be intelligent, was killed trying to contain the original breakout. The weapon may have been used by this being against the Twos and later retrieved by the second intelligent e-t from its body, or the second e-t used it in an attempt to

rescue or avenge the first one . . . ."

"No good," said Hollis breathlessly as he ducked out of yet another useless compartment. "Only one door."

The room might have given them indefinite protection if they could have defended the door against Twos, but there were no wall-nets inside storage and dormitory compartments and no means of bracing themselves against attack. If the Twos succeeded in battering their ways in, the result would be a shambles of twisting, spinning bodies and stabbing, slashing spears and tentacles. Most of the casualties would be on the human side.

If they had to fight Twos it was better done in a corridor.

". . . *Before listing the data and reasoning which leads us to believe that there were only two intelligent e-ts crewing the Ship, and that one of them still survives in a physically and mentally damaged condition, we must deal with what is known and deduced about their home planet's environment and culture . . . .*"

At McCullough's signal they checked themselves against the wall-net, faced inward and laced their feet and legs through the strands so as not to be torn free during the attack. The butts of their spears were jammed against the net's supporting brackets or any other convenient projection. And they waited, McCullough thought, for all the world like a bunch of medieval foot soldiers about to soak up a cavalry charge.

"Since we left the crew's quarters . . . . " began Hollis, then finished with a rush, "I think we picked up some kind of scent in there. It's driving them mad. I recognize Twos we wounded a couple of weeks ago, and every blasted Two in the Ship must be after us. This is a good chance for us to wipe them out completely."

"Have you *counted* them?" said Berryman bitterly.

"Sixteen," said Drew.

". . . *whose gravity, pressure and atmospheric composition is similar to Earth's — which is probably the chief reason for the Ship's presence here. Observation of pictures of planetary flora and fauna suggest a world subject to frequent or perhaps constant high winds . . . .*"

The leading Twos were only yards and split seconds away.

XXII

They could not be sure where exactly the Threes and Ones fitted into the picture, but the position of the intelligent caterpillars and the Twos was now plain.

The tentacled animal with the single, underslung horn was a carnivore, of course, and the natural enemy of the intelligent e-ts. They had adapted well to weightless conditions, but on the home planet their normal method of locomotion was to use the large, curved horn as a sort of skid while propelling themselves with their tentacles. The skid also served as a weapon when jumping onto their prey. Or, when plunged into soft ground during periods of high wind, as an anchor which allowed the Two to seize smaller animals with its tentacles as they blew helplessly past.

The plant life was uniformly alien.

Smaller plants consisted of a long, flexible stem which, because of the wind, lay on or close to the ground. The stem carried a number of large, thick leaves with thorns or rootlets on their undersides and seemed to combine the process of photosynthesis with the digestion of ground-burrowing insects. At the other end of the scale were the giant trees towering hundreds of feet into the air, with trunks fifty feet in diameter and massive, stubby branches in proportion.

Because of their tremendous thickness the trunks and branches bent only slightly in the wind. Their leaves were enormous airfoils controlled either by the vegetable nervous system of the tree or by some automatic stabilizer system in the leaf itself, so that they streamed out to leeward while maintaining a formation which kept every leaf in sunshine.

The leaves were the only opaque parts of the trees. Trunk and branches were translucent, except for dark areas occurring at irregular intervals — which could have been parasitic growths or caused by small animals being dashed against the trunk by the wind. Other dark patches were various forms of animal life existing inside the trees.

Another growth or structure which had puzzled them until pictures became available which gave a true indication of its size was the heap of varicolored, translucent spaghetti. This mass appeared flexible and open enough for the wind to blow through it without putting too much strain on the individual tubes, which divided and sub-divided at intervals and contained hundreds of bulbous swellings along their length before rejoining into a single stem again or linking up with another stem. From the top of this squirming and strangely beautiful mass hundreds of metallic blooms on ridiculously thin stems trailed in the wind.

Eventually they realized that they were seeing an alien city. A great, artificial tree with trailing windmill blooms supplying power to a structure which must extend a considerable depth below the surface.

The wind was such an integral part of the aliens' lives that on the Ship the sounds it made were played like background music . . . .

". . . *Originally the intelligent e-ts must have developed from a species of burrowing tree-dweller. Physically they resemble outsize, leathery caterpillars whose heads are very well supplied with teeth which now show signs of advanced atrophication. They have four mandibles, terminating in flexible digits which appear both strong and highly sensitive . . . .*"

The first one came at them along the center of the corridor, shell first like a tentacled cannonball. Their spears were useless against that bony carapace so they flattened themselves against the net and let it sail past. The next one came spinning at them edge on the tentacles flailing, close to the wall occupied by Drew. He guided his spear into the soft area below the edge of the shell and between the tentacles. The momentum of the Two's dive did the rest. He pitchforked the dying animal down the corridor.

". . . this deeply rooted racial agoraphobia — they are burrowers, after all, even if they do burrow through nearly transparent trees. The murals, illustrations and especially the close-fitting hammocks support this.

"It could be argued that the process of overcoming this agoraphobia and achieving the level of technology evident here was a slow one, which means that they could be much farther advanced in the sociological sciences than we are, and a peaceful first contact would be possible — if it wasn't for the suspected mental damage . . . ."

They came at them two and three at a time, seeming to fill the corridor from wall to wall with flailing tentacles.

McCullough got his spear to a vital spot, but in the act of pushing the furiously dying thing away he felt a tentacle crash excruciatingly against his legs. When he could see again there was a Two crawling up his legs, and he had too long a hold on his weapon for it to bear. He twisted frantically to the side, pulled one leg out of the net and drew it up until the knee touched his chin, then stamped down hard on the base of the Two's horn. Reaction from the blow dislodged his other foot from the net, but the kick must have inflicted severe internal damage because the two went into violent convulsions and died.

"Dirty fighting, sir," said Drew, who had just finished off another by more conventional methods. "I must remember that trick."

Both his legs were sticking out into the corridor. Before McCullough could swing them back another Two grabbed his foot. This time the spear would bear all right, but he jabbed himself in the leg before he was able to kill it. Strangely the only pain he felt was one of loss — there was only one functioning spacesuit left now. But there was no time to think about that for long. The corridor was a solid mass of struggling alien and human bodies, a nightmare of tentacles, legs, arms, furry carpets, stabbing horns and spears. And over the high-pitched gobblings and furious voices of the combatants there was the quiet voice of McCullough expounding his theories regarding alien psychology.

". . . So far as we can tell the Two life-form is the enemy of everything which lives and moves, but particularly of the intelligent e-ts who made up the crew of the Ship. It is small wonder, then, that the single remaining alien refuses to come out of its quarters. A high level of fear must be added to the loneliness and lack of support from its fellows which it is suffering — feelings which we ourselves are in a very good position to appreciate. If we also assume them to belong to a bisexual race, and there is no evidence against this, then the crew were probably mated . . . ."

McCullough fended off a violently dying alien with a Three on its back, and saw that Drew was in serious trouble.

He had lost his spear. A Two had its tentacles wrapped around his hips and waist. He was trying frantically

to push it off him, both hands flat against its underbelly and arms stiffened. This was how Morrison had died. McCullough thought sickly as he swung up his spear and took careful aim so as not to stab Drew.

But before he could do anything a second Two landed on Drew's back and drove its horn right through his chest. Drew's arms went limp and he was caught, sandwiched and impaled between the two of them, For an instant he looked appealingly at McCullough, his face yellow-white with shock, and tried to say something. But only blood came out, and McCullough killed both the Twos without worrying about jabbing Drew.

Then suddenly the corridor was clear. The Twos had dived and spun and blundered their way past. The half dozen or so that had survived were clinging to the netting a short distance along the corridor, preparing to attack again.

". . . If the crew member has lost its mate, especially if the survivor is the weaker or less technically qualified of the two, this would further aggravate its emotionally disturbed condition as well as explain the lack of interference during our exploration.

"There is also a strong possibility that the survivor is physically as well as mentally damaged. But it is, of course, the mental aspect which concerns us at the present time . . . ."

"Here they come," said Berryman in a voice which was too weary to show emotion.

McCullough dragged his eyes away from the gruesome three-body problem which was Drew and tried desperately to pretend that none of this was happening, that soon he would wake up somewhere, anywhere, else.

But he did not wake up. The Twos rushed down on him, figments of a nightmare which was not even of Earth. Their tentacles spread and coiled like the legs of great, fat spiders and that horrible, obscene horn jabbed and quivered and gave every attack the added horror of indecent assault.

". . . psychology is far from being an exact science, and it is difficult enough to cure the aberrations of a human being . . . ."

Twice his spear made a wet, thudding sound and another pair of Twos spun out of sight. He began to think that they might, after all, succeed in exterminating the animals. It was obvious that they were all here, attracted by the scent the humans had picked up in the crew quarters. With the Twos out of the way they could investigate the Ship at leisure, building up a picture of the culture of its home planet and getting to know and understand the alien crew-member before actual contact was attempted.

But then everything went suddenly wrong.

Berryman speared a Two just as another came spinning close to the net on McCullough's side. The doctor lunged, missed and had to fend it off with his feet. Both animals crashed together just as a third arrived on the scene, and within seconds the remainder of the Twos were adding to the pile-up. McCullough

lost his spear — he couldn't bring it to bear anyway — and somebody screamed and then went on cursing. McCullough wanted to laugh, because that meant the wound had not been immediately fatal.

He threw his arms around a passing Two, hugging its bony shell close to his chest so that its horn and threshing tentacles formed a defensive shield. He shouted, "Get out of here! Crawl along the wall-net! get *clear*!"

They kicked and wrestled their way free of the jam, Berryman first, then Hollis and McCullough trailed by their madly flapping Threes. Already the first Twos were beginning to give chase.

"We have to find shelter," Berryman gasped as they sailed along the corridor. "A good, strong door — "

Hollis was looking back over his shoulder. He said, "Only . . . only five of them left . . . . "

"In here!"

Berryman had stopped and was clinging to the net beside a door, one arm out to check Hollis. They pulled the door aside and within seconds the pilot's head, shoulders and spear showed around the edge as he prepared to defend it until the others arrived.

Behind them the Twos went suddenly berserk.

"*No*!" McCullough shouted urgently. "*Berryman, get out of there!*"

But it was too late.

A Two hurled itself past both Hollis and himself without bothering even to strike at them. It impaled itself on Berryman's spear, driving the haft backward between the wall and the sliding panel. Berryman yelled that he couldn't free his spear — and the door was jammed open.

Hollis had caught the netting beside the door and was about to go through when McCullough arrived behind him. The doctor gripped the net firmly, planted both feet in the small of the physicist's back and pushed hard. Berryman looked at McCullough as if he had just committed murder.

"Contact Walters!" McCullough yelled as Hollis went spinning down the corridor. "Clear the short in the generator! And don't worry about the Twos — they aren't interested in you now!"

They would not follow Hollis — because Berryman had just opened another way into the crew quarters.

It was a different entrance, opening into a compartment they had not seen before. One wall was covered with the bright, translucent murals McCullough had come to know so well, and the rest of the small room was devoted to storage cabinets. There was a sound of wind blowing through alien trees. It was unoccupied.

McCullough pointed to the room's inner door and said, very seriously, "They mustn't kill the last survivor. We've done enough harm to the Ship as it is. We've got to kill every last one of them here and now."

"*. . . And in conclusion we must state that the surviving e-t, for physical or mental reasons or both, is almost certainly helpless . . . .*"

It was a large doorway. The spear jammed across it did not form an effective barrier.

The first attacker blundered onto Berryman's spear, the second batted it aside with one tentacle and reached for him with the other three. With no net to steady him, suspended weightless and helpless in the middle of the room, Berryman was being pulled onto its horn when a Three got between them and was caught instead. It fluttered like a furry flag and died while Berryman struggled free. The rest of the Twos were swarming in.

McCullough took a blow on the shoulder, nearly paralyzing his arm, and suddenly there was a Two with its tentacles around his head and shoulder and its horn only inches away from his face. He let go his spear and grabbed for the horn with both hands. It was dry and hot and felt like rough wood. The whole, twitching mass of its underbelly was oily with alien sweat or saliva and the stink made him want to be sick. The room rotated slowly around them as their struggles made them spin.

Berryman swam into sight beside a dying Two. He was terribly wounded and large, red bubbles were forming and breaking away from his abdomen and chest. A Three was trying to spread itself over him so as to staunch the flow of blood, and wriggling because Berryman, an expression on his face that was almost sublime, kept running his fingers through the fur on its back. The pilot swung into sight three or four times before McCullough saw that he had died. And still the doctor gripped the Two's horn and tried desperately to push it away.

But it clung and tightened its hold and hung above his head like a vile, alien umbrella. His legs were encircled, and another Two swarmed awkwardly along his body. He tried to kick it away, but it was too high up. Then he saw that there was a Three on its back, the flat, furry body oozing between the Two's tentacles, blinding and smothering it in tight, clinging fur until it drifted away dead.

But the Threes were fluttering and flapping all over the compartment, unwilling for some reason to come to his aid. His spear was drifting a few feet away, but he dared not let go of the horn for even a second and expect to live. The Two kept changing its grip and each time the horn came a little closer. His arms were very tired . . . .

". . . *In general terms its psychological troubles stem from loneliness, grief, and fear caused by its being surrounded by enemies. It must feel that there is nobody who cares whether it lives or dies.*

"*We know so little about this being that curative therapy is beyond us. But if its basic needs are enough like ours and if its mental condition has not already reached the point of no return we might, by our actions alone, show it that . . . .*"

McCullough tried to count slowly to ten. He thought that if he could just hold off that horrible yellow horn for ten seconds he would be able to do it for another ten seconds. But the muscles in his back were cracking and his arms felt as if they were on fire. He closed his eyes tightly because he was horribly afraid of seeing himself being killed.


USA

". . . and eventually make it realize that it isn't alone and that someone, us, is trying to help it . . . ."

The noise in that confined space was incredible.

McCullough opened his eyes to see chunks of tentacles and shell being torn off his Two. Then he saw why the Threes were so excited: the weapon with its odd double stock and very ordinary magazine and barrel, and the being who was holding it.

He saw, too, the four manipulators encircling the alien's head, three of which were so badly damaged that it was a miracle it was able to hold the weapon at all, and the awful, Two-inflicted scars running the length of its body. He looked last at its eyes, and for a long time neither of them did anything. Then the alien pushed its machine-gun away, and McCullough, now that his taped report had come to an end, began calling Hollis and Walters on his suit radio.

XXIII

Both supply rockets with their water, food and spare spacesuits went off course.

When he told him about it Walters's voice was strained. McCullough could imagine the pilot's feelings — the fear of how the doctor might react, his pleas for help which the pilot could not possibly give him and Walters's own, personal fear of the long voyage home with Hollis in a vehicle which had already passed the time limit for operational safety. When the pilot went on speaking, his cheerfulness was obviously forced.

He said, "Brady feels terrible about this. He says you did the right thing despite his and everyone else's opposition. He's sorry for the things he said to you, and he says he deserved everything you said to him. He — well, he's beginning to sound like Churchill — the debt owed you by the whole of humanity, the immeasurable social and scientific advances this first contact will bring about, and so on. He wishes there was only some way to bring all of us back."

The pilot broke off, then said awkwardly, "You said earlier how terrific a thing it would be to travel to another solar system . . . ."

McCullough and Hollis looked at each other, and the alien watched both of them. They were in the antechamber of the generator blister, where the physicist had just completed repairs. The e-t had followed them there as it followed them everywhere. Sometimes the being made noises at them or waved its mandible or exchanged sketches. But mostly it just hung there and watched.

It was possible that the being was security conscious or anxious lest they commit further acts of sabotage. But McCullough did not think so. To his way of thinking the e-t was simply glad of the company. Any company.

To Walters he said. "It seemed like a fine idea at the time, But I wasn't thinking straight just then. No doubt someone will bust a gut to get going, and soon. If, as I am convinced, we can duplicate the Ship's drive. But I prefer to go home."

"But, sir . . . ."

"Hollis's suit is still in one piece, and I have an idea. Last week it would not have been a good idea."

. . . Because last week Berryman and Drew were alive and both P-ships would have been needed to get them home . . . .

By the time he had finished explaining, Walters was much happier. The pilot said briskly, "Two days should be enough for the job, but I'll contact Brady at once asking for a course based on a four-day countdown. That will give us time to check our ship. And . . . and I'll tell them we want return tickets for three!"

He had to explain his idea to the alien then, but that was not too difficult because the old adage about a good picture being worth two thousand words held true even among extra-terrestrials. But the result was that the alien stuck even closer to him from then on, especially when Hollis was working on P-One. And it kept forcing things on him, things like odd pieces of equipment, the lovely, glowing murals and carvings, books and film spools as well as food and water. McCullough explained graphically about fuel reserves and weight allowances and knew that the alien understood, but it still continued to give him things.

Then early in the second day Hollis completed his work on P-One. On the Ship a large cargo hatch swung open; and Walters, moving very slowly and carefully, edged toward it. The two P-ships were docked nose to nose, and Hollis had stripped P-One of all its projecting antenna, collectors and sensory equipment and had completely removed the return fuel tanks and motors so that the bare command module would fit, just nicely, into the large cargo lock.

Walters slid the stripped-down P-One into the cargo lock, detached it from P-Two and withdrew. The outer seal was closed and pressure restored. Hollis, McCullough and the alien began transferring quantities of food, water, artifacts, photographs and sketches which they had placed in the corridor into the module. Then they wedged it firmly into the lock chamber — a present from Earth for a culture an unguessable number of light-years away.

And suddenly it was time to go.

It had been relatively easy to exchange simple concepts via sketchpad, but there was no way at all for him to tell what it was thinking during those last few minutes in the airlock. It was just a great, fat, caterpillar, an LSD nightmare with too many eyes and mouths in all the wrong places, for him to be able to read such a subtle thing as a facial expression — and the problem cut both ways. All he could do was look at it for a few minutes while it looked at him, then follow Hollis into P-One.

The cargo hatch swung open, air whistled into space and Walters came edging back with P-Two. He docked, they transferred themselves and their stores and artifacts into P-Two and drifted away again. The cargo hatch closed, Walters used steering thrust briefly, and the great Ship efll slowly away from them.

For a long time McCullough did not speak. He was thinking about the alien he had just left and its Ship and the beings who had sent her out, and wondering what they would think of his people — the people who had left three of their dead aboard, killed while trying to clear the Ship of a particularly nasty form of vermin. And in one of the cargo locks there was a human artifact, a tiny, ridiculous, fragile shell which had carried three human beings more than fifty million miles out to their Ship. He did not know what they would think about his people, but that P-ship should tell them a lot.

Walters had completed a last attitude check and was listening to Control during the last few seconds of the countdown when the generator blisters on the Ship glowed suddenly. In an instant it had shrunk from sight.

Hollis gave a great sigh of relief. "I was worried in case I'd botched the repair job," he said. Then he looked closely at McCullough and added, "Don't worry, Doctor, our friend will be all right. It's going home."

Walters was moving his lips silently. Suddenly he pressed the thrust button and said, "So are we!" END

Want to meet your favorite author? See science-fiction fans in their native habitat? Talk about the stories you've liked and hated? Here are some of the upcoming science-fiction events. We'll try to keep it up-to-date and complete, month by month . . . so if you are running a conference, let us know!

March 3, 1968: ESFA Annual Open Meeting. At YM-YWCA, 600 Broad Street, Newark, N.J.; for information, Allan Howard, 157 Grafton Ave., Newark, N.J. 07104. Membership $1.25.

March 16, 1968. SFWA Awards Dinner. Speakers, presentation of annual "Nebula" awards for excellence. Simultaneous dinners in New York and Oakland, Calif. Open to members of Science Fiction Writers of America and guests only; for information (East Coast), Robert Silverberg, 5020 Goodridge Avenue, NYC 10471; (West Coast), Poul Anderson, 3 Las Palomas, Orinda, California, 94563. An informal and unofficial conference is planned for the day of the banquet on the West Coast — SFWA members only.

March 23-24, 1968. BOSKONE-5. At Statler-Hilton Hotel, Boston; for information, Paul Galvin, 219 Harvard Street, Cambridge, Mass. 02139. Guest of Honor, Larry Niven; presentation of "Skylark" award; meeting of Tolkien Society, etc. Membership $2.00.

March 30-31, 1968. MARCON III. At Holiday Inn East, Columbus, Ohio. Guest of Honor, Frederik Pohl; panel discussions, talks, etc. For information: Larry Smith, 216 East Tibet Road, Columbus, Ohio 43202. Membership $1.50.

April 12-15, 1968. THIRDMANCON. At St. Anne's Hotel, Buxton, Derbyshire, England. Guest of Honor, Kenneth Bulmer. For information: Harry Nadler, 5 South Mesnefield Road, Salford 7, Lancaster, England. Membership, $1.00.

August 29-*September* 2, 1968. BAYCON: 26th *World Science Fiction* Convention. At Hotel Claremont, Oakland California. Philip José Farmer, Guest of Honor. More details later. For information: BAYCON, P.O. Box 261 Fairmont Station, El Cerrito, Calif. 94530. Membership: $1.00 foreign, $2.00 supporting, $3.00 attending. Join now and receive Progress Reports.

Dear Editor:

I read with delightful pleasure *To Serve the Masters*, in your September 1967 copy of *If*. Mr. (or is it Mrs.) Gaughan did a beautiful job of illustrating it.

Your cover for September issue was beautiful; not at all a match for the story. *Bride Ninety-One* was poor taste. — (Mrs.) J. H. Owens, Rt. 4, Box 401-J, Mobile, Alabama.

* * *

Dear Editor:

When you said that *If* should have a fantasy story once in awhile like *Faust Aleph-Null*, I thought that it would ruin the whole character of the magazine. But I was completely wrong. It would be a credit to the magazine if you put in a fantasy novel even more often than you had planned.

I just started reading *If* this summer. The only reason I picked it up off of the newsstand was because there was an Andre Norton story on the inside. I enjoyed this story and the rest of the book very much so I started buying it monthly.

I notice that fans don't usually ask more than one question in a fan letter, and for me one question would just not satisfy my curiosity. So here it goes.

I think that Lancer supplies the country with the best adventure fantasy books. Any reader of adventure-fantasy should read the Conan series by Howard, I would like to know if Howard's other stories will be reprinted after the 8 books of the Conan series are completed? I would like to know also if Ed Bradbury is going to write any more stories to his Martian series and if he is related to Ray Bradbury?

I can't see why writers don't expand on a story into a series. Could you tell science-fiction fans how many Doc Savage novels Kenneth Robeson wrote and how many books Neil R. Jones wrote in his famous Professor Jameson series of which Ace has printed the first three? The Jameson series is a must to all readers.

Of all the companies I like Ace the best. Do you think that Andre Norton's *The Star Hunters* will be reprinted soon?

Critics say that Kline is one of the closest contempories of ERB so could you tell me if he has any more books out besides his three Venus books, two Martians, one moon story and *Jan of the Jungle?*

I read somewhere that Gardner F. Fox works for a magazine company. What is it? And is he planning on writing another book on Llarn?

My last question is this; When is there going to be the second book in the series Tarnsman of Gor by John Norman?

I'm postive a few of these questions have been bothering other fans and I'm sure they'll be glad to read the answers.

No matter what anybody says, *If* is the best magazine on the market. — Anthony Kolodziej, 617 Hirsch St., Calumet City Ill. 60409

● Answers, anyone? — *Editor.*

* * *

Dear Editor:

Re: Max H. Flindt's article (*The Food of Mars*) printed in the October issue of *If*. Mr. Flindt states: "No other agency whether natural, animal or insect has ever made a network of lines to compare with the map of the canal systems of Mars." I contest that; think of the forces of nature that formed the Andes or better yet the gigantic rain forests of South America or the Congo. Nothing that man has done compares with such a project as that that the building of the Martian canals would entail. The Martian "canals" are, most likely, strips of vegetation (lichen would be my guess) that grow and shrink with the seasons.

This theory is supported by the fact that the smallest "detail" that we can see on Mars would have to be at least 150 miles in diameter. Only a plant spread (such as a rain forest) would fit all the qualifications for a Martian "canal". Water is fed to it through natural channels; remember the Mississippi would be invisible to us there. Freak water reflection would account for the "canals" being blue that once (sure the mathematics are against it, the mathematics are against you being alive to read this. Besides, who's going to build a 150 mile wide canal? Wanna argue?). I vote for lichen as the culprit plant as all of the evidence is in its favor. What do you say?

And while I'm at it, why do you persist in placing ads in which you "cut out the coupon" in such a manner as to force you to ruin either the cover or the opening page to a story. It's ridiculous. No sf fan will wantonly mutilate an sf magazine that he doesn't have at least two of. And put a *Hue and Cry* section in *Galaxy* while you're at it. You can't have too many letters from interested readers! — Scott Beavers, 2313 Sunrise Ave., Modesto Calif.

* * *

Dear Editor:

I have been a reader of SF since I was a freshman in high school and I've been reading *If* for two years now. *If* has presented some really great novels, such as *Skylark DuQuesne, Retief's War* and *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress,* as well as skillions of short stories and novelettes. I think, however, that the most absolutely gripping story you've ever printed, at least to my knowledge, is *Faust Aleph-Null,* by Algis Budrys.* I heartily endorse your new "policy" of printing science-fanstasy as well as straight SF. I enjoyed Andre Norton's novelette and was half scared out of my wits by the end of *Faust Aleph-Null.* I usually stick to the straight stuff, but Conan and the Witch-World can turn me on too.

Keep up the good work, Herr Editor! — Stephen Noe '71, Room 141, Stanford Hall, University of Notre Dame, Indiana 46556

● By *who?* — *Editor.*

Your Subscription Is Your Private Window On

the stars in our galaxy

The only thing we know about tomorrow is that it has its roots today. And out of the fantastic facts of today's scientific wonders *Galaxy's* all-star lineup of contributors weave stories that are sometimes wry, sometimes terrifying—but always a delight to read.

Would you like to join us, next issue and every issue thereafter for years to come, on this fascinating exploration of the fears and foibles of tomorrow? All it takes is a check, a stamp and a minute of your time. (If you prefer not to tear the coupon out of your magazine, just give us the information requested on a plain piece of paper.) From then on the mails will bring *Galaxy* to your door, with the best stories being written by the best science-fiction writers of all time.

Here are some of the famous stories that appeared in *Galaxy* in its first fifteen years. Will the next fifteen years be as good?

Frankly, we don't think so. We think they'll be better!

Galaxy Publishing Corp.
421 Hudson Street
New York, N.Y. 10014

Yes, start my subscription to *Galaxy* right away. I enclose my check or money order for:

☐ 12 issues for $6.00 ☐ 24 issues for $11.00

Name .....

Address .....

City & State ..... Zip Code .....

U.S. only. Add 10c per issue foreign postage.
Please check whether ☐ new or ☐ renewal.

Baby Is Three
Theodore Sturgeon

The Ballad of Lost C'Mell
Cordwainer Smith

The Big Time
Fritz Leiber

The Caves of Steel
Isaac Asimov

Day After Doomsday
Poul Anderson

The Demolished Man
Alfred Bester

Do I Wake or Dream?
Frank Herbert

The Dragon Masters
Jack Vance

The Fireman (Farenheit 451)
Ray Bradbury

Gravy Planet (The Space Merchants)
Pohl & Kornbluth

Here Gather the Stars (Way Station)
Clifford D. Simak

Home from the Shore
Gordon R. Dickson

Hot Planet
Hal Clement

King of the City
Keith Laumer

Mindswap
Robert Sheckley

Med Ship Man
Murray Leinster

The Men in the Walls
William Tenn

The Old Die Rich
H. L. Gold

The Puppet Masters
Robert A. Heinlein

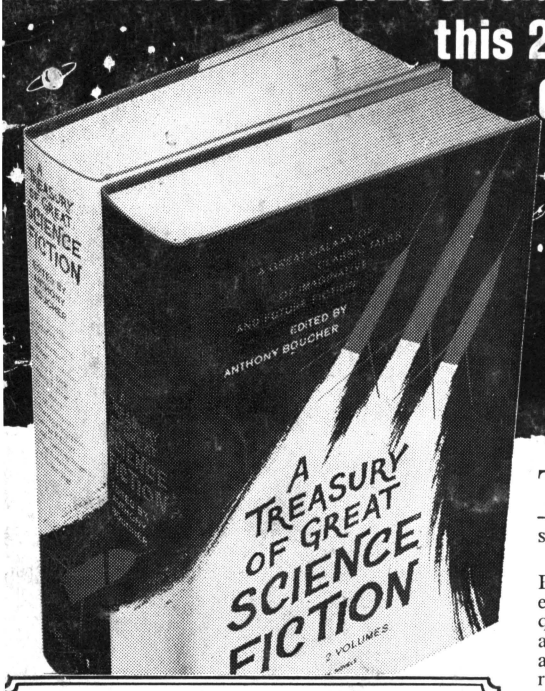
Surface Tension
James Blish

The Visitor at the Zoo
Damon Knight

Wind between the Worlds
Lester del Rey

The Science Fiction Book Club invites you to take this 2-volume Treasury of Great Science Fiction *for only* 10¢

when you join the Science Fiction Book Club and agree to accept only 4 books during the coming year.



A TREASURY OF GREAT SCIENCE FICTION
Edited by Anthony Boucher

Two giant volumes. Over 1000 pages of exciting fiction. A handsome addition to your library. Includes John Wyndham's classic **Re-Birth** . . . Heinlein's **Waldo** . . . Anderson's **Brain Wave** . . . a total of 4 full-length novels, 12 novelets, 3 short stories by such masters as Bradbury, Arthur Clarke, Judith Merril, Alfred Bester, A. E. Van Vogt, C. M. Kornbluth, Theodore Sturgeon — and more.

TAKE this 2-volume Treasury of Great Science Fiction — a "must" for any S-F fan — for only 10¢ . . . with a short trial membership in the Science Fiction Book Club.

How to Get This Unusual Value

Because you enjoy Science thrillers, the Science Fiction Book Club would like to acquaint you with the most imaginative, informative, entertaining new science fiction books as they are written. That is why we have arranged to send you this 1000-page Treasury of Great Science Fiction for only 10¢, to help cover shipping and handling, with a Trial Membership in the Club.

Here's how the Club works: each month it offers a really superb new science fact or fiction book at a fraction of its regular price. Even though these books sell for $4.95, $5.95 and more in their original editions, Club members get them FOR ONLY $1.49 EACH — in special full-length, hard-cover editions. Extra-value books cost more. And the Club tells you in advance what each monthly selection will be. During your Trial Subscription you agree to take as few as four books in the next twelve months. After that you may take as few or as many books as you want, and you may cancel at any time.

No Risk Guarantee

Send for your big introductory package today. After ten days, if you are NOT delighted, return the books and your membership will be canceled. Otherwise you will be enrolled in the Club as a Trial Member, and you need take only four books in the next twelve months. Mail the coupon today to: Science Fiction Book Club, Garden City, New York 11530.

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB
Dept 82-FHX, Garden City, N.Y. 11530

Please enroll me* as a trial member in the Science Fiction Book Club and rush me The Treasury of Great Science Fiction. I enclose 10¢ to help cover shipping and handling. Then, every month, send me the Club's free bulletin, "Things to Come," which describes coming selections. For each book I accept, I will pay only $1.49, plus shipping and handling, unless I take an extra-value selection at a higher price. I need take only four books within a year and may resign at any time thereafter.

NO-RISK GUARANTEE: If not delighted with my introductory package, I may return it in 10 days, pay nothing, owe nothing, and my membership will be canceled.

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____

If under 18, parent must sign here (Offer good in U.S.A. only.)

*Membership applications are subject to acceptance by the Club. 23-S73-A