

STIRRING SCIENCE STORIES

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REBIRTH OF TOMORROW

SCIENTIFIC NOVELETTE
by Hugh Raymond

BLACK FLAMES

FANTASY NOVELETTE
by Lawrence Woods

S. D. Gottesman, Clark Ashton Smith,
David H. Keller and others

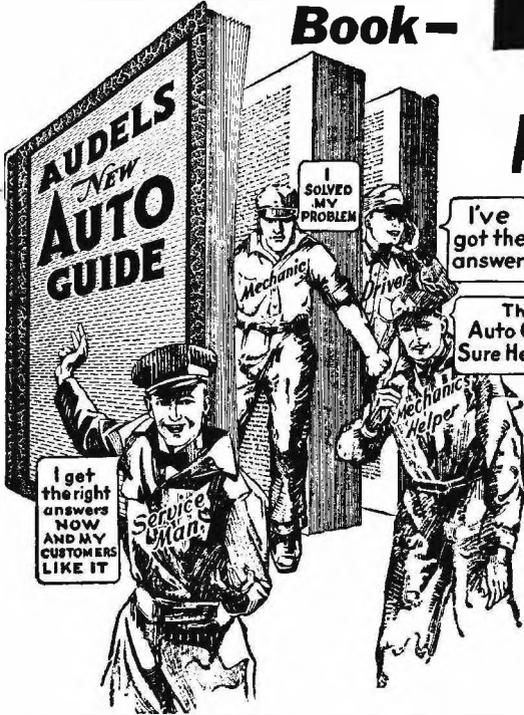
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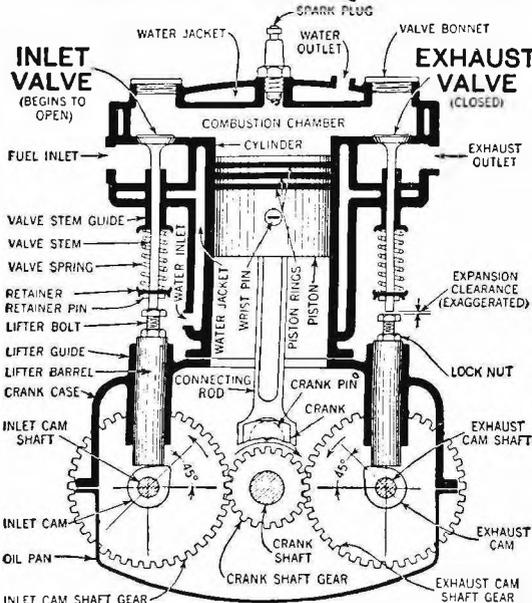
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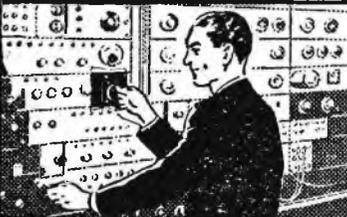
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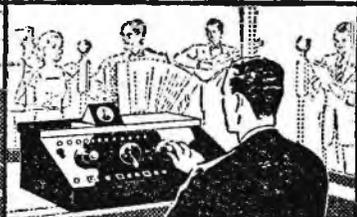
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STIRRING SCIENCE STORIES

VOLUME I

APRIL, 1941

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Cover Illustration by Hannes Bok

Interior Illustrations by Bok, Hunt, Forte, Kyle, Coe.

DONALD A. WOLLHEIM, Editor **JERRY ALBERT, Man. Ed.**

All characters mentioned in the stories contained herein are fictitious, and any similarity to actual persons living or dead is accidental.

Published bi-monthly by Albing Publications, Office of publication, 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and Executive offices, 19 East 48th Street, New York, N. Y. Entered as second-class matter December 12, 1940, at the post office at Holyoke, Massachusetts, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright 1941 by Albing Publications. Manuscripts should be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelope, and are submitted at the author's risk Yearly Subscription, 90c; Single Copies, 15c.

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69-75	100.00	200.00	300.00

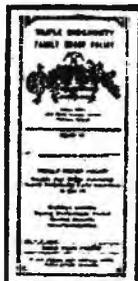
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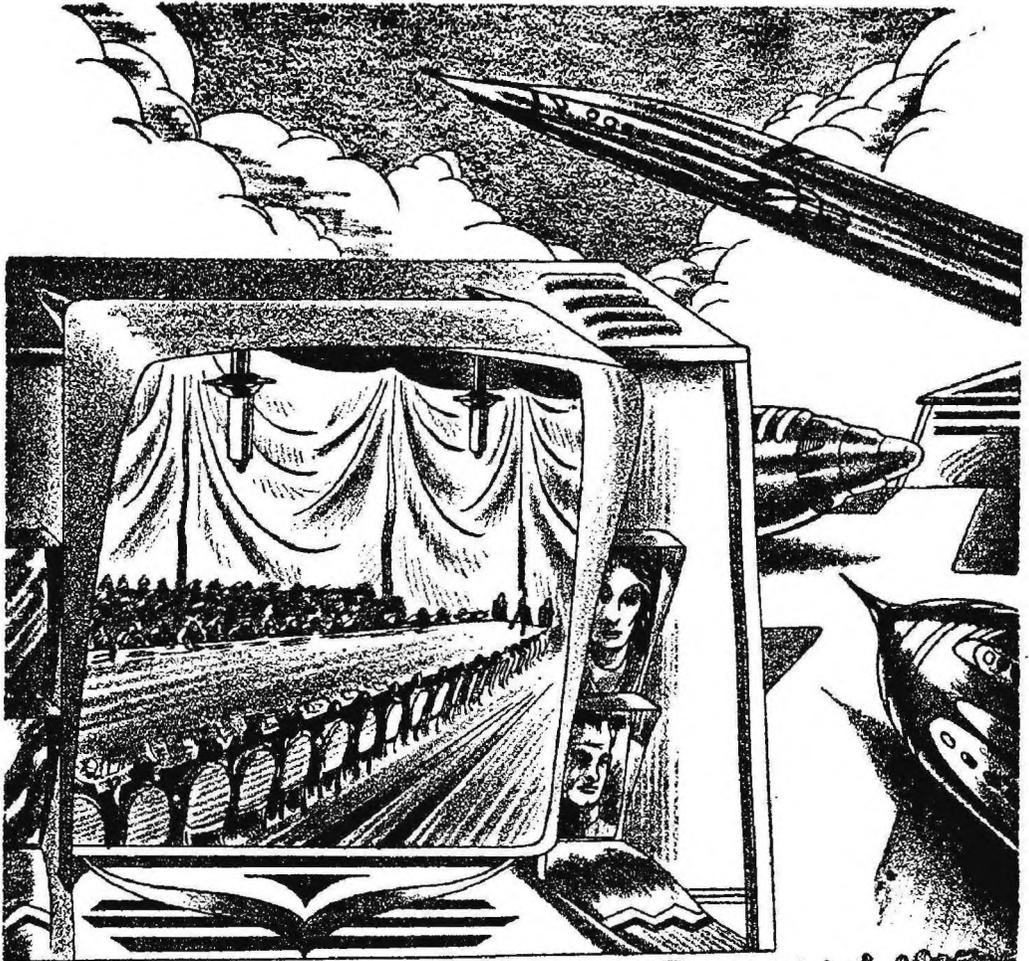
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REBIRTH OF TOMORROW

by Hugh Raymond

(Author of "The Last Viking," "He Wasn't There," etc.)

Peter Haldane returned from space to find the World Government planning to turn mankind back three hundred years. It meant the end of space flight, the end of atomic power!

PETER HALDANE, citizen of the World State, was coming home. Coming home from outer space, from the great reaches of the planetoid belt, where, for six months, he had combed the dust-filled void for traces of the valuable element used in the release of atomic energy. Six months of constant searching, searching that had been crowned triumphantly with success. In the loading chambers of the space car reposed, in great tanks of sodium, powdered quantities of the infinitely precious metal upon which the fabric of Earth's civilization depended—enough to last the whole requirement of the planet for the next hundred years.

Fleecy clouds appeared in the ports. Then the thunder of the atomic rockets became audible, even through the protective padded helmet he wore, satisfied him with their deep, steady roar. With some difficulty he lifted his head again, glanced sidewise; far off to the horizon gleamed a curving wall of water: the ocean.

Presently the rockets ceased their roar and a clicking sound from outside betrayed the unfolding of wings required for landing. The folding slots opened outward and suddenly the slim rocket took on the semblance of a bird.

New York came into view, seen in patches, as the space-bird swooped and dipped, preparatory to landing.

The straps of the space-swing opened and an automatic radio clattered into action. Before Haldane, the central screen on the panel glowed suddenly with the interior of the control room atop the great Interplanetary Tower midway on Manhattan Island. He threw off his cumbersome suit, hung it away quickly in a metal closet set into the curving wall and returned to the screen.

An exclamation of pleasure burst from his lips. "Crane!"

"Hello, old skylark!" The words crashed out at him in incredible volume and clarity. "Nice to see you back. Lanya's been anxious, too."

At the mention of her name, Peter Haldane's heart stood still. He had left her reluctantly six months before; though his life companion, she had been required to stay behind to continue her duties as Head Psychologist of her section of the New York social complex for the adolescent classes.

He smiled, but the smile faded as he caught sight of the emblem of the World State blazoned on the wall behind Crane's back and the draped flag hung about it.

Back to Earth, he mused. Back to Earth—and duty. Duty.

Crane's eyes flamed with instant recognition of his friend's attitude; he nodded sympathetically. "See you at the space-port," he said quietly; the screen went blank.

HALDANE DREW his short weather cloak about him and walked to one of the ports. Landing in New York was always an exciting event for him, though he had done it a thousand times. Still the great social center on the face of the planet, New York had altered radically since the establishment of the new order in 1960, the age of power and planning. Gone, now, were the scattered skyscrapers, the dusty, muck-strewn slums, the crowded, narrow boulevards. In their stead rose twenty giant pylons, each fully a half mile high and several thousand feet across at the base, between which stretched park land dotted thickly with many hundreds of smaller structures. Four immense highways traversed the island, crossed on both ends on enormous high-flung spans, into the Bronx and Brooklyn, now altogether wooded or sown with infinite stretches of grass.

It was evening and already the giant pylons glowed with the fierce, brilliant glow of internal illumination.

Atop the Interplanetary Tower, the central pylon, fluttered the great flag of the World State with its heroic emblem blazoned in gold. Haldane regarded it with impatient eyes. A relic, he thought, of smaller times and darker days; thoughtfully he cupped his chin, regarded the fluttering folds.

He remembered in time to hang on tightly to the handrail as the automatic controls forced the space-car into its last long dive to the Hudson. A moment now and it was rocking on the surface of the water. He climbed out, stood silently on the back of the mighty flyer. Behind him towered the black bulk of the Palisades; to the east flamed New York.

He waited a few minutes, then descended as the landing boat, manned by a silent attendant, bumped against the rocket's side. He threw himself expertly down the curving sides, landed in the boat without a bruise.

Abruptly the great steel hatch closed, underwater tanks began to open, and amid a mighty gurgling and splashing of water, the rocket disappeared beneath the Hudson. Haldane promptly forgot it; he knew that automatic controls would guide the machine to the water-locks opposite the space-port at the lower end of the island and berth it in the giant hangars cut into the solid granite hundreds of feet below the surface. The tiny boat moved rapidly to shore.

A swiftly-moving sidewalk carried him in a few minutes to the base of the Interplanetary Tower and in another half-minute he jumped off at sight of a familiar figure.

"Hello!" Saturo Kuoshibe, a tall, gangling, middle-aged Japanese, clapped him on the shoulder.

"Hello yourself! Where's Lanya?"

Crane walked up in time to answer. "She couldn't come just yet; had to attend to some classes. Well, where's the report? I have to hand it in to the Central Committee."

Haldane frowned. "Damn the Central Committee! I haven't got a report; didn't make one out. Why should I go to all that infernal trouble? The automatic recorders tell the full story." Abruptly he shook himself, smiled. "Sorry, Crane. I know you have to hand it in, but I haven't got it."

The Japanese shook his head sadly. "I do not know how long the Committee is going to tolerate this laxness. I've been reprimanded twice

for failing to turn in my own weekly report. Frankly, they are getting to be a nuisance; what is the use of adding more piles of hand-written data to the tons they have down-island?"

Crane grunted sympathetically. "It's going to be something approaching Goetterdammerung, this time, but I guess we can manage it."

"Eaten yet?" asked Kuoshibe.

Crane nodded. "Have to go now," he added. He waved and hopped the moving sidewalk.

"How about my quarters?" asked the Japanese of Haldane. "I've some canned suki yaki from my brother in Kobe."

Haldane pushed the other into a lift. "Move on; I accept."

PETER CAME OUT of the wash-room in time to see the other laying out the plastron eating utensils.

"What's new?" he asked, towelling himself briskly.

Saturo shut off the heater, brought the glowing containers to the table and opened them daintily.

"Nothing you haven't heard. What did you bring in?"

Haldane sat down, basking in the warm glow of the food. "I have solved," he said a trifle pompously, "the power problem of the planet for at least the next fifty years. Sixty tons of baranite."

Kuoshibe grinned maliciously. "You'll probably get a medal."

Haldane snorted disdainfully. "They can go to hell! Don't you ever get tired of these stupid bureaucrats mussing up your work?"

"Lanya did," replied the other quietly. "She failed to attend a section meeting and was hauled up before the section committee two days ago.

They threatened her with loss of her duties, told her that disregard of the formalities was practically treason to the government."

"The government!" Haldane swallowed a glass of water, waved his arm wildly. "There isn't any government; what the devil is all this authority of theirs? This ordering about and disciplining? The planet runs like clockwork with automatic machinery which repairs itself. We don't need authority; we've arrived, after two centuries and a half, at a condition of equilibrium; society runs itself."

Kuoshibe reached back and set the radio humming out a soft melody before replying. "Yes, society runs itself. And still the committees go on; still the World Government meets and issues orders; still there are officials and World Presidents."

"I wonder for how long?"

The other regarded him with a level glance. "As long as *we* permit it."

Haldane flung down his fork, wiped his mouth with a paper napkin. "*We*? What are *we*, Saturo? *Who* are *we*?"

Kuoshibe shut off the radio, then gathered up the dishes and dumped them down the waste chute. "*We* are *we*, just like that." He squatted cross-legged on a low antimacasser set under a great window facing the north. "*We* are the opposition, the ones who dislike control. I've been reading some old books lately and obtained a better insight into just who and what *we* are."

"Who wrote these old books?" Haldane asked.

"Old fools. By name H. G. Wells, Olaf Stapledon, and a few others. They were the old social prophets. Half-baked, of course, as the present

state of civilization proves, but they weren't all wrong. They warned about this great revolt against the universe. Have you ever spoken to any of the men and women at the social gatherings? Dull clods, aren't they? Alive, aware, yes. Valuable members of the social order, yes. But somehow dead; somehow on one side of a barrier they cannot cross. They are not Star-Begotten."

"Star-Begotten?"

"An awkward term invented by Wells. He used it to describe a group of people in a fantasy of his. They were supposed to be influenced from afar by mysterious forces, more alive, more sensitive than other people. They looked always to the stars; the rest were content to play on the earth."

"I know Wells," said Haldane softly.

"It is perhaps better not to know him. Karvex Kent and Maigha Khan might object."

"The World President and his faithful lover? I haven't seen either of them for a year."

"You will see them soon," said Kuoshibe quietly.

Abruptly the vision screen glowed, a buzz interrupted the conversation. Kuoshibe barked something rapidly. An automatic control hummed and the screen cleared, Crane's face appearing.

"Peter! You're on call to the Power Council. Better get down right away; Langston is hopping mad."

Haldane rose. "All right," he growled as he slipped on his weather cape, strode toward the door of the apartment. "Crane!" he called, as he opened the portal, "tell Lanya to wait up for me. Thanks for the meal, Saturo; see you tomorrow."

CHAPTER II

THE POWER COUNCIL awaited Haldane in silence. Grouped about a large table on the ground floor of Pylon #3 at the south end of the island sat Thomas Langston, chairman of the Council. To his right sat Alberta Gold, Jon Payne, and Anita Wang. To his left were seated Mathias Greyson, Jean Galbreth, and Stuhmer Goes.

There was silence as the great doors were flung open and Haldane advanced to the foot of the council table, silence while the tension heightened. The members of the council sat rigidly in their chairs, regarding the space pilot with cold eyes. Only Mathias Greyson, the great atomic engineer, seemed to regard the occasion with levity. His great black eyes, infinitely kind and understanding, blazed now with sardonic amusement.

Langston frowned and rustled some papers in front of him with an annoyed air. He regarded Haldane, who was standing in front of him relaxed, with hostility.

"We understand that you have refused to submit a written report to the Central Committee. Do you realize that this constitutes technical insubordination? What have you to say?"

Haldane waited a full minute before replying. He glanced around the council table taking full note of the absurd formality of the situation.

"I have nothing to say except this: the automatic recorders contain full information as to the fulfillment of the assignment I was given. Frankly, I feel that the Council is putting much too much stress on a matter of little or no importance." He looked Langston full in the eyes. "In fact,

it seems to me that the Council is more concerned with the preservation of useless formalities than with fundamentals."

Alberta Gold thrust back her chair and stood up. The greatest expert on the atom in the Western hemisphere, her tall, somewhat plump figure towered commandingly over the rest. Again Mathias Greyson smiled.

"The main question, I think," she remarked furiously, "is whether or not the authority of the Central Committee—which appointed us to the Power Control—has any weight. This 'technical insubordination' is not the first case the Control has encountered in the past few years. Such occasions are becoming more and more frequent. I have only to cite the recent example of," she paused to regard Haldane with a curious glance, "Lanya Quayle." Again she turned to the Council. "I suggest that immediate discipline be applied."

Langston thrust back his white velvet coat with a gesture and stood up. "I agree." He fixed his glare upon the pilot. "Peter Haldane, as a punishment for resisting the reasonable request of the Power Council for a formal, written report, you are hereby ordered to the confinement of your quarters for the full period of a week."

There was silence for an instant, then Haldane burst out laughing. "And who," he demanded, "is to enforce this ridiculous order?"

THE COUNCIL was taken aback at the potency of his question; furious exclamations broke from several members. Langston sat silently, seething with rage. Again, only Mathias Greyson preserved a semblance of reason. He raised his arm.

"Permit me," he said, rising, "I

believe that Haldane has spoken with a certain amount of truth. I feel that the Council has overextended its authority in this matter."

"We cannot be disregarded!" burst out Alberta Gold, while Jon Payne and Stuhmer Goes nodded vigorously. "The authority of the Power Council has not been disregarded or abrogated in all its three hundred years of existence!"

Greyson waved his hand in a gesture of deprecation. "My dear Alberta, the facts cannot be hidden beneath a cloak of rhodomontade. I repeat that the Council has exceeded its authority. Haldane was assigned a specific job over six months ago; that job has been completed—successfully."

"But the Council . . ."

"The Council, it seems, no longer has anything to say. As long as a citizen of the World State fulfills his duty to the welfare of the planet, and at that with neatness and dispatch, the Council has no grounds for complaint. I would consider the matter as closed."

Langston was forced to acquiesce; the tall man fumed and spluttered for awhile. "All this," he remarked with venom, "is plainly an indication of the subtle decay that is overtaking society. The great planners who established the World State were not anarchists; they would never have countenanced this flagrant flouting of an important organ of state power." He turned to the engineer. "Greyson, I am astonished that you—you who were once the life and soul of this Council—should lend your tremendous influence to the opposition. It is incredible. Unbelievable!"

The engineer was not moved. "The social scientists who built our World State did not intend that their dead

arms should extend over the years to rule a planet that would now seem to be ruling itself."

Alberta Gold interrupted, pointing an accusing finger. "Let us cease indulging in fantasies. The men and women who began this could not envision the problems that confront us today: a rising hysteria, mass neurosis, inexplicable anarchy, and a subtle decay in the beliefs that are the foundation stone of society. Yes, even sabotage!"

Haldane started. "Sabotage!"

Greyson noticed his confusion. "Since you have been away," he said quietly, "a number of instances of industrial wrecking have occurred. Motivation for these acts, as far as can be determined, is completely lacking. Gold has mentioned mass neurosis: that is the conclusion of the psychologists. A mass revolt against the extension of science, of knowledge; a secret, subconscious expression of a mighty fear of the unknown—of the universe itself."

"But these things have been known for many years!" cried Haldane. "Essentially they are a reactionary phenomenon . . ."

"I myself consider them so," replied Greyson. "But apparently the Supreme Council does not. The recent decision to limit space-flying . . ."

"What!" Haldane stood aghast.

". . . Will eventually amount to complete prohibition of space-travel."

"For what reason?" demanded Haldane, regarding the Council with accusing eyes.

"For the preservation of reason!" roared Langston. "A preventative against social anarchy! These outbreaks of madness must stop; they *shall* stop, even if the Supreme Council has to seal the planet away from

the universe. These new ideas; these new billions of books; these"—he groped for a word, "—these heretical notions; this mad, stupid dipping into the unknown must be suppressed!"

He paused, eyes alight with the frenzied glow of the fanatic.

"Langston!" cried the engineer. "You forget yourself."

The chairman of the Power Council stared past him unseeing. His voice was now calm. "I give voice only to what is already in the minds of the Central Committee and the Supreme Council. You know these things as well as I . . ."

ABRUPTLY THE great room shook to the reverberations of a distant explosion. Wave upon wave of crushing sound penetrated the mighty plastron walls. The Council rose to its feet as an attendant dashed in, eyes horror-stricken.

"What is it?" rasped Greyson.

"The Central Atomic Power Plant has exploded! The entire northern end of the island is in flames!"

Only Greyson and Haldane lingered as the rest of the Council streamed out of the chamber. The space-flyer stood immobile. He raised a hand to his forehead, brushed it lightly.

"I don't know," he stammered. "I don't know—"

Greyson leaped to his side. "Courage, man! Everything Langston said is true except that Reason must be suppressed. That must not happen." His great eyes flashed. "We are at the end of an epoch, the epoch of control, of authority, of the ability of tyrants, whether by hand or brain, to impede human progress. Look at me, Haldane! You have traversed the highways of space, felt the boundless

void, seen the stars. Would *you* give them up for a pittance, this puny earth? Would you surrender to this small call to the suppression of hunger, this license to run riot on a planetary prison while the universe beckons? The cosmos, man—the cosmos itself calls us! Would you surrender the stars for the security *they* seek?"

Haldane shook his head. "I would not. But *we* are not many; isn't the struggle hopeless?"

"I do not think so. Those ancestors of ours who created the basis of all this did so knowing that it was but necessary to put humanity on the right track. From that point it would go on, confidently, to eternity. These disorders, this mass hysteria—real though it may be—are temporary manifestations. But *we* must prevent them from being fostered; if they are not, a very real danger exists. Langston and Gold are representatives of the viewpoint which seeks to throw the social order back to a prehistoric condition."

Suddenly Haldane came alive. "What are we standing here for? The upper end of the city is in ruins, if I know anything about atomic blasts." He seized Greyson's arm. "Let's go!"

CHAPTER III

TO THE NORTH, the night sky was lit with raging fires. Haldane stopped short as they dashed out of the pylon. What about Kuoshibe, Lanya? His heart sank; he looked to the great highway passing just outside the pylon. Interminable streams of rescue tanks, equipped with all manner of devices for removing wreckage flowed past, manned by both men and women.

He called out to one of them as his tank rumbled by.

"How many pylons destroyed?"

The operator shrugged his shoulders. "Pylons 13, 14, and 17 have collapsed. That's all I know."

A warm hand touched Haldane's heart. Lanya, Kuoshibe safe! Greyson nudged him.

"Let's get aboard one of these tanks. Some of them need help."

They waited until a tank came up manned by a boy of eighteen who seemed to have difficulty managing it. Haldane and Greyson sprang aboard.

"Want some help, son?" cried the engineer above the roar of the motors.

The boy nodded gratefully. He reached into a recess beneath the control panel, dragged forth two pairs of heavy gloves. These he gave to Greyson, who handed a pair to Haldane.

After a while the boy yielded his place at the driving controls to Haldane. He took over the disintegrating beam which assisted in tearing down wreckage. Designed primarily for intensive and heavy mining, the great tanks were easily converted to the purpose for which they were now being used. Greyson manned the powerful arms of the atomic jacks.

They passed Pylons 4, 5, 6, and 7. Still the northern sky blazed in pyrotechnic splendor. And now they could smell the burning wreckage. Great gusts of flame exploded into the sky, just behind the location of the destroyed power plant. Evidently the catastrophe had indeed completely levelled the surrounding towers.

They came at last to the great crater where the plant had formerly stood; on all sides was horrifying destruction and noise. Great burning

piles of metal erupted continuously. Activated by small quantities of bar-anite, the supporting girders of the power plant had turned into atomic bombs which exploded continually in terrifying relays. The entire surrounding region had been devastated.

Haldane clutched Greyson's arm. "Look!" he cried, pointing to the north.

Beyond, as if by magic, a thousand tanks came into formation around the great pile of wreckage that had been pylon 14. Line by great, circling line they piled up and, at a signal, hurled themselves upon the burning building. Suddenly the hiss of disintegrator rays stabbed through the uproar, and the assault upon the destruction began. The sullen thunder of thousands upon thousands of mighty atomic motors beat down the chaotic explosions of the activated steel. Gradually the tanks conquered the metal and extinguished the atomic fires. Against the background of pylon 17, which still blazed far to the north, they resembled monstrous devils playing with gigantic energies.

Haldane swung the tank around the outer circle and directed it toward 17; here the maneuver was repeated. Surrounding the pylon, the tank and hundreds of others advanced in repeated waves against the forces of destruction.

Finally, the entire massed force deployed into a gigantic circle that completely surrounded the entire area of devastation and closed in, disintegrating beams playing constantly on the ground before.

Within an hour not a spark remained alive. Where once had stood cloud-defying pylons and the great central power plant, was nothing but a vast, churned, empty space.

The tanks withdrew at once be-

hind pylons 18 and 13, allowed the heavy ground levelers to come into action. Presently, growling, these immense land tractors lumbered forward from both north and south, met precisely at the dividing line between the two halves of the destroyed area.

GREYSON SHUT OFF the driving gears of the tank and picked the boy from the metal floor under the controls of the disintegrating beam; he had fainted.

Haldane pulled off his gloves, stared northward.

"There must have been three hundred thousand people in those buildings," he said helplessly, stepping down to the ground.

"Dead," replied Greyson flatly. He was vainly trying to revive the boy. "See if you can get some water."

They waited awhile, until the expected supply trucks came up. Haldane dashed out onto the great highway as one of the trucks swung by.

"Lanya!" he cried.

The truck swerved dangerously, swept into a sharp curve and lumbered back. It came to a halt in front of him; the girl driver leaped out and flew into his arms. He pressed her to him, unmindful of his grimy, sweating cheeks and the smouldering remnants of his clothes.

Ignoring them, Greyson jumped into the truck and drove off, returning shortly with a container of water. He dashed it over the boy's face; In a little while, the fellow's eyes flicked open.

"You're all right, son," said the engineer cheerfully.

The boy pushed out an arm and raised himself; he gazed out, into the now-dark spaces.

"My mother," he faltered.

The engineer bit his lip. "If she

was in any of those buildings, she's gone now," he said softly.

The other looked at him, bewildered, for an instant, then burst into hysterical tears. Lanya tore herself from Haldane's embrace, took the lad into her arms, smoothing his hair, comforting.

Greyson took Haldane aside; they both moved up the roadway, drew back from the confusion that reigned about them. Great trucks arrived and departed; rescue tanks streamed past, returning to their stalls at the south end of Manhattan, far beneath the ground level. The two men stood in silence for a moment, watching. Finally Haldane spoke.

"This seems like the end. The Supreme Council will interpret this catastrophe as a good excuse to tear down every atomic power plant on the planet."

Greyson clenched his fists. "I have seen this coming for a long time; we must not give in; we must never consent! I have struggled too long to want to see that. You are right about the Council; we must organize at once.

"They will call a meeting immediately, appeal to the primitive instincts of the people. I have some friends . . ." He stopped and looked upward; a small atomic flyer was descending.

As it landed, Crane and Kuoshibe alighted; the Japanese glanced coldly about him.

"This is hardly the place to remain," he said. "I suggest we return to my apartment. It is perfectly obvious that conditions have suddenly altered—radically. Get Lanya."

The girl, however, was coming toward them. She turned and waved to the boy who had remounted the tank and was swinging it toward the

south. The great, slow monster crawled up to the highway, teetered for an instant on the incline of the roadbed, then roared forward. He waved good-bye.

CHAPTER IV

PYLON 20 WAS a scene of the utmost confusion. Great streams of people rushed through the entrance hall, bewildered, not knowing what to do. Among the thousands of inhabitants was scarcely one who had not lost a relative in the terrible catastrophe.

Across the mighty facade of the Pylon entrance hall glowed the public-address visagraph, announcing the facts of the disaster. As the five raced across the domed room, the flickering lights reported the sudden calling of the World Council. All citizens were advised to tune their receiving and sending units to its wave length at nine o'clock the following night.

They were whirled aloft in the automatic lifts to Kuoshibe's apartment. Once there, the men made use of the sumptuous washroom facilities, while Lanya removed the marks of the encounter at a communal bath on the same level.

Emerging from the showers first, Kuoshibe prepared some broth.

Finally Lanya, radiant in brilliant new robes, appeared, walked straight to Haldane and kissed him; he drew her away to the balcony.

"BAH!" SNORTED CRANE. "What you are afraid of is impossible. The Council cannot do away with atomic power without the consent of the entire population—or at least a majority of it. Greyson," he gestured inquiringly toward the engineer who was busily engaged in

dunking some flavored wafers rather unsuccessfully in the plate of broth before him, "you say that the Power Control is fully in agreement with the Central Committee on this matter of limiting the extent of space travel?"

The other nodded.

"How do they intend to enforce this—this law?"

"Technically, the Control, not even the Supreme Council, can enforce any 'law' it passes. You know yourself that 'authority' on this planet at this time is merely nominal. However, it has been the custom not to question the decisions of the Controls, much less those of the Supreme Council. They have been run by experts so long that it has become an automatic act to regard *their* every act as completely in accord with reason. They are not acting unreasonably according to their own lights, remember. As a 'controlling' body they are and have been for three hundred years entrusted with the safety of the planet and its inhabitants. They know that and act accordingly. Whether or not they can persuade the people to the same viewpoint is now a question."

He raised a goblet of water and drained a long draught. "It will be extremely interesting to see whether or not our ancestors were correct when they declared that freeing mankind from economic shackles freed it from that time on from all shackles."

Kuoshibe stared glumly at the polished surface of the pastron before him.

"I am not a good student of history. Physics and solar mechanics are my—trade," he paused and laughed briefly at the archaism. "But I know enough about the past to realize that no government gives up its

position without a struggle. The conflict still remains. Still the race is divided. Perhaps a revolution will be necessary to force a change in outlook. This—stodgy—viewpoint of the Control's and the Council's is reactionary—I think we all agree as to that. Mankind cannot forever remain bound to the Earth.

"These conditions of mass neurosis and the thinly disguised manifestations of mass hysteria cannot be allowed to impede the progress of the race. The problem is simply this: is violence necessary, or will the sanity of human judgment in this age justify the faith of those earlier ones who made the earth safe for it?"

Crane shook his head. "I stand with Greyson in this: I think at least he has faith in the correctness of those 'earlier ones.' Perhaps Karvex Kent can persuade the world otherwise—but I do not think so.

"Yet, suppose he does?"

KUOSHIBE STOOD UP and walked to the north window, gazing silently outward for several minutes. Finally: "Throughout the world, there must be thousands of people like us; there may be millions. People who feel the need for change—the greatest change that the human race has yet experienced, the final throwing off of the shackles of artificial authority. If the people decide against us, there is only one course open; let the decision remain and hold power. Let them go through with their plans to dismantle the power plants and turn the clock back three centuries. But let us escape."

Greyson started, astonished, but presently a sly little grin replaced the gaping look. "I think I understand."

"Yes," continued Kuoshibe, "escape. Escape from the Earth and

from the dull clods—they will be dull clods in that event—who inhabit it. We—we control the space-cars. Before the final decision, which must follow inevitably upon the other, to limit and prohibit the traversing of space, we must escape. The thousands of us—the millions of us.”

Crane turned strange eyes upon him. “It is incredible how calm one can feel in the face of that. No sickening sentimentality about ‘home’ and the ‘dear old planet.’ What’s home to us but a changing track in ever-changing space?”

Greyson nodded. “It’s the natural result, given the conditions that brought it about. I’m an atomic engineer—possibly the best on the planet. I understand and control energies vaster than those of the sun. What do mountains and nostalgic sunsets and rolling oceans and the ‘might’ of the puny elements mean to me? I can turn them all aside with the flick of a finger.”

“But *they* cannot,” broke in Kuoshibe. “They *will* not. They will drown the earth in slobbering phrases . . .”

Greyson chuckled. “The sanctity of the planet! ‘Honor!’ Even flag waving. Why *must* they keep that stupid old rag fluttering atop Interplanetary?”

“What will they say about the explosion?” cut in Crane.

“Abominable things!” returned the Japanese. “Stale arguments about the fallibility of human nature . . .”

“All the more reason for mechanizing the planet,” said Crane.

“They’ll not like that. Mechanizing the planet! That would be the final straw indeed. It’s rational, logical, and what’s needed. Who wants to oversee a machine, however simple and for however short a time,

when it takes nine of the old lifetimes even to begin to understand the universe? Talk to them about that! It would be like abandoning ‘home’ forever.

“Well, they’ve gone as far as they dare—appointing people to ‘supervise’ automatic machinery, even if it does repair itself in case of an accident. But they never leave it alone and forget it.”

“But Kuoshibe,” protested Greyson, “if we ‘escape’ from Earth, where shall we go? The system has been explored to its last cranny; it’s cold, cruel, uninhabitable.”

“Have you forgotten your power that crushes mountains and suns?” the Japanese asked, turning to him. “We could escape to the system if we wanted, but it would only be a short step—too short and limited a step. No, this time we want something else. I remember a phrase in an old book: ‘all the universe or nothingness!’ That is what we want: the universe. The answer, for the first attempt, would be Alpha Centauri!”

“Done!” cried Greyson. “But I suspect selfish motives,” he added, grinning. “Your articles on that binary are too well known.”

“I shall not go,” remarked Kuoshibe quietly. “I am too old—older than you, Greyson. I have never left the Earth; that ‘rationalism,’ that new conception of freedom is for you; I agree with it, but it is not for me.”

Crane downed the last of his broth, stuck his feet up on the back of another chair.

“Well, we can do nothing but wait. I have a feeling that if the Council goes against us, we won’t have to organize rapidly to ‘escape.’ It has been proven time and time again that events happen at the precise

moment when the forces of history call them into being. If we sit here discussing the question, the whole Earth is discussing it. Millions are arriving at decisions *now*. Among them are others of *us*. I know that *we* will be unanimous. In New York, in London, in Paris, in Tokio, in Moscow, at the Poles, in the Himalayas. In the meantime," he broke off and yawned, "Saturo, you can accommodate Greyson and myself for the night. He *used* to live in 14 and I once had an apartment in 15." He shuddered.

Kuoshibe nodded and barked a sharp command; immediately the lights began to fade. He led the way to two small sleeping rooms.

As they passed the door to the balcony, Greyson nudged Crane, sleepily.

"What about the lovebirds?"

"As if they were thinking of *you*! Goodnight, Saturo."

CHAPTER V

THE FOLLOWING EVENING the little party gathered at the spaceport, together with some hundred of their closest friends. As visual screens were placed throughout the social complex at every conceivable spot, they had not found it necessary to remain in their various quarters.

Promptly at eight thirty, New York time, the great screen attached to the west wall of the freight ship hangars glowed into life and a sonorous voice rolled across the immense extent of the space port. On the screen was shown, in brilliant natural colors, the interior of the central hall of the mighty pylon on the Azores which housed the administrative bodies of the entire Earth.

"Look," whispered Haldane to

Greyson, who stood nearby silently, watching, "they've covered the murals."

Greyson shifted his glance further up on the screen and discovered this to be true. Discreetly the famous mural by the great Russian artist Chibirtsev, depicting the glories of interplanetary flight, with its accompanying panels describing graphically the history of Man's conquests of space and of the atom had been draped with plain cloth. Nowhere within the mighty Council Hall was evident the usual brilliant decoration that accompanied a meeting of the Supreme Council. The only official marking was the great emblem of the world state, which completely filled the curving dome. Inset with jewels and flashing gold, the object of hundreds of intensely white beams that shot from the walls just above the draped murals, it blazed in a symphony of chromatic magnificence.

Beneath, in row on row of benches, were seated the highest dignitaries of the government of the World State.

"I wonder if they've checked their leashes at the door?" giggled Lanya.

"Levity, in the presence of such splendor, is distinctly out of place," rebuked Kuoshibe, in mock disapproval.

Presently, from behind plain hangings at the back of the Hall filed a stream of figures who took their places at a long table on a raised dais at one end of the hall. Among them, as they moved forward, were recognizable Karvex Kent, the World President, accompanied by his life-companion, Maigha Khan. Following them were Thomas Langston, Alberta Gold, Stuhmer Goes, and others. The imposing figure of the World President completely dominated the scene. Beside him, basking in the

reflected glory was Maigha Khan, her eyes drinking in the spectacle of power.

From where they stood on the level of the spaceport, it was, of course, impossible to make out any of the details on the big screen, but numerous, smaller screens grouped about it reflected the features of the men and women on the presidium. From time to time faces would loom large in the smaller screens.

At a signal, the overhead searchlights were extinguished and three gigantic beams were thrown directly at the seated figures on the dais, who now rose.

SOLEMNLy, TOGETHER with the massed thousands of officials, they sang the world anthem. Ordinarily, an answering roar of song from the millions upon millions of private and public units broadcasting directly to the Council Hall would have drowned out the singers present in the Hall. This time, the people were silent.

As the anthem concluded, the face of Karvex Kent was suddenly thrown upon a small screen. It had changed. Lines of poorly disguised disappointment creased the noble features; a look of astonishment crawled slowly over them. Then he recovered his poise.

Long minutes were spent in formal preliminaries. Stuhmer Goes, the representative on the presidium from western Europe rose and introduced the various members. Again roars of applause came only from the people present in the Hall. Finally he gave way to Kent, who, impatient, thrust him aside brusquely.

"Citizens of the World State!" bawled the President in thunderous tones. "This meeting of the Supreme Council has been called to act upon

several questions of extreme importance. Of such importance, in fact, as you well know, that their solution will decide the future course of the affairs of this planet. Previously, decisions of this Council have been made without the formal consent of the population of the Earth. The decisions tonight must be arrived at upon an entirely different basis.

"Tonight, I call upon the utmost discretion of every citizen of the World State—who I know will decide these questions properly to the ultimate benefit of the race. The first question is the extremely important one of the complete dismantling of every atomic power plant on the face of the planet. The terrible catastrophe which engulfed half of the great social complex of New York must not be allowed to happen again. Since the obliteration of Shanghai in a similar catastrophe thirty years ago, this radical course has been urged increasingly upon the Supreme Council.

"Mindful of the benefits of the release of atomic power, the Council has, thus far, not acted upon the question. Tonight, it must. I must say, first, that I, personally, am in favor of the solution proposed by the presidium: total and complete dismantling of atom-power plants! I trust that my view will have some weight with all citizens; now I shall relinquish the floor to a member of the presidium who will present the case for the destruction of the plants."

Amid a roar of applause, the President sat down. Alberta Gold arose, made a short speech outlining the reasons why the Supreme Council deemed destruction was the best course. She concluded, maliciously, with the remark that human nature was too fragile a thing to which to

entrust the care of the djinn of physical energy.

THROUGHOUT THE WORLD state, one hundred men and women had the power to demand voice at meetings of the Council, to be heard at the same time as members of the Presidium. Now, from South America, a Negro scientist, Hujai Sadau, stepped before his broadcasting unit and flashed a call through to the exchange at the Azores. It was answered within a few minutes in the affirmative. Presently, his deep voice boomed through the Council Hall and into the thousands of pylons and millions of private homes on the face of the Earth, accompanied with simultaneous television broadcast of his imposing figure.

"Alberta Gold has argued well tonight!" said the Negro, "but she has advanced no argument which cannot be beaten down by cold logic. It is the verdict of all experience and all history that no race can stand still! Alberta Gold proposes that we return to an ephemeral, unstable order of things in which our principle sources of power will be one million times less than those we now control. She proposes a return to the conditions that prevailed three centuries ago, before the formation of the world state.

"This is sheer retrogression! She has proved that we cannot stand still, and she is unwilling that we go farther ahead. Her remarks as to the fallibility of human nature in its control of atomic power have no ground in fact. The destruction of Shanghai was the result of negligence on the part of human beings, yes; but it has been proposed many times since then that control of the atom-power plants be made completely automatic. This has not been done.

"It has not been done because the Supreme Council has opposed the measure every time it was proposed to install precision and automatic control! Had this idea been followed through, the upper part of Manhattan island would today be standing; three hundred thousand human beings would be alive, instead of dead, crushed and burned beneath piles of useless wreckage. Rather than such abstract excuses as 'the frailty of human nature,' there is the very tangible fact of stupidity on the part of the Supreme Council which has made the situation remain dangerous." He paused and pulled himself to his full height. "Prohibiting of atomic energy distribution means not only slow starvation, but the abandonment of space-travel which *alone* permits the earth to exist upon the high level of achievement we have attained. Ours is a high-energy civilization; destruction of the atomic power plants, and the subsequent prohibition of space-travel which must follow, is vile reaction!"

Immediately the World President sprang to his feet.

"That's a lie!" he roared. "I call for the vote!"

But there was no answering click of the voting machines installed beneath the dais. Instead, a low murmur was heard that grew in volume until it crashed from wall to wall of the huge Council Hall in an overwhelming cataract of sound. Laughter! Mighty and divine, rocking the pylon of the Supreme Council to its core. The world was laughing, shaking in ironic, contemptuous mirth, hurling against brute force and reaction the irresistible might of the greatest gift of the gods of old: Human laughter!

Karvex Kent, however, was undaunted. Tall, commanding, he

stepped to the front of the platform where he loomed like a gathering storm.

"This is treason!" he shouted, poisoning his body like a prophet, hand raised warningly. "This is madness and defiance of the authority of the World State—of humanity itself! Citizens! Prepare yourself for immediate action! If madmen are prepared to thrust the race over a precipice, then reason and liberty must vanish for a time! I command . . ."

"You command whom?" Hujai Sadau's mighty voice broke in upon the tirade. "By *what* will you command? Where is your authority? Where are your police, your armies, your powers of compulsion? Dead a hundred years ago! No, Karvex Kent, you are beaten because your authority is dead; humanity has decided. Against it you cannot stand!"

The President reeled as if from a blow, staggered back against the firm figure of Maigha Khan who now stood beside him. He thrust out a staying arm.

"Wait! I repeat: if you do this thing, you hurl humanity into the loathsome depths of the cosmos—into eternal darkness!"

Again that wave of infinite laughter like a tidal washing up and over the Supreme Council. Again the world trembled with the united voice of mankind announcing its decision.

And suddenly it was over.

One by one the great searchlights outlining the President winked out. Instead, a general, stark white light played upon the great Hall. Confusion, the wildest confusion reigned. After a time, quiet settled again; the delegates, officials, and functionaries began to disperse. Silently they left the hall and boarded their private planes and departed. After a time, the presidium was almost alone.

HALDANE AND THE OTHERS stared, transfixed for a long time after the final, triumphant wave of laughter that destroyed forever the last vestiges of tyrannical control on the planet.

He could not take his eyes away from the scene on the dais: Thomas Langston rushing distractedly up and down in front of the broadcasting screens; Maigha Khan, standing silently against the council table, her arrogance gone; Stuhmer Goes, philosophically preparing to depart, something of a chagrined smile playing on his face; Karvex Kent, saturnine, a broken giant, pale but majestic at the center of the platform. He finally folded his arms and stalked off, Maigha Khan following. They disappeared behind the hangings at the back of the hall and out of history.

Finally Lanya touched Peter's arm. The spell broken, he stepped back and breathed deeply.

"They've lost!" he cried.

"Because we were right; because they had to lose!" answered Lanya.

Kuoshibe grunted as was his wont. "The birth of anarchy. Tonight control is gone forever, my friends. Tonight the planet has no master, no overlord save itself and its teeming billions."

Greyson clapped him on the shoulder. "No, my friend, not the birth of anarchy, but the maturity of reason. All that has passed before was only a prelude to this moment. Do you know what is happening out there?" His outflung arm encompassed the planet. "The world does not realize it fully yet, but it has suddenly grown up. The old ones were right when they made their plans. Put mankind upon the right track once—and on the right track it will remain!"

For awhile there was silence, and a light glowed in their eyes that had been a mere glimmer before.

"And now?" asked Kuoshibe, breaking the spell.

"Alpha Centauri!" cried Greyson. "Why not? What holds us to Earth; it is in good hands. Let us cultivate other gardens!" A tall, golden haired girl approached them, arm in arm with the man of her choice.

"Why not?" she echoed.

Kuoshibe gathered his robes about him. "Very well," he said, "turn yourselves to new tasks. But do them quickly. The void will wait forever—but I cannot."

Advancing to the space lockers, the entire party donned space armor. Then, clad in impenetrable metal, they stood for an instant and regarded each other and finally Kuoshibe, standing apart, alone.

"Goodbye, Saturo! For ten years!" shouted Haldane as he clasped Lanya's armor-clad figure to him.

"Goodbye! Do not forget to come back," said the Japanese simply. He turned on his heel without another word and walked away.

NOW THE ROAR of the lifting cranes began and from beneath the metallic floor of the space-port began rising the giant forms of ships, fifty of them. Automatically the cranes bent down and with ease lifted the vessels into the proper firing positions. Above, the deep blue of the night sky winked with a million eyes.

Lanya-followed Peter into his ship and allowed him to buckle her into a space-swing. He swung open the face plates of their helmets before he turned away to the control board, kissed her full on the lips. Then he moved rapidly to the integrator, set up the necessary calculations. Finally he swung himself into a webbed hammock.

Abruptly, the world vanished and he felt the beginning of the ascent. The side ports turned slowly black and, in a little while, through the innumerable windows, the universe peered in. Haldane gazed out into the star-litten blackness, smiled.

On each side, by turning his head slightly in its cradle, he could see the faint, atomic blasts of the sister ships. Fifty of them, flashing upward to Alpha Centauri. Up and away from old Earth. To one side flamed the Earth's sun; they were leaving him for a long time, he mused. But they would come back—and go again.

Behind, in the rear of the vessel, the mighty atomic motors thundered their song of infinite power. Power enough to wreck a world; power enough to tear the sun out of the sky.

He clenched his fists in his armor, smiled again. Strange, he thought; all his life had been fresh beginnings. A new beginning to each moment, each dawn, each sunset. He knew that this beginning was not the last.



BLUEPRINT

by Donald A. Wollheim

(Author of "Bones," "The Man From the Future," etc.)



It was just a metal scroll found in a field, but what was the mystery of its origin?

HARRISON found the thing the afternoon of the great electric storm. It had been late and Harrison had been surveying on the new development just outside of town. The sky had been clear and there had been no indication that the weather would take the queer turn it did.

The young architect had just left

the lot and was walking across the open fields towards the end of the trolley tracks when the sky was suddenly split by a terrific bolt of lightning and an almost immediate deafening burst of thunder.

He stopped stock still as did almost everyone else in town. That had been sudden. No one had expected it. Harrison looked up; there were

still no clouds, yet seemingly things were a bit darker. There was that terrible tension in the air that always seems to precede storms. Then another bolt of lightning rent the sky and another roll of thunder echoed through the district.

"Close," thought the young man, "too close." There was hardly any lapse of time between the light and the sound.

The wind began about then, springing up out of no place and rising to a howling cavorting gale in a few short seconds. Papers, dust, and leaves were picked up and whirled about madly. Signs banged away near the town, trees tossed wildly, the wires in the telegraph and trolley poles whistled and sang. Harrison had just managed to grab his hat as it was about to take off under its own power and, holding it tight, stood still, bracing himself against the blast.

The lightning storm began in dead earnest, thunder rumbled all around now for about three or four minutes, the sky was dark with flying and circling dust and objects; his eyes were dazzled with repeated flashes of blinding white lightning bolts.

Then, as suddenly as it had come, it left. The wind died down, the dust settled and the papers and leaves came fluttering down. The air was tingling with ozone. Harrison started off across the fields, a bit dazed and a bit dusty, towards the trolley, which didn't seem to be damaged.

He had hardly gone more than a few steps when he saw it. It was just a bit of polished metal gleaming among some weeds and scrub. Looked at first like a bar or a cylinder.

He stepped over and picked it up. It was surprisingly light for something its size. It appeared to be a

cylinder about a foot and a half long. On close examination it looked like a very thin sheet of metal that had been rolled into cylindrical shape for, looking at its ends, Harrison could see the rings as the sheet must have curled.

For a moment he wondered just why it was so light. A sheet of metal rolled tight the length and size of that sheet should weigh quite a lot. This, on the other hand, was no burden at all; it weighed no more than a rolled up sheet of paper would have.

The architect hefted it a second and wondered out of just what metal the thing was composed. He knew from his training that very few metals would or could be as light as he estimated this to be — and it seemed to him that it might be worth while to make an analysis. It might be valuable, and then again he wanted to see what it was.

He tucked it under his arm next to his portfolio and went on.

THE ELECTRIC storm must have had some odd effect on the trolley line because he never saw a car respond so rapidly to the motorman before. The driver seemed to have trouble keeping the car in check. Harrison, and later the others who got on, were mildly amused and a bit amazed at the ease with which the car moved. It veritably jumped forward every time the motorman swung his throttle another notch. The driver seemed puzzled; it was as if a tremendous amount of power other than usual were coming through his lines.

Harrison got home quicker than he ever had before. He walked up the path to his front door, got a bit of a shock when he inserted his key in the lock (his body must be charged

with static electricity he thought) and said good evening to his housekeeper.

Going upstairs he laid his portfolio and the strange object on his desk in his room and washed for supper. There was some table talk about the storm, everyone agreed that it was unusual, and that was all.

It was late before Harrison remembered the metal cylinder. Going upstairs, he switched on the desk light, sat down and picked up the mysterious object. There was a tingling sensation when he first touched it which he put down to the same electric storm. Though he did wonder vaguely that it hadn't discharged itself some time before.

He looked at the rolled up sheet of metal carefully. He got his desk ruler, a foot measure, and started to find its exact length. To do that with a foot rule, he had to move the ruler along after putting his finger on the foot mark measured off first. He did this three times and each time he got a different answer.

That puzzled him. There was always about a half inch error from the last measurement. He could never get it just right, yet he would swear the thing was always the same size.

Giving that up, he started to see whether the sheet could be unrolled. To his surprise the very hard metal—for he had tried scratching it and failed—unrolled easily. A sheet of lead foil would have been harder to unroll, Harrison thought.

He unrolled about a foot of it; there seemed to be yards more he thought, noticing that the diameter of the cylinder had scarcely diminished.

At first he thought it was all covered with cracks and flaws. Then he thought it was some sort of dec-

orative scroll, then he didn't know what to make of it.

The thin sheet of metal glistened in the desk light and the markings on the interior surface, though extremely thin, were easily perceived. They were thin delicate lines and tracteries, seeming at first to run in intricate circles and mathematical designs. Ovals and loops criss-crossed each other in beautifully exact white lines.

Harrison stared at it carefully. He couldn't make out head or tail of it, but the exactness and clarity of the line work pleased his architect's eye. He noticed that there seemed to be some writing in red and blue and green alongside many of the lines; now that he surveyed the whole unrolled portion he noticed that a myriad of script lines in excessively tiny handwriting covered the whole surface.

He bent closer to see the writing more clearly. It seemed to him as if the part he was looking at expanded. He could make out in a couple of square inches (he guessed) at which he was focussing, almost as much detail in white lines and notes as he had first noted on the entire foot or so of unrolled sheet.

The closer he looked the more detail he saw, yet every time he sat back in his chair and looked at it from a distance he could not make out those tinier lines, only the main and original tracteries. He had to bend over close and when he did that the section would seem to spread itself out, and his eyes, which though good, never seemed to be that good, would take in details so tiny that he would have sworn they were microscopic.

HE FOCUSSED on a line of red script shining in the light of his

desk lamp. He thought at first that it was unreadable. The figures and letters meant nothing to him, were as incomprehensible as if they were Arabic or Sanskrit. Yet as he tried to make out the configurations he suddenly realized that they were English after all! A tiny, very precise and very correct hand had written in red beside one tiny white interlaced circle the following cryptic words:—

Met. strm. 247—Delete 23, hyp. 14. See comb. as in im. vic.

This meant nothing to Harrison. He looked at some of the other items in red; they were about as cryptic or more so:—

Com. 504—Demolish—Parab. gas bol.—See in st. galx. type 2. Delete. Gen. vic. to hyperblast. Demolish met. strms. here in toto. 67MWxx2.

Somebody's notes, and like all working notes, mainly abbreviations and references without significance save to one who might have some previous knowledge.

Harrison unrolled the cylinder further. It was all like that. The stuff written in green was about as cryptic as was that in blue.

The odd thing about the writing was that every time he saw some of it he got the impression that it was not in English. Yet every time he bent to examine it, it resolved itself into legible script. He felt puzzled and a bit annoyed.

The whole business was pretty incomprehensible. It seemed to mean nothing. It might have been a blueprint but one could hardly determine anything from the infinite cross-patch of circles and ovals, parabolic and hyperbolic curves inscribed on the thing. They seemed to connect nowhere and to be going nowhere.

The green writing read slightly differently. The words *demolish* and

delete never appeared, for example. Instead a sample line would go like this:—

3 plan. rev. plus 11 sat. 3 sub-sat.; slow at 4—035.007. Ev. hard.

Or like this:—

Confl. type 9. expl. 1 plan. 3 com. 10675 met. at 2—700.513. Easy.

It didn't seem to make sense. If it was a new type of mathematics, it was one Harrison had never heard of. The stuff in blue writing was the worst. That was numbers. Nothing else, just numbers.

THE YOUNG architect sat back in his seat and scratched his head. To rest his mind from the struggle he reached over to his desk radio and put it on. When it warmed up, he was startled by the reception of the most angry squawking and static he had ever heard. The set emitted screeches and stuttering all along the band.

"Blazes," he thought, "the electric storm must have gotten that, too!" and turned it off.

Picking up the cylinder again he looked at it speculatively. He still hadn't found out what it was. Except that it was obviously a blueprint of sorts or a set of plans or a problem in super-Einsteinian mathematics.

Well, he could find out what the metal was anyway. He opened his pen knife and tried to scratch it. No dice, the knife point blunted. This was something, he thought.

He forced the ring off his finger and holding it gem down tried to use the sharp little diamond to scratch it.

It failed. And that really was amazing. A diamond was just about the hardest thing he could get and yet it could not make an impression on this.

He decided that it was too much for him. He had better bring the thing over to the university for the physics and chemistry departments to figure out. Meanwhile he'd better get his night's sleep, he had work to do tomorrow.

Harrison rolled up the metallic sheet as it had been and laid it on his desk. He turned off the desk light, washed, undressed, and went to bed.

He was awakened about 2 A. M. by a roll of thunder. There was a repetition of the electric storm again and he lay in his blankets and watched the lightning through the window. It was close again, the thunder coming on the very flashes of the bolts. A terrific clap seemed to shake the house and he was dazed as a bolt of brilliant white fire seemed to come into his very room. When his eyes cleared, the room was dark as before and the storm had died as rapidly as it had come.

WHEN HARRISON woke up the next morning, the metal scroll was gone. Missing. He could not find it anywhere.

On his desk, where the cylinder had lain were several little discs of metal. Yellow metal, gold coins to be exact. As if during the night, the owner of the scroll had come and taken it and had left some money to repay Harrison for taking care of it.

There are two more items to be mentioned in this account. One is that the coins, worth about seventy dollars in bullion, were not those of any nation on earth, past or present.

The second is that the local newspaper for some odd reason chose to editorialize on the brilliant new star that had been first noticed glowing in the sky that night, by declaiming philosophically that the wonders of heaven are everlasting and the work of creation never ending.

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THE CASTLE ON OUTERPLANET

by S. D. Gottesman

(Author of "Dead Center," "Return from M-15," etc.)



What was that call for help that drew the patrolman from Pluto out to where no planet ought to be?

UNDING bent closer over the transmitter grid of his space-phone; unmistakably it was a distress signal that he heard. Without moving from his seat, he plugged in the jack that would connect him with Home Base. The dis-

tance tubes glowed faintly as a needle quivered toward a red line on the dial that registered power-buildup. Needle and line met; he switched in audio frequency.

"Tain Unding, Patrol," he said.

A long pause, broken only by the

etheric cracklings and snappings followed. Then the thin voice of a phone receiver announced: "Home Base. What's up, Unding?"

"Carl? Connect me with Commander Morley."

"He's busy. Can your call wait?"

"Don't think so. I just received a distress signal."

"Okay," came the voice of the Home Base operator. "Stand by." Unding held down the contact as sputtering noises informed him that, across millions of miles, an officer was being contacted.

A brusque voice came through. "Unding? I hear you have a distress signal."

"Check, Commander. It's very faint. Seems to be from outside the Plutonian sector."

"How far?"

"I haven't traced it yet, sir." He paused a second. "It's like this—I'm on Coldspore duty, covering a sector of Pluto in a one-man ship. I know I shouldn't ditch my post, but I'm the only one even relatively near the source of this signal; so I thought that you could send a relief to take over my post while I triangulate to get location. By the time relief arrives, I'll be gone to the rescue."

"Sounds all right" commented Morley. "But we'd be taking a large risk. If any Earth-ships get down to Pluto they're out permanently. What do you think?"

"I know the chances involved, sir. But the distress call is urgent."

"What do they say?"

"It isn't on audio, sir. They're sending in peak-and-valley code. I'm not very well up on that, sir, but it seems to read: 'Attacked—send help.' This is followed by words I can't make out and the transmitter doesn't help any. Then the message begins

again. I just picked it up twenty minutes ago; it's been continuous ever since. How long it may have been going before I picked it up I don't know."

"Do you think it's a record?"

"Couldn't say. It might be—there aren't many variations in the sending and those that there are might be etherics."

The line was silent for a moment, then Morley snapped: "Okay, Unding. I'll send a relief ship to your sector. Official orders: proceed with all possible speed to locate origin of the distress signals; when that is accomplished, investigate that origin and render any help you can. Report to me any extraordinary occurrences; a clear wire will be kept for you. You are authorized to use arms against any person or group which may attempt to impede your executing these instructions." There was another pause, then, "Good luck, Unding. I know you'll do the best you can against whatever it is." A sharp click, and the phone official spoke again. "That goes for me, too, Unding."

"Thanks, Carl. I'll have to switch off now and get to calculations. 'By." He turned to his instruments, studying the jagged lines of the code message that was unrolling across an endless strip of parchment.

TAIN UNDING STARED through the vision plate of his little ship and rubbed his eyes. For three days he had been driving at steady full-speed toward the direction whence came endless signals for help. Beyond Pluto, past a tiny comet and countless vagrant, hurtling masses of cosmic rubbish, was its source. But he could see nothing, could detect no source — no liner, wrecked and drifting out of course; no transport

crammed with ores and plant-matter breached at the seams.

Half unbelieving, he turned again to the spacephones, started the clock-work mechanism of the recorder. Again there crept across the strip of white the peaks and valleys of the code, now in heavier bands. He fitted a transcriber blank over the message; through the intricately spaced windows in the sheet of metal appeared unmistakable figures that reduced, in the code printed before his eyes, to the same cryptic message.

Bewilderedly, he snapped off the mechanism; there could be no mistake. His calculations as to distance and direction had been correct; his course checked to a minimum with the growing intensity of the code signals. Now they were at maximum—yet, where was the ship?

Unding glanced at his power gauges. Needles quivered at nearly full capacity; he had started at a full load, permitting inertia to do the work of driving the ship except for occasional acceleration when impatience struggled with prudence.

His fingers stole to a small stud on the board, a stud whose engraved symbols read *Lv—9*, the name for its particular function. This stud governed the far-flung zone of energy which infallibly detected any foreign matter aspace within a pre-determined distance—but at a terrific expenditure of fuel, one which few tanks could bear at the end of a long journey. He pressed that stud, knowing that it was a matter to report. Normally no pilot or captain would resort to *Lv—9* without the approval of, at the very least, an immediate superior. But no message could go through from this sector of space while the mysterious signals were emanating from some unseen

source to the complete distortion and negation of any other sender.

Invisibly the zone of energy shot forth from the focus of the ship and Unding bent eagerly over its detector panel, a dull grey square of metal. Almost at once a green spark gleamed forth from that background—a pulsating little thing that moved in a slow elliptical orbit, seemingly unaffected by any outside influence. Unding drew in his breath sharply; that was it. He stabbed two buttons and in glowing letters the coordinates of the green spot flashed on the screen.

He snapped off the zone, flung his control drivers into action. In a moment he was beside the spot which the detector had revealed. Unding shok his head in amazement. Was this the powerful sender that had been functioning for more than three days on full power? It seemed to be no larger than a man! Constructed after the pattern of a conventional spaceship, yet no more than twenty-four cubic feet in size, it drifted in a slow ellipse until Unding slipped a noose of cable disproportionately heavy for its task about a projection and drew it in through a lock.

THE LITTLE THING lay on the floor of Unding's control cabin humming faintly to itself with a colossal storage of power. "Whoever planned this dingus," Unding said to himself slowly, "had lots of juice to waste." He attacked its lid with a jimmy and pried loose the shell, already relaxing from the cold of space. But there was nothing inside—nothing at all.

He turned an extermination-beam on the device on the offchance that it was the product of some malignant microscopic race, or perhaps infected by the Coldspores of Pluto. The metal tube, heavy and pulsing,

that was the only mechanism inside the apparatus, was unaffected. Curiously he laid his hand on the metal of the tube, recoiled as he felt a slight shock. "Connected with a power lead," he muttered nursing his stinging fingers. But when he sought to measure the current he found that this was wrong; it was the metal that gave off electricity in an uninterrupted stream, as a lodestone emits lines of magnetic stress.

There was no doubt in his mind but that this metal was something unknown to Earthly science. As he investigated further, he found its weight—only as he estimated, for he could not penetrate that shell—was small. In fact, it was negligible, as heavy stuff goes. Compact, it bore some relation to the silver-platinum-iridium series, to judge by its color and electrophoric qualities; but it was hardened and tempered beyond anything known to man.

"How," he brooded, "can a metal which ought to be ductile as all git-out become fabulously resistant to tools of any description?" The answer was simple and somewhat terrifying: a people, or an individual, had progressed technologically far beyond man. And when that happens, thought Unding, there may be difficulties brewing; something, he thought, he ought to report.

He turned to the spacephone, but heard nothing save the sputter of interference; tried code but obtained no more satisfactory result. Obviously he could not use his phone so long as he was near this little dynamo. The best course, then, was to scam back to Home Base where they had tools that would crack anything—saws of pure energy, drills that bit through asteroids. Unless—

Unding prepared to decelerate, turn the ship for home. Then a bell

rang. With the instinct of the spaceman whose reactions have been sharpened and tuned by gruelling courses of treatment, then refined again, he snapped to the control board and slammed on switches that sent great roaring gouts of flame into space, bringing the ship to a stomach-wrenching halt.

And only when the ship was no longer in motion did Unding look through his vision plate. There was a planet ahead. He had known that, really, for nothing smaller than a planet would set the alarms ringing as they had. Yes, he had known it, but not until his eyes checked that knowledge had the import of it seeped into his consciousness. "Planet Ten," he whispered to himself.

Outside the known solar system, long suspected and sought by Terrestrial astronomers. Before the first observation-post had been built on Luna, they had known that the probabilities of a planet beyond Pluto were high; from then on, observations and calculations had narrowed the probabilities against such a planet down practically to zero—but the planet still had never actually been seen, either by human eye or photographic plate. Not until now.

He stared at the dim globe beneath him. Albedo was low—it reflected practically no sunlight. About the size of Mercury, he estimated, and seemingly barren. No air or atmosphere of any sort; not even the vestiges of a hydrosphere. No ice or frozen gases; he shuddered as he thought of what a rocky hell it must be.

DETERMINEDLY TAIN UN-
DING prepared to land. This would bear investigation. Who knows—it might be named after him some day, he thought.

The ship began to drop free as it slowly came under the influence of the planet's weak gravitation. He turned to the little-used instrument, gasped as he read its dial. From somewhere on this planet was emanating a wave of force such as only could come from functioning machinery of the highest order. And from somewhere near, Unding noted, as he set a direction-finder on the influence. He sent the ship roaring toward the setting sun, here no more than a dazzling, frosty star in the distance.

At that moment a mass on the horizon broke the view, blanked the sun from his sight. Tain Unding was not a fanciful man, but he was hard put not to swear that here he saw a Norman keep plucked from the soil of England and transported to this desolate planet.

He slowed the ship and inspected the building as it drifted beneath the viewplate. His conclusion had been superficial, the product of overwrought nerves and a tired body. It was no castle of stone but a utilitarian spire built dymaxion fashion. Seemingly it struck roots deep into the rock of the planet, spiring far down to cling precariously to a dying or already dead world. And it was from this spot that the vibrations emanated.

Unding dropped the ship abruptly, cut loose with landing jets as he eased to the planet's floor; landing here was simple. There was no water-bearing atmosphere to cause the gushing clouds of steam that confused a pilot returning to Earth. He broke out a spacesuit from a locker, donned the cumbersome garment and sealed it securely against the space-cold that prevailed without.

Of one thing he was certain: there was sentient activity going on inside that castle, either friendly or unfriendly to the human culture; even if, at the moment, the activity might be indifferent to, or unaware of, human culture, ultimately it must take one course or the other. If friendly, there was no harm done in his excursion from ship; if otherwise, then he might escape with valuable information.

Smiling wryly, Tain Unding stepped through the outer lock of the ship onto the metallic rock of Outerplanet. And at that moment, a wave of thought hit on his mind like a blow.

At first there was naught save the indefinable sense of impact: it was as if a hand were caressing his skull with fingers that sank through the bone to the very surface of his brain. Unding glanced about himself bewilderedly; there was nothing to be seen.

He had the frantic desire to scratch—impossible always in a spacesuit—and how much more so when the counter-irritant must be applied to deep-buried tissues within the skull. Then the fingers seemed to sink deeper beneath the surface, touch on sensory ganglia, for at once he became aware of odors both foul and sweet, and his tongue was flooded with all manner of tastes. For an instant he feared blindness as roaring gouts of light flashed before his eyes and sounds thundered through his ear-drums.

Then all was quiet.

He felt no untoward stimuli of any nature now; instinct, however, told him that the activity had plumbed beneath his senses, was seeking and probing for the scattered molecules

of grey matter that controlled his very will and individuality. Forgetfulness began to rise about him, a quieting, soothing amnesia. About him the scene began to dim, the way a cinema scene fades into another sequence. Stunned, he stood on the darkened plain of rock, behind him his ship, before him the castle, all wispig away into twilight that pervaded his being.

Even as he felt himself sinking into the quiet abyss, his mind was invaded by a thing obscurely different—a thing of hope rather than the despair that pervaded the other searching. But before the nature of this became clear his consciousness had drifted away.

UNDING SAT UP and yawned, then looked about himself in astonishment. He lay on a slab, still in his suit, in a chamber open to the bleak sky of Outerplanet. As he stared at the bleak walls, a rich voice spoke to him.

"Welcome," it said simply.

"Where are you?" he asked. He could not feel alarmed; there was the consciousness of having been subjected to a grueling therapy of some sort and of having emerged the better for it.

"You cannot see me, nor do you hear me through normal channels," explained the voice. "I have been chosen to explain to you what has happened to your mind."

"I know something has happened," he mused. "But tell me first whether I am to consider you as a friend or an enemy."

"As a friend by all means," responded the voice with a burst of what sounded like hearty laughter. "Now I shall tell you what I can."

"This world—Outerplanet as you

call it—is no child of your sun. This is evident from its composition and from the alien turn life has taken on its surface. We do not know whether it was captured by this sun, or whether it was already here when the other planets were formed. This last is not wholly impossible, for we know that ours is an ancient race which has passed through many cycles of advancement and degeneracy before attaining a relatively stable civilization."

"How long has this been?" interrupted Unding.

"Long—many millions of your years. More recent has been the division into two opposing camps of thinkers in rivalry. Now I must tell you what manner of entities we are; you cannot see me for I have no atomic structure. I am built of waves in harmony, or in balanced discord, as are all of us. You think you hear me speak? How could you when there is no air on all the surface of this planet save for that which your spacesuit contains? No. I have a certain control over your brain—enough to stimulate your aural nerves in the patterns which form words in the tongue you speak."

"But wait," Unding objected. "You say I am to regard you as friendly. What was this—hostile—impression I received when I first emerged from the ship?"

"I know. That was the work of those of whom I spoke—our enemies. This division of us into two camps is the result of a difference over ethical practices. Fully advanced as our camp, they flout the ethical principles which we consider basic for all conscious beings. In line with their motives and aims they attempted to seize upon your mind and make you their instrument for some purpose

which I cannot guess. Which camp is cosmically correct, I cannot say—nor, I suspect, can you. Only time can tell that; enough it is that both camps consider themselves correct and act accordingly; eventually one will prevail over the other. You, and your species, I can see, are basically attuned to the ethical concepts to which we adhere.”

“But what happened to me?” asked Unding.

“Alone, you were helpless and confused before their unfamiliar mode of attack. Possibly now that you have experienced the technique you could withstand them if another encounter came. As it was then, however, I was forced to come to your help and do what I could to repel them. You succumbed to the shock of battle; it was better so; otherwise you might have become insane had you been conscious, fully, of the struggle that went on within your mind.

“It is enough to say that I won, Unding. I propelled your body to this place, which is our home, and caused your subconscious to forget all that had taken place after your collapse; otherwise there would have been permanent scars left on your mind.”

UNDING THOUGHT HAZILY of what he had been told. “Did you,” he asked hesitantly, “explore _____”

“I found it necessary,” replied the voice, “to learn your language and something of your way of thinking to avoid confusion and strain on your awakening. However I have not invaded the privacy of your conscious mind.”

“I wish you would,” stated Unding. “You can probably make more out of certain events than I can.

Poke around—however you do it—until you come on the reasons for a self-powered little radio job being elaborately prepared to broadcast a disaster call till hell freezes over. I don’t understand it myself.”

“I shall do that,” agreed the voice. And again Unding felt the fingers at his brain, probing through his memory and conscious mind. They withdrew and the voice came again. “There is no doubt but that this peculiar affair has been engineered by our enemies.” There was a note of alarm in the voice’s tones.

“But why?” snapped Unding. “Was it just to get me in their clutches? Or to get my ship? Or what?”

“Deeper in your brain than you know, I found the answer which you had worked out. It would occur to you ‘intuitively’ under the right circumstances, but there is not time to wait for them. You assembled facts unconsciously and came to the correct conclusion that our enemies’ desire was to draw you away from Pluto so that they might land and obtain cultures of Coldspore.

“With these cultures they plan to infect the mammalian planets of the Solar System and render life on them impossible for all except beings constituted as we.”

“Lord!” whispered Unding, his face drawn and suddenly haggard.

“This must not be,” said the voice firmly. “It is a violation of inoffensive individualities. We are best qualified to halt these operations of our enemies. We shall do that.”

“How?” asked Unding. “Surely they must have spaceships—that signal set proved it. Have you ships also?”

“We have neither spaceships nor the time to construct them,” replied the voice thoughtfully, “so therefore

we must use yours. Now I must introduce you to another facet of my existence—the material body with which I do building and other works. Do not be alarmed at its appearance; it has no mind of its own. It is purely a synthetic creation whose actions I control. It has been bred over many of our years and feeds on the rocky surface of this Outerplanet.”

A door opened slowly in the wall of the room and there stumped in a grotesque little creature. Its surface was black and leathery and it had no face to speak of, yet there was an unmistakable touch of humanity to its lines. For it stood and walked—rather waddled—on two legs, and its long arms reached to the ground. The fingers and hands were of a contrasting color, seemingly much more developed than the crude remainder of the body. They were long and sinewy, full of capacity for great construction work.

“This body may not come in contact with air,” warned the voice. “It has already constructed a metal tube in which will be secured for the voyage. Let us set out now.”

UNDING CAUTIOUSLY HEAVED on the radio set, working it into the space-lock of his ship. He slammed the door, stabbed at the buttons which would release the outer door, and saw the little, coffin-like object catapulted far out into space by the released air-pressure.

“As soon as we get far enough away from that,” he commented, “we’ll be able to signal and warn the other patrols.” He relaxed his mind, attempting to tune in with his invisible friend.

“Looking out of the window,” he declared triumphantly. In the four days of intimate association he had

grown to sense the psychic displacement effected by the entity with which he travelled.

“Right,” said the voice. “This Pluto of yours is a bleak place. Suppose you try to signal now.”

Unding sat at the spacephone and built up power. “Carl?” he asked.

Dimly the voice of the ‘phone official came in, somewhat scrambled by the code-sender, now half a million miles away: “Who’s this?”

“Tain Unding, reporting from special orders.”

“I’ll get you Morley—hold on.”

The brusque voice of the commander spoke. “Ready for your report, Unding. Go ahead.”

“I’ve uncovered something big, commander,” said the patroller. “All I can say now is be on the lookout for a strange vessel. It will be dangerous to approach it, so give orders to blast on sight.”

“I’ll take your word for it, Unding,” replied the commander. “But if harm comes of it, you’ll find yourself in acid up to your neck.”

“Sorry, sir,” said the Patrol, “but I can’t do anything more than warn you and hope that it will do some good. Meanwhile, I’ll scout around. I’ve encountered a friendly force which is in full co-operation.”

“You’re giving me grey hair, Unding,” came back the voice of the Commander, “but it’s obvious that all we can do here is sit tight; ships will be instructed as you suggested.” There was a slight pause, then: “I’m going to give you full authority to do whatever you consider expedient and to commandeer any forces available. If it works out oke, then you’ll be in pretty; if it doesn’t—well, from what you intimate you won’t be the only one on the spot. Good luck, Unding.”

The Patrol switched off the phone

and spoke to his invisible friend. "A fat lot of good any ship will do," he remarked.

"Very true," said the voice thoughtfully. "If your other men find the ship of our enemies, before they can compute the distance and range to turn on blasts they'll be thought out of existence. Or perhaps their minds will be seized and they will be forced to turn on each other. Yet—they feared you."

"How's that?" snapped Unding.

"Consider this: they were forced to lure you out of position before they could get to Pluto and obtain the Coldspore. When you had landed on Outerplanet *and were out of your ship*, they seized on your mind with almost foolish ease until I intervened."

"What does that add up to?"

"It seems," meditated the voice "that you have a weapon which our enemies fear. And also that this weapon is no complicated thing, requiring devices and endless charts for its successful operation."

"But if I had such a weapon," protested Unding, "wouldn't I be the first to know about it?"

"Not necessarily. Under the right circumstances—such as these—you would appear to be the last.

"It must be something concerned with the operation of your ship, and probably is not regarded by you as any weapon at all. Remember that we are a peculiarly constituted people, of reactions strange to your ways of thought."

"Then," asked Unding, "how do we find out what instrument they're afraid of?"

"You must concentrate," said the voice. "Exploration of your mind directly will do no good, for your lack of experience with my type of life has not equipped you with the

faculty of setting up relations which involve variables of that nature.

"Now go through your every piece of equipment, one by one, reporting mentally all its features and suggested qualities. We shall see what that will do."

FOR HOURS UNding had been concentrating with desperate intensity on the demands of the voice. They had covered all the items of war on the ship, first of attack, then of defense.

"It's no use," he said. "It can't be."

"Nevertheless," replied the voice, "we shall continue. Enumerate the navigation devices you employ."

The man wiped perspiration from his brow. "There are my landing lights," he began, wondering why he picked on them first.

"And their qualities are—?"

"Especially designed to pierce steam, fog, dust, what have you. For this purpose they are fluorescent—electrically activated gases. Their color is what you might call a reddish orange."

"I cannot see color," said the voice with a tense note; "describe it otherwise."

"Toward the lower end of the spectrum," said the man. "The longer end, that is. The rays of the lamps are within the range of visible light, but approach heat rays and are noticeably warmer than a blue or green light, though no heat is incidental to their production."

There was a long pause. "Tell me more about them," commanded the voice in interested tones.

"They're focused by a parabolic reflector, and have an attachment which lets them ride pick-a-back over distances too long for them to keep their concentration. For use when

you have to sight a meteor or something."

"That, then, is what we have been seeking," declared the voice.

"How so?"

"As you said, the landing lights are but little removed from heat-rays in the scale, and I know that our enemies cannot stand heat in certain forms.

"Now you must put on your space-suit and drain all air from the inside of the ship. I wish to use my 'body' to construct some apparatus necessary to our purpose."

"Can't I do it for you?" he asked.

"No" replied the voice firmly. "I do not wish you to learn the nature of the device. I hope you trust me—?" There was half a question in the words.

"Of course," snapped Unding hastily, donning his suit. "But what shall I do meanwhile?"

"Head for Pluto. I can sense that already our enemies have landed there; we must arrive before they have obtained their cultures of Cold-spore and departed."

Unding let the air in his ship hiss out into space then released the dwarf-like "body" of the voice from its airless tank. He began to realize the purpose of those powerful hands as he saw them pick tubes and condensers from his compact repair bench and begin to assemble them, at dazzling speed, into a strange device which was like nothing ever seen before by Earthmen.

THE SHIP FELL LIGHTLY to the frozen gases that blanketed Pluto with eternal snows.

"Well?" asked Unding. The dwarf-like creature was still; with sudden, jerky movements it went back into its tank and closed the lid. "They

are there across the snow," remarked the voice quietly.

Unding shielded his eyes, saw tiny moving flecks of black. "Sure it'll work—whatever it is?" he asked.

"Quite sure. And there is a thing I must tell you now. That is that soon I will no longer be able to help you. But the machine will still be here. You are to have it analyzed by your own experts, thus work out a stratagem which will enable it to be used without ill effects to—certain individuals. Now there will be some accidental happenings which are unavoidable because of the brief time I have had to utilize the facts which you told me."

"What are you driving at?" Unding snapped.

"This machine," replied the voice emotionlessly, "is a broadcaster of X-rays. These rays act only as a carrier principle for other radiations which will do—the work they must. Note the fourth phase of the tube set-up."

Unding inspected the device. "Red light," he said, baffled; "what's the idea of that?"

"Red light: yes. And carried a phase lower yet, which reduces it to heat—radiant heat in its most deadly exterminating form. You will have to throw the black lever when I give you the signal. And that will be soon—I can sense our enemies and they are about to go into action."

Unding began to feel it too—again the crawling sensation on the surface of his brain.

"I'll hold them off and explain," said the voice, "for as long as I can."

Unding concentrated, felt a bewilderingly vast battle going on. It was all quite silent and unhurried; on the part of the foe, their small "bodies" spread across miles of

frozen gases, a steady driving attack against the psyche of his friend and protector; and here in the ship, a forceful repulse of the beating surges of thought that sought to destroy him.

In the midst of that, a small section of the protector's mind spoke to Unding. "We cannot compromise now," it whispered. "And I shall tell you what I did not wish you to know until this moment. That is: when you throw that switch, I shall perish as will our enemies. There is no other way; I can only ask that great caution be taken in hunting down the remainder of their people so that none of mine will come to harm.

"And now—farewell."

With the words, Unding flung back the handle of the switch as far down as it would go. There was a dazzling surge of light in the tubes, and, for a moment, the man saw a vision of glory. It was the vibratory body of the voice, momentarily visible in death.

Like a tower of flame weirdly

spinning, it hovered over the patrol, its eddying currents contorted in agony. Then it vanished. As Tain Unding looked through the port and saw the distant dwarfs fall to the snow, he knew that the enemy had not survived.

He could sense the absence. There was no longer the pressure of mind on mind that he had so casually come to accept. He turned to the space-phones.

"Morley," he called.

A moment, then the voice of the commander. "Speaking."

"The mission has been successfully accomplished, sir. A full report will be ready when I return—I must request immediate transfer Home Base."

"Granted, Unding. What happened to the friend you spoke of?"

"Gone, sir," whispered Unding. In his mind echoed a phrase which he had seen somewhere in a history book, or perhaps one of the telecinema romances based on life in olden times. "*Dead on the field of honor.*"

A GREAT NEW CHARACTER

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by X

Read this carefully; it may contain a message of great importance to you, one of you!

THE JIG is up, Jadgar! We've got you pretty well holed up already. We've tracked you across a cosmos and across a dozen worlds and this time you've trapped yourself! We've got you narrowed down to a mere hundred thousand possible people; you've tied your own hands this time, you can't possibly escape before we get you!

Remember, Jadgar, our chase? Remember how we've been closing in on you steadily? For a hundred years now we've been on your trail, a hundred years Earth-time, a long time for Earth maybe, but a short time for us . . . and you. Remember? But of course you can't. You don't remember anything at all . . . yet. Your disguise is too perfect. That was your mistake all the time, Jadgar, you overdid things.

Well, try to remember these things, Jadgar, try to remember. Your time is growing short but before it's all over, we'll review the whole business. Just for your benefit . . . and ours. You'll understand soon to your misfortune.

It all started when you got yourself the Directorate of the Planning Board. You got it, you'll recall, by falsifying the tests, by stealing the lay-out in advance, by murdering a few candidates ahead of you. You don't recall? Oh, have patience, you



will. Yes, you can't stop now, you'll go the whole chain and you'll remember it all.

We didn't suspect anything like that was going on. How could we? It hadn't happened in thousands of periods; how were we to suspect that you were a mutant, an unnoticed one? Oh, you think you are a super-being, you think you're the Next Step. But you aren't, you're just a rotten side-step. A warped, vile, vicious and dangerous side-step; a freak, on the surface perfect, calm, intelligent, underneath misshapen, explosive, and diabolically clever. No, you're not the next evolutionary step above us, for we've beaten you at last, we've cornered you, and your particular strain will never appear again.

Remember how we never suspected you? Remember how your true motives never occurred to us? How you knew that we would never suspect, how you knew we could not conceive of motives such as yours in a sane individual?

You'd finally gotten where you wanted, didn't you? Into the Planning Board, into its Directorate no less! No, not your city board, no, not even your planet board, but the Galactic Board itself! It was the whole

star-cluster or nothing for you; you had to use us all for your warped experiments. You still don't know what we are talking about? You will, don't be impatient.

H, your plans were cunning. So simple to see, so pat in their explanations, so smooth in their operation. Flooding the worlds with neat little emanations. Subtle little things, "harmless" by-products of your nice new improved power-comets. Whirling in and out of the sun systems on their pre-arranged orbits, carrying new and "improved" power sources in their super charged tails. Our space traffic could dip in and fill up everywhere, it was so convenient, so brilliant, and so damnably clever on your part.

You didn't really care about the power supplies in space, did you? You wrote nice long tracts on them and gave long involved research recordings, but it was all camouflage, wasn't it? It was all rubbish to you, something nice to hide your real work, those emanations. Those harmless, invisible, oh so faint, rays that bathed all the planets so steadily. So steadily, so unnoticeably . . . save only for the etheric biologist you murdered, Jadgar! We thought it was an accident then, but you knew!

Your plans were perfect, weren't they? You'd alter the genes of a universe, you'd produce worlds of your kind. You'd make every birth, the birth of another Jadgar, the birth of another of your so-called Next Step! Your plans were great, weren't they, you'd replace us with a greater species. But you weren't really superior, you were just a freak, weren't you, just a freak, like the millions and millions of screaming horrors that cut so fiercely through the homes of our galaxy, that brought in-

sanity and chaos, agony and grief, into the homes of our many worlds! Remember, Jadgar, remember your failures? Remember the screaming freaks!

Were they like you? No, you fiend, no. You should have known, but your warped mind couldn't tell you, you were a freak, a misfit, not a brilliant super-being! And you were responsible for the mad chaos of flesh that horrified our homes! Those new-born children! Those shapeless, mindless, squirming, screaming monsters! Millions of them, Jadgar, millions of what might have been strong minds and sound bodies, a generation you murdered!

You broke under the horror, didn't you? It was a mistake to make that emotional error, wasn't it? You didn't expect to, you "superman," did you? But you didn't betray yourself long; you came back to normal fast, Jadgar, you put on your most innocent face and that was what gave you away!

We found you out. We followed the evidence of science. We uncovered the emanations, we found out how they had been artificially stimulated, we traced your record, we found your false tests, we went after you, but you'd escaped. Cleared out. Ran.

YOU THOUGHT you could get away from us, but you can't. You tried hiding out on one of our worlds but your impassive visage gave you away. Horror tracked you down. You escaped us then and a dozen times more but we've got you now.

You left our star-cluster entirely, didn't you? You crossed the uncrossable void, didn't you, and thought we've leave you alone to perform your little pranks in some other stars than

ours. But we followed you, we followed you. Vermin like you must be eradicated, wiped out, annihilated. We were prepared to follow you across the whole of Existence, but you broke first, didn't you? You've holed yourself up now and we've got you.

You tried disguising yourself as an animal in the jungles of Spica IV, but we found you out; you were a creeping tree in the swamps of Deneb I, but you were detected; you became a whole planet around Cor Caroli and whirled on your own axis so placidly, but you were traced; we almost had you then! Remember, Jadgar?

Then you were a comet, dark in the interstellar void, gas flying through darkness. You thought we'd never find you, but we did. How you got away then was nothing short of a miracle, but it will be more than a miracle if you can get away now.

We've tracked you to Earth, Jadgar. We've gotten you down to one out of a possible hundred thousand people. Our psychological mathematics worked out perfectly this time, we can't miss. Your mind, your mental make-up, and the social structure of this world, narrow our chase down to a limited number. Down to the readers of this issue of this magazine. You couldn't possibly avoid being one of them, Jadgar. You *are* one of them. You are one of the readers of this story, Jadgar.

Your disguise this time was too perfect, Jadgar. When you devised your human form you eliminated all consciousness of who you really are, you built up a mind full of pseudo-memories, a mind that knows only a human life and a human past. A mind that has no conscious realization of ever being anything else. You buried your own identity deep in the sub-conscious. That was your ruin.

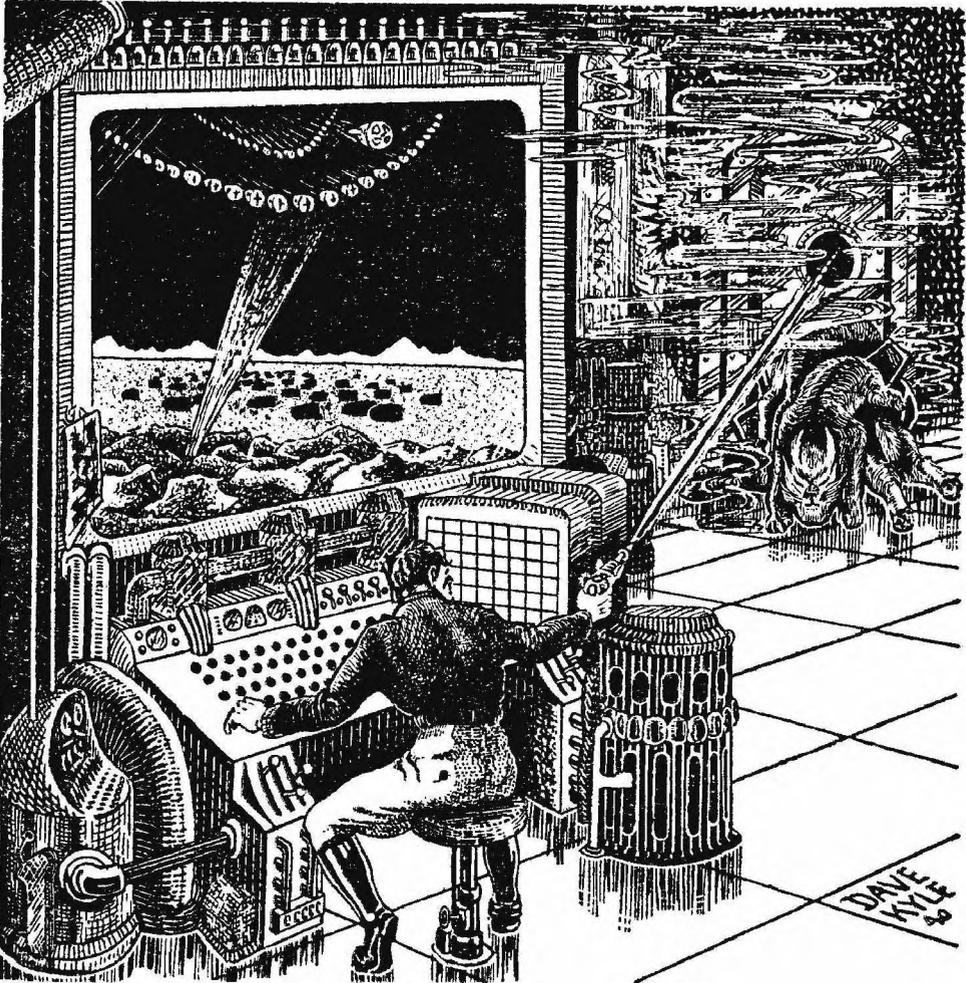
We don't know your unit now, we don't know what sex you are, nor how old. But the make-up of your mind will, must, lead you to reading this story which we have caused to be placed here. When you do, you won't remember either. You won't connect it with yourself, Jadgar, *consciously*. But it will stir your real self, Jadgar, it will start the chain of thought that will break your disguise. Sooner or later from this point on, your sub-conscious reality will break into your conscious being. You'll know who you really are and that we are here, waiting for you! But you can't escape! We've got every reader of this story covered, the first break you make, Jadgar, the first break you make, the first instant you realize that your human form is only a disguise, we'll have you! We're ready to pounce, Jadgar, it's only a matter of a few hours or a few nights, and then, Jadgar, then . . . we're waiting!



CALLISTAN CABAL

by James Blish

(Author of "Citadel of Thought," "Bequest of the Angel," etc.)



When wheeled beings from the dead world lo invaded Callisto, Johnny Owen's suspicion was aroused. Wheels do not occur in nature.

THERE NEVER WAS a squarer peg than Johnny Owen in the round, round hole of a Centrale Government office. At first he had passed the time quite pleasantly ragging Major Allison, his one-time superior, over his new promotion to equality; but Allison was too bird-brained to understand when

he was being kidded, most of the time, and the sport was small compensation for a life of giving orders over a desk-top.

He ground his teeth as he remembered that he had once thought such a life heaven. The disreputable dog-ears of the Martian astronaut Nikki, who was deposited in a tangle of long

legs on the chair next to him, twitched back unconsciously at the sound, then went forward again as Barclay wound up his interminable speech.

"In short," said the Coordinator, "we know next to nothing about these Ionian invaders of Callisto, since we know nothing about Io. Brisco is dead, so we must have a new commander for the A fleet; all our forces must be concentrated upon this outbreak."

He paused impressively, and Owen squirmed. A very bad habit of Barclay's, something he must have learned making speeches to his worshipping public after his election. What in the universe was there so much to gas about? Everybody in the conference already had the meagre facts of the interplanetary incident. Oily DiFalco over there had brought them with him days ago, and every telecast in the system had been featuring shots of the crude iron projectiles which had rained upon the Callistan desert, together with original ideas about the wheeled attackers themselves. Curious what unsuspected imaginative powers a newscaster can show, given the bare fact of a living being with a pair of wheels for legs . . .

"So who's to command A Fleet?" demanded bluff old Mark Harris from behind Johnny.

"Tan Lao."

All the faces in the circle were blank but DiFalco's. His seemed at first faintly pleased, then craftily guarded.

"Who's that?" insisted Harris.

"He's the new governor of Callisto, since considering—"

He got no farther. Even the bored Owen joined in the unanimous "What!"

"Sir Christopher," said Nikki. "After all, a colonial—"

"On the contrary," Barclay returned quickly. "A native."

"Worse," said Nikki sibilantly.

Barclay was flustered and tried to smooth things over. "Perhaps you forget that Callistan autonomy was voted several months ago," the Coordinator reminded him, but the gangling Martian merely answered, "I didn't vote for it."

DiFalco looked furious, and Owen wondered detachedly if Nikki was about to be murdered as a relief in the monotony. "*Cipharjo* Nikki," he snapped. "*Aleri de crico?*"

The astronaut shrugged. "Oh, no particular objection, DiFalco. Only I think Sir Christopher may have overlooked the fact that until you landed there barely twenty years ago the Callistans were not a civilized people. This man Tan Lao that is going to command half the battle-ships of the Solar System was scuttling around in a disgusting yellow swamp, blowing poisonous cactus spines at people."

"It's little enough you know of Callisto," DiFalco said, his eyes smoldering. Then he went on silkily, "My dear Nikki, the Callistan *Elders* are not savages. Far from it. Their race is very old, perhaps the oldest in the system, and their minds are highly developed."

"I check that," agreed Barclay nervously. "I've talked with this man Lao, and he doesn't strike me as being a savage. He read my mind all the way across the Council floor in the middle of the autonomy debate. Most remarkable."

"The Venusians can do that," put in Harris, startling Owen by leaning forward and bellowing the information past his ear.

"The Venusians," DiFalco parried,

more oily than ever, "are hardly savages."

"Major Owen," said Barclay, obviously yearning to clear the air, "What's your opinion? If everybody's against the appointment it can be withdrawn, of course."

"Patrolmen don't think," Johnny grinned, refusing to stick his neck out by taking sides. "I've never seen a Callistan myself, anyhow."

Mark Harris laughed outright. "A wise man in our midst, Barclay. Personally, I see no reason why an erstwhile dart-blower shouldn't make a good commander of war vessels, especially since it's more or less his battle. While we quibble, Callisto is probably being reduced to ashes."

"Damn Callisto," muttered Nikki. "Damned savages, not even dry behind their damned phylogenetic ears."

Johnny Owen escaped to the Iron Boot and set six pitchers of karra-beer in a row on the table before him.

THE GAME of chug-a-lug had only gone two pitchers along before Johnny began to worry again. He was heartily sick and tired of sitting in Mars Port giving orders, and he was sick and tired of the perpetual arguments of Barclay's private conferences, and he heartily wished the Ionians would roll their wheels all over Callisto and go home and leave him alone. Still, there was something decidedly odd about it. It was, according to Dan Lothar who was the first and last man to land there, a dead rock world surrounded by corrosive purple gas—not an environment in which to raise the babies of a space-crossing people. And these wheels—well, nature just never used the wheel, that's all there was to it. All the other kinds of levers,

but the wheel and axle was strictly artificial. And then there was that cat-that-ate-the-canary expression on DiFalco's face when Tan Lao's appointment was mentioned.

Timed neatly with the thought, DiFalco pushed open the door of the Iron Boot, followed by a goat.

At least it looked like a goat at first glance; closer inspection decided him that it was Satan instead. The coarse gray hair waved up into two ridges on either side of the head, giving a distinct impression of horns; the chin was hidden by a stiff spade beard, the face framed in the same material, and the eyes—never in all his life had he seen such eyes, huge, slanted, glowing yellowly, and wise, wise! The light in them was that of wisdom of the eternal order. Meeting them was like a physical shock. Old Nick himself.

They did not notice him, but retreated instead directly to a small booth at the back of the cafe. Owen pondered. The Mephistophelian gentleman must be Tan Lao. If he was, Owen didn't blame Nikki; he hated the man on sight. What if the Martian had been right?

Owen knew that if he poked his officious nose into Council business he'd probably get it bitten off. Still, it had always paid him to follow his hunches. He surreptitiously balanced his Y-Ray mirror on his knee, bowing his head on his hand in a crying-in-the-karra posture, and directed the probing, invisible beam toward that booth. After a moment's jockeying he got the image, a profile of both faces which allowed him to read their lips without much difficulty.

"I thought it would go through," DiFalco was saying. "Barclay is so damned unprejudiced."

Lao nodded. "The Earthman's

sense of justice is a delightfully plastic sort of thing," he remarked, and the other sneered slightly at the veiled thrust.

"Next is Maharni," he started to say, when the Callistan made a warning gesture, indicating his watch. With a smothered curse Owen cut off his mirror. Luckily watch-dial fluorescence told only of the presence of a Y-Ray, not its direction.

SO DIFALCO had indirectly engineered Tan Lao's appointment! But why? Where did it get him? And where did this Maharni, whoever he was, come in? He was to be "next." For what?

He shook his head in disgust, dropped a plugged Venusian *seco* into the coin-slot, and left leisurely. When he was well away and sure nobody was watching him he twisted one cuff-link and spoke into it.

"Allison," he said. "Take your feet off the desk, nipple-noggin."

A tinny voice shot back from the cuff-link. "Now what are you up to, swell-head?"

"I'm on the job, where you ought to be. What do you know about a Maharni?"

"What's up?"

"Curiosity. Nosiness. Mind your own business. Who is he?"

"Venusian, appointed to command the B fleet yesterday. Automatic appointment—he was next in line when Black's term expired. Why?"

"Back to your wire puzzles," Owen returned absent-mindedly, and cut the connection. It was all worse than before, especially since the karra-beer had risen maliciously into his brain and further befogged the situation. What had DiFalco and Lao to do with this purely routine promotion?

He flagged a passing air-cab, but the driver, seeing his uniform and knowing he would frank the ride, flew serenely on, pretending not to see him. By the time he reached his quarters on foot he had resolved to drop the whole business.

A note bearing instructions to call back his cousin was waiting for him, and he deliberately put off the call as long as possible in hopes of infuriating the major. At last he twisted the link.

"Spindle-snout?"

"Oh, hello, Johnny. Listen, our man on Callisto's on leave at the wrong time. I wish I could give you orders, but all I can do is ask you to go now."

"Suspicious?" asked Owen, adding an ounce of soda to half a glass of Scotch.

"No. Routine. More dope on this war layout before the fleet goes over."

So now Johnny was happy. No more swivel-chair manoeuvres. He was just about to put the patternless puzzle out of his mind when Allison's voice cut in:

"By the way, why did you ask about Maharni this afternoon?"

"False lead, I guess. Why?"

"He was killed about fifteen minutes ago. The whole *Mare Vaporum* blew up right next to him. Looks accidental, but geotron explosions are too damn' efficient to leave clues."

Owen emptied his glass carefully on the carpet and grabbed the bottle.

THE HESSACOPTER, hurtling toward Callisto with all the famous and much advertised power of her geotrons, was quiet and dark. It was the sleeping period, but Johnny couldn't sleep. The jig-saw baffled and annoyed him, and he forced him-

self to sit quietly in one of the observation-blister's deep chairs and puzzle it out. Nearby the iron-gray hair of some elderly insomniac showed above the top of another chair, and the stars were unnaturally bright in the field of the engines. On a freighter there would have been a distinct warping effect apparent, but the Hessacopter did not operate on the heavy energy levels. Their humming was a soothing sound, and helped Owen to concentrate.

Both regular fleet commanders dead; one murdered; Callistans substituted, and the murder and substitution apparently a deliberate part of a plan. What could be the object? Perhaps gradual substitution of Callistans for the regular officers, until Callisto had a majority in Council? No—too long a process, too easily detected, and too uncertain to risk.

Yet there was the invasion. At least one city had been attacked and burned by the Ionians, according to report; their ships were plainly to be seen by the commonest newscaster lying menacing, immobile upon the yellow desert; a military cordon had formed around the danger area to keep out sightseers, and nobody knew when the invaders would attack again. Now, apparently, they were inside the ships, cooking up something deadly for their next try. The fleets, both of them, were planning to head for Callisto as soon as more information could be had, and to attack the grounded Ionian projectiles. Certainly Tan Lao, once governor of his planet, would not stoop to capitalizing upon its misfortune for his own personal gain.

A momentary green streak of light marked a meteor rebounding from the geotron field, and Johnny's thoughts took a new tack. Suppos-

ing this capitalization was not for Tan Lao's own gain, but for the planet itself? More in character, certainly. Still that seemed more impossible than the last case. He took out his miniature concertina and sent a few piping notes rippling softly through the blister. This Ionian invasion marked the first outbreak of open warfare since the founding of Centrale; all the other planets had had their differences settled, the Nationalists were broken up, trade barriers were down, space pirates still existed only beyond the orbit of Uranus—and now, without warning, a fierce attack from a supposedly uninhabited and deadly little world! An attack upon Callisto, which had an atmosphere much like that of Mars—surely not a desirable planet for a people who lived in that lung-rotting purple pea soup Dan Lothar had described. They had been reported to have attacked in spacesuits, but still, why did they want Callisto in the first place? You can't spend your life in a spacesuit, even if you aren't quite as interested in women as Johnny Owen.

They had come in projectiles, without motive power. Logical way to span intersatillary distances, although what landing might be like inside a controlless iron shell could be imagined only by very blood-thirsty minds. Projectiles would be easy and cheap to fake—

Fake!

But how would you fake the burning of the city?

THAT QUESTION had barely answered itself in Johnny's mind when the cold isoglass muzzle of a heat-gun dented a chilling circle in the back of his scalp. "I can't shoot you on the Hessacopter, obviously," Tan Lao's voice whispered, "but I'm

afraid you're getting a little too close to the truth for your own good, Major Owen."

That mind-reading power Barclay had mentioned!

"Do you mind if I get up?" said Owen coolly.

"Not at all. But I should hate to have to cook your brains in the pan—here."

"I'll be good," said Johnny quite sincerely, and got out of the chair. There were two of them, although where the second one had come from he couldn't imagine.

"May I introduce San Janic, new commander of B fleet?" smiled Lao, and Owen bowed ironically.

"And what now?"

This seemed to puzzle the Callistans. "We'll have to lock you in your cabin," Tan Lao decided at last. "Will you come along, please?"

Johnny picked up the concertina from the chair with a resigned gesture. It squeaked mournfully once and then hung limply in his hand as they herded him down the dimly-lit companion-ways. In a moment they were in the little metal room.

"We'll come for you at the end of the voyage and dispose of you elsewhere," Lao informed him in a softly polite and deadly voice. "Until then—"

Only the fact that Johnny acted instinctively and without conscious forethought saved him from having his face seared away. He flung the concertina in Janic's face and dived for Lao's legs. The beam from the Callistan's heat gun hissed wickedly over his head and rebounded in a shower of sparks from the suddenly-white hot wall; then he struck, and the gun fell to the floor as they fell, Owen on top. Lao fought with concentrated, silent ferocity, like a madman, and Johnny couldn't find the

breath to cry out. For a moment the scales leaned in his favor—

Then the figure of Janic loomed over him, a rubber truncheon enlarged to enormous size and burst into a thousand pinwheels on his head, and the universe folded around him like a black hand . . .

FOR A MOMENT he lay on damp stone, trying to remember the details of last night's binge, which must have been a beauty if the hang-over was any judge. There seemed to be a white-hot stone lodged just under the skin of his forehead.

Then the kidnapping came back to him, and he jerked his eyelids open and sat up. The movement was torture, but it woke him up. Four stone walls enclosed him, pierced to the left by a heavy metal bulkhead, and in front of him by a long window which opened into darkness. Obviously they had taken him off the Hessicopter, so he must be on Callisto; underground, it seemed. He recalled that DiFalco had once mentioned that the Callistan Elders lived in an elaborate series of caves under the desert. Probably that was where they had put him.

There was no source of light in the little cell; he was able to see by a faint glow that drifted out of the blackness beyond the window, and just outside he could see an irregular roof stretching away into invisibility. The light must be coming from below. Painfully he got to his feet and went over to the opening.

His cell was a sort of small gallery opening upon an enormous cave, which reached away far below him to an inestimable dark distance. Dimly he could make out the outlines of a huge tower occupying the center of a far-distant floor and rising almost up to him in a series of smooth

long curves. A muted, confused murmuring, as of many voices, drifted up through the musty air.

Suddenly he became conscious of a new sound—a high, thin, musical keening, almost inaudible, but growing. It set his teeth on edge. A low rumble added itself to it, swelled, and a thin line of blinding light split the tower from top to bottom, sending a brilliant pathway cutting through the blackness. Momentarily the line grew, and as his eyes became adjusted he saw that the wall of the tower nearest his left was opening slowly, as if massive portals were being rolled aside. At last the movement ceased, but the keening note stayed steady, and from the interior of the tower a great light played, slowly, fiercely—

What was that! He craned his neck farther over the edge, and a little thrill of horror shot up his backbone. Standing before the opened portals, clearly outlined in the terrible radiance, was a tiny human figure, with arms rigidly upraised. In a moment he lowered them again, and walked forward without hesitation into the furnace!

The rumbling voice came again, the keening slid down the scale and died slowly with the light as the great doors rolled ponderously shut, leaving all blacker than before. What kind of strange sacrifice was this?

HE HAD NO time to ponder the question, for a bolt shot back on the steel door with a startling report, and he spun to see two Callistans enter, guns drawn. The first smiled crookedly at him.

"Watching the ritual, Major?" he said. "You should be interested. The Tower of the Yellow God is older than your very race; and you are soon to join the many who have been

honored by purification in its fires."

Johnny spat deliberately over the edge of the window, and the Elder's eyes lit dangerously.

"You will go willingly enough, when your mind has been reduced to its proper level," he bit off. He approached the edge and looked over, a fanatical glow suffusing his face. He seemed to be watching, with his cat's eyes, something that Johnny couldn't see.

"Ah, yes," he said softly. "There is another of your compatriots being prepared hypnotically to perform the ceremony."

Very little could shake Johnny Owen's cold-steel nerves, but he was shaken now. "You lousy damned fiend—" The Callistan waved his gun warningly, seemed about to speak—

But a hairy, claw-like hand clapped over his mouth, and before Johnny's astonished eyes the second satyr had brought the butt of his ray-pistol down on the other's head!

"Good disguise, eh, Owen?"

"Nikki! How the hell—"

"No time to explain now. Mars has been suspicious of this 'Ionian invasion' from the first. It's been staged. There's nothing with any intelligence on Io. Men with wheels! I ask you! More Callistan deviltry."

"I guessed that—but why—"

"They've planted ray batteries all around the desert—planning to have Lao and Janic lead the fleet within range and then burn it down. These caverns are full of the Callistans' own ships. The rays here are more powerful than any a cruiser can carry. With the fleet out of the way, goodbye Centrale." The Martian made an exaggerated tragic gesture.

"So that's it! The Elders—"

"Smart, but degenerate—the race is about burned out morally. Half scientists, half superstitious savages

with a lust for power. The fleet was to leave today—we've got to move fast. Pitch that illegitimate son of Janicot overside."

Johnny shook his head. "Sorry, Nikki. He's out cold, and that'll have to do." The Martian looked at him with a mixture of scorn and admiration.

"You damned Terrestrials. All right. Let's go!"

They raced out of the gallery.

NIKKI SEEMED to know the caverns well. After a few twists and turns Owen was hopelessly lost; every corridor looked the same to him. No indecision slowed the Martian's flying feet, however; in a moment they had reached a tight spiral staircase and were pounding up an endless series of steps.

"How did you—manage to get in?" Johnny puffed, cocking the Callistan's heat-gun. "They read minds —"

They emerged suddenly into a machine-parked grotto, crossed it, entered another stairway.

"Johnny, what do they call the people of the three major planets?"

He thought that over. Venus—the Biologists. Earth—the Engineers. Mars—the Philosophers!

"Exactly. A Martian can read minds, or prevent their being read, as well as any Callistan. It just isn't considered ethical, that's all—like your taboo on Peeping-Tomism."

Further explanation was cut off as a great clamor rolled around them. An alarm bell, booming brazenly through the very rock! Had the Callistan guard come to? Or—was it the signal that the fleet had been sighted?

The same thought seemed to hit Nikki. They were apparently close

to the surface now. The second spiral had brought them into the greatest cavern of all, a place so huge that the far-away roof was like a rocky sky. Tubelights glowed faintly in the shadowy reaches, and blue gleams reflected from hulking ray-tubes and the spider-webbing catwalks beneath the ugly breeches. Callistans, dwarfed by the distance, ran hastily to their places at the controls, the ringing of their feet on the metal plates joining the awesome clamor of the alarm, and a heavy car screamed to a stop on its rail beside the catwalks and was hastily unloaded of its cargo of charging cells.

Nikki and Owen slunk along the wall, hoping that none of the gunners would look down. "I'll try to find a place up there and signal with a ray," the disguised Martian howled above the din. "You take that stairway—leads to the central control chamber. Quick!" and before Johnny could say a word he was gone.

Johnny pumped the charge-rod on his pistol and crept cautiously up the stairs. In a moment he was before a metal rivet-studded door, pierced by one small port; behind it goat-like figures were moving. He raised the gun and kicked at the panel.

AT THAT INSTANT the triple-damned alarm gong stopped, and the steel plates crashed back against the wall with an earth-shaking noise. Yellow-eyed satyrs spun, clawing for guns, and he pulled the trigger rapidly. His first shot missed, striking a heavy matrix-tube and melting it into a puddle. At the second try he had the satisfaction of seeing a demoniac snarl turn suddenly into charcoal, and the hissing, needle-fine beam struck out again at a charging devil. He screamed once,

terribly, and went down, his head bouncing on a few cooked fragments of flesh where the neck had been. A heavy chair spun across Owen's legs, and he vaulted it and burnt down the Callistan who had thrown it; for an instant a white-hot wire seemed to have been laid across his wrist—then the plunger drove in once more and the last of the operators slumped against the wall and slid with infinite slowness to the floor.

A nice clean job, if somewhat hasty. Near the control-banks the melted tube boiled its cream-like, liquid yellow contents, spilling a dense fog into the room. Matrix-gas, not lethal, but damned annoying. He was glad he hadn't hit the other two of the set, or he wouldn't have been able to see a thing. He slammed the door and sat hastily before the screens.

Shadowed there was an awe-inspiring sight. The electric eye was planted on the northern edge of the desert, overlooking the bogus Ionian cylinders and the hidden gun-emplacements. Almost motionless in the clear, dark blue sky, the fifty ships of the B Fleet of Centrale made a mighty flying V, and behind them, mere spots against the ethereal curtain, the A Fleet followed. The armada of the Solar System! Come to meet an imaginary invader and a very real and fatal Armageddon unless—

The sound-pickup shrieked suddenly and a livid green disintegrator bolt flashed skyward at the lead ship—Janic's ship—and caught it! There was only a slowly scattering cloud of dust to show where forty innocent men and a traitor had flown before. Johnny groaned. Nikki had done that—still, perhaps it had been necessary. Perhaps the fleet would be warned of the danger awaiting it,

the power of the "Ionian" weapons—

But no. Tan Lao, blast him, had taken over. Owen remembered his role and clicked the communicators.

"What fool fired that shot?"

"A Martian, sir, in disguise. We threw him over."

So. Poor Nikki, dead as a patrolman would like to die, fighting for his planet. Now it was up to Johnny. But what could he do among all these unfamiliar controls? There were range-finders here—was he supposed to direct the fire? He swore frantically and searched the panels for a radio, but there was nothing but the communicators and banks of enigmatic buttons.

A swirl of movement on the screen caught his eye. The whole mighty fleet was sweeping forward, Tan Lao hovering high above, directing them into the death-trap!

LAO'S SHIP WAS too high to hit, and killing him and his guiltless crew wouldn't help now, anyhow. He barked a set of ranges into the communicator, intending to fire a salvo harmlessly upward, showing the patrol the nests ringing the desert—but an ominous silence greeted him. Then a voice, faintly—

"That can't be right—" and the connection was broken. They had caught on! What now? They would be in in a minute! Cursing himself for a fool, Johnny scanned the infuriating banks of buttons, so much like the keys of an enormous typewriter, marked with Callistan symbols. A chart overhead indicated hidden batteries with corresponding characters. Could he assume control from here?

He picked one out of range of the approaching fleet and punched, holding his breath. A shell arced upward and exploded. No go. Didn't

they have any damned searchlights? They must have planned something to allow for a night attack—

He heard feet on the stairs and ran to the door, slammed it shut. It had no bolt or lock, but he piled the extra chairs and the dead Callistans against it, ran back again to push the next key—

Ah! A dis-ray! Better than nothing, and the ships would keep clear of it now. The door began to tremble under the blows as he tapped quickly, *TDX — TDX — TDX*—the patrol danger signal. Two things had to hold out until somebody recognized the message: the dis-ray's power charge and that door—

The glass pane splintered and he fired quickly, half turning. A gun clattered to the floor and a shriek of pain from outside answered the shot. Johnny smiled grimly. They wouldn't try that soon again. He thanked his ruling star for the obscuring fog of matrix-gas from the molten tube, which had forced them to shoot wild. He was at an angle from the port, so they couldn't stand back from it and shoot in, and the black opening was plainly visible to him. He found something humorous in the thought of owing his life to some unknown Callistan architect. He continued frantically to tap the call, and the now-paling beam of the dis-ray winked greenly at the still-approaching fleet. In a moment the power would be gone, and precious time would be wasted finding another gun while the first one went through its ten-minute charging period—the door shook suddenly to a heavy blow, and the piled chairs and corpses tottered and toppled gruesomely—*TDX — TDX*—

that and the barricade would be all broken. There was still one chair wedged beneath the doorknob—a metal chair. He saw the other two tall matrix-tubes, and on a hunch he smashed the top off them and heated them to incandescence with a low-power beam. Yellow-white fog seethed from them, almost blinding him, cutting off his view of the door port, even the screen. He groped his way through it and flattened himself against the wall by the door, emptying his gun deliberately into the apparatus. At least they would have a tough job getting their attack going again for a while.

They must have counted the *spangs* of the ray, for there was a last triumphant crash, a rending of metal hinges, and they came piling recklessly into the room, stumbling over the tumbled barricade, charging blindly for the control seat. It was an easy matter for Johnny to slip out the door, his footsteps drowned by the racket they were making; in the swirling matrix-gas they didn't discover he was gone until he had reached the cavern.

He went cold inside as thin beams of pure heat from the cat-walks hissed about him, but ran doggedly on, picking an exit at random. A dull boom shook the very floor beneath him, although it seemed to come from far above. Another followed, then another. The rolling, racking concussions of dinitron. He would not let himself imagine what it could mean, but its effect, multiplied by the labyrinth of caverns and corridors, was electrifying. Pursuit was forgotten. Callistans ran aimlessly, milling about in confusion behind him; and it was an easy matter to find the exit to the desert.

There a terrible and unforgettable

NO TIME TO watch the screen now, for a few more blows like

sight greeted the exhausted patrolman. Lao's ship was down, about a quarter of a mile from him, flanked by two patrol vessels bearing the IP insignia; and Lao himself was out on the sand, under guard of his own men, watching with bitterness the death of his dream. The fleet had risen high into the air, out of range of the Callistan batteries, and was bombing the desert methodically. The "Ionian" ships, supposedly helpless, were taking the air, but the collapse of the death-trap had disorganized them; they were clumsy anyhow, having apparently been designed only as mopper-uppers, and no match for the darting vessels of the patrol. The hidden Callistan fleet was trapped in its caverns.

A well-placed bomb struck a key-stone somewhere, and the floor of the desert seemed to open. The sacrificial cavern! For a moment Johnny Owen could see the great metal spire of the Tower of the Yellow God, in which he had been destined for immolation, before another red dinitron blast wiped out all trace of its mysterious, decadent rites from the Solar System.

FOOTSTEPS SOUNDED behind him, and he turned to confront Major Allison. "Johnny!" he puffed. "Good man!"

"Is that your head I see, or am I threading a needle?" Owen demanded sternly, to hide his pleasure. Allison disregarded the insult.

"We got your signal, and Lao tried to make a getaway. His navigator grabbed him."

"How about DiFalco?"

Allison looked crestfallen. "He beat it from Mars Port before we could warn our men there."

"Typically stupid of you," said Johnny, looking even more sternly at his cousin.

"We'll get him. Don't worry. Good work, you dog. They'll probably promote you over my head, now, and you'll be utterly insufferable."

Johnny Owen thought of the hellish weeks he had had cooling his heels on a desk-top and handing out action to other men; and he remembered the body of the Martian astronaut, Nikki, the conqueror of Pluto, now but another part of that blasted desert.

"Sorry to disappoint your hopes of having a famous relation," he said. "Nikki sent the signals. I was tied up all the time. He let me out and was shot while we were beating it."

Allison looked genuinely sorry. "Oh . . . too bad, Johnny."

"Yeah," said Johnny Owen. But he really didn't feel very sorry about it.



THE ROCKET OF 1955

by Cecil Corwin

(Author of "Thirteen O'Clock," "The Reversible Revolutions," etc.)

The Event of the Century!

THE SCHEME was all Fein's, but the trimmings that made it more than a pipe-dream, and its actual operation depended on me. How long the plan had been in incubation I do not know, but Fein, one day in the spring of 1954, broke it to me in a rather crude form. I pointed out some errors, corrected and amplified on the thing in general, and told him that I'd have no part of it—and changed my mind when he threatened to reveal certain indiscretions committed by me some years ago.

It was necessary that I spend some months in Europe, conducting research work incidental to the scheme. I returned with recorded statements, old newspapers, and photostatic copies of certain documents. There was a brief, quiet interview with that old, bushy-haired Viennese worshipped incontinently by the mob; he was convinced by the evidence I had compiled that it would be wise to assist us.

You all know what happened next—it was the professor's historic radio broadcast. Fein had drafted the thing, I had rewritten it, and told the astronomer to assume a German accent while reading. Some of the phrases were beautiful: "American dominion over the very planets!—veil at last ripped aside—man defies gravity—travel through space—plant the glorious red-white-and-blue banner into the soil of Mars!"

The requested contributions poured in. Newspapers and magazines ostentatiously donated yard-long checks of a few thousand dollars; the government gave a welcome half-million; heavy sugar came from the "Rocket Contribution Week" held in the nation's public schools; but independent contributions were the largest. We cleared seven million dollars, and then started to build the space-ship.

The virginium that took up most of the money was tin-plate; the monoatomic fluorine that gave us our terrific speed was hydrogen. The take-off was a party for the newsreels: the big, gleaming bullet extravagant with vanes and projections; speeches by the professor; Farley, who was to fly it to Mars, grinning into the cameras. He climbed an outside ladder to the nose of the thing, then dropped into the steering compartment. I screwed down the sound-proof door, smiling as he hammered to be let out. Rather to his surprise, there was no duplicate of the elaborate dummy controls he had been practising on for the past few weeks.

I cautioned the pressmen to stand back under the shelter, and gave the professor the knife-switch that would send the rocket on its way. He hesitated too long—Fein hissed into his ear: "Anna Pareloff of Cracow, Herr Professor . . ."

The triple blade clicked into the

sockets. The vaned projectile roared a hundred yards into the air with a wabbling curve—then exploded.

A photographer, eager for an angle-shot, was killed; so were some boys of the neighborhood. The steel roof protected the rest of us. Fein and I shook hands, while the pressmen screamed into the telephones which we had provided.

But the professor got drunk, and, disgusted with the part he had

played in the affair, told all and poisoned himself. Fein and I left the cash behind and hopped a freight. We were picked off it by a vigilance committee (headed by a man who had lost fifty cents in our rocket). Fein was too frightened to talk or write so they hanged him first, and gave me paper and pencil to tell the story as best I could.

Here they come, with an insulting thick rope.



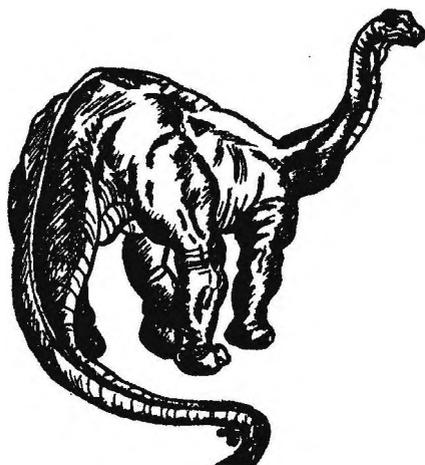
WAR ROCKETS

Before the war broke out, during the ten or twelve years past, various scientific magazines and pseudo-scientific Sunday supplements were fond of featuring articles on the use of rockets in the next war. There would be amazing diagrams and illustrations showing just how giant radio-controlled rockets, loaded with high explosives, would fly hundreds of miles, across oceans and continents, to drop with deadly accuracy upon their victims.

We were regaled with whispered accounts of secret experiments in Germany and other countries, we heard scary reports of so-called eye-

witnesses, we saw accounts of just how such rockets were to be built, how they would be controlled, how much explosive they could carry, and how they would render artillery and cannon obsolete.

A bitter war has been raging in Europe for over a year now. The greatest powers of the old world have been hurling every weapon they have at each other. And still there are no war rockets, still no sign or sound of any radio-controlled aerial torpedos. Surely if either side had them, they would have used them in this death-struggle. But their absence proves only one thing—there are no war rockets and never were!



THE BRONTOSAURUS

by
Robert G. Thompson

Dickuh Jonnis was determined to see a Thunder-Lizard if he had to go back to the Dawn of Time to do it.

IF YOU SAW it first from the desert, you thought the Science Building stood alone. When you came closer, you could see the huts around, puny compared to the Huge Building.

It stood halfway between Brukul and Manhatta, but had no responsibility to the clans of either territory; the Scientists were completely independent and the desert surrounding their retreat enforced that independence.

Few people came across the desert to the Council City (as it was called); that was good. But the corollary of that proposition was bad: many of the younger members of the community would have liked to leave. They could not do so and were ostracised if they attempted it.

Dickuh Jonnis had been born there. For all of his thirty years, ever since he had been admitted to the Science Council, he had dreamed of getting away. Age was an important consideration here, and, according to the accepted standards, he was young; anyone under forty-five was considered adolescent, his or her rights accordingly limited. Because of his youth, he fell under the scorn of the older men; yet, there was still

another reason for their disapproval: his originality and impetuosity.

If he hadn't been so, he never would have knocked San Cunduh over the head with Grin's "History of Astronomical Observation," putting the old boy to sleep most effectively.

That requires a bit of explanation: you see, Dickuh Jonnis' enthusiasms ran to paleontology. They amounted to an obsession—one which he had acquired from the perusal of a tattered volume discovered in the Museum, which described in ancient Engrik an animal called the brontosaurus or thunder-lizard. It was of monstrous size, this creature. There was definitely nothing like it anywhere on Terra today; it dated from before the Great War, or Downfall, as it is more commonly called, and (the volume hinted) even before humanity itself.

So Dickuh was determined, unswervingly, absolutely determined, to see at least a skeleton of this remarkable animal before he died.

How? It was possible for any member of the Science Council to see a brontosaurus—or any other sight in all the past, because they had a Time Machine. They built it in the course of about three years, checked it,

double-checked, experimented, analysed, experimented again and re-double-checked. And their answers all added up to the same thing: it worked. With this machine they could travel back to any point in history — to the ultimate remote backspot in time of fifteen thousand years. Everyone knew, of course, that fifteen thousand years was the ultimate; before that, all you had was a semi-molten mass of incandescence which would someday be the Earth.

Yes, it was possible for Dickuh Jonnis to see a brontosaurus. There was only one difficulty.

Every last member of the Science Council had some sight in the past which he wanted to see.

And though the time machine required very little radium for its operation, there was just enough for about one journey and return. Only one person could fulfill his desires through it.

So the high Ep Samtora Ajk decreed that, since the time machine could never settle *all* of the questions, and since every member of the Council had an equal claim upon that one possible trip, it would settle none. He ordered it placed in the Museum, which was done, and further commanded that it be guarded by at least two men and one Scientist at all times—which was not done.

THE ONLY guard over the time machine was feeble San Cunduh. It had been very easy for Dickuh Jonnis, once the necessary courage had been aroused, to tell old San, excitedly, of a star which was in the wrong position, and, while the old man was scouring the skies for this astronomical marvel, to tap him gently on the head with the ten-pound book.

The time machine was protected by a thick case of glass, a case which the strongest man in the community could not have broken with his hands. But Dickuh Jonnis decided that it was not built to resist a meteorite, such as the small one which rested in the next room, even though it were to travel at the relatively negligible velocity that a man's throwing might give it. He was right. And a moment later, Dickuh Jonnis had his time machine.

It was built in the shape of a life-preserver, worn like a vest. Jonnis put it on with emotions similar to those of a passenger in a sinking liner as he dons a life belt. Maybe it wouldn't work—but he knew it would.

There was a little lever to throw over; Jonnis touched it, closed the contact.

Nothing happened.

Suddenly, he knew why. There was a dent in the apparatus where the meteorite had glanced off it; the jar had dislocated something inside the machine.

Experimentally he banged it with his hand, banged it again and again the way one bangs a watch which refuses to start ticking when it should. And then, suddenly, he was Outside. He had left his normal space-time frame and was ready to journey *outside* along the years.

There were dials to be set; he chose a time-point about two centuries prior to the point of his departure. This, he knew, was not the era of the brontosaurus, but he had other curiosities as well; he would like to fix once for all the exact time of the Downfall. Moreover, he might be able to obtain precise data on the finding of the brontosaurus there. The thought also came to him that he might be able to acquire enough

radium, at stopping-off points, to enable him to travel quite extensively.

So he spun the dial. The affair was a bit foolish, because he had expected some sort of physical sensation from travelling in time, and none came. He looked at the dial and saw that it indicated his arrival at the time-point he desired. Apparently, then, he could not *measure* the duration of his voyages in relation to his own time-concepts. It was practically instantaneous. He broke the contact, threw the lever back to its normal position.

Once more he was in the museum section of the Science Building. But it was daylight where before had been night, and the room was not as he had left it.

He went out through the open door, ran into a Scientist in the hallway.

"What kind of a thing is that?" inquired the man, frowning at the time machine. Jonnis hesitated in replying, then was saved the necessity as another man came forward. He looked closely at Jonnis, then gasped. "Lin!" he exclaimed; "by the Samtora, that man is a stranger!"

"A stranger! But he wears the clothes of a Scientist."

"Of course, pig-head" cried the other. "But I know every Scientist in the Council. We have a spy here—a spy!" Jonnis jumped back, started running as the two reached out for him.

He could obtain no information from these people — he knew how jealously the Science Council guarded its privacy, what chance he would have of proving he was not a spy. He pulled the lever as he ran, pounded on it desperately. Even after pounding, nothing happened.

Was it because the belt couldn't act on a body in motion? Jonnis had heard something of the sort. He

stopped, closed the contact again. At the third slap the mechanism responded and Jonnis was Outside again. To his pursuers, he merely merged into invisibility and could not be captured.

THIS TIME he made a hop of a thousand years before he halted. But then, he reasoned, it was 1200 years before his time, and doubted gravely that man had existed so long before the Downfall.

However, he took the chance, found himself in a stranger place. The Science Building was gone and so were the oasis and the desert in which it had stood. He was on what seemed to be a grassy plain. Far in the distance, he saw a hut with taller plants around it.

He walked toward it, a distance of about a mile. A peasant came out, saying, "Greetings, worship." He surveyed Jonnis' dress curiously, but made no comment.

"Greetings" replied Jonnis abstractly, trying to think of a way of asking the peasant whether or not the Great War had occurred yet, without arousing his astonishment. "Can you direct me to the nearest village?"

"There are no villages around here, worship. You are welcome to my hut if you want food or sleep."

No villages. And the peasant called him worship.

That was all Jonnis needed to hear, for he knew his history. The Great War was still to come; he had passed its time. He was now in the time before it, when the continent was made up of vast farms and a few tremendous cities; the cities owned the farms and exacted tribute in the form of crops. A few scattered peasants such as this man were permitted their individuality provided

they showed proper respect to City Dwellers whenever they might come by — which was seldom. It was a hard life, that of the individual peasant and his woman, or family, and few farmers cared to tackle it. Thus there had been no necessity for harsh measures against those who were willing to try it; the individual farmer, or peasant, as he was termed by the collective farmers could expect no outside help in case of accident or emergency of any kind. When the society of that day left an individual alone, there were no half-way measures about it.

Jonnis said "Thank you" to the man and started on waving goodbye. The peasant made no objection, but stood and watched Jonnis trudge away, then a call from within the hut took him away from the traveler's sight. Dickuh Jonnis pressed the lever again.

He felt that he was now on the trail of the brontosaurus. The plan of obtaining more radium had been forgotten; he set the dials for two thousand years so as to complete the journey.

JONNIS emerged from Outside in the middle of a howling gale and lashing sleet. An Ice Age, he reflected, remembering that the brontosaurus was spoken of as a denizen of a hot climate.

He threw the lever again for another two thousand years.

He found himself now in a chaotic scene. It was night in a barren, desolate land. The air was filled with flickering beams of light, the noise of explosions, and the cries of screaming humans.

But what was the cause of all this? Jonnis saw ditches traversing the bare land, and suddenly recognized them. They were what the Ancients

had called "trenches"; *this* was the Great War.

And that told him what the light-beams were, for they were well known in books of history. They were deadly carrier-beams of absolute cold.

He ran blindly as a beam approached him, flicked past without touching his body. He felt numbing agony chill through him. But he didn't fall. He would struggle on, he knew; he could not die until he'd seen the brontosaurus.

Whence came the beams? From the sky, it seemed. Jonnis had read that the ancients had had the power of flying; that was what made the beams so deadly: there could be no shelter from them.

The lights overhead were moving, and finally the sky immediately above was almost clear of them. The battle was being concentrated in a spot several miles away though beams were still approaching him at times. Then Jonnis stopped running, hid behind a grove of dead, barren trees. (The rays of cold, he realized, had killed their foliage.)

And once again Jonnis was Outside. Five thousand years he went this time. Now he was beginning to realize that the time-charts of the Science Council were terribly incorrect. He tried to reconcile the peasant with the war, and gave up, thinking that perhaps many of the history books were hopelessly inaccurate. Or had there been more than one Great War? But, enough of this: he must be close, now, to the time of the brontosaurus.

Another five thousand years he went, before the point, he recalled now, where the Scientists claimed, Terra supported life.

This time something seemed to have gone wrong with the space controls of the time belt. Dickuh Jonnis

found himself in a subterranean cavern, dank and foul-smelling, stretching into the distance on either side. Oddly, there was some light in it.

Jonnis decided he had best look for an opening to the surface. It was not likely, he thought, that the brontosaurus lived underground. Then he became conscious of a rumbling that grew to a violent roar. Then a huge black shape darted around a bend in the cavern.

The sound was louder than thunder. Thunder! Weak from the shock of it, Dickuh Jonnis realized that he

had found the brontosaurus, the Thunder Lizard. He could see its red, gleaming eyes as it dashed toward him. There was no place where he could flee to safety; the Brontosaurus was going to trample him down, crush him to a pulp. Well? . . .

He had seen it before he died.

THE BMT local was unable to stop before it hit the oddly dressed young man in the tunnel. Three cars of the subway train passed over his body, but the emergency crew found a smile on his mangled, dead face.



The Fishers

by Damon Knight

Along the ways that once were streets we rowed,
 Between the crumbling walls, night-dark and drear;
 And fished in silent waters, murky-clear,
 For relics from the ancient ones' abode.
 With sluggish, stealthy grace the waters flowed
 Around our net as from its sunken bier
 We raised, in bony arms tight-clasped, a spear.
 We tore the prize from outraged hands, and rode,
 In silence, on the agitated waves,
 Far from the place. And now, with all our lust
 For riches gone, the memories will not fade.
 A little thing: a smell from damp sea-caves—
 Upon an empty road, a puff of dust
 In air—And suddenly, *we are afraid!*

COSMOPHOBIA

by Millard Verne Gordon

(Author of "The Space Lens," "Purple Dandelions," etc.)



What is ordinary fear compared to that which must come when the very air and soil are alien to one?

A BRIEF CRY; the grinding of brakes; the bursting open of an automobile door. Rush of footsteps, buzz of hurried conversation.

"We'll have to take him with us."

"Yes. Can't leave him here. No one around. And we cannot afford police interference now."

They picked up the body of the injured man, carried him into their car. They propped him against a seat, hoping that no fractures had taken

place, covered him with their overcoats. Then the motor roared again; the car drove on.

In Merrill's head was an ache and a dizziness. But over and above the pain and nausea, a curiosity. Where was he; whither was he bound? He could recall only the horror of that moment when he realized a car was upon him and he could not move fast enough.

He opened his eyes slightly. Beneath lowered lids he could see

through the side windows. Rows of drab houses. Tenements, fire-escapes, cars. Then something that was crying for rest and quiet took over; he lay back still.

Later, though not fully awake, he felt the car stop. He heard the two get out then open the door and lift him. He opened his eyes to observe a side street. Rows of old fashioned brown-stone private residences lined it as far as he could see. Then he was being carried up stone stairs into a house. Again a rush of dizziness and blackout.

When Merrill opened his eyes again, he found himself lying on a couch in a large, dim room. A parlor furnished in the rather stuffy manner of the early 1900's. He sat up. The ache was gone; only a trace of the weariness remained. He put his hand up to his head to find it neatly bandaged.

But where were his benefactors? He had not seen them so far. He must find them, thank them, then go.

Accordingly he walked across the heavily carpeted floor, out into the long hallway. At one end, near the back of the house, he thought he heard a voice. He walked toward it. As he neared the door, it grew clearer; he could distinguish two people speaking. A chance word aroused his curiosity so that, instead of putting his hand on the door, he stopped and listened.

"It's finished now."

"Shall we try it? I don't want to wait."

"In a moment or so. Let's rest a bit. By God, I'm almost scared myself. Now that it's done, I can barely believe that it will really do what it's built to do. A door into other worlds: can you believe that? A vibratory panel that, when induced, will cause

a bending of the fourth dimensional time-space continuum so as to bring a spot on some far-off world in contact with this room."

"Like an opium-eater's dream. You step through a screen of light and find yourself on another planet. Wow!"

"I think we're too excited to try now. We'd better go and eat first, then have a quiet smoke. Discuss just what we'd better take with us. Must be in full control of ourselves. Come."

MERRILL HEARD footsteps approaching the door. Instantly he fled back over the silent carpet, back to the parlor where he flattened himself against a wall, holding his breath. He heard the door open, heard two men come out. Then the sound of footsteps descending the stairs to the floor below. Silence.

Why had he done that? But the wonder was swept away by an overpowering desire to see what was in that room at the end of the corridor. He stepped out, quietly, down the long hall again. Quietly he opened the door, slipped inside.

It was a large room, evidently used as a laboratory. Along one end ran a long, slate-topped table. One wall was filled with shelves of chemicals. The rest of the room held machines, seemingly electrical in character. In the corner, a small generator.

Two windows in one wall. He could see through these, noted a back yard outside. He was on the second floor.

In the space between these windows was what looked like a long closet set flush with the floor, rising about seven feet high. About three feet wide. Before this closet, a table with a panel of controls like the face of a complex radio.

Merrill walked over to the closet, opened the door. He looked out upon the yard visible through the windows. But between him and the open air was a sheet of wire netting which screened the entire opening. Lining the sides of the closet were little glass discs like the ends of search-lights.

He stepped back. This, he knew, would be the contrivance about which the two had been speaking. And that panel must be the controls. He looked at it, noting the many dials. One read *intensity*, another *volume*, still others controlling things he didn't understand. Apparently all were set. There was a small lever marked *On* and *Off*. Obviously, this was the starter. Merrill put his hands on it, wondering for a second if he was being fair to the others. But curiosity overcame him. Strangely, he never thought that perhaps it might not work; the voices he had heard had been so full of enthusiasm and confidence, he took it for granted. He closed the closet door, threw the switch marked *On*.

A faint humming, not enough to disturb those below. Merrill went to the closet door, opened it.

There was a sheet of blue fire filling the entire opening. Now he could no longer see through it. But, after a second's observation, he saw that it was not fire. The wires were glowing brilliantly; the little glass discs emitting a brilliant blue light.

No breeze from the outside blowing as before. He listened but could hear nothing, not even the noises of the city. Heart pounding, he stretched out a hand cautiously. It went right through the vibration screen. He felt no wires, nothing to impede him. Now, taking a deep breath, he stepped through.

A SUDDEN WAVE of blue; a tingle of shock running through him. And that was all. He looked about wonderingly, nerves tingling.

It was dim. The light gray and sombre as if it were late evening. There was a strong flow of air about him; queer smells entered his nostrils. He strained his eyes through the dark. His feet, he could see, rested on soil, rather flaky, black stuff. He was in a thin clump of trees—strange trees, like overgrown weeds, black and shivery in the half light. Through the trees he looked out upon a vast expanse of dark. In the far distance a few pulsing reddish lights glowed.

Suddenly he whirled in fright. The door! A shimmering vibration in the air reassured him; tentatively he thrust his hand through, noted with relief that he could feel a tingle. He jerked his head back again.

He was frightened, no doubt of that. He stared about him wildly, heart thumping heavily. Nowhere could he see any cause for fear. His breath came in gasps; he felt a terrific desire to rush back to his own world. Perhaps this thing should be done by degrees, a little at a time, a few moments for each trip until one were used to being—outside. But he could not do this; he could not hope to carry on a long series of explorations as the others; he must see as much as possible this time. Rapidly he tried to calm himself; what cause was there for fear?

What threatened him? Nothing. Had he not been in the great war? There he had been afraid, yet never afraid in this strange way. Here it was not the bite of shrapnel, the shocks of bullets, the stabbing of bayonets, or the searing of poison gas to dread. This was a different kind of fear; what could it be?

He began to hear things. A lapping over to the right seemed to indicate the presence of water. Yet, was it water? Perhaps some unseen stream working its way towards the sea, or perhaps it was the edge of a Stygian ocean whose shores gave upon waters which lapped other shores unguessed. Yet, was it ocean? Could *something else* make such a lapping, lapping sound?

A rustle in the air about him; the trees were murmuring—against him? Were they not advancing? He drew back, his eyes piercing the semi-darkness, trying to make out the precise nature of those tree-like forms. Had they come closer since last he observed them? No! He caught himself in time. Obviously only the breeze wisping through the plants. The breeze from the ocean. *Or the breath*— No—fantastic. Only the breeze.

Far off there sounded a clanking. As if heavy metal gates had been swung open somewhere in the darkness. He started, peered forward anxiously. Another sound came to him. Many sounds. Footsteps far off. Footsteps. Yet, was it the sound of—feet? But they were coming closer. Sounds treading nearer to him now, much nearer. Men of this strange world coming to kill him. He was dreadfully afraid now; he did not want to meet these—people.

He glanced about him again, fearfully. The trees—he hated and feared them. The air—it seemed to burn his throat, trying to choke him. The waters—their sound was alien and hateful.

Alien! That was it; everything was alien. The very ground he walked on unlike that of Earth; the lowliest worm that crawls on the Earth was closer to him than the

highest intelligence of this world. The worm and he had, at least, sprung from the same little primeval batch of writhing protoplasm. But here, all was—different. No relation, not a single atom of similar ancestry in his being.

There could be no ease here; he was a piece of foreign life. He did not belong. Every living thing spawned hate of him instantly. Deeper than instinct.

NOW THE FOOTSTEPS were close. A body suddenly looming up in the darkness; a figure vaguely in the shape of a man.

A terrific, all-engulfing fear sprang up in Merrill. His body and soul cried out together. A scream of pure terror burst from his mouth as he turned and flung himself through the shimmering screen.

He found himself back in the laboratory. He knocked over tables and chairs in his anxiety to get to the door. Down the hallway he dashed, down the hallway then through the front door. Down the stoop, then he was racing madly along the street, dreading to look back at that accursed house.

At the end of it he collapsed in a quivering heap. They took him to a hospital, where, after several weeks, he recovered sufficiently from his shattered nervous system to emerge again upon the world. His hair was white, his face grey and haggard. Often he dreams of that strange semi-darkness, the odd breeze wisping in from the water—if water it was. And the vague shape looming up in the darkness while the trees creep closer, closer. And the lapping, lapping of something he *must* remember is water.

The fear of alien worlds . . .



AS THIS ISSUE goes to press, our February issue has been on the stands only a few days. As a result we have received only a few of the letters we expect to pour in during the next few weeks. We shall present what we have of those letters in this column. Meanwhile we wish to thank all who have commented on our magazine and we want you to know that we are taking consideration of every opinion we receive, weighing them, and using them as guides for our future issues.

In that regard we continue to ask your views. Just one letter will not suffice, we want you all to comment on each issue. Let us know our progress. If you have noticed any faults, have we corrected them? Is our science-fiction the type you seek? Is our fantasy the kind you like? What do you wish to see, what sort of art do you want?

Speaking of our art, you will notice that we adhere to a rather conservative appearance. Our illustrations are in correct squares or else full page work. They are not chopped up, mutilated, odd sized, or confusingly overprinted spreads. Do you, the readers, approve of our choice of art? Let us know.

Another important point we want to know is whether you approve of

our style of cover. We think it's effective; do you? We can give you full color covers similar to those of other magazines if you ask for them. But would you honestly advise us to do so? Think it over and let us know.

The first letter that comes to our desk is from *John W. Bell* of the Stranger Club, Boston, Mass. Mr. Bell writes:—

“A line of comment on Vol. 1, No. 1.

“Cover, Excellent.

“Title, So-so.

“Which brings up the question, is it needful that all s-f mags have a *screeching* title? I must admit that our present title suggests most annoyingly a super-super electric mixing machine with ultra-ultra mixing blades doing a hobgoblin fantasy under the influence of a triple overload.

“As for the yarns, there is ample material well handled, with the one objection, they are too short.

“F'rinstance, Gottesman had material basis for a yarn the length of one of E. E. Smith's epics around his 'Dead Center' . . . s'too bad he made it so brief. Should he by any chance want to do a long yarn around it, the howl is going to rise that it's nothing but 'Dead Center' all over again. But again his ego-swelled Maclure, a super-man who knows he is, is a good concept. Like to see more of him. Should be able to develop a Northwest Smith series about him.

"Didn't make so much of 'Resilience' and 'Golden Nemesis,' however that's allowable I trust. Blish's 'Citadel of Thought' is a good yarn. . . . Why the authors restrain themselves to this galaxy I cannot make out. . . . Hubble in the Smithsonian Report for 1938 in the article 'The Nature of the Nebulae' mentions the *Local Group* and includes within it the great spiral in Andromeda, M 31. If that is 'local' why doesn't some one write a yarn in which there is action in one of the spirals that might be considered distant?"

"'Strange Return,' fair. '13 O'Clock' good fantasy. . . . 'Bones' the same. 'Key to Cornwall' good. . . . 'Devotee of Evil' good. Like the continuance of Lovecraft's *Necronomicon*, etc., in 'The Abyss.' There is another field that will allow tremendous development. . . .

"On the whole, a very promising first issue. . . . More power to you."

Now let's see, what can we say about that letter? Our title . . . well we honestly don't know ourselves why titles must "screech" but we have heard that if they don't, lots of people wouldn't be interested. So that for the sake of the magazine, a screechy title is often the best. Time will tell. Our sister magazine *Cosmic Stories* isn't what one would call screechy; we'll see how things turn out.

If Gottesman writes a sequel to "Dead Center," and we happen to know he wants to, we'll make quite sure that it isn't a repeat of his first story. We've said that we will play fair with our readers, and we mean it. But doesn't "Dead Center" satisfy you with a story that's "distant" from the *Local Group*?

There's a chap who has been known to write letters to editors, and also occasionally write anecdotes which are usually placed on various contents pages in the impression they are stories. We refer to *Isaac Asi-*

mov, a really first rate writer who is also a voracious reader and fan. He writes:—

"The first issue of *Stirring Science Stories* reached my father's newsstand this morning and lingered there the two and three-eighths seconds it took me to reach it and remove it to a safe place in my portfolio, before some nasty customer came along to grab it ahead of me. I've just finished it, and there it is up on the shelves just waiting for a long line of successors to make it look impressive.

"Put down one vote in favor of the idea of the double feature—that is: science on one side of the 'Vortex' and fantasy on the other. However, as far as the fantasy is concerned, I favor a minimum of shudder-shudder — *Necronomicon* — nameless horrors — horrible evil — mad Arab — weird rites of Ktlbgpq, etc. Give us instead light fantasy and screwball yarns.

"The world is sufficiently horrible today for escape to be found in screwiness rather than horror. Weird rites and nameless horrors don't cut any ice in comparison to the darn *named* horrors of a London bombardment.

"Consequently the story I enjoyed most in the issue was Cecil Corwin's 'Thirteen O'Clock.'

"Sure, I'm an escapist. So what! Take a look at the awful mess around us. Don't you want to escape? If you don't, there's something wrong with you. Maybe you're a sadist—or a masochist.

"Do you want me to pick a few flaws in science? That's one thing that gets editors' goats and makes them fit to be tied. In 'Strange Return'—any good astronomer will tell you that if there *were* a planet opposite the Earth on the other side of the sun (and what a coincidence *that* would be), we'd know all about it. There *are* such things as planetary perturbations and you couldn't hide a mass the size of the Earth anywhere in the ecliptic inside of Pluto's orbit.

"But I don't mean anything. Spot-

ting scientific errors is an interesting game, but a million errors don't spoil a story by themselves and I report myself satisfied with *Stirring Science* as a first issue. I expect improvement with time, of course, and I am also sure it will come.

"Besides—heh, heh—I was only kidding. I hate fans who carp and criticize and split hairs and pick out flaws. Authors are great people. They work hard for a living. Let's all us readers get behind them and not worry them with extraneous bellyaches. Who cares if planets could be detected or not? Let's take the broad view. Were the stories good? Yes. Hurray for authors.

"(The fact that I have a story coming up in *Cosmic Stories* has nothing to do with the previous paragraph. Honest! May I drop dead if—ooooohhh!)"

We'll tell Lawrence Woods about why his planet t'other side of the sun couldn't be. Off hand, we can think up a number of reasons why we think it could be, but unless hard pressed, we'll leave it to Woods some day. One of them involves Einsteinian light warping, another involves slandering astronomers in general. But we won't go into that.

But hold, here comes a ten pound letter from *Mallory Kent* of Greenwich, Conn., which goes into details about the first issue:—

"The first thing noticeable about *Stirring Science Stories* is its neatness in makeup; apparent from the contents page to the last line in the *Fantasy World* column. There is no other stf or weird magazine on the market that can match the magazine in this respect, although some do come close.

"Of appearance, specifics: The cover looked well even if the drawing itself was not as good as Morey's interior for the same story. Think the new style cover is a double-dyed knockout and hope it is retained as long as the mag keeps going. In

other words until planet 3 finally blows up. Kyle's drawing for his own story is quite good, but the one for 'Strange Return' is not so hot. It does fit the scene; but there's something lacking about it nonetheless. Forte's a real find; I've noticed his work in other magazines of *Stirring's* type and hoped, when I saw the copy, that he might be in it. The same can be said of Hunt, except that he hasn't been seen before, has he? His work, while reminiscent of both Bok and Finlay has something of its very own in it, and I shouldn't be surprised if he didn't give the two real competition after awhile. The drawing for 'The Abyss' is excellent. The two cuts, particularly the one for *Fantasy World*, are gorgeous. Bok comes up to expectations and then goes on leaving me miles behind. The drawing for 'Thirteen O'Clock' is magnificent! Same can be said for 'Devotee of Evil,' and the cuts for the Tanner story and your own effusion are no slouches either. Which brings us to request number one: *Cover by Bok!* Yes? No? (See page one, Ed.) And Mooney's drawing for 'Key to Cornwall' is far too good to be mentioned last; in fact all the drawings, except the one for the Woods tale, are well above average.

"Of stories, specifics: 'Dead Center' is a good opener even if it does need a sequel. 'Lunar Gun' follows nicely, one of those quiet short-shorts which often linger in the memory. John L. Chapman seems to be getting around these days. 'Golden Nemesis' was somewhat overdone; it should have been toned down a bit. Story not as good as the drawing for it. 'Resilience' is cute; more of the same, maybe? 'Citadel of Thought' was very well written and all in all quite satisfying. While not so new in conception, the style makes up for it. And finally 'Strange Return' is a capital tale. While vaguely similar to others in the past, it is treated in a new light and the development is so smooth that it reads like a brand-new idea. Request number two: *More Gottesman, Woods, and Blish.* No? Yes?

(See page 3, Ed.) To put the stories in the science-fiction section in their order of preference: 'Strange Return,' 'Dead Center,' 'Citadel of Thought,' 'Lunar Gun,' 'Resilience,' and 'Golden Nemesis.'

"Fantasy fiction section: 'Thirteen O'Clock' is terrific, a whiz and a bang. The episode of the trolls and the lava nymph (local toity-tree) is classic, as is Hugo the Bandur. Who is this guy Corwin? If he's a new man, then he's been smothering his light under a bushel too long; if not, he's still stupendously delightful. Request number three: *Sequel to Thirteen O'Clock*. 'Bones' was nicely gruesome, Mr. Editor. What lovely dreams you must have! And to think I'd been considering myself as a subject for suspended animation. Shudders! 'Out of the Jar' was old stuff yet done with a pleasing twist. 'Devotee of Evil' was excellent. I hope this (noticing announcement of tale forthcoming) indicates a return of Clark Ashton Smith to regular magazine appearance. 'Key to Cornwall' likewise. Keller's tales have the knack of being even more ghastly because of his subtle understatement of cases. They wouldn't be half as jolting if written in the usual manner of squeezing the last drop of horror from each paragraph. And, finally, 'The Abyss' is a fairly passable Lovecraftian thing, with a nice eerie touch. Suggest that Lowndes try to present his stuff in a manner distinctly his own in the future; 'The Abyss' would have been much more powerful had this been done here, I think. Fantasy fiction tales in order of preference: 'Thirteen O'Clock,' 'Key to Cornwall,' 'Devotee of Evil,' 'Bones,' 'The Abyss,' and 'Out of the Jar.'

"Of departments: They're both nifty; please continue them. I like your style of presenting letters and commenting very much, and agree with Lowndes' letter to the cross of the t; glad to note that you do, too.

"And finally, request number four: *please use captions under illustrations*. Oh yes; for your first issue, I think the fantasy section tops the science-fiction section; and here's one

fan who'd buy every issue just out of sheer curiosity to see which half of the magazine is better this time."

Cecil Corwin is a new writer whom we expect to rival the masters in very short order and you may look forward to seeing his best work within the covers of Albing's fantasy magazines. We have talked over the possibility of a sequel to "Thirteen O'Clock" and while he's enthusiastic about finding out the further adventures of Grandfather Packer, he's also interested in finding out how the readers liked the Packer family. He says that if he writes a sequel, it won't be called "Fourteen O'Clock" but might be called "Mr. Packer Goes to Hell." What do you think of that! And it's just barely possible that if enough people yell for it, you might see that sequel in the very next issue of *Stirring Fantasy*.

Incidentally, in case you missed it, you can find Hugo the Bandur and the Lava Nymph in the March issue of *Cosmic Stories* where they're helping advertise *Stirring Science*. As for why they are there and not in "Thirteen O'Clock," the story is this: Artist Bok was so enthused over the story that besides the full page illustration we ordered, he did the two drawings of characters extra. We would have gotten them into the story somehow but there just wasn't any room. So we slipped them into blank spaces in *Cosmic* and built ads around them!

In closing this department, we note that only three letters found space. Because your letter is not published, don't fear that it wasn't read. It was read and every opinion is kept track of. We are relying on our readers as our guides; don't let us down. We'll be seeing you again in April.

Donald A. Wollheim, Editor.



Black Flames

by Lawrence Woods

(Author of "Strange Return," "Inhuman Victory," etc.)

A weirdly haunting story of a land where black flames crackle against a red sky and the castle of They-who-guard-the-path stands watch against strange enemies

THE SUN beat down upon the man with relentless fury, blasting, withering away his life and vitality at the roots. Weakly he leaned back against a tree, wiping the moisture from his brow with a dripping handkerchief as he mentally cursed Sundays. Why did this have to happen to him? Any other day he would have been at his desk high up in the twenty-third floor of a downtown skyscraper, where a cool breeze was always wisping in from the river. But today was different; the office was closed; there was nothing to do, and everyone he knew had fled from the heat-stricken city.

For two days now the incredible heat wave had smitten New York with its molten hands; he had been driven out of his apartment by the mercilessness of it, driven out to seek consolation in the park. But none was to be found here. Perspiration poured down his face; his shirt was soaked through and through; he felt as if someone had doused him with a bucket of water. If someone only would!

Gasping for breath in the furnace-litten air, he wrung out the handkerchief and tramped on, coming at last to a stone font. He bent over, eagerly, but the water was lukewarm; little consolation there, either. Wearily he wandered along the paved path that would soon, in its rambling way, lead him between the scorched meadows toward where

the buildings lining Seventy-Second street loomed. The man gazed at their flickering outlines, wondering, half-feverishly, if those inside were as hot as he, if it were possible for anyone else to be as thoroughly miserable.

He slouched over to a vacant bench and eased himself upon it. True, it was in the full glare of the sun, but it would be some relief. For a moment, he felt better, but only for a moment; here the burning luminary could work upon him without interruption. After a moment, a dizziness filled him; he put his hand to his head, let himself slump against the wooden slats of the bench. The fields and distant trees flickered in the brilliant light; he closed his eyes, let his head sink upon his chest.

This was better, he thought sleepily; he would stay just so until the dizzy spell had passed away. His hand nervously tapped the stone seat; it flattened itself against the cool, smooth marble seat and rubbed across its surface softly.

Marble!

He must be dreaming; there were no marble benches in the park; the one he had slumped into had been made of wood. But this was a bench of marble; he let his hands roam over it, still disinclined to open his eyes. His right hand encountered an obstacle, a stone arm; this was stranger still, he thought. His hand raised itself to the top of the arm,

slipped along it to the end. It felt like carving; he ran his fingers over the projections wonderingly: eyes, a broad, flat nose, an open mouth like the carved head of a beast. Now, thoroughly aroused, he opened his eyes.

A glare of deep red and black struck him; he blinked furiously, his heart pounding violently at the sight of it. "Where am I?" he thought. This surely could be no place on Earth; could he have died?

He leaned back against the stone bench gripping the projections and closing his eyes. For a moment he breathed deeply, then let his breath come naturally; quietly he moved his fingers and toes; raised arms and legs, satisfying himself that his body was intact.

"I am David Ross," he said aloud, listening carefully for notes of hysteria in his voice. "I live on Wadsworth Plaza in New York City, state of New York, in the United States of America. I am twenty-six years of age, unmarried, and am by profession a publisher, being a partner in the firm of Ross-Sherry. My business is good; there is no reason why I should want to escape from reality by creating a dream-world; I am confident of my prowess in every phase of my life. People like me, as a rule, and I get along well with women; when I open my eyes, I shall be back in New York City, sitting on a wooden, not a marble, bench, and I shall be suffering abominably from the heat, but otherwise shall be all right."

HE OPENED his eyes. He was seated on a carved marble bench atop a soft, rolling hill; before him stretched a long meadow of soft, blue-green grass. In the distance, perhaps half a mile away, loomed a

glistening structure like an enchanters' castle out of legend and fairy tales. Behind the castle, rising even above its bizarrely-shaped towers, he saw a vast, unearthly forest stretching across the horizon as far as the eyes could discern.

"Obviously," he remarked to himself, "I am no longer in New York City, nor for that matter, in any recognizable section of the world. Something beyond my immediate comprehension has happened so that I am here, in a place as yet unnamed, or at any rate nameless to me. It is, or was, inhabited, because marble benches, carved in the shape of two-headed beasts, the seat being hollowed out of their bodies, do not grow by themselves. Nor do castles as large and intricate as the one I see on the horizon appear by themselves. Since I am here, in a land where there is little familiar, it is to be assumed that what I see actually is."

Black flames, that is what the great forest spreading beyond the castle was; a rampart of flickering and frantically-weaving ebon flames, it grew from the earth even as do trees in the land he knew. Raising their lightless tongues of sable fire, the flames licked the necine sky while the heavens, a dull glowing crimson, completed the eerie aspect of the landscape. Above him lay the arched dome of the red sky, unbroken by clouds or any luminary, but the heat was as great as he had known in Central Park.

Slowly, because there was obviously nothing else to do, he started down the hillside toward the great castle; he had examined the marble bench minutely and found that the beast there represented resembled no form of animal life on Earth. It had a faint similarity to some gar-

goyle-carvings he had seen; apparently it was a quadruped, and probably a carnivore. He assumed that its form was decorative in respect to its two-headedness, or rather, its having a head at either end of its body. It was fairly safe to assume, further, he thought, that such creatures did not run wild here.

His feet brushed softly through the thick carpet of blue; his lungs took in the heavy, strangely sweet smelling air; his ears strained for sound. When he realized it, he came to a full stop, listening intently; there were no sounds. He held his breath; now, just at the limit of audibility, there came to him a faint, distant whispering and crackling. It ebbed and flowed just as the flames of the forest rose and fell; a subdued crackling as if the ungodly things were alive, growing. Vaguely, it was crystalline.

Then, for the veriest fraction of an instant, he heard a weird, far-off tinkling as of hundreds of tiny glass bells being rung by elves and gnomes of another world. It emanated from the castle, filled his being with a strange quiver. For a moment, he felt weak, then it passed; the tinkling sound seemed to question him, explore his being. Then, as if reassured that his irruption into this strange land meant no ill, the tinkling ceased, withdrew. He stared at the distant castle, gasped when the details of its unearthly architecture finally penetrated his mind.

The towers, four of them that could be seen, were like huge statues in the forms of women standing. The faces were perfect, yet emotionless, crowned by high jewelled miters, with sloping side pieces falling to their shoulders. The arms, either held stiffly at their sides like soldiers, or, in the case of the fourth, were

raised, held tightly against the bosom, clasping a glowing bell. The rest of the statue-towers fell in straight lines to merge with the main mass of the building.

Ross saw that the entire structure was bejewelled and gorgeously decorated. The walls of the edifice glowed with myriads of flowing colors, as if hundreds of inset gems caught the red light and black shadows and threw them off. Flickering here and there about the structure were vague hints and suggestions of colors never before seen, belonging to no spectrum or combination, yet captured here to delight and torment the onlooker.

He stared, entranced, and just a little frightened. What manner of beings had built this castle; would they be friendly or hostile to him? And, even if they were friendly, would they be able to care for his needs? Did this strange land contain the various kinds of substances he needed to sustain life and health; would his eyes be able to endure the weird color-scheme here; could his nerves, made for Earthly environments, stand up under the alien conditions here?

A GAIN there sounded the fairy tinkling; this time, it seemed aroused and warning. That it signified danger to someone he felt sure; could it be warning him? He glanced around him, hurriedly; nothing was in sight. Unconsciously he quickened his pace toward the castle.

There came a scream, a girl's scream of mortal terror. He whirled to his right whence it had come. Now he noticed an extension of the black flames he had not seen before; from out of them a figure came running, as if exhausted, yet impelled onward by terror. It was impossible for him to make out details at this

distance, nevertheless, whoever it was was human and was in danger. He broke into a run, hoping he could reach the fleeing figure in time to help against whatever it was that menaced her.

Now out of the jetty flames floated an amazing thing, a small dark cloud. Black it was, black as the face of total night, yet no color was in it because he saw it as a hole in the landscape about him. Silently the strange shape glided in the air, leisurely pursuing the running figure. Ross stopped, wondering what he could do.

The thing hovering in the air rapidly approached the girl; her motions seemed slower now as if she were running in a slow-motion picture. She stopped suddenly, turned to face the thing. Before her the hole stopped, hung suspended on a level with her eyes. There was an instant of immobility, then the girl slumped to the ground in a pitiful little heap and the cloud glided toward Ross.

He stood still, his feet seemingly paralyzed with awe and vague terror; he watched the thing come toward him, then poise about a yard from his eyes. He looked at it, saw it as an impenetrable vortex of blackness. Not the darkness of something that merely reflects no light, but the darkness of a hole, deep and bottomless. He seemed to stare into a lightless pit in the air, a hole in space; it was something not of three dimensions, something only partly in this world; perhaps, as with icebergs, only a small section of it was perceivable here. Immaterial, non-existent, yet sentient and perceivable.

And in the center of this mind-shaking vortex, there appeared a tiny, almost microscopic glint of white, a shining mote of unbearable

white light burning into his eyes and holding them. He felt his mind being probed for an instant, his soul being laid bare and dissected, his innermost thoughts and emotions examined minutely by this thing. Desperately he tried to withhold something, what he knew not, tried to fight off the influence of it; as if entranced, he felt that the thing would destroy him, carelessly, once it had drawn all the knowledge it desired from him. Hatred for it leaped into his being; he flung angry defiance at it, clenching his teeth.

And—it shrank away. For an instant it hung there, searching, trying to beat down the flimsy barrier of his defiance; but with the knowledge that he could prevail, Ross intensified his thoughts, flung a wave of sheer murderous hate against the thing. The vortex quivered visibly, then fled away and disappeared into the black flames.

CHAPTER II

ROSS shook himself, then, the paralysis vanishing, he went over to where the figure of the girl lay in the sward.

She was apparently unconscious, yet her deep, brown eyes were fully open, staring ahead of her as if fixed upon something invisible. Her face and clothes were strangely familiar; then he knew; she was garbed like the figures on the castle, her face of the same type.

It was marble white now, her face; only the faintest tinge of pink suffused it. Her carmine lips were tightly closed, revealing no emotion. Beneath the bejewelled semi-metallic miter she wore upon her head, a few strands of raven tresses showed. Her clothing of semi-metallic, ornamented material with long sleeves and high

neck, fell in almost straight lines to an ankle-length skirt. A thin belt of interlocking silver discs encircled her waist.

He knelt beside her, clasped her wrist; there was a pulse seemingly normal. He picked her up in his arms, finding her light, and set off toward the gleaming edifice at the edge of the flame-forest.

As he drew nearer he could hear the crackling of the eldritch forest more plainly; no other sound broke the spell; there was nothing but the subdued burning of the unearthly fires. He trudged on, holding the girl's limp form in his arms, feeling no exhaustion despite the heat.

As he approached the castle, he saw that a long, narrow, twenty-foot high doorway opened onto the grass. No other entrance could be seen; no window or side door, no chimney or eave. There was nothing save the long, dark doorway and the great stone columned walls rising up to end in the huge figures far overhead. Ross felt awed, fearful; he tried to step quietly, fearing lest the great figures might awaken and be resentful of his intrusion.

A faint, soft humming beat upon him; he saw a shaft of light appear in the doorway; saw now a person standing within, waiting. He walked slowly up a small incline and entered the portal.

THE PERSON in the entrance was another woman, taller, and perhaps older than she whose unconscious form he held. Clad in the same sombrely jewelled garments, bearing the same emotionless expression, she waited. As he entered, something seemed to drop behind him and shut the entrance from the world; but he scarcely noticed this, for, at the same instant, a dull, gold-

en light illumined the hall in which he found himself.

Great tapestried hangings covered the walls; symbolic figures, carved out of some semi-transparent material graced the high, arched ceiling. A subdued glow filled all while far away he could hear the rustle of faint sounds. Several dark or dimly-lit halls opened on this central one; a thick, arabesque rug covered the floor, muffling his tread.

The woman stepped up to him, took the body of the girl from his arms. She spoke, her voice sounding as a low liquid succession of notes of surprising timbre; it was a rising and falling tongue, full of queer intonations. Yet, as she talked, he understood; it seemed to him that the voice was used not as a spoken language, but more as a carrier for thought-impressions. The words were strange, yet he understood.

"Welcome, oh stranger who did rescue the maiden Aurhija, welcome. We know not from what land of unknown clime you come, but, so long as ye desire, this is your dwelling and we are your friends. The castle of They-Who-Guard-the-Path welcomes you and bids you rest."

Without waiting for an answer, she turned and walked silently to one of the halls; a figure appeared there, one too dimly shrouded in light to be made out. To this person she handed the motionless form of Aurhija; the figure withdrew, rapidly vanishing into the gloom.

Turning again to him, the woman said: "You are bewildered, my friend. I shall take you to Bhantoj, the all-wise, who will explain all that you wish to know. Come with me."

Ross nodded, followed by her side. She drew aside a curtain, revealing an opening upon a curving stone staircase. Up the ancient, worn steps

they passed. Up and again up a nameless distance they strode until they emerged upon a wide, dimly-lit room filled with ponderous furnishings and dust-covered statues and carvings. Silently they crossed it and Ross saw that the statues were in the forms of men and of strange, erect-standing beasts. But there was no time to examine them closely; they went on and came to a thick door studded with golden spikes in the center of which appeared a weird hieroglyph. The woman motioned to the door and, turning, disappeared into the shadows whence she came.

He stood silently before the portal a moment, observing the hieroglyph; it, too, represented nothing with which he was familiar. There was no resemblance to any symbols of antiquity he had seen or heard of before. Shrugging his shoulders after the futile attempt to find some trace of recognizability, he grasped the metal handle of the door, pulled it open.

IT WAS A wide chamber, one only partially lit. Dimly he could see the walls, covered with bas-reliefs; a few dark shadows in the background identified themselves as furniture, or, perhaps, instruments. He could not be sure. There was an aura of timelessness about this room, as if, from this center worlds had been conceived, sent spinning into existence to go through their prearranged courses of life-bearing and ultimate death, then forgotten in the rush of other things whose importance dwarfed them into inconsequence. He leaned back against the wall, lost in the strangeness of the impressions which beat upon him; at length they faded away and he became aware of a figure in the center of the chamber, upon whom the

light, such as there was, concentrated.

At first Ross thought it was an old man sitting in that massive chair, carved like a sculptured beast, behind the great desk. Two intense black eyes burned into Ross', a calm smile spreading over the countenance of the seated figure. He motioned for Ross to enter and seat himself before the scroll covered desk; as the man approached he saw that the figure seated before him could not rightly be described as old. Like the room he bore about him the stamp of timelessness; his figure was straight, his features unwrinkled; Ross thought of Ponce de Leon and wondered if a fountain of youth would do this to an ordinary mortal.

The figure spoke: "I thank you for saving the venturesome maiden, Aurhija. But for you she might be no more."

"But what is all this? Where am I?" said Ross, suddenly finding his tongue and giving voice to his bewilderment.

Bhantojh looked perplexed for an instant.

"You do not know where you are?"

"No. Nor do I know how I got here."

"Tell me what happened; perhaps I can enlighten you."

Something about the man radiated confidence, filling Ross with a sense of security and ease; quietly he began at the beginning, telling Bhantojh of Earth, and of New York, his home city. He told of the heat wave and how he had been overcome in the park, related his experience with the thing from the forest of black flames.

At Bhantojh's questioning, he went deeper into the descriptions of Earth, its people and their customs.

After Ross had finished, the All-Wise remained silent for many minutes, apparently lost in deep thought. Finally he spoke.

"My friend, you are not of this world at all; rather, your home belongs to another plane, another sphere coexistent with this yet separated by a different scale of vibrations by which it becomes possible for two things to occupy the same space at the same time without interfering with each other. Your scientists know what atoms are, do they not?"

Ross wrinkled his brow. "Yes," he answered, "I think that even I know, although I am not a scientist. They're composed of minute particles of energy, aren't they?"

The other nodded. "That is right; they are supposed to be pure energy; we might say crystallized energy. Energy itself is nothing but a vibration; therefore, in the end, everything is vibration.

"Now, if through some means the rate of vibration of a body could be raised to a much higher rate, it becomes apparent that this being will pass out of existence, or at least out of visibility and audibility of the world to which it formerly belonged; its atoms will be vibrating at such a speed as to be unable to reflect the new high rates of light, thereby becoming perfectly transparent. Also, substances of higher vibration will be able to pass through the advanced substance without affecting it. It seems, however, that there will come into this being's cognizance other things, and indeed another world, all composed of energy vibrating at this new rate."

Ross nodded. "I think I understand; that is what happened to me. As far as my world is concerned, I've just disappeared."

Bhantogh nodded. "That is cor-

rect. Objects of your world, even now, may be occupying the space you occupy here. I suspect that your sun, and the unusual heat-wave your world underwent, served to effect the speed-up; whether or not you can return is problematical. Theoretically, if you were stepped up, then you can be slowed down. But whether the means of effecting it are to be found here, I do not know."

BEFORE Ross could ask the question now trembling on his lips, the tinkling he had heard out in the blue meadow rippled through the room, the fairy timbres of it bounding along the shadowed walls, catching in the heavy draperies. He gripped the arms of his chairs, tiny fears lancing through his body as if myriad Lilliputian darts had suddenly been thrust into him. Then the warning-sound died away and he bounded to his feet.

"What was that?" he gasped.

The great door swung open and the woman who had been his guide stood framed in the archway of it, standing there like a forgotten stone goddess awakened. Her large eyes mirrored astonishment for the fragments of an instant, then her face became again the emotionless sculpture he had known.

"The *tharla* have sent one of their number alone," she announced.

She glided to a wall, raised an arm and seemingly rested her hand upon it. But over at the far end of the room a tiny pinpoint of light was born, a bubble of light bobbing on the waves of grey that swirled through the place. It grew quickly until it was a great sphere of brilliance poised between floor and high arched ceiling. Bright it was, yet no heat came from it and he found he could behold it with unshielded eyes.

Then, as it swirled, it took the tenor of crystal and glass and became at last a sphere of vision. Gazing into its depths, he could see the blue expanse of grass and the little ramp leading up to the door that had suddenly appeared before him in the seemingly unbroken walls of the castle. Unconsciously he strained his eyes, trying to find the outlines of it now. But something came into sight, so that he forgot all else.

Spinning, twisting like the great funnel of a hurricane, it sped above the softly curving hills where the tongues of flame caressed the red sky alternately flattening and elongating in its flight. It darted up to the castle walls, and suspended there, a splatter of unutterable darkness against the fantastically lighted sky-scape. Again Ross beheld the mote of blinding white that was its core, and again he felt the power of the thing and an indescribable hatred for it.

CHAPTER III

THE WOMAN sank gracefully into the depths of a great chair, stationed between Bhantojh's desk and Ross' seat. Her eyes rested upon the thing.

"What do the *tharla* want of us that they send an envoy?" she asked.

He thought it was a question she was asking of the all-wise; thus he was startled when a metallic whisper emanated from a box-like object, vaguely reminiscent of a radio speaker, set into the wall at one side of the desk.

"We offer you life, Bhantojh. We who are *tharla* have long been able to blot out you-who-guard-the-path, yet have we refrained from so doing because we saw no immediate desirability in it; there is much for us in

our own realm to be conquered so that we can easily grant you peace for the momentary extension of your frail lives. After you, and those with you, have passed on . . ."

"And what do you demand as the price of our safety?"

"Deliver unto us this strange being who resembles you. The creature is like none other we have found; we are convinced that his similarity to your kind is merely superficial, that in actuality he represents a unique life-form. Let us have him for study and we will not harm you, nor any in the castle with you, for the rest of your lives."

The woman rose. "What mockery is this, *tharla*? Ye know well the scroll of destiny that decreed the duties of they-who-guard-the-path and built here this castle. When we have become unable to perform our duties, then must our young take up the task, passing it on to their young and thus until *dzyarsang*, the final victory.

"Until that time comes, when the scroll has decreed that ye shall find a way to enter the castle, you can do us no harm. Only if and when we are so foolish to venture forth from the castle, as did the maiden Aurhija, can you harm us."

What sounded suspiciously like a sigh emanated from the speaker. "Poor, superstitious fools; brothers of the beast that you are; earth-bound; chained to your primal fears and scrolls of destiny for all your up-reaching! Did you think that we of *tharla* have learned nothing? Destiny exists, truly, yet have you not discovered that it is many-sided, that it is fraught with countless bypaths, each leading to a different ultimate, each equally possible, until, by choosing one freely, you eliminate the others. And know not that ye are

constantly at the portals of the paths of destiny so that, daily, the scroll is revised and altered so far as ye are concerned?"

Bhantojh shook his head. "There is no superstition in the scroll, *tharla*. It does not concern itself with details and specific persons, for, although an individual may play an important role in the unveiling, still do all things proceed from the underlying principles that compose them. The wisdom of the scroll teaches us merely that all that is, is in a state of flux, a state of beginning-to-be, being, and ceasing-to-be even as that which supersedes begins-to-be. *Dzyarsang* shall show whether you of *tharla* or we of *lhome* are destined to supersede the beast.

"Depart now, for there can be no peace between us nor again a treaty on such basis as ye desire."

"As ye will, then, *lhome*; ye have chosen."

The envoy floated away easily, then, extending into a great pear-shaped mass, sped away over the meadows toward the forest of flames. When it had finally disappeared, the sphere became blank and slowly shrank back to a pinpoint of light, finally dying away altogether.

ROSS blinked his eyes. "What was that?" he asked, turning to Bhantojh.

"The *tharla* are neither flesh nor mineral; they are alive, yet are not any creature. They are great vortices of pure thought, thought existing and having evolved beyond the need of a body so that it *is* of itself.

"Long ago, but a few generations after we *lhome* had indeed ceased to be of the beasts, had cast aside the ways of the jungle and built a world of our own making around us, providing us both with physical needs

and comforts, a certain scientist by the name of Lhar determined to devote his life study to the phenomenon known as thought. At that time, our society was in a very unstable state; the vast majority were little more than beasts of burden for a small minority and, although some measure of scientific appreciation was necessary in order for the system to maintain itself, the burden-bearers were not encouraged to learn much about the nature of the world in which they lived. Thus, we had the paradox of remarkable scientific progress in a world where the majority looked upon science as a form of magic to be approached with awe and fear. In a thousand different ways the burden-bearers were taught to distrust science and scientists, even while they accepted the fruits of science's labor. As a result, when it was learned that Lhar had perfected a means of creating vortices of pure thought, great waves of fear swept over our world, sheer animal terror of destruction at the hands of a 'mad magician.' Despite the efforts of the authorities to restrain the terror-stricken burden-bearers, Lhar's laboratory was destroyed and the scientist slain.

"However, among the bearers were some less driven by fear than impressed by curiosity and a desire for individual attainment. Several of these managed to salvage much of what Lhar had discovered, much of his notes, and actually succeeded in constructing the required power-mechanisms which created the thought-vortex; it was their thoughts which fed the vortex, their thoughts which evolved into the *tharla*.

"Out of the great era of struggle that followed arose a new, stable order; out of it also rose the *tharla*. For the *tharla* desired to make all

of us *lhome* as they. But many of our scientists were not at all certain that this was well, that we of *lhome* had matured, as a race, to the extent that we could make so radical a change. Thus arose the conflict; the *lharla* were the thoughts of *lhome* who, under the old society, had been frustrated slaves, unable to live normally. In the eagerness of their new freedom, they thought that all of *lhome* would be as anxious as they to be free from the un-life they had known, and, when scientists protested, assumed that they sought to restrain their fellow-*lhome* for selfish reasons. They could not see that importance of us *lhome* completing the destiny that was ours before a new form of existence could be taken on.

"Thus was war. The scientists built this castle with its defensive equipment; the world of the *lhome* lies behind, well-protected. We guard the path until such time as the final struggle comes. If the *lharla* prevail, they will sweep through our world, making all of *lhome* as they, leaving only the beasts; if they are destroyed, then we shall have many generations to fulfill ourselves until such time as we may decide it desirable and well to become as they. But, when that time comes, we shall not be warped, ambitious vortices of thought; our sole desire shall be tranquility and knowledge. Perhaps we shall never desire to abandon our present form; thus we-who-guard-the-path must ever keep watch, passing the duty from parent to young, generation after generation, until *dzyarsang*, the day of balance, has come."

"But," asked Ross, "what of the maiden, Aurlhija?"

"The thing of *lharla* that encountered her held her in its hypnotic grip and drained her body and brain of

its mental power. Had you not come along when you did, it might have taken her very life-force itself, thus leaving her body empty and lifeless while she became as one of them. As it is, she will lie unconscious for days before her brain rebuilds enough energy to take up where it left off. But she will live again, and we are grateful to you for your intrusion."

The woman turned to Bhantojh. "It was more than an intrusion, All-Wise. Did you not observe that the *lharla* was repelled by him and finally fled, almost as if in terror?"

Bhantojh shook his head. "That cannot be; the *lharla* are incapable of emotion. The closest to it they come is that unfeeling determination of theirs to engulf all of us *lhome*. Perhaps there is something about our friend which the things find of interest, some quality which they can use for their own purposes or destroy if it is dangerous to them. At any rate, we shall not yield."

He arose and grasped Ross' shoulder. "We shall do our best to make your stay here pleasant and to return you to your home as soon as possible. You are tired, now, and in need of sustenance. Refresh yourself, then, and I shall see you after you have slept. Morya will lead you to a room which shall be yours as long as you are with us."

Bhantojh touched the woman's wrist and their eyes met for a moment. Then, as she nodded, he turned and strode back to the desk. Ross blinked bewilderedly; so many things here were familiar up to a point, then they tapered off into the unreal and the fantastic. Shrugging his shoulders, he followed Morya out the great door, down the twisting staircase.

THERE WERE, he observed, no windows in any part of the

castle he had seen. Some parts were brightly lit; others immersed in gloom. So far as he could see, there were no appurtenances for light, yet he passed rooms which might have been sun-flooded apartments in the world he had left. These people seemed to be indifferent to light except for immediate needs; he wondered if they could have found the secret of cold light, illumination without heat.

Another thing struck him; despite absence of light and windows, ventilation within the castle was quite perfect; the air here was as fresh and fragrant as the atmosphere he had encountered outside; of dust there was but little, and there were no traces of decay or mildew. Beneath his feet stretched an endless road of thick rug, which, he saw, had the appearance of having been newly lain the day before. Of dirt he saw none.

They strode on in silence, passing by countless statue-filled niches, statues again of man-like creatures and erect beasts. And there were tapestries on the walls in which both *lharla* and *lhome* were depicted. At length the woman paused before another highly decorated door. The handle was in the form of a carved head; he bent to examine it.

"That is Lhar," said the woman.

"Isn't he also represented in many of the statues and tapestries?" asked Ross.

"That is right." She indicated the door. "There is food and a couch awaiting you. If you desire anything further, merely speak into the sphere on the farther wall. You may not wish to sleep at once; if not, then merely ask for a companion. We shall meet again after you have slept."

She turned to go, but Ross caught

her arm. "Wait! What of the maiden Aurhija. May I see her?"

"I do not believe that she has yet recovered; if you wish, we will go to her chamber now, or, if you are tired, you may ask to see her in the vision sphere."

His brow wrinkled. "I see—but—can anyone look in upon anyone else at any time they wish? Don't you have any privacy here?"

She was silent for a spell. "I think I know what you mean," she replied. "The only answer I can give you is that no one here ever has anything they would think of concealing from anyone else. Or, to put it more clearly; no one desires to conceal either their person or the occupations from anyone else. If, for example, you wanted to see me, and I were sleeping, or were engaged in some matter which could not be interrupted without causing me inconvenience you would hear my thoughts asking you to wait. If I were engaged in duties which must not be interrupted, you would be informed. Does that answer your question?"

He nodded relievedly. "I think so. Goodnight, Morya."

She left the chamber without replying. Perhaps, he thought, the expression was meaningless to her or perhaps, in cases where there was no common ground for thought-impressions, she didn't hear him. There was no such thing as day or night in this world; thus the expression "goodnight" could not have any meaning. And, since these people were well nigh devoid of emotion, there could be no reason for their having well-wishing expressions.

He turned from the door, glanced about the room that was to be his. It was large, yet not expansive. A comfortable-looking, wide couch, flanked by large, well-padded chairs

rested in one corner. There were other chairs, a table upon which rested a large bowl filled with what looked like fruit and square cakes. A small alcove lay at one corner; he went over to it, found that it led to a luxurious-appearing bath. The vision-sphere lay waiting. He sank into one of the chairs, relaxing in sheer satisfied pleasure. Whatever problems must be met here, physical comfort was not among them.

CHAPTER IV

SOMEWHERE on the rim of his mind a voice whispered, and Ross tossed fretfully, trying to throw it aside. In his dreams, the beasts he had seen enstatued came to him and led him out of the castle into the deeps of a blue forest where their kinsmen danced beneath the red red sky. But throughout the enchanted delight of it, a faint metallic whisper sparkled so that at length the sky fell into the midst of the revelry and swallowed up the beautiful beasts and the blue trees and weaving grasses. And, with terror surging through him, he fled, heart bursting, gasping, until the dreams faded and he awoke with a start.

The room was enshrouded with the same dusky twilight that pervaded most of the castle, but, as one by one his thoughts awoke, the light grew until the room was filled with a full-moon like glow. It was night still, he thought unconsciously; surely the others in the castle were sleeping now. He lay quietly, trying to piece together the torn shreds of his dream.

Then his heart gasped again in strange fear, for he heard now the same whisper that had plunged his dream-world into dissolution; it was the whisper of the black thing, the

tharla. "Hurry, hurry," it vibrated. "There is danger here; hurry, hurry or it will be too late!"

He arose, slipped on his garments. "This way; this way," came the whisper, receding into the distance. He followed suspiciously; it might do no harm to find out where it would lead him so long as he did not leave the castle. Quietly he strode in the direction of the voice, down a corridor he had not seen before, through a door that gave upon steps winding deep into the bowels of the castle. Even as he hurried along after the leading voice, he was aware that, for all its gloomy lightlessness, neither here was there lack of ventilation nor sign of decay and neglect.

He would stop, he thought, when he saw a portal leading outside. He would stop then and refuse to go any farther, force the leading one to give as much information as possible, promise a few things, perhaps, then decline to leave the castle. All this passed through his mind and was determined upon as he strode up a short incline and came to a doorway that looked familiar.

He halted. "Who or what are you?" he asked, "and what do you want of me?"

"Come," replied the voice, "there is no time for explanation. The castle of They-Who-Guard-The-Path is to be destroyed with all in it; we of *tharla* have no quarrel with you, even though you appear to be of the *lhome*. You will be safe with us, and we will return you to your own world."

"How do I know you speak truly?" he asked. "Why should I trust you?"

"Fool!" replied the whisperer. "Do you think we could not have destroyed you along with the *lhome* maiden had we so desired? Did you think we feared one who knew nothing of our

world and whose concepts of science had little relevance in it?

"If you wish to remain with the *lhome* and find destruction with them, so be it. But we assumed that, as an intelligent creature, you would be interested in self-preservation."

His thoughts hardened. "How do I know," he asked, "granting that you spared me when you might have destroyed me, that you are capable of conquering this castle? The mere fact that you could have blotted out one as helpless as I doesn't indicate that you are able to overwhelm a set of defenses which has held you back as long as this one apparently has."

"Behold then," came the answer.

Ross looked about him anxiously. Nothing seemed to be happening. Yet—what was it? The walls about him were growing indistinct, although no less light beat upon them; they were fading, dissolving into emptiness. He rushed over to the wall nearest him; laid his hand on it desperately, trying to assure himself that it was still there. His hand met no resistance. Frantically he kicked out at it, found himself executing maneuvers in an empty space. And above him the enclosing walls of the castle likewise melted away until he saw a red spot. Slowly it grew, the inksplash of scarlet until it filled the arch of sky above him; he looked down and saw that he was standing on blue grass; in the distance were curving hills and beyond them the necine forest.

Startled, he whirled. The castle was behind him; it reared, unharmed a short distance away, the four female statues staring expressionlessly at him. But where was the black thing, the *lharla*?

Again the whisper came to him. "We have found a way to speak from a distance; it is no longer necessary for us to come to you. Do not delay,

now that you are satisfied of our power; head directly for the forest that looks to you like black flames; there you will find one of us waiting, who will guide you to safety and a comfortable shelter."

He looked back at the castle. Could he possibly make it?

"Come!" insisted the metallic whisper. "Delay no longer."

Suddenly he knew what he must do. "No!" he shouted defiantly. "No!" He grated his teeth and hurled thoughts of defiance and hatred at the voice as he turned and ran toward the castle. The voice was commanding him to halt, but he merely increased his speed, concentrating on sheer hate as he did so. Then, as if the clouds in his own world had opened and let fall a torrent of rain, a deluge of fairy notes surged over him, the tinkling he had heard when first he came and later when the envoy from *lharla* had approached the castle. Running with all his strength he headed for the ramp; his foot slipped, he twisted and fell.

The blue carpet of grass rose up and smote him mightily and everything was darkness.

"**T**HE BLAME is mine," said Morya. "I should have warned you that the *lharla* are masters of illusion. You were never outside the castle; that is why you did not see the black one."

Ross sat up, shook himself. "I'm all right now," he said. "And I think that pure hate does have some sort of effect upon them; they may not be afraid of it, but I think it irritates them in some way."

He turned to Bhantoj. "Do you know of any way in which my emotion-waves, if you can call them that, could be intensified, broken down into

pure vibration, synthesized, and perhaps broadcast?"

Bhantojh was quiet for a moment. "I think," he said at last, "it might possibly be done. If you are correct, and you well may be, then we have a weapon against the *tharla*, one which they cannot override."

"The maiden Aurhija is best-versed in work of this nature. We had best go to her."

Without another word, he left the desk, beckoned to them, and walked out of the room. Ross and Morya followed at his heels, the man feeling a weird current of peril in the air. Could it be that, despite the illusion, the black one had spoken truly when it boasted of the *tharla's* power to destroy the castle, obliterate it utterly? He hurried after Bhantojh, fearing to be left behind.

Down the stairs they went, into a great hall. Here Ross perceived a rushing and a hurrying about as unseen attendants scurried on nameless errands. At the far end of the room sat a figure at a large organ-like instrument. She arose as they entered, came forward. It was the brown-eyed girl he had carried in his arms up the ramp into the castle.

She clasped the man's hand. "I and all of *thome* thank you for what you have done," she said simply. Her voice was clear, pleasant, but there was little inflection to her words, nor did her expression change. Bhantojh touched her wrist and the two stood for a moment in wordless concentration. Then she turned to Ross.

"Sit here, please."

He sank down on the long high, curving backed seat before the organ-like instrument, eyes intent upon the sweet beauty of the maiden before him. There was something of a sob in his heart, because he realized that

these people were creatures devoid of emotion, beings who would be intelligently interested in, but who could never understand, his feelings for this brown-eyed girl.

Her voice knifed into his brooding. "Think as you did when you saw the thing of *tharla*."

He threw back his head and suddenly knew an intense hatred, not for the black ones, but for blind fate which had thrown him in with these strangely beautiful people who could not appreciate beauty. All the frustrated desires in his life welled up in a torrent of fury so that the room reeled about him, so great was the emotion he felt. For a timeless period he concentrated thus, then fell limply back against the seat, spent and tired.

DULLY, he heard the warning tinkle, dully saw the vision sphere grow from a pinpoint of light into the massive ball filling the entire end of a room. The four of them gazed into the sphere, beheld the strange black flames. A road of flat stone blocks, he saw, ran into them from one side. It cut a cleft between the great flames which, Ross observed, behaved like fire except that they emitted neither light nor heat. If ever there were such things as dead flames, these were they.

Down the road, deep in the fire-forest at the very limit of observation, an ebon cloud was growing, a weird cloud, not truly black, but more like something seen only because it blocked out the scene behind it.

It was a large mass of the thought-vortices, Ross realized. Continually growing and enlarging, joined by swarms of the unearthly beings coming from the flames, collecting in one great cloud, expanding visibly second

by second. Out of the black forest it sped, a titanic mass of menace.

It seemed to Ross that soon the cloud must be as large as the castle itself; slowly, now, it glided down toward the castle, floating relentlessly, its edges touching the sides of the flames bordering the road. And where they touched, the flames seemed to vanish, though they were not interrupted.

Now Ross caught a slight flicker of many tiny points of white, star-points in a lightless void. The motes that formed the core of each individual vortex made up these points; on and on they came until at length they halted, just without the castle walls.

And Aurhija touched a button on the console of the great organ-like machine.

Staring at the burning pin-points in the intense, brain-staggering blackness of the *tharla*, Ross was hypnotized into immobility. He felt darkness closing in around him, felt as if he were being plunged into the heatless depths of intergalactic space and was being torn apart by the demons that guard the immemorial void from profaning hands. His brain reeled, hammered, a thousand indescribable conceptions entering his mind. One glance only he received of the mass of *tharla* suddenly reeling back as from a staggering blow, then he seemed to be falling, vast

avenues of non-Euclidean angles opening up before him. Shooting comets and the vasty interiors of suns blazed before his eyes; the magnificent whirling of planets of the outer dimensions dinned in his ears; the universe shivered and began to tear, space ripped slowly along the seams, and a horde of inconceivable foul things swarmed through . . .

AND THERE came a sudden release, a flood of peace and quiet that flowed over him as the tranquil flow of happy rivers; he seemed to lie floating, serenely, in the darkness preceding the birth of worlds.

"Feel better now?"

Ross opened his eyes; leaning over him was the figure of an Irish policeman; he was lying on a stretcher, covered with a woolen blanket.

"Sure, ye might have met your death, man, sitting out there in the blazing sun with no hat on; many's the case of heat-prostration and sun-stroke we've had these past days."

Ross closed his eyes with a smile of thanks. "All a dream," he murmured to himself as he sank into sleep. But deep within him, he knew this was not true, knew that the land of black flames was as real as the world to which he had returned.

Knowing this, he fell asleep to dream of a castle beneath a red red sky.



Calypso's Island

by David H. Keller

(Author of "Key to Cornwall," "Goddess of Zion," etc.)



A quiet little tale about a woman, a tree, and men with the souls of beasts.

JAMES BURKE was so excited that he rushed into my apartment without knocking.

"Real news!" he shouted. "There is a woman in New York and I want you to meet her."

"No!" I answered with a smile. "There are a million women in the

city that might, under certain circumstances, want to meet me but I would not walk one foot or spend one second to meet any of them. What does it matter if there is one more?"

"But you never met a woman like this one. She has everything. A brilliant intelligence in a beautiful

body and in addition rich and unmarried. I am sure that you will be interested in her personality."

I shook my head, and once again told him that my only love was the study of organic chemistry.

But Burke was persistent. He had even gone so far as to secure an invitation for the two of us. Not exactly a blind date, he explained, because there would be others there. "I bet that once you meet her, you will agree that she is a most unusual type. Only saw her once, but since then I have had dreams of her beauty. She is the kind of person that haunts your subconscious. I really want to know what your opinion of her is. Certainly an evening with her will not harm you."

"I am not afraid of that," I said with a laugh.

We finally agreed to accept the invitation. He left my apartment and I resumed my studies. For the rest of the day I gave my friend and his wonder woman not a single thought.

The next evening at nine Burke called for me. He was rather excited, and seemed puzzled at my seeming apathy. Of course it was rather easy to explain the difference in our reactions. He was always intensely interested in some woman while the fair sex passed in and out of my life like so many shadows. I would meet a woman, spend an interesting or boring evening with her and by the next morning have forgotten her name and what kind of a face she had.

AT LAST we reached the lady's apartment. I was rather interested in the fact that there were no other women there, just a lot of men and Caroline Armstrong. We were in a large room with heavy

carpet, velvet drapery and indirect lighting. The men were seated on the sides and most of them were smoking. The hostess sat in an antique chair that seemed to be of carved teakwood inlaid with gold and ivory. Her hair, jet black, was parted in the middle and held in place by a coronet of twisted gold. Her dress was voluminous and seemed to flow like waves over her. No ornaments relieved its whiteness. She wore only one piece of jewelry, a golden armlet which, in the form of a snake, ran around her left arm three times.

When we entered there were no introductions. We simply found chairs, sat down and started to join the smoking group of men. I first tried to make an inventory of these men, but gave it up as useless. They were all young, all well dressed, and that was about all that could be said of them. I suppose you would meet a similar group at almost any social function in the city. So I turned my attention to the lady. She was beyond question beautiful but it was her face that puzzled me. It had a classic beauty but behind that was a sense of supreme power, absolute contentment and there was something else—something that was hard to put into words—but finally I said to myself: "She is simply entertaining herself with these men. In reality she thinks them stupid, intolerable. She enjoys having them worship her beauty but otherwise she has no room for any of them in her life."

It was rather soon after this that she went over to the piano and without a word started to play. At first just little fragments of old themes which began nowhere and ended on the other side of past memories. The men stopped talking, even ceased to smoke and simply sat listening.

Now the fragments seemed to have more connection and her left hand beat out in heavy vibrations a theme which, while harmonizing with the treble, seemed to be entirely independent of it. And on and on this heavy bass came to our ears like constantly rolling thunder from the wooded mountains, or like constant surf lashing against the rocks. I found my feet keeping time to the music and looking around found that the other men were doing the same thing. Then, when at last I seemed unable to stand any more of the incessant pounding in my ears, she came to an end, gave a little laugh and left the piano. Servants came in with trays of refreshments, everybody started to talk and it seemed as though it was going to be just one more party.

Miss Armstrong walked around the room chatting with her guests. Finally she came over to my chair and sat down beside me.

"I am so glad you came, Mr. Har-kings. I have been anxious to meet you for several years."

"That is very kind of you to say, but at the same time it seems to be unnecessarily false. In the first place there is no reason why you should have wanted to meet me, and I have been available all these years and I have noticed no effort on your part to relieve your anxiety. Personally I am pleased to meet you and have enjoyed your hospitality. Were I an artist I would rave over your beauty. If an interior decorator I would talk of the harmonies of your drawing room and speak knowingly of the chair you lately graced. Or if I were a musician I would deeply appreciate your playing and talk learnedly of the music and its ancient roots. But unfortunately I am none of these things. I am an or-

ganic chemist. I work with the problems of life, am interested in vitamins and hormones, and therefore I can only say that I have had a very pleasant and unusual evening and thank you for it."

"It is because you are a chemist that I am interested in you, and I want to talk to you about some matters I am sure you would be rather keen about. The party is going to break up soon. Would you mind staying on after the rest leave? Then we can have a long talk."

"Rather unusual invitation, is it not?" I asked.

"Very unusual," she agreed. "Look at these men around us. Rather handsome brutes. In other levels of life they would be swine, cattle, hyenas, perhaps one or two of them would rise to the level of the tiger, but most of them just plain pigs. I hate them. Perhaps they sense that hatred but still they come here whenever they can, to look at me, to hear me play the piano and to drink my liquors. I would not think of asking one of these men to stay after the others leave. They would not understand; they would stop being men and turn into some animal—think I was an animal."

"But you think you are safe with me?" I asked. "Just where in the animal world do you put me? I hope not a monkey?"

She shook her head.

"That is what puzzles me. I meet men, lots of them and in a few seconds I classify them—pig men, hyena men, dog men, ape men, tiger men. But I cannot find a pigeon hole that I can put you in. That is what I want to talk to you about."

AT TWELVE the party broke up and we were alone. She walked over to the old chair which

seemed to harmonize so well with her dress and beauty. Seated, she closed her eyes and for a few minutes seemed to be asleep. I stood, leaning against the piano, and watched.

Suddenly she opened her eyes and said,

"All men are animals."

"How about the women?" I asked.

"Perhaps they also resemble other forms of life. I think it must be true, though I have made no experiments. Tell me one thing. Do you think that there is any drug that would cause metamorphosis? Could there possibly be some plant, which, if eaten by a man, would change him into the animal he resembles?"

"Anything is possible but some things are improbable," I replied. "A few years ago I would have unhesitatingly said no to your question. Now I simply say that I do not know the answer. I am a scientist, and my idea is that drugs might change the conduct and mentality of a man but nothing could change his body. If a man were drugged he might act like a pig or a monkey or a tiger but he would still have a man's body."

"Would you be surprised if I tell you that you are wrong?"

"No. Nothing surprises me. But I would doubt your sanity."

"I know you would. Perhaps it would end in doubting your own sanity. Now I am going to tell you something that I have never told anyone. I know of a plant, the fruit of which, eaten by a man, turns him into an animal."

"You mean makes him behave like one."

"Yes, and more than behave. Actually changes his body."

"You have seen this happen?" I asked calmly. I wanted to hear the rest of the story. There was no doubt in my mind that this woman believed

what she was saying, and if so, then she was insane but sane or insane it promised to be of interest and I wanted to hear all of it. If she thought I believed her she would go on talking.

"It was purely accidental in the first place," she began. "I was on my yacht with a rather nondescript lot of guests. Three of the men had their wives with them, but the rest were bachelors. We found an island that the captain said was uncharted. The other women were afraid to go ashore and insisted on their husbands staying with them. Thus the party of exploration consisted of the bachelors, the sailors who rowed the boat and myself. The sailors stayed on the beach with the boat while the rest of us went a mile or more inland. To make a long story short we discovered a tree with red fruit on it, and the men experimented with that fruit and thought it rather fine eating. I did not try it."

"And what happened then?" I asked.

"Something I never saw before and I suppose no one else. The men went to sleep and slowly changed into animals. Three became pigs, one a monkey and the fifth a tiger. The monkey went up a palm tree; two of the pigs ran into the jungle and the tiger killed the third one. I ran as fast as I could for the shore. There was no use trying to explain to the sailors what happened so I simply told them the men had been killed by natives. Beyond the breakers I had the sailors stop rowing, and we saw the tiger on shore. There is no doubt about the fact that the sailors saw the tiger.

"I took the yacht back to civilization and sold it. My guests were financed back to New York, and the crew paid off. But I had the captain

carefully chart the location of that island because I thought I might want to return there—for further experiments.”

“**I** AM FORCED to admit that this was a most unusual experience,” I commented. “It must have been rather puzzling to you to explain it.”

“It was. I cautiously worked over the problem from every standpoint and talked to some very learned men about phases of it. I found that there was a folklore about some metamorphosis, but nothing very definite. And of course many people had toyed with the idea that every man resembled in some ways a definite animal. After that I began to study men, and soon had no difficulty in distinguishing the pig men from the monkey men, and some men were like dogs in their psychology. Not so many tiger men. And then the question came about this red fruit. What was it? Had it really changed the men to animals or was all the experience simply a psychic error on my part?”

“It might have been,” I suggested. “The men might have wandered off; you might have fallen asleep. When you woke the men were gone and some animals were there and you took it for granted that there had been a change. You never stopped to try and find the men. You never went back to the island.”

“You are wrong there. I have been back to the island and more than once. But I never took any tiger men with me. Just harmless types like pig and monkey men. On my second visit we explored the island thoroughly and found it rather small, only about three by seven miles. We located the tiger, perhaps I should say, a tiger and

killed him. The pigs were doing rather well and the monkey tried to be friendly. It was odd about the monkey. He would come and eat with us and try to talk—at least it seemed that way. And I found the tree with the red fruit on it. There was just one tree like it on the island.”

“But all this does not show that your first thought was correct.”

“I admit that. I had some guests on this second trip. One was a botanist. I brought him a leaf and one of the red pearshaped fruit and he could not identify it. Of course I never showed him the tree and I kept him from eating the fruit. He was afraid of it anyway. But there was one of the men who was decidedly of the pig type. I think he came on the trip with the idea of making violent love to me if he had a chance. Sober he was bad and drunk he was simply beastly. So I suggested to him one day that we take a walk and he thought that was his opportunity. I encouraged him in his advances up to a certain point, but finally we reached the tree and I suggested that he eat some of the fruit. He went to sleep just like the other men had done, and I climbed up a tree. In a few hours he changed to a pig, a very vicious boar and the only thing that saved me from him was the tree. I had a small revolver with me and I fired it several times in the air and the other men came and killed-him. So after that I knew that red fruit really would work.

“After that I became what might be called an experienced navigator. I learned to sail a small boat and run a marine engine. I would get interested in a man or two and off we would go to my tropical island and then I would come away by myself leaving more animals there.”

"Just like that," I said laughingly.

"Yes, it was so easy. Not at all hard to get the men to go with me—."

"I suppose not. Almost any man would be willing to do that—with such a beautiful woman. But let me ask you a very direct and personal question. Why have you never eaten this fruit yourself?"

When I asked this I was still standing by the piano. She left her chair and walked over to me. There was no question about her beauty and allure. Misogynist though I was I could feel her charm. She evaded my direct question by asking one.

"What kind of a woman do you think I am? If I changed to an animal, what kind of an animal would I become?"

SHE PLACED her hand on mine. I looked at that hand, the long pointed fingernails tinted dark pink, and then I looked at her eyes. She kept looking at me, looking at me with those yellow eyes, and I felt myself slipping backwards into the void of time. With almost a jerk I woke.

"You would be a tigress," I said, my voice trembling in spite of my effort to keep it calm. "A beautiful, lithe, powerful tigress, and when you would purr in the jungle the pigs would run for cover and the little monkeys shiver in the palm trees."

"And I would be cruel, relentless, in my hunting hate?"

"Absolutely. Well, why don't you try it! It is your nature. You have literally killed these men—at least you changed them to animals, why not change yourself to a tigress and hunt them down, one at a time, eat their bodies as you have their souls? That ought to satisfy you!"

She started to laugh.

"You almost got excited," she chuckled. "Seriously I have thought of going on with my experiments but I want a new type of man. And now you have come into my life. What kind of an animal do you resemble? Certainly none I am familiar with. I would be interested in finding out. You are different from the other men. For some reason I admire you and respect you. I presume this is partly because you have brains and so far have made no effort to love me. I cannot recall another man who, given a few minutes alone with me, has not tried to kiss me—or more. You are the man I have been waiting for. If you were with me under that tree with the red fruit I would be willing to partake of it with you. No matter what happened I would be happy. It would be interesting, because no matter what we turned into there would still be mutual respect and even in our conflicts there would be pleasure. Of course you are not the tiger type but you might make a wonderful St. Bernard dog. What pals we could be! I a tigress and you a two hundred pound dog. We could not talk to each other but we would be better friends because of that. We would learn to hunt together. How about it?"

"How about what?" I asked sharply.

"How about going to the island with me and finding out for yourself whether I am insane or not. I will play the game absolutely on the level. If you do not want to eat the fruit I will not even ask you to. You can sit there and watch me eat it and see what happens."

"And then I suppose if you do change into a tigress I will supply you with your first meal?"

"No. Not unless I lose all mem-

ory. We do not kill what we love, or do we? But woman or beast I would not want to kill you. Because I love you too much."

"You must not say that!" I answered sharply. "You do not know me. You have only seen me for a few hours. How can you say you love me?"

"Because I do. Oh! I know you despise me, think I am insane, or if sane a cruel, heartless woman. But perhaps if I changed to an animal you might learn to become fond of me. Now when can you leave the city?"

"Leave the city for your island of enchantment?" I asked.

"What else could I mean? It would be a wonderful adventure! What an experiment in necromancy! We would eat the fruit together. We would change together, and then live together, not as human personalities tormented by the culture and refinements of civilization, but just beautiful animals."

"But what kind of animals?"

"How can I tell? Would it make any difference? As long as we could be together?"

"It would make a lot of difference, Caroline," and as I called her by her name I wondered at my doing it. "We might be rather fine creatures; but then one of us might be something horrible, like a hyena, utterly repulsive. And it seems to me that I am taking a rather long chance. You say that you know the fruit changes a man but you do not know what it does to a woman because you have never experimented. I might become an animal, you might simply remain the beautiful woman you are now. Why do you want to do it? Why not take another man? Surely you could find any number."

"I want you!" She cried and

twined her arms around me. "I wanted you from the second I saw you. Oh! I know you are utterly fine and I also know you think I am something detestable and undoubtedly insane. You might learn to love me, but you would always hate me. Hate and love! But if I were an animal you would always be tender to me. I could be with you, share your life."

"It would not be much of a life if I changed to a dog," I commented. "It seems to me that you overlook certain possibilities."

We might have argued for hours had she not kissed me. That kiss broke down my reserve, overcame my judgment, and before we parted I helped her complete the plans for a trip to her island.

IT IS USELESS to give the route we took. It is also not of any particular interest to give the location of the island. We finally arrived in her little sailboat. The last four days we were alone in the boat, almost alone in the whole world. Caroline was like an April day in her changing moods. For hours she would want to be by herself, somber, beautifully sad; then she would change and try harder than ever to show me that she loved me.

The island was just as she had described it. There was a little gem of a harbor and a beautiful beach. We made a camp under the palm trees and spent a few days simply loafing and loving. For some reason she did not refer to the tree and the red fruit. Then, without explanation, one morning she left me and was gone for some hours. When she returned she simply sat on the sand and looked out over the sun-sprinkled waves. At last she started to talk.

"I went to look at the tree, Jacob.

I wanted to be by myself when I went to it. Something happened to it and it is nearly dead. The beautiful fruit that used to be in such perfection and abundance has rotted on the withered branches. There was only one perfect one left. Perhaps it is best that way; it may make our future easier. I brought it for you to see. You no doubt thought that I was insane when I told you about it but here it is. If it were larger we could divide it and eat it but I feel that there is just enough for one. I told you that I loved you; I tried to show you that I loved you. You have been sweet and tender to me, but always you have treated me as though I were a sick child. You think it is all a fantastic impossibility and I know that if I asked you to do so you would eat it and then you would change. I had a dream last night about that change and you had become an elephant, a very wise, dignified elephant."

She laughed hysterically. "In the dream I tried to get you on the boat so I could take you away from here, and you were too large, and I could not live with an elephant in the city. I woke crying. I do not want you to be an elephant, Jacob. If I were sure you would be a dog it would be different; you would be such a nice dog. But I know now that I want you as a man, no matter what I become. At times you do not like me as a woman, you think I am heartless and cruel, but you would be always kind to me if I changed to an animal. So to complete the experiment, to end the story, I am going to eat it. I know that anything can happen or nothing, but that is the way it has to be."

I tried to argue with her but it was useless. She held me in her

arms and kissed me and made me promise over and over that no matter what happened I would always love her and keep her in my life. Torn with emotion, both of us crying, I promised her, and we dropped to sleep.

When I woke she was gone. I saw her down in the breakers bathing, and then she came up on the warm sand and dried her hair. And then she sat down and started to eat the red fruit. I ran to her and tried to stop her but it was too late. She simply smiled at me, gave me her lips and went to sleep. I held her close to me, not knowing what the hours would bring, and then holding her still closer I slept by her on the warm sands.

I SLOWLY WOKE and became conscious of a new sound mingling with the break of waves. And in my arms was a cat, a lovely, lithe, magnificent tiger cat, and the cat snuggled close to me as she licked my face.

I could not believe it. For some days I hunted all over the island for Caroline. For a while I thought that the waves would carry her dead body ashore. All the time the cat stayed with me. And I love cats.

Once back in the city I plunged frantically into my laboratory and my research. My friends think that I am more of a woman hater than ever. I have called my cat Caroline and we are wonderful friends, perhaps more than friends. She seems to understand everything I say to her, and is never completely happy unless I am holding her in my arms.

But there are times when I wish that Caroline Armstrong could have shown her love for me in some other way than by eating the last red fruit.

The Other

by Robert W. Lowndes

(Author of "The Abyss," "The Martians Are Coming," etc.)

The stranger was haunted by the ghost of his own future.

MY FRIEND Higgins says that it happened at a bar near the airport, about two hours before the Bermuda clipper was due to take off. He'd made an error and arrived early, so was idling as pleasantly as possible with martinis and the radio.

He was nearing bottom on the third when the stranger came in. He happened to be looking in the bar mirror, and his first impression was that the man had just seen a ghost. The stranger was white, snowy white, and taller and thinner than most. His hands were trembling; he leaned against the wall a second, then slouched forward and flopped into the chair opposite Higgins.

"Narrow escape," the stranger — Higgins never did get his name—murmured weakly and a little breathlessly. "God, I was almost on that plane!"

"Can I get you a drink?" asked Higgins. It was plain that the pale man was momentarily incapable of ordering. He nodded, mumbled thanks, and drained the glass at a single gulp as soon as the waiter had set it down.

"I'm really sorry," he said. "I suppose I'm intruding . . . but I've had a shock. The Bermuda plane, you know; I nearly took it."

"But it isn't due to take off for another half hour," protested Higgins.

"I know." The other's breath was

coming a little more normally now. "You see—it's rather odd—but, what I meant was: I nearly got caught. Fate. Half an hour margin, yes, but suppose I hadn't caught on when I did? Then I'd be on that plane when she takes off." He paused for a moment, lit a nervous cigarette, then leaned forward confidentially.

"I just learned that that plane won't reach Bermuda! Maybe a storm will hit it, or the engines fail. But it's doomed. . . . All on board lost . . . well, perhaps not all; some survivors, perhaps, but not me."

"I beg your pardon?" said Higgins.

"Of course. You don't believe me. Few people do. . . . You're not booked on it yourself, are you?"

"I am."

"Then I'd better tell you the whole story. I've told it before, and it's usually been laughed at. Though those that didn't laugh, I think, are rather glad of it. You see—I'm psychic. I suppose that's what you'd call it."

Higgins began to smile, but the man was not even looking at him. He was talking to his own reflection on the glazed table-top.

THE FIRST time I remember anything like it was when I was swimming one day. I was about thirteen at the time. Summer day, clear sky, lazy hot sun. Everything was all right, when suddenly I thought I saw someone in trouble

about a hundred or two yards from me. It was strange, you see, because it wasn't a public beach and I hadn't seen anyone about. It was a boy—I couldn't see his face—and he was thrashing about, apparently in pain. He went down before I could get to him. I dove under, looked all around the spot, but there was nothing to be seen. And the water was perfectly clear and not much over my head. It scared me so that I swam ashore and went up to the cabin.

"I didn't go in the next day, either. And about an hour before lunch, when I was ordinarily to be found in the water, I was taken with an acute attack of appendicitis. The pain doubled me tight; if I had been in the water I wouldn't have had the beginning of a chance to be saved."

The stranger looked up and lit a new cigarette from the stub of his old one. "That was almost twenty years ago. It didn't happen again for almost a decade, and, at first, I didn't connect the two.

"But when I was twenty-one and a senior at N. Y. U., I lived in a ramshackle, old-law rooming house trying to live on not enough money. It was summer, or almost, and the place didn't seem to be too bad. One particular day I was walking a blonde co-ed through the park, demoralizing the squirrels with peanuts, when I got the impression that someone was following us. Ever had that feeling sort of crawl in the back of your mind? I looked around, but no one was in sight; still, I couldn't shake it off.

"We dropped into a Chinese restaurant, and I still felt someone following. Everyone around seemed perfectly busy with their own affairs, and I didn't want to attract undue attention. My girl felt that something was wrong, too, but I

didn't want to tell her. I felt like a fool . . . It kept recurring, all that night, particularly when we went to a movie. I could have sworn that somebody was staring at the back of my neck, someone I knew. But the seats directly behind us were vacant.

"On the way home it came again. I could even hear the footsteps. They were familiar to me, but not reassuringly so. Finally I stepped into a doorway, hoping it would pass by and I could see it. The night was rather misty, but I saw something.

"It moved slowly, and, as it approached, I could see why. It was black and charred, a hideously burned thing. I saw the blackened lips and ruins of a face. It passed by, but, when it was just before me, it turned and looked squarely at me. Nothing was human but the eyes. *They were my eyes!*

"I didn't go back to my room that night. I wanted company. I stuck to the always-populated streets around Thirty-Fourth, near Penn Station. But I went to the room the next day after classes and there I got an inkling of what it was all about. The fire department was still poking around what was left of the place; full details in all papers; nine people incinerated."

"**A** PREMONITION," said Higgins. "A damnable gruesome one, but a premonition nonetheless. Had them myself."

"That's right," agreed the stranger. "It was a premonition. Solidified. I swear that the cinder I saw walking was as solid as this table.

"Well, I haven't had an important accident or sickness for twenty years. I've had a dozen narrow escapes, but each time, one of these visions came a little bit before. Once I was going to take a train, the Aller-

ton Flyer: you probably read what happened to it. But the day before, I met my double, horribly crushed and mangled. I was warned away from 42nd Street the January day several years ago when five people were killed by ice falling from the Chrysler and Chanin towers. I met a frozen zombie of myself in the Rockies one fall and stayed indoors through a sudden cold snap.

"I've always been warned in time, so far, but the escapes have grown narrower, closer."

His voice went down to a whisper. "You see, at first, at the very first, I had a margin of over 24 hours. I nearly punked out, at that. Then, afterwards, it was nearly always ten or twelve hours leeway. And to-day—"

"Today?" repeated Higgins with a cold feeling at the back of his neck.

"Drowned! A cold, drowned corpse with fish eaten face and a strand of seaweed in its hand. I saw it just a

minute or two before coming in here.

"I've got it figured out: my time's running short. Today, there was only about half an hour's warning. Next time it will be less. Then, one day—"

He shuddered and took a quick gulp of the drink before him. "I'm all right now," he said. "Sorry to have troubled you, my friend; should be used to this now—but it seems I'm not." He stood erect. "A new lease of indefinite duration. I'm not taking that clipper today, and I hope you're not." He waved his hand friendlily and walked out.

Higgins felt like a corsage of idiots that night after he'd cancelled his booking and was trying to enjoy a Victor Moore musicale. Imagine being taken in by a tale like that!

But the next morning, when he went out for his paper, he saw, before crossing the street to the sidewalk stand, that there were huge, black, screaming headlines.

The Wind From the River

by Richard Morrison

He did not like the sinuous shapes that writhing trees
Assumed, when, from the river an obnoxious wind
Blew ceaselessly. It made him think of monstrous, blind,
Demented things . . . And ever on the dampish breeze
There lingered certain, nameless scents detestable,
Which drove his hounds to maddened flight, and then the sound
Of plaintive cries and alien whisperings around
The mansion, made complete the grim, mephitic spell.

None would believe him when he spoke of hideous things,
Unhuman, robot-like, by sentient shapes controlled,
And told the curious fates of those ones who, before
His residence therein, had likewise striven for
Assistance . . . Now the semi-crumbling mansion brings
No profit: tenants say it's always damp and cold.

The Burrowers Beneath

by Willfred Owen Morley

The stars that gave them birth remember when they
were supreme

And reared their seven cities and their stately
monoliths

Upon the crest of a young world. Now only ancient
myths

Recall them vaguely, nor do haughty humans ever
dream

They still survive. Across the brooding face of Time
A veil is drawn, and though men, seeking truth, may
often find

Strange relics of the genius of some other, alien mind,
Such men heed not for they are blind with vanity
sublime.

They swarm the deeper caverns and the monumental
tombs

Of men they rule, in grim delight; deep in shunned
depths they stalk.

Beneath the streets of city, town, and unknown
hamlet, small,

The sightless, hate-filled horrors listen, bide their time,
and crawl.

For on Fate's dark and hideous page their day of
vengeance looms:

The Burrowers, who, ere men came had vanquished
them, did walk.

The Touching-Point

by Edward J. Bellin

The safe in Gracken House was usually empty yet more came out of it than went in!

IT ISN'T as though the business had been my fault, really. I cannot help but believe that I acted perfectly logically from the beginning. Only once did I yield to impulse—when I inserted my uncle Panzer in the safe—and, of course, I was irritated at the time almost to the point of madness. Who wouldn't have been? Consider *my* background: a Cambridge man, quite good at tennis, generally able to outrace any car on the road, and with, they tell me, natural dancing feet — well, life has never seemed very grim to me. I've never had to work. Uncle Panzer supported me, along with a few other relations, and, since he had plenty of the stuff, there was no reason why he shouldn't have done so.

Still, I rather regret now that I put him in the safe.

But it wasn't actually my fault. If people persist in acting like wild-eyed creatures from *Castle of Otranto* and *Frankenstein*—well, it seems to me they're pretty well asking for trouble. Gracken House has always had the reputation of being haunted. There's a secret room, and wailing at night, and probably a Woman in White who walks on Midsummer Eve, for all I know. I've been in the mansion often enough, but the only uncomfortable things I found were the grackens.

Oh, those. Not alive—they were merely carvings of queer animals, or composites. They were done in brass over the mantel, and in wood on the

newel-posts. Nasty little creatures, partly like a lion, partly like a snake, and God knows what else. The house has been in our family for generations, grackens included, and I suppose they gave it its name.

Not that there was much of the family left these days. There was Uncle Panzer's brother, Leonardo, and Leonardo's son, Tom. But it was Panzer who had the money, and he stubbornly refused to die, though often enough he had been on the verge of it. The man had the most irritating way of getting critically ill, and then recovering. It wasn't easy on my nerves. I can't speak for Leonardo or Tom, but I knew they hated me, because I stood to inherit most of Panzer's money. I didn't much care for them, so that made it even.

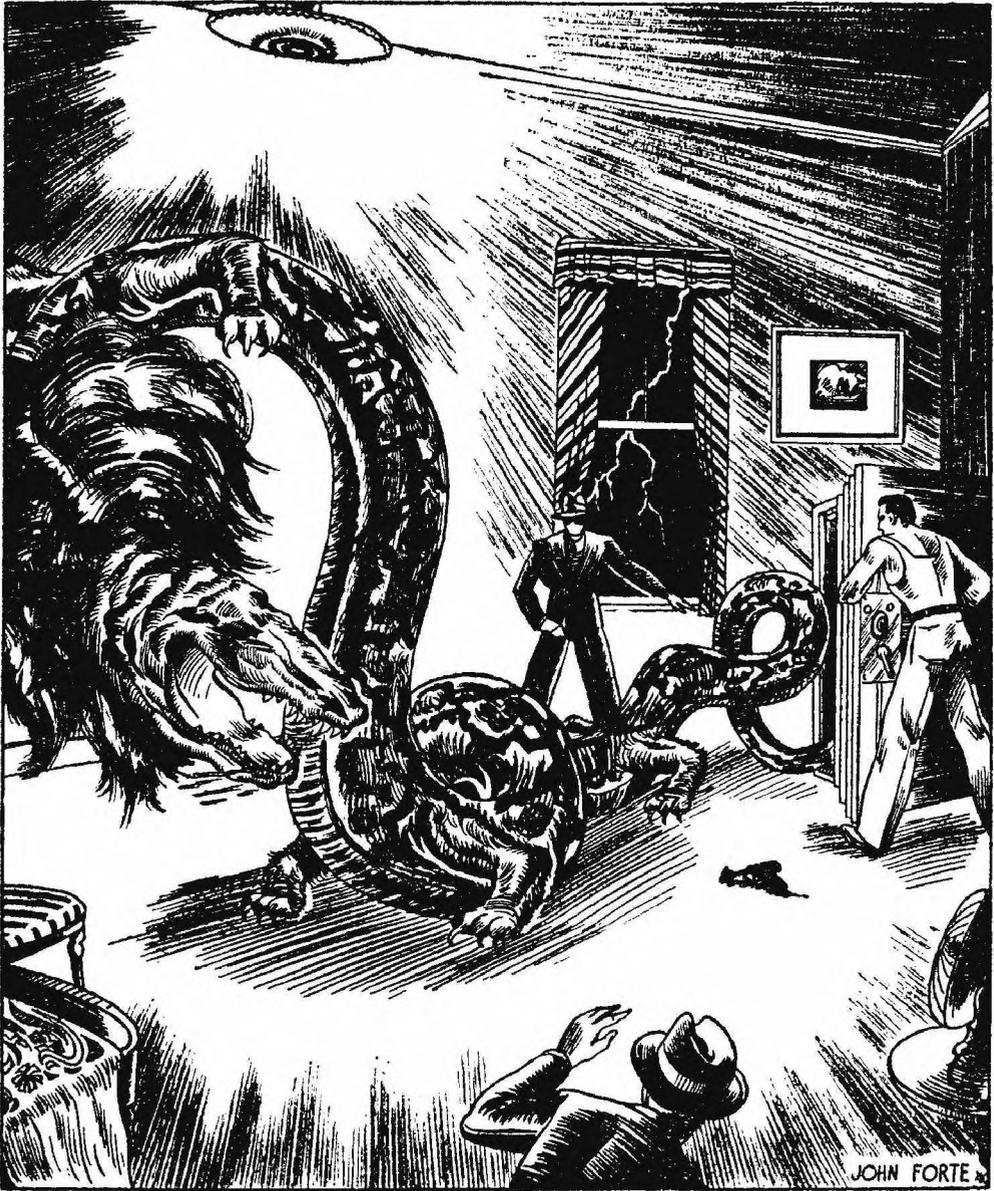
When I reached Gracken House, in response to my uncle's telephone call, Tom was already there, fingering one of the carved grackens on the balustrade. He was a husky fellow who would have looked well in tweeds or tails, though he had an inexplicable desire to spend his days working instead. He looked very brown and stolid, and flashed me a glance of some contempt.

"Ah," he said, "the young stinker. What do you want?"

"Uncle Panzer's money," I said.

"Well, they'll probably lock up the old fellow directly," Tom told me. "He's gone quite mad and opened the secret room."

"It never was a secret room," I observed. "At least, not for quite a



few centuries. It's got all modern improvements."

"Except that nobody likes to sleep there. Bad dreams."

"I know," I said. "Mad laughter from the walls. You wake up to find a wet, oozy, drowned personage in bed with you. Little feet go pater-patter on the ceiling all night. Nothing like a good old-fashioned ghost to make for conviviality."

Just then the door opened and Tom's father, Leonardo, entered, clad

in hunting costume and brandishing a gun. The murdered carcass of an unhappy rabbit hung from his pocket.

"Ha!" he said. "Young stupid. So you're here." He fingered the gun and looked at me as he might have eyed a rabbit.

"Hello, Nimrod," I said. "Why don't you stop butchering the fauna everywhere you go? What fun do you get out of it?"

I only said it to annoy him, be-

cause hunting is Leonardo's life-blood. He growled at me, seized the wretched rabbit by its ears, and took it back into the kitchen, I suppose. A voice from upstairs called,

"Is that Richard? I want to see Richard. Richard, come up here."

"Loopy," Tom said significantly. "Listen to the old so-and-so."

"Well, he wants me," I said, and went upstairs.

UNCLE PANZER met me in the hall. He was a skinny, doddering gentleman with a faceful of wrinkles. "Ha!" he said, clawing at my arm. "You're my heir, Richard. I must give you this." He gave me a slip of paper with numbers written on it.

"What—"

"It's the combination for the safe."

I remembered that there was a huge, old-fashioned safe in the haunted room. Uncle Panzer grinned and dragged me along to the door, which he flung open. "Look!" he said.

It was an ordinary room, with a gigantic, closed safe in one section, a bed, assorted furniture, a large pier-glass mirror, and a smell of bed-bugs.

"Yes," I said. "and am I to sleep here?"

"No, no, no!" he said, with a queer air of greediness. "This is my secret! Do you know the history of this room, Richard? Then I shall tell you. It was in existence during Norman times, but bricked up because of what they called ghosts. Two hundred years ago it was re-discovered and thrown open. The ghosts came back."

"Ghosts?"

"They said," Panzer said, grinning. "But they were wrong. I found that out. Anyway, my grandfather put this safe in the room, and after that

the manifestations mostly stopped."

"Well, what about it—Uncle?" I asked.

"I've been investigating. Ran across some old manuscripts that gave me a clue. There's something wonderful in that room, Richard, and the whole secret's in the safe."

"I don't see—"

"A gateway!" said Panzer in a hoarse whisper. "A gateway to another world! Another dimension! Somewhere in the secret room is a certain spot through which the other world touches ours!"

"Ghosts?" I repeated.

"I don't believe in 'em. Not ghosts at all. Another universe, existing along with ours but in another dimension. At one point they touch. That point happens to be in the secret room of Gracken House. And that's why my grandfather moved in the safe. To guard the touching-point."

"You keep talking," I said, "but you say little."

"You're a fool," he told me without malice. "Don't you see that all the supposed ghosts in the haunted room had their origin in this other universe, and manifested themselves through the touching-point? Now, if anything materializes from the other world, it'll find itself inside the locked safe. That was grandfather's idea, and it worked."

"Then the safe is empty?"

"Ah," he said, looking wise. "Come and see. But you must be careful."

So he led me to the safe, and made me open it, with the combination he had given me. "For I am getting old," he said, "And you will be the next owner of Gracken House."

"The sooner the better," I said—but to myself. The safe door swung open, and there was nothing whatsoever inside. It was utterly empty.

I DON'T know what I expected. Anyway, looking at Panzer's grinning, idiotic face, I felt a surge of unreasonable irritation. I felt he had been playing a joke on me—a ridiculous thing for a man of his age to do! Panzer should have been sitting by the fire with a hot-water bottle at his feet, sipping broth and preparing to die. Yet here he was, bouncing around as lively as if he didn't expect to leave me most of his fortune. Well, you can't blame me for what I did then. It seemed that Uncle Panzer was going to keep on living forever. I saw him leaning forward, peering into the safe — so I just shoved him a bit. That was all. The safe was quite roomy, and after I'd closed the door and locked it, not a sound emerged.

Then I leaned against the safe and wondered. It wasn't murder. I needed the money pretty badly, due to certain visits to gambling casinos, and I knew Panzer wouldn't have given it to me. But now I'd inherit his money—

How sordid it all sounded! It made me look like a murderer. I strolled to the window and looked out at the green, lovely countryside. That stretch there could be converted easily into a marvelous links. I'd attend to that after I'd inherited Gracken House.

On the other hand, I thought, perhaps I was being a bit too harsh on Uncle Panzer. The old fellow had gone loopy, of course, babbling about dimensions and universes. But he didn't deserve to be killed merely because of that. I could have him locked up in an asylum just as well.

So I went back to the safe and opened it, wondering whether Uncle Panzer had suffocated by this time. I thought not.

He was not in the safe. There was nothing in the safe. My uncle had evaporated.

He was not in the habit of walking through solid steel, and the safe had only one door. I went over the whole business very thoroughly, in order to convince myself that I wasn't loopy. Eventually I was forced to the only possible conclusion. There *was* another universe somewhere around, pretty close. I had studied some physics, and read a little of Eddington and Jeans and the solar boys, so I wasn't too ignorant of what had happened. But I made some tests, just to be sure.

I took a pencil and tossed it into the safe. It vanished into air without striking the back wall at all. Then I took my fountain pen, tied it to a bit of string I found in my pocket, and cautiously extended it, keeping hold of the string with my free hand.

Up to a certain point nothing happened. Then the pen started to vanish, inch by inch, as though it were being eaten away. When my hand disappeared too, I jerked back in a hurry.

I was holding a bit of string that ran tautly into the safe and ended in thin air.

I pulled it back, and again I had my pen. Well, what had happened seemed obvious enough. Uncle Panzer had taken a stroll into the other dimension. He'd be back in his own good time. But he'd be back to accuse me of attempted murder.

I locked the safe again. For my uncle wouldn't remain in the safe and suffocate. He'd simply retreat to this other dimension, where he was now. Fair enough. I'd keep him there, and keep the safe locked forever.

SO I WENT downstairs, lighting a cigarette, and encountered Tom in the hall. He wanted to know what had happened. I put him off with soft words, and hoped he wasn't suspicious. There was no reason why he should have been.

So I thought, then. I didn't realize how unmoral Tom was—quite unable to refrain from snooping. If I wanted to murder Uncle Panzer, it certainly was none of Tom's business. But he's always thinking of himself, and how he can turn a profit his way.

That was why, an hour or so later, Tom and his father, Leonardo, descended on me while I was in the library, toasting my feet before the fire and looking over the gossip column in the paper. They were waving guns and looking excited, though rather sly at the same time.

"There he is," Tom said. "That's the murderer."

I put down the paper and stared at them. "Now what is this?" I asked.

"You know," Tom said. "I followed you. I saw you put Uncle Panzer in the safe."

"Spying is a vice," I said severely. "Besides, I didn't."

"You did. And you're going to open it. We'll save Uncle Panzer."

"You'll open the safe or be shot," Leonardo said, pointing his gun at me.

I stood up, moved over to the fireplace, and fingered one of the carved grackens there. Quite a nasty little monster. I wondered how old it was. Well, that didn't matter. I looked at Tom and said:

"Why did you wait so long?"

"We couldn't find you."

That, of course, was a lie, though Tom and his father would stick to it in court. What they wanted was to allow sufficient time to be sure

Uncle Panzer suffocated in the safe.

Well, I knew my uncle wasn't where they thought he was. So I shrugged and agreed. They kept the guns steadily on me while I went up to the haunted room and took out the slip of paper which held the combination.

I looked around the room, seeing my reflection in the pier glass, the dust on the bed's counterpane, the stretch of countryside outside the windows. I noticed, for the first time, that a carved figure of a gracken surmounted the big mirror, lion head, snake body, and all.

"Open the safe," Tom said.

I obeyed. It would be empty, anyway. My relations were due for a surprise. As I spun the dial, I thought I heard a little movement within the safe, but it was gone right away, and I ascribed it to imagination. All the chances were against Uncle Panzer being in the steel box at this exact moment. I'd let them see it was empty, shut the door quickly, and they'd be baffled.

But it didn't quite work out that way. As I turned the lever, I felt the safe door swing open, and saw movement inside the safe itself. I jumped aside involuntarily, which was very lucky for me, because there *was* something in the safe. It wasn't Uncle Panzer, though. It was a monster that was partly lion, partly snake, and various other unpleasant things. It was huge, ferocious, and roared in savage fury as it sprang out of the safe. The fact is, it was the original of a gracken.

In that instant I realized the explanation. Grackens were the inhabitants of the other dimension into which my uncle had gone. Very likely, in the distant past, more of them had found their way into our world, by way of this haunted room.

That was why it had been thought haunted. The carved grackens had been done from life, or from memory.

Strangely, I found myself wondering what had happened to Uncle Panzer. From all I'd read, alien dimensions are pretty completely alien. He might be lost, insane—or being digested in the stomach of this huge gracken that was roaring like a hurricane. Although the creature still seemed rather hungry.

By sheer good luck, Tom and Leonardo had their guns out. They were light weapons, but both men knew how to shoot. For myself, I jumped into a corner behind the safe. Then I saw that even that wasn't safe. If the gracken finished my relations, the creature would head for me next. The way out of the room was blocked, and the window was too far from the ground. I acted mostly on instinct and dived into the safe. Even another dimension was preferable to this room filled with flying lead, yelling men, banging guns, and a roaring, hungry gracken.

I DIDN'T WAIT for the outcome. I went head-first into the safe, and it was like jumping off a springboard into a bottomless pool. I felt a sensation of falling, curiously at an angle, an odd wrenching sensation, and a feeling that my whole body was being torn apart. Then I hit the ground, hard, and after a moment recovered myself and sat up.

The first thing I saw was a circle of light, about six feet across, hanging in the air a few feet away, like one of those hoops circus riders jump through. Apparently this was the gateway between the two dimensions, my own, and the one in which I now found myself. Just where was I?

I decided to look for Uncle Panzer. I didn't know quite what I'd do when

I found him. Kill him, perhaps. I was in rather a mess, and I had no intention of returning to the haunted room in Gracken House until I was sure the gracken was either killed or had gone away. True, there might be more grackens here—this might be their stamping-ground — but there were none in sight just now. If one came along, I'd jump through the circle of light and return to my own world before it could reach me.

Of course, I couldn't stray far from the dimension-door. I looked around, but found it difficult to focus my eyes. The landscape seemed to be misty, and kept shifting and changing like a mirage. Sometimes it looked like one thing, sometimes like another. Once it was a lot of cubes; then, again, a flat plain tilted at an alarming angle. Well, another dimension would certainly be rather difficult to understand. I kept wondering where Uncle Panzer had gone.

I got to my feet and took a few steps. Instantly the circle of light vanished, and I found myself in the midst of a big bowl, made, apparently, of silvery sand. It looked like an ant-lion's burrow. I ran up the sides, but the ground kept shifting under my feet, so that I could get nowhere. Eventually I went tumbling down to the bottom, feeling certain that some extra-dimensional ant-lion's jaws would clamp on me, or that I'd fall into the mouth of a gracken.

This didn't happen, though. The ground seemed to dissolve under me, and I fell upwards. I don't know how to explain that. But I did fall up, until I hit a smooth surface and gravity reversed itself. I was flat on what looked like a pane of glass, though it was opaque and I could see nothing through it.

I stood up, and my feet skidded

from under me. Again I fell. This time, when I opened my eyes, I was hanging in empty air, amid fluffy gray clouds. I wondered whether I'd died, but it seemed strange for me to be in Heaven. I tried to move, and found myself shooting downward at a sharp angle.

Something like a whirlpool of air got hold of me. I was twirled about so violently that I became sickeningly dizzy. Finally I landed back on the place where I'd begun, with the circle of light only a few feet from me. I lay there, waiting.

Perhaps a gracken would appear. Perhaps Uncle Panzer would come along. What had happened back in Gracken House? I hesitated to move, for fear I'd be lost in this dimensional chaos and unable to find the gateway-light again. Then I had an idea. Perhaps I could stick my head through the "door" and draw it back immediately in case of danger.

I crawled forward, not daring to rise, till I came to the shimmering, white light. Carefully I pushed my head through. It was like looking into a searchlight for a second. Then I felt blackness around me. My head was in the safe, though my body remained in the other dimension.

That was a new menace. A gracken might come along and attack me, seeing only a prostrate, seemingly headless victim. It wasn't a pleasant idea, hanging like Mohammed between two worlds.

The safe door was open, and I could see Leonardo and Tom standing by the window, talking loudly. They still had their guns. On the floor was the dead body of the gracken, blood streaming from holes in its head. My relations had killed it. That's the advantage of knowing how to shoot.

SAFELY hidden, I couldn't resist listening to them. They didn't turn toward me, so I was unobserved. Tom was saying:

"But he must have jumped out the window."

"It isn't even open," Leonardo pointed out, tapping the pane with his gun-muzzle.

"He couldn't have jumped into the safe."

"I saw him."

"But where is he now?"

"I don't know."

"Well, that beast was in the safe. You saw it come out."

"You said you saw Panzer locked in."

"I did," Tom asserted. "I saw Richard push him in and lock the door."

"Maybe he let him out later and put that beast in?"

"Why should he do that? Besides, where would he get a creature like that? What is it?"

"A hybrid, maybe," Leonardo pondered. "I don't know. I've never seen anything like it before. But it's dead now." He laughed a little. "I'm going to have it mounted. It'll fit nicely in the library downstairs, after we inherit Gracken House."

So that was what they intended!

Tom suggested, "Why not simply lock the safe and forget about Richard and Uncle Panzer?"

"It isn't as easy as that. They're not *in* the safe."

Tom didn't seem to understand. "We could drop it in the ocean."

"No," Leonardo said. "We'll just wait here. If Panzer's dead, that's fine. If he isn't, we can kill him and blame it on Richard. If we have to, we can kill Richard too."

I felt disgusted. My relations didn't seem to have any morals whatsoever.

"First, though, we'll lock the safe," Leonardo went on.

I couldn't allow that, of course, for it would lock me in that alien dimension. So, as the two men turned from the window, I hurriedly gathered myself and sprang forward. A curious and inexplicable shock went through me. I felt, somehow, subtly different.

I WAS ON hands and knees before the safe, trying to get my balance. But I found it oddly difficult to stand up. Facing me was the pier-glass, and for a second I didn't quite understand what I saw there. I thought it was the reflection of the dead gracken, lion head, snake body, and all.

But it wasn't. This gracken was alive. When I lifted my head, the reflection did, also. My jaw dropped in astonishment, and so did the gracken's. I heard Tom and Leonardo gasp and then yell.

Well, I'm not exactly stupid. But for the moment I certainly couldn't understand. I seemed to have been transformed into a gracken. A bullet dug a gouge out of my shoulder, and I saw that Leonardo and Tom were shooting at me.

I told them to stop, but I could only roar. So, of course, I had to kill them in self defence. Luckily, their guns were nearly empty, and they had not paused to reload after killing the first gracken.

I was fighting for my life. Generally I'm a pretty mild person, but the thought of what Tom and Leonardo had been planning so unscrupulously made me furious. And they were trying to kill me. If you have ever faced blazing guns, you'll be able to imagine how I felt. I don't quite remember what happened till I was standing, panting a little, above

the bodies of my relations. Their heads were crushed, and I had a few bullet wounds, but nothing serious.

There was no sound from the servants. The noise of battle had frightened them away, I suppose. I went to the pier-glass and looked in again.

Yes, I was a gracken. The alien dimension had been more alien than I had supposed. A different atomic pattern, even. A chemical and physical change had taken place in my body, and I had been transformed into a gracken. It was logical enough, I supposed. There was a precedent. Probably others had gone into the other dimension in the past, my own ancestors, and when they returned, they were grackens. Monsters, apparently. They had been killed, and the haunted room had gained its reputation. That was the explanation of the carved grackens all over the house. They had been done from life.

And the dead gracken at my feet? Well, that must be Uncle Panzer. He, too, had gone into the other world, suffered the complete physical atomic change, and come back as a gracken.

I became very frightened, ran out the door into the hall, and downstairs. There I blundered into the butler, who had a gun. He looked terrified, but shot at me nevertheless. So I fled into the library, and we played a game of tag around there for a while, wrecking the place completely. The coals from the fireplace were scattered, and soon the room was ablaze.

I finally jumped out the window and fled to the nearby wood. There I waited, while Gracken House burned and fire-engines came, much too late to save anything. I didn't dare show myself.

I had some vague hope that if I went back into the alien dimension,

I might re-emerge as myself. But Gracken House was a mound of ashes. The point where the other world impinged on ours was now thirty feet or more above the smouldering coals. By no stretch of agility could I jump that high. If I had been in human form, I might have got a ladder and propped it up somehow, but I was a gracken. And I couldn't tell anybody of my predicament. My throat wasn't made to form intelligible words.

Of course, even had I been able to reach the dimension-gate and go through, I might have been unsuccessful. There was no way of telling. But it was a chance, and still is.

UNFORTUNATELY, I stepped into a bear-trap while wandering through the woods, and when the trapper returned, he found me weak with hunger. I don't quite recall what happened after that. I remember a net, and an awakening in a cage.

Just now I'm in a menagerie. I've been sold to a circus, and am on ex-

hibition as a freak. There's no way at all of telling anybody that I'm human.

By dint of great efforts, I have managed to secure pencil and paper, and, by gripping the pencil in my teeth, I've been able to write this, secretly at night, when no one is watching. Now that it is completed, I shall leave it on the floor of my cage and, at the proper time, push it out among the audience. But I fear everyone will think it's a hoax—that some publicity man has written it and slipped it into my prison. People believe I am a sport—a freak. I can't explain, except by painfully putting down my story on paper. It may be that someone will believe me, and help me reach the dimension-gate that exists somewhere above the ruins of Gracken House.

The whole business was Uncle Panzer's fault, and I don't see why I should have to suffer. Won't somebody please believe me and, at least, make an investigation? I'm not really a gracken. It's all the fault of my relatives!



Ghost Story

(About three years ago a London newspaper ran a contest for the shortest weird yarn their readers could tell. The following gem is one of their prize winners. The name of the writer is not given.)

"Bets," said the khaki-clad stranger, entering our conversation. "You don't know what a real gamble is.

"I once bet our C. O. a dozen

Johnny Walkers that I'd go over the top and fetch back eight Germans single-handed. It was a million-to-one chance. If it came off, a dozen Johnny Walkers and the Victoria Cross. If it failed—absolutely certain death."

"Bravo!" we exclaimed. "And it came off?"

"No," said the stranger. "It failed."

The Coming of the White Worm

by Clark Ashton Smith

(Author of "The Devotee of Evil," "Dweller in Martian Depths," etc.)



A weird legend of ancient times and of a great white iceberg that drifted down from the farthest north.

EVAGH the warlock, dwelling beside the boreal sea, was aware of many strange and untimely portents in midsummer. Chilly burned the sun above Mhu Thulan from a heaven clear and pallid as ice. At eve the aurora was hung from zenith to earth like an arras in a high chamber of gods.

Wan and rare were the poppies and small the anemones in the cliff-hidden vales behind Evagh's house; and the fruits in his walled garden were pale of rind and green at the core. He saw by day the unseasonable flight of great multitudes of fowl, going southward from the isles beyond Mhu Thulan; and by night he

heard the clamor of other passing multitudes.

Now Evagh was troubled by these portents, for his magic could not wholly interpret them. And the rude fisher-folk on the shore of the haven below his house were also troubled in their fashion. Day by day they had gone forth through the summer in their coracles of elk-hide and willow, casting their seines: but in the seines they drew only dead fishes, blasted as if by fire or extreme cold. And because of this, as the summer drew on, it came to pass that few of them fared any longer to sea.

Then, out of the north, where ships from Cerngoth were wont to ply among the Arctic islands, a galley came drifting with idle oars and aimlessly veering helm. And the tide beached it among the fishermen's boats on the sands beneath the cliff-built house of Evagh. And, thronging about the galley, the fishers beheld its oarsmen still at the oars and its captain at the helm. But the faces and hands of all were white as leprosy; and the pupils of their open eyes had faded strangely, being indistinguishable from the whites; and a blankness of horror was within them like ice in deep pools fast frozen to the bottom.

Loath were the fishers to touch the dead men; and they murmured, saying that a doom was upon the sea, and a curse upon all seafaring things and people. But Evagh, deeming that the bodies would rot in the sun and would breed pestilence, commanded them to build a pile of driftwood about the galley. And when the pile had risen above the bulwarks, hiding from view the dead rowers, he fired it with his own hands.

High flamed the pile, and smoke

ascended black as a storm-cloud, blowing in windy volumes. But when the fire sank, the bodies of the oarsmen were still sitting amid the mounded embers, and their arms were still outstretched in the posture of rowing, and their fingers were clenched; though the oars had now dropped away from them in brands and ashes. And the galley's captain stood upright still in his place: though the burnt helm had fallen beside him. Naught but the raiment of the corpses had been consumed; and they shone white as marble above the charrings of wood; and nowhere upon them was any blackness left by the fire.

Deeming this thing an ill prodigy, the fishers were all aghast, and they fled swiftly to the highmost rocks. But the sorcerer Evagh awaited the cooling of the brands.

Quickly the brands darkened; but smoke arose from them still throughout the noon and afternoon; and still they were overhot for human treading when the hour drew toward sunset. So Evagh fetched water in urns from the sea and cast it upon the ashes and charrings so that he might approach the corpses. After the smoke and hissing had died, he went forward. Nearing the bodies he was aware of a great coldness; and the coldness began to ache in his hands and ears, and smote sharply through his mantle of fur. Going still closer, he touched one of the bodies with his forefinger-tip; and the finger, though lightly pressed and quickly withdrawn, was seared as if by flame.

Evagh was much amazed: for the condition of the corpses was a thing unknown to him heretofore; and in all his science of wizardry there was naught to enlighten him.

RETURNING to his house ere night, he burned at each door and window the gums that are most offensive to the northern demons. Afterward he perused with sedulous care the writings of Pnom, in which are collated many powerful exorcisms against the white spirits of the pole. For these spirits, it seemed, had laid their power upon the galley's crew; and he could not but apprehend some further working of the power.

Though a fire burned in the chamber, piled with fat pine and terebinth, a deadly chill began to invade the air toward midnight. And Evagh's fingers grew numb on the sheets of parchment, so that he could scarce turn them. And the cold deepened steadily, slowing his blood as if with ice; and he felt on his face the breathing of an icy wind. Yet the heavy doors and stout-paned windows were tightly closed; and the fire blazed high in no need of replenishment.

Then, with eyes whose very lids stiffened about them, Evagh saw that the room grew brighter with a light shining through the northern windows. Pale was the light, and it entered the room in a great beam falling directly upon him where he sat. And the light seared his eyes with a chill radiance, and the cold sharpened as if somehow one with the brightness; and the wind blew swiffler out of the light, seeming no longer air but an element rare and unbreathable as ether. Vainly, with numbing thoughts, he strove to recall the exorcisms of Pnom. And his breath forsook him on the thin wind, and he fell down in a sort of waking swoon that was nigh to death. He seemed to hear voices muttering unfamiliar spells, while the bleak light and ether ebbed and flowed like a

tide about him. And in time it seemed that his eyes and his flesh were tempered to endure them, and he breathed once more, and his blood quickened again in his veins; and the swoon passed, and he rose up like one that rises from the dead.

Full upon him poured the strange light through the windows. But the stiffness of cold was gone from his limbs, and he felt no more of chillness than was natural to the late summer night. Looking forth from one of the windows, he witnessed a strange marvel: for in the harbor there towered an iceberg such as no vessel had yet sighted in its seafaring to the north. It filled the broad haven from shore to shore, and sheered up to a height immeasurable with piled escarpments and tiered precipices; and its pinnacles hung like towers in the zenith. It was vaster and steeper than the mountain Yarak, which marks the site of the boreal pole; and from it there fell upon sea and land a frosty glittering paler and brighter than the light of the full moon.

On the shore below were the char-rings of the beached galley, and among them the corpses incombustible by fire. And along the sands and rocks, the fisher-folk were lying or standing upright in still, rigid postures, as if they had come forth to behold the great iceberg and had been smitten by a magic sleep. And the whole harbor-shore, and the garden of Evagh, filled with that pallid splendor, was like a place where frost has fallen thickly over all.

Feeling a great wonder, Evagh would have gone forth from his house: but, ere he had taken three steps, a numbness came upon all his members, and deep sleep overpowered his senses even where he stood.

The sun had risen when he awoke.

Peering out, he beheld a new marvel: for his garden and the rocks and sea-sands below it were visible no longer. In their stead were level spaces of ice about his house, and tall ice-pinnacles. Beyond the verges of the ice he saw a sea that lay remotely and far beneath; and beyond the sea the low looming of a dim shore.

Terror came to Evagh now, for he recognized in all this the workings of a sorcery beyond the power of mortal wizards. Plain it was that his stout house of granite stood no longer on the coast of Mhu Thulan but was based now on some upper crag of that stupendous iceberg he had beheld in the night. Trembling, he prayed and knelt to the Old Ones, who dwell secretly in subterrene caverns or abide under the sea or in the supermundane spaces. And even as he prayed, he heard a loud knocking at his door.

Fearfully he arose and opened the portals. Before him were two men, strange of visage and bright-skinned, who wore for mantles such rune-enwoven stuffs as wizards wear. The runes were uncouth and alien; but when the men bespoke him he understood something of their speech, which was in a dialect of the hyperborean isles.

"We serve that Outer One whose name is Rlim Shaikorth," they said. "From spaces beyond the north he has come in his floating citadel, the ice-mountain Yikilth, from which pours an exceding coldness and a pale splendor that blasts the flesh of men. He has spared us alone amid the inhabitants of the isle Thulask, tempering our flesh to the rigor of his abode, making respirable for us the air no mortal man may breathe, and taking us to go with him in his seafaring upon Yikilth. Thee also he has spared

and acclimated by his spells to the coldness and thin ether. Hail, O Evagh, whom we know for a great wizard by this token: since only the mightiest of warlocks are thus chosen and exempted."

Sorely astonished was Evagh; but seeing that he had now to deal with men who were as himself, he questioned closely the two magicians of Thulask. They were named Dooni and Ux Loddhan, and were wise in the lore of the elder gods. They would tell him nothing of Rlim Shaikorth but avowed that their service to this being consisted of such worship as is given to a god, together with the repudiation of all bonds that had linked them heretofore to mankind. And they told Evagh that he was to go with them at once before Rlim Shaikorth, and perform the due rite of obeisance, and accept the bond of alienage.

SO EVAGH went with the Thulaskians and was led by them to a great pinnacle of ice that rose unmeltable into the sun, beetling above all its fellows. The pinnacle was hollow, and climbing therein by stairs of ice, they came at last to the chamber of Rlim Shaikorth, which was a circular dome with a round block at the center, forming a dais.

At sight of that entity which occupied the dais, Evagh's pulses were stilled for an instant by terror; and, following upon the terror, his gorge rose within him through excess of loathing. In all the world there was nothing that could be likened for its foulness to Rlim Shaikorth. Something he had of the semblance of a fat white worm; but his bulk was beyond that of the sea-elephant. His half-coiled tail was thick as the middle folds of his body; and his front reared upward from the dais in the

form of a white round disk, and upon it were imprinted vague lineaments. Amid the visage a mouth curved uncleanly from side to side of the disk, opening and shutting incessantly on a pale and tongueless and toothless maw. Two eye sockets lay close together above the shallow nostrils, but the sockets were eyeless, and in them appeared from moment to moment globules of a blood-colored matter having the form of eyeballs; and ever the globules broke and dripped down before the dais. And from the ice-floor there ascended two masses like stalagmites, purple and dark as frozen gore, which had been made by this ceaseless dripping of the globules.

Dooni and Ux Loddhan prostrated themselves, and Evagh deemed it well to follow their example. Lying prone on the ice, he heard the red drops falling with a splash as of heavy tears; and then, in the dome above him, it seemed that a voice spoke; and the voice was like the sound of some hidden cataract in a glacier hollow with caverns.

"O Evagh," said the voice, "I have preserved thee from the doom of others, and have made thee as they that inhabit the bourn of coldness and inhale the airless void. Wisdom ineffable shall be thine, and mastery beyond the conquest of mortals, if thou wilt but worship me and become my thrall. With me thou shalt voyage amid the kingdoms and isles of earth, and see the white falling of death upon them in the light from Yikilth. Our coming shall bring eternal frost on their gardens, and shall set upon their people's flesh the rigor of transarctic gulfs. All this shalt thou witness, being as one of the lords of death, supernal and immortal; and in the end thou shalt return with me

to that world beyond the pole, in which is mine abiding empire."

Seeing that he was without choice in the matter, Evagh professed himself willing to yield worship and service to the pale worm. Instructed by his fellow-wizards, he performed the rites that are scarce suitable for narration, and swore the vow of unspeakable alienage.

STRANGE was that voyaging, for it seemed that the great iceberg was guided by sorcery, prevailing ever against wind and tide. And always, as they went, the chill splendor smote afar from Yikilth. Proud galleys were overtaken, and their crews were blasted at the oars. The fair hyperborean ports, busy with maritime traffic, were stilled by the iceberg's passing. Idle were their streets and wharves, idle was the shipping in their harbors, when the pale light had come and gone. Far inland fell the rays, bringing to the fields and gardens a blight more lasting than that of winter; and forests were frozen, and the beasts that roamed them were turned as if into marble, so that men who came long afterward to that region found the elk and bear and mammoth still standing in all the postures of life. But, sitting in his house or walking abroad on the berg, Evagh was aware of no sharper cold than that which abides in summer shadows.

Now, besides Dooni and Ux Loddhan, there were five other wizards that went with Evagh on that voyage, having been chosen by Rlim Shaikorth and transported with their houses to the berg through unknown enchantment. They were outlandish men, called Polarrians, from islands nearer the pole than broad Thulask. Evagh could understand little of their ways; and their sorcery was foreign

and their speech unintelligible to him; nor was it known to the Thulaskians.

Daily the eight wizards found on their tables all provender necessary for human sustenance; though they knew not the agency that supplied it. All were seemingly united in the worship of the worm. But Evagh was uneasy at heart, beholding the doom that went forth eternally from Yikilth upon lovely cities and fruitful ocean-shores. Ruthfully he saw the blasting of flower-girdled Cerngoth, and the stillness that descended on the thronged streets of Leqqan, and the frost that seared with sudden whiteness the garths and orchards of the sea-fronting valley of Aguil.

Ever southward sailed the great berg, bearing its lethal winter to lands where the summer sun rode high. And Evagh kept his own counsel and followed in all ways the custom of the others. At intervals that were regulated by the motions of the circumpolar stars, the warlocks climbed to that lofty chamber in which Rlim Shaikorth abode perpetually, half coiled on his dais of ice. There, in a ritual whose cadences corresponded to the falling of those eye-like tears that were wept by the worm, and with genuflections timed to the yawning and shutting of his mouth they yielded to Rlim Shaikorth the required adoration. And Evagh learned from the others that the worm slept for a period at each darkening of the moon; and only at that time did the sanguine tears suspend their falling, and the mouth forbear its alternate closing and gaping.

At the third repetition of the rites, it came to pass that only seven wizards climbed to the tower. Evagh, counting their number, perceived that the missing man was one of the five outlanders. Later, he questioned

Dooni and Ux Loddhan and made signs of inquiry to the four northrons; but it seemed that the fate of the absent warlock was a thing mysterious to all. Nothing was seen or heard of him; and Evagh, pondering long and deeply, was somewhat disquieted. For, during the ceremony in the tower chamber, it had seemed to him that the worm was grosser of bulk and girth than on any former occasion.

Covertly he asked the Thulaskians what manner of nutriment was required by Rlim Shaikorth. Concerning this, there was some dispute, for Ux Loddhan maintained that the worm fed on the hearts of white arctic bears, while Dooni swore that his rightful nourishment was the liver of whales. But, to their knowledge, the worm had not eaten during their sojourn upon Yikilth.

Still the iceberg followed its course beneath the heightening sun; and again, at the star-appointed time, which was the forenoon of every third day, the sorcerers convened in the worm's presence. Their number was now but six, and the lost warlock was another of the outlanders. And the worm had greatedened still more in size, thickening visibly from head to tail.

Now, in their various tongues, the six remaining wizards implored the worm to tell them the fate of their absent fellows. And the worm answered; and his speech was intelligible to all, each thinking that he had been addressed in his own language: "This matter is a mystery, but ye shall all receive enlightenment in turn. Know this: the two that have vanished are still present; and they and ye also shall share even as I have promised in the ultramundane lore and empery of Rlim Shaikorth."

When they had descended from the

tower, Evagh and the two Thulaskians debated the interpretation of this answer. Evagh maintained that their missing companions were present only in the worm's belly; but the others argued that these men had undergone a more mystical translation and were now elevated beyond human sight and hearing. Forthwith they began to make ready with prayer and austerity, looking for some sublime apotheosis which would come to them in due turn. But Evagh could not trust the worm's equivocal pledges; and fear and doubt remained with him.

SEeking for some trace of the lost Polarians to assuage his doubt, he made search of the mighty berg, on whose battlements his own house and the houses of the other warlocks were perched like the tiny huts of fishers on ocean-cliffs. In this quest the others would not accompany him, fearing to incur the worm's displeasure. From verge to verge he roamed unhindered, and he climbed perilously on the upper scarps, and went down into deep crevasses and caverns where the sun failed and there was no other light than the strange luster of that unearthly ice. Embedded here in the walls, as if in the stone of nether strata, he saw dwellings such as men had never built, and vessels that might belong to other ages or worlds; but nowhere could he detect the presence of any living creature; and no spirit or shadow gave response to his evocations.

So Evagh was still fearful of the worm's treachery; and he resolved to remain awake on the night preceding the next celebration of the rites of worship. At eve of that night he assured himself that the other warlocks were all housed in their sep-

arate mansions, to the number of five; and then he set himself to watch without remission the entrance of Rlim Shaikorth's tower, which was plainly visible from his own windows.

Weirdly and coldly shone the great berg in the darkness, pouring forth a light as of frozen stars. The moon rose early on the eastern sea. But Evagh, holding vigil at his window till midnight, saw that no visible form emerged from the tower, and none entered it. At midnight there came upon him a sudden drowsiness, and he could sustain his vigil no longer but slept deeply throughout the remainder of the night.

On the following day there were but four sorcerers who gathered in the ice-dome and gave homage to Rlim Shaikorth. And Evagh saw that two more of the outlanders, men of bulk and stature dwarfish beyond their fellows, were now missing.

One by one thereafter, on nights preceding the ceremony of worship, the companions of Evagh vanished. The last Polarian was next to go; and it came to pass that only Evagh and Ux Loddhan and Dooni went to the tower; and then Evagh and Ux Loddhan went alone. And terror mounted daily in Evagh, and he would have hurled himself into the sea from Yikilth, if Ux Loddhan, divining his intention, had not warned him that no man could depart therefrom and live again in solar warmth and terrene air, having been habituated to the coldness and thin ether.

So, at that time when the moon had waned and darkened wholly, it occurred that Evagh climbed before Rlim Shaikorth with infinite trepidation and loath, laggard steps. And, entering the dome with downcast eyes, he found himself the sole worshipper.

A palsy of fear was upon him as he made obeisance; and scarcely he dared to lift his eyes and regard the worm. But soon, as he began to perform the customary genuflections, he became aware that the red tears of Rlim Shaikorth no longer fell on the purple stalagmites; nor was there any sound such as the worm was wont to make by the perpetual opening and shutting of his mouth. And venturing at last to look upward, Evagh beheld the abhorrently swollen mass of the monster, whose thickness was now such as to overhang the dais' rim; and he saw that the mouth and eye-holes were closed in slumber. Thereupon he recalled how the wizards of Thulask had told him that the worm slept for an interval at the darkening of each moon.

Now was Evagh sorely bewildered: for the rites he had learned could be fittingly performed only while the tears of Rlim Shaikorth fell down and his mouth gaped and closed and gaped again in a measured alternation. And none had instructed him as to what rites were suitable during the slumber of the worm. And being in much doubt, he said softly: "Wakest thou, O Rlim Shaikorth?"

In reply, he seemed to hear a multitude of voices that issued obscurely from out the pale, tumid mass before him. The sound of the voices was weirdly muffled, but among them he distinguished the accents of Dooni and Ux Loddhan; and there was a thick muttering of uncouth words which he knew for the speech of the five Polarians; and beneath this he caught, or seemed to catch, innumerable undertones that were not the voices of any creatures of Earth. And the voices rose and clamored, like those of prisoners in some profound oubliette.

Anon, as he listened in awe and

horror, the voice of Dooni became articulate above the others; and the manifold clamor and muttering ceased, as if a multitude were hushed to hear its spokesman. And Evagh heard the tones of Dooni, saying:

"The worm sleeps, but we whom the worm has devoured are awake. Direly has he deceived us, for he came to our houses in the night, devouring us bodily one by one as we slept under his enchantment. He has eaten our souls even as our bodies, and verily we are part of Rlim Shaikorth, but exist only as in a dark and noisome dungeon; and while the worm wakes we have no separate being, but are merged wholly into the being of Rlim Shaikorth.

"Hear, then, O Evagh, the truth which we have learned from our oneness with the worm. He has saved us from the white doom and has taken us upon Yikilth for this reason, because we alone of all mankind, who are sorcerers of high attainment and mastery, may endure the lethal ice-change and become breathers of the airless void, *and thus, in the end, be made suitable for his provender.*

"Great and terrible is the worm, and the place wherefrom he comes and whereto he returns is not to be dreamt of by mortal men. And the worm is omniscient, save that he knows not the waking of them he has devoured, and their awareness during his slumber. But the worm, though ancient beyond the antiquity of worlds, is not immortal and is vulnerable in one particular. Whosoever learns the time and means of his vulnerability, and has heart for the undertaking, may slay him easily. And the time for this deed is during his term of sleep. Therefore we adjure thee now by the faith of the Old Ones to draw the sword thou wearest beneath thy mantle and

plunge it into the side of Rlim Shaikorth; for such is the means of his slaying.

"Thus only shall the going forth of the pale death be ended; and only thus shall we, thy fellows, obtain release from our blind thralldom and incarceration; and with us many that the worm has betrayed and eaten in former ages and upon distant worlds. And only by the doing of this thing shalt thou escape the worm's mouth, nor abide henceforward as a ghost among other ghosts in his belly. But know, however, that he who slays Rlim Shaikorth must necessarily perish in the slaying."

EVAGH, in great astonishment, made question of Dooni and was answered readily concerning all that he asked. Much did he learn of the worm's origin and essence, and the manner in which Yikilth had floated down from transpolar gulfs to voyage the seas of Earth. Ever, as he listened, his abhorrence gretened; though deeds of dark sorcery had long indurated his flesh and soul, making him callous to more than common horrors. But of that which he learned it were ill to speak now.

At length there was silence in the dome; for Evagh had no longer any will to question the ghost of Dooni; and they that were imprisoned with Dooni seemed to wait and watch in a stillness of death.

Then, being a man of much resolution and hardihood, Evagh delayed no longer but drew from its ivory sheath the short and well-tempered sword of bronze which he carried at his baldric. Approaching close to the dais, he plunged the blade into the over-swollen mass of Rlim Shaikorth. The blade entered easily, slicing and tearing, as if he had stabbed a monstrous bladder, and was not stayed even by

the broad pommel; and the whole right hand of Evagh was drawn after it into the wound.

He perceived no quiver or stirring of the worm; but out of the wound there gushed a sudden torrent of black liquescent matter, swiftening and deepening till the sword was caught from Evagh's grasp as if in a mill-race. Hotter far than blood and smoking with strange steamy vapors, the liquid poured over his arms and splashed his raiment as it fell. Quickly the ice was awash around his feet; but still the fluid welled as if from some inexhaustible spring of foulness; and it spread everywhere in meeting pools and runlets.

Evagh would have fled then; but the sable liquid, mounting and flowing, was about his ankles when he neared the stairhead; and it rushed adown the stairway before him like a cataract. Hotter and hotter it grew, boiling, bubbling, while the current strengthened and clutched at him and drew him like malignant hands. He feared to essay the downward stairs; nor was there any place in the dome where he could climb for refuge. He turned, striving against the tide for bare foothold, and saw dimly through reeking vapors the throned mass of Rlim Shaikorth. The gash had widened prodigiously, and a stream surged from it like waters of a broken weir; and yet, for further proof of the worm's unearthly nature, *his bulk was in no wise diminished thereby*. And still the black fluid came in an evil flood; and it rose swirling about the knees of Evagh; and the vapors seemed to take the form of a myriad phantoms, wreathing and dividing obscurely as they went past him. Then, tottering giddily on the stairhead, he was

swept away and hurled to his death on the ice-steps far below.

That day, on the sea to eastward of middle Hyperborea, the crews of certain merchant galleys beheld an unheard-of thing. As they sped north, returning from far ocean isles with a wind that aided their oars, they sighted in the late forenoon a monstrous iceberg whose pinnacles and crags loomed high as mountains. The berg shone in part with a weird light; and from its loftiest pinnacle poured an ink-black torrent; and all the ice-cliffs and buttresses beneath were astream with rapids and cascades and sheeted falls of the same blackness, that fumed like boiling water as they plunged oceanward; and the sea around the berg was clouded and streaked for a wide interval as if with the dark fluid of the cuttlefish.

The mariners feared to sail closer; but, full of awe and marveling, they stayed their oars and lay watching the berg; and the wind dropped, so that their galleys drifted within view of it all that day. The berg dwindled swiftly, melting as though some unknown fire consumed it; and the air took on a strange warmth between gusts of arctic coldness, and the water about their ships grew tepid. Crag by crag the ice was runneled and eaten away; and huge portions fell off with a mighty splashing; and

the highest pinnacle collapsed; but still the blackness poured out as from an unfathomable fountain. The watchers thought, at whiles, that they beheld houses ruining seaward amid the loosened fragments; but of this they were uncertain because of those ever-mounting vapors. By sunset-time the berg had diminished to a mass no larger than a common floe; yet still the welling blackness overstreamed it; and it sank low in the wave; and the weird light was quenched altogether. Thereafter, the night being moonless, it was lost to vision. A gale rose, blowing strongly from the south; and at dawn the sea was void of any remnant.

CONCERNING the matters related above, many and various legends have gone forth throughout Mhu Thulan and all the hyperboreal kingdoms and archipelagoes. The truth is not in such tales, for no man has known the truth heretofore. But I, the sorcerer Eibon, calling up through my necromancy the wave-wandering spirit of Evagh, have learned from him the true history of the worm's advent. And I have written it down in my volume with such omissions as are needful for the sparing of mortal weakness and sanity. And men will read this record, together with much more of the elder lore, in days long after the coming and melting of the great glacier.



The Doll Master

by Paul Dennis Lavond

(Author of "A Prince of Pluto," "Lurani," etc.)

Dolls play an important part in witchcraft, just how important Fran Carlson only partially realized.

FRAN WHISTLED when he saw the dolls. "So that," he said, "is why Niela wanted individual photographs of all of us."

"Nice, aren't they?"

"Quite. Did you have a hand in this, Bette?"

She shook her head. "It was all Niela's work. I didn't know a thing about it until I saw them. See, if you maneuver the arms and legs, they'll stand up by themselves." She picked up Fran's doll. "Niela didn't forget a thing; she's cut out our signatures and pasted them around the waist of each respective cutout.

"I hope you can stay awake until midnight, Fran; you're to be my partner for dinner."

"What about Jerry? Isn't he here?"

"Niela's cousin will take care of him."

"You mean Dorothy—the little red-head?"

"Yes; she'll keep Jerry occupied."

Fran smiled. "Then you and I can get together, eh?" He moved Bette's doll closer to his own, made the two embrace. "Your image isn't half the little teaser you are; see how nicely she responds?"

"We're not on the stage now, Fran," she said. "You're a good enough puppet-master, but I'm not a puppet."

That stung; he must think of a

good retort. "You belittle me," he drawled. "I'm more than that."

"Such as?"

"A sorcerer. Ever hear of black magic, Bette? We have a good basis for it here. These dolls are representatives of all of us; they are our likenesses, and our signatures, a tangible part of our personalities are on each. All that is needed now is the proper incantation."

She laughed. "Then what happens?"

He lit a cigarette. "Very interesting. The dolls come to life."

Her eyes were mocking. "Let's see you do it."

He crushed the butt into a tray, and spoke rapidly in Latin. "That," he announced, "is a minor spell. It puts the shadow of each person here into their respective miniature. It will endure until three o'clock."

"They don't look any different."

"But they are," he replied solemnly. Might as well make a good job of this, he thought. "Only you and I know that they are different; I shall not tell; you cannot."

There was no laughter in her eyes now. "Please don't look so diabolical, Fran," she whispered. Then, tearing herself away from his gaze, "If everyone's soul-image is in his doll, then I don't think we should let Jerry see us together like this. I'll have to pull wool over his eyes—literally."

"No need for that; we will merely keep Jerry occupied. We'll put Dorothy between him and us, so that he won't have occasion to notice."

"Clever people, you wizards. What else can you do?"

"Want a demonstration?"

She nodded.

"Then I shall." He smiled and reached for her, surprised that she yielded, that she didn't laugh and slip away as usual. There was nothing of the teaser about her now as their lips brushed, then clung to each other. He looked deep into the black of her eyes; there was no laughter now, only fierce desire.

"Bette," he whispered, "Bette!"

She leaned against the table, panting. Then, as suddenly, the passion in her eyes died away to be replaced by a look of bewilderment. Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed that their dolls had been jarred apart.

"I think that will do for demonstrations," she said coldly.

Fran smiled and held out his hand. "Forgive me," he said quietly. "Shall we forget it?" Her eyes widened. "Look!" she exclaimed. "Someone's doll has fallen into the water."

It was Harvey. Someone had placed him among the flowers. "Ferdinand," thought Fran as he fished the miniature out. Then, aloud: "We'd better dry him off quickly; we wouldn't want him to catch cold."

"YOU'VE MET BETTE FRAZER, of course," said Niela, as Dorothy followed her in. "She draws pretty pictures for Jerry's magazine. And Jerry rejects things."

"Oh," chimed Dorothy, "are *you* an editor?"

"Definitely," nodded Frazer. He caught Fran's eye. "Sorry, old fellow," he chirped, "but that last novelette just *won't* go." He fished in his

pocket. "Just had a new batch of rejection slips made up; you, you lucky person, are the first victim." Bowing gracefully, he presented it to Fran.

"The gentleman with the injured look on his face," interrupted Niela, "is Fran Carlson, one of Jerry's top writers."

He bowed and took her hand. "But hardly a royal favorite," he added, indicating the little green slip.

Fran withdrew to a bottle of wine, and began searching for a corkscrew. "Did you hear," asked Niela, proffering the instrument, "about Harvey's falling into the fishpond?"

"What!"

"Careful; you'll spill the wine." Niela looked at him a moment, then started to laugh.

"What's funny?" he wanted to know. "Here I nearly massacre your rug and you go into semi-hysterics?"

"If you could have seen yourself!" she choked. She paused and looked at him puzzledly. "Fran, you didn't have anything to do with it, did you?"

"Hardly. I didn't know until you told me. By the by, I just read your latest book. Very neat, Niela; very neat."

His mind was swirling. Could it possibly be that . . . but no, that was impossible. He hadn't meant it; the incantation had been sheer gibberish. He tried to keep his voice on a sane level. "How did it happen?"

"The poor boy had much too much grape beverage, I think. Celebrating the success of his poetry. I told him to get some air—you know, stuff you breathe at times? Lee was driving up with a case of gin and saw Harvey standing by the fishpond with a horribly blank expression on his face—the kind he always has when he's blotto. Then, all of a sudden, he

tipped over—Lee said that was the only way you could describe it—and fell in head first. Strangest thing about it is that he only went in up to his shoulders; his foot caught in a root. Lee ran over to pull him out before he drowned, and, before he got halfway, Harvey pulled himself out—just like that.”

“How is he now?”

“All right. He’s wearing Lee’s suit and won’t have to take a bath Saturday night.”

Fran smiled. Then a voice called in “Niela!” and she excused herself and darted away. He was grateful to be alone, for his head was whirling faster now. The dolls. Bette. Bette. The dolls. Dolls, dolls, dolls. What did it all mean?

He slipped into the dining room again; the dolls were all as he had left them. None were where they would fall off the table; none where anything would fall on them. Chances were that no one would come in and upset them. He saw to it that Jerry’s and Dorothy’s dolls were paired off in a corner, and that Bette’s doll still clung to his. Then he went out of the room, looking for her.

She was waiting for him in the lounge. Music called them and they danced out of the world into a place of splendor and enchantment. Her eyes were deep and there was a tenderness in them he had never seen before. They were dancing very close and stars fell about them as the music brought them still closer.

“Bette,” he whispered, “Bette!”

Her lips answered him.

“**W**ANT TO PLAY MURDER, BETTE?”

“Who’s playing?”

“Everybody,” said Fran.

“I don’t know how,” she protested, whispering to him.

“Not now,” he murmured. “They’ll know if we’re the only ones not playing.”

He cleared his throat. “It’s very simple, but lot’s of fun. Everyone,” he held up a deck of cards, “gets cards until the deck is dealt out. Ace of spades is the murderer; ace of diamonds the victim. Ace of clubs is the District Attorney; king of diamonds the judge, and ace of hearts the executioner.

“The joker is for the witness who first testifies. Witness has to give evidence damaging to someone else. Throws suspicion from the very start. The DA, of course, is exempt. He has to weave a chain of evidence around the murderer within a given time, or pay a forfeit. If he picks the wrong person, or cannot decide, then the murderer gets a prize for a perfect crime after he explains how it was done—abiding by evidence given. All clear?”

All was clear. Everything was going nicely, Fran decided, as he dealt the cards. Niela had suggested the game; Bette had kept everyone from the dining room. He looked at the clock; one thirty. There was time, then. He saw to it that Jerry received the murderer’s card and that he was the District Attorney.

And, an hour later, all agreed that he had done a magnificent job of sifting through masses of misleading and contradictory evidence, and establishing the identity of the murderer beyond shadow of doubt.

“And I demand,” he concluded, addressing the judge, “that this person receive the highest penalty that the law can give; that his effigy be hanged by the neck until adjudged dead.”

Niela pronounced the sentence, and they went into the next room where Dorothy improvised a set of gallows.

Bette came forward with a silk thread. Just the thing, thought Fran, to give it the oriental touch. But now he had eyes only for Jerry.

It would probably go down as heart failure; Frazer's heart had never been very good. He smiled as Dorothy raised the doll with the silken cord looped about its neck, and let it fall.

His breath caught in his throat with a jerk. Now was the moment; now he would know. No one was looking at Jerry; all were watching the little figure that swayed back and forth at the end of the golden thread.

The room was getting stuffy. Fran loosened his collar; something was biting into his throat. He'd had too much to drink; it always affected him like this. Strange, nothing was happening to Frazer; he didn't seem to be harmed at all.

Then, he almost laughed and cried at once. Laughed at the fool he'd been; cried because this thing meant so much to him. Of course nothing would happen to Jerry; hadn't it all been a joke for Bette's sake? Nonsense?

Yet, it would have been such a convenient way of getting rid of her husband . . .

But he was drunk . . . drunk. And his throat hurt. It was almost as if he were being . . . strangled.

Strangled! Then he knew, knew before the little doll turned around and he saw that it was his own. And

Jerry—Jerry's doll stood over at the end of the table, its arms about Dorothy's likeness.

The little red-head laughed sweetly. "Sorry, your honor," she said, "but the prisoner escaped. Daring jail-break. We had to hang someone, so we substituted the District Attorney." Everyone laughed.

But he couldn't laugh. He leaned against the table in a paroxysm of terror, clutching at his throat, trying desperately to tear something away—something that was biting deeper, and ever deeper. He wanted to shout at them, to tell them to take it down, but he couldn't speak.

The room was growing dark . . .

"Look," he heard Frazer say, "at this magnificent portrayal. A Carlson production!"

God! They thought he was acting.

Then, suddenly, the pressure was gone. He felt free. "Bravo!" cried someone. The room was somewhat misty; Harvey was taking flowers from the table. "On behalf of the company," he was saying, "we wish to present you . . ."

He heard Niela gasp. "Look at the way he's lying." Then, strangely, Bette flung herself to the floor, sobbing "Fran! Fran!"

Across the floor was a mirror. He knew he would have to look into it, dreaded what he would see.

The scream that burst from him was thrice horrible because he realized that no one heard . . .



Swing Low

by Elmer Perdue

The newcomer could pound a mean piano,
a very mean piano indeed.

SOMETHING about that little man in the grey suit struck me as peculiar from the first. It could have been his pointed chin, and the way his widow's peak—well, gave him a Mephistophelian appearance; or perhaps it was the way his eyes seemed to pass through you as though you were beneath his plane of existence.

Or maybe it was the way his heels clicked on the floor as he walked across the stage to where I sat at the piano. Or the way he cocked his head as he listened to my playing for a while before he motioned for me to slide over.

But I see I've forgotten to tell you where we were or anything. Well, each Thursday night, some of us get together in the college auditorium and hold a jam session. That's one advantage to being the only campus ork—we can always use the auditorium whenever nobody else wants it. Otherwise, you see, we wouldn't get much practice, and the band would turn corny and give the Uni a bad name. And it gives us a chance to practice up on our swing terms. Words like *gut-bucket*, *schmaltz*, *dog-house*, and the like. You know that no musician uses them when he's among musicians. The jitterbug trade among the campus dancenthusiasts go for them, and it helps the ork's good will. So I figured maybe



this stranger was a town musicat that'd heard of our jiving and had come up to sit in with us. He sounded like a good eighty-eight man to me, but he was just playing the spots.

I usually filled in on the piano when the regular black-and-whiter wasn't around, but now that this outsider'd taken it over, I was able to get out the horn and drag up a chair with the boys. Four of us were there: Charley Curtis, a real gate on the clarinet—and I mean he swings wide, too; George Robinson, a satchel-mouth with a hot tram; and Bill Pritchard, the skin-beater and rim-shot expert. Also myself, cornetician. So we sat in a semicircle, with our backs to the auditorium, facing the open side of the piano. It's the best playing arrangement you can get on the stage.

We'd all gotten warmed up, and decided to start off on the blues. So George leaned forward and said to the stranger, "Blues—in F." The fel-

low nodded, modulated through some nice chords, and we started.

Charley began easily enough with a wild skyward run on his licorice stick, using but gently with swing even an icky could follow, and then becoming hotter still—hotter—feeding us slop from the old gutbucket straight for three choruses. His elation faded, then; he ran down a rapid arpeggio and began rolling in the groove with us.

George took the next chorus, trying to “send” us, but he couldn’t quite make it. His jive was most distinctly similar to a certain vegetable that comes on a cob. He realized it, and started playing riffs, easing back down in the groove for one of us to take over. I was just getting ready to ride a few, when I heard an amazing chord fly out of the moth-box, so I let the stranger take over, while I stayed with the boys.

YOU KNOW the old eighty-eight isn’t an instrument you can send on like you can a trumpet. But I really heard it give that night. He started a roll in the bass, swelling it till I wanted to beat my head and roll on the floor like any common jit-bug would; while his right hand darted back and forth over the keyboard, carrying his jive in octave chords. Just when I thought I’d go completely wacky, that roll stopped, and he took the blues up to where they’d never been before. He was a real boogie-woogie—he was a gate, and he swung wide—he was pounding out the blues on the killer side.

Suddenly, surprised, I caught on. I stood up, swaying with the beat, and joined the stranger. I rose—higher—higher—the cornet took the jive away from my thoughts—I was completely out, listening to the cornet, piano, and background swirl away

into the wildest polyphonic jam I’ve ever heard. I felt the runaway horn hitting hotter still—and suddenly realized I’d never be this far out again. Then I heard an odd riff from the piano, and I fell with a thud back to reality.

George dropped the slush-pump from his sweating face, leaned over and said, “God! That sender’s sure hep! If we’d only got that jameroo recorded, it’d skin the cats proper”

Then he noticed what I’d seen—although we were all wiping the sweat off our faces, the stranger wasn’t even moist around the hair line. Nobody said anything about it, but I guess we all thought it pretty queer.

That’d been a jam of the first water, so we decided to try “Sweet Sue,” who’s a chippy that’s a sure-fire scat-sender for the gators and poison to the longhairs, and still easy to swing on. So we started out as we usually did, playing her straight for a chorus, then dropping the melody, just riding the beat waiting for somebody to take over.

Charley started it again, riding his agony pipe up on a wild run that reached an ear-piercing climax he held for half-a-dozen measures before he slid down and began to rock it. He hit a glorious jiveroo, taking Susie for a magnificent ride as he showed us things about her we’d never even thought of before. We were all of us hep, so we understood what he was saying about her with his clarinet.

But suddenly his story changed—he was still talking about Sue, but the wench had turned into a Circe or a siren instead of the ordinary pickup we’d always known. Seductive, beautiful, but somehow unholy, you know. . . . He talked about her for some little time before he came back to nor-

mal—his jive was major again, and Sue turned back into the healthy floozy she'd been before.

He slid back down into the groove; and George and I simultaneously began to send. We started out with exactly the same notes—yes, it happens—but quickly fell apart. George jived and I faded him. We rocked her along for a few bars, and then I really became surprised—my cornet suddenly ran away from me and told about this weirdly exotic Lilith. And George's did too. You could see quite plainly that he didn't want it to, either.

This only lasted a little while; then we were swinging out on our old friend Susie once more. I was so worried about it that I couldn't put my soul into my jam, and I'm pretty sure that's what was wrong with George, too. Anyhow, the way I was playing, Henry Busse would have to work hard to hold his place as king of the corn-et; and George wasn't exactly the mosta of the besta, either. So first Charley, then Bill and the stranger, joined in; we barrel-housed for a couple more choruses, then stopped.

WE SAT and talked, then, beat to the socks, while our bodies made up for the energy we'd used in the session. You know jazz jamming takes a lot more out of a fellow than an outsider'd think it would. And the stranger didn't say anything—he just leaned back in his chair and listened to us. And he smiled as he sat, with an uncanny grin that made us so nervous the conversation faltered and died.

Just as we were wondering whether to start jiving again to break the embarrassing silence, the stranger sat up and began running through a minor chord introduction. We

hitched our chairs back toward the mothbox, I picked up my bugle and the boys took their hardware, and we started rolling in the groove for him, faking the chord changes till we caught on.

He started out playing octaves on a melody I'd never heard before. The tune was an odd little number, appealing enough in its way; but somehow it carried a faint suggestion of unwholesomeness—a feeling that you couldn't play it in the open air, or it would wilt and die like the poisonous-looking fungi you find in cellars. But it was catchy enough, and we stayed in the background while he carried it solo for a chorus, throwing in a few riffs but keeping it close to the spots. I stood up, intending to take a little off on it, but he scowled at me and I sat down.

He carried a pine-top boogie bass for the break, and then his mood changed. He began talking about good and evil. Yes, I know it sounds silly; but if a longhair says he can hear the footfalls of the mourners in the first movement of the *Marche Funebre*, or the transcendent disillusionment of the dead soul in the third—well, even a swing-happy hep-cat can find things in the music he knows and loves that no one else can.

But he was telling us about how there are two forces in the universe—good and evil; and how they exactly counterbalance each other. And he dwelt on the evil part of the cosmos—his melody was just the right type for that anyhow—but in a moment or two, I wished that I wasn't hep, because the stuff he was talking about was horrible. He spoke of certain secrets that it isn't good to know. He mentioned the ghastly end toward which the cosmos is drifting, and its unspeakable death;

he whispered eerily about the true shape of the cosmos, and of the elder Gods that controlled its course; he simpered as he spoke of He Who Must Not Be Named, and of the idiot God to Whom Men cry for help; and he drooled as he mouthed other things. . . . things I didn't understand . . . hellish things, vaguely glimpsed in his improvisation, as in a glass darkly. . . .

But he tired of his sport. His music told then of certain evil forces that wanted incarnation on Earth, and he hinted that all that was needed was someone below to call them down, and . . . bodies to receive them. And I struggled, then, trying to drop my cornet; but it continued playing for him, in spite of all I could do.

HE STARTED to weave his sorcery. The melody took on a steel-hard quality, as delicately beautiful as a dewdrop in spring; but still that unwholesome tinge persisted. The music swelled toward its climax. Singing notes of evil beauty flew from the piano and seemed to make an invisible web at the back of the auditorium. Clear, malevolent tones filled in the framework of the web, strengthening his gateway to the evil ones. He hesitated, seeming to laugh inwardly at us and our accompaniment; then he shrugged and struck a rapid chordal modulation.

The chords rolled into the invisible net of melody behind us and disappeared. They didn't seem to die out; rather, they faded into infinite distance, reverberating as they went, until I couldn't hear them any more. He struck more chords; deep, rolling basses that seemed to reach out and bring unguessable infinity itself within the hall. Then I could hear those

first far-flung chords returning—and to them clung a perceptible aura of evil, as though they'd been tainted by some greater horror. . . .

He wove his incantation a little more delicately. And from that invisible gateway behind us, I sensed a dark stirring that possessed, somehow, a vast sluggish life of its own. The cyclorama before me darkened; and I felt a breath of cold pour past like a flood. Behind, I felt that nameless thing waiting—waiting only for the command of its master before it sprang.

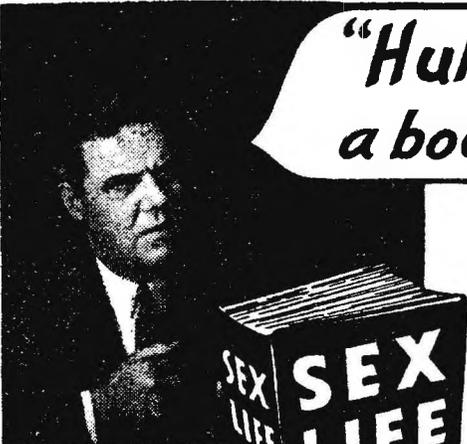
The stranger swayed back and forth as he played. He seemed to be toying with us as a cat does with a captured mouse. Then, as I expected the command to come, he abruptly shifted his mood. I was listening to a corny Confreyish arrangement of "Kitten on the Keys." The spell was broken; he struck a tremendous dissonance and stopped playing.

I sat stupefied for a few seconds, thankful to be alive. I looked at the others. They looked at me. We dropped our horns and dived for the pianist.

He simpered a little as we came, then beat out a chord that reverberated through our bodies and held us motionless in the air, frozen in place. He looked at us coolly, chuckled to himself, played some three choruses of Chopsticks—no, I'm not kidding; he actually did—and then hit a discord and faded from sight. The unknown force held us a heart-beat longer before it released us.

I looked at George. He shook his head slowly, and carefully walked over to where he'd dropped his trombone. He picked it up gently; and broke it without passion across his knee.

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THE WAR has pretty well disrupted the fantasy world in Great Britain and the Empire. Only recently all U. S. pulp magazines were barred from Canada as luxuries that must be set aside in favor of the products of war. This will remove from Canada's stands this and other magazines of fantastic fiction which will be a serious blow to Canada's fantasy reading public. Canada is not unique in this; a year ago importation to the British Isles of American magazines became impossible. Shortly after that the same became true of Australia. Yet the fantasy world continued to survive the blow.

In Great Britain a few fans still struggle on, keeping in touch with the American fantasy world over great difficulties. Several of the once numerous fan publications continue to come out whenever the possibility arises.

In Australia, however, the fantasy world not only took the loss in its stride but actually grew instead of diminished. An elaborate system of loaning and subscribing to American fantasy magazines is indulged in and the number of new Australian fan magazines is larger than ever.

Every few weeks we receive a batch of copies of the Australian fan

news sheet *Futurian Observer*. This is put out quite regularly by William Veney and Bert Castellari of the Futurian Society of Sydney. From its pages we gather news of the active little Antipodean fantasy world.

The Futurian Association of Australia was formed last August to band together all the various groups and fans in that continent. It seems to have done its work well. There are three strong local groups, the Futurian Societies of Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane, which indulge in collecting, fan publishing, and working for the re-entry of U. S. fantasy into the country.

These energetic fans bombarded newspapers with letters demanding the ban of the prohibition on fantasy. We do not know how successful they were, but they did receive considerable notice.

Besides the *Futurian Observer*, the boys from down-under put out *Zeus*, *Cosmos*, *Austra-Fantasy*, *Ultra*, and others.

ALMOST diametrically opposite the Australian Futurians, on the other side of the globe, is to be found the Futurian Society of New York. Outside of similarity of name, this group is not connected with

(Continued On Page 126)

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STIRRING FANTASY-FICTION

(Continued From Page 124)

their friends down-under. The New York Futurians antedate the others.

The Futurian Society of New York is probably one of the most famous of all science-fiction groups today. Among its charter members are listed the editors of seven newsstand fantasy magazines and many professional writers and artists. The Society is very informal in structure, meeting irregularly, and not seeking new members.

The Futurians are credited with many achievements in the fantasy world, both amateur and professional. They have helped innumerable fans with collections and with writings. Though they rarely issue any fan magazines, they number among them some of the best fan writers and publishers.

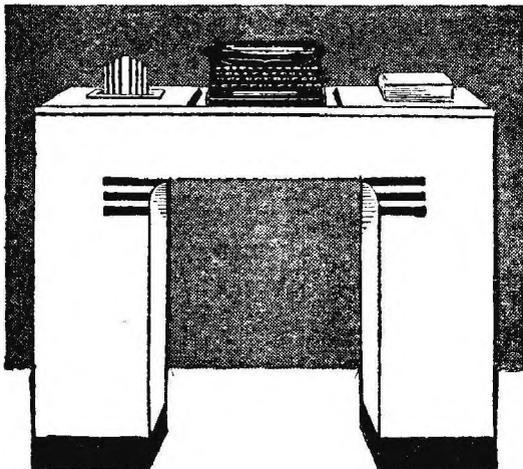
DAVID H. KELLER, M. D., who authored "Calypso's Island" in this issue, is well known for his numerous fantasy stories. He is generally considered one of the best liked writers of science-fiction and weird-fiction. Recently he triumphed in another field, that of books.

"The Devil and the Doctor" is the title of his first published novel and the lucky publishers are Simon & Schuster. It is a neat volume illustrated appropriately with pen and ink sketches.

The story concerns one Jacob Hubler, a retired Pennsylvania doctor with a singularly open mind. Because of this fact he received a visit one day from a tall youthful chap who turns out to be the devil himself. The devil's name is Robin Goodfellow and because Hubler is unprejudiced Goodfellow unburdens his woes and explains why the world misunderstands him.

It would seem that God and the

(Continued On Page 129)



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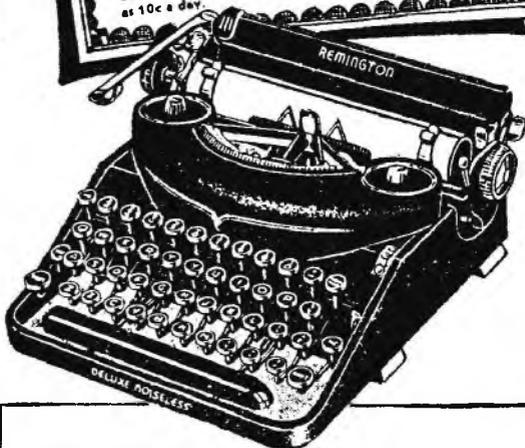
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Some of the Savings
You Can Show

You walk into an office and put down before your prospect a letter from a sales organization showing that they did work in their own office for \$11 which formerly could have cost them over \$200. A building supply corporation pays our man \$70, whereas the bill could have been for \$1,600! An automobile dealer pays our representative \$15, whereas the expense could have been over \$1,000. A department store has expense of \$88.60, possible cost if done outside the business being well over \$2,000. And so on. We could not possibly list all cases here. These are just a few of the many actual cases which we place in your hands to work with. Practically every line of business and every section of the country is represented by these field reports which hammer across dazzling, convincing money-saving opportunities which hardly any business man can fail to understand.

Profits Typical of
the Young, Growing Industry

Going into this business is not like selling something offered in every grocery, drug or department store. For instance, when you take a \$7.50 order, \$5.83 can be your share. On \$1,500 worth of business, your share can be \$1,167.00. The very least you get as your part of every dollar's worth of business you do is 67 cents—on ten dollars' worth \$6.70, on a hundred dollars' worth \$67.00—in other words two thirds of every order you get in your. Not only on the first order—but on repeat orders—and you have the opportunity of earning an even larger percentage.

This Business Has
Nothing to Do With
House to House Canvassing

Nor do you have to know anything about high-pressure selling. "Selling" is unnecessary in the ordinary sense of the word. Instead of hammering away at the customer and trying to "force" a sale, you make a dignified, business-like call, leave the installation—whatever size the customer says he will accept—at our risk, let the customer sell himself after the device is in and working. This does away with the need for pressure on the customer—it eliminates the handicap of trying to get the money before the customer has really convinced himself 100%. You simply tell what you offer, showing proof of success in that customer's particular line of business. Then leave the invention without a dollar down. It starts working at once. In a few short days, the installation should actually produce enough cash money to pay for the deal, with profits above the investment coming in at the same time. You then call back, collect your money. Nothing is so convincing as our offer to let results speak for themselves without risk to the customer! While others fail to get even a hearing, our men are making sales running into the hundreds. They have received the attention of the largest firms in the country, and sold to the smallest businesses by the thousands.

EARNINGS

One man in California earned over \$1,600 per month for three months—close to \$5,000 in 90 days' time. Another writes from Delaware—"Since I have been operating (just a little less than a month of actual selling) and not the full day at that, because I have been getting organized and had to spend at least half the day in the office; counting what I have sold outright and on trial, I have made just a little in excess of one thousand dollars profit for one month." A man working small city in N. Y. State made \$10,805 in 9 months. Texas man nets over \$300 in less than a week's time. Space does not permit mentioning here more than these few random cases. However, they are sufficient to indicate that the worthwhile future in this business is coupled with immediate earnings for the right kind of man. One man with us has already made over a thousand sales on which his earnings ran from \$5 to \$60 per sale and more. A great deal of this business was repeat business. Yet he had never done anything like this before coming with us. That is the kind of opportunity this business offers. The fact that this business has attracted to it such business men as former bankers, executives of businesses—men who demand only the highest type of opportunity and income—gives a fairly good picture of the kind of business this is. Our door is open, however, to the young man looking for the right field in which to make his start and develop his future.

No Money Need Be Risked

In trying this business out. You can measure the possibilities and not be out a dollar. If you are looking for a business that is not overworked—a business that is just coming into its own—on the upgrade, instead of the downgrade—a business that offers the buyer relief from a burdensome, but unavoidable expense—a business that has a prospect practically in every office, store, or factory into which you can set foot—regardless of size—that is a necessity but does not have any price cutting to contend with as other necessities do—that because you control the sales in exclusive territory is your own business—that pays more on some individual sales than many men make in a week and sometimes in a month's time—if such a business looks as if it is worth investigating, get in touch with us at once for the rights in your territory—don't delay—because the chances are that if you do wait, someone else will have written to us in the meantime—and if it turns out that you were the better man—we'd both be sorry. So for convenience, use the coupon below—but send it right away—or wire if you wish. But do it now. Address

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(Continued From Page 126)

Devil are brothers; that they had a quarrel in which Goodfellow came out second best. As a result of deliberate propaganda, Robin is believed by the world to be a scoundrel whereas he is actually well-meaning. Sooner or later, in the course of millions of years, the quarrel will be ironed out and the brothers reconciled. Meanwhile the Devil's life is hell.

Hubler befriends Goodfellow and is rewarded for it. But the neighbors, superstitious people, suspect the devil's hand in it and begin to make things uncomfortable.

Dr. Keller spins a great yarn and we hope that those who enjoy his short stories will take pains to get "The Devil and the Doctor."

WE HAVE JUST received the latest mailing of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association. This organization, which has received little publicity among general fantasy readers, is actually the most active and most completely democratic national fantasy organization that exists. It is an association of amateur fantasy magazine publishers and writers, young chaps who write and publish strictly for their own amusement and with no expectation of making money. They organized the F. A. P. A. several years ago as a means of keeping in touch with each other and exchanging their hobby magazines efficiently.

There are about two or three dozen titles of these F. A. P. A. fantasy magazines which are usually not for sale and rarely recorded. Some of them are amazingly excellent and the F. A. P. A. boasts some of the best fan writings and fan work that has ever been produced.

(Continued On Page 130)

Free for Asthma During Winter

If you suffer with those terrible attacks of Asthma when it is cold and damp; if raw, wintry winds make you choke as if each gasp for breath was the very last; if restful sleep is impossible because of the struggle to breathe; if you feel the disease is slowly wearing your life away, don't fail to send at once to the Frontier Asthma Co. for a free trial of a remarkable method. No matter where you live or whether you have any faith in any remedy under the Sun, send for this free trial. If you have suffered for a lifetime and tried everything you could learn of without relief; even if you are utterly discouraged, do not abandon hope but send today for this free trial. It will cost you nothing. Address:

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(Continued From Page 129)

Among those magazines we recently received were: *Horizons* a hektographed review published by Harry Warner; *Sustaining Program*, a 20 page mimeographed collection of the opinions of Washington fan Jack Speer; the famous *Science Fiction Checklist* which is a catalogue of every fantasy amateur publication ever issued; such varied and interesting items as H. Koenig's *Reader And Collector*, Paul Freehafer's *Polaris*, William Groveman's *Lovecraftian*, Lee Gregor's *Milty's Mag*, the official *Fantasy Amateur* and innumerable others.

The present officers of the organization are Bob Tucker, Milton Rothman, Harry Warner, and Elmer Perdue. The association holds elections each year and usually manages to survive the heated campaigns. Among those who have held office in the F. A. P. A. are Frederik Pohl, R. W. Lowndes, and your editor.

THE COVER this issue does not represent any particular story. We had Hannes Bok, our star artist, let his imagination have full rein and he produced this man-monster glowing over the humans. When we asked him where this scene was taking place, he said he didn't know, he had remembered the idea from a dream.

Now dreams, as we all know, are more or less apt to have counterparts in reality. But where could such a reality as this be or have been? Looking the picture over it becomes obvious that the scene must be taking place on one of the asteroids. No-

where else in the solar system would worlds be packed so close together as they are here—unless the scene is a glimpse from the future when the sun will grow dim and the planets come closer and closer to each other.

Hannes Bok, who calls this monster "The Snake-Father," is an enthusiastic young man from Seattle who has been making his mark as a fantasy artist. We predict that before 1941 is out he will be considered the leader among fantasy illustrators. His particular delight is in doing weird creatures, usually delightful little grotesques. We had the pleasure of seeing some of his color work and have been amazed by the remarkable effects he can produce.

Roy Hunt, who is responsible for our department heads, is another young man who is going to go places as an artist. He lives in Denver where he is one of those helping the Colorado Fantasy Society work on the coming Convention July 4th. Hunt can produce some marvelous effects with demons and horrific creations.

IF YOU haven't joined the *Cosmian League*, you'll want to. It's one of the numerous features in our sister magazine *Cosmic Stories* which you really can't afford to miss. *Cosmic Stories* specializes in science-fiction and presents a greater collection of stories than any other magazine of its type. We predict that it will take its place as a leader of science-fiction, alongside of *Stirring Science Stories* of course. Keep your eye on us, we'll be back in April, better than ever! DAW



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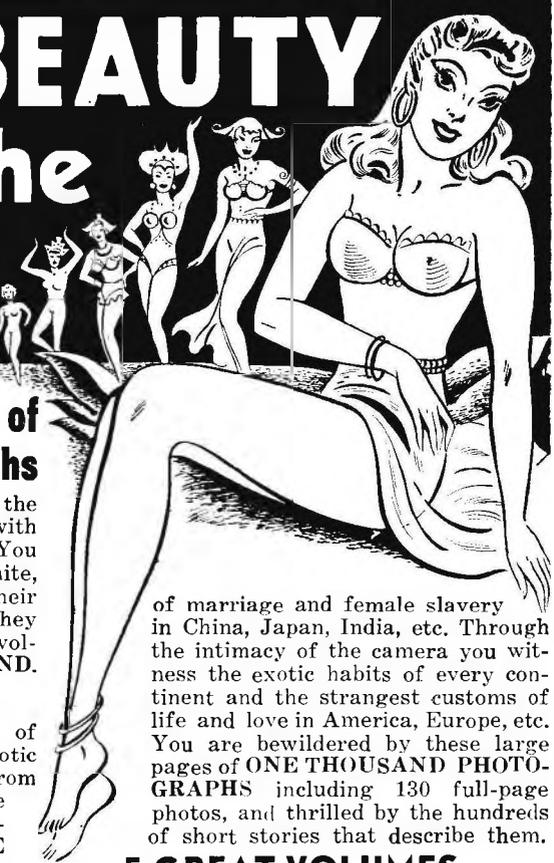
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