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FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

JAN. 1953

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by John Wyndham

A DOUBLE-ACTION MAGAZINE

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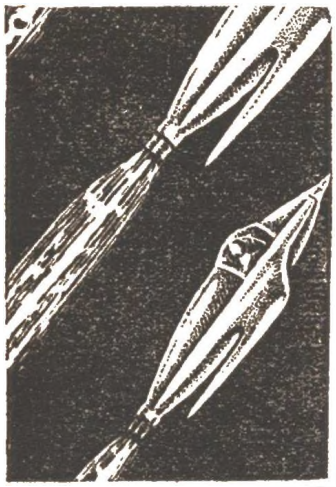
FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

Robert W. Lowndes, *Editor*

Volume 3 — January, 1953 — Number 5



Feature Novelets

Novelet, Short Stories and Departments

Cover by Milton Luros, symbolizing the distortions of "Testament of Andros"
Interior Illustrations by Milton Luros and Paul Orban

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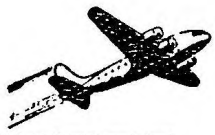

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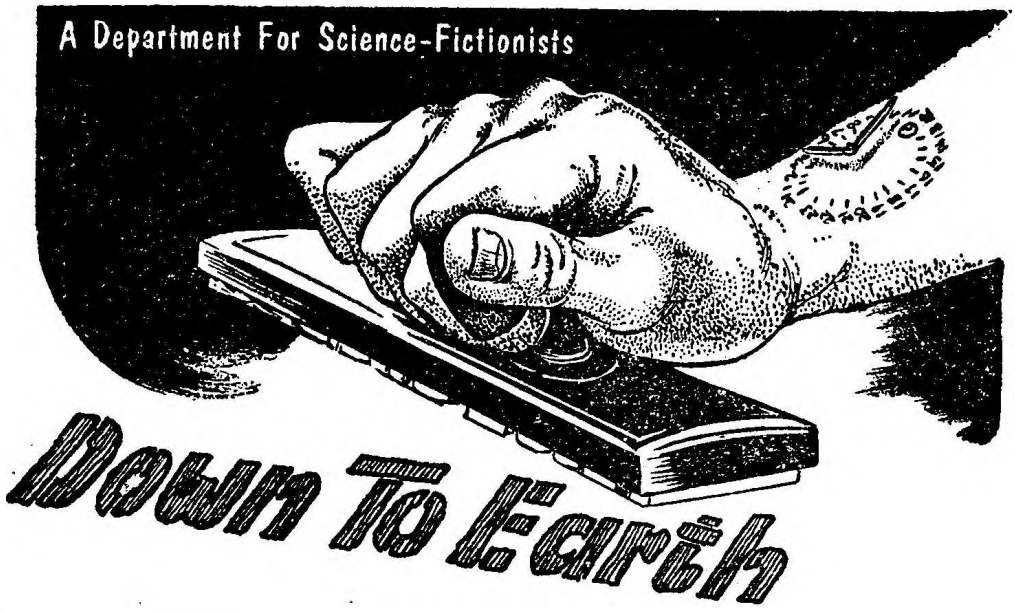

IT'S SEVERAL millions of words from various candidates between now and Election Day, as I type these comments, although the Day may have come and gone before you see this editorial. One of the many amusing aspects of being in the publishing business is that you may find yourself working on a magazine dated January, which goes on sale in November—but by the calendar on your desk, the date is July or early August. Actually, we started work on the present issue before the GOP Convention.

I mention this because we decided that it was time for a change, a bit before the esteemed General took that phrase up as a battle-cry. The change we had in mind was simply that of offering you readers—who've made it as clear as Schaeffer what you wanted—better covers, better artwork, and still better stories than before. Not that we consider that our stories have been teetering on the top of the pinnacle right from the very beginning; we know this has not been the case, as surely as we know that we've been presenting you with good entertainment—and a few items which you told us were up there at the top.

But, we're trying to upgrade the general level of our fiction, and incidentally (although it's far from incidental to those directly concerned) offering better rates to our authors.

The serpent in this projected garden turned out to be the sad fact of life that others have decided that it was time for a change, too! Specifically, paper manufacturers—and others along the line of production—all seem to be out to change the old saying to "what goes up must keep on rising". When you come right down to it, they aren't any more nasty old villains than any of the rest of us; we can all confabulate and spin out splendid ideas amongst us for containing inflation—but when any one of us finds out that he has to pay more, then he naturally wants to see if he can't get more wherewith to pay!

The end result is that we've had to tack another five cents onto *Future's* selling-price, without adding pages. However, *you're not paying an extra nickel for just the same magazine:* it's a different magazine, and, I believe, a better one.

Top names don't necessarily mean top stories all the time, perhaps, but we're not just after "names" for their own sake; we want better stories, and in most cases those "names" are in

[*Turn To Page* 8]

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Why put up with days . . . months . . . YEARS of discomfort, worry, and fear—if we provide you with the support you want and need? Learn NOW about this perfected truss-invention for most forms of reducible rupture. Surely you keenly desire . . . you eagerly CRAVE to enjoy most of life's activities and pleasures once again. To work . . . to play . . . to live . . . to love . . . with the haunting fear of Rupture lessened in your thoughts! Literally *thousands* of Rupture sufferers *have* entered this *Kingdom of Paradise Regained* . . . have worn our Appliance without the slightest inconvenience. Perhaps we can do as much for you. Some wise man said, "Nothing is impossible in this world"—and it is true, for where other trusses have failed is where we have had our greatest success in many cases! Even doctors—thousands of them—have ordered for themselves and their patients. Unless your case is absolutely hopeless *do not despair*. The coupon below brings our Free Rupture Book in plain envelope. Send the coupon now.

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"I am happy to report that the Appliance that I received from you nine days a year ago has given perfect satisfaction in every way.

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their happy position because of story-ability above the average. When I say average, I don't mean mediocre or poor material; I mean the average better-than-just-"good" story.

At this point, perhaps, I ought to rhapsodize over how and why we've managed to bring you, in this issue, the greatest literature ever written for a science-fiction magazine; how you're getting at least five dollars extra value for the extra five cents, and so on for several pages. Sorry—if that's what you want in editorials, you'll have to look elsewhere. If I didn't feel that this issue represents a *beginning* in the new direction, I wouldn't have said anything at all; but how much of a beginning it is I leave for you to decide.

And when you've decided, I'd like to hear from you!

Letters

CODE PROPOSED

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

Yes, I would like to try to draw up a code as to what constitutes science-fiction. First, of course, one must first define the term itself, the simplest one being (taking for granted that the definition of fiction is the fictionilising of scientific fact, principle &/or ideation". This immediately leads to a further arbitrary but necessary division of "physical" and "social" sciences. That social sciences are "sciences" is debated by some, but for the purpose of S-F I believe they should be considered as such.

In view of this definition then, let us go on to a consideration of what may fall into the classification. There are many "stories" which—unsuccessful in their own field—by changing the date to 2180 or throwing in an atom powered automobile, have been published as S-F, just as there have been successful stories, first published by old masters at the art, refurbished by the addition of jet cars or the locale of another planet and republished as S-F. Neither of these adaptions are legitimate science-fiction. Certainly the typical "Western" has been refurbished time and again, a successful plot merely being transferred to Venus or Pluto with little attempt past that locale change being made to disguise the story—also the tried and true formula of "boy-meets-girl", and the triangle with its numerous versions. None of these are S-F. Not that there is not a legitimate place in science-fiction for the relationships, love included, between persons, since an extension of fictionilising a social science may happen to be only expressed through that method. But in science-fiction "boy-meets-girl", or the triangle, should be only secondary to the ideation expressed. Naturally there are always borderline cases; some great stories have been written purely as a literary effort and yet fall within this classification (Orwell's "1984" is the best one that I can think of as an example); the fact that a story is S-F, does not preclude that it is, or can be, good literature; but it does make specific classification possible.

Let us now lay down some rules for an editor to follow and then examine the stories in the current issue (Sept.) of your magazine and see which fullfill the criteria:

1. Cut out all reference to "boy-meets-girl" or the eternal triangle (inverted or multiplied or whatever the diversification) and then examine the residue to see if a scientific principle, idea or fact remains—whether or not the principle is "true" according to our present knowledge. If such residue is not present, then we do not have science-fiction but merely a rephrasing or relocalising of an ordinary "story".

2. Cut out Mars, atom-power packs, intergalactic patrols etc. and re-examine for a residue as mentioned in 1.

3. Remove all reference to "crime", bank robberies, pirating etc. and examine the residue as in 1.

4. This is the most difficult; remove the line of interrelationships between "people"—i.e., love, antagonism, chicanery etc.—and examine the residuum for science. This is difficult—because groupal relationships—which is one of the social sciences—may constitute a valid science-fiction story, provided it is not merely a rehash of our own mores relocated to an "interplanetary" atmosphere.

5. Then examine the story as a whole to see if it may be only an "old master" relocated or re-dated. This, of course, is where the editor, as such, is most valuable.

[*Turn To Page* 10]

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In explanation of the above I should like to say that there are being published enough "western", "romance", "crime" etc., magazines and books to supply the writer—as well as the public demand for such stories—so that there should not even be the economic reason for stories from those fields being published as "science-fiction". The fact that it is Xerlon 99 who is opening the safe of the Intergalactic Federated Reserve Bank with a modified atomic-power hand-pack, while his female confederate keeps the rotors of the turbo-jetstratocar warm, does not make the story science-fiction; if such a story is worth printing it had best be in one of the detective magazines. Such a story could be saved, however, if the "crook" were exploiting to his advantage—in transportation or otherwise—a space-warp, or teleportation, etc., if that exploitation—i.e. its explanation, possible applications or disadvantages could stand up alone as a story. As a purist, I personally object to such window-dressing for the main story, merely in order to seduce readers from the detective field. The addenda as outlined—according to the rules laid down—could lift the story into the S-F field.

In the romance field, it is not science-fiction if CR121, Terran, meets XR22, Martian; falls in love but has to chase all over the galaxy in his trusty space cruiser in order to win her. But, if, in addition, the cultural level of Mars and its attendant mores is explained in the telling of the story then it is science-fiction. Again, from the purist viewpoint, the romantical trappings are unnecessary—except to seduce readers from the "Romance" field. Most good S-F stories are told without the extra trappings, and although the borderline cases are close, they can still be identified.

I can think of classic examples to further the point. "The Vicarion," could exist as a well-told and valid S-F novel completely without the "heroine"; if an editorial blue pencil deleted her entirely, or substituted a robot, the story, per se, would be undamaged. *"The Heads of Cerebus"* could have the sister deleted entirely and still stand as a good "story"—and certainly as science fiction. The well-known Lensman series, S-F although they are, are still very close to the borderline. If one substituted pirate ships, and ordinary muzzle-loading cannon, for the "maulers" and "tractor beams", you would still have an excellent "adventure" yarn; and if any expressed "diety" were to be substituted for the Arisians, the story would be lifted into fantasy realm. I see no particular reason why fantasy and the science fiction should be confused, each genre being entirely able to stand on its own merits, and I do not think that we should begin to classify Poe as an S-F writer.

I have proposed a "code"; now let us apply it to each of the stories in your current issue.

1. "The Gods Fear Love": aside from an inept title definitely a S-F story. If "boy-meets-girl" is deleted, we still have the story of the possible technologic culture meeting one based simply on love, and in the resultant conflict loss of one and possibly two of its members. The trappings of the story could be changed to a personality less factual report, and the "theme" would still be there. True, it could fall into the boderline case because the plot—i.e. insanity as a plea against marriage and its attendant tradgedy—has been used before, in purely literary effort; but still I believe the story is one of the social-science type.

2. "Final Barrier", definitely, not. Here we merely have the typical "Dead Man's Gulch" story. If rule 2 were invoked, we have no residue that expresses any science, even if we try to stretch the premise of the story to include space-flight—because human greed is the barrier to almost anything. The story would better stand alone on its literary effort, than to be included as S-F.

3. "Small Fry": No, because—although an entertaining story—again if we invoke rules 2 and 3 we do not have a science residual, but an idea that again would stand only in the realm of the "short story" (I can not at the moment quote the reference, but the story has a very familiar ring—something about a group of youngsters taking over the city administration during the war).

4. "We will Inherit": Again no. Retelling legend, even from a "Mars" angle, would fall more into the classification of fantasy; and if we invoke rules one and two, again we have not a scientific residual, but merely a good story capable of standing on its own.

5. "Confidence": No again. The story of the "inspector general" has been done

[*Turn To Page* 86]

IF ENTHUSIASTIC LETTERS MEAN ANYTHING . . .

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I threw the contents of the can at the transparent wall. It was queer the way the stuff splattered suddenly in mid-air . . .

TIME STOPS TODAY

Feature Novelet

by John Wyndham

It wasn't war; it wasn't cosmic catastrophe. But two couples woke up one morning to find that their houses and a part of the grounds had suddenly been cut off, isolated. And beyond the invisible barrier that closed them in. .

A PERSON awaking should, in my opinion, glide smoothly back into co-ordination; otherwise he feels that there is some part of him that hasn't got back in time.

And if there's another thing I dislike, it's the sharp drive of a woman's elbow—well, come to that, anybody's elbow—among the ribs, more particularly if that woman happens to be my wife. After all, it's part of a wife's job to learn not to do these things.

In the circumstances my response came clear out of the subconscious.

"Well, really...!" said Sylvia. "I know I'm only your wife, George, but—well, really...!"

My time-lag caught up. "Sorry," I said. "But, damn it...! What's the matter, anyway?"

"I don't know," Sylvia admitted; "but I've got a feeling that there's something wrong."

"Oh, Lord!" I said, and switched on the light. Naturally, everything looked just as usual. "Intuition?" I suggested.

"You needn't sneer at me, George. What about that Sunday I knew we were going to have an accident with the car?"

"Which Sunday? There were so many."

"Why, the Sunday we *did* have one, of course; I felt just the same way about it as I do now."

I sat up in bed. The clock had been a wedding present; after a while I calculated that it was trying to indicate 3.15 a.m. I listened; I couldn't hear anything, any place. Still, you know what intuition is.

"I suppose I'd better have a look. Where did you think it was?" I asked her.

"What was?"

"Whatever you heard."

"But I didn't *hear* anything. I told you—it's just a feeling that something's wrong."

I relaxed and leaned back on the pillow. "Would I do something about that?"

"What can you do? It's just a feeling."

"Then why on earth...?" I began.

At that moment the light went out.

"There!" said Sylvia, triumphantly; "I knew!"

"Good. Well, that's over then," I pulled up the bedclothes.

"Aren't you going to look at it?" she inquired.

"A blown fuse can keep till morning—even if you'd not left my torch some place," I told her.

"But it may not be a fuse."

"To hell with it," I muttered, getting comfortable again.

"I should have thought you would want to *know*," she suggested.

"I don't; I just want to sleep."

•

WHEN I WOKE again the morning was nice and bright. The sun was shining in, and painting a part of the opposite wall with pale gold. I stretched a bit in warm comfort, and reached for a cigarette. As I lit it, I remembered the light. I pushed the switch on and off a few times, without result. That cute elecric clock still seemed to be saying 3.15; my watch said 7 o'clock. I lay back, enjoying the first few puffs at the cigarette.

Sylvia slept on. I allowed the temptation to drive *my* elbow into *her* ribs for a change to pass; she manages such a decorative and confiding appearance when she sleeps. Just then she said "Ugh-h-huh," and pulled the sheet over her ear; she is not one who greets the dawn with a glad cry.

At about the same moment, it occurred to me that there was something wrong with the day—a sort of background buzz of traffic from the main road—an occasional car in our own road; milk bottle clinking, and feel a general sense of stir. This morning all that was missing—even the bird-sounds; a disturbing air of peace lay over the neighborhood. The more I listened, the more unnatural it seemed. At length it drove me to get up and go to the window. Behind me Sylvia said, "Hell!" and pulled the bedclothes more closely round her.

I think I must have stood looking out of the window for several minutes before I turned back. Then I said: "Sylvia. Something funny's been happening."

"Ugh," she remarked.

Dropping the understatement, I continued, "Come and look. If you

don't see it, too, I must be going crazy."

The tone of my voice got through to her. She opened her eyes. "What is it?"

"Come and look," I repeated.

She yawned, pushed back the covers, and maneuvered off the bed. She thrust her feet into a pair of mules decorated, for some incomprehensible feminine reason, with feathers, and pulled on a wrap as she staggered across.

"What...?" she began. Then she shut up, and stood, staring.

WE LIVE in a suburb; it's a nice suburb, nice sort of people. The houses are pretty much alike, all with their garages and gardens. Not large houses—not large gardens, either, though quite large enough for the husbands to look after. We stand on a slope, and from the bedroom window we look down upon the backs of a similar row of houses which front upon a road parallel with ours and have gardens running up towards us. The end of our garden is separated from the end of the one opposite by a high wooden fence, which is continuous along all the properties. Across the roofs of the opposite houses, we can see the huddle of more industrial parts beyond.

On fine days, we can see a considerable distance further to low hills—where houses similar to our own stand out among trees and gardens; but more often, the two residential areas are hidden from one another by the haze, thickened with smoke, that rises between them. It is not, perhaps, an inspiring view across the tall chimneys, municipal towers, and the beetle-backs of several movie-houses; but it does give us a sense of space and a big stretch of sky. The trouble with it, this morning, was that it gave us little else.

Just beneath us lay our lawn and flower-beds; then the hedge which cuts off the vegetable garden. There the rows of beans, peas, and cabbages should have run down past a pear-tree on the left, and a plum-tree on the right, until they reached the raspberry and currant department. But they didn't; they began—but about halfway down their proper length they just stopped. Beyond that abrupt edge there was a brown, sandy-looking soil in which a coarse grass grew in large or small patches and lonely tufts. It was dune land, save that it lacked any noticeable hillocks; it stretched on and on, undulating gently into the distance, until it met brownish green hills far away.

We stared out at it in silence for some little time. Then Sylvia said in a choked voice: "Is this some kind of joke, George?"

Sylvia has two reactions to any sort of unpleasant surprise. One is that if it utterly fails to amuse her, it must be some form of joke; and the other is that, whatever it concerns, I must be responsible for it, somehow. I do not pretend to know what she thought I might have been doing in order to spirit away a whole landscape, but I was able to reply with truth that no one could be more surprised than I.

Whereupon she gave a kind of gulp, and ran out of the room.

I stood where I was, still looking out. On the left was the Saggitt's garden, running down alongside our own, and cut off in the same peculiar way. Beyond that was the Drury's—at least, part of theirs; not only was it cut off on a line with ours, but there was no more than a six-foot wide strip of it to be seen; beyond, was the sandy soil.

SYLVIA came back looking frightened. "It's the same in front," she said. "The garden's there, and half the width of the sidewalk—then there's just that stuff; and half the garage has gone."

I raised the window sash and looked out to the right. From that angle I could look down on the garage-

roof. It looked usual enough; then I saw what she meant.

"It's half the Gunners' garage that's gone," I said.

And it had. The roof of their garage climbed to within an inch or two of the ridge, then stopped as if it had been sliced clean off. Where the rest of it should have been—and where the Gunners' house should have been—tussocks of grass waved in a light wind.

"Thank goodness," said Sylvia. Not uncharitably, you understand—but, after all, we had only had our new convertible a couple of weeks.

"We must be dreaming," I said, a little shakily.

"We can't both be," she objected.

That, of course, was debatable, but this was scarcely the moment, so I said: "Well...am I dreaming you, or are you dreaming me?"

I let her have it: I ought to have known better than to ask the question in the first place.

I hurried on some clothes and went outside to see what I could make of it. The front was just as Sylvia had said. I walked down the path, opened the gate, and stepped out on to the half-width of sidewalk. The edge, where the sandy soil began, looked just as if it had been trimmed off with a sharp knife. I bent over to look at it more closely—and caught myself a sharp crack on the head.

It was so unexpected that I recoiled slightly. Then I put up a hand to see what had done it. My fingers met a smooth surface which was neither hot nor cold and seemed as solid as rock. I raised the other hand, and felt across several square feet of it. It scared me a bit because, though it was unfamiliar, it was only a step on from the quite familiar. One just had to imagine plate glass with a perfectly non-reflecting surface...

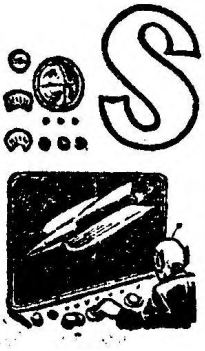
I could not touch the sandy soil and the grass beyond; the transparent wall rose from the very line where normal things ended. As I stood there, bewilderedly looking through it, I noticed an odd thing: the grass beyond was waving; yet I could not feel even a stir in the air around me.

After a moment's thought, I went to the garage. There I chose my heaviest hammer and found an old can half full of sludgy kerosene. Outside again, I threw the contents of the can at the transparent wall. It was queer the way the stuff splattered suddenly in mid air and began to trickle down; then I took a grip on the hammer, and hit hard. The thing rebounded, and the shaft stung my fingers so that I dropped it; there was no other perceptible result.

When I investigated at the back of the house, I found that the same invisible barrier terminated what remained of the garden—and with increased bizarre effect, for there it appeared to bisect the plum-tree so that, seen from as nearly to the side as I could get, the whole trunk and spread was flat-backed like a piece of stage scenery. I wished I could crane around to see what the devil it looked like from the back, but the wall itself prevented that.

In a rough survey, I estimated that the area of normalcy enclosed by these walls would be an approximate square of seventy yards. Beyond this in all directions stretched the featureless dunes—featureless, that is, save for the hills in the distance which occupied just the same position that hills usually occupied in our view. Not much wiser, I went back to the house.

2



SYLVIA, who feels able to face most things better on a cup of coffee, was cursing the cooker for not heating. "Oh, there you are. Can't you fix that fuse?"

"Well..." I began doubtfully. Then

I went and looked in the box. As I had expected, the fuses were okay; I said so.

"Nonsense," said Sylvia; "nothing goes on."

"On the contrary, quite a lot goes on," I said. "Though just what... Anyway, the point is—where would the power come from?"

"How would I...?" she began. Then she got the idea; she opened her mouth again, failed to find anything to say, and stood looking at me.

I shook my head. "I'll go and see the Saggitts," I said.

It was not that I expected either of the Saggitts to be much help, but one began to have a feeling that some company would be acceptable. Still, I get along all right with Doug Saggitt, although he's quite a bit older than I am—forty-seven, forty-eight, maybe. He's getting thin some places, and gray in others, and though he's not fossilizing yet, it's hard to see why Rose married him—she being only twenty-one, and quite a whistle-rouser.

It seems to me that some girls, maybe when they're half-awake one morning, get a kind of nudge from the life-force. 'Hey!' says the life-force. 'Time you were getting married.' 'What, me?' says the girl. 'Sure, you—and someone else, of course,' says the life-force. 'But I mean to have a lot of fun first,' says the girl. 'Maybe—but then maybe not,' says the l-f, ominously. 'It could be you'll come out in spots tomorrow, or lose a leg in a car accident, or—'

After it's gone on this way for a bit, it has the girl so paralytic with fright that she flies off wildly, and marries a Doug Saggitt. After a bit, she finds that she doesn't have spots and *does* have two legs; that she doesn't have a lot of fun and *does* have Doug Saggitt, and she begins to wonder whether Doug Saggitt was just what the life-force had in mind, after all. Mind you, that's only a theory, but it does save me having to say 'I can't think why she married him,' the way the rest of the people in the road do every time they see her.

ANYWAY...I went over to their house, and pressed the bell. It looked as if, whatever it was, we and the Saggitts were in it together—and alone, for the transparent barrier on the side beyond them passed through the Drurys' house, including in our area simply the side-wall and a depth of perhaps six inches beyond. It looked extremely dangerous, though it showed no sign of falling. Looking at it while I waited, I reckoned that it, like the plum-tree and the other things the barrier cut across, must be clamped to the invisible surface by a kind of magnetism.

I gave a second long chime on the bell. Presently I heard feet on the stairs. The door opened, and a hand thrust out some coins wrapped in a scrap of writing-paper. It moved impatiently when I didn't accept the offer; the door opened a little more, and Rose's head appeared.

"Oh," she said. "I thought you were the milk. What's the...?" She cut off abruptly; her eyes widened as she saw the view behind me.

"Wh-what's happened?" she stuttered.

"That's what I want to see Doug about," I told her.

"He's still asleep," she said vaguely, still staring where the other side of the road ought to be.

"Well..." I began. Then Sylvia came hurrying across.

"George," she said, with a note of accusation. "The gas doesn't work, either."

"Is that surprising? Look where the gasworks was," I said, and pointed away across the dunes.

"But how can I possibly cook breakfast?"

"You can't," I admitted.

"But that's ridiculous; you'll have to do *something* about it, George."

"Now, what in hell do you suppose *I* can do?"

Sylvia regarded me, and then turned to Rose with an expression of sisterly suffering. "Aren't men helpless?" she asked, in a voice needing no answer.

Rose was still looking round in resentful bewilderment.

"If you'll rout Doug out, we can at least hold a conference about this," I said.

Sylvia and I waited in the lounge. It wasn't a comfortable wait; Sylvia was doing her hedgehog act—she kind of rolls into a ball of silence, with all the spines sticking out. I used to be the fool terrier in that game, but not now; I don't know which irritates her most.

Doug made his appearance in a dressing-gown, with his chin bristling, and his hair on end—what there was of it. Rose followed; for some reason she had chosen to put on a hostess-gown.

"What the hell's supposed to be going on?" Doug demanded.

"Listen," I said, "before we go any further, will everybody quit barking at me as though I'd done it. You can see what's happened, and you know about as much as I do."

"There's no power, and no gas," muttered Sylvia, aggrievedly.

"And the milkman's late," added Rose.

"'Late!'" I repeated, helplessly, and sat down.

"Well, if you men won't do anything..." said Sylvia, and laid hold of the telephone.

I WATCHED, fascinated. Have you ever seen a woman grossly insulted by a perfectly silent instrument? It's good; her mouth clamped, and she marched out of the room with a kind of Amazonian determination to fight something.

There was a pause while I looked at Doug, and he looked at me. At last: "What *is* going on?" he said bemusedly. He waved a hand at the window. "What is this, George? Where's..."

Then he was interrupted by Sylvia's return. Her eyes were watering slightly, and she was holding a handkerchief to her nose. Her anger had given place to bewilderment; she was even a little scared.

"There's a wall there—only you can't see it," she said.

"Wall—rubbish," said Doug.

"How dare you?" snapped Sylvia, recovering quickly.

Doug went outside to look for himself.

"Now," I said when he came back, "you know just as much as I do. What do we do next?"

There was a pause.

"I'm out of bread, and I suppose the baker won't be coming either," Rose said, miserably.

"I think we've got an extra loaf, dear," Sylvia told her consolingly.

"That's sweet of you, Sylvia—but are you sure you'll be able to spare...?"

"For heaven's sake!" I said, loudly. "Here we are with the most amazing, the most monstrous thing happening all around us, and all you two can do is to chatter on about gas and bread."

Sylvia's eyes narrowed a bit, then she remembered that we weren't alone. "There's no need to shout. What do you suggest we *do* do?" she said, chillily.

"That's not the point—not yet," I said. "The first thing is to find out what has happened; *then*, maybe we can begin to do something about it. Now has anybody any ideas?"

Apparently nobody had. Doug wandered over to the window and stood there mutely, uninspired by the empty miles of dunes. Sylvia and Rose sat registering womanly forebearance with the male.

"I have a theory," I suggested.

"It'll have to be good," said Doug, gloomily. "Still, let's have it."

"It seems to me that we may be the unwitting subjects of some test or experiment," I offered.

Doug shook his head. "If 'unwitting' means what I think it does, it's

the wrong word. I'm extremely aware of all this."

"What I mean is—someone tried his experiment, and we just happened to be here when he tried it."

"Experiment? ...You mean like letting off an atom bomb or something which just happened to finish everybody but us? Because..."

"I do not," I said, shortly. I went on to make my points. Though all trace of buildings had vanished, the configuration of the ground was roughly the same; we seemed to be in a kind of invisible glass box. Certainly, there were walls all round; and probably, since the air was so still, there was a roof as well—we could test for that later. Everything within the enclosed area was unchanged—everything outside, except the general lay of the land, was altered. Or it might be *vice versa*. Now, the contents of the invisible box were quite alien to the surroundings—it followed that they must have been moved from somewhere to somewhere else. *But* the evidence was that they were still in the same place though it had an unfamiliar aspect. Therefore, as they had not been moved in space, the only other thing they could have been moved in was time.

THIS PIECE of calm, and, I felt, logical reasoning was received with a silence which lasted for some moments. Then Doug said: "If an atom bomb, or several atom bombs, were let off, and we happened to be protected by this glass case or whatever it is..."

"Then there certainly wouldn't be grass growing out there," I finished for him. "No. What must have happened is that in some way this enclosed area was twisted through another dimension to another section of time—probably what we would call forward, or to the future. I don't see that anything else could explain the situation."

"H'm," said Doug. "And you think that *does* explain it, eh?"

There was a pause. Sylvia said conversationally to Rose: "My husband reads the most captivating magazines, my dear. All about girls who go through deep space—whatever that is—just in bras and panties. And about good galaxies fighting perfectly horrid galaxies, and the cutest little things called mutants, or robots, or something, and such lovely men who go out on space-patrol for a few hundred light-years at a time. So intriguing. Such interesting titles they have, too. There's *Staggering Stories, Stunning Science Stories, Dumbfounding Tales, Flabbergasting Fiction, Bewild—*"

"Listen," I said, coldly. "Maybe you'd like to explain what's going on around here on the hints you've picked up from *Woman's Glamor, Clean Confessions, Gracious Loving, Wolf Tales,* or *Heartbeat Magazine?*"

"At least they have stories in them about things that *could* happen," said Sylvia, equally chilly.

"Euclid said all that was necessary about triangles in his first book—and he got some place with them."

"Well, what place do the stories in your magazines about things that *never could* happen get to?" Sylvia snapped.

"I wouldn't know; what I *do* know is that one of the 'never coulds' is all around us right now. Look at it! And when I try to understand it, you just sneer."

"Sneer!" said Sylvia. "I like that; I was just explaining to Rose. Why, if anybody was sneering..."

"Yes," agreed Rose, decisively, as if answering a question.

We withdrew to our corners for the moment. Doug broke in: "You really think there must have been some fourth-dimensional twist?"

I nodded, glad to get back to the matter in hand. "Well, some *other* dimensional twist," I agreed. "It must have been that."

"What is a fourth dimension?" asked Rose.

I tried: "It's—well, it's a kind of extension in a direction we can't per-

ceive. Suppose you lived in a two dimensional world, you'd only be aware of length and breadth. And suppose that in your flat country you found a square."

"What of?"

"Nothing; just a square."

"Oh," said Rose, with some reservation.

"Well, that square might really be the bottom surface of a cube—only you wouldn't be able to preceive the rest of the cube, of course. Now if somebody outside picked the cube up and put it down somewhere else it would, as far as you were concerned, vanish suddenly, and then reappear in a different place; you'd be quite at a loss to understand it."

"Well, I certainly am. So what?" agreed Rose.

I WONDERED irritably why anybody marries them. "Don't you see...?" I began patiently. But Sylvia cut in: "We don't. What's more, I don't see that it would make any practical difference if we did."

"Well, not practical, exactly," I admitted.

"All right then." She turned to Rose. "Haven't you a kerosene stove, dear?" she inquired. Rose nodded, and they went out together.

I looked at Doug, and shook my head.

"The trouble about women..." I began.

"Yes, yes," said Doug hastily. "But this theory of yours—are you serious?"

"Of course. What else can it possibly be? I reckon that this section with us in it has somehow been shifted—maybe to several thousand years in the future. It must be the future because it can never have looked like this hereabouts in the past."

"Hard to swallow," said Doug. "I mean it *is* a bit like one of those magazines Sylvia was talking about, isn't it?"

"It may be," I said irritably. "The thing is that some day, somewhere, someone is inevitably going to try to raise a bit of the past. I take it that one of the tryers has succeeded—and we happened to be just in the time and place he hit on."

He muttered again about difficulty in swallowing, then he added: "Supposing you are right; what happens next?"

"I imagine someone comes to see how the experiment went off. Quite likely we'll not be able to learn much—they'll be much more advanced. They'll want to know all about us and our times, of course, but that may not be easy. I expect the language will have changed a lot."

"We'll have to draw diagrams of the solar system, and all that?"

"Why?" I said, in some surprise.

"Well, because...oh no, of course—that's when you get to other planets, isn't it?"

IN A SHORT time Sylvia and Rose returned, bearing coffee. The warmth and flavor increased amiability all round. Doug, sipping his, said: "George thinks we're likely to have visitors."

"Where from?" asked Rose, interestedly.

That girl does have the damndest gift for fool questions.

"How...?" I began. Then I stopped; I happened to be sitting facing the window, and I caught sight of a movement way down in the shallow valley. I could not distinguish the cause, but it was clear that something was raising a moving cloud of dust. "It could be they're on their way here now," I said.

We all crowded to the window to look. The thing, whatever it was, showed no great speed, but it was headed our way.

"In George's books they always have huge heads and no hair," said Sylvia, reflectively.

"How perfectly horrid," Rose exclaimed, and I thought Doug looked a trifle hurt.

"What sort of things will they want to know, I wonder?" he said. "It'll be a bit like an exam we've not prepared for."

"I'd better go and put on something more suitable," Sylvia said.

"My goodness, so must I," agreed Rose. "And Doug, you *must* brush your hair...and you've not shaved yet."

"You've not shaved, either, George," Sylvia told me pointedly.

"Look here," I said. "Here we are on the brink of one of the most amazing encounters in the whole of history, and what do you think of...? Oh, all right, then."

3

THE MOVING object was still several miles away when I had finished in the bathroom. But I could see it a lot more clearly, now—a long, boxlike contraption with a transparent cover over all catching the light from time to time. It was not moving much above twenty miles an hour, I judged, but it travelled very smoothly over the rough ground. There was too much dust round the lower part for me to see how it was supported.

I joined Sylvia; she had changed into a blue dress of soft wool which became her well. Her expression of satisfaction over that was modified, however, at the sight of me. "Well, really, George! You can't go around like that."

"What the hell do you use that blade in your razor for, anyway?" I asked.

"You used my...?"

"What else? No power. So cold water, ordinary soap. Your idea, anyway."

Sylvia drew breath, but at that moment Doug's voice floated up from outside: "Hey! They're just about here, George."

I went down and joined him. We walked the length of what remained of my garden, with Sylvia and Rose following us. Where it ended, we stood close against the invisible wall, watching the vehicle approach. It seemed to be travelling on some kind of millipede-arrangement which compensated automatically for inequalities in the ground. It came to a stop about fifteen yards short of us. The whole side opened towards us on hinges at the base, and came down to form a sort of ramp. Four men inside got up from their seats, walked down the ramp, and stood looking at us.

I was aware of indrawn breaths beside me. "Gosh! What d'you know!" murmured Sylvia's voice.

"Ooh—ooh!" said Rose, as if someone had given her a very large box of candy.

For myself, I didn't see—well, let's be fair. The four men were magnificent specimens, I'll grant. Tall, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, narrow-hipped, and all that—but then, so was Tarzan, and some others. There are other things required of a man beyond a handsome appearance; in fact, some of the best-looking men I have known... Anyway, I didn't much care for the way they were dressed, either.

They wore deep yellow tunics, patterned around the edges in brown, belted, and coming down just to knee-length. Their legs were in narrow trousers or gaiters of a brown material, and their thong-fastened shoes were yellow. They wore no hats, and their fair hair had a slightly bleached effect seen above their sunburned faces. Each stood something over six-foot four; the whole effect struck me as slightly stagy.

IT WAS AT once clear from the way they looked at us that they were puzzled. They conferred, and then regarded us again. There was some laughter, which I considered ill-man-

nered in the circumstances. With the wall between us, we could not hear the slightest sound of their voices. Once more they debated; then came to some agreement. One went back into the vehicle and emerged with an instrument which looked something like a theodolite. He set it up on a tripod, sighted it, and then pressed a switch on it. Immediately the air around us began to stir, as if the wind were blowing through a gap in the wall. Then, leaving the instrument where it was, all four men began to walk towards us.

I held up my open hand to show that we had peaceful intentions. They looked puzzled. One said to another: "Funny thing, that; I thought Hitler died in 1945?"

I lowered my hand. "Oh! You speak English!" I said.

"Of course," said the nearest man; "why not?"

"Well...er...I thought..." I began, and then gave it up. "My name is George Possing," I told him, introducing myself.

He frowned slightly. "It ought to be Julian Speckleton," he said.

I looked at him. "Really!" I said, coldly; "well, it's not—it's George Possing."

"I don't understand this," he murmured, reflectively.

"It's quite easy. I'm Possing—and I've never even heard of anyone called Speckleton."

"And you're not on the sub-atomic drive?"

I suppose I looked blank.

"The sub-atomic drive that Solarian Rockets are developing," he said, with a touch of impatience.

"Never heard of it—or them," I told him.

"H'm," he remarked. "Something *has* gone wrong; Paladanov's going to be wild about this."

It occurred to me that I ought to introduce the others; but when I looked, I found it was unnecessary. They were all talking together already. The man with me asked who Doug was. I told him. He asked: "What's the date here?"

When he heard, he whistled. "Thirty-five years out of register. Somebody's going to get a smack for this. Hey, fellers!"

They didn't notice him; one had taken Doug to the gap in the invisible wall, and was showing him something there. The other two were chatting with Sylvia and Rose. Very animatedly, too. Sylvia's eyes were shining brightly. They kept on flicking about the face of the man who was blushing a little. I'd never seen her blush like that before—or look quite that way. I didn't care for it a lot.

"Hey!" said my man, more loudly. The others broke off, and came round him. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Sylvia and Rose turn to one another. They giggled like a couple of schoolgirls, and then started whispering.

"Listen," said the man beside me. "Something's gone haywire here; neither of these guys is Speckleton."

THEY ALL regarded us for a moment. "Well, I don't know that I mind that a lot," said one, turning to look at Rose, who blushed.

"Nor me," agreed the other. "Just my climate around here." And Sylvia blushed even more than Rose had.

"Maybe," said my man. "But the point is there's no work for us to do here. No Speckleton; no drawings. These folk come from thirty-five years before."

"I'm not worrying about that a bit," one of the others assured him. "Nice folks," he added. And the girls giggled.

"All the same, it's a washout. So what do we do?"

"Wait for instructions," one said, promptly.

"That's so. Then we'll be right on hand when they correct the error," added the other.

"Okay; I'll put a report through." The man turned and walked back towards the vehicle. The man who had been talking to Doug went with him.

Rose, still a little pink, and with a touch of that demureness which isn't meant to deceive anybody, said in a

hostess way: "I'm sure you must be terribly thirsty after all that dust. Won't you have some coffee?"

They had no hesitation at all about accepting the offer. Doug and I were left to watch them push their way through the hedge which separated our gardens, and stroll up, laughing, to his house. We looked at one another.

"Well...!" I said.

Maybe George's years had improved his philosophic outlook. He said, calmly: "I'll have to hand it to you, George; your deductions were dead right."

"Huh," I said, watching the others go into the house.

"Yes. There has been a time transposition, some way. And apparently some kind of hitch in it—so you were right, too, about it just being an accident for us that we're here."

"Huh," I said again. "It might help if I could understand what the hell goes on when there *isn't* a hitch."

"It's not so difficult. That fellow gave me the general idea. You see, in a few years time the offices of the Solarian Rocket Corporation, Inc., will be standing on this site—with a man called Julian Speckleton in charge of the drawing department. Okay? Well, the guys who operate this time-lift dingum just whisk away a part of the block to—er—whatever time it is out there... Just the way we were whisked."

"But what for?"

"Ah, that's where these chaps come in. They arrive and photograph all drawings and documents of interest."

"I don't see what for; they must be centuries ahead of us, anyway."

"Sure. But the way they work, they've got a second time-lift in operation some place. Now that brings along some guy called Paladanov. They give him the photographic copies; then they reverse the time-lift, and put things back."

I THOUGHT that over. "I don't see...," I began.

"There's a subtlety there," said Doug. "The office block goes back to the split-second it left, so that nothing appears to have been touched. But this Paladanov and his place don't—not quite. It has to be missing from its proper place for a few minutes—long enough for him to collect the photographs so that they are in the house when it goes back."

"This is horribly bewildering."

"Well, if the Paladanov guy went back to the same split-second in which he left, he'd not have the photographs—they weren't in his house at that second, you see."

"I suppose not. But it's so involved; why don't they just whisk up Paladanov here and tell him a few things that'll put him years or generations ahead of his competitors, anyway? Surely that'd be easier?"

"It would be. But would these guys get anything out of it? Somewhere in this, there's a racket; there always is. It could be that Paladanov's employers put money on deposit, and leave it to accumulate, maybe? In that case the more slowly the information is dribbled out, the longer the racket would last... Or it could equally well be that they work the thing the other way round as well, and keep both sides plodding along neck and neck on one another's secrets. That'd be very nice smooth work."

He paused to contemplate the idea admiringly. "I know one thing," he added; "if and when we get back, the first thing I do is to buy my house and ground."

"But, look here," I said. "It's crazy ...and unpatriotic."

"How? I don't see that an information office in Time—if you can move about in Time—is any more crazy than one in space. Properly operated, it could make big money. As for being unpatriotic, that depends on the distance, doesn't it? The way I see it, to give the Germans radar around 1938 would be bad...but to let the Trojans in on the wooden-horse gag wouldn't matter a lot."

"There's no difference in the morals," I said, coldly.

"Maybe they don't have those, anyway," suggested Doug.

"I've been wondering about just that," I admitted uneasily, looking up towards his house. I listened to the sounds coming from there; it seemed to me there was a pretty unnatural amount of high-pitched giggling going on.

"Don't you think we'd better...?" I asked, jerking my head in that direction.

Doug listened, too, for a moment. "Maybe we had," he agreed. We turned, and walked up the garden.

At the door he paused. "Er...pretty big fellows, aren't they...strong looking?" he suggested.

I had to agree with that.

4

I SHALL have, I am afraid, to draw a veil over most of the three following days. I never would have believed that two decently brought-up girls...and respectably married too...

Mind you, I didn't take it all lying down; I told Sylvia what I thought about it one time when I did manage to get her alone. Her response wasn't amiable:

"Will you please stop interferring in my affairs?" she demanded.

"But it's *your* affair that I'm complaining of," I pointed out, reasonably.

"If you don't like Alaric being a friend of mine, you'd better go and tell him so—and see what he does."

Alaric was, I think, slightly the tallest of the four.

"I don't mind him being a friend of anybody's," I said, "what I mean is..."

"Well, what *do* you mean?" she asked, dangerously. "Are you accusing him of anything? Because maybe he ought to hear it."

"I'm not talking about him; I'm talking about *you*."

"Well?"

"When a married woman throws herself at another man's head..." I began.

"I thought you said you weren't talking about him?"

"Hell, I'm not; I'm just pointing out..."

"Now, look here," she said. "You're having all the fun of one of your damn silly magazines stories coming true.... So what right have you to interfere in mine?"

"It isn't at all the same sort of thing," I said, shortly. "Anyway, I didn't ask for this; it just happened."

Sylvia softened unexpectedly. "Yes," she said. "That's how love is for women—it just happens," she added, gently.

"That's all very well in those fool stories..." I began.

Her softness suddenly vanished. "'Fool stories'," she said. "And from you, too!" she gave an exceedingly unnatural laugh.

"At least mine are harmless and clean," I replied.

"Well, mine always end up most morally; they have to," she countered.

"It's not so much the ending that I'm concerned about at the moment..." I was pointing out when she snapped: "What are you going to do about it?"

She did not seem to understand somehow that the whole conversation *was* what I was doing about it.

Doug, I must admit, was more direct in his method of objection—though no more decisive. As I understand it, he had taken Rose over his knee to whang the daylights out of her with a slipper, and the whole thing was going pretty successfully when her friend Damon came in, attracted by her howls. He quietly picked Doug up by his collar and the slack of his pants, and dropped

him out of the window. Then, of course, Rose needed consoling, so the affair really backfired quite a bit.

After that, Doug devoted most of his attention to deciding just how much of the land about us would be (or had been, depending how you look at it) occupied by the Solarian Rocket concern, and considering methods of raising capital.

IT WAS on the afternoon of the third day that the man who had spoken to me first, strode up the garden from their vehicle with a satisfied expression on his face. "They've traced the error," he said. "There was a sticky point in one of the computors which made it run wild now and again, it'll be all okay now."

"I'm glad you think so," I said. It didn't seem to me that a corrected computor was going to set my domestic life to rights again.

"Sure, it will," he nodded. "They'll flip you back to where you came from, and then pull in Speckleton in the Solarian office. I gather Paladanov's been raising hell. As if it mattered; that poor goop will never get it straight that this is time out for him. However long he has to stay here, he can still be returned to within a few minutes of his lift. You, of course, will be returned to the thousandth of a second—pretty close to tolerance, that."

"I suppose so," I said, without zest. "All the same, we've been here three days, and during that time my wife..."

"Oh, you'll just have to count that as time out," he said, easily.

"You think so," I remarked. I felt maybe I had better leave that angle. I looked over the near-desert surrounding us. "It'd be kind of nice to know where and when we spent this time out," I suggested. "How did the place get this way?"

"This?" he repeated. "I can't say exactly. It sure caught something, didn't it? That'd likely be during the Second Atomic War, I guess. Well, I gotta tell the boys we're pulling out; where are they?"

"I wouldn't know, but I could make a goodish guess," I said, bitterly.

DOUG AND I stood on the narrow terrace-path between his house. The scene at the end of my lopped-off garden was not edifying; beyond the invisible wall the four men were now climbing into their vehicle. This side of the wall, Sylvia and Rose stood clinging together, apparently for mutual support. They had handkerchiefs in their hands. Sometimes they fluttered them at the vehicle; sometimes they dabbed them at their faces. We watched the performance gloomily and in silence; we had already repeated all our comments on the situation to one another a good many times.

"Well, at least they're going," said Doug. "I'd begun to wonder if they'd get carried along with us."

"How much longer have we got?" I asked him.

He looked at his watch. "About five minutes," he said.

"Ought we to be doing anything special?"

"No. According to them it just happens."

The vehicle was drawing away now. Sylvia and Rose went on waving, and the men inside waved back. Presently, a couple of hundred yards away the thing stopped. Apparently that was a safe distance. We could see the four heads under the transparent top turned to watch us. The girls were still clinging together, and still waving.

"Listen," I said to Doug, "I don't quite get this. If everything goes back to a thousandth of a second from where we were, how are we going to remember that it ever...?"

My sentence was cut off and I had my answer in the same moment; I found myself sitting up in bed. The light was on, the clock said three-fifteen. Beside me Sylvia was sobbing into her pillow.

I jumped out, and went over to the window.

"We're back," I said.

Sylvia took no notice; she went on crying into her pillow as if she had not heard.

I decided to remove to the spare-room for the rest of the night.

•

"I shall go and see Groves this afternoon," I announced at breakfast.

Sylvia looked up. She was not at her best this morning.

"I shall be seeing him about divorce proceedings," I amplified.

She stared at me, rallied, and came back absolutely true to form. "Is this some kind of a joke?"

"Joke! Is that what you call your behaviour?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," she said.

I looked hard at her; she didn't even blink. "Look here," I said, "you're not going to pretend to me that you don't remember your own disgraceful behavior?"

"Are you trying to insult me?" she asked, coldly.

"I've got witnesses, remember. The Saggitts will bear me out."

"How interesting, George. About what...and where...and when?"

"Well, of all the barefaced..." I began.

Sylvia shook her head reprovingly. "Perhaps I should be angry, but I'll forgive you, George."

"*You'll* forgive *me!*"

"Well, it's hardly fair to hold a person responsible for what he dreams, is it? I expect it as something to do with all those absurd stories you read just before you go to sleep. Now if you were to try reading stories about things that could really happen, George..."

WHEN I SET out for the office everything appeared utterly normal; you'd never believe that anything in the least unusual had happened to the place. When I looked carefully at the sidewalk I fancied I could trace the hairline of a crack, but I couldn't be sure even of that.

Doug came out of his front door just as I was passing. "Hullo, George." He looked around at the familiar scene. "It's Wednesday," he remarked. "I checked on the phone...and yesterday was Tuesday. And yet we've had three days in between. Queer, isn't it?"

"I'm glad to hear you say it," I told him; "I was just beginning to wonder if I *am* crazy."

He cocked an eye at me. "So that's what she's been telling you. Funny, so has mine."

We regarded one another.

"It's—it's collusion or conspiracy or something," I said.

"Possibly," Doug agreed. "But I don't see what we can do about it. I recommend a good spanking... one wouldn't be interrupted this time."

"Er... I don't think Sylvia..." I began.

"Worth trying. Works wonders," Doug advised. In a different tone of voice, he went on: "I'm just going to start up some tentative inquiries about this property. Are you on?"

For me, the whole recollection was becoming more and more like the dream Sylvia said it was, but Doug evidently meant business.

"Give me a few days," I suggested.

"Okay; no hurry," he agreed as our ways parted.

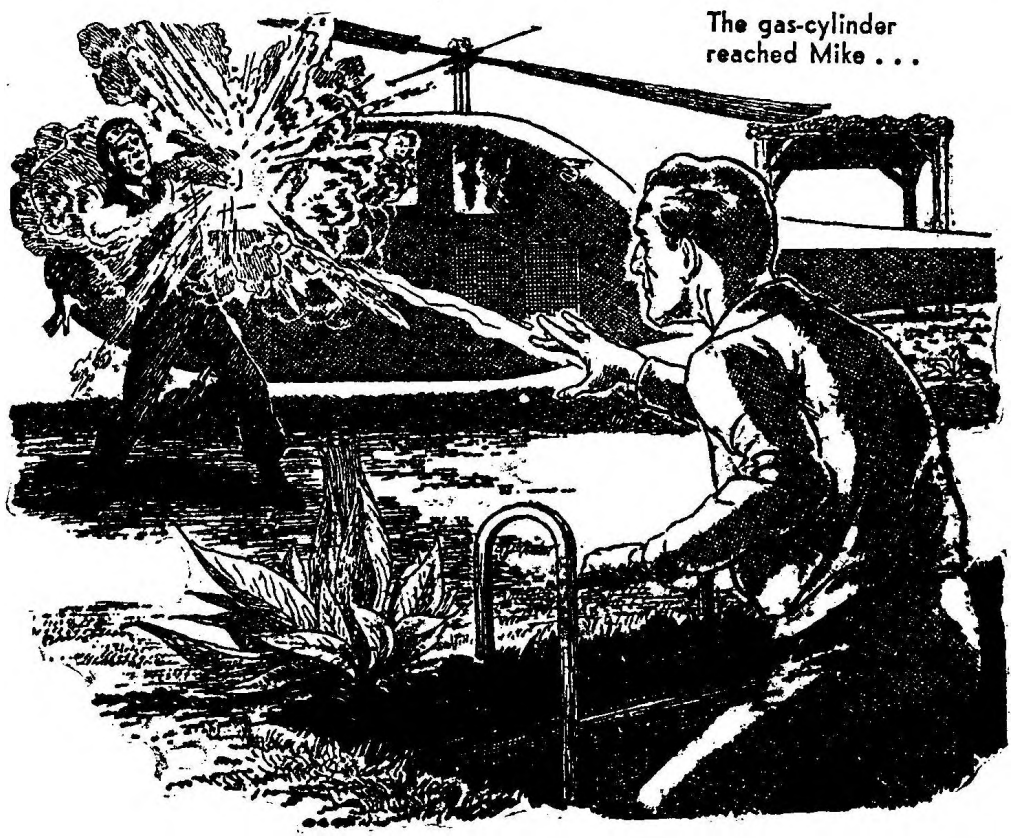
I very nearly dropped out of it. There was such a solidarity of opinion between Sylvia and Rose; and the whole occurrence did seem increasingly fantastic in retrospect... When I looked at Sylvia now, I really couldn't imagine...

But, fortunately, an announcement in the local paper caught my eye a week or so later. It said: *To Emmeline, wife of Alfred Speckleton, a son, Julian.*

★

The Compleat Collector

by H. B. Fyfe



The gas-cylinder reached Mike . . .

Medford was a mild-looking fellow, quite nondescript, in fact. Who would suspect that he carried an arsenal of lethal equipment with him, or that he needed it? But a bill-collector is never a candidate for popularity-prizes. On the contrary!

VASHI, SEEN from Terra by such as might guess exactly where to look, appeared as a small, nondescript, yellowish star in the constellation Sagittarius. Vashi IV, discernable only from a much closer viewpoint, was about the size of Terra; but to the Vashians it was the fastest growing little colony in that volume of space. Sol, they liked to say, looked pretty dim from Vashi, if you turned things around.

Thus, it was perhaps fitting that the Vashian customs-guard in the big, bare shed at the big, bare spaceport outside Center City should be

a large man; for the Terran at whose papers he squinted seemed no more important than the distant sun he claimed as home.

"Hey, Bill!" yelled the guard. "Gimme a hand here a minute!"

Two other officials, idle now that most of the tourists from the sleek inter-stellar ship had passed a cursory inspection, stopped their talk and approached.

"Check me on this description," requested the first guard, reading from the passport in his hand. "'*John P. Medford, commercial traveler. Height five feet seven, weight one-forty. Hair brown, eyes gray, complexion tanned.*' That right?"

Under their combined regard, meanwhile, the Terran stood stiffly erect, as if displeased at having attention called to his moderate stature. His loose-hanging jacket was draped as casually as current fashion demanded along the borders of Terra's expanding space-empire, and his full trousers were tucked into calf-high boots with the prescribed jauntiness. Despite all this, despite even the ornately heavy silver buckle of the wide belt holding up the trousers, Medford managed to exude an air of formal dignity. His jacket, pants, and shirt were all of varying shades of gray.

"'Bout right," agreed one of the guards colleagues. "Don't mind Vergil, Mr. Medford; it's just that he's color-blind."

"There ain't enough of anythin' to go around, quite," added the other helper, "let alone fellers to be customs-men. We take what we kin get."

The original examiner glared at him, glowered again at the passport, and demanded, "What's the 'P' for?"

The Terran hesitated. A faint expression of distaste formed on his features, as if the question had rattled bones inside a scrupulously kept closet. It seemed to be a choice of causing less sensation by giving or by withholding an answer. For all the details of the passport-description and its worn photograph, he might as well be anonymous; hair called "brown" can be a sandy mixture that may be turning gray, or may always have been the same nondescript shade; eyes called "gray" can be underestimated because of definite pouches under them; skin called "tanned" can be leathery enough to make the date of birth meaningless at a distance of a few dozen lightyears.

"Pluto," said Medford finally.

"Pluto?"

"It happens to be the ninth planet of Sol. I was born there."

The guard looked up to discover his companions studying Medford speculatively. After a moment, he thrust the papers at the visitor and pointed toward a nearby exit. "Ground taxis to the city out there," he offered. "Ship goes out just after local dawn, remember."

"Where can I get an aircar?" asked Medford.

"Can't—we ain't had time to import all the luxuries of civilizaton, so air transport only works between cities."

"We got a jet factory goin'," said one of his friends, "but, like I say, there ain't enough to go around yet. Not enough of anythin', except maybe *yannaine*."

"*Yannaine*," murmured Medford. "Sounds familiar. Isn't that the stuff those furry things over on Yanna 2 are always chewing? We stopped over there a day."

"That's right," confirmed the guard. "I hear it doesn't hurt them kangaroos, but if anybody offers you a plug around Center City, be careful; it'll knock ya into a week of dreams if you ain't used to it. It's about the only thing we got more of than we need here."

"How is that?"

The guard shrugged. "Don't ask me—long's I don't see any come past here, I dunno anythin' about it."

"Smugglers?" asked Medford.

"That's a dirty word," retorted the other. "Yanna's only three lightyears away."

MEDFORD nodded and started slowly toward the wide doorway. As he walked, he pushed back his left sleeve to finger what looked like an elegant, gold-cased wrist visor. It was rather large for a good instrument, presenting an oval dial perhaps two inches long. Outside, in the noon light of Vashi, Medford paused to shade the screen with his hand; an image shimmered into focus.

The guard, Bill, was shown speaking into the miscrophone-grill of a televisor whose screen revealed only a swirl of colors in a privacy pattern. Medford heard him say, "Yeah, yeah, he gave the name of Medford plain as you please. No, didn't say he was here on business...but I remembered you said to report, Ted—"

Medford adjusted the tiny knob slightly, and presently picked up another image. The first guard was also on a visor. When he discovered, in another moment, that the third man was engaged in a similar manner, he listened only long enough to assure himself that the three conversations seemed to be with very different people. A glint came into his gray eyes.

"Official salaries here must be low," he murmured. "Or am I better known than I hoped?"

Ignoring the curious regard of a taxi-driver parked at the end of the concrete walk, he reached into an inner pocket for a small sheet of paper, and scanned the note written on it in neat script: "Vashi IV—Theoar Brog, *C*60,000,000 to Moran Space Yards—Teresa Soray *C*2,250,000 to Alpha Export—Orville 'Red' Jenkins, *C*500-000 to 'Big Joe' Kyraj."

"Might as well try the big one first," he told himself. "Sixty million credits isn't stardust."

He switched off the wrist "visor," returned the slip of paper to his pocket, and drew out an antique pocket watch that filled the palm of his hand. It must have been run down, for Medford fiddled with the stem, changed the setting, and looked up, as if judging the time of day. He frowned briefly as one of the drooping shrubs outside the customs-shed rustled. Then Medford continued his interrupted stroll toward the ground car at the end of the sidewalk.

He ran his eye over the broad horizontal stripes of blue and yellow, and inquired, "Taxi?"

The driver's face froze slightly as he jabbed a button on his dashboard to swing the rear door open. He nodded in silence to the Terran's request to be taken to a good hotel. Medford hesitated, as if unfamiliar with the type of sliding door the cabbie had opened for him. His right hand groped absently in the air for a moment before slipping briefly under his jacket. Finally, after standing clear of the door a second or two, he climbed in and sat down.

THE DRIVER slid the door closed impatiently and started off. Medford sighed contentedly as he eyed the depression in the nap of the carpeted floor near his feet.

The ride to the city proper—a distance of about four miles—was made in good time. Center City itself, Medford noted, had already begun to sprawl outward from a cluster of older buildings that must have been the first settlement. It was bustling, spacious over-new, and functionally unbeautiful. A few of the buildings grudgingly pointed out by the driver, such as the governor's palace, were obviously recent-constructions, in poor but ornate taste to fit the growing importance of the colony.

At the hotel, apparently the only one accustomed to visitors from space, Medford took advantage of the wistful hospitality to have a message sent to the Vashian governor, asking for an appointment. He then disengaged himself from the manager's little speech against spacelines which did not allow passengers to stop over long enough to patronize the hotel, and followed

the bell-hop up to his room. He seemed curiously preoccupied, especially entering elevators and turning corners, so that the bell-hop's being a girl was wasted upon him.

"Will you see that any messages for me are brought right up?" he requested, handing over a tip that should ensure promptness, even in bustling Center City.

Left alone, Medford waited a few minutes before pulling the ornate pocket watch from his pocket and flipping the case open. Once again, he touched the area about the stem delicately with his fingertips, his eyes half-closed in concentration.

Gradually, a misty outline condensed in mid-air before him, about the size of a small suitcase.

Medford relaxed and watched it solidify into a bag seemingly of dark, grained leather, approximately one foot by two by six inches. When it was at last clearly visible, he manipulated the controls of the "watch" to lower the foot of the bed. He finished by clicking a tiny switch after which the nap of the carpet surrounding the bag lost its flattened-out look.

With the field turned off, the Terran sat on the edge of the bed and leaned forward to open the now-visible case. He pressed a hidden catch, causing the upper half to unfold into two sections. The lower six inches for the whole length remained a completely enclosed unit, which Medford found slightly warm to the touch of his hand. In the two open sections nestled a surprising number of tiny gadgets.

Some gleamed metallically; others were as dark as the silky black lining upon which they rested; still others by their tininess would have escaped the notice of any bystander, until Medford used a pair of tweezers to pick one up.

He chose a jeweler's lens from an instrument-compartment and examined the mechanism held in the tweezers. Satisfied, he set the gadget down and took up the control-box that looked like a watch. He opened the side of its case opposite to the one previously used; under the tiny telescreen revealed, were several little dials which he touched gently.

An image of his own knees appeared upon the miniature screen. He continued to adjust the controls, causing the mechanism to rise into the air until it hovered by the door a good deal less conspicuously than a Terran house fly. Then he closed the "suitcase" and parked it invisibly in a corner of the room above the bed.

"When in Vashi," he murmured, recalling the telecalls from the spaceport, "do as the Vashians do—whether with spies or spy-eyes."

Shortly thereafter, having received a surprisingly prompt invitation to call upon the governor, he left his lunch in the hotel dining room and went—but not alone. The tiny spy-eye drifted along twenty feet above his head, out of sight.

AT THE palace, Medford was passed rapidly along a chain of guard, receptionists, secretaries junior and senior, and a quartet of gaudily-uniformed bodyguards.

Governor Drog welcomed him with homely affability. "Always happy to see someone from the home system," he boomed. "We colonists lose touch with the latest news...we so seldom have the leisure to keep up with the rest of the galaxy."

Medford smiled politely while the governor boomed out a lengthy performance, designed to make himself seem a simple son of the interstellar frontier. He accepted a handful of cigars of the governor's own tobacco—descended from a strain imported directly from Terra—and sat in a rather uncomfortable chair of swamp-cane which was praised as being of original, clean-lined Vashian design. There he listened quietly, and sipped at a glass of wine pressed upon him with apologetic pride in the fact that the grapes had been

grown on the governor's own extensive plantation.

Thedar Brog was about what should have been expected of a system which permitted the governor to be nominally an appointee of the Terran Colonial Administration by approval of the local populace. On dozens of outlying planets, Medford had seen that the most grasping and powerful freebooter was generally elected "freely and democratically."

Brog's beefy red face perfectly suited his bulky body. The Terran guessed that if the man had stood behind his vast desk, he would have towered more than six feet. He must have weighed nearly two hundred and fifty pounds Terran; even his hands were beefy, with thick, powerful fingers suggesting that this man knew how to grab, and knew even better how to hang on.

At last, Thedar Brog ran out of genial boasts concerning the rapid growth of the Vashian settlements; he looked at Medford expectantly. The Terran pulled out the slip of paper he had referred to previously, as well as a small black notebook.

"I have been commissioned by the Moran Space Yards of Callisto, Sol," he said pleasantly, "to inquire what plans you have for settling your account. According to their figures, only the down-payment of twenty million credits has been received for the construction of four new spaceships delivered recently to the Vashian Government. The balance is sixty million."

Brog's face turned even more ruddy. He quivered in his chair. "Why y-y-you cheap little...*spy!* What do you *mean* by coming in here like this?"

"It's my business," said Medford. "I understand that the Moran people have exhausted all the normal means of getting in touch with you; protests lodged with the Colonial Administration have disappeared into space, and other messages have likewise gone unanswered."

"I don't have time for that sort of thing!" Brog waved that sort of thing aside with a large gesture. "We need those ships to prevent smuggling around Vashi. As soon as we get those ships armed—"

"The idea is," Medford slipped in, "that the builders are considering asking to have them returned."

"They can't *do* that!" Brog gripped the edge of his desk with such a convulsive clutch that Medford thought the big hands must surely leave indentations. "And as for you— I've had enough of this...this...*Williams!*"

One of the uniformed guards thrust his head inside the doorway from the corridor.

"This is the Medford we thought it might be," Brog sneered. "Throw him out the back way!"

"Yes, sir!" said Williams.

The four guards entered with an eager rush. Medford had time only to rise before they surrounded him and literally lifted him from his tracks. With his toes barely dragging along the thick carpet, he was borne from the governor's presence, through the short corridor connecting the offices of Brog's suite, and out through the reception room toward the rear of the building.

"Down the stairs quietly," ordered the chief guard, tightening his hold upon Medford's left forearm.

TWO OF his companions obeyed, but the third suddenly grunted and dropped out of the human mass at the head of the steps. White-faced, he hopped on one foot as he held the other ankle; it seemed to have been stamped upon.

The three guards and Medford thrashed their way down the first flight in a melee of waving hands and feet. At the landing, another guard had the misfortune to catch a flying heel in the groin; he doubled over in a corner of the landing with his face a twisted mask.

Williams yanked the harder on Medford's elbow. The three remaining men surged downward four steps, bounced off the balustrade to their left,

staggered another half dozen steps lower before careening off the wall to their right. Immediately thereafter, Williams' colleague found a third foot between his and lost his balance. It almost seemed, for a moment, that he would succeed in keeping his feet; but the pulling of his chief on the Terran's other arm tipped the scales. The three of them, still maintaining a relative quiet, finished the flight in a rolling, churning tumble.

They came apart as they sprawled out onto the polished floor at the foot of the stairs. Medford slid in one direction, Williams in another. The second guard lay in a limp heap with his feet on the bottom step; from the bleeding cut under his chin, he appeared to have been hurled.

Medford rose, hitching at his waistband. Williams had scrambled up and was advancing with an outraged expression on his blunt-nosed face. With his open left hand, he shoved the Terran against the wall and measured him for a long, rocking right hook. But before he could complete his swing, something metallic in Medford's hand flashed in a short arc ending along Williams' jaw. The guard quivered like a ship running aground, and buckled at the knees.

Between the time the group of five had started down the first flight of stairs, and the moment Medford caught Williams under the armpits, to ease him soundlessly to the floor, hardly half a minute had elapsed.

Medford glanced quickly about. He spotted the door that he thought must lead to the front section of the building's main floor, and strolled toward it. As he walked, unhurriedly but wasting no time, he fitted the disguised blackjack into place on his belt. The six inches of flexible leather grip slipped into a slot in the right-hand side, and the silver ornament hid the real buckle.

Having found his way without further incident to the main entrance, Medford paused outside under a shade tree to call his spy-eye after him. He regretted missing the coming bustle about the governor's office, but decided he might have need of the instrument. When it arrived, he slipped it in his pocket.

"Do you know where Soray's is?" he asked the driver of a ground taxi parked on the avenue before the palace.

"Huh!" grunted the cabbie.

He jabbed a dashboard button to close the door by which Medford had entered the back of the taxi. As he drove off, he explained. "Everybody on Vashi IV knows where Soray's Store is. Biggest department store in Center City. Branches everywhere else. They even import or make their own stuff."

"Yes, I knew they imported," said Medford drily. "So they are the leading merchants locally, I take it?"

"Huh!" remarked the driver. He pondered that a moment, then added, "Nobody else counts. You buy what Soray imports, because they wholesale to everybody else. You should hear what my old woman has to say about the dresses and such. We may not be very old and settled around here, but the women still have time to get ahold of fashion books from the interstellar ships passin' through."

He muttered some more on the subject, and told Medford about a movement among a group of exasperated women to form a sewing-club. "They swore they'd all make their own clothes, but most o' them backed out. Too much of a job for them without sewing machines—an' Soray don't import *those*."

The Terran listened with one ear, for he had spotted the ground-car following them. With the detector he wore as a wrist-visor, he sought to discover whether the two burly occupants were using their radio.

Finally, he hit upon the frequency and caught some snatches of a conversation. It seemed to be to the effect that "we" were "right on his jets" and would "bring him in" anytime "Red" desired. Medford pursed

his lips thoughtfully, and chewed one of Thedar Brog's cigars until the taxi pulled up before a wide, six-story building. It was huge compared to its surroundings. Medford remembered further that the driver had said something or other about Soray warehouses outside the city.

You'd think they could pay their bills! he thought.

IT TOOK only a short time for him to reach a comfortable office on the top floor. If Medford was surprised to learn that Teresa Soray was the present head of the company, he did not permit his expression to show it.

Miss Soray, however, stared when he mentioned Alpha Export. "I thought you said you were from the governor's palace!" she exclaimed.

Medford looked at her and smiled pleasantly. She was dark of hair and eye, very trim, and looked old enough to know her way around—but young enough to have inherited the business. At the moment, her lips and eyes were tight with suspicion, but normally she would doubtless have a pretty smile.

"I fear your secretary misunderstood," apologized Medford, who had taken care to encourage the misunderstanding. "I said I had just *come from* the palace."

She raised an eyebrow at that, but finally relented and developed a slow grin. "A bill-collector!" she said.

Medford gestured airily. "On a large scale only," he murmured.

"Thank you," said Teresa Soray. "It's nice to know that one is included among the big business people of the galaxy—or such of it as has been reached by Terrans."

"I don't doubt that you deserve such a reputation," replied Medford smoothly. "These frontier planets are beginning to attract the attention of big business, you know. Some of the large manufacturers are wondering what could be done out here with home appliances."

"Why, as to that, we think it may be time to—" She stopped and looked at him askance. "What sort of home appliances?"

"Oh, you know—washing machines, television, robot-chefs, sewing machines."

Teresa Soray measured him anew with a thoughtful stare. "How long have you been on Vashi IV, Mr. Medford?" she inquired politely.

"A few hours. Of course, I have spent much of my time so far with Governor Brog. One likes to know that he has the support of the local authorities, although we have found that most people like to settle their accounts. It's mostly just a matter of calling their attention to the debts."

At the mention of Brog, she relaxed slightly and smiled. "Naturally," she admitted, "we like to keep our reputation intact. I'm very glad you called it to my attention. You see, Terra is so far away that—" She broke off to shrug. "As for Foggy Broggy, my advice would to be wary of him."

"Why?"

"His dreams, Mr. Medford, are a bit beyond the scope of his position. I have heard that he fancies himself a power in space, and even plans to build up a little space fleet. I'll bet he won't pay for it, unless he has to!"

Medford busied himself with searching out a copy of Alpha Export's bill from among his papers. He wondered how much the girl could possibly know about his affairs. Perhaps someone at Soray's had been on the receiving end of a call from the spaceport. After all, the name "Ted" he had overheard might stand for Teresa as easily as for Thedar. Or, he reflected, he might even have misunderstood a reference to "Red." At any rate, there had been several calls; he seemed famous.

As he rose to leave, having been assured that steps would be taken shortly to settle the Alpha Export account, Teresa Soray succeeded in surprising him. "Would you have dinner with me tonight, Mr. Medford?" she asked.

Medford hesitated while she eyed him speculatively.

"You musn't mind my abruptness," she laughed. "We pioneers are known for being free and direct. I assure you, my invitation would not be considered improper here."

"Why...in that case, I'd be delighted," Medford acceded. "Where shall I—"

"Oh, I'll pick you up at the hotel," she said. "You must be staying at the Terran House; it's the only one that attracts space travelers."

Medford had learned on many worlds to avoid showing surprise at local customs. With only a mental shrug, he took his leave and found his way downstairs to the street. He hoped he could complete his Vashian business by eight o'clock, local time. Things were about even so far; now he had to see about Mr. Orville Jenkins.

ONCE HE was on the street, the the beginning was remarkably easy. The ground-car he had earlier spotted when it followed his taxi from the palace reappeared, gliding up to the curb beside him. Medford decided to seize the initiative. "Would you gentlemen mind giving me a lift?" he asked, putting on a slightly worried expression.

The two bulky men stared at each other, then at Medford. The darker of them wrinkled a nose that had at some time sustained extensive injury. His suspicious examination was interrupted by a jab of his companion's elbows. He climbed out, and motioned Medford to the middle of the front seat, where the Terran would be snugly placed between the pair.

During the next hour, which Medford was sure extended halfway through the night, things moved at great speed. When the end of that period found the trio in Jenkins' submerged country-retreat in the Vashian swamps, the flat-nosed gentleman reported at length. Medford stood calmly by, trying to act as if his gray trousers were not spattered to the knees with gobs of sticky mud.

"...so Mike an' me think he's kiddin' about the palace bulls, but outside town we see this other hot-rod tailin' us. We hadda leave the car an' jump in the swampster without even coverin' up."

"They even shot after us before we got into the cane clumps," verified the driver, who stood watchfully behind Medford.

"But we got the jet bubblin'," resumed Flat-nose, "an' made it away. Then all the way out here, this flutter-head acts like it was a joy ride, sittin' there with a big cigar in his face an' sneerin' every time Mike skipped over a sunk log."

Medford recalled briefly how much he had regretted the cigar at the time. His clenching of teeth whenever the jet-propelled swamp boat had threatened to flip over had been deeply understood. He returned his attention to Jenkins.

Where Governor Brog had run to beef, this man was still lean; but there was a resemblance about the eyes. Jenkins' facial muscles were muscular, with jutting chin and thick brows. Despite his close-cropped red hair, he might one day—given success and soft living—look a good deal like the Vashian governor. "Okay," he said in a mild voice. "Say, for the time being, you really want to see me. What about?"

Mike and Flat-nose relaxed, now that their chief's eyes were on Medford. The only other person present, a vacant-eyed youth armed with a stun gun that Medford suspected of being set for a lethal charge, continued to watch the Terran narrowly.

"To begin with, there is a gentleman residing on a planet of the nearby star, Yanna, who looks somewhat like an anemic ape wearing a green fur suit."

Jenkins stiffened slightly. He was sitting in a large, leather covered armchair that must have been awkward to ship out into the swamp; now he

sat erect where before he had leaned comfortably back.

"His name is Kyraj," continued Medford. "For some reason, he is known to the Terran spacemen as 'Big Joe' and is generally rumored to be engaged in widespread criminal activities. Actually, the drug he sells is perfectly legal on Yanna II, since it affects Yannites about the way coffee affects us."

"Now tell me something new," suggested Jenkins.

"Since Kyraj is a legitimate businessman, he expects to be paid for his merchandise; he engaged me to remind you of his bill for half a million credits."

For at least a full minute, Jenkins stared in dead silence. Flat-nose and Mike looked faintly uneasy; the youth with the stunner never changed expression.

"What if I don't feel like playing?" grated Jenkins finally.

"It might be suggested to Governor Brog that you are being too bold, and making too much money out of smuggling a drug that has a profoundly debilitating effect upon his colonists. If he has to make a choice between having a wide-open planet, and getting his new spaceships armed, he might throw you to the wolves."

"Maybe; maybe not," grinned Jenkins. "I wouldn't be surprised if Broggy knew what side the sun shines on. I think I'll just keep you around till I make sure he remembers."

AND SO Medford found himself climbing down yet another ladder like the one in the concrete shaft that was the entrance to Jenkins' swamp hideout. He was escorted to a small room by the youth with the stun-gun, and there left to make himself as comfortable as he might on a canvas cot that unfolded from the wall.

As soon as he thought it prudent, Medford reached into his jacket pocket for the spy-eye he carried with him. He hoped he might catch Jenkins making a telecall to the governor; there seemed to be little doubt that Brog was not above accepting money from any source whatever, in order to defray the expenses of his personally-run government.

When he had jockeyed the little mechanism out through the keyhole of the door and up to the floor above, Medford surmised. He "found" the wasting no time televising. Possibly his little fortress was not equipped for it, Medford surmished. He "found" the smuggler and his two muscle-men on an upper level; there they were engaged in opening a camouflaged section of roof to the purple twilight of Vashi, to permit the launching of an antiquated jet helicopter.

"Not enough of anything to go around," Medford recalled. "Or perhaps he thinks a new one would be too showy."

The young gunner sat outside Medford's room, tilted against the wall in a chair of woven cane. Languidly, he chewed at the corner of a greenish plug of *yannaine* wrapped in aluminum foil. His eyes gazed weirdly into the distance, and he forgot to put the plug back into his pocket.

"But will he wake up if I appear?" Medford asked himself, examining the image in his pocket control screen.

He decided that the sooner he made a move, the better; they would hardly expect him to try anything so soon.

With considerable difficulty, and several false starts, he maneuvered the tiny spy-eye into the single keyhole and worked the lock open without benefit of a key. Then he sent it out into the corridor again. When he was ready, he had it dive at his guard's ear from one side while he padded rapidly up to the stung youth from the other.

Thirty seconds later, Medford was running for the ladder and tucking in his belt buckle. He hoped the gunner would be happy in his *yannaine* dream, even though sprawled on a cold concrete floor.

The problem of catching Mike alone, warming up the helicopter while Jenkins and Flat-nose were getting heavy jackets for the flight, took a little longer. That gave Medford time to realize that sneaking up close to this burly fellow would present difficulties.

The Terran stood on a rung of the metal ladder leading to the surface. He saw that the "roof" of the underground building was disguised by about two inches of mud from which grew a number of short, broad-leaved swamp plants. Thirty feet away, a section had been raised like an elevator; between this and Medford's position stood the helicopter. Mike was climbing down from the low cabin.

Medford opened his jacket and reached around to the rear of his belt. He shook his head regretfully; this he considered an emergency measure.

His hand came away with an object about the shape of a short, thick cigarette. Medford held his breath, twisted the end of the object, and flipped it at Mike's chest. The man caught the motion from the corner of his eye. As he turned slightly, the cylinder—already trailing a wisp of gas—reached him and puffed out into an astonishing amount of pinkish gas.

Mike gasped in surprise and promptly slumped to the ground. He slept.

WHEN JENKINS and the other muscle-bound man hustled up the ladder, followed more slowly by the *yanmaine*-chewing youth, Medford was hovering twenty feet up in the helicopter. Old it may have been, but the craft had obviously been kept in perfect condition for business reasons. Its tiny jets were quiet enough for the Terran to hear the gunner clearly.

"I'll kill him!" the youth mouthed thickly, a trickle of greenish saliva showing on his chin.

He raised the stubby stun-gun, but Jenkins grabbed his arm. "That wouldn't do any good," he snapped. "Want to lose the 'copter *besides* marking up this place like a target?"

There was a brief struggle, which Medford did not stay to watch. He was more concerned with gaining altitude, and picking up some sort of powered communication on his wrist-set to use as a bearing back to Center City.

The trip that had seemed so long by swamp boat took only about fifteen minutes by air, once he had the direction. Night was still an hour or so away when Medford reached the city and hovered over the governor's palace in the dusk.

"Ummm...he's been missing me," the Terran muttered, watching his tiny intercepted image of Brog on the air giving directions for finding Medford. "Well, if he's willing to stay late at the office on my account, I ought to drop in on him."

He proceeded to do exactly that, leaving the helicopter on the grounds at the rear of the building and making his way with quiet assurance up the back stairs. He was not regarded with suspicion until he stepped into Brog's outer office, and let a flabbergasted guard escort him in to the governor.

"I think it is time we had a few private words about your spaceships," said Medford severely. "I have just learned by personal experience that there really is need for them, if you are to suppress smuggling around Vashi."

Thedar Brog closed his mouth. Then he noticed faces of his entourage outside the door and closed his expression like a satellite going into eclipse. "It'll be all right," he said. "I'll see Mr. Medford alone."

When the door was shut, leaving them together, Medford spoke. "Governor Brog, I am tired, hungry, and interested in keeping another appointment; I shall therefore come straight to the point. There is a certain Red

Jenkins out in the swamps who is obviously a smuggler of *yaunaine*, if not of other things. You absolutely must have armed spaceships if you are to catch his men with the goods before they touch down on Vashi 4 and scatter their cargos."

"My dear Medford!" exclaimed Brog. "That is exactly what I tried to—"

"All right," interrupted the Terran. "You and I know it; but if anyone around Sol is to realize the facts, some evidence must be obtained. Not only must you actively show that you need the ships armed, but also you had better pay the current installments on them, to make utterly clear that there is no trickery or propaganda involved."

Brog's mask of politeness vanished. He scowled and began to sputter.

"Even you cannot get something for nothing," Medford insisted. "If you don't want Moran pulling strings at Colonial Administration headquarters to keep any armament for those ships from being sent out here, you better pacify them with credits."

"Where does the money come from?" demanded Brog heatedly.

"Well..." murmured Medford suavely, "if the Vashian penalties for smuggling do not include heavy fines, it is certainly very foolish of you. Besides, the Administration might be moved to assist—*if* you really have smugglers here!"

Feeling that he had gone far enough, he left Brog scowling meditatively at his desk and returned to the Terran House in a ground taxi. He sent out for a new pair of slacks to replace the mud-splattered ones he had worn into town and through the swamp, and for a fresh shirt.

THE BELL-HOP had obviously pegged him as an old fuddy-duddy. The slacks she brought were a conservative deep crimson. The shirt Medford received with them was rose-pink. Apart from destroying his careful inconspicuousness, it made him look spacesick.

Teresa Soray grinned at his expression when he stepped out of the elevator downstairs. "So that's why you kept me waiting!" she laughed, eyeing the shirt.

Medford apologized as they headed for the dining-room. He had no intention of explaining that he had been sending a message to Yanna 2 by means of one of the little instruments in his case. It had been necessary for him to await a suitable opportunity, when the spaceport interstellar-station was sending a message. He wondered what the operator thought of the strange drain upon their power.

Medford took care to make himself charming, but as dinner progressed he became somewhat abstracted; more and more often, he fiddled with his wrist-visor, until his companion showed pique.

"There are no public programs for that thing on Vashi 4," she reminded him.

At the moment, the intercepted telecast from the palace showed Governor Brog's impatient visage.

"He's in that goddam' swamp somewhere!" Brog was shouting. "We know he took half a million with him. I want Jenkins and the credits both—or don't come back!"

Medford stared abstractedly at the neckline of Teresa Soray's sparkling green gown. It was meant to be stared at, but not in just that way; she glanced down uneasily.

"You're quite right," the Terran admitted. "I ought to leave the damned gadget in my room. In fact, if you'll excuse me— Waiter!"

A few minutes later, the pair of them advanced along the upstairs hall toward Medford's room at a near-trot. Miss Soray's dark eyes glinted with a mixture of anticipation and outrage. "You should have let me pay, Johnny," she repeated. "I invited you, didn't I?"

Medford rammed his key into the slot of his door. As it completed the electrical circuit, the door swung

open, but Medford halted in the opening and turned.

"Now, listen here!" said Teresa, becoming just a shade shrill. "The Vashian men don't generally make *me* stand on the doorstep to beg for a good-night kiss. I get all the invitations I want in Center City!"

Medford rubbed the back of one hand with the other—gesture that suggested wringing them. He scanned her trim figure and nodded. "Naturally, naturally. It happens, however, that a certain matter—"

Teresa planted one hand on the gentle curve of her hip and leaned forward to examine him as if he were a newly discovered humanoid species. "Johnny," she said unbelievingly, "are you...ditching me?"

"I...uh...I'm afraid so," replied Medford desperately, and shut the door.

Inside, he ran to the window and opened it so he could send his spy-eye flitting out toward the swamps. Then he hastily maneuvered his invisible case down from its hovering-position near the ceiling. From it, he took a small stunner that lay flatly in the palm of his hand before being slipped into his pocket.

His next move was to scribble a note and leave it on the table, with enough interstellar credits to pay for his brief stay—following which he took a firm grip on the handle of his gadget bag and stepped out the window.

IT WAS about four hours later that Medford, with his spy-eye back in his pocket and his fingers twiddling with his old-fashioned "watch," strolled into the entrance of the space-port-building. He showed his papers to a sleepy guard and made his way out to the sleek interstellar ship that would depart within a few hours.

The elevator-boy was slightly annoyed with him for hesitating so sleepily before entering the car, and for nudging the boy aside as he left. Medford ignored this and strolled to his cabin nearby. A dull *thunk* sounded immediately after the door slid back.

Medford glanced back at the elevator-boy and lifted one foot with a grimace. "Stubbed my toe," he complained.

He entered and locked the door carefully, before pulling out his watch-control. This time, the bulk that shimmered into solidity in mid-air was quite large. There was the leather-covered case, but balanced across it on his stomach teetered Red Jenkins, vigorously rubbing a growing egg on his forehead.

"Sorry about the doorway," apologized Medford.

"That's all right, perfectly all right," sighed Jenkins.

He dropped lightly to the deck, then obeyed Medford's gesture to occupy one of the two acceleration-hammocks. "I sure was glad to find you waiting out there on the road," he went on. "Old Brog really crossed me this time. I didn't know just *what* I'd do even if I made the space-port. Now I find you've even arranged a job for me on Yanna 2 with Kyraj!"

Medford sat upon a padded chair that unfolded from the bulkhead and began to unzip his boots. The bags under his eyes were more apparent with fatigue. "I'll put the case up there with you in a minute," he said. "Might as well keep you out of sight as long as possible. As to the job with Big Joe—what else could I do, especially when it turned out that your wealth was so over-estimated? A quarter million wasn't enough to pay off, so the next best thing was to put you in a position to earn the rest."

"Which I will do," vowed Jenkins, "as soon as I get passage for Yanna at our next stop. You're sure it's all legal, too?"

"As long as you sell only to Yannites—no Terrans," said Medford.

Jenkins lay back with his hands beneath his head. "I sure am glad I

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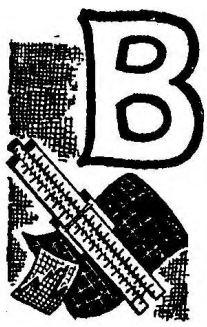
by Bryce Walton

minority decision

In a world of, by, and for the common man, there still had to be an elite — and the elite wanted out!



BORDEN of Special Features Telenews adjusted levitation and sighed as his bulk assumed an easier position behind his alloyex desk. He lighted up a para-cigar. "All right, Leydon. We want a complete kinescope on this big opening premier of LeBarre's Cultural Center—or whatever the devil it is! It comes off tonight!"

"Tonight!"

"Eight-thirty. If you get the dope, I might be able to swing that Field Promotion for you, friend. Otherwise—" Borden's shrug was unpleasantly eloquent.

Mitch Leydon nodded uneasy understanding. He was no snob, but he had no desire to find himself abruptly demoted to membership in the People's Garbage Disposal Service. "What's up?" he asked.

Borden's bulk shifted forward. "LeBarre's put out a kind of program, and I managed to get hold of a copy of it. Take a look, friend, and wonder."

Borden clicked on the projector and the program reconstructed itself on the wall screen. Leydon stared and scratched his straw-colored cowlick.

"I'm no artist, Borden; I don't dig much of this aesthetic stuff. Why send me?"

"Who *does* understand it? We don't have an artist on staff who does."

"This LeBarre's a real one hundred proof screwball," Leydon said emphatically.

"To us. But if you could see the names who have accepted his invitation to attend opening night! Brother! Anyway, to the *People*, LeBarre's a mystery man. A complete kinescope with a running commentary on this affair would be of interest to the *People*, not to mention its obvious value as a Service. That's what we're in the Bureau for, Leydon. Service. Not only that, but it would be feathers in our caps. Here—you might be able to use this invitation to sneak in."

"What's this?" Leydon sighed.

"It was extended to a friend of the *People*, Yeluf Aradian, the physicist. He's got to fly back to Iran for some kind of religious appointment and won't be able to attend. He's about the only important guy in United Nations City who won't be there, believe me! He knew about my wanting to

get this to the *People*, so he sent the invitation on to me. Nice fellow. One of the Intellectually Elite, strictly. But he's never lost contact with us *People*."

Leydon was barely listening. His mental faculties were straining in an attempt to figure out the program mentioned generally on the elaborately-printed invitation.

FUTURISTICA

The future as it should and will be in a progressive and not a static society, symbolized by modern dance, impressionism in real-life. Symbolic escape from static social chains via transcendental aesthetics.

MUSIC

Subjective, impressionistic rhythms designed for psychic release from the mundane. Many excerpts will be presented of music from the past and also music of the future—*all rejected by the World Welfare Society as decadent, immoral and bourgeois.*

ESCAPE FROM MASS MAN

Mr. LeBarre will speak on this vital, and pressing subject. Shall the elite be victimized by the Suicide of the Masses?...

Leydon looked up slowly without reading further. It was all a bunch of nonsense as far as he was concerned. But, so far, he wasn't concerned—and wished that he never would be. Longhair music and art was out of style. This was a strictly materialistic society; there was room and demand for the intellectuals, but what was all this symbolic, impressionistic stuff for? That went out with the old era.

He said to Borden. "This Cultural Center was built only for the residents of United Nations City. I did a short article on it once a few months ago. A brief." He closed his eyes and quoted slowly. Leydon had a photographic memory. "*'This is the era of Mass Man. But what is being done for the Upper A, IQ Division, the elite minority? They are being suffocated, forced to maintain a mundane level with the suicidal norm. My philanthropy is revolutionary. It is designed for the benefit of the tiny, socially-neglected minority!'*"

Leydon opened his eyes. "That's anti-social," he said. "Maybe this LeBarre's more dangerous than we think. If he's such a crack-pot, how come he gets all the smartest cookies in the world to come to this premiere?"

"That's what you've got to find out, Leydon. *The People* want to know! Maybe it'll be good just for laughs. Maybe not. Here's a dossier on LeBarre; read it on the way. Any of this material you can use on your commentary, use it. Now get started, friend, and goodbye!"

LEYDON waited five minutes at the monorail station, then found himself hurling above the desert toward United Nations City. He looked down at the blurred coloration of the Arizona desert for a while before looking over the dossier.

It certainly seemed to add up to crackpot in sixty-point type— Either that, or a dangerous element disguising itself by going to fantastic extremes. The biggest big-shots in the world were too busy making the world Socialized machinery go round to take time off for gags.

But they were accepting LeBarre's invitation. Maybe it was flattering. LeBarre had spent billions in consideration of the neglected minority of intellectuals, as he called them. But why call them neglected? They were part of the Social World Federation weren't they? Well, maybe those big brains did consider themselves slighted, but if they did, this was the only manifestation of it Leydon knew about. Maybe there was a secret cult of geniuses objecting to the status quo!

A needle slipped in through the warm safeness of membership in the World Social State and it was a cold thrust. He shivered, and if he had been addicted to thinking of highly

speculative matters he might have continued on logically and grown very much afraid of probability.

He went on reading about LeBarre. To read about him was to revue recent socio-economic history:

Man's capacity for self-destruction had forced the issue in 1973. World Government had resulted. The governmental agencies had come from Mass Man, not from the intellectual, artistic, and scientific classes. The latter were merely utilized for the benefit of Mass Man. That was all right. It had balanced nicely.

Leydon glanced through the opaque wall of the car at the vast Western desert, long since irrigated and turned into a kind of giant World Playground. And in the heart was U.N. City. As the monorail car approached it, Leydon could catch its glitter from a distance of over five hundred miles.

LeBarre's life tied in closely with the city, with social trends since 1973. There was no more private enterprise in the older sense. Cartels and international ownership setups had became passe. Actually there were no longer national boundary designations. Every former 'owner' had received compensation for his confiscated world monopolistic possessions in world credits. And he had been allowed to retain a managerial position in the new order in coordination with governmental bureau heads.

LeBarre had emerged from the shuffle with an estimated twenty billion in world credits. He had resigned from the offered managerialship. There was nothing to invest the twenty billion in then. He was no longer a partner of the world's people. But there was the privilege of disposing of such a fortune however—through the channels of social welfare. Philanthropy.

LeBarre had buried his credits in the World Bank for some time. Finally he started spending it. That was his own business so long as the process was for social benefit, and so long as it wasn't utilized in any one of thousands of unlawful, old anarchistic ways.

Not much was known of LeBarre's personal character. He was considered a scientific genius of a highly individualistic and unorthodox sort. At one time he had done a great deal of research in the various laboratories controlled by his vast holdings. His original capital investments had come from inventions. After the big reshuffling, LeBarre had gained notoriety as a world crusador against what he termed: "the suicidal trend glorifying Mass Man at the expense of the personal integrity and sacred rights of the Individual." It was an old gag, but he had some new angles.

HE HAD started many movements that had never seemed to go anywhere. He lectured. He published papers and phamplets. He built private telecasting stations for proselyting purposes—all at his own expense naturally. He had twenty billion credits to spend and he was being philanthropic, that is, educational. And the World Government had no objections. If the people knew when they were well off, why object to open criticism and recommendation for change when the People were perfectly satisfied?

And anyway, most of his ideas had been considered meaningless, vague, unrealistic, decadent. Some of them had been downright ridiculous and therefore missed the classification of hostile propaganda.

His last big campaign had garnered for him his crackpot label. He had presented a complicated set of figures, charts, graphs, statistics. He interpreted the presentation as signifying, absolutely and inevitably, that within a thousand years, man would be extinct.

The Bureaus put reputable men to investigating his reports. The Bureaus rejected his theories as nonsense, though they did admit that his theories on the gradual radioactivation of cer-

tain unstable elements in the earth due to the huge subterranean atomic power plants were disconcerting. The investigation had never resulted in facts serious enough to warrant looking into by the Intellectual Elite.

Then he started building the fantastic structure which was advertised as the U.N. Cultural Center. A mile from the official boundary line of U.N. City, LeBarre built it with his own inexhaustible wealth and enthusiasm, on property which he purchased the right to build on—the justification being philanthropic of course.

He had gotten enough signatures on a petition circulated in U.N. City to justify the project.

There would naturally, Leydon thought vaguely, be a cultural gap between the tastes of the Elite of U.N. City and the People. If LeBarre wanted to build a highly specialized entertainment center for the Elite, that was all right. The Bureaus were not too favorably impressed, but LeBarre was within the law. The Law was lenient.

LeBarre might be within the law, Leydon thought then. But the building he had constructed was out of this world.

HE LOOKED down at it, awed as usual, as the monorail car rocketed over it and stopped at the central U.N. Station. A towering streamlined creation of highly ingenious cubes and angles. He spent some time at a tourist floating skyroom, altering his appearance slightly with fleshine and arranging himself so as to resemble somewhat, Aradian, the physicist. The invitation itself was perforated for electronic reaction and it was unlikely that there would be any personal investigation. The invitation itself served to identify.

A picture of Aradian helped in the casual transformation. The clothing helped. As did all his religious sect Yeluf Aradian wore a turban and a somewhat different type of evening dress replete with cummberband. Though there were no more nations, strictly speaking, there were many sects of neo-philosophical religious nature. Each had some scientific basis now, thanks to Rhine and others, but Aradian's sect went back almost ten thousand years, and he had been proud of his distinctive dress.

The fleshine, the darkened skin, the scarf and the turban would sure get him inside, especially with the invitation.

He rented a heliocar and arrived back at the Cultural Center building a little after eight. He landed the heliocar about fifty yards from the building on a special sink-away cylinder, got out and stretched and breathed in the cool dry desert night air.

Beyond the building the streamlined tubeways, power-hung buildings, skyways, and Luciferine light of U.N. City gleamed white and silver under the stars.

But the Cultural Center structure topped everything else. Funny, Leydon thought, no matter how advanced things were, someone always came up with a new twist, another radical angle. The most advanced architecture had gone into U.N. City. The last word in planned, utilitarian construction, highly functional in its beauty. But after LeBarre finished his structure, U.N. seemed a little bit ancient, somehow...

According to LeBarre its swirling lines, sudden harsh cubes slipping off into grotesque angles, its broad base sloping at dizzy digressions to its gleaming coned top—all designed to signify "Escape".

"Escape of the free-flying individual mind away from the gray deadly amorphous faceless and static nonentity known as the common denominator." Unquote Lebarre.

Leydon carried a small case with him, it contained a special midget sized camera, some delicate equipment

including a tiny rotating mike and several fifty faceted eyes that were coordinated with the mikes.

He walked a short distance, stopped. He saw doors, circular like those of a vault, set flush with the oddly curving walls. And the walls glowed strangely over the desert. The neon with its evangelical-like words flickered with bubbles and streaks of fire.

Leydon took a deep breath before approaching what was apparently the foyer. If he failed, Borden could make things unpleasant for him. You worked for years in 'service' to attain a certain position in your chosen sphere of social activity. One act of negligence and a director could and certainly would, usually, break you flat.

Borden could do that to Mitch Leydon, and Leydon determined that if it were humanly possible to get a kinescope of this fantastic affair back out to Borden he would do it. Up one more notch and he could marry and live the good life.

He stared at a large three-dimensional light placard flashed on the damp night air. It trembled with a kind of life before him. Robotic-like creatures with flash-bulbs for eyes and zig-zagging chains for legs and arms, were caught frozen in the midst of a symbolic dance, or that was what it seemed to Leydon.

Also cast in three-dim light on the air was a large treatment of LeBarre himself. A short man, bald, with hanging jowls and wearing a pince nez attached to a somewhat old-fashioned vest with a length of black plastic. It would be hard to imagine anything more archaic than a period curiosity such as a pince nez, but LeBarre looked at ease peering through it at the stars.

A sign wavered through darkness, blinking and crawling like a number of regimented glow-worms.

CHARLES LEBARRE

The last hope of individualism, of determinism, founder of your Cultural Center.

FOR PRESERVATION OF FREEDOM OF MIND AND OF PROGRESSIVE ART AND SCIENCE.

And there appeared that intriguing promise:

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

MURMURING a quiet prayer for his future, Leydon presented the special invitation marked Aradian. The ticket-taker wasn't human. It was a scanner and it scanned the invitation, and a massive door of metal two feet thick started to open for him.

He was in.

The scanner was something constructed apparently of metal, but it had a lot of life's dominant characteristics. Its arms were snaking silver cords, and its eye was a red disc.

Leydon didn't see LeBarre. Something ushered him along a corridor. The something was without arms or legs and it floated several varied distances from the floor. It also had an eye. A green globe with a red pupil that shot out needles of fiery light to guide the way.

Anything for a gag, Leydon thought. But the humor of it missed him. Entirely. And when humor missed so completely, it left something else, closely akin, but hardly the same: fear, and it chilled Leydon. It stayed with him as he followed the robotic or whatever it was. He had never seen anything like it before. Robot development had stopped with certain advanced kinds of super calculating machines. The Bureaus had considered robots an effrontery to the *People's* dignity. LeBarre obviously had other ideas.

Leydon was led through a tubular corridor that finally became something else. Something else. Things are not what they seem. In spite of the air-

conditioning, sweat was beginning to run down Leydon's ribs. Everything in here could so easily be something else. It was more than merely disconcerting. There was fear. And the corridor finally became something like the inside of a hollow corkscrew. Door after door, all of massive shiny metal, opened noiselessly, let him through, closed again. He was led up. He was led down. He was led round and round.

A big hand seemed to clamp around his stomach. He had a hard time breathing. It was absolutely dark except for the red beams of the floating thing's single probing eyes.

The place is, thought Leydon with sudden awful clarity, a perfect trap if anyone desired to utilize it for such a purpose. He was bewildered. And he had no idea how to escape. Odd, he should be thinking of escape. But he knew that without guidance he would never be able to find his way out, even if it were light. The massive doors functioned automatically and there seemed to be no visible sign anywhere of anything even reminescent of manual control.

A dim glow gradually faded on as the corridor broadened out. Large doors swung wide and a flood of symphonic music enveloped Leydon. He was familiar with this particular kind of music. Decadent art. Full of imaginative, escape themes. Stuff loaded with the symbols of maladjustment to the material social world in which one was supposed to function. It was negative music, designed to stimulate reaction, and discontent with the status quo.

How could anyone living in such a pat, well-ordered world as the New Social Era, with its materialistic certainties and objectives, fall for this kind of nonsense?

The floating robotic preceded Leydon down a narrow aisle. The seats were of a deep cushiony stuff and when Leydon selected one in which he might possibly carry out his assignment in the best possible manner, and sat down, he felt as though he was sinking utterly and forever from sight and sound.

He floated back up slowly and it seemed that he was floating on a cloud.

The seats were circular, spiraling up and around in an unbroken line like the threads inside a tap. In the center, below, was a stage. In the center of the stage, in a circular sort of pocket, was an orchestra.

It was playing—but there were no players. Just a mass of instruments, playing together. On one edge of the pit was a high narrow, box-like arrangement covered with dials, levers, switches.

Leydon sat stiffly and looked apprehensively about. He dabbled at his sweat-pocked face. Some of the make-up came off on the handkerchief. Instruments playing, but no players. It was a good gag, but slightly eery. In fact, more than slightly eery. Some sort of invisible power, but it was more like a vaudeville joke. Something you might expect to see on television, but not here! But music was perfection. And then Leydon got it. The new Social Era had stifled musicians, so that none were available to play this decadent kind of stuff. So LeBarre had had to devise this fantastic method of presenting the music.

THERE were several others here now, and more coming. He slipped the mikes out of the case and slid them down before him on thread-like almost invisible strands. The shadows of weirdly-playing lights gave everything an unreal cast. And then he realized the full import of the arrivals being directed down the aisles by the floating boxes with red eyes. He had known all the elite would be here. But the mass of sheer eliteness all in one place at one time blinded Leydon.

There were subdued exclaimations from women. A few light, uneasy male

laughs. Leydon dropped a number of minuscule teleyes down beside the mikes. It wasn't very satisfactory, but it was the only way to sneak out a kinescope. Then he sat back and tried to relax. The case containing kinescoping equipment waited at his feet.

The idea of relaxing was ridiculous. It only increased his awareness of his nervous state. This was something more than a disgruntled old monopolist's whim! A tremendous effort had gone into this structure. Those robotics were ingenious. The instruments playing intricate and highly abstract music down there, playing without human hands, seemed to have an eery life of their own!

What could LeBarre's real motive be for all this display? Something was hidden behind the music, the symbols, the strange architecture.

LeBarre, according to the dossier, was dedicated, as a person at least, to the defeat of the World People's Federation. He was a rugged individualistic corpse that refused to be buried. Had consistently refused to admit he was dead. He had clung to ideas developed before the reshuffle. He believed in the privilege of the elite. Elite's privilege for its own sake, rather than dedication to Service.

Well—everyone had a right to his own opinion as long as it wasn't regressive or destructive.

But this business might be a long way from a mere innocent kind of reaction. Why should such a man as LeBarre, cunning enough to have circumvented the law in such a way as to have enabled him to build such a place, invite the key figures of the world here in one super austere body?

Leydon moistened his lips.

LeBarre had reached a certain point in a fantastic tour de force, but where was the point?

And where was he going?

THE AUDITORIUM had filled rapidly. The importance of those around him almost stifled Leydon. Under one roof, trapped perhaps behind many steel doors and twisted corridors that all could resemble something else—all the men and women whose intelligence and training and highly exceptional genius, *literally ran the highly intricate machinery of the New Era Order!*

They weren't World Government. But they constituted the genius that enabled the World Government to function. They were the brains of the *People*. The specialized brains, the intricate computing section of the vast organic machine.

Leydon stared self-consciously about. Faces expanded, seemed to solidify and become motionless for his study.

Anavar Burks, Chief head of Nuclear Physics of the World. Ferreti, Head of all world Psychbiotics. D. Young, Head of Socio-Psychology and Psychometry. Snaski, Chief of Forensic Sociology Division. Matthews, Chief of the Biochemisty sectors. The list was all-inclusive. It was a highly specialized social system, and each name was the greatest brain in his field, the working core of a vital department. They *were* those respective departments. No other brain could handle any of those departments, and if one department failed, the chain would break, impairing the whole structure. And if the chain went—the anchor called the *People* would fall.

The ultra-distinguished guests filled the seats rapidly. Leydon's mind smarted with speculation as probabilities whispered more loudly in his head. The drone of voices rose higher. Women's soft voices were spotted here and there. Behind surfaces of conditioned calm, the men might be under something of a strain.

At least three hundred of the world's greatest intellects were here. And the thick steel doors slid noiselessly shut. The strange rising sounds from the orchestra pit gnawed at Leydon's nerves and shrieked in his head.

Everybody seemed to be enjoying

the sound. Everybody but Leydon. This music was alien, long-hair, decadent, sentimental, imaginative, abstract....anything you wanted to call it—but it didn't spring from the People.

No one else but Leydon seemed worried. And yet if something should happen to this gathering, the carefully layered structure of world society would rip apart overnight. Anarchy then, probably something far worse. And then the undisciplined masses free among agencies of destruction unlimited. The old situation again. But this time there wouldn't be a chance for survival. There wouldn't be time.

But the dossier stated that security investigation had found nothing to be alarmed about concerning this building of LeBarre's. In fact several members of the Security Force were here tonight, notably Ralph Derek, Commander in Chief of all the World's Military Security. Other uniforms were situated about. LeBarre had allowed the security personnel to conduct a thorough search of the building at various times during its destruction.

There had been no adverse reaction.

Leydon sighed. His fears were only projections of his own personal feeling. He was pretty alien here among all these intellectuals and artists. After all, there was a pretty big gap between the intellectually elite class and a reporter for *People's* telenews. What Leydon knew about any of these unbelievably specialized s c i e n c e s wouldn't even be an adequate flea stimulant.

So he didn't belong here, and this exaggerated fear was an excuse for his feelings of inferiority. Dime-store stuff, but it might explain. Something had to explain this fantastic feeling of terror—of entrapment.

But LeBarre's good, damn good, Leydon thought then. A wonderful job of publicity. Everybody, simply everybody, was here. All the brains that ran the world were in UN City. And if there were any of those brains who weren't here, Leydon couldn't see them. Yeluf Aradian, and he was different, was the only exception. He had never lost contact with the People.

Leydon stiffened. The 'house' lights dimmed. A wavering spot snaked down through blackness. There was LeBarre and in the absolute darkness around him there was a sudden and painful silence.

A cylinder had risen up through the surface of the stage and on it was a tube-like chair, deeply cushioned and in the middle of it sat LeBarre. He turned his ageless, fleshy face upward, gazed through his *pince nez*.

There was no applause.

Leydon leaned slightly forward. He could feel, but not hear, the tenseness around him. Below him, against his leg, he could feel the purring of the kinescoping equipment, recording the music, the speeches, everything, for the *People*, for Borden—for a promotion.

LEBARRE spoke. "Ladies and gentlemen." It was the only prosaic expression of the evening, and it rang comfortably through Leydon's mind, superimposed over the remainder of the speech.

"You are here because of *ennui*."

Ennui meant you were fed up, Leydon thought.

"You have been the living dead, buried in a grave of anonymity. Lost in the amorphous group. You are here because of starvation and you will be fed. You have wanted to live again. You have known that service to a gray, nameless and faceless machinery has no self-justification. You have known that you were trapped in a vast and still ocean of faces that have blended into no face at all.

"Your great intellects, artistic talents, and aesthetic abilities must not drown in the abysmal depths of human normalcy. You are supranormal. You must have a world of your own in which to function for your own betterment and expansion, unfettered

by the will of the unthinking mass.

"You are a different breed. You must not diffuse your talents through the racial organism, but instead throw your genetic factors together and maintain your difference."

A slight stirring began around Leydon. He stared at LeBarre, at the shining pince nez. He wanted above everything else to get up, to try to get out, but he knew he never would. He was hypnotized by the dark and the beam of shivering light and LeBarre's pince nez. A few coughs and sighs came out of the darkness. Feet shuffled. Someone sneezed.

An intellectual could catch a common cold, thought Leydon desperately. That was some consolation.

After a long pause, LeBarre continued. "I promised you entertainment. There will be plenty of time for that. I promised you audience participation and that there will be—soon. I promised you Escape. Now we shall escape. Escape from the freedom of all, to a great unlimited Freedom for ourselves alone."

LeBarre pulled a switch.

Leydon was trying to yell and then a big flat hand pressed him down into his seat and the spot on LeBarre wavered and went out. A deep throbbing roar seemed to point through Leydon's veins and his head felt as though it was balooning out and out. An explosion—

He straightened up slowly, weakly. The spot expanded to include all of the stage below. LeBarre's cylindrical chair had disappeared back into the floor, but LeBarre was still out there on the stage. The orchestra was playing again, the instruments moving in perfect decadent and thoroughly regressive harmonies. This music was so utterly and completely individualistic that it stirred Leydon up with a sense of guilt.

LeBARRE flipped his pince nez gleefully into the air and waved it about.

"I brought you all here to be entertained, but that isn't all of it. Now there is Escape, and you have escaped. Later you will realize how fortunate you are. There will be adjustment and a new life, a rise to the fullfillment of our potential greatness!

"The fools had no idea what this building really was. It was inspected. The inspectors couldn't have known that they were blinded during their tour by special hypnotic treatment that sent them away with no idea of what they actually had seen! But now you can see. See how thoroughly we have escaped!"

The top of the great dome slid open, revealing a great expanse of the heavens. The terrible clarity of light against blackness made things clear to Leydon then. There was an awed shocked stillness.

For an instant, Leydon had a wild impulse to jump up, run away. But there was no place to go. He sank back slowly and closed his eyes. He scarcely heard LeBarre's voice anymore, not the shouting and exclamations around him. The cries of confusion, the moving of bodies.

LeBarre had known of course what was to happen. The others hadn't known—not exactly perhaps—yet Leydon had a feeling they had suspected somehow that they would escape. Undoubtedly some of the elite would have known though.

The kinescoping equipment in the case at his feet purred on futilely. The *People* would never hear what happened. No one ever would. Maybe the *People* would find out somehow what had happened. And maybe not. Anyway, the *People* were lost. They had lost their brain.

The brains of the people hadn't deserted of their own choosing completely, perhaps, but partly at least they were responsible in that they had been a part of a program of temptation, of corruption, of withdrawal from the *People*.

Or that was the way Leydon thought about it, but then he wasn't one of the Elite.

Leydon could tell now, from the reactions around him, that a number of the big shots from UN City had been in on the know. Some of them at least had worked with LeBarre.

They'd probably been planning this with LeBarre for a long time.

Someone was saying to someone else. "I hope the world survives without us. One thing sure, it would never have survived with us either. It was rotten, stagnant, static and dying, but the World Civilization didn't know it."

Leydon stirred a little. Maybe they were right. He didn't know. He didn't know from nothing now.

LeBarre had had the genius to construct a building that was really a spaceship. And he had gotten away with it. And now they were out somewhere in deep, deep space—going, going—where?

Only God and Lebarre knew.

And all Leydon could think about was: "What will they do with a jerk like me?"

THE COMPLEAT COLLECTOR

(*continued from page* 38)

stopped the kid from stunning you," he said; "that was one good deed that paid off."

"Oh, it wasn't entirely due to that," admitted Medford, drawing off his boots. "You see, if you don't pay that bill, *I* don't receive any commission. That would have spoiled my run on Vashi 4. The other two parties I called on are going to pay—one from choice, and the other out of necessity."

Jenkins watched thoughtfully as Medford climbed wearily into his hammock and wriggled his stockinged feet luxuriously. When the Terran had taken out his control box and sent the case of gadgets gliding over to his guest's hammock, the former smuggler asked one last question. "Since you're so thick with Kyraj," he ventured, "maybe you could give me some advice about doing business legit?"

"Gladly," replied Medford, loosening his belt. "Always pay your bills!"

★

REMEMBERED WORDS

Joel Nydhal is the first-place winner this time, in our letters sweepstakes; will you please let us know, in the near future, which original in the September issue you would like to own, sir? We'll send it right out. Michael Reynolds came in second; Brother Reynolds is urged to make two selections, in case Joel takes the one Mike picked for first-selection. Margo Hughson is third — and there's two others ahead of you, ma'am, so you'll have to select three originals.

David King, who took second place last time, has made his selections, but we still haven't heard from the 1st-place winner, Frank Jameson. If we don't hear from Frank by November 15th, David, we'll send you that Murphy jllo you said you liked most, and ship him your 2nd choice.

HYPNOTISM: Fact vs. Fiction

Special Feature by Leo Louis Martello

MAGICIAN BELIEVED TO HAVE HYPNOTIZED CROWD

SO BEGINS A. E. Van Vogt's "The Seesaw" in August Derleth's anthology *Beyond Time And Space*. The story concerns one McAllister who steps through this illusory door on the magician's stage and enters into the year 4784—seven thousand years into the future. He finds himself in a strange city where he soon discovers he's unwanted, and why. It seems having travelled across seven thousand years he's been charged with trillions upon trillions of time-energy units. As the girl explains to him: "If you should step outside this shop, you'd blow up Imperial City and half a hundred miles of land beyond." Which is all beside the point: the story makes no further mention of hypnosis at all, except the above newspaper-heading—which in itself is misleading.

First of all it's next to impossible to hypnotize an entire crowd—simply because a person can't be hypnotized without knowing it. Then, too, not all of them may be hypnotizable. Another fallacy here is that hallucinations can only be produced when a subject is in the deepest stage. Of course this doesn't detract from the story which is excellent in itself; Van Vogt doesn't say the magician did hypnotize the crowd but that the newspapers *believed* he did.

Most fiction writers who undertake to use hypnotism as a theme, only present the sensational, mysterious, and evil-eye aspects of it. Popular opinion is still shrouded in misconceptions, and overladen with all sorts of supernatural and metaphysical trappings. Such novels as Du Maurier's *Trilby*, with its emphasis on the opaque and subterranean powers of a paranoic Swengali, have done nothing to further public knowledge of the facts in the case. When Swengali turns a previously voiceless, toneless *Trilby* into an internationally famous nightingale, hypnotism then goes off into the realm of the author's imagination.

Here are the facts; the only people who *cannot* be hypnotized are those

who cannot concentrate—idiots, imbeciles, morons and some psychotics. Everyone else is hypnotizable. A favorite cliche in the field is: "The higher the I. Q, the easier the hypnotizability."

Clark Hull, head professor of psychology at Yale University, did extensive research into this field. He found that seventy-five percent of high-school seniors were hypnotizable and that ninety-five per cent of college students were hypnotizable. He said that if he had gone further he would slowly have gotten a hundred per cent. In Hull's book *Hypnosis and Suggestibility*, after making thousands of hypnoses, he condenses them into bell-like charts, showing at what age people are better subjects, tests on suggestibility etc.

A HYPNOTIZED person cannot be made to do anything against his morals, safety, self-preservation, or religion; however a person still retains his personal idiosyncrasies under hypnosis. Drs. Paul Schilder and Otto Kauders, in their book, *Hypnosis*, go into this aspect in detail. Two people given the same posthypnotic suggestion will respond to it differently. Told to laugh uproariously an extrovert will do so, while an introvert will merely give a half smile.

While giving a lecture-demonstration before an all-women's group I give the posthypnotic suggestion that when they awaken they'll see Clark Gable standing at the door, I tell them, "It's his birthday; you'll run over, kiss him on the cheek and wish him happy birthday". (Between you and me it's just the door usher!)

It's amazing to see how different people will react. About three of them will run over and carry out the suggestions. Another two or three show conflict. They're going; they're not; they're going; they're not. And another three sit in their seats, rigidly; they'd never kiss a man for anything in the world!

The oldest dispute in the history of hypnosis is whether a person will commit a crime at the suggestion of the hypnotist. The answer is no. There's not one single case on record—not one! If such things were possible, hypnotism would be outlawed as a dangerous thing—and rightly so. Theoretical discussions on this have been raging for years. There have been laboratory tests, pro and con, by experts in the field. Yet such tests in themselves were false: the gun was unloaded, or filled with blanks, or there was a pane of glass separating the intended victim from having acid thrown in his face, or some other modification.

Hollywood hypnotists are usually villains. Oldtimers remember Erich von Stroheim getting some poor imbecile into his powers and forcing him to obey his every command—or more recent villains, Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff. This has further fostered the belief that only morons can be hypnotized. However, an excellent picture dealing with hypnosis was *"Whirlpool"*, with Jose Ferrer as the hypnotist-villain, and Gene Tierney as the subject who's married to a psychiatrist Ferrer meets Tierney at a bar, eventually hypnotizes her, and tells her to steal her husband's records of his patients. This she does. Finally her huband discovers this (his wife disappearing in the meantime) and in the process learns somehow that she was hypnotized. But he knows that a person under hypnosis can't be made to do anything against his morals; further checking on his wife's past reveals that she was a kleptomaniac—had a compulsion to steal. Thus she *wasn't* actually doing anything against her morals.

The only fallacy in this picture was the auto-suggestive method used. It seems that Ferrer killed a man, but had an ironclad alibi: he just underwent major operation the day before so couldn't have gotten out of bed.

Police checking on his story find this to be true. However, it shows him holding a mirror in front of him, trying to outstare himelf, beads of sweat breaking out on his brow. And he succeeds in anaesthetizing himself into feeling no pain whatever when he leaves the hospital, for those few minutes, to do the killing.

This is all possible and many hypnotists are good auto-suggestionists. But the method used is wrong; auto-suggestion, once learned, is a relatively simple matter of giving yourself a certain code. But for dramatic effect the mirror-method had to be used!

Science-fiction writers and authors could well adapt hypnotism to their stories. The "superman" theme could be scientifically developed showing how through hypnotism and auto-suggestion (occasionally called self-hypnosis) men can improve their memories, concentrative powers, learn how to relax at will, how to fall without being injured, how to anaesthetize their bodies not to feel pain—especially important in time of war.

USAGE OF hypnotism can be traced way back to the dawn of civilization, among the witch-doctors of the primitive tribes, miracle-workers and healers of all sorts, in voodoo and other practices. It wasn't till the Eighteenth Century when Dr. Franz Anton Mesmer began his studies did the subject begin to be investigated scientifically. Mesmer named his "new" discovery after himself—Mesmerism, teaching a magnetic fluid theory and that of "animal magnetism". Though wrong, he did much to pioneer the field and modern day hypnotism owes much to him.

It was Dr. James Braid, highly respected on the English medical profession, who gave hypnotism its name—from the Greek word *hypnos* meaning to sleep. His research went into a book called *Neurypnology or the Rationale Of Nervous Sleep.* In defiance of the medical profession, he began using hypnosis as an anesthetic in many of his surgical operations. Braid had his counterpart in France in a shy, modest little country doctor, A. A. Liebault, who was first aroused by what was then called mesmerism. For twenty years he practiced beneficial hypnosis on his patients, unclaimed, unnoticed, refusing to accept pay for his treatments. Only one copy of his book on hypnosis was sold. His fame spread among his patients who affectionately called him *le bon pere Liebeault.*

At this same period, in 1880, the famous Parisian neurologist and anatomist, Charcot, began a series of lectures and experiments in hypnotism at his Salpetriere clinic. Liebeault was to be recognized, at last; Bernem, professor at the Nancy medical school, had treated a patient of his six years for sciatica, unsuccessfully. As a last resort the patient went to Liebeault—and was cured. When Bernheim heard of this he went to visit the man, expecting to meet a quack. After seeing the man's amazing work he was instantly converted to the cause of hypnotism. He began an extensive study, and in 1886 his *Suggestive Therapeutics* was published, drawing much attention to Liebeault's unpretentious and clinically-rewarding work. They founded the Nancy School of Hypnotism advancing the theory that all hypnosis is suggestion.

Their feud with Charcot is quite well-known. Charcot believed that hypnosis was a form of hysteria, and that the best subjects were hysterics; he committed all the errors which led Mesmer up a blind alley. Bernheim was able to produce all the phenomena that Charcot could, using only suggestion. By experimental demonstration he proved the psychological basis for hypnotism.

Sigmund Freud, at that time, a student of neurology, studied under Charcot and then went to Nancy to

improve his hynotic technique. Once watching Bernheim do a hypnotism-show, he saw a young lad made to do various things. When awakened the lad had completely forgotten what went on.

Under constant probing and pressure from Bernheim his memory returned bit by bit. "How long have you been standing here?" asked Bernheim. "I don't know," answered the lad. Then looking at the clock said: "Half an hour."

Freud was profoundly impressed. Here, in such a short time, this lad was able to put out of his conscious mind everything that happened within the past half hour only to be brought to conscious recollection under probing.

The reason Freud dropped hypnosis, was because not all of his patients could be hypnotized. We realize today that, with some of the poor techniques they employed at that time, it's a wonder they achieved the success they did! In Volume V of his *Collected Papers*, translated by Ernest Jones, Freud writes: "But the majority of reports of the injurious effects of hypnosis are derived from observers who have worked very little with hypnosis, or not at all, whereas all those research workers who have had a large amount of hypnotic experience are united in there belief in the harmlessness of the procedure." In other words hypnotism isn't and can't be dangerous. The only ones who say it is have no real knowledge of the subject.

Today, one of the biggest centers for Hypnotherapy is the Menninger Clinic at Topeka, Kansas. In 1939, psychiatrists were given a grant to do further research in hypnosis and the Menninger Clinic is the acknowledged leader in medical hypnosis. Two of the staff members, Drs. Merton Gill and Margaret Brenman, have written a very authoritative book on the subject called *Hypnotherapy*.

ANOTHER pioneer in the field is Dr. Lewis Wolberg, whose book *Hypoanalysis* has opened up a new door to the understanding emotional problems not usually considered possible. He actually succeeded in hypnotizing a schizophrenic—which is so rare that he wrote a whole work on it. Another interesting book is *Rebel Without A Cause*—written by Dr. Robert M. Lindner, who was a prison psychologist, and who worked with the U. S. Public Health Service. He relates how he treated a psychopathic criminal, successfully, with hypoanalysis—a problem which has heretofore baffled psychologists and psychoanalysts.

Writers should use hypnotism more in their stories, basing their assertions on present day facts. As soon as writers can start presenting a hypnotist as someone who can do good, instead of some dark, sinister character, then I'll know that these writers have some *imagination*.

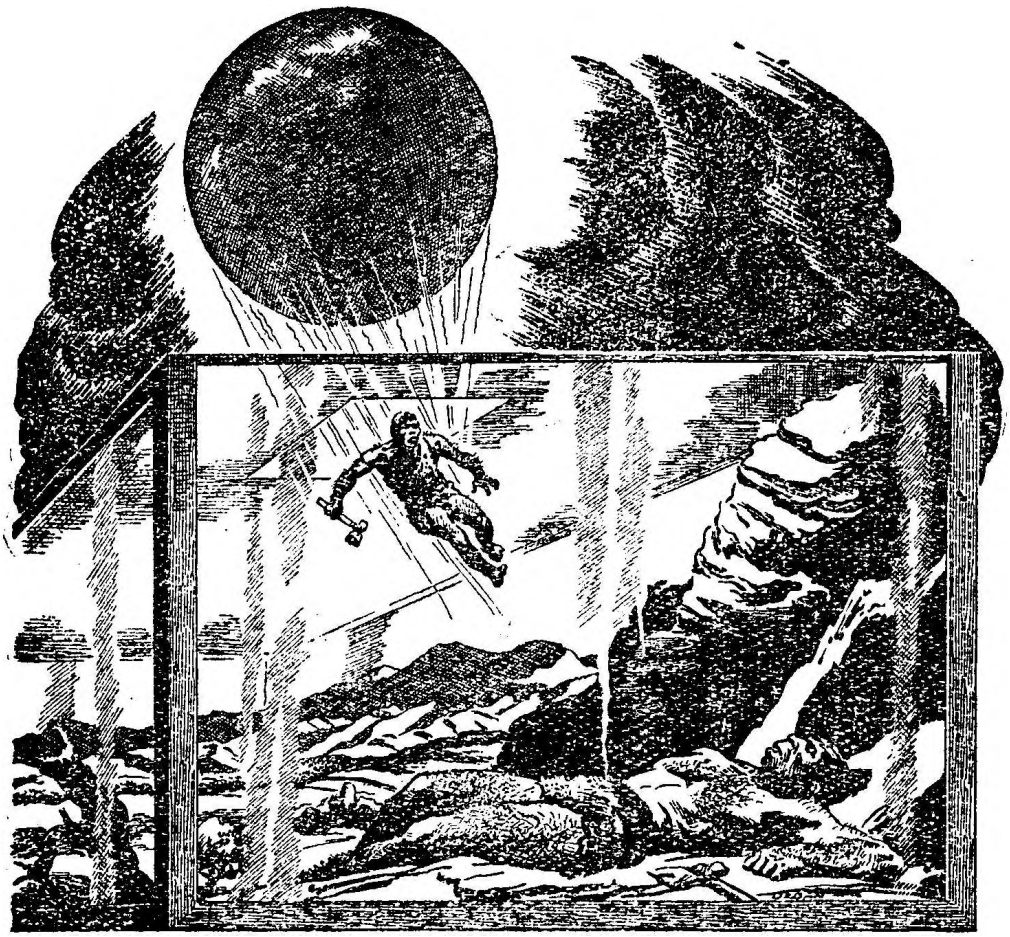
Trilby was O.K. in Du Maurier's day, but now it's a little outdated. The scarcity of good science-fiction employing hypnotism astounds me. After ploughing through six anthologies, the only mention of hypnotism I found was in the Van Vogt story. Imagine a world of "supermen" and "superwomen"; under hypnosis this is more possible than in any other way. Newspapers and magazines have carried hundreds of stories about painless childbirth at John Hopkins Unversity, where hypnosis is the sole anesthetic. Why not a future with *all* women having painless births either thru hypnosis or auto-suggestion? Or an army of men completely without mental conflicts? During World War II, hypnosis was found to be the briefest method for rehabilatating maladjusted and combat-fatigued soldiers and veterans. Perhaps, some science-fictionist will turn to hypnotism the next time he's groping for a theme.

★

in the beginning

Novelet of Ironic Genesis

by Damon Knight



It wasn't only that the scientist was indulging in the most dire of heresy — but his theories were utterly nonsensical in any event. How could any intelligent being accept the premise of intelligent matter?

"WELL, WHAT do you think of it?"

Green—whose full name was unwieldy, since it described every color and band in his spectrum —looked up from the shining little mechanism and regarded the other for a moment without replying. His companion was an entity still in his prime, not more than a century old, if that; his energies still flamed fiercely blue-

white in the twenty-foot globular force-matrix of his body.

Green was acutely conscious of the faded luster of his own aging matrix; in addition, he felt bewildered and a little afraid.

He sent speech-colors rippling deliberately across the hemisphere of his body visible to the other. "I don't quite know what to say. Do you really expect it to work?"

"Certainly not. A scientist never expects anything that's never been tried to work. All I can say yet is that I can't think of any reason why it *shouldn't* be successful. Look here: this motor is powered by my own battery. The machine itself can be controlled perfectly from a distance; you've seen the tests.

"The receptors," he indicated a row of grids mounted on the bow of the tiny air-car, "will pick up any radiated energy and transmit it to my receiving screen, and there are other mechanisms inside that correspond to our mass-sense. Thus, if I succeed, we'll get a complete picture of the inside of a place that no person in all our history has ever seen, and lived."

"I know all that," Green broke in, "you've explained it often enough. But—do you think it *can* work? Do you think it's possible, by any means, for mortals to discover the Unknowable?"

Blueviolet's spectrum flared impatiently. "Unknowable, my nucleus! The trouble with you, Green, is that you've never recovered from the indoctrination they gave you in your youth, when the Renascence was just beginning. Your art has benefited by the new freedoms of expression; why do you find it necessary to cling to superstitions in other fields?"

Green was miserably silent.

"What are you afraid of? That we'll fail, and the Gods will arise in Their wrath and smite us?"

"No," Green answered slowly; "I think I'm afraid you'll succeed."

Blueviolet extended a tractor beam and picked up the air-car. "There's no use in arguing with you, I suppose. I'll have to show you visible proof that you're wrong; I only hope it doesn't drive you mad."

Blueviolet's apprentice was waiting for them at the window in a runabout. "All clear?" asked the scientist.

"All clear. There've been a few idlers around, but no priests that I recognized. They're probably all in New Asia, attending the Devotions."

GREEN GOT in, and they swept smoothly away from the huge cylindrical building, the runabout's motor humming with effortless power. Below, the scarred relief map of the earth spread itself out and unrolled before them. They crossed the gulf that surrounded Blueviolet's laboratory on three sides, and raced over steeply tilted tablelands, sparsely covered with soil and littered with jagged boulders. From horizon to horizon nothing moved but themselves; no trace of green hinted of life. The great, hot sun blazed down from a blue-black sky, pouring an unceasing terrible flood of radiation upon the land. Heat-waves blurred and distorted the picture; far in the distance, the tiny trickle of a river was the only illusory relief of coolness against the fiery colors of the plain.

Naked, Cyclopean mountains appeared ahead and rose swiftly to meet them. They swerved to avoid a chain of thundering volcanoes, belching their livid gasses and their debris for miles into the thin air, and dribbling the shining snakes of their lava down their own scarred sides. Then the mountains gave way to tablelands again, and mounting speed blurred the view into an amorphous stream.

•

"I can understand Green's point of view," said the apprentice, hours later. "Consider the facts: for sixty millenia of recorded history our race has lived here; and always, from the beginning, it has been the same. We

come into being in that—Place—at the north pole of the planet. From that day until the day we are drawn willy-nilly back to It to die, we are unable to approach it or learn anything about it.

"Two hundred generations of our people have tried to solve that single mystery—and failed. Under those circumstances, there are only two alternatives for a sane mind. One, to accept the dogma of the priesthood, and sink one's individuality in their unquestioning faith in the Gods of benevolence and wrath. The other, to think of the Place as simply an unexplained phenomenon; a problem which science has not as yet solved, but which, given time, it will solve.

"But even so, it is impossible to ignore the fact that the Place is the work of reasoning beings and not a manifestation of nature. We are not free-willed beings. We're—

"Have you ever read the books of Orangered of Antarctica? They're banned by the Oligarchy, of course—but he thought, among other things, that we're—*property*. That's not a comfortable thought... Do you wonder that so many took the Jump in the early days of the Renascence?"

Green looked down through the transparent floor of the runabout at the blue Arctic ocean hurtling past. He thought of the swift, easy leap up through the stratosphere into vacuum, where the unshielded radiation of the sun would floor his body beyond its power to absorb or reflect—and then quick, merciful extinction... No, not a comfortable thought.

They were slowing now, gliding in to meet a ring of low mountains that hid the shallow cup of a valley. Green caught sight of a temple clinging to the slope of the highest peak, and then another a few miles away, and another. A broad, flat ledge came to meet them, and the runabout settled gently down in the shadow of a low ridge. Beyond that ridge—

"This is proscribed territory," Blueviolet flashed. "We'd better work fast. Get that air-car out, Yellow.'"

"Yes, sir. Do you want to take the whole layout up to the top of the ridge?"

"No. We can control the thing just as well from here, and it's safer. Set it down."

A BLUE-WHITE globe appeared abruptly over the rim of a dead volcano; it hovered for a moment and then came swiftly toward them. Yellow got into the runabout, wavered uncertainly, and bobbed out again.

"Who is it?" Blueviolet asked tensely.

"I don't know... Oh-oh! It's a priest, I'm afraid. I can make out the dark bands at the lower end of his spectrum; that type invariably enters the Church."

Blueviolet joined him over the ledge. "Get back in; I'll talk to him."

The priest swooped down and snapped to a halt a hundred feet above them. "Why are you desecrating the Holy of Holies?" he radiated.

"In the cause of science," Blueviolet answered curtly.

The other stared silently for a moment and then began, "Youth, have you no fear for your immortal soul? Give up your folly and leave this place. The wrath of—"

Blueviolet cut him short. "I will endure any wrath you can call down. This position is necessary to the taking of certain observations, and I intend to remain.'"

"You would be better advised to leave. The Gods are not without their faithful servitors on Earth; and if They disdain to punish you, we will not."

"I'll take that chance."

The priest started to speak, changed his mind, and soared rapidly away again. Blueviolet watched him out of sight and then dropped back to the runabout. "Let's get started," he said. "He's gone to fetch help, but he'll

have to go to East Azure to get it, and by that time we'll be gone."

Yellow regarded the horizon beyond which the priest had vanished. "But we haven't seen the last of him," he said.

2

RODS OF force from Blueviolet's body depressed keys on the board before him, and the gleaming little air-car rose and arced up over the ridge. The dark screen beside the console came to life, and for a moment reflected chaotic glimpses of cloudless sky and tangled rock; then, as the air-car angled down, the cuplike valley slid into view. Far down at its center, toylike with distance, a half-sphere of shimmering, unstable whiteness rose from the barren ground.

Too slowly, it came nearer. As they watched, a blood-red sphere rose over the farther rim of the valley; then, a quadrant away, two more together. With dreadful unanimity, they shot toward the hemisphere and vanished behind its flickering curtain.

Green looked away in horror, but turned back in time to see three milky-white spheres drift free of the hemisphere and float aimlessly away. "Balance," the apprentice flashed softly. "Birth against death." Blueviolet watched his instruments intently and said nothing.

The air-car's speed dropped to a crawl as the hemisphere filled their screen. Slowly, under Blueviolet's careful direction, it inched forward. Its bow disappeared behind the opalescent barrier; then the receptor grids followed—and the screen went dark.

"Oh, eternally damn!" The scientist tested connections futilely, and moved the air-car forward again. Eagerly he watched the tapes of his recording machines, but nothing came forth.

Again and again he sent the car in and out of the deceptively fragile curtain. Outside the transmitting mechanisms functioned perfectly; inside, they went dead.

"It's no good," he said at last. "We're beaten again. Machines can get through the field of force that holds *us* a mile away from it, but they can't transmit through that shield. I should have known, I suppose, when Cobalt failed with proxy television; but that was more than two centuries ago, and there was no way of telling where he might have slipped up."

"Recording devices?" suggested Yellow.

"No. The magnetic field wipes them clean. *They* thought of everything, apparently. This was the last thing I could think of, and it's failed."

"I shouldn't be, perhaps," Green said abruptly, "but I'm glad."

"Oh, sign off, will you!" the scientist flashed. And then, "I'm sorry, Green; I didn't mean that. Come on, let's get out of here."

•

Night had fallen by the time they reached the laboratory. They left the runabout at the ground level and floated up the shaft between floors to the topmost, where Blueviolet's energy lamps were. Blueviolet turned on the power, and the three soaked in the life-giving radiation.

"You can't go back to your studio without a lamp," the scientist said dispiritedly. "You'd better stay here until tomorrow."

"All right," Green answred.

Now that it was over, he was curiously relieved. His mind was still beset by doubt and uncertainty, but the hideous, nightmare fears which had tortured him were receding, for the moment, in the grateful flood of energy. He was pleasantly surprised to find himself thinking of a new sculp-

ture: something in malachite, perhaps. He was tired of working in plastics. For a theme—

He reached over to his kit on a nearby workbench, and drew out a spheroid of clear glass, half-filled with water, in which his microscopic vision could make out myriads of tiny, ciliated animalcules in constant, aimless motion.

HE WATCHED them intently for a long time, building in his mind a statue based on their slipper-like forms, expressing the kinetic relationships of their interrelated movements. Then, with a corner of his brain he noticed that Blueviolet was saying something.

"What?"

"Those things—what are they?"

"Oh, these? They're a sort of super-"dinky". I was over to see Saffornorange last week, and he gave them to me for a copy of my "Cubes"—you know, the one in blue crystal? You have a cast of it around somewhere, I think—"

"Yes, yes! But what do you mean, supr-'dinky'?"

"Oh. Well, you know what ordinary dinkies are: blobs of a certain chemical compound that seem to have a pseudo-life of their own. Saffronorange was fooling around with some he'd made in his laboratory, and got to bombarding them with radiation of various wave-lengths. Some kinds killed them, of course, but other combinations had different effect. He could tell you about them—some made them grow faster, some made them grow slower, and so on. Finally he found one frequency that changed them, somehow. When they split, the halves would grow differently. He kept at it, and eventually got these. Instead of being just shapeless blobs of matter, these have a definite form, and filaments along the sides that they can swim around with. I—"

"But why hasn't he published?"

"Didn't think it was important enough, I suppose. They're just a curiosity. If I'd known you'd be interested, I would have shown them to you before."

"Of course I'm interested!" Blueviolet blazed. "Give me that, you idiot!"

Yellow floated across the room and joined him as he picked up the bowl and stared at its contents. "What are you thinking of, chief?" he asked.

"They *are* super-dinkies. They're improved. If one can make these out of ordinary dinkies—why not extend the process...?"

"To what—super-super dinkies?"

Blueviolet looked at him. "No. To something i n t e l l i g e n t—intelligent enough to go into the Place and come out again, and tell us what it's seen!"

"Oh, really, Blueviolet," Green burst out. Green burst out. "This is too much."

"You think so?"

"Intelligent *matter!*

"Why not! Because we are the only intelligent form of life known, must we suppose that we are the only type possible?"

"But suppose you did make such a creature—it's fantastic, but suppose you did. How would you communicate with it?"

"I don't know. Telepathy, perhaps. I'll deal with that when I come to it."

Green felt anger surging through him. He knew that it was unreasonable, and was the angrier because he knew.

"You're mad!"

"Maybe... You'd better go down in the dark and get some rest, Green. You're overwrought. I'll talk to you in the morning, if you feel differently. Come on, Yellow, we've got work to do."

Green watched them go, in helpless dying rage.

GREEN SAID carefully, "Sorry I blew up last month; I can't think what could have been wrong with me."

"Forget it; we all have our mo-

ments. Want to see what Yellow and I have been doing?"

There were rows of spacious tanks down the center of the room, each with its battery of ray lamps. Blueviolet led him past each in turn; one contained hundreds of differing types of protozoa, milling and swarming inextricable; the next, tiny hard-shelled creatures, with waving, jointed members; the next, irregular clusters of cells and fronded vegetable growths.

"It's the variety that's astonishing," Blueviolet said. "All kinds of monstrosities are born, but the worst ones die or don't reproduce. There seems to be no end to it." He paused. "Green, this is the biggest thing of the millenium. There are a dozen new sciences here; I can't even begin to scratch the surface of any of them. I haven't published anything yet; no use inviting trouble from the priesthood; but I've talked to Saffronorange and several others, and they're all enthusiastic about it, and duplicating my experiments independently.

"There are a lot of difficulties I never anticipated, though. They not only have to have water to live, but the water has to be kept full of oxygen in solution."

"Oxygen? Why?"

"For combustion. They get their energy from chemical reactions. And not only that—they eat each other."

"They *what?*"

"They eat each other. They have to have something to use for fuel, don't they? Very well, they burn each other." He led Green back to the first tank. "Here: look."

A hydra, lashing its six arms, had snared a frantically writhing protozoan. As they watched, it drew the struggling body into its gaping vacuole and engulfed it.

Green drew back. "It's—horrible."

"Fascinating, though."

"Yes, that too. But—I don't like this, Blueviolet. All this hungry, cruel, insensate life. Have you started something you can't stop?"

Blueviolet was thoughtful. "I don't think so—these couldn't live without my care. As to whether I have the willpower to stop, that's another matter. I don't think I would willingly even if there were a good reason, which I don't think there is. Why do you ask that?"

Green started to speak, then stopped as Yellow shot into the room. "Chief!" he flared, "priests coming!"

"How many?" Blueviolet snapped.

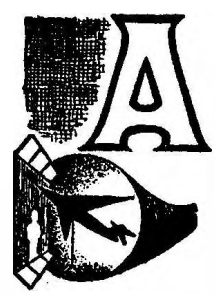
"Dozens—in armored runabouts. From the west."

Blueviolet dashed to the window, followed by Green. A fleet of five large runabouts was approaching, arrowing down with a grim unity of purpose. "It isn't a social call," he said. "Have you got a battery?" He darted off again without waiting for Green's answer.

"Yellow!" The apprentice flew back into the room, trailing after him a large metallic cylinder on wheels, and three smaller copies of it. "Oh, there you are. Good man!"

He tossed one of the small tubes to Green. "Here, catch!" Paralyzed by fear, Green let it fall to the floor unheeded. The oncoming armada swept down toward him, then divided with disciplined precision to encircle the laboratory. A beam of raw energy shot past, missing him by inches and making tangled wreckage of machinery beyond. He cowered away from the window, and in sheer terror picked up the slim tube.

3



ACROSS the room Blueviolet and Yellow hovered each beside a window, Blueviolet with the large cylinder and his apprentice with the two smaller ones. As the aircraft shot past, they drew energy from the batteries, expending it again from

their bodies in bright, deadly beams. Again and again they dodged back as destructive rays tore through the spots where they had been: the interior of the room was a shambles.

Green wanted to flee, to hide in the farthest corner where those probing beams could not find him, but he forced himself to stay by the window, to draw on the cylinder he held for concentrated energy, to spew it forth again as the attackers passed him. His ray found a momentarily exposed opening in the bow of a runabout: the pilot blackened instantly, then exploded in one furious blast of energy. The runabout nosed down, wavered, and then circled up again as the others inside regained control. Green was more terrified than ever.

"Two down," said Blueviolet. "Green got one, I think. You all right, Yellow?"

"So far."

Blueviolet followed a runabout with his beam, striving to make it penetrate. Suddenly a hideous shock swept through his body, and he saw that his aura was blackening in a great, ragged patch where a beam had grazed him. Desperately he drew on the great battery at his side for strength. The back spot widened inexorably... And then Yellow was at his side, flooding it with gentle radiations from his own body. The blackness swirled in upon itself and disappeared, leaving him weak and shaken.

He looked out of the window again, but it was empty of raiders. "They've fallen back to count their losses, sir," Yellow said. "But they'll be back in a few minutes. They can stand off and ray us 'til the building crumbles around us, if they like. What shall we do?"

Blueviolet looked around him in desperation. Across the room Green was saying piteously, "Oh, Gods! Not yet! It'll be soon enough. Not yet! Not yet!"

"*Sign* OFF!" Yellow blazed at him, but with no effect.

Blueviolet searched his mind for a way out as the minutes slipped away. Escape was useless; there was nowhere to hide; their weapons were insufficient. A three cornered-dilemma.

It was curious that he was able to remain so detached, when in a half-hour at most he would be dead. It was true, then, that impending destruction could numb the mind, not awaken it with hysteria and terror. But no! He was wasting time. There must be something—

Nothing. What equipment the rays had spared—energy lamps, lathes, metal-working machinery—all useless. Nor would the chaos on the floor, even of it had been whole, have aided. The shattered tanks, the tiny organisms flopping or crawling or swimming or dying in the thin layer of spilled water... The water— The water!

"Here they come," Yellow said.

The artesian well—there would be enough pressure. Quickly! He flared commands at the apprentice, not stopping to see that they were obeyed, and shot himself down the entrance well to a store-room below. Feverishly he pried through mountains of discarded and unused equipment, overturning bins, sweeping litter off shelves. At last he found what he wanted—a snaky length of thick rubber tubing.

TRAILING it after him, he dashed up again. In a far corner, Yellow had shut the valve of the water pipe they had installed and was disconnecting one of the outlets. As he entered, the first beam from outside tore through the air in front of him. Green was at his window, hopelessly returning the fire and cursing in a steady, monotonous stream. He hurled one end of the tubing at Yellow.

"Connect that, hold it on yourself if you have to, and turn the valve when I tell you!" Still carrying the other end of the tube, he raced to a window.

"Ready," the apprentice called.

A runabout crossed his field of vision, two rays shooting out from open-

ing at the prow and stern, searching for him.

"Now!"

The tube stiffened in his grasp. A powerful stream of water hurtled out of its end, out of the window, straight at the oncoming runabout. He guided it carefully: it crossed the two deadly rays. There was an intolerable flash of energy, and the runabout was gone.

"Turn it off!" he flashed exultantly.

Another runabout came past. "Oh!

It was too easy. Before the rays could find his bobbing form, the stream of water connected them, short-circuited that converted deadly energy into the bodies of its users. Another gone.

And another.

And then the remaining two had turned and streaked away in headlong, final flight.

He dropped the tubing, and was astonished at the violence of the reaction which shook him.

●

Months later, Green was stopped short in midair a good two hundred yards away from the laboratory. Surprised and alarmed, he looked at the apparently empty expanse of atmosphere between him and his goal, and tried again. As before, he bounced back from a rigid but invisible barrier.

In a moment, Yellow bobbed into view in the window opposite him. "Oh, hello, Green," he signalled. "Hold on a minute." He disappeared.

Green waited, and then tried the barrier once more. This time there was no opposition to his progress, and he flew directly into the window.

Blueviolet emerged from the entrance wall as he entered, and greeted him cheerfully. "Run into a wall, Green?"

"Yes. What on earth was it?"

"A force-field—similar to the one that stops us short of the Place. You'll find we've improved our defenses considerably since the last time you were here." He extended a tendril of force toward the huge, deadly cylinders standing in their swiveled mounts near each window. "Converters. They transform ordinary, storable energy into lethal beams in the same way that our bodies do, and they can handle more power.

"We thought we had something when we developed the field that stopped you outside. I worked out an interfering frequency that can break it down, but—" he made an expressive flash of colors, "it won't work on the field around the Place. The more juice we feed into the interfering beam, the more builds up in the field itself. We gave up and went back to work on the dinkies."

GREEN CAST a troubled glance at the rows of tanks lining three walls, and asked, "Have you had any more trouble with the priesthood?"

"Yes—almost constant attacks ever since that first one. Tremendous loss of life, on their side. Saffronorange and the others have been raided, too—Mauve of Africa was killed. We sent them plans of the converter and the force-field generator, and they're all as well protected as we are by now; but it's odd the way the priesthood singled every one of them out. There must be a leak of information somewhere. Anyhow, it doesn't matter now. Guess who called me on the visiplate yesterday."

"Who?"

"The Pontiff himself."

"Really?"

"Yes. It finally filtered through to him that the local organizations were sending out enormous numbers of priests to get killed trying to kill us. We had a long chat. He doesn't approve of what we're trying to do any more than the rest of them, but he's sensible enough to see that these incessant raids were accomplishing nothing, and he's ordered them stopped."

"That's—excellent," said Green, spinning nervously on his axis.

"Well—it's good to see you again, Green. What have you been doing lately?"

"Oh, nothing of any importance. A few plastics, and a bronze or two. I'm more interested in you. What progress have you made?"

Blueviolet glowed. "I was wondering when you'd ask that. To tell you the truth, Green, I think we're close—very close. Come over here, will you?"

The tanks were filled with a profuse and variegated vegetable growth, through which Green could see the occasional flicker of tiny, swift-moving bodies.

"The process was too slow," Blueviolet explained, "so we found a way to speed it up. The field we set up around each tank accelerates the chemical reactions of their bodies, hastens their entire life-cycle. From birth to death is only a matter of weeks. And, of course, we can take them out of the field and examine them at leisure. Here—" he led the way to a tank near the end of the row, "here are some of the latest specimens, living at normal speed."

Thousands of tiny, chitin-armored creatures scurried through the myriad tunnels of their burrow, intent on divers errands. Green's spectrum flared startledly.

"Intelligence?"

"No," replied Blueviolet regretfully, "or at least, not much. We were excited too, when we first got them, but they never go any farther than this. They're a dead end. Size has something to do with it; we don't know what. We've had experience with other lines of small dinkies. They develop mind, of a sort, but it stops at a certain point and won't go any further. These, though—"

IN THE LAST tank were a group of hairy, soft-fleshed creatures; quadruped, their front appendages already more arms than legs. Several were fighting half-playfully in a tangled mass; others were climbing trees for the clustered, purple fruit, or roaming with aimless curiosity about the earthy floor of the tank. As they watched, one clumsily picked up a fragment of rock, and used it to split the hard shell of a nut.

"Tools," Blueviolet said. "That is the key to it. Their bodies are soft and weak; they are forced to learn other means to solve their problems. This—" he gestured, "is only the beginning. Another couple of weeks will tell the story; I'm sure of it."

Green regarded him thoughtfully. "And communication?"

"We've got that almost licked, too. Yellow has done some really excellent work on it; he made this." He picked up a metallic cone, wired with copper leads to a battery from a nearby bench. "Luckily, their processes of thought correspond to ours; both are electrical. This mechanism picks up the electronic waves and amplifies them to a degree that we can perceive. It isn't complete—Yellow has the rest of it down below, rewiring it—but we've already been able to catch faint, chaotic thought-pictures from some of the dinkies." He set the cone down again. "Well, Green?"

The other's kit still dangled from his body by its harness. Slowly he thrust a tendril of force into it and withdrew the gleaming cylinder of a battery. Before Blueviolet could speak, a slim incandescent beam lanced out from his body and made fused wreckage of the tiny, carefully-wrought cone on the table.

"I'm sorry, Blueviolet," Green said. "Don't move; in a minute I'm going to have to kill you."

Blueviolet stared at him in stunned incomprehension. "Green—! Then *you* were the spy..."

"You've gone too far. I tried to stop you, but you wouldn't listen. I have to do it; I have to!"

"Green, listen to me!"

"No. You listen. There isn't much time; Yellow might come up; he

might stop me before I could kill you. I've got to tell you my reasons. It's not just that I'm afraid for myself; I'm thinking of the generations to come. You want to knock the props out of life; you want to tear away the veil that makes life bearable. What's to become of us, if you find out, and tell the world, and we *know?* You're selfish, Blueviolet, you don't think about that. And that's why you've got to die. That's—" He paused. "That's why—"

Blueviolet saw that the other's aura was slowly darkening, falling through the spectrum: reddening!

"I—something—"

Desperately Blueviolet flung his strength against the slim cylinder in the other's grasp, wrenching at the slim tendril of force that connected it with his body.

"No! I'm so weak! No! I can't be— Not yet! You—"

A deadly beam shot out but its radiance was dulled: it cascaded uselessly away from Blueviolet's defenses. And in that moment he had torn away the tiny, lethal cylinder and sent it hurtling into a far corner of the room.

Green stared at him dully for a a moment, then, little, insane lights flickered over the wine-red surface of his aura.

4

NORTHWARD and northward Green went, flying against his will ever faster, as in an incredible dream. He screamed protests, but no one saw; he thrust himself back with all his energies, but an irresistible compulsion drew him on.

The vast desolation below unreeled itself smoothly before him: plains, tumbled foothills; now mountains. The jagged flank of one upthrust pinnacle loomed ahead; unable to stop or turn aside, he dashed himself against it, bounced, and then rolled swiftly up its uneven slope.

In an ecstasy of terror, he strained to fling himself up through the thick envelope of air above him; up, up, to sudden, merciful death. But the plain below only receded a little and then steadied in its inexorable, dreamlike flight. Not yet, Gods!

Volcanoes appeared ahead, thrusting their belching snouts toward him. He passed straight through a stiff debris-filled column of flaming gas and fled on, and the volcanoes receded behind him,

Faster and faster... So little time left now! The landscape blurred beneath him, and he was left rocketing onward all alone in a gray, unfriendly void.

Is.. there...no... JUSTICE... *in...the...world?* But no one is listening. No one cares. All I've done—all I've worked for—nothing. Stop, stop! You can't do this, do you hear? STOP!

But the ocean below was the Arctic, and the fringe of land ahead... *STOP!*

The circle of mountains came nearer. The blue-white globe of a young priest came out of one of the temples perched on their sides and watched him incuriously.

Then he was over the mountains, and the moment was at hand. The shimmering hemisphere of the Place swam up towards him; nearer, nearer—infinitely terrifying, infinitely beautiful. It reached out and enfolded him, and he was inside.

Green was mad. The towering immensities around were meaningless to him. Little disordered traceries of color pursued themselves over his blood-red body as, neither happy nor unhappy, he floated slowly toward the center of the hemisphere.

But in the moments remaining, he saw through golden haze the enig-

matic Titan machinery among which he passed, and in the center, an eye-wrenching maze of crazy colors and queer angles. So much, uncaring, he glimpsed, and then dark, cold oblivion closed down over him forever.

●

Swiftly the small, bloody head thrust itself forth; the miracle of birth was over. For a moment the tiny creature lay beside its mother, and then, too quickly to follow, she scooped him up and they were gone.

"Did you see?" Yellow radiated tensely.

"Yes. This may be it. Turn off the field!"

The blur of movement in the huge tank abruptly slowed, and the miniature world thronged with life. Tiny, living creatures swarmed over the low hills, stalked their prey in the Lilliputian jungles and rivers.

"There!" The mother was resting in a forest glade, her already half-grown infant playing beside her.

"What do you think?"

"It's possible... The head is larger—there's less hair. Turn the field on again, full strength."

"Shouldn't we mark him first?"

"No; if he's what we want, we'll be able to find him again without it. Go ahead."

Like a motion picture suddenly speeded up, the scene blurred again into motion. They waited impatiently while the minutes grew into hours, neither willing to abandon the vigil for other tasks.

At last Blueviolet looked for the hundredth time at the chronometer on the wall, and said, "It should be time. Let's try again."

YELLOW pressed the contact, and the scene dropped to normal speed once more. There had been little apparent change in the years that had fled by in minutes. Infants still crawled over the mossy floor of the tank under their mothers' jealous eyes, but they were not the same infants. The grizzled oldsters who crouched near the entrances of their caves were the pubescent youths who had hunted and fought hours ago. Somewhere in the swarm of active, vociferous adult males that roamed the mountains and valleys should be the one they sought.

For a time they hunted fruitlessly: the males within sight were as hairy and as slant-browed as their fathers; nowhere was there any significant change.

And then they saw him. Too obvious to be noticed, he was crouched against the transparent wall of the tank, staring outward in wide-eyed wonder.

Blueviolet regarded him with surprised satisfaction. "Curiosity," he said. "The others take their world for granted; he wonders."

As they watched, the creature picked up a stick that lay beside him, rose from his cramped position and blundered into one of his fellows, wandering aimlessly by the edge of the tank. The other, taller and more heavily muscled, bared his teeth instantly and leapt for his throat. For a moment they rolled together on the ground and then the first creature squirmed free and raised the stick which he still held. Crude thongs held a jagged lump of stone to its end; he swung, and his opponent dropped with a bruised and bleeding skull.

"It's enough," Blueviolet decided. "Take him out."

Yellow was already waiting at the top of the tank. A tractor beam shot out, gently lifted the conqueror away from the stunned body of his victim, and dropped him in a quivering heap on a nearby dais.

Tensely Blueviolet fitted a metallic cone over the animal's head, holding a curved framework of wires close to his own body. He checked over the wiring that connected the two to a battery on the dais, and then closed the switch.

"Do you get anything?"

"Only fear, so far... I'm trying to quiet him. Wait...

"There! He's still frightened, but his curiosity is overcoming it. The images are much clearer than ever before... He sees me. He is wondering what I am. Now I am directing him to come toward me."

The biped hesitated, then, fearfully, he sidled over to the edge of the dais and stood looking open-mouthed up at them.

"Excellent! Remove the cone and bring him along, Yellow."

"You're going to make the attempt now?"

"Certainly!"

"But don't you think—"

"No! This one will do, I'm convinced of it. You don't know what this means to me, Yellow! If I succeed in this, I can die happy."

"All right, chief."

"You're not afraid, like Green, are you?"

"No. No, of course not."

SUCCESS, it seemed to Yellow, had come unreasonably soon. He had been expecting it for some time, of course, but still... It was a little startling to realize that every second, as they hurtled northward, brought them nearer to their ultimate objective. No, he was not afraid, like Green.

But he was uneasy. All his training, since Blueviolet had adopted him at birth, could not obliterate that fundamental, unavoidable queasiness about the Place. And it was true, as he had said—"We're—*property*. That's not a comfortable thought."

Soon, now. He looked down at the quivering, bewildered mite pressed against the rear wall of the runabout. Through this clumsy monster they were going to try to unravel the mystery of ages. And if they succeeded—what then?

He caught a flicker of motion behind him, and looked again, guiltily. It was his place to keep watch, and he had been daydreaming. There it was again. A swiftly-moving shape, appearing and disappearing in the cover of the gathering storm clouds.

"Chief!" he said urgently. "We're being followed."

Blueviolet stared at him. "What? Where?"

"There—see? They're gaining on us."

"So they are," the other said thoughtfully. "I should have thought—but surely they can't have been waiting for us all this time. Nevertheless—" He cut in the reserve battery, and the runabout leaped ahead with increased power. "This means we'll have to limp home—if we get home."

They scanned the changing horizon in silence for awhile, and then Yellow cried out again. "Look! To the left—another one, angling to cut us off."

"Yes, I see it. They've laid their preparations thoroughly, it seems. We should have anticipated this."

"If we can make it to the proscribed area—"

"They might follow, even there; but they'll be at a psychological disadvantage, I think. It's our only chance."

They watched tensely as the first pursuer dropped back and then gradually matched their own speed. The other was gaining swiftly; in another moment it would intercept their course.

"Hold on to the dinky," Blueviolet flashed. "Don't let him get damaged." Still guiding the ship with a force-tendril, he picked up the slim tube of a converter from a pocket in the wall. "Fire at will!"

THE SWIFT, deadly runabout flashed across their path, beams already flaming. Yellow loosed the full power of the converter he held through the orifice next to him, and then Blueviolet had brought their ship about in an abrupt, disconcert-

ing loop, dangerously close to the attacker.

The other pilot sheered startledly away, and they gained distance; but the first runabout had narrowed the gap between them, and now both were on their tail, rays reaching out for them.

Blueviolet sent their craft ahead in an erratic, twisting course. Yellow fired through the rear port, aiming as best he could and saw the closer ship waver and fall back as its pilot blackened dangerously. He cast a swift glance downward, and saw that they were already over the Arctic shore.

The temples on the mountainsides were swarming with priests. As they shot past, a cluster of rays darted out at them and fell short. And then they were over the ring of mountains, and circling down to haven on their farther slopes.

Blueviolet brought the runabout to rest in a deep cleft in the rock just above the half-way point, beyond which they could not go. He looked searchingly upward. The pursuing runabouts, surrounded by a milling crowd of priests, appeared above the rim and hovered, reluctant to go farther. Rays probed for them, but glanced harmlessly off the rocky wall above.

"Made it!" he said. "Getting away is another matter, but at least we're here."

He picked up the biped and brought him forward into the light. "He's unharmed," he said with satisfaction. "The cone, please."

Yellow handed it over wordlessly.

•

Urgent, voiceless thoughts beat their way into the man's bewildered brain. He must not be afraid... They wished him no harm... Who were *they?* But the thought fumbled upon itself and collapsed; the question was too much for him. He must not be afraid...

But there were enemies near, who wished him harm. To escape them, he must go down into the valley, into the great egg there. There he would be safe.

There he would be safe... He must go down... Over and over, hypnotically. And then he must return...

He could not understand. But the commands were overpowering; his undeveloped mind was too feeble to resist them. Presently it seemed to him that he had always known, somehow, that he must go down into the great egg... And then he must return...

He scrambled clumsily to get past the transparent wall that held him away from the valley. And then the hard thing was lifted from his head, and an invisible force lifted him gently and deposited him on the rocky mountainside.

He looked up, and was terrified. Instead of the familiar sky of his childhood, a sky that a man might someday reach if he could find a way to climb up, there was an azure void inconceivably far away, so far that his mind rejected its distance. Vertigo gripped him suddenly; he reeled, missed his footing, and fell.

The rough tumble restored him. He picked himself up at the bottom of the short ravine down which he had rolled, and with a backward glance made his way downward.

It was farther than he had thought. The shimmering half-sphere receded as he descended the mountain, and its size grew in his mind proportionately.

But he rejected that thought also. Such hugeness was not to be thought of. There was only that he must go down...and then he must return.

He must go down...and then he must return...

THE HEMISPHERE balked gigantically before him as he ap-

proached it across the floor of the valley. It filled his vision, and at last became not quite real. He walked mechanically toward it in a half-dream, knowing that he must enter it...and then return...and then the dream would be over.

He hesitated when he stood before the shimmering curtain. There was no opening; it was solid—or was it?

He went forward; blankness closed about him for an instant, but before he could draw back he was past the barrier, in another strangeness filled with golden haze.

He stood for a moment, gaping at the unfamiliar towering shapes that surrounded him, and then he turned to go—but something held him. He felt the nearness of an invisible Presence, already close, and yet still approaching from an unthinkable distance. Unseen forces held him motionless, and s t r a n g e, dispassionate thoughts probed in his brain.

There was an interminable pause, and then he sensed that the Presence had called others; in a moment he was surrounded by the currents of their grave thinking.

...Sorry to disturb you, but this is a new thing.

An interval.

True. Have you examined its mind?

Whence did it come?

This is interesting: the force-beings made it!

Interesting indeed. This will change the whole course of the experiment.

Have you told the Mentor?

No. Let us surprise him.

What do you think, Third?

What is its purpose here? Oh, I see.

There was colorless mental laughter.

A blood-red sphere floated through the opalescent wall and gravitated to the center of the hemisphere, where perspective changed to impossible, eye-wrenching angles. The mechanisms around it came to life; new energy flowed into the sphere, replacing the red tint with milky white; and it floated away again. The man watched, comprehending nothing.

It has seen. Should we let it return with that knowledge?

All depends. If we intend to continue the experiment as planned, no. It would unbalance the force-creatures, and no results would be conclusive.

But have we not sufficient data on the force-beings' simple culture? They are a common enough creation, after all; this is new.

My own thought.

Then?

We have not interfered with their lives formerly; but perhaps, if we are careful, it would be proper to do so now.

What is your plan?

Send it back, with such information as they will be able to obtain from its small brain. Then, cause them to continue their work in this direction in the hope of obtaining more data. Then, gradually, let the force-beings die out; turn over this planet to their creations.

We will have to tamper with the motivation of the religious ones; otherwise this new life would be destroyed, sooner or later.

That can be done.

Careful with that probing, Fourth. You're frightening it.

Soothe it. What does it want?

Food. Also, a mate.

You shall have them, small one. And more—your descendants shall rule your little world. But it does not understand me; let it know that it is to have a mate; that is enough.

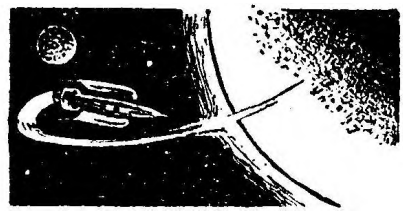
Dimly, and then more strongly, the first man understood: there would be a female... The forces holding him relaxed. He passed out through the opalescent barrier, smiling in fierce anticipation.

★

INCIDENT in IOPA

by Richard Wilson

Scott Warren's only chance lay in feigned inefficiency...



WITH THE cold muzzle of a Q gun touching the back of his neck, there wasn't much else Scott Warren could do. "Okay, okay," he said. "The machine has to warm up first."

The Martian had slipped unheard into the Iopa bureau of Galactic News Service. It was past closing time; all the staffers had gone home. The radio-teletypes on the Mars-Earth wave had been shut down. Only the bureau chief had been there, going over some expense accounts and inventory reports.

Scott wasn't aware of the fact that anyone was in the room with him, until he felt the gun in the back of his neck and heard the Martian voice warn him not to turn around.

Then the Martian said: "You will send a message for me."

Scott tried to keep his voice calm. "You're in the wrong place, Mac," he said; "this is a news-service. You probably want Interradio. That's down on the twenty-ninth floor."

"This is what I want," the Martian insisted. "You will send a message from me to World Government on Earth."

"World Government has its Mars headquarters right here in Iopa; why not go over there?"

"Do not argue with me, please," the Martian said. "I am very nervous, and my finger is trembling. I wish the message to go to Earth—to the most high in World Government, on whom I spit."

Scott turned on the machine. Radio-waves carried the impulse instantaneously to Earth, he knew; and in the New York bureau of Galactic News, the Mars-Earth machine had begun to hum. Scott was careful to turn the switch so that the wave would only transmit, not receive. It needed no time to warm up; he pretended it did to gain time.

"Okay, pal," said Scott. "What's your message?"

"First," said the Martian, "you will arrange the machine so that I will see everything you send—so you will not be able to trick me."

"Wouldn't trick you for the world," said Scott. "I've got the machine on both local and remote; everything I send will be printed right here on the roll."

"Prove this," said the Martian.

He withdrew the gun from the back of Scott's neck and moved closer to the machine. The newsman saw him now for the first time. The eyes, aside from the Q gun he held, were what Scott noticed first: they were wide and burning, with the pupils mere pinheads. That, as much as the bit of amber cloth the Martian wore around

his neck, told Scott that his visitor was a member of the fanatic religio-nationalistic sect of Vril.

The stocky body of the Martian was bent over the radioteletype. He was waiting for Scott to prove to him that there was no way of sending a secret message.

Scott said: "I'll punch out *'testing one two three four'* on the tape, which then goes through the transmitter. There, the perforations in the tape will cause those words to appear on this machine—and simultaneously on a machine in Galactic's New York bureau. There is no way of communicating directly with World Government from here."

"Do this test," the Martian said.

Stale perspiration on his body made Scott's nostrils quiver. "Just remember that I'm not a regular operator. I know how to work the machine, but I'm slow at it."

"Don't talk. Do."

THE TRUTH was that Scott was almost as good on the radioteletype as a skilled operator, but he pretended that he was laboriously punching out the test-line. When he had finished it, he said: "Now I put it through the transmitter." As the paper tape clicked through, the words *"testing one tow three four"* appeared on the machine.

"I made a mistake in the word 'two,'" said Scott; "I'm sorry." He had deliberately made the error.

"I understand," said the Martian. "You will send this message: *'To the World Government leaders, greetings from one of Vril, the chosen of Mars. Be it known to you that I, Rakho, have this night slain your puppet governor on the red planet—Morrison, the director-general of World Government.'* "

"What?" said the newsman.

"It is true," said the Martian. "Look." Rakho held out his left hand. In it, bloody-edged, was an ear.

"My Lord."

"You have put that message on the tape?"

Scott took his fascinated gaze away from the bloody ear and tried to shudder the sight out of his system. He said: "I've got *'...that I, Rakho...'* How do you spell that name?"

" 'R, a, k, h, o, have this night slain your puppet governor on the red planet—Morrison, the director-general of World Government.' "

Scott punched it out, carefully, his mind racing ahead of the words.

Rakho, the Martian fanatic, watched as the words appeared on the roll on the machine, to see that they were as he had dictated.

"This is really bulletin-material," said Scott; "I'd like to put bells on it, but our bell-signal is broken."

"Do not joke with me, Earthman."

"Okay, okay."

"I will say more. *'This just deed has been accomplished at the bidding of the great Vril, who in his celestial abode is pained to see the oppression under which his chosen sons live. The great Vril appeared to me with a command to kill, and I have killed. My brethren and I will kill again, until the oppressors of World Government take heed of their great offense to Vril and depart the land they have usurped.'* "

"You'll have to slow down," Scott told the Martian. The words were appearing haltingly on the machine. "I'm rustier than I thought."

"When the message is sent, I shall kill you, too," said Rakho. "You will be only a small offering to the wrath of Vril, but it may add to my celestial reward."

This is a real hopped-up nut, thought Scott to himself, but he felt a spasm of fear contract his stomach. He concentrated harder on his punching.

The fanatic Martian had a long message. Scott was thankful for that. Death waited at the end of it—unless...

SCOTT STOLE a glance out of the corner of his eye. The Martian was close and the Q gun was held negligently in his hand—but it was just too far away; it could fire before he reached it. And the burning eyes of the assassin were on him constantly.

Finally Rakho finished his message, and Scott took as long as he could to put the last sentence on tape. The Martian waited impatiently for the tape to reach the transmitter and print the words on the machine.

He said: "You will sign for me, *'Rakho the Chosen.'* And you will die."

Now it was done. The Martian motioned the newsman away from the machine. He said: "You may have a god to whom you wish to consign yourself. I shall wait that long." He raised his Q gun and pointed it at Scott's head.

Oh, Lord, thought Scott, without piety. *Didn't they get the message on Earth? Aren't they going to do anything about it?*

The door from the hall crashed open. The Martian whirled toward the sound. He fired; the man in the doorway fired back. The Martian took the blast which shriveled his body and as he sank to the floor he fired again. But the shot was as wild as the first; a second blast from the doorway made Rakho a corpse.

The World Government Investigator said: "Are you all right?" Other W. G. I. men crowded in behind him.

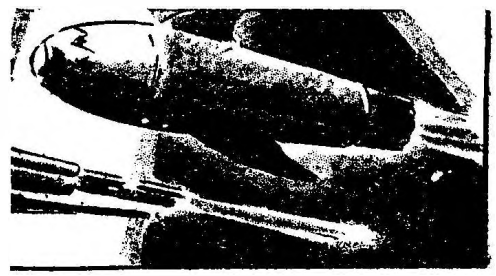
"I think so," said Scott, "outside of being limp as a puddle."

"They relayed your call almost immediately. Most of the delay was in getting over here. It took a lot of guts to mix those S. O. S. bells in with the Martian's message. How did you do it with him watching you every second?"

"With the tape," Scott explained wearily. He sank into a chair and lit a cigaret after some effort. "We'd disconnected the bell-signal on our end of the circuit a long time ago, because it was too much of a distraction. Someone was always at the machine to get messages from Earth, anyhow. So when I spaced the bells into an S. O. S. they didn't do anything here, but they rang in Galactic's New York bureau. At least I hoped to hell they did."

"They did; New York got hold of us immediately. We'd been looking all over Iopa for that fanatic, and we got here as soon as we could. What's that clicking?"

Scott reached across the corpse of the Martian and switched on the incoming wave from Earth. The machine burst into life.



"Are you all right?" it was chattering. *"Acknowledge."*

Scott punched out on the Earth-bound machine: *"All OK. WGI arrived like cavalry to rescue, killed assassin. No other casualties except my ulcer. Warren."*

"And if you think that's just bravado," said Scott to the W. G. I. men, "you're dead right."

Two of the agents had hauled the dead Martian to one side of the room and covered as much of him as they could with an old jacket. A third was making a report to headquarters.

The machine from Earth was chattering again: *"Handled flash-urgent-bulletin from here. Request eyewitnesser from you soonest."*

"We'll clean up this mess and get out of your way," said the W. G. I. man; "I guess you've got work to do."

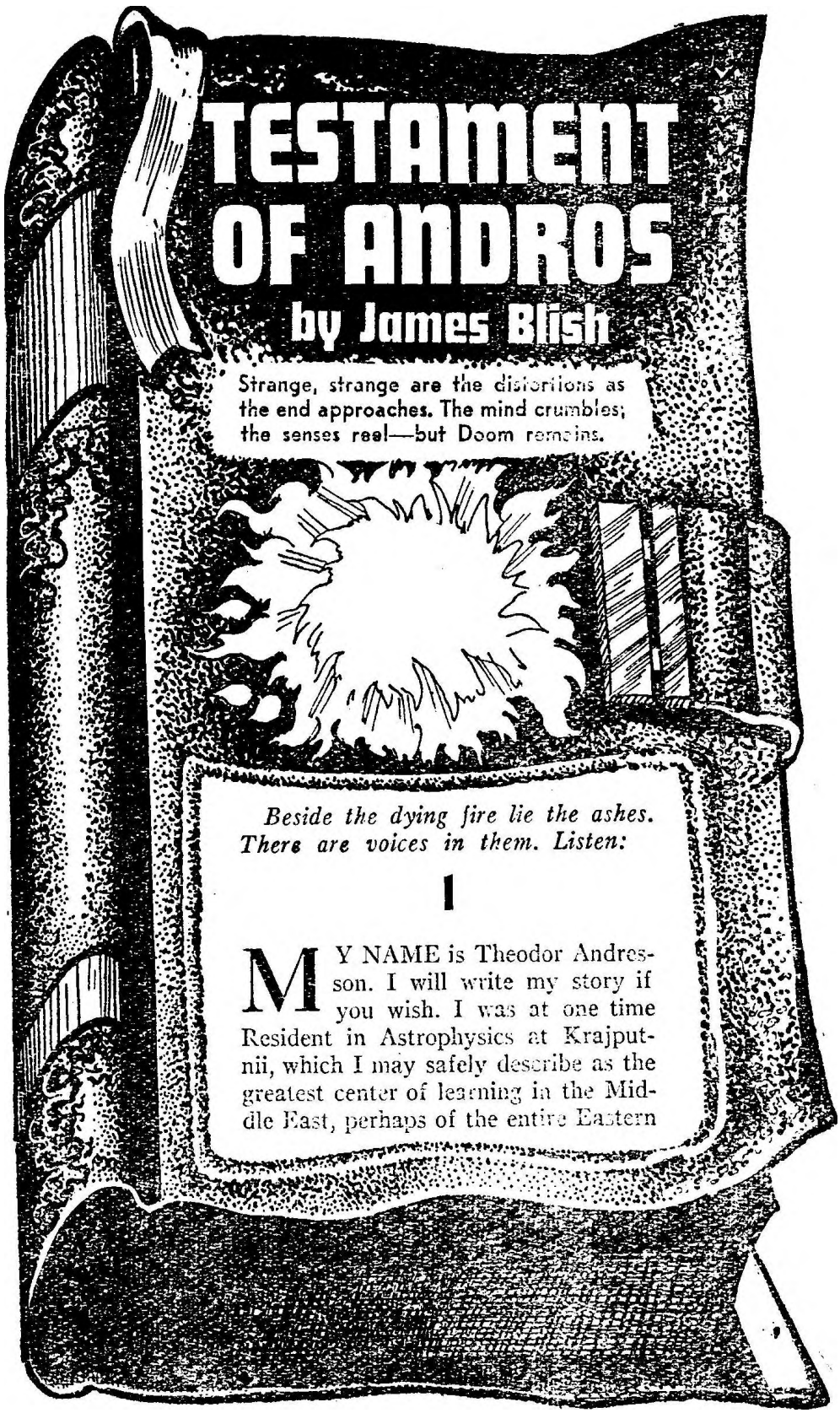
"No rest for a newsman," said Scott. "What I really want to do is go out and hang on the biggest bender this side of Senalla; but first I've got to be an eyewitness. Excuse me, gentlemen, while I earn my living."

★

TESTAMENT OF ANDROS

by James Blish

Strange, strange are the distortions as the end approaches. The mind crumbles; the senses reel—but Doom remains.



Beside the dying fire lie the ashes. There are voices in them. Listen:

I

MY NAME is Theodor Andresson. I will write my story if you wish. I was at one time Resident in Astrophysics at Krajputnii, which I may safely describe as the greatest center of learning in the Middle East, perhaps of the entire Eastern

You Will Remember This Story

I don't think you have ever seen a story like this before—certainly, not in science-fiction.

It is a story for thinkers, and one to read slowly.

When I first read it, this story puzzled me; it irritated me; it would not leave me free to continue the day's work. I had to stop everything else, and read it again.

Some of you, I know, will not like it. Some of you will think it is badly written and confusing. Some of you will loathe it, and mark it down as one of the worst stories you have ever read. You will write me angry letters, asking why I could even consider using it.

I think that more of you will see that this is both five stories, and one story at the same time, each section in a different style. You will get past the initial feeling of chaos, grasp it as a unified whole, and find it deeply moving—as I did myself.

I am not sure that this is the best story I have ever seen in science-fiction, but I am sure that it is one of the most unusual. And I think that you will remember it, and talk about it, for a long time to come.

The Editor

Hemisphere. Later—until the chain of incidents which brought me to this *Zucht-Haus*—I was professor-emeritus in radio-astronomy at Calimyrna University, where I did the work leading to the discovery of the solar pulsation cycle.

I am sure that this work is not credited to me; that is of no importance. I would like it clearly understood that I am not making this record for your benefit, but for mine. Your request means nothing to me, and your pretense of interest in what I may write cannot deceive me. My erstwhile colleagues in the so-called sciences were masters of this kind of pretense; but they, too, were unable to prevent me from penetrating the masquerade at the end. How then does a simple doctor hope to succeed where the finest charlatanry has failed?

And what is allocation of credit—of what importance is priority of discovery before the inexorability of the pulsation cycle? It will work to its new conclusion without regard for your beliefs, my colleagues', or mine. Neither the pretended solicitude nor the real metal bars with which you have surrounded me will matter after that.

I proceed, therefore, to the matter at hand. My position at Calimyrna in that remote time before the cycle was discovered, befit my age (84 years) and the reputation I had achieved in my specialty. I was in excellent health, though subject occasionally to depressions of spirit, readily ascribable to my being in a still-strange land and to

those scars inflicted upon me in earlier times.

Despite these fits of moodiness, I had every reason to be happy. My eminence in my field afforded me the utmost satisfaction; despite poverty and persecution in youth, I had won to security. I had married Marguerita L—, in her youth and mine the toast of twelve continents, not only for her beauty but for her voice. I can still hear now the sound of her singing as I heard it for the first time—singing, on the stage of La Scala in Moscow, the rapturous quartet from the second act of Wagner's *Tristan et Messalina*.

It is quite true—I admit it immediately and calmly—that there were certain flaws in my world, even at Calimyrna. I do not mean the distractions which in old age replace, in the ordinary man, the furies of youth, but rather certain faults and fissures which I found in the world outside myself.

Even a man of my attainments expects at some time to grow old, and to find that process changing the way in which he looks at the world around him. There comes a time, however, when even the most rational of men must notice when these changes exceed the bounds of reason—when they begin to become extraordinary, even sinister. Shall I be specific? Consider, then—quite calmly—the fact that Marguerita did not herself grow old.

I passed into my eighth decade without taking more than perfunctory notice. I was deeply involved in the solar work we were then carrying on at Calimyrna I had with me a young graduate student, a brilliant fellow of about 30, who assisted me and who made certain original contributions of his own to the study. His name, and you will recognize it, was Mario di Ferruel. Calimyrna had completed its thousand-inch radio-telescope, the largest such antenna anywhere in the world—except for the 250-foot Manchester instrument. This was at once put to work in the search for so-called radio stars—those invisible bodies, many of them doubtless nearer to Earth than the nearest visible star, which can be detected only by their emission in the radio spectrum.

Completion of the thousand-inch freed the 600-inch paraboloid antenna for my use in solar work. The smaller instrument had insufficient beam-width between half-power points for the critical stellar studies, but it was more suitable for my purpose.

I HAD IN mind at that time a study of the disturbed sun. Hagen of the Naval Research Laboratory had already done the definite study on the sun in its quiet state. I found myself more drawn to what goes on in the inferno of the sunspots—in the enormous, puzzling catastrophes of the solar flares—the ejection of immense radio active clouds from the sun's interior high into its atmosphere.

It had already become clear that the radio-frequency emission from the disturbed sun was not, and could not be, thermal in origin, as in the RF emission of the quiet sun. The equivalent temperature of the disturbed sun in selected regions at times rises to billions of degrees, rendering the whole concept of thermal equivalency meaningless.

That the problem was not merely academic impressed me from the first. I have, if you will allow me the term, always had a sense of destiny, of *Schicksal*, an almost Spenglerian awareness of the pressure of fate against the retaining walls of humana survival. It is not unique in me; I lay it to my Teutonic ancestry. And when I first encountered the problem of the disturbed sun, something within me felt that I had found destiny itself.

For here, just *here* was the problem in which destiny was interested, in which some fateful answer awaited the asking of the omnipotent question. I felt this from the moment when I had first opened Hagen's famous paper—NRL Report 3504—and the more deeply I became interested in the sun

as an RF radiator, the more the sensation grew.

Yet how to describe it? I was 84, and this was early in 1956; in all those preceding years I had not known that the mortal frame could sustain such an emotion. Shall I call it a sensation of enormous unresolvable dread? But I felt at the same time an ecstasy beyond joy, beyond love, beyond belief; and these transports of rapture and terror did not alternate as do the moods of an insane man, but occurred simultaneously—they were one and the same emotion.

Nor did the solar flares prove themselves unworthy of such deep responses. Flares have been observed in many stars. Some of them have been major outbursts, as indeed they would have to be to be visible to us at all. That such a flare could never occur on our own sun, furthermore, could not be said with certainty, for flares are local phenomena—they expend their energy only on one side of a star, not in all directions like a nova—and we had already seen the great detonation of July 29, 1948 on our own sun, which reached an energy level 100 times the output of the quiet sun, which showed that we did not dare to set limits to what our own sun might yet do.

It was here, however, that I ran into trouble with young di Ferruci. He persistently and stubbornly refused to accept the analogy.

"It's penny-dreadful," he would say, as he had said dozens of times before. "You remind me of Dr. Richardson's stories—you know, the ones he writes for those magazines, about the sun going nova and all that. Whenever it's cloudy at Palomar he dreams up a new catastrophe."

"Richardson is no fool," I would point out. "Other suns have exploded. If he wants to postulate that it could happen to ours, he has every right to do so."

"Sure, Dr. Andresson, in a story," di Ferruci would object. "But as a serious proposition it doesn't hold water. Our sun just isn't the spectral type that goes nova; it hasn't ever even approached the critical instability percentage. It can't even produce a good flare of the Beta Centauri type."

"I don't expect it to go nova. But it's quite capable of producing a major flare, in my opinion. I expect to prove it."

di Ferruci would shrug, as he always did. "I wouldn't ride any money on you, Dr. Andresson. But I'll be more than interested in what the telescope shows—let's see what we have here right now. The thermocouple's been calibrated; shall I cut in the hot load?"

AT THIS point—I am now reporting a particular incident, although it, too, was frequently typical of these conversations—I became aware that Marguerita was in the observatory. I swung sharply around, considerably annoyed. My wife is innocent of astronomical knowledge, and her usually ill-timed obtrusions upon our routine—although I suppose they were of the desire to "take an interest" in her husband's profession—were distracting.

Today, however, I was not only annoyed, but stunned. How had I failed to notice this before—I, who pride myself on the acuity of my observation? What stood before me was a young woman!

How shall I say how young? These things are relative. We had married when she was 36, and I was 44; a difference of eight years is virtually no difference during the middle decades, though it is enormous when both parties are young. Marguerita had been in no sense a child at the time of our marriage.

Yet now, as I was finding, a spread as small as eight years can again become enormous when the dividing-line of old age insensibly approaches. And the difference was even greater than this—for now Marguerita, as she stood looking down at our day's three-dimensional graph of solar activity, seemed

no older to me than the day on which I had first met her: a woman, tall, graceful, lithe, platinum-haired, and with the somber, smoldering, unreadable face of Eve—and yet compared to me now a child in truth.

"Good afternoon. Mrs. Andresson," di Ferruci said, smiling.

She looked up and smiled back. 'Good afternoon," she said. "I see you're about to take another series of readings. Don't let me interrupt you."

"That's quite all right; thus far it's routine," di Ferruci said. I glanced sidewise at him and then back to my wife. "We'd just begun to take readings to break up the monotony of the old argument."

"That's true," I said. "But it would be just as well if you didn't drop in on us unexpectedly, Marguerita. If this had been a critical stage—"

"I'm sorry," she said contritely. "I should have phoned, but I'm always afraid that the telephone will interrupt you, too. When I'm here I can hope to see whether or not you're busy—and you can see who's calling. The telephone has no eyes."

She touched the graph, delicately. This graph, I should explain, is made of 14 curves cut out in cardboard, and assembled so that one set of seven curved pieces is at right angles to the other set. It expresses the variation in intensity of RF emanation across the surface of the sun at the 10-centimeter wavelength, where our readings commonly are taken; we make a new such model each day. It shows at a glance, by valley or peak, any deviation from the sun's normal output, thus helping us greatly in interpreting our results.

"How strange it looks today," she said. "It's always in motion, like a comber racing toward the shore. I keep expecting it to begin to break at the top."

di Ferruci stopped tinkering with the drive clock and sat down before the control desk, his blue-black helmet of hair—only a little peppered by his memories of the Inchon landing—swivelling sharply toward her. I could not see his face. "What an eerie notion," he said. "Mrs. Andresson, you and the doctor'll have me sharing your presentiments of doom any minute now."

"It isn't a question of presentiments," I said sharply. "You should be aware by now, Mario, that in the RF range the sun is a variable star. Does that mean nothing to you? Let me ask you another question: How do you explain Eta Carina?"

"What's Eta Carina?" Marguerita said.

I did not know quite how to begin answering her, but di Ferruci, who lacked my intimate knowledge of her limitations, had no such qualms.

"It's a freak—one of the worst freaks of the past ten years," he said eagerly. "It's a star that's gone nova three times. The last time was in 1952, about a hundred years before the previous explosion. Before that it had an outburst in the 1600's, and it may have blown up about 142 A. D., too. Each time it gains in brightness nearly 100,000 times—as violent a stellar catastrophe as you can find anywhere in the records." He offered the data to her like a bouquet, and before I could begin to take offense, swung back upon me again. "Surely, Doc, you don't maintain that Eta Carina is a flare star?"

"All stars are flare stars," I said, looking steadily at him. His eyes were in shadow. "More than that: all stars are novas, in the long run. Young stars like our sun are variable only in the radio spectrum, but gradually they become more and more unstable, and begin to produce small flares. Then come the big flares, like Beta Centauri outburst; then they go nova; and then the cycle begins again."

"Evidence?"

"Everywhere. The process goes on in little in the short-term variables, the Cepheids. Eta Carina shows how it works in a smaller, non-cluster star. The other novas we've observed simply have longer periods—they haven't

had time to go nova again within record history. *But they will.*"

"Well," di Ferruci said. "If that's so, Richardson's visions of our sun exploding seems almost pleasant. You see us being roasted gradually instead, in a series of hotter and hotter flares. When does the first one hit us, by your figures?"

MARIO WAS watching me steadily. Perhaps I looked strange, for I was once again in the grip of that anamalous emotion, so impossible to describe, in which terror and ecstasy blended and fused into some whole beyond any possibility of communication. As I had stated for the first time what I saw, and saw so clearly, was ahead for us all, this deep radical emotion began to shake me as if I had stepped all unawares from the comfortable island of relative, weighable facts into some blastingly cold ocean of Absolute Truth.

"I don't know," I said. "It needs checking. But I give us six months."

Marguerita's and di Ferruci's eyes met. Then he said, "Let's check it, then. We should be able to find the instability threshold for each stage, from RR Lyrae stars right through classical Cepheids, long-periods, and irregulars to radio-variables. We already know the figure for Novas. Let's dot the i's and cross the t's—and then find out where our sun stands."

"Theodor," Marguerita said. "What—what will happen if you're right?"

"Then the next flare will be immensely greater than the 1948 one. The Earth will survive it; life on Earth probably will not—certainy not human life."

Marguerita remained standing beside the model a moment longer, nursing the hand which had been touching it. Then she looked at me out of eyes too young for me to read, and left the observatory.

With a hasty word to di Ferruci, I followed her, berating myself as I went. Suspecting as I did the shortness of the span left to us, I had not planned to utter a word about what was to be in store for us in her presence; that had been one of the reasons why I had objected to her visits to the observatory. There had simply been no reason to cloud our last months together with the shadow of a fate she could not understand.

But when I reached the top of the granite steps leading down to the road, she was gone—nor could I see either her figure or any sign of a car on the road which led down the mountain. She had vanished as completely as if she had never existed.

Needless to say, I was disturbed. There are cabins in the woods, only a short distance away from the observatory proper, which are used by staff members as temporary residences; we had never made use of them—radio-astronomy being an art which can be carried on by day better than by night—but nevertheless I checked them systematically. It was inconceivable to me that she could be in the main observatory, but I searched that too, as well as the solar tower and the Schmidt shed.

She was nowhere. By the time I had finished searching, it was sunset and there was no longer any use in my returning to my own instrument. I could only conclude that I had miscalculated the time lag between her exit and my pursuit, and that I would find her at home.

Yet, somehow I did not go home. All during my search of the grounds, another thought had been in my head: What if I was wrong? Suppose that there was no solar pulsation cycle? Suppose that my figures were meaningless? If this seems to you to be a strange thing for a man to be thinking, while searching for an inexplicably vanished wife, I can only say that the two subjects seemed to me to be somehow not unconnected.

And as it turned out, I was right. I have said that I have a sense of fate.

IN THE end, I went back to the observatory, now dark and, I supposed, deserted. But there was a light glowing softly inside: the evenly lit surface of the transparency viewer. Bent over it, his features floating eerily in nothingness, was Mario di Ferruci.

I grouped for the switch, found it, and the fluorescents flashed on overhead. Mario straightened, blinking.

"Mario, what are you doing here? I thought you had left before sundown."

"I meant to," di Ferruci said slowly. "But I couldn't stop thinking about your theory. It isn't every day that one hears the end of the world announced by a man of your eminence. I decided I just had to run my own check, or else go nuts wondering."

"Why couldn't you have waited for me?" I said. "We could have done the work together much quicker and more easily."

"That's true," he said slowly. "But, Dr. Andresson, I'm just a graduate student, and you're a famous man; young as you are. I'm a little afraid of being overwhelmed—of missing an error because you've checked it already, or failing to check some point at all—that kind of thing. After all, we're all going to die if you're right, and that's hardly a minor matter; so I thought I'd try paddling my own canoe. Maybe I'll find the world just as far up the creek as you do. But I had to try."

It took me a while to digest this, distracted as I already was. After a while I said, as calmly as I could: "And what have you found?"

"Dr. Andresson—*you're wrong.*"

For an instant I could not see. All the red raw exploding universe of unstable stars went wheeling through my old head like maddened atoms. But I am a scientist; I conquered it.

"Wherein am I wrong?"

di Ferruci took a deep breath. His face was white and set under the fluorescents. "Dr. Andresson, forgive me; this is a hard thing for me to say. But the error in your calcs is way the hell back in the beginning, in your thermodynamic assumptions. It lies in the step between the Chapman-Cowling expression, and your derivation for the coefficient of mutual diffusion. Your derivation is perfectly sound in classical thermodynamics, but that isn't what we have to deal with here; we're dealing instead with a completely ionized binary gas, where your quantity D 12 becomes nothing more than a first approximation."

"I never called it anything else."

"Maybe not," di Ferruci said doggedly. "But your math handles it as an absolute. By the time your expanded equation 58 is reached, you've lost a complete set of subscripts and your expressions for the electron of charge wind up all as odd powers! I'm not impugning your logic—it's fantastically brilliant—but insofar as it derives from the bracketed expression D 12 it doesn't represent a real situation."

He stared at me, half-defiantly, half in a kind of anxiety the source of which I could not fathom. It had been many years since I had been young; now I was gravid with death—his, mine, yours, Marguerita's, everyone's. I said only: "Let's check it again."

But we never had the chance; at that moment the door opened soundlessly, and Marguerita came back.

"Theodor, Mario!" she said breathlessly. "Are you trying to work yourselves to death? Let's all live to our appointed times, whenever they come! Theodor, I was so frightened when you didn't come home—why didn't you call—"

"I'm not sure anyone would have answered," I said grimly. "Or if someone had, I would have suspected her of being an imposter—or a teleport."

She turned her strange look upon me. "I—don't understand you."

"I hope you don't, Marguerita.

We'll take that matter up in private. Right now we're making a check. Dr. di Ferruci was about to knock the solar pulsation theory to flinders when you entered."

"Doc!" di Ferruci protested. "That wasn't the point at all. I just wanted to find—"

"*Don't call me 'Doc'!*"

"Very well," di Ferruci said. His face became whiter still. "But I insist on finishing my sentence. I'm not out to kick apart your theory; I think it's a brilliant theory and that it may still very well be right. There are holes in your math, that's all. They're big holes and they need filling; maybe, between us, we could fill them. But if you don't care enough to want to do the job, why should I?"

"Why, indeed?"

He stared at me with fury for a moment. Then he put his hand distractedly to his forehead, stood up slowly, and began to pace. "Look, Doc—Dr. Andresson. Believe me, I'm not hostile to the idea. It scares me, but that's only because I'm human. There's still a good chance that it's basically sound. If we could go to work on it now, really intensively, we might be able to have it in shape for the triple-A-S meeting in Chicago two months from now. It'd set every physicist, every astronomer, every scientist of any stripe by the ears!"

AND THERE was the clue for which, all unconsciously, I had been waiting. "Indeed it would," I said. "And for four months, old Dr. Andresson and young Dr. Ferruci would be famous—as perhaps no scientists had ever been famous before. Old Dr. Andresson has had his measure of fame and has lost his faith in it—but for young Dr. Ferruci, even four months would be a deep draught. For that he is willing to impugn his senior's work, to force endless conferences, to call everything into question—all to get his own name added to the credits on the final paper."

"Theodor," Marguerita said. "Theodor, this isn't like you. If—"

"And there is even a touch of humor in this little playlet," I said. "The old man would have credited young Dr. Ferruci in the final paper in any case. The whole maneuver was for nothing."

"There was no maneuver," di Ferruci ground out, his fists clenched. His nervous movements of his hand across his forehead had turned his blue-black hair into a mare's nest. "I'm not an idiot. I know that if you're right, the whole world will be in ashes before the year is out—including any research papers which might carry my name, and any human eyes which might see them.

"What I want to do is to pin down this concept to the point where it's unassailable. The world will demand nothing less of it than that. *Then* it can be presented to the AAAS—and the world will have four months during which the best scientific brains on Earth can look for an out, a way to save at least a part of the race, even if only two people. What's fame to me, or anyone else, if this theory is right? Gas, just gas. But if we can make the world believe it, utterly and completely, then the world will find a loophole. Nothing less than the combined brains of the whole of science could do the job—and we won't get those brains to work unless we convince them!"

"Nonsense," I said calmly. "There is no 'out', as you put it. But I'll agree that I looked deeper into you than I needed for a motive. Do you think that I have overlooked all these odd coincidences? Here is my wife, and here are you, both at improbable hours, neither of you expecting me; here is young Dr. di Ferruci interrupted at his task of stealing **something** more than just my work; here is Marguerita Andresson, emerged from wherever she has been hiding all evening, unable to believe

that Earth's last picture is all but painted, but ready to help a young man with blue-black hair to steal the pretty notion and capitalize on it."

There was a faint sound from Marguerita. I did not look at her.

After a long while, di Ferruci said: "You are a great astronomer, Dr. Andressen. I owe you twenty years of inspiration from a distance, and five years of the finest training a master ever gave a tyro.

"You are also foul-minded, cruel-tongued, and very much mistaken. I resign from this University as of now; my obligation to you is wiped out by what you saw fit to say of me." He searched for his jacket, failed to find it, and gave up at once in trembling fury. "Goodbye, Mrs. Andresson, with my deepest sympathy. And Doc, goodbye—and God have mercy on you."

"Wait,' I said. I moved then, after what seemed a century of standing frozen. The young man stopped, his hand halfway to the doorknob, and his back to me. Watching him, I found my way to a chart-viewer, and picked up the six-inch pair of dividers he had been using to check my charts.

"Well," he said.

"It's not so easy as that, Mario. You don't walk out of a house with the stolen goods under your arm when the owner is present. A strong man armed keepeth his house. You may not leave; you may not take my hard-won theory to another university; you may not leave Hamelin with pipes in your hand. You may not carry both my heart and my brains out of this observatory as easily as you would carry a sack of potatoes. In short—*you may not leave!*"

I threw the points of the dividers high and launched myself soul and body at that hunched, broad back. Marguerita's sudden scream rang deafeningly as a siren in the observatory dome.

The rest you know.

I have been honest with you. Tell me: where have you hidden her now?

2

I, ANDREW, a servant of the Sun, who also am your brother, he who was called and was sanctified, say unto you, blessed be he that readeth, and keepeth the word; for behold, the time is at hand; be thou content.

2. For behold, it was given to me, in the City of Angels, upon a high hill, to look upon His face; whereupon I fell down and wept;

3. And He said, I am the Be-All and End-All; I am the Being and the Becoming; except that they be pure, none shall look Me else they die, for the time is at hand. And when He had spoken thus, I was sore afraid.

4. And He said, Rise up, and go forth unto the peoples, and say thou, Unless thou repent, I will come to thee quickly, and shine My countenance upon thee. I shall loosen the seals, and sound the trumpets, and open the vials, and the deaths which shall come upon thee will be numbered as seven times seven.

5. The sun shall become black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon become as blood; and the stars of heaven shall fall onto the earth, and the heaven depart as a scroll when it is rolled together, and every mountain and island be moved out of their places. And all men shall hide themselves, and say to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne.

6. There will be hail and fire mingled with blood, and these cast upon the earth; a great mountain burning with fire shall be cast into the sea; and there will fall a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, upon the fountains of waters; and the third part of the Sun shall be smitten, and the third part of the

moon; and there shall arise a smoke out of the pit, so that the air and the day be darkened.

7. And if there be any who worship not Me, and who heed not, I say unto you all, woe, woe, for ye shall all die; ye shall feast without sacraments, ye shall batten upon each other; ye shall be clouds without water, driven by dry winds; ye shall be dry sterile trees, twice dead, and withered; wandering stars, to whom is given the dark of the emptiness of eternity; verily, I say unto you,

8. Ye shall be tormented with fire and brimstone, the third part of trees shall be burnt up, and all green grass be burnt up, and the third part of creatures which were in the sea, and had life, shall die; and the waters shall become blood, and many men die of the waters, because they be bitter; and the smoke of your torment shall ascend up for ever and ever, and thou shalt have no rest, neither day nor night; for the hour of judgement is come.

9. And saying thus, He that spake to me departed, and His dread spirit, and I went down among the people, and spoke, and bade men beware; and none heeded.

10. Neither those who worshipped the stars, and consulted, one among the others; nor those who worshipped man and his image; nor those who made prayers to the invisible spirits of the air; nor those who worshipped any other thing; and the spirit of Him who had spoken was heavy upon me, so that I went unto my chambers and lay me down in a swound.

11. And the angel of the Sun spoke to me as I lay, and spake with a voice like trombones, and said, Behold, all men are evil, but thou shalt redeem them, albeit thou remain a pure child of the Sun, and thou alone. Thou shalt have power; a two-edged sword shall go out of thy mouth, and thou shalt hold seven times seven stars in thy palm, and be puisant; this I shall give thee as thine own, If only thou remainest, and thou alone. And I said: Lord, I am Thine; do with me as Thou wilt.

12. And I went forth again, and spoke, and the nations of men hearkened, and the kings of the world bent the knee, and the princes of the world brought tribute, seven times seven; and those who worshipped the stars, and the spirits of the air, and all other things, bowed down before Him; and it was well with them.

13. Now at this time there appeared a great wonder in heaven: a star clothed in a glory of hair, like a woman; and the people gathered and murmured of wonder, saying, Beware, for there is a god in the sky, clothed in hair like a woman, and with streaming of robes and bright garments; and behold, it draws near in the night, and fears not the Sun; the hem of this robe gathers about us.

14. And there arose a woman of the world, and came forward, preaching the gospel of the wild star, saying: Our god the Sun is a false god; his mate is this great star; they will devour us. There is no god but man.

15. And this woman, which was called Margo, summoned the people and made laughter with them, and derision, and scorned the Sun, and gave herself to the priests of the voices in the air, and to those who worshipped numbers, and to the kings and princes of the world; and there was whirling of tambourines in the high towers of the Sun.

16. And the angel of the Sun spoke to me with the sound of trombones, saying, Go with thy power which has been given to thee, and crush this woman else thou shalt be given to the wild star, and to the flames of the wild star's hair, and with thee the world; I command thee, slay this woman, for thou hast been given the power, nor shall it be given thee again; I have spoken.

17. And I went, and the woman called Margo spoke unto me, saying: Thou art fair, and hath power. Give me of thy power, and I will give you of mine. Neither the wild star nor the

Sun shall have such power as we have.

18. And I looked upon her, and she was fair, beyond all the daughters of the earth; and when she spoke, her voice was as the sounding of bells; and there was a spirit in her greater than the souls of men; and a star, clothed in a glory of hair, with streaming of robes and bright garments; and I kissed the hem of her robe.

19. And the voice of the angel of the Sun was heard like a sounding of trombones, saying, Thou hast yielded thy power to an harlot, and given the earth to the fire; thy power is riven from thee, and all shall die;

20. So be it.

3

MY NAME is George Anders. I have no hope that anyone will read this record, which will probably be destroyed with me—I have no safer place to put it than on my person—but I write it anyhow, if only to show that man was a talkative animal to his last gasp. If the day of glory which has been foretold comes about, there may well be a new and better world which will cherish what I put down here—but I am desperately afraid that the terrible here-and-now is the day the voices promised, and that there will be nothing else forever and ever.

This is not to say that the voices lied. But since that first night when they spoke to me, I have come to know that they speak for forces of tremendous power, forces to which human life is as nothing. A day of glory we have already had, truly—but such a day as no man could long for.

It was on the morning of March 18, 1956, that that day dawned, with a sun so huge as to dominate the entire eastern sky—a flaring monster which made the memory of our accustomed sun seem like a match-flame. All the previous night had been as hot as high summer, although not four days before we had a blizzard. Now, with the rising of this colossal globe, we learned the real meaning of heat.

A day of glory, of glory incredible—and deadly. The heat grew and grew. By a little after noon the temperature in the shade was more than 150°, and in the open—it is impossible to describe what an inferno it was under the direct rays of that sun. A bucket of water thrown into the street from a window boiled in mid-air before it could strike the pavement.

In some parts of the city, where there were wooden buildings and asphalt or tarred-black streets, everything was burning. In the country, the radio said, it was worse; forests were ablaze, grasslands, wheatfields, everything. Curiously, it was this that saved many of us, for before the afternoon could reach its full fury the sky was gray with smoke, cutting off at least a little of the rays of that solar horror. Flakes of ash fell everywhere.

Millions died that day. Only a few in refrigerated rooms—meat-coolers, cold-storage warehouses, the blast-tunnels of frozen-food firms, underground fur-storage vaults—survived, where the refrigeration apparatus itself survived. By a little after midnight, the outside temperature had dropped to only slightly above 100°, and the trembling and half-mad wraiths who still lived emerged to look silently at the ruined world.

I WAS ONE of these; I had planned that I would be. Months before, I had known that this day of doom was to come upon us, for the voices had said so. I can still remember—for as long as I live I will remember, whether it be a day or forty years—the onset of that strange feeling, that withdrawal from the world around me, as if everything familiar had suddenly become as unreal as a stage-setting. What had seemed commonplace became strange, sinister: what was that man doing with the bottles which contained the white fluid. Why was the uniform he wore also white? Why not blood in the bottles? And the man with the huge assemblage of paper;

why was he watching it so intently as he sat in the subway? Did he expect it to make some sudden move if he looked away? Were the black marks with which the paper was covered the footprints of some miniscule horde?

And as the world underwent its slow transformation, the voices came. I cannot write here what they said, because paper would not bear such words. But the meaning was clear. The destruction of the world was at hand. And beyond it—

Beyond it, the day of glory. A turn toward something new, something before which all men's previous knowledge of grandeur would pale; a new Apocalypse and Resurrection? So it seemed, then. But the voices spoke in symbol and parable, and perhaps the rising of the hellish sun was the only "day of glory" we would ever see.

And so I hid in my shelter, and survived that first day. When I first emerged into the boiling, choking midnight smoke I could see no one else, but after a while something white came out of the darkness toward me. It was a young girl, in what I took to be a nightgown—the lightest garment, at any event, which she could have worn in this intolerable heat.

"What will happen to us?" she said, as soon as she saw me. "What will happen to us, Will it be the same tomorrow?"

"I don't know," I said. "What's your name?"

"Margaret." She coughed. "This must be the end of the world. If the sun is like this tomorrow—"

"It *is* the end of the world," I said. "But maybe it's the beginning of another. You and I will live to see it."

"How do you know?"

"By your name. The voices call you the mother of the new gods. Have you heard the voices?"

She moved away from me a little bit. There was a sudden, furious gust of wind, and a long line of sparks flew through the lurid sky overhead. "The voices?" she said.

"Yes. The voices of the powers which have done all this. They have promised to save us, you and I. Together we can recreate—"

Suddenly, she was running. She vanished almost instantly into darkness and the smoke. I ran after her, calling, but it was hopeless; besides, my throat was already raw, and in the heat and the aftermath of the day I had no strength. I went back to my crypt. Tomorrow would tell the tale.

SLEEP WAS impossible. I waited for dawn, and watched for it through my periscope, from the buried vault of the bank where, a day before, I had been a kind of teller. This had been no ordinary bank, and I had never taken or issued any money; but otherwise the terms are just. Perhaps you have already guessed, for no ordinary vault is equipped with periscopes to watch the surrounding countryside. This was Fort Knox, a bed of gold to be seeded with promise of the Age of Gold under this golden fire.

And, at last, the sun came up. It was immense. But I waited a while, and watched the image of it which was cast from the periscope eyepiece onto the opposite wall of the vault. It was not as big as it had been yesterday. And where yesterday the direct rays from the periscope had instantly charred a thousand-dollar bill, today they made only a slowly-growing brown spot which never found its kindling-point.

The lesson was plain. Today most of what remained of mankind would be slain. But there would be survivors.

Then I slept.

I awoke toward the end of the day and set about the quest which I knew I must make. I took nothing with me but water, which I knew I could not expect to find. Then I left the vault forever.

The world which greeted me as I came to the surface was a world transformed: blasted. Nearly everything had been levelled, and the rest lay in jumbled, smoking ruins. The sky was

completely black. Near the Western horizon, the swollen sun sank, still monstrous, but now no hotter than the normal sun at the height of a tropic day. The great explosion, whatever it had been, was nearly over.

And now I had to find Margaret, and fulfill the millennium which the voices had promised. The tree of man had been blasted, but still it bore one flower. It was my great destiny to bring that flower to fruit.

Thus I bring this record to a close. I leave it here in the vault; then I shall go forth into the desert of the world. If any find it, remember: I am your father and the father of your race. If not, you will all be smoke.

Now I go. My knife is in my hand.

4

MY NAME is Andy Virchow, but probably you know me better as Admiral Universe. Nowhere in the pages of galactic history has there ever been a greater champion of justice. Who do you know that doesn't know Universe, ruler of the spaceways, hero of science, bringer of law and order in the age of the conquest of space? Not a planetary soul, that's who.

Of course not everybody knows that Andy Virchow is Admiral Universe. Sometimes I have to go in disguise and fool criminals. Then I am Andy Virchow, and they think I am only eight years old, until I have them where I want them and I whip out my Cosmic Smoke Gun and reveal my indentitification.

Sometimes I don't say who I am but just clean the crooks up and ride off in my rocket, the *Margy II*. Then afterwards the people I have saved say, "He didn't even stay to be thanked. I wonder who he was?" and somebody else says, "There's only one man on the frontiers of space like him. That's Admiral Universe."

My rocket is called the *Margy II* partly because my secret interstellar base is on Mars and the Mars people we call Martians call themselves Margies and I like to think of myself as a Margy *too*, because the people of Earth don't understand me and I do good for them because I am champion of justice, not because I like them. Then they're sorry, but it's too late. Me and the Margies understand each other. They ask me for advice before they do anything important, and I tell them what to do. Earth people are always trying to tell other people what to do; the Margies aren't like that, they ask what to do instead of always giving orders.

Also Admiral Universe calls his rocket *Margy II*, because my patron saint is St. Margaret who gets me out of trouble if I do anything wrong. Admiral Universe never does anything wrong because St. Margaret is on his side all the time. St. Margaret is the patron saint of clocks and is called the Mother of Galaxies, because she was a mother—not like my mother, who is always shouting and sending me to bed too early—and mothers have milk and *galaxy* is Greek for milk. If you didn't know I was Admiral Universe you'd ask how I know what's Greek for anything, but Admiral Universe is a great scientist and knows everything, Besides, my father was a teacher of Greek before he died and he was Admiral Universe's first teacher.

In all the other worlds in the universe everything is pretty perfect except for a few crooks that have to be shot. It's not like Earth at all. The planets are different from each other, but they are all happy and have lots of science and the people are kind and never raise their hands to each other to send each other to bed without their supper.

Sometimes there are terrible accidents in the spacelanes and Admiral Universe arrives on the scene in the knick of time and saves everybody,

and all the men shake his hand and all the girls kiss him and say mushy things to him, but he refuses their thanks in a polite way and disappears into the trackless wastes of outer space because he carries a medal of St. Margaret's in his pocket over his heart. She is his only girl, but she can't ever be anybody's girl because she is a saint, and this is Admiral Universe's great tragedy which he never tells anybody because it's his private business that he has to suffer all by himself, and besides if anybody else knew it they would think he was mushy too and wouldn't be so afraid of him, like crooks I mean.

Admiral Universe is always being called from all over outer space to help people and sometimes he can't be one place because he has to be in some other place. Then he has to set his jaw and do the best he can and be tough about the people he can't help because he is helping somebody else. First he asks St. Margaret what he should do and she tells him. Then he goes and does it, and he is very sorry for the people who get left out, but he knows that he did what was right.

This is why I wasn't there when the sun blew up, because I was helping people somewhere else at the time. I didn't even know it was the sun, because I was so far away that it was just another star, and I didn't see it blow up, because stars blow up all the time and if you're Admiral Universe you get used to it and hardly notice. Margaret might have told me, but she's a saint, and doesn't care.

If I'd of been there I would have helped. I would have saved my friends, and all the great scientists, and the girls who might be somebody's mothers some day, and everybody that was anybody expect Dr. Ferguson, I would have left him behind to show him how wrong he was about me.

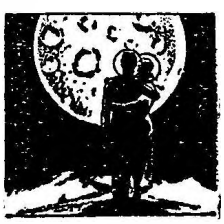
But I wasn't there at the time, and besides Admiral Universe never did like the Earth much. Nobody will really miss it.

5

MY NAME is T. V. Andros. My father was an Athenian immigrant and a drunkard. After he came here he worked in the mines, but not very often because he was mostly soused.

Sometimes he beat my mother. She had TB but she took good care of us until I was eight; early that year, my father got killed in a brawl in a bar, and the doctor—his name I forget—sent her back to the little town in Pennsylvania where she was born. She died that March.

After that I worked in the mines. The law says a kid can't work in the mines but in company towns the law don't mean much. I got the cough too but the other miners took care of me and I grew up tough and could handle myself all right. When I was 14, I killed a man with a pick-handle, one blow. I don't remember what we was fighting about.



Mostly I kept out of fights, though. I had a crazy idea I wanted to educate myself and I read a lot—all kinds of things. For a while I read those magazines that tell about going to other planets and stuff like that. I didn't learn anything, except that to learn good you need a teacher, and the last one of those had been run out by the company cops. They said he was a Red.

It was tough in the mines. It's dark down there and hot, and you can't breathe sometimes for the dust. And you can't never wash the dirt off, it

gets right down into your skin and makes you feel black even at noon on Sundays when you've scrubbed till your skin's raw.

I had a sixteen-year-old girl but I was too dirty for her. I tried to go to the priest about it but he wasn't looking for nothing but sin, and kept asking me had I done anything wrong with the girl. When I said I hadn't he wasn't interested no more. I hadn't, either, but he made me so mad he made me wish I had. After that I sort of drifted away from going to Church because I couldn't stand his face. Maybe that was bad but it had its good side, too, I missed it and I took to cracking the Bible now and then. I never got much of the Bible when I was going to church.

After a while I took to drinking something now and then. It wasn't right for a kid but I wasn't a kid no more, I was eighteen and besides in the company towns there ain't nothing else to do. It helped some but not enough. All the guys in the bar ever talk about are wages and women. You got to drink yourself blind and stupid to keep from hearing them, otherwise you go nuts. After a while I was blind and stupid a lot of the time and didn't no longer know what I did or didn't.

ONCE WHEN I was drunk I mauled a girl younger than I was; I don't know why I did it. She was just the age I had been when my mother left me to go home and die. Then it was all up with me at the mines. I didn't mean her any harm but the judge gave me the works. Two years.

I got clean for once in my life while I was in the jug and I did some more reading but it just mixed me up more. Two years is a long time. When I got out I felt funny in my head I couldn't stop thinking about the girl who thought I was too dirty for her. I was at the age when I needed girls.

But I wasn't going to mess with girls my age who could see the prison whiteness on the outside and all that ground-in coal dust underneath it. I couldn't forget Maggy, the girl that got me into the jam. That had been a hot night in summer, with a moon as big as the sun as red as blood. I hadn't meant her any harm. She reminded me of myself when my mother had gone away.

I found another Maggy and when the cops caught me they worked me over. I can't hear in one ear now and my nose is skewed funny on my face. I had it coming because I hurt the girl. When they let me out again I got a job as a super, but there was another girl in the apartment above, and I went to fix a pipe there while her mother was away. It was a hot day with a big sun and no air moving, just like the day my mother left. I didn't really know nothing had happened until I saw that one of my hands was dark red. Then I tried to get her to talk to me but she wouldn't move. After a while I felt some woman's hands beating at my neck. She said, "Stop, you!"

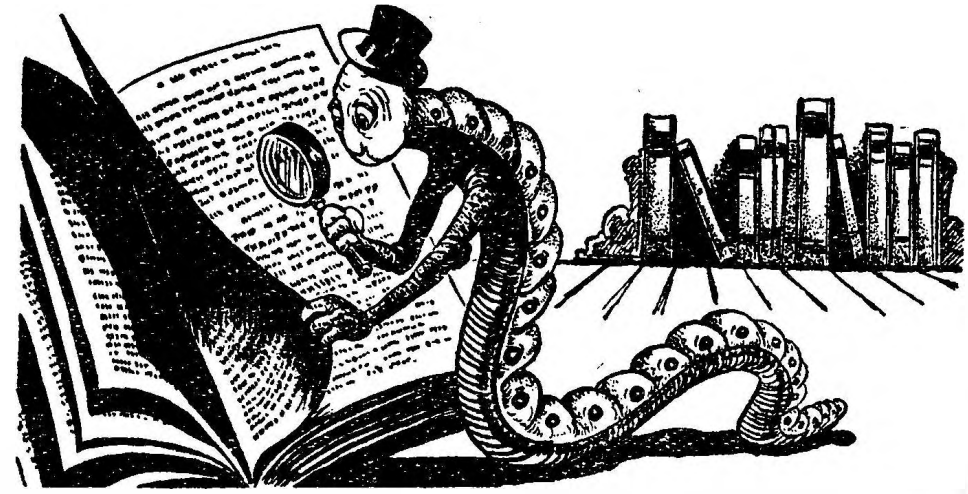
This time they took me to a hospital and a Dr. Ferdinand talked to me. Write it all down, he said. It may help you. So I wrote it all down, like you see it here. Then they put me in a cell and said I would have to stay for a while. I don't talk to them much any more.

It is a real hot day. Outside the cell the sun is bigger. I don't breathe good any more but there's something wrong with the air. I pulled my mattress to pieces but I didn't find nothing. Maybe something is going to happen. Something is going to happen.

6

MY NAME is Man. I will write my story if you wish.
I was...

Here the ashes blow away. The voices die.



Readin' and Writhin'

READIN' AND WRITHIN'

LAST MONTH, I noted that the "science-fiction juvenile", as exemplified by Winston's "Adventures in Science Fiction" series need not be "juvenile" at all in the sense that it is "written down", or that the plots and characterizations are leftovers from comic-strips. Within the particular limitations—none of which are crippling—there is no reason why such novels should not be as well-written, as strongly-plotted, and as soundly-motivated, as the best "adult" fare.

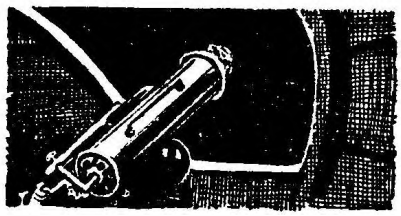
All this made good talk, but the first test of my theory came in sampling the initial selection offered by Winston. I've read four of the five titles—my usual cramped reading-time wouldn't permit completion of the set—and was gratified to find that one was decidedly a superior science-fiction novel; a second very good; the third well above average. The fourth missed.

To take them in order of merit: Raymond F. Jones, in "Son of the Stars" has presented one of the most adult and moving, treatments of the theme of humans versus the first "alien" to land upon Earth that I've yet seen. The "alien" is humanoid, and decidedly understandable; at first glance, he could be mistaken for a boy the age of our protagonist. The reactions of Earthlings, as expected, range from warm, friendly welcome to hysteria. But it is not just the matter of "fear of the alien" that Jones treats with such knowing and communicative skill; it is the dissection of *kinds* of fear, particularly the delineation of rational, necessary fear, based upon "sane" appraisal of "realities". This is exemplified in the General, who would like to be as free in friendly response as those who accept the visitor at his face value, but *must* have proof, first. I have heard that this book has enjoyed a very good sale; it certainly deserves wide acceptance.

There is less depth of basic character-study in Lester del Rey's, "Marooned On Mars", a novel of the first landing on the "red planet", and a gripping account of the thoroughly-hostile environment there. However, both the motivation, and behaviour of the hero and his associates are soundly thought-out, and believably presented; as with the Jones novel, suspense and sensible "action" make the story seem considerably shorter than it is. del Rey's Martian "life" sounds credible enough, until he comes to the intelligent creatures living beneath the sands. There's nothing overly-fantastic here—it's well-controlled, by comparison with the things we've all seen on Mars, throughout years of avid science-fiction reading—but it does tend to jar the sense of hard, down-to-Mars verisimilitude that the story achieved up to that point. While I enjoyed this book, and recommend it as good reading, I still wish Lester hadn't introduced his "Martians", outside of plant-life, and small insects, etc.

Somewhat wilder is Philip Latham's "Five Against Venus", although there can be no complaint about the sudden introduction of an element which doesn't seem to fit, as above. It's a sort of "Swiss Family Robinson" on the planet which used to be treated as a "hothouse world", and Latham has some of the aspects of the familiar Venusian "jungle" in this story. The story's strength is not so much in what happens, as in the reactions of the characters to their situation—shipwrecked on this unknown world, forced to combine what native cunning they own with what they can remember, from past education, of the requirements for life on a primitive level.

(*turn to page* 91)



DOWN TO EARTH

(*continued from page* 10)

frequently enough to have made the plot a little thin by now; in the straight field, although the story would stand, it would not make much splash if dropped. Making the characters partially non-Terran does not necessarily create science-fiction.

6. "Facts of Life": certainly science-fiction. If the "boy-meets-girl" angle were deleted, or if the central characters were to be changed to two machines, or two robots, or what have you, the scientific ideation of a possible divergence of unicellular organisms still would stand as a story.

Two out of six stories fit the classification. Not a very high percentage and strikingly enough two that I would be least likely to classify as science-fiction, the "sex-angle" stories being usually the ones most easily discarded from science fiction. But I applied the rules.

As a corollary: Does the genre of science-fiction change? I would say "no," except that the fiction part of the definition may become fact. Jules Verne's stories of the submarine are no longer truly fictional since the submarine has become an accomplished fact. Stories in which the atom bomb was depicted as being discovered now become factual, although the "effects" portion of that writing may still be fictional.

A word about your magazine in general. I agree with what I believe is becoming a majority that a partially-unclad female is no longer essential to a cover. Just as, if essential to a cover. Just as, if not more, effectually lovers are printed by other S-F magazines without including a human figure of either sex. Your last cover, although admittedly displaying an incident relatable to the story it porports to illustrate (many of the covers of magazines can be traced in no way to the supposedly-related story) does have a discrepency which could easily have been corrected had the illustrator read the story: the ship in the picture does not match the verbal picture. As to the format as a whole—except for economic ones I see no real reason why we should continue castigating honest literary efforts with the designation "pulp". If, economically, that is the only paper available to enable the publisher to maintain his contents at a good level, then by all means use that paper—it may be messy, but not nearly so messy as printing ungrammatical, thinly-disguised scatology and pornography on "slick". I have no special puritanical desire to see such things deleted from print as long as they are not mislabeled—an editorial problem, I believe, of seeing that each genre is printed in a vehicle appropriate to the genre.

No doubt there will be a storm of protest in making the definition too narrow; but if we are to have a code then it should be simple and fairly narrow. True, arguments can always be presented to include some favorite author who happens to slip once in awhile; but I think that there should be no reason why any author has to stick entirely to one genre of writing, nor do I think that all writings of any particular author should be crammed into one genre. But I do think that a magazine labeled science-fiction should print science-fiction.

—*Charles C. Custer, MD., P. O. Box* 1015, *Lanikai, Hawaii*

(It looks like a good working start for deciding whether a given story can justly be called "science-fiction" irrespective of its merits as a story. And that is what we need, first of all. By these standards, a number of favorites may be found not to be "science-fiction", while numerous tales which were rather far from good stories must be included in the genre. More discussion invited.)

●

RE-FORMULATION

Dear Editor:

Haven't had much time for reading of late, so I just got around to the September Future, although the next one is now on sale. My thanks to Mr. de Camp for answering my query, but it looks as if we've strayed from the point—or perhaps I didn't make it clear in the first place.

First of all, it seems pretty obvious that if the genuine article ever existed, or does exist, then the "true prophet" will still be pretty rare. So the number of "false prophets", while instructive enough, doesn't seem too relevant to the question, the way I see it.

What I wanted to get straightened out, in reference to the discussion on "false prophets" is simply this. (1) What would be the basis of judging as alleged "prophet"? I don't mean the basis on which persons claiming to be prophets *have* been assessed for the most part, but rather a scientific yardstick for the critter. And that would also bring up the point of *what kind of prophecies* (as opposed to scientific predictions drawn from tangible evidence) *would not qualify*. In the social and historical field, it would seem to me that we'd have to exclude forecasts of events in which the prophet could play a direct part, or in which the prophecy itself would have a measurable weight. (A person who heard, or read, the prophecy and believed it—or rejected it strongly enough to take action on its basis—might well do things he wouldn't have done otherwise.) So it would seem to follow that the prophecy *must not be heard* by anyone who can subsequently have a hand in the event predicted.

That probably isn't the only necessity. Oh, yes—then there was the point that the prophecy must not be such as could evolve out of the prophet's general or private stock of information—no inside tips. Twould seem that it would have to deal with events and persons concerning whom he had no prior knowledge. Perhaps even the quality of its being obscure to the prophet would be necessary. (2) On the basis of the accepted yardstick—and I was asking de Camp, who seems well up on the subject, to present a measuring rod for the purposes of this discussion—do we know of anyone who could qualify?

Or, to take another tack, and disregard some of the proposed building-materials for the yardstick I included above, what about something in the nature of Wells' speculations, not on the airplane itself but the limitations on its military use, which was sheer crystal-gazing at the time?

—*Murray King, Greenwich, Conn.*

(This isn't a private argument between Messers King and de Camp—it isn't even an argument. At any rate, let's hear from some of the rest of you who have ideas on the subject.)

●

AS TO THE FACTS...

Dear Sir:

In the interest of the proper evolution of science-fiction, I offer these observations.

Your authors, in having to write about places they have never seen, are in a position comparable to those authors writing about far-away places when the whole known world existed around the Mediterreanean Sea. Some of their best—or at least more known enduring—works were about Ulysses, Sinbad the Sailor, etc. The difference between these, and the modern-day travel adventure stories, has a certain parallel to the science-fiction stories of today, and what they will be, when based on actual experience when the planets are overrun and interstellar travel is history. If your authors would endeavor properly to orient themselves for their task, their scope of vision would expand to new horizons; however, prefer to ignore known facts and analysis for greater freedom of imagination. Such freedom is shortlived, and the imagination is soon traveling a closed circuit, for lack of new experience in thinking.

I would suggest that your department do the service of providing writers with mimeographed information—at least on the Solar System and request that they correlate their stories accordingly. All of the science-fiction readers I have known were first students of Astronomy and Science, through formal education or as a hobby, and having exhausted available non-fiction sources of information choose to read fiction as the only possible means of extension of their interest short of building their own spaceship.

With this thought in mind, is it any wonder that many of your letters express disgust, when we are expected—for example, at a story concerning Mars—to accept that which we know to be false; and even

are required to make radical adjustments of basic concepts, which we know to be contrary to facts, to the point where we must suffocate our intelligence before we are able to enjoy the plot of the story. I might as well try to enjoy reading a story describing Africa as an icy waste with nude mermaids in every fishing-hole—and, of course, the treasure somewhere that causes everyone to get murdered in the end.

About your cover; here is a governor's wife—a dignitary of a supposedly-civilized race of cultured people—caught in her unmentionables between a volcano and a spaceship. I think if General MacArthur wrote an epic on the Korean Conflict, and accidentally got one of your artists to paint a cover for it, it would depict a brazziere-clad lady caught in the crossfire of the UN, and Red Communist forces; and the only evidence of the latter would be blazing guns and explosions from the shadows. The worst of it is the cover usually doesn't have anything much to do with the story. I like my cover-girls to look like real people, rather than just vapid fleshpots. My dates wear just as brief fashions as the rags your artists drape their enticements with, but they wouldn't be caught dead in some of the costumes your cover-girls wear. (When the occasion calls for brevity, that is).

Murder in many of the science fiction stories is merely thrown in for good measure, and as a convenience in winding up the story without the finnesse of a good murder story. In the same manner authors throw in a bit of romance; a dash of wild west action; a little hawkshaw; and then place this hash in a setting such as Gandemade, Gallisto, or further, and figure, "Well, that's that for another month's grocery bill. If they would read books of Yerby, Shellenback, Robert Heinlein, and others, perhaps they might better understand how to give their characters a substantial personality. However, for personalities they substitute swear-words and slang in the effort to make their adventurers seem swashbuckling and devil may care.

Oh well; no doubt if you have read this far you will have decided I am an insane malcontent, whose only pastime is deriding the honest efforts of others. Perhaps not. However, I am not concerned; time and tide wait for no man—including science-fiction writers.

—Gunter R. Stave,—5406 E. 19th Street, Station B, Kansas City, Missouri

(When you see a story in a science-fiction magazine, wherein the "science" is false to known facts of that particular science, there are a number of possible explanations.

1. The author and editor didn't know better.

2. The author and editor didn't give a damn.

3. The author and editor both knew better, and will be mortified when the boner is pointed out to them. Just an honest error, committed in the heat of enthusiastic creation on the author's part, which wasn't noticed because the editor was also carried away by the story.

4. The author and editor both knew better, but decided to let a minor point ride for the sake of a good story.

5. It isn't established fact, after all; just a common impression.

6. New evidence has shown the accepted facts to have been wrong.

7. We haven't any evidence to go on, so any reasonable logic derived from the author's premises should be accepted for this story.

8. The author has set out to explore what might happen if the facts were otherwise.

In the instances of explanation 1: This shouldn't happen, but it does; and it will continue to happen. Most writers, even most science-fiction writers, cannot possibly be as well-informed on any particular science, or a spect of it, as any given reader. Few science-fiction editors have had as thorough a grounding in the sciences as would be ideally requisite; they often have to rely upon the integrity of the author, particularly when nothing *looks* wrong.

In the instances of explanation 2, no censure can be too great; such authors and/or editors have probably existed in the past, and there may be some today. If there are, I think they're exceptions and that they won't fool the science-fiction public long. Not in science-fiction *magazines*, at least. Personally, I have no use for any author who figures, "Well, it's only science-fiction; why should I exert myself for the nuts who like that sort of trash?" This isn't to say that I may not have been deceived by some such writers in the past—you can get away with it for a time if you turn out a good story and stick to the type of story where a considerable knowledge and understanding of science and science-fiction isn't necessary—and I may be taken in in the future. But not for long, in any event, I think.

Explanation 3 is the one I find to be most common. Here charity should be offered where the sinner is repentant and doesn't backslide too soon.

Explanation 4 is also common. In some instances the "minor point" is far from

minor, and the offendors have to be stepped on; but that is the risk they take. Usually, the point is unimportant enough not to offend. Almost any story in which humans and humanoid other-worlders mate and produce viable offspring, for example, is questionable at best. Assuming that they could reproduce at all, the odds are that the offspring would be sterile.

Explanation 5 is very frequent. Almost any story depicting human reactions to the environments of space, space-flight, and other worlds would fall into this group. Similarly the much-debated question of whether a spaceship can travel faster than light. There isn't any natural "law" which rules that light is the fastest-traveling stuff in the space-time continuum; it's just the fastest that has been discovered, so far.

Explanation 6 comes up very frequently. Example! for a long time there was reasonable "scientific" basis for describing the planet Venus as a sort of "hot-house world"; now, the latest evidence shows that the "facts are most likely quite different.

Explanation 8 is perfectly legitimate in science-fiction, *per se;* the proviso has to be that the author makes it clear that he's going against the "facts" deliberately, and he has to pass the test of convincingness.

We're getting away from the type of cover that was on the September *Future*, so there's no need to argue that point any longer. However, in reference to the costume of the governor's wife, I am assured by that eminent authority, John Van Praag, that she was dressed in the best of taste according to the standards of her world. By a laughable coincidence, this fitted nicely with the requirements for our covers at the time.

●

ALL GREEK

Dear Editor:

Here's one vote in favor of your running novels split up into series, although I'd prefer more definite sections than we had in the "Great Legend" stories. It was awfully close to being a four-part serial.

But I liked it—even though it galled me a little to be reading about ancient history in a magazine entitled *Future*. So far as I'm concerned, you're forgiven this time, but please don't do *that* again. Now that you have another magazine coming up, I, for one, would like to see enough of a difference amongst the three titles so that all stories might not be interchangeable.

I'd like to see *Future* confined to stories taking place in the future; no present day tales, although I don't mean necessarily far-future, either. Then *Science Fiction Quarterly* could be general science-fiction—even using the past if you have something really good in that line—while the newcomer has its own slant.

Oh—one hair to split on the "Great Legend" stories. The main characters are, of course, the old Greek gods, and some of the outstanding heroes of that mythology. But shouldn't "Heracles" have been "Herakles"? (The Greek version of the better-known, Romanized "Hercules".) Maybe I'm wrong, but the impression I've received from de Camp, and others, is that the Greek form (put into our alphabet) would call for a "k" where the Roman would use "c". This didn't impair my enjoyment of the stories—Wallace West was one of my favorites, years back, and he hasn't lost any of his appeal in his present material—but I'm curious on this point. (The only objection I have in the whole novel, and I'm not sure of that!)

I see you're changing the covers, at last. Well, the September one was the best of that particular lot—a perfect swansong for the "girlie" cover. The story, "Small Fry", was rather good, too. My impression is that Collins isn't very well up on science-fiction, but he'll improve when he has more of it inside him. I think it's a good idea to break in writers who have shown the ability to write a good story in other fields. (Unless I'm thinking of another Collins, and the author of "Small Fry" isn't the same Collins who's also done detective stories.) If Collins gets the feel of science-fiction, he might turn out very well in a few years, as John D. MacDonald did—after a few fumbles due to not realizing what had already been done too often.

Willis Freeman, Skowhegan, Maine.

(Since your letter came in the very day I was making up this department, brother Freeman, I won't be able to investigate your question on the Greek "k"; off hand, it looks as if you have a point, but we'll have to wait and see.

Nope, you don't have your Collins' mixed. Hunt has also written detective, western and sports stories.

●

OUR MISTAKE

Dear Sir:

We very much appreciate your printing in full our letter re Blavatsky and de Camp in your September issue, even though the typesetter appeared to find it

a good location for his allotment of typographical errors for the day. We are quite willing to settle for the results, as de Camp didn't answer any point that we consider important. However, if you can bear with us for a few lines, we will answer your own about "paranoid megalomaniac" and add some information about de Camp's quotes which may be of interest.

"Paranoid megalomaniac" came out in Italics for some reason, which was not the way we wrote it, but could give the impression that we meant the epithet in a technical manner. What we did mean is this: If, for instance, de Camp's remarks about H. P. Blavatsky were to annoy us to the extent that we spent most of our spare time for several years in research, trying to discredit everything he wrote, he would be justified in considering us "as nutty as a fruit cake." When we add the fact that what set Coleman off on a similar course about H. P. B. was a single letter from her—quite courteous, and such as received by innumerable others without umbrage—merely suggesting that, in order to meet the Mahatmas personally, he would have to go through a stiff course of self-discipline and self-development; we think we have a picture of mental pathology quite recognizable in psychiatry, and for which the nearest term would properly be "paranoid megalomania." Everything Coleman writes about her reflects a personal bitterness of extreme nature with nothing rational in the record to account for it—quite different, we may say, from de Camp's own attitude; to him, it all appears to be more or less like a game of checkers. If, on the basis of our remarks about him—which were far more adapted to give annoyance than anything H. P. B. wrote to Coleman—he were to make it a main object of his life hereafter to persecute *Theosophical Notes*, he would then be exemplifying the Coleman type of mind. We think that a pretty good case can be made out against anybody by a persistent and determined enemy.

In regard to his rebuttal quotes on the origin of the Stanzas: his references are tangled in two directions, one of which possibly is not his own fault. The 1888 edition of the *"Secret Doctrine" was not* the "Adyar" edition which is held, as he says, "uncanonical" by some Theosophical groups, including us. The 1888 was H. P. Blavatsky's orjginal edition, issued three years before her death. What he seems to refer to is the "third and revised" edition of 1893—which contains over 40,000 changes by others than H. P. B., some of them actual corruptions of meaning. That is why we hold it "uncanonical." In our Original Edition there are no such quotes on the pages cited. The second one occurs on p. 1 of the Proem; the first seems to be the one which is on p. xliii of "Introductory." If so, either it was changed after H. P. B.'s death (we do not have at hand the Adyar volume) or de Camp misquotes it. It does not say that the Stanzas were written in Atlantis, but in Central Asia at the time of the beginning of the Aryan Race; what it says about Atlantis is that the Senzar, in which they were written, was as well-known to the Atlanteans as to their own predecessors. As to the first part of the Stanzas being a "paraphrase" of the Rig Veda Hymn of Creation—that depends on which came first. They naturally look alike because they are describing the same thing. It would be as logical to say that a description of the genesis of the Solar System by one scientist was a "paraphrase" of the same by another. We hold that the Stanzas were probably the *origin* of the Rig Veda version, not the converse. Since we probably have no argument that would mean anything to de Camp, we will have to leave him to it. As to H. P. B.'s "chaotic writing"—it looks from here as though de Camp's troubles with the text were due more to his chaotic reading than her chaotic writing.

On the Editor's remark about colors of pots and kettles—the best suggestion is that interested parties do some rubbing on both, by personal reading, and see how they come out...

Blavatsky says something about the "lost ten tribes"—that there weren't any, and that their representatives who were alleged to have shown up at a certain historic gathering must have been ghosts.

Re sense of humor, etc: we do have one in a grim sort of way, but it gets worn thin now and then by people like Coleman and or de Camp.

Again thanking you,

—Editors THESOPHICAL NOTES, % Leo Louis Martello
653 Washington Street, New York 14, N.Y.

(The responsibility for italicizing "par-

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Readin' and Writhin'

(continued from page 85)

My chief objection is that the book seems all too short; I could easily have taken twice the length, without tiring, for the sake of more detailed treatment of the days the castaways spent before their rescue.

EVAN HUNTER'S "Find the Feathered Serpent" gets to first base on the strength of its opening idea: a search, back into the past, for the man who was actually the living basis of the Mayan god, Kukulcan—the "feathered serpent". A fascinating subject, and I spent half an hour looking over the "Central America" section of my encyclopedia, which relates briefly what is known. Unfortunately, the Hunter story dies on base, due to a complex of weaknesses. It isn't only that the "science" is dubious, where not absurd. (The author places Chichen Itza on the seacoast; a brief glance at the map shows it to be at least fifty miles inland. The Mayas our characters meet are, apparently, the very early ones—*before* the adopted of Kukulcan as the creator-god. This might be acceptable, except that Kukulcan, the feathered serpent; Chac, the rain-god; Itzamma, the sky-god—as well as lesser gods of maize and the sun—are all *early* Mayan deities. Moreover, the early Mayas didn't live in Yucatan, where Chicen Itza is found; the expansion into Yucatan marks the New Empire era of the Mayas. No gods are named at all in our story—although an elaborate ritual exists, including human sacrifice on important occasions. But human sacrifice came from Mexico, into the Yucatan Mayan culture. In short, the background is such a jumble as to suggest that little research was done upon it, as compared to the intricate thought that went into the other three books.) This might be forgiveable, however to be deplored, if we had a well-constructed story, with believable characters—but that is lacking, too. The "time-machine" just happens to go out of order; they just happen to land in the sea, right in time to be picked up by a Viking ship—which just happened to have been lost and in these waters at that time. The Vikings may be presented more accurately than the Mayas, but I don't find them believable. And, although there's action enough in the story, plot-threads are suddenly dropped as you go through; in the end, hardly anything has happened. Some persons have decried the device that the author uses—the basic plot-gimmick, which is revealed at the end—as being passe in science-fiction; on this score, I'll defend the author. There's no reason why he shouldn't have used this "twist"—after all, it hasn't been overdone for the particular market—and the only valid complaint is that it was not well done.

I'll get to the other book in this group, Miltotn Lesser's "Earthbound", next month.

★

anoid megalomaniac" in your letter was mine, although it wasn't deliberate. According to my policy, when a letter of criticism is directed to an author, I sent your letter on to Sprague, inviting a reply if he wished to make one. He underlined various parts of it, indicating what he would take up in his reply; and I forgot, by the time the letter was sent off to the printer, that this wasn't supposed to be in italics.

Incidentally, let me express my appreciation of your sending along a carbon of your present letter to pass on to the author; this aids debate, and makes such errors as the above less likely— I don't insert ital. into a letter where the reader has none, unless he has put a phrase in capitals, which same I don't care for; it reminds me of a Hearst editorial.)

●

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

I am writing a "History of Science Fiction" in collaboration with a well known pro-editor, and for that reason would like to complete my collection of reference-material, especially in the line of rarities.

For one thing, I would like to buy copies of all fan magazines ever published. This isn't really an impossible task since I do have a tremendous background of "franzines" numbering several thousand, beginning with the very earliest in 1930.

I would also like verification on several elusive stories, supposed to have been published about thirty years ago. I say, "supposed to have been," because I've never read any specific information as to their whereabouts. Two of these particular titles are "The Betelgeuse Express" and "Within the Earth-Atom," the latter supposed to have been a four-part serial.

Among the rarities needed for our sets are certain copies of the *Black Cat* Magazine, first year *Weird Tales*, large-size issues of the *Thrill Book* (or any other issues in fact, since they could be used for trading purposes), the January, 1930 issue of *Astounding Stories*, and the two issues of *Miracle, Science and Fantasy Stories*.

We're only interested in mint copies of the *Astounding*, and *Miracle Stories*, however, having in mind a reproduction of their covers.

You will be doing us a great service by featuring this letter in your readers' department.

—*Larry B. Farsace,*
187 North Union Street,
Rochester 5, N.Y.

DOWN TO EARTH

●

CALLING GENE HUNTER

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

I've just finished reading the September issue of *Future Science Fiction*. Thought I'd write and let you know I enjoyed it very much. All the stories, it seems to me, were quite well written. My favorite, though, was "The Gods Fear Love", by Gene Hunter.

Speaking of GH, I wonder if you have any data on him. I knew someone of that name, and just wondered if the two could be one and the same person.

About the covers: as far as I'm concerned, they look fine to me. I'm really more interested in the stories, on the inside.

All in all, you have a fine and interesting magazine. Here's hoping you can keep up the good work.

—*Dani Gilleland,*
1807 *Durant Avenue,*
Oakland 3, *California.*

(Mr. Hunter works through an agent, so I couldn't tell you anything about him. Suggest you inquire of Forrest Ackerman, 915 S. Sherbourne Dr., Los Angeles 35, Calif.)

●

CONTRARIWISE

Dear RWL:

Just a note to register disagreement Mr. Jerry Megahan, who contends (September *Future*, page 86, top of left column) that "Down to Earth" is one of the worst letter-departments in science-fiction magazines. I keep an eye on nearly all of them, and I can't buy that decision, or even borrow it. Of course, I don't know if Jerry was trying to sell it, or loan it out. In any event it's his, and he has a right to it. He also has a right to let you, and everyone else who reads your magazine, in on it.

All that's okay with me. I just wanted to let you know that this reader considers "Down to Earth" one of the best letter-departments in science-fiction magazines, and I'm not praising you in order to run the others down. You have very fine competition here, as well as in every other department of your magazine (I'm con-

[*Turn Page*]

sidering the fiction as a "department", just for the purpose of separating things) and think you stack up well all around.

—*Jay Tyler*, 127 *East* 128*th Street*, *New York N. Y.*

(So far, we haven't received any seconds to Mr. Megahan's motion, but maybe some will come in now, eh? Well, if you readers agree with Jerry, I want to know about it. I'd like to hear also which you think are the best letter-departments, and what it is they have that we haven't. It may be something we can't get on unless it comes naturally—in that case, I have to be patient. But if the majority agree with Jerry, and there are any corrections I can make—they'll be made!)

●

DOOM TO THE SERIES

Dear Doc:

I am not exactly a staunch supporter of *Future*, usually religiously by-passing it on the newsstands, but of late I wonder if I have been missing something. That is a possibility. I'm thinking of the last issue—July 1952.

The cover is good. At this time it outshadows easily the current covers on *Astounding* and *Galaxy*. Take a look on the magazine-rack and see.

What is of special interest to me is the novelet by Wallace West. West has been an occasional writer since the early days of *Weird Tales;* only within the last three years or so has he begun appearing with any consistency.

And, being somewhat of an action-fantasy fanatic I can only approve the current series. Long may it endure!

I'm afraid I can not be as favorable and enthusiastic in my comments, in reference to the suggestion that Judy Merrill made. What is she trying to do—start another Cthulhu Mythos? It might be all right for *one* author to do it, but for a whole set of authors it sounds pretty impossible to me. First of all there's the difficulty involved; time-lapse difficulty. How many months is it from acceptance of a story to publication, Suppose that a writer makes up a story based on the setting, then, before his can be published, another of the series, written by a different author, appears which is contrary to some things in *his* story. Imagine how troublesome it would be to an author to try to write a story in the series; he'd have to limit his imagination to fit the series and be very carefully

withal. That is no longer science-fiction; that's historical fiction!

What I *would* like to see would be a series of stories, written by different authors using the *same basic plot*. By that I mean, some basic discovery-and-reversal. I'd better make it more definite than that. A writer friend of mine is planning a novel in which the hero is incited against a person. The hero follows this hated person into a place in order to kill him. He goes about doing this, having to face many obstacles. At last it comes about that he does not kill him; in fact, he, the hero, has gone through preliminary testing by certain-high-and-mighty forces, to see if he is capable of something.

Well, I wrote a story with the same plot myself, but consider this difference: my friend plans a far-future setting, and the place, into which he follows the guy he's going to kill, is the Science Building. A group of scientists need a person with certain qualities for an experiment which they plan to carry out upon him. Such an experiment is, of course, illegal; the person himself is, by definition, someone who would not willingly accept experimentation on himself; so, he is moved along, a pawn, to the final end. My story has the same plot, but my setting is thousands of years in the past, in a city of old Babylon and the controlling, ruling force is a mystic god. Thus, by different applications of the same plot completely variant stories can result.

Thus: with any given plot—de Camp might make a farce out of it; van Vogt might make it a powerful mental melodrama; George O. Smith might make it gadget-hounded space opera, etc.

The results might be interesting.

But for your future-history series: I am Cassandra and I cry *"Doom!"*

It is quite possible that there are, among your readers, people who live in and around Philadelphia and would like to join the Phildelphia Science Fiction Society (whose members include L. Sprague de Camp, Alan Nourse, Ozzie Train, Milt Rothman, etc.). I would greatly appreciate (and that particular group might, also) if you would say (or let me say) that any one interested in the Phila. S-F Society could find out all about it (including members, dates of meetings, programs, etc.) by dropping a card to me.

[*Turn Page*]

FUTURE Science Fiction

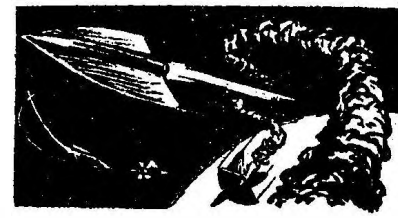
And, for the sake of those people interested in getting originals, I think the best letters in the July issue were by the three girls (or at last females): Judy Merril, Evelyn Catoe, and Felice Perew.

—Dave Hammond, 806 Oak Street, Runnemede, N. J.

(Should a series, such as Judith Merril proposed, be set into motion, the problems you suggest would be ironed out well in advance; each author would be informed as to the status of the background, to date, before being asked to carry it along.

Your suggestion about a number of different stories constructed around one plot isn't bad by any means—but it "happens" often enough without foreplanning. The main difference between a deliberate series, and what has frequently happened in the past, is that, in this instance both authors and readers would be aware in advance of what was afoot. Writers have frequently rewritten other writers' plots without realizing it, often without drawing the notice of any but a few fans with microscopic eyes and long memories. Your editor was amused within the last year or so, to find that a couple of his early efforts had been reworked; in neither case was there any ground for suspecting plagiarism or the like, and both exhibits were good stories. When this sort of thing happens, origins do not matter so long as the result is original.)

Coming Next Issue



COURIER OF CHAOS

A Fascinating Novelet of Free-Will Feedback
by Poul Anderson

THE MOON IS DEATH

A Powerful Short Story
by Raymond F. Jones

THE RECKONING

A Report on Your Votes and Comments

Four out of six stories, this time, seemed to meet with your unqualified approval; one reader showed a distressing lack of confidence in Fyfe, and a few didn't like the third novelet in Wallace West's series. The most interesting case, in this post-mortem, is that of Dave Dryfoos—with but three exceptions, he was picked for either second place, or next-to-last.

There seems to be a bit of confusion about the voting on the "series of novelets" question, some apparently thinking that a vote in favor meant an automatic nod at the "Great Legend" series. It doesn't; you can dislike this particular example without being against the series-novelet idea in itself. Some, contrariwise, have voted "no" on the idea, but expressed approval of the West stories, nonetheless. At present, the votes show pretty much of an even split between those in favor, and those opposed.

The way the stories came out this time is as follows:

1.	**The Gods Fear Love (Hunter)**	**2.30**
2.	**Small Fry (Collins)**	**2.60**
3.	**Final Barrier (Nourse)**	**3.50**
4.	**Facts of Life (Dryfoos)**	**3.60**
5.	**We Will Inherit (West)**	**4.20**
6.	**Confidence (Fyfe)**	**4.80**

A number of readers have suggested that we try something of the "modern art" approach in our covers, and Luros' job, this time, is a step in that direction. Those of you who may feel that the woman was somewhat more the boudoir-type than is really needed can take comfort in the fact that your editor, art director, and publisher recently held an inquest over this cover and came to the same conclusion: we don't need so much flesh on the covers. That aspect to the side, we're eager to know if you like the general slant of this cover; the next one will be more conventional, but we promise you there'll be considerably less flesh—oh yes, considerably!

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Number these in order of your preference, to the left of numeral; if you thought any of them bad, mark an "X" beside your dislikes.

—1. Time Stops Today (Wyndham) .....
—2. The Compleat Collector (Fyfe) .....
—3. Minority Decision (Walton) .....
—4. Hypnotism: Fact vs. Fiction (Martello) ..
—5. In The Beginning (Knight) .....
—6. Incident In Iopa (Wilson) .....
—7. Testiment Of Andros (Blish) .....

Would you like to see more of the "modern art" type of cover? .....

Who are your nominees for the three best letters in "It Says Here"?

1. .....
2. .....
3. .....

General Comment .....

.....

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