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by ISAAC ASIMOV
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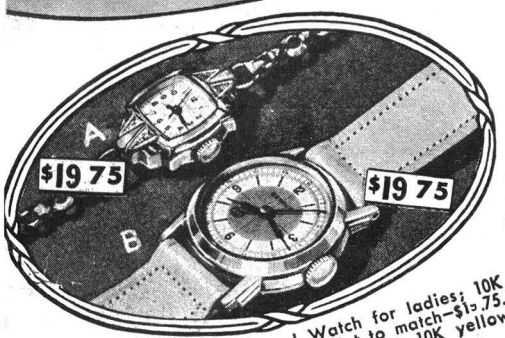

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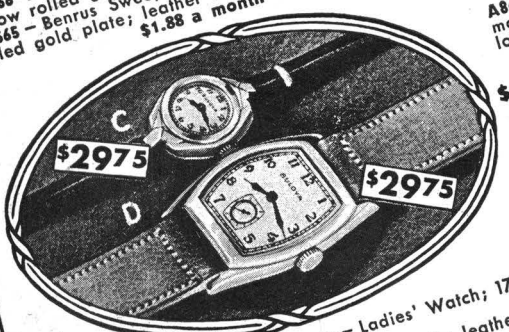

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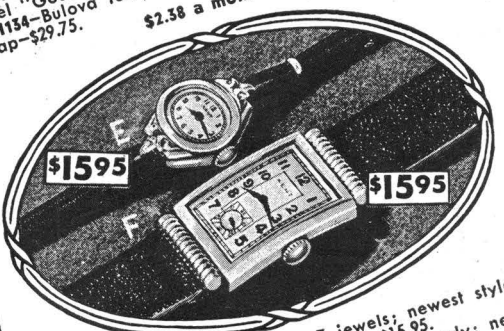

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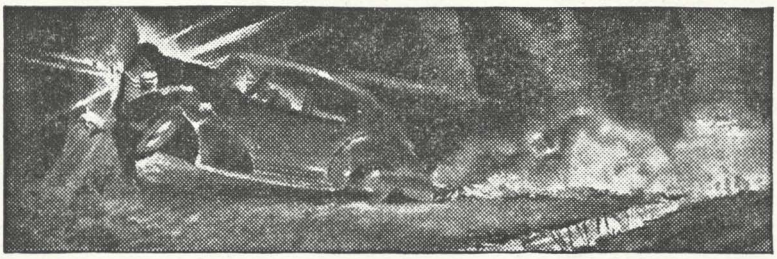
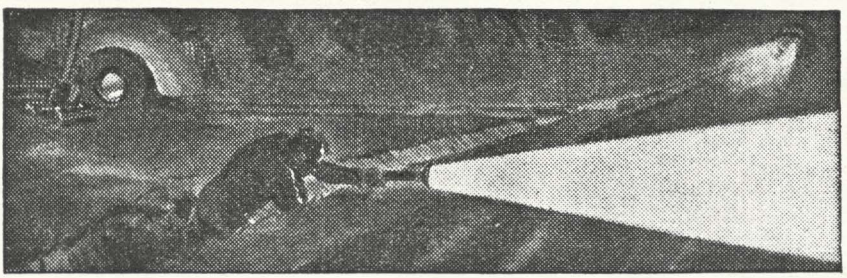
A true experience of P. S. NICHOLLS, *South Bend, Ind.*



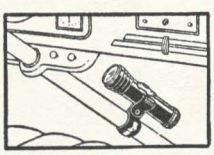
"LATE ONE NIGHT, returning from a fishing trip, I dozed at the wheel of my car while going at a fast clip," writes Mr. Nicholls. "Suddenly there was a blinding crash!

"MY CAR HAD VEERED off the road and smashed head on into a tree. My throat was gashed and bleeding badly. I was able only to whisper—and seemed doomed to die in the inky darkness. Then . . .



". . . I REMEMBERED MY FLASHLIGHT! Somehow I managed to get it from my tackle box and crawl weakly back to the road. Quickly the bright beam of the flashlight, waved in my feeble grasp, stopped a motorist, who took me to a hospital just in time. There is no doubt that I owe my life to dependable 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries!

(*Signed*) *P. S. Nicholls*"



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VOL. 2 DECEMBER, 1940 NO. 2

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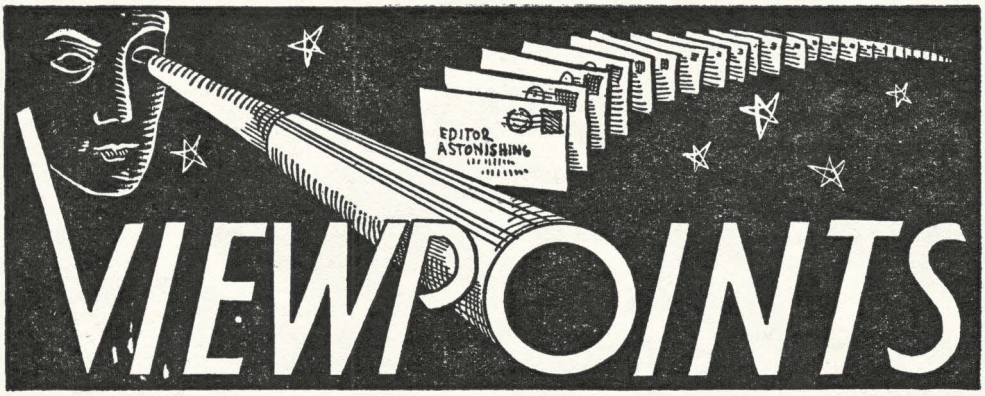

Weird Complaint!

Dear Mr. Pohl:

Complete disregard of the few serial attackers should be the attitude taken by the more sensible and adult of your reading public, and by the editorial and publishing staff. If anything is killing science fiction it is the short story; you may help immeasurably by giving the reading majority the longer yarns that are better, not only because of length, but for the added time and care an author takes in writing a novel. Let's hope for many continued stories in the future. Personally, I read the serials in one sitting anyway.

I'm about to make the weirdest complaint: you use too many illustrations. Far be it from me to gripe about good drawings; I find, though, that with so many to do each month the artists are getting careless. I stick—though with reservations—to my rule: one full-page, framed illustration for every ten pages of story, and, if you are so anxious to please, a half-page drawing—both the column-strip and the horizontal type are acceptable—added to each novelette; if the shorts have exceptionally good scenes, you can use the same rule for them, too.

By way of finishing up the "art critic" department, I should like to nominate Bok, Morey, Marconette, Binder, Gabriel, and Ghorp (machinery) your best artists; and I should also like to express my appreciation for your giving the "amateur-fan" artists a chance in your pages. I ask that you give one more such a chance, Clay Ferguson, whose art appeared in some fan magazines a few years back.

To "Mister Island" I gladly give first place, and "Flight to Galileo" makes an uncomfortably close second. Third is Gallun's tragic and pitiful "Stepson of Space" (will this author ever do a sequel to "Guardian Angel," a really good satire with humorous, but difficult, writing style?)

Glad you stress fantasy.—Charles Hidley, 2541 Aqueduct Avenue, New York, New York.

● Artists "Gabriel" and "Ghorp" are really, respectively, Gabriel H. Mayorga and Gerald Thorp.—*The Editor.*

Promises Sneers

Dear Mr. Pohl:

Once again I bravely take my pen in hand and, bottle at my side, dare thy editorial wrath. With intrepid courage and valiant dauntlessness derived from my beverage and bolstered by frequent swallows, I once again essay to give a perfectly unbiased review of *Astonishing Stories.*

I will not say that it is the worst mag, but I will venture the opinion that it is in a class by itself. (That can be taken two ways, so suit yourself.)

Your best department is your review of Fan Mags. Really, that's the first thing

(Continued on page 109)

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HALF-BREEDS ON VENUS

The Tweenies land on Venus—and enlist the aid of the Venus-creatures to fight off their pursuers.

By Isaac Asimov

CHAPTER ONE

Venus

THE damp, somnolent atmosphere stirred violently and shrieked aside. The bare plateau shook three times as the heavy egg-shaped projectiles shot down from outer space. The sound of the landing reverberated from the mountains on one side to the lush forest on the other, and then all was silent again.

One by one, three doors clanged open, and human figures stepped out in hesitant single file. First slowly, and then with impatient turbulence, they set first foot upon this new world, until the space surrounding the ships was crowded.

A thousand pairs of eyes gazed upon the prospect and a thousand mouths chattered excitedly. And in the other-world wind, a thousand crests of foot-high white hair swayed gracefully.

The Tweenies had landed on Venus!

MAX SCANLON sighed wearily. "Here we are!"

He turned from the porthole and

slumped into his own special arm-chair. "They're as happy as children—and I don't blame them. We've got a new world—one all for ourselves—and that's a great thing. But just the same, there are hard days ahead of us. I am almost afraid! It is a project so lightly embarked upon, but one so hard to carry out to completion."

A gentle arm stole about his shoulder and he grasped it tightly, smiling into the soft, blue eyes that met his. "But *you're* not afraid, are you, Madeline?"

"Certainly not!" And then her expression grew sadder, "If only father had come with us. You—you know that he meant more to us than to the others. We were the—the first he took under his wing, weren't we?"

There was a long silence after that as each fell into deep thought.

Max sighed, "I remember him that day forty years ago—old suit, pipe, everything. He took me in. *Me,* a despised half-breed! And—and he found you for me, Madeline!"

"I know," there were tears in her eyes. "But he's still with us, Max, and always will be—here, and there." Her hand crept first to her own heart and then to Max's.

"HEY, there, Dad, catch her, catch her!"

Max whirled at the sound of his elder son's voice, just in time to catch up the little bundle of flying arms and legs that catapulted into him.

He held her gravely up before him, "Shall I give you to your pappa, Elsie? He wants you."

The little girl kicked her legs ecstatically. "No, no. I want *you,* grand-daddy. I want you to give me a piggy-back and come out with grandmamma to see how nice everything is."

Max turned to his son, and motioned him sternly away, "Depart, despised father, and let old grand-dad have a chance."

Arthur laughed and mopped a red face, "Keep her, for Heaven's sake. She's been leading me and the wife a merry chase outside. We had to drag her back by the dress to keep her from running off into the forest. Didn't we. Elsie?"

Elsie, thus appealed to, suddenly recalled a past grievance. "Grand-daddy, tell him to let me see the pretty trees. He doesn't want me to." She wriggled from Max's grasp and ran to the porthole. "See them, grand-daddy, see them. It's all trees outside. It's not black anymore. I hated it when it was black, didn't you?"

Max leaned over and ruffled the child's soft, white hair gravely, "Yes, Elsie, I hated it when it was black. But it isn't black anymore, and it won't ever be black again. Now go run to grandmamma. She'll get some cake specially for you. Go ahead, run!"

He followed the departing forms of his wife and granddaughter with smiling eyes, and then, as they turned to his son, they became serious once more.

"Well, Arthur?"

"Well, dad, what now?"

"There's no time to waste, son. We've got to start building immediately—underground!"

Arthur snapped into an attentive attitude, "Underground?" He frowned his dismay.

"I know, I know. I said nothing of this previously, but it's got to be done. At all costs we must vanish from the face of the System. There are Earthmen on Venus—purebloods. There aren't many, it's true, and there aren't likely to be many for years; but there are some. They mustn't find us—at least, not until we are prepared for whatever may follow. *That* will take years."

"But father, *underground!* To live like moles, hidden from light and air. I don't like that."

"Oh, nonsense. Don't overdramatize.

We'll *live* on the surface—but the city; the power-stations, the food and water reserves, the laboratories—all that must be below and impregnable."

The old Tweenie gestured the subject away with impatience, "Forget that, anyway. I want to talk about something else—something we've discussed already."

Arthur's eyes hardened and he shifted his glance to the ceiling. Max rose and placed his hands upon his son's brawny shoulders.

"I'm past sixty, Arthur. How long I have yet to live, I don't know. In any case, the best of me belongs to the past and it is better that I yield the leadership to a younger, more vigorous person."

"Dad, that's sentimental bosh and you know it. There isn't one of us that's fit to wipe your shoes and no one is going to listen for a second to any plan of appointing a successor while you're still alive."

"I'm not going to ask them to listen. It's done—and you're the new leader."

The younger man shook his head firmly, "You can't make me serve against my will."

Max smiled whimsically, "I'm afraid you're dodging responsibility, son. You're leaving your poor old father to the strains and hardships of a job beyond his aged strength."

"Dad!" came the shocked retort. "That's not so. You know it isn't. You—"

"Then prove it. Look at it this way. Our race needs *active* leadership, and I can't supply it. I'll always be here—while I live—to advise you and help you as best I can, but from now on, *you* must take the initiative."

Arthur frowned and the words came from him reluctantly, "All right, then. I take the job of field commander. But remember, *you're* commander-in-chief."

"Good! And now let's celebrate the occasion." Max opened a cupboard and withdrew a box, from which he abstracted a pair of cigars. He sighed, "The supply of tobacco is down to the vanishing point and we won't have any more until we grow our own, but—we'll smoke to the new leader."

Blue smoke curled upwards and Max frowned through it at his son, "Where's Henry?"

Arthur grinned, "Dunno! I haven't seen him since we landed. I can tell you with whom he is, though."

Max grunted, "I know that, too."

"The kid's making hay while the sun shines. It won't be many years now, Dad, before you'll be spoiling a second set of grandchildren."

"If they're as good as the three of my first set, I only hope I live to see the day."

And father and son smiled affectionately at each other and listened in silence to the muted sound of happy laughter from the hundreds of Tweenies outside.

HENRY SCANLON cocked his head to one side, and raised his hand for silence, "Do you hear running water, Irene?"

The girl at his side nodded, "Over in that direction."

"Let's go there, then. A river flashed by just before we landed and maybe that's it."

"All right, if you say so, but I think we ought to be getting back to the ships."

"What for?" Henry stopped and stared. "I should think you'd be glad to stretch your legs after weeks on a crowded ship."

"Well, it might be dangerous."

"Not here in the highlands, Irene. Venusian highlands are practically a second Earth. You can see this is forest and not jungle. Now if we were in the coastal regions—" He broke off short, as if he had just remembered something. "Besides, what's there to be afraid of? *I'm* with you, aren't I?" And he patted the Tonite gun at his hip.

Irene repressed a sudden smile and shot an arch glance at her strutting companion, "I'm quite aware that you're with me. *That's* the danger."

Henry's chest deflated with an audible gasp. He frowned. "*Very* funny—And I on my best behavior, too." He drifted away, brooded sulkily awhile, and then addressed the trees in a distant manner, "Which reminds me that tomorrow is Daphne's birthday. I've promised her a present."

"Get her a reducing belt," came the quick retort. "Fat thing!"

"Who's fat? Daphne? Oh—I wouldn't say so." He considered matters carefully, one thoughtful eye upon the young girl at his side. "Now my description of her would be—shall we say—'pleasingly plump,' or, maybe, 'comfortably upholstered.' "

"She's *fat,*" Irene's voice was suddenly a hiss, and something very like a frown wrinkled her lovely face, "and her eyes are green." She swung on ahead, chin high, and superbly conscious of her own lithe figure.

Henry hastened his steps and caught up, "Of course, I prefer skinny girls any day."

Irene whirled on him and her little fists clenched, "I'm not skinny, you incredibly stupid ape."

"But Irene, who said I meant you?" His voice was solemn, but his eyes were laughing.

The girl reddened to the ears and turned away, lower lip trembling. The smile faded from Henry's eyes and was replaced by a look of concern. His arm shot out hesitantly and slipped about her shoulder.

"Angry, Irene?"

The smile that lit her face of a sudden was as brilliant as the sparkling sheen of her silvery hair in the bright sun.

"No," she said.

Their eyes met and, for a moment, Henry hesitated—and found that he who hesitates is lost; for with a sudden twist and a smothered laugh, Irene was free once more.

Pointing through a break in the trees, she cried, "Look, a lake!" and was off at a run.

Henry scowled, muttered something under his breath, and ran after.

The scene was truly Earthly. A rapids-broken stream wound its way through banks of slender-trunked trees and then spread into a placid lake some miles in width. The brooding quiet was unbroken save by the muffled beat that issued from the throat-bags of the frilled lizards that nested in the upper reaches of the trees.

The two Tweenies—boy and girl—stood hand in hand upon the bank and drank in the beauty of the scene.

Then there was a muffled splash near by and Irene shrank into the encircling arms of her companion.

"What's the matter?"

"N—nothing. Something moved in the water, I think."

"Oh, imagination, Irene."

"No. I *did* see something. It came up and—oh, goodness, Henry, don't squeeze so tightly—"

She almost lost her balance as Henry suddenly dropped her altogether and jerked at his Tonite gun.

Immediately before them, a dripping green head lifted out of the water and regarded them out of wide-set, staring goggle-eyes. Its broad lipless mouth opened and closed rapidly, but not a sound issued forth.

CHAPTER TWO

The Phibs

MAX SCANLON stared thoughtfully at the rugged foot-hills ahead and clasped his hands behind his back.

"You think so, do you?"

"Certainly, Dad," insisted Arthur, enthusiastically. "If we burrow under these piles of granite, all Earth couldn't get at us. It wouldn't take two months to form the entire cavern, with our unlimited power."

"Hmph! It will require care!"

"It will get it!"

"Mountainous regions are quake regions."

"We can rig up enough stat-rays to hold up all Venus, quakes or no quakes."

"Stat-rays eat up energy wholesale, and a breakdown that will leave us energyless would mean the end."

"We can hook up five separate powerhouses,—as foolproof as we can make them. All five won't break down at once."

The old Tweenie smiled, "All right, son. I see you've got it planned thoroughly. Go ahead! Start whenever you want —and remember, it's all up to you."

"Good! Let's get back to the ships." They picked their way gingerly down the rocky slope.

"You know, Arthur," said Max, stopping suddenly, "I've been thinking about those stat-beams."

"Yes?" Arthur offered his arm, and the two resumed their walk.

"It's occurred to me that if we could make them two-dimensional in extent and curve them, we'd have the perfect defense, as long as our energy lasted—a stat-field."

"You need four-dimensional radiation for that, Dad—nice to think about but can't be done."

"Oh, is that so? Well, listen to this—"

What Arthur was to listen to remained hidden, however—for that day at least. A piercing shout ahead jerked both their heads upward. Up towards them came the bounding form of Henry Scanlon, and following him, at a goodly distance and a much more leisurely pace, came Irene.

"Say, Dad, I had a devil of a time finding you. Where were you?"

"Right here, son. Where were you?"

"Oh, just around. Listen, Dad. You know those amphibians the explorers talk about as inhabiting the highland lakes of Venus, don't you? Well, we've located them, lots of them, a regular covey of them. Haven't we, Irene?"

Irene paused to catch her breath and nodded her head, "They're the cutest things, Mr. Scanlon. All green." She wrinkled her nose laughingly.

Arthur and his father exchanged glances of doubt. The former shrugged. "Are you sure you haven't been seeing things? I remember once, Henry, when you sighted a meteor in space, scared us all to death, and then had it turn out to be your own reflection in the port glass."

Henry, painfully aware of Irene's snicker, thrust out a belligerent lower lip, "Say, Art, I guess you're looking for a shove in the face. And I'm old enough to give it to you, too."

"Whoa there, quiet down," came the peremptory voice of the elder Scanlon, "and you, Arthur, had better learn to respect your younger brother's dignity. Now here, Henry, all Arthur meant was that these amphibians are as shy as rabbits. No one's ever caught more than a glimpse of them."

"Well, we have, Dad. Lots of them. I guess they were attracted by Irene. No one can resist her."

"I know *you* can't," and Arthur laughed loudly.

Henry stiffened once more, but his father stepped between. "Grow up, you two. Let's go and see these amphibians."

"THIS is amazing," exclaimed Max Scanlon. "Why, they're as friendly as children. I can't understand it."

Arthur shook his head, "Neither can I, Dad. In fifty years, no explorer has ever gotten a good look at one, and here they are—thick as flies."

Henry was throwing pebbles into the lake. "Watch this, all of you."

A pebble curved its way into the water, and as it splashed six green forms turned a back somersault and slid smoothly below the surface. With no time for a breath between, one was up again and the pebble arced back to fall at Henry's feet.

The amphibians were crowding closer in ever increasing numbers now, approaching the very edge of the lake where they grasped at the coarse reeds on the bank and stared goggle-eyed at the Tweenies. Their muscular webbed legs could be seen below the surface of the water, moving back and forth with lazy grace. Without cessation, the lipless mouths opened and closed in a queer, uneven rhythm.

"I think they're talking, Mr. Scanlon," said Irene, suddenly.

"It's quite possible," agreed the old Tweenie, thoughtfully. "Their brain-cases are fairly large, and they may possess con-

siderable intelligence. If their voice boxes and ears are tuned to sound waves of higher or lower range than our own, we would be unable to hear them—and that might very well explain their soundlessness."

"They're probably discussing us as busily as we are them," said Arthur.

"Yes, and wondering what sort of freaks we are," added Irene.

Henry said nothing. He was approaching the edge of the lake with cautious steps. The ground grew muddy beneath his feet, and the reeds thick. The group of amphibians nearest turned anxious eyes toward him, and one or two loosened their hold and slipped silently away.

But the nearest held his ground. His wide mouth was clamped tight; his eyes were wary—but he did not move.

Henry, paused, hesitated, and then held out his hand, "Hiya, Phib!"

The "Phib" stared at the outstretched hand. Very cautiously, his own webbed forelimb stretched out and touched the Tweenie's fingers. With a jerk, they were drawn back, and the Phib's mouth worked in soundless excitement.

"Be careful," came Max's voice from behind. "You'll scare him that way. His skin is terribly sensitive and dry objects must irritate him. Dip your hand in the water."

Slowly, Henry obeyed. The Phib's muscles tensed to escape at the slightest sudden motion, but none came. Again the Tweenie's hand was held out, dripping wet this time.

For a long minute, nothing happened, as the Phib seemed to debate within itself the future course of action. And then, after two false starts and hasty withdrawals, fingers touched again.

"Ataphib," said Henry, and clasped the green hand in his own.

A single, startled jerk followed and then a lusty return of pressure to an extent that numbed the Tweenie's fingers. Evidently encouraged by the first Phib's example, his fellows were crowding close now, offering hosts of hands.

The other three Tweenies slushed up through the mud now, and offered wetted hands in their turn.

"That's funny," said Irene. "Everytime I shake hands I seem to keep thinking of hair."

Max turned to her, "Hair?"

"Yes, ours. I get a picture of long, white hair, standing straight up and shin-

ing in the sun." Her hand rose unconsciously to her own smooth tresses.

"Say!" interrupted Henry suddenly, "I've been noticing that, too, now that you mention it. Only when I shake hands, though."

"How about you, Arthur?" asked Max.

Arthur nodded once, his eyebrows climbing.

Max smiled and pounded fist into palm. "Why, it's a primitive sort of telepathy—too weak to work without physical contact and even then capable of delivering only a few simple ideas."

"But why hair, dad?" asked Arthur.

"Maybe it's our hair that attracted them in the first place. They've never seen anything like it and—and—well, who can explain their psychology?"

He was down on his knees suddenly, splashing water over his high crest of hair. There was a frothing of water and a surging of green bodies as the Phibs pressed closer. One green paw passed gently through the stiff white crest, followed by excited, if noiseless, chattering. Struggling amongst themselves for favored vantage-points, they competed for the privilege of touching the hair until Max, for sheer weariness, was forced to rise again.

"They're probably our friends for life now," he said. "A pretty queer set of animals."

It was Irene, then, who noticed the group of Phibs a hundred yards from shore. They paddled quietly, making no effort to approach closer, "Why don't *they* come?" she asked.

She turned to one of the foremost Phibs and pointed, making frantic gestures of dubious meaning. She received only solemn stares in return.

"That's not the way, Irene," admonished Max, gently. He held out his hand, grasped that of a willing Phib and stood motionless for a moment. When he loosed his grip, the Phib slid into the water and disappeared. In a moment, the laggard Phibs were approaching shore slowly.

"How did you do it?" gasped Irene.

"Telepathy! I held on tightly and pictured an isolated group of Phibs and a long hand stretching out over the water to shake theirs." He smiled gently, "They are quite intelligent, or they would not have understood so readily."

"WHY, they're females," cried Arthur, in sudden breathless astonishment. "By all that's holy,—they suckle their young!"

The newcomers were slenderer and lighter in color than the others. They advanced shyly, urged on by the bolder males and held out timid hands in greeting.

"Oh-h," Irene cried in sudden delight. "Look at this!"

She was down on her knees in the mud, arms outstretched to the nearest female. The other three watched in fascinated silence as the nervous she-Phib clasped its tiny armful closer to its breast.

But Irene's arms made little inviting gestures, "Please, please. It's so cute. I won't hurt him."

Whether the Phib mother understood is doubtful, but with a sudden motion, she held out a little green bundle of squirming life and deposited it in the waiting arms.

Irene rose, squealing with delight. Little webbed feet kicked aimlessly and round frightened eyes stared at her. The other three crowded close and watched it curiously.

"It's the *dearest* little thing, it is. Look at its funny little mouth. Do you want to hold it, Henry?"

Henry jumped backwards as if stung, "Not on your life! I'd probably drop it."

"Do you get any thought images, Irene?" asked Max, thoughtfully.

Irene considered and frowned her concentration, "No-o. It's too young, mayb—

oh, *yes!* It's—it's—" She stopped, and tried to laugh. "It's *hungry!*"

She returned the little baby Phib to its mother, whose mouth worked in transports of joy and whose muscular arms clasped the little mite close. The tiny Phib swiveled its little green head to bend one last goggling look at the creature that had held it for an instant.

"Friendly creatures," said Max, "and intelligent. They can keep their lakes and rivers. We'll take the land and won't interfere with them."

CHAPTER THREE

The Earthmen

ALONE Tweenie stood on Scanlon Ridge and his field-glass pointed at the Divide ten miles up the hills. For five minutes, the glass did not waver and the Tweenie stood like some watchful statue made of the same rock as formed the mountains all about.

And then the field-glass lowered, and the Tweenie's face was a pale, thin-lipped picture of gloom. He hastened down the slope to the guarded, hidden entrance to Venustown.

He shot past the guards without a word and descended into the lower levels where solid rock was still being puffed into nothingness and shaped at will by controlled blasts of super-energy.

Arthur Scanlon looked up and with a sudden premonition of disaster, gestured the Disintegrators to a halt.

"What's wrong, Sorrell?"

The Tweenie leant over and whispered a single word into Arthur's ear.

"Where?" Arthur's voice jerked out hoarsely.

"On the other side of the ridge. They're coming through the Divide now in our direction. I spotted the blaze of sun on metal and—" he held up his field-glass significantly.

"Good Lord!" Arthur rubbed his forehead distractedly and then turned to the anxiously-watching Tweenie at the controls of the Disinto. "Continue as planned! No change!"

He hurried up the levels to the entrance, and snapped out hurried orders, "Triple the guard immediately. No one but I, or those with me, are to be permitted to leave. Send out men to round up any stragglers outside immediately and order them to keep within shelter and make no unnecessary sound."

Then, back again through the central avenue to his father's quarters.

Max Scanlon looked up from his calculations and his grave forehead smoothed out slowly.

"Hello, son. Is anything wrong? Another resistant stratum?"

"No, nothing like that." Arthur closed the door carefully and lowered his voice. "Earthmen!"

For a moment, Max made no movement. The expression on his face froze for an instant, and then, with a sudden exhalation, he slumped in his chair and the lines in his forehead deepened wearily.

"Settlers?"

"Looks so. Sorrell said women and children were among them. There were several hundred in all, equipped for a stay—and headed in this direction."

Max groaned, "Oh, the luck, the luck! All the vast empty spaces of Venus to choose and they come here. Come, let's get a first hand look at this."

THEY came through the Divide in a long, snaky line. Hard-bitten pioneers with their pinched work-worn women and their carefree, half-barbarous, wilderness-bred children. The low, broad "Venus Vans" joggled clumsily over the untrodden ways, loaded down with amorphous masses of household necessities.

The leaders surveyed the prospect and one spoke in clipped, jerky syllables, "Al-

most through, Jem. We're out among the foothills now."

And the other replied slowly, "And there's good new growing-land ahead. We can stake out farms and settle down." He sighed, "It's been tough going this last month. I'm glad it's over!"

And from a ridge ahead—the last ridge before the valley—the Scanlons, father and son, unseen dots in the distance, watched the newcomers with heavy hearts.

"The one thing we could not prepare for—and it's happened."

Arthur spoke slowly and reluctantly, "They are few and unarmed. We can drive them out in an hour." With sudden fierceness, "Venus is *ours!*"

"Yes, we can drive them out in an hour—in ten minutes. But they would return, in thousands, and armed. We're not ready to fight all Earth, Arthur."

The younger man bit his lip and words were muttered forth half in shame, "For the sake of the race, Father—we could kill them all."

"Never!" exclaimed Max, his old eyes flashing. "*We* will not be the first to strike. If we kill, we can expect no mercy from Earth; and we will deserve none."

"But father, what else? We can expect no mercy from Earth as it is. If we're spotted,—if they ever suspect our existence, our whole hegira becomes pointless and we lose out at the very beginning."

"I know. I know."

"We can't change now," continued Arthur, passionately. "We've spent months preparing Venustown. How could we start over?"

"We can't," agreed Max, tonelessly. "To even attempt to move would mean sure discovery. We can only—"

"Live like moles after all. Hunted fugitives! Frightened refugees! Is that it?"

"Put it any way you like—but we must hide, Arthur, and bury ourselves."

"Until—?"

"Until I—or we—perfect a curved, two-dimensional stat-beam. Surrounded by an impermeable defense we can come out into the open. It may take years; it may take one week. I don't know."

"And every day we run the risk of detection. Any day the swarms of pure-bloods can come down upon us and wipe us out. We've got to hang by a hair day after day, week after week, month after month—"

"We've *got* to." Max's mouth was clamped shut, and his eyes were a frosty blue.

Slowly, they went back to Venustown.

THINGS were quiet in Venustown, and eyes were turned to the topmost level and the hidden exits. Out there was air and the sun and space—and Earthmen.

They had settled several miles up the river-bed. Their rude houses were springing up. Surrounding land was being cleared. Farms were being staked out. Planting was taking place.

And in the bowels of Venus, eleven hundred Tweenies shaped their home and waited for an old man to track down the elusive equations that would enable a stat-ray to spread in two dimensions and curve.

Irene brooded somberly as she sat upon the rocky ledge and stared ahead to where the dim gray light indicated the existence of an exit to the open. Her shapely legs swung gently back and forth and Henry Scanlon, at her side, fought desperately to keep his gaze focussed harmlessly upon air.

"You know what, Henry?"

"What?"

"I'll bet the Phibs could help us."

"Help us do what, Irene?"

"Help us get rid of the Earthmen."

Henry thought it over carefully, "What makes you think that?"

"Well, they're pretty clever—cleverer than we think. Their minds are altogether different though, and maybe they could

fix it. Besides—I've just got a feeling." She withdrew her hand suddenly, "You don't have to hold it, Henry."

Henry swallowed, "I—I thought you had a sort of unsteady seat there—might fall, you know."

"Oh!" Irene looked down the terrific three-foot drop. "There's something in what you say. It does look pretty high here."

Henry decided he was in the presence of a hint, and acted accordingly. There was a moment's silence while he seriously considered the possibility of her feeling a bit chilly—but before he had quite decided that she probably was, she spoke again.

"What I was going to say, Henry, was this. Why don't we go out and see the Phibs?"

"Dad would take my head off if I tried anything like that."

"It would be a lot of fun."

"Sure, but it's dangerous. We can't risk anyone seeing us."

Irene shrugged resignedly, "Well, if you're afraid, we'll say no more about it."

Henry gasped and reddened. He was off the ledge in a bound, "Who's afraid? When do you want to go?"

"Right now, Henry. Right this very minute." Her cheeks flushed with enthusiasm.

"All right then. Come on." He started off at a half-run, dragging her along.—And then a thought occurred to him and he stopped short.

He turned to her fiercely, *"I'll* show you if I'm afraid." His arms were suddenly about her and her little cry of surprise was muffled effectively.

"Goodness," said Irene, when in a position to speak once more. "How thoroughly *brutal!"*

"Certainly. I'm a very well-known brute," gasped Henry, as he uncrossed his eyes and got rid of the swimming sensation in his head. "Now let's get to those Phibs; and remind me, when I'm president, to put up a memorial to the fellow who invented kissing."

UP THROUGH the rock-lined corridor, past the backs of the outward-gazing sentries, out through the carefully camouflaged opening, and they were upon the surface.

The smudges of smoke on the southern horizon was grim evidence of the presence of man, and with that in mind, the two young Tweenies slithered through the underbrush into the forest and through the forest to the lake of the Phibs.

Whether in some strange way of their own the Phibs sensed the presence of friends, the two could not tell, but they had scarcely reached the banks when approaching dull-green smudges beneath water told of the creatures' coming.

A wide, goggle-eyed head broke the surface and in a second bobbing frog-heads dotted the lake.

Henry wet his hand and seized the friendly forelimb outstretched to him.

"Hi there, Phib."

The grinning mouth worked and made its soundless answer.

"Ask him about the Earthmen, Henry," urged Irene. Henry motioned impatiently.

"Wait a while. It takes time. I'm doing the best I can."

For two slow minutes, the two, Tweenie and Phib, remained motionless and stared into each other's eyes. And then the Phib broke away and, at some silent order, every lake-creature vanished, leaving the Tweenies alone.

Irene stared for a moment, nonplussed, "What happened?"

Henry shrugged, "I don't know. I pictured the Earthmen and he seemed to know who I meant. Then I pictured Earthmen fighting us and killing us—and he pictured a lot of us and only a few of them and another fight in which we killed them. But then I pictured us killing them and then a lot more of *them* coming—

hordes and hordes—and killing us and then—"

But the girl was holding her hands to her tortured ears, "Oh, my goodness. No wonder the poor creature didn't understand. I wonder he didn't go crazy."

"Well, I did the best I could," was the gloomy response. "This was all your nutty idea, anyway."

Irene got no further with her retort than the opening syllable, for in a moment the lake was crowded with Phibs once more. "They've come back," she said instead.

A Phib pushed forward and seized Henry's hand while the others crowded around in great excitement. There were several moments of silence and Irene fidgeted.

"Well?" she said.

"Quiet, please. I don't get it. Something about big animals, or monsters, or—" His voice trailed away, and the furrow between his eyes deepened into painful concentration.

He nodded, first abstractedly, then vigorously.

He broke away and seized Irene's hands, "I've got it—and it's the perfect solution. We can save Venustown all by ourselves, Irene, with the help of the Phibs—if you want to come to the Lowlands with me tomorrow. We can take along a pair of Tonite pistols and food supplies and if we follow the river, it oughtn't to take us more than two or three days there and the same time back. What do you say, Irene?"

Youth is not noted for forethought. Irene's hesitation was for effect only, "Well—maybe we shouldn't go ourselves, but—but I'll go—with you." There was the lightest accent on the last word.

Ten seconds later, the two were on their way back to Venustown and Henry was wondering, if, on the whole, it weren't better to put up *two* memorials to the fellow who invented kissing.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Lowlands

THE flickering red-yellow of the fire sent back ruddy highlights from Henry's lordly crest of hair and cast shifting shadows upon his brooding face.

It was hot in the Lowlands and the fire made it worse, yet Henry huddled close and kept an anxious eye upon the sleeping form of Irene on the other side. The teeming life of the Venusian jungle respected fire and the flames spelt safety.

They were three days from the plateau now. The stream had become a lukewarm, slowly-moving river, the shores of which were covered with the green scum of algae. The pleasant forests had given way to the tangled, vine-looped growths of the jungle. The mingled sounds of life had grown in volume and increased to a noisy crescendo. The air became warmer and damper; the ground swampier; the surroundings more fantastically unfamiliar.

And yet there was no real danger—of that Henry was convinced. Poisonous life was unknown on Venus and as for the tough-skinned monsters that lorded the jungles, the fire at night and the Phibs during day would keep them away.

Twice the ear-splitting shriek of a Centosaur had sounded in the distance and twice the sound of crashing trees had caused the two Tweenies to draw together in fear. Both times, the monsters had moved away again.

This was the third night out, and Henry stirred uneasily. The Phibs seemed confident that before morning they could start their return trip, and somehow the thought of Venustown was rather attractive. Adventure and excitement are fine and with every passing hour the glory of his scintillating bravery grew in Irene's eyes—which was wonderful—but still Venustown and the friendly Highlands were nice to think about.

He threw himself on his stomach and gazed morosely into the fire, thinking of his twenty years of age—almost twenty years.

"Why, heck," he tore at the rank grass beneath. "It's about time I was thinking of getting *married*." And his eye strayed involuntarily to the sleeping form beyond the fire.

As if in response, there was a flickering of eyelids and a vague stare out of deep blue eyes.

Irene sat up and stretched.

"I can't sleep at all," she complained, brushing futilely at her white hair. "It's so hot." She stared at the fire distastefully.

Henry's good humor persisted. "You slept for hours—and snored like a trombone."

Irene's eyes snapped wide open, "I did not!" Then, with a voice vibrant with tragedy, "Did I?"

"No, of course not!" Henry howled his laughter, stopping only at the sudden, sharp contact between the toe of Irene's shoe and the pit of his own stomach. "Ouch," he said.

"Don't speak to me anymore, *Mister* Scanlon!" was the girl's frigid remark.

It was Henry's turn to look tragic. He rose in panicky dismay and took a single step towards the girl. And then he froze in his tracks at the ear-piercing shriek of a Centosaur. When he came to himself, he found his arms full of Irene.

Reddening, she disentangled herself, and then the Centosaurian shriek sounded again, from another direction,—and there she was, right back again.

Henry's face was pale, in spite of his fair armful. "I think the Phibs have snared

the Centosaurs. Come with me and I'll ask them."

THE Phibs were dim blotches in the grey dawn that was breaking. Rows and rows of strained, abstracted individuals were all that met the eye. Only one seemed to be unoccupied and when Henry rose from the handclasp, he said, "They've got three Centosaurs and that's all they can handle. We're starting back to the Highlands right now."

The rising sun found the party two miles up the river. The Tweenies, hugging the shore, cast wary eyes towards the bordering jungle. Through an occasional clearing, vast grey bulks could be made out. The noise of the reptilian shrieks was almost continuous.

"I'm sorry I brought you, Irene," said Henry. "I'm not so sure now that the Phibs can take care of the monsters."

Irene shook her head. "That's all right, Henry. I *wanted* to come. Only—I wish we had thought of letting the Phibs bring the beasts themselves. They don't need us."

"Yes, they do! If a Centosaur gets out of control, it will make straight for the Tweenies and they'd never get away. We've got the Tonite guns to kill the 'saurs with if the worst comes to the worst—" His voice trailed away and he glanced at the lethal weapon in his hand and derived but cold comfort therefrom.

The first night was sleepless for both Tweenies. Somewhere, unseen in the blackness of the river, Phibs took shifts and their telepathic control over the tiny brains of the gigantic twenty-legged Centosaur maintained its tenuous hold. Off in the jungle, three hundred-ton monsters howled impatiently against the force that drove them up the river side against their will and raved impotently against the unseen barrier that prevented them from approaching the stream.

By the side of the fire. a pair of Tweenies, lost between mountainous flesh on one side and the fragile protection of a telepathic web on the other, gazed longingly towards the Highlands some forty miles off.

Progress was slow. As the Phibs tired, the Centosaurs grew balkier. But gradually, the air grew cooler. The rank jungle growth thinned out and the distance to Venustown shortened.

Henry greeted the first signs of familiar temperate-zone forest with a tremulous sigh of relief. Only Irene's presence prevented him from discarding his role of heroism.

He felt pitifully eager for their quixotic journey to be over, but he only said, "It's practically all over but the shouting. And you can bet there'll be shouting, Irene. We'll be heroes, you and I."

Irene's attempt at enthusiasm was feeble. "I'm tired, Henry. Let's rest." She sank slowly to the ground and Henry, after signalling the Phibs, joined her.

"How much longer, Henry?" Almost without volition, she found her head nestling wearily against his shoulder.

"One more day, Irene. Tomorrow this time, we'll be back." He looked wretched, "You think we shouldn't have tried to do this ourselves, don't you?"

"Well, it seemed a good idea at the time."

"Yes, I know," said Henry. "I've noticed that I get lots of ideas that seem good at the time, but sometimes they turn sour." He shook his head philosophically, "I don't know why, but that's the way it is."

"All I know," said Irene, "is that I don't care if I never move another step in my life. I wouldn't get up now—"

Her voice died away as her beautiful blue eyes stared off towards the right. One of the Centosaurs stumbled into the waters of a small tributary to the stream they were following. Wallowing in the water, his huge serpentine body mounted on the

ten stocky pairs of legs, glistened horribly. His ugly head weaved towards the sky and his terrifying call pierced the air. A second joined him.

Irene was on her feet. "What are you waiting for, Henry. Let's go! Hurry!"

Henry gripped his Tonite gun tightly and followed.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Storm

ARTHUR SCANLON gulped savagely at his fifth cup of black coffee and, with an effort, brought the Audiomitter into optical focus. His eyes, he decided, were becoming entirely too balky. He rubbed them into red-rimmed irritation and cast a glance over his shoulder at the restlessly sleeping figure on the couch.

He crept over to her and adjusted the coverlet.

"Poor Mom," he whispered, and bent to kiss the pale lips. He turned to the Audiomitter and clenched a fist at it, "Wait till I get you, you crazy nut."

Madeline stirred, "Is it dark yet?"

"No," lied Arthur with feeble cheerfulness. "He'll call before sundown, Mom. You just sleep and let me take care of things. Dad's upstairs working on the stat-field and he says he's making progress. In a few days everything will be all right." He sat silently beside her and grasped her hand tightly. Her tired eyes closed once more.

The signal light blinked on and, with a last look at his mother, he stepped out into the corridor, "Well!"

The waiting Tweenie saluted smartly, "John Barno wants to say that it looks as if we are in for a storm." He handed over an official report.

Arthur glanced at it peevishly, "What of that? We've had plenty so far, haven't we? What do you expect of Venus?"

"This will be a particularly bad one from all indications. The barometer has fallen unprecedentedly. The ionic concentration of the upper atmosphere is at an unequalled maximum. The Beulah River has overflowed its banks and is rising rapidly."

The other frowned, "There's not an entrance to Venustown that isn't at least fifty yards above river level. As for rain —our drainage system is to be relied upon." He grimaced suddenly, "Go back and tell Barno that it can storm for my part—for forty days and forty nights if it wants to. Maybe it will drive the Earthmen away."

He turned away, but the Tweenie held his ground, "Beg pardon sir, but that's not the worst. A scouting party today—"

Arthur whirled, "A scouting party? Who ordered one to be sent out?"

"Your father, sir. They were to make contact with the Phibs,—I don't know why."

"Well, go on."

"Sir, the Phibs could not be located."

And now for the first time, Arthur was startled out of his savage ill-humor, "They were gone?"

The Tweenie nodded, "It is thought that they have sought shelter from the coming storm. It is that which causes Barno to fear the worst."

"They say rats desert a sinking ship," murmured Arthur. He buried his head in trembling hands. "God! Everything at once! Everything at once!"

THE darkening twilight hid the pall of blackness that lowered over the mountains ahead and emphasized the darting flashes of lightning that flickered on and off continuously.

Irene shivered, "It's getting sort of windy and chilly, isn't it?"

"The cold wind from the mountains. We're in for a storm, I guess," Henry assented absently. "I think the river is getting wider."

A short silence, and then, with sudden vivacity, "But look, Irene, only a few more miles to the lake and then we're practically at the Earth village. It's almost over."

Irene nodded, "I'm glad for all of us—and the Phibs, too."

She had reason for the last statement. The Phibs were swimming slowly now. An additional detachment had arrived the day before from upstream, but even with those reinforcements, progress had slowed to a walk. Unaccustomed cold was nipping the multi-legged reptiles and they yielded to superior mental force more and more reluctantly.

THE first drops fell just after they had passed the lake. Darkness had fallen and in the blue glare of the lightning the trees about them were ghostly specters reaching swaying fingers towards the sky. A sudden flare in the distance marked the funeral pyre of a lightning-hit tree.

Henry paled. "Make for the clearing just ahead. At a time like this, trees are dangerous."

The clearing he spoke of composed the outskirts of the Earth village. The rough-hewn houses, crude and small against the fury of the elements, showed lights here and there that spoke of human occupancy. And as the first Centosaur stumbled out from between splintered trees, the storm suddenly burst in all its fury.

The two Tweenies huddled close. "It's up to the Phibs," screamed Henry, dimly heard above the wind and rain. "I hope they can do it."

The three monsters converged upon the houses ahead. They moved more rapidly as the Phibs called up every last bit of mental power.

Irene buried her wet head in Henry's equally wet shoulder, "I can't look! Those houses will go like matchsticks. Oh, the poor people!"

"No, Irene, no. They've stopped!"

The Centosaurs pawed vicious gouges out of the ground beneath and their screams rang shrill and clear above the noise of the storm. Startled Earthmen rushed from their cabins.

Caught unprepared—most having been roused from sleep—and faced with a Venusian storm and nightmarish Venusian monsters, there was no question of organized action. As they stood, carrying nothing but their clothes, they broke and ran.

There was the utmost confusion. One or two, with dim attempts at presence of mind, took wild, ineffectual pot-shots at the mountains of flesh before them—and then ran.

And when it seemed that all were gone, the giant reptiles surged forward once more and where once had been houses, there were left only mashed splinters.

"They'll never come back, Irene, they'll never come back." Henry was breathless at the success of his plan. "We're heroes now, and—" His voice rose to a hoarse shriek, "Irene, get back! Make for the trees!"

The Centosaurian howls had taken on a deeper note. The nearest one reared onto his two hindmost pairs of legs and his great head, two hundred feet above ground, was silhouetted horribly against the lightning. With a rumbling thud, he came down on all feet again and made for the river—which under the lash of the storm was now a raging flood.

The Phibs had lost control!

Henry's Tonite gun flashed into quick action as he shoved Irene away. She, however, backed away slowly and brought her own gun into line.

The ball of purple light that meant a hit blazed into being and the nearest Centosaur screamed in agony as its mighty tail threshed aside the surrounding trees. Blindly, the hole where once a leg had been gushing blood, it charged.

A second glare of purple and it was

down with an earth-shaking thud, its last shriek reaching a crescendo of shrill frightfulness.

But the other two monsters were crashing towards them. They blundered blindly towards the source of the power that had held them captive almost a week; driving violently with all the force of their mindless hate to the river. And in the path of the Juggernauts were the two Tweenies.

The boiling torrent was at their backs. The forest was a groaning wilderness of splintered trees and ear-splitting sound.

Then, suddenly, the reports of Tonite guns sounded from the distance. Purple glares—a flurry of threshing—spasmodic shrieking—and then a silence in which even the wind, as if overawed by recent events, held its peace momentarily.

Henry yelled his glee and performed an impromptu war-dance. "They've come from Venustown, Irene," he shouted. "They've got the Centosaurs and everything's finished! We've saved the Tweenies!"

IT HAPPENED in a breath's time. Irene had dropped her gun and sobbed her relief. She was running to Henry and then she tripped—and the river had her.

"Henry!" The wind whipped the sound away.

For one dreadful moment, Henry found himself incapable of motion. He could only stare stupidly, unbelievingly, at the spot where Irene had been, and then he was in the water. He plunged into the surrounding blackness desperately.

"Irene!" He caught his breath with difficulty. The current drove him on.

"Irene!" No sound but the wind. His efforts at swimming were futile. He couldn't even break surface for more than a second at a time. His lungs were bursting.

"Irene!" There was no answer. Nothing but rushing water and darkness.

And then something touched him. He lashed out at it instinctively, but the grip tightened. He felt himself borne up into the air. His tortured lungs breathed in gasps. A grinning Phib face stared into his and after that there were nothing but confused impressions of cold, dark wetness.

HE BECAME aware of his surroundings by stages. First, that he was sitting on a blanket under the trees, with other blankets wrapped tightly about him. Then, he felt the warm radiation of the heat-lamps upon him and the illumination of Atomo bulbs. People were crowding close and he noticed that it was no longer raining.

He stared about him hazily and then, "Irene!"

She was beside him, as wrapped up as he, and smiling feebly, "I'm all right, Henry. The Phibs dragged me back, too."

Madeline was bending over him and he swallowed the hot coffee placed to his lips. "The Phibs have told us of what you two have helped them do. We're all proud of you, son—you and Irene."

Max's smile transfigured his face into the picture of paternal pride, "The psychology you used was perfect. Venus is too vast and has too many friendly areas to expect Earthmen to return to places that have shown themselves to be infested with Centosaurs—not for a good long while. And when they *do* come back, we shall have our stat-field."

Arthur Scanlon hurried up out of the gloom. He thwacked Henry on the shoulder and then wrung Irene's hand. "Your guardian and I," he told her, "are fixing up a celebration for day after tomorrow, so get good and rested. It's going to be the greatest thing you ever saw."

Henry spoke up, "Celebration, huh? Well, I'll tell you what you can do. After it's over, you can announce an engagement."

"An engagement?" Madeline sat up and looked interested. "What do you mean?"

"An engagement—to be married," came the impatient answer. "I'm old enough, I suppose. Today proves it!"

Irene's eyes bent in furious concentration upon the grass, "With whom, Henry?"

"Huh? With *you,* of course. Gosh, who else could it be?"

"But you haven't asked me." The words were uttered slowly and with great firmness.

For a moment Henry flushed, and then his jaws grew grim, "Well, I'm not going to. I'm telling you! And what are you going to do about it?"

He leaned close to her and Max Scanlon chuckled and motioned the others away. On tip-toes, they left.

A dim shape hobbled into view and the two Tweenies separated in confusion. They had forgotten the others.

But it wasn't another Tweenie. "Why—why, it's a Phib!" cried Irene.

He limped his ungainly way across the wet grass, with the inexpert aid of his muscular arms. Approaching, he flopped wearily on his stomach and extended his forearms.

His purpose was plain. Irene and Henry grasped a hand apiece. There was silence a moment or two and the Phib's great eyes glinted solemnly in the light of the Atomo lamps. Then there was a sudden squeal of embarrassment from Irene and a shy laugh from Henry. Contact was broken.

"Did you get the same thing I did?" asked Henry.

Irene was red, "Yes, a long row of little baby Phibs, maybe fifteen—"

"Or twenty," said Henry.

"—with *long white hair!"*

THE END

FANTASY REVIEWS

Fantasy Books

NO OTHER MAN by Alfred Noyes. Frederick A. Stokes Co., New York. $2.50.

Following in the theme of "The Twenty-Fifth Hour", "The Purple Cloud" and others, "No Other Man" deals with an empty planet—empty, that is, save for the inevitable last survivor and his equally inevitable mate. Mr. Noyes Mark Adams is the sole occupant of a disabled submarine at the time that—during the second or third war after the present one,—two opposing nations simultaneously press the buttons of secret inventions that immediately strike dead every human in the world.

Escaping from his underwater plight, Adams searched through an empty England and France, finally tracking down his Eve in Italy. Eve, be it known, has just escaped the clutches of a scoundrel named Mardok. Mardok leads them a merry chase but is foiled in the end. The pair find a tiny colony surviving at Assisi, where they set out to rebuild the world anew.

Mr. Noyes writes his book with intensity and poetic feeling. Many long quotations and dissertions are encountered, which do not add to the flow of the volume. However, on the whole, the book is enjoyable and the several excellent illustrations by Steele Savage are commendable.

TOM by Don Prince. Julian Messner, Inc., New York. $2.00.

Here is a light and somewhat bawdy fantasy about a man who found that his housecat could talk. Since it happens that the man was elderly and recently a widower, the course of his talks with Tom, resulted in a trade. Tom swapped part of his feline virility for part of the man's soul.

At that point the book starts off on a Thorne Smith chase. The new feline upsurge in the old gentleman's body makes him irresistable to the women and as he is by profession the owner of a lingerie factory, the results become chaotic and not exactly subtle reading. The line sketches accompanying the yarn come up to snuff.

ATTACK by Lelan Jamieson. Morrow, New York. $1.50.

"Attack" is a yarn of the next war breaking on the shores of the America as seen by a pilot of the air corps. The theme is familiar, the motive likewise. The U.S. is unprepared, we must be stronger in the air or else. . . .

Notwithstanding, the book is fast and exciting reading. Air war is exciting when it is fictitious and if the reader hasn't gotten enough of this type of combat yarns from his daily newspaper, he might enjoy "Attack." Leland Jamieson is a good writer who knows his aviation.

A QUESTION OF IDENTITY by Godwin Lorac. Brice & Carter, Boston, Mass. $2.00.

While listed as a detective story, which it is, the lover of fantasy should not overlook this one. Starting off in the familiar whodunit manner it soon becomes the most involved science-fictional tangle. The old idea of transporting men by radio and receiving two where one had been sent is carried here into the realm of detective fiction.

A scientist who had been successfully working on radio transportation is murdered by one of seven absolutely identical men, each of whom is a duplicate of the experimenter's assistant who had served as the guinea pig for the first radio-trip. Six of the seven men are extras, unwanted,

(Continued on page 33)

Rocket of Metal Men

Two spacewrecked honeymooners, adrift in the void for six days, can't be choosy about their rescuers—but they may wish they were back in their wrecked ship.

By Manly Wade Wellman

"WE'RE saved, darling — here comes a space-liner!"

Big Grat McKye smiled honestly for the first time since the fuel feed of his honeymoon rocket cruiser broke six days ago. Mona's lovely dark face shone with an answering smile. She had made light of the accident; but all space-craft should be going somewhere. When you float from the established interplanetary lanes, out of control, the breathless darkness of the void seems to pierce the bulkheads. Your heart quickens, your mouth goes dry with terror.

But that was over now. Through the foreward port could be seen a metal cigar, waxing larger against the star-sprinkled black sky.

McKye was at the radio. "They don't answer me." he complained.

Mona cuddled her dark head against his tawny one. "They're coming," she replied. "That's what counts, eh?"

Their own little craft stirred and moved —magnetic grapples were drawing it to the liner. In a few moments they clanked against the larger ship's hull, scraped along for several feet and then came to a stop with their lock-panel opposite an entrance to the stranger. More clanks—that was a vacuum-gangway coupling on. Then knocking. McKye crossed to the panel and opened it.

In stepped a silver-gleaming form—a man, it seemed, dressed in a space-overall. He stooped to pick up a pair of dressing cases, then turned. And they saw at once that he was no man at all, but a machine.

Its shape was roughly human, cunningly jointed in arm, leg and body. The face was a blank surface, with a central lens in which a soft light waxed and waned rhythmically. In place of hands were deft lobster-claws, which easily manipulated the cases.

The man and girl stared curiously. Even in the twenty-fourth century robots were scarce and crude. The best models needed human operators at radio controls. Yet this metal being displayed absolute independence and understanding as it nodded them toward the open panel. Gladly enough they stepped through the gangway into the corridors of the liner.

Several more robots clanked past them into the cruiser, reappearing with the rest of their possessions. One machine led the way along a promenade between metal bulkheads to a compartment. Stacking the baggage quickly and neatly, the things departed. McKye closed the panel.

"They're pretty efficient for clockwork," he commented.

"Tactful, too," added Mona. "They know we're honeymooners. That's why they cleared out."

The remark called for a kiss and a hug. Then: "I'll go and see the captain," suggested McKye. "If he can't service our cruiser, we'll sign on as passengers to the nearest port."

HE STEPPED out upon the promenade. It was a lengthy strip of metal decking, bounded on one side by a row of compartment-panels, on the other by the port-pierced outer bulkhead of the liner. He saw no other creature of flesh and

blood—only two robots polishing fixtures. They turned their lenses as if to glance at him, then resumed their work.

"Is the ship run by these tin soldiers?" pondered McKye. Just then a human figure rounded a far corner. McKye, walking thankfully toward him, saw him to be a short, slight man with gray hair and a withered face. His shabby garments were of a style five years dead.

"I'm Grat McKye," the younger man introduced himself briskly. "Can you direct me to the captain?"

The other took McKye's proffered hand and looked up with something of surprise and timidity. "My name's Thiessen. Are you from the derelict that I saw picked up. Yes, of course—you're young."

"Young?" echoed McKye. "Is everybody else so old?"

"Yes. Old, everybody." Thiessen's husky voice quavered. McKye frowned.

"Tell me where I can find the captain," he said again.

"Captain Jaub?" Thiessen's old face turned waxy pale and his lips trembled. "God forbid that you ever find him!"

And the old man turned and walked away, surprisingly swift for one of his apparent years. In two moments he had vanished around the corner again.

Shrugging, McKye strolled in the opposite direction. He found a bulletin board, but all its notices seemed months old—years old, perhaps. Turning from it, he saw another man, even older and more stringy than Thiessen. standing near by and staring fixedly at him.

"Where's the captain?" demanded McKye.

The stranger started violently. For a moment he goggled, then whirled and tottered feebly away.

McKye squared his broad shoulders and ruffled his tawny locks. There was a flavor of insane practical joking about this. Had he and Mona been recognized as newlyweds, and was some ridiculous prank being attempted?

If so, he wouldn't stand for it. He'd see the skipper. If anyone else acted funny—McKye clenched a hard fist.

He mounted a flight of stairs to the promenade off of which the control room would open. A few steps, and he found the door.

It was locked and its edges fused into the wall by ray action.

More perplexed than ever, he stood staring at the sealed portal. Footsteps behind him made him turn quickly. Little old Thiessen was coming toward him. One withered hand beckoned McKye along to a place where several girders joining at an angle, formed a small nook.

"I must warn you," whispered the old man. "It may do no good—but be careful!"

McKye scowled his amazement. Thiessen hurried on: "With you two, there are only nine—would God we could make a stand, but we can't!"

"Please explain," urged McKye.

"I'll make it short. Five years ago Captain Jaub cleared this ship from St. Louis Skyport, for Mars. On the first day half a dozen of the hundred passengers disappeared. On the next day, others. On the third morning some of us called a mass meeting in the saloon and asked Jaub what was happening. He laughed. Then he opened a secret hold."

THIESSEN paused to shudder. "Go on," McKye said.

"Out rushed his robots—more than a score. They settled the few who resisted and hove them out into space. The rest of us were quickly cowed. And Jaub, with his machine-man crew, turned off the lane into space."

"Piracy?" explained McKye. "What's his home port?"

"He has none—has never landed since that day. He captures other ships, takes their supplies and treasures—and their crews."

McKye bit his lip in fresh mystification. "What's it all for, Thiessen?"

The pathetic eyes widened earnestly under the young man's gaze.

"I can only guess. Let me start by saying that he has gradually taken one after another of the helpless passengers into his sealed den. They never come back, nor have the captured crews been seen, except briefly. But his crew of robots gets larger, larger—"

McKye swore. "You mean he sacrifices human beings to make machine-men? How?

"I can't tell you how," mumbled Thiessen. "That's his secret. He wants a heartless metal army to serve him, to

operate a great pirate fleet. He'd be the only leader, take all the profits. And there are only seven passengers left—old and stringy men, lacking the energy he seems to need in his experiments."

McKye shook his head hazily. Thiessen interpreted it as a sign of disbelief. "Please take me seriously, it's your only chance. And guard your wife—" His thin, withered hand clutched McKye's strong one. "I'll go now. Remember what I say."

He departed as abruptly as before. McKye followed at a little distance, still arguing within himself that it was all a grisly joke. Thiessen turned down a stairway that led to the promenade below. McKye, coming to the head of the flight, paused.

Thiessen had cowered at the bottom. Eight or ten silent robots stood in a ring around him. "Wh-why are you here?" the old man was quavering at their blank, lensed faces.

One of them motioned for him to go back up the steps.

"No!" wailed Thiessen hysterically. "Not to Captain Jaub!"

The robot closed a claw on the withered arm. The old man screamed and, strengthened by horror, jerked loose.

"I know why I've been sent for," he jabbered. "Jaub thinks I warned the young man!" The thin hands spread pleadingly. "Let him live a little longer, let him and his wife know a few hours of happiness. It'll do no harm—"

The robot leader swung a metal claw, smiting Thiessen to the deck.

McKye, in the act of dashing to the rescue, checked himself. That gang of machine-beings would make short work of him, and Mona would be left defenseless. He watched for a moment, while the robots picked up the fallen Thiessen and began to mount the stairs. Then he quickly retreated, found another companionway and descended to the lower promenade. When he reached his compartment and found Mona unharmed he could have shouted for joy. Kissing her, he answered her questions with a fine show of carelessness.

"The captain's busy," he said. "We'll see him at dinner."

"Will he like this dress?" Mona asked. It was a wine-colored evening gown that hugged her graceful figure and set off the creamy tan of her bare arms and shoulders.

"I hope he doesn't like you too much," McKye replied, with a significance she did not catch, and began to change into the dress uniform of an officer in the Terrestrial space-navy-blue breeches and tunic, glossy black boots, platinum insignia. Mona clapped her hands in delight at his splendor. Waiting until she glanced away, her husband stealthily drew a ray pistol from his dressing-case and tucked it into his waistband. Together they left the compartment and, after a brief search, found the dining saloon.

It was small, evidently a walled off portion of what had once been a hall of considerable size. At a single table sat six old men, eating. A pair of the omnipresent robots acted as waiters. As the young couple appeared all six diners rose and bowed. A tall gentleman with hair as white as thistledown motioned them toward two chairs at the head of the table.

Both Mona and McKye were hungry, and the food was excellent. They ate heartily, although McKye kept an alert watch on the door. Thiessen was absent—probably for good. What did that mean as to the rest of them?

"When does the captain appear?" he asked his nearest neighbor.

The six old men stopped eating. Their parchment faces grew paler yet as they gaped at McKye.

At that moment a clammy shadow fell across the table.

The diners gasped. McKye followed their gaze to the threshold.

A GROSS shape filled the doorway from side to side—a manlike form of ungainly hugeness, standing on wide-spread, spindly legs with an immense, hairy hand on either jamb. Those legs swayed beneath the unwholesome weight of bulbous belly, deep chest and high, uneven shoulders. Lolling forward on a thick, flaccid neck, the bald head appeared almost freakishly large. On the wide, doughy face the features seemed unduly small. Two lizard-bright eyes bulged from under lashless lids, a coarse, pendulous nose quivered as if with a separate life and intelligence. Loose lips smacked and twitched.

A threadbare uniform with space-captain's insignia identified the apparition as Skipper Jaub; but, despite the garments, McKye could not believe that the thing was human. It wasn't a beast, even. It was a mistake of nature, a slip of creation's powerful machinery. . . .

The protruding eyes had fastened upon Mona. The slack lips twitched, and from one mouth-corner crept a thread of saliva.

McKye's right hand slid under the skirt of his tunic to the hilt of his ray-gun. In another moment, so overwhelming was his apprehension and loathing, he would have drawn—perhaps discharged the pistol. But, quick as light, for all his awkward bulk, the monster that was Captain Jaub had vanished from the doorway.

Mona gave a deep, whimpering sigh. "Horrible!" she murmured. "Horrible!"

McKye took her hand and drew her to her feet. None of the others moved. Still clutching the stock of his pistol, McKye led his wife from the saloon, down the promenade and back to their compartment.

At once they saw that their luggage had been thoroughly ransacked. Every semblance of a weapon was gone—two ray-guns, a jewelled dagger such as space-officers wear on dress parade, a pen-knife, even Mona's manicure scissors. Whatever Jaub planned to do would be attempted soon.

McKYE locked the door and turned to Mona.

"I may as well give you the story," he said. "I hoped it would work out some way without your knowing."

He told of Thiessen, of the robots, of his estimate of the situation. Mona's face bravely refused to show terror, but her clenched hands turned ivory white at the knuckles.

"We have this," he finished, producing his pistol. "Probably he doesn't know I took it with me."

He pulled off his tunic and stood up with only a sleeveless silk jersey covering his torso. Flexing his unhampered muscles, he smiled encouragement at Mona. "I think we have some food tablets in one of the cases, and some bottles of mineral water."

"Right," said Mona, investigating.

"Then let's stand siege. Give Jaub a chance to make some foolish move. Lie down and rest, dear—I'll take first watch."

Somewhat reassured, the girl stretched out on the lower berth. McKye kissed her lightly, then drew an armchair around to face the locked door. In this he sprawled, his ray pistol in his lap. Lighting a cigarette, he commenced his vigil.

In a few minutes Mona began to breathe deeply. She was asleep. Devoutly he wished she were safe at home. Cigarette stubs multiplied on the floor beside him, and once or twice he yawned, but stayed awake.

Finally he heard Mona murmur softly. The rhythmic breathing ceased, as if she had awakened.

"Are you all right?" he queried, turning his head.

Mona was not on the berth.

He sprang up. The door was locked on the inside—she hadn't gone out.

She couldn't have passed him anyway. The berth, hollowed by her slender body, was still warm. Nothing behind it or under it, nothing in the narrow closet. Had

Mona vanished into space? He must think fast, hard. . . .

A secret panel, of course!

He rapped with his pistol-butt on the bulkheads. No difference in sound there, but, as he crossed the floor, his boot-heels rang hollow just beside the berth. He knelt to peer at the metal sheathing. A hair-wide crack outlined a section that might drop to admit the passage of a human body.

Through there his wife must have been snatched.

He did not stop to hunt for fastenings. He levelled the ray-gun and pressed the trigger. A lean streak of light spurted upon the floor. Green radiance sprang up at the point of contact, puffs of gleaming vapor shot away. A ragged, dark opening began to form.

For six seconds the flame ate at the thick metal. Then McKye released the trigger and swung down through the hole he had made. His feet struck the floor of a dark passage eight feet below.

He produced a small radium lighter. Its glow revealed footprints on the dusty floor—a few marks of a dainty bare foot and many prints of the slabsoled robots. all pointed in the same direction. He ran forward on the trail.

A huge robot loomed out of the darkness ahead, claws extended. Levelling his pistol, he rayed the creature. It fell heavily, head completely washed away in the corrosive light. Stepping over the metal carcass, McKye came to a wall up which a metal ladder mounted.

Quickly he climbed up, twenty feet or more, to the ledge of a door. Through a small, square opening he peered into the den of Skipper Jaub.

IT WAS thrice the size of an ordinary compartment, well lighted. On one hand was a sealed door, evidently leading

to the promenade. Along the opposite wall were ports through which stars and sky were visible, and there was also a great round valve-panel on a spring hinge. Pressure on this, McKye knew, would open the panel for a moment, discharging the object that pressed.

Then he saw Mona. She lay on a table, wrists and ankles bound, eyes staring up in horror at the unholy bulk of Jaub. The skipper's great hands held scalpel and syringe.

"Kill me," she pleaded, "but don't torture."

Jaub spoke in a throaty voice, like the wind from a cave.

"I shall not kill," he promised mockingly, "and the torture will not be for long. I must have your brain, my dear—to give life and thought to one of my metal pets."

"Do that," she answered, brave in her extreme peril, "and my new metal body will kill you." There was fear-inspired courage in her voice.

Jaub laughed, patting her cheek with loathsome fingers.

"I see you do not understand. Removed to the metal cranium, your brain loses memory, personality, sex—it knows only obedience. You will not even recognize your husband as you help drag him—"

McKye's gun-ray slashed the door. It shot through the panel from side to side, then from top to bottom. Jagged chips of metal fell tinkling away. McKye, plunging through the hole he had made, pointed his weapon at the skipper.

But no ray came, Jaub did not fall. The charge was exhausted.

McKye hurled the weapon. Dodging, Jaub made a gesture of command. Two robots hurried out of a dark corner and toward the invader.

McKye sidled warily away, then suddenly stooped and lunged. His shoulder, catching a robot in the midriff, spilled it. Turning, he struck the other on the headpiece, not with his knuckles but with the solid heel of his right hand. The eye-lens flickered out and the thing reeled backward, its brain-mechanism jammed.

The first robot scrambled up. McKye ducked under a murderous swing of its claw, grappled it. For a brief moment the two forms swayed, unbending metal and lithe sinew. Then McKye hooked a knee back of the thing and threw his weight forward. As the robot fell backward, he kicked its lens in. The light went out, clashing limbs slackened.

A scream of rage from Jaub. He flew across the room to where, on a table, lay the ray pistols he had filched from McKye's luggage. McKye, leaping after him, hooked a hand under his baggy chin and jerked him back. Up flew Jaub's scalpel.

McKye seized the arm, but the gigantic, misshapen skipper had gorilla strength. His other arm clamped McKye close, while the point of the scalpel drew slowly down. Desperately the young man writhed aside from it and, plunging his head forward, bit the weapon hand. Jaub snorted in pain and dropped the scalpel. At the same time McKye, tearing free, drove both fists hard into the doughy countenance. Jaub staggered back against the wall.

AT ONCE he yelled in glee. His great thumb jabbed a button. A bell screamed, a door flew open across the compartment. A dozen gleaming robots appeared at the threshhold.

At the same time Jaub swept McKye into another crushing hug, not fighting but holding his enemy until the metal beings could lumber forward and finish the business. The great head burrowed into McKye's shoulder, away from blows, and Jaub, striving to push the young man into the claws of his metal servants, turned his own back to the bulkhead—to the valve-panel.

McKye felt a surge of wild inspiration. Up flew his left hand. Its thumb dug into

Jaub's drooling mouth-corner, tilted the giant head back. As the chin bobbed up, McKye's right fist smashed it with every atom of his strength.

Jaub, torn loose from his grip, staggered backward. McKye rushed in at a crouch. Even as the back of Jaub's head smote the center of the valve-panel, McKye tackled the knobby knees and heaved violently upward and outward.

The panel dashed open before that mighty burst of strength. The cold of space fell upon McKye like a chilly blanket, and the rush of escaping air nearly swept him out—out in the wake of the grotesque, writhing figure that hurtled into the starry nothingness outside and abruptly ceased its struggles.

Almost before the valve-panel sprang shut, McKye whipped around. The robots closed in, but he dodged among them, leaped across the floor to Jaub's table and seized the ray pistols, spinning around to take rapid aim.

Into the huddle of metal figures he spurted twin destroying streaks of light. A deafening clangor rang out as the foremost robots fell, their synthetic lives rayed out of them. The survivors charged, to wither in turn before his invincible blaze. In a few seconds the last of them was down.

Baring his teeth, McKye directed his fire at those that still watched.

When the last robot lay quiet, McKye hurried to Mona, cast off her bonds. Trembling, she came into his arms, gathering strength and courage from his hug. Still holding her to him, he turned a ray upon the sealed promenade-door.

It fell away before the gush of flame. Outside huddled half a dozen trembling figures—the old passengers who had survived.

"Where did you come from?" they chattered. "Where have you been? Has the skipper—"

McKye grinned, wearily but triumphantly.

"I'm the skipper now," he told them. "Jaub's dead, and without him his robots won't be hard to handle. Let's get into the control room and point this ship for home."

THE END

FANTASY REVIEWS

(Continued from page 25)

and unlisted. One of the seven is a murderer, all of the seven claim to be the genuine original, none admit the crime. And no one else can tell which is which. The manner in which the business is solved will leave the reader stunned and gasping. Heartily recommended for a dizzy night's perusal.

—Donald A. Wollheim

Book Notes

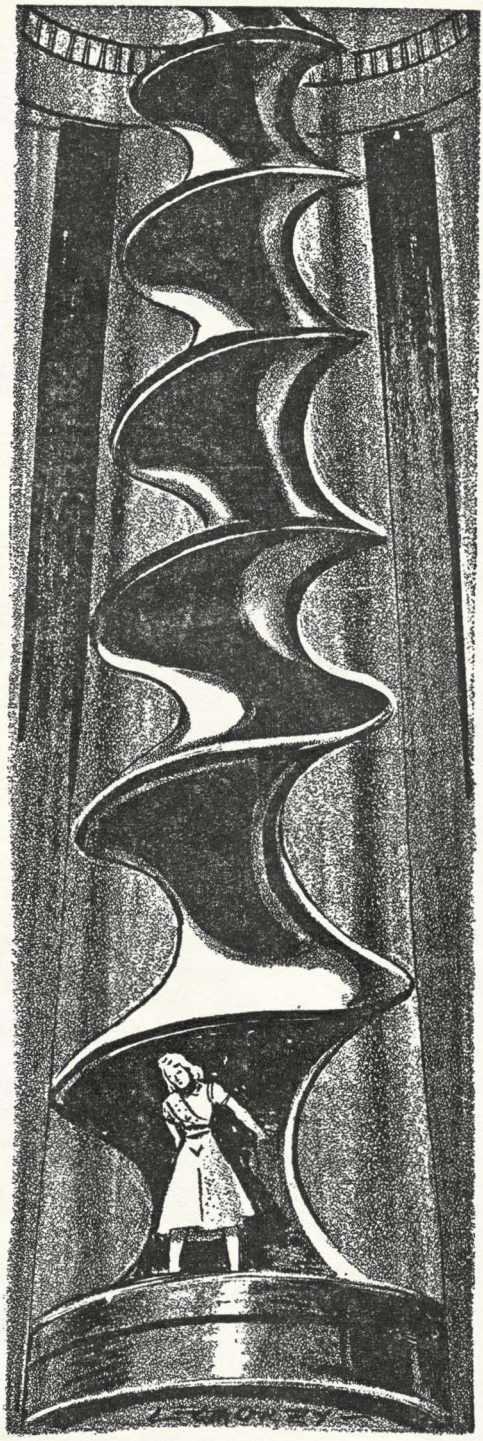
William Seabrook has authored a new volume on "Witchcraft in the Twentieth Century" which is a comprehensive account of what is going on today in that ancient traffic. It is an eye opener. H. G. Wells' latest work is a longish novel entitled "Babes in the Darkling Wood." A somewhat allegoric tale of love and violence in a warring world. . . . Peter Fleming's "Flying Visit" is an hilarious account of an accidental visit of Hitler to England during the war. Illustrated by Low, it should get a laugh provided the developments of the war haven't made the topic by then exceedingly funny. . . . David H. Keller, well-known science-fiction author, has just published a new nonfiction book on medicine and witchcraft.

—Danold A. Wolheim

Trouble In Time

The scientist's crack-pot time machine didn't exactly work, but it *did* transport Mable Evans to the sleeping world of the future!

By S. D. Gottesman



TO BEGIN at the beginning, everybody knows that scientists are crazy. I may be either mistaken or prejudiced, but this seems especially true of mathematico-physicists. In a small town like Colchester gossip spreads fast and furious, and one evening the word was passed around that an outstanding example of the species Doctissimus Dementiae had finally lodged himself in the old frame house beyond the dog pound on Court Street, mysterious crates and things having been unloaded there for weeks previous.

Abigail O'Liffey, a typical specimen of the low type that a fine girl like me is forced to consort with in a small town, said she had seen the Scientist. "He had broad shoulders," she said dreamily, "and red hair, and a scraggly little moustache that wiggled up and down when he chewed gum."

"What would you expect it to do?"

She looked at me dumbly. "He was wearing a kind of garden coat," she said. "It was like a painter's, only it was all burned in places instead of having paint on it. I'll bet he discovers things like Paul Pasteur."

"*Louis* Pasteur," I said. "Do you know *his* name, by any chance?"

"Whose—the Scientist's? Clarissa said one of the expressmen told her husband it was Cramer or something."

"Never heard of him," I said. "Good night." And I slammed the screen door. Cramer, I thought—it was the echo of a name I knew, and a big name at that. I

was angry with Clarissa for not getting the name more accurately, and with Abigail for bothering me about it, and most of all with the Scientist for stirring me out of my drowsy existence with remembrances of livelier and brighter things not long past.

So I slung on a coat and sneaked out the back door to get a look at the mystery man, or at least his house. I slunk past the dog pound, and the house sprang into sight like a Christmas tree—every socket in the place must have been in use, to judge from the flood of light that poured from all windows. There was a dark figure on the unkempt lawn; when I was about ten yards from it and on the verge of turning back it shouted at me: "Hey, you! Can you give me a hand?"

I approached warily; the figure was wrestling with a crate four feet high and square. "Sure," I said.

The figure straightened. "Oh, so he's a she," it said. "Sorry, lady. I'll get a hand truck from inside."

"Don't bother," I assured it. "I'm glad to help." And I took one of the canvas slings as it took the other, and we carried the crate in, swaying perilously. "Set it here, please," he said, dropping his side of the crate. It *was* a he, I saw in the numerous electric bulbs' light, and from all appearances the Scientist—Cramer, or whatever his name was.

I looked about the big front parlor, bare of furniture but jammed with boxes and piles of machinery. "That was the last piece," he said amiably, noting my gaze. "Thank you. Can I offer you a scientist's drink?"

"Not—ethyl?" I cried rapturously.

"The same," he assured me, vigorously attacking a crate that tinkled internally. "How do you know?"

"Past experience. My Alma was the Housatonic University, School of Chemical Engineering."

He had torn away the front of the crate, laying bare a neat array of bottles. "What's a C.E. doing in this stale little place?" he asked, selecting flasks and measures.

"Sometimes she wonders," I said bitterly. "Mix me an Ethyl Martini, will you?"

"Sure, if you like them. I don't go much for the fancy swigs myself. Correct me if I'm wrong." He took the bottle labeled C_2H_5OH. "Three cubic centimeters?"

"No—you don't start with the ethyl!" I cried. "Put four minims of fusel oil in a beaker." He complied. "Right—now a tenth of a grain of saccharine saturated in theine barbiturate ten percent solution." His hands flew through the pharmaceutical ritual. "And *now* pour in the ethyl slowly, and stir, don't shake."

He held the beaker to the light. "Want some color in that?" he asked, immersing it momentarily in liquid air from a double thermos.

"No," I said. "What are you having?"

"A simple fusel highball," he said, expertly pouring and chilling a beakerful, and brightening it with a drop of a purple dye that transformed the colorless drink into a sparkling beverage. We touched beakers and drank deep.

"That," I said gratefully when I had finished coughing, "is the first real drink I've had since graduating three years ago. The stuff has a nostalgic appeal for me."

He looked blank. "It occurs to me," he said, "that I ought to introduce myself. I am Stephen Trainer, late of Mellon, late of Northwestern, late of Cambridge, sometimes fellow of the Sidney School of Technology. Now you tell me who you are and we'll be almost even."

I collected my senses and announced, "Miss Mabel Evans, late in practically every respect."

"I am pleased to make your acquaintance, Miss Evans," he said. "Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you," I murmured. I was about to settle on one of the big wooden boxes when he cried out at me.

"For God's sake—not there!"

"And why not?" I asked, moving to another. "Is that your reserve stock of organic bases?"

"No," he said. "That's part of my time machine."

I looked at him. "Just a nut, huh?" I said pityingly. "Just another capable sometimes fellow gone wrong. He thinks he knows what he's doing, and he even had me fooled for a time, but the *idee fixe* comes out at last, and we see the man for what he is—mad as a hatter. Nothing but a time-traveller at the bottom of that mass of flesh and bone." I felt sorry for him, in a way.

His face grew as purple as the drink in his hand. As though he too had formed the association, he drained it and set it down. "Listen," he said. "I only know one style of reasoning that parallels yours in its scope and utter disregard of logic. Were you ever so unfortunate as to be associated with that miserable charlatan, Dr. George B. Hopper?"

"My physics professor at Housatonic," I said, "and whaddya make of that?"

"I am glad of the chance of talking to you," he said in a voice suddenly hoarse. "It's no exaggeration to say that for the greater part of my life I've wanted to come across a pupil of Professor Hopper. I've sat under him and over him on various faculties; we even went to Cambridge together—it disgusted both of us. And now at last I have the chance, and now you are going to learn the *truth* about physics."

"GO ON with your lecture," I muttered skeptically.

He looked at me glassily. "I *am* going on with my lecture," he said. "Listen closely. Take a circle. What is a circle?"

"You tell me," I said.

"A circle is a closed arc. A circle is composed of an infinite number of straight lines, each with a length of zero, each at an angle infinitesimally small to its adjacent straight lines."

"I should be the last to dispute the point," I said judiciously. He reached for the decanter and missed. He reached again grimly, his fist opening and closing, and finally snapping shut on its neck. "Will you join me once more?" he asked graciously.

"Granted," I said absently, wondering what was going around in my head.

"*Now*—one point which we must get quite clear in the beginning is that all circles are composed of an in—"

"You said that already," I interrupted.

"Did I?" he asked with a delighted smile. "I'm brighter than I thought." He waggled his head fuzzily. "Then do you further admit that, by a crude Euclidean axiom which I forget at the moment, all circles are equal?"

"Could be—but so help me, if—" I broke off abruptly as I realized that I was lying full length on the floor. I shuddered at the very thought of what my aunt would say to *that*.

"The point I was about to make," he continued without a quaver, "was that if all circle are *equal*, all circles can be traversed at the same expenditure of effort, money, or what have you." He stopped and gaped at me, collecting his thoughts. "All circles can be traversed, also, with the same amount of *time!* No matter whether the circle be the equator or the head of a pin! Now do you see?"

"With the clarity appalling. And the time travelling. . . ?"

"Ah—er—yes. The time-travelling. Let me think for a moment." He indicated thought by a Homeric configuration of his eyebrows, forehead, cheeks and chin. "Do you know," he finally said with a weak laugh, "I'm afraid I've forgotten the connection. But my premise

is right, isn't it? If it takes the same time to traverse any two circles, and one of them is the universe, and the other is my time wheel—" His voice died under my baleful stare.

"I question your premise vaguely," I said. "There's nothing I can exactly put my finger on, but I *believe* it's not quite dry behind the ears."

"Look," he said. "You can question it as much as you like, but it *works*. I'll show you the gimmicks."

We clambered to our feet. "There," he pointed to the box I had nearly sat upon, "there lies the key to the ages." And he took up a crowbar and jimmied the top off the crate.

I lifted out carefully the most miscellaneous collection of junk ever seen outside a museum of modern art. "What, for example," I asked, gingerly dangling a canvas affair at arms' length, "does this thing do?"

"One wears it as a belt," he said. I put the thing on and found that it resolved itself into a normal Sam Browne belt with all sorts of oddments of things dangling from it.

"Now," he said, "I have but to plug this into a wall socket, and then, providing you get on the time wheel, out you go like a light—*pouf!*"

"Don't be silly," I said. "I'm practically out now in the first place, in the second place I don't care whether I go out *pouf* or *splash*—though the latter is more customary—and in the third place I don't believe your silly old machine works anyway. I dare you to make me go *pouf*—I just dare you!"

"All right," he said mildly. "Over there is the time wheel. Get on it."

The time wheel reminded me of a small hand-turned merry-go-round. I got on it with a good will, and he made it turn. Then he plugged in the lead to a wall

socket, and I went out like a light—*pouf!*

THERE are few things more sobering than time-travel. On going *pouf* I closed my eyes, as was natural. Possibly I screamed a little, too. All I know is when I opened my eyes they were bleary and aching, and certainly nowhere very near the old house past the dog-pound on Court Street. The locale appeared to be something like Rockefeller Centre, only without fountains.

I was standing on polished stones—beautifully polished stones which seemed to set the keynote of the surroundings. Everything was beautiful and everything was polished. Before me was a tall, tall building. It was a dark night, and there seemed to be a great lack of illumination in this World of Tomorrow.

I followed my nose into the building. The revolving door revolved without much complaint, and did me the favor of turning on the lights of the lobby.

There were no people there; there were no people anywhere in sight. I tried to shout, and the ghastly echo from the still darkened sections made me tremble to my boots. I didn't try again, but very mousily looked about for an elevator or something. The something turned out to be a button in a vast column, labeled in plain English, "Slavies' ring."

I rang, assuring myself that doing so was no confession of inferiority, but merely the seizing of an offered opportunity. All the lobby lights went out, then, but the column was glowing like mother-of-pearl before a candle. A sort of door opened, and I walked through. "Why not?" I asked myself grimly.

I seemed to be standing on a revolving staircase—but one that actually revolved! It carried me up like a gigantic corkscrew at a speed that was difficult to determine. It stopped after a few minutes, and another door opened. I stepped through and said "Thank you" nicely to the goblins of the staircase, and shuddered again as the door slammed murderously fast and hard.

Lights on again at my landing place—I was getting a bit more familiar with this ridiculous civilization. Was everybody away at Bermuda for the summer? I wondered. Then I chattered my teeth.

Corpses! Hundreds of them! I had had the bad taste, I decided, to land in the necropolis of the World of Tomorrow.

On slabs of stone they lay in double rows, great lines of them stretching into the distance of the huge chamber into which I had blundered. Morbid curiosity moved me closer to the nearest stiff. I had taken a course in embalming to get my C.E., and I pondered on the advances of that art.

Something hideously like a bed-lamp clicked on as I bent over the mummified creature. God above! With a rustling like the pages of an ancient book it moved—flung its arm over its eyes!

I'm afraid I may have screamed. But almost immediately I realized that the terror had been of my own postulation. Corpses do not move. This thing had moved—therefore it was not a corpse, and I had better get hold of myself unless I was determined to go batty.

It was revolting but necessary that I examine the thing. From its fingers thin, fine silver wires led into holes in the slab. I rolled it over, not heeding its terrible groans, and saw that a larger strand penetrated the neck, apparently in contact with its medulla oblongata. Presumably it was sick—this was a hospital. I rambled about cheerfully, scanning cryptic dials on the walls, wondering what would happen next, if anything.

There was a chair facing the wall; I turned it around and sat down.

"Greetings, unknown friend," said an effeminate voice.

"Greetings right back at you," said I.

"You have seated yourself in a chair; please be advised that you have set into motion a sound track that may be of interest to you."

The voice came from a panel in the wall that had lit up with opalescent effects.

"MY NAME," said the panel, "is unimportant. You will probably wish to know first, assuming that this record is ever played, that there are duplicates artfully scattered throughout this city, so that whoever visits us will hear our story."

"Clever, aren't you?" I said sourly. "Suppose you stop fussing around and tell me what's going on around here."

"I am speaking," said the panel, "from the Fifth Century of Bickerstaff."

"Whatever that means," I said.

"Or, by primitive reckoning, 2700 A. D."

"Thanks."

"To explain, we must begin at the beginning. You may know that Bickerstaff was a poor Scotch engineer who went and discovered atomic power. I shall pass over his early struggles for recognition, merely stating that the process he invented was economical and efficient beyond anything similar in history.

"With the genius of Bickerstaff as a prod, humanity blossomed forth into its fullest greatness. Poetry and music, architecture and sculpture, letters and graphics became the principal occupations of mankind."

The panel coughed. "I myself," it said, modesty struggling with pride, "was a composer of no little renown in this city.

"However, there was one thing wrong with the Bickerstaff Power Process. That is, as Bickerstaff was to mankind, so the element yttrium was to his process. It was what is known as a catalyst, a substance introduced into a reaction for the purpose of increasing the speed of the reaction."

I, a Chemical Engineer, listening to that elementary rot! I didn't walk away. Perhaps he was going to say something of importance.

"In normal reactions the catalyst is not changed either in quantity or in quality, since it takes no real part in the process. However, the Bickerstaff process subjected all matter involved to extraordinary heat, pressure, and bombardment, and so the supply of yttrium has steadily vanished.

"Possibly we should have earlier heeded the warnings of nature. It may be the fault of no one but ourselves that we have allowed our race to become soft and degenerate in the long era of plenty. Power, light, heat—for the asking. And then we faced twin terrors: shortage of yttrium—and the Martians."

Abruptly I sat straight. Martians! I didn't see any of *them* around.

"OUR planetary neighbors," said the panel, "are hardly agreeable. It came as a distinct shock to us when their ships landed this year—*my* year, that is—as the bearers of a message.

"Flatly we were ordered: Get out or be crushed. We could have resisted, we could have built war-machines, but what was to power them? Our brain-men did what they could, but it was little enough.

"They warned us, did the Martians. They said that we were worthless, absolutely useless, and they deserved the planet more than we. They had been watching our planet for many years, they said, and we were unfit to own it.

"That is almost a quotation of what they said. Not a translation, either, for they spoke English and indeed all the languages of Earth perfectly. They had observed us so minutely as to learn our tongues!

"Opinion was divided as to the course that lay before us. There were those who claimed that by hoarding the minute sup-

ply of yttrium remaining to us we might be able to hold off the invaders when they should come. But while we were discussing the idea the supply was all consumed.

"Some declared themselves for absorption with the Martian race on its arrival. Simple laws of biogenetics demonstrated effectively that such a procedure was likewise impossible.

"A very large group decided to wage guerilla warfare, studying the technique from Clausewitz's 'Theory and Practise'. Unfortunately, the sole remaining copy of this work crumbled into dust when it was removed from its vault.

"And then. . . .

"A man named Selig Vissarion, a poet of Odessa, turned his faculties to the problem, and evolved a device to remove the agonies of waiting. Three months ago—*my* time, remember—he proclaimed it to all mankind.

"His device was—the Biosomniac. It so operates that the sleeper—the subject of the device, that is—is thrown into a deep slumber characterized by dreams of a pleasurable nature. And the slumber is one from which he will never, without outside interference, awake.

"The entire human race, as I speak, is now under the influence of the machine. All but me, and I am left only because there is no one to put me under. When I have done here—I shall shoot myself.

"For this is our tragedy: Now, when *all* our yttrium is gone, we have found a device to transmute metals. Now we could *make* all the yttrium we need, except that. . . .

"The device cannot be powered except by the destruction of the atom.

"And, having no yttrium at all left, we can produce no such power. . . .

"And so, unknown friend, farewell. You have heard our history. Remember it, and take warning. Be warned of sloth, beware of greed. Farewell, my unknown friend."

And, with that little sermon, the shifting glow of the panel died and I sat bespelled. It was all a puzzle to me. If the Martians were coming, why hadn't they arrived? Or had they? At least I saw none about me.

I looked at the mummified figures that stretched in great rows the length of the chamber. These, then, were neither dead nor ill, but sleeping. Sleeping against the coming of the Martians, I thought. My chronology was fearfully confused. Could it be that the invaders from the red planet had not yet come, and that I was only a year or two after the human race had plunged itself into sleep? That must be it.

And all for the want of a little bit of yttrium!

ABSENTLY I inspected the appendages of the time travelling belt. They were, for the most part, compact boxes labeled with the curt terminology of engineering. "Converter," said one. "Entropy gradient," said another. And a third bore the cryptic word, "Gadenolite." That baffled my chemical knowledge. Vaguely I remembered *something* I had done back in Housatonic with the stuff. It was a Scandinavian rare earth, as I remembered, containing tratia, eunobia, and several oxides. And one of them, I slowly remembered—

Then I said it aloud, with dignity and precision: "One of the compounds present in this earth in large proportions is yttrium dioxide."

Yttrium dioxide? Why, that was—

Yttrium!

It was one of those things that was just too good to be true. Yttrium! Assuming that the Martians hadn't come yet, and that there really was a decent amount of the metal in the little box on my belt. . . .

Quite the little heroine, I, I thought cheerfully, and strode to the nearest sleeper. "Excuse me," I said.

He groaned as the little reading-lamp flashed on. "Excuse me," I said again.

He didn't move. Stern measures seemed to be called for. I shouted in his ear, "Wake up, you!" But he wouldn't.

I wandered among the sleepers, trying to arouse some, and failing in every case. It must be those little wires, I thought gaily as I bent over one of them.

I inspected the hand of the creature, and noted that the silvery filaments trailing from the fingers did not seem to be imbedded very deeply in the flesh. Taking a deep breath I twisted one of the wires between forefinger and thumb, and broke it with ease.

The creature groaned again, and—opened its eyes!

"Good morning," I said feebly.

It didn't answer me, but sat up and stared from terribly sunken pits for a full second. It uttered a little wailing cry. The eyes closed again, and the creature rolled from its slab, falling heavily to the floor. I felt for the pulse; there was none. Beyond doubt this sleeper slept no longer—I had killed him.

I walked away from the spot, realizing that my problem was not as simple as it might have been. A faint glow lit up the hall, and the lights above flashed out. The new radiance came through the walls of the building.

It must be morning, I thought. I had had a hard night, and a strange one. I pressed the "Slavies' ring" again, and took the revolving staircase down to the lobby.

The thing to do now was to find some way of awakening the sleepers without killing them. That meant study. Study meant books, books meant library. I walked out into the polished stone plaza and looked for libraries.

There was some fruitless wandering about and stumbling into several structures precisely similar to the one I had visited; finally down the vista of a broad, gleaming street I saw the deep-carven words, "Stape Books Place", on the pediment of a traditionally squat, classic building. I set off for it, and arrived too winded by the brisk walk to do anything more than throw myself into a chair.

A panel in the wall lit up and an effeminate voice began, "Greetings, unknown friend. You have seated yourself in a chair; please be advised—"

"Go to hell," I said shortly, rose, and left the panel to go through a door inscribed "Books of the Day".

IT TURNED out to be a conventional reading room whose farther end was a maze of stacks and shelves. Light poured in through large windows, and I felt homesick for old Housatonic. If the place had been a little more dusty I'd never have known it from the Main Tech Library.

A volume I chose at random proved to be a work on anthropology: "A General Introduction to the Study of Decapilation Among the Tertiates of Gondwana as Contrasted with the Primates of Eurasia." I found one photograph—in color—of a hairless monkey, shuddered, and restored the volume.

The next book was "The Exagmination into the incamination for the resons of his Works in progreSs," which also left me stranded. It appeared to be a critique of the middle work of one James Joyce, reprinted from the original edition of Paris, 1934 A. D.

I chucked the thing into a corner and rummaged among the piles of pamphlets that jammed a dozen shelves. "Rittenhouse's Necrology"—no. "Statistical Isolates Relating to Isolate Statisticals"—likewise no. "The Cognocrat Manifest"—I opened it and found it a description of a super-state which had yet to be created. "Construction and operation of the Biosomniac"—that was it!

I seated myself at one of the polished

tables and read through the slim pamphlet rapidly once, then tore out some of its blank pages to take notes on. "The arrangement of the regulating dials is optional," I copied onto the paper scraps, and sketched the intricate system of Bowden wires that connected the bodies with the controls. That was as much of a clue as I could get from the little volume, but it indicated in its appendix more exhaustive works. I looked up "Vissarion," the first on the list.

"Monarch! may many moiling mockers make
my master more malicious marry mate—"

it said. Mankind, artist to the last, had yet found time to compose an epic poem on the inventor of the Biosomniac. I flung the sappy thing away and took down the next work on the list, "Chemistry of the Somniac". It was a sound treatise on the minute yet perceptible functionings of the subject under the influence of the Vissarion device. More notes and diagrams, collated with the information from the other book.

"The vitality of the sleeper is most profoundly affected by the operations of the Alphate dial. . . . It is believed that the Somniac may be awakened by a suitable manipulation of the ego-flow so calculated as to stock the sleeper to survive a severing of the quasi-amniotic wiring system."

I rose and tucked the notes into my belt. That was enough for me! I'd have to experiment, and most likely make a few mistakes, but in a few hours men would be awake to grow hard and strong again after their long sleep, to pluck out their wires themselves, and to take my yttrium and with it build the needed war-machines against the Martians. No more sleep for Earth! And perhaps a new flowering of life when the crisis of the invaders was past?

"The compleat heroine — quite!" I chortled aloud as I passed through the door. I glanced at the glowing panel, but it glowed no longer—the unknown speaker had said his piece and was done. Onward and outward to save the world, I thought.

"EXCUSE me," said a voice.

I spun around and saw a fishy individual staring at me through what seemed to be a small window.

"What are you doing awake?" I asked excitedly.

He laughed softly. "That, my dear young lady, is just what I was about to ask you."

"Come out from behind that window," I said nervously. "I can hardly see you."

"Don't be silly," he said sharply. "I'm quite a few million miles away. I'm on Mars. In fact, I'm a Martian."

I looked closer. He *did* seem sort of

peculiar, but hardly the bogey-man that his race had been cracked up to be. "Then you will please tell me what you want," I said. "I'm a busy woman with little time to waste on Martians." Brave words. I knew it would take him a while to get from Mars to where I was; by that time I would have everyone awake and stinging.

"Oh," he said casually, "I just thought you might like a little chat. I suppose you're a time-traveller."

"Just that."

"I thought so. You're the fourth—no, the fifth—this week. Funny how they always seem to hit on this year. My name is Alfred, John Alfred."

"How do you do?" I said politely. "And I'm Mable Evans of Colchester, Vermont. Year, 1940. But why have you got a name like an Earthman?"

"We all have," he answered. "We copied it from you Terrestrials. It's your major contribution to our culture."

"I suppose so," I said bitterly. "Those jellyfish didn't have much to offer anybody except poetry and bad sculpture. I hardly know why I'm reviving them and giving them the yttrium to fight you blokes off."

He looked bored, as nearly as I could see. "Oh, have you some yttrium?"

"Yes."

"Much?"

"Enough for a start. Besides, I expect them to pick up and acquire some independence once they get through their brush-up with Mars. By the way—when will you invade?"

"We plan to *colonize,*" he said, delicately emphasizing the word, "beginning about two years from now. It will take that long to get everything in shape to move."

"That's fine," I said enthusiastically. "We should have plenty of time to get ready, I think. What kind of weapons do you use? Death-rays?"

"Of course," said the Martian. "And heat rays, and molecular collapse rays, and disintegrator rays, and resistance rays—you just call it and we have it in stock, lady."

He was a little boastful. "Well," I said, "you just wait until we get a few factories going—*then* you'll see what high-speed, high-grade production can be. We'll have everything you've got—double!"

"All this, of course," he said with a smug smile, "after you wake the sleepers and give them your yttrium?"

"Of course. Why shouldn't it be?"

"Oh, I was just asking. But I have an idea that you've made a fundamental error."

"Error my neck," I said. "What do you mean?"

"LISTEN closely, please," he said. "Your machine—that is, your time-traveller—operates on the principle of similar circles, does it not?"

"I *seem* to remember that it does. So what?"

"So this, Miss Evans. You postulate that firstly the circumference of all circles equals infinity times zero. Am I right?"

That was approximately what Stephen had said, so I supposed that he was. "Right as rarebits," I said.

"Now, your further hypothesis is probably that all circles are equal. And that equal distances traversed at equal speeds are traversed in equal times. Am I still right?"

"That seemed to be the idea."

"Very well." A smug smile broke over his fishy face. He continued. "Your theory works beautifully—but your machine—no."

I looked down at myself to see if I were there. I was.

"Explain that, please," I said. "Why doesn't the machine work?"

"For this reason. Infinity times zero

does *not* equal *a* number. It equals *any* number. A definite number is represented by *x; any* number, *n*. See the difference? And so unequal circles are still unequal, and cannot be circumnavigated as of the same distance at the same speed in the same time. And your theory — is a fallacy."

He looked at me gloatingly before continuing. Then, slowly, "Your theory is fallacious. Ergo, your machine doesn't work. If your machine doesn't work, you couldn't have used it to get here. There is no other way for you to have gotten here. Therefore . . . *you are not here!* And so the projected *colonization* will proceed on schedule!"

And the light flashed in my head. Of course! that was what I had been trying to think of back in the house. The weakness in Trainer's logic!

Then I went *pouf* again, my eyes closed, and I thought to myself, "Since the machine didn't work and couldn't have worked, I didn't travel in time. So I must be back with Trainer."

I opened my eyes. I was.

"You moron," I snapped at him as he stood goggle-eyed, his hand on the wall-socket. "Your machine doesn't work!"

He stared at me blankly. "You were gone. Where were you?"

"It seemed to be 2700 A. D." I answered.

"How was it?" he inquired, reaching for a fresh flask of ethyl.

"Very, very silly. I'm glad the machine didn't work." He offered me a beaker and I drained it. "I'd hate to think that I'd really been there." I took off the belt and stretched my aching muscles.

"Do you know, Mable," he said, looking at me hard, "I think I'm going to like this town."

THE END

Quicksands of Youthwardness

By Malcolm Jameson

A powerful serial novel of a planet where age reigned triumphant, and to be young was a fault which meant death!

Part Two

SYNOPSIS

THE exploring space-ship *Thuban,* coming within range of Sirius' dangerous gravitational pull by order of its domineering supercargo, the explorer Ulberson, blows out its motors in the struggle to get away. The ship escapes from Sirius, but wanders aimlessly through space, at a vast speed, for months. In that time the crew is able to jury-rig some auxiliary motors, but they will last only a short time, and cannot therefore be used to get the ship back to Earth.

In its wandering, the *Thuban* approaches a "coal-sack" in space, a dark cloud through which no light is visible. They are powerless to alter the course of the ship without ruining the auxiliaries as well as the main motor, so are forced to pass into the cloud.

Examination of the space-atlasses shows that this cloud has been christened *Amnesion* by the few persons who have ever been inside it, because of its curious property of causing those who enter into it to lose their memories. Captain Yphon of the *Thuban* believes that some radiation from the cloud does this, and has the entire ship ray-screened. But he himself looks at the cloud through an unshielded telescope, and his eye suffers a remarkable transformation. A cataract on the eye disappears and his sight becomes as good as it was when he was thirty years younger. Simultaneously he forgets everything that ocurred for an hour before he peered into the telescope.

After they have penetrated almost to the center of the space-cloud, the radiation vanishes, and they spy a planet. Using the auxiliaries, they effect a landing. They are surprised to find that the planet is inhabited by incredibly aged Earthmen, descendants of marooned spacemen or in some cases the wrecked spacemen themselves. They speak a clipped, slurred form of English, and hold everything that comes from the Earth in deep reverence

As soon as the crew has landed, they are sub-

jected to a medical examination. The older members of the crew are treated with great respect, having come from Earth. But the younger Thubanites, though also from Earth, are disregarded.

When pressed for an explanation, one of the patriarchs of the planet, which is called Athanata, tells them that there is no point in treating them with any respect, as they are too young to live long on the planet!

PART II

CHAPTER SEVEN

Twelve Skeletons

IN THE days immediately after their landing, the boys took in the sights. There was little else to do, for the old people were very definite that nothing could be done about repairing the *Thuban* during the holidays, which were of a religious nature.

Captain Yphon was living with the Prizdint, as the chief magistrate was quaintly called, after an old title formerly borne by the chief executives of America. The others were billeted in various quarters of the city, each pair being taken care of by some local family.

Elgar and Daxon were quartered with one Pilp Tutl (or Philip Tuthill, for he claimed to be one of the Earthborn) in a pleasant house in a quiet district under a pale rose dome. Tutl and his wife were far better preserved than the run of the inhabitants of Hygon, as the city was called, and so were their neighbors. The old couple were very considerate hosts, and after a brief chat at dinner, showed the boys to their rooms and then left them to themselves.

The apartment, to Elgar's delight, since he was something of an antiquarian, reminded him of the Twenty-Second Century Wing in the great museum at America City. It had the same tile-lined water bath, an elementary television set in a little cabinet, and the primitive system of lighting by means of small glowing wires enclosed in exhausted glass containers.

"Pretty soft, even if it is old-fashioned," commented Daxon, looking around. "Beats zipping through the void with nothing to breathe and less to eat."

In the morning, Tutl went out with them long enough to acquaint them with the lay of the city, then left them to their own devices. He saw that being so young and active, they could get along much faster by themselves. Furthermore, as superintendent of the power plants, he had his own work to do. He apologized for leaving, explaining that he must attend to the laying up of the machinery in preparation for Sealing Day, which was close at hand. With that, which meant nothing to his guests, he was off.

Despite the generally feeble condition of the population, there was much activity in the streets. Gangs of fairly spry old men were at work everywhere, boarding up ground floor windows, erecting heavy crating about exposed statuary, and bolting signs to buildings. It was as if preparations were being made for an approaching hurricane. The signs most noticed bore arrows and the words "Food Depot", and they were placed at frequent intervals along the street.

At a good store itself, they saw truck after truck roll up and discharge its cargo of packages, each of the same size, like picnic lunches. Craning so they could see into the door, Elgar noticed that inside there were no tables or counters—only rows and rows of deep bins, almost all of which were already full of the uniform packages.

IT WAS the museum that interested them the most. Beyond the interminable rows of showcases containing bits of flora, fauna and minerals of Athanata, was a great bay in which were housed the space ships of the pioneers. The ships sat on concrete skids with wooden stairways built up to their entry ports. A gang

of workmen were busy laying out a rectangle beyond the last one, taping off distances and making blue chalkmarks on the floor.

There were four ships there. The two tremendous transports of Rangimon, in which the firstcomers had arrived, filled the center of the hall, while at one side of them was Sigrey's somewhat smaller *Procyon,* and on the other the wreck of a little freighter bearing the embossed name *Gnat.* The last was badly pitted and scored, and its bow bashed in, but intact. Behind the ships, lining the walls, were additional rows of showcases containing displays of the material found in the ships.

Elgar looked over the cases first, much interested in the medical supplies and first-aid kits furnished ships two millenia before, while Daxon was equally eager to examine the antique astragational equipment. The cases contained a queer hodge-podge of stuff, all the way from nuts and bolts to can-openers. They found Ronny back there, with one of his men, making lists of stuff they could use, in case a little burglary seemed expedient.

There was a reading room in a small bay back of the *Night Dragon* where the ships' libraries had been put, and there were more cases containing the logs, the muster-rolls, manifests, and other ship's documents. They noted that the *Gnat* was laden with telludium and other rare ores, bound from Tellunova to Earth. Among the papers of the *Night Dragon,* they saw their host's name, Tuthill. He had said he was her chief engineer, that is how he came to have charge of the city's powerhouses. But oddly, he knew nothing whatever of the installation on board her. Said he couldn't remember, but it was all in the books. They could find out about it, if interested, by going there and reading the engine room log. That is the way he found it out himself, he admitted, blandly.

They inspected the ships, all of which were of the obsolete rocket-propelled type. They had been pretty well gutted, as was to be expected, considering the yards of well-filled cases out on the floor, but they found that most of the *Gnat's* cargo was still in her.

"You know what I think?" demanded Daxon, replacing the manhole cover of the cargo hatch of the *Gnat,* and sniffed the heavy odor of telludium quintoxide that had welled up to him, "these old galoots can't know what this stuff's good for, or they'd have used it. From the looks of this town, there hasn't been a new idea in it since the year 2300, and that's funny, because they're human. They ought not to stand still this way for two thousand years."

But Elgar did not answer. He was on ahead, staring down into a long showcase set on trestles in the control room. In that case, neatly wired up, were twelve tiny human skeletons. All were complete, except that one lacked a left arm.

"Children—fifteen months to two or three years," said Elgar, in a low voice, and pointed to the label stating, "This vessel found early in the 14th Era in Province of Nu Noth Klina, evidently having fallen out of control. These skeletons were found huddled in control room. There is no evidence as to when or how the crew abandoned ship, or why they left these infants behind to starve."

"BY GOLLY, Sid," exclaimed Elgar, tense, with excitement, "I have a hunch we're about to get the lowdown on this queer planet. You remember that old billygoat that examined us the first day—he said we were too young to survive. Well, that is what he meant . . ." pointing a trembling finger at the display of little bones. "Come on, let's ransack this *Gnat's* papers."

Somewhat mystified, Daxon followed Elgar back into the alcove library, where they pulled down the log, the muster-

roll, and other documents of the vessel. Elgar found the crew to number eight, with four officers. "Look for something about losing an arm," he urged Daxon, while he himself began searching the library for the ship's binnacle lists.

The last entry in the deck log said simply, "Expect to enter dark nebula at about five bells." That was all. There were no notations for months before to indicate any distress or fear of it. Daxon found nothing until he had gone back to the second week after clearing Tellunova. Then, there was this entry, ". . . at sixteen-fifty-three, Tubeman Simok became entangled in pericycloid mesh: left arm badly mangled. At seventeen-twenty, Lt. Tosson amputated arm. Simok resting comfortably with fair chance for recovery. Severed arm ejected through port tube."

"That's it!" ejaculated Elgar. "Twelve men on board, one of them one-armed. Twelve skeletons, one of them one-armed. That's the crew there, Sid, what's left of them."

"You're crazy," said Daxon, "you know nobody'd send out a shipload of tricky telludium ore with only a crew of kids. Why, those weren't even kids, they're babies."

"No," said Elgar, soberly, "I'm not crazy. This all ties up with what we've already seen—forgetfulness, coupled with rejuvenescence—we see signs of it everywhere. We'll get younger and younger, and then finally go out like a candle, unless we starve first. The skipper is old enough to take it, he has the years to spare, and so has Angus, but you and I and the others are *too young.*"

"You may see it, but it's thick as mud to me," retorted Daxon, thinking of their Earth-like surroundings and their own safe passage through the outer envelope of nebula.

"I *may* be wrong," hesitated Elgar, "but I think we'd better split up and each of us go on a still hunt. Find out what you can about the Athanata's orbit, and their calendar. I'll tackle the medical and historical angles."

THE evidence of the tendency toward forgetfulness of which Elgar spoke was mainly in the abundance of signs all over the city telling in utmost detail the uses and ownership of every building and thing. Not only did public buildings, such as libraries, carry brass markers setting forth what they were and how they should be used, but dwellings were similarly labelled.

Tutl's house, for an example, had an intaglio set in the wall beside the entrance stating it to be the home of Filp Tutl and Febe Tutl, and also gave their description and identifying marks and the information as to where spare keys were kept, and references to file numbers in the city's archives where additional information could be found. Besides that, one morning the two officers were astonished to find a pair of aged workmen affixing a bronze tablet alongside the Tutl marker. It stated, "Dr. Elgar—Sid Daxn—your home, come in." And below was their description and spaces left for their serial number which had yet to be assigned.

They blinked when they read it. That was hospitality with a vengeance. But now they were beginning to understand the significance of the branded or tattoed marks on people's forearms, giving their names and other data. It was preparation for a spell of amnesia. The sufferer, or his finder, had but to look at the marks, and he knew where he belonged and where his history was filed.

There was also the matter of keeping notebooks. Just as the Thubanites had started diaries in coming through the fog, so did the Athanatians record everything they did. Houses were filled with filing cases, and duplicate copies were placed with the priests in the Temple.

One day a priest came and carted away the records of Tutl and his wife, but returned a few days later with them. "Hardly any deletions," said Tutl proudly, showing the diaries to Elgar. Occasional passages had been blocked out, as by a censor, but in general the record stood.

"That's why we are such a perfect race," Tutl continued. "Here is everything worth while I've ever done. Mistakes which teach no lesson are blotted out, and we forget them. In the new Era we will start off with only the best experience to guide us. Those are grand books," and he affectionately patted the filing case, as he twirled the combination lock.

CHAPTER EIGHT

By Order, The High Priest!

ELGAR'S research in the library was not particularly illuminating. There was a copious literature dealing with the history of Athanata and the city of Hygon, but the more of it he read, the less was his understanding. It seemed to require a key.

There were detailed accounts of this Era and that Era, but except from their numbering, it was nearly impossible to say whether a given Era preceded or followed the next one to it. It was as if a single history existed that had been run through many editions, each differing from others by minor additions or deletions. Always there were the same personalities, doing much the same things. Except that the earlier periods told of the construction of the city, while the later ones dealt only with repairs and slight additions, one Era was much alike any other, yet they were evidently distinct periods, though unconnected in any way. It was as if Time, in Amnesion, was not only discontinuous, but repetitive.

Daxon had even less success in his efforts. There was no planetarium, and people looked blank and just a little shocked when he questioned them about their relation to the sun. It was as if there was something sacrilegious in the inquiry. If there was any knowledge of astronomy, it was a secret of the priesthood, whom Daxon found singularly uncommunicative.

As to the calendar, it was nearly meaningless. Athanata *did* turn about an axis, but other than days the units were arbitrary and unrelated to astronomical realities. Thirty days made a month, and twelve months made a year—perhaps a tradition brought from Earth. But how many such years it required to make the circuit of the sun was unknown. Maybe the natural year was what they called an Era, but an Era appeared to be roughly eighty Earthly years, although the beginnings of each was hazy and indefinite, like the dawn of human history.

But Daxon resolved not to let the ignorance or superstition of the old men get the best of him. He took a run out to the *Thuban* where she still lay as she had landed in the midst of the field. He picked up his old file of observations on the sun. Day by day he made new shots and plotted them in curves. Given a little time, and he would work out Athanata's orbit for himself, although it didn't really make much difference.

IN THE meantime, the business of securing the city against whatever was to come was about finished. The food depots were filled, their doors opened wide and secured at the tops so that they could not be easily closed. At night the populace gave itself over to a carnival of pleasure and merry-making, much in the fashion they formerly did on Earth at the approach of the New Year. Old men and aged women mingled in the streets, hilarious and gay, or filled the

cafes, grotesquely attempting to dance, cackling all the while in high glee. Elgar would wander among them, tremendously curious, marveling at what he saw.

Hearing that Ronny had renounced the city and gone back to the hulk of the *Thuban* to live, Elgar went out there one day with Daxon to see him. Ronny had found the companionship of Ulberson distasteful, and the antics of the ancient couple where he was quartered disgusted him. Ulberson had wangled a plane, somehow, out of the authorities and gone off into the interior of the country with a bagful of notebooks and chartpaper to do some exploring. As soon as he went, Ronny rounded up most of the ship's crew and went back to live in it. To amuse themselves, they pottered about in the engine room, piecing together bits of the blasted Kinetogen, welding them into bigger fragments.

"Anything to keep from going nuts," was the way Ronny put it. "I couldn't stand that wizened old galoot they boarded me with or the harridan that keeps him company. When a couple of octogenarians start making whoopee, I'm done. Didja ever see a couple of superannuated scare-crows try to jig?" he demanded, in righteous indignation. "And then when I found out what the old bird's occupation was, I walked out. He's in charge of the delumination plant, if that means anything to you. It's a field south of town where they have all those black balls and bolts of black velvety stuff parked in the sun. Absorbs light, he says, but what the use of it is, he didn't even know himself. But he's proud of his job—says it is important, as we'll see, on final Sealing Day. Rats!"

Elgar and Daxon chatted with him a little while, amused at his contempt for the Hygonians. As they left the ship, they encountered a group of the old codgers just outside the entrance. Beyond them a truck was parked and there was a posthole digger nearby. The old men had just finished setting a post opposite the *Thuban* and attached to it was a sign bearing these words:

"Earth skyship *Thuban.* Fell 87th year, 17th Era. DO NOT OPEN until sun half high. Place in museum on blue X's. For instructions see Folio BH-446, Locker R-29, Little Temple. By order, High Priest."

"So that's what they were laying out on the floor by those other ships," grunted Daxon. "They mean to add this one to their collection."

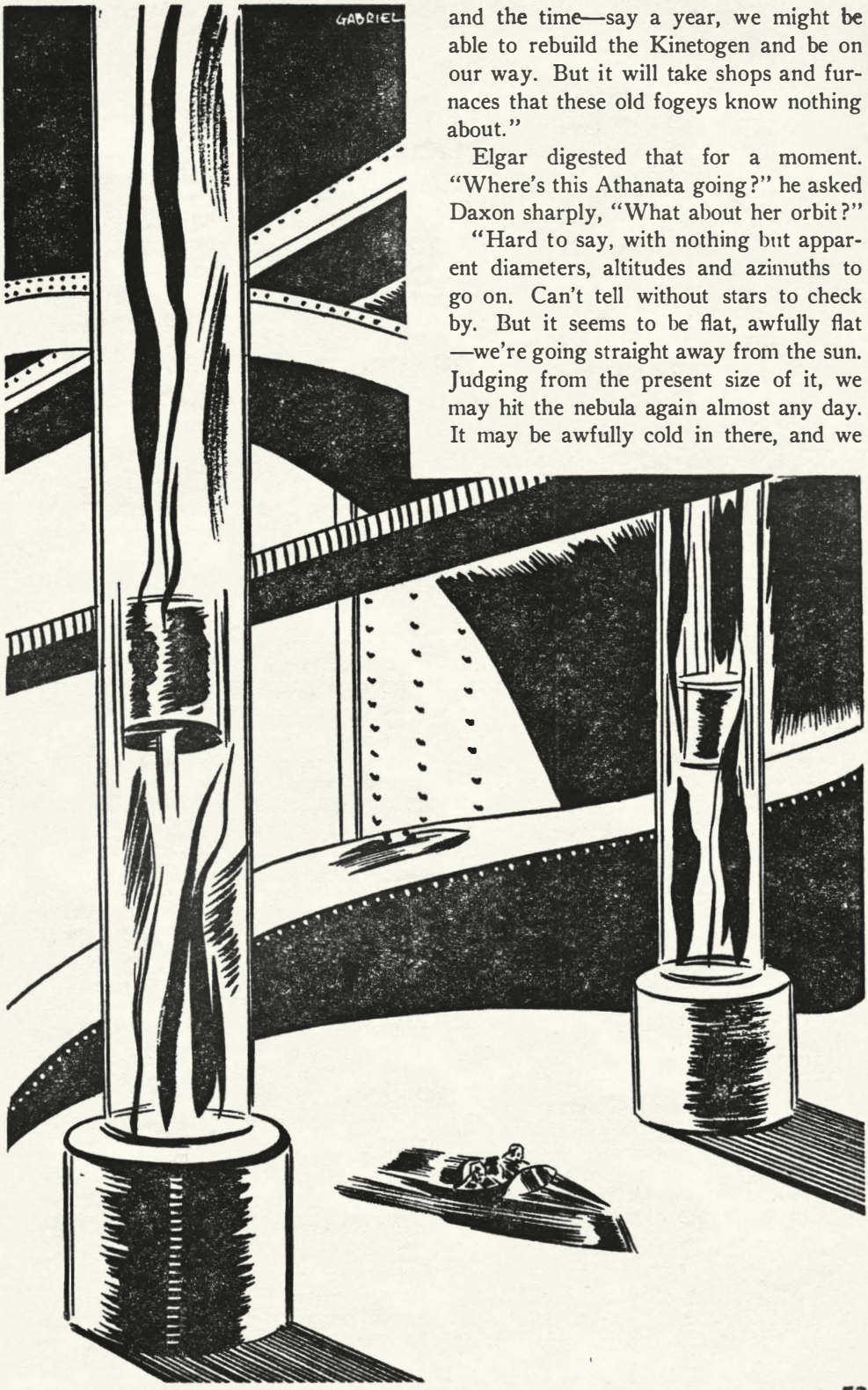
"Like Hell!" snorted Ronny, dashing among the quavering oldsters, shooing them away. He seized the half tamped post and pulled it up by the roots and cast it out into the field. The boss of the post-setting party tried to remonstrate, but made no headway against youth and vigar. Shaking his head and muttering something about the heinousness of resisting the High Priest's order, he gathered his gang together, and after mouthing a few more protests, drove away at the mad rate always affected by the old men when they handled machinery.

ELGAR looked significantly at Daxon. "These people don't mean for us to leave—not if they've already picked a spot in the museum for the old *Thuban.*"

"This ship don't go into anybody's museum. Not yet, anyway," blurted Daxon, with considerable heat. "She's my ticket home, and not all the tottering old dodos in this crazy city can take it away from me."

They discussed with Ronny the chances of getting the ship off. He shook his head gloomily.

"I inspected those old wrecks at the museum—thought we might swipe one, but it's no go. They're the old atomic powered type, and there's not an ounce of fuel left aboard any of them. That's why they're stuck here. If we had the makings



and the time—say a year, we might be able to rebuild the Kinetogen and be on our way. But it will take shops and furnaces that these old fogeys know nothing about."

Elgar digested that for a moment. "Where's this Athanata going?" he asked Daxon sharply, "What about her orbit?"

"Hard to say, with nothing but apparent diameters, altitudes and azimuths to go on. Can't tell without stars to check by. But it seems to be flat, awfully flat —we're going straight away from the sun. Judging from the present size of it, we may hit the nebula again almost any day. It may be awfully cold in there, and we

know it's dark, but I guess the planet will turn around when she comes to the end of her orbit and go back. That's all I know so far."

"I was afraid of that," remarked Elgar, thoughtfully, but it was the unguessable hazards of amnesia and the unnatural rejuvenation of the light-hungry fog that troubled him, not the dark or cold that any spaceman knows how to deal with. "Let's go see the skipper and put it up to him."

CHAPTER NINE

Thirty Minus Seventy Leaves—

AS THEY drove through the streets, Ronny nudged them, calling their attention to the men setting black spheres on low brackets of the city's street lighting poles. They were the "deluminants" he had spoken of so contemptuously.

"Can you tie that?" he snorted. "Deluminants! Supposing black does absorb all the light that falls on it? So what? The dimming effect in this street you can put in your eye—anyway, what's the idea?"

But farther down the street they saw more of the deluminant stuff being rigged. At one of the big food emporiums, men were at work inside the widely opened doors, draping black velvety cloth on the inner walls, like the preparation for some grand state funeral. The doors to the food building had been secured at their tops so that they could not be closed easily. On the other hand, when they passed the museum and the main library, they noticed that their doors were closed and covered with great seals, and barricades built in front of them. Mystified by these unaccountable preparations, they hurried on to the place Yphon was.

They found him lying in an easy chair on the roof of the Presidential palace, his eyes covered with goggles having heavy clear lenses. He was looking up at the sun through an opening in the heliotrope dome, and was evidently dictating something to a black-robed little priest who sat by him taking copious notes. Behind the chair stood the wizened and bent old gerocomist who had been assigned him to affect the "restoration" of his eyes. The two Athanatians, at the unmistakably determined order of the three younger and vigorous men, flutteringly withdrew a little way toward the parapet, the priest clutching up his notes in palsied hands.

The *Thuban's* officers saw with their first glance that the Captain's forearms were elaborately branded with the tattoo-like markings worn by all Hygonians, and through the open front of the robe he wore they could see much other information inscribed on his chest, starting with the words, "Pol Yphn, Capt. Thubn. B. Earth—4333 E.T." and so on, even to the cumbersome serial number assigned each citizen, together with the usual cryptic references to files and lockers.

"What's the dope, skipper?" asked Daxon, affectionately, noting the branding and the Captain's attitude of resignation. "Gone native?"

"Part way," said the Captain, attempting a feeble grin. He took off his goggles and held them in his lap. "I was just about to send for you, though. There are some things you should know."

Elgar was shocked at the Captain's eyes. They were in almost the condition they had been the day they pulled out of the fall onto Sirius—faded, dull and yellow, the eyes of an aged man. But he said nothing about it, the Captain had cleared his throat and was talking.

"You boys must round up all the crew and take them aboard the ship. Dig in there behind screens, like you did coming in here, for I am afraid there is real danger ahead. Maybe you'll be immune there. As for me, and Angus, we'll be all right outside, so don't worry about us.

Take care of yourselves, that's all I ask.

"It seems that they are at the end of an Era here—day after tomorrow is the last day, the day of the Final Festival. Then comes the Dark. And in the dark, so the priests say, everyone's sins are washed away and forgotten; their physical disabilities and decrepitudes removed; they will all come out at the beginning of a new Era young and strong. I know that sounds like a lot of poppycock, but on these planets of the south weird things do happen—impossible things, by any Earthly mathematics—I have seen plenty of queer ones long before we fell into Amnesion.

"The fact that the race here is controlled by the priesthood makes me think they only partially understand it themselves. It is a peculiarity of the human race, whether at home or on the farthest flung planet, that when faced with the Unknowable, they make it into a religion. I have an idea that they knew here what happens, but not why. However that may be, we see millions of people living and thriving under the conditions of this system. We have to believe them, follow their advice.

"To put it briefly, we are going into the Dark—that nebula, probably—and in there we will grow younger. And we will lose some of our memory."

ELGAR nodded his understanding. He had already guessed that much. Yphon looked very worn and tired, but in a moment he went on.

"For the best interests of the ship, I've taken their advice. The Prizdint assures me that it is impossible to do anything about repairs until the new Era. That is why I am dictating these notes. They want a record of everything I know—all our newer inventions and the later developments at home. When the next Era comes, I can reread what I have written and refresh my memory. In here are the plans for getting the *Thuban* back in commission, and taking her home. The Prizdint promises he will give us every help, if after seeing this city in the new Era, we will want to go back."

"An easy promise . . . seeing that he will forget it, and so will we, along with the desire," interrupted Elgar, bitterly. He was thinking not only of the preparations made in the museum for the display of the ship, but of the blacked out passages in the Tutl diaries. "Your notes have been put in a safe place, I hope?"

"Oh, yes . . . the Big Temple. See . . ." and he pulled his robe open wider and pointed to the "ZR-688". "My personal file. This priest is my amanuensis. He writes it all down and takes it over there every day and files it. If I slow down, or run out of words, he prompts me—asks questions. Smart fellow, that little old priest."

"Smart. Too smart," thought Elgar, anxiously. The Captain was in greater peril than he realized. The hierarchy that ruled Athanata would be only too glad to wring his store of knowledge from him. And equally, they would want to entrap a man of that caliber and add him to their stagnant population. Elgar saw his brother officers shared his feelings, but with a quick gesture of the hand he indicated to them to let it pass. They could discuss it later, among themselves.

"This process of rejuvenation in the dark, as I understand it," the Captain continued, "goes on evenly all over the body. That's why they're aging my eyes again. That concentrated dose of rejuvenation I got through the magnifying lens of the periscope put them out of step with the rest of me. The doctors say that if I left them that way I would be blind in the end. While I am getting younger, they would degenerate to nothing—or embryonic eyes at best—wouldn't develop afterward.

"There ought to be nothing harmful

about getting young again. Not if you're old enough at the outset. But when I was down at the Registrar's to get my number and have them print the records on me with that ray-machine, I watched them running all those newborn—the ones born during the current Era—through. They number everybody indelibly, because they forget. They would lose their identity in the dark. I asked about you, but the old man in charge there just shook his head and said it was no use. It didn't matter. You were all too young to bother with. They don't want your names in the ledger because it would make their statistics look bad. Since they regard themselves as immortal, records of people who die are blots on the system."

"Immortal my eye!" rasped Ronny, with a short laugh. "Why, coming through South Portal the other day, I saw one of those old buzzards—you know how they drive—wrap his Leaping Lena around that statue that stands in the middle of the concourse. If *he* wasn't dead, I don't know what it takes. They must have picked him up with a blotter."

"ACCIDENTS don't count," said Yphon, with a return of his old, grim humor, "they can't be blamed on the priests or doctors. It's age they worry about, and that's why they have this system of tinted domes. They are really ray-filters to regulate metabolic rates. With recurring rejuvenation, it is important that everybody reaches the end of an Era at the same *equivalent* age. They start off the new Era all alike. The original pioneers, the colonists on the two first ships, are almost all alive, although in talking with them I find they have forgotten coming here, or anything about the Earth, although some retain very clear memories of their childhood there.

"In each Era since, the population has expanded, but at perihelion and for awhile after, by exposing them to more of the rays of the sun, they can bring their physical age up to match the pioneers. Calendar age means nothing here—it's physical condition that counts. People who mature slowly live under the paler domes. The prematurely old they keep in twilight. Last week I heard the case of a gerocomist who had had one of his charges—an old woman—die. It was a great scandal, because she died of old age. They have reduced him to the rating of a laborer and destroyed the records of his past."

"I think I know our danger, Captain," said Elgar. "We will take steps. It is all a matter of arithmetic. Apparently you will lose three-quarters of a century, more or less, of equivalent age. But *you* have plenty to spare. About ninety, aren't you?"

"Ninety-six."

"What a spot for us," said Daxon, with a big grin. "Take seventy-five from ninety-six and you have a nice age. Only I start with thirty-six. Beginning taking seventy or so from that and . . . pouf! Out I go like a candle before I get halfway. Sweet place, this!"

The old-time twinkle came into Yphon's weary eyes, and he smiled his famous cynical smile. "At least you know what you're up against—I won't worry about you boys."

He replased into a fatigued silence and closed his eyes. The others stood uneasily around, wondering whether the interview was terminated. The marks of the long trip were plain on the skipper. He should have remained on Earth, retired. But presently he stirred and spoke again.

"About Ulberson . . . off in the mountains somewhere . . . great find, won't come back until it is all written up. He's an opinionated ass . . . don't risk your lives for him . . . but keep an eye open, he may come back. After all, he is a shipmate . . . we have a responsibility. Good luck—take care of yourselves. I

can live on this accursed planet, if I have to . . . get used to anything in space . . . that's what I've always said. . . ."

The old man's words trailed away as he dropped off into senile slumber. His devoted officers waited a moment then tiptoed away. As they left, the little priest and the gnarled doctor swooped back like a pair of harpies to resume their guard. A man like Yphon was a great find to them. They meant to keep him.

CHAPTER TEN

Shun the Sun!

THAT night they hauled out every space suit there was in the *Thuban.* The ones of the lighter type they stripped of their fleece linings and heating coils, and swabbed them well on the inside. Delicately wielding his tools, Ronny applied a plating of magnalium foil to their inner surfaces. The outside of them he sprayed with antilux.

"Ray-proof as I know how to make 'em," he asserted, grinning up through his running sweat. "They can't get out and they can't get in. If this isn't the answer, we're stuck. You fellows go ahead and prowl around. If you don't come back, we'll know they leak."

"Thanks," said Elgar, tersely, picking up two of the suits and starting for the parked car outside. "Sid and I mean to have a look at the big show in the Temple tomorrow. After that, we'll come back. I've read so many of the edicts of that High Priest, I want to see the old boy in action. See you after church."

On the way in, they noticed with mild amusement that the old men had finally succeeded in planting their post with the sign about moving the *Thuban.* It was located near the end of the causeway, a good mile out of Ronny's reach, and right where a person coming from the city would encounter it.

They found Tutl on his doorstep, anxiously awaiting their return. A commissioner had been there worrying him about the car. It should have been turned in and sealed along with all other machinery before the advent of the dark. Greatly relieved, their host drove off to get rid of the machine.

They carried their space suits up into their apartment and hid them in a closet. The inside of the house had a most funereal aspect, as it was draped throughout with runners of the black cloth they had seen put up in the food stores. They had to go to bed that night by candle-light, an astonishing relic of antiquity, because Tutl said that he had had to close down the city's power plants and seal them for Last Day. There would be no more light until the new Era came. Asked when that would be, Tutl only shook his head.

"May as well come along," invited Tutl, in the morning, "you will find it dreary here. They haven't registered you, I know, but everybody is welcome at the Temple on Last Day."

Elgar had some misgivings about having left their armor off when he passed out the front door. The door itself had been unhinged and removed, leaving only a gaping portal. Through it an ominous red glow could be seen, as if distant parts of the city were being swept by conflagration. Outside, they saw that the sky, which heretofore had been blue, nearly as on Earth, and not admitting the reddish rays they knew existed beyond, was today tinged with the same color they remembered from breaking through the outer shell of Amnesion. The sun was up, but its shape was vague and misty, and surrounded by a crimson halo. Daxon shrugged. It would take ten hours or more before they were really within the nebula.

Unheeding the angry light, everywhere throngs of the tottering Hygonians were converging on the Temple. Many man-

aged without canes or staffs, but from the darker zones came others in caravans of wheelchairs. But notwithstanding their decrepitude and the ominous flush of the heavens, there was a holiday atmosphere. Neighbors exchanged airy farewells, gay almost to the point of hilarity. It was like the old New Year's Eve custom on Earth, or Soaring Day at some great space-port when a super-liner takes off for a gala cruise.

THE great Temple was approached across a vast plaza filled with the hurrying crowds, if such a word could be applied to the pathetic senile efforts at speed on foot. It was a circular building of hewn granite blocks, surmounted by a dome of the same material. On the meridian, on the south face of the dome, was a small dormer window, otherwise the building had no outward openings except three doors, the central one huge and

flanked on either side by small ones.

Tutl led the way to the left hand door.

"The right is the priests' entrance—this is for the Earthborn. Everybody else uses the middle one."

But at the door they were stopped by a pair of surly, testy guards. "Can't help it," the old man snapped, turning back the two officers, "but you are not registered. This floor is for first-class citizens only. Go in, if you must, but use the main entrance."

Tutl was quite embarrassed and started apologies, but the boys waved him on.

It did not matter to them. The fact that the rulers of Hygon regarded them as non-existing persons was already something of a joke with them. They entered the main door and climbed an interminable flight of steps, marvelling as they did so at the fortitude of the elderly ones puffing and struggling along beside them.

At the top, they found it led out into a gallery that was divided into many segments. Choosing the one with the best view of the altar below, they entered it and sat down in empty seats beside an astonished looking patriarch. The other aged in the vicinity gaped and buzzed, nudging one another, but after a moment, the rustle subsided.

"It is an honor to have Earthborn sit in this section," said the old man next to them, with elaborate courtesy. "We here are of the 14th Era, and you are most welcome.

The Thubanites bowed their acknowledgement of the old gentleman's salutation and then began the study of the great hall. It was an amphitheatre, the building apparently being cut in half from east to west by a flat wall. They were facing north, where in the center of the wall was a high opening in which stood a tall monolith or obelisk surmounted by a golden sphere. About its pedestal were four great bronze vessels, woven of flat bands and standing on tripods. Apparently they were huge censers. Immediately in front of the obelisk was a small stage on which was the altar. Behind was a reredos carved with an odd design of bewhiskered old men and cherubs engaged in some sort of play. The entire hall was illumined by myriads of candles.

On the main floor, in front of the altar, on semi-circular marble seats, a number of the Earthborn—those individuals who had first come to this planet on the ships in the museum—sat like the elders in some Senate of remote antiquity. In the gallery, to the right and left, stretched the other segments for seating those born in subsequent Eras. The ones at the far right were narrow, and each successive one as the eye moved around to the left was larger, increasing seemingly in harmonic progression. The left-most two sections, largest of all, were quite empty.

"Each Era's children sit apart," whispered their volunteer host. "Those of the Second over there—and on the other side is room for two more. Then we shall have to build a new Temple."

Daxon was curious about the single opening in the dome and he turned around and looked up at it. There was a circular hole there, and the bloodily misty light that shone through it was in strange contrast to the gaily lit interior. But he knew that the sun was still fighting its way through the smoky sky.

Just below the spring of the dome was a high frieze richly decorated with marching, prancing figures moulded in low relief. As the design on the reredos, it consisted of an alternation of boys and old men in constant mutual pursuit. The symbolism was clear. The rhythm was stated as well as a plastic art could state it.

"There," said Elgar quietly to Daxon, "is the whole story—the history of this people. Life, sweeping back and forth like the ebb and flow of the tide, from youth to senility. A vicious circle, to my thinking."

"Wonder what the backtrack is like?" remarked Daxon.

"We'll soon know," answered Elgar, grimly.

JUST then the ancient who had spoken to them before politely called their attention to the inscriptions, one above the other, on the face of the obelisk.

"It will be a great day when we see those again, in the light of the sun, and know what to do. Well do I remember, early in this era, when the sun kissed the

fifth command from the bottom, and the priest called out my name. It was then they appointed me to be supervisor of transport, and gave me the instruction books and permission to break the seals. Each of three eras, now, I have been supervisor."

The old man beamed proudly on them, while the officers murmured their congratulations. His remarks made them understand a little better how the machinery for reorganization worked in the land of amnesia. That obelisk was a sort of calendar stone, or device such as employed by the Egyptians to regulate their plantings. As the declination of the sun changed in the beginning of an era, it automatically confirmed the orders carved onto the slender monolith. Undoubtedly each such order had appended the usual references to files elsewhere, and those the priests could interpret. In this way, the population could leave their notes and their plans, and forget. The sun would order their life for them, as prearranged.

But the vivacious, gay chatter suddenly hushed. Cranning to see what was happening below, they saw Captain Yphon, solemn and dignified and with old Angus at this side, being escorted down the aisle of the main floor to a seat of honor in the very first row.

The moment they were seated, the noisy multitudes in the galleries hushed their babble. Waggling beards ceased moving; there was a momentary twinkling as tens of thousands of shiny bald heads stopped their nodding and turned their eyes to the altar. The High Priest and his attendants were taking their places. Soft music was wafted into the hall from some unseen gallery.

The High Priest spoke for a long time. He recounted the accomplishments of the Era, the improvements to the city, the augmentation of the population. He spoke of the newcomers who had brought new ideas, and had Captain Yphon stand up and receive the tumultous cheers of the assembly. After that there was a pause.

The almost inaudible music turned from its triumphant major mode to a throbbing minor. As soon as the changed mood had had its effect, the Priest launched into a dirge-like recital of the woes of age, the infirmities, the pains, and the fatigue.

He raised an arm. The music took on a more strident, martial aspect, and swelled to fill the vast hall. It was Noon. A single shaft of ruddy light struck through the sun's portal in the roof and fastened itself glitteringly on the symbol of the sun atop the stone shaft. Sonorously and passionately the Priest reviled the sun for being the cause of all their griefs, and cursed it ponderously. As the music rose to clamorous volume, the entire audience rose and began chanting in furious, querolous voices, "Shun the Sun! Shun the Sun! Shun the Sun!" The High Priest struck a gong and responded, "So be it!"

Assistants with firebrands stepped from behind the obelisk and lit the censers. At the same instant, the abused sun slid past the meridian. The shaft of light faded, and the glittering crimson ball at the apex of the monolith ceased to shine. Heavily scented smoke welled up from the censers, swallowing up the obelisk, and as it rose still higher, the very symbol of the sun itself. Quietly, a priest slid a cover over the aperture in the dome. For a moment nothing could be seen but the rising clouds of black vapor, dimly lit beneath by the scarlet coals of the braziers. A tremendous sigh ran through the multitude.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Where Am I?

THEN, by some ecclesiastical legerdemain, an effigy of a child, modeled from some glowing white substance, sud-

denly appeared in a rift in the smoke before the stone. It slid forward and came to rest surmounting the altar.

The galleries and the floor below now rang with the cacklings and shrill laughter as the frenzied oldsters staggered to their feet once more, abandoning themselves to unrestrained rejoicing, orgies of back-slapping, and wild cries. The old man beside Elgar was up, pounding the floor with his cane.

"Ah, isn't it wonderful to be young again!" and he threw away his cane and tried to dance. But even in that flickering half-light it was easy to see that he was not young again.

"Let's rescue the skipper and get out of here," Daxon urged.

Attendants were now making their way through the aisles carrying large wicker-covered demijohns slung on poles between pairs of them. They were stopping everywhere and pouring goblets of the peculiar torlberry wine, the sticky green drink loved so by the Athanatians. The people were mad with delight. They had come to the end of time. Nothing mattered now.

Fighting their way through the hysterical devotees. Elgar and Daxon sought a stair to the lower floor, but there seemed to be none. They went down the same stairs by which they had come up and found themselves entirely outside, in the plaza. The haze had thickened to a deadly red quality and the two officers knew there was no time to lose.

The guards at the door of the Earth-born again refused them passage, but considerations of courtesy were now thrown to the winds. Firmly they pushed the old codgers back against the wall and strode past them.

Pandemonium reigned on the main floor of the Temple. The lowering smoke of the incense of the altar made vision difficult, while the joy-maddened old men had knocked down and extinguished many of the candles in their exuberance. Once they glimpsed Yphon, surrounded by his captors, all eagerly telling each other about their childhood on Earth—the only permanent memory they had to share. But in the milling crowd and the smoke they lost him, and twice even were separated.

But getting out was not so easy as getting in. The indignant guards, smarting not only from what they regarded as a personal affront, but in high rage at the sacrilege of forcible entry onto the floor of the Temple, had summoned aid. In the corridor there were now scores of the old men, and more pouring in from every direction.

Slugging ruthlessly, bowling their aged opponents over like ten-pins, the two officers smashed their way through the crowd. The screams of the guards brought excited, now partially drunk old men, tumbling down out of the galleries by the hundreds. Feeble though they were and unsteady on their feet, not a few of them were quite strong of arm. Daxon learned that when he tripped over a fallen one and found himself pinned under a pile of others clinging tenaciously to him. Striking out with his fists and kicking viciously, he extricated himself from that group but only to be felled by another.

ELGAR fared better. He was ahead and succeeded in fighting his way to the door. Assuming Daxon was close behind, he flung himself through it onto the plaza. Once there, he perceived there was not a moment to lose, for although scarcely an hour past noon, the air was a thick bloody haze and where the sun should be was only a brighter blotch. Athanata was almost within the nebulous envelope of Amnesion.

He could not wait for Daxon or afford to go back to aid him. One of them must retain his faculties. As long as one did, there was hope for the rest. He ran

down the street, concentrating fiercely on the thought of reaching the Tutl house, knowing full well the peril that threatened if his attention faltered for a single instant. In that way he managed to traverse some two-thirds of the distance to where the ray-proofed suits were waiting.

He kept always in what sunlight remained, avoiding the shadows. But to reach the Tutl house he suddenly found he had followed a route that forced him to choose between the hazard of several blocks of shaded diagonal street, or else make a long and uncertain detour. Mustering all his will power he plunged into the gloomy street, intent on his destination.

Then, without warning, he became vaguely conscious that something was wrong. He was sitting in the dark on what he felt to be pavement, and it also seemed to be outdoors, for a breeze fanning his cheek gave that suggestion. He wondered if he had fainted . . . ah, just now he was engaged in battering a withered, bearded face and tearing away the clutching talons of some frenzied old devil who was trying to stop him . . . fighting—that was it . . . he must have been knocked out.

But he could not follow through with the thought . . . a lazy indifference, a sort of stupor had hold of him. What may have been hours, or merely seconds, passed. Time was eternal, time was momentary—either meant the same thing now. But again he struggled to think. A moment ago they were watching the lighting of the censers and the billowing smoke . . . this smoke . . . when it cleared, they must get Yphon and get out . . . beat that insidious amnesia . . . wouldn't do. Amnesia—ah . . . can this be it? No—can't be . . . I know perfectly well who I am. . . .

But he could not think. His thoughts wandered in the most baffling and exasperating fashion. If he could only think . . . but he *could* remember Amnesia—Bosh! Why, I am Elgar . . . but where is Sid? It could not have been more than a minute since he helped me take those space-suits out of the car . . . Tutl drove off right after . . . silly to call this amnesia.

Ahead was a reddish blur of light, higher than his head. Five uncertain steps took him close enough to see it stood like a flower on its stalk at the top of a slender greenish thing—a rod. And when he was that close, the ruddy color paled to reveal a ghastly white sphere, dim and eerie above him, glimmering just enough to show the swirling wisps of greyish fog. He put his bare hand forth and touched the green stem, only to withdraw it with a jerk. The stem was iron—a lamp post—and deathly cold. Why so cold? He must be dreaming. But his hand shone faintly with a spooky greenish-violet radiance, he noticed, and the sight of it made him nauseated.

He sat down and stared at his hands. Both were glowing—nearly imperceptibly, to be sure—but when he waved them about, he could see them, even in the dark. And his tunic sleeve, which should have been a deep blue, was a horrid salmon color. Then, as a ship looms abruptly out of the mist, a man, shimmering with pale lights of many colors, stumbled over him, nearly fell—staggered on.

Elgar saw and did not care, and knew that he did not care. Not caring made him feel stupid. It's not right. . . . I *should* care . . . ghosts trampling you like that . . . I'm a ghost, too. Oh, I see now . . . *I'm radiating* . . . but hold on! That's a symptom of amnesia—supposed to be . . . a lot of rot . . . what have I forgotten? I am Elgar, and I have taken precautions . . . in one more hour we'll be finished with those suits . . . bring on your fog. . . .

To Be Concluded

HOLD THAT COMET!

Recipe for a top-notch football team: A heavy line, a smart quarterback, and a chewing-gum-crazy, mind-reading, extraterrestrial animal named Iggy!

By F. H. Hauser and H. B. Fyfe

DAILY TELEMIRROR, *Dec. 28, 2017, 2:30 P. M. Edition*

"Professor Charles Reilly, the famous explorer, returned to Earth today following a two-year expedition to Alpha Centauri. Among other outlandish specimens, he brought back a small, fox-like animal which can, he claims, speak somewhat after the fashion of a parrot. Reilly plans to send it as a present to his son, James. The latter is the same Jim Reilly who led the All-Earth football team to a 21-20 victory over Venus last week, rounding out a brilliant season at quarterback for Western U. His father has returned just in time for the last game of Jim's college career, to be played on Mars against the Martian All-Star team."

THE day before the game, Coach Horner dismissed the men from practice early. Reilly left the field with "Bull" Smeed, the hard-plunging fullback of the Earth team.

"Some game," Bull remarked laconically.

"Yeah," agreed Reilly, "but a lot easier than playing those Jovians who cleaned up in the Interplanetary Pro League this year."

"By the way," asked Bull, "do you know anything about this game they're supposed to play against a team of amateurs?"

"Only what everyone knows: Some rich Jovian has bet their owner he can produce a team of amateurs that will beat the 'Thargs'."

"Something like a million credits," mused Bull wistfully.

"You know," said Jim, "I feel sorry for that mine-owner. He hasn't produced his team yet. He has to have them on the field at two o'clock tomorrow or he loses. And they have to be amateurs."

"On such short notice, he'd have to pick well-known college players," said Bull. "Fat chance, too—this is after the regular season. Well, that's *his* trouble. How about dropping in tonight for a hand of cards. Bring that watcham'callit of yours along. Maybe he'll talk for us this time."

"Alright, Bull," agreed Reilly, remembering how the weird "fopar" his father had sent him had shown signs of temperament by losing his tongue in the presence of company.

They returned to their Martian hotel and Reilly went up to his room. As he opened the door a raucous voice greeted him:

"Get ya foot outa the door! We don't want any!"

Reilly jumped like a skittish horse, then relaxed as the furry fopar walked out from under the chair.

"Well, Iggy! So you're talking today!"

"Betcha life," giggled the fopar, and drunkenly attempted to stand on his head.

"Oh-oh! Been at the chewing gum again," accused Reilly. He realized the truth even as he uttered it, for he found one foot to be stuck to the floor. "Oh, dear . . . ." he sighed.

After he came back from supper with the rest of the team, Jim got out the fopar's leash.

"Come on, Iggy," he called. "We're going out."

"Night club?" asked the animal casually.

"Shhh!" quieted Reilly. "Don't let the Coach hear that!"

"Burlesque?" persisted the fopar.

"*No!* We're going over to see Bull."

"Oh, boy! Candy!" chortled the animal, turning a somersault.

Jim wound the strap around his wrist and they left the room. In the hall Iggy spoke again.

"Oh, what a guy!" quoth the fopar.

Reilly turned and saw that the remark had referred to a tall man, dressed like a dandy in tight-fitting doublet and trousers of silvery material and cloth-of-gold cape. The elegant one approached.

"Are you James Reilly, the Earth quarterback?" he asked politely.

"That's right," Jim started to answer, "but what—"

He instinctively pulled back from the puff of white smoke that issued from the small tube somehow drawn by the stranger. Before he could make a move, however, sleep stole over him and he slumped gently to the floor. He did not even see the fopar succumb to the same weapon, while the tall dandy held a damp handkerchief to his nose.

When the air was again clear, the stranger whistled. Two other men slipped out of a nearby room with a laundry bag, whose meager contents they proceeded to round out with the body of Reilly. In the

interests of neatness, one of them scooped up the fopar and dumped him in. They shouldered the bag and made for the stairs . . . . .

WHEN Reilly woke, he found himself in a strange locker room. A familiar figure in silver and gold stood over him. Silence dripped all over the place.

"Naturally," he of the golden cape at last spoke, "you will want to know where you are. This is the Jovian Universal Stadium, where you will shortly have the pleasure of captaining an all-star amateur team against the Jovian Thargs. If you have never heard of—"

"I have," interrupted Reilly briefly.

"Ah, good. And as you may have guessed, I am Arthur Renling, who recently made a very foolish wager. My apologies for my rather unorthodox way of securing enough men for the purpose, but now that you have arrived I expect no difficulty in winning the game."

"I do," said Reilly laconically.

Renling stared at him coldly.

"I might mention," he said, "that not a soul would guess you are on Jupiter. The method used to transport you so quickly has not yet been made public."

He turned on his heel and stalked out.

Reilly stared after him, then looked around. To his surprise, the first person he saw was Bull Smeed, sitting in a corner with his head in his hands.

"And we're not the only ones," the fullback answered Jim's unspoken question. "They collect football players like stamps."

"Well," said Reilly, remembering Renling's remark about anyone guessing his whereabouts, "I guess we play. What do I wear?"

"You just root in that pile of cast-off equipment over there."

"Where?" asked Reilly.

"Turn on the lights and I'll show you," said a small voice.

A football helmet walked around the end of the row of lockers. Reilly lifted it to disclose Iggy, the fopar.

AFTER outfitting themselves from the pile of uniforms, Bull and Reilly joined the group of men sitting around in mis-matched suits. Iggy followed at their heels.

"Here they come," said someone. "I wonder what positions they play."

"Holy smoke!" whispered Bull. "It's the Venusian captain."

It was indeed. They had cause to remember Rado, a thorn in the side of the Earth team all during last week's game.

"How large a team do we have?" asked Reilly after the first "hello's."

Rado avoided his eye and spat expressively on the floor.

"That brain, Renling, allowed one man for each position."

"What!" exploded Bull. "He can't do that!"

"I'm afraid he can. I don't know how you got here, but I must have left Venus under very peculiar circumstances . . . . ."

There was a worried silence until Reilly broke it by asking who the others were. Rado introduced them as they straggled out of the locker room onto the field.

The other backfield man was a fast Martian named Benjab. In the line were a countryman of Rado's, Vorr by name; Crasma, a Ganymedan; Blander, a Callistan who had played his football on Earth; a huge fellow from the Neptunian colonies nicknamed "Hungry" because of his voracious appetite—an adaptation toward building up bodily energy to help combat the cold of that planet; and a slight youth named Dak.

The latter was from the Saturnian moon, Titan, and his race had a peculiar physical construction. Bull Smeed didn't believe the short, slim Titanian could play center until he tried to lift him and discovered that he weighed close to three

hundred pounds, considerably denser than he looked.

As they came out on the field, Rado presented a tall Mercurian who played end. Gig was jointless of arm and leg, as far as could be seen, and possessed an uncanny, rubbery flexibility of muscle.

Reilly looked around for the eleventh man, and was shocked to notice that a vast throng crowded the stadium and stared at them in weird silence. Then the surprise occasioned by the first appearance of the "all-stars" wore off, and a ripple of laughter ran around the colossal bowl. It swelled to a sighing roar of guffaws as the collection of tramp-like figures began to warm up.

"Where's the eleventh man?" Reilly finally asked Rado, who was scowling viciously at the stands.

"How should I know," muttered the Venusian. "Who do they think they—WHAT!"

He hastily counted, and began to swear about Jovian efficiency.

"What's this coming on the field?" interrupted little Dak.

Reilly turned and saw a sloppily nailed wooden crate being carried out on the field. It was set down near the gasping All-Stars, and one of the Jovians who had borne it began to rip off the slats closing one side.

"This is your left end," he informed them over his shoulder.

The last slat off, what appeared to be a tree ambled out. Its lanky body was covered by something that was almost bark, and equipped with a variety of slender, tentacle-like appendages. The whole was ornamented—half covered, in fact—with viny tendrils reminiscent of the thrums decorating a Daniel Boone hunting shirt. The lower, sturdier "branches", upon which the thing walked, ended in divisions that could have been roots. The head end sported a mass of what were obviously leaves.

Bull clapped his hand over his eyes.

"It isn't even funny any more," he moaned. "A walking bunch of poison ivy. And it wants to play football!"

"On the contrary," rustled the thing, "I have no such desire."

It's "voice" sounded like a breeze through the trees by some quirk of nature articulating words of the Universal Language.

"Then what are you here for?" demanded Rado.

"I can only guess that a mistake was made," wheezed the thing. "I am called Yyyy"—Bull later swore that was what it sounded like—"and live on the Saturnian moon Dionysius. I imagine these creatures which brought me must have landed on the wrong satellite."

"Ohhh! This is going to be fun," muttered Bull Smeed.

AND he was right. It *was* fun—for the Tharg team. After ten minutes of play they had run up up a 14-0 score without any apparent opposition.

"Come on, we've got to do something about this," said Reilly.

When the Thargs kicked off the All-Stars started a march of their own. Yyyy, the plant man from Dionysius, was the mainspring of the attack as he caught pass after pass with his multitude of appendages. Anything that Reilly threw reasonably near him was netted in, much to the disgust of the Thargs. One of them decided to do something.

On the next play, when Reilly dropped back to pass again, he froze in horror. Where Yyyy had been was a tower of flame. Someone had used a match to good advantage. The All-Stars rushed to Yyyy's assistance, but the referee was already running back from the sidelines with a bucket of water. The blaze was soon quenched, and Reilly breathed a sight of relief when he saw that Yyyy was only slightly singed.

The referee was about to have the game proceed when Dak, the Titanian, stepped up to him.

"Well?" asked the official coldly.

"That was obviously an illegal trick," said the little center. "You're going to penalize them, aren't you?"

"For what?" inquired the referee. "Show me the rule that's been violated."

The anaemic looking Dak rested his foot lightly on the referee's toes. He smiled and leaned some of his unearthly weight on the toes.

"I think I remember which rule you mean," the official groaned.

Dak released him to limp off a fifteen yard penalty.

This put the All-Stars inside the twenty, and Reilly decided to gamble with a pass to Gig, the Mercurian. Unfortunately the Tharg linemen broke through and he had to let it go in a hurry. Despairingly, he saw that it would go at least a yard above Gig's reach, although he was already over the goal line.

He reckoned, however, without the jointless structure of the end. Gig showed the stuff he was made of by stretching himself to an absurd length and pulling down the ball for a touchdown!

"Did you see that?" asked Bull. "He looked ten feet tall!"

Reilly had trouble realizing that they had actually scored. He doubted it with all his might, and felt a return to normal when he was bowled over by the entire Tharg line before he could kick the extra point, and the score remained 14 to 6.

Play was resumed when Bull kicked off. The Thargs smashed their way to the All-Star ten yard line, where the gun ended the quarter. A flood of replacements came out to relieve the Thargs while the All-Stars slumped wearily to the ground—they had no substitutes.

The respite was brief, and seemed briefer. Reilly tried to cheer the others up, but the lack of success against the Thargs defense was discouraging. Then the whistle blew and play was resumed.

The first thing that happened was spectacular. When the ball was snapped, Kleek fell back to pass. Reilly went back to cover the Tharg right end. He caught a glimpse of Kleek's arm coming down; apparently he was going to throw although all his receivers were covered.

Then, without warning, the air was full of footballs! They hurtled past the All-Stars heads like snowballs in a school gang war. The ground was covered with bouncing pigskins. Yyyy had caught several, and looked like nothing more than a burdened fruit tree.

"Where in the Andromedan nebula did they come from?" Reilly was asking himself when a shrill shout from Dak turned his head.

Kleek was bearing down on him full-speed—with the ball snuggled in his arms! The one rolling on the ground had abruptly vanished.

"Stop him!" cried someone, but Reilly had been caught flatfooted.

He lived up to his reputation by stabbing a desperate hand into the runner's waistband; then it was too late and the Tharg had dragged him over the line for another score. The extra point made it 21 to 6.

"How did they do it?" asked Dak. "Hey, Ref, you aren't going to let them get away with that, are you?"

"Get away with what?" demanded the official, looking tired of it all.

"With what! Why, somebody covered the field with footballs!"

The referee turned a cold eye on the little center.

"Footballs? I don't see any. Where are they?"

Reilly and Rado needed all their combined strength to drag Dak back into the huddled All-Stars before the referee suffered any further damage to his lordly person.

"Now listen," Reilly told the assembled players, "we've got more against us than meets the eye. If we want to make any showing at all, we'll have to rely on our wits."

"We've got to do something about those short passes," said Rado.

"Yes," agreed Reilly in puzzled tones. "Say, am I seeing things, or is there something strange about the way Kleek is throwing them?"

"I *thought* there was something phony about them!" exclaimed Bull.

"You sort of lose them for a second after they leave his hand," said Reilly. "I wonder how he does it. It makes you dizzy."

"I KNOW!"

Reilly looked around. None of the other players had spoken. The only other person near was the approaching water boy, one of Renling's men. The latter seemed unhappy. He set down the bucket, gestured toward it and sidled away.

The men gathered around—then hastily backed away as a small, furred head rose up where the water should have been. Iggy, the fopar, pulled himself up on the edge of the bucket and hopped to the ground.

"It's all right," said Reilly. "My pet."

The All-Stars took stock of the unearthly little animal.

"Monstrous little brute, isn't he?" Rado evidently didn't care for Iggy's looks.

"Neither do I consider *you* pretty," remarked Iggy, "but enough of this. I see that if I do not offer you some assistance, this contest will degenerate into a miserable farce."

"Now, look here!" said Reilly. "You're cute, and all that, but this is our business. We don't have any time to play—"

"—football. I've noticed that," Iggy finished. "I suppose you don't even know the Thargs have a scientist in one of the boxes with a mechanism for distorting light waves. That's why you can't see the ball."

"But how can *they* see it?" demanded Dak. "And how can *you?*"

"I don't. I just know," Iggy told him serenely. "Look at their ends."

They looked. Reilly noticed nothing unusual for a second, then he saw that the two Tharg players were wearing inconspicuous goggles.

"Those lenses," explained Iggy, "enable them to see the ball at all times. I have—er . . . obtained some for you. In the bucket."

"How did you know all this?" asked Reilly curiously. He had known that Iggy was intelligent to a degree unusual among the lower animals, but—

"I'm *not* a 'lower animal'," he heard Iggy impossibly answering his unvoiced thought. "Does that tell you what you want to know?"

Reilly hastily tried to think of everything he had ever thought of since acquiring the fopar.

"You can read minds . . ." he said dazedly.

"My mental powers are much more versatile than that," said Iggy. "I have seen fit not to reveal all of my ability to you until now."

"But how can you—?"

"You'll see," interrupted the little animal. "Put on those goggles!"

The All-Stars lined up wearing the purloined goggles. The Tharg team realized it after the first play, when Reilly intercepted a long pass and made a swivel-hipped, twenty yard return.

After that, however, the pros tightened up, and the amateurs were forced to kick. Reilly booted a beauty into the coffin corner, send the ball out of bounds on the six yard line. Kleek called time out.

"I wonder what they're cooking up now," said Reilly. "They can hardly pull that same gag again."

"What we ought to worry about," said Dak, "is our offense. We haven't any set plays because we've never played together."

"Elementary," spoke a familiar little voice.

The fopar had arrived again via the water bucket.

"It is apparent," he said with what on a human face would have been a sneer, "that you gentlemen have no . . . er . . . *oomph*. I fear I must stay with you and take you by the hand, as it were."

"How?" demanded Reilly.

"Simple. I'll ride on top of your helmet."

"But they'll see you and—"

"Do you see me?"

The fopar was gone. Reilly felt something bump atop his helmet. He raised his hand to feel and was rewarded by a sharp sting.

"Foolish!" reproved a voice above his right ear. "Do you want to give me away?"

"Am I crazy?" groaned Reilly. "Does he show, Dak?"

"Does who show?" asked Dak. He looked rather intently at Jim.

"That's all I want to know," sighed the quarterback. "Let's go!"

The first play was a wide end run. Reilly and Rado went over to the left and nailed the runner. Jim saw Rado receive a lackadaisical straight-arm; then they had him.

The Tharg's free hand slapped lightly across Reilly's face and suddenly the Earthman was blind.

"Hey, Reilly!" called Rado, a hint of panic in his voice.

"Take off your goggles," suggested a little voice from above, with just a touch of sarcasm. "They have been too smart for you."

Reilly obeyed. Light burst forth. The goggles were smeared with some black substance that was probably shoe polish. The All-Stars, to a man, were staggering about with outstretched hands. The Tharg team was already lining up.

"Get your goggles off!" screamed Reilly at the top of his lungs.

The tidal wave nudged him aside. When he stopped rolling, about ten yards away, the field was strewn with flattened All-Stars. The Tharg team was far away, speeding en masse for the goal line.

Kleek was laughing so hard he almost missed the try for the extra point. Not quite, however, and the score was 28 to 6.

RADO received the ball on the kick-off; and with better interference than before, he ran it back to the thirty-two yard line. As soon as they were in the huddle, Iggy made an announcement.

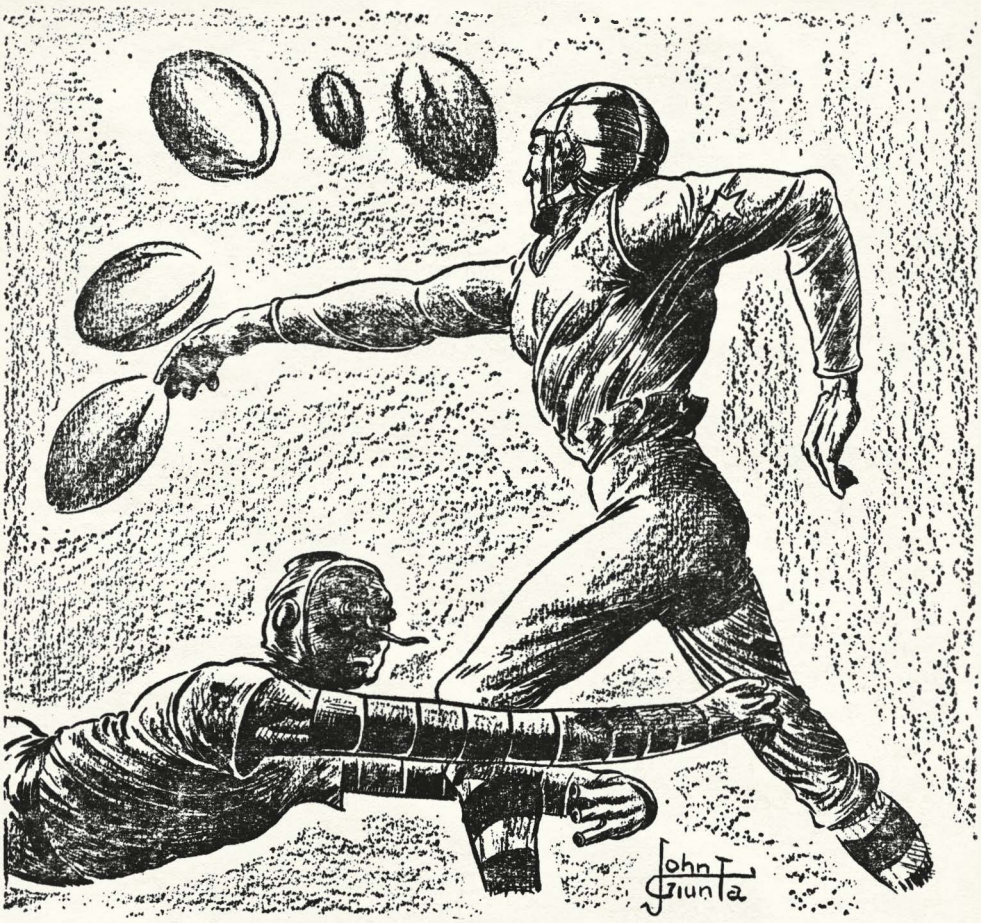
"Now," he said, *"we'll* do some passing."

"You're crazy," said Bull flatly. "These fellows know every passing play there is. They'll know who's to receive before we do."

"Who's running this team?" demanded the fopar belligerently. "You do as I say, or get someone else to spot those Tharg passes. Now I want Reilly to do the passing, and everyone else eligible to receive is to run down the field."

"We might as well humor him," whispered Reilly, forgetting the fopar's mind-reading ability. "We weren't getting anywhere without him."

The others grumbled a little, but lined up. Dak snapped the ball and Reilly started to fade back. He saw the diminutive center drop back to bowl over two husky Thargs. Then he spotted Yyyy weaving his ungainly way down the sideline, and decided that since all his receivers were covered he might as well gamble on the farthest away. He put all his skill and strength into a long one, and watched it fly to intersect Yyyy's path about forty yards away.



On the opposing side, the men covering the All-Star eligibles stopped in their tracks. Kleek rubbed his eyes frantically and stared.

He distinctly saw five footballs leave Reilly's hands. What was worse, he saw the five pigskins float towards five All-Star receivers, not one of whom betrayed by the slightest change of facial expression that he expected to catch one of the ovaloids. Kleek did not know that four of them showed no such expectancy because they saw no such footballs; and as for the fifth, he had reached the prime of life among his odd race without having developed a face—much less an expression to wear on it.

Reilly saw an entirely different scene. To him it was perfectly obvious that Yyyy was about to catch the pass, but not one of the Thargs was paying any attention to him.

"You see, my friend," said the fopar, "I have built up in their minds a simple illusion. They see almost as many footballs as they projected at you a short while ago."

It was at that moment that Kleek caught sight of Bull Smeed trotting along muttering to himself. The Bull was only mumbling about the folly of sending a fullback down for a pass on the say-so of a lunatic squirrel, but Kleek thought of only one thing.

"This is the one!" he yelled.

He and his pass-defenders closed in on

Mr. Smeed, effectively preventing that gentleman from witnessing Yyyy's touch down. The weird tree-man reached high in the air and netted in Reilly's pass. With his man engaged in piling on the human mass concealing the Bull, Yyyy formed a cocoon of tendrils about the ball and scored.

They brought Bull back to consciousness and he surprised all by kicking the extra point. The All-Stars were in the game again, but at this point the half ended.

It seemed as if they had just staggered off the field when one of Renling's water boys thrust his head in the door and called:

"All right, everybody out on the field!"

"Ohhh," groaned Bull, "I'll never last another half of pushing those big muscle-masses around."

"Neither will I," agreed Dak. "And I have to do more pushing."

In fact, it was the general consensus that the All-Stars could stand only fifteen minutes more of the gruelling struggle.

"Can you do something about *that*, Iggy?" asked Reilly.

"I'll see," muttered the fopar.

THE All-Stars limped out on the field, where the Thargs were awaiting them. The ball was kicked off and Benjab, the Martian, received. The All-Stars, however, were soon forced to kick; but succeeded in forcing the same action upon the professionals.

After making little progress, Reilly decided to go in for a kicking duel and had Bull return the ball to the Thargs. At this moment the whistle sounded to end the quarter.

Everyone turned to look at the timekeeper. The Thargs poured from their bench to reinforce those players already gathering around the officials. No one noticed the fopar slip from the timekeeper's pocket and race toward the Stars.

"Simple telepathic control," panted the little animal.

". . . and there's the watch," the referee was ranting, "and if anyone wants to look at it, go ahead—*at five yards a look!*"

The Thargs declined without thanks, and the All-Stars gratefully awaited the start of the last quarter. Iggy made himself invisible and took up his position atop Reilly's headgear. Just before play was resumed, a whole new line came in for the Thargs—an even heavier line than that against which the All-Stars had failed before.

"Well, Iggy," said Reilly, "what now?"

"I have an idea," replied the invisible fopar. "I think I can probably make it work. You, Reilly! Start line plunging!"

"*What!* Against those?"

"Why, I wouldn't care to do that myself," said Bull.

"You be quiet!" ordered the fopar. "Just help hold those Thargs until we can get the ball again."

The All-Stars, hoping that Iggy had something up his sleeve, obeyed. They succeeded in holding the Thargs to short gains. With a few inches to go for first down, Kleek gambled with a running play. Most of the All-Stars line was bowled over, but little Dak squirmed through and nailed the runner behind the line of scrimmage.

The All-Stars took over possession of the ball.

"Alright, Iggy," breathed Reilly. "Do your stuff!"

He took a pass from center, spun as Bull and Rado cris-crossed behind him, and kept the ball to plunge into the line, between Dak and Hungry, the huge Neptunian.

The massive Tharg lineman loomed up before him. Dak and Hungry, although able to hold their own, could not knock them off their feet.

"Caught!" thought Reilly, and put his

head down to make what he could of it.

He hit the line with all he had, expecting to be brought to a thudding stop. Instead, he bowled over the opposing giants as if they had been hollow dummies. His momentum helped him rip through the Tharg backfield for a first down before being dragged down by them.

"How—?" asked Bull incredulously in the huddle.

"I did it," answered Iggy. "I simply paralyzed for a split-second the opposing linemen, just as Reilly hit them."

"Let's do it again," said Reilly. "Only this time, don't stop at the linemen."

He took the ball into the line again. Once more he tore through line as Iggy's powers jolted them. The backfield, this time alert, closed in. Jim caught a glimpse of their expressions, frozen for an instant as the fopar went into action. Before they could recover, the Earthman had slipped through their arms. Once in the clear, the "Speeding Spook" of the Earthly sports pages cut loose. The Thargs came out of their trance and gave pursuit, but in vain. Reilly crossed the goal line ten yards ahead of the nearest of them.

"Nice work, Iggy," he complimented the fopar a minute later as he held the ball for Bull.

THE big fullback made the point good and the score was 28 to 20 in favor of the Jovians. The All-stars went back to kick off.

The Tharg fullback took Bull's kick and ran it back to his own twenty before Yyyy tangled—literally—with him and brought him down with a thump. The Jovian pulled a cigar lighter from his waistband with a threatening leer, and the tree-man hastily scrambled up.

"I guess we taught them better than to pull any more tricks with that animated pile of kindling," said Kleek jeeringly.

"Look out for an end run," warned Iggy as the Thargs went into their huddle.

"You think they will?" asked Dak, who had overheard.

"I'll take Iggy's word for it," said Reilly. "And, by the way, it wouldn't be a bad idea for you to drop back on this play."

The wisdom of that suggestion was made plain a moment later, when Kleek turned the end under full sail. The alert Dak was right there to meet him. Reilly never knew whether the Tharg just did not care or whether Dak's small stature made him contemptuous. At any rate, the Jovian quarter, instead of trying to avoid the little center, lowered his head and attempted to run him down!

There was a terrific *thunk!* Dak was sent staggering backward, and Kleek, for all his momentum, was stopped dead in his tracks. Before he could fall. Bull Smeed—remembering, no doubt, the time the Tharg backs had so effectively squelched him—crashed into the Jovian. Kleek and Bull flew through the air in the general direction of the All-Star's charge, while the ball was released from the Tharg's dazed grasp to bounce upward.

"Ball!" shouted Reilly, and dived forward.

Unfortunately, he was not the only one who did so. Players of both teams jumped in to grab. Reilly never saw what hit him. He struck the ground with such force that his headgear bounced off and rolled under the cleated feet of the milling players.

He later learned that Gig had been responsible for recovering the fumble. The rubbery citizen from Mercury had knelt at the edge of the pileup and probed for the ball. Having wrapped his flexible fingers around it, he signaled to Hungry for help. The massive Neptunian seized Gig's legs and heaved with all his weight and strength until the Mercurian's elastic muscles reached the limit of their extension. The ball snapped through the tangle of bodies as if on the end of a rubber band.

They brought Reilly to and handed him his helmet. Time was slipping away rapid-

ly and here was their chance to pull up a bit. Therefore Bull was impatient when he saw Jim fumbling fearfully in his headgear.

"Come on, come on," he called, "What's the hold-up?"

Reilly turned a stricken face to him.

"Something wrong?" demanded Dak.

Reilly gulped.

"He's gone!"

"Who's gone?"

"Iggy! He must have bounced off."

"Omigawd!" moaned Bull. "What'll we do?"

"The little fellow must be out cold," deduced Rado, "or he'd make himself visible."

Reilly shivered as he thought of the fopar lying unconscious under those milling cleats.

"He can't be far," said Bull. "See if we can find him around here."

The long-suffering referee clapped hand to brow once more as the entire All-Star team dropped to hands and knees and began to paw the apparently empty ground.

"Lord, give me strength . . ." he whispered.

The turf had been gone over completely before he opened his eyes and summoned the energy to bellow:

"What *is* this? That's five yards for too much time! Just one more irregularity will cost you fifteen for impersonating a football team!"

HE PICKED up the ball and paced off the distance as the grinning Thargs followed along. The All-Stars grudgingly retreated.

"It's no use," groaned Reilly. "He wouldn't be back here."

"Well," said Dak, "we might as well do what we can."

"Yes," agreed Bull. "Suppose we give Reilly the ball. They'll expect him to plunge again, so he might get away with an end run."

It seemed as good an idea as any. Reilly took Dak's pass from center and feinted toward the line. As the Thargs prepared to meet him, he shifted and swung wide around end.

Suddenly he realized there was something unusual about the ball he was carrying. It was speaking to him!

"Here I am, inside the ball," said Iggy. "I couldn't let you know before, or the man in the striped shirt might have found out."

Reilly had run about fifteen yards to his right and gained about two yards forward. The Thargs had recovered and were forcing him toward the sidelines. He saw that he was not going to make it.

"Stop talking and *do* something!" he muttered to the fopar.

And then he thought he must have taken leave of his senses. For there, directly ahead of him by five yards, ran a man with a football. The ball, like the one Reilly carried, was marked with a white stripe, put on by the referee at the same time he had marked the Thargs' shirts. The man was uniformed in a worn red jersey with a white number "six". In fact, it was Reilly's shirt.

"He's me!" thought the Earthman.

So did the Thargs.

The nearest one launched himself in a vicious tackle—at the man in front of Reilly! To the crowd in the stands it must have looked as if he had missed, but Reilly saw him pass clear through the "ball-carrier's" body. The new Reilly ran right through the next tackler as well, leaving the Jovian to sprawl off-balance for want of opposition.

"I'd better get away from here; it's not going to be healthy when they see me," thought the real Reilly, reversing his field.

Nevertheless, his double was still in front of him. No matter which way the harried quarterback turned, the double with the other ball preceded him by five yards at all times. Would be tacklers flew

through the air like ten-pins, but they could not seem to grab anything substantial—except for one valiant pair who succeeded in clamping the frantic Kleek squarely between them.

The referee tore at his hair, and finally gave up chasing the flying phantom that in the eyes of everyone in the stadium carried the ball. He sat wearily on the grass and hid his face in his hands.

It was in this position that Bull Smeed found him.

The big fullback hauled him to his feet and showed him the field strewn with glassy-eyed men in the uniform of the Tharg Professional Football Club, champions of the System.

"He's over the line," suggested Bull gently, handing the referee his whistle.

Reilly *was* across the goal.

"Sorry I had to include you," Iggy was saying from within the ball, "but when I had to produce at such short notice the mass illusion of a man running five yards ahead of himself, I can't—"

"So that was it," exclaimed Reilly.

"That," replied the fopar, "was it. I can't pull much more, though. I'm getting tired."

"There are only a few minutes to go," said Reilly. "You'd better stay where you are."

"Alright," agreed Iggy, "but I have an awful headache."

Rado kicked the point after touchdown, making the score 28 to 27 in favor of the fading Thargs. The All-Stars had the crowd with them now, for there is something inspiring about seeing a hopelessly outclassed team battle up to even terms. But it was too late. As Bull kicked off, there was only a minute and a half left to the game.

IT WAS to the Thargs' advantage to stall, but, enraged at being made to look bad, they began a crashing offensive. On the third play the tired amateur line collapsed and a Tharg back was loose. Reilly and his crew gave pursuit, but they did not catch up until the Tharg had reached their twenty yard line. There they snowed him under. The first Thargs to arrive piled on with might and main.

The harassed referee untangled the bodies and sought for the football. In the confusion no one saw the ball sneakily crawl away and climb into Hungry's lap as he sat where he had been dumped on the ten. Men from both teams were beginning to gather menacingly when someone discovered Hungry staring apprehensively at the pigskin he held.

The Tharg fullback was the first to recover the power of speech.

"Say!" he exploded, "How did—"

"That's the way, Hungry," shouted Reilly quickly. "That's covering those fumbles all right, ol' boy!"

Bork paused indecisively, which was fatal. By the time he had looked to Kleek for support the All-Stars were already lining up.

"How much time?" Reilly asked the timekeeper.

"Twenty seconds."

"Time out," demanded Reilly like an echo.

In the huddle he addressed Iggy, who remained inside the ball.

"Can you do that again?"

"What?" asked Iggy's tired voice.

"Guide the ball anywhere you want."

"I think so," replied the fopar, "but my head aches terribly."

"If you can hold out," announced Reilly firmly, "we are going to kick a field goal."

"But you can't!" protested Bull. "Don't you realize we're on our own ten yard line?"

"We have to," said Reilly. "We only have twenty seconds."

"Oh, well," sighed Bull, disclaiming all responsibility by his tone.

"Alright," said Reilly. "I'll do it myself."

The teams lined up on the ten, forcing Bull to kneel on his own goal line while waiting for the ball to be snapped.

Dak centered the hall. Bull touched it down, closed his eyes, and waited. Reilly put his heart into it, and the ball rose over the heads of the inrushing linemen. Silence descended over the crowd as the gun went off. The ball rose higher and higher, a tremendous boot.

"It'll never make it," breathed Bull.

Reilly made no answer. Like everyone else in the stadium, he had his eyes glued on the ball. It seemed as if it would land about twenty yards short of the goal.

But what was this?

The ball was curving upward! In spite of the wind blowing against it, it climbed higher. It was going to be close . . . close. . . .

The crowd released its collective breath as the ball struck the cross-bar and bounded upward to be borne back by the wind. Then that breath was caught again as the hall, defying nature, halted in its retreat. It wobbled uncertainly for a moment. Then it descended, moving over the goal for three points, thereby winning the game for the All-stars by a score of 30 to 28.

Simultaneously there was a blinding flash of light around the pigskin. Like a shot bird, it slumped deadly to the ground.

"Iggy blew a fuse," gasped Bull.

"Come on," said Reilly.

To a man, the All-Stars followed him down the field. The first wave of spectators was already pouring out of the stands as he scooped up the ball. The team surrounded him and they ploughed their way to the locker room, where Reilly proceeded to let the air out of the ball.

"That was close," Bull said as Jim fumbled with the lacing.

The quarterback had just found his knife in his locker and cut Iggy out of his leather prison, when he realized that all was quiet. He whirled about, as Renling raised his little tube. . . .

REILLY awoke to find himself tackling his pillow and falling out of bed in his Martian hotel. He sat up and shook his head.

"Oh, boy!" he said to himself. "I almost thought that dream was real. *Ouch!*"

This last as he banged his leg against the bed in getting up. He had not, come to think of it, had that bruise last night.

"Holy Smoke!" said Reilly.

He looked wildly about the room. Yes, there was Iggy on the bed.

"Mars to play this afternoon," chortled Reilly. "Wait till I get him in that game. . . ."

DAILY TELEMIRROR, JAN. 1, 2018—

Six o'clock news headline: Earth, 105; Mars, 0.

THE END

The Door at the Opera

Henry Macomber wasn't unusually strong, but single-handed he could fight an invading army of the spindly futuremen!

By Ray Cummings

HENRY MACOMBER sat in the back of the box at the opera contemplating with increasing sorrow that once again he had yielded to temptation and eaten the olive out of his Martini at dinner. Somehow olives always refused to efface themselves; he might have known it. The resplendent, over-stuffed Mrs. Macomber, with the pandering Livingstons around her, were more or less in front of him so that he had only glimpses of the stage. No one was thinking of Henry. But that didn't bother him; he was used to it. The olive, at the moment, was far more a problem.

The love-duet of the entombed, suffocating Rhadames and his self-sacrificing Aida welled out in all its lyric tragedy. But its sublimity was lost on Henry Macomber. His mind was largely on the olive; and the fact that a stiff shirt bosom was a barbarous thing, a torturing thing. The back of the box was deeply shadowed; the sort of shadow which somehow life had always put on Henry Macomber; and he was vaguely surprised now as suddenly he realized that there was a sheen of light behind him. He turned his head, awkwardly because it bumped his large Adam's apple against his stiff collar.

Henry's first thought was that the box curtains had parted. There was a narrow slit in which a girl was standing. And then he saw that the slit was nearer to him than the curtains. The darkness close beside him had opened with a narrow, vertically rectangular rift through which a sheen of light was coming.

"Well—" Henry murmured. He was surprised, of course; who wouldn't be? But he had very little chance to show it, for the girl herself was obviously more than surprised. She was startled, terrified with amazement which was holding her fascinated. There was no question but what she was afraid of Henry; and that in itself was so surprising that it made him murmur hastily,

"I say, what's the matter? I won't hurt you." His heart was jumping with a strange excitement which made him forget the olive and the very slowly dying Rhadames and Aida. This girl, here at the shining threshold in the air was very beautiful; extremely small, with a fragile, ethereal beauty so that Henry knew that if he stood up beside her he would tower over her by comparison. He tried it and found that he was right. But disconcertingly the girl shrank away, with a little cry of fright.

He could see over the threshold now. The slit in the air was perfectly rectangular, parallel sides about three feet apart as straight and clean as though someone had carved them in the darkness with a huge knife and a ruler. It gave Henry a vista of faintly shining, rose-colored landscape of trees and shining water that lay below this balcony height upon which the girl was standing.

There was a railing behind her so that she couldn't retreat from Henry any farther.

Automatically Henry stepped over the threshold. He was hardly aware that the slit closed behind him. He was breathless with a queer excitement, as anyone would be under such circumstances, of course. It was almost a sort of triumph.

He said, with what he hoped was an ingratiating smile, "Just thought—let's talk about this—just as surprised as you are, my dear—really, I wouldn't hurt you."

IT WAS astonishing what a really beautiful little thing she was, certainly not five feet tall, so fragile, so exquisite, like a butterfly. Her garment was a single, brief filmy affair that hung from her pink-white shoulders almost to her knees—a blue drape, the blue of a morning summer sky, with a paler blue tasseled scarf tying her tiny waist. Her head was bound like a turban with a blue-white scarf that framed her face and flowed down forward over her shoulders.

"Oh," she gasped. "You—why—why I have heard them say that such a thing was possible, but I could never have believed—" She ended with a hopeless little shrug of her dainty shoulders. And now she was timidly smiling.

"Well—" Henry responded awkwardly. It was idiotic that he should feel like an embarrassed, tongue-tied schoolboy. But that was only because he was confused, as who wouldn't be? He and the girl were alone here, on a high circular platform that was like a roof-garden with flowered walks and pergolas of flowers and little mossy niches in which one might recline.

It was exciting somehow—the soft indolent beauty of everything here; the perfume of the flowers; the soft, very faint suggestion of romantic music in the air. It was night overhead—a cloudless night of stars. And now he realized that the shining landscape beneath the tower-top was artificially lighted with spreading soft beams of pastel-colored effulgence. It seemed to be a city down there—little habitations dotting a flowered landscape, that went off to the shining river where there seemed to be fields of open country.

"I don't think I have ever seen pictures of any of them dressed like you," the girl was saying. He was aware that she was regarding him from the tips of his patent leather shoes up to his sandy, slightly greying hair. It was horribly embarrassing; never in his life before could Henry remember that anyone had given him a second glance, and he had always felt queer in tails anyway. But the girl's gaze, not so frightened now, was obviously a mixture of awe, and admiration.

"You look so strong," she added suddenly, "I suppose I should be—frightened but I'm not." She was breathless. "I think I—like you."

"Well—" Henry began. He realized he certainly would have to say something else. "Well, thank you very much," he amended. "I was going to say something just like that to you. In fact, I do say it. That last part, I mean. You liking me is what I mean."

It wasn't just as clear a statement as he would have liked to have made. But the girl's little ripple of awed laughter made it all right—a rill of laughter like a summer brook.

A shout from down in the flowered little city interrupted her laugh; and neither she nor Henry had a chance to say much more. People were down there now among the flowers and trees; people were appearing like magic from the dwellings and the leafy blossoming bowers—a shouting, gesticulating crowd staring up. Henry had been discovered. It was an excited throng. Henry realized that everybody looked frightened. Then the girl—he heard now that her name was Teena—was calling down reassuringly. And presently the crowd came up and engulfed her and Henry.

To Henry Macomber, during that next hour or two, himself was the greatest surprise. An anachronism. And yet it was as though now, for the first time, he was experiencing himself in his true light. These women and girls (he speedily saw that Teena was quite large for her sex) were all dressed in somewhat the same brief, flowing-style garments; and all had their heads bound in graceful, flowing veils The children, almost naked, had shining, round glistening skulls. The fragile, tiny females—children, young girls and women—were almost all beautiful, heavy with cosmetics, redolent with exotic perfume.

But a pity welled up in Henry when he saw the men. There wasn't one who came more than up to his shoulder—spindly, effeminate-looking men with pale faces, round flat ears, high forehead and glistening, pink-white pate bald as an egg. They all wore a sort of toga; some smelled of perfume and a few looked suspiciously red-cheeked, as though they were rouged. Timid little fellows—Henry Macomber felt, and indeed was, a giant striding

among them as they crowded around him, awed, chattering with piping voices as they led him to some dignitary who had already heard that he was here and demanded to see him.

THE power of numbers is very great; the thing unique must stand alone. There was nothing here, nobody here, unusual except Henry, and even he was beginning to be awed by himself, though of course he tried hard not to show it.

"How much further you taking me?" he demanded as he and the crowd clattered one of the winding, flower-banked little streets along which gaping faces from everywhere were peering at him; and the bull-like roar of his bass voice—by comparison with the piping voices of the crowd—struck everyone into an awed silence. Then somebody stammered,

"N-not far now—"

The ruler (Henry supposed by the look of him that he might best be called a King) was evidently hard-pressed to maintain the poise which his office demanded. But he managed it. He was a wizened, pallidly frail little old man in a purple robe that started at his head, framed his shriveled face and then fell in a shapeless voluminous mass so that his arms stuck out and all the rest of him was lost within it. He looked Henry over with great dignity.

"Only twice before in the records of history," he pronounced gravely to his awed people who crowded the audience room, "has this happened. This Time-space slip to give us, if only for a brief interval, a savage from the remote eras of antiquity."

He paused. Everyone was looking at Henry Macomber. He realized that he positively must say something.

"Well—" he said. The awed silence deepened. "I mean, in this strange moment of my being able to be with you this—er—this evening— "

A commotion at the doorway of the rose-lit audience chamber interrupted him. A dozen of the most learned men of science, whom the King had hastily summoned, were arriving. They were all older, even more shriveled than the King himself. Henry had abruptly sat down again on the hassock which the King had given him. But now he had to stand up, with the little savants prodding him, rapping their knuckles on his boiled shirt-front, trying to span his biceps with their two hands, measuring the immense width of his shoulders, noting his massive legs within his tubular trousers.

"Amazing." "Doubtless pre-scientific era—" "Eighteenth to twenty-first century after the Christ perhaps—" "Remarkable physical specimen—typical of the pre-scientific wars—the wars of savagery." "Typical Anglo-Saxon savage warrior—"

It was all a babble to Henry. He let them prod him; he let them run their excited fingers through the amazing profusion of his sandy hair. But he resisted when they began taking off his coat and pulling at his shirt and vest.

"Well now, I say—" he protested. "You know—women here—"

BUT it was in the interests of science, and he was rewarded by the awed gasp of admiration that went up at the magnificence of his stripped torso—the play of his muscles as they made him flex his arms, square his shoulders and expand his chest. And the hair on his chest—Badge of his savagery. Henry could have wished that there was a bit more of it, but still there was ample.

The babble of admiration—particularly from the women and girls, Henry noted—was gratifying. Why wouldnt it be? But Henry's mind, at that moment, was wandering. Automatically he went through the postures demanded of him, but his gaze now was fixed upon a girl who sat beside the King—a girl who was staring at him with parted lips and eyes wide with

mixed emotions. The King's daughter; the White Princess, he had heard somebody murmur. If he had thought little Teena beautiful, what was he to think now, for here was an exquisite, pale-white little creature so transcendently beautiful in her diaphanous white and gold tasseled robe that she fairly took his breath away.

He met the gaze of her pale-blue eyes, and then her gloriously long dark lashes shyly lowered. Her gently curving red lips were parted with her accelerated breath. Her whole ethereal little face bore a strange expression, as though her stirred feelings and vagrant thoughts were surprising to her—and frightening.

"The pointed ears—excessive lobe—the suggestion of mobility. The ears of an animal. You notice them, Ahti?"

"And the flattened cranium—still evidence of the original low order of intelligence. Hair growing in the scalp and on the body."

"There is evidence of the animal third eyelid, still here."

Henry's view of the White Princess was being spoiled because one of the little anthropologists had inserted his face in front of Henry as he excitedly stared at Henry's eyes. Henry blinked.

The King was asking interested ques-

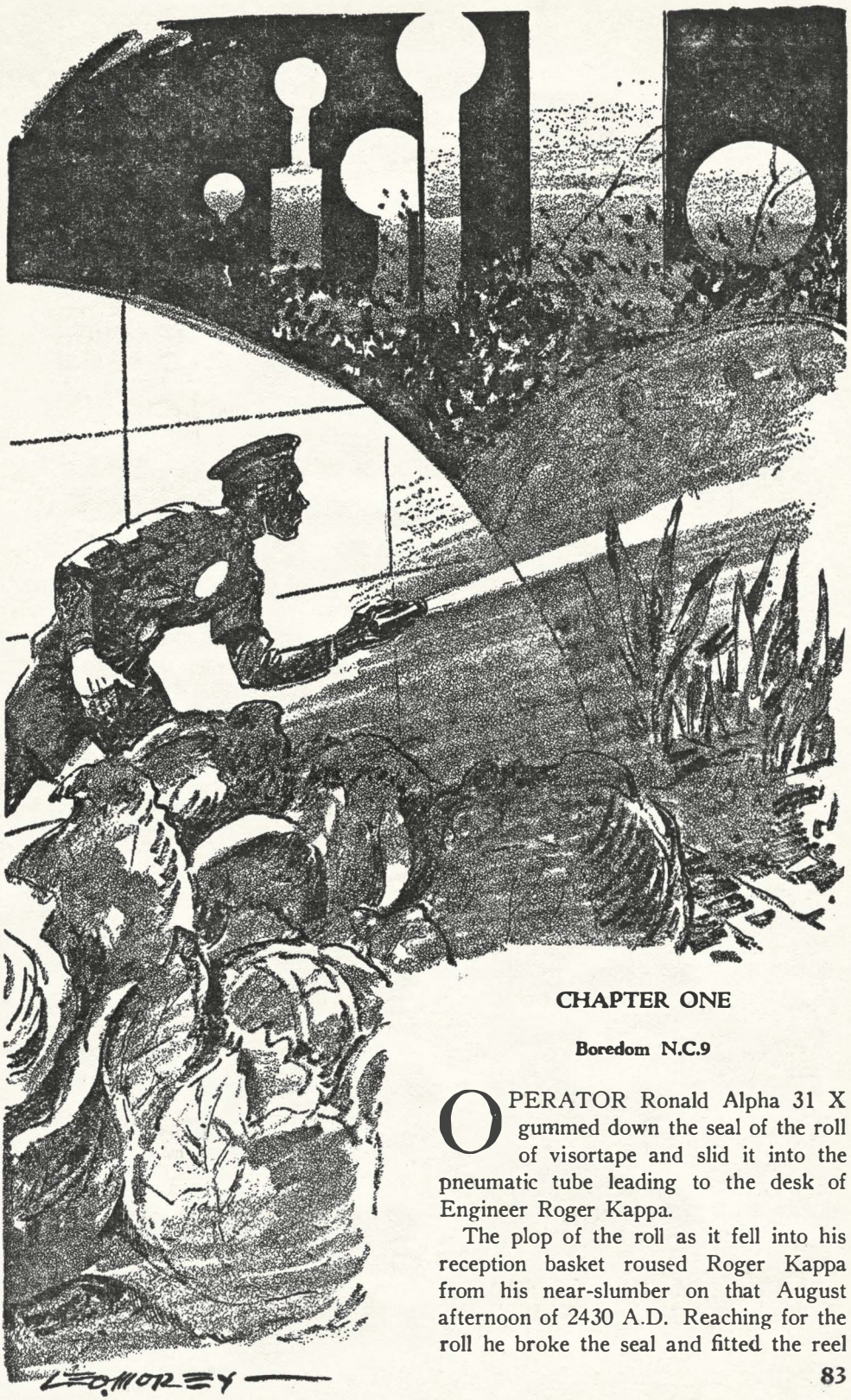
(Continued on page 103)

Age of the Cephalods

By John C. Craig

A bored Engineer and an intelligent Pipeliner combine to spell trouble for the complacent humans of the Twenty-Fifth Century!

A Novelette



CHAPTER ONE

Boredom N.C.9

OPERATOR Ronald Alpha 31 X gummed down the seal of the roll of visortape and slid it into the pneumatic tube leading to the desk of Engineer Roger Kappa.

The plop of the roll as it fell into his reception basket roused Roger Kappa from his near-slumber on that August afternoon of 2430 A.D. Reaching for the roll he broke the seal and fitted the reel

into his desk reproducer, but, when he switched on the apparatus, the tiny vision screen refused to function. From the speaker emerged a disconcerting crackle. With a grimace he pressed a button, then, rising from his chair, he walked across the polished floor to the huge window. High up in the great building, the headquarters of the Metropolitan Water Distributing Council, he looked out over the shining roofs of the great city.

The Water building was one of the tallest in the Western Metropolis, for, unlike the Asiatic races, the Western people had striven for lateral spaciousness rather than unnecessary height. The sight of the gleaming city did not please the Engineer apparently, for discontent was written over his face. If only something would happen to break the monotony of existence, even the appearance of a cloud across the face of the sun.

But there would be no cloud, he knew. His calendar told him that the Weather Clerks had decreed that unbroken sunshine should continue until August 24th, when there would be a three-day period of dullness accompanied by occasional showers of light rain.

Three days of light rain. Not for the purpose of assisting the culture of public and private gardens—the agrabiologists attended to that—but for the successful prosecution of the Festival of Coloured Mackintoshes, an idiotic spree where the youths and girls of the city indulged in endless processions and squirted one another with the aid of little syringes containing rosewater. It was said that the Festival was connected in some remote way with the days before the institution of the weather control regions but its actual origin was somewhat obscure. It did not matter; anything as an excuse for indulging in some form of collective amusement in this perfectly ordered world wherein chance happenings had little place. Over the doorway of the palace occupied by the Council of Cephalods were engraved the words 'We have ascertained the Cause and shall control the Effect.'

Meaningless jabber, taken out of its context, but the phrase was sacred.

Engineer Roger turned as the Operator entered the lofty room.

"Alpha 31 X" he barked. "The reproducer is out of order, please attend to it."

The Operator tinkered with the machine for a while, and then straightened up with a smile.

"The cause of the defect"—he began, and Roger motioned him to be silent.

"Never mind. let me hear the message."

The image of a minor Cephalod appeared on the screen, a cherubic grin across his fat face.

"You are directed to gather all workers of the Water Distributing Council in the great pumping Chamber at 15:15 tomorrow afternoon, the tenth of August, to hear an important announcement by the First Cephalod of the Council," he stated in tones like golden olive oil. "Fail not in the matter. That is all."

Roger switched off the machine.

"HOW I hate that fat fool's face," he grunted. "Unctuous ass. Important announcement. Nothing important has happened for years. How can it? Nothing ever goes wrong."

"No, Engineer."

"Why does nothing go wrong?"

"Because we are able to predetermine the effect of every cause in relation to our practical existence."

"What rot!" He turned impatiently away.

"What possessed me to become a water engineer? I should have been a philosopher. They are the only ones left with anything to argue about."

"Water is a vital thing, Engineer."

"So it is. So it is. And I am responsible for the country's water supply—but what does that responsibility mean when there is no chance of a breakdown." He paused, grinned. "Supposing the water supply in the Metropolis were to be cut off?"

The Operator's face registered outraged propriety.

"Engineer!"

"Have I spoken treason, Operator? Yes, I can see from your face that I have. Would you like my job, Operator?"

"Engineer—I—"

"Of course you would. You imagine it carries power and glory. You may have it as far as I am concerned."

"Engineer, you are not well. You must not talk like that—"

"Certainly I am not well. I am probably the only person in this whole city who is not well. I am sick—sick with boredom."

A bell chimed rapidly sixteen times.

"Sixteen of the clock, Operator. I now leave my important post with the full knowledge that it makes no difference whether I go or stay. I shall get drunk tonight. What is the fine for inebriation?"

"Forty dollings, Engineer."

The engineer consulted his diary.

"I see that I am near my allotted span of drunks. I have had forty out of my fifty already this year. I shall have to consult the Council on the advisability of increasing the number for important officials."

The engineer left the building, doors opening electrically at his approach. He glared at them resentfully.

"Can't even open a door for myself," he grumbled. He waved away the driver who waited to drive him to his club along the elevated roadway reserved for high speed vehicles.

"I'll walk," he grunted.

The driver looked astonished but said nothing. The engineer walking! The man must be unwell. What would the Council say about such a breach of social etiquette by its Water Engineer? The sight of a leading official walking among the crowds thronging the spacious boulevards occasioned not a little curiosity and some speculation. Roger enjoyed their discomfort. How fat they all were! How placid and contented, and how they all drew to one side as he passed as though to touch him were something not quite nice—like eating in public.

HIS club was an exclusive one reserved for leading technicians. In the visor lounge he observed Thomas Omicron 3, the Electrical Engineer, Robert Sigma 4, the Visortape Chief, Paul Lambda 9, the Agrabiologist, Henry Delta 5, the Engineer for Elevated Roads, and many others. They were discussing an intricate problem concerning a new type of color visortape reproducer. Thomas Omega spied him and beckoned.

"Look here, Kappa," he called in his shrill voice. "What's your opinion on—"

"Sorry," answered Roger shortly. "I can't stop now. I'm on my way to the inebriation chamber."

A shocked silence promptly overcame the little group. Really, there ought to be some reticence about these things.

The white coated attendant at the inebriation chambers greeted Roger with a cheery good evening.

"The usual, Engineer? This way, Engineer. Shall I send up Vicello 37?"

"Yes, send up Vicello," answered Roger.

He entered the little white walled inebriation room where another attendant promptly appeared to take his order.

"Give me some good, old fashioned whiskey," said Roger. "Lots of it."

He turned as Vicello walked through the doorway. As he looked at her an expression of repugnance crossed his features. Judged by civilized standards she was beautiful, her make-up running true

to all the canons of the Council of Beautification. From the tips of her little colored sandals to the top of her crenellated aluminum tinted hair wave, she was a gorgeous product of synthetic beauty. Her richly carmined lips parted in an inviting smile as she approached him with the sinuous slink achieved only after arduous study at the school of Beautification. She held a 3X degree in Makeup and 4+ certificate for Lovemaking, to say nothing of various diplomas for dress, coiffure and body grace; altogether the most accomplished type of student who graduated from the School of Beautification.

The attendant placed the whiskey at Roger's elbow at the same moment as Vicello sank onto his lap with "movement—in—approach" number 5, variant 3.

"Old type soda, or Fizz-Bizz, Engineer?" he asked briskly.

"Old type soda—" Roger gazed stupidly at the attendant for a moment. Without warning he was overcome by an overpowering feeling of repulsion. He jumped to his feet, letting Vicello fall with a bump onto the carpet. Furiously she arose, albeit a trifle awkwardly since the School of Beautification taught no movements to cope with such a situation.

Roger tore from the room and banged the door after him. He raced through the lounge and emerged on the perambulation gallery at the top of the building. His face was hot and his mind raced with thoughts which would unhesitatingly be termed treason by the Cephalods. All that evening he walked around the Metropolis, stirred by emotions he could not analyze. He spent half an hour watching a game in company with five hundred thousand well fed, placid, citizens. The game was baseball. "Come and see baseball," screeched the loud speakers. "The oldest game in the world." And, magically against the sky, flaming letters spelled out the word B A S E B A L L . Some-

how he found his way back to his living quarters where he flung himself on his Pneumo-Sleepit bed falling into a deep slumber without the aid of the usual Beautifo-Dream sleep inducing drug.

CHAPTER TWO

Treason Earns a Vacation

THE next day Roger took his place at the rostrum of the great pumping chamber. Punctually at 15:15 the greatly enlarged figure of the First Cephalod appeared on the visortape screen. An awed, expectant hush fell over the audience. For some of them it was their first glimpse of an almost mythical figure. Roger was reminded of ancient statutes of eastern gods which could be seen in the museums. The First Cephalod began to speak.

"Fellow citizens, I greet you," he announced benevolently. "Today I bring news of importance to all. For some years the Council of Cephalods has become increasingly aware that our calendar is in need of adjustment. The gigantic task of coördinating the views of all citizens in accordance with the principles of democracy as laid down by our ancient forefathers —may science bless their memories and hallow their astral state—"

Roger groaned inwardly. News of importance for all. An adjustment of the calendar. For over an hour he sat glumly listening to the monotonous voice of the First Cephalod. After a while he ceased to pay serious attention to its droning as it spoke of the almost unsurmountable difficulties the Council statisticians had overcome in arriving at a compendium of opinion on the matter, and how after three years work it had been decided to begin on different lines.

"We realized," said the First Cephalod, "that our efforts were not a success, and therefore we decided to place the matter in the hands of the public Competition Organisers. A simple question was asked—how should the years of the scientific era be named? Several million entries were received and it is my pleasant duty this afternoon to inform you that the letters N.C. will in future be used to name the years.

"N.C. New Cycle. We are lost in admiration for this original term which so aptly describes our age, there is something eternal about it. Cycle—the circle —the eternal.

"The prize of eighty thousand dollings goes to a citizen of leisure, Arthur Wallflower I. Long may science enable him to live and enjoy his well earned fortune. The term will come into use immediately and I am honored more than I can say by the suggestion that the New Cycle should begin with the year of my accession to the First Cephalodship—that is, just over eight years ago.

"I accept this honor humbly and gratefully, and hereby declare that this day is the 10th August N.C.9."

The First Cephalod's fat face quivered with emotion as two tears trickled down his cheeks. Roger shut his eyes. What glorious human endeavor! The years renumbered. New Cycle! Never had a fortune been earned for so little thought or work. Later he returned to his office. His friend Stupendo, a member of the Second Council of Cephalods, sat in his chair.

"I WANT to talk with you, Roger," he said pleasantly.

"Proceed, Stupendo."

"You are feeling in need of a vacation —yes?"

"Why do you say that?"

The Cephalod fiddled with the visortape reproducer.

"I find myself in a difficult position, my Chief Engineer."

"Why?"

"You should control yourself a little. Even a Chief Water Engineer cannot speak treason. Now, I am of the old school. I am not like these new young Cephalods who would destroy at the veriest sign of disease. I must warn you, Roger."

Roger burst out angrily, "So the operator has reported, eh—so."

"The operator reported to me because he is loyal and knows I am your friend." Roger strode over to the window. He felt a little uncomfortable.

"I did not know that loyalty still found a place in this world. I thought all such concepts had been long ago conditioned away."

"I think you had best take a vacation."

"Where?"

"You will go for two months to sub-pumping station M.X.5."

"I see. Degrading me, eh?"

"Sending you away for your own safety, Roger. If this should come out—you know what it would mean. There is a disease called Atavisticus these days, and its chief symptom is a state of discontent with the times. You must realise that even I, your friend, cannot countenance an open expression of dissatisfaction. "

"But why sub-pumping station M.X. 5?"

"Because it is ideally situated. Being at the edge of, but not within, a weather control region, the climate is one which you will find bracing. I shall make it easy for you. You will be officially on a visit of inspection. You may walk in the surrounding countryside with complete freedom. No one will comment as no one save the staff resides in the district. Take plenty of time off. Visit the agrabiological farm nearby. You will find it interesting."

"And supposing I refuse?"

"Then even I cannot prevent your trial and conviction for treason."

Roger shrugged.

"Very well then."

CHAPTER THREE

Decimal 43

AT THE top of a hill stood sub-pumping station M.X.5. From it, in radial lines, stretched the gigantic pipes of the water grid system. M.X.5 was an important station, being the control point of the supply, not only to the Metropolis, but to various manufacturing cities, and to the collossal agrabiological farm in the vicinity.

Engineer Roger Kappa stepped from his gyroplane and took off his close fitting hat. A fresh evening breeze blew his brown hair over his forehead. Wondering, he stepped over to the parapet to look out over the landscape. To the east spread a huge forest upon which he had not set eyes since his youth. The sight of the late, slanting rays of the sun on the tree tops came as something new to him and he drank it in with the same avidity as he had felt at his first symphony concert.

He turned his head, his gaze following a pipe line to the agrabiological farm almost lost in the distance, its long ranges of glass-houses flaming like red fires. He gave it merely a glance before turning once more to the forest.

He stepped back awed.

"To think that this has existed," he murmured softly.

"All my life, and yet this is the second time I have set eyes on it. Now I am really aware of beauty."

"Wide spread they stand, the Northland's dusky forests,
Ancient, mysterious, brooding savage dreams;
Within them dwells the Forest's mighty God,
And wood-sprites in the gloom weave magic secrets."

The Engineer, startled, turned abruptly at the voice which recited this in deep tones. He bumped into a great, grey-clad figure, which stood aside immediately.

"What was that you said?" he asked sharply. "You—oh—"

The figure bowed. "Good evening, Engineer. I am Decimal 43, the chief pipe line examiner."

"But what was that you said?"

"Said, Engineer? *I* said?"

"Yes—something about ancient forests—gods—and wood sprites."

"I do not know, Engineer."

"Of course," replied Roger softly. He looked at the huge figure in front of him. Two meters tall he stood. Roger knew the height exactly. They were uniform, these pipe line examiners, born in incubators and conditioned from birth. They were human—if you wanted to call it that. That is, they possessed certain human functions. But the biologists created them.

They responded to a code, a series of commands, were merely a mass of conditioned reflexes. The biologists experimented on them, he knew, and sometimes little accidents happened. Some over-enthusiastic biologist must have been experimenting on this one when young. Reciting poetry to him, so that occasionally he had what was termed a mental flash-back. Sometimes these flashes seriously interfered with their efficiency and they had to be destroyed.

ROGER felt something like pity as he looked at Decimal 43. The being was such a magnificent figure of a man. The muscles bulged under his uniform and his handsome face was reddened by rain and wind. He could have torn Roger apart with his hands in a couple of minutes, and would have done so unhesitatingly had the engineer so commanded.

"Put my plane into its garage," he ordered abruptly.

Decimal 43 bowed.

The next day Roger decided to inspect a section of the pipe line. As an escort he chose Decimal 43, partly on the recommendation of the resident engineer and partly because Decimal 43 fascinated him. They set off on foot, following the smooth concrete path running beside the gigantic pipe line. In order to facilitate testing inspection, ladders curled around the pipe at each joint. The day was hot with haze shimmering in the atmosphere.

"Why the devil am I doing this?" said Roger to himself. "It's just a damn pipe." But he knew that inside that pipe the water flowed under great pressure. From the great purifiers in the northern hills it flowed in an increasing stream, the life blood of the Metropolis.

"I'd like to blow it up just to jerk them out of their complacency," he grated.

He became aware of Decimal 43 staring at him. It did not matter; he could speak in safety in front of him. He turned to the forest.

"I'd like to explore it," he said.

"I know the forest, Engineer."

"You know the forest? How?"

"I go there often."

"But you are not allowed."

"I know, Engineer. But I go there just the same. It is beautiful in the forest. I escape from my cubicle. And now I suppose you will have me destroyed?

The look in Decimal 43's eyes was not the look of a conditioned pipe-line man. It was a human look, and it was anxious. The look of a man who has unburdened himself of a great confession.

"Not yet," answered Roger. "Not until I have learned something. You are not an ordinary pipe-line man."

"Neither are you an ordinary engineer. For years I have hoped to meet one who talked as you do."

"Tell me, what are you?"

"The biologists erred during my conditioning. Perhaps I was born with an original mind too strong for them. You see, I can think and act on my own initiative." He looked towards the forest. "One day I shall go and live there."

"Why have you not done so already? If you have a mind why are you content to act the slave?"

"Because, Engineer, I do not wish to go into the forest by myself. There are reasons."

"What are they?"

"First will you tell me whether I am to be destroyed?"

The engineer shook his head. "Destroy the greatest discovery of a lifetime? Destroy the evidence that there is yet an effect which cannot be determined? No, Decimal 43. Never!"

"Thank you, Engineer. You will soon make a greater discovery. Would you like to go now?"

"But—"

"You must trust me."

CHAPTER FOUR

Dryad

IN THE forest sunlight filtered through the arched vault of the tree tops overhead in sharp spears of light. The ground was covered thickly with an undergrowth of weeds and briars making progress difficult, without cutting a way through. Decimal 43, however, led the way unerringly through gaps and along paths formed by rabbits and foxes. Startled birds fluttered restlessly away at their approach. Roger found the heat and the insects rather trying unaccustomed as he was to so much exercise, but Decimal 43 appeared to suffer no effect at all. After an hour the engineer was forced to rest and bathe his feet in a little stream which bubbled rhythmically along.

"It is not far now," said Decimal 43. "We follow this stream from here."

They resumed their journey along the banks of the stream which widened here and there into cool, dark pools.

Decimal 43 pointed to fish swimming in the water.

"They are called trout," he explained. "In an old book I know, there is explained a method of catching them by tickling." He stopped, and cupping his hands over his mouth, he uttered a little lilting cry. "Coo—coo—coo—oooh!"

In answer there came a fainter cry on a more musical note—"Coo—coo—coo—oooh!"

Decimal 43 beckoned him on.

"This way, Engineer."

Suddenly they emerged into a clearing. Here the stream had formed a pool about twenty meters across.

A voice called, "Watch this, Decimal!"

ROGER'S surprised gaze followed the sound. He caught a glimpse of a brown form perched on an overhanging branch, a body that tensed, stretched out arms, and dived into the water.

"By all the Cephalods, it's a woman!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Engineer. Dryad!" he called.

"Coming," she answered, and swam rapidly towards the bank. She scrambled out of the water with a laugh shaking the wet hair from her eyes. Then she caught sight of Roger.

"Decimal," she said sharply. "Who is this?" She stood tensely; Roger thought he saw her tremble. She was quite unclad and tanned a rich golden brown.

"It's all right, Dryad," replied Decimal. "He is a friend."

Roger bowed. "Permit me to introduce myself. I am Roger Kappa."

"A Kappa, a leading Water Engineer!" She turned furiously to the big pipe-line man. "What does this mean—have they discovered—?"

Decimal smiled at her. Roger had never seen a man so transformed. But then he had never before seen an adoring father.

"Discovered, in a sense, Dryad. This man has discovered himself. I promised you that one day I would bring such as he. Shall we go to the house?"

Roger found the girl's frank gaze a trifle disconcerting. He became conscious of his heavy clothes and lumbering boots. He glanced at her tiny feet. She held out her hand to him.

"Come," she said.

Her hand was firm, its grip strong. He contrasted it with the cultured softness of Vicello's. Soon they came in sight of a building. From his recollection of pictures in the museums Roger recognised it as the remains of an ancient mansion.

"This is where I live," she said. "Look, there is my flower garden and over there is my vegetable plot."

The flower garden was quite unlike the exotic, mathematically arranged gardens cultured by the agra-biologists, with their huge, crossbred blooms. The vegetables, by their small size, would have caused even a first year student to burst into derisive laughter. Here were old type flowers scattered in brilliant disorder with bees energetically engaged in their age-old courtship.

Dryad plucked some apples from a tree.

"Have one," she offered. "Eat it."

"What, right here in the open?" said Roger, slightly scandalised.

"Why ever not?" she answered, taking a bite.

With an effort Roger raised the fruit to his lips. With the first bite a wealth of repression departed from him.

"We could do with some real food and drink," said Decimal.

"You shall have all you want," answered Dryad.

"What are those things?" asked Roger, pointing to some conical structures about a meter high.

"Bee hives."

"Bee hives?"

"Yes, I use honey for sweetening. I cannot make sugar, you know."

WONDERING, Roger followed her into the building. It was mainly in ruins. Flowers grew in parts of the dilapidated roof. She led the way to the wing of the house which had been made into a habitable dwelling. Inside, her nudity became more apparent and, seeing the engineer's self-consciousness, Decimal said, "You had better put on some clothes, Dryad. The engineer is not used to our ways." Dryad disappeared to return with a skirt of animal skins around her waist.

"It's very hot," she protested. She turned to Roger. "Do you like my living room?"

The room was large and more or less intact except the original decoration was almost worn away. Old furniture had been restored and there were actually curtains in the windows, which had been patched with remnants of glass from other parts of the building. Against one wall were shelves containing books. To Roger it was as though he had stepped into a museum. He walked over to the book case, and extracted a mildewed volume. It smelt musty and some of the pages were indecipherable. Decimal picked out another book.

"Last night you heard me quote from this," he said. "It is one of my favourites. It is called the Kalevah and is a translation from the language of a country once known as Finland. It deals with old legends of that country."

"Come and eat," said Dryad.

They seated themselves at a table. Once again Roger found it necessary to master his repugnance at eating "out loud" as it were, but his—to him—unnatural hunger conquered this. The fruit, and salads of fresh vegetables which Dryad provided for the meal were very refreshing. From

an earthenware container, she poured a drink of sweet whitish liquid.

"Mead," explained Dryad. "It is made from honey."

After the meal they sat outside on the remains of a stone-flagged terrace overlooking a little patch of lawn.

"How do you cut the grass?" asked Roger.

"With a very thin blade which I found, cleaned and sharpened. Decimal made a roller for me from a heavy round log."

"Tell me," went on Roger. "How did you come here?"

"I will answer that," replied Decimal. "It is a long story.

"IT BEGAN a long while ago. I discovered at the early age of six that I was not a normal conditioned being. Even at that age I realised that if this were discovered I should be destroyed, so I trained myself to give no sign. As I grew older how I gloated over my independence. Think of it, the only example of a conditioned being with a free mind who had lived to cheat the clever biologists. I was used for many tasks. At one time they made me a cleaner at a museum. Here I studied ancient methods of life. You can imagine what I felt like when I realised that at one time people were not born in incubators.

"Gradually my whole ambition was directed to finding another of my sort. I had wonderful ideas of a revolt of the slaves against their callous masters." He shrugged. "But I could find no other conditioned being whose mind had escaped the biologist. It was not until I came to the pumping station twenty-two years ago that I conceived the idea of stealing a child.

"You know well enough that only the Cephalods are allowed to breed children naturally, and this by careful selective breeding so that the class may be always

paramount. I decided to steal a Cephalod's child. It was my intention to take a male child but the only living natural child was a girl, that of a Cephalod who supervised the agrabiological farm. I will not weary you with an account of the plans I made, they had been forming for years. Long ago at the museum I had stolen a bottle of chloroform. Dryad was just five years old—not old enough to be conscious of her class.

"It was quite simple. I took her when she was out with her nurse in the Cephalod's private park. I was supposed to be on inspection duty at the time. There was no need to use the chloroform on Dryad, she came willingly enough. I brought her here. For a long while I had busied myself with making part of the place habitable. Ages ago when it was deserted—who knows under what circumstances—it fell into disrepair, but one wing was almost hermetically sealed with rubbish. This I cleared, unearthing the relics with which these rooms are furnished. I found interesting items which would be of great value to a museum."

Roger roused himself from a reverie.

"But—a child of five—alone in this place?"

"I visited her every day. I took food. I taught her to grow plants from seeds which I stole. And so Dryad grew up. But, too late, I realised that my efforts to start a new race were useless without a mate for Dryad. I thought of myself, but I am too old—and am not entirely normal. Even I could not withstand all the effects of the biologists' treatment. But at last—" he paused.

"At last," prompted Roger.

"I found you," said Decimal slowly. "Are you willing to give up your life as you live it at present?"

"Yes, are you willing?" asked Dryad. Her hand stole into his. "I want a companion so badly."

Roger looked at her. Feelings from long ago stirred him.

"Yes, I am willing," he replied huskily.

She grasped his hand firmly, then rose.

"You must first see me at my best," she said naively. "I will put on an old dress I found."

Roger stared after her retreating form.

"You are certain?" asked Decimal softly. "Because if you are not—."

Roger nodded. "I am certain. I only hope that I can live up to it. How shall I—a civilized product—be able to live under these changed circumstances?"

"You will live as you were meant to live," answered Decimal. "As you know, a cultured flower, if left untended, will revert to type. So with you, you have the will to live as nature intended."

In silence they sat watching the sunlight in the garden. Presently there was a little sound from the doorway. Dryad stood there clad in a dress of the twentieth century. She looked like a magnificent portrait from one of the art galleries.

"Do you like me, Roger Kappa?" she asked.

Roger caught his breath.

"You—you—are beautiful," he said, and found difficulty in speaking.

"Will you not kiss me?" she asked simply, and held out her arms.

Decimal 43, with a little smile playing over his face, walked into the garden.

AS THEY returned to M.X.5 Roger's brain was occupied with thoughts of how he could escape from civilization. A leading engineer could not disappear without an extensive search being made, and that would cover the whole of the forest.

"Do not worry, Engineer," said Decimal 43, as though reading his thoughts. "I have a plan. It came to me when you spoke your thoughts this afternoon."

"Which thoughts?"

"When you spoke of the complacency of human beings. My plan will also fulfill your wishes in that direction. It will entail a visit to the farm. Listen, and I will tell you."

CHAPTER FIVE

Theft!

"I INTEND to take a night flight," Roger told the resident engineer. The engineer raised his eyebrows slightly but made no comment. He had been warned in a confidential message from Cephalod Stupendo not to query anything that his superior officer did whilst on his visit of inspection, but to report any really unusual happening.

"Very well, Engineer," he replied. "Shall I accompany you?"

"No thanks, I'll go alone. Have my gyroplane ready in half an hour."

It was dark when Roger took off from the roof of Sub-pumping Station M.X.5. His machine soared into the air and travelled for about a quarter of a mile then alighted gently on a little open patch of grassland. He opened the cabin door. A low whistle answered his soft call and a moment later a dark form hurried out of the shadows running towards the machine. The form materialized in the glow of his landing lights as Decimal 43.

"You got out all right then?"

Decimal 43 chuckled.

"As I have done every night for many years, Engineer. No one ever suspects a conditioned man of doing such a thing and therefore no watch is kept." He climbed in behind the engineer, shut the cabin door, and the machine throbbed as Roger pulled over the power stick.

"We had better alight about a mile from the farm," said Roger. "We can't afford to be seen in the vicinity."

They found a terrace on the side of a slope on which Roger brought the machine to rest.

The greater part of the huge farm was in darkness, but here and there one of the long glass houses glowed with yellow, white or red light, according to the type required for whatever was being artificially cultured inside. On the outskirts of the farm they walked along paths between rectangular beds of coarse cinders in which grew giant vegetables, cabbages a meter and a half high, carrots with feathery tops which brushed their cheeks as they passed, and many varieties of bean clinging with rope-like tendrils to steel lattices. The fresh vegetables were sent to the processing factories to be turned into soups and purees, or into compressed food for those who were fastidious and considered that eating should never go beyond the swallowing of a pill.

THE first of the huge semi-circular glass houses suddenly loomed above them. Roger nearly stepped into an irrigating channel which ran at its side and Decimal 43 pulled him back.

"Careful, Engineer. We must beware of getting our clothes splashed with any liquid. That channel contains a nitrate solution. The storage sheds are over there." He led the way to some square sheds.

Roger fished out of his pocket a small flash light.

"Which one is it?" he asked.

"This one," answered Decimal softly. He tried the door. "It is unlocked." He laughed. "Stealing is something new to the agra-biologists." Once inside they soon found what they wanted.

Roger filled a large haversack with sulphur and Decimal 43 loaded up his with saltpeter and charcoal.

Outside, near disaster overtook them. They bumped straight into a slender bearded young agra-biologist engaged on some nocturnal task.

He flashed a light.

"Is that you, Epsilon 4?" he called shrilly.

"Yes," answered Roger without thinking.

"That's not your voice. Who is it? Ah—a—"

His startled cry had followed a squelching sound as Decimal 43 hit him on the nose.

He fell to the ground with a thud.

"Come on," said Roger. "Let's get out of here. May the stupid fellow be stricken with a blight," he cursed.

Decimal 43 was running swiftly ahead faster than Roger. He disappeared around the corner of a glass house. "Wait a bit," called Roger. "I can't see you. Where are you?"

"Here," answered Decimal's voice out of the darkness. "Careful, Engineer. Here is a channel."

At that moment the young agra-biologist recovered from his daze sufficiently to decide that he had been badly hurt. It was probably his first contact with physical violence. His noisy cries rent the still night air like explosions from rocket plane tubes.

Ahead of the two fugitives a door in a small building suddenly opened letting forth a stream of light. Two men emerged.

"What's that noise?" called one.

"This way," hissed Decimal 43. They charged to the left.

"Intruders," shouted one of the two men behind in incredulous tones.

He began to run after Roger and Decimal.

A glare of bluish white light blinded them as they turned a corner. It came from a domed glass building which barred their path with no exit either side.

"We'll have to go through here," panted Roger, and turned the door handle, blinking in the terrific glare.

"No no," shrieked Decimal. "If you go through the glass shield you'll be burned and blinded, they're intense ultra violet rays!"

THEY turned so quickly that they collided with their two pursuers who, facing the glare were taken at a disadvantage, while Roger and Decimal had their backs to it. These agra-biologists, like their young colleague, were apparently unused to fighting. At the first blows they cowered back. Roger landed one of them a smashing hit with his right fist, a new felt sensation of power suffusing his being as he did so. The fellow tumbled backwards into a trough of thick brown liquid. The other ran like blazes with Roger and Decimal willy-nilly in pursuit, since their only exit was in the same direction.

The place was in an uproar now. Doors opened everywhere; cries of alarm mingling with the sound of running feet. Nothing like this had happened in living memory. Like all perfectly ordered organizations in which no provision is made for accident, the slightest mishap threw the place into a panic.

The fellow ahead ran into a little knot of his companions and began yelling incoherently. Once again their passage was barred.

"This one is safe," called Decimal as he charged for a yellow glowing glass house. "Through here." The heat was overpowering. As they tore along Roger had an impression of water dripping incessantly, of gigantic red tomatoes hanging from vine-like plants, and of long, thin things resembling cucumbers with a red patch at one end. Their feet pounded on the duck board flooring. The heat issued from near the ground. Roger felt it travelling in waves over his body. In ten seconds he was dripping with perspiration. From a little offshoot another agra-biologist emerged. He was also bearded and wore only a loincloth.

Decimal 43 uttered a fearsome oath he had learned from one of his ancient books. Tearing loose one of the cucumber-like fruit he used it as a club and smacked

the man full on the crown with the red end. The thing burst with a plop, showers of pulp and juice spattered over them. Exhilarated, Roger followed Decimal's lead hitting his opponent on the side of the head. A wild scramble ensued, for this agra-biologist was made of sterner stuff than his colleagues. Unfortunately for him he was no match for Decimal who seized him by the scruff of the neck, then proceeded to rub his face in the sticky concoction in which the fruit grew. Half blinded, the man staggered about until Roger tripped him up, sending him sprawling. At that moment four others clattered into the glass house.

"God, I can't keep this up much longer," panted Roger. "The—the heat—" Dizziness seized him. He reeled, clutched hold of a support. Decimal hurled long and red fruit in the path of the others who went down in a bunch as they slipped on the sticky mess. He grabbed hold of a heavy tank, turned it over so as to block the gangway, and caught hold of the wilting engineer.

Outside, Roger gulped deep breaths of fresh air and would have rested had Decimal not urged him on. Very soon they had left the scene of uproar behind them and gained the safety of the countryside beyond. They found their way to the concrete path beside the pipe line so that the going was easier. Once, Roger looked back, the farm was now a blaze of light. Loud shouting could still be heard. Roger began to laugh. He roared until the tears came.

"That's the first laugh I've had since one of the Cephalods fell off the rostrum in the great pumping chamber," he gasped. "Did you see the fellow's face when you hit him with that fruit. I bet they cost five dollings each!"

Decimal 43 laughed with a deep throated rumble.

"You are beginning to live, Engineer," he answered.

CHAPTER SIX

Gunpowder

DECIMAL left the plane at the same spot where Roger had picked him up.

"You know what to do?" asked Roger. "News of what has happened will be all over the place before the night is out and I shouldn't be surprised if the resident engineer begins to suspect me." He became thoughtful. "There is no going back now. I've—what was that phrase you used yesterday?"

"Burned your bridges behind you?"

"That's it." He glanced at his watch. "It is 23:11 exactly. I will meet you later as we arranged."

In his quarters Roger refreshed himself with a draught of "nerve reviver" wine.

"The last drink of that," he said to himself as he threw the bottle into the waste chute. He took out his portable visortape recorder, settled himself in his chair, and began to speak into it.

Thirty minutes later, still clad in his flying kit with the bulky haversack on his back, he roused up the sleepy resident engineer.

"I intend to make an inspection of the whole line," he said. "Decimal 43 will accompany me."

"But Engineer, it is dark."

"I know. As we are going a long way I wish to start immediately. That is all."

"Very good, Engineer."

Roger turned to go, then, as though remembering, he drew forth a reel of visortape.

"Dispatch this to Cephalod Stupendo tomorrow while I am absent. It is an interim report." The resident engineer stared at him. Interim report? The fellow had not seen anything to report on as yet. After Roger had gone he stared at the door for a considerable time. Cepha-

lods, this was strange! He heard the sound of footsteps and voices outside. Looking out of the window he saw his chief and Decimal 43 taking off.

With puckered brow he examined the visortape. He would have given a lot to know what it contained. He dare not open it however, for it was sealed with the chief engineer's official seal. For over an hour he sat chewing his lip and drinking "nerve reviver." "Report anything very unusual," Cephalod Stupendo had told him. Was this unusual enough? The Cephalod would not be pleased at being disturbed at that time of night. He took another long draught of "nerve reviver," then, mind made up, he switched on his visortape machine.

"GET me Cephalod Stupendo," he ordered.

After some delay he was confronted by the Cephalod's night secretary.

"Is it a matter of A.I. importance?" inquired that bored individual.

"It is," answered the resident engineer.

"I'll put you through."

Contrary to expectations Cephalod Stupendo was not annoyed at being disturbed. He even displayed some apprehension, for he had regretted his action over Roger Kappa since he had thought about the consequences if he were found out. He had no desire to be liquidated for treason of the third magnitude.

"My apologies for disturbing you, Cephalod Stupendo," said the resident engineer inserted the reel in the transmitter. report that Roger Kappa has gone away on a night inspection and has left an interim report."

"Interim report! On what?"

"I cannot say, Cephalod."

"Put it on."

"It is sealed with his personal seal."

"Never mind. I authorize you to break the seal." With trembling fingers the engineer inserted the reel in the transmitter. Cephalods, suppose Kappa had found out that little irregularity with the chief agra-biologist's daughter!

Roger's face appeared in the screen.

"Greetings, Stupendo," he said. "This is the last message which you will receive from me." (Both onlookers started.) "You were right. I do suffer from Atavisticus; so badly that I cannot be cured. I am a misfit in this perfectly ordered world. I have no place and therefore I cheerfully relinquish my post. Since I wish to save myself being tried for treason I have found another way out. The Ancients called it suicide I think. Before I go, however, I am resolved to do one last service to the State.

"You see, I also can judge an effect. And I can detect a flaw. You were all so certain that the one main pipe supply system was infallible that you decided against reservoirs and so your whole supply depends on this one main—this great twenty meter pipe. Nothing could happen to it—for nothing was likely to happen which you could not foresee and therefore control. But that is where you were wrong. There will be no water in the Metropolis tomorrow. Goodbye, Cephalod Stupendo. I hope you do not suffer because of my action. I am sorry that the pipe line man accompanying me has to die also but I had to take him to allay the suspicions of the resident engineer. By the time you hear this the Metropolis will be without water!"

THE two lookers gazed at the screen dumbfounded. The Cephalod was the first to recover.

"His brain has cracked! He's bluffing! What can he do?"

"I don't know," answered the engineer unhappily.

"Go after him, man! Take gyroplanes and search the line—I'll come down immediately. If you don't find him we shall all be liquidated. No water! Why, it's catastrophic! It's absurd! I *order* you to find him!"

The resident engineer jerked himself into action. He bellowed orders. "Get the gyroplanes out of the garages. Take one for each pipe line and search every inch with full lights. Fly as low as you can. If you see Engineer Kappa and Decimal 43, destroy them without question. Cephalod's orders." In his excitement he forgot that Stupendo had given no such order, but panic gripped the man.

He scrambled into his flying kit and dashed up to the take-off roof. The gyroplanes stood silent and black in the landing lights.

"Start up, start up. This is urgent."

He was met with an excited buzz of voices.

"The engines will not work. A vital part in each has been destroyed. We cannot repair them for hours."

The engineer almost wept with rage and fear. He was experiencing like others were destined to experience, emotions alien to him. One of his subordinates approached him.

"There are gyroplanes at the farm."

"Order them at once. Eight, without delay. Put these back in their garages so the others can land." He wrung his hands.

"Look, the farm is blazing with light and there's a gyro coming—see its lights."

The crowd of workers stood aside to allow the plane to land. The deputy biologist stepped out, saw the engineer.

"There has been a theft at the farm," he said excitedly. "We have reason to believe one of your workers is concerned. He wore the uniform of a pipe line examiner."

"But that's impossible, we have no nonconditioned workers. Was he alone?"

"He was with a civilian," answered the deputy grimly.

"A civil—What was stolen?"

"Merely some trifles of sulphur, saltpeter and charcoal."

"Some trifles," shrieked the engineer. "Trifles did you say? By the ancient scientists, do you know what those chemicals can be used for?"

"For various purposes. The cultivation of—"

"Cultivation nothing! They're going to be used for making old fashioned *gunpowder!*"

CHAPTER SEVEN

Destroy Them on Sight!

THE night was dark and still. The gyroplane rested by the side of the pipe line where a heath sloped to the south and the fringes of the forest almost touched it on the north. Only a quiet soughing of the trees broke the silence accompanied by the voices of the two men who worked together on the forest side of the pipe.

They had just finished blocking up one end of a small culvert that ran underneath one of the pipes almost at the point where one of the joints was supported on a concrete cradle. It was a strategic spot, for here was the weakest point to be found in the pipe line for kilometers. They rammed some dark-colored powder into the narrow aperture they had left.

"Keep enough for a trail," said Roger. He was trembling with excitement. Decimal 43 went apart a little to make a small fire. Each of them took off some of his clothes and rent them in pieces, well singeing each piece. These they scattered about in the vicinity.

"If they find these remnants they will decide we have been blown to bits," said Roger. He laughed. "One day I may return—who knows, I may find a more in-

teresting, and a more dangerous world."

"There will be no return, Engineer."

"Don't call me Engineer, call me—well—"

"I should like to call you Adam."

"Adam! What a peculiar name."

"Significant, I hope!"

"Very well. I am Adam and you are—?"

Decimal seized a brand from the fire.

"Prometheus—because I bring a forgotten fire to the earth! Look, Adam, it is dawn."

Roger glanced at the east.

"Yes, we must hurry. Set fire to the gyro while I lay the trail."

Prometheus scrambled up the ladder like a cat. Adam sprinkled a line of powder from the culvert in the direction of the forest. A glow and a crackling told him that the gyroplane was alight. Prometheus hurried back.

"Quickly, Adam! I can see the lights of a plane. . . ."

The resident engineer was the first to see the blazing plane. "There they are! We are just in time. Charge the immediate section of the air with the electrical vibrator and paralyze them!"

LOOKING back Prometheus saw the rapidly approaching plane. "Faster, Adam, or we shall be caught in their electric vibrations!"

Adam ran harder. He felt a sudden tingling sensation. His muscles began to contract. He saw Prometheus begin to flag. Together they helped each other. It was as though they were walking in water but with each step the influence of the vibrations lessened and gradually tapered away. They were free. . . .

"Land," ordered the resident engineer. He wiped his brow. "Cephalods be thanked! The traitors shall be destroyed at once."

The 'plane descended vertically a little to the south of the burning wreckage. And then it happened!

The crashing roar of the explosion rent the air rocking the gyroplane nearly out of control.

"Altitude!" shrieked the engineer in sudden fear. He had seen the spurt of angry flame from the culvert and knew that they were too late after all. The machine soared rapidly upwards, its searchlight playing on the spot where the explosion had occurred. A spout of water gushed from the wrecked section of the pipe. A seething, boiling column of water which rushed away over the heath. The engineer buried his face in his hands. It was one of his men who grimly switched on the visortape to contact M.X.5.

"Turn off all the main stopcocks on the Metropolis line," he ordered.

"THERE it goes," said Roger quietly. "Our work is done. I am a criminal. I have forfeited my life in that world."

"Think of it as a service, Adam. No one will die. There will be discomfort, a new sensation. There will be anger, inquiries. People will be forced to think again."

Long they travelled in the forest, and the grey of the dawn gave way to the lighter grey of daylight. A sharp shower of rain fell and then the sun came out. The fresh smell of the forest was good to their nostrils.

And at last they approached their future home.

"Coo—coo—coo—ooh," called Roger. In the distance a brown form waved to them. Roger ran towards her and she met him with outstretched arms. Prometheus held back, a smile on his face.

"Adam," he murmured.

And—was it his fancy—or did the gentle voice of the forest murmur in reply—Eve?

THE END

THE DOOR AT THE OPERA

By Ray Cummings

(Continued from page 81)

tions now. The anthropological discussion wandered into ethnology and then into ethnography. Henry would have liked to have had some part in it, but for the Princess' sake he realized it would be a shame to display any ignorance of mind to mar the magnificence of the physical aspect of this thing. So as soon as practical he sat down again on the hassock with his hands dangling between his knees and his gaze going from one to the other of the speakers.

"The striated muscles—what amazing length of fibre. Obviously extraordinarily powerful—"

It gave Henry his opportunity to do something besides just sit. "Well—" he said. He stood up. "Want me to show you?"

Amid the awed silence of the onlookers —including the White Princess—he walked to the center of the room facing an open window. He didn't take the hassock with him. After all, he hadn't had any demonstration yet that these little men were actually as weak as they looked.

"If you don't mind," he said modestly, "bring me that hassock, will you?"

He gestured, and was reassured to see that two of the men—rather the strong-looking ones—picked up the hassock and pantingly struggled with it as they carried it between them and set it down beside him.

"Thanks," Henry smiled.

THE round hassock was made of leather, stuffed with something soft. It weighed maybe ten or twenty pounds. It reminded him of a medicine ball he had tossed once when a friend took him to a gymnasium. And Henry Macomber often read the sports sections of the newspapers.

A gasp went up from his audience as

he picked up the hassock, balanced it on one hand with his elbow pressed against his side and his body leaning sidewise and backward. He was about ten feet from the big open window. He held his stance through a brief electric silence and then he lunged and heaved. He had a second of breathless hoping that the hassock would go through the window. It did, sluggishly.

There was a dull, awe-inspiring thud from outside where it fell. And screams of frightened people out there, mingling with the gasps of admiration from here inside.

Henry turned toward the White Princess. "Really was nothing," he said. "I mean—"

But the screams and shouts from outside interrupted him. There were really more shouts than the sudden appearance of the hassock should have warranted. For an apprehensive second Henry thought he might have killed somebody out there. But now over the shouts there was a single dominating voice:

"The Mogrubs! The Mogrubs are coming! Message for the King—the Little People are coming!"

The voice of the oncoming messenger already had thrown the city into confusion and panic. Here in the audience chamber the anthropologists stared at each other blankly. The King stared with popping eyes and dropped jaw; and a gasp of terror ran over the gathering. With a little whimper the White Princess huddled against her father, her wide frightened eyes fixed on Henry.

And then the breathless messenger arrived, flung himself before the King and gasped out his news. Henry gripped a little man beside him.

"What's happened?" he demanded.

In all the panic-stricken confusion it was hard to find out anything, but Henry presently got the gist of it. The savage

Mogrubs had at last dared come to the attack. From the cliffs beyond the river they had been seen out in the swamps. Hordes of them coming. Outside the window now Henry could see the young men of the city here getting themselves into a line like soldiers. And then they were beginning to march off. Pitiful, thin little column of spindly men.

It was really pitiful. The poor King here was trying to stammer out orders, but in the excitement nobody paid much attention to him. Within Henry something was stirring. Something frightening, but tremendously exciting.

"Listen," he said to the panic-stricken little man beside him, "these Mogrubs—what I mean, how big are they? Big as you people maybe?"

"Oh, not so big," the little man gasped. "But there are so many of them."

SUDDENLY Henry was aware that there was a silence here in the room, and that everybody was looking at him. He didn't exactly plan it. The thing just seemed to be forced on him by the drastic exigencies of the crisis. Why not? It was the obvious thing. How could he do less?

"Sire," Henry heard himself saying into the silence, "in this emergency, well what I mean, I'll be glad to lead your armies."

How could he have said less? How could he have failed now to rise into this breach? He couldn't. Henry kept telling himself that over and over as he was swept along now by the tidal waves of things tremendous.

"Macomber . . . Macomber. . . ." As he marched out at the head of his gathered legions he could hear his name chanted by the women and children, the very old and the very young who were left behind to wait and pray for the result of the battle. . . . "Macomber—Macomber will save us. . . ."

Why, his very presence was an inspiration here. This tidal wave of inspirational triumph at his prowess would roll out and even now might be reaching the crestfallen enemy, psychologically defeating them even before the battle. Or at least, Henry fervently hoped so. . . .

Despite his excitement and a queer feeling in the pit of his stomach, Henry kept his wits. Military strategy was half a battle; maybe even more. At the top of the cliff he gathered his sub-leaders around him and told them what to do. There was a narrow canyon here; it was the obvious pass through which a large portion of the Mogrubs would come. Henry had decided to deploy his forces in two main flanking movements.

With a right and left flank they would bring pressure on the enemy—a pincers movement pressing the oncoming columns together so that of necessity they would all pass into the little canyon. And hidden in there would be Henry, suddenly to bar them, with the element of surprise aiding him.

It was good strategy. He hoped it would work. And so far as herding the enemy into the canyon, most certainly it did. Henry was stripped to the waist. He had seized a long chunk of wood that made a good sizable club. Alone with a mixed variety of emotions, he stood panting in the shadows of a rock, exactly in the middle of the starlit little canyon.

He could hear the shouts of the enemy now as he waited.

And then the first ranks of the Mogrubs appeared in the defile—weird-looking, savage little creatures, half naked, with contorted, goggling faces and spindly jointed bodies that looked almost as though they were some form of big upright insect. They came shouting ferociously, brandishing their weapons at the pallid, supposedly empty canyon.

He waited until almost he could see the whites of their eyes, then he drew a

deep breath and went at it. The thing was worse than he had anticipated. Never in his life before had Henry Macomber struck a blow in violence. But there has to be a first time for everything. His club struck the little Mogrub in the middle. The club kept right on going; there was just a squishing sound where the Mogrub had been.

The lust for killing—horrible phrase, but Henry understood it now. The first person you killed gave you a queer sinking sensation, but after thirty or forty you sort of got used to it. The club didn't last long; Henry swung it so violently once that it mowed through a whole front rank of Mogrubs and at the end of its swing he had to drop it to keep it from making him lose his balance. Above everything he knew he mustn't fall. He couldn't find another club so he tried seizing Mogrubs by their heels and swinging them. They weren't as heavy as the club and they broke more easily. But there was an endless supply of them.

"MACOMBER! Macomber the Magnificent." It rolled out over the city as Henry at the head of his victorious columns, came marching back.

"Macomber the Magnificent. . . ." Why, it would be a hundred years before the Mogrubs would ever dare try anything like that again!

"Really, it was nothing," Henry said modestly, as he was greeted by the smiling King back in the audience chamber. "I mean, well, we beat them."

The White Princess was gazing at him with her soul in her eyes as attendants sponged off his blood-smeared, sweat-soaked chest and threw a towel over his shoulders. How the idea of reward ever got started Henry didn't know. By popular acclaim probably. At all events, here in the room—and all over the cheering city apparently—the populace was shouting that Henry be rewarded. The maiden of his choice should be his. He had saved the nation; what less with decency could be offered him?

"Well—" Henry said.

He was interrupted by a commotion in the room behind him. Somebody murmured, "The Red Princess—how dare she?"

But she did dare. Quite evidently she was declassé and defiant. Henry turned and saw her as she swept imperiously into the room. If he had thought little Teena beautiful, and then the White Princess still more beautiful, here certainly was the ultimate in beauty.

In a frigid silence she came forward. The women drew themselves away; but the men furtively were watching her. The King quite obviously was a little flustered at this sudden appearance of his older daughter, but he tried to carry it off.

"As I was saying," the King declaimed, "you shall have the woman of your choice." His hopeful smile was on the chaste features of his younger daughter.

"Well—thanks," Henry said. "I am greatly honored." And as he held out his hand the Red Princess put hers warm and vibrant within it.

IT WAS one of the young men, undoubtedly, who had the courage to start the applause; and once it started, it rolled out. Beyond the windows, out in the little flowered city, the applause was greatest, because they didn't know what they were applauding. Here in the audience room Henry felt his cheeks flushing. Fortunately an interruption spared him. There was a shout outside the room; a messenger coming.

"The portal has opened! He must go! The portal has opened—"

"You—you'll have to go," the King was stammering. "Go quickly—oh my goodness, by the records, one of those others who came didn't get out quick enough. It must have been horrible—

ghastly for that poor fellow. They say he had a premonition of it—"

Come to think of it, Henry himself did feel queer. It was as though the space here were pressing against him—urging him. And it did feel sort of ghastly. His body was an alien thing here.

"Well—why I guess you're right," he gasped. "Better get me to that portal—"

The Red Princess went with him. It was a rout, a flight, but no one could blame Henry. It was no disgrace to be routed by the giant, cataclysmic forces of an outraged nature. They hurried up the steps to the platform. There was the narrow rift in space-time, with darkness over its threshold. The sides of the rift were quivering as though almost about to snap closed again.

"Well — sorry — goodbye —" Henry murmured. There was no time for anything but her handclasp.

"I just feel it will open again—for us," the Red Princess said softly. "When it does, I shall be here waiting—Henry."

HE was in bed, in the dark bedroom, before Martha was awake enough to realize that he had come home. But when she did wake up, she had plenty to say.

"Sneaking out of the opera like that—don't tell me you'd rather play billiards half the night than conduct yourself like a gentleman. And at least if you have no appreciation of good music, you might have the decency to pretend to, for my sake."

"I do like music," Henry said suddenly. "I love opera. Listen, I'm going to get that box for two or three performances a week. I do hope I'll hit the right one. Maybe it won't be too long to wait—"

"Henry Macomber, what on earth are you talking about?"

"Oh well, what I mean, skip it my dear," Henry said.

THE END

Tales to Come

PROFESSOR JOHN L. HICKEY had an invention and a wife. The wife was secret; and Professor Hickey was afraid of her. The invention was secret, too, but Hickey never thought of fearing *it*—until the day that he accidentally started it going, and found himself and his wife subdividing, becoming smaller and smaller, until they reached the stage where a tiny ant was an enemy more fearsome and huge than a mad bull elephant! "The Professor Splits," by J. Harvey Haggard, is the lead novelette of the February *Astonishing Stories.*

Meet Roger Harris, the man who incubated a nebula! It took a sealed and buried telescope mirror made by Herschel himself, five weeks in bed, and an earned utation for being the biggest crackpot nineteen counties to do it, and when the g from the Pleiades finally hatched into sea-horse shaped, animate hell-bender of adiant fire, whose greatest joy was to eat—anything!—even the sacred cause of science couldn't keep Harris' irate roommate from trying to kill it. But "The Pet Nebula" didn't *want* to be killed, and it had some very potent weapons of defense! The story is by Alfred J. Bester.

Professor Jameson and his robot-figured band of Zoromes thought they were doing a good turn when they brought back to life the brains of the creatures they had found in a floating, wrecked spaceship in an alien solar system. But that act plunged them into a strange political intrigue, cost them the lives of several of their members, and nearly caused the death of all of them on the weird planet of the four-legged, highly intelligent Jribpdls. Neil R. Jones' new novelette, "Cosmic Derelict," continues the strange adventures of 21MM392—once Professor Jameson of Earth—and the other metal men in their immortal voyagings through the Universe.

These and four other complete science fiction stories, plus the concluding installment of Malcolm Jameson's serial, "Quicksands of Youthwardness," are in the February issue of *Astonishing Stories.* It will appear December 26th.

VIEWPOINTS

(Continued from page 4)

I read. And if you don't make "Viewpoints" *a two-way readers' column,* the Fan Mag review will be *all* I'll read.

So you're going to add serials, are you? Well, if you don't go monthly along with them, you can expect to receive quite a few condemnatory epistles from down here. And when I want to be sneeringly insulting I can do quite a good job, so beware! Remember now: Serials *and* monthly, or else no serials.

And now for the fifth time I'd like to ask if you could announce the formation of *The Ohio Fantasy Association.* All Ohioans interested should send me a three-cent stamp for constitution, other details, etc. Really, such an announcement won't take much space, just four lines would do it. So come on, be a good sport and do your bit to help me. After all, I help you, don't I?—Joseph M. Lewandowski, Acting Director, *The Ohio Fantasy Association,* 17 Riverview Road, Brecksville, Ohio.

● Well, "Viewpoints," as you can see, is now two-way. But the Fan Mag review has been moved right out of the magazine!

Your condemnatory epistles eagerly awaited. However, we would like to suggest a better plan for making *Astonishing Stories* go monthly. All you have to do is buy 5,000 copies of each issue, and have as many others do the same as is necessary to exhaust the stocks of the magazine. The Circulation Dept., bewildered by the influx of repeat orders, will order a supplementary printing of the issue, and in the confusion the Editorial Dept. will slip in a brand-new lineup of stories. This would involve only a little trouble on your part, and would immediately achieve the desired results. We think you probably will be glad to do this.

After all, we help you, don't we?—*The Editor.*

A "Careerist" Speaks

Dear Mr. Pohl:

I notice you haven't complied with the request of the majority of your readers for a two-way *Viewpoints* column,—why? As I said before, it will give the feature a much more personal touch. Try it. If it doesn't work out—do away with it.

You seem to be getting worse as to stories, though you began well—maybe the coming Asimovtale in the next issue will offset this.

I think the "career science fictionists" should get all het up about M. Smith's letter. What does he want to do—take all the joy out of science fiction? Why, we Careerists *never* read the stories, just the departments. He's made a bet, however, if he wants it.

If the reader who signs himself Richard deVries of Memphis, Tennessee, will get in touch with me I would appreciate it very much. As he may not have heard, we have started a science fiction club in Memphis recently, and are looking for members.

Amen to Lowndes' suggestion for more Bok. (Aside: Hi, Doc; how about reissuing *Squeaky?*)—Art. R. Sehnert, 791 Maury, Memphis, Tennessee.

● Come, come, Reader Sehnert, this *is* a two-way column! And you're right—we think it does lend a more personal touch.

To those not familiar with science fiction fan slanguage, *"Squeaky"* is the nickname of a defunct fan magazine, *The Science Fiction Weekly,* formerly published by Robert W. Lowndes. —*The Editor.*

If This Keeps Up. . . .

Dear Mr. Pohl:

The latest *Astonishing* (Oct.) surpasses all previous issues as regards stories and illustrations. If this keeps up, *AS* will soon be one of the best s-f mags on the market (and that is nothing to sneer at, noting the great number of them).

As the stories, "Flight to Galileo" placed first, "Quicksands of Youthwardness" (Part I) was second (it promises to be an excellent serial), and "The Future's Fair" third. To do real justice to a serial, *Astonishing* should be placed

on a monthly basis. Four months is much too long to wait.

The art work has improved considerably. The cover by Mayorga is the best yet and the interior illustrations by Morey and Marconette (his style reminds me of Finlay's) are ditto. I've come to the conclusion that Morey needs the better grade paper, used in *AS*, to show what he can really do, and I enjoy the full-page drawings a great deal.

I close this letter with a plea for 12 *Astonishings* per year.—Bill Stoy, *Science Fictioneer* 206, 140-9L Burden Crescent, Jamaica, New York.

Zam! Pow! Bop!

Dear Ed.:

The August *Astonishing* had the biggest lineup of punk stories I ever saw! "The Deadly Swarm" was the best story in the issue—yet it was only fair. The "Professor Jameson" story, after the big build-up, was boring; I didn't even finish it.

Print this!—Harry Schmarje, 318 Stewart Road, Muscatine, Iowa.

Increase Price?

Dear Mr. Pohl:

When I saw your magazine, *Astonishing Stories,* on the newsstand, I looked twice. But there it was in the upper left-hand corner, "10c".

After reading the magazine I still don't know what to think. Of course you must know now whether the magazine is making a profit at such a price, but I'm inclined to wish you charged a nickel more and could add a few pages and improve it a bit here and there.

Your cover was pretty punk. So was all the art work inside except for Bok. Why not let him do a cover?

Wollheim does an interesting job with "Fantasy Reviews." A lot of good science fiction is being published in book form these days that we fans would never know about except for such a column as this.

The stories were only average. One *really* punk one was "Woman Out of Time." How writers can turn out such junk as this is beyond me.—William H. Groveman, 18 Maryland Avenue, Hempstead, New York.

All We Need. . . .

Honorable Pohl:

In reference to the excellently covered and well-illustrated (*now* all you need is good stories) October issue of *Astonishing,* here's a vote definitely in favor of serials up to three installments. Delighted to see that Morey is doing good work for you; particularly happy to note the full-page illustrations. I close with a plea that the illustrations have explanatory captions beneath, that the readers' column be put in smaller type, i.e., that used on page 112 of October issue, and that the two-way column get under way. Oh yes, a new cut for "Viewpoints" is really needed, don't you think?—Robert W. Lowndes, 2574 Bedford Avenue, Brooklyn, New York.

When Did That Happen?

Gentlemen:

Just read your story, "The Deadly Swarm." Fantastic, perhaps, but—

Its publication was and is just 60 days behind the fact,—with your story not even telling a tenth of it!—James M. Faurane, c/o 3295 Beaver, Jackonette, Minnesota.

● "The Deadly Swarm" referred to the invasion of the U.S.A. Up to the time of this writing, no such enemy invasion of this country was recorded in the newspapers.

Does Reader Faurane refer to the European war?—*The Editor.*

The Slump Is Over!

Dear Mr. Pohl:

Volume 1, Number 1 of *Astonishing*

Stories did more than astonish me, it also *delighted* me. The next issue slumped a little, but that was only temporary. Now, in Volume 2, Number 1, the magazine equals or surpasses that fine first issue. You can't possibly go wrong with such stories as "Stepson of Space," "The Future's Fair," and "Flight to Galileo." Moreover, the remaining stories complete in the issue are all enjoyable. But the style, the restrained, smooth workmanship characterizing the first three stories named, as well as the serial, mark this as a superior magazine in its field. Right now, I think only one magazine in the field, regardless of price, outranks *Astonishing Stories* on the basis of current issues. Two others approximately equal it. The rest are definitely inferior.

I'm very much disappointed in one respect, however. *When are you going monthly?* If I have to wait *four months* for the conclusion of "Quicksands of Youthwardness," I, along with many others, will feel duty-bound to institute proceedings against you for practising cruel and unusual forms of torture. But, no matter what method of presentation is necessary, continue publishing serials.

The cover is better. I presume it represents a scene from Jameson's story; but, if so, how did the girl get in? Oh, well—perhaps no excuse is needed for her presence. On the inside, Morey has the best work he has produced in months, I think.

I suspect that M. Smith represents the opinions of a great many readers, although perhaps the percentage isn't quite so high as the relative purity of that well-known brand of soap. But I think the present departments are O.K., and will continue to be so, as long as you steer clear of quizzes, puzzles, etc., which are sometimes overemphasized.—D. B. Thompson, 3136 Q Street, Lincoln, Nebraska.

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Editoramblings

NOW that the Chicago Science Fiction Convention of 1940 is over, science fiction fans can take a well-deserved rest for another full year, until the 1941 Convention is held. This one will be held in Denver, Colorado, conforming with the plan of holding the Convention in a different section of the country each year.

By all accounts, the *Chicon,* as the Chicago gathering was nicknamed, was the finest convention yet. Compared with the previous conventions, it had an air of pleasant informality, with editors, authors, and fans hob-nobbing on a common footing. Which makes the job of the Denver Convention Committee (headed by Olon F. Wiggins) so much the harder, for they plan to surpass this year's conclave or bust!

Our space is limited this issue, so we'll report briefly on the standings of the stories in the last issue and close: Taking first place with a considerable lead was "Flight to Galileo", by Lee Gregor. Second was "Stepson of Pace" (Raymond Z. Gallun), followed closely by Vincent Reid's novelette, "The Future's Fair". Too few commented on the serial to be indicative, so we'll reserve comment until it is concluded. These results are taken, of course, from opinions of the readers as expressed in letters to "Viewpoints."

—THE EDITOR.

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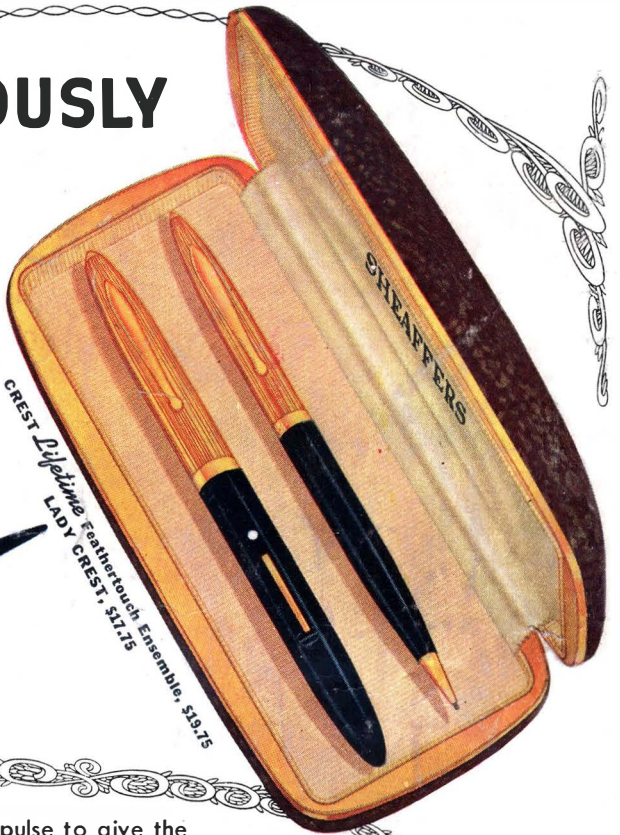

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