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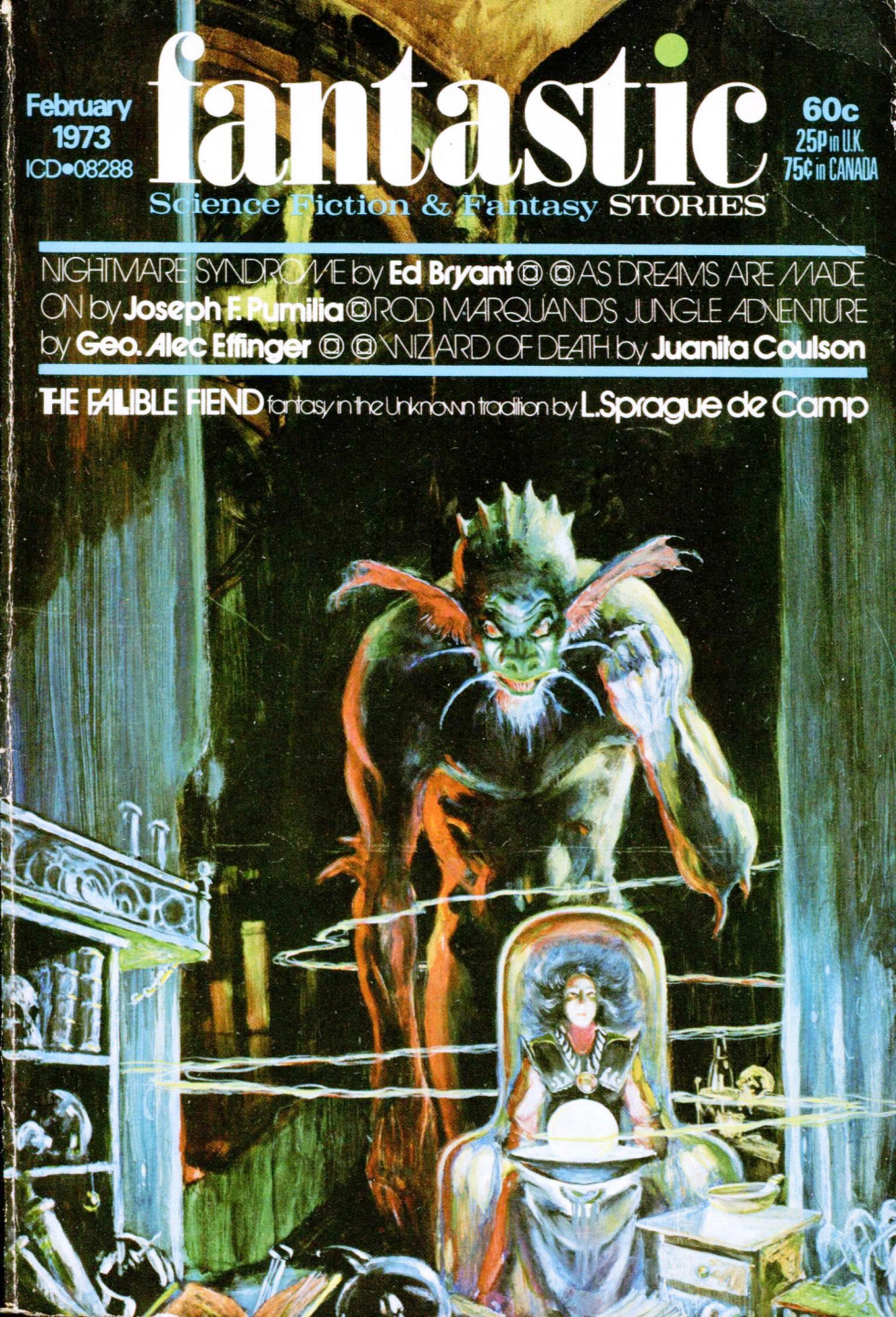

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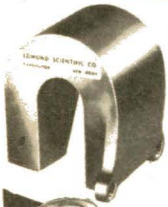

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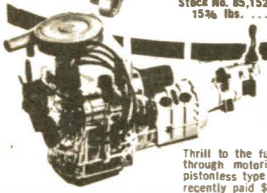

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Science Fiction & Fantasy STORIES

ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

FEBRUARY, 1973 **VOL. 22, No. 3**

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MOSHE FEDER, Assistant Editor
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TED WHITE editorial

I'M GOING TO START this editorial off with a letter. It's from reader Roy J. Schenck, and speaks for itself:

Dear Ted:

Believe it or not, I'm not submitting a story or offering some lame-brained critique with this letter.

I'm writing about the Postal Service's five-year 140% increase in magazine mailing.

After conferring with my Congressman on this, I've learned that the public has a chance of altering this *if* they are willing to have themselves heard by the Congress, who can appropriate monies for the Postal Service instead of having them raise it directly from the postal users.

I'm critically aware of AMAZING/FANTASTIC's vulnerability to any drastic raises in postage as has been enacted, and hope to be of some help in this matter by petitioning my Congressman on the matter and encouraging others to do likewise.

I'd hate to see your wonderful magazines sacrificed to Big Business and other bureaucratic monsters. The little man in America needs to stick together, and not sit back on his ass to silently wonder where all his money's gone (ten percent Jehovah; eighty per cent government . . .).

A simple editorial informing your readers of the opportunity our form of government has to fight off this incredulous rate increase should suffice, don't you think?

Thanks for listening.

Yours sincerely:

Roy J. Schenck
R.D. # 1
Canisteo, NY 14823

IN 1959 I spent several months working for the Post Office in Baltimore and I was astonished at the fact that in nearly every respect, the Post Office still conducted itself exactly as it had in the horse-and-buggy days. There were only a few machines in Baltimore's main Post Office—cancelling machines (which were known for their inability to cancel postcards), one 'facing table' and a conveyor on which bulk packages slowly moved from one end to the other. The 'facing table' was used for all letter-sized mail—this was dumped in its middle and men lined up along its sides laborously picking up each piece, separating out airmail and special delivery and dropping everything else into one of two slots at the table's edge. The objective was to 'face' all the envelopes in one direction for cancellation; there was a slot for business-length envelopes and one for shorter, personal (#6½) envelopes, and letters dropped into these slots were carried by a conveyor to one end of the table where yet someone else would collect them in trays. The bulkpackage conveyor had much the same purpose: sacks of packages were dumped at one end and men lined the sides, picking out packages and throwing them into appropriate canvas-lined wagons as the conveyor brought them up the table.

(continued on page 126)

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NIGHTMARE SYNDROME

ED BRYANT

Ed Bryant's last story for us was "The Lurker in the Locked Bedroom" (June, 1971); this time he turns to a less frivolous topic: the coming of age of a most unusual man . . .

Illustrated by BILLY GRAHAM

TO BE TWENTY-SEVEN, black and middle-class—It wasn't easy.

THE FLARE of the alien sun beat agony against his staring eyes. The red star bloodied both the sky and the sandscape before him. In the distance a range of dragon's teeth hills thrust raw and ragged against the horizon. The blast furnace roar crashed against his ears.

Jesus God! he thought, sitting bolt upright in the bed. *Another dream?*

He grasped the sheets that had fallen to his waist. The fabric felt real enough. He opened his mouth; fire surged into his throat and seared his lungs.

Burning! his mind screamed. *Burning, I'm on fire!*

Every nerve ending in his body agonized. A haze of smoke rose above the bed as the sheet edges began to char.

The star above him bloated to fill all the sky with flame.

Nightmare! Wake up wake up wake up. . .

The familiar, cool, blue patterns of his bedroom walls wavered about him, then solidified. Arthur Jason flopped back against his pillow. His eyes swam in crimson after-images. Fists clenched around tufts of sheet and every muscle tense, he resisted the impulse to scream. He felt the sweat chilling his body in cold drops.

The worst one yet! He moaned and hugged the pillow to his chest, taking comfort in its tactile reality. *But so damned real! God, please don't let it be a breakdown. Dr. Gomez would be so disappointed in me. . .*

It hurt to breathe; his lungs ached. Shaking, Arthur Jason switched on the lamp beside his bed. He looked down and this time he did scream. The edges of his sheets were brown and scorched. And on the floor around the base of the bed was a light dusting of red sand.

"RED SAND on your bedroom floor," mused Dr. Gomez the next afternoon. The analyst placed his palms together and rested his chin meditatively on the peak formed by the index fingers. "It is entirely possible that your red sand was

merely a vivid remnant of the dream-fabric—in other words, just a mild hallucination."

"No," said Arthur. "I stepped in it when I got out of bed this morning. I tracked it into the bathroom. It was real, Doctor."

"If I accompanied you home now, could I see it?"

"Well, no. You know how exacting I am about neatness. Before I left for work, I swept up all the dust. The cleaning lady comes in Tuesday and Friday afternoons. By now the dust will be out with the trash."

"I see," said Dr. Gomez. "What about the charred sheets?"

"Those too. I was going to buy some new linen after I finished this session."

"Then there is no material evidence remaining," said the analyst.

"No," said Arthur. "None."

"None," repeated the doctor, raising his black, bushy eyebrows so that they rose above the frames of his glasses like creeping centipedes.

"That's what I said, Dr. Gomez." Arthur occasionally found his relationship with the psychoanalyst something less than easy.

There was an uncomfortable silence. Dr. Gomez stared at Arthur and Arthur glumly watched the photographic blow-up of a Rorschach inkblot that adorned the wall above Gomez' shoulder. *We're just not developing a good patient-doctor rapport*, thought Arthur. *But still*, he reasoned, *eight dollars an hour is so much more agreeable a rate than any of the other analysts I inquired about.* Arthur had never questioned Gomez' bargain rates. He had started his periodic visits

because of a general sense of unease with his life. Too, Arthur had a vague feeling that psychoanalytical sessions were a prerequisite of the successful auditor.

"Aha," said Dr. Gomez unexpectedly.

Arthur's attention snapped back from parsimony.

"I think I have something."

It's about time. "Marvelous," he said.

Dr. Gomez thoughtfully tugged at his beard, a mannerism which Arthur had lately begun to find irritating. "Arthur, do you have a close friend of the opposite sex?"

Arthur hadn't expected that one. "A girl?" he asked stupidly. "Uh, no. No, I don't." There was, of course, Miss Kunitz down the hall in the apartment building; but though they exchanged 'good mornings' each day in front of the elevator, Arthur doubted she even knew his name. It was a pity. Arthur had covertly lusted after Miss Kunitz for months now, but he had never managed to get past the stage of trading morning pleasantries.

Dr. Gomez ceased pulling at his beard and began to curl one side of his thick moustache; Arthur found this mannerism ever more irritating than the beard-tugging. "Your dream is syndromic—that is, symptomatic—of acute sexual conflict. In conventional dream analysis the jagged hills are symbolic of the male generative organ; the sprawling landscape of sand serves a similar role in symbolizing the female principle. The tone of the dream-experience itself, the heat and fire, the pain you felt in breathing—all this shows conflict, perhaps frustration."

"Maybe my dream means all that," said Arthur, "but why did it leave red dust and charred sheets?"

"Undoubtedly those phenomena were simply hallucinated after effects triggered by the vivid dream," said the analyst. "You would be surprised at the power of the mind to manufacture elaborate images out of unconscious imagination."

"Oh," said Arthur, unconvinced, yet awed by jargon.

"Well," said Dr. Gomez. "~~It is 6:30~~ our time is up. We will talk more about your dream tomorrow. Often the doctor and patient may spend weeks discussing a single fantasy—it is important that you not only know the meaning of your dream, Arthur, but also *feel* it, relate to it."

"All right, Doctor. But I'm afraid we're going to have a backlog—I've been having these nightmares all week; a different one each night. There'll probably be a new one tomorrow."

"All the better," said Dr. Gomez, teeth gleaming very white. "It will give us a more representative field of material to work from."

"If I survive them," said Arthur. "They're getting rather frightening."

"No one ever directly died from a dream," the doctor reassured him. "If they do become too disturbing, however, let me know and I will prescribe a sedative."

"Thanks, I'll do that." Arthur pulled the office door shut after him.

"Arthur," called Dr. Gomez. "You forgot your gloves." The psychoanalyst rushed to the door, just in time to peer down the hall at the elevator doors

sliding shut. *Well,* thought Dr. Gomez, turning back into his office. *Arthur can pick them up tomorrow. I'll put them aside.*

He stopped, disturbed. Arthur's brown leather gloves had lain on the chair by the doctor's desk. He had seen them only seconds before. Now they were gone. Dr. Gomez leaned over to see if the gloves had fallen to the floor. They hadn't.

The doctor blinked, frowned and turned back to his desk. He picked up the ~~scribbled~~ notes which lay on Arthur's file and scanned them:

Arthur Samuel Jason. Age 27. Born in Flint, Michigan. Parents were Dr. and Mrs. Marcus Jason. Father prosperous physician in Negro community. Orphaned age ten when parents killed New Year's Day '57 in freeway wreck. Adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Shapiro of San Francisco, close friends of Arthur's father in college. Arthur's secondary education at exclusive Mycroft School. College at University of Cal. in Berkeley. Graduated with accounting degree. Employed as junior auditor at Price, Ryznik Corp. NOTE: Arthur is anomaly—about as middle-class as anyone can adhere to that general label and still be non-Caucasian. NOTE: Arthur seems a man of extreme repressions.

The transition man of our times, reflected Dr. Gomez. *He has no clear identity.*

ARTHUR TUMBLED PAST the fantasy shapes of crystal. Slowly, with the ductile exaggeration of dreams. Arthur reached out and could almost touch the polished surfaces.

As Arthur descended, his body rotated so that he had alternate glimpses of the cliff, a dull-steel sky overhead and an amorphous darkness below. That was all; no other horizons. The cliff extended to either side indefinitely and faded into the sky.

This is fun, thought Arthur, extending his arms. He wheeled over and over, enjoying airy freedom, until he abruptly realized he was dizzy. Arthur drew in his limbs and hugged himself. He kept on spinning. The dizziness swirled to vertigo. Arthur's stomach reacted violently and he wished he hadn't gorged himself on cheese blintzes.

He watched the paisley remains of supper spiral out around him. He moaned. The dream was no longer pleasurable.

Arthur looked down and gasped. His destination was in sight—a cluster of needle-tipped spires thrusting up from the base of the cliff.

All right, dream. You're supposed to end here.

But the dream didn't end.

Arthur kept falling and was suddenly among the forest of impaling towers. One of the spires was only a few yards beneath him. His body made one final revolution and then, for a fractional moment, the tip of the stone spear painfully dug into Arthur's belly.

Arthur screamed.

The cry echoed off the walls of his bedroom. Arthur lay spread-eagled on his stomach on the rumpled blue quilt, his chin nudging the footboard. He held that position, still paralyzed by the horror of imminent impalement. Then in a single hysterical movement he rolled

off the bed and leaned shaking against a chair. His mouth was sour with the taste of vomit; he looked down, but there was no trace of the lost supper on either the bed or the floor.

He suddenly clutched at his stomach and pulled up the pajama top. A large bruise was spreading blue-black across his belly, just above the navel.

Arthur swayed and sat down on the bed. He again tried to throw up his supper, but this time there was nothing left to lose.

"TO GENERALIZE, Arthur, it seems plain that a major conflict is developing in your subconscious. The fantasy of the fiery hills and desert was obviously libidinous, fraught with sexual symbology—a motif representative of the life instinct. On the other hand, your dream last night of falling endless miles toward impalement was a clear example of a mortidinous manifestation, the satisfaction of the death instinct."

"So what's going to happen?" Arthur looked dazed.

"Well, it's really too soon to say." The psychoanalyst tugged at his beard and Arthur winced. "Keep in mind that these dreams may possess manifold interpretations. For example, much could be drawn from the sexual implications of your being impaled by a phallic object in last night's fantasy. This will take time. Much time."

Arthur reflected on last night's dream in which he had plunged in slow-motion toward the spire. Libidinous? Mortidinous? He couldn't remember any sexual thrill. There had just been fear and pain, and later in his bedroom, the bruise.

He'd just call it a psychosomatic manifestation or something, Arthur thought.

The analyst gave a final sharp yank at his beard and looked up. "Arthur, I would like to try another word-association series with you."

"Certainly, Doctor."

"Now just relax," said Dr. Gomez. "Listen carefully to each word I speak and respond with the first word that comes to mind."

Arthur leaned back in the chair and half-closed his eyes.

"Black," said Dr. Gomez.

Arthur paused. "Uncle," he finally said. "No, I mean beautiful."

THEY HAD COME to his apartment one Thursday night, a month ago. The two men looked alike: skin shining black; bushy Afro hair and pointed beard; turtleneck and black leather jacket; shades. The pair were physically huge—each man stood well over six feet. They looked like football players.

"Evening, Brother," said the first man. "We're from the Unity-Liberty Party. My name's Jackson." He gestured with a thumb nearly the diameter of Arthur's wrist. "This is Gray."

"Mind if we come in?" Gray's voice was deep and soft, but the tone was more command than request. "We'd like to rap a while."

"Uh, sure." Arthur stepped back from the door.

"You hip to the Unity-Liberty Party?" asked Jackson.

"More or less," said Arthur. "I don't really pay too much attention to politics these days."

"This isn't politics," said Gray. "It's race survival."

"Oh," said Arthur, subdued.

"We need help," said Jackson. "Our Legal Defense Fund's been eating a lot of bread. We're asking all our people for help."

"Well, I don't know."

"Look, baby," said Gray. "You work in a big outfit downtown. You're doing better than most of us. If anyone can afford to help out his brothers, it's you."

"It's not the money," said Arthur. "It's just that I hesitate to involve myself with militancy as outspoken as your group."

"*Our* group!" snapped Jackson. "You *are* one of us, aren't you?"

"Well, of course," said Arthur.

Gray's lip curled. "Hell, it's Toms like you what let Huey rot in the Oakland jail."

Arthur bridled. "Look, it's not that at all. I'm no Uncle Tom; I'm just—"

Jackson laughed, a deep rumble with no amusement. "You're just pretty cautious, aren't you, Mr. Jason. Think maybe your office would fire you if your name got linked with a bunch of black freedom-fighters?"

Arthur said nothing.

"Whitey's really stamped you in the mold, huh?" Jackson spat on Arthur's immaculate carpet. "Come on, Gray. Let's split. This cat's given himself a real bleach job."

The two blacks slammed the door behind them. Arthur mixed himself a stiff vodka martini and turned on the television; but he didn't see the program. Finally he snapped off the set and mixed another drink. As he passed the glassy eye of the TV, Arthur glimpsed his reflected chiaroscuro.

Sometimes, he thought, *I can almost forget I'm black.*

But never completely. There were too many reminders, explicit in people's actions, implicit in their words and thoughts.

And then a disturbing thought: *Do I want to forget?*

Scotch, this time. Arthur tossed down the ounce, allowed it to seeth for several seconds before letting a shot of soda smother the bitter flame.

Arthur paced the length of his living room. *Gray and Jackson are just a sympton*, he told himself. *It disturbs you, doesn't it. And you try not to think about it. But you can't avoid it. Black skin. White ambitions. Even a Jewish family. God, who are you?*

Hell, he thought. *No good kvetching.* He reached for the bottle of Scotch, downed a gulp with no chaser and belched miserably.

That night Arthur took a long unread volume of Eldridge Cleaver down from the bookcase.

"FATHER," said Dr. Gomez.

"Polonius," said Arthur.

"ARTHUR," said Samuel Shapiro, when his foster son was a college freshman. The old man's voice was dryly pedagogical. "There are some things in life you have to accept because they exist and you cannot do anything about them. For instance, your skin. You're going to college and some day you'll be a successful man. But you're black, Arthur, and there will always be people who will hold that inconsequential acci-

dent of nature against you; who will treat you as an inferior. That's the system, Son, and you'll have to keep minding that it doesn't destroy you."

"The system," answered Arthur confidently, "is built on money. That's its most important component. So I'm going to get money. When I do, I can face down the system, whatever my skin."

"No," said Shapiro. "I don't think you can." The old man's face wrinkled in lines of sadness. "You can't buy acceptance. We know."

"FRIEND," said Dr. Gomez.
"Club," said Arthur.

THIS MORNING, there was the office. ". . .at least one. We've got to." Arthur intercepted the words as he approached the water cooler.

"Good morning," he said.

The two men by the cooler started; then flashed ingratiating grins that would have served creditably on late-movie tooth paste commercials; or maybe on a small school of barracuda.

" 'Morning, Art," said Weiss. The greeting was echoed by O'Malley. Both worked in Arthur's department.

"Say, Art," said Weiss. "Pat and I were wondering about something."

"Oh?" said Arthur politely.

"Do you happen to play golf?"

"A little."

Weiss clapped his hand down on Arthur's shoulder. His mouth remained an ivory rictus. Arthur wondered if Weiss's lips were paralyzed.

"Pat and I and some of the other guys belong to a little club out in Carling, you see, and right now the group's having a—uh, sort of recruiting drive. For new members, that is. Since you're such a great guy and all, Art, we sort of wondered if maybe you might like to join up."

"Thanks," Arthur said. "I'll think about it." He drained his Dixie cup and walked back to the desk. He was vaguely surprised with himself, and rather pleased; a few days earlier, he would have leaped at the chance to join Weiss's country club. But now— Arthur turned his head and smiled broadly at Weiss and O'Malley. *Shmendricks*, he thought. He smiled with token friendliness.

"CONSCIENCE," said Dr. Gomez.
"Party," said Arthur.

THE NIGHT BEFORE LAST, the cocktail party. Arthur secretly despised such parties; but they often helped business contacts, so he forced himself to attend. At this affair, however, he had somehow ended up trapped in a bitter debate. One one side had been Halberstaum, a thin, balding, junior executive type who Arthur knew vaguely. On the other side was Carl Collins. Tall, intense, angry, his hair in an Afro, Collins had once been called by the *New York Times* "*the* rising young black playwright." In the middle was Arthur. A passive occupant of the corner, he was desperately seeking an unobtrusive way to escape. The topic of discussion had unfortunately turned from sports to race.

"Hell yes," replied Halberstaum to Collins' query whether the former was anything better than a typical honky racist. "The Student Nonviolent Coor-

dinating Committee. I was a member during college."

"The great white liberal," said Collins. He looked disgusted.

"Now just a second," said Halberstaum. "I help your causes. I believe in what you believe in. I mean, each year I give a substantial amount to the NAACP among other groups."

"Forget it," said Collins. "Assuage your conscience elsewhere. We don't need your help. We don't want it. Right?" He looked at Arthur.

"Uh," said Arthur.

"Listen," said Halberstaum. His voice was almost pleading. "All through college I helped with civil rights work. I marched and picketed and sat in. There were a lot of us whites who did the same thing. We did it because we knew how bad things were in this country for the Negro—"

"Did you, Mr. Halberstaum?" Collins' voice was caustic. "Did you really know where it was at? Did you ever really think just how it is to be black? The little things, like looking up from your table in some greasy cafe and seeing the stares wondering just where you got the gall to come in and eat where whites are? Ever think about that moment every black child has when he discovers he's somehow different from whites? When somebody calls him nigger? When he finds out whites aren't just treating him like an inferior, but more like he was an animal?"

Halberstaum spread his hands helplessly. "I tried."

"Yeah, sure, Mr. Halberstaum. You're a credit to your race." Collins turned on his heel and stalked away. As he left, he turned his head: "And it isn't 'Negro' any more, man. We're not proud of Whitey's labels. It's 'black man'." He disappeared into the crowd.

Halberstaum turned to Arthur. The white man looked strangely vulnerable. "He just doesn't understand," he said.

Athur wondered: *Do I?*

"THAT'S ENOUGH for today," said Arthur, getting to his feet. "I don't feel well."

"All right," said Dr. Gomez. "I don't think this is getting us anywhere. We may as well terminate and take the session up again tomorrow."

"Great." Arthur turned to leave.

"Oh, by the way."

From the doorway, Arthur looked back questioningly.

Dr. Gomez fondled the straggling ends of his moustache. "Did you by chance forget your gloves here yesterday?"

Arthur slapped his coat pocket. "No, they're here." He hesitated. "It's a funny thing, though. When I got in the elevator yesterday, I remembered I hadn't picked up my gloves and started back to your office. Then I suddenly felt they *must* be in the pocket I'd just checked. They were. They must have been there all the time. It was a very strange feeling."

"Yes," said Dr. Gomez. "Very strange, I'm sure."

AT THE NEXT session Dr. Gomez slipped a card deck out of his pocket.

"Have you seen cards like these before?"

Arthur picked the deck up; it was about half as thick as a standard deck

of playing cards. He spread the rectangles out on the desk. The familiar suits were absent; instead there were only five designs on the cards: circle, square, star, cross, three wavy lines.

"These are used in testing for extrasensory perception," said the psychoanalyst. "They are one of our primary tools."

"'Our?'"

"Yes. My colleagues and I at the Parapsychological Institute in my native land. I doubt you are aware of it, but I specialized in parapsychology at the Institute in Uruguay before coming to America for psychiatric training. Though I now practice psychoanalysis, the study of supernormal phenomena remains my first love."

"So what's it have to do with me?"

"I have a strange hunch," said Dr. Gomez. "And one of the first tenets we analysts adopt is a deep trust in our intuitive powers. There are a number of anomalous things I have observed about you, Arthur. I am putting them finally together, adding much I am only guessing at. The answers are—surprising."

"Just what are you talking about?" Arthur looked mystified.

"I would rather not yet say," said Dr. Gomez. "May I make some tests? I think they may disclose something quite extraordinary about you."

Arthur considered. To find out more about himself. To discover who he was . . . "All right."

"Good." The analyst reached into a desk drawer and brought out two dice and a cup. "Now what I want you to do is concentrate on the total number of dots you wish to face up."

Arthur predicted the roll of the cubes twenty times. He was correct on three rolls.

"Not very good."

"About average," said Dr. Gomez. "As I expected. Roll up your sleeve, please."

Arthur made a face as the doctor pulled a syringe and vial out of another drawer.

"Don't worry," said the analyst. "I am going to administer a weak solution of sodium amytal; it will relax you. Most parapsychologists believe that sedation tends to lower ESP abilities; indeed, that is often true. However we in Montevideo have discovered contradictions." He inserted the needle into Arthur's arm; the patient winced. "Ah, see there, Arthur? Just a small prick. Now lie back and relax."

Arthur felt his arms and legs grow heavy. The doctor's voice droned hypnotically from the distance.

"Very good, Arthur. I think you're in the proper state. Now listen carefully. I am going to shake the dice and throw them; you need not touch them at all. But I am going to tell you what combination of dots is to be formed and I want you to desire that those dots arrange themselves as I suggest. Do you understand?"

Arthur nodded slowly. His eyes stared up at random holes in the acoustical tile.

"Good. I want my first throw to come up two and five, for a total of seven. Now concentrate."

The dice tumbled across the desk and came to rest. Two dots. Five. Dr. Gomez rolled the cubes a dozen times more, each time suggesting to Arthur

what faces the dice should turn up. Twelve more times the results were exactly as the doctor requested.

Dr. Gomez felt an excitement he quickly moderated with professional caution. It still could be only chance. Another test. He saw an empty water tumbler on the bookcase across the room.

"Arthur," said Dr. Gomez. "I am thirsty. It would be very nice if you could get me the glass that is on top of the bookcase."

The glass was no longer on the bookcase; it sat on the desk by Gomez' hand. The doctor started involuntarily.

"Arthur, the glass is empty. It must contain water if I am to drink."

The glass was full of cold water.

Arthur lay motionless on the couch as Dr. Gomez made suggestions and objects vanished and reappeared instantaneously around the room. Night shaded the city as he made one final suggestion.

"You've been lying too long in that position, Arthur. Why don't you move to the chair by my desk."

Arthur sat in the chair by Dr. Gomez' desk.

"Aha!" said Dr. Gomez in triumph. "This is the—the— What is your idiom? Ah, the clincher." He smiled broadly. "All right, Arthur, you may awaken now."

Arthur raised his head drowsily. He yawned. "How long was I under, Doctor? Feels like a million years."

"Only an hour. But it was possibly the most important hour ever utilized by science."

Arthur looked more alert. "What happened?"

"You know the meaning of telekinesis?"

Arthur shook his head.

"What about teleportation?"

"Vaguely."

Dr. Gomez leaned back in his chair. "Both are names given to various extra-sensory powers. Telekinesis is the power to manipulate physical objects by mental power. Teleportation is the instantaneous transmission of matter from one point to another through the exercise of mental power. And you possess both those abilities wrapped up in a single parcel."

"Oh, come on, Doctor," said Arthur. "That's insane. I mean, look what happened when I tried to influence the dice."

Dr. Gomez told him the results of the experiments while he had been under the sodium amytal. Arthur made a futile attempt to blanch. The doctor pulled a fifth of brandy from another desk drawer and offered him a drink.

Arthur drained the glass. He leaned back, dazed, the brandy burning his throat.

"There is a singular aspect of your ESP," said Dr. Gomez. "You may think that many times you have wished that some physical object would change or move. But it never did, correct?"

Arthur nodded.

"I can establish a hypothesis. Your supernormal power is a manifestation of your unconscious; it cannot be triggered by your conscious mind."

"You mean my id and superego are in charge of my telekinesis?"

"That is correct. However I think now that you are consciously aware of your inner capability, you will find your

ego in a position of increasing control. Time and training should help."

Arthur poured himself another brandy.

"I think you'll find also that this afternoon makes lucid some of the recent mysteries in your life. You remember a few days ago when you forgot your gloves here, and then found them in your pocket? While your conscious mind was trying to recall if you actually had left them, your unconscious simply teleported the gloves into your coat."

Arthur poured a third drink. "Sounds very handy."

"Indeed. It has tremendous potential," said Dr. Gomez. "Oh, and about your dreams . . ."

Arthur lowered his glass. "What about my dreams?"

"They are involved in this. I can think now of a quite rational explanation for the red dust you found around your bed after the dream of the fiery desert."

"But you mean—" Arthur set the glass down hard. "Omigod, no!"

"That's right, Arthur. What you thought was dreaming, was reality; your subconscious teleported you, sometimes with bed, sometimes not."

"But where on earth—"

"Nowhere on earth. Where in the universe would be a more valid question."

Arthur felt sick. "Then the desert and the cliff and the spires were—"

"All real, Arthur. All quite real."

Arthur poured a fourth shot of brandy. "And tonight?"

"Don't worry. You'll recall that your mind always returned you from your 'dreams' before serious harm occurred."

"After everything you've told me," said Arthur, "I'm not sure I can trust my id and superego."

Dr. Gomez laughed. "The human mind has quite a survival instinct; and you are not the type to have a critical death wish. Now listen, just go home and have a good meal and full night's rest. Try not to let the excitement disrupt your daily routine and I will see you at our usual time in the afternoon. There will be more tests. We have much to learn; the nature of your control factor, where you tap such an immense supply of energy, how you channel it, and so on."

A tangential thought occurred to Arthur. "Doctor—" He hesitated.

"Yes?"

"This phenomenon. What causes it?"

"No one knows."

"I mean, was I born with it?"

"Probably."

"Could it be possibly—" Arthur hesitated again. "Because of my race?"

The doctor looked at him peculiarly. "Yes, perhaps. We don't know."

"It's something—good, isn't it?"

"It's like a gun," said Gomez slowly. "It can be used for good. Or not. It depends on the user."

"Thank you," said Arthur. "Good night."

BLACK: all of it. The night. The smog-drowned city. The skin of Arthur Jason. His thoughts. He walked down the dirty streets toward his high rise apartment. Arthur thought about Dr. Gomez and the dreams and his unconscious and ESP. He was frightened, yet

somehow excited. The darkly silhouetted city skyline seemed to shift and subtly reform. The brandy, Arthur supposed.

In front of the grilled display window of a pawn shop a black hooker stood, dressed in brown coat and dark leather miniskirt. She glanced incuriously at Arthur as he passed. Beyond the store he stopped, turned. "Hey, Sister." She looked up. "I love you." Impassive for a moment, then she smiled back.

That reminded him. The Unity-Liberty Party maybe could use some help. *I'll call Jackson tomorrow.*

Arthur Jason walked, and the night was warm against his skin.

His supper was simple; a glass of Mogen-David and a kosher bologna sandwich. Not exactly soul food, but it satisfied.

Arthur tried to teleport the dirty dishes to the washer. Nothing happened. He concentrated; the hard china outlines didn't waver. *So my id is lazy,* he thought. *Just wait.*

He felt relaxed. Arthur sat on the couch and turned the television on. Very relaxed. He realized he was lying on his side on the couch, his head propped on a pillow. Relaxed. A montage flickered in his mind, part from his eyes, part from his memory. The television screen: a network newscast, another voter registration team had been assassinated in a deep southern state, two shotgun blasts from a passing car, no arrests. In his mind: the party with Halberstaum and Collins, the club membership offer from Weiss, the visit from Jackson and Gray. The visit. *I want to do something.* His mind hovered on a frontier. *Want to do something, do something, something . . .*

Arthur slept. He lay quiet and seemingly inert, his black skin gleaming in dim light as the city's neon face peered in the window. In his mind, networks meshed and broke, joined again.

His dreams:

An ex-fried chicken vendor in Georgia found himself gasping for air under a blazing, exploding star on a sand-strewn planet.

An Alabama demagogue with dangerous ambitions of power wheeled unbelieving past a wall of fantasy crystal shapes toward impalement on a spear of stone.

A group of men acquitted on charges of abrogating the civil rights of three dead civil-rights workers found themselves slogging through a nightmare swamp-world where dawn never came.

His dreams.

Arthur slept very well that night. He would sleep well many nights.

—Ed Bryant

COMING IN MARCH AMAZING
JACK VANCE'S GREATEST NEW NOVEL, TRULLION ALASTOR: 2262, PLUS OTHER GREAT STORIES AND ARTICLES.

AS DREAMS ARE MADE ON

JOSEPH F. PUMILIA

Dream on, for the whole world dreams with you . . .

Illustrated by JOE STATON

IT WAS THE DAY after I'd first used the stuff to induce a dream. Karen and two friends came down the hall as I was opening my locker. I stood there numbly twirling the knob as they passed. Karen turned over her shoulder and said, "I dreamed about you last night, Bob."

I caught a glimpse of her secretive smile as she turned away, gold strands of hair fanning out. The girls giggled as they walked, shoulders touching, never missing a step.

Down the hall they went, past the cafeteria and gym, and out to the bus stop. I finally got my locker open and stuffed my books into my bookbag. I loitered in the hall till I was sure the bus had picked them up, and then I went out to the bus stop to wait for the next bus. Finally it came along and I went home, watching the afternoon shadows, feeling neither warm nor cool, and thinking of Karen.

We had been children together. We still lived in the same houses we had lived in as children. As I walked up to my house, I could see her house next door. Her younger brother and sister were playing ball on their lawn. Shaggy cedars kept the low sun from their eyes. I looked up to see Karen's window and saw a shape behind yellow curtains. I heard the clicking of a typewriter.

I went home. Mom fixed me a snack, and then I went up to my room. From my window I had another view of Karen's house. Her window was almost opposite mine, but it was dark with shadow. I could hear faintly the clicking of her typewriter as she did her homework. I wanted to be with her. I wanted to hold her and press myself against her.

I flopped onto the bed and took up a fantasy paperback. I read into the evening, Dunsany, Lovecraft, Howard, gods, demons, broadswords, and the clicking of Karen's typewriter as an overlay to the sounds of night that grew up around me like an impenetrable forest of briars.

I'd known her all my life, and now I didn't know her. Before I even knew what a girl was, we'd played together, known each other, and loved each other

as children, simply, without words. We had been amorphous, androgynous. And now without anything having passed between us we were separate and different. When we talked, it was like two other people talking. I seemed unable to speak to her without double meanings creeping into the most innocent of sentences. I wanted to be alone with her, and to be sure of myself, and say what I really wanted to say.

I wanted to say, Karen, I love you. I even went so far as to draw up a big sign, KAREN I LOVE YOU, to exhibit in my window where she'd be sure to see it, but then I realized how ridiculous the idea was.

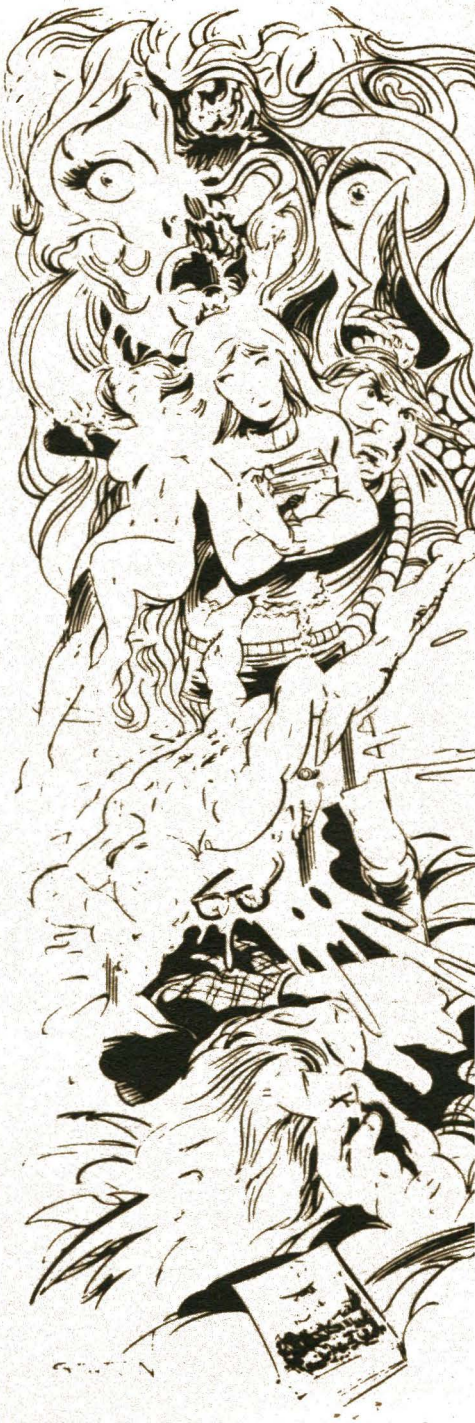
It was dark. The light in her room came on, but her shade was down. I went downstairs to eat.

After supper, I went back to my room, not turning on the lights. I lay in bed, looked out the window at Karen's dark window and wished she'd leave it open one night while she undressed. I didn't want to spy on her. I wanted her to do it of her own free will. Because I loved her, and I wanted her to be herself, and me myself. It got so I couldn't stand it.

Then I started using the drug. The research lab where Dad worked had invented the stuff. Dad was preparing a preliminary article on its effects for his company. One night, I saw the article in a half-open drawer of his desk and I read it, and I was fascinated.

Metamorphium.

I'd heard him mention it before, but I hadn't paid attention. The article mentioned psychic effects. The full effects, the article said, were not known, but a certain form of it enabled a person to



induce dreams. That is, you could take the drug and dream about whatever you wanted. There was some other stuff about psychic transference, race memory, Jungian theories, and proposed experiments in controlled hallucinations. I couldn't make out a lot of it because it was so technical, but according to the rough draft of the article it wasn't habit forming.

I wondered if by some chance Dad had brought some of the drug home. My parents were going to be out late that night, so I ransacked his desk (replacing everything as it was), his room, his study. I couldn't find anything.

In the kitchen as I had some milk and cake, I looked up to see the light in Karen's room. I didn't really want to see her naked, I just wanted to see her, to talk to her without any barriers between us. I just wanted to get to *know* her. That sounds stupid, but I didn't really know her any more. We'd stopped being brother and sister a long time ago, and it hurt me that I couldn't pin down the exact moment this had happened.

I went into the hall and called her on the phone.

"Karen, can you give me the assignment for Mrs. Fallon's English class?"

"Who is this?" she asked.

"Bob, dummy. Your neighbor."

"Oh! Bob! I'm sorry, but I didn't recognize you. You sound funny over the phone."

"I'll send a telegram next time."

"Just a minute," she said.

I waited while she went to get the assignment. The time seemed long and empty. I wanted to look at her. God, it's bad when you're like that. I just wanted to see her face.

"Here it is," her voice said suddenly, and proceeded to give me the information. I didn't take it down since I already knew it.

"Thanks. See you tomorrow."

"Okay, Bobby. Good night."

She hung up.

Bobby. That's what she'd called me when we were kids. Lately it had been just Bob.

I went to my room and got down last year's yearbook. I found the page with the corner turned down and saw her picture there, all formal looking, with her hair different from the way she had it now. But it was her face, and I looked at it a long time, feeling miserable. Later I went and showered and brushed my teeth.

I lay in bed, thinking about the drug metamorphium, and the effect it was supposed to have on dreams. How would they experiment with it? Human subjects? Sure. I wondered—had Dad ever tried it? Now that I thought about it, the article had seemed less than objective and aloof and scientific. It almost seemed as if the author had known things that couldn't have been known unless he had tried the stuff himself.

I got up and went to my parents' room. They would be home soon now. I looked in different places now. The coat he wore to work that day was on a hanger on the door. Inside I found the little plastic notebook. In a pocket of the cover was a piece of folded paper. Inside was a bit of sweet-smelling white powder. I didn't bother to think about

it; I just wet a finger and picked up some of the powder and put it into my mouth.

It could have been a deadly poison, but I wasn't worried. It didn't matter a lot if I died. Big deal. At least I wouldn't be worrying about Karen any more, and a lot of people would be better off.

Nothing happened. Feeling utterly stupid, I went to bed. I looked out the window toward Karen's room a long time, but her window was dark. Finally I drifted to sleep.

And I dreamed about Karen.

"I DREAMED ABOUT YOU last night, Bob!"

"Again? Very flattering. What did we do?"

"We? I didn't say *we* did anything. I said I just dreamed about *you*."

"Oh, well, what did I do, then?"

"Oh, a lot of dumb stuff. Riding horses, swimming, playing football. It was boring, really."

"Why didn't you change channels?"

"Ha, ha," she said deliberately, indicating that I wasn't being funny. Then after she'd gone off to her next class it struck me that dream she'd described had been mine too, except that in my dream we'd been together part of the time. In my dream I'd held her hand as we'd walked, and I'd kissed her.

I tried to be where she was that day, accidentally on purpose. I'd smile casually and say a word or two. I got the impression that she was warming to me, but I wasn't sure. That afternoon I was there when she caught the bus.

"Want to go to a show tonight?" I asked her.

"Oh, Bob, not tonight. I'm busy tonight."

A date with Jim Briar, I strongly suspected. He'd been with her a lot today.

"Saturday, then?"

She smiled. "Maybe. Call me tomorrow."

Her eyes were beautiful, and blue, but unreadable.

"Okay," I said.

On the way home we talked about school and the silly things that had happened that day. It was the first time I'd ever asked her for a date, a real one.

That night I was up late. Finally Jim Briar's car rolled up into her driveway and they both got out. They walked to the front door, hand in hand. They paused at the front door. He kissed her. They embraced and stood there for a long time. Finally she went inside and Briar went back to his car and drove away.

A few minutes later her light came on. About fifteen minutes later it went out again. I laid down and tried to think of Karen, wanting to dream of her. But I hated Jim Briar for kissing her, and it was hard to think about her. That night I dreamed about Jim Briar.

I dreamed that we had a series of contests and combats. Sometimes it was boxing, and I clobbered him good. Sometimes it was armed combat, and I shot him down, or blew him up with a grenade. Once it was a chicken race and I made him swerve into a tree and explode in a lovely blossom of flame.

The next day, Saturday, I met him downtown at a movie. He had a black eye.

"Where'd you get the shiner?" I

asked, not even thinking about my dream.

"I guess I fell out of the goddam bed this morning. I had the damndest dream about you. I dreamed you gave me the beating of my life." Grinning, his expression made it clear that such a thing could happen only in a dream.

I was mildly surprised. I wondered whether his body exhibited a line of blisters where my dream dum-dums had caught him. I did notice a slight burn on his finger.

"Where'd you burn your finger?" I asked.

"I don't remember," he said. "It wasn't there yesterday. I must have touched a stove or something."

AFTER I'D GONE to bed that night, I began wondering if Dad had brought home any more of the drug. I waited till my parents were asleep, then I slipped into their bathroom. I closed the door and put a towel along the bottom of the door to block the light, then I turned the light on.

In the medicine cabinet were lots of small sample bottles of different drugs, some with little notes and addresses of chemists or salesmen or drug companies. I saw a bottle that looked like the stuff I wanted. It had the same sweet smell, like some kind of perfume. I wet my finger and picked up some of the powder. I put it in my mouth and licked my finger clean. Like before, nothing happened while I was awake.

But in the dream, I was a hero, tall and black-clad and wearing a huge nightwinged cloak. I rode through a sorcerer's thunderstorm, dodging lightnings and battling goblins until I reach the tower where I rescued Karen from Briar's clutches. He hurled oaths and thunderbolts as we rode off, Karen behind me on the saddle, her hands tight across my chest, weeping with joy.

We rode out of the darkness as if it were a great cave and in a broad meadow a festival was being held. There were colorful silk tents and lush gardens, dancing jugglers and clowns, gypsies and beggars, princes and artists. At the edge of the world rose mountains like a giant's fingers. Cloud streamers trailed from the jagged peaks, like maidens' tresses. Karen and I danced and laughed and sang, and we sat on the soft grass to hear ancient bards tell fantastic tales to the sound of lute and harp. Briar the sorcerer was imprisoned in his own dark corner of his gloomy creation, cursing and hurling lightning, but never harming us.

Night came like a curtain pulled across the sky. Karen was in my arms, her hair wrapped around my face. Around us, the tents and pavillions stood empty, the revellers gone. We lay under a silken roof on a pile of cushions, and I opened her dress as her hands caressed my face. And then there was nothing between us and the gods in my belly were melting down basalt in salamandrine fires.

Sunday Karen came over with a cake.

"Happy Sunday," she called from the driveway.

I looked out the window and called down, "Hey, what is this?"

"I made a chocolate upside down cake. Happy unbirthday."

Stupidly, I said, "But today's not my birthday."

"That's what I said. Unbirthday!"

She and Mom were cutting the cake when I came down. Karen had made the cake herself. She said if we didn't keel over dead, she figured she'd pass Home Ec without any trouble. Finally Mom went out and left us alone in the kitchen.

"Bobby," she said, "do you want to go out tonight?"

"On Sunday?"

"We can go out early and come home early. Let's go to a show or some-[redacted]"

"All right. What do you want to see?"

"I don't know. Let's look in the paper."

We spent a few minutes chasing down the movie section of the Sunday paper.

"Let's see that one," she suggested. It's really good."

"How do you know?"

"I've seen it twice."

"Have you seen it with Jim Briar?"

"None of your beeswax. Do you want to see it or not?"

"All right. I'll see if I can get the car tonight."

WE DIDN'T pay much attention to the show. Or it might be more accurate to say that the show was just part of the total scene. We held hands and after a while, she put her head on my shoulder. And when we got in the car, she kissed me.

On the way home I said, "Karen, you know I dreamed about you last night."

"I dreamed about you too. I dreamed I was a princess or something and you rescued me."

"And we went to the carnival, and when everyone was gone we went inside one of the tents."

I heard her gasp. "How do you know that?"

"I had the same dream."

"All of it?"

"Yes. All of it."

After a pause, she asked, "How could that happen, Bobby? I don't understand."

"I think it's something I took. Something that, when you take it, it lets you dream about anything you want."

"Did you want to dream about me, Bobby?"

"Yes."

I felt her move closer to me, snuggling against me. "I wanted to dream about you too. But—*did* I dream about you? Or did *you* dream about me—I mean, *whose* dream was it?"

That was a strange thing to say, I thought. But then I hadn't really thought about it.

"Mine, I guess," I said. "I took the stuff. And I'd been reading some fantasy books about warriors and wizards."

"But so have I," she said. "Fairy tales. Old books I had as a kid. I was re-reading them. I don't know why."

"You don't know why?"

"I just got the urge to read them. I hadn't even looked at them in years."

I thought that over.

"When was that?" I asked. "When did you read them?"

"Saturday morning."

The day of my dream. Hours before the dream.

"Maybe this stuff I took works—not just on your mind, but somehow it

works *through* time. Maybe when you take it, it starts working *before* you take it."

"That doesn't make sense. And besides, where did you get this stuff? What if it?"

I didn't say anything at first. Then Karen asked, "Is it illegal?"

"No. It's too new to be illegal. I stole some that Dad brought home."

"From where he works?"

"Yes."

"But how can it affect *me,* if *you* took it?"

"It doesn't affect you. I mean, it's like you're reading my thoughts—or like I'm sending you my thoughts, by ESP."

As soon as I said that, I remembered Jim's black eye and burned finger, but I didn't say anything about that.

"Bobby, I don't think we should be doing this."

"Heck, how can we help what we dream?"

"You could stop taking the stuff."

"But it's not harmful. It's not habit forming. And the effect sometimes lingers a while after the first dose. Even if I didn't take any tonight—and I won't—the effect should last into next week. Anyhow, I don't think Dad will be keeping any around very long. He's probably gotten rid of the stuff by now."

"Well—what will happen tonight?"

"We'll be together, in the dream."

She didn't say anything until we got home. I drove into my driveway and cut the engine. I turned to her and put my face against hers.

"It's only a dream," I said. I put my arm around her, touching her breasts, and I kissed her. She kissed me on the lips and we held each other close for a moment. Then we let go, and looked at each other, smiling, and then I went around to her door and helped her out.

At her front door, we kissed again. "It's only a dream," she said. "It can't hurt anything."

She went inside.

I felt good. I knew the stuff would still be active in me. I went home, climbed into bed, and tried to hurry myself to sleep, and so of course it took longer than usual.

Hello, Bobby. This is our dream.

Yep. We're in this together.

She wore a light, loose dress, and her legs were bare. The sky had a golden color and the clouds didn't seem to move. We walked along a little brook and sometimes we'd go in where it was shallow. The water was cool on our feet. I made a pole out of a stick and Karen gave me some string and a hairpen. I bent the hairpen into a hook, and we sat side by side and fished. We caught a fat trout and cooked it over a twig fire, and ate it, laughing and licking our fingers.

After a while a naked man came out of the forest and stood looking at us until we noticed him. Then he made a loud, strange laugh and ran into the woods. Later on, we saw him swimming with two women in a deep part of the stream. One of the women was my mother and I said to Karen, "Let's go somewhere else." As we walked away, we heard their laughter behind us.

Later we crossed a wooden bridge, and below us was a fisherman, wading out in the stream. His basket bulged with fish and somehow he looked fa-

miliar. A young woman wearing just the bottom half of a bikini lay on the bank sunning herself, waiting for him.

Karen and I talked a lot and said things that had been hard for me to say before. I knew that when the metamorphium wore off we wouldn't be able to do this again, and she knew it too, so we tried to put a lot of living in the time we had. We found a place where the leaves made a roof, and the light that came through was green and golden. There was thick grass there to lay on, and we began to undress. Suddenly she screamed.

The dead body of the naked man was lying in the weeds. I looked down at the ripped body, the gaping, bloodslimed mouth, the insects. The stiff, grasping hand was already beginning to decay.

That morning was cold. I didn't want to get up, but I didn't want to try to go back to sleep. I threw back the covers and went to the window. The light was on in Karen's room. She was sitting by the window, cuddling herself in her robe. Behind the peak of her house the grey, crisp morning rose. We looked at each other a long time, and then I blew a kiss to her. She returned it. I pointed down. She nodded, and we went down.

Breakfast was strange. Dad suddenly said, "Boy, I wish I had some trout to go with these eggs. Sleep okay, Bob?"

"All right, I guess," I told her.

"I think I'll take my vacation early this year, honey. Might go up to lake Harding and fish. This is the weather for it, you know."

"Hey, that'll be great, Dad. Can we wait till Thanksgiving holidays so I can go along?"

"Oh, I don't know. It might do me good to get off by myself, just me and the fish. Going's been tough at the lab lately."

Then he turned back to his paper and saw something that made him go white.

"My God," he said hollowly. "Dilling's dead." He put the paper down and sat back, staring at nothing. "A heart attack. And at his age!"

I didn't say anything else about fishing. I finished my breakfast and left for school. Karen was waiting at the bus stop. We didn't say anything to each other or even smile. We just stood there, shoulders touching, feeling the closeness of each other.

I had met Dilling once, a long time ago, on a tour of the lab. I remembered now what he had looked like. The naked man.

That night it was hard for me to sleep. I went to the window, but Karen's window was dark. I made a slingshot out of a rubber band and shot some thumbtacks against her house. After a couple of shots she came right to the window. She hadn't been sleeping. I signaled to her to phone me, and then went downstairs.

I lifted the phone before it was able to ring very long. I didn't want to wake anyone.

"Karen, I can't get to sleep—"

"Bobby, I don't want to. That dead man we saw last time. I'm scared. I don't want to see that again. And he was—naked."

"Forget it. It was just a dream. Look—I bet I couldn't go to sleep because you weren't sleeping."

"But how could it do that?"

"ESP. Thought transference. Maybe my brain's got to be tuned in to your

sleeping brain or something. Anyhow, go on to sleep. I won't let anything happen. I'll take care of you."

"All right," she said in a small voice. "I'll try. Goodbye."

"Don't say that. We'll be together in a little while."

I hung up. I wasn't tired. I went to the john. I got back in bed and tossed. I was hungry. I started down the stairs and then stopped when I heard Dad's voice, loud, coming from my parents' room.

"I *wanted* him dead, Bess. Dilling was after my job. He was a no good louse, a parasite. Now he's gone and died and I feel guilty. I don't know why."

"It's just your nerves," said Mom. "He was close to your work. It's normal to feel this way."

"And there's something else," Dad said. "I even dreamed I killed him last night, the night he died. It was if I killed him—"

"You know that's not true."

"*It was as if I'd killed him*!"

I just stood there, not moving, a cold knot tightning in my stomach.

"I dreamed," said Dad, "I dreamed that he was seeing you behind my back—and that's why—"

I heard the bedsprings squeak, and a little while later I thought I heard Mom say, "It was only a dream."

But Dad knew it wasn't a dream. I knew it too. Dad was the fisherman, the fisherman who was with that woman. Was she one of the lab technicians or secretaries that I had met on my tour? It was so long ago, and I couldn't remember. Was Dad just dreaming about her, or were they meeting in their dream like me and Karen? Is that why I saw Mom with Dilling, because Dad had dreamed that up to justify his own unfaithfulness? And I knew why Dad was so upset. Because sometimes the dream came true, in a way. Like Jim Briar's burned finger and black eye. And if Dilling had had a weak heart when Dad attacked him with his fishing knife—

Or maybe Dilling was on the drug too. If two people were using the drug would they be more real to each other in the dream? Would their actions toward each other affect them more?

And whose dream was it anyhow? Mine? Dad's? Dilling's?

I didn't want to go to sleep now. I did my best to stay awake, but around three in the morning I fell asleep. The next morning I couldn't remember what I'd dreamed, but Karen wouldn't speak to me while we waited for the bus.

"Keep away from me," she said. "Just keep away."

"But Karen—"

"And keep out of my dreams from now on."

I went through the day in a fog. I fell asleep in study period and no one woke me and I woke up in the middle of another class.

She wouldn't talk to me on the bus going home, and I couldn't make a scene right there. I followed her home. She held her books tight against her chest and walked rapidly with long strides. Finally I caught her arm and stopped her, making her drop her books.

"You have to talk to me. Tell me why you're this way, Karen!"

"Let me go, Bob."

"No."

She hit me in the face with her fist and pulled loose, leaving her books on the ground. I ran after her again, grabbing her arm tightly, hoping I hurt her.

"Let go!"

"No! You've got to talk to me."

Her eyes were full of tears and her face was ugly. She shook my hand free but she didn't run. She stood close and whispered harshly, "You came to me there in the woods and you tore my dress. I tried to fight you off, and you hit me. You threw me down, Bob. You *raped* me."

Crying, she turned away. I tried to remember what I dreamed last night, but I still couldn't. I wanted to call after her, but I couldn't. I caught up with her.

"I don't remember," I said. "I found out something about the drug. I tried to stay awake because—and I didn't want to hurt you, Karen. I love you."

She said nothing. She turned up her walk, not looking back. I was shamed and hurt and getting mad.

"You can't stop it, Karen. You'll see me tonight too. I'll be waiting for you."

She turned to face me just before she went inside and looked at me with cold eyes.

"I won't be there," she said.

I'M NOT SURE what had happened, but it may have been that I was so exhausted when I went to sleep that I couldn't control the dream, that the ugly part of me came to the surface and did things too horrible for me to remember when I woke up. I felt miserable, because whatever had happened I didn't want to happen. And I didn't like being shafted for something that wasn't my fault. And it was worse because I still loved her, because for me, at least, it could never really be over.

So I kept my promise.

The first part of the dream, I just wandered around, walking aimlessly through dark, dirty streets in a misty half-light. Later there were twisted trees and naked grey hills and tall brown grass that swayed slowly in a breeze I couldn't feel. I knew that I was looking for her, and that she must be hiding from me.

I found her in the sorcerer's castle. She was looking down at me through a window in a high tower. On the castle wall below the tower was Briar in the uniform of a gladiator, except that his armor was black and decorated with skulls and spikes. His helmet was a heavy black thing shaped like a skull. He was laughing at me. Karen looked at me without showing any emotion at all.

I stood at the base of the wall and threw rocks at them, and cursed, and called them names. They laughed at me.

I woke up.

My clothes were soaked with sweat. The sheet was knotted up under my feet. I lay there, breathing heavily. Karen's window was still dark. Let her sleep, then, I thought. I'll show her.

Dad hadn't gotten rid of the stuff. Maybe he wasn't going to get rid of it. Maybe he figured adultery was all right if you just dreamed about it, never mind if you dream the same dream with the other woman. Well, it didn't matter

to me. Only one thing mattered.

I took a big dose of the powder. I didn't care whether Dad missed it or not. Then I went back to bed and waited restlessly for sleep to come.

And I was in a desert place where the sky was a bronze shield, and the sun was a diffuse reflection on the edge of the shield. Sharp, bare rocks thrust up from the ground, and here and there the twisted corpse of a tree stood immobilized in agony.

The sounds they made led me to them. They lay under gnarled and rotting tree, their bodies moving together, flesh and flesh.

"Briar," I said.

He looked up. "Who are you?" he said.

"Who is he? he asked her as he moved to face me.

"You know who I am," I said.

Karen sat up, not even bothering to cover her nakedness. She looked straight at me as she said, "Kill him, Jim. Kill him for me."

"Who is he? Briar asked again, as he stooped for his sword.

"He is my brother. Kill him and you shall have his place."

Briar stood up, his huge chest heaving. The sword was a shaft of bright lightning. He smiled confidently and stepped forward.

"I'm going to kill you," I told him.

I felt the strength in my hands. I felt as though I could uproot a tree and crack it over my knee. I was that powerful. And I knew I could kill him because I hated him, and I hated him because he was the worse thing in the world. He had taken Karen away from me.

"God, what a dream!" laughed Briar.

He didn't know, then, that we were all in the same dream. Perhaps Karen hadn't told him because he wouldn't have believed it. Perhaps she thought that his strength would be greater if he didn't know that combat would be real.

But I knew that this was more than a dream.

He swung the sword through the air, testing its weight. He laughed as he sliced a dead limb from a dead tree. He turned to Karen for approval. She was standing against the tree, her body one with the dead tree against the bronze sky. She moved her hands over her body and smiled at him.

I wanted her.

Briar was before me, huge, dark, mountainous, lightning in his hands. Naked though I was, I had the power to stop him, should I choose to use it.

I chose.

His charge slowed into slow-motion. He swam in a sea of jelly, unable to extricate himself. He screamed, and squirmed and tried to escape as I walked over to him and pulled the sword from his hand.

I shoved the sword into his guts. He sank to the ground like a falling feather. I stood over him, pushing the sword in and out of his belly, mashing his viscera to a paste. Sounds and blood came from his lips. I knew what he was trying to say, but I didn't listen.

"I told you I'd see you tonight, Karen," I said.

She didn't try to run as I came to her. She knew that it was useless to run. I controlled the dream now.

I threw the sword away. It hit a rock, throwing out sparks and ringing until it

struck the ground. Even then it hummed a moment before its sound finally died out.

I reached for Karen's arm and found it cold. I pulled her to me, put my other arm around her. My mouth found hers, my lips thrust against hers.

I tasted blood. She had bitten into my lip. Her hand came free and raked viciously across my ribs, and I cried out—

—and woke up.

My pillow was covered with blood.

I lifted my pajama top and saw that the pain in my side was matched by a quadruple row of welts.

The first light of morning was in the air like a luminous fog. I went downstairs and ran across the cold, wet grass to Karen's house.

I rang the bell and banged the door until they answered me. Puzzled and angry, they explained that Karen wasn't there. She had spent the night at a friend's house. I made them let me in to use the phone. By the time they'd called my folks over, I'd checked and found that the girl Karen was supposed to be staying with didn't know anything about it.

I didn't bother to try and explain things to them. I ran out the back way, behind the house, to lay on the little hill there, on the cool grass. My skin felt tight, as if encased in plastic. I watched the stars leave the sky and the sun come up. I watched the morning clouds form and vanish and take shape again. For a long time I lay there.

Later that day we learned that Jim Briar was dead. Karen, who had spent the night with him in his garage room behind his folks' house, had woke up next to a corpse. Jim had died from a weakness of tissues deep in his body, an aneurism that had burst, killing him in his sleep.

The stuff wore off slowly. Sometime I would dream about her, and sometime I wouldn't. The dream became more and more normal, and more and more she didn't share them.

Whenever I dreamed of her, she would wake up screaming. They didn't believe what she told them about us. Maybe Dad did, but he didn't say anything, because I guess he could get in trouble for unauthorized use of the drug.

Karen and her family moved away. I think she might be pregnant, and I think she might have told them that I raped her in a dream. I wonder—will the child be Jim's or mine?

Metamorphium. You can't suppress something like that. Sooner or later the word will get around, and then it'll all be one big dream, one big mind asleep and dreaming all the time, even though individual dreamers will wake from the big dream. But they can't stay awake forever, and when they go back to sleep they'll be part of the big mind.

I wonder how that'll be, living in two different worlds, a waking world and—the other world.

I've been thinking. Maybe if you can get enough of the drug you can learn to control things, be the top man, make them dream *your* dream instead of everybody dreaming the same dream in common. I've got it all figured out. The fellow who discovered metamorphium is bound to be using it. One night, while I'm asleep, I'll find him. I'll make him

(continued on page 39)

Juanita Coulson is one half of the husband-and-wife team that has been publishing Yandro, *a Hugo-winning fan magazine, for nearly twenty years. She is also the author of a number of science fantasy novels over the past half-dozen years, and with the following story she launches a new sword-and-sorcery series for this magazine set upon an alien world amid a war of wizards, the first of whom we encounter is the—*

WIZARD OF DEATH

JUANITA COULSON

Illustrated by DAVE COCKRUM

THEY CAME, as always, silently. And if they had not been overeager, they would have succeeded. But as the first assassin rushed out from the dark womb of the rock, the horses shied in fear, and the attack was deflected. The beasts' cries tore the still, muggy air, and other white-clad figures poured from the warren, weapons in their hands, expressions of triumph on their alien faces.

Too soon. This was no easy quarry.

Gordyan did not even cry out a warning, knowing it unnecessary. He knew the Rena would have a lance at ready even as he himself snapped free the sling at his belt.

Then he remembered. Without turning, his first leaden missile already striking down one of the enemy, he shouted, " 'Ware, My Lady!"

A horse screamed somewhere at his back, and a second assassin ran toward him, sword raised. Gordyan laughed aloud as the man sprawled back onto the path, stunned by the lash of a kick. "Goddess, smile! Drink their blood!" Gordyan shouted as his war-trained roan trod the downed man beneath its hooves.

"Rena . . .?"

The Marckues did not scream, but the one which had taken the point of the Rena's lance gave a strange, grunting little cry and had to be dragged against the side of a rock before he would release his grasp on the weapon that had dealt him death.

Seeing his master safe, Gordyan turned, and ice grew in the pit of his belly. One remaining white-clad attacker sought for the Lady Lira, pinned to the ground by her mortally wounded screaming and threshing mare. Gordyan bruised his roan's sides to reach her.

Abruptly the Marckue drew back with a look of pain on his face, and Gordyan grinned when he saw the little glittering dagger in Lira's hand. She could still bite. But the man was poising his lance to slay the sorceress. The bolt from Gordyan's sling knocked him sideways, and a moment later the weight of that giant's body crushed the Marckue to the ground.

"Gordyan—here."

He wiped his knife against his thigh and looked up to see Gordt te Raa struggling to free the lady. Gordyan, shamed that the Rena should be forced to such work, hurried to them. "Care. There may be others, Siirn."

"I see none. I feel were there more, they would be here, now. Aid her."

With ease Gordyan used his great strength to lift, slightly, the glaze-eyed mare. "Can you move, My Lady?"

"A moment . . . yes. My poor pet!" She had drawn her leg free from beneath the dead beast and was stroking its cold head.

"Better the mare than you. I could never return to the Zsed were you to die under my protection," Gordyan said soberly, his eyes searching the rocks warily for further treachery.

There was a hint of amusement in her voice, despite her recent little tragedy. "Danaer would not blame you. I came of my own will . . . for the Rena."

Gordyan glanced sharply at their leader, but Gordt to Raa was studying the ground abstractedly. "But we would blame ourselves, even should your man forgive us." He raised his head then, and his arm swept to the trail ahead. "See you more, with your far vision?"

Lira nibbled her lip and shook her head. "My sight is not of that. Would that it were. But, trouble not. We must go on, to find what you seek."

"Ai," Gordt said quietly.

Gordyan wanted to argue, but kept his peace. One did not plead with the Siirn Rena of all the tribes. Here they were all alien, here on this smoking mountain, surrounded by water. Water? It was a thing to make the Goddess smile, and wonder at their sanity. But the enemy, the hated Markuand, they must be driven out, destroyed. And if it took the blood of the tribes mingling with that of an old adversary, the army, it would be done. The Siirn had pledged the honor of the Destre-Y, and the tribes would follow him unto death. Malol, that one civilized chieftain of the Unbelievers, would keep his word—on the life of his son. They could trust him.

Now here, in far Clarique, on this alien water-drenched land called an island, they sought battle.

But first there would be wizards. Again.

Indeed, wizardry had pursued them here from the lonely plains of home, the Vas-Tre, where the allies had first bested the Marckues, first ridden stirrup by stirrup with Malol's army. Wizardry had won for them there, in that initial battle. Good against evil.

Uneasy, Gordyan glanced at Lira. She was looking back at him, her immense dark eyes fathomless. Only a woman—a small, fragile woman, her tiny dagger still wet with Marckue blood, her eyes tear-glistened for a dead mare. A mere woman—but her wizard's eyes . . .

"It was a trap, Rena," Gordyan said. "We should turn back."

"Not yet. My Lady, there *is* a great warlock here?"

"We have met his mind, briefly, those of my Web. Yes, he is here. We have seen the essence of a . . . a great smoking cave. And there are the tales told by the peasants on the plains below us. It is said he speaks to the dead, and calls them back."

"Truly?" The Rena's voice was thick. Gordt te Raa stared at the little sorceress with that greedy hope of those who have tasted deeply of joy, and lost it.

"I do not know," she said with brutal honesty. "But his mind is that of a powerful sorcerer. He touches. He may indeed have this gift the ignorant claim for him."

"We will go on."

Gordyan knew it was useless to protest. Worse, it was an offense. He of all people was sworn to serve the Rena, body and mine—had taken a new name to proclaim the fact. Resignedly he held down his hand and lifted Lira up before him on the roan.

They picked their way among the bodies on the trail and went on as before. Only Lira looked back, and Gordyan felt her shudder against him. Strange. He would never understand her foreign ways, nor how she had ensnared Danaer, his own blood friend. But as he loved that man whose blood mingled with his, so he would guard that friend's woman. And yet . . . a destre woman would never have glanced back. A dead enemy should be beneath scorn, part of the earth, beyond pity.

But she looked back. And she was steeped in sorcery. There was always that darkness about her that he could not, would not touch.

"Are you afraid of me,Gordyan?"

He looked down upon her wind-blown brown ringlets, bound with yellow ribbons. Only a woman. "To speak with the dead. . . Lady, do you believe this?"

"The Rena does." He could hear womanly sympathy in her words. "He must not be cheated. If this wizard means him ill . . ."

"The Markuand, our bloody enemy, mean him ill. They have already tried. They will try again. They knew of our coming."

"Perhaps. Or dreaded it."

He pondered her words as the beasts picked a way through the narrowing passage. Occasionally the ground trembled and the horses snorted unhappily. But they were sturdy destre roans and they bore it well, this movement in the soul of the earth, like Bogotana himself waking to fearful life. At last they reached a gaping mouth in the side of the mountain itself. The air was warm, steaming with that unnatural Clarique damp; yet Gordyan suddenly felt cold. The black entrails of that mountain door flashed now and again with red—the heart's blood of the rock? Warning them? Tempting them?

Tempting the Rena, certainly. It bespoke arcane reaches, and answers to bitter questions. And for a man who clings to hope . . .

Gordyan wanted to precede the Siirn, but Gordt te Raa was too impatient for that. It was like moving into . . . what? A hot, moist starless night. And there was in the pit of Gordyan's soul a nameless terror all at once—he, who feared no man and lived secure in the smile of the Goddess. He *feared*. It was as if an untouchable memory struggled to reach the surface of his mind, and its clawing and climbing filled him with horror—of that which he did not want to meet. Not death. He did not fear death. But this!

"You seek those who live no more?"

A gaunt whitebeard faced them, standing on a shining surface of opalescent-tinged rock. Behind him the heart of the mountain throbbed, sending forth flares of red light, like an alien pulse.

And Gordyan found his fear suddenly diminished. This man was real. A scrawny old Clarique, wizard or not. A naked piece of mere flesh, clad only in his snowy, brittle hair, his watery blue eyes mis-aligned, sightless.

Yet he knew their presence, and they had come quietly.

"We have been told," the Rena began carefully, "that you speak with the gods, and with those who have joined the gods."

"Come and drink of the soul of the earth." The blind man lifted a ewer at his side, gestured. Gordyan looked uneasily at the Rena, but Gordt nodded and dismounted. Obeying, the big man also got down, then held up his arms to Lira. She gave him but a glance, and as he set her upon the cave floor she stared impolitely at the stranger. Gordyan's mind eased. Wizardry to combat wizardry. It was for this they had brought her, stolen her from beneath the very eyes of the high army com-

mand . . . and from his own blood friend's pallet.

Gordt squatted beside the blind warlock, drank deeply from the wine. Gordyan wished the Rena had at least given him the opportunity to taste the potion first. There was too much treachery about. Poison would be simple, and the death of the Siirn Rena would wound them all grievously. Without him the tribes were headless, the Marckues infinitely stronger in their striving for conquest, perhaps the war was lost.

"It is safe," Lira whispered, then she too drank.

Gordyan could do nothing but trust her, and no destre should scorn hospitality. The wine was bitter. Poor hospitality. The man's taste matched his eyes.

"Gordt te Raa, Siirn Rena of all the Tribes." It was not a question. This blind wizard knew them, or their leader. "Indeed, my reputation astounds me."

"Is it deserved?" Gordt said.

A shriek of laughter echoed off the reddened walls of the cave.

"Ah, you too have a reputation! He Who Cuts. Through all things. But *you* have been cut, sorely wounded, a cord dry with the blood of death. And I am the wizard of death—he who has power over death."

Gordyan sucked in his breath and looked sideways at the Rena with apprehension. To others that darkly handsome face might have seemed remote, detached; but Gordyan plainly saw the pain of remembrance there.

That a man should grieve so over the loss of a woman! But then, admittedly, Kandra had been no ordinary woman. She had bewitched the Rena.

Gordyan watched Lira with a tail of his eye. She was carefully studying the blind wizard, her lips thinned, her large eyes narrowed suspiciously.

That was good.

The wizard's hands moved in the air, and tiny mists drifted from his fingers. Gordyan had seen such charlatanism before, but never so cleverly done, and never by one so obviously bereft of outside help. Again he felt cold.

"Ai, Kandra, she of Ve-Nya, she of the eyes of a diamond black. She who gave of her life that your tribes might live. Her life on your altar of victory."

A sound very like a groan escaped Gordt te Raa. He leaned forward and with one strong, scarred hand clutched at the old man's hair roughly. "This is not a game, ancient one."

"No, it is not. To seek the dead is never a game. It is a peril beyond your knowing, Gordt te Raa. Are you willing to pursue such a risk?"

"If honestly offered." Gordt's free hand was on his dagger, lightly. Without releasing the wizened sorcerer, he spoke to Lira. "Lady? Can you tell his truth?"

And in the following moment of silence, Gordyan saw the blind warlock wince, as from a blow. He could almost see a force flowing between the fresh young woman and this filthy wizard who promised miracles. The old man had not flinched when the Rena seized his hair, but at Lira's silent touch of the mind, he quailed. His sightless eyes were expressionless, but his lips snarled back from rotten teeth.

"Ah! A Web walker! You touch me? You dare? You are too wise, He Who

Cuts. You should not have brought her. Better if you had sacrificed yourself alone!"

"Gordyan," Lira began, and there was warning in her voice.

He could not tell if she was seeking help for herself, or was bidding him defend the Rena. And as he moved closer to her he saw her eyes widen in shock. She fell back against his arm, throwing out her hands, grasping at Gordt.

Utter cold overwhelmed Gordyan, and hideous blackness rushed upon him, blotting out the paler darkness of the cave and all sight of the naked wizard. Desperately, he willed himself to move a hand to his boot knife, to be able to *see*, for only an instant. It was useless. Tremendous vertigo struck him, and in his mind he formed a prayer, seeking the Goddess. He had ever been faithful, and she would . . .

The blackness disappeared like a melting fog, and was replaced with a granular vista of dun and brown, gritty beneath his knees, sharp and annoying against his face.

Stunned, Gordyan gazed around. It was several heartbeats before he could orient himself, but the scene was familiar, blessedly so. He had been here before.

"Kant, prodra Argan," he breathed in relief. "Goddess . . ."

"The Lady!" Gordt detached Lira's small hand from his wrist and then shook her gently. Gordyan too was swept with concern: she stared at nothing, her dark eyes white-rimmed in terror. What had happened? Only she could tell them, with her wizard skills, and if she were stricken beyond speech, could they ever know?

"I . . . I hear you," she said, very feebly. "Hold my hands, both of you—*tightly*!"

They did so, and gradually the panic faded from her face and the rigidity of her body slackened.

"It is safe . . .*now*." She released their hands and hid her face between trembling fingers for a moment. "He is strong! His is a fearful strength! And alone! I had not thought it possible. I sought for his Web, for his other minds—but, Rasven protect, *there were none! He is like a god! A god*!"

Gordyan curved his shoulder to protect her from the worst of the driving dust, disturbed by her shuddering. He sensed, somehow, that save for her sorcery they all would be dead. And even yet, could not evil find them?

"Lira, we are in Nortea," he said as best he could manage into the teeth of the wind.

"Ai," Gordt agreed, "we are half the world away from that accursed cave. I was here once, as a young man. I remember. There's one of the pinnacles, there." He pointed through the wind-stirred dust to a distant tower of misshapen rock, unmistakable to anyone who had ever made a journey through Nortea's desolate highlands.

"I know," Lira said, sounding more herself, even a trifle amused. "I *am* Sarli, and this is part of my homeland. But be grateful that we are *here.* Nortea, unpleasant though it may be, is of the world of the living—*and we hung for a space over that abyss where living is not.*"

Gordt looked solemn, then said slowly, "I should not have regretted

death, for myself. But I would have been shamed by the burden of your lives' losing."

"There are other lives to consider," Lira said gently.

"All the tribes," Gordyan added, underlining her words. "It is your oath to the Goddess. Without you, now, far from council, the tribes will disintegrated into chaos—here in a world of the enemy, and of aliens, and of our old foes among our present allies."

A corner of Gordt's mouth quirked. "*Here*? Gordyan, we are in Nortea, not Clarique. Even granting a bridge over the inland seas, we are a Ten-Days' ride from that speaking mountain and that false blind tool of Bogotana."

The wind suspended a spiraling canopy of dust over their heads for a moment, tearing at the Rena's words. And in his mind's eyes Gordyan could almost see that sightless warlock, imagine his evil delight over their banishment.

"No, Gordyan, he thinks us dead." Lira struggled to her feet, the men, solicitous, supporting her, their frail link with sanity and life. "He thinks us dead."

"Lady . . ." Gordt te Raa stepped back from her, his eyes narrowing as he was Lira's expression. Gordyan could not believe the Rena was afraid, but he could blame no man for recoiling from the witchery that was blooming in her face. He wondered anew at the daring of his blood friend, to join soul with such a woman, such a sorceress.

"Dead!" Lira clasped her hands before her, not in supplication but in seeming deep thought. "We were not alone, there. There over that abyss. Rena, we can return. We must!"

Gordt's face broke in a faint smile. "Almost weaponless, without horses? It will take a Five-Days' walk north to the Vas-Tre before we can reach those of the tribes left behind, those who will speed us again to Clarique . . ."

"No! *Now*! As we came." She touched the tips of her thumbs together and steepled her fingers above them.

"Goddess, smile," Gordyan said hastily, reverently, thinking this little witch had at last become one with the tribes, foresworn her false god—for she truly made the sacred symbol of the Goddess with her hands.

But she spoke on, and he learned his folly. "He did not intend for us to live. Yet, we were borne here, quite beyond the planning of my Web. You did not feel it?" The two men dumbly shook their heads, regarding her with nervous awe. "Alone, like a god, he flung us toward the abyss. I reached for my Web, strongly—for you must know, as a soul bond between those who give their bodies, the Web is never broken. It can even grow stronger at need. But . . ."

"Lady, the sacred three?" Gordyan indicated her still-touching fingers.

"The Web, that Bog' cursed monster who touched us, and . . ." Her eyes clouded and she for a moment refused to look at the Rena. "There was besides these a ***third*** touch—a touch which snatched us from that abyss, to this—this corner of your sacred symbol, Gordyan."

"Nortea."

"Because of my Sarli blood. It must be. An affinity, the Webs call it," she said absently. The wind lashed at her

thin garment, lifted it slightly, revealed her white thighs. Gordyan felt toward her none of the desire a man well might; there was wizardry in her eyes, eyes intent on the Rena. "We must return, now. Or her will destroy all. The alliance, the tribes. He is a god in strength. But . . . it will give you pain."

"To there?" Gordt said, misbelieving. "To that liar?"

"He did not lie. He *can* touch the dead. But . . . he *did* betray you, for whatever reasons."

"Those Marckue assassins!" Gordyan exclaimed.

"It is possible, indeed. Or his fear and jealousy of our Web, of the touch of other minds. And with the enemy's gold to feed his ambition, he can achieve such tyranny that . . ."

Gordt te Raa still had his dagger, and his hand no longer held it lightly. "Return us there, Lady, and he will have bought the gold with his blood. I care not that we use wizardry. Only place him at my hand."

"We cannot, *alone*. There is help, from that abyss." Lira paused and moistened her dust-white lips. "One who will help us—again. But it will be painful for you, Rena," she warned once more.

"I fear not the dead." Gordt's knife was in his fist now, and his eyes cold, a powerful look of vengeance that Gordyan recognized. The thought of imminent revenge swelled his own eagerness, put his own hand to knife.

"Your free hands in mine, then."

Torn by the wind, plucked at and dashed by the Fingers of Wyolak, the three joined their fortunes. The little woman's eyes seemed to lose focus, her body stiffened, and wordlessly she spoke to those Gordyan could not see. This time he did not trouble his soul over it, but steadied himself.

The blackness came again, the numbing cold, the dizziness. And yet it was blackness with light beyond it—movement, forms he could not quite discern. Voices he could not quite hear. Soft murmurings. Yet, nothing to frighten a man, if this were death.

And abruptly the world was reddened, glowing, fiery.

Bogotana's Regions? Must they pass through the very depths to seek that traitor's life?

But no, not hellish fire. For this too was something seen before. A cave, lit with the pulse of a trembling, evil mountain. They were back. "Kandra . . . maen." The endearment tumbled from Gordt's lips in the instant Gordyan realized the return of sight and movement.

And he understood, now, the pain which the sorceress had spoken of.

The blind wizard had sensed them. He stood with three of the hated, white-clad Marckues—traitor indeed! —and cocked his old head curiously, listening, confusion on his anile face.

To one side, forming a third corner of their frozen scene stood—hovered—a shape Gordyan had thought now forever beyond the sight of man: uncorrupted, as beautiful as she had been in life, Kandra of Ve-Nya, Siirndra, Consort of the Siirn Rena . . .

Kandra, who had died last spring on the blood-drenched hill of Yeniir, her life severed by attacking Marckues.

"Kandra . . ." Gordt repeated numbly.

"No," Lira said softly, insistently. "We have only a moment. For *them*! Waste not what she has given you!"

The Marckues were moving now, circling, wary of the shadowy form of Kandra. Gordyan crouched, grinning. This he understood. They had swords, but they were still disorganized, and his mountain of a body would again prove his shield. Even should one strike him, he could sustain life until he had sent them as gifts to the Goddess.

"Kant, prodra," he shouted, feinting toward one of them. The man stumbled, and Gordyan laughed loud. The Goddess had smiled. In the moment before the Marckue died, Gordyan saw that familiar look of incredulity: the enemy could never believe so large a man could move so rapidly. His knife slashed below the man's chin, and Gordyan cursed at the thorough bloodying of his well-crafted gloves.

But now there was a sword in his other hand, to meet the remaining Marckues.

"Rena!" He heard Lira shouting and knew: they must not touch the Siirn Rena, and they would not. Gordyan would be the shield against these assassins, his very name his destiny to stand for Gordt.

The two Marckues had separated, refusing to come at him together, moving craftily. One would surely succeed.

And then there was a dark powerful figure striking at the Marckue to his right. Gordyan instantly swept upon the man to his left, using to full advantage his long arms, the awkward, alien sword.

Awkward, but enough to cut well through a belly.

The Marckue's own sword clattered to the rocks, and the man sank to his knees, breathing through his teeth, his brighter red echoing the fire of the mountain. Gordyan thought it best to be sure. He thrust the ugly little sword through the Marckue's throat, then turned to aid the Rena.

Gordt te Raa had not needed him. The third Marckue lay in his blood, and now the Rena moved toward the blind wizard.

That evil man seemed to know what had happened, but for some reason Gordyan could not fathom did nothing. Gordyan braced himself for a repetition of the blackness, the cold, but it did not come. And in another instant the Rena would be upon the accursed devil worshipper.

"She shall return! Yours again! The warmth of life! Your own beloved!" the wizard cried, and Gordt te Raa stayed his hand, his bloodied knife frozen in air, ready to strike.

Without turning to look at her, the Rena questioned of Lira, "Lady?"

"I do not know . . ."

"Kandra, maen . . ." The leader of all the tribes of the Vas-Tre spoke in a voice that broke with mingled grief and hope. Gordyan dared glance where the shade had appeared. It still stood there, shimmering, almost transparent.

Slowly, the spirit form lifted a slender arm, pointing an accusing forefinger.

The pale, sightless eyes of the wizard opened—as if he had suddenly been granted vision. And he screamed—high-pitched, piercing, desperate.

After the silence of so many battles with the stoic Marckues, it was shattering.

And final. With a convulsive jerk the traitorous wizard flung himself forward. Resisting, protesting, forced by things unseen, he impaled himself on the Rena's waiting knife. The scream died away in a bubbling froth, and the weight of his body bore down Gordt's arm, permitted the body to drop to the cave floor.

As one the three travelers looked toward the shade. It had vanished. Gordt took a stop forward, spoke in agony, a last husky, "Maen . . . kedra."

"The abyss," Lira said with great gentleness. "It is not ours to question. She is gone."

Gordt glanced at the body of the wizard. "He said he could have called her back. I would have . . . waited."

Suddenly Gordyan understood, as a man outside the embrace of two souls sees either more clearly than those who so touch. "You must lead, Rena. Not wait. The Lady Kandra would not permit it. Ever. She was too great a princess. It is the sacrifice of victory—a sacrifice she has made before. The Goddess wills, and so must she."

After a long moment, Gordt te Raa turned and walked toward the cave's entrance. Slowly, careful of his sorrow, Gordyan and Lira followed. They did not look back.

—JUANITA COULSON

AS DREAMS ARE MADE ON

(continued from page 29)

show me how to make the stuff. I'll be strong enough to make him do it, because I still have some of the stuff, some that I took out of the medicine bottle and kept that last time.

I've been taking a bit each night, and in the dream I search for the man who invented metamorphium.

The only thing is, I'm worried about some unknown long range effect. I've been tired lately, been spending more time in bed, and I've found it hard to get up in the morning. Everything's getting kind of vague, like its almost the same being asleep or awake. Sometime I'm in school and I'll suddenly wake up and find myself in bed. And then I'll wake up *again,* and find that I've fallen asleep on the couch, or under a tree.

I mean, how do you know you're in a dream, or which dream you're in?

And the other night—I think it was the other night—I dreamed about Dilling. I mean, did I dream about him because Dad dreamed about him, or because—or because— Can a dead man dream? Or maybe I didn't *really* dream about Dilling.

Maybe it was all a dream I dreamed I dreamed.

—JOSEPH F. PUMILIA

Coming In March AMAZING
JACK VANCE'S greatest new novel, TRULLION-ALASTOR: 2262, plus other great stories and features.

Rod Marquand is back! Forced to divest himself of his secret superhero identity as the Iguana ("The Awesome Menace of the Polarizer," December, 1971), and no longer teenaged, Rod has left the comic books for the adventure pulps in—

ROD MARQUAND'S JUNGLE ADVENTURE

GEO. ALEC EFFINGER

Illustrated by JOE STATON

THE WINDS BLEW wet and hot over the coastal plain of the great continent. The equatorial African temperatures and the extreme humidity conspired to hunt out the weak and unprotected of all species. To the unwary white man, such natural and unseen forces were as surely fatal as the bite of a viper.

At the very edge of the great forest, in a clump of stubby sourfruit trees, the tribe of Apshek the Sly picked over the available food without enthusiasm. It was a poor time for the great apes. Food was scarce, and in their hungry listlessness it was difficult for the weaker members to flee the attacks of Sorna, the lioness, and Athir, the panther; the great felines of the jungle were also feeling the effects of the drought. Already some of the stronger young bull apes were grumbling to themselves as they foraged. Apshek knew that soon one of them would take food from the hands of one of the king's wives. Then there would be battle and, perhaps, a new king.

For these reasons the tribe of great apes moved westward, into the vast rain forests of Kenya. For a time they enjoyed a greater abundance of food, finding in the dense tropical verdure insects, rodents, birds, and eggs. One day the tribe crossed the trail of a party of Men. Immediately a halt was called: the great apes were no strangers to the criminal "sport" of the *Bastagathi*, as they called the white men in their gutteral speech. The shes nervously clutched the bewildered young; the older members of the tribe fretted at being left behind, defenseless, in case of emergency; the young bulls drummed on their chests and voiced the fearsome challenge of the male ape, confident that it would go unanswered, for the scent spoor of the safari was many hours old. At last the tribe of Apshek resumed its march, proceeding cau-

tiously. Late that night they could see the fires of the white men's camp through the tangled foliage.

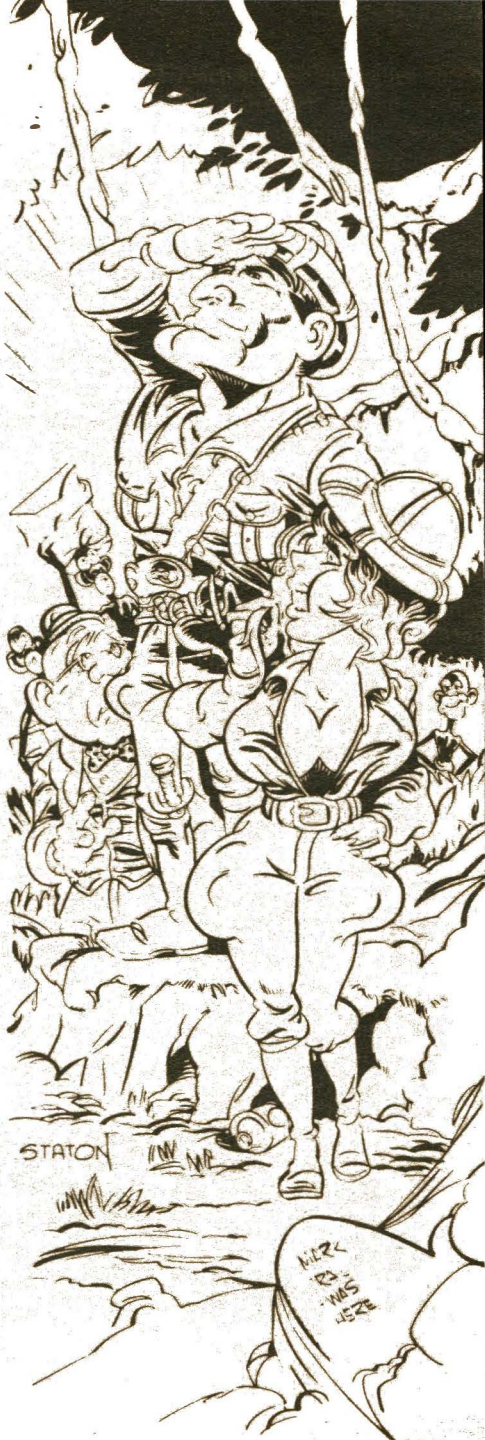
THE NATIVE PORTERS had thrown up a protective thorn barrier, or *boma*, within which fires were built for protection and for the preparation of the evening meal. The blacks ate by themselves, grouped together in the outer area of the enclosure. The white men watched and listened with amusement as the natives laughed and entertained themselves, singing and dancing as their ancestors had done for many centuries, accompany themselves with the drum rhythms that certainly were even more ancient.

One of the men watching the blacks seemed more intent on a solitary figure standing close by the natives, but yet out of the glare of their firelight, as if recognizing the futility of communication. He stared at the silhouette for another moment, his thoughts causing his handsome face to frown. When he spoke, it was in the low, cultured tones of a gentleman.

"Professor Tebbets," he said, "I admire your daughter's courage in so closely approaching those brutes. I myself would think twice about it."

Professor Virgil Horace Tebbets was a short, rather fleshy man, not at all suited to strenuous journeys through the African wilds. His companions still wondered at the nature of his mission; his motives for leaving his Connecticut home were still his secret. Now he mopped his face with a huge pocket handkerchief and looked back across the campfire.

"I was given to understand, Mr.



Marquand, that these blacks had been picked by you in Mombasa for their loyalty and tractability. I do not like to think, now that we are here in this monstrous jungle, in your hands, so to speak, that our security is imperiled by our own porters."

Marquand gazed at the blacks across the enclosure. "I believe," he said, his voice well-modulated among the harsh noises of the African night, "I believe that you have no cause for alarm. But you must know that these natives are more beast than man; they are ruled by emotion and cannot consider the consequences of their actions." Professor Tebbets puffed out his cheeks and nodded, but his reply was stilled by the appearance of his daughter.

Lucy Tebbets stood by her father's side, her hand resting lightly on his shoulder. She was a beautiful woman; her features were molded sharply and clearly, without the extreme angularity which marks the merely attractive face. Her eyes were large and brown, and vivacious in the most magnetic way. Her smile was lovely and frequent. She smiled now, as Marquand rose from his camp stool.

"Lucy, my dear," said Professor Tebbets, "we've just been discussing your attitude toward those porters. From now on I wish you would show more discretion and prudence in your dealings with them."

"Oh, Daddy," she said, laughing, "they're really harmless. It's just like you to get so worried. I'm old enough to take care of myself, and, anyway, they like me. They think it's unusual that any white person would show an interest in what they do."

"I think your father is right in this," said Marquand. "I'd feel better if you stayed closer to our part of the camp."

Lucy Tebbets glared across the fire and stamped her small foot in rage. "*You* think I should stay in my tent?" she cried. "When have my actions become a concern of yours?" Her beautiful auburn hair swirled about her face as she stormed from the campfire, back to that of the native porters.

Rod Marquand sat down once more, his mind a seething cauldron of mixed emotions. When in a short while Professor Tebbets excused himself, Marquand was alone in the camp, with only his bewildered thoughts and Gele, the moon, for company.

LUCY STOOD in the shadows. At night, the stars were eyes; they stared and she could not look at them. She stood very straight, hiding from so many things; her left hand was crooked behind her back, her right hand twined in her hair. The strobe flashes from the blacks' fire touched her shoulders, nicked her face. She smiled, but she always smiled: shifting weight from one foot to the other, coughing to clear her throat, again and again. She watched the blacks.

She stood there a long time. Her mind was forcing her to sort out her impressions, and she fought this tirelessly. She hated being in Africa; she had no friends in Connecticut, either, but at least there her loneliness was framed with familiarity. Her father's manner irritated her. What other people found charming—his absentmindedness, his lapses of diction, his Victorian manners and morals—Lucy thought pretentious

and pitiable.

And Rod Marquand. . .

Damn him anyway for a fool! They had known each other for nearly five years. They had been in love for almost that entire period, or so Lucy had believed. Now. . .

Now she forced the spider-threads of thought from her mind. She stepped out from her customary place by the woodpile, walking out among the porters, closer to the fire. The blacks shouted their unintelligible greetings, they danced and jumped around her. Lucy was frightened and then . . . she wasn't. Her right forefinger twisted locks of her long hair; she glanced repeatedly down at her hand to watch.

She hid by the fire, in plain sight but still hiding, concealing in herself a new set of feelings. It would be a while before she knew how to accept the changes that were tempering her life. Until then she would hide.

She glanced over her shoulder, back toward her part of the camp. Her father was not there; it was late and he had probably retired to his tent. Rod still sat by the smaller fire, and as she looked she met his eyes across the dark enclosure. She turned back to the blacks and their noisy fun, shutting out once more the thoughts which had begun to flower.

She stared at the ground, at the tiny black insects the firelight revealed, at her own feet as they shifted. She smiled sadly to herself, remembering something of home; she began to sing. It was a silly song, something she had heard incessantly on the distant Connecticut radio. Very soon she became aware that the blacks had nearly stopped their shouting; they were listening. She stopped, too, apologetically; she smiled her smile and began again.

She sang louder. After about a minute the blacks began to sing; they laughed. The natives laughed harder, shouting their song between gasps, drowning Lucy out. She faltered, confused, feeling humiliated. She stared at the blacks for a little while, then turned and ran crying to her tent.

IT WAS WELL before noon of the next day; the tropical sun was already burning with merciless intensity. The buzzing and biting of the jungle insects was nearly enough by itself to drive the unwary foreigner insane. In this climate of deadly natural foes, both intangible and physical, the small party of Professor Tebbets labored. No one yet knew the purpose of the expedition: as far as the others were aware, it might be merely the whim of an old and bored teacher. But Professor Tebbets had very definite goals, and it was time to reveal them, if only to young Marquand.

The two men sat in the Professor's tent. Tebbets held a glass of sherry in his right hand as he paced. In his left hand was the ubiquitous handkerchief. It was already soaked with perspiration.

"Masulu brought back a dead leopard today," he said. "Perhaps you saw it: young, seemingly healthy, not a wound on it."

Marquand followed the Professor's pacing with his eyes. "Yes, sir. There seemed to be nothing unusual about it except for three strange swellings on its right front shoulder."

"Exactly. I want to find out how that animal died. I feel that the crux of the whole problem lies in that direction."

"Excuse me, sir," said Marquand, "but I don't know what the problem is."

"Oh yes, that's right. Forgive me, Mr. Marquand; allow me to explain." Tebbets crossed the tent to where a large wooden trunk was lying. He lifted out the bottle of sherry and refilled his glass. He continued his story after the first sip.

"As you've no doubt heard, there has been some sort of mysterious epidemic in this region. Animals of all kinds have been dying in huge numbers, although no recognizable infectious agent seems to be the cause. The only creatures that are so far immune are the herbivorous birds, reptiles, and amphibious mammals, and human beings. The poor animals die on their feet, perfectly sound pathologically except for the sort of emaciated quality connected with a long and debilitating disease, but without any sign of a previously recorded disease. This is evidently something quite new, and quite terrifying in its implications. Our only clue is that in some cases we find those swellings you remarked upon, but not always in the same location.

"We're here to stop it. The Authority is depending on us; I'm relying on you, Rod. It's a big job, and it's not going to be an easy one. Do you think you'll be able to handle it?"

Rod looked up. His voice was low, confident. "Why, yes sir. I'll certainly do my best for you, sir."

"Good boy. I knew you would; that's why I asked for you to be assigned to me." Professor Tebbets regarded him over the rim of his glass.

THE TEBBETS PARTY continued its trek into the wilds of Kenya. The forest hung over them, the greenness growing heavier, the rains pounding until their backs broke with the strain of standing. Time began to do stranger things, the hours passing slowly, the steady march making each day as endless as a fevered night, but the days passed swiftly in succession, so that they despaired of solving their riddle before the situation grew incurable.

The party marched. They followed game trails along immense rivers; they skirted ravines whose bottoms were invisible beyond their blankets of mist; they crossed deadly expanses of savannah, and everywhere they went they found the corpses of animals that had apparently just decided to waste away.

The head man, Masulu, had informed the Professor that they had entered "lion country". They were camped near the edge of a vast and grassy plain, unmarked by protective shelter of any kind in all directions to the horizon. Tebbets gave orders that no one stray out into the shoulder-high elephant grass alone, and no parties were to go without special permission.

Lucy felt that the orders were given to keep her confined to the area of the camp. She was occupied with her own problems; she did not even know why her father had brought her to Africa, and she still resented him very much. She avoided Marquand. He had rejected her, cruelly, and she still hurt. She might always hurt. . .

She was following a small game trail.

She was walking alone, slipping past the boasting native guards, singing under her breath among the waving stalks of grass. The trail was dangerous: it obviously led somewhere (a waterhole?); it was just the sort of leading-somewhere trail that would be closely guarded by an entertaining variety of predators. Lucy did not think of this; she sang.

As she walked she sneezed. She had an annoying allergy in the United States, and in Africa it was much worse. Her head buzzed, making her irritable. Every few steps she clucked the back of her tongue against the roof of her mouth because her ears itched deep inside.

She sneezed, she clucked, she sang. The insects fled her, some of them bit her. The snakes and lizards skittered. Birds flew overhead. Small mammals watched and ran. There were the snarls of cats.

It seemed to her that a pool of water had fallen from the sky, turning as it dropped, beginning the brightest blue, going green, and yellow, and muddying to the brown of *cafe au lait*. Lucy found it where it lay, now among the high grasses. There were jungle beasts drinking, but they ran, their eyes terrified, their throats making little animal screams. This saddened her, because she liked the antelopes and deer; she wanted to hold one like Alice and the fawn in *Through The Looking-Glass*.

She sat on a rock and sang to herself. She sang mostly old songs from her childhood. When she got the idea to go swimming she was singing Jimmy Charles' "A Million to One." When she finished she sat for a while, quietly, twisting her hair on her finger. She thought that she made a lovely picture, sitting there by the pool. She looked around, but no one was there to see.

She folded her clothing neatly on the rock. She didn't strip: rather, she became naked. The water was warm, dark, frightening. She bathed in it, thinking all the time of the crocodiles that should even now be slithering splashless from the shore. She saw some crowlike birds in the dry, stunted trees, but that was all. And what a silly song to think of here, "The Lion Sleeps Tonight": the Tokens?

Lucy inspected her body, as it segmented in the murky water. The arms held high, body submerged, or legs scissoring, or her floating torso—these parts were beautiful. She enjoyed herself as a woman, living with the idea gracefully. She knew consciously that this was the reason she walked so well. But Rod had denied her. She had come to him, after five years, but his virtue had meant more. What Parsifal miracles would he lose by taking her?

She napped in the sun after her swim. As she dozed a phrase passed through her head: "watch them go." She repeated the phrase over and over, counting the letters on her fingers until the last letter in the phrase fell on the little finger of her right hand. She slept, and when she woke the sun was already close to the horizon in the west. She dressed and hurried back to camp. Nothing had mauled her, nothing had chewed her, nothing had harmed her at all. Nothing but the bugs.

THAT SAME afternoon some of the

native boys had managed to capture one of the diseased animals alive. It was the first time that Marquand had had the opportunity to observe the effects of the plague before its terminal stages. The animal was a small jackal, gaunt, whimpering, with eyes that would not track. It could not stand by itself, and when left alone would rouse at odd intervals, waving its head about and yawning. It was partly covered by the telltale swellings, located on its nearly hairless back. Besides the familiar swellings, smaller blisters were scattered over the animal's body; they were unusual boil-like marks, tiny blue points and concentric red rings. The jackal died within three hours of being brought to camp.

Professor Tebbets was excited at the find. He considered it to be the first practical breakthrough that they had had. "Mr. Marquand, I want you to do a tissue section immediately. Try to document the progress of the disease. Those little red marks apparently are undeveloped forms of the usual swellings."

At this point Professor Tebbets' daughter poked her head into the tent. "Hello, father," she said.

"Where have you been, Lucy? You know I don't want you walking about this countryside. This isn't Branford, you know."

"Oh, Father! I didn't see anything, and nothing bothered me except a few mosquito bites."

Marquand spoke up. "Maybe you had better let me look at any insect bites you have. Some of the insects here can transmit some pretty dangerous illnesses."

Lucy's always-smile flipped to a frown for a second. "Thank you, but it isn't necessary. I've had all my shots."

Professor Tebbets disagreed. "Please let me see them, Lucy. At least so they won't become infected." He took his daughter's arm, examining where she indicated. He saw the red and swollen marks. He dropped her hand, he sat down. He cried.

THE TRAIL was a narrow prison. They wandered on, only the porters free from the constriction of terror. Lucy had somehow been infected; as the situation stood, it would be only a matter of weeks before she was as dead as the jungle creatures they spotted along their path. They hoped that the disease would run a different course in a human host. The hope was absurdly without basis in fact.

The first indication that something was affecting her occurred three days after her infection. She stopped suddenly, in the middle of the path, staring dumbly up into a tree. The party took little notice until they had passed her by; Marquand looked back to see her still standing in the same position, right arm held out above her head, reaching toward a monkey on a branch. She smiled sickly, her lovely smile deformed into a slackmouth, drooling parody of itself. Even after the monkey skipped away she held her pose. Marquand hurried to her side, urging her along the path to the remainder of the party. She greeted him with the open, gurgling grin that was now hers. Marquand was horrified.

Professor Tebbets decided to turn back. At camp that night he watched

his daughter, who sat by herself, silently, with no recognition of the people around her. She would not eat voluntarily, and when coaxed or forced to eat she could not keep the food in her stomach. She tended to sleep often; her waking time was passed in staring, sneezing, or singing tunelessly to herself. She played with her hair constantly.

"From the early specimens we know that the disease is actually the effect of an insect parasite. The adult lives in a healthy organism, somehow timing the death of the host to coincide with the laying of its eggs and, then, its own death." Marquand paced the tent this time, while Professor Tebbets listened. The Professor was understandably distracted, feeling responsible for his daughter's condition and, at the same time, totally helpless. Marquand went on.

"What happens after the birth of the larvae is still not quite clear. My theory is that they feed on the corpse of their parents' host for a short time, then going into an intermediate stage, perhaps freeliving in the earth or as a parasite in a secondary host.

"I have not been able to discover the agent that causes the psychological and physical changes that destroy the host. Without that agent there may be no cure except the actual removal of every individual parasite. Even that may be accomplished to late to halt the process."

Professor Tebbets nodded listlessly. "Do what you think best," he said.

Lucy grew more and more introverted in the next few days. She became defensive about the swellings which were now so obvious on her arm. It was as if she were for some reason protecting the very cause of her death. She did not like to have people around her, and she sat in her tent nearly all day. She ceased even to sing to herself or twist her hair in her fingers. She sat and stared, and if she thought anything at all it left no visible clue in her expression.

SHORTLY AFTERWARD Lucy disappeared. She had not stirred from her cot in her tent for many hours; the next morning she was gone. Marquand organized the blacks into parties to search the area, knowing that in her condition she could not have travelled far. Professor Tebbets broke down completely, and was ordered to his tent and sedated.

Lucy wandered through the great forest. She fell often, but to her the falling was as much progress as the walking. She was only concerned with staying away from people; not only people, but all moving things. She wandered until she fell, and she fell again until she did not get up, she lay still, breathing, but little else, her mouth open, dry, her breath crackling in her throat, her arms very heavy, useless, just to rest her head on, eyes aching, closed now, nose tickling, not enough air to sneeze, fogging inside, a little more gray, less color, better, rounder and softer, growing smaller grayer and quieter

Ngotu carried her body into camp. He put it down outside Marquand's tent and walked away. Possibly because of fear of retribution or because of some native belief he said nothing to

Marquand himself. The young scientist discovered his former fiancee's corpse there about an hour later. When he saw her he wept. He carried her into his tent and placed her on his cot. Marquand arranged to have her buried before her father was able to see her in the horrible condition in which she died.

July 15, 19—

DEAR PROFESSOR TEBBETS:

I hope this letter finds you in better health. I have learned some remarkable facts since my last letter. Perhaps you have no interest in the practical outcome of our tragedy, but I feel you would like to know.

As you will recall, before leaving Africa I managed to isolate the parasitic adults, and I preserved sections of dead material containing viable eggs. My experiments with rats here in New York have produced the following astounding results: the parasitic agents are capable of producing in the host an endocrinic reaction which simulates a particular strong emotion. Whether this reaction is identical to or merely a likeness of the actual emotion is purely a psychological quibble. The important fact is that the parasite is able to control the host's attitude toward it during the entire maturation period. The host is killed by a combination of starvation, neglect, and an intense and long-term emotional overload.

After several months of observation with the rats, I felt it necessary (both for the protection of human life in the future and as a final duty to the memory of your daughter) to conduct further experiments, with myself as subject. I injected myself with between one and two milligrams of the agent which I had isolated and tentatively identified as the active catalyst in the process. It produced in me an unbelievably intense, almost hallucinogenic, response. The feeling was like (or maybe was?) profound love, but without an object. The feeling was so strong, and so pleasurable, that it seemed almost addictive in nature.

I can understand why the wretched victims of the parasite fall into such total apathy. The parasite provides a total internal experience of such scope that the purely physical needs seem trivial in comparison. The host is somehow aware of the source of the experience, and it is no wonder that he becomes defensive toward it (this is, I believe, why your daughter disappeared).

There are positive aspects to be considered. The possibilities are so amazing that I fear to list them for sounding insane in my goals. We have the key to the workings of our emotions! I have already isolated love, and, artificial as it may be, it produces an exact replica of the natural response.

I plan to send my paper, unpublished, to Washington. Only the Government can be trusted with a development that carries such potential impact. Imagine, if you dare, the perverted and immoral uses our extract may be put to by the irresponsible military of other nations.

As a tool for the understanding and relief of mental aberrations alone, our results are invaluable. Where we will go from there, I can hardly wait to see.

Yours most truly,
Rod Marquand
New York, New York

—GEO. ALEC EFFINGER

The tower of Ir was surrounded, laid seige, by the savage Paaluans, and all hope rested upon one being—

THE FALLIBLE FIEND

L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

(Second of Two Parts)

Illustrated by MIKE KALUTA

SYNOPSIS

ZDIM AKH'S SON is a demon—or, more properly, an inhabitant of the Twelfth Plane of existence—who has been drafted for a year's service on the Prime Plane, as those who dwell there vaingloriously call it. (The demons actually consider theirs the Prime Plane, and the plane whereof the lands of Novaria form a part the Twelfth Plane, but inasmuch as this story takes place largely in Novaria, it is referred to throughout as the Prime Plane.) Egg-laying and in some respects reptilian in appearance, demons are stronger and larger than men, have tails, can change colors, and are on the whole more logical of thought and less given to emotional outbursts and the problems which accompany such emotionalism such as crime or war.

Unfortunately, the plane on which the demons reside is deficient in iron, so much so that they have made a pact with the humans of the Prime Plane by which a demon is indentured for a year as a servant to the Prime Plane in return for an ingot of iron.

ZDIM (as he is more familiarly known) protests to HWOR, the Provost of Ning, that he should be deferred, inasmuch as his wife, YETH PTYG'S DAUGHTER, has just laid a clutch of eggs and he feels he should be present to guard them. He adds that, as a student of philosophy and logic, he is unsuited to the kind of rough-and-tumble adventuresome life he has been told awaits him on the Prime Plane.

Nevertheless, his protests are to no avail and he is escorted to a pentacle, where, by magic spells from the Prime Plane, he is transported to an identical pentacle on that plane. He takes with him a warning:

"Whereas we demons are stronger, tougher, and longer-lived than the men of the Prime Plane, it is not yet known for sure whether we have souls, which upon death move on to another dimension, as do the souls of the Prime Planers. Do not needlessly expose yourself to harm from such weapons as they possess." And ZDIM recalls that the Prime Plane afterworld is an extraordinary place, where gods are feeble wraiths, magic is virtually impotent, and most of the work is done by machinery. . . .

He has been summoned to the Prime Plane by DOCTOR MALDIVIUS, a rather testy old wizard, a thin, stoop-shouldered man with bushy gray whiskers, hair and eyebrows and clad in a patched black robe. DR. MALDIVIUS is accompanied by a short, stout, swarthy, black-haired boy of about fifteen

years, GRAX the apprentice. And they are standing within an underground chamber which is at the core of a labyrinth beneath the ruined temple of Psaan, near the town of Chemnis.

It quickly develops that what is expected of ZDIM is that he assume the duties of a servant, cooking and housecleaning (tasks GRAX has no patience for), and guard upon the humans' absense. MALDIVIUS gives him explicit directions: "If anyone enter the sanctum ere I return, you shall devour him instanter. The first person to enter before my return is to be eaten alive! No exceptions! Listen, comprehend, and obey!"

Demons are rather literal minded. ZDIM tried to ask him if an exception should be made for GRAX, but the old wizard would brook no questions. Thus, when GRAX, after a night on the town in the wizard's absense, finally returns ZDIM devours him alive. When MALDIVIUS returns, he is insensed, but ZDIM manages to explain to him the inflexible logic of the command. "I did but try to give satisfaction, As we say in Ning, no one being can excel in everything."

It develops that MALDIVIUS has a more serious problem on his mind. He possesses a Sibylline Sapphire in which, with the aid of herbs and spells he can scree, and what he has seen is a doom befalling the land. He has gone to JIMMON, the Chief Syndic of Ir, to sell this information, but the haggling is long and complex, for the wizard bears good will to few, convinced that he has been trespassed upon by all.

ZDIM occupies his idle moments in reading from the wizard's library and chances upon a copy of Voltiper's *Material and Spiritual Perfection in Ten Easy Lessons*. Seeking all the perfection he can attain, he discovers the second chapter deals with diet; Voltiper recommends vegitarianism. When confronted with the notion, DR. MALDIVIUS agrees—he was himself a vegitarian until the late GRAX insisted upon eating meat. Both become vegitarians forthwith.

Unfortunately, when MALDIVIUS again absents himself, a thief makes a hole in the ceiling of the sanctum and drops down a rope to steal the Sapphire. ZDIM is prepared to do his duty and devour the thief alive until

it occurs to him that this will conflict with his newly found vegitarian diet. Frozen in indecision (demons do not think quickly, albeit they think carefully), he allows the thief to escape with the precious gem.

This is the last straw for MALDIVIUS. He forthwith sells ZDIM's contract to MASTER BAGARDO, the owner of a travelling circus.

Here too ZDIM endeavors to give satisfaction, but with difficulty. Commanded to act ferocious while standing within a cage, he is so caught up in the barker's speil that he all but forgets to go into his act. Reprimanded by BAGARDO, he vows to do better next time, and is commanded to attempt to escape the cage. This, it turns out, is all too possible, and his success sparks off a riot which ruins the circus.

In the aftermath, his contract is auctioned and bought by an agent for MADAM ROSKA of Ir. Ir is an underground city, accessible only through a tall tower which must be ascended on the outside and descended on the inside of its wall –a perfect defense for the city. Ir is lighted in the daytime by a vast mirror atop the tower which follows the sun and directs its rays downward into auxilary mirrors which light its houses and ways. Ir is ruled by a Syndicate, and MADAM ROSKA aspires to become the first woman Syndic, for she is a beautiful, gracious and wealthy widow.

She also has in her possession MALDIVIUS's Sibylline Sapphire, having bought it from the thief that she may herself assess the doom of which MALDIVIUS warned. She requires ZDIM's help to use the gem, however, since only he has watched its use and knows the spells and herbs necessary.

The doom proves very real. A fleet of ships are coming from across the western sea. The Paaluans are coming. They are in appearance naked savages but in fact they have a high civilization. Unfortunately, their land is largely desert and supports little livestock. Upon occasion they send out foraging expeditions –for human meat. It is clear that they are the doom MALDIVIUS foretold.

It takes time but ultimately the Syndics are convinced of their danger. Unhappily, they are ill-prepared to deal with it, since they are a relatively peaceful merchant culture who hire mercenaries to do what fighting is necessary—and their mercenaries are largely elsewhere. LAROLDO THE BANKER, the youngest of the Syndics, is sent with a makeshift army of local citizenry to meet the fleet's landing—which is imminent—but he is lucky to escape to return with his life. Those less lucky are caught and salted down by the Paaluans. All too soon the surrounding countryside is bare of human inhabitants and the city of Ir is laid siege.

Ultimately the Syndics vote to ask MADAM ROSKA to send ZDIM north, to undertake a mission to Solymbria to hire an army of barbarians, and he manages to escape the besieged city under the cover of darkness (but not without incident).

ZDIM finds the countryside scoured clean—all who have not yet been caught and salted down by the Paaluans have departed for perhaps safer climes—but finally encounters a horse. He spends much time endevoring to catch it and then in learning to ride it, but succeeds eventually.

Crossing the Solymbrian border he finds the customs house and watch tower deserted. He carries ambassadorial credentials, but finds no one to present them to. He decides, after much deliberation, to press on—he was told to present his documents at the border, but clearly this might entitle an unconscionable wait—and follows the road to Solymbria City through the Green Forest, one of the few truly wild areas left in Novaria. There he is captured by a band of thieves who live in the forest, robbing from the rich and giving to the poor. (The thieves reckon themselves the poorest folk they know.) He is brought before MASTER AITHOR, the leader of these rogues, and ultimately convinces the man that his best course is to free ZDIM to continue his mission, but not before watching him deal with another captured traveller, a merchant being held for ransom. This unfortunate man has not yet been ransomed, and AITHOR has his large toe severed from his foot to be sent to his relatives. If ransom still does not arrive, other detachable portions of

his anatomy will be sent, and if still no ransom comes, his relatives will receive his head.

AITHOR also explains to ZDIM that the office of Archon of Solymbria is decided by lot, and has fallen to one GAVINDOS OF ODRUM, a wrestler by trade. He is an inept ruler, having paid the public servants and guards and soldiers nothing in months, and they in turn have deserted their posts, hence the unguarded border and AITHOR's own easy freedom to prey upon whom he will.

VII. GAVINDOS THE ARCHON

NEXT MORN, Aithor was genial once more. He returned my belongings—all but the money—and gave me a fur-collared robe and a velvet cap to match. The cap they had to fasten on with a strap, since my skull is ill-suited to Prime Plane headgear. Then Aithor led me to a saddled horse and gave me instructions for managing the creature.

"That is not my horse," I said.

"Nay; 'tis an older beast we had here, whose decorous gait were better suited to your horsemanship. Your former steed is too good to let you ruin it by inexpert handling. Besides, ye'll now have the comfort and security of a saddle."

Fearing that Aithor might, in one of his playful moments, have my tail or some other member cut off, I forbore to argue the point. I was compelled, however, to say:

"But good my sir, whilst I might manage with that horse, I can hardly cover the distance hence to Shven without any money at all, to buy food and lodging for myself and fodder for my beast."

"Ye mean ye demons buy things with money, like a human being?"

"On the Prime Plane, I needs must do as the Prime Planers do. If you send me forth destitute, my journey will abort ere well begun."

"Ye can borrow from taverners on the credit of the Syndicate."

"O Aithor, from the way Solymbrians scream and run at the sight of me, I anticipate enough trouble even to gain admission to inns. Were you a taverner, would you give me credit?"

Aithor chewed his beard. "I see what ye mean. Well then, steal a lamb or a fowl and dine on it."

"And have the countryside up and hunting me? Come, come, Captain Aithor. You know better."

"Oh, the nine hells with it. I'll give you enough to take you to Shven, if ye be careful. Ye should get there in a sennight, and three marks a day should be ample therefor." He counted out twenty-one marks and dropped them into my wallet. "How ye fare after ye shall have reached the steppe is your problem, and wherret me no more about it."

My tendrils told me that one of Aithor's rages was brewing not far beneath the surface, so I did not "wherret" him further. A couple of robbers led me back to the road and dismissed me.

THE GAIT of that swaybacked old nag certainly proved sedate. It took a mort of beating with a switch I cut from a branch to get the creature from a walk up to a trot, and never did I persuade it to canter more than three lopes at a time.

Withal, I reached Solymbria City on the evening of that same day. I rode in through an unguarded gate. The streets were deserted. When I halted the horse

and leaned over to ask a passerby the way to an inn, the man stared at me for a trice, then put his fingers in his mouth and whistled.

Two other men ran out of a tumbledown house, and all three attacked me. One tried to pull me out of the saddle by one leg, while the other two strove to reach me with knives. I grasped my mace, which hung by its lanyard from my saddle, and crushed the skulls of two attackers with one blow each. The third man fled into the night.

I looked around for some officer to whom to explain the two corpses but saw none. So I left them lying and rode on until I passed an inn, which I recognized by the skull of an ox above its door.

This door was bolted, and it took much knocking and shouting to get the taverner to open it a crack. When he glimpsed my face, he gave a cry of terror and tried to shut it again, but I got my foot into a crack.

"I am a cash customer!" I cried. "A guest! An envoy from Ir!"

By much repetition and argument, I prevailed upon the man to admit me, even if he stood nervously with an iron-bound cudgel poised while I showed him my documents. When I had made arrangements for lodging, I told the taverner of my encounter of that evening.

"No wonder, if you ride the streets of Solymbria after dark!" said he, whose name was Rhuys. "The place swarms with brigands."

"Is nought done to abate this nuisance?"

"Practically speaking, no. The constables, being unpaid and undisciplined, have oft turned robber themselves. Others have hired out to citizens as private bodyguards."

"A strange land and a strange city," I said. "Has it always been thus?"

"Nay; last year 'twas a fine, orderly place. But under that ninny Gavindos, pox take him, all's gone to pot. Ah, well, an we can survive another month, there will be another election. Belike the gods will give us an abler archon."

DESPITE my protests, it took me two days to get an audience with the archon. In the meantime the taverner Rhuys, finding that I was not quite the monster I looked, became friendly. I was his only current guest, business having become ruinously bad. When, on the day after my arrival, he set forth to buy provisions, he urged me to come with him.

"Nobody would be such a dunce as to attack me in your company," he said.

"What are those?" I pointed to a gaggle of women being shepherded along the street by a pair of burly men-at-arms.

"Housewives on their way to market," he explained. "The armed men are former constables whom the householders of one block have hired as guards. They've arranged for all the women of the block to market in concert, so that the guards can go with them to ward them from rape and robbery."

"You Prime Planers are strange creatures," I said.

"How so? Do you better in demon land?"

"On the Twelfth Plane, a demon properly reared by his parents adheres to decent behavior thereafter without constant compulsion. Hence we have little of this raveled and oppressive machinery of laws and coercion that ob-

tains here. But you human beings—the instant you are freed from constraints, you run wild like insensate beasts, abusing and preying upon one another, like—like—"

"Like crabs in a bucket," said Rhuys.

"Thank you, sir; I could not recall the name of those scuttling aquatic creatures."

"We're not all thieves and murderers at heart," quotha. "In fact, most of us do be peaceable and orderly, asking only to be let alone to earn our livings."

"But enough of you are of the other kind, if I may say so," I said.

Rhuys sighed. "I fear me you are right. Do no demons ever misbehave?"

"Oh, certes; but the fraction is small enough to be easily mastered. Besides, our wizards have puissant spells, which compel one accused of crime to speak the exact truth. This greatly simplifies the task of ascertaining the culprit's guilt."

Rhuys looked sharply at me. "Does the Twelfth Plane permit immigration?"

"I misdoubt the question has hitherto come up. When I return thither, I will try to learn and let you know."

WHEN at last I was ushered into the palace, I found Gavindos of Odrum a short man with a barrel-shaped body and very long, muscular arms. He reminded me of my friend Ungah, the ape-man.

"Siddown," he said. "What said you your name was?"

"Zdim, Your Excellency."

"Stim, Za-dim—oh, the nine hells with it. I'll call you 'hey, you.' Have some beer. What you here for?"

"I am an envoy from Ir. . ." and I explained the circumstances of my visit.

"Ir. Let's see. That's some futtering foreign country, isn't it?" As the man spoke, my tendrils picked up emotions of bewilderment, as a child might feel when these high matters were explained to it.

"It is the republic adjoining yours on the south, sir."

Gavindos: "I always get them futtering foreign places mixed up. So, what's that got to do with me?"

"The Syndicate of Ir urgently requests that you, sir, dispatch an armed force to break the siege of Ir City."

"Huh? You mean they want my futtering army to go down and fight these clowns from—what did you say the futtering invaders are called?"

"Paaluans, sir. They come from across the Western Ocean—"

"All right, all right. I heard you the first time. Have some more beer. So why should I send my futtering army to this place—Ir, is that it?"

"Aye, sir."

"And send my futtering army across the ocean to fight these clowns in some place I never heard of—what was I saying?"

I explained again. Gavindos wrinkled his brow. At last he said:

"But look here, if the people of Ir have tails and scales like you, I don't want no futtering part of them. If these other clowns kill them and eat them, I say good riddance."

"But, sir, as I have tried to explain, the Irians are just as human as you are. I am merely a demon bound to their service."

"Then if they be human, why didn't they send a futtering human being to me?"

"Because I was the only one who could get through the Paaluan lines."

The archon took a mighty swallow of beer. "Let's see, now. Be those clowns from over the sea attacking Ir, or is Ir attacking them?"

I explained once again.

"Well," said Gavindos, "I don't see what good it would do me to interfere. We don't seem to have no futtering money to pay our futtering army where it is, let alone sending it into foreign countries I never heard of."

"Your Excellency! When the Paaluans have cleaned out Ir, they'll invade Solymbria next."

"Huh? You think they might?"

"Certes!"

"Which of 'em is likely to invade? Ir or—I've forgotten the futtering name of the other?"

I explained again. The archon pondered. At last he said:

"Well, let 'em come. I'll challenge their head man to a wrastle! I'll break his futtering back, and they'll have to go home because they won't have no general no more to give 'em orders. Have some more beer before you go."

VIII. YUROG THE SHAMAN

LIKE THE SOUTHERN part of Solymbria, the northern was infested by robbers. I suspect that some of the rough-looking men I saw on the road or in inns were of this type. Some gave me hard looks, but none molested me. I suppose my appearance dissuaded them from any nefarious plans they may have entertained.

On the second day after leaving Solymbria City, I came to the foothills of the Ellorna Mountains. While eating my supper, I showed the taverner, one Hadrubar, my map and asked him about the road across the mountains.

"Hard to tell," said he. "The Needle's Eye"—he pointed to the place on my map that showed the pass over the crest of the range—"is closed in winter by snow. Now it's high summer, and the pass should have been open for two months or more. But nary a traveler has come through from the land of the Hruntings."

"How about travelers northward bound?"

"Some have set out hence, but none has returned. Some say the Zaperazh have closed the pass."

"The what have closed the pass?"

"The Zaperazh—you know, the tribe of cave men that dwell thereabouts. It used to take a regular military campaign every year to open the pass against their opposition. Then the government made a treaty with 'em, but with murthering savages like that, one never knows."

"What are these cave men like?"

"Would you see one? Step hither."

He led me to his kitchen. There a surly-looking, tawny-haired youth, with the thin iron collar of a slave around his neck, was washing dishes.

"That's Glob, my Zaperazh slave," said Hadrubar. "An ill natured scrowle, almost more trouble to train and discipline than he's worth."

"Are cave men enslaved as a regular thing?"

"No more, since the treaty."

"This treaty did not, evidently, restore to Master Glob his liberty."

"Of course not! Some such silly proposal was mooted when the treaty was being higgled; but it roused such a towrow among Solymbrians who's paid good money for slaves that the archon

rejected it. After all, unjustly to rape us of our property were a tyranny no man of spirit would submit to."

As he led me back into the common room, Hadrubar continued in a lower tone, so that Glob should not overhear: "Under previous archons, the border was so well patrolled that runaways had little chance of slipping across; but now. . ."

"As we say in demon land," quoth I, "it is an ill tide that washes nobody's feet clean."

Hadrubar shot me a sour look. "Waste not your sympathies on those brutes, who esteem not the niceties of civilization even when they're forced upon 'em."

"This is not my world, Master Hadrubar, and it is no concern of mine how you Prime Planers entreat one another. I am, however, often puzzled by the gap between your professed principles and your actions. For ensample, you condemn Glob's primitive folk; yet methought Solymbrians believed all men to be created equal?"

"You have it wrong, sir demon. That Immur created all Solymbrians equal is a plain fact, attested by divine revelation. Who made the other peoples of the world, and how, I know not. The Zaperazh have a god of their own, hight Rostroi. Belike this Rostroi made the Zaperazh; if so, he botched the job."

I forbore to carry the argument further, thinking it illogical to dogmatize about these Zaperazh without having known any personally.

NOVARIA has excellent roads linking the capitals of the eleven mainland city-states. (The twelfth, Zolon, is on an isle in the Western Ocean, off the Solymbrian coast.) The road north from Solymbria City, however, was less well kept. After it crossed the border of the polis—where I passed another deserted customs house—it dwindled to a mere track, suitable for pack animals but hardly passible to wheeled vehicles. In the steeper places, freshets had washed the dirt off the bare bones of the mountains. My poor old horse slipped and stumbled so on the rocks that I had to dismount and lead him, scrambling from ledge to ledge.

By the end of the first day out of Hadrubar's Inn, I had left the border leagues behind and begun to climb. All the next three days I climbed, while the snowy ridges ahead loomed closer and closer. In the foothills rose dense stands of trees with dark-green needles, looking almost black. As I got higher, these forests thinned out to a mere scattering.

As Hadrubar had implied, there was no traffic. The silence was broken only by the sigh of the wind, the purl of a torrent, and the echo of my horse's hooves from a cliff. I sighted distant flocks of wild goats and sheep, and once a bear on a far hillside frightened the horse.

The increasing cold made me sluggish and stiff. The robe that Aithor had given me was of little help, since we demons do not have a source of internal heat like the higher animals of the Prime Plane. Hence our bodies cool down to the temperature of the ambient air, and our activity slows proportionately. The first two nights, I could thaw myself out enough by my campfire to carry me through the following day; but then I found that I needs must stop at midday, build a fire, and warm myself then as well.

On the fifth day after leaving the inn,

I reached the pass called the Needle's Eye. The track wound up and down fearsome precipices. Snow lay in isolated banks and patches. Huge, snowclad peaks towered to right and left.

At noon by my pocket sun-ring, I stopped to build a fire. The horse ate a small bagful of grain that I carried for such emergencies, since there was too little herbage at this height to keep him fed.

Gathering material for a fire proved onerous, for there was nothing to burn save a few gnarled and scattered shrubs. Moreover, between the cold and the thinness of the air, I had become so sluggish that I could scarcely move. After an hour of burdensome efforts, I collected enough combustibles. Moving like one of those Prime Plane garden pests called snails, I kindled my fire.

I hardly had the blaze going when a strange thing happened. My tendrils detected magic. Then, with a roar, a blast of ice-cold air swept down upon me. It seemed to come from overhead. It flattened out my little fire, which blazed up fiercely and then died almost as quickly as the twigs were consumed.

I lurched to my feet, meaning to put more fuel on the fire. By the time I had stood up, however, the cold had so slowed my movements that I became as rigid as a statue. Not being well braced, I toppled slowly over—fortunately not into the dying fire—and lay stiffly in the posture I had reached when I lost the power of movement.

The horse pricked its ears, snorted, and began to shamble away, clop-clop. Then came a snapping of bowstrings and a whistle of arrows. The horse screamed, reared, and fell over thrashing as several shafts struck it in the side. Others, missing their target, clattered and tinkled against the rocks. One fell near me, and I saw that the arrowhead looked like glass.

Later, I learnt that this was indeed the case. The cave men of the Ellornas are in the stone age of culture. Discovering that glass was as easily worked as flint and furnished even sharper edges, they had made a practice of trading furs with the Solymbrians for the cullet from broken bottles and windowpanes. This they wrought into arrowheads and other tools and weapons.

The archers now appeared from behind boulders and streamed down into the path. Some began cutting up my dead horse with knives of flint and glass. Others clustered around me.

The Zaperazh looked at first sight like some sort of bearmen, but as they got closer I saw that this was the result of the furs wherein they were clad from hood to boots. They were evidently of the same species as the Novarians and other human Prime Planers, not members of another species as in the case of Ungah. They were taller and heavier on the average than the Novarians. From what I could see of their faces past the fur hoods, beards, and dirt, they were not ill-looking men as Prime Planers go, with hair of assorted hues and eyes of brown or gray. Their smell, however, was overpowering. Frozen stiff as I was, I could do nought to avoid it.

They yammered in their own tongue, being even greater chatterboxes than the Novarians. I did not, naturally, understand a word of their speech. There seemed to be two leaders amond them: a very tall, middle-aged man, and

a stooped, white-bearded oldster. The former ordered the tribesmen about but paused betimes to consult in an undertone with the latter.

They turned me over and unfastened my robe to examine me in detail, with much pointing of fingers and a perfect torrent of words. At last four of them picked me up, one by each limb, and bore me off. The rest followed, laden with masses of flesh from the horse, of whom little was now left but the skeleton.

I could see little of the route we followed, since I was in a supine position and could neither turn my head nor roll my eyes. I could only stare at the sky, with my pupils closed down to slits against the glare of the sun.

THE ZAPERAZH dwelt in a village of leathern tents, clustered about the entrance to a huge cave at the base of a cliff. They bore me through the village, which swarmed with women and young, and into the cave. The darkness of the cave was soon banished by torches and by a multitude of little stone lamps, which they set around the floor at the edges. Each lamp was a shallow dish with a handle to one side, and in it a wick in the form of a lump of moss, floating in a pool of melted fat.

To the rear of the cave, dimly illumined, stood a stone statue, twice the size of a man. It appeared to have been sculptured from a big stalagmite. It had holes for eyes and mouth, a knob for a nose, and a male organ as big as any of its roughhewn limbs.

For a while, the Zaperazh ignored me. There was an infinity of coming and going and of ceaseless talk.

What of the village fires at the entrance, the lamps and torches, and the swarm of Zaperazh, the cave was warmer than the air outside. I begun to thaw out. I found that I could move my eyes, then my head, and lastly my fingers and toes.

While I was still planning how best to use my new-found mobility, the white-haired oldster whom I had seen before came through the milling mass and stood over me, holding a lamp and peering. Presently he leaned over, grasped my hand, and gave a sharp tug.

I ought to have pretended to be rigid still, but the move caught me by surprise. I jerked my hand away from the Zaperazh, betraying the fact that I was recovering my normal lissomness. The old man shouted to some of his fellow tribesmen, who hastened up. Some wrenched off the robe and the cap that Aithor had given me; others bound my wrists and ankles together with rawhide thongs. Those who had taken the garments amused themselves by trying them on, roaring with laughter at each other's appearance thus garbed.

The oldster set down his lamp and seated himself cross-legged beside me. He asked me a question in a language I did not know. I could only stare. Then he said in broken Novarian:

"You speaking Novarian?"

"Aye, sir."

"Who you?"

"My name is Zdim. Whom have I the honor to address?"

"Me Yurog, shaman—what you call wizard—of Zaperazh. But *what* you? You not man."

"Nay, sir, I am no man. I am a demon from the Twelfth Plane, on an errand for the Syndicate of Ir. May I take the liberty of inquiring your purpose?"

Yurog chuckled. "Demons evil, wicked things. But you got nice manner, anyway. We sacrificing you to Rostroi." He nodded to the idol at the back of the cave. "Then Rostroi send us many sheep, many goats to eat."

I tried to explain the reason for my journey and the urgency of my mission, but he only laughed off my explanations.

"All demons liars," he said. "Everybody know that. We no fear your black men, even if they true."

I asked: "Doctor Yurog, tell me, pray. I was told that a treaty between your folk and the Solymbrians provided for the safe passage of travelers through the Needle's Eye. So why should you seize me?"

"Treaty no good! Solymbrians promise give us one ox every month, to eat, so we let people through pass. When Gavindos become chief of Solymbrians, he no sending oxes no more. He no keep treaty, we no keep him either. All flatlanders liars."

"Did you capture me by a magical spell that froze me stiff?"

"Why, sure. Me great wizard. No know freeze spell make you hard like stone, like snake or lizard from flatlands. That make it easy for us, ha ha."

"Well now, behold. You have cut up my horse for food and leather, and it must have almost as much meat as one of those oxen the Solymbrians used to send you. Wouldn't you consider that a fair payment of toll to allow me to pass on through your land?"

"No got treaty with you. You enemy. All flatlanders enemies; all demons enemies. Is right to sacrifice them whenever we catching them. Tell you what, though. Zaperazh like me to skin you, slowly; but, because you nice demon with good manner and because of horse, I cut your throat quick-quick, so you got hardly no pain. Is good of me, yes?"

"Aye, though it were better still to treat me as a friend—"

Before I could carry this interesting discussion further, the tall chief loomed up and spoke to Yurog in his own tongue. Yurog replied and added in his atrocious Novarian:

"Chief, must meet guest. Is demon Zdim. Zdim, meet Vilsk, chief of Zaperazh. I got nice manner, too, yes?"

Then the chief and the shaman went off together. For some hours I had nothing to do but lie in my bonds and watch the cave men prepare for a grand festival. The first item was to be a ceremony in honor of Rostroi, to be followed by a feast on the remains of my horse, washed down with some sort of beer they brewed and kept in leathern bags.

THE SUN was setting when the Zaperazh gathered in semicircular rows at the entrance to the cave. The men occupied the foremost rows, with women and children in the rear. Many of the women were nourishing their infants by means of those protruding lacteal glands that distinguish the females of the higher animals of the Prime Plane. The stench of the crowd was overwhelming. My tendrils picked up emotions of intense anticipation.

One tribesman sat down beside the statue of Rostroi with a drum, while another, with a wooden pipe of the flute kind, sat down on the other side of the idol. Vilsk made a speech. It went on and on and on. He gestured, shook his fists, stamped, shouted, roared, growled, whispered, laughed, wept,

sobbed, and went through the entire gamut of human emotions.

Because of the crowd, I could not tell from my tendrils how sincere Vilsk was in histrionics. But the tribe took the oratory with the utmost relish. This can be understood from the cave men's lack of urban amusements.

Vilsk finished at last, and the musicians struck up. A squad of dancers, stripped to breechclouts and weirdly painted and befeathered, went into action, leaping and prancing. The dancers shouted continuously to one another, I suppose exhorting one another to get in step and to be ready for the next figure in the dance.

I seemed to have been forgotten for the moment. Having now fully thawed, I tested my bonds. These were by no means so secure as those that Aithor's men had put upon me, for the Zaperazh had assumed that my strength was no greater than that of a man. While the eyes of the audience were fixed upon the bounding, whirling, stamping dancers, I put forth my full strength and broke the thong holding my wrists. Waiting a moment for circulation to return to the members, I then grasped the thong around my ankles and snapped it, also.

Then I began levering myself slowly along the ground, a few digits at a time, towards the entrance to the cave. In the dim light, none observed as I slithered around behind one horn of the crescent formation in which the Zaperazh sat.

When I thought it safe, I rolled over and got to hands and knees. I had almost reached the exit when a child saw me and set up an outcry. A woman turned at the sound and screamed.

Before any could lay hand upon me, I bounded to my feet and ran out the entrance. Behind me, the cave seemed to boil as the entire tribe scrambled up to pursue me.

I sped out the cave and through the tent village. As I passed a fire, near which a pile of flesh from my horse was stacked, I had the wit to snatch a steak from the pile before speeding off into the night.

Had the ambient air been warm, I should have easily escaped from the Zaperazh. My strength and my night vision gave me an advantage over Prime Planers that was usually insuperable. The cold of this height, however, soon slowed me down to no more than a Prime Planer's speed.

Behind me, a swarm of cave men ran in pursuit, setting up a view halloo as my scales reflected the light of their torches. I bounded down the rocky slop, swerving to right and left in an effort to shake them off. But they were fast and hardy as human beings go. The swarm of torches, like a flight of luminous insects, came bobbing after me no matter which way I ran. In fact, they gained upon me. With every stride, I slowed as the cold took hold of me.

Had I known the terrain better, I could doubtless have given them the slip by some ruse; but I did not. Closer and closer they came. If I turned at bay, I could slay two or three, but then I should learn what it was like to be slowly hacked to death by crude weapons of stone and glass. And this, I was sure, would not at all give satisfaction to Madam Roska and the Syndicate, which I was obligated to do.

An arrow whistled past me. Desperation at last spurred my sluggish wits.

Making sure that they saw me, I changed color to the palest shade I

could—a pearly gray. Then I angled off to the right. When they were pelting after me and yelling in anticipation of an easy triumph, I leaped down a bank that stood athwart our path. As I vanished momentarily from the sight of my pursuers, I changed my color to black and ran along the foot of the bank to the left, perpendicular to my former direction.

In a trice, the mob of Zaperazh poured down the bank and went on in the direction they had been running. I trotted lightly off in my new direction, taking care not to spurn stones and make a clatter. By the time the tribe discovered that their pale-gray quarry was no longer in sight and came to a halt, shouting and waving their torches, I was beyond their grasp.

BY DAWN, I had found the footpath through the Needle's Eye and was on my way down the northern slopes of the Ellornas towards the steppes of Shven.

During my captivity and flight, I had been inclined to agree with the taverner Hadrubar's unfavorable view of the Zaperazh. As I walked down the trail in the rosy light of dawn, taking a bite now and then from the slab of horsemeat, I achieved a more rational view. The Zaperazh had merely acted in the normal manner of Prime Planers, who instinctively divide up into mutually hostile groups. Each member of such a group regards all other groups as not fully human and therefore as fair game or legitimate prey. These divisions can be formed on any pretext—race, nation, tribe, class, belief, or any other difference that will serve.

Having, as they thought, a grievance against the Solymbrians, the Zaperazh had, by the normal workings of the human mind, taken a hostile attitude towards all Novarians. Since I was working for a Novarian government, they placed me in the same category. The fact was not that the Zaperazh were "murthering savages" in distinction to the civilized Novarians, but that all human beings had a touch of "murthering savage" about them, however they disguised it by a veneer of civilized manners and custom.

IX. CHAM THEORIK

FOR THREE DAYS I plodded over the flat, grassy, windswept steppes of western Shven without seeing a sign of human life. In fact, I saw no animal life, even, save birds and a few antelope and wild ass far off. I had long since finished the horsemeat and had no means of getting more food, since the wild animals were too swift even for me to run down and I had no missile weapon.

Lacking food and water, I was weakening when my tendrils picked up a hint of dampness. I stood at gaze, testing the air, and set off in the direction indicated. In half an hour I found a water hole, surrounded by a few small trees. The water was largely mud, but I did not let that stop me. Luckily, we demons are proof against nearly all the diseases of the Prime Plane.

I was still sucking up muddy water when the sound of hooves aroused me. As I arose, the horseman spurred his beast to a gallop. He was a big man, similar to the Shvenite mercenaries whom I had seen at Ir. He wore a bulbous fur hat, a sheepskin coat, and

baggy woollen trousers tucked into felt boots. His blonde beard blew in the wind.

I held up my hand and cried in Shvenish: "Take me to your leader!" This was one of several phrases that I had memorized before setting forth. Time and a good instructor had been lacking for a complete course in the language.

The horseman shouted something like *"Yipi!"* and continued his charge. As he came, he unfastened a coil of rope that hung from his saddle and whirled a noose on the end about his head.

Evidently, the man intended to snare me with his lariat, as Aithor's robbers had done in the Green Forest, and drag me along the ground. Not relishing such treatment, I braced myself. As the loop came whirling towards me, I spring into the air and caught the rope in my claws. As I came down, I dug in my heels and threw myself backwards.

The results were astonishing. The rider was prepared to pull me off my feet and drag me, but the unexpected tug from my end jerked him out of the saddle, to fall on his head in the grass. The horse halted and fell to grazing.

I hastened to the fallen man. When I turned him over, I was still more astonished to find him dead. The fall had broken his neck.

This put a new complexion on things. The man's garments would furnish me with some insulation against extremes of temperature, for the midday heat of the steppe nearly prostrated me and the cold of midnight froze me almost to immobility. I therefore adopted the man's fur hat, sheepskin coat, and felt boots. The trousers I gave up because of the discomfort of cramming my tail into them. I also adopted the man's weapons and his flint and steel.

The horse I essayed to catch. Repelled by my looks and odor, it moved away as I approached. At the same time, it seemed reluctant to leave the neighborhood of the water hole. I pursued it round and round the clump of trees in a circle; but, weak from hunger, I could not catch it.

Then I bethought me of the lariat. I had never practiced the art of casting nooses, and the first time I tried it I only wound the rope around my legs and sent myself sprawling. Several hours of practice, however, enabled me to make a fairly good cast up to twenty feet. By this means I succeeded at last in getting close enough to throw the noose over the horse's head. Then I led it back to the water hole and tethered it to a tree.

The dead man I ate, rejoicing in being able to cook my repast for a change. Some Prime Planers would be horrified and deem me a mortal enemy of mankind, but I cannot take their illogical and inconsistent tabus seriously. The man had brought about his own death by attacking me. His soul had presumably gone to that Prime Plane afterworld, where everything is done my machinery. If he had no more use for his body, I certainly did.

Knowing men's peculiar feelings about the devouring of their own kind, however, I buried the dead man's remains. It would be hard enough to engage these barbarians in a rational discourse without giving them an additional reason for hostility.

Then I mounted the horse and steered it northwest. According to the map I had once possessed, this was the way to Cham Theorik's horde. One

could never be sure, because every few sennights the tribe packed up and moved in search of new grass for their flocks and herds.

On the second day from the water hole, I sighted another rider on my left. He was headed in a more northerly direction than I, so that our courses converged. Like the first nomad, he wore a fur hat and a sheepskin coat.

As the man and I neared each other, I waved. Here, I thought, was he who should show me to the horde's present encampment.

The man waved back, and I thought I had made a friendly contact. When we drew nigher, I called in my rudimentary Shvenish:

"Sir, would you please direct me to the camp of Cham Theorik?"

We were now about twenty or thirty paces apart. Evidently the man was near-sighted, for only now did he appear to notice that the face under the fur hat was not that of a fellow tribesman after all. His eyes widened with horror, and he shouted something like: "Aroint thee, vile demon!" He pulled the bow from his bow case and fumbled with the arrows in his quiver.

I had a bow and a quiver, too, but never having practiced archery I had no hope of hitting him before he skewered me. Moreover, I wanted a guide, not another corpse.

My next actions were quite out of character. Had I stopped to plan them rationally, I am sure that I should have abandoned the scheme as rash and foredoomed. I had never even practiced the maneuver, which were difficult at best. But as we demons say, luck often befalls the fearless.

I jabbed my horse's flanks with the sharp corners of the heavy iron stirrups, which the Shvenites employ in lieu of spurs. As the beast bounded ahead, I swerved towards the mounted Shvenite. While the latter was still nocking his arrow, I swooped within a few feet of him. Then, doing as I had seen Madam Dulnessa do in Bagardo's circus, I threw myself up on my hands, gripping the saddle bow, and brought my feet up under me. In a trice I was standing erect on the back of the galloping horse.

If I had had to go any distance, I had surely fallen off this precarious perch. By this time, however, the two horses were almost in contact. I sprang from the saddle on which I stood to the rump of the other horse and slipped into the riding position just behind the other rider. I grasped his neck with both hands, driving the ends of my talons into his throat beneath his beard, and shouted in his ear:

"Take me to your leader!"

"I will take you!" he cried in a strangled voice. "Only pray cease digging your claws into my neck, lest you open my veins and slay me!"

I let him continue on his course. The poor fellow did not realize that I was as weak with terror at my own recent daring as he was at my unfamiliar aspect.

THE MOVABLE CITY of the Hruntings reminded me of the camp of the Paaluans and even of the village of the Zaperazh. The houses, however, differed from either of these, being made of sheets of felt spread on hemispherical frameworks of poles. Around this mass of gray domes, areas were marked off for special purposes, among which I noted horse lines, an archery range, and a park for war

mammoths.

The nomads and their females and young swarmed about the mass of felt tents, among which were also placed hundreds of large four-wheeled wagons. As my captive guided his mount through the spaces between these obstacles, he and the other nomads kept up a running fire of shouts. My man cried:

"Keep off! Stand back! Interfere not, or this thing will slay me!"

In the midst of the tent city stood a tent of double size, with a clear space around it. Before it rose a pair of standards bedight with horsetails, human skulls, and other emblems of nomadic sovranty. A pair of Hruntings, in cuirasses of lacquered leather, stood guard before the cham's tent; or rather, were supposed to be standing guard. One sat with his back to one of the standards and his head bowed on his knees, asleep. The other sat with his back to the other standard; while not asleep, he was idly spinning a little wooden top with thumb and forefinger on the hard soil before him.

At my captive's shout, both sentries hastily rose. After an exchange of words with my captive, the sentry with the top clumped into the tent and soon returned to say that the cham would see me forthwith.

I leaped down from the horse and walked towards the entrance. My captive also dismounted and started for me, drawing his sword and yelling threats. I half drew my own blade, but at this point the sentries intervened. They pushed him back with the shafts of their spears; I left them shouting and entered.

Part of the oversized tent had been partitioned off as an audience room. As I came in, the cham and two more guards scrambled into official positions and assumed expressions of dignified sternness. The cham sat on a saddle placed on a block of wood to hold it clear of the floor, thus giving visitors the impression of the fearless leader of intrepid horsemen. A guard in fancy dress, with squares of gilded brass sewn to his leathern cuirass, stood on each side of the cham with spear and shield.

Cham Theorik was an elderly Hrunting, as tall as I and hugely fat, with an enormous white beard curling down his chest. He wore a purple robe embroidered with silken patterns from far Iraz. Golden hoops, chains, and other gauds larded his neck and arms.

As instructed, I got down on all fours and touched my forehead to the carpet, remaining in that ungraceful pose until the cham said: "Rise! Who are you and what do you want?"

"If," I said, "Your Terribility could furnish an interpreter of Novarian, since I know little Shvenish—"

"We speak Novarian, also, our good—we cannot say 'our good man,' now can we? Ho ho ho!" Theorik slapped his sides and guffawed. "In fact, we are told we speak it perfectly. So we will proceed in that tongue."

Actually, the cham spoke Novarian with such a thick accent that I could not understand it much better than I could his Shvenish. I did not, however, deem it prudent to offer my opinion. I related the circumstances of my visit to Shven.

"So," said Theorik when I had finished, "the money-grubbing Syndicate wants us to save them from the fruit of their own avarice and poltroonery, eh? Or so you say. Where are your credentials, and where is the

Syndicate's offer in writing?"

"As I have told Your Terribility, the cave men of the Ellornas took all my papers when they captured me."

"Then what proof have you?" He wagged a fat forefinger. "We have a short way with people who try to deceive us. They are apt to find themselves with sharp stakes up their arses, ho ho ho!"

By a mighty effort of thought, I found a solution to this latest snag. "Great Cham, before the invasion, a few hundred Hruntings served Ir as mercenaries. After the battle, these men marched off to their homeland. Some will remember seeing me in Ir."

"This shall be looked into. *Rodovek!*"

"Aye, sire?" said an official-looking Hrunting, issuing from a curtained doorway.

"See that Master Zdim be lodged in a style proper to an ambassador. See also that he be guarded against attack from without—or against escape from within. If he turn out in sooth to be an ambassador, well and good; if not, ho ho ho! Now then, Master Zdim, you shall return hither at sunset, when our chieftains and we hold a drunken tribal council. We shall then discuss your proposal."

"Excuse me, sire, but did I hear you say 'drunken tribal council'?"

"Certes. Know that it is our custom to discuss all at two councils, the first drunken so that thoughts shall come freely and fearlessly, the second sober so that reason and prudence shall prevail. The sober council will be on the morrow. Fare you well, lizard-man; you have our leave to go."

My last glimpse of Cham Theorik on this occasion showed his two guards, with much heaving and grunting, getting him off the saddle he used as a throne.

THE DRUNKEN COUNCIL was held in a pavillion in the open space behind the cham's abode. Unlike the latter, it was a tent of canvas, supported by poles and guys like the main tent of Bagardo's circus. In fact, it had a familiar look. It harbored fifty-odd chiefs and other tribal officials, stinking worse than the Zaperazh.

When I had been shown my place, my table mate on one side was an extremely tall, powerful young Hrunting, with shiny hair the color of gold falling to his shoulders. He was Prince Hvaednir, a nephew of the cham. Since he belonged to the same royal clan as Theorik and was the strongest and handsomest man of that clan, he was considered next in line for the rule of the Hruntings. As he spoke only a few words of Novarian, he and I exchanged no more than polite amenities.

The neighbor on the other side, Prince Shnorri, was short and fat. He, too, belonged to the royal clan. More to the point, he was fluent in Novarian, having studied at the Academy at Othomae. To him I spoke of the familiar look of the tent.

"It is no wonder," said Shnorri. "An I mistake not, this is the same tent that your circus man employeed. When his properties were auctioned, an enterprising trader brought it over the Ellornas and sold it to the cham. He argued that it would hold more diners with less weight and bulk than would one of our traditional round tents of poles and felt.

"The deal caused a great to-do

amongst the Hruntings. Some said: Buy the tent, for it represents progress. Progress is inevitable, and our only defense against it is to keep up with it. Others said: Nay, the old and tried ways are best. Besides, to use essentials from Novaria were to make ourselves dependent upon the Novarians, who would soon, by greed and trickery, reduce us all to beggars. As you see, the party of progress prevailed."

The council began with a dinner. Unlike the Novarians, the Shvenites chewed loudly with their mouths open. Then huge drinking jacks were set out and filled with beer by the women. The cham and his chiefs began guzzling.

The time arrived for toasts. The Shvenish custom differs from the Novarian. Novarians drink to others whom they would honor; the honored one remains seated and abstains while his dinner mates rise and drink to him simultaneously. A Shvenite, on the other hand, stands up, boasts of his prowess, and drinks to himself. For ensample, one burly fellow with a broken nose stood up, belched, and declaimed as follows:

"Who has led the foremost in every battle? I, the fearless and invincible Shragen! Who slew five Gendings single-handed at the battle of the Ummel? I, the mighty and valorous Shragen! Who won the inter-clan wrestling tournament in the fifth year of Cham Theorik, on whom may the gods ever smile? I, the fierce and redoubtable Shragen! Whose sense of honor has never failed him? Mine, that of the noble and virtuous Shragen! Can any warrior compare with the peerless and well-beloved Shragen? Nay, and therefore I drink to my own magnificence!"

Down went a mugful of beer. When the magnificent Shragen had set down, another arose and delivered a similar harangue, which Shnorri translated for me. As we say at home, self-conceit oft precedes a downfall.

AFTER AN HOUR of this, the chiefs of the Hruntings were well into their cups. At last, Cham Theorik hammered on his table with the hilt of his dagger.

"Time for business!" he bellowed. "We have two items only tonight. One is a complaint from the Gendings, that one of our brave heroes has stolen a flock of their sheep. The other is the proposal brought from Ir by the demon Zdim—that dragonny-looking fellow yonder, between Shnorri and Hvaednir. First, the sheep. Step forward, Master Minthar!"

The Gending envoy was a middle-aged Shvenite, who told how a Gending had been robbed of fifty sheep by a gang of Hrunting thieves. Cham Theorik questioned Minthar. No, the victim had not seen the rustlers. How knew he they were Hruntings? By his shepherd's description of their costume and horse trappings, and by the direction in which they had fled. . .

After an hour of this, during which several chiefs went to sleep, Theorik ended the proceedings. "Enough!" he roared. "You have produced no competent evidence. If the Gendings need more sheep, they can buy them from us."

"But, Your Terribility, this is a weighty matter to us—" protested the envoy.

Theorik belched. "Begone, wretch! We do not believe a word of your tale. Everybody knows what liars the Gendings are—"

"Everyone knows what thieves the Hruntings are, you mean!" shouted the envoy. "This means another war!"

"You insult and threaten us in our own tent?" yelled Theorik. "Guards, seize me this pestilent knave! Off with his head!"

Guards dragged Minthar, screaming and struggling, out of the tent. A buzz of argument arose among the chiefs. Several tried to speak to the cham at once. Some said that this was the way to treat those treacherous scum; others, that the person of an ambassador should be respected regardless of his message. By shouting louder than the others, one of the latter party got the cham's ear.

"Aye, aye, we see your point," said Theorik. "Well, we will consider the matter again on the morrow, when we are sober. If Minthar merit a more considerate treatment—"

"Cham!" cried my companion Shnorri.. "Minthar will be in no state tomorrow to get better treatment!"

Theorik shook his head in a puzzled way. "Aye, now that you put it thus, I see what you mean. Guards! Belay our last order, about killing—oh oh, too late!"

A guard had just stepped into the tent, holding at arm's length, by its scalp lock, the dripping head of Ambassador Minthar. Theorik said:

"A good joke on us, ho ho ho! By Greipnek's balls, we shall have to think up some excuse or apology to Cham Vandomar. The other item is the proposal brought from Ir by the demon Zadim. . ."

Theorik gave a résumé of my proposal. "At first we suspected some sessor trick," said the cham, "for Zdim brought no credentials or other evidence with him, claiming they had been stolen by the Zaperazh. Several of our men who served in Ir, however, confirm that Zdim was there, in service to a lady of that city. So we are inclined to believe him. At least, it is hard to see what ulterior motive he could have in making so long and arduous a journey by himself. But now let him speak to you in person. His Excellency Zdim!"

By "sessor," Theorik meant a non-nomad, like a farmer or a city-dweller. The nomads use the word as a term of contempt for all men of sedentary occupations.

I had some difficulty in standing up, for Prince Hvaednir had fallen asleep with his golden head on my shoulder. When I had disengaged myself from him, I told the chiefs of the facts, while Shnorri translated. I was circumspect in my speech, having seen what might befall an ambassador who roiled this crowd of drunken barbarians.

The ensuing discussion ran on and on. Because the speakers were now thoroughly drunk, their arguments were also largely irrelevant or unintelligible. At last the cham rapped for order.

"That will be all for tonight, comrades," he said. "We shall come to our deshish—our deshiss—we shall make up our minds tomorrow at the sober council. Now—"

"I crave your pardon, Great Cham, but it is not all!" cried a Hrunting, whom I recognized as the man I had forced to convey me to the tent city. "I was fain not to interrupt your business; but now that is over, I have something to settle with this demon!"

"Oh?" said the cham. "What would you, Master Hlindung?"

"He has insulted my honor!"

Hlindung told of our meeting on the steppe and of my coercing him to bear me to the cham's abode. "So I name him a vile, inhuman monster and will prove my words upon his corrupt and loathsome body, forthwith! Stand forth, demon!"

"What means this?" I asked Shnorri.

"It means you must fight him to the death."

"Cham!" I called. "If this man slay me, how shall I present the proposals from Ir on the morrow?"

"Let that fret you not," said Theorik. "I have heard the proposals, and I am sure that Shnorri as well knows them by heart. Meanwhile, this combat will provide an amusing end to a prolixious evening. How jolly, ho ho ho! Stand forth and take your chances, Master Zdim!"

Hlindung swaggered back and forth in the space before the cham's table. He bore a sword, which he swished through the air, and an iron-studded leathern buckler.

"I endeavor to give satisfaction," I said, "but what am I supposed to fight him with?"

"Whatever you have with you," said the cham.

"But I have nought with me!" I protested. "Your guards disarmed me when they took me into custody, and my weapons have never been returned."

"Ho ho ho, how funny!" roared Theorik. "How unfortunate for you! I cannot order that you be given weapons, for you might hurt Hlindung with them, and then I should have been disloyal to my own tribesman. Come on, push him out, somebody."

My tendrils tingled with the lust of the assembled chiefs to see blood flow. Hvaednir awoke, and he and another seized me by the shoulders from behind and began to push me out from behind the table.

"What if I kill him?" I cried to the cham.

"That would be a fine jest, ho ho ho! Why, nought so far as I am concerned, since you would have slain him in fair fight. Of course, his kinsmen would then be at feud with you and entitled to slay you on sight."

Before I knew it, I stood in the cleared space, facing Hlindung. The latter went into a crouch, holding his shield up before him, and began to slink towards me, making tentative little motions with his sword, on whose blade the yellow lantern light danced.

"But, Your Terribility—" I began, when Hlindung rushed.

Although in strength I far surpassed the ordinary Prime Planer and was more solidly put together, I did not delude myself that Hlindung's sword would simply bounce off my scales. Since the space was cramped, I did the only thing I could to avoid that wicked-looking blade. I leaped clear over Hlindung's head, alighting behind him.

The Hrunting was well gone in drink, whereas I had drunk only a moderate amount of beer. Besides, alcohol seems to effect us of the Twelfth Plane much less than Prime Planers. Perhaps the alchemists can puzzle out the reason.

When Hlindung realized that I had vanished, instead of turning around, he slashed the air where I had been standing. "Witchcraft!" he shouted. "Demonry!"

I sprang upon him from behind, seizing the collar of his jacket and the slack of his trousers with my talons. Then I swung him off his feet and spun

him in a circle, wheeling on my heels. The third time around, I let him go on the upswing. With a scream, he flew against the sloping side of the tent and went right on through. A thump came from outside.

Several Hruntings rushed out. Presently some came back in, saying:

"Great Cham, Hlindung is not badly hurt. He merely broke a leg coming down."

"Ho ho ho!" chortled the cham. "So my brave swasher thinks he can take liberties with beings from other planes, eh? This will teach him. He should be harmless for a few moons. By the time he recovers and can seek a return match, Master Zdim, you will doubtless have found business elsewhere. Cursed clever of you, by Greipnek's bowels! Even if you did damage my tent. To bed, everybody; I pronounce this drunken council ended."

THE SOBER COUNCIL, the following afternoon, was less picturesque but more reasonable, despite the hangovers of some of the chiefs. If fact, some Shvenites displayed reasoning powers that would not shame a Twelfth Plane demon. The chiefs favored an expedition to Ir but boggled at the dragon-lizards.

"The mammoth is a fell weapon," said one, "but the beasts have a craven mislike of wounds and death. Confront them with some outlandish sight and smell, like these dragons, and they are wont to panic and flee back through their own host. This leaves the host in an untidy state."

"We demons," I said, "have a saying: to seek to save oneself is a natural law. But have you no magicians amongst you, to render these monsters harmless?"

"We have a couple of old warlocks, good only for curing bellyaches and forecasting the weather. We brave nomads had rather trust our sword arms than the juggleries of magic."

"If the Paaluans invaded Shven," mused another, "it were simple. Wait for a cold spell, and their dragons—being cold-blooded reptiles—would slow to a halt as the cold stiffened them."

"That gives me an idea, if I may take the liberty of speaking," said I. "I know a shaman of the Zaperazh—if 'know' be the word I want for a man who tried to sacrifice me to their god. He has a cold spell in his magical armory; in fact, they captured me when this fellow Yurog froze me so that I could not move. Now, could we persuade Master Yurog to apply his spell to the Paaluans. . ."

This suggestion met with shouts of approval from the chiefs. "Good!" said the cham. "That is, *if* Master Zdim can enlist this savage in the enterprise. We'll march as far as the Needle's Eye and then see what his powers of persuasion will do.

"Now," he continued, "another matter. We still have no written contract with the Syndicate, and we should be fools to bleed ourselves white on their behalf without a solid agreement. We know those tricksters all too well. We could sacrifice half the nation for them, but if we had no piece of parchment to show, they would say: 'We owe you nought; we never agreed to your helping us.' "

There was general agreement with the cham. Since nearly all Shvenites are illiterate, they have a superstitious

reverence for the written word. Besides, from what I had seen of the Syndicate, I doubted not that the Shvenites' apprehensions of being cozened had a basis in fact.

In the end it was decided that, first, an expeditionary force of five thousand warriors and a hundred mammoths should be sent as far as the Needle's Eye. If I could enlist Yurog, the force would then march on through Solymbria, which would be in no position to resist the trespass, to Ir.

After some chaffering, they and I agreed upon essentially the terms the Syndicate had offered: one mark per man per day, with sixpence a day for each mammoth and a maximum of a quarter-million marks. They insisted on adding a minimum of a hundred thousand marks, to which I acceeded.

Before engaging the Paaluans, however, we should make every effort to get a written promise from the Irians. How this could be done, with Ir surrounded by the Paaluans, would have to wait upon the event. Lastly, Theorik said:

"O Hvaednir, since you may some day succeed me, it is time you learnt the art of independent command. Therefore you shall lead this foray. I shall furnish you with a competent council of war, made up of seasoned commanders, and I advise you to heed their rede."

"I thank you, Uncle," said Prince Hvaednir.

X. GENERAL ULOLA

We marched to the Needle's Eye. Our scouts caught a Zaperazh tribesman, told him that we wished to confer with Yurog, and let him go. Presently, Yurog appeared from among the rocks. A payment of ten oxen to the tribe—five at once and five promised after the campaign—easily persuaded him to join us. As we swayed down the southern side of the pass on the back of a mammoth, the old fellow confided:

"Is nice, being shaman; but me want see civilization, meet great wizards, learn higher magic. After many years, rocky mountains and ignorant cave men is big bore."

At the Solymbrian border, we faced the problem of how to treat the Solymbrians. I told Shnorri:

"Methinks they cannot stop your army on its march to Ir, since they have become disorganized by having a halfwit as archon. But they will soon hold another election, and this time the lot may fall upon somebody more competent. If Hvaednir let his men run wild, robbing, raping, and slaying, you may have to fight your way back through Solymbria after the campaign."

At the next council of war, Shnorri brought up the subject. (I attended these councils as the representative of Ir.) A chief said:

"Who is this faintheart, who would have us treat vile sessors in this delicate, namby-pamby fashion? Out upon him! If our brave lads futter the Solymbrian wenches, it is a favor to the Solymbrians, by infusing our heroic blood into their degenerate veins."

"Even a rat will bite if cornered," said another. "Therefore, I agree with Prince Shnorri. If we push these Solymbrian rats too far, they will surely retaliate. What boots it for us to slay ten of them for every one of us?

That one man who would die is worth far more to us back on the steppe, if war with the Gendings flare up again."

"Oh, bugger the Solymbrians!" said the first. "We shall go through them like a hot knife through butter. Have you forgotten how we sacked Boaktis City in the days of Cham Yngnal, whilst the sessors fled like rabbits before us?"

Shnorri said: "I also recall that, as our force was on its way back across the Ellornas, the combined forces of the Boaktians, Tarxians, and Solymbrians assailed us and recovered most of the loot."

So it went, back and forth, while Prince Hvaednir listened. This young man did not strike me as very intelligent, even when I had learnt enough Shvenish to converse with him. Thus far, however, he had listened attentively to the advice of his chiefs and accepted it when they more or less agreed. At last he said:

"I will follow my cousin Shnorri's advice. Command the warriors to stay on the highway; straggling shall be severely punished. Moreover, they shall pay the price demanded for everything they take from the Solymbrians. Theft and assault shall be punished by the loss of a hand; rape, by castration; murder, by the loss of a head."

There was grumbling at this, and some warriors seemed not to take the command seriously. After one had lost his head for manslaying, however, the rest settled down and obeyed the rules.

At first the Solymbrians fled wildly from the Hrunting army. When they learnt how well-behaved the nomads were, however, most returned to their domiciles. A host of sutlers, entertainers, and whores assembled to minister to the warriors' wants.

From some of these, I learnt that Ir still stood. The news was not new, because all the land roundabout Ir City, for many leagues, was bare of human life. Some of the folk had been captured by foraging parties of Paaluan kangaroo-cavalry and taken back to be eaten. The other dwellers, hearing of the fate of their countrymen, had put all the distance they could between themselves and Ir.

When we marched past Solymbria City—which prudently closed its gates against us—we passed a camp of Irian refugees. We halted for the night in sight of the city, and a delegation of Irians waited upon our commander.

"We fain would join your army in the rescue of our city," they said. Shnorri again translated.

When Hvaednir seemed at a loss as to how to take this offer, Shnorri suggested calling a council of war. This was done. One chief asked:

"How many would you be?"

"Perhaps five hundred, sir."

"How are you armed?" asked another.

"Oh, we have no arms, sir. We fled in too great haste. We thought that your well-stocked army could furnish the arms."

"How many are seasoned warriors?" asked a third.

The spokesman began to look depressed. "None, sir. We are a peace-loving folk, who ask only to be allowed to till our farms and ply our trades." A Hrunting made a sneering remark in his own tongue, but the Irian continued: "Natheless, we burn with patriotic fervor, which makes up for our lack of experience."

A chief said: "I fear that, with such a

covey of fumblers, one might carry out one good charge but hardly a campaign. How are you mounted?"

"Not at all, sir. True, a few brought horses; but these are mere hackneys and farm nags, unsuited to war. We meant to serve as foot soldiers."

Hvaednir spoke up: "We are a completely mounted army. Every man, save the mammoth riders, has at least two horses. What use would a battalion of untrained infantry be to us? You could not even keep up with us on the road."

Several chiefs remarked: "A plague on them! We need no crowd of cowardly sessors." "Aye, they would only be in the way." "Honor demands that we keep the glory of this campaign to ourselves." "Send the lowns packing, Prince."

The Irians could not understand, but they caught the tone and looked sadder than ever. As they prepared to depart, I said:

"Sirs, you know not what you will find at Ir. The Paaluans may have thrown strong defenses around their position. For assailing these, if I read my Prime Plane history aright, your animals will be of no use. You would have to undertake a siege of your own, which is a slow, laborious business.

"Whilst you made your preparations, the Irian refugees could catch up with you. If you lent them a Novarian-speaking officer as drillmaster, he could train them on the road. When the time came to assault a fortified camp, you might find that one soldier afoot is much like another."

There was another outburst from the chiefs. Most of them still objected to arming the Irians, although Shnorri and two others came over to my side. At length Hvaednir said:

"Well, since the arguments are balanced, let us let the gods decide."

He took a coin out of his purse, flipped it, caught it, and slapped it down on his wrist.

"Heads," he said. "The Irians shall be armed and mustered as the demon proposes. I have spoken."

THE WEATHER became hot as, marching through deserted country, we neared Ir. The Hruntings' heavy garments were unsuited to this sultry climate. Men rode with heads and upper bodies bare and then complained of sunburn. (Most Shvenites shaved the scalp save for a braided scalp lock; Hvaednir, vain of his golden locks, was one of the few to wear a full head of hair.) The stout Shnorri suffered especially, the sweat cascading off his rotund body. Sickness became common.

I must say that, when it came to moving an army, throwing out scouts, or pitching and striking a camp, the Hruntings were efficient. The chiefs might be full of fantastic notions of honor, valor, and superiority, but in practical matters they were effective. Hence it did not much matter that Prince Hvaednir was a rather stupid young man. So long as he followed their advice, he could not go very far wrong.

As we neared the Kyamos, our scouts reported that the Paaluans still surrounded Ir City. The Kyamos itself could not be seen from Ir, because of a low ridge between the Kyamos and the little Vomantikon. It was therefore decided to march by stealth and at night to the Kyamos and camp there, in hope that the Paaluans would not discover our presence until we were ready to attack. The cannibals no longer sent their

scouts out on bouncers to range the countryside. I suppose they had given up searching for anything—or rather, anybody—edible, and it had not occurred to them to watch for a relieving army.

One evening, the Hrunting army moved quietly into the valley of the Kyamos, crossed the drawbridge, and camped. The men ate a cold supper, and all would have gone well had not one of the mammoths uttered a shrill, trumpetlike squeal. Several others responded, and within minutes our scouts reported that a body of Paaluans on bouncers were issuing from their camp with torches. The chiefs dispatched a larger force of horsemen to deal with them. The Hruntings scattered the Paaluans and killed most of them, but some got back into the camp.

The cannibals now knew that there was a hostile force nearby, but they did not know what sort of force it was. The chiefs strove to keep them from finding out. They posted pickets along the ridge separating the Kyamos from Ir and sent horsemen to patrol the higher points in the area, day and night. Some Paaluan scouts may have glimpsed our camp, but from too far away to do them much good.

On the second night after our arrival, the war council convened. A chief reported:

"Our scouts tell me that the Paaluan soldiers were busy around their camp all day with picks and shovels, enlarging their fortifications. Some dig pits and plant stakes at the bottom; some set up barricades of sharpened branches; some dig ditches and raise walls. We should attack at once, ere these savages make themselves impregnable."

"Nay!" said another. "We are the world's most dashing horsemen; but stumbling about afoot, we should get ourselves slaughtered to no end. Better to cut off their supplies and starve them out."

"We should starve the Irians to death whilst we were about it," said another.

"So what? When the craven sessors are all dead, we can help ourselves to their wealth."

"That were dishonorable counsel!"

"Comrades!" said another. "Let us keep our minds on the present problem. The Irian foot are but a day's march behind us. If we await their arrival, we shall be better able to storm the cannibal camp. We shall, of course, put the Irians in the first wave. After all, it is their city, so they should not mind dying for it."

And so it went, round and round. At last Prince Hvaednir remarked:

"Comrades, my uncle the cham warned me, ere we departed, against joining battle without a firm agreement on terms with the Syndicate."

"But how shall we agree with the Syndicate," said a chief, "with the circle of Paaluans betwixt us and them?"

"We could go over, under, or through," said a chief, half in jest. "From the amount of bare rock hereabouts, I doubt if a tunnel were practical."

"As for going over," said another, "have we no magician who can fly an envoy into and out of the city? I have heard of enchanted rugs and broomsticks that could carry a man."

Shnorri said: "When I was a student at Othomae, a lecturer told me that such spells had been cast. But only the mightiest wizards could cast them, and

they only with costly preparations, long labor, and the exhaustion of their own strength and powers. We might, however, ask our own magicker, Yurog the Zaperazh."

Yurog was fetched. When the proposal was explained to him, he sighed. "Me no great magician like that. Me just little tribal shaman. Me hope learn stronger magic in civilized countries, but no have chance yet."

Shnorri: "My friend Zdim here, I understand, escaped from Ir through the Paaluan lines by stealth and by his power of changing color. If he did it once, why not again?

The chiefs shouted approval. All eyes turned to me. I said:

"Gentlemen, I endeavor to give satisfaction. I must, however, point out that the task were harder and riskier than before. As we say on the Twelfth Plane, every pitcher goes to the well once too often and gets broken. The Paaluans are raising stronger defences—"

The chiefs drowned me out. "Hurrah for Zdim!" "Zdim shall be our trusted messenger!" "With those claws, he can go over a stockade like a squirrel." "You are too modest, noble Zdim; we will take no denial!"

The council was unanimous. I cast a look at Prince Hvaednir, hoping he would gainsay them; the lad had been showing more independence lately. But he said:

"You are right, comrades. Zdim shall take a contract into the city, get the Syndics' signatures, and fetch it out again. Until he do so, we shall remain here and merely harass the cannibals. I have spoken."

Since I saw no other way to serve Ir as commanded, I accepted the mission, albeit with reluctance. Writing materials were brought. The learned Shnorri inscribed, both in Shvenish and in Novarian, in duplicate, a contract between the army of the Hruntings and the Syndicate of Ir. The terms were those agreed upon at the Hruntings' camp in Shven: one mark a man a day and so on. Shnorri and I signed. Hvaednir made his mark, which Shnorri and I witnessed.

ERE the moon arose, I neared the Paaluan camp. The earthworks on which the besiegers had been laboring presented no great obstacle, because only a fraction had yet been completed. I threaded my way on all fours across the band of broken earth and half-finished works to the main ditch and embankment.

Again I crept into the ring-shaped camp, with my hide a midnight black. I watched, listened, and sniffed for sentries and their ban-lizards. If I say so myself, I moved as quietly as a shadow.

I was halfway across the space between the inner and outer walls and was circling a pile of logs, when I sensed the approach of a sentry. I froze against the logs. Around the corner he came, with a lizard trotting beside him on a leash. He walked past without seeing me.

But his lizard felt my presence. The reptile stopped and thrust out a tongue. Feeling the tug on his leash, the Paaluan halted and turned to see. As he took a step back, his hand brushed against my scales.

The man jerked his hand away, stared into the darkness, and leaped from me with a yell. As other shouts answered him, I started to run, dodging around obstacles towards the inner

wall. In rounding a bend, however, I cut the corner too closely. I tripped over a tent rope and fell sprawling, half bringing down the tent.

I was up again instantly, but in that instant a man appeared with a torch. As I started to run again, something hummed through the air and wrapped itself around my legs, bringing me down once more. It was one of those devices of stone balls whirling on the ends of a cord.

Before I could untangle myself, it seemed as if half the Paaluan army had pounced upon me. Two or three I could have handled, but these fellows clustered about and hung on to my limbs like a swarm of those Prime Plane insects called ants. I bit one in the leg, but that did not stop them from binding my arms and legs with enough rope to have restrained a mammoth.

They even roped my jaws together so that I could not open them. Then they bore me to an inclosure and tossed me in. Several cannibals stood around with spears poised, lest I somehow conjure my way out of my bonds.

I spent several painful, tedious hours thus. At dawn, I was picked up again, carried to the largest tent, and dumped inside before the high command.

THIS was my first chance to see Paaluans closely in good light. They were a tall folk, mostly lean, albeit there were a few stout ones among them. They had black—or at least very dark brown—skins. Their heads were covered by curly mops of black or brown hair, and they wore beards as well.

Unlike the Novarians and the Shvenites, they had no tabu against public nudity. Save for some who wore pieces of leathern armor, and the feather cloaks of the high officers, they went completely naked. Their dark skins were painted with gaudy designs of several colors, red and white being the favorites. Far from concealing their sexual organs, as do most Prime Planers, they painted them in contrasting colors to make them more conspicuous.

They had low foreheads and large bony ridges above their eyes, on which the brows grew, so that their dark eyes seemed to peer out from little caverns. Their noses were extremely wide and flat, with no bridge. The mouths that opened in those great curly beards were very wide.

On a drum in the midst of the tent, surrounded by lesser officers and guards, sat the central figure in this tableau. He had a luxuriant, curly beard, turning from black to gray. Around his neck hung a golden chain, whence depended, below his beard, a large golden plaque or medallion—perhaps his insigne of rank.

Among the attendants was one who looked like a Novarian. He wore Novarian costume, but over it a leathern cuirass of Paaluan pattern.

There was talk, in an unfamiliar language, among these men. They stared at me as they spoke. At last the Novarian said:

"What are you, creature? Can you speak a human tongue?"

Since I still had the rope around my jaws, I could only grunt. The men presently saw my difficulty. With a laugh, one cut the jaw rope.

"Thank you, sir," I said.

"Oh," said the Novarian, "you speak Novarian?"

"Aye, sir. Whom have I the pleasure

of addressing?"

"Charondas of Xylar, chief engineering officer to His Excellency General Ulola, commander of this foraging expedition."

"Sir," I said, "is it not unusual for a Novarian to occupy such a position in this foreign army?"

"Very," said Charondas. "I am now, however, an honorary Paaluan, having changed my allegiance. One must dwell amongst the Paaluans to appreciate their virtues; they are true gentlemen."

"And the gentleman on the drum, I take it, is General Ulola?"

"Aye."

"Well, kindly convey my respects to him, since I speak not his language."

Charondas translated, and the Paaluans burst into laughter. The renegade explained: "They're amused that a prisoner—and an inhuman one at that—should, whilst lying bound by twenty pounds of rope, natheless display such courtly manners."

"They are the manners I was taught on my own plane," I said. "Now, could you please tell me—"

"Look here, creature," said Charondas, "it is for us to question, not you. First, who and what are you?"

I explained. The general spoke, and Charondas asked: "He would know if you are that same ouph who passed through our camp in the other direction, six or seven sennights ago?"

"I suppose I am. I know of no other Twelfth Planer hereabouts."

"This relieves the general's mind; he's been concerned lest the sentry who bore the tale had been suffering hallucinations. And now, what's your purpose in seeking stealthily to mich back into doomed Ir?"

"I am sorry, sir, but I do not think it proper to answer that question."

"We have ways of making prisoners talk," said Charondas.

Just then, an officer came in and handed the general the two copies of the proposed contract between the Irians and the Hruntings, which I had been carrying. After more converse, Ulola gave the documents to Charondas. The renegade unrolled one and began to read it aloud, translating into Paaluan.

When he had finished, there was more talk. Then Charondas said:

"Since these documents tell us what we need to know about your mission, we shan't have to question you. It but remains to decide what to do with you."

He spoke with the general and again to me: "It is decided to execute you, as we do all Novarians we catch. The general says, however, that we shall not eat you, for you might disagree with us. You'll be served to our dragons instead."

"Well, sirs," I said, "you have me in a position to do as you please with me. But if you will pardon my saying so, such an act does seem a bit drastic, when I have only striven to furnish satisfaction and obey my masters' hest."

Charondas translated this remark and the general's reply. The ensuing indirect discussion between me and the general went as follows: "Demon, we have nought against your kind as a whole. But, by working for the Novarians, you have incurred their guilt. You have committed a moral outrage that merits instant death."

"How so, General?"

"The Novarians, like the other folk of this continent, are irredeemably

wicked and therefore should be destroyed."

"What does their wickedness consist of, sir?"

"In making war upon one another. We have looked into the matter and know they are all given to this vile practice."

"But, General, you are currently making war upon them, are you not? Wherein, then, lies your right to judge them?"

"Oh, we are not making war! We are conducting a foraging or harvesting expedition. We harvest a crop—a human crop—and we do it for the simple, normal, wholesome purpose of feeding our people. Since all creatures must eat, this is a natural and hence moral procedure. But to slay men for no good reason is wicked and immoral. Those who practice it deserve no mercy."

"But, General, I am told that the folk of this continent, when they make war, claim to have equally just reasons."

"What reasons? So that some political adventurer can extend his rule over more human beings, or seize their wealth, or convert them to his particular superstition, or kill them off so that his own folk can occupy their land?"

"How about those who defend themselves against such attacks? We demons of my plane do not practice war, but we do recognize the right of self-defense."

"That is a mere pretext. Two of these nations go to war, each claiming the other has attacked it, which is obviously absurd—albeit the most diligent inquiry might not be able to assign the true blame. Besides, if one of these paleface nations defends itself now, you can be sure that it has attacked some neighbor in the past.

"Nay, the only legitimate reason for slaying another human being is to eat him. So the only sensible thing is to round up the whole tractious lot, salt them down, and consume them. Since we Paaluans do not engage in war, we are obviously more moral than the palefaces, and it is therefore right and proper that we should so use them.

"But enough of this, demon. We have sentenced you to death, which is normally by decapitation. Charondas tells me, however, that you demons are of very tough fiber, and an ordinary ax or sword might give you no more than a flesh wound. Have you any suggestions?"

"Yes, General. Commute my sentence to banishment back to my own plane."

"Ha ha, very funny." Ulola spoke to Charondas, who replied in Paaluan. Then Charondas said to me:

"The general has commissioned me to build a beheading machine that shall take care of you, demon. A few hours should suffice. We shall see you anon."

Several soldiers bore me back to the inclosure, dumped me in, and stood guard over me. The day was one of the most unpleasant of my Prime Plane experience, combining apprehension with tedium. None fetched me water or did aught else to alleviate my discomfort. I had no hope of rescue by the Hruntings, since Hvaednir had decided not to move until I brought the signed contract back from Ir.

Under the circumstances, there was nothing else for me to do but sink into a digestive torpor. I was getting muckle tired of being mewed up in this tyrannous manner.

EARLY NEXT DAY, I was dragged out of the inclosure and taken to a place before the general's tent. A gang of Paaluans were putting the finishing touches on Charondas' machine. This consisted of, first, a beheading block of the conventional kind, grooved for the reception of the victim's neck and chin. Fifteen feet away stood a massive wooden framework, in which a log was pivoted at one end. The lower end of this pole was fitted with a short axle, which in turn revolved in a pair of stout uprights. The upper end bore a huge blade, like an ax blade but several times as large. The Paaluan smiths must have worked all day and all night to get this piece of steel ready.

Beyond the pole and its foundation, a tall, three-legged wooden structure provided support for a pulley, over which ran the rope that held the log nearly upright. When the rope was released, the log would fall forward, bringing the blade down on the block—probably with enough force to split it in twain. This engine would have done for beheading a mammoth.

As the Paaluans hauled me to the block and laid my neck across it, I called out to General Ulola, who stood nearby with his officers:

"Sir, permit me to say that I truly believe this to be an unjustifiable and imprudent procedure. Yesterday I lacked the time to marshal my arguments in logical order, but if you will defer this function until I can explain, I am sure I can convince you—"

General Ulola said something to Charondas, who laughed and said to me: "O Zdim, the general wonders at a being who, about to lose his head, can still argue quillets of logic."

Charondas spoke to another Paaluan, who stepped to the tall tripod of timber with an ax. I saw that he meant to sever the rope that held the pole against falling. Ulola raised his arm to signal the ax man.

Before the general could lower his arm, there came a trumpet blast. This was followed by more trumpet calls, whistles, drums, and general uproar. Paaluans ran hither and thither, shouting. Some went by, pulling on their armor. The general, too, ran off. Dragon-lizards waddled past me with armed men on their backs.

Bound as I was, I could not truly see what was happening. From the noise, I inferred that Hvaednir must have changed his mind and attacked the camp.

The noise waxed even louder. I could discern the clatter of weapons and the screams of wounded men. After some time, the racket receded, as if the battle were rolling away from the camp. Had Hvaednir been repulsed?

Then the noise rose again, but from another direction. A few Paaluans ran past. After them came a multitude in the garb of Novarian sailors. They swirled past and out of sight.

A few lingered. One, in an officer's uniform, said: "And what in the nine hells is this?"

"Sir," I said, "permit me. I am a demon named Zdim, in the service of the Syndicate of Ir. To whom have I the pleasure of speaking?"

"Well, what do you here? Oh, I see; the cannibals were about to shorten you by a head. Ho Zarko! Cut not that rope! Come hither and sever this thing's bonds. If it be a foe of the cannibals, it must be a friend of ours."

The sailor cut the ropes that bound me. While rubbing my limbs to restore

circulation, I again asked the name of my rescuer.

"I am Diodis, High Admiral of Zolon," said the officer. I knew that the High Admiral was the chief executive of that island principality. "Explanations were too long for now, and I must forth with my men."

"Sir," said I, "if you will kindly lend me a weapon, I shall be glad to play my part in this affray, since the Paaluans have given me no cause to love them."

"Better not mix it in the front ranks, lest you be slain in ignorance by one of your own side. I have it! You shall stay by me as a bodyguard, eh? Come along!" he barked, and trotted off towards the main gate.

I followed the admiral, who had a brusquely authoritative way not easy to gainsay. We climbed a watchtower that flanked the main gate, whence we had a splendid view. A stream of messengers came and went, swarming up and down the ladder to our eyrie.

BEFORE US, an extraordinary sight was spread out. To avoid confusion, permit me to summarize what I learnt later, piece by piece, about the situation.

Having destroyed the pirates of Algarth, the Zolonian fleet had sailed back to Chemnis to collect their pay from the Syndicate before returning to Zolon. Arriving at Chemnis, however, they found the harbor full of strange-looking craft manned by small numbers of naked black men, who shot arrows at them as they neared. The admiral ordered an attack and soon captured all the strange ships.

The admiral deduced that the main Paaluan force had marched up the Kyamos to attack Ir. So he chose a fleet of vessels of shallow draft, both Zolonian and Paaluan. He loaded them with armed men and brought them up the Kyamos. They anchored at the mouth of the unnavigable Vomantikon and marched up that affluent.

The Hrunting scouts saw this force, and the chiefs sent to demand their purpose. When the nomads learnt that the Zolonians meant to break the siege of Ir, they decided that, if they expected any pay at all for their long march, they needs must attack the Paaluans themselves, before the Zolonians could do so. Although the Zolonian force was small compared to their own, there was a chance that a surprise attack would rout the cannibals. Then the Irians would refuse to pay the Hrunting army one penny, on the ground that they had done nought to earn it.

The Hrunting chiefs were not rash. The five hundred Irians, who had arrived in the camp, were sent out as a decoy force, with a few hundred Hrunting horsemen to protect them from being surrounded. The Irians attacked the camp but let themselves be driven back. Filled with ardor, the Paaluan army poured out of the camp in pursuit—dragons, bouncers, and foot.

As soon as the Paaluans were clear of the camp, Yurog cast his cold spell. Down from the sky roared freezing winds. These not only discomfited the naked cannibals but also slowed the dragons to a gradual stop, like some mechanism that has run down. Now they stood like so many gray stone statues all over the plain, some with one leg lifted for the next step.

Then over the ridge separating the two camps came the rest of the Hrunting army, with its great block of mammoths in the middle. The cold was

nothing to the Shvenites in their furs and sheepskins and to the mammoths in their hairy hides.

Meanwhile, the Zolonians entered the nearly vacant Paaluan camp, sweeping the few cannibals there before them. The sailors passed on out the front gate to assail the Paaluans in the rear.

But the cannibals, for all their strange customs, were fell fighters. Their dragons might be immobilized, their bouncer cavalry be scattered like chaff, their bodies be littering the plain, and they be surrounded and outnumbered. Natheless, the survivors formed a vast hollow square, with pikes bristling on all sides, and stood fast.

From within the square, their archers sent flight after flight of high-arching arrows, and their javelineers cast twirlspears. They beat off charge after charge by foot, horse, and mammoth. Each attack left more bodies piled in front of the steady ranks of the spearmen. The Hrunting horse archers whirled past the square, pouring shafts into the massed ranks. When a Paaluan fell, his comrades closed the gap.

I was surprised that the first charge of mammoths did not roll over the cannibals and scatter them, but then I saw what they did. As the hairy monsters shuffled forward, with leathern sleeves on their trunks to protect them from sword cuts, the Paaluan wizards sent illusions of flying monsters against them. Squealing with terror and shaking their heads, the mammoths turned back.

Beside me in the tower, Admiral Diodis cursed and prayed, while messengers came and went. His speech was disjointed:

"Tell Captain Furio to move men from his left wing to his right!—Zevatas, king of the gods, help thy faithful worshipers—by Vaisus' brazen arse, get *in* there! Get close, so they can't use their pikes!—Franda, mother of gods—Tell Lieutenant Omphes he hangs back; if he bestir himself not, he'll hang *up* later . . ."

THEN ANOTHER force arrived. This was an army of gaunt, pallid men from the city of Ir. They jog-trotted through the Paaluan camp, past our tower, and out on the battlefield. Their trumpets warned the Zolonians to clear the path, and they went through the gap at a run.

The Irians crashed into the hollow square with a fury that nought could withstand. Men climbed over the bodies of their fellows to get at their foes. When their spears were broken, they fought with their swords; when they lost their swords, with their daggers; when these had gone, with nails and teeth. In a trice they had broken the square and were pouring into the interior, spearing and swording Paaluans in the back.

At the same time, another charge by the mammoths got home. The wizards inside the square were too busy being slain to cast another spell. The beasts plowed into the foe, swinging their heads. With each jerk, one or two cannibals would be caught by the huge tusks and sent flying.

The dust became so thick that it was hard to see anything. Little by little, Paaluan fugitives appeared out of the cloud, racing across the plain and throwing away weapons and armor. After them came Hvaednir's horsemen, shooting and spearing.

Of the original seven thousand Paaluans who had marched up the

Kyamos, a little over six thousand were left at the beginning of the battle, the rest having perished in the siege or succumbed to sickness. Of this six thousand-odd, the great majority fell on the field, for no prisoners were taken. A few got away; but, lacking means to cross the Western Ocean, all were hunted down and slain during the ensuing months.

The greater part of the Paaluan losses took place after the Irians pierced the square and the formation began to break up. By contrast, of the nearly ten thousand men that fought against the cannibals that day, several hundred were killed or later died of their wounds. This was a sizeable loss, but still only a small fraction of that of their foes. Such disparity in losses is not, I am told, unusual in battles on the Prime Plane, since a crowd of fleeing men can be slaughtered with comparative ease and safety by their pursuers.

Strictly speaking, one prisoner was taken: General Ulola, who was found wounded on the field. A quick-witted Irian officer stopped the soldiers from killing him as they were doing with other wounded cannibals. Rather than slay him at once, the Irians took the rest of the day to try and formally condemn him.

General Segovian acted as chief justicer. Since Charondas the renegade had prudently disappeared, there was nobody to translate for the general. He made some vehement but unintelligible speeches. My tendrils told me that he was filled with righteous indignation, that he should be punished for doing what he considered only right and proper.

In any case, he was found guilty and, despite his struggles and vociferous protests, placed on the headsman's block prepared for me. An Irian cut the rope. Down came the log, *crash*, and off flew General Ulola's head.

I was sorry in a way. If he had been spared and I could have learnt to communicate with him, there were some interesting philosophical points on the morality of cannibalism, which he had brought up, that I should have been glad to pursue further. After all, I had eaten Prime Planers myself, even if I had never wantonly hunted them for aliment. But then, human beings have no due appreciation of abstract questions.

The battle had another curious consequence. The dragons had been frozen stiff by Yurog's spell, but the spell did not last for ay. Our victorious fighters had all but forgotten the statuesque reptiles when they began to thaw out and move. The commanders at once ordered their men to slay the monsters. This they did to a number; but not a few, no longer under control of their Paaluan masters, fled the battlefield and escaped. Some were hunted down. But I later heard rumors of dragon lizards dwelling in the great Marsh of Moru, in southern Xylar, where the clime may be mild enough to sustain them the year around.

XI. PRINCE HVAEDNIR

I HAVE READ many of those imaginary narratives that Prime Planers compose for one another's amusement, which are called "fiction." We have nothing like this on the Twelfth Plane, being too logical and literal-minded a species to enjoy it. I confess, however, that I have acquired a taste for the stuff, even though my fellow demons look at me

askance as if I had become addicted to a dangerous narcotic.

In these imaginary narratives, called "stories," the human authors assume that the climax of a story solves all the problems posed and brings the action to a neat, tidy end. In a story, the battle of Ir would have been the climax. Then the hero would have mated with the heroine, the villains would have been destroyed, and the leading survivors, it is implied, would have lived happily ever after.

In real life, it is different. After this battle, the survivors continued their lives as before, with the usual ups and downs of fortune. Sometimes they profited from their virtues or suffered for their faults; sometimes the inscrutable workings of fate raised them high or cast them low irrespective of their merits.

Prince Hvaednir was overseeing the care of his wounded after the battle and the merciful cutting of the throats of those who seemed likely to die. General Segovian approached him and spoke, but neither could understand the other. Hvaednir looked around for Shnorri. Not finding him, he sighted me, standing with Admiral Diodis. The admiral was engaged in similar duties. Hvaednir called:

"Ho, Zdim! Come hither and interpret."

"With your kind permission, Admiral," I said. "Prince Hvaednir wants me."

"Is that the Hruntings' commander?" said the admiral. "I'll have a word with him myself."

Presently I was making formal introductions among the three commanders and translating for them. When amenities had been exchanged, Hvaednir asked:

"Can I do aught for you, General?"

"Food," said Segovian. "The Irians starve."

"You shall have it. Admiral, what can we do about this?"

"We have spare food in the ships. How about you?"

"We can match you from the supplies in our camp. But after today, I know not . . ."

"Permit me, Prince," said the admiral. "Your force is full of daredevil riders. Why not send messengers north, east, and south, with word of this victory? Whilst they're at it, they can let it be known that any farmer or produce merchant who wishes a quick profit has but to get a cartload of edibles to Ir ahead of the rush."

Hvaednir made a mow. "Appealing to base commercial lusts is not the way *we* do things, but I suppose you know your Novarians."

The admiral chuckled. " 'Base commercial lusts' forsooth! Sink me if you don't see that they bring results."

Indeed they did. On the second day after the battle, laden asses and creaking farm carts began to arrive from Solymbria, Metouro, and Xylar. How they covered such distances in that time I know not. Some must have driven their beasts all night.

Meanwhile, Hvaednir and the admiral agreed to distribute enough food from their stores to furnish every Irian in the city one good repast. General Segovian said:

"Prince, why come you not into the city ere nightfall, to receive the plaudits of a grateful people?"

Hvaednir glanced down at his armor, covered with dust and blood. "What, looking like this? I mean, my dear sir, I

am too fatigued tonight. Tomorrow I shall be glad to. The food, however, shall go forthwith."

I bid the admiral farewell and accompanied Prince Hvaednir back to the camp. Shnorri, having received a minor wound in the arm, was there ahead of us. Hvaednir clapped his cousin on the back, bringing a yell of pain from the wounded man.

"A murrain!" said Shnorri. "Now you have started this thing to bleeding again."

"I am sorry," said Hvaednir. "I never thought . . . But it was a fine battle, was it not?"

"If we do not have to fight the Gendings within a year, what of our losses," said Shnorri.

"Oh, you are always glooming. Wine! Where in the afterworld are those worthless servants of ours? Ah, there you are! Wine, and speedily!" When the flagon and bottle were brought, he drank deep. "You know, cousin, I like this southern land. Think of being able to drink real wine the year round—none of our weak, sour steppe beer!"

"Novaria in summer is too cursed hot for me," said Shnorri, sweating.

Hvaednir had food for the three of us brought to the tent, but he kept on drinking at a rate that promised trouble. Sure enough, the sun had been down scarce an hour when the golden prince began to utter thoughts that a prudent being would have kept to himself.

"Why in the nine hells," he growled, "should I have to wait around forever for old winter-locks to die, when I could carve out a country of my own? For a beginning, a few hundred stout warriors were enough to seize Ir from these craven money-grubbers—"

"I notice that Segovian's men were no cravens in today's affray," said Shnorri.

"Oh, that! I daresay I could beat some proper nomadic discipline into them. Might even make warriors of them. And why not? Am I not the victor of the greatest battle of our time? The bards will sing of it. By Greipneck's prick, once given a good start, I shall be a greater conqueror than Heilsung the Invincible . . ."

Shnorri said: "Zdim, you had better go to your own tent. I shall see you at daybreak."

Evidently, Shnorri did not wish me to overhear any more of his cousin's indiscretions. I bade them good-night and returned to my quarters, where I sat in thought. It occurred to me that I ought to slip away from the camp under cover of darkness, go to Ir, and warn the Syndicate against Hvaednir's burgeoning ambitions.

When I had come to this conclusion, I discovered that a sentry had been posted at my tent. This did not utterly dismay me, because I foresaw that in the let-down after the battle, discipline would relax. In the normal course of events, the sentry would probably get drunk himself, wander off, or fall asleep. I had only to watch and wait for an hour or two . . .

THE NEXT THING I knew, the dawn sun was streaming in through the flap of my tent and Shnorri was shaking me awake. "Up, lazy-bones!" he cried. "We are about to set out in the grand procession to Ir, to receive the plaudits of a grateful people. You must come with us as interpreter for Hvaednir; I shall have too many other duties."

I shook myself awake. I had slept right through the time when I meant to go to Ir to warn the Irians. Although this was a grave lapse on my part, I had some excuse, having had no proper sleep for two days and nights. I asked Shnorri, who still had one arm in a sling:

"Prince, what about that plan I heard Hvaednir broach last night, of seizing Ir and using it as a base for further empery?"

"Pooh! That was just your sweet Novarian wine talking. I argued him out of such folly. He has solemnly promised me that, if Ir keep faith with him, he will do the same by Ir."

"He seemed like a mild enough youth back in Shven. What has gotten into him?"

"Me thinks yesterday's victory has gone to his head—that, and having his own first independent command. On the steppe, the cham kept him on a tight rein. But I am sure he will be all right."

"Too bad you are not next in line. You are much wiser than he."

"Hush, demon! Such thoughts were treasonable, albeit I thank you for the compliment. Hvaednir is not really stupid—merely spoiled and of commonplace mind—and he is far handsomer than I. This counts among Shvenites. Moreover, he is a better man of his hands than I shall ever be; I am too fat for leading charges. But enough of this haver. Don some garment and come with us."

WE MARCHED across the battlefield, through the Paaluans' camp—already partly dismantled—and to Ardyman's Tower. We climbed the broad spiral ramp and entered the main portal, now open for the first time in over two months. Inside, the courtyard resounded with the clatter of workmen repairing the great mirror, which had been damaged but never quite put out of operation by the besiegers' catapult missiles.

The entire Syndicate, which now included Her Excellency Roska sar-Blixens, met us. Chief Syndic Jimmon—a little thinner but still comfortably upholstered—made a speech. He read a citation from a parchment scroll and handed Hvaednir a symbolic key to the city. These formalities accomplished, Jimmon said to me:

"Hail, O Zdim! You'll have some fascinating tales to tell us when the ceremonies are over, eh? Now, Prince, we have laid out a suitable parade route. We shall march the length of Ardyman Avenue, then turn right . . ."

We marched into the underground city, where the only illumination was furnished by beams of sunlight reflected from mirror to mirror. In front, to the beat of drums, marched a company of Hruntings, armed to the teeth; then Shnorri with a couple of chiefs and several Syndics; then more warriors. Then came Hvaednir, Jimmon, and the rest of the chiefs; then Admiral Diodis and some of his sailors, and so forth. Jimmon walked on one side of Hvaednir and I on the other. Hvaednir had garbed himself in the most awesome costume that the Hruntings' wardrobe afforded. He wore a winged golden helm, a fur-edged white woollen tunic embroidered in gold thread, and a jeweled sword. He could have been one of the Prime Plane's gods.

Having enjoyed their first good meal since the beginning of the siege, the

Irians cheered us mightily. In that confined space, the reverberating sound hurt the ears. I watched for a chance to slip away and warn the Syndics against Hvaednir, but none came.

The parade ended at the Guildhall, which was filled with officers of the guilds and most of the merchant class. For three hours I listened to speeches and translated Novarian to Shvenish and vice versa. Jimmon made the longest one; Hvaednir, the shortest. All speeches were trains of well-worn stock phrases: "Deadly perils . . . gallant allies . . . bloodthirsty savages . . . immortal fatherland . . . doughty warriors . . . hour of need . . . noble ancestors . . . intrepid heroes . . . implacable foes . . . eternal friendship . . . undying gratitude . . ." and so on.

The audience stood and applauded when all was done. Then the Syndics, Admiral Diodis, General Segovian, Hvaednir, Shnorri, and I went to dinner in one of the smaller chambers. So many pressed compliments upon Hvaednir that I was almost kept too busy translating to eat.

Hvaednir ate and drank heartily; especially, he drank. At first he displayed the roynish table manners of the steppe, but as Shnorri kept nudging him in the ribs, he began to imitate Novarian customs.

WHEN IT WAS OVER, Hvaednir cleared his throat and stood up, saying: "Your Excellencies! On behalf of my cousin, Prince Shnorri, and myself, I—ah—I extend heartfelt thanks for this entertainment and for the many honors bestowed upon us this morning.

"Now, however, we must come to practical matters. Your envoy, the worthy Zdim, overcame deadly perils to reach the headquarters of the Hruntings and importune us to send this expeditionary force. Zdim started out with a written offer of compensation but lost his papers to the cave men of the Ellornas. He remembered the terms, however and, after the usual bargaining, an oral understanding was reached.

"When we reached the Kyamos, we dispatched Zdim to gain entrance to the city, confirm this understanding in writing, and return to us with your signatures. Again, misfortune robbed him of the documents, and he came close to losing his life as well.

"All is not lost, however." Hvaednir produced from his embroidered jacket the two copies, somewhat tattered, of the agreement that we had drawn up in the camp the night before the battle. "These were picked up in the cannibals' camp. I am sure that, in recognition of the services of the fearless Hrunting warriors in saving your city, there will be no difficulty about getting you to append your signatures now and to begin payment forthwith."

The smile that usually pervaded Jimmon's round face was wiped off. "Humph. Of course, noble sir, none would dream of withholding a just reward from our heroic feodaries. But may I have the actual terms agreed upon, pray?"

Hvaednir passed one of the two copies to Jimmon. The other he handed to Shnorri, saying: "Read this aloud, cousin, since you speak the language and read with more facility than I."

When Shnorri had finished, Jimmon arose, dangling his reading glass by its ribbon. He launched into another verbose encomium on the valor of the Hruntings.

"But," he continued, "we must, of course, take certain realities into account. The city has suffered dreadfully during this cruel siege, and our resources will be sorely strained during the recovery. It is also a fact that, for all their dash and heroism, the Hruntings were not the only ones to take part in the battle. Admiral Diodis' gallant tars played their role, to say nought of our own Irians.

"And furthermore, noble Prince, it is also a fact that no true legal obligation exists on our part, since the gage in question was not signed before the fact. Of course, with generosity and good will on all sides, I am sure that an amicable settlement can be reached amongst us . . ."

Gods of Ning, I thought, is the fool going to try to wriggle out of paying the nomad, when the latter has him in his power?

" . . . and so, dear friend and noble colleague, I am sure you will agree to the necessity of—ah—adjusting these demands in accordance with realities."

"What had you in mind?" said Hvaednir in a tight voice.

"Oh, something on the order of twopence a man a day, with nought extra for the mammoths. The beasts have after all been eating our fine Irian hay to their hearts' content—"

Prince Hvaednir's face turned crimson. "Horse dung!" he roared. "Last night I promised that, if Ir kept faith with me, I would do likewise; but if not, then not. No brave steppe warrior permits some paper law to stop him from doing right. You welshers are condemned from your own mouths, and be what follows on your own heads!"

He blew a blast on a silver whistle. A score of Hruntings filed into the chamber with bared swords and took positions behind the other diners. Roska screamed.

"One false move, and off go your heads," said Hvaednir. "I hereby pronounce myself king of Ir and of such other lands as may in the future come under my sway. Chief Fikken!"

"Aye, my lord?"

"Pass the word to my chiefs to carry out the plan I laid out for them last night. First, I wish every bit of gold, silver, and jewels in Ir taken from wherever it now is and brought to the Guildhall. I proclaim all such valuables part of my royal treasury. We shall begin by searching those present—ho, where is the admiral?"

There was a general turning of heads, until a Syndic said: "He excused himself, saying he had to visit the jakes."

"Find him!" said Hvaednir. A couple of Hruntings were dispatched on this mission, but without success. Sensing what was coming, the admiral had slipped out of Ir altogether.

The Syndics, bursting with indignation but not daring to complain, submitted to having their purses dumped out on the table. Hvaednir returned to each man the copper coins in his possession but swept the gold and silver into a heap.

"I—I'm sorry," said Roska, "but I left my purse at home."

"We will take care of that later," said Hvaednir cheerfully. "This is but a beginning, my dear subjects."

Shnorri, sweating freely, kept his mouth shut. Hvaednir directed us all to rise and to file back into the main hall, where we had listened to speeches that morning. From outside came the sound

of many running feet and the outcries of Irians as their cave-homes were invaded and searched. Presently warriors began to enter the Guildhall, bowed under bulging sacks of coin and precious objects. They dumped the sacks on the floor, and Hvaednir put the Syndicate's clerks to sorting the loot and totting up its value.

Now and then a disturbance broke out as some Irians resisted the sack. There were shouts and the clang of arms. A couple of wounded Hruntings were brought in, while others reported that the rebels had been slain out of hand.

The Syndics sat in a glum row, guarded by Hruntings. They carried on fierce recriminations under their breaths: "I knew Jimmon's plan would bring disaster . . . " "Rubbish! You were as keen for it as any last night . . ."

Shnorri, who had been talking to some of the chiefs, approached Hvaednir and said: "Cousin, what plan you with our army? You could not settle them all here even if they were willing, and most of them wish to return to Shven forthwith. Summer wanes, and snow will close the Needle's Eye by the Month of the Bear."

"I will call for volunteers to remain," said Hvaednir. "The rest may go home when they list. You, Shnorri, shall lead them. For all I care, you may take my place as heir apparent to Theorik. I shall have my hands full here."

Shnorri sighed. "I suppose I must. I wish now that, when I was offered a post on the faculty of the Academy of Othomae, I had taken it."

HVAEDNIR spent a couple of hours in organizing his rule and appointing cronies to posts. Then he gave a prodigious yawn.

"Madam Roska," he said, "you left your purse at home, I believe. May I impose upon your hospitality?"

"Of a surety, Your Majesty."

"Then lead us thither. You, too, Zdim, lest I be unable to converse with this beautiful lady."

We set out for Roska's house, preceded and followed by bodyguards. Almost at the front door of the house, a groan attracted our attention. A wounded Hrunting lay in the shadow at the side of the street.

Hvaednir commanded that the bodyguards carry the man into Roska's house. Inside, the man was laid on a sofa. As Hvaednir was examining him, he expired.

"He must have been stabbed by some Irian who was not fain to give up his gold," said Hvaednir. "We cannot brook this, but I see not how to find the culprit." He looked puzzled, then said to a guard: "Go, fetch my cousin, Prince Shnorri. I must ask his rede."

The other guards he posted before the house. Roska's servants peeked timidly out through door cracks. Hvaednir lowered his huge form into a chair, doffed his golden helmet and jeweled baldric, and rubbed his forehead.

"By Greipnek's nose, I am fordone!" he said. "I think I will move the capital of the kingdom to some more normal city. Being cooped up in this glorified cavern gives me the shudders."

"Now, about my purse . . ." began Roska, but Hvaednir held up a hand.

"I would not think of raping so gracious a lady of her gold. You may keep your pelf. But may I beg a stoup of wine?"

"Awad!" she called.

The swarthy Fediruni shuffled

timidly into the room. When he saw me, he grinned through his pointed black beard. Roska sent him for wine, which Hvaednir was soon drinking in great gulps.

"I need a friend amongst the Irians," he said abruptly. "I know how many would resent today's events, even though they brought them upon themselves. In time, I hope to show that a king of the noble Hruntings will rule them far more justly than those lucre-loving Syndics."

He gulped down another goblet, then stood up unsteadily. "Roska, my dear, would you care to show me your house?"

"Why, certes, Your Majesty."

"Let us, then. Remain here, Zdim. I needs must practice my few phrases of Novarian on our gracious hostess. If I am to rule them, it behooves me to learn their clack."

Roska took Hvaednir on a brief tour of the living room, pointing out the pictures, vases, and other ornaments. Then they departed up the stairs.

Awad scuttled in and squeezed my hands. "Master Zdim! It is good to see you. The mistress followed your adventures in her scry stone and told us of some of them, but we would hear the story from your own mouth. You'll be returning to service here, I hope?"

"I know not, yet," I said. "I could use a little more of that wine, myself. This is from Vindium, is it not?"

"Aye. And now for the story. You left on the first day of the Month of the Eagle—"

A scream from upstairs interrupted. Since my primary duty was still to Madam Roska, I leaped from the chair and bounded up the stairs, followed by Awad.

Another scream was followed by Roska's cry of "Zdim! Save me!"

The sound came from her bedchamber. Thither I rushed. In the chamber were Roska and Hvaednir, Roska, with her gown torn from her body, lay supine on the bed. Hvaednir stooped over her with one knee on the bed. The prince was trying to hold down Roska with one hand while he fumbled with the fastening of his breeks with the other.

I had read of this Prime Plane practice called "rape," in which a male human being copulates with a female against her will. We have nothing like that on the Twelfth Plane, and I had wondered how certain mechanical problems in carrying out this operation—deemed a crime among most human societies—were surmounted.

Having been commanded by Roska to save her, however, I could not indulge my curiosity by standing back and watching with philosophical objectivity. I leaped to the task without stopping to think out all its logical implications. I sprang upon Hvaednir from behind, fastened my talons in his torso, and pulled him back from the bed.

The man fought free of my grasp, although his tunic and the skin beneath it were badly torn in the process. He fetched me a buffet beneath the jaw that staggered me and would, I daresay, have sent a Prime Planer clear across the room. Then we grappled again. I tried to fang his throat, but he got an elbow under my jaw and held me away.

I was amazed at the man's strength. I had engaged in hand-to-hand combat with Prime Planers before and found

them all comparative weaklings. Not only, however, was Hvaednir a virtual giant among Novarians—taller than I and much heavier—but also his muscles seemed to be of unusually good quality. His physical strength was little if any below my own.

We staggered about, stamping, tearing, and kicking. Neither seemed able to gain a definitive advantage. Then I felt a knife hilt pressed into my hand. I drove the blade into Hvaednir's side, once, twice, and thrice.

The huge Hrunting groaned and jerked in my grasp, and the strength fled swiftly from his frame. As I released him, he slumped to the floor. Behind him, little Awad pointed to the long, curved dagger in my hand.

"Mine," he said.

"I thank you," I said, bending over my fallen antagonist.

A quick examination disclosed that Hvaednir, the would-be king of Ir, was dead. Madam Roska sat up on the bed, pulling a sheet about her nakedness. She said:

"Good gods, Zdim! Why slew you him?"

"What? Why, madam, I heard your cry for help and endeavored to obey your commands. Did you not wish it?"

"Nay! I could not permit him to have his will of me without a ladylike show of resistance, but this! It may cost us all our lives."

"I am sorry, madam, but nobody had explained these quiddities to me. I try to give satisfaction."

"I suppose you do, poor dear Zdim. But my so-called virtue is not a matter of such great moment as all that, since I am a widow old enough to be this barbarian's mother. I might even have enjoyed it after he got under way. Later, as his mistress, I might have guided him for the good of Ir.

"Natheless, that's all by the bye. The pregnant question is: what now?"

I heard the voice of Shnorri, calling: "Cousin Hvaednir! Your Majesty! Where are you?"

"Shnorri is our only hope," I said. "Let me fetch him, pray." Without awaiting arguments, I put my head out the door and called: "Prince Shnorri! Up here! Come alone!"

"Is aught wrong?" said he as his head appeared at the top of the stairway.

"You shall judge, sir. Good or ill, it is of the utmost moment."

When he saw Hvaednir's body, he rushed over to it and confirmed that the man was dead. "Who did this? How befell it?"

"I will explain," I said, standing with my back to the door in case Shnorri attempted to rush out and summon his men. If needful, I should have slain him, told the bodyguards that their commanders were asleep, and fled the city. When I had finished, Shnorri said:

"I might have known the drunken fool would get into something like this. If only he had had a noble mind to go with that splendid body . . . But what now? The warriors will burn you over a slow fire if they find out. I understand your side of it; but the reason is that I have dwelt amongst Novarians and hence am only half nomad in outlook."

"Sir," I said, "marked you that corpse in the living room?"

"Aye, and I meant to ask about it."

I explained about the dead warrior. "Now," I said, "let us do as follows: Tell the soldiers that the lady Roska retired to her room to rest; that the dead man, who was merely stunned and not gravely hurt, recovered con-

sciousness, slipped upstairs, and essayed to rape Madam Roska; that Hvaednir, hearing her outcry, rushed to her rescue; and that in the affray, he and the warrior each dealt the other a mortal wound. Then there will be nobody to blame."

There was some argument over this plan, but none could think of a better. Roska slipped into the adjacent dressing room to make herself presentable. I told Shnorri:

"At least, if Ir be ruled by nomads, you were a better monarch than your late cousin."

"Not I!" quotha. "I shall be glad to get out of this beastly heat and to take the warriors with me, ere they be softened by Novarian luxury. Hvaednir's was a chancy scheme at best. A cleverer man might have carried it off; but then it would have weakened the horde back on the steppe. We shall need every man to confront the Gendings. Help me to carry the dead warrior up to this room, that our story shall hang together."

XII. ADMIRAL DIODIS

I SAID: "It strikes me, Prince Shnorri, that Madam Roska and I had better get out of Ir ere you announce your cousin's demise. You human beings are easily excited by rumors. If some of your men think up a story different from yours, I should not care to be in their power when it happened."

After some small debate, Shnorri acknowledged that we had right on our side. We went down to the living room, where Shnorri summoned a chief.

"Take these two outside Ardyman's Tower," he said, "and lend them horses from the general reserve herd."

A quarter-hour later, we were on our way. "Whither, O Zdim?" said Roska.

"Admiral Diodis, meseems, offers us the safest refuge till these things blow over. If attacked, he can sail down the Kyamos and away."

So it proved. The stout, grizzled admiral welcomed us heartily aboard his flagship. He had already recalled his men to the ships, and the shallow-draft fleet lay anchored well out from shore, so that surprise was unlikely.

Seated on Diodis' quarterdeck, we were served a hot, reddish-brown beverage. The admiral explained:

" 'Tis called 'tea' in its land of origin, which is Kuromon in the Far East. It comes in the form of dried leaves to Salimor, and thence to Janareth in the Inner Sea, and thence by land over the Lograms to Fedirun, and at last to the sea again at Iraz. Let's hope it will some day be for sale in Novaria, too. We need a good drink that won't make us drunk.

"Now, O Zdim, tell us the tale of your adventures."

I launched into my story. After I had been speaking for some minutes, however, I observed that Admiral Diodis and Madam Roska were paying me little heed. Instead, they were watching each other, betimes exchanging some irrelevant comment in an undertone. They smiled and laughed a lot.

At length, this became so marked that I let my narrative trail off while I enjoyed my tea. They never noticed.

The following day, Prince Shnorri and some of his chiefs rode to the water's edge and waved. The admiral and I were rowed in a longboat to within speaking distance.

"Come back to Ir and bid us fare-

well!" said Shnorri.

"Are you packed to depart?" asked the admiral.

"Certes. Fear not; there was no difficulty about the story of my cousin's death, and my own feelings are entirely friendly." Since he spoke Novarian, his chiefs could not understand him.

"We appreciate that," said Diodis, "but this will do as well as any place for a farewell."

"I know what you suspect, but it is not so. At noon I shall light my cousin's funeral pyre and give the command to march. It were worth your while to be there, Admiral, since I understand that Ir owes you money, too. Now were the time to present your reckoning."

"But if you Shvenites have cleaned the city out—"

"We have not. I have taken only so much as was needed to meet Zdim's contract. The balance should suffice for Zolon's claims. Bring a guard of sailors if you trust us not. Or stay on your ships, if you prefer, and take your chances of collecting from the Syndicated later, when gratitude has been weakened by casuistry and self-interest."

"We'll come," said the admiral.

PRINCE SHNORRI thrust a torch into the pyre, atop of which lay Hvaednir's body. As the roaring fire hid the corpse in flame and smoke, the ranked Hruntings burst into sobs. Hardly a cheek among them was not wet with tears. Shnorri said aside to me:

"Come back in a hundred years, Zdim, and you will find that Hvaednir has become the hero of a cycle of legends—the pure, noble, beautiful ideal of the Hruntings. His shortcomings will be forgotten, whilst his virtues will have been exaggerated out of all recognition."

We talked of this and that, and I said: "Pray tell me, Prince, you know Prime Planers better than I. See you that pair yonder, Admiral Diodis and Madam Roska?"

"Aye."

"Well, ever since we boarded the flagship yesterday, they have been acting out of character—at least, as far as I could judge their character—to so marked a degree that I am baffled, who thought myself fairly familiar with the oddities of Prime Plane nature."

"What puzzles you?"

"By herself, Roska sar-Blixens is a grave, reserved lady, of great dignity and presence, even if she be ever changing her mind. Admiral Diodis is gruff, positive, and forceful. Both are, one would say, as mature as one would ever expect of a human being. Yet, when together, they seem as full of careless laughter and foolish remarks as children, and they seem interested in each other to the exclusion of all else."

"It is simple," said Shnorri. "They are in love."

"Ah! I have read of this emotion in my studies, but never having witnessed the phenomenon I did not recognize it. Will they now mate?"

He shrugged. "How should I know? I know not if Diodis already have a wife; or, if he have, whether the laws of Zolon permit him to take a second. I daresay, however, that the old sea dog and your gracious mistress will presently find means to warm the same bed.

"And now we must part. If you ever get to Othomae, tell old Doctor Kylus that I wish I had taken his offer of a readership in the Academy. I know I

am too fat, lazy, and good-natured to be a nomadic warrior chieftain, but the gods seem determined to make me one."

"Could you bear the Novarian summer heat? It seems to undo you."

"Yes, with a summer camp in the Lograms, even that."

"Then, what stops you from riding to Othomae and taking up this academic career?"

"Tribal duty and loyalty, curse them. Fare you well!"

With the help of two warriors, he heaved himself into the saddle. Then he waved to the crowd and trotted off. The squadrons of Hrunting horsemen swung into line behind him, and then went the mammoths and the rear guard. Shnorri might be a fine fellow, but we were all glad to see the last of that formidable host.

The dust of their departure had scarcely settled when the admiral, too, presented his scot for the expedition to Algarth and for his help against the Paaluans. Jimmon and the other Syndics looked aghast; but, thoroughly cowed, they did not dare to risk another clash. They paid. As they were counting out the money in the Guildhall under Diodis' watchful eye, Roska said:

"Everybody's being requited for his part in the rescue save the one man—I mean being—to whom we owe the most. That is my bondservant Zdim."

"By Thio's horns!" cried Jimmon. "We shall be beggared as it is, Roska. If you are fain to reward your demon, nought stops you."

She set her mouth in that expression that, among human beings, betokens stubbornness. " 'Twere only fair that, since all profited, all should share in the recompense. Am I not right, Diodis?"

"Sink me!" said the admiral. "It's no business of mine; but if you insist, my dear Roska, I must own that you are right as always. Perhaps, howsomever, it were well to ask Master Zdim what *he* would like. Don't assume that, like a mere human being, he lusts for silver and gold."

"Well, Zdim?" said Jimmon.

"Sirs," I said, "I seek to fulfill my obligations. But since you ask, what I should most like is to be freed from my indenture, like the other slaves and bondservants of Ir. Then I wish to be sent back to my own plane, to rejoin my wife and eggs. Oh, and besides, I should appreciate a few ingots of iron to be sent with me."

The relief on the Syndics' faces would have made me laugh, had I been capable of that human sound and had I possessed that human quality called a sense of humor.

THE MAGICAL OPERATION was performed in the sanctum of Doctor Maldivius, under the ruined temple of Psaan near Chemnis. Having by his magical arts avoided the cannibals' bouncer cavalry when they were scouring the land for human flesh, Maldivius had returned to his old abode. When I arrived, I was astonished to see another bent, white-haired figure.

"Yurog!" I cried. "What do you here? I thought you had returned to the Ellornas with the Hruntings."

"Me apprentice to Doctor Maldivius. Me learn to be great wizard."

To Maldivius I said: "Is it not unusual for a magician of advanced years to take as apprentice another as old as himself?"

"That's my business, demon," snap-

ped Maldivius. "Yurog does what I tell him, which is more than I can say for the silly young bucks I've tried. Ahem. Now sit on those ingots in the pentacle."

Madam Roska stopped holding hands with the admiral long enough to step forward and plant a kiss on my muzzle. "Farewell, darling Zdim!" she said. "I've returned Maldivius' Sapphire to him to enlist his coöperation. Give my love to your wife and eggs."

"Thank you, madam. I have endeavored to give satisfaction."

Diodis added: "Do you demons need an admiral to organize your navy? I thought some day I should like to take a year off and see some other plane."

"Not practicing the art of war, we have no navies," I said. "But we do have shipping. If occasion arise, sir, I will tell the demons concerned of your interest."

I sat down on the two hundredweight ingots of iron. Maldivius and Yurog began their incantation. Ere the scene faded out, I waved to the several Prime Planers who had come to see me off. I was happy to have been able to keep in touch with these human beings to the end of my stay. Many others with whom I had come in contact, such as Bagardo the Great, Aithor of the Woods, and Gavindos the wrestler-archon, vanished from my ken; I know not what befell them.

I was glad to learn that Ungah the ape-man survived the cannibal war. A Paaluan sentry saw him in the camp and wounded him in the leg with a javelin. He would have been slain, but just then the uproar caused by my own discovery on the far side of the camp distracted the sentry, and Ungah escaped.

He got as far as the border of Metouro, but then his leg became so bad that he could no longer walk. He would have perished had not a local witch-wife taken him in and nursed him back to health. By the time he was able to travel on, the war was over; so he settled down with his rescuer to stay. I was told that she was a singularly ugly woman; but to Ungah she doubtless looked like a female of his own species and therefore just his heart's desire.

PROVOST HWOR looked at the two ingots. "Why the man did you not bring more with you?" he barked.

Expecting praise, I became wroth. "Because this is all their spell would carry across the dimensional barrier!" I cried. "If you like them not, send them back!"

"There, there, my good Zdim, I meant no harm. Yeth will be delighted to see you half a year ahead of time."

"How fared our clutch of eggs?"

"Most of them hatched safely, I hear."

"Then I am off for home!"

A PETITION TO THE PROVOST OF NING, FROM ZDIM AKH'S SON AND HIS WIFE, YETH PTYG'S DAUGHTER: You are familiar with the circumstances of my indenture on the Prime Plane a few years back. Having returned safely to the Twelfth Plane, I thought I should never again wish to see the Prime Plane, so vastly less rational, logical and predictable than our own.

Now, however, that our offspring are of school age and hence independent, my wife and I should like to know if arrangements could be made for us to remove to the Prime Plane for an extended residence. In case the regula-

tions require that an equal number of Prime Planers be moved to this plane to maintain the balance of energy, I know at least two Prime Planers who said they might like to shift to the Twelfth plane. I will undertake to find them and arrange the transfer.

As for gaining my living, I have several plans in mind. For example, I have the name of a professor at one of their institutions of learning, who might have a position for me. After all, I am a trained philosopher and, from what I saw of the Prime Plane, I gather that amongst those folk the science of philosophy is in utter disarray. If that fail, I have other connections and acquaintances. Fear not that I shall be unable to earn an adequate income.

If you wonder why I present this request, know that, despite the hazards and hardships of life there and the rampant irrationality of its people, that world has many fascinations. One never gets bored, as I fear one often does in our well-run world. Something interesting is always happening.

Respectfully yours,
Zdim

—L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

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A.	Total No. Copies Printed (Net Press Run)	69,470	68,480
B.	Paid Circulation		
	1. Sales through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors and Counter Sales	24,024	25,000
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C.	Total Paid Circulation	25,124	26,273
D.	Free Distribution by Mail, Carrier or Other Means		
	1. Samples, Complimentary, and Other Free Copies	105	131
	2. Copies Distributed to News Agents, But Not Sold	44,379	42,407
E.	Total Distribution (Sum of C and D)	25,229	26,404
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G.	Total (Sum of E & F—should equal net press run shown in A)	69,470	68,480

I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.
Sol Cohen, Publisher

VIRGIL FINLAY- a portfolio

Ever since his first work appeared in WEIRD TALES, Virgil Finlay has been considered the greatest of fantasy illustrators. The following samples—from our own pages —amply demonstrate this.

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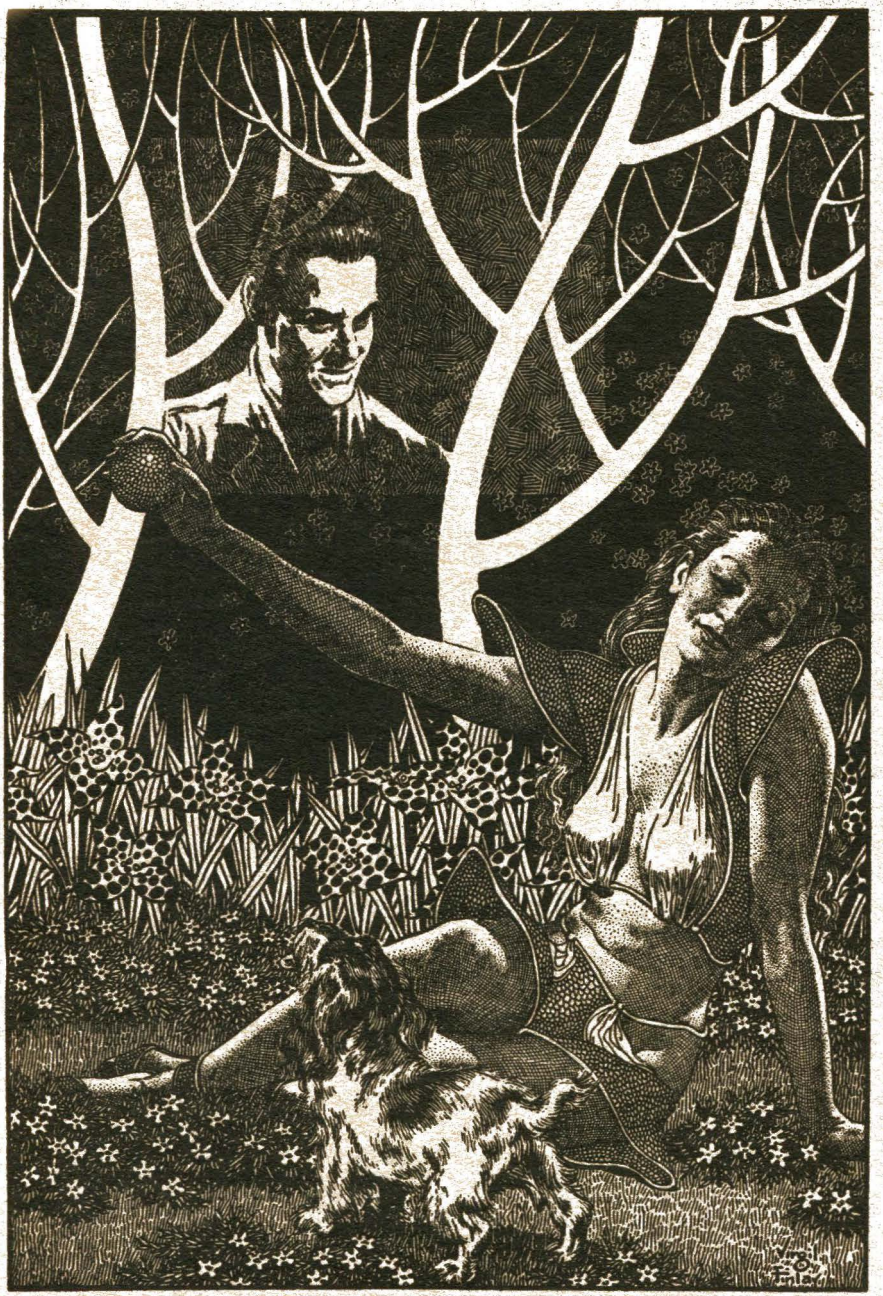


Virgil
Finlay

This is the ad the Racing Form refused to print!

Winning at the Races May No

Here I sit, trying to write about Larry Voegele. And all the while I'm working and sweating, the guy I'm writing about is out at the racetrack. Not a worry in the world—and probably making more money in a day than I make in a week.

What's his secret? *He knows how to beat the races. Really* knows. Knows so much that he runs a school for handicappers. (It's the only one of its kind in the world. Which is why he was asked to appear on "What's My Line.")

He charges his "students" two hundred bucks apiece. He tells them that if they're not completely satisfied he'll return every cent they've paid, and *nobody* has ever asked for his money back.

What's more, he went on a *live* radio show and did something that had never been done before. The interviewer really threw it to him: asked him to pick the winners in the 7 races that were being run at Santa Anita, while the program was on the air. Two out of seven would have been good enough to show a profit. Three would have been phenomenal. Larry Voegele picked *five!*

If he'd been at the track betting, say $20 on each race, he would have picked up a cool $404...net profit! Not bad for an afternoon's "work." And all the knowledge that Larry publicly *proved* that day... *every* fact that he teaches in his $200 course... is in his book.

If you've never bet on a horse in your life, you'll read and enjoy every word. And end up understanding more than most guys who have been following the ponies all their lives.

If you're an oldtimer, you'll skip the background and get right down to the nitty gritty. If you can forget what you *think* you know, if you have the nerve—and the *discipline*—to follow his methods to the *letter*, you could make more money than you ever dreamed possible.

Why? Because you'll *know* more than 95% of the people who go to the track—and you're betting against *them!* The money they lose, *you'll* win! The track and the state take their cut, but there's plenty to go around.

At Santa Anita, for example, over *two million dollars* is bet every day. And it's a statistical fact that only one out of 20 walks out a big winner. You can be one of them!

Larry Voegele doesn't look like a racetrack tout. He's not. He's a college graduate. He was the editor of a newspaper. He was a legislative assistant to a congressman.

He was a stockbroker, working for a major Wall Street firm. *Was* because he found out that investing in horse races was *safer*—and more profitable—than trying to beat the Bulls and the Bears at their own game.

And that's the secret of his book. He approaches handicapping as a *professional. It's scientific.* No "hunches." No "tips." No so-called "systems." It isn't even "inside information." Just simple, hard *facts.* Facts that *anyone* could see if they knew what to look for. In short, if they knew what Larry Voegele knows—and tells in his book.

t Be Your Idea of Fun, But . . .

It'll take you about an hour to read it. Another hour to practice what he preaches.

Then if you do *exactly* as he says, step by step . . . if you don't get reckless or greedy . . . you'll be on your way to the kind of life you want.

Is that worth a 2-hour nvestment? Because that's all you're r sking. Just time. Not money.

Here's why: your check or money order will *not* be deposited for two weeks *after* your copy of the book is mailed. That'll give you plenty of time to receive your book, read it thoroughly, and put the principles into *action.*

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But there aren't many people who can afford that kind of money. Even for a sure thing. So what do you think about 10 dollars? That's all—10 dollars. And you have something *better* than a money back guarantee. Because your check or money order won't even be cashed unless—and until—you decide to keep the book because it's worth a *lot more.* Winning at the horse races, traveling first class and living in the best hotels may not be your idea of fun. As for me, I think it sure beats working for a living. See you at the track.

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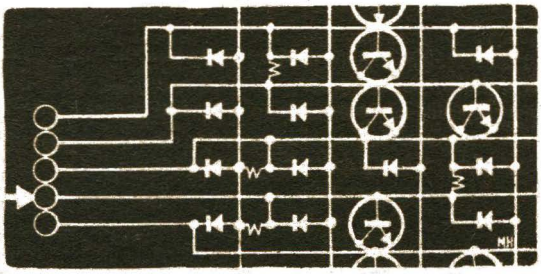
SF in Dimension



THE SEARCH FOR SENSE (1947-1957)

WE HAVE SAID that the explosion of the atomic bomb marked a coming of age for science fiction. It did. Sf had all the uncertainty of any youngster who has just reached his majority, and the Bomb confirmed sf's coming to intellectual maturity. In a real sense, sf felt that it had demonstrated its power, that it was responsible for ending this long terrible war.

As Hugo Gernsback had put it so long before: "The time has already come when scientifiction makes science. The author who works out a brand new idea in a scientifiction plot may be hailed as an original inventor years later, when his brain-child will have taken wings and cold-blooded scientists will have realized the author's ambition."

Gernsback was vindicated. Science fiction had won the war.

Like Kipling's Butterfly Who Stamped, scientifictionists were dizzied by their own power. Atomic bombs! Bazookas! V-2 rockets! Which of their words might be literalized by cold-blooded scientists next?

There was a hot gaiety to the moment. Alva Rogers, in his history of *Astounding,* says, "As was to be expected, the December [1945] 'Brass Tacks' was devoted almost entirely to letters about the bomb and atomic energy. And, as was also expected, Campbell got a bit carried away in his predictions in answering a couple of letters: To one letter writer who thought, 'We'll be on the moon before 1960,' he replied: 'Personally, I think you are over conservative. I'd say we should reach the moon by 1950.' To another, he said: 'First sale of *Astounding* on the moon by 1955, I'm betting!' Also in 'Brass Tacks' was a letter from Theodore Sturgeon in the form of a Norman Corwin style dialogue entitled 'August Sixth 1945,' which asked the questions, 'Who buys this crap?,' 'Who writes this crap?,' 'Why do you read this crap?' and answers them in heroic measure. It's rather pretentious, but really not bad when you consider the heady excitement the science fiction editor, writer, and fan was [sic] experiencing in those first days following the disclosure

that man had finally unleashed atomic energy."

But very shortly, sf began to gag on power. When sf had time to consider itself in this new magical role in which the words it spoke altered the fabric of the world, it was less happy. What did it dare say? What evils might it loose with a careless word? Like Heinlein's character in "By His Bootstraps," sf was shaken by a glimpse of the transcendent, and it did not recover for more than ten years. In the meantime, it sought responsibility.

The results of the Bomb—the real results of the Bomb, after the elation had passed—became apparent in sf a year later. Science fiction was sorely troubled. There was a split, a bifurcation into the highly imaginative and the highly realistic, that was a repetition of the uncomfortable situation of 1942-1944. But there were several differences. The split was deeper this time, and it lasted much longer, from late 1946 until 1950. And, more important, during the earlier troubled days of the war, *Astounding* had still contained all the best work of the field within itself, both the realistic and the imaginative. Not so, now. In the late Forties, John Campbell came to reject the highly imaginative and *Astounding* became a narrower place than it had ever been before under his editorship. *Astounding* abdicated its previous role of leadership.

The "success" of Hiroshima—or the trauma, and the need to atone for this literary invention—led John Campbell far astray from the real business of sf into futurology. In 1946, Campbell said, "Atomic bombs and radar, robot bombs, and radio-controlled planes, were all perfectly predictable. The function of science fiction is to consider what these inventions can, or could, do to people." In 1953, he was saying, "I consider that speculation is as essential to the safety of a civilization as insurance policies are to the safety of a family." In 1959, he was still saying, ". . . *Astounding* . . .has, for twenty years [the approximate period of his editorship] been the non-escape literature that seeks to meet the problems of tomorrow in the only possible way—'git them before they git you!'. . ."

No one ever asked Campbell what necessary place *fiction* had in this process of predicting the problems of tomorrow, preparing for them, and bombing them flat with pre-emptive air strikes. Campbell spent the rest of his life shuffling through various unorthodoxies, from Dianetics to dowsing, seeking another success. Heinlein has defined serendipity as digging for worms and striking gold. Campbell lost himself in the unserendipitous process of sorting worms in search of gold.

The results of his mistaken reading of sf—the Campbell Delusion, if you like—were immediately bad for *Astounding*. The demand for prediction from Campbell coupled with a deep uncertainty about the future. The Bomb gave sf the screaming horrors. As in the darkest days of the war, future history was not a viable possibility, this time because the most likely future that sf could foresee was one in which the Bomb would go off again and again until nothing was left. Story after story, particularly in *Astounding*, must com-

pulsively show an unstable near future suddenly smashed flat, as in the Kuttner and Moore novel, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow (Astounding,* January-February 1947—under the name Lewis Padgett), or "E for Effort" by T.L. Sherred (*Astounding,* May 1947), or "Thunder and Roses" by Theodore Sturgeon (*Astounding,* November 1947). Over and over again: Bang! Blackness punctuated by unholy fire... Curtain.

The whole of Sturgeon's introduction to another story of atomic disaster, "Memorial" (*Astounding,* April 1946), in his 1948 collection, *Without Sorcery,* is:

"It could happen. It really could.

"It might happen. It really might.

"It can be stopped. It's up to you."

Recall Sturgeon's excitement when the Bomb was exploded.

Much of what was not Bomb-fiction in *Astounding* was realistic and didactic. It might keep a concentrated gaze on the present, as in Wilmar H. Shiras's "In Hiding" (November 1948), and its sequels, gentle accounts of child geniuses avoiding the public eye. Or it might be ironic and sensationalistic, as in Lewis Padgett's biter-bitten story, "Private Eye" (January 1949), in which for lack of anyone clever enough to do the job, the biter bites himself.

Two novels in *Astounding* in these years were exceptions to the general absence of highly imaginative work, Jack Williamson's . . . *And Searching Mind* (March-May 1948—in book form as *The Humanoids*), and A.E. van Vogt's incoherent *The Players of Null-A* (October 1948-January 1949), sequel to the 1945 novel. Other than these, the most imaginative fiction to appear in *Astounding* during the late Forties was galactic space opera, not as limited as the old local space opera of the Thirties, but still confined in its transcendence. No realms. Few aliens, tightly confined. Mostly mundane power—at the outer limit of imaginativeness transcendent mental power, as in James H. Schmitz's appealing "The Witches of Karres" (December 1949).

The other half of the bifurcation of the late Forties was highly imaginative work, but it did not appear in *Astounding.* It appeared in Sam Merwin's *Startling Stories* and *Thrilling Wonder.* It was as headless as Campbell's fiction was heartless.

In the late Forties, there were only a few places left undomesticated where the imagination was free to be wild, but these places were sought out and used. For a brief time, alternate universes were a possibility. They had been used only as locations for strange powers in *Unknown,* but for a few years they served as the places of alien realms—as in Kuttner's *The Mask of Circe* (*Startling,* May 1948)—until the sensible assumption that the laws of other universes would be much like the laws of this one robbed these locations of their mystery and reduced them to the equivalent of space opera settings. H. Beam Piper's Paratime series—perhaps most notably the story "Last Enemy" (*Astounding,* August 1950)—is an example.

And there were other peripheral places, while they lasted. Leigh Brackett's *The Sea-Kings of Mars (Thrilling Wonder,* June 1949—in later

book form as *The Sword of Rhiannon*) was an alien realm story that was set in the remote past of Mars—reached from the firm base of a space opera near-future Mars. And the unimaginably far future of Earth served as the background of several notable stories, like Arthur C. Clarke's first novel, *Against the Fall of Night* (*Startling*, November 1948), and Jack Vance's first book, the Clark Ashton Smith-influenced *The Dying Earth* (1950). Significantly, the conclusion of both books is a rediscovery of man's history, intimating the end of the far future as an unknown alien realm. And in the final paragraphs of both books, men find the promise of rebirth beyond Earth in the stars, to which they will travel.

Some few of these imaginative stories were the best work of the late Forties, but the bulk of them were as escapist as that highly realistic work that could not bear to look beyond the specter of the Bomb at tomorrow. These emotional stories of timeless worlds do not bear close examination. They could find no balance between aesthetic meaning, of which they had plenty, and didactic sense, of which they had none.

The split was not only general to science fiction; it affected the work of individual writers, perhaps most visibly the team of Kuttner and Moore, who were the most consistent source of good fiction during these lean years. In 1945, as Lewis Padgett, they did four stories about mutant telepaths—the Baldies—in a future different from our world, but connected to it—that is, future history. These stories were brilliant, combining aesthesis and didaxis, emotion and thought, meaning and sense, as effectively as one could wish. In normal times, it would seem to have been natural for these future history stories to be followed by others, by the Kuttners and by other writers, just as it would have been natural for Heinlein's path to be followed after 1941. But future history was cut off short by the Bomb and not picked up again until the Fifties. And there were no Baldy stories from the Kuttners from 1945, when the first four were published, until a final story completed the series in 1953.

There were no future history stories from the Kuttners in the interim except one novel, *Fury* (*Astounding* May-July 1947—as Lawrence O'Donnell). Their other work for *Astounding* during the late Forties, particularly their short fiction, was clever, grim, ironic, didactic and realistic—as it had been during the war years. On the other hand, from 1946 to 1949 they wrote no less than seven novels for *Startling* that were aesthetic nearly to the point of silliness. Between the two of them, the Kuttners had the potential of balanced and mature work, but through these schizoid years they could not put it together in single stories. It seems a considerable shame, for if they had been able to invest a minimum of their Lewis Padgett aspect in the highly imaginative novels signed by Henry Kuttner—for instance, *The Time Axis* (*Startling*, January 1949), with its emotionally compelling central symbol of the *axis mundi*—they could have produced durable respectworthy work instead of occasionally affecting potboilers.

The late Forties now seem another period of stagnation, comparable to the

late Thirties, if not so desperately limited. There was at least some good work done during these years, unlike the earlier period. Sf in the late Thirties had run out of horizon, the chief stock of sf in those years, and until it figured out what to do, it could only offer cheap pulp fiction melodramatics. John Campbell rescued sf then by finding new writers and setting them to the necessary business of organizing and defining the supporting symbols of the genre. On the other hand, the writers of the late Forties still had obvious and important work to do, unlike the writers of ten years earlier, but were too bedeviled to do it.

The bedevilment was over by 1950, perhaps simply having been worn away by the passage of time. The job of plausibly detailing the future and the other new playgrounds of speculative fantasy was resumed. Instead of beating its head eternally against the brick wall of the Bomb, sf leaped over the wall. It began to consider the possibility that atomic war just might not come after all. It began to consider the alternative possibility that even if the Bomb did go off, it might not be The End.

It isn't possible to identify one editor, one writer, or one new approach responsible for the change. But we can identify a number of relevant factors. Around 1950, a flood of new talent entered the field or came at last to prominence: Poul Anderson, Ray Bradbury, Algis Budrys, Arthur C. Clarke, Philip K. Dick, Gordon Dickson, Philip José Farmer, Charles Harness, Walter M. Miller, Edgar Pangborn, James H. Schmitz, Robert Sheckley, Cordwainer Smith, William Tenn, Jack Vance and Kurt Vonnegut. The young Futurian talents of the early Forties became mature: Asimov, Blish, Knight, Kornbluth and Pohl. Alfred Bester, a minor writer for Campbell, long absent, returned to science fiction and did work of a flamboyant intensity previously unknown in sf. These men joined the most durable writers of Campbell's Golden Age, most notably Heinlein, Sturgeon, Fritz Leiber and Clifford Simak. Where previously one writer—an E.E. Smith or a Robert Heinlein—might dominate the field of science fiction at any moment, sf now became a guild of masters.

They were encouraged by the large numbers of new magazines, as one pulp line after another turned to sf as their other types of magazines failed. Most influential among them were *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, which began publication in the fall of 1949, and, of more immediate importance in the early years of the Fifties, *Galaxy*, introduced in the fall of 1950. The standards of their editors, Boucher and McComas, and H.L. Gold, were every bit as high as John Campbell's and, if limited, were limited in other directions.

In the hands of these new writers and editors, sf took on a distinctly different character than it had had through the late Forties. Highly imaginative, highly aesthetic novels disappeared. The Fifties had a didactic and realistic bias throughout, but never so strikingly as in the years 1951 and 1952 when even galactic space opera all but disappeared. Isaac Asimov's novels of those years, *Tyrann* (*Galaxy*, January-March

1951—in book form as *The Stars, Like Dust*) and *The Currents of Space* (*Astounding*, October-December 1952), are galactic space opera set in his future history some twenty thousand years or so before the Foundation stories, but they are not very imaginative and offer no transcendent symbols at all except historical forces-beyond-historical forces. Very weak tea. A.E. van Vogt, whose last highly imaginative novel, *The Weapon Shops of Isher*, was published in *Thrilling Wonder* (February 1949), rather than *Astounding* like all his previous novels, stopped producing original sf altogether during the Fifties. The few books he published were expansions or cobblings-together of old material. The conditions his stories depended upon no longer obtained. In the drier, more precise and didactic Fifties, vague mistiness was disallowed.

Startling and *Thrilling Wonder* continued to publish moderately imaginative novels, but these were now space opera or were placed on contemporary Earth, rather than set in the highly imaginative places of previous years. With rare exceptions, sf was not set more than a few hundred years in the future or on a planet not directly reachable from Earth.

If novels were not imaginative, there were still a few imaginative short stories and novelets published, most of them in minor magazines like *Planet Stories*. Damon Knight did have several striking examples in *Galaxy*—"Don't Live in the Past" (June 1951), "Cabin Boy" (September 1951), and "Ticket to Anywhere" (April 1952). And James Blish published two highly imaginative novelets: "Common Time" (*Science Fiction Quarterly*, August 1953), and the brilliant "Surface Tension" (*Galaxy*, August 1952), the story of microscopic Adapted Men living in a pond on another planet, who build a two-inch wooden "spaceship" to cross a spit of dry land to another pool. But these stories were a small minority in their time and moreover were constrained in their imaginativeness. That is, not only were the stories short but the aliens behind the scenes in "Ticket to Anywhere", like the aliens in *2001*, are never revealed, and the scope of "Surface Tension" is, ultimately, no larger than a puddle.

The majority of stories confined themselves to nearer places and times—known space and the day after tomorrow. The powers invoked might be as limited as simple space travel, atomic-warfare-beyond-Hiroshima, or social-power-beyond-social-power just as in *Looking Backward*. Or, in a last attempt to fulfill the original aims of Gernsback, there were occasional stories of the fruits of science and technology. Beyond powers, they might go so far as to have present-day Earth visited by an extraterrestrial or a time traveler. Most stories did not venture beyond these limits.

The new higher standards of style and technique, and the trend to the relatively realistic and the didactic, were confirmed by the first attempts at sf criticism which now began to be written. The critics were almost exclusively sf writers like Knight and Blish, William Tenn and Fletcher Pratt, speaking for their own benefit and the benefit of their fellow writers. As with

almost any other sf innovation, this one initially relied heavily on borrowed materials. Sf criticism operated on the premise that science fiction should be subject to mimetic standards of excellence—no doubt because these were the highest standards available. To the extent that sf began to question itself for the first time and to care about the presence or absence of technique and style and other felicities, the results were a highly desirable addition. This criticism, and the historical account of the development of speculative fantasy presented by de Camp in his *Science-Fiction Handbook* (1953), were a school for the apprentices and journeymen of sf. But to the extent that sf was encouraged to form itself in the image of mimetic fiction, the innovation was less desirable and the apprentices and journeymen misled. Sf had small need of more realism and more didacticism.

The dominating concern of sf criticism from the early Fifties to the present has been for visible coherence. It is a reasonable concern. However, when sf concentrated on the search for sense during the Fifties, it painted itself into a blind corner. The new guild of masters produced many individual stories of high quality, fiction that was the direct fulfillment of the possibilities implied by the innovations of the Golden Age. But in spite of their successes, the Fifties themselves were no Golden Age.

Instead of seeking new territories and developing new symbols, as before, sf turned conservative and concentrated on filling in the territories it had already found with more and more concrete possibilities, and with buffing and polishing its familiar symbols to a high gloss. Mistaking realism for maturity, and the visible intelligible surface of a story for its true subject matter, sf forswore all the wild exotic nonsense of its adolescence in favor of making responsible explicit statements about the ills of the world. The only advance in subject resulting from the essay into realism was a new-found ability to talk explicitly about sex—as in Philip Jose Farmer's "The Lovers" (*Startling*, August 1952)—and religion—as in James Blish's "A Case of Conscience" (*If*, September 1953). Significantly, Sam Moskowitz reports that H.L. Gold was willing to buy "The Lovers" only if it were rewritten and the setting changed from an alien planet in the future to Earth in the present, and Blish says that Gold offered to take "A Case of Conscience" "only if 'there's some way we can get rid of this religious jazz—I run a family magazine.' " *If* was not then a sister magazine of *Galaxy* as it is today. [Larry T. Shaw was the editor at that time.—TW]

In 1950-1952, when the limitations on the aesthetic were at their straitest, strong directly-expressed emotion was, of course, impossible. Except for the intervening development of a wide variety of supporting symbols, these few years were not unlike the nineteenth century. Once again, stories necessarily depended on intellectual and secondary emotional appeals.

For a few years, through 1953, sf was lent a feverish vitality by its intense concentration on the purely didactic. Perhaps because the didacticism of the

Bomb-haunted Forties had been so narrowly limited—and perhaps, also, because of the variety of talented new writers—these years were not a loss to total escapism. But even the full range of didactic sf is limited to indirect expression of the comparatively simple meanings inherent in power and highly concretized aliens. Aesthetic sf is far more subtle. It does not fall into easily identifiable categories unless it accepts unthinkingly the easy convenience of some imaginative symbol complex. Didactic sf, on the other hand, is readily categorizable.

The secondary emotional appeals of didactic sf, for instance, can be tagged as sensationalism, sentimentality, melodrama, and so on. And it would not be unfair to loosely describe *Galaxy, F & SF* and *Astounding* in these years as respectively sensational, sentimental and melodramatic.

Intellectual appeals are as easily pigeon-holed. Irony, satire, twist-endings, mysteries and puzzles.

It is purely an intellectual game to mock human folly. It can be done by drawing an ironic contrast between us—benighted humanity—and beings superior to us, or by satirically projecting our foibles onto inferior aliens or our own degenerate descendants. The early Fifties were loaded with stories about aliens who have solved their atomic problems coming to marvel at us and go *tch, tch* over our backwardness. There were, besides, double ironies, like William Tenn's "Betelgeuse Bridge" (*Galaxy,* April 1951) and "The Liberation of Earth" (*Future,* May 1953), in which superior aliens prove to be our intellectual or moral inferiors.

The Fifties were even heavier in satire. Kurt Vonnegut's first novel, *Player Piano* (1952), which presented a near future dominated by automation inflated to transcendent dimensions, was an early example. But the *typus* was set by Pohl and Kornbluth's *Gravy Planet* (*Galaxy,* June-August 1952—in book form as *The Space Merchants*), which presented a near future dominated by advertising inflated to transcendent dimensions.

In the world of *The Space Merchants,* throat-seizing, head-rattling commercialism runs unchecked. Beverages contain habitforming alkaloids. The ads for one product tie into the ads for the next: "Think about smoking, think about Starrs, light a Starr. Light a Starr, think about Popsie, get a squirt. Get a squirt, think about Crunchies, buy a box. Buy a box, think about smoking, light a Starr." Commercials run nine minutes at a time. Senators represent corporations. Labor is kept in permanent debt to its employers. And on top of the heap sits advertising. As Kornbluth later said, "As I leaf through the book I see that Pohl and I left virtually nothing in American life untransformed, from breakfast food to the Presidency of the United States. I see that with almost lunatic single-mindedness we made everything in our future America that could be touched, tasted, smelled, heard, seen or talked about bear witness to the dishonesty of the concepts and methods of today's advertising."

At the outset, this kind of satire seemed a promising and overwhelm-

ingly responsible road to take. An sf story might say, for instance, that Senator Joseph McCarthy was a bad man. That is, it might kick around a character who closely resembled the senator. And more than a few sf stories, like Blish's *They Shall Have Stars* and Kornbluth's *Takeoff*, did just this in a period when mimetic fiction largely preferred to leave Senator McCarthy to his own devices. But it now seems that the more explicit such an attack was, the more marginal as speculative fantasy was the work, and that responsible statements about the ills of the world all too often proved to be set-ups to confirm liberal cliches. And later, after the liberal cliches had been exhausted, conservative clichés. There is no pleasure in blatantly fixed fights.

Through the Fifties, satire—realistic and didactic stuff by its nature—was a minor industry in sf. In *Galaxy*, it was a major industry, with Frederik Pohl the leading manufacturer. That *Galaxy* continued to concentrate on satire and contemporary realistic stuff in the middle Fifties when the other magazines were tempering their didacticism with at least a minimum of aesthesis may explain why *Galaxy* gradually lost the power and importance that it had had through 1953.

Many short stories in those first years of the Fifties, instead of being ironic or satiric—or in addition—depended on surprise endings. The reader is lulled with apparent realism and then suddenly confronted with a transcendent surprise, like a joy buzzer or a dribble glass. James Blish, who was then keeping score, counted thirteen such stories in seven magazine issues in the first quarter of 1953. He said, ". . . The one-punch story is probably a more serious miscalculation in science fiction than it is anywhere else. How often, after all, do you see a new idea in science fiction which is surprising of itself? Almost never, it seems to me; science fiction readers have had new ideas pulled out of the hat routinely since before 1928, and that 'new' gimmick that the young writer plans to wow us with will turn out, nine chances to one, to have appeared at least five times before." Surprise, when It becomes expectable, is a bore. Practical jokers, when their tricks are played too often, wear out their welcome.

The remaining common categories of didactic sf in the early Fifties were mysteries and puzzles. Puzzles have the form of a detective story, but do not depend on the solution of a crime. Asimov's robot stories were puzzles. So were all the many stories, common in these years, in which a party of Earthmen land on a strange planet where they are faced with a baffling situation which is resolvable in the last page or paragraph with a bit of triumphantly produced esoteric knowledge—invariably information "known since way back in the twentieth century". The problem may be scientific, social, logical, or philosophical. Blish's "A Case of Conscience", with its religious baffler, is a particularly eccentric example.

In the Fifties, sf pushed beyond the esoteric puzzle story to the detective stories that lay behind them, and formal mystery stories with an added

transcendent element began to be published. Asimov did a number of hybrid sf murder mystery stories, most notably *The Caves of Steel* (*Galaxy*, October-December 1953), which featured a robot detective. But even A.E. van Vogt produced one science fiction detective story, *The House That Stood Still* (1950), before he fell silent.

The most striking and successful novels of the early Fifties—Theodore Sturgeon's *More Than Human* (1953) and Alfred Bester's *The Demolished Man* (*Galaxy*, January-March 1952)—while not so unrelentingly didactic as most other novels of their period, which may be a reason for their own comparative success, are still stamped as the product of these years. *More Than Human* is perhaps the most realistically-detailed sf novel ever written. If it were an ultimate virtue for sf to be well-written in the style of mimetic fiction, as early sf criticism would seem to suggest, this book could serve as the final model for modern speculative fantasy rather than as an outstanding example of sf from a limited period. It is, besides being realistic, sensational and sentimental and written to prove a thesis. For its part, *The Demolished Man*—while unusually imaginative for a book from the early Fifties, as well as more flamboyant, compulsive and frenzied than any other sf book except Bester's 1956 novel, *The Stars My Destination*—is also melodramatic, sensational, and caramel. Moreover, it has touches of satire and irony, and it is a formal mystery. In short, the best sf of the early Fifties was overwhelmingly didactic—just like the worst.

The early Fifties did concentrate on future history as no previous period had. It was a natural adjunct to the realism of the times. Sf in these years treated the future as a place not of wonder and mystery, not of imaginative surprise, but of convincing dailiness. For example, *The Caves of Steel*, *The Space Merchants* and *The Demolished Man* all present pictures of life in a New York City of the future, all three extrapolated from the present, and all three as different as one could wish.

Extrapolation is a device for achieving plausibility, not a method for accurate prediction. Heinlein's techniques established in 1941 were now the standard tools of speculative fantasy. Every writer was expected to be able to perform the trick of characterizing a future, and any number of writers—Poul Anderson, James Blish, H. Beam Piper—were engaged through the Fifties in filling in great expanses of time and space with consistent stories. If the writers of these times skimped on transcendence—adolescent flightiness that these new grownups had put firmly behind them—they did their best to do their duty to plausibility and invented supporting symbols prodigiously.

This stuff was not conventional realism. It was not a reflection of present actualities. It was imaginative. But it was imaginativeness so closely defined and interconnected, so tight and self-consistent, so gosh-darn plausible, that it became a kind of realism. There was no more room in this pseudo-realism for the transcendent than there had been in the space opera of the Thirties or in the Village-limited sf of the nineteenth century.

In the middle Fifties, aesthesis crept back into sf. Speculative fantasy remained characterizable as didactic, but it was not purely didactic. There was room for characters whose emotions were shared—at least a little—rather than merely observed.

The one writer of the Fifties who came closest to striking an effective personal balance between aesthesis and didaxis was Robert Heinlein. In these years, he did not lead the field as he had in the early Forties. He was not innovative. But he was beyond question the most skillful master in the guild of sf writers.

The balance that Heinlein managed was peculiarly individual. Heinlein is both a born didact and a born aesthete. He is endlessly didactic about things. He has always been willing to tell what he knows or thinks at great length in his stories. At one point in *Have Space Suit—Will Travel* (1958)—one of the happiest successes in a series of superior juvenile sf novels—he presents eleven consecutive pages of fascinating extrapolation on the care and feeding of a space suit. On the other hand, Heinlein is aesthetic about his protagonists. He is so deeply involved with them that he is unable to judge when they are acting silly or stupidly or badly. This is only a problem and a fault if the reader would judge them silly, stupid or worse. Heinlein tripped on this particular missing stair a few times at the beginning of his career. In his first short novel, "If This Goes On" (a title that is announcement of Heinlein's early sense of the nature of extrapolation), his protagonist, John Lyle, announces at one point: " 'Tell her I am hers to command!' " This is juvenile speechifying, but neither Heinlein nor his character, who wears Heinlein's mother's maiden name, seems aware of it. However, thirteen years later, in 1953, when Heinlein revised and expanded this story for book publication, he was able to separate himself sufficiently from his character to add this didactic afterthought: "It seems flamboyant in recollection. No doubt it was—but it was exactly the way I felt." In the Sixties, Heinlein has broken his neck on this fault. But it was not a problem during the Fifties. His aesthetic heroes were then a rare blessing.

But though sf was somewhat more aesthetic, more emotional, it was not radically more imagainative. Realism as an ideal was not that easily abandoned.

In the mid-Fifties, speculative fantasy was fat and happy. The number of sf magazines had fallen from its 1953 high, but then risen again. And sf was left standing alone, the one survivor of the death of the pulps, its pretensions confirmed once more. It was prospering. More and more sf was being published in book form, both hardcover and paperback. There was a flourishing Science Fiction Book Club. And if there were only occasional extremely exciting stories, the guild masters were producing an sf product of an obviously high average quality.

But the success of these times was as unfirmly based as the success of the Tremaine *Astounding* twenty years earlier, and as doomed to come to an end. The eventual crisis of the late Fifties was every bit as severe as the crisis of

1936 and after.

In retrospect, it seems predictable. The concentration on realism or pseudo-realism in the Fifties was a mistake. Only time-honored transcendent symbols were acceptable. New ones were not invented. Those that were in use were not treated as wild mysterious creatures, but as tame kitty-cats. Only a very few young writers managed to break into publication in these years—Robert Silverberg, Harlan Ellison, Brian Aldiss and J.G. Ballard--and none of them came to immediate prominence. What was desired in the Fifties was variations on standard material, and new writers could not hope to present standard material as effectively as the writers who had first invented it or who had been writing it successfully for many years.

Robert Silverberg, who received a Hugo Award in 1956 as Most Promising New Author, has told us that when he first began to write he discovered that his most original and personal work consistently went unsold, to the point that he abandoned originality and personal investment as an exercise in futility until the Sixties. Even writers like Philip K. Dick, Robert Sheckley and Harlan Ellison, who in the Sixties have revealed themselves as men of eccentric vision, in the Fifties found it necessary to stuff their zigs and zags into conventional boxes and good luck to whatever was still outside when the lids were slammed on.

In the mid-Fifties, *Galaxy* was the narrowest of the major magazines. It remained realistic, didactic and satiric, repeating and repeating itself. It did not even add the aesthesis that made the other magazines bearable. The editor of *Galaxy*, H.L. Gold, was a recluse who found it increasingly difficult to leave his apartment. Writers appealed to his limitations and his magazine became filled with stories like "The Bomb in the Bathtub" by Thomas N. Scortia (February 1957), "Man in a Jar" by Damon Knight (April 1957), and "The Claustrophile" by Theodore Sturgeon (August 1956).

Astounding was not as stifling because it did allow some aesthesis into its pages, but Campbell, too, in these years had a particular hobby-horse to which writers pandered—the story of extra-sensory perception, or psi. In the Forties and earlier, psi was the stuff of highly imaginative fictions, like van Vogt's *Slan*, with its superior telepaths in a foggy future, and Heinlein's "Waldo", with its world-altering power mentally siphoned from another universe. However, as a transcendent power invisible in all but its effects—the purest sort of power there is—psi was made to order for a realistic time like the Fifties. It was rendered suitably plausible by reference to the parapsychological investigations of Dr. J.B. Rhine at Duke University and put to work in the familiar present. Sturgeon's *More Than Human* was but one story of wild talents in our midst among many. But psi only became overwhelming in the pages of *Astounding*. Campbell published articles on psi phenomena and psionics machines, and wrote some himself. And the stories in his magazine repeated his interest. As James Blish pointed out at the time, no less than six out of nine stories in the January and February

1957 issues of *Astounding*, one of them a novel by Blish himself, were about psi. And this was too much of a sameness.

Beyond the narrowness of specific magazines, in the mid-Fifties stories of future history set on Earth became more and more difficult to write because of limitations on transcendence. The future was too well-known. It held no promise of mystery. After 1956, stories of future history on Earth became comparatively rare, and even before then had grown heavily dependent on sensationalism to carry interest. One novel after another, like Knight's *A for Anything* (1956), Vance's *To Live Forever* (1956), and Bester's *The Stars My Destination* (1956), presented a thoroughly kinky society, either decadent or twistedly puritanical, boiling with violence and melodrama.

James Blish's Hugo-winning novel, *A Case of Conscience* (1958), is a particularly interesting example. Book One, the novelet of the same title, originally published in 1953, is a static debate on the nature of a puzzle planet. This was a common style of story throughout the Fifties as sf took inventory of all the planets in its realistic universe. Murray Leinster summed their spirit in the title of a Hugo-winning novelet, "Exploration Team" (*Astounding*, March 1956), and in the title of the collection in which this story was included the following year: *Colonial Survey*. However, Book Two of *A Case of Conscience*, new in 1958, takes place in a mad, decadent twenty-first century society. This strange Earth is unhinted at in the original story—but is quite typical of the productions of the later Fifties. In fact, it is extraordinarily typical, since the world it premises is one that has descended into Eisenhower's bomb shelters—remember them?—and never come up again.

In the mid-Fifties, sf once again began to present galactic space opera—aesthetic if not imaginative stuff. Relatively aesthetic. But just as Campbell had encouraged his writers to rethink the romantic local space opera of the Thirties and concretize it more realistically, now writers returning to galactic space opera, which was thoroughly romantic in the Forties, began to treat it more hard-headedly. Comparison of the series begun by Murray Leinster with "Med Service" (*Astounding*, August 1957) and the series begun by L. Ron Hubbard's "Ole Doc Methuselah" (*Astounding*, October 1947—as Rene Lafayette) demonstrates the difference. Both are about a single human physician, with his alien companion, zipping around the galaxy on medical missions in his personal space ship. But in the later case the emphasis is on medical problems and the alien is pet and guinea pig, and in the earlier the emphasis is on adventure and the alien is servant and inferior-in-residence.

The master of the revived galactic space opera was Poul Anderson. Though he has made frequent excursions into other story types in a prolific career, space opera has been his most common form. Anderson's space opera combines melodrama, contemporary physics and conservative political moralization. His early space opera in the late Forties, like "The Double-Dyed Villains" (*Astounding*, September

1949), which featured a Galactic Patrol that employed chicanery rather than force, was more realistic than was then common. His later work, like "Margin of Profit" (*Astounding*, September 1956) and *We Have Fed Our Sea* (*Astounding*, August-September 1958 —in book form as *The Enemy Stars*) and even more recent fictions, has been moderately to highly realistic. "Margin of Profit", for instance, is about an interstellar entrepreneur maintaining his profits in the face of seizure of his ships by latter-day Barbary Pirates. It's all very tactical. As a sop to tradition—and in keeping with his general conservative orientation—Anderson has frequently included retrospective romance in his stories. His protagonists often linger over the memory of past pleasures—nights once spent under sail beneath a storm-tossed sky, full bottle and willing wench in hand. And they often find romantic morals for their experiences. But nostalgia is didactic. It is second-hand emotion. And the present moments in an Anderson space opera are neither romantic nor emotional. They are a series of problems to be solved.

The new galactic space opera was a dead end. Without active transcendence and without mystery, speculative fantasy is meaningless. Solving the imaginary problems of imaginary space ships becomes a rote exercise in ingenuity, like the invention of computer programs in the absence of a computer solely for one's personal amusement. Melodramatic maneuverings for mundane motives, like the preservation of profit, when divorced from deeper emotions, have less power to command attention than a dog fight.

If sf is only projected realism—as Robert Heinlein still insisted that it was as late as 1957—then it must exist on sufferance. Time and realer realities must kill it dead. If the point of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is not an emotional meaning, if it is to tell us of realities to come, then the year 1984 will see the book ashes blown away on the wind. It will be not-true or it will be less-true-than, and either way it will be nothing.

The point was made in 1957, that very year. In a day when sf was finding less and less that was original to say, because it had disavowed originality, Sputnik was launched and the launching was a profound shock to speculative fantasy. Sputnik was a realer reality than any that sf had ever projected. Moreover, it was a Russian reality rather than the American reality that sf had always proclaimed. And it was clear that realer realities would happen again and again—just as they have. Compare the actual first trip to the Moon with the 1950 Heinlein-scripted movie, *Destination Moon*, which in sf terms was "highly realistic".

Sf had proclaimed that it was realistic and predictive. But when its prediction of space travel came true, it was not applauded. It did not gain a sudden new audience. Instead, the number of sf magazines suddenly dwindled. In 1957, there were 29. In 1958, there were 22. In 1959, there were 15. In 1960, there were 13. In 1961, 11. In 1962, only 7. Sf felt betrayed. But then, why should it have? If realer realities existed, who needed science fiction?

But the idea had already occurred to a few even before Sputnik that perhaps the real nature of sf was not realistic and predictive. Perhaps it was something else entirely. In a lecture delivered four weeks before Heinlein's in the same series in 1957 at the University of Chicago, Cyril Kornbluth, the co-author of an sf novel commenting on the "dishonesty of the concepts and methods of today's advertising", and the author of an sf novel commenting on Senator Joseph McCarthy, presented an involved argument leading him to this reluctant conclusion:

"The science fiction novel does contain social criticism explicit and implicit, but I believe this criticism is massively outweighed by unconscious symbolic material more concerned with the individual's relationship to his family and the raw universe than with the individual's relationship to society."

Kornbluth spoke of social criticism. Social criticism was the assigned topic of the lecture series. And that was understandable in view of the central role that responsible social criticism had played in sf throughout the Fifties. It was the topic of the day. But Kornbluth was really saying far more. It was not only social criticism that was massively outweighed by unconscious symbolic material concerned with the individual's relationship to his family and the raw universe. It was any and every other thing: the Gernsback Delusion—science; the Campbell Delusion—prediction; the Heinlein Delusion—realism.

If Kornbluth is right, then science fiction has never known what it is primarily about. And as is clearly true, it has not. From 1926 to the present, as we have seen, there has never been closer agreement on the nature of sf than that sf exists. And yet sf has always managed to muddle on in spite of not being self-conscious but merely self-aware. But also if Kornbluth was right, science fiction had been concentratedly pursuing a false god throughout the Fifties. It had been massively deluded. If Kornbluth was right—then at what cost these years when sf had believed itself to be a most conscious art and abandoned the unconscious?

—ALEXEI & CORY PANSHIN

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Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet, and addressed to According To You, *P.O. Box 409, Falls Church, Va., 22046.*

Dear Mr. White:

Because I am not one of your more perceptive readers, I am compelled to pose the questions contained herein.

AMAZING is a magazine of "Science Fiction Stories." No mention of fantasy. But FANTASTIC is a magazine of "science fiction *and* fantasy" (my italics).

There is, I realize, a thin line between fantasy and science-fiction; Too, I can see AMAZING as *primarily* an s-f magazine, FANTASTIC as *primarily* a fantasy magazine.

You have mentioned before that you see the sister magazines as having their respective functions. My questions relate to the "science-fiction" in FANTASTIC (if I were writing to AMAZING I would wonder about the "fantasy" or lack of it, there):

Does FANTASTIC carry "science-fiction" when, that month, there wasn't room for that good s-f story in AMAZING, or do you advertise—and carry—science-fiction in FANTASTIC because fantasy doesn't sell alone?

Or, is there a FANTASTIC-type "science-fiction" story that is *different* from an AMAZING-type science fiction story? Are there criteria by which you decide that *this* science fiction belongs in AMAZING, *that* in FANTASTIC?

J. WAYNE SADLER
332 East Adams Street
Jacksonville, Florida 32202

To answer your last question first, no. In general I let my intuition guide me: this story feels right for FANTASTIC; *that story feels right for* AMAZING. *My criteria are different, however, in that I try to put all the "hard science" stories in our sister magazine and the "softer" sf here. To take an example from this issue, Joe Pumilia says he considers "As Dreams Are Made On" to be sf—but quite obviously the "sf" quality lies largely in the background rationalizations. To answer your other questions, no, if I think a story is right for* AMAZING, *it goes there—because in fact there is no "overflow" at all. We receive (and buy) a larger proportion of "soft" sf and fantasy than we do out-and-out sf—a reflection of the fact that damned little "hard science" sf is being written these days, and if there is any overflow, it's in the opposite direction, when I let a story I regard as more "fantasy" than "sf" creep into* AMAZING. *As for the fact that we "advertise" science fiction here, this is more a case of letting potential readers know about the actual spectrum of fiction we publish.* FANTASTIC *actually publishes a broader range of fiction—from swashbucklers like the Conan stories, through sf novels like Anderson's* The Byworlder *and more tradition fantasies like "The Fallible Fiend", to experimental fantasies and satirical stories like "Rod Marquand's Jungle Adventure"—than any other magazine. Our subhead is meant to convey at least an impression of this fact.*—TW

Dear Editor White,

I have just been reading the October issue of FANTASTIC STORIES and my attention was

particularly caught by the letter column discussion in this issue. I realize that by the time you receive this you are tired of receiving comments concerning the financial handling of the Science Fiction World Conventions, and with this in mind I normally would not continue with the discussion. However, Erwin Strauss made a comment which I feel deserves a reaction, and I hope that you'll see fit to bear with me just this once.

Mr. Strauss defended a $10 attendance fee for the convention with the argument that, in effect, since one can see so many people spending ten dollars and more for flagrantly unnecessary affectations, one can assume that a $10 fee is comparatively little expense, and further, that this sum is merely proportional to the higher costs of entertainment today.

I have to admit that for someone who will spend $30 for a beat-up copy of a pulp magazine, ten dollars is as nothing for five days of good times, and further, I have to agree that costs in general for anything is higher these days than, say, in 1939. However, I'd like to point out that the admittance fee is simply a sum paid to allow one to walk into the hotel for a faanish event. It should be stressed that the Worldcon is not quite the same as a film showing where prices are set with the idea in mind to grab from people what they are willing to pay. The Worldcon is not yet a commercial enterprise. The purpose is not to make a profit. In other words, I feel that Mr. Strauss implied that Worldcon fees should be set by the same standards by which competitive entertainment prices are set, and I think this is the wrong point of view.

Also, Mr. Strauss as much as said that since people have generally higher incomes, no one will be crippled by a rather high fee. The example he mentioned in his letter was of "the raggediest kids" spending large amounts at huckster tables. It shouldn't be necessary to make obvious that ten dollars represents a fairly-sized amount to many people; not everyone can look at that amount as if it were nothing.

What I am trying to say is that ten dollars is indeed a high price if conditions for a hobbyist event do not make that fee necessary, and it is erroneous to assume that everyone can casually afford to drop ten bucks.

I support anyone who argues that ten or more dollars represents a valid fee if the money is needed to pay for the convention. However, I feel that as a non-profit event, the Worldcon should require the least possible expense from every individual for participation. I would, in fact, would cheer the Con Committee that made attendance fees non-existant.

In short, I find Mr. Strauss' view indefensible given the reasoning he included in his letter.

If I might, I'd like to take the opportunity to go on to another matter I'm almost certain you don't care to hear more about: comic books. I realize that you may feel that the readership of FANTASTIC wouldn't tolerate more space in the lettercol given to this subject, so I want to have you understand that the following comments are addressed specifically to Ted White, individual, rather that Ted White, editor.

From your comments in your magazines and especially from what you wrote in a letter recently printed in George Proctor's *Citadel*, I understand that you may enjoy comics, but not very much, and you definitely take a grim view towards comics fans in general. I easily accept your point of view, and I thoroughly support your intention of bringing "more objective critical standards to (the comics) field". Sure enough, no one could object to that.

What I hope you understand is that tastes vary greatly, and the psuedo-science and sensationalistic material in comics holds a deep appeal for many people. I don't think you should even imply (as you have) that comics and comics fans are inferior simply because they display traits not to your liking. In the *Citadel* letter, for example, I believe you mentioned the apparent greediness of comics fans and the inability of some to write coherent, correctly-formu-

lated letters (which makes me uncomfortable, somewhat, as may be obvious from the stilted writing in this loc), which is not quite a valid argument to criticize comics fans in general. And the standards you assume important—such as a reasonably valid scientific basis for sf-orientated stories—are not correctly applicable for wholesale condemnation.

I understand that you have repeatedly stated that you are only giving one man's opinion, and I sincerely respect your views. However, I have gotten the feeling that your standards and the strength of your distaste for certain human failings have made you somewhat unreasonable in your conclusions.

As I stated, the above is a comment directed at you as another individual, and I hope that you understand that my intention is only to ask for understanding, or even tolerance.

On that plea, I will end this letter. If you feel I have wasted your time, I apologize. But thanks for listening.

CHARLES T. SMITH
620B Front St.
Brainerd, Minn. 56401

I think you've oversimplified my views. I am not arguing that comics must adopt the critical standards of Great Literature, nor even that they raise their sights above the level of that mythical eight-year-old reader. However, I am only echoing a viewpoint increasingly voiced within the comics industry when I suggest that there is also room for more intelligently-produced comics for an older audience, and that the graphic-story medium is yet to realize its great potential. Bear in mind, please, that in my reviews here to date I have dealt with books, *presumably marketed with an older audience in mind, and not with the 20¢ comics themselves. Nevertheless, I see no reason why illogical or implausible quasi-sf backgrounds are any more justifiable in a story aimed at children than in adult fare. Children are not stupid and the contempt many form for the low level of achievement in comics is a clear indication of this. As for comics fans, they're just people—and you'll recall that in my letter in* Citadel *I stressed my own ambivilence towards comics fandom as a whole. In general, I think that the rampant lust for money among a sizable number of comics fans is demeaning, disgusting, and—to the extent to which it can and has polluted adjoining fandoms—reprehensible. At the same time, the level of creativity attained by some comic fan artists has on occasion exceeded industry standards. In any case, I have many friends among comics fans and pros, and I certainly don't take a "grim view" towards their interest in comics—which I share.* —TW

Dear Mr. White,

Ah, me!

I find myself, as the kind of comic book fan i am, in the position of telling those inside the comics industry how bad it is and what they should do to improve it and telling people outside the industry how good it is and how much it *has* improved over the last 40 or so years. I grew up on comic books—and *The Twilight Zone* and Jay Ward cartoons and *The Ruff and Ready Show*. And i'm a died-in-the-wool comics fan. But since FANTASTIC isn't a comic book or comics fanzine, i'll *try* to be brief in answering some of things you and Denny O'Neil said in the October issue.

I dispute the contention, no matter how it's said, that comic books, per se, are a subliterate medium. Most comics, because of one or more of several reasons (the space limitations of the medium, the fact that comic books *are* primarily for children and secondarily for young adults, the lack of talent of some writers, and the fear or unwillingness of others to use theirs on comics work), are, in most cases, for intelligent adults and some adolescents trash. But i would claim a far higher percentage of good work for the medium than either you or Mr. O'Neil would (although i don't include *Batlash* in that percentage). Whether science fiction or just fantasy, there've been

some very good *literate* comic book strips over the last 15 or so years. Despite their many faults, *The Flash* and *Green Lantern* under Gardner Fox and John Broome, *Hawkman* and *Adam Strange* by Fox, *The Fantastic Four* for its first eight years under Stan Lee, *Iron Man* by Archie Goodwin, *Superman* during the mid and late fifties and the first two years of the sixties, the Marvel fantasy shorts of the late fifties and early sixties, and occasionally *Daredevil* were *good*. At least i think so, and so do actually hundreds of other adult comics and sf fans (and no doubt an sf pro or two here or there who secretly enjoys a Kirby comic along with an Ellison or Zelazny novel). And even some of the golden age strips like *The Justice Society of America* are still read and enjoyed by adult comics and sf fans. No, i disagree that comics are sub-literate *or* that they're only, as Mr. O'Neil says, *potentially* an art form.

Obviously, though, Mr. O'Neil sees the "upgrading" of comic books to a large degree in terms of bringing "relevance" to the medium. Of course, it doesn't work. But while Mr. O'Neil would attribute the failure to the inability of gut-issue stories to survive in an illiterate medium, i'd attribute it to the incompatability of the O'Neil kind of "relevance" and the special kind of fantasy escapism which was the very fabric of the best "superhero" stories of the past 34 years. And i don't think this says anything bad about that kind of "superhero" story.

Gods! I'm a rabid socialist-thinking McGovernite of the first order, and i'm probably bothered by a lot of the same social and political ills Denny O'Neil's bothered by. But sometimes i get so depressed i deliberately search for an escape. And comic books *are*, to the extent no other medium is, escapism. In fact, they have to be; it's intrinsic to their claim to being a legitimate art form. Any attempt to try to fuse the comic book with "relevance" works against both the comic book and the relevant cause which is sought to advance.

And as far as i'm concerned, the "too-good syndrome" is a needless impediment to and a poor excuse for not having good comic books. Certainly writers can try for good comics scripts, and, unless they equate "good" with what Denny O'Neil means by "relevant," they can and at times some have succeed. Writers currently turning out good, literate comic book scripts include Jack Kirby, Mike Friedrich, Nelson Bridwell, Len Wein, and Elliot Maggin.

Rounding out my criticism, i don't see anything to be gained by the overground comic books "learning from" the underground comix, which i consider about 95% pure filth; i view "acceptance" of comic books by "intelligent" non-industry or non-fan critics the same way i view the same with regard to sf (with the exception of the truly knowledgable and unbiased criticism of Darko Suvin and perhaps one or two others); i look upon the original Comics Code as a very *good* and necessary thing and admire National for adopting its own code long before the CCA was established (the National code being as strict or stricter than the original CCA code and which won a reputation as being also a set of guidelines for other, less respectable comics publishers of the forties on what *to* do in their comics); i take note of the fact that Denny O'Neil placed himself in agreement with much of what you said in *All in Color for a Dime* but still tend to agree with Fred Patten that it was—pardon me—just a hodgepodge of hearsay, guesswork, and opinion rather than fact (If i was born in 1951 and don't know first hand what happened anywhere in anything in the 1930's, you, if you'll forgive me, aren't in much of a better position, having been, i would guess, roughly a year old in June, 1938.); and i still believe that a lot of the Superman stories by some of the sf and pulp greats who wrote for the strip at various times were up to their best marks, accumulated paraphenalia or not. In fact, a lot of the Superman mythos was invented by some of those writers. Otto Binder, for example, created Supergirl and Brainiac (as well as Bizarro and red kryptonite). And Jim Steranko has said that Superman writers like Binder, Edmond Hamilton, Dave Vern,

Horace Gold, Manly Wade Wellman, and Alfred Bester served "to hype Superman tales with imagination and verve." And, despite the reputation the Superman series has, i think the junk started to permeate it after 1961, leading the man of steel down the road to contempt and ridicule that was well-deserved after 1961 but not before 1962.

I do want to say something about another feature in the current FANTASTIC. Rich Brown, in an excellent story, speculates that by 1983 there will be only one sf magazine group left, the AMAZING-FANTASTIC-STELLAR group, under the single editorship of yourself. Well, i like to entertain a bit of fantastic speculation myself, and *i* speculate that by 1979 there will be five sf magazines left, all monthly, four from Ultimate Publishing Company, AMAZING STORIES, FANTASTIC STORIES, PLANET STORIES, and THRILLING WONDER STORIES, all under publishership of yourself, with AMAZING and FANTASTIC under the editorship of Alexie and Cory Panshin, PLANET under the editorship of Lester del Rey, and THRILLING WONDER under the editorship of Fritz Leiber, and one other from another company which shall remain transparantly nameless, *Astounding Stories*. But then i'm the same guy speculates that by 1974 the only comic books Marvel i'll be publishing i'll be *The Inhumans, Antman and The Wasp, Spiderman, Iron Man, The Hulk, The Cat, Doc Savage,* and *Conan!*

By the way, "Vampire from the Void" was simply superb and ranking after it but behind "Dear Ted" was "Time Killer." In the latter, there were times when i didn't know just where the author was going, this in a story with such a "worn-out" theme!

LESTER G. BOUTILLIER
2726 Castiglione Street
New Orleans, Louisiana

We could certainly argue about many of the opinions you express here, but agruments over which comics were or are literate strike me as fruitless. I do agree with you, however, that "relevance" and the superhero story are intrinsically at odds with each other—a point I feel I failed to make sufficiently clear in my review. As for the original Comics Code, the code itself may have been "good" and necessary, but it required, among other things, only stories with happy endings, and was administered in such a fashion that it reinforced the popular bigotry of the day. (No, I won't cite chapter and verse here, but I can back up those statements.) Finally, I haven't seen Fred Patten's review of All In Color for a Dime, *but I challenge your characterization of my contribution as "just a hodgepodge of hearsay, guesswork and opinion rather than fact." My date of birth is irrelevant (Patten is considerably younger than I, anyway), but my facts came from a number of both formal and informal interviews with such diverse figures from the industry as William Gaines and Sol Cohen (whose first job was to promote Superman in 1939), and no one in a position of knowledgeability has questioned them.*—TW

Dear Ted,

Cover art work for AMAZING and FANTASTIC has been pretty damn good of late. But inside, *inside*, bleh! I know that art work is traditional and one or two fans even prefer it to good stories. But it should be either dumped or improved. I note F&SF uses very little art and is a superior mag.

Let me use B. Graham's illustration for *Vampire in the Void* as an example. (No reflection on B.G.'s ability in particular, he just happens to be typical of the strain.)

His drawing depicts the silhouette of a man standing hunched over a barren landscape watching an explosion in the sky. But the story is set in a city, not a barren landscape. And the explosion at the end of the story was not in the sky; "With brain stunning speed it elongated (from the ground) toward the zenith . . . There it flowered, a mighty crimson tulip fully 500 feet in height." Also the witnesses were described as throwing themselves flat. The picture in no way began to do justice to Mr. Russell's fine story.

Regretfully, that illustration was typical rather than the exception. Either the art poorly depicts the event or it looks like a stock production which could have been used in any story with the same effect.

The saddest thing is, the art tends to override an author's often beautiful descriptions. Well planned landscapes and characters are reduced by artists to one dimensional parodies. A lot of people are not going to visualize the authors' worlds as anything more than the illustrator was capable of transferring to paper.

I can't help but feel the lousy art is one reason s.f. magazine sales are at a historic low. Many people probably figure the stories aren't any better than the pictures, a logical but false assumption.

All I can think to suggest is that art work be rejected until it approaches excellence. Also, look for artists in other mediums besides comic books. Better still, use those extra pages for a short story.

AMOS SALMONSON
2825 South 211 Street #3
Seattle, Wa. 98188

I think you're being a bit hard on our artists, whose styles and work are remarkably diverse, but in all I think your point is not without merit. An illustration is a window into the story it accompanies and its purpose is to entice the reader into that story. Just how this is to be accomplished depends a lot on the story in question and the artist who must deal with it.—TW

Dear Mr. White:

Your Oct. '72 issue, as usual, was excellent. But for the first time in years, something bothered me. Why are you using the larger type? Doesn't that cut down on the amount of material you can print? Why not use the size print you use on your features throughout the whole magazine, then we could have more fiction. And why the cut in the number of pages in this column?

If possible I would like Fritz Leiber to clear up a few points for me in his excellent and informative review. How long has *The Complete Chronicles of Narnia* been unavailable in the U.S.? I remember back in May of this year it was all over the book stalls and shops across Binghamton. In fact I picked up the first book in the series, not having the money for the complete set. What if I want to complete the entire series, will I have to go to another country like Canada, or is there some sign of it being sold again in this country?

Any information regarding this from Mr. Leiber, or some other person, would be most welcome. Thank You.

A plea to local fans. Is there anyone in the immediate area (Southern Teir) who has a club, or is interested in starting one? Also, does anyone have any info. on local fanzines and/or conventions?

Again any information would be welcome. Thank you.

J.A. NIZALOWSKI
R.D. #2, Berkshire
New York, 13736

The larger type was an error—it was the same point-size as that used by our previous typesetter, but turned out to take up about 10% more space! I believe the error was corrected with our last issue (which I've yet to see). As for your other query, see the next letter.—TW

Dear Mr. White:

As Mr. Leiber highly recommended *The Complete Chronicles of Narnia* in the October FANTASTIC, I request letter space to correct his availability information.

His copies from Puffin Books, Penguin contain a copyright statement "not for sale in the United States." My paperback copies are marked: Collier Books, The Macmillan Company, First Collier Edition 1970, Printed in USA, 95¢ each. The CHRONICLES are still selling well in Chicago. They can also be obtained through Kroch and Brentano's, 29 South Wabash, Chicago 60603.

British publishing legalisms are often pe-

culiar. Many British paperbacks actually selling freely from Chicago stores state at length on their copyright pages that they are absolutely and under no circumstances for sale in the United States. I've never figured it out.

Others say "this book shall not, by way of trade, be lent, recovered, sold, hired out, or otherwise disposed of in any other cover or binding without the publisher's consent." Ha, if I ever want to re-cover and by way of trade or otherwise lend, etc. books for which I've paid, I shall certainly do so without asking anyone's consent.

CHANNIE MURRAY
1726 North Sedgwick
Chicago, Illinois 60614

That stricture I should imagine, is meant to apply to the bootlegging of coverless copies of books which have had their covers torn off and returned to the publisher for credit.—TW

Dear Mr. White;

Want a screw ball suggestion?

Seems to me all science fiction conferences are planned along pretty similar lines. They don't have to be held in hotels, friends.

Ever hear of a fair? How about camping areas? Yeah, I'm suggesting a Science Fiction Festival. Let's not get too rock and roll festivalish about it, else the old timers might not come and the pigs might think we're importing something from the fields of planet Arg and a saucer load of pure Argian mind brinder sauce is on its way. But take the best qualities of fairs and camp grounds and put them together.

I'm not suggesting this as a replacement, just an alternative. Some, not all, conventions could be held outside, in ball parks, astro domes, fair grounds . . . Or way out in the woods even.

Yeah I know I'm crazy. This approach has its own set of problems. But the answers are cheaper, dangnabit. And science fiction circles could use the young blood a set up like that would attract. My granddaddy would have dug it, too.

My convention motto is, "Come as you are, sleep in your car."

AMOS SALMONSON
2825 South 211 Street #3
Seattle, Washington 98188

Dear Ted,

My favorite part of FANTASTIC was Alexei and Cory Panshin's column, *SF in Dimension.* They seem to get a better grip on the theory and practice of SF than many other reviewers, critics, and pseudo-critics.

Too many people put down an author not because of the ideas he puts forth but because they don't like his style of writing or choice of subject (re Sam Lundwall).

The problem with too many critics in SF (and possibly in other fields of fiction) is that they forget Sturgeon's Law and attack the whole in the manner they should attack only ten percent of it (perhaps "attack" is unfair, there are a great many critics who are truly helpful to both reader and writer in their criticisms. Maybe I should use "approach").

The result is that some enjoyable novel that really doesn't ammount to anything but is fun to read is sneered at because it isn't A Great Work Of Art. Remember all the atrocious, B-grade, cliché-ridden juvenile space operas we used to read and love when we were just starting to read SF in Miss Pruneface's third grade class? Because of many critics' ravings, however, we wouldn't dare pick up, much less purchase, these books today unless we cover up by saying that "They're camp" or "I want to see what the younger fen are reading." Bull.

What you need is a "Media" column in which you could have reviews of films, TV, radio, comix, records, plays, etc. without sacrificing the straight book reviewer readers or turning your zine over to (shudder! gasp! cringe!) comix and film fen.

BUZZ DIXON
519 Aberdeen Dr.
Raleigh, N.C. 27610

But when we were in Miss Pruneface's third grade class, happily reading John Keir Cross' The Angry Planet, *who paid any attention to critics?*—TW

Dear Mr. White,

Your recent review of *The Tombs of Atuan* and editorial concerning your own juvenile novel has prompted some thought on my part about juvenile sf these days. Perhaps the rest of the sf world should turn an eye and examine the current phenomenon.

Our library has a copy of *Vandals From the Void*, by Jack Vance, an early juvenile. (The book, that is; not Vance.) It's about interplanetary adventure and space pirates, who are defeated by the Space Navy, with the aid of the teen-age protagonist. Published in 1953, it was one of the earlier attempts of sf writing aimed particularly at juveniles. Ten years earlier the sf in the magazines was still written for and read by both adolescents and adults, and there was little expanding into new publishing areas done during or immediately after World War II, but by around 1950 original hardback sf publishers began to come out, and juvenile sf, among other things, was launched. What has happened to it since then?

Robert Heinlein is one of the main things that happened. From around 1954 up until the early sixties, Heinlein wrote and published about a dozen juveniles, most of which are still in print and selling well today. No one can say that they weren't among the most imaginative and creative sf written during that period; Alexei Panshin is of the opinion that they will eventually be seen as the best and most durable of Heinlein's work. Certainly the main reason for that was that they were not necessarily thought of as being for kids only; they were readable by people of all ages. Several were first published in some of the adult magazines like *F&SF*, and one of them, *Starship Troopers*, went on to win a Hugo.

These books, unfortunately, are still just about the best available in j-sf. There have been no improvements over them for fifteen years. Why is this, when today there are more good writers appearing in print than there *ever* has been before; and what shape is the subject in today?

A good example is *The Many Worlds of Science Fiction*, edited by Ben Bova. This book, just published last year, embodies most of what is wrong with j-sf today. Its roster is comprised of some of the top sf writers today: Ellison, Silverberg, Wolfe, McCaffrey, and others. They were given the wide open field of writing anything that embraces or shows the many worlds of Science Fiction, as could be read and enjoyed by a juvenile. What came out is interesting to note.

Several of the writers simply wrote down to their audience. Not being quite familiar or at ease with writing for young audiences, they either try too hard and bend over backwards trying to contrive a situation that juveniles will find interesting, as Anne McCaffrey did, or not try hard enough and end up with an unimaginative and simplistic story line, as Silverberg did. The only one really at home was Keith Laumer, who's been writing juvenile stories all his career, except that they've been appearing in adult markets.

Some of the writers, like Gene Wolfe and Harlan Ellison, came out with stories that would not have been out of place in any of the sf magazines or anthologies. These were the best stories in the book, for juvenile or adult readers. I don't know whether these stories were written with juvenile audiences in mind, but if so, then Messrs. Wolfe and Ellison know more about what attracts and interests young people than any of the other writers that have been trying to do just that for several years.

Which leads us to Andre Norton. Mrs. Norton has been writing j-sf for many years, has racked up an incredible number of novels, many of which have sold quite well and have been in print for many times the average lifespan for sf books. Unfortunately, her work falls far below what should be expected of the sf writers these days. All her works for young readers are basically of

the same format: simple adventure stories, dealing with the Good Guys versus the Bad Guys (usually Russians or Aliens), and told in a completely standard narrative style, complete with run-of-the-mill suspense gimmicks, ludicrous romance devices, and the bloodless violence you see in G-rated war movies. The mere bulk of their number and longevity show that people read them, but one glance at the current bestsellers' list should convince anybody that quality and quantity don't necessarily go together. Which is true of Norton's work. Competent? Undeniably. Creative? Hardly.

So look at us today. *A Wizard of Earthsea* is probably the best juvenile sf or fantasy story ever written. When you spoke of the failings of *The Tombs of Atuan*, I groaned inwardly, because as flawed as it is, the rest of the j-sf in print today is so much worse it hurts. Top quality stuff, like on the level that was being written for the Ace Specials or Ballentine originals, just isn't being written.

There are exceptions, of course. I haven't mentioned Ben Bova's excellent novels (which are good for the same reason that Heinlein's were; one of them was serialized in Galaxy last year) or James Blish. But these are the exceptions. Why has no publisher's house contacted Panshin, or Zelazny, or Anderson, concerning a juvenile? They pay well enough, and good works would mean the possibility of first serial or reprint rights from regular sf markets. But so far it just hasn't happened.

But it should. I don't have any statistics, but I, and most of my acquaintances, were introduced to sf through juvenile novels we read as kids. Those that are interested in promoting sf should consider introducing it by this means—getting it to bright young readers as they begin to look for reading matter on the library shelves. SFWA, take note! Harlan Ellison, arise! Here's one important aspect of the field that's been virtually ignored.

GREG FEELEY
41727 Murphy Pl.
Fremont, CA 94538

I can't disagree with you on basics, but Heinlein's first juvenile came out in 1947, not 1954; Poul Anderson's Vault of the Ages *was another in the same series of Winston juveniles which included the Vance; Norton is primarily an engaging story-teller who, at her best, can evoke a quality of the sheerly* alien *better than almost anyone, but whose volume of output precludes this happening in every book; and (he modestly said) some of us are writing juveniles to higher standards. Just in from Atheneum for review:* The Farthest Shore, *Ursula K. Le Guin's third Earthsea novel, and one I'm really looking forward to reading. (I'll try to have a review next issue.)*—TW

Dear Ted,

On the whole, FANTASTIC's 20th anniversary looks a great deal more impressive than AMAZING's 45th. A new novel by Avram Davidson, an impressive array of new short stories by well known writers, excellent cover by Jeff Jones, and some of the best interior artwork and layout in a long time (I hope Staton and Roland stay on as regulars). Yes, very very good!

The Conan novella, however, stunk. Now, I'm not opposed to heroic fantasy or sword & sorcery, or whatever you want to call it—in fact, I like some of it (such as Tolkien's and LeGuin's) a great deal. But the plot for this Conan thing is such a dead, tired, worn-out *cliché*. I've read it so many times before that it isn't even funny. Alexei & Cory Panshin say in their column this month that "the sword and sorcery complex itself is a living fossil with no apparent ability to evolve"—why don't Carter & deCamp try something new instead of continuing this piece of tripe? Are all the Conan stories this bad? If they are, I would hope that (if at all possible) you would avoid publishing more of them in the future.

James Tiptree's story I enjoyed much more (there was some real, actual emotional impact in it!) although it did not seem as science fictionally inventive as most of his previous stories. Ova Hamlet's parody of Philip Dick seemed the best—though quite

honestly, I enjoyed it as a *story*, rather than as a parody. I'm not certain that you can parody Dick—if you exaggerate the "search for the nature of reality" theme in his stories, all you'll be doing is improving upon and reinforcing Dick's idea that reality is a piece of bubblegum that one can stretch and shape in almost any fashion imaginable. I didn't quite get the ending on the Hamlet story, however.

The Panshins' column is excellent, and I find myself agreeing with what they say more and more, even if it doesn't matter to me whether we call sf speculative fantasy or science fiction or simply fantasy—"a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." There is, however, one area in which I think they are making a mistake. Way back in the August, 1970 issue of FANTASTIC, Alexei said "Contemporary fantasy . . . as a conscious remaking of older myths *that are no longer believed in* [italics mine], but are merely expected to entertain, . . . is sterile and limited." Alexei then goes on to say that science fiction contains the beginnings of the "new myths" (such as time travel, aliens, space flight, etc., etc.), ones which *are* believed in, and thus have the power that the older types of fantasy lack. And both he and Cory have repeated this idea in subsequent columns.

But are the "old myths" no longer believed in? Astrology is very popular now. Witchcraft. The Jesus Movement. Seances. And if the older fantasy is "sterile and limited," why has *The Lord of the Rings* far outsold any sf novel? On the other hand, how many people really believe in the science fiction myths? Time Travel. Parallel Worlds. Telepathy. Or even aliens. I wonder.

Also, Alexei & Cory have consistently rejected the idea that sf must be "scientifically plausible" or "realistic"—that the only important thing is that a story be "internally consistent." And I agree with them. But isn't it the scientific credibility that makes the sf "myths" believable? What difference, really, is there between having a golden fairy tap you on the head with a wand or jumping into a matter-transmitter if you don't offer a rational, *believable* scientific explanation for it happening?

Another point: if sf stories are more powerful than fantasy stories because the myths in them are more believable, it would seem to logically follow that the more believable the myths/symbols the story contained, the better, the more powerful it would be. In other words, a "mimetic" (mainstream) story would automatically be more powerful than a sf one, simply because it would be more "believable."

You see what a mess Alexei & Cory have gotten themselves into?

The fact of the matter is this: it doesn't matter whether the story—or the myths used—are believable or not (in comparison to the outside world). If Alexei & Cory find sf myths more powerful than the older ones used in fantasy stories, well, perhaps it's because they're just less cliched. But believability, realism, and a one-to-one relationship with reality go hand in hand. Sf most definitely is a new form of fantasy, but I think the new and old myths tend to complement each other, rather than having one replace the other. I think that's most obvious from a book like *The Left Hand of Darkness*—here we have a world filled with small villages, kingdoms, legends, folklore, and a trek across the freezing wilderness—surely this sounds very similar to the traditional epic fantasy novel? And I'm sure you could find a similar mixture in many other writer's works.

Anyway, thanks for publishing such provocative material.

CY CHAUVIN
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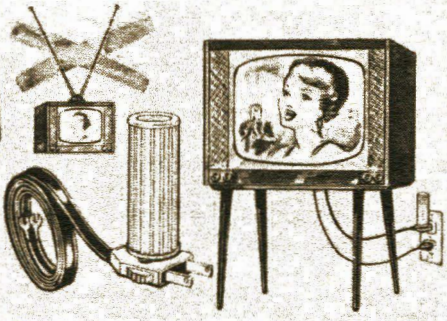

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BACK ISSUES S F MAGAZINES

AMAZING and FANTASTIC (1963–1970), S F GREATS, THRILLING S.F., S F ADVENTURE CLASSICS, STRANGE FANTASY, SPACE ADVENTURES, SCIENCE FANTASY, ASTOUNDING S F, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES YEARBOOK—1970, THE STRANGEST STORIES EVER TOLD, SCIENCE FICTION CLASSICS—MOST ISSUES AVAILABLE (65¢). ULTIMATE PUB. CO., BOX 7, OAKLAND GARDENS, FLUSHING, N.Y. 11364.

(Continued from page 4)

Everything else in this giant post office was done entirely by hand.

There was talk, then, of "automation," but no one knew what exactly would be involved, since most of the tasks involved did not lend themselves—or so it seemed—to machine work. The parcel post office, uptown by the railroad tracks, was a pilot project in automation—one of the country's first—but this was a distant unreality to all but those men who worked there. The parcel post office was regarded as a prize plum at the main office.

In 1959 the postal rates had already begun their meteoric rise; after more years than I'd been alive of 3¢ letter-rates, first-class postage was now up to 4¢ an ounce. The Postmaster General had shut down the Post Office to extort these higher rates from Congress only two years earlier, and some of the curtailed services were never revived. In my area, for example, twice-a-day deliveries were permanently cut back to once a day.

Everyone felt that the Post Office was simply failing to cope with the time. Articles were published lauding the postal systems in London and Paris where, it was said, same-day delivery was still the order of the day, and pneumatic tubes were used to speed mail from pickup points to central sorting depots. A number of the Post Office's most fervent critics blamed its general ineptitude on the fact that it was a government-run monopoly staffed through political patronage. There was something to this: in 1959 the "Eisenhower Recession" was very much with us, and one area of attack was to hire additional men to work in the post office, thus taking up the slack on unemployment. Hand labor, the critics said, was the most expensive kind. My starting salary was around $2.00 an hour, with "night time differential" of 10% more—and no increase for overtime.

OVER THE YEARS the postal service continued to deteriorate. Letters which once sped between two points in a single day could be counted on to take several days minimum. There was a Postal Workers strike (the justification for which was always dubious). In 1969, a special-delivery package containing galleys for this magazine took ten days to travel from Manhattan to Brooklyn. (And, although the Postal Service has never advertised the fact, there is apparently no Special Delivery service in Manhattan any more.) This year a package from the local regional post office (about which, more in a moment) took a week to get to the main Brooklyn post office, at Air Mail Special Delivery rates.

What's happened?

The Post Office is gone, replaced by the new Postal Service which we were all clamoring for ten years ago. What has the Postal Service done, besides raise the rates yet again?

Mail pickup boxes which had been repainted only a year or two earlier have all been repainted with new decals on their sides. *Every* mail pickup box has been repainted.

Neighborhood mailmen who until recently drove their own cars to their delivery routes are now driving Postal Service jeeps—and have to use these jeeps for the entire length of their routes.

Self-sufficient local post offices (like the one in Falls Church where Box 409 is located) have been demoted to branch stations and no longer process, sort or deliver mail. All mail is now taken to regional centers (the nearest one here is five miles away, and serves the entire Northern Virginia area; it is a vast building which covers more than a square city block) to be sorted and dispatched; all incoming mail is sorted there for the local postmen.

Service continues to deteriorate.

Since moving to Virginia I have, at the request of my publisher, made exclusive use of airmail for all important materials to be sent to him (such as the package of manuscripts which comprises an issue of this magazine). There are large signs posted in the lobbies of both my local post office and the regional center which state that airmail posted at designated drops before 4:00 PM

will be delivered the next day at the following locations: the list includes all parts of New York City and the Flushing area of Queens (where my publisher's offices are located) in particular. When I first moved here, in October, 1970, I could count on a 50-50 chance of next-day delivery. Today we are lucky if delivery occurs two days later and a recent important package from my publisher to me took four days to get here—at extortionate air mail rates.

Because the local postman no longer sorts his own mail for his route, service has deteriorated there as well, with a higher frequency of missorted and misdelivered mail. For a period of several months weekly magazines like *Time, Newsweek* and *New York* arrived here erratically, often up to a week late, sometimes forcing me to purchase duplicate copies from the newsstands at higher prices when I despaired ever receiving them. (Usually my subscription copy would arrive the next day in such cases.) I've discussed the situation with my local postman, who is an honest man and who could offer me no reassurance that things would get better.

I have no doubt that most of you have had similar experiences, differing only in detail. The Postal Service's reputation in the business community has never been lower. Several reputable mail-order houses now recommend against the Postal Service and suggest the United Parcel Service or other private delivery services for faster, safer delivery. The guarantee card on a recently purchased Timex watch states "For safer and faster service we advise you to use first class or air mail. *Because of the increased percentage of losses occurring in the Postal Service, we recommend registering or insuring your package.* If you do not receive an acknowledgment of its receipt within a reasonable time, start a tracer with the Post Office." (Italics mine.) Recently my wife mailed a collection of Plaid Stamp books (accumulated in New York; Plaid Stamps are not used in this area) to the Plaid Stamp Redemption Center in the midwest. The package containing the items she ordered arrived two days *before* we received the receipt from the Postal Service showing that the registered books had been delivered. Those items arrived by UPS, of course.

WHERE IS THE POSTAL SERVICE HEADED? Downhill, by all indications. While the Postal Service fiddles with special (and highly expensive) services for those business interests which can afford them, it is bent on phasing out most of those services which it has traditionally made available to the private citizen. According to an item in the *Federal Spotlite* column of the Washington *Star* a few months ago, the Postal Service master plan includes the discontinuation of Saturday deliveries for a start, and climaxes with the discontinuation of *all* home deliveries. Some time in the none-too-distant future, you can expect to be required to pick up your mail at the post office, if you want to get it at all. I am uncertain about this point, but it wouldn't surprise me if in the process you had to pay extra for this service—something in the nature of the present-day box-rent (which has gone up too in the last year).

Ultimately, the Postal Service wants to concentrate exclusively on where the profits are the largest: big business. The nickel-and-dime business of private letters is just too much trouble.

THIS COUNTRY WAS BUILT upon the efforts of the original Post Office. Not only has the delivery of private, personal mail been a cornerstone, but so also the subsidized second-class and special 4th-class (book and record) rates which have allowed the open distribution of at least quasi-educational materials throughout a country as vast as ours. It would seem that this proud tradition is now dead. Although the Postal Service was set up as a semi-autonomous public corporation in an effort to pare waste and bring our mail-system into the Twentieth Century (at long last), its actual goal seems to be little different than that of any private enterprise given a monopoly on a public service: gross indifference to the public it was in-

tended to serve and a lust for profits at the expense of the public.

The second-class postal rate hike of which reader Schenck speaks is of course only the most glaring example. But little-recognized is the fact that this magazine and its sister stand in dire jeopardy of losing their second-class mailing privilages entirely, purely on the basis of their present sales-to-print-order ratios. Under the circumstances, I am less concerned about an eventual 142% rate increase than some might be. It seems astonishing to me that the Postal Service has a right to demand that we sell a certain minimum percentage of the copies we print in order to qualify for second-class mailing privileges when the loss of these privileges will additionally hamper our circulation. But, you see, we are a marginal business from the point of view of the Postal Service, and no doubt if we ceased publication the Postal Service would be just as happy not to have to bother with us.

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT? Well, Roy is right. This is one time when a letter to your congressman makes good sense. We the people, despised though we may be by the Postal Service, still have the ultimate responsibility for its destiny. I strongly urge that you do write to your Congressman, protesting both the specific present-day policies of the Postal Service and offering any information you may have about its inadequacies in your area.

With luck, your letter may even be delivered.

—TED WHITE

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One day, to his astonishment, he discovered that he could actually broadcast silent commands, which others instantly obeyed. Using the secret he tells you about in this book, he tried it time after time — commanding others to sleep, get up and come to him, talk or not talk — and act according to his silent wishes. It worked every time!

Working relentlessly from this evidence, Reese P. Dubin succeeded in perfecting a new kind of instrument — called a Tele-Photo Transmitter — that concentrates your thoughts, and sends them like a streaking bullet to their destination!

OTHERS OBEY SILENT COMMANDS! Writing of the success of this method, one user reports the following experience:

"I willed her to pick up and eat a biscuit from a plate in a corner of the room. She did so. I willed her to shake hands with her mother. She rushed to her mother and stroked her hands . . .

"I willed her to nod. She stood still and bent her head, I willed her to clap her hands, play a note on the piano, write her name, all of which she did."

"No one can escape the power of this method," says Mr. Dubin. "Everybody — high or low, ignorant or wise — all are subject to its spell! And unless the person is told what's being done, he will think the thoughts are his own!"

HEARS THE THOUGHTS OF OTHERS! Experimenting further with the Tele-Photo Transmitter, Reese P. Dubin soon found that he could "tune in" and HEAR the unspoken thou hts of others. He says, "At first, these hearing impressions startled me, and I took them for actual speech, until I realized that people don't usually say such things aloud! And their lips remained closed."

SEES BEYOND WALLS, AND OVER GREAT DISTANCES! Then he discovered he could pick up actual sights, from behind walls and over great distances! And when he "tuned in" he could see actual living scenes before him—as clear as the picture on a television screen!

MAKES WOMAN APPEAR — SEEMINGLY OUT OF THIN AIR! With mounting excitement, Reese P. Dubin launched one of the most exciting experiments in the history of psychic research. He wanted to see if the Tele-Photo Transmitter could bring him an actual material object! He chose, for this experiment, the seemingly impossible: an actual living person!

He simply focused the Tele-Photo Transmitter, by dialing the object of his desire. In a flash the door burst open, and there — standing before him, as real as life — was his long-lost cousin!

He stared and rubbed his eyes, and looked

again! There — smiling, with arms outstretched in greeting— stood living proof of the most astounding discovery of the Century!

Dial Any Treasure!

You'll see how to use the Tele-Photo Transmitter, to summon your desires. This special instrument — your mental equipment — requires no wires, and no electricity. "Yet," says Mr. Dubin, "it can teleport desires, swiftly from the invisible world."

When you dial your desire—whether for riches, love, or secret knowledge—you capture its invisible, photoplasmic form, at which point "it starts to materialize!" says Dr. Dubin.

"Telecult Power can work seeming miracles in your life," says Mr. Dubin. "With it, it is possible to dial any desire — called a Photo-Form — then sit back, relax, and watch this powerful secret go to work!"

"Instantly Your Life Is Changed!"

With this secret, the mightiest force in the Universe is at your command! "Simply ask for anything you want," says Mr. Dubin, "whether it be riches, love, fine possessions, power, friends, or secret knowledge!"

Suppose you had dialed Photo-Form #2 for Jewels, for example That's what Margaret C. did, in an actual example Mr. Dubin tells you about. Rich, glittering diamonds and jewels literally appeared at her feet: a pair of gold earrings, which she found that morning . . . a surprise gift of a pearl necklace, and matching silver bracelets . . . a beautiful platinum ring set with emeralds and diamonds, dropped on her front lawn!

"Almost overnight," says Mr. Dubin, "it can start to multiply riches, bring romance and love . . . draw favors, gifts, new friends . . . or anything else asked for! It isn't necessary for you to understand why. What is important is that it has already worked for many others . . . men and women in all walks of life . . . worked every time . . . and it will work for you, too!"

Brings A Pocket Full Of Money!

You'll see how Jerry D. used this method. He was broke a week before payday. All he did, he says, was to dial Photo-Form #1. Suddenly he felt a bulge in his pocket. Lo and behold! He took out a roll of money . . . fives, tens, twenties . . . and more! Obviously, it had been placed there— but when? And by whom?

A Brand New Car Comes!

Marty C., a taxi driver, reports that he just dialed Photo-Form #4, sat back, relaxed, and waited for things to happen. In a short time, great excitement filled the house. His wife came hurrying in, saying, "We won it! We won a car and a cash prize! They just delivered it!" He got up and went to the window. There, big and beautiful, standing in the driveway, was a brand new Cadillac!

Brings Mate Without Asking!

Mrs. Conrad B. reports that she was tired of "pursuing" her husband, as she called it. She wanted him to voluntarily do the things she longed for, take her places, show affection. But he hadn't looked at her in years. He would fall asleep immediately after supper, or watched the ball games, or read the papers. Secretly Mrs. B. decided to try this method. She dialed Photo-Form #9 for Love! Instantly, her husband's attitude changed from boredom to interest and enthusiasm. And from that day forward, he showered her with kindness and affection! It was like a miracle come true!

The Power Of This Method!

There are so many personal experiences which I could recount, stories of healing, wealth, and happiness with this secret, that I find myself wanting to tell all of them at once. Here are just a few . . .

• **REGAINS HAIR GROWTH!** Walter C. had a shiny bald head with just a fringe of white hair showing around the edges. He tried this method, and soon his hair began to regrow. The new hair came in thick, dark, and luxurious!

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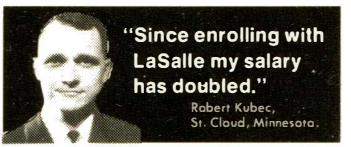

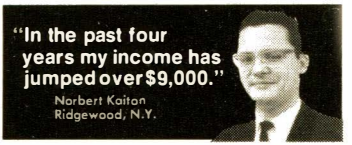

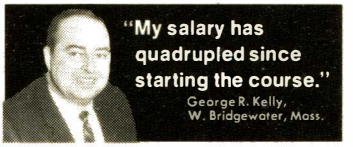

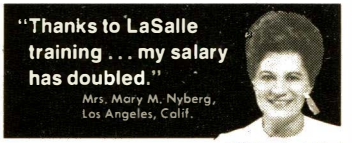

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