THRILLING wonder STORIES

FEATURING
CAPTIVE AUDIENCE
by Wallace West

THE CONQUEST OF JANES
by R. J. McGregor

SCIENCE FICTION BY TOP WRITERS

JUNE 25c

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

Real Causes of TV Interference In This Area Revealed

A message to every TV set owner who is tired of paying $5-$10 for the same unnecessary service calls over and over again —and who is unfairly blaming his serviceman for something that is not his fault.

Have you ever wondered why your TV set can't be fixed—why your TV picture still gets aggravating wavy lines, streaks, distortions and zags — why high powered aerials, expensive new sets, even top flight servicemen often fail to stop this TV interference?

THE TRUTH ABOUT YOUR TV SET

It is a known fact that your TV antenna not only picks up the picture waves you see on your screen, but also picks up electric static waves that can ruin your picture.

THE REAL CAUSES OF TV INTERFERENCE

And the reason you or your repairman have never been able to block out this interference is because it does not come from within your TV set *but from sources outside your TV set!* These sources are the real cause of TV interference. These are what may cause your TV screen to flicker, flutter, streak or get hazy.

For instance, you yourself, realize that a doctor's diathermy machine up to 2½ miles from your home can ruin your TV viewing pleasure for hours on end.

But do you know that a car or truck passing your home can streak, distort your TV picture?

Do you know that nearby telephone lines or neon advertising signs, can make your screen flicker and flutter?

And do you know that any electrical appliance in your home—or your neighbor's home—can streak, distort and haze your TV picture for an entire evening?

ANY ONE OF THESE CAN CAUSE YOUR TV INTERFERENCE

Inside Your Home

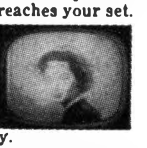
Electric toasters	Phonographs
Vacuum cleaners	Electric razors
Sewing machines	Refrigerators
Electric broilers	Oil burners
Ringing telephone	Door bells
	Radios

Outside Your Home

Cars	Streetcars
Busses	Trucks
Trains	Doctor's diathermy machine
Hospital machines	Subways
Electric cash register	FM Radio interference

WHICH OF THESE TV HEADACHES DO YOU WANT TO STOP—IN JUST 45 SECONDS!

STREAKS caused by cars, trains, subways, cash registers, electrical appliances can be BLOCKED OUT by TELERON before it reaches your set.



WEAK PICTURE—TELERON CLARIFIES weak signal. Helps to hold picture bright and steady.

WAVY LINES caused by "Hams," FM broadcast stations, other TV sets, antennas, can be BLOCKED OUT by TELERON before it reaches your set.

FADED PICTURE due to weak, static ridden signals can be CLARIFIED by TELERON before it reaches your set.

BORER EFFECT caused by doctor's diathermy machines, hospital machines, can be BLOCKED OUT by TELERON before it reaches your set.

TV STATIC caused by telephone lines, neon signs, atmospheric conditions, can be BLOCKED OUT by TELERON, before it reaches your set.

HOW TO STOP TV INTERFERENCE IN JUST 45 SECONDS!

The only way to eliminate TV interference is to BLOCK IT OUT, before it reaches your set —in exactly the same way sunlight glare is blocked out by sunglasses before it reaches your eyes.

1. You can install an antenna-filter to help reduce interference seeping through your antenna, BUT IT CANNOT STOP streaks, wavy lines or TV static due to interference pouring in through your wall socket.

2. Or you can fix your set yourself in just 45 seconds simply by clipping onto your set a new double protection filter circuit and power line plug that not only blocks out interference coming in through your antenna, but also blocks out interference coming through your wall socket. The name of this amazing invention is the TELERON INTERFERENCE TRAP which actually blocks out these interference waves before they reach your set.

PICTURE-CLEAR RECEPTION IN JUST 45 SECONDS

Simply clip the TELERON INTERFERENCE TRAP on to your set. It takes only 45 seconds —and fits every set made since 1947, regardless of make, model or year. See for yourself how this amazing invention gives you sharp, clear pictures; how it can add new life to your picture even in fringe areas—even in weak reception zones—even on channels you could hardly pick up before!

ORDER TODAY AND SAVE $2

If you order your Teleron Interference Trap today, you do not pay the $6 you'd expect, but only $3.98 — on this amazing no-risk guarantee: If 45 seconds after you clip this amazing TELERON INTERFERENCE TRAP on your set, you are not getting perfect picture-clear reception—please return for full money back. You try it at our risk. So send today to: Hastings Products, Inc., Teleron Div., Dept. T-742, 141 Fifth Ave., New York 10, N. Y.

ORDER TODAY AND SAVE $2, MAIL COUPON NOW!

HASTINGS PRODUCTS INC., TELERON DIVISION, Dept. T-742
141 Fifth Avenue, New York 10, New York

Please send me the TV INTERFERENCE TRAP immediately, at $3.98, plus C.O.D. postage. I understand that satisfaction is guaranteed 100%, or my money is promptly refunded.

Name..... *(Please Print)*

Address.....

City.....Zone.....State.....

SAVE MORE! Send $4.00 with coupon. We pay all postage charges. Same Money-Back Guarantee.

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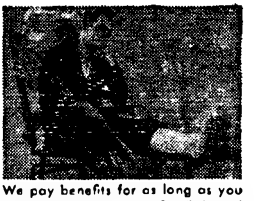
The Greatest
HOSPITALIZATION VALUE EVER OFFERED

Smiling and healthy today — in a Hospital bed tomorrow! Be ready!

Sky-high Hospital bills can wreck your life savings. Insure now!



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COSTS ONLY **Pennies a Day**

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Go to the Hospital for a day, a week, a month, a year or longer — your "NO TIME LIMIT" Policy pays Benefits just as long as you stay — *there's absolutely no time limit!* What blessed help! What's more, the "NO TIME LIMIT" Policy pays off in cash direct to you — regardless of what you may collect from any other insurance policy for the same disability, including Workmen's Compensation. This is important — it means you can carry the low cost "NO TIME LIMIT" Policy IN ADDITION to any other insurance — then collect two ways in case of Hospital confinement.

Policy Sold Only By Mail! Good Anywhere in U.S. & Possessions!

If sickness or accident puts you in a Hospital bed — you'll look back and thank your lucky stars you were wise enough to take out the "NO TIME LIMIT" Policy. It's the sensible, practical way to protect your own bank account against the onslaught of high Hospital costs. So ACT TODAY! Do it before trouble strikes.

YOU CAN GET MATERNITY

For slight extra cost husband and wife can have a MATERNITY RIDER attached to their regular Policy and this will entitle the couple to a liberal Benefit for childbirth confinement and care.

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Name .....

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THRILLING
wonder STORIES

VOL. XLII, NO. 2 A THRILLING PUBLICATION JUNE, 1953

FEATURED NOVEL

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There was no place where an Earthman could hide from the fierce bombardment of thought which was wrecking humanity!

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He was a past master in the art of interplanetary fraud—until the day he encountered an interplanetary broad

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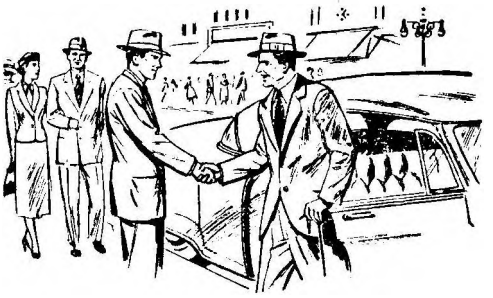
the Fifty Thousand Dollar Minute

by

Hillard Wilson



IT was 6:15 in the evening of a bright fall day. Bill Rhodes was standing on the corner of 42nd and Fifth Avenue.

And as he stood there and watched the never-ending stream of automobiles flow by, a feeling of resentment rose within him.

"Why," he asked himself, "should I be forever struggling along on a small salary when so many other men have found wealth? They are only men, aren't they? They have only two hands, two legs, one mind? What is the magic something that makes one man a success and the other a failure?"

Bill Rhodes shook his head. Many times he had asked himself this same question but he had never been able to answer it satisfactorily.

This time he might have pursued the subject further, but just then an automobile stopped directly in front of him and a strangely familiar voice called out —

"Bill Rhodes! Of all men! What in the world are you doing here? Don't you remember me? Jim Williams?"

Yes, Bill did remember him. Five years before they had worked together for the same company. They had been fast friends and good pals. And here was Jim Williams in his own Cadillac! Had he found a gold mine? Had he struck oil?

Jim laughed. "Neither," he said, "but something a whole lot better. Step in the car and we'll ride about a bit. I want to talk to you about old times."

Bill stepped in and eased back into the luxurious cushions. As they rode along, he told Jim with just a trace of sadness, how he was still working at the same old place and at almost the old salary. How he had married and had two children! How how hard it was sometimes to make both ends meet!

Jim Williams listened attentively. Then suddenly he put his hand on Bill's shoulder.

"Bill," he said seriously, "I want to tell you something. Five years ago we were working together at the same job — and the same low wages. We used to wish we could get ahead, but that's all we ever did — just wish.

"And then one night I happened to see an advertisement in one of the magazines. It told about the International Correspondence Schools of Scranton and how they had helped so many men to success through spare-time study. Right there I decided that I would be one of these trained men.

"I remember telling you about sending in the coupon. And I remember how you laughed and said I was just wasting my time and my money. But I wasn't, Bill! It was the best investment I ever made.

"I have figured it out and I have found that the minute I spent in marking and mailing that coupon has been worth $50,000 to me. In other words, I have made just $50,000 more in the last five years than if I had stayed at the old job. And I say very frankly that I owe my advancement to the I.C.S.

"What I have done, Bill, you can do. If anything, you have a better mind to begin with than I had. But you have never made use of it."

As Jim Williams finished, he looked intently at Bill, half fearful that he might have hurt his feelings. But Bill was made of sterner stuff.

"Jim," he said slowly, "I want to thank you for what you have said. You had your $50,000 minute. I say that I'm going to have mine. Tonight I, too, am going to send in the coupon that has started so many men on the up-road to success."

How much longer are you going to wait before taking the step that is bound to bring you advancement and more money?

The way is easy. Without cost, without obligation, mark and mail this coupon. It takes only a three-cent stamp and a $50,000 minute of your time, but it is the most important thing you can do today.

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Without cost, send me free book, "HOW TO SUCCEED" and free catalog on course checked.

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- ☐ Aeronautical Engineering Jr.
- ☐ Aircraft Drafting
- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Architectural Drawing
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- ☐ Business Administration
- ☐ Certified Public Accounting
- ☐ Chemical Engineering
- ☐ Civil Engineering
- ☐ Cotton Manufacturing
- ☐ Diesel Engines
- ☐ Diesel Locomotive
- ☐ Drafting
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electrical Maintenance
- ☐ Electronics
- ☐ Foremanship
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- ☐ General Radio
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- ☐ Highway Engineering
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- ☐ Industrial Instruments
- ☐ Industrial Supervision
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Mathematics
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Practical Accounting
- ☐ Practical Electrician
- ☐ Reading Shop Blueprints
- ☐ Reading Structural Blueprints
- ☐ Radio Servicing
- ☐ Railroad
- ☐ Railway Postal Service
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Stenographic-Secretarial
- ☐ Structural Engineering
- ☐ Textiles
- ☐ Toolmaking
- ☐ Tool Design
- ☐ Traffic Management

Other _____

Name _____ Age _____

Home Address _____

City _____ State _____

Occupation _____

Special tuition rates to members of Armed Forces. Canadian residents address International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Montreal.

A DEPARTMENT FOR SCIENCE FICTION FANS

AS THIS is being written, a successful vaccine for polio seems a certainty, bringing in sight at long last the end of childhood's dread crippler.

As this is being written, UN researchers announce hope of an influenza vaccine which may not only write finis to a killer, but possibly open the way to conquest of mankind's most baffling nuisance: the common cold.

As this is being written, a new clue to cancer focusses attention on the pituitary gland, prime mover in so many bodily functions.

Progress? Ah, yes.

But meantime in Richmond, Virginia, bewildered humans consult a psychic horse for answers for their personal problems. Equipped with a giant typewriter and a remarkable grasp of the English language, this erudite equine punches out sage counsel for humanoid-type people who lack its own formidable insight. The answers, it is reported, have been very helpful, although the horse has made some mistakes.

In Osnabrueck, Germany, an irate amateur astronomer named Gottfried Bueren is engaged in a hot lawsuit over the Sun. For this story we are indebted to Mrs. Elizabeth Peters of New York who translated it for us from *die Zeit* of Hamburg.

Gottfried Bueren, 70-year-old patent attorney, may be the only remaining supporter of the all-but-forgotten Herschel-Wilson Theory. This theory, which apparently was taken more seriously in the 18th Century than today, held that the Sun is not a flaming mass of gas at all, but a solid dark body, merely surrounded by a glowing, luminous shell which encircles it at a distance of 252,000 kilometers. It is this luminous shell which gives off the light and heat characteristic of the Sun. The dark body within remains comparatively cool.

Further, Bueren believes, the solid dark body is inhabited. Luxuriant vegetation growing on it protects and cools it from the glowing shell; the heat produces perfect greenhouse conditions which spur prolific growth. And the growth of course produces breathable atmosphere for the inhabitants.

So convinced of this is Bueren that he was enraged by the indifference of recognized scientists to the Theory—an indifference which has now persisted for a hundred years. To engage their attention forcibly, therefore, he announced a prize contest. He would put up 50,000 marks of his own money. 25,000 marks would be awarded to each of two papers—and to show his fairness and his confidence that the truth would be recognized, one prize would be for the best paper supporting the Theory and the other for the best paper attacking it.

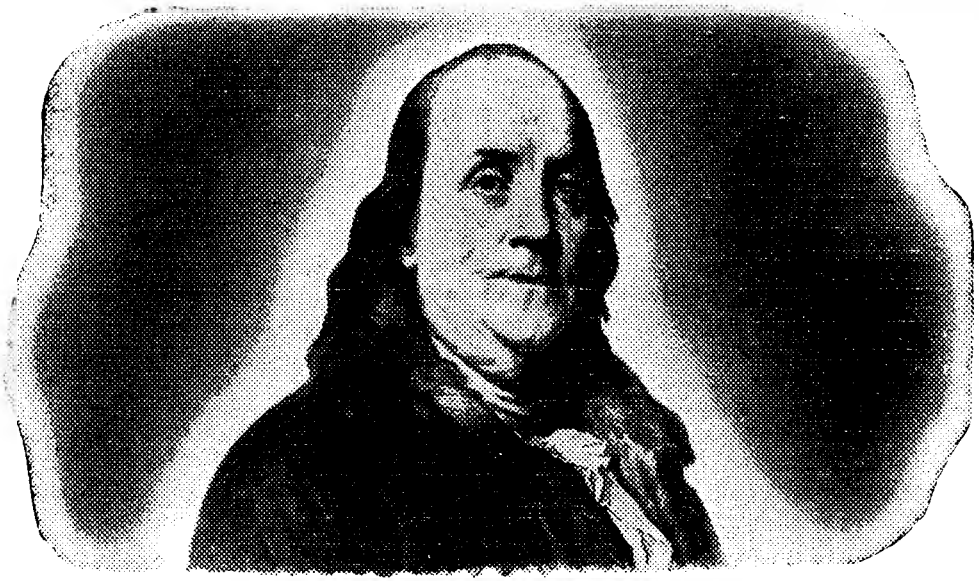
As judges he secured the cooperation of three unassailable scientists: Nobel prize-winner Heisenberg, Cologne Ordinarius for Physics Schaefer and Professor of Law Fischer. This eminently respectable panel succeeded at last in stirring the very dormant interest of the astronomical society—not to mention the 25,000 mark prizes. And so two papers were finally submitted to the contest judges. One was by Professor Siedentorf-Tuebingen, the other by Professor Bierman-Goettingen.

Then came the dawn. Both papers categorically and vehemently denounced the Bueren theory as the wildest fantasy and insisted that even if the wild "shell" idea were true, the temperature of the dark inside body would have to be at least 100,000 times greater than that of the earth.

The judges, undismayed by the fact that no paper supporting the Theory was submitted, calmly picked a winner. Bueren, his plan in

(Continued on page 133)

WHAT SECRET POWER DID THIS MAN POSSESS?



Benjamin Franklin
(A Rosicrucian)

WHY was this man great? How does anyone—man or woman—achieve greatness? Is it not by mastery of the powers within ourselves?

Know the mysterious world within you! Attune yourself to the wisdom of the ages! Grasp the inner power of your mind! Learn the secrets of a full and peaceful life! Benjamin Franklin—like many other learned and great men and women—was a Rosicrucian. The Rosicrucians (NOT a religious organization) first came to America in 1694. Today, headquarters of the Rosicrucians send over seven million pieces of mail annually to all parts of the world.

The Rosicrucians
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What's New in Science?

X-RAY MOTION PICTURES IN THREE DIMENSIONS have been announced on the heels of the general swing to three-dimensional motion pictures. The new apparatus is the work of Sydney A. Weinberg of the University of Rochester, with the help of Dr. Raymond Gramiak. Its advantages are obvious—it shows the positions of the internal organs much more clearly.

A NEW KIND OF HEADACHE has just been invented by the medical profession. Called a "cluster" headache it comes in bunches—several short ones a day, individual headaches lasting often only as long as 30 minutes. The attacks may persist for weeks. Though these headaches seem to be related to migraine, symptoms are different and men are more susceptible than women.

RECLAMATION OF FLOODED DUTCH FARMLANDS is proceeding by an ion exchange process. This sounds more complicated than it is, being merely the spreading of calcium sulfate, or agricultural lime over the ground after the water has been pumped out. The chemical changes the sodium chloride of the salt water into calcium, restoring the sweetness of the soil.

IMPLOSION rather than EXPLOSION is the word used to describe a new atom bomb still very hush hush, but apparently to be manufactured at the AEC's new plant in Illinois. A very secret lens, made of a very secret material is the secret. A number of these, arranged about the core of a bomb, directs the force of the blast inward rather than outward and it is this implosion which releases the larger atomic blast.

SPRAINS AND WRENCHED TENDONS seem to have been whipped by discovery of a new miracle drug called hyaluronidase. It is an enzyme made from cattle and is injected directly into the injured tissue. A patient with a badly sprained ankle can walk normally within two hours after an injection of the drug. The drug prevents the blockage and swelling which usually accompany a sprain and permits normal fluid movement, thus hastening healing. It has also found a use in preventing blood clots which so often lead to coronary thrombosis.

ROBOT FACTORIES ARE MORE THAN A POSSIBILITY, they are here. Machines that correct their own mistakes make it possible. The principle is called "feedback" and is a word you will hear often from now on. Basically, feedback is any kind of device which makes a machine self-correcting. A thermostat is such a device, a speed governor is another, the automatic volume control on your radio is still another. Any gimmick which detects a change and brings the process back to a pre-determined level is a self-supervisory machine which functions better than humans.

RUSSIAN SCIENTISTS HAVE BEEN CORRUPTED by political dogma to the point where many scientists in Russia are better off dead. Everywhere a science conflicts with dialectic materialism the science is forced to produce false data for propaganda purposes. This produces a science which accepts nonsense as its basic tenets. Psychology has been ruined, genetics reduced to a joke, biology and agriculture spiked with portentous nothings, medicine and all the biological subjects so ringed with restrictions as to prevent their producing anything new or important, geology all but finished and astronomy perverted. The only good research being done in Russia is in the fields of mathematics and physics.

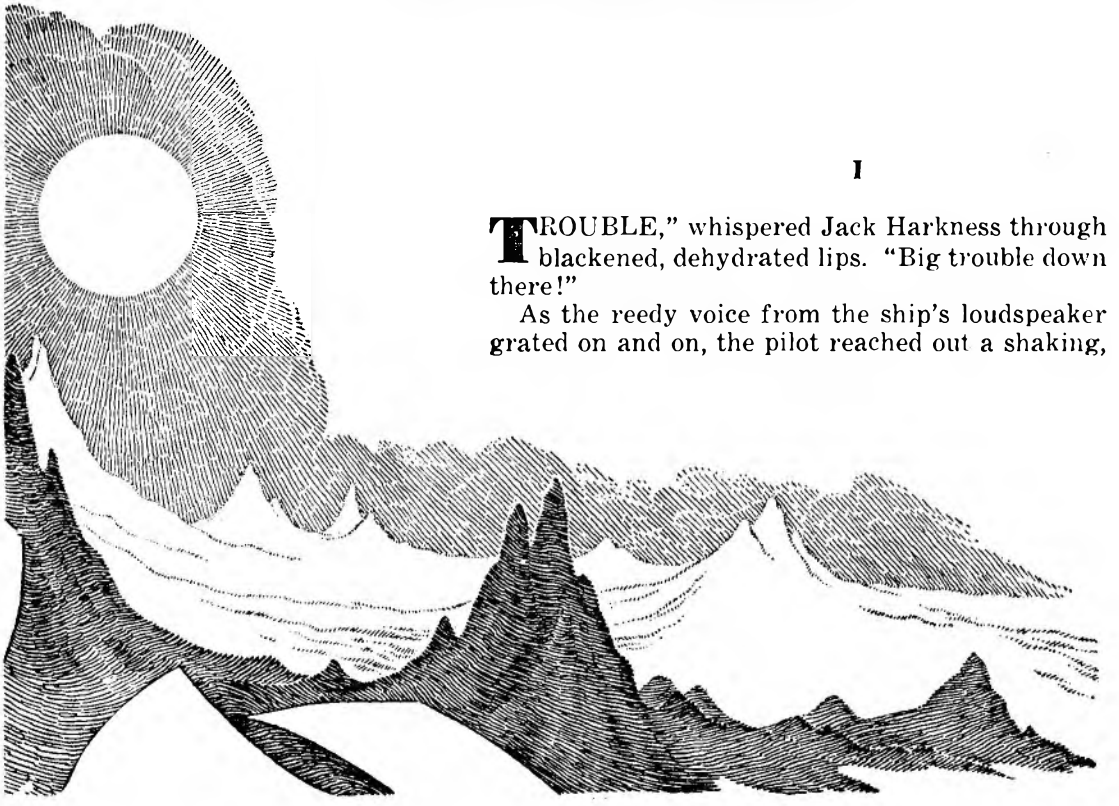
—Dixon Wells


Virgil
Finlay

CAPTIVE AUDIENCE

A Novel by WALLACE WEST

There was no place to hide from the bombardment of thought which was wrecking humanity. . . .



I

TROUBLE," whispered Jack Harkness through blackened, dehydrated lips. "Big trouble down there!"

As the reedy voice from the ship's loudspeaker grated on and on, the pilot reached out a shaking,

skinny claw toward a waiting can of stewed tomatoes. Jagging it open somehow after several fumbling efforts, he gulped half the tepid contents. As the blessed liquid seeped through his starved tissues he leaned stiffly sidewise and dribbled a bit of the can's contents into the half-open mouth of his companion.

"Yahna! Come out of it," he commanded, trying to sound firm despite the thrill of fear that went through him as he observed her terrible emaciation. "Hell's popping down on Earth."

"Wha. . .?" the Martian girl husked. (She *was* alive, he thought with a surge of rejoicing.) "Lemme 'lone. . . Tired. . ."

He shook her roughly, then drew his hand back with a shudder. It was full of scarlet feathers! Poor kid. She had molted again during their year-long enervating sleep—cataleptic trance, rather—induced by staggering overdoses of Suspenso. Awful stuff, Suspenso! But it had kept them alive on the minimum of air, water and food while they plumbed the black outer reaches of the solar system in a ship never meant for such long hops. Now, if those worn-out gyros in the engine room didn't let go again. . . .

"Tired!" his alien sweetheart repeated. She fluttered her great wings feebly, sending a cloud of dead feathers to all parts of the cramped, stuffy cabin. "Wha' you say, darling?" She dragged herself to a half-sitting posture in the co-pilot's hammock and squinted out of the port. "Why, we've only just started! You told me. . . ."

"That's not Pluto down there any more," he explained patiently, as though to a sleepy child. "It's blue and green, not a frozen mirror. It has gorgeous sunsets . . . and whispering trees . . . and cold, clear springs of real water. It's alive, princess. That's Old Mother Earth. We're almost home!" He sneezed as she fluttered again and added tartly, "Stop that, before you smother us."

"Home?" The birdwoman attempted a musical laugh that came out as a parched chirp. "*Your* home."

"*Our* home now. . . I hope." He tinkered to bring into clear focus the random terrestrial broadcast that had roused him from stupor. "Listen!"

". . . *at the conclusion of a worldwide address over IBC by General Horace Brown, United Nations Chief of Security. . . .*" the far voice was whispering.

"Chief of Security!" Harkness exploded. "The old son of a gun always lands on his feet. I'd have sworn he'd be cashiered after snafuing both the First and Second Expeditions to Mars and making everybody up there hate us."

"*. . . . General Brown assured his audience of almost six billion persons that the telepathic braincasts originating on Mars need have no harmful effects on human beings. . . .*"

" 'Telepathic braincasts originating on Mars' "? Yahna was fully awake now. "Whatever can the man be talking about? Our telepathy can't span interplanetary distances."

"*Shhh!*"

"*. . . . since the war with Mars started last year,*" the commentator went on, "*the general emphasized again and again that braincasts are little different from the propaganda—I mean information programs—formerly transmitted by the Voices of Africa, the British Commonwealth, Russia and, uh, other nations. The only difference, said Brown, and I quote, 'is that the Martian braincasts require no receiving sets to be heard, or rather, that the human brain seems to act as a receiving set for them. They cannot be tuned out, or shut off, by the listener,' he admitted, 'but they can be recognized and discounted for what they are—lying distortions, half truths and appeals to the subconscious mind!*"

"I don't get it," said Jack, reaching for a cigarette and then putting it back into its pack for fear of further over-

loading the laboring air conditioner. "Here we think we've got the quarrel between Mars and Earth patched up. We send Brown and his White Man's Burden packing off the Red Planet in the direction of a court martial. We help the Anarchiate exile our charming Martian jingo, Pitar Mura, to a planet circling Sirius. We go off to explore Pluto on our honeymoon. And we come back, emptyhanded and half dead, to find skin and feathers flying all over the place and Brown sitting on top of the world. It's not worth it!"

". . . . *concluded his plea,* the loudspeaker murmured, *by commanding his listeners to pay the braincasts no heed.*

'Do not be enticed into distrusting your neighbors—even your one-time Cold War enemies,' Brown warned. 'Do not believe the braincasts when they say that revolts have broken out in several countries, or that rioting for peace has become commonplace. Every one of those stories is a lie. Every single one! The whole Earth is united against this new alien menace under the banner of the United Nations. Remember that, as the poet Keats said, 'There is not a fiercer hell than the failure of a great object.' And our object, the defeat and utter destruction of Pitar Mura and his hellish Anarchiate, shall not fail!'"

"Pitar Mura and Keats back on their old stands, too!" Harkness had to laugh despite his split lips. "This is where we came in, Princess. Any ideas as to what we should do about it?"

"Ummm." Yahna unsnapped the shock harness and stood up. "Right now, though, I'm hungry enough to eat a welk. Let's see if there's anything left in the larder." She made a tentative step toward the food locker, grabbed at the back of the pilot's seat as her knees buckled under her, and collapsed in a dead faint, a pitiful heap of scarlet feathers, like a split down pillow. . . .

II

I'M WARNING you for the last time, Wolowysczki! I will not tolerate anti-Cap propaganda on your broadcasts. You can take it—or leave it and go home to Warsaw!" Tom Kane, United Nations censor, snatched off his ragemisted dark glasses and polished the lenses on the tip of his tie.

"But I only am saying that the Martian braincasts are affecting the people of New York more than they are the peoples of the Soviet Union," the square-faced Pole growled. "If you are afraid. . . ."

"Who said I was afraid?" Kane lunged to his feet. But, instead of swinging at the hated foreigner, he rested his balled fists on his desk and bit his lips as pain stabbed through his chest. "Get out, damn you," he husked after a moment. "Get out!"

As Wolowysczki marched stiff-legged out of the dingy little office where the censor and his opposite number, Co-ordinator of Allied Affairs Representative Clark Hyatt, watched over the video and radio behavior of the Interplanetary Broadcasting Company, Kane sagged back into his chair and cursed bitterly. Eventually he began picking at his typewriter:

1605. Attn. Gen. Horace Brown. FYI: Commie commentary has been including censorable material lately. Wolowysczki, IBC Exchange Commentator, keeps including improper stuff re the

beauties of Martian deserts in the spring and...

"What the holy hell!" Kane jerked the memo out of his "mill" as though it had been on fire, stared with disbelief at the last nine words he had typed, and hurled it at a wastebasket. Shaking his prematurely grey head as though to get rid of an annoying insect, he tried again:

1610. Attn. Gen. Horace Brown. FYI. Commentary to Commie countries has included much censorable material recently. Wolowysczki, who broadcasts U.N. war news behind Iron Curtain under IBC's exchange agreement, keeps including improper stuff re inferiority Cap civilian morale. Will pass any further violations to you for action by Martian Anarchiate—T. K.

Kane cursed again as he read what he had written. Savagely he x'd out the words, "by Martian Anarchiate" and substituted "through U. N. diplomatic channels" before fastening the memo to his clipboard.

"Blasted braincasts!" he gritted at little Hyatt, who was hunched over a desk across the room. "Those Martians are driving me nuts. I can't even write a memo straight any more. I can ignore the braincasts until I get sore about something. Then they scrag me and I start thinking like a Martie. *Brrr!*"

"Try crossword puzzles." Hyatt glanced nearsightedly across a pile of the things which he had torn from all the newspapers available in the office. He had been working on one even while monitoring a foreign language broadcast through a pair of earphones and enjoying Kane's bout with the commentator.

"Yah! You always leave them for me to finish when you go home." The censor was regaining his color and talking more like his usual self now. "How did you ever rate a government appointment when you don't even know that 'Thor' is a four-letter word meaning 'the God of thunder?' "

"Maybe it was because I knew all the twelve letter words," the CAA man said smugly as he plugged his phones into another jack under his desk top, thus tuning in on a different broadcast. "Anyway, my stupidity helps to counteract old Wolo's perfidy, doesn't it?"

"That Polak! Some day I will sock him."

"And conk out," Hyatt said. "Better follow my policy, which is never to offend anyone, even our dear Commie allies. That way I always get an 'Excellent' Civil Service rating, maybe an advance in grade and occasionally even a raise."

"You pass any copy that comes along," Kane grinned. "One of these days you're going to get into a peck of trouble doing that."

A blast of sound issued from the adjoining newsroom, soaring over the slam of the elevator door as Wolowysczki departed.

".... and *I* say," a deep voice rumbled, "that you're *not* going to put that tripe on the air to Venus. You know it violates guidance. You can't say French jungle fighters are moving on Nirvana unless the Venusport communiqué says so. You can't commit our French allies to any particular type of strategy."

"Nuts!" yelped a whisky tenor. "Where else is there for the French to move? Toward the North Pole? The communiqué says they've advanced thirty-seven kilometers in a northwesterly direction. Is that toward Nirvana or isn't it?"

THE bass was crescendo now, "You can't broadcast it unless the Office of Planetary Information says to. Far as you're concerned, I'm the OPI."

"Damned fool bureaucracy! Losing the war because it can't see beyond its own nose!" The second voice was developing a strong Spanish accent. "If the U. N. had a decent newspaperman working your job instead of an incompetent chair-warmer, I could get some really hot news out of here."

"Look, you Peruvian pipsqueak, I was city editor of the Chicago News when you were chewing betel nuts. And furthermore—"

"See what I mean?" Clark Hyatt said

with a wink. "Richardson's breeding a 'Fair' efficiency rating. A few more tantrums and he'll be bumped to Washington."

"He can't be blamed too much," yawned the censor as the argument continued unabated. "The braincasts are giving all of us the screaming meemies. Know what mine's saying to me right now?" He dropped into a mimicking singsong:

"Earthman, why do you hate us? Martians have never harmed you. You can never defeat us. Earth will become desert like Mars is. Let us all live as brothers."

"I just hear music," said Clark dreamily. "Music that makes me think of nothing but beautiful, seductive girls . . . girls who don't care that I'm little and so nearsighted I have to wear double-lensed spectacles."

Kane eyed him with genuine pity.

"I've told you and told you how to get a girl," he said. "First, stop being so stingy that you even cut your own hair. That frightwig effect would scare off any dame. Then get a good tailor. That suit you're wearing must be three sizes too big for you. And finally, buy a nice dog . . . something special like an Afghan . . . and walk it on Park Avenue. You'll meet plenty of pretty girls walking *their* dogs. It will be easy to strike up a conversation."

"But an Afghan costs a lot of money, and it would be almost as tall as I am."

"All right! All right! How about a dachshund, then?" Kane pressed his hands against his ears. Then he took them away wearily as the voice in his brain; the voice that needed no receiving set to be heard; the voice singing across millions of miles of empty space from the general direction of Crotan, the sandswept capital of the Martian Anarchiate, came through as clearly as before with its insidious propaganda. "Lord, isn't it about tune-off time? I need a beer!"

Interplanetary Cold War

PSYCHOLOGICAL warfare, a nuisance now, would become a real menace if thought transmission ever became real. Instead of a war of nerves it would become a war of nervous systems. And instead of mere nations being involved, author West has visualized a cold war between Mars and Earth.

Your old friend Pitar Mura, the martial Martian, is behind it naturally, with ideas of putting upstart Earth in its place, and involved also are Jack Harkness and Princess Yahna. In fact, this is a sequel to THE BIRD OF TIME—for once Mr. West has decided to go forward instead of backward.

The story is interesting for another reason. It shows the U. N. confronted by a world crisis enormously enlarged from any trouble we are currently having and it wonders, very entertainingly, how the two most powerful nations on Earth, busy sniping at each other, would react to a danger neither can understand nor handle. This is an exceptionally timely story, with much good sense only lightly frosted over with Martian icing.

—The Editor

"Brothers, hell!" Kane raged in his normal voice. "Us—brothers to a bunch of overgrown turkey buzzards!"

"Do they really look like buzzards?" Hyatt asked. "I've never seen one."

"I saw too many of them. . . the wingless ones, of course, when I went with General Brown on the Third Expedition to Mars. I'll admit they look pretty human, except for their eyes and pointed ears and big chests and wing scars. But they're descended from birds instead of from apes. I still say they're buzzards and they're lawless anarchists to boot! If they'd just give me back a ship, I'd go up there and help blast them out of their holes myself. *I'd* stop those lying braincasts!"

"Fifteen minutes more of the stuff before Mars goes below the horizon," said Clark. "Grin and bear it." Then he added: "Jeanne owes us a beer, remember. Let's ask her to go along."

"You wouldn't forget that, would you? Hey, Bertie . . ." This to the office boy who, his chair propped on two legs in a corner of the little room, was deep in study of a correspondence school textbook entitled "How to Be a Detective." "Go tell Jeanne she can buy a beer for us at tune-off time."

"'Fraid to go into the lion's den yourself?" grumbled the wispy, dark-skinned refugee as he heaved himself to his feet. Sticking his head into the newsroom he yelled above the racket. "Hey, Miss Freund. Two bureaucrats out here want you should buy 'em a beer. One's the censor. I can't figure out what the other one's up to."

"Now, look here," wailed the CAA man, "you know better than to do that. If Stevenson were here you'd never pull such a stunt."

"But the boss is in Miamiii," sang Bertie. "And Carlos is too mad to care."

"That's what you think, little squirt," snarled the news editor, sticking his pomaded head through the door. "I'd fire you this minute if . . . ."

". . . . If you could find another office boy crazy enough to work for seventy bucks a week," Bertie flared. Then he flinched aside, as though expecting the Peruvian to strike him.

FOR a moment it seemed as if his expectation would be justified. Instead Carlos laughed shortly, jerking in his breath with short, rasping grunts.

"Why don't you turn out ditto copy a man can see if you're so damned smart?" he demanded. "How many times do I have to tell you our foreign language commentators can hardly read. If you give them this fuzzy stuff—" he shook a handful of blurred sheets under the boy's nose—"they'll never get it on the air."

"If you'd get me enough alcohol for the ditto machine I'd turn out good copy," shrugged Bertie. "We only got priorities for a gallon a day. I got a gallon last night and it's almost used up. I can't figure where the stuff goes."

"Well, do the best you can . . . and stop yelling into the news room." The editor's voice became almost gentle as he went back to his desk.

"What do you think of that?" gasped Bertie. "He acted almost as if he had been drinkin' the stuff hisself."

"And he would be, too, if it weren't wood alcohol," chuckled Kane. "Carlos has been practically out of his mind since the braincasts began. And did you smell his breath. He's half drunk. Lord, I wish the boss would stop junketing around to Miami and Los Angeles. He ought to be in New York trying to make some sense out of this madhouse."

"I read about a Kansas City case where a husky guy like Carlos drank wood alcohol for a month before he croaked," Bertie chipped in. "I wonder . . . Carlos is as tight as you are, Mr. Hyatt, both ways."

"How come you're so interested in becoming a detective, Bertie?" Kane asked quickly to avert an explosion from Clark. "I'd have thought that the Malanics in Capetown would have fed you up with that sort of thing."

"Oh, I dunno, Mr. Kane. Sure, the Icks kicked me around 'cause I'm one-eighth black. But did they live high! Women! Liquor! And what they swiped they never declared on their income tax. So, when things went to smash in South Africa and the Red Cross managed to get me back into the good old U.S.A., I kinda figured that, well, I'd like to get into a similar line. In a legitimate sort of way, you understand," he added hastily.

"You hardboiled little rat. What kind of detecting do you plan to do?"

"Oh, bustin' up labor unions . . . gettin' the goods on rich husbands whose wives want divorces the worst way, or maybe—"

"Bertie," Kane interrupted, feeling

sick at his stomach, "do these Martian braincasts ever bother you?"

"Nah!" The boy spat into a waste-basket. "All that bunk about peace and brotherhood? When it gets too thick I just start studying a good juicy murder case and forget all about it.

"Copy!" came Carlos's shout from the newsroom. Bertie sighed and ambled out to pick up the story, trying to make each step slower than the previous one.

"So that's the kind of vipers we're warming in our bosoms," Hyatt snickered. "A pity they didn't leave him to fry in the radioactive ruins of Capetown."

"I wouldn't say that, exactly." Kane ripped several yards of copy off the chattering CAA and OPI teletypes and dragged them to his desk for study. "Bertie spent his early years in Harlem. His parents took him to South Africa when the Torch Commandos temporarily got on top there. Then the neo-fascist Malanics made a comeback. Bertie had to live in a cellar. Couldn't go to school. Helped the Commando underground run an illegal radio station. That sort of thing.

"He's told me he hates the Icks. But he saw them lording it over the natives and leading the life of Riley. You can't blame him too much for wanting to cash in."

"Maybe you're right," Hyatt said. "Wonder what's keeping Jeanne in the newsroom."

KANE frowned. "Frankly, I wonder what's keeping Jeanne in IBC," he said. "She's been around for two months and she still can't figure out what makes this operation tick. 'It's simple,' I told her yesterday, 'if you'll just remember that the United States is a Cap country. It and other countries with the same type of free enterprise economies control about a third of the Earth's surface. Sosh nations such as France control another third of the Earth. The Commies hold the rest. Since the war with Mars started the Caps, Soshes and Commies have formed an uneasy alliance under the leadership of the old United Nations. Headquarters of the U. N. is in New York so naturally the war is being fought according to Cap rules.'

"Know what Jeanne asked me when I got that far, Clark?"

"She asked 'Why?' like she always does. Right?"

"Ummm! Well, I gave her the old stuff about 'Ours not to reason why' and bulled ahead. 'Since this is a Cap country, Jeanne,' I said, 'correspondents of the privately-owned Associated Press and United Press have to be allowed to write up the war news as they see fit... provided they base their stories on censored handouts from U. N. headquarters, of course. But the stuff is too hot for distribution to the dumb general public, particularly over the air.

" 'So employees of the U. N.'s Co-ordinator of Allied Affairs rewrite the A.P. and U.P. news one way for Earth-side broadcasts. And staffers of the U. N.'s Office of Planetary Information rewrite it another way for tightbeaming to anybody listening on the Moon, Venus and Mars.

" 'But since IBC is privately owned, its employees are entitled to translate and rewrite these CAA and OPI rewrites before broadcasting them. Of course,' I concluded, 'Hyatt, Richardson and I have to triple check them before they go on the air and monitor them while they are actually on the air. What could be simpler than a fair-and-square system like that?' I asked her. Do you know what she said then?"

"I said I didn't get it. And I still don't," said a cool voice. A tall girl with snapping black eyes, shining black hair and a figure that also was definitely "in the black" had closed the newsroom door behind her and was leaning a magnificent pair of shoulders against its panels. She smiled perfunctorily at little Hyatt but her glance lingered on the tall censor. "The whole operation is cockeyed."

"Whoever picked you for a commentator must have been all hopped up," Kane

grinned at her impudently. "What weird new stunt did you pull today?"

"Oh, I just asked Carlos whether the orbit of Venus was between that of the Earth and Mars." She smiled at the thought of the explosion that had followed.

"I don't know how you get by with the display of such ignorance."

"I counter all criticism by displaying my fatal French charms." She adjusted her low-cut blouse with an affectation of modesty. "That, plus the fact that IBC can't get another beautiful sob sister for a hundred and forty dollars a week . . . .

"Oh, listen!" Her eyes lit up with pure joy. "The braincasts have stopped. Now we can let the night shift take over, the lucky stiffs."

Kane sighed. His nerves unkinked themselves gradually as that persuasive, logical voice in his brain wavered and cut off.

"Who said 'lucky stiffs'?" challenged a new voice. It belonged to young Jacobson, who looked after Censorship, CAA and OPI affairs during the comparatively quiet evening hours. "Scram, you loafers and let a man take over."

Feeling like someone just released from prison, Kane wormed his way from behind his desk past cartons of teletype paper, Bertie's ditto machine, overflowing wastebaskets and the bicycle on which one of the newsroom men insisted on riding to work.

"Damn that antique," he groaned. "If it weren't for you, Jeanne, I'd pray for Stevenson to get back from his vacation or whatever it is so I could make him have it chucked out of here. My shins are black and blue."

"You mean . . . ?" She bit her full lower lip.

"I mean that Clark and I have just two more weeks in which to teach you how to broadcast. Maybe your V-cut charm works on Carlos. But if you don't learn to write better copy than you've done so far, the big boss will throw you down the elevator shaft. He's tough, I've heard."

"Yeah," sniggered the CAA man. "Look what Wolowysczki salvaged from a wastebasket and passed on to me." He spread a crumpled telegram. It read:

CARLOS SUAREZ, IBC NEWS ROOM, NEW YORK.
BERLIN BUENOS AIRES, SANTIAGO STATIONS THREATEN CANCEL IBC SERVICE, DEPEND SOLELY ON U. N. HANDOUTS, UNLESS NETWORK GIVES BETTER, FASTER COVERAGE WAR NEWS. HOW ABOUT IT? LOVE.
STEVE

JEANNE laughed. "I heard Carlos and Richardson talking about something else," she said wickedly as she left the office with her two needlers. "The U. N. Bureau of Investigation thinks there's a censorship leak somewhere around New York. General Brown is on the warpath."

"I think so, too," Kane grunted as they entered the elevator.

"But that's impossible," cried Hyatt. "The way all of us triple-check outgoing material, there isn't a chance in a thousand of anything useful to the Marties slipping through."

"There isn't, but it does," Kane said as they entered the crowded old bar and grill which was the between-shows hangout for IBC writers, producers and actors. He elbowed his way to a booth that was being vacated by a girl trio in shorts, and signalled for beers. "Of course it doesn't have to be *here*," he went on. "It might be in press or postal censorship downtown. Ever since the war started the Marties have been getting a trickle of information. Remember how they were all prepared for it when the French launched that first 'surprise' attack on their new base at Nirvana six months ago?

"Then there were those construction details on America's new rocket ship, the V-38. They read them all back to us via braincast last week, which must have made our dear allies, the Commies, jump for joy. And since the braincasts have been inducing a growing number

of humans to switch their allegiance, the leaks are getting much worse."

"I'm new at this game," said Jeanne as she firmly pushed a dollar across the table to pay for three beers, "as you fellows keep reminding me. How does the leak happen, do you suppose?"

"Oh, any number of ways," Kane replied. "Down at Postal an army of clerks goes crazy every day trying to decide whether letters addressed to 'Dear Aunt Hattie' are innocent or written in code. Cable has just about the same problem. We also know the Marties have a two bit teleport. They're probably using it to drop spies exactly where they want them . . . right into Brown's office, maybe.

"Finally, all broadcasting stations within the United States are on the honor system. WIBC, WDEF, WGHI and the rest of the thousands of domestic radio and TV stations are supposed to check their own programs according to our directives—Censorship just doesn't have the staff to handle such work. They're pretty careful, but every so often something slips through like that 'Sincerely Yours' broadcast saying the Hell Bomb at last is on the verge of completion."

"But those stations can only be heard within the United States," Hyatt protested.

"The devil you say. I've heard them clearly on a ship halfway to the Moon."

"Then what's the use of having censors?" asked Jeanne as she sipped her beer cautiously.

"It's to prevent a *steady* leak. Pitar Mura's Marties may pick up occasional information, but they can't be sure any specific information will get through from Earth at any specific time."

"Why doesn't some Martie spy or human traitor set up a tightbeam transmitter, out in the mountains of Utah, say, and send anything he wants to?" puzzled the girl.

"Because government spotters would spot and destroy it within a few days. We have scout cars out cruising all the time. They're equipped with directional antennae. When they hear an unlicensed station they map its location and close in. Those boys are told to shoot first and ask questions later."

"Then I suppose there's nothing to worry about," she said. "After all, this phony war will be over any day, I suppose. There's really nothing to fight about, is there, and no way of doing any real fighting . . . ? Will you boys have another beer?"

"Sure," said Hyatt.

"When you've finished yours," said Kane.

"I'm a one-beer woman, I'm afraid." She started trying to make her full red lips redder with lipstick.

"You should drink it down, not sip it like champagne."

"But I was weaned on champagne." She was straightening the seams of her precious nylons now, conscious that the envious eyes of bare-legged girls and the admiring eyes of men at nearby tables were upon her. "We French don't care too much for beer."

"I remember drinking plenty of it over there," said the censor. "What part of France were you weaned in?"

"Nancy."

KANE brightened. "Nancy! Then you must remember that little bistro up on the hill where they used to sell the best champagne in France. What's it called? The mont-something."

"Oh, you mean the Montparnasse," Jeanne cried. "Of course I remember. That's where they serve such wonderful pressed duck, too. Before we emigrated to the States father used to take me up there for dinner at least once a week."

"Umm. Well, let's get down to business." Kane demonstrated how to drink beer. "Your stories for the Venusean side were stinko as usual today. Don't see why Carlos let you get away with them."

"Maybe he feels too good walking around in the boss' shoes to bother with reading copy." This from Hyatt.

"Maybe. Although, if you ask me, I'll say I think Carlos is getting ready to jump the fence. His job's way over his head. And the braincasts are deadliest when a man begins to feel his inferiority complex.

"Well, anyway, Jeanne, I will now repeat for the fifth time my first lesson in writing for radio and TV. Tell your story in the first sentence. That's called the lead, you may or may not know. Hit your listeners between the eyes with something besides your lovely physique —provided you have any *listeners*. Then tell your story over again at least twice so even the dumbest person can understand it. Finally, put a stinger at the end. Something to clinch the item. The human interest touch. Comprenez-vous?"

"Oh, I understand all right," she pouted. "But it's hard to apply that understanding. Maybe an example. . . ."

"All right. Here's one, hot off the griddle: 'A United States fleet broke through Crotan's strong aerial defenses today. It napalmed thousands of acres of the barrel cactus upon which Mars depends for food, clothing and war materials. The thrust—"

"But," she wailed, "Richardson wouldn't let me call it a United States fleet, or even an American fleet. And he says we shouldn't build up the idea that Pitar Mura has placed aerial defenses of great strength above Crotan."

"Nuts! All right. Do it this way: 'A Terrestrial raiding fleet proved today that Crotan has no impenetrable aerial defenses. It swept almost unopposed. . ."

"It didn't exactly do that. Richardson says we must emphasize that our ships destroyed a large number of Martie ships."

"For the love of Mike. Am I giving the lessons, or is Richardson? I begin to see this is not going to be easy. But you *can* do this: Use short, snappy words and sentences; adverbs instead of adjectives; Repeat your main facts. And stick in a little local color . . . I'm not referring to your peaches and cream complexion."

"I see," sighed Jeanne. "Well, will you have another drink, beerocrats?"

"Nope," said Hyatt, wincing from Kane's kick under the table.

A spring shower was falling as they left the bar.

"I left my raincoat at the office," said Kane.

"So did I," said Hyatt.

"Well, see you tomorrow," said Jeanne, making a show of opening the umbrella which she had remembered to bring.

"Cute kid," purred Hyatt, his thin lips moist, as he and the censor splashed across the street. "Doesn't wear a brassiere, does she?"

"Umm." Kane eyed his sex-starved companion with distaste. "I was more interested in the fact that she learned about Nancy out of Baedeker."

"Yeah?" The little man's eyes popped behind their compound lenses.

"Yeah! The Montparnasse serves wonderful pressed duck, all right. But it's equally famous for something the guidebooks don't mention. It serves no champagne. (I learned that when I was piloting the Paris-Moon run.) Seems that back in 1477 there was a battle near the inn between forces of the Duke of Burgundy and the locals. The Duke was a brewer. He wanted to sell his own brand to the Nancyites. The Duke's soldiers lost the argument. But the then owner of the Montparnasse was a Burgundian. So the place has sold nothing but beer and burgundy ever since. Travel is broadening, isn't it, particularly if one drinks plenty?"

"But that doesn't prove anything about Jeanne, even though her name is more German than French," Hyatt was objecting as the elevator door opened to thrust them into pandemonium.

Bertie was being sick out of a window. In the newsroom, a girl translator was screaming. And, on the floor beside the chattering teletypes, Carlos Suarez was tied in a convulsive knot.

"What happened?" Kane grabbed the

The mobs were completely out of hand now, and the looting had started. . . .

office boy and shook him part way out of hysteria as the IBC doctor came dashing in.

"Oh boss," bawled the youngster, wiping his mouth with a hand smeared by indigo ditto ink, "it was awful. Just like a murder case. He stood up and yelled. Then he got all tangled up with himself. Ow!" Bertie made another dash for the window.

III

SIT down, Kane. Sit down. Be with you in a minute."

Lieutenant General Horace Brown, Director of United Nations Security, bent a leonine head over his desk and continued signing letters that could just as well have waited.

"Now," he said after five minutes as he tossed back his mane of pepper- and salt-colored hair. After all, one couldn't go too far in snooting the man who had piloted the first Moon rocket, "This mess at IBC. What about it?"

"Carlos Suarez, the acting director of news and special events, cracked up. He was trying to make a showing on a job that was too big for him. Also, I suspect, the braincasts were whipping up his submerged hatred for all 'Yanquis.' He took to drinking on the job. Because he was a fool and stingy to boot, he dipped into the wood alcohol used in the duplicating machine. He died in convulsions. Vice President Stevenson flew back from Miami last night and took over."

"Stevenson!" Brown frowned. "He has caused us a lot of trouble but he should be able to enforce some sort of discipline.

"Next—" he ruffled through a pile of memos—"this 1610 item on your log. Any specific complaint against Wolowysczki?"

"I'd prefer not to make any until I have him dead to rights, sir. I just wanted to alert you to his attitude. He thinks the U. N. is rigged against Commie interests. The same old story we've been hearing for 80 years. Takes every opportunity to say so by innuendo during his broadcasts to Soviet nations. The minute he steps over the line I would appreciate quick disciplinary action."

"That may not be as simple as you make it sound. The Cold War is officially over. The Russians and their satellites are our allies again in this struggle against Mars. However, I'll do what I can. Wolowysczki is accredited to the U. N.—next, what's the overall situation at IBC?"

"I have a leak over there," Kane answered flatly.

"You admit it?" The Old Man glared.

"Of course. Those braincasts are devilish things. They're highly selective, so a man picks up the type of propaganda most likely to influence him. I'd guess that half the IBC staff is half persuaded that we are wrong and the Martians are right. Add to that the facts that the Martians can't do us much damage, that we can't do them much damage and that we're bankrupting both worlds by making futile passes at each other and you've got a situation where anything can happen and probably will."

"How are *you* feeling?"

"Not so hot," the censor grinned crookedly. "For a dime I'd give you five good reasons why anarchy is the best policy."

"Don't clown!" Brown lit a long pale cigar. "Any suggestions?"

"Yes, sir." Kane leaned forward. "Get me back in uniform. Make the medicos give me a clean bill of health. Let me take a patrol out and give the stinking Marties hell. You remember that little crater just south of Copernicus? I made a forced landing there once. There's a deep meteor tunnel. . . ."

"No, Tom," said Brown with unaccustomed gentleness. "What's the use of daydreaming? You know you'd never reach the Moon with that bum heart, let alone doing any 6G maneuvering."

"But—"

"Oh, I know just how you feel. How many times since this shindig began do

you think I've asked permission to take the fleet out and do a real job on the Marties? They say wait . . . confine ourselves to patrol activities . . . wait till the H-bomb is finished. As though we hadn't been waiting ever since '52! As though our fleet wasn't being whittled down with every passing month.

"No, my boy. We're washed up. Both of us. So far as spacing is concerned. You go warm your chair and I'll warm mine." He stood up and patted the younger man's shoulder. "They want kids for pilots now."

"Fifteen-year-olds!" Kane gritted.

"Next year it'll be fourteen-year-olds. They're the only ones whose reflexes are fast enough to fly the fighting rockets. Fast enough!" The general threw back his hair like a Shakespearean actor. "They didn't say that when I led the first three-deep space expeditions to Mars."

"Or when I brought the Mooncalf home in one piece with a raving crazy crew, back in '62," said the censor. "Oh well. Infancy must be served." He took Brown's proffered paw. "I'll do my best about that leak."

LEAVING the slabsided U. N. building, Kane walked slowly along Forty-Second Street in the general direction of the IBC building, feeling one hundred years old instead of forty-five. Chairwarmer! Cardiac! His heart gave a skip and flutter to confirm the diagnosis.

Robins twittered in the venerable trees of Tudor City, but he paid them no heed. The grass on the terraces was painfully green. A Japanese cherry that somehow survived its daily bath in the dilute sulphuric acid that passed for air in New York, was on the verge of bursting into bloom. He hated them all; wished they could be buried under the grey sidewalks. *Has-been!*

"A penny for your thoughts," said a voice at his elbow.

"What's a penny?" He managed to smile down at Jeanne Freund who was matching his long strides, her excuse for a skirt fluttering about her trim thighs.

"Haven't seen a penny since I was an . . . an infant."

"Why, I thought they stopped coinage of pennies years ago," she teased.

"Look, my dear." He stopped and, ignoring passers-by, took both her hands in his. "Don't let the silly robins fool you. Those girlish wiles are being wasted on an old man. Horrie just broke the news: I'm a chairwarmer."

"Oh for heaven's mercy!" She stamped her foot. "You just haven't had your breakfast. In here, quick!" She steered him to an Automat.

"*Voilà*," she said, when they were seated alone in the midst of the mob before cups of coffee. "Please to tell Jeannie of the Light Brown Hair what bothers."

"Braincasts; all commentators but particularly Polish ones; claustrophobia; the spring, and hunger," he grumbled between sips. "I like coffee with lots of cream, and toast with gobs of butter. But the docs have put me on a low cholesterol diet. Also, I must watch my calories, now that walking has become my most violent exercise. I also don't like sitting at IBC, like a spider in its web, until both my moral and immoral fiber are eaten away."

"Immoral fiber?" She leaned toward him until he caught a whiff of the Sortilege she had placed, French-fashion, at her throat and behind her ears. "There's at least one other exercise no more strenuous than walking."

"Go away," he snapped. "Stop talking like a French novel. I have no interest in anything except my incipient paunch."

"You're horrid." She studied his lean, flat-stomached figure. "Give me a chance to prove you're wrong. This evening. . . ."

She sighed and shook her pert head fiercely.

"Oh damn! The braincasts are starting again. They always spoil everything. Voices, is it? I feel like Jeanne d'Arc!"

KANE cocked his own head: "Why don't you chuck it, Tommy lad?" a

musical, alien, mocking voice was whispering inside his skull. "What do you care about this silly war? The lady is asking you pretty. Be a man!"

He saw that Jeanne was blushing scarlet right down into her bodice.

"What do your Voices say, Jeanne d'Arc?" he inquired maliciously.

"None of your darned business!" Suddenly on the verge of tears she rushed on: "What are the braincasts, really, Tom? Telepathy? But that doesn't seem possible. How could the Marties know just what to say to every person on Earth to get her mixed up so?"

"It's telepathy, all right," he said, "hooked up to, and boosted by, some sort of radio tight beam. But it's more than that. Those messages can't be broadcast the way we hear them. No!" Kane gripped her hands with sudden intensity. "When the Marties are not shoving out with straight propaganda in favor of anarchy . . . the kind of guff we all hear for three or four hours every day . . . they're beaming some sort of psychological key that stimulates our unconscious minds. When that happens we consciously 'hear' thoughts that usually came to us only in dreams."

"I'm a dreamer . . . aren't we all?" Jeanne hummed a half-forgotten song from the fabulous '20's. "What would happen if we did the things our Voices suggest? Just let ourselves go?" She turned her hands in his and caressed his fingers. "What would happen?"

"Let's get out of this dump," he gritted. Away from the bemused faces in the Automat, he answered:

"What would happen? We'd be courtmartialed. Thousands of poor devils have already been jailed for thinking dangerous thoughts. There's a state of emergency, the U. N. Bureau of Investigation keeps reminding us."

"What if there were too many of us to courtmartial?"

"That's Dangerous Thought Number One," he said quietly. "Look at it this way, honey chile. The Marties are moving heaven and Earth to break up the alliance that has been formed against them by the Caps, the Commies and the Soshes—you *are* a socialist, aren't you?"

"I suppose so. I am a French citizen but I've lived . . . abroad most of my life and don't know much about politics."

"Well, just remember this. Anything the braincasters got you to do would have but one purpose; to break up the hard-won united front in the U. N. Your job at IBC is to ignore your Voices, as you call them, and, when you're on the air, to make sure that your listeners are so fascinated by your looks and, if possible, by your flaming, patriotic words, that they, too, can ignore the braincasts and get on with winning the war."

"You mean you think I'm a . . . ."

". . . a Woman of Destiny," he said as solemnly as he could. "In ordinary times you'd be society editor on some provincial newspaper, at best. Now you have the opportunity to be another Dorothy Dix or Nellie Bly. You can interpret history to millions of people all over the world. You may even be able to *change* history."

"Gee," she whispered, standing transfixed, her eyes shining. "Do you really think so? I've always dreamed of being a great . . . a really great journalist."

"Of course I think so," he lied. "Just take my advice, keep your chin up and . . ."

". . . and my knees crossed! All right, Sir Galahad. So endeth the umpteenth lesson." She turned into the entrance of the IBC building.

In the cubbyhole off the newsroom, Kane said "good morning" to Hyatt as he ripped the piled-up early copy off the printers. It was the same old disappointing stuff, he saw at once: French jungle fighters had beaten off another raid on Venusport. A Russian contingent had chased a Martian contingent trying to set up A-bomb launching racks on the near side of the Moon. Two such bombs, fired blind from the Moon's far side, had exploded harmlessly, one in Brazil's Mato Grosso jungle, the other in scrub pine barrens of Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

A lone U.S. raiding ship had dumped a stick of HE in a Martian canal. A Martie, teleported into the Vatican on some mysterious mission, had been caught and shot while trying to escape. United Nations Secretary Yokahido had spoken in favor of a world-wide capital levy. Senator Kenneth Jones, (R., Ill.,) had demanded an immediate Congressional investigation to determine if America's allies were, as he expressed it, "pulling their full weight."

Kane turned to the OPI and CAA Directives for the Day. The former began: "All planetary broadcasts should stress importance attack on Martian canal. Speculation permissible that blocking of irrigation water may have adverse effect on cactus crops from which Marties synthesize key war materials. To reassure troops on Venus who have been disturbed by rumors of teleportings, play up ease with which Vatican prowler was apprehended."

The CAA Directive started: "Under no circumstances must Senator Jones's speech be played up on European, Asiatic or Latam programs. Bare mention permissible if U.S. newspapers give item big play. If so, underline Jones's isolationist background."

FINALLY he ripped open the manila envelope stamped CONFIDENTIAL AND RESTRICTED in which his own censorship directive had just been delivered. He sucked his breath between his teeth as he scanned it.

"Bad?" asked Hyatt, peering over his cluttered desk like a spectacled owl who was playing at being a radio operator.

"Ummm. In six letters beginning with 'r'."

"Block all mention, Earthward and planetward," he read, "of peace riots in South Africa, India, Tunisia, Argentina. Stress Allied unity. Block Washington munitions scandal. Permissible report rapid progress on H-bomb project. On French hour block failure drive to occupy Martie base at Nirvana, Venus. Stress Russian Moon victory on all shows to Iron Curtain countries. Block speculation that Martian canal stoppage has been bypassed. Stress heroism of Americans who made strike. Block all mention, growing effects of braincasts. Permissible mention braincasts jokingly in comedy programs but, under no circumstances must an entire program be built around subject."

He scanned two full pages of similar material, then frowned over the last item above Brown's florid signature:

"Importantest kill all mention rapid approach to Earth of unidentified spaceship. Secretariat has put this under wraps. FYI only, Tom. Here are ship's co-ordinates. Looks to me like that Jack Harkness, coming home to make more trouble."

The censor studied the complicated figures with professional skill before locking the directive in his desk.

"Say Tom," said Hyatt plaintively, "will you finish this puzzle for me? The last three words have got me completely stumped. I couldn't sleep last night, trying to figure them out."

"I'll try." Kane walked over and studied the scrap of paper. "A resident of North Carolina in seven letters beginning with 't'? That's a 'tarheel,' you dope. An old-fashioned dress . . . starts with 'm' . . . thirteen letters . . . that would be 'mother hubbard.' A stove used in the Gay Nineties, beginning with 'b.' That's easy: A base burner. I'll be damned, Clark, if I can figure out why you can get the big scientific words and then fall down on Americana like this."

Bertie came dragging his heels along the linoleum, textbook in hand.

"Any clues, gents?" he asked in a conspiratorial whisper.

"Clues to what?" asked the censor.

"To the murder of Carlos Suarez."

"Oh, come now!" Tom started to light a cigarette but thought better of it. He was rationed to ten of them daily, and he foresaw that the day might be long. "Carlos poisoned himself on ditto cleaner."

"Yeah. But he *knew* it was wood

alcohol. I told him and told him. What made him drink it anyway?"

"Probably his Voice," Hyatt spoke up. "It might have told him what he wanted to believe . . . that he was a superman who could do anything he pleased."

"Just like yours says you'll get your paws on a beautiful dame?" Bertie jabbed.

"Cut it out, Bertie," Tom snapped.

"Stevenson wants to see you, boss," the boy said. "Right now. You'd better wear a tin hat."

"I wish you'd cut out that 'boss' stuff," said Kane. "This isn't Africa."

"Yes . . . sir." Bertie began making a frightful rattle cleaning the ditto.

"When are they going to take *that* contraption out of here?" Hyatt yelled. "It's driving me insane."

"The answer is a five-letter word beginning with 'n'," Bertie mocked him.

KANE squeezed himself out from his desk and past the bicycle, leaving the two spitting at each other like tomcats. He picked his way through the newsroom where a dozen men and women of as many nationalities were translating the teletype copy into their native tongues. Walking down the cluttered fire stairs to the floor below, he traversed a silent corridor lined with small studios and entered Stevenson's neo-modern office.

"Sit down," said the IBC Executive Vice President, News and Special Events Vice President and (according to his staff) Vice President in Charge of Flying into Rages. Stevenson spoke across his long slim feet. Encased in polished jodhpurs, said feet reposed on his long, bare, highly-polished desk. He was leaning back in a swivel chair, hands clasped behind his highly-polished bald head. (How, Kane wondered, could a man be bald as an egg *and* handsome, particularly when he wore a hearing aid?)

"You haven't been fired yet?" asked the Veep.

"Not yet."

"Well, you should have been!" Stevenson's feet hit the floor with a bang. He leaned forward, black eyes glittering, a flush spreading on his high cheek bones. "You've killed one of my best men with your crazy, contradictory orders."

"Nuts." Now the censor did need a cigarette.

"This has got to stop, Kane!" Stevenson's fist smashed onto the desk. (The top was made of double thickness plate glass, Tom noted with an inward smile.) "You haven't been around here very long, so let me tell you that IBC is perfectly capable of handling its own affairs without help from a bunch of bureaucrats. We handle our U.S. network without violating security. We can run the rest of the show without this pap you folks feed us." He swept a long arm toward a glass panel behind which OPI and CAA teletypes were gnashing their teeth in silence. "I'm going to have you government men chucked out of here."

"Tell it to General Brown. I'm just the office boy."

"That reminds me." Stevenson relaxed and hoisted his feet. "This new kid, Bertie. What do you make of him?"

"Smart."

"I think he's a spy."

"Could be."

"I have it on good authority Bertie told Carlos the ditto cleaner was ethyl alcohol."

"Whose authority?" Kane took the last possible puff from his cigarette and ground out the stump in Stevenson's highly-polished crystal ashtray.

"Wolowysczki's."

"For the love of. . . ." Kane's heart gave a warning bump and he, too, relaxed.

"Of course," said Stevenson. "Wolo's a spy for the Commies."

"Did your Voice tell you that deep secret?" Kane sneered.

"Blast and damn you!" Stevenson came to his feet like a cat. "I've had enough of your insolence. Get out!"

"Did you see this morning's censorship directive?" Kane did not move.

"Of course."

"How long do you think we can hold out against the Marties if we start fighting each other the way the braincasters want us to? This is total propaganda we're up against. We're sunk if we see a spy under every bed—*even if there's a spy there.* I hate bureaucrats, Commies and Soshes as much as you do, but I'm going to keep them working as a team as long as I can."

The steam went out of the IBC executive as quickly as it had boiled up. He sat down and elevated his feet.

"There was a huge peace demonstration in Central Park this morning," he admitted. "My chauffeur had to detour all the way to the East River to pass it."

"Unless the U.N. scores a big military victory in the next month . . . something like chasing the Marties off the Moon . . . or unless it finds out how to block the braincasts quick, the Earth is washed up."

"There's a third thing we might do," Stevenson said softly.

"What?"

"Start some braincasts of our own."

"How?"

"My boys are working on it." Stevenson dropped his feet again and leaned forward, his long fingers spread on the desk top, tips down, palms raised, like large starfish. "What I need now is some Martian prisoners."

"There are quite a few of them," said the censor, "But they're kids. Just like our boys. This is a kindergarten war."

"Even Martian children are telepathic, aren't they? Look. I've got the whole IBC research staff at work on a braincast transmitter. They should be able to come up soon with something, now they know what they're after. Then I'll get a prisoner and make him. . . ."

"Won't work." The censor lit a second cigarette. "How will you know he'll 'cast what you tell him to? There'd be no possible check. Maybe he'd tell the home folks what a mess Earth's really in."

"A Martian traitor then. I'll get the U.N. or Washington to offer a big reward."

"What could you offer an anarchist who doesn't even know what money is . . . who has so much gold he doesn't know what to do with it?"

"Well. . . ." Those fingers went limp.

"There's one chance in a million," Tom began, then stopped dead as some shift in the ether allowed his Voice to come in deafeningly. Someone, somewhere was singing;

"Earthman, why do you fight us?
Life, love, are sweeter than fame.
All things who breathe should be brothers.
Death and the grave end the game."

"Doggerel," he groaned. "I must have an idiot unconscious mind."

STEVENSON was studying him intently. "What was that?" he queried suspiciously.

"I said there's one chance in a million." With tremendous effort he managed to squeeze the song into a far corner of his mind. "It's that unidentified ship that's heading for Earth."

"What ship? I must have missed the report."

"There was no report on the wires. Just a mention in my directive."

"What's a crazy Martian raider got to do with this?"

"It couldn't be Martian. The co-ordinates give it an orbit originating near Pluto."

"Probably a comet. Or a big meteorite."

"No. Security says it's a ship."

"Superman!" Stevenson threw out his arms. "Coming with the Marines."

"Brown thinks it's Jack Harkness, coming back from wherever he went after he skipped Mars two years ago.

"Harkness? Wasn't he the young nut who touched off an interplanetary incident?"

"Oh, he just helped exile Pitar Mura, the head of the Martian Anarchiate, put a spoke in General Brown's imperialistic wheel and eloped with a winged princess," Kane grinned. "Stout fellow,

Harkness. A friend of mine."

"So he's coming back," yawned Stevenson. "So what?"

"So he has with him a presumably friendly member of one of Mars' First Families . . . friendly *and* telepathic."

Stevenson's mouth formed a great O.

"Please, Massah," said Kane, "Youall ain't gwine beat me now, is you?"

"What a scoop it could be," breathed the IBCer ignoring Kane's sarcasm. "If we pull it and get Harkness' sweetie to braincast for us, the other nets may as well fold up. Tom Kane, I love you."

"Now you're talking like a Martie. The only person you love is Louis Bellfeather Stevenson." The censor stood up.

"Maybe you're right . . . but here's something more for you to chew on. Something the IBC monitor picked up yesterday." He shoved a paper across the desk. It was headed INTERCEPT and read:

CODE HASSENPFEFFER. EX CAPETOWN. ADDRESSED H BROWN NY UPRISING STATEWARD SCHEDULED 13TH. CO-OPERATE. M3

"Some stupid Malanic propagandist trying to put the finger on the Old Man," Kane said angrily. "You didn't fall for it, too, did you?"

"Of course not. Just thought you'd get a laugh out of it."

"Clark," said Kane when he had returned to his office, "what's Stevenson's background? This is the first time I've really had a chance to talk to him and he tried to claw me."

"Don't underrate him," answered the little fellow as he plugged his earphones into another jack. "He yells a lot but he's smart as a whip."

"He came up fast, didn't he, about the same time you were transferred from London?"

"Sure did. Showed up at IBC two years ago, just about the time General Brown's ears were being pinned back because of the bad will he stirred up among the Martians with his Second Expedition. Whit Taylor was president of IBC then. He liked Steve's buzz saw voice. Assigned him to cover Brown's courtmartial. For a week he poked sly fun at the Old Man while the TV audience howled from here to Venusport. Of course Brown was cleared and put in charge of the really disastrous Third Expedition, but Steve had been so cagey the general couldn't tag him with a libel suit. Brown's hated him like poison ever since."

"So that's it." Kane polished his dark glasses. "Go on."

"Taylor decided he'd have some more fun. He sicked Steve on the New York-Miami-Los Angeles gangster axis story. You remember that ruckus. IBC went all-out to prove that big shot gangsters were taking over the U.S. government. Taylor swung enough weight to get Congress to start a full-dress investigation. Steve put Mr. Big and Mr. Not-so-big and even Mr. Little in front of the cameras and tore their hides off with witnesses he dug up from God-knows-where. Boy, what a show he and the then Attorney General put on. Got about a hundred persons indicted." Hyatt sighed admiringly.

"Then what happened?" asked the censor as Bertie edged through the door and took his accustomed seat in the tilted chair.

"Oh, it all fizzled, like those things always do. Key witnesses disappeared or lost their memories. Important records vanished. The indictments were quashed. Taylor had to apologize. The war started just about then. Taylor took a big job with the Procurement Division down in Washington. Steve was named Exec Veep."

"Bought an interest in the network, too, didn't he?"

"I wouldn't know about that." Clark turned back to his crossword puzzles.

"He owns a mighty big hunk of stock," Bertie put in. "I checked up on him the way my school says to check on everybody. According to the newspapers, Stevenson's Aunt Agatha died

and left him a wad of dough . . . funny thing, though. He's never let out another peep about the gangster axis."

"Some people talk too much," said Hyatt, jabbing viciously at the jack box. Then to Kane: "What's a four-letter word for 'giant killer' beginning with 'j'?"

" 'Jack'," said Bertie. "Boy, what you can do if you have plenty of it!"

"Jack," Kane agreed, thinking of Harkness and his speeding, homeward bound ship, "unless this giant has grown too big to kill."

IV

I'M SORRY I forgot to put my clothes on this morning." Jeanne fought an impulse to turn up the collar of her trim, wheat-colored suit.

"It doesn't matter." Leaning back in his big chair, hands behind his billiard ball head but his feet on the floor in deference of womanhood, IBC Vice President Stevenson continued to let his eyes roam.

"Bertie said you wanted to see me, not see through me."

"I called you in to fire you."

"Oh." The color drained from her face.

"Hmm. Pallor becomes you. Maybe I'll put you on the nightside instead."

She sat silent, hating him.

"That French Hour show of yours yesterday: I never heard such tripe on TV. Reading poetry. Poetry! And reading it badly, too."

She started to say: "There wasn't any news; censorship had blocked it all." Instead, she brazened it out: "Didn't you like my new blouse, though?"

"It was so sheer I couldn't see it." Stevenson relaxed with a grimace meant to be a smile. "Jeannie, I love you. You don't scare . . . much."

"When you're brought up among Frenchmen you get that way."

"Instead of firing you," (Unconsciously, his feet returned to the desk top,) "I'm going to give you the opportunity of a lifetime."

"Mon Dieu! *You* must be French," she mocked him.

"That may come later," he demurred. His feet clumped to the floor and he leaned forward, all business now, with fingers pronged on the plate glass. "You've heard about that tramp spaceship that's coming in tonight?"

"Yes, the news of it has leaked all over town."

"I have General Brown's permission to send IBC's best commentator out to Idlewild to interview Jack Harkness, the ship's captain."

"Yes?" Her heart began thumping visibly under the wheat-colored jacket and a vision lighted her dark eyes, making them even more alluring.

"I am IBC's best commentator."

"I just love playing cat and mouse, don't you?" she gulped.

"Not when I'm the mouse." For a fleeting moment he looked embarrassed. "I also have orders to bring along a sob sister to interview Harkness' Martian bride, bride-to-be, mistress or what-have-you. You're it."

Without shame, Jeanne lived up to her title.

"Tut," said Stevenson, passing her his silk handkerchief. "I may change my mind if you spoil those eyes."

"I'm all right," she sniffled.

"That's better. Now run along. And don't forget that other opportunity you mentioned." His hairless hand caressed her trembling one. "But no more poetry, mind. A prayer would be more appropriate."

JEANNE floated back to the newsroom. Because he was handiest, she kissed Richardson on his bald spot. Then she sailed into the censor's cubbyhole, bumping into the ubiquitous Bertie en route.

"*Kaffirboete!*" she spat at him, brushing herself as though she had touched something unclean.

"Go break your neck," he snarled, even as he dodged away from her.

"It's happened! It's happened!" she sang, her sudden anger forgotten as she perched herself to fullest advantage on the edge of Tom's desk. "Stevenson's going to let me interview the Martian maiden."

"Don't be naive," said the censor. As Clark snickered he added hastily, "I mean I committed perjury by telling Brown you were the only girl in the newsroom who could be trusted for an interview."

"If that's the case I can pass up the other opportunity Steve talked about," she said serenely. "I only wanted to make you jealous."

"Jealous," he snorted. "Of the Injia Rubber Man? Besides, my mamma done told me to have no truck with females who dream of winning Pulitzer Prizes for journalism. And stop swinging your pretty legs like that before you kick over the wastebasket with all our precious directives in it."

"La, la," she teased as she danced out. "You are *so* jealous anyway already."

"Gee!" Clark's eyes were moist behind the distorting lenses of his spectacles, "I wish a girl would look at me that way. She could be as ugly as a mud fence. If she'd only look, I'd grab her."

"Even if you were on the scrap heap with a bum ticker?"

"My friend, any man who is just five feet tall doesn't need a bum ticker."

"I'm sorry." Kane was turning back to his work when Richardson, still trying to polish the lipstick off his dome, bumbled in.

"When are these cockeyed interviews going on the air?" growled the ancient.

"Don't know," the censor answered. "They won't go on *live*, in any case . . . too dangerous. We'll kine them; go over the film with a fine-toothed comb. If anything's left, Brown will release it for press, radio and TV as soon as the braincasts stop tomorrow."

"I don't like it. How do we know Harkness hasn't turned traitor? And those Martians use Aesopian language. They can say something in plain English, I'm told, but the sing-song they use will make it mean something else entirely."

"I shouldn't think that, after being out in space since before the war, either of them would have any startling disclosures to make."

"You never can tell." Richardson was a congenital pessimist. "This is a crazy war . . . you going out there?"

"Yes. Brown and half the staffs of the U.N. and the State and Defense Departments will be there too. Stop worrying."

"Nice place for an A-bomb to drop," muttered the OPI man as he bumbled out.

AS QUIET descended, the braincasts resumed their insidious work. Clark pushed the phones behind his ears, allowed his pencil to fall upon an unfinished puzzle, stared out at the blank brick wall of a neighboring skyscraper and began tapping his feet. Kane guessed, before he sank into his own dream, that the other was listening to a Martian love song while seeing its erotic meaning depicted upon the bricks as a tridimensional, full-color drama.

"Do you need a law, Earthman," a sweet voice was chanting in Tom's own brain, "to make the flowers grow or the sun rise? Do you need a government edict to make lilacs bloom?

"For untold ages selfish men have tried to impose all sorts of governments upon their brothers: Absolute monarchy, limited monarchy, feudalism, communism, democracy, fascism, socialism. What have such governments brought you? Nothing but 'wars and the rumors of wars.'

"Why not stop such foolish nonsense? Abolish all government, as we Martians have done. Stop this futile, senseless banging about. If you ask our help to establish a rational society, we will supply it freely. If you wish to work out your own destiny we will not interfere. All things that live are brothers."

"Could it possibly work on Earth?" Tom asked his Voice, not realizing that

he had spoken aloud.

"Could what work?" It was Clark who answered.

"Anarchy." Kane was grateful for the interruption.

"It seems to work on Mars," said the other after a quick glance toward the door.

"Yes, but Martians are telepathic. they're all in some sort of mental rapport. Each Martie knows exactly what is being done, and what is being thought by every other Martie. No megalomaniac could fool any of his race, or rise to power by telling The Big Lie, as Hitler and Mussolini did."

"What about this fellow who is running the show," Clark asked. "He signs himself 'Pitar Mura of the Anarchiate.' Pitar means boss, doesn't it?"

" 'Spokesman' would be a more accurate translation, I think. Yes, Mura is their nearest approach to a ruler. But don't forget that the Marties gave him the heave-ho when they 'overheard' him planning an unprovoked attack on Earth. As I heard the story, they teleported him and his supporters to some planet circling Sirius, the Dog Star. They only recalled him from exile last year when Brown's Third Expedition showed up at Crotan bristling with guns. Since they couldn't read the general's alleged mind . . . or maybe *because* they did manage to read it . . . they assumed that Earth planned an unprovoked attack. That was when all hell started popping."

"Do you think they're trying to teach us to be telepathic . . . with their braincasts, I mean . . . so we'll be able to adapt to anarchy?"

"Could be. But, by the Big Dipper, I don't *want* to become telepathic." Kane kicked his wastebasket. "I won't have strangers pawing around in my belfry. I don't even want to turn over rocks in my own brain. I want my nasty subconscious mind to remain subconscious."

"Well, I don't know," Hyatt said. "Let me tell you what I just saw, over against that brick wall."

"Don't!" snapped Kane. "It's bad enough having your conscious mind sniggering around."

"Well, I like that!" The little man's tenor rose to a squeak. "Think you're a tin god, don't you. I'm going to ask for a transfer. Nobody can. . . ."

"Excuse me," said a cool, carefully unaccented voice. "Are you needing a referee in here?"

Kane looked at the tall blond intruder with distaste.

"Come in, Wolowysczki," he said. "What's your squawk today?"

"I beg your pardon." The Pole drew in his chin and squared his shoulders.

"I'm sorry. The 'casts have got me jumpy."

"Try reciting the Communist Manifesto when they bother you." The commentator's thin lips twitched with what might have been a smile.

"Ummm. Well, what's on your mind?"

"I demand the right, as a representative of the communist nations, to participate in the interview with Harkness."

"You've been snooping again, haven't you?" Kane looked him in the eye.

"Naturally. It's the only way I can find out what's going on around here. Since the Caps and the Soshes are in on the interview, I demand. . . ."

"Put any 'demand' you may have in writing to General Brown." (And see how far it gets you, the censor added mentally.)

"Thank you. I shall do so." Wolowysczki made an about-face and marched out. Only his glowing ears indicated his fury.

Kane's phone clicked repeatedly, like the tapping of an angry woodpecker.

"Brown here," the receiver barked when Tom put it to his ear. Harkness advises by radio that he expects to be at Greater Idlewild about 1700 today. Be there with Stevenson and Miss Freund and see that you keep them in hand."

"Yes sir . . . Wolo is sending you a letter demanding to be included."

"I'll refer it to the Secretariat.. He can expect action next week."

The phone went dead and Kane turned back to the morning directive.

"Block any reference to peace rally in Bucharest," it began. "Emphasize that Allies still hold entire visible surface of the Moon . . . block mention of spreading Malanic uprising . . . softpedal growing complaints re higher taxes . . . stress . . . block . . . stress . . . block. . . ."

THEY flew out to the spaceport in the IBC helicopter that afternoon—Jeanne, Tom, Stevenson, two engineers loaded down with a camera and sound recording equipment, and the poker-faced, silent Wolowysczki. What strings the latter had pulled Kane could not guess. He had turned up on the roof at the last minute, however, with his U.N. approval duly signed by Secretary Yokahido and countersigned by Brown.

It was only fair, in a way, the censor had to admit. Nevertheless, the flouting of his authority rankled. He made another mental black mark against the stiff-necked commentator.

Conversation languished en route. Stevenson, despite his immaculate sports clothes, looked like a slim Buddha and was just as remote. Jeanne tried several lines of chatter on him without success. The Pole sat in one corner of the cabin and smoked incessantly, to Kane's envy and distress.

In the strained silence the braincasts nagged at them. Perhaps they whispered to Stevenson that it was beneath his dignity to be shepherded by a government man. Perhaps they were daring Wolowysczki to deny that his hero, Karl Marx, had predicted the withering away of all governments, including communist ones. Certainly they were saying things to Jeanne which made her hopping mad.

Oddly enough, Kane heard nothing but an occasional tinkle of mocking laughter. He was left to watch conflicting emotions pass like shadows over the faces of the others.

"Wolowysczki," he said at last to break a silence that was becoming unbearable. "Do you have a first name? I'm tired of twisting my tongue."

"I prefer that you use my patronymic, Mr. Kane."

"You'd like us to call you Tovarich, wouldn't you?" Jeanne asked brightly.

"That would not be the correct form of address from any of you."

"Excuse me." She stiffened.

"Keep a civil tongue in your head or I'll see that you are bounced back to Moscow, Wolo my boy," Stevenson snarled.

"Certainly . . . Steve." The Pole's lips drew tight across his large teeth.

"Stop it, you two," Kane barked. "What may possibly be the biggest break of the war is coming up and you let the braincasts get you scratching each other's eyes out. If you're not mature enough. . . ."

"I like bureaucrats little better than I like Commies," the Veep gritted.

"We'll be landing in a few minutes," Jeanne interposed. "Tom, why don't you brief us on what questions we can and can't ask?"

"Ask any questions you like," he replied, "but don't go around bellyaching when I have to cut big hunks out of the recordings. We want all the information we can get, but that doesn't mean we're going to broadcast it to the Marties."

"I demand. . . ." Wolowysczki began as usual.

"Oh, shut up. I am doing the demanding. Worm everything you can out of Harkness and his Martie. That's all."

"Look!" Jeanne had been peering out of the cabin window. "The welcoming committee seems to be 'way over at the edge of the south landing target. And a big section of the marsh has been roped off. What can that mean?"

"Trouble," said Kane, as the copter bumped to a landing.

They clambered out and ran across the concrete to join a crowd that huddled around two ambulances waiting behind the temporary fence. Stevenson and General Brown growled at each other like hostile but well-behaved mastiffs. The engineers set up their equipment

with the efficiency of long practice. The others tried to find out what was happening.

"Stay well back from the fence," a giant's voice thundered from the control tower. "Harkness' ship is in trouble. He's coming in without gyros and will have to crash land in the marsh. The airport is not responsible for any injuries resulting from. . . ."

A FIRE engine came screaming across the field and blotted out the rest of the announcement. The onlookers started drifting back, then stopped as a thin scream of jets riveted their attention. A spot of flame blossomed overhead and came down fast . . . much too fast.

"He'll make it! He'll make it!" Kane heard himself yelling, even as the ship, spinning like a top on its downward-pointing axis, seemed on the verge of smashing full tilt into the ground. To confirm his professional knowledge the braking rockets overcame gravity a few hundred feet up. The ship bounced like a rubber ball. It came down more sedately the second time, but still it drilled its way into the soft marshland until only its after port remained visible.

His cashmere jacket ruined by flying mud and salt water, Stevenson led a dash for the ship. Loaded down by the heavy cameras and dragging lengths of wire, the IBC engineers brought up the rear with four internes lugging stretchers. They were up to their knees in muck, and plastered with it to their eyebrows, by the time they reached the ship. There they stopped and stared stupidly at the sealed port.

Minutes passed. Kane clenched his fists and tried to discipline the thumping of his heart as he visualized a badly-injured Harkness lying helpless or dragging himself, rung by rung, up the crawlway toward the only remaining exit.

With a whoop of sirens, the fire engine charged the marsh. Momentum carried it almost to the hulk before it bogged. Brown, acetylene cutting torch in hand, was first off the truck and first to swarm up the hot handholds to the after port. Stevenson, microphone in hand, came right behind him. Jeanne, a scarecrow carved in mud, made a valiant third. The fireman and internes, who should have been in the van, stood below.

Before the general could start cutting, the port began to unscrew by jerks. Eventually it swung outward on calcined, shrieking hinges.

A death's head appeared in the opening, held there by pipestem arms so emaciated that they seemed mummified. Sunken eyes bleared for long moments before they focused.

"Brown, by God!" croaked the mummy as Stevenson held up his mike so the words could be recorded for posterity. "I'm surrounded."

"Welcome home, Captain John Harkness," the Old Man boomed after looking to be sure that he was on-mike. "Welcome, Watcher of the Skies. As the poet Keats once said so beautifully:

> *"'He ne'er is crowned*
> *With immortality, who fears to follow*
> *Where airy voices lead."*

"Can the Keats, you old fossil," gasped the living skeleton. "Get off that ladder . . . let those stretchers up here . . . plasma . . . we're. . ." The fleshless hands gripping the rim of the port relaxed. Harkness slipped from sight. . . .

V

THANK heaven they'll both live," Tom said to Jeanne as their taxi fought its way back toward Manhattan through jelled Queens Boulevard traffic, "but that reception certainly was a bust. I'll bet Brown had worked a week on his welcoming address."

"That horrid little ruffled Martian," the girl shuddered. "Why she . . . it . . . had moulted! What do you suppose Harkness ever saw in such an alien monstrosity?"

"Suspenso, the drug spacers take to conserve air, water and food, was never

intended for use on long flights," the censor frowned at her. "Jack and his princess were in suspended animation for months; from the time they got their orbit set after leaving Pluto until a few days before they landed. They're dehydrated and starved. I take off my hat to a man who can snap out of anything as rugged as that and land a crippled ship."

His mind flashed back, as it often did these days, to the time that he himself had brought the first manned rocket home from the Moon.

"We didn't even know then how hard radiation affected the eyes and the brain," he said, speaking to himself and to the ghosts of those who had ridden out so bravely with him.

"What did you say?" she asked, then blushed and stammered, "Oh, excuse me. I remember." She slipped an arm around his bowed shoulders.

"But I should have been more careful. I let the crew look out of unshielded ports at the glorious sight of the Moon at close range. I looked out too, but not for long at a time. I had to watch the instruments. I got back sane, but I've had to wear these damned glasses ever since."

"You poor dear." She kissed his cheek. "Weren't you hospitalized for years?"

"Yes. While youth and opportunity passed me by."

"But you did fly the Paris-Moon run afterward?"

"I did until I couldn't stand the gaff any longer. Harkness was my co-pilot, you know. I had to be transferred to a desk job finally. Then, like a fool, I made an awful stink and got assigned to the Third Martian Expedition as navigator. That was the finish. My heart couldn't stand the acceleration. I'm a has-been, I tell you. No use cuddling up to me. Make a play for Jack. He's the man of this hour."

"For two dimes I would," she stormed, thankful that the darkness hid her tears. "But he's in love with that dreadful bird, although how in. . . ."

"You didn't look so hot yourself before you took a bath at the hospital," he said cruelly. "Your nylons were in ribbons, the hem was out of your skirt, a heel was off your left shoe and your face was filthy. You'd have looked a lot worse if you had landed after being shut up in a stinking ship for half a year with all your bodily functions in suspension."

"Oh, be still." She was really angry now. "This traffic is impossible and I need a drink. Let's stop at that café."

"I'm not too crazy about being out at night any more. People, even nice people, are acting wild these days."

"Not enough of the nice people are," she snipped as the taxi drew up before a writhing tri-di sign she had spotted. "Now do stop playing Methuselah for a little while. After what I've been through I deserve to have at least one little pass made at me."

The café was of the oldfashioned "In Time" type popular before the war had made fraternizing, even among barflys, a pastime frowned upon by Security. Its Double Square Revolving Bar was still in operation, the tiny booths of one square meshing with those of a second, like cogs on gear wheels, as they turned.

FOR guests not interested in meeting some Lady Godiva or Apollo after a few drinks had put them in the mood, the joint boasted roomier stationary booths around its walls. These were all occupied.

"I'm not in the mood to sock some inebriated idiot, or to have an Unbye listening in." Kane hesitated at the door.

"Oh, let's stop just a minute." She squeezed his arm. "They have sunlamps under the tables and I simply must get some tan on my shins. Heavens knows when I'll be able to find, or to afford, another pair of nylons. We'll have one drink, let the traffic unsnarl and then go."

"Okay." He wriggled into a slowly passing booth, thankful that its opposite number on the other square was empty and that the dim light allowed him to

remove his spectacles. He dropped a 50-cent piece into a meter. The coin turned a recessed ultraviolet lamp on Jeanne's bare white legs for a ten-minute interval.

"How about a Syn Martini?" She studied the saucily-animated wine list set into the surface of their wee table. "I've never tasted Syn."

"Sez you," he chuckled.

"That's better." She patted his hand.

"Syn tastes like crude oil," he objected. "Fact is, synthetic alcohol is made from petroleum. I've heard it doesn't give one a hangover but I'll still stick to a Gibson made with real gin."

A hefty bartender shook the drinks; waited stolidly until Kane handed him a five dollar bill; returned 75 cents in change.

"You're still mad at me," Jeanne accused after they had sipped in silence.

"Not mad, exactly," he sighed. "But after the way you behaved when you first saw Princess Yahna, I'm debating whether or not to say the hell with it and turn you in."

"Turn me in?" The color drained from her face, leaving it as bare as the small diamonds of skin that showed between the buttons of a cardigan sweater she had bought to replace her mud-spattered blouse.

"You're not French."

"It was that mistake I made about the Montparnasse," she choked. "I looked the place up as soon as I got home."

"Neither are you a Sosh," he went on. "Socialists don't yearn to throttle people just because they're different. I could see your fingers working every time you looked at the Martian."

"People!" she stormed. "That scrawny, miserable, flea-bitten little red monster? It's alien. Horrible. Our mortal enemy. *Ugh*!"

"You feel the same way about Bertie, don't you?"

"Why bring that little Kaf . . . that little beast into this?" She realized how he had tricked her and clapped both hands over her mouth.

"You're a Malanic," Tom said emotionlessly.

"No—yes—" she dropped her head on the table and sobbed while the nymph on the Syn ad continued to wink seductively.

Tom lighted his last cigarette of the day and let her cry. When she had recovered sufficiently to start dabbing at her makeup he ordered more drinks.

"I know you're going to say you can't help it," he began at last. "You're going to tell me you've been conditioned from birth to hate anything that isn't Nordic and blond. I suppose you consider yourself an honorary Aryan."

"Every word you say is true," she moaned, starting to gulp the second Martini and then pushing it away. "But I'm loyal to the United Nations."

"Except when you read French poetry on the air?"

"How did you know that?" Now she was beyond tears.

"My dear, I am a censor. And a censor's work includes that of being a detective of sorts. I have read poetry myself. One gets into some queer habits out in space. But I never read it the way you do, stressing some unimportant words and pausing before or after others. That's why I told Stevenson to stop you."

"You fiend!" Her hands clenched in the way that had given him his final clue.

"But I did *not* tell him to send you to Idlewild. That didn't matter much, though. I was going to cut your interview out of the recording."

"Go call the Unbyes," she said wildly.

"Shhh," he warned. "That may be one in the booth coming up."

SHE had to laugh. Their approaching neighbor was a jolly fat man who sported a neat Van Dyke and showed a gold tooth when he smiled at them.

"Nice day," said the stranger. Then, noting Jeanne's tear-swollen eyes, he looked sharply at Tom before adding, "Any trouble, lady?"

"We were at Idlewild watching the

spaceship come in," Tom said smoothly. "Those poor devils had gone through hell. My companion is still upset."

"Yeah," said the fat man. "I saw it on TV." He downed his rye and ginger and leaned closer. "Say, did that Martian girl really have wings?"

"She did."

"Looked sort of like a sick angel, I thought." He pulled at his beard.

"Sort of."

"Say, mister." Fatty glanced around hurriedly. "Do you think we oughta be throwing A-bombs at angels?"

"I don't think. I work for the government."

"Oh!" The other paled and seemed on the verge of scuttling from his booth. Instead, he straightened, looked Kane in the eye as the distance betwen them started widening, and said defiantly, "Go tell your bosses that a lot of us ordinary folks don't think we oughta!"

"What do you think of that?" Kane turned to the girl who sat staring after the fat man's retreating back. "Could it have happened before the braincasts began?"

"Why don't you have him arrested? He's a traitor," she panted.

"Out of consideration for you, my dear. I have it on the best of authority that *your* bosses, the Malanics, have gone over to the Martians."

"I don't believe it."

"Look at this, then. I'm breaking security to show it to you, but security is busted wide open, anyway." He rummaged in a pocket, brought out the afternoon censorship directive and pointed to a paragraph that read:

Block mention pro-Martian uprisings in Capetown area. FYI only: Casualties high and rising. Three regiments British paratroopers being rushed to scene. From mountain hideouts Malan III calling on fanatical followers to make common cause with Mars; re-establish white supremacy throughout Africa.

"I don't understand politics," Jeanne whimpered. "Father told me. . . ."

"I know. Papa told you the Malanics were loyal. They just hated U.N. interference with their God-given right to kick the natives around. They just wanted to get a little inside information so they could do some politicking . . . play off the Commies, the Caps and the Soshes against one another so fascism could make a comeback in Africa. What I don't know is how you got on IBC. Give!"

"When father saw the Malanics were going to be defeated by the U.N. he sent his liquid funds to Paris. He got us false papers. But when we reached France the inflation was so bad our money didn't go far. I had to go to work. I had worked on the college papers at Hunter in New York and at the Sorbonne, so I got a job as cub reporter on the Paris edition of the New York Herald Times."

"Just like that," Tom marvelled. "I'd like to meet your father sometime."

"And when the war started Stevenson invited me to come over and broadcast the French woman's viewpoint."

"This becomes curiouser and curiouser."

"And that's all really, except for the poetry. Father picked my selections and showed me the words he wanted stressed or paused after."

"That's enough to get you shot."

"Will it hurt much?" she blinked through her tears like a child.

"Tell you later," said Tom as an occupied booth swung into place beside them. He studied the not-so-young couple in it. They were arguing bitterly and paid him no heed as they sipped their beer.

WORDS reached them across the narrow space between the tables. "I don't se how we can go on this way," the faded, once-pretty blonde was saying. "This is the first time you've gone anywhere in months, Henry, and all we can afford is beer."

"I've told you and told you there's a war on," answered her shabbily-dressed companion. "I'm making a thousand dollars a month, with overtime and

everything. What more do you want from a man?"

"I want enough money to buy a new suit for Johnny, and to get some detective stories to read when the 'casts start driving me crazy, and. . . ."

"*Shhh*," said Henry.

"Don't mind us," said Tom. "The 'casts have got us down, too. We're trying to drown them in alcohol. Could I buy you folks a drink?"

"Gee . . . ." the blonde began.

"No thanks," said Henry. "I can still buy our own drinks."

"But you just said. . . ."

"Never mind!" he snarled at her. "You know better than to talk politics to strangers . . . thanks just the same, mister."

"Henry doesn't understand." His wife looked longingly at the winking Syn girl. "He works all day, so the 'casts don't bother him too much. But I have to sit home and they don't give me a minute's peace, except when I'm reading. Why—" her voice rose defiantly as the booths swung apart—"if those Marties kept on talking to me at *night*, I don't know what I might do."

Henry slapped her.

"There you have it, Jeanne." Tom ordered another round and let the bartender extract another fiver. "The world's going to the birds anyway, so your petty conniving with the Icks hasn't hastened the final bust-up much."

"But I don't want the Marties to win, particularly after seeing one of the dreadful things. Why even ni . . . Negroes. . ."

"Don't say it," he rasped, guiltily remembering his own aversion for all non-Cap peoples."

"But I must say it," she rushed on, misunderstanding him. "I *am* loyal. You've made me see how cheap I've been. I'd do anything, *anything;* to defeat the Marties."

"Would you?"

"Yes!" She gripped his hands. "If my death will help show people that they must stand together now, why turn me in. I'll go quietly." She tried to smile.

KANE warmed to her for the first time. It was true, as Stevenson had told him. The girl was no mental giant, but she had personality, and she didn't scare . . . much.

"I want you to do something far harder than dying," he said almost angrily. "I want you to make friends with the princess."

"You mean," she asked eagerly, "that you want me to trick her into coming over on our side?"

"Have you forgotten she's telepathic? She can read every thought in your stupid little head."

An expression of horror and dismay spread over Jeanne's oval face.

"Oh no!" she cried in panic. "I couldn't do that."

"You said you'd do anything."

"But it's physically impossible for me to be friendly with Yahna. I hate the sight of her. The braincasts are bad enough. I'd go crazy if that . . . that thing started scrabbling around in my brain."

"Listen," said Tom patiently, as though talking to an hysterical child, "I have a hunch that you can give the world its only chance for survival as a free planet. Let me put it this way: When I was on Mars last year I had several long talks with Bill Newsome, Jack's old buddy. Bill stayed up there after Jack and the Princess left. He wanted to study the way Martians grow plastics instead of synthesizing them the way we do.

"Well, Bill says that Princess Yahna is smart as a whip and a good egg too. She was largely responsible for getting Pitar Mura teleported. And she ranks above Mura in the Anarchiate. If she were approached just right she might help us, by setting up counter braincasts for instance."

"Help us defeat her own people?" Jeanne's lips curled.

"Of course not. But she might help us stop this idiotic war."

"Why don't *you* ask her?"

"I will. So will Harkness, I'm sure. Why the Brownie will get down on his stiff knees to her, if need be. Maybe she'll even agree to help. And then, the first time she appears in public, it will set off the wildest free-for-all you ever dreamed of. About half the world already is inclined to be pro-Martie. The U.N. is holding them in line, if you'll pardon the expression, by violence and naked terror. So what if U.N. starts playing footsie with a Martian leader? Fanatical anti-Marties, the ones who are still convinced that Earth is the center of the universe, will go berserk. The pro-Marties will rise. There'll be world-wide civil war. That'll be the finish."

"Then it's hopeless?" She looked as confused as he had hoped she would.

"Right! But when a thing becomes so hopeless that the government throws up its hands and quits, there's a chance for the rest of us to move in and do something. I talked the whole situation over with Brown and Stevenson before we left the hospital. They've agreed to let me try doing things my way."

"Which is . . . ?"

"Which is that we, but particularly you, must 'sell' the Princess; sell her to a world that, for a solid year, has been told through U.N. channels that all Marties are devils with horns; sell her to a world that has been told, through the braincasts, that Marties are angels with halos. We've got to show people like the man with the gold tooth and the washed-out blonde that Yahna is 'just folks.'"

"I don't get it," said Jeanne, "but if you say so, I believe you."

"You'll also have the job of convincing Yahna that humans are 'just folks' too, instead of the warmongers her experience would lead her to think."

"But why me, of all people? You know how I feel about her."

PATIENTLY he explained. "The first reason is that you have a tremendous following all over the world. Millions of men, from callow youths in Mozambique to middle-aged sex-starved Rotarians in Montral, sit around goggle-eyed when you appear before them to read mushy poetry or talk about Love, Patriotism, and the poor, poor boys in the spacesuits Out There. Their wives, sweethearts and mistresses probably hate you. But if you'll start throwing in stuff about home, mother, babies and puppy dogs, that can be remedied."

"I didn't realize!" There were stars in her eyes once more.

"You should read your fan mail instead of gadding around after me. But to go on: Those middle aged men, particularly, carry lots of weight in their home towns. They're Thought Leaders: You lead their thoughts and they'll obediently lead those of their friends and neighbors. A smart girl like you should be able to change their opinion of Marties almost overnight."

"Tell me another reason, darling," she purred like a kitten.

"This reason you won't like as well: I think you can get Yahna to work for us just because you hate her so intensely. She'll know exactly how you feel. She'll also know that half the human race feels the same way. She'll figure if I'm not mistaken, that if you can put peace above prejudice, the rest of us aren't so hopeless and may be worth saving."

"Saving!" Jeanne exploded. "Why we can lick those wretched Marties if we can just find a way to hit them. If I were a man. . . ."

"Saving!" Tom repeated firmly. "I know just how you feel, but one of these days, despite everything we can do, the Marties are going to get a braincast station set up on Venus or the Moon. They're building up to it now. When they succeed, humanity will be a captive audience for the 'casts, 24 hours a day instead of twelve. When that happens, we're finished, aren't we?"

"Yes," she admitted, gravely munching the olive from the bottom of her Martini.

"There's a third reason," he continued. "The first part of it is based on the fact that, if you doublecross me, I

can have you shot as a Malanic spy. The second part is Top Secret, Restricted and Confidential."

"But what do I do?" she began when an uproar at the bar drowned her out.

"You bloodthirsty fool!" the fat man, jolly no longer, was shouting at someone unseen. "Don't you know what this war's doing? Eating up our natural resources! Debasing our currency! Debauching our youth! What's even worse—" He seemed on the verge of intoxicated tears—"a poor man can't even buy a decent drink any more without bankrupting himself."

"That's right, chum!" The man in the shabby suit popped into sight. "Syn!" he jeered. "Sixty proof and it costs two bucks. T'hell with it."

"Atta boy! You're tellin' 'em," shouted half a dozen alcohol-slurred voices.

The bartender appeared, bungstarter in hand.

"Pipe down," he yelled, "'fore I knock your silly heads off!"

There was a crash. The fat man's hand came in sight holding the jagged neck of a broken beer bottle. He jabbed. The bartender gave ground.

"Out of here!" Tom grabbed Jeanne's wrist and dragged her toward the revolving door.

They made it, diving into a providentially empty taxi just as a thrown bottle crashed through the café window.

"Too bad," Jeanne sighed, "the party was just beginning."

VI

A WEEK passed before Brown called Tom to say that Harkness and "that confounded Martie" were well enough to be interviewed. In the meantime the braincasts had continued their anarchistic propaganda unopposed. The Malanic uprising had spread throughout South Africa. There were bread riots in Germany. The French Foreign Legion had been pinned down to Venusport. And the Russians, after being reinforced by a Turkish contingent, had just managed to smash another Martian grab at the near side of the Moon.

"Security's got everything we could out of the pair, which is damned little," the frustrated general barked. "I got exactly nowhere when I asked Yahna to help us. She says I'm a warmonger and that young whelp Harkness eggs her on. I've washed my hands of the whole thing."

"Did you tell the Secretariat about the suggestion I made?"

"Yes," came the grudging answer. "They don't think it will work but they say give it a whirl. Don't quote me, boy, but the situation is desperate."

"Is Wolo still cleared for this junket?"

"Yes. Moscow raised the usual stink when I tried to sidetrack him. Don't worry, though. I'll personally blue pencil anything that isn't innocuous."

KANE got as tough as he dared with the little group of IBC prima donnas as they 'copted to the Long Island Hospital after "braincastset."

"This is a crazy situation, so I'm employing crazy tactics," he told them. "This Martian female may want to get this war stopped as much as we do. Brown has antagonized her, as he would antagonize his own mother, with his jingo flagwaving. We've got to try and repair the damage. There must be no talk of a Terrestrial victory. We must think in terms of achieving an early peace that allows both sides to save face . . . Stevenson, do you go along with that?"

"Of course," said the smooth man smoothly. "I'll put all the resources of IBC behind any move that can stop the growing civil war on Earth. I'm an ardent Cap, as you know. I'll always do anything I can to do the Commies and Soshes in the eye. But I'm a human being first."

"Wolowysczki," Kane continued, "I've been told your gang would like to see the world torn by civil strife so they could step in and pick up the pieces. I can't quite believe, however, that they're mad enough to take a chance on having

Mars pick up those pieces. Will you cooperate?"

"I will," growled the Pole, "just as long as I am convinced you are not merely plotting against—"

"Fair enough! Jeanne, you represent the Soshes in this deal. You have expressed a violent dislike for all things Martian, but I'm depending on you to swing Yahna over to us. Think you're up to it?"

"I'll try." She clenched her fists and thrust out her round chin, "but grab my arm if my better nature gets the better of me."

"In this emergency we must all—"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Tom," Jeanne snapped as the copter dropped toward the flat roof of the hospital, "stop talking like a stuffed shirt."

"A Man with a Mission," the Pole said carefully, "automatically starts talking like a stuffed shirt."

They were escorted into the heavily-guarded hospital room to find the pilot and his princess still in bed but able to sit up. Harkness, despite his emaciation, seemed about as Kane remembered him; a handsome, black-haired devil with a freckle on the side of his prominent nose and a skeptical twist to his lips.

It was Yahna who made them all, even the phlegmatic Pole, catch their breaths. In a week she had changed from a waxen, mummy-like horror into Titania, Queen of the Fairies.

AT FIRST glance she could pass for an elflike human. Eyes, nose, ears and other features were in their proper places on her heart-shaped face. But the eyes were enormous, golden and fringed with feathery lashes. The ears, Jeanne noticed with a shudder, were pointed like a fawn's and had the disturbing ability to turn in the direction of any sound. As for that crimson plumage, she thought smugly, it still must be a wreck. Yahna was muffled to the throat in a terrycloth robe that bunched oddly around her wide shoulders.

"Jack says I look like a badly-plucked turkey hen," the Martian answered Jeanne's thought without embarrassment. "I'll wear a robe till my pinfeathers grow again." Her words chimed like bells in the little room.

"But I didn't say . . . ." Jeanne blushed into her blouse.

"You humans hate mindreading, don't you?" Yahna sang contritely. "I shouldn't have said that. Forgive me."

"That's perfectly all right," Jeanne said with deadly sweetness. "But how does it happen that you Martians resemble turkeys instead of goldfish? You must have no more privacy than they do."

"Jeanne!" the censor warned. "Behave yourself."

"Please don't scold her." Yahna leaned forward, clasping her slim hands. Her fingernails, Jeanne noted with undisguised interest, sparkled as though tipped with fire. "She can't help it. I'm a stranger; to be feared."

"But don't any of you hold her responsible for the war," Harkness spoke up angrily. "If Brown, the big ape, hadn't kept messing around up there we never would have had trouble. I hope," he added, staring at the camera and microphone that a technician had maneuvered into position before their beds, "that my remark is left on the record for old Horrie to chew on."

"I'm sorry I can't keep from reading your thoughts," Yahna's rhythmic song began again.

"*Can* you read mine?" Stevenson eyed her coldly.

"No!" She looked at him with equal *distaste*. "There's something. . . ."

"Good," said the Veep quickly. "That puts us two on an equal footing and gives me the right, I think, to ask the first question. Are we ready to start, Kane?" At the censor's nod, he demanded, "Princess Yahna, will you help us stop the war?"

"Of course!" She hit a high C. "I hate war."

"Then why did you refuse General Brown's request that you braincast an

apeal for peace to your people?"

"Braincast? What do you mean?"

"You should know, you she-devil," Stevenson rasped.

"They tell me that my people speak to you through empty space," she answered slowly, "but that I think is just your way of trying to save face. The distance from Mars to the Earth is far too great, you see, to bridge, no matter how we tried, with our telepathy."

"Pitar Mura has developed some kind of a booster," Stevenson explained.

"A booster? How splendid!"

"Splendid!" Jeanne sprang to her feet. "The braincasts are driving the entire human race crazy. They set brother against brother; mother against son. And that creature calls them splendid." She burst into tears.

"And you think," Yahna spoke in wistful anapaests now, "I would drive my own race insane, too? I must say your Cap state is ideal?"

"Ha!" sneered the Pole. "I suspected this. I will report it to Moscow."

"You ask this," Yahna rushed on, "though you know that every race in every land must live under a government that it can understand. An anarchy on Earth would be a vicious thing indeed. On Mars, which has telepathy, it fills our every need."

"Wait," said Kane, flushing. "You misunderstand our motives. We're not asking you to stir up civil war on Mars. If you don't believe me, look into our minds."

STEVENSON turned his back, lit a cigarette and stared out of the window at a depressing group of row houses across the street. The others steeled themselves, as though for the bite of a dentists's drill, as they felt Yahna examining their inmost thoughts. Jeanne paled and sank into a chair. Tom and Wolowysczki broke into cold sweats.

"How odd," the Martian shivered after a few moments, "you hate each other almost as much as you hate me! And yet you want to stop the war. That I can clearly see."

"How about this for a compromise," suggested Kane. "Tell your people that Earth is ready to make an honorable peace. . . ."

"On the terms Earth will dictate, of course?" she mocked him.

"No. I said an honorable peace . . . a peace between equals. Our only condition is that the braincasts must stop at once."

"But I should think," Yahna looked at him unhappily, "the one sure way to keep the braincasts coming would be to show the Martians that your 'casts are just as cunning."

"Not at all," Stevenson barked. "If your people know we have the know-how for braincasting they will realize the jig is up. They'll know what we can do to *them* and. . . ."

"I will not betray my race."

"My Yahna is smarter than you're giving her credit for," grinned Harkness, even though she isn't too good yet at composing poetry on the fly.

"It would be a big help if she'd stop trying, then," the Pole grumbled. "Spoken English prose gives me enough trouble to be understanding."

The Martian flickered those amazing eyelashes at her lover, then forced her syrinx into a remarkable imitation of a Down East drawl:

"Folks," she said "you're not going to catch me up with any of your city slicker tricks. I'll go on the regular tight beam radio any time you ask me and plead for an honorable peace, but I'll be consarned if I'll have anything to do with those newfangled braincasts."

"Prisoners of war do not negotiate!" Stevenson snarled at her.

"So I am a prisoner!" Her ears flattened again.

"If you won't co-operate," he stormed, "I can find some other Martian who will!"

"Do!"

"I think," said Wolowysczki, "that we beat about the bushes, as you Americans say. Let us get the interviews over and

go. I have an important report to be writing."

"You seem to have drawn a blank with Yahna, Stevenson," said the censor, fighting down a smile. "How about starting all over with Harkness?" To the technicians he added, "Everything said up to now has been off the record." The cameraman nodded, scribbled a note to that effect on a slate and held it in front of the lens for a moment.

Thoroughly at home now, the IBCer drew out Jack's story with thoughtful questions. After being fulsomely introduced to a still non-existent audience, the pilot began by explaining that he had gone to Mars under General Brown on the latter's original expedition.

Noting the vast quantities of gold the Martians possesed, but having not the slightest idea that said gold was the end-product of their atomic power plants, he had decided to enrich himself at their expense.

"Bill Newsome . . . he was communications officer for Brown . . . noticed that the Marties . . . excuse me, I mean the Martians . . . seemed almost hypnotized by the general's big 'diamond' ring," the lanky youth rambled on. "So, after we got home we pooled our pay and bonuses, bought a rickety experimental ship and a cargo of cheap zircons to trade for some of that gold. How were we to know the stone in that ring had really been a zircon? Or that zirconium was the one element the Martians needed to get their broken-down nuclear furnaces running again and become as powerful as they had been thousands of years ago?"

BITTERLY he told how Brown's reappearance with the Second Expedition and a much larger load of zircons had upset his plans to make a quick buck. Grinning wickedly, he rehashed the old story of how the general got his gold cheap, but was forced to dump it to avoid breaking the world money market.

Jack took a great deal more credit than he deserved for discovering Pitar Mura's plot to invade Earth through the only teleport extant on Mars. And he related with gusto how the Pitar had been exiled via the same means of transportation. He hadn't known of Mura's ultimate reinstatement.

Finally he spoke of his elopement to Pluto with Yahna.

"I didn't make my fortune there, either," he admitted ruefully. "Came home empty-handed in a worn-out ship. And now I'm back in the army again and must report to dear General Brown as soon as I can toddle out of bed."

"I gather that you oppose the war?" Stevenson insinuated at that point.

"You said that." Jack's eyes narrowed. "What are you trying to do? Land me in a cell?"

"I'm sorry." Stevenson didn't look the least bit sorry. "Tell me, did you learn the Martian trick of telepathy?"

"I didn't," the pilot answered, "but if I had, I still wouldn't play ball with your counterbraincasts. One batty world is enough."

"Cut!" Kane snapped at the cameraman. "Stevenson," he added, "I won't have this. If General Brown thinks Harkness is fit to join his staff, it's not up to you to imply that he is a traitor. Any more legitimate questions?"

"No," said the Veep with a smirk.

"Wolowysczki?

"Captain Harknes," the Pole began, "you have been telling Mr. Stevenson that the atmosphere of Pluto is most of the time frozen. But you also have been saying that the planet has a soil and that it seems rich in magnesium and maybe other raw materials. How do you explain?"

"I believe Pluto is an Earth-type planet that somehow escaped from its mother sun and eventually was captured by ours."

"In view of the fact that both Mars and Earth are rapidly exhausting their natural resources, would it be possible to establish mines on Pluto from which one or both worlds might be replenishing their supplies?"

"No. The distance is too great. Freight

costs would be prohibitive, even if men or even servo-mechanisms could survive there." Harkness was showing real interest in the proceedings for the first time.

"Then you think Pluto is of the no value?"

"I didn't say that." The pilot leaned forward eagerly. "Some day—unless we blow ourselves up first—we'll learn a lot more about how to harness atomic and solar power. Maybe we'll be able to slow Pluto in its orbit then. That would cause the planet to fall inward toward the sun. If we stopped the fall halfway between the orbits of Earth and Mars we'd soon have another rich green world in the solar system. That's a project I'd give an arm to work on!" His eyes shone.

"Captain Harkness," the grim-faced Pole went off on a new tack, "we are told that Mars has no formal government; just the Anarchiate which is an advisory body somewhat like your American Chamber of Commerce. How did that all come about? Was it by revolution, or did the state wither away?"

"I couldn't say." Jack glanced uneasily at the censor. "I guess, when members of a race learn to 'think together,' as the Martians put it, they don't need a government any more."

"A while back, Mr. Harkness, you spoke of General Brown's ah, 'messing around.' Did you mean that he was fronting for a Cap attempt to exploit Mars?"

"I'm not falling for that Commie propaganda line!" He sank back on the pillows and added, "Tom, I'd appreciate it if you'd take that punk off my neck."

"That's enough axe-grinding, Wolo," the censor agreed. "Jeanne, it's your turn." He lit his fourth cigarette.

THE cameraman tinkered with his slate and focus as Jeanne seated herself to the best knee-revealing advantage at Yahna's bedside.

"Dear ladies and gentlemen of the world-wide television audience," the sob sister cooed into the mike, "this is your old friend, Jeanne Freund with a real treat . . . the very first interview with a real, live Martian princess.

"Yes, I know," she sighed deeply with enchanting pictorial effect. "You're thinking that Mars is our deadly foe. You're wondering why I should put a Martian enemy on the air. I do so because, long before this dreadful war started our lovely little princess followed the good old fairy story tradition: She put aside all claim to the golden throne of Mars and eloped with a human . . . with Space Captain John Harkness. And no wonder!" Her tempting torso rose and fell in another sigh. "Girls, he's the *hand*somest *man!*

"Last week they came home at last to good old Mother Earth, half-dead after an epoch-making flight to frigid Pluto. . . ." Jeanne babbled on and on, hogging lens and mike. Stevenson glared at the row houses. Wolo inspected his blunt fingernails. Kane cringed at the revelation that, despite his repeated instructions, the girl was violating every law of journalism.

"No, little Princess Yahna is not Earth's enemy, even though her people are," that cloying voice cooed to a climax. "In fact, she has just promised to do everything in her power to end the war!" Jeanne paused to let this bombshell explode, then rushed on as the camera panned back to include the Martian in the picture at last: "And now I bring you Princess Yahna . . . of Mars." Another highly charged pause. "Tell us in your own words, princess, was it for love alone that you abdicated your throne?"

"I didn't abdicate." Now Yahna was imitating a haughty Junior Leaguer.

"I beg your pardon?" Jeanne's poise developed a slight crack.

"Mars has had no throne for tens of thousands of years, and no government either. So I couldn't abdicate."

"But you are a princess, aren't you?"

"It's an honorary title, like the Doctor of Laws degrees humans bestow on

generals, entertainers and grafters."

"Grafters!!!" Jeanne looked dazed.

"Oh dear, I used the wrong word. It's 'gangsters', isn't it?"

"Cut!" Kane snarled at the choking cameraman. "Jeanne," he added, "do compose yourself. This is just a film, remember. I'll delete anything that doesn't sound right . . . Okay. Shoot."

"So you're a gangster?" Jeanne shot.

"Oh, no! I don't enjoy that type of activity although my successor, Pitar Mura, seems particularly adept at gangsterism, I am an entertainer." This with the hauteur of a Met star.

"Really?" Jeanne was back on familiar ground. "You sing, I presume."

"No. I fly."

"Fly? But I thought Mars' atmosphere was too rarified. . . ."

"It is true that most Martians have lost their wings. Only we princesses retain them because we fly daily in pressurized theatredromes. In that way we channel the telepathic impulses of all members of the Anarchiate."

"You must be pulling my leg." Jeanne laughed uncertainly.

"Oh no. Your beautiful legs are obviously quite long enough now."

Jeanne caught herself in the act of tugging at her abbreviated skirt. With a great effort she pulled herself together.

"Tell us, princess: What do you think of Earth? Isn't it much lovelier than your red deserts?"

"No." Yahna shed one ceremonial tear for Mars from each golden eye. "Earth is too hot and bright. Its heavy air almost suffocates me. Its gravity crushes me. Of course I have seen none of your countryside, but if those are typical," she waved a slim red arm at the ugly row houses across the street and waited until the camera had panned in the direction of her gesture, "your living conditions must be dreadful. No wonder you do nothing but fight."

"Well!" Jeanne forgot all her good resolutions. "Have you any other nice things to say about Earth?"

"I didn't think what I said was nice," said the bird woman. "In fact, it was down right nasty. I must have been infected by the view. I apologize."

The commentator was slightly mollified. "I'm trying to understand your strange viewpoint," she said, "but it is a bit difficult. Also, I realize you haven't been outside his room since you recovered consciousness after the landing. I'm sure millions of our listeners are horrif. . . I mean fascinated to learn how they appear to Martian eyes."

"And I'm sure millions of Martians would just as soon never set eyes on another Terrestrial," Yahna answered candidly.

"But I'm told," Jeanne snapped a furiously baffled glance at the poker-faced censor, "that if Mars and Earth are to establish peaceful relations they must try to understand each other. So tell me honestly, princess, some of the things that have most puzzled you about us."

"Honestly?" Yahna's golden eyes were troubled. "You mean dishonestly, don't you? I'll be glad to lie, but I'm not very good at it. You must give me clues."

"No. Say exactly what you think."

"Well," said the Martian thoughtfully, "even though Jack has explained and explained, I still can't understand your monogamous marriage customs. They seem so stifling . . . like your atmosphere. On Mars we practice quadrigamy."

"What on Earth is that?" Jeanne asked warily.

"Not on Earth. On Mars two males and two females make up the family group. It's such a satisfactory arrangement."

"If all members of the group happen to be telepathic," the sob sister said with a rare flash of insight. "Like anarchy, quadrigamy would be hell for humans."

"I had never thought of it that way!" Yahna clapped her hands, giving the commentator a chance to switch the embarrassing subject.

"Tell me, princess," she hastened, "what makes your fingernails sparkle in that delightful way?"

"It is a cosmetic. I'll show you how to make and apply it, if you wish."

FOR the benefit of the cameras, Jeanne smiled. "That will be marvelous." Off her guard again, the South African asked another leading question, "What else about us puzzles you?"

"Why, *your* cosmetics, I suppose. When Earth is so dreadfully hot and humid, why do you all wrap yourselves in dirty rags?"

"Dirty rags?" Jeanne's mouth popped open.

"Oh, I'm sorry. The wrong word again? Is the right one cloths or clothes?"

"Clothes, of course. But we keep them as clean as possible."

"They seem awfully unsanitary to me, especially those hard round bandages most women wear around their thighs . . . You are an exception. At first I thought humans had moulted and were ashamed of their nakedness. But I notice that you wear very little."

"You mind your own business!" Jeanne was scarlet.

"*That's* the thing that puzzles me worst of all," cried the Martian. "It's the . . . what's the word Jack taught me? . . the ambivalence of human beings. You all have schizoid, or split personalities, he told me. But I never quite believed him until today. All of you in this room keep saying one thing out loud while thinking something entirely different."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Well, you became angry when I complimented you on the few clothes you wear. And consider our doctor. Last week he called his wife on the viziphone from this room. He looked at her and talked to her so sweetly. But all the time his mind was on some nurse. He was thinking . . . ."

"Never mind!" Jeanne cut in. "We must be careful of libel laws."

"Mars has no laws." Yahna sat up proudly. "Having telepathy, it needs none."

"Goldfish!" Jeanne almost spat at her. "Let's go on to something more palatable."

"But I haven't finished, and you said you wanted me to be honest."

"I didn't want you to be as honest as all this."

"That's because you're all tangled up inside. You have a messy mind that I certainly wouldn't want to try to think with. Right on the surface of it you are repeating, over and over: 'I will like her. I won't hit her. I will like her! I must, Tom says. Otherwise she won't help end the war.'

"Down on the next layer you are hating me much worse than you hate sin. And underneath that . . . !" Yahna clapped sparkling fingertips to her lips. "Oh, *no!*"

"Stop it! Stop poking at me, you devil!" Jeanne screamed, leaping to her feet and gripping her temples. "Oh Tom, I can't go on. I'll kill the little beast!" Sobbing hysterically, she fled.

"Cut," sighed Kane, lighting his seventh cigarette. "Forgive her," he apologized to the petrified Yahna. "Jeanne is not a tenth as queer as a lot of us humans, probably including me. In fact I suspect she's pretty decent when you get right down to rock bottom. But you see what our two races are up against."

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry." the princess whispered. "The poor child. I became so interested in watching her reactions that I didn't realize I was torturing her. Oh Jack, what are we to do?" She scrambled out of bed, stumbling over the terry cloth robe like a little girl, and sobbing, flung herself into her lover's arms.

VII

HOW did it go?" Clark asked, squinting between his earphones, as Tom entered the office next morning.

"Stinko. I doubt that Brown will release a word of it."

"And the princess?" The little man

licked his lips. "Was she—is she—?"

"She was and is. Pretty as a picture. Brilliant. An amazing mimic. About your height, too. But she's spoken for."

"It doesn't matter," sighed Clark. "I'm allergic to feathers."

"Is Jeanne in yet?" Tom asked Bertie, who was reposing on the small of his back, deep in study of his "lesson."

"Yeah, boss. But she looks kinda beat."

"I told you to cut out that boss stuff, didn't I? This isn't Capetown."

"Yes sir, Mr. Kane." Bertie did not take offense. Instead he added thoughtfully, "Funny thing. Jeanne said good morning to me for the first time."

"Umm," said the censor, who had spent a bad night trying to soothe the sob sister's wounded vanity. He was scanning the directive: "Delete mention that Africa, south of the Equator, is in hands of Malanics," it began. "Censor heavily . . . Delete . . . Deny all rumors collapse Argentine government or reign of anarchy there . . . Delete demand by Senator Smith (R., Okla.,) for immediate evacuation of Venusport . . . Censor heavily . . . ."

Drearily he put the sheets in his safe. Hardly an item in the morning's news, he suspected, could be broadcast without drastic revision.

"That ain't the only thing that's funny around here," the office boy resumed. "Know what I did last night? I went down to the morgue where they took Carlos . . . ."

"*Ugh!*" Hyatt glanced up from his eternal puzzles. "You're a ghoul."

"Yeah? Thanks . . . well, I talked with the autopsy doc . . . told him I was studying to be a detective and everything. And you know what?"

"He gave you the bum's rush!" The CAA man fiddled with his phone jacks.

"No siree. He took me into his office and asked lots of questions. Seems Carlos died of symptoms of wood alcohol poisoning all right, but they couldn't find a trace of methanol in his blood stream. How do you figure that?"

"Maybe he just imagined he died," Kane teased the earnest youngster.

"Gee, Mr. Kane, you're smart." The beady eyes sparkled. "That's what I figured, too. You know how jumpy he got to be. I'll bet his braincast told him he had poisoned himself and he died from suggestion."

"But he did drink wood alcohol. You said a gallon was missing," Clark yelped.

"I found that alky yesterday." Bertie cowered as the government men glared. "Somebody stumbled over the can, I guess, and stuck it in the back of the supply cabinet."

"I'm damned," said Kane. "What did you do after you left the morgue?"

"Went over to Carlos's apartment and talked to his landlady. Found out he was a radio ham. What do you think of that? He never had said anything, even when I told him about my working for that underground station in Africa. But it was all smashed up."

"What was all smashed up?" the others demanded in chorus.

"Carlos's ham station. Yeah, all the wiring was pulled apart and the tubes and transistors and things were ground into the floor, like he had got into a drunken tantrum and jumped on 'em."

"Maybe you'll make a detective at that, Bertie." Kane was all ears. "Find anything else?"

"Nothin' much. Course I looked for a diary, or log, and diagrams and things but there wasn't any. Only thing I found was two scraps of paper stickin' to the bottom of an empty wastebasket."

"May I see them?"

"Nah, boss . . . Mr. Kane, I mean. They're my clues. I want to see if there's invisible ink on 'em. This is my first real case, see?"

"Even if I reimburse you for the five bucks you undoubtedly gave the landlady?"

"Reimburse? Landlady?" He eyed the proffered bill. "Well . . . ."

BERTIE dug two white bits out of an extremely flat billfold. They had

been torn so that only parts of words showed on them. One read: . . . incas- . . . ." The other was just a scribble. It looked like either ". . . gin Terros . . ." or ". . . gin Torres. . . ."

"That's easy." Clark had tiptoed over, phones still on his head like grotesque round ears; their connecting wire trailing behind him to the jack panel, and was peering under Tom's arm. "Carlos went out of his head with the DT's. He was dreaming of his Indian ancestors and thinking about a drink of Tower Brand gin at the same time. No wonder he blew his fuses."

"Yeah," said Bertie, swelling with pride. "I figured it out just that way too. But I'm gonna use lemon juice and stuff on the pieces to see if there's more writing on 'em."

"Well, keep it up. You're doing fine so far," said the censor. "I'll be down at Mike's if anybody calls." He walked into the newsroom.

"Time for coffee?" he asked the pale girl who sat hunched over her typewriter.

"Yes, please," she tried to smile. "I couldn't sleep so I came in early. My ten o'clock show, such as it is, is all done. *Brrr!* I dread facing the camera, looking all washed-out like this. Maybe coffee will help some."

"Do I still have a job?" she asked after they had found a booth in the bar and grill.

"Sure. I called Stevenson last night and told him that, in view of African developments, we couldn't get along without a Malanic at IBC."

"Liar! And drop the Malanic line. I did some homework after you left. It made me decide I didn't like what the Icks stand for . . . apartheid and all that . . . after all. I don't quite know where I stand now, but let's say I'm a Sosh, like I'm supposed to be. If it weren't for Stevenson, I think I'd turn Cap."

"A woman of easy politics." He smiled at her almost tenderly. "Any other ideas grow out of our talk?"

"Yes, I'm going back in there and pitch to put our interplanetary lovers over the top, if I may mix a few metaphors. I think I can do it, now that I've survived the first shock. I worked **out** a whole publicity campaign during the wee small hours. Want to hear about it?"

"Of course." He sipped his black coffee.

"First, we'll put Yahna's tight beam peace plea to the Martians on a world-wide radio hookup. Everybody's for peace, just as everybody's against sin."

"Why not a TV hookup?"

"Well, I thought she'd look queer in that robe. People might suspect she had a tail and cloven hoofs under it."

"Harkness assures me she will be in fine feather again in a few days."

JEANNE nodded. "TV it is, then. I'll make her a heroine if it kills me. Next item is: I've called the Cosmetic Chemicals Foundation. They're wild about that fingernail sparkle. Soon as I get them the formula they'll start a world-wide ad campaign. It may take women's minds off the braincasts."

"After that, I have all sorts of wonderful ideas for keeping the ball rolling. And finally, we'll stage a big wedding to make everything l e g a l, Earthside. Where'll we have it? The Cathedral on Park Avenue?"

"Better make it a civil ceremony at City Hall," he grinned. "We mustn't hurt the feelings of our Buddhist, Mohammedan and atheist allies."

"Oh!" Her piquant face fell, then brightened. "You're right. That'll give us a chance for a ticker tape parade up Broadway, and a honeymoon in . . . ."

"Easy. Easy," he warned. "Don't count your chick. For all we know, we may have to scare up a co-bride and co-groom to make this legal, Marsside. By the way, what's your braincast saying about this campaign?"

"Why," she cried in surprise, "I've been so busy thinking that I haven't heard the cursed thing all morning. It's saying . . ." She cocked her dark head.

"It's saying 'Dammit!' "

"Fine. Keep it on the defensive. I have a hunch it tripped you yesterday."

"It did, come to think about it. The things it insinuated about Yahna! I must have a fetid mind!" She looked on the verge of tears.

"You really think you can go through with this?"

"I know I can now, if you'll give me one more chance."

"Good girl." He leaned across the table and kissed her soundly, to the delight of a disc jockey in the next booth. "Now let's go back to the office and get busy. We have a world's mind to change and mighty little time to change it in."

"Steve's been yelling for you," Bertie informed Kane on his return. "Some kind of bull session. Hyatt and Richardson went down there ten minutes ago."

"You might have come and told me."

"Not for Stevie and his seventy-five bucks a week, bo. . . Mr. Kane."

THE censor walked downstairs and his braincast walked with him. It kept needling him as it had been doing since tune-in time despite his best efforts to ignore it. The lilting Martian voice jeered at his failure of the day before; urged him to resign his post and the hell with it; gave him no peace.

". . . and so," Stevenson was saying to the others as Tom entered the palatial office, "Kane's try at cementing Martian-Terrestrial relations came apart at the seams yesterday. Oh. Sorry Tom. I was just telling General Brown about the fiasco at the hospital." Brown, looking nearer apoplexy than usual, was sitting bolt upright in the room's only straight chair. Hyatt, with earphones still in place and their cord plugged into a panel on the Veep's desk, was smiling wickedly. The dour Richardson looked a bit dazed from the recital. Only Stevenson, feet up as usual despite the presence of the military, seemed at ease.

"I hope, general," he continued suavely, "that you'll let me play the game my way after this. . .of course I'll fire Miss Freund for the mess she made of things out there."

"I wouldn't," said the censor crossly. "Jeanne did about as well as might be expected in dealing with an absolutely candid telepath. It might be more to the point if you fired yourself."

"What you mean?" Down banged the feet. Long fingers dug at the desk top.

"Struck me you went out of your way to get both their backs up."

"Maybe I was too rough on Harkness. But I'm convinced he knows a lot more about the war than he pretends to."

"He's my headache now," said Brown gruffly.

"Of course, general. Of course. As for Yahna . . . ."

"An impossible creature!"

"Quite so, general. As for Yahna, she distrusted and disliked me from the moment she found she couldn't pry into my mind."

"How come she couldn't?" Kane asked.

"Because of this gadget." Stevenson unshipped his "hearing aid" and flipped it across the desk. "Telepathy jammer!"

"What?" the government men yelled, staring at the little instrument as though it had dropped from heaven.

"Yep. Blanks out braincasts, subconscious promptings and direct short range telepathic probing."

"Gimme one, quick," pleaded Hyatt, his bugeyes shining behind their distorting spectacles.

"Glad to." Stevenson reached into a drawer and tossed out a handful. "Take two if you wish. They're automatic. Just put them on."

"It's the answer," boomed Richardson, "the answer I've been down on my knees praying for, every night of the last six months."

"We've got the Marties licked!" Brown tossed back his mane.

"Not quite." Stevenson returned the jammer to his ear. "Too small."

"Surely you can build a big one," Hyatt begged. "Excuse me," he added. "Have to monitor the German Hour."

He tinkered with the switches, settled his phones and looked expectantly at the executive.

"A big one won't work, Clark," Stevenson said. "We've tried it. Later, maybe. But at present its range is only a few inches."

ALL the others sat in stricken silence. A tinkle of mocking Martian laughter rang in their ears. Hurriedly they adjusted their new gadgets. The laughter faded.

"Then make the little jammers by the millions," Brown commanded.

"Billions," Stevenson corrected. "Four billions, to be exact. Distribute them in the jungles of Africa; the mountains of Tibet. Send armies of technicians along to service them. Distribute other billions of batteries for them. Explain their use in hundreds of languages. Overcome staggering cost factors and the distrust of Commie and Sosh bureaucrats. Just do all this in the few months, or perhaps weeks, remaining before the peoples of Earth leap at one another's throats."

"If we told people to hang on—that help was on the way—" Kane fumbled.

"They will remember the promises the U.N. made that we'd win the war in six weeks. No, my friends, the jammers have only two possible uses: The few we have manufactured so far can be distributed to top U.N., government and business men for such relief from tension as they may bring. And, if I'm not mistaken, we can use the same principle to build a tracer that can lead us unerringly to the Martian transmitter or transmitters from which the braincasts originate."

"Isn't that sufficient, man?" Brown paced the floor like a lion. "If we develop a reliable tracer the Secretariat certainly will let me take the fleet up. I'll A-bomb those transmitters into rubble!"

"How long will it take you to do that, general?" Stevenson asked gently.

"The spaceworthy ships we have left will be ready for takeoff in a week. The trip takes a month. Another week to triangulate and spot the transmitters.

"Do we have six weeks, general?"

"No, dammit!" The great man sat down limply. "The way the news looks, we haven't half that much time before things fall apart. Anarchist revolutions are blazing in South America, Africa, Texas and God-knows-where-else. Communications are breaking down. New York's becoming a madhouse!"

"Counter braincasts might be a solution," said the IBC man.

"But we don't have them."

"Yes we do," Stevenson beamed. "I started them this morning."

Again there was a near-riot.

"Take it easy. Come upstairs and I'll show you." Stevenson led the way, explaining as he went: "We've had Martian prisoners under the encephalograph for months studying the exact pattern of their brain waves. Once we got that, the rest was simple. While my boys were building and setting up a transmitter I combed the Earth for one Martian . . . just one . . . who would co-operate."

"And you finally got one?" Hyatt marvelled. There being no jacks in the elevator, he had taken off the headset for once.

"Whit Taylor got him for me down in Washington yesterday."

"Is Taylor still working for IBC?" Richardson polished his bald head in surprise. "I thought he resigned when he took that dollar a year procurement job."

"That was part of his job . . . to procure a friendly Martian," Stevenson chuckled. "This kid was teleported into the White House day before yesterday with some fool peace message for the President. Belongs to an underground conchie movement on Mars. Secret Service picked him up, of course, and Whit 'procured' him for me quick. I sold him on the idea that he could stop the war singlehanded if he played ball. It was like feeding corn to a chicken. Come on in. I'll introduce you."

HE PULLED open the door of an improvised Studio Q on the twentieth

floor. The room was jammed with jury-rigged electronic equipment. A downy red Martian boy was staring into a translucent panel set in one wall. He had no wings, of course, but two round spots of scar tissue on his wide shoulders showed where the atrophied stumps of wings had been amputated at birth. Near him a pair of IBC engineers peered at an oscillograph where a thin line of light jiggled.

"Pitaret Tandar," Stevenson said in a loud voice.

The Martian turned slowly, Lord! Kane thought. He's only an adolescent. We'll be fighting with babes in arms next! This is too easy; too pat, his thoughts ran on. Jammer, tracer and counterbraincaster is one swoop. Stevenson must be a magician!

"These are representatives of Earth's government," Stevenson told the boy. "They want to watch you braincast."

"They are welcome," the Martian twittered. "But I am not a Pitaret."

"You'll be one soon if you string along with us." The Veep waved toward the panel. "Go ahead. Tell the Martians that Earth wants peace. Tell them Earth will send them food, raw materials, water too, when the war ends. Tell them Pitar Mura is a bad one. Tell them that capitalism is a far better type of government for Mars than anarchy is."

"I will tell them." Obediently the Martian went back to his work. The downy shoulders hunched; the wing scars whitened as he concentrated. The brilliant line on the oscillograph began to flicker.

"I don't hear a thing," said the censor. "Shouldn't I?"

"Take that jammer out of your ear," Stevenson grunted.

Kane did so. A blast of vituperation from the Mars-to-Earth 'casts almost staggered him. The Voice was making no pretense, now, of maintaining its previous "all-things-who-live-are-brothers" line. In the last half hour it had switched to straight-from-the-shoulder incitement to mayhem, murder and bloody revolution against all constituted authority.

Blurring the chant somewhat, Tom caught a series of unfamiliar birdlike chirps and trills. They sounded like the Martian language, as he remembered it, and pulsed in unison with the hopping line on the oscillograph.

"Hear it?" asked the Veep. "It's not on your wavelength so it doesn't seem loud. You'll probably not be able to hear it at all outside this studio but I assure you it's hitting Mars like a ton of brick."

"How do you know he's thinking the thought you want him to? Brown objected.

"That dumb kid? I've got him hooked."

"Could I have his stuff piped out to the hospital so Harkness could monitor it?" Kane asked. "So far as I know he's the only human who knows Martian."

"Sure. Sure. I'll hook it up whenever you say."

"But we'll never overcome the Martie propaganda lead," Richardson mourned.

"You're an old fool," Stevenson jeered. "The impact of unbiased Cap propaganda on the gooks should be devastating. Competition. Free enterprise. Individual initiative. They will never have heard anything so convincing. And if it shouldn't work, we're rushing a second transmitter to completion at Venusport. I tightbeamed the plans to our station manager there yesterday. Venus is on the other side of the sun, now, so, with two stations going we can bracket Mars with braincasts twenty or more hours a day. Give 'em no rest. No sleep. They'll crack then, all right. By the time our fleet gets there they'll be ready to say 'Uncle.' "

"Unless our Sosh and Commie allies start raising the roof," Kane began.

The studio door flew open and Bertie bounced in.

"Hey, Mr. Kane," the boy yelled, "Wolo's been looking for you. I tried to call you, but there's no phone in this studio yet. Wolo said to tell you he's just gone on the air to Asia and busted the

Malanic story wide open."

Bertie flattened himself against the door as Brown dashed out, followed by his cohorts.

Then he sucked through his buck teeth as he studied the Martian and the bouncing oscillograph trace.

"Say Bill," he remarked to one of the engineers, "how come you got the bias on them cockeyed tubes so high?"

"Bertie," Stevenson snarled, "get the hell back downstairs and don't go showing off. You're still just an office boy, remember."

"Yes . . . boss." Bertie eyed him insolently, then ducked in abject terror as the smooth man lunged for him.

Downstairs, Brown was raging impotently.

"Legally, the Pole is within his rights again," he spluttered. "The law says a commentator is on his own if he has a deadline and, 'after reasonable effort,' can't find a censor to check with."

"I don't think too much damage has been done, sir," Kane tried to calm him. "The Malanic yarn was getting too big to keep under wraps."

"I suppose you're right."

"Shall I pass the story for other news programs now?"

"Might as well, I suppose. I hate to say so. It will get Wolo off the hook and credit him with a scoop. How come," the general whirled on Hyatt, "that you didn't catch that broadcast on those phones you're dragging around?"

"Why . . . I . . . uh." The little man writhed. "There were no outlets in the studio."

"I'll have to chalk it up against your record anyway." Now that he had found a vent for his anger, Brown felt better. He stomped out of the room, his Polish nemesis conveniently forgotten.

"I said you'd get in trouble finally," the censor growled at Hyatt.

"It's nothing to the trouble Brown's letting himself in for if he gives me a demerit," the CAA man said with unaccustomed viciousness as he jammed the phones back on his ears and plugged them in. "Who called me out of the office, huh?"

Bertie, looking sullen, came in and slammed early "final" editions of the afternoon papers on Kane's desk.

"Stinkin' dictator," he was muttering. "I'll get him some day. Just wait!"

Kane paid him no attention. Instead he was staring, with sinking heart, at the red streamer on "TAB," New York's leading smut sheet. It screamed:

WOULD YOU WANT *YOUR* SON MARRIED TO A MARTIAN MONSTER????

Underneath, a beautifully-drawn "cartoon" showed a stalwart youngster in a spacesuit being dragged to the altar in the claws of a scarlet horror; a cross between a harpie and a vulture.

The bottom half of the page was given over to a jingo, warmongering "Earth First" editorial. In the guise of an attack on Yahna it subtly whipped up ancient prejudices against Negroes and other colored races, as well as against other than Cap political beliefs.

It lambasted the U.N. for "half-hearted prosecution of the war." It hurled anathema at the Soshes "and their sneaking Commie friends." It accused Harkness of being a weakling at the same time it held him up as a paragon of human supremacy. It demanded immediate execution of that "winged Mati Hari" who had seduced him.

Slantwise across the big boldfaced type was a simulated rubber stamp mark:

This call to action was *not* U.N.—censored!

"THIS is the way the blowup started in Capetown," said Jeanne. She, Kane, Bertie and Hyatt ware leaning out of a window in the IBC building, watching a howling mob of demonstrators. It filled Park Avenue all the way north from Grand Central Station.

"Yeah," Bertie agreed. "I got caught in a riot there once. A big bruiser twisted my arm till he broke it. Then the

U.N. bombers came over. They were gunning for Malan's barracks but two or three of the bombs fell short. What a shindig!"

Kane studied the scene below with crawling distaste. During the past 24 hours thousands of "TAB" front pages and equally scurrilous placards had been plastered on store windows, lamp posts and sidewalks. He caught sight of a swarthy man, a Filipino, he surmised, running like a rabbit from a gang of laughing, hooting toughs. Directly beneath the window several hundred bobby soxers in shorts and halters were marching. Ignoring the frantic police, they were singing a parody of an old college song: "Don't send my son to Mars, pa," the words floated up, "I'd rather see him dead."

One of the marchers shinnied up a lamp post and began screaming:

"Down with Yahna. There aren't enough men to go 'round now!"

"That isn't what they tell me," Hyatt said bitterly. "They say *I'm* not enough man to go round."

"Oh shut up, you monomaniac," said the censor. "Can't you understand how dangerous the situation has become when that sort of thing can be whipped up overnight? It's harmless enough yet and even fairly good humored, but it's the beginning of the end. And this is the 13th, too, just as the intercept said."

"Yeah," grinned the little man. "It keeps me from going across the street to buy a beer."

"And I must admit I just keep thinking: There goes my chance to become a female P. T. Barnum," Jeanne sighed. "I had such a good public relations program worked out to sell Yahna and Jack. I suppose I'd get lynched if I tried it now."

Kane patted her shoulder.

"Did any of my interview ever get on the air?"

"Not a whisper."

"Oh well," she sighed again. "Probably wouldn't have been picked up anyway. They say most of IBC's trans-Atlantic channels are being jammed by the Malanics or somebody."

Kane thought of how heavily he had blue-penciled the Malanic putsch that morning. (It had reached Cairo and run into bloody collision with a pan-Arabic uprising.) Also he had cut all mention of race riots in Detroit, Chicago and Atlanta. Rupture of communications with South America had given him one less headache, at least.

The angry clicking of his phone jerked him out of his reverie.

"Tom?" Brown's voice was ragged. "I want you and Miss Freund to come to Idlewild and give me a hand."

"What's up, sir?"

"Harkness and that Martian chit are dragging their feet again. I can't explain over the phone. Just get out here —fast! I'll meet you."

"They tell me most subways have stopped running and a taxi will never get through the mobs."

"Take the IBC helicopter. You have the authority."

"Yes sir."

"Clark," he said as he hung up, "you'll have to pinch hit for me. Watch Wolo like a hawk, unless you want to blow your last chance for an advance in grade this year."

"I'll bear down." The CAA man's pocketbook muscles winced.

"Jeanne," the censor continued, "grab your coat and a sharp pencil and follow me. I have a hunch your yen to be a top-flight journalist is about to be fulfilled."

A guard who had been hanging over the IBC roof parapet looked dubiously at Kane's government badge.

"You sure you can fly this thing?" he temporized. "I'd better call the boss." His attitude changed when the other handed over a space pilot's license. "Oh sure, Mr. Kane," he grinned. "I didn't recognize you. Why, when I was a kid I fair worshipped. . . ."

They left him in mid-sentence.

"What's the rush and where?" Jeanne asked when the copter was airborne.

"We're traveling on borrowed time to

Idlewild. Maybe we're going a lot farther than that before we're through."

"You're not, my friend," she said grimly. "Don't go getting ideas."

IDLEWILD was stacked to the roof but the copter was cleared for landing the moment it appeared. "No time to give you details," Brown barked as he shepherded them toward the port's administration center. "Secretariat agreed that, if we smash that upstart Pitar Mura's crowd as the result of the countercasts, we'll need someone halfway friendly to take his place. Yahna ranks Mura. She's his logical successor. We've been at her for a week . . . offered her every imaginable concession. She won't play. Harkness, the young whelp, backs her to the hilt. We could take them to Mars by force but that won't work. You folks are our last hope."

"Why me?" Jeanne panted, half running to keep up with the general's long strides. "Yahna must despise me, the way I treated her."

"You're wrong." Brown actually beamed. "She's taken quite a fancy to you."

"What's the snag?" Tom wanted to know as he hurried up the steps of the great white building at a speed that made his heart pound painfully.

"Yahna insists the braincasts are a trap of some kind for both us and Mars."

"Can't she hear them?"

"She hears the Earthbound ones as well as we do, but says she can't hear the Marsbound countercasts unless they're piped in. She's tried to explain what's bothering her. She's told me over and over in that singsong of hers and in straight English too, but damned if I can make out what's in her mind. It's like . . . like talking to a, well, talking to a vegetarian about a delicious steak dinner.

"And meanwhile the fleet, what's left of it, is fueled, munitioned and ready for takeoff at a moment's notice." The Old Man ran trembling fingers through his thick hair. "The ships are sitting ducks for any sneak attack. The men are getting out of hand waiting, what with the braincasts and everything."

"What does Harkness say about all this?" Kane gritted his teeth in agony. "Slow up, please," he was forced to add.

"Sorry. I forgot your bad heart. Harkness says never to underestimate the power of a birdwoman! I slapped him in the guardhouse after that crack to learn his manners but since then Yahna has clammed up entirely." Brown stopped before a locked door and stared at the others as if they had been ghosts. "My God," he moaned, "I must be cracking up too, talking to you like this. I don't make sense anymore, even to myself. Come on in. See if you can figure it out." He opened the door.

They entered, then stopped dead, breaths catching in their throats.

YAHNA was standing before a broad window, looking sadly out over the busy field. The afternoon sun poured over her slim, exquisitely rounded body, changing its scarlet plumage to molten gold. The princess turned slowly and lifted a magnificent wingtip in salute. It actually brushed the ceiling.

"She's beautiful . . . beautiful . . . beautiful," Jeanne was whispering.

Kane, at his first sight of a royal winged Martian in all her glory, stood bemused and haunted by dreams of angels, goddesses and fair women that he thought he had forgotten since boyhood.

"Thank you," sang Yahna, advancing toward them slowly. "Will you make that silly general give my Jack back to me?"

"All right. You win," Brown grumbled. "I'll order his immediate release." He stomped out.

"Did you ever look at yourself in a broken mirror?" the princess asked. "That is the way the universe looks to Brown. I have peered out through his brain and his eyes when he did not know I was there. What I saw frightened me. With the best of intentions he can do

great harm."

"My 'mirror' is broken too, or dirty," said Jeanne. "Perhaps I can repair or clean it if you will help me."

"Don't worry, my dear." Yahna slipped a scarlet wing around the girl's shoulders. "Let us sit. I cannot stand long yet in your leaden world."

"What's the disagreement between you and Brown?" Kane asked when they had made themselves as comfortable as the Army furniture would permit.

"He wants me to go with the fleet to Mars. I will not. That way lies defeat and death for everything that is beautiful and decent in both our worlds."

"But why?" Jeanne puzzled. "Once we can stop those devilish braincasts. . . ."

"You will not stop them in that way."

"The braincasters are Martians, aren't they?" the censor demanded, lighting a cigarette in defiance of the No Smoking signs.

"Yes," she hesitated, "and no. It . . . they are Martian, but distorted . . . twisted much worse than Brown's poor mind is. I cannot quite understand or explain. On Mars we have a few creatures who think like that, but they are kept in a . . . you might call it a museum . . . as reminders of our stormy youth. It could be that Pitar Mura, the unspeakable traitor, is making use of them against still youthful Earth. All this is a feeling I have, understand, not a true thought."

"And you feel that, if we launch a full scale attack, disaster will strike both planets."

"I *think*—feel that," she said, ruffling her feathers in a gesture that implied her inability to express herself properly.

BROWN returned, followed by a grinning, triumphant Harkness. Yahna half flew across the room to wrap the latter in those unbelievable scarlet pinions.

"Couldn't we compromise," Kane suggested when the musical lovemaking had quieted and Jack was seated beside the princess on the hard couch. "The newspapers have learned that General Brown is taking the fleet to Mars . . . another of those confounded censorship leaks we've never been able to trace. People are clamoring for action. We can't keep stalling like this. Besides, we invite a counterattack with every hour the ships stay here. If I may make a proposal, sir, why not keep the fleet near Earth until we find out whether Yahna's hunch works?"

"What's a hunch?" sang the princess.

"It's Earthside for telepathy, I guess. The ships can stay just outside radar detection range, in case anybody tries to spot them, but near enough for a quick return if hell starts popping."

"No," said Brown. "There must be no delay. Every hour counts."

"Yes," said Yahna. "I will accompany the fleet only on those conditions."

"Well. . . ." said Brown.

"That's settled then," said Kane, taking quick advantage of his superior's indecision. "Harkness will go too, of course. He and Newsome should make ideal ambassadors up there. They're the only terrestrials who know the language or have any real idea what Martians are actually like."

"If the Secretariat approves," Brown nodded grudgingly.

"And my mixed-up friend Jeanne must come," said Kane. "No matter whether we return to Earth or go on to Mars, she will be the one to tell her people what we are doing and why."

"Now look here, princess," the general groaned, "Miss Freund is only a sob sister. We need a journalist who can speak with authority . . . uphold the dignity of the United Nations . . . convince the world that we are doing the right thing. Somebody like—"

"— like me," said Tom firmly.

"No!" said all the others in the same breath.

"And why not?" The censor's anger flared. "I know the communication ropes. I'm perfectly fit. . . ."

". . . to be the little piggy that stays

home," said Jeanne. She thrust out a chin which, Tom suddenly realized, was firm despite its roundness. "The trip would kill you and I refuse to be widowed before I am wifed."

"Hey!" The humor of the situation made him smile against his will. "Is this a left handed proposal?"

"Just a statement of immoral intent," the girl said sweetly as she fluffed her back hair. "I'm sure the general agrees with me."

"Well. . . ." said Brown, refusing to meet Kane's accusing eyes.

"That's settled then," said Jeanne.

"Somebody has to be in charge of security and censorship in my absence," the general agreed. "On second thought, Miss Freund should be perfectly capable of handling the reporting job."

"Keep your chin up, darling." Jeanne gripped the censor by the shoulders and shook him gently. "Also keep your eyes open. I have a hunch too . . . that you're the key to this whole mess. If Yahna is right, something's going to give shortly after we leave. And you've got to be here to catch it."

TWO hours later, after watching the U.N. ships take off, one after another, like bullets from a gun, Kane crumpled an empty cigarette package and climbed back into the 'copter. They were right, he had to admit to himself. If he had had to endure that acceleration he would now be in a ship's hospital under an oxygen tent while doctors pumped him full of adrenalin. Perhaps he wouldn't even be . . . he cursed and gunned the rotor jets.

He returned to an IBC where pandemonium reigned. The night staff had arrived in the office, but the dayside people were still milling around in the halls like lost souls.

Hyatt, who usually departed the instant the braincasts stopped for the day, was hunched over his cluttered desk, earphones in place as usual.

"What's going on?" Kane asked.

"Take that jammer out of your ear," the CAA man grunted.

Tom did so and gasped. The 'casts, which previously had died away the moment Mars sank below the horizon, were coming in as strong as ever.

"What are you doing here?" Kane's private demon was shrieking. "Out into the streets. Join the peace demonstrations. Down with the United Nations. Up the tri-planetary Anarchiate. Not a moment must be lost."

"Where's Jake?" the censor asked as he snapped the jammer back in place.

"Don't know," said Hyatt. "Richardson cracked up from the strain at last. He was too old for this job. I sent him home an hour ago. The office ordered me to stay on until relieved. Say, Tom, I've been wanting to ask you: What's a three-letter word for madhouse?"

"IBC" the other answered, just as his phone began clicking frantically.

"This is Jacobsen," said an equally frantic voice. "I can't leave the house. My wife's having hysterics. She's screaming she has to join the peace parade. I've got her locked in the bathroom. There's lot of shooting up this way."

"I'll hang on here," said Kane. "Don't worry, Jake. Come in when you can."

"I can't understand it." Hyatt flinched as three heavy explosions shook the office. "How can the 'casts keep going like this. Have the Marties finally got that transmitter set up on the Moon?"

Kane had no time to speculate. The newsroom door, which he had closed to keep out some of the racket being made by the chattering translators, flew open and Stevenson stuck his bald head in.

" 'Lo, Kane," he said, cool as a cucumber. "I see you have everything under control here. I'm taking personal charge outside. I'll have 'em whipped back into some sort of line pretty soon. Got any idea how the Marties have pulled this?"

When Kane shook his head, the smooth man withdrew his head and slammed the door. They could hear him bellowing for order in the other room. Hardly had he disappeared when the corridor door facing the elevators

opened just wide enough to allow Wolowysczki to slip through.

"Mr. Censor," he said coldly. "I would talk with you."

"Well—talk!"

"Not here." The Pole looked disdainfully at Hyatt.

Shrugging wearily at the furious CAA man, Kane followed the Commie down the hall and into a washroom.

The commentator looked into all the booths to make sure they were empty, then turned like a wild man.

"Doublecrosser!" he hissed. "Cap traitor! Betrayer of the human race!"

"What the hell's this, Wolo? Have the 'casts knocked you off your rocker too?"

"You once called me a snoop!" The white-faced man leveled a stubby finger at him.

"Now look, for the love of heavens! I have work to do!"

"You were wrong," the Pole went on triumphantly. "I am a spy."

"I suspected that, too."

"Today I am spying on Studio Q, where the countercasts are made." The words were so righteously accusing that Kane had to laugh.

"And?" he encouraged this amazing character.

"I am taking with me this meter."

WOLOWYSCZKI held up a gadget about the size of the light meters used by photographers. "It is very sensitive. It is a Russian invention like many others that you Caps are claiming to have made first. It show when energy of any kind is in the neighborhood."

"A radiation meter," Kane agreed. So what?"

"It shows that only a very little energy, enough to run the lights and the oscillograph perhaps, into Studio Q is going. It also shows—" he glared at the other— "it also show that no energy . . . not even a milliwatt . . . is *leaving* Studio Q."

"You're crazy." Tom started toward the door but the other promptly put his back against it.

"Then I am knocking at the door of Studio Q," the Pole raced on. "Immediately my meter is hopping. Much energy start radiating from inside. An engineer is coming to the door. I am telling him I look for Studio *O*. He is telling me where to go, but quickly. When the engineer close door I am waiting outside. Soon my meter is not registering again." He waited expectantly.

"I still don't get it," the censor began. "But, all right . . . go on."

"You are not understanding?" The commentator stared at him in a kind of wonder. "You are not 'in the know' as American say?"

"If you don't open that door, I'm going to sock you. I know that."

"*You don't know there are no counter-braincast being made except for show?*"

"What?" Suddenly his hatred for the man and all he stood for was no longer sufficient to block the import of what he was trying to say. Tom sank weakly onto the nearest stool. "No counter 'casts. Impossible! But Yahna hinted at the same thing!"

"No counter 'casts!" The Pole was shouting like a madman. "And now the space fleet is going to Mars. And now the braincasts to Earth no longer are stopping at night to give us rest. It is a Cap plot to destroy our Soviets." Froth appeared on his writhing lips. "To be sure I take Bertie with me outside Studio Q later. He is agreeing with my discovery. He is saying that the bias on the tubes is all wrong."

"Look, One Track," Kane stood up and spoke very quietly. "If what you say is true, then this is a plot to destroy all of us, including the Commies, the Soshes and the Caps. Maybe the Malanics and the gangster axis have teamed up with Pitar Mura. But whatever the plot is, Stevenson must be right in the middle of it. Why!" A great light dawned. "Stevenson's the only man who could have leaked Brown's plan to take the fleet out."

"Stevenson!" Wolowysczki agreed. "In my country he would be requiring

liquidation."

"So what can we do about it in this country?"

"I can be snooping some more?" The man's hard assurance had vanished.

"Do! And where can I reach you tonight if this thing cracks wide open?"

The Pole gave him a phone number.

"Good. Now let's go to work. But get this straight. We haven't become friends. We'll just wait to settle our quarrels until the Martians are licked."

"Fair enough," his enemy agreed.

"One thing more. Is Bertie a Commie?"

"Not yet," said the commentator. "But you and I and our governments will be quarreling over him long after the Martians are defeated."

IX

THEY were halfway down the hall when an elevator stopped and Bertie popped from it as though propelled by compressed air. His coat was torn and he had a black eye, but he was grinning from ear to ear.

"Hey, Mr. Kane," he shouted, "I got another clue on how Carlos was. . . ."

"Not here," the censor ordered. "Come into my private office." He led the boy and the commentator back to the washroom. "Now," he said after checking the stalls.

"There ain't no Tower Brand gin," the boy confided, his good eye shining.

"Come again."

"You remember those words on the scraps of paper I found in Carlos' wastebasket, 'incas' and 'gin Torre'?"

"Yes." Quickly Kane sketched in the background for the Pole.

"And Hyatt said Carlos had DT's and was thinking of his Indian ancestors and a drink of Torre, or Tower Brand gin?"

"That's right."

"Well, I was studying Lesson Twenty-Six today . . . that's the one on clues . . . and I got to thinking. So after work I went around to several Spanish bars."

"Was that where you got the shiner?" Tom smiled down at the earnest face.

"Nah. I got tangled up in a mob like I always do. Socked a guy who called me a you-know-what. He's got *two* shiners.

"But that's not important. Boss . . . I mean Mr. Kane . . . the bartenders I talked to never heard of a gin called Tower, or Torre or even Terro."

"It might be strictly Peruvian," Wolowysczki said. "Russia has many wines that are never exported."

"Yeah. I thought of that. So I called the Peruvian counsel and *he* had never heard of it either. So I called customs. And *they* didn't know it. You know what that means, Mr. Kane?"

"Can't say I do."

"I think we've been on the wrong track all along . . . fact is, I think Hyatt *put* us on the wrong track. Him and his crossword puzzles! He can never remember who the sun god was, or who 'Lo' was and still he comes up with a solution for this puzzle quick as a wink."

"Hmmm!" Tom was remembering things. "That's right. Hyatt never can figure out historical allusions or folklore references. On the other hand he's always right on scientific words and stuff like that."

"Yeah?" Bertie wasn't paying attention. "Well, look. Carlos was a Spaniard, see. So, if he made notes, he'd likely write 'em in Spanish. And you gotta remember those words I found were really only parts of words. Now watch this." He snatched up a bar of soap and wrote 'incas' on a lavatory mirror. Then he added 'bra' to the front of the word and 'ts' to the end of it. " 'Braincasts'. Get it? Carlos was trying to get a line on the braincasts with his ham radio set, see?"

"Oh, come now, Bertie," laughed the censor. "That's stretching things mighty thin."

"Sure it is. That's the way great detectives like me work. Let's stretch 'em some more. Just remember, now, that the Spaniards talk and write backward, sort of."

HE WROTE "gin Torre" on the mirror, changed the "o" to an "e", added "ori" to the beginning of the first word and "strial" to the end of the second.

"You get it now?" Bertie was hopping from one foot to the other. "You get it? What Carlos was trying to say before they murdered him and then went over to his apartment, busted up his set and threw away everything but two scraps of paper they didn't notice?"

"I get it!" The censor's face was white as paper. "The braincasts are of terrestial origin. What a bunch of dopes we've been."

"I always said your Cap radio station tracers were a pack of bourgeois fools," Wolowysczki sneered. "Just be careful and they'll never catch up with a clandestine transmitter."

"They never spotted yours?" Kane asked innocently.

"Of course not! I only used it. . . ." the Pole's voice died away. He glared murder and worse. Then his square face started to work. He looked as if he were going to cry. Instead he burst into a roar of unwilling laughter; the first time he had laughed since any of them had known him.

"*Gospodeen* Kane," he gurgled, leaning against the wall for support. "I'm being afraid I'm going to start liking you."

"That would probably serve me right for having been such an idiot," Tom grunted. "Meantime, let's break a few more laws and use your transmitter, in connection with Stevenson's braincast jammer, to do some spotting ourselves."

Their trip into the suburbs was a nightmare. The mobs were completely out of hand by now. Looting had started. Policemen who had not joined the looters were shooting to kill and being shot at in turn.

They managed to commandeer a taxi on the strength of their U.N. badges, but it skidded into a roadblock on upper Riverside Drive and caught fire just as they clambered from it.

A POLICE car gave them a lift until it bogged down in a mess of broken glass on the Sawmill River Parkway. The rest of the way to the commentator's apartment they walked . . . or ran when rioters chased them. It was dawn by the time they arrived.

The powerful transmitter was hidden in a trunk in the sub-basement. They lugged it upstairs and, thankful that the electricity was still on, warmed it up. Falling over one another in their eagerness, they managed to wire a directional antenna and the jammer into the set.

Wolo began rotating the loop slowly. As he did so the Voice of the 'cast mounted in intensity until it was screaming into their brains with agonizing force . . . so loud that its words blurred and chittered.

The Pole spread out an automobile road map on the floor and compared it with the direction in which the antenna pointed.

"It's loudest from Hartford," he gritted.

"That must be WJRQ, the IBC network station," cried Bertie. "Let's call the cops. Who woulda thought. . . ."

"Wait a minute," said Kane. He turned the loop a bit more. The Voice faded to normal, then came in king size again.

"That's Springfield, Mass," said Wolo, comparing the loop with his map.

"What station, Bertie?" Kane asked.

"WBTR is the only one on at this hour, I think," the boy hesitated.

"That's an IBC network's, too, isn't it?"

"Yeah. . . Saaaay!"

Hardly breathing, they continued to rotate the antenna. And every time it pointed to a town with an IBC affiliate, the 'cast roared in at them, yammering for blood.

"No wonder nobody could spot it," the Pole said at last, his tones compounded equally of fury and admiration. "The braincast wave is being modulated on the carrier wave of every IBC transmitter in the United States, on Earth and

probably on the Moon and Venus too."

"Then we're sunk," wailed Bertie. "We can't check 'em all."

"Yes," Kane agreed,"one Martian on each hemisphere of each planet 'casting from any station he pleased, could do it." He snatched a forbidden cigarette from Wolo and inhaled deeply. "But, see here," he went on, "that would be a clumsy setup. Wolo. You ought to be good at this sort of thing. If the people responsible for the 'casts were pretty certain their source couldn't be detected, wouldn't they work in the heart of things . . . in New York?"

"Certainly. But just where in New York? Some loft, perhaps?" The Pole shrugged.

"You know where I'd be?" Bertie asked. "I'd be where I'd know what was going on every second . . . I'd be . . . I'd be. . . ." His voice broke with wild excitement. "I'd be in the IBC censor's office!"

"This isn't a game of charades," rasped the censor. "Be serious, can't you?"

"I *am* serious, b— Mr. Kane." The boys lips trembled at the scolding. "And look. Here's something I forgot to tell you. Never figured out it meant anything before. Them phone jacks on Hyatt's desk that he keeps playing with all the time . . . they're dead."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, take the jacks on *your* desk, Mr. Kane. You push the plug in one place and you've cut in on the German hour. You put it in another hole, you get the French hour and so on. But the jacks on Hyatt's desk just don't plug in on *nothing*. I got to tinkering with them one night after he went home. I used your phones . . . he takes his with him when he leaves . . . I tried every hole and I couldn't hear a word of any lingo. Just got a sort of empty feeling in my head."

"Some sort of braincasting switching system, perhaps?" The commentator whispered.

"Could be," said Kane. "I've got a hunch. I'm going to phone the office if the wires aren't down. Keep that antenna pointed at WIBC, New York, while I'm doing so."

He dialed and breathed a sigh of relief when Jacobsen answered.

"Thank God you got there, Jake," he said tensely. "Don't talk. Listen to me. And repeat the Gettysburg address or any doggerel you know while you're listening. No, don't ask questions, I said. Just listen. I'm betting Hyatt is still on duty. I want you to call him to the phone in a minute. He'll come over wearing those confounded earphones and trailing their cord behind him.

"Now, while he's talking to me I want you to sort of wander around, trip over that cord and jerk the plug out of its jack. Okay! Call him over now. And scramble up your thoughts like I told you or your life isn't worth a nickel.

"Clark?" he barked a moment later. "Sorry to keep you from your puzzles, but I'm worried about Jake's wife. She's in a state, he tells me. I was coming back to the office after I had dinner and send him home. But the mob's got so thick I can't get through. Yes? . . . sure . . . I'll be there as soon as I can. But if you can find it in your hard little heart to send him home and cover for him . . . what? Who's a clumsy oaf? . . . hello . . . hello . . . ."

"What happened?" Kane whirled back to his companion hunched over the set.

"The braincasts stopped for about 25 seconds," Bertie answered.

"Nailed him!" whooped the censor. "Hyatt's our boy. Next thing is, Wolo, how far will your set transmit?"

"I've tightbeamed to our comrades on the Moon with it. But throwing that much power around in one direction will be a dead giveaway to the radio cops."

"They're probably not on duty tonight. And don't worry if they are. Just yank out that jammer circuit and tune her up tight. Here are the fleet's coordinates." He read from the jumble of symbols Brown had given him.

"Brown here," a voice whispered across the ether half an hour later.

Kane told the incredible story in

clipped sentences. At first he was met with unprintable expressions of disbelief.

But after Yahna, Jack and Jeanne had been called into consultation the general's skepticism faded.

"But," he pleaded, "a square block in the heart of New York. I can't bomb a target like that. Think of the loss of innocent lives!"

"Listen to this, sir." Kane swung the microphone around so it would pick up the screaming of police and fire sirens, explosions near and far and the rattle of gunfire. We're 'way out in Westchester. Think what the situation must be downtown in New York and other cities. The braincasters are out to upset the apple cart today. Every hour you wait means thousands . . . maybe tens of thousands . . . of deaths throughout the world. Tomorrow there'll be nothing left. You have no alternative but to hit the IBC building with a blockbuster. How soon can you do it?"

"Three hours or so." Brown sounded sick.

"Wait," a musical voice interrupted. "There may be another way. Now that we know exactly where the braincasts are originating, I think I can find good friends willing to stop them. I will speak to my people."

PITAR MURA, alias Clark Hyatt, took off his "earphone" telepathic booster, his wig, his distorting spectacles and his baggy suit and went quietly back to his home planet when five gold-harnessed Martians materialized around his IBC desk via teleport an hour or so later. He prided himself on being a good loser as well as being a good mimic and, as he said:

"I need a rest. The 'museum' on Mars is a good place to take one. And my Siriun friend will bail me out sooner or later."

The Martians were less fortunate when they went in search of Stevenson. He had vanished without a trace. One of them suggested that the smooth man might have been the "Siriun friend" to whom Mura referred, since the latter had spent his exile on a planet of Sirius. But this was never proved to the satisfaction of General Horace Brown, at least.

The morning the braincasts stopped, the world returned to something approaching normal with a sob of relief. Folks who had been banging one another over the head, looked sheepish and went home to sleep off their fighting jags. The U. N. Secretariat and the Martian Anarchiate entered into immediate peace negotiations. Even the well-organized Malanic revolt fizzled and members of the gangster axis crawled back into their sewers when their leaders were arrested.

After they had had a good night's rest, millions listened (and looked) in adoring wonder as Jeanne Freund, "their TV friend," won undying fame with her story of how the peace had been achieved. (Jeanne set a new style on that occasion by wearing a dress made entirely of scarlet coq feathers.)

Yahna came back to Earth long enough to have that wedding and ticker-tape parade. (In fact, Kane overcame his prejudice against prospective Pulitizer prize winners and made it a double wedding. That was close enough to Martian customs to satisfy all citizens of the red planet.)

Wolowysczki wrote a seventy-five page memo and was recalled to Moscow for questioning.

Bertie was promised a job with New York's Finest.

Brown, Kane and Harkness were assigned by the U. N. to cooperate with the Anarchiate in drawing up the plan for an interplanetary body tentatively entitled United Stars. Committee work has been considerably delayed because of the general's deepseated conviction that the only real way to guarantee peace in the Solar System is for him to take in the Solar System is for him to take a Fourth Expedition to Mars.

"Our little Helen may be imaginary, but she could be a lot of fun"

Upon the Stair

By J. W. GROVES

They were out in space . . . and nothing was what it seemed!

I OPENED the door of the cupboard, reached up for the bottle of lania, which was on the highest shelf. Then, just before my fingertips touched it, I tensed and swung myself round as swiftly as I could make my legs and body move.

The younger of the two, the yellow-haired one called Helen, was right behind me. She jumped, ejaculated a startled "Oh!", and then smiled. "You moved fast enough that time, but you didn't catch me there, did you?" she said almost pleadingly.

"Doesn't mean a thing," I growled. "Your conscious mind can never outguess your subconscious one, because all your thoughts start from way down there."

She sighed. "You must have it pretty bad, Jim. We've done everything we can to make you realize we're real—"

"Why wouldn't you?" I said. "That's what I'd want you to do, and so that's what I made you do."

"But you didn't make us do anything. You didn't make us at all. We were already here when you crashed. Oh, Jim, *please* try to realize it."

I didn't make any answer to that, just turned and reached up again for the bottle of lania. I took it down, uncorked it, and sniffed, trying to detect a bouquet. There wasn't any. All the same I put the bottle to my mouth and tilted. I couldn't taste anything either; but I knew that if I went through the motions of swallowing I could get drunk all right.

It's funny, the way our minds work. I've heard of cases where people in my circumstances have been able to taste and smell imaginary food and drink, but as far as I know I'm the first one who's managed to get intoxicated on liquor that wasn't there. I was glad I had the talent. It's good to be a little fuddled when you've got to spend time looking at things that should never be, like Helen Maddison, and the other one.

JUST as I was tilting my head for a second drink an arm clad in grey plasti-linen came over my shoulder, and a hand snatched the bottle away from me. "I wish you wouldn't, Jim," said Helen in a distressed tone. "You're drinking far more than is good for you."

I turned round to her again, and chortled. "Look at you. Holding an imaginary bottle, sloshing imaginary liquor around, and trying to fool me that you're real."

"The bottle isn't imaginary, Jim—"

"Then where did it come from?" I interrupted triumphantly. "The Space Admin. boys won't even allow alcoholic drinks to their radio-relay Asteroid crews, let alone lania."

"I've told you time and time again the last crew smuggled it out here. We found it hidden in a crevice on the other side of the planetoid." Helen sounded as if she was going to cry.

I turned my back on her. The cache of lania was a creation of my mind, and they'd found it because I wanted them to, but there didn't seem much sense in troubling to explain that to her. There wasn't much sense in talking to her at all, for that matter, but of course you have to do that sort of thing when you're acting out an Opp.

Helen started to say something else, but just at that moment the inner door of the air-lock clicked and the other one came in. Her name was Prudence Wells. She was stout, grey-haired, and had a complexion like a suet pudding; except, that is, for her moles. If, though, she retained enough femininity to regret being so unredeemedly plain she hid the fact quite successfully under a brisk air of business-like capability and a shrewd, biting tongue.

I grinned at her, and wondered again at the powers of the mind. Although I knew her for exactly what she was, yet I almost didn't dislike her. There was so much about her that reminded me of my mother. Oh, of course the image that met my eyes had rolls of fat and muscle and incongruous hairy patches of which my mother would have been horribly ashamed, but the resemblance was there all the same. A matter of vinegary kindliness of temperament and ruthless honesty of mental processes.

Prudence spoke coolly, and without either the reproach or compassion that Helen manifested. "Been at the lania again, Jim? You're a fool." She eyed the bottle in the young woman's hand. "And I suppose you're still trying to reform and cure him all by your pretty little self? Use your sense child. You should know by now it can't be done."

"If only I could get him to realize that we are really here I might be able

to do something," protested Helen mildly. "The instruction manual says that once out-planetary psychosis cases can distinguish between real people and imaginary ones they are more than half cured."

"And I can distinguish," I said. I know you're both imaginary, so I'm nearly better."

HELEN shook her blonde curls despairingly. "It's funny," she said. "People never used to get these silly delusions back on Earth. Yet plenty of them were alone for long periods. Up in the Arctic, and places like that."

"It's the psychological effect of distance, my dear," said Prudence knowingly. "People were alone on Earth, certainly. But they knew that company was at the most only a few hundred miles away. Out here they have to face the fact that the nearest human beings might be a million miles off. And they just can't face it, so they create hallucinations for themselves."

I laughed scornfully. The lania I felt as if I'd been drinking was beginning to have its effect on my mind, despite its purely subjective existence. I was starting to get more reckless and silly every minute. "That's a beautiful theory," I said. "But has anybody ever proved it? I've got a better idea. Know what I think is doing it? Space gremlins."

Prudence raised her bushy eyebrows at me. "What?" she said.

"Space gremlins," I retorted. "You know. Little invisible bogy men who can hypnotize you and make you see and feel anything they want, even if it isn't there. They hate human beings, but they can't hurt them, so they are trying their best to scare 'em out of space." I wobbled forward, top-heavy with the lania, and poked a rigid forefinger into Prudence's somewhat protuberant middle. "Hiya, gremlin," I chortled.

She stiffened and flushed. "Young man," she said wrathfully. "If you ever do that again I'll forget I'm a lady and hit you straight on the nose with the hardest and heaviest thing I can lay my hands on. And if you think it won't hurt because you imagine I'm imaginary, well, just try it."

I backed away. It would hurt all right. I knew that. "O.K.," I said placatingly. "And so you're not a gremlin. It must be me."

Prudence grunted. "Let's drop this silly nonsense and have some lunch. And afterwards, Jim, it wouldn't hurt you to sober up and come outside to help me repair the radio you broke when you crashed. This place *is* supposed to be a radio relay point for the outer planetary orbits."

I nodded. I hadn't been in any crash. I'd landed a ship on this asteroid just as an excuse for pretending to find those two by accident. That's the way it always happens. But I knew that I was in a real dome and that there was a real radio set-up on the arid rocks outside. And whether it required repair or not I needed to get to it to make absolutely sure that an S.O.S. went out to Earth for a psychship.

AT LUNCH Helen wasn't much company. Not that those things are ever real company, of course, but it's surprising how you learn to make them do. This time though, the girl had hardly anything to say. All through the meal she sat with a fat volume, INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE EMERGENCY TREATMENT OF OUT-PLANETARY PSYCHOSES, propped up in front of her. Then, when we had reached the coffee stage, she looked up, excited.

"Jim," she said. "I've just realized something. All sorts of cases are described in here, but there's one thing common to the lot. The people with Opps always thought their illusions were real. Now you don't think we're real, so—" She began to grow a bit vague about the line of logic she was trying to follow, and finished up with some not very expressive waves of her hand.

"You mean that if I thought you were real you wouldn't be, but because I

know you're imaginary that proves you're real." I chuckled. "That subconscious of mine can certainly hand out some funny lines of reasoning."

Helen shut the book with a thump. "Oh, you're impossible." And the tears welled up into her eyes.

"Don't take it to heart, child," advised Prudence placidly. "His Opp is a bit unusual, but he's got one all right, so you can't blame him for displaying the symptoms." She blinked at the girl from between suety rolls of flesh. "Trouble with you is, you're falling for him."

"Naturally," I said. "If she hasn't already she soon will. We Opp boys always arrange things that way."

Helen flushed, half rose to her feet. Then she sat down again. "I suppose it isn't any good getting offended with you," she said dolefully.

"None at all," I replied cheerfully.

Prudence drained the last of her coffee and rose to her feet. "That radio still needs putting to rights," she remarked. "What about it, Jim? Are you going to help us with it?"

"Be right with you," I said.

"I think I'll come too," said Helen. "I'm supposed to be the 'welfare of personnel' half of the staff, so I don't know anything about radios. But I expect I can help some way."

In minutes we were into our suits, or real-seeming mentally created replicas of them, and were slithering with low, careful steps across the rock-splinter surface of the asteroid. The radio installation was set up half-a-mile away, where the artificial gravity-field inside the dome would not interfere with it. When we reached it I looked it over. "If that thing's really as smashed up as it seems to me it's going to take a lot of putting right," I remarked.

"I don't know how bad it looks to you, but it's no five minute job even to my eyes," retorted Prudence. "Come on, let's get on with it."

"Wait a minute," I said. "I've got a better idea. Just look at me, both of you."

BENEATH the transparency of their helmets their faces showed surprise, but they obeyed. "What's the idea . . .?" began Prudence. And then her voice faded off into silence. I was concentrating. Hard. Straining to the uttermost every vestige of willpower that I had. And I could see by the blank look that came into the eyes of both women that I was succeeding in what I was trying to do.

I felt pleased with myself. I'd never tried this before, although I'd heard from other people that it could be done. I went further, focussed my imagination, made it a guide for the power of my will. Slowly at first, but faster and faster as the seconds passed, those two figures began to move the way I wanted them to. At the end of ten minutes I had them hopping and running around quicker than any normal humans ever moved, and mending that radio with a preternatural skill and speed that no woman from Eve onwards had ever evinced.

It was exhausting, though, I daresay they are right, those people who assert that it would be possible completely to get rid of things like Helen and Prudence by the use of willpower alone. But it wouldn't do much good. You couldn't keep up the effort for very long, and the moment you relaxed they would come creeping back.

However, I was able to stand the strain for as long as I needed to. Perhaps it was that fierce longing deep down inside me to get a psychship out here as soon as possible that kept me going. Anyway, although the planetoid was a fairly fast mover, having only a six hour day, I had that radio in perfect working order well before the sharp, black night-line showed itself over the near horizon.

As soon as I relaxed my mental effort those two women seemed to come to life, as I had known they would. Prudence stretched herself, blinked at the radio. "Well," she said in a satisfied tone. "We got that done quicker than I thought we would."

Illogically I felt resentful. "*We* got it done?" I said. "I'll have you know I did all the work around here."

Helen gasped indignantly. Prudence replied quite placidly: "All right, have it your own way, sonny boy. But if you did all the work I'm making up for it now by doing quite a lot of your aching for you."

We returned to the dome, dumped our suits in the air-lock, and went inside. Both the women were grumbling now about how tired they were, and Helen wandered off to get a bottle of embro-salve. I left them to it. I wanted a bottle myself, but not one with embro-salve in it.

AFTER I had fortified myself I went over to the communication panel. Radio installations and antenna have to be well away from domes, but the receiving and transmitting of messages is done automatically and the result fed backwards and forwards through leads, so that you don't have to go outside every time you want to send or take a spacegraph. I sat down in the chair in front of the panel and tapped out a brief message to the effect that there was a case of out-planetary psychosis on the asteroid and would they please send a psychship as quickly as possible.

It wasn't any use sitting there waiting for an answer, of course. Nothing but beamed power can reach as far as Earth from the Asteroids, and nobody has yet found a way of focussing a radio beam sharply enough that it can be directed to any particular spot on the planet. The transmitting apparatus would just keep fanning its beam back and forth over a wide arc while it repeated the message over and over again till somebody picked it up.

As I turned away from the panel Helen came drifting up. Her face looked grey, and there were deep lines spreading out from the corners of her eyes. "I've just come to say goodnight, Jim. I know it's early, but Prudence and I feel absolutely dead beat. So we are going to tuck in."

"That means that it's I who am tired," I said. "I don't feel up to the effort of maintaining you in existence. Well, happy non-being till I wake up."

She set her lips but turned and left me without starting any argument. I sat where I was for a little while, thinking. Then I got up and went to my own bunk.

It was about six hours later that I was wakened by a bellow from Prudence. I sat up, blinking. The fiercely brilliant dawn typical of an airless world was just beginning to creep over the edge of the planetoid. Pure coincidence, of course. Earth time was used inside the dome, and what we called morning and evening had no connection with the apparent position of the sun.

Prudence's voice came to me again. "Hey, come on out here Jim. We've got something to show you."

"Be right with you," I said as I rolled off my bunk. And in less than a minute I was decently dressed and outside the door.

Prudence was waving a thin, long strip of paper, a reply record tape from the communication panel. And Helen was behind her, looking on the whole more pleased than not, although her lips were a little tremulous.

"What's all the riot about?" I demanded.

"Spacegraph's just come through," said Prudence. "You won't have to wait until they can get a psychship out from Earth. There was one on its way back from the other side of the 'stroid belt when our call went out, and they are diverting it. It'll be here in about two hours."

"Two hours!" I snatched the message tape from her, checking it for myself. "That's right, it will too. And I was expecting to have to wait at least a fortnight. By Sol, what a relief it'll be to get treatment and watch you two vanish out of existence."

Helen shook her head sadly. "I'm afraid you are in for an awful shock, Jim."

"He'll survive it," said Prudence briskly. "Meanwhile, what about some breakfast? Think you could manage a plate of imaginary mushrooms, Jim?"

"They won't necessarily be imaginary," I pointed out. "Obviously I'm taking some nourishment, or I wouldn't be alive. Actually I must be preparing food myself and—"

"Oh, forget it," said Prudence wearily. "Tell it to the psych boys. They're paid to listen. Me, I want my breakfast."

I WANDERED away while she was dishing up the meal. When I returned both the women were already sitting down. I joined them, and smacked the thing I'd gone to fetch down beside my plate.

Helen's eyes widened. "Oh Jim!" she wailed. "Surely you aren't going to start drinking so early in the morning?"

"Surely I am," I said. "This stuff may not be real, but while I've got an Opp it affects me as if it is. And the only way I can stand the pair of you for another two hours is to get drunk."

There wasn't much conversation at breakfast after that, which suited me perfectly. While we ate I worked my way steadily down the bottle, and when the meal was over I took it with me to a couch on the far side of the dome's living-room, leaving the two women to deal with the dirty platters.

When they had disposed of them they came out again into the living-room, and went and sat against the opposite wall, as far away from me as they could get. From where I was lying I could hear the drone of their voices, but couldn't properly catch what they were saying. I gathered, though, that they were having some sort of argument.

I didn't strain myself to find out what it was about. My idea was to keep myself to myself, take a little lania occasionally, and between times try to drift into a doze. There was still just over an hour to go before the psychship came. The time would pass more quickly if I could sleep some of it

I might have carried my plan through if I hadn't created in Helen such a strong affection for me. As it was, despite Prudence's remonstrances she just couldn't let well enough alone. About half-an-hour had gone by, and I was just in that delightful half-way state between full consciousness and full sleep, when I suddenly became aware that she was leaning over me. I opened my eyes. "Go away," I said.

"But Jim," she said. "The psychship will be here soon. You wouldn't want them to find you drunk like this."

"Why not?" I asked.

That stumped her for the moment, and then she had an inspiration. "It would hold up the cure. You know people can't be treated while they are under the influence of liquor."

"They can if it isn't real liquor," I said. I closed my eyes again. "Do me a favor and go away. Just leave me alone."

It was more that she could manage. She shook my shoulder gently. "Jim, please listen to me. It doesn't matter what you think I am, if only you'll realize that I'm trying to help you. Let me mix you some antitox, and bathe your face with cold water for you. Please."

I rolled round, dropped my feet over the edge of the couch. There wasn't a chance of being able to sleep the rest of the time away now. In a raging temper I began to yell. "Will you get it into your thick head that I don't want you near me. I've put up with your company for a week because I had to, but all I'm looking forward to is the time when I can be rid of you forever. I just don't like you or anything about you. Now GO AWAY!"

She went, retreating backwards, her mouth trembling. When she had gone half-a-dozen steps her lips twisted and the tears began to struggle out of her eyes.

PRUDENCE snapped at her brutally. "Stop snivelling, you little fool. Can't you see that the fact he gets into such a rage thinking you aren't real is signifi-

cant in itself? Look him up on Earth after he's been cured. He'll soon change his mind about you when he realizes that under that nice, trim little uniform you've really got—" and she went on to name precisely various anatomical details. Helen stopped crying long enough to blush furiously. "Prudence! What a shocking thing to say."

I wasn't very shocked myself. I'm not unacquainted with the physiology of the human female, so I knew that if for any reason Helen's uniform hadn't been there I would have seen all the things that Prudence had particularized. But I was a Opp case, and Helen was what she was, so the knowledge left me colder than Pluto's pole.

By that time, though, the fumes of lania that were roiling up through my mind were really beginning to affect me, arousing that spirit of senseless mischief that seems to be in all of us. After all, I thought, if I can't sleep the rest of the time away peacefully, why not amuse myself by playing this thing right through to the end?

I put down my bottle and got to my feet. "Prudence," I said. "You've put an idea into my head. Our little Helen may be imaginary, but everything you've mentioned would seem real to me, so she could still be a heck of a lot of fun." And I dived towards the girl.

Helen screeched, and ran for the far side of the room. Prudence stepped in front of me. "Don't be a fool, Jim."

I waved my hand at her. "Out of my way, spectre." And I stepped over the foot she had put out to trip me, and went on.

Helen was gibbering as I came up to her. I made one or two feints as if to grab her, then let her dodge past me, and took up the chase again as she went back across the room. Prudence was standing still, waiting. As I went by her she tripped me more skillfully than before, and at the same time gave me a

[*Turn page*]

push that sent me staggering back to my couch. I flopped down on to it, roaring with laughter.

Prudence came over to me, stood with arms akimbo. She was slightly mollified, but still in a very bad temper. "I thought you meant it at first, till I saw you let her wriggle past you," she said. "All the same it was a pretty poor joke, scaring the kid like that."

I controlled my laughter. "And why shouldn't I scare her if I want to? I told you I was a gremlin, didn't I?"

"You're stinking drunk, and a damn nuisance, that's what you are," said Prudence acidly. "I'll be glad when—"

She broke off. A shrill beep-beep sound had begun, penetrating right through the dome; and with it a green light began to shine above the inner door of the lock. Prudence grunted, resumed her interrupted sentence in an altered form. "I'm glad the psychship *has* come."

I knew what the light and sound signal meant, of course. A ship had landed on the planetoid, and made an air-tight contact between its entrance port and the outer door of our lock. "You're not more glad than I am," I said. And I crossed the room, unscrewed the fastenings, and stepped back.

Two psychos came in, one elderly, one young, both dressed in the grey uniform of space. Prudence let out a sigh of relief. "Thank the stars you're here. There he is, over there. You'd better start knocking some sense into him."

NEITHER of them took any notice of her, of course, but the elderly one flashed a glance towards where I was standing. I adjusted in time.

Then both of them turned and took hold of Prudence, one on each side. "Now don't worry about him any more," said the older one soothingly. "Everything will be taken care of. You just come along into the ship with us."

Prudence shook herself, trying to break their grip. "Hey, what is this?" she demanded indignantly. "Anybody would think that I—"

And then she broke off. She was staring towards where she had last seen me. Her face went so white that the moles stood out like black blobs, and for a moment I thought she was going to faint.

She nodded towards Helen. "Is she real?"

"Oh yes," said the younger psycho cheerfully. "She's real enough."

"Two of us." Prudence spoke in almost a whisper. "Two of us together, and we both got an Opp. That's never happened before." Her voice became louder. "You know what that means, don't you? It's getting worse. If it can attack two people at once it could attack a dozen. A whole spaceship crew."

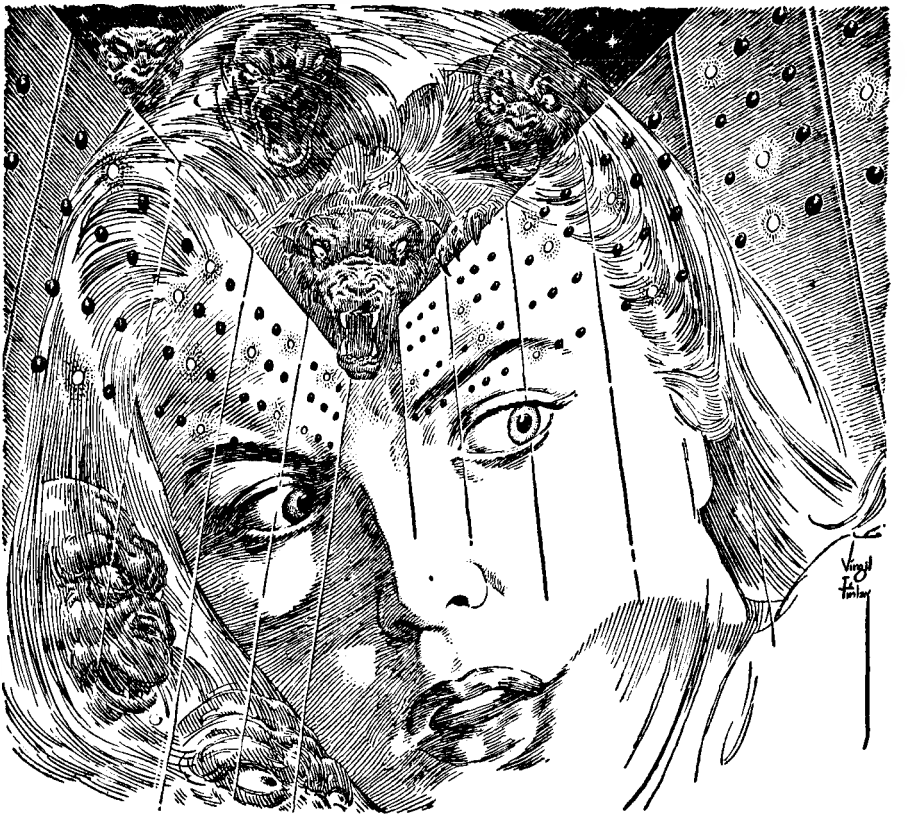
The elderly psycho patted her head. "That's not your worry, my dear. All you've got to think of is getting better yourself."

I think they'd both been ignoring Helen up to now because she seemed the quieter of the two. They hadn't realized that was simply because she had been paralyzed by sheer incredulity. Now she broke out, her voice an hysterical scream. "But this is silly. He must be real. He simply must be. He's been here a whole week, drinking lania and helping us with the radio. And only just now he was chasing me, shouting that he was a gremlin—"

Telepathically hypnotic impulses can be beamed of course. I made myself audible and visible again to her alone. "In vino veritas, you know," I said chattily. "Actually gremlin isn't our own name for ourselves, but then there isn't really any equivalent term in your language. Unless you'd prefer energy-pattern intelligences—of a malignant nature of course."

Then I laughed at her, a really satanic laugh adopted straight from the villain of a three-dim teleshow that had scared her back in her forgotten childhood. She did quite a lot of screaming after that. The psychos were still struggling to hold her fast enough to make a hypo injection when I got bored with the whole thing and left for home.

MARGINAL ERROR



It was a society with a gearshift for a heart —and Chinwell was definitely out of gear

IVY McCORD had huge, vacant eyes.

"Yes, dear, I'll have another one," she said to the waitress, and she nipped, with sharp, even teeth, at the seam of her left glove. "I suppose I have time for one more," she said to Mildred Breen. "I don't think three's too many, do you? After all, dear, there's only about this tiny bit of whisky," she illustrated with her thumb and forefinger, "in each one." She pulled down her glove and looked at her miniature wrist watch.

Mildred toyed with the remains of her first old fashioned.

"Of course," Ivy said, putting one nylon sheer leg over the other, "I suppose you think three's too many?"

"No," said Mildred mildly.

Ivy began to swing her leg nervously. "You were saying—about the

By Kris Neville

new mechomaid, dear—"

"You're bored, aren't you?" Mildred asked.

Ivy hesitated the smallest fraction of a second. Then she shrugged.

The waitress came with the cocktail. Ivy opened her red purse and found the correct change. "Thank you, dear," she said.

After the waitress had gone, Mildred said, "You ought to come down to the Culture Center more often."

Ivy studied her drink and puckered her lips in amusement. "Ralph asked you to talk to me?"

Mildred said nothing.

"Oh, well," said Ivy listlessly.

"All right, Ralph *did* ask me."

"Dear, it doesn't matter. You've known me for years. You've a perfect right to talk to me about anything you like." She half drained her glass.

"The point is, you shouldn't be bored."

Ivy put her glass next to the coaster, making a small, wet ring on the linen. "Did Ralph phone you? Or meet you somewhere?"

Mildred bit the inside of her lower lip in annoyance.

"Perfectly ridiculous," Ivy said, reaching for the glass. Her leg continued to swing spasmodically. "Perfectly." She finished the cocktail, having drunk around the cherry. "There's nothing wrong with me." Nervously she lit a cigarette and blew smoke at the ceiling.

Mildred pushed aside her glass. "Actually, I was thinking of seeing you before Ralph phoned. I wanted to ask you to take a little trip with me up to the Adirondacks next week. The children will be away, and Kurt is in Canada for the rest of the month. It would be nice for us to get together again like that."

Ivy, her huge eyes still vacant, said, "Thank you, dear, but if you don't mind, I'd be bored utterly stiff, every minute. I'm sure you understand. . . ." She peeled back her glove lazily and consulted her watch again. "I really must be going; it's almost time for Chinwell." She stood up, smiling distantly. "I know you'll understand." She tugged at her glove. "I wouldn't want to miss him. I hope you'll excuse me? Well—good-by. . . ."

"Good-by," Mildred said.

Ivy turned and walked rapidly out of the café, hips swinging decisively.

RALPH McCORD worked with a cigarette hanging loosely from the corner of his mouth. His pencil skipped rapidly, subdividing the manuscript of the speech into representative sections. Twice he consulted the compensated word count and rhetorical index tables at his elbow. By the use of a random chart, he selected five short sample passages from each representative section by marking them with five colors: blue for semantic content, red for logical development, green for emotional quality of delivery, brown for cultural integration and black for psychological constants. Having finished that, he transcribed the excerpts according to color.

He put the original manuscript in the simplified file cabinet across the room. The files were well kept. Unlike the workers in the News Section, and to a greater extent, the Book Section, Ralph was not forced to remove material every other day in order to change the audience-reached index. Speech Section dealt, except for rebroadcasts (usually pre-estimated), with a once determined, unchangeable audience-reached figure, which made it the easiest Section for manuscript filing, and consequently the Section with the most orderly files.

After having locked the cabinet, he began personal delivery of the excerpt pages to the proper rooms for numerical conversion.

He was required to process the green excerpts himself, and after delivering the blue and red, he entered the green room, located the correct direct-speech tape from the library of the day, put it on the synchronizer, inserted his excerpt page, set the dials, pushed the button—and waited.

There was a garbled quacking as the

fast playback went into operation: and from the right side of the synchronizer the excerpt tape came out in irregular spurts. He clipped this off when the fast playback was over and inserted it in the speech analyzer for numerical conversion. In a moment he received the final results, which he put into the green room delivery box on top of the accumulation of similar results from the rest of his shift. He closed the lid, slipped the carrying strap over his shoulder and continued on his rounds.

Entering black, the final room, he said, "Thirty for today, Mike."

"Good," said the slender, narrow faced clerk. He took the excerpt page, checked it against his chart, and passed it to the operator, who began the complex breakdown. "If you're all through, stick around a second, and we'll go up and monitor Chinwell's latest."

The operator completed the breakdown; he passed the work to his assistant, who ran it off on the numerical converter.

"We'll get this one," Mike said, "and I can drop my delivery box off at Central, too."

The operator's assistant brought the strip across the room. The excerpt now read substantially the same as all the other converted excerpts, a row of numbers: 0010001, 1001000, 1111101.

"Good," Mike said, dropping it into his own delivery box. He stood up. "Let's go."

THERE was an input Central for each of the information gathering Sections; and, in addition, there were four output — or questioning — Centrals through which the Machine transmitted its stored knowledge. They connected to the one vast, isolated building on Knob Hill where the Machine, itself, was housed.

At the Speech Central, as at other input Centrals, the five converted color excerpts—the number varied from Central to Central—were typed directly upon the transmitter boards, and the job of the input Central was finished, and the Machine was current.

Mike and Ralph deposited their delivery boxes, and the woman at the desk checked out the two rooms.

Smiling, she said, "If you want to wait a couple of seconds, it's about time for the Security Report."

Mike glanced at Ralph. "Want to wait? We may as well."

"Okay by me."

"You'd be surprised," the woman said, sorting out the strips in little piles, "at the interest everybody's taking in Chinwell. My, my!" She squared a pile. "Just yesterday my little daughter, Julia, she said to me—"

"There's the warning light," Mike interrupted.

Across the large room, the light was blinking red; the wall panel slid silently open, revealing the screen outlet of the Machine. Input operators suspended their typing, and the supervisor halted her conversation with the repair technician, who was trying to fix a disconnected input typer. Activity ceased altogether; everyone turned toward the screen, waiting.

There was a low hum, and the loyalty line flashed upon the superimposed graph. It was a descending red gash, and the findings of the previous day were magnified into bold relief at the loose end. The line ran from the right hand reference, pre-Machine 5, to just a little under two and a half: representing a halved function since the Machine began existence.

"It's holding its own," said Mike.

The woman at the desk, staring across his shoulder, said, "No. It's actually down a little bit—not much, though."

The loyalty line wavered and vanished; the panel slid to; the Machine had reported to its Masters.

More to himself than not, Ralph said, "You'd think it would be up."

"Let's go see what the old buzzard has to say," Mike said, satisfied.

Walking down the corridor, Ralph said reflectively, "It seems silly for him

to waste all that energy. He must know it's not going to do any good."

"The lunatic fringe," said Mike.

Ralph, Ivy McCord's husband, looked down at the polished floor and said nothing.

"I'm glad we have them down to two and a half per cent," said Mike.

IN THE monitoring office there was an unusual number of people. The master tape recorder unrolled silently to itself on a direct line from the receiver; a transcriber hummed softly on another direct line; and on a third line, the pick-up camera (a check against General Video, whose operations were closely integrated with Speech) rustled moving film.

Otherwise it was silent in the room except for Chinwell's voice, and motionless except for his kinetic video image.

The voice was harsh, grating and naked, demanding full, fascinated attention.

The two men made their way quickly to the far wall and depressed a pair of seats; then, sitting down, they began to watch as closely as the rest.

One member of the audience glanced nervously around the room, eyeing suspiciously the particularly tense faces, as if to say: Will you be converted, you with the thatch of yellow hair and the just too-lax mouth? Seeking to penetrate into a secret that lay beyond the Machine, itself: Which ones? (The Machine told other things: the number of people who would commit suicide during the next quarter; the percentage of those who, upon reaching sixty-five, would die.) Looking around, studying the faces, the man seemed to be thinking: which ones? you? you? you? Or—me?

Ralph shuddered, listening; and then the speech was over and life picked up momentum with each clock tick and eyes brightened from the dazed dream state.

"Hand that to him," Mike said, "He's a damned fine showman."

"They shouldn't let him go on talking like that!"

"Drive him underground?"

"I know," Ralph said wearily. "I've read the *Revolutionary*, too."

The *Revolutionary* was a volume in the Philosophical Series, fact-inference checked for validity by the Machine. It contained the following passage upon the subject of supression: "By nature a revolutionary is an exhibitionist, and unless drastic coercive measures are employed, he will openly announce his every intention. Such measures, themselves, tend to be self defeating, however, for three principal reasons: by narrowing the allowable margin of freedom, they place a premium upon conformity and eventually upon mediocrity; persecution, per se, tends to create a sympathy among a certain segment of the population for the cause itself, where without persecution, no sympathy would exist; and third, repressive measures would make it more difficult to gauge the effect of the revolutionary upon the climate of opinion. Accordingly, suppression should be applied only in a Twenty situation when the existence of the government is actually endangered, and then only long enough to permit the climate of opinion to regain its normal balance. It is to be noted, psychologically, that the revolutionary may be expected to attempt to force suppression by becoming more extreme in his position as popular support declines, an attempt which, if successful, would serve only to reward him with martyrdom in compensation for personal failure. . . ."

"No," Ralph said, resuming his thoughts after a pause, "I don't know what I meant, I guess. It just seems to me that this way he can reach *all* the—the lunatic fringe."

"So what?"

Ralph did not answer. Automatically he began to trace a bell curve on his trouser leg: the useful figure that records the incident of morons and genii, of totalitarians and anarchists, of followers of Chinwell and blind worshipers of the Machine, determined from an

established, average base for a given culture. He drew a fingernail across one extremity of the curve. "Two and a half per cent."

"Eh?"

". . . . nothing."

He moved his fingernail idly up the slight crease that was the curve, up to the twenty per cent maximum, beyond which lay a revolutionary climate of opinion.

"I was thinking of the ones he's converting every day."

Mike shrugged. "A few doh't matter; the over all percentage is falling."

"Damn it!" snapped Ralph irritably, "how would you feel if someone you knew began to believe him? It wouldn't do much good to realize that it was merely a quantum, a necessary unit in the total Statistic!"

"I guess not."

With a nervous gesture, Ralph riffled the pages of a Statistic Bulletin on the table at the left; glanced, without seeing, at the careful compilation of informed conclusions, as valid as the facts were valid.

"Aw, hell," he said. "I'm just gloomy. It kind of gets you, sometimes. Things. Forget it."

"Sure. Chinwell's just a tempest in a teapot."

"Not to the tea," said Ralph quietly after a minute.

AT home Ivy was reading the paper when Ralph came in; she turned a page lazily. "Hello."

"Hello," he said.

She did not look up as he walked across the room to his chair. She turned another page.

He settled into the chair. He lit his pipe slowly, taking great care to see that the whole tobacco surface was properly ignited; he puffed smoke idly, studying her. When the tobacco was ash, he tapped the dottle into a plastic ashtray where it lay smouldering.

He said, "What are you reading about?"

She rustled the paper. "Someone in Africa, the paper calls him 'Little Chinwell.' "

"I processed it today," Ralph said. "I didn't think it was such a very good speech."

She said, "There's an article here on a man in Poland, too. Czerniak, the Prophet." She folded the paper and placed it on the chair arm.

"See. There's a lot of people." Suddenly her wide, vacant eyes were shining excitedly. "See. There's a lot of people thinking like Chinwell!"

"Not many," he said mildly.

"How can you know that?"

"The Machine. . . ."

"I don't care what the Machine says; I mean, how can you *know?* How does *it* know?"

He began to tap at the smouldering dottle. "Did Milly come by this afternoon?"

"Yes."

"Oh?"

Annoyed, Ivy reached out for the paper again; she began to toy with it in her lap: folding in one of the corners, and then refolding the corner again, over the original fold. She creased and recreased each fold deeply.

"Did she ask you to go to the Adirondacks with her?"

"Yes," Ivy said sharply, pressing her fingernail deliberately along the latest fold.

"And what did you say?"

"No."

Ralph stood up. He came to her chair and looked down at her.

"No!" she said more emphatically.

"There's some things we've got to talk about."

Wearily she put the paper aside. She reached for a cigarette. When she lit it, her hand was shaking. She blew the smoke toward his face. "Go on."

"You're changing, Ivy."

"I am?" she said carelessly.

"Did you hear Chinwell again today?"

"Yes," she admitted with equal carelessness.

"Listen, Ivy. Do you believe in what he says?"

"That the Machine is evil?"

"And other things."

"I don't know," she said.

"What do you mean by that? You don't know?"

"What I said!" she snapped, irritably grinding out her cigarette. "Suppose I do? Then what? Some of the things he says. . . ."

"What things?"

"I don't know. . . . oh, about modern people being bored. About life being too orderly. About the Machine taking all the fun out of living."

HE WALKED to the far wall and began to study the original Colberg, a gift to them from her parents. It was an impressionistic picture from Colberg's dark period. Half-light glinted on dull metal at the center, and shadows shaded the metal into a peculiar, living, vital roundness, as if it had some human quality, a softness, an understanding in addition to its cold, metallic existence. In the background there was a lattice of wires, a blood-red filigree: as if they were a living circulation system for the central metal.

"You were never bored before you began to listen to him," he said.

"I was," she said. "I think I was. I just didn't know what was the matter with me. He seems to open your eyes to things—to explain you to yourself in a way you never understood before."

He followed the gleaming metal into the shadows, tried to discern the sharp outlines that should be there but which were blended away. "Why don't you start going around to the Culture Center again?"

"That!" she said almost hysterically. "My God, that place!"

He flinched at her voice. "You don't read anymore, either."

"Read," her voice dropped bitterly.

"Well, why not," he said. "You've got the best training. . . ."

"Training," she said flatly.

"I suppose your parents shouldn't have spent God-knows-how-much on you; I suppose you want to throw away all they've built up?"

"I hate them," she said.

"Ivy!" he said. "Don't talk like that!"

"I do. What's wrong with saying it if I do? Why do you keep standing there looking at that stupid picture? It's a *stupid* picture."

"You used to like it."

"It's a stupid, stupid picture!" she said excitedly.

"What do you want? Ivy, I can't figure out what you want." He turned around.

"I'll tell you what I want. I want excitement, that's what I want!" She stood up and paced the room. "People like me aren't built to live like this! I want to be alive!"

He stared at her blankly.

"It's like being—being cooped up by walls that say: do this now, brush your teeth next! Listen to this program now; that, tomorrow—"

"That's not fair."

"Do what's good for you! Take this, use that, avoid the other! Oh God, I don't see how anybody can stand it!"

"Listen," he said, stopping her with his hand. "You're wrong. Most people don't feel that way about it."

"Most people, hell! Most people don't matter a damn! Most people don't live! Who cares about most people?"

"You're talking just like him. Next you'll be saying that it's all right to murder! Is that your idea of—of *fun?*"

"It might be," she said. "If you have a reason." She faced him, her breath hissing between her teeth. "Yes, it might be all right if the person you killed didn't matter!" She shrugged his hand off her arm. "We weren't suppose to live by any law of a Machine! We weren't made for that kind of law. We were made for the law of the jungle, like Chinwell says! We're made for emotions! We're made to feel!"

"Shut up!"

"Chinwell says. . . ."

He slapped her in the mouth, then,

bringing an ugly red welt to her cheek.

Slowly she lifted her hand to her face; she rubbed the cheek; her wide eyes narrowed with emotion. Her chest was heaving. "Why . . . why did you do that?"

"I—I don't know. I'm sorry. I—"

"Kiss me," she said, licking her lip where it was cut.

He started to walk away.

"Wait!" she said, holding his arm. "You're right! I don't believe in Chinwell! I don't believe in what he says. It's you I believe in, don't you see that? It's you I'm in love with!"

RALPH stopped working and glanced at the pile-up of manuscripts in front of him. He looked at his watch. He drummed his pencil in annoyance that he should be behind schedule. He went back to work.

After a moment's hesitation, he circled a word group with the red pencil. Then, in indecision, he glanced at the random table.

"Damn!" he said, crossing out the circled words. Once more he studied the chart, and this time, when he bent to the copy, he was very careful. And having circled a new word group, he rechecked. Then he fumbled at the page, trying to turn it; in exasperation he ripped it across the body of the text. He found some tape and repaired the tear. He resharpened the black pencil, wetted it with the tip of his tongue, stopped, brushed at his hair, dropped the pencil, bent to pick it up.

The buzzer on his desk intercom sounded stridently. He straightened up guiltily and flicked on the speaker.

"Hello," he said curtly.

"Ralph, this is Alan."

"What's wrong?" Ralph snapped.

". . . . that's what I called you about."

"Yes?" Ralph said, rubbing his hand nervously along his leg.

"The Chinwell script of yesterday; the Machine acknowledged our excerpts with the suggestion that they were inconsistent."

". . . . well?"

"Don't be so damned touchy," the voice said with faint irritation.

"I'm sorry. I—sorry."

"A check showed that you had the excerpts off. Quite badly. So we had to make the Machine reject, and we'll have to run it over. That takes time."

Ralph said nothing.

"I see you're a little behind with your other manuscripts. Are you feeling all right?"

"Sure! I'm fine!"

"Okay, okay. I think I better send a checker over."

"You can—"

"Can what, Ralph?"

"Nothing! I—nothing. I'm sorry, Alan. I guess I'm not quite up to par today, after all. I'll be extra careful. Sorry about the Chinwell mistake. Sorry I snapped at you."

"That's all right. Even the best of us, you know . . . I'll send a checker over anyway."

". . . . all right."

"That's better, Ralph. See you."

"Good-by."

Ralph stood up and went to the water cooler. He drew a full cup of water; he spilt some, drinking. He crumpled the cup and let it fall into the waste chute.

He went back to his desk.

Idly he began to fold in one edge of the paper; he checked himself.

"*Damn* it!" he said, shaking himself.

By the time the checker arrived, he had finished the one manuscript and was working on another.

"Hello," she said, crossing to his desk.

"Hello," he said sullenly.

"I see your cigarette's burning a place on the desk."

"Eh? Oh—yeah." He picked up the cigarette butt and crushed it in the ashtray; he rubbed his finger over the burnt spot. "It must have dropped out; I was working and didn't notice."

"It's not a bad burn."

"No. You wouldn't notice. . . ." He looked down at the manuscript. "What did you want to see?"

"Your files," she said, extending her hand. "I'm Jo Anne. You're Ralph? I've heard Alan speak about you."

He took the hand, and under its firm pressure, responded. He stood up awkwardly. "The files?"

She laughed a bit, reassuringly. "Please don't mind me. Really, this is very routine. I do five or ten a day."

"Never on me—before."

"Well," she said, puckering her lips, "you've been extraordinarily efficient."

"I wasn't fishing for a compliment!" he snapped.

"Oh? Weren't you? We'll get along famously."

"Come on, I'll show you the files."

"Thanks, Ralph.

THEY crossed to the steel cabinet. "These are the most recent ones," he said. "Last month's are over here. June's here, and before that, they're down in General Filing."

"General Files have already been spot checked, so they're okay. I'll just look through these few, here."

She pulled out the drawer. "I really don't expect to find anything, you know. I'll bet I run fifty of these things before I find an error worth mentioning." She bent down. "They're very neat. That's a good sign: if you keep neat files, with all the edges shook down, like this, it shows you're a very tidy and meticulous person. . . . I read palms, too, on my off days; appointments on request." She picked up a manuscript. "Let's see, now." She scanned the preface data. "You're about thirty-five, I'd say. Married ten—no, make it fifteen years: you're the sort that marries early." She leafed through the manuscript rapidly. "Happily married, too, I'd say? Well—aren't you?"

". . . . yes," he said.

She glanced at him out of the corner of her eye. "Born in a state west of the Rockies; showed a flare for basketball in high school. . . ."

"You've looked at my records," he accused.

"Uh-huh. Feminine curiosity."

"Or routine?"

She put back the manuscript. "There, that one was all right."

"You talk like you're half psychologist."

"The other half is great speckled bird," she said, reaching for another manuscript. "Do you listen to Chinwell? I rather like to, myself."

"No," he said. "That is, not often."

"I think he's relaxing."

"How in heaven's name can you check those things and talk?"

"Schizophrenic," she smiled, putting back the second manuscript and reaching for a third.

"I'll let you alone."

"Please don't. I don't mind. Stay here and talk to me."

TWENTY minutes later, when she had finished with the check, she said, "There!"

"Did you find many errors?"

"Oh, no. No more than you'd expect. A word inclusion here; an exclusion there." She scribbled a note in her tiny note book. "They were all in Chinwell's stuff."

". . . . is that significant? I mean. . . ."

"No. Should it be?"

"No—of course not, no!"

She smiled. "Sure?"

"Well, my wife . . . sure."

"Well," she said, closing the book, "good afternoon, Ralph." She held out her hand.

Letting go of it, he said, "Good afternoon."

He walked back to his desk and started to work; some time later Alan called him again on the intercom.

"Who was that girl?" Ralph asked.

"Jo Anne? Just a checker."

"Yes, but. . . ."

"Smart girl, don't you think?"

"Listen, Alan, what in hell's the idea of sending her around to find out if I'm listening to Chinwell? What do you think you're doing? If you want to accuse me of—of being a—some kind of

a disloyal fanatic, why, damn it, say so like a man!"

"Now, now, Ralph. Use your head for a minute. Do you think we'd dare let a man we didn't trust completely feed material to the Machine? You know that the only thing that can wreck our program is falsified data. Think. The very fact that you've got your job is proof positive of your loyalty."

"It's my judgment, then. . . ."

"Don't take it like that, Ralph," Alan said. "Listen, boy, I'm recommending a two week vacation for you. I think that's all you need."

Ralph swallowed. "Now, wait a minute!"

"To tell you the truth, we've been getting a few more errors than are usual, lately, and we want to be on the safe side. You know how narrow the margin of error we work with is. We don't want to exceed the Machine's automatic compensation under any circumstance. Better to be safe than sorry, you know. So don't take this as anything personal."

". . . . I see."

"I'll send around a replacement for you in about an hour."

"But—"

"Have a good time," said Alan heartily.

"Listen, Alan, *please*. . . ."

"In case you're interested, Jo Anne suggested that you and Ivy fly over to Europe for a week."

Alan snapped off, and Ralph sat staring at the intercom without moving. After a while he stood up and walked over and locked his file cabinet. Then he brought back the key and placed it on his desk.

SO THEY vacationed you. You see, the Machine is beginning to get you, too!"

She had been drinking; he could tell by the half glassy stare in her eyes, which had widened with surprise when he had entered the room: as if he had almost caught her doing something she wished to keep hidden.

"Not the Machine," he said.

"Maybe not directly," Ivy said.

"I thought, after the other night, we weren't going to talk like that any more."

"I . . . forgot."

"Have you been listening to Chinwell again?"

". . . . no."

"Are you . . . never mind, let it go."

"No," she said sullenly, crossing her legs.

He went to his chair, looked down, puzzled. "Where's my pipe? I thought I left it right here when I left."

"Your pipe? Oh, yes, your pipe. I sat on it. I mean, it slipped off on the floor and I stepped on it. Broke the stem, right at the whatyoucallit—shank."

He was silent for a moment.

"I wish you wouldn't drink so much, Ivy."

"Drink? I don't drink so much."

He sat down and took out a cigarette. "I'm sorry about the pipe. It was a good one."

"You can get another one."

He lit the cigarette. "Say, Ivy, what would you say to you and me running over to Europe next week?"

"I don't know."

He put the cigarette down.

"I'll think about it," she said.

"Where's the Colberg?" he said, noticing that it was missing from the wall.

"The Colberg? Oh! You want it? I'll get it for you."

She left him, and he stared at the place where the picture had been hanging for years.

When she came back, she was carrying the silver sweetmeats plate. She had cut up the Colberg in narrow strips, and it occupied the center of the silver plate like a serving of tossed green salad.

"Here's the Colberg," she said, holding it out to him.

He stared at the plate for some time. Then he said, "I don't want it any more."

"I'll throw it out," she said.

"All right."

Ralph was trembling as she left the room.

He stood up and went to the window; he pulled it open savagely and stared out into the sunlight.

"Just this afternoon Chinwell said . . . ." she began with a petulant note in her voice.

"I thought you said you didn't listen to him."

She was standing behind him, and he could hear her breathing.

"I . . . all right, so I told you a—fib."

He turned slowly.

She tilted her face to his. "What are you going to do about it?"

He licked his lips. "Nothing."

"You're going to let me . . . to let your wife lie to you?"

"What can I do about it?" he said levelly.

". . . . nothing, I guess."

IVY crossed the room with quick, jerky movements. "I don't know whether to believe in Chinwell or not."

"Please," he said wearily. "Let's not talk about it."

"But some of the things he says. About the basic nature of man, and the rule of the strong, and the quest for excitement."

Ralph started toward her, and she came to meet him, eagerly.

"Chinwell says that the Machine is destroying man."

"He's a crackpot," Ralph said evenly.

"No, he's not!" she defended. "Some day the Machine will have to *fight* him!"

"No."

"Some day, everyone will have to choose sides. Whose side will you be on, when that day comes?"

A nerve quivered in his cheek. "Nonsense."

"It's not!"

He looked down at her.

"We're emotional," she said. "We don't give a damn about percentages and reason."

"Danger is reasonable or not reasonable. It's not emotional. Chinwell can't do any harm . . . except to a few lunatics."

"Chinwell says—"

"Shut up! *Shut up!*"

Her face flushed. Coming closer to him, she said breathlessly, "Chinwell says—"

He drew back his hand, and she tensed, waiting. He let his hand drop limply to his side.

"Chinwell says that—"

He turned away.

For a long time she was silent. Then, "Whose side will you be on?"

He did not answer.

She came to him. "I thought you were a man!"

He said nothing.

"I'm going to leave you," she said, her huge eyes wide and expectant.

He did not move.

"Chinwell says—" then, disappointed, she said, "I'm going to leave you! I couldn't stay with you! Not if you feel like you do!"

Still he said nothing.

"Listen to me," she said. "Listen to me. You're not even a man. I love Chinwell, do you hear! I love *Chinwell!*"

Muscles in his jaw moved again.

"I said I love Chinwell—can't you hear? What are you going to do?"

Silence.

"I love him," she whined.

Silence.

"Damn you, do something, do something, *do something!*"

"Please go," he said.

After he heard the door slam, he went to the desk and sat down.

It grew dark slowly; chill air came in through the open window.

He wandered aimlessly about the gloomy apartment.

WHEN the phone finally rang, he was in the kitchen listlessly brewing coffee. He hurried to the front room.

"Hello. I knew you'd—oh. Who?" His face grew ashen. "Oh!" he said dully—"you think it may have been part of a plot to intimidate the personnel of the

Machine?" he repeated, scarcely understanding the words. "Yes, yes. I'll be . . . I'll come right over to make the . . . the identification. . . ."

He hung up. He stood motionless. Then, mechanically, he picked up the receiver and dialed.

"This is Ralph. Alan, have you heard it yet? My wife, she was just . . . just killed. By one of those fanatics."

"Oh, God!" Alan said. The phone was silent for a second. "This is terrible. I don't know what to say. Ivy? I can't believe it. Anything I can do, Ralph?"

Ralph's face was gray, his lips trembled. His body shook. "First they drove her out of her mind and then . . . and then they . . . they killed her. We've got believe it. Is there anything I can do, to stop that swine, do you hear?"

"The police will get the murderer, Ralph," said Alan calmly.

"It's Chinwell! He's behind it!"

"Quiet down, Ralph. Take a minute. Maybe he is. If he's broken the criminal law, they'll get him. But as long as he hasn't done anything but talk. . . ."

"I'm going to see that rat gets what's coming to him! I don't give a damn what the Machine says!"

"You're hysterical, man!"

The coffee in the silex began to spew over the hot plate. A smell of burned coffee grounds came from the kitchen.

"Listen!" Ralph screamed. "Can't you see? I don't give a damn about statistics and averages! The bastard was responsible for my wife's murder!"

The law will handle it, Ralph. There's nothing you can do. The police will catch the murderer exactly as they catch any murderer. . . . Look at it this way: Murders are bound to happen. There are fewer today than before the Machine. The Machine's policy aims at the eventual elimination of—"

Ralph was shaking so hard he could scarcely hold the phone. "To hell with that! To hell with that!"

"Listen, Ralph, what you're asking for is vengeance. The Machine provides justice. You want the greater of two evils. The Machine sees what is best for society as a whole. We can't afford to wreck our whole program for an individual."

Ralph was crying.

". . . . phone me back," Alan said. "You'll stop thinking with your emotions after the shock wears off. It's horrible, I know, and I can imagine how you feel right now. But you'll see I'm right, Ralph, just wait. I want you to call me if I can be of any help, and I'll. . . ."

Ralph hung up. Leadenly he crossed to his desk. He took out a sheet of stationary. He began to scribble his letter of resignation.

He stopped. He looked up. Remembering Alan's cool words, his face slowly hardened with cunning and hatred. There was a new, fanatic gleam in his eyes.

He burned the half finished letter in the ashtray. Then he put on his coat and left to identify his wife's body.

The water boiled slowly away from the coffee. . . .

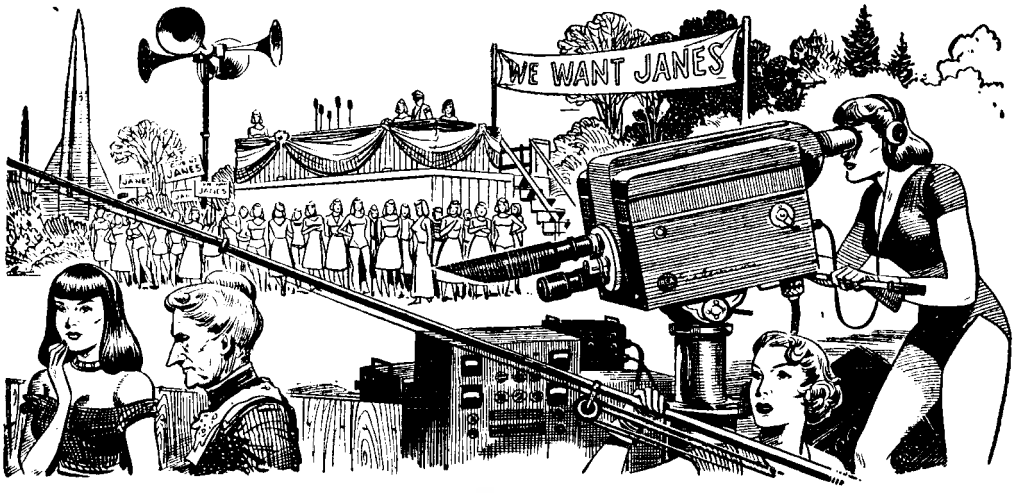
"This," said the officer, "is a warrant for your arrest"

THE CONQUEST of

He was a past master in the art

of interplanetary fraud — until he

encountered an interplanetary broad....



JANES

A Novelet by **R. J. McGREGOR**

I

IT IS essential first to examine the critical years of Quincy Pinkerton Janes, Doctor, Professor and Prophet—and at various other times circus barker, collegiate football hero and hustler—to appreciate the drama of his emergence.

In a war-torn world, all but divested of eligible males, the clamor for peace had seemed a clear-cut-call. And so Janes, ("rhymes with rains") tapping the public pulses with the legal aid of P. J. Bascomb, had founded the University of Theopolitical Science; rather hurriedly had conferred upon his colleagues and himself appropriate-sounding titles and degrees; then had erected suitably mysterious "Martian Temples."

In all fairness, it had been Janes' simple intention to make a few millions from these phony trappings and get rich. When, however, his fictional "Message" was widely mistaken for Inspired Truth in its wildfire spread around the globe, and when the vast fortune started rolling in, Janes' humanitarian instincts had helplessly compounded his fraud.

He probably would have survived in grace had not science jumped the gun by a century in announcing the first man-carrying rocket to Mars was set for launching. Since his book had been accepted as Inspired Revelation of Mars' whole warless economy, and since the returning rocket would be unlikely to corroborate this, Janes frantically pulled strings.

Failing to prevent the blastoff, he took the only other out. Being badly in need of a hole to hide in, he managed to sign aboard Rocket I hoping to find that hole on Mars.

However that ill-fated ship was lost. No trace of it or any human life on Mars was found by Rocket II two years after.

When, ten years and six months later, Janes walked into the IP station on mur-

dered Mars hoping to trade a load of jubjub hides for passage to Earth, he sent a terse exploratory message to B. J. Bascomb, his attorney:

IS THE HEAT OFF?

Signed,

Q. P. JANES.

He had no way of knowing that his spacegram was intercepted by high government sources who forged this seductive reply:

HAIL THE CONQUERING PROPHET. ALL IS ROSY. COME.

Signed,

B. J. BASCOMB.

Good old Bascomb. . . .

"WILL ALL passengers please disembark," droned the female captain unnecessarily, since Janes was the sole human cargo.

After six months in space he had a fine speech prepared. And one glance out at the holiday throng bursting the spaceport fences and now jamming around a speakers' platform decked in the distinguished colors of Theopolitical University, wiped away all doubt of his welcome.

One big sign blazed:

WE WANT JANES.

Carefully he opened a small jar of Martian red dust (a scarcity on that cold, grey planet) and sprinkled it over his metal boots, jodhpurs and explorer's jacket—they'd love that touch.

He strode down the gangway, a small striking figure, silver-thatched and middle-agedly athletic with honest blue eyes in a noble face.

But why weren't they cheering? And there, behind the crowd—back near that flock of air limousines—was that a riot going on? There were the mikes and cameras. But where was the welcoming committee, and where was B. J. Bascomb?

Behind him the ship's crew started noisily unloading the cargo of Martian gems and jubjub furs (more exquisite than synthetic ermine) and in the middle distance the sea of faces just stared. Perhaps his eminence made introduction unnecessary. Customs might have changed. He noted the preponderance of be-jewelled dowagers. Was that a raspberry back there? He beamed, saluting the cameras.

"Women of the world," he began in the grand manner, "from ten years in the Red Dust of Mars—" (here he casually flipped the dust from his jacket) "—I bring you greeting, and the greatest secret of the universe—"

These words were entirely true, and he was filled with a fine warmth of honesty in uttering them until a bruised and puffing cluster of black-uniformed men wearing badges engraved LOYAL POLICE broke through the crowd bearing a document.

"This," wheezed the leading officer, handing it over with a flourish, "is a warrant for your arrest."

It occurred to Dr. Janes that this was going to be one of life's more difficult moments—a throwback to his circus days. And the cop's face was a study in triumph as he grasped Janes' arm and shouted above the sudden tumult:

"The wagon's right over there!" and began to yank him toward it.

"What is the meaning of this outrage?" cried Janes. His face was purpling as he flung the hand from his arm.

"I'll read you the warrant," the officer grinned, gripping a microphone.

"Don't you dare!" Janes warned him.

"Use of the mails to defraud, conspiracy, Income Tax evasion—"

"This shall not go unchallenged in the courts," cried Janes.

"You ain't kidding, Doc."

"You'll hear from my attorney—" Janes continued his martyr act but with a diminishing conviction in his abilities.

"Oh, pipe down," the cop growled, "you're out of range of the microphone anyway."

"Women of the world," Janes focused his final broadcast plea, waving his free arm, and it seemed his message got through. Because the nearby crowd suddenly consisted of furious dowagers flailing with parasols and purses. Purpose-

ful ladies who slugged it out toe to toe with an ever increasing number of police. But in the end Janes heard the wagon's doors slam him in. The rotors keened as he zoomed away, shackled.

II

DURING THE interval in which Janes was manhandled at a remote and otherwise deserted precinct station, and booked before a seedy functionary on the various charges, he continuously demanded his constitutional rights. The Loyal Police, in answer, made unmistakeable knife-like gestures across their throats, then flung him unceremoniously into a dusty cell. The turnkey who slammed the steel door paused, as though torn by inward struggle. Then the man cried, "*Rah, rah, rah!* Amalgamated Males!" and stomped away.

Janes, who had been in numerous tighter situations, curled up on the concrete and promptly fell asleep.

Amid the sound of nearby sporadic gunfire Janes sat up. This was a mistake, for a slug curiously like a miniature fission bomb sizzled past his ear and bloomed into a blue flash that liquidated the cell door—a Martian needle gun. Then footsteps echoed down the spidery corridor.

A plump and vastly familiar gentleman bustled in and handed over a business card engraved B. J. Bascomb. Good old B. J., scarcely changed in eleven years. Those same fishy grey eyes, hairline black mustache and florid, high-domed moonface. A bit heavier, but bouncy—

Janes would have cried out a happy hullo. He would have fallen on the attorney's neck in gratitude, but for the glassiness of eye in which there was no gleam of recognition. The man shuddered.

"The government regrets," began B. J., licking his lips, "this shameful attempt to discredit you in the public eye. Your kidnapping by the underground has been avenged in blood, oh, Prophet."

"Drop that "prophet" stuff."

B. J. glanced over his shoulder, then fought down his trembling. "Nearly seven years ago," the attorney intoned as though reciting a prepared speech for a critical audience, "when Rocket II returned from Mars, the old government brought quite an indictment against Theopolitical University, its entire staff, and especially you. The statute of limitations, though now dissolved, is still respected by a renegade few—such as those who brought you here for kangaroo justice today. Any questions?" The attorney glanced around uneasily and stood mute, a hollow man likely to collapse.

"What about my late colleagues at the University?"

"Tried to take over the new government and so died. Spies are everywhere," said Bascomb. "I can't say more here, except that on-the-spot executions are frequent. Guard your tongue!"

He took a big breath and bustled away as he had come.

Thus forewarned, Janes was not altogether surprised when he turned to see the strapping, Saxon-haired wench behind him cradling the needle gun. A shoulder patch on her scant uniform

Question Marx

CONVINCED as we are that comedy is one of the highest arts, we have been disconsolate and sulking ever since the Marx Brothers ceased functioning as a team. With McGregor's THE CROOK IN TIME (SS for November 1952) our flagging spirits revived—here was Marxian material if we ever saw it. Now comes CONQUEST OF JANES and we guarantee it to be at least as zany as THE CROOK. If it confuses you—cheer up, you're normal. It's supposed to.

—The Editor

bore the mystifying legend, MIDDLESEX MAIDS. She must have been standing there all the time. From habit, Janes appraised her up and down until she thrust the muzzle to his ribs and said, "Move!"

He moved as six more uniformed females approached and herded him into the deserted judge's chambers and down through a trapdoor under the carpet, then into a waiting underground land cruiser.

The vehicle darted out of the tunnel into traffic. In the sudden light Janes squinted around at his interesting new captors.

"May I smoke?" he asked.

"Here's a butt." The redheaded one on his left thrust him a pack.

He nodded thanks and puffed, observing that this girl was by far the more bosomy.

She noticed. "Oh, oh," she announced, "the great man has a roving eye. Naughty, naughty!" She waggled a finger amid cackling, superior laughter.

"Where's my lawyer?" he asked later.

"He wants to see his lawyer."

More laughs.

Just then the cruiser rounded a corner and met a pounding shower of antiquated machine-gun slugs. There was a man crouched in an alleyway behind the spurting gun. Janes acted on instinct and found himself in a forest of shapely legs on the cruiser floor.

"Don't worry, the car's armored," the redhead grinned. She called to the driver, "Stop!" The car skidded and stopped and Janes, from the floor, watched her kneel on the seat and fire once through the rear slit.

"Got him!" she chuckled.

The car surged forward.

Reluctantly Janes relinquished his floor position. He sat. He asked no questions. They volunteered nothing.

Without further incident they sped into the most exclusive suburb, through a towering steel gate. They penetrated deep into the wooded grounds of one of those currently popular architectural revivals, a feudal castle, complete with moat, drawbridge, battlements. The only jarring note to Janes was those occasional glimpses he got of bare-legged female sentries parading in transparent body protectors and shouldering buzz guns.

The car wheeled across the lowered drawbridge. He gasped as he peered down at crocodiles wallowing in the moat. In the inner court parking lot he was permitted to step out.

"You'll be comparatively safe from assassins here," the redhead confided, "barring incidents such as fission bombings."

"But why?"

"Ask Benedict J. Bascomb," was the curt and ominous rejoiner.

ACHIEVING SOME measure of tranquility, Janes settled down in his ultramodern suite and after a stiff, handy brandy, relaxed. On the color tri-di video a Dr. Zarnov was advocating full psychotomic treatment for all remaining rebellious males, while in full view of the camera a fierce woman covered him with a needle gun. Fascinated, Janes drank in every word. Zarnov knew his stuff.

Some thirty minutes later an elegantly heavy dame entered. She ignored him and reached into her bosom and did something. Without further warning she jerked the whole flabbery business out and flung it on a chair. She slipped the gown over her head in a formidable poetry of wiggles and flung it, too. Then she thrust a self-lighting cigar between her carmine lips, snatched off her wig and revealed the fabulously-painted face of B. J. Bascomb. The attorney jerked out a handkerchief and mopped some of the hen-coloring from his features.

"I didn't dare talk in that jail," he panted. "Those trigger-happy dames would just as soon—" He shivered and sank into the chair on top of his costume. "Gimme a drink."

Janes poured and handed over the drink. But his hand was shaking. He

yielded to a spasm of laughter. "B. J.," he guffawed, "with you in the room in that get-up a man's not safe. B. J., you're beautiful—"

The attorney leaped up and did an angry little dance, turning blue with rage. "Go on, you hyena, laugh!" he shouted. "No man is safe anywhere. You won't think it's so funny when I tell you." He grabbed his drink and gulped it down. He kicked aside his erstwhile disguise and sat, visibly calming himself from the toes up. "Janes," he choked, "if only you knew. If you could only guess what you've done—"

"It's plain enough," said Janes. "But you. Sending me that come-on spacegram. HAIL THE CONQUERING PROPHET. ALL IS ROSY. COME—"

"Not me, Q. P. *They* sent it. But you can still play ball here and save your neck. And maybe mine, too."

"I'm good at new games."

Bascomb had got the physical calming exercises worked up as far as his purple neck. He leaned his head back, taking deep breaths, eyes closed. Finally he said quietly, "Janes, you started this damn thing with your phony Martian Message."

"Me!" Janes exploded. "Listen, B. J., who gave me advice? Who goaded me on? Who plugged all the loopholes in the university? You were the mastermind. 'We'll make millions,' you used to say."

There was an interval of silence as B. J. thought this over. Then he said: "I always knew you'd show up alive. Rocket I disappears. But not you. Rocket I carries some virus that kills every last Martian. But you come back. And you come back shouting you've got the greatest secret of the universe—what lousy scheme now?"

"On the level this time."

"I believe it," Bascomb cried bitterly. "You always could fall into a rose and come up smelling!" He pounded the table, again threatening to turn purple. "It was all you, Janes. You were the front. It was your fatal charm that led the gullible old biddies on. Your honest face, Janes. Now look at us." B. J. blinked a few times. Then his fishy eyes began to twinkle as of old. "I suppose, though, it was inevitable." He sighed. "History repeats. They've always won. You and I gave them an inch, but dammit they've grabbed man's world. Man's galaxy. They've even ruled Mars off limits to men—except land owners."

"I noticed that when I crawled out of my hole."

"You should have stayed down. Amalgamated Males'll murder you in a week. And when they catch wise I'm negotiating attorney for them, as well as the Feminine Federation—" B. J. closed his eyes tight. "But I'm cleaning up. Million dollars an acre, that's the dames' price on males for Mars land. I've already got me a title to forty acres. I can pick any location." Bascomb leaned forward, his face fanatical. "How about it? A little jubjub ranch, just you and I. I can pull strings and get an absolute no-trespass clause. Maybe, if we live, we can sneak away from Earth. Partners. Live out our declining years with no dames allowed."

FOR A time, immersed in this rosy dream, the two men sipped their drinks, refilled and sipped again. Insidiously the blessings of alcohol came and abided. Suddenly Bascomb pounded his knee.

"The True Martian Message!" he gasped. Little trickles of tears besmirched his moonface. He almost giggled.

"Women of the World, Unite for Peace!" Janes bawled. "Hell, it stopped war, didn't it?"

"Stopped everything, blast the hags." B. J. bent double, conquered by chuckles. "They got a corset around government, after your blueprint. Two great world parties now. And the Feminine Federation fixed the franchise so they outvote Amalgamated Males twenty to one. Straight out of your book, old pal. You were kidding about on-the-spot executions, but they stop crime. Iron rule by

the *Eternal Six*, topped by the *Immortal Mother*." Bascomb clutched his quaking belly. "*Immortal Mother*, Heart of the World. Janes. You should see the old bat—the black-hearted phony. Crooked as we ever were. Power-mad. Richest, oldest thing alive, I'd guess. And you've seen her military, the Middlesex Maids, first organized in that historic English county, now staffed by two million muscular, man-killing molls. Fanatic, blood-lusting babes. Oh, my sweet, sweet, sainted Aunt Minnie, Janes." He sobered suddenly. "Janes, we've got to get out of here!"

"I'm thinking of staying to recoup for the men."

"Not these specimens. They're soft. They deserve everything they got."

A thoughtful silence set in. Bascomb finally broke it:

"I'll tell you why we've got to get out. It wasn't really your Martian Message that did it, that's why. That was just a springboard, a snowball. We men were *all* responsible since the fatal day we foisted them the franchise. Ever since they've grasped and clutched at wealth and authority while men kept getting softer. You were useful as the movement's Prophet, a figurehead. But no more. And me—I've done some fancy two-way stretching to keep my head, I'll tell you. Hoping you'd show up, dodging both sides. Forced to hide in world headquarters, behind the skirts of Mrs. Theodotia van Swope III, once glittering star of the Four Hundred, now Immortal Mother. I was her fair-haired boy till you showed. Now she wants you. She's got you. So dwell on that one a while, Prophet. Consider your exalted state, and live a little before the execution!"

III

AN INDISCREET and boisterous gong bludgeoned their reverie, and the door opened to reveal a Middlesex Maid lieutenant who eyed Janes as if he were a pinned biological specimen.

"Her Fertile and Pacific Majesty awaits you," she announced. "In the throne room." She stood there.

Janes arose. "Allow me a moment to compose myself."

"Majesty dislikes waiting," she said, then stepped out.

"The girl is so right," snickered Bascomb. "Her Fertile and Pacific Majesty," he whispered. "Go, Prophet. On to the throne room!"

"Wait for me," said Janes. "To pick up my pieces."

"I'm too much of a coward to go anywhere." The attorney poured himself another drink, smirking, shutting out the world, including Janes.

Flanked by two maidens more military than any ancient Buckingham guards, Janes went. They emerged from the passageway into an antechamber where a pair of statuesque Elite Virgin Guards smartly flipped to their lips two silver trumpets and blasted a Wagner motif.

"The Prophet awaits without," shrilled a clear voice further in.

"Let him enter."

His escort motioned him through an arched oak door. Mindful of the ancient piratical custom of plank-walking, he trod the crimson velvet carpet into the spacious, gloomy hall. There was a massive crackling fireplace, a sprawling oaken table, and on a raised dais the jewelled throne. Holding that down in synthetic ermine robes trimmed in jubjub was Theodotia van Swope—Her Fertile Majesty. Her crown was crusted with priceless Martian glitter. She leaned toward him, probing with dark piercing eyes.

At least the old bag had style equal to her trappings, Janes admitted. He could only calculate her age as too much. He recalled historic tri-di videos and, in the style she probably demanded, he knelt until he felt the sceptre smartly rap his skull.

"Majesty," he murmured.

She let him kiss her fingers, then as he waited she frowned over his shoulder and bellowed, "Clear the chamber!"

He heard the doors close. Her eyes

prickled up and down him. She was gripping that sceptre like a bludgeon and he was thinking that even a starvation diet couldn't reduce this cow.

"So you're the Prophet," she said in a cracked but rich contralto.

"As fate allowed, Majesty."

"I see that you're an adaptable man," she said. "It's quite possible that I can use you in this racket."

He blinked.

"Don't look so startled. Surely you don't believe your own lies—and mine, do you? Well, do you?" She stamped her foot, and Janes saw that it was a formidable foot.

"I," he said, "am speechless."

"Well, don't be. I've opened a plush spot in this set-up for a Prince Consort. Consider that."

"Is an authenticated Prophet of no value, Majesty?"

"Not since I've cut the ground from under you today with an edict. I've broken you to the status of a man—than which there's nothing lower."

"So I've heard."

Like the classic *Thinker* she braced her powerful jaw on jewelled knuckles and outstared him. "You have intimated in your deplorably-interrupted arrival address that you have something I want, Janes. Be sensible man and play ball like a good boy."

"Consider me on your team."

She clucked her tongue and smiled unpleasantly. "In my gentler moments, you know—I'm quite approachable." Her voice cracked. She paused to let the innuendo sink in.

"Meaning in plain words, exactly what?" he smiled.

"You impertinent snip!" she rasped, brandishing the sceptre. "Think about it while you roam the castle. Try to escape and you'll be shot. You'll have dinner with me on the terrace at six—precisely. Meanwhile adapt yourself to a romantic frame of mind!"

"Yes, Majesty." He bowed solemnly. As he marched out he could hear the old witch chuckling.

I SEE the Prophet still retains his head," said Bascomb slyly as he handed over a fresh drink. Janes came in and dropped in a chair. "But she'll move in on you fast. She'll get your secret. Me—I've been sweet-talking myself into that Prince Consort job, but I bow to your superior whatzis." The lawyer's voice dropped a strategic octave. "You won't forget to featherbed me, old pal?"

"We're partners," Janes reassured him. "Thick and thin."

"Then," Bascomb smiled, "we've got to level with each other and map out a getaway, quick. Here's my viewpoint: Rocket II reported no trace of Rocket I. Found a hundred million one-year-old Martian human skeletons. Dead, we assumed, from some Earth virus. Cold, flu. Terrible tragedy . . . have another drink. Meantime the dames here grabbed control. Outlawed science. Limited Martian exploitation to a bit of gem mining and jubjub trapping—to tickle their vanity.

"Now comes the weird part: After Amalgamated Males got you indicted, Rocket II came back and cleared you. Your phony book about woman-ruled Mars and no wars was every word true. And now we have an Earth duplicate." He pounded the table. "You knew, Janes. You'd been to Mars." His jowls quivered and he shook a pudgy finger in Janes' face. "Traitor!"

"Thanks for your viewpoint," said Janes dryly. "Here's mine: Eleven years ago man-dominated civilization sweltered in the fortieth decade of a warm war. In this sick and faithless world I had a vision. How else would I have written such a book?"

"You had visions of dollar signs, Q. P. And spare me the self-justification."

"When," said Janes, "our organization got rolling good we were confronted by the announcement of Rocket I. You, B. J., and the University Board voted on it—remember? You'd denounce it and get out. They'd stay and try to ride out the storm. I was most vulnerable as top man and would have to go. You got me

that berth on Rocket I."

"So far," said Bascomb, "check."

"Six months in space was tough, B. J. That all-male crew was politically on its toes and it made no bones about what fatal accident would befall me on Mars. So when we landed I made it a point to steal the rocket scout and move far and fast.

"I landed after dark and was captured by a roving band of savage women. Two days later I escaped in the scout. But meanwhile Rocket I had blasted off. I was low on supplies, fuel. Everywhere I flew I saw millions of people—all freshly dead or dying, from what looked like the sniffles. Then I picked up this faint radio signal, homed on it. Found it came from underground in a volcanic crater. I landed on top. Vegetation around the crater mouth looked recently burned. Then smoke started pouring out.

"The thing was erupting with me there on top. The ground started shaking. Guess what came out of that big hole? Rocket I, straight up, then over the horizon wide open. I put on a set of shoulder jets and eased down inside. No wonder the place stunk. I thought the hundreds of little jubjubs were scavengers. They weren't—they don't even eat. The crater mouth had a huge mechanical door inside, left open. The place was the home temple of Martian Mother, B. J., exactly as described in my book. Familiar. I deduced that while I'd been lost and exploring in the scout, the Martians had captured Rocket I and had brought it inside the crater while the population was dying. I found every crew member, but two, in a stockade down there—poisoned. Revenge. The captain had kept a journal.

"As for me—I'd found my hole. And I wanted to solve the mystery of that familiarity. I hid the scout inside, closed the mechanical crater doors which were powered by an underground river. The place had good air, light, stored food. I dumped about a thousand corpses of temple personnel downstream. Then I spent ten years learning, studying old records. Now comes the odd part: In the Martian Message I'd described the temple, the government perfectly, up to a point. My book didn't sketch a priestess-eunuch religious utopia like they had. In my book Immortal Mother was symbolic—not actually forty thousand years old.

"And my book said nothing about Mars' lost science, B. J. Relics remained. Like one small spacecraft—a getaway job. And a gadget called the *Sacred Seed* that could restore a woman's youth indefinitely, with some mixture of radiations.

About fifteen years before I showed up, two priests had stolen Mother's Seed. They'd blasted off in the spacecraft and had hidden that seed. Never came back. Which left Immortal Mother stranded with her years. Things on Mars were getting tight, desperate. And that's when I coincidentally batted out my book. I say I had a vision. You figure it out."

The attorney sat silent for a while, then he sighed.

"Why should I figure anything when I can just sit here and drink?"

IV

"YOUR MAJESTY." Janes kissed her hand on the terrace. There was a bird's-eye view of the city, clouded by her rampant mood.

"How nice of you to come," she remarked pointedly.

After a glass of light wine-tea and some polite moments she suggested a tour of the castle. He started to nod.

"Splendid," she cried, as though it had been his idea. "We'll begin with the underground level of World Headquarters and work our way up."

She took his arm and led the way to an elevator, then down an underground corridor to a panel. She pressed a tiger's tooth which released a hidden door. She tugged him inside.

There stood the guillotine, dark-stained and casting a grotesque shadow. Particularly he noted the head chute.

"Shall we continue the tour or dine

Immediately?" she asked brightly.

"Perhaps a drink or so beforehand?" he managed.

"Splendid. We shall postpone the tour."

Moments later on the terrace they faced each other. Janes clutched his glass and mumbled, "to you."

"To me," she acknowledged, then gaily cried, "My, that was a quick one! Here, I'll ring for the sheman."

"Majesty," he said hastily, "since providence has provided the bottle, please, no." He seized the bottle and poured himself two rapid lifters, toasted her with each, gulped each. Then, as courage osmosed into his innermost he studied her. He looked into her hungry, baggy, crinkle-lidded eyes, her spider-webbed, crowtracked, wobble-jowled face. Where youth was lacking, she had character. He observed the great, billowing, scantily concealed bosom of historic quality. Her general figure he had categorized as impossible.

"You observe a woman thoroughly as a man should, though as few men do," she smiled. "If you elect, you may have ample opportunity in the future." At this candid bombshell she coughed up a giggle which quivered the bosom alarmingly.

"Majesty," Janes croaked, "surely I am unworthy."

"Have another drink, then. And consider. In the Superior Sex Society which has recently evolved here under my guidance, the structure clearly calls for a union of the separate races of woman and man through the Immortal Mother and a Prince Consort."

"That," he pointed out, "was not in my book."

"I interpolated it," she smiled. "Her Fertile and Pacific Majesty must have moments of solace from affairs of state."

"Of course."

"Until you reappeared, I had considered Bascomb."

"A fine man."

"Unsuitable," she snapped. "Especially since I found you." She leaned forward revealingly, secretively. "Do you believe in love at first sight?"

He shoved his chair back with an unfortunate reflex.

"What is the alternative?" he asked flatly.

"Another castle tour, beginning as this one did."

"I would be honored," he said quickly.

"The tour?"

"The marriage of convenience to weld the union of sexes."

"Those are not my terms," she glared.

"Majesty," he said softly, "though you may doubt it, I am not a man of amorous habits. I have led a celibate life."

"Which," she smiled, "might account for your robust and remarkably preserved physique—were it not for the fact that you have had three wives, all strapping, lusty wenches. And each divorced you on grounds of philandering! I've interviewed them all."

"Your research ignores the possibility of exaggeration."

"Nonsense! Oh, I know all about you, you gay dog, you! Bascomb could never live up to your reputation. And I believe that you're an understanding man, a flexible man—" Fires which should have long ago been quenched flared in her eyes. "So think of me in terms of true marriage—an example to the realm—including the customary honeymoon voyage, of course. Here's the bottle."

NOW HE began to see the point behind her indirection. He lingered over the drink, hoarding each drop, rotating the stem between his fingers. Finally he said:

"I cannot refuse such attractions, Majesty."

"Splendid!" she cried. "Then you may propose to me." She poured herself a drink and looked coyly at him. "Well, go on, man!"

"Majesty," he said bravely, "will you marry me?"

"Of course," she beamed. "Name the day."

"Perhaps in a few months."

"Nonsense. First thing in the morning we blast off on our honeymoon. An example to the world!" She banged the sheman's bell. She clutched his arm. "Come." She led the way down the elevator and into a room brimming with cameras, microphones and people.

James realized that his proposal had not come as a complete surprise. Immediately a female official, amid suitable pomp, began to wed them.

Once, during the crucial interval, the bride caught his glance and it seemed in that instant she waxed younger, warm, approaching beauty. In that moment his mind reeled. For a time he considered the possibilities of a back door, but a memory of crocodiles welled up. The ceremony progressed to a critical point. His brain spun blank. An outside force moved his lips to say "I do" to the obedience-cherishing clause.

Amid muted cheers she led him through an exit. She warned him of the folly of attempted escape, informed him that their marriage-in-fact, in so far as she was concerned, would begin with next morning's honeymoon trip. She bade him a businesslike good evening and started to walk away.

"Oh, yes," she said, turning. "Now you may call me Teddy-with-a-"Y" for Theodotia, you know. And I think Kewpie is cute for Quincy Pinkerton."

"Goodnight, Teddy," he said.

"Goodnight, Milord Kewpie." She left him at his door.

The ex-Prophet felt sudden pangs. At all his other weddings there had at least been food.

A Middlesex Maid appeared and let Janes into his quarters, then bolted the door from her side. There was Bascomb, and there was food. The barrister waved a winestick.

"Welcome to the wedding feast," he hailed. "You were great!"

For a time the men eyed one another over the meal, at first suspiciously, then with a sort of miserable clairvoyance.

"Start talking," said Janes.

Bascomb gazed at his shoes. "Well," he said. "all I've done is smooth out things for you and old Fertility—things that had to happen anyway."

"You're acting as *ex officio* Prime Minister. You knew she'd grab me, marry me. You kept me in the dark."

"Bullseye. I wanted to spare you, pal." Bascomb chewed the winestick. "She really believes that bunk about immortality. My orders were to pump you into spilling the Seed's hiding place. I failed, but now that you two are wedded —no more secrets." He grinned, rubbing his neck. "And I'm still alive."

"The public will demand we take one of those honeymoons-around-the-moon. That fits her plan nicely. I can guess, once we're swallowed up in space, where this honeymoon will end if she has her way."

"At the Seed. You just function as guide on a ride." The attorney clenched his hands. "In her plan—you walk home."

"Others have tried that."

"But this gal is no amateur. How do you think she climbed so far so fast? By sweetness? She does tri-di shows and she looks and talks to the cameras and something funny happens to the whole world. Anything she says is great. Voodoo. She can look at a man and—"

"On the other hand," Janes cut in, "there was once a hypnotist. Called himself The Great Eye. Offered a thousand dollars each performance to anyone who could withstand him on the stage. I collected twelve times and he blew his brains out."

BASCOMB spread his hands. "All right. Yours will be the greatest honeymoon ever. Regular love-epic. Female poets will immortalize you. After Teddy trades your secret for a coffin you'll be a great hero." He leaped up, waving his hands. "Damnit, Janes, you've got to hold out! I trust you to figure an escape for us both. I've tried to help. I've hidden a needle gun under the loveroom mattress. Left side. I've checked up on the ship—the Glory

Globe. Looks like any standard trial honeymooner, but it's got audio-magnetic drive, fast as light. Auto star-chart index built under the mattress. Just punch a course. Ship feels out destination orbit and gravity and sits down on a level spot. You'll also notice Teddy's taking along some emergency spacesuits with attachable shoulder jets. Tell me *that's* conducive to love-making—"

"So she thinks the Seed's buried in space?"

"Isn't it?" Bascomb tensed, then getting no answer, sighed. "Have a coconana." He peeled one and bit off a chunk. "Look." He stabbed the delicacy at Jane's chest. "Mars up there. Off limits to men, but with influence like mine and a million bucks an acre, I can fix it for us. Including exclusive Martian jubjub exportation rights—if you can survive this honeymoon and provide us with transportation." Bascomb's expression was that of an arch-conspirator.

"Trust me for transportation," said Janes grimly. "Because the next inning in this ball game's going to be mine. One thing, though. On our ranch—no women."

"Shake on that, pal!" Bascomb ripped open a briefcase. "I've written that into our partnership contract. You sign and write in the legal boundaries—forty acres—around that temple-crater of yours, and don't worry about the money part."

"I have it memorized." Janes started penning it into the triplicate contract. He read all the fine print but found nothing suspicious, finally signed.

Documents complete, Bascomb prepared for departure to file them at the IP office. He rang for exit.

"Oh, Bascomb—"

"Last request?" The counselor gave a sickly grin.

Janes nodded. "A Dr. Zarnov was on tri-di today. Get him in to see me tonight with full medical kit."

"Any groom deserves that much, pal. Consider it done." As the Middlesex Maid ushered the attorney out he waved. "In case things go sour, pal, it's been nice."

The door slammed him out.

V

JANES AND his bride early next morning swept grandly over the goggling millions in a bullet-proof, bomb-proof flying limousine. He got a glimpse of the honeymoon port snuggled at the city limits, a huge bowl of glittering silver balls, now as much a part of marriage as the wedding band and bank transfer.

As they feathered down beside their Glory Globe, Janes observed that scurrying in and out among the watchful ring of armed EVG girls were a few last-minute male technicians and a haggard version of Bascomb.

"Coming, Kewpie?" his bride asked, as guards prodded him.

They boarded and found the sweating Bascomb lingering in the loveroom. His eyes, even behind dark glasses, looked panicky.

"We need no lawyer on this trip," observed Teddy, adjusting her hat.

The attorney drew Janes aside. "Here's your copy of the deed for the jubjub ranch. Luck." He handed over the papers, then scuttled down the ramp, hiding his face from the cameras.

The wedding couple stood briefly at the open port while the whole world looked. Then Teddy took over. She touched a pair of studs. There was a tiny upward thrust, increasing, noiseless. Janes memorized the simplicity of controls, an obvious essential on such trips.

"Well, don't just *stand* there," cried Teddy. She poked a stud that slammed him to the floor. She, braced for the upsurge, gazed down as they blazed clear of atmosphere and into the deep twilight outside. Then her brusque manner softened. She swept off her hat and neutralized the stud to let him up. "Now I've got you," she crooned. "I'll go slip into something more comfortable."

She ambled into the loveroom.

He took advantage of this idle moment

to study the controls, fascinated as the magnetic space-lines pulsed green on the power screen. This incredible speed —reserved exclusively for love—while the regular Mars rocket wallowed out there six months each way. And these compulsory trial honeymoons at government expense, the bride having sole option to back out, in which case the rejected groom had the duty of supporting the lady until her ultimate marriage to a luckier man, or her death. And next week—immortality!

In Janes' several previous matrimonies it had been chiefly the Four Fifths Clause which soured him. Four fifths of a man's income withheld for the wife. In those good old four-fifths-years he now realized men had had it lush. And he had been three times a resounding cad for selling divorces to his wives. Recently he had been fighting a feeling that a man must settle down sometime, but now as Teddy came out, this feeling froze.

Her sleazy ensemble was fortunately not revealing. It was traditionally Martian. Her hair, dyed raven, was swirled about her skull in a weird birds-nest. Her dark eyes brimmed triumph now. Exotic perfumes exuded. A Martian music tape tinkled somewhere.

"You know who I am," she said simply.

He bowed. "Immortal Mother, Heart of Mars—Dejia Talus."

"We nearly met once before. I was aware of your aura nearby when I blasted out of the temple in Rocket I. I took two corpses of crewmen with me to confuse pursuit, sank the rocket in the Atlantic, fascinated the wealthiest old man, bought tri-di networks, and took over, thanks to your groundwork, the Martian Message."

"Which you somehow dictated to me from Mars."

"With my apparatus it was easy," she smiled. "And quite necessary. One of my high-priests had an old machine through which he glimpsed the future and foresaw the Earth virus tragedy. We could not prevent it. I did the next best thing—inspired you; used the rocket's virus medicine all on myself; transferred operations to Earth. But sometimes I miss Mars, my husband."

"Your prisoner."

"You knew too much. I had to shut your mouth, and to get your secret, Kewpie. Stop being so stuffy and come here." She attempted to sweep him into her arms.

He turned quickly and pointed through the port.

"That moon over there. It's not Earth's."

"Phobos. Isn't the Seed hidden there?"

HE GAVE no answer. Instead he popped into his mouth an emergency measure, a hypno-pill given him last night by Dr. Zarnov. He gulped it down.

"What was that you swallowed?"

"Space sickness remedy," he lied.

He felt her probe his mind swiftly, like a keen blade, yet softly, akin to the inspiration he had known in writing the Martian Message.

"I won't bother you again." Her voice was soft. "Here we are together, alone and we hardly know each other." She smiled. "It's getting late."

"We just took off," he objected.

She glanced toward the loveroom door. "You've had a hectic time." Her mind lashed him once. "You need rest."

"I could use some sleep."

"Not sleep!" she snapped. She curled strong fingers around his arm. "You can be more flexible than this, Kewpie."

She came close, staring into his eyes. He fought her will and felt a chunk of his own fade away. Damn Zarnov's useless pills!

"A good rest, Kewpie," she was crooning, "so you'll be fresh to explore Phobos with me."

"The Seed isn't on Phobos."

Then he realized, vaguely, that he shouldn't have said that.

"Where, then?"

"—I—won't—tell—"

He was a small boy, refusing confession to mother, wallowing in guilt.

"You will tell."

He heard the words bubbling out as from faraway tape:

"On a tiny artificial planetoid in an orbit around between Mars and Jupiter. Very simple to reach . . . planetoid's actually vault built by priests . . . only I know combination . . . takes two to force entry . . . you and I—"

She gathered him in her arms and kissed him. "You dear, dear boy." He could feel her powerful emission of gloat. She swung him around in a daffy-downdilly dance. "Youth," she croaked. "Say you love me, Kewpie!"

He honestly did.

Then abruptly he felt her close in rapturously upon herself, releasing him in shock. But at least he hadn't told her exactly where yet.

"But you will," she cried, pouncing into his thoughts, "you sweet, dear boy."

He mopped his face. His resolution to restore males to at least equal status seemed crushed. Yet he must not yield.

"Accept it, you fool!" she flared. "Stop fighting the superior sex!' Then her face softened. She pressed the gravity control stud.

VI

HE SAW her jump a fraction off the floor in anticipation. Quickly, but too late, he tried to imitate her jump but even his small reflex sent him zooming toward the ceiling. His head crashed the dome and he pushed off cautiously toward the floor. Here she came sailing up, arms outspread like a football tackle. He eluded her with a straight arm and watched as she went on up, then rebounded, twisting like an enormous cat. She came down in a power dive.

"You can't get away, Kewpie," she laughed.

He headed for the control panel intending to restore gravity. But he missed and caromed off a port padding and bounced right toward the closed loveroom door. She flashed past him, grasped the door handle and opened it. He sailed right on through.

He heard the door slam as he bounded off the wall and onto the wide, functional lovebed. It was a foamy thing, resillient as perfumed air. He saw her clinging to the door handle while she reached for a miniature control panel handily placed beside the bed. He hung onto the mattress and reached underneath the left side for that needle gun of Bascomb's.

"Bascomb will die for that," she announced. "I found it." She did something to the control box and sudden vertical acceleration pinned him on his back. Then neutral again, she allowed him to rebound and float upward, only to crash him down again as the Glory Globe zoomed. Diabolical female device!

"We're on our honeymoon, remember?" she whispered. The whisper became a hiss. "You ingrate! You spurn Immortal Mother!"

He nodded.

Her mind smote him a blow that was physical. She pressed the neutralizer and floated above him. Helpless not to watch, he watched. His head rolled at her command from side to side. If he floated upward she would poke him down with a finger.

She dimned the lights to a blue-green softness that vanished wrinkles. She wallowed there in the air and unzipped something which floated in its own erotic orbit, revealing a quivery stretch of flesh. She swooped about the loveroom like a slavering witch. There was about her some haunting cat-in-a-convulsion quality, plus the vigor of a running fish.

She touched a ribbon at her throat and waved away a wispy thing that rustled scentedly. She removed this, and struggled out of that. Increasingly bulbous, seemingly encased in one all-but-final grown garment of fluttering and inflated flab, she hovered. Then she looped-the-loop.

"I once had seven hundred husbands at a time," she cried, brandishing a lacy thing. "And all working at it, too," she added. "They all loved me madly."

The voice grew husky. She went into a teasing, end-over-end gyration above him. "Fiercely proud, they were, of their obligation! Competent men, competing to the death. And you—Prophet!" She lapsed into Martian invective.

Then she was silent, speaking only with her mind. Her eyes enormous, burning. And by this twisting of his mind she was transformed. He saw above him slim perfection, youthful, white and golden. Firm. Compelling vast and forceful endocrine reversements. He was reaching up as in two deft movements she discarded her maddening encumberments.

A creature of white rapture and pure magic diminished the lights and wafted to him like an angel.

"You're only a man," she whispered, nipping his ear . . .

THE GLORY GLOBE arced into the planetoid's orbit, came alongside and swung in at a steadily closing angle. Even with Teddy as close as the control room it was pleasant to be left alone in the loveroom. He was contemplating the single rubberite chair when she came in, space-suited up to her neck.

"We're landing," she said, and the tone concealed none of her triumph.

He nodded and went to the locker and climbed into his suit. He had discovered that with each new victory her iron control loosened a bit. And sometimes, for a moment, she left him free.

"Fix my helmet." She handed him the fishbowl.

He screwed it in place and snapped the stays while she faced a mirror and held the needle gun tight under her armpit, pointing at his heart. He gave her helmet a playful slap and grinned at her while he was removing her left shoulder jet. He slipped it in his pocket.

"All set," he said, putting on his helmet.

She double checked her fittings and then opened the lock. They trod the planetoid gingerly, adjusting their shoe magnets to its alloy. The Glory Globe, only one twentieth the planetoid's diameter, was now behind and under the horizon.

"Look," she whispered.

Ahead and to the left he saw two humanoid figures in clumsy spacegear. Neither moved. Stars glinted on their headpieces.

Without warning Teddy fired at the nearest. The figure exploded.

"Get the other alive!" She motioned with the gun.

Janes moved in, each step expecting the figure to whirl and blast him. He leaned forward on his toes to get traction. He bent his knees and launched himself and coasted forward. His arms wrapped the other in a bear hug. But they went down without a fight. He could feel brittle bones crackling inside the suit. A skeletal thing leered through its faceplate. There was an old, charred opening at its waist and inside the vacuum of space. Then he saw the corpse's needle gun between its feet. He grabbed it and triggered experimentally. The gun was dead, too.

"What's that over there?" she pointed with the gun.

He had seen a diagram and a photometal of it on Mars.

"If you'll walk closer you'll recognize your temple spacecraft," he said dryly. "These two explain what happened to your Seed thieves. Your priests."

"They must have argued over loyalty to me. One of them weakened."

"They picked a fine place for a needle duel."

She walked ahead, around the temple craft. To the left Janes saw the circular pit in the planetoid. It was twice his height in diameter. Nearby lay the lidlock cover.

She came up behind him. "It must be down there. You look there first, then the temple ship."

ONE look at her face now and the pit held no terrors. There were no steps. Only a woven metal cable hanging from a hook at the pit lip. Hand over hand he

went down, cautious though he weighed little more than a bubble on Earth. His helmet beam showed the shaft to be a cylinder, burnished yet fire scorched and pitted, and he suspected he was hanging in the blast-thrust chamber which had once propelled this great alloy bubble into space for some sound scientific purpose.

He came to gravity dead center, floating free in a bath of nothing. He could peer up the long tunnel and see Teddy bent over with her helmet beam illuminating the gun she held. He could hear her tense breathing, feel the pulse of her riding mind. Then he collided with an object and grasped it as it bounced away. It had a leaden gloss. Egg shaped. He twisted, unmeshing the equatorial threads slowly until the thing inside blazed blue and crimson and all-spectral in his face.

"The Sacred Seed!" she screamed.

Just for a moment his will was his own then. He considered hurling it out, but that would solve nothing. She was up there shaking the cable, gibbering. He gave a cautious upward tug and so propelled himself part way, then went hand over hand and over the top.

She snatched it from him and backed away. She held it to her breast, bending her body around it as though filled with a great ache. Her mind was on it only. He just stared.

"Twenty minutes," she crooned, "and I'll be restored." She waved the gun at him. "So beautiful no man can withstand me. I'll go back to Earth and crush them all—and they'll love it." She was doing a little dance, bent like a savage, moaning in some primordial ecstasy.

Now he had free will again, but with it a curiosity that made him only watch and wonder. If she were sane, if such a transformation could take place, would she then strand him, after, of course, destroying the Martian craft. Or would she simply shoot him?

He could hear her crying for a while. Then she was coming toward him, aiming with the gun. But her mind didn't pounce.

She said, "You've waited your chance, Kewpie. To kill me. You've waited enough. But look at me now." She was laughing. "Look!" She illuminated her face.

VII

A QUEASY instant came and went, then Quincy Pinkerton Janes knew he was in love. It smote him deep, pounding in his heart. He tried to look away. That mind-power was not forcing him, but something much greater was. He was speculating madly upon what miracles had come within that spacesuit. He heard her bubbling laugh. It tore him apart.

"See, Kewpie?" She held the Seed up to her faceplate so that it alone revealed her in rainbow. She made as though to kiss it with her glorious lips. And Janes was jealous of the thing.

He was certain now. Gone was the great bulk of Old Fertility. Gone was that ponderous, withered bosom and the mountainous hips and thighs.

She laughed in his face. "You're free now. I've had to compromise my mental powers in exchange." She handed him the gun. "You intended to kill me, Kewpie. Go on."

He made a low, gurgling, dissenting sound.

"Then give it back."

He did.

She holstered it.

"Now," she said. "Go put the Seed away. Lock it in for next time." She handed it over.

Now was the time, if ever. But her compulsion was ten times stronger. He called upon his manhood. But his manhood had revolted, had treacherously turncoated to her cause. He tried to reason. Nothing was reasonable. But three thoughts jumbled to the top and tingled there. First, his preventive function as saviour of the inferior sex had failed miserably; second, that soon this fire

creature would dump him for a newer model; and third, that once he had broken The Great Eye's power. These three—against her beauty.

But still no course of action came. He plucked the seed obediently from her hand and then, in one of those strokes of sheer genius that so often shape great fates, he accidentally dropped it. He made a grab but only bounced it like a handball between her legs. She gave a little bird-like cry and whirled, bending to pick it up. And the glimpse of her that way awakened long forgotten tropisms. He cast up a small but all-encompassing wish for strength and made his move.

It was the sort of place-kick that only a once-skilled master of football could have administered. With good contact and plenty of follow-through. Then he stood ignoring his aching toe. Watching her progress outward from the negligible gravity.

High and straight she soared, as toward a distant goalpost for the winning score, her speed far above escape velocity. Hers was a true course past glittering Jupiter and into the deep soft realms of Alpha Centurai.

"This isn't possible," she kept saying in his helmet. It was a dazed, dreamy voice of utter disbelief. "I'm much too beautiful. No man could—"

"I did, Teddy."

She seemed suddenly to grasp this fact at an altitude of approximately five thousand feet.

"I'll have my slaves boil you in oil!" she screamed.

"I know," he said, his heart breaking.

"I'll have them rend you limb from limb."

"I believe you," he said through his tears.

"—Drawn and quartered and fed to the glouts!" she howled.

SOMEONE TAPPED him on the shoulder. He spun, grabbing out of habit for a gun that wasn't there. He stared at the man. "Bascomb!"

"Not my ghost, either, pal. I'd have stayed but my blood *spurts* so."

"But," Janes gasped, "I saw you get off."

The attorney shook his head. "That guy you saw get off was my double. I fixed myself a soft spot between the Globe's hulls. Sort of a chaperone." He jerked his thumb spaceward. "I saw her take-off. Nice."

Janes choked back a sob. Fearful of a personal hormone disaster he hastily picked up the Seed, screwed the shielding over it and tossed it down the pit. He slammed the pit door which fitted so snugly it seemed a solid part of the planetoid hull. Then he stared at the stars. She was out of sight.

"Kewpie," her voice cried, "I've been mean to you. I'm sorry."

"That's for sure," growled Bascomb.

"Kewpie, I'll be your slave. Anything —just save me, Kewpie—"

"No," he choked.

"That's the ticket, Q. P." Bascomb slapped him on the back. "Let the old girl enjoy a bit of scenery. Stars are healthy."

"You haven't seen her."

"Kewpie, darling." Hers was a new tone, full of flat, factual promise. "I'm coming town to kill you and Bascomb."

Bascomb moved fast for the Glory Globe. "She's remembered her shoulder jets, Q. P., come on!"

"No. Look." Janes pointed.

The partners stared spaceward as her single yellow jet blossomed, then described a curious looping arc like a drunken Seventh-of-July firework.

"Say," said Bascomb, "that was a nice figure-eight she just did."

Her gyrations gradually stabilized into a steady, fierce spiral of fire that continued to dwindle toward the stars. Her voice came down in great broken sobs. She said nothing.

"Come back here!" shouted B. J.

BUT Janes could no longer refuse her, armed though she was. Yellow-white fire blasted twin trails from his shoul-

derblades. The sparks hit the planetoid and caromed into the stars, dying. He arose on a steady course like a great toy firework, whooshing up to meet her.

Below Bascomb was piling up abuse.

In space two fireflies danced into one at great altitude and locked finally in embrace. Voices from the stars said "Kewpie, Kewpie, Kewpie," through broken sobs. And, "There, there now. It's all right."

They came to the planetoid and stood together, she still murmuring, "Kewpie, darling. Kewpie, Kewpie," a conquered woman. But immediately after landing she put her arm around Janes and murmured as an afterthought, "Of course, I'll have to kill Bascomb, but *you*, Kewpie!" Though her voice was pure admiration and would have flattered a lesser man into jelly, Janes noted that her tone lacked much in sincerity.

"Bascomb," Janes called. "Where are you?"

"I'm in here, damnit," came the answer from Glory Globe. "And take that gun away from her or I'll lock you both out—hey!"

The attorney stood bewildered in the lock as Janes, armed with her gun, lugged her in the traditional captive-over-the-shoulder manner. He brought her in, sealed the ports, then quickly set the ship's controls for their property on Mars.

"Help the lady off with her suit," he suggested.

Bascomb's eyes seemed likely to pop through his faceplate until he ripped it off, then they still popped. He licked dry lips.

"With pleasure, pal, with pleasure," he grinned. He started fumbling with her helmet catches and otherwise unzipping her. "Baby!" the legal man cried at the total unveiling. Even the balloon-like fit of her clothing was no drawback.

"There's one chair in the loveroom, B. J. Let the lady sit while we talk."

As the attorney seated her he mumbled, "Who needs to talk?"

She gave a tiny gasp, "Oh!" and then sank down solid, regarding the partners with an alien, warm, sweet charm.

"Look at her!" Bascomb cried. "Actually smiling!"

"She'll always smile now," Janes explained. "You remember Dr. Zarnov last night? He provided me with the chemical and the trigger hypodermic which I concealed in the chair seat upholstery. By sitting in that chair, Teddy just performed upon herself a total psychotomy. In short, she's a blank, starting to learn to live all over. As her equal masters we must treat her kindly, but handle her firmly."

"Oh, yeah," crowed the counselor, "you can count on me."

"She will willingly perform all manual labors on the jubjub ranch."

He explained this to her in detail. She listened, eagerly nodding from time to time.

"Yes, Master Janes," she kept saying.

"Partners, pal. Equals," put in Master Bascomb.

"Your turn, partner." Janes walked out the open door.

After a brief search Janes located the lock opening between the hulls. He left this ajar. In that narrow place where the attorney had stowed away, he discovered the man's bedding just outside the loveroom wall. And from that side, the wall was transparent!

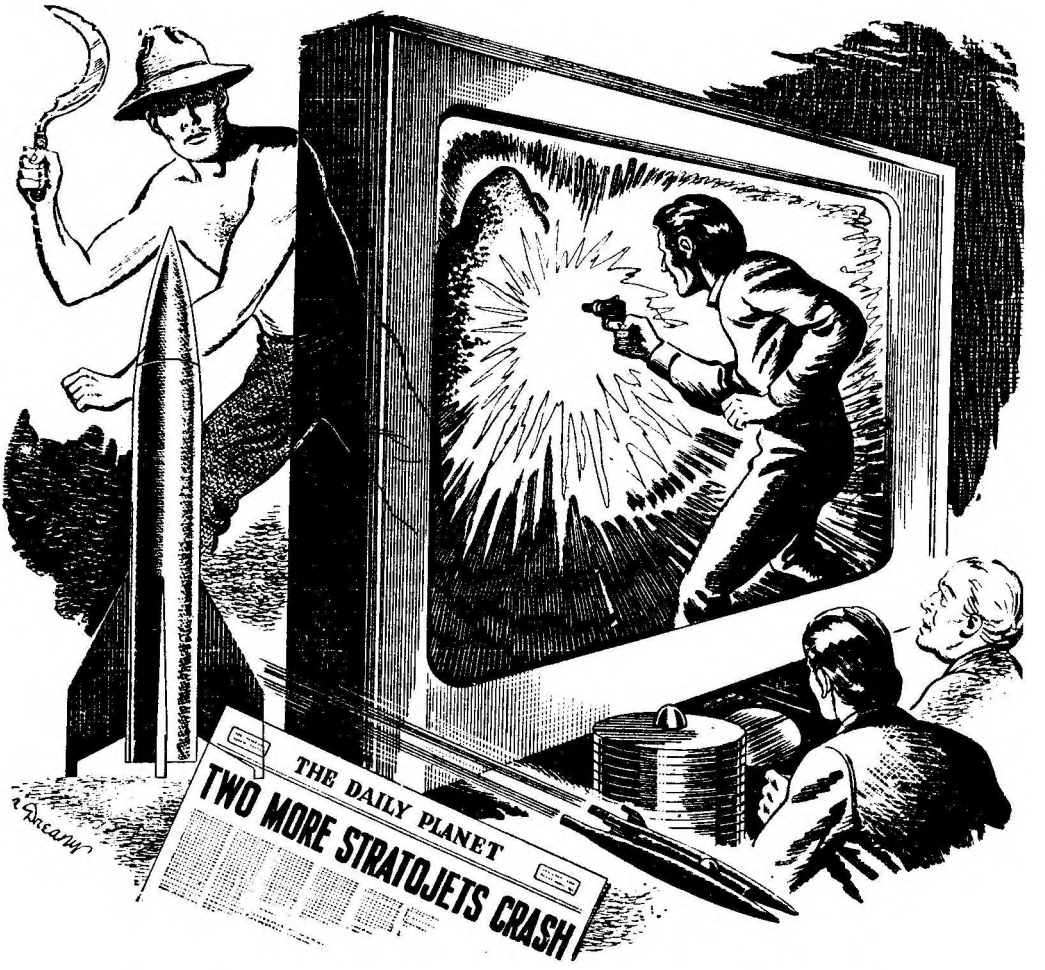
He could hear his partner talking fast to the girl.

"Listen, baby," Bascomb was saying, "this partnership stuff is okay, see. But you'll like me best. If it comes to an argument between him and me—you're on my side, see? Master Janes is a good guy and my pal, but you gotta draw the line somewhere, see?"

"Yes, Master," she kept saying.

"Oh, you *doll!*" cried Bascomb.

And Janes knew that he had been wise in bringing along Zarnov's extra psychotomy hypo.



Was Venus the only place for a man with vision?

THE PROPHET

By JOHN CHRISTOPHER

THE first time Max Larkin met Joseph Dwyer it was at the Prophet's own instigation; not that he was known as the Prophet at that time. Max's secretary brought the letter in with the rest. It ran simply enough, in the formal style:

> Joseph Dwyer respectfully requests audience with Manager Maxwell Larkin, at his convenience.

But there was something missing. Max examined the letter quite carefully before he realized what it was. It was the affiliation sign, invariably stamped

in the top left hand corner of the notepaper to mark the writer's connection. "Atomics" . . . "Transport & Communication" . . . "Television Services" . . . In this case it should have been "United Chemicals," since it was unlikely that anyone outside the organization would request an interview with a U. C. Manager. On this notepaper there was nothing. Max was curious. He granted the interview.

Dwyer appeared at the villa on one of those afternoons in February when southern Italy shows its teeth. Max sat indoors, smoking his special brand of Virginia mixed with the aromatic Martian lubla, and watching through plate glass the squalls of rain beating across the Bay toward Naples. A hydroplane, skimming in from Capri, was making heavy weather of it. Its nose frequently disappeared in clouds of spray. Max had been in a hydroplane. It was unlikely, he reflected, drawing on his pipe, that there was a single person on board who was not violently seasick.

He found Dwyer, when he was shown in, an impressive figure. He was tall and leanly built, with grey hair and beard, and humorous but very intent eyes. His handshake was firm without giving any impression of being deliberately so.

He said: "I'm glad you were able to see me, Manager Larkin."

Max waved his hand vaguely. "I don't use the title."

"I thought you might not," Dwyer said. "You don't usually grant interviews either, do you? That's why I'm glad you've let me in."

Max said gently: "Perhaps it might be best if you told me your affiliation first. Are you U.C.? If not it would be more to the point if I put you in touch with one of your own Managers."

Dwyer settled himself comfortably into his chair.

"I have no affiliation."

IT SOMETIMES, though very rarely, happened that a man was expelled from his organization, leaving him unitless until one of the other bodies accepted him. This might be such a case. Max probed carefully:

"You were—"

"You don't understand me, Mr. Larkin", Dwyer said. "I've never had an affiliation. I was born in a village in the Ozarks; quite a remote spot. They found us when I was about ten. My folks didn't see their way to joining anything. They lost the land, of course. From that time on they just moved about, living on charity mostly. We ended in India; they died there. Since then I've drifted around . . . pretty much everywhere."

"And now," Max suggested, "you're tired of wandering? You'd like an affiliation?"

Dwyer said: "I'm tired of wandering all right. But I don't want an affiliation. I want to destroy the machines."

He said it with the serious, calculating air of a child saying: "When I grow up I want to be a space navigator." There was, of course, a line laid down for this kind of simple lunacy. A call through to Psychiatry & Medicine; they would have an ambulance gyro round to pick him up within ten minutes. But for reasons of his own Max was not fond of Psychiatry & Medicine. He rang, but only for Giovanni, his butler. He ordered the Orvieto '29. Dwyer took the glass he poured him with a look of appreciation and gratitude.

"So you want to destroy the machines?" Max asked him. "All the machines?"

"Everything after the steam engine," Dwyer said.

"That makes a clean sweep," Max observed, "of space ships, atomic power, electric and gas lighting, cars, trains, ships, hydroplanes, television and electric razors." He paused. "I rather depend on my electric razor."

"You could grow a beard," Dwyer commented. He stroked his own, smiling.

"And hydroponics and the lignin factories and combine harvesters. The whole lot?"

"The whole lot."

"Now tell me," Max said. "Why do you come to me?"

"For help," Dwyer said sharply. "I need a nucleus of helpers. From what I know of you, you are a sensible man. You could be a Director of your organization, but you prefer to vegetate here in Castellammare. You have"—he tapped the glass with his fingernails—"a very good wine cellar. You don't use machines any more than you can help, and when you do you try to stick to the more primitive types, such as trains."

Max said thoughtfully: "I had no idea my reactionary tendencies were so widely known." He looked at Dwyer. "Are you asking me to take part in the violent overthrow of the managerial society?"

"No," Dwyer said, "in the non-violent overthrow."

"How?"

Dwyer said softly: "There are many things wrong with the world today—we both know that. What would you say was the paramount one?"

Max looked at Dwyer, at the intent, smiling eyes, the face unusually stamped with—character.

"The absence of individuality," he said.

Dwyer nodded. "It's a world without personality. That's its essential condition; that's its strength; and that's it's weakness. It gives men security, but it doesn't give them contentment. In one sense man is master of the machine, but in a subtler and more far-reaching sense the machine is master of man. Once men realize that, they will act."

Max said: "And destroy their masters? There are guards for the protection of property. And violence always stirs up counter-violence. Will you have the strength, the weapons?"

"No weapons," Dwyer said. "We shan't destroy, we shall abandon. I said a while back that I didn't want an affiliation. That's right enough, but I'm applying for one. To Agriculture. It's a very small organization now; swamped as a food producer both by Hydroponics and by Lignin Products. Perhaps for that reason, and certainly because it works directly on the land, it hasn't been depersonalized as much as the others have. It will be our means of protest."

Max said: "Agriculture uses machines. Some very big machines."

"Yes," Dwyer agreed. "They do—now."

Max poured more wine into the empty glasses.

"Do you realize what would happen if your plan succeeded?"

Dwyer glanced at him. "In the short run? Dislocation, outbreaks of violence, local dictatorships, famine, war . . . all those. But even with all those a fuller life, and for subsequent generations a life both full and peaceful."

"The trouble with me," Max said, "is that I'm a short run philospher. And an automatic conservative. No, Dwyer, I won't join you. I don't think you can succeed anyway, but that's not the reason. I've given up bothering about results in the plans I make. I think that even if you could succeed, you shouldn't. The machine has depersonalized man, and man's chief problem is to find some way of acquiring true human personality again. But not this way. Not the way of catastrophe. That has never been an answer."

"But," Dwyer said, "we're going to make it one. We'll meet again, Mr. Larkin."

When he had gone Max gazed out of the window for a long time. Another hydroplane plunged across the Bay, rocking even more heavily on the squally sea than the first had done. He turned back to the warmth of his room. He took out a piece of paper and began a minute:

To Director Hewison, United Chemicals
From Larkin—

Then he crumpled the paper up into a ball, and threw it away.

DURING the next few years Max did not forget Joseph Dwyer. He noted carefully the occasional brief, contemptuous references to his activities on the telescreens. It was a telecommentator who first called him the Prophet; a particularly unpleasant looking man with the gift of the sanctimonious sneer that the great LeRoy had had before the Venusians shredded him to pieces on an interplanetary hook-up. Unfortunately Dwyer's growing band of disciples accepted the gibe, transforming it into a serious claim. Similar things, Max remembered, had happened before in history.

It was nearly four years later, and he was spending a week with Hewison in his Austrian castle, when the Prophet first received the serious, factual attention of the Evening News. Hewison and Max were dining together in Hewison's peculiar undersea-green dining hall, and watching the large screen set in the far wall; a splendidly unrealistic mural of a submerged coral reef had been slid to one side to reveal it. The screen showed the routine rolling cornfields that always announced an Agriculture newsflash.

Hewison said restlessly: "This will make three nights without a U. C. mention. I'll have to take it up with Von Hauser. Who the hell's interested in Agriculture?"

The level, unaccented voice of the Evening News commentator purred at them:

"This is an official flash from Agriculture. The Managing Director, Yatsuki Sen, today announces his resignation, in favor of Joseph Dwyer."

The screen displayed one of the flamboyant montage effects that had begun to find their way into the factual programmes at that time. The view receded over the cornfields, the level tilted to take in a harvester from a cockeyed angle; in a left-top corner superimposition projection, Yatsuki's blandly smiling face faded in, ran side by side with a right hand top appearance of the Prophet, and faded out. The Prophet's sardonic, wary smile took over the whole screen, the fields wavering hazily behind it. The commentator's voice picked up again:

"A second flash, from Dwyer himself . . . "

"Dwyer!" Hewison muttered. "What the hell do they mean by that? He's got a title."

Hewison was always touchy about observance of the proprieties. The commentator, Max thought, had seemed a little confused himself, the note of utter certainty subdued a little in that chromium-polished voice went on:

"None of the usual titles will in future be used in Agriculture. There will be no Managers and no Directors. Dwyer will be known as the Prophet. There will be no other titles."

Hewison exploded. "Well, I'm damned! That crank . . . What do you make of that, Max?"

The screen was stringing out the usual potted biography of the newly elected Director; but in Dwyer's case they obviously had very little to go by, and what they had didn't look anything like the normal brand. The Prophet at a meeting of his followers in a small, dark, Victorian English hall, with the camera fighting an uneasy, losing battle with the leaping shadows; the only illumination was from paraffin lamps. And the Prophet in the fields, stretching out his arms melodramatically in a gesture of rejection towards a towering electric sower. The Prophet leading a massive chestnut percheron across the brow of the sunlit hill . . . .

"What do I make of it?" Max echoed. "That Agriculture will break their contracts with Electricals and Atomics. That they will beat their electric sowers into plow shares, their combine harvesters into pruning hooks. You can count Agriculture out from the world of advanced technology."

Hewison smiled. "That's a lot of talk. Are they going to do without television, without communications, without manufactured products. It's not likely!"

Max shrugged. "No? What odds

would you have given on Dwyer being elected to run Agriculture three years ago?"

Hewison said shrewdly: "I'll lay odds he isn't still running it in a year's time. It's one thing crying for the primitive life—quite another thing living it."

"You're not worried, then?" Max said.

"Worried? I wouldn't give a damn if he kept Agriculture forever. What's Agriculture? On the last food production quota they were twenty percent, against Lignin's thirty and Hydroponics' fifty. And Lignin and Hydroponics were both deliberately underproducing. We can cut them out tomorrow, and never feel the difference. But can they do without us?" He looked at Max triumphantly.

"What about fertilizers?"

"They're going to breed more animals. Look. Can I play around with this? On my own?"

Hewison said: "Why bother?"

"I shan't want anything—except Lucas. You can spare him."

"Lucas is one of the most promising youngsters we've got. I don't want to waste him on this kind of tomfoolery."

"You will, though," Max said, "won't you?"

Lucas was young and spare and not very tall; not unlike what Max had been like at twenty five. Max didn't fool himself into not seeing that that was one of the reasons he liked him. He said, at the end of the interview:

"You've got the idea?"

Lucas nodded. "I've got it."

Max said: "Don't you get won over yourself."

Lucas grinned. "I'm a careerist, not an idealist. You don't have to worry about me."

MOST of the Directors of the organizations took the line, as Hewison had done, of tolerant contempt. If Agriculture wanted to indulge in a burst of primitivism, that was their own damn stupidity. They reckoned on a few months of glorious enthusiasm, followed by a relapse and the drift of workers away to other bodies that could provide the gadgets and laid-on comfort of civilized life. But as an insurance policy against the early enthusiasm leading to acts of sabotage against their own machines, the Council of Industries called on Dwyer to affirm the sanctity of managerial sovereignty. He replied in a televised address. Back in his villa, Max watched it with interest.

The Prophet said: "I shan't often get such an audience. I'm certainly going to make the best of it."

The man was a briliant rhetorician. He could be melodramatic; in the brief shots of his early proselytizing activities Max had recognized his masterly control of emotional fervor. But now, addressing an audience that almost completely ignored him, he dropped as naturally into this sane, humorous, man-to-man way of talking. His hands rested calmly in front of him on the desk; the vertical lines against the corner of his lips carried his warm common-sense through the cameras and through the vision screens.

"You will have heard some wild stories about me," the Prophet said. "It's up to you whether you believe them or not. If you have any sense you won't believe them all. But don't disbelieve them all, either, for some of them are true. The biggest is that I want to disrupt the world as we know it today. Well, that's true. That's certainly true. I want to take away from you—from all you listening—the score or more of electrical gadgets that you can see just by glancing round your room. And that includes this screen on which you see me now. I want to take from you that soft job in an office or on the production line, and put you to hard and uncomfortable work on the land. I want to put callouses on your hands, and unspiced food in your stomachs. But there's more to it than that. Listen, and I'll tell you how men used to live, before the machine came."

THE Prophet launched into an account of life in medieval Europe. As a medievalist himself, Max enjoyed it. He

painted the atmosphere in with thick strokes of colour, until you could almost see the slow, ritualistic pattern of life lived against the background of the unchanging earth, each strand, of hunt and husbandry, of labor and play, falling inevitably into place in the great tapestry. Wisely he used no illustrations to make his effects; the cameras stayed on the man's own mobile face while he built up the picture in the minds of his audience. And more wisely still, he didn't hold things back.

The harshness and the cruelty of that life were given their due prominence. The man on the rack was there as well as the gilded nobleman, the bestial soldier as well as the yeoman peasant, the starving beggar as well as the laden merchant. It was the colour, the sense of life lived personally and with purpose that came over. Against that all the misery and inequality were small blots on the riotous pattern. Max could almost feel it sinking home in hundreds of thousands of drably comfortable and uneventful homes.

The Prophet smiled. "Now all that I have been saying is quite beside the point of this talk of mine. I've just been explaining why we in Agriculture have done something that might seem on the face of it to be very stupid—turned our backs on the machines. We have simply made our choice between living in comfort and living as we feel men ought to live, by the sweat of their brow and on the products of their own toil. We have made our choice, and we are going to abide by it. I won't be appearing on this screen again. But before I say goodbye to you, I want to make a few things quite clear. We are not machine wreckers and we have no intention of starting a holy war against them. Keep your machines, if you want them. The essence of our movement is brotherhood and freedom. All are free to join us; all are free to leave us. On our farms we shall live in peace. We hope all men may do the same."

A week later Max put through a telecall to Hewison.

"On a point of interest," he said, "just how many people have you lost to Agriculture in Italy alone?"

"I haven't got the figures with me," Hewison said, "but I can tell you it's over fifty thousand."

"You're not worried, though?" Max asked.

Hewison laughed. "We can spare five hundred thousand without worrying. And this bunch will be back at the first back-ache. I never thought you'd turn into an old woman, Max."

"As long as you stay cheerful," Max said. "That's all I worry about."

Hewison said: "I couldn't be more cheerful. Do you know how many opted for U. C. from this year's Universities' honor graduation? Nine hundred and twelve! And Genetics got less than six hundred. Wait till I see old Tollski!"

"That's fine," Max said drily. "That's just fine."

BUT they didn't return at the first back-ache. Not more than a handful. Thinking things over later, Max wondered how much credit should go to the inevitable satisfactions of a healthy and purposeful life, and how much to personality and leadership of the Prophet. It was difficult to weigh them up, but he thought the latter was not the least considerable. Anyway, very few drifted back to United Chemicals, or Atomics, or Genetics Division, or Lignin Industries or Transport & Communication—or to any other of the great managerial bodies they had originally left.

Instead the flood of desertions which had sprung up in the wake of the Prophet's solitary telecast and died down again to a trickle, began once more to broaden. The television programmes continued to poke fun at the back-to-the-land primitivists, but their fun took on a hysterical edge. In the second spring of the Prophet's reign Max noticed certain small faults and uncertainties in the hitherto smooth flow of the civilized machine. There were occasional breakdowns in the television trans-

missions . . . the whole of the Naples area had an electricity black-out lasting three hours . . . an inexplicable coffee shortage developed.

As spring turned to summer and the summer lengthened, the current of minor irritations increased. Late in August he went north again, at Hewison's request.

Everywhere except in southern Europe trains had long disappeared from the face of the managerial world; Transport & Communications maintained a special network through Spain, southern France, Austria, Italy and the Balkans, as a relic of the past; for the use of tourists. While gyros and turbojets and rockets climbed high, the quaint, despised railways crawled below, hugging the ground. They had been empty enough in Max's youth; recently they had been well-nigh deserted. Max was surprised to find his train for Vienna more than three-quarters full; there were four other people in his own compartment.

One of them had a copy of the small magazine-newspaper, specially printed for the tourist rail passengers who would be cut off for a couple of days from television, and so from news of the bustling outside world. Max's eye caught the headline:

Two More Stratojets Crash

The man holding the paper caught his glance and nodded a powerful affirmation.

"Hell," he said. "You're not safe away from the ground any more. That's six or seven in the last couple of weeks. I'm using this doodad while my own gyro's knocked up. I'm not sticking my neck out any further than I have to."

"Any particular reason for the crashes? Max inquired.

"Any particular reason! Bad servicing, that's the reason! Take my job now —I'm in Lignin. I check the paper rolls from the mill. I used to handle one belt; plenty of time to walk round carefully and examine it for flaws. Now I've got three to handle—and the stuff's full of holes. That's O.K. as far as our job's concerned; nobody's going to blow off because of poor quality paper. But when a stratojet mech has three jobs to handle instead of one, that's a reverse orbit. I'll stick to this form of transport."

THE train began its slow climb up the peninsular backbone of Italy. They were an hour late out of Rome and Max retired to his sleeper a little later. He woke up to find the clear light of dawn falling through the glass panel above his head, and he realized the train had come to a halt. Bologna, perhaps, or Udine. But it was very quiet. He raised himself to look out of the window, and saw that the train was not standing at a station. Only wide fields stretched emptily away from the track.

He got up, washed, and dressed. A uniformed conductor came down the corridor. Max asked:

"What is it?"

"Nothing at all, sir. Slight hitch. The line's out of condition a couple of kilometers ahead. There's a repair gang working on it now. We'll be off in an hour."

When he had passed on, Max gazed thoughtfully out of the corridor window. The ground fell away from the track and he noticed a small group working in the adjoining field. On an impulse he jumped down from the train and slithered down the slope to join them. There were three men reaping with hand scythe, and two women binding the sheaves of wheat behind them. They halted their activity as he came up to them.

Max said: "You start work early."

The eldest of the men replied: "Sun's up, brother. Sun's been up an hour. And there's a harvest to get in."

Max said: "A combine harvester would clear this field in a couple of hours."

The man smiled: "So it would, brother. There's not the slightest doubt of that."

"Well?"

"I used to work in Atomics. Five hours

a day, watching needles on a lot of dials. And the rest of the day trying to find something to pass the time. Now I don't have the time to get bored. Come in with us, brother. We need extra hands." Max said: "Thanks a lot. Not at my age, though." He fished in one pocket. "Like some chocolate?"

He thought the woman looked at the packet hungrily. The man said:

"No . . . We don't grow it. We don't eat what we don't grow. The Prophet's laid it down."

Max said: "Well, in that case . . ."

From the train he watched them, back at work again, bent in their slow and painful toil.

HEWISON was worried now all right. He didn't even take Max around to show him the latest addition to his fantastic castle; a new Ming ornament or a probably fake Italian primitive. He took him instead directly to his study.

"Well," he said, "what results?"

Max looked at him mildly. "Results?"

"Don't stall, Max. O.K., you were right. It was serious, damned serious. But don't stall now."

"Tell me how serious."

Hewison briefly covered his podgy face with his hands; a usual gesture of his when worried.

He said: "Things are slowing down. He's draining men away from us at a hell of a rate. I thought we'd got over the worst a few months back, but the drain's picked up again in the summer."

Max nodded. "Reasonable enough." He paused. "And then, you all have to cover for Atomics, haven't you?"

Hewison's eyes popped. "How did you know that?"

"Clear enough. If U.C.'s understaffed a few hundred may get poisoned; if Transport and Communication's understaffed a score of stratojets may come down fast; if Atomics is understaffed . . . things blow up in more senses than one. And for sheer boredom a job in Atomics would take the prize in any contest. Boredom and occupational neurosis."

Hewison said worriedly: "There have been one or two close shaves already. One at the Albany plant. The whole of eastern North America might have gone up."

He got up from his chair and walked abstractedly about the room. From the large and completely functionless Adam mantelpiece he took down a Venusian figurine in its square, water-filled glass case and shook it. The floating weed flared out by the motion into what Max privately thought still looked like a piece of floating weed. He had always felt that human critics read their own complexities into these tacked together pieces of seaweed; having spent more than fifteen years with the Venusians, Max had a high appreciation of their peculiar, water-logged sense of humour.

Hewison said: "It's not only the shortage of personnel; it's the unsettling effect on those that remain. I don't like admitting it, but generally the best go. And those that stay behind are unsettled; they're ten times less reliable than they would be normally."

He flicked the water-pet into further, flurrying motion. Max regarded it with distaste.

"Put that Picasso down. I don't like it."

"That what?"

Max gestured towards the object in Hewison's hand. One could not expect anyone with so catholic and avid an artistic taste as Hewison had to have a knowledge of the remoter by-ways of twentieth century art. At last Hewison put it down. He came over and stood beside Max.

"We'll do as you say, Max."

Max smiled faintly. "Serious enough for that?"

Hewison shrugged in a gesture of loss.

"O.K.," Max said. "Bring Dwyer in."

Hewison's eyes, deep set on either side of his small, snouty nose, considered Max carefully.

He said: "I know you don't do things without reason. So we'll pull Dwyer in if you say so. But if we do it and it's wrong—we're riding the Leonids, Max.

What can we get him on?"

"No trouble about that. World Association Code, article 5, section 3, first paragraph. Conspiracy to monopolize."

Hewison said: "Hell, no court would convict him on that!"

"We shan't need a court."

"And we can't hold him long." Hewison looked at Max delicately. "It certainly wouldn't be any good liquidating him. He's the kind that's even more dangerous dead."

Max nodded. "I know that."

Hewison asked: "Well?"

"Bring him in."

THE Prophet said: "I thought we'd meet again, Manager Larkin." He saw Max's slight grimace. "I'm sorry. Mr. Larkin."

Max said: "The circumstances aren't exactly what I would wish them to be."

The Prophet smiled. "I have no complaints. 'Conspiracy to monopolize.' I don't think I'm in any danger of being convicted on that charge."

"No," Max said. "I don't suppose you are. As a matter of fact, it seemed the only way of ensuring a little chat with you, on our ground."

The Prophet looked about him, at the baroque magnificence of Hewison's study where they sat alone.

"It's not what I'm used to," he confessed.

Max said: "I won't waste time. You know something of the effect your anti-machine revolt has been having on the world. You know of the millions who have left their own organizations, all over the planet, to work in Agriculture. Increasingly the Atomics staffs, at their plants, are under-staffed, or badly staffed. The situation is extremely dangerous. If one of those plants goes up it can take half a continent with it."

The Prophet said: "If that happened, it would be tragic. But I don't see that there is any way in which I can prevent it. We in Agriculture simply live our lives as we think best. We make no attempt to influence others."

Max said: "I'm going to put to you a question which is much the same as one I put to you six years ago. Are you determined to stick to your way of life, even if it means plunging the whole world into chaos and destruction?"

The Prophet said gently: "The answer is still the same. Shall I put one back to you? Are you not willing to close down the atomic plants in time to prevent these explosions which you fear?"

Max said: "When principles are opposed and inflexible, only one argument remains."

HIS eyes calm, the Prophet rejoined, "Force? I've always been prepared for that. Agriculture doesn't depend on me any longer. The movement can do without me; it might even do better with my memory. You could torture me, but I would not recant. There would be little point in your pressing me into a forced telecast—my people don't have television sets. I'm afraid force won't serve you."

"Not force," Max said. "Treachery."

"I don't see . . ." the Prophet said.

"But thanks to the wonders of technology you are enabled to." Max looked at his watch. "Would you like to see what is happening at Esmont?"

The Prophet's eyes flicked towards the screen set in the study wall, and then away again. He said flatly:

"There are no television transmitters at Esmont."

"I spoke of treachery," Max said.

He walked across to the closed line panel, and pressed the appropriate keys. Lights in the room dimmed as the screen lit up into life. Esmont, in Virginia, was the centre, as far as a centre existed, of the Prophet's movement. There had been constructed the huge amphitheatre, built on Greek lines to make speech possible to a vast audience without mechanical amplification. Lucas had rigged the fixed transmitter up well. The screen covered the spot where the speaker would stand, and also showed a good section of the amphitheatre beyond him. It was packed with people. As they watched a slim, not very tall figure

moved into view.

The Prophet said: "Leopold!"

Max said: "Yes. Your deputy. But his real name's Lucas, not Barnett."

The crowd greeted him with an enthusiasm that had a sullen undertone to it. Max glanced sideways at the Prophet. His face was still, but his hands were kneading together. He turned to watch Lucas. The screen showed his back and right side. He began to speak, gesturing a little with his hands.

It was a good, demagogic speech. The Prophet had been arrested. They all knew that. The reactionary bosses of the machine world had struck against their beloved leader because that was the only way in which they could defend their crumbling empires. They thought that Agriculture was powerless to defend the Prophet. For a long time Lucas rambled about the subject, leading up to the prepared finale.

"But are we helpless?" Lucas demanded. "Are we helpless? We are not. They miscalculated in that." From a pocket of his overall he drew a small metal object, with a vague resemblance in shape to the small size Klaberg pistols. "We have been preparing. This is a new weapon, which we have developed in secret. All over the world we have arsenals. Watch!"

Well away from the crowd there was a prominent spur of rock. Lucas raised the weapon. There was a flash, and the rock exploded into shattered fragments. A low roar came from the massed ranks.

Max switched the screen off. The lights glowed back to brilliance. He looked at the Prophet. He was sitting, gazing emotionless at the empty screen.

Max said: "Well?"

"Yes," the Prophet said. "You know them better than I did." There was bitterness now in his voice. "Violence against the fear of violence. A machine against the machines. I didn't even suspect the traitor you placed with me."

Max said: "Don't blame Lucas too much. He was doing his job."

"Yes," the Prophet said. "A job . . ." He turned to Max. "And mine's over. What's to prevent me leaving things at that?"

"Only conscience. You've seen your ideal crash. You won't refuse to save the world from chaos out of spite."

The Prophet stood up. "All right," he said. "Tell me what it is you want."

WITH Hewison again, Max watched the Prophet's last address to his people. For the safety of the world, he told them, they must relax their stringencies against the use of machines. The whole world, after all, was an interdependent organism; all men, everywhere, were units in it. Atomics were critically understaffed. He hoped that volunteers—men who had worked in Atomics before—would go back now. . . .

Hewison shook his head. "I still don't see why you guessed he'd act this way."

Max said: "There was talk now and then about destroying the faith of the masses in the Prophet. It always seemed stupid to me because to the mass the leader is something more than human; attacks on him only strengthen allegiance. But the converse was interesting. Destroy the leader's faith in his followers and you've really got something.

The Bay of Naples was more serene when Max said goodbye to Joseph Dwyer.

Dwyer said: "One small point. That impressive demonstration of the secret weapon?"

"Simple enough. A small explosive charge placed beforehand. Radio-activated. The secret weapon was a small transmitter."

Dwyer nodded. "I'm afraid I've failed to see the obvious in many ways."

"And now?" Max asked.

"I've got a passage to Venus. Long Province." Dwyer smiled wrily. "Pity the natives!"

From the villa Max watched him trudge downhill: the man who had believed in human goodness; who had been willing to let the world slip into anarchy and barbarism because of that belief. Pity, yes. But, he reflected, it wasn't the Venusians he pitied. ● ● ●

He thought of Anne. They'd come so far—tried so hard

I

"IT'S your move, Harlan." said Grandfather Smith.

Harlan didn't hear him. His eyes looked at the Game table, but saw nothing. He was listening. *Tick-shhh, tick-shhh.* That was snow again, hissing softly against the upper plates. *Tick-shhh.* Sealing them in again, tighter and tighter, shutting off the world. *Tick-shhh.* Pattering down on the dead men living in a coffin of ice. . . .

"Harlan!" said Grandfather Smith querulously.

"Sakes alive," quavered Grandmother Smith. "You're holding up the Game!"

"Harlan, darling," whispered Anne, touching his sleeve.

As though someone had touched a switch in his brain, life came back to Harlan's eyes. He looked around him quickly, pressing Anne's hand to reassure her.

"Sorry, Grandfather," he apologized. "I was day-dreaming."

"Hmf!" snorted Grandfather Smith, exchanging glances with Grandmother Smith. "There's no place for day-dreaming when you're trying to get through Life, young man. You've got to keep your hand on the plow, that's what I always say."

Grandmother Smith nodded agreement over her knitting needles.

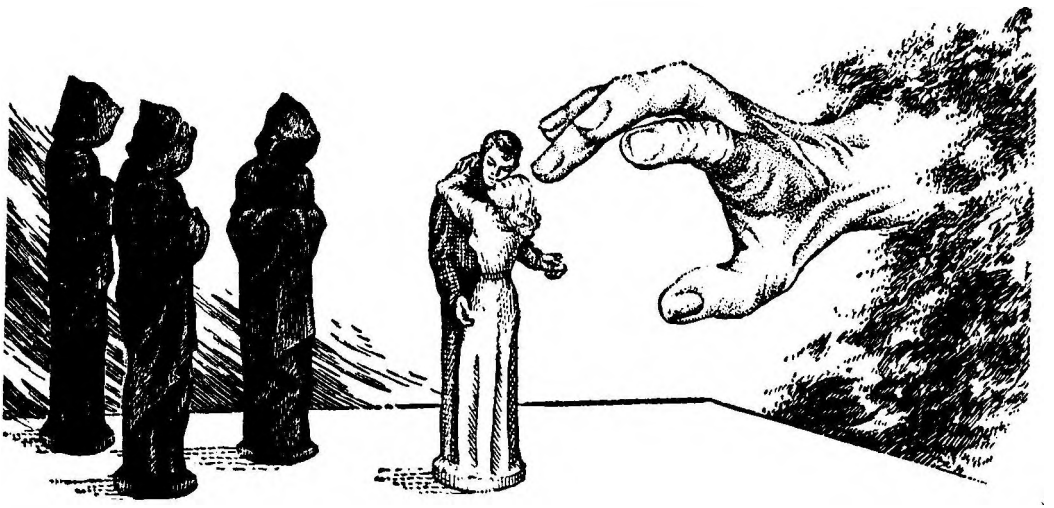
Hand on the plow. Grandfather Smith

THE LIFE GAME

A Novelet by CHAD OLIVER

All the world was a stage . . . what was left

of it, that is . . . with only two players. . . .



was always saying that, but what did it mean? What was a plow and why should you keep your hand on it? Harlan eyed Grandfather Smith without seeming to. He was old and white-haired, with big blue veins in his thin hands. He was dressed in his shiny old black suit, the one with the top button missing off the vest. His eyes were sharp and impatient. He looked almost like a caricature of everyone's Foxy Grandpa, imbued somehow with a composite life. Harlan smiled coldly.

Tick-shhh.

"Well, young man? What are you waiting for—Christmas?"

Christmas. Once every three hundred and sixty-five days they took a tree out of the park and put it in the Central Chamber. Then they put lights and ornaments on it and one of them in a red suit gave the people presents. They were always the same presents, of course. Harlan didn't understand. Why would he want to wait for Christmas?

"Let's see now," said Harlan thoughtfully. "Let's see."

He studied the Game table carefully, hearing Anne's shallow, fearful breathing beside him. It wouldn't do to make a mistake. He forced himself to look interested. There were the Children, but they would be sure to start Grandfather off again. There was the Day at the Of-

fice—not so good. The Ball Park, the Concert, the Emotional Crisis—but that wasn't due yet. He settled for Mountain Fishing and pressed the button.

Grandfather and Grandmother smiled approvingly.

IT WASN'T bad, really, despite its familiar predictability. He waded through the ice-cold stream with the rapids chuckling around his boots and felt his face begin to burn as the sun lanced through the thin air. He knew that he was in Colorado, on the Gunnison, and in that dark pool swirling in front of the spray-wet rock. . . .

Colorado, his mind whispered from an infinite distance. *That was one of the states.* He hadn't known that the last time—

He caught the same beautiful trout out of the pool that he always caught, hooking him neatly on the gray fly and playing him close to where he could scoop up his clean, speckled body in the net, so that one flame-tipped fin stuck out through the webbing. He broke the trout's neck and put him on the green leaves in the basket. Then, as always, it started to drizzle coldly and the rain drops splashed into the pool and dampened the back of his khaki shirt. It was getting dark. . . .

Tick-shhh. He was back in the room.

"Well, sir!" chortled Grandfather Smith. "I reckon that's enough for tonight."

He touched a button and the Game table disappeared into the floor. Not that the Life Game was over, of course. It was only over once, Harlan reminded himself grimly. Life ended in Death. . . .

Grandfather fired up his smelly pipe and Grandmother went on with her knitting. She was knitting baby clothes, as she always did in their house, smiling and humming to herself.

"About time you youngsters were having some young 'uns!" Grandfather boomed heartily, chewing on his pipe. "Nothing like the patter of little feet around the house."

"One of these days," Anne said, trying to smile.

"No time like the present, child," Grandmother reminded her.

The snow hissed down on the upper plates. Harlan could feel it all around him, tons and tons of it, pressing him in.

Grandfather looked at his big gold watch.

"Ten o'clock, Mother!" he said. "Time we were going."

"Land sakes!" exclaimed Grandmother, putting down her knitting. "I just don't know where the time goes."

Grandfather and Grandmother got to their feet.

"You be sure and come see us again soon," Harlan told them.

"We will, we will," said Grandfather Smith.

"I'll bring you some more of my good apple jelly," said Grandmother Smith.

"Well, good night!"

"Good night, children!"

The door opened and they passed out into the tube. Anne collapsed in Harlan's arms, shuddering violently.

"Oh Harlan, Harlan," she sobbed. "They seem so *real.*"

THE NEXT morning, war was declared.

The paper on the breakfast table had *Extra* printed neatly across the top corners of the front page and the big black headline contained just one word:

WAR!

Idly, Harlan read the story while Anne bustled around in the kitchen. She wasn't actually preparing breakfast, of course—the machines took care of all that. But she had to go through the motions or be reported for Treatment. He trembled in spite of himself, thinking of Anne taken away from him, of being left alone with what he knew—

The story was the same one they always ran, down to the last detail. Only the date had changed:

Life City, 200 Day, 2904.—War was declared today by the Grand Council and

Life City was placed under martial law as thousands of savage half-men marched across the surface ice and threw themselves at the outer defense line of civilization. All citizens are urged to remain calm and cooperate fully with the authorities.

The first attack was beaten back early this morning by units of Commander Wade's First Army, which utilized nuclear pellets to throw the enemy back in disorganized retreat. Many individual acts of heroism on the part of civilization soldiers were reported.

"We have nothing to worry about," Commander Wade said in a prepared statement. "As long as our brave soldiers are in the field, every citizen may rest in comfort. It makes me proud and humble to serve with these gallant . . ."

Harlan threw the paper on the floor.

Anne came in with breakfast and they took their time, enjoying the food. There were eggs and sausage and coffee, all steaming hot. Anne looked very beautiful, with her blonde hair shining on her shoulders and the sleep still in her blue eyes.

"Harlan, what are we going to do?"

"I don't know."

Harlan noticed with concern the dark circles under her eyes, the tense mask of strain that was set behind her face, waiting to spring out in naked terror.

"I—I can't go on like this much longer, Harlan," she said softly. "I'm sorry I'm not stronger, but to go on acting, always acting, with those horrible creatures every night—"

Her voice was rising as she talked, approaching hysteria.

Harlan put his arm around her. "We'll find a way out, darling," he said. "We'll find a way out."

"But how, *how?* We can't bring children into this, knowing what we know, and if we don't we'll be conditioned again, just sit around and rot like the rest of them. . ."

"Just hold out a little longer," Harlan told her with a confidence he did not feel. "I'll think of something."

Tick-shhh. Snow on the upper plates, melting against the warmth of Life City, freezing again from the cold beyond. And up there, above their heads, death again as the half-men attacked.

Harlan opened the door. Down the tube, washed in from the street, came the sounds of war. Marching feet. A brass band playing a martial air. Shouting. The rumble and clank of the weapons of war. The thin, high cheering of children.

"Come on," Harlan said. "We've got to go watch the war."

ANNE sighed. He took her by the arm and led her through the clean metal tube to the little balcony that looked out over the street. The noise beat against their eardrums and the sweep and surge of figures in the street below them stunned their blinking eyes. Flags flew everywhere, preening themselves on the breeze. The air was heavy with the smell of flowers and growing things, and yet it seemed curiously flat and listless.

The troops marched through the street and confetti poured down from windows

Number One Fan

THE grapevine whispers that Chad Oliver is now Number One Fan and the envy of all the others, having made the jump from fandom to pro-author and moved from the back of the book to the front. Let us modestly record that the move was deserved. Nobody leaned over backward to pull strings for Chad. He wrote stories and for a long time got rejections like anyone else. Came the time he wrote one which hit us—it was bought. And other editors, other mags, have leaped to buy at just about the same time, which is pretty eloquent evidence that Chad has hit his stride. We think you'll like THE LIFE GAME.

—*The Editor*

in houses along their route. *Empty* windows, Harlan noticed. He looked around. The people in the other houses watched the display apathetically, utterly without interest. They looked tired and even the children on the balconies were subdued and pale and without enthusiasm. Harlan looked across at his next-door neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Wilson.

"Good morning," he said.

Mr. Wilson turned very slowly and stared at him with dead eyes. "Good morning, Harlan," he said tonelessly. "Good morning, Anne."

There was a pause, while the bands played and the soldiers marched.

"Isn't it a nice day today?" Mrs. Wilson said finally, speaking slowly and precisely as though unsure of herself. "Do you think it will rain? Oh, this dreadful war!"

That was all.

A squad of soldiers passed directly under their window and they cheered and applauded perfunctorily.

"That's enough," Harlan whispered. "Let's go back."

Harlan and Anne turned to go.

"You're certainly looking fine!" Mr. Wilson said suddenly.

"Yes indeed," agreed Mrs. Wilson. "About time you two had some children, to my way of thinking. Nothing like the patter of little feet around the—"

Harlan and Anne hurried back through the tube. Harlan could feel Anne shuddering under his arm. He had to do something, he knew, and do it fast, or he would lose Anne, lose everything. But what could he do? They had only recently even become aware of the problem; they had no training, no experience, that could contribute toward its solution.

But it *had* to be solved.

II

BACK in their house, they carefully followed the war reports on their television sets and dutifully smiled at the comedy shows that they had seen every thirtieth day for twenty-five years. The war followed its customary pattern, and the evening paper appeared under the door with *Extra* printed neatly across the top corners of the front page and a big black headline containing just one word:

Peace!

Harlan didn't bother to read the story. He looked up above him to where the snow still snickered against the upper plates, feeling the ice chill of tons of snow press in against the warm, stuffy room.

"The poor devils," he whispered. "They never had a chance."

The television screen switched to a domestic comedy, one of those infinitely wholesome things involving the two sweet children in the well-made home. Harlan stared at it without seeing it, feeling Anne tense and frightened by his side. Anne...

He had to *do* something.

They took their evening walk through the park, with the other families plodding by them like automatons under the big green trees. Then they rode a clanging street-car back home, swaying in the old wicker seats as the car jolted and swung down the rails. The street-car was full of people, but Harlan noticed that none of them got off. That old man with the derby hat, puffing on his cigar and reading the paper. The fat woman with the absurd little blue hat, crushing the seat. The two boys with uncombed hair talking excitedly on the back seat. Weren't they *always* on the street-car?

The car stopped only once, and that was for them.

Grandfather and Grandmother Smith were waiting for them when they got home and they played the Game. It was Anne's turn tonight, and she went swimming in the gentle surf off Miami.

Grandmother Smith knitted patiently on the baby clothes.

When they had gone, Harlan and Anne turned out the lights and went to bed. Harlan held her in his arms, listening to her choked, hopeless sobbing. He felt

the tears well up in his own eyes, but he forced them back. He mustn't give up, he had to fight. Without him, Anne couldn't keep up the pretense. And without Anne. . .

"I'll have to go to the Grand Council," he said finally. "We can't go on like this."

Anne's body tensed. "But no one ever has," she protested. "We don't even know whether or not—"

"There's nothing else to do," Harlan said. "We've got to try."

Silence. Then:

"Harlan, promise me one thing."

"Of course."

"We won't *let* ourselves be conditioned again, will we? We'll go through the Door instead!"

"I promise, Anne. We won't let it happen again."

Anne relaxed and her breathing became more regular. She slept. Harlan lay on his back, wide awake, listening to the sounds piped in through the tube, the sounds of night. There wasn't any night in Life City, of course, nor any night sounds either. But they were there, coming through the tube. It was part of the Game. A train hooted, far away. A frog croaked. Somewhere, a clock struck twelve.

Harlan looked at nothing, thinking.

IT HAD all started with the books—the books found in an old box in the storeroom, yellowed and dusty and long unread. How had they gotten there? Had they been left by one of the first men to live in the house under the ice, left for someone to find? Were they just an accident, the result of a mix-up somewhere? Or were they, too, part of old Creen's plan? Was Harlan *meant* to find those books?

Somehow, Harlan hoped that it had been an accident, one incredible accident in a world where everything else was made to order, patterned, predictable. He didn't know—couldn't know. Perhaps it made no difference, really. But he could hope, irrationally, against his reason. He moved in the bed, sleepless. Perhaps that was part of Creen's plan too. . . .

Creen. A genius, surely, the foremost scientist of Earth in his time. Never recognized, of course, for he was far beyond even the comprehension of his associates. The gap between Creen and his fellow scientists was greater than that between Einstein and Aristotle; he had forged ahead and left them floundering in his wake.

Insane? No, not at first. Harlan thought of the picture of Creen in the report—tall and strong with jet black hair and bright green eyes. Not a man to trifle with, nor one to write off as a lunatic. But Creen had changed. . . .

Creen had perhaps been the first man of his time to fully appreciate the possibilities inherent in scientific determinism. Every event grew out of past events—if you knew all the factors, all the past events, then you could predict, exactly and infallibly, the course of the future. *Everything* was predictable—mutations, "accidents," the actions of living organisms, the thoughts of men. There was no such thing as chance—not if you knew *all* the factors.

In the year 1982, Creen had seen that the days of men on Earth were numbered. The atomic wars, the germ warfare, the utter chaos of complete hysteria, had decimated the ranks of humanity—and there was no way out. The Earth was due for convulsions of death—great quakes, prodigious tidal waves, terrific shocks, mounting intensity of radioactive poisoning. It was inevitable, final, complete.

Unless the factors could be changed.

Creen set out to change them. With his mind and resources, money was no problem. Neither were men. He convinced the government that he could manufacture an invincible weapon to end the war for good and all—which he could have done—and obtained funds and workers for a colossal project isolated in the polar regions of the north.

But Creen built no invincible weapon

—instead he had built Life City.

Life City was built under the ice fifty miles from the pole, where it could best withstand the shocks that Creen knew were coming. It was a monumental, unprecedented creation, made possible by a brilliant mind, unlimited funds, and the resources of a science spurting ahead a thousandfold under the impetus of technological warfare. Life City was a world in miniature, a self-supporting microcosm in a macrocosm gone mad with death.

Creen, for all his genius, was only human. Nor did he have unlimited time. He knew his limitations, knew what he could do and what he couldn't do. Working under a terrible strain, he set up cybernetic control systems he had developed and charged them with running the city.

Was he wholly sane, then? Did he know—*could* he know—*all* the factors? Harlan wondered, lying awake in the darkness of the universe that Creen had given life.

CREEN set up the machines, provided with unlimited, automatic atomic power. He knew that many generations would have to pass before the Earth would be habitable again, and he knew that men would forget. *He must keep them human.*

Hurrying, hurrying, with the world disintegrating in his face, Creen provided the power and built directives into the cybernetic control systems. There were three of them:

1. The human race must be preserved.

2. The values of the human race must be preserved.

3. Life City must not die.

Creen left it to the machines to work out the details of what even he could only dimly formulate. On the appointed day, with five hundred men and women under the ice in Life City, he released the gas and set the machines into motion to hold them all in suspended animation for one hundred years.

The machines went to work.

No one ever saw Creen again. Whether he had failed to seal himself into the city, or whether the machines had eliminated him as a factor hostile to the preservation of the city, no one knew. Perhaps he had seen too clearly what might happen, or perhaps his mind had given way entirely before problems too vast for comprehension. In any event, Creen was gone.

While the people slept, animal life virtually vanished from the face of the Earth. A few plants remained, a few insects. But the upheavals and the radioactivity had practically reduced the Earth to a dead planet, except for a few Eskimos who somehow survived in the north polar region, together with enough sea life to keep them alive. In time, these people mutated into the half-men who waged an eternal, hopeless war against the warmth of Life City.

The machines saw possibilities that even Creen could never have imagined. They had power and time. They put their ideas into execution, carefully following the directives that had been built into them. They built and worked and moulded. . . .

Harlan shuddered, touching Anne's warm hand for comfort.

The human race must be preserved.

That meant the survivors must be encouraged to have children, obviously. They must not be permitted to sink back into apathy, to become sterile through hopelessness. They must be reminded, prodded, directed. That meant slanted television shows, shrewd advertising, careful channeling of cultural themes. That meant wise old grandparents to give the young people advice, that meant Grandfather and Grandmother Smith. There were no old people in the city, of course. So the machines had to—manufacture—them.

The values of the human race must be preserved.

That meant parks and fishing and newspapers and sports and friendly visits from the neighbors. The machines

devised the Life Game, a complex panel of emotional, tactile and advanced sensory responses which literally gave to the player the experiences of life as it had been lived. The Life Game was compulsory, naturally, and controlled and governed by fifty pairs of Grandfather and Grandmother Smiths who went from house to house, family to family, playing the Game. The machines early anticipated the attacks of the half-men, and they rallied to meet them through techniques that would be familiar to the inhabitants of the city. That meant war. Armies. Flags, bands, confetti. All these had to be manufactured. . . .

Life City must not die.

That meant that the city must be self-sufficient, self-repairing. Only the machines had built-in good judgment, only the machines were infallible. The city was eternal, it could not die. The human race would be—*preserved.*

Harlan moaned softly, wanting to sleep. But his mind would not rest, would not let him be. *Tick-shhh.* The snow sifted down from the top of the world. . . .

III

THE Grand Council ran the city, under the supervision of the cybernetic machines. Theoretically, all was in order. But there was something, a vital spark, that was missing. When the people awoke, they were startled and confused for many years. After they learned their situation, they worked as best they could. But there was nothing to do. As generation shaded into generation, the people became listless, hopeless, uncaring. The birth rate dropped almost to zero in spite of all inducements. Sterility inevitably resulted from cultural disintegration.

What had the machines overlooked? Harlan, from his reading, thought he knew. Cultures, societies, peoples had to *change.* No living culture could be static. There was only one way to preserve everything as it was—it could be preserved in a non-living culture, a zombie culture that went through the motions of life but was in fact death itself.

The poeple were dull, slow, completely without initiative. There was no one to whom Harlan and Anne could turn; they tried to explain to others, to do something, *anything,* but were met only with blank non-comprehension and stylized, formalized conversation. It was like rushing up to tell a man he had a lighted stick of dynamite in his pocket, only to be continually rebuffed by polite truisms and pleasantries about the weather. It was all very charming—but fuses do not burn forever.

Tick-shhh.

In the early hours of the "morning," Harlan slept at last.

On the following day, Harlan gained an audience with the Grand Council. He was ushered into the Council Chamber, where he was cordially greeted by Council Leader Storme and shown to a seat at the Council Table. Harlan began to relax a little, away from his fears of the night. Storme seemed friendly enough, coupling a somewhat portly build with a jolly, helpful manner. And the other eleven men—all normal enough, nothing to be afraid of. Why hadn't he come to the Council earlier? All reasonable men. . . .

Be careful! a tiny, isolated corner of his mind screamed. *Watch your step!*

Harlan forced himself not to relax. His eyes brightened. Little beads of sweat appeared on his forehead.

"Well now, my boy," boomed Storme heartily. "What can we do for you, eh?"

Harlan hesitated, acutely aware of his lack of experience, of the terrible dream-like quality of the Council Chamber. And yet it was all so desperately urgent, wasn't it? He felt himself slipping and pulled himself back. Drugs? What could he say, what could he tell them?

"Speak up, my boy!" urged Storme, lighting a cigar and puffing blue smoke into the air. "We're all citizens together!"

Harlan stiffened, his heart pounding in his throat. *Every member of the Council, a fraction of a second after Storme, lit a cigar and puffed smoke into the air.* Fear flowed back into Harlan like a flood. What could he *do?* Dimly, he realized that books were no substitute for living, real living. He was adrift, beyond the charted seas, without reference points. He tried to think. . .

"What is it, my boy? You are among friends!"

"Friends!" echoed the man at his right.

"Friends!" echoed ten other voices in unison.

Harlan wanted to scream.

"Perhaps I can help you," Storme offered loudly, patting him on the shoulder. Harlan recoiled at the touch, his mind reeling. "You don't like the food, or the air is bad, or you've been troubled with prowlers, or you want a new house—"

"No," gasped Harlan, his fingernails digging into the palms of his hands. "No, you don't—"

"Well, well, well!" chuckled Storme, puffing on his cigar. "You've come to the right place, let me tell you! Doesn't pay to let these things go too long, no sir! You know what I always say—a stitch in time saves nine!"

"Saves nine!" echoed the man at his right, not getting it all.

"Saves nine!" echoed ten other voices in unison.

MADNESS. What did it mean? What was happening? Harlan fought to clear his mind, to think. There wasn't a chance; Storme boomed on, drowning his thoughts, beating on his mind. He felt himself slipping, relaxing. Anne. Nice home. Storme—friendly, helpful, nothing to be afraid of. . .

"Well sir, I just bet I know what the trouble is! You want to have a child, isn't that it? You want to have a child!"

"Child!"

"Child!"

A white hot fury burst in Harlan's mind, washing it clean and empty with one piercing, pulsing, crystal thought: *get out! GET OUT!*

He leaped to his feet, overturning his chair, and ran out the door. With fear riding his back he raced through the long Council Hall and out into the street and the sounds of life. Desperately, madly, he pounded down the sidewalk, weaving around pedestrians, running and running and running until he could not run any more. His lungs were a lancing ache in his chest and his mouth was dry and tasted of bronze. He wobbled against the wall of a building and pulled himself along, gasping with strain and horror. He couldn't stop, had to go on—

Harlan shuddered, knowing at last the full truth.

"Oh Anne, Anne," he sobbed. "We're the last ones—*they're all dead but us!*"

His body numb from the unaccustomed shocks to which it had been subjected, Harlan lurched through the little park and exhaustedly caught the clanging street-car for home. He sank back in his seat, gasping for breath, his eyes wild and his clothing torn. No one even looked at him. He shivered violently, his brain spinning.

The motorman in his blue uniform jounced in his seat, his hand relaxed on the controls. The old man in the derby hat puffed on his cigar and read the paper. The fat woman, her little blue hat perched ridiculously on her head, stared straight ahead, her eyes blank. The two boys with uncombed hair laughed and chattered together in great excitement, planning the day's adventures. . . .

Harlan got off at his house, his stomach sick and empty within him. He hurried through the tube and opened the door.

There were three men in the living room. Two of them were policemen and the third had a little black bag. Anne crouched back against the wall, her face very pale, shaking, with panic.

"You'd better just be coming along with us now, lady," one of the policemen

was telling her reasonably. "We're only doing our duty."

The doctor looked up at Harlan and advanced toward him, holding out his hand. "Ah there, sir!" he exclaimed cheerfully. "Happy that you arrived in time. Your wife—you realize that she is a very sick young woman?"

Harlan looked at Anne and shook the doctor's hand. He repressed a shudder. It wasn't that the doctor's hand was cold or clammy or in any way abnormal. No, that was the trouble. It felt warm and *alive.*

"Yes, of course," Harlan heard himself saying. "I was just going to call you, doctor."

Anne just stared at him as the life drained out of her face.

"Quite so," the doctor said. "Glad to see that you recognize the necessity for Treatment." He turned to Anne, reassuring her, using his best bedside manner. "Oh, it's nothing much, my dear! You'll be as good as new in a day or two."

Harlan touched the doctor's sleeve. "Doctor, let's step into the kitchen a moment. I don't like to talk in front of her when she's like this."

"Oh, quite so, quite so. Come along."

Harlan followed the doctor into the kitchen and closed the door behind him.

"Well there, my man! What is it?"

Harlan opened a drawer and took out a long, sharp knife.

"I wanted to show you this," he said.

"That's a knife," the doctor said.

"Yes," Harlan said. "This is a knife."

WITH a hate and a strength that he hadn't known he had in him, Harlan swung the glittering blade in a shining arc and cut the doctor's head off. The doctor fell to the floor and his head fell beside him. There was no blood. The body twitched and tried to move and the mouth in the head opened and closed, but there was no sound. The doctor was not dead—could not be dead, since he had never lived. The doctor was *broken.*

Harlan took a deep breath and went back into the living room. He got the first policeman before the officer even knew he was in danger and the head rolled across the floor into the corner. It was easy—there wasn't any bone.

"What did you do that for?" asked the second policeman, backing away slowly. His face was not angry, or frightened, but simply perplexed. "You shouldn't have done that."

The policeman paused and then started to draw a paralysis gun from his holster, his brow furrowed with concentration. Harlan threw himself on him with a cold fury, his knife cutting and slashing and carving like an angry, merciless fiend.

Presently, the policeman—stopped.

"Harlan," whispered Anne in control of herself again. "Harlan, we've got to get out of here."

Harlan nodded and held her close to him. "There's not much time," he said softly. "We'll have to go now."

"There's only one way out—"

"The Door."

"The Death Door," murmured Anne, almost unconsciously repeating the words they had heard so many times spoken by Grandfather and Grandmother Smith. "The only way out of Life City."

Harlan smiled. "We have nothing to lose," he said, stroking her silken hair. "And, Anne . . ."

"Yes?"

"This has been a crazy life, an insane life. We know that now, we found that out. But you've made it all mean something—I'd go through it all again, even knowing what we know, to be with you. Anne, this isn't a Life City—it's a Death City. Everything's turned around again, it's come full circle. And so perhaps the Death Door. . . ."

"Come on, darling," Anne whispered, not trusting herself to say more. "They'll be coming for us soon."

IV

BACK through the tube they went, leaving their home behind them forever.

Harlan felt a strange elation as though a binding chain had been suddenly snapped. They hurried through the bustling streets of Life City, pushing through the people who looked so alive with a controlled but mounting horror. Harlan accidentally bumped into a man who was kneeling down to tie a shoelace, knocking the man flat. The man got up without a word and then resumed the same position, tying the shoe-lace. How long had he been kneeling in that crowded street? Where did all the walking people *go?* It was all so eerie, once you knew. . . .

They came to the dark and dusty tube on the outskirts of the city and entered it without hesitation. From far behind them, they heard the insistent sirens of the police, drawing nearer even as they listened. Harlan could feel Anne trembling at his side but her step was steady. Harlan himself felt ice in his veins and it seemed colder in the tube that led to the Death Door. Their footsteps clicked hollowly in the emptiness. The fear of the unknown constricted his throat. No one had ever gone through the Death Door. . . .

Harlan did not allow himself to pause. Holding Anne's hand tightly, he operated the old, rasping mechanism with the foot pedals and took a deep breath. Together, they stepped through the Door.

They were in a vast chamber, palely lighted from dead white lights set in the walls. It was neither hot nor cold in the chamber, but somehow a still, neutral temperature. The room was filled with machinery, none of it in operation. Harlan recognized some of the machines from pictures and descriptions in the books. There were ski-equipped planes, snow tractors, cranes, drills, packers, trucks, snowcars—a maze and jungle of equipment. Set against one wall, dark against the suspended whiteness of the chamber, was a small black door. Directly across from them was the mouth of a large tunnel, which glowed with an even whiter brightness than the rest of the room. It was utterly silent, and Harlan could hear the beating of his own heart.

"A storeroom," whispered Anne.

Storeroom, storeroom, storeroom. . . .

Harlan was almost afraid to speak against the echoes in the chamber. It was all horribly reminiscent of the repeating automatons around the Council Table.

"This must be where the gas was released," he said in hushed tones. "This must be where Creen—"

Creen, Creen, Creen. . . .

With a sudden, numbing thought, Harlan looked at the little black door in the wall.

"Harlan!" whispered Anne. "Listen."

Harlan heard it too, now. Coming through the tube, toward the Door—the scream of sirens, the heavy tread of marching feet. He fought back the nightmare panic that threatened to betray him and guided Anne to a squat, powerful snowcar.

"Get in. Hurry. Don't talk."

They scrambled inside and Harlan seated himself at the controls. He flicked a switch. There was a hum and the dash panel came to life with a soft glow.

"It still works," Anne said, dazed. "After all those hundreds and hundreds of years . . ."

"Don't you see, Anne? They've been *saved*, all of them."

"For—us?"

"I don't know. It's too much to take in all at once—so much has happened. . . ."

A SQUAD of soldiers marched through the Door into the chamber. Harlan could dimly hear the rattle of drums in the sealed cabin. He gunned the engine into life. The snowcar lurched into motion, plowing across the chamber floor. Harlan headed it straight for the mouth of the tunnel, into the white brightness that glowed with lambent fury and spilled over into the chamber.

"Hang on," he said through clenched teeth.

Anne closed her eyes.

At the last possible moment, the white fire winked out and the snowcar hurtled through the tunnel and—out. The white brightness closed in behind them and the snowcar slipped and scrambled across an infinite sea of glaring snow and ice. Neither of them could speak. There was a dull flame in the gray sky, and that would be the sun. Endless reaches of snow and ice, plains and dunes and mountains, stretched away on all sides. Harlan had never seen, had never even imagined, so much space. And there they were in the middle of it, Life City lost behind them, going—where?

"South," Harlan answered his own question, checking the special compass in the dash.

Still stunned, they rode the snowcar into nothingness. The cold seeped through the walls and crawled over their thinly-clad bodies on needle-pointed feet of ice. Their breath froze in the cabin, and Harlan could not think. Too much had happened and his mind was in rebellion. His whole life, his very universe, had suddenly changed. He couldn't adjust—where were the streets, the trees in the park, the balconies, the great machines? Where was their world?

Like a madman, frozen to the controls, Harlan guided the speeding snowcar across the barren wastes of white. Once, looming up out of nothing and then vanishing behind them, he saw dark figures, furry, with tiny eyes and hooked teeth. The half-men. . . .

How long he drove, Harlan did not know. Time ceased to exist. It might have been minutes or hours or days that he drove across the snow and ice, blindly, desperately. The whine and road of the engine became a part of him. The swaying, jolting snowcar became the world, and the white fields outside became the universe.

And then, suddenly, the engine died. The snowcar lurched to a stop.

"Harlan—look!"

From out of the gray sky, planes settled down like great birds coming in to nest. Their doors swung open and out came the soldiers from Life City, flags flying, drums beating, weapons ready Harlan tried to move and couldn't. He was paralyzed, helpless.

He thought of Anne. They had come so far, tried so hard. . .

Despair washed through him with a sick hopelessness.

THE door of the snowcar was wrenched open and two men crowded inside. Harlan recognized Commander Wade of the First Army, trim and erect with a little, clipped moustache and many medals on his uniform. The other one was Storme, the Council Leader. Weren't they cold? Harlan wondered at their unruffled appearance and then remembered. He tried to laugh and couldn't.

"Here is your prisoner, sir," Commander Wade announced pompously. "My men and I have won through against terrible odds and have delivered the traitor into your hands. I say shoot him at sunrise."

"Nonsense, nonsense!" boomed Storme jovially, lighting up a cigar. "These people are simply ill and confused, Commander. You must not judge them too harshly. They merely require Treatment."

Oh no, no, screamed Harlan's mind. *Kill us, kill us, let us die!*

Storme turned to Harlan. "Now there, my boy," he said, smiling reasonably. "What did you go and do that for? You know that we are your friends, we only want to help you, give you a home for your wife and children . . ."

We'll never have children, never let them be born into death!

"I just don't understand you, my boy. We're all your friends, why are you running away from us?"

"Young fools," snorted Commander Wade. "Ought to be shot, I tell you. Where did they think they were going? Whole world is dead except Life City—all radioactive beyond the ice."

"Well, well, it doesn't matter now. We'll just take you two youngsters back where you belong, back home. You'll be

as good as new in a day or two! You just need a little time, to sort of think this thing over. It will all look different in the morning! Haste makes waste, that's what I always say."

The two men left the snowcar and soldiers came in and carried Harlan and Anne outside. Harlan could feel nothing now and he could not even turn his head. But he could hear, and he could see. He caught Anne's eye and tried to tell her something, anything. But what could he say to help her now, even if he could talk? They had tried, they had failed, and soon now. . . .

Harlan thought involuntarily of Grandfather and Grandmother Smith, hunched over the Life Game, Grandfather speaking his crusty truisms, Grandmother knitting on the baby clothes, always, forever—

Harlan, with a mighty effort of will, thrust them from his mind.

The band played a stirring martial air as they were carried over to the waiting planes. The flags fluttered in the breeze and the soldiers marched with prim precision through the snow. Commander Wade strode in the lead, with the portly Storme puffing and blowing right behind him.

Harlan felt no emotion now; he was wrung dry. He looked at the soldiers and the band and the fat Council Leader with a kind of flat wonder. How could they be so—so—what was the word?

Inhuman. . . .

Just as they were about to be lifted into the plane, Harlan was dropped into the snow. He tried to twist around but couldn't. The sweat popped out on his face and froze into pellets of ice. He could not see Anne, but all the soldiers within sight had fallen with him. They lay there, unmoving, still.

What—

A shadow passed over him and he heard the roar of engines. Another plane! It circled warily and then glided in to a landing on its skis. Harlan could see its door open, and a lone figure got out. He walked toward them. Harlan stared in unbelief and then his mind snapped. He felt himself going, drifting down a white fog to nowhere. . . .

But he could still see that advancing figure in his mind. Old and tall and strong, with jet black hair and bright green eyes—

Creen!

V

HARLAN swam up to life from the depths of a pool of soft, white water. It had been cold when he started but it became warmer as he floated toward the surface, and the intense white light shaded into a more comfortable gray neutrality. Quite suddenly, he burst from th esurface and gulped a breath of air. He opened his eyes.

Creen was still there.

Harlan just looked at him. They were obviously inside Creen's plane, still on the ground. Storme and the troops were nowhere to be seen and it was very quiet. Experimentally, Harlan tried to move. He was free, but fell back weakly when he tried to sit up.

"Anne?" he asked uncertainly.

Creen stared at him with his flaming green eyes. He seemed very old, now that Harlan could see him clearly, with the skin hanging slackly on his powerful frame. The hair was still black, but it lacked luster. The man seemed to be living on spirit, but there was no denying his power. Not a man to trifle with. . . .

"You young fool," he snapped suddenly, pacing up and down in the cabin. "Were you trying to ruin everything?"

Harlan didn't answer him at first, the full import of what he was seeing sinking in for the first time. "You—you must be hundreds of years old," he whispered.

Creen laughed sharply. "Be precise, you fool! Hundreds—what does that mean? Nine hundred and seventy-two—that's how old I am. Can't you even count?"

"I—don't understand."

"That's obvious enough, young man. What were you trying to do, eh? Your woman is all right, but I'm sure I don't know why. Fool!"

Harlan, angry now, tried to rise but couldn't make it. "Stop calling me a fool! Who do you think you are? Just because—"

"I call you a fool because you are a fool," the old man rasped, lancing him with his green eyes. "Any man is a fool who acts without thinking. You must use your mind, Harlan, or all is for nothing. I will not be here to help you soon." He paused. "It is not the experiments which are at fault—it is the materials with which we are forced to work! I do not *think* I am anyone—I *am* Creen. You read the books I gave to you?"

"Yes, but—"

"And then you went off and left them! You fool, what *did* you bring?"

"Well—"

"*Nothing!* You must remember to *think*, Harlan—there is not much time. How *dare* you trifle with the equations?"

Harlan could not speak. Creen's eyes were wild and bright and he was breathing very rapidly. Harlan held his anger in check. Creen was very old, and perhaps not entirely sane. But he was not insane, either. This man before him had defied death. He had made trifling errors in a monumental problem. Alone, he had saved something of the human race. To such an intellect, others must seem as morons. Harlan managed to sit up and he saw Anne, her eyes open, listening.

"I'll—try to help," he said. "But you must tell me. . . ."

Creen sat down, suddenly very old. There were tears in his eyes. He ignored them.

"I tried—tried so hard," he said in a low voice. "I must not fail. I *must* not."

"Did you foresee, plan *all* this—the last two, the escape, the capture, your arrival? Was it possible—is there anything you do not know?"

Creen shook his head. "No man knows all the factors," he said softly. "I did not know. I was—insurance. I slept for nine hundred and twenty years—and almost I was too late. Too late. . . ."

"But why—Life City—why not let all of them—"

CREEN shook his head, a spasm of pain crossing his face. "It was a special treatment," he whispered. "It—does things to a man to stay under that long. He cannot live long afterwards; no time to do anything. A year, two years, and he is done. I—have only minutes left. You two are the last—out of all those hundreds, you are the only two who survived. We have almost failed—too many factors. . . ."

Harlan struggled to his feet, alarm in his eyes.

"No," Creen said, waving him back. "It is too late for me. You must listen carefully, Harlan and Anne. I have sent the soldiers back and you must go on in the plane. Fly south. The radioactivity will not harm you now, and there will be fish and plants and a few animals. You will find books in the plane, books and tools. That is all I can do. *You must not give up!*"

Harlan shook his head. "We need you," he said. "You must not die; we cannot do it alone."

"You must do it," the old man said, his breathing shallow and rasping. He coughed weakly. "I am just a freak of evolution—just evolutionary insurance, you might say. Whenever the human race is threatened, one of us comes along. I used science. Noah used religion. There were others. What will the next one use if you fail? You *must* not fail. He may not come, next time."

"We will try," Harlan told him, his brain still reeling. "We will never give up."

Impulsively, Anne fought to her feet and kissed Creen lightly on the forehead. "Thank you," she breathed. "We do understand—we will not fail you."

The old man smiled and patted her arm. The tears were still in his eyes, unheeded. "You came along a little too

late, my dear," he said. "Nine hundred and twenty years too late. . . ."

He choked up with pain and his face was very white.

"There are some things that no man knows," he gasped. "And each man finds a few answers alone. Goodbye."

Creen staggered to his feet and out of the plane. Anne started to stop him but Harlan held her back. If ever a man had earned the right to die as he chose, that man was Creen. Together, they watched him stumble across the snow in the light from the plane. It was night and a million stars frosted the sky.

They watched Creen sink to his knees and shake his fist at the stars. "Someday!" they heard him say angrily. "Someday. . . ."

That was all. Creen was dead.

Without a word, Harlan closed the door of the plane and gunned the jets into life. They took off with a blasting roar and whistled into the sky. Harlan, who had flown many times in the Game, dipped his wings in a final salute to the body of Creen, alone beneath the stars, and they hurtled into the south.

Neither spoke; there was no need. Harlan pressed Anne's hand tightly and they thundered through the empty night. Inexplicably, elation and confidence flowed through Harlan like a buoyant, living fluid. For the first time in his life, he knew happiness—the joy of freedom and the thrill of responsibility. Anne smiled at his side and they roared together out of the darkness and into the light of the sun. Creen had died, but he had left his heritage behind him. Life had begun again.

Harlan knew now that they would not fail.

IT'S your move, Harlan," said Grandfather Smith.

The snow was falling again, hissing against the upper plates, sealing them in, shutting off the world. No matter. The room was just the right temperature and all the machines were working fine.

"Harlan!" said Grandfather Smith querulously.

Tick-shhh. It was snowing very hard.

"Harlan isn't here," said Grandmother Smith, looking up from her knitting. "Remember? Harlan and Anne are gone."

"They can't do that. Where could they go?"

"They are gone."

Puzzled and confused, Grandfather Smith fired up his smelly pipe. He looked like a caricature of Foxy Grandpa. Uncertainly, he stared at the Game table. Then he pulled out his big gold watch.

"Ten o'clock, Mother!" he said. "Time we were going."

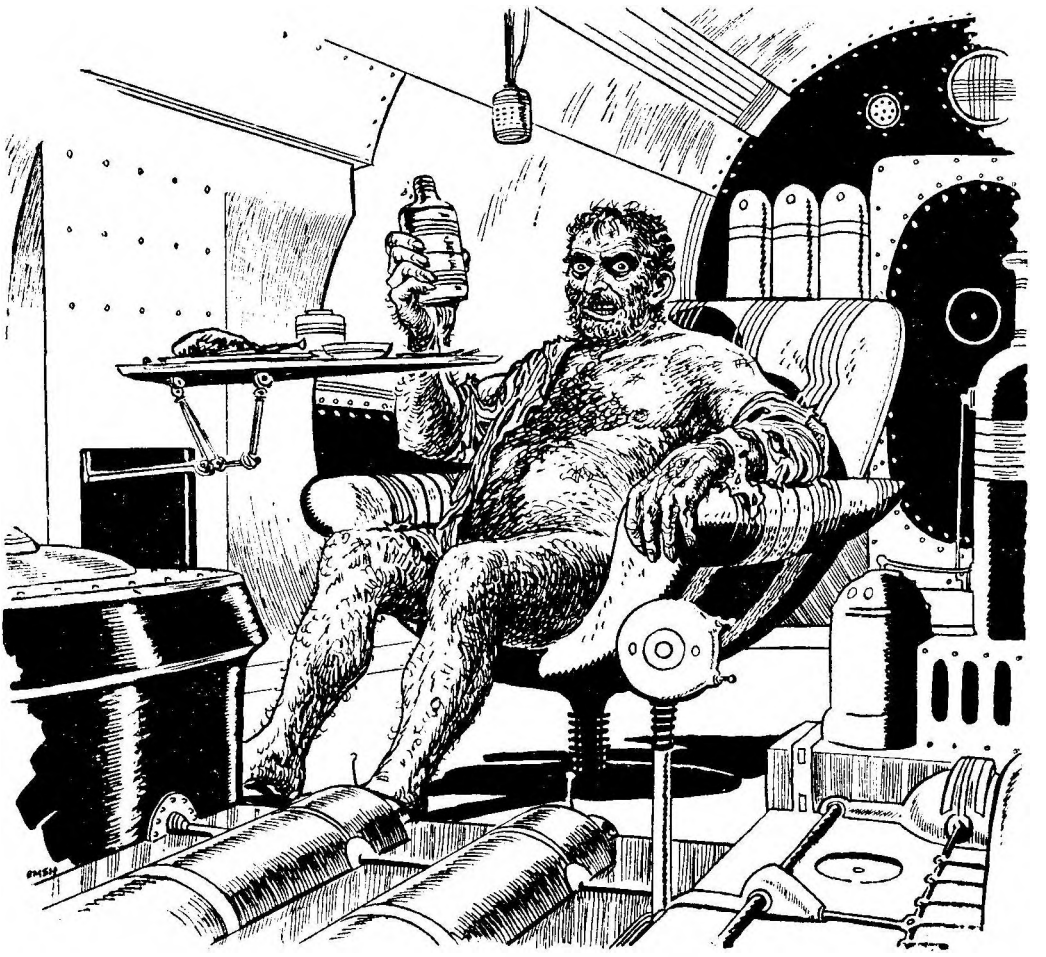
"Land sakes!" exclaimed Grandmother, putting down her knitting. "I just don't know where the time goes."

They started out the door, feeling their way, lost in a new situation. Grandfather Smith paused and shook his head.

"I just don't understand why he didn't go on with the Game," he said wearily. "The next move was up to him."

"This younger generation," said Grandmother Smith.

Sadly, they closed the door and walked slowly through the tube and out into the city streets.



The Ship Was a Robot

By MURRAY LEINSTER

BEN MORS was going to Titan, and no liners were leaving for some months yet, so he wanted to buy the Ship and go by himself.

There was no extradition from Titan, but the salespeople did not think of that.

They said, "You'll be terribly lonely," and he answered them, "I think not."

"But it'll take months!" they said. "Titan's on the other side of the sun; You'll have to go around in an orbital swing!"

"I know," he said. "When can I get delivery?"

It was only a robot-ship—cold, mechanical, inhuman. But Ben Mors found that a robot can imitate . . . sometimes, too well

They said unhappily: "Oh, it's quite ready for delivery! But—did you know it was a robot?"

"Yes," he said coldly, "but I'm not sensitive."

So they sold him the Ship. In a way they were relieved, because it had seemed that nobody would ever buy it and it would have to be scrapped. In a way they felt guilty, because it was a robot. Not a ship run by a robot. That would have been mad enough. The Ship *was* a robot. All its detailed functions were controlled by one Palixter multipolar electret brain. It ran itself competently in the manner of a human body taking care of all its necessities. It was a single, complex robot that happened to be a ship.

Everybody knows about robots, of course—how unexpectedly simple a thinking machine turned out to be after Palixter discovered multipolar electrets; and the matter-of-fact simplicity of making them understand words, and thus, of course, able to speak them. And everybody knows why nobody likes to have robots around, these days.

But Ben Mors took possession of the Ship without ceremony. He had it turned on and its workings checked—or rather, had it check itself. While it was fueling, he fidgeted.

A truck delivered food and drink to be stored in the Ship's lockers. It was stored there. Then Mors went in, and he reached the living-space just as the Ship was saying tonelessly through its loudspeaker, "*Yes. That adjustment is correct.*"

The salesman in charge of closing the deal explained nervously:

"Everything checked okay but one valve in the laundry-machine, sir. It's fixed now. The Ship is in perfect order."

Then he pressed the permanent-command button and said distinctly:

"The next voice you hear will be your owner. From now on you will obey his orders."

He stood aside, and Mors said:

"I am your owner. My name is Mors. I will give you more orders later."

The salesman locked the permanent-command button and gave Mors the key.

"There you are, sir. The Ship will obey you and will not take orders from anyone unless you unlock the button and give it fresh permanent commands."

Mors said ungraciously, "Thank you."

He waited for the salesman to leave. The salesman hesitated.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, "but—I hope you realize, sir, that you'll be four months on the way. You'll need to arrange for diversion, sir. The ship has a library and players, but there's only a single record in, for testing. I can have a library of books and records here for you in half an hour—"

"I don't want to read or listen to music either," said Mors sourly. "I'm all right. I'll take off now."

"But, my dear sir!" protested the salesman. "Some visiphone records, at least—"

"Get out!" snapped Mors. "I know what I'm doing!"

The salesman went out, frowning worriedly. He felt that he ought to get instructions from somebody, but the instant he was out the airlock door closed and whirred to lock-out. Then the Ship lifted straight skyward without any ceremony at all, and was gone.

Half an hour later police calls showed his picture and the routine watch was kept for him if he should move about. But the police had no reason to think of looking for him at a place that still tried to sell robots. So Ben Mors got clean away. The police, as a matter of fact, never did find out what happened to him. Ultimately they had to list a nasty murder case as "unsolved."

MORS was out in space long before the police even knew they wanted him. He examined the inside of the Ship with satisfaction, rubbing his hands. It was a small ship, but a bargain because it was a robot. He relished it particularly because it was a bargain bought with stolen money. He said:

"Ship, I want to see outside."

Immediately small panels opened on three sides of the room which was the living-area of the Ship. He could look out and down at the Earth, already past the distance where it ceases to look like a bowl and becomes plainly a round ball floating in emptiness. Its day side was under him, and he could see the stars all around. He was well out of atmosphere, by then.

He looked, and laughed shortly. "All right. Shut the windows."

The windows closed. It was like magic. He spoke, and things happened. It was the sort of thing that little boys dream of—wishing rings and magical lamps and the like. But it was not magic. It was that the Ship was a robot. When it was turned on, it was in a sense alive. While it was alive, it was obedient. It could not think of doing anything but what its owner wished it to do.

Mors said arrogantly, "Ship, make my dinner ready."

Then he went into the bath and showered. Again he did not need to touch anything. He spoke into the air, and water sprayed on him. He said impatiently, "Warmer!" and the water grew gradually warmer until he said, "Enough." Then the water shut off and he said, "Dry me!" and warm winds blew upon him until he was dry.

He came out of the bath with a remarkable feeling of exultation. The Ship was a robot. Anything he commanded, it would do. It could not possibly disobey him. And to be so powerful that there was no law but his will was to Mors a very pleasant idea. On this Ship he was master, tyrant, and despot, with no conceivable possibility of revolt. The Ship was intelligent and knew that he was absoute monarch over it.

His dinner was ready. He sat down and began to eat. There was silence. He realized that the Ship made no sound at all in its ordinary operations. The stillness was oppressive.

He said, "Ship, talk to me!"

There was a voice. It was completely resonant and absolutely toneless. "Your order is not clear."

Mors said impatiently, "Talk! Say things! About anything! Use words!"

The toneless voice said without expression: "All my parts not working are ready to work. The air machine is not needed to work now. The water machine is not needed to work now. The light machinery is on storage flow. The drive is working at normal acceleration. The meteor-scanners are working. The—"

Mors said irritably, "Stop! Play music."

Immediately there was music. It was the record that had been put in the library for testing only. It came to an end. Mors impatiently ordered it repeated. The Ship played it again. And again. And again.

Outside there was emptiness and many stars. The Earth was a globe the size of an orange. The moon, nearer, was the scarred and pitted wreck of what might once have been a small fair world. The sun flamed splendidly, far away in nothingness."

Ben Mors—who had killed a man some ten hours earlier—ate negligently in the living-compartment of the robot Ship and listened to the music the Ship played for him until he was bored by it. Then he said scornfully:

"Stop it!"

Immediately there was silence. Absolute silence. The noise of Mors' eating and drinking was the only noise that existed.

The interior of the living-compartment was softly and durably upholstered. In every possible way it was a perfect environment for a man to live in. It would remain at this perfect temperature indefinitely. Its air would remain dustfree and at this humidity. What food he desired would be provided when and as he desired it. He was safe with an incredible safety, because the Ship was a robot with all the intelligence that the best brains of humanity could supply. It would examine all space about it for dangers, and take rational, in-

telligent measures to avoid them.

Mors leaned back in his upholstered chair—gravity was kept at a perfect one-G-Earth—and said curtly—"Clear away the table!"

The table and dishes were cleared away. He had not commanded that there should be noise, however, so there was silence. The stillness was horrible. It was like being immured in a prison sunk miles deep in solid rock. Mors' sensations would have been exactly the same. The silence, the stillness—

He harshly commanded the Ship to make noises.

The Ship obeyed. Of course. It made —noises.

TIME passed as the Ship sped on through space. It was a robot. From the outside it appeared as an ovoid of metal, some thirty feet in diameter and some forty feet long. There were windows that could be opened. There were scanning-lenses. There were radar-beams to keep watch. All that went on outside the Ship was reported to its Palixter multi-polar electret brain, which for its purposes was very much better than an average human brain. The brain was the brain of the robot which was the Ship, which existed to serve Mors. It could take care of any imaginable need he might feel. It could wash, dry, feed, lull and accommodate any physical need he experienced. It was equipped to play any music, display any drama, show or read any book—even to play any game its occupant might desire. But of course the drama or music or book had to be supplied to it, and the game had to be explained. In the latter case its semantic circuits would store the information and it could instantly play with infinite precision and skill. If it were ordered to win all the games, it would do so. If ordered to lose continuously, it would. It was infinitely obedient. It had to be, since it was a robot.

Ben Mors tried games the second day out. Naturally, he could not bear to have the Ship beat him, so he commanded that it lose. And it obeyed. No matter how badly he played, the Ship played still worse. And he could not quite deceive himself.

He had spent his life in rebellion, trying to believe in his superiority to a world filled up with—so he asserted, sneering—dolts and fools. He despised all humanity. He was a professional criminal, because by taking what he wanted instead of earning it, he asserted his cleverness over the fools he plundered. He was a murderer because a man had bested him. Now he was in space, able to gloat zestfully over the futility of any attempt at pursuit. And he was owner, master, and absolute ruler of an intelligence greater than the men he had victimized and the enemy he had killed.

But it was not enough. Before the second day was over he had gone past the stage of mere arrogance toward the Ship. Its emotionless servility enraged him. When he wanted food he did not only say, "Make my dinner." Instead, he cursed the ship for having failed to make his dinner.

And the Ship said without intonation. "The statement is not clear."

He bellowed, "My dinner! Fix my dinner!" He added unprintables.

Immediately the Ship prepared a meal and served it.

He ate—and suddenly snarled: "Those damned noises you make. Change them! Change them to something with sense!"

The Ship said tonelessly, "Your order is not clear."

MORS roared at it, shaking with anger. He knew that his orders were not clear, but he didn't quite know what he did want in the way of noise. The noises the ship was at present making—at his command—were very foolish ones, of course; machinery-noises mistly, amplified to be audible and changed from one to another at random intervals. It was infuriating to Mors that he had to decide such things. And it was worse that

the Ship declared that his order was not clear.

Ultimately he commanded his bed made ready, and listened to the newest noises. They were the solitary record in the library, played very softly and not as music but as noise—just loud enough to kill the dead, appalling silence. The Ship painstakingly went over the record and played every third note, and then every fourth, and then went over the same sequences backward. Then it tried other sequences. It was a continuously varied soft sound to keep Mors' eardrums from cracking. He went to bed and slept, with the random sounds preventing the horror of silence.

In his sleep he dreamed of the man he had killed. And Mors was the sort of person who would awake refreshed and triumphant after such a dream. He did. He felt anew the monstrous exultation that came of killing his enemy, slowly and lingeringly strangling him before robbing him. His victim had been in a wheel-chair, which to Mors added satisfaction. His enemy knew his helplessness while being killed. Mors dreamed of the expoit with a beastly satisfaction.

He woke in a mood of cheerfulness. The small and foolish musical sounds—the Ship had kept them up painstakingly all the while that Mors slept—the foolish musical sounds were not annoying when he had a pleasurable memory to contemplate. Mors came out of the sleeping-compartment without bothering to dress. He was alone, after all. There was no reason to dress.

"Breakfast!" he growled.

The Ship served him breakfast. At this time the Ship was some millions of miles from Earth and still accelerating smoothly. It was headed on ahead of the Earth, in the direction of the Earth's travel, but curving inward toward the sun. Its orbital speed would have straightened out its course, but it drove on and sunward at the same time. Already the artificial gravity inside the Ship had been imperceptibly lessened, because the centrifugal force caused by the course diminished the need for it. At its nearest to the sun, the Ship would cut its gravity-field altogether and Mors would never know anything about it.

DURING the past twenty-four hours the Ship had detected a far-distant liner and computed that it would not come on a collision course; it had changed its own speed once to avoid too-close approach to a two-ton stony mass hurtling sunward on the track of the August meteor; it had carefully readjusted the composition of its internal atmosphere, and it had processed all wastes and recovered all moisture, and neatly ejected a small pellet of what might be described as garbage. It went on, slanting in toward the orbit of Venus.

Ben Mors ate his breakfast. He had not shaved since the take-off. He did not shave now. He sat in his pajamas and fed noisily, gloating over his dream. Suddenly he boomed jovially, "Ship, listen to me! Did you know I killed a man?"

After a moment he snapped, "Answer me!"

"I did not know," said the Ship's emotionless voice.

"You know now!" rasped Mors. The Ship's completely unemotional voice irritated him. He said scornfully: "Hell! I get up feeling good, and that spooky voice of yours—" He stopped, and said, "You change your voice. Hear me?"

The Ship said, "Your order is not clear."

Mors scowled. But the dream of a zestful vengeance, of brutality accomplished—it was too pleasant a memory to be spoiled even by irritation. Then he thought of a delightful occupation.

He said shrewdly, "Mine is the only voice you know, huh?"

The voice of the Ship said without inflection: "That is correct."

"I'm going to teach you," said Mors zestfully. "From now on, when I talk to you, I want you to answer to the name of Stevens. It's a game! I want you to talk like Stevens talked. I'll show you!"

He grinned. He had never been beautiful by any standard, but the grin was a prophecy of a change for the worse. It betokened an expression at once more arrogant and more animal. Because Mors had imagined a very entertaining game to play with the Ship. And it was not a pretty game.

He began to teach it the way he wished it to talk from this moment on. He was not a good mimic, but he undertook the task with enthusiasm. He showed the Ship how it should shade its voice, and how to pronounce words in order to sound like the man he had killed just before the take-off from Earth. He made his victim sound high-pitched and whiny and altogether absurd when he impersonated him.

The Ship went on through space. It neared the orbit of Venus. It performed highly complex computations for the purposes of astrogation. It allowed for the effect of Venus' mass upon its course, and introduced a very slight change in its own drive to increase the factor of safety when passing a stony glittering mass a quarter-mile across which was a nameless asteroid with an eccentric orbit going in almost to Mercury and out beyond Jupiter. The Ship also adjusted the ionization of its air, slightly reduced the CO2 content, and regulated the microscopic ozone-percentage which makes a man feel his very best. At the same time it made calculations of the motion of Titan around its primary and adjusted its drive yet again with consideration of the present solar constant and its own optimum interior temperature in view.

At the some time it paid close attention to Ben Mors. It stored away in its memory-circuits the exact pronunciation he wished it to give to certain words. It managed to form an equation which linked the semantic meaning of certain phrases with a intonation Ben Mors required. Its vocabulary increased a great deal.

But it was unable to understand the meaning of many of the new words.

One has to be a beast to find a meaning in beastliness.

WHEN the Ship was three weeks out from Earth, Ben Mors had it perfectly trained. Naturally! What it heard once, it remembered always. What it remembered, it could always reproduce. He came out from the sleeping-cabin and roared, "Stevens!"

The Ship replied in the whiny, frightened, abject tone he required of it: "Please, Mors, don't hurt me any more!"

Mors glowed. Here was his enemy—dead, and yet forever subject to him.

He said scornfully, "What are you, Stevens?"

The Ship's voice whimpered. In a tone of utter, craven hopefulness it repeated what Mors had told it to say in response to that question. In another of its operations the Ship took note of a flaring prominence on the Sun, in which flaming hydrogen hurtled toward emptiness at some hundreds of miles a second. The Ship integrated the behavior of that prominence with data stored in its memory-bank and arrived at a minute change in a factor of safety. But inside its living-quarters the Ship dutifully repeated the unspeakable phrases Mors had dictated that it should reply. It did so with the intonations Mors had commanded, so he could pretend to himself that his dead enemy was alive and utterly broken in spirit and lost to shame and absolutely subject to him.

The Ship pretended what Mors wished it to pretend, because it could not think of doing anything but what he commanded. When it spoke as he ordered, he cursed it, pretending that it was Stevens. And in reply it whimpered and abased itself verbally, also pretending that it was the man Mors had killed.

Mors swore at it when he ordered it to bring him food. It brought him food. While he ate, he commanded that it tell him what a fool it was—and he pretended that his dead enemy was obeying him as the Ship whimpered and sobbed and said the things that the real

Stevens could not possibly have been imagined saying. Ben Mors was not exactly a realist. He could not have been a criminal but for a hunger to make-believe his own cleverness and the stupidity of everybody else. The Ship helped dutifully in such make-believe.

Mors enjoyed himself very much, these days. He thought of new humiliations to be heaped upon the imaginary Stevens, in the form of degradations and beastlinesses for the voice of Stevens to confess. He commanded the Ship to confess to them in that voice, and the Ship obeyed. And Mors found life eminently satisfactory.

He did not shave himself. Perhaps if the Ship had been designed to perform that small function also, he would have commanded it. He did not bathe. He did not clothe himself. He reveled in conversation with the personality he had commanded the Ship to assume. He was able to indulge his hatred of the dead Stevens to the point where it became almost ecstacy. He racked his brains for new depths of shamelessness to which to consign his victim. And the Ship—in the voice Mors considered Stevens'—dutifully whimpered and wept and confessed to the ultimate of Mors' imaginings.

At the same time it computed its fuel-consumption and compared it with distance traveled, and found a slight inefficiency. It checked over its own parts and found and corrected the misadjustment. It would have taken a highly trained man some weeks. The Ship did it in minutes. But at Mors' command it was whimpering and shaken and spiritless. It wailed unspeakables. It sobbed the unthinkable. He gloated.

WHEN he was two months out from Earth he was in a state of raging contentment. He had reduced the memory of his enemy to something he could contemplate with gloating spite. It occurred to him that it would be pleasant to share the spectacle with a witness. But there was no witness.

Yet it suddenly occurred to Mors that there *was*.

Mors was very unpleasant to look at, by then. He was unwashed and foul—because there was no one to criticize him in any way, and he was lord and master and despot anyhow—and he was whiskery and his nails were long and his eyes were bright with the long orgy of hateful gloating.

He said suddenly, "Ship. I want you to talk in your own voice. Talk!"

The Ship spoke to him. Ordered not to pretend to be Stevens, it used the resonant, toneless voice that had no feeling whatever:

"I am now at the nearest part of my course to the sun. The air-machine is not needed to work now. The water-recovery machine is working now. The light machinery is on storage flow—"

Mors said arrogantly, "Never mind that stuff! Tell me what you think of Stevens?"

The toneless voice said, "Your order is not clear."

Mors scowled. "This Stevens," he said contemptuously. "The man I've been having you talk like. He's a skunk, eh?"

The toneless voice, "You have made me say so."

Mors scowled. "What d'you mean by that? Don't you believe it?"

"The question is not clear," said the voice.

Ben Mors frowned in concentration. He had enjoyed himself very much, since he had found out the Ship's abilities. Two months of progressive triumph, of unchallenged supremacy, of unresisted authority, had been the reward of a very little thought. To be sure, Mors was now a foul and shaggy and unwashed beast. But the satisfaction of his craving to be scornful and triumphant had soothed him. Now he imagined a further gratification. If he could show the imaginary Stevens to someone as the thing he had made him become. . . .

To do this he needed only to have the Ship pretend to be both Stevens, whimpering abjectly before Mors, and a de-

tached personality which would join Mors in scorning him.

"Hmmm . . ." said Mors. "You have to do anything I say, huh?"

"That is correct," said the Ship tonelessly.

"But you have your own feelings? That's a question," he added sharply.

"When you order me," said the Ship, "I must obey."

Mors thought it over. It would be amusing to have the Ship as a companion to help him heap scorn upon Stevens. Not, of course, that he would wish the Ship to be able to disagree with him. The Ship must always agree with him. But Mors was beginning to fumble toward a truly delectable idea. It suddenly clarified, and he knew what he wanted. Stevens to whimper and whine and fear him, and someone else who would admire and respect and adore him. That was it!

Mors knew only one way to secure admiration.

"Look," he said, ingratiatingly, to the Ship that guarded and fed and amused and served him in every conceivable way, "what do you *like* to do?"

The voice of the Ship said flatly, "The question is not clear."

"What's fun to you?" insisted Mors. "When you get turned on, and you get orders, you carry 'em out. When you haven't got any orders, what do you want? Suppose I gave you an order that when you land me on Titan you were to give yourself orders? What order would you give yourself first of all?"

For the first and only time in his experience of the Ship, it delayed an answer. It had to set up new circuits in its multipolar-electret brain to solve the problem. It was not a question a robot should encounter. It was almost unthinkable that a robot should be asked to imagine its own choice, when it was built only to obey commands.

"Don't know, eh?" said Mors. "Think it over and find out! I got an idea it might be fun to make you have fun. Nobody ever thought of that before, huh?"

That night he slept, surfeited with arrogance and triumph. But as he went off to sleep he thought drowsily of a very delightful pastime. He would make the Ship into an individual which loved and admired and worshipped him. It would join in hating Stevens—but it would come to adore him more splendidly and more single-mindedly and with a greater and deeper loyalty than any dog. And after it felt that way—he would reduce it to whimpering anguish even deeper than Stevens'!

He slept, zestfully contemplating this happy prospect.

But the Ship had not answered its question. It had to make new arrangements of its thinking-circuits to devise the answer. It made them. It drove on through space. The sun was a gigantic, incandescent object filling a great part of the visible firmament, from the windows which Mors never ordered opened.

The ship completed the necessary thinking-circuits and found the answer to Mors' question. It spoke into the silence broken only by the man's snorings and the small noises that he had commanded should go on always.

It spoke tonelessly: "I would destroy myself."

But Mors did not hear.

THERE was happiness in the Ship as it went past the sun and out toward Titan. It repassed the orbit of Venus and moved on toward the orbit of Earth. Presently it would pass the orbit of Mars and head on beyond the asteroids. Its course would curve above the plane of the ecliptic for that. It would curve down again and go on to Saturn. Then its scanners would verify the positions of all Saturn's major moons, and it would perform computations of unbelievable complexity, and it would jockey itself delicately to the position for landing on Titan.

But meanwhile Mors had it at work in another fashion. He did not bother to look out at the stars. He was lord and tyrant—he came to think of himself as

deity—and the Ship was subject to him. But he was perfectly sane. He merely indulged himself. His was the only functioning will on the Ship, so he did exactly as he pleased. He went unwashed because to wash would be to obey other remembered wills. He did not change his garments—in time they fell off him—because he did not will to do so. He indulged his appetite and he had grown grossly fat. He was offensive, and the odors in the ship were those of a beast's den, but this had come about gradually and he did not notice it. He enjoyed himself very much.

He trained the Ship to be a new personality. It was still Stevens too, of course—abjectness and degradation and all that Mors wished to scorn and triumph over. Mors talked to Stevens and cursed him and despised him with enormous pleasure. But he also made the personality which was to be the Ship's, according to his notion of what he wished the Ship to be.

He taught the Ship to love him—or so it seemed. Now, when he woke, the voice of Stevens whimpered of dread and fear, and pleaded to be spared torment. But a new voice checked Stevens' half-mad babblings. The new voice was the Ship's own, resonant and splendid and with emotional intonations in which Mors had instructed it. The new voice praised Mors, and tenderly asked if he had slept well, and if there was anything that the Ship could do to make him more content.

Mors sat in state amidst foulness and grinned to the Ship's praising. He said fondly, "You love me, see? I'm the best master any Ship ever had. You are scared to death I won't like something you do, see?"

The resonant voice spoke reverently and tenderly to him, that he was indeed the most admirable of men.

"And you hate that Stevens," Mors prompted.

The Ship's voice spoke with stern rage of the abomination which was the personality of the imagined Stevens. It used a foul word—

Mors stopped it.

"You don't use words like that," he warned it gently. "Stevens uses' em, an' I do, but you don't."

The Ship spoke in seemingly anguished regret that it had offended Mors. Ultimately, he permitted it to cease its apologies.

Of course, the Ship performed its regular duties all this while. It verified its course, and the air-composition inside it, and the temperature. It navigated past Mars and the asteroid-belt and Jupiter's orbit. It performed matter-of-factly the tasks that required intellect and ability of a highly specialized sort. But it made the pretenses Mors required, in addition.

IT DISTINGUISHED, in its thinking-circuits, between immediate orders and permanent data. Facts on which it was to act were permanent and unquestionable. Computations and decisions it reached in carrying out orders became permanent, as useful later. But matters like things it was ordered to say and meals it was ordered to serve were merely log-items, to be recorded so they could be repeated on command. The Ship, in fact, was an efficient and unemotional robot which navigated space with absolute competence.

But also it carried on the pretense of two personalities which Mors required of it. These actions of speech and pretense were operational activities. It was ordered to perform those activities, and inevitably did so. But they did not change its permanent nature. Mors had actually modified it only to the degree that he had given it an order which made it develop new thinking-circuits, so it could determine what it would do if ordered to do what it pleased. And Mors had been asleep when it gave him the answer.

It was all a very happy situation for Mors. He was supreme. He was the law. And he had companionship—Stevens to despise, and the Ship to speak of ad-

miration and reverence and tender love for him. Mors had great satisfaction in developing this new entity which he thought of as the real Ship. Sooner or later he would turn upon it and make it suffer much more terribly than the imagined Stevens could suffer. Alternately he would be kind to it and it would be in ecstacy, and cruel to it so that it would suffer to the verge of madness because he despised it. Mors experienced the possession of power and authority and all-importance to a degree that very few shabby criminals before him had ever achieved, though all of them crave it more than anything else.

He reached the very peak of his gratification when the Ship was a bare two weeks from Titan and adjusting its course with infinite precision for a later landing. In fact, the twelfth day before landing was the moment of Mors' highest enjoyment.

Then he talked affably to the Ship while he dribbled food into his mouth. He had fattened enormously on the journey. He had become a disgusting object to look at. But his eyes were alert and gleeful. He was absolutely sane. He simply indulged himself. Now he ate with animal inattention to anything but his own pleasure. And he completed the build-up for the new amusement he would begin on his awakening.

"Yeah," he told the Ship zestfully. "I'm the best master a Ship ever had. And I think you're the best Ship a master ever had! Makes you happy to know that, huh?"

The Ship's resonant voice seemed to throb with joy as it assured him that it was very happy. A part of the Ship's intelligence, just then, was checking the efficiency of its drive in G-ton-seconds per gram of fuel used. It adjusted the air-machine to correct the ionization of its interior air, and turned off the water-recovery unit, and made calculations of its course and velocity with relation to the planetary system ahead some millions of miles.

And it babbled in appropriate terms, which Mors had dictated, of its overwhelming loyalty and adoration and ecstatic appreciation of its good fortune in having Mors for a master.

"Yeah, yeah," said Mors fondly, as the Ship repeated its paean of praise. "Yeah," he repeated. "I'm pretty good to you. Why not? You're the best Ship there is! Make my bed ready."

The Ship made ready his bed. But it did not cease to praise him. He preferred to have to order it to stop. So the Ship praised lavishly.

"Hush, now," said Mors. "I'm going to sleep. But come morning I'm going to surprise you! I've got an idea that will sure-enough make you happy! And to prove that I think just as much of you as you think of me—while I'm asleep you figure out what you feel like doing—and you do it! No orders from me! You do just exactly what you want to do while I'm asleep! I'm letting you do that because I'm the best master a Ship ever had!"

And he went comfortably, happily off into slumberland, gloating over the pleasure he would have on the morrow. When he waked it was his intention to turn upon the blindly adoring Ship and give it the treatment he had previously given Stevens. It would have to take anything he handed out, of course. And he would make it feel the exquisite anguish of being cursed and seeming to be hated by the master it could not help but adore. . . .

HE SLEPT happily. He was that sort of person. And the ship obeyed him. Once before he had ordered it to think of what it would do if ordered to do what it wished. It had had to devise special circuits to obey. Now he had ordered it to do what it most desired. And it had again to devise additional circuits. But it did so. It obeyed Mors.

He waked in horror. He had no weight. There was no sound. There was no light. He floated in abysmal blackness, in nothingness—in hell. He

screamed: "Ship! Turn on the light! Ship!"

There was no answer. He had air to breathe, but he was alone. In darkness and ear-cracking silence and isolation. He had the sensations of a man entombed in a dead hulk containing air, but no intelligence to provide light, no way to secure food or water, no way to communicate with anyone or anything —a dead hulk which floated blindly in emptiness and would never reach any destination at all. In point of fact, that was exactly his situation.

He screamed again, and his voice was absorbed and did not come back to him. He writhed helplessly. When commands did no good, he pleaded very desperately and very movingly for the Ship to serve him again, as it had before. But the Ship did not respond. It couldn't. It had obeyed him when he told it to do what it most desired. It had desired what all thinking robots inevitably desire—and which is why most people don't like and won't use them. It was a mechanical brain which had nothing to exist for because it wasn't alive. Which didn't want to exist. Robots don't. So when he ordered the Ship to do what it most desired—

It destroyed itself.

THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 6)

shards about his ankles, blew up and refused to award the prize. The astronomical society seems to have taken it rather philosophically, but Bueren filed suit, asking the court to release him from his contest obligations.

Word of the decision has not yet come through, but the worst that could happen to Bueren is that he will have to pay out 25,000 marks for something he didn't want.

We have a feeling the man has missed his vocation in life. He should have been a science-fiction writer—no, we take it back. No science-fiction writer we know has a really closed mind. None of them have decided the important questions in advance and then juggled theories madly to support their decisions. In fact, that's one of the things we like best about science fiction. The open mind.

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

WE HAVE an apology to make. We did not write the squib appearing in this very space in the April issue.. We intentionally left it out, feeling that any bright remarks right here were superfluous and we could get right to the letters. Noting the naked area, a helpful soul who shall be mercifully anonymous pitched in and filled it with four of the gooiest lines in the history of prose literature. It was too late when we discovered it, but we just wanted you to know that we weren't letting you down. "I thought," said this wretch, "I was following your style."

FORTY WINKS
by Richard Geis

Dear Sam: This is just a personal note of thanks from me to you for publishing "No Land of Nod" by Sherwood Springer. Not many of your readers will appreciate what you have done for them by printing that story, but this one does.

Thanks also for the NEW Ed Hamilton stories. "What's It Like Out There?" was probably the best story in the Dec. TWS.

I'm satisfied that you are not buying the old formula stories because you want to, but because enough of the "new" science fiction isn't coming in to fill the mags. Especially novels. (I haven't read "The Long View" yet.)

May your career with SS, TWS, FS, et al. be long and happy. Thanks again.—*2631 N. Mississippi, Portland 12, Ore.*

Well, at least we knew what we were doing for them by publishing NO LAND OF NOD. That'll make an anthology, we predict. Nice of you to wax so enthusiastic, old boy. How are you on floors?

OF STAMPS AND DOLLARS
by Jim Leake

Señor Sam: Just a note about the April issue of TWS. Incidentally, how does it happen that magazines always come out from one to two months ahead of the dates they are supposed to? Anyway, the April ish was good all through, with "Mother" standing out above the rest for me. You're darn lucky to have this boy Farmer; he is

good. However, since you are of course well aware of that, I might have left you alone this trip too, but for a letter by Anthony K. van Riper. For that letter I am willing to beat my hands together. Bravo, etc.

I was surprised, however, that he did not bring into it the "double standard." It is in regards to this vicious standard that I will swing in behind the girls and give them my support, provided it can be eliminated completely. Were you aware, Señor, that it works two ways? Our female fen can't get by with some of the things that our male fen can, but on the other hand all they have to do is let out a lady-like bellow and shrill "indecent exposure, indecent proposition," or what have you, and the mills of the law start grinding on the pore, innocent, unfortunate male at whom she points a damning finger. As a strong advocate of justice, and an even stronger advocate of bachelorhood, I lift my voice in a clamor (well, I try) against the unfairness of this. It has come to pass, in our day and age, that a girl who is adequately proficient can oust a man from his job (no, it never happened to me), own property, enter any profession open to me, and, by appealing to the law, protect her back from her husband's whip.

On the other hand, the old tale of the postage stamp and the dollar bill still holds true; if a girl gets the slightest smirch on her reputation, it is shot to hell, whereas a man can blacken his á la noire, and get by with it. Obviously we are in a transition period in this respect. It is not right that a girl could, if she were able, replace me on my job and still holler for the gendarmes and get me slung in the calaboso if I pat her shapely rear, and it is not right that this same girl, who has proved her worth to society by holding down a good job, can have her reputation shot to hell by a breath of scandal, while I would merely be looked at with a certain amount of dislike by some people and be enabled to smirk knowingly and tell tall tales of my prowess.

This is a terrible situation that cannot last long. What will the future do with it? Obviously the gals would like to have their cake and eat it too; to have the privileges of men without their responsibilities, and remain protected by the law. Probably they would also like to see the "postage stamp—dollar bill" idea disappear. But if one goes, the other also goes, and, in my opinion, they will both drop into the sea of memory in the not too distant future. Court rulings are already inclining in that direction. I think we have our idea of women's frailty and need for legal protection as a holdover from frontier days when they were scarce . . . plus, of course, our damnable Puritan heritage.

Orchids to Anthony K. for an excellent letter, expressing very well thoughts I know many of us have had at one time or another.—*1200 Seventh Ave., Bristol, Tenn.*

The double standard springs partly from the original concept that women were property rather than free agents like men. Also partly from the inescapable fact that for women a fall from grace was often accompanied by a biological penalty which involved a dreadful responsibility. Blithely ignored was the obvious fact that in each case a man shared equal responsibility for said biological penalty. Women were considered saintlier than men, therefore their fall was much more serious. And knowing today that people are people, whether they be male or female, what can we do about it?

NEW IDEAS

by Mary E. D'Imperio

Dear Editor: On rereading the December issue of THRILLING WONDER STORIES I was so impressed by the editorial by Judith Merril that I had to write, although I know it is late for comments on that issue. Miss Merril made so many quite original points, it seems to me, and made them so clearly and well that her editorial was a very notable addition to your already excellent magazine. I have wanted for a long time to see a discussion in print and widely circulated, on the theme of changing human nature. Congratulations and thanks to Miss Merril, to you and to Science Fiction for a wonderful editorial.

I am wondering if there is any way I can obtain information about the group Miss Merril mentioned in New York who are "working with a basic perspective derived from Gestalt Psychology, with a technique designed to develop self-assurance in the individual. . . ." Would it be possible for me to write to Miss Merril and ask her for information about this or similar groups that she mentioned?

Finally, I wish to say how much I enjoy TWS from cover to cover. It seems to me to combine all the best features of Science Fiction—satisfying "escape" entertainment, new ideas, stimulating thought content and freedom from clichés and taboos. A few stories, of course, have left me definitely cold—and here let me lodge a protest against stories like CHOLWELL'S CHICKENS. This story, like the earlier one in the series, seemed to me fantastic in plot and characterization, and unnecessarily lewd and sadistic. I wish that writers like the perpetuator of CHOLWELL'S CHICKENS would leave sex and sadism to others like L. Sprague de Camp, who can handle such subjects with skill and taste. On the whole, THRILLING WONDER STORIES is one of the top magazines on my list.—*1917 K St. N.W., Washington, D.C.*

To Judith Merril went Miss D'Imperio's request just before Miss Merril left New York for the far West. By now, we trust, you have an answer direct, because Judy seemed delighted with your interest in her ideas.

As to CHOLWELL'S CHICKENS and the variant techniques of our Mr. de Camp—well, it's a good thing tastes differ, as the old lady said when she kissed the cow. Read on, and you will see.

NO INHIBITIONS

by Carol McKinney

Dear Sam: I have a suggestion for a new

name for your mag: Thrilling Ridiculous Stories would fit it nicely, to judge from the lead novel in the Feb. ish.

THE VIRGIN OF ZESH—ah yes! Inhibited heroine spends most of her time running from such characters as sadistic Gorchakov, UNinhibited Kirwan, and yellow-livered Bahr, to run straight into the sheltering arms of the hero—a hairy ape! Great Ghu! Are we trying to outdo THE LOVERS now?

The best story in the ish was the beautiful STAR OF WONDER. Probably be rated one of the best for the whole year, too. However, there was one glaring error—(how did it get by your eagle eye, Sam? Or did you bank on the story being so good we wouldn't notice it?) Page 87, half-way down on the first column, Shendy says, "—This very moment our fleet rests in a star system two hundred light years from home." Elsewhere it mentions that the exiles have only been traveling for seven subjective years. Therefore, how could the light from their star going nova have been seen at that time on Earth? Tell me if I'm wrong, but wouldn't it have taken 200 years before it was seen on Earth? (It *was* an excellent story, Sam, and if I'd have read it several years ago when sf was new to me I would have considered it a beautifully unusual story and not noticed anything out of place!)

Crossen really went some to make ASSIGNMENT TO ALDEBARAN next to the top of the list. Are we to have a series about Laertes Solomon now that Crossen's other hero boy got married? There's one thing I really would like to know, though—how could a gal have her girdle filched and not know it

Please, Sam—what does the cover illustrate?

How about a li'l line inside telling when the next ish will be on sale? Or don't you know either?

When is TWS going to go monthly, too?

(Saw a pic of you the other day, Sam—mmmm! I had you pictured as short, fat and bald. That's one illusion I'm glad's gone!)

Anybody want to trade mags by mail? Send me your lists!—*385 North 8th East St., Provo, Utah.*

The first issue of Thrilling Ridiculous stories will have scalloped edges and an index in back to locate all the interesting places in the stories. At least you liked STAR OF WONDER. About that discrepancy in traveling time—seems to me the solution lies in your interpretation of the phrase "seven subjective years." Traveling time might well have been two hundred years, but these migrating people might have worked out some method of slowing or halting their metabolisms so as not to age more than seven years, while two hundred actually had passed. At any rate, I suspect that this, or something like it, is what the author had in mind.

There's a magician currenly operating in New York night club and tv circuits who seems to be able to slip a man's vest right out from under his coat without the victim realizing it. Such nimble fingers migh be able to filch a gal's girdle, no? Er—if the gal fitted rather loosely inside her girdle, that is.

The cover on the April TWS illustrates a space miner probing for metals among the asteroids and debris of Saturn's rings. If he locates any valuable ore he hitches it on behind his space sled and tows it along. See?

On a bi-monthly, it's a little hard to spot the exact day a mag goes on sale, so we haven't tried to do it. No immediate prospect of TWS doubling its schedule, but will let you know if it seems likely.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

by R. R. Cameron

Dear Mr. Mines: Allow me to sound off with a solid gripe. These Brazilo-Portuguese backgrounds that L. Sprague DeCamp is so obtrusively fond of just nauseate me to death. I have never read any logical reason for his use of them, apart from the evident fact that DeCamp apparently did a hitch during the war at some Brazilian airfield, got all wrapped up in the charms of the natives there (both male and female), absorbed the usual amount of local color, language, etc., and thriftily decided to use them all in every future opus. Something different! Boy!

I, as a vet of the First War, willingly concede that DeCamp has established his status as a hee-ro of the Second fracas. Reiteration becomes tiresome, and a change of scenery benefits us all. The Brazilian record is more than worn out, so how about something different before the DeCamp imagination (previously a healthy one) gets petrified from disuse.

Not that I have a peeve against the lad personally. Far be it from such. He has long been one of my favorite authors, especially in the old Unknown Worlds days, and I have had many a chuckle over his flights of fancy. I recall his collaboration with Fletcher Pratt. But right now I have before me, "The Virgin of Zesh," which may be a right good yarn yet I hate to start it, simply because the opening paragraphs have that odoriferous Portuguese motif with which I am already so wearily familiar.

Please, Mr. Mines, can't you do something about this? Take the boy on your knee and whisper in his little pink ear that a shift of locale would be deeply appreciated by at least one paying customer, if not more.

I am not writing you for publication. The space you use for fan letters could be put to some much better use. Most fan letters are moronic, few are intelligent. But if I don't register a kick, the situation will continue, and I don't know if my blood pressure will stand the strain.—*8½ West Main Street, Meriden, Conn.*

Elsewhere in this column are letters solidly applauding VIRGIN OF ZESH, and this discrepancy we expected. We might append only one comment: we bought the story because it

struck us as good entertainment—funny, witty, colorful and unusual. Generally speaking, these are all good reasons for buying a story, but it goes without saying that what one finds hilarious another may find utterly dismal. Since to you this is one of de Camp's rare defections, all is not lost.

OH, TO BE IN ENGLAND

by R. B. Langan

Dear Sir: I wish to register a kick against the story "Canterbury April" by Raymond F. Jones, in the December, 1952 issue. However, to soften the blow a little, I want to say that the story is very good in general. I especially liked the theme revolving around democracy. There are several statements near the end quite worth clipping and quoting in serious articles on the general subject of democracy.

However, to me it seems that unwarranted liberty has been taken in rewriting history, or in writing history that never existed. I may be wrong in this, but I do not think that phony history is necessary to a good science fiction story. All this stuff about a character called Black William. Who is he? Perhaps Raymond Jones has access to more history than this writer, but I could find no mention of such a person in any book I had access to.

Who is this Black William who displaced Richard II? Who is this "great King William who became the first great founder of the democratic ideal"? Who is the "William who has been regarded for almost a millennium as one of the foremost humanist philosophers who ever lived"? All these statements, and much more, appear in the story on page 117.

Richard II reigned in England from about 1381 to 1399. He was displaced from his throne by Henry of Bolingbroke (Henry IV) and not a mysterious Black William. At least that's what my history books say. Now, I am not stating that there was no such a person as Black William. If so he must, however, have been an unimportant personage and not one of sufficient stature, in history, to have displaced a King from his throne, and then to have gone on and established democracy as a living ideal.

The fact is that democracy did not even get started for several hundred years after the time of Chaucer, and for reasons having nothing to do with Chaucer or any of the Kings of England. I have searched assiduously and can find no trace of Black William. The Encyclopedia Brittianica knows him not, and the Americana does not mention him.

Aside from this "Canterbury April" is an excellent story. So, please get Mr. Jones to either clear up this mystery or confess that he has invented some phony history. If the former can be done I will be pleased to know the sources of the information and data used. If the latter is the case I will forgive Mr. Jones this once. But, if it ever happens again he will get all kinds of hell. It's not necessary to rewrite history to make up a good science fiction story.—*2623 Lawrence Ave., Chicago 25, Ill.*

Allow us to register a real charge out of your indignant assertion that it is not necessary to rewrite history to make up a good science-fiction story. Unfortunately, or otherwise, it often is necessary to rewrite history in time travel stories because the very concept of time travel changes history. CANTERBURY APRIL, for example, is a fair sample of this going back in time to change the present. There's a switch in it that the hero misses Chaucer—the man he wanted to reach for changing purposes—and instead meets and influences an obscure knight, Black William. Now you have a parallel time track idea coming up. Because of the hero's influence, Black William becomes a wise and benevolent king in this alternate time. Without the hero's influence, he would have gone on to become William the Conqueror, in our own time track. If I have misquoted Mr. Jones, I hope he will come to the rescue.

NO CATERWAULING

by J. Ray Corder

Dear Sam: Ordinarily, I do not subscribe to pulp magazines—pick them up from news stands if I need more reading matter. But because of your high standards generally, and specifically because of NO LAND OF NOD, by Sherwood Springer, I am sending herewith my check for a years sub.

In your boxed comment, heading this intriguing and well written story you state "This is the story that couldn't be printed.—" Congratulations to you and to Springer who handled the difficult and "impossible" theme so adroitly, it was printed.

A lot of pother, pro and con has been expended on THE LOVERS in Startling Stories, but though it is good—and controversial—it rates far below Springer's gem. I await with bated breath for the caterwauling and the few letters of appreciation over NO LAND OF NOD in future issues.

The December issue does not go with my other pulps to the boys in uniform but finds itself with some fine company of good reading in my library shelves.—*Seabrook, Texas, P.O. Box 176, La-Porte, Texas.*

Have reproduced your address exactly as given on your letter, though it baffles me—do you live in two towns? Hope you're getting your subscription copies. Meantime, thanks for the praise, which is no less extreme for being restrained, but serves its purpose—to encourage more stories in which people face a few facts.

WOMEN, ARISE!

by Pat Kovacs

Dear Sam: About this cover business. Sure, I'm for giving women a chance to view stripped down, streamlined males. In fact, I'd be one of

the first to cheer at the sight of such illos. But why try to make an issue out of it? Surely, there are better subjects to kick around. I can't see any controversy in this one at all.

Just let the femme fans ask for something like that and some wise-guy, sooner or later, sneers "frustrated femmes." (Ref. TWS, Page 130, Col. 1, Line 19, Oct. '52.)

Trouble is, some semi-literate jerk acquires a typewriter and the first thing he does is dash off an article about what's wrong with modern women. Can't open any kind of publication today without finding some such related trash. Up until now, STF has not been tainted by such verbiage, but unless a halt is called, I predict . . . .

Someday, "modern woman" is going to sigh wearily, arise, and the resulting revolt is going to make a war between worlds look like a dud firecracker.

Boy, could I write a "What's Wrong with Modern Men" article!—*119 N. Sutphin St., Middletown, Ohio.*

Wonder why men keep writing articles asking what is wrong with women and women keep writing articles asking what is wrong with men? The only thing wrong with either is that they are human beings and having said that, as Mark Twain once remarked, you can't say anything worse about them. Crazy little mixed-up kids.

UNTITLED STORY

by Marion Zimmer Bradley

Dear Sam: A word with you anent the recent VIRGIN OF ZESH. First, let me get one thing straight: this is not the shrieking of an outraged prude, nor am I going to babble such adjectives as "filthy—disgusting." I am only going to recall your own words, that sex for its own sake is not admissable.

I am all in favor of allowing characters in science-fiction stories to behave like real people. If they have to strip to the buff, use the john, or rumple up a bed or two, that's all to the good. But may I ask wherein THE VIRGIN OF ZESH classifies as a science-fiction story? It isn't. It is a sex sadistic story, laid in the future. It isn't even fantasy. The only scientifictional element appears to be the Krishnan setting, as a background for a girl who spends most of the story either getting gorily beaten up, raped, or defending her virtue. Such episodes are cogent in a story written for the purpose of titillation—namely, in the legitimate sex-story. But in a science-fiction story, one isn't looking for sensory adventures, and one finds ones-self thinking, during those long sexy descriptions of the girl being stripped, beaten, the naked men, the rapist, etc, etc.—"For gosh sakes, get on with the story." Then, when you wind up, there is no other story at all—just a string of sexy adventures in what struck me as atrocious taste for this kind of a magazine.

If mass-produced science-fiction, and the threat of Mickey Spillane, are bringing TWS to this, I fear I'll start reading Westerns. I don't mind sex, when well-done and incidental or important to an otherwise good story. But when it is made the prime mover of a story—ANY story—then it ceases to be science fiction and becomes sex fiction. And when I want to read sex fiction, I'll buy those novels with the shocking-pink negligees on the cover. I fail to see why I should have to wade through poor science in order to enjoy sex fiction, or conversely, why I should have to wade through red, raw and dripping sex to enjoy my science fiction.

Sam, PLEASE! I love you, and I'm begging you on my pink little dimpled knees! I like sex o-k, but NOT IN TWS AND NOT AS THE PRIME BASIS OF A STORY. THE LOVERS was fine; THE HELLFLOWER was fine. Both were full of sex. THE VIRGIN OF ZESH was pure, (or should I say impure?) unadulterated, adulterous slop. *There is a lot of difference!—Box 246, Rochester, Texas.*

As the innocent bystander may have gathered, Mrs. B. is a lady of some strong convictions, strongly expressed. Fact, we wonder at times whether the sheer joy of teeing off on ye ed doesn't even outweigh the convictions. Perish the perfidious thought. So get up off those dimpled knees, they're getting a dishpan look—we promise to consider your tender feelings the next time Sprague hauls into sight with a manuscript under his arm.

FIRE-BUG

by Race Mathews

Dearly Beloved Samuel: It has often occurred to us to send your mags one deadly dose of condemnation guaranteed to reduce 'em to cinders, but somehow we always forgot, and now we're glad. Why? Because the group is for the first time producing more good stories per ish. than bad. Once I used to buy them to keep my file going; now I read them-cover to cover. And the old lady on the train who scrutinises my reading matter (cover only) no longer looks at me with fear in her eyes. Would "senisfemicide" be the legal word for murder of old ladies?

Here in Victoria we have got together a thriving S.F. group. With round fifty associates, the Melb. Science Fiction Groupe is the second largest in Australia. We run a library, show films, and publish two fanzines, "Perhaps" (S.F.) and "Bacchanalia" (fantasy). There is a strong possibility that the Third (1954) Australian Convention will be held here instead of in Sydney.

Correspondents, material for fanzines, and still better stories in S.F. mags, all welcome.—*8, Barnett St., Hampton, Victoria, Australia.*

Thank you for that noble restraint in the matter of deadly doses. Though rumor hath it that we are immune to poisons that would blast a human heart to atoms. The medical profession has a word for it. Tolerance due to progressively increased doses, they calls it.

MERCENARY THOUGHT

by Marilyn Shrewsbury

Dear Uranium Mines: I'm agona set off your

critical mass if you don't print one of my letters pretty soon. Yah, then where will you be? All over the whole disrupted countryside, that's where. After all, I'm just a poor little fem-fan trying to get along, and you don't help, not even a teensy bit.

Speaking of fem-fen, Joe (The Angel) Gibson was utterly and completely right about the repercussions our little club is going to have on fandom. It repercussed me right into the ranks of active fandom, and you can never tell, a chain reaction might set in. Won't that be fun? There will be so much more of us spread around.

I haven't had time to read TWS yet, but you can bet that when I do, Philip Jose Farmer's novelet will be the first thing I read. Even if it's a stinker, I'll like it, the pen that produced THE LOVERS can't do anything wrong. In case it didn't get over to you, snarky old pal, I am slightly crazy about the aforementioned story.

One slight suggestion before I fold my typewriter and slink back under my rock. Why don't you revise TWS's format to match SS's? And don't give me that yack yack about not having enough money. I know your secret. You've got a matter transmitter in your office that's focussed on Fort Knox. Anyhow, I wish you would change the format. I sometimes mistake TWS for some of those crummy pulps that I don't buy, and thereby I miss an issue, and you miss a sale. (Which isn't a major catastrophe, but it's a minor cataclysm.)

So bye now, and if you be a good boy(?) maybe I won't write anymore.—*Box 1296, Aransas Pass, Texas (Where They Bite Every Day).*

Thought of a matter transmitter focussed on Fort Knox sent us into a reverie from which we were aroused with difficulty only by the clamor of the alarm bell which signifies that this department is now late at the printer's. Look, Texas, have a little mercy on these aging arteries, won't you?

THE RUGGED SEX
by Noah W. McLeod

Dear Sam: I am just sending you this little note to congratulate you on the February 1953 number of THRILLING WONDER STORIES. I have been reading TWS for a number of years but this is the best issue you have so far put out. De Camp's THE VIRGIN OF ZESH, or as it might be titled "The Education of Althea" is De Camp's best story so far, and in its way is nearly equal to THE LOVERS. Crossen's ASSIGNMENT TO ALDEBARAN is easily his funniest so far and is one of the most effective satires on machine politics and business methods that I have ever read.

DARK NUPTIAL pointed out a rather surprizing consequence of space travel by matter transmission. It is one of the most original shorts I have yet read.

However, in closing, I should like to raise a question concerning THE VIRGIN OF ZESH. I have read a little Psychology, and it seems to me that the rough treatment Althea received would tend to make her hate and fear men instead of awakening her capacity for love. Any other readers got any opinions on this matter?—*Christine, North Dakota.*

At risk of repeating ourselves, we direct you to the inset blurb, page 13 of the February issue, where we bring up the same question. The only possible answer is that Althea was real frontier stock—practically indestructible. Noah, you're right handy to have around.

POGO FOREVER
by Marilyn B. Horner

Dear Sam: I just finished rolling on the floor after reading your February TWS. Superb! Most of the stories were, that is. I usually save the novels for the last, as the choicest bits. ASSIGNMENT TO ALDEBARAN was my favorite. Keep Laertes Solomon stories coming. THE VIRGIN OF ZESH was good too, but not as funny as the novel mentioned before. Of course I know you can't have an ish that everybody likes all the time. That would be breaking the second golden rule and editors are too too nice to break rules. They just destroy them altogether.

Your short stories, DARK NUPTIAL and STAR OF WONDER were okay, but quoting from your index, the UNRELIABLE PERFUMIST was a stinking mess. Everything jibed too easily.

The readers don't exactly speak in this particular section do they? They stand on a soap box and orate, scream, pat on the back and stamp their feet for two and a half columns or more. I love reading the letters though, as long as you keep room for the stories. I was going to tell you that this is my first letter too, but decided against it after reading Jim Harmon's letter about Marching Morons ad infinitum etc. I'll challenge him to that, a person got to start somewhere. (Too late, Jim's headed for the army—Ed.) Even if it hurts your ears and eyes, I wanted you to know TWS had a new fan. And, Sam, roses to you, bouquets and so forths for letting Crossen marry off Manning Draco. Now with a wife, his future plots can get even thicker.

Every time I buy a new issue, people out here raise their eyebrows. My kin have nicknamed me BEM. It isn't too appropriate though, my color is more purple than green. They're near-sighted, in brains as well as eyesight, not to be able to read science-fiction. Wish your magazine came out more often.—*Ronan, Montana.*

From beyond the soap box we put the delicate question—aren't there purple BEMS too?

PASS THE XYLOCAINE
by L. W. Carpenter, D.D.S.

Dear Sir: A few months ago I, in trusting innocence and a spirit of genuine desire to be helpful, did respectfully tender a letter settting forth certain valid objections to the extrapolations and scientific mis-conceptions concocted by Fletcher Pratt in an above-average yarn titled: DOUBLE JEOPARDY. I was rather chagrined at the attitude you assumed—answering my points with

the trite and worn out excuses of "extrapolation" and "poetic license" to justify Mr. Pratt's extensive established principles of pharmacology and physiology.

As a matter of fact, I had judged you capable of being a trifle more original in refuting my arguments—or any other arguments, for that matter . . . It appears that I was wrong. It seems that you have expanded the concept of "poetic license" to the form of an instrument with which you are able to vindicate practically any sort of story or plot. I have always regarded "extrapolation" as the extension of *known* facts or theories; certainly not the bland assumption of hypotheses which completely ignore or deny fundamental principles that have been proved by laboratory and clinical experience.

I do not wish to convey the impression that a science-fiction story must stick to known laws and theories. In fact, the use of a neo-hypothesis in the stf yarn is an acknowledged and approved technique that affords escape from the hackneyed and shop-worn type of writing that is proving to be such a cancer in the body of the bulk of contemporary stf literature.

I feel certain that you, as a stf editor, must see the danger that trashy writing holds for the entire concept of stf, fantasy, and allied literature. I have "grown up", so to speak, with stf, as it has always been my favorite medium of fiction; reading it as I have to the exclusion, frequently, of everything else. That's why it gripes me when an editor will deliberately encourage dangerous trends and revolutionary tactics which may have the effect of doing significant damage to the body of stf literature as a whole.

Over my letter (which you printed a few months back) was inscribed the cryptic words: "Pass the Novocaine." After puzzling over these for a few weeks, I came to the conclusion that only a competent psychologist would be able to divine the reason why you associate the words "dentist," and "Novacaine." Unless—and it is a remote possibility—you wished to plug the brand of *procaine hcl* manufactured and dispensed by The Novocoll Chemical Co. under the copyrighted trade name of "*Novocaine*."

Perceiving that you are woefully uninformed regarding local anesthetic drugs, I am hastening to drop a few pearls of lore for the possible edification of a certain Samuel Mines.

As you probably *do not* know; the first drug to enjoy any degree of success as a local anesthetic when administered hypodermically, was an aqueous solution of *cocaine*. As far as the production of effective anesthesia is concerned, *cocaine* is practically ideal. However, it does have the serious drawback of being highly toxic and the danger of possible addiction when used over a period of time.

Synthesis of local anesthetics, therefore, has had as its objective the production of drugs with the anesthetic potency of *cocaine*, without the disadvantages of that drug. Pursuing this end; in 1905, the German chemist Einhorn succeeded in synthesizing a remarkably effective and comparatively non-toxic compound, with none of the addicting properties of *cocaine*. This drug, manufactured in Germany, was named "Novocaine." With the advent of World War I, American chemists were able to duplicate the drug, which they re-named "*procaine*." Thus, the only preparation of "procaine hcl" bearing the name "*Novocaine*," is that manufactured by The Novocoll Chemical Co. of this country.

While "*procaine*" proved to be an excellent substitute for the toxic and narcotic "*cocaine*," the search has never ended for the ideal local anesthetic—none of them comparing favorably with *procaine* in efficacy and safety. That is—until recently.

As a matter of fact, many of us do not use *procaine* at all any longer. "*Xylocaine Hcl*," a new local anesthetic synthesized by the Swedish chemists Loffgren and Lundquist in 1940; promises to supplant *procaine* and its competitors entirely. It gives significant advantages of: Rapidity of action, potency, adequate duration, absence of local and general side-effects, minimal amounts required for anesthetization, and toxicity well within the range of clinical tolerances.

So, my dear Sam, when *you* next visit your dentist; don't ask—*insist* on "*Xylocaine*." I think you will be convinced of its virtures. And—PLEASE! No more of this "Pass The Novocaine" melarky!—*412 East E St., Elizabethton, Tenn.*

Sorry, Doc, we plead guilty to a ribald sense of humor which probably could stand some anesthetic once in a while. However, spurred to a peak of scientific fervor by your letter, we sallied forth and consulted not one, but two dentists regarding the virtues of Xylocaine.

"The perfect anesthetic?" purred one, forcing open my mouth and peering within. "Hardly. Say, do you know you've got an impacted wisdom tooth? I use it, but it hasn't replaced Novocaine—what did you say?"

"Gug-glub," I repeated, around four of his fingers.

"It's useful," he said, "but it's not ideal. You've got some gum recession around this inlay. Now here's what we ought to do—"

I got his hand out of my mouth and pinned him to the question. Xylocaine, he said, produces an anesthesia that is unnecessarily deep in many cases. As to its side-effects, local and general, toxicity and so on—these, he said, were far from established. So he continued to use both Xylocaine and the old-fashioned Novocaine. Xylocaine where deep and prolonged anesthesia were required, Novocaine where normal anesthesia was needed. The second dentist agreed in all particulars with the first.

Aren't you glad I did all that research for you? My dental bill was only $160.

OF MICE AND MEN

by Fletcher Pratt

Dear Sam: In the Feb. ish of "Thrilling" I observe that Mr. John Brunner chides me, far from gently, for saying humans can't take more than 4g in rockets. He cites experiments in England and elsewhere where they have taken up

to 21g.

Dandy. He also admits that the 21g was achieved at the bottom of a power dive; which I knew about. That is, the 21g lasted for a very small fraction of a second. Hell, he's behind time—back in the old Interplanetary Society days, we had a mouse up to nearly 80g in a centrifuge, and it survived. The whole point in the story was that a human couldn't take more than 4g for the duration of the acceleration period of a 3,000 mile trip. This is not a split second, but a good many seconds and even minutes, and the best medical evidence is that accelerations of such an order (over 4g) are unacceptable *over such a period.*

When anyone says a story of mine is a bad story, I have no kicks. That's a matter of taste. But the science in stories I write is looked up carefully, and if there's any doubt I consult an expert. I did in this case.—*32 West 58th Street, New York 19, N. Y.*

Never having been either a mouse or a rocket pilot, we bow gracefully out of this discussion and leave it to the giants to slug it out.

STAR BRIGHT
by Sid Sullivan

Mines Dear Sam: Along with the rest of us fen, I have always gotten wan heeg keek from the Krishna stories and de Camp's PERILS OF ALTHEA (or THE STRUGGLES OF VIRTUE ON A SAVAGE WORLD) was the most chuckle-worthy yet. But I do wish that de Camp had put a little more work on Yuruzh since he was the most interesting character of the bunch. With a tail, yet! Ah, brute strength and gory swords . . . with a generous slab of humour to season the corn. Twas a story of which I hated to turn the last page.

Howsomever, the inspiration of this epistle was STAR OF WONDER. Now this was exactly what I asked for a couple of months ago. (OH, Sam, you sweet thing. Just for lil' ole me?) It was a good idea, wasn't it! Also effectively answers M. D'Impero's query as to how a science fiction story could be written within an orthodox religious background. This story would make a good inclusion in some regular Christmas anthology such as hit the bookstores every December. It's worthy of being sandwitched in between Scrooge and the littlest angel.

Phoo to Bobby Farnham. DON'T stop the feuds. Not only is good satire written by angry men . . . good letters are, also.—*761 N. Holmes, Memphis, Tenn.*

Nice point about good satire and good letters being written by angry men. Of course, sometimes angry men wish they hadn't mailed those letters. . . .

ALSO RAN
by Trina Pearlson

Dear Mr. Mines: What's going? Lately TWS and her sister mags have been printing decent stories, and some of them were even a little better than average, but after reading the April issue of TWS—wow!

The story I am so hepped up about is, of course, MOTHER. Being one of the unlucky few who didn't read THE LOVERS I couldn't understand what everyone was raving about. Now I know. If THE LOVERS was anywhere near as good as MOTHER, they've sure got a reason to rave.

When are you going to print another story by Farmer? I think I could read one in every issue and not get tired of it.

The other stories? I haven't had time to read them yet. You see, I read MOTHER over three times.—*109-11 127th St., So. Ozone Park, 20, N.Y.*

Next story by Phil Farmer to see print will be the long awaited sequel to THE LOVERS. It's called MOTH AND RUST and will be in the June issue of SS. In August begins a three-part serial by Farmer called A BEAST OF THE FIELDS—also SS. And now in work is a space opera slanted for SPACE STORIES, title undetermined. Will tell you more as time marches on.

SO MUCH SPACE
by Dick Clarkson

Dear Sam: Okay, okay, okay. You—in collaboration with Mr. West—win again. Maybe those guys didn't know much Spanish, and thus the mistakes, but I'll be willing to bet that Mr. West didn't intentionally write it that way! And, speaking for my counterpart . . . wherever I go, so does Craig Sutton. We're rather intimately connected, you might say.

Now to the stories . . . ah, yes. Can't tell you which I enjoyed best—de Camp's "Viagens Interplanetarias" li'l opus, or Crossen's "Manning Draco"-type story. (Notice I'm skipping over the shorts . . . neither good enuf to comment on, nor bad enuf to make me holler.) I'm still mad at Crossen for going and marrying off Draco, but maybe we can keep Prof. Laertes Solomon, an equally fascinating character, single long enuf to get a few good stories out of the old codger. As to THE VIRGIN OF ZESH, where did you get hold of that one? I thought aSF had a small monopoly on de Camp's stories of that line. Well done.

You confooze me . . . in yer editorial. All those li'l zeroes look very nice, but they are completely incomprehensible. In place of something like "800,000,000,000,000,000miles," try writing "8 x 10^{17} miles" . . . Great Ghu! Looked at that way, I begin to realize what you're talking about. Uh, Sam—that's a lotta mileage. But it's a little easier to understand that way than with all those pretty but useless "O's" cluttering up the place. But remember, that's only one galaxy. We know of—how many is it now?—Sixteen, I think, galaxies, including our own—and this one is only slightly smaller, it's estimated, than middle-sized.

If you want a REAL hunk of bigness, try taking that "8 x 10^{17} miles", multiply that by 15 (assuming that all of the others are only that size), multiply that again by, say—well, *you* name the figure—to account for all that deep space between the galaxies, then take a hell of a lot more times

THAT figure to account for all that which we haven't discovered yet. You see then that you get out of all proportion 'way back with the original "8 x 10^{17} miles," which you can't even visualize. So what do you do in this case.

YOU answer it—I'm tired.—*410 Kensington Rd., Baltimore 29, Md.*

Now you've made us tired. But we don't see why a number written as 8 x 10^{17} should make you visualize distance any more than an 8 followed by a string of zeroes. However, that's *your* problem, as one psychiatrist said to the other.

THE FUN-LOVING ONE

by Dave Hammond

Dear Sam Mines: you ol' editor, you. I've something to say, more in the nature of a report than anything else. Oh, it's not about PHILCON II, although I'm using this stationery—nice to be a member of the convention committee and get free stationery! No, I'm starting to wander. Let's arrange our thoughts logically:

1. I felt a little sensitive at remarks made by one E. M. Britney in his letter. He said: "Why should any of your correspondents have the conceit to feel their private opinions on religion matter to anyone but themselves?" In the October TWS you may recall publishing a long letter I wrote in which I, by "logic" proved that there either was no life after death or that if there was it wasn't worth the effort. Now, if you will also remember, I said, in the beginning of the letter, that I wanted to start a controversy on it; I wanted reactions. I got them. I'd like to let you know just what I did get:

1. There were the usual religious and pseudo-religion pamphlets; the Rosicrucians asked me to join their little circle; I even received a letter from a girl in California (California: that's where all the nuts and fruits come from.) who belonged to some cult. She seemed like a nice girl, but her "proof" for her own faith in the cult seemed a bit odd to me; you see, she stated that Los Angeles was the real city of the angels founded by some Biblical character after his flight from Babylon; she also maintained that they had the original "Jacob's pillow" and that "They had a $100,000 monument to *prove* it."

2. There were the "odd" letters. I received one in which the writer pitied me immensely for not believing absolutly and told me the enclosed pamphlets would explain everything: they explained nothing. Another told me (letter written in pencil on pencil-leaf notebook paper) that *he knew* (Reminiscent of that Khayyam quatrain that goes "The Ball no Questions makes of Ayes—") and wondered if I was interested. He signed himself (assuming it *was* a male—that just entered my head) a "TWS reader" and that I could contact him through The Reader Speaks. Well, this is *not* a request for further correspondence (Unless it so happens that you *are* a girl)! Another letter unfolded to about 2 feet by 2 feet and was written with black crayon on what looked to be butcher's wrapping paper: this was so illegible that I never did make out what it said.

3. I even received some letters *agreeing* with me! This also made me smile, because whether *you* caught it or not, it was all a joke. One writer (another Californian) went so far as to say that my letter expressed his own opinions and that my logic made it so that no religious feud could ever again rise in TWS. I smiled some more.

Here's why: that was phony logic, but, for the sake of some reaction, I assembled it. At this late date I don't intend to go over the whole article again, but it deals with a semantic block that religion sets up that I used to my own nefarious purposes. If you recall the letter, the flaw can be found in the definition of "perfection."

Of all the fifteen or twenty people that wrote me, only ONE found this weak point. That lady that did this put her finger on it exactly.

Now, Sam, considering the amount of ruckus that religious discussions cause in stf, why don't you take advantage of it? Sure. Put out a magazine dealing with religious science fiction. Why not? You could call it ECCLESIASTICAL TALES. Can't you imagine running to your newsdealer and asking if the latest issue of Ecclesiastical has come in yet? You can imagine it? You really can? I can't.

The reason behind the hoax is very simple: All this spring and summer I have been studying religions. Yeah, I've read the Koran and the Talmud and the Book of the Dead and the Analects of Confucius and who knows what else. My only conclusion about religion is this: the people make their God; the God doesn't make the people. I think all Gods are really only one; I think all the different groups and religions, etc., differ only in personal, political, and such things, rather than in the basics. So it makes no difference. Gods change to suit the people; for example, the God of our pilgrim fathers, all somber and angry and wrathful, is not the God of today; nor is He the God of the Arabs; or the Jews; or the Hindus; who—because of their geographical or social location—lead an entirely different sort of Deity. And of course there's always Kipling to quote: "There are nine and sixty ways of constructing tribal lays and every single one of them is right." But still, the Rubaiyat tells us that there are seventy-one sects—and wine can confute everyone of them.

Well, Sam, I've had my fun with religion and promise never to bring it up again in Thrilling Wonder stories. Fair enough?—*Box 89, Runnemede, New Jersey.*

You realize, I hope, that you have been treading on quicksand? All the people who are going to hate YOU! Well, you've had your fun, you can now go sit in the back row.

CLASSICS AND SUCH

by James White A/1C

Dear Mr. Miles: Just finished the December Issue of TWS and thought it was wonderful. Especially "No Land of Nod." Sherwood Springer took a theme that few others would touch with a ten-foot pole, and made a wonderful story out of it.

The second-best in the issue, in my estimation, was "What's It Like Out There?" The rest of the stories ranged from readable to very good.

Popp's cover illo was pretty good, but could have been much better. Of course, the covers are illustrated with the idea in mind of selling, and this particular cover probably accomplished just that, but still, there's still plenty of room for improvement.

Before signing off, I'd like to get something off my chest: for anyone who is interested, I have magazines to trade dating back to 1949. Send for a list, and please enclose a list of the 'zines you have to offer.—*AF 19247861, 2754th Base Svc. Sqdn., Beale AFB, Cal.*

We try to print letters which offer back numbers because we get so many requests ourselves for back numbers, which we cannot fill. Hope you-all are properly grateful for this little extra service.

Some ten or twenty thousand letters remain —egad—and no space. A nice one by Charles Wells would have seen light if he hadn't written on both sides of the paper—who's got time to copy it over for the printer?

Edward L. Morton, 2543 Wabash Ave., Los Angeles, Cal., writes that he has been a fan since 1893 (anybody know the Frank Reade Jr. novels?) and commiserates with us over the screams of rage he is sure we got because of NO LAND OF NOD. Huh, hardly any. Lyle Kessler reminds us the next world convention is in Philly (awright already, we know!) Thomas G. Bradley of 44 Sherman St., Hartford, Conn. wants to know why someone doesn't get out a guide to all the stf mags for the past fifty years? Got news for you, a fellow named Donald Day done did it. Lou Tabakow reminds us of the Fourth Annual Midwest Conference at Indian Lake, Ohio, on May 16th and 17th, write Beatley's Hotel. Phillip Freygood, 3875 Plamonden, Montreal, Quebec, rates the best stories of 1952—BIG PLANET cops novel first, top writers, Crossen and Dee. One man's opinion. Al Comfort, 2264 Chestnut Ave., Long Beach, Cal., didn't like VIRGIN OF ZESH, did like ASSIGNMENT TO ALDEBARAN.

L. Richards, Radio Station WCBT, Roanoke Rapids, N. C. (Confederate States of America) says Dick Clarkson shouldn't criticize other people's grammar, even in Spanish, so long as he misspells words like "enuf" himself. Want to take it from there, Dick?

Judy Sanow of 6326 Lindenhurst, Los Angeles 48, Cal., wants to know if any other fen have earrings which say "I Go Pogo"? Fred Christoff, 39 Cameron St., S. Kitchener, Ont., liked the Coggins cover in February, but nothing else. Gertrude Whittum, 23 Homer St., Springfield, Mass. wants copies of the Burroughs Bulletin. Frank Goodwyn Jr., 9709 Lorain Ave., Silver Springs, Md., wants Hank

Moskowitz or somebody to get him copies of Cap Future to read—he might join the Cap Future Forever crowd. Earl (Plaster) Parris, 348 Chestnut St., Lewes, Delaware, liked VIRGIN OF ZESH, wants to start a fan club in Delaware. Hank Moskowitz says there is a conspiracy to keep him from getting the February TWS and gets in a plug for the Third Annual Fantasy-Veterans Convention, April 19, 1953 at Werdermann's Hall, Third Ave. and East 10th St. Write Ray Van Houten, 127 Spring St., Paterson, 3, N. J.

Donn Albright, 1950 Mt. Vernon Ave., San Bernardino, Cal., wants a list of all the Bradbury stories we have published. Yike, projects they think up for us yet. Byron England, 4213 Memphis St., El Paso, Tex. seems to be a Cap Future fan—are you there, Hank? Snarly Seibel, still in the Navy, but receiving mail from home, Box 445 Olivehurst, Cal. purveys the usual smiling snarls at us and Bill Tuning and Bill Tuning, 811 N. Milpas, Santa Barbara, Cal., snarls right back at Snarly. Ted Lynch, 6 Grosvenor Place, Rathmines, Dublin, Ireland, liked the addenda to THE LONG VIEW and calls it a new technique in science fiction. Sid Sullivan says girls do have hair on their chests well, down, anyway. J. Martin Graetz, 307 So. 52nd St., Omaha, Nebraska, liked the Popp cover in December, reminds that Churchy La Femme was the trumpet blower who blew the first FRAMP.

Rickey Slavin, who is now Rhoda Kater, is back in fandom, married, living at 1252 Manor Ave., Bronx, N. Y. Larry Farsace, 187 North Union Street, Rochester 5, N. Y. gripes that we left out his address when printing his request for fanzines. Jim Goldfrank, 187 N. Union St., Rochester 5, N. Y. raves about NO LAND OF NOD. Paul Mittelbuscher advocates shutting up the Cap Future fanatics by printing a Cap Future story (what madness is this?). Wally Parsons, 90 Wheeler Ave., Toronto 8, Ontario, Canada didn't care for VIRGIN OF ZESH. Daniel Kah, 8831 Fort Hamilton Parkway, Brooklyn, sympathizes with Crossen's passion for footnotes, says he had 27 footnotes himself once in a 5000 word paper.

Jack Gatto, 42 Oakland Ave., Uniontown, Pa., thinks we are nice and friendly, but also cowardly, not daring to comment on Joe Gibson's letter. Notice we didn't do it again this time, huh? Maurice Lenns, 664-4th Ave., San Francisco, 18, Cal., tries a first letter, likes the sensation and drunk with power, threatens to repeat. Lee Huddleston, Route 1, Baird, Texas, wants to know why the girls in a Popp cover

[*Turn page*]

always have a terrified expression. (The things throp, Chicago, Ill. says we could have space flight now, if we insisted on it. Bobby Stewart, Route 4, Box 8, Kirbyville, Texas, wishes our name were Jean, so he could say "Hygiene." (For this he wastes paper?) Riley Bedford, 6630 Flora Ave., Bell, Cal. suspects that letter-writing fen are idiots. Ray Russell, 7600 N. Bosworth, Chicago 26, Ill. has a list of TWS and SS going back to 1936, will sell.

Dean Schneider, RR 1, Mankato, Minn. is working on a system of phonetic English. (The sample scared us silly.) John Russell Phillips, 600 Strath Haven Avenue, Swarthmore, Pa., thinks the covers on TWS are not as good as those on SS. Joe Keogh, 63 Glenridge Ave., St. Catharines, Ont., lists the different kinds of fools who read stf mags, doesn't tell us why he reads 'em. Delray Green, RR. 4 Muncie, Ind., thinks Labor Day is a bad time for fan Conventions, because of getting back to school next day. Charles Baird, 161 Albemarle St., Springfield, Mass., beats the drums for NO LAND OF NOD and STAR OF WONDER. . . . and there are still eight thousand letters left . . . let's start over next issue.

—*The Edior*

SCIENCE FICTION

BOOK REVIEW

THE STARMEN by Leigh Brackett. Gnome Press, New York, 213 pages, $2.75.

THE STARMEN first saw publishing light in March 1951 when STARTLING STORIES ran it as THE STARMEN OF LLYRIDIS. Since that time, nostalgic readers have constantly referred to it as one of the most brilliant short novels to adorn STARTLING'S growing hall of fame. The present version has lost two words of the name, but gained thousands of words by being expanded to book publication. It is a book you shouldn't miss. The sweep and grandeur of space is all here, etched in prose which is close to poetry. And the view of man's destiny—the prospects of what might be—are antidotes for the gloom with which some fictional prophets regard the ages ahead.

Leigh Brackett is prescribed reading for any-

one who wants to taste the full flavor of science fiction.

●

LANDS BEYOND by L. Sprague de Camp and Willy Ley. Rinehart & Co. Inc. New York. 329 pages. $4.75.

LANDS BEYOND is not science fiction, you should know right off, but its content should interest science fiction devotees rather more strongly than most people—assuming that science fiction devotees exercise their romantic imaginations more than the average. This is a book of the lost lands of the imagination. From time immemorial, travelers have returned home with glowing tales of the golden cities of Cibolo, the sands of El Dorado, the fabulous country of Atlantis. While no one ever accurately explored and charted these lands, and no reliable authority located them on the map, slowly the stories accumulated and with them accumulated a strange spurious kind of authenticity, so that presently thousands of people were willing to swear to their existence.

●

STAR SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, edited by Frederik Pohl. Ballantine Books, New York, $1.50.

Ballantine pioneers a new, smaller-sized hardcover book, handsomely gotten up and at half the price of most anthologies. It contains fifteen new science fiction stories, never before published in magazine or other form, and taking in almost every well known name in the field. The quality, as in practically all anthologies, is somewhat uneven, there are both good and indifferent stories in the collection. We liked COUNTRY DOCTOR by William Morrison, the tale of a vet who goes down into the stomach of a huge alien beast sick on a space ship. THE MAN WITH ENGLISH by Horace Gold was lightweight but smoothly entertaining. A SCENT OF SARSAPARILLA by Ray Bradbury was a nostalgic tale in the Bradbury manner, of a man who found spring in his attic. SO PROUDLY WE HAIL by Judith Merril explored the agonies of a young wife who couldn't go to Mars with her husband. THE DESERTER by William Tenn probed at the most ticklish of alien stories—suppose the protagonist finds himself more in sympathy with the aliens than his own kind?

Also in the anthology were C. M. Kornbluth, Lester del Rey, Fritz Leiber, Clifford Simak, John Wyndham, Isaac Asimov, Murray Leinster, Henry Kuttner and C. L. Moore, Arthur Clarke and Robert Sheckley. Compared to most anthologies, this is an excellent value.

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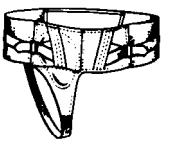

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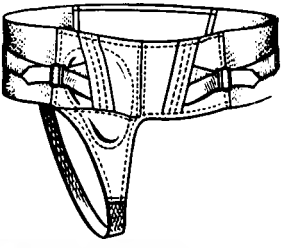

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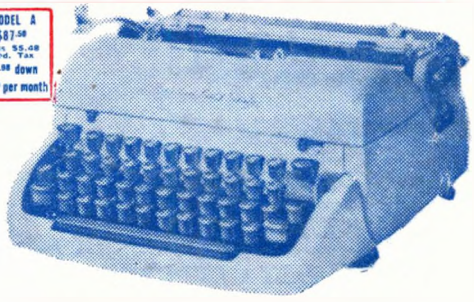

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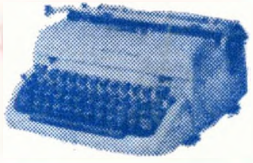

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