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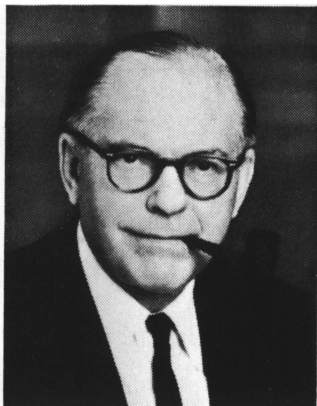
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DIARY

FOUND IN THE ST. LOUIS ZOO

Robert Bloch

AUG, 28, 1969

Dear Diary:

I've got a surprise for you. Today I am taking you to a World Science Fiction Convention.

That's right. while my wife attends to the ~~minor~~ ~~no~~ minor details,

arranging reservations, packing luggage, carrying it out to the car and driving to the airport, I will engage myself in the important business of oiling my fountain pen and setting down these notes.

You've never been to a science-fiction convention before, have you, my little Diary? I can tell, because you are so clean and spotless and undamaged—as fresh as the day I stole you from the dime store. After this convention you will look different, believe me.

What is a World Science Fiction Convention? Well, it's not a regional convention, where science-fiction fans foregather with writers and editors and publishers and artists from their own section of the country. The World Convention is big. It draws attendance from all over the United States, Canada, Europe and Asia. It's an annual affair, sponsored by a fan group located in a city which won a bid to stage the get-together at the previous convention.

This year the World-Con is being held in St. Louis, and that's where we're heading. So fasten your seat-belt, dear diary, and off we go. Cooperate by recording the words I put down in you and I promise you'll wind up immortalized in the pages of *If* magazine, right next to some Jack Gaughan artwork.

Trust me.

Later.

The first pro I met on the flight was Joyce Muscat. The first fan, Alan Foster, who sat with my wife and myself during the flight. I spent most of my time talking with Alan while my wife read *Nicholas And Alexander*, the biography of the Czar of Russia and his Empress. I guess she thinks that learning about riots, revolutions and assassinations is good preparation for the Convention.

Somewhere along the line they served us breakfast.

"These must be powdered eggs," Alan told me.

I nodded.

"What else do you expect from powdered chickens?" I inquired.

As Alan digested this bit of impeccable logic—along with his eggs—we began our descent upon St. Louis. The first sight of the city from the air came as something of a surprise to me. I've heard of the *St. Louis Blues*, but St. Louis actually looks green; at least from a height of ten thousand feet. And so do I.

At ground level the city is hot and humid. We made our way to the Chase-Park Plaza Hotel and discovered that it's really two hotels connected by a hyphen—and a passageway from the lobby of one to the elevator bank of the other. Getting from room to room is going to mean a lot of walking

(Please turn to page 146)

FRANK HERBERT



No one had ever seen a Caleban.
And now McKie had to love one!

WHIPPING

FURUNEO was his name. Alichino Furuneo. He had reminded himself of this on the ride into the city to make the long-distance call—he clung to his identity now. It was wise to firm up the ego under the circumstances. He was sixty-seven years old and could remember many who had lost their selves in the sniggertrance of communication between star systems.

But more than the cost and the mind-crawling sensation of dealing with a Taprisiot transmitter, was at stake here—and, Furuneo did not feel he could trust anyone else to speak to Jorj X. McKie.

He stood—with the two enforcers he had brought along to guard his privacy—in the reception room of the Taprisiot breeding center—one of only about twenty known to



STAR

exist in the universe. The room was no more than fifteen meters wide, perhaps thirty-five long. Its tan walls were oddly, randomly pitted. A high bench occupied three-fourths of one long wall. Multifaceted rotating lights above it cast patterned shadows onto the bench and the Taprisiot on it.

Taprisiots came in odd shapes like sawed off lengths of burned

conifers, stub limbs jutting every which way, needlelike speech appendages fluttering even when the creatures remained silent. This one's skidfeet beat a nervous rhythm on the bench.

For the third time since entering, Furuneo asked, "Are you the transmitter?"

No answer.

Taprisiots were like that. One of

the enforcers behind Furuneo cleared his throat.

"Looks like it's gonna be a long wait for this Tappy."

Furuneo nodded. He had learned several degrees of patience on his way up the ladder to his present position as Planetary Agent for the Bureau of Sabotage. He knew his only recourse now was to wait quietly. Taprisiots took their own time about anything and everything—and without a Taprisiot transmitter one did not make real-time calls across interstellar space.

Strange, this Taprisiot talent—the sensational press abounded with theories on how they communicated. Furuneo's belief was that Taprisiots distorted space in a way similar to that of a Caleban jumpdoor, sliding between the dimensions. But whatever Taprisiots did to make a call, one thing was certain—it involved the human pineal gland or the equivalent among other sentients.

"Putcha, putcha, putcha," the Taprisiot on the bench said, squeaking its speech needles.

Furuneo asked again, "Are you the transmitter?"

"Putcha, putcha, putcha," the Taprisiot repeated. "This is a remark I will now translate in the only way that may make sense to ones like yourselves of Sol/Earth ancestry. What I said was: 'I question your sincerity.'"

FURUNEO moved to a position below the bench.

"I wish to make a call to Saboteur Extraordinary Jorj X. Mc-

Kie," he said. "Your robogreeter recognized and identified me and took my creditchit. Are you the transmitter?"

"Where is this Jorj X. McKie?" the Taprisiot asked.

"If I knew, I'd be off to him in person through a jumpdoor," Furuneo said. "This is an important call. Are you the transmitter?"

"Date, time and place," the Taprisiot requested.

Furuneo sighed and relaxed. He glanced back at his enforcers, motioned them to take up stations at the room's two doors, waited while they obeyed. From here on he wanted no outside interruptions. He turned back, gave the Taprisiot the required local coordinates.

"You will sit on floor," the creature said.

Furuneo silently thanked his stars. Once a transmitter had led him to a mountainside in wind and driving rain and made him stretch out, head lower than feet, before opening the overspace contact. It had had something to do with "refining the imbedment."

Furuneo sat.

"Close eyes," the Taprisiot squeaked.

Furuneo obeyed.

"Think of contact," the Taprisiot ordered.

Furuneo thought of Jorj X. McKie, building the image in his mind—squat little man, angry red hair, face like a disgruntled frog.

Contact began with tendrils of cloying awareness. Furuneo became in his own mind a red flow sung to the tune of a silver lyre. His body went remote. Awareness

rotated above a strange landscape, its horizons slowly turning. He sensed the stars engulfed in loneliness.

What the ten million devils!

The thought exploded in Furuneo's awareness. He recognized it at once. Contactees frequently resented the call. They could not reject it, no matter how inopportune the timing—but they could make the caller feel their displeasure.

It never fails! It never fails!

McKie would be jerked to full inner awareness now, his pineal gland ignited by the long-distance contact.

Furuneo settled himself to wait out the curses. When they had subsided sufficiently he identified himself.

"I regret any inconvenience I may have caused," he said. "But the max-alert failed to say where you could be located. You must know I would not have called unless it were important."

A more or less standard opening.

"How the hell do I know whether your call's important?" McKie demanded. "Stop babbling and get on with it."

This was an unusual extension of anger even for the volatile McKie. "Am I interrupting something important?"

"I'm standing here in a Telicourt, getting a divorce," McKie said. "Can you imagine what a great time everyone here's having, watching me mumble to myself in a sniggertrance? Get to the business."

"A Caleban Beachball washed

ashore last night below Division City here on Cordiality," Furuneo said. "In view of all the deaths and insanity and the max-alert from the Bureau, I thought I'd better call you at once. It's still your case, isn't it?"

"Is this your idea of a joke?" McKie demanded.

In lieu of red tape, Furuneo cautioned himself, thinking of the Bureau maxim. It was a private thought, but McKie no doubt was catching the mood of it.

"Well?" McKie demanded.

Was McKie deliberately trying to unnerve him? Furuneo wondered. How could the Bureau's prime function—to slow the processes of government—remain operative on an internal matter such as this call? Agents were duty bound to encourage anger in government in order to expose the unstable, temperamental types, the ones who lacked the necessary personal control and ability to think under psychic stress—but why carry this duty over to a call from a fellow agent?

Some of these thoughts obviously bled through the Taprisiot transmitter because McKie reflected them, enveloping Furuneo in a mental sneer.

"You lotsa time unthink yourself," McKie said.

Furuneo shuddered, recovered his sense of self. He recognized a close call—he had almost lost his ego. The veiled warning in McKie's words had alerted him, allowing recovery. Furuneo began casting about in his mind for another interpretation of McKie's reac-

tion. Interrupting the divorce could not account for it. If the stories were true, the ugly little agent had been married fifty or more times.

"Are you still interested in the Beachball?" Furuneo ventured.

"Is there a Caleban in it?"

"Presumably."

"You haven't investigated?"

McKie's tone suggested Furuneo had been entrusted with a most crucial operation and had failed because of inherent stupidity.

Now fully alert, Furuneo said, "I acted as my orders instructed."

"Orders!"

"I'm supposed to be angry, isn't that right?"

"I'll be there as fast as I can get service—within eight standard hours at the most," McKie said. "Your orders, meanwhile, are to keep that Beachball under constant observation. The observers must be hopped up on *angeret*. It's their only protection."

"Constant observation," Furuneo said.

"If a Caleban emerges, you're to detain it by any means possible."

"A Caleban—detain it?"

"Engage it in conversation, request its cooperation—anything," McKie said.

His mental emphasis added that it was odd a Bureau agent should have to ask about throwing a monkey wrench into someone's activities.

"Eight hours," Furuneo said.

"And don't forget the *angeret*," he repeated.

MCKIE, on the honeymoon planet of Tutalsee, took an hour to complete his divorce, then returned to the float home he had moored beside the island of love flowers. Even the nepenthe of Tutalsee had failed him, McKie thought. His marriage had been wasted effort—this wife had been his fifty-fourth, somewhat lighter of skin than any of the others and more than a bit of a shrew. It had not been her first marriage and she had shown early suspicions of McKie's secondary motives.

She had already vacated the float home and McKie could sense the living entity's resentment. He had shattered the idyl the float home had been conditioned to create—the home would return to its former affability only when he, too, was gone. The floats were gentle creatures, susceptible to sentient irritation.

McKie packed. He examined his toolkit—a selection of stims, plastipicks, explosives in various denominations, raygens, multigoggles, penetrates, a wad of uniflesh, solvos, miniputer, Taprisiot life monitor, holoscan blanks, rupters, comparators all in order. The toolkit was a fitted wallet—he concealed it in an inner pocket of his jacket.

He stowed a few changes of clothing into a single bag, consigned the rest of his possessions to BuSab storage, left them for pick-up in a sealpack on a couple of chairdogs. They appeared to share the float home's resentment. They remained immobile even when he patted them affectionately.

Too bad.

McKie sighed, took out his S'eye key. This jump was going to cost the Bureau megacredits. Cordiality lay halfway across the universe.

Jumpdoors still seemed to be working all right but it disturbed McKie that he must make this journey by a means the Calebans had provided. Eerie situation. S'eye jumpdoors had become so common that most sentients accepted them without question. McKie had even shared the common acceptance before the max-alert. Now he wondered at himself. Casual acceptance demonstrated the adaptability of rational thought—a common characteristic of all sentients. The Caleban artifact had been known to the Confederated Sentients for only nineteen standard years. But in that time exactly eighty-three Calebans were known to have contacted ConSent—the first one with his gift of the jumpdoor. And eighty-two others.

McKie flipped the key in his hand, caught it deftly.

Why had the Calebans refused to part with their gift unless everyone agreed to call it S'eye? What was so important about a name?

I should be on my way, McKie told himself. Still, he delayed.

Eighty-three Calebans.

The max-alert had been explicit in its demand for secrecy regarding the outlined problem—Calebans had been disappearing, one by one. Disappearing—if that was what the phenomenon could be called. Each disappearance had been accompanied by a massive

wave of sentient deaths and insanity.

No question why the problem had been dumped in BuSab's lap instead of onto some police agency. Government fought back wherever it could—powerful men hoped to discredit BuSab. McKie found his own share of disturbance in wondering about the hidden possibilities in the selection of himself as the sentient to tackle this.

Who hates me?

He used his personally tuned key in the jumpdoor. The door began to hum with its aura of terrifying energies. Its vortal tube snapped open. McKie tensed himself for the syrupy resistance to jumpdoor passage, stepped through the tube. It was like swimming in air become molasses—perfectly normal appearing air.

MCKIE found himself in a rather ordinary office—the usual humdrum whirldesk, alert-flicker light patterns cascading from the ceiling, a view out one transparent wall onto a mountain-side. In the distance the rooftops of Division City lay beneath dull gray clouds. A luminous silver sea stretched to the horizon beyond. McKie's implanted brainclock told him the time was late afternoon, the eighteenth hour of the twenty-six-hour day. This was Cordiality, a world two hundred thousand light-years from Tutalsee's planetary ocean.

The jumpdoor's vortal tube snapped shut behind him with a crackling sound like the discharge of electricity. A faint ozone smell

was detectable in the room.

The room's standard-model chairdogs had been well trained to comfort their masters, McKie noted. One of them nudged him behind the knees until he dropped his bag and took a reluctant seat. The chairdog began massaging his back. Obviously it had been instructed to make him comfortable while someone was summoned.

McKie tuned himself to the faint sounds of normalcy around him. Footsteps of a sentient could be heard in an outer passage. A Wreave by the sound of it—the peculiar dragging of the heel on a favored foot. A conversation was going on somewhere—McKie could make out a few Lingualgalach words.

His fidgeting set the chairdog into a burst of rippling movements to soothe him. Enforced idleness nagged at him. Where was Furuneo? McKie chided himself. Furuneo probably had many planetary duties as BuSab agent here. And he could not know the full urgency of the problem. This might be one of the planets where BuSab was spread thin. The gods of immortality knew the Bureau could always find work.

McKie began reflecting on his role in the affairs of sentiency. Once, long centuries past, ConSents with a psychological compulsion to "do good" had captured the government. Unaware of the writhing complexities—the mingled guilts and self-punishments beneath their compulsion—they had eliminated virtually all delays and red tape from govern-

ment. The great machine with its blundering power over sentient life had slipped into high gear, moved faster and faster. Laws had been conceived and passed in the same hour. Appropriations had flashed into being and were spent in a fortnight. New bureaus for the most improbable purposes had leaped into existence and proliferated like some insane fungus.

Government had become a great destructive wheel without a governor, whirling with such frantic speed that it spread chaos wherever it touched.

In desperation a handful of sentients had conceived the Sabotage Corps to slow that wheel. There had been bloodshed and other degrees of violence but the wheel had been slowed. In time the Corps had become a Bureau and the Bureau was whatever it was today—an organization headed into its own corridors of entropy, a group of sentients who preferred subtle diversion to violence but were prepared for violence when the need arose.

A DOOR slid back on McKie's right. His chairdog became still. Furuneo entered, brushing a hand through the band of gray hair at his left ear. His wide mouth was held in a straight line, a suggestion of sourness about it.

"You're early," he said, patting a chairdog into place across from McKie and seating himself.

"Is this place safe?" McKie asked. He glanced at the wall where the S'eye had disgorged him. The jumpdoor was gone.

"I've moved the door back

downstairs through its own tube," Furuneo said. "This place is as private as I can make it."

He sat back, waiting for McKie to explain.

McKie nodded toward the transparent wall and the distant sea.

"That Beachball still down there?"

"My men have orders to call me if it makes any move," Furuneo said. "It washed ashore just like I said, imbedded itself in a rock outcropping and hasn't moved since."

"Imbedded itself?"

"That's how it seems."

"No sign of anything in it?"

"Not that we can see. The Ball does appear to be a bit—banged up—some pitting and a few external scars. What's this all about?"

"No doubt you've heard of Mliss Abnethe?"

"Who hasn't?"

"She recently spent some of her quintillions to hire a Caleban."

"Hire a—" Furuneo shook his head. "I didn't know it could be done."

"Neither did anyone else."

"I read the max-alert," Furuneo said. "Abnethe's connection with the case wasn't explained."

"She's a bit kinky about floggings, you know."

"I thought she was treated for that."

"Yeah, but it didn't eliminate the root of her problem. It just fixed her so she couldn't stand the sight of a sentient suffering."

"So?"

"Her solution, naturally, was to hire a Caleban."

"As victim?"

Furuneo was beginning to understand, McKie saw. Someone had once said the problem with Calebans was that they presented no patterns you could recognize. This was true, of course. If you could imagine an actuality, a being whose presence could not be denied but who left your senses dangling every time you tried to look at it—then you could imagine a Caleban.

They're shuttered windows opening onto eternity...

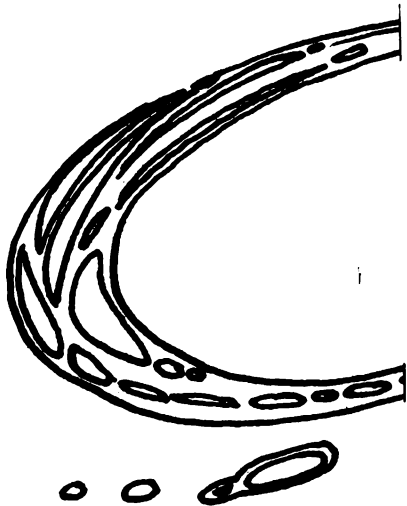
McKie had attended every Bureau lecture and briefing about Calebans. He tried to recall one of those sessions now, prompted by a nagging sensation that it had contained something of value to his present problem. It'd been something about "communications difficulties within an aura of affliction." The precise content eluded him. Odd, he thought. It was as though the Calebans' crumbled projection created an effect on sentient memory akin to their effect on sentient vision.

Here lay the true source of sentient uneasiness about Calebans. Their artifacts were real—the S'eye jumpdoors, the Beachballs in which they were reputed to live—but no one had ever really seen a Caleban.

FURUNEO, watching the fat little gnome of an agent sit there thinking, recalled the snide story about McKie, that he'd been in BuSab since the day before he was born.

"She's hired a whipping boy, eh?" Furuneo asked.

"That's about it."



"The max-alert spoke of deaths, insanity—"

"Are all your people dosed with *angeret*?" McKie asked.

"I got the message, McKie."

"Good. Anger seems to afford some protection."

"What exactly is going on?"

"Calebans have been—vanishing," McKie said. "Every time one of them goes, there are quite a few deaths and other unpleasant effects—physical and mental crippling, insanity—"

Furuneo nodded in the direction of the sea.

McKie shrugged.

"We'll have to go take a look. The hell of it is, until your call there seemed to be only one Caleb-an left in the universe, the one Abnethe hired."

"How're you going to handle this?"

"That's a beautiful question."

"Abnethe's Caleb-an," Furuneo said. "Does it have anything to say by way of explanation?"



“Haven’t been able to interview it,” McKie said. “We don’t know where she’s hidden herself—or it.”

“Really don’t know?” Furuneo blinked. “Well, cordiality is pretty much of a backwater.”

“That’s what I’ve been thinking. You said this Beachball was a little the worse for wear?”

“That’s odd, isn’t it.”

“Another oddity among many.” McKie frowned.

“They say a Caleban doesn’t get very far from its Ball,” Furuneo

said. “And they like to park them near water.”

“How much of an attempt did you make to communicate?”

“The usual. How’d you find out about Abnethe hiring a Caleban?”

“She bragged to a friend who bragged to a friend who—and one of the other Calebans dropped a hint before disappearing.”

“Any doubt the disappearances and the rest of it are tied together?”

“Let’s go knock on this thing’s door and find out,” McKie said.

MCKIE'S immediate ex-wife had adopted an early attitude of resentment toward BuSab.

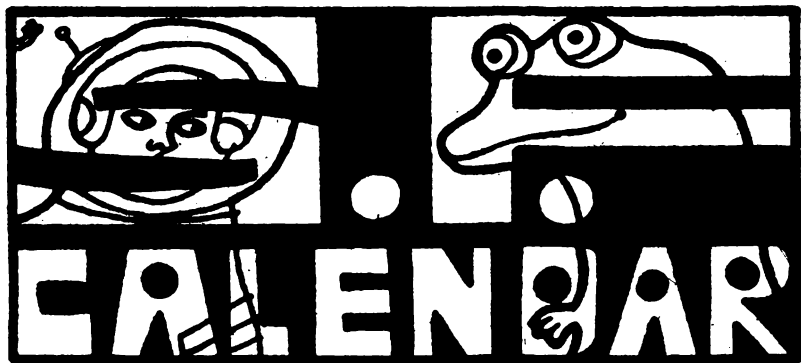
"They use you," she had protested.

McKie considered her words now as he and Furuneo sped by groundcar toward the Cordiality coast.

How are they using me this time? Setting aside the possibility that

he had been offered up as a sacrifice, many possibilities remained in reserve. Was his legal training needed? Or had the assignment been prompted by his unorthodox approach to inter-species relationships? Obviously they entertained some hope for a special sort of official sabotage—but what sort? Why had his instructions been so incomplete?

You will seek out and contact the Caleban which has been hired



March 27-29, 1970. BOSKONE. At the Statler Hilton, Boston. For information: Anthony Lewis, 33 Unity Avenue, Belmont, Mass. 02178.

March 27-29, 1970. SFCOn '70. At Hilton Inn, San Francisco Airport, California. Pro Guests of Honor: Miriam Allen de Ford and E. Hoffman Price. Fan Guest of Honor: Felice Rolfe. Memberships: \$3.00 now, \$4.00 after January 1st, \$5.00 at the door. For information: Quinn Yarbrow, 369 Columbus #5, Berkeley, California 94707.

March 27-30, 1969. EASTERCON. At the Royal Hotel, Southampton, England. Guest of Honor: James Blish. Panels, films, lectures and displays. Scheduled speakers: Raymond Fletcher, Member of Parliament who works closely with the Ministry of Technology; Dr. Kit Pedler, lecturer in Ophthalmology and TV script writer; et. al. Most of the British sf writers will be in attendance. For information: SCI-CON 70, 28 Bedfordbury, London, W.C. 2, England.

April 3-5, 1970. MINICON 3. At

by *Madame Mliss Abnethe*—or find any other *Caleban* available for sentient contact—and you will take appropriate action.

Appropriate action?

McKie shook his head.

“Why did they choose you for this gig?” Furuneo asked.

“They know how to use me,”

McKie said.

The groundcar, driven by an enforcer, negotiated a sharp turn and a vista of rocky shore opened be-

fore them. Something glittered in the distance among black lava palisades. McKie noted two aircraft hovering above the rocks.

“That it?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“What’s the local time?”

“About two and a half hours to sunset,” Furuneo said, correctly interpreting McKie’s concern. “Will the *angeret* protect us if there’s a *Caleban* in that thing and it decides to—disappear?”

the Andrews Hotel, Minneapolis. For information: Jim Young, 1948 Ulysses Street, N.E., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55418.

Memberships: Supporting, \$1.50; Attending \$2.50. For information: AGACON 70, Box 10885, Atlanta, Georgia 30310.

April 10-12, 1970. LUNACON/EASTERCON. At the Hotel McAlpin, Herald Square, New York City. Advance registration: \$2.00. For information and registration—: Devra Langsam, 250 Crown Street, Brooklyn, New York 11225.

July 3-5, 1970. WESTERCON XXIII. Will be held in Santa Barbara, California. Guest of Honor: Jack Williamson; Fan Guest of Honor: Rick Sneary. Memberships: \$3.00 through June 22; \$5.00 at the door. For information: Westercon XXIII, Box 4456, Downey, California 90241.

August 21-24, 1970. 28th WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION: HEICON INTERNATIONAL. In Heidelberg, West Germany. All convention functions will be held at the Staatshalle in Heidelberg; members of the convention will find accommodations in hotels in town. The accent of this con will be an international one, with fans and pros coming from all over the world. Guests-of Honor: Robert Silverberg (USA), Ted Tubb (England) and Dr. Herbert W. Lester del Rey. Memberships: \$2.50 (supporting membership, receive all progress reports), \$4.00 (attending); after December 31, \$4.00, \$6.00. For information and registration: HEICON 70, 6272 Niedernhausen, West Germany. Make all checks payable to Mrs. Molly Auler.

August 14-16, 1970. AGACON 70.

"I sincerely hope so," McKie said. "Why didn't you bring us by aircar?"

"People here on Cordiality are used to seeing me in a groundcar unless I'm on official business and require speed."

"You mean nobody knows about this thing yet?"

"Just the coastwatchers for this stretch. And they're on my payroll."

"You run a pretty tight operation here," McKie said. "Aren't you afraid of becoming too efficient?"

"I do my best," Furuneo said. He tapped the driver's shoulder. The groundcar pulled to a stop at a turnaround which looked down onto a reach of rocky islands and a low lava shelf where the Caleban Beachball had come to rest. "You know, I keep wondering if we really know what those Beachballs are."

"They're homes," McKie grunted.

"So everybody says."

Furuneo got out. A cold wind set his hip aching.

"We walk from here," he said.

THERE were times during the climb down the narrow path to the lava shelf when McKie felt thankful he had been fitted with a gravity web beneath his skin. It would limit his rate of descent to a non-injurious speed if he fell. But it could do nothing about any beating he might receive in the surf at the base of the palisades and it offered no protection at all against

the chill wind and the driving spray.

He wished he had worn a heat-suit.

"It's colder than I expected," Furuneo said, limping out onto the lava shelf.

He waved to the aircars. One dipped its wings, maintained its place in a slow circling track above the Beachball.

Furuneo struck out across the shelf and McKie followed, jumped across a tidal pool, blinked and bent his head against a gust of windborne spray. The pounding of the surf on the rocks was loud here. They had to raise their voices to make themselves understood.

"You see?" Furuneo shouted. "Looks like it's been banged around a bit."

"Those things are supposed to be indestructible," McKie said.

The Beachball was some six meters in diameter. It sat solidly on the shelf, about a half meter of its bottom surface hidden by a depression in the rock, as though it had melted out a resting place.

McKie led the way up to the lee of the Ball, passing Furuneo in the last few meters. He stood there, hands in pockets, shivering. The round surface of the Ball failed to cut off the cold wind.

"It's bigger than I expected," he said as Furuneo stopped.

"First one you've ever seen close up?"

"Yeah."

McKie passed his gaze across the thing. Knobs and indentations marked the opaque metallic surface. It seemed to him the surface

variations carried some pattern. Sensors, perhaps? Controls of some kind? Directly in front of him was what appeared to be a crackled mark, perhaps from a collision. It lay just below the surface, presenting no roughness to McKie's exploring hand.

"What if they're wrong about these things?" Furuneo asked.

"How?"

"What if they aren't Caleban homes?"

"Don't know. Do you recall the drill?"

"You find a nipples extrusion and you knock on it. We tried that. There's one just around to your left."

McKie worked his way around in that direction, getting drenched by a wind-driven shower of spray in the process. He reached up, still shivering from the cold, knocked at the indicated extrusion.

Nothing happened.

"Every briefing I ever attended says there's a door in these things somewhere," McKie grumbled.

"But they don't say the door opens every time you knock," Furuneo said.

McKie continued working his way around the Ball, found another nipples extrusion, knocked.

Nothing.

"We tried that one, too," Furuneo said.

"I feel like a damn fool."

"Maybe there's nobody home."

"Remote control?"

"Or abandoned—a derelict."

McKie pointed to a thin green line about a meter long on the Ball's windward surface.

"What's that?"

Furuneo hunched his shoulders against spray and wind, stared at the line.

"Don't recall seeing it."

"I wish we knew a lot more about these damn things."

"Maybe we aren't knocking loud enough."

McKie pursed his lips in thought. Presently, he took out his toolkit, extracted a lump of low-grade explosive.

"Go back on the other side," he said.

"You sure you ought to try that?"

"No."

"Well—"

Furuneo shrugged, retreated around the Ball.

McKie applied a strip of the explosive along the green line, attached a time-thread, joined Furuneo.

Presently, there came a dull thump that was almost drowned by the surf.

McKie felt an abrupt inner silence, found himself wondering: *What if the Caleban gets angry and springs a weapon we've never heard of?*

He darted around to the windward side.

AN OVAL hole had appeared above the green line, as though a plug had been sucked into the Ball.

"Guess you pushed the right button," Furuneo said.

McKie suppressed a feeling of irritation he knew to be mostly *angeret* effect.

"Yeah. Give me a leg up. Okay?"

Furuneo, he noted, was controlling the drug reaction almost perfectly.

With Furuneo's help, McKie clambered into the open port, stared inside. Dull purple light greeted him, a suggestion of movement within the dimness.

"See anything?" Furuneo called.

"Don't know." McKie scrambled inside, dropped to a carpeted floor. He crouched, studied his surroundings in the purple glow. His teeth chattered from the cold. The room around him apparently occupied the entire center of the Ball—low ceiling, flickering rainbows against the inner surface on his left, a giant soup-*spoon* shape jutting into the room directly across from him, tiny spools, handles and knobs against the wall on his right.

The sense of movement originated in the spoon bowl.

Abruptly, McKie realized he was in the presence of a Caleban.

"What do you see?" Furuneo called.

Without taking his gaze from the spoon, McKie turned his head slightly.

"There's a Caleban in here."

"Shall I come in?"

"No. Tell your men and sit tight."

"Right."

McKie returned his full attention to the bowl of the spoon. His throat felt dry. He had never before been alone in the presence of a Caleban. This was a position usually reserved for scientific investigators armed with esoteric instruments.

"I'm ah—Jorj X. McKie, Bureau of Sabotage," he said.

There was a stirring at the spoon, an effect of radiated meaning immediately behind the movement.

I make your acquaintance.

McKie found himself recalling Masarard's poetic description in *Conversation with a Caleban*.

Who can say how a Caleban speaks? Masarard had written. Their words come at you like the corruscating of a nine-ribbon Sojuru barber pole. The insensitive say such words radiate. I say the Caleban speaks. When words are sent, is that not speech? Send me your words, Caleban, and I will tell the universe of your wisdom.

Having experienced the Caleban's words, McKie decided Masarard was a pretentious ass. The Caleban radiated. Its communication registered in the sentient mind as sound but the ears denied they had heard anything. It was the same order of effect Calebans had on the eyes. You felt you were seeing something but the visual centers refused to confirm.

"I hope my—ah—I didn't disturb you."

I possess no referrent for disturb. You bring a companion?

"My companion's outside."

Invite your companion.

McKie hesitated, then: Furuneo. "C'mon in."

The planetary agent joined him, crouched at McKie's left in the purple gloom.

"Damn, that's cold out there," Furuneo said.

Low temperature and much

moisture, the Caleban agreed. McKie, having turned to watch Furuneo enter, saw a closure appear from the solid wall beside the open port. Wind, spray and surf were shut off.

The temperature in the Ball began to rise.

"It's going to get hot," McKie said.

"What?"

"Hot. Remember the briefings? Calebans like their air hot and dry."

He already could feel his damp clothing begin to turn clammy against his skin.

"That's right," Furuneo said.

"What's going on?"
"We've been invited in," McKie said. "We didn't disturb him because he has no referrent for disturb."

"Where is he?"

"In that spoon thing."

"Yeah—I—uh—yeah."

You may address me as Fanny Mae, the Caleban said. *I can reproduce my kind and answer the equivalent for female.*

"Fanny Mae," McKie said with what he knew to be stupid vacuity. How could you look at the damn' thing? Where was its face? "My companion is Alichino Furuneo, planetary agent on Cordiality for the Bureau of Sabotage."

I make your acquaintance, the Caleban said. *Permit an inquiry into the purpose for your visit.*

Furuneo scratched his right ear.

"How are we hearing it?" He shook his head. "I can understand it but—"

"Never mind," McKie said.

He warned himself: *Gently, now. How do you question one of these things?* The insubstantial Caleban presence, the twisting way his mind accepted the thing's words—it all combined with the *angeret* in producing irritation.

"I—my orders," McKie said, "are to seek a Caleban employed by Mliss Abnethe."

I receive your questions, the Caleban said.

MCKIE tried tipping his head from side to side, wondered if it were possible to achieve an angle of vision where the something across from him would assume recognizable substance.

"What are you doing?" Furuneo asked.

"Trying to see it."

You seek visible substance? the Caleban asked.

"Uh, yes," McKie said.

He was reminded of the original encounter with the Gowachin planets, the first earth-human meeting the first froglike Gowachin and the Gowachin introducing himself as William. Where in ninety thousand worlds had the Caleban dug up the name Fanny Mae? And why?

I produce mirror, the Caleban said, *which reflects outward from projection along plane of being.*

"Are we going to see it?" Furuneo whispered. "Nobody's ever seen a Caleban."

"Quiet."

A half-meter oval something of green, blue and pink without apparent connection to the empty-presence of the Caleban materialized above the giant spoon.

Think of this as stage upon which I present my selfdom, the Caleban said.

"You see anything?" Furuneo asked.

McKie's visual centers conjured a borderline sensation, a feeling of distant life whose rhythms danced unfleshed within the colorful oval like the sea roaring in an empty shell. He recalled a one-eyed friend and the difficulty of focusing the attention on that lonely eye without being drawn to the vacant patch.

"That's the oddest thing I ever saw," Furuneo whispered. "You see it?"

McKie described his visual sensation.

"That what you see?"

"I guess so," Furuneo said.

Visual attempt fails, -the Caleban said. *Perhaps I employ insufficient contrast.*

Wondering if he could be mistaken, McKie thought he detected a plaintive mood in the Caleban's words. Was it possible Calebans disliked not being seen?

"It's fine," McKie said. "Now may we discuss the Caleban who—"

Perhaps overlooking cannot be connected, the Caleban said, interrupting. *We enter state for which there exists no remedy. As well argue with the night, as your poets tell us.*

The sensation of an enormous sigh swept out from the Caleban and over McKie. It was sadness, a doom-fire gloom. He wondered if he were experiencing an *angeret* failure.

"You feel that?" Furuneo asked his companion.

"Yes."

McKie felt his eyes burning. He blinked. Between blinks, he glimpsed a flower element hovering within the oval—deep red against the room's purple, with black veins woven through it. Slowly it blossomed, closed, blossomed. He wanted to reach out, touch it with a handful of compassion.

"How beautiful," he whispered.

"What is it?" Furuneo whispered.

"I think we're seeing a Caleban."

"I want to cry," Furuneo said.

"Control yourself," McKie cautioned.

He cleared his throat. Twanging bits of emotion tumbled through him. They were like pieces cut from the whole and loosed to seek their own patterns. The *angeret* effect was lost in the mixture.

Slowly, the image in the oval faded. The emotional torrent subsided.

Furuneo exhaled audibly.

"Fanny Mae," McKie ventured. "What was—"

I am one employed by Mliss Abnethe, the Caleban said. *Correct verb usage?*

"Bang," Furuneo said. "Just like that."

McKie glanced at him, at the place where they had entered the Ball. No sign remained of the oval hole. The heat in the room was becoming unbearable. *Correct verb usage?* He looked at the Caleban manifestation. Something still

shimmered above the spoon shape but it defied his visual centers to describe it.

"Was it asking a question?" Furuneo asked.

"Be still a minute," McKie snapped. "I want to think."

Seconds ticked past. Furuneo felt perspiration running down his neck, under his collar. He could taste it in the corners of his mouth.

McKie sat stared silently at the giant spoon. The Caleban employed by Abnethe. He still felt the aftermath of the emotional melange. Some lost memory demanded his attention but he could not bring it out for examination.

Furuneo, watching McKie, began to wonder if the Saboteur Extraordinary had been mesmerized.

"You still thinking?" he whispered.

McKie nodded.

Then: "Fanny Mae, where is your employer?"

Coordinates not permitted, the Caleban said.

"Is she on this planet?"

Different connectives.

"I don't think you two are talking the same language," Furuneo said.

"From everything I've read and heard about Calebans, that's the big problem," McKie said. "Communication difficulty."

Furuneo wiped sweat from his forehead.

"Have you tried calling Abnethe long distance?"

"Don't be stupid," McKie said. "That's the first thing I tried."

"Well?"

"Either the Taprisiots are tell-

ing the truth and can't make contact or she's bought them off some way. What difference does it make? So I contact her. How does that tell me where she is? How do I invoke a monitor clause with someone who doesn't wear a monitor?"

"How could she buy off the Taprisiots?"

"How do I know? For that matter, how could she hire a Caleban?"

Invocation of value exchange, the Caleban said.

McKie chewed at his upper lip.

FURUNEO leaned against the wall behind him. He knew what inhibited McKie here. You walked softly with a strange sentient species. No telling what might cause affront. Even the way you phrased a question could cause trouble. BuSab should have assigned a Zeno expert to help McKie.

"Abnethe offered you something of value, Fanny Mae?" McKie ventured.

I offer judgment, the Caleban said. *Abnethe may not be judged friendly-good-nice-kindly—acceptable.*

"Is that your judgment?" McKie asked.

Your species prohibits flagellation of sentients, the Caleban said. *Abnethe orders me flagellated.*

"Why don't you just refuse?"

Contract obligation.

"Contract obligation?"

McKie glanced at Furuneo, who shrugged.

"Ask where she goes to be flagellated," Furuneo suggested.

Flagellation comes to me.

"By flagellation, you mean

you're whipped? Is that right?"

Explanation of whipping describes production of froth, the Caleban said. Not proper term. Abnethe orders me flogged.

"That thing talks like a computer," Furuneo said.

"Let me handle this," McKie ordered.

Computer describes mechanical device, the Caleban said. I live.

"He meant no insult," McKie said.

Insult not interpreted.

"Does the flogging hurt you?" McKie asked.

Explain hurt.

"Cause you discomfort?"

Reference recalled. Such sensations explained. Explanations cross no connectives.

"Do you choose to be flogged?" he asked.

Choice made.

"Well, would you make the same choice if you had it to do over?"

Confusing reference, the Caleban said. If over refers to repetition, I make no voice in repetition. Abnethe sends Palenki with whip and flogging occurs.

Furuneo shuddered.

"A Palenki!"

"You knew it had to be something like that," McKie said. "What else could you get to do such a thing except a creature without much brain and lots of obedient muscle?"

"But a Palenki! Couldn't we hunt for—"

"We've known from the first what she had to be using," McKie said. "Where do you hunt for one

Palenki?" He shrugged. "Why can't Calebans understand the concept of being hurt? Is it pure semantics or do they lack the proper nerve linkages?"

Understand nerves, the Caleban said. Any sentience must possess control linkages. But hurt—discontinuity of meaning appears insurmountable.

"Abnethe can't stand the sight of pain you said," Furuneo reminded McKie.

"Yeah. How does she watch the floggings?"

Abnethe views my home.

When no further answer was forthcoming McKie asked, "I don't understand. What's your home have to do with it?"

My home this. My home contains—aligns? Master S'eye. Abnethe possesses connectives for which she pays.

McKie wondered if the Caleban were playing some sarcastic game with him. But all the information about the species made no reference to sarcasm. Word confusions, yes—but no apparent insults or subterfuges.

"Abnethe sounds like a mixed-up bitch," McKie muttered.

Physically unmixed, the Caleban said. Isolated in her own connectives now but unified and presentable by your standards—so say judgments made in my presence. If, however, you refer to Abnethe psyche, mixed-up conveys accurate description. What I see of Abnethe psyche most intertwined. Convolutions of odd color displace my vision-sense in extraordinary fashion.

McKie gulped.

"You see her psyche?"

I see all psyche.

"So much for the theory that Caleban cannot see," Furuneo said. "All is illusion, eh?"

"How is this possible?" McKie asked.

I occupy space between physical and mental, the Caleban said. Thus your fellow sentients explain in your terminology.

"Gibberish," McKie said.

You achieve discontinuity of meaning.

"Why did you accept Abnethe's offer of employment?"

No common referrent for explanation.

"You achieve discontinuity of meaning," Furuneo said.

So I surmise.

"I must find Abnethe," McKie said.

I give warning, the Caleban said.

"Watch it," Furuneo whispered. "I sense rage that's not connected with the *angeret*."

McKie waved him to silence.

"What warning, Fanny Mae?"

Potentials in your situation, the Caleban said. I allow my—person? Yes, my person. I allow my person to entrap itself in association which fellow sentients may interpret as nonfriendly.

MCKIE scratched his head, wondered how close they were to anything that could validly be called communication. He wanted to come right out and inquire about the Caleban disappearances, the deaths and insanity,

but feared possible consequences.

"Nonfriendly?"

Understand, the Caleban said, life which flows in all carries sub-ternal connectives. Each entity remains linked until final discontinuity removes from—network? Yes, suitable term: network. Unaware of tanglements, I convey linkages of other entities into association with Abnethe. Should personal discontinuity overtake self—all entities entangled share it.

"Discontinuity?" McKie asked, not sure he followed this but afraid he did.

Tanglements come from contact between sentients not originating in same linearities of awareness, the Caleban said, ignoring McKie's question.

"I'm not sure what you mean by discontinuity," McKie pressed.

In context ultimate discontinuity presumed opposite of pleasure—your term.

"You're getting nowhere," Furuneo said.

His head ached from trying to equate the radiant impulses of communication from the Caleban with speech.

"Sounds like a semantic identity situation," McKie said. "Black and white statements—but we're trying to find an interpretation in between."

All between, the Caleban said.

"Presumed opposite of pleasure?"

"Our term," Furuneo reminded him.

"Tell me, Fanny Mae," McKie said, "do we other sentients refer

to this ultimate discontinuity as death?"

Presumed approximate term, the Caleban said. Abnegation of mutual awareness, ultimate discontinuity, death—all appear similar descriptives.

"If you die many others are going to die—is that it?"

All users of S'eye. All in tangle-ment.

McKie was shocked.

"All?"

All such in your—wave? Difficult concept. Calebans possess label for this concept—plane? Planguinity of beings? Surmise proper term not shared. Problem concealed in visual exclusion which clouds mutual association.

Furuneo touched McKie's arm.

"Is she saying that if she dies everyone who's used a S'eye jump-door goes with her?"

"Sounds like it."

"I don't believe it!"

"The evidence would seem to indicate we have to believe her."

"But—"

"I wonder if she's in any danger of going soon."

"If you grant the premise, that's a good question."

"What precedes your ultimate discontinuity, Fanny Mae?" McKie asked.

All precedes ultimate discontinuity.

"Yeah, but are you headed toward this ultimate discontinuity?"

Without choice, all head for ultimate discontinuity.

"McKie mopped his forehead. The temperature inside the Ball

had been going up rather steadily.

I fulfill demands of honor, the Caleban said. Acquaint you with prospect. Sentients of your—planguinity appear unable, lacking means of withdrawal from influence of my association with Ab-nethe. Communication understood?

"McKie," Furuneo said, "have you any idea how many sentients have used a jumpdoor?"

"Damn near everyone."

Communication understood? the Caleban repeated.

"I don't know," McKie groaned.

Difficult sharing of concepts, the Caleban said.

"I still don't believe it," Furuneo said.

"You'd better believe it," McKie said. "It squares with what some of the other Calebans said, near as we can reconstruct it after the messes they've left."

Understand withdrawal of companions creates disruption, the Caleban said. *Disruption equates with mess?*

"That's about it," McKie said.

"Tell me, Fanny Mae, is there immediate danger of your—ultimate discontinuity?"

Explain imminent.

"Soon," McKie snapped. "Short time."

Time concept difficult, the Caleban said. *You inquire of personal ability to surmount flagellation?*

"That's good enough," McKie said. "How many more flagellations can you survive?"

Explain survive.

"How many flagellations until you experience ultimate disconti-

nunity? Can you possibly know?"

Perhaps ten flagellations. Perhaps lesser number. Perhaps more.

"And your death will kill all of us?" McKie asked, hoping he had misunderstood.

Lesser number than all, the Caleban said.

"You just think you're understanding her," Furuneo said.

"I'm afraid I understand her."

Fellow Calebans, the Caleban said, recognizing entrapment, achieve withdrawing. Thus they avoid discontinuity.

"How many Calebans remain in our—plane?"

Single entity of selfness, the Caleban said.

"Just the one," McKie muttered. "That's a damn thin thread."

"I don't see how the death of one Caleban can cause all that havoc," Furuneo said.

Explain by comparison. Scientist of your planguinity explains reaction of stellar selfdom. Stellar mass enters expanding condition. In this condition stellar mass engulfs and reduces all substances to other energy patterns. All substances encountered by stellar expansion change. Thus ultimate discontinuity of personal selfdom reaches along linkages of S'eye connectives, repatterns all entities encountered.

"Stellar selfdom," Furuneo said, shaking his head.

Incorrect term? the Caleban asked. *Energy selfdom, perhaps!*

"SHE'S saying," McKie said, "that use of S'eye doors has

tangled us with her life some way. Her death will reach out like a stellar explosion along all these tangled networks and kill us."

"That's what you think she's saying," Furuneo objected.

"That's what I have to believe she's saying," McKie said. "Our communication may be tenuous but I think she's sincere. Can't you still feel the emotions radiating from her?"

"Two species can be said to share emotions only in the broadest way," Furuneo said. "She doesn't even understand what we mean by pain."

Scientist of your planguinity, the Caleban said, explains emotional base for communication. Lacking emotional commonality, sameness of labels uncertain. Emotion concept not certain for Calebans. Communication difficulty assumed.

McKie nodded. He could see a further complication—the question of whether the Caleban's words were spoken or radiated in some unthinkable manner completed their confusion.

"I believe you're right in one thing," Furuneo said.

"Yes?"

"We have to assume we understand her."

McKie swallowed in a dry throat.

"Fanny Mae," he said, "have you explained this ultimate discontinuity prospect to Mliss Abnethe?"

Problem explained, the Caleban said. *Fellow Calebans attempt remedy of error. Abnethe fails of*

comprehension or disregards consequences. Connectives difficult.

"Connectives difficult," McKie muttered.

All connectives of single S'eye, the Caleban said. Master S'eye of self creates mutual problem.

"Don't tell me you understand that," Furuneo objected.

"Abnethe employs Master S'eye of self," the Caleban said. "Contract agreement gives Abnethe right of use. One Master S'eye of self. Abnethe uses."

"So she opens a jumpdoor and sends her Palenki through it," Furuneo said. "Why don't we just wait here and grab her?"

"She could close the door before we even got near her," McKie growled. "No, there's more to what this Caleban's saying. I think she's telling us there's only one Master S'eye—control system, perhaps, for all the jumpdoors—and Fanny Mae here is in control of it or the channel operation or—"

"Or something."

Abnethe control S'eye by right of purchase, the Caleban said.

"See what I mean?" McKie said. "Can you override her control, Fanny Mae?"

Terms of employment require not interfere.

"But can't you still use your own S'eye doors?" McKie pressed.

All use, the Caleban said.

"This is insane!" Furuneo snapped.

Insanity defines as lack of orderly thought progression in mutual acceptance of logical terms, the Caleban said. Insanity frequent

judgment of one species upon other species. Proper interpretation otherwise.

"I think I just had my wrist slapped," Furuneo said.

"Look," McKie said, "the other deaths and insanity around Caleban disappearances substantiate our interpretation. We're dealing with something explosive and dangerous."

"So we find Abnethe and stop her."

"You make that sound so simple," McKie said. "Here are your orders. Get out of here and alert the Bureau. The Caleban's communication won't show on your recorder but you'll have it all down in your memory. Tell them to scan you for it."

"Right. You're staying?"

"Yes."

"What'll I say you're doing?"

"I want to look at Abnethe's companions and her surroundings."

Furuneo cleared his throat.

"Have you thought of, you know—just bang?"

He made the motion of firing a raygun.

"There's a limit on what can go through a jumpdoor and how fast," McKie chided. "You know that."

"Maybe this jumpdoor's different."

"I doubt it."

"After I've reported in, what then?"

"Sit tight outside there until I call you—unless they give you a message for me. Oh, and start a general search on Cordiality—just in case."

"Of course." Furuneo hesitated. "One thing—whom do I contact at the Bureau? Bildoan?"

McKie glanced up. Why should Furuneo question whom to call? What was he trying to say?

It dawned on McKie then that Furuneo had hit on a logical concern. BuSab director Napoleon Bildoan was a Pan Spechi, pentarchal sentient, human only in appearance. Since McKie, a human, held nominal charge in this case, that might appear to confine control of it, excluding other members of the ConSentiency. Inter-species political infighting could take odd turns in a time of stress. Best to involve a broad directorate here.

"Thanks," McKie said. I wasn't thinking much beyond the immediate problem."

"This is the immediate problem."

"I understand. All right, I was tapped for this chore by our Director of Discretion."

"Gitchel Siker?"

"Yes."

"That's one Laclac and Bildoan, a PanSpechi. Who else?"

"Get somebody out of the legal department."

"Bound to be a human."

"The minute you stretch it that far—they'll all get the message," McKie said. "They'll bring in the others before making any crucial decision."

Furuneo nodded.

"One other thing."

"What?"

"How do I get out of here?"

"Good question." McKie faced the giant spoon. "Fanny Mae, how

does my companion leave here?"

"He wishes to journey where?"

"To his home."

Connectives apparent, the Caleban said.

MCKIE felt a gush of air. His ears popped to a change in pressure. There was a sound like the pulling of a cork from a bottle. He whirled. Furuneo was gone.

"You—sent him home?" McKie asked.

Correct. Desired destination visible. Sent swiftness. Prevent temperature drop below proper level.

McKie, feeling perspiration roll down his cheeks, said, "I wish I knew how you did that? Can you actually see our thoughts?"

See only strong connectives.

The Caleban's remark about temperature came back to him. What was a proper temperature level? Damn! The air was boiling in here. His skin itched with perspiration. His throat was dry. Proper temperature level?

"What's the opposite of proper?"

False.

McKie gave up. How could false be the opposite of proper? He passed a hand across his forehead, gathering perspiration which he tried to wipe off on his jacket.

The shimmering oval above the giant spoon abruptly wavered outward, contracted, flowed up, down, left. McKie received a definite im-

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pression of distress. The oval vanished but his eyes still tracked the Caleban's unpresence.

"Is something wrong?" McKie asked.

The round vortal tube of a S'eye jumpdoor opened behind the Caleban. Beyond the opening stood a woman, a figure dwarfed as though seen through the wrong end of a telescope. McKie recognized her from all the newsvisos and from the holoscans he'd been fed as background briefing for this assignment.

He was confronting Mliss Abnethe in a light somewhat reddened by its slowed passage through the jumpdoor.

It was obvious that the beautybarbers of Steadyon had been about their expensive work on her person. He made a mental note to have that checked. Her figure presented the youthful curves of a pleasurefem. The face beneath fairyblue hair was focused around a red petal mouth. Large summery green eyes and a sharply cleaving nose conveyed odd contrast—dignity versus hoyden. She was a flawed queen—age mingled with youth. She must be at least eighty standard years but the beautybarbers had achieved this startling combination—available pleasurefem and remote, hungry power.

The expensive body wore a long gown of gray rainpearls which matched her, movement for movement, like a glittering skin. She moved nearer the vortal tube. As she approached, the edges of the tube blocked off first her feet, then her legs, thighs, waist.

McKie felt his knees age a thousand years in that brief passage. He remained crouched near the place where he had entered the Beachball.

"Ah, Fanny Mae," Mliss Abnethe said. "You have a guest."

Jumpdoor interference caused her voice to sound faintly hoarse.

"I am Jorj X. McKie, Saboteur Extraordinary."

Was that a contraction in the pupils of her eyes? McKie wondered. She stopped with only her head and shoulders visible in the tube's circle.

"And I am Mliss Abenthe, private citizen."

Private citizen? McKie thought that this bitch controlled the productive capacity of at least five hundred worlds. He rose slowly, to his feet.

"The Bureau of Sabotage has official business with you," he said, putting her on notice to satisfy the legalities.

"I am a private citizen."

The words were prideful, vain, marred by petulance.

McKie took heart at the revealed weakness. It was a particular kind of flaw that often went with wealth and power.

"Fanny Mae, am I your guest?" he asked.

Indeed, the Caleban said. I open my door to you.

"Am I your employer, Fanny Mae?" Abnethe demanded.

Indeed, you employ me.

A breathless, crouching look came over her face. Her eyes went to slits.

"Very well. Then prepare to ful-

fill at once the obligations of—"
"One moment."

McKie felt desperate. Why was she moving so fast? What was that faint whine in her voice?

"Guests do not interfere."

"BuSab makes its own decisions about interference."

"Your jurisdiction has limits."

McKie heard the beginnings of many actions in that statement—hired operatives, gigantic sums spent as bribes, doctored agreements, treaties, stories planted with the visos on how this good and proud lady had been mistreated by her government, a wide enlistment of personal concern to justify—what? Violence against his person? He thought not. More likely to discredit him, to saddle him with onerous misdeeds.

Thought of all that power made McKie wonder suddenly why he made himself vulnerable to it. Why had he chosen BuSab? *Because I'm difficult to please*, he told himself. *I'm a Saboteur by choice*. There was no going back on that choice now. BuSab appeared to walk down the middle of everywhere and always wound up on the high road.

"Agreed we have limits," McKie growled, "but I doubt you'll ever see them. Now, what's going on here?"

"You're not a police agent."

"Perhaps I should summon police."

"On what grounds?"

She smiled. She had him there and knew it. Her legal staff had explained to her the open-association clause in the ConSentient Ar-

ticles of Federation: *When members of different species agree formally to an association from which they derive mutual benefits the contracting parties shall be the sole judges of said benefits, provided their agreement breaks no law, covenant or legative article binding upon said contracting parties; provided further that said formal agreement was achieved by voluntary means and involves no breach of the public peace.*

"Your actions will bring about the death of this Caleban," McKie said.

He did not hold out much hope for this argument but it bought a bit more time.

"You'll have to establish that the Caleban concept of discontinuity interprets precisely as death," Abnethe said. "You can't do that because it's not true. Why do you interfere? This is just harmless play between consenting ad—"

More than play, the Caleban said.

"Fanny Mae," Abnethe ordered. "You are not to interrupt! Remember our agreement."

MCKIE stared in the direction of the Caleban's unpresence, tried to interpret the spectrum flare that rejected his senses.

Discern conflict between ideals and structure of government, the Caleban said.

"Precisely," Abnethe said. "I'm assured that Calebans cannot suffer pain, that they don't even have a term for it. If it's my pleasure to stage an apparent flogging and ob-

serve in detail the reactions of—”

“Are you sure she suffers no pain?” McKie asked.

Again a gloating smile came over Abnethe's face.

“I've never seen her suffer pain. Have you?”

“Have you seen her do anything?”

“I've seen her come and go.”

“Do you suffer pain, Fanny Mae?” McKie asked.

No referents for this concept,

“Are these floggings going to bring about your ultimate discontinuity?” McKie asked.

Explain bring about.

“Is there any connection between the floggings and your ultimate discontinuity?”

Total universe connectives include all events.

“I pay well for my game,” Abnethe said. “Stop interfering, McKie.”

“How are you paying?”

“None of your business.”

“I make it my business,” McKie said. “Fanny Mae?”

“Don't answer him,” Abnethe snapped.

“I can still summon police and the officers of a Discretionary Court,” McKie said.

“By all means,” Abnethe gloated. “You are, of course, ready to answer a suit charging interference with an open agreement between consenting members of different species?”

“I can still get an injunction,” McKie said. “What's your present address?”

“I decline to answer on advice of counsel.”

McKie glared at her. She had him. He could not charge her with flight to prevent prosecution unless he had proved a crime. To prove a crime he must get a court to act and serve her with the proper papers in the presence of bonded witnesses, bring her into a court and allow her to face her accusers. And her attorneys would tie him in knots every step of the way.

Offer judgment, the Caleban said. Nothing in Abnethe contract prohibits revelation of payment. Employer provides educators.

“Educators?”

“Very well,” Abnethe conceded. “I provide Fanny Mae with the finest instructors and teaching aids our civilization can supply. She's been soaking up our culture. Anything she requested she got. And it wasn't cheap.”

“And she still doesn't understand pain?”

Hope to acquire proper referents.

“Will you have time to acquire those referents?”

Time difficult concept, the Caleban said. Statement of instructor, to wit: 'Relevancy of time to learning varies with species.' Time possesses length, unknown quality termed duration, subjective and objective dimension. Confusing.

“Let's make this official,” McKie said. “Abnethe, are you aware that you're killing this Caleban?”

“Discontinuity and death are not the same,” Abnethe objected. “Are they, Fanny Mae?”

Wide disparity of equivalents exist between separate waves of being.

"I ask you formally, Mliss Abnethe," McKie said, "if this Caleban calling herself Fanny Mae has told you the consequences of an event she describes as ultimate discontinuity?"

"You just heard her say there are no equivalents."

"You've not answered my question."

"You're quibbling."

"Fanny Mae," McKie said, "have you described for Mliss Abnethe, the consequences of—"

Bound by contract connectives, the Caleban said.

"You see." Abnethe pounced. "She's bound by our open agreement and you're interfering."

Abnethe gestured to someone not visible in the jumpdoor's vortal tube.

THE opening suddenly doubled its diameter. Abnethe stepped aside, leaving half her head and one eye visible to McKie. A crowd of watching sentients could be discerned now in the background. Into Abnethe's place darted the turtle form of a giant Palenki. Its hundreds of tiny feet flickered beneath its bulk. The single arm growing from the top of its ring-eyed head trailed a long whip in a double-thumbed hand. The arm thrust through the tube, jerked the whip against jumpdoor resistance, lashed the whip forward. The whip cracked above the spoon bowl.

A crystalline spray of green showered the unseeable region of the Caleban. It glittered for a moment like a fluorescent explo-

sion of fireworks, then dissolved.

An ecstatic moan came through the vortal tube.

McKie fought an intense outpouring sensation of distress, leaped forward. Instantly, the S-eye jumpdoor closed, dumping a severed Palenki arm and whip onto the floor of the room. The arm writhed and turned, slowed—slowed. It fell still.

"Fanny Mae?" McKie said.

Yes?

"Did that whip hit you?"

Explain whip hit.

"Encounter your substance!"

Approximately.

McKie moved close to the spoon bowl. He still sensed distress but knew it could be a side effect of *angeret* and the incident he'd just witnessed.

"Describe the flogging sensation," he said.

You possess no proper referents.

"Try me."

I inhaled substance of whip, exhaled my own substance.

"You breathed it?"

Aproximately.

"Well—describe your physical reactions."

No common physical referents.

"Any reaction, dammit!"

Whip incompatible with my glssrrk.

"Your what?"

No common referents.

"What was that green spray when it hit you?"

Explain greenspray.

By referring to wavelengths and describing airborne water droplets—with a side excursion into wave

and wind action—McKie thought he conveyed an approximate idea of green spray.

You observe this phenomenon?

"I saw it, yes."

Extraordinary!

McKie hesitated, an odd thought filling his mind. *Could he be as insubstantial to the Caleban as the Caleban appeared to him?*

He asked.

All creatures possess substance relative to their own quantum existence, the Caleban said.

"But do you see our substance when you look at us?"

Basic difficulty. Your species repeats this question. Possess no certain answer.

"Try to explain. Start by telling me about the green spray."

Greenspray unknown phenomenon.

"But what could it be?"

Perhaps interplanar phenomenon, reaction to exhalation of my substance.

"Is there a limit to how much of your substance you can exhale?"

Quantum relationship defies limitations of your plane. Movement exists between planar origins. Movement changes referential relatives.

No constant referents? McKie wondered. But there had to be. He explored this aspect with the Caleban, questions and answers obviously making less and less sense to both of them.

"But there must be some constant."

Connectives possess aspect of this constant you seek."

"What are connectives?"

No—

"Referents!" McKie stormed. "Then why use the term?"

Term approximates. Tangential occlusion another term expressing something similar.

"Tangential occlusion," McKie muttered. Then: "Tangential occlusion?"

Fellow Caleban offers this term after discussion of problem with Laclac sentient possessing rare insight.

"One of you talked this over with a Laclac, eh? Who was this Laclac?"

Identity not conveyed but occupation known and understandable.

"Oh? What was his occupation?"

Dentist.

McKie exhaled a long, held breath, shook his head with bewilderment.

"You understand—dentist?"

All species requiring ingestion of energy sources must reduce such sources to convenient form.

"You mean they bite?"

Explain bite.

"I thought you understood dentist."

Dentist—one who maintains system by which sentients shape energy for ingestion.

"Tangential occlusion," McKie muttered. "Explain what you understand by occlusion."

Proper matching of related parts in shaping system.

"We're getting nowhere," McKie growled.

Every creature somewhere, the Caleban said.

"But where? Where are you,

for example? Just tell me that.”

Planar relationships unexplainable.

“Let’s try something else,” McKie said. “I’ve heard you can read our writing.”

Reducing what you term writing to compatible connectives suggests time-constant communication, the Caleban said. *Not really certain, however, of time-constant or required connectives.*

“Well—let’s go at the verb ‘to see,’” McKie said. “Tell me what you understand by the action of seeing.”

To see—receive sensory awareness of external energy.

McKie buried his face in his hands. He felt dispirited, brain numbed by the Caleban’s radiant bombardment. What would be the sensory organs? He knew such a question would only send them off on another empty label chase.

Presently he dropped his hands, said, “Is there somewhere you

could take this—your home—where Miss Abnethe couldn’t reach you.”

Cannot.

“Why?”

Agreement prohibits.

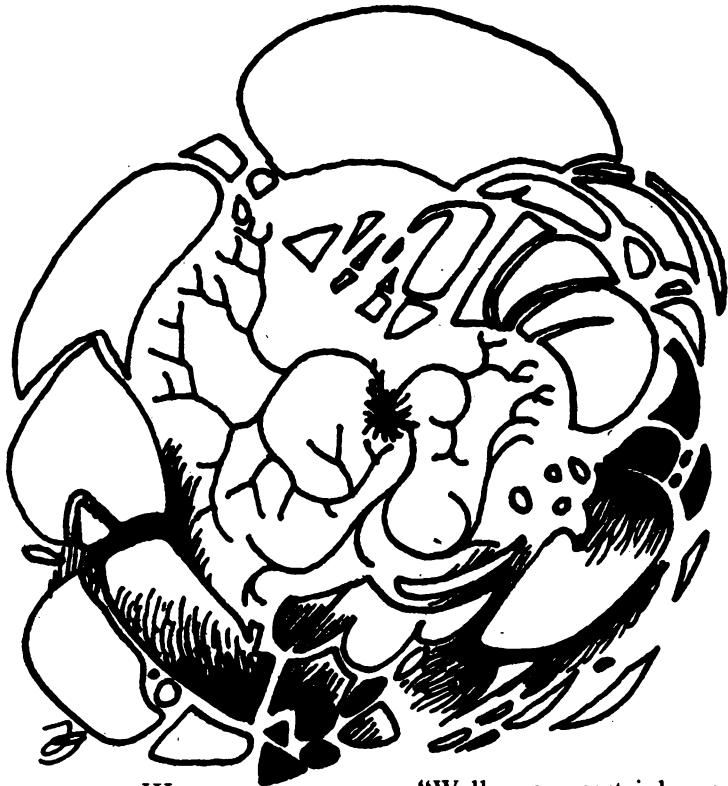
“Break the damned agreement!”

Dishonorable action brings ultimate discontinuity for all sentient on your—suggest wave as better term. Wave. Much closer term than plane. Please substitute concept of wave wherever plane used in our discussion.

This thing was impossible, McKie thought.

He lifted his arms in a gesture of frustration and, in the movement, felt his body jerk as a long-distance call ignited his pineal gland. The message began to roll and he knew his body had gone into the sniggertrance, mumbling and chuckling, trembling occasionally.

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III

GITCHEL SIKER here," the caller said.

McKie imagined the Bureau's Director of Discretion, a suave little Laclac sitting in that nicely tailored environment back at Central. Siker would be relaxed, fighting tendril withdrawn, his face slit open, an elite chairdog ministering to his flesh, trained minions a buttonpush away.

"About 'time you called," McKie said.

"About time I called?"

"Well, you certainly must've gotten Furuneo's message quite a—"

"What message?"

McKie felt as though his mind had touched a grinding wheel, shooting off ideas like sparks. No message from Furuneo?

"Furuneo," McKie said, "left here long enough ago to—"

"I'm calling," Siker interrupted, "because there's been no sign of either of you for too damn long and Furuneo's enforcers are worried. Where was Furuneo supposed to go and how?"



McKie felt an idea blossoming in his mind.

"Where was Furuneo born?"

"Born? On Landy-B. Why?"

"I think we'll find him there. The Caleban used its S'eye system to send him home. If he hasn't called yet, better send for him. He was supposed to—"

"Landy-B only has three Taprisiots and one jumpdoor. It's a retreat planet, full of recluses and—"

"That would explain the delay. Meanwhile, here's the situation—"

McKie began detailing the problem.

"Do you believe this, this ultimate discontinuity thing?" Siker interrupted.

"We have to believe it. The evidence all says it's true."

"Well, maybe—but—"

"Can we afford a maybe, Siker?"

"We'd better call in the police."

"I think she wants us to do just that."

"Wants us? Why?"

"Who would have to sign a complaint?"

Silence.

"Are you getting the picture?" McKie pressed.

"It's on your head, McKie."

"It always is. But if we're right—that doesn't make any difference, does it?"

"I'm going to suggest," Siker said, "that we contact the top level in the Central Police Bureau—for consultation only. Agreed?"

"Discuss that with Bildoon.

Meanwhile, here's what I want done. Assemble a Bureau Con-Sentient Council, draft another max-alert message. Keep the emphasis on Calebans but bring in the Palenkis and start looking into Abnethe's—"

"We can't do that and you know it."

"We have to do it."

"When you took this assignment, you received a full explanation of why we—"

"Utmost discretion doesn't mean hands off," McKie said. "If that's the way you're thinking then you've missed the importance of—"

"McKie, I can't believe—"

"Sign off, Siker," McKie said. "I'm going over your head to Bildoan."

Silence.

"Break this contact," McKie ordered.

"That won't be necessary."

"Won't it?"

"I'll put the agents onto Abnethe at once. I see your point. If we assume that—"

"We assume," McKie said.

"The orders will be issued in your name, of course," Siker said.

"Keep your skirts clean anyway you like," McKie said. "Now, have our people start probing into the Beautybarbers of Steadyon. She's been there and recently. Also, I'll be sending along a whip she—"

"A whip?"

"I just witnessed one of the flagellations. Abnethe cut the connection while her Palenki still had an arm through the S'eye door.

Cut the arm right off. The Palenki will grow another arm and she can hire more Palenkis—but the whip and arm could give us a lead. Palenkis don't practice gene tagging, I know, but it's the best we have at the moment."

"I understand. What did you see during the—incident?"

"I'm getting to that."

"Hadn't you better come in and put your report directly onto a transcoder?"

"I'll depend on you for that. Don't think I should show at Central for a bit."

"Right. See what you mean. She'll try to tie you up with a countersuit."

OR I miss my guess. Now, here's what I saw. When she opened the door she practically filled it—but I could see what appeared to be a window in the background. It it was a window, it opened onto a cloudy sky. That means daylight."

"Cloudy?"

"Yes. Why?"

"It's been cloudy here all morning."

"You don't think she's—no, she wouldn't."

"Probably not—but we'll have Central scoured just to be sure. With her money, no telling whom she has bought."

"Yeah—well, the Palenki. Its shell carried an odd design—triangles, diamonds in red and orange and a rope or snake of yellow wound all the way around and through it."

"Phylum identification."

"Yes—but what Palenki Family?"

"Well, we'll check it. What else?"

"There was a mob of sentients behind her during the actual flogging. I saw Preylings—couldn't miss those wire tentacles. There were some Chithers, a few Soborips, some Wreaves—"

"Sounds like her usual patch of sycophants. Recognize any?"

"I'll try to ID's later but I couldn't attach any names to this mob. But there was one, a Pan Spechi and he was stagfrozen or I miss my guess."

"You sure?"

"ALL I know is what I saw and I saw the scars on his forehead—ego surgery, sure as I'm sniggering."

"That's against every Pan Spechi legal, moral and ethical—"

"The scars were purple," McKie said. "That checks, doesn't it?"

"Right out in the open, no makeup or anything to cover the scars?"

"Nothing. If I'm right it means he's the only Pan Spechi with her. Another would kill him on sight."

"Where could she be where there'd be only one Pan Spechi?"

"Beats me. Oh, and there were some humans, too—green uniforms."

"Abnethe houseguards."

"That's the way I made it."

"Quite a mob to be hiding away."

"If anyone can afford it, she can."

"One more thing," McKie said.

"I smelled yeast."

"Yeast?"

"No doubt about it. There's always a pressure differential through a jumpdoor. It was blowing our way. Yeast."

"That's quite a bag of observations."

"Did you think I was getting careless?"

"No more than usual. Are you absolutely sure about that Pan Spechi?"

"I saw the eyes."

"Sunken, the facets smoothing over?"

"That's the way it looked to me."

"If we can get a Pan Spechi to make an official observation of this fellow it would give us a lever. Harboring a criminal, you know."

"Apparently you haven't much experience with Pan Spechi," McKie said. "How did you get to be Director of Discretion?"

"All right, McKie, let's not—"

"You know damn' well a Pan Spechi would blow up if he saw this fellow. Our observer would try to dive through the jumpdoor and—"

"So?"

"Abnethe would close it on him. She'd have half of our observer and we'd have the other half."

"But that would be murder."

"An unfortunate accident, no more."

"That woman does swing a lot of weight, I admit, but—"

"And she'll have our hides if she can make it stick that she's a

private citizen and we're trying to sabotage her."

"Messy," Siker agreed. "I hope you made no official sounds in her direction."

"Ahh, but I did."

"You what?"

"I put her on official notice."

"McKie, you were told to handle this with dis—"

"Look, we want her to start official action. Check with legal. She can try a countersuit against me personally. But if she moves against the Bureau we can ask for *seratori* hearing, a personal confrontation. Her legal staff will advise her of that. No, she'll try to get at—"

"She may not go into court against the Bureau," Siker said, "but she's certain to set her dogs on us. And it couldn't come at a worse time. Bildoan has just about used up his ego-time. He'll be going into the creche any time now. You know what that means."

"The Bureau Director's chair up for grabs," McKie said. "I've been expecting it."

"Yes, but matters will be in a real uproar around here."

"You're eligible for the seat, Siker."

"So are you, McKie."

"I pass."

"That'll be the day. What I'm worried about is Bildoan. He'll blow when he hears about this ego-frozen Pan Spechi. That might be all it takes to—"

"He'll handle it," McKie said, putting more confidence into the statement than he felt.

"And you could be wrong. I

hope you know I'm not passing."

"We all know you want the job," McKie said.

"I can imagine the gossip."

"Is it worth it?"

"I'll let you know."

"I'm sure you will."

"One thing," Siker said. "How are you going to keep Abnethe off your back?"

"I'm going to become a school teacher," McKie said.

"I don't think I want that explained," Siker said.

He broke the contact.

MCKIE found himself still seated in the purple gloom of the Beachball. Sweat bathed his body. The place was an oven. He wondered if his fat actually were being reduced by the heat. Water loss, certainly. The instant he thought of water he sensed dryness in his throat.

"You still there," he rasped.

Silence.

"Fanny Mae?"

I remain in my home, the Calaban said.

The sensation that he heard the words without hearing grated on McKie, fed on the *angeret* in his system, stirred a latent rage.

"Are you willing to cooperate with us in trying to stop these floggings?" McKie asked.

As my contract permits.

"All right. Then you insist to Abnethe that you want me as your teacher."

You perform functions of teacher?

"Have you learned anything from me?" McKie asked.

All mingled connectives instruct.

"Connectives," McKie muttered. "I must be getting old."

Explain old.

"Never mind. We should have discussed your contract first thing. Maybe there's a way to break it. Under what laws was it executed?"

Explain laws.

"What honorable system of enforcement?" McKie blared.

Under natural honor of sentient connectives.

"Abnethe doesn't know what honor means."

I understand honor.

McKie sighed.

"Were there witnesses, signatures, that sort of thing?"

All my fellow Calebans witness connectives. Signatures not understood. Explain.

McKie decided not to explore the concept of signatures.

Instead he asked, "Under what circumstances could you refuse to honor your contract with Abnethe?"

After a prolonged pause, the Caleban said, *Changing circumstances convey variable relationships. Should Abnethe fail in her connectives or attempt redefinition of essences, this could produce linearities open for my disentanglement.*

"Sure," McKie said. "That figures."

He shook his head, studied the empty air above the giant spoon. Calebans. You couldn't see them, couldn't hear them, couldn't understand them.

Is the use of your S'eye system available to me?" McKie asked.

You function as my teacher.

"Is that a yes?"

Affirmative answer.

"Affirmative answer," McKie echoed. "Fine. Can you also transport objects for me, sending them where I direct?"

While connectives remain apparent.

"I hope that means what I think it does," McKie said. "Are you aware of the Palenki arm and whip over there on your floor?"

Aware.

"I want them sent to a particular office at Central. Can you do that?"

Think of office.

McKie obeyed.

Connectives available, the Caleban said. You desire sending to place of examination.

"That's right!"

Send now?

"At once."

Once, yes. Multiple sending remains outside our capabilities.

"Huh?"

Objects going.

AS MCKIE blinked, the arm and whip snapped out of his view accompanied by a sharp crack of exploding air.

"Do the Taprisiots work in any way similar to what you do in transporting things?"

Message transportation minor energy level, the Caleban said. Beautybarbers even more minor.

"I guess so," McKie said. "Well, never mind. There's the little matter of my friend, Ali-

cheno Furuneo, though. You sent him home, I believe?"

Correct.

"You sent him to the wrong home."

Creatures possess only one home.

"We sentients have more than one home."

But I view connectives!

McKie felt the wash of radiant objection from the Caleban, steadied himself.

"No doubt," he said. "But he has another home right here on Cordiality."

Astonishment fills me.

"Probably. The question remains, can you correct this situation?"

Explain situation.

"Can you send him to his home here on Cordiality?"

Pause, then: *That place not his home.*

"But can you send him there?"

You wish this?

"I wish it."

Your friend converses through a Taprisiot.

"Ah," McKie said. "Can you listen in on his conversation?"

Message content not available. Connectives visible. I possess awareness that your friend exchanges communication with sentient of other species.

"What species?"

One you label Pan Spechi.

"What'd happen if you sent Furuneo to—his home here on Cordiality right now?"

Shattering of connectives. But message exchange concludes in this linearity. I send him. There.

"You sent him?"

By connectives you convey.

"He's here on Cordiality right now?"

He occupies place not his home.

"I hope we're together on that."

Your friend, the Caleban said, desires presence with you.

"He wants to come here?"

Correct.

"Well why not? All right, bring him."

What purpose arises from friend's presence in my home?

"I want him to stay with you and watch for Abnethe while I attend to other business."

McKie?

"Yes."

You possess awareness that presence of yourself or other of your kind prolongs impingement of myself upon your wave?

"That's fine."

Your presence foreshortens flogging.

"I suspected as much."

Suspected?

"I understand!"

Understanding probable. Connectives indicative.

"I can't tell you how happy that makes me," McKie said.

You wish friend brought?

"What's Furuneo doing?"

Furuneo exchanges communication with—assistant.

"I can imagine."

McKie shook his head from side to side. He could sense the morass of misunderstanding around every attempt at communication here. No way to steer clear of it. No way at all. At the very moment when

they thought they had achieved closest communication—right then they could be widest of the mark.

"When Furuneo concludes his conversation, bring him," McKie said.

He hunched back against the wall. The heat was almost unbearable. Why did Calebans require such heat? Maybe the heat represented something else to a Calaban—a visible wave form, perhaps serving some function other sentiments could not begin to understand?

A WAVE of relatively cold air told McKie Furuneo had arrived. McKie turned, saw the planetary agent sprawled beside him and just beginning to sit up.

"For the love of reason," Furuneo shouted, "what are you doing to me?"

"I needed the fresh air," McKie said.

Furuneo peered at him.

"What?"

"Glad to see you," McKie said.

"Yeah?" Furuneo brought himself to a squatting position beside McKie. "You have any idea what's just happened to me?"

"You've been to Landy-B," McKie said.

"How did you know? Was that your doing?"

"Slight misunderstanding," McKie said. "Landy-B's your home."

"It is not."

"I'll leave you to argue that with Fanny Mae," McKie said. "Have you started the search on Cordiality?"

"I barely got it going before

you—"

"Yes, but you've started it?"

"I've started it."

"Good. Fanny Mae will keep you posted on various things and bring your people here for reports and such as you need them. Won't you, Fanny Mae?"

Contract permits.

"Good girl."

"I'd almost forgotten how hot it was in here," Furuneo said, mopping his forehead. "So I can summon people. What else?"

"You watch for Abnethe."

"And?"

"The instant she and one of her Palenki floggers make an appearance, you get a holoscan record of everything that happens. You do have your toolkit?"

"Of course."

"Fine. While you're scanning, get your instruments as close to the jumpdoor as you can."

"She'll probably close the door as soon as she sees what I'm doing."

"Don't count on it. Oh, one thing."

"Yes?"

"You're my teaching assistant."

"Your what?"

McKie explained about the Calaban's agreement.

"So she can't get rid of us without violating the terms of her contract with Fanny Mae," Furuneo said. "Cute." He pursed his lips. "That all?"

"No. I want you and Fanny Mae to discuss connectives."

"Connectives?"

"Connectives. I want you to try finding out what in ten billion

devils a Caleban means by connectives."

"Connectives," Furuneo said. "Is there any way to turn down the furnace in here?"

"You might take that as another subject—try to discover the reason for all this heat."

"If I don't melt first. Where'll you be?"

"Hunting—provided Fanny Mae and I can agree on the connectives."

"You're not making sense."

"Right. But I'll try to make tracks—if Fanny Mae'll send me where the game is."

Furuneo said, "You could walk into a trap."

"Maybe. Fanny Mae, have you been listening?"

Explain listening.

"Never mind!"

But mind possesses ever!

McKie closed his eyes, swallowed.

Then: "Fanny Mae, are you aware of the information exchange just concluded between my friend and myself here?"

Explain conclu—

"Are you aware?" McKie belated.

Amplification contributes little to communication, the Caleban said. I possess desired awareness—presumably.

"Presumably," McKie muttered. Then: "Can you send me to a place near Abnethe where she will not be aware of me but where I can be aware of her?"

Negative.

"Why not?"

Specific injunction of con-

tract.

"Oh." McKie bent his head in thought. "Well, can you send me to a place where I might become aware of Abnethe through my own efforts?"

Possibility. Permit examination of connectives.

McKie waited. The heat was a tangible thing inside the Beachball, a solid intrusion on his senses. He saw it already was beginning to wilt Furuneo.

"I saw my mother," Furuneo said, noting McKie's attention.

"That's great," McKie said.

"She was swimming with friends when the Caleban dumped me right in the pool with them. The water was wonderful."

"They were surprised, no doubt."

"They thought it was a great joke. I wish I knew how that S'eye system works."

"You and billions of others. The energy requirement gives me the chills."

"I could use a chill right now. You know, that's one weird sensation—standing one minute talking to old friends, the next instant yakking at empty air here on Cordiality. What do you suppose they think?"

"They think it's magic."

McKie, the Caleban said, *I love you.*

"You what?" McKie exploded.

Love you, the Caleban repeated. Affinity of one person for another person. Such affinity transcends species.

"I guess so but—"

Since I possess this universal affinity for your person, connectives open, permitting accomplishment of your request.

"You can send me to a place near Abnethe?"

Affirmative. Accord with desire. Yes.

"Where is this place?" McKie asked.

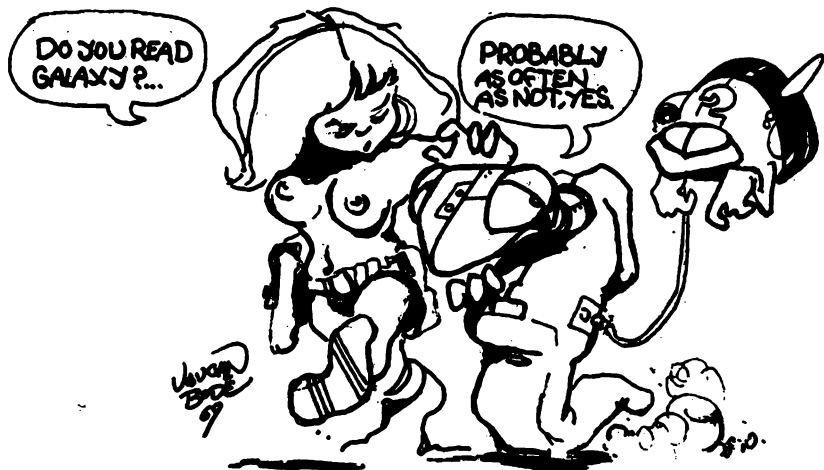
He found, with a chill wash of air and a sprawling lurch onto dusty ground, that he was addressing his question to a moss-capped rock. For a moment he stared at the rock, regaining his balance. The rock was about a meter tall

and contained small veins of yellow-white quartz with flecks of reflective brilliance scattered through them. It stood in an open meadow beneath a distant yellow sun. The sun's position told McKie he had arrived either at mid-morning or mid-afternoon, local.

Beyond the rock the meadow and a ring of straggly yellow bushes stretched à flat horizon broken by the tall white spires of a city.

"Loves me?" he asked the rock.

TO BE CONTINUED



**BLINDA BUMP
FIRST OFFICER**

Dr. ELECTRIC

ELECTRIC BEL



HARRY HARRISON

BY THE FALLS

He could only achieve the
impossible. The possible
was forever beyond him . . .

IT WAS the rich damp grass, slippery as soap, covering the path, that caused Carter to keep slipping and falling, not the steepness of the hill. The front of his raincoat was wet and his knees were muddy long before he reached the summit. And with each step forward and upward the continuous roar of sound grew louder. He was hot and tired by the time he reached the top of the ridge—yet he instantly forgot his discomfort as he looked out across the wide bay.

Like everyone else he had heard about The Falls since childhood and had seen countless photographs and films of them on television. All this preparation had not readied him for the impact of reality.

He saw a falling ocean, a vertical river—how many millions of gallons a second did people say came down? The Falls stretched out across the bay, their farthest reaches obscured by the clouds of floating spray. The bay seethed and boiled with the impact of that falling weight, raising foam-capped waves that crashed against the rocks below. Carter could feel the impact of the water on the solid stone as a vibration in the ground but all sound was swallowed up in the greater roar of The Falls. This was a reverberation so outrageous and overpowering that his ears could not become accustomed to it. They soon

felt numbed from the ceaseless impact but the very bones of the skull carried the sound to his brain, shivering and battering it. When he put his hands over his ears he was horrified to discover that The Falls were still as loud as ever. As he stood swaying and wide-eyed one of the constantly changing air currents that formed about the base of The Falls shifted suddenly and swept a wall of spray down upon him. The inundation lasted scant seconds but was heavier than any rainfall he had ever experienced, had ever believed possible. When it passed he was gasping for air, so dense had been the falling water.

Quivering with sensations he had never before experienced, Carter turned and looked along the ridge toward the gray and water-blackened granite of the cliff and the house that huddled at its base like a stony blister. It was built of the same granite as the cliff and appeared no less solid. Running and slipping, his hands still over his ears, Carter hurried toward the house.

For a short time the spray was blown across the bay and out to sea, so that golden afternoon sunlight poured down on the house, starting streamers of vapor from its sharply sloping roof. It was a no-nonsense building, as solid as the rock against which it pressed. Only two windows penetrated the blankness of the front that faced

The Falls—tiny and deep, they were like little suspicious eyes. No door existed here but Carter saw that a path of stone flags led around the corner.

He followed it and found—set into the wall on the far side, away from The Falls—a small and deep-set entry. It had no arch but was shielded by a great stone lintel a good two feet in diameter. Carter stepped into the opening that framed the door and looked in vain for a knocker on the heavy, iron-bolted timbers. The unceasing, world-filling, thunder of The Falls made thinking almost impossible and it was only after he had pressed uselessly against the sealed portal that he realized that no knocker, even one as loud as cannon, could be heard within these walls above that sound. He lowered his hands and tried to force his mind to coherence.

There had to be some way of announcing his presence. When he stepped back out of the alcove he noticed that a rusty iron knob was set into the wall a few feet away. He seized and twisted it but it would not turn. However, when he pulled on it, although it resisted, he was able to draw it slowly away from the wall to disclose a length of chain. The chain was heavily greased and in good condition—a fair omen. He continued to pull until a yard of chain emerged from the opening and then, no matter how hard he

pulled, no more would come. He released the handle and it bounced against the rough stone of the wall. For some instants it hung there. Then with a jerky mechanical motion, the chain was drawn back into the wall until the knob once more rested in place.

Whatever device this odd mechanism activated seemed to perform its desired function. In less than a minute the heavy door swung open and a man appeared in the opening. He examined his visitor wordlessly.

The man who was much like the building and the cliffs behind it—solid, no-nonsense, worn, lined and graying. But he had resisted the years even as he showed their marks upon him. His back was as straight as any young man's and his knob-knuckled hands had a look of determined strength. Blue were his eyes and very much the color of the water falling endlessly, thunderously, on the far side of the building. He wore knee-high fisherman's boots, plain corduroy pants and a boiled gray sweater. His face did not change expression as he waved Carter into the building.

When the thick door had been swung shut and the many sealing bars shoved back into place the silence in the house took on a quality of its own. Carter had known absence of sound elsewhere—here was a positive statement of no-

sound, a bubble of peace pushed right up against the very base of the all-sound of The Falls. He was momentarily deafened and he knew it. But he was not so deaf that he did not know that the hammering thunder of The Falls had been shut outside. The other man must have sensed how his visitor felt. He nodded in a reassuring manner as he took Carter's coat, then pointed to a comfortable chair set by the deal table near the fire. Carter sank gratefully into the cushions. His host turned away and vanished, to return a moment later with a tray bearing a decanter and two glasses. He poured a measure of wine into each glass and set one down before Carter, who nodded and seized it in both hands to steady their shaking. After a first large gulp he sipped at it while the tremors died and his hearing slowly returned. His host moved about the room on various tasks and presently Carter found himself much recovered. He looked up.

"I must thank you for your hospitality. When I came in I was—shaken."

"How are you now? Has the wine helped?" the man said loudly, almost shouting, and Carter realized that his own words had not been heard. Of course, the man must be hard of hearing. It was a wonder he was not stone deaf.

"Very good, thank you," Carter shouted back. "Very kind of you

indeed. My name is Carter. I'm a reporter, which is why I have come to see you."

The man nodded, smiling slightly.

"My name is Bodum. You must know that if you have come here to talk to me. You write for the newspapers?"

"I was sent here." Carter coughed—the shouting was irritating his throat. "And I of course know you, Mr. Bodum—that is I know you by reputation. You're the Man by The Falls."

"Forty-three years now," Bodum said with solid pride, "I've lived here and have never been away for a single night. Not that it has been easy. When the wind is wrong the spray is blown over the house for days and it is hard to breathe—even the fire goes out. I built the chimney myself—there is a bend part way up with baffles and doors. The smoke goes up—but if water comes down the baffles stop it and its weight opens the doors and it drains away through a pipe to the outside. I can show you where it drains—black with soot the wall is there."

While Bodum talked Carter looked around the room at the dim furniture shapes barely seen in the wavering light from the fire and at the two windows set into the wall.

"Those windows," he said, "You put them in yourself? May I look out?"

"Took a year apiece, each one.

Stand on that bench. It will bring you to the right level. They're armored glass, specially made, solid as the wall around them now that I have them anchored well. Don't be afraid. Go right up to it. The window's safe. Look how the glass is anchored."

CARTER was not looking at the glass but at The Falls outside. He had not realized how close the building was to the falling water. It was perched on the very edge of the cliff and nothing was to be seen from this vantage point except the wall of blackened wet granite to his right and the foaming maelstrom of the bay far below. And before him, above him, filling space, The Falls. All the thickness of wall and glass could not cut out their sound completely and when he touched the heavy pane with his fingertips he could feel the vibration of the water's impact.

The window did not lessen the effect The Falls had upon him but it enabled him to stand and watch and think, as he had been unable to do on the outside. It was very much like a peephole into a holocaust of water—a window into a cold hell. He could watch without being destroyed—but the fear of what was on the other side did not lessen. Something black flickered in the falling water and was gone.

"There—did you see that," he called out. "Something came down

The Falls. What could it possibly be?"

Bodum nodded wisely. "Over forty years I have been here and I can show you what comes down The Falls." He thrust a splint into the fire and lit a lamp from it. Then, picking up the lamp, he waved Carter after him. They crossed the room and he held the light to a large glass bell jar.

"Must be twenty years ago it washed up on the shore. Every bone in its body broke too. Stuffed and mounted it myself."

Carter pressed close, looking at the staring shoe-button eyes and the gaping jaws and pointed teeth. The limbs were stiff and unnatural, the body under the fur bulging in the wrong places. Bodum was by no means a skilful taxidermist. Yet, perhaps by accident, he had captured a look of terror in the animal's expression and stance.

"It's a dog," Carter said. "Very much like other dogs."

Bodum was offended, his voice as cold as shout can be. "Like them, perhaps, but not of them. Every bone broken I told you. How else could a dog have appeared here in this bay?"

"I'm sorry, I did not mean to suggest for an instant— Down The Falls, of course. I just meant it is so much like the dogs we have that perhaps there is a whole new world up there. Dogs and everything, just like ours."

"I never speculate," Bodum

said, mollified. "I'll make some coffee."

He took the lamp to the stove and Carter, left alone in the partial darkness went back to the window. It drew him. "I must ask you some questions for my article," he said but did not speak loudly enough for Bodum to hear. Everything he had meant to do here seemed irrelevant as he looked out at The Falls. The wind shifted. The spray was briefly blown clear and The Falls were once more a mighty river coming down from the sky. When he canted his head he saw exactly as if he were looking across a river.

And there, upstream, a ship appeared, a large liner with rows of portholes. It sailed the surface of the river faster than ship had ever sailed before and he had to jerk his head to follow its motion. When it passed, no more than a few hundred yards away, for one instant he could see it clearly. The people aboard it were hanging to the rails, some with their mouths open as though shouting in fear. Then it was gone and there was only the water, rushing endlessly by.

"Did you see it?" Carter shouted, spinning about.

"The coffee will be ready soon."

"There, out there," Carter cried, taking Bodum by the arm. "In The Falls. It was a ship, I swear it was, falling from up above. With people on it. There must be a whole

world up there that we know nothing about."

BODUM reached up to the shelf for a cup, breaking Carter's grip with the powerful movement of his arm.

"My dog came down The Falls. I found it and stuffed it myself."

"Your dog, of course, I'll not deny that. But there were people on that ship and I'll swear—I'm not mad—that their skins were a different color from ours."

"Skin is skin, just skin color."

"I know. That is what we have. But it must be possible for skins to be other colors, even if we don't know about it."

"Sugar?"

"Yes, please. Two."

Carter sipped at the coffee—it was strong and warm. In spite of himself he was drawn back to the window. He looked out and sipped at the coffee—and started when something black and formless came down. And other things. He could not tell what they were because the spray was blowing toward the house again. He tasted grounds at the bottom of his cup and left the last sips. He put the cup carefully aside.

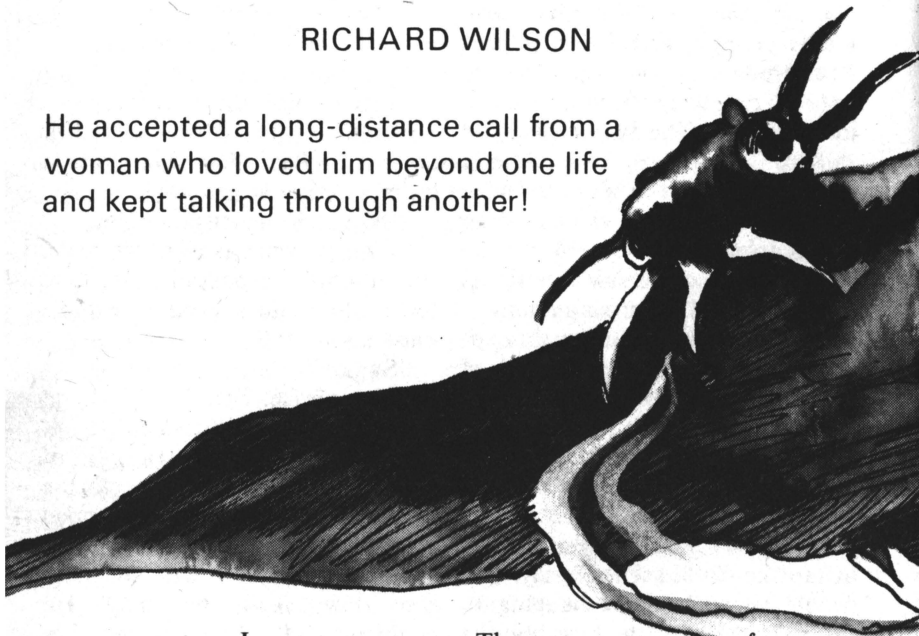
Again the eddying wind currents shifted the screen of spray to one side just in time for him to see another of the objects go by.

"That was a house! I saw it as clearly as I see this one. But wood
(Please turn to page 144)

IF A MAN ANSWERS

RICHARD WILSON

He accepted a long-distance call from a woman who loved him beyond one life and kept talking through another!



I

IF YOU get off the New York State Thruway at the Rome exit and head north along Route 26 you'll be close to one of the most desolate areas in the northeast. Geographers call it the Tug Hill Upland—or Tug Hill. The early settlers avoided it as did the Oneidas and the Onondagas before them. Tug Hill has some of the dreariest landscape in the country.

There are no resorts or farms once you leave the ski centers and the little villages on its borders. July mean temperatures are below 66° and the growing season is short. Vast areas of burned-over land mark where farmers once tried to grow crops or graze animals on the thin soils overlying Paleozoic sandstone, limestone and shale. The old logging roads that lead into Tug Hill are impassable in winter—the snowfall totals nearly



two hundred inches. In April there are snowbanks higher than a car and the mist rises eerily over the scene of thwarted dreams. Few venture into the upland's emptiness even in summer except fishermen and an occasional hiker.

I live here, though, and I like it. My name is Walter Hurd. I talk to the stars. I'm keeping a journal during my sabbatical year away from the university.

I'm an academic type, pushing

thirty-three. I have most of my hair and my features are regular. Before I left the campus I had to fend off the occasional coed who thought it would be fun to discuss the spicier parts of Chaucer or Swinburne over a drink in my bachelor apartment. And when I was a newcomer to Central New York—I grew up in Utah—a pert little junior persuaded me to take her to the submarine races in Onondaga Lake. What happens in

these nightly events is that you park on the shore and since the submarines are submerged there's nothing to see. So you neck.

I had been at the university for years, first as an undergraduate, then as a graduate student and teaching assistant and finally as an A.B.D. That is, I have all but my dissertation toward a Ph.D., the college professor's union card. What with teaching and serving on a dozen committees and being conscientious about student activities and dabbling in politics (I ran for the city council and lost to a man whose parentage and mixed marriage appealed to the three biggest ethnic groups in town), I had no time to finish the dissertation.

Then I won a fellowship. I interested the Guggenheims in research I was doing on Stephen Crane's lost manuscripts. Crane had been a stringer for some upstate papers and during his brief stay on campus he'd lived at the Delta Upsilon house. There were fragments of his work around, waiting to be identified.

The dean of faculties granted me a leave of absence and I rented an old farmhouse about an hour's ride north of town. I didn't know then that the farm sat on the western slope of Tug Hill. I didn't even know then that there was a place called Tug Hill. Neither do most people—they refer to it vaguely as the snow belt or that

good trout stream country up there. Mostly they're talking about the edges of the Tug Hill Upland (or Escarpment, as the geologists say)—places like Orwell, Smartville, Osceola, New Boston, Constableville or Turin. These are villages and hamlets—not big but at least occupied. Nothing occupies Tug Hill proper except snowshoe rabbits, deer, secondary growth—and me.

How this came about is that my old friend, the assistant dean of liberal arts, whose name is Mel Oliphant and who bowls every week with Jerry Boyd, the assistant director of research and development, drove up to my rented farm one September Saturday with a six-pack of cold beer. Mel and I climbed one of the drumlins that came with the place and looked out over the countryside to where Lake Ontario shimmered on the western horizon. He asked me how things were going.

"Just fine," I told him. Except, I said, that maybe I'd been ill-advised to specialize in the unpublished writings of Stephen Crane. "A lot of it is pretty crude, with just a nugget here and there to foreshadow the greatness."

Actually, most of what I'd found was discouraging.

Mel tried to cheer me up. He got me to admit that I'd come across a line here and a paragraph there which Crane had apparently reworked later into *The Blue Ho-*

tel or *The Red Badge* or *The Black Riders*. I did get excited then, remembering, and quoted a paragraph I'd found in an 1891 issue of the university newspaper and another fragment I'd exhumed from a magazine of literary pretensions that had been put out by the brothers of Delta Upsilon. The magazine piece was signed S.C. and although records showed that in the nineties there'd been another DU named Sherman Caldwell I was fairly certain I'd recognized the Crane touch.

"Did Caldwell publish anything else?" Mel asked.

I told him I'd have to research that next time I was in town.

"Let me do it for you," he said. "I've got an eager new grad assistant. I've also got a proposition for you if you're not tied up in a long-term lease."

I told him I rented on a month-to-month basis.

"This may not interest an exalted Guggenheim fellow—"

"Cut it out, Mel," I told him. He's a summa cum laude from Brown and the youngest college dean south of the snow belt.

He said: "No kidding—our boss couldn't be more pleased if he'd got the fellowship himself. You're one-third of all the Guggenheims on campus this year, you know."

Then Mel told me about the job R&D had. "Easy work, room and board included. Lots of time

for your own project. The only thing is, it's right in the middle of Tug Hill. Nowhere, in other words. You'd be a hermit."

I didn't have to think about it long.

"Suits me," I said. "Outside of my weekly trip to the general store and maybe to a movie I'm already a hermit. But what's Tug Hill?"

Mel hadn't known either until Jerry Boyd told him, so he was full of fresh information. I was fascinated. I turned my back on Lake Ontario to stare east. But all I could see was Jerry Look Road (dirt) at the foot of my rented drumlin and a scrub forest rising behind it.

"Will they bring beer with my provisions?" I asked. "This is a local-option township. I have to go clear to Richland for a six-pack—but Tug Hill sounds like Carry Nationsville."

"I'm sure that can be part of the deal."

We wandered down to the brook where we'd left the last two cans to cool and drank them, talking and watching a herd of cows pastured at the farm for the summer. Then, since Mel wasn't spending the night, we drove both cars to Pulaski and had dinner. I went back to the farm and did some work, then went to bed.

At the end of the month I drove to the campus to get briefed and sign a contract and arrange to

store my car. At 9 a.m. on the first of October I took up residence in the trailer at Tug Hill.

IN THE absence of roads the trailer had been set down by helicopter on a previously laid concrete foundation full of electronic gear. I can't write about that—I couldn't even get in. The gear in the basement had needed no attention since it was installed. I did, though. In my first few months at Tug Hill I went from being a loner who thought the solitary job was what I'd been looking for all my life to a man who thought he'd go crazy waiting for the next arrival of the cop-ter.

April was the cruelest month. The radio told me it was a beweb-beautiful day in Watertown but I looked out on an eerie landscape. Snow covered the lee sides of hills and mist rising from them moved in a slight wind. The mist drifted over everything and the cloud-shrouded sun gave it just enough substance to invest it with menace, as if something else might be drifting with it. The ghosts of residents past, I thought. The daunted pioneers, the discouraged settlers, the disappointed explorers. I was sick to death of winter. I was restive. Spring was stirring within me and I felt like going to the submarine races. I felt like telling R&D I wanted out, to get itself another boy. Instead I made

myself a cheese sandwich, heavy on the mustard, drank a beer and tried to console myself with Crane.

I hadn't been doing much with the Crane project, though I'd had all the time in the world. My R&D duties occupied me two hours a day. The job was a sine-cure but I could see why it had been hard to fill. No family man would sign up for a year away from the wife and kids. Nor would it entice any healthy young chap who liked the submarine races. I wondered myself whether I could stick it out, though the worst was behind me—the incredible nothing of a winter in Tug Hill. No one had told me it was normal for the snow to be up to the level of the high windows of the trailer six months out of the year. One unbelievable day I had to tunnel from the door to the windswept knoll where the ski-equipped helicopter landed.

Now the leaves were coming out. The juices were stirring in me, too. My contract ran to the end of September and I supposed I'd keep my word to R&D. The job was part of a classified government project. I'd been given just enough information to enable me to handle it. It was obvious that the work was connected with the space program and at first I thought I was sending signals to a satellite and recording the bounce-back. But that wasn't it.

Gradually it dawned on me that

I was talking to the stars. Or trying to. The signals I sent out once a day were Earth's attempt to find somebody intelligent out there in the void.

I knew there was at least one other station doing the same thing and maybe there were many. I'd read about the pioneering West Virginia project, Ozma, named for the princess in *The Wizard of Oz*. What did they call me? I wondered. The Tin Woodman? The Hermit of Tug Hill? And whom was I supposed to be talking to? Another person like me? A machine?

I didn't know at first what my messages said but I imagined they'd been pretty carefully thought out. One plus one equals two. The square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides. E equals mc^2 . All mathematical.

It was dull stuff to me, an ex-English lit major who took as few math courses as the degree requirements permitted. It could be dull for them out there, too, if anyone were listening.

I didn't suppose our signal encoders had put much faith in Chaucer or Shakespeare or Crane. But by spring I was asking myself why not use a line or two from our glorious heritage of language? Shouldn't the people out there, if there are any, hear some of the best we've got? They couldn't all be mathematicians.

Why not send a bit of Chaucer? It would seem appropriate to the nature of the experiment to beam a few words from *The Canterbury Tales*:

*What is this world? what asketh
man to have?*

*Now with his love, now in his
colde grave*

*Allone, with-uten any
companye.*

They might have the answer out there. Or send some Stephen Crane:

*A man said to the universe:
"Sir, I exist!"*

Perhaps omit what the cynical Stephen imagined to be the universe's reply:

*"However," replied the universe,
"The fact has not created in me
A sense of obligation."*

THE messages were transmitted in a narrow beam, with no interference from man-made noise. You can't get that kind of pure projection from just anywhere. Except for what went up from my trailer the only sounds Tug Hill produced were nature's own. The humming of the bee, the southing of the wind in the leaves, the chirp of the bird. And, occasionally, when I went out to lie on my back

and stare up into the infinity of stars, the lonely voice of me. *Hey, up there—hey...*

And I found myself writing messages to aliens.

That's inexact. I was writing to one alien, an extraterrestrial and, because I was the kind of person I was, I imagined my unknown friend to be female and young and attractive. Therefore one of the givens, as we academic types say, was that she was human. I didn't think I'd find much joy in a saurian or a scaly sea-creature or a spider-lady, however complementary our minds might be.

At first I wrote the messages but didn't send them. I couldn't, at that stage, because I didn't know how. My job was so simple that all I had to do was flick switches, adjust dials and make a few log entries that even an A.B.D. in liberal arts could be trusted to do. I supposed it could have been done by remote control, electronically, but probably R&D didn't yet rely on machines to that extent. I had never asked many questions about my job except to get the overview.

But I watched carefully the next time a young technician collected and replaced the tapes and copied the log. It was a fine day and after he'd done his work he wasn't anxious to get right back. Without seeming to, I brought the conversation around to the equipment he had serviced. He probab-

ly thought it was idle shop talk. I learned a great deal. After he flew back I went over it in my mind.

The message beam from Earth went out for one hour a day—at 9 a.m., saying exactly the same thing, stopping always at the same time. This punctuality and repetition, I assumed, were an important part of the transmission. If I were monitoring another section of the galaxy and it were sending at constant intervals for an exact length of time—even though the length of our days were different and the transmission gibberish—I'd get the message that somebody was trying to strike up an intelligent conversation with an intergalactic pal.

Earth's message to the stars wasn't monitored by the senders—you don't need a record of what you yourself are saying, especially when you say the same thing over and over. I'd also understood from the technician that Earth listening stations were all over the globe and that my little installation couldn't measure up to most. Still, it has been fitted with a piece of sophisticated new equipment R&D was trying out.

So Tug Hill listened for an hour a day, late in the afternoon. That was the other part of my job, to switch on the monitor at 4 P.M. There was a fair-sized dish antenna set up in a natural bowl about a mile from the trailer. I'd never

known it was there—my technician friend pointed it out during our talk.

At any rate I now knew enough about the equipment to start playing with it.

II

I WANT to emphasize here that what I did in no way interfered with the R&D project. I merely supplemented it in my own humanistic way.

To start with, I put messages from old Geoffrey Chaucer and young Stephan Crane on tape. I used my best lecture-hall voice. I didn't know how to encode it so it would sound like that mathematical stuff, nor would I have wanted it to sound that way. It seemed to me that the R&D people were underestimating the aliens by sticking to mathematics. For all their modern equipment they were merely using a variation of a 19th century notion I'd read about. Gauss, the German physicist, had wanted to plant hundreds of miles of trees on the Siberian tundra in the form of a Pythagorean triangle for the aliens to see. I didn't think R&D was doing much better.

One Tuesday morning in July, after I'd disconnected the official transmission, I sent my voice and the thoughts of Chaucer and Crane out into space. I began to keep a personal log as part of my

journal, in which I'd been making only desultory entries.

I was nervous the first time and left my tape on for no more than five minutes.

Later in the day, after wandering around outside, kicking at low clumps of sun-faded grass and eating handfuls of wild blueberries, I went back and remade the tape, reversing the order of the quotations and opening with a line from William Saroyan.

I put that on the beam the second day, at 10:05 A.M., for ten minutes. Getting bolder, you see. I ran it at that time for the rest of the week. Then, on Sunday, I replaced it with a longer message, expanding Chaucer and adding Shakespeare and Keats. (*The poetry of earth is never dead...*) I let that one run for twenty-five minutes, from 10:05 to 10:30, for seven days.

Meanwhile I'd decided to talk to the stars in my own words.

No harm in that, I told myself. At worst I was using up a few minutes of power but with three generators available R&D could spare it. At best I was providing a new avenue of communication with the putative aliens who, for all anyone knew, might be more word than number-oriented. Certainly I would be if I were a listener. Even if I didn't know the language I might sense the poetry.

My own words, I knew, wouldn't rival Keats' or Shake-

spare's or even Crane's or Saroyan's. But they would reflect the human microcosm that I was. As such they might just evoke a human response in a far-off listener. I told myself this in justification for the unethical thing I was doing. It was my rationalization but not my reason.

My reason was simply that I had to communicate with somebody. If I'd had a girl who meant anything to me I'd probably have written to her instead.

But no such correspondent was available, so I chose an unknown space lady, imagining her as a sympathetic person of mature (say 25 to 28) years who stood five-three and was as proportioned as all get-out, in a terrestrial way, but who had, withal, an intelligence that wouldn't bore me.

I spent a lot of time on drafts of my message. I threw them all away because they looked as if I'd worked hard at them instead of saying what I really meant. So I started over and it came out easily because I was talking about what I was doing and how I got here and about Tug Hill. A lot of it was what I've already written.

I began reading into the tape.

"If you get off the New York State Thruway at the Rome exit and head north . . ."

And that was what I transmitted to anyone out there who might be listening.

The next afternoon I began taping where I'd left off and transmitted that. It was as representative of me, and therefore of Earth (because I was of Earth) as anything I could have composed specifically for the starcast—so I read the aliens my journal in ten-minute installments, concluding very soon that it wasn't half bad for that purpose. And one day I had an answer.

I SAY "an answer" as if the message replied directly to me. It didn't. What came in was the voice of one intelligent human being speaking to another—but I don't want to mislead you into thinking it said anything like, "Hello, Walter: Yours of recent date received and contents noted . . ." But it did tell me as clearly as if the speaker were at my elbow that an individual out there—and not a member of some R&D team—was saying something to another individual. It was a person-to-person call, so to speak, not station-to-station.

More than that—the person calling was a woman.

Dear friend beyond the range of my present acquaintance—Greetings from one whose words may never bring a reply but who nonetheless yearns to communicate. I have spoken to you

in the past but you may not have heard. If you have—I know you forgive the repetition.

My time is short because I speak in many directions, the better to reach you wherever you are. But I'll be back, at what will be the same time of day for me, though for you it may vary by (word illegible).

Please listen again, my friend.

You can imagine my excitement. I played the tape over and over. The voice was that of a young woman—I felt confident of that—intelligent and intimate.

She spoke again nine hours, four minutes and thirty-two seconds later. I hadn't slept in the meantime. This time she said:

Greetings, my friend across the void—it has been a day for me but probably a different interval for you. To be that alike would be too much to hope for. But we are alike in other ways—we must be if you hear me and understand.

My time is short because I speak in many directions, the better to reach you wherever you are.

I am happy today as the result of a visit from (word unclear). He tells me I am right to continue my quest,

however others may scorn me.

Listen again, my friend beyond. Please hear me.

I glowed at her words. But I also found myself jealous of her other hearers on other worlds—and of her visitor. Think of that! I envied him his closeness to her and the regard in which she held him. I was probably a little nutty and overimaginative from lack of sleep, the season and my environment but I felt strongly about her—and so record it in my journal.

Before I could go to bed I had to get ready for my regular R&D transmission, to be followed by my clandestine one.

The R&D beeps over with, I read the next segment of my journal into the tape and sent it off. I prefaced it, trembling, with the daring words: "Dear friend across the void." It was as much as I could bring myself to improvise, feeling then—irrational from lack of sleep—that to say more would be to tempt the fates against me and jeopardize my tenuous contract.

Then I slept, first having set my alarm for the interval that would wake me in time for her next message.

She was there, on time to the second. I logged it in my journal as I listened:

I greet you once more,

unknown friend from afar.

If you've heard me speak before you'll know that I am (unclear) of (unclear). My time is short because I speak in many directions, the better to reach you wherever you are.

Let me tell you about myself. I am called a Vemban. I am able to reproduce my kind, although I have not yet done so, with one of the other sex of my species. But this is in the future. My life partner and I have not yet chosen each other.

Listen again, friend beyond the stars."

I was jealous again, this time of the person of the other sex of her species who one day would help her reproduce her kind.

Stung, I immediately prepared the tape of my next transmission and prefaced it with the words: "Never mind him, Star Girl; wait for me."

I went no further—I was appalled at my temerity in going that far—except to read the third extract from my journal.

ONE of the consolations of my being stuck in this uninhabited vastness had been that I had had time to read. I had been able to give some attention to questions of a scholarly nature, such as: Where did Tug Hill get its name?

Well, you'd think to find the answer would be simple. But I'd read Adam Lascaris's *A Brief History of the North Country* (Lowville Press, 1925) and Peter B. Felshaw's privately printed monograph *West of the Adirondacks and East of Lake Ontario* (1938?) and Martin McVickar's *Ordovician Ode* (an undated epic preserved in the Lewis County Archives) and Fairchild Hovey's nostalgic study, *Snow Belt*, which ran in several issues of the *Watertown Times* in 1952. But not until I'd found a letter to the editor of the *Syracuse Post-Standard*, reprinted in a 1953 volume marking the 150th anniversary of James C. Constable's historic horseback ride did I get a hint.

The writer of the letter was a professor emeritus of geography at Cazenovia College. He suggested that the name was associated with the fact that the area was once a lumbering center and pointed out that part of the harness of a work horse was a tug. Since the area abounded in hills everything had to be tugged in behind a horse. Therefore . . .

Dear God (or whoever you revere, Star Girl), is this what I have on my mind? Is this all I can say to you when I long to share my innermost soul?

I'm inhibited by our insufficient contact, of course,

by the possibility of eavesdroppers, by the suspicion that you don't exist—that in my isolation I've made you up in my mind.

But this is the way I am, now at this point in time, and I won't have you see me other than as I am—not if you're who I hope you are, Star Girl—not if we are to know each other at whatever impossible distance.

Star Girl! Was I out of my cautious, expensively-educated mind? Was this scientific method? I was beginning to sound like somebody in a comic book or a Japanese monster movie. But I had to call her something. She told me she was a Vemban, whatever that was, but she had no name I could speak. In the end I left my impetuous words on the tape.

I went out and hiked the scrubland, thinking only of her.

Star Girl. Space Girl. Star-Space Girl. Stacy. Stacy, my love.

Now wasn't that absolutely ridiculous? I beheaded a daisy with my boot, lost my balance and fell. I stayed down to inspect a circle of ferns at their own level, then lay back and stared into the sky, presumably in her direction.

Stacy!

I couldn't help it. She was out there somewhere. I'd heard her and maybe one day she'd hear me.

A bee came by. Was it possible that the intelligent life which had developed on her planet (Vemba?) was bee-shaped? I couldn't have loved a bee, no matter how compatible our minds, but because Stacy might be one I suffered this one's approach. It buzzed close, honey-hunting. Maybe Stacy was at this moment (between transmissions) staring up into her alien sky, beyond which lay me.

Stacy! Are you thinking of me?

My Earthbound bee hovered, buzzing comfortably, then darted off to a whole daisy and went to work. Its job was simple. Mine had been, too, until Stacy spoke. Now I was possessed. I was in love with a voice from infinity.

Madness.

Intelligent Earthman that I was, holder of an M.A., part-time apprentice scientist entrusted with an important experiment, gatherer of new knowledge, I'd gone crazy over a voice which, if I allowed myself to think rationally about it, must have come from so far off that its owner and I could never hope to meet. And my own voice, speaking its insignificant message, would reach no one until I was long departed. It was a clean miss.

I rolled over on my stomach and stabbed out a hand to behead the daisy the bee had lately left. I missed. I cried then, into a clump of moss under my face.

Stacy, I breathed into its bloom.

After a while I got up and went inside and listened over and over to the tapes of her three messages.

Oh, my girl. Oh, my friend. Oh, my impossible love . . .

I WRITE more calmly today (an entry read). Thumbing back in my journal, I see that at times I've been overemotional, not to say of my mind, while at other times I've written calculatingly, addressing a "you" as if posterity would be interested in every detail of my small adventure.

Am I beginning to see in myself a historical figure like Constable, the early explorer of this outlier of the Appalachian Plateau? ("Outlier" is a geographer's term I've picked up.) Constable, having ridden horseback along hundreds of miles of wilderness trail, remarked to his own notebook that twenty-six miles in eight hours was pretty good speed. Stacy's voice, preserved here light-years from its source on Vemba, wherever that is, has also traveled at a good speed. And my voice? Is it being heard?

It says in the books that James' ancestor, William Constable, sold French emigres more than half a million acres somewhere up here. The plan was to build a little Paris in the heart of the Great Woods. That was in 1792. They were going to call it Castorland because of its potential fortune in beaver pelts.

So there are precedents for one's dreams. Is mine more fantastic than Constable's? Instead of an outlier of old France, laid out like an architect's dream, he has a hamlet of a handful of souls, named for him on a crossroads to nowhere.

But I'm not trying to build a civilization, merely to reach one. Constable sought his in the wilderness of a young America—I seek mine in the ancient sky.

From that sky again came her voice.

Once a day I sit in the brief glow of noon and direct my thoughts to him who may hear. There is little more I can say. Most of the time now I merely exult in the brief blue heat which comforts me for so short a time. It is then, as I bask, that I permit myself to hope that in the lands beyond this bleak world there lives one to whom I can speak.

And in speaking, how shall I know that he will hear? Or hearing, understand? Or understanding, reply?

I have none of the answers but I speak nonetheless. It is my hope to speak to one like me, rather than to a creature of unrecognizable or incompatible form.

Preferably he should not be an insect or a quadruped or a scaly amphibian.

If he is any of these he may forgive me for being a lonely chauvinist.

It's time to talk to Stacy again. Stacy the non-bee. Or is it my turn to listen for her? The intervals grow complicated and confusing. I must leave my journal and check my charts.

I'm coming, Stacy!

What shall I tell her?

Dear Star Girl—we should know each other, not just because our worlds must communicate for the good of science, for the advancement of knowledge—but because I'm lonesome and maybe you are, too.

There's a time when nothing you have, or can foresee having, is quite enough. You yearn for more, even if what you need is unattainable, even if you're reaching too far.

How much farther could I reach than to Stacy? For all I knew she could be clamshaped or so alien that I would be unable even to comprehend her shape. But in my mind she was—she had to be—a desirable, lovely, slim girl with all the Earthlike qualities and gradations of form that make slim lovely girls desirable. I was in love

with the Stacy I wanted her to be—though she might have died before I was born.

III

THEN there was silence. I heard the voice no longer. Had she spoken her last? Had she become bored with what could only have been a pastime? I had no answers. I could only speculate.

Loneliness engulfed me. My sense of desolation increased tenfold. Thinking that she might have altered her intervals of transmission, I listened for twenty-four hours without a break, drinking all the remaining beer and filling page after page with her name.

Stacy, Stacy, Stacy...

She was gone. The impossible contact had been broken. Questioning my sanity and distrusting my journal entries, I played the tapes to convince myself that I had actually heard her.

Without a fresh message from her to inspire me there was nothing for me to tell the sky. For a while I repeated the first tapes I had made—"Hello out there—" but my heart wasn't in them. I moped around, routinely sending R&D's mathematical messages, doing my job and little else. I gave up shaving and ate only when hunger forced me to. I spent a lot of time sitting outside the trailer in the sun, doing absolutely

nothing. The only creative thought I had was that this was one of the few times in my life when I could get an allover suntan but I couldn't muster the energy to take off my clothes, much less shave the beard, now two weeks thick and beginning to get greasy from sloppy eating.

Then I heard a new voice.

I'd gone back one more time and listened, certain I'd hear nothing, and prepared to slouch outside for a few more hours of vegetablelike absorption of sunshine.

The voice was clearer than the other had been. It tingled the back of my scalp. It said:

Hello, down there, my friend on Tug Hill . . .

Like the other, it spoke English. But this was that of a more contemporary person. I knew it—there was a lilt, an air of excitement and purpose that the other had lacked. It was also a woman's voice, or a girl's.

But the marvel was that she was speaking to me, her "friend on Tug Hill." My skepticism fought that for a while—it was more than I could logically accept. But who else could she be talking to? The postmistress at Lyons Falls? The ham operator in Port Leyden? No—I wouldn't have it.

This new Star Girl was speaking

to me—to me and to no one else.

Her message was short. I wondered if she'd had to sneak it in after the official transmission, as I had done.

I heard you speak and then you stopped. I hope you will speak again. I'll be in touch with you several times again before . . .

I must leave you now. There isn't time. Listen again, you on Tug Hill. Do listen. And speak to me.

My joy in the contact was tempered by her statement that our talks would be limited to "several." Why?

There isn't time.

What was happening?

I was plunged into gloom. Had I reestablished communication only to have it broken again? This would be too cruel. But she had asked me to listen again. I reran the tape to verify that.

Listen again, you on Tug Hill. Do listen . . .

I yelled and got up. I ran around like a wild man, knocking things over, hurting myself. Holding a painful elbow, I howled as if my sound could reach her without the transmitter.

"Stacy! Stacy-Stacy-Stacy!"

I grabbed the log book to see when my next transmission would be. Soon. I got up to pace back and forth, to think what to say.

As I passed the mirror over the wash basin I had a shock. The reflection was of a filthy, mad-eyed creature with matted hair and beard and grease-stained clothing.

I tore off my clothes and threw them out the door. Then showered and shaved.

NEVER mind what I said to her. What matters is that I was clean and alive when I said it, and that later she replied. She said:

Dear Friend on Tug Hill:
I feel I know you well. I have heard your voice, although you did not address me then. And although I have another name I'd like to be your Stacy. I'm a lonesome one like you even if I'm surrounded by many like me. I envy your privacy.

Do you know who it was you talked to? Do you know the woman who spoke to you, not knowing you would hear but hoping someone would hear? She is a part of me. She is dead now, poor unfulfilled thing, sweet lady who lives in me. She died in her favorite place, in her garden, in the brief warmth of noon, with a smile I shall remember. I was there, a child at her feet on the sere grass, listening, as her words came to an end.

She said this: "I am old, child, and can hope no longer, but you may see a land my voice has reached. I can do no more and soon I will know what I have only imagined."

It was my grandmother's voice you heard and I bless you for answering her, though she never heard you. I answer for her. Will you speak to me now as you spoke to her? May I be your Space Girl, your Star Girl, your Stacy?

Would I? Might she? I can't remember all I said but it was impassioned and wild. I spoke to her directly—out of my heart, not my notebooks—and my message went out live. It's probably just as well I have no transcript. I'd be embarrassed to hear it played back. But I excused myself. I was an old friend of the family. Hadn't I known her grandmother?

She replied as openly, as warmly.

I'm talking to you as I would to myself, Walter. That's a compliment. It means you make me feel comfortable, as if I'd known you as long as I've known me. Oh, I do hope to meet you! Do you think they'll let us? They must! We'll see to it, won't we? I won't look be-

yond that. I must go. I'll talk to you again. Speak to me!

It was agony to have to wait for the next transmission. I had so many questions to ask. What did she mean about hoping to meet me? Was it possible? Would who let us? Was she—could she be—was it too much to believe that she was on her way to Earth from whatever land was hers?

She answered my questions in her own way, possibly because her opportunities were limited—possibly, I hoped, because she was as excited as I.

I'm attracted to you, chance-chosen resident of Tug Hill. I think you're attracted to me. I must identify myself further so you won't mistake me for one of the other females aboard the *Forerunner*. I'd hate that. I'm me, Stacy, not one of them, though you might be misled. I must be sure you know me when we arrive—it can't be otherwise. I'll know, but how will you? Shall we have a password? A secret sign? A way of meeting? I'll think about that between now and the time we speak again.

The *Forerunner*—a spaceship? Arriving on Earth? It was what I had hoped, but I had hoped wildly,

unscientifically. A spaceship from where? A spaceship whose crew spoke English? Fantastic! All at once I doubted that I had heard anything on the R&D equipment—the madman in the mirror had made it up after nearly a year at Tug Hill. It was obviously an occupational hazard, a delirium, a fermented fruit of loneliness, a wilderness-bred hallucination.

THEY didn't often call me on the microwave from R&D. Mostly when they did it was to say I had a letter, usually from Mom, and I'd tell them it could wait till the end of the month—or that the NSF wanted a report and I was to put some stuff together for pickup.

This time they had a news item I wasn't going to hear on the commercial broadcasts for some time. The R&D director told me contact had been made with a nonterrestrial space vehicle that was approaching Earth. They were most excited about a theory that the ship was homing on my signals from Tug Hill. Their information was frustratingly vague and technical. The alien ship was in the such-and-such quadrant, traveling at such-and-such speed, which presumably would bring it to Earth, unless its course deviated, in so many days. Next Tuesday, in translation.

"How do you know all this? I asked.

"They told us."

"How? Mathematically?"

"No; that's the funny thing. In clear speech."

"Speech?" I asked, innocent.

"English. Don't ask me why. Excuse me—Washington's on the phone. Jerry can fill you in on the rest."

Jerry came on.

"How about that, Walter-baby, you talker to the stars?"

"How big is the ship? How many are aboard? What are they like?"

"Unknown. But they do say they come in peace, on a mission of exploration."

"That's nice," I said. "It'd be hell if they were unfriendly. I'd hate to see us invaded."

"Don't be flippant. Aren't you aware of the importance of this moment in which you share?—The historicity?"

"Congratulations," I said. "I'm proud to be in on it. Is there anything you want me to do?"

Jerry said that until further notice I was to carry on as usual but that I should report any deviations from the norm.

That was the way he put it and that's the way I'm carrying out his orders. The messages from my space girl had become my norm and technically I wasn't obligated to tell R&D that my interplanetary lady friend and I had established a prior rapport. After all, the rights of the individual transcend those of the state. Or so I've always assumed in my humanistic way.

You can imagine with what ea-

gerness I looked forward to my next message from Stacy. She didn't fail me. Promptly at our complicated rendezvous time I heard her voice.

It was no hallucination. She spoke in English, with intelligence, humor, eagerness. But she did skip around, not really answering my questions or answering those I hadn't yet thought to ask. She also told me a story.

One reason I'm aboard is that yours is largely a water world and I've made a study of the creatures that inhabit the depths. There's another reason but my vanity prevents me mentioning it. I was lonely as a child and some of my most satisfactory relationships were with such creatures. I had a boat then in which I went out to summon them from the depths. They rose and stuck their snouts above the surface and I talked to them. They did tricks for me. They surfaced and dived, surfaced and came to be tickled on their undersides. Once a group of them, after playing in this way, stood their tails in the air and dived deep. They came back with a friend they introduced with proud cavortings. Their friend was a big flat fellow, dull-white and eyeless. He repelled me

at first. But he wanted to be tickled too. When I put aside my repugnance and obliged him he swam in furious circles around the boat, then paused close by to be tickled again. I had the feeling that he was thanking me. It was as if, lacking eyes, he were expressing himself to me in another way I could not yet understand. My fear of him gone, I leaned far over the side toward him and fell out, swamping the boat. I was a good swimmer but far from shore. The boat sank as I tried to right it. The sea creature circled me, unseeing but aware of my position. I swam determinedly but the shore seemed no closer. He came up under me so that I was able to sit upright on his broad back and cling to a bony protuberance above his snout. I hung on and he took me to shore in zigzags, as if to prolong his role of savior. I sensed his enjoyment, which increased when I said, "Thank you." He understood me. In later days I came to understand him. We took many sea rides and became friends.

I'm glad I had more time to talk today, Walter. I've been thinking about how we should meet. Will you meet me, Walter?

I assured her, when it was my turn to speak, that I would. Then I told her what I'd learned from the R&D people and confessed my guilt at not having let them know earlier what I had known. I mean, iconoclasm should go only so far.

Still, to have told them would have been to have risked their laughter. What could I have said at that point? And if I had spoken they'd probably have yanked me out of here for skeptical conferences and sent in a hard-headed team of technicians. Then who would have talked to Stacy?

Stacy couldn't be bothered with my crisis of conscience. Her captain was talking to them, she said—it was all being handled at the proper level, officially. Besides, Stacy had a plan for us at the unofficial level.

This is what I'll do, Walter. I'll come to you from out of the sea. The inland sea in which we are to end our journey. You probably know they've radioed us information from which we drew maps. The place is called Lake Ontario. Isn't that nice? I'll come to you from there. I'll be your lady of the lake. Now listen. Do you have a map like ours? Do you see the places called Watertown in your country and Kingston in Canada? Almost where lines drawn south

from Kingston and west from Watertown meet in the Lake there's an island called Galloo . . .

Stacy seemed to have lots of time. She went over the plans twice.

Finally she answered some of my questions. For the first time she told me the name of her people, although I'd heard it before from her grandmother. They were Vembans, from the land called Vemba. She was vague about where it was, in my terms, but she knew its history, including its generations-old tradition of exploratory voyages to Vembalike planets.

The explorer teams had failed again and again to discover planets inhabitable by beings like themselves but had extended the range of their space voyages until one day they found Earth.

But it was an Earth barely evolved beyond the sea stage. Nothing had yet crawled ashore to the still-smoking land. Nevertheless the Vembans studied the new land and when they returned home they took with them some of the sea creatures.

By the time of a later voyage to Earth there were inhabitants on its land masses. Again they returned to Vemba with specimens which were not yet man but which gave promise.

The third voyage to Earth was a cause for rejoicing. The specimens

it yielded were a pair of brutish humanoids who had begun to use tools.

The fourth voyage was the first to be recorded by Earth's historians—in tablets of clay. The people the Vembans found had advanced spectacularly. They had built cities and mastered the rudiments of astronomy and their rulers were preserved in huge pyramidal tombs. Two of the people of this era voluntarily returned with the explorers to Vemba. But the Vembans also took the clay tablets, so Earth's record of their visit was lost.

The Vembans' voyages became more frequent as their technology advanced and on successive trips they returned with Greeks, Romans and Elizabethan Englishmen.

Their latest expedition was to bring them in contact with the nuclear North Americas, including R&D and me, Walter Hurd, A.B.D.

It's a pity grandmother was never able to go. She was the descendant of a space captain and the mother of one but it was her misfortune that she lived her entire life between voyages. She died before her son left on his. So she found what satisfaction she could in speaking to the stars. It's a shame she never heard you reply. But her son

did and so did I. So she has been an important part of it—if she could only know.

Stacy told me her people were returning to Earth a little ahead of schedule because for some time they'd been getting our signals—but they weren't the signals from R&D or anybody like it. They were the lights of Earth's cities, which had been sending tacit signals since the Mazda revolution.

As a matter of fact, Stacy said, her people were piqued and irritated by the math messages they had received when they were on their way (the messages hadn't reached Vemba itself; our aim was off, apparently). The Vembans' irritation was with the fact that the messages stayed mathematical instead of becoming human speech or human thought patterns. It wasn't until my unofficial messages reached them that they began to get enthusiastic.

We all like you, Walter.

A little imagination is appreciated.

EVENTS moved fast then—at least for me, whose life had been a limbo of arrested movement in the desolation of Tug Hill.

Sometimes I had to laugh at the pomposity of the arrangements my fellow Earthmen were making for the arrival of the Vembans. To unofficial me, with my prior, person-

al knowledge, it was as if the alien ship were no more unexpected than an ocean liner preparing to dock as it had a dozen times before, while the rest of the Earthmen were as nervous and awestruck as the Watling Islanders must have been who first saw the sails of the Pinta rise over the eastern horizon.

I have the advantage over you. You with your mathematical minds are preparing logistically for the great event while I have only my romantic soul to put in order. You have no personal stake in this adventure and this blunts your perception. I have Stacy.

Stacy, Stacy!

Every time I thought her name a wave of weakness swept over me. How would I greet her? What would I say? Would words be needed? It was as if I had always known her and that it would be necessary only for me to enfold her in my arms.

And then we would kiss in a tender, wondering way and look deep into each other's eyes and smile with sudden shyness and step apart. But we'd be holding hands still and would wander off along the beach. And our talk, whatever it was, would be natural and unformed, as with old friends or new lovers.

I had to rouse myself then and prepare for the next transmission. Regulation-bound R&D was still sending $2 + 2 = 4$ because no one had amended the instructions.

When my turn came I sent a little something from the Portuguese, Browning version:

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways . . .

I don't know how I got through the days that followed. Soon after the official contact Stacy told me it would be wiser if we didn't speak to each other again until we met. But how was that meeting to take place? I had no idea and this soon became apparent to Stacy. My mind had been too dulled by a year at Tug Hill to think in terms of action and Stacy, one of a company of adventurers, had to do the planning. She had told me where she would meet me. An island called Galloo. All I had to do was be there. In her last message from the *Forerunner* she told me when. My final words to her were my promise to be there. She signed off satisfied.

I wish I had as much faith in my ability to make the arrangements as she had. I was good at digging quotes out of books—how good was I going to be at planning a rendezvous at a place I'd never heard of and persuading the infernally busy people at R&D to let me keep it without telling them why?

Fortunately I still had my official transmissions to look after. The routine continued and took up time.

When I asked Jerry if I could stop he replied, "You don't think they're the only intelligent life out

there, do you? This contact increases our chances of others on an exponential basis—"

He also told me where the aliens would come down.

ARRANGEMENTS for the splashdown in Lake Ontario were made by the Can-Am Ad Hoc Committee—it had some such name, as I had come to expect from minds too long pent in government or on campuses. I allowed myself a little fantasy. I imagined members of Ad Hoc's reception subcommittee rowing out in a dinghy filled to the gunwales with tape recorders and litmus paper and box cameras and trade goods. And maybe a shotgun loaded with rock salt lest the aliens prove unfriendly.

In romantic rebellion I appointed myself to my own limited membership group, The Committee of One to Greet Stacy. Maybe I'd take along a volume of Keats.

But there must have been a lot of serious advance planning, perhaps years of it on the Vembans' part, because the splashdown took place efficiently and safely at the eastern end of Lake Ontario. The commander of the alien craft had been easily persuaded that the sheltered waters would be preferable to the chancy waves of the North Atlantic. Ottawa and Washington agreed to designate the site as international waters pro tem.

The *Forerunner* splashed down

at about 2 A.M. on the third of August. The hour and the fact that a summer storm had sprung up kept anyone from seeing it except the American-Canadian crews who had been alerted to expect it. Having come to rest, the huge ship rode high in the choppy waters. I heard about it on R&D's private radio. But no one had come out yet.

They brought in a replacement and heliographed me northwest out of Tug Hill. I don't know why they agreed to my unexplained demand. A reward for my stellar services, maybe—or because of my implied threat to quit at this crucial stage when they had so many more important things on their minds.

The helicopter pilot, a young fellow who'd been raised in the North Country, chattered away as we flew over the scrubland toward the Lake shimmering in the sun.

"That's Frederick Corners down there," he said. "Worth Center's just along that road. Lorraine's up ahead. There's Route Eighty-one—lot of traffic today. Henderson Harbor's off to your right now and we're coming up fast on the Lake. That's Stony Island ahead. Next stop Galloo."

"Not Galloo Island," I told him.

"Galloo, Jr., then. There's no name for that little hunk of rock. You sure it's big enough for this bird?"

"That's what they told me."

R&D had told me nothing of the sort. It was Stacy who had picked it. Galloo itself was a place of shepherders and coyotes.

Galloo, Jr., had no name before my pilot gave it one. It lies just east of the dotted line on the map that cuts through Lake Ontario to let the fish know whether they're Canadian or American. It was an ideal place for my rendezvous—it was far enough away from Galloo for privacy and yet it was the only other land in the area.

The pilot repeated his instructions about when to return—apparently he was under orders not to ask questions and I volunteered nothing—and left me there. It was a pleasant enough place to wait—about as big as a ballfield, with a clump of stunted trees growing out of a small knoll at the east end that sheltered me from the bright morning sun. I had a good view of the oceanlike waters to the west. A few pleasure boats were out, far away. I saw nothing else in that direction. I wandered down to the western shore—it had a flat, rocky bottom, a shelf that ran out under the clear water as far as I could see.

It was good to be outdoors, virtually surrounded by water, after my months in the scrubland of Tug Hill. There was a light breeze. I savored the fresh, wet air in deep breaths as I made a quick circuit of the island, then went back to the knoll to wait in the shade. I had

sat with my back against the highest tree and despite my excitement I had dozed. I woke out of a gray dream.

The brightness of the sky and water failed to dispel the brief nightmare in which not Stacy but a great dark fish had come to me out of the sea.

The word to me back in Tug Hill that the *Forerunner* was to make a splashdown instead of a landing had revived an old unspoken dread. What if Stacy were not human? I didn't care about the rest of them—they could be mollusks or eels or great crabs and probably R&D would be just as happy. But Stacy would have to be human and my kind of human. Nothing halfway, either—I couldn't accept a mermaid.

But what if she were a fish? No one had seen the aliens yet—still inside the *Forerunner*, they might be anything.

Stacy had talked to fish—she had told me so. Might she not also be a fish?

Clouds came out of the west and covered the sun. The sky turned gray, like my dream. The breeze strengthened to a wind. It began to rain.

The stunted trees offered little shelter. I pulled up the collar of my light jacket and waited.

Something was moving on the water to the west. I could barely see through the gloom. The pleasure craft had gone out of sight

and what was coming didn't look like any of them. It moved sluggishly, a black thing of ugly shape.

If there had been anywhere to go I'd have run from it. It came on, straight toward my island; slowly. It couldn't be a boat—it was too wide. But it could be a Vemban boat.

Of course.

But as it came closer I could see that it was no boat. It was a sea creature unknown on Earth.

The rain passed to the east. The sun came out and the sudden brightness left no room for doubt. It was a dark gray monster from some alien sea, keeping its rendezvous with Walter Hurd, talker to the stars, dreamer, romantic idiot.

It came closer. Heartsick, I turned away and looked back to the mainland—where my year of isolation had conjured up a golden-haired space girl of terrestrial perfection. Back there was Tug Hill, graveyard of so many dreams.

“Walt—”

A human voice was calling.

Well, that only made it worse. We'd spoken in human English and now we'd have to again. This black fish spoke my language. I'd have to reply with cross-cultural courtesy, diplomatically masking my feelings as the historicity of the occasion demanded.

I turned back to the sea.

The black monster was in the shallows. But now I could see on its back what had been hidden by

the distance, the dimness and the angle of its head-on approach. It was flat in the water now and on its back was a slender golden-haired girl of terrestrial perfection.

"Walt!" she called again.

"Stacy—"

I splashed out to meet my lady of the lake.

HER sea friend circled offshore while we talked. Once when a light plane flew over he dived out of sight. He wasn't so bad after I'd been introduced to him. Black and ugly he was—but winsome. Stacy liked him. She had called him out of the depths and he had taxied her ashore. That was enough for me.

Stacy and I talked for hours, sitting on the knoll, strolling the perimeter of Galloo, Jr., wading out to tickle her friend on his underside.

But as the sun began to move toward the west Stacy warned me of what would happen soon.

As the sun went down Stacy's radiant hair began to dull. Her glowing skin, once golden, faded. I thought I'd be prepared for it, that it wouldn't bother me.

It was not just that she became pale. In a shocking transformation she turned sallow, then waxen, then blue-gray. I tried to hide my reaction but she wasn't fooled.

"It bothers all of us," Stacy said, "so I can understand its effect on you."

I protested that it didn't matter a bit, that she was my beautiful star girl from the world of a blue sun, but it was clear to both of us that my words were false.

"Even we refuse to accept it," she said. "Nobody is content to be warm for part of the day and to shiver, blue with cold, the rest of the time. Just as we wear clothing for warmth and heat our houses, we use artificial color to hide our pallor. Like this."

From a tiny pouch she shook out a yellow cloak and swirled it around her. It hid her body but accentuated the absence of color in her face and hair.

She had become fretful as her color drained.

"I'm really ugly, you see," Stacy said, and drew up a cowl that masked her further.

"Oh, no." I put out a hand to reassure her. She shrank from it. "No," I said. "You're beautiful."

But I said it from memory and that must have been my tone.

"Indoors it's simpler," she said, speaking from deep within her cowl. "We have light that equals the effect of the sun. But we can't be lit up all the time. There must be some darkness."

"People don't see in the dark. The values are different then."

"The spectrum is different here," Stacy said. "I could never be out with you in the early morning or the late afternoon. I'd be a fright. You'll have to give me up

and find a girl who doesn't turn into a death's-head when the sun goes down."

Damn it, she wasn't giving me time to adjust. I was sure the problem could be lived with, overcome, forgotten. But she was distraught—nothing I said now counteracted the overtones of my first reaction. We walked along the sun-deprived shore, desolate.

I protested that I'd known many girls but that none had appealed to me in any permanent way. I said there were special qualities I'd sought but had never found until I heard her voice. A quality of mind that had made all the difference. A mind that matched mine.

But Stacy was intractable.

"Don't tell me you respect me for my mind. I can't believe you'd love an intellectual hag. If you were that strange I wouldn't want you. I have enough ego to want to be wanted for my face and my body—maybe even more than for my mind. I'm a woman and women feel more than they think."

She was talking too much.

"I'm a man," I said, "but I also feel."

I drew her toward me and held her in my arms. She stiffened, resisting for a moment, then relaxed. Her cowl fell back. I looked into

her eyes, which were clear white and deep black, and saw no other part of her. She was soft in my arms but her eyes were wary as they looked into mine.

I told her, "It's a custom of Earth to close your eyes when you're kissed."

She closed them. I closed mine and kissed her.

The universe exploded. Comets flashed. Stars pinwheeled. The moon of lovers beamed.

I didn't care if Stacy were gray or green. In our kiss she was red as fire, golden as the sun, white-hot with promised passion.

I opened my eyes. There was color in her face.

"You're a peach!" I said.

"What?" She looked at me, puzzled. Her eyes were no longer black and white—they were blue with specks of gold. And her skin . . .

"The color of a peach," I said. "Close your eyes."

I kissed her, again, for a long time, then looked. She was glowing—face, hair, throat. Who needed the noontime sun? We had our own source of energy, our own box of colors.

IT'S only a treatment, of course, not a cure. We'll probably have

REMEMBER New subscriptions and changes of address require 5 weeks to process!

to supplement the kisses with sun-lamps and Vitamin D. These may be useful adjuncts. But I prefer the inner fires that were lit in the lonely time of our journeying toward each other and which have upset her Vemban-based spectrum. There had never been such a romance as ours. She continued to glow as I admired her.

I think we knew then, with the sun low over the lake and the R & D helicopter beating toward us from the mainland, that we'd find the ways to work it out. We kissed again and her glow lasted until long after we were airborne.

There's probably a scientific explanation but science is not my field. As an English major I prefer the poetic. Shakespeare said: *For now my love is thaw'd; which, like a waxen image 'gainst a fire, bears no impression of the thing it was.*

You know the rest. The captain of the Vemban craft, Stacy's father, offered to modify a multi-nation space vehicle for stardrive. Their ship and Earth's will make the journey to Vemba with mixed crews. It may take a year. Some Vembans will remain here to continue their studies of an Earth on the eve of the twenty-first century.

They have a lot to catch up on. The Vembans hadn't journeyed to this planet since the time of Shakespeare. Neither he nor any other Earthman recorded the visit then but one of his patrons might have

heard rumors of it. Didn't Queen Elizabeth say in 1580 (she was addressing the Spanish ambassador): "The use of the sea and air is common to all; neither can a title to the ocean belong to any people or private persons, forasmuch as neither nature nor public use and custom permit any possession thereof."

She might have been talking about space.

There's a long list of volunteers who want to make the trip to Vemba next year. I'm high on that list. The Vemban captain, son of the woman whose voice I was the first Earthman to hear, has insisted that I have priority. Furthermore, as his future son-in-law, I've been forgiven for withholding information about his mother's voice contact with R&D's Tug Hill station.

The Guggenheim people are willing to wait until a calmer time for me to finish my work on Stephen Crane's lost manuscripts. The vice president for academic affairs has extended my leave of absence indefinitely.

NASA has asked me to write a report. *Life Magazine* is outbidding *Look* for a first-person account. The university wants my papers.

Anything else? Yes. After the wedding Stacy and I are going to take a year's lease on that farmhouse on the western slope of Tug Hill. I may never write another word. ●



CHILD'S PLAY

• LARRY EISENBERG

Which would *you* rather make—rabbits or girls—or young men to march off to war?

I HAD just left the Computer Center when I ran into old Ashby in the hall. His face was sheet-white as he leaned against the wall. Ashby is one of the senior people in chemistry. I thought he might be having a heart attack.

"Anything wrong?"

Ashby looked at me silently, his eyes clouded with pain. He spoke with obvious effort.

"Do you remember the name of that six-foot rabbit in the old play?"

"Do you mean Harvey? He was an invisible rabbit."

"Well this one's six feet long and visible," said Ashby. "I saw him in Duckworth's lab."

As unobtrusively as I could I sniffed the air between us but could detect no scent of booze. Senility, of course, is odorless. Nevertheless, my curiosity was piqued and I made straightway for the chemistry building and Duckworth's lab. His door was locked but a dim glow seeped over the transom. I hesitated for a moment and then knocked. No answer. I knocked again and a shuffle of steps approached the door. It opened and Duckworth peered out, clearly annoyed. But his face cleared when he saw me and he waved at me in a friendly manner.

"Come in," he said, "and be quiet. I'm in the middle of something."

I followed on tiptoe, drawing

on experience gained in the fourth year of kindergarten many years back. I had been in these hallowed surroundings before but I had never lost the sense of reverence at seeing Duckworth's complex maze of apparatus. The small room held a mass spectrometer, a countercurrent apparatus of many glass curves and bends—beyond these, Duckworth was gazing into microscope stand. I took a seat nearby and sat quietly. After a while Duckworth entered some penciled notes into a stained gray binder, sighed contentedly and turned to me.

"I suppose you've run into that idiot, Ashby," he said.

I was startled at his reading of my thoughts. I coughed in embarrassment.

"I did see him in the corridor outside the Computer room."

"He's an ass," said Duckworth. "I showed him an amazing thing, a bead and wire model of a new complex molecule I've developed after years of work. It is the basis for growing an entire living organism. Ashby stared at it for a while and then he said, 'Somebody's going to poke their eyes out on that wire.'"

I smiled.

"He mentioned something about a six-foot rabbit."

Duckworth frowned.

"Emma?" he said. "I suppose the secret's out. Come along and I'll show her to you."

He led me through a side corridor into his Animal Room. He opened the door in a gingerly manner, fumbling for the light switch, flicked it on. I almost leaped out of my skin. There, working its whiskers amiably, was the biggest rabbit I'd ever seen.

"What do you think of her?" said Duckworth.

"She's big."

"A slight miscalculation on my part," said Duckworth. "But look at those gorgeous blue eyes and the snow white fur."

"She is a beauty," I admitted, "if you can get past her size."

"Don't get hung up on her length," said Duckworth. "The important thing is—I made her."

The room reeled about me. I steadied myself on what I thought was Duckworth's shoulder until I realized I was holding on to the rabbit. I recoiled as if from an adder.

"What do you mean, made her?"

Duckworth sighed.

"Ashby reacted the same way," he said. "I told you I had a new complex molecule from which I could grow a living organism. It was the logical next step from my macromolecule, which was so like the RNA-DNA complexes. I decided to work out a way of formulating my own genetic coding and create something according to blueprint."

"The rabbit was your first try?"

"Emma was my fifth," said Duckworth. "But she's the first to develop into a viable creature."

"Do you know what you've done?" I cried. "You've cracked the greatest secret of the Ages. Why haven't you announced it?"

"Too many ramifications," said Duckworth. "Besides, I've got one Nobel Prize in chemistry. I don't think I could get another."

I PULLED out my handkerchief and wiped my brow but the sweat popped out afresh.

"My God," I said. "Wait until the ecclesiastical types hear what you've done."

"That's why I've kept it quiet."

A sudden thought struck me. I hesitated to voice it.

"Is it now possible," I ventured tentatively, "to create some kind of human creature?"

Duckworth stroked his beard calmly.

"Odd that you should ask that," he said. "The preparation I was examining when you came in is just that."

I shook my head violently.

"You've gone much too far," I said.

"Do you really think so?" said Duckworth. "It's at a very early and tricky stage of development right now. There are cells in the process of dividing. At the moment, they are in the blastocyst stage. I've got to supply a pseudo

uterus for anchoring. It will be a couple of months before it will look human."

"What color will the baby be?" I said.

Duckworth shrugged.

"I didn't give a thought to color," he said. "But it will eventually be a white female."

"Ah ha," I said. "You didn't think about color but you chose white. That will open you to the charge of racism."

Duckworth's eyes widened.

"I suppose you're right," he said pensively. "Most of the world is nonwhite. I probably should have made her black."

"Then you'd have been accused of exploitation, of appeasing the ghettos or just not giving a damn."

"You can't win, can you?"

"Stop the embryo from developing any further. Then present Emma to the world. The rabbit should be enough for starters."

"You mean kill my embryo? I couldn't do that," said Duckworth. "It's alive."

I sighed.

"Good God, Duckworth. People have had abortions before. There are circumstances which make it perfectly proper."

"Not to me," said Duckworth.

And his jaw set in a manner I'd seen before. It was clear that further argument was futile. We both sat silently brooding over what had taken place, until Duck-

worth's innate optimism won.

"It will all work out," he said. "Wait and see."

"What about President Hinkle? Does he know what you've done?"

"No one knows but Ashby and you," said Duckworth. "I underestimated Ashby's loquacity and your strong ethical code."

"You'd better tell Hinkle before he gets it indirectly. And quickly."

Duckworth scratched his head.

"I hate like hell to do it," he said. "But I suppose you're right. I'll let him know today."

IT TOOK some convincing but I finally persuaded Duckworth that it wouldn't do to tie a bright pink ribbon about the rabbit's neck and set a basket of colored eggs at her side. He muttered something about my lack of humor and went to the phone to dial the president's office. I can still see the look on Hinkle's face when he came into the lab. Right behind him was his secretary, Myrna, and I was in position to catch her as she fell backward.

President Hinkle kept muttering, "God damn—" as Duckworth patiently described what he had done. He also avoided looking at the rabbit, although every now and then he sneaked a side glance at her. I patted Myrna's wrists and rubbed her temples until she came to.

Duckworth had paused and I

assumed he was about to spring his *pièce de resistance* about the human embryo, so I slowly backed out of the room and beat it the hell out of the chemistry building. I went home, turned on my television set and watched the basketball game of the week. It was wild, exciting, with some of the finest defensive play I'd ever seen. But I was waiting for something else and it came.

During overtime, a small line of news flashes suddenly broke at the bottom of the picture. The name of Duckworth appeared, "secret of life discovered—" and a lengthy quote from President Hinkle. I switched off the set and decided to make amends for my cowardice and get back to the side of my friend.

When I arrived at the campus an enormous mob was there, held back by the biggest array of state troopers I'd ever seen. For a moment I was totally perplexed. We already had a black-run department of African Culture, two hundred black students and four courses in Swahili. Then I realized that the TV flashes had done the job.

Despite my faculty card I could make no headway through the lines. Then I saw a guilty looking chap ease out from under the barricades, gingerly balancing a small package. He was neatly dressed and shaven but I recognized Duckworth at once. He

clapped his hand over my mouth before I could shout his name and we stumbled off together. When we had fled some distance from the crowd I pried his fingers from my mouth.

"Why are we running away?"

"Have you got a better idea?" he snarled. "There were twenty television cameras turned on me and a deadly stream of the most idiotic questions. Besides, I didn't want them to find out about the embryo."

He pointed to the package.

"Is it in there?"

Duckworth nodded.

"Didn't you tell Hinkle about her?" I said.

His shoulders sagged.

"I couldn't," said Duckworth. "I decided the only way to handle this problem was to take the embryo with me, let it develop to full maturity and then publish the information in a scientific journal."

"And the rabbit?"

"Hinkle will be good to her," said Duckworth. "Some day when Emma is older she'll understand why I had to abandon her."

"It's a mistake, Duckworth," I said. "Eating in diners, sneaking chemicals from the corner drug store, holing up in the High Sierras. It won't work."

Duckworth chewed on his lower lip.

"There is another way," he said pensively. "I could have Laura Lockman look after the embryo at

her apartment. How about that?"

"Laura Lockman, your graduate student? Does she know about the human embryo?"

"Not officially," said Duckworth. "But I think she's on to what I've been doing. I'm sure she'd help and we'd only require a minimum of equipment at her place."

And that's where we went.

LAURA was delighted to help. From time to time she'd slip me a little black-and-white photograph to look at.

"Notice," she said, "it's now about one-quarter inch long. That tiny tube is the heart and it's beating strongly."

Five weeks later she pointed out the head, the beginning of fingernails, the tiny, closed eyelids. The project was fascinating and chilling. Month by month our human developed, from embryo to fetus, fetus to an about-to-be-born baby. The most difficult part, I gathered, was the special membranous *amnion* that Duckworth devised out of a selectively permeable plastic material.

On the academic front, Duckworth was constantly plagued by visitors, invitations to television interviews and correspondence from the National Institute of Health, asking him to gather his ideas and techniques into a monograph on the creation of life.

"It's hopeless," said Duck-

worth to me, one morning. "Between all this harassment, sneaking over to Laura's apartment and maintaining my research here I'm exhausted. And tonight I'm featured speaker at the Alumni Dinner."

"I wouldn't miss you for the world," I said. "Especially since a contingent of Fundamentalist Churchwomen is promising to disrupt the proceedings."

Duckworth said wistfully, his face brightening for the first time in weeks, "God, I hope they do."

But they didn't. The dinner proceeded mechanically along its predestined dull path. President Hinkle in a flowery introduction outlined his own career and capped it with his penetrating discovery of Duckworth teaching chemistry and coaching basketball at a small girls' college in the Berkshires.

As Duckworth arose, spreading his spidery fingers through the wrinkled notes of his speech, an usher came quickly down the aisle and pressed a note into his hand. He read it, turned livid beneath his newly restored beard and bolted from the dais. I clutched at his tuxedo as he went by.

"Duckworth—what's happened."

"It's Laura, I must go to her," he muttered. "The baby is being born—"

President Hinkle had also jumped to his feet and waddled

over to me. He looked puzzled.

"Where's he going," he whispered hoarsely. "He's disrupting the dinner."

"It's the baby," I said without thinking. "He's got to go to Laura Lockman at once."

President Hinkle stared at me, thunderstruck.

"Baby?" he cried. "Duckworth, Laura? I can't believe it. The scandal could destroy the University."

And he fell heavily into a nearby seat without giving its occupant a chance to get out from under. The dinner ended in confusion—indeed, to this day there remain those who insist that Duckworth and Laura produced the infant through rather standard procedures. But the academic world knew better. The excitement and adulation that followed the publicizing of Duckworth's rabbit was nothing compared to what erupted on the announcement that a girl baby had been produced by artificial means.

Denunciations quadrupled and the raging moral issues underlying artificial creation were debated across every breakfast table. Duckworth seemed impervious to all of this furor. He called me aside one morning to show me three six-by-eight free photos that had come with the diaper service.

"It's amazing, Duckworth," I said. "You've kept your balance and avoided a display of hubris.

Why sometimes even I feel overwhelmed by it all."

"I can't afford to be," said Duckworth. "I've a new mouth to feed now. And besides, a certain high government official is meeting with me this afternoon. It's all very hushhush but I refused to come unless you were present. After I'd ignored the reasons detailing why you can't get a security clearance, they reluctantly agreed. Will you come?"

"I'm flattered," I said. "But what help can I offer?"

"I have an idea of what they want," said Duckworth," and if I'm right I'll need your moral support."

I WAS apprehensive all through the preliminaries of the meeting. Mr. Hubbard of the Defense Department was surrounded by a half-dozen of his brightest aids. On our side were President Hinkle, his secretary Myrna, Duckworth and myself. Mr. Hubbard, in glowing terms, began to outline a vast grant program involving millions for the University, with Duckworth heading a new Chemical Life Research Building. Duckworth looked at me, eyebrows raised. I shrugged.

"What do you get in return?"

Mr. Hubbard smiled.

"Not me," he said. "Uncle Sam. He's wise enough not to tell Emmett Duckworth what to do. But we do have one little specific

project in mind." He paused, shuffled his papers, cleared his throat and went on. "Dr. Duckworth, the government would like you to produce a test run of fifty male babies for us."

We were all thunderstruck.

"Fifty babies?" said Duckworth. "But why?"

Mr. Hubbard looked around the room.

"There are a considerable number of us present," he said. "Could this be just between you and me?"

President Hinkle arose, swaying like a seal, his pride clearly injured.

"I'm ready to go," he said, his voice breaking.

Hubbard's six aides rose quickly.

"He stays," said Duckworth, pointing at me.

Hubbard hesitated, frowned, then nodded. In short order the three of us were alone.

"Now," said Hubbard, "in my portfolio is a fully detailed scenario. I've been working on it since the announcement about your six-foot rabbit. I knew that eventually you'd have to produce a human child." He glanced down at his papers. "It's taken me many months of arduous work."

"No doubt," said Duckworth dryly.

"Briefly," said Hubbard, "it's this. For years, our nation has been frustrated and held back in

its military policy by the fear of deaths among our military personnel. Some observers feel that one of our Presidents was driven from office because of casualty lists and the resulting resistance to the draft. Every mother whose son may be sent into battle becomes a potential propagandist against the government. But she'd be quite placid if she knew that her own sons would never have to go to war."

"Meaning?" said Duckworth.

"If we had a group of youngsters without family ties, real and yet not real, belonging to no one but Uncle Sam, there would be no protests, sit-ins or demonstrations if they died in battle. It would be the ultimate solution of our military manpower problem at minimal cost."

I sucked in my breath. Duckworth looked at me and placed his hand on my shoulder.

"As I understand you," he said severely, "you want to use my methods to man an Army."

"Also a Navy and Air Force," said Hubbard. "It should be child's play for you—and no pun intended. You might even give us youngsters predesigned with particular aptitudes for the military life, perhaps some XYY chromosomal types with aggressive tendencies?"

Duckworth stood up and I joined him.

"The answer is no," he said.

"Forget the idea. I'll never cooperate with you."

"Bravo, Duckworth," I murmured.

Hubbard ignored me. He looked at Duckworth and sighed.

"I was afraid you might react this way," he said. "I know you think you're taking a moral stand but you're wrong. Do you want to condemn real youngsters to death?"

"I want no youngsters to die," said Duckworth.

Hubbard gathered his papers together.

"You realize," he said, "that we can proceed without you. I took the precaution before this meeting of impounding your papers and notebooks under the National Security Act. Somewhere we'll find competent, patriotic chemists who can build on your notes."

"I don't doubt that you'll find biochemists to help you," said Duckworth. "But it will take quite a while before you'll get what you want."

Hubbard smiled.

"Perhaps—we'll see."

Duckworth leaned forward.

"Could you use an entire army of women?"

Hubbard frowned.

"Why women?"

"Because as yet I've been unable to produce a male," said Duckworth, "a problem in synthesizing a perfect Y chromosome. I haven't the foggiest notion of how to solve it."

"You're bluffing."

"Ask your chemists," said Duckworth. "And while they spend ten years digging up the answer, maybe I can scuttle your plan."

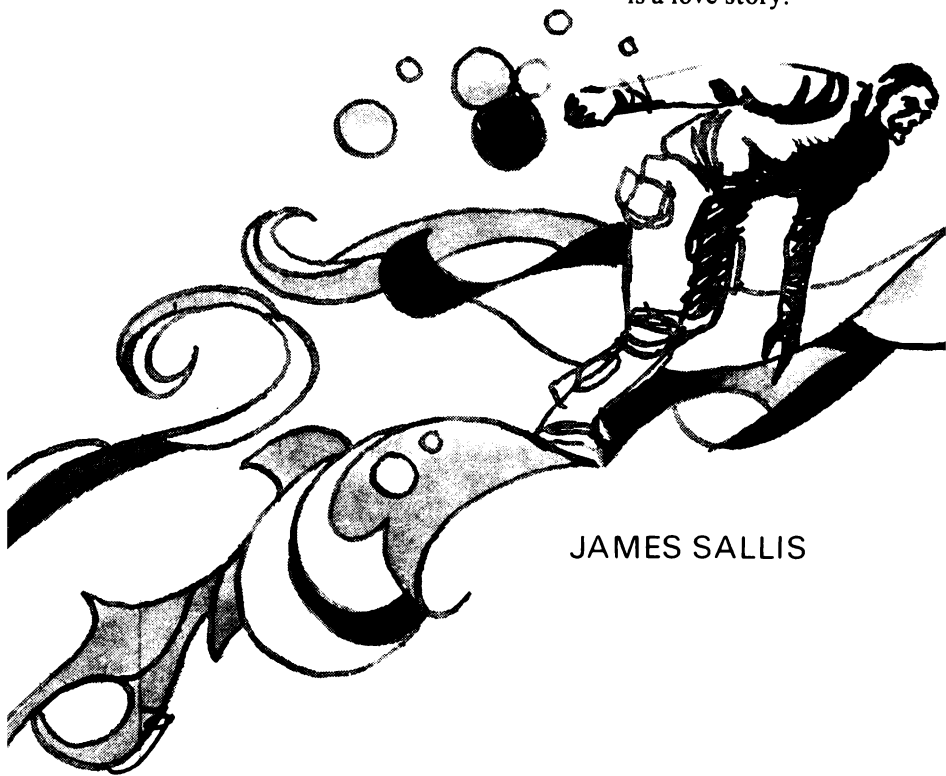
AFTER, as we walked under the fragrant pines that bordered the campus, I congratulated Duckworth on his stand.

"Imagine that SOB calling my little girl unreal," he said. "But you were right. It really is a lulu of a mess I've gotten into. But science doesn't produce evil consequences, only men do."

And for the rest of the afternoon, Duckworth and I pooled our intellects and went through the list of four hundred girl's names without finding a single one we could agree upon. ●

THIS ONE

is a love story.



JAMES SALLIS



The human and the alien had
nothing in common—but
each other

I

IT BEGINS on Merthe—and there, finally, it returns. But now, for this moment, the planet is nodding its flat top out toward the curdled milk-smear in which Earth—so far away—floats like a bit of blue-green mold. The four huge moons are sliding along the equator toward the far side of Merthe—taking with them the light and warmth of a dwarf sun

which for past hundreds of years has receded slowly, inexorably, into the distant sky. Already the luminescent fur that caps the pole is filling the air with a ghostly blue that drifts down, mingling into the red haze. In a month, two months, this blue light will be all that remains. Under its strange pervasive quality the psychology of the people will begin to change, children

will emerge—and then, silently, the mbons will appear one by one on the horizon, like vast orange bubbles coming up out of lakes. Light—the red haze—will return.

Though for them, for now, none of this matters.

They are together on the patio, sitting at the hammered-silver table. Quiet. Light gleams in the copper tiles and wind wanders in the grass nearby, resting on leaves, sighing in shades. They are drinking a dark, heavy fluid from turquoise cups and sucking at fruits that, opened, fill the hand with rainbows.

And she—she of the hair to match the tiles through the gentle red haze, the frail pink bones showing under the skin—she sits biting at a thumbnail and gathering the torn fruit peelings into a pile by her cup. Her features sharp, her hand on her knee. Opening her mouth to show the solid curved bands of bone where teeth might be.

“My Parent has sent a note.” The hand moves away from her mouth, leaving a tiny crescent of orange behind, on the lower rim of her lipless mouth. “They thought —”

“No, Rhillanda.”

The answer she knew would come.

Her fingers abandon the crescent to the peelings. She turns her face out away from the Home toward the trees. They are straight

and tall, white and slender like a man’s arm, the round leaves borne on tiny branches spaced regularly from the ground up, going out from the trunk like zigzags of lightning. Through swinging hair he catches a glimpse of the prongs of her ear.

“When, Jon. When, if not now?”

“Soon, Rhillanda. I’ve told you before, I’ve tried to explain.” For a moment he looks toward the trees himself, as though he sees the ship there behind them, miles away. “I must return with the others.”

She utters a clicking sound, the sound of her bony tongue striking the hard palate. One of the phatic formulas common to her people, it could mean anything, almost anything. But here it meant: Why?

“The man called Perez-sky, the one I call Captain, is not my Parent. The note will do no good,” he says. “My Parent is millions of miles away, months from here. A government. A state which was once many separate countries.”

She is watching the trees. Or the sky. She puts the rest of her fruit on the small pile of peelings.

“Country—” she almost whispers and he moves closer to her. “A country is like a Home. You have told me things before, so many times.”

“And you’ve never understood them, never believed them. I’ve tried.” The turquoise tints of her skin show strangely against the

thin, red-hazed sky, making her for a moment seem to him unreal—distant, then near. They speak in their confusion of Basic, her own language, body gesture, and he feels in the words their real distance, their essential isolation, one from the other. "They are not easy things to understand. But I must return to ask permission of my people."

"A Man controls his own fate, Jon. Women and Others are the Duty of their Parent. A Man belongs to himself, decides for himself."

"Only here, Rhillanda." His hand takes hers beside the peelings. Soft and warm like a bird's breast, it fits perfectly within his palm. "I am my own but I have Duty to my Parent."

Their hands are brown and green, like separate clays that have come together.

"Others can have no Duty, only obedience. You say you are a Man—my Parent is willing to purchase you as an Other—"

"But my Parent is far away. And to him I remain an Other in many ways."

"—only Others lie," she finishes and takes away her hand. She hides it in her lap. "Only Others are bound to the Parent. So a note was sent, an offer made, it was ignored. It is past understanding. Your words are as empty as shells." She gestures toward the sky, orange nails flashing—then

the hand drops back to its lap. Of a sudden she's a beggar, crippled by not understanding. Quietly then: "Is it the price? My Parent will raise it. I can ask him, he'll do as I wish."

No . . .

"Then what am I to believe? Tell me—what?"

"Just what I have said. I know how difficult it is for you. But things are different, ways are different. I'll come back. And then there will be time to explain, to understand." He reaches out and touches the pile she has made and he damns their mongrel tongue, that holds back so much more than it lets pass. "Time. Believe that—that there will be time."

THEY sit together, looking out over the broad lands surrounding the Home. His eyes catch the glint of another Home far away on a hill, these strange slender trees posted around it, thin limbs barbed like wire. A bird emerges from one of the trees nearby, its mirrorlike wings flashing light across the patio floor.

"Rhillanda," he says and turns to find her watching him. "Soon."

Returning had been in his mind: that he would be back. But somehow again the words obscure the thought. She sees beneath them.

"Today?"

He nods.

"We have to check out the ship before we Lift." As well this way

as another. How else would he have said it—begun to explain the reason he came this one last time. And because he can think of nothing else he repeats himself: "Soon."

And she takes the word. Turns it, examines it—holding it off from her and looking.

"Soon—" Her fingers flush and covey in her hair. "Soon I will have time—you asked me to believe in time? I will have time then to remember all you've told us. About your world, your people and their ways, the cities you speak of. Time to think of all the things you've told me alone—"

"Two years. No more."

"—and soon I will be Age. Your refusal—" her voice lifts, pushing his denial away—"has taken Honor from my Parent. His Duty is past and he'll not hold for bids." One hand climbs to the table and lies there. It is a quality of hers, he realizes now, that her hands are forever moving as though of their own accord—taking, bringing, arguing with themselves, arranging objects or peering over the edge of tables. "Though there will be a bidder, early and high—"

And now her eyes go away to something in the distance.

"The Markets pay well," she says. "There are people who think beauty as important as utility and they'll take a woman for that, even Bred. They'll pay the Markets well; my Parent will have his Honor."

"But I will be back."

"You will be back."

"And soon."

Her hand lifts the silver pot. Dark liquid pours into her cup.

"The universe, Jon. The worlds. All that." A gesture toward the bright thin sky and this red haze blushing in the air. "And this is us, the two of us." She holds up a small rock of sugar, drops it into the steaming cup. Liquid splashes up against the side and runs back into the rest. Ripples consume themselves. The world is again dark, again indomitable. "Hurry," she says, "so little time."

The sugar is slowly dissolving. . .

He stands and sunlight slides across his shoulders, making shadows on the ground of Merthe.

"Those are not the words of your Parent," he says. "Or of your people."

"No, they are not. Perhaps, after all, I have learned something in hearing your stories." She smiles. He notices the absence of lips, the bands of bone. "Goodbye, Jon."

"Until I come back. To you. And soon."

A turning, a going away. Her words come down the path behind him.

"A Man controls his life, Jon. I can wait but where I wait is the Duty of others. I can do nothing more than has been already done."

Her voice clicks as his feet plod. Partway into the trees he stops.

If only there were a simpler thing to say, something to cross the spaces.

Like Orpheus he looks back. She is standing by the table with her hand on the chair. Her Parent has come out to the patio from his study. He is speaking softly to her, reaching out to take her hand. Her head is down.

Rhillanda, Jon says to the trees around him. And again: *Rhillanda*—to the wind which follows him away from that still place, that girl—to the wind that follows him back to his ship, wings at his heels, the prince of thieves, whispering.

*And the ship took anger,
took fury,
took fire
to itself, shoving
the ground away.*

*And Merthe was below,
was behind, was
calling, was gone.*

II

SO JON'S long legs took him back to his Earth—the sprouting cinder, the whirling place.

Took him back to a waiting world. Back through corridors of formalities, to forms and paper and offense all stacked like concrete blocks. Back to a room with long bare tables made like fists—where officials harrumphed, officials inquired, officials demanded. It seemed to him they all smoked pipes, all snorted softly.

Back to the months like the tables, long—like the tables, clenched. To the waiting.

Two weeks in a large blue room that smelled of wood and old paper. The faces behind the tables changing subtly with the hours. He sat in the center. The world moved around him.

They put him in a smaller room, green, with aluminum bars in the eye of the door and across the windows lacing the floor with outside light, making squares in which he could pace like a chesspiece. A bed, a sink, a table and paper. Anything he asked for.

They would come and take him to other rooms. He would answer questions. They would bring him back here.

—The subject will please identify himself.

—Jon Butler, Citizen L-154-D. Academy, '15, anthropology. Service rating, D.

—Linguist, late aboard Union ship Vesper?

—Yes.

—Last port?

—Merthe.

—Will the subject please speak more distinctly?

—Merthe.

At other times they brought their cameras and took only his image to those other rooms, where busy men sat for a moment, listened, rushed on.

Faces floated past the door, looked in, spoke, moved on. Footsteps followed people down the corridors and stopped when the people stood still to listen. He asked about the room, the bars—a formality.

He asked, *When?*

Soon . . .

ONE OF his guards, a sulky Negro, grinned and told him the whole world loved a lover.

—Your statement is that you spent (rustle of papers) ten months on Merthe, and that during the last three of those months you went among the inhabitants and made yourself known to them, held communication with them and exchanged gifts. Is this common practice, Citizen Butler?

—No, Honor. I was the first. They had watched our base, seen the ships—shuttlers—drop and lift. And talked to Reps, of course. But I was the first, really.

—It is not common practice?

—No.

—No? And why not, Citizen Butler, why not?

—Merthe is A-unclassified.

—Which means?

—“No contact pending further study.”

—You have just quoted from

a book. Will you name that book for the Court, Citizen Butler?

—“Regulations of Union Expansion”.

—“No contact, pending further study.” That applies, does it not, both to personal and cultural contact?

—Yes. Only what is absolutely essential is permitted.

—Yet you told these people of Earth, the Union. You even went so far as to exchange gifts, thereby introducing cultural anomalies?

—Yes.

—Then I must insist that this be set in the transcript: That the subject knew and was fully aware that he acted in direct opposition to Union regulations.

—And I must insist that my assignment was to analyze the Merthe language, this being essential to further study. An assignment which, if the Court pleases, is extremely difficult to accomplish through port-holes and energy fences. Also, there were particular problems with the language. Recorders have a rather limited vocabulary.

—Another outburst such as that and we will be moved to hold you in contempt of

Court, Citizen Butler.
Simply answer the inquiries put to you.

—I apologize, Honor.

—Strike the reply.

THE rooms to which he was taken for questioning grew smaller. He began to guess the passing time by the size of the rooms.

And this happened once: the guard's face came to the door, asked, *What are you doing?*

Singing.

Sounded more like moaning. Thought you were sick. Never heard singing like that before.

No. You haven't.

The face went away. The footsteps went away.

He burst into laughter. Someone had just said "social intercourse." The last word had gotten the accent.

The rooms were smaller—the people larger, more important. Time passed, a great deal of time. He lost sense—completely—of how much time had passed and this became an obsession for him. He sat remembering Merthe.

—Merthe, then, is a slave world?

—I didn't say that, Honor.

—Governed by anarchy?

—There is no government.

—There are no communities,

no social groups?

—The Family lives together. That's the only thing.

—But the Family sells its children, its Others?

—Only when they are Age and if no new Home has been created for them.

—I ask the Court to consider that reply carefully. Who supervises these Homes?

—The Parent.

—Which is?

—A father. Like that, anyhow.

—What of the mothers? Have they no say?

—I don't know. There was a woman in Rhillanda's Home. But she always said Parent, singular.

—There is, then, no agency, no control?

—The Homes are self-sustaining, virtually hermetic. There is a system of morality, confusing to us, difficult to talk about. Honor, Duty . . .

—Who does the work that must be done, the work that a government must be established to perform?

—I don't know.

—Please speak louder.

—I don't know. It is difficult . . .

—And do you know, Citizen Butler, why the adults isolate themselves the way they do? And also why they

dissolve the social order?
—Perhaps because they are afraid of what can happen when men live together.

—I see. Is that what you were told?

—No, a guess. It is impossible—we can't hope to understand a culture as different as theirs, not right away. They couldn't make me understand, though they tried again and again. The language—

—We have already heard your testimony concerning the language, Citizen Butler. Do you know why their women are degraded so?

—They're not. They are loved and valued. You are trying to sway the lady Honors.

—He refuses to cooperate, may the Court notice. I submit that the subject tries to confuse the Court with these contradictory stories.

Cameras lumbered in and followed their cables back out. Each day he was brought large sacks of mail. Most of the letters were addressed simply: Jon Butler, Councilhome. They were from ministers, mothers, public figures, perverts, schoolchildren, artists and teachers. It seemed to him that never before had he seen the sympathy and savagery of the human heart so starkly portrayed.

His guards were pleasant. The young Negro's name was Berkell, and he had been born on Mars—in one of the religious colonies there, of one of the increasingly rare pure Negro strains. Each year he applied to the Academy and each year he was refused admission.

And time passed.

—Will you identify this for the Court?

—It is a gift from Rillanda.

—A gift from the girl. And is . . . ?

—A portrait of her, a painting done by her Parent. It was taken from me.

—I ask the Court to accept this as evidence and request that it be circulated among the Honors.

—(Gasps and whispers.)

THERE was a break in the trees near Rillanda's Home, a sort of chamber where the only sound was water running down a slope somewhere deep in the woods. There birds—like mirrors set out on the limbs and staring silently across the spaces at one another—filled the trees.

One day on the patio she had jumped up, taken his hand and brought him there. He had listened to her singing, lying on his back in the dry moss. Her voice, low and soft, combined in his mind forever with the sound of

the water far off among the trees.

—Citizen Butler, you have told us something of the girl's language. You have mentioned, among other things, that there exists in the language a certain (ruffling papers) "gender confusion". Have you any explanation for this?

—No.

—Nor for the "fuzziness of verbs" to which you also called our attention? Nor the elaborate, recompllicated adjectives?"

—No. I have only the vaguest hold on the Merthe language, actually. I was forced to work from memory rather than understanding, hoping that perception would eventually show roads to conception.

—And each—ah—Home has its own language?

—Dialect, but not really that. And I don't know—I visited only one of the Homes. I made my statement in full faith that it would turn out to be true from what I do know—and feel—about the language. It's terribly complicated, a much more sophisticated structure than our own.

—Then our picture of Merthe is a kind of land of Babel, everyone speaking

his own language? In these—ah—emphatic sounds you mention.

—Phatic. No, I believe it's a process that occurs spontaneously in the individual Home. A kind of amplification of interpersonal expression. It comes of being so close, of knowing one another so well. Certain grammatical connections and implications can be dropped, they're superfluous. The phatic responses carry no actual meaning. They are more like direction signals. They can mean many different things, according to how they're used.

—A return to the origins of language?

—In a way, perhaps. The process certainly began as a simplification. But on Merthe the phonemes have reduplicated, developed a kind of endogeny, become almost an auxiliary language. It is full of nuance, extremely sophisticated. You can't see the relations anymore but there must have been some at one time—derivatives, the signals which begin trains of speech-thought. The nuances are virtually impenetrable to the outsider.

—I'm afraid, Citizen Butler, that the Court hasn't your training in these matters. This means little to us. Simply put, we can say that these queer people walk about grunting like apes and—

—No!

—But he could not be heard above the laughter.

Once, when they were together in the clearing, Rhillanda had suddenly stopped singing and looked behind her. A girl was standing there among the trees, watching. He, too, looked around and she turned and fled away through the trees toward a Home on the hill, a mile or so from Rhillanda's own.

—An impenetrable language. A gender confusion. Anti-social, atavistic, introverted patterns. Callous treatment of women. This is a rather frightening picture you've given us, Citizen Butler.

—But we can't—

—Thank you, Citizen. If it please the Court I should now like to call to witness.

ONE day, early in the morning, he was taken to another room, the smallest yet. The guards who had brought him here (Berkell was not among them, having at

last been taken into the Academy) had been in uniform. The room was brown, trimmed in gold, the walls lined with matched massive volumes. The place was lit indirectly. The light, soft and suffusing, reminded him strangely of the clearing near Rhillanda's Home. A huge steel desk occupied most of the floor space. There was nothing on the desk. Four black robes glistened in the light and a set of spectacles flashed calmly. He had never seen glasses before. The man wearing them was the one who spoke to him.

—I'm Dr. Graybar, comparative physiology. Did you know the girl's race is hermaphroditic?

—(Deep breath.) I thought that might be the fact. From what I was able to understand of what they tried to explain to me. It explains several tendencies in the language; also, perhaps it accounts in part for the Homes.

—Perhaps so. I've been studying the picture they took from you and attempting to learn what little I can from Union Expansion Records. Someday maybe they will find out the proper way to survey a new planet. Maybe. (Looked to see if it was

taken down—it was.) Good
—Citizen Butler, I believe
that the women of Merthe
are hybrids—throwbacks,
or sports. Freemartins.
Barren and sterile. Had
you guessed that?

—No. I knew we couldn't
breed. I wasn't able to un-
derstand the rest.

—One of the Honors: Please
enter in the records that
the subject wilfully with-
held evidence from these
Courts.

—I didn't. I can't see that it
mattered.

—Another Honor: Every-
thing matters to the law,
Citizen. You should real-
ize, we must have the en-
tire truth. A point such as
this could in the end be
most important. Perhaps
crucial.

—You're fully aware of what
I'm telling you?

—Yes, Dr. Graybar.

—And you still want per-
mission?

—Yes—yes.

—Thank you. That will be
all for now.

—How long have I?

—An Honor: That will be
all, Citizen Butler.

Three days later they gave him
his freedom.

It came as a gift, wrapped in
cautious words. He opened it,

took the gift, left the wrappings in
the room.

He found himself outside in
sunlight, being escorted past a
group of staring, curious people.
As his guards pushed a way for
him through the crowd he caught
sight of Berkell standing away
from the others, smiling, his
hand raised in a silent greeting
and farewell.

And Earth shrugged him off
her shoulders—he went out from
Earth as from a bow.

*Hurled
upward, forward, outward
like a rock
and Merthe
was calling again.*

III

TO GET her back, take her
back. It was always that.

When he walked the bleaching
sands of Coldor, or between the
blushing quartz hillocks of goose-
flesh Albay-3—when on Farthay
his feet kicked out jewels before
him. Through all the pleading
winds of Xantharie, telling and
crying with a hundred voices, a
hundred hands. Under the pastel
rains of Chyth; the acid snows
that make the island of New
Corfu a floating sponge; through
the seas of Fford thick with
weeds. Among the many-bodied
people of Gaffrt and the sad wo-
men of Llyrch with their exor-

cised breasts and carved bellies.

Always.

To get her back, take her back.

And to find her he ripped the stars apart, tore wide the years between them, screamed in the skull of space.

Three years had passed.

The stars told him so and he shouted back, *You lie*. He screamed at the stars: *Stand still*. He told them: *I'll put out your eyes*.

But three years had passed.

From her Parent's study, where in the blue light a new child moved quietly among the patio furniture, he went directly to the Markets. She was sold the first day, they told him, for a fine price, and Llyrch was the name given.

He went to Llyrch, went down among the Nonconformists and their shanty churches. Gone. And for weeks he wandered, at last finding a minor official, a small man hurt further into smallness, who would tell him, would tell him simply because superiors wouldn't. Goliath was what the man spoke. Goliath was where he went.

Gone. He wandered.

On Farthay he gathered gems—scarlet, emerald, gold, spilling from his hands—and on Plath gave them all for a ship, little caring that behind him as he left, a dozen ships sped toward Farthay with empty holds.

It was with this small ship he ripped the stars apart, pushed down the walls between worlds.

Off Plath he accelerated. His ship went like a stake into the black eye, the Samba sky, immeasurable space.

He heard of a girl on Lilth, where men have long legs and the houses are built on stilts off the ground. A strange girl with copper hair and clicks in her speech—a strange girl. He went there, the girl was gone.

Was she Rhillanda? He followed what traces he found.

He sought her on Garth, in the caves of Perchmont. When at last he came up out of the caves, light struck his eyes like fists and for days he was blind—nearly blind—and fevers raged in his chest from the damp air of the caves.

ON BYZANTIUM, where he had been before and which he had named, he found them singing her songs. The girl who had brought the songs? No, they could not remember, there were so very many singers—wait!

Alsfort.

Could she have gone there?

He jumped.

No, not Alsfort, no longer.

Nor Plethga.

Nor Ghlint.

He wondered, wandered. Deep space opened like doors. He raged along the bands of night.

Nor Mersey.

Nor Larne.

He searched for her among the bodies and wasting faces of the people of Hikuu, where poison had come up out of the rocks to spoil the waters and this world was dying. For once there was joy in his heart at finding her gone.

He strayed among the superstitious tribes that peopled Vofura and was thought a god for his hair and size. Yes, Lord, there had been a ship at the great port many months ago. It had come down out of the black for repairs and flown away again into the darkness.

He left. He followed her. And behind him the tribes began to await his return.

Again he lost the trail. Again, the thread tangled and vanished out among the whirling galaxies.

Insouciance. Six weeks of it, brimful, sitting in a chamber of the hotel Grand Daphne. In losing the trail he had lost something else as well—the strength to go on. He sat in his shell chair. Rainbow hues spilled down the wall. His eyes rattled hollowly, idly, uncaring from face to face.

An old woman without teeth or clothes, an astrologer, came and made his chart.

The stars are friendly to no man, she said, grinning to show a mouth full of brown and pink flesh, though to you less than to others. I see a dark star and a bright star, between which you

must pass. And water, which may be real or emblematic. That is all. A dark star, a bright star, water. You must find their meaning for yourself—there meaning exists within you.

And she went away.

He sat in his chamber and it came to him that the bright star meant going on—the dark star, surrender. There, in the light-clustered, color-cluttered room, he passed between them and chose. And the water—space like an endless sea. Or many seas. He sailed to them.

THE waterworld of Tigris—his small boat ferried him down the waters that lapped up against the prow, swelled under it, ran off in wings to either side. He drifted past the floating islands of thick-packed leaves, under the quick shade of lonely slick trees. He came to one of the fortress islands, arms upraised.

He asked his questions. His boat wound its way back.

And later, in the flannel seas of space, he found the thread wrapped around the world of Euphis, where the sky forever frowns and the clouds hang on the horizon like black fists and you can tell the falling rain in the plunge of thermometers. On Euphis he mixed fury with finesse and clawed his way back into space, following the thread, spilling stars behind him.

Going on.

HE CAME to the energy shells outside Darwin. He passed the warning shell and rockets erupted from the ground below and chased him away, darting and skimming into the blackness.

HE CAME to the festival crowds of Mensch and for two hours followed a woman who at last turned and smiled invitingly and was not Rhillanda.

HE CAME to Delhi and found nothing. Some ruin, some wreckage and crablike inhabitants scuttling sideways in the cluttered sand under a white sun.

HE CAME to Altar, bowed and begged and was sent away.

HE CAME to the gaming houses that acned spoiled Vega, Vega the victim of another's war, and a girl there told him of one who had been taken away to the magistrates at Kil-hing. Taken for her beauty alone, though beauty was a thing that could tire.

HE CAME to Kil-hing and the prophets with their bears met him at the shipcourt and said, *No, go on. She is not here.*

Stories came from Catmount, stories of slaves and a new order.

He arrived there in the daze, the craze, the dazzle and whirl of revolution, resolution. Bands roamed the streets, chanting slogans at one another, poking at the cadaver of their city as though they tried to understand why, what had happened. Children

wandered in the ruins, bearing stickguns and wearing armbands. Sentries challenged his passage, women whimpered for food, shelter, kindness.

And the new order, they told him, was abolitionist—the slaves were sent away.

Guns screamed and crowds shouted.

But could not call him back.

HIGHKER. He came down in a field beyond the burrows, where a duel had just been fought. The grass crackled under his feet as he walked across it toward the bodies. Behind the burrows the trees rippled in the wind like green foil.

One body lay swollen and still at the toe mark. The other—the challenger and winner—had staggered away and lay in the folds of a vast cabbagelike plant. Stinger spent, the body was dying, twitching regularly, the motion going out in slow waves along the plant's leaves.

And gasping at the doors of death, the twitches becoming a shudder that gradually mounted in intensity and claimed the whole body, this man who had kept his Honor intact told Jon of a new colony in the Upper Places. There were slaves there, many were women. There was one. . .

Jon ripped the stinger from its case of bone and plunged it into the man's stopped heart, leaving

the other lying there in dishonor.

His small ship surged

out

like a sea,

out

like a sun.

IV

IT WAS on bright Alabaster he found her at last—in the slave camps of the Brocks.

The Places streamed by—a thousand-mile plume of white-lit bodies. A fall—and the Places were replaced by a stream of farms. White suns blazed at his head like matches freshly struck.

He found her in Thalk.

Months ago a hundred larvae the size of large dogs had scaled the trees and barnacled themselves to high branches. There, in their crisp shells, they had slept and grown, transforming into near-adults that weeks later came down out of the trees and moved into the camps to take their places, leaving behind the bony shell, the Husk. Now, matured, they were going out again from the camps—to retrieve their Husks and bring them back as a sign of completed manhood and to save them from the soul-preyers, the scavengers who were also abroad in the land now.

He went to the offices at Thalk, built of five leaves from the uthru plant.

You have a girl.

We have many girls.

So he began again.

You have a girl.

He told them of her face, her hair, the fragile bones beneath her skin. To them he showed the gold which, according to custom, he had taken from the dying man on Highker. Light came through the small window and filled his hands

It is yours, it is all I have. . .

HE STOOD near a stream, watching the Thalkian come toward him. Its head was down as it pushed its way through the soft, needle-thin, purple grass, the Husk lashed to its back. It was half his height, with slender bent legs like twigs, a ridged ovate body and a tiny immobile head. It looked up from yards away and saw him standing there.

It turned to run and then thought better—it had taken the Honors of manhood.

“Go away, scavenger,” it said, blinking one of its eyelids, like the fingernail of a new-born child. “My soul will not be your prey. You will not have my Husk. Go away. Or I shall kill you.”

It held its club, thicker than a man’s leg, out in front of it. It crouched, preparing to fight, to swing and turn and keep the frail Husk away from the preyer.

“No, hold your weapon. Your soul is not what I seek. Nor your Honor.”

Jon showed his palms upraised. Their shadows reached out and touched on the ground.

"I know the trickery of the Thorynx." The Thalkian drew up straight, taller, and looked steadily up at him. "Years ago the men of my camp kept the huth-bird. The huth-bird is too large to move. We block off its throat and when it bewitches the prey into its mouth children run and remove the prey and bring it to the camps, where we all eat well." It pointed the club toward him. "The Thorynx is like this huth-bird. You snare men in words, tangle them in coils of flattery and illusion. Then you take what you want, more than you need—and you leave the rest to rot. You take our Husks, our souls, from us. You grow strong on them while we wither and die. Our camps are full with tales of your trickery." It shook the club. "You do not kill, for that would take Honor and you have none. Your deceptions are worse than honest death."

"No, not mine. I am not of this world."

"Another of your lies. You take an unfamiliar shape, turning a man's desire for knowledge against him."

"**I** AM an Earthman."
"Earthman." Its eyelids flicked several times and the Thalkian looked away into the distance, trying to recall a thing it had heard.

It came to him and the eyes came back: "The men of Earth, they chase after dreams."

"No. A woman." He described her.

The Thalkian listened, then pointed with its club up along the stream.

"The rath fields. If the woman is what you really seek you will find her there. The raths are ripe and must be picked before they break off the stems and turn on us, ruining our crops, killing our young on the trees."

He had turned to go but Thalkian spoke after him: "You are the only Earthman I have known. Good luck with your dream, whatever you call it."

He turned back.

"And you with yours."

The Thalkian stood watching, club alert, until he was out of sight. Then it crossed the stream and sprinted toward its camp, shadows rushing behind it.

And in the white light she came down from the hill, slow and quiet as a falling leaf. The suns were in her eyes and her shadows trailed back over the hill behind her. She was pale, the color of lemons bleached by the sun. Her copper hair was gone. Her bare head was scarred and dark. She limped.

And somewhere out there worlds were spinning, weaving lives and faces to a patchwork fabric. Children were born. Gen-

erations were dying. Stars were exploding, suns colliding, systems collapsing and bursting, swelling and shrinking. But for now, for here, for them—only these two were moving together.

He saw the sores along her ribs, like fists that had beat against doors until the knuckles burst and blood erupted. Her long nails, once bitten, were now torn and several were missing. Blood and dirt had spread a brown paste across them. There were marks on her fingers—tiny parallel slits where raths had twisted around on the stem and slashed to fight at the picking.

And on her back, bending her to a stoop, was a shield emblazoned with the Honor-colors of her lover, the Thalkian who soon would return and ceremonially offer his Husk, binding their two souls together, taking her out of the slave fields into his camp for her beauty and service.

They came together at the foot of the hill. He, the wanderer—and she. The waiter.

"I came," he said.

I screamed your name in a thousand worlds. I made mountains and crossed them. I ripped the skies apart and kicked suns out of my way and stepstoned on stars. I laughed at space, I gathered the stars in a net of need. I carved a hundred worlds to your likeness with my jets.

But he said: "I came—" and

the shield fell back to the hard rath ground.

He took her hand and together through the white light they went over hills and along the stream—they trampled with boots and bare feet the violet grasses of Swans-down Plein.

His ship slammed like a fist into the sky and together they fled with their scars (some that showed) and their freedoms (some that didn't).

BACK to Merthe. And now it's evening. . .

Across the pale red lake the sky fills with ribbons of ochre, maroon, and pearl. In a gentle wind the ribbons twirl and blend together, settling into the lake, pulling night down around them. In the last minutes a bird emerges from the trees and glides along the corridors of wind, flashing color across the copper tiles. Small things come up on the lake's edge and begin to throb softly as the twilight deepens to cobalt.

Hearts and doors. Their two hearts had done business like doors and now for all time they shut them, closed themselves inside. Outside, Sirens beckoned, Furies called and went unheard.

They are sitting together on the patio. She has limped to bring him food and sits beside him, singing quietly over the night sounds. Years have passed, wind passing

(Continued on page 158)



DANIEL F. GALOUYE

O KIND MASTER

The Magnificent Ones used People
Catchers to keep dog's best
friend from destroying his kind!



TREMBLING with anger, Hobart drew back a sinewy arm and let it remain poised. Then he lashed out and backhanded Keith with gnarled knuckles.

Stud Keith, out of the Gyp Louise Clark, fell to the dirt.

Arms folded over a broad hairy chest, the Pack Leader towered above him. "All right, *stud*—" He spat the word. "Tell me some more about life in your Magnificent Metropolis."

Wiping blood from his lacerated

lips, Keith whimpered, "I want my Kind Master."

In a fury, Hobart seized him by the hair. He winced. The Pack Leader was giant of a man. Curly red beard and bushy mustache framed flaring lips. His blue eyes burned with fierce intensity. Such ruggedness, the prisoner suspected, had been born of crude existence Outside. To think that until only yester-light, Keith had imagined Outside to be but a legend, an imaginary place men-

tioned by gyps when they wanted to frighten their young.

"On your feet!" Hobart hauled him from the dirt. "So you want to go back to your Master? You want that life of ease, all of your needs taken care of by those damn Spheres who have grabbed our Earth?"

Earth? What, Keith wondered, was that?

"This world used to belong to humans. Now we have to hide in it like rats—unless our ancestors happened to be spineless enough to become pets—"

World?

Pets?

Hobart hustled Keith to the compound gate, then toppled him and pinned him with a foot while manipulating the latch.

Keith himself was no weakling. His gyp, while teaching him to talk, had also insisted that he exercise rather than rely on the exertion-saving forces of Radiant City. But Keith was shorter by half a head than his captor. And Keith's beard, straight and blond, suggested a temperament nothing at all like Hobart's fiery one.

Oh, if only they were in the City of Force now, instead of this horrible Outside! Then he would show his tormentor, thought Keith. He would make the glittering carpet of energy material rise up and pound Hobart in the face until he choked on his own blood!

Seized once more by beard and mane, Keith was hurled through the gate. He stumbled, fell to his hands and knees. His head hung between splayed arms.

THE lithe form of a young bitch, partly wrapped in animal hides as were Hobart and everyone else out here, ran from between the two nearest shacks.

"Must it be this way, Chris?" she asked the Leader. "You don't want to kill him, do you?"

"I'm determined to bring out the guts in him," Hobart said. "If he has any."

Keith was jostled down the main pinkway—no, not pinkway; it certainly wasn't pink, and it couldn't plane you along—the main "street" of the village.

"But it's unfair," the bitch pleaded, following. "He shouldn't have been brought out of the City this soon."

Keith regarded her with scorn. For it was she—Laura, out of Gyp Bernice Tallman—who had escaped through her force-mesh fence yesterylight to free him from his own enclosure. That was when the stray pack had come yowling down the pinkway to capture him.

Now, as Hobart prodded him through the village, Keith was sickened by the squalor. The dirt on which the village sat. Shabby shacks shaped like squat cones and made up of slender rods bound at the top and smeared with clay. Hundreds of villagers who, if not actually filthy, seemed so in their crude animal hides.

Keith wore nothing. Personal people were not allowed to.

"I didn't know you were going to be this rough on him," Laura said.

Hobart tightened his grip on Keith's beard. "Well, there's a

reason. In four days that boatload of lodestones and magnets is due downriver from Tucky. The moonshiners made tons of magnets back in the hills. When the boat gets here, we attack!"

She gasped. "That soon? But we've got so many preparations to make!"

Keith stumbled along, bewildered. "Lodestones? Magnets? Attack the City? He had to find some way to get back and tell the Masters about all this!"

But how could he? You couldn't actually talk with Them. Oh, They could understand your general feelings. But you couldn't tell Them even such a simple thing as: *I'm ready to mate. Please find me a nice bitch.*

"Preparations, hell," Hobart snorted. "Just as soon as we get our weapons, we'll wipe out that cancer on the other side of the forest." He pointed and his arm trembled.

Through a gap in the trees Keith saw the distant proud glow of Radiant City, bedimming even the Orb of All Orbs high up in the Blue Dome. He could discern only the very tops of the magnificent force structures. Lofty yellow spires of pulsating energy. Massive cylinders of emerald enchantment. Opalescent pyramids and iridescent ovoids that spun as they balanced on end, casting out merry showers of sparks and dazzling sprays of nonsubstance.

How he longed to return to Kind Master and all the other Spheres who took such good care of their personal people.

THE Pack Leader clubbed Keith across the back with a forearm and sent him staggering ahead. Hobart followed, shoving him first in this direction, then that, until finally they were nearing the end of the village.

"But if we attack that soon," Laura protested, "we won't have time to bring all the people out of the City. Or even find out how many can be humanized."

"That's why everything hinges on this miserable creature." Hobart planted a foot against Keith's buttocks and propelled him forward again—outside of the village, towards a fenced-off area enclosing several elongated mounds, each with a "stick" standing upright at one end and another "stick" crossing the first near its top.

"I don't understand," the bitch said.

"I've led stray packs into the City for the past ten years," Hobart explained. "We've brought out hundreds of animalized humans, either lured them away or carried them off kicking and screaming for their Spheres."

"Years" was a minor enigma to Keith. What confounded him most was this further evidence that the strays Outside were not only plotting evil against the Masters but were also stealing away Their personal people.

"So?" said Laura.

"So—this creature before us is the most spineless, most subservient, most dehumanized animal we've run across in all of that time. This is the ultimate test cast. If

we can break him down, we'll know that everybody in that City, and therefore in other Cities of Force, can be reclaimed as a human being."

Keith was astonished. Why, only yesterlight he had imagined that his one Magnificent Metropolis filled all existence everywhere.

He stole a glance at the trailing bitch, then looked away in disgust. For several hot-colds he had been avidly aware of her presence in his moundhood. Many were the times he had watched her, even shouted at her, as she exercised within the force-mesh enclosure behind her Master's mound. And each time she had shouted back or waved to him, he had torn his fingernails trying to breach the crisscross energy strands of his fence.

But all the while she had apparently been only a plant, a spy, eager to tell Hobart who should be captured and taken Outside next. Such a beautiful bitch he had never seen before. Rich brown hair. Eyes as dazzling blue as the energy material of the most lustrous mound. But what treachery! What evil purpose against the Spheres! And he had liked her better when she had been properly nude rather than covered with animal hides.

LAURA looked ahead at the area of elongated dirt mounds and crossed sticks. "You're not going to give him the graveyard shock—not *this* soon?"

The pack leader twisted his

captive's arm into a hammerlock. Keith cried out against the bone-bending pain.

"He's going to get every shock treatment in the book," Hobart swore.

"But why? He'll come around once everything's explained," Laura promised. "Actually he leads a miserable existence but just doesn't realize it. The Spherellets in his mound—"

Hobart turned the bitch around and shoved her back toward the village. "We've got only four days."

The Pack Leader released Keith's arm and catapulted him forward, half burying his chest and head in one of the mounds.

"Know what's under you?" Hobart demanded. "That's a human being. Know what he's doing there? He's dead—rotting away. One of your Masters killed him."

Keith did not even listen to the nonsense as he spat dirt from his mouth. His arm swept slowly along the curving surface of the mound until his fingers encountered the crossed sticks.

"This is a graveyard," Hobart roared. "It's full of dead people. Most were murdered by vicious bolts hurled by your Glorious Globes! But you wouldn't know what a graveyard is, would you? You wouldn't know about dead people or murder, either. Because the Spheres are too tidy. They don't leave carcasses lying around on their pinkways."

The Leader must be a mad-stud, Keith reflected. When Hobart spoke he made no sense. This

entire pack of strays was mostly madstuds and madbitches. In desperation, he gripped the upright member of the crossed sticks. And it moved loosely in the dirt.

"You're not listening," Hobart shouted, jerking Keith to his feet.

Keith grinned through lacerated lips. Perhaps he couldn't use his thoughts, as he did with the force stuff of the City, to make the dirt heave up and strike the Leader. But he could use the crossed sticks!

Lunging, he brought them crashing down on Hobart's head.

He watched the Leader fall. Then he charged off, heading for the brilliant glow beyond the forest.

II

ENTHRALLED by the magnificent City of Force lying just ahead, Keith broke out of the forest and paused.

He stared in renewed wonder at the luminescent panorama. Emerald cylinders and flashing orange pyramids that stabbed high into the Blue Dome. Sheets of crackling energy, scintillating with every color imaginable, fluttering between blunt orchid cubes and slender yellow cones. Pure nonsubstance streamers that rose, wavering, from shimmering purple obelisks, thin red pylons, gaily rotating ovoids.

Surrounding the entire City was the can't-see-through wall that prevented any of the personal people from even guessing that nonCity existed independent of City.

Keith drew up before the great barrier. Even as he wondered whether it would let him in, the wall gaped open and a projection of crimson force stuff flicked out like a tongue to slide under his feet. It retracted, with him, into the City.

The projection melted back into the carpet of pink radiance that lay everywhere. Keith fell to his knees in thanksgiving for his deliverance from the horrible village, from its uncouth madstuds and madbitches.

The majestic force structures of City Central were still distant. But closer, much closer, were many rows of glittering blue mounds. He was near one of the outlying moundhoods. From this perspective he could see that he was not too far from where he was kept.

Free now, delivered from the indecency of Outside, he lifted his face to the Blue Dome—only, it was Gray now; since the Orb of All Orbs was hidden behind clouds. He let out an exuberant cry. Blunt projections rose from the radiant pink carpet all around him, developing awkward mouths that pantomimed his shout of triumph.

Finally he sat upon the coral radiance and thought-formed a large wave against his back. It rolled forward, sweeping him before its crest.

He ordered up slow propulsion at first, until he adjusted his balance. Then he by intense concentration spurred on the wave toward the nearest pinkway. For

now Keith was not more than a stray. He had to reach Kind Master before he ran afoul of the People Catcher.

BRILLIANT residential mounds were soon blurring by on either side of the pinkway. Only fine coordination of balance and thought impulses kept him from sliding back over the crest of his wave or being hurled into one of the force-mesh fences bordering the travel strip.

He managed a sharp turn to the right, entering another pinkway. Soon he became aware of the other personal people, all safe and contented behind their force-mesh enclosures. If only he could reach his mound without incident!

A Sphere approached from ahead, floating just above the pinkway. Kind Master? It could be, for Keith was in his own moundhood now.

Respectfully, he planed well toward the edge of the strip as the Magnificent Being drifted by. No, that was not Kind Master. The silvery coloration differed and none of the memory-images that flicked in looping spirals along the Sphere's surface was familiar.

Passing the mound of Laura's Master, Keith had only a contemptuous scowl for the empty enclosure of sapphire force-netting that curved up and over the Sphere's residence and swept all around it. Indeed, the Radiant Being who lived here was much better off with a personal person—if His personal person happened to be so treacherous a bitch.

Presently Keith dismissed the propulsive wave and slid to a halt just outside his own enclosure. Mock arms reared from the radiant carpet and lifted him to his feet. Behind his heels twin wavelets formed and moved him toward the fence.

Provoked, he stomped upon the elevations until the glistening pink carpet stretched once again into unbroken levelness. Of luxuries such as short-distance planing Keith would have none—a disposition instilled in him by his dear old gyp.

At the fence, he inspected the force-mesh through which he had squeezed yesterlight. But all the crisscross strands of energy were back in place. The sapphire netting was one of those forms of nonsubstance that would not respond to human thought, yet Laura had breached it easily enough in order to let him out. How?

He cupped his hands about his mouth. "Kind Master! Let me in! The pack is going to hurt our beautiful City of Force!"

Of course, the Magnificent Beings could not hear people. But Kind Master might sense the desperation behind his shouts and let him inmound.

"Kind Master! *Kind Master!*"

KNOCK it off!" "What's all the yapping about?"

"Let's have some quiet!"

Irate voices rose in protest from enclosures up and down the pinkway.

A hole opened in the shimmering blue energy-substance of the next mound and out bounded a many-times-around female and one of her young: Gyp Emma and Bitchette Margo.

"Your Master's outmound," the gyp revealed.

She was considerably older than Keith. Although in fairly good shape, she had hair beginning to take on the striped-silver appearance of a meditating Sphere. Lines were forming in her face. Keith hoped that when it was time for him to mate, Kind Master would search farther than nextmound.

Gyp Emma gripped her force-mesh fence. "Where have you been all tolight and yesterlight?"

"Outside. There really is an Outside! Horrible. No force stuff. Filled with impersonal people who steal us away and—" He snapped his mouth shut. No sense telling her what he had learned. She would blabber it throughout the moundhood and none of the personal people would even believe her.

"Gypsy, he's hurt." Bitchette Margo had spotted the effects of Hobart's backhands. "His lips are swollen. His—"

"Hush," Emma ordered, dark eyes narrowed and alarmed.

Thin arms shot up from the radiant carpet and grew tender fingers that explored his puffed lips.

He shoved the tendrils aside and they sank back into the energy layer. "I'm all right," he said, staring up at the Dome—dark now, though you could hard-

ly notice the darkness against the sparkling brilliance of everything in the City of Force.

"What happens when people get too hurt, 'gypsy?" Margo asked, in the fashion of curious youngsters, everywhere.

"What a stupid question," Emma scolded. "I did my duty. I taught you ways and whys. I wouldn't be surprised if Bulgy Ball—" she nodded toward their mound—"finds you a Master of your own pretty soon. Yet you come out with stupid questions like that."

"Not stupid at all," Keith said, wishing Kind Master would return. "I often wonder about that myself. Seems there ought to be a limit to how hurt you can get. Or how sick. Or how old."

"Stud Murdock, across the pinkway, is plenty old," Margo reminded him. "But how old is too old? And what happens when you get there?"

He could only shake his head. As if to mock his ignorance, three blank heads popped out of the coruscating energy-layer and swung from side to side. "Maybe They take you to another part of the City, to a Master who likes too-old people."

TWO Majestic Beings were passing. Gliding just above the roseate stardust ribbon, They swept along at a breathless pace, silvering the coral radiance beneath Them with Their own warm glow. From the other direction came a single Magnificent One, carrying a budding Spherelet on

His downspeed side. The Sphere flow had started slacking off shortly after light-dark. But, now that dark-dark could be seen upon the Dome above the vividly luminous City, traffic was beginning to pick up again.

"There's Stud Murdock now!" Margo pointed. And from the lambent force stuff beneath her, several skinny arms sprang up to level stiff index fingers at the mound across the pinkway.

Egbert Murdock, out of Gyp Clara Murdock, was stumbling around in his enclosure, groping.

"Poor stud gets blinder every day," observed Emma. "Lame, too."

Egbert's limp was pronounced. His flesh seemed to have fled for some happier place, leaving behind only bone and wrinkled skin. And, even from across the pinkway, his frequent coughing could be heard.

"He's old, Keith, isn't he?" Margo inquired. "Pretty old, huh?"

"You know," Emma said, "there's a rumor about Murdock. He—"

"I've heard." Keith tried to head her off.

But she was determined to ex-hume the scandal. "They say Gyp Murdock wasn't properly put to stud. Her-Master hadn't planned anything at all. She—"

"Yes, I know." Keith stemmed her flow of words as he watched compliant force-stuff arms rise in Egbert's yard to catch him whenever he stumbled. But proud old stud that he was, he had enough

self-reliance left to slap them away.

"Keith," said Margo, "you think maybe Stud Murdock is *too* old?"

"Hush!" Emma reproved. "As I was saying, Gyp Murdock wasn't a gyp at all. Breeding wasn't prearranged. There was this stray stud and—and—oh, poor Egbert!"

BUT the old fellow, Keith reflected, had carried his humiliation well over all these hot-colds. So well that no one dared talk about his questionable origin while he was around.

"Look," exclaimed Bitchette Margo, while glistening pink hands rose again to point for her. "There's a hole in his mesh. He's coming out!"

Indeed, Stud Murdock was upon the pinkway now, crossing.

"Watch out, Egbert!" Emma screamed.

The Sphere missed him by the length of his beard. He spun twice before force-stuff hands shot up to steady him. After a fit of coughing, he came the rest of the way seated on the foreslope of a radiant wave.

"That was a close one, Egbert," Keith sympathized.

"Yep—might have—got—hurt," the old stud said between coughs. Trembling, he ordered up an energy-substance bench from the force stuff underfoot. Keith shared it with him, but found that he had to supply the continuous thought impulses to keep it from withering out of shape.

"How did that hole get in your mesh, Stud Murdock?" asked, Margo hanging on the fence.

"It was—*cough*—just there. I think — *cough - cough* — Gentle Globe made it. Maybe He wants me to get out and have—*cough-cough*—a little fun."

Emma laughed. "What kind of fun could you have now?"

"None. I'm worried."

"About what?"

"About Gentle Globe." Egbert's breathing sounded like the hissing of the sparks that occasionally showered from the mound ceilings. "He keeps me by Him a lot now. And He's always a deep blue. I've never seen a sadder Sphere."

"What's He sad about?"

"Wish I knew. Maybe I could do something to make Him turn orange and green with happiness again."

Keith was first to feel the tingling, bristling sensation that seemed to take root and grow, to die out and grow again, deep within his thoughts.

"Stud Murdock," Margo shouted through her fence. "Gentle Globe's calling you. Don't you feel Him?"

"Eh?"

Keith stared across the pinkway. Sure enough. The old stud's Master was drifting impatiently back and forth behind the energy-mesh enclosure, hurling thought commands at Egbert.

Obediently, Murdock started across the ribbon of coral stardust—and promptly was hit by a speeding Sphere.

He lay on the pinkway for a while, then gathered himself up and, holding his chest, rode an ill-shaped wave back to his enclosure.

Much later, after Emma and Margo had been called inmund and the pale Lesser Orb was hanging low in its Dark Dome, Keith lost hope that his Master would return before next light-light.

Accumulated exhaustion drove him to the edge of sleep as he sat against the outside of his impenetrable fence. He shielded his eyes against the dazzling crimson luminosity of the underlying energy layer, the sparkling sapphire radiance of the force-mesh fences, the shimmering blue brilliance of the mounds all around him, the magnificent coruscations of City Central's great geometric force-stuff edifices.

Thirsty, still dirty from his forced stay Outside, he concentrated upon the pink radiance, ordering up a huge bowl. He thought upon it an extreme coldness. In moments the film of moisture condensing on its inner surface formed drops and ran down to begin filling the container.

From cupped hands he drank his fill, then splashed the remainder upon his face, arms, chest, feet. Feeling cleaner now, he allowed the bowl to sink back into the levelness of the luminous carpet.

Then he thought-excavated a trench in the radiance and lay in it. He let the pink nonsubstance

flow back over him until only a small part of his face remained exposed. For, while he slept and awaited Kind Master's return, he must make certain that he would become the prey of neither Hobart's returning strays nor the People Catcher.

III

BABBLING voices awoke Keith. He stared through the gap in his force-stuff covering. It was light-light. And the Magnificent Metropolis was never more lustrously alive than now—during Food-Collecting Time.

Showers of sparks sprayed from the countless energy-material structures—mounds and moundplexes—pyramids and pylons and spires—cones, cylinders and great iridescent ovoids. From the multidinous surfaces also, silvery ribbons reached out, wavering gracefully, toward the Orb on High. The dazzling streamers were greedily sucking up its warm energy substance. Golden droplets formed along the ribbons, slid down, merged into larger pellets, then sank into the luminous surfaces of the structures: food-stuff to feed the Masters and their obedient personal people and even replenish the forms of the City.

Keith heard Margo exclaim nextmound, "I saw it all! These two Spheres came and took him off down the pinkway on a sit-down wave."

"How did he look?"

"Not so good. Moaned and held his chest. Gypsy, what's go-

ing to happen to Stud Murdock, huh?"

"Hush, Margo. Egbert has just become too old, I guess. Maybe it's like Keith says—They find new Masters for too-old people somewhere else in the City."

Then Keith could sense Bulgy Ball calling Emma and Margo back inmound. Which was just as well. He didn't feel like talking with bitches or anyone else. He concentrated on how he would try to tell Kind Master about the treacherous strays Outside-of-the-City.

But other voices suddenly assailed his ears.

"Here we go!"

"Around the bend!"

"Spur your wave, Hank. Fast-er."

"Watch out, damn stinkin' Spheres. We'll run you down—"

"Yip-ee! Look at all those locked-up suckers."

Dismayed, Keith shrank within the covered trench he had thought-molded for himself. Hobart and his strays!

They were not wearing their "animal hides" now—so the Spheres would not guess they were from Outside-of-the-City.

But already the personal people in many enclosures were rising to the vocal challenge of the pack:

"Scram . . . Get lost . . ."

"Leave us alone. We got us a nice moundhood."

"Look for your bitches somewhere else!"

"I hope the People Catcher gets you—all of you."

"Go back Outside!"

Keith was about to add his lusty voice to the customary outcries. Then he remembered that Outside-of-the-City was not just a foul word, but a real and terrible place. So he concentrated on preventing any imitation mouths from forming in the radiant carpet and betraying his hiding place.

He could tell from the nearness and loudness of the shouted barrage that the pack had stopped in front of his hiding place. With intense concentration, so that he would not accidentally manipulate any part of the energy layer in his defense and thus give away his position, he began counting backward from a hundred.

"Well," said Hobart, "he's not here, unless he's inmound."

"Why don't we just forget about him?" queried another stray.

"I want him," Hobart growled. "Laura will keep an eye on his mound while we go make our other two pickups."

The strays continued on their way, returning insult for insult at full lungpower.

"Lick your Master's belly!"

"Locked-up suckers . . ."

"Break out. Learn what it means to be free!"

"Fetch, boy. Good boy. Fetch, and you get a force-food ball!"

Only when the pack was well away did Keith emerge. Down the pinkway, the shouting strays were being swept toward City Central on frothing stand-up waves.

A glance in the other direction revealed Bitch Laura, wearing no

"hide" now, staring at him from within her old enclosure.

Should he force her to reveal what foul new conspiracy was hatching? Or wait here for Kind Master and try to tell Him what was going on? Or follow Hobart and learn what the pack was up to?

Deciding, he ordered up a swift sit-down wave. As it propelled him along the pinkway in pursuit of the strays, he thought-molded another wave immediately in front of him. Riding in the trough between the two crests, he could peek over the forward one yet remain hidden behind it.

SOME of the strays abandoned their force-stuff conveyences and went loping ahead in broad, ranging strides. Others still rode.

"On and on!"

"Charge!"

"Join the fun, you miserable locked-up people!"

"Rise! We'll help you escape —"

Hobart, riding the foremost wave, was shouting more loudly than any of them as the wind whipped his red hair and beard backward.

The pinkway wound through an area of great moundplexes, some piled many layers high. Keith remained well behind the pack, not only to spy from a safe distance but also to savor the spectacle of the magnificent structures. Never before had he viewed them from such close range. Radiant Spheres were drifting in and out of them at all levels.

The ribbon of pink stardust climbed sharply, curving around one of the marvelous clusters of mounds. Here it had sprouted many minor coral ramps that struck off and disappeared among recesses in the towering azure 'plex. The main pinkway itself continued on toward the lofty energy-material structures of City Central.

Ahead, the shouting resumed. Three of the strays had found a slow-moving Sphere. Two were sprinting in front of Him and the third planed alongside the Master, feet planted on the foreslope of a small, swift wave. They were all shouting:

"Damn bully-ball! Put 'em up!"

"Ya-a-a-h! Your poppa was oblate."

"Stop and fight—"

"Come on, boys. We got 'im on the run!"

Hardly had Hobart's voice risen above the general yelping with "Don't lay it on too thick!" when the Sphere flushed His surface with a menacing yellow hue and cast a vicious bolt.

The stud on His right caught the sizzling streak in the chest and collapsed, charred over most of his body. Resilvering, the Sphere swept on while the pack gathered around the stricken stud.

Curious, Keith brought his sit-down and hide-behind waves almost to a halt but continued to think-direct them forward slowly, peering over the advance one.

Four Magnificent Masters passed him, but none seemed to

pay any attention to the pack assembled around the charred, still stud. *Too charred? Too still?*

As though in outright revolt, Keith's hide-behind wave abruptly lost its form and disintegrated into scores of long projections that coiled back around his arms and legs and held him rigidly. Only then did Hobart, still quite a few wavelengths ahead, turn and laugh.

"Thought it was you all along," the Leader boasted. "Hold him, boys. But watch out for his backlash."

Mortified, Keith thought-molded a huge cudgel out of the radiant carpet immediately in front of Hobart. But even as it drew back and swung at the Leader's head, a much thicker club reared up to parry the blow.

Then one of the stringy projections tightened around Keith's neck and he could no longer even think of attack.

"Watkins, Adler, LeBlanc," Hobart called out. "Concentrate on freezing all the force stuff around here, except what I want to use."

The Leader came over and hauled Keith erect while the restraining nonsubstance projections became limp and slid off his body.

Gasping for breath, he ordered up a dozen forms of attack against the red-bearded Hobart and his strays. Stout projections to bludgeon them. Yawning pits beneath their feet. Strands of force stuff to bind them. But none of his assault devices materialized. Once

again he was a captive of the uncouth Hobart from Outside. And none of the passing Spheres seemed even concerned.

Gripping Keith's beard, Hobart led him over to the charred stray.

"Filthy lightning-hurling fiend!" The Leader swore. He jerked Keith's head forward. "This, you ignorant animal, is a dead man! Take a good look!"

"Why doesn't he get up?" Keith asked nervously.

Hobart only scowled.

"Is he *too* still?"

"Yeah, he's too still—*dead* still!"

"What's 'dead' still?"

Hobart unleashed the back of his hand and it stung Keith across the mouth. "You poor, stupid, degenerate specimen," the Leader said.

The other studs stood with bowed heads. A projection of the pinkway folded the too-still one's hands across his seared chest, then he began sinking slowly into the energy layer. Glistening force stuff flowed over and around him, restoring the pinkway's unbroken surface.

POPLE CATCHER! People Catcher!"

The strays picked up Hobart's cry and backed away toward City Central on reverse stand-up waves.

Tinged with the rich violet of annoyance and the deep russet of determination, the dread Sphere came charging around the curve. Trailing behind and above Him, in the most convenient position

for casting, was His tightly knit sapphire mesh.

The Leader snatched Keith's arm as though determined not to lose his captive. He thought-molded a propulsive swell large enough to accommodate both of them. More afraid of the People Catcher than the pack, Keith went along without resistance. Carrying double, however, their escape wave was a bit slower than those hurling the other studs to the edge of the elevated pinkway.

The People Catcher's net was already swinging in widening circles. As the fleeing strays let their waves wash them over the edge of the ribbonway, the People Catcher was upon Keith and Hobart. His net flared.

Horried as he watched the green mesh descending upon them, Keith wrested free of Hobart's grip, made his part of the mutual wave hurl him forward along the pinkway. Looking back, he saw the Leader being launched over the side by a slingshot of force stuff—just in time to escape a second throw of the cast net. Reprieved by the fearsome Sphere's pursuit of Hobart, Keith propelled himself City Centralward on a towering swell of coral stardust.

There were many Spheres riding the pinkway now, all indifferent to the drama of the People Catcher and the escaping strays. In this heavier traffic Keith had to concentrate on guiding his sit-down wave. The horror of the too-charred, too-still stray remained fresh in his mind although he

could comprehend nothing of what had happened.

Keith's wave bore him between two Spheres and around a looping curve of the ribbon as it ascended another moundplex. He hazarded a second rearward look. Aglow with the russet of determination, the People Catcher was coming along at full speed.

In the same glance, from around the inside of the curve, Keith had been able to see what had happened to Hobart and the other strays. They had thought-manipulated the edge of the pinkway into long, dangling streamers and were shining down them into the lower recesses of Radiant City.

The People Catcher was gaining on Keith. He demanded more speed of his wave. He weaved in and out of the transient Spheres. Dipping sharply from its dizzying height, the ribbon carried him into the core of City Central, its great, glistening geometric shapes rising majestically above him.

He swept past coruscating spires, beautiful emerald cylinders that rotated ceaselessly, tapering pyramids displaying many-colored splotches upon their restless surfaces, iridescent ovoids spinning gaily upon their ends.

An orange-tinted cube, twirling as it balanced atop a fluorescing tower, loosed a fountain of sparks—happy sparks that danced and gamboled as they splashed down upon lesser edifices.

Oh, the beauty of City Central! The shimmering translucence of all the majestic forms, translucence that betrayed the presence

inside of many Magnificent Spheres! But who could ever guess what they were doing? And overhead were awesome displays of flaming curtains and whirling halos and dazzling beams, rippling ribbons of pure silver and tenuous, luminous veils of opalescent energy. All so bright that they bedimmed even the Orb of All Orbs.

Keith drank in the breathtaking display. Here he was, realizing his fervent hope: access to City Central! Deeply he resented the stud named Hobart who would wrest him from all of this and take him to that hellish Outside.

Yet he was grateful, too. If it had not been for Hobart's strays he would not now be cruising through this paradise of splendor.

Swish! The People Catcher's net landed on the ribbonway, barely missing Keith. Another cast and he would be captured.

Remembering how Hobart and the pack had escaped, Keith summoned a final measure of will power and had his wave catapult him over the side of the pinkway. As he fell he ordered the primrose stardust of the ribbon's edge to extend a streamer to him.

But he was plunging faster than the projection was stretching down! The People Catcher's net, however, descended faster still.

IV

SCARCELY old enough to be away from his gyp a pre-stud sat on his haunches and wailed. In another enclosure across the

pinkaisle, a towheaded bitch tossed her weight against the sapphire mesh and screamed to be let out of the pound.

A forlorn bitchette kept murmuring, "O, Dear Radiant Roundness, come and get me!" In the next pen a surly stud paced back and forth, cursing incessantly.

Keith turned over on his side and remolded the coral force-stuff slab on which he had lain all dark-dark. But no matter how much softness he thought into the lambent energy material he could find no comfort against his bewilderment. Miserable, he rose and stood shuddering.

"Had it rough, hey?" That from the stud in the next pen.

"I want my Kind Master," Keith whined.

"Don't worry. He'll come—if He is kind."

"How do you know?"

"I've been through this. Fifth time around." The impounded stud was past his prime as a breeder. His hair and beard were streaked with the gray hue of a tired Sphere. His shoulders slumped. He had too much belly.

"What if my Master doesn't come?"

The stud shrugged. "They'll take you down the aisle there and put you in that black compartment and—"

"Yes?"

"And make you too still."

"Too hurt?"

"Oh, I don't know about that. But definitely too still."

"Too—'dead'?" That was the

word Hobart had used, wasn't it?

"How's that?"

"Forget it." Keith shook his head. Everything was so confusing. As he tried to sort his thoughts a sound caught his ear. A familiar sound. Was it possible? There it went again.

"Cough-cough—"

That confused him still more. Why was Egbert Murdock here? Murdock had not been caught by the People Catcher.

"Hey, Egbert," Keith shouted. "How you feeling tolight?"

Murdock only clutched his ribs and coughed.

At the end of the pinkaisle the mesh parted and in glided the People Catcher. With Him was Murdock's Gentle Globe! It was easy to recognize Him. He was blue all over and bright thought-images of Murdock could be seen flowing across His surface.

They opened Egbert's mesh and caused a gentle wave to sweep him out and down the aisle. He sat with arms folded, smiling slightly as though in anticipation of a pleasant surprise, as the wave planed him into the black-walled enclosure.

Gentle Globe and the People Catcher waited for a time. Then the black wall opened and Egbert, lying down, was swept out and propelled by a wave-form along the pinkaisle and out of the pound. He did not seem too hurt any longer. But after having become too caught, he now appeared too still, Keith reflected.

Gentle Globe followed, radiating a deeper blue than Keith had

ever seen. It was all so puzzling. So confusing.

The People Catcher glided back to Keith, breached the sapphire mesh of his pen. When a wave began pushing him in the direction of the black-walled place, he suddenly felt that he ought to be afraid of an enclosure that made people too still.

But abruptly the wave sank back into the levelness of the pinkaisle and the People Catcher glazed over with silver-gray indifference.

And when Keith looked down the aisle, there was Kind Master drifting his way, brightly orange-green and anxious to see His personal person again.

Keith hurled himself upon the Magnificent One and with outstretched arms fondled His under-surface. And scores of hands raised themselves out of the aisle to pet the Grand Sphere, helping Keith express his gratitude.

Oh, how desperately he had wanted to be reunited with Kind Master! He would never run afoul of the People Catcher again! He would never let Hobart take him Outside-of-the-City!

Outside? Of course. The villagers—their conspiracy!

“Kind Master!” Keith leaped up and down, waving his arms. “There’s a bunch of strays trying to hurt our beautiful City! They’re stealing Your personal people! They live Outside-of-the-City and —”

Around and around the towering Globe he went, while the radiant carpet recoiled to hurl him

to heights almost level with the Master’s upper pole. And dozens of hands rose from the force-stuff layer to help him plead for comprehension from the Splendid Being.

But the Majestic One only displayed the orange-green of contentment in splotches all over His surface. It was no use. There was no way to make Him understand

A slim projection of nonsubstance snaked up out of the energy layer and looped around Keith’s neck. Then, as Kind Master drifted down the pinkaisle, the leash followed, remaining attached to the coral carpet at all points along the way and drawing Keith along with it.

PERHAPS as an expression of the Kind One’s joy at having him back, Keith was allowed in-mound that dark-dark.

While the Radiant Being dozed comfortably in His fluorescing niche, Keith kept a wary eye on the two Spherelets, Innocent Demon and Little Imp. He had forgotten about them.

Occasionally Demon was assuming a mischievous cinnamon hue, drifting over to him, then shading off into the yellow coloration of bolt-hurling readiness. But each time the tinge was flushed off His surface by the sable tint of frustration when He perceived that Keith was not about to budge from his sanctuary almost directly beneath the Master’s lustrous rotundity. Innocent’s bolts hurt, and Keith did not intend to ab-

sorb any more of them than he had to.

Throughout most of the dark-dark Imp, too, drifted back and forth along the sparkling azure wall of the mound. He kept flashing in a succession of hues—from the violet of annoyance into His boiling yellow bolt-hurling sheen. Then, flushed with power He dare not use so close to the Parent grayed over in slumber, Imp would drain off all that fierce energy into the coral carpet. Immediately he would register the bluish green of disappointment, followed by the total nonradiance of blighted hope and once again the violet of annoyance to start the cycle all over again.

About middark-dark, sparking time came and Keith rose, fully alert, in order to miss none of the beauty of this incomprehensible happening.

Along the vaulted turquoise ceiling, vivid splotches of scarlet light chased one another in a dance interrupted only when two of the blobs collided. Then showers of hissing sparks cascaded out and down. Everywhere they fell, the blue force material of the walls and the soft energy stuff of the floor would take on new, glowing splendor.

Kind Master, still hover-dozing in His alcove, stirred and turned lazily about his axis, His surface taking on the silvery tinge of wakefulness.

As Innocent Demon and Little Imp hid behind the golden fountain, Keith resumed his attempt to communicate the treachery.

“Don’t You understand, Master? They’re Outside. They’re taking away personal people. The strays want to *hurt* our Magnificent Metropolis!”

Countless pairs of imploring arms grew out of the carpet to mimic his supplicating gestures.

But it was futile. He just wasn’t getting through to Kind Master!

Keith glanced at the alcove’s lustrous wall just as several force-food balls were popping out of the places where they had been embedded. They hovered just above his head—delicious morsels from the Orb of All Orbs. Sphere food! And they were to be his, if only he did what was expected of him.

Excited, he sprang into the air and came down on his palms. He teetered for a moment but finally held still, arms stiff and corded as they supported his inverted form. Oh, these were the happy times—when Master was awake and Imp and Demon hid on the other side of the sparkling fountain!

He sprang erect and Master let one of the pellets drop into his mouth. Delicious. Sphere food was a rapture in itself.

Next, the twirling handsprings. But careful! Not too far away from the Radiant One or he would be exposed to bolts from the Spherelets.

More force-food balls.

Then the cartwheels. With Master glowing orange-green all over. And more delectable pellets to melt in his mouth and trickle down his throat.

Tiring, the Glorious Sphere finally filmed over with the gray tinge of slumber.

KEITH felt contentment too. Really, why bother about the threat—threat, indeed—of Hobart and his wretched strays? Certainly they could do nothing to harm the Radiant Ones and Their City.

He stepped closer to Kind Master, sent his eyes roving over His surface. Occasionally something would attract his attention and he would return again and again to the spot.

Most of the memory-pictures that flowed fuzzily across the sleep-grayed surface of the Sphere, however, were as incomprehensible as the Illustrious Ones Themselves and Their Magnificent Metropolis.

Here: a sequence of idea-images limned in vivid colors—memories of a flight over the pinkways of City Central. There: great flashes of light and shimmering nimbuses climbing pearly walls and occasionally arranging themselves into rings that linked and unlinked. They were recollections of happenings in the lofty spire to which Master went every dark-light and returned every light-dark.

Oh, if only he could understand some of these idea-pictures and memory-images that flicked—sometimes in spirals, sometimes in great curves—across Master's surface!

Working his way around the

Sphere, Keith suddenly came upon an image that he could understand—almost.

There, in the animated scene, was Kind Master. And next to Him was someone else's Master. They were within the sapphire force-stuff enclosure just outside the very mound he was in now.

Between them stood a bitch.

Sensing the meaning behind the image, Keith tried desperately to make out her features. Impossible. For a Master was not good at telling personal people apart—except His own personal person, of course. The bitch was without detail in the Sphere's memory.

Nevertheless Keith wanted to know what she looked like. For he sensed that she was going to be put to stud. And, just as certainly, he knew he would be the stud. For the first time he was going to consummate his studship.

Keith, in his pride and anticipation, forgot all about Demon and Imp. But Little Imp, taking advantage of His Parent's slumber, had glided from behind the golden fountain and was flaring with the vivid orange-green of delight. The hues rainbowed through the cinnamon of mischief-contemplation and turned a threatening yellow.

The Spherelet hurled his bolt.

Scoring a near-miss, the sizzling streak produced the smell of seared flesh and an ugly welt on Keith's shoulder.

Enraged, he lunged from behind Master and ordered the radiant carpet to spin him around—just in time to see Innocent Demon turning cinnamon.

But before Demon could decide upon a method of torment, Keith made a great wave of the floor wash him across the room. He rained a series of indignant kicks against the Spherelet's surface.

The little Master turned pea-green with fear and scurried, together with Imp, into the sparkling alcove beside their Parent. As they arrived, Kind Master was silvering with wakefulness—a reaction, no doubt, to the fright-thoughts assailing Him from His Spherelets.

And His mercurial cast immediately gave way to yellow. The tinge collected into a small dot on His surface and came hurtling at Keith—an ominous zigzag bolt!

It melted a huge area of the carpet immediately in front of him. Only a warning bolt, luckily.

Then the floor of pink stardust molded a cresting wave taller than Keith himself. It swept him toward the thick azure wall of the mound. The wall spread open long enough for him to be washed out into the yard. Then it closed behind him.

V

NEXT light-light, Keith huddled in his sulking corner out-mound, drawing little comfort from the Orb on High's warmth. Imp's mischievous bolt had left his shoulder raw. And there were blisters on his legs, raised by the sparks from Kind Master's warning bolt.

He was busy think-dismissing the solicitous hands of force stuff

that insisted upon exploring his hurts when he noticed a Radiant Being drifting toward his enclosure. The Magnificent One floated at such a height as to appear to be a gigantic, silvery head sitting upon the shoulders of the bitch who trailed behind Him on a nonsubstance leash.

But what a bitch! What a body!

His captivated stare was accompanied by dozens of spurious, unseeing eyes flung up on long-stemmed stalks out of the radiant ground before him.

His bitch! Keith sensed it. He could not quite see her face, not at this angle. But her swaying hips displayed a graceful rhythm. Her skin was firm and smooth with youth. Surely she was a first-time-out bitch.

When her Master reached the fence, its sapphire netting parted. She was washed into the enclosure, the leash slipping from her neck and sinking into the pink radiance. Restoring the fence's energy strands, the Sphere withdrew down the pinkway.

"Hello, there," Keith began excitedly—trite, too, he realized. "Are you ready for—"

The bitch turned to face him and he gaped. Laura! From the mound down the pinkway. From Hobart's village, too.

He sprang. "I've got her, Kind Master," he shouted over his shoulder. "I've got the treacherous Outside bitch!"

A projection of force stuff rose to snag his lunging instep and he plopped to the radiant carpet.

Even so, he thought, this was

not her village. This was his territory. He would show her. He thought-fashioned a lariat out of the carpet and thought-hurled its loop, catching her around the waist.

But she plucked from her hair the short, flat bar she had used four yesterlights ago to free him from his enclosure. She touched the noose with the thing. Instantly it sucked up the whole lariat, together with the part of the energy layer to which the lariat had been attached.

"Keith," she said, "I've got to make you understand that—"

He thought-tossed coils of pink radiance around her ankles and tried to think-tug her off her feet. Again she used the bar to suck up the coils. While she was thus occupied, however, he made the coral carpet catapult him toward her. She had expected that. She thought-erected a hard shell of nonsubstance. He slammed head-long into it, the impact felling him.

Cunningly he remained motionless while the pink carpet restored its levelness.

She hurried to him on a small stand-up wave.

"Keith, are you all right? Did I hurt you?"

He might have got away with his deception. Except that while he lay still, he caused several arms to ease up out of the energy layer and reach for her.

"Sorry," she said.

And a piece of the backyard whacked his skull, bringing on unfeigned unconsciousness.

COMING to, he heard the cries.

"Yipee! Suckers. Suckers!"

"Get out of the way, damn blubber balls!"

"I'm a stray... Hooray, hooray..."

"Don't you suckers want to escape and have some fun?"

"Faster. Ride the pinkway. Let freedom ring!"

As Hobart and his pack came sweeping around the curve on cresting waves, Laura held her bar close to the fence mesh. The sapphire strands squirmed out of shape, fashioning a large hole.

But the whole moundhood was shouting back at the villagers now:

"Hit the pinkway, you filthy strays!"

"Go back where you came from—"

"People Catcher! Where's the People Catcher?"

Keith launched himself at Laura. Seizing her with one hand, he reached for the small bar with the other. But she tossed it to Hobart through the opening in the mesh.

A projection of nonsubstance shot up from the carpet, looped around Keith's neck and yanked him away from Laura.

Hobart barked orders.

"Johnson, Adler, DuBois, keep all this energy-layer stuff immobilized. Laura, come on out. Hit the pinkway for the village. Hank, Bradford, see that she gets there okay."

Laura hurried through the gap in the mesh.

"Came as soon as McAllister brought your message," the Pack Leader said. "We get here in time?"

She nodded, then summoned up the pinkwave that would take her, together with Hank and Bradford, back Outside.

"Go easy on him," she advised, as she thought-washed herself away. "He can be brought around, I'm sure."

Keith surged against his choking neck-shackle. "Bring her back," he screamed. "She's my bitch."

Hobart came through the mesh. "Okay, boys, let the force stuff loose. I'll take over."

Even as the nonsubstance fetter flipped from Keith's throat, he thought-molded a bludgeon out of the radiant carpet and directed it to club the Leader's head.

But Hobart's devastating knuckles smashed into Keith's face first.

DARK. Dark. Such frightful darkness, thought Keith.

Shrinking from the vast nonradiance that engulfed the village, he reached down to the strips of hide that bound his feet.

"Don't touch those," Hobart shouted out of the adjacent dark. "And keep those clothes on. We're human out here."

Keith waited for the backhand. This time it did not come.

"Let me try reasoning with him," Laura urged from other darkness.

"Shock's the medicine, not reason."

"I'd say this one can't be humanized, Ho," ventured a stray assigned to guard Keith.

Hobart swore, "He'll make it or die trying."

"But that boatload of magnets is due tomorrow. We attack the City at nightfall. It's impossible to bring him around before then."

"We've got to take time to prove out this test case," Laura persisted. "If he doesn't come through, that could mean we'll find ourselves with hundreds of people on our hands who'll simply die without their lousy Masters."

"Take time? So the Spheres will have a chance to detect our magnets?" Hobart stomped off in a huff. Keith watched the Leader kneel and, after a while, produce one of those bundles of dancing yellow projections that strays called "fire."

Laura, in animal hides, studied Keith intently. She moved closer and the guard halved his distance.

"You'll be all right, Keith," she comforted. "The darkness around us is only natural. You'll get used to it."

What a miserable place, Keith thought. Thick forest cut off starlight, moonlight, even the glow of the distant City. The wan fire was a laughable substitute for the magnificent radiances and sparkling illuminations that the spheres knew.

"You see, Keith, we must destroy the City and free the personal people. We have a moral commit—"

"No! You and I are going back and you're going to be my first-time-out bitch and—"

Seized by the shoulders, he was lifted and spun around. Then his head snapped back with the jarring impact of a backhand blow.

"We don't use that word out here," Hobart growled. "Not unless we're mad as hell and ready to fight."

Keith rubbed his cheek. "Is she your bi—"

Whap!

"She's a woman," snarled Hobart. "You hear that? A woman. But not mine. I'm too busy for women—I'm organizing a revolt, collecting animals and turning them into people, receiving supplies from upriver, raiding library ruins."

Keith made it back to his knees and looked at Hobart. Supplies? Upriver? Library ruins?

"Chris," Laura said, "don't hurt him."

Bitter was Hobart's laugh. "I couldn't hurt him any more than he's already been hurt." He turned back to Keith. "Quit groveling. Up and out of the dirt!" The Leader slipped something hard and shiny between his captive's ankles and the thongs fell away.

But Keith merely whined, "I want my Master."

Hobart seized his arms and jerked him erect.

Whap! Another mouthful of knuckles.

"Well, aren't you going to do something about it?" the Leader demanded.

Keith commanded the ground to rise and strike Hobart with many projections of force stuff. But even his most desperate inner pleadings could not stir a ripple in the coarse brown-black nonradiance.

"Fight, damn you!" Hobart challenged.

Keith lunged awkwardly and threw a fist at his tormentor.

Laughing, the pack Leader easily dodged. He raised his hand as if to swing but Laura stepped in front of him. "Please, Chris. He's had enough for now."

Hobart walked off into the darkness. "He struck at me, anyway. We may just possibly be witnessing the creation of a man."

KEITH awoke to the cold pressure of obstinate ground beneath his aching body. But had he been a Magnificent One surely he would have turned orange-green all over, for it was light-light at last.

"Feeling better now that the darkness is gone?" Laura asked, stepping out of the nearby mound—"shack," rather, Keith remembered.

There were many other shacks. And many studs and bi—well, men and women, moving among them.

His eyes swept the area. He tensed when he noticed, not too far off, something that might be a pinkway. It rose gracefully from the ground, climbed until it was higher than a Sphere, then made a broad sweep and twisted around under itself. Beyond were other

pinkways curving up and over one another and sending off ribbonways in all directions.

Keith blinked. Why, they weren't pinkways at all! They did not shimmer. They did not look the least bit like coral star-dust. Rather, they were light gray in color, like the hue of a sleeping Master. Oh, there was nothing out here to compare with the splendid structures in the City of Force! Here everything was drab. There was no radiance anywhere, except that from the Orb on High.

He raised his arms to the Majestic Light Giver that dominated the measureless Blue Dome.

"O, Great One!" he intoned. "Take me back—"

"No, Hobart!" Laura cried.

Too late. *Whap!*

"Sun, animal!" Hobart raged.

"The sun. Say it!"

"Sun," Keith conceded.

"That's better. I—"

Keith lashed out with his fist and felt it crunch against jawbone beneath the red beard.

Hobart raised himself half off the ground and sat there feeling his chin and laughing.

"Exit animal, enter human?"

He sprang up, wrapped an arm about Keith's shoulders. "Nice going, Keith. Hungry?"

Keith frowned down at the carrying-slab that the guard placed before him. On it lay perhaps a dozen peculiar things: dull gray—bowls?—each the size of a cupped hand. Rough and with small bumps and ridges on the outside. The insides were white, and in each lay a gray blob.

"What kind of force-food balls are those?"

"Oysters. From Lake Pontchartrain, a couple of miles down the expressway." Hobart tossed one of the blobs in his mouth, threw away its bowl, then offered a shell and oyster to Keith.

He accepted it gingerly and slid the blob into his mouth.

"Chew," Hobart urged.

The oyster was nasty and vulgar. It tasted nothing at all like the delicious pellets Kind Master bestowed so generously whenever Keith performed well. He swallowed queasily.

Hobart slapped him on the back. "You'll like 'em after a while. Hank, as soon as he's ready march him to the first overpass. We're making up a library scrounging party and another to unload the magnets. He's going to get the hell shocked out of him."

The Leader paused and searched the Blue Dome, which was filling with white puffs and more ominous dark-gray ones.

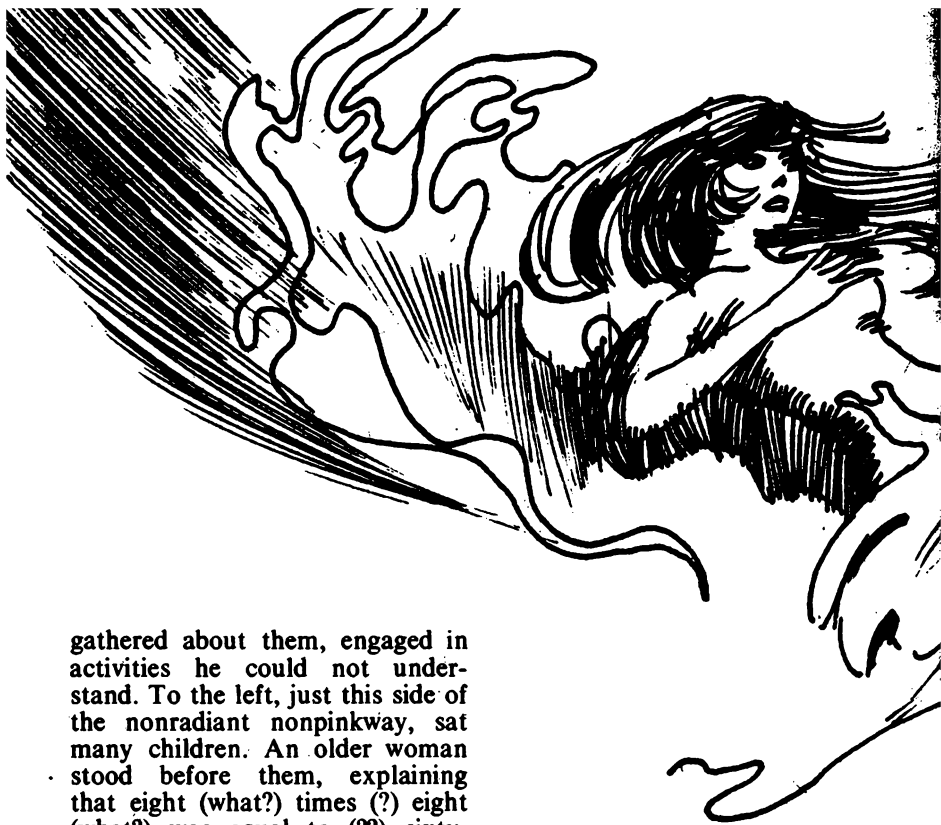
"We may be able to give him the full treatment before tonight. Looks like it's making up for some weather."

"Hey!" Hank was jubilant. "That's a thunderstorm brewing."

"Could be," Hobart said hopefully. "But it's a long way off."

VI

ON THE WAY to the overpass, Keith passed a number of shacks. Men and women were



gathered about them, engaged in activities he could not understand. To the left, just this side of the nonradiant nonpinkway, sat many children. An older woman stood before them, explaining that eight (what?) times (?) eight (what?) was equal to (??) sixty-four (what?).

When he reached the recess under the overpass he found Hobart addressing a large group of men. "Watkins will lead a simple library scrounging party. Recently he dug down to a new vault, found a lot of permabooks and more Armageddon reels. The party will pick up the stuff. The rest of us will unload that boatload of magnets."

"When can we see the reels?" someone asked.

"Now, Morty, you know we have to wait for a thunderstorm."

Keith studied several queer,

nonforce-stuff things arrayed in a row under the overpass. Each consisted of a flat slab, waist-high, with a non-nonsubstance ring at each corner. The lower curves of the rings sat in the dirt, while their hubs supported the configurations.

The Leader leveled a rigid finger at Keith. "We're taking our test animal along. Everybody keep an eye on him. Hasn't learned about loyalty, yet."



Keith leaned back against a cube with two curving projections protruding from opposite faces and regarded Hobart scornfully. What did such as Hobart know about loyalty?

For no apparent reason, Hobart sprang upon him. *Whop!* This time it was a fist that delivered the blow.

The Pack Leader loomed over him. "That's a hand generator you propped yourself against, you

damn fool! Just touch those cranks when we don't have the cover of an electrical storm, and you'll have a dozen Spheres breathing bolts down our necks!"

"Look, son," Hank said, not unkindly, "that thing makes electricity, see?"

Lek-tris-City? Could they build their own Metropolis out here?

"The Spheres don't like our electricity. Maybe they would have just ignored us when they

came and took over our world. But we had phased current—something they can't tolerate. That's why they destroyed civilization. But we've discovered something else they can't stand. Magnetic force fields—"

"Let's go," Hobart interrupted. "If we run into a Sphere, just drop the carts and start whooping it up like strays."

But the Leader's words blazed in Keith's mind like the most vivid memory-images on a Magnificent One's surface: *Just touch those cranks... have a dozen Spheres...* So there was a way to alert the Masters to this Outside threat!

Several of the men tugged on projections extending from each slap. The platforms rolled on their rings onto the gray expressway.

THE trek was an exhausting ordeal. At one point Keith dropped down upon the grayway and sat there breathing heavily. Oh, if he could only be with Master, enjoying all the comforts and delights of the City of Force!

There was the edge of the City now—so close that the can't-see-through wall of radiant stardust rose high beside the grayway ahead. He thrust imploring hands towards the treasured haven, knowing that Kind Master was somewhere within all that glistening brightness.

So heartfelt was his yearning that the glittering wall grew two great, gyplike arms and extended

them toward him, atremble with endearment.

"Knock it off." DuBois kneed him in the back. "On your feet. We don't want to get left!"

Keith pleaded with the surface of the grayway to bulge up into a wave of effort-conserving self-propulsion. But the hard, miserable stuff behaved as though he were directing no thoughts at it.

DuBois lifted him and they trudged onward. The radiant, receptive arms that had reached out toward him flowed back into the coral barrier.

This grayway was nothing like the City's shining pinkways, Keith told himself. It heaved up here and there in broad, tilted slabs where stout trees were pushing up through it. Ugly, brown masses were cluttering it, ancient mounds with grass growing all over them. If you looked closely, Keith noticed, you could even see what once might have been four rings beneath each one.

Finally they reach the "library." Everywhere were great chunks and slabs of nonforce stuff, tilted crazily, strewn about, covered with soil, grass and trees.

The Leader came over. "While Watkins' party gets the perma-books and the others go unload the boat, you come with me. Something to show you."

Hobart clambered up the face of a huge, tilted slab. Crawling from treelet to treelet, they finally arrived at the top. From this dizzying height, Keith could see far along the grayway. Off to his right was the resplendent City of

Force, so brilliant and magnificent.

He stared at Central City's vivid spires and cylinders, its soaring ribbonways and glistening, sparking cubes and pylons, and his eyes became moist.

"Not there!" Hobart back-handed his shoulder and he wobbled. "Here—all around us!"

Keith stared down. They were in the midst of a vast field of broken, leaning slabs of huge, formless clumps of grayness, of crevices and chasms—all being swallowed by green growth.

"Thank your Spheres for that." The Pack Leader snarled. "This was once a beautiful city—a city of concrete and steel and glass, of people, ambitions, pride, lights and festivals."

City of man? Men never had cities!

"And do you know what happened?" Hobart raged on, fists clenched. "This is what your Magnificent Spheres did to it! They came from—somewhere. Another universe, maybe. Popped through all over. And just like that—" he snapped his fingers—"they had a whole world. Of course, there was a little cleaning up to do—like smashing all of our cities and towns and homes."

The man had wound himself into a frenzy. "But we're not finished," he shouted. "And we won't live like dogs. Tonight we'll show them that we can strike back!"

Keith could hardly keep from laughing at such stupid arrogance.

Hobart thrust out his arm. "See that? That's the Mississippi."

At first Keith thought it must be a huge pinkway—broad and twisting and glittering.

"See the boat tied up at what used to be a wharf?"

Nodding, Keith supposed it was the "boat" they had been talking about. Oval in shape, it lay at the edge of the Missi—the Missi—something. Approaching it over the rubble were carts towed by men.

"Well, it's just brought us the weapons we need—lodestones and magnetized metal. Damn it, you should be begging us to use them on that festering City."

Keith wondered how he could stop them, whether their "generator" thing would actually summon the Masters. But for some reason his thoughts kept going back to the shaggy "Reb" that had silently performed and begged for its food.

BACK in the village it was midlight—no, "noon," Keith corrected himself—when Hobart left him with Laura and two guards who forced him to eat something called "fried fish."

He had been finished for some while when the Leader returned. "How'd he do this time?"

"Kept it all down," Laura boasted.

"He may be over the hump," suggested one of the guards. "Just a matter of getting him to admit he's human."

Hobart smiled vaguely. "Think so?" He put his arm around

Keith's shoulders. "Son," he said, "we're going to let you go back to the City."

"Oh, no—you don't mean it—*really?*" Keith exulted.

Whap! Grayway-hard knuckles backhanded his face.

"Over the hump, eh?" Hobart mocked the guard.

"But we've had him only a couple of days!" Laura's voice carried the blue hue of Spherical sadness as she kneeled beside Keith. "The other pick-ups had weeks!"

Hobart shrugged. "Our magnets are deployed all along the western edge of that City. They might be detected. So we can't wait. Tonight we hit our target." He glanced at Keith. "Looks like we're going to be stuck with a lot of dumb, hopeless animals after all."

A returning "fishing party" broke through the tall grass and its leader sprinted up to Hobart.

"It's the widow Wooley!" the woman exclaimed. "Drowned!"

Hobart's forehead crumpled as he watched two of the fisherwomen carrying a third between them. "What happened?"

"Fell into the lake. Current washed her under the seawall."

The bearers laid down their burden nearby and Keith could see that the fisherwoman was still, very still.

Much later, when several men came with "shovels" (Laura explained the word), Keith was still waiting to see when the "drowned" woman would start moving again. But she remained motionless as

they carried her to the—"graveyard."

He became alarmed as everybody gathered around and the Leader said soft words while the shovelers scooped a hole in the dirt.

"Hobart, what are they doing?" Keith demanded.

"Burying her."

"Why?"

"So she doesn't stink up the place. She's dead." Hobart laughed grimly. "She's too still. Dead still. Remember?"

Keith only stared at him.

"It means she won't ever move around or think again."

Certainly Hobart was having fun with him. "What *will* she do?"

"She'll lie there and rot. All the flesh will fall off her bones and the bones will turn to dust."

"But—what will happen to *her?*" Keith felt that he was treading the edge of a vast and horrible unknown.

"Oh, Chris," Laura said. "Go easy with him, please."

"No! The truth is what makes a man out of an animal."

By now the shovelers had placed the drowned fisherwoman in the hole and were throwing clumps of dirt on top of her.

Keith felt terrified, small, lost.

"That's death, Keithie boy," Hobart rasped. "That's what happens to all of us eventually!"

"To—me—too?"

"Yes. You poor, damn simpleton."

"But—but I'm afraid. I can't believe—"

"Wise up, Keith. Throw off

your degenerate ignorance. Learn what it means to be a man—a mortal man!”

Keith reared erect in defiance. “You’re a liar, Hobart! This can happen only Outside. In the City, if anybody becomes too still or too old or too hurt, the Spheres simply find him a new kind Master.”

Hobart laughed scornfully. “So you’d rather live in the City, doing tricks for your food, letting the Spheres breed you when and to whom they wish? Because then you can go on thinking life is endless?”

Keith squared his shoulders. “I’d rather be bred than—dead!”

The Leader was stumped, but only for a moment. “Think back, Keith. That wasn’t a live corpse we buried in the force stuff of the pinkway when you were with us.”

Panic and forlorn desperation brought on by vast, unfolding truth rose once again in Keith. There had been Stud Murdock, too—so old, so hurt, so still when he had come out of the black-walled box in the pound.

Terror and helplessness exploded into piercing conviction.

Too still. Forever still.

Keith dropped to his knees and buried his face in his hands.

Laura reached out to him.

But Hobart pulled her back. “Poor jerk. Leave him alone. Until a few moments ago he had no concept of mortality. Subjectively, he was immortal.” The Leader laughed. “A true god.”

“And now?” Laura asked, as though she didn’t know.

“And now he’s aware that some day he will die. An animal can’t realize that about itself. Therefore he must recognize that he’s a man.”

VII

THEY let him lie besides the fresh mound with its new cross most of the afterli—“afternoon.” His guards had been withdrawn to a respectable distance. Only Laura remained close.

Sometimes Keith’s eyes even sought out the distant spires of the City of Force. But he rejected bitterly its false promise.

For knowledge had been forced upon him. He knew now that the Spheres were cruel tricksters, that the kind Masters were not kind at all. For They had lied to him. They had led him—and the other personal people—to believe that existence was endless. Disillusionment brought hate for them. And deep fear. Fear of death.

Eventually Laura came and sat by him, soothing his head upon her shoulder. Her softness and nearness brought comfort, somehow forced back the encroachment of fear.

Was it possible that she could make him forget his certain non-endlessness?

He looked into Laura’s blue and beautiful eyes, and he smiled for the first time since he had left the City of Force.

Her face glowed like the surface of an iridescent ovoid as she smiled back at him. That face, he

saw, had all the warmth of the radiant carpet of shimmering star-dust.

"Oh, Keith," She pressed her cheek to his. "You're going to make it."

An immense nonSphere bolt lanced down in the distance and the sky jumbled mightily as big drops of water splashed down.

Another thunderbolt. And another. And all the while the sky became darker.

Suddenly there was Hobart atop the overpass, shouting down upon the village:

"Armageddon reels!" His hands were cupped about his mouth as the mounting wind tossed his beard.

"We're going to show Armageddon reels! On the double! Storm won't last long!"

KEITH and Laura joined the Krush of the villagers into the recess under the overpass. Hank raced to the hand generator and began whirling its cranks.

Hobart was standing behind an odd cubelike object with two reels attached to its side and a short cylinder poking out of its front surface.

There was a whirring sound and the little cylinder hurled a beam of radiance. It fell upon the washed-out wall in a large square pattern.

Keith was perplexed, for now it appeared to him that the square was just an opening. For through it he could see—a City!

Not a City of Force. Nevertheless, a true City. Made up of

many soaring forms of solid substance. Among the clumps of forms, there were broad grayways running alongside greenways of trees and grass.

"Greetings," said a deep, emotional voice. "If you are seeing this, our mission will have been fulfilled. You will have retrieved the time-capsule units from the vaults of the New Orleans Public Library."

Keith gasped. All along the grayways in that magical scene were shiny, sleek things of every color imaginable, gliding along on four rings. Inside were people!

"This," the sad voice continued, "will be the last of the Armageddon reels, for little time is left. All that remains now is for suicide crews to process this film underground and vacuum-pack it."

Laura, close behind Keith, whispered, "They're memory-images. Just like the ones we can see on the surfaces of the Spheres. Only these are images of proud people who lived long ago."

The flickering scenes portrayed more towering structures, the faces and clothes and belongings of fleeing human beings.

"The Spheres are due any moment," said the voice. "Full evacuation has been ordered."

The square memory-image steadied on the wall, showing a pair of tall obelisklike forms stabbing the sky. Fascinated, the villagers watched scores of shimmering motes appear in the distance, aglow with the boiling yellow of bolt-hurling readiness.

Like glaring evil eyes, the Spheres came and hovered over the soaring structures, casting fierce bolts in every direction.

A great splash of blinding light here, and one of the obelisks crumpled. Another superbolt there, and an elevated expressway lashed back upon itself, strewing the shiny moving things in every direction. The scene changed. Still a third bolt, and a great arch spanning the Mississippi collapsed into the water.

"Cut!" Hobart shouted, yanking on something long and thin that extended from the hand generator to the memory-image hurler.

"Cut," acknowledged Hank, bringing the cranks of the generator to an abrupt halt.

"Storm's over outside," Hobart explained.

THE villagers filed out of the recess, leaving Keith alone in the murkiness intensifying as night approached. He sat in a corner, head almost touching his up-drawn knees. For the moment, endlessness was far from his mind, as was fear of the darkness that would soon engulf him.

"Kind" Masters? "Generous" Globes? "Magnificent" Ones? He shuddered.

Rising, he walked over to the hand generator. Could he make those gripping Armageddon scenes come back on the wall?

He seized the handles and spun them. But he could produce no radiance. He cranked until he was exhausted.

When he went outside, Hobart was giving orders to men and women gathered about many fires.

Laura noticed Keith first and pointed him out to the Leader. They came over, together with Hank, and Hobart asked, "Well, Keith, think it all out?"

Keith hesitated. The Leader clenched his fists and raged. "Good God, man! A human being is born to be free—to exercise his industry and initiative—to take his chances with success and failure—to climb as high as luck and his own capability will let him. Why can't you understand?"

Keith expected either a back-hand or a balled fist. But he stood there unflinching. "I want to take my chances. I want to use the magnets."

"Did you hear that?" Hank exulted.

"Damn right I heard it!" The Pack Leader grinned.

Laura hugged Keith. "You made it!"

Firelight sparkled in her eyes and made her cheeks glow like pink—

No! Keith reversed himself. There was nothing in all of Radiant City to compare with the soft beauty of Laura.

"I wanted to see more of those memory-images," he said. "I turned those cranks but—"

Hobart gaped. "What did you say?"

"The cranks—I turned and turned—"

"When?"

"Just now."

Hobart sent his sonorous voice booming out over the village: "Attack parties deploy! The Spheres will be here any minute! Unassigned personnel take to the forest!"

THE village was a blur of motion. Men, women, children stumbled over one another, hurdling their fires and lunging off into the darkness.

Palms upraised, Keith pleaded, "I—I didn't know, Chris. I forgot about the—'lectri-city."

"Not your fault, Keith. You didn't realize—"

Laura screamed and pointed. Two brilliant motes were hurtling in their direction, jewels against the blackness of night.

"Hank," Hobart said, "get Laura out of here. Man your assault positions."

Dismayed, Keith watched the glittering motes grow to the size of twin suns over the forest.

"Down!" the Leader ordered, pulling him to the ground. "We don't know what they're seeing—or sensing. But we can't let them get back to their City."

He took several bar magnets from his waist pouch and spread them on the ground. Keith reached over and grabbed a couple.

The fiercely glowing Spheres were high above the village now. And the drab shacks and cluster of overpasses and underpasses were bathed in their awful, menacing radiance.

Suddenly one Sphere loosened a superbolt. The hit sent great

hunks of the elevated expressway hurtling into the night.

The other Sphere dropped to just above ground level and drifted toward the overpass.

Hobart waited until it was almost upon them. Then he leaped up and hurled a magnet. The bar embedded itself in the Sphere's glowing surface, whereupon the creature immediately began to shrink, shrink—and it was all gone, leaving dense darkness where it had been.

The other Sphere swooped down as if to learn what had happened. Bewilderment was betrayed by the purplish cast now flooding its surface.

Hobart lurched erect and hurled another bar. It missed.

But Keith had sprung into action. His magnet thudded into the Sphere's undersurface. It dwindled to nothing.

The Leader rained thumps on Keith's back. "Today you are a man!"

Let's go catch up with the assault force."

THE line of assault, several hundred abreast, had already pushed past the shimmering outer wall. Magnets, hurled ahead of the march, had completely sucked in the radiant nonsubstance, together with the coruscating carpet of energy material beneath it.

Every man and woman in the attack force, including Keiths, was weighted down by waist pouches filled with magnets.

Trailing behind came the supply carts, heaped with more weap-

ons and tugged along by special details. Youngsters scurried among the carts, retrieving magnets already hurled. The pouches of the attackers were kept well-filled.

It was a neatly planned operation, Keith had to acknowledge as he pushed ahead. Several paces on his left marched Hobart, and Laura on the right. Beyond them advanced Hank, Watson, DuBois, Adler and many other villagers. Keith recognized in the radiance of the force-stuff structures that lay ahead of them.

Having covered the area between the outer barrier and the first moundhood, he looked back and saw that the line of attack had left nothing glistening behind it. The magnets worked magic. He hurled a bar at the nearest mound, even as Hobart and Laura and everyone else in the line cast weapons at targets of their own choice.

Great patches of pinkway were disappearing before them. Sapphire mesh enclosures twisted and then shrank. Whole domes were being sucked up. And the Spheres within, trying to squeeze through the openings made by magnetic attraction, were drawn against the ends of the hungry bars and swallowed. As radiant nonsubstance evaporated before the attack, personal people rose, dazed, from the dirt that had underlain their mounds and enclosures.

Suddenly Laura screamed. Keith spun in her direction. One of the Spheres had escaped its mound and was hovering above

her, already yellowing with its bolt-hurling hue.

He sprinted over and heaved a magnet. But the Magnificent Being was too high to be within range.

Shoving the girl behind him, he tensed as he watched the evil power lance out.

It would have hit him full in the chest. But the lightninglike streak curved slightly and jabbed into—actually was attracted to his pouchful of magnets! He was not even singed as the bars held the streak frozen in midair. Gradually they sucked up the shaft of energy, drawing the Sphere along on its bolt-turned-leash. His pouch swallowed the last of the streak, then the now fist-sized creature as though in a final gulp.

Shaking, Laura clung to him for a moment—until Hobart's triumphant laughter jarred her erect.

"Sorry I couldn't get over to help," the Leader shouted from his position in the line. "But I had an idea the magnets would do something like that. Now we know for certain. Back to your places. Let's get on with it!"

The attack continued, pressed more vigorously now that word had been passed along the line and everyone knew the magnets also afforded protection against bolts.

THROUGHOUT the night Keith, glancing left and right while the assault swept over the City, saw many a Radiant Master drawn into a pouchful of magnets

at the end of its harmless bolt. At one point, scores of the things mounted a counterattack. But each eventually gave up the last glimmering radiance of its life to a pouch filled with magnets or to a hurled bar.

The great moundplexes and the hulking cubes and pyramids, pylons and cylinders of City Central required a more intensive assault effort. But magnets scattered at their bases were sufficient to begin the sucking-up process. Slowly the proud edifices sank, losing their nimbuses, their emissions of showering sparks, their sheets and streamers of energy. Special details remained behind to finish them off while Hobart, with Keith and Laura and the bulk of the attack force, pushed on to sweep the rest of the Radiant Metropolis from end to end.

Counterattacks continued throughout early morning. Not until shortly before dawn did the few remaining Spheres realize the suicidal hopelessness of attempting to hurl bolts. These Beings eventually fled, disappearing over the horizon.

At the eastern edge of what had been the City of Force, Keith turned to survey the results of their attack. Not radiant structure anywhere! He saw only rubble on which the City had stood. The assault forces rushed about, retrieving magnets and herding frightened personal people into bewildered groups.

But not all were frightened or bewildered. Noticing Bitchette Margo in one of the groups, Keith

rushed over to her, tried to talk reassuringly.

"Everything will be all right," he told her. "You're free now. Don't be scared."

"Who's scared? This is marvelous!" She clapped her hands. "Who needs a Master?"

He laughed.

"You look wonderful in those animal skins, Keith," she said. Staring into his eyes, she added, "If I let you have me, will you get me some of them?"

Keith laughed again, walked off to another group. Laura was talking to them.

She took his hand. "Don't worry, Keith. They'll all be humanized. You proved they could be."

He wiped grime from his face. "I wasn't all that unhuman, was I?"

"Not to me. I knew all along—"

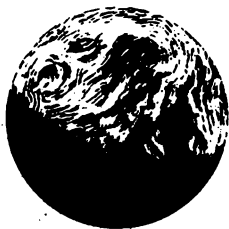
Feeling like a man, he acted like one. He kissed her.

"Break it up!" Hobart growled, signaling them to follow him. "Got to get a rehabilitation program going and move camp at the same time. May not be too long before those guys—" he indicated the direction in which the Spheres had retreated—"come back with their big brothers."

"Where are we going?" Keith asked.

"After we get things under control, we'll split up. Send training units all over. There are 'stray packs' operating outside many another City of Force. And every one of those cities is begging for the magnetic treatment." ●

THE STORY OF OUR EARTH



The Coming of the Dinosaurs

Few lay persons have occasion for any in-depth contemplation of jaws—save maybe their own in connection with visits to the dentist. But jaws are important when it comes to tracing evolutionary lines.

Let us begin with our own, specifically the lower jaw and one side only since the left is the mirror image of the right. It consists of one bone which has an upward bend in the rear to form a hinge that connects it with the upper part of the skull. Since the teeth are attached to this bone it has the technical and logical name of “dentary.” This construction is the

same for all mammals, whether the jaw is that of an ape, a cat, a dog or even that mythical jawbone of an ass with which Samson killed a large number of probably innocent people.

If we now look at the jaw of a reptile we find that matters are far more complicated. There is a dentary for the teeth but it is narrow, hence it is reenforced below by another bone which is called the “splenial.” The combined dentary and splenial are joined in the back to a bone named the “surangular,” which forms the hinge. But it, too, has its reenforcement, called the “angular.”

And at the back of the angular is still another bone, the "articular." Nobody stops anybody from thinking that this is patchwork but the setup described is found in all reptiles, living and extinct—with, of course, the exceptions necessary to prove our point.

These exceptions—one could have guessed it—occur in the Karroo-fossils and provide us with our chance to check life's progression. In *Seylacosaurus* (*skylax* is Greek for 'puppy') the splenial is missing. Angular, surangular and articular are present and have nearly their normal sizes. But they have become superfluous because the dentary has not only grown heavy and strong—it also has developed the hinge part. In *Cynognathus* (from *kyon*, meaning dog and *gnathos*, meaning jaw) the three extra bones are markedly reduced. In *Sesamodon*, one of the last theriondons that survived into the Triassic period, they are missing. *Sesamodon* was a reptile in transition—its nearly mammalian jaw shows the lines along which evolution was running then.

Apparently there was a line running from these reptiles to the mammals but since any fossil is the result of several successive accidents—first the animal must get into a situation where its remains can become fossil and then the fossil must be found—we do not know all the stages that line had to pass through. At any event those

reptiles that stayed reptiles—one might call them confirmed in their species—kept their complicated jaw construction to this day.

But let us first discuss their period.

Triassic means triple and with a good reason, the Triassic period has three clearly distinct subperiods. The oldest is usually referred to as "bunter" in English, an abbreviation of the German name which is *Buntsandstein*, meaning colorful sandstone. The middle one also has a German name: *Muschelkalk* from *Muschel* which means clam and *Kalk* which means limestone. The top layer of this triad is called *Keuper* which is an old miner's term for a certain kind of rock. The total duration of the Triassic period was from 33-35 million years. The three subperiods share this duration more or less equally, though, if you go by the volume of fossils, the *Muschelkalk* period, consisting of marine sediments in Europe, seems to come out on top.

Originally it was believed that the Tethys Sea had simply widened to cover western Europe. In the light of later knowledge of continental drift the explanation is different. The lowlands were flooded by the Tethys from the south, but by a western projection of the later Indian Ocean. That the *Muschelkalk* Sea had been shallow had been known all along—its fossils proclaimed the fact.

Life in the ocean and its branches that made inroads into the continents that began to crack up just then was variegated. Practically everything one would expect to find in ocean was there, except for marine birds and mammals. The mammals that existed stayed on land, though they may have frequented rivers—the birds still had to evolve from the reptiles.

Therefore the highest life forms in the seas were reptiles and the triassic forms showed what was to come. The earliest known marine turtle was found in late triassic deposits and since *chelys* is Greek for turtle it was logically named *Triassochelys*. Though the fossil we have is from the late Triassic, marine turtles must have been around during the earlier subperiods (the oldest tortoise-like fossil was discovered in the Karroo).

Another Triassic marine reptile was an early form of the ichthyosaurs that had the general shape of our porpoises. The first find of triassic ichthyosaurs was made on the island of Spitsbergen to the north of Scandinavia—its name became *Mixosaurus nordenkjoldi*. Later somewhat earlier forms came to light in California.

A THIRD kind of marine reptile from the Triassic was not yet quite marine. It was a fairly large (about twenty feet from the tip of its snout to the tip of the

tail) and massive saurian with a long neck, a big body and a medium-long tail. Its teeth show that it caught fish but its feet indicate that it was still a walker. We have to picture this animal, *Nothosaurus andriani*, as a shore-dwelling fishing type, probably able to swim but still a land animal. *Nothosaurus*, found in southeast Germany, had a close relative in *Lariosaurus* from northern Italy. Both show how the ancestors of the plesiosaurs were not directly ancestral to the plesiosaurs and seem to have died out around the end of the Triassic period.

But we are not yet done with the marine life forms of the Triassic.

Among the fishes all the later types were well represented, since the earliest of the modern fishes (with a bony skeleton) exist since the Devonian period. A find from the Devonian of Scotland has proved that representatives of the crossopterygians were present, that group of ancient fishes that became so well known because of one—incidentally quite large—form that was discovered to be still living in the waters around the Comores Islands to the north of Madagascar. That particular crossopterygian can now be found, under *Latimeria*, even in children's encyclopedias.

One interesting point is that there were already flying fish during the Triassic period. A fine

specimen was recovered from late triassic deposits in Austria. Its name is *Thoracopterus* and though it seems to be an adult it is only four inches long. Quite probably *Thoracopterus* swam in schools like the flying fish of our time.

Of course the older forms of fishes called *elasmobranchs* (the zoologist's collective designation of sharks, rays and chimeras) were present in the triassic seas since they originated during the Devonian and Carboniferous periods. However, one cannot say that they did not fossilize well.

The lower life forms were present, too. At the top of the list are a few ammonites, shelled relatives of the octopi of our time and vaguely represented by the living nautilus. Whether unshelled octopi like the living forms already existed is not known—in fact we do not know when they originated. The oldest known fossil is *Palaeoctopus*, found in Lebanon in layers that belong to the latest portion of the Cretaceous period.

That all the kinds of echinoderms were present can be seen from the following tabulation:

crinoids (sea lilies) from Middle Cambrian to present;
asteroids (sea stars) from Upper Cambrian to present;
echinoids (sea urchins) from Lower Silurian to present;
holothurians (sea cucumbers) from Middle Cambrian to present.

Since representatives of all these groups are still alive there can be no doubt that they lived during the Triassic period, though fossils of some (especially sea stars) are rare.

Turning to the land we can expect only three kinds of land vertebrates: amphibians, reptiles and mammals. The amphibians are subdivided into two groups which even the layman finds logical, namely tailed amphibians (newts and salamanders) and tailless amphibians (frogs and toads.) All the amphibians from the Cambrian period to the end of the Triassic were tailed, and one (*Lysorophus*) could actually be called an early salamander. No fossils of tailless amphibians are known from the Triassic; fossil frogs appear in late Jurassic deposits both in North America and in Spain, but nobody knows when they originated.

We know considerably more about the reptiles of that period. In an area in western Germany known as the Eifel remains of a reptile were found that belongs to the same type as one still living under severe protection on some small islands near New Zealand. The living type is known as *Hatteria* or *Sphenodon*, the order to which it belongs is that of the *Rhynchocephalia* and we know that the triassic form gave rise to a number of marine predators that probably ate mollusks. They also produced a crocodile-like form

(*Champsosaurus*) that has been found in cretaceous deposits in North America. All the later forms are now extinct, whether still other post-triassic reptiles (also extinct by now) sprang from the *rhy-nchocephalians* is now doubtful, though the theory was widely accepted half a century ago.

But triassic deposits contain remains of another early group of reptiles, called the *pseudosuchians* (pseudo-crocodiles, if you want) which was ancestral to many other reptiles as we shall see. The early pseudosuchians were small, looked generally like lizards and seem to have been tree-climbing. True crocodiles appear first in late Jurassic layers and, as in the case of the tailless amphibians, one may believe—or not—that they go back to late triassic times.

IT WAS during triassic times that the first true dinosaur trod the land and it is certain that the pseudosuchians were their ancestors. Everybody knows that many dinosaurs walked on their hind legs only and although it seems logical to assume that the dinosaurs began their career as quadrupeds, two of the best known triassic dinosaurs had a bipedal locomotion.

The inhabitants of certain areas of Connecticut were familiar with "bird tracks in stone" for decades before anybody said "dinosaurs" or talked of evolution. The Con-

necticut yankees could tell at a glance that some of these "birds" must have been quite large. At any event they did not live there any more.

Geologists could tell that the rocks with the "bird tracks" were triassic rocks and they suspected that the tracks were reptilian. But it took a long time before the track makers became known, if not "in the flesh" at least "in the bone." The largest of them, somewhat bigger than the African ostrich, was *Podokesaurus holyokensis*. It had very small forefeet, long hind-legs with three-toed feet and a long tail.

The European triassic dinosaur *Plateosaurus longiceps* was larger and more massive than the American form. Its head must have been about ten feet above the ground when the animal straightened up to look around. It had proportionally much larger forelegs than *Podokesaurus* and when feeding might have assumed a four-legged position as kangaroos can be seen to do. *Plateosaurus* has been found in deposits that clearly indicate that it lived in a desert area. It is probable that the specimens we have, all of them from a fairly small area, are the remains of individuals that perished while migrating from a dried-up water hole in search of another one.

A few fossils from the Triassic of California prove the presence at that time of still another rep-

tilian type called the *Thalattosaurs* (*thalatta* is Greek for "sea"). They also seem to have been shore dwellers like the European *Nothosaurus* but were much smaller, the largest Californian thalattosaur was between six and seven feet long. It is likely that it belonged to the ancestral group of the monitor "lizards" of our time.

The mammals of the Triassic remain to be discussed—unfortunately there is not much to say. The earliest mammals naturally must have had some reptilian traits. One could speculate that the mechanism that regulates the internal temperature of a mammal was not as efficient in the earliest mammals as it is in the late forms. One could also speculate that the earliest mammals still laid eggs like reptiles. But such speculations

are unnecessary, it so happens that two types of the earliest mammals are still alive in Australia. Named platypus and echidna they show very nicely how the earliest mammals were built. Their blood temperature varies over a range that humans could hardly survive. And they do lay eggs. As if to display early versatility, echidna is a dry land animal while platypus lives, beaverlike, in fresh water.

Both are about a foot in length, the actual early mammals, as the rare fossils show, were much smaller, about the size of a mouse. We can guess that virtually all of the early mammals were insect eaters; plants bearing small seeds did not yet exist as far as we know.

The mammals had to wait for a round hundred million years before they came into their own. ●

By The Falls

perhaps, not stone, and smaller. And black as though it had been partially burned. Come look, there may be more."

Bodum banged the pot as he rinsed it out in the sink. "What do your newspapers want to know about me? Over forty years here—there are a lot of things I can tell you about."

"What is up there above The Falls—on top of the cliff? Do people live up there? Can there be a whole world up there of which we live in total ignorance?"

(continued from page 49)

Bodum hesitated, frowned in thought before he answered.

"I believe they have dogs up there."

"Yes," Carter answered, hammering his fist on the window ledge, not knowing whether to smile or cry. The water fell by; the floor and walls shook with the power of it.

"There—more and more things going by." He spoke quietly, to himself. "I can't tell what they are. That—that could have been a tree and that a bit of fence. The

smaller ones may be bodies—animals, logs, anything. There is a different world above The Falls and in that world something terrible is happening. And we don't even know about it. We don't even know that world is there."

He struck again and again on the stone until his fist hurt.

The sun shone on the water and he saw the change, just here and there at first, an altering and shifting.

"Why—the water seems to be changing color. Pink it is—no, red. More and more of it. There, for an instant, it was all red. The color of blood."

He spun about to face the dim room and tried to smile but his lips were drawn back hard from his teeth when he did.

"Blood? Impossible. There can't be that much blood in the whole world. What is happening up there? What is happening?"

His scream did not disturb Bodum, who only nodded his head in agreement.

"I'll show you something," he said. "But only if you promise not to write about it. People might laugh at me. I've been here over forty years and that is nothing to laugh about."

"My word of honor, not a word. Just show me. Perhaps it has something to do with what is happening."

Bodum took down a heavy bible and opened it on the table next to

the lamp. It was set in very black type, serious and impressive. He turned pages until he came to a piece of very ordinary paper.

"I found this on the shore. During the winter. No one had been here for months. It may have come over The Falls. Now I'm not saying it did—but it is possible. You will agree it is possible?"

"Oh, yes—quite possible. How else could it have come here? Carter reached out and touched it. "I agree, ordinary paper. Torn on one edge, wrinkled where it was wet and then dried." He turned it over. "There is lettering on the other side."

"Yes. But it is meaningless. It is no word I know."

"Nor I, and I speak four languages. Could it have a meaning?"

"Impossible. A word like that."

"No human language." He shaped his lips and spoke the letters aloud. "Aich—Eee—Ell—Pea."

"What could HELP mean," Bodum shouted, louder than ever. "A child scribbled it. Meaningless." He seized the paper and crumpled it and threw it into the fire.

"You'll want to write a story about me," he said proudly. "I have been here over forty years, and if there is one man in the entire world who is an authority on The Falls it is me.

"I know everything that there is to know about them." ●



**Diary Found in
the St. Louis Zoo**

(continued from page 3)

for us and even more for the house detective.

Leigh Couch registered us at the Convention desk and did the job so graciously that I stifled my initial impulse to ask the obvious question—*Mrs. Couch, if you were widowed in India, would you commit settee?* Actually, there was no time for questions. The fans were already pouring into the

lobby and the bartenders were already pouring out at the bar. That, of course, is the real thrill of convention attendance—within the space of a few minutes you meet more fans than you can shake a stick at. I know, because I tried.

Soon a group assembled for dinner in the Hunt Room (so named because if you want a waitress you've got to hunt for her) and the nose-count included Philip Jose' Farmer, Bette Farmer, Samuel D. Russell, Florence Russell, David and Ruth Kyle, Judy-Lynn Benjamin, Don Bensen, my wife and myself. A total of eleven noses in all—there was one little fellow whose face I never saw. Only his nose was visible above the table top, so naturally he couldn't eat a meal. He just sniffed some airplane glue for dessert.

After dinner various noses got on the scent of room parties but we decided to retire early and rest for what lies ahead. And after looking over the list of speakers on the program I expect plenty of lies ahead.

Our room seems very nice but lacks closet space. Also there's no lock on the door and people keep coming in and out. From the way they all talk about "up" or "down" I suspect they must be on drugs. I may have to letter a little sign—KEEP OFF THE GRASS.

..AND WHEN THA'S
NEXT IN LANCASHIRE
THA HAS TEA WI' ME!



Fan guest of
Honor

Aug. 29

DEAR DIARY: Every eatery in this hotel has a name. I had breakfast in the Tack Room. Couldn't figure out why they called it that until I sat down in my seat.

I got the point.

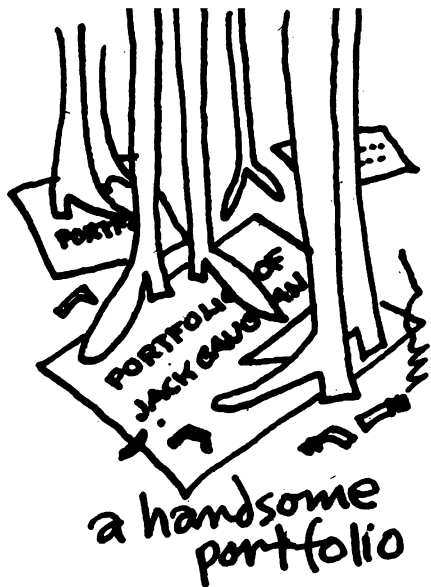
I breakfasted alone—for about ten seconds. Then I was joined by William Rotsler. He in turn was followed by one Johnson and two del Reys (Evelyn and Lester), plus James Gunn, Gordon Dickson, Jack Williamson and Ross Rocklynne. From the way the mob was surging in as I left, I gather this will be a big affair.

Out in the lobby I encountered

two of my very favorite people—Lee Hoffman, Bea Mahaffey and Bob Tucker (think about it).

Lee, who has been writing science fiction and westerns, has just sold a book to the movies. Bea, formerly editor of *Other Worlds* (not to be confused with *Udder Worlds*, the Dairy Magazine) hasn't attended a World-con for some time and commented on the magnitude of this one. Bob Tucker, whom I studiously ignored, managed to steal my identification badge and exchange it for his own. I didn't realize our badges were switched until a group of fans came up and asked for my autograph. Then they began stoning Tucker—a superfluous gesture, since he was already stoned.

The Convention was to open at 11 A.M., so we made our way through the halls to the main auditorium. En route I had the pleasure of meeting TAFF-winner Eddie Jones, the British artist who was brought over as a guest by the Transatlantic Fan Fund. This is the voluntary subscription which sends an American fan to Europe one year and a European fan to the United States the next, as a guest of the Convention. I could explain how this is done, by nomination and popular vote, but I've already loused it up by neglecting to mention that in past years there was also a winner from Japan. Suf-



fine to say that Mr. Jones was indeed this year's TAFF delegate—and also the Fan Guest of Honor at the Convention—and to judge from our meeting, he is going to fill both roles admirably.

Walking toward the auditorium I noted the huge Huskster Room—where books, magazines, artwork and manuscripts are displayed for sale to collectors. Emerging from it I spotted Sam Moskowitz (science-fiction's real answer to Tiny Tim), Alexei Panshin and Dr. C.L. Barrett. Doc, the longtime *doyen* of the annual Midwescons, was as genial as ever. Hoping to get some medical opinion, I informed him that I thought I was losing my voice. He reacted with great alarm but when I repeated my symptoms he laughed.

“Losing your voice?” he echoed with obvious relief. “Had me worried for a moment. I thought you said ‘vice?’”

But I did go and get a prescription. Not that anyone at a Convention really needs a voice, with Harlan Ellison around.

The opening session of the Convention came off as scheduled, complete with introductions of various attendees. Sure enough, when my name was called, Bob Tucker stood up. When Tucker's name was called, I stood up. This baffled a lot of people; apparently because they didn't think either of us could stand up.

Bob Silverberg and Dick Lupoff delivered masterful speeches. Somewhere between syllables I found myself walking with Fritz Leiber, past the NFFF Hospitality Room to the Press Room, where Chelsea Quinn Yarbro held sway. She sways very prettily. Terry Carr, Ben Bova and Hal Clement continued the Convention program—come to think of it, they preceded Dick Lupoff—but I opted for lunch. Other opters who operated at my table were Jay Kay Klein (who vows he'll shoot 1000 pictures at this Convention), Bob Pavlat, Mary Young, John and Bjo Trimble. Bjo and Bruce Pelz are handling the Art show upstairs and I promised to look in on it. Every attendee has been presented with a handsome port-

folio of Jack Gaughan drawings—once you see it you realize why he was chosen Guest of Honor. And there's more of his art upstairs, along with the work of a score of other pros and fans.

Somewhere along the line I visited with my wife (whom I affectionately call Mrs. Bloch) and then it was time to get down to the outdoor swimming pool for the Poolside Party. Here each of the pros was presented with a plastic straw hat decorated with a red-white-and-blue band. The idea was to wear this headgear so that fans could identify their victims. I did a little identifying myself—of both fans and pros—and encountered Andy Offut, Ben Solon, Anne McCaffrey, Jim Warren, John Millard, Linda Stanley, Jack Chalker, Dan Galouye and his charming family, etc. Meanwhile, of course, Bob Tucker was busily signing my name in autograph-books, and just to make it look authentic, I was busily signing his name on various portions of feminine anatomy. And everyone was thoroughly confused.

Ray and Joyce Fisher, co-chairmen of this Convention, joined fellow committee members in dispensing cotton candy, soft drinks and music from a genuine calliope—an old fashioned instrument which baffled younger attendees; even the name itself was unfamiliar to them, except for the last syl-

lable. But as the music blasted away I talked to Joe Haldeman, Ben Bova, Harry Harrison, Ed Meskys, Fred Prophet, Verne Corriel, Larry Niven, Leigh Brackett, Edmond Hamilton, Harlan Ellison and—according to the name I put down in my notes—somebody named Sundry Others. Because we were standing around for so long a time, I began to lean on several of these people, but never on Sundry.

The editor of this magazine and his gracious spouse hosted a dinner-party in yet another hotel eatery, together with Judy-Lynn Benjamin. We joined them and the Silverbergs, Clifford D. Simak, Don Bensen, the Russells, and part of the large Budrys family—Algis and Mrs., to be exact. A pleasant gathering. In case anyone wants to know what the “dirty pros” talk about in these mysterious conclaves, I jotted down a fragment of table conversation.

The subject then was the prevalence of drug-addiction among the young.

Budrys: Everybody's turned on! Why, half of the bike races in this country are won on grass.

Barbara Silverberg: Oh—I thought they used paved roads.

Alan Nourse, M.D., hosted an evening gathering for Science Fiction Writers of America in a joke-filled room. I sneaked out of there to attend a First Fandom

Aug. 30th.

YOU MEAN TO
TELL ME THERE'S
NOT ONE BOTTLE
OF BALLANTINE'S
INDIA PALE ALE
IN ALL OF ST.
LOUIS?



DEAR DIARY: I got my voice back at breakfast, listening to Anne McAffrey, Gene Wolf and Chelsea Quinn Yarbro. Then on to the Art Show with Forry and Wendayne Ackerman. Met Jack Gaughan, who is a most delightful person. His wife and his mother are justly proud of his Convention honors. The Art Show is quite impressive—and so are the artwork prices. Writers don't command such money. Now I know what they mean when they say, "One picture is worth a thousand words."

Star Trek may have been canceled, but the artists don't seem to know it. I counted 412 portraits of Leonard Nimoy—an early sight indeed. Also (believe it or not—and I prefer not), a *Mr. Spock* doll! and a *Gene Roddenberry* doll! I shudder to think what might happen if Harlan Ellison buys the latter and sticks pins in it.

In the Convention Hall (which, I discover, is called the Khorassan Room*) they voted on the site of the next convention. The 1970 Worldcon will be held abroad, so this group voted for the 1971 location in the United States. The winner, I'm told, is Boston. This is a wonderful break for Isaac

*So named in honor of Vladimar Khorassan, the inventor of artificial plastic.

meeting in Lou Tabakow's suite, where Walt Liebscher gave a speech entirely in spoonerisms and Bob Madle and Dave Kyle talked in a somewhat less comprehensible fashion. Herb Carlson had clued me in that a program of movies was starting at one A.M., scheduled to last all night. Not being scheduled to last all night myself, I retired.

There's a bulletin board in the Chase Lounge. On it some wag has posted a notice:

WARNING! THE AUTHOR OF PSYCHO IS LOOSE IN THIS HOTEL. FOR SAFETY'S SAKE, SHOWER IN GROUPS.

Asimov, who can now attend by spending 35c for bus fare. Isaac, despite his championship of modern science, refuses to fly. He's going to be the only angel in Heaven with a subway ticket.

Boston has selected Clifford D. Simak as Pro Guest of Honor and Harry Warner, Jr. as Fan Guest of Honor. Two excellent choices—both have contributed so very much to science fiction through the years.

The annual Burroughs Bibliophile Dum-Dum was held this noon. The Burroughs Bibliophiles are fans of Edgar Rice Burroughs and the Dum-Dum is a luncheon, not just an expression popularized on *Laugh-In*.

While this took place I visited with L. Sprague de Camp, Marion Zimmer Bradley and longtime fan J. Vernon Shea, with whom I've corresponded since the days when both of us were part of the old "Lovecraft circle." Vernon and I circulated and picked up a few tidbits of information. It seems there's been the usual lack of meaningful dialogue between the hotel management and the way-out segments of fandom, resulting in a credibility gap which almost escalated into open warfare. A victim of descent rather than escalation was Ruth Kyle, who last night was plunged by elevator into the hotel basement and somehow got locked in there for a time. Since the purpose of her trip was

merely to get some milk for her kids, this came as an added bonus.

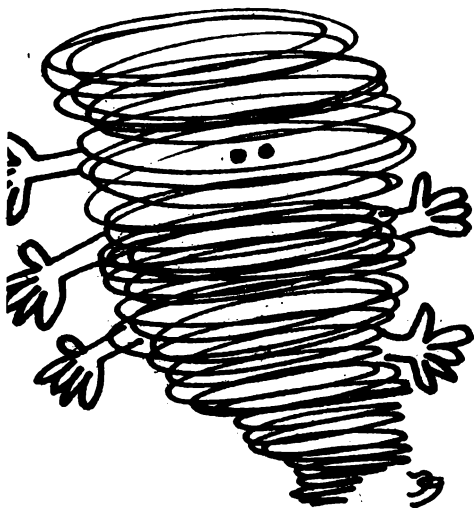
During the auction session in the afternoon I had a late lunch with some of the German fans, who are over here hoping to capture the 1970 Worldcon for Heidelberg. Mike Bradley joined me. Meanwhile, back at the auction, Ellison and Silverberg were sold to the highest bidders. This I can well believe, since anyone who bid on those two would have to be pretty high.

Then on to Room 822 where Vonda McIntyre hosted a party. It's her birthday, and among her guests I spotted Jack Gaughan, the editor of this magazine, Chuck and Sally Crayne, Poul and Karen Anderson, Oliver Saari and Dale Tarr. Most of them were spotted when I spilled my drink.

We had dinner, and somewhere in the lobby I spoke to Andy Porter, Anna Wilson and Elliot Shorter (who is really taller).

Time now for the Masquerade Ball. Prior to it, my wife met Bob Tucker's wife—an occasion for long and mutual commiseration. The Masquerade, a Worldcon tradition, produced eighty-six costumed competitors for prizes. After repeated parading and judging, the winners (according to my garbled-as-usual jottings) were:

Karen and Astrid Anderson as "The Bat and the Bitten" (*Most*



Harlan Ellison

Popular Award); Ron Bounds as "Ottar" in full barbarian regalia; Bruce Pelz as "Gertrude From Gormenghast" (*Grand Award*); University of Chicago group (*Best Group Award*); Bertram B. Parker and Lawrence Ropp as "Caliban And Prospero" (*Most Beautiful Award*); other winners in various categories included Eric John Stark, Lori Canellen, John Stopa, Marcia Brown, William Kritzberg, Alan Nourse, Anne E. Trimbley; Lin and Noel Carter, with Lin as "Ming the Merciless" and Rick Norwood as "Charlie Brown"—*Most Humorous Award*.

If I've misspelled names, omitted winners and left out categories it's largely because of the last-mentioned award. Carried away by histrionic zeal, the portrayer of

Charlie Brown stumbled against a large rented screen behind the promenade platform and gouged a sizable dent in one corner. Ellison called for volunteer offerings to pay for damages and various conventioners passed through the crowd and returned with approximately \$432 in a matter of moments. Dazed by the realization that at one time the entire attendance at a Worldcon couldn't raise such a sum if everyone emptied his pockets completely, I missed some of the proceedings. All I could think of was a way of luring Ellison into a quick crap game. But more of that later.

Bruce Pelz's performance as "Gertrude of Gormenghast" was outstanding—he soliloquized to a bird, in what I presume was Pidgin English—and while Bruce's real sex was never in doubt, the bird's was artfully concealed. But the "Bat and the Beautiful" presentation lingers longest in my memory, for personal reasons. Karen Anderson, as a black-cloaked vampire, menaced her white-cloaked daughter in a weird pantomime which culminated in raising her arms, transforming the cloak into gigantic outspread bat-wings, enfolding her victim and drinking her blood. Lest this activity be doubted, Karen buried her mouth in her daughter's neck and then raised it to display her ensanguined lips, together with

gore which spattered the victim's white attire. I know how this effect was obtained but have sworn silence; sufficient to say that it was a stunning piece of *Grand Guignol*. And when Karen flitted off the platform she at once swooped down on me and bestowed a vampiristic kiss which left my own mouth bloody.

So go report on Masquerade winners when you've just been bitten by a vampire! I suppose next year a werewolf will shed on me.

Aug. 31

DEAR DIARY: That sound you heard last night after the Masquerade was a Rock Group. You heard it. I was in bed with ear plugs.

After breakfasting with my wife and assorted characters, I participated in a panel discussion on *Who Sowed Courtney's Boat?* with Lee Hoffman and Bob Tucker. Once the boat was sunk I got in on the latter portion of the Science Fiction Writers of America Meeting. Back in the auditorium, I joined the Gaughan family to listen to various symposia on science fiction through the decades—including a nostalgic panel discussion by Leiber, del Rey, Simak and other notables. T. L. Sherred, Alexei Panshin and Harry Harrison followed. And then Ellison came on to de-

liver a summation speech which was in effect a challenge to the Establishment to recognize the pioneering vision of science fiction.

A few words with Chuck Hansen, then the auction—but now it was time for me to slip out to the nearest Chinese restaurant, kill a waiter and steal his tuxedo for the Awards Banquet.

I'm told 1893 people registered as Convention members and that at least 1500 showed up as attendees. I can well believe it, for there seemed to be that many present at the banquet.

My wife and I were seated at the head table. At first I considered this quite an honor. Then I ran into an old Navy man and he told me what "head" meant. But there we were, along with various members of the Convention Committee—some of whom were sitting down for the first time in four days, after their hectic labors—plus the Guests of Honor and Toastmaster Ellison.

In the course of his humorous remarks, Ellison reported on last night's fund-raising campaign for the repair of the damaged screen and told the audience that any amount over and above the actual sum required to restore the screen itself would be donated to the Clarion College Workshop for its science fiction program. The audience reaction to this announcement was—to put it bluntly—somewhat negative. For a moment

it appeared that an additional amount would have to be raised to pay for the cost of Ellison's hospitalization and funeral. But good humor was restored and the show went on. Forrest Ackerman presented the E.E. Evans Memorial Award—a First Fandom Award was posthumously presented to Willy Ley. Fan Guest of Honor Eddie Jones delivered a well-received speech and Pro Guest of Honor Jack Gaughan was eloquent. Now nerves and bladders tightened as the time drew near to announce the winners of the annual Hugo Awards, the top honors bestowed by vote in the science-fiction field.

I'm pretty sure who won these particular awards, because I announced them and presented them

to the recipients or those accepting for the absentees. Herewith, the Hugo Award winners for 1968:

Best Fan Writer—Harry Warner, Jr.

Best Fan Magazine—Psychotic /Science Fiction Review, edited by Richard Geis.

Best Fan Artist—Vaughn Bodé.

Best Professional Artist—Jack Gaughan.

Best Professional Magazine—Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction (I can't help it, Judy-Lynn; I gotta tell it like it is).

Best Dramatic Presentation—2001: A Space Odyssey, written by Arthur C. Clarke.

Best Short Story—The Beast That Shouted Love At The



Heart Of The World, by Harlan Ellison.

Best Novelette—The Sharing Of Flesh, by Poul Anderson.

Best Novella—Nightwings, by Robert Silverberg.

Best Novel—Stand On Zanzibar, by John Brunner.

Then it was party time. I have vague memories of meeting collector Darrell Richardson, author Richard Wilson, Evelyn Barrett, and Rich Wannan. Twenty-seven of the people I insulted during my banquet remarks chased me down the hall. And the next thing I knew, it was—

Sept. 1.

DEAR DIARY: No more meetings for me! Breakfast with George Clayton Johnson and assorted pros. R. A. Lafferty and Roy Lavender kindly informed me that a business session voted to change the name of the Convention, starting in 1973, to the North American Science Fiction Convention—covering all future Conventions held in the area bounded by Canada on the north, Panama on the South, the West Indies on the east (that's somewhat confusing) and, I suppose, the East Indies on the west.

It being five days since I've been out of this hotel, I felt it only natural to do a little comparison shopping and see how the rest of the world stacks up alongside of the Convention cosmos. With that

I encountered
Bob Tucker



in mind I wandered across the street, through the park and into the St. Louis Zoo.

Verdict: it's less crowded there, less noisy but it smells worse.

Back to lunch with the Kyles, Poul Anderson, Jock Root, Rusty Hevelin, *et. al.* An afternoon of visiting—the Art Show again, the Huckster's Room, the bar. I had a chat with Sid Coleman, longtime fan, and discussed the continuing hassle with hotel personnel who turned away people with valid reservations, reportedly upped rates and closed public rooms which were to have re-

mained open all night for the benefit of various insomniacs and out-somniacs who wanted to Do Their Thing. I know how diligently the Convention Committee has labored to preserve harmony but with such a large attendance the problems multiply. I still feel future Conventions must employ some professional organization to assist in preparations, just as business and fraternal convention groups do. But that's an old story.

A newer story, Dear Diary, is our dinner with Larry Niven and Marilyn, his bride-to-be—a quiet, pleasant evening interlude at a little restaurant down the street. My wife and I shared with them the inevitable nostalgia which seems a prelude to the final day of every Worldcon. You've seen so many people, so many friends, and now you realize that in a few hours they'll be scattered to the four winds.

Sept. 2.

DEAR DIARY: We'll make it short and sweet. Breakfast with Karen Anderson, Joyce Muskat and a dozen other passersby,

most of whom halted to say farewell before proceeding to the checkout desk with their stolen towels and ashtrays.

It's hard to accept the fact that it's really over; that upwards of 1500 people gathered here, from all over the world, just to listen to speeches and participate in panel discussions, to see films and artwork, purchase manuscripts and printed matter at auctions, applaud award-winners, enjoy a banquet and masquerade and poolside party, attend private parties of their own—and all in the name of a unique hobby.

It's even harder to believe that next year they're going to do it all over again—in Heidelberg. Yes, Heidelberg did win the Convention bid for 1970 and plans are to hold the gathering in an authentic German castle. *Wunderbar!*

But you won't be there, Dear Diary.

In just a few moments, Dear Diary, I am returning to the St. Louis Zoo. And this time you go with me.

It is my intention to drop you into the pit at the Reptile House and let the alligator swallow you.



Reading Room

LESTER DEL REY

THE wheel turns, apparently at the rate of once a generation. I can remember subscribing to a raft of magazines that dealt mostly with series characters, such as Doc Savage or the Shadow. Such series books were a market must at one time. And before them had been the books that were obviously ended in such a way that the reader would demand a sequel—such were the first Tarzan and John Carter books.

Then all that passed into limbo. Publishers put their ears to the ground and heard a great stam-pede away from all such old-fashioned nonsense. With the acumen that has always distinguished such groups, who listen mostly to each other, they realized that se-

quels and serials finally were out.

Now a bit more than thirty years later, it seems that another group of publishers has discovered a magic new way to capture readers—with series stories and novels that demand sequels. *Plus ça change...*

One of the current series that looks least promising turns out to be almost good and certainly worth a look by anyone who likes fantasy of the weird sort. *The Haunting of Alan Mais*, by Peter Saxon (Berkley Medallion Books,

Because of the space given Robert Bloch's spritely account of the World Science Fiction Convention (see page 2), this issue has omitted HUE and CRY. That department will be back in February IF.

60¢), is listed as # 3 of *The Guardians*. This is obviously an American edition of an English series and the order of appearance here seems to be somewhat mixed up, if there is any order.

The writing is surprising for this type of book. It's literate and even deliberate at times, not at all like the hack style where events mean far more than their description. The characters of the Guardians—a group formed to fight occult evil for a fee rather than because they're good guys—are not always sharp but they are a lot more real than might be expected. Most of their past is hinted at but obviously must wait for many books for full development.

Generally, it's a rather good weird story. But at the end we're left with problems which remind us that we're mixed up in a series. The haunt may be settled but the effects on the girl linger on. And some of those effects are rather startling, demanding an answer if she's to continue as part of this evil-fighting group. And there are a lot of other questions about the rest of the company that need attention.

If you like weird stories and are willing to read them as they appear and try to straighten out the order in your head as you go along, these books are worth their price. Maybe the confusion adds to the fun.

This One

(continued from page 103)

through leaves. *Passons passons puisque tout passe, je me retournerai souvent.* He had once told her that—years ago, in one of the many dead languages of Earth—that memory is a hunting horn, it dies along the wind. His hair has grayed and gotten thin. His face has begun to relax in brown folds around his eyes and mouth. Her delicate features remain, only now the bones show more surely under the skin, turning darker, like the night's cobalt, and her hair is the earth-color of leaves before they fall.

It's a simple story, written in the land of these hills. Listen

closely—the wind whispers an old song. And you can know in a few words who they are: lovers of a still place, of the bird that swings its wing in the wind above the trees; movers through time and fury to this quiet conclusion, so near and strange.

Now the bird turns and starts across the water. Over the still red lake its wings are full of darkness.

*So sing
with her
songs: epithalamium.
The sun's their
morning star.*

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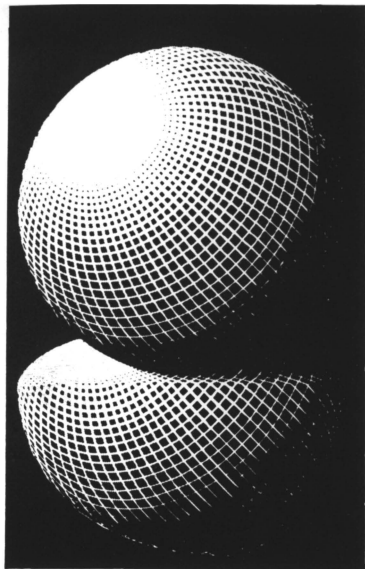
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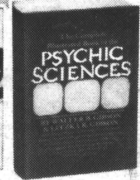
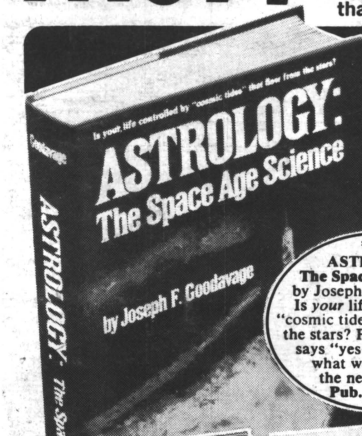
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