

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

SCIENCE FICTION

JUNE
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ICD



Virgil
Finlay

THUNDERING DEATH

A Complete Novel
by LEE PRIESTLEY

WHO RULES SPACE

by LESTER DEL REY

SHAPES IN THE SKY

by CIVILIAN SAUCER INTELLIGENCE

MIRAGE

THE LANDING WAS EASY—deceptively easy. She settled down, soft and light, in the valley Lassiter had seen in the B-screen earlier. The air—the cold snow-capped mountains surrounding the valley—the very ground itself, reminded him of a lonely valley in Tibet he'd once crash-landed in, very much a part of Earth and still a million years away from the Earth that the men of Lassiter's generation knew. It'd been the loneliness that had been so frightening to the man who had been on his way to the bustling trading centre that 21st century Lhasa had become; there had been a feeling that time had forgotten the bare brown hills and the trackless snowclad mountains surrounding him. When the rescue ship came, he'd run towards it with a shout of joy at the sight of another human, at the sight of something *alive*.

Hours after he had landed there in the valley on Deimos he had the same feeling. Nothing except the faint throb of his own engines could be heard. The air was wonderful, cold and bracing like—he realized suddenly—the air had been in that lonely Tibetan valley. For one blind moment he wanted to flee from there. There was something menacing in the very silence around him once he'd come some distance from the ship. The silence seemed to grasp at him, to draw him to itself; *did* silence have a personality?

He heard himself start to talk—to protest wildly—and stopped, appalled. This was the route to madness. There was no one there to talk to. There couldn't be. This was Deimos, millions of miles from nowhere, millions of miles from everyone whose voices he suddenly wished he could hear.

Millions of miles away from lovely, delicate, mocking Claire.

He thought for a moment that he heard Temple Bells in the distance, but this was ridiculous. There could be no Temple Bells on Deimos. There was no life on Deimos as far as the Survey people had been able to determine. It was a cold and barren little planet, with air that Man could breathe, and snow-capped mountains that reminded you of Tibet, and bare brown hills that looked as if Time had passed them by.

But still there were those bells!

He clapped gloved hands to his ears to shut out their sound, and still he heard them—softly, ever so softly, like the bells had sounded in the clear, cold mountain air, a million miles and years ago. . . .

Somehow it was natural that Claire should suddenly be there; lovely, fragile Claire, looking very much like that first time he had seen her, something soft and shimmery thrown over her, that Grecian urn in her hand, her hair shining brightly with the brightness of the snow-covered mountains.

He began to stagger towards her—the bells louder in the clear mountain air.

It was wonderful that she was there. How and why was unimportant. Her being there was all that mattered. . . .

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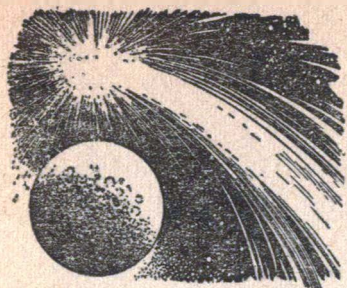
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FU 86

trainee
for
mars

by . . . Harry Harrison

The important thing was that they survive. Men were needed who'd be able to explore the surface once the ship landed.

MARS was a dusty, frigid hell. Bone dry and blood red. They trudged single file through the ankle-deep sand and in a monotonous duet cursed the nameless engineer who had designed the faulty reconditioners in their pressure suits. The bug hadn't shown during testing of the new suits. It appeared only after they had been using them steadily for a few weeks. The water-absorbers became overloaded and broke down. The Martian atmosphere stood at -60° centigrade. Inside the suits, they tried to blink the unevaporated sweat from their eyes and slowly cooked in the high humidity.

Morley shook his head viciously to dislodge an itching droplet from his nose. At the same moment, something rust-colored and furry darted across his path. It was the first Martian life they had seen. Instead of scientific curiosity, he felt only anger. A sudden kick sent the animal flying high into the air.

The suddenness of the movement threw him off balance. He fell sideways slowly, dragging his rubberized suit along an upright rock fragment of sharp obsidian.

Tony Bannerman heard the other

We seem so close to Space Flight that we've been afraid, these last weeks, that history might catch up with us and make Harry Harrison's exciting story dated. There is that danger, these days. Harrison, well known SF writer and editor, will be remembered for his OPEN ALL DOORS, in our February issue.

man's hoarse shout in his earphones and whirled. Morley was down, thrashing on the sand with both hands pressed against the ragged tear in the suit leg. Moisture-laden air was pouring out in a steaming jet that turned instantly to scintillating ice crystals. Tony jumped over to him, trying to close the tear with his own ineffectual gloves. Their faceplates close, he could see the look of terror on Morley's face—as well as the blue tinge of cyanosis.

"Help me—help me!"

The words were shouted so loud they rasped the tiny helmet earphones. But there was no help. They had taken no emergency patches with them. All the patches were in the ship at least a quarter of a mile away. Before he could get there and back Morley would be dead.

Tony straightened up slowly and sighed. Just the two of them in the ship, there was no one else on Mars who could help. Morley saw the look in Tony's eyes and stopped struggling.

"No hope at all, Tony—I'm dead?"

"Just as soon as all the oxygen is gone; thirty seconds at the most. There's nothing I can do."

Morley grated the shortest, vilest word he knew and pressed the red EMERGENCY button set into his glove above the wrist. The ground opened up next to him in the same instant, sand sifting down around the edges of the gap. Tony stepped

back as two men in white pressure suits came up out of the hole. They had red crosses on the fronts of their helmets and carried a stretcher. They rolled Morley onto it and were gone back into the opening in an instant.

Tony stood looking sourly at the hole for about a minute, waiting until Morley's suit was pushed back through the opening. Then the sand-covered trapdoor closed and the desert was unbroken once more.

The dummy in the suit weighed as much as Morley and its plastic features even resembled him a bit. Some wag had painted black X's on the eyes. *Very funny*, Tony thought, as he struggled to get the clumsy thing onto his back. On the way back the now-quiet Martian animal was lying in his path. He kicked it aside and it rained a fine shower of springs and gears.

The too-small sun was touching the peaks of the sawtooth red mountains when he reached the ship. Too late for a burial today—it would have to wait until morning. Leaving the thing in the airlock, he stamped into the cabin and peeled off his dripping pressure suit.

It was dark by that time and the things they had called the night-owls began clicking and scratching against the hull of the ship. They had never managed to catch sight of the night-owls; that made the sound doubly annoying. Tony clattered the pans noisily to drown the sound of them out while he pre-

pared the hot evening rations. When the meal was finished and the dishes cleared away, he began to feel the loneliness for the first time. Even the chew of tobacco didn't help; tonight it only reminded him of the humidior of green Havana cigars waiting for him back on earth.

His single kick upset the slim leg of the mess table, sending metal dishes, pans and silverware flying in every direction. They made a satisfactory noise and he exacted even greater pleasure by leaving the mess just that way and going to bed.

They had been so close this time, if only Morley had kept his eyes open! He forced the thought out of his mind and went to sleep.

In the morning he buried Morley. Then, grimly and carefully, passed the remaining two days until blast off time. Most of the geological samples were in and the air sampling and radiation recording meters were fully automatic.

On the final day, he removed the recording tapes from the instruments and carried the instruments away from the ship where they couldn't be caught in the take off blast. Next to the instruments he piled all the extra supplies, machinery and unneeded equipment. Shuffling through the rusty sand for the last time, he gave Morley's grave an ironical salute as he passed. There was nothing to do in the ship and not as much as a

pamphlet left to read. Tony passed the two remaining hours on his bunk counting the rivets in the ceiling.

A sharp click from the control clock broke the silence and behind the thick partition he could hear the engines begin the warm-up cycle. At the same time, the padded arms slipped across his bunk, pinning him down securely. He watched the panel slip back in the wall next to him and the hypo arm slide through. Moving erratically like a snake as its metal fingers sought him out. They touched his ankle and the serpent's tooth of the needle snapped free. The last thing he saw was the needle slipping into his vein, then the drug blacked him out.

As soon as he was under, a hatch opened in the rear bulkhead and two orderlies brought in a stretcher. They wore no suits nor masks and the blue sky of earth was visible behind them.

Coming to was the same as it always had been. The gentle glow from the stimulants that brought him up out of it, the first sight of the white ceiling of the operating room on earth.

Only this time the ceiling wasn't visible, it was obscured by the red face and thundercloud brow of Colonel Stegham. Tony tried to remember if you saluted while in bed, then decided that the best thing to do was lie quietly.

"Damn it, Bannerman," the

colonel growled, "welcome back on earth. And why did you bother coming back? With Morley dead the expedition has to be counted a failure—and that means not one completely successful expedition to date."

"The team in number two, sir, how did they do . . . ?" Tony tried to sound cheerful.

"Terrible. If anything, worse than your team. Both dead on the second day after landing. A meteor puncture in their oxygen tank and they were too busy discovering a new flora to bother looking at any meters.

"Anyway, that's not why I'm here. Get on some clothes and come into my office."

He slammed out and Tony scrambled off the bed, ignoring the touch of dizziness from the drugs. When colonels speak, lieutenants hurry to obey.

Colonel Stegham was scowling out of his window when Tony came in. He returned the salute and proved that he had a shard of humanity left in his military soul by offering Tony one of his cigars. Only when they had both lit up did he wave Tony's attention to the field outside the window.

"Do you see that? Know what it is?"

"Yes, sir, the Mars rocket."

"It's *going* to be the Mars rocket. Right now, it's only a half-completed hull. The motors and instruments are being assembled in plants all over the country.

Working on a crash basis the earliest estimate of completion is six months from now.

"The ship will be ready—only we aren't going to have any men to go in her. At the present rate of washout there won't be a single man qualified. Yourself included."

Tony shifted uncomfortably under his gaze as the colonel continued.

"This training program has always been my baby. I dreamed it up and kept after the Pentagon until it was adapted. We knew we could build a ship that would get to Mars and back, operated by automatic controls that would fly her under any degree of gravity or free fall. But we needed men who could walk out on the surface of the planet and explore it—or the whole thing would be so much wasted effort.

"The ship and the automatic pilot could be tested under simulated flight condition, and the bugs worked out. It was my suggestion, which was adopted, that the men who are to go in the ship should be shaken down in the same way. Two pressure chambers were built, simulated trainers that duplicated Mars in every detail we could imagine. We have been running two-men teams through these chambers for eighteen months now, trying to shake down and train them to man the *real* ship out there.

"I'm not going to tell you how many men we started with, or how many have been casualties because

of the necessary realism of the chambers. I'll tell you this much though—we haven't had *one successful simulated expedition* in all that time. And every man who has broken down or "died," like your partner Morley, has been eliminated.

"There are only *four* possible men left, yourself included. If we don't get one successful two-man team out of you four, the entire program is a washout."

Tony sat frozen, the dead cigar between his fingers. He knew that the pressure had been on for some months now, that Colonel Stegham had been growling around like a gut-shot bear. The colonel's voice cut through his thoughts.

"Psych division has been after me for what they think is a basic weakness of the program. Their feeling is that because it *is* a training program the men always have it in the back of their minds that it's not for real. They can always be pulled out of a tight hole. Like Morley was, at the last moment. After the results we have had I am beginning to agree with Psych.

"There are four men left and I am going to run one more exercise for each two-man group. This final exercise will be a full dress rehearsal—this time we're playing for keeps."

"I don't understand, Colonel . . ."

"It's simple." Stegham accented his words with a bang of his fist on the desk. "We're not going to

help or pull anyone out no matter how much they need it. This is battle training with live ammunition. We're going to throw everything at you that we can think of—and you are going to have to take it. If you tear your suit this time, you're going to die in the Martian vacuum just a few feet from all the air in the world."

His voice softened just a bit when he dismissed Tony.

"I wish there was some other way to do it, but we have no choice now. We have to get a crew for that ship next month and this is the only way to be sure."

Tony had a three-day pass. He was drunk the first day, hungover sick the second—and boiling mad on the third. Every man on the project was a volunteer, but this was carrying the thing too far. He could get out any time he wanted. Though he knew what he would look like then. There was only one thing to do, go along with the whole stupid idea. He would do what they wanted and go through with it. And when he had finished the exercise, he looked forward to hitting the colonel right on the end of his big nose.

He joined his partner, Hal Mendoza, when he went for his medical. They had met casually at the training lectures before the simulated training began. They shook hands reservedly now, each eyeing the other with a view to future possibilities. It took two men to make a team and either one

could be the cause of death for the other.

Mendoza was almost the physical opposite of Tony, tall and wiry, while Tony had the squat, solid look of a young bull. Tony's relaxed, almost casual manner, was matched by the other man's seemingly tense nerves. Hal chain-smoked and his eyes were never still.

Tony pushed away his momentary worry with an effort. Hal would have to be good to get this far in the program. He would probably calm down once the exercise was under way.

The medic took Tony next and began the detailed examination.

"What's this?" the medical officer asked Tony as he probed with a swab at his cheek.

"Ouch," Tony said. "Razor cut, my hand slipped while I was shaving."

The doctor scowled and painted on antiseptic, then slapped on a square of gauze.

"Watch all skin openings," he warned. "They make ideal entry routes for bacteria. Never know what you might find on Mars."

Tony started a protest, then let it die in his throat. What was the use of explaining that the real trip—if and when it ever came off—would take 260 days. Any cuts would easily heal in that time, even in frozen sleep.

As always after the medical, they climbed into their flight suits and walked over to the testing building.

On the way, Tony stopped at the barracks and dug out his chess set and a well-thumbed deck of cards. The access door was open in the thick wall of Building Two and they stepped through into the dummy Mars ship. After the medics had strapped them to the bunks the simulated frozen sleep shots put them under.

Coming to was accompanied by the usual nausea and weakness. No realism spared. On a sudden impulse Tony staggered to the latrine mirror and blinked at his red-eyed, smooth-shaven reflection. He tore the bandage off his cheek and his fingers touched the open cut with the still congealed drop of blood at the bottom. A relaxed sigh slipped out. He had the recurrent bad dream that some day one of these training trips would *really* be a flight to Mars. Logic told him that the army would never forego the pleasure and publicity of a big send-off. Yet the doubt, like all illogical ones, persisted. At the beginning of each training flight, he had to abolish it again.

The nausea came back with a swoop and he forced it down. This was one exercise where he couldn't waste time. The ship had to be checked. Hal was sitting up on his bunk waving a limp hand. Tony waved back.

At that moment, the emergency communication speaker crackled into life. At first, there was just the rustle of activity in the control

office, then the training officer's voice cut through the background noise.

"Lieutenant Bannerman — you awake yet?"

Tony fumbled the mike out of its clip and reported. "Here, sir."

"Just a second, Tony," the officer said. He mumbled to someone at one side of the mike, then came back on. "There's been some trouble with one of the bleeder valves in the chamber; the pressure is above Mars norm. Hold the exercise until we pump her back down."

"Yes, sir," Tony said, then killed the mike so he and Hal could groan about the so-called efficiency of the training squad. It was only a few minutes before the speaker came back to life.

"Okay, pressure on the button. Carry on as before."

Tony made an obscene gesture at the unseen man behind the voice and walked over to the single port. He cranked at the handle that moved the crash shield out of the way.

"Well, at least it's a quiet one," he said after the ruddy light had streamed in. Hal came up and looked over his shoulder.

"Praise Stegham for that," he said. "The last one, where I lost my partner, was wind all the time. From the shape of those dunes it looks like the atmosphere never moves at all."

They stared glumly at the familiar red landscape and dark sky for a long moment, then Tony turned

to the controls while Hal cracked out the atmosphere suits.

"Over here—*quick!*"

Hal didn't have to be called twice, he was at the board in a single jump. He followed Tony's pointing finger.

"The water meter—it shows the tank's only about half full."

They fought off the plate that gave access to the tank compartment. When they laid it aside a small trickle of rusty water ran across the deck at their feet. Tony crawled in with a flashlight and moved it up and down the tubular tanks. His muffled voice echoed inside the small compartment.

"Damn Stegham and his tricks—another 'shock of landing' failure. Connecting pipe split and the water that leaked out has soaked down into the insulating layer; we'll never get it out without tearing the ship apart. Hand me the goo, I'll plug the leak until we can repair it."

"It's going to be an awfully dry month," Hal muttered while he checked the rest of the control board.

The first few days were like every other trip. They planted the flag and unloaded the equipment. The observing and recording instruments were set up by the third day, so they unshipped the theodolite and started their maps. By the fourth day they were ready to begin their sample collecting.

It was just at this point that they really became aware of the dust.

Tony chewed an unusually gritty mouthful of rations, cursing under his breath because there was only a mouthful of water to wash it down with. He swallowed it painfully, then looked around the control chamber.

"Have you noticed how dusty it is?" he asked.

"How could you *not* notice it? I have so much of it inside my clothes I feel like I'm living on an ant hill."

Hal stopped scratching just long enough to take a bite of food.

They both looked around and it hit them for the first time *just* how much dust was in the ship. A red coating on everything, in their food and in their hair. The constant scratch of grit underfoot.

"It must come in on our suits," Tony said. "We'll have to clean them off better before coming inside."

It was a good idea—the only trouble was that it didn't work. The red dust was as fine as talcum powder and no amount of beating could dislodge it; it just drifted around in a fine haze. They tried to forget the dust, just treating it as one more nuisance Stegham's technicians had dreamed up. This worked for awhile, until the eighth day when they couldn't close the outer door of the air lock. They had just returned from a sample-collecting trip. The air lock barely held the two of them plus the bags of rock samples. Taking turns, they beat the dust off each other as well

as they could, then Hal threw the cycling switch. The outer door started to close, then stopped. They could feel the increased hum of the door motor through their shoes, then it cut out and the red trouble light flashed on.

"Dust!" Tony said. "That damned red dust is in the works."

The inspection plate came off easily and they saw the exposed gear train. The red dust had merged into a destructive mud with the grease. Finding the trouble was easier than repairing it. They had only a few basic tools in their suit pouches. The big tool box and all the solvent that would have made fast work of the job were inside the ship. But they couldn't be reached until the door was fixed. And the door couldn't be fixed without tools. It was a paradox situation that seemed very unfunny.

It took them only a second to realize the spot they were in—and almost two hours to clean the gears as best they could and force the door shut. When the inner port finally opened, both their oxygen tanks read EMPTY, and they were operating on the emergency reserve.

As soon as Hal opened his helmet, he dropped on his bunk. Tony thought he was unconscious until he saw that the other man's eyes were open and staring at the ceiling. He cracked open the single flask of medicinal brandy and forced Hal to take some. Then he had a double swallow himself and tried to ignore the fact that his

partner's hands were trembling violently. He busied himself making a better repair of the door mechanism. By the time he had finished, Hal was off the bunk and starting to prepare their evening meal.

Outside of the dust, it was a routine exercise—at first. Surveying and sampling most of the day, then a few leisure hours before retiring. Hal was a good partner and the best chess player Tony had teamed with to date. Tony soon found out that what he thought was nervousness was nervous energy. Hal was only happy when he was doing something. He threw himself into the day's work and had enough enthusiasm and energy left over to smash the yawning Tony over the chessboard. The two men were quite opposite types and made good teammates.

Everything looked good—except for the dust. It was everywhere, and slowly getting into everything. It annoyed Tony, but he stolidly did not let it bother him deeply. Hal was the one that suffered most. It scratched and itched him, setting his temper on edge. He began to have trouble sleeping.

And the creeping dust was slowly working its way into every single item of equipment. The machinery was starting to wear as fast as their nerves. The constant presence of the itching dust, together with the acute water shortage was maddening. They were always thirsty and had only the mini-

um amount of water to last until blast off. With proper rationing, it would barely be enough.

They quarreled over the ration on the thirteenth day and almost came to blows. For two days after that they didn't talk. Tony noticed that Hal always kept one of the sampling hammers in his pocket; in turn, he took to carrying one of the dinner knives.

Something had to crack. It turned out to be Hal.

It must have been the lack of sleep that finally got to him. He had always been a light sleeper, now the tension and the dust were too much. Tony could hear him scratching and turning each night when he forced himself to sleep. He wasn't sleeping too well himself, but at least he managed to get a bit. From the black hollows under Hal's bloodshot eyes it didn't look like Hal was getting any.

On the eighteenth day he cracked. They were just getting into their suits when he started shaking. Not just his hands, but all over. He just stood there shaking until Tony got him to the bunk and gave him the rest of the brandy. When the attack was over he refused to go outside.

"I won't . . . I CAN'T!" He almost screamed the words. "The suits won't last much longer, they'll fail while we're out there . . . I won't last any longer . . . we have to go back . . ."

Tony tried to reason with him. "We can't do that, you know this

is a full scale exercise. We can't get out until the twenty-eight days are up. That's only ten more days—you can hold out until then. That's the minimum figure the army decided on for a stay on Mars—it's built into all the plans and machinery. Be glad we don't have to wait an entire Martian year each time until the planets get back into conjunction. With deep sleep and atomic drive that's one trouble that won't be faced."

"Stop talking and trying to kid me along," Hal shouted. "I don't give a flying frog what happens to the first expedition. I'm washing myself out and this final exercise will go right with me. I'm not going crazy from lack of sleep just because some brass-hat thinks super-realism is the answer. If they refuse to stop the exercise when I call, it will be *murder*."

He was out of his bunk before Tony could say anything and scratching at the control board. The EMERGENCY button was there as always, but they didn't know if it was connected this time. Or even if it were connected, if anyone would answer. Hal pushed it and kept pushing it. They both looked at the speaker, holding their breaths.

"The dirty rotten . . . they're not going to answer the call." Hal barely breathed the words.

Then the speaker rasped to life and the cold voice of Colonel Stegham filled the tiny room.

"You know the conditions of this exercise—so your reasons for call-

ing had better be pretty good. What are they?"

Hal grabbed the microphone, half-complaining, half-pleading—the words poured out in a torrent. As soon as he started, Tony knew it would not be any good. He knew just how Stegham would react to the complaints. While Hal was still pleading the speaker cut him off.

"That's enough. Your explanation doesn't warrant any change in the original plan. You are on your own and you're going to have to stay that way. I'm cutting this connection permanently; don't attempt to contact me again until the exercise is over."

The click of the opening circuit was as final as death.

Hal sat dazed, tears on his cheeks. It wasn't until he stood up that Tony realized they were tears of anger. With a single pull, Hal yanked the mike loose and heaved it through the speaker grill.

"Wait until this is over, Colonel, and I can get your pudgy neck between my hands." He whirled towards Tony. "Get out the medical kit, I'll show that idiot he's not the only one who can play boyscout with his damned exercises."

There were four morphine syrettes in the kit; he grabbed one out, broke the seal and jabbed it against his arm. Tony didn't try to stop him, in fact, he agreed with him completely. In a few minutes, Hal was slumped over the table, snoring deeply. Tony picked

him up and dropped him onto his bunk.

Hal slept almost twenty hours and when he woke up some of the madness and exhaustion was gone from his eyes. Neither of them mentioned what had happened. Hal marked the days remaining on the bulkhead and carefully rationed the remaining morphine. He was getting about one night's sleep in three, but it seemed to be enough.

They had four days left to blast off when Tony found the first Martian life. It was something about the size of a cat that crouched in the lee of the ship. He called to Hal who came over and looked at it.

"That's a beauty," he said, "but nowheres near as good as the one I had on my second trip. I found this ropy thing that oozed a kind of glue. Contrary to regulations—frankly I was curious as hell—I dissected the thing. It was a beauty, all wheels and springs and gears, Stegham's technicians do a good job. I really got chewed out for opening the thing, though. Why don't we just leave this one where it is?"

For a moment Tony almost agreed—then changed his mind.

"That's probably just what they want—so let's finish the game their way. I'll watch it, you get one of the empty ration cartons."

Hal reluctantly agreed and climbed into the ship. The outer door swung slowly and ground into

place. Disturbed by the vibration, the thing darted out towards Tony. He gasped and stepped back before he remembered it was only a robot.

"Those technicians really have wonderful imaginations," he mumbled.

The thing started to run by him and he put his foot on some of its legs to hold it. There were plenty of legs; it was like a small-bodied spider surrounded by a thousand unarticulated legs. They moved in undulating waves like a milliped and dragged the misshapen body across the sand. Tony's boot crunched on the legs, tearing some off. The rest held.

Being careful to keep his hand away from the churning legs, he bent over and picked up a dismembered limb. It was hard and covered with spines on the bottom side. A milky fluid was dripping from the torn end.

"Realism," he said to himself, "those technicians sure believe in realism."

And then the thought hit him. A horribly impossible thought that froze the breath in his throat. The thoughts whirled round and round and he knew they were wrong because they were so incredible. Yet he had to find out, even if it meant ruining their mechanical toy.

Keeping his foot carefully on the thing's legs, he slipped the sharpened table knife out of his pouch and bent over. With a single, swift motion he stabbed.

"What the devil are you doing?"

Hal asked, coming up behind him. Tony couldn't answer and he couldn't move. Hal walked around him and looked down at the thing on the ground.

It took him a second to understand, then he screamed.

"IT'S ALIVE! It's bleeding and there are no gears inside. It can't be alive—if it is we're not on earth at all—WE'RE ON MARS!" He began to run, then fell down, screaming.

Tony thought and acted at the same time. He knew he only had one chance. If he missed they'd both be dead. Hal would kill them both in his madness. Balling his fist, he let swing hard as he could at the spot just under the other man's breastplate. There was just the thin fabric of the suit there and that spot was right over the big nerve ganglion of the solar plexus. The thud of the blow hurt his hand—but Hal collapsed slowly to the ground. Putting his hands under the other's arms, he dragged him into the ship.

Hal started to come to after he had stripped him and laid him on the bunk. It was impossible to hold him down with one hand and press the freeze cycling button at the same time. He concentrated on holding Hal's one leg still and pushed the button. The crazed man had time to hit Tony three times before the needle lanced home. He dropped back with a sigh and Tony got groggily to his feet. The manual actuator on the frozen sleep

had been provided for any medical emergency so the patient could survive until the doctors could work on him back at base. It had proven its value.

Then the same unreasoning terror hit him.

If the beast were real—Mars was real.

This was no "training exercise"—this was it. That sky outside wasn't a painted atmosphere, it was the real atmosphere of Mars. He was alone as no man had ever been alone before. On a planet millions of miles from his world.

He was shouting as he dogged home the outer air lock door, an animal-like howl of a lost beast. He had only enough control then to get to his bunk and throw the switch above it. The hypodermic was made of good steel so it went right through the fabric of his pressure suit. He was just reaching for the hypo arm to break it off when he dropped off into the blackness.

This time, he was slow to open his eyes. He was afraid he would see the riveted hull of the ship above his head. It was the white ceiling of the hospital, though, and he let the captive air out of his lungs. When he turned his head he saw Colonel Stegham sitting by the bed.

"Did we make it?" Tony asked. It was more of a statement than a question.

"You made it, Tony. Both of

you made it. Hal is awake here in the other bed."

There was something different about the colonel's voice and it took Tony an instant to recognize it. It was the first time he had ever heard the colonel talk with any emotion other than anger.

"The first trip to Mars. You can imagine what the papers are saying about it. More important, Tech says the specimens and meter readings you brought back are invaluable. When did you find out it wasn't an exercise?"

"The twenty-fourth day. We found some kind of Martian animal. I suppose we were pretty stupid not to have tumbled before that."

Tony's voice had an edge of bitterness.

"Not really. Every part of your training was designed to keep you from finding out. We were never certain if we would have to send the men without their knowledge, but there was always that possibility. Psych was sure the disorientation and separation from earth would cause a breakdown. I could never agree with them."

"They were right," Tony said, trying to keep the memory of fear out of his voice.

"We know now they were right, though I fought them at the time. Psych won the fight and we programmed the whole trip over on their say-so. I doubt if you appreciate it, but we went to a tremendous amount of work to convince

you two that you were still in the training program."

"Sorry to put you to all that trouble," Hal said. The colonel flushed a little. Not at the words but at the loosely-reined bitterness that rode behind them. He went on as if he hadn't heard.

"Those two conversations you had over the emergency phone were, of course, taped and the playback concealed in the ship. Psych scripted them on the basis of fitting any need, apparently they worked. The second one was supposed to be the final touch of realism, in case you should start being doubtful. Then we used a variation of deep freeze that suspends about ninety-nine per cent of the body processes; it hasn't been revealed or published yet. This along with anti-coagulants in the razor cut on Tony's chin covered the fact that so much time had passed."

"What about the ship," Hal asked. "We saw it—it was only half-completed."

"Dummy," the colonel said. "Put there for the public's benefit and all foreign intelligence services. Real one had been finished and tested weeks earlier. Getting the crew was the difficult part. What I said about no team finishing a practice exercise was true. You two men had the best records and were our best bets.

"We'll never have to do it this way again, though. Psych says that the next crews won't have that

trouble; they'll be reinforced by the psychological fact that someone else was there before them. They won't be facing the complete unknown."

The colonel sat chewing his lip for a moment, then forced out the words he had been trying to say since Tony and Hal had regained consciousness.

"I want you to understand . . . both of you . . . that I would rather have gone myself than pull that kind of thing on you. I know how you must feel. Like we pulled some kind of a . . ."

"Interplanetary practical joke," Tony said. He didn't smile when he said it.

"Yes, something like that," the colonel rushed on. "I guess it was

a lousy trick—but don't you see, we had to? You two were the only ones left, every other man had washed out. It had to be you two, and we had to do it the safest way.

"And only myself and three other men know what was done; what really happened on the trip. No one else will ever know about it, I can guarantee you that."

Hal's voice was quiet, but cut through the still room like a sharp knife.

"You can be sure, colonel, that *we* won't be telling anybody about it."

When Colonel Stegham left, he kept his head down because he couldn't bring himself to see the look in the eyes of the first two explorers of Mars.

NEXT MONTH—

Death haunts a flight to the Stars in
William Campbell Gault's **ESCAPE FEROCITY**

Agatha Sherlip returns from her strangest expedition in
Evelyn E. Smith's **THE TWO SUNS OF MORCALI**

Life becomes worthless in an isolated New York in
Robert Silverberg's **THE ROAD TO NIGHTFALL**

We learn the truth about an immortal statue in
Thomas Burnett Swann's **WINGED VICTORY**

A student rebels against conformity in
Robert Bloch's **EGGHEAD**

and also—

Morris K. Jessup, writer and lecturer, prominent Ufologist,
discusses **THE TRUTH ABOUT FLYING SAUCERS**

Werner Buedeler, founder of the
Association of German Science Writers,
reports on **SATELLITES OF THE FUTURE**

—in **FANTASTIC UNIVERSE**

fall of knight

by . . . *Bertram Chandler*

Sir Ian's proposal shocked them all. They were spacemen. This was not a thing that they'd know how to do.

IT IS customary for the spacemen serving in the Federation's star ships to sneer at the titles bestowed, with a lavish hand, by the Kingdom of Waverley upon its spacefaring subjects. An officer who rises to become Master of one of the Empress Class vessels—equivalent to the Federation's Alpha Class—is invariably, after a short period of probation, dubbed Knight. His Chief Engineers—Reaction and Interstellar Drives—usually are given the title of Esquire, as is the First Mate. There are quite a few Dames among the senior Pursers and Catering Officers.

A spaceman is a spaceman, however, no matter what fancy handle he has to his name. He has to know his stuff, otherwise he would not be where he is. He has to be efficient, otherwise he would never wear upon his shoulders the four gold stripes of captaincy.

So it was with Captain Sir Ian MacLachlan Stuart, Master of the interstellar liner *Empress of Skye*. When things went wrong he coped, and nobly, and saw to it that his officers coped. It was Sir Ian who had the gas turbine and the tractor wheels broken out of the cargo and

We've all been guilty of the tendency to ascribe to British SF a sobriety of outlook and a pessimistic approach to the World of Tomorrow perhaps natural to a people living so much closer to reality than we do. Here, in Chandler's latest story, is proof that this is an unwise generalization.

with them rigged a makeshift, but effective governor for the racing, almost uncontrollable Mannschen Drive unit. It was Sir Ian who caught James Murdoch, the ship's Bio-Chemist, in the act of introducing poisons into the hydroponics tanks that would have destroyed every plant aboard the ship—and with them her air purifying and regenerating plant. (Murdoch later confessed to other acts of sabotage, including the damage done to the Interstellar Drive unit, claiming that he was actuated by hatred for the Stuart dynasty and love for the Hanoverians.) It was Sir Ian who brought his almost unmanageable ship down to the inhospitable surface of Rob Roy, one of the less important planets ruled by King James VI of Waverley, making a landing which, in the circumstances, could not have been bettered by any space captain in the Galaxy.

Rob Roy is an unimportant planet. There is only one city—Ballantrae—and that, on any other world, would be called a village. There are no important industries. The colonists rear sheep and cattle, and distill whiskey. There is something about the radiations from the sun—Epsilon Aurigae—about which Rob Roy revolves, that has a peculiar effect upon non-indigenous animal life—the sheep, the cattle, and other imported beasts—but not upon human beings. It is said that the amount of whiskey consumed by the colonists has an inhibiting

effect upon the effects of the radiation. This may well be true. Somebody once said that if the quality of the Rob Roy mutton were affected to the same extent as the quantity then Rob Roy would be famous throughout the Galaxy. This may well be true, too.

Incredible though it may seem, *Empress of Skye* succeeded in dropping unobserved through the Rob Roy atmosphere. It had been Captain Sir Ian's intention to make his landing at the Ballantrae spaceport, but this intention he had to abandon—the Hanoverian saboteur had contrived, before his detection and imprisonment, to make such a mess of the ship's controls that, during the final, ticklish phases of the landing, officers were having to make hasty, last minute repairs with string and chewing gum, and Sir Ian was concerned only with setting his ship down anywhere in safety, without overmuch worry as to the precise location. A further complicating factor was that *Empress of Skye's* frantic signals to the spaceport radio station were unanswered. Sir Ian should, perhaps, have remembered that it was Burns Night—but he had, during his descent to the surface, more things to concern him than dates.

So the big ship dropped through the night and the rain, the flare of her exhausts shrouded by cloud and storm. She landed in a field, incinerating a half dozen or so of the giant sheep and starting a short-lived fire in the sodden grass. She

rocked gently for a few seconds on her vaned landing gear, then quivered for a few seconds more before coming to rest.

After a minute or so the airlock door high on her sleek side opened and the long, telescopic ramp extended itself. Down the ramp came Sir Ian, a tall, spare man bearing himself with knightly dignity, followed by his Mate and his two Chief Engineers. The beams of their torches fell upon the charred shapes that had once been sheep, were reflected from the clouds of dirty steam still rising from the grass. The Captain led his officers to the road running beside the field.

"Ballantrae," said Malcolm Macdonald, Esquire, pointing with his torch, "must be that way, Sir Ian."

"And how far, Esquire Macdonald?" asked the Captain.

"All of a hundred miles, Sir Ian," replied the Mate.

"We must have help from Ballantrae to effect permanent repairs," said the Reaction Chief.

"I am aware of that, Esquire Hendry," said the Captain. "If Ballantrae had answered our signals I should feel happier about our chances of help coming with daylight."

"They have only one ship a year here," volunteered Interstellar Chief Fleming. "They'll not be manning their station when there's no ship due."

"Regulations . . ." began Macdonald.

"And who's to enforce regula-

tions on this ball of rock and mud?" asked Fleming.

"Somebody," said Sir Ian, "will have to ride into Ballantrae."

"Ride, Sir Ian?" asked the Mate.

"Perhaps, Esquire Macdonald, it has escaped your memory that there is a horse in the cargo."

"But we're spacemen, Sir Ian. Horse riding is not a thing that we know anything about. Perhaps one of the passengers . . ."

"We are the crew of the ship, Esquire Macdonald. We must do all we can to make her spaceworthy once more, and we must not call upon her passengers for help. You, Esquire Macdonald, will make enquiries among your juniors and see if any of them know anything of the art of horse riding. You, Esquires Hendry and Fleming, will do the same."

"And supposing we find nobody, Sir Ian?" asked Hendry.

"Then, gentlemen," said Captain Sir Ian MacLachlan Stuart, "I shall ride the horse."

The first twenty miles weren't too bad. After its initial hostility the animal seemed to have become resigned to its fate as a beast of burden and was proceeding along the road at a brisk trot. Sir Ian, apart from a feeling of soreness in that portion of his body in contact with the saddle, was beginning to enjoy himself. He remembered the reluctance with which he had mounted a horse during his last leave—he had been staying with a

distant cousin, the Laird of Troon—never thinking that the experience thus gained would be advantageous to him in the exercise of his profession. He began to think that, after all, horseback was the only suitable means of transportation for a knight—in olden days a knight was automatically a man on horseback.

The day was fine—but with a fineness that seemed too good to last. The air was abnormally clear, the distant, forested hills standing out in detail as though viewed through a telescope. Here and there rose thin threads of blue smoke, signs of human habitation. The Captain was tempted to deviate from the main road and to ride up to one of the farmhouses where he could use a telephone. He resisted the temptation without much effort—the other temptation, to ride into Ballantrae, a spaceman-knight on horseback, was so much stronger.

At noon he halted. There was a stream running by the road from which the horse could drink. Sir Ian dismounted clumsily, stood stiffly and watched the animal slaking its thirst. He was too stiff to leap forward in time to catch the reins as the beast, throwing up its head, galloped skittishly back along the road. Sir Ian shouted—and if the horse had had any intelligence it would never have returned after being called the things that it was called. It never returned in any case.

The Captain decided to sit by the

roadside to think things out—then changed his mind. He did his thinking standing. He would walk on, he told himself. Sooner or later he must come to a house either with a telephone or transport, or both. Sooner or later some other wayfarer would overtake him and offer assistance. Sooner or later, even if he had to make the entire journey by foot, he would come to Ballantrae.

As he trudged doggedly on the afternoon deteriorated. A smeary gray veil was drawn over the sky, obscuring the sun. It started to rain—a persistent, chill drizzle at first, coalescing into larger and colder drops with the rising of the wind. With the fall of dusk a half gale was sweeping in from the north and the rain had turned to a gelid sleet. Sir Ian thought of the warmth and the comfort of his ship—far more real to him than the hypothetical warmth and comfort to be found in Ballantrae.

When he saw the light he was, as he admitted himself, ready to lay down and die in the ditch. He drove his tired, frozen muscles over the last mile of the road, at last was hammering at the stout wooden door of the house from which the light had shone. Over his head creaked the sign, the lettering barely distinguishable in the dim glow from an upstairs, shuttered window—*The Duke of Cameron*.

The door opened slowly. Sir Ian staggered inside. He looked up at the big man, taller even than Sir

Ian, who was looking down at him with a certain distaste. He looked past the big man to the golden haired girl standing behind him. He was absurdly warmed by the shy, half smile that she gave him, by the pity that he saw in her blue eyes.

"I don't usually take in tramps," said the big man.

Sir Ian straightened himself. His once smart uniform must be, he knew, a sorry mess—but, even so, surely this clod should be able to see who and what he was.

"I," said Sir Ian, "am the Captain of the star ship, *Empress of Skye*. We were obliged to make a forced landing on this planet and we have been unable to get into touch with the spaceport at Ballantrae. I was riding into Ballantrae to get help to effect repairs, and I lost my horse . . ."

"Your *horse*?" asked the innkeeper incredulously.

"Give him a drink, father," insisted his daughter. "Canna ye see the poor man is half frozen?"

"All right."

Without much ceremony Sir Ian was shown into a warm parlor, seated in a chair before a roaring fire. It was the innkeeper's daughter who poured him a generous slug of whiskey and handed it to him.

The whiskey hit Sir Ian hard. He knew that it would be foolish to essay to speak for a while, that he would be bound to say something silly. He resolved not to open his mouth until he felt better.

"Your *horse*?" asked the innkeeper again.

"I am a knight," replied Sir Ian. "Why shouldn't I have a horse?"

"A knight?" asked the girl. Her incredulity was not so offensive as her father's.

"Yes. I am Captain Sir Ian MacLachlan Stuart, Master of the interstellar liner *Empress of Skye*."

"It could just be true, father. It could be a Captain's uniform under the mud. You remember that young spaceman who stayed here a couple of nights last year—the Second Mate of the *Countess of Stornoway*?"

"Ay, my girl. I remember him right well. And I swore that I'd never let another spaceman set foot in my house."

"Let me finish, father. He was telling me that the Captains of the big ships, the *Empress* ships, were often knights. He was saying that he hoped to be one himself one day . . ."

"And filled up your silly mind with ideas that you'd be his lady."

"Forgive me for interrupting a family discussion," said Sir Ian, "but I have to look after the interests of my ship. Have you a telephone?"

"Ay. But it's broken."

"Then have you a ground car, or a 'copter?"

"No."

"Then have you a horse?"

"No."

"The mail 'copter calls in," said the girl, "tomorrow."

"Then tomorrow it will have to be," said Sir Ian. He pulled out his notecase. "I have money with me. I should like a hot bath, a meal, and a bed . . ."

"I swore," growled the innkeeper, "that I'd never let another spaceman stay in this house."

"But a *knight*, father. He's more than just a spaceman . . ."

"Oh, all right. Come with me, Sir Ian, and I'll show ye the bathroom and lend ye a change of dry clothes. There'll be a meal ready down here when ye're dressed."

Sir Ian thawed out slowly in the hot bath. It was obvious, he thought, why the innkeeper disliked spacemen. That daughter of his would appeal to a man straight in from Deep Space—even to one who, like Sir Ian, had enjoyed the social life of a big ship. That daughter of his would appeal to a man. Period.

After all, thought Sir Ian, I'm not old. And after all, I'll never see this world again, ever. The girl herself looks clever enough to handle things so that her father could never do more than suspect. I hope.

He got out of the bath, looked around vainly for the hot air blowers to dry his body. He realized at last what the big towel was for, used it. He dressed in the slacks and shirt left out for him by the innkeeper, managed by taking in a reef in the waistband of the trousers and turning up the bottoms of them to look fairly presentable.

He made his way slowly downstairs.

The meal was good, made all the more enjoyable by the sound of the wind and the driving rain outside. But Sir Ian was not as comfortable as he should have been. It was the fault of the girl—she was making it all too obvious what her feelings were and what her hopes were for the night. The Captain did not object to the pressure of a feminine knee against his under the table—what he did object to was that the innkeeper would have had to be blind not to see what was going on.

It was the innkeeper who interrupted Sir Ian in the middle of a story that he was telling about his service in the Survey ships as a young man.

"I think," he said slowly, "that you should consider the interests of your ship."

"My officers," said Sir Ian, "are capable of looking after her. Besides—what can I do?"

"I have remembered," said the innkeeper, "that I can, after all, offer you transport. As you may know, certain animals on this planet grow to what would be considered abnormal sizes elsewhere. Frankly, I bore in mind at first both your knightly dignity and the fact that you are not native to this world—but I have decided now that you ride to Ballantrae tonight."

"I am content," said Sir Ian, "to wait for tomorrow's mail 'copter."

"In this weather," said the innkeeper, "it may not fly."

"Tomorrow will be time enough to find that out," said the girl.

"Tomorrow," said her father, "may be too late."

"For what?" she flared.

"I have pride," he replied, "even if you haven't."

"Pride?" she asked. "In what?"

"Enough!" he roared. He got to his feet, towering over the seated Sir Ian. "I will furnish you an animal, sir, more intelligent and sure-footed than any horse ever foaled, an animal that will deliver you safely at Ballantrae, even if he has to carry you there by the scruff of your neck!"

He whistled.

He whistled again.

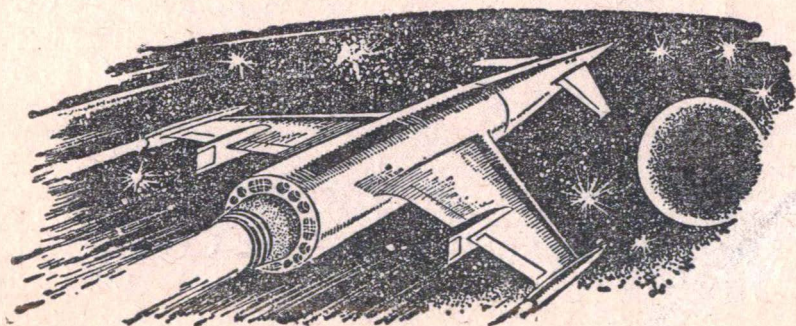
Something whined outside. There was the sound of claws scabbling and clicking on the polished floor. And then the thing that had made the noises was looking at them with big, mournful eyes, its head and shoulders completely blocking the doorway—and it was not a small door. Sir Ian felt the shock that

one always feels when seeing something familiar blown up to many times its normal size.

Telling the story afterwards, he was ever to maintain that he would have refused the innkeeper's offer of a steed, ignoring all possibility of ensuing complications, but for one thing. It was, he always said, utterly fantastic how attractive women had the knack of destroying all their charm with one ill-considered word or action. It was not, Sir Ian would take pains to point out, that he was deficient in a sense of humor—it was just that he considered some forms of humor—alleged humor, that is—to be singularly unfunny. The pun, or any play on words, was a case in point.

He left the inn, said Sir Ian, without regret, in spite of the shrieking wind and the driving sleet, in spite of the weirdness of his mount. He could do nothing else after what that girl had said.

"Father," she had complained, "surely you wouldn't send a knight out on a dog like this?"



who rules space

by . . . *Lester del Rey*

It is time to consider how close we—and others—are to the mastery of space we talk of, and what this means.

A FEW hours ago, as I write this, the title changed from an abstract question for the future to an immediate problem of the present. The Army, having finally been permitted to make the attempt, has just launched the first U. S. satellite to compete with the Russian ones for mastery of space.

This is obviously welcome, if hardly surprising news. There was never any doubt that we could get into space when we finally decided we wanted to badly enough, and when we were willing to put the right amount of intelligence into the effort. Like the four-minute mile, it was possible long before it was accomplished; but the mind-barrier against it was too great. Once the first four-minute record was established, several other runners also found they could run the mile in that time. And once the first satellite circled the Earth, it was inevitable that we should also come out of our mind-block and achieve similar results.

It might be wise here to take a quick look at the background for the current success. The Army Explorer satellite isn't any late-comer built in a final effort to

Lester del Rey, continuing his series of articles on the Earth Satellite situation, turns to still another aspect of the problems facing the Free World. Del Rey is the author of the recent ROCKETS THROUGH SPACE *(Winston, \$3.95) and of the anthology, ROBOTS AND CHANGELINGS (Ballantine Books, 35¢).*

catch up to Russia. Instead, it is the product of the longest planning and the greatest practical experience with rockets in this country—probably in the world. It succeeded because it was adequately designed, had sufficient thrust—at least twice that of Vanguard—and was supervised by a man whose experience with working rockets goes back to the first ones to fly. Both the rocket and the man to use it were available long before the first Sputnik went up; all that was needed was the will to get into space great enough to overcome interservice struggles, red tape and the complicated lethargy that seems to be one of the less happy by-products of any large democracy.

Dr. Wernher von Braun and a number of other scientists worked out the first practical scheme for a minimum satellite several years ago—the original Operation Mouse. This was sidetracked in favor of the Navy's Project Vanguard—not entirely unreasonably, since Vanguard called for somewhat better instrumentation. Then, when we were shoved into making the effort to get into space during the IGY, Project Vanguard was set up, independent of the missile program, and apparently as a minimum effort, since space satellites were now acceptable ideas, but hardly considered of major importance.

Meantime, von Braun was busy working on rockets (when not ad-

vising Hollywood, etc.), but under the greatest restrictions. The Army's missile program had been restricted to flights not to exceed 200 miles—less than the capabilities of the original V-2! Long range missiles were being fought over by other services, and the man who achieved the first great rocket success was seemingly shoved into the background. Nevertheless, the Redstone (Jupiter) missile was perfected and ready.

It was only after the sensational success of Russia—quite a while after, in fact—that the wraps were finally taken off and the Army was permitted to make the spectacularly efficient and unwavering launching of our satellite.

As Dr. von Braun was first to state publicly, this doesn't mean that we've caught up with Russia. We're still far behind, as the different weights of the satellites underscore. But we can catch up—in less time than might be thought—if we'll learn our lessons from the confusion of all this background.

The first lesson we have to learn is to drop all clichés about who or which group in our country shall rule space affairs. It's easy to make wrong snap decisions on this, as we've already done. It's a lot harder to remedy the results of such stereotype thinking.

Science fiction has been as guilty of making such possibly false assumptions as any other group. Most of our "space services" have been based on the Air Force or the

Navy. The temptation to think in such terms is obvious. The Air Force is already in charge of above-ground operations, and space is—supposedly—only a logical extension. Or the Navy is already in control of ships, ship-building and ship-operations. Won't spaceships be just more ships—at least no more dissimilar than submarines?

Maybe either of these assumptions is correct. I have no wish to sneer at either service or its abilities. I'll even admit that Project Vanguard might well have succeeded if it had been given anything like the chance it should have had. But let's not decide that any one group shall rule until we know more.

The Army has been "being made" obsolete for some 2000 years now—by everything from the catapult to the guided missile. But it won't lie down and die. As I wrote some time ago (*It's Your Atomic Age*, Abelard Press, 1951), "No method of eliminating the foot-soldier has done more than increase the number of foot-soldiers per battle. Perhaps space travel and combat in space will eliminate the infantry—but it seems more probable that some Army genius will invent a new race of infantrymen capable of breathing in a pure vacuum and walking around comfortably on nothing!"

As long as the Army is still faced with the fundamental job of controlling the land, it must be able to check any form of invasion

and retaliate against such invasion; in an age of intercontinental missiles, that means it must deal with them. It was entirely natural then that the Army should have leaped into the research work on rocketry more rapidly than other services; its duty demanded that. And it might also be remembered that such massive land operations as the building, supplying and launching of a ship from land to space (over ocean and through air, but not necessarily more than in passing) ties in very neatly to Army skills. To rule the Army out of space without prolonged study is hardly wise.

On the other hand, space itself offers very little immediate advantage to any Armed Service beyond observation. Rockets are tied in with missiles now—but it's just as valid to tie motor cars in with tanks. Space is fundamentally most important to science—and the men who must develop the systems to put us there are mostly scientists and engineers.

It's not too early to begin considering what group must finally control our space effort. But the study must be a thorough one. Whether the Army, Navy, Air Force or some civilian group (in keeping with our basic traditions) gains ultimate control, we need some responsible, capable and flexible group who can take over and see that the job of getting into space is done and done properly. We've had enough of flying off in all directions with more attention to

the arguments about *who* than the thought of *where*.

Until we get that, it hardly seems that there's much chance of bringing all ideas and all the best brains together, though this is surely the best way for us to catch up with Russia. After all, that country made its first success by putting the best minds on the subject together (under their Academy of Sciences, which is itself naturally a branch of the government) and giving them full-speed-ahead orders.

And once we're ready to put our own house in order, perhaps we can turn to the extremely urgent job of deciding on the rule of space among the various nations which will be going out into space.

At the moment, by a streak of remarkably good luck, this has been temporarily cared for. The International Geophysical Year is organized internationally in fact as well as in title. Since both Russia and the United States are nominally sending up satellites as an official part of this program, all space activities fall within this international jurisdiction. The fifty-odd cooperating countries have waived all matters of space law for the moment, and the satellites are cruising over boundaries without any argument. But this is only a temporary situation. The IGY comes to an official end in the middle of 1958.

Of course, the ideal solution might be to have the IGY simply declare an extension of their program—letting everything but the

space studies lapse, but continuing at least nominal control there. Then, as the decades passed under such an extension of the Year—semantically not any more confusing than many other historical cases—the precedent already established would eventually become firmly set, and there would be the IGY as a truly international governing body for all space. It would be both the easiest and the most nearly ideal solution.

But history indicates that simple solutions are seldom chosen, perhaps because they offer so little chance for the palaver and the chest-beating that mankind has an instinct for, along with other anthropoids. Probably the IGY will run to its end and stop, leaving everything in chaos. What then?

Well, there is no clear legal definition of how high the boundaries of a country reach. We know that they do reach upwards, since air rights over a country are matters of established custom. If a plane crosses a boundary into another country without permission, it can be shot down at once. The air belongs to the nation under it. So far, this ownership has been construed to reach as high as any plane flying over it may go, but we have no clear limit.

Nor do we have any rule that says rights stop at the end of the atmosphere. There is nothing to prevent any country from claiming rights out to infinity and acting upon that claim by bombing any-

thing out of its skies. For that matter, it's impossible to say exactly where the atmosphere ends; the aurora is an atmospheric phenomenon, and it reaches to a height of some six hundred miles! Above that, there must be a few molecules drifting about. There is no boundary, but only a gradual change.

Suppose we simply drift along into the future. We have space stations (which can be confined to one country only when put into an orbit 22,000 miles out, where circum-rotation once each 24 hours matches the Earth's own rotation). Let's say Russia has a station some 500 miles up, manned with a group of scientists. Now, a medium-sized country we'll call Hyborea is having a tiff with Russia at the UN about something. Meantime, a tiny country we'll call Graustark is screaming at all those satellites passing overhead—mostly because Graustark can't even build rockets on her budget. Well, Hyborea has a fine supply of United States super-range, atomic-warhead missiles, as part of a defense alliance with us. So Hyborea makes a sub-rosa suggestion to Graustark.

Graustark signs a trade-agreement with Hyborea, which somehow just happens to include a mutual defense pact under which Graustark will be given training by Hyborean-hired technicians. Hyborea gets the right to conduct maneuvers on Graustark territory.

While conducting such maneuvers, Graustark suddenly finds that

the Russian space station is going to be directly over her territory in three days. She issues an ultimatum to Russia demanding that Russia not invade her territory—the space over her—at the risk of any invading craft being shot down. (There might be a hint that passage right could be bought, of course.) Anyhow, Russia can't turn the station, and pays little attention to it all. So Graustark appeals under the mutual defense pact to Hyborea—who happily is conducting missile tests on Graustark at the time—and Hyborea solemnly agrees to keep its word. At the proper time, as the station "invades" the space over Graustark, a U. S.-made missile is launched from Graustark by Hyborea, using hired French technicians. It hits the space station, causing an explosion there that slows the station into a falling orbit. The station comes down out of control, only partly burning up. It lands in the middle of Manhattan, kills 713 people, does a billion-plus dollars damage, etc.

What are the legal penalties? Well, Graustark was acting legally—she was clearly invaded. Hyborea was only living up to her pact with Graustark. The United States and France were not responsible for what was done with their missiles and technicians. Who is at fault, anyhow?

Simple. Russia is. She's responsible for the damage to the United States and should pay for it. Or she can even be accused of invad-

ing the United States if one man of military status is somehow still alive on the wrecked station before it lands.

That is a very highly simplified example of what might happen. In real life, things have many more sub-currents. Any one of these could result in almost any country involved declaring war and the others being in such a muddled mix-up that they couldn't back down. In the first launching of war missiles, a lot of other countries would be crossed by the missiles and could logically decide to avenge this insult to their national honor!

These complications arising from space flight were foreseen long before the first successful satellite. I have before me a paper dated 1953, entitled *Air Law and Space* by Prince Welf Heinrich of Hanover—a thesis for his doctorate of laws. Another, *Space Law—The Development of Jurisdictional Concepts*, by Andrew G. Haley, General Council of the American Rocket Society, was presented in 1957 at the 8th Annual Congress of the International Astronautical Federation in Barcelona. And finally, a late one by Andrew G. Haley and John Cobb Cooper, is revealingly entitled *The Russian Satellite*. In these (the last two published by the American Rocket Society), there is an extensive list of references to papers delivered over a great many years on the subject of space law.

The subject has been discussed

before Disarmament Conferences, before the United Nations, and wherever possible. Many very capable men have been aware of the coming age of space and have tried to resolve some of the problems in advance.

Space Law, by Haley, sets forth the basic proposal that seemed most logical before the flight of Sputnik. Very briefly, this suggests that the "air space" above nations be limited to a zone of about 300 miles in height, known as contiguous space. This, it was felt, was the minimum height at which a true satellite could operate, since below that air would retard its speed; while this height would offer the maximum height for all craft which gained lift or support from the air, such as airplanes. Contiguous space would fall into the rule of national sovereignty, with legal rules similar to those pertaining to the flight of normal aircraft. Beyond that, true space would be international, with no country having the right to restrict passage through it.

Interestingly enough this paper also proposes what I consider a remarkable law for problems that may arise from our future contact with other non-human races, where what we like may not apply. In this version of the Golden Rule, Dr. Haley suggests that we must do unto others as *they* would have done unto *them*. Science fiction writers and readers obviously have no monopoly on mental flexibility

and awareness of the future! I think he has proposed the best possible rule here.

But getting back to space law—the whole concept received a severe jolt from the flight of Sputnik, since the first satellite's flight indicated that space craft could operate well below the proposed 300 mile level. At the moment, it's a little hard to set up even a satisfactory arbitrary zone of demarcation between true space and contiguous space.

Nevertheless, there is a body of theory well enough worked out that it should be entirely possible for some agency to formulate a satisfactory law to govern space. While the exact height of the "contiguous space" may be in some doubt (probably soon to be settled by further satellite work), most of the other details have been settled in theory. Such things as the right of passage through contiguous space by a peaceful launching or return of a spaceship have been taken care of, for instance.

All that would seem necessary is for a conference at which the nations could agree, perhaps making the exact height tentative, to be subject to later revision. This would have seemed easier to do before any satellite was up, when no nation had any vested interest in space. But nothing was done.

We have a precedent for that, too. International law as applied to the oceans was developed long after men first began building

powerful navies and merchant fleets that could go anywhere.

But this is a precedent that must not hold good. *Laissez faire* won't work, even when backed up by a strong nation. There are no strong nations today, when defensive power is compared to offensive; and in the near future, the situation may well get worse. There must be some working arrangement made before anything can get badly out of hand.

This, of course, relates primarily to satellites. In the case of true spaceships, making passage to the moon or to other planets, the legal situation seems just as unsatisfactory, but the actuality is simplified by another factor. Effectively, it's a pretty good rule that anything is international which cannot be policed by any nation. This is not a matter of legal concern, but of common sense. It does no good to post a "Keep Off" sign unless you can make sure there are enough men around with power to back it up. It's useless to claim sovereignty over anything which you can't get out to protect.

There's a man in Chicago, for instance, who staked out a claim on space. He went through some elaborate rigmarole about it to make it legal—at least in his eyes. So when Sputnik went up, he cabled a strong protest to Russia. So far as I know, he never got a satisfactory reply. But the claim would have had some kind of validity if he'd been in a position to send his

troops up and knock Sputnik aside, or build a pound out in space in which to hold Laika from Sputnik II. At least, in that case, his efforts would have received very serious consideration.

Without power to implement claim, possession is merely obsession. The power may be your own, or it may be loaned to you by your government, but it *has* to be there.

Up to a certain distance—the distance at which land-based missiles from below are effective, probably—space will be only as international as tight agreements can make it. Beyond that limit, it will automatically become international.

Any government can stake out the whole moon on the first trip. But no government can adequately police every square mile of it to prevent others from setting up bases. If any government could—assuming cheap and common rockets which we won't have until this has all been settled—it still would not pay. Who can hope to get enough out of any planet in its early development to pay for 1% of the manpower it would require to protect it from invasion?

So we can assume that up to some limited height—from twenty to three hundred miles—the air-space is national; again, beyond a certain distance where national control can be exercised, space will necessarily be international.

But that still leaves us a zone of uncertainty, where anything might happen. Here is where we will put

our observation satellites to study the world below by television and our manned space stations for work, for spying perhaps, and conceivably for an attempt to build up a space arsenal of missiles. It's this zone of uncertainty that needs some fast and decisive agreement among nations to prevent what might be a sordid mess, indeed! Before we put any manned satellites up, at least, some working arrangement had better be made. And that doesn't leave us much time!

It's also in this narrow zone that the hopes and fears of many people have been placed. It's about this small zone that most of the shallow thinking in science fiction and out of it seems to center. Here, suddenly, rule no longer means to establish an order of rules, but rather to control.

"Who rules space, rules the Earth!"

How often have you heard this? It has been used to justify nearly everything. And the pattern can be stated fairly simply, since it has been used so often.

Basically, the idea is that any nation which gets a satellite up capable of holding a few people and a lot of missiles will be able to lay down the law to the whole world. It will prevent any other nation from building a space station, will ground all the rest of Earth, and will sit up there spying out any hostile movement, ready to enforce a Pax Vacuo below. We can have dictators like none before,

or we can have a wonderful world where (before Sputnik, as the stories went) the U. N. will enforce the millennium of happiness on all, and no little backward nation will even resent it!

Since Sputnik, the picture is a little grimmer, it seems; and many who don't like grim pictures are not really talking about it now—just shuddering quietly. It now might be possible for Russia to get that first working station up, and what would poor us-uns do then, poor things?

The whole idea is an easy fallacy to accept. I swallowed it myself, at first. Sure, who rules space rules the Earth. Simple, obvious—and damned nonsense. It's one of the purely mechanistic ideas that completely overlooks all factors but one, and that one is incomplete.

Granted, bombs could be put up there. With hydrogen warheads in space missiles, based in a space platform that could observe the Earth and fire at the first sign of trouble, there could be enough rapid striking power to annihilate all opponents and to wreck any other station before it could be assembled to the point of usefulness.

That's the mechanical part of it all that makes a convincing picture. As I indicated, it isn't even mechanically complete. It also leaves out all the other factors that govern mankind's living together.

Because of these human elements, the fact that the station

could prevent any other station being built has no real meaning. In theory, once we had the A-bomb, we could have prevented any other country getting one, too. All we had to do was to go out at once in high-flying planes from whatever base we could use and bomb the big cities of every other country. It would have disorganized things too much for any other program of atomic bomb building for quite a while.

Of course, it wouldn't have worked, because we'd have gotten hurt trying it. (I don't know whether ethics would have prevented our doing so, and don't care. Ethics have a habit of somehow relating to practicality in the long run.) We'd have had to face the united fury of the world, and without bombs to help them, they still could have hurt us too much. We couldn't wantonly declare war on the world.

Neither can we do so from a space station. Whether space is international or not, the station can safely be considered to be property of the nation building it. To attack it with missiles—after warning or not—will constitute a clear act of aggression as viewed by the rest of the world. (We would have to be given the world's consent to sole ownership of space to have the right to blast others out, and we won't get that.) Even our closest allies would never stand for that—because they couldn't risk letting any single nation achieve that much

control. The wrecking of another station would only be done if we were ready to go ahead and wipe out the entire nation that tried to build it—and probably many others as well. We can't afford it—enough H-bombs to do it might wipe us out through contamination, if we could even hope to achieve such destruction.

This will be clearly apparent to other nations. And since they'll know we won't blast away stations they may try to build, there will be other stations put up. Once there are several, there is no longer any more chance of using stations to rule than there now is of using H-bombs here below to rule.

Even mechanically, the picture isn't as simple as it seems. We completely overlook the fact that the station itself must be vulnerable. It cannot carry as much power as the whole Earth below. And it must operate on a fixed orbit, easily predicted in advance. It can attack the Earth—but at the first sign of attack, it will itself be blasted out of existence. If the first bomb does not get it—and it's going to be a pushover, lacking any heavy armor—the next ones will. The moment it fires at Earth, it is doomed—and it may never even be able to guess what nation decided to pick it off at the first excuse.

After all, when the day comes that we can build ships to carry up the parts to build such a station, then the day will have arrived when it's simple to build hydrogen-

warhead rockets to reach the station.

It's hard to find how a stock of missiles aboard a space station can have any military value at all. And the expense of getting them into space and maintaining them, the task of building rockets to move them, etc., are all so much greater than building them for a ground take-off that they would be only expensive, useless toys. Aside from some rather silly idea of shaking a big stick for the first few months after the station is built—at the risk of a lot of bad will and no results—it would be pointless to put military missiles into space.

It seems possible—though human beings in specialized professions of any sort being what they are, not necessarily probable—that we'll never bother building a space arsenal. If we do try it, or if any other nation tries it, it will be only a tiny added bit of hell that can menace us along with the horrors of ICBM's beyond what we now dream. The Earth must fear rockets, but only rockets from Earth itself.

Of course, there remains the missile that is from a fixed base on Earth, and which penetrates space briefly on its way to the enemy. This, however, has nothing to do with the true rule of space. It's like saying that who rules the air rules Earth when we mean that anyone who can fire enough arrows can rule.

Space power—in the sense of military power based in space,

rather than simply passing briefly through it—is a meaningless noise. For the amount of results it can achieve, it will remain hundreds of times as expensive as any other means. And any practical military man is going to recognize this and use his appropriations to increase his effective power to strike where he can get the most for it.

It is probably the basic awareness of this which has created some of the official lethargy about space. The Services are busy with their guided missiles, but they've given comparatively little attention to true space flight. It isn't practical, even when achieved, from their point of view. Russia has devoted more work to it, because of its tremendous propaganda value in proving that she is forging ahead. She got her money's worth, but we could not have done as much; there would have been no shock value had we been first, as there was when she beat us. (Of course, in the long run, our loss in propaganda was tremendous; but this is a negative, not a positive, value, and harder to anticipate and spend for.) A few civilians, like Dr. von Braun, have retained a wider vision than military power—but that isn't the business of the Services; we're lucky for the few effective space pioneers we have.

Of course, a space station would have some military value—as a spy. From such a platform in space, we could locate hostile movements, lo-

cate valuable striking places, etc. We could ship this news down to the ground where it could be used, if necessary. Since this would be done before hostilities, bombing the station for such spying would be a tipoff, and hence useless.

But in the long run, this will lessen the likelihood of any future decisive military blows, and act to some extent as a deterrent to war. Rather than acting as a means of gaining control or rule of the world, it will make it harder—and also less necessary—for any nation to try to achieve rule. Let us consider that maybe who rules space will reduce the thoughts of ruling Earth.

Or, perhaps in one sense, the idea of the rule of space being synonymous with the rule of Earth makes some sense. No nation will rule space—beyond the limited area of airspace, or contiguous space, where rule will become less valuable anyhow. But an abstraction will rule it. Science is the only thing that can logically gain any immediate great value, or any long range lasting power, from space. Science—the use of organized knowledge to gain more knowledge—not scientists. To get there, to stay there, and to utilize what is found in space, science must rule.

Perhaps through the increase and added value of such science, the influence of science on Earth will increase and deepen. Perhaps we'll learn to think in terms suitable to the age, and to some extent to rule

ourselves below in keeping with the international abstraction of science above.

I suspect that the first few years of the space age are going to be rough ones for all of us, from internal and external stresses. But in the long run, space will create its

own answers. I believe those answers are going to be good ones.

Who rules space, after the first trying years, doesn't really matter. In this case, and against all military tradition, it is far more important to occupy the territory than to rule it!

SPACE AGE'S PIED PIPER

THE RACE INTO SPACE is obviously only in its initial stages. The 30.8 pound Explorer must be succeeded by heavier satellites. The United States Army has stated, unofficially, that it could launch a 500 pound reconnaissance satellite within a year. Sputnik II weighed 1,118 pounds. And we are working on a satellite that will weigh a ton or more and be boosted into space with multistage engines having up to one million pounds of thrust.

This is the Pied Piper.

A top Air Force officer has referred to it as a "fighting satellite," implying that it has considerable military value and can be developed into a missile-shooting platform. While the wish may here be father to the thought, the military potentiality of a satellite of this size is obvious, a potentiality forecast, it will be recalled, by Field Marshal Viscount Montgomery in a lecture several years ago,— "The military requirement is that a large unmanned satellite could contain television, photographic and communication equipment. The satellite could look down on any desired area several times in each twenty-four hours. The information thus gained would depend on the state of development of radar, visual optics and television technology. The pictures taken would be automatically developed and sent back to earth by radio."

Work has been pushed on this reconnaissance satellite for close to three years, but launching is still at least another two years off. The project has priority for materials and, according to one newspaper story, better scientific "brains" than those working on the Thor, Atlas or Titan ballistic missiles. The project is being directed by Air Force ballistic missile officers under tight security rules.

Pied Piper is described as a "fighting satellite." Whoever wins the race to get their reconnaissance satellite into the air will obviously, as Del Rey has pointed out, be in a strategically important position. A civilian scientist is quoted as pointing out, however, that these satellites may also "force peace on the world," removing as they would the previous element of surprise in some military actions. Here, of course, is the ultimate potentiality, anticipated by SF writers for the past decade.

there's
always
tomorrow

by . . . *Eric Frank Russell*

They'd lived only for the moment, learning nothing from the past and caring nothing for the future....

"GOOD NIGHT, Bateson," said Miss Helm pleasantly. Flashing her usual smile she passed through the door he was holding open for her.

"Good night, Miss Helm." He watched her skip dexterously down the many steps to the street. Nice girl. Not dry and spinsterish like some secretaries in their early forties.

She always had a bright look and a kind word for the oldster at the door.

"'Night, Bateson," snapped Mr. Collister in his abrupt military manner.

"Good night, sir."

Collister descended the steps slowly, deliberately, like one eternally preoccupied with the preservation of dignity. It had been said out of his hearing that he had strolled that way across the Elbe while under fire from a German Marine Fusilier company. The story was true. He had the scars to prove it.

"Good night, Bateson," gasped portly little Mr. Dean. Rushing down the steps he passed Collister and continued along the road at a sharp dog-trot. Everyone knew he was doomed to miss his bus by

Eric Frank Russell returns after much too long an absence with this story of men, working in the past, for whom the world changes—suddenly and with a soft finality. There is perhaps reason to ask how we would behave, if we were Albert Bateson, staring across flaming roofs toward the horizon.

three minutes. Invariably he missed it but never ceased to hope.

The others followed in quick succession, fourteen of them. That left only Mr. Darrow, the curator-in-chief.

Closing the doors slowly, Bateson trudged across the museum's great hall, his footsteps echoing through the emptiness. Going along a gloomy corridor lined with glass cases, he reached the brightly lit office at the end.

"Ah, good evening, Bateson." Darrow glanced up from his desk on which lay a couple of heavy books, a note-pad and several lumps of corroded metal. "Has everyone gone?"

"Yes, sir," said Bateson. "Everyone."

"Then I suppose it's time I finished." Darrow sighed, gazed lovingly at a piece of junk that wore a thick patina of verdigris. "I'd like to carry on with this job. It is very interesting. Yes, Bateson, most absorbing." He stood up, placed the books on a nearby shelf, took his hat from its hook. "Oh, well, there's always tomorrow."

"Yes, sir," approved Bateson. "There's always tomorrow."

"We weren't so sure about that once, were we, Bateson?"

"No, sir."

"Nobody dared bet on anything when the air-raid alarms sounded. But all that is over. It's nice to know the sun will rise again. I often wonder whether people properly appreciate the fact." He poked

a distorted hunk of metal, added, "They didn't."

"No, sir?"

"No, Bateson. They learned nothing from the past and cared nothing for the future. They lived only for the immediate moment." His head wagged in sorrowful reproof. "A pity."

"Yes, sir," agreed Bateson.

"Well, good night."

"Good night, sir."

Putting on his hat, Darrow took his small leather case and departed. Bateson remained looking dumbly at the exhibits on the desk and wondering who *they* had been. The distant slam of the front door brought him out of his reverie. Switching off the office light, he commenced his nightly patrol.

He was accustomed to the loneliness and boredom of night-watch. The job had its compensations. It involved no great physical or mental strain and was suitable for an elderly veteran willing to sleep daytimes. And he was lucky in having charge of a big museum. Not so far away brother watchmen in banks and stores had been laid out by thugs but nobody ever broke into a museum.

All the same he made his rounds conscientiously, going over the entire building once per hour and spending the rest of the time in his cubby-hole where he had an easy chair, an electric radiator, a radio and a bubbling percolator. Some parts of the museum he liked, some

he detested. He tended to hang around in the former, hurry through the latter.

The Bone Room, as he called it, gave him the creeps. It was long, dark, cold and unfriendly. Right in the middle of it stood a full-scale plaster replica of the framework of a monster named *Tyrannosaurus Rex*. Around the sides real skeletons posed in glassy coffins. They ranged from those of small birds and tiny lizards to that of a huge gorilla with brooding eye-sockets.

By way of complete contrast was the Jade Room, the place he loved best. It had bright, joyful lights and its cases were filled with beauty. There was a Goddess of Mercy delicately carved in smoke crystal, a polished jewel-box of lapis-lazuli, a contemplative toad of sparkling amethyst. There was a dainty teapot with a humming-bird spout, a peach-branch handle and peach blossoms spreading all over it, the whole thing carved from one solid slab of water-clear crystal.

And the jade! A leaping salmon craftily fashioned from muttonfat jade, a magnificent fruit-bowl of spinach jade, a spice-jar of mauve jade, a finger-bowl of cinnamon jade, the Sacred Hill complete with paths, caves and trees wonderfully cut from one great hunk of apple jade. There was every possible color and shade of jade excepting black.

It was while he was in the Jade Room gloating over the peach-blos-

som teapot that slowly the object of his affection turned pale pink. The phenomenon passed by unnoticed at first. His mind was pondering the patient, painstaking craftsmanship needed to produce masterpieces like these and he was philosophizing that such work came naturally only to a timeless, unhurried people confident that tomorrow would be followed by a million more tomorrows.

Then he saw the pinkness. The Goddess of Mercy was faintly touched with pink. So were the glass cases, so was the whole room. He turned around, puzzled. Pinkness poured in through the windows from a strangely rose-hued sky.

He glanced at his watch. It said 10:30—far too late for an exceptional afterglow of sunset. The sky should be pitch-dark by now.

Filled with vague alarm he went to the nearest window and looked out. For as far as he could see the sky was uniformly illuminated in pale rose. Maybe there was a fire somewhere, perhaps in those huge warehouses down by the docks. If so, it must be a big one, just about the biggest blaze in history.

But down in the street there was no visible excitement. Cars and buses rolled along, their shiny rooftops reflecting the pink sky. A few pedestrians went by and none of them were running. Above and beyond the opposite roofs shone the flickering gleam of hidden neon-signs, their nightly sharpness

dulled by the pink radiance from on high.

Across the road the great marble library was limned in pink. To the right the municipal cemetery was full of pink slabstones, pink crosses and pink angels. It was like looking at the world through rose-colored glasses.

The sight should have been a pretty one. Instead, he found it frightening. It was contrary to natural law and that is the prime source of horror.

Hastening to his little room, he turned on the radio. It responded with a violin solo. Fiddling while Rome burns, he thought. He switched to another station, got the noisiest portion of a noisy play. For fifteen minutes he sought right across the dial, picked up not a word about the glowing sky. Oh, well, perhaps they'd explain it while giving the midnight news.

He settled himself in his chair and tried to read but could not concentrate. Again and again his mind came back to the fact that the sky should not shine at night. After a while he plodded upstairs to the Egyptian Room which was right at the top of the building. From there he got a better view. The world was still pink. Descending, he opened the front door and waited there until Police Officer Hegarty arrived.

Hegarty said, "Admiring the view, Albert?"

"Can't help looking," Bateson

admitted. "I've never seen anything like it."

He stood aside, let the other through, carefully closed the door. Hegarty headed straight for the cubby-hole, eyed the rumbling percolator with approval.

Pouring him a cup of coffee, Bateson asked, "What is it?—a big fire?"

"No. That's what I thought at first but the fire depot said no alarms had been turned in. So I phoned headquarters." Hegarty blew hard on his coffee and took a sip. "They said that the local observatory thinks it's a freak effect caused by a cloud of meteoric dust at a great height."

"They only think it's that. They don't know for sure."

"Darn it, Albert," objected Hegarty, "they can't be expected to know everything. But they ought to guess better than anyone else of us."

"Maybe." Bateson fidgeted restlessly, went on, "All the same, I don't like it. I've a funny feeling that something extraordinary has happened or is about to happen."

"Why?"

"Because the world is still turning and the more it turns the farther we move into the night-side. The sky ought to grow darker. It isn't darkening. In fact it seems to have gone slightly brighter this last half-hour."

"What, if this pink strata is a million miles away?" scoffed Hegarty. "The stars don't go dark,

do they? The later the hour, the brighter they shine."

"That's true," conceded Bateson with some reluctance.

Hegarty eyed him speculatively. "Just what's on your mind, Albert?"

After a little hesitation, Bateson said, "There's been an awful lot of stuff in the papers about the danger of radio-active fall-out. It seems to be worrying a lot of clever scientists and they know more about it than do the likes of us."

"So?"

"How do we know somebody hasn't set off a jumbo bomb somewhere? How do we know we're not sitting under its cloud right now? How do we know our days and hours aren't numbered?"

"I've never heard that a fall-out creates a great pink glow," said Hegarty. "And in any case it would have been detected, there'd have been warnings given over the radio and by now the entire town would be scoting into the country." He waved a careless hand toward the street. "Take a look out there. You'll find nobody racing for his life."

"If the cloud is big enough to cover a country, or a continent, or half a world there'd be no point in letting the radio create a wide-spread panic," Bateson persisted. "A thousand million people can't rush round to the other side of the planet."

"They could take cover," Hegarty retorted. "Even a sheet of

brown paper is protection of a sort." He finished his coffee, added, "You spend too much of the night alone with your imagination, Albert. A man like you needs company. Thanks for the coffee. I'll drop in again at four ayem."

He went out, stood on the sidewalk while behind him Bateson closed and locked the door. Slowly he surveyed the sky. Yes, it did look eerie and held promise of something that caused a peculiar coldness in his back hairs. Strange that a mere layer of dust could make people uncomfortable, apprehensive.

"Of dust art thou made and to the dust shalt thou return."

Shrugging aside the gloomy thought, Police Officer Hegarty resumed his patrol. He paced along one side of the pink and silent cemetery and carefully refrained from looking into it.

At twenty minutes to midnight Bateson found himself delaying his progress through the Oriental Section. Curiosity urged him to go up to the Egyptian Room and view the outside scene, foreboding insisted that he should postpone the sight. For five minutes he stared at a polished hardwood god with an elephant's trunk and eight arms. To western eyes the god's pose was somewhat obscene. Nearby were other gods equally grotesque, all holding power of life and death over their true believers.

Mooching unwillingly toward

the door, he stopped and flicked the prayer-wheel standing on an adjacent table. It spun round and round, its ribbons fluttering. *Om mane padme om . . . Om mane padme om.* For many centuries similar prayer-wheels had been turning in their millions, some rotated by hand, some by the wind. Darrow had told him with unconcealed cynicism that the most modern ones were spun by fractional horsepower motors, thus speeding up the moment when Destiny would be fulfilled.

In a world full of faiths and gods there had to be a real basis somewhere. Perhaps his idle play with the prayer-wheel had added its tiny quota to the count toward a potent total when, with a mighty clash of cymbals, all would become known. He betrayed a touch of defiance as he flicked the wheel again. *Om mane padme om.*

Eventually he trudged upstairs and stood by a window. The sky wasn't pink any more. It had deepened to blood-red. For as far as the eye could see the entire vault of the heavens was of the same warning hue. Not a star was visible, not a glimpse of the pale moon. Underneath, the town sprawled blood-red in its slumbers. A police cruiser rolled redly along the red and deserted street. A crimson cat crouched close to the library wall.

Miss Helm would be abed by now, her evening's knitting lying on a chair and waiting further at-

tention on the morrow. Collister would be practising his breathing exercises before going to sleep. Dean would be reposing wide awake and battling with tomorrow's problems while, elsewhere, Darrow snored with an open book still in his hands. Not so far away Hegarty was pounding his beat, testing doors and windows and longing for the dawn that heralded tomorrow. The blood-red world was carrying on as usual without caring what its color.

Bateson's vague apprehension boosted itself to a curious mixture of awe and fear. Removing his gaze from the window, he examined the Egyptian Room. In the center of the floor, the place of honor, lay a sarcophagus. It contained the mummy of someone. Darrow once had mentioned, Seti I or Seti II or some name like that. The golden face on its ornate lid usually looked serene. Now, in this weird light, it bore an expression of sinister triumph.

To one side of the great casket stood a hawk-headed god holding a long, slender rod. On the other side posed a jackal-headed one grasping an ankh. Both these deities had eyes of polished agate that caught the redness from the windows and lent them baleful stares.

More gods, thought Bateson. More blind faith, more everlasting search for an ultimate truth that never would be revealed.

He moved back to the window,

the passing of his shadow creating a lifelike flicker in the eyes of the jackal-headed Anubis, Keeper of Souls, Guardian of the Dead, God of the Netherworld. The sky held a fearful fascination for Bateson in much the same way that the distant sparkle of exploding anti-aircraft shells had transfixed the victims of a coming blitz. He stared across flaming roofs toward the flaming horizon and became aware of still another phenomenon.

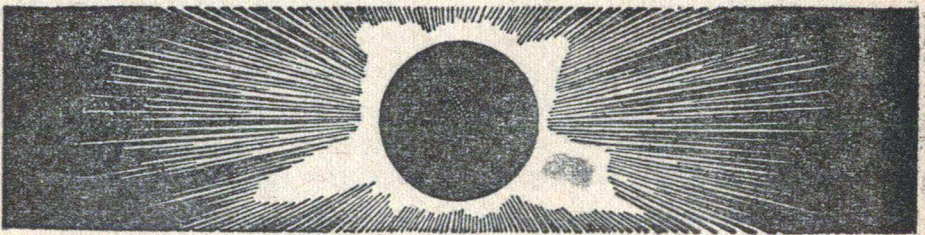
Slowly growing into the overhead redness was an arch of bright primrose. It widened as he watched, strengthened in color, became a great golden rainbow. Then with equal slowness there appeared above and beyond the hoop of gold two great peaks of whiteness that scintillated like twin auroras.

Something was about to happen.

He knew it as surely as he knew that Friday follows Thursday. The certainty of it paralyzed him. His stomach went taut, cold beads crept down his spine, his feet seemed fastened to the floor.

A long, sonorous note emanated from the golden ring and awoke the Earth from pole to pole. There were upheavals in the cemetery and monuments fell over. Behind him Bateson could hear the grinding rasp of the sarcophagus lid being pushed aside but still he could not budge an inch.

The white peaks of angel wings shifted and the golden ring fell below the horizon as Gabriel lowered his trumpet. Albert Bateson and the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Favorite of the Sun-God Ra, Lord of the Nile, stood silently to attention—waiting for their names to be called.



SPACE MEN AND SCIENCE FICTION

JOHN PITT, in an article on "Space Messages" in the March 1957 issue of James W. Moseley's *Saucer News*, raised the interesting possibility that the extraterrestrials reported visiting these shores in *Flying Saucers* may be avid Science Fiction readers. "Another remarkable attribute of 'Space-men,'" he wrote, "is their ability to digest and to plagiarize novel ideas from Terrestrial Science Fiction periodicals."

Subscription Department please note.

operation peanut butter

by . . . Robert F. Young

He had never expected to see anyone quite so wonderful as Mr. Wings, or anyone quite so beautiful as Sally Sunbeam. . . .

THE drought came early that year and crouched grimly above the valley. It hunched its hazy shoulders against the sky and frightened away the thunderheads that tried to build up over the surrounding hills. It blew its hot breath over the fields and the forests, and the leaves of the trees turned yellow and the grass became a sickly brown. Crops withered and began to die, and the valley people had pain in their eyes when they looked out over their barren land.

It was a summer the valley people remembered for the rest of their days. Geoffrey remembered it too, but for a different reason. He remembered it not as the summer of the Great Drought, but as the summer of Mr. Wings. But most of all, he remembered it as the summer of Sally Sunbeam . . .

He had just turned seven when school let out that year. He was a small boy with light brown hair it was a waste of time to put a comb to, and big brown eyes that seemed intent on absorbing the whole world. Like most small boys—and many large ones—he liked to go fishing.

He liked to get up early morn-

Fantasy is a much abused word, and there are times when you suspect that the word has come to have a catch-all quality, embracing as it now does everything from the occult to vampires and witches. Here, then, by way of contrast, is a gentler variant, an echo of perhaps more innocent times.

ings and pack a lunch of peanut butter sandwiches, then take his home-made hickory pole and his can of bait, and meander into the woods that fringed his father's farm. There was a talkative brook, not far away, that wound beneath a canopy of willows, and there was a particular willow beneath which he always sat, and fished and watched the ripples. When noon came he would open his little green lunch box and eat his peanut butter sandwiches, and then lie back and look at the jigsaw pieces of the sky that showed through the leafy patterns of the willows, and try to put the pieces together.

Once in a while, he caught a fish, but never a big enough one to take home and have for supper, just big enough to look at and wonder about and then throw back in the water. But catching fish was only part of the fun—the smallest part.

The woods, to Geoffrey, were a magic place where almost anything could happen. It wouldn't have surprised him one bit if Hansel and Gretel had sneaked up behind him and said "Boo!" in his ear, or if Rose Red had popped her pretty face out of the underbrush on the opposite bank and said "Hello." In fact, he momentarily expected something of the sort to happen.

But just the same, though, he never expected the thing to happen that *did* happen. He never expected to see anyone quite so wonderful as Mr. Wings, or anyone

quite so beautiful as Sally Sunbeam . . .

"Mr. Wings" and "Sally Sunbeam" were his own names for them, of course. He never thought to ask them their real names, and apparently they never thought to tell him. "Mr. Wings" and "Sally Sunbeam" fitted so well anyway, there wouldn't have been any point in asking.

At first he thought Mr. Wings was a bird. It was noon, and he'd just taken the first bite of one of his peanut butter sandwiches, when suddenly there was a silvery blur of wings over the brook, accompanied by a soft humming sound, and a moment later he felt the pressure of tiny feet on his shoulder. When he turned his head, there was Mr. Wings.

Mr. Wings *could* have been a bird. He wasn't any bigger than one, and in many ways he looked like one. His gray eyes, for instance, were so wide apart they were partly on the sides of his head, and his hair was more like feathers than hair; and not only that, fine down the color of moonlight grew all over his body. His chest was bird-like too, coming to a point in front instead of being flat like a human's, and his fingers and his toes were real long—probably from gripping boughs and fence wires.

The rest of him was human enough, though (except for his gossamer wings, of course, and

they were more butterfly- than bird-like); he had a long straight nose and a firm mouth and chin; his shoulders were broad, his hips narrow, and his legs lithe and muscular. But the word "human" never entered Geoffrey's mind. Mr. Wings was a genuine, honest-to-God pixie, and that was all there was to it.

There was a brief silence. Then: "Hello," Mr. Wings said softly, without moving his lips. "You're Geoffrey, aren't you?"

Geoffrey didn't consider it at all remarkable that Mr. Wings should know his name. After all, Mr. Wings was a pixie, and pixies knew just about everything. He nodded. "Yes sir," he said. Then, seeing the wistful way Mr. Wings was eyeing the peanut butter sandwich, Geoffrey did the most natural thing in the world. He broke the sandwich in two and gave Mr. Wings half.

Mr. Wings accepted it eagerly. It was the biggest half and it had lots of peanut butter on it. However, he did not, as Geoffrey had expected, take a bite. Instead, he gave a little kick with his feet, flew across the brook, and disappeared among the willows.

Geoffrey wasn't angry, though he was a little disappointed. He hoped Mr. Wings would come back, and after a while Mr. Wings did—minus the half a sandwich. This time he brought Sally Sunbeam with him. Mr. Wings perched on Geoffrey's left shoulder and Sally Sunbeam on his right. They

seemed tremendously excited about something.

Geoffrey had been able to take Mr. Wings in his stride, but Sally Sunbeam took his breath away. She was all gold, from her feathery golden hair to her tiny golden toenails. Her graceful body was all softness and curves, and the fine down covering it was like sun-mist. And blue eyes? Geoffrey could have sworn God had cut two little round pieces of azure out of the sky and slipped them beneath her feathery lashes, they were so blue.

After Mr. Wings had flown away, Geoffrey had started in on the second peanut butter sandwich. He'd already taken one bite, and he had it halfway to his mouth now, intending to take another. But when he saw the way Sally Sunbeam was looking at it, he did not take a bite after all, he gave it to her instead, the whole sandwich.

"Thank you," Sally Sunbeam said, and Geoffrey wondered how she and Mr. Wings could talk without opening their mouths. But her words were so sweet and so soft in his mind that the way she said them didn't seem very important. Then, a moment later, both she and Mr. Wings flew across the brook and into the willows, and he was left with other things to wonder about.

Where they had come from, for instance, and where they were going now; and, most important

of all, whether they'd be back or not—

He didn't think they'd be back today, and besides, he was hungry; so he wound his tackle around his hickory pole, picked up his bait can and his lunch box and started home. He could hardly wait to tell someone, and when he came to the south field where his father was cultivating the tomato plants, he ran along in the row beside the tractor till his father stopped at the end of the field and idled the motor and asked him what he wanted.

"Fairies!" Geoffrey shouted. "We've got fairies in our woods!"

"Humph!" his father said.

"Honest, Dad. I saw two of them!"

His father's thin face was burned from the sun and the wind, and sweat glistened on his forehead and cheeks. There were dark circles in under his eyes. "First thing you know, you'll be seeing Martians and flying saucers," he said. "Run along home now and give your mother a hand with the washing."

The tractor snorted and began to roar again, and Geoffrey had to step out of the way of the cultivator. He watched his father start down another row and he saw the dust rising from the dry cracked ground and the sickly tomato plants and the sweat-darkened back of his father's blue chambray shirt.

Presently, he headed for the house, remembering how it used to be with him and his father. His father used to pat him on the head

and ask him how the fish were biting and how many he'd caught, but he didn't any more. All his father did now was glower at the sky and say mean things to his mother.

Last summer his father had even gone fishing with him a few times, and once, while they were tramping through the woods, he had recited a poem about a Barefoot Boy. It was a long poem and Geoffrey had thought how smart his father must be to have remembered all of it. He wondered if his father still remembered it. He didn't think so. Something had happened to his father lately, and Geoffrey knew it was the drought.

When he came to the house he ran across the bleached grass to where his mother was hanging clothes in the summer wind. "Ma!" he shouted. "Ma! I saw two fairies in the woods!"

His mother took two clothespins out of the clothespin bag and secured one of his father's T shirts to the clothesline. "Now Jeff, you shouldn't tell such stories. Why, I'll bet you fell asleep and dreamed them!"

"But I didn't, Ma! Honest. I really saw them!"

His mother laughed. It was the laugh his father used to call her "summer laugh." Whenever she laughed that way, her pretty face got even prettier, and her eyes twinkled like tiny stars. The trouble was, she hardly ever laughed that way any more.

"Okay, okay," she said. "So you saw them. I see one myself right now—the good fairy who's going to help me with the rest of the washing . . . There's another basket of clothes on the backporch. Think you can carry it?"

He knew she didn't believe him for a minute. That was the way it was with grown-ups: they didn't believe in anything.

He gave a little sigh. "All right, Ma, I'll get it for you," he said.

Next morning he packed an extra peanut butter sandwich, just in case. He could hardly wait till noon came, he was so excited; in fact he didn't really wait, he opened his little green lunch box an hour ahead of time. He'd hardly got the cover off when there were two flurries of wings over the brook, and first thing he knew he had company for dinner.

Sally Sunbeam's eyes were more like pieces of the sky than ever. Geoffrey couldn't get over them. She smiled a soft little smile when he gave her a sandwich and she said "Thank you" again in her sweet, soundless voice. And then away she went, sandwich and all, a golden blur over the brook and among the willow branches. Mr. Wings said "Thank you" too, when Geoffrey gave *him* a sandwich, and then away *he* went, a silver blur; and then the sun was bright on the brook and there were bird calls everywhere, and the water ran in ripples like it always did, and the

fish didn't bite as usual, and the day was so common and ordinary that it was as though Mr. Wings and Sally Sunbeam hadn't come around at all. But they'd been around all right, Geoffrey knew. He had only one sandwich left, and he was sure he hadn't eaten the other two; and besides, there was no doubt in his mind, anyway, as to the reality of Mr. Wings and Sally Sunbeam, and their penchant for peanut butter sandwiches was the most natural thing in the world. The only thing he couldn't understand was their apparent reluctance to eat them in his presence.

But they probably had their reasons, he decided. Perhaps they were bashful; perhaps they didn't want him to think that fairies got hungry like everybody else and sometimes had to panhandle for their meals. Whatever their reasons were, Geoffrey was sure they were good ones, and he was content to let the matter rest, so long as he could keep on seeing Sally Sunbeam's eyes and hear her gentle voice.

And so the days drifted by, the hot summer days; the rainless summer days . . . His father's face got thinner and thinner, and his mother never smiled her summer smile at all any more; but every noon Mr. Wings and Sally Sunbeam flew down from the willows and perched upon his shoulders and impertuned him with their eyes, and then flew happily away with the sandwiches he gave them . . .

He kept wondering where *they*

went and one day he decided to investigate. He didn't think they flew very far; the weight of the sandwiches precluded that. Maybe if he walked a little ways into the woods beyond the brook he'd find their hiding place and be able to watch them eat from the concealment of the underbrush.

The brook had dwindled to a mere trickle in some places, and it was easy to jump across it. There were locusts beyond the willows, and then a medley of maples and oaks and beeches. The forest floor was littered with last year's leaves and they were so dry and crackly that he didn't think he could possibly catch Mr. Wings and Sally Sunbeam unawares. But just the same, he did. They were so preoccupied with what they were doing in the little clearing that they never even heard him at all when he came up and hid behind an oak tree and peeked around its shaggy trunk.

What they were doing was a sight to behold: They weren't eating the peanut butter sandwiches at all; they were scraping the peanut butter off the bread and feeding it into a tiny machine. There was a spiral of coils at the base of the machine, terminating in a minute spigot. Beneath the spigot was a can the size of Geoffrey's bait can. Ever so often, a dark brown globule would form at the opening of the spigot, then drop into the can, and whenever this happened, both Mr. Wings and Sally Sun-

beam did a little dance around the machine as though the most wonderful thing in the world had come to pass.

But the machine and its two exotic operators were the least surprising aspects of the scene. What really took Geoffrey's breath away was Mr. Wings' and Sally Sunbeam's house. He knew, of course, that fairies, being unusual creatures, virtually had to live in unusual houses. But this house was more than merely unusual: it was incomprehensible.

Why, there weren't even any windows in it, unless you could call the bubble-like skylight on the top—where the shingles should have been—a window. And there was only one door, and that was halfway up the side of the house—on a level with his eyes—and was round instead of rectangular. Moreover, the house itself was cylindrical instead of square, and instead of resting on a concrete foundation, it stood perilously on three shiny poles. But the most fantastic thing about it was the material it was made out of. Geoffrey was accustomed to wooden houses, but this one didn't have any wood in it at all. It was all one piece and it was made out of something that reminded him of his mother's new teakettle.

Apparently Mr. Wings and Sally Sunbeam were ashamed of it, for they'd piled tree branches all around it. Most of the leaves had died and fallen off the branches by

now, though, and the house was hardly hidden at all. Geoffrey thought it was funny they'd do such a thing; but probably they were afraid of grown-ups. And maybe they had good reason to be. Grown-ups didn't believe in fairies, and Geoffrey knew that grown-ups didn't like to be confronted with things they didn't believe in, and there was no telling what they'd do if they ran across Mr. Wings' and Sally Sunbeam's house.

He decided he hadn't better tell his parents about the house after all. His first impulse had been to run home and blab everything to his mother—or maybe even his father, if he'd listen—but he saw now that that wouldn't be the right thing to do. Mr. Wings and Sally Sunbeam were his friends—despite the fact that they'd deceived him about the peanut butter sandwiches—and he'd hate to have anything happen to them.

The thing to do, if he valued their friendship, was to keep on bringing extra peanut butter sandwiches. After all, what difference did it make whether they ate them or not? The really important thing was to keep their friendship. For all he knew, they might be the only fairies he'd ever see.

So after a while he left his hiding place behind the oak and went home and kept mum. That night he sat on the porch steps while his mother and father listened to the radio in the kitchen, and watched the fireflies wink on and

off in the spiraea and forsythia bushes that bordered the road. He heard his father swear when the weatherman gave the weather at nine o'clock, and a little while later his mother called him to come to bed.

Next morning, when he was making his peanut butter sandwiches—he was taking three every day now—he saw how low the peanut butter was getting in the big quart jar and he told his mother she'd better get some more, they were running out. His father was on the backporch, glowering at the sky, and he heard what Geoffrey said and came stomping into the kitchen.

"Peanut butter!" he shouted. "The crops are burning up, I'm up to my neck in bills and it isn't going to rain for fifty million years, and all you can think of is peanut butter!"

"Now Pete, don't take it out on him," his mother said. "It's not his fault it doesn't rain."

"Now don't *you* start!" His father's face was drawn and the circles under his eyes were so dark they were almost black. "I've got troubles enough without *you* nagging me! And don't you dare buy another jar of peanut butter, do you hear me? Not another jar!"

Geoffrey was crying when he left the house. His tears had dried by noon, but his eyes were still red, and so was his nose, and Sally Sunbeam looked at him closely

when she and Mr. Wings flew down and perched on his shoulders. "What's the matter, Geoffrey?" she asked.

"It's my father," Geoffrey said. "He's mad because it won't rain and he won't let my mother buy any more peanut butter."

Mr. Wings and Sally Sunbeam looked at each other over Geoffrey's nose. Mr. Wings' eyes were puzzled. "Why should he be mad because it doesn't rain?"

"Because his tomato plants are dying and his sweetcorn is drying up," Geoffrey said. "Every time he looks at his cabbages it makes him sick."

There was a silence. The sandwiches lay in Geoffrey's lap, as yet unshared. After a while he picked them up, gave one to Mr. Wings and one to Sally Sunbeam. He took a small bite of his own and began to chew.

Presently: "You don't have to worry about the peanut butter," Sally Sunbeam said. "We've got enough now . . . What will happen to your father if it doesn't rain?"

"He'll lose his farm," Geoffrey said. "We'll all have to go to the Poor House."

There was another silence during which Mr. Wings and Sally Sunbeam regarded one another solemnly. "Well," Mr. Wings said finally, "I suppose we could—"

"We *do* owe him something for the peanut butter," Sally Sunbeam said.

Mr. Wings nodded, as though it

were all settled. He looked at Geoffrey. "I—I guess it's time to say good-by, Geoffrey," he said. "I'm afraid you won't be seeing us any more."

Geoffrey's heart missed two beats. "I won't? Why?"

"We're going away," Sally Sunbeam said. "A long ways away." Her eyes looked funny and her little mouth was quivering. "Thank you for all the peanut butter sandwiches . . . Good-by, Geoffrey."

"Good-by, Geoffrey," Mr. Wings echoed, and then there were two flurries of wings over the brook and in the willows, a gold one and a silver one, and Geoffrey found himself all alone.

He felt so bad he couldn't eat his supper that night and his father was madder than ever. "It's those peanut butter sandwiches," his father shouted. "He's eaten so many of them he can't eat normal food any more!"

"Now Pete—"

"I haven't eaten hardly any of them," Geoffrey said. "I gave most of them away."

"Gave them away! To who?"

He'd done it now—given the whole show away. But it was all right. Mr. Wings and Sally Sunbeam were probably miles away by now. It wasn't necessary to keep them secret any longer.

"I gave them to my friends," he said. "I gave them to Mr. Wings and Sally Sunbeam."

Down came his father's fork on

the plate with an awesome clatter. A cloud so dark it could have been a rain cloud settled over his father's face. "You've been in those damned woods daydreaming again! What kind of a son have I got anyway?"

"Pete, stop it! I know it's been a bad year, but you can't pick on him all the time like this."

"I didn't daydream Mr. Wings and Sally Sunbeam," Geoffrey said staunchly. "Mr. Wings and Sally Sunbeam are real."

"Real, are they?" his father said. "You take me in the woods and show them to me then! If they're real I ought to be able to see them."

"They're gone by now," Geoffrey said. "At least I think they're gone. But I can show you where I saw them. I can show you their house."

His father was standing. The cloud on his face was darker than before. "Come on," he said. "And believe me, you'd better show me something!"

Geoffrey led the way and they walked down the road to where the woods began, and jumped the ditch and started off through the trees. The sun had set behind the hills and it was dark in the woods, a sort of gray-dark. Leaves and twigs rustled beneath their feet, and all the birds were still.

The brook hardly ran at all any more, the drought had got so bad, and in places it had collected in stagnant pools. When they came

to his favorite willow, Geoffrey said: "This is where I gave them the sandwiches, but they won't come around now, even if they are still here."

"I don't guess they would," his father said.

"I'll show you where their house is. I don't think they'd mind now."

They hopped the brook and walked through the willows and the locusts and then through the maples and the oaks and the beeches, and it was the way it used to be when his father liked him and they'd tramped through the woods together, only not quite the same because his father didn't like him any more. Geoffrey choked back a sob and walked faster. It was real dark now, and his father had to get his flashlight out of his hip pocket and snap it on. The beam was a yellow splotch jumping over the forest floor as his father shone it first one way and then another.

And then a funny thing started to happen. Geoffrey began to hear Sally Sunbeam's voice right in his head, even though she wasn't anywhere in sight; and suddenly he realized that that was where he'd always heard her voice—and Mr. Wings' too—right in his head; that they'd been thinking to him all the time, instead of talking; and that their thoughts had aligned themselves in words and groups of words that were already in his mind—

"I'm going to tell you a story,

Geoffrey," Sally Sunbeam said. "It's a story about your mother and father, but it's really about us. Please try to understand.

"Suppose your mother and father decide to take a trip to a distant town. Now suppose that the gasoline tank on their car holds just enough gasoline for them to get to this town and back, and that there isn't any place, either in this town or along the way, where the tank can be refilled. So before they leave, they're very careful to fill the tank—but they're so excited about the trip that they don't notice that the tank has a slight leak in it.

"They go to this faraway town and have a wonderful time, and finally they start back. And then, about halfway home, they discover the leak and find that, while they've lost only a few drops of gasoline, there still isn't quite enough left for them to make it *all* the way home. You see, not having quite enough gasoline is just as bad as not having any at all—you've got to use your imagination here, Geoffrey. Because if they run out of gasoline even a short distance from home, their car will crash and they will be killed.

"When they discover the leak, they're frantic. They're in a very wild part of the country, far from civilization. But they decide that the best thing to do will be to stop anyway, and try to find something they can use in place of the gasoline they've lost. So they drive into a

big woods and hide their car and start looking around.

"The people in this section of the country are giants, and your mother and father are afraid to ask any of them for help. Then one day they see a boy-giant sitting by a brook, eating a sandwich that may be made out of what they're looking for. They watch the boy-giant for some time before they get up enough courage to approach him. When they do approach him, they're astonished when he *gives* them one of the sandwiches, and when they find out that it *is* made out of a substance that can be processed into a substitute for the gasoline they need, they're overwhelmed with happiness.

"So they take the sandwich back to the car and build a machine to get the oil out of the peanut butter and to change it into fuel (your own scientists have discovered the possibilities of peanut oil themselves, and some day they'll be doing the same thing). Every day the boy-giant brings more sandwiches, and once he spies on them while they're processing the peanut butter, but they pretend not to notice. Finally they've got enough fuel to take the place of the little bit they lost, and their problem is solved. Naturally they're grateful to the boy-giant for saving their lives, and are delighted when they find there's a way they can repay him.

"We've got to go now, Geoffrey. Thank you for the peanut butter

sandwiches . . . and tell your father not to worry any more about his tomatoes." Her thoughts seemed strange—as though there were tears in them. "Good-by, Geoffrey—"

"Good-by, Geoffrey," Mr. Wings echoed.

"Good-by, Sally Sunbeam," Geoffrey said aloud. "Good-by, Mr. Wings."

His father had just started to look down at him when the lightning hit the clearing. At least his father thought it was lightning, but Geoffrey knew better. And he understood suddenly why the house had seemed so peculiar. It was peculiar only when you thought of it as a house instead of as a spaceship.

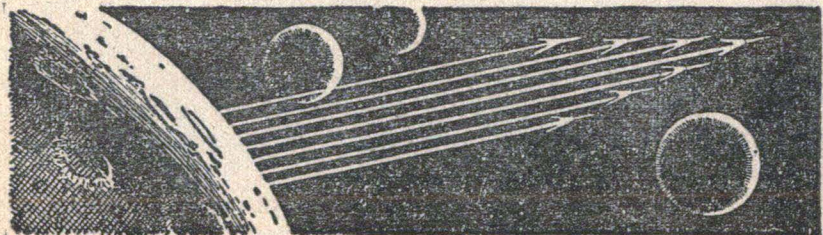
His father was plunging ahead into the underbrush, shouting: "If a tree catches fire, the whole woods will go!" Geoffrey followed him. But there wasn't any fire in the clearing when they reached it. There wasn't anything in the clearing at all, except a small blackened spot where the "house" had stood, and an acrid chemical smell.

His father was shining the flashlight around wildly. "Well, I'll be

damned!" he was saying. "I could have sworn that was a bolt of lightning. But it couldn't have been, of course. Lightning means a thunderstorm, and a thunderstorm means rain, and anybody, even a fool like me, knows it doesn't rain any more!"

Suddenly there was an odd sound in the leaves of the trees, a gentle rustling sound. His father stopped shining the light around then, and stood perfectly still in the middle of the clearing, his face uplifted to the sky. The rustling sound grew louder, became a steady patter. Geoffrey felt the first drop of rain then, and then the second. Abruptly the whole sky lit up with lightning—real lightning, this time—and from somewhere, thunder crashed.

Slowly, the patter of raindrops turned into a steady downpour, and still his father stood unmoving in the clearing, his face uplifted to the sky. Lightning flashed again, and Geoffrey saw how wet his father's face was, saw the raindrops coursing down his cheeks. And suddenly he realized that some of the drops weren't rain at all, but tears instead.



thundering death

by . . . Lee Priestley

Did she talk about evil, he screamed at her. She was a creature of the deep darkness and an evil spirit too!

CONANT watched the mountains draw nearer. The sun, low in the western sky behind him, made magic with refraction angles and aerial dusts to bathe the peaks in a rosy glow like a displaced sunrise.

Under him now reared the columnar rocks that had looked like organ pipes to some imaginative geographer thousands of years before. This valley between the river and the mountains had supported a large population based on agriculture and the atomic production base nearby. Had supported it until the stockpile blew up in a catastrophe that had made this whole region forever uninhabitable. . . .

Conant glanced at the ground view screen. He had an impression of motion, lost as he had looked. What had moved down on the mesa, bare save for mesquite and sparse tufts of grass? Perhaps some small underground life had escaped the blasts and the after contamination. The experts had agreed that no man could have survived or escaped through the radioactive rubble. He frowned at the screen and dropped to a lower altitude to see better. He had just missed seeing something—

The world of the mutant, discussed from time to time in SF, will inevitably affect the social mores of the feverishly "normal" coexistent society of the day. Kansas-born Lee Priestley, wife of a New Mexico newspaper publisher and author of some fifty novelettes and short stories, makes a challenging contribution to the literature on that possible World of Tomorrow.

The light was failing now. The deadly fires began to glow in the twilight with eerie glimmerings. After a thousand years this was still dangerous terrain. It was strictly forbidden to fly over it even.

By an association of ideas Conant felt in the breast pocket of his tunic to finger the cysteine anti-radiation tablets he carried there. The big pills, compounded of amino acids protected against lethal radiation for short periods of time. He had six of them. More than that could cause organic damage and if he were in hot terrain for longer than six-pill-protection. . . . Conant shrugged and absently popped one of the tablets into his mouth.

He had turned aside from the regular trans-terran routes in a long repressed curiosity. He wanted to see the area where his illustrious ancestor had helped explode the first atom bomb and later died in the elemental fires he had helped to kindle.

The gravest damage resulting from the catastrophe had been the removal of this large area from food production. Now that population increase made food supply more critical from year to year the loss of even a few acres was deplorable. Here had been a fertile river-empire, not too unlike the far older valley civilizations of the Nile and the Tigris-Euphrates that had cradled the human race. Here, too, had lived ancient races in the dawn of history.

A desire to see this ethnic cradle was one of the reasons Conant had turned aside into forbidden territory.

He would be punished—any deviation brought punishment in a highly regulated world—but he didn't care.

Mounting the ethnographic hobby that fascinated him, Conant thought about the Spanish who had first settled this region and displaced the aborigines. They wrote of a *querencia*, the region where an animal (including man) was reared and with which he felt a mystic kinship. It was this instinctive tie that drew the dog, the cat, the horse (now extinct animals) back across incredible distances to home. A man could have a spiritual *querencia*, Conant thought; could feel an in-born sympathy with a time and a place. The grim forbidding mesas and mountains above the valley had drawn him all his life.

Here had lived the Apaches supremely adjusted to their ungenerous environment and becoming incredible savage cavalry. Conant had come across two bits of information in his reading of time-worn old manuscripts that posed an interesting question. After one of the many wars preceding the Atomic Age, Kalmuks who were the last remnant of the Golden Horde, those Asiatic horsemen who had swept across half the world like death in a whirlwind, had been resettled on these arid mesas so like their own homeland on the high steppes. What might have happened had the two civilizations with a remote common origin and a culture based on the horse (now extinct, of course) had time to merge and interbreed? Pos-

sibly a better world than the one Conant knew where the things of the spirit were choked by wealth and debt and servitude and cynicism—

The ship dropped out from under Conant, then, clutched in the pull of a down draft. As he fought the controls he saw movement in the view screen again. Incredulously, he recognized the animals streaming across the mesa below him. Galloping, manes and tails afloat on the speed of their passage; up-flung heads drinking the wind; slender legs spurning the dust . . . horses! Horses, supposed to be extinct these many centuries!

The thunder of their passing merged with the crash of the ship and the trumpeting of a stallion became the keening of telescoping metal. . . .

Conant kept his eyes closed with a childish certainty that knowledge of his predicament would be more painful than his present ignorance. Only, what he didn't know *was* hurting him. The small effort of keeping his eyelids down against the stimulus of bright light exploded red flashes of pain inside his head.

Cautiously, he slit one eye, then the other. He looked down over his own chest. He hurt all over as if he had been beaten, but no members were missing. Turning his head he found that he lay on a painfully thorny bed of flattened mesquite, tangled in the cordage of his ejector-chute. When he rolled to

escape the puncturing thorns, he found out about his leg. Broken midway between knee and ankle—mercifully not a compound fracture.

He lifted his shoulders to look around him. Gray-tan mesa sparsely studded with green-brown vegetation; a blinding flash of reflection from polished metal gave him the position of the wreckage three hundred yards away.

He must crawl there, dragging his leg. He had to rig some kind of splint if he didn't mean to lie here and die. It took a long time to hack out a chunk of fabric from the chute, then to crawl across it. Bound roughly into the nylon by some of the cords his leg would have all the protection he could give it. It wouldn't be easy.

Conant set his teeth and began crawling along the gouges the ship had plowed into the gray-white soil. The mesquite and the creosote bushes grappled with him; the cactus snagged his garments and his flesh; his eyes and mouth filled with stinging alkali dust. He resisted the mounting pain in his leg with all the determination he could exert.

Don't think about it . . . don't think how much it hurts . . . Don't think! Don't . . . think. . . . Damn you, if you have to keep thinking, at least change the subject!

This gray-white powdery soil that choked him had decomposed from limestones . . . limestones meant caverns, underground water systems, and few surface streams. Funny . . . the Apaches, pressed to the

limit in their search for food in this barren land, would eat nothing that came from water . . . not even mountain trout. The Indians had been good swimmers, too. . . .

Conant lay with his face against an outcrop of stone until the minor pain nagged him to renewed effort. He progressed another foot. *Think about something!* he told himself savagely, tearing his tunic out of the grip of a mesquite. *That leg feels exactly like it's on fire. . . . Time to change the subject. . . .*

The Kalmuks, those Mongol remnants of the Golden Horde, and surely of the same ethnic stock of the Apaches, reversed that taboo. They ate gratefully anything they could obtain from water but they never bathed all over for fear of turning into fish. . . .

There wasn't much left of the ship, but it hadn't burned. The automatic switch-off had worked. *That leg is a flaming misery. And no switch-off. . . .* He had to salvage what he could. Water, food, a covering against the sharp cold of the high altitude. And something to splint his leg. He squirmed among the jagged twisted scraps.

Before exhaustion stopped him he found a plastic bottle of fruit juice, a bitten-into-and-rejected sandwich showing through the transparency of the flattened memo-plastic lunch box, the torn jacket that still hung over the back of his smashed seat before the controls. With what he had in his pockets . . . ray gun—gone, probably snagged by one of

the mesquite branches, watch and wrist radio (smashed), a lighter, the cysteine tablets, and miraculously intact in the same pocket, a midget scintillometer ticking rapidly as it measured radiation by flecks of light. He watched the glowing dial for a moment, then clicked off the current. No use exhausting the batteries to show him what he already knew. This terrain was lethal.

He rested a few minutes and then set about the splinting of his leg. It was noon before he uncovered a tool and mid-afternoon before he had hacked out a hairpin shape strong enough to sustain his weight. If he could hobble—if he could get the leg secured in the hairpin—if there was any better place to hobble to. Resting, he scanned the scintillometer, calculating how far apart to space the cysteine tablets.

The cordage he had brought from the chute was not enough to bind the leg securely. He eyed the nylon square, but without it the night would be a cold misery. Mud for a make shift cast? The powdery soil here would swallow water endlessly, if he had any. But *adobe*, a certain red-brown soil of the region, had been used for molding bricks that had outlasted centuries. If he could locate some of that—

Conant looked across to the spurs that walled the mesa. He might find *adobe* at their bases, if he could get that far. He *had* to get there, for the tumbled limestone strata of the mountains possibly channeled water down there. He must find water

soon and with luck the *adobe* would be nearby. He splinted his leg to the knee and began crawling again.

Mercifully, he was numb with pain as he wormed across the sun-baked mesa. *Keep squirming, Conant, you fool. A sensible man would lie down and die in peace. Only you're not sensible. You wouldn't be here if you were.*

It hadn't been sensible to disobey the regulation against coming here, to keep resisting the pressure of the intolerable and interminable net of laws and rules. It wasn't sensible to hunger for human relationships, for a way of life that had long since joined the dinosaurs. The decision to fly over this region had been suicidal, the blind escape of a wounded animal. . . .

Yesterday he had hurried to tell Alaine about his promotion. It would mean they could establish a home together, make their love a matter of public record. He hated the job that made him only a superior variety of Peeping Tom, but a complex civilization had to stamp out its heretics and he could endure it for Alaine. Conant took the steps up to her living cubicle three at a time.

Working the knocker, he waited impatiently. At last, the click of Alaine's sandals drew nearer and she opened the door. Golden-eyed, her curled hair the smokey purple fashionable that season, ripe body revealed by the supple silver mesh of the robe she clutched around her,

Alaine set Conant's pulses racing as she always did.

"Oh, it's you." Her voice was flat and there was no welcome either in her wide golden eyes or on her perfect face. She looked fleetingly over her shoulder, then stepped out into the hallway, pulling the door closed behind her.

"You might as well know now, Con," she said rapidly and softly. "I don't want you coming here any more."

Conant's arms dropped and astonishment washed the eagerness out of his face. Not want him—As if a door had opened on a too-full closet, a host of incidents ignored in the past cascaded off the shelves of his memory. The times she had laughed at him, calling him "old-fangled" . . . her impatience with his unfashionable moral code . . . her avid reach for money and position . . . the occasions when her response to his passion had been less than warm. . . . Firmly, Conant closed the mental door against any more.

He caught her into his arms, laughing down at her. "Don't tease me like that, darling. For a moment I thought you really meant it!"

She put his arms away and stepped back, her hand on the door. "I do mean it. We simply aren't suited and a girl has to think about her future. You're always talking about getting married and having children. Heavens, *nobody* does that any more! You're so behind the times you'll never be anything but a

clerk. You'd have a fit if I saw other . . . friends—" She glanced over her shoulder.

"Who's in there?"

Before she could make a denial Conant stood her away from the door and pushed it open. The man sprawling in a state of gaudy undress on the couch was Marteen, Conant's bureau chief . . . who did not know as yet that Conant's promotion would reverse their positions. Marteen looked up sleepily and tipped him a gesture of greeting, derisive and triumphant.

Conant closed the door again. "Alaine of the main chance," he said to the girl. "Only you've sidetracked yourself, darling. Suppose I told you that I'm to be bureau chief as of tomorrow . . . that Fancy Pants in there on your couch is on his way *down* the ladder I'm climbing. Would that make any difference?"

Alaine's eyes narrowed. "Con, you can't mean— Oh, Con! *Darling!* How marvelous!" She made overtures with her lashes, letting him see the invitation in her half-veiled glance. She leaned forward to whisper, a sensuous and calculated whisper. "I'll get rid of Marty. You and I have so much to . . . talk about!"

Conant parted her arms with force enough to send her staggering back against the closed door, the robe parting over long white thighs. But she was back at once, throwing her arms around his neck, laughing gayly.

"Silly. Couldn't you tell I was

teasing? A girl likes to see if she can *really* raise a couch-mate's blood pressure!"

Conant put an arm under her knees and kicked the door open. He carried her inside and stood a moment looking down at the lovely face resting confidently against his heart.

"Use your wiles on the new couch-mate, dearie. Your couch is getting too crowded for my taste," he said.

Then he had dropped her beside Marteen. . . .

Conant erased the hateful picture of Alaine's furious face from his mind. She probably was no worse than the rest of the women in the city . . . certainly not worth dying for. Still, why strive so painfully for a few more days or hours of a life that had turned to dust and ashes?

Crawl another inch . . . gasp another lungful of the searing air . . . crawl . . . crawl. *Give it up, Conant. Is life so sweet that you'll torture yourself for a few more hours of it?*

But the instinct of self preservation isn't controlled by thought. While his brain railed at the stupidity of his toiling body something blindly indomitable in every cell drove him on.

Once he dropped his head toward the scanty shade of a mesquite. From the inch-wide shadow a dry rustling whisper spoke of death. Conant's eyes found the s-shaped snake only inches from his nose. Again his body acted of its own

volition to hurl him away from the danger. *You can quit worrying*, he told the indomitable cells. *There's no sense in it, but I won't quit.*

When the blaze of pain from his jolted leg had died down Conant realized that the sharply rising hillside before him was pocked with caves. One might protect a seep of water; be floored with lime sulphide marl.

He had hauled himself to the mouth of the nearest cave when he heard the drumming thunder. Twisting to see behind him, he stared in a transfixed astonishment.

A band of horses . . . a band of the fleet, spirited animals supposedly extinct for centuries. A great stallion raced and trumpeted, driving his harem of mares before him. Conant rolled recklessly to see better the sight that no living man had beheld.

The mares were small of size, fleetly graceful, and golden dun in color. Conant groped through his mind for a word. Such golden horses had been called "palomino". The impression that some of the mares had riders was swept from his attention by sight of the stallion. Dark and splendid, he flashed past, driving his harem into the safety of a narrow shadowed canyon.

When his band had drummed out of sight, the stallion wheeled and galloped back. Conant gasped anew. This was no common horse! Again his mind gave him a word, this time out of ancient legend. Centaur! Half man and half horse! Man to

the loins; then the man's body merged into the splendid strength and beauty of a stallion.

Closer now, the man's face beneath the tossing mane twisted into a savage malignance. Blazing eyes and rearing hoofs threatened Conant. He realized that the stallion meant to kill him.

With the centaur's piercing scream in his ears, Conant dived for safety. Kicking and scrambling, his fingers digging into the sand, he threw himself at the darkness of the cave mouth. He was half inside at the direction of thudding heart and bursting lungs before his brain caught up with him.

Even when the hoofs smashed down on his broken leg there was a moment before the tide of pain swept him toward unconsciousness . . . a moment when the blind determination to keep living catalysed his ebbing strength and sent him scrambling deeper into the safety of the cave.

He heard a new sound at the cave's mouth. A catlike snarling rising to an eerie scream above the thud of flailing hoofs and the trumpeting of the centaur. Conant caught a glimpse of a tawny creature bounding after the galloping stallion. A cat? Long thought extinct like the horse?

Through roaring red waves of pain that engulfed him now, Conant's brain had the last word. *Look, maybe you did see a centaur. But if you're seeing sabre-toothed tigers, I give up!*

Then the red waves darkened . . . crested into smashing seas that pounded him under. . . .

Conant lay quietly, puzzled by the bumping, sliding motion under him. The last thing he remembered was being swept under waves of pain after the stallion had trampled him. Now, he seemed to be riding the crests of the waves.

He wondered if he dared try to move. Better not. There had been the snapping stick sounds when the stallion struck his leg. It was probably shattered now beyond any repair.

He opened his eyes, then slitted them against the intolerable blue brightness. How had he got out of the cave? He rolled his eyes enough to see that he was progressing jerkily across the mesa at a height that gave him a face-brushing closeness to the bleached grasses. Obviously the centaur didn't have him, Conant thought, or he would be higher above the ground. Maybe he was being carried in the big cat's mouth!

Cautiously, he raised himself a few inches and saw that his transportation was not so exotic as centaur or cat. He was being pulled laboriously by a very small cream colored pony. He lay back, turning his head to watch without much curiosity a long black tail swishing back and forth across small rounded hips, faintly golden and fuzzed like the cheeks of a sun ripened peach. The silky tail half hid slim legs that darkened from the knees down and tap-

ered to small black feet— Feet? Not hoofs . . . feet!

Conant reared on the travois contrived from roughly trimmed mesquite branches to stare incredulously. This was not simply a pony any more than the centaur was simply a stallion.

Tugging between the pair of branches that served as shafts was a . . . well, call her a pony-girl. She was small and rounded, clothed in a short tunic that did not hide the soft cream colored coat that was more a bloom on the skin than a fur. Down her back ran a shadowy stripe ending in the silky black tail. He could see only the back of her head, pointed elfin ears, and a cloud of dark mane tossed by the breeze.

Conant exhaled the breath he had been holding. The delicate ears flicked hearing the sound and the pony-girl turned to look back. Conant did not know what he had expected, but he saw real beauty. Her face was finely modeled with a faint length and gauntness that underscored beautiful bones. She lifted round arms that darkened below the elbow and pushed aside a silky forelock with small black hands. She looked at him with great brown velvet eyes, soft with sympathy and concern.

A coyote dun, Conant told himself. A bit addled with all the surprises of the past hours he went on to quote from some forgotten manuscript. "*The dun and the dorsal stripe are always waiting to come*

back in horses, for all colors with the exception of gray and roan are recessive to dun."

"Are you in great pain, sir?" The pony-girl spoke in a soft clear voice using *lingua mercatura*, the worldwide language of trade and commerce. "It is not far now. There will be help for you." She looked fearfully across the mesa whence they had come. "If El Leon made Ladino run far away—" Then with a shy smile she touched her breast with a small black hand. "Me, I am Mestina." Then she returned to the shafts.

Not far to where? Or what? Was Ladino that living legend, the centaur? And *what* was this Mestina? Conant seethed with questions. He dug through the scraps and tags of archaic languages picked up from his hobby. Ladino . . . Mestina . . . the words were probably Spanish. He dredged deeper for meanings. Had "ladino" meant "hard to catch," therefore a kind of lone wolf? The word "mestina" first meant "lost sheep" and then later had come to designate a wild or mustang mare.

The bumping grew worse as Mestina crossed a canyon floor beside a deep cleft in the rocks. Toiling up a shale talus slope to approach a cave, the pain in Conant's shattered leg worsened, too. He grew giddy with sensory images becoming a senseless, fragmented pattern juggled in the kaleidoscope of misery.

Some of the fragments seemed un-

usable even in the chaotic patterns of nightmare. Such was the sight of the great tawny cat padding now ahead of the pony-girl, now scouting beside the faint track they followed, now fawning and purring at her heels. It might be a mountain lion. Conceivably, the big cats might still live in these lonely wastes. A fierce predator acting like a pet pussy? Conant shook his puzzled head.

The girl-pony called out as she drew him into the entrance of a cave. "Jeff? Jeff, it was a man! Not quite dead!"

With a light headed acceptance, Conant watched a crude light cart roll into the flickering firelight. A man lay, stomach down, on the low contraptions, his head and chest lifted by a kind of padded bolster. He propelled himself by pushing against the sandy floor with doubled fists housed in leather.

The quick thrusts by the ropey arms and some movement in the neck, half-hidden behind a thick red beard seemed the only activity of which the grotesquely twisted, wasted body was capable. All the vitality of the man concentrated in his face. So lean that the bones visibly stretched the leathery skin, a sardonic humor pointed all the lines up to the flirt of white hair crested like a cockatoo. Bright blue eyes looked Conant over.

"Let's hope our personalities don't clash, *amigo*," the man said. "We're likely to be thrown together some." The blue eyes had been assessing the damage the crash and

the centaur had worked on Conant. "Kinda roughed up."

Conant nodded, not trusting himself if he unlocked his jaw.

"We'll do what we can, but don't look for much." The man's mobile face warned more than the words. "We've got no medicines except some herbs to chew and *tulapai* to get drunk on. I'm willing but I've got only the experience of patching myself when I crashed here twenty years ago." He looked wryly over his shoulder at his wasted trunk and legs. "And I didn't do much of a job on myself."

He wheeled the cart around. Whistling soundlessly, he leaned across the bolster that supported his chest and gently examined Conant's leg. Mestina came then, bringing a flat pottery saucer. She lifted Conant's head so he could swallow the green tasting fermented fluid it contained. He gagged over the stuff and the old man looked up from sorting a handful of yucca fibers to grin faintly.

"*Tulapai* ain't exactly champagne but fill it with pounded *pyote* it numbs a man a little."

After a few moments Conant felt his tongue buzzing and growing thick. The nasty tasting fluid was taking effect. He would need numbness when this fiery bearded old crock tried to set the shattered leg.

Mestina came again and Conant saw with surprise that she had the metal loop he had planned to use for a splint. She had brought it from the cave where he had

encountered the centaur. The pony-girl listened to some muttered instructions from the old man. Then kneeling with a pottery jar she began kneading water into a spot on the cavern floor.

After a time she brought a mass of stiff mud close to the old man's hand. She went to stand behind Conant. The *tulapai* had set his head whirling, but he was aware of the pungent, smoke-sweet scent of her body. Was it one of the desert sages? Indians had perfumed their favorite ponies by chewing the leaves of aromatic plants and then blowing and spitting the bits into manes and tails.

He noticed that the old man watched the pony-girl intently. She stood close behind Conant, one soft hand resting on his shoulder. Then an eyelid dropped over one of the old man's bright blue eyes. A signal of some kind, Conant thought.

But he stopped thinking when Mestina dealt him the blow that would keep him mercifully unconscious of some of the pain to come. . . .

Conant looked around the cave with interest. He had been here for a long time, he was sure, but this was the first moment he felt really awake. That half remembered diving into and struggling out of consciousness—

He delved into his memory. Pain, continual pain . . . *don't bother to recall that . . .* small strong hands (there was something endearing in

their darkness) that ministered to him: the clean sage scent of Mestina's golden body bending over to offer the rough saucer of water; the refuge of her arms when he had been lost in the terrifying half world of delirium; the reassurance of the old man's patience in the interminable hours. . . .

Fully awake, Conant examined the cave. A frugal fire burned in a small pit away from the entrance shielded now with a brush wind screen. Around the walls were ranged bundles and filled bags. One tawny bulk seemed to stretch and move but Conant decided for the moment that the flickering flames caused the effect.

Ready to hand hung hunting bows of wood strengthened with layers of sinew and quivers of arrows more than three feet in length delicately feathered with turkey plumes and pointed with stone or bone. In a corner stood a horseman's lance more than fifteen feet long with a fire-hardened barb. Beside it lay a shield of toughened hide stretched over a wooden frame and several leather and thong slings. The tools of a hunter who must be Mestina.

To think of hunting was to think of food. Conant found that he was ravenously hungry. As if he had rung an invisible bell Mestina came from some inner part of the cave carrying a steaming earthen platter, which she offered to Conant. His nose told him it was a stew containing lumps of some unknown meat, reinforced with thin sheets of

bread made from pounded and soaked seeds.

"How did you know I was hungry?" Conant asked her, around a large bite.

"I saw that it was so." Mestina hunted for a clearer explanation seeing the puzzled look on his face. "I saw it inside my head."

The old man came rolling on his cart then. "She's a mutant, of course and so she had the extrasensory perception they commonly have. She always knows what I'm thinking if I make the thought urgent."

"I was urgently hungry all right." Conant paused with the slab of bread he had been using for a spoon half way to his mouth. "I'm only a little less curious than hungry."

The man laughed, flinging up his head until the white crest flared. "I should think you'd be bursting. We're—shall we say unusual?—Mestina and I. I'm Jeff Fords. All the Fords have been desert men, miners and prospectors, way back yonder even Indian scouts and traders. I used to prospect for uranium-thorium deposits. I wanted to see this forbidden country and curiosity killed my cat same as it did yours. I found out the down draft could pull a small ship right out of the sky. I crashed near here. In spades."

"No one was with you? There was no one to help you as you've helped me?"

"You can answer that by lookin' at me. But don't fret, bud. I patched

you up a sight better than I did myself. And you wasn't busted into so many pieces to start with."

"I don't see how you survived."

"I don't dwell much on the memory," Fords said grimly. "It was purely Hell." His bright eyes crinkled again in their raying laughter lines. "Still, a man likes to blow about his exploits and you could call it considerable of one that I lived at all. I was a dead man that wouldn't die. I ate the grass and the brush within reach down to the last inch of grubbing-up root. I couldn't move, busted like I was, but I did. I pulled myself a few inches by my arms and went to work on the new circle of fodder."

"What about water?"

"See these?" Innumerable puckering seams had made Fords' lips and mouth one continuous cicatrix. "I chewed the cactus . . . never mind the spines. They worked out eventually. I've got no notion of how long it took to work my way here where there's a seep in the back of the cave. I grew a little stronger then and I caught a lizard or two, a few bugs now and then. It got harder when I found Mestina and had to keep her alive. I chewed what awful food I could catch and put it into her little mouth. If I hadn't trapped some horses in the box canyon down there, she would have died. I'd put myself on wheels by then and I killed a horse with a rock. But don't ask me how I managed to milk a spooky mare. I couldn't have done that either, but I did. It was sur-

prisn' how soon she got so she could help. She's quite a hunter now with El Leon to help."

Conant looked again at the tawny bundle near the fire that had seemed to move. His eyes focussed better now to recognize the sleeping bulk of the great cat-animal.

"Mestina found the mountain lion when he was only a handful of cub and they grew up together," Fords was saying.

"You found Mestina? Where did she come from?"

"The Indians had exposed her to die. That's their practice, you know, when a child is born with any physical difference or deformity. I heard the little thing wailin' all one night before I could get to her. Lucky there wasn't any lions about and that Ladino wasn't old enough then to be interested in females. He gets all the exposed girl babies now and his *mujer*-mares raise them. Mestina is a mutant, of course. Practically everybody around is one now—some not so sightly as she is. Her type is getting more common all the time. I think it's going to settle down into a new species."

Conant's attention had grounded on one of Fords' statements. "Indians? There are men still living in these hills? All life wasn't wiped out by the stock pile blasts?"

"What do you think? Maybe they were saved by the caves, I dunno. But there's quite a few Indians, descendants of the Apaches and the Kalmuks that settled near the reservation." Fords grinned. "Yessir, if

all life was wiped out, these mesas and mountains are haunted by some mighty lively ghosts!"

Conant stared down at his leg. It was neatly bound into the metal loop, then plastered over with stone-hard adobe. Fords had made a neat job of it.

He reached for the jug Mestina had set beside his couch and took the last cysteine pill with a swallow of the greenish, sour-tasting liquor. He shuddered over the stuff but remembered to be grateful for the oblivion it had given him when he needed it most. He had stretched a six day supply of pills over more than twelve weeks. He checked the scintillometer. Only a scattering of light flecks here while at the scene of the crash and the first cave the dial had glowed like the rising moon. Radiation was far less here . . . the radiation that hung over the region like a cloud of death.

That was a good simile, Conant thought. A cloud didn't cover all the sky; apparently the radioactive danger didn't cover all the area. There must be valleys and canyons that were relatively uncontaminated. The hidden valleys where the Indians lived, for example. There was a safe way through the hot terrain, too. Mestina was proof of that. And Fords believed that Ladino, the centaur, knew the way. How else was he able to cross the mesa to carry off the exposed infants or to steal women for his harem?

Conant picked up the canes

Mestina had made for him and walked about the cave, picking his way with caution. Every day now he could do more. Soon he would be able to pull his oar in this strange boat, so precariously kept afloat by an old man and a . . . girl. Girl? What was Mestina?

She was beautiful . . . so had Alaine been physically beautiful. Honest? Mestina was intrinsically honest; Alaine and most of the women in Conant's world had no knowledge of the term.

Conant made himself face the final question. Human? An animal could be beautiful and kind and certainly honesty was more fundamental in animals than in man . . . but was Mestina human?

Conant sat down again and dropped his head into his hands. Ancient literature held instances of love between man and horse. Even more, ancient film strips abounded with examples. It was a comrade love.

His feeling for Mestina was more than that.

He had not heard her come in until he felt the soft sleekness of Mestina's shoulder as she leaned to set down a water jar. The fragrant cloud of her mane swung to touch his face. Almost against his will his arms reached out to draw her close. He bent to kiss her lips warm and responsive under his own.

But he had pushed her aside and dropped back to his couch before he heard the squeak of Jeff Fords' cart.

"Maybe I'd better ask about your

intentions, mister," Fords said dryly. "Me bein' all the family she has."

Conant kept his gaze on his tight gripped hands. When the silence grew overlong he looked up to face the angry contempt he expected to see in Jeff Fords' sapphire eyes.

There was instead a wry sympathy. "Make up your mind, Conant. What is she? A maiden or a mare?"

Conant felt a surge of anger. How could he speak so callously? The anger went nearly as soon as it had come, swallowed in a vast bewilderment. He got up to pace beside the fire, his hobbling gait repeated by his shadow, giant and agitated on the wall. Then as he turned the clumsy cast tripped him. He would have fallen had Mestina not caught and steadied him in the slim dark arms that were so amazingly strong.

With her cloudy aromatic hair under his chin and her golden ripeness pressed close to his body, Conant stopped thinking. Thinking was a pale and flaccid thing beside the flood of feeling that overwhelmed him. He held Mestina hungrily and over her head answered Jeff Fords.

"I don't care which she is! Or what!" he said furiously. "I love her as she is!"

If he had looked again Conant would have seen an expression of satisfaction on the old man's ravaged face as he wheeled the cart deep into the cave. But Conant didn't look. . . .

Next morning Fords was full of

plans. Before Conant was more than half awake, as soon as Mestina had gone out with a seed gathering basket, he had wheeled the cart beside Conant's couch. Talking earnestly he began to chip away the mud of the cast.

"You've got to take Mestina away now."

"Away? Have you got a recipe for sprouting wings?"

Conant's eyes went to the scintillometer. He didn't need to turn it on to see the flecks of light that measured radiation.

Jeff Fords saw the glance. "That's exactly what I mean. This place is better than where you were, but it isn't good enough. I'm pretty sure that Mestina and many of the other mutants have some immunity but you don't have that protection. Maybe the pills have saved you so far. But you've got to get out . . . and take Mestina with you."

"What will you do?"

Fords lifted his white eyebrows in the facial gesture that amounted to a shrug. He looked at Conant with laughter in his brilliant eyes. "I've had it. . . . I won't crowd my luck. Not when you've dropped in from heaven like an answer to a prayer!"

He nudged the little cart closer. "Listen, you should know all I can tell you about Mestina. First, there are other—shall we say more commonplace?—women in the Indian stronghold someplace back there in the mountains. And I think you can get there so you don't have to choose either Mestina or a life of

celibacy. She's a mutant, of course, and I believe, a hybrid. It's against all knowledge for dissimilar animals to breed, but things have been different for a thousand years in here. Ever since the stock pile exploded mutations and genetic changes became the rule instead of the exception."

"Kitty, kitty!" Fords called, looking over Conant's shoulder and snapping his fingers.

From the fireside El Leon rose and stretched himself fore and aft. Then he came obediently and purring to place his broad wedge-shaped head under Fords' hand.

"Look at this," the old man said. "No more claws than I have."

He lifted a great paw, turning the leg until the pads could be seen. He spread the members on his own hand. Blunt short claws instead of sharp retractable hooks; wide caloused "fingers," five to the hand.

"Ladino wouldn't instinctively fear El Leon if he knew Mother Nature, with an assist from radiation, had literally clipped his claws!" the old man said.

He sat for a moment scratching the big cat's ears. "There's supposed to be a kernel of truth in legend, isn't there?" he asked then. "The Mescalero Apaches used to say that all the wild horses hereabouts were descendants of Diablo, a black stallion that their ancestors raided from Sonora. This devil horse was half man and half stallion like Ladino. Diablo ate flesh and demanded the best looking maidens as a sacrifice.

His get were mare-maidens—like Mestina. This I know for sure. There are Indian women with Ladino's band. I've seen them. Maybe he steals them or possibly some of them go willingly. The Indians both fear and revere the centaur, I think. There are a few *mujer*-mares, too, like Mestina. When a hybrid is born in the stronghold, the Indians expose the infant to die. Then I believe Ladino gives the babes into the care of his captive women."

Jeff Fords sighed and ran a hand through his crest of white hair. "Don't look so confused, son. I don't hardly believe it myself most times. Until I look at Mestina or see the stallion a long ways off." There was a longer pause this time. "She's a real woman in every important way. But if she's a hybrid, she will be barren."

Conant made a slight gesture with one hand. "Is this a situation in which you'd want children?"

"You understand I wouldn't let you touch her if I didn't see that there's love in it?" the old man said sternly. Then the sapphire eyes grew soft. "Because of Mestina I've been a dead man that couldn't die. She gave me a reason for living and I couldn't leave her for Ladino to capture. . . . Now about getting away. Mestina and the stallion are both mutants—if that's the right word for so big a change—so they both have extra sensory powers. I believe the stallion knows a safe path across the hot country. One end of the way must reach to the

Indian stronghold. The other possibly crosses the desert out toward the rocket lanes. Maybe you could try that and take a chance on getting far enough over to be rescued."

"You think Mestina can pick the stallion's mind, so to speak? Get inside his thoughts and learn the way out of here?"

"I'm sure she can do it," Jeff Fords nodded.

Mestina crouched at the cave mouth, completely still. Her eyes looked inward, dark and remote. Conant found that he was holding his breath fearful of disturbing her trance-like concentration.

Then she lifted her head, the delicate ears flicking as she seemed to listen mentally. Her eyes scanned the horizon, then watched a faraway point.

"I see them!" she said, her voice growing excited. "Ladino! Ladino, where is the safe path?"

There was a long silence, then she began whispering as if she talked to herself. "Ladino is very angry. He will not tell me the secret of the path . . . angry . . . angry."

Jeff Fords reached out to take one of the small dark hands into his. Comforted, Mestina stopped the shivering that told of inner fear. She began to speak again.

"Ladino lashes out at the frightened mares as he drives them before him. He punishes them when they will not turn at once as he wishes. Even the *mujer*-mares are not safe from his anger."

Mujer-mares . . . woman-mares. Conant realized that Mestina's inner vision had confirmed what Jeff Fords had told him. There were other mare maidens in Ladino's harem.

"The band is hungry. They wish to stop and feed upon the mesquite beans which grow abundantly there. But Ladino will not let them stop. Now he stands silhouetted against the sky to look back. The wind brings the scent of El Leon. I sent him to harry the band, thinking Ladino might lead them to safety along the path we wish to learn."

Conant spoke softly to Jeff Fords. "Is she really seeing them?"

"Of course. How did you think she knew where to find you, hidden in that cave as you were?"

"Ladino is raging now," Mestina reported. "He strikes the rocks with his hoofs until the sparks fly. He trumpets and whistles, driving the band with rappings of his sharp hoofs as he rears to threaten them . . . now kicking and biting until the foam on his lips is flecked with blood. . . . He turns the band. They come thundering toward us—"

"Are they near or far?" Conant asked the old man.

Fords shook his head impatiently, not taking his eyes from Mestina's face. As Conant looked at her again she gently released her hand from the old man's clasp. Then she sprang to her feet and listening for a moment, ran lightly down the shale talus slope below the cave. On the rocky floor below she stood looking intently across the mesa.

"Mestina!" Fords called anxiously. "Come back, Mestina! *Mestina!*"

He wheeled the cart around. His face, ashen and with the skin tight over the bones of his skull, looked like a death's head.

"Fool that I am!" he said furiously. "Telepathy is like that path we seek . . . two ends to it! Now Ladino is aware of Mestina. Her thoughts have led him to her. We've got to get her back in the cave!"

Conant saw then what the man meant to do. "You can't go down to her in that cart! Don't try! *Don't!*"

But Fords did not listen. He turned the frail cart and careened out and down. Conant leaped to follow, his eyes on the wasted body flung about by the crazily bouncing wheels. His broken leg would always be shorter— Forgetting to allow for that, Conant's charge threw him heavily to the talus. He half-slid, half-rolled down the slope over the shifting shales.

It was a nightmare with time stretched out of shape and the agonizing moment stretched to a seeming lifetime. Mestina in a half-trance of concentration stared across to the canyon— The cart bumped and leaped—Conant clawed at the sliding stone trying to get back on his feet.

Then galloping hooves drummed in the canyon. Ladino's band burst out, manes tossing, tails streaming, eyes rolling, heaving chests and widened nostrils drinking the wind. The mares divided around Mestina.

Before she could turn to run Ladino had seen her. Head lifted, splendid savage strength in every line, the centaur halted, gravel spurting from the brace of his forefeet. A wild triumph raced across Ladino's face. Then he flung himself between Mestina and a possible retreat to the cave.

She was cut off from any help.

Conant tore at the sliding shales to regain his feet. Mestina had seemed to flit down so easily and swiftly— He threw himself sideways . . . hung for a moment. Frantically he dug in with heels and hands to get some kind of purchase. He managed to hold himself spread-eagled on the slope . . . cautiously sat up.

He saw that Jeff Fords somehow kept his unresponsive body on the wheeled platform although at times he fluttered like a tattered pennon. Then the cart bounced onto the silt apron fanning out from the canyon mouth.

Sending the cart spurting toward Ladino the old man swung a sling in a blurring circle. When he released a thong, a rock flew from the sling to crash against the stallion's head.

Ladino screamed in a fury of rage and pain. His rough-hewn face contorted in a crazy snarl, he charged at the cart and its rider. Jeff Fords whirled under the rearing forefeet and miraculously emerged untouched. He sent another rock thudding into Ladino's ribs.

Conant hobbled half way down the slope, his lungs bursting with exertion and his heart breaking for the utter bravery of the man below him. Then a wheel came off the frail cart and rolled erratically to scatter the mares. Mobility gone, Jeff Fords snatched a dagger from some resource of his garments and brandished it in a splendid puny defiance.

The sun flashed from the sliver of steel as Ladino reared above. But the tiny wound could not retract the mountainous weight. Its sting only added frenzy to the stallion's trampling, rending attack. . . .

Sobbing in futile impotence Conant fought his way down. But long before he could reach the bottom, much less cross the canyon floor, Ladino had trampled Jeff Fords to a pitiful heap of tattered, red-stained rags.

The stallion heard Conant's wild shouting then. Flinging up his head he looked across the splintered wood and sodden flesh. Trumpeting in a crazy triumph Ladino dismissed the approaching man contemptuously.

He burst through the ring of mares that had obediently restrained Mestina and caught the sobbing girl roughly into his arms. At his command, the band raced ahead of him to plunge into the canyon and out of sight.

Conant climbed back to the cave. Hastily, he gathered a filled skin water bottle and a blanket. What dry foodstuffs he could find he poured into the memo-plastic food

box saved from the crash and now returned to its original shape. He laid the bundle beside the entrance and selected the sharpest of Mestina's lances and skinning knives.

He picked up Jeff Fords' red blanket that lay where it had slid from the wheeled platform and tumbled into the man's food platter and water jug. He looked around the cave for one last time. Then shouldering the bundles he hobbled down the talus slope again.

With his jaw locked against his aching grief, Conant folded the trampled scraps of Jeff Fords' flesh into the red blanket. Then he searched out the bottomless gash in the rocks, remembered from the trip with Mestina. Following the ritual for a dead chieftain, he placed the wrapped body on the broken cart and tugged it over to the crevice. Lacking a favorite dog to send before his master, Conant threw into the depths the sling with which the man had challenged the monster. Next followed the personal utensils of daily use. As a symbol of "the dead man who would not die" he stripped a handful of silken blossoms from a cactus and let them flutter into the darkness. The favorite horse. . . . Conant lifted the body from the splintered platform. Then he dropped in the cart.

Now that all was ready he lowered the blanket-wrapped body until the lariat that held it stretched to full length. He opened his hands and let the slight weight slip away.

He began following the tracks of the mustang band down the canyon. He didn't believe he could either find or rescue Mestina but a man had to try . . . especially with Jeff Fords' sacrifice burning like a torch in his brain. He wouldn't think about Mestina now . . . not recall the frantic grief in her awakened eyes or her despairing cry as Ladino's arms had swept her up and away.

He'd have to use what intelligence he had against the stallion's speed and strength. Hobbling painfully, Conant tried to recall everything he had read about the equine race whose usefulness to man had been outgrown. Still, now that fissionable materials were becoming too scarce to use for all power sources, why wouldn't the horse be a useful means of short transportation again? No time to consider that now—

The range of a mustang band was seldom more than twenty miles across. Jeff Fords had said that the site of Conant's crash and the cave from which Mestina had brought him were about ten miles to the west. So he was midway to the band's east-west range. But it seemed improbable that the stallion frequented the barren mesa where Jeff Fords and Mestina had lived in the cave. Otherwise Ladino would have seen Mestina earlier. Conant thought the cave was probably beyond the extreme edge of the band's north-south range.

Men had captured mustangs by walking them down, dogging them

day and night without giving them an opportunity to rest or feed. Could one man alone possibly do that? Conant knew the answer but he could not accept it.

The tracks cut into the sandy floor of the canyon led east and north. Steadily, too, the terrain sloped downward to the Tularosa basin, an arid saucer rimed with tumbled mountain ranges. The canyon broadened and grew shallow with water marks and flood debris to show that it was a major carrier of run-off from the infrequent and torrential desert rains.

Conant followed the natural roadway as fast as his leg would let him, refusing to recognize the pain and weariness that verged on exhaustion. He kept his eyes on the horse tracks now growing less distinct as the floor of the canyon became irregular plates of limestone swept clear by wind and water.

But on the little shelves of silt built up close under the canyon walls occasional mesquite bushes heavy with ripe beans were growing . . . the mesquite that had spread over wide areas carried through the stomachs of wild mustangs like these who followed Ladino. Mestina had said in her telepathic vision that the band was hungry . . . that Ladino would not permit them to stop to feed as he had followed the mental path that had brought him to the cave. Would the band stop to feed soon now?

Conant hobbled faster, taking care to avoid unnecessary noise. The

canyon widened still more and now on either side were tiny grassy *vegas*, the mountain meadows. Then around a bend in the rocky wall ahead Conant heard Ladino's trumpeting, the blood stirring half-animal, half-human call that held the tragedy of being *sui generis*, unique and alone in a hostile world.

Conant tested the wind so that his scent should not notify of his coming. Kicking off his sandals he began climbing to a ledge of rock that overhung the *vega*. He heard small tearing, rending sounds that told him the band was feeding. Cautiously, he leaned over to look.

Perhaps forty mustang mares, half a dozen young stallions surely neither old enough nor rash enough to challenge Ladino's leadership. Conant forgot to breathe when he saw Mestina— He frowned and narrowed his eyes against the sun to see better. It was another, older *mujer*-mare without Mestina's beauty. She rode a mustang controlling it with an Indian bridle, a thong tied around the lower jaw.

Between the *mujer*-mare and the overhang from which Conant looked down, grazing horses burst out as they were crowded from behind. Ladino came into view leading a mustang with one hand as he tore hungrily at the small body of something soft and furry held in the other hand. On the led mustang's back Mestina sat, her hands bound behind her.

Conant didn't stop to plan. A surge of fury flung him off the ledge

and down upon the centaur. This blood smeared eater of living flesh should not keep Mestina!

Conant's lance tore through flesh as he jolted to a sliding perch on the stallion's withers. Ladino's startled plunge tore the weapon from Conant's hand and the next spin smashed it against the canyon wall. The lance had only ripped through the hide to graze a muscle . . . and enrage the stallion to a wild frenzy.

Then Conant was falling down by the centaur's claw-like pulled hands. Above him he saw the rearing hoofs that would chop the life out of him. Then another horse rammed into the stallion with enough force to half whirl him. Conant hit the ground rolling, felt the jam of the memo-plastic food bundle flatten under him, then bounced to his feet beside Mestina! He leaped up behind her and at the same instant, the older *mujer*-mare, eyes flashing pure hate, thrust the leading rope into his hand.

Piercing the nightmare of motion, Conant heard a coughing roar rising to a wail. A tawny blur sprang through the air to land upon the stallion's back. It was Mestina's pet lion.

El Leon grasped the stallion's neck using his weight to make the twisting blow a lethal one. If the big cat had been armed with sharp retractile claws as his kind had been before mutations had changed them, Ladino's neck would have snapped. But El Leon's blunt fingers slipped and the leverage failed.

Ladino sunfished, then spun as his hoofs spurned the ground. The lion fell under the thudding smashing hoofs. Conant heard a cracking, crunching— Then the mustang he and Mestina bestrode was caught up in the stampede that swept Ladino, too, away from his victim.

Conant instinctively clamped his legs to the mustang's flanks and reached around Mestina to grab at the animal's mane. Pounding and jolting they tore along in the dusty thunder of the stampede. Ears laid back, hoofs flashing, eyes frantic, the runaway river of horseflesh rushed down the canyon in a suicidal frenzy.

Wrenching at the bridle thong, Conant tried to turn their mount aside. But the mustang was hard-mouthed and keeping his head down galloped after the band. Until the double load slowed him, they had all they could do to stay on the horse's back. When they had fallen behind the band Conant managed to free Mestina's hands and then wrench the mustang's head around.

Kicking the horse, now as anxious to stop as he had been to run, Conant tried to get every possible yard out of him. He did not think the band would run far before scattering. When his frenzy had worked off Ladino would return for Mestina.

Momentarily, with the horse plodding docilely and Mestina in his arms, Conant forgot the impending danger. To have her silken sage-scented mane under his chin again; to feel the tumult of her breast slow

to contentment; to hold the beguiling dark fingers that clung to his own; it was enough.

"El Leon saved us—" Mestina's voice caught in a sobbing breath. "As Jeff did—"

"Don't think about it now." Conant bent to kiss her trembling lips, to wipe the tears from her eyes with a fluttering rag of his tunic sleeve. "They died gladly to keep you from Ladino. We can't stop to grieve for them until I've managed to keep you safe."

"It was Yegua who rode into Ladino," Mestina murmured after a while. "I hope he did not see, for he would kill her."

"Yegua?" Conant repeated. "The older *mujer-mare*?"

"She is the lead mare of the band and Ladino's— what would you say—"

"Number one wife?"

Mestina nodded. "So she is jealous of him and did not wish me to become one of Ladino's mares. She dared his anger hoping you would take me away."

Conant remembered the eyes flashing with hate as Yegua had thrust the leading strap into his hand. But neither the *mujer-mare*'s jealousy nor El Leon's life would make any real difference, he thought hopelessly.

If Ladino turned and came back alone they had only a few more minutes. If the stallion waited to round up his band they would have longer. A stampeding herd dispersed quickly and a mixed group

of mares and stallions would scatter more widely.

He urged the tired horse to a spurt of speed with drumming heels in his flanks. He scanned the canyon with despairing eyes. Would it be better to dismount and climb to the top of the walls? Then Conant's eyes widened with surprise. He had not noticed before that the mustang band had turned away from the main canyon. Here was the forking, here again the water marks and flood debris.

The band had turned down the other canyon to feed. The bend that had concealed them had been the junction of the two canyons. This main branch before them penetrated deeper into the limestones and shales of the mountains. Water followed limestone. . . .

Conant sent the mustang galloping down the steep pitch of the canyon floor. His spirits lifted hopefully and he looked down at Mestina with a half smile.

"Maybe we'll get away yet," he told her. "Water follows limestone. There's lots of limestone and the marks of lots of water. If we can find it in time there's sure to be some kind of hole where we can hide from Ladino!"

Blithely, he bent to kiss the red lips so conveniently near. But his horsemanship was too new to manage the feat and stay on the mustang's back at the same time. One moment there was the thrill of the kiss . . . the next Conant and Mestina rolled head over heels into

a flood-swept tangle of grasses and small branches.

Over the snapping and crackle of the dry debris, they heard the drum of the mustang's hoofs, soon lost in the distance.

Conant stared unbelievably at his leg. Evidently it had mended well indeed. He pushed himself up with his punished hands and found that he had only a myriad scrapes and scratches from the fall. Mestina was equally lucky.

"Now we travel on shanks' mares," he said, cocking his head to listen to the faint sounds of the mustang's passage. "If he gets past the junction, Ladino may follow him and not search for us here quite so soon."

The loss of his sandals made every step a wincing torment and their progress was so slow, Conant began to think they might as well stop. As well face Ladino and death here as around the next bend in the canyon. . . .

But he kept plodding. And around that next bend they saw the cave. From the yawning opening bats drooled out into the twilight. When the dribble grew to a dark stream, Conant knew the cavern was of some size.

Mestina drew back in fright but Conant gave her no time to balk at entering. "We have to go on," he said, "and we don't have time to look before we leap, either."

His arm around her, he urged Mestina forward. She shrank close

to him until he felt the thud of her heart quicken with fright under his hand. Almost at once the smooth sandy floor descended and the ceiling of the cave arched high above them. Overhead the bats flew in a twittering, invisible river.

"How far must we go?" Mestina asked. "Surely Ladino will not come—"

Magnified many times her words hissed back and forth like flying snakes. The sibilances became a background to the growing wail of vowel sounds that echoed and re-echoed until both Conant and Mestina covered their heads with their arms.

Until silence finally absorbed the pelting sound Mestina stood with her face buried against Conant's chest, trembling and shaking with fright. He stroked her mane soothingly, thinking of the act as "gentling her down." After a moment he realized that he was standing on a puzzling inequality of the cold damp floor. He traced it out with a bare toe—

Putting Mestina out of his arms Conant knelt to explore with his fingers. Hoof prints! No doubt about it. Hoof prints in the damp sulphur-stinking marl.

Possibly the mustangs sheltered here . . . or possibly Ladino came. They must go deeper into the cave. Conant kept Mestina behind him as he slowly felt out the way. When the damp marl led them around a corner, he flipped on the tiny blaze of his lighter. The pinprick of il-

lumination could only show them that the next step was safe.

"Turn right now," Mestina said suddenly in the undertone that did not set the echoes flying.

"How do you know? We must take care—"

"The path is safe. I know that it is safe."

"How—does Ladino come here?" Conant asked fearfully. "Do you know the path is safe because you have learned it from him? Don't think about him, Mestina! Or he may come to you as he did before!"

"Ladino knows this cave," she agreed. "It is part of his path." She put a hand on his arm. "Let me lead the way, Con."

Conant turned to look at her. The tiny flame from the lighter glowed along the line of her cheek and reflected in pinpoints deep in her velvet eyes. Eyes vague and dreamy as they had been when she was reaching out to Ladino by telepathy.

Reluctantly Conant let her go ahead. She moved with the confidence of a sleep walker. Around clumps of stalagmites, under dimly looming curtain flows, skirting the edges of chasms lost in darkness, she led him swiftly. Always the path descended.

Conant lost all sense of direction in the maze of turns and passages. He wondered if they were turning away from the mountains and crossing under the mesa by an underground tunnel opened by primeval waters. If it led far

enough, they might safely traverse the radioactive area. More likely, they would emerge at Ladino's feet. . . .

Conant lost track of time as he had lost direction. After a while he became conscious of the muted thunder of water. Then he realized that the blackness Mestina threaded with the certainty of a blind man in a familiar room was no longer complete. Now they walked through a deep twilight that led to a glimmer far ahead.

They emerged, dazzled with the sun of a wide valley, rock rimmed and mountain walled. The murmuring water that had traversed some underground channel became a cascade thundering down into a swift river. Grass growing lush and green clothed the slopes that ran up into heavy timber. Everywhere horses grazed.

Beehive shaped huts clustered to form a village below. The primitive structures were built of saplings and brush thrust into the ground and bent over to meet at the top. The framework was clothed with bark or deerskin or a dark substance that was probably a kind of felt. From tall poles colored strips fluttered like banners.

Wind horses, the Mongol prayer flags? Apache *wickiups*? *Yurts* of the high steppes? The ethnographer in Conant leaped in alerted interest. The Apaches of the Southwestern deserts and the remnant of the Golden Horde that had overrun Eastern Europe long ago! The two

long separated races with a common origin had survived and mingled here!

Mestina touched his arm. Looking where she pointed Conant saw two men coming across the *vega* toward them. When Mestina shrank against him Conant put an arm around her and drew her forward with him. It would not be wise to seem afraid.

Conant held up a hand in what had been a nearly universal peace signal. Then he waited quietly with Mestina in the middle of the *vega*.

When the foremost approached them, he sniffed like an animal, his face contorting at the messages his nose brought him. As he turned his head, Conant saw his eyes opaque with cataracts and remembered that one of the first results of radiation had been a high incidence of blindness.

The man wore a yellow medicine shirt decorated with sun and rain symbols. Upon his long hair perched an elaborate headdress of feather and fluttering fabric strips. Pendant on his bared chest lay a medicine bag from which he drew pinches of a yellowish powder which he scattered in the direction of the strangers. Conant supposed it was *boddentin*, the magic powder made from reeds, that the Indians had believed held protective powers. On his lean body, the man wore a breechclout of dressed skin, its ends falling to his knees front and back. Buckskin moccasins tough soled and pointed of toe could reach high up the coppery-red thighs but had

been folded down to knee length.

The second man lifted his hand in a gesture of peace. Tall and hawk-faced, he looked inscrutably at Conant and Mestina with bird-brilliant eyes. Then he spoke in a recognizable distortion of *lingua mercatura*.

"I am Batu." He indicated his blind companion. "He is Noche, the shaman."

At first glance the men were like as brothers, different only in their dress. But the second glance found only a racial resemblance. Batu's hair was black like the shaman's, but where the medicine man's was dull and coarse, the chieftain's was silken and shining with dark red glints. His eyes were set far apart under a sloping forehead but their hard gleam came from a gray-green iris. His skin was weather burned as dark as the shaman's but there was a hint of ivory toned fairness under the bronze.

The man Batu wore trousers under a loose robe of a rough weave slit up the sides for freedom and belted with a wrapped length of brightly dyed fabric. A long thin knife was thrust into the girdle on one side; on the other an ornamented purse was held by a metal chain. Like the shaman he wore high boot-moccasins turned up at the toe tip and having a pocket at the folded top from which the bitten stem of a pipe protruded. A wide brimmed hat of felt sat primly straight on abundant black hair pulled back and braided into a waist-long plait.

The blind medicine man had halted. He stabbed an accusing finger toward Mestina while his nose sorted faint odors suspiciously.

His voice was a mingled neigh of surprise and disapproval. "A woman! A *mujer-mare*! Spawn of the devil horse Ladino! Whence do you come? And this stranger-man?"

"We seek refuge," Conant answered. "I have been cast away on the desert from a fallen ship. She helped me to survive. To escape Ladino, we have come through the cave—"

"Through the cave?" the shaman screamed. "From Noogi, the Place of Darkness Under the Earth?"

The Apaches had feared the night and the darkness; the Mongol forebears of the Kalmuks had feared the earth as the abode of devils. Here was a combination of the two superstitions.

Batu's voice interrupted. "Hush, old one. Merit is acquired by hospitality to strangers. It would seem they come in peace."

The clouded eyes darted toward the sound of the chieftain's voice like a striking snake but the shaman answered in a sugared tone. "No one has come to this valley for generations and I had forgot. Do you take the man into your *yurt* and serve him with all honor. I will see that the *mujer*-woman is safely lodged where none may molest her because of her strangeness."

Mestina caught Conant's arm. "Do not let him take me from you," she whispered. "I can see into the

dirtiness of his mind . . . see the evil he plans."

"You prate of evil?" the shaman screamed at her. "You creature of the deep darkness! Witches and evil spirits come from the cave. *Bruja!* Witch! Cursed witch!"

People had come streaming from the beehive dwellings after the chief-tain and the shaman. Now they formed a tightening circle around Conant and Mestina, moving respectfully behind Noche and Batu. Curiosity was written on every face, but fear and animosity were the other side of that writing, Conant knew.

In his mind he called desperately to Mestina. If they could draw the medicine man into a contest, perhaps Mestina's extrasensory powers and his personal possessions could be used to outwit the shaman. There wasn't time to plan. They'd have to make it up as they went along. . . .

If Mestina could sense his thought. . . . *Tell him your magic is greater than his. Charge that his magic comes from evil spirits; yours from good. Challenge him! Say that your medicine is the stronger.*

And Mestina heard mentally. Her clear voice rang out to be heard by all. "How can you say that evil alone comes from the earth and the darkness? Whence comes the water that brings life to the desert?" She gestured to the fall of water plunging from the cavern. "Does not the grass that feeds your horses—and hence your children—spring from the darkness below the ground? I

have come from the darkness, but I am no witch. If I am a spirit I am a spirit of good! My medicine can overwhelm yours!"

What tricks could the man produce? Conant dredged up the last scraps of information he had about the man's savage forebears. The shamans had been masters of magic . . . rain making, fire swallowing, control of animals—

The shaman plucked a handful of feathers from his headdress. He cast them upon the ground at his feet and made commanding gestures over them. The feathers fluttered . . . swayed . . . lifted. . . . Conant wondered if this trick involved a mass hypnotism. He could not take his eyes from the moving bits. One feather rose . . . swayed . . . stood upright. Another and another. . . . All the feathers stood upon their spines swaying in a mimic dance.

A collective sigh of amazement from the watching people seemed to make the dance grow wilder. Conant tore his eyes away. Now was the time to pass to Mestina the flattened lump of the food box, stirring against his chest. Warmed by his body, its memo-plastic should regain its shape.

He called mentally to Mestina. *Take what I shall hand you. Then cast it down at your feet where the sun will strike it. Do you understand? Tell him it is a stone that you will cause to grow and produce food.*

At her side Mestina's hand reached up. Conant slipped the stir-

ring lump of plastic into her grasp.

"The feathers of the eagle, Lord of the Sky, obey my will!" the shaman shouted. "Can you do as much, *bruja*?"

Mestina's laugh was scornful and immensely confident. "I can do more, shaman. You have only made feathers to move in the wind. What is that? I shall throw down a stone and it will grow into a food bundle!"

She cast the irregular lump of plastic that looked not unlike a piece of quartz on the sun-warmed grass at her feet. Because the food container had almost reached the critical time and temperature that would cause it to resume its original shape, its transformation was rapid.

The lump stretched, growing before their eyes, and assumed form and size. In a few moments it became a food box. Through its transparency could be seen the seed cakes Conant had thrown into it when he left the cave that had been Jeff Fords' home.

This time the amazement of the watchers caused a noisy stir. When Mestina reached down to pick up the food container and offered it to the shaman, he drew back in fear. The murmur grew puzzled and awestruck.

Conant waited tensely. What would the shaman try next? When he saw the man dip into the purse that hung at his side for flint and steel he reached into his own tunic to finger his lighter. Mestina could make fire with it— But that would not be enough. He felt reasonably sure an exhibition of fire eating

would come next. He felt in the pocket. Nothing else except the broken wrist radio that would do nothing but emit blasts of crackling static.

Now the shaman pranced about the small fire he had kindled. He lighted lengths of reed drawn from some pocket of his garments. Lifting the flaming lengths high in the air he swallowed them. Then he opened his mouth to draw them forth again still burning. Conant conceded it to be a really superior performance.

He called mentally to Mestina. *You remember the small object that can make fire? Take it from me . . . here. . .* He felt Mestina's fingers and slipped the lighter into them. She knew how to flick it on.

But it would be no excitement to make a flame appear. The same thing happened when the shaman struck flint and steel. The difference in method would not be impressive. Then he remembered another bit of Indian superstition.

He sent the thought to Mestina. *The medicine man believes his strength resides in his hair. He will not permit anyone to touch it. Bring flame to the lighter. Then toss it into his head dress!*

The shaman brought a flaming reed out of his throat for a last time. Then he stood panting but triumphant, sure that nothing could top his performance.

"My medicine is stronger than yours, O eater of flames!" Mestina said scornfully. "I, too, can make fire to come at my command." She

flicked on the lighter, the small flame seeming to come from the ends of her fingers. "And I also can make the flame obey me. I command it to destroy your strength, O shaman!"

As she lifted her arm to throw the lighter, Conant pressed the stud of the wrist radio. Here in the mountains and the heat it should pick up static— The tiny radio howled and went into an ear splitting crackle. And Mestina threw the lighter, unseen, into the medicine man's headdress.

Conant hoped the noise might be mistaken for the summer thunder that sometimes was heard after a lightning bolt from a clear sky. Indians and Mongols alike had held an awesome fear of lightning, "the sky arrows."

In a puff of flame, the shaman's feathers caught fire. Howling, the man snatched off and hurled away the headdress, but his long greased hair had started burning. He cast himself on the ground and rolled, pulling at his fiery locks in a frenzy.

"The lightning! The arrows from heaven!" The onlookers hid their faces in superstitious fear. "The *mujer-mare's* medicine is the greater. The shaman is punished by the Great Blue Sky!"

The fire was out now and the medicine man back on his feet. But as he groped blindly hunting a way through the circle, the people moved away from his pleading hands, refusing him the aid of their eyes. The fear and revulsion on their

faces as they did so spelled the death of his influence in the village.

Conant and Mestina looked at each other with carefully noncommittal eyes. Then they relaxed enough to draw the first full breath for minutes.

They might be safe in the Indian stronghold now.

Conant opened one eye, then closed it again. He drew Mestina closer into his arms, burying his face in her sage-scented mane. He settled into the comfortable warmth of the fur robes piled on the floor of the *yurt*.

But his eyes opened again; he was fully awake in spite of himself. He lay relaxed and contented staring up into the thong-bound willow lattice of the hut. Lazily he watched a thin blue thread of smoke find the opening at the top of the cone and escape into the gray of dawn.

He examined the now familiar interior of the *yurt* with a continued respect for the efficiency of its arrangement. For the pared-down-to-essentials way of life it served, it would be hard to improve upon. Now the two-panel door set into the south side of the felt-covered wall was closed against the cold morning of the high altitudes. On the left side of the door cupboards held a supply of household utensils. Opposite the door were the shrine, complete with images of the gods, and a low platform where the bed furs and blankets were kept. Chests for garments and treasures and a

heap of felt floor cushions completed the furniture.

With the exception of a small circle in the center of the *yurt* the floor was covered with quilted felt. In the circle a tiny fire of dried dung burned under a pot upheld on interlaced and legged iron rings. The flicker of the fire highlighted brightly painted designs on the chests, glinted on the silver of the drinking cups, and gilded the polished bone and reed of bow cases.

Conant heard an impatient stamping and snorting outside. That was the horses tied to the hitching place in front of the *yurt*, ready for him whenever he wished to ride. These Nomads (Conant had found the continual repetition of Apache and Kalmuk a nuisance and had, long since, given the blended tribes a name that suggested their stage of civilization,) with horses in plenty never walked when they could ride.

It was a notion with which Conant had come to agree wholeheartedly. He rode with enthusiasm, wondering at times if he had a remote ancestor from these People of the Horse. Certainly, here with the Nomads and Mestina he had found his *querencia*. Here he was at home.

He lifted himself upon an elbow to look down into the furry nest where Mestina lay. Stroking back the silken forelock tumbled across her forehead he kissed her lightly. A smile came into the corners of her mouth but she slept on. Conant lay back folding his arms under his head

and remembered yesterday. It had been like most of his days now spent in the saddle or filled with hard physical activity that sent him to his bed at sundown, drugged with a pleasant fatigue.

Yesterday Batu, the chieftain, had taken Conant on one of the training trips he made almost daily with his young son. The schooling for war actually began in infancy, then accelerated when a boy reached fifteen or sixteen. Woodcraft, the making and use of weapons, horsemanship, tests of endurance such as icy swims, long runs, going without sleep for forty-eight to seventy-two hours, and proficiency in all hard exercise made up the curricula for the young warriors.

Batu, with typical Nomad care and love for children, worked with unconcealed pride to make Kayitah ready for the war path. So long as the tribes were prisoned in the valley, the training was theoretical based on a long tradition that was almost instinctive. But the Nomads believed that some day a way would be found to escape. So the boys were prepared according to the ways of their fathers.

Yesterday the problem had been fighting from horseback. Conant had envied the grace and agility with which the boy Kayitah rode out from ambush. Guiding a half wild pony with his knees he had set three yard-long arrows in a target as he galloped past. Again and again the boy charged down a rocky hillside brandishing a fifteen foot lance or clat-

tering it against his shield of toughened hide.

Once he had fallen when the horse stumbled, but he had bounced to his feet instantly. Catching the horse's mane he had pulled himself to the animal's back again, still carrying the long lance. It was then when Batu, that stolid one, had let his love and pride become visible on his face that Conant knew he had been accepted as a friend.

Conant thought about these bronzed people that the men of the effete cities he had left behind would call brutish savages. Were they? These Nomads had a definite social code—and what was more important, lived by it. According to their conception of the truth as something shared between friends and family only, they were truthful. They did not steal from their own tribesmen although stealing and not getting caught at it was a virtue when practiced against outsiders. They paid their debts and obligations scrupulously. If a member of the family faced a serious drain on his resources such as a daughter's puberty rites or the death ceremonies for a father or mother, other members helped him. They were open handed and generous to a fault. They fondly loved their children and never abused and almost never punished them. Their old people were cared for and honored. The women of the tribe worked hard and made loyal and faithful wives.

The Nomads were a happy merry people completely contented with

the simplicity of their lives. By limiting their needs they were never obliged to overwork themselves to obtain luxuries. Unhurried, they took time to savor every experience to the limit. They had none of the unrest, the discontent that made the lives of "civilized" people only a choice between the greater and the lesser evil. For example their work with the horse herds—

Conant sat up with a yelp that brought Mestina to an elbow looking sleepily curious. He began thrusting his legs into loose felted trousers and pulling on a long side-slit robe. Through the folds of the last he answered Mestina's question.

"We're going with Batu this morning to choose horses for breaking. Up to the farthest herd. And I forgot. Hurry!"

But when Mestina reached across him for the short tunic that was her only garment, Conant took time to catch her velvety softness into his arms. She shrugged back her shining mane with a small characteristic gesture and looked at him with her brown velvet eyes soft with love. Conant kissed the nape of her neck where the golden softness was irresistible as a baby's silken head, and then the small hollows of her throat. . . .

The stamping of hoofs grew louder and the voice of Batu outside made remarks about slothful sleepyheads and a ribald guess about what kept them abed so late. Conant opened his arms to let Mestina go.

She kissed him fleetingly and reached for the forgotten tunic. Stopping only to swallow a few mouthfuls of *kumiss*, the fermented mare's milk that was the mainstay of Nomad diet, they went out to Batu.

Behind the *yurts* of the village the mountains opened out to small interlocking valleys that climbed steadily to a pass. Here the grass grew even greener. Batu's finest horses moved about grazing under the watch of the herdsmen and their boy helpers. Mestina and Conant rode with Batu around the natural pasture, bounded at one end by cliffs dropping to the river far below and at the other by a rocky passage to the summit.

Batu pointed upward with his whip. "One man must watch the Gates there to keep the horses from straying. Below and on the other side of the mountain is the Ground that Glows in the Dark."

Conant looked speculatively at the mountain barrier that shut the Nomads from the roving life that was bred in their bones as a dam holds back a river. What would happen as their numbers increased? Would the people leave behind them the noble simplicity of their life in the saddle? Would they become cultivators of the soil and city dwellers? Or would a new race emerge, of which Mestina was a forerunner, whose pressure would break the radioactive barrier? It would be interesting to record and coordinate any changes he himself observed—

Conant frowned. More and more he found himself thinking in terms of a lifetime spent among the Nomads. But here in the comparative safety of the village Mestina could undoubtedly pick up the thoughts of the centaur and ferret out his knowledge of a safe passage-way through the contaminated country. Since men lived inside the region supposedly fatal to all life, Conant could believe in a passage through country that had similarly failed to become radioactive. But when Mestina did learn of the passage, he would go with reluctance. It was fascinating to observe a people embedded in their past as a fly is eternally preserved in amber.

Batu had brought along three speedy and well trained lasso horses to use in cutting out the horses to be broken. He equipped Conant with the Mongol lasso, a slender willow pole fifteen feet long with a rawhide running noose at the end. With the herdsmen, Batu rode into the herd and began separating the horses wanted for breaking from the rest.

Guiding the lasso horses with their knees, the Nomads dashed through the band after the marked youngsters. Almost at once the intelligent lasso horses understood which animal was wanted and chased him in and out among the hundreds of others until his rider could drop the lasso and make a catch. Then the lasso horse stopped abruptly and haunched down to take up the strain when the loop dropped

around the neck and was drawn up between the youngster's ears. Two deft twists by the rider made the loop into a halter. Then the animal was drawn out of the herd to join the group held by the herd boys.

Sitting his own mount at one side Conant watched the first cutting made with neatness and speed. Then when a wanted animal raced toward him Batu signaled with an upflung arm and a wordless yell. Conant drummed his heels against his horse's flanks. The horse fanned out to head the runaway without really waiting for any direction from his rider.

Twisting, turning so abruptly that Conant clung to his mane to stay on, the lasso horse drove the youngster away from the herd. He raced beside ready for the catch and throwing his head in a gesture that amusingly told his opinion of his rider when Conant missed his first cast. Trying again, Conant was successful. It was scarcely possible not to be with the horse doing everything except using his teeth to twist the noose around the youngster's neck.

"I don't know why you don't go a step farther," Conant yelled at Batu. "Train the lasso horses to snatch the ones you want out by the ear. Why do they need a rider?"

The chieftain shook his head. "The rider is the horse's brain. That is an old proverb of my people."

"Then Ladino should be—" Conant began.

"He is a devil horse and we fear

him. He has only part of the horse's strength; only part of a man's wisdom. If Ladino should have a son with *all* the strength of the horse and *all* the brain of the man—"

"Ladino is a hybrid and therefore sterile. He cannot reproduce his kind."

The Nomad shrugged. "Who can say what can, and cannot, be? There have been many changes since the long ago time when the ground was made to glow."

"Mutations."

"The word I do not know. The fact is plain to see," Batu answered. "Now let us get back to—" He stopped abruptly, then pointed up the slope.

Against the blue sky caught in the notch, the centaur silhouetted for an instant, head upflung and nostrils tasting the wind. Then with a high pitched trumpeting he plunged down at the herd.

Already excited by the working, the horses began to pour down the pasture like an avalanche. Caught in the van, Batu and the herdsmen would have to outride the panicked horses. Further down where the *vega* widened they could turn and control the band.

Conant fought to control his own mount then raced to Mestina. If Ladino saw her—

He lashed her horse with the rawhide loop of the lasso, hoping the animal would bolt out of sight in the serrated cliffs that walled that side of the pasture. But the sting of the lash whirled the animal instead.

Ears laid back and eyes rolling Mestina's mount caromed off the racing river of horseflesh. Mestina was unseated and flung aside.

It was the shaman who turned the running into blind stampede. The man seemed to spring up from the ground. Certainly he rose in front of the thundering leaders of the herd. Going up to high places to commune with the spirits had been a regular part of Noche's routine, Conant knew. Now that he had been discredited by Mestina such help as his gods could give him was more than ever necessary. But his gods had not warned him to crouch unseen in the crevice from which he had emerged.

The tags and feathers of his garb whipped in the wind. He ran in short darting rushes, hands out and head thrown back, his voice a whining scream. The man's Apache forebears, wily eaters of the white man's beef, had been adept at causing stampedes but they could not have planned a more certain method of insuring panic. The horses went into a stampede, senseless with fright.

The shaman went down under the galloping hoofs. Conant heard the beginning of a scream. Then there was only the stream of horses, at first dividing around the trodden heap fluttering with tags and feathers. In seconds the body was no longer an obstacle. And the rushing river poured over and obliterated it.

Curses like prayers tore at Conant's throat. Mestina was dangerously near the edge of the

stampede, staggering to her feet after her fall. As he raced to reach her a horse, pushed out of the stream, rammed his mount. Conant was flung beside Mestina, to the ground that shuddered with the pound of running hoofs. He arched his body over hers and closed his eyes at the imminent death.

But the horses swerved aside, even in panic frightened of the centaur. Noche, the shaman, had his moment of revenge then, even if he had died for it. The stampede had turned Ladino, too. And he had caught sight of Mestina.

The thundering dust was pierced by his triumphant scream. Galloping up, he swerved in a skidding stop and his lean arms swept the girl from Conant's protection. A hoof scraped the side of Conant's head and pain seared like a hot iron. Then Ladino was gone, galloping up the slope to reach the pass.

Something in Conant's whirling head spoke to him clearly. *Let her go. What else can you do except get yourself killed? If Ladino takes her then she will surely find the safe path. And find some way to tell you. You couldn't take a mujer-mare back to civilization, anyway—*

With a violence that denied the inner voice, Conant struggled to his feet. He couldn't let her go. He could die . . . as heroically as Jeff Fords had done . . . even as the beast El Leon had done . . . to save Mestina from the stallion's savage embrace.

It was the loop of the lasso that

downed him that time. Again he fought the pain and the exhausted lurching of his bad leg to stagger to his feet.

The scene seemed to have frozen in its violence. Below where the *vega* widened, Batu and the herdsmen shouted and rode, turning aside the tiring leaders of the stampede. But beside Conant the panic stricken horses still raced past like the rapids of a living river, plunging, momentarily subsiding, crashing together, trampling, smothering, mutilating each other . . . and presenting an impassable barrier to Ladino.

The stallion had raced up the slope to go behind the stream of horses and so reach the pass. But the river flowed on. Ladino whirled and galloped back. He thundered down upon Conant swaying and propping himself erect with the willow pole of the lasso still held in his hand.

Someplace Conant had read about gladiators sent into the arena with nets to fight against tridents. With the same desperation they must have felt, he cast the lasso at the centaur.

When it fell over Ladino's throat, Conant threw himself backward to put every ounce of his weight into the closing of the noose. But the centaur's jarring stop yanked him upright again.

Pulling the long Nomad knife from his girdle Conant leaped at the stallion.

Driving the steel into Ladino's neck he prayed that it would reach

the great artery. He would have no second chance.

The probing steel missed a vital spot and Conant crashed to his knees. Raging, Ladino flung Mestina aside to concentrate on the killing of this man. Rearing, he struck down at Conant with flailing hoofs. His hands clawed at the trailing lasso, its loop still around his neck.

Conant dodged under the hoofs. He couldn't avoid the down coming death . . . but a man had to keep trying. He flung himself away from Mestina, lying in a small quiet heap barely out of the path of the stampede. *Not bring Ladino down on her, too. . . .*

Ladino's chest struck Conant's shoulder. He saw the blazing hate in the stallion's eyes as he fell, saw the teeth ready to rend and tear. But the crushing impact did not come.

The last wave of running horses caught the rawhide lariat still hanging from Ladino's neck as they plunged down the steep slope that led to the cliff edge. A hoof faltered . . . a horse fell against another . . . pulled down a third. Their tangled weight pulled Ladino into the fighting screaming mass. Like wreckage caught in a whirlpool, the stallion was swept under, emerged again for an instant, eyes bulging and mouth gasping for air against the throttle of the lariat. Then he was swept onward and was gone, plunging over the precipice with the maddened horses.

Conant crawled to Mestina. He cradled her in his arms, murmuring

as he stroked back the silky forelock tumbling across her closed eyes. She lay still, softly furry and somehow shrunken as Conant remembered a dead squirrel from his first boyish hunt. He tightened his arms around her, his lips moving from the dark cloud of her mane down to the velvety softness of her throat. And there a faint throb against his mouth told him that she was not dead.

He rubbed the limp dark hands that were so oddly appealing and frantically called to her. When her great dark eyes opened at last she stared vaguely for a moment. Then the velvet depths grew soft as she recognized him and the small dark hands clung to his.

Batu came galloping, having turned and saved a part of his herd. In the instant when he looked from Mestina to the concerned face of his friend, Conant thought of many things. His lifetime and Mestina's would be spent in this hidden valley, for the secret of the safe passage through the contaminated region was gone with Ladino. He was not sorry. Life here was good. There would be no more centaurs, for Ladino had been a hybrid and therefore sterile. . . . So too, would be his mating with Mestina, but if there were no children there were compensations in the noble simplicity of the Nomad life. And Batu had said, "Who can say what can, and what cannot, be?" If there could be a son to train and love. . . .

For some distant day—Conant was suddenly sure of it—the

Nomads would ride out of their high valleys, like a driven plow they would break up the burgeoning weeds of wealth and debt and servitude that choked the growth in the garden of the world. When the rotting faiths became effete cynicisms and freedom no longer struggled in the entanglement of parasite regulation, then the men of the valleys would break up the festering stagnation and release the world to new beginnings.

The little creature stirred in the secret glade where his mother had hidden him. Small hoofs and thin wobbly legs tucked under him, he had remained quiet for many hours. The light had come and gone, the warmth had been swallowed by cold darkness, then come again to stay his shivering. But his mother had not returned.

A long time ago she had left him at the whistling call of a great stallion who had come to the secret glade. The small creature had looked wonderingly with vague baby eyes when the great one had crossed the grass to stand above him. He had drawn away and then submitted to the oddly gentle stroking of a rough hand, had curled baby fists around a proffered finger. Then a trumpeting thrilled through the glade and the great one was gone in a thunder of hoofs.

The small creature struggled up to stand swaying on wobbly knock-kneed legs. He took a tentative step, bringing up against one of the bushes

that walled his tiny home. Without purpose, he nibbled at the browse with soft lips. He chewed and swallowed. Then he nipped at the bush again. The strange food stayed his gnawing hunger.

He set to work to make a meal of the small green leaves of the desert shrubs. He pushed his way through the walling green and stepped out into the open. There he tried a bite of the soft fruit of the tuna, persisting even when its spines pricked his sensitive mouth. He stared at the cactus thoughtfully for a time. Then he pawed at the branches until he had knocked off some of the watery pods. He broke open the tuna fruit with his hoof. Then he ate the smashed watery pulp delicately.

His stomach stayed, the centaur colt moved about all the day cautiously exploring his widened world. Often he paused to look off across the mesa to the distant mountains. Sometimes he saw a far off cloud of dust that moved and hid the animals that raised it. The colt watched, instinctively aware that the swift creatures were his own kind. The band of mustangs headed toward the mountains.

Those distant mountains seemed to beckon the colt as well. But in the twilight now falling rapidly as the sun was lost behind the peaks the

miles between glowed with radiant gleamings, beautiful and baleful. The colt watched fascinated as the glow deepened as darkness fell. But he was instinctively aware of the danger.

Suddenly lonely, the colt turned to go back to his secret glade. Then a strange thing happened. He heard a voice calling, a warm, soft, friendly voice. And it spoke to him inside his brain.

If you are out there somewhere, Child of Ladino, be sure that we are your friends. We are your own kind, too. We are waiting for the centaur with all the strength and swiftness of the horse; with all the wisdom of a man. If you are that awaited one come to us. We can be friends, not enemies. Come . . . come . . . come.

The colt stood listening long after the voice had died away. It had been a mothering voice, the yearning voice of a woman as yet denied a child of her own.

Night had blotted out the blue spires of the mountains now and deepened the baleful glow of the angry fires. Ladino's son turned away, going back to the safety of his secret glade.

There was a way across the valley of fires. He was sure of it. Some day when he was a little older and a little stronger he would find it.

ZOO

by . . . Edward D. Hoch

It was time to leave. The six-hour limit had run out. Ten thousand staring people had passed the barred cages.

THE children were always good during the month of August, especially when it began to get near the twenty-third. It was on this day that the great silver spaceship carrying Professor Hugo's Interplanetary Zoo settled down for its annual six-hour visit to the Chicago area.

Before daybreak the crowds would form, long lines of children and adults both, each one clutching his or her dollar, and waiting with wonderment to see what race of strange creatures the Professor had brought this year.

In the past they had sometimes been treated to three-legged creatures from Venus, or tall, thin men from Mars, or even snake-like horrors from somewhere more distant. This year, as the great round ship settled slowly to earth in the huge tri-city parking area just outside of Chicago, they watched with awe as the sides slowly slid up to reveal the familiar barred cages. In them were some wild breed of nightmare—small, horse-like animals that moved with quick, jerking motions and constantly chattered in a high-pitched tongue. The citizens of Earth clustered around as Professor Hugo's crew quickly collected the waiting dollars,

The third advertising agency staff member in this issue is Edward D. Hoch, of Rochester, N. Y., who has become increasingly well known in both the mystery and science-fiction fields in recent years. Hoch returns with this deceptively simple story of what we may look like to extra-terrestrials.

and soon the good Professor himself made an appearance, wearing his many-colored rainbow cape and top hat. "Peoples of Earth," he called into his microphone.

The crowd's noise died down and he continued. "Peoples of Earth, this year you see a real treat for your single dollar—the little-known horse-spider people of Kaan—brought to you across a million miles of space at great expense. Gather around, see them, study them, listen to them, tell your friends about them. But hurry! My ship can remain here only six hours!"

And the crowds slowly filed by, at once horrified and fascinated by these strange creatures that looked like horses but ran up the walls of their cages like spiders. "This is certainly worth a dollar," one man remarked, hurrying away. "I'm going home to get the wife."

All day long it went like that, until ten thousand people had filed by the barred cages set into the side of the spaceship. Then, as the six-hour limit ran out, Professor Hugo once more took microphone in hand. "We must go now, but we will return next year on this date. And if you enjoyed our zoo this year, phone your friends in other cities about it. We will land in New York tomorrow, and next week on to London, Paris, Rome, Hong Kong, and Tokyo. Then on to other worlds!"

He waved farewell to them, and

as the ship rose from the ground the Earth peoples agreed that this had been the very best Zoo yet. . . .

Some two months and three planets later, the silver ship of Professor Hugo settled at last onto the familiar jagged rocks of Kaan, and the queer horse-spider creatures filed quickly out of their cages. Professor Hugo was there to say a few parting words, and then they scurried away in a hundred different directions, seeking their homes among the rocks.

In one, the she-creature was happy to see the return of her mate and offspring. She babbled a greeting in the strange tongue and hurried to embrace them. "It was a long time you were gone. Was it good?"

And the he-creature nodded. "The little one enjoyed it especially. We visited eight worlds and saw many things."

The little one ran up the wall of the cave. "On the place called Earth it was the best. The creatures there wear garments over their skins, and they walk on two legs."

"But isn't it dangerous?" asked the she-creature.

"No," her mate answered. "There are bars to protect us from them. We remain right in the ship. Next time you must come with us. It is well worth the nineteen commocs it costs."

And the little one nodded. "It was the very best Zoo ever. . . ."

lost aurora

by . . . *Franklyn Roberts*

It was so wonderful to be home again. He could hardly contain his happiness as he gazed at the lilac tree. . . .

THE dream had been shockingly vivid and David had trouble extricating himself from it. He lay in bed, straining his eyes in the dim room, trying to focus them upon the gray streaks of light that showed between the slats of the window blind. He was involved in two realities—the reassuring one of his bed and bedroom, and the nightmarish one of the plain and the mountains.

He was aware of the smooth cool sheets of the bed and the timid breath of the summer morning seeping through the window ventilator, and yet at the same time he was aware of the preposterous plain and the outrageous shapes of the distant mountains.

He seemed to be lying on the plain, facing the mountains. His body was supported by an unyielding object beneath his shoulders. Another, much larger object loomed beside him, an indeterminate object, tall and violently twisted. In the sky, harsh pinpointed stars glittered, shedding pitiless radiance upon the scene, turning the plain into a glistening shambles, transforming the mountains into glinting grotesques.

Franklyn Roberts returns, after much too long an absence, with this sensitive story of part of the price that Man will have to pay if he wants the Stars. Purists will perhaps question the description of this as SF—but this is to deny that—even Tomorrow—man will remember lost dreams.

He was without physical sensation. He could glimpse his bulky shapeless body but he had no kinesthetic awareness of it. While it was unquestionably his body, he had no contact with it, no relationship.

The dream was peculiar in other aspects. It did not progress. There was no movement—except the imperceptible movement of the stars—and yet there was a sense of time, a distorted cognizance of hours passing, a vague remembrance of other hours that had already passed—

David concentrated on the window, the familiar window with the first light of the morning filtering through its Venetian blind. After a long while the details of the bedroom began to assert themselves: the unforgettable slant of the hipped ceiling, the dim silhouette of his bed table piled with books, the gray blur of his chest of drawers, the dark mass of his antique rolltop desk; finally the pale expanse of the sheets and the remembered crescent of the foot of the bed.

Tentatively he got up and slipped into his summer clothing, moving softly so he would not awaken his mother and father. He went downstairs to the kitchen and put the teakettle on, and he washed in the kitchen sink while the water came to a boil; and while the water bubbled and gurgled in the dripolator he fried bacon and eggs, and made toast. Suddenly he remem-

bered the morning and he opened the kitchen door, and the morning tiptoed in, sweet and cool, and moist as a child's kiss.

It was so wonderful to be home again! David could hardly contain his happiness. Through the open door he could see the lilac tree laden with its mauve explosions of scented blooms, and the sweep of dew-drenched meadows with their scattered snowfalls of daisies; and beyond the meadows the lavender mistiness of the gently rising hills. He ate his breakfast hurriedly, not tasting it, then he went out into the morning. He followed the old path through the orchard, over the little rickety bridge that spanned the creek, past the blackberry patch and down to the country road. The road was damp and cool beneath its canopy of sugar maples, a long green tunnel of associations. He walked along it, fondling memories.

The mass melody of birds was all around him, accompanied now and then by the boisterous leitmotiv of an awakening rooster. He passed drowsy farmhouses dreaming in their green retreats of lawns and trees, familiar rural mailboxes standing one-legged by the roadside with their remembered stencilled names and their little metal arms that the postman raised when there was mail.

His heart began to pound when he neared the last house, when he saw the apple orchard and the pasture; the strawberry patch, and

then the neat lawn with its prim little islands of tulip beds and its disciplined spiraea. He knew why his heart was pounding, but he wouldn't admit the reason even to himself until he reached the white picket fence and looked up suddenly and saw Jo Ann standing by the gate.

A different Jo Ann—a mature Jo Ann in a white summer dress. Her awkwardness had absconded: her legs were rounded now, and long and graceful; her breasts full. And she was tall, almost as tall as he was, he saw when he came up to her.

Her bobbed hair was darker, a dark lustrous brown, and her freckles were gone. No, not quite. A few of them were still there—little nostalgic traces half hidden in her summer tan.

"I heard you were back," she said. "I've been waiting here, hoping you might come by."

"I'm so glad to see you, Jo."

He stood there quietly, looking into her eyes. The warm brightness had come into them, the way it used to before he had gone away. Seeing her eyes like that he wondered why he had ever gone away at all, how he ever could have gone away. But he had been much younger then, of course, just as she had been; they had been kids then, both of them, too young to know what love was all about.

It was different now. It was different, and yet in an intangible way it wasn't different at all. He took

her hand, the way he used to, and they started down the road together. And the road was the same as it had always been, and they were the same too, even though they were man and woman now, instead of boy and girl.

In a way everything had changed, and yet in another way nothing had changed at all. . . .

It was the time of the morning that David liked best, a phase of dawn that most people never saw at all—a haunting, evanescent phase. The light was gray, and yet it was pink too; part mist, part fragrance, soft, tenuous, unreal. It was all around him, filling the valley, turning the valley into a gentle place of pale shadows and diaphanous mists; of green pastures and still waters. And then, abruptly, it was gone; the lovely moment was over and the first rays of the sun were slanting brightly down from the hills.

When they reached the end of the road they struck off across the fields. The farm buildings dwindled slowly behind them, and the hills grew gradually taller, the deep green of forest and clearing showing upon their misted slopes.

David knew the valley intimately. He was acquainted with every rise and fall of ground, every clump of sumac, every isolated elm and sprawling oak. He told Jo Ann all the silly things he used to think about when he was a boy playing on the meadows; hunting,

fishing, climbing grassy hills; running in the summer wind. And she listened to his words quietly, smiling her soft understanding smile.

There were many things he didn't need to tell her—the things they had done together and had reciprocal thoughts about. When they came to the places they had shared there was no need to talk, and they walked silently side by side, glancing at each other and touching eyes.

He thought of how wonderful it was to be back. How marvelous it was to be walking hand in hand with his unforgettable childhood sweetheart, lightly leaping little meadow brooks, climbing pasture fences; pausing like mystified children before some strange flower, some odd twist of tree, some tiny impression in soft earth that only a leprechaun could have made — Walking and talking in low voices, seeing each other in quiet moments, alone in the morning, on the meadows, the lazy hills spread out before them, rising like green gigantic shoulders into the matchless summer sky.

Presently they came to the special creek that meandered across the valley floor beneath a serpentine canopy of willows. They found a shadowed place where the water ran clear and cold, and they sank down upon the grassy bank to rest. They removed their shoes, the way they used to do, and let the flashing water swirl round their feet. Then they lay lazily back and look-

ed up at the sky through the arabesques of willow leaves.

"I don't know why I went away," David said. "I can't understand why I went away."

"The valley was too small for you," Jo Ann said. "You had to go."

"I never stopped wanting to come back. Not once. I could never get the valley out of my mind. The valley the way it is on a summer morning, the way it is now—"

"Am I a part of it?"

"You're the most important part," David said. "Without you, the valley would be nothing. Without you, this wouldn't be morning at all. It would be—would be—"

He paused, concentrating. He closed his eyes for a moment. Abruptly, horribly, the plain rushed into focus, the plain and the distant fantastic mountains. And again he found himself lying in the midst of a glinting wasteland beside a tortured twisted shape which he could only half see and did not want to see at all; a shape that held frightful associations, that symbolized something he desperately wanted to forget.

His eyelids seemed to be cemented together. He could not raise them and yet, paradoxically, in one sense they were raised, and his eyes were fixed with terrible intensity upon the plain and the mountains, upon the cruel hating stars that glittered in the stygian sky.

He concentrated with his whole being. His eyelids weighed incal-

culable tons. Raising them was like raising the world, and yet when he finally did raise them he was not sure whether he had raised them at all. For an unreasonable moment he was sure that he had lowered them instead. But it did not matter really, because the lovely morning scene flowed back and the plain and the mountains faded away. And there above him were the delicate willow limbs and the little patches of sky showing through exquisite interstices; and there beside him was his glorious grown-up sweetheart.

"I don't know why I went away," he said again. "I must have forgotten about the morning. I must have forgotten about you."

"But you remembered us again."

"Yes," he said. He leaned back, pillowing his head upon her shoulder, being careful not to close his eyes. "I remembered . . . But not till after I went away. Not till it was almost too late. And I never should have forgotten in the first place. I never should have forgotten from the first moment on, the first morning, remember? When I carried your books from school."

"But you did."

"Yes . . . It seems crazy now. But I remembered for awhile. Till the stars started to get into my eyes and I couldn't see anything else, only in a distorted kind of way, a way that turned values upside down. A drunken way really, because I was drunk then, drunk with trajectories and escape veloci-

ties and Einsteinian space time. I was so drunk that I wanted to escape from the valley. From the morning. From you—"

"But you sobered up in time."

"Yes," he said. "I'm glad of that. But it took me so long. Think of all the mornings we've lost. All the sweet mornings, the irretrievable mornings—"

"We'll make up for them."

"Not all of them. We can never make up for all of them."

"We can try." She pulled her feet out of the water and slipped them, wet and glistening, into her sandals. "Come on," she said. "Let's not waste a minute of this one!"

David put his own shoes on abstractedly. A light wind had crept down from the hills and into the valley. There was a dreamy stir of branches, a gentle rippling of the tall timothy of the meadows. He breathed deeply, smelling the forest smell of the hills, the damp decayed smell; the living-dying smell of new life springing from the compost of old.

They left the creek and struck off across the fields again. The valley was washed in warm golden light.

They waded through tall drifts of daisies and climbed fences embroidered with wild morning glories. The hills crept closer. Finally they came to the beginning of the forest and they slipped into its fern-scented coolness. Birds

sang softly in the dappled fastnesses before them.

The ground rose gradually and David recognized the familiar contour of the first hill. He began to see the familiar forest places—the grapevine swings and the wild berry patches, the dwindling stands of locusts; the tall straight beech where once, long ago, he had carved the big awkward heart and laboriously inscribed the names "David" and "Jo Ann" within its asymmetrical boundaries. The vague outline of the heart was still there, and by looking closely and concentrating he was able to make out the names. They were on a level with his eyes, he noticed, and something in him shouted that that shouldn't be; that both he and the tree had grown during the years and that the heart and the names should have risen in proportion to the tree's growth, not his. The inscription should be high above his head now, not precisely on a level with his eyes.

But it wasn't high above his head at all. It was right there where he could see it conveniently, where he could look at it closely and make out its dimly remembered outlines— He turned quickly away and continued up the hill, Jo Ann walking quietly beside him. He reached out and took her hand, holding it tightly to assure himself of her reality. Her hand was cool and light, and she seemed to float along beside him, half ethereal, half real, beautiful and unbeliev-

able after all the lonely years without her. The sun, sifting down through the lacy forest foliage, splashed upon their heads and shoulders, and it was as though they were walking in golden rain, the rain falling soundlessly, forming bright puddles on the forest floor around them, accumulating in the clearings in warm golden ponds.

They found a place between two hills where the spongy ground was riotous with violets. David picked a small bouquet and fastened it in Jo Ann's hair. "To match your eyes," he said. The violets were lovely, but her eyes were lovelier still. He gazed into them wonderingly, seeing for the first time how deep they were, how infinitely deep; knowing, with sudden overwhelming conviction, that they contained the whole world. . . .

The valley sank farther and farther below them, visible now and then through delicate traceries of leaves and limbs. But David only glanced at it and then glanced away. He wanted to save it till the last. He wanted to save it till they breasted the highest hill and then look down and see it in all its auroral splendor, spread lavishly out below him just as he remembered it. Thinking of the valley made him happy. It was his valley in a way, now that he'd come back. In one sense he only owned a tiny corner of it, but in another sense he owned it completely. He promised himself that he would never

leave it again. "Never," he said aloud. "Never," he repeated. His voice sounded oddly muffled, far away and unreal.

The hills fell away below them, lost in the soft undulations of tree-tops. Halfway up the highest one they stopped to rest. Jo Ann sat with her back against a forest oak and David lay full length upon the ground, his head upon her lap, his eyes gazing up into her face.

Subtly, the scene shifted. It turned upside down, and suddenly he seemed to be looking down into a clear pool of water and seeing Jo Ann's reflection, slightly blurred, with great arches of branches showing deeply below it, and below the branches, at tremendous depth, the sky. Vertigo overcame him and he fought it desperately. He was careful not to close his eyes, but the dream returned anyway.

It was as though someone had cast a stone into the limpid pool. The reflected images went awry. They blurred and faded into meaningless distortions, and then the plain intruded itself, the plain and the distant mountains. The mountains were more distinct now, and he saw that they had abrupt shapes, as though they had just been formed, had just been squeezed up out of the ground and into the impassive sky, distorted in agony, twisted in infinite pain.

And then he became aware of the cold. He did not feel it. He *saw* it. He saw it in the stark clearness of the atmosphere, in the hard

iridescence of the plain, and in the glinting shapes of nearby outcroppings. And suddenly he realized that the plain was covered with snow, and that the outcroppings were upheavals of ice.

He became aware of something else, a phenomenon that had been absent before. There was a glow above the mountains, a silvery incandescence that intensified even as he watched, that reached out until it dominated the sky. And then, incredibly, the tip of a glittering silver lance rose slowly and magnificently above the peaks and stabbed into the stars.

He closed his eyes in anguish, and when he closed them in one sense he opened them in another. Jo Ann's face swam into focus, and then the background of motionless oak leaves and the deep perspective of sky. The stone had sunk to the bottom of the pool, out of sight beyond the stratosphere, and the pool was calm again, its images clear and steady.

He sat up slowly. The wooded hillside was spread out reassuringly all around him. The air was warm and pleasant, fragrant with a hundred forest scents, alive with a hundred forest sounds. He got to his feet and pulled Jo Ann up beside him. "Let's hurry," he said. "There isn't much time. And I want to see the valley. I've got to see the valley."

The hillside grew steep. They had to dig their feet into the earth and pull themselves upward by

branches and saplings. David felt the fluttering of his heart, the searing agony of his every breath. Jo Ann climbed gracefully, easily, her face cool and composed, more beautiful than he had ever seen it before.

When they were nearly to the summit he thought for a moment that he wasn't going to make it. The forest swam greenly around him, the blue sky patterns pinwheeled. For a moment he thought that he was going to slip back down the slope, go tumbling hopelessly down the hill. Then Jo Ann took his hand and new strength flowed into him, and suddenly there was the grass-covered shoulder of the hilltop and they were striding up its gentle contour into the sun.

They stood on the hilltop, against the sky, in the high, cool wind. "I love you, Jo Ann," David said. "I've always loved you. I never told you before. I waited too long to tell you . . ." He could see the valley clearly. It was a green-blue vastness below him—a vastness of fields and meadows and woodlands; of creeks and ponds and the shining ribbon of a river; of miniature houses nestling in green arbors, of the red bric-a-bracs of barns.

He saw the nostalgic curio of the country schoolhouse sitting on

its green shelf of lawn. In the distance the highway was a straight chalk line, and in the foreground the country roads were unpremeditated pencilings on verdant paper. The diffused light of the morning gave every detail a softness, a delicacy of contour, and the vivid blueness of the morning sky above the opposite line of hills lent a final flourish to the meticulous mental picture.

Then, subtly, the colors began to melt. The blueness of the sky began to sag, to run in blue blobs down into the greenness of the valley, smearing the exquisite details of houses and fields and roads and trees. And where the blueness of the sky had been the distorted mountains began to show, and then the plain. And finally the hills themselves dissolved, and Jo Ann flew away, and he lay all alone on the plain, propped against his air tanks, his body turning to ice in his heat-exhausted suit, his broken ship rising like an ironic tombstone beside him.

And he knew, in the last lucid moment, lying there watching the edge of Saturn's rings stab Titan's forsaken sky, that morning is a part of the price you have to pay if you want the stars, and that the only time spacemen ever go home to their childhood sweethearts is in their dying dreams.

science
and
anti-
science

by . . . John Christopher

Passion rejected meant
passion turned to hate.
In years to come he'd
remember this moment.

IT IS not often realized how idealistic a bunch the science-fiction writers are. Wrecking, as they commonly do, a world in a sentence, a galaxy in a paragraph, they are thought to be cynical and despairing. Edmund Crispin accuses them of having rediscovered Original Sin.

I used to share this common view until the occasion, a few years ago, when I was one of a number photographed and interviewed for a popular magazine feature. What, we were asked, did we think the proper function of science-fiction to be? It all came out in a rush. Not a word about First British Serial Rights, the terrors of the future, or the horrors of the human heart. We (except for me) believed in Science and (with the same exception) in Science-Fiction as the handmaid of Science.

Now although I quite often find myself on the outside peering in, I have never been reconciled to this condition. I am a natural born conformist, and it distresses me no end to be unable to share the innocent hopes and ideals of my colleagues. And if I cannot share them, I want to know why not. It is not enough

Those readers who look back, nostalgically, on the glittering never-never quality of much of SF in the thirties, where scientists would often be mad and power-hungry men, as Lester del Rey pointed out last month, will welcome this autobiographical article by a prominent British Science Fiction writer.

to say I would not trust a scientist any further than the gentleman in Charing Cross Road who once sold me 3 1/3rd playing cards as a means of performing the three-card trick. I realized very quickly where I had been had on that. Science is altogether too majestic for the comparison to be sound.

My defect must be traceable, and I believe I have finally run it to earth. A point to bear in mind is that, in my life, science-fiction predated Science. At the age of ten, I loved Science for science-fiction's sweet sake. Now let us examine the scene.

At my school, both Greek and Chemistry were held over till the second year. In the first year, we did Physics, but few right-minded schoolboys equate Physics with Science. There is little ecstasy in rubbing bakelite sticks with artificial silk or setting up rows of pins between mirrors. Science is Stinks.

I spent a year longing for that exquisite moment when I should enter the Chemistry Lab. My other studies suffered. (My conjugation of 'sein' in an end-of-term German exam is still, I believe, remembered: Ich seine, du seinst, er seint . . .) When September again hove to, I grabbed a seat in the front row, and trembled as I touched a test-tube. Spaceships were just around the corner.

The Chemistry master was a small neat man who, perhaps as an extension of his small neatness, gave marks out of 5, not 10. It

distressed me when, in those early blissful weeks, my own marks were 1, 1½, and occasionally 2; but I adored the chastening rod. Nearly a term went by before the grim truth dawned.

He handed back our books. "Christopher," he said with desiccated passion, "I have been in the habit of subtracting 3 marks from you because of your disgusting handwriting. Your most recent effort demands a penalty of 4, and I am still being generous. As, in addition, I partly disagreed with what I could read of your work, your mark this week is minus ½."

It took me some while to realize he wasn't joking. Illegibility, I had always thought, was a sign of the scientific genius. Even if I were wrong about that, surely blots and a wild scrawl would not bar the doors of the Royal Society to the eager mind? But he was in deadly earnest. I tried, for a time, to appease him. I strove to write well or, if not well, with some semblance of neatness. But those were the Bad Old Pre-Chancery Days. Failure succeeded failure, and despair stole into my heart. I wound up 31st, in a class of 32. (The one below me had been away three months with a broken leg.)

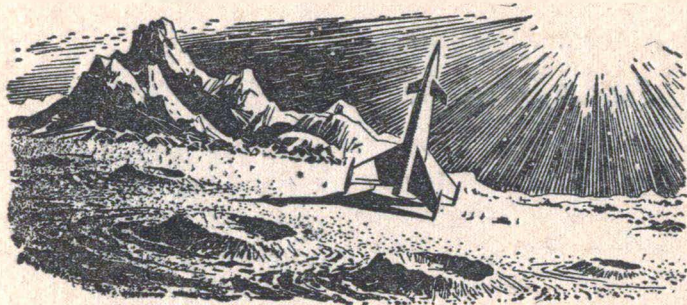
At the end of the second year, the School split into streams labeled Science and Literary. My Greek marks were not brilliant, but they served. After a bare ten months, the Chemistry Lab door clanged behind me,

In my last year at school, I entered it again. With a shortage of accommodation, the Upper Sixth Greek set (three boys and a moribund master) were allocated the Lab once a week. I found before me the familiar bottles and jars. And, Satan entering along with a weary distaste for Thucydides, I began to play with them. Surreptitiously I tipped the contents of one jar into the next, mixed hydrochloric with nitric acid, set the magnesium smoking. There were some pretty effects, but even when noth-

ing visibly happened, I savored the joy of sabotage.

I wonder how many years it was, after I left, before Chemistry in that school became predictable again?

I need no psycho-analyst to lay bare my ambivalence. Passion—passion rejected—passion-turned-to-hate—and so Guilt. How could I ever hope to be one of the happy brotherhood who rap Pandora's Box to smarten things up? I have been faithful to thee, Science, in my fashion.



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shapes in the sky

by . . . *Civilian
Saucer Intelligence*

If UFO are hallucinations—what is the explanation for the times when machines are affected by them?

IN *Fantastic Universe* for May we described five of the bizarre UFO reports of the extraordinary sighting wave in early November, 1957: the five cases which the Air Force had "explained." Far more interesting is the fact that of these five reports four involved what the French author Aimé Michel calls "hallucinated machines." That is, not only did the observers see something, but the UFO apparently had some kind of electrical effect on whatever kind of mechanical contrivance the observer was using.

At Levelland, Texas, at Orogrande, New Mexico, and at Kearney, Nebraska, the witnesses said their automobile engines failed when the unknown object was in the vicinity. (True, the Kearney report of "spacemen" has all the earmarks of the hoax that the Air Force labeled it; but at the moment, all we are saying is that the witness's automobile *was reported* stalled.) In the Gulf of Mexico the Coast Guard cutter *Sebago* tracked an object for 27 minutes by radar. (The object seen visually, presumably Sputnik II, does not appear to have any connection with the radar returns.)

Civilian Saucer Intelligence of New York, authors of the above discussion on "hallucinated machines"—someone has suggested they could also be called "pixillated"—is a N. Y. research group which holds occasional public meetings, publishes a newsletter, and has a large file of material on UFOlogy.

We have already discussed the effects of UFOs on radar (F.U., February and March). But what about these other "hallucinated machines"? We know that in France, during the wave of sightings in the Fall of 1954, there were many cases where car motors and headlights were affected by saucers; but what about the more recent reports in this country?

The stalled-motor reports from Texas and New Mexico on November 3 and 4 brought to light several earlier cases of the same sort. In Covington, Indiana, Mrs. Robert Moudy said that around midday on October 15, nearly three weeks earlier, her husband, a 42-year-old farmer, had sighted a flat, "dish-shaped" (sic) object hovering 1500 feet over his farm at nearby Foster (on the Illinois border). An estimated 20 feet in diameter, it was described as a "glowing, silver flying object" with a "red flame shooting out of the middle of it." Moudy was driving a combine in his bean field when he noticed the object. "It gave off a piercing, screaming noise like a screeching tire and then suddenly shot off into space at a 22-degree angle until it disappeared high in the sky in a few seconds." The motor of the combine had inexplicably stopped as the object hovered overhead; and Moudy said that two cars were stalled at the same time on a nearby road. Moudy reported the incident to local civilian defense officials (this was before his

wife's statements to the newspapers). (Indianapolis *Star*, 11/5.)

Another delayed report came from Casper, Wyoming. On October 30 two Casper residents, Hugh Pulju and Shirley Moyer, had encountered a round shiny object which "appeared" before them in the road as they were driving some ten miles north of town. "It was as big as a house, and had two pointed peaks on it," said Miss Moyer, and "it glowed about halfway up. I've been scared before, but this thing had me petrified." Pulju, a member of a seismographic crew, said that the object was not a derrick, a trailer house, or a tank: "it was something that shouldn't have been there." He tried to turn his car around, but the engine kept stalling. Once he had succeeded in turning around and had reached the highway, the trouble stopped. (Casper *Tribune-Herald*, 11/5; Cheyenne *Wyoming Eagle*, 11/6.)

On the night of November 3—nearly 24 hours after the Levelland reports of "eggs" and stalled motors—Dorothy L. Stevens, of Springfield, Illinois, was driving near Virden, about seven miles south of Springfield, when she saw "a bright light in the south." Her car lights "dimmed like the old model T's used to do, and the motor stopped." After the light had departed the car again functioned properly. (Springfield *Illinois State Journal*, 11/6.)

On that same evening a similar incident occurred in Alberta, Can-

ada. The *Calgary Herald* (11/6) provides a detailed account. Miss Edna Ireland, a 28-year-old Calgary resident, accompanied by two friends, was driving back to Calgary from Saskatchewan on highway #9, and was approximately 15 minutes west of the Saskatchewan border, in Alberta, when all three women suddenly saw a blinking light "about 15 times the visual size of a star" appear in the sky, coming into view from directly over their car. The object was headed in a northwesterly direction. "I thought it was a plane at first," reported Miss Ireland, "but it had no wing lights as a plane would have. It looked like the blinking beacon at the airport, up in the sky. It was moving very fast in a curve which carried it toward the northwest horizon. By the time it had reached the horizon it had blinked fifteen times from when it had first been sighted."

As the UFO passed over their car, the motor began acting up—it coughed and the headlights flickered. "We chalked it up to loose wiring." (The blinking of the object is similar to the behavior of the "egg" at Levelland; there, motors and lights quit when the object *blinked on*, and functioned properly when the object *blinked off*. This effect was described as similar to the blinking of neon advertising signs.)

Brightly luminous UFOs again affected car motors, in Texas and in New Mexico, on November 5.

The *San Antonio Light* (11/6) reported that about 9:30 p.m. the previous evening Lon Yarbrough, a 39-year-old civilian cook at Lackland AFB, was driving along highway 81 from Devine to San Antonio. Just outside the city, he saw a bright egg-shaped object in a field "off the old Frio City Road," about 200 yards away. The color was a glaring white "like a big neon sign." First his radio faded, and his lights went out; then his car engine abruptly stopped dead.

He had watched the white object—which he estimated was 60 feet long—for approximately ten seconds when it suddenly rose vertically from the field. At a height of about 60 feet, it leveled off into horizontal flight and crossed the road ahead of him on a southeast heading. The witness said he heard a "whistling noise" as it went overhead, and felt a blast of hot air at the same time (as at Levelland and Orogrande). It disappeared from view in a few seconds. When it had vanished, his lights and radio came back on, and he had no difficulty in starting his motor again. (UP accounts stated that the witness had seen the object settle down in a ravine near the highway, and finally disappear toward San Antonio—to the northeast. These details are in conflict with the local version of the report. Either Yarbrough told two different stories, or else the reporters got the details garbled.) Yarbrough was driving a 1957 Mercury, which

was in "perfect mechanical condition."

Shortly before 11 p.m. (MST) an unidentified 21-year-old New Mexican clerk and a friend were returning to Hobbs from Carlsbad on highway 180. About 38 miles west of Hobbs, the two men noticed a "reddish colored" light north of the road. "Of course we both thought at first it was an oil-field flare that burns in that area, as it remained in sight for the next nine or ten miles," the driver told the Hobbs *Daily News-Sun*, which printed the story the following day under eight-column double banner headlines.

"Then, while we were both watching it, the light suddenly rose straight up into the sky. We could not tell how high, because we could not judge how far away from us it actually was." As they continued toward Hobbs, the object travelled parallel to them north of the highway. "I was getting pretty scared about that time and kept speeding up, trying to get away from it. I finally reached a speed of about 90 miles an hour when the light suddenly turned toward my car and passed directly overhead while we were about a mile west of the Permian Basin Pipe Line plant. At the exact moment it was over us, my car motor began acting up—coughing and missing. At the same time the lights suddenly went out. Then the motor quit altogether.

"I put the car in neutral and coasted all the way to the Monu-

ment Road on highway 180. My friend kept watching the light and he told me it had passed over us and seemed to hover over the Basin Pipe Line plant, remaining there maybe seven or eight minutes. I coasted nearly to a stop and then tried my starter. The motor caught and the lights came back on. I drove on into Hobbs." The following morning, he said his car battery was dead and the dashboard clock had stopped.

On November 7, several residents of Plattsburgh, New York, reported independently that their cars had been stopped on Lake Shore Road by a "strange object" flying overhead. The witnesses—one of them, according to the Plattsburgh radio station, a prominent local resident of highest reputation—refused to identify themselves publicly, although the radio station presumably has their names. A brief item in the Plattsburgh *Press-Republican* (11/8) said "two other persons also reported seeing the unidentified object over Lake Champlain and passing over the Lake Shore Road in the vicinity of Pray's Motel." The radio station was said to have received more than thirty calls that night.

The really insistent question about these incidents is, why does this kind of thing *not always* happen when a UFO is near an automobile? UFO history has plenty of cases where the object came just as close to a car as in the sightings we have just described, but with-

out any effect—or at least without any *reported* effect. Some do and some don't stop cars; and no suggested reason for the difference is more than a speculation. It would seem to be just one additional piece of evidence that the origins, purposes, and operating methods of the UFOs are extremely diverse—like other details in these cases the reader will notice. Noise at Foster, Indiana, and at San Antonio, Texas; silence elsewhere (so far as the reports tell us).

And it is not merely car motors, headlights, and radios that have gone crazy over UFOs. Searchlights, TV sets, indoor lighting—these have also been among the “hallucinated machines.”

At 3:12 a.m. on November 4, for example, in Elmwood Park, Illinois (suburban Chicago) two policemen and a fireman were out in a squad car when they noticed a brightly luminous red-orange object, “shaped like an egg,” hovering over Elmwood Cemetery. It appeared to be about 200 feet long, and was slowly descending as if about to land. Patrolman Clifford Schau, the driver, mistook it at first sight for the moon.

“I switched off our lights and started following it,” said Schau. “When we got close, I turned the lights back on and then it shot up about 200 feet and went off to the west. I think it would have landed if we hadn't turned our lights on. We followed it for a mile at about

65 miles an hour, but couldn't catch it.”

He added that “our motor didn't stall, but our lights flickered a couple times. I shone the big spotlight on the object, and the light (spotlight) almost went out.” His companion, Patrolman Lukasek, confirmed this, adding that the “object seemed to be folding up like a parachute” until the spotlight beam caught it, when it “puffed out” again and sped off. When they finally lost sight of it at 3:22, “it seemed to fold inward from the bottom and disappeared.”

The radio dispatcher at the police station, Sgt. DiGiovanni, stepped outside when he heard Schau report the object, and he corroborated their report. (*Chicago Daily News*, 11/4; *Tribune* and *Sun-Times*, 11/5.)

Are there any earlier reports involving malfunctioning searchlights? CSI has none in its newspaper files. However, a Form 112 Intelligence Report sent to ATIC in Dayton describes the following incident: On June 26, 1955, four observers at National Airport, Washington, D. C., saw a brilliant round object, like a yellow grapefruit, approach the airport with an erratic motion. The object stopped, oscillated and then moved off at high speed. It left a trail four or five times its own length, and was visible for about seven minutes. *Ceiling lights at the airport went out when the object approached, and returned to operation when it*

had passed. Searchlights trained on the object went out when the object was caught in the beam. The names of the four observers, two of them military officers, are in our records.

Two months after the Washington National Airport incident, and during the peak of a UFO wave in Ohio and neighboring states, another light failure of more localized character occurred in Bedford, Indiana. On August 25, 1955, Mrs. Lester Parsons and Mrs. Lloyd Wright had returned to Mrs. Parsons' home on Route 5 and were amazed to see a huge white object, "larger than an ordinary room," sitting on the lawn by the corner of the house. The UFO had a black stripe down its center and "seemed to contract and expand with regularity, and as it did so, the lights which had been left on inside the house appeared to dim." Frightened, the women drove off to fetch their husbands; when they returned, the object had departed. Later, they found a number of depressions in the earth, "each the shape of a half circle," and about a quarter of an inch deep. (Indianapolis *Star*, 8/27/55.)

A ten-minute power failure affecting a four-mile area between Tamaroa and Du Bois, Illinois, may have been the result of a low-flying UFO near a transformer on November 14, 1957. Mrs. John Riead, wife of the Tamaroa justice of the peace, told authorities that she heard a sputtering noise, "like someone driving into our drive-

way." Looking out, she saw above the trees bordering Route 51, a bright moon-shaped object with a tail, or ray of light, extending downward toward the ground, as it moved along. The object suddenly emitted five or six loud booms, and several brilliant flashes, when the lights suddenly went out.

H. D. Heath, district manager of the Illinois Power Co., said service was restored when workmen closed an open circuit breaker. He said the men could find no apparent cause for the break. (AP, *Centralia Sentinel*, 11/4; INS, N. Y. *Journal American*, 11/15.)

Suburban Chicago was again the scene of police vs. flying saucers on November 10. Shortly after 7 p.m., switchboards at the local police department in Hammond, Indiana, began buzzing with calls from perplexed residents about a "mysterious flying object" and interference on radios and TV sets. One unidentified woman, who said she lived near Cherry Street and Jackson Avenue, excitedly told police that the object was "fifty feet over my house." Sgt. Charles Mauder and Officer Steve Batustak hurried to the area. They saw an object, its shape indistinguishable, at an estimated altitude of 500 to 1000 feet. Although no clear outline was seen, the officers described it as having a red light at one end and a white light at the other. They heard no motor noises such as an airplane might make, but Batustak said they heard a "thumping sound" as the

object made a 120-degree turn before departing. People in the area whom the officers questioned also told of hearing the same "thumping" noise.

After the object made its turn, "banking like an airplane," and headed toward Gary, the officers noticed that the rear light of the object turned green. They immediately radioed Charles Moore, a traffic accident investigator who was investigating an accident at 175th St., and Indianapolis Blvd., that the object was headed in his direction. Scanning the sky, Moore picked out the silhouette of what he described as "an elongated basket-shaped object," with one green light. Heavy traffic on Indianapolis Blvd. prevented Moore from hearing any noise.

Another officer, Capt. Dennis Becky, also alerted by radio, joined the chase along Indianapolis Blvd. He said that in the vicinity of 169th Street, the radio in his police car emitted a loud beeping sound for about five blocks; returning later along the same route, he encountered no such interference. Becky said that the police department had received numerous phone calls about "beeps" on car radios and television, and that many TV sets were "blacking out." (Hammond *Times*, 11/11.)

Other sightings were made that same evening at 7:40 p.m. in Whiting, a few miles north on the shore of Lake Michigan. Here local police reported seeing a saucer-

shaped object with red, yellow, and blue lights, flying in a southwesterly direction; and later that night, INS reported that Mrs. Louise Wood, in Martinsville, Indiana (about 160 miles south of Hammond) saw a basket-shaped UFO fly low over her barn and disappear into the woods beyond; but UP described the object as a butterfly with six-to-ten-foot wings, so, apart from Mrs. Wood, God only knows what happened in Martinsville.

Newspaper accounts comprise the bulk of our data, and one can never be certain that a basket is *not* a butterfly; therefore, one reliable first-hand account in illustration of any specific point is evidence worth its weight in gold. The following first-hand report of a UFO emitting a radio signal (as at Hammond) is one of the most striking examples of electrical effects, presumably laid to unidentified flying objects, on record.

It took place at the crest of the November 1957 wave—November 6—at Sullivan's Hunting Lodge on Lake Baskatong, in Quebec, some 100 miles north of Ottawa. The observer was Jacques N. Jacobsen, Jr., of Staten Island, who holds a responsible position in New York City with a large railroad company. He was on vacation during the first week of November with three friends: William Munday, William Totten, and Robert Dawson. Although they had no electricity at the lodge, they did have a portable

radio of the ordinary kind and also a portable short-wave radio "of the type used in World War II landing craft." (Both Munday and Dawson are professional electronics workers, and radio hams on the side.) On this evening they were listening to the radio, which was reporting UFOs seen everywhere; reception was subject to fading, but many stations could be picked up.

At about 9 p.m., Totten went outside; he came back in exclaiming: "There's a flying saucer out here!" The others laughed and told him to bring in the little green men for coffee. (Mr. Jacobsen stressed the fact that "the whiskey had run out two nights before.") However, Totten persisted. They went out on the porch and saw, to the east of south, a "huge brilliantly-illuminated sphere," one-eighth to one-sixth the apparent diameter of the moon. It hung a few hundred feet over the summit of a hill two or three miles away. The sky had been completely overcast for several hours, and the object was beneath these clouds. A conical beam of light fanned out from both the top and bottom of the object, the lower beam lighting up the tops of the pine trees on the hill, and the upper beam illuminating the undersurface of the low clouds. The brightness of the object was dazzling—"like looking into a gas-mantle" (they had gas-mantle lamps at the camp)—but its color was a yellowish-

white, not the bluish-white of a mantle. Because of the glare, its edges were not sharply defined. It did not flicker, pulsate, or oscillate. 8 x 25 binoculars revealed no further detail. For fifteen minutes it remained in absolutely the same position.

While they watched, it was discovered that there was no reception on the portable radio. Munday tried the short-wave radio, with the same result: on none of its bands could anything be picked up—not even the government time signal, which invariably came in clearly.

But there was one exception: *at one frequency a very strong signal was received.* It was a rapidly modulated single tone, somewhat like Morse code in effect—but *not* Morse, which would have been recognized. Mr. Jacobsen could not recall the frequency, but thought it was in the vicinity of 2.5 or 25 megacycles—not 14.286 megacycles, where a "mystery beep" signal from something moving in the sky had been received that week all over the earth, pole to pole.

At 9:15 the object began to float slowly upwards and moved off to the south, over a trackless area of lake and forest. It had entered the clouds and its light could now only be seen intermittently; by 9:30 it was completely out of sight, and both radios were again working properly.

On their return homeward the next day, they learned that on the afternoon of the 6th numerous

silvery specks had been seen moving over Shawbridge (50 miles northwest of Montreal)—singly, in pairs and in groups of up to ten. Residents watching on the ground had seen jets repeatedly attempt to catch the UFOs, which always put on a burst of speed and outdistanced the pursuing aircraft. Among the viewers was Robert Dawson's wife, waiting in Shawbridge to meet him.

ERRATUM

Our April article on ice-falls started off with a howling error by giving the date of Kenneth Arnold's epochal saucer observation as "June 30, 1947" (should be June 24, of course!) We can't blame the printer, who set a rather complicated text with exemplary accuracy: the boner was in our manuscript. We can only presume that gremlins put it there.

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**Comments on recent novels,
announcements of SF fan
conferences and remarks
on various other matters.**

THE SPUTNIKS AND SATEL-
LITES were holding their First
Annual Winter Frolic in Brooklyn,
just as we were about to go to press.
You were invited to "Come in a
'Space Suit' or 'Space Dress' or
just dress 'Out of this World.'"

It had to come . . .

"Sundered from us by gulfs of
time and stranger dimensions
dreams the ancient world of Neh-
won with its towers and jewels, its
swords and sorceries. Nehwon's
known realms crowd about the
Inner Sea: northward the green-
forested fierce Land of the Eight
Cities, eastward the steppe-dwelling
Mingol horsemen and the desert
where caravans creep from the rich
Eastern Lands and the River Tilth.
But southward, linked to the desert
only by the Sinking Land and
further warded by the Great Dike
and the Mountain of Hunger, are
the rich grainfields and walled cities
of Lankhmar, eldest and chiefest of
Nehwon's lands. Dominating the
Land of Lankhmar and crouching
at the silty mouth of the River Hlal
in a secure corner between the
grainfields, the Great Salt Marsh
and the Inner Sea is the massive-

A report on several books of interest to SF and fantasy readers, each reflecting the many facets of this field we call Science Fiction. As previously announced, it is hoped this column will now appear more often, discussing books and matters which may interest SF and fantasy readers.

walled and mazy-alleyed metropolis of Lankhmar, thick with thieves and shaven priests, lean-framed magicians and fat-bellied merchants—Lankhmar the Imperishable, the City of the Black Toga.”

This is the world of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser, the heroes of Fritz Leiber's TWO SOUGHT ADVENTURE (Gnome Press, \$3.00). Seven unusual stories about these two make up this volume which should be a delight to the many who enjoyed the stories when they first appeared. And if you had the misfortune not to read them at the time, get the book as soon as you can! Preferably buy the book! Buying books is a good habit.

Charles Eric Maine's WORLD WITHOUT MEN (Ace Books, 35 cents), allegedly slanted at "the intelligent adult reader," describes the struggle to re-create the male sex in a world where babies are created by laboratory techniques based on mass-deception *and there are no men*. Undoubtedly one of the characters is correct when she writes that, "the psychology of a social perversion-neurosis is very complex."

The unexpected statement by Major Donald E. Keyhoe that his committee, the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena, in Washington, had been working with a Senate committee investigating official secrecy on unidentified Flying Objects was

"faded" (but not cut off with the exception of a few words) at the end of Keyhoe's appearance, on January 22nd, on the Armstrong Circle Theater's discussion that evening of UFOs. Participants in the discussion, in addition to Major Keyhoe (who feels that "the flying saucers are real machines under intelligent control") were Dr. Donald H. Menzel of Harvard University, Lt. Col. Spencer Wheldon in charge of the ATIC Information Office at Wright Patterson, and the Hon. Richard E. Horner, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force in charge of Research and Development.

Arthur C. Clarke's latest group of stories, THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SKY (Harcourt Brace, \$3.95), illustrate this writer's ability to set himself into the minds and to reflect the mores of the men and the women who will each play their separate roles in the Days to Come.

Granted that this is not unique, and that there are other writers who have this ability to either breathe life into Yesterday or to describe a singularly credible Tomorrow, what makes Clarke unique among these is the absence of a sense of contrivedness in *his* Tomorrow. His Royal Highness Prince Henry is a very believable person, as is Vladimir Surov and Hans Muller and the others. A Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society, and twice Chairman of the British Inter-

planetary Society, Clarke is one of the most challenging of the writers in the field. Recommended.

FANTASIA MATHEMATICA (Simon & Schuster, 1958) isn't for mathematicians, we're assured. Edited by Clifton Fadiman, here are stories and oddments by Aldous Huxley, Robert Heinlein, H. G. Wells, Arthur C. Clarke, James Branch Cabell, Karel Capek, Arthur Koestler, Willy Ley, Fredric Brown, Bruce Elliott, and still others. A young man chases his fiancee right into the fourth dimension—a distinguished professor falls headlong into a stripteaser's act—you learn how to make a mathematical genius by magic and what happens when you fill one spaceship with 29 women and one man. And you learn a lot of other things. Cheerfully recommended.

Several months ago, in a speech at the Eastern Science Fiction Association in Newark, I dismissed as neo-Wagnerian nonsense a statement by John Magnus, in *Varioso*, a Baltimore fanzine, which I felt echoed a rather morbid trend in the field towards unduly detailed excursions into abnormal social psychology.

I am afraid I underestimated the influence of James Dean on Science Fiction.

Magnus had written that—"Science Fiction CAN be escape literature. It can be enjoyed by those who desire the death of this world,

their world, at any cost; at the cost of the birth of another."

And now we have Charles Eric Maine's THE MAN WHO COULDN'T SLEEP (Lippincott, \$3.00), described by the publishers as "a novel of menace" and an extraordinarily persuasive novel of some very unpleasant people in a not too distant future.

Philip Maxwell has invented *psychotape*, in the course of his research for a means of alleviating his total insomnia. Philip Maxwell, by doing this, becomes one of the most important men in the world to the strange Paul Zakon of Cine-sphere Productions, Ltd., who has rather fantastic ambitions. Zakon doesn't regard entertainment as an art—"It is a science. It is the science of escape and every production of mine is scientifically planned to provide the maximum amount of escape." Seeing in Maxwell's invention a means for arriving at his ambitions, the worldwide supremacy of "unliving"—"the abandonment of life in favor of dreams," Zakon manipulates Maxwell and the men and the women around him with almost guignolesque efficiency.

A disturbing book and a revealing book, Charles Eric Maine's THE MAN WHO COULDN'T SLEEP shouldn't be read by those innocents among us who see science fiction in less grim terms, and who do not like the shadows to come too close over us even when we relax. . . . Perhaps this is naive, but

I am afraid I wasn't happy about this book.

People who've attended the *Midwescon* all seem to agree that it's the next best thing to a world science fiction convention. The Ninth Annual Midwescon will be held at the North Plaza Motel, 7911 Reading Road, Cincinnati 37, Ohio, on June 28th and 29th, 1958. For further information I suggest you write directly to Dale Tarr of the Cincinnati Fantasy Group, at 1940 Kinney Avenue, Cincinnati 6, Ohio.

One of the interesting things about Robert Silverberg's writing is his ability to create an obviously contrived and still persuasively credible society, set in Tomorrow—or the day after Tomorrow, and without the Nietzschean undertones hinted at above. In contrast to some writers I can think of, who do not feel such concessions are too necessary, Silverberg—increasingly so—pays the reader the courtesy of assuming that he or she is not simply interested in escaping into a glittering never-never land, complete with ray-gun brandishing sheriffs in a comfortably distant future who always draw a bead on the bad guy as he flees across the sands of Mars. . . .

The collaboration of Robert Silverberg and Randall Garrett resulted in some rather interesting contributions to the field and preceded, I believe, the two Ace novels

by Silverberg reviewed here some time back. Robert Randall's *THE SHROUDED PLANET* (Gnome Press, \$3.00) is a product of this collaboration, and interesting—not necessarily as a novel but as a portrait of a way of life, on the planet Nidor, as customs and mores change over a period of time under the influence of the earthmen. Worth reading.

The Lunarians, a New York Science Fiction group, have announced their second annual conference, LUNACON II, for Sunday afternoon, 1 p.m. to 6 p.m., April 13th, 1958, at 213 West 53rd Street, just off Broadway. A panel discussion on "Isaac Asimov—The Man—The Writer," is scheduled, and also an illustrated lecture on the work of Frank R. Paul, and an editors' panel on "What Editors Think of Fans." Membership in the Lunacon, which is \$1, is available at the meeting.

Talking of Isaac Asimov, a new edition of his *THE END OF ETERNITY* has just been published by New American Library, and Ballantine Books have just reissued Arthur C. Clarke's novel, *EARTHLIGHT*. Both books are 35 cents, and well worth the money.

Readers interested in metaphysics (including the California adepts) will welcome the new edition of Alexandra David-Neel's famous *MAGIC AND MYSTERY IN*

TIBET (University Books, \$6.00). Madame David-Neel, up to that time the only European woman to have been honored with the rank of a Lama, writes on the powers of Tibetan mystics and on psychic phenomena in Tibet. The book, considered an important reference work on Tibet of that period apart from aspects of her story of interest mainly to the metaphysically minded, does explode one generalization about the alleged Tibetan approach to "miracles." Nobody denies that these take place, she points out, but nobody considers them to be miracles. "Indeed, Tibetans do not recognize any supernatural agent. The so-called wonders, they think, are as natural as common daily events and depend on the clever handling of little-known laws and forces." The Tibetans, in other words, are not necessarily mystics (just as all of the late Mahatma Gandhi's countrymen are by no means spiritually minded), but they are the inheritors of traditions and procedures-and-approaches to little remembered forces. As Aaron Sussman points out in his introduction, it should be kept in mind that the book was first published in 1932, "five years before J. B. Rhine and the Duke University experiments in extra sensory perception, ten years before Edgar Cayce's startling story was told in *THERE IS A RIVER*, and twenty-four years before the uproar began over *THE SEARCH FOR BRIDEY MURPHY*." As someone

who has personally been rather interested in the Middle East for many years, I recommend this.

The Washington Science Fiction Association is making plans for their first Disclave in Five years, tentatively scheduled (as we go to press) for the weekend of May 10th and 11th. Those interested, who live in that area, should contact Bob Pavlat, President, WSFA, at 6001 43rd Avenue, Hyattsville, Maryland. The committee promises one thing—"no speeches."

Jules Verne's *FROM THE EARTH TO THE MOON AND A TRIP AROUND IT* (Lippincott, \$1.95), is a reissue of the famous book that was first published in 1865. Verne, anticipating space travel and also the use of dogs for testing purposes, likewise predicted in this book a moon-bound satellite.

If you haven't already done so, make a special effort to get Bjorn Nyberg and L. Sprague de Camp's astonishing *THE RETURN OF CONAN* (Gnome Press, \$3.00), the first part of which appeared in the September 1957 issue of *Fantastic Universe*. I say astonishing, because Lt. Nyberg, a Swedish air force officer, writing in a language foreign to him, collaborating with Sprague de Camp, has done a remarkable job in recreating the spirit of the Conan saga in all its turbulence and vivid imagery.

Hereward Carrington's *THE CASE FOR PSYCHIC SURVIVAL* (Citadel, \$3.50) is an interesting report on what is described as "the first scientific experiment to establish the reality of life after death." Carrington, who has devoted a lifetime to probing the unknown, is Director of the American Psychical Research Institute. He subjected Eileen Garrett, the famous medium, to a succession of tests designed to establish the personality—or personalities—speaking as "Uvani" through the mediumship of Mrs. Garrett. The possibility had been raised that "Uvani," allegedly an Arab (*with that name?*) who had died a hundred years earlier in Basrah, was actually an active dramatization by the medium's subconscious mind. The results of the tests, described in the book, were interesting in that they indicated Uvani to be two diverging and opposite personalities with distinctly different intellectual backgrounds.

Mark Clifton and Frank Riley's *THEY'D RATHER BE RIGHT* (Gnome Press, \$3.00) describes what happened when Washington had asked that a servo-mechanism be built which could foresee the outcome of any probability pattern and take action to alter that pattern when necessary. The whole thing was a fluke really. Bossy had originally been designed for guiding airplanes and preventing them from crashing, but all sorts of things had happened and so much

more had been demanded of her, that soon they had a hyper-computer on their hands. *They* were Duane Hoskins, former Professor of Cybernetics at Hoxworth, and his associates who, working with and around the hyper-computer, suddenly found themselves able to solve their problems and—in short—to think. This happened to be heresy, because for the past decades the world had been in the grip of opinion control, and Bossy, the hyper-computer, represented a serious and immediate threat to that dominance—and to the norm. So Bossy and her inventors had to go underground, and work in hiding while testing the computer's full potentialities, hiding as much from the authorities as from people, afraid of something they could not understand. The result is *THEY'D RATHER BE RIGHT*, which I suspect many of you will like.

I have meant for some time to comment on a rather extraordinary person, John Nebel, who is making a unique contribution to the field through his program, "Long John's Party Line," heard nightly over WOR from midnight to five-thirty in the morning. Topics discussed by the panel (which has included Isabel Davis of CSI, Ivan T. Sanderson and this writer on several occasions, and writers like Theodore Sturgeon and Will Oursler at other times) range from juvenile delinquency to hypnotism, flying saucers to Boomerology, sci-

ence fiction to "life after death" or *any* subject felt to be of interest to the several million (no exaggeration, I assure you), here in the East, who listen to the program nightly. Panelists have ranged from voodoo drum players to violinists, psychiatrists to stamp collectors, natural health practitioners to writers, men who have teleported themselves to Mars or (in another case) taken a half-hour trip on a flying saucer between White Sands and New York and back, conversing telepathically all the time with the unseen pilot of the saucer. Dedicated people—and perhaps at times less dedicated people—they at all times have something to say, the response to which—on the part of the "night-people"—is nothing short of fantastic. It is a startling thing, if you are not used to it, to sit there at five o'clock as I have done on many a morning, and watch the lights flicker as listener after listener is phoning in to agree or, as often, disagree with what you've just been saying.

Throughout it all, John remains always poised, always tactful, the ideal moderator. While the program is probably identified in the popular mind with some of the more exotic subjects discussed—flying saucers included, and whether these are animate or inanimate, machines piloted by extra-terrestrials or aliens from behind the Iron Curtain, it can't be stressed too much that Nebel performs a genuine public service by as often

(oftener, in fact) discussing subjects closer to the daily lives of his listeners such as, as I mentioned before, that spreading disease, affecting us all, so inadequately labeled "juvenile delinquency."

John Nebel's program should be of particular interest to Science Fiction readers however. Himself genuinely interested in the field, he frequently has SF personalities on the program, discussing a variety of subjects from space flight clear across to Dianetics. (John Campbell was on the other night, discussing the latter.) Throughout it all, as I said, whatever the topic (or tempers of the panelists) John remains the perfect moderator, impartial and stimulating. My guess is that he has made many thousands (if not more) sufficiently aware of Science Fiction to do that important thing, BUY a SF book—soft-cover or otherwise, or BUY a magazine.

It's a good habit to get into, you know. . . .

But to return to Science Fiction titles.

Algis J. Budrys, author of *FALSE NIGHT*, and increasingly well known in the field for several years, has written an interesting novel, *MAN OF EARTH* (Ballantine Books, 35 cents), built around the adventures of a frightened little man, a successful citizen in a corrupt business world, who finds it urgently necessary to disappear. Mr. Sibley is on the point

of being found out—the cardinal sin in the world of Allen Sibley; the little man is perfectly aware of the fact that, in the coming investigation, he will be nominated for the villain's role, with participating officials (and silent partners) described as his innocent dupes.

Mr. Sibley—after some persuasion—disappears, and finds himself on Pluto, a new man in more ways than one, meeting the need on Pluto for a ruthless man. Interesting.

Some of you may remember my writing (in the November 1955 *Fantastic Universe*) that—"Science Fiction demands something more of its readers than a blind belief in the eventual triumph of unfettered gadgetry, and demands more than the glib certainty that we will go off, a million or a thousand or ten years from now, on sometimes rather badly prefabricated and unconvincing tangents—socio-political and well-meaning."

"What I don't understand," I wrote, "is the bland assumption that we will carry with us into the golden, streamlined, multiple-Galaxied Tomorrows, the fears, hatreds and suspicions which are a part of our own times. Are we only going to half grow up? With the causes removed, are the diseases still to persist?"

Anthony Boucher, in his introduction to Damon Knight's *IN SEARCH OF WONDER* (Advent,

Chicago, \$4.00) pointed out, and with a good deal of justice, that "professional criticism is extremely rare in the science fiction field" and that "the critical contributions of self-appointed scholars and intellectuals have been marked by equal portions of distaste for science fiction and complete ignorance of it."

Damon Knight has been the blessed exception to this situation. Science fiction fan, editor, critic and writer, Knight, as Boucher writes, can be "dazzlingly individual as either critic or writer." If you've had the misfortune to miss *IN SEARCH OF WONDER*, a group of essays on modern science fiction by Damon Knight, correct this mistake quickly!

Advent (whose address is 3508 North Sheffield Avenue, Chicago 13) has also published, at \$1.50, an interesting portfolio of drawings by Frank Kelly Freas.

As Dikty points out in his introduction to *THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES AND NOVELS: NINTH SERIES* (Advent, \$3.50), "people who tried to keep up with the world in 1956-57, to quote the Red Queen in *Through the Looking Glass*, had to run as hard as they could just to stand still." To some extent, this breathless tempo is echoed in many of the selections, stories by writers like A. J. Budrys, Eric Frank Russell, Leigh Brackett, Poul Anderson (represented by the superb *CALL*

ME JOE) and others. Worth reading.

I can't resist commenting on something which has nothing to do with SF or Fantasy or even (if my friends in Seattle will forgive the expression) UFOs. If any of you are interested in Flamenco rhythms, don't miss the Ximenez-Vargas Spanish Ballet Company (who performed here in New York on March 3rd) if they come to your town. *They are superb!*

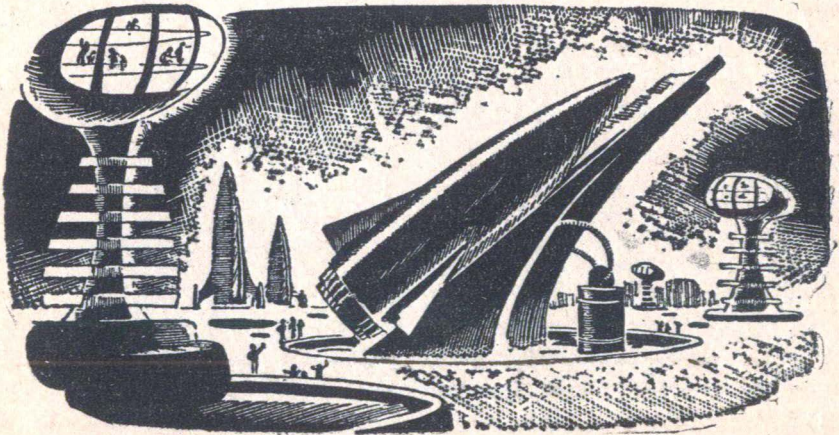
Richard Matheson's novel, *A STIR OF ECHOES* (Lippincott, \$3.00) is described as "A Novel of Menace," and perhaps the publishers are right. Written by the author of *The Shrinking Man*, this is one of those curious border-line novels guaranteed to make the lives of over-worked librarians even more frustrating.

Tom Wallace, who works in "publications" at North American Aircraft, out in California, is an

extremely normal young man, happily married and a thoroughly adjusted citizen of suburbia—until the night his young brother-in-law hypnotizes him.

Phil tells him, when he wakes him up, that his mind will be completely free and uninhibited, but this turns out to be not quite correct. Tom's mind becomes much too free, as he is able to see into the minds of his friends (to his frequent embarrassment) and he is plagued with dreams which predict the future. Overshadowing all this, however, is the almost nightly visits of a ghost, a woman who had lived in the house before they moved there, and who had "gone away"—or so her relatives said. The truth is somewhat grimmer. Decidedly so.

While the novel has been reviewed, with considerable justification—because of this grimmer angle—as a mystery, there *is* equal justification for commenting on it in these pages.



the
tie
that
binds

by . . . George Whitley

Are Englishmen civilized—
she asked, when I insisted
we'd never dream of wearing
a tie we'd no right to use.

IT ALL started with one of those absurd squabbles over what most people would consider inessentials. It was a Sunday evening and Lili and I, having finished our dinner, were sipping our coffee and discussing our simple plans for the week to come.

"Winter," she said, "is almost here, and you must get yourself a decent pair of gray flannels . . ."

I refrained—this time—from telling her that my corduroys were good for a few more years yet.

"And," she went on, "I'd rather like you in a blazer . . ."

"I've been meaning to get one for quite a while," I admitted. "I may as well blow the Income Tax refund check on that as on anything else. What shall it be—the Old School badge, or Merchant Navy? I knew a doctor once who had a most ingenious system—he had one blazer and a collection of badges, all he had to do was to clip them over his breast pocket . . ."

"Badges," she said, "are no longer worn."

"Not even," I pleaded, "a simple Tudor Crown?"

"No."

British SF writer George Whitley, who will be remembered for his wry THE EXPLANATION in our January issue, returns with the present report on that facet of the British character which has fascinated the New Yorker, for quite some time—the British conception of what a civilized man may wear.

"Anyhow," I said, "the trouble with getting a blazer is that I shall have to buy a new tie . . ."

"Why?" she asked.

"One cannot possibly," I told her, "wear a bow tie with a blazer. It *must* be an up-and-down job, with School, Service or Club colors. The M.N. tie is quite tasteful—dark blue with narrow green, white and red diagonals . . ."

"No," she said.

"Yes. It's the only possible tie. To get an Old School tie I should have to send to England. The Service tie I can buy here."

"You English," she flared, "are like *sheep!*"

"But why? How? This business of ties is so very convenient. You meet a bloke, and you know his background at once. He's wearing a horrid affair of red and brown stripes on a green ground, and you know that he was a tankman—through mud and blood to the green fields. You see that he has a tie with little red castles on a navy blue ground—and you know that he did his pre-sea training in H.M.S. Conway. Or he might be wearing R.A.F., or R.N., or R.N.V.R. colors . . ."

"It's so childish," she maintained.

"It's not. It's convenient. For example—last night you met the Tauntons for the first time. Jeff was wearing a blazer and a tie with little gold tomcats carrying Salvation Army banners. If you'd known anything about ties you'd have

known that he was exposed to his maritime education at Southampton University . . ."

"And what good would that have done me? He told me, later in the evening, anyhow."

"Yes. But look what a good impression you'd have made if you'd started talking about Southampton right away."

"I made a good impression anyhow. But what I have against all these fancy ties is this. We pride ourselves on being individualists . . ."

"Don't change the subject. We were talking about ties."

"All right. I concede that in matters of taste, general taste, you know more than I do. But I maintain that no civilized Englishman would dream of wearing any other tie with a blazer than either a striped or a crested one. And if he is going to wear such a tie he might as well wear one which means something—and no civilized Englishman would dream of wearing a tie to which he was not entitled."

"Are Englishmen civilized?"

"At least," I replied, looking at her long, slim legs, "they wouldn't dream of wearing tartan slacks unless they had a dollop of Scottish blood to make it permissible. Could it be, darling, that you, in your ignorance of our complicated *mores*, thought that a tartan was merely a fancy check and that you, as a very fancy Czech, could rightfully use it to bedeck your lower limbs?"

"Oh, buy whatever bloody tie you like, then!" she snapped.

"I will, my sweet. Scrabble?"

"Why ask? We always play on Sunday night."

I got out the board. We drew for the privilege of starting, which was mine. I looked at the seven tiles on my rack, found that I could use four of them. I put them down.

"T . . . Y . . . E . . . S . . ." she read contemptuously. "Can't you spell, now?"

"Look it up," I said, passing her the dictionary. "They're ropes for hoisting and lowering sails—not things you wear round your neck."

When Lili left for work the following morning we had things worked out. I was to meet her at four twenty five at our usual corner. We were then to proceed to Arrowsmith's, where I was to purchase the gray flannels. From Arrowsmith's—whose slogan was NOTHING BUT TROUSERS—we would go to Gardener's to buy the blazer, and a tie to go with it. The M.N. tie—to suit my low taste—I would get at one of the uniform tailors on John Street before meeting Lili.

Everything went according to plan. I bought the M.N. tie, I met Lili at the corner within thirty seconds of the arranged time, we were able to buy a pair of flannels at Arrowsmith's that neither of us found revolting. The blazer—double-breasted, dark blue—was not hard to purchase, and I was pleased to be able to find one that

required no alterations whatsoever. Then we went to the necktie counter. I was determined not to purchase anything that bore the remotest similarity to any existing Old School or Regimental tie, and was quite severe with Lili when she tried to persuade me to get one that would have conveyed the altogether false impression that I had been educated at Eton.

Then, pawing through one of the boxes, I found *the* tie. It was rich, without being gaudy. It had a black ground—and that black was, somehow, almost three dimensional. The diagonal stripes were silver—or were they an incandescent blue?—that merged into a bright scarlet. The thing had a luminous quality that made the other neckwear look like a bundle of soiled rags.

"This," I said, "I must have."

"Aren't you sorry that you wasted money on that Merchant Navy tie?" asked Lili. "I told you that you could get a tie to wear with a blazer without making a uniform of it—and I was right."

"You were," I admitted. I asked the young man behind the counter, "I suppose that this tie isn't the Old School Tie of some college we've never heard of?"

It was not, he assured me. He didn't know what the material was, although it seemed to be one of the synthetic fibres. He didn't know where the tie was made or who had made it—we both of us examined it and found no maker's name.

Not that this worried me unduly—it was obviously worth a lot more than the other ties in the box but, in the absence of any identification marks, could not be charged for at a higher rate. It was a bargain—and we all like bargains.

After our shopping we spent a quiet evening at home.

The next day we arranged to meet again in town, as before. The forenoon I spent working, finishing the story that I had been writing for the past three days. I corrected the fair copy and the carbons, had lunch—bread and cheese and pickles and a glass of beer—then decided that an afternoon in town would do me no harm; there were several bookshops that I had not browsed around in for some time. The day was fine, but not overly warm, so I decided on wearing my new flannels and my blazer and, of course, the new tie.

Yeoman's Bookshop was my first call. I wandered round the counters and shelves quite happily, picking up an occasional book and glancing at its contents, not looking for anything in particular but willing to consider buying something if it happened to be just what I wanted.

I was standing sneering at the display of the latest Flying Saucer books when I became aware that somebody was staring at me—never a very comfortable sensation. I turned away from the collection of Sauceriana, found myself looking at a fellow of about my own height

and build, dressed in a conservative gray flannel suit. There was something about him that suggested a naval officer in civilian clothes—but this impression came later. The first thing that I noticed about him was not his face, nor his suit, nor his bearing—it was his tie.

Hell! I thought. *This could be embarrassing. I should never have listened to Lili—I should have stuck to the old M.N. neck rag . . .*

"Prizzat caltre wrizzit?" asked the stranger politely.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I don't speak Czech."

He grinned apologetically.

"You're right, of course. When in Rome—as these people say . . . Have *you* been to Rome yet? I'm hoping for the chance before we leave."

"It's a long way from Sydney," I said rather foolishly.

He laughed. "*A long way*—that's good! But I didn't know that any of the other ships had personnel operating here. Are you with old Tin Whiskers' mob?"

"I'm sorry," I said. "You must be mistaken."

"Cautious beggar, aren't you?" he complained. "But from what I've heard, old Tin Whiskers has always been inclined to give the aborigines credit for more intelligence than they have, and I suppose that he's got his whole crew thinking the same way. Anyhow—let's get out of here. I feel like getting outside some of the local brew—it's not as good as *mooza*,

but it's far from very poisonous."

This impressed me as being a good suggestion. It was obvious that I was wearing a tie to which I had no right—and apologies and explanations are best made in an atmosphere of conviviality. I accompanied the stranger from the bookshop, walked with him into the first hotel we came to. We went upstairs, to the Lounge which, at this early hour of the afternoon, was almost deserted. There were only two other customers there, a man and a woman. The woman's scarf was the same pattern as the men's ties. I felt that I was gate-crashing an Old School Reunion.

We—my new acquaintance and I—joined them. Nothing was said until the waiter had filled our orders for drinks. Then, when he had retired to a corner to study form in his newspaper, the woman asked, "Who is this?"

I looked at her, decided that I didn't like her. She was handsome, beautiful almost, but hard. She was as metallic as the polished platinum of her hair, the gray steel of her eyes.

"I found him in Yeoman's Bookshop," said my companion. "He was having a quiet laugh at all that rubbish these people print about flying saucers. He's from Tin Whiskers' ship . . ."

"Then what's he doing here?" asked the other man. "The main fleet is covering Europe and America . . ."

The main fleet . . . Foreigners,

with more than a hint of naval officer in their manner and bearing . . . The main fleet . . . Submarines—wearing the Hammer and Sickie ensign . . .

"I must apologize," I said. "Quite inadvertently I bought this tie that I am wearing. I did not think that it was the tie of any school or club—but it seems that I was mistaken. I'll leave you now—but I promise you that I will go straight to the store where I bought the thing and lodge a complaint . . ."

I'll go straight to the Police, I thought. But will they believe me?

"Stop!" ordered the woman. Her handbag—a big one—was on the table, and her right hand was inside it. It was obvious that something in the bag—it was big enough to hold a .38 pistol—was pointing at me. "Remain seated."

"And if I refuse?"

She smiled.

"You will be persuaded."

I saw the tendons of what little remained exposed of her right hand twitch slightly.

I thought, Here it comes! But she'd never dare—or would she? There are silencers . . .

My intention was to fling myself sideways from the chair. It was a good intention, and all in the best traditions of crime fiction, but like most good intentions it never came to anything. Not that I didn't try . . . Oh, I tried, but I could have been suddenly turned to stone, but for one thing. Stone is cold—

but I wasn't. The heat was coming from no definable source, but seemed to be spreading from inside rather than outside. Dimly I wondered how long it would be before my clothes started to smoulder, and if the waiter would look up from his paper when they did.

"You see?" asked the woman. "Just a little applied radiation, and you do as we say. Now, you'll answer a few questions."

"By what right . . . ?" I began.

"This," she replied, moving whatever was inside her handbag slightly. "First of all, your name."

"Whitley," I told her sulkily.

"Occupation?"

"Writer, or sailor. Sometimes one, sometimes the other, mostly both."

One of the men—the one from the bookshop—started to laugh.

"This," he said, "is rich. You know that I've been making a study of what these people call science fiction magazines, just to see if anybody has stumbled on the truth yet, and this Whitley is one of the science fiction writers." He turned to me. "You wrote DRIFT, didn't you?"

"Yes," I admitted.

"Never mind all this," said the woman. "Marital status?"

"I don't see what . . . ?"

"Want some more?" she asked, her right hand twitching.

"No."

"Then tell me everything. I want to find out who's going to miss you, if anybody."

When I had finished—prompted by a couple of short sessions of burning—she said to the others: "This is lucky. Only his wife will miss him—and we can make sure of her at the same time."

"No," I said. "She's not in this."

They ignored me.

"What we still have to find out," said one of the men, "is where he got the tie—and how."

"I can guess," said the woman. "That fool Rroozal said he was going to make a collection of Ter-ran neckwear. He must have been buying some in that shop, worn one away with him that took his fancy—you remember that the Old Man did give him hell for being improperly dressed—and left his own on the counter . . . Anyhow, finish your drinks. Let's get out of here."

They managed it well. The waiter must have thought, as passers-by must have thought, that here was a man who had celebrated rather too well at his old school reunion and was being assisted home by his old schoolmates. It was . . . nightmarish. It was wanting to run and not being able to stir a muscle. It was wanting to shout and not being able to emit the feeblest croak.

They got me into their car—nothing fancy about it, just an ordinary more or less streamlined box on four wheels with all the usual modern conveniences. One of

the men drove, the other, with the woman, sat with me in the back seat. They went through my pockets, found an envelope with my address. They drove me home, supported me up the steps and the stairs to the flat, let us in with my key.

They didn't smoke, but they allowed me to do so. They allowed me to have a drink, and helped themselves to cold beer. They browsed through the bookcases—but all the time one of them was covering me with the glittering weapon from the handbag. It looked as pretty and harmless as the plastic rayguns sold with children's spaceman outfits, but I knew that it wasn't.

"He might as well get packed," said one of the men.

"Packed?" I asked.

"Yes—packed. You and your wife won't feel quite so lonely when you're able to have a few of your own things in your new home."

There was a knock at the door. It was Lili. I made a move to get up to let her in, but was motioned back by the woman.

"We still don't trust you," she said. "Your wife has her own key, no doubt . . ."

Lili came in. She looked rather beautiful, as she always does when in a bad temper. She said, "I waited for you, you . . ." Then—

"Sorry, George. I didn't know we had guests . . ."

"We are hardly that," said the woman. "Sit down. Let your husband tell you what has happened."

So I told her. She took it very well—but then, she's always had itchy feet. She's rather looking forward to seeing that Earth type planet revolving around Alpha Eridani. Already she's made plans for the dress shop—*Earth Models—Exclusive*—that she is opening.

And Marrza—she isn't such a bad sort at all when you get to know her—has agreed to let me write this story and post it off to my agent in New York; there will be no stamps on the envelope, so he's bound to get it. She says that nobody will believe it anyhow and it can't possibly do any harm.

And now it's time to lock up the flat and to lug our suitcases down to the car. We shall rendezvous, they tell us, with a small, shuttle spaceship in French's Forest—the real spaceship is hanging above the Earth in a twenty-four hour orbit.

I can keep the tie, they say—now that I have been recruited into their service I'm entitled to wear it. I've taken it off, though, and I'm wearing my neat and dignified M.N. necktie.

And if I find anybody on Alpha Eridani III wearing one like it, it will be my turn to raise hell.

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THE NAKED SUN

by
Isaac Asimov

ON THE PLANET "SOLARIA" Earthman Elijah Baley should NOT have blushed to the ears when beautiful Gladia Delmarre casually stepped out of her shower to talk with him! For all Solarians CONSIDERED THAT ENTIRELY PROPER . . . because their social contacts were carried on by VIEWING through two-way television.

And just as Elijah (an Earthman brought up in underground cities) was terrified by Solaria's naked sun, the Solarians dreaded mingling with other HUMANS. Physical contact was out of the question. Even DISCUSSING such things was obscene!

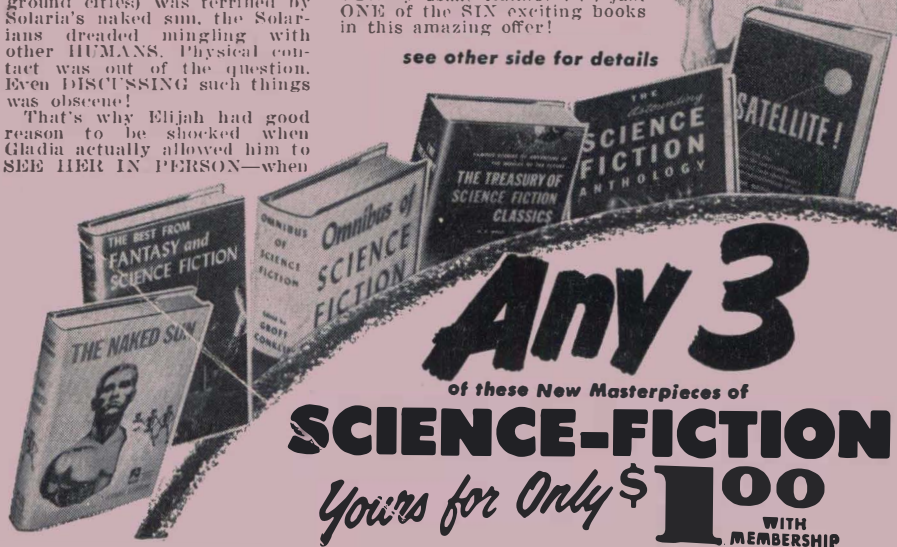
That's why Elijah had good reason to be shocked when Gladia actually allowed him to SEE HER IN PERSON—when

she brazenly reached out her naked fingers to TOUCH HIM!

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