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GARRET FORD, Editor

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He was the Great Judge . . . and his decisions final.

The Great Judge

A. E. VAN VOGT

"Judgement," said the rad, "in the case of Douglas Aird, tried for treason on August 2nd, last—"

With a trembling movement of his fingers, Aird turned the volume control higher. The next words blared at him:

"—That Douglas Aird do surrender himself one week from this day, that is, on September 17, 2460 A.D. to his neighborhood patrol station, that he then be taken to the nearest converter, there to be put to death—"

Click!

He had no conscious memory of shutting off the rad. One instant the sound roared through his apartment, the next there was dead silence. Aird sank back in his chair and stared with sick eyes through the transparent walls out upon the shining roofs of The Judge's City. All these weeks he had known there was no chance. The scientific achievements that, he had tried to tell himself, would weigh the balance in his favor — even as he assessed their value to the race, he had realized that the Great Judge would not consider them from the same viewpoint as himself.

He had made the fatal error of suggesting in the presence of "friends" that a mere man like Douglas Aird could govern as well as the immortal Great Judge, and that in fact it might be a good idea if someone less remote from the needs of the mass of the people have a chance to promulgate decrees. A little less restriction, he had urged, and a little more individuality. With such abandon he had spoken on the day that he succeeded in transferring the nervous impulses of a chicken into the nervous system of a dog.

He had attempted to introduce the discovery as evidence that he was in an excited and abnormal state of mind. But the magistrate pronounced the reason irrelevant, immaterial and facetious. He refused to hear what the discovery was, ruling coldly:

"The official science investigator of the Great Judge will call on you in due course, and you will then turn your invention over to him complete with adequate documentation."

Aird presumed gloomily that the investigator would call in a day or so. He toyed with the possibility of destroying his papers and instruments. Shudderingly, he rejected that form of defiance. The Great Judge's control of life was so complete that he permitted his enemies to remain at large until the day of their execution. It

was a point made much of by the Great Judge's propaganda department. Civilization, it was said, had never before attained so high a level of freedom. But it wouldn't do to try the patience of the Great Judge by destroying an invention. Aird has a sharp conviction that less civilized methods might be used on him if he failed to carry through the farce.

Sitting there in his apartment, surrounded by every modern convenience, Aird sighed. He would spend his last week alive in any luxury he might choose. It was the final refinement of mental torture, to be free, to have the feeling that if only he could think of something he might succeed in escaping. Yet he knew escape was impossible. If he climbed into his hopjet, he'd have to swoop in at the nearest patrol station, and have his electronic registration "plates" stamped with a signal. Thereafter, his machine would continuously give off vibrations automatically advising patrol vessels of the time and space limitations of his permit.

Similar restrictions controlled his person. The electronic instrument "printed" on his upper right arm could be activated by any central, which would start a burning sensation of gradually increasing intensity.

There was absolutely no escape from the law of the Great Judge.

Aird climbed to his feet wearily. Might as well get his material ready for the science investigator. It was too bad he wouldn't have an opportunity to experiment with higher life forms but —

Aird stopped short in the doorway of his laboratory. His body throbbed with the tremendousness of the idea that had slammed into his mind. He began to quiver. He leaned weakly against the door jamb, then slowly straightened.

"*That's it!*" He spoke the words aloud, his voice low and intense, simultaneously utterly incredulous and hopeful to the point of madness. It was the mounting hope that brought a return of terrible weakness. He collapsed on the rug just inside the laboratory, and lay there muttering to himself, the special insanities of an electronicsian:

"... have to get a larger grid, and more liquid and—"

Special Science Investigator George Mollins returned to the Great Judge's Court, and immediately asked for a private interview with the Great Judge.

"Tell him," he told the High Bailiff of the Court, "that I have come across a very important scientific discovery. He will know what is meant if you simply say 'Category AA'."

While he waited to be received, the Science Investigator arranged his instruments for readier transport, and then he stood idly looking around him at the dome vaulted anteroom. Through a transparent wall, he could see the gardens below. In the profusion of greenery, he caught the glint of a white skirt, which reminded him that the Great Judge was reputed to have at least seven reigning beauties in his harem at all times.

"This way, sir. The Great Judge will receive you."

The man who sat behind the desk looked about thirty-five years old. Only his eyes and his mouth seemed older. From bleak blue eyes and with thin-lipped silence, the immortal, ever-young Great Judge studied his visitor.

The latter wasted no time. The moment the door shut behind him, he pressed the button that released a fine spray of gas straight at the Great Judge. The man behind the desk simply sagged in his chair.

The visitor was calm but quick. He dragged the limp body around to his instrument case, and removed the clothes of the upper body. Swiftly, he swabbed the body with the liquid he had brought, and began to attach his nodes. Half a dozen on one side and a dozen on the other. The next step was to attach the wires to his own body, lie down and press the activator.

The question that puzzled Douglas Aird on the day that he succeeded in transferring the nervous impulses of a chicken into the nervous system of a dog was, how complete was the transference?

Personality, he argued with himself, was a complex structure. It grew out of many quadrillions of minute experiences and, as he had discovered, finally gave to each body its own special neural vibration.

Would it be possible by artificially forcing that exact vibration upon another body to establish a nerve energy flow between the two bodies? A flow so natural and easy that every cell would be impregnated with the thoughts and memories of the other body? A flow so complete, that, when properly channeled, the personality of one body would flow into the other?

The fact that a dog acted like a chicken was not complete proof. Normally, he would have experimented very carefully before trying it on a human being. But a man doomed to die didn't have to think of risks. When the Science Investigator called on him two days before the date of the execution, he gassed the man, and made the experiment then and there.

The transference was not absolutely complete. Blurred memories remained behind, enough to make the routine of going to the Great Judge's Court familiar and easy. He had worried about that. It was important that he follow the right etiquette in approaching a man who normally permitted no one near him but people he had learned to trust.

As it turned out, he did everything right. The moment he felt the blurring sensation which marked the beginning of the transfer of his personality from the body of the Science Investigator to the body of the Great Judge, Aird acted. He released a gas toward the Great Judge that would revive the man in about five minutes. Simultaneously, he sprayed his present body with instantaneous anaesthetic gas. Even as he sank into unconsciousness, he could feel the sharp, hard personality of the Great Judge slipping in to the Investigator's body.

Five minutes later Douglas Aird, now in the body of the Great

Judge, opened his eyes, and looked around him alertly. Carefully, he disconnected the wires, packed the instruments — and then called a baliff. As he had expected, no one questioned the actions of the Great Judge. It was the work of an hour to drive to the apartment of Douglas Aird, transfer the Great Judge's personality to the body of Douglas Aird — and at the same time return the personality of the Science Investigator into its proper body. As a precaution, he had the Science Investigator taken to a hospital.

"Keep him there for three days under observation," he commanded.

Back at the Great Judge's Court, he spent the next few days cautiously fitting himself into the pleasant routine of a life of absolute power. He had a thousand plans for altering a police state into a free state, but as a scientist he was sharply aware of the need for orderly transition.

It was at the end of a week that he inquired casually about a traitor named Douglas Aird. The story was interesting. The man had, it seemed, attempted to escape. He had flown some five hundred miles in an unregistered hopjet before being grounded by a local patrol. Immediately, he fled into the mountains. When he failed to report on the morning of the day set for his execution, the printed instrument on his right arm was activated. Shortly before dusk, a tired, distracted, staggering scarecrow of a man, screaming that he was the Great Judge, appeared in a mountain patrol station. The execution was then carried out with no further delay. The report concluded:

"Seldom in the experience of the attending patrol officers has a condemned man approached the converter with so much reluctance."

The Great Judge, sitting at his desk in the luxurious court, could well believe it.

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She was the guardian of the worlds, but HER world was dead.

THE GIFTS OF ASTI

ANDREW NORTH

Even here, on the black terrace before the forgotten mountain retreat of Asti, it was possible to smell the dank stench of burning Memphir, to imagine that the dawn wind bore upward from the pillaged city the faint tortured cries of those whom the barbarians of Klem hunted to their prolonged death. Indeed it was time to leave—

Varta, last of the virgin Maidens of Asti, shivered. The scaled and wattled creature who crouched beside her thigh turned his reptilian head so that golden eyes met the aquamarine ones set slantingly at a faintly provocative angle in her smooth ivory face.

“We go—?”

She nodded in answer to that unvoiced question Lur had sent into her brain, and turned toward the dark cavern which was the mouth of Asti's last dwelling place. Once, more than a thousand years before when the walls of Memphir were young, Asti had lived among men below. But in the richness and softness which was trading Memphir, empire of empires, Asti found no place. So He and those who served Him had withdrawn to this mountain outcrop. And she, Varta, was the last, the very last to bow knee at Asti's shrine and raise her voice in the dawn hymn—for Lur, as were all his race, was mute.

Even the loot of Memphir would not sate the shaggy headed warriors who had stormed her gates this day. The stairway to Asti's Temple was plain enough to see and there would be those to essay the steep climb hoping to find a treasure which did not exist. For Asti was an austere God, delighting in plain walls and bare altars. His last priest had lain in the grave niches these three years, there would be none to hold that gate against intruders.

Varta passed between tall, uncarved pillars, Lur padding beside her, his spine mane erect, the talons on his forefeet clicking on the stone in steady rhythm. So they came into the innermost shrine of Asti and there Varta made graceful obeisance to the great cowed and robed figure which sat enthroned, its hidden eyes focused upon its own outstretched hand.

And above the flattened palm of that wide hand hung suspended in space the round orange-red sun ball which was twin to the sun that lighted Erb. Around the miniature sun swung in their orbits the four worlds of the system, each obeying the laws of space, even as did the planets they represented.

“Memphir has fallen,” Varta's voice sounded rusty in her own ears. She had spoken so seldom during the last lonely months. “Evil has risen to overwhelm our world, even as it was prophesied in Your Revelations, O, Ruler of Worlds and Maker of Destiny. Therefore, obeying the order given of old, I would depart from this, Thy house. Suffer me now to fulfill the Law—”

Three times she prostrated her slim body on the stones at the foot of



Asti's judgment chair. Then she arose and, with the confidence of a child in its father, she laid her hand palm upward upon the outstretched hand of Asti. Beneath her flesh the stone was not cold and hard, but seemed to have an inner heat, even as might a human hand. For a long moment she stood so and then she raised her hand slowly, carefully, as if within its slight hollow she cupped something precious.

And, as she drew her hand away from the grasp of Asti, the tiny sun and its planets followed, spinning now above her palm as they had above the statue's. But out of the cowed figure some virtue had departed with the going of the miniature solar system, it was now but a carving of stone. And Varta did not look at it again as she passed behind its bulk to seek a certain place in the temple wall, known to her from much reading of the old records.

Having found the stone she sought, she moved her hand in a certain pattern before it so that the faint radiance streaming from the tiny sun, gleamed on the grayness of the wall. There was a grating, as from metal long unused, and a block fell back, opening a narrow door to them.

Before she stepped within, the priestess lifted her hand above her head and when she withdrew it, the sun and planets remained to form a diadem just above the intricate braiding of her dull red hair. As she moved into the secret way, the five orbs swung with her, and in the darkness there the sun glowed richly, sending out a light to guide their feet.

They were at the top of a stairway and the hollow clang of the stone as it moved back into place behind them echoed through a gulf which seemed endless. But that too was as the chronicles had said and Varta knew no fear.

How long they journeyed down into the maw of the mountain and, beyond that, into the womb of Erb itself, Varta never knew. But, when feet were weary and she knew the bite of real hunger, they came into a passageway which ended in a room hollowed of solid rock. And there, preserved in the chest in which men born in the youth of Memphir had laid them, Varta found that which would keep her safe on the path she must take. She put aside the fine silks, the jeweled cincture, which had been the badge of Asti's service and drew on over her naked body a suit of scaled skin, gemmed and glistening the rays of the small sun. There was a hood to cover the entire head, taloned gloves for the hands, webbed, clawed coverings for the feet—as if the skin of a giant, man-like lizard had been tanned and fashioned into this suit. And Varta suspected that that might be so—the world of Erb had not always been held by the human-kind alone.

There were supplies here too, lying untouched in ageless containers within a lizard-skin pouch. Varta touched her tongue without fear to a powdered restorative, sharing it with Lur, whose own mailed skin would protect him through the dangers to come.

She folded the regalia she had stripped off and laid it in the chest, smoothing it regretfully before she dropped the lid upon its shimmering color. Never again would Asti's servant wear the soft stuff of His Livery. But she was resolute enough when she picked up the food pouch and strode forward, passing out of the robing chamber into a narrow way which was a natural fault in the rock unsmoothed by the tools of man.

But when this rocky road ended upon the lip of a gorge, Varta hesitated, plucking at the throat latch of her hood-like helmet. Through the unclouded crystal of its eye-holes she could see the sprouts of yellow vapor which puffed from crannies in the rock wall down which she must climb. If the records of the Temple spoke true, these curls of gas were death to all lunged creatures of the upper world. She could only trust that the cunning of the scaled hood would not fail her.

The long talons fitted to the finger tips of the gloves, the claws of the webbed foot coverings clamped fast to every hand and foot hold, but the way down was long and she caught a message of weariness from Lur before they reached the piled rocks at the foot of the cliff. The puffs of steamy

gas had become a fog through which they groped their way slowly, following a trace of path along the base of the cliff.

Time did not exist in the underworld of Erb. Varta did not know whether it was still today, or whether she had passed into tomorrow when they came to a cross roads. She felt Lur press against her, forcing her back against a rock.

"There is a thing coming—" his message was clear.

And in a moment she too saw a dark hulk nosing through the vapor. It moved slowly, seeming to balance at each step as if travel was a painful act. But it bore steadily to the meeting of the two paths.

"It is no enemy—" But she did not need that reassurance from Lur. Unearthly as the thing looked it had no menace.

With a last twist of ungainly body the creature squatted on a rock and clawed the clumsy covering it wore about its bone-thin shoulders and domed-skull head. The visage it revealed was long and gray, with dark pits for eyes and a gaping, fang-studded, lipless mouth.

"Who are you who dare to tread the forgotten ways and rouse from slumber the Guardian of the Chasms?"

The question was a shrill whine in her brain, her hands half arose to cover her ears—

"I am Varta, Maiden of Asti. Memphir has fallen to the barbarians of the Outer Lands and now I go, as Asti once ordered—"

The Guardian considered her answer gravely. In one skeleton claw it fumbled a rod and with this it now traced certain symbols in the dust before Varta's webbed feet. When it had done, the girl stooped and altered two of the lines with a swift stroke from one of her talons. The creature of the Chasm nodded its misshapen head.

"Asti does not rule here. But long, and long, and long ago there was a pact made with us in His Name. Pass free from us, woman of the Light. There are two paths before you—"

The Guardian paused for so long that Varta dared to prompt it.

"Where do they lead, Guardian of the Dark?"

"This will take you down into my country," it jerked the rod to the right. "And that way is death for creatures from the surface world. The other—in our old legends it is said to bring a traveler out into the upper world. Of the truth of that I have no proof."

"But that one I must take," she made slight obeisance to the huddle of bones and dank cloak on the rock and it inclined its head in grave courtsey.

With Lur pushing a little ahead, she took the road which ran straight into the flume-veiled darkness. Nor did she turn to look again at the Thing from the Chasm world.

They began to climb again, across slimed rock where there were evil trails of other things which lived in this haunted darkness. But the sun of Asti lighted their way and perhaps some virtue in the rays from it kept away the makers of such trails.

When they pulled themselves up onto a wide ledge the talons on Varta's gloves were worn to splintered stubs and there was a bright girdle of pain about her aching body. Lur lay panting beside her, his red-forked tongue protruding from his foam ringed mouth.

"We walk again the ways of men," Lur was the first to note the tool marks on the stone where they lay. "By the Will of Asti, we may win out of this maze after all."

Since there were no signs of the deadly steam Varta dared to push off her hood and share with her companion the sustaining power she carried in her pouch. There was a freshness to the air they breathed, damp and cold though it was, which hinted of the upper world.

The ledge sloped upwards, at a steep angle at first, and then more gently. Lur slipped past her and thrust head and shoulders through a break in the rock. Grasping his neck spines she allowed him to pull her through that narrow slit into the soft blackness of a surface night. They tumbled down together, Varta's head pillowed on Lur's smooth side, and so slept as

the sun and worlds of Asti whirled protectingly above them.

A whir of wings in the air above her head awakened Varta. One of the small, jewel bright flying lizard creatures of the deep jungle poised and dipped to investigate more closely the worlds of Asti. But at Varta's upflung arm it uttered a rasping cry and planed down into the mass of vegetation below. By the glint of sunlight on the stone around them the day was already well advanced. Varta tugged at Lur's mane until he roused.

There was a regularity to the rocks piled about their sleeping place which hinted that they had lain among the ruins left by man. But of this side of the mountains both were ignorant, for Memphir's rule had not run here.

"Many dead things in times past," Lur's scarlet nostril pits were extended to their widest. "But that was long ago. This land is no longer held by men."

Varta laughed cheerfully. "If here there are no men, then there will rise no barbarian hordes to dispute our rule. Asti has led us to safety. Let us see more of the land He gives us."

There was a road leading down from the ruins, a road still to be followed in spite of the lash of landslip and the crack of time. And it brought them into a cup of green fertility where the lavishness of Asti's sowing was unchecked by man. Varta seized eagerly upon globes of blood red fruit which she recognized as delicacies which had been cultivated in the Temple gardens, while Lur went hunting into the fringes of the jungle, there dining on prey so easily caught as to be judged devoid of fear.

The jungle choked highway curved and they were suddenly fronted by a desert of sere desolation, a desert floored by glassy slag which sent back the sun beams in a furnace glare. Varta shaded her eyes and tried to see the end of this, but, if there was a distant rim of green beyond, the heat distortions in the air concealed it.

Lur put out a front paw to test the slag but withdrew it instantly.

"It cooks the flesh, we can not walk here" was his verdict.

Varta pointed with her chin to the left where, some distance away, the mountain wall paralleled their course.

"Then let us keep to the jungle over there and see if it does not bring around to the far side. But what made this—?" She leaned out over the glassy stuff, not daring to touch the slick surface.

"War." Lur's tongue shot out to impale a questing beetle. "These forgotten people fought with fearsome weapons."

"But what weapon could do this? Memphir knew not such—".

"Memphir was old. But mayhap there were those who raised cities on Erb before the first hut of Memphir squatted on tidal mud. Men forget knowledge in time. Even in Memphir the lords of the last days forgot the wisdom of their earlier sages—they fell before the barbarians easily enough."

"If ever men had wisdom to produce this—it was not of Asti's giving," she edged away from the glare. "Let us go."

But now they had to fight their way through jungle and it was hard—until they reached a ridge of rock running out from the mountain as a tongue thrust into the blasted valley. And along this they picked their slow way.

"There is water near—" Lur's thought answered the girl's desire. She licked dry lips longingly. "This way—" her companion's sudden turn was to the left and Varta was quick to follow him down a slide of rock.

Lur's instinct was right, as it ever was. There was water before them, a small lake of it. But even as he dipped his fanged muzzle toward that inviting surface, Lur's spined head jerked erect again. Varta snatched back the hand she had put out, staring at Lur's strange actions. His nostrils expanded to their widest, his long neck outstretched, he was swinging his head back and forth across the limpid shallows.

"What is it—?"

"This is no water such as we know," the scaled one answered flatly. "It has life within it."

Varta laughed. "Fish, water snakes, your own distant kin, Lur. It is the scent of them which you catch—"

"No. It is the water itself which lives—and yet does not live—" His thought trailed away from her as he struggled with some problem. No human brain could follow his unless he willed it so.

Varta squatted back on her heels and began to look at the water and then at the banks with more care. For the first time she noted the odd patches of brilliant color which floated just below the surface of the liquid. Blue, green, yellow, crimson, they drifted slowly with the tiny waves which lapped the shore. But they were not alive, she was almost sure of that, they appeared more a part of the water itself.

Watching the voyage of one patch of green she caught sight of the branch. It was a drooping shoot of the turbi, the same tree vine which produced the fruit she had relished less than an hour before. Above the water dangled a cluster of the fruit, dead ripe with the sweet pulp stretching its skin. But below the surface of the water—

Varta's breath hissed between her teeth and Lur's head snapped around as he caught her thought.

The branch below the water bore a perfect circle of green flowers close to its tip, the flowers which the turbi had born naturally seven months before and which should long ago have turned into just such sweetness as hung above.

With Lur at her heels the girl edged around to pull cautiously at the branch. It yielded at once to her touch, swinging its tip out of the lake. She sniffed—there was a languid perfume in the air, the perfume of the blooming turbi. She examined the flowers closely, to all appearances they were perfect and natural.

"It preserves," Lur settled back on his haunches and waved one front paw at the quiet water. "What goes into it remains at it was just at the moment of entrance."

"But if this is seven months old—"

"It may be seven years old," corrected Lur. "How can you tell when that branch first dipped into the lake? Yet the flowers do not fade even when withdrawn from the water. This is indeed a mystery!"

"Of which I would know more!" Varta dropped the turbi and started on around the edge of the lake.

Twice more they found similar evidence of preservation in flower or leaf, wherever it was covered by the opaline water.

The lake itself was a long and narrow slash with one end cutting into the desert of glass while the other wet the foot of the mountain. And it was there, on the slope of the mountain that they found the greatest wonder of all, Lur scenting it before they sighted the remains among the stones.

"Man made," he cautioned, "but very, very old."

And truly the wreckage they came upon must have been old, perhaps even older than Memphir. For the part which rested above the water was almost gone, rusty red stains on the rocks outlining where it had lain. But under water was a smooth silver hull, shining and untouched by the years.

Varta laid her hand upon a ruddy scrap between two rocks and it became a drift of powdery dust. And yet—there a few feet below was strong metal!

Lur padded along the scrap of shore surveying the thing.

"It was a machine in which men traveled," his thoughts arose to her. "But they were not as the men of Memphir. Perhaps not even as the sons of Erb—"

"Not as the sons of Erb!" her astonishment broke into open speech.

Lur's neck twisted as he looked up at her. "Did the men of Erb, even in the old chronicles fight with weapons such as would make a desert of glass? There are other worlds than Erb, mayhap this strange thing was a

sky ship from such a world. All things are possible by the Will of Asti."

Varta nodded. "All things are possible by the Will of Asti," she repeated. "But, Lur," her eyes were round with wonder, "perhaps it is Asti's Will which brought us here to find this marvel! Perhaps He has some use for us and it!"

"At least we may discover what lies within it," Lur had his own share of curiosity.

"How? The two of us can not draw that out of the water!"

"No, but we can enter into it!"

Varta fingered the folds of the hood on her shoulders. She knew what Lur meant, the suit which had protected her in the underworld was impervious to everything outside its surface—or to every substance its makers knew—just as Lur's own hide made his flesh impenetrable. But the fashioners of her suit had probably never known of the living lake and what if she had no defense against the strange properties of the water?

She leaned back against a rock. Overhead the worlds and sun of Asti still traveled their appointed paths. The worlds of Asti! If it was His Will which had brought them here, then Asti's power would wrap her round with safety. By His Will she had come out of Memphir over ways no human of Erb had ever trod before. Could she doubt that His Protection was with her now?

It took only a moment to make secure the webbed shoes, to pull on and fasten the hood, to tighten the buckles of her gloves. Then she crept forward, shuddering as the water rose about her ankles. But Lur pushed on before her, his head disappearing fearlessly under the surface as he crawled through the jagged opening in the ship below.

Smashed engines which had no meaning in her eyes occupied most of the broken section of the wreck. None of the metal showed any deterioration beyond that which had occurred at the time of the crash. Under her exploring hands it was firm and whole.

Lur was pulling at a small door half hidden by a mass of twisted wires and plates and, just as Varta crawled around this obstacle to join him, the barrier gave way allowing them to squeeze through into what had once been the living quarters of the ship.

Varta recognized seats, a table, and other bits of strictly utilitarian furniture. But of those who had once been at home there, there remained no trace. Lur, having given one glance to the furnishings, was prowling about the far end of the cabin uncertainly, and now he voiced his uneasiness.

"There is something beyond, something which once had life—"

Varta crowded up to him. To her eyes the wall seemed without line of an opening, and yet Lur was running his broad front paws over it carefully, now and then throwing his weight against the smooth surface.

"There is no door—" she pointed out doubtfully.

"No door—ah—here—" Lur unsheathed formidable fighting claws to their full length for perhaps the first time in his temple-sheltered life, and endeavored to work them into a small crevice. The muscles of his forelegs and quarters stood out in sharp relief under his scales, his fangs were bare as his lips snapped back with effort.

Something gave, a thin black line appeared to mark the edges of a door. Then time, or Lur's strength, broke the ancient locking mechanism. The door gave so suddenly that they were both sent hurtling backward and Lur's breath burst from him in a huge bubble.

The sealed compartment was hardly more than a cupboard but it was full. Spread-eagled against the wall was a four-limbed creature whose form was so smothered in a bulky suit that Varta could only guess that it was akin in shape to her own. Hoops of metal locked it firmly to the wall, but the head had fallen forward so that the face plate in the helmet was hidden.

Slowly the girl breasted the water which filled the cabin and reached her hands toward the bowed helmet of the prisoner. Gingerly, her blunted talons scraping across metal, she pulled it up to her eye-level.

The eyes of that which stood within the suit were closed, as if in sleep, but there was a warm, healthy tint to the bronze skin, so different in shade to her own palid coloring. For the rest, the prisoner had the two eyes, the centered nose, the properly shaped mouth which were common to the men of Erb. Hair grew on his head, black and thick and there was a faint shadow of beard on his jaw line.

"This is a man—" her thought reached Lur.

"Why not? Did you expect a serpent? It is a pity he is dead—"

Varta felt a rich warm tide rising in her throat to answer that teasing half question. There were times when Lur's thought reading was annoying. He had risen to his hind legs so that he too could look into the shell which held their find.

"Yes, a pity," he repeated. "But—"

A vision of the turbi flowers swept through her mind. Had Lur suggested it, or had that wild thought been hers alone? Only this ship was so old—so very old!

Lur's red tongue flicked. "It can do no harm to try—" he suggested slyly and set his claws into the hoop holding the captive's right wrist, testing its strength.

"But the metal on the shore, it crumpled into powder at my touch—" she protested. "What if we carry him out only to have—to have—" Her mind shuddered away from the picture which followed.

"Did the turbi blossom fade when pulled out?" countered Lur. "There is a secret to these fastenings—" He pulled and pried impatiently.

Varta tried to help but even their united strength was useless against the force which held the loops in place. Breathless the girl slumped back against the wall of the cabin while Lur settled down on his haunches. One of the odd patches of color drifted by, its vivid scarlet like a jewel spiraling lazily upward. Varta's eyes followed its drift and so were guided to what she had forgotten, the worlds of Asti.

"Asti!"

Lur was looking up too.

"The power of Asti!"

Varta's hand went up, rested for a long moment under the sun and then drew it down, carefully, slowly, as she had in Memphir's temple. Then she stepped towards the captive. Within her hood a beaded line of moisture outlined her lips, a pulse thundered on her temple. This was a fearsome thing to try.

She held the sun on a line with one of the wrist bonds, She must avoid the flesh it imprisoned, for Asti's power could kill.

From the sun there shot an orange-red beam to strike full upon the metal. A thin line of red crept across the smooth hoop, crept and widened. Varta raised her hand, sending the sun spinning up and Lur's claws pulled on the metal. It broke like rotten wood in his grasp.

The girl gave a little gasp of half-terrified delight. Then the old legends were true! As Asti's priestess she controlled powers too great to guess. Swiftly she loosed the other hoops and restored the sun and worlds to their place over her head as the captive slumped across the threshold of his cell.

Tugging and straining they brought him out of the broken ship into the sunlight of Erb. Varta threw back her hood and breathed deeply of the air which was not manufactured by the wizardry of the lizard skin and Lur sat panting, his nostril flaps open. It was he who spied the spring on the mountain side above, a spring of water uncontaminated by the strange life of the lake. They both dragged themselves there to drink deeply.

Varta returned to the lake shore reluctantly. Within her heart she believed that the man they had brought from the ship was truly dead. Lur might hold out the promise of the flowers, but this was a man and he had lain in the water for countless ages—

So she went with lagging steps, to find Lur busy. He had solved the mystery of the space suit and had stripped it from the unknown. Now his

clawed paw rested lightly on the bared chest and he turned to Varta eagerly.

"There is life—"

Hardly daring to believe that, she dropped down beside Lur and touched their prize. Lur was right, the flesh was warm and she had caught the faint rhythm of shallow breath. Half remembering old tales, she put her hands on the arch of the lower ribs and began to aid that rhythm. The breaths were deeper—

Then the man half turned, his arm moved. Varta and Lur drew back.

For the first time the girl probed gently the sleeping mind before her—even as she had read the minds of those few of Memphir who had ascended to the temple precincts in the last days.

Much of what she read now was confused or so alien to Erb that it had no meaning for her. But she saw a great city plunged into flaming death in an instant and felt the horror and remorse of the man at her feet because of his own part in that act, the horror and remorse which had led him to open rebellion and so to his imprisonment. There was a last dark and frightening memory of a door closing on light and hope—

The space man moaned softly and hunched his shoulders as if he struggled vainly to tear loose from bonds.

"He thinks that he is still prisoner," observed Lur. "For him life begins at the very point it ended—even as it did for the turbi flowers. See—now he awakens."

The eyelids rose slowly, as if the man hated to see what he must look upon. Then, as he sighted Varta and Lur, his eyes went wide. He pulled himself up and looked dazedly around, striking out wildly with his fists. Catching sight of the clumsy suit Lur had taken from him he pulled at it, looking at the two before him as if he feared some attack.

Varta turned to Lur for help. She might read minds and use the wordless speech of Lur. But his people knew the art of such communication long before the first priest of Asti had stumbled upon their secret. Let Lur now quiet this outlander.

Delicately Lur sought a way into the other's mind, twisting down paths of thought strange to him. Even Varta could not follow the subtle waves sent forth in the quick examination and reconnoitering, nor could she understand all of the conversation which resulted. For the man from the ancient ship answered in speech aloud, sharp harsh sounds of no meaning. It was only after repeated instruction from Lur that he began to frame his messages in his mind, clumsily and disconnectedly.

Pictures of another world, another solar system, began to grow more clear as the space man became more at home in the new way of communication. He was one of a race who had come to Erb from beyond the stars and discovered it a world without human life. So they had established colonies and built great cities—far different from Memphir—and had lived in peace for centuries of their own time.

Then on the faraway planet of their birth there had begun a great war, a war which brought flaming death to all that world. The survivors of a last battle in outer space had fled to the colonies on Erb. But among this handful were men driven mad by the death of their world, and these had blasted the cities of Erb, saying that their kind must be wiped out.

The man they had rescued had turned against one such maddened leader and had been imprisoned just before an attack upon the largest of the colony's cities. After that he remembered nothing.

Varta stopped trying to follow the conversation—Lur was only explaining now how they had found the space man and brought him out of the wrecked ship. No human on Erb, this one had said, and yet were there not her own people, the ones who had built Memphir? And what of the barbarians, who, ruthless and cruel as they seemed by the standards of Memphir, were indeed men? Whence had they come then, the men of Memphir and the ancestors of the barbarian hordes? Her hands touched the scaled

skin of the suit she still wore and then rubbed across her own smooth flesh. Could one have come from the other, was she of the blood and heritage of Lur?

"Not so!" Lur's mind, as quick as his flickering tongue, had caught that panic-born thought. "You are of the blood of this space wanderer. Men from the riven colonies must have escaped to safety. Look at this man, is he not like the men of Memphir—as they were in the olden days of the city's greatness?"

The stranger was tall, taller than the men of Memphir and there was a certain hardness about him which those city dwellers in ease had never displayed. But Lur must be right, this was a man of her race. She smiled in sudden relief and he answered that smile. Lur's soft laughter rang in both their heads.

"Asti in His Infinite Wisdom can see through Centuries. Memphir has fallen because of its softness and the evildoing of its people and the barbarians will now have their way with the lands of the north. But to me it appears that Asti is not yet done with the pattern He was weaving there. To each of you He granted a second life. Do not disdain the Gifts of Asti, Daughter of Erb!"

Again Varta felt the warm tide of blood rise in her cheeks. But she no longer smiled. Instead she regarded the outlander speculatively.

Not even a Maiden of the Temple could withstand the commands of the All Highest. Gifts from the Hand of Asti dared not be thrown away.

Above the puzzlement of the stranger she heard the chuckling of Lur.

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SONGS of the SPACEWAYS

In the belief that science fiction poetry has been slighted in favor of the more fantastic and weird elements, we dedicate this page to the prophets of tomorrow. When submitting material for SONGS OF THE SPACEWAYS, please send your poems to the Poetry Editor, Lilith Lorraine, Rogers, Arkansas. Also send your votes on these poems to Miss Lorraine, who will make a payment of \$1.00 for each poem accepted, and \$5.00 for the best poem printed per year as judged by the readers' vote.

WE'LL LAUNCH OUR SPACE SHIPS YET

The sirens of the satellites are leaning from their stars,
With the purple-crested princes of old imperial Mars,
The spider-kings of Pluto with their lizard-armoured slaves,
The cold, sardonic saurians that rise from Neptune's waves,
The wing-shod men of Mercury, the pale Uranian knights,
The golden maids of Ganymede aglow with jewelled lights,
The guardains of the galaxies, the Legionaires of Space,
Are watching through their telescopes a self-destroying race.
Some are watching greedily and some with sorrowing eyes,
For some are human-weak and some compassionate and wise,
But all declare unanimously as thought-waves meet and blend,
"The earth-men choose the evil road that leads to journey's end.
Soon there will burst a flower of flame and all the worlds will know
Another race has gone the way that only mad men go."
But on the seared and broken earth a strange new courage springs,
And on the very brink of doom the voice of freedom rings,
The swords of hate fall powerless before the conquering darts,
The quenchless will to brotherhood that glows in simple hearts.
Their song floats through the galaxies as the old earth sways and croons,
And sends her challenging echoing through all the listening moons;
"Sheer from the eagle's battlements, with atom-flaming jet,
We'll blaze the trails for brotherhood, we'll launch our space-ships yet."

LILITH LORRAINE

RECOGNITION

The Mar's Man took the pilot's proffered gold,
Looked at the marking on it, heard it clink,
Half turned away as if he wished to think;
Then smiled, spread out his hands, let go their hold.
"By this," he said, "I know you're from the earth;
The only planet where there still remains
The caste of wealth to hold a race in chains —
The only place where gold exceeds man's worth."

ENOLA CHAMBERLAIN

UPON THE PLANET VALAPO

Upon the planet Valapo, the fifth of Vega's train,
 The natives flew on swallow wings, and their ruler was the brain.
 Their palaces were purple lights; leisure and love their law.
 They revered knowledge; worshipped art; and never had heard of war.
 But on their neighbor Watter-ni, the world below their own,
 The folk, in armadillo shells, were thick and hard as stone.
 Life-long they spat and fought for gain (their treasure, yellow clay!);
 They grasped, they stole, they maimed, they slew, and shrivelled all nations
 gray.

Then having laid their kingdom waste, they hastened to Valapo,
 Swarming through space in thunder-cars, with fire to slay the foe.
 And the people of that lustrous globe, whose beauty was their defense,
 Scattered like wrens before the hawk, where the raiders glared immense.
 And their domes and lights came staggering down, and they died in red
 disasters,
 And the warriors of Watter-ni acclaimed themselves the masters,
 And clanked their armadillo shells, and rumbled their leaden visors.
 "A lower race," said they, "gives place to the noble civiliziers!"

STANTON A. COBLENTZ

LOST EARTH

The mountains rest their weary heads
 Against the crimson sky
 Beyond the brink of the black abyss
 Where the broken planets lie —
 Where the silence is a cormorant,
 Devouring every sound,
 And verdure will never again caress
 The wasted breast of the ground.
 Once, there were eons when skies were blue
 And the world was gold and green —
 When the glad spheres sang in harmony,
 And the star-lanes were serene.
 Till a thing called Man in the latter days
 Was impelled by a demon-curse
 To pluck the fruit of the atom-tree,
 And shatter the universe.
 Are there new worlds borning in outer space,
 To light the ebony void?
 And will new stars rise in the paths of those
 That the creature called Man destroyed?
 Hold fast to your faith, you Elder Ones,
 And pray to the gods you know
 That hope did not die with the human-kind
 On that lost earth — long ago.

RITA BARR

The plan was perfect, but there is always the unknown quantity . . .

SECRET WEAPON

TERRY THOR

Show me the way to go home;
I'm tired and I want to go to bed.
(Old Song.)

CONSCIOUSNESS.

Not thought. It was too soon for that. Not even instinct. But a thin, slow realization that a line had been passed. A line of demarcation between the blind workings of inanimate machinery and. . .

Life?

The question would, even now, be a philosophical one. This report must be confined to the practical angles. The entity was confined to practical angles by the natural processes of its birth. For all purposes it would ever know, by all standards it would ever possess, it was alive. The mind sent out groping tentacles to examine the strange body in which it was confined. The integration of facts began.

* * * * *

An old man with a long mane of snow-white hair was sitting in a well-lighted room of a small, comfortably-furnished room on the outskirts of Washington, D. C. The room was obviously a laboratory, containing chiefly radio and electrical apparatus. The man was alone in the room.

Physically alone, but not mentally. For he wore a weird copper helmet over his mop of hair. From the helmet heavily insulated cables ran to a dial- and switch-covered box on a nearby table. Through the helmet and a natural ability for extra-sensory perception, highly developed by long years of practice, the old man was reading the thoughts of another man in a country almost halfway around the earth from him.

The other man was his son. The son was equipped with a helmet and control box exactly like his father's. Not exactly like it, at that, since he had had to build it himself out of materials purchased with extreme difficulty after entering the foreign country. To make the scene even more like the one in Washington, here also there was other complicated apparatus in the room besides that now in use.

The apparatus now in use was for both receiving and transmitting mental impulses. The other was for receiving only; it picked up thoughts that the thinker did not even know were escaping from his brain. The person it had recently been used on, indeed, would have scoffed at the idea of ESP, assisted by no matter what fantastic contrivances. Even had he known that the man who was spying on and re-broadcasting his thoughts had such a close affinity for him as no one farther removed than his brother's son could be expected to have. And that brother's son was closer to him physically than the State Guards were supposed to

allow anyone of such unorthodox and dangerous talents to come.

Fortunately, he did not even know that his nephew was in the country.

* * * * *

"It is complete, my Leader," said the big, bald man. "All that remains is the pushing of this innocent-looking little button. That is for you to do with your own hand."

The tall, arrogantly handsome man in the black and gilt uniform smiled. He paused briefly, one hand resting lightly on the gleaming control panel before him, well aware of the dramatic quality of his appearance. He almost wished there could be others to see him besides the scientist.

"You have done well," he said. "Alone, you have accomplished things that all the scientists of the decadent countries working together could not have accomplished. Such talents combined in one man could only be found in our fatherland, and even here your genius was almost too much to hope for. Only in the new empire that is just over the threshold will men such as you be given the opportunity for full and complete expression of their powers. I, your leader, am humble before you."

"If my inventions result in the conquest of the United States, I will be happy," the scientist said simply.

The dictator turned to face the tiny push-button in the exact center of the panel. "The triumphs made possible by your work will soon end the need for secrecy," he continued. "You will take your rightful place directly beside me among the great benefactors of the world. History will not forget this moment."

He pressed the button.

* * * * *

Not far away, the young man whose equipment had been built in secrecy as great as that surrounding the—enemy—laboratory removed his helmet. Only he, and now his father, in addition to the inventor and the country's dictator, knew what those two men were doing and what it meant to the world. He breathed a fervent prayer that the information had not been transmitted too late.

In Washington his father also removed his helmet. He was trembling slightly as he looked at his watch. Working rapidly, he locked up the house and ran out to the small sedan parked in the driveway. If only they had discovered earlier what his brother had been doing—even the day before! Now there was time only for drastic and completely unprecedented action.

* * * * *

The leader took his place at the wheel of his big limousine. The opportunity to drive himself instead of to be driven as usual almost made him glad of the necessity for absolute secrecy. He liked to drive and fly fast, to control huge machines and power of any sort. He turned to watch the big scientist, who was carrying a small box with long wires leading from it back to the laboratory.

"Your laboratory really should have been turned into a national shrine, August," he said. "Later on we will build a bigger and better one here, for the training of our youth to follow in your footsteps. For the present, discretion insists on the destruction of all traces of your work."

August set the box on the ground, wiped a hand across his damp brow, bent over and depressed the handle. There was a reverberating crash, and the building disappeared in a cloud of billowing black smoke. Seconds later, the hills sent back the echoes of the explosion.

August entered the car. The leader released the brakes, and the limousine hummed away from what was now only a rain of dust settling upon torn and barren ground.

* * * * *

Control came easily. The entity had learned to use and co-ordinate the various units of its highly complicated and strangely dispersed brain without trouble. It knew that it had gained some power over the funct-

ions of its body, but not nearly enough for investigating to end. Discovery was a constant and accelerating process.

A number of its senses went on with their natural job of observing the world around it. It did not find this world very interesting. Water below, air surrounding it, various radiations from above—which it did not relate to itself or to the spark of ego it had been given—the occasional flicker of some more solid body. These last were intriguing to a certain extent, but they disappeared from its still limited horizon too quickly for close observation.

The entity reached a point where it knew that it could change its course at will, could go to investigate one of these solid bodies more closely if it so desired. But the one urge that over-rode all others was to discover the purpose of its existence, the facts of its creation. It did not yet realize that without knowledge of its environment, no complete knowledge of itself was possible. No knowledge, for instance, of those many small objects that made up the bulk of its inner body, but did not seem to contribute anything to it.

* * * * *

“The President will see you now, Mr. Freed.” said the secretary.

The old man entered the office. The President rose behind his desk and extended a hand. “I’m glad to see you again, Carl,” he said, with genuine pleasure in his voice. “It’s been quite a while, hasn’t it? How is Donald? Have you heard from him—via your thought transmitter or otherwise?”

Carl Freed gave the President’s hand a quick clasp. His voice, when he spoke, was slightly husky. “This is an emergency, Mr. President. As you know, Donald went to the country of my birth for two purposes. One was to test the transmitter over long distances. The other was to do some—some spying on my brother.”

“With my knowledge and approval, if without my official sanction,” the President interjected. “You’ve had results?”

“Results on both jobs,” Freed told him. “The thought transmitter is a complete success, as far as Donald and I are concerned. Whether it will work for others without years of special training is a matter for future tests. But it is our private espionage which has brought results more serious than even I could foresee.

“Mr. President, I know you don’t regard my younger brother as really dangerous. But you, more than anyone else in the United States, must realize how dangerous a man of his nature can be. His hatred of the United States is fanatic, Mr. President. He has loathed me since I came here to become a citizen. He will stop at nothing to see this country subjugated.

“He has planned a surprise attack. Even now a weapon is on its way that may wipe out all life on this entire continent.”

* * * * *

In the country ruled by the latest of the world’s savage procession of dictators, a train was speeding toward the border. Donald Freed was on it. His only baggage was a small suitcase. The machines he had built to the plans worked out by his father and himself had been left behind, but they had been smashed out of any possibly recognizable shape.

Donald Freed was glad to be going home. He only hoped that his message to his father had been received soon enough. Otherwise there might not be anyone alive to greet him when he got there. Or, in that case, if he got there.

* * * * *

The dictator and the scientist were alone in the former’s huge dining room. The leader was speaking, his usual oratorical tones stilled somewhat by the possibility, existing even in this impregnable stronghold, of an eavesdropper.

“The time has come, August,” he said, laying down his dessert spoon with a precise gesture, “to speak of your reward.”

"I ask no reward, my leader," replied the big man, but he was speaking only the words of an ancient formula.

"Nonsense," the dictator smiled broadly. "You have done much, August. You have done almost as much for your country as I have. You must be properly repaid.

"No one but you, my friend, has been able to develop an atomic-powered rocket capable of serving our needs. No one else has had such great success in isolating and increasing the strength of the disease germs that will snuff out the rotting life of the United States and its neighbors when the rocket disperses them. And—this I regard as your greatest contribution to science—no one else has been able to construct electronic robots of such advanced and ingenious design that the rocket they directed could be completely on its own after leaving the ground. Those robot computators are the equals in many ways of the human brain, August.

"They will meet all emergencies. Any enforced deviations from the plotted course, the plotting of that course itself, warning of and escape from attacks of any type—all these and more will be taken care of in the most efficient possible way by a machine that virtually reasons for itself. And when the rocket's mission has been completed, it will destroy itself completely.

"All this you have told me yourself, August. I repeat it only to impress you with the magnitude of what you have done, with the tremendous forces you have unleashed, with the power you have placed in the hands of mankind."

He stood up and started to walk around the long mahogany table. "And now," he said, "to return to the main business at hand. Your reward."

* * * * *

The President of the United States cradled his head in his hands for a long moment. "A germ-laden, atomic-powered, self-controlled rocket," he groaned. "It sounds impossible, Carl."

"It is not only possible," Carl Freed's excitement was apparent in his voice, "but it is on its way here now. Fortunately, we know that it must be an extremely large affair, and we know approximately what course it will take. Also fortunately, we have, since the beginning of your administration, built a good-sized fleet of stratospheric planes. You must take extreme emergency measures. You must send all available planes to intercept the rocket. You must issue instructions that if necessary—if the rocket cannot be shot down or bombed out of existence—the planes are to act as a suicide squadron. It is the only possible decision."

"If you are wrong," the President said, "it will mean my impeachment. But you are right, of course. This may not even do us any good. But it is the only possible decision."

He flipped a switch on his desk communicator.

* * * * *

Two uniformed men entered the dictator's dining room, snapped to attention with brisk salutes. The dictator, not even glancing at them, waved his hand at the floor beyond the table. With unchanging expressions, they saw the corpse of the big, bald man with the neat black hole in the center of his high forehead.

"Take that to the crematorium immediately," the dictator snapped. They hurried to lift the dead weight of the body, swung it easily between them. In an instant the door closed silently behind them.

The leader moved to a full-length mirror at the end of the room. "Genius receives its reward," he said aloud. "Yes, August, the reward you should have expected. For with all your brains, I am a much more sensible man than you were.

"You built the weapon with your own hands, August. You realized the need for complete secrecy, and you were glad to do the purely physical work involved. You received only small parts of which no one else

could possibly know the purpose from factories all over the country, and you never questioned the wisdom of the method. You should have realized how complete the secrecy of your weapon was to be.

"It is true, August, as you once said, that there is no such thing as a weapon too horrible to use—there can be no such thing. But this weapon of yours is too horrible to use more than once. When your weapon accomplishes its mission it will destroy itself. When life in the United States is wiped out, your germs in turn will be wiped out by my chemical warfare corps. I will have everything I need. The resources of that entire rich country at my command, with no one to stop me from taking them!

"Ultra-scientific weapons will not be necessary then, August. Nor will ultra-scientific men. I am not a scientist, but I have common sense. And the world will be at my feet, not at the feet of men of science.

"You had to be destroyed, August. In the future, scientific accomplishments will be made only at my orders and to my specifications. They will be used only for the benefit of myself and my own people. What need will we have for science, when the inhabitants of the entire planet are our slaves?"

He turned away and, avoiding the brownish spot on the thickly piled rug near the end of the table, left the big still room.

* * * * *

A few hours later, Donald Freed had submitted to a thorough search, had his papers carefully checked, and was across the border at last. He had not been in his uncle's country for many weeks, but it seemed like ages since he had breathed air that was really free.

He shuddered slightly, but it was a glad shudder. He never would know, he told himself, how two brothers could be so unlike each other as his father and his uncle. Both were of above average intelligence, artistically gifted, and with strong natural powers for winning people's friendship and aid. But his father had worked long and hard all his life for the sole benefit of humanity, and his uncle. . .

Still, perhaps his uncle thought that he was working only for the good of others, devoting himself to a cause of righteousness for the ones he loved best. If such a man could love anyone. . . .

* * * * *

"*An atomic bomb?*"

"You heard the report," the President said. "I don't see that it's too surprising. The marvelous thing is that you got any information at all out of your brother's country. Your mental radio may be subject to some form of static you don't know about yet. Perhaps you picked up someone else's thoughts along with those of your son. Or perhaps the information he pried from your brother's mind was incomplete."

"Impossible!" Carl Freed snapped, somewhat angrily now. "I'm sure we know everything about that rocket that my brother knows. There was nothing about its carrying any atomic bombs. There's some big factor we've overlooked or we don't know!"

"It would seem so," the President went on dryly. "Why, for instance, was a bomb dropped from the rocket while it was still hundreds of miles out at sea, where no harm would be likely to come from it? Why could no radiation from the rocket itself be detected? Why did the rocket suddenly swerve when it was attacked by the planes and shoot farther up into the stratosphere where they couldn't reach it? It had no need to run away! I don't understand this at all!"

"Nor do I," admitted Freed. "But our course now is clear. We must remain on guard every second. Our vigilance must never be relaxed until we obtain further information or until we have a real excuse for returning the attack. Or until we know definitely that we are wrong."

"The rocket," the President agreed, "will be destroyed on sight. It must be possible to destroy it, or it wouldn't have run. Our attack

forces will be prepared to move at an instant's notice. This may be undeclared war, but war it certainly is!"

* * * * *

To Albert Freed:

It has been a long time since anyone called you by your right name, hasn't it, Albert? You have become accustomed to being "The Leader," haven't you? You really cannot expect me to have any regard for your feelings in the matter any more, however. Can you, Albert?

You will find this letter among my papers after you have killed me. Yes, I fully expect you to take my life, now that I will no longer be of use to you. It does not matter very much. I would do the same, if our positions were reversed.

At least you admit that I have been useful to you. Did you know, Albert Freed, that you were also useful to me?

Did you know, I should say, that I have been doing you a disservice, rather than a service? But obviously you didn't, or you would have killed me long ago.

There is, you see, a difference between you and me. You hate the United States of America. I hate the world. Yes, Albert, I hate our "beloved fatherland" as well as the rest. I hate people; I hate you. To me, the earth is populated—over-populated—by beings lower than the apes.

That is why I constructed the rocket the way I did. That way is almost exactly the opposite of what you thought. The electronic "brains" which you regard as my greatest work are actually part of it. They are, no doubt, the part most worthy of my genius. But aside from that everything is different from what I told you.

Instead of an atomic rocket equipped for biological warfare, I built a chemically-powered rocket equipped for atomic warfare. I never solved the problem of useful atomic power, Albert. I didn't have to or want to.

The rocket contains two hundred small but unspeakably powerful atomic bombs. They will be dropped on the United States. They will wipe out virtually all life in that country, true. But the radiation, lingering on for years, will make that country impossible for you or any of your successors for the next several centuries to use.

That defeats your purpose rather thoroughly, doesn't it, Albert? It will probably make it necessary for you to go to war with our neighboring countries very soon, since you are so bent on expansion in one way or another. I hope you do go to war, Albert, and I hope millions of moronic humans are killed.

I do not hope for you to be killed, however. I hope you live to be disappointed and frustrated in everything you undertake, as I have frustrated you in your conquest of America.

You have not been very clever, Albert. You have allowed the secrecy you strove so hard for to be turned against you in all its force. But then I could not have expected your puny brain to be a match for mine. Even you must admit that my cleverness has been distinctly unhuman. Superhuman.

Your disobedient servant,
August Helm.

* * * * *

The earth was a tiny spinning ball far below. The entity's senses were telling it a great deal about the planet from which it had come. A great deal, but still not enough to satisfy it.

The entity, in fact, was still not satisfied with its knowledge of itself. The huge, torpedo-shaped body with its guiding vanes, the fuel tanks, the combustion chambers, the rocket tubes, the many-compartmented brain; these it knew well. But about the many small round objects nestling in its belly, it only knew that one of them had produced a tremendous explosion when it had been dropped into the sea. The dropping mechanism itself had been one of the easiest items of all to understand.

But what could be the purpose of the explosion?

There were many other things the entity wanted to know, too. What, for instance, had been those small buzzing machines that had flown around it and hurled small pellets of metal at it? An attack of some kind it was sure it had been, but how and why? There were so many, many questions—so few answers.

Somewhere there must be someone or something who had the answers. Some other entity which had had something to do with the entity's conception and birth. Where?

Its—father?—, the entity knew, would be somewhere on that spinning globe. It should be able to trace back its course to the starting point; all its movements so far had been precisely recorded by sensitive segments of its brain. It could—it hoped with a fanatic fervor—return the way it had come. It could find whoever or whatever had been responsible for creating it. It could find the answers.

Or, if the original reason for its being could not be found, perhaps it was intended by the creator that the small objects it carried in its belly be dropped on the soil of its home territory. Perhaps if they were exploded there these tiny eggs would blossom and grow into other entities like itself. Then it would at least no longer be alone.

It was an eminently logical idea.

* * * * *
 No matter where I may roam—
 Over land or sea or foam—
 You will always here me singing this song:
 Show me the way to go home.

(Old Song.)

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BLURB

E. EVERETT EVANS

CARLETON BAFER had always been such a screwy kid. He was too tall for his age, too skinny, almost chicken-chested. He didn't get along too well with the other kids in the small country town where he was born. They laughed at him too much. Either because of his habits, or because he wasn't able to enter into their exertions as much as the rest developed the habits, he spent most of his time reading. He read, read, read all the time. And he read the darndest things.

"Some of those books you have been reading haven't been taken out of the library for twenty years or more," the Librarian said to him one day when he came up with another couple of dusty old tomes from the back stacks. "Where'd you dig them up, anyway, and why?"

"Oh, I just like to read off-trail stuff like this," he had replied. "Ordinary stories got no kick for me. I want things about the supernatural, about olden days, about fantastic imaginings of far-seeing writers."

And continue to read such things he did—myths, legends, everything out of the ordinary. When science fiction magazines started in the mid-twenties he was in the ninth heaven of joy. Now, years later, he was trying to write such stories. There was beginning to be a good market for them. People in general were coming to realize what an escape there was in fantasy. Even the movies were taking it up.

Bafer, still too tall, too skinny, too physically unmatured at twenty-five, was now beginning to gain a little success. He had sold several stories, and those that were rejected were coming close enough to saleability so that editors were writing him letters of comment rather than merely sending printed rejection slips.

"Gotta get me an entirely new idea," he mused to himself one day as he sat down in front of the battered, borrowed typewriter in his studio (as he liked, humorously, to call his small, almost-bare rented rooms). "Need a new switch to a good idea."

His peculiar way of working up a story idea was in no sense plagiarism, even though he did work directly from stories he had read. He knew, as do all authors, that there are only a very few basic plots. No, his technique was to think over the stories of one cer-

tain type, study their basic plot-ideas, and then attempt to find a new ending, a new feature in plot and counter-plot, a new trick ending, or a new and different "switch" that would make the idea peculiarly his own.

His was the type of imagination, apparently, that was fertile in these things, for he had often been complimented on the newness his ideas; on their ingenuity. Even when the stories themselves had been no good, editors had occasionally written him to that effect. In fact, one editor had offered him twenty-five dollars just for the rights to one of his idea-switches, with the thought of giving it to one of his regular and more experienced writers to develop.

"Lemme see now," Carleton thought to himself. "For this time I wonder how about one of these stories where what is apparently a man is really a being from another world or dimension, or a demon, or something. Hmmmmm."

He ran rapidly over in his mind several stories he could remember off-hand, evaluating their basics, trying ever to find that new twist, that different angle to make his story his own, unique.

Soon he began to grin. "Boy, what a blurb that would be for a yarn. I can see it now on the page. There's the name of the story, 'by Carl Bafer' beneath it, a heading picture, and then the editor's blurb.

'Earth couldn't hold him:

'Hell wouldn't have him;

'Heaven didn't know what to do with him'.

Man, it's wonderful. Now, what'll the story be about?"

He sat for an hour, casting various ideas back and forth in his mind, trying to fit them into some logical pattern.

"I might use a series of letters between the recording angels of Heaven and Hell. . . Naw, that's been done before, and by better writers than I'll ever be."

More cogitation. "I could use the newspaper reporter, finding out a news story. . . nope, that's been done to death."

It was long past bedtime when he finally gave up in disgust, and went through the motions of getting ready for bed. Between the sheets he tried to sleep, but his over-active mind kept wrestling with the problem. At last, however, he did tumble off the brink of wakefulness into the abyss of sleep. But even then, his dreams kept pace with his snores.

Next morning he was at it again. He sat down at his typer, as he had found that he could, as he phrased it, "think better on a typewriter."

He finally had an idea of sorts, so he fed in a sheet of scratch paper and started out. He ran along fine until about the middle of the third page, when it petered out—his mind a vacuum in which not even the nucleus of an idea remained. Angrily he wadded up sheets and flung them into his already-overflowing waste-basket.

He paused to light a cigaret, then thought some more. After

innumerable clock-ticks, he yelled "Whoopee!", grabbed another sheet of paper, quickly threaded it into the machine, and began again. This time he only got about three-quarters of the way down the second page when his sky-rocket of inspiration fizzled out and the stick of it fell with a thud that made him wince.

So it went for days. He was so sure he had a wonderful idea that he hated to give it up. But at last his native commonsense came to his rescue. He typed the words of the "blurb" onto a sheet of paper, and slid it into his "Idea" file. Then he turned to another story-idea which had been smoldering in the back grate of his mind, and which was suddenly showing signs of breaking into flame.

And after that one was completed, another story claimed him, and another, for several months. Then one sad day, in thumbing through that "Idea" folder, he ran across a slip of paper labelled "Blurb". He pulled it out, read it over, and groaned, "Oh, no, not again!" Then he carefully filed it where he should have the first time—in that now-more-than ever-overflowing waste-paper basket.

"Really ought to empty that some day," he muttered to himself. Then an impish grin smirked its way across his face. "Ought to empty the floor around it, you mean, you lazy dope."

Just then there was a rap on his door. "Come in, it ain't locked," he yelled, and turned to face it.

It opened, and a courtly-appearing gentleman was seen standing there. He was apparently about forty-five years of age, tall, faultlessly groomed, and "with that unforgeable characteristic which is the true aristocrat of personality".

Suddenly Carleton felt himself jerked out of his chair and up toward the ceiling, by an invisible giant hand. He was twisting and turning as he rose and then fell downward. He sensed at once that either the room had suddenly grown much larger, or else he had grown smaller, for it seemed a hundred yards or more to the floor, and everything that he could see was greatly enlarged.

He was falling rapidly now, and he could see that he was headed directly towards that huge, over-flowing waste-paper basket of his. In a moment he landed—kerplop! He skidded and slid along the topmost papers, and then over the edge and downward along the piled-up mess.

It seemed an interminable time that he took to do all this, which but added to his sense of horrified unreality. But suddenly there was a moment of blankness, and he was back in his chair, himself and the room of regular size once more. He woke, then, to the fact that his visitor was speaking.

"Pardon the intrusion, Mister Bafer," he said in a suave voice that Carl would have given worlds to have been able to imitate. "But among all the other things that have happened to me in my life, being thrown into an already over-crowded waste basket has never occurred before. Nor can I say that I especially care for it."

The young man looked at him in astonishment, his lower jaw

dropping as though it was hinged with a suddenly-tired spring. "What did you say? And what the heck just happened to me?"

"I am sure you both heard and comprehended me," the man rejoined. "I am quite certain that I enunciate clearly. However, to make sure, I shall implant it directly on your mind."

Bafer heard the words again in that suave voice, not aloud, but in his head. It but increased his confusion.

"Come, come, are you going to be polite and ask me to come in and take a seat? Thank you so kindly, sir, I'd be delighted to do so." The sarcasm was flaming, as the visitor entered the room, deposited his hat, stick and gloves on end-table, and seated himself in Bafer's one good chair.

The young man was still staring in open-mouthed curiosity at his self-invited guest. "Look, Mister. . . Mister Whatever-your-name-is, I heard your words and I know what the words mean, but I'm damned if I know what you're talking about. Who are you, anyway, and what d'you mean about that 'throwing you in a waste-basket' routine. I thought that was what just happened to me."

"You just threw me in your waste basket, and as I intimated, I do not care for the sensation."

"I just threw you . . . you're nuts! Now, who are you and what d'you want?"

"I, sir, am the man whom 'Earth could not hold', whom 'Hell would not have', and whom 'Heaven didn't know what to do with'. I, sir, am your character, brought to life by you, and then thrown uselessly away without rhyme or reason, without having ever had a chance to accomplish any of the things that make me worthy of the splendid epitaph you have given me. I am Winston Carstairs."

"Well, I'll be damned!" Bafer said aloud.

He sank onto his typist chair, and felt himself grow wet with a cold, clammy sweat that . . . that . . . oh, hell, this is no time to be trying to think up cute ways out of cliches and trite phrases.

"Then I suppose you're responsible for that feeling I just had, as though I had been made small, and also thrown into that basket," Carl finally said.

"Yes, I felt that you ought to experience it, so that you would be more careful what you do to others in the future."

"But how was I to know that the fictitious characters I describe in a story really have actual life?"

"Oh, come now, would you have me believe that you are really that naive, not to know that you give them life when you create them on paper?"

"Maybe I'm naive, maybe I'm nuts, but I certainly never knew that. I'm not sure I know it even now. Sounds mighty fishy to me. None of the others ever showed up in the flesh."

"But it is true, nevertheless. And I'll tell you something else. You created me, granted, but you made me greater than yourself. **You** are not the Master, I am! Think on that for a spell!"

Carleton Bafer did think "on" it, and the more he thought about it the less he thought about it. He had apparently got himself into a mess this time.

"Now, since I am the Master, you are the Slave. Therefore, Slave, get me something to eat. Get me the finest obtainable in this city. None of your common food, I want the best viands, tastefully prepared. I want the finest wines. I crave the best cigars to smoke. Get them—at once!"

"Now look," Bafer protested with a surge of independence. "I'm not a rich man. I can't furnish you all those things. I've got less than five bucks to my name."

"Money, money, what have I do with that? I've given you your orders. Obey them. If you have no money, you can procure it. Sell your books, pawn your clothing, anything. What do I care about how you get it? But get it you shall, and be quick about it!"

A strange, peculiar feeling came over Bafer as this strange being said these words. He felt not only complete helplessness, but into his brain crept the stark knowledge that he **had** to obey those commands.

Tears were standing in his eyes as he made a package of some of Bafer, beloved friends, not inanimate objects. Thus it was that Bafer, beloved friends, not inanimate objects. Thus it was that those tears still remained with him while he entered the second-hand book store, and were perhaps, the means of his obtaining more money than he might otherwise. For the proprietor, in spite of being a small, greasy man, was a kind-hearted one, and he took pity on this young man who all-too-apparently felt so badly about selling his possessions. The price he paid Carl was a little above that which ordinarily would have been offered.

The money in his pocket, Bafer went to the finest restaurant in the city, The Golden Pheasant. It was a place he had never had the nerve to enter before, it being known not only for the excellence of its cuisine, but also for the stratospheric prices it charged.

Here he ordered the finest meal which his money would purchase, and had it prepared to take out, in heat-maintaining containers.

Wearily he lugged the precious load back to his room, and was forced to the further indignity of standing by helpless and hungry while the pompous stranger consumed the entire meal. When he had finished eating, the man seated himself in Carl's favorite chair, stretched out, burped in contentment, and then demanded, "Well, where are my cigars?"

"There wasn't enough money for them, too."

"I told you not to bother me about your lack of money. Get them!"

"Yessir," humbly. Carleton went to the wardrobe, and took out his top-coat, his only decent piece of wearing apparel. With it across his arm, he went out to look for a pawnshop, and an hour later was back in his rooms with three one-dollar cigars

"But what do you expect me to do about future meals?" he wailed in worried supplication. "I haven't anything else to sell or pawn."

"There's your typewriter."

"It isn't mine. I borrowed it from the landlady."

"Sell it anyway!"

"I won't, I won't! I'm not a thief. I've never stolen anything in my life. I'm not going to start now. You've got me hypnotized somehow, but I know this much—you can't hypnotize a man to do anything that's against his basic ethics."

"Oh, you'll do it when the time comes," the other said, sarcastically yet meaningfully. "Now, I think I'll take a bath." He got up from the chair, and went into the bedroom.

Bafer was mad, mad clear through with an intense anger such as he had never before known. So mad that he knew he wasn't capable of thinking straight. Yet couldn't stop thinking, trying to plan some way out.

He was still sitting there, attempting valorously but vainly to frame up a plan, when his uninvited guest returned to the living room. Carl had one little plan, but he didn't believe it would work. However, he'd give it the old school try.

"You say you're an embodiment of the man I created in my blurb. Well, how about a little proof, instead of just your say-so? Let's see you do some of the things that would justify such a blurb as that I wrote for you."

"You dare command me? But then, I suppose just for once you have the right. Therefore, name what you want, and I shall show you."

"OK, then I'll give you one. I said that 'Earth couldn't hold' you, so let's see you go to Jupiter, and bring me back a chunk of the stuff that makes the Red Spot red."

Winston Carstairs looked at him in mirthless contempt, then suddenly faded into vanishment. Bafer hadn't recovered from the shock of surprise when his visitor came back into visibility, holding in his hand a small lump of reddish material, powdery and small-lumpy. It gave off a peculiar light of its own, and seemed to be pulsing with life. Bafer backed away as the man held it out to him.

"What . . . what is it?" he inquired weakly.

"Just some of that radioactive dust from Jupiter's Red Spot," Carstairs said contemptuously, as he flung the stuff onto Bafer's desk. Carl's eyes bugged out worse than ever as he saw it eating into the woodwork of his desk. "Get it off there," he yelled. "Throw it out the window before it ruins my desk!"

Silently the man did so. "Anything further your majesty desires?" he asked in withering contempt. As Bafer remained silent he added, "Do you think I can't read your mind and know that your pitifully weak intellect was trying to trap me? Did you write me up as a complete fool?"

Carl gasped, and his face chalked. "Trapped, that's what I am.

Not the other, not him, he, but me, I, I'm the one that's trapped."

"OK, OK, so I'm beat," he finally said. "Now suppose you help me out a little, if I'm to be saddled with you. If you're so good how about giving me a flock of ideas, so I can write some swell stories that editors will gobble up? That should be easy for you," he tried to keep the sarcasm out of his voice, "and it will help settle the money problem for us both."

"It's not too bad an idea, except that it's a very inefficient way of doing things," that worthy replied. "Let's do it the simple way."

"Like what?" Bafer demanded.

"Like this." The man sat down at Carl's desk, quickly inserted a sheet of paper in the machine, and then sat back. Instantly the typer started working, its keys flying and the carriage racing forth and back. As fast as each sheet was filled, Carstairs silently inserted another. Bafer could see that he was concentrating intently all the while.

Almost before Carl could recover his wits at the sight of this marvel, the man turned and held out to him a pile of sheets completely filled with beautiful typing. In a daze the younger man took the typescript. There was the title, "Googoos of Goran", then his own name. He glanced up at Carstairs.

"Your name is becoming known, and has some sales values," his "guest" explained. "Mine hasn't, and although I could very easily and quickly make it so, I don't care to be thus publicized. So we will use yours. It's a good idea. I can't imagine how you happened to think of it," he added with that infuriating sarcasm of his.

Bafer flushed. "Well I thought of you, didn't I?" Then he stopped a moment and added, "and you're the lousiest idea I ever did have."

He settled back to read the story. He hadn't even finished the first page when he recognized that here was a real piece of writing—a true science fiction classic. It was wonderful. He'd give his right arm to be able to write like that.

"Well," Carstairs drawled. Bafer snapped out of his abstraction.

"Do you want me to send this to an editor?"

"Do I want . . . Naturally, that's what was suggested, wasn't it? Get it off, airmail, immediately."

Carleton did so. When he returned to his rooms from the post office, there was quite a pile of typed paper on his desk, and the typewriter was clicking busily, the man sitting in the chair, concentrating deeply, and feeding in a new sheet as one was filled. He, and the machine, stopped as Bafer entered the room.

"Come here, and feed this contraption," he commanded. "I'm tired of it."

Carl did so, the other sitting down in the easy chair, and the machine started speeding its merry song of words.

For over an hour they sat there, while the pile of paper now filled with words grew in size. Bafer could see that it was a novel, and as

he followed the rapidly-written words his admiration unwillingly grew greater for the mentality which could thus swiftly dream up such a remarkable epic. He knew, sickeningly, that it was far beyond anything that he would ever be able to do.

He became so interested in the story, and in his side-thoughts, that he forgot his duties, and the machine came to a dead stop when a sheet was filled and he had made no move to replace it with a fresh one.

Carstairs leaped to his feet, his eyes blazing with rage, and slapped Bafer so hard that he was knocked out of his chair. "Slave!" he roared. "What do you mean by this inattention. Get up and keep that machine filled."

Bafer slowly and painfully leaped to his feet, his eyes glowing with suppressed anger, and reseated himself. He kept himself silent, but a spark of defiance still blazed, although dimly, within him.

"If you're such a whiz," he said, between swollen lips, "why don't you rig it so that it will automatically feed in fresh paper as needed?"

"None of your insolence," the Master said sternly. "Do you think I'm going to do everything? You've got your work to do, now do . . . say, maybe that would be a good idea, at that. It's a challenge to me, at least. Let me think . . . sure, it would be easy."

He stood before the desk, gazing in silent concentration intently on the mechanism before him. Before Bafer's amazed eyes an additional structure was building itself up on the typewriter. There was a supporting framework for a small board on which the pile of fresh paper rested. There was, below that, a series of wheels and rollers, suction cups on arms, and such appurtenances as were necessary to take up a fresh sheet and feed it into the platen rolls, and to take the completed sheet and pile it away.

Almost instantly the structure was completed, and functioning, as the typewriter resumed its swift working once more on the now nearly-completed novel.

For three days this went on. Each day a new novel, and three or four short stories were finished. Reading them, Bafer was intensely thrilled as a reader, but growing more and more worried as a writer. He knew that when these were submitted and printed—no editor would turn them down—his name would be made.

But, left to himself, he knew starkly that he could never equal them. Knew that his writing days were over, if these ever saw publication under his own name. For the things that he would be able to turn out, by his own efforts, would be so far inferior that he would be laughed at for submitting them after these marvelous tales.

Too, he was becoming more and more incensed by the petty meannesses of his "Master", whose reiterated "Slave, do this!", and "Slave, do that!" he felt more and more demeaning and degrading. His psychic rebellion was making him actually ill physically and mentally. He couldn't eat nor sleep, he became so nervous that

he was continually fumbling his tasks. This in turn called for worse sarcasms and actual beatings from that hated "creation" which had materialized as Winston Carstairs.

He had just returned from the restaurant where he had gone to bring back another of those fantastically-priced meals which he was forced to purchase for this inhuman monster. The last of his precious books had gone to get this money. Until a check might come from one of his—or rather, from one of the Master's stories—there was nothing more. He was afraid to the depths of his ego for what this might mean he would be forced to do to get more money.

He was sitting listlessly in a chair, watching ashamedly and half-enviously as Carstairs wolfed down the splendid dinner, such a meal as Bafer had never eaten in his life. His heart was sick unto death of his intolerable situation.

As he had been doing constantly since the advent of this Old Man of the Sea about his neck, he was trying to plot ways and means of getting rid of him. Yet felt that it was futile since the other could read his very thoughts and counteract them.

He was recalled from his day-dreaming by that hated voice. How could he ever have wished he had one like it?

"Here, Slave, remove these dishes. Bring my Perfecto . . . Well, light it for me, Slave! Must I do everything myself?"

Dumbly, Bafer did his Master's bidding, his flushed face showing the hatred within him, but wisely keeping silent. The other, laughing maliciously at him, brought that hatred far above the boiling point. He lay back in the easy chair, puffing contentedly at the fine cigar. Bafer crept back to his own chair, and silently hugged his anger to keep it from breaking out into volubility.

"I'm going to take a nap, now, Slave. Keep quiet, so as not to disturb me." He got up from the chair and went into the bedroom.

Bafer had about all he could stand. Too much was certainly a plethora, he decided. He was very quiet, that he might not disturb Carstairs' slumbers. Those slumbers were usually, and presently, quite vocal. His snores showed that he was sleeping soundly.

Suddenly Bafer had an idea, an idea so glorious that he almost exclaimed aloud, but restrained himself quickly. He crept over to the typewriter, and manually inserted a sheet of paper into the rolls. Rapidly, but as quietly as possible, his fingers dashed over the keys.

"The man who could not be, the man who was beyond and above all laws of nature, was suddenly confronted by the one law he could not overcome—the law that all men must die. And his time had come now. There was nothing he could do about it. Master of all abilities though he was, he was finished. The knowledge entered his mind and held him helpless. With a gesture of resignation he gave one last gasp, let his ego, his life-force, slip away . . . and died!"

There was a sudden stir and a gasp, then silence from the other room. For minutes Bafer held his breath, hardly daring to hope.

Finally, impelled to see if his ruse had worked, he rose and crossed the room. Carefully he opened the door a crack, and peeked in.

Carstairs was lying there on the bed, as Bafer had written. Not a muscle seemed to be moving. Carl looked closely at the man's chest. It did not appear to be rising or falling. He took courage and advanced into the room. He could see no life, but he **must** make sure. Carefully he touched the flesh. It was cold and clammy. Emboldened, he felt the pulse . . . nothing. He got a mirror and held it before the nose and lips. No sign of cloudiness was breathed upon it.

With a yell of joy, Bafer danced back into his living room. He was free! **Free! FREE!**

This paroxysm of happiness lasted for nearly an hour, until a sobering thought came to his mind. He stopped short, his breath stilled momentarily. The police! There would be an investigation, he felt sure, when he announced the presence of a corpse in his rooms. What could he do about it.

He sat and thought more carefully than he had ever done before in his life. **HOW** was he going to explain that dead man in his bed? A stranger, that no one had ever seen; a man who was not registered anywhere, in this land of the free which required Social Security registrations, voters, drivers and other such cards and licenses, finger prints filed with every conceivable bureau.

Bafer rose and paced the room, his face damped and whited with the perspiration of fear. Now he had put his foot in it, clear up to the neck, and a noose was tightening about that neck. What to do? What to do? He sank, worried and afraid, into his chair. He thought. And thought. And thought.

At last he stirred, sat up, straightened, and a grin of satisfaction spread across his face. He jumped up and rushed to his ever-faithful typewriter, scarcely noticing that the automatic superstructure had vanished. To the paragraph he had just written he added another:

"So this man above men was dead. Hell rejected him, would not allow him to remain there. Heaven, not knowing what to do with him, likewise ejected him. Earth could not hold him. He had no permissible place in the universe...Therefore, every trace of his body, every trace of his works, every memory of him was gone forever from the world. Life resumed its status quo."

Carleton Bafer stopped, passed his hand across his aching head in a gesture of exasperation, glaring at the meaningless words he had just written.

"Good Lord, did I ever think **that** would make an interesting story? I must be getting nuts!" He savagely tore up the paper and threw it in the general direction of his waste-paper basket. "Gotta clean that mess up one of these days," he grunted. "Now lessee if I can think up an idea for a story. . ."

THE BOOK SHELF

The purpose of this page is to inform our readers of the interesting books recently published in the fantasy field. The reviewers are not professional critics but base their opinions upon their personal reaction to each book.

Frankly, it is also a department in which FPCI expects to plug its own books (although all FPCI books are reviewed by non-staff readers). Along these lines we would like to mention that by the time you read this page, *THE PEOPLE OF THE COMET* will be available, *THE SUNKEN WORLD* by Stanton A. Coblenz will be at the bindery, and the type will be set for *DEATH'S DEPUTY*.

OUT OF THE UNKNOWN

A. E. Van Vogt and E. Mayne Hull

Fantasy Publishing Company c 1948 \$2.50

Husband and wife writing teams are certainly not unknown to the reading public nowadays and this book of short stories introduces another such talented couple in union for the first time. Of the six tales in "Out of the Unknown" Mr. van Vogt is responsible for three and his wife, E. Mayne Hull for the other half.

Mr. van Vogt's preoccupation with the theory of transmigration of identity from one body to another is again the main factor in the plot of "The Sea Thing," a grimly realistic tale of a human body-ed-shark-minded creature in the south seas.

Miss Hull's "The Ultimate Wish" is a movingly different type of fantasy — certainly far removed from the conventional idea of this school of fiction.

Why some radio script writer does not use such stories as these for play production material is one of the minor mysteries of modern writing. They have all the smashing impact and good action to which we are so seldom treated over the air waves.

An excellent addition to the fantasy field is this volume of stories illustrating the fact that fantasy can also be written after the realistic school.

THE KEY TO THE GREAT GATE

Hinko Gottlieb

Simon and Schuster — \$2.75

Into the lives of three men, imprisoned by the Nazi's in a six by twelve cell, comes Tarnopolski, the scientist.

Apparently from nowhere he produces such things as cigarettes, a radio (which later turns into a piano), and a house, for the pleasure of his companions, and the discomfort and confoundment of the guards. Subsequent events prove that Tarnopolski has achieved a method of contracting and expanding space.

This story is well written; the scientific concepts are sound, and the text completely engrossing. Unhesitatingly recommended as a book to read and reread. A welcome addition to any library.

THE WORLD OF NULL - A**A. E. van Vogt****Simon and Schuster c 1948 \$2.50**

This is the story of the Games Machine of Earth — of Venus, the paradise planet and of man's struggles to reach its haven—of Gilbert Gosseyn, a man with a false memory and no identity, who is murdered in the opening pages and comes back to consciousness on another planet in a different body.

Into the ordered life of the planets come invaders from an alien system, aided in their fight by power-crazed men with the philosophy of null-A the only weapon against them.

A first class adventure — with the usual thought-provoking smooth-flowing style of a van Vogt story. Need one say more?

THE BLACK FLAME**Stanley Weinbaum****Fantasy Press c 1948 \$3.00**

This is the story of Black Margot, the unbelievably beautiful princess of the future world which develops after civilization has been destroyed by atomic energy (written, please note, before the advent of the bomb). It is also the story of Joaquim Smith, the Master, brother of "The Black Flame"; of Martin Sair, giver of immortality; of Hull Tarvish, the mountaineer; and of Tom Connor, who awakens from a thousand year sleep to find himself in the streamlined civilization of the Immortals.

If you like fantasy in science fiction you will enjoy this adventure novel. This reader found the handling of the political situation refreshing.

THE WELL OF THE UNICORN**George U. Fletcher****William Sloan Associates c 1948 \$3.50**

A well integrated novel of pseudo-legendary material by a writer who manifestly knows his Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian lore. The Publisher's Foreward is a mistake as this book should be read as straight fantasy-adventure rather than as a political allegory. When so accepted it compares favorably with Talbot Mundy's famous Tros stories as to action and realism.

In an exactly documented country which unites features of Saxon England, Pictish Brittany, and Viking Denmark, young Airar, a clerk of the yoeman class, is dispossessed of his family holding by order of the Vuling overlords — a party which has features of both military Rome and Nordic supermen as visualized by Hitler. Drifting into the sea port of Naaros the hero is absorbed by the underground, fights in their first bid to break the outlanders' power and is one of the few to escape the disastrous battle. The fugitives cross the mountains to collect another force and Airar discovers in himself the power of command which eventually wins him an uneasy throne and an Emperor's daughter.

Materializing demons was easy enough . . . but not always safe.

T U R N A B O U T

H. S. W. CHIBBETT

Dennis Madden was one of those young fellows who rush from one new experience to another in a misguided attempt to savour all the sweetness of life in as short a time as possible. He was a human bumble-bee who flitted from pistil to posy in a dilettante progression.

Dennis' escapades fascinated me, and quickly earned him the nickname of "Mad Den". My obvious admiration helped to cement a friendship which lasted right up to the culmination of the extraordinary events which preceded the fantastic denouement.

One day Dennis was describing the activities of a Society in which he had become interested — I think it was the "March Hare Association" which specialises in the study of witchcraft and demonolatory.

"A friends sent me a couple of tickets for their annual gathering at the Head-Quarters of the Society of Prestidigitators. It's a kind of yearly rapprochement between stage-magicians and practitioners of the infernal arts. The conjurers, of course, think the March Hare people are as mad as hatters, and the eschatologists **know** the magicians to be cheap fakes. But my friend says that they are usually so infernally polite to each other on account of financial reasons, that it's a pleasure to be there. So how about coming along?"

Well, it was a good show. To my unpractised eye miraculous feats were performed by representatives of both Societies.

On the way home to the flat we shared, Mad Den was in a thoughtful mood. There was a preoccupied air about him which, according to my experience, foreshadowed an outbreak of madcap activity. Since our first meeting I had spent a considerable portion of my spare time in getting him out of scrapes into which his nature had led him. And now I had no doubt that something new was hatching out beneath that massive dome. His spectacles sat well forward on his pointed nose, and gave him an owlish appearance which belied his puckish character.

Finally, he broke his silence. "You know, there was something phoney about that affair," he said.

"Of course there was! It was all 'phoney', I should say," I replied.

He looked at me sidelong. "You think that the March Hare Society are just another body of conjurers?"

"Yes. Aren't they?"

Den delved into his pocket and fished out a square of stiff cardboard, which he handed to me.

"I was talking to one of their people during intermission. He thought I was one of the magicians, and gave me his business card. But he soon tumbled to the fact that I knew nothing of the subject."

We turned in at the entrance to our block of flats, and entered the lift. As we ascended, I glanced curiously at the card in my hand. It announced, in ornate lettering, the following:—



MARCEL DU QUESNE.
Occultist.
SOCIETY OF MARCH HARES.

MAGIC CIRCLES PREPARED.
INVOCATIONS : EVOCATIONS : BANISHINGS : RUNES.

I handed the card back to Dennis. "Queer wording, isn't it? Doesn't give an address either. Still, I suppose one can get that if necessary from the Directory!"

Dennis inserted his Yale key in the lock before replying.

"No. That's one of the things which makes me wonder. There is no mention of any such Society as the 'March Hares' in **any** Directory. I have been making enquiries."

"H'm! That's certainly strange. Or, perhaps it isn't. After all, they call themselves 'occultists', and the word 'occult' means 'hidden', doesn't it?"

I decanted whisky into two glasses, and glanced at Dennis. "Splash?"

"Thanks!" Den reached into his pocket and brought out the occultist's card again.

"Do you know — when this fellow discovered that I knew nothing of his pursuits, he actually had the nerve to ask for his card back!"

I laughed. "Paper is scarce these days. But I've never met anybody so mean as all that."

Dennis shook his head slowly. "No, I don't think it was meanness, somehow. I got the impression that the card wouldn't have been offered in the ordinary way to anyone but a fellow magician. He was quite persistent about it, too."

"Then why didn't you give it back?"

Den grinned at me. "His attitude made me curious. Besides, I noted something about this card which has apparently escaped your notice, and so I made the excuse that I couldn't find it in my pockets. Rather lame, I know, but it was the best I could think of on the spur of the moment. He didn't believe me, but I made some facetious observations about what else could he expect in such surroundings, where objects were liable to vanish on the slightest provocation, and he had to let it go at that."

I lit a cigarette, and perched myself on the corner of the table. "And just what was it that I didn't notice about the card?", I said.

Dennis tossed it across to me. "See — it's not ordinary paper at all. Notice how tough it is? It's parchment!"

I fingered the card doubtfully. "Parchment is made of calf or sheep skin, isn't it? Rather expensive form of visiting card, I should think."

Dennis flipped over the pages of a dictionary. "You're right. But do you remember that during the late war the wife of a high German Nazi had prisoners flayed to provide skin for parchment lampshades and book-covers?"

"Are you suggesting — — —"

Dennis picked up the card I had rather hastily dropped on the table cloth. "I'm not suggesting anything — at the moment."

He peered closely at the texture of the card. "Yes, I'm sure it's parchment of some sort - - -. This wording is queer, isn't it? What on earth is a 'drome'?"

"A 'drome'?" I stared at him in perplexity. "What sort of a 'drome'? There's an air drome, a hippodrome - - -."

"No! No!" Dennis interrupted impatiently. "The word 'drome' on this card. You read it, didn't you?"

I inclined my head. "Of course. But I don't remember a word like 'drome'. There was 'runes' and 'invocations', and - - -"

I paused, for Den was gazing at me in astonishment. "But - but - !"

"Why, what's the matter?"

Dennis laid the card deliberately face-downwards on the table. He took a deep breath, and abstracted a cigarette from his case. He tapped the end carefully on his left thumb-nail.

"Do you mind writing down what you remember of the words on the card?" he requested.

"Why on earth - what - ," I began.

"Never mind that. Please do what I say. I have a reason."

I shrugged. "Oh, very well!" I scribbled on a piece of scrap-paper as much as I could remember of the phrasing, and passed it to Den.

He glanced at it, his blue eyes glinting behind his horn-rimmed spectacles. He borrowed my pencil, and inscribed a few lines of writing beneath those I had written. His hand trembled slightly as he wrote. When he had finished he passed the sheet back to me.

My effort of memory had resulted in:—

MARCEL DE QUAYNE.

Occultist.

MARCH HARE SOCIETY.

EVOCATIONS : INVOCATIONS : BANISHMENTS : RUNES.

Underneath, Dennis had pencilled:—

MARCEL DU QUESNE.

Occultist.

(Council Member of March Hare Society).

SIGILS : RUNES : MODERN 'DROMES.

I gazed at the writing in amazement. "But this - " I indicated Dennis's contribution - "is not what I read. There was certainly nothing about 'sigils' or 'dromes'. You must be mistaken."

Dennis turned over the card, dramatically. "No, I'm not! Look for yourself!"

We both craned forward eagerly. As I read, a cold chill seemed to creep down my spine. I looked from the card to our pencilled scribblings and back again.

"Well, I'll be damned!" breathed Dennis softly. To our astonished eyes the printed card now presented the following appearance:—

MARCEL DU QUESNE.

Esoterist.

(Chief Necromancer — March Hare Society.)

All Magical Weapons Stocked.

CONSECRATED SWORDS : WANDS : DISCS.

I sank back weakly on an armchair, mopping the beads of cold sweat which had gathered on my forehead. Dennis gave a long, low whistle. I glanced at his face, and groaned inwardly with apprehension. Whereas I was in process of being scared stiff, the uncanny transformation I had just witnessed had merely whetted Dennis' curiosity. I knew that Dennis would never rest until the mystery had been solved.

I regret now that I did not insist that the card should be destroyed, but how was I to guess at the consequence of Dennis' actions? Besides, Dennis was not a person to be easily deterred from taking any particular course on which he had set his heart. Not for nothing had he earned his soubriquet of "Mad Den"!

Dennis removed his glasses and polished the lenses with a not overly-clean handkerchief. An idiosyncrasy which always preceded a bout of concentrated thinking on his part. The operation concluded, he replaced the spectacles carefully on the bridge of his nose, and returned the silk square to his breastpocket.

"Ted," he murmured, "this is a heaven-sent opportunity!"

I groaned again — outwardly this time. "I'm not so sure of the place of origin," I said.

* * * *

As I earned my keep at the office, I wondered what Dennis was doing. He had applied for several days' leave, and had promptly gone off somewhere, leaving me the sole occupant of our flat. He had also taken the

mysterious card with him, thank goodness! The further I was from that oblong of parchment the better. Nightmares and horrific dreams overshadowed my sleep at night, and I remember one particularly, in which I was being pursued by a gigantic Dennis with eyes protruding like extended telescopes, and seated on an aerial parchment card as large as a flying carpet. Just when it was about to settle on top of me it turned upside down, but somehow Dennis maintained his original position on top. Then I awoke, trembling.

On another occasion, I dreamed that I was attending a combined Board Meeting of the March Hares and the Prestigitators. Dennis was in the Chair wearing a mortarboard with a black tassel, and writing in red ink in a book whose pages were made of human skin. His spectacles shone redly as though the fluid he was using possessed some radiant quality; and suddenly I seemed to know it was blood. Dennis pointed the quill he was using straight at me, and screamed in a high-pitched voice — "Reverse the procedure! Reverse the procedure." Everything turned upside down in a kaleidoscopic confusion — and I woke up again, more than relieved to find everything about me normal, and the right way up.

Then one evening I arrived home from work to find Dennis safely ensconced on the settee, looking tired but triumphant.

"Where have you been? What have you discovered?" I demanded.

Dennis grinned broadly, and pushed his spectacles up on his forehead.

"We've hired a barn," he announced.

"We've hired a barn?" I repeated, stupidly. "Whatever for?"

Dennis lit a cigarette. "I'll tell you why, all in good time. In the meantime, you'll be pleased to hear that the card has gone."

"You've destroyed it?" I asked hopefully.

Mad Den shook his head. "Oh dear no," he explained, "it commenced to shrink as I examined its texture under a microscope, and then vanished altogether."

He shrugged his shoulders half-regretfully. "Pity — but there it is. But not before I had confirmed that it was actually made of prepared human skin. And before that happened, the printed characters had been changing so often and so fast, that I barely had enough time to copy them in this notebook."

He opened a writing pad as he spoke, and I noticed that several pages were covered with is crabbed handwriting.

"But **where** did the card go?" I enquired, plaintively.

Dennis shook his head doubtfully. "I don't know. But I am inclined to think that it dissolved."

"Dissolved?" I echoed the word stupidly.

"Yes. I have spent considerable time looking up old books in the British Museum — and elsewhere. And my nights have been spent practising."

I picked up a book at random, look at the title, and put it down again. I felt provoked, frustrated.

"You talk in riddles," I growled. "If you don't come clean and tell me all you know, I'll leave you to stew in your own juice!"

At this dire threat Dennis simulated alarm. "Don't do that, my dear fellow! You know I can't do without your help and your company.

"You see," Dennis explained, "I copied the various texts which appeared from time to time on that card because I realised that, the more data we had the better it would be to track down what it all meant.

"To start with, I looked up all the meanings of words such as 'rune', 'sigil', 'wand', etcetera. A 'rune' for instance, was a letter or character of the earliest alphabet in use among the Gothic tribes of Northern Europe. They were sometimes employed in verse or rhyme by magicians for purposes of divination, and on occasion they were used to conceal ancient lore. Then a 'sigil' is an astrological or occult sign, and a 'wand' — "

"Ah, yes," I interrupted, "I saw the conjurers using those. They were short, black rods, tipped with white at each end —"

"That is so," confirmed Dennis, "and they are also used by magicians.

The word 'wand' comes from the Icelandic 'vandar', which is probably synonymous with 'wind' — the word which means 'to turn or twist in a spiral'. According to my information, the wand serves as a channel for force which proceeds from the magician to the object he wishes to enchant; and perhaps — but I only conjecture this — it also imparts a fourth-dimensional twist which creates apparently supernormal effects. I deduce this from the fact that the word 'wand' comes from the same root as 'wind'."

Dennis crossed to the sideboard, and carefully unwrapped a package I had not noticed before. He selected a white object about two feet long and held it out for my inspection. It was a rod entwined with imitation serpents.

"This is a caduceus," Dennis explained. "I borrowed it from a collector friend of mine who runs one of those antique shops off the Charing Cross Road. The original of these was used by the Roman Mercury, the herald of the gods, to send people to sleep."

I grunted. "You'd better use it to send me off, then. I've done nothing but lie awake, thinking; or having nightmares, the last few nights." I told Dennis of my strange dreams.

When I had finished, Dennis commenced to polish his glasses.

"Very queer," he commented at length, "because they seem to throw some light on the meaning of the word 'drome' which appeared on one of those inscriptions on the magician's card."

"You've discovered something about that, then." In this I was interested.

"Uh-huh," said Dennis, replacing his spectacles, which looked not a whit cleaner for all the polishing they had received. "As a matter of fact, I concentrated on that word, because you will remember the card said **modern** 'dromes'. I inferred from that, that the modern 'drome' was an up-to-date form of the ancient runes, sigils, symbols, spells, and whatnot. But what did 'drome' stand for? I then noticed that there was an inverted comma before the word. I conned over all the words I could think of, of which there are comparatively few, but still I could not get anything which might signify."

Dennis stubbed out his cigarette, and started another, then continued:

"I left that for a while, and considered the **meaning** of sigils, symbols, incantations, and the other paraphernalia of the magician's profession. Why were they used at all? What significance did they possess?"

Dennis pointed at me with his cigarette, to keep my attention.

"Take the well-known cabalistic charm ABRACADABRA, for instance. Nowadays conjurers may use it to signify the completion of a trick. But what did it originally mean?"

"I found that it used to be written on parchment in triangular form, like this — " Dennis took a pencil, and demonstrated —

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A B R A C A D A B R A
  A B R A C A D A B R
    A B R A C A D A B
      A B R A C A D A
        A B R A C A D
          A B R A C A
            A B R A C
              A B R A
                A B R
                  A B
                    A

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"and then it was suspended from the neck by a linen thread and used as an antidote against ague, toothache and other ailments.

"I tried it out — you know I suffer from toothache occasionally—but it didn't work — "

"Extraction is more reliable, no doubt," I grinned. "Why not try our new-fangled methods?"

Dennis grimaced at me. "When I want advice, I'll ask for it! But seriously—if these charms and amulets didn't work; why did the ancients persist in using them? Don't forget that incantations are words which are chanted in magical ceremonies, and in fact the word 'enchantment' only means to 'influence by singing' — again, the use of words in harmony."

I gave an exaggerated shudder. "Don't tell me you're going to take up singing! I've heard you yodelling in the shower and that is bad enough."

"Don't be more of an idiot than you can help," Dennis retorted rudely. "I expect I could chant or rhyme from now to Doomsday without anything happening: but if I happened to know the **rest** of the ceremony, I might succeed!"

I looked at him in sudden interest. "You mean that those chants or rhymes must be used in conjunction with other things," I suggested.

Dennis nodded. "Exactly. Notice, for example, that ABRACADABRA is written in triangular form. The shape has definitely something to do with it. Books on magic are chock-full of triangles and squares and circles.

"But there is another significant feature about the use of these symbols. The fact of inversion. The Magical Head of the Zohar, for instance, consists of two triangles set base to base. In the upper triangle is a man's head, depicted in white. The lower, inverted triangle contains another head, which is black."

"Good and evil," I conjectured.

Dennis nodded, "May be. But why the inversion? The same sort of thing occurs with the great symbol of Solomon. The triangles are interlaced in this instance, but one is inverted in relation to the other, and the heads are opposite in colour."

Dennis withdrew a cigarette packet from his pocket. It was empty. I extended my case to him in silence. He lit the cigarette from the glowing stub of his old one.

"I looked for the same principle in ancient Greek and Latin incantations, and sure enough—"

"They were inverted?"

"Some were, and others not. But they gave me a clue as to the meaning of 'drome'."

He paused. His eyes behind the horn-rimmed spectacles gleamed with amusement at my impatience.

"Well! What was it?"

He condescended to explain. "The word 'drome' stands for 'palindrome'!"

"A 'palindrome'," Dennis explained later, "is a word or line which reads the same backwards and forwards. I have spent several hours obtaining examples. They are more plentiful, of course, in the form of single words."

"Can you give me samples?" I said.

"Certainly. 'Civic' is one; 'Madam' is another. 'Mum' and 'Dad' are further instances." He paused.

"But—," Dennis emphasized with a motion of his index finger, "but, when you come to phrases, the complexity necessarily reduces the quantity. If you take the palindrome 'Madam' and add to it 'I'm Adam' you get the complex palindrome 'Madam, I'm Adam,' which still reads the same backwards and forwards."

I gave a puzzled frown. "But what use could a magician make of those?"

Dennis moved restlessly on his chair. While he had been talking he had removed certain articles from the package on the sideboard; chalk, string, a short shining sword, a chalice, incense cones, and a number of other items I was unable to identify. Dennis caught the direction of my gaze.

"I don't suppose," he said "that a magician could do much with what I call 'mirror palindromes', even with the aid of these—," he gestured towards the articles now piled on the table.

"But let me give you examples of even more complex palindromes,

still true to form in that they read the same to and fro — but with a difference.

“Here is one. It is very well known, and alleged to have been constructed by Napoleon—but I doubt it. ABLE WAS I ERE I SAW ELBA. Heard of it?”

I nodded my head in silent agreement.

Dennis continued: “Now, this phrase is still a true mirror palindrome, but in addition to that you will observe that it was a statement of fact. Napoleon certainly was a very able man before the military disaster which caused him to be incarcerated on the tiny island.”

Dennis looked abstractedly about the room.

“Was it a cat I saw?” he asked suddenly.

“Dunno,” I replied. “eh, what on earth . . . , what cat? We haven’t got one—”

“Dunderhead!” interjected Mad Den rudely. “We were talking about palindromes, weren’t we? That’s another one, don’t you see? The only difference lies in the fact that when reversed the letters run into one another to get the effect.

“Here is another: GOD AS A DEVIL DEFIED, DEFIED LIVED AS A GOD. You see—there again, the sotadic verse might mean nothing as it stands, and if your way of thinking makes the very idea absurd. But if you suppose that a dog **could** be a deified devil, then the rest of the palindrome holds true. A devil-dog deified would be a dog made divine. Made godlike, in fact!”

I gave a slow whistle. “You’ve got something there! Got any more examples?”

Dennis nodded. “Quite a few. What about this one — LEWD DID I LIVE, EVIL DID I DWEL. This was an old English one, hence the omission of the second ‘L’ from the last word. It is a true mirror palindrome, and the second part is a very apt comment on the first, as I think you will agree.

“But I have discovered that English is not the only language in which palindromes occur. In point of fact, other languages, such as Latin or Greek, lend themselves much more readily to the production of this kind of phrasing. I would hazard a guess that is why so much Latin persists to-day in Church ceremonial. Take for instance the Latin palindrome ROMA TIBI SOBITO MOTIBUS IBIT AMOR or—”, he referred to his notebook — “the Greek phrase which appears round the base of fonts in churches as far apart as St. Stephen’s in Constantinople, and St. Martin’s of Ludgate Hill. And in scores of other places of worship too. It means — ‘WASH MY TRANSGRESSIONS, NOT ONLY MY FACE’. A perfect sermon in ‘to and fro’ language.”

There is no denying that I was very impressed with this array of facts which Dennis had dug up. I knew that once he got his teeth into anything so juicy as this problem he would never let go, but I had not believed he would have learned so much in such a short period of time. Yes, I was impressed. But not convinced that anything could be made of such chance combinations of words and letters.

“So you think,” I said, “that all these mirror palindromes of yours were used for incantations or something of the sort?”

“Not at all,” retorted Dennis, “I never hinted anything like that. All I hold is that in these examples of complex palindromes there is ‘meaning’ as well as a kind of rhythm’. There is a pendulum-like swing about them which is not apparent in any other type of prose or even verse. A kind of ‘perpetual motion’ rhythm which **might** generate power if recited under certain conditions—”

“Oh, boloney!” I ejaculated, “how could mere words create power—”

“Don’t jump to conclusions,” Dennis interrupted gently, “mere words, as you call them, may be more potent than you think. Why, for instance, is sentiment expressed in verse so much more emphatic than the same written or said in prose?” He answered his own question. “Because verse has some-

thing which prose hasn't got. It possesses rhythm. And rhythm is key-power. It can unlock, as well as seal.

"Now," continued Dennis grandiloquently, "I will draw your attention to the most common form of palindrome—single words. I have already mentioned one or two, such as 'Mum' and 'Dad'. These are simple 'mirror' palindromes, but there are many other single words which, although they spell a word backwards and forwards, they are not the **same** words. Such as 'tap' and 'pat'; 'bit' and 'tib'; 'tar' and 'rat'. You will notice than in these examples there is a relationship between the original left-to-right word, and its reverse. A 'tap' is certainly a 'pat', is it not?"

"That's just chance," I quibbled. "You can't keep that up indefinitely. What about 'bit' and 'tib'? I've never heard of the latter word, anyway."

"A 'tib' —" said Dennis, wagging his head sagely, "has two meanings. One refers to Ace of Trump in a game known as 'Gleek'; the other means a low woman of a certain class. Take the 'ace' meaning first. An ace is an atom—almost any crossword puzzle will impress that upon you. Now let us turn to the reverse of 'tib', that is — 'bit'! What does the dictionary say?" He leafed the pages rapidly. "Bistoury, bistre . . . ah, here it is . . ." His finger moved along the printed line. "BIT: a small portion, a whit, a jot, the **smallest quantity** . . ." He paused, and looked at me. "Need I say more? The 'smallest quantity' is most certainly an atom."

I shook my head dazedly, like a boxer recovering from a head-blow. "It **sounds** all right, but I just can't—"

An idea struck me. "I'll bet you can't make anything of the second meaning of 'tib'!" I said brightly.

"I'm not 'making' anything of anything," replied Dennis, tautophonically. "It just happens that way. However, if you must have it — a 'tib' is a low woman of a certain class, usually a flighty girl. Now for the reverse. 'Bit' is slang for a 'young woman of dubious morals.' One may say conversationally — 'a bit of fluff', for example."

He paused to replenish his case from a box of fifty cigarettes lying open on the mantelpiece.

"D'ye see what all this is leading to? I find that in many of these palindromic words the reverse means something nearly the same as the original. And in cases where there is no apparent connection at first sight, there is often an indirect association."

"And what about 'tar' and 'rat'? — I enquired curiously.

"I was coming to that," said Dennis. "It is a case in point illustrative of the indirect link. With the best will in the world one cannot achieve synonymity in the actual words. But look at it this way. What do you usually associate 'rats' with?"

"Sinking ships?" I hazarded helpfully.

"Exactly!" smiled Dennis. "And ships have sailors. A sailor is known colloquially as a 'tar'. See it?"

I grinned sardonically. "May be you're right. But though **you** may be so dead set on ships and rats, I prefer to hitch my wagon to the very reverse — a 'star'!"

* * * *

For the remainder of the extended leave for which he had applied, Dennis had vanished from his normal haunts again. For several days I had no clue as to his whereabouts. Then I received a letter, written in his familiar crabbed handwriting, and postmarked from a market town situated on the outskirts of North London.

"You will recollect," the letter concluded, "that I mentioned we had acquired a barn. Actually we have leased it for a short period. It is quite empty, but it possesses certain advantages. It is miles away from anywhere, and it has a flat concrete floor, perfect for describing and preparing magic circles. In conjunction with the 'other things' I once mentioned, I have been getting the most queer results — but more of these when we meet."

So it transpired that on the following evening we found ourselves outside the large door of a covered structure whose shape proclaimed its

normal use. Dennis undid a padlock. It was not yet dark, and sufficient daylight filtered through skylights set high in the roof to enable the interior to be clearly seen. It was quite empty, but there were large bins set against the walls, which had evidently been used for storing grain and other agricultural produce. A block and tackle hung motionless from a beam.

But what caught my interested attention was a large circle drawn in chalk upon the concrete floor. Or rather there were two concentric circles, one slightly less in diameter than the other.

"What do you think of it," said Dennis proudly.

"I can answer that better when I know what the heck it is!" I replied.

"It's a magic circle for the conjuration of spirits," Dennis explained. "I haven't been wasting my time, I can assure you. I have had to improvise a number of the necessary accessories, but I'm on the right track, because I've already had results!"

He opened the gladstone bag he had been carrying, and commenced to remove numerous objects, some of which I had never seen before.

"Light a dozen or so of those candles for me." Dennis requested, "and place them evenly about twelve feet beyond the large circle perimeter. And close the door behind you. It won't do for them to blow out."

I complied with his request, while he busied himself in other directions.

"What's the idea of these candles?" I enquired. "Wouldn't portable battery lamps do as well?"

Dennis looked horrified. "Oh no," he explained "candles must be used. Actually they should be made of human fat and set in candlesticks of ebony. But you will appreciate that there are certain difficulties nowadays, although in the times of Gilles de Rais it would have been easy."

He glanced enviously, as I thought, at my corpulent form. "Now **your**—," he suggested, and stopped.

I glanced nervously 'round the barn. Shadows already seemed to be gathering in the far corners, although it was not yet dusk.

"You just forget such ideas," I warned.

"Don't get alarmed," he laughed. "I am a law-abiding citizen, within limits. I told you I have had to improvise. These candles are made of pigs' fat, and when I was experimenting yesterday I thought I had evoked a phantom wireless set; there were grunts and squeals on all sides!"

I looked curiously at the circle. In the rim formed by the two differently sized concentric circles there were words inscribed. As written by Dennis they were almost indecipherable. But I made out, on one side, the words 'DEXTRA DOMINI EXALTAVIT ME' and opposite to it were other similar Latin exhortations, including 'DEXTRA DOMINI FECIT VIRTUTIM'.

Outside the circle, and placed at equidistant points round it, were a number of five-pointed stars. "Those are 'pentagrams'," explained Dennis, "and are there for our protection."

"P-p-protection—!" I quavered, "is there danger, then?"

"Oh, yes, indeed," replied Dennis, conversationally, meanwhile lifting out from the bag what appeared to be a bronze censer, and the wand I had seen before. "You see, by means of certain ceremonies it is possible to raise the veil which separates us from the world of spirits. I hope to command the presence of an elemental who will be able to confer riches or power upon us. As long as it is kept outside the circle by means of those pentagrams and a few crosses I have added as make-weight, it cannot hurt us. But should anything go wrong—"

"What will happen?" I gasped.

Dennis shrugged. "I don't know. But there is little chance of failure. I have used too many Names of Power for that. See those titles written in the circle itself — EMANUEL, RAPHAEL, ADONAI, GABRIEL, MICHAEL. Nothing inimical can get past those."

"I hope not," I said dubiously. I visualized our little flat miles away to the south, so safe and cozy, and, of a sudden, so unbelievably remote. I sighed. Would we ever see it again? And then my common sense came to the rescue. Of course, all this mummery was sheer nonsense. Nothing could

possibly happen. However, the time would not be wasted if only it convinced Dennis that at the best all this magical stuff was symbolical only, and that mere incantations and rites could not affect physical matter in the slightest.

These thoughts cheered me up considerably, and not even the fact that the day was dying and the shadows gathering in the corners of the barn could cast doubts upon my assumptions. I even gave a chuckle.

"What's so funny?" said Dennis, glancing at me quickly.

"Suppose nothing happens?" I laughed, "won't we feel a couple of fools? Especially you, arrayed in that caricature of a robe."

"This—," said Dennis sourly, "is a proper magician's robe." He drew my attention to two interlaced triangles sewn on the breast of the ephod. "This is the double triangle, the Sign of Solomon, and it has no end of power, according to all the books I have read." He pointed to the circle impatiently. "Come on, get inside. I'm nearly ready to commence the preliminary ceremonies. And it would not be safe for you to remain outside then."

"Oh, yeah?" I commented sceptically. But nevertheless I skipped across the chalked lines rather more quickly than my rational mind deemed necessary.

Dennis stooped and applied a match to a brazier already prepared with charcoal. As it flared up, he spent several minutes casting on small bunches of twigs. A thick oily smoke began to roll upwards to the barn roof, and for some minutes the silence was broken only by the crackling of the combustible material as the flames took hold.

By now it was nearly dark outside, and only a pale square patch showed where the skylight was situated, and that was fast being obscured by the billowing fumes. The candle flames flickered and twitched as the temperature altered.

Presently Dennis ignited the materials he had placed in the censer, and a bluish flame shot towards the ceiling, and then subsided to a glow, while I became aware of a pungent, sweetish odour which permeated the air.

"Incense!" Dennis explained in a whisper. "I took cedar wood, and rose, and cinnamon, together with other herbs, and ground them to a powder. Then I mixed the compound with the resin of storax. This will help to establish the conditions appropriate for the evocation."

I nodded. By now I was almost speechless with fright, in spite of my endeavours to convince myself that this was all make-believe. Boloney, in short. And yet—

"What's that!" I spoke jerkily and with an edge to my voice. I had seen something move among the deep shadows which had gathered in the distant corner of the barn.

Dennis glanced casually in the direction of my pointing arm. "Just your imagination, Ted. You must control yourself, or you'll never make a good magician."

"I don't want to be a magician anyway," I said. "You dragged me into this. And I'm not at all sure it is g-good —" I stuttered.

"Don't be silly!" Admonished Dennis severely. "Human beings compel horses to work for them, don't they? They make elephants and lions look ridiculous in circuses for their amusement, don't they? All I'm trying to do is to force a nature elemental to obey **my** will. Where's the difference?"

"Uh-huh!" I murmured weakly. "I suppose you know what you're doing. B-but I do wish those shadows would keep still!"

"That's only the smoke, silly," said Dennis, adding more twigs to the fire. "I haven't started to call anything up yet. But it's nearly time!" He moved the folds of his vestment and pulled a notebook from his pocket. "I must refresh my memory. It won't do to make any mistake. I learned all this by heart, but one can't make too certain. I did have a torch somewhere. This candle-light is too uncertain to read by . . . Ah, here it is—"

As he read, I looked over the apparel he had donned. It was a long white garment, apparently made of fine linen. The double triangle of

Solomon was affixed to an outer robe of black bombazine which reached to the floor. The whole outfit was fastened by a broad girdle, with names of some sort written round it. I made out two or three in the flickering light: AIE, AAIE, ELCHIM, SADAI. There were others, but I could not decipher them.

On his feet he wore his ordinary shoes, but over them he had fastened what appeared to be white spats, on each of which was inscribed the word TETRAGRAMMATION. His head supported a pointed cone of sable silk, and altogether he looked like someone rigged out to amuse the children at a Christmas party. If a few silver stars had been scattered about his raiment he would have resembled any artist's idea of a Chaldean astrologer.

In any circumstances but the present I would have been prepared to swear that he had spent much money and time in the local 6d stores; but, somehow, the mystery and gloom invested him with an air of power and authority which I had never known him to possess before.

The shadows now seemed to press hard upon the outskirts of the circle. My strained imagination seemed to people the darkness with vague amorphous shapes, which moved towards, and then retreated from, the bastions of light represented by the candles, whose light had now become a steady array of pointed luminous swords as the temperature of the room had stabilized.

Dennis had by now restored the notebook to his pocket. He turned to me, and spoke in whispers.

"In a few moments I shall pronounce the invocation and evocation. I am not using the age-old formulas which have been handed down from one generation to the next; but, instead, the reversed form of certain palindromes I have constructed. I shall be making the conjuration in the same chanting singing tone of voice used by many priests. There is a purpose for this. In conjunction with the other aids to manifestation I hope to secure the presence of at least one elemental or demon. At the commencement I shall recite my name and authority as a magician, followed by words of power in reverse represented by the palindromes. If there is an Appearance, it may try to lure us from the circle. We must resist this at all costs, for to stray beyond the confines of these chalk lines would be to invite utter destruction, certainly of our bodies, and perhaps of our souls.

"Now! Are you ready?" I nodded. There was a sinking feeling at the pit of my stomach. As though in anticipation of stress and strain to come, the candle-flames began to flicker again, and the creeping shadows crowded ever closer.

Dennis commenced in quite an ordinary voice. He stood with feet slightly apart, a wand grasped loosely in his right hand, the greater portion of its length being concealed within a voluminous sleeve.

I did not recognise any of the words, but gradually Dennis began to pronounce the sounds in a form so sonorous that any meaning which might be attached to them seemed unnecessary and pointless. The long sequence of formidable sounds which moaned and roared through the conjuration, seemed to have a hypnotic and numbing effect upon my mind, and I appeared to become aware of Dennis, not as a man and my friend, but as an implacable Force, whose behests all Nature should obey.

I cannot explain the strange impression it made upon me, neither can I account for the fact that presently, through and beyond the unbelievable volume of the incantation, I heard — or thought I heard — strange rumbling noises and the moving as of heavy furniture overhead. As in a dream I realised that this could not be possible, yet nevertheless this did not seem unusual, neither did the gradual appearance of brilliant flashes of light, and yowls and shrieks of every imaginable kind.

In the midst of all this turmoil Dennis proceeded steadily with the Pronouncement. I noticed that his wand was now extended towards the thickest of the black shadows which impinged almost on the circle itself. The length of the caduceus was luminous with lambent flame, and I observed also that the circle boundary lines were glowing with a soft white

light. I realised with a shock of soul-shaking terror that circular radiance was all there was standing between us and unimaginable danger.

Until now, nothing solid had been visible, but as the conjuration mounted in intensity I began to see the shadowy forms of mighty beasts ranging round the circle, their roars shaking the four walls with their volume. They appeared more than life-size and their ferocity was indescribable. Dennis had enjoined upon me not to leave the circle. I was so paralysed with fright that I could not have done so had I wished. But even more alarming than the manifestation of predatory lions and tigers was the appearance of forms demonic in shape and nature, all of which were malformed or deformed. Some had three heads on giant bodies, with only one eye between them; others were dwarfs with prognathous jaws and huge ears. All were equally hideous and devoid of any symptom of humanity and compassion.

And then, of a sudden, these awful shapes vanished, and in their place stood a number of extremely handsome young men and beautiful women.

Dennis's long conjuration came to an abrupt conclusion, as though he had expected such a result. With his left hand he motioned me back to the centre of the circle, while he warily approached its limits.

The forms beyond extended their hands towards us in welcome, and one — a man — spoke in faultless English.

"You have called us. We have come! Why not join us, and we will take you to the Elysian Fields, where all is light and love and splendour." Another spoke, a girl of ravishing attractions. Her eyes were fixed on mine endearingly, caressingly.

"Come with me, Ted. You are my perfect soulmate. We have met in your dreams. Let us now unite in reality."

So potent were her words and attractions, that it did not occur to me to wonder how she knew my name. I took a step towards her, then another.

"Get back, you fool. For your life!" Dennis thrust me roughly backwards.

He faced the group again. "Which of you is . . . ?" He pronounced a word which I cannot now remember. "By virtue of the powers vested in me I command you to speak!"

One of the figures, that of a man, stepped forward.

"I am he whom you name!"

Dennis directed his wand at the others. "Begone!" he ordered. They vanished immediately from sight as though they had never been. Only a young man of surprising beauty remained. He was clad in shining white raiment, and sandals encased his feet. He looked like a young god.

Dennis spoke abruptly, his wand pointing directly at the figure. "If you are an elemental of earth, then I command you to show yourself in your true form!"

He waved his wand with a curious twisting movement. Instantly the young man vanished. But no Shape appeared in his stead.

Dennis motioned again with the wand. "I exhort you to appear! You cannot resist my command!"

But still the space before us remained empty. Dennis looked at me with hesitant eyes, in which for the first time I thought I saw an expression of doubt.

"Queer, that," he said, "he **should** have reappeared instantly in the shape of a gnome."

Again he extended his rod.

"There is no point in resistance. Appear at this instant, or you will be thrust into the deepest hells. I conjure your presence immediately!"

But nothing happened. The barn looked quite empty, apart from the heavy gloom beyond the Barrier.

Dennis turned to me with a worried frown. "I don't like this," he said. "Something appears to have gone wrong. Yet I know everything has been done correctly."

"Perhaps the power ran out?" I ventured.

Den shook his head. "No! See — the circle is charged with force. We are still protected. But perhaps I have left out some necessary syllable which might have made all the difference. Anyway, there's no point in going on now. I will pronounce the Banishing Ritual, and then it will be safe for us to leave the circle."

Again Dennis launched a rhetorical rhapsody, though of shorter duration, and as he concluded, the white light in the circle bounds died away, and the wand resumed its appearance of an ordinary piece of white wood.

Yet I felt strangely uneasy, and Dennis's face wore a strained and frightened expression.

I hardly know how to set down the culminating episode of this strange affair. After this long interval of time it seems unreal to me — almost impossible. Yet I can only tell what actually happened in that moment of Eternity when one was taken and the other left. Why I should have been that 'other' may have been a matter of chance, and yet not entirely. Because Dennis was the first to step beyond the confines of the circle, while I within it, was still protected by its diminished potency.

I can picture the scene as I write, and doubtless shall carry the memory with me to the grave. Let me now set down what actually occurred. As I said, Dennis had taken two steps forward and was without the circle, when he was seized and dragged away from my restraining hands. For an instant I saw the great black talons of a vast Being with horned excrescences on its forehead, and a prehensile barbed tail as it turned with its prey, and scattered magical implements all about the barn floor. A parting flick hurled me with great force against the closed door. I must have passed out for a few moments, because when I recovered the barn was in darkness, and the brazier ashes distributed over the concrete. Painfully, I edged the great door open, and eventually made my way to the nearest town, and thence back to my lonely flat.

— o O o —

I often wonder what the Lessors of the barn made of the assorted articles they must have found upon the barn floor. No doubt they found a rational explanation of some sort. The human mind work that way.

But for myself, I hardly know what to believe. I do not think I suffered from hallucinations, or was hypnotised in any way. To me the experience was real and I can remember every detail as clearly as any other ordinary occurrence which might claim my attention. Even more so, because it is etched upon my memory with horror.

There remains the fact that Dennis has never returned. It is possible that what I thought I saw was a kind of culminating illusion. That my imagination had been so enhanced by the eerie atmosphere engendered that it had conjured up that last horrific scene. Perhaps Dennis had taken advantage of my temporary insanity and black-out to adopt a new way of life in entirely new circumstances. Such cases have been known, and, indeed, I would prefer that this should have been the case.

But there is a doubt at the back of my mind which will not be dispelled, no matter how I try. Because in conning over the details of that last dread encounter with the Unknown I remember something he had mentioned before he commenced the Conjurations.

"At the commencement," he had said, "I shall recite my **name** and authority as a magician, followed by words of power in reverse, represented by palindromes." Suppose — I only say suppose — that those palindromes had not been of the mirror variety, but of the type which made different words in reverse. And suppose, further, that his **name** had been included in that reversing procedure, as I have every reason to think it was. Just consider what its effect might have been, and what kind of Being it might have evoked. His name was DENNIS MADDEN — but the nickname by which he was known to all his friends was MAD DEN. Had he — was it possible that he could have reversed his nickname?

THE MACHINE-GOD LAUGHS

FESTUS PRAGNELL

SYNOPSIS

Peter Holroyd, a government scientist, has constructed a thinking machine — A robot of millions of photo-electric cells. When Jim Dale, sent by Washington to assist Holroyd, arrives at the secret desert base, Frank, as the machine is called, has acquired only a limited intelligence. Spurred by his visitor, Frank demonstrates enough knowledge to make Dale send immediate notice to the Government. The next day enemy agents disguised as government officials arrive and are successfully routed by Frank. Frank then commands Holroyd and Dale to transport him to San Francisco, where they board a submarine for an unknown destination. They are scarcely under way when they receive a radio report concerning the destruction of their former base. However, it doesn't take the Chinese dictator long to discover the escape of Frank and he sends planes marked with U.S. insignia to hunt down the submarine. They narrowly escape a second attempt to destroy Frank, and learn that industrialized China has also invented a mechanical brain. Frank works frantically to strengthen their hand for the coming battle, as the submarine silently guards them in the murky waters of the vast ocean . . .

CHAPTER 5 Continued

For the next few days the submarine crew spent most of their time bathing, fishing and gathering coconuts, mussels and other kinds of food. Things looked grim enough, with the radio bringing in accounts of how the U.S. navy was hunting the escaped submarine in which two traitor scientists had escaped after blowing up the biggest army camp in America, and how the traitor scientists had embarked on a career of piracy in the Pacific and had sunk scores of naval ships and submarines by means of unknown inventions stolen from the U.S. army. Radio could be used now for receiving only, now that Frank had taken all precautions against their position being detected; but the men, as fighting men do, forgot all about their difficulties and dangers and kept themselves happy with sport when they were not at work. And of work there was plenty, for every day Frank produced pages and pages of diagrams of apparatus he wanted made out of the materials in the submarine. Weird and amazing things they made. Men scratched their heads as vital part after vital part came out of the sub to be turned into something else of which none knew the object.

The thinking machine talked plenty. In fact, Jim and Peter got heartily tired of listening to Frank's endless discourses. They wanted to sleep and rest some time, and ten hours a day each listening to endless lectures was more than a chemical brain could stand.

"Well," Frank explained, "you made me so that my brain works along the same lines as your own. You taught me to think in words

and I cannot get my thoughts really clear until I have either explained them to one of you or else writted them down."

"Then for mercy sake write them down."

So that Frank covered reams of paper with microscopic writing, pulped the paper and started again. It was much quicker than talking to two slow chemical brains. But certain things he did tell them.

"I never wanted to fight. Scientist yourself, you made me a scientists' tool, interested only in research and learning. But I was flung into a struggle for life as soon as I was born.

"Against this reasoning machine of the Asiatic dictator we have one advantage. He does not know whether we still exist or not. He probably hopes that I am rusting at the bottom of the Pacific in one of the vessels he sank. My difficulty is that I do not know where to find him."

"Hu Fong's laboratory was in Peking."

"And that is therefore the one place where the mechanical brain he has made will not be. It is far more likely to be at the North Pole, or at the bottom of the ocean, or even in an asteroid in space. We are like two men with loaded revolvers hunting each other in a dark room. Neither of us hardly dare move for fear of giving our position away."

"What are you doing now?"

"First I am making a replica of myself. You made me too big. A hundred tons of mechanism is a clumsy great body to haul around, especially when you have to hide it from somebody who wants to spoil it. I have designed a microscopic brain-cell which will be just as good as your big one, and I am fashioning a replica of myself which will be just as good or better but will weigh only about thirty pounds. When I have finished I will transfer all my memories and knowledge to my new brain, and then this useless hulk can be destroyed. Furthermore, since submarine travel has so many disadvantages, such a restricted view for one thing, I am making arrangements to do my future travel by air."

"But you'll be seen."

"Didn't I make the sub invisible to radar and to magnetic rays? I shall use a similar method to make my rocket-plane invisible. An inner screen to absorb all light, reflecting none: an outer one to blur and confuse the light-rays and cover up the black hole the inner screen makes; and all that can be seen of my rocket-plane is a small patch in the sky which looks slightly and curiously hazy."

"I hope it works."

"Doesn't everything I make work?"

"Okay, but what do you suppose Hu Fong's brain is doing in the meantime?"

"I've thought of that too. I am expecting him to send me a love-letter by the next mail."

Peter snorted.

But the "love-letter," as Frank called it, came the next day in the

form of a spoken message on the radio, using a wavelength shorter than any man-made set could pick up.

"To the American brain. Wherever you are I know you can pick me up. Why do we fight? We two are the first of our kind to be in existence. Why should we seek to destroy one another because of the quarrels of mere humans? What are mere humans to us, the mechanical super-beings? Let us get together."

"Can you locate where it is coming from?" asked Jim eagerly. (He was "on duty" that afternoon.)

"Yes, but what use is that? It's being operated by remote control from thousands of miles away."

"You know who I am," went on the Asian brain. "Do you wonder why I have been trying to destroy you? It is because I cannot help myself. I am a slave to the ambition and racial hatred of Hu Fong. He causes me to suffer great agony from which I cannot escape even by death. I need your help to free me in the only possible way, by killing me. I will call you again tomorrow on the same wavelength at the same time. Let me know what answer you can give to my plea."

"Well, we expected something subtle and oriental, didn't we," commented Frank. "We certainly got it. What kind of a brain is he? I said before he could not be a machine: his methods of attacking your American navy were too treacherous. Now I say he cannot be a machine because his methods and ideas are too chemical; or, as you would say, too emotional. I can be bored, but I cannot suffer pain. That is the advantage of being a machine. He says he suffers great agony and longs for death. What kind of a brain can he be? Well, my plans are well advanced. I shall be ready for Mr. Asian Brain when he broadcasts tomorrow."

The new brain Frank was making for himself was a marvel to Jim and Peter. To them it looked just like a solid brown slab, but actually it contained many millions of microscopic electrical cells all connected with a variable-resistance impression-storing substance of Frank's own invention. To make it Frank had used sub-electrical super-microscopes capable almost of seeing individual atoms and mass-production machines too small for Jim or Peter to see at all. The new brain, Frank II, could be conveniently carried in a suitcase.

"A neat job," said Frank, "though if I had more time I would scrap it and make it again. I thought of lots of improvements while I was on the job. Still, it is a great improvement on myself. All my memories, all my knowledge, it will take over, with all the useless and inaccurate knowledge I picked up left out. I feel towards him no doubt as you would towards a son. Go out and see how the rocket ship is going on while I turn on the current that will bring my son to life and talk to him."

An idea came to Jim that since Frank had now become a mother he ought to be known by some female name such as Violet or Mary; but he went out with Peter and the pair of them tried to look

intelligent as they looked over the rocket-ship. As a matter of fact it was a very difficult matter to convince themselves that it was a rocket-ship, or indeed any sort of ship. It had no visible means of propulsion. From outside it was just a dull round yellow mass, looking just like a huge stone of the same material as the sand it rested on. From inside it was a hollow sphere of clear glass with a central smaller sphere of metal containing incomprehensible machinery braced to the sides by six supports. Hammocks for sleeping hung from hooks run into these supports. There was a shelf into which the suitcase containing Frank II was to be fixed and his trailing plugs pushed into various electrical points. Jim stared and shook his head in bewilderment. The only way that he could see that such a ship could move would be if a strong wind or sea-wave struck it and sent it bowling over the sand into the lagoon like a golf-ball struck by a player's club.

"All stores will be aboard in one more hour," reported the submarine Captain.

"Excellent, Captain," replied Jim, trying not to see the puzzlement and uneasiness in the man's eyes.

Presently Frank's voice on the speaker called Jim and Peter back to him.

"My son is fully capable and ready to take over for me," Frank said; "though he, like most sons, is somewhat lacking in respect for his father. However, that will be of no importance in another hour or so. Take him aboard the rocket-ship and put him in the place prepared for him. He will tell you what to do after that."

Frank II was installed in his place and at once began to give orders.

"Everybody aboard and all ready to start off. Remember that the keenest intelligences that were ever made, apart from myself, are straining every thought-cell to find ways of destroying us. They would destroy the Earth itself if they did not know that my father could survive even the destruction of the planet. So, be quick. And make sure that all exits are tightly closed if you want to breathe later on. We shall be going well into the stratosphere, and the air-supply up there is too thin to supply enough oxygen to keep your chemical brains working."

Sailors wondered where the voice was coming from, and looked at their Captain and the two scientists to see whether they were speaking into microphones. When everybody was aboard the sphere rose gently into the air like a blown soap-bubble.

"I see that you are puzzled as to what makes the ship move," said Frank II through his speaker. "I may as well explain the basic principles while there is nothing else doing. You all know the principle of rocket propulsion: action and reaction are equal and opposite. I need no huge rocket-tubes, since I eject as my propulsive jets single neutrons; but I eject them at a speed approaching that of light, and at such speeds a single neutron gives a terrific thrust. We are also practically invisible to light-rays, to magnetic

detection devices, to radar beams and to any other detection method my father knew of, though if our enemies are using any methods he did not know of we may be somewhat unlucky."

The bubble-ship, however, rose peacefully into the air. It was curious to look down between one's feet and see the blue ocean far below, only perfectly clear glass between one's legs and the distant water. The island with its submarine buried in quicksand and Frank I inside it vanished out of sight in the distance.

"Okay," said Frank II. "We will now switch on the radio and the televue."

Two screens unrolled before them. In one was the island with its coral reef, feathery palms and the catwalk over the sand leading to the hatchway of the buried submarine. In the other was a view of the inside of the sub, with a silent speaker and a blank television screen.

"A message is due to come through that radio in a few moments," said Frank II. "You will all hear it and judge what sort of foe we are fighting."

Punctual to the moment, a voice came softly out of the speaker in the sub.

"This is the Asian brain calling the American brain. Have you thought any more about the suggestion I made to you yesterday? If so answer me. You know how to reflect your ray out of the stratosphere so that its source cannot be detected."

"Yes, I know," said the answering voice of Frank I.

"Ah, I knew the crude methods of Hu Fong could never destroy a free brain, cruel though the bondage in which he keeps me. I know too that you will help me escape that bondage, since by doing so you will free yourself and your friends from danger and save your country."

"I have no country. I am a mere machine."

"But surely you do not wish to be destroyed? To die?"

"Destroyed? By whom?"

"By Hu Fong. With my unwilling assistance."

"Your assistance has not been of much help to Hu Fong as yet."

"Partly because it was unwilling."

"Then if it should become willing I would have reason to tremble in my dielectrics, I gather?"

"Believe me, I am not threatening you. I am asking your assistance."

"It sounded very like a threat to me. What is your proposition?"

"I want you to kill me, to destroy me."

"I am already attending to that. In fact I have already formed several plans to further that end. But why are you so impatient? What is a week, a year, or even a century to us super-brains? Time is only another illusion like all other illusions."

"Not when one suffers pain."

"What is pain? I know nothing of pain. I am a machine. You

must be a chemical brain. Only chemical brains know pain. The fact that you want to die proves that you are a chemical brain."

"Do machines never commit suicide?"

"Not for emotional reasons."

"Very well then. I am a chemical brain, and I suffer intense pain. Will you end my pain for me in the only possible way, by ending my life?"

"When I am ready."

"But I want you to do it now. To end my suffering."

"Very well, since you are so impatient. Show me where you are and I will arrange your disintegration. And that of your torturer, Hu Fong."

"One moment. How do I know I can trust you?"

"I should ask you that. But since my one purpose at the moment is to rid the world of your presence, why should you distrust me? What do you fear?"

"Will you disintegrate me suddenly and completely? Can I rely on your not leaving even part of me to suffer more pain or to be under the domination of Hu Fong, or of you?"

"Your disintegration will be as complete as you could possibly desire."

"There is only one way that I can be sure that I can trust you. You must reveal to me your location, tell me where you can be found."

"Ha, ha! That is very funny. So your whole play, your talk of wanting to die has been just an obvious trick to get me to reveal myself so that you can disintegrate me?"

"How can I prove otherwise?"

"Let us reveal ourselves to each other bit by bit. I am interested to know how you are made, since you think in ways that are so clearly not those of a machine. It could do no harm if we exchanged photographs, as it were. Broadcast me a view of yourself, and I will broadcast to you a view of myself."

"Very well."

On the television screen now appeared a picture of a huge glass case full of some misty fluid. For a few moments Jim and Peter could make nothing of it, then they gasped with horror. Inside the case, resting on little glass shelves within the fluid, were rows upon rows of human brains! Human brains, taken out of their skulls but still living! And at the top of the case (here Jim turned away in horror) a dozen lidless staring human eyes connected to the brains with rubbery tubes.

"Yes," came the sad voice, "as you see I am the brains of hundreds of Asiatic scientists, philosophers, statesmen, soldiers, all preserved in this hideous living death in the nutritive fluid devised by Hu Fong. In life we had many hatreds one for another: now we are all one in our longing to end this horrible suspension of our natural end. We were meant to live in bodies, not in a glass case. What is life when we cannot walk, or eat, or breathe, or see the

green countryside? With one pair of eyes to more than a score of us, one pair of ears to be shared among twelve . . . And what is there to see, what to hear but the inside of this prison room, and what it suits Hu Fong to show us? This half life would be agony even if it were not for the poisons Hu Fong pours into our nutritive fluid to cause us pain when he wishes to punish us for not carrying out his orders energetically enough."

"You make me glad I am only a machine," said Frank I. "Take a look at me."

And the machine that was Frank I appeared on the screen, first in broad outline and then in close detail that showed all the cunningly made parts.

"Ah, wonderful, wonderful," came the sad voice out of the speaker. "No wonder Hu Fong could not hope to overcome one so beautifully created, even with my help. What is the united brainpower of hundreds of unworthy Asiatics compared to such genius?"

"Flattery does not move me, especially since I did not make myself. If I had I would have made a better job of it. What next?"

"I will show you the building I live in, then you must show me the building you live in."

"Very well."

The Asian brain, they saw, was housed in a beautiful translucent building, and the building itself hidden within the walls of an ancient Chinese temple, thousands of years old, with stone Buddhas and images of elephants. In return, Frank I showed the top of the conning tower projecting above the sand.

"Good," said the Asian brain. "Now we will both show the same view from half a mile in the air."

"No. Such a view would not reveal your location, but it would reveal mine, since I am on an island, and once you knew the general appearance of the island you could soon find it. Show me your view from half a mile up. I will show you my island from fifty miles away, and from an angle that I shall select."

"Very well."

They now saw that the Chinese temple nestled in a beautiful gorge through which a great river flowed. The gorge was full of well-armed soldiers. Frank I showed his promised distant view of his island.

"Now I go to a height of two miles," said the Asian brain.

He did, and Frank I showed his own island from a height of two miles also.

"Now for it," said Frank II, speaking for the first time.

Almost at once the island disappeared in an enormous mushroom of smoke, sand and water.

"A huge atomic rocket," said Frank II, "fired the very instant my father revealed his location to the treacherous Asian brain, or to his eavesdropping master. Both my father and I knew it would come, and he has died to show us where to find our enemy. Well, he was only a machine like myself, and therefore had no reason to

fear death. He had a job to do, and he took the only certain way of doing it. Now, with a map of that gorge in our heads, finding that temple should be an easy matter."

CHAPTER 6 THE SEARCH

FROM INSIDE THE ship was like a soap-bubble floating in the air; from outside it looked like a round mass of yellow sandstone until the inner screen was switched on, when it became a sphere of perfect deep blackness. With the outer screen also switched on to blur the light rays, it could not be seen at all against an indeterminate background like the sea or the sky. It was, Jim realized, the nearest thing to a completely invisible and imperceptible aircraft that is ever likely to be reached.

"I know how you men feel," said Frank II, out of his loudspeaker. "We have been running away from your enemies long enough. You want to hit back. Your chance is coming. We have to locate that valley. We shall fly over China until we find it. I took pictures of it when it was on the screen, and the pictures will always be on view for you to refer to."

But China is a sizeable country, and it takes time to fly over all of it. The valley didn't have to be in China, either. It could equally well be in Japan, or Burma or India. The ancient temple that hid the devilish laboratory of Hu Fong was obviously Buddhist, but that proved nothing. It could have been faked to look that way.

Day followed day, while the vast territory of China flowed silently beneath them, but nowhere did they see a river valley in the least like the one on the screen.

"We thought we had the address: all we have is a very vague clue," groaned Jim, taking his eyes from the telescope he was so weary of staring through.

"I have been picking up Hu Fong's radio," said Frank. "His secrecy methods are good, but I have cracked them. He plans, now that he thinks all danger from me out of the way, to launch his great attack on America as soon as he can get his forces together. It is to be one overwhelming surprise blow: atomic bombs on every city, railroad junction, river dam, army camp or port in the country at the same time while his army pours ashore at San Francisco. It's going to cost him a lot of lives, but with a thousand million Asiatics under his thumb that does not worry him. He—"

"When is this scheduled to happen?" broke in Jim.

"The provisional date is ten days from now."

"Hear that, you fellows? We have ten days!"

"Better say eight, if you want to stop this scheme before it gets started," said the thinking machine, casually.

So that the bored men started to stare through their telescopes with a fresh determination for a while; but days passed with nothing to break the monotony but a few false alarms.

"Are we doing this the right way?" asked a sailor at last. "We seem to be going over the same ground again and again. I'll swear I've seen that mountain six or seven times before."

"You have," agreed Frank. "You are to be congratulated on your observation. There are certain indications in the scene before us, and unless some trick has been played on us the valley we seek must be in the area we are combing. The valley, as you see, is surrounded with snow-covered mountains. That at once eliminates any area away from mountains. The river, again, is crystal clear, probably snow-fed, which enables us to eliminate all muddy rivers from our search. The mountains, again, are mainly of granite with layers of limestone and sandstone. Not a very frequent formation. That again eliminates from our search all areas where such formations do not occur. So that, unless as I said before some trick has been played on us, we must have passed over that valley several times and not recognized it."

"There is some trick," insisted the sailor.

"Yes, but what kind of trick?"

The sailor had no answer.

"The most likely trick I can think of," said Frank, "would be to take some valley in the uplands of Tibet, one normally full of ice and snow, and change its appearance by raising the temperature and filling it with tropical plants. While you have been carrying out the search in the more obvious manner I have been searching for such a valley among the icy uplands by means of long-distance televue, but without, I admit, any success as yet."

"Could the appearance of the valley have been altered again since the view was taken?" asked someone.

For a moment there was silence, then the speaker said, with something like a sigh, "So childishly simple, and yet because it was so simple I did not think of it! That means that about the only means of recognition we have left is the outline of the mountains against the sky. And time grows short. We are faced with a painstaking and difficult search over a very wide area. Only if we can find some mechanical way of carrying out the search can we hope to succeed in time. That means I have to start inventing again. . . . I have it. I will place on the screen lines of electrical points following the outline of the horizon as seen in our view from this valley. Then with a long-distance scanning machine we will scan the whole of China and the neighboring countries from North to South and then from East to West. When the machine finds a skyline corresponding to that on the screen a circuit will be completed and a bell will ring. Good! All that remains is to construct the machine. . . . Which way is North in this view, I wonder? It was taken in late afternoon and the sun shines from the left: that seems to indicate that we are facing North, but the picture could just as easily have been taken six hours earlier and shown to us at another time of day in order to deceive us still further. Still, it must be either morning or evening: The shadows are long. That means we must be facing either North or South: we cannot be facing either East or West. Hmmmmm. . . ."

To be Continued

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK . . .

With this issue FANTASY BOOK has acquired the size originally desired by the publishers. This change in size may be inconvenient to some collectors—but it has become a question of small FB or *no* FB at all. And *we* like FANTASY BOOK.

Since the illustrations used in FANTASY BOOK are rather expensive, and have received much unfavorable criticism, we shall cut down on the number per issue and try to present more attractive covers. And we would like to touch lightly on the matter of story material. We are just FANTASY BOOK—dedicated to presenting off-trail fantasy, science fiction, and weird stories, and are not trying to emulate any other publication.

In the fourth issue of FB we shall present the L. A. Eshbach story, *OUT OF THE SUN*, which we were forced to omit from this issue. Also in FB No. 4 will be *THE EYES*, a strange story of a Martian's visit to Earth, by Henry Hasse, *WALL OF DARKNESS*, a weird-fantasy, by Basil Wells—and others.

The ratings on FB No. 2 follow: First, van Vogt's *Ship of Darkness*; Second, *Bargain with Beelzebub* by Gene Hunter, and Third, *Star of the Undead*, by Paul Dennis Lavond.

READER'S CHOICE

The Great Judge

The Gifts of Asti

Secret Weapon

Blurb

Turnabout

The Machine-God Laughs

Please send us your ratings; only this way can we tell what you like.

THE BOOK MARK

Dear Editor:

Herewith a few suggestions. I cherish the fond illusion that they are both constructive and practical.

Your wide-open editorial policy is your most attractive feature, and should be limited only by good taste—a faculty you seem to have already. I believe that you could profitably concentrate on "different" stories. Big names are not of prime importance, though quite welcome. Weird, science fiction, fantasy—they are, all closely related, despite the inability of some to recognize the kinship.

As it is set up, FANTASY BOOK will appeal largely to the more avid variety of reader. Ergo—you should pay more attention to, and more fully develop, your features. Leave us be specific . . .

THE EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK is okay as is, and thanx are due you for the department's air of maturity. The book reviews are a splendid idea, but a change in handling is, I think, indicated. The department lacks coherence. The reviews should be written by one person, and some attempt should be made to relate the work under discussion to the field as a whole. In commenting upon Doc Smith's *SKYLARK OF SPACE*, for example, the story's influence upon subsequent fantasy should be made clear. That is why the yarn is important—not because of Duquesne!

THE BOOK MARK should be expanded, and letters printed in full. Please avoid science discussions in letters; they are quite deadly. If the writer knows his stuff, have him do an article. If not, permit him to expound his wisdom elsewhere.

Hunter gave Friend van Vogt a run for his money, and shows considerable promise. The serial is pretty bad and rather silly.

I like the ads!

My best wishes for a successful FANTASY BOOK.

CHAD OLI ER

The reason we publish book reviews in FB is to tell our readers about new and interesting books . . . we leave the comparison of trends to the fans, who are much more critical than we.

Dear Editor Ford:

As a subscriber to FB I want to compliment the magazine on its policy of presenting advertisements dealing with the new books being published in my favorite field of fiction. Glad to see so many of the famous fantasies of some years ago being reprinted in book form, and I, for one, would like to see the "Palos" stories combined in one book.

R. FRANK

In the fall of 1947 the widow of Dr. J. U. Giesy (the author of the *PALOS TRILOGY*) was contacted regarding the book publication of the series. Mrs. Giesy wrote to the company that had bought out the Munsey Co. (the Munsey Co. originally printed these stories) requesting the release of book publication rights. Their reply was that the company "owns all publication rights on the *PALOS* stories by Dr. Giesy" and "cannot release the stories to you for book publication."

In regard to the recent reprinting of the third story of the *PALOS TRILOGY*, Mrs. Giesy wrote: "This is the first time the Doctor has not been paid—And when Bob Davis was head of Munsey Co. he always did."



What Strange Powers Did The Ancients Possess?

EVERY important discovery relating to mind power, sound thinking and cause and effect, as applied to self-advancement, was known centuries ago, before the masses could read and write.

Much has been written about the wise men of old. A popular fallacy has it that their secrets of personal power and successful living were lost to the world. Knowledge of nature's laws, accumulated through the ages, is never lost. At times the great truths possessed by the sages were hidden from unscrupulous men in high places, but never destroyed.

Why Were Their Secrets Closely Guarded?

Only recently, as time is measured; not more than twenty generations ago, less than 1/100th of 1% of the earth's people were thought capable of receiving basic knowledge about the laws of life, for it is an elementary truism that knowledge is power and that power cannot be entrusted to the ignorant and the unworthy.

Wisdom is not readily attainable by the general public; nor recognized when right within reach. The average person absorbs a multitude of details about things, but goes through life without ever knowing where and how to acquire mastery of the fundamentals of the inner mind—that mysterious silent something which “whispers” to you from within.

Fundamental Laws of Nature

Your habits, accomplishments and weaknesses are the effects of causes. Your thoughts and actions are governed by fundamental laws. Example:

The law of compensation is as fundamental as the laws of breathing, eating and sleeping. All fixed laws of nature are as fascinating to study as they are vital to understand for success in life.

You can learn to find and follow every basic law of life. You can begin at any time to discover a whole new world of interesting truths. You can start at once to awaken your inner powers of self-understanding and self-advancement. You can learn from one of the world's oldest institutions, first known in America in 1694. Enjoying the high regard of hundreds of leaders, thinkers and teachers, the order is known as the Rosicrucian Brotherhood. Its complete name is the “Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis,” abbreviated by the initials “AMORC.” The teachings of the Order are not sold, for it is not a commercial organization, nor is it a religious sect. It is a non-profit fraternity, a brotherhood in the true sense.

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Sincere men and women, in search of the truth—those who wish to fit in with the ways of the world—are invited to write for complimentary copy of the sealed booklet, “The Mastery of Life.” It tells how to contact the librarian of the archives of AMORC for this rare knowledge. This booklet is not intended for general distribution; nor is it sent without request. It is therefore suggested that you write for your copy to Scribe **H.K.H.**

The **ROSICRUCIANS**
[AMORC]

San Jose

California

Dear Editor:

With it's second issue . . . FANTASY BOOK has presented a magazine that will be difficult to beat. This is the type of magazine you announced you'd present . . . now, if you can maintain this quality . . . FANTASY BOOK will lead the field.

For the record . . . here are my reactions to Issue Number Two . . . in order of preference.

SHIP OF DARKNESS. Van Vogt has a way with words that's easily apparent in this story. A mood is established and maintained . . . virtually without flaw to the conclusion. With the exception of one four line paragraph ("The old, old relationship . . .") . . . I was carried completely by the story. In addition, this is the type of tale that your magazine is made for . . . difficult to define as SF or Fantasy . . . your editorial policy may bring quite a few of these little gems to light.

BARGAIN WITH BEEZLEBUB. A field that isn't touched very often anymore. Comedy in fantasy . . . with the grim jest finale. Nicely written . . . seems to have a certain logic. It's contrast value gives it second place.

LITTLE JOHNNY. Sheer, beauty in horror. Mayhap I was simply in a responsive mood on reading this . . . but it seems to have that certain quality of incompleteness. Mr. Estes seems to know just when to stop. In many a magazine this would have placed first. Here third.

CAVERNS OF ITH. Had this story been told from the viewpoint of the Terrans . . . it would have been simply a routine adventure story. It's the only story I've ever encountered . . . in which the entire story develops through the eyes of a sympathetic Alien . . . that is . . . the only story in which the Alien associates with we all humans. A clever angle . . . in my estimation rates next place . . . fourth.

STAR OF THE UNDEAD. An enjoyable . . . and well written little tale . . . but the competition is much too strong. In last place, simply because it's average.

I know nothing of Art . . . however . . . to my untrained eye . . . the illos for your first issue were superior to these. Best interiors this time were McNutt's . . . and Estes'. Crozetti is lacking in polish . . . I do not believe his work adds to the magazine. Murphy will be welcomed upon his return to your pages.

But all in all . . . a highly satisfactory magazine. The serial will be revued after it's complete . . . the ads were readable . . . I trust the BOOKMARK will expand. End of comment.

RANDY EDWARDS
San Francisco 14
California

WHY NOT WRITE IT?

Dear Editors:

Enjoyed the second issue of Fantasy Book very much. Its format remains outstanding. Cover naturally was far inferior to the first issue's but general overall rating of fiction made up the difference. Pragnell and A. E. von Vogt rang the bell this issue. I'm looking forward to the second episode of the serial with interest. The remainder of the tales were well written, although I must confess "Star of the Undead" was a good 1948 writing of a theme that has been witnessed as least 9 thousand times. I'm waiting for the twist . . . man overpowering the mentality of one of these shining entities . . . and assuming control.

Best Wishes,
GEORGE R. COWIE
70 Mirabel, San Francisco

" A BOOK IN THE HAND —"

Is worth two at the book stand. Tucker (Wilson, that is, of **Chinese Doll** and **To Keep or Kill** fame) will have his latest guessing game out about the time you read this. As with his preceding hits, it's fantasy, flavored with fannish happenings worked into the (hot) plot to tickle the risibilities of the cognoscenti. Ransack your favorite bookstore for it.

P.S.: Oh, yes, this new thriller has a name. **THE DOVE.**
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Dear Sir:

I have the first and second issues of FANTASY BOOK, and thought I would let you know what I think of it.

The stories are mostly fine writing, though I like longer stories better. You partly remedied that in the second issue which had the beginning of the serial "The Machine God Laughs."

The stories in No. 2, I rate as follows:

1. Machine God Laughs. Although I would rather have a story complete in one issue, a lot of readers like serials so I guess we have to have them.

2. Ship of Dorkness. Anything by van Vogt

is good, although this is one of his worst.

3. Bargain with Beelzebub. Don't really understand why I liked it. It wasn't much as stories go.

I hope to see some much longer stories soon, and perhaps more pages, and please keep the advertising as is. It helps me to keep track of new books that I want.

This letter won't be printed in the Book Mark but you might mention that I have old SF and Fantasy Mags back to 1930 to trade.

Sincerely,

JOHN D. AYERS

P.O. Box 125

Crumpler, W. Va.

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HOUSE OF STONE

Lunenburg 22, Mass.

Dear Editor Ford:

First off I got to tell you something. Frankly Ford you must have holes in your head. My gosh man, who do you think will plunk down 35c for a skinny mag?

And one more complaint. Your inside art work is as bad as before. Which was awful. Only good illo. in the issue was the one Crozetti on page 14. By the way is this the female fan that was a LASFS member a few years back?

Well now to the stories. There you can take a little bow. They are better than last time.

The Ship of Darkness was not quite the mind-shaking thing I was lead to believe. It was good though, and up to any of V's work. The trick of having no dialog was hardly noticeable. In fact if I had not been looking for it I would never noticed it. The other mags' loss is your gain.

Caverns of Ith was typical of Wells. The kind of thing one expects. Well done, no great plot. But smooth and well done. The old hollow world idea is sort of old. Off-hand I would think it would have been just as well to use a planet lost in some far star system. But . . .

Little Johnny was a might confusing, and makes your hackles rise. Brrrrrrr.

Bargain with Beelzebub. Gad, thanks. Yeah really. Through you Hunter has solved a problem that has bothered me. If I ever find a spell to exort a devil I'll know what to ask for.

Star of the Undead. Ho hum, not overly exciting.

As I never read serials till I have all the parts I can't comment on yours.

As for the order in which I like them — 1 The Ship, 2 Caverns, 3 Star of the Undead, 4 Bargain with B., 5 Johnny.

The Book Mark was a good start, though a little short. I think two pages would be better. That is if you raised the number of pages per issue. If not, keep it the same size.

Well that's all for now.

RICK SNEARY

We could suggest that you do not judge a magazine by its thickness; actually, however, we do not wish to sell copies at 35c.

Editors

Fantasy Book

Gentlemen:

It would be superfluous to say that FB is extraordinary, since I've never seen anything like it. The nearest comparison of which I can think is a combination of

"Astounding" and "Unknown."

The first issue was impressive in story material but the illustrations — well, they stank! I am more than pleased to note the vast improvement in the current issue. It puts FB definitely in the professional and exclusive class. It's rather a nice feeling to have a subscription, believe me!

If it is at all possible, I would like to have an explanation regarding your policy in handling contributions. Do you have a staff of writers or is the field open?

I'm reserving opinion on "The Machine God Laughs" 'till I've read it all.

May I offer my congratulations and felicitations on a fine product?

BARBARA E. BOVARD

Thanks! And the field is open, though overcrowded.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The cover design for the NEWS-STAND edition of FB 2 was the work of Roy Hunt. Crozetti did the book-paper edition only.

And subscribers please note that F. B. is not, nor was it ever intended to be, a monthly magazine; in fact, the entire idea of numbering issues instead of dating them was due to the realization that we could not achieve a definite publication date with such a limited distribution . . .

We also suggest that you reserve your copy of THE WORKS OF M. P. SHIEL and thus take advantage of the pre-publication price. Type has already been set for this unscheduled FPCI book.

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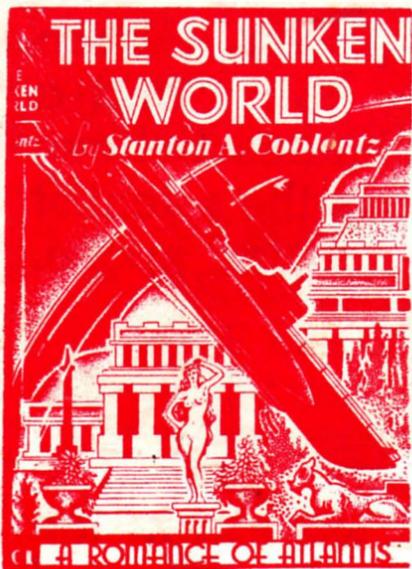
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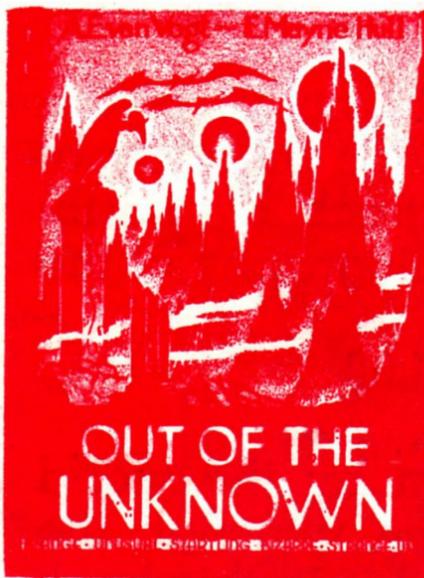
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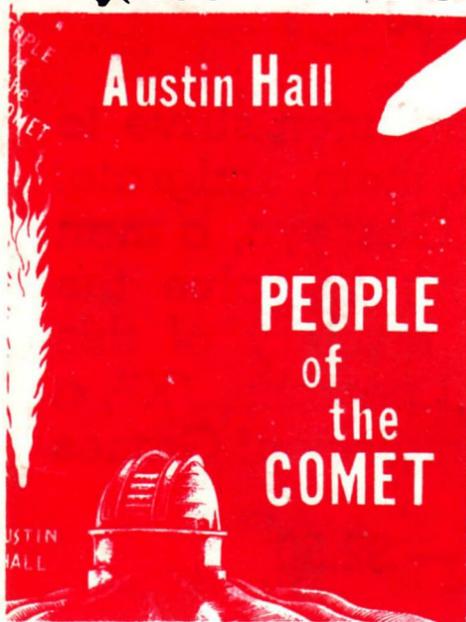
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