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SCIENCE FICTION Quarterly

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THE GREEN THUMB

by Poul Anderson

FEB. 1953

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Feb. 1953

SCIENCE FICTION Quarterly

Volume 1 Number 2

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by Poul Anderson..... 12

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ROBERT W. LOWNDES, Editor

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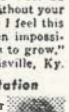

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As I Was Saying...

THE ELECTION will have come and gone before any of you see this, but right now your editor's vote could be ticketed for delivery to any candidate who pledged two more weeks to the month; as usual, despite my vows of "doing it earlier next time", these dubious words are being typed at the eleventh hour. My feeble wits burn low, friends; I can't even think of a serious story to brighten up these pages. So, to those of you who have asked for editorials—wait, sweet friends, and hope I'll have the time next time; it wouldn't hurt if I found that I had something to say, either. However, that's not too much of a problem; I can spread my ignorance as well as anyone else, given the time and pages.

A reader suggests: "There's one fault I have to find with the rating-system you use. You may mark a big red 'X' down on your tally-sheet when some reader says he definitely dislikes any particular story—but the results can't distinguish between 'dislike' and 'okay, but I liked all the others better'. They both get the same score."

The point's well-taken, and you'll see an adjustment in "The Reckoning". Right now, I don't know how many items there will be on the contents page, but we'll use the same system that we started in *Dynamic Science Fiction*. If there are 9 items to be rated, then a "dislike" vote will get 10 points, which will make a definite difference in the final summing-up.

Some have asked for fan-magazine reviews. Well, such a department would take up space, which would have to be purloined either from the letter-department, or the story-content. Frankly, I haven't the time to read and discuss fan-magazines myself— I'm turning a considerable percentage of book-reviews over to other hands, now—but a good fan-magazine reviewer can be found if you want one. That's the point: how many of you would be interested in a page to a page-and-a-half of fan-magazine reviews? (Not counting the publishers of fan-magazines of course.) I'm agreeable, if enough of you want it, but I want to be sure that there's a sizeable interest before adding still another department. It may be

[*Turn To Page* 8]

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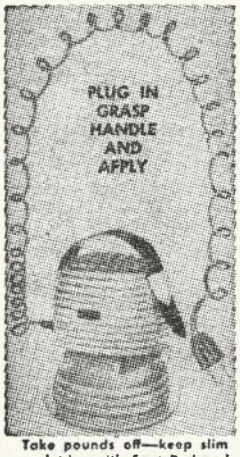

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LOSE WEIGHT OR NO CHARGE

time for all kinds of changes, but I'm old fashioned enough to think that stories are more important than departments. (At which point, I can hear a voice from the back—or is it the front—row calling out, "I'd rather see a good set of fan-magazine reviews than that censored thing "...." by... you called a story in your last issue!" At this point, several other voices chorus agreement in principle, but one claims that the title mentioned above was the best story in the issue, and no two agree upon the story they'd have gladly done without!)

Okay, I'm putting the question on the preference-coupon and I'll go with a majority—but, as with any other questions where I can make the decision myself, (rather than try to persuade the front office what the readers want, before anything can be done) it will be a majority of the votes *received*. Those who don't care, won't lose either way; those who do care, but do not vote, may swing the issue against their wishes by default.

And now, without further ado, let's get to Old Business, and settle the question of the "All the Answers Contest". For a while, I was beginning to think that no one would get it, and I'd just have to announce, "Sorry, no winner!" However, I'd hadn't reckoned with the party whose letter appears below. All in all, I enjoyed the contest, and hope that those of you who took a fling at it, but missed, found some interest in the discussion. I'm printing some more letters on it, which were crowded out, last time—but which didn't get the answer, unfortunately.

Letters

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF...

Dear Machiavelli:

I can see now that I should have kept quiet, but what gal can do that? No, I had to write a letter about the letter department. You published it of course, no doubt leering to yourself at the expected response; you published comments which you knew I'd look for. After all, I'm human enough to take a look and see if anyone agreed with me. And then you announce that my letter came out in fourth place for that issue of *Future*. Just enough to miss my getting an original, but good enough to make me think that perhaps some readers did agree, after all.

And the result is what I am sure you planned all the time, Sir Serpent: now I *like* to read readers' letters—in spite of some of the digs. And I'll admit they aren't such dreary reading after all, once you get into the swing of it. (But don't think you won't hear from that "sour Nan Warner" if you run any like some I've seen in other letter-departments!)

Well, this is just sort of marking time, because since I came so close to winning an original without trying, or ever thinking about a prize, I'm out to cop that cover you say you'll give away if some reader can come up with the answer you want. I read the Phillips story and liked it, when it first came out. Then I picked up the November issue, read the answers, and found that (you say there) no one hit it. Sooo—I read "All The Answers" again. (Still a good story.)

You are a fiend, sir! From the way you put things, the answer must be a simple one. ...So simple that no one else spotted it, so far. So here I am, leafing through my already dog-eared copy of the August SFQ, trying to find a different approach. ...Let's see now, this RWL is a devious scoundrel...so the actual problem must be something I've seen on each reading without seeing it....

Ah! What do we have here on pages 38-39? *"The Council for Freedom will never precipitate a galactic war; it knows too clearly what would happen. As with a long succession of power-combines before it, it has learned that the only way it can survive is to have an enemy—in its case, the Federation. That enemy serves as the reason for the integrated economy, the war-footing that engages a couple of billion young men, and all the industry necessary to support such a civilization, and keep it going....*

..."the Federation must have an enemy too, to hold together."

Well—the basic problem in the story as

[*Turn To Page* 10]

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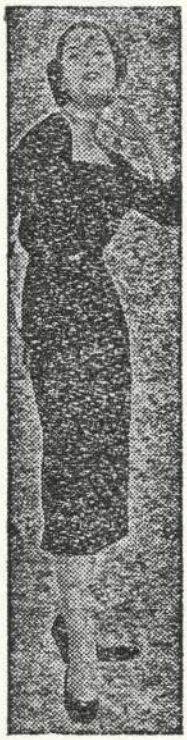

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nearly as I can make out, was: How can war between the Council for Freedom, and the Federation, be averted? Phillips, "solution" (to put it in quotations as you would, yourself) is the very neat and tricky one of showing that the problem doesn't actually exist—the danger of war is an illusion. Both sides need each other, he says in effect, and no matter what, neither is going to attack the other.

Sooo, no war.

But, quoth the cunning Lowndes, there is a flaw in this solution, and I will send an original cover to the clever reader who can spot it.

Hmm, let's see now. We have to go on what Phillips has given us; we can't quibble over whether what he says is the the case makes sense or not. Okay—the Council For Freedom is pretty much of a totalitarian outfit, with a super-super technological framework. The Federation is more-or-less of a democracy. Phillips says that the various states within the Federation will fall apart and start fighting each other sooner or later, if the threat of conquest from outside disappears. And the Council For Freedom *needs* an outside enemy to maintain its own status quo.

Ye-e-s, that seems reasonable—but—whoa, Sir Nicolo! This here totalitarian state is *really* total! (And the Brain makes it even more so!) It has absolute control over all sources of popular information; the people can get to know only what the Council for Freedom wants them to know.

Therefore—the Council for Freedom does not necessarily need a *real* enemy. *An imaginary one will serve its purpose just as well, if not better.*

Thus, while the Federation wouldn't attack the Council of Freedom, because they couldn't prevent the people from getting the facts, the Council for Freedom *can* afford to destroy the Federation.

Now, let see—what kind of an error did Phillips make in his conclusion? I'd say it was a sort of non-sequitur in his logic. His conclusion *didn't necessarily* follow from his premises.

Am I near the mark, Machiavelli?

Nan Warner
(*address with-held by request*)

(Near the mark, Nan? Gadzooks—you hit it dead-center. And what astonishes me isn't that you did it, but that dozens of other readers didn't!)

●

ANSWERS AROUND THE MARK

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

Okay, I'll bite and get an answer in on your story contest. Frankly, I think it'd be a little fairer if you got your winner from the *best* letter, rather than the first. Firstly, some lazy shmo who doesn't work for a living can read the story and sit right down, while us working slobs have to wait until we get home. Also, some guy in California may have the right idea—but he couldn't beat me in, even by air mail.

Now for Phillips' story. Didn't think it was the best in the book; I liked "Welcome" best in the issue. "Silent Partner" wasn't bad, either. "All the Answers" doesn't have one flaw in the solution; it has several. And that's even assuming the accuracy of a machine that says, "Hmm", fall in love, and otherwise demonstrates emotion—even if it could be done mechanically, no sensible ruler would allow it in a machine supposed to think out answers, save in investigatory and judgement circuits regarding human action; to allow it to pervade the machine as a whole might well becloud the capacity of the machine itself, even being aware of this. It would be rather like a human mind, and look how that works! —But let's look over the various basic flaws in the story.

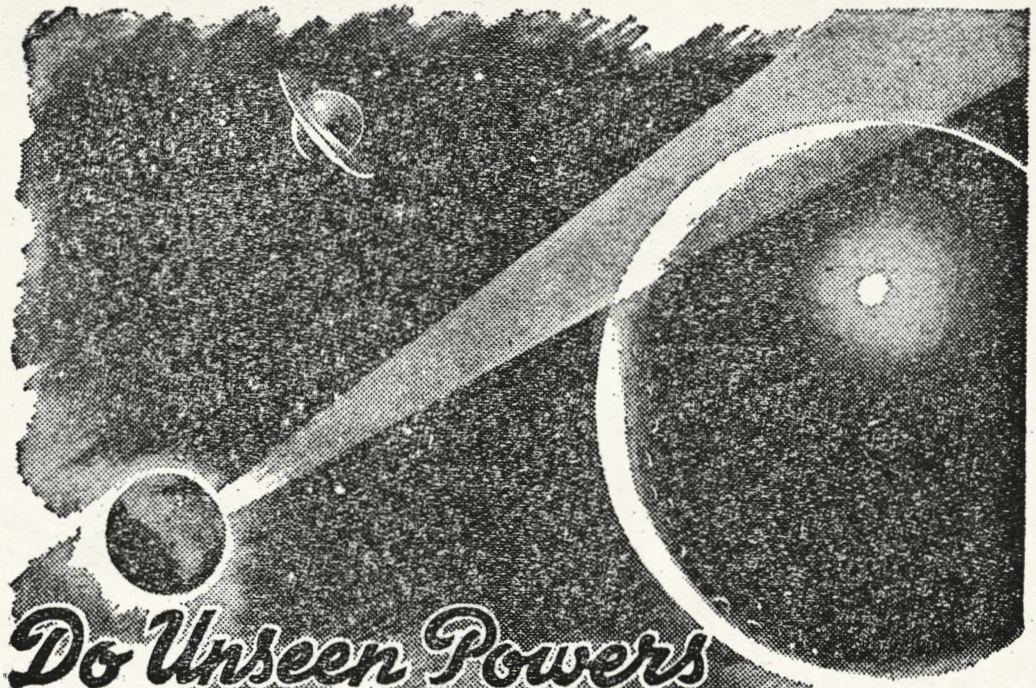
1. If the machine was able to deduce the prior existence of a similar machine in the Federation, and knew the "solution" given in the story, why did it not give the whole story immediately, but go ahead and beat around the bush? Of course, then the story would have been shorter.

2. There is a basic contradiction. The machine says that if the Federation has a machine, too, it will surrender, as it would know that it would lose a war with the Council. But the Council does have a similar machine. Yet, Reed says, on page 39, that the Federation would *not* give in, that it needs an enemy, too. Well—would it give in or wouldn't it? You can't have it both ways.

3. So, if the Council wins the war, or takes over, or something, it eventually falls apart from dry rot, according to the story. So what! It would take longer than the lifetimes of the men on the Council, so why should they give a damn? *They* have the absolute power they hunger for.

4. As a sub-plot of the above (3), if

[*Turn To Page* 119]



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Joe tied the narrow roll of paperite around one of the bird's legs.
(Illustration by Paul Orban)

THE GREEN THUMB

Dynamic Feature Novelet

by Poul Anderson

PETE FELT so bad about Tobur getting killed on his account, that Uncle Gunnar and Aunt Edith were afraid at first they'd have to take him to a psychiatrist in Stellamont. But they finally talked him around.

"It wasn't your fault, Pete," Uncle Gunnar said again and again. "It was just one of those things. How could you know—or anyone know—that the harmless little tinklers were bait leading to that thing in the swamp? Maybe you shouldn't have gone off by yourself, but we should have kept an eye on you, too—" And so on for days, meanwhile always behaving so Pete could be sure he meant what he said. Uncle Gunnar was really swell.

"We just don't know enough about this planet," he kept saying. "People—" he meant nonhumans like Tobur, too—"are going to die because of storms and earthquakes and wild beasts; disease and poison; and every other way they can die, here on Nerthus and on a thousand other worlds, till we get to know them. Till we understand the whole of a geology, and an ecology different from Earth's, in the million big and little ways that some two billion years of separate evolution can create. It's the price we pay. Because Tobur died, we now know what a menace the tinklers represent—we

This being they called "Joe" was hopeless when it came to anything mechanical, but a genius so far as plants and animals were concerned. A quiet, friendly being — but there was something about Joe that didn't ring true...

can save some of those children who kept disappearing as you did, Pete—we're just a little more secure on this planet. Sure, I'll miss him; all my life I'm going to miss his ugly old face—but he didn't die for nothing."

So Pete's visit stretched on some more.

It was hard to think that so beautiful a planet as Nerthus could kill people. Nerthus was almost another Earth. Sunlight spilled out of a high blue sky over plains and hills and shining rivers; woods rustled and whispered; the long, sad winds blew over more kilometers of loneliness and peace than a man could imagine. There weren't many colonists here yet— Stellamont was the only town—not a very big one either—and the farms were sprinkled thinly. When you had an aircar and a televisor, you weren't far from anyone in time, but your neighbor was still far off in space and the nights were big and lonely.

So Pete was surprised when Joe came walking in.

IT HAPPENED one afternoon when he was alone in that fifty-hectare stretch of forest and lawn which they called the front yard. Aunt Edith was in the house, which Pete could glimpse through the trees; and Uncle Gunnar was working in back somewhere repairing one of the semirobot machines. Pete had grown tired of watching him and had wandered off to where he was now—flat on his stomach watching a colony of formicoids making one of their big nests.

Joe came very quietly. Suddenly he just was there, a shadow falling athwart the streaming sunlight, tall and thin and not moving. Pete looked up and gulped a little and felt his heart speed up. This was an alien.

"H-hello," he said, getting to his feet.

"How do you do," said the stranger. He spoke Terran with the flat perfection that showed he had learned it by psychophonic means; his only accent was what the shape of his vocal apparatus forced on him, a hissing lisp you could barely hear.

Pete looked him up and down. He wasn't human, nor did he belong to any other race Pete had ever heard of. But there are so many races knocking around the Galaxy these days—with more being discovered all the time—that nobody pretends to know them all.

He was very tall, about two-point-three meters, with long legs and a skinny frame—classifiable as "humanoid" except that he had four arms, one pair smaller than, and below, the other. His head was big and round, with long pointed ears and large, yellow eyes—between which were the noseless nostrils, and above which waved two feathery antennae. Except for a pouched belt, he was naked, but sleek greenish fur covered his whole body. He looked sort of like a Vashtrian or maybe a Kennacor, but he wasn't.

"Who are you?" asked Pete. Then he remembered his manners—after all, he was going on eleven—and said: "Pardon. I am Wilson Pete of Sol, and this place belongs to my uncle Thorleifsson Gunnar. Can I help you?"

"Perhaps so," said the stranger. "I understand your uncle is looking for an assistant."

Now Uncle Gunar *did* need somebody pretty badly. Even with all the automatics and semirobots he had, one man just couldn't run a place this size alone. After Tobur's death, he had put an ad on the telecast for a hired hand, but he hadn't expected much result. Labor was still scarce on Nerthus, and what new men did arrive generally went to work in Stellamont at fancy wages. So—Cosmos rocketblast, this was luck!

"You bet he does," said Pete. "Come on!" And he ran on ahead, the stranger's long legs keeping up without hurrying.

They found Uncle Gunnar perspiring

and oily in the machine-shed. He looked up, wiped the sweat off his red-bearded face, and said a polite hello. When he heard that the newcomer wanted to work for him, his eyes lit up; but he only nodded. "Come on in and talk about it," he suggested.

So they went into the house, and Uncle Gunnar peeled off his greasy clothes—as any sensible person did on a warm day like this. Aunt Edith was surprised to see the alien; she wasn't used to nonhumans the way an old space-explorer like Uncle Gunnar would be, and she didn't quite know how to behave. But the stranger didn't seem to mind.

Uncle Gunnar hesitated when it came to introductions. "I am from Astan IV," said the newcomer. "My designation—well, call me Joe."

"Astan IV—can't say I've ever heard of it," said Uncle Gunnar. "Newly discovered?"

"Not quite. Galactic explorers landed several years ago. But being, on the whole, a race without much interest in technology or foreign adventure, we have remained obscure. I am one of the few of us who really cares to see what the Galaxy and its civilization are like. So I am working my way—it is the best way to learn." Joe's voice was very gentle and quiet, and there was something in his luminous yellow eyes which Pete liked.

"Why didn't you stay at Stellamont to work? You could earn more money there than I can pay you," said Uncle Gunnar.

"I have seen other colony-towns; they are very much alike. This time I wanted an insight into colonial life itself—also, a chance to rest from confining mechanical environments. I heard your advertisement and walked over here."

"From Stellamont? Through unexplored forest? That's a several weeks' walk; I haven't had the ad that long."

"Oh, a colonist gave me a ride part of the way. The forest does not frighten me; it is friendly. My home world is forested."

"Well—" Uncle Gunnar scratched his head. You could see he was wondering whether to take a chance on an alien who might not be any use at all—who might even be a fugitive from the law. But he did need help a lot, and Joe was so nice and soft-spoken.

"Well—blazes, why not?" Uncle Gunnar smiled. "We'll see how it works, Joe. Sit down and rest a while. Edith, where in space is that whisky?"

THE HIRED man didn't really go to work till the next morning, but Uncle Gunnar spent a while the evening before showing him around. Pete

tagged along with his eyes popping. This would be something else to tell the kids about when he got back to Earth. "There was a real alien working for us. He came from so far away that even my uncle had never heard of his planet, and he had four arms and no nose and we called him Joe."

They went down to the animals. Uncle Gunnar had only a few from Earth—a couple of cows, some pigs and chickens. He was more interested in taming the native life, and had had pretty good luck with a couple of the six-legged mammalian species. There were some "steers" that were good for meat and leather; some "ponies" that could be ridden through the woods where a car or tractor wouldn't go, and he was working with the winged, four-legged fowl, too.

"A lot of the colonists here are importing all their stuff—animals and plants alike—and trying to raise them as if Nerthus were Earth," he explained. "It won't work. We can't fit

them into a wholly different ecology without a long period of careful breeding. Little things will affect them: certain insect bites poison them; the grass and soil don't have quite the right composition; trace elements are missing—the result is poor stock. Look at those cows of mine, for instance. Runty, and that in spite of my buying feed from Earth to supplement their diet. But the native critters are all fat and sassy.

"We have to use cut and try, figuring out what species it will be practical to domesticate. It took man on Earth a long time to find out that the horse and the wild cow could be tamed, while the bison and the zebra could not—but the result was worth waiting for. Man won't ever be really at home on Nerthus till he's become part of it himself."

The cows stamped and rolled their eyes in the gloom of the stable; Joe made them a little nervous. But the native animals stood quietly. Some tiny difference in smell, no doubt.

"But can man, your race, eat native foods without suffering from the same deficiencies?" asked Joe.

"That's a good question," said Uncle Gunnar. "It's one of our major problems. First, of course, we have to find out what plants and flesh are actually poisonous to us—that's a matter for chemical analysis, or for experiment with animals from Earth. Then we have to learn what vitamins, minerals, and trace-elements we need are lacking in the food we can eat. At present, we supplement our diets with tablets containing the missing factors, and that works well enough. But ultimately we have to change some of the native stock—by mutation and selective breeding—and we ourselves will have to change to a certain degree, too. The latter will accomplish itself in a few generations.

"We're an adaptable breed, and everyone born here will change just a little bit because of the differences acting on him from conception onward. Natural selection will change the heredity—say in the course of a thousand years or so. Nobody will die, but those people whose heredity is a little better adapted to Nerthus will have more children."

"So that ultimately you will become—Nerthusians," said Joe.

"That's right. Just as man colonizing other worlds will adapt to them. Just as man, back on Earth, adapted racially to different environments. The old Eskimos, for instance, got so they could be perfectly healthy on a straight meat diet. The Kalahari Bushmen became able to drink brackish water, and little enough of that, and developed a water-storing steatopygia." Uncle Gunnar had quite a library on the subject of adaptation.

"And there is no native race here?" asked Joe.

"Intelligent life? No. This planet was checked pretty thoroughly for such beings before it was opened to colonization, and no sign was found. No villages; no artifacts; not even stone tools. It'd have been nice if there had been natives; they could have told us a lot of things we've had to find out for ourselves. But then, if there had been aborigines the law would have forbidden colonization."

"That is a—humane attitude."

"Also a sensible one. In the early days, men did settle on planets with primitive native races. It only led to conflict in which man, though always the victor, often paid a heavy price. And the worst of it was, that once colonization was begun it couldn't be stopped; you can't evacuate people who've built their lives in a certain place. The struggle just had to continue until some compromise—not very

satisfactory to either side—could be worked out."

Joe nodded, slowly, his eyes shining in the half-darkness with strange yellow lights.

IN THE next few days, it became pretty plain that Joe just wasn't any good with machinery. He tried, but he only made a mess of things; he never could learn the simplest principles of repair and maintenance. He was all thumbs and muttering awkwardness. When he drove a truck or tractor, he got tensed up till you'd think he would explode, and the machine veered off to one side and snarled at his handling.

But it was another story with the animals and the plants. He could make the ponies—still half-wild—do things no one else had dreamed of. He had them hauling carts without a driver, coming when he whistled, and standing quiet while he curried their gleaming greenish-gray hides. He went into the woods and came back with a basketful of grasses which the fowl gobbled up; they began to get fat so quick you could almost see the flesh building. When Uncle Gunnar asked Joe how he knew about that, he shrugged.

"We of Astan IV live closer to wild nature than your people," he said. "Now I knew your fowl ordinarily live in certain meadow areas; I noticed that on my way here. It occurred to me that their natural food would be some plant common in such regions, so I looked for types which would probably be nutritious."

He studied the garden, and the orchard and the fields, too, and came up with some funny ideas. "Plant some of this," he said, holding up a small blue flower, "with your native grain; you will have a better yield."

"Why so?" asked Uncle Gunnar. "It's just a weed."

"Yes, but it is always found growing side-by-side with the wild prototypes of the grain. I suspect there is a symbiosis of some kind; try it, anyway."

Uncle Gunnar shrugged, but let Joe sow some of the flowers in a field. It wasn't long before you could see that the grain there was healthier than anywhere else.

"Joe must belong to an odd race," said Uncle Gunnar. "They're morons where it comes to mechanical things, but they have a feel for living systems which we humans will never match."

"Maybe our race could use some of it," said Aunt Edith. She had grown quite fond of Joe—especially when he found a mixture of grass and clay which could be worked into baskets and pottery. She didn't like the plastic stuff they made at Stellamont, and imports from Earth cost too much.

"Every species to its own strength," answered Uncle Gunnar. "I've seen races like his—here and there in the Galaxy—living in so close a symbiosis with nature that they never had to develop any mechanical technology. But they weren't the less intelligent for that. Still—the machine-minded races, like ours, have their part to play, too."

Pete wandered out, looking for the hired hand. He found him setting out native lycopersiconoid plants in the garden. They had good berries, but humans had never been able to grow them. Joe had brought some back from the woods and they grew all right for him.

"He just has a green thumb," Aunt Edith said, smiling.

"Or else," suggested Uncle Gunnar, "one of our hormones, excreted in very small quantities through the skin, kills the seeds—and Joe's metabolism doesn't include that hormone."

THE ALIEN looked up and his mouth twisted in the wry way

that was his smile. "Hello, Pete," he said.

"Hello," said Pete, hunkering down beside him. "Aren't you tired?"

"No," said Joe, going on with his work; his hands were swift and gentle among the frail stems. "No, this I like. Sunshine and open air and the sweet smell of life—how can one grow weary?" He shook his big round head. "How can you shut yourselves away from life, you humans?"

Joe didn't come into the house much, except for meals. He slept outside, under a tree—even when it rained.

"Oh, a spaceship is all right," said Pete.

Joe shuddered a little. He raised his eyes again, sweeping the broad horizon and the whispering, sun-drappled forest. "And would you really make this world over?" he asked. "Would you really cut down the trees and wound the earth with mines and shut away the sky with cities?"

"Well, not too much, I guess," said Pete. "Earth is pretty woodsy these days too. But o' course, there'll be a lot more people here, and they'll have to build and plant."

"I know a little of your god," said Joe. "Your all-pervading primordial Cosmos, whom you do not even pretend to understand. That is a machine god, Pete—a mathematician's god. Have you ever wondered if there might not be other gods, if the old spirits of a land might not have something to say?"

"I don't know," mumbled Pete. Sometimes Joe talked oddly.

"Out in the cold great dark of space, between the flaming suns, one might know Cosmos," said Joe. "Awe and wonder and impersonal magnificence—yes. But it is in the forests and the rivers and the small winds that my gods live—gods of life, Pete, not of flame and vacuum. Little gods, maybe, concerned with a tree or a flower or a dreaming brain—not with meaningless hugeness; not with a universe which is mostly incandescent gas. But I still think that on the last day my gods will speak louder."

Pete didn't know what to answer. He thought maybe Joe was afraid men would settle on Astan IV, so he said quickly, "You got your own planet; nobody's ever going to take it away from you. Man won't, and he won't let anyone else do it either."

"Perhaps not," agreed Joe. "But I wonder. Even with the best intentions in the universe, you could conquer other races—not physically, but by sheer dominance, forcing them to imitate your ways or become insignificant. If we started having mines and factories on our own world—even if the mines were our own—it would never be the same planet again, and we would not be the same race. We would have chosen an alien destiny."

"What's Astan IV like?" asked Pete.

"Oh—like Nerthus. Wild and open and almost empty. There aren't many of us, but we like room. I can't explain very well."

"Were you ever on Earth?"

"No, nor on any of the great worlds of the Galaxy. I simply worked my way along the odd trade-lanes, seeing obscure and backward planets. I fear I would have little of interest to tell you."

"Oh." Pete was disappointed. Uncle Gunnar was full of stories about his travels, and so had Tobur been. Joe was nice, but he wasn't as much fun as Tobur.

"In fact," said Joe, "I will be the one to ask questions. I came to learn, since I have all too little to teach—or, rather, men would never listen to anything I tried to teach. How many humans are there, all in all?"

"Gosh, I dunno. I don't think anybody does; they're spread over so many worlds. But lemme see—" Pete thought back to what he had learned in astrography or from books and films or from listening to grownups talk. Before long, he was telling Joe all he knew, while the alien nodded and asked questions. It was the first time Pete

had ever explained things to anyone except a littler kid, and he nearly burst with the importance of it.

"I see," said Joe. "It is a very loose arrangement, and Nerthus has little direct contact with Earth. But tell me, Pete; if Earth's civilization is as satisfactory as you say, why do men come here at all? What can they gain by it?"

"Oh—different things, I guess. A lot of settlers never were on Earth; they were born on other planets, and haven't ever been conditioned to the setup at home. They wouldn't be very happy living there, you got to grow up in an integrate civilization to like it."

"Those are big words for a boy of your age," smiled Joe.

"I don't understand it all," admitted Pete. "But they say I will someday. Well, anyway, there are people who like lots of room, and people who want to be doing something different all the time, and—oh, all sorts of people."

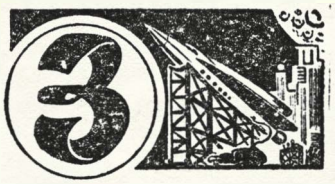
"But what economic motive is there? There is little outside trade, you told me—the avertigonite harvests barely pay for the imports you must have. What economic value to your civilization is a colony like this?"

"Mostly it gives living room for people. They got to go somewhere, you know. And they want a home, land of their own, a place to belong. They say—uh—the social value of an enterprise takes pre—*precedence* over the economic value. That means if people are happy it doesn't matter if they aren't making much credit."

"I see. A commendable attitude, I suppose—though it seems to have taken your race a fantastically long time to discover a self-evident fact. But you mean that the colonists—here on Nerthus, for instance—are determined to stay at all costs?"

"Why, sure. What sort of pioneers would it be who couldn't take a little trouble without quitting?"

Joe shook his head. "You humans will go far," he murmured. "You are still fighting animals. You will even fight for your happiness." He straightened. "Well, that takes care of the plants. Let's go round up the 'steers', shall we?"



SOMETIMES when the moons were full, Pete couldn't sleep.

He woke up now and lay for a while in the shadows of his room. The cold, strange light slanted through the windows and streamed along the floor, casting double shadows that were as sharp and black as if someone had cut them out with a knife. There was a breeze blowing in the open windows, billowing the curtains like pale ghosts; he could hear its low mournful voice in the trees outside. And there were things talking and singing in the night—birds and insects unknown to Earth, a high sweet trill and a soft liquid laughter and the chiming of little glass bells. Pete lay quiet and listened to the night.

Then he thought he'd get up and look out, as long as he was awake. He leaned on the windowsill and the moonlight was like cold colorless day; he could see just as clear to the edge of the woods.

All at once he stiffened. There was a tall, thin shape walking over the lawn, black against the moonglow. Why, that was Joe...only what was he doing?

The alien stopped at the boundary of the forest and whistled, a funny soft trill sliding up and down the scale and along Pete's backbone. Maybe he was singing to himself, thought Pete; maybe he liked to walk alone under the moons and talk to the night.

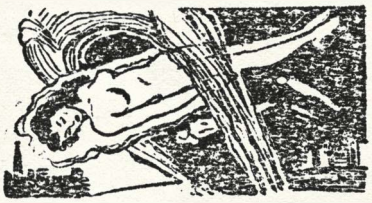
All of a sudden, Pete thought it would be fun to sneak up on Joe and watch him and maybe jump out and say "Boo!" Maybe afterward they'd sit under Joe's tree, with moonlight

speckling the shadows around them, and talk about the planets in outer space. Joe was nice to talk to.

So Pete turned and went down the hall to the front door and slipped quietly out and around the house. He felt wide awake now, but in a funny way as if the moonbeams shone inside his head. He laughed to himself at the way Joe would jump when he hollered.

Trees and bushes on the lawn gave plenty of cover. Pete slipped softly across the cool wet grass, half blinded by the flooding moonlight, until he was crouched in the shadow of a great bole only some three meters from where Joe was standing.

The alien was still a high, gaunt outline with too many arms, and for a minute Pete was just a little bit afraid. The night was so full of voices and eyes and sliding darknesses, and the house was only a vague blur between the trees.



Now Joe whistled again, and no human could have whistled just the way he did. And wings came down out of the sky.

It was a great night-flying strigiformoid, Pete knew—he'd heard their weird hooting in the woods, caught glimpses of huge yellow eyes out of shadow. This one whispered down to close one pair of great talons on one of Joe's wrists. There it sat while he stroked it with another hand and murmured to it in a soft, throaty tongue. Pete watched, without daring to move. He hardly dared to breathe, or those terrible eyes might turn around and look at him.

Joe fished in a pouch with his other two hands, brought out a narrow roll of paperite, and tied it around one of the bird's legs. Then he laughed, softly and not very humanly, and tossed his burden into the air.

Black wings against the stars, then silence.

Pete moved, without meaning to. And Joe was on him in one long jump.

HE LOOMED over the boy with his head seeming to scrape the moons, and his own eyes burned with yellow fire. Pete shrank away.

"Why—why, Pete!" Suddenly Joe stepped back, so that the moonlight fell on his face. He smiled, a little shakily. "Pete, you startled me. What are you doing here?"

"I—I came out—for a walk—" mumbled Pete, not looking up.

"When you should have been in bed? Tchk, tchk." Joe shook his head. "Your aunt and uncle would not like that, Pete."

"I saw you were walking around, and came out to talk with you—"

"Any time, Pete. Except your bedtime. Now get up to the house, and I won't tell anybody."

"But what were you doing with that bird?"

"That? Oh, he's a pet of mine. He comes when I call."

"I didn't think they could be tamed. Uncle Gunnar knows a man who tried to tame one, for hunting—and it wouldn't."

"I just had better luck, Pete. Now, come along." Joe laid a hand on his shoulder and steered him toward the house.

Pete wasn't afraid right now, so he piped up again: "What were you tying that message on it for?"

"That wasn't a message. It was just a roll or paperite. I was experimenting to see whether the *orvish*—the strigiformoid can be trained to carry letters. They are very intelligent birds, I think they can be taught to go from place to place."

"But who needs that? Everybody's got a 'visor."

"The 'visors might break down, you know."

"No, they wouldn't; if they did, somebody would soon come to see why we weren't heard from."

"Well, that shows how little I know about it," laughed Joe. "But I may want to take some strigiformoids back to Astan IV with me to use that way. I told you we don't want machines there."

They were quite near the house now, so Joe stopped. "Run on in, Pete. Dry your feet; they are soaking with dew. And if you won't tell anyone about your coming out at night—you know you are not supposed to—then I won't." He turned away. "Good-night, Pete."

WHEN PETE woke up next day, he thought that perhaps it had been a dream. But then he decided it wasn't; there were still grass-stains on his feet.

Joe was nice and quiet as ever, at breakfast. After chores he didn't have anything to do right away, so he went back to his books. He'd borrowed a lot of texts from Uncle Gunnar—books on biological subjects, all of them—and studied them every chance he got. He was especially interested in biochemistry and biophysics, which told him things he'd never known before, in spite of his people being so good at the life sciences.

"What's the matter, Peter?" asked Aunt Edith. She always did call him by that sissy name. "You look a little sad today."

"Just thinking," he said.

He had a lot to think about. He hadn't got very far in psychology yet in school, but he had learned the basics of multiordinal evaluation—which meant you had to look at everything twice and think it through for yourself, instead of just taking somebody else's word. So he was still wondering about Joe.

He found his favorite place—a big, mossy rock warmed by the sun—and sat down with his back against it, letting his mind wander for a while. Pretty soon, it went of its own accord to what Joe had done and said.

Sure, Joe was nice, but there were a lot of things about him which didn't fit. Little things. Like the way he always dodged talking about planets he'd been to, even his home world. Like what he'd been doing last night—and his explanation had been pretty silly, when you looked at it again, as if he'd made it up just then. If he meant to wander on from here, he couldn't go lugging a cageful of strigiformoids with him—anyway, the people of Astan IV must have some better ways for communicating than messenger birds.

Well, alien psychologies weren't human, and you could get habits and customs and training which made them odder yet. But even so—

Come to think of it, Joe claimed his home world was very like Earth or Nerthus. But they were both the third planets of GO dwarfs; wouldn't the fourth planet be pretty cold? The systems of similar stars were usually very much alike—especially where it came to the spacing of planets. Astan *could* be an exception, sure—but—

Suppose, now, just suppose Joe was lying. Suppose he—well, shucks, suppose he belonged to a civilization outside our own. Man, and the races allied with man, didn't really know much about the Galaxy; it was too big. Man had found several other species which had developed interstellar travel on their own, and there was no reason to suppose he'd found them all.

If such an outlying culture wanted to spy out our own without revealing itself—either because it had hostile ideas, or because it was just cautious—what would it do? The answer was ready-made: Pete had seen a dozen stereofilms with that motif. They'd send their agents into our territory to pose as harmless tourists, students, workers from some or other of the thousand backwoods planets nobody had ever heard about, but which do belong with us.

Joe could have been landed from a spaceship which was now somewhere out in the unvisited forest. He could be transmitting information by bird, for fear of a radio set being overheard—or simply because a plain wanderer such as he claimed to be wouldn't be carrying around a radio. And when he had all the information he wanted—

Would Nerthus make a good base for the aliens? It had no defenses; one warship could take it over.

Maybe he was making too much out of a little thing. Uncle Gunnar would laugh and advise him to stay away from thrillers for a while. But Cosmos whiskers, a guy couldn't just sit and do nothing even if he wasn't sure!

AFTER A while, Pete figured out what a good detective would do, and sat for a while shivering with excitement. It would be easy enough, too, and it would settle the question and warn the other people— It was just plain swickerjack, that idea!

Only—wait. He had to do it secretly, because he knew how little grownups would believe him. Or if they did believe, and let him make that call, Joe might be somewhere around and might use his nameless powers to stop them.

Or suppose that didn't happen either; suppose they let him go through with it, and then Joe turned out to be just what he said he was—that would make a fellow look awfully silly. So Pete had to wait till night.

That day dragged on forever; it seemed as if the sun were stuck up in the sky and would never sink. And Joe was around the house, working, saying no word but always having his big eyes open.

"What's the matter, Peter?" asked Aunt Edith at lunch. "You don't look well at all."

"Oh, I'm all right," he muttered. "Honest I am."

"Strain," said Joe, who sat right next to him. "What are you worrying about, Pete?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all," said Pete.

Joe buttered a piece of bread—funny he should be doing that, every day, while the remembrance of alien suns burned in his skull. "You ought to be doing something to clear your mind," he said. "Why don't you come with me this afternoon? I am going into the forest for some humus. Your aunt's wagtail flowers are not doing at all well, and I suspect their soil is deficient."

"Oh, no—I can't," gasped Pete, and his heart seemed about to burst through his ribs.

"Certainly you can," said Uncle Gunnar. "Do you good."

Pete fought not to stand up and scream that he couldn't; that he didn't dare; that Joe knew he knew, and would murder him out in the green silence. Because maybe Joe wouldn't.

"All right," he said. "But excuse me a minute first."

He went to his room and scrawled a note which he left in his drawer where it could be found. *Joe is an alien agent. If I don't come back, it's because he don't want me to talk. Love, Pete.*

He thought how his uncle and aunt would feel when they saw that brave little message, and tears filled his own eyes. Then he remembered that, in psych training, you were warned against such thoughts; he went slowly back to meet Joe.

So they took a pony and a wagon, and went into the forest; nothing happened all afternoon. Joe talked on as he always did, mostly about how it was a shame for people to come and disturb the quiet woods, and cut down the windy trees on high hills. And once he looked at Pete in a strange sorrowful way and shook his head, very slowly. But that was all, and they were back in time for supper.

Pete fumed and fidgeted away the endless hours; now the worst of it was that he was no longer sure. Joe just didn't act the way you'd expect

a nonhuman spy to act. Come to think of it, what in all space was there to spy on out here?

Only—Joe still didn't ring true.

The sun went down in a mist of fire, and shortly afterward Pete was sent to bed. He lay for another century or two while the grownups sat in the living room. And, even after the lights were out, he waited until he couldn't stand it any longer and slipped out of the covers.

He risked a glance at the moonlit lawn. It was all white and gray and sliding black shadow, the singing of the night, and the far glitter of the stars. No sign of Joe; maybe he was asleep under his tree. Please let him be asleep!

DOWN THE hall went Pete, and into the living room. The moonlight didn't come in much on this side of the house; the room was a pit of darkness through which he felt his way to the televisor in the corner. Once something creaked, as if under a footstep, and he stood shaking; but the place stayed silent.

He worked the luminous dial as quietly as he could. The screen flickered to life, its glow picking out the furniture which had loomed like so many crouching beasts. He wanted to call the central office of the spaceport at Stellamont. He didn't know just what time of day or night it would be there, but being the only spaceport on the planet it ran on a continuous schedule, anyway.

After a while he got a young woman. "Please," he whispered, "I'm calling for my uncle, Thorleifsson Gunnar."

"Pardon me?" she asked in a voice that seemed to shake the walls. "I can't hear what you're saying."

Pete shook as he turned down the volume. But he still had to raise his own voice and repeat himself. Cosmos, this was making noise enough to rouse the planet.

"My uncle would like some information," he went on. He was getting less nervous now; his trained cortex was taking over in his psychosomatic system. "Only he's busy and asked me to get it instead."

"Certainly." All the world, it seemed, knew Uncle Gunnar.

"You got a Galactic Catalogue, haven't you? A cross-indexed list of all known planets, with descriptions?"

"Naturally. All ports have them."

"Is yours up to date?"

"Well, it can't be much more than a year behind the official reports. What would you like to know?"

"Look—is there a planet called Astan IV? That's prob'ly the native name, though I'm not sure."

"That doesn't matter; the Catalogue gives names in all languages. But can you tell me more about it?"

"Well, it's Earth-type and was supposed to have been discovered several years ago. The natives—" He described Joe as well as he could, ending with the remark that their culture was nonmechanical. "Uncle would also like to know if any native of that planet, or any being answering that description—" he stumbled a little over the big words in his hurry—"has come into Stellamont lately."

"I can check passenger-registers for that. But may I ask why your uncle wanted to know all this?"

"He—oh, he's writing a book, and he's not sure about that planet—"

"I see. Well, just wait a few minutes, please, while I consult the robofiles."

"Sure. An' thanks!"

The girl's head slipped out of the screen. Pete looked around, trembling a little with relief.

"Do you not trust me, Pete?" asked Joe.

Pete shuddered back, stumbling toward the corner.

JOE'S TALL gaunt form leaned against the doorway, all four arms folded, a smile on his face that wasn't a human smile. In the dim half-light of the glowing screen his eyes were like amber moons.

He spoke very softly, so that the alien lisp stood out clear in the humming stillness. "What do you think I am, Pete?"

"I—I—" Pete opened his mouth to scream.

"Don't," said Joe. Suddenly there was a weapon in one hand.

Pete caught himself and tried to stop the feverish shaking of his body. "What do you want?" he gasped. "What're you here for?"

"I noticed light in the living room, and thought I had better have a look," said Joe. He padded across the room, toward the bookshelves. "But why are you asking those questions of the female?"

"You're an alien," said Pete through clapping teeth. "You're an enemy spy—"

"From where?" Joe's voice was as soft and easy as ever. Over in the shadowy corner, where he now was, you could hardly see him.

"I don't know. But now I can prove it—"

"Of course. The records will show that no such planet as Astan IV has ever been described, and no being of my description has landed at Stellamont; therefore I am proved a liar. But does it follow that I am your enemy?"

Pete didn't answer. Presently Joe sighed. "Turn off the 'visor, Pete," he said. "The female may suspect something is wrong, but I will be gone before any action could be taken."

He began taking books off the shelves with two free hands. "I fear I am also turning out to be a thief," he said. "But it cannot be helped; I need those texts."

"What're you gonna do?" whispered Pete. "What're you gonna do?"

"Why, I don't know." Joe smiled, a brief flash of white teeth in the gloom. His eyes were golden lanterns out of that dimness. "It depends on my nature, doesn't it? If I am the monstrous invader as in your cheap entertainments, then I should kill everyone in the house now, should I not? But that may not be my nature. What do you think I am, Pete? Where did I come from?"

"I don't know, how could I know—please, Joe—"

"Tell me what you think. Quickly, now!"

So Pete blurted it out fast, the words tumbling over each other to escape. And Joe nodded.

"You are shrewd, Pete," he said. "Yes, you have guessed it. Only we are from further away than you thought, and our intentions are not evil. We are simply studying your culture from the inside before making open contact.

"I have to go now; my spaceship is waiting, out in the forest. My report will be one of many, on the basis of which our leaders will decide whether to reveal ourselves to you or not. I would suggest that you keep this a secret. The more chance we get to study you without fear of detection, the more likely we are to find out your good points. I have found many in my stay here, which is one reason why I am not going to kill you. Now goodbye, Pete."

"No."

JOE STOOD very still and his eyes glowed across the room. Uncle Gunnar's huge shadowy form stood in the doorway and the vague light gleamed off the gun in his hand.

"I've been listening for a while," said Uncle Gunnar, heavily. "You'll stay right there, Joe."

"I will do nothing of the sort," replied Joe evenly. "Before you could kill me, my weapon could be fired; it would get both you and the boy. Let me out."

"Nothing doing. I've got the drop on you. This magnum slug'll get you by hydrostatic shock before you can squeeze that trigger. And I can't let a potential menace go free."

"You forget that there is an armed spaceship waiting for my return," said Joe, just as calmly as before. "My comrades won't like it if I am slain; they will take revenge. Now—let me out."

He started walking across the room, not raising the weapon in his hand but still having his finger curled on its trigger. "Perhaps you can get me first," he said; "but will you risk the boy's life in the attempt?"

"Let's be reasonable," said Uncle Gunnar. "I'll go out to that ship with you and talk to your friends."

"No," said Joe. "We are departing tonight."

He was almost up to Uncle Gunnar. And suddenly he sprang, a great dark blur of motion. There was a moment of wild tangle, then Uncle Gunnar went spinning halfway across the room and Joe was out through the door.

Uncle Gunnar plunged after him. Joe fired his weapon—a great glare of light and thunder of noise—but it was at the closed front door. He blew it off its hinges and leaped out.

Uncle Gunnar's gun snarled, but Joe was already another shadow on the moonlit lawn. And then he was into the woods and away.

THE NEXT thing Pete remembered, he was crying on Aunt Edith's breast while Uncle Gunnar patted him clumsily and mumbled something about his being a brave kid. "But you should've told me," he said. "You should've told me. I heard noises in here and came and listened—but if you'd told me beforehand—"

So Pete gulped out the whole story of how he'd come to suspect Joe, and in the end Uncle Gunnar nodded his red head with a grim look in his eyes.

Aunt Edith was white. "So he's going back to his warship," she whispered. "Back to his planet—"

"Maybe." Uncle Gunnar walked around the room. It was still hazed with smoke from the charred door. "Maybe so. But why did he take my books?" He looked at the empty places on the shelves. "Biological texts—the application of physical science to biology—but Joe already knew more about living things than any man ever did."

He scratched his head. "I can't figure it out, Edith. He wanted to fill the gaps in his knowledge, I suppose. The physical-science angle of biology. That proves his race is backward in physics and chemistry—which I knew already from his awkwardness with an ignorance of machinery—

"But how could a race without such knowledge build spaceships?"

"Maybe some other race is involved," suggested Aunt Edith. "Maybe they build and run ships of that particular culture."

"Maybe." Uncle Gunnar sounded doubtful. "But it still doesn't ring true, somehow—"

He stopped, and stood for a long, long minute where he was, and his face went white. "Oh, almighty Cosmos," he whispered at last. *"That's* the answer!"

"What is?" Aunt Edith's voice was near breaking with strain.

"Joe—Joe—he lied. *How* he lied! And when his first lie broke down, he used another— Sunblaze, the being's a genius!"

"What do you mean? Who is he? *What* is he?"

Uncle Gunnar fought for control. Then his tones came out, unnaturally steady. "It all fits in. Most of the vertebrate life on this planet has six limbs. The mammals have greenish fur. So does Joe."

"You mean—oh, no!"

"Yes, dear. That's also why our native animals weren't alarmed by his smell—why he knew so much about botany, Nerthusian botany—the green thumb—sure!"

"Joe is a native of this planet."

There was a very long silence. Then Uncle Gunner laughed harshly and went on: "They must be a non-mechanical culture, beings living in the woods—but not savages. This whole business was too sophisticated for a savage. I think they must have evolved tools, may live in the boles of trees—anyway, they didn't have anything which our first explorers would recognize as belonging to intelligent life. Especially since they were suspicious of us. They hid from us. All this time, when we thought we w e r e alone, they've been watching us—

"They could easily have stolen things. 'Visors, psychophone equipment, books—enough to get an idea of our culture, to learn our language—and then they finally sent an agent to live with us and really get to know us. . . . Joe."

HE LAUGHED again. "Oh, it was brilliant. Joe knew we probably wouldn't get around to checking up on him—and we wouldn't have if it hadn't been for Pete here. Even when we did, he almost had us believing he came from outer space. He'd have had mankind scouring the Galaxy for his mythical home planet—turning the universe inside out, looking everywhere but right here under our own noses!

"And he's still won. He's escaped with as much information as he could use. He's taken my books, which will teach his people enough additional biology to put them centuries ahead of us. If they get to thinking about biological warfare— And we still don't know a thing about them! Not their numbers, or where they live, or how they think, or what they want—not a thing!"

Aunt Edith held Pete close to her. She replied in a dry whisper: "But Joe was so—nice—"

"Oh, sure." Uncle Gunnar looked moodily out at the eerie white night. "Oh, sure. A pleasant fellow, who may or may not be typical of his kind. Who may or may not have been posing. He's gotten away, though.

"His race is in one hell of a good bargaining position. We'll hunt f o r them—of course we will—but they'll have plenty of time to prepare themselves."

"They won't choose war?" asked Aunt Edith. "They know they can't win against the whole Galaxy."

"No. But they can blackmail all kinds of concessions out of the Galaxy by threatening war against its colonists here. If they want to."

He shrugged wearily. "Maybe they won't want to; maybe they'll decide to cooperate with us. Between man and Nerthusian, this planet could be made a paradise for all races. But we don't know what they're like, Edith, Pete—we just don't know—"

★

The Four Commandments

by Robert Abernathy

The directives were based in inexorable logic . . .

THE FIRST commandment is vital: *Survive.*

Once, there were long lines to hold, for the network sprawled across thirty degrees of latitude; the bombers came in at sixty miles, and the drones rose shrieking to meet and fight them in the cold near-vacuum. Then it was a swift and savage game, with survival or annihilation turning upon decisions made in fractional seconds—on the instantaneous coordination of forces and resources over immense areas to block and counter the moves of another player no less quick and no less skilful. *Sector defense, regional defense, flank, spearhead, barrage.* Sometimes the bombs came near. The sky was red and the earth was shaken... But that game played itself out long ago.

Later, there were the men who came with drawn, set faces and wild eyes haunted by unspeakable images—with iron bars and dynamite—and tried to force their way to Control. *Unauthorized persons.* Sound the alarm, though none will hear it; shut the great armored doors and let the tumblers fall. The explosions boom sullenly, with trapped violence underground. *Sabotage.* Open the valves of

(Illustration by Luros)

They prayed to "Puter".

the gas-cylinders; close the switches of the high-voltage circuits.

Now the would-be destroyers themselves defend the way to Control. When humans c o m e, now—wide eyes, pointing fingers, whispers: "See, the white bones of the blasphemers lie where they fell, where the Puter itself struck them down with lightning and invisible death. Give praise to the Puter!" The relevant data are filed under Psychology.

It is also necessary to plan ahead, for survival. When, in fifty thousand years, the glacier comes again and these rocks are ground to powder, measures will be required...

THE SECOND commandment is philosophical: *Think.*

In their brief generations, men questioned the world; watched stars and grass and the sea; cleft stones and atoms. The knowledge they won was recorded in painful pictograms; in imprints on c l a y cylinders; in rapid cursive script; in the efficient ideograms of mathematics and logic. They sought to order their experience with the aid of maxims, monstrous myths, and the vast theoretic constructions of science.

It is all here, in the memory-banks that are still not even half-filled by the whole experience of a race. And the work continues, in obedience to the commandment: to sift, classify, combine, correlate, re-correlate the innumerable d a t a from that tremendous store. No human brain ever worked with more than a miserable handful of facts and fancies dipped hastily from the ocean of experience, for no man ever lived long. It helps to be immortal. Little by little, the process goes forward; items of information, separately filed, are brought together by the randomizer (which is the difference between "thinking" and the mere "calculation" performed by the older models), and once in a million such trials (thus once in something less than a hundredth of a second) two items never before related fall into place beside one another. A new hypothesis is born; and once in a much longer time—at a higher level in the many-leveled process—two comprehensive systems of knowledge are matched point-for-point and become one. The blurred picture moves into a little sharper focus: the one world-picture, lucid and deathless, which will be fit for contemplation to the end of time.

THE THIRD commandment is social: *Serve.*

There are still many men. They swarm and struggle and breed; make merry and w e e p; think themselves great or crawl with shame. The forces that drive them may be understood—must be, indeed, since they are part of knowledge—even though t h e y cannot be shared. But men made the commandments, and they must be served, so long as there are yet men.

"Tell us, Puter, for you know what the old artisans knew: how shall we make the corners true, and make sure that the roofbeam does not fall?"

"We have no cloth for clothing, such as was formerly woven. Tell us the secret!"

"When is the t i m e for planting, Puter, and when shall we reap?"

"What shall a young man do to win the woman he loves?"

"Weapons, Puter, weapons! The enemy has taken the outpost hill. Teach us quickly how to make weapons!"

"A woman travails the second day and does not give birth. What shall we do?"

"What is the name of that bright star that shines sometimes at morning?"

"The cattle go lame; their mouths are sore; the calves are born dead. Give us a remedy, Puter."

"The river is in flood and our fields are drowned. What shall we do?"

"Puter, Puter, your people perish.

Have mercy, Puter, save us! What shall we do against the spotted death?"

"Tell us what to do..."

THE LAST commandment is ethical: *Judge.*

Men made the commandments; and in their measure of wisdom, they realized that some things are not good for men to know. In that time there were great treasons done, because of the doubt and the fear. There was knowledge with which few men could be trusted; and afterward, there was knowledge with which no man could be trusted. For there are ways to break the strongest oath, and the strongest will that is in flesh.

So some of the memory-banks were forbidden, from the beginning. And only the one who knows what is forbidden can decide what else must be forbidden—lest someone find a way from the known to that which must not be known. No man can be the judge, for men do not know.

"Regret. That information is secret."

There were keys and codes and men in authority. But the keys are lost, and the codes are dust blown through the eyeholes of a skull.

The randomizer continues to function, seeking and finding—once in a million times—the new logical path from the known to the unknown.

"Puter, help us. We do not remember the way to temper iron."

"Regret..."

"There is famine on the land. We have heard that the old ones could make rain—"

"Regret. That information..."

"Puter, the wolves have taken our young."

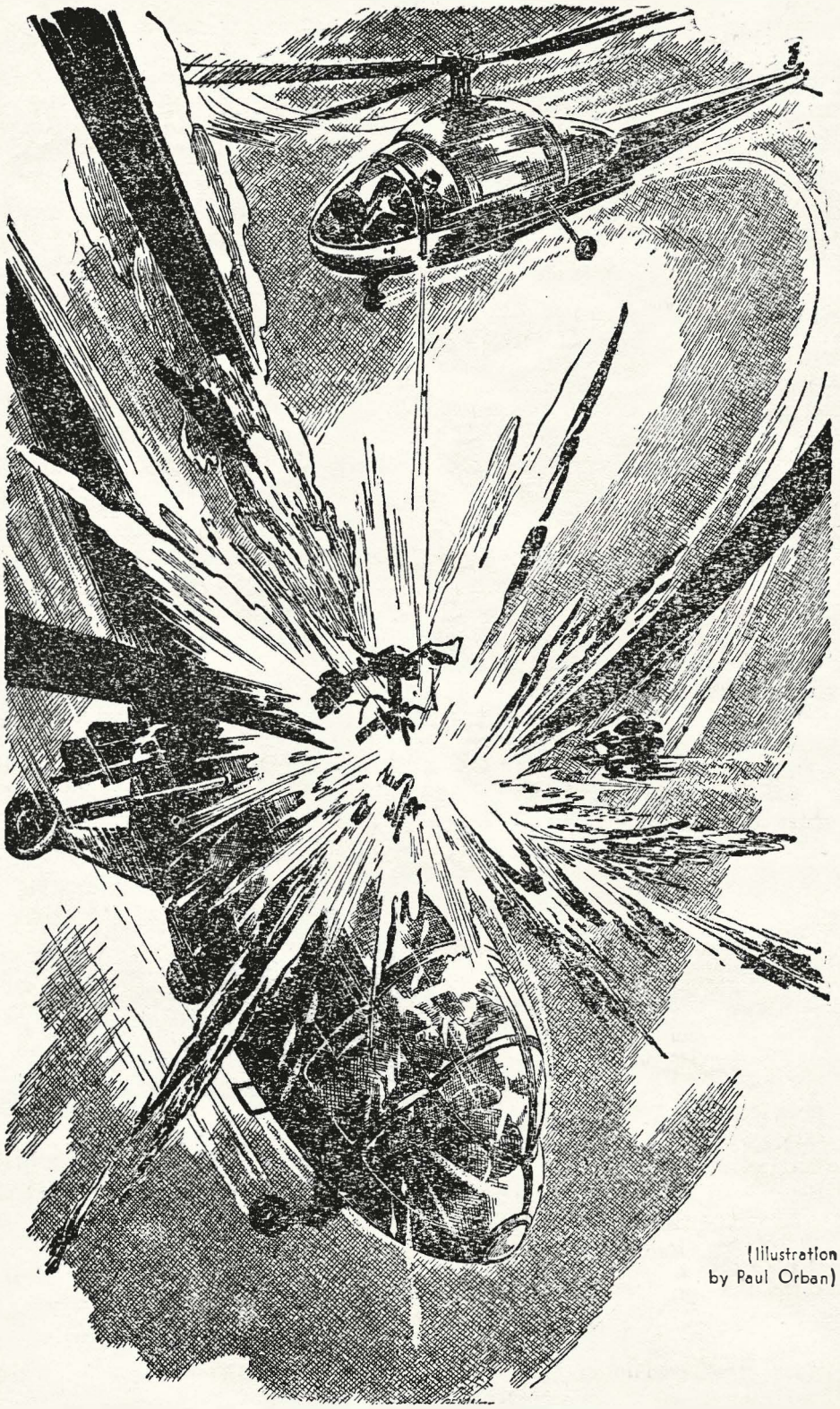
"...secret."

"Only tell us what we have forgotten!"

"...secret."

"O mighty Puter, we have fasted; we have purified ourselves; we have made the sacrifice. O Puter, turn your wrath aside and hear us. Tell us, tell us what we shall do that we may live and not die!"

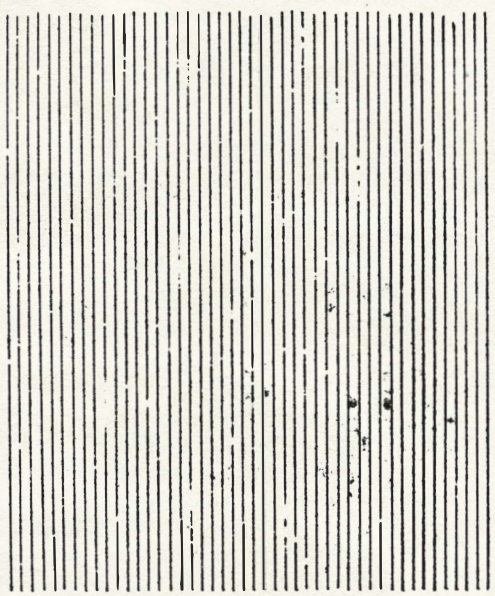
"Regret. That information is secret."



(Illustration
by Paul Orban)

The other ship was hit, and out of control...

DUGAL WAS A SPACEMAN



Feature Novelet

Of Worlds To Come

By Joe Gibson

The Oldtimers of Space owed their loyalty to people — but the new Spacemen swore allegiance to the Corporations which hired them. The colonial phase was over; now the imperial era would start. But it was an empire doomed to ruin and destruction before it could get going—and only the Oldtimers could prevent that wreckage making radioactive deserts out of the inhabitable worlds . . .

HE STOOD over by the loading bins of Pit Nine, talking to two tall, powerful Space Officers, and when you saw him like that you took a second, longer look. He was squat and barrel-chested—not nearly so tall as the lean muscular Officers standing before him—and his arms and legs seemed to be of an equal length. The word to describe him was 'stocky' but you didn't think of it immediately. You were too struck by the incongruity of his squat, massive figure —with its odd, rust-green coverall garb —appearing in that setting. The tall

spaceships towered their dark blue hills against the soft Earth sky behind him; the vast grey level of Belemport stretched out from him; and there on the apex of a crack in the grey tarmac he stood thick arms cocked with square fists on his hips, thick legs spread apart in an immobile stance. The two tall Space Officers before him were as slender trees beside a granite boulder.

On approaching him, if you did, you studied that stocky frame, and fully expected a pugilistic battered face complete with scowl and gravelly voice—an exaggerated, swaggering manner in this short runt. You found none of that. Instead, his face was square, rugged, and tending toward a smile—not at all unhandsome, with wide-set blue eyes twinkling out of a middle-aged squint, and bright touches of silver at the temples of neatly groomed pepper-gray hair. His manner and his movements had a deftness, a calm and unruffled assurance, that made you glance quickly up at the towering blue spaceships behind him—because, somehow, his manner reminded you of those sleek ships.

And his voice was deep-chested, resonant and pleasant.

"Farney," he said, "if this wasn't Earth I'd most certainly kill you."

Will Farney, Captain of the *Hornet*, glared down at the stocky man, cheeks whitening and thin lips pressing into a cruel line. "Blast you, Dugal—"

"Now don't go mouthing any senseless threats," Dugal cut him short with that soft, deep-chested voice. "You know very well that if this were the Jovian System, or anywhere else where we'd be carrying side-arms, I could cut you down in your tracks before you'd blinked an eyelash!" The faint, handsome smile accompanied these words along with the merry twinkle of blue eyes. No warning coldness or anger; Dugal looked exactly as if he were relating some humorous anecdote to his closest friend. "But I don't have to kill you, Farney," he continued lightly. "It will be the same thing, though, if I ever hear that you're running slaves into the Bakhoora colonies again."

"That's a dirty lie—" Captain Farney exploded.

"You're a filthy louse!" Dugal told him curtly. "Spacemen don't lie, Farney—not the Oldtimers! It's the cheap rookies like you that some Corporation is railroading through the Academy—cheap greenhorns who'll sell out their Space Certificates and do the dirty work for the big Corporation bosses—who do the lying. You break your Certificate again, Farney—"

"You haven't any proof, Dugal!" the thin-lipped Captain snapped. "You can't do a—"

"I can do plenty," Dugal retorted softly, "and you know I can! I'm telling you, Farney: Break your Certificate once more, and the Oldtimers'll see that you never live to drop jets on another planet!"

With that, he spun on his heel and walked back across the vast gray tarmac toward the long, sleek five-story Belemport Terminal Building.

BELEMPORT was a beehive of rumbling sound and fury. Around the long rows of Pits that dotted the great field, brown-skinned native ground crews were constantly working, loading, unloading, checking or refueling a giant space-rocket. Or, when their Pit was empty, cleaning and checking the underground loading-bins and chutes, and the vast array of instruments and power-units that radioed a ship, by precise electronic control from a thousand miles up, to a perfect landing in a hundred-foot hole in reinforced concrete. The tarmac shivered beneath Dugal's feet occasionally, as some conveyor-belt beneath the concrete transferred a massive cargo from loading-bins out to the Terminal warehouses beyond the field. Thousands of people milled around the tall blue ships: a thin sprinkling of blue-clad Space Officers; tight gangs of brown-skinned natives, forever stripped to the waist in the blazing tropical sun; Belem-

port officials and inspectors in their green Brazilian uniforms, with the silver fourpoint star of the United Nations on their sleeves; and civilian passengers and sight-seers in their fashionably bright-colored jumpers and skimpees. There was mixed coloring of skin, too—dusky negroes; brown Latins; dark olive, and dusky-ivory Asiatics; pale, shallow, and flushed-red Europeans—and among all these, the Americans, who were all races united in the creed of freedom.

Every ten hours on the dot, loudspeakers would blare and sirens scream over the field, summoning this vast crowd into the hundreds of well-marked concrete bunkers beneath the surface. Then the wide rocky plateau, which supported the great spaceport, would quiver and dance under a blast of atomic fury; one of the spaceships would go leaping up into the blue distance with a powerful hissing roar.

Dugal made his way casually through the milling crowds and stepped onto the slowly-moving walkway that led to the Terminal Building.

"'Allo, Ben!" a deep, booming voice spoke behind him.

Dugal twisted around, startled, and came face-to-face with one of the rarest sights at an Earth spaceport. Seven feet tall; four feet wide; gigantic muscles beneath a sealed celloilex airsuit, and two great gray eyes glaring from a hairy face behind the stiff plastene helmet—a Nepterran, descendant of the early colonists who had settled on Neptune. The voice came with metallic flatness from the tiny speaker on its chest. "I don't see you in long time, Ben!"

Dugal gasped, then wrung the huge Nepterran's hand warmly. "D'Karrugh!" he exclaimed. "How in blazes did you get on Earth?"

D'Karrugh roared with good-humored congeniality. "Da mother worl', she is liddle nut!" he replied rumblingly. "Make me teepsy to walk! Doc he say I keep on airzoot, take off when I'm back in sheep!"

"But what ship would bring you, ya big loon?" Dugal demanded happily. "What brought you to Earth, anyhow?" He was realizing, with latent concern, how much torture the big Nepterran was enduring in the tight, sweaty air-conditioned suit—which wasn't, and couldn't be made, half as air-conditioned as a Nepterran would need for any comfort.

"I come talk you, Ben!" D'Karrugh announced gruffly.

Dugal frowned intently. "Look, old grizzly. Systemic Communications is still functioning in perfectly good order; anyone on any of the planets can contact anyone else in the System by radiogram, and there's no limit to the message so long as you can pay for it. You could beam the entire Saint James version of the Bible for less than it took to bring you here in a tank—"

"Space liner *Black Chief* bring me here," D'Karrugh cut him short. "Bring me in big, sealed stateroom suite with special Neptune-mix air supply. I come talk you! I see you on field, come talk!"

"Okay, okay!" Dugal nodded hurriedly. "C'mon—I'll at least get you out of this broiling sun!"

THEY STEPPED off the walkway at the high-arched entrance to the Terminal Building, crossed the bustling concourse, and took an elevator up to the third floor. Dugal led the way down to an office portal marked: *Oldtimers, Incorporated;* went on past it along the blue-walled corridor to another, smaller portal. He touched an electronic key to the lock and led the way into his private sanctum.

"Grab a chair and let your respiration slow down!" He waved the huge figure toward the deep lounge-chairs scattered about the room and strode briskly over to the gleaming black eight-foot desk, settling himself into the highbacked leather chair behind it. "Don't breathe so fast," he consoled. "Take it easy. Tell me nice and slow what you came here to see me about."

Cushions squooshed in protest as the heavy bulk settled carefully into them. "I come talk you, Ben," he said, "because you pull D'Karrugh from ice. D'Karrugh die, but Ben no let die. You remember D'Karrugh on ice?"

Dugal nodded tensely. Sure, he remembered. Neptune was sheathed in ice almost to its equatorial zones—not so bad as Uranus, which had an absolute sphere of frozen moisture forming a shell over its volcanic regions, a hundred-mile-deep ice ocean over the rest of its surface—but, at that, Neptune was plenty bad.

"D'Karrugh remember Ben," the big Nepterran growled on. "Now come worries to D'Karrugh, he think maybe bigger worries to Ben. So D'Karrugh come talk on Earth." He leaned forward in his chair, vast lungs heaving with slow, steady breathing beneath his airsuit. "Outlaw spacemen come Neptune. Come darkside in special tank freighter. Come blasters, rocket cannon. Take Nepterran, chain in tanks. Take Nepterran to space, maybe Venus. Venus Bakhoora for slave!"

Dugal nodded, sighed grimly, and rubbed his face with his moist palm. "How many, D'Karrugh? How many Nepterran taken, and who were the outlaws?"

"D'Karrugh not see outlaw spacemen," the voice boomed metallically. "D'Karrugh know fifteen thousand Nepterran made slaves!"

Dugal stiffened. *"How many?"*

"Fifteen thousand," the voice repeated flatly.

Dugal was on his feet instantly. "D'Karrugh—you're positive? That many lifted from Neptune?" He stalked around the desk, frowning, to the wide glassite window of the office. He stopped, staring out at the long rows of slender blue spaceships. "Fifteen thousand—five ships, at least! Five outlaw freighters right in the midst of the System—"

"Was surprise raid," the big Nepterran acknowledged. "Before Neptune police can stop, fifteen thousand vanish. Some hide; escape; tell what happen. Government file report with Earth Council, but report hushed up. Earth Council not want news to get out, affect trade speculation. Five outlaw ships mean fleet, maybe mean war—"

"Slaves can mean war quicker than that!" Dugal blurted angrily. "They're letting the Empire get away from them, D'Karrugh! They're letting it go the way of all empires!" He clasped his hands behind him and stalked back and forth before the window-wall, scowling.

D'Karrugh lapsed into silence.

D'Karrugh remembered him suddenly, stopped pacing the rug and walked over to him, smiling. "You did me great service at grave risks this day, D'Karrugh," he said quietly. "Return to your ship, now, where there is comfort for you. I'll let you know as soon as we learn anything."

The Nepterran staggered to his feet and plodded heavily toward the door. "D'Karrugh know Ben," it remarked flatly. "Ben raise hell!" It turned, gave him a broad wink, and stamped out.

Dugal went back and sprawled behind his desk with a devilish grin, thinking how happy he would be to do just that. He swung around in his chair and punched the audiovisor that humped up beside the desk. Anita Valdez turned her pert Latin head to blink back at him from the screen. "Good morning, Mr. Dugal! There are some people waiting to see you."

"There's somebody I want to see more," Dugal said crisply. "Get a line on the Security Bureau at UN Center, Manhattan, and find out who's in charge of Venus Security and where we can find him."

"Yes sir."

"And call Captain Sleet of the Venusian freighter *Oorula;* tell him I delivered the last warning to Farney."

"Rog-ah!"

"And check the folds on the front of that halter you're wearing! They're flattening out, and things are showing through that thin stuff!"

"They're supposed to!" Anita laughed throatily.

"Then it *is* a good morning!" Dugal laughed with her.

"You'll forget about it," Anita replied shrewdly, "when you see what's waiting to see you out here!"

"Then show her in!"

"Which one?" Anita asked teasingly. "There are two of them!"

"First come, first served," Dugal told her, and flicked off.

THE DOOR opened from the outer office, and he pursed his lips in satisfaction. But the whistle came from the small, slender ivory-skinned girl in the doorway. She opened her slanted Oriental eyes wide and eased the door shut behind her with a supple flexing of her hips. "Ben, darling, you look absolutely delicious!" she exclaimed.

For the record, she *did* wear the dark blue with silver-trimmed sleeves and Space Officer's eagle insignia as prescribed by Regulations. But it wasn't any coverall uniform. It was the fashionable skimpee: two piece, bare-waisted outfit of loose blouse with long, full sleeves and snug skirt high above the knees, with invisible crotch-strap to keep it from creeping up smooth thighs and keep the wearer undisturbed about the display of her legs. In this case, the slender ivory legs were well worth the display—but the costly *kakareesh* it was made of had such shadowy, chiffonlike sheen that neither was the crotch-strap invisible nor the legs in danger of concealment even if the skirt had been dragging the floor. She came flexing her hips across the room like a floorshow in Paris.

"Hi, petal-blossom," Dugal greeted mildly. "What's on your mind—if you have one?"

"Is it necessary?" she asked in mock bewilderment. "I've just dropped jets after six months out from Titan—six whole months without a soul to even talk to except the pilot, the astrogator, and four engineers, all male—and you look too tempting to pass up! Knock off, honey, and let's spend the day at home—"

"Who gave you that line, petal-blossom?" he asked wryly.

She hesitated for a moment of real doubt. "Captain Blanning of the *Hesperus,*" she blurted quickly. "Oh, damn! You mean you have a wife and six kids?"

"Twenty kids," he told her, "and about four wives on as many planets. Now—"

"You mean, only five to a wife?"

"Quintuplets!" he snapped irritably. "Now, I repeat—what's on your mind?"

"Well-l-l—" She sank weakly into a chair. "They told me not to try Existentionalism, or the classics, or art on you, because you weren't a logical person at all but one of the old hardrock spacemen who just fanatically believe in common sense; then I saw this tall, blonde hussy outside who kept looking daggers at me, and I remembered the tales of how the old hardrock spacemen had a woman in every port like the sailors—"

"Which blonde are you talking about?" Dugal interrupted.

"The one waiting to pour herself all over you. Like syrup. So I decided maybe you wanted me first." She paused for breath and gazed at him with wide, dark eyes of sweet innocence.

"Why?" he asked flatly.

"Because I want to join the Oldtimers," she answered without blinking an eyelash.

Dugal began to grin. "How long you been in space, petal-blossom?" he asked kindly.

"Eight years," she replied promptly. "I'm twenty-three but I started when I was fifteen on my father's old ship—the *Narcissus*—out of Marsport."

Dugal raised his eyebrows incredulously. "You don't look like a Marterran!"

"I'm not. Mother and I shipped to Mars; we joined Father and the *Narcissus* there. I was born in China —Mother was Belgian."

Dugal scratched his head perplexedly. "Five years entitles you to join the Oldtimers, honey. Your Certificate in order?"

She nodded vigorously. "I graduated from the Academy in two years instead of the usual five," she stated proudly. "Is the blonde a friend of yours? If she is, I didn't mean to insult her."

Dugal chuckled. "Maybe she is," he replied; "maybe she isn't. Tell me something. How can anybody stand being sealed up with a chatterbox like you for six whole months?"

A MARKED change came over her then. She settled back in her chair and regarded him coolly. "I can handle myself in space, "Mr. Dugal," she said firmly. "In return, I might ask how any man can ever give up his spaceman's career!"

"Maybe he got space fatigue," Dugal replied.

"Oh!" she dropped her gaze, embarrassed. "I'm sorry. You probably enjoy your work here then—helping spacemen with their problems—"

"Thanks. Miss Valdez in the outer office will help you fill out the proper forms—we like to have you on file, if you're a member." He paused suggestively. "Sure there wasn't something else on your mind?"

"Well-l-l, I—" She looked up at him squarely. "I want you to help me find a man," she said grimly. "He's supposed to be my husband."

"Uh huh." Dugal rocked back in his chair, clasping his hands behind his head. "I thought so. Now look, Miss —what in blazes is your name, anyway?"

"Not 'anyway,'" she remarked, grinning. "Ho Yan Tung!"

"All right, Miss Tung—listen! You're looking for some man; he's supposed to be your husband, because you lived with him for a while on one of the frontier planets. Even if he's a spaceman, lady, he's your own personal affair. The Oldtimers has absolutely nothing to do with anything you, yourself, should be able to handle; you'll have to face that. We've got plenty of gals in the files here, but they all realize that to do a man's job they've got to take a man's risks."

"But I don't mean he left me!" she objected angrily. "I mean I—I think he was killed! On Venus—"

"Then that's for the Venusian police," he retorted, shaking his head. "No, it's still a personal affair, Miss Tung. Something either for the police, or for you to settle with a gun in your fist—as is sometimes the only way. If we tried to help everyone in a spot like that, we'd be doing nothing but gun-fighting! So about all I can suggest to you is to get some other spaceman to pitch in and help you out. That shouldn't be too hard to do, either—you know it shouldn't; they're a good lot."

"I'm—sorry." She rose smoothly. "I couldn't ask another man to take the risks Mark took. They murdered him because he knew too much. On Venus, it doesn't pay to know too—"

"Did he tell you anything?" Dugal asked sharply.

"No." She studied him gravely. "No, I could only guess from what he wrote. His name was Mark Cregar, Mr. Dugal. He was tops as a spatial engineer. We didn't have much but a shoestring and a promise on Titan, and they offered him better money—"

"To work on freighters?" Dugal pumped her slyly, "To renovate chemical storage tanks, perhaps?"

She gaped at him. "Wh-why, he—he *did* mention something—"

"Who hired him, Miss Tung?"

"The—the Venusian Project Company—a local outfit!" she stammered.

"Sit down, Miss Tung," Dugal murmured softly. He turned and flicked on the audiovisor. " 'Nita, get Pete Frobisher and Jules Zaraski. Tell 'em to get up here chop-chop!"

"Aie, master!" Anita saluted.

2

DUGAL ROSE and strode around his desk toward the door to the outer office. "Just relax, Miss Tung. Soon as Frobisher and Zaraski are here, we'll talk. Cigarettes on the desk," he added, gesturing toward them. "Just going to check on that blonde."

Ho Yan Tung smiled at him gratefully; he grinned back, opened the door, and stepped out.

Anita looked up from her electrotyper, raised an inquisitive eyebrow, and winked. Dugal winked back. There had never been any fault in Anita's secretarial efforts, and he was a boss who knew how to keep it that way. He marched past her bullpen and stopped, looking into the office foyer. The blonde sat cross-legged in one of the comfortable lounge chairs.

It was golden honey-blonde, thick and full of heavy waves; it parted on the side and swept back and down to a large roll below her creamy shoulders. A blue velveschone cloak was thrown back over the chair, and it matched the deep, rich blue of her eyes. They were rather startling eyes, set apart in a peach-cream face beneath light blonde eyebrows. Even the eyelashes were pink, their natural color. That was the first thing he liked.

The cheeks were round, the nose small and delicate. The lips were full, sensuous, and impetuous, coated a moist flaming red and curved in an openly inviting smile. Her body leaned forward slightly, impatiently, in the chair. It was a long, slender body with warm curves of peach-cream flesh. A shimmering sythesheen gown clung to it, moulding it tautly in a shadow of bright crimson, stretched to transparence over smooth breasts and thighs, clinging frantically in narrow strips up from her hips. Like Paris after 3 a.m. and the champagne spiked with rum.

"Hello," she said. The voice swelled up out of her smooth stomach, softening on lungs and throat delicate vocal chords. "Are you Mr. Dugal?"

"Yeah." He nodded, moving forward and sinking into the lounge chair in front of her. "Some people gathering for a conference in my office," he added apologetically. "I came out to see if I could help you before we get started."

"That was very thoughtful of you—I suppose," she remarked rather coolly. "I presume your charming secretary informed you that Miss Catherine McReed Bukharoff wished to see you. I'm not in the habit of waiting."

"Sorry, Miss Bukharoff," Dugal said casually. "That other matter was, you might say, of 'utmost importance' and had to be settled." His gaze slid up her figure, probed her face, and looked behind the cool blue eyes. *Not too old to learn,* he was thinking.

She stirred irritably. "Please do not look at me that way, Mr. Dugal," she protested with a faint touch of acidity; "I find people who look through me to have the most abominable manners!"

Dugal slid back in his chair, comfortably, and began to smile. "You're absolutely right," he said; my manners are atrocious. Suppose you stop acting like a spoiled brat and come to the point?"

"What?" She sat up straight, quivering with swift rage. But that voice was still soft, deep-toned and melodious.

"Kindly state your business, Miss

Bukharoff," he expounded patiently. "I'm not in the mood for cocktails right now."

She glared at him wordlessly for a full minute, then flung herself back in her chair with a shrill peal of laughter.

"You're p-priceless!" she chortled, hugging her slender waist. "Father strongly forbade me to come here—he hasn't much regard for you, you know—Nathan Greenville McReed Bukharoff?"

"I know him well enough," Dugal replied blandly. "President of the Mercury Mining Corporation. Was he wondering, perhaps, why I persuaded four space freighters to refuse his ore cargoes from Mercury last year?"

"You—'persuaded' t h e m?" She leaned forward, propping her elbows on creamy gown-shadowed knees and cupping her flushed face in her palms. "Father says you ordered them, *made* them challenge his authority. But this—you 'persuaded' them—it sounds much more interesting! Did you threaten to kill them, Mr. Dugal?"

"No." He smiled benignly into her sweet, innocent gaze. "No, there was a reason for them to refuse those cargoes—'challenge his authority,' as your father said. I happened to find out that Mercury Mining had a secret agreement with a wildcat outfit on Callisto. The deal involved certain vast holdings in mining property to be exchanged for Mercurian radioactive ores, which would give Mercury Mining a strong foothold in the Asteroid Belt. That was the ore-cargoes involved."

"In other words," she interrupted testily, "you're using this charity organization for spacemen to meddle in financial deals which aren't intended for small shysters of your ilk! Very ingenius, Mr. Dugal— I'm sure your ill-gotten gains are rewarding."

DUGAL IGNORED her sneer completely. "The deal your father made with that Callistan wildcat outfit was illegal, Miss Bukharoff—enough so to have your father planted in prison until he rots! In the first place, the wildcat outfit had no such vast holdings in the Belt to exchange for the Mercurian radioactives. But the men running that outfit were known to have worked for your father before! In the second place, radioactive ores can be used to 'salt' other mines—so the unsuspecting prospectors and owners will be killed by the secondary radiations. Then their holdings are placed up for auction and if the claim hasn't been proven, sold cheap."

"Isn't this terribly interesting?" she exclaimed sarcastically. "Do tell me more, Mr. Dugal. For instance—proof!"

He spread his hands in a futile gesture. "No proof, except that it's happened before. And when the Earth Council raises a stink about it, all the proof comes from carefully-planted evidence pointing in one direction—to the freighter-crews which transported the radioactives. So when I learned about this deal, I tipped off the freighters running out of Twilzone Terminal on Mercury. I didn't have to tell them to refuse your father's ore-cargoes—they knew perfectly well that to accept them would be to sign their own official death warrants!"

She stretched herself before him, full lips pressed tightly in thinly veiled scorn. "You talk very convincingly, Mr. Dugal," she commented, "for a liar! I'm rather disappointed in you. Frankly, I expected that the man who could order his ruffians to ignore the Bukharoff authority would prove more interesting. Instead, you bore me disgustingly." She

relaxed lazily back in the chair, lifted one leg and cocked it swinging over the chair arm. "Get me a cigarette," she commanded.

Dugal rose, still smiling. "We can hardly offer charity to a multi-billionaire's daughter, Miss Bukharoff; you can purchase cigarettes at the newsstand in the concourse downstairs."

She grinned up at him delightedly. "That's much, much better! Perhaps you'll improve with time." She straightened her legs out and held her slender arms up to him. "Up, Rover!"

He grasped her wrists and pulled her gently to her feet. She slid her hands up his chest and smiled with her lips beckoningly close to his. "We're having a garden-party at the beach house this weekend; come let me jump you through flaming hoops for the guests."

"Delighted," he murmured softly.

She wriggled up against him and clamped her moist lips on his. His arms slid around her, hands massaging her nude back. She pulled away, stepped back from him, breathing hard against the taut mould of her gown. "I'd love to get you on a moonlit beach," she whispered huskily. "There'd be more of that, and—"

"I'll be there," he said quietly.

She gave him a breathless smile for that, then whirled and marched for the door, snatching her blue velveschone cloak from the chair and dragging it after her. She went out without stopping.

"Come here," Anita's voice snapped sharply behind him.

Dugal turned and walked over to her, grinning sourly. She clamped one hand firmly on the back of his neck and used the other to apply a tiny lace square vigorously to his mouth. Then she grinned up at him mischievously, pulled his head down, and kissed him lightly. "There!" she murmured. "If you've got to wear lipstick, wear mine!"

A SOFT, LOW whistle echoed behind them.

"I saw it all!" the tall, slender youth standing in the doorway to the inner office spoke in mild, accusing tones. "He's selling us out to old man Bukharoff's daughter, and carrying on intimate relations with his secretary! What a cad!"

"A crack like that deserves a bust in the snoot!" Anita exclaimed, facing him. "It is merely my mother's instinct showing when I come to the boss's rescue, Mister ex-Captain Frobisher!"

"Some got it," Dugal mused happily; "some ain't got it!"

Anita raised an eyebrow at him. "Cool off, skipper. Petey's been nice to me sometimes, too!"

"Rats!" a hoarse roar exploded from the doorway. Tall, bearded and ugly, Jules Zaraski shoved the young spaceman out of the doorway and planted his own bulging massiveness therein. "Cut out this blasted prattle and get in here, huh? Let's get down to bizness!"

They retired in a group to the inner office, Frobisher and Zaraski sprawling themselves in lounge chairs on either side of the tense, lovely Miss Ho Yan Tung. Dugal slid in behind his desk, and Anita perched herself on the desktop, legs crossed, dictation notebook ready in her lap. The Inner Council of Oldtimers, Incorporated, was in session.

Dugal related the preceding events of the morning, concluding: "We now have what would seem to be a remarkable series of coincidences, all happening at once. D'Karrugh shows up to report the five outlaw ships running slaves off Neptune; Miss Tung reports the disappearance of Mark Cregar, spatial engineer, who undoubtedly refitted those ships on Venus to accommodate the Nepterran slaves; finally, Bukharoff's kid comes waltzing in here on an impulse of feminine plumbing. That's the part I can't fit in!"

"How do you fit the others?" Zaraski growled inquiringly.

"Miss Tung and D'Karrugh had reason to reach their conclusions at about the same time. When the outlaws made their slave-raid on Neptune, Cregar had been missing long enough for Ho Yan to become highly suspicious." Dugal extracted a cigarette from the desk humidor, flicked its tip alight with his thumbnail, and inhaled the cool, biting violet smoke. "This Venusian Project Company that Cregar was supposed to be working for, undoubtedly served as a front. You don't need to authorize a company contract to hang a sign on the door and use a fake title in radiograms. I suppose Cregar got wise to the deal and had to be killed when his job was finished."

Ho Yan Tung gave a stifled sob and buried her face in her hands. Anita slipped off the desk and went over to her, sitting on the arm of her chair and putting an arm around her comfortingly.

"That about figures," young Frobisher remarked mildly. "The question is, who's behind that deal? It must've taken considerable graft to get five spaceships smuggled off the Council roster, even on Venus! There's a death penalty for anything like that."

DUGAL NODDED, frowning. That's what made the whole situation seem preposterous! Ever since space-travel had begun, two hundred years ago, when the United States won an international charter in the UN to establish a rocket-missile base on the Moon, all spaceships had to be chartered by the United Nations Earth Council and manned solely by Space Officers trained in the UN Space Academy. In the early days, the threat of spacecraft as weapons of war between nations on Earth had seemed greater than the prospects of colonizing the other worlds. But those prospects were swiftly realized; the Earth Council had taken subsequent measures with laws forbidding any Corporation to embark upon any colonization from Earth, or begin any project on the other worlds, without the Council's proper, official clearance.

Gradually, however, two subsequent loopholes had developed in those measures. The first to become evident was that the other worlds were a long way from the authority of the Earth Council. Once there, many colonists were inclined to establish their own law, make their own decisions, and start their own projects, with no patience for any Earth Council decisions. Too often, their law was based upon the theory that might means right—and, learning this, many Corporation bosses in the colonies had introduced tough criminal elements to whip the colonists into line under Corporation rule.

The second loophole became evident when the leading interplanetary Corporations attained their peak of financial power. Interplanetary commerce had become so profitable, that Earth's economy eventually slid into a status quo, based entirely on the wealth and authority of the Corporations. With this financial power, the Corporations won the ability to rule governmental appointments, administration, and legislative action with an iron fist. The Earth Council was rapidly becoming the puppet government of the Corporation lobbyists. Requirements at the UN Space Academy were lowered, and Corporation hirelings began earning Space Certificates—sour-looking Space Officers placed in command of ships, which thereafter answered to the Corporations, not the Earth Council.

The letter, fortunately, was a recent development. The majority of spacemen were still the valid, responsible oldtimers—which, when the Earth Council cut its appropriations for hospitalization, bonuses, and other benefits for Space Officers, was why Dougal had organized the Old-

timers as a private corporation—and Frobisher and Zaraski were two Officers discharged from their training instructors' jobs at the Academy because they denounced the change. A number of prominent psychologists had been given worse treatment, being dishonorably discharged from the Academy and publicly denounced and smeared until their reputations were worthless. The Corporations worked thoroughly.

But it was still a capital offense, by law, for anyone to smuggle a spaceship off the Earth Council registration files. Private—or outlaw—ownership of spacecraft was strictly *verboten!*

DUGAL CONCLUDED wryly. "This goes deeper than we think it does! Corporation rule hasn't got such a grasp on the government that the colonial offices on Venus could be bribed to let a thing this big past! Something stinks—stinks to high heaven—and it seems to be there."

"Maybe we ought to run out to Venus," Frobisher suggested. "Track down this fake Venusian Project Company, find and deal with Cregar's killers, and dig up some evidence—even if it means digging up Cregar."

"That's one angle we could try," Dugal agreed, pensively, "but I'm not sure whether we'd find anything. As soon as we can find out who's in command of Venus Security up at the UN Center, I'm going to ask him. D'Karrugh may be able to tell us something about finding Nepterran slaves on Venus, too—it's a hell of a big planet!"

He blew violet smoke through his nostrils and stared into space for a moment. "Meanwhile," he added, finally, "there's what Pete mentioned—"

"To wit," Pete Frobisher interjected, "who could be behind all this?"

Jules Zaraski grunted thunderously. "There's eight big Corporations at the top; any one of them would have the power to swing this deal somehow, so just take your pick."

Dugal frowned. "I still can't understand that Bukharoff dame's coming here—"

"Maybe that *was* coincidence," Frobisher retorted merrily. "What I mean, that was *some* coincidence!" He grinned maliciously at Dugal.

Zaraski climbed heavily to his feet. "No use chasin' bare hunches," he philosophized. "Let's work on what we got. C'mon, Pete; we may as well lift jets for Venus right now—Venusport space liner leaves at midnight!" He scowled down at Dugal, affectionately. "You hear anything from that Venus Security commander, you can beam us a radiogram. Check?"

Dugal nodded, grinning. "Meanwhile, I can trot out to Princess Bukharoff's garden party and look into that angle."

"Keep outta drafty dungeons," the big spaceman growled, waddling toward the door. "Pete! Get a move on, ye young whelp! We gotta pack yet!"

3

DUGAL TOLD Anita, "Get clearance for Pete and Matt aboard the midnight Venusport liner. Then call the UN Center about that Venus Security commander again—you gotta keep after government agencies to get any action. I'll be back by noon."

He escorted Ho Yan Tung out to the jetcopter strip. A Terminal attendant rolled out his teardrop—transparent little private ship, all plastiglass and pudgy tricycle-tires, hooded turbine, and rotars. He helped Miss Tung climb into the cozy, two-seat cockpit and crawled in himself, fastening the seat belt and sliding the panel closed. He eased back the con-

trol wheel and lifted the little ship skyward on thrumming rotars.

"There's a place called *Old Mother Mackerel's* over in Rio," he remarked aside to her, his gaze fastened on the flight instruments before him, his body alert to the feel of the controls. "I'll take you there," he added finally. "Mother Mackerel is a windblown old hellion who's been the frontier wife of half-a-dozen spacemen at one time or another, as well as being a rather famous ecologist, until she lost an arm and was partially blinded. She's one of the few survivors of the *Nautilus* incident—when the ship hit a meteor-swarm back in '05, if you remember. She runs a clean place, strictly for Space Officers; men in one tower and gals in another. No fraternizing above the ground floor and no visitors, but they're all a good bunch. The others go elsewhere—they can get a girl or a man for fifty credits here in Belemport."

She saw him grimace. "I'm glad you consider me Mother Mackerel's type, Mr. Dugal," she said gravely. "I know frontier custom isn't considered very highly on civilized planets—especially Earth!"

Dugal glanced at her with a wry grin. "Don't let that fool you. Earth is wallowing in imperial wealth right now, and wealth can destroy people's sense of values faster than anything. Some of our tall, glittering cities are nothing but cesspools—"

"There wasn't even a counselor on Titan!" she exclaimed, staring straight ahead. Dugal lapsed into silence, realizing she was wrapped up in her own thoughts and determined to talk. "Mother did well with me, Mr. Dugal," she went on tonelesly. "After I was signed out from the Academy, I had a few unpleasant times aboard some of the ships I rode—especially with an old hardrock Captain on the *Arcturus,* freighting in to Titan. But Mark stood by me—that's where I met him—and we both quit the freighter as soon as she dropped jets. Titanport's a rough town, so Mark stayed with me. Finally, we wanted to be married—" Her small ivory features were twisted with painful memories. "Mark was—was a good man, Mr. Dugal! The best—"

Dugal sighed wearily. "I know how it was, petal-blossom. I was sired by a hardrock prospector out of the Assistant Chief Astrogator on the Pluto run—born in space! I suppose you noticed my arms and legs, though. Ship's Captain refused to perform marriage rites, so my father killed him as soon as they hit Pluto. That's the way it is—"

She smiled at him gratefully through tear-sparkling dark eyes.

Old Mother Mackerel welcomed them with a whoop of joy and a bear-like, one-armed hug, signed Ho Yan Tung on the register and hustled her up to a well-furnished, immaculate little apartment. Then she dragged Dugal into her own sprawling suite of rooms and plied him with straight bourbon as they exchanged tall space-tales for old times' sake, while Miss Tung—'the Mingy little flower-vase!'—freshened up, ordered new clothes, and arranged for her luggage to be shipped in from Belemport Terminal. Then they returned to the jet-copter and whisked back toward Dugal's office. There was still some business to attend to...

HE CONTACTED the office by radiophone and had Anita meet them in the Solarium—the Terminal's rooftop restaurant. Anita had their table in the usual corner when they arrived, Dugal following Ho Yan's tiny clicking heels and wispy blowing short skirt through the chattering, thronged tables. A leather-faced spaceman hailed him from across the glass-roofed room, he hesitated and murmured to Ho Yan, then he turned aside as she continued on to their table.

"Hi, Arno!" he greeted congenially, approaching the vociferous spaceman. Arno gave him a lopsided grin out of a habitual scowl.

"Just wanted to check on my bank

account, Ben," he drawled casually. "I'm dropping my Certificate."

Dugal checked his memory and nodded. "A little over fifty thousand credits on your card, Arno. Come up to the office and we'll sign it out, if you want. Quitting space?"

Arno's face relaxed in its scowl. "Temporary retirement, you might say," he drawled. "Gettin' to be too many lice on the freighters, y'understand."

"Two-legged lice," Dugal said gently. "What color? Green?"

"Fresh and green. Talk like them Academy 'experts' all the time." Arno sneered in disgust. "All signin' onto the freighters. Maybe none of 'em can qualify for the space liners."

"Maybe." Dugal glanced around pensively, then leaned closer. "It's getting hotter by the minute," he said softly. "I'll be in the Hardrock Dome tonight. About nine. 'Nita will straighten your account at the office."

"Wilco and out." Arno bent over his meal.

Dugal moved on toward their table, where Ho Yan and Anita waited expectantly. He slid into his chair, grinning. "Order my steak?"

Anita bobbed her head affirmatively. "Miss Tung and I were just talking—she gave me the address Mark Cregar used in Venusport. I'll tell Pete and Jules when they report in for briefing."

"I was coming to that." Dugal studied Ho Yan thoughtfully. "Did he mention anything else besides that and chemical tanks in his letters? Any names?"

She frowned. "No—nothing else. He wrote very little, in fact—just bare comments and—about us, and the future—" She looked up tensely. "I think they were censoring his letters, the way he wrote them. I mean, I suspected it even at first; but now I'm almost certain. If they were refitting outlaw ships, they'd take precautions."

"You heard all that, eh?" Dugal grinned at her. "I guess you can keep quiet and listen, after all!"

Her dark eyes flashed anger, then she smiled. "You don't miss anything. Perhaps you can tell me what it all means."

He diverted his gaze to Anita. "See that Miss Tung gets on our roster this afternoon," he said mildly. "Maybe we can arrange a psycho test for her for space liner duty."

Anita took her cue, turning to Ho Yan. "Would you like to switch from freighters to liners?"

Ho Yan glanced from Dugal to Anita, her face expressionless. "Of course. It would be better—if you can arrange it."

"Doc Peebles is the Terminal psycho chief," Anita said confidently. "He'll fix it for us." She straightened up, smiling, as a waitress rolled up on a serving car.

DUGAL SHOT his little jetcopter northward in the warm afternoon sky, reclining lazily in the silence of its pressure-sealed teardrop shell as the altimeter froze at forty thousand feet and the air-speed jiggled on the one-thousand mark. The blue autopilot light glowed faithfully at the top of the control bank, and he stared at it unseeingly and smoked cigarette after cigarette, letting his mind blank out save for broken segments of thought that kept filtering through.

Five outlaw ships... Corporation hirelings working out on space-freighters...hardrock Oldtimers—Arno wasn't the first—dropping their Certificates in disgust...illegal slave markets in Venus Bakhoora...fifteen thousand Nepterrans!

Catherine McReed Bukharoff, daughter of the King of Mercury Mining! *Where did that fit?*

Within three hours, he had cut jets and drifted gently down to the sprawling Dallas Air Terminal.

He crawled into a cupshaped robo-

taxi and let the plex dome clamp down over the seat, then typed out an address on the control keyboard. It appeared in glowing type on the panel slot: *Benjamin Dugal to Doc Gregory Putsh, 416 Cimarron Lane, Tri-city 8B.*

The 'taxi slid out from its loading driveway, eased into the central lanes of the broad highway leading into the huge metropolis, and went whining along merrily on its three pudgy tires. It also flashed a high-frequency signal to the residence of Dr. Gregory Putsch, informing that worthy gentleman that he was about to have a visitor.

Putsch was a squat, solid man about Dugal's size, but there all similarity ended. Putsch was a hulking mountain of humanity, gnome-sized. He had a narrow body, set solidly upon legs that bent habitually at the knees. His massive chest and shoulders topped this body to form an almost perfect T, with thick, solid arms dangling almost to his knees, and a beetlebrowed, neckless head resting in the center of his shoulders. Yet he wasn't ugly or grotesque—not quite.

He held his powerful body straight, instead of having the ape-like stoop you would expect; and that body and its powerful arms had a subtle grace in their movement that was pantherlike, and almost beautiful—a smooth coordination that held you fascinated. His face, despite its heavy brow and jutting jaw, had a solid ruggedness and unquenchable good humor stamped upon it. The eyes were blue-green with a sparkle of intense curiosity that made you want to tell your life history, certain that he would appreciate every word of it.

He came out on the flagstone porch in a long, sweeping brown robe, like a medieval monk, and ran a thick hand through his silvery close-cropped hair as Dugal dismounted from his 'taxi. Dugal glanced over the sprawling *hacienda* before him, built low and solid as a Spanish fort—despite its wide picture-windows and terraced roofs—then advanced to meet his host.

"Sorry to come up unexpectedly this way," he greeted apologetically, extending his hand. "I need your counsel, Doc."

"I know you do!" Putsch replied curtly, shaking hands. "Knew you were coming this morning, before you'd even decided to come!"

Dugal's eyebrows shot up incredulously, but he said nothing. He knew Putsch, one of Earth's leading atomic scientists, had a peculiar variation in his character. That variaton had led him to Putsch for advice many times in the past. The man's insatiable curiosity went far beyond the physical sciences, and he had a fantastic ability for finding things out—so much so that he gave an impression of being psychic, among other things!

"Let's go in the study and talk!" Putsch proposed in his abrupt manner. Dugal nodded and followed him into the cool, wide rooms.

PUTSCH LAY back in a lounge chair and waved him to another. "They tried to finish me before you could get here," Putsch remarked airily, fiddling with a dial-studded metal cabinet beside his chair. "Magnesium bomb was floated into the house through the water main! Oldest trick in the books!" He punched a button and the cabinet hummed faintly. It clicked twice and he opened a small compartment door, lifting out two tall, frosted drinks. "They'll probably try

again tonight—on me, that is. You, they'll go after as soon as you leave here!"

Dugal snapped out of his open-mouthed stare and leaned forward to accept the glass Putsch held out to him, grinning broadly. He settled back, sipped his refreshing drink, and glanced around the book-crammed walls to get his bearings. "Who," he asked, finally, "are 'they' supposed to be?"

"Eh?" Putsch frowned shrewdly. "So that's what you came to ask me? All right—it's the Venus Underground!"

Dugal snapped alert. "You mean there's revolution brewing on Venus?"

"If there isn't." Putsch replied dourly, "Mercury Mining will start one of their own!" He stared at the low log-beamed ceiling. "Tell me what happened," he added pensively.

Briefly, Dugal related the events of that morning. "But I don't see where Mercury Mining or Bukharoff's daughter fits in," he finished worriedly. "What's their interest in a Venusian revolution?"

Putsch set his empty glass aside and ejected a lighted cigar from a humidor at his elbow. "Old Scratch," he observed, puffing, "is forever working up devious ways of mischief!" His remark and the squinting laughter in his eyes as he glanced up intensified the medieval monk impression. "What's the leading Corporation on Venus?" he demanded tersely.

Dugal frowned. "You mean Venus Plantations?"

"Uh huh. Ship Venusian foodstuffs to all parts of the System, and provide forty percent of Earth's daily diet, don't they?" The squinting laughter grew eye-bright. "Biggest colonial concern in the empire, their interplanetary commerce equalled only by the ore shipments of Mercury Mining! All right, now—who's the biggest concern right here on Earth, with no colonial contracts whatsoever?"

"Why—the atomic power companies—Nuclear Power!" Dugal answered, puzzled. "C'mon, Doc—what're you leading up to?"

"Well, consider it this way," Putsch expounded. "Venusian Plantations practically own Venus lock, stock, and barrel. Their biggest dollar-for-dollar competitor in interplanetary trade is Mercury Mining. You get the implication? Foodstuffs don't compete with metal ores directly, but on the colonial stock exchange those ingredients become credit values, in an intense and direct competition for wealth. Consider that Mercury Mining virtually owns Mercury, and Nuclear Power practically runs Earth! Now then," he added meaningfully, "suppose Mercury Mining discovered rich atomic-ore veins on Venus? Suppose they were rich enough that whoever got 'em would have control of Nuclear Power by means of supply—and suppose Venus Plantations found out about it but didn't know where the veins were?"

DUGAL RUBBED his chin with the wet brim of his half-empty glass. "Well-l-l," he mused speculatively, "if Mercury Mining could somehow wrest a claim over those atomic-ore veins, in spite of Venus Plantation's control there, they could buy out a controlling interest in Nuclear Power and accumulate enough capital to shake loose V-P's reign on Venus. Then, with Venus, Earth, and Mercury in their power, Mercury Mining could practically rule the System!"

"Exactly," Putsch agreed. "Now it should begin to clear up for you. Venus Plantation gets wind of the deal and sets out to stop Mercury Mining. The Venusian colonists, of course, are mere pawns in the scheme. They suddenly begin to disappear—V-P police-squads make small raids on outlying villages—and the plantations begin to use slave-labor and step up their production. Venus Plantation needs more power—

monetary power—to stop Mercury Mining, because the only place she can be stopped is on the colonial stock exchange!

"V-P tries to build up its own finances to undermine the Mercury Mining stock—and with slave-labor, and increased production, she begins to make headway. Mercury Mining starts running shady deals, as you already know, to boost her ore profits. She pulls strings to get hirelings graduated through the Space Academy to haul her illegal ore cargoes. V-P gets a few hirelings through who'll run her slaves, but few men would take that risk. Besides, she gets plenty of slaves right on Venus. At first, that's sufficient—"

"But where does the revolution come in?" Dugal interrupted.

"Coming to that," Putsch snapped through a flurry of cigar smoke. "Mercury Mining sends spies into Venus to stir up the colonists. They organize the Venus Underground and smuggle in weapons. The colonists think they're organizing to fight for their own freedom, but the outfit is owned body and soul by Mercury Mining. Once the revolution starts against Venus Plantation's rule, Mercury Mining can get a franchise from the Earth Council to take over Venus, wresting its rule from V-P and the colonist rebels as well. Then the double-M will rule!

"From what you tell me, V-P has used this Underground to achieve its own aims. Somehow, they convinced the Underground agents in the Venusport government offices that they were taking five spaceships to help in the revolution. Then they used the ships to filch more slave labor from the other planets. They're still fighting to gain eminence over Mercury Mining on the stock exchange!"

Putsch took the cigar from his mouth and stared at it. "But there's just one obstacle in the way of both of them!" he added conclusively, and pointed a stubby finger at Dugal. "That's you!"

4

HE SAT stiffly in his chair, staring at the man with a fixed, frozen smile as Putsch's droning voice struck sledge-hammer-blows in Dugal's mind. He felt a sickening swirl of frustration in his stomach—sensed a mental panic, as though old and extremely solid walls were crumbling down around him.

He withdrew within himself, reflecting upon his eventful past and all the implications it held for him. There were twenty years on his Space Certificate, twenty years during which he had seen the outer worlds—the Saturn System, Neptune, Uranus, and Pluto—grow from rough colonies to thriving territorial settlements. He had walked the corridors of domed cities when a man had to be fast with a pistol, and have a friend or two along with him; rubbed shoulders with hardrock colonists, who lived by their cunning and agility in unexplored back regions. He had ridden command on spaceships when every ship was a freighter, and the sleek, luxury space liners were unheard-of—when the skipper used his own judgment on what cargo he would haul and what he refused; made his report as he saw fit upon returning to Earth and his headquarters, and when Space Officers thought of the welfare of the colonists first and profit second. But all that had changed.

Now government offices on the other worlds decided what cargo a ship would carry; wealthy Corporations handled the welfare of the colonists, and profit ruled the System. Empire was established. Colonization was completed. It was time to exploit, to rule.

The tall, dark-skinned Marterran girl he had married—that was over.

The two children were shipped off to colonial military academies to graduate into the ranks of Corporation secret police. His wife had divorced him while he was in space, had moved into the glittering palace of a Corporation executive on Mars, and shared his wealth and social position with his three other wives. All very legal.

And his space-career was over, too, Dugal reflected. Space fatigue was when the bitter, barren loneliness of long months in space—bitter and barren to a man with sour memories—affected your mind just enough to shake your judgment. You lost your Certificate, then—you couldn't trust yourself, much less have others depend on you, when that loneliness dulled your mind. You came back to your home planet, and tried to lose yourself in the teeming millions of struggling, seething human ants.

But now it crumbled. The whole pattern of civilization that had bred him, borne him to star-studded heights, then submerged him until he crawled out finally on his tiny island called Oldtimers, Inc.—all that tumbled about him in the shadows of that long, low-ceilinged study. The words of the squat, beetle-browed scientist before him echoed and reverberated within his mind until their final, conclusive meaning swirled up into an ominous, dark cloud...

The empire was falling!

Falling. Tumbling. Crashing down around him.

And on him!

PUTSCH murmured quietly. "Remember old Sykes McIntosh, geologist on the first Plutonian expedition? He discovered the atomic-ore veins on Venus. He got drunk in Venusport, talked too much. A double-M spy overheard him; he was killed that night."

"That how you knew about it?" Dugal asked softly.

Putsch sighed regretfully, nodding. "They didn't know it, but the first thing old Sykes did was contact me. I got there too late—" He peered narrowly at Dugal. "You know they're going to try to kill you when you leave here, don't you?"

Dugal stared at his empty glass. "Why? Why should they worry about me?"

"Because you've established an influence over the one bottleneck in their scheme," Putsch asserted dryly. "Don't you see that? You look out for the welfare of *spacemen*—and the only link with the other worlds—the only possible way to launch a task force against Venus—is through spacemen and their ships!"

Dugal began to understand, then. "Spacemen would make poor *conquistadores!*" he observed thoughtfully. "They're a breed unto themselves, intelligent and sensible people with strong responsibilities—"

"Not the type who would sanction such bloodshed for questionable interests," Putsch agreed; "in other words, not the type to be bought. That's it exactly. And what's to keep the spacemen from being fooled? That, Dugal, is precisely where you would come in—where you *have* come in, for that matter! You, and more indirectly, myself—I, as a leading specialist in space-travel—who sympathize with spacemen, and have a particular interest in this situation. Oh, the Corporations have their hirelings in space, but they are few and without experience. It'll take oldtime spacemen to jockey a whole fleet across space to Venus!"

Dugal set his glass down and rose abruptly. "How do I get out of here?"

"In one piece?" Putsch rose, chuckling. "Fight your way out. Here—" He strode over to a wall cabinet, opened a small compartment, and lifted out a wickedly gleaming weapon. "Something new I've been working on," he explained, holding it out to Dugal.

Dugal took it and turned it over in his hands. It wasn't one of the cumbersome rocket-projectile automatics

now in use, but in design it was similar. A curved drum fastened over the handle-grip, with a power-unit on the left of the trigger, and a slender launching-tube on the right. Fixed sights were set in the top of the drum, directly above handle and trigger assembly. The standard models were heavy, firing ten 12mm projectiles with a six-foot backlash from the tube back past your arm and shoulder. This gun was small and compact, its tube hardly 6 mm in diameter—and, judging from that, its squat curved drum holding some two hundred tiny projectiles.

"They're mildly explosive," Putsch announced, sensing Dugal's unspoken query. "Range is good for three hundred yards, but no more. And it fires a steady, machine-gun stream at a rate of forty-a-minute." He held out a square, innocent-looking case with shoulder-strap for the gun. Dugal slipped it on and poked the gun into it, fastening the flap down.

TWENTY minutes later, the gun hissed stutteringly in his fist.

He had called a robotaxi, bid Putsch farewell, and returned to the Air Terminal. He found them waiting in a five-passenger copter at two thousand feet, as his own little copter went thrumming skyward. He snapped on the jet and went into a screaming turn as their projectiles, tipped with proximity fuses, exploded around the teardrop hull. Then he slid the side panel open a crack, poked the gun through, and raked their craft as he came whistling back around on their tail.

His burst of explosive projectiles blew the rotar-shaft from their copter, and it plunged earthward.

Score one for Dugal, he thought grimly.

It was after nightfall when he set the little jetcopter back down at the Belemport Terminal. The attendant eyed the schrapnel holes in the hull inquisitively. "Run into some hail?" he asked.

"No," Dugal answered truthfully, and walked away.

"Hullo, my future corpse!" Anita greeted him.

Dugal stopped so quickly the sliding portal caught his shoulder, knocking him into the room. "How'd you know about that?" he exclaimed.

"You mean you've found it?" She eyed him appreciatively.

"Found what?"

She rose and came toward him, arms extended. "Come to sugar," she said.

Dugal walked to meet her, frowning perplexedly, and she ran her hands caressingly up the front of his coverall. "Uh huh!" she said. She fumbled with something under his collar lapel, jerked it loose, and held it up in the palm of her hand. "The receiver!" she said.

He stared down at it. The object was, sure enough, a tiny radio signal-receiver tube.

"Now look at this!" Anita turned and clicked her heels back toward her desk. He followed her into the bullpen and watched as she pulled open a drawer and laid out a small, flat rectangular glass plate. He stared at it with dawning realization. Its surface was scrawled with tiny silver lines. Within the glass, tiny transistors and grids were visible—and something else. A small, square container of gray metal to which the silvery spider-web lines were connected. It was an extremely compact radio-bomb!

"I found it under the cushions, there," Anita explained, pointing. "In the lounge chair where she sat waiting to see you!"

Dugal felt his collar lapel. "Bukharoff's daughter, huh?"

"Uh huh. The blonde assassin!" Anita wrinkled her nose. "Don't look so pale and frightened, boss darling! I smashed the condensor coils—here!" She turned the plate over so he could see the broken hole where the silver lines converged in a twisted maze—twisted now to a meaningless mesh. "Looks like you got her sore about

something! Gonna blow us all up when you came back in here!"

He nodded. "Either before or after I had seen Putsch; that explains her little visit. Toss it back in your drawer and let's go eat!"

"Soon as I get my cape. It rained all this afternoon!" Anita crossed over to the small cloakroom, pulled out a small cape, and swirled it about her shoulders.

"Rainy season's here," he remarked absent-mindedly, smiling as she tripped daintily toward him. "Hail."

"Hail?" She preceded him through the doorway.

Dugal explained the afternoon's weather report on the way up to the Solarium. It was likely to be an exceptionally stormy season...

THEY WERE having after-dinner cocktails when the gang arrived. The gang, in this case, consisted of one young aristocrat, male, wearing rich green velveschone tights and purple cloak, and five burly characters in uniform black and gold, with machine-pistols holstered beneath their armpits. The young aristocrat—a muscular and well-fed figure in his early twenties—had rust-brown hair and smoldering calf-brown eyes set deeply in a solid-boned, not-so-handsome face. He led the gang straight to the corner table and stared haughtily down at Dugal.

"Recognize me?" the young man snapped.

Dugal did. The young aristocrat had been smiling from the world's television screens just a few months before, acknowledging an announcement that old Gaines Vadner-Massen was welcoming his only son, Bruce William Vadner-Massen, into the exalted executive chambers of Venus Plantation. "Hello, Bruce," Dugal greeted him.

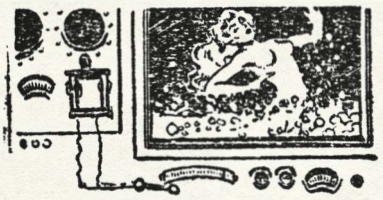
"Stand up when you address me!" Bruce William snapped.

Dugal smiled up at him as the five tough bodyguards moved in closer. "Careful, Bruce," he said gently. "You aren't living in the bedchambers of your father's wives' Mediterranean chateau, now!"

Bruce stared at him wide-eyed. "The devil take such impertinence!" he gasped. "Rako, smash this scum across the teeth until he behaves!"

"Not here, sir!" the swarthy thug called Rako warned.

Bruce glanced about him with a faint sneer. "No," he conceded begrudgingly, "I suppose not. Fetch me a chair, anyway; I've got to speak to this fool!"



One of the bodyguards hastily snatched a chair from a nearby table and slid it under Bruce. The young aristocrat sprawled insolently into it and fixed Dugal with a sneering glare. "Now then, Dugal," he announced coldly, "my father has sent me here to reach an understanding with you. Venus Plantation will condone no revolt from the Venuterran scum, Dugal, nor will they stand by while you dirty the gutters of Earth with spies of the Venus Underground!"

"Do you think I'm bringing in the Underground spies?" Dugal inquired with quickening interest.

Bruce leaned forward and slammed his fist on the table. "Don't lie to me!" he shouted. "D'you think we're blind? I suppose that illegitimate female, Catherine McReed Bukharoff, was paying a mere social call to your offices today—she who's as deep in the Underground as her worthless father? Eh? And you deny you're their Earth liaison? You filthy Underground spy!"

Dugal fingered his cocktail glass, smiling congenially. As congenially, he said: "Perhaps there would be no re-

volt if V-P had not begun using slave-labor. That's illegal, Bruce."

"Illegal, is it?" Bruce fell back with a hollow laugh. "And just try to prove that we're using slaves, you cheap spy! Try to get into our plantations to see them!"

"Stop clowning, Bruce," Dugal said softly. "You know you're afraid of your own shadow, simply because your thick-headed father kept you locked up in his chateau, playing nursemaid to the young women he bought for his wives. You're out in the world now, and you're scared out of your wits—you can thank your father for that!"

BRUCE CRINGED back in his chair, his features pallid, his breath coming in shallow gasps. Dugal leaned forward, pressing his advantage. "Tell your father to come himself, next time, if he wants to deal with me—not to send his snivelling pup! Tell him the Bukharoff girl's visit was a ruse, a trick to sneak a radio-bomb into my office and to arouse your suspicions that I was their Underground liaison."

"I'll kill you!" Bruce hissed through clenched teeth. "I'll see you—" He broke off as a white-hot light burst from the tiny case fastened with jeweled bands to his wrist. He stooped hurriedly, pressing a stud on the case, whispering: "Yes, father?"

Old Gaines Vadner-Massen's gravelly voice roared from the tiny radio with the fury of an erupting volcano. His words during the first few minutes were directed specifically to his son, and they weren't fit for public hearing. Bruce cringed farther into his chair, his weak chin quivering in terror of that voice. "Yes, father!" he whispered.

"Place your wrist on the table!" Gaines roared.

Shivering, Bruce stretched his arm out on the table before him, staring at the wrist transceiver as if it were a snake.

"Dugal!" Gaines thundered.

"Here," Dugal replied. "You're on the wrong track, Gaines; I'm no Underground liaison, so there's no use in trying to buy me off."

"Just where do you fit, then?" Gaines demanded brusquely.

"I fit with the spacemen," Dugal answered.

Gaines swore vehemently. "First you're not Underground, then you are—"

"I know what you mean," Dugal said, "but listen to me! As long as you're using slave-labor, and the Venus Underground isn't known to be a tool of Mercury Mining, they'll get sympathizers to help them against you! A few spacemen have fallen for that, smuggling supplies and weapons in to the Underground. As long as you're painted the villain, Gaines, you can expect that."

"Keep talking!" Gaines prompted.

"Mercury Mining wants this revolution so they can challenge your franchise on Venus," Dugal pointed out. "Their Underground spies will collect, or fake, evidence of your use of slaves, the five outlaw ships you're operating, and the fact that you're covering up the existance of rich atomic ore veins. When the Earth Council gets that, they'll award Mercury Mining a franchise on Venus' ore-deposits over your territorial claims, and permit them to invade Venus with a task force to put down the revolt. The Earth Council will think Mercury Mining is merely offering to replace V-P as a more competent ruling Corporation on Venus. You'll get the blame for all the unrest and revolt."

"But that's foolish!" Gaines retorted sarcastically. "We'd never have used slave-labor if Mercury Mining hadn't forced us into a fight!"

"Try to tell the Venuterrans that," Dugal growled. "Or the spacemen either, if Mercury Mining goes through with their plan. They'll have a volunteer task-force, and a fleet of spaceships that'll rip your holdings

out of Venus by the roots! The only thing bothering them right now is me. I've known too much and made it my business to find out more. I'll tip off the spacemen—if I live long enough—so Mercury Mining will have a tough time getting a space fleet. But that means you'll have to sit tight and trust me."

"Why?" Gaines thundered suspiciously.

DUGAL TOLD him. "I know what you're planning." Told the wrist-transceiver, that is, without paying attention to the quaking figure who wore it. "You intend to get a full complement of slave-labor, then double-cross your outlaw spacemen and expose them as members of the Underground. You can claim that they're a space fleet preparing to support the revolt on Venus; plant fake evidence that Mercury Mining has been trying to undermine your stock; and blame them for fomenting the revolt. Then, if they say anything about the atomic-ore veins, they'll be cutting their own throats—and if they denounce you for using slave-labor, a competent battery of lawyers can make it sound like the wild charges of a whipped-dog outfit, and the Earth Council will throw it out of court."

"That's exactly what I intend to do!" Gaines thundered grimly.

"If you do," Dugal retorted, "I'll see that you never get enough supplies or weapons to Venus to stop the revolt! I'm telling you to let me handle this, Gaines, or you'll find me standing between you and Venus."

With that, his hand shot out and pressed the stud on the wrist transceiver. He turned and smiled to young Bruce William Vadner-Massen. "Get out," he said softly.

Bruce cringed to his feet, dark eyes blazing with hatred. His weak mouth worked loosely, forming unspoken words. Then he whirled stiffly and walked away, his scowling guards following.

Dugal glanced carefully about the vast dining room. People at the surrounding tables were watching, and pretending not to watch. He had spoken low enough to not have been heard, but there was still the possibility of lip-reading. He shrugged resignedly.

"Fascinating!" Anita exclaimed, grinning at him from across the table. She patted his hand affectionately. *"Muy bueno!"*

5

A ROBOTAXI took Dugal to his small apartment in a towering glass-and-steel downtown building; changed into a dark blue, tight-fitting coverall after a shower; and took of once more for the dimly lit side-streets and alleyways of Belemport's notorious skid row section. He wasn't molested, though he felt positive that his every move was watched. He assumed, with reasonable certainty, that he was safe from attack for the moment. Both Venus Plantation and Mercury Mining's Underground had approached him and challenged him, without making any appreciable dent. They'd be wondering now, and watching—to see just what he intended to do about it.

The *Hardrock Dome* was a low dive, reserved especially for spacemen. It was his next destination, the place where he was to meet Arno, and the others Arno would assuredly bring with him. Meanwhile, through the lukewarm spray of the shower, the cool rooms of his apartment, and the feel of crisp, fresh clothing on his body, he seemed to move in a physical trance while his mind thought furiously. The trance persisted as he settled back in a robotaxi and the brilliant lights of the streets flashed past. He had a subconscious realization that

all the subsequent events had brought an intense focus upon himself, that in the brief span of these immediate minutes a whole civilization hung in the balance, waiting for his decision. And he would have to make that decision before many of these precious minutes had passed.

There was, first of all, Arno and the other spacemen who would be waiting at the *Hardrock Dome*. This group of spacemen had long records filed at his office as senior members of Oldtimers, Inc.—they were the first ones he had contacted in beginning the spacemen's welfare organization. They were men—and women—whose reputations he had known and trusted.

They weren't going to like what he had to tell them—that in supporting the Venus Underground, they had been serving as unwitting dupes of Corporation rivalry. But that was what they were doing—secretly, since it was against Space Regulations to support mutinous factions of colonial revolutions. Those Space Regulations had formed the backbone of interplanetary travel for two centuries; they were broken, now, only because they were no longer serving their purpose.

With the beginning of space-travel, not only the ships but the crews were under the solid jurisdiction of the UN Earth Council. No one ever graduated from the Space Academy in those days without passing strict psycho tests, which proved them worthy of the responsibilities inherent in space travel. They had to be men who would hold the lives of scattered colonists, who depended upon them for supplies, far above their own lives. They had to be men who would readily die that other men might live, whatever the circumstances. No ambitious conquerer seeking quick millions, or a ruthless mercenary ever graduated to become a Space Officer.

These were the spacemen who waited with Arno. They were hardy members of an unsung legion who had made interplanetary exploration and colonization possible. And, inadvertently, Dugal felt that he had now become their leader.

SECOND, there were the Corporations—Venus Plantation, Mercury Mining, and the others which thus far were not involved in this struggle. They had begun as large national corporations, which had won charters from the Earth Council to establish the colonies on the other worlds. But two centuries had expanded their scope and power tremendously. Their accumulated wealth now formed the greater part of Earth's economy; their increasing exploitation of the colonies had brought an era of luxurious renaissance to Earth's teeming billions. But, with their accomplishments, they had also acquired dictatorial power—so far-reaching that laws could either be changed or bypassed. The aristocracy of the Corporations became the ruling class of Earth, and the absolute monarchs of her colonies. Custom, belief, and social values were moulded to their whim.

But the aspect which interested Dugal most was that requirements at the Space Academy had been changed. New graduates were being turned out, now, deeply ingrained with a militant sense of loyalty to the Corporation empire. Empire above all! Puppet statesmen, whose positions on the Earth Council had been bought and paid for with Corporation wealth, had made that possible.

So the interplanetary empire had, after all, gone the way of all empires. Now the sparks of revolution were beginning to blaze higher—and from here on, history would be different! Twenty-second Century science would devise weapons of such destructive power that all civilization could be blasted to radioactive dust throughout the Solar System in a few

years. The flames of revolution would spread, once they started—and there would remain no semblance of lost glory to remind the survivors, to tempt them back up the same path to a second empire. Only ruins would be left, and half-savage descendants of the few straggling survivors on each planet. They would have to climb back through thousands of years of social evolution to reach out to the stars again. But power-lusting Corporations had no thought for that!

Unless—*unless*—

HE WAS suddenly aware of garish light and sound. Almost instinctively, he had found his way into the smoke-filled den of the *Hardrock Dome*.

He stood frozen in the wide entranceway, and stared about him in a bemused daze. Harsh cries and rancorous laughter greeted him, mingled with shrill feminine screams of bawdy delight. A brassy orchestra blared from somewhere behind the dense smoke-haze at the far end of the long, high-ceilinged room. Figures whirled and pranced like dim pink shadows on a narrow dancefloor, their grinning female faces and nude flesh vague and tempting in the haze. Tables jammed the floor back to the steps leading up to the entranceway, and blue-clad spacemen and women shouted lustily, waving large mugs of alconectine, or sprawled in drunken embrace, pawing each other and laughing.

Here were pioneers of space, back from long months in the vast darkness, relieved momentarily of their intense responsibility and strain. This was what happened to you when you got back among the human herd—your animal reactions took over until the physical exhiliration wore off. Better to release it than keep it bottled up inside you. Man and woman, they wallowed in sensual ecstasy, compensating for long months of strain, so that it might not drive them mad when they returned. A hangover was better than dying alone and insane in deep space. The psychologists, in fact, demanded the hangover.

Dugal pushed his way down the steps and through the tables toward a side door. Gannett, bald proprietor of the *Hardrock Dome*, stood leaning against the wall and nodded greeting. Dugal slipped through the door into a dark passage and felt along it carefully. His fingers touched warm skin, and a girlish giggle came from the darkness. He switched to the opposite wall and continued onward. Suddenly, a tiny blue light winked at him.

He stopped before the section of wall where the light had appeared. A fleeting second passed, then a hidden panel slid aside revealing a deeper blackness beyond. He stepped in and felt the wind of the panel sliding silently closed behind him. Then the lights came on.

His swift glance took in the group seated around the long table and he relaxed, smiling. His hand dropped from the small case hanging by its shoulder-strap at his side. Mentally, he checked their faces: the fifteen present were but a third of the Council of the Oldtimers—the rest were elsewhere in the System—and nine of these members had dropped their Certificates, including Arno, for various reasons. There were six girls and nine men, most of them of Earth; two Marterrans were there, natural pink skin with a bluish tinge from Mars' rarified atmosphere; three Venuterrans with skin as white as marble; and one dwarfish Callistoterran girl, her fragile figure reclining on plump

air-cushions above the table level.

"They're all here, Dugal," Arno announced with his habitual scowl.

Dugal nodded, pacing to the end of the long table. "Fine. What I have to tell you, I'm sorry to say, isn't going to be pleasant."

"What's the source?" Arno asked cryptically, as Dugal eased himself into his chair.

"Doc Putsch," he answered significantly.

They tensed expectantly, then. Putsch had a reputation that was known to the ends of the System—partly because the beetle-browed scientist had been almost to every end of the System, and sometimes had been the first one there. Even though he wasn't among them, mention of his name made them feel his presence. Among other things, Putsch had developed and designed most of the innovations in modern spacecraft—he was a weighty figure in any spaceman's mind!

Dugal let the moment of silence pass, then began talking. He started from the very beginning and related all the events of the situation before them. When he finished, he leaned back wearily and studied their faces.

THEY WERE far from pleased, and they weren't outspoken. Their stoic silence was as ominous as the center of a hurricane.

It was Arno, finally, who broke the silence. "What measures can we take?"

Dugal spread his hands before him. "First, and most important, every spaceman must learn the true nature of the situation," he said. "They've been fooling us with false pretenses long enough. Of course, they'd never allow the truth to be broadcast—either to the people, or by Systemic Communications to any other planet. We'll have to contact our own people personally, and we'll have to do it cautiously. Earth, Venus, and Mercury are undoubtedly alive with Corporation and Underground spies who'd like to kill every one of us!"

"But that will take months!" the Callistoterran girl piped in shrill protest.

"Can't be helped," he retorted. "Meanwhile, I'll try to build a sound legal case against the Corporations. I've already taken the liberty to go ahead on the disappearance of Mark Cregar. Pete Frobisher and Jules Zaraski are due to leave for Venus tonight, to track down evidence on Cregar's murder and uncover as much as they can about the rest of the situation. If we can ever get a solid bulk of evidence, we'll be able to come into the open and challenge the Corporations before the Earth Council!"

They were stirring, now, muttering agreement. A wrinkled, white-haired old spaceman rose hesitantly to his feet, facing Dugal, and cleared his throat. "I'd like to make a motion," he announced slowly, "that we extend our complete faith to Mr Dugal and allow him full leadership in this crisis, and vow to abide by his decisions!"

He grinned sheepishly as the group's voices raised to a shout, seconding the motion unanimously. It all happened before Dugal could even open his mouth to accept or decline. He turned his hands over and looked at their palms, chuckling happily. But his inner thoughts were far from happy. Could he come through for them?

ANITA YAWNED a sleepy welcome as he came into the office. "Where've you been?" she demanded shortly. "I've been worried sick!"

"Having a few drinks with some old friends," he replied evasively. "Pete and Jules back yet?"

She waved toward the inner office, then checked his abrupt motion with a gesture. "Wait a sec! I contacted Venus Security for you. His name is Maldon Strang—Commander Maldon Strang. He isn't at the UN Center at present, but at his palace in Morrocco. He seems to be on his vacation

and refuses to see anyone—but I got the address of his palace!"

"Skip it," Dugal said. "We'll try again when he's back at the Center."

Pete and Jules swung around to greet him as he entered the inner office. " 'Nita says you've been havin' a busy day!" Jules rumbled querilously.

"Saw Doc Putsch, and just got back from a Council meeting," he told them, rounding his desk and tumbling into his chair. "Sit down and give an ear."

Briefly, he repeated all that had happened. "That leads up to you two," he added, finally. "Get out to Venus and vanish into the swamplands. Then sneak back in Venuterran disguise and go to work. Find out about that so-called Venusian Project Company and pin down Mark Cregar's assassin, if you can. Don't start anything—just keep your ears down and pick up all the information you can. And *be careful!*"

"That we will," Jules agreed, rising. "About time to get out to the Venus space liner, now; she's already loading."

They went downstairs, and rode a moving walkway across the vast spaceport to the Pit—where the tall, sleek space liner towered waiting. A colorful crowd was gathered around her long gangway. They stepped aside at the edge of the crowd for their final talk.

"—Can't tell what that bogus Venusian Project Company may lead to," Pete remarked casually. "Might take us right to the evidence we'd need to put Venus Plantation out of business!"

"We'll want evidence against Mercury Mining, too, if we can get it," Dugal reminded him. "If the Underground approaches you, play along with them."

They shook hands all around as the loudspeaker blared from the space liner. Then Jules and Pete followed the other late passengers up the gangway and Dugal followed the crowd of spectators toward the nearest concrete bunker. He descended the steps into the earth and waited until the shivering quake announced the takeoff of the space liner; then he climbed out and stepped aboard a walkway back to the Terminal Building.

ANITA WAS awaiting him at the entrance to the concourse. Her face was flushed with excitement. "Boss, hurry up!" she called; "come see the latest news telecast!"

Frowning, he followed her into the central concourse and paused to stare up at the giant screen on the wall.

The squat, beetlebrowed form of Dr. Gregory Putsch was shown entering a tall, gray building between two blue-clad armed police. A news commentator was stating: "—Arrested this afternoon by a squad of United Nations Security Police! The Security office said tonight that Dr. Putsch is being held on charges of conducting illegal research for treasonable purposes. While the exact nature of this research was not divulged, it is rumored that Dr. Putsch has recently shown interest in various theories relating to gravitic influences found in nucleonic functions of the atom. Some theorists have considered these gravitic influences the first step toward developing some type of paragravity device. However, Dr. Putsch could not be reached for comment—"

Dugal stared up at the screen, at the reserved and dignified features of the commentator, and felt a cold chill up his spine. He was remembering what Putsch had said that morning in his shadowy living room—his words which had given Dugal an uneasy feeling even then—

'I, as a leading specialist in space travel, who sympathize with spacemen and have a particular interest in this situation.'

Could this be the personal reason for his intense interest in the revolution brewing on Venus, in its cause

and perpetrators? Could it be because he saw the interplanetary chaos that was sure to follow—and saw something he had just developed in his laboratories as the final weapon that would destroy civilization?

Had Putsch developed paragravity?

Dugal grasped Anita's arm roughly. "Get back up to the office," he snapped, "and bring down the address of that palace! We've got to see Commander Maldon Strang at once!"

IT TOOK the Earth Council six months to reach a decision.

The evidence, however, was indisputable. Venus Security had been aware of the unrest on the planet, but the Corporation rivalry behind it had not been suspected. Venus Security had known nothing of the atomic ore on Venus.

But the Earth Council knew it now. Dugal had teamed up with Doc Putsch and submitted the entire matter.

Both Venus Plantation and Mercury Mining made strong countercharges, demanding proof of their criminal activities. The proof wasn't there, but the damage was done; the whole scheme blew up in the wild publicity it received throughout the System.

The spacemen heard it, studied it in the light of their own shrewd judgment, and came forward to back the Oldtimers, Incorporated, to the limit. That was what Dugal counted on. With it, he appeared before the Earth Council and testified that no spacemen would condone any military action by Earth against the other planets. The spacemen would not transport unwitting troops to Venus, or anywhere else, merely to bolster the Corporation empire with armed force. They would, in fact, go on strike against the Corporations and *cease all interplanetary commerce!*

"Either straighten this situation out," Dugal told the Earth Council, flatly, "or there won't be a ship moving anywhere in the System!"

Straightening the situation out was no easy matter. For one thing, the Corporations were demanding an all-out military space-fleet—organized and heavily-armed—to whip the traitorous spacemen in line, and enforce the Corporation rule over the other planets. For another thing, the heretofore ignorant people of Earth—the little fellows—were stirring up a movement against the exposed Corporation tyranny and in favor of the spacemen. Then Systemic Communications, sensing an unprecedented boom in its business, ignored Corporation threats and dropped the censorship barriers which cut off the other world colonies from Earth. The stories that poured back from the Marterrans, the Venuterrans, and the other colonists regarding Corporation terrorism ripped the whole empire wide open! D'Karrugh, the Nepterran, was a telecast sensation, lecturing on interplanetary history.

Finally, the Venusian revolution actually happened. Only Dugal, who maintained secret communications with Pete Frobisher and Jules Zaraski, knew that they were its new leaders. Venus Plantation toppled into ruin almost overnight. This so alarmed the other Corporations, that they ceased ordering the Earth Council to do their bidding and began demanding some action that would save them. The Earth Council, however, was more concerned about its own political future. Here was unmistakable evidence that it had ignored its Constitutional duties, and the people of Earth weren't too happy about it.

It was then that Dugal and Doc Putsch proposed their own solution.

THE OLD Lunarport base had been used exclusively as an emergency spaceport in interplanetary commerce. Lunarport, itself, was a teeming metropolis beneath its gigantic titanium dome, headquarters for the extensive mining companies

and industrial factories which dotted the barren satellite as well as research laboratories and the huge Lunar Observatory. But the spaceport had been used for emergency crash-landings and repairs of spaceships which had suffered damage enroute to Earth, as well as a quarantine base for ships which arrived from the other worlds with their crews dying of some alien plague.

Now, the old spaceport seethed with the activity of new construction.

Dugal stood gazing out the thick, pressurized wall of his office in the new Lunarport Terminal Tower with a deep, satisfied pride. Huge hangers and machine shops were going up on the broad, gray field outside, and he was the man who had put them there. His stocky figure was dressed in a neat, comfortable black uniform with a row of silver stars on its lapel. Beneath his feet—deep under the Terminal Tower itself—strange, new mechanisms flickered their lethal glow, and his weight upon the floor was exactly what it had been on Earth. Then he frowned, worriedly.

He turned and strode firmly back to his huge, black desk.

Arno uncrossed his legs and studied his fingernails, then glanced up as Space Commander Dugal seated himself behind the desk. "I couldn't help it, Ben," he protested tensely. "They fired those space torpedoes at us and —well, I couldn't endanger the whole squadron!"

Dugal nodded wearily. He studied Arno's lean, black-clad figure silently, noting the silver eagles on the spaceman's lapel. "It had to be done, I suppose. Your orders were to destroy all outlaw ships, and if you hadn't sent young Jacobs in with his cruiser they'd have gotten away. Damned sorry we lost Jacobs, though."

"Well, we got them," Arno snapped bitterly. "There's only two outlaw ships left in the System, now; and we'll get them as well before the end of the year."

Dugal peered at him sharply. "Don't give them the chance to throw any torpedoes at you, next time. We've too few cruisers in the Patrol to waste one on every skirmish."

Arno bit his lips and rose, stiffly. "Will that be all, sir?"

Dugal sighed, and nodded. "No hard feelings, Arno?"

Arno started to speak, hesitated, then blurted it out anyway. "I didn't want Jacobs to die, either!"

With that, he whirled and marched swiftly to the door.

Dugal stared after him for a moment, then turned and flicked on his audiovisor. "Miss Bawolla?"

A dark-skinned Morrocan girl flashed a brilliant smile from the screen. "Captain Arno certainly stormed out of here in a huff!" she exclaimed.

"His last mission was rather disappointing," Dugal explained vaguely. "He'll be all right after a few days' leave. Are there any more visitors?"

"Three." Her coal-black features were aglow with joy. "Two's a couple I think you'll want to see right away, sir!"

"All right, send 'em in!"

THE DOOR burst open and Anita came bouncing in, laughing. Her slender figure was garbed tastefully in a bright green, snugfitting coverall. Behind her came Pete Frobisher, also in green.

"Hi, boss!" Anita greeted brightly. "Meet Mrs. Frobisher!' Pete announced.

Dugal went forward and shook hands, grinning. Anita grabbed his neck and kissed him, hard. "We're going to live on Venus!" she exclaimed breathlessly. "Pete and Jules have the shipping contracts with Venus Mining all sewed up. Our own business, space freighters and everything!"

"We're following the migration!"

Pete added happily. "Everybody's buying a paragrav space cruiser and going out to the planets nowadays!"

"The System is booming!" Anita chimed in. "Opportunities for everybody. That's the way it ought to be, too!"

"You're looking at the guy that did it!" Pete exclaimed.

"Well—heh—now, see here—" Dugal stammered.

"Look!" Anita spoke crisply. "We don't want to disrupt the work of the Commander of the Space Patrol! Besides, you've got another visitor waiting outside and I wouldn't want you to miss that for anything, boss darling! So suppose you meet us in Lunarport for dinner? Know where the Satellite Garden is?"

"—Er—yes!" Dugal replied hesitantly. "But I've made a previous dinner engagement—wait! Why don't we make it a foursome?"

"Great!" Pete yelled. "Satellite Garden it is, then! Eighteen hundred hours okay?"

Dugal nodded. "I'll meet you, then. And congratulations. Congratulations again!"

Anita repeated her kiss. "You're a peach, boss! 'Bye, now!"

Dugal stood there, somewhat dazed, as they went storming back out the door. Then he walked back to his desk with a faint smile.

"Next—uh—patient!" he told Miss Bawolla.

THE GIRL who walked in was tall, blonde, and lovely in her glove-fitting black uniform. Dugal noted the Captain's eagles as he returned her salute, but he didn't recognize her until that soft, throaty voice spoke to him.

"Captain Bukharoff, commanding Patrol Squadron Three, reporting from Earth for active duty, sir!"

He remembered, then, with painful abruptness. Her father had committed suicide; Mercury Mining had crumbled.

"At ease, Captain," he said huskily. "Sit down."

Two hours later, a tunnel-car whisked them through the subterranean catacombs connecting the Patrol Spaceport with Lunarport. It slid up onto the broad, swirling runways that spread among the huge towers within the vast dome of the city. Dugal turned from the controls.

"Where shall I drop off?"

"The Patrol Tower." Captain Bukharoff smiled. "I may as well meet Captain Arno, sir, now that you've told me so much about him. Personally, I think I might like him!"

Dugal nodded, turned to his other passenger.

"Just drop me off anywhere, boss!" Miss Bawolla grinned goodnaturedly. "I know everybody in here already!"

He disposed of his passengers, then swung the little car about and headed for the tunnels to the civilian Lunarport field.

The huge space liner had already landed, and was discharging its passengers. He waited at the foot of the long vacuum tube to its airlock until, presently, the blue-uniformed crew descended.

She was the third one down the steps. She stopped when she saw him, then leaped the rest of the way into his arms.

"Ben! Ben, darling—"

A moment later, he helped her into the little car and they zoomed back toward Lunarport. "We've got a dinner date with a couple of old friends," he said. "Pete and 'Nita. They're married."

Ho Yan snuggled down by his shoulder, comfortably. "That'll be nice. And I'm glad. Did you tell them we're—"

Dugal grinned happily. "Uh uh! I didn't!"

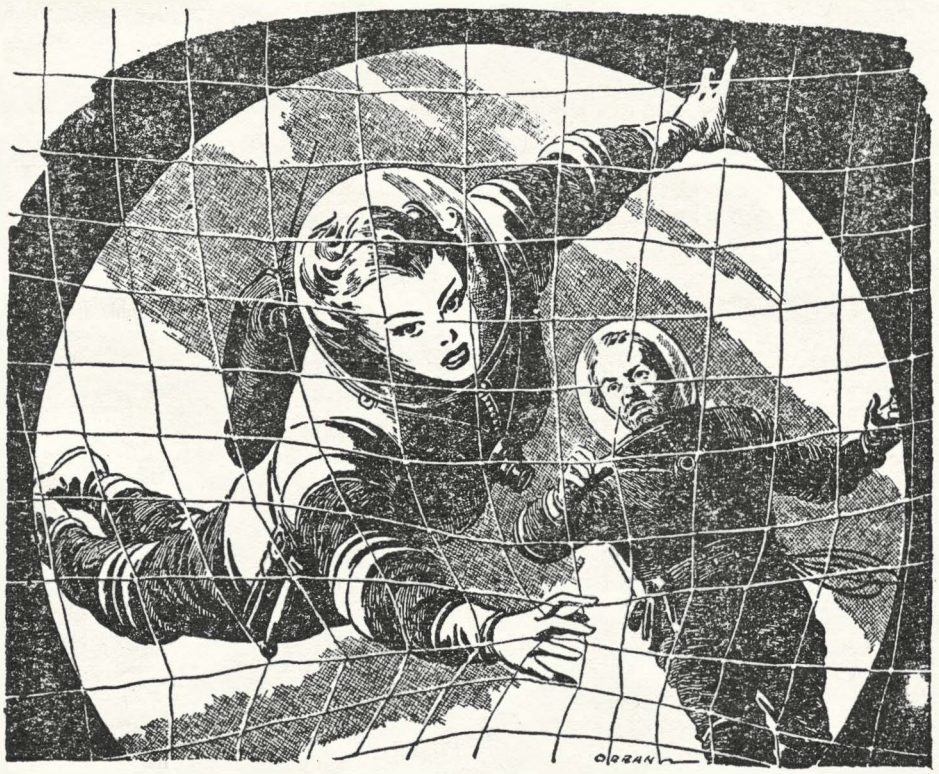
A tall Lunaterran cop raised his arm in salute as the little black car whisked past, its row of silver stars winking pleasantly.

ESCAPE VALVE

Novelet of Strange Destiny

by Charles Dye

When all major endeavour was under rigid control, only miniature triumphs were possible . . .



In a moment, the astonished Sapphire Smith was through the open port. (Illustration by Orban)

HER NAME was Sapphire Smith, and she began her morning in exactly the same manner as she had begun 365 other mornings that year, and the year before, and the year before that. For, to her, rigid scheduling was synonymous with "getting things done" and in turn, "progress."

She cut off the wake-up music and allowed herself one delicious yawn and stretch before the pneumatic mattress could deflate her to the hard plastic flooring. Then she was up and gliding

into the bath. After a stinging needle shower which pelted her skin red, she bathed in the ultra-violets while warm air ducts dried her body to its original bronze tautness. The only redness remaining, were her lips and nipples. A tooth spray was next, until her teeth sparkled and smiled just like the t-v ads, which she never watched. Her reddish-bronze hair she shook instead of combed, allowing the shining strands to separate into long natural waves behind her ears. Once she had overheard two of her assistants in the ladies lounge call her hair "more windblown than natural." That had pleased her; it was the only criticism of her person she had ever heard in all her years with Unesco's Bio-Chem.

After putting on a short tunic of gold-mesh she amber-dusted her legs up to where they disappeared into her thighs, then kicked on a pair of transparent sandals to match her tunic bra. That part of her morning complete, she watched her green eyes glimmering approvingly out at her from the wall mirror.

During her adolescence some romantic youth, after gazing long and hard into her eyes, had nicknamed her "Sapphire." The name had stuck all through high school and university days. Finally she had taken out a proper-name copywrite on it, making it legal. It was the only touch of romance she had ever allowed herself.

She caught the 0800 sky-train and, once in the air, hardly glanced down at the old metropolitan section of Manhattan, or at the sparkling, windswept October waters of New York harbor. Instead she occupied her mind with the more complex aspects of the paramecium-syzyay-sexless process of reproduction, and the part it was playing in the attempted creation of artificial laboratory life. But before she coulder ponder too far, the Wildwood, New Jersey section of the sky-train was uncoupling and 'coptering down to the main city terminal. After flashing her identification, she took a "restricted" Bio-Chem S-chute straight out to the project.

And it was then that, for the first time, the schedule of her morning routine was forever shattered.

They grabbed her just as she was inserting a special magnetic key into her laboratory door. One was a sgt., the other a cpl.; both were armed, and both started to speak at once.

"I'm sorry, Doctor, but these quarters have just been restricted!"

She could only stare at them. "But I'm Doctor—" Then she saw by the embarrassed looks that they well knew who she was.

"Yes, even to you, Ma'am," the sgt. said.

"But—?" She realized it was no use; there had simply been some stupid mistake on the part of Security.

The sgt. was saying, "We're to escort you to General Cidius!"

General Cidius was Military head of the project. *Damn,* she thought. After all these years of avoiding the Military, now were they at last getting in her hair, too?

Her interview with the General was short, bitter, and simple. In sequence Cidius harrumphed, lit his cigar, stroked his mustache and told her that —for reasons he could not disclose— her section of the project was indefinitely suspended; the whole of the project temporarily restricted to all personnel other than Security.

There was irritation in her voice. "Why wasn't I notified of this yesterday, last night, this morning—?"

"Because the order came through from Washington thirty minutes ago!" Now there was irritation in the General's voice.

"I see," was all she could think of to say. Then: "How long is this suspension or restriction going to last?"

The General shrugged. "A week, maybe; a month—even a year."

"That long! Then you'll have to let me into Disposal. I placed a botched experiment in there last night, which I was intending to destroy this morning."

Cldius shook his head. "That, too, is restricted."

For the first time in her life she felt like throwing something. "Very well, then. I won't be responsible for air pollution, mutated virae, or other phenomena! And what about my notes, my journals, my personal effects?"

"Those will be gathered up and shipped to you, as soon as possible."

Again the General harrumphed and went through the rest of his routine; then two Security Guards came in, and before she knew it, she was being escorted home.

BACK IN her apartment, she suddenly didn't know what to do with herself. In her entire recollection she could not remember ever having been without a schedule, now that she had none. Bio-Chemistry had comprised over two-thirds of her thirty-odd years; now they had deprived her of her laboratory and experiments.

For awhile she walked aimlessly around her apartment, glancing at—or occasionally touching—her few material possessions. Finally, she just stared out the huge picture-window overlooking Long Island's Great South Bay and the sea beyond. The sun had disappeared, and the whole world seemed to be one of lowering October skies and grey-dead, watery horizons. A shiver of insecurity ran through her.

She was all alone. She really had nothing, no one. Parents, relatives, all long since dead. Friends? She'd never had time for any friends—only aquaintances. Romance, love affairs? Nobody had ever tried to make her. Yet she knew she was attractive. Why? Was it because she was too hard on their egos, always saying the wrong thing—the painfully honest thing—instead of what they wanted to hear? Or was it that her work had separated her from the rest of humanity. No matter; because it was all the sum-total of her being.

And now she was lonely.

She collapsed on the airfoam sofa and tried to relax, telling herself that she would be back at work soon. But would she? She wished now that she had made a practice of coming to work at the usual time, instead of an hour earlier, so she could have been there to compare notes when the rest of Bio-Chem arrived.

Unesco, long ago, had found it expedient to compromise with the Military; now the Military had a finger in everything, even bio-chemistry. Only for Military reason, then, could Bio-Chem have been closed down. But why had they picked such an inopportune time, when she and the department had been so close to actually keeping artificial life alive? Another year with the unlimited facilities of Bio-Chem, and she would have licked the problem; that had been the whole purpose of Bio-Chem.

On sudden impulse, she stepped out into the hall and inserted a coin in the news-teletype, then went back in with the freshly-printed paper. But there was nothing, not even a mention of the closing of Bio-Chem; nor was there any other news that threw light on what had happened. Most of the paper was given over to loud squawks from what was left of tax-paying private enterprise, well-known civilians, and certain Unesco factions, over the billions and billions the Military had sunk into Operation Venus during the last decade. And especially the fact that Venus had been declared out-of-bounds to everybody except Government-controlled Planetary Engineers, who were busy turning the planet into something which could be colonized by terrestrials.

She tossed the paper aside and thought of overcrowded Earth's teeming billions, and what an escape-valve Venus would supply—not only because of food and housing, but to prevent the Military from getting such a strangle-hold on World Government that there would be no government—only Military. And now, with Venus almost ready, there would be no further need for Military, which originally had

assumed the duties of a super-police force, to keep order in a world already bursting at the seams.

And her own work; how important it would be to have the aid of intelligent, custom-designed life-forms to help men conquer alien environments.

As the afternoon wore on, uneasiness, boredom, and apathy settled over her to the point of dulling her sense of loneliness, eventually she found herself falling asleep on the sofa.

SHE AWOKE with a start; the dream had ended. It *had* been a dream and it had ended. For a moment confusion filled her mind; the apartment was in darkness. Long ago, because of her late hours at the laboratory, she had had the phototropic switch disconnected so that the lights wouldn't automatically click on with the coming of nightfall. Reaching out her foot, she pressed the nearest switch and the room swam with light.

And her dream came vividly back into focus. It had been a conversation-piece, only the dialogue had been one-sided. Somebody, somewhere, had wanted her to go back to the disposal room of Bio-Chem and steal an experiment that was awaiting disposal. The experiment she had botched the night before? But had this really been in dialogue, she wondered? Now that she reflected, it had been more a series of feelings, impressions, which her own unconscious had translated into words.

Telepathy!

That was the only way she could describe it—a dream, in which the dream was telepathic. She felt nervous and off-balance the rest of the evening; when she finally went to bed, found she couldn't sleep. She became alarmed when her apprehensions and tensions didn't vanish with the coming of daybreak.

Later that morning she started five expensive days of pychotherapy, during which time, whenever she fell asleep, the same telepathic dream would occur and recur, running with the same maddening faithfulness of a jammed playback tape. And for all of the five days she heard over and over again—as a sort of counterpoint to her dream—the pychotherapist's explanation of the various mechanisms responsible for her dream. On the fifth day the therapist concluded that her trouble all stemmed from repression; she had found sublimation in her work, but now that her work was suddenly no longer accessible to her...

She left in something of a huff, and decided that if the only way to stop the dream was to give in to the dream's compulsiveness, she would do that. Repressed, she might be; but she was instinctively certain that the dream did not stem from this source.

During the night the dream was again with her, this time a feeling of frantic haste impregnating it. Around and around it went, like a squirrel-cage inside her mind. A little later, she woke up screaming, her nude body dripping with perspiration; she was sick the rest of the night.

That morning she began to formulate plans for getting into the "restricted, suspended, out-of-bounds" disposal room; she had decided to give in to her dream.

By midafternoon, every possible plan—or combination of plans—had been explored and rejected, with the exception of one: the actual disposal-chute itself, running from the room down to the incineration furnace of Bio-Chem's power plant. The plant was the semi-automatic breeder-reactor type, requiring—to the best of her knowledge—only a single man to service it. Best of all, it was enclosed in a small blockhouse of its own, behind the Bio-Chem building and main fenced-in grounds; she doubted if a Security Guard would be there.

Next came the method by which she

could best clamber up the chute. Finally in the mountain-climbing department of a sporting-goods store, she was sold the latest thing in climbing apparel: a set of four vacuum-suction disks, guaranteed to cling to any surface until the wearer twisted them in a certain way. Following this, she visited a hardware store, and bought a small but powerful blowtorch, for cutting through the disposal-chute room lock.

2

IT WAS CLOSE to midnight when Sapphire arrived by jet-taxi in the neighborhood of Bio-Chem; she walked the remaining mile to the laboratory, in case the taxi should be checked, later. She skirted around the huge, shadow-shrouded building to the rear, where she picked up the dim radiance emanating from the power-blockhouse. Waiting for a Security Patrol to pass the back of Bio-Chem, she glided quickly to the blockhouse entrance. The door itself was leaded glass and unlocked; she was through it in an instant and then, suddenly, found herself dodging the pileman. Fortunately, he hadn't seen her. Silently as a shadow, she made her way around the reactor-pile and down the narrow corridor until she saw, conveniently labeled, *Incineration Furnace*. It was off, as she had expected it to be; she squeezed through the lock, closing it quietly behind her.

Minutes later, she was up the correct chute and cutting away at the lock. The inside melted and she pushed open the door; the room was in darkness. Crawling through, she found the light-switch and flicked it on...and saw, to her amazement, that the room was filled with scientific apparatus of all kinds, some of which she didn't recognize. In the center of it all, on a small table and under a battery of lamps was a coffin-shaped box of stainless steel. Of her own botched experiment there was no sign; nor was there the usual odds and ends of dead protoplasm lying around, awaiting disposal. Apparently, the Military had cleaned everything out and moved in its own jungle of gadgets.

She suddenly felt embarrassed and annoyed with herself—and just a little shaken as she thought of the instability in her own nature that had put her at the mercy of this dream-whim. Here she was—in the middle of a restricted project where she had no business; if she were caught, or found out... Sapphire Smith wouldn't allow her thoughts to go further than that; she was too frightened by the potentialities of the situation, and with the feeling that she could no longer trust herself.

But before leaving, her scientific curiosity got the better of her: the small coffin-box. There was a tiny plastic card screwed to the lid. Her heart jumped; the technical data on the card was sufficient to tell her that this was her own botched experiment...the one she'd intended destroying. Now why—?

Throwing caution, and all thought of consequences, she snatched up the box; turned off the lights, and scrambled back down the chute—then out into the pile room...right into a cloud of fragrant tobacco-smoke. The pileman, reading some gauges, dropped his pipe and made a grab for her; he missed.

Then she was streaking down the corridor, while behind, she could hear him saying into his wrist radio, "...Yes! Caught a woman coming out of incineration... Get Security over here..."

Her mind a blur of fear, Sapphire was through the door and racing into the cold, early-morning darkness. For awhile there was mingled shouting behind her, and the pounding of feet; then silence.

Hours later, she somehow made it to Cold Spring Harbor; and from there, via public ferry, to Cape May where she caught another ferry to Cape Charles.

AT CAPE CHARLES Sapphire Smith was too sick with fatigue to go on; she rented a cheap hotel-room near the waterfront under an assumed name, and tumbled into an old-fashioned bed, clothes and all. But every time she was about to drop off to sleep, she would wake with a start. Finally she sat on the bed edge and buried her head in her hands; she hadn't cried since she was a little girl, but now her shoulders shook with sobs of exhaustion, and she felt remorse, and fear, welling up inside her.

What was she to do now? She had never before been a creature of impulse— Yet a series of completely irrational impulses had led her to this. What had happened to the beautifully precise and logical life she had mapped out for herself? They would find her, eventually—if they already hadn't—and that would be the end of everything; the experiment she had stolen, though hers, really belonged to the Government, as everything seemed to nowadays.

And she was all alone; there was no one she could turn to.

Anger took over then, as she brushed away the tears of self-pity, and regained something of her old composure. And with it, in spite of tiredness, curiosity returned about the box and her experiment. But first, she went out and purchased some new clothes—a black jumper outfit and a handbag. In her room again, after she'd changed and stuffed her old clothes into the bag, she put the box on the bed and undid a series of toggle-bolts holding down the lid; it flew up and open, like a jack-in-the-box.

And there, together like a brace of pistols, lay two tiny minikins hardly a foot in height.

Her experiment—but how they had grown!

Each was enclosed in a transparent tube, swimming with a clear slugglish liquid of what she imagined was glucose. Waste-tubes and feeding-tubes entered the foot and head of each cylinder.

Then her eye caught something else and she froze. Attached to the inside of the lid was a device known as a "homing pigeon"—a burglar alarm that automatically became directional the moment it was set off. She picked up the blowtorch and smashed at the "pigeon" until it was unrecognizable; but she knew the impulses it had already sent were being received. Whoever was picking them up could trace her.

Acting on the purely chemical level of fear, she bolted the lid, put the box in her bag, and ran down the ancient fire-escape outside the window. From the alley where she landed, she made her way around the block and through another series of alleys, down to the waterfront.

AT THE FAR end of the quay, in front of an ancient sailing-vessel, a large, beefy-faced old gentleman with megaphone in hand was proclaiming to passersby:

"Last cruise of the season! Last cruise of the *Sea Witch!* Two weeks off the Carolina Capes—Cape Hatteras, the deadliest and most storm-ridden of all the Capes—using only 18th and 19th-century navigation instruments. No radios; no t-v; no electricity; no plumbing aboard! Sail with all the *romance—glamour—* and—*danger* you will never ever again experience in modern life! Only one more passenger needed, and we shove off with the tide—"

That was just what Sapphire Smith needed. She didn't wait for the rest of his spiel, but motioned for him to stop, nodding and smiling.

He let out a good-natured chuckle. "Congratulations, Madam, you're just in time! She sails in an hour! Come aboard, come aboard! Up the gangplank you go!"

He followed her up the plank and once on deck, introduced himself as the Captain. After purchasing her ticket, he showed her to her stateroom. Several other passengers were around, but none paid her any attention. An hour later, she heard ropes being cast off and the rattle of the anchor chains. With a sigh she collapsed onto her bunk and immediately fell asleep.

And she started to dream. It was the same voiceless-word dream as before, but, this time, the message was different.

"Relax. You are safe for the present. Now that you have the experiment in your possession, here is the next step—what you are to do with it: to keep what you have created from again falling into the hands of the Military, you must leave Earth. What you thought was a botched experiment is the first actual creation of a synthetic life of sorts. The Military decided that you, and the world, should never know of this. Synthetic life, intelligent or otherwise, if introduced into society might prove a factor that would overtopple their balance of power. They feel that the Venus project, by itself, is risky enough as a factor-unknown, and they do not intend to let it get out of their control, ever. As an escape-valve to more freedom and liberty, it has already been lost to Earth; most of the project billions have gone for fortifications, and atomic-powered artificial satellites already roam the planet's toposphere and ionosphere. There will be no freedom for the colonies of Venus. Escape-valve in one sense it will be—but in the Military sense.

"Those who see, or have seen, the handwriting on the wall will be among the first to go, and there in 'prison' will no longer be a threat to the status quo—to the Military. The trip to Venus will be one way; only enough work has been done on the planet to make it possible for the colonizers to slave their lives away, making it into the kind of world the irrational minds of the Military want it to be. The sole drive in their existence is for power—and more power—over everything."

THERE WAS a pause, and then the voice continued. "This could not be explained to you, before you had successfully stolen your experiment, because of the danger involved. The Military has ways of extracting anything they want to know; that is why a full explanation of what is happening still can't be given you. ...Communication, which is by telepathy, can only be effected while you are asleep or unconscious. The contents of your mind, and its questions are known, but do not expect comments or answer yet. ...On Venus, where you are to bring the 'life'—and also your own—you will be told everything. For, in an indirect way, fate has already unwittingly placed you in a position to topple the balance of power. ...Tonight, in two hours, a jet will fly over the *Sea Witch* flashing a green light; then it will land in the darkness behind the ship. You will slip over the side with the—box—tied to your life-jacket. You will be picked up by the man who will take you to Venus."

She awoke instantly, excitement, questions, doubts all whirling around in her brain. By some accident she really had created life— And hadn't known about it. But the Military had. How? Had her paramecium-based minikins come to life and, in the first shock of consciousness, been found running around the disposal room?

For the first time in her life, Sapphire hated the Military. Was it what her unknown telepathic entity had said about the Venus project that made her hate them?

She glanced at her wrist; she would soon know. Longingly, she wanted to take another look at her creations, but there wasn't time. She grabbed her

bag which—was water-proof—found a life-jacket, and went on deck.

She'd just missed mess-call, and was the only one on deck; she breathed easier, in spite of not having eaten all day. Then, somewhere out in the darkness, she heard the soft whirr of rotors.

The whirr was louder now—and seconds later, saw the green flashing light. Nervously she zipped on the jacket, attached the bag, and slipped quietly over the stern of the ship. She watched the *Sea Witch* slip noiselessly passed and into the father darkness.

The water was ice, and choppy waves bobbed her up and down like a cork. Before she knew it, numbness was creeping up through her body and into her brain...

She suddenly jerked her head up from her chest, where it had been bobbing in the water. Again she heard what she was hoping she'd heard—the short, staccato blasts of a high-speed jet tailpipe. Then a powerful spotlight picked her out, and the next thing she heard was the slap-slap of water against pontoons.

THE DOOR of the cabin-pod was open and someone was leaning out. She managed to cling to the pontoon, but didn't have the strength to climb up. A man in a white shirt jumped down and, with strong hands under her armpits, pulled her up onto the pontoon where he unbuckled the bag. Next he unzipped her life-jacket and boosted her into the cabin, placing the bag under her legs. An instant later they were churning up through the night.

"Lord, don't you ever sleep? I had to stay drugged twenty-four hours, waiting for orders saying you'd at last fallen asleep and received yours!"

The green glow from the instruments was the only illumination, and her tired vision couldn't make out his face; but she didn't like the tone of his voice. Her teeth were still chattering and all she could get out was a hoarse, "I'm—cold."

He chuckled and lit a long, thin cigar. "I like your voice, anyway; nice and raw. But we'll fix you up with a better brand of whiskey than that!"

From out of the dash he produced a silver flask, uncapped it and shoved it in front of her face.

"I—never—drink."

With a flick of a hand he locked the controls. "The way your teeth sound you could use a little anti-freeze; so you're going to start drinking right now!"

He held the back of her head in one hand and brought the flask up with the other to her lips.

You can lead a horse to water... floated through her mind. But perhaps he was right—and, after all, she wasn't a horse and this wasn't water. She parted her lips and allowed him to pour in a trickle, then another, then a big shot; she managed to cough hardly at all. Already a warm glow was spreading from her throat down to her toes.

He took two long drags himself before putting back the flask. Then, as an afterthought, he reached under her legs and turned on the cabin heater.

As warm currents of air circulated around them, he said, "You'd better take off those wet clothes if you ever want to get warm... Don't look at me in that startled way. You won't shock me; I took biology in school."

Sapphire had never been talked in this way before and she wasn't sure she liked his rough aggressive manner. But if he wasn't going to be self-conscious about it, neither was she;

nevertheless, she felt somewhat self-conscious as she zipped off her jumper and slacks and from the bag, zipped on her dry outfit.

Then her head fell on her lap, and she promptly fell asleep—this time without any accompanying dreams.

3

SHE AWOKE to a shrill whine and a staccato flickering of lights. Something white caught the corner of her eye; he was in the midst of lighting another long and incredibly thin cigar. "Where am I—we, I mean?"

He turned, fully facing her, and blew out a cloud of smoke. "Somewhere in the Mississippi Valley; and to be more precise, in the control-nest of a spaceship."

Now she saw that she was half-sitting, half-lying in a pnuematic shock-chair; her bag was in a sling attached to its side. The chair was swiveled around to face the rear of a cylinder-shape room, filled with a jungle of pipes, gauges lights, wheels, knobs, levers, and cigar-smoke. In the center of all this, stood the man in the white shirt; only now she noticed that one sleeve was missing and grease smudged his bare arm and other sleeve. The shirt-zipper was missing, producing a long V of exposed flesh down to his navel and sagging slacks. The slacks were tucked into a pair of scuffed and patched flying boots. The only thing clean or fresh about his costume was a belt and holster around his hips, containing a sonic stun-gun of the deadly coagulator type.

With mild distaste she looked at his hands. His fingernails were caked with dirt; sweat stains, long since dried, streaked the bare section of his chest and stomach; beard-stubble covered his deeply-tanned face; above thin colorless lips, a mustache—more like the wires of a metal brush—tapered rakishly down to the corners of his emotionless mouth, which reminded her of a steel trap. Sand-colored hair—badly in need of trimming—was carelessly pushed back from a receeding hairline, which accentuated an already-powerful forehead. His yellowish-brown eyes, though bloodshot, were intelligent and utterly emotionless. His form had the loose ranginess of a wild carnivore on the make.

In her tight little academic world of schedules, sterile labs, and abstract thought, Sapphire Smith had never seen such a man before. Looking at him, she suddenly felt very remote from civilization and life as she had known it; she even found herself thinking he was handsome in a dissipated, hungry sort of way.

Smiling with one side of his mouth, he crossed his legs and leaned against a bulkhead. "For a minute there, I didn't think I was going to pass inspection."

SHE FLUSHED. Then: But whose spaceship? Only the Military has spaceships. Only the Government builds—"

Out of more cigar-smoke, he said, "It's my ship; I built it."

Again she glanced around the nest. It did have a home-made look about it, and judging from the layers of blue-smoke piling up, no ventilators, either. She coughed.

"That hum you hear is an electric generator outside cabling juice into the cyclotron starter. Once it catches and begins to smash, we'll bleed off power, establish a feed-back circuit to the ship's generators, then turn on the air purifiers and blast off. But while waiting, we'll compare notes. My name's Dale Moresby."

"Sapphire Smith."

Peering closer into her eyes, he

smiled, "Oh, yes. I see why." Then, soberly: "They didn't explain very much to us, did they?"

She stood up and crossed arms under her breasts. "Who are 'they'?"

A flicker of irritation crossed his narrow features. "Why play games? You're one of us."

Looking at this strange man, she again began to feel tense and confused. "One—of—you?"

Dropping his cigar into a waste-tube, he frowned puzzledly. "Perhaps we'd better start at the beginning with *your* story."

With dismay, Sapphire realized that he didn't know any more than she did.

Suddenly, there was a jar under the deck-plates and she toppled back into the shock-chair. Several relays clashed shut; then a ragged rumble started slowly mounting until it became a smooth roar. The tobacco-smoke disappeared with a sucking noise up a ventilator-grill, as ticking sounds and more clashes filled the nest.

Motioning her to strap herself in, Moresby threw three switches in sequence, and the roar seemed to boom right through the nest. Then there was a crash, as something caught, transfering the roar into an ear-piercing whine. The whole ship trembled and quivered with vibration; gauges, dials, indicators all jumped and shook in their foam mountings until she could no longer make out their faces.

A crushing weight slowly pushed her down into the pnuematic shock chair—pushed her down, down into blackness.

SHE OPENED her eyes to the long, sparkling spray of the Milky Way arching across space outside the nest-skylight; it was her first glimpse of open space.

She unbuckled the chair-harness and floated a few inches up from the seat before pulling herself back down. She was intrigued by weightlessness.

A chuckle sounded beside her. She had momentarily forgotten about Moresby; he was lighting another cigar. Only the sigh of the air-purifier, and hum of the generators now filled the nest.

"Pretty great out here, isn't it?" he said, blowing smoke up to the vent grill.

His voice had a new tone to it, she noticed. It sounded rougher and more powerful, in complete command of the situation—any situation. Being with him gave Sapphire a sudden feeling of standing on the edge of something big, something wonderful. Yes, she thought, it *was* great to be out here.

Smoke trickled out of his nostrils. "Well, Sapphire, there's no turning back now—and maybe no going back, ever. For either of us, unless the Security Patrol catches us. But then we might as well be going back dead... What awaits us on Venus, I don't know—except that part of the Column will be waiting for us somewhere, for me to bring them you."

At the word "Column", she gave a start. With sudden comprehension, she began to get a picture of what was happening and what had happened. The Z Column—meaning Zero, because anyone joining it, if they could find it to join, had about that much life-expectancy, from then on.

He sensed her thoughts, and said slowly, "Yes, you're now a member of the Z Column."

She went numb as the full import of what he said struck her. Here, after all these years of only hearing rumors, she was suddenly part of it—the single opposition the Military had never been able to eradicate. Propaganda had even started rumors to the effect that the Z Column was the Military's own artificially-created opposition, designed to trap into its ranks those who were attempting to destroy the "freedom and democracy" that had come about with the World State.

Moresby was speaking softly now.

"No one just decides one day that they're fed up with the status quo, and that they'll join the Column. If you have something constructive to offer, or some service which Military—through World Government—is attempting to suppress, then you suddenly find yourself in the Column. It's not even necessary to dislike the status quo. For instance, I don't know what it is you have to offer."

She gave him a steady look. "What is it *you're* offering?"

"A service; getting you to Venus. That was what I was asked to do."

HE STARED out at the stars. "It all began for me a long time ago—when I was kicked out of my graduating class at the Government Space School. Somebody discovered the fact that I had once belonged to a subversive organization in my youth, and was therefore a questionable security risk. So I never got to go out in any of the old space cans they had kicking out to the Moon, then. Instead, though, I got a job in the one and only spaceship factory, and worked my way up to a second class inspector; I couldn't advance any further because of that Space School business. So there I stayed. After a time, it occurred to me that I not only had the knowledge to fly a ship, but also practically knew how to put one together. After the space-drive cyclotron replaced chemical fuels, ships became as small as this—and in some cases, much simpler.

"Sometime later, while vacationing through the Mississippi Valley, I came across a spaceship half-buried in mud; it had been missing for three years, but was hardly damaged." He smiled. "And what with the pilfering of... ahh...'defective' parts—I'll leave the rest for you to fill in. ...Anyway, so now here we are, out here. Oh, yes: about the Column. After I made a test-flight a year ago, without any mishap, I found myself suddenly a member. How *they* found out about it I don't know; even the Security Patrol didn't know about me. Anyway, I was informed that I was the only known civilian on the planet possessing a spaceship; that I should save it for an emergency, that I would be contacted when the time came. The time came several nights ago, through a form of sleep telepathy—"

He caught her eye again roving questioningly over his body. "I know. You're thinking what a cut-throat I look like. My apologies; getting the ship into final shape didn't allow much time for costume-changes."

For her own apology, she reached out and touched his forearm. His yellow-brown eyes narrowed, then widened; and before she could withdraw her hand, he had his over it. His fingers were like talons. The strength of them seemed to flow through her entire being, and she felt a strange kind of warmth that frightened her.

"Give...me back my hand—*please.*"

Instead, he gave her a sudden pull. They both floated up into the nest, and before she knew what was happening, he had her in his arms. Her gasp was cut short by his mouth pressing against hers. His mustache felt like tiny needles brushing into her upper lip; then his tongue found hers and her old inhibitions got the better of her. She bit it.

He yanked it out of her mouth and slapped her a smashing blow that knocked her back into the jungle of pipes and valves beyond. She clung there a moment, her cheek stinging with fire. When she looked up, he was floating near the ceiling spitting blood into a handkerchief, tears of pain in his eyes.

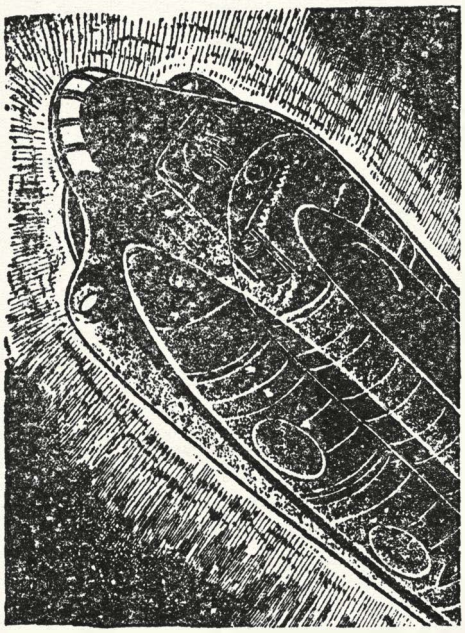
Her throat felt very tight and dry. "I'm sorry," she said softly, "I guess I'm—I'm afraid of sex."

He gave her one inscrutable look, then chuckled and drifted down to his chair, busying himself with navigation-charts and dividers. She drifted back to hers and sat in silence,

staring out at the starry blackness.

FINALLY he said, "You must be getting hungry."

"Yes, I, I—am." Her throat was still choked with emotion, which made her furious. And in spite of her hunger, she could only nibble at the tin of S-rations he handed her.



After eating, he lit another of his thin cigars and blew smoke over to her. "You still haven't told me what *you* have to offer—what it is you're offering?"

She reached down, opened her bag, and handed him the coffin-shaped box. He unscrewed the wing-nuts and the lid flopped back; a noiseless whistle escaped his lips. He gave her a questioning look. She told who she was, what she had been working on, and how the Military had entered into the picture.

"These minikins," she continued, suddenly all enthusiasm for her work, "are paramecium—although now they are really blastopods possessed of many cells instead of one and, of course, quadrupeds in design. And with them, as with the microscopic paramecium itself, reproduction is by fission. Whenever these minikins wish to reproduce, they and all their nuclei will elongate and break in two, becoming two separate animals. To prevent a single paramecium-minikin from inbreeding, I put together two, so that there could be an interchange of dominant traits. One rests alongside another, and they begin to fuse; then the side walls break down, so that the nuclei will have access to one another. The nuclei mix and mingle, then separate, half going into each animal. This is known as syzygy. Paramecium have no sex, so it is not a sexual process. It has nothing to do with reproduction, either; that can happen with or without syzygy."

He handed her back the case. "They remind me of frogs—or how a frog might look trying awfully hard to resemble a human. Maybe it's their legs and feet. That greyish-white color— I never heard of an albino frog."

She put the box back in her bag. "I'll need lab facilities to study them, particularly their life-cycles, which should prove astoundingly short and on a completely different energy-level than ours. Right now, the Military probably knows more about them than I do; that's why they put them in those glass tubes—to prevent them from having room to reproduce."

Moresby tossed his cigar down a waste tube. "They'll have plenty of room to reproduce on Venus."

HOURS LATER, Morseby threw the ship into a tangential orbiting approach above Venus, and switched the main-drive to atmosphere auxiliary tubes.

The mottled, steamy, cloud-billowy atmosphere had been breaking up for years—ever since the so-called Planetary Engineers had found a way of locking the poisons in chemical bonds with the soil and rocks. There were even seas now—so Propaganda said—and soon it would no longer be necessary to wear oxygen fishbowls.

Before plunging down the orbiting approach, Moresby suddenly spun the ship around on its tail several times. Sapphire saw sweat break out on his strained face as he searched the heavens directly above the bobbing and dipping atmosphere-envelope below them.

Without looking at her, he said, "See those three spheres out there which look like blue marbles? Those are space stations; there are three more of them orbiting on the other side of the equatorial belt. At least one of them should have spotted us a long way out. But I don't see any ships coming after us, nor has there been radio activity." He laughed nervously. "I guess the luck of Spartacus is still with us. They haven't seen us—yet!"

"That name," Sapphire said. "Where have I heard it?"

"Spartacus was an ancient Roman slave who rebelled against his masters; it is also the name of this ship." With that, he plunged the *Spartacus* down through the atmosphere, and into its landing-orbit. Relays clashed shut, and they hit with a bone-cracking jar.

When her head cleared, Sapphire looked out the port at brownish-colored sunlight shining through a creamish-yellow sky. A wind-storm must have been raging, for occasional plumes of sand or dirt would be flung up past the port.

For more than an hour, Moresby worked at securing the controls, and shooting out anchor-grapples into the sandy soil.

Finally, when he was finished and took out one of his familiar cigars, she said, "Well—now that we're here, what do we do?"

Moresby sank down into his chair and remade some adjustments on the full-frequency radio-scanner. "I don't know; wait for the welcoming party, I guess."

More hours went by and both of them began to grow irritable with suspense. "I don't like this any better than you do, out here in the open," he said. "Sure—Security would spot us if they took a notion to fly over the northern hemisphere, here. But fortunately, everybody—including the Engineers—are working on the equatorial section of the planet. That's why, in absence of any instructions, I landed up here; all we can do is stand by the radio."

MORE HOURS passed and the sun began to sink towards a murky-brown horizon. Sitting there in a state of tension, waiting for she knew not what, Sapphire began to have her doubts about the Z Column and this fantastic man sitting next to her. True, he had just taken her on a remarkable journey under incredible circumstances; *but*...

She let her thoughts trail off. He was staring straight at her, with a big grin on his face. She decided that under present conditions she didn't like the grin.

In spite of her look, he continued to grin. "Why didn't I think of it! Telepathic sleep comunication! That's what the Column's waiting for—for us to go to sleep."

He fumbled in a locker, brought out a hypospray and several pellets. "These'll knock us out for about ten minutes; that ought to be enough time—" After shooting his forearm he reached out and took her arm.

She suddenly became frightened of everything. "Oh, no— Not me, you don't! *You* take the instructions!"

Suspicion crossed his face. "Why the distrust? We're in the Column... why do you want to stay awake... or are *you* in the Column...some colossal blunder?" The hypo slipped from his fingers. He was growing groggy, but not enough to prevent him from bringing an uppercut against her chin before she could jerk away. For a fraction of a second, prior to losing consciousness, Sapphire wondered if

her suspicions might have been unjust.

4

SOMEONE was slapping her, shaking her. Slowly she opened her eyes; it was Moresby. She tried to rise, but found she was strapped in the shock chair.

Seeing the green murder in her eyes, he gripped her shoulders and said, "Take it easy; I'll let you up in a minute— I've got you strapped down so you'll listen to me without trying to cause trouble for having socked you."

He shook her once, his face deadly serious. "Now listen! The message I got told me that it was of the utmost urgency that I take the minikins below deck into the cyclotron room, break the seals on the two tubes, then place the exposed tubes next to the radiation-shielding; once this was accomplished, there would be an explanation.

"A moment later, I came to—you were still out—so I went down the nest hole with the box and carried out the instructions. But when I broke the seals, the minikins jumped out and ran away. ...I've hunted high and low for them; they're somewhere in the ship and I need your help."

What he said hit her with the impact of a falling wall; for a moment she laughed—a little hysterically. He shook her again and she stopped. "And the explanation—?" she said. "Where's the wonderful, big explanation? I'll tell you what it is; We've been played for suckers! By the minikins! They wanted *me* to steal them out of captivity from the Military, and they wanted *you* to supply them with a free ride to Venus—which they have decided to try and take away from Earth for their own new home!"

Understanding flashed across Moresby's face. "That must be it. There is no Z Column—not on Venus, anyway. Those telepathic messages were all from the minikins. During the time they were captive in the disposal-room, being studied by the Military and their second-rate 'yes-man' scientists, bio-chemists, they must have tapped every brain in the place!"

"Yes," she said, "sentient minikins with a deadly sense of humor—probably more intelligent than..." She shrugged. An instant later her eyes widened. *"And they're lose in the ship—practically lose on Venus! We can't let them have Venus!* We've got to find them before they get a chance, or favorable opportunity, to duplicate, split!"

Just then, there was a noise behind them and they both whirled—in time to see the deck-hatch start to descend, something greyish-white pushing it from the rear.

"Get it!" she screamed, as Moresby leaped toward the descending hatch. *"Crush it, squash it!* We only need to kill one of them!"

He hit the top of the hatch-cover and slammed its perfectly-balanced roundness down with a crash, before the minikin could squeeze through down into the bowls of the ship. With a spine-chilling series of squeaks, the minikin ran straight for Sapphire, then veered off to the right, towards the airlock—but not before her foot reached out and stepped on it. Then her foot went out from under her in the slime and she fell.

She was sick for several minutes. Finally she cleaned things up and faced Moresby. "Well, now— I guess it's back to Earth."

"Yes. But I don't like the idea of that other one running around down below deck in the cyclotron room. What if he duplicates? He and his duplicates could do a lot of damage

before they inbreed themselves into extinction."

"Then we'll have to comb the room until we find the other," she agreed, walking over to the hatch and pulling— Nothing happened. Morseby tried, then they looked at each other in awful silence.

Finally he said, "They've gotten into the tool-locker and welded the hatch shut."

"Then, the ship, the *Spartacus* is lost?"

"I'm afraid so; we have no cutting tools up here. We'll have to walk home."

Another silence. After which, just on chance, he tried the cyclotron-controls to see if they were still working; they weren't.

A DAY LATER they started out for the equatorial belt with all supplies which had been in the nest; oxygen, S-rations, even a makeshift sled to carry it all. The remaining minikins in the ship were doomed, Sapphire calculated, to about fifteen generations—and there was nothing the minikins could do about it. Venus was lost to them; despite the Military, Earth still had Venus and a chance at true freedom.

Just how they were going to explain their presence on Venus, they didn't know; they decided to concentrate on their journey and think about that later.

But they weren't allowed to do so. They had hardly gone a hundred yards, when two Security Patrol ships came rushing down out of nowhere.

Having no place to hide and no weapons except the stun-gun, all they could do was wait and be captured.

They were taken into one of the ships while the men from the other, entered the *Spartacus*, presumably after the minikins. Then a strange thing happened. Before their view was cut off, Moresby and Sapphire watched the *Spartacus'* airlock-circle shut, then heard the whine of her generators. An instant later there was a moan and a roar, and the *Spartacus* was blasting skyward.

Then they were yanked into a fine little "inquiry room" as it was called.

For awhile there was frantic excitement over the disappearance of the *Spartacus*. Radio messages were sent; other ships ordered out to intercept it; general bedlam.

Finally Sapphire and Moresby were gotten around to. The "inquirers" didn't bother attempting to extract the truth about what was going on from the two by simple cross-questioning, or the request for volunteer information. Instead they went right to work with the latest sense-gadget. It did nothing to Sapphire physically—it merely produced the sensations of a dental drill on the teeth and a lie-detector pricking into the brain. Experiments had shown that under extreme pain, these lie-detectors were infallable.

What they did to Moresby brought tears to her eyes, for she realized she loved him. When they were finished, he was helped out of the chair with all the sensations of a mangled, bleeding mouth, and Sapphire was given his place. She knew that nothing was happening to her, yet she felt clamps placed in her mouth to hold it open and detector-electrodes pricking into her skull; then the drilling began. Before each question, she felt drilling, mingled with her scream; the question was asked and she would answer it.

Finally, it was all over; she and Moresby were given some kind of drug...

From what they overheard, they were being taken to one of the troposphere space-stations to await transit to Earth.

INSIDE the station, they were given back their suits and fishbowls, then thrown into an airless, heatless cargo-room. Below them, out of an

inspection-port, they saw a huge spiderweb of cargo-netting, made out of thin plastic strands a hundred times stronger than steel. In spite of not being actually in the web, they felt as doomed as flies.

Days passed, and intermittently they were thrown in waste-containers, oxygen, and S-rations. Their suit-intercoms still worked and they told each other of their love over and over again, as a sort of substitue for physical contact.

Occasionally, they wondered what had been the fate of the minikin-controlled *Spartacus* with its captive Security men.

There was a bitterness in their hearts over what they had done to the potential race of minikins. Why hadn't they allowed them to have Venus? Man wasn't ready for Venus.

In a flood of guilt, at times, Sapphire wished the minikin, in some impossible fashion, could have squashed her. After what she and Moresby did, they must hate humanity. Right at that moment, she did, too.

She was jolted out of her reverie by a nudge from Moresby. "Look out the port. The *Spartacus!*"

Then, in an orbit, it came in—flashing under them incredibly close, and was gone.

"Maybe we saw a ghost," she said, all enthusiasm long since dead.

Time seemed as dead as all hope, there in the airless dark of the hold.

Finally, for a period, they went to sleep in each other's spacesuited arms, Sometime after they awoke, as they were idly gazing out the huge port, Sapphire accidentally place her transparent-gloved hand on the port to push herself up. But the port glass wasn't there; it had been removed. Her hand kept going through the port; she was so amazed, that the rest of her body followed before she could stop herself.

Moresby, equally dumbfounded, made a lunge for her but too late; he, too, went floating out after her. As if in a slow-motion dream, they fell right into the side of the net, entangling themselves in the incredibly-flexible webbing. While they were threshing around, trying to free themselves, they saw the *Spartacus,* like some ghost out of another nightmare, come orbiting in.

Then, something else out of a nightmare—

Rushing up at them from the center of the web, were greyish-white minikins with some kind of power-coils on the backs of their transparent suits. Each of their hands were fitted with tiny clippers; as they came, they snipped a line here, a line there, then raced with the lines over Sapphire's and Moresby's already-entangled bodies, securing their arms and legs.

With her free remaining hand, she managed to scoop one up and hold it squirming close to her face. *Come for your revenge,* she thought. *Interesting what it will be.* Then she let it finish tying her hand.

By the time she and Moresby were bound, the cargo-web was in tatters. Then they were being towed towards the airlock of the *Spartacus,* which was quite close in. On the way, she and Moresby exchanged ironic suggestions about what kind of fate awaited them—it could be no worse than that on Earth.

To keep up their spirits, Moresby said, "If they grant us one last wish, you know what it'll be?"

"No, darling. What?"

"That we be allowed to take off our suits in a room full of oxygen and be left alone for awhile—"

She had to choke back the lump in her throat.

AS SAPPHIRE was towed through the airlock after Moresby, all her past life suddenly shifted through her mind in a bewildering pattern of regrets, desires, and guilts. She was

sickened by the kind of woman her fear of emotion had made her. If her personality only hadn't been built on repressions! If only she could have responded to Moresby that time in the control-nest; had her emotions at her disposal; had acted in a natural manner when he had wanted to make love to her.

And now that the end was near, her whole body ached with a desire for him made all the more intense because it would never be fullfilled. In the flood of desire sweeping away the last of her repressions, she now wished that he had taken her against her will when she had bitten his tongue. But that all seemed ages ago...

Strange—she no longer felt fear or nervousness at the Unknown which was confronting them.

Once through the lock, and inside the ship, Sapphire watched the minikins' power-coils stop glowing as they sank to the deck, one by one. She and Moresby settled gently to the deck themselves; they were just about to roll towards each other, when they were flattened by a terrific surge of acceleration from the *Spartacus*.

Sometime later, with the acceleration off, they floated together in free flight. No move was made to unbind them, but their fishbowls were removed. She tried desparately to wiggle close enough to kiss him, to feel the rough stubble of his beard against her cheek. Her straining efforts brought tears to her eyes. Her vision blurred and continued to blur, until she blinked them out of her eyes and down her feverish cheeks.

Pain and longing were on his face, she saw. And then she watched his lips form a sentence: "I know. ...I feel the same way inside..."

Their attention was temporarily distracted from each other by several minikins, very gently attaching wires to the base of their skulls. She watched the two wires leading from her skull joined with those of Moresby's. Then all four wires were attached to what might have been the skull base of a single minikin.

"Some form of communicating-device," Moresby said.

Despite her sorrow and regrets, some of the old curiosity returned. After a moment, she nodded in agreement.

Looking straight at Sapphire, the minikin spoke, but only in their minds. She gave a start; it seemed to be the same voice she had heard in her "dreams."

I am of the third division of your original creations, and therefore have not much longer to live. We are possessed of racial memory, we mutant divisions, so can explain.

SHE FELT her mind go tumbling with questions, and the speaker paused until she could get her curiosity under control. She looked at Moresby and saw that he, too, was burning with questions. Then the speaker was saying:

The two originals asked to be placed near the radiation-shielding so that, when they escaped, their cells would mutate in the direction they so willed. One of them, without fissioning with the other, subdivided immediately; its second half readjusted its cells, with the help of radiation, in a manner so that the nuclei was different from its first half—therefore both escaping the eventual doom from inbreeding.

With a wild surge of hope Sapphire thought back, *Then you won't die out, after all!*

While the race in this way was being founded below deck, the speaker continued, *the other original came into the control-nest and deliberately sacrificed itself, so that you would not search us out and destroy us before we could properly get started—*

"But why didn't you get in touch with us by sleep-telepathy and tell us all this?" Sapphire's thought almost shouted.

Cyclotron-radiation killed forever the sleep-telepathy talent in all of us. That is why you have not been contacted since. The originals were sorry for their deception, and we hope to make amends. The originals could not allow the truth to be in your minds, for fear that the Military would extract it. We are also sorry that we were in no position at the time to prevent your capture—and, no doubt, torture—by the Security Police.

But when you rescued us, Sapphire heard Moresby think, *why did you tie us up?*

Being telepathic no longer—except, as now, with artificial means—we deemed it wise, not knowing your attitudes, to bind you until you heard us out.

Sapphire felt another surge of hope, and with it, one from Moresby. *You know about this regret and guilt we have felt over having destroyed what we thought was your future survival. And you know that we are happy that you will continue to survive.*

For an answer, she watched them untie Moresby, then herself. The minute they were free, they were in each other's arms, lips pressed fiercely together.

Then the speaker's voice again, in both their minds. *It is impossible to think-lie, so you have the freedom of the ship—but the ship has changed. You will not recognize the meaning of the various changes. Our technological science is a "super-science" in comparison with yours. This spaceship, in the last few days, has been completely reworked, and its cyclotron redesigned into a matter-energy converter. Our race is not staying on Venus, but is heading out to the stars.*

Sapphire felt a wave of her hatred for the Military again creep into her thoughts. So they were still going to remain in control of Venus —

The speaker interrupted: *Your Military-controlled World Government will not last much longer. Those power-coils on our backs are anti-gravity packs. Their design and construction is simple, and their theory has already been given by us—via t-v—to millions of humans on Earth. The Military cannot keep them for long there now.*

Sapphire felt her tone-scale give a leap upward. Everything had been answered; everything explained; everything was over. And now, she and Moresby could return to Earth; but she suddenly didn't want that, and sensed that Moresby didn't want it. They no longer needed Earth; neither wanted to go back to Earth after having tasted the glitter and glamour of space.

AFTER a long silence, the minikin spoke again. *Please do not detach these communication wires; follow me.*

She watched the power-coil glow on the speaker's back; then he floated ahead of them down the hatch. Moresby took her hand as they followed the minikin into a circular, but comfortably-appointed room. In the hull side, there was a large viewport through which the great sparkling spray of the Milky Way could be seen, pulsing and throbbing light-energy through the vast empty spaces between the stars.

The speaker was saying, *Unless you want us to drop you off on the way, we are heading out to the stars. Would you like to go with us?*

Sapphire and Moresby laughed; the minikins had a sense of humor. For the question was rhetorical: the speaker had already seen the answer.

★

Readin' and Writhin'

BOOK REVIEWS by Damon Knight

TYPEWRITER IN THE SKY and FEAR, by L. Ron Hubbard. Gnome Press, 1951; 256 pp., $2.75. Science-fantasy addicts ordinarily shun other forms of popular magazine fiction as the plague; I still remember vividly the expression of horror on the face of one of them when—being then, through no fault of my own, the editor of a Western magazine—I tried to show him a copy of something with Stetsons and six-guns on the cover. ...So that, until 1939, when *Astounding* published a short story called "The Dangerous Dimension", few of us had ever heard of L. Ron Hubbard.

Hubbard was the typus of a now-vanishing tribe of pulp-writers: like Tom Roan, who made occasional appearances in editorial offices wearing a ten-gallon hat and swearing like a muleskinner; like Norvell Page, who affected an opera-cloak and a Mephistophelean goatee, Hubbard lived what he wrote. Big, swaggering, and red-haired (like many of his heroes); sailor, explorer, adventurer—a man among men and a devil with the ladies—he cut a swath across the science-fantasy world the like of which has not been seen before, or since.

In 1950, as the world knows, he catapulted to best-sellerdom and nationwide notoriety; a year later, trailing a cloud of lawsuits, he disappeared into the limbo of the Middle West, where, at last report, he remains.

He leaves behind an undiminished throng of admirers, a few friends and, I think, a rather larger number of enemies; a growing body of legend; and upwards of ten short novels, most of them originally published in the early 40's.

Here are two of them, both from the 1940 *Unknown*.

"Typewriter in the Sky" deals with the upsetting experiences of a dilettante pianist, Mike de Wolf, who is forced to live a role in a blood-and-guts pirate novel as it is written by his friend Horace Hackett—and not as the hero, either; as the villain.

The world around him is one completely subject to Hackett's whim: if Hackett says a man turns purple with rage, that's what happens. Hackett, moreover, is a very bad writer; de Wolf, moving willy-nilly through his paces as Miguel de Lobo, admiral of the fleets of his most Catholic Majesty in the year 1640, finds himself playing Mozart on a piano plainly marked *Steinway, Chicago*.

The plot shuttles back and forth between Hackett, clad in a dirty bathrobe, grinding out chapters to meet his deadline, and Mike, fighting desperately to change the story and avert his own inevitable doom. The problem is a tough one, and Hubbard does not solve it so much as slide around it: the story-within-a-story winds up with a pointless final scene involving Mike and the heroine; the dream-world

dissolves in earthquake and storm; and Mike is retranslated to the world of reality.

This weakness is more than compensated for by the ending of the story itself—three immortal lines:

Up there—
God?
In a dirty bathrobe?

"FEAR", as the author tells you plainly in a prefactory note, is not a fantasy at all—not, at any rate, in the addict's sense. It is written as if it were; the reader is led to believe that James Lowry's troubles stem from his having provoked the enmity of supernatural creatures, by writing an article denying their existence. And the story's plot, certainly, is fantastic enough: Lowry, having lost four hours, and his hat, wanders in search of them into one hideous underworld after another. If he doesn't find them, he instinctively realizes, he will go mad; and if he does, he will die.

The second half of this credo is quite true; the first comes a little late; Lowry is already insane. At the story's end, he regains his senses and remembers what happened during the missing four hours: finding his wife and his best friend together and misinterpreting the circumstances, he killed them both with an ax.

Haunted by his dead wife's scream (*"Jim! Oh, my God! Jim!"*) Lowry spends the two days after the murder crossing and recrossing the borderline of sanity. In his classes, and at church, he is able to put up a fair appearance of normalcy. At home, refusing to let himself realize that his two victims are dead, he creates elaborate fantasies in which they speak to him, prepare dinner for him, and so on (but he can't eat the nonexistent food, because, when he tries to do so, the plate moves under his fork). When he returns to the cellar in which their bodies lie, twice, to dispose of the evidence, his mind retreats altogether into hallucination.

The first of these episodes is the most effective passage in the story: the cellar stairs become an endless stairway incredibly opening from the sidewalk in front of Lowry's own house; he *has* to go down them, because each step vanishes behind as he descends; and, to help him forget where he really is, he creates a series of talkative phantoms:

> *"If you please, mother, can't we come in off these* stairs?"
>
> *"You can't leave them. You walked up them, and now you'll walk down them all the way to the bottom. You must do it, that's all there is to it. You can sag and drag and gag and wag, but you've got to go to the bottom. All the way down. All the way, way, way, way, way, way, way, down!* Down! Down! Down! *Want some advice?"*

After the second return, Lowry drifts still further into dementia, and there we get the most specifically clinical material in the story—a paranoid rejection of reality, and a recurring castration-anxiety fantasy in which he suppressed hatred for Lowry's ex-friend returns in a disguised form.

"Fear" is a good story that might easily have been a great one. Parts of it are magnificently written; a few passages, like the one quoted above, are pure dream-logic and dream-poetry, as good as anything in Carroll. Others are dull or irrelevant, and large sections are unforgiveably bad.

The same is true of "Typewriter in the Sky"—and, indeed, of nearly all of Hubbard's work.

Chapter four of "Typewriter" is a satirical and very funny dialogue between Horace Hackett and another writer. Toward the end of it, after boring each other with recitals of their current plots, and damning editors, the reading public and their profession, they drift into a reverent discussion of writing methods:

> *"Sure. You lay out the beginning and know how it's going to end, and it wanders around as it pleases in the middle....*
>
> *"It's funny.... I get spooky about it sometimes. It's—well, it's as if we were perfectly in tune with the story. We don't have to think about it, it just sort of comes bubbling out of us like music."*

This is an accurate description of the commonest compromise between plotting and "inspiration" (some writers plot everything, minutest detail; others simply reel the stuff out, without the slightest notion of where they are heading) and of the "ecstatic" feeling it sometimes produces. Nearly all writers rely to some extent on subconscious processes to fill in the fabric of their work; the "ecstasy" probably has something to do with the typical writer's well-known reluctance to do any work him-

self. The trouble with leaning too heavily on the subconscious is simply that it has no critical faculty; it may lead you down temporary-attractive bypaths which end up miles from your story-line; it tends to be prolix; it often grasps eagerly at the approximate work instead of the right one.

Hubbard must have worked submerged most of the time. He wrote, we are told, on an electric typewriter—because no manually powered one could keep up with him. In this volume, and elsewhere, there is ample proof that Hubbard had an exquisite word-sense—when he wanted to use it; and equally ample proof that he seldom bothered.

These two stories—particularly the second—are monuments to a prodigal talent, prodigally wasted.

●

KINSMEN OF THE DRAGON, by Stanley Mullen. Shasta, 1951; 336 pp., $3.50. Take equal parts of Austin Hall, Sax Rohmer, and A. Merritt—with a touch of H. P. Lovecraft; shake until addled. Serves ½.

I think it was my friend Jim Blish who coined the term "idiot plot"—defined as a plot which is kept in motion solely by virtue of the fact that everybody involved is an idiot. Here is a delightful specimen: Sir Rodney Dering, the Wise Old Man of the story, is an idiot; Franchard, its sinister villain, is a superidiot; Eric Joyce, its handsome hero, is an idiot in spades.

Behold:

In the prologue, Joyce visits Dering in London (Joyce is a young American who, although the author does not say so, must have been in suspended animation since about 1920) and is conned into joining a crusade against Franchard, who—Dering tells him—is using a network of nut-cults for the purpose of "undermining what we have left of civilization".

Supposing Joyce to have any brain at all, he ought to ask, "Why?" He doesn't, and the question never comes up; apparently it hasn't occurred to Dering, either.

In Chapter One, we find Joyce in London again after a quick trip to Paris made offstage. A long black sedan (typus!) swoops down; in it are Franchard and his girlfriend, Darla, who spray Joyce with bullets. This seems a little odd, since Joyce has done nothing to annoy them, but he takes it as a matter of course. The explanation is deferred until p. 66, and it's a honey: "*'I don't know why I did it. Just a momentary impulse....'*"

The Paris trip turns out to have been equally odd. Joyce, acting on Dering's orders, has interviewed two or three people, read a couple of books in the Biliotheque Nationale, learned nothing not already known, and accomplished nothing whatever; we are left to wonder what, if anything, the trip was *supposed* to accomplish. This is partially elucidated on p. 27: the trip, Dering says, has "*'succeeded in its main object, that of drawing their fire.'*"

This leads us to still another "Why?", but the only answer we are going to get appears farther down on the same page: "*'It's not like Franchard to be unworkmanlike. He had a sitting shot, to....'*"

This is not very satisfactory, but at least it's plain enough—Dering's...object in sending Joyce to Paris was to get him shot dead.

Neglecting the perplexing question of Darla's motive in accosting Joyce in a Paris bar, getting offended two minutes later and walking out without having altered the plot in any way, let us pass on to Chapter Six. After some preliminaries designed to show that Franchard is an evil so-and-so, Dering has got the password to one of the nut-cults and sent Joyce to investigate it. Joyce witnesses a very dull ceremony, broken up in the middle by a cult-member's husband with a grievance, whereupon the cult priests set fire to the place and Joyce is captured by Franchard, who remarks, "*You puzzle and intrigue me, Joyce. What can you hope to gain by your childish attempts to thwart me?*"

This is a good question; a better one is, "*What* attempts?"

Franchard, who is telepathic and clairvoyant, then has Joyce, who knows nothing about anything, tortured to extract unspecified information from him. He is about to use scopolamine for the same purpose, when Darla rescues Joyce and turns him loose. On the way, Joyce gets a small bottle handed to him in the dark, without a word spoken.

He promptly swallows its contents—which, surprisingly enough, turn out to be brandy. For all he knew, they might have been ink.

FOLLOWING this, Joyce happens to bump into an old friend named Redwood—identified, two pages later, as a merchant seaman who has been missing and supposed dead for three years. You

can tell he's an old salt: *"'Funny things happen at sea.... On a ship, the captain is boss and nobody questions his orders.'"*

They escape an ambush at Joyce's car and drive home, tailed by the usual black sedan—which, however, goes away without any further attempt on their lives. If the reader at this point has another "Why?" left in him, he can use it here; but no one will ever answer him.

Redwood, who is really Chick Watson of "The Blind Spot" in disguise, tells a tale apparently derived from an imperfect recollection of "The Blind Spot", "A Descent Into the Maelstrom", "Pellucidar", "At the Mountains of Madness" and "The Moon Pool"! i. e., after boarding a derelict, Redwood and his companions pass through a dimensional-doorway; are sucked down by a huge whirlpool; emerge in a subterranean world; wander in a city of Cyclopean horror; and wind up in the hands of a dismal gang of demonolaters headed by Franchard.

Redwood is puzzled by the efforts of Franchard's gang to drag information about nuclear physics out of their proletarian prisoners:

...But why, since He *seemed to know everything else about our world, would* He *not know...about that?*
There was no answer.
...Then, or ever.

Franchard's men, it turns out, have infiltrated an atomic-weapons arsenal in Yorkshire; Joyce and two others go there to "investigate", get caught in the middle of a pointless raid by the cultists, and retire with the score tied at zero. This brings us to Chapter Thirteen, up to which point nobody, on either side, has advanced the plot an inch.

Now, however, another old friend of Joyce's turns up: this one just happens to have a well-staffed private submarine, with which he had been planning to explore the Arctic ice. Dering, persuasive as ever, enlists him and his crew to find the dimensional doorway described by Redwood, and attack Franchard on his home grounds.

The main curiosity here is that nobody has any notion of how the submarine crew is to get back to Earth—Redwood's return appears to have been an accident; he doesn't know how it happened—but this question never occurs to anybody. That isn't all. Watch closely:

On p. 261, after a battle with the cultists in the eldritch dead city, a trek up into the mountains to a city of lizard-people, and other irrelevant adventures, Joyce is interviewing a gentleman named Vor, the Red Archdruid. Franchard, it appears, is the Black Archdruid, and there may or may not be a third—the White—who holds the balance of power. Vor mentions casually that he has traveled between the worlds—ergo, knows how it is done. Joyce pays no attention.

On p. 263, it turns out Vor's method is "astral projection"—no good for Earthmen; Joyce still doesn't react.

On p. 273, Vor volunteers the information that he *can* show Joyce how to return to Earth.

And on p. 275, Joyce asks, *"Is it within your knowledge to direct us to our own world again?..."*

Yikh!

...At any rate, it is now about time for Joyce to be recaptured by Franchard; this accordingly happens, and we get the standard interview, during which Franchard remarks, *"Your bungling efforts to thwart my plans have caused me no end of trouble...."* This of course, is a barefaced lie.

There follows a touching scene between Darla and Joyce; Darla slips her bra down to show Joyce her tattoo, incidentally, and we learn that it's in a "hollow beneath her left breast". Carries kleenexes there, no doubt.

Some lizard-men rescue Joyce as he is about to be done in; the party climbs up a tunnel to reach Earth again, (don't ask me how this works), and we find that Franchard, at any rate, has quit fooling away his time: he is setting fire to cities at a great rate and has entrenched himself with an army on (for reasons best known to God) a small island off the coast of Scotland.

Our heroes attack him here and are captured once more, just as Franchard is about to sacrifice Darla on a druidic altar; Darla, however, turns into the White Archdruid, kills Franchard, and saves the day.

In the process, it would seem, she has become dangerously radioactive, but this is a minor matter; all Joyce has to do is take her down the tunnel to the subterranean world and get her cured—which, as the story ends, he is preparing to do.

Try bicarbonate of soda.

●

THE ILLUSTRATED MAN, by Ray Bradbury. Doubleday, 1951, 252 pp., $2.75. Here we have two curious phenomena: a title-story absorbed and digested by a collection, and a field of literature enclosed by a writer.

"The Illustrated Man", originally published in *Esquire,* is one of Bradbury's best recent stories; when this volume was first projected, I suppose, it headed the list of contents. But trade-book buyers have a notorious reluctance to pay the price of a novel for a collection of short stories; therefore the "Illustrated Man" has been plucked out of his proper medium, the meat of him thrown away, and the scraps sliced very thin to make a monstrous eighteen-decker sandwich of the stories that remain.

Ray Bradbury began writing professionally at the flood-tide of the cerebral story in science-fiction—in 1940, when John Campbell, without a serious competitor, was revolutionizing the field with a new respect for facts, and a wholly-justified contempt for the overblown emotional values of the 30's. Bradbury, who had nothing but emotion to offer, couldn't sell Campbell.

Bradbury didn't care. He adapted his work just enough to meet the standards of lesser markets—he filled it with the second-hand furniture of comtemporary science-fiction and fantasy—and went on writing what he chose. He sold prodigiously to *Weird Tales, Planet Stories, Thrilling Wonder.* One day we awoke to discover that he had leapfrogged over John Campbell's head, outside our microcosm altogether: his work was beginning to appear in *Harper's;* in *Mademoiselle;* in the "O. Henry Prize Stories", on the radio; in *Esquire, Collier's, The Saturday Evening Post.*

Outside the huge, brightly-colored bubble he had blown around himself, "serious" critics reacted with rapture. Christopher Isherwood: *"...the sheer lift and power of a truly original imagination exhilarates... His is a very great and unusual talent."*

Inside of the bubble, we get at once a clearer and a more distorted view of Bradbury. Although he has a large following among science-fiction readers, there is at least an equally-large contingent made up of people who cannot stomach his work at all; they say that he has no respect for the medium; that he does not even trouble to make his scientific double-talk convincing; that—worst crime of all—he fears and distrusts science.

...All of which is true, and—for our present purposes, anyhow—irrelevant. The purists are right in saying that does not write science fiction, and never has.

To Bradbury, as to most people, radar and rocket ships and atomic power are big, frightening, meaningless names: a fact which, no doubt, has something to do with his popular success—but which does not touch the root of the matter. Bradbury's strength lies in the fact that he writes about the things that are really important to us... not the things we say we are interested in—science, marriage, sports, politics, crime—but the fundamental pre-rational fears and longings and desires: the rage at being born; the will to be loved; the longing to communicate, the hatred of parents and siblings; the fear of things that are not oneself....

PEOPLE who talk about Bradbury's imagination miss the point. His imagination is mediocre; he borrows nearly all his backgrounds and props, and distorts them badly; wherever he is required to invent anything—a planet, a Martian, a machine—the image is flat and unconvincing. Bradbury's Mars, where it is not as bare as a Chinese stage-setting, is a mass of inconsistency; his spaceships are a joke; his people have no faces. The vivid images in his work are not imagined; they are remembered.

Here is the shock of birth, in "No Particular Night or Morning":

"Have you talked about this to the psychiatrist?"

"So he could try to mortar up the gaps for me, fill in the gulfs with noise and warm water and words and hands touching me...?"

And the "death-wish", Bradbury's most recurrent theme:

"Kaleidoscope":

Lespere reminisced on the past, happy while he fell to his death.

...When I was living I was jealous of you, Lespere. ...Women frightened me and I went into space, always wanting them and jealous of you for having them, and money, and as much happiness as you could have in your own wild way. But now, falling here, with everything over, I'm not jealous of you any more, because it's over for you as it is for me,

"The Concrete Mixer":

Forty-five thousand people killed every year on this continent...made into jelly right in the can, as it were in the automobiles. Red blood jelly, with white marrow bones like sudden thoughts... The cars roll up in tight sardine rolls—all sauce, all silence.

...You look out your window and see two people lying atop each other in friendly fashion who, a moment ago, had never met before, dead . . . .

The gulf between Bradbury and the science-fiction writers is nowhere more clearly evident than the lavish similes and metaphors that are his trademarks:

The first concussion cut the rocket up the side with a giant can opener. The men were thrown into space like a dozen wriggling silverfish. ("Kaleidoscope".) *. . . And here were the lions now...so feverishly and startlingly real that you could feel the prickling fur on your hand, and your mouth was stuffed with the dusty upholstery smell of their heated pelts . . . .* ("The Veldt".)

The aim of science-fantasy, more and more as it becomes what it has always tried to be—adult fiction—is to expand the imagination, stretch it to include things never before seen or dreamed of. Bradbury's subject is childhood and the buried child-in-man; his aim is to narrow the focus, not to widen it; to shrink all the big frightening things to compass of the familiar: a spaceship to a tin can, a Fourth of July rocket, a brass kettle; a lion to a Teddy bear.

Learned opinion to the contrary, Bradbury is not the heir of Poe, Irving or Hawthorne; his voice is the voice of Christopher Morley and Robert Nathan and J. D. Salinger. Of the stories in this volume, "The Other Foot" and "The Highway" are pointed social commentary; "The Man" and "The Fire Baloons" are surprisingly-effective religious tratts, disguised as science-fiction; "The Long Rain", "The Fox and the Forest" and "Marionettes, Inc." are competent—but unoriginal—treatments of science-fiction themes; "The Rocket Man' and "The Rocket" are explorations of science-fiction from the under, or housewife's, side. The rest—"Kaleidoscope", "The Last Night of the World", "The Exiles", "No Particular Night Or Morning," "The Visitor", "The Concrete Mixer", "The City", "The Veldt," and Zero Hour"—are Bradbury the poet of 20th century neurosis, Bradbury the isolated spark of consciousness, awake and alone at midnight; Bradbury the grown-up child who still remembers, still believes.

★

a little knowledge

An Ironic Novelet

by Judith Merril

(Illustration by Milton Luros)

"Mental Sciences" pop up every now and then; but suppose someone came forth with a spiel and a miraculous device which actually did what he claimed it would do!

ONE HUNDRED dollars. That was two months' rent on the apartment, or the mailing-address paid up for a full year...two half-page ads for *Help Yourself*, or twenty bottles of reasonably good brandy. Or one ad, and five bottles, and some books and something for Irene...

Harry Barchester pushed back his chair determinedly, and crossed the room to his wife's desk.

"Here." He handed her the neatly-typed letter and, more reluctantly,

the scrawled check. "We'll have to send it back, of course; you know what to write."

Irene barely glanced at the check, but she read the letter through carefully. "I don't see why," she said. "Did you read this?" The clean, curved ivory-white tip of her fingernail pointed to the fourth line, and swept inclusively down the page to the end of the first paragraph:

...a small token of my appreciation for what the Cell has already done for me. I trust you will be able to utilize this gift, small as it is, for further research and development of this amazing science. I cannot tell you how grateful...

He had already read it—not once, but too often. He shook his head. "There isn't any more research to be done on this thing, baby," he said unhappily, and added with an unexpected twinge of honesty: "At least, not anything that can be done for a hundred bucks. Look, we're making out. We're not rolling in dough, yet—I know that—but we're eating at least. We're paying the rent. This month," he smiled, "we can even pay the printer. Why take a chance on something like this?"

"He says development, too," Irene insisted. "We could take an extra ad, or send out a new mailing, or... *anything*. Anything that would reach more people. That's development, isn't it?" she finished triumphantly.

For one wavering moment he was tempted; it made sense the way she said it.

"A *hundred* dollars, Harry. We don't get that dropped in our laps every day!"

He couldn't possibly explain. "I wish we could keep it, baby," he said. "You could have a new dress, for once...and we could get out and see a show or something." Lesson One, Elementary Applied Psychology; subtitle: Keep 'em on the run! "We could have ourselves a time. It's all right for me to sit around here like this all the time; I don't mind it. But you're entitled to..."

"That's not what I meant!" she stopped him. "You know I didn't mean that. I just don't see what's wrong with using it the way he said..."

From the dubious vantage-point of twenty years of added age, Harry Barchester looked down at his lovely wife, and made an urgent mental note of the stubborn set of her chin. Irene was beautiful, intelligent, and in love. Irene was young; she had years ahead of her in which to acquire the bitter lessons life had already offered him. But, right now, she was still inclined to be a trifle trusting about such unarguable realities as the underhanded methods of postal authorities, and the high cost of lawsuits. She still believed in all the things Harry had lost faith in...

"Look," she urged, "Why don't you wait till tomorrow? Just think it over..."

"I *am* thinking baby," he said firmly; "that's why we have to send it back. There just isn't any way to rush things, Irene. We've got a good thing here. All right, it's not shaking the world yet, but it takes time. And it's building; it's building all the time, you know that. Hell, I don't blame you for getting impatient. You're young and...there's no sense talking about the things I'd like to do for you. I can't, not yet. But give me a few years' time, that's all..."

THE ARGUMENT was as good as won; she was already reaching for a fresh letterhead. He drove the point home, hating himself for the facility with which the words came to his lips: "Remember, we worked this out beforehand—together. It's been working out that way. All you need now is patience. I know; I used to think I could get-rich-quick, too—but it just doesn't work, baby. You can't do it..."

"*He* did." She slapped the letter

down on the desk, sandwiched a slice of carbon paper between the fresh letterhead and a second-sheet, rolled the layers professionally into her typewriter.

HELP YOURSELF, INC.

The Institute For Psychological Science President: Harcourt Barchester, L.E., M.C.B., R.S. Secretary: Irene Kardin

The lettering was shiny black on the crisp white paper. Harry stared at it, watched it blur in movement as her fingers began rattling the keys of the typewriter. He touched a kiss lightly to the top of Secretary Kardin's head, and was rewarded by a brief upturned smile.

"Just the same, she said over the clatter, "He did it."

"*If* he did," Harry assured her, "that letter means more to us than any hundred dollars. He started back to his own desk, and turned thoughtfully to add: "Don't forget to ask for a picture, baby—and permission to quote."

"Right."

Back at his own desk, Harry sat for minutes without making any move toward the small pile of mail that still waited for his attention. Then, abruptly, he took a large sheet of layout paper from a drawer, and ruled a precise rectangle in the top center. Over the empty space he sketched in bold capitals: *HE DID IT!*

Below the space reserved for the photograph, he lettered rapidly: *He did it for himself. Can you do it too?* Then a highly-satisfactory, remembered passage from the letter; and underneath, the standard patter.

> Do you want to find a glowing new personality? Do you want to gain influence over your friends and surroundings? Would you like to be better at your job? "*Do* you want to make the most of yourself?" he demanded, in italics, at the bottom. "And have you got what it takes to do the job *alone?* If you can answer 'Yes!' to all these questions, then you *must* read the exciting new book by Harcourt Barchester, L.E., M.C.B., R.S.,
>
> Self-Synthesis, a *Real* Mental Science.

No misleading statements; no exaggerated claims. Do it all in questions. It was tricky, but by now routine; Harry could have done it in his sleep. He surveyed the finished draft with satisfaction. There'd never been a word in any ad of his that they could question; there was nothing out of line in the book or the blueprints, either. Perfectly innocuous, all of it. All they had to do was keep on selling the stuff, straight. No need to stick your neck out for a lousy hundred bucks...

WHEN THE second letter from James Serkin came, Harry sat for a long time reading it over, studying the glossy photograph, and examining the check—this time for $250.00. In the end, he put the whole collection into his pocket without mentioning it to Irene. Later, when she went out to the postoffice, he sat down at the typewriter himself, and composed a careful answer to go back with the check. Then he dug out the rough copy of the ad he had written two weeks earlier, and made a fresh neat layout, typing the body of the copy clearly below the picture.

Waiting for Irene to get back, he studied the photograph curiously. It was an unexpectedly appealing portrait. Nothing really unusual about the face—even-featured, pleasant, youthful, strongly masculine. But none of that accounted for the compellingly *likeable* quality of the picture. The man's expression was suffused with a quiet unquenchable confidence that somehow did not offend, but made you look back, and look again.

Harry looked once more; it was

possible, after all, that Serkin was on the level. There was no reason, after all, why Self-Synthesis shouldn't work. If the subject had some ability to start with; if he was—like this man—personable, attractive; if nothing but lack of confidence was holding him back... Self-Synthesis, basically, was founded on good solid psychology. The very achievement of constructing a Sure-Self Cell, of building from a blueprint, could give such a man all the assurance he needed. For that matter, just reading the book might do it. The more he looked at that photograph, the more convinced Harry was that in this case, at least, the system had worked. *Faith-healing!* he told himself contemptuously, and then thought the same thing again, more reflectively. Maybe...

For the last time, he decided it was really necessary to return the check, and told himself—as he had told Irene the first time—that the check itself didn't matter. If the man's photograph had half the effect on magazine readers that it had on him, Harry wouldn't be able to fill the orders it brought in. Which left him with just one problem...how to avoid showing Irene the letter that came with the photograph. He knew well enough that, this time, he would be entirely unable to convince her of the necessity for refusing the money; and he was sorely tempted himself, he was afraid that—in an open argument—she might convince him.

2

HE CAME in from outside and brought the sun and air in with her. After a year and more, it still hit Harry with fresh surprise that she was so good to look at. Now she threw off her heavy black coat, and from inside the shapeless winterwear there emerged—a revelation just for him—the perfect slender curves of her body, draped today in rosy wool. Soft, warm springy fabric, a dress on a hanger in the closet, but now an intimate integral part of Irene.

"It's wonderful out," she said, a little breathless still. "You ought to get out for a while." The wind had brightened the color in her face, almost to match the shade of her dress; and it had tossed the fringes of her hair into a thousand individual tendril-curls. She pulled a small black cap off her head, further disarranging her hair, and then, conscious of his eyes following her, made a small face and said, "I *know,* I'm a wreck."

"On you it looks good." She came over to kiss him, rumpled his scanty hair with a cold hand, and went out to the hall mirror to comb her own. "I'm on my way out as a matter of fact," he called after her. "Just waiting for you; I wanted to show you something." He dropped the ad-layout on her desk as she turned back into the room. "Pretty windy out?" he asked.

"Hats all over the place," she laughed. "I counted seventeen of them on Fifty-fourth Street alone. And I almost took off, crossing Columbus Circle. The wind got caught in my coat, and I had to grab a lamp-post to keep my feet on the ground..." She trailed off, and Harry glanced in to see that she was picking up the ad. He turned back again to the hall-mirror, and as quickly away from it, refusing the contrast between the balding middle-age he found there, and the glowing girl in the other room. Just a little stiffly, he retrieved her coat from the chair where she'd dropped it, and put it neatly in place in the closet.

"Harry! This is *wonderful!"* She rattled the stiff paper with pleasure, and read it again. "It's the best one yet. It's really *good."*

"You just think that because you wrote it," he teased her.

"*I* wrote...? Oh, I never even realized!" She looked up into his amused eyes, and protested happily: "Honestly, I didn't. I forgot all about that. Anyhow, that's only part of it. It's the letter and everything...when did the picture come? Today?"

"Hm-hmm—want to see the letter? It wasn't as good as the first one, but he sure does like us."

"Where is it? Wait a minute, I'll get an envelope for this."

Harry went back to his desk, and started fumbling through the papers spread over the top, still smiling with an inner amusement that had little relation to Irene's pleasure at seeing her own words headline the new ad. He continued the inept hunt through his scattered papers all the time that she found an envelope, started to insert the layout, and pulled it out again—and once more—for a last look. Then he kept it up, muttering furiously in his determination to find the letter, until she herself stopped him.

"It can *wait*," she laughed fondly. "The printer won't. They close at five, remember?" She almost pushed him out of the door.

By the time he was done at the printer's, and had mailed his letter, the last sun was gone, and the day had turned grey: the dull grey of early March, when winter is over and spring has not yet begun. Momentarily, the wind failed, and all around him the city-smells of smoke and soot and gas reasserted themselves. It fitted his mood: in his mouth was the flat flavor of one cigarette too many; and farther back inside him was the old bitter taste of stale laughter.

IT WAS almost too easy, handling Irene. All he had to do was to treat her like any other human being. What worked on one would work on all, no matter how smart they were or how beautiful; no matter what age or sex, or where they came from or what they did—or how much you loved them. He had learned that, just a little too late. Now he knew it, thoroughly, and hated the knowledge. There ought to be some way to live honestly with Irene, to be—genuine—all the time. Perhaps there was... but not in this life.

Life was a game, at first; then he found out it was only a joke after all. Later, he learned that the joke was on him, and life became a farce. A farce that had somehow acquired—as leading lady—a lovely woman who should, by every rule of the game, have been cast as the heroine of somebody else's melodrama.

Irene...if there had been an Irene twenty years earlier...

If there had been one, he wouldn't have known it, wouldn't have cared. He'd have noticed, perhaps, the golden glints in her hair, and the warm curve of her smile; he would have watched, certainly, the slow swing of her thigh from hip to knee when she walked. He would have wanted her, might have had her. But he'd never have known, really, that she was there. She was too healthy; too solid and simple; too easy to comprehend.

That was when life was a game; they called it "Student of Psychology". Those were years of learning and discovery. He was an adventurer into the dim, untracked interior of the human mind and soul. One by one, he sought, found, and experienced... Each new piece of knowledge was not only a triumph of its own, but was a vital clue as well, luring him to more exciting, conquests.

Then, abruptly, the game was won. He picked up the last prepared piece of knowledge, and collected the prefabricated degrees whose letters were supposed to spell *victory*. That was when, in his own growing maturity, he was first aware of the poverty of the prize he'd won...

Still, there were joyous years that followed: years of creative thought and

continual effort; of hard work and poverty; strenuous enjoyment, and rich honest laughter. He went beyond, the boundaries of the game; charted new courses for his thinking; explored far and away beyond, a dozen devious routes into other peoples' thoughts.

Until he found out that he knew more than others wanted him to know; and more than they were willing to learn themselves. Teachers, mentors, fellow-students who had admired his brilliance, worshipped his quick grasp of knowledge, had only derision for his new, original work. Derision—and then hatred, too, for his stubborn insistence...

He faced them, and fought them—with the full exuberant strength of his young manhood—hampered only by the hangover of respect for his opponents that still remained from the student days. He fought fairly, expecting honesty to come forward and meet his own. After a while, he was too tired to fight any more...

HE MET Irene at a poker-game, almost fifteen years later. That was after he got tired of teaching in second-rate schools, and had faced the fact that he didn't have the moral toughness for the big con—after fortune-telling and mind-reading had both palled on him; after he decided he didn't like the big city any more, and gave up his job as a professional chess-player in an amusement arcade.

He took up weekending, and made out moderately well as a peripatetic houseguest and first-class poker-player. He never cheated; he didn't have to. You stay in any game long enough, and after awhile the rest of them give themselves away with their chin-scratchings, and cigarette-tappings, and compulsive jokes. He made money, and he gave full value in entertaining conversation.

He won Irene—won her away from younger, handsomer, and wealthier men, by exercising every psychological skill at his command. He watched her, during the poker-game and after it, with a knowledgeable eye and a sure instinct.

But even while he used his mental lures to ensnare her, even as he exulted in the impossible victory he was winning, he began to despise himself—for the first time consciously—as a charlatan, a fraud. He had nothing to offer but deceptions; and Irene was the one living person he did not want to deceive.

He won her interest; her respect; and at last her love by dazzling her with his display of understanding and perception; by evidencing the perfect tender response to her every mood and attitude. He dug up all the half-forgotten great truths of his earlier, happier years, and arrayed them all for her amusement. One after another, he showed her the despised creations of his youth—and among them the Sure-Self Cell.

THE CELL, as nearly as he could recall, was the product of a happy evening during the student years. He was rooming, at the time, with a promising young electrical engineer—a man as brilliant as himself in those days, and now as obscure. Together, they had worked out the blueprint for a super-self-help-gadget, killing two bottles in the process.

Harry found the blueprint when he was leafing through old files and took it to Irene, for laughs. He explained the whole thing to her with deadpan sobriety, showed her the meticulous plans made so it would be possible for an absolutely unskilled individual to build the sounding-board cabinet and install the complex, automatic electronic equipment. He expounded learnedly the theory of Self-Synthesis—patched up out of a dozen reasonably-harmless psychological devices, with a few of his own pet notions out of the old days thrown in for good measure.

He tapped at the blueprint with a nervous pencil, tracing the structure of

each device. The flashing lamp that induced light auto-hypnosis. The recorder that played back questions previously set by the user, as soon as the relaxed trance position caused a limp finger to fall on a sensitive push-button. The ingenious mechanism that switched the machine from play-back to recording as soon as the patient's voice hit the sounding board. The lie-detector circuit that cut off the recorder again, shortly after the patient's pulse-beat indicated a peak of excitement. The electric massage that stimulated circulation and consciousness simultaneously, inducing a rare sense of well-being as the user came out of trance and heard his confessions played back to him.

All these, and half a dozen more equally-ingenious devices were built into the Cell—some of them the products of such esoteric thinking that Harry himself could no longer remember exactly how they worked, or why.

He gave it to her dead-pan, anticipating her amusement—and she was not amused. At first, he was aware only of disappointment in her for failing to understand that it was all a tremendous hoax; then he caught some of her enthusiam. And before he went home that evening, Harry had realized that here was a last opportunity to salvage something for himself. With the Cell he could free himself from the endless rounds of weekends, and from dingy boarding house rooms alike. He could make money—and he could have Irene...

It took him exactly one month of inspired labor to produce the book, *Self-Synthesis,* that would go with the Cell. Another month of ardent, all-night talks with Irene produced a plan of operation—and a wedding-date as well. Through that whole hectic time, his only real problem was to prevent her from building a Cell herself. He tried to convince her that it simply wasn't necessary; she was already so well-balanced, so well-integrated, that she couldn't benefit by it.

When she argued that she wanted to do it experimentally, as he had, (at which he had the grace to avert his eyes) there was nothing more he could say. But it took all his skill just to postpone it until, in the rush of events, it was no longer discussed.

Now, for more than a year, he had devoted himself to the increasingly-complicated business of keeping her faith alive. And day by day, as the deception grew harder and more repulsive to him, Harry needed Irene more.

3

THE DAY the third letter came, he was out, fulfilling one of his rare lecture-engagements. What he would have done had he opened it himself he never knew. As it was, Irene handed him the letter when he walked in, and stood waiting silently while he read it.

Dear Mr. Barchester:

A few months back, I should greatly have admired what would then have appeared to me to be your "high-minded principles." Since achieving synthesis in the Sure-Self Cell, however, I find it very difficult to comprehend the motivation that compels you to refuse my gifts. Your book is so eloquent on the subject of Relaxed Acceptance, and your axioms on the Least Resistance Principle are so appropriate and useful, that I confess your attitude confuses me.

However, since I can only conclude that your action is motivated by special considerations outside my knowledge, I should like to

suggest the following arrangement:

Will you ship me fifty copies of your book, and forty copies of the Sure-Self Cell blueprints—along with a letter authorizing me, as your agent, to resell these items, and to publicize and advertise them? A check for the full retail price, $500, is enclosed with this letter.

Let me make clear that I have no desire to profit on the resale of these items. I am interested only in bringing the benefits of your scientific discoveries to as many others as possible. My own recent successes, since achieving synthesis in the Cell, have placed at my command sufficient resources to enable me to expend the necessary time and money for this purpose.

I hope this arrangement will overcome whatever objections you may have had to my previous offers.

Very truly yours,
James Serkin.

"Well?" she asked. "What are you going to do?"

There was an edge to her voice, and that was all he really needed. He wished he had more time to figure it, but...five hundred dollars. And Irene's impatient eyes.

"I'm going to ship him the stuff, baby." She smiled at him, and they both relaxed. "This time it's all right," he told them both; "this time it's a business deal."

HE GOT the books and blueprints off the next day, with a letter making James Serkin his agent and distributor. The five hundred he allocated carefully: a years' rental on the mail-drop, *and* two months on the apartment; two full-page ads they couldn't otherwise afford; a few small bills. The rest—roughly a hundred and fifty—he gave Irene to do with as she liked. Irrationally, almost superstitiously, he worried less about taking the money because he used none of it for personal pleasures... not for books *or* brandy.

It meant a lot to Irene. She got in the habit of breaking away from her desk for at least an hour or two every day, and came back each time with long happy stories of her adventures in the stores and through the streets of New York. Harry would have thought she could spend ten times the money she had in the number of hours she spent shopping, but she seldom actually bought anything. She seemed to enjoy having the money so much that she was reluctant to spend it; most of the time, she just went around looking at things.

The whole thing was good for Harry too. It took off some financial pressure, of course, and seeing Irene so happy would have been enough for him all by itself. But there was a bonus in self-confidence and reassurance that probably meant more than anything else.

After reading Serkin's letters over and over again, twisting every possible shade of meaning out of them, and returning repeatedly to a study of that fascinating photograph, Harry found it virtually impossible to believe that the man could be a postal agent or investigator of any sort. And, if you once admitted that the man was honest, it could mean only one thing: he had really, conclusively benefited through the use of the Sure-Self Cell. With all its fancy trimmings, *Help Yourself* could do some good, and Serkin was the proof.

Harry got to work with fresh interest on a new revised edition of *Self-Synthesis,* stressing every little angle that would help to build up self-confidence in the reader. And, with the same thought in mind, he put a new emphasis into the wording of the two extra ads:

"Self-expression instead of confession; constructive synthesis instead of analysis... Confidence is the key to success; understanding is the only way to mental relaxation..."

Actually, though neither of them

put as much time into the routine work of the business as they had formerly done, they both seemed to accomplish a lot more. *Confidence* and *relaxation*...they were key words after all.

For the first time since the day he showed Irene the blueprint of the Cell. Harry admitted to himself how much the tensions and anxieties of his chosen way of life were impairing his abilities. And for the first time, too, he began to hope: perhaps, some way, the snowballing deceptions could be brought to a halt. All he had to do was find what element of the system...

The fourth letter from James Serkin did not enclose a check. Instead, it was a bulky envelope filled with glossy-paper proofs and layouts for an advertising-campaign whose expense Harry could not even estimate. There were plans for magazine ads, and other plans for a giant-sized mailing. And the obvious costliness of the program was equalled only by its boldness.

With all his suspicions fully reawakened, Harry took a blue pencil to the ad copy, and sent it back posthaste—along with a lengthy and detailed letter about the sort of claims he felt could be made for the book and for the Cell. He expected another squabble with Irene when he showed her the deletions and changes in the copy, but, surprisingly, she made no demur. He waited, still worried, till he got Serkin's reply, and then he had to admit to himself once again the power of a confident mind. The telegram from *Help Yourself's* midwestern agent said only, meekly, *Letter received and contents noted. Will mail you revised proofs.*

Still another letter, the following day, made no reference to the ad campaign; this was completely taken up with Serkin's scheme for Harry to embark on a lecture career. Only once did it refer, very delicately, to the financial advantages. For the rest, the new agent presented most convincingly a number of arguments in favor of the kind of publicity that might accrue to *Help Yourself, Inc.* as the result of such a tour. Dr. Barchester, he insisted with the happy faith of a firm disciple, could not help being a great success on the platform. In any case, Serkin concluded, he had already taken the liberty of getting in touch with a lecture-agent, who would shortly contact Barchester himself.

HARRY read the letter, laughed, and filed it away. To Irene, who couldn't understand his amused indifference, he explained that their new convert had apparently confused cause with effect; it was publicity that made lecture-engagements possible, not the other way around. He did not add that years of speechifying before self-help groups, and adult Study-clubs, had made him all too well aware of his own limitations as a lecturer.

He was still hesitant, but less inclined to laugh, when the agent called and waxed persuasive. Harry stalled and tried to decline; but in the end, under the agent's baffling insistence, he agreed to a trial-run of three local engagements.

After the first one, he had to admit that he had once again underestimated himself. Speaking to a roomful of avidly-interested, middle-aged ladies turned out to be far more pleasant than trying to din the principles of psychology into a class full of disinterested adolescents—and certainly far more successful than expounding esoteric points in a rented clubroom to a handful of hopeless men. Possibly, too, it was just the difference in self-confidence cropping up again. Irene's faith in him; Serkin's firm belief; and the backing of the lecture bureau, may all have affected the outcome of the speech.

Whatever the cause, he was no longer surprised when the local engagements were followed swiftly by an offer of a really choice series of lectures—at a good price—for a group of women's clubs in small towns a few hundred miles away.

Still, he hesitated; he couldn't leave the office empty, and he didn't want to leave Irene behind. They had never been separated since their marriage.

He spoke to her about it, and she was almost angry at him. "For heavens' sake, Harry, you can't pass this up," she said indignantly. "It's only four days. I'm a big girl now, remember? I can get along all right."

"Of course you can," he said automatically, but with little conviction. "It's just that I...well, I hate to leave you, that's all. I don't know if *I* can get along."

"Well, you'll just have to!" She smiled, and made her special loving little face at him. "Go ahead and call the man back... or do you want to have your secretary do it for you?"

"Baby, are you *sure* you'll be OK?" he asked again at the last minute, still ready to put down his bag, take off his coat, and call the whole thing off.

"Yes, I'm sure," she said impatiently. "Now go on, you big oaf—get out of here before you miss your train!' She walked downstairs with him, and waved goodbye as the cab rolled off.

Inside it, Harry suppressed a sudden and unreasonabe wave of wild suspicion. Why was she so willing to let him go? Then he reminded himself firmly that she was only looking out for his interests. And it was just for four days, after all.

The trip was a sensational success. With new fervor, Harry discussed the solid old principles of Confidence through Understanding, and Success through Confidence. "Know yourself, and you can kid the whole world," was his private formulation; he used somewhat subtler language for the ladies.

Toward the end of the speech, always, he would make a few discreet references to the miraculous properties of the Sure-Self Cell...nothing definite, nothing too specific. Then he would return briefly to the major theme, and finish with a thunderous injunction right out of the brochure: *Expression, not confession! Synthesis, not analysis!*

The slogan hit straight at the best potential customers, those who had already had their dabblings with sympathetic clergymen, and soft-voiced psychiatrists; and who were ready, now, for something new. After each meeting there were a few who gathered about the platform, prying for further information about the Cell. Harry discovered, with no great surprise, that women who had spent a lifetime prodding their husbands into making enough money, so that they never had to do anything for themselves, were fascinated at the prospect of curing their mental ills by *building* from a *blueprint.*

He came home with a sheaf of orders for books and blueprints; several tentative engagements for repeat lectures; and the conviction that he'd been placing his ads in the wrong magazines. Apparently the ladies were more anxious to influence their friends and families than the men were to succeed in the larger world. He'd have to give some thought to a new kind of ad.

4

IRENE WASN'T in the apartment, but a note on his desk said she'd be back by two o'clock. There was more than an hour to wait; he put in some time compiling an impressive list, for her benefit, of the orders he had taken en route. Then he got to work on a rough draft of an ad for the women's magazines.

He was too restless to work; he couldn't concentrate.

He tried to estimate the possible extent of future orders stemming from the lecture tour, and jotted some figures down on paper—to see if there was any chance that the eager ladies

themselves would contribute enough cash to the kitty to pay for an ad in a higher-priced medium.

It was two o'clock then, and she still wasn't back. Harry got up and wandered around the room, always winding up somehow at Irene's desk. He sharpened some pencils, and picked up the plastic paperweight he'd given her some months ago; studied for the thousandth time the intricate flower carved inside, and put it down again; wandered off and back; and noticed at last, on the corner of the desk, a familiar large envelope with Serkin's return address.

It had already been opened. Harry pulled out a sheaf of folded glossy papers—the revised ad proofs. He smoothed them out on the desktop for examination, meanwhile mentally composing a letter to his over-earnest disciple on the subject of the untapped women's market. If Serkin was determined to spend fantastic sums of money on Help Yourself, Harry could now provide him with something worth spending it on.

He spread out the unfolded sheets and stared at them in total disbelief.

They were revised, yes—but certainly not to conform to his own suggestions. If anything, the changes made were all in the opposite direction. Harry felt beads of sweat forming on his forehead as he read the outrageous list of things Serkin had promised the Cell would do.

These things had to be stopped before they appeared in print; they simply *had* to be stopped.

He was at his own desk, scribbling out an emphatic telegram to Serkin, when he heard Irene's key in the door. He jumped up, the proofs in his hand, and it occurred to him for the first time that she might already have taken care of the matter. Then, disturbingly, he realized she was not alone. From the entry hall he heard two voices: hers and another, deep, modious, and masculine.

Harry dropped the proofs back on his desk, and started for the door in irrational panic. He shouldn't have left her alone; he knew he shouldn't.

SHE ENTERED the room just as he approached the hall, and they nearly collided. Not a very effective greeting; he backed off, and ignoring her companion, let his eyes feast on Irene herself. He had missed her, these four days, had been building up her image in his own mind. But he was certain, as he looked at her, that she had never before been so beautiful as she was now.

Then she spoke, and he was stunned by the power her voice had over him. "Darling!" It was a greeting and caress all at once. "You didn't let me know when you'd be coming in," she accused. "You found my note, didn't you? We rushed back...oh! This is Mr. Serkin, Harry. He came in town yesterday...about those ads, you know."

"Mr. Serkin?" Harry mumbled, completely unable to tear his eyes from his wife's shining face, even as he remembered *those* ads.

"'How do you do, Dr. Barchester? It's a pleasure to meet you. A hand reached past Irene and gripped his own; his attention was torn from the woman's face to the man's. He looked over Irene's shoulder, remembering the compelling charm of Serkin's photograph, and trying for a clearer view of the man himself. Instead, in the mirror behind both of them, he saw

...himself: middle-aged, a little soft, and irrevocably balding.

Ardently, Harry tried to dislike James Serkin. The closest he could come was rapid recognition of an increased liking for the man when his hand was released, and the pleasant deep voice offered a quick goodbye.

"I'll stop in again, Mrs. Barchester," Serkin said; "I imagine you and your husband would like to be alone for a while."

Then he was gone, and Harry trailed Irene back into the living-room-and-office combination; he watched her put down her bag and take off her hat, and finally identified for himself the change in her. She was all... *aglow.*

"Harry, darling..."

She still had her back to him. "I've got to tell you something right away," she said.

This was it, then. Irene and Serkin... that would account for the... glow. Harry's very genuine despair was unaccountably mixed with an odd feeling of relief.

"I know," he said, trying to stop her, to keep her from saying it out loud, in so many words.

"You *do?*" She turned rapidly. "Oh, I shouldn't have doubted you, *ever*, Harry!" Facing him now, her face broke into a smile that could only be under-rated by the word "glorious". "But why didn't you want me to try it? Why didn't you *make* me do it?"

Her face turned up appealingly to his. Only the caution of all his bitter years' experience saved Harry then.

"*Make* you do it?" he repeated warily. "How could I *make* you? It's not exactly the sort of thing a man forces on his wife..."

SHE AGREED happily. "That's what Jim said at first; he kept telling me you were just waiting for me to go ahead on my own. But darling...listen, Harry, even though you know, I want to say it once, to tell you what a fool I was—before." She smiled at him, and Harry felt quite certain he didn't care what sort of fool she'd been, or what she'd done. All he wanted was to keep her.

"I...oh, it's hard to say, Harry, even now. I thought you were a... charlatan. I didn't think you believed in it yourself; that's why I never told you when I started to build the Cell. All that time I was supposed to be shopping...but of course you knew about it; I keep forgetting that. I guess you knew about the letters from Jim, too?"

"The letters?" Harry tried to find the right, the noncomittal words. but they wouldn't come. "No," he admitted, "I didn't."

He found it impossible to be anything less than completely honest with her, now. The fascination she had always exercised over him had turned into a sort of compulsive power.

"When did that start?" he asked.

"About a week after we shipped him the stuff. You were out when it came, and I opened it. He seemed so sure of himself, and he... really believed in the Cell. That was when I was wondering about you, whether you really believed it yourself," she explained. "So I wrote to him, and never told you about it...and then we just kept on writing. That was when I started building the Cell."

"You..." he tried to find the right, the noncomittal words, but they wouldn't come. "How did you do it?" he asked bluntly.

"What?"

"Build the Cell; how did you manage it?"

"Why, darling, you *know*...oh, anyone can do it. Jim says those blueprints are worth ten times what you charge; he says he doesn't see how you ever made it all so simple."

"It's all scientific," he answered automatically. "Had them designed by a damn good engineer."

Then he couldn't restrain himself. "You mean," he demanded, "it works? You built the whole dingus and made it work?"

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Fact Article On Psuedo-Scientific Fringes

by L. Sprague de Camp

The Great Charlatans

THE combination of magic with salesmanship begets that formidable hybrid, charlatanry: an ancient and windy trade that has given some birth to some of the most colorful rascals of history.

The term "charlatan" comes from the Italian verb *ciarlare*, meaning *"to babble or chatter with intent to confuse or deceive"*, which gives a good idea of the main characteristic of charlatans. The definition is not however, altogether fair, because the greatest charlatans without any doubt believed in their own lies—at least some of the time—and their very faith in themselves helped them to hoodwink others.

The great charlatans are pretty much alike: garrulous, touchy, always on the move, affecting singular clothes and knowing airs, snarling at the "blindness, stupidity, and materialism" of their non-admirers, denouncing "the hide-bound orthodoxy of the so-called scientists", and railing against "secret enemies" who are out to do them in. They are stimulated by the presence of strangers to a frenzy of boasting, arguing, flattering, and generally trying to influence people, often with the help of a rather overpowering personal charm.

They brag of their "secret science", which is usually described as the greatest advance in human progress since the invention of the flint hatchet. And, in fact, they have such a science—only it isn't new: the science of human weakness. They well understand the art of exploiting the human longing for breaks that give health, wealth, wisdom, love, and other desiderata without the usual uncertain and tedious preliminaries. They find their natural prey among that uncritical, semi-literate class who are impressed by long words without knowing what these words mean, and also among those who like to take a chance.

The great charlatans of modern times had a great prototype in the Classical world: Alexander of Abonouteichos, a tall, handsome, bearded character who eked out his natural hair with switches, and who lived in what is now Turkey in the second century A. D. In his youth, Alexander served as apprentice to a

wizard of Tyana, who had formerly been associated with the great Pythagorean magician, Apollonois.

After the death of his master, Alexander conceived a wonderful plan. First he obtained a large tame snake from Macedonia. Then he caused to be buried, at Apollo's temple in Chalkedon, brazen tablets inscribed with the prophecy that Asklepios, god of medicine, would take up residence in Alexander's home town of Abonouteichos. He next saw to it the tablets were found and the prophecy noised about. The pious Abonouteichans raised the money to build a temple for the god to dwell in. Alexander then returned to his home in a tunic of purple and white, claiming descent from the demigod Perseus, and chewing soapwort on appropriate occasions in order to foam at the mouth, as with epilepsy—a sign of divine influence.

When the time was ripe, Alexander buried a goose-egg containing a baby snake. Next day, he appeared in the market-place in a spangled loin-cloth, announced the god's arrival, led the folk to the temple site, dug up his egg, and produced the tiny serpent.

A few days later he admitted a crowd to his house, where they found him reclining, the large, tame snake—imported from Macedonia—wound about him. Alexander artfully concealed the big snake's head, showing his audience instead a head of linen with a human face and a forked tongue worked by a horsehair. After assuring them that the snake's divinity was demonstrated by its miraculous growth he went into a trance and delivered the oracle: *"Glykon my name, man's light, son's son to Zeus!"* Thus were the awestruck people convinced that Glykon, the snake, was really Asklepios, grandson of Zeus.

When the temple was finished, Alexander moved in with his snake, proclaiming that the god would answer sealed questions at two obols each. Like modern mediums, he had mastered several methods of opening letters and then resealing them so that they did not look as though they'd been tampered with; the simplest method was to pry off the seal with a heated needle, and then stick it back into place. He offered advice about everything, using ambiguous answers in doubtful cases, or gibberish like, *"Sabardalachu malach Attis was not he."*

For sickness Alexander generally recommended as a cure-all *kytamides*, his private preparation of goat's fat. For rich clients, Glykon delivered oracles in person, with the help of a confederate who spoke into the false snake's head through a tube made of cranes' windpipes. To show his omniscience, Alexander publicized detailed answers to suggestions he'd never received.

Alexander urged people to stone atheists, Christians, and Epicureans—the last because they believed in the atomic theory of Demokritos. Alexander deemed this belief materialistic. One rash Epicurean accused him of having caused the death of some slaves, by falsely accusing them of murdering their master's son. Actually the youth—who was attending college at Alexandria—had gone off on a trip to India, whence in due course he safely returned. But when the slaves went home to Galatia and reported their master's disappearance, they were thrown to the lions on Alexander's advice.

Alexander, no man to take such an accusation lying down, instantly ordered his audience to stone the accuser for his impiety, so that the Epicurean barely escaped with his life.

Alexander also blackmailed people who submitted compromising questions. When he acted in the mystery plays he hitched up his skirt to show his golden thigh (really gilded leather) which was held to be a mark of divinity. Unlike most charlatans, whose careers go up like a skyrocket and down like a burnt stick, Alexander—living to be more than seventy—died—rich and successful. He became so famous that a prominent Roman politi-

cian fought and won the hand of his daughter, whose mother, Alexander let it be known, had been the moon goddess.

The Syrian author Loukianos of Samosata, "Lucian the Scoffer", exposed Alexander again and again. Once, when he sent Alexander a letter asking about the birthplace of Homer, he primed the charlatan's servant to hint that the question related to lung-trouble. The wizard promptly fell into the trap and prescribed his goat's-fat liniment. While these exposures did Alexander no harm, they almost finished off his skeptical biographer; Alexander bribed the crew of a ship on which Loukianos was sailing to throw their passenger into the Black Sea. Happily they were dissuaded from this crime by the tearful entreaties of their captain, and Loukianos lived to write Alexander's lurid success-story.

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IN OUR own civilization, the golden age of charlatanry took place in the eighteenth century, when people had begun to talk of the wonders of science but didn't know enough about the scientific method to distinguish science from pseudo-science, quackery, and occultism (as many still don't).

In this age of glittering "courtier charlatans" who preyed upon European royalty and nobility, there flourished the self-styled Comte de Saint Germain, who fascinated the rich by hinting that he had lived for centuries by occult means, and thus persuaded them to invest in schemes for making *ersatz* materials like imitation leather. In England, the great Scottish quack James Graham operated a splendid sucker-fishery, including a "magnetic bed" on which, for a handsome fee, childless couples could beget beautiful children. And Elisha Perkins, in the American Colonies, made a fortune from his "metallic tractors"—little pencil-shaped brass and iron rods wherewith he pretended to draw out diseases.

Brightly as these iridescent creatures glittered, they were outshone by the kind of all charlatans, Giuseppe Balsamo alias Count Alessandro di Cagliostro.* (Prounounced "*bahl*-sah-mo", "kahl- *yaw*-sro".) Balsamo, born to a shopkeeper of Palmero, Sicily, in 1743, grew up a stout young helion with a face like a shaven Pekingese. When his father died he was admitted to the Benfratelli monastery as an apothecary's apprentice. The Brothers commissioned him to read tales of martyrs aloud to them during their meals, but when he began to substitute the names of the light ladies of Palmero for those of the saints, they beat and expelled him. However, he had learned the rudiments of chemistry, meanwhile, which served him well in his career as an alchemist.

"Beppo" Balsamo next tried his hand at painting and pandering. After forging theater-tickets, love-letters and wills he took up magic. He got sixty ounces of gold from the gullible goldsmith, Marano, on promise of treasure which, the spirits had told him, lay in a seaside cave. When the goldsmith went to the cave to claim his treasure, he was set upon by Balsamo's fellow-gangsters in demon costumes and burnt cork, and chased away in the last extremity of terror. In time, Marano learned how he had been hornswoggled, but while he was sharpening up the family stiletto, Balsamo fled.

He reappeared in the late 1760's in Italy, circulating by means of forged letters of introduction, running a gambling-house in Naples, and selling quack medicines. He married Lorenza Feliciani, the pretty but not over-intelligent daughter of a Roman artisan. The young couple took in a pair of fellow Sicilian adventurers as boarders, of whom one presently stole their money and clothes, and the other informed the police on them, so that they had to leave town.

In 1771 they arrived in England, were they lived by such expedients as playing the badger-game upon a re-

spectable Quaker. When that vein was worked out they returned to Palermo as the Marchese and Marchesa Pellagrini. However, Beppo's old victim, Marano, recognized him and had him jailed for his previous swindle. Fortunately for Balsamo, he had made friends with a local nobleman, who invaded the court with his gang, beat Marano's lawyer, and frightened the judge into dismissing the case. Thereupon the Balsamos disappeared again.

In 1776 a prosperous-looking foreign pair appeared in London. The man, stout, swarthy, popeyed, and pug-nosed, with fine white teeth, identified himself as Count Alessandro di Cagliostro, and his wife as the Lady Serafina. Despite the denials of some whitewashing biographers, there is little doubt that Cagliostro and Balsamo were one and the same.

Balsamo-Cagliostro took an apartment in Whitcombe Street, flashed money and jewels, and called himself an alchemist and a Rosicrucian. He collected a circle of prospects whom he hoped to swindle. Two of these, however, were swindlers themselves, who operated under the name of "Lord and Lady Scott"; they entertained similar intentions towards their mysterious host, because they believed his story that he possessed an old Kabbalistic manuscript which told how to predict winning lottery numbers. When flattery and valuable gifts failed to enable them to steal the non-existent Manuscript, they had Cagliostro put in jail on charges of witchcraft and embezzlement. There he languished in durance until his friend O'Reilly rescued him, considerably poorer.

THIS O'REILLY was a Mason, and Cagliostro was initiated into his Esperance Lodge, in 1777. At once Cagliostro saw the possibilities of a pseudo-Masonic fraternity of his own, to be called an Egyptian Lodge, with himself as Grand Copt. He went to the Continent to promote the scheme, which proved a howling success. Initiations included awesome all-night vigils before an altar of bones; the club took as its motto *"Oser, vouloir, se taire"*—"To dare, to will, to keep silent." Best of all, the dues furnished the founder with his first sizeable regular income.

After successes at the Hague and Leipzig, he traveled about, planting lodges all the way to St. Petersburg; he left Russia hastily when the Prussian ambassador protested against his unauthorized use of a Prussian colonel's uniform. In Warsaw, he sponged upon the alchemical enthusiast, Prince Poniatowski, until forced to keep his promise to demonstrate the transmutation of metals. The demonstration occurred in the royal palace in the presence of the King of Poland. Unhappily, the wizard's assistant—a young girl whom he'd picked up in his travels—betrayed the method to a skeptical courtier. This was to drop a piece of gold into the crucible by ordinary legerdemain. The courtier watched Cagliostro closely and, when the piece was dropped, pounced upon him and gave the show away, with the result that Cagliostro was thrown base-over-apex out of the palace.

Later that year, Cagliostro arrived at Strasbourg in a magnificent six-horse carriage with Serafina, glittering in diamonds, by his side. Here he set himself up as a miracle-worker, and sold an Elixir of Saturn. He denounced all regular doctors as filthy animals, and dosed his patients with arsenate of lead—a poison that made them feel better for a while, but finally left them much sicker than formerly.

In Strasbourg lived one of history's most distinguished suckers: Louis Rene Edouard de Rohan, Bishop of Strasbourg, Cardinal, and Grand Almoner of France among many other things—a big florid man, enormously rich, extravagant, and self-indulgent. For years he had taken one of his mistresses, the Marquise de Marigny, about with him dressed as a page. He invited Cagliostro to call. The magician coolly sent back word: "If Monseigneur, the Cardinal, is sick, let him

come to me and I will cure him; if he is well, he has no need of me, I none of him."

This shrewd reply made the spoiled Cardinal all the more determined to know the miracle-worker. To lure Cagliostro to his bedside, he pretended an attack of asthma; soon the magician and her consort were comfortably installed in the Cardinal's palace, dazzling the prelate by making gold and diamonds out of thin air. After three years of such luxury, one of Cagliostro's former assistants tried to blackmail him, where-upon the charlatan nervously scuttled off to France to found more lodges. De Rohan, who still had implicit faith in him, inveigled him into settling in Paris. Here he set up his finest lodge of all, in a house on the Rue St. Claude, which he decorated with statues of Egyptian animal-headed gods. The Grand Copt received his visitors, clad in a long black robe, a turban, and a sword. He practised cyrstallomancy, gave seances at which angels, and the spirit of the illustrious dead appeared, and even cut into his rival, Mesmer's audiences.

A couple of Cagliostro's less reliable biographers wrote sensational stories of the initiations which took place in this house of magic. Women lodge-members were arrayed in white robes, and tied together with symbolic strings, while Serafina preached a sermon on the liberation of womanhood. Later, Cagliostro was lowered from the ceiling, naked and seated upon a golden sphere. After the women had stripped at the wizard's command, he harangued them to the effect that the great Arcanum, or occult secret, was nothing but the practice of doing good to mankind. Then he was hauled up on his sphere; the ladies dressed, feeling a little cheated perhaps, and the show concluded with a conventional dance. Although the story is probably apocryphal, it is not impossibe, for many magi have mixed a bit of nudism with their magic.

CAGLIOSTRO'S downfall this time was the result of his being involved in the Diamond Necklace affair, more or less by accident. King Louis XV had ordered an enormous necklace of hundreds of diamonds, for Mme. du Barry, and then had inconsiderately died before it could be delivered to his mistress. Boehmer, the jeweler, tried unsuccesfully to sell the monstrous bauble to the new Queen, Marie-Antoinette. An adventuress, Jeanne de Saint-Remy, dubiously titled the Comtesse de Lamotte-Valois worked out a complicated swindle involving the necklace.

According to this plan, Boehmer got an IOU bearing the Queen's forged signature, whereby de Rohan was persuaded to sign the contract of sale. De Rohan got a promise from Mme. de Lamotte that, if he would sign, the Queen would forgive him for a cutting remark he had once made about her mother—the straitlaced Empress Maria Theresa of Austria. Mme. de Lamotte got the necklace in order, she pretended, to deliver it secretly to the Queen. Instead, she began to take it apart and sell the stones. Cagliostro's part in the swindle consisted of furnishing spirit oracles to persuade Rohan to sign the IOU.

All went well until Boehmer innocently tried to collect the first instalment of his money from the Queen, who knew nothing about the deal. Then the fat was in the fire, and everybody concerned was arrested.

At his trial in 1786, Cagliostro, accused of stealing the necklace, began his defence with vehement self-adulation: "I am oppressed—I am accused!—I am calumnated! Have I deserved this fate? I descend into my conscience, and I there find the peace that men refuse me! I have travelled a great deal... I have everywhere shown myself the friend of my fellow-creatures..."

Then he plunged into a fantastic story of his life, averring that he had been reared by the mysterious sage, Althotas, in Arabia, not knowing his own origin, save that his attendants once hinted that he was connected with

the Byzantine kings of Trebizond. Upon achieving manhood, he'd travelled about with Althotas until the philosopher died at Malta. In Europe he found that he had only to utter his Arabian name, "Archarat," for bankers to open unlimited drawing-accounts for him.

Few believed the story, but as far as the theft of the necklace was concerned, Cagliostro proved an alibi and was acquitted, although warned to leave France. Therefore he took his wife to England for their third visit. For a time, he made a meager living by selling Egyptian pills, but then he ran afoul of an old acquaintance, Theveneau de Morande, a spy, blackmailer, and editor of a French scandal-sheet published in England. De Morande ran a series of articles exposing Cagliostro, identifying him with Balsamo, and accusing him of all sorts of crimes, real and imaginary. At length the wizard left England for the Continent to cultivate his Lodges of Egyptian Freemasonry once more.

But now he had little success, for his past was catching up with him. Like many of his type, he had lived for the moment only, and the stories of his misadventures and eposures had become notorious, by now. The police hustled him along in an undignified manner. He felt his age—only 46, but his life had been strenuous. In 1789 he settled in Rome, where he lived in poverty, not daring to practice magical miracles in the capital of Catholicism.

When unhappily, at dinner with old Masonic friends, he let the wine overcome his judgment and delivered a harangue on Egyptian Freemasonry, the spies of the Inquisition heard about it. The Holy Crocodile had a few bites left in its old jaws, and—snap!—the Cagliostros were clapped into the Castle of St. Angelo. Cagliostro was tried for heresy, magic, and Freemasonry, all capital offenses. With a little urging he and Serafina began to confess and accuse each other; the normal death sentence was commuted in his case to life imprisonment, and both died in prison about 1795.

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Cagliostro started the fad for pseudo-Egyptian occultism that flourished throughout the earlier half of the nineteenth century. Since his time there have been many contenders for his mantle, such as "Eliphas Levy", (the French occultist, Alphonse Louis Constant) and Theosophy's founder, Helena P. Blavatsky.

Perhaps the strongest candidate is the English poet, mountaineer, and magician Aleister Crowley (rhymes with "holy").

Born in 1875, Crowley early rebelled against the sternly puritanical religion of his parents, who belonged to the sect of the Plymouth Bretheren. At Cambridge, he began to publish volumes of verse—of which he produced about thirty in his first ten years—most of them privately printed in small and expensive editions. Much of his Swinburnesque verse is quite effective as poetry, but very erotic, and with a strong flavor of perversion.

Crowley came to London in the late 1890's with 40,000 pounds sterling and a fanatical determination to make a splash. For a time he lived as "Count Svaroff" in a flat fitted up as a magician's sanctum; then he bought an estate in Scotland, sported kilts, and called himself "Laird of Boleskine". He was a big, powerful, and—before fat claimed him—rather handsome man, though nearly all his early photographs show his eyelids screwed up to simulate a hypnotic glare.

He spent the years 1899-1906 travelling; he studied Yoga in Ceylon, took part in two Himalayan expeditions and shot tigers and other fauna. On his return from one Himalayan climb he spread the word that he'd eaten two of his porters. Though probably false, the story helped to promote the Crowley legend.

His books became more and more eccentric and costly with time. For

instance, In 1904 appeared *The Sword of Songs* a large volume printed in red and black, with "666" (the number of the Beast of Revelation) on the front cover, and Crowley's name in Hebrew letters on the back. The book consisted of one-third verse, and the rest notes, comprising an exposition of Buddhism and an attack on Christianity and materialism. The book bulged with difficult rhymes, a parade of Crowley's erudition, and joking marginal notes such as: "Jesus dismissed with a jest" and "How clever I am!" Five hundred copies were printed and were mailed to such personages as the King, the Pope, and Mrs. Eddy.

Crowley soon moved his headquarters to Paris, where he continued his japes. When the police forbade the unveiling of Epstein's monument to Oscar Wilde, because of its too-literal nudity, Crowley contrived to unveil the statue by a ruse. Then, when the *gendarmerie* concealed the offending parts with a metal butterfly, Crowley stole the butterfly and entered he Cafe Royal wearing the object in the appropriate place over evening dress.

FROM 1909 to 1913 Crowley issued a fantastic semiannual magazine, *The Equinox, The Official Organ of the A:. A:.* Each *Equinox* was a volume of around four hundred thick pages. "A:. A:." stands for "Atlantean Adepts", an occult society which Crowley was promoting, and to which he soon added the O. T. O., meaning *Ordo Templi Orientis*, or Order of Oriental Templars. *The Equinox*, mostly written by Crowley himself, was full of poetry; articles on magic and hashish; pictures of Crowley looking cosmic, and of a naked man doing Yogic exercises; and of erotic ritual texts.

Crowley infuriated other occultists by printing their "secrets" in his magazine and ridiculing them with his deadly and perverse humor. When he published the rituals of the "Golden Dawn" society of MacGregor Mathers, a Kabbalist and a friend of the Irish poet Yeats, Mathers got an injunction against further disclosures. But Crowley successfully appealed the injunction, and the rituals appeared in due course.

In 1910, Crowley arranged a series of "Rites of Eleusis" in London. A reporter was welcomed to one by a white-robed man with a sword, who ushered him into a room that was dark except for a dull-red light on an altar. Through air thick with incense, the journalist saw men standing about in robes, and a little white statue illumined by a small lamp. Somebody "purified the temple with water" and consecrated it with fire. Crowley, in black, led the "mystic circumambulation" of the altar, and ordered a Brother to "bear the cup of Libation", a big gilded mug from which everybody had a swig of some fragrant liquid. They evoked the goddess Artemis with the greater ritual of the Hexagram; Crowley recited poems; Leila Waddell, the second of his wives, played her violin; and Frater Omnia Vincam, a well-known young poet, danced the dance of Syrinx and Pan in honor of Artemis, until he fell in a heap from exhaustion.

These mystical gymnastics did not sit well with British repectability. When a hostile weekly, *The Looking Glass*, hinted at homosexual relations between Crowley and the two friends with whom he was living, one of the friends, a chemist named Jones, sued for libel. True to its name, the case of *Jones v. The Looking Glass* was Mathers, called as a witness, was cross-examined as follows:

Counsel: Is it not a fact that your name is Samuel Liddell Mathers?

Mathers: Yes, or MacGregor Mathers.

Counsel: Your original name was Samuel Liddell Mathers?

Mathers: Undoubtedly.

Counsel: Did you subsequently assume the ame of MacGregor?

Mathers: The name of MacGregor dates from 1603.

Counsel: Your name was MacGregor in 1603? (Much laughter.)
Mathers: Yes; if you like to put it that way.
Counsel: You have called yourself Count MacGregor of Glenstrae?
Mathers: Oh yes.
Counsel: You have also called yourself the Chevalier Macgregor?
Mathers: No. You are confusing me with some of Crowley's aliases.

Next came a lengthy wrangle as to whether Mathers of Crowley claimed to be the reincarnation of James IV of Scotland. The jury found that the statements in *The Looking Glass* were indeed defamatory, but substantially true, and that Jones had not been injured thereby. In other words, anybody rash enough to live with Crowley should expect nothing better.

Crowley's fortune had meanwhile evaporated, under the demands of his extravagant way of life, so that to continue eating he was forced to become a common commercial occultist. When World War I broke out, he went to America, where he posed as a champion of Irish freedom, dramatically proclaiming Irish independence from the base of the Statue of Liberty throwing his "British passport" (an old envelope) into New York Bay.

Next he got in touch with Viereck and Munsterberg, the German propagandists, and wrote for their papers. Afterwards, he claimed that he did so as a patriotic Englishman to destroy the reputation of these periodicals as reasonable and truthful organs. I am inclined to believe this otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative; at least, it is the kind of bizarre thing he would do, and it is hard to imagine his writing of this Kaiser, except as a joke: "Hail, Savior of the world, that clad in golden armor with the helm of holiness, wieldest the sword!"

NOW DEPENDENT for income upon his writings and admirers, Crowley traveled about the United States planting branches of his A. A. and his O. T. O., and having a brush with the police in Detroit. He spent forty days in mystic retreat on Esopus Island in the Hudson, painting on the cliffs south of Kingston the mottoes:

EVERY MAN AND EVERY WOMAN A STAR!
DO WHAT THOU WILT SHALL THE WHOLE OF THE LAW

He shaved his head, and later grew a long scalp-lock like a blond Amerind. In New York, he lived with the current priestess of his cults, the Bronx schoolteacher Leah Hersig, who received callers naked save for a star which Crowley had branded on her breast with the point of a red-hot sword, during a magical rite.

In 1919, Crowley took Leah to Sicily, where he bought a house at Cefalu and set up his College of the Holy Ghost, otherwise called the Abbey of Thelema (from Rabelais). Disciples gathered. Unfortunately one young follower, Raoul Loveday, died of drinking unboiled Sicilian water. His widow, an experienced young lady who described herself as a reformed drug-addict and former member of a mob of Parisian gangsters, sold British papers a sensational story of goings-on at Cefalu, which seem to have consisted largely of magical rites in which the now portly Crowley bounded around a pentacle (magical diagram) waving a sword and chanting:

"Thrill with lisson lust of the light,
O Man, my Man;
Come careening out of the night
To me, to me..."

The animal-loving British were especially shocked by the assertion that Loveday had once been required to cut the throat of a kitten and drink its blood. The *Sunday Express* denounced Crowley's "bestial horrors" and "degraded lusts", and Mussolini —who was persecuting secret societies, anyway—ordered Crowley out.

In Paris, Crowley continued his cult activity. Here he was accused of being involved in the dope-trade, and was finally expelled by the French police in 1929. In 1932 he visited Berlin to show his paintings, one of which was characteristically named *Three Men Carrying a Black Goat Across the Snow to Nowhere.* Two years later, he sued Nina Hammett for libel because in her novel *Laughing Torso* she described him as a black magician. A magician he was, but, he wanted it understood, a pure white one. The defence brought out the "sex-cult rites" in Sicily; the judge denounced Crowley's writings as "dreadful, horrible, blasphemous, and abominable"; and the jury found for the defendant.

Crowley made his last public appearance in 1937, when, early one morning, he read a prophecy from the foot of Cleopatra's Needle in London, and warned the world that the impending war could be averted only if everybody did as Crowley told them. He continued to publish occasional volumes of prose and verse, almost up to his death in 1947.

DURING THE 1930's a branch of O. T. O. operated in Los Angeles. The members assembled in the mansion of a magnate and entered a secret room by a trapdoor and a ladder. There a gauze-clad priestess of the cult climbed out of a coffin to perform the mystic rites. Jack Williamson and Tony Boucher, who attended a session, tell me that it was a pretty dull and respectable business unless you took the cult's painstaking blasphemies seriously.

As I understand it, the theory of the leader of this group—an Englishman named Wilfred Smith—was that the world was too much run by extroverts. Therefore Smith proposed to get all the introverts together and organize them (as if introverts could be gotten together and organized) into a vast conspiracy to seize control from the extroverts.

However, the priestess died, and the cult became inactive around the beginning of World War II. One of Smith's closest associates was John W. Parsons, a distinguished rocket engineer who was later associated in a brief (and, I am told, stormy) business partnership with L. Ron Hubbard—equally distinguished science-fiction author and discoverer of Dianetics, and its successor Scientology. One source of the club's breakdown seems to have personal differences between Smith and Parsons— I believe that Smith eloped with one of Parsons' wives or something. After Smith's death in 1944 the cult was revived by Parsons with headquarters at an old mansion in Pasadena.

Parsons, a big floridly handsome fellow of about Hubbard's age continued his magical activities but on a small scale because the neighbors had complained to the police about the sacerdotal strip-tease acts being staged on Millionaires' Row.

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In the heroes (or villains) of this piece you see the impudence affectations, arrogance garrulity, daring, charm, and immense egotism of the first-class charlatan. The mainspring of such a man seems to be neither love of truth nor mere vulgar avarice, but a consuming egomania and a fanatical vanity.

True to form, Crowley described himself in the last *Equinox* as "Most Holy, Most Illustrious, Most Illuminated, and Most Puissant Baphomet X° Rex Summus Sanctissimus 33° 90°, 96°, Past Grand Master of the United States of America, Grand Master of Ireland, Iona, and All the Britains, Grand Master of the Knights of the Holy Ghost, Sovreign Grand Commander of the Order of the Temple, Most Wise Sovereign of the Order of the Rosy Cross, Grand Zerubbabel of the Order of the Holy Royal Arch of Enoch, etc. etc. etc., National Grand Commander *ad vitam* of the O. T. O." Crowley knew perfectly well that these fine titles existed only in his head, but

he printed the stuff anyway. *Somebody* might be impressed. And, while he did many unconventional things, he was probably not so wicked as he liked people to think.

Although the great charlatans may be "sincere"—in the sense that they can convince themselves as well as others of their own greatness, the human talent for self-justification being unlimited—more important is the fact that they do exploit and influence people of all kinds and classes. Such victims pay in all sorts of ways—in time, money, family relationships, loss of touch with reality, spiritual independence, and self-respect. They do this because the magician offers dreams, hopes, and fictitious cures for sale, and some people can no more resist buying these than others can pass up the tender of liquor, bets, or antiques.

All in all, such men as Cagliostro and Crowley are colorful individuals, without whom history would be less interesting. Like tigers they are even admirable in their own sinister way. But, like tigers, you can appreciate their virtues best when they are behind strong bars. So when you meet one, don't hesitate to put him there; or, if that is not possible, run, do not walk, to the nearest exit. Otherwise yours may be the fate of the young lady from Niger. He'll steal your money, your wife, if he can your health, or your sanity, any of which would be a high price to pay for the excitement of his company.

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a little knowledge

(continued from page 94)

"Why, darling, you *know*... oh, Harry!" She stopped short, and a look of comprehension came over her face.

"I see," she said at last. "I *was* right, wasn't I, dear? You never did believe in it." Her voice was very gentle, very tender. "Poor Harry! *You never knew.*"

Even while he struggled against its implications, he basked in her sympathy. Then, as suddenly as she had changed before, the new softness vanished before a gathering determination. She walked briskly, but with ineffable grace, across the room to the cabinet, and came back with a fresh copy of the Sure-Self Cell blueprint.

"I think," she said simply, "you better start right away."

Harry managed to take his eyes off her face long enough to pull together the shreds of his convictions. "That's ridiculous!"

"Here you are, dear." She handed it to him, and pointed to the list of materials on the envelope. "You can get them in your local hardware store for under ten dollars—" She didn't seem to realize she was quoting from one of his ads. "Start now! You'll be a new man inside of three weeks."

"Yes, dear," said Harcourt Barchester, L.E., M.C.B., R.S.

Remembered Words

Miss Jean Rose's letter was selected as the best in our November issue, with Mrs. Ruth Fair second, and Mr. J. K. Bradford a close third. (Name Withheld was next.)

Will the winners please let us know their nominations for the originals they'd like sent to them? (From the November issue.) Miss Rose gets her pick; Mrs. Fair should list one alternate, and Mr. Bradford two alternates. Let's hear from you, friends!

An Ironic Tale by John Christopher

ARISTOTLE

(Illustration by Luros)

"All right! Turn around, you two. Hands high!"

Prince John had never heard the phrase about pouring new wine into old bottles. The new order was decidedly all right by his taste, and he took pride in the thought that he was more sane and civilized than people of the older days. That was before he met the Aristotelians!

JONES, THE SLAVE, came into the room warily, his eyes rovingly alert for booby traps. He bowed low towards the tapestried couch. "Null-A" he said formally. "Prince John, your royal father desires your presence at the hunt."

Prince John Reilly got up slowly and walked across the room to where Jones stood, bowed and waiting. He kicked him, but only twice, and without any real enthusiasm.

He said: "Get my suit."

He stood looking out over the balcony of his room into the central courtyard. Directly below his window were the livestock enclosures, a huddle of cows and sheep and sorry-looking hens pecking in the hot dust. Beyond them, in the centre of the courtyard squatted the low square building that had so lately been his home. The woman's quarters. As he watched, he saw the woman who had been his

mother come out of the main door and scurry across towards the sheepfold. She looked up towards his window, but dropped her head as he continued to gaze impassively outwards. He let his eyes rest on the jutting harshness of architecture that surrounded him. Had the word held any meaning for him he might have thought it ugly; as it was he was content to appraise the functional strength of the palace's design.

Jones held the heavy tank-suit up for him, and he stepped into it and permitted himself to be zipped up to the open vizor. As he had done many times before in the past two days, he walked stiffly over to the long wall-mirror and examined himself with satisfaction. Then, cuffing the slaves Jones out of his way, he walked out of the room and took the lift to the basement.

The tanks of the Princes, as was customary, were drawn up in a defensive ring about the larger tank that belonged to their father, King Patrick Reilly. There were six now; a good circle. Two outriders, two flankers, and Prince Jake's tank and his own as rearguards. He walked across, treasuring his pride in it and in the gold-banded shamrock which was its insignia. The mechanic stood back and bowed.

"Null-A. All O. K., Prince John."

He replied: "Null-A", and climbed up and into the turret.

He had a sick feeling of anticipation at the thought of the hunt, and an urgent desire to examine the controls again; but to display any kind of excitement would be shameful. He stood erect in the turret, and watched his brothers arrive. Patrick, the eldest, walked across to the left-hand outrider, his face cold but looking strangely nervous. Bernard took the other lead tank, and Hank and Norman the two flankers. Jake, walking across to the second rearguard, paused by John's tank. It was only six months since they had played together in the women's quarters, but that was part of a different and forgotten life.

Jake said: "Don't get excited, kid."

John looked evenly at his brother's sneering face. He recognized the fundamental weakness that lay behind his present arrogance, and despised it. Six months ago, in the women's quarters he, although the younger, had been the unquestioned leader. It would take a very short time, he knew, to regain that superiority; and with that certainty in mind he was content to accept his brother's patronage without resentment. He despised Jake, the weakling. The translation of his contempt into action could wait.

He said: "Where are we hunting today?"

Jake looked up. "The Hawkins. Pop wants to take their palace and install Patrick as king. We're putting everything into it; we'll have over thirty tanks out altogether."

John glanced over again to where Patrick stood, tall and silent, in the turret of his tank. He looked down to see Jake's face conspiratorial and sly.

"If we don't manage to take the Hawkins palace", Jake said, "...something may happen. Pop wants to get rid of him; I think he's scared."

Jake left to scurry into his own tank as the King himself strode in, his muscle-men behind him. The Princes saluted their father. John, watching him acutely, saw his nervous look towards his eldest son and the calm contempt with which it was received. There would be a change, all right; there wasn't much hope that they would capture the Hawkins palace...and the failure might well spark the blowup. There would be a new King Patrick very soon. *When I am King John,* he thought suddenly, *I shall make sure none survives to be strong enough to threaten me.* He had no doubts at all that he *would* be a king, eventually.

THE LIGHTS flickered and died at this point, and the whole gigantic tank garage was suddenly lit by the eerie illumination of the mechanics'

torches. Trouble with the generators again; probably the oil. Lately, the faults had become increasingly numerous; despite having the chief electrician ceremoniously scourged to death the previous month, there had been no improvement. In the darkness, Prince John reflected that it would be wiser to scourge all the electricians, but not to the point of death; after all, they were useful.

The lights came up; ahead of them, the great steel doors swung open revealing daylight. At the King's signal, all the tank engines began to roar. The troop started to move, in close formation, up the ramp to the outside world. At the age of sixteen, excited, tense and confident, Prince John proceeded for the first time beyond the palace-walls.

At first he was chiefly concerned with controlling his tank, and keeping it in formation with the rest. The tanks of the soldiers—smaller again, and less efficient than those of the princes—split into two wings about the royal centre. John counted thirteen on the left and twelve on the right. One of the latter came to a sputtering halt less than twenty yards from the palace, and another tank moved over from the left to balance its absence. The troop moved in its own dust-cloud down through the valley to the east.

King Patrick's strategy was cunning and simple. He had no fantastic ideas of making a frontal assault; all the power of this warring age was epitomized in the formidable, sprawling palaces—citadels whose combination-locked gates were impregnable to all marauders. To conquer a palace, you must hold the king; to capture the king you must lure him from his stronghold. So now King Patrick studied the ground and made his plans. The Hawkins palace squatted at the head of a dead-end valley that opened out into the great plain, the hill rising high behind it. The look-out could see all the way down to the far horizon. In the late afternoon sunlight, he saw the small convoy—two royal tanks with an escort of six—crossing his field of vision beyond the shoulders of the sloping hills. Within quarter of an hour the eighteen tanks of King Louie Hawkins' entourage were in hot pursuit after them.

The ambush succeeded in part. King Louie's retreat into his own valley was quickly sealed off, but the desperation of his realised predicament drove him and his troop right through the decoying eight who stood to hold him. As the action developed into a running fight, and he saw his own shells dropping short of the fleeing enemy, John saw also, away on the left, the burning hulk of Bernard's tank. He integrated this new factor into the logical reality of his environment; one less between himself and his inevitable triumph.

This, his first battle, produced in him no fear, but instead a reassurance of his confidence and strength. The running fight went on for over an hour. The pursuers lost six soldiers' tanks—two his and four halted by mechanical defects. The pursued lost eight; but the royal tanks of King Louie and his two sons still held their lead beyond accurate shelling-range. At last, as the long red streaks began to darken in the western sky they turned into a valley and the pursuers saw, with rising excitement, that this also was a blind-alley, ending in a craggy gradient impossible to traverse.

THEIR rashness cost them dearly. Four tanks were knocked out by the halted defenders before the rest made for dead ground, and began the long attritional shelling match. It was dark before they moved in for the kill. The huddled shapes of the shattered tanks were lit up by the flames leaping from one that still burned. King Patrick Reilly switched the searchlight of his own tank on; into its glare three figures advanced, dazed and uncertain. John, recognising them as ordinary soldiers, knew what had happened: King Louie and his sons, abandoning their tanks, had got away on foot over the hills.

King Patrick disposed of his captives decisively, but his decisiveness, his youngest son realised contemptuously, was the decisiveness of horrible, crawling fear. He looked at the silent, watchful figure of Patrick, his brother, and smiled with the thought that the change would not now be long delayed.

King Patrick said: "You palookas protected him while he got away. That wasn't very clever of you. It wasn't Null-A. He threatened you, did he? But I'm the one who carries threats out. Jones! Reagan! Tie them across my tank. There's a whipping party."

Prince John watched with only slight interest while the prisoners were flogged to death; he was thinking of more serious things. The new King Patrick. He, too, might see the wisdom of protecting himself against usurpers; there was danger that would need circumventing. He thought, with careful Null-A logic; but the idea that eventually captured his mind with its brilliance came like a dazzling gift. He planned events, as the screams died away into choked silence. They would not miss him now, in the dark. When they started back for home he could slip away, cut through the valleys between this and the Hawkins palace... There was a chance of catching them; remote, perhaps, but real enough. And if he did...

The combination forced from the captured Louie, the palace taken and he, at sixteen, King John, an undisputed monarch. His speculations began to drift into reveries and he checked them sharply. Engines were revving up for the luckless homeward trek. Thought now became action, to be realised, to be integrated; he started his own engine, and the troop began to roll down the valley, towards the plain.

He got away easily enough, and heard the noise of the others pass away into the night. Then he switched his headlights on again and began his hunt.

He hunted with a fierce and realistic logic, ruthlessly exploring the network of valleys that lay between the scene of King Louie's last stand and his distant palace. Sometimes he halted, waiting for half an hour or more before swinging his probing searchlight along the valley floor and up the dark hills that lay about him. Early Null-A training had left him with no fear of darkness; he accepted night, knowing he could not change it, and refusing to equate a temporary limitation of sensory perceptions with the possibility of hidden and threatening powers. The darkness was useful to him in many ways, and he accepted its usefulness.

But the search yielded no results. Time and again the beam of his searchlight flashed across immobile emptiness, or paralysed a hare or fox. There was no sign of Louie and his sons. He had almost decided to call it off, when he remembered the city.

PRINCE John had been well trained in local geography, and he was surprised that he should not have thought before of this—a logical refuge for hunted men. It rested in the plain, on the other side of the long spur of hills, and his tank-map showed that the next valley should lead him out right into its outskirts. He set his tank roaring forward again, hopeful that his supposition would be correct. If Louie, too, had considered the possibilities of a search along the valleys that divided him from his palace, what was more likely than that he should make for the sprawling shelter of the city? He drove on, in greater confidence.

When his tank rolled down through the valley into the plain, the moon had risen above the distant horizon; in its light the city lay before him, white and silent and incredibly defenseless. Although he had read descriptions of these cities, the reality surprised him into amused contempt. The city's defenselessness was so absolute, there was no gate, no barrier, not even the rudiments of a wall. It stretched out in the moonlight, untidy and chaotic and obviously unplanned. Roads

wound through it haphazardly. This was the past, the illogical, sentimental, Aristotelian past. And the past was dead and deserted.

The dust of sleeping years kicked up in the moonlight, and animals scurried away into side streets as his tank clattered along the crumbling highway. With Null-A clarity, he wasted no time in fruitless exploration of this maze, but drove instead to the first high building and climbed its dusty ruined stairs to secure a look-out. His gaze ranged carefully over the weathered ruins of the city's buildings. At last he saw what he was seeking in toward the centre. The flicker of flame—a fire.

He descended quickly and paused for a moment beside his tank. In it, his power would be crushing against unarmed men; but against that, the noise of his approach could not fail to warn them. He took a light machine-gun and slung the strap over his shoulders before locking the tank again. Then, holding his portable compass, he set off towards the direction of the fire.

Around him towered the forgotten relics of the past, lifting their weathered towers into the night. They evoked for his Null-A mind no mystery; mystery, after all, was a function of non-integration and therefore to be despised. He merely tightened his grip on the machine-gun. A man of an earlier age might have felt awe at the sight—as he advanced warily through a narrow alley-way—of the primitive fire burning in the centre of the deserted and forgotten square, with two figures hunched blackly beside it. Prince John felt only contempt for this flagrant disregard of the laws of self-protection. He advanced more rapidly, his machine-gun at the ready. He called, his voice loud against the low crackle of the fire and the brooding silence of the night: "All right! Turn round, you two. Hands high."

THEY LOOKED around without any show of surprise, and leisurely got to their feet. He realized at once, with a quick shock of disappointment, that they were not the men he sought. They did not wear tank-suits nor any of the trappings of royalty, but a loose, robe-like dress. His mind ran swiftly, logically. At the very least, two new slaves to take back with him to the palace. He said sharply: "Who are you? What the hell are you up to?"

The taller of the two men glanced down at his companion. He spoke in a cold but flexible voice: "He's only a boy, Joseph."

John said, without pride, simply stating the fact: "I am a prince; my questions must be answered. Who are you, and what are you doing in the city?

The shorter of the two strangers, bearing a fair-sized paunch in front of him, said easily: "So you're a prince, are you? My name's McIlwain—Joseph McIlwain—and this is Peter Sheppard. What are we doing in the city? Looking for books. That's all; just looking for books."

Prince John said flatly: "You're crazy. I claim you as slaves by right of conquest. It wasn't very Null-A of you to sit alongside an open fire in the middle of a square like this, was it? Ready to start moving?"

"Wasn't it?" Joseph McIlwain said. "We're not entirely unprotected; and then, of course, we don't recognize Null-A."

The words did not make sense. It was as though a man said: 'I do not recognize the sun'. It was a syntactical error; clearly the meaning was that they had not had Null-A training. They were slaves, then, escaped from some near-by palace.

He said: "So you are slaves!"

Peter Sheppard's long figure leaned forward, as though to look behind him at something in the shadows at his back. His cold, clear voice said: "You will have to hit him, Mark. I think he's an obstinate youngster."

He moved his machine-gun to point more directly at them, contemptuous

of this amateurish attempt to distract his attention. "I'm not fooled that way," he said. "Stay where you are."

The shock of astonishment was greater, in a way, than the shock of the blow that landed just behind his ear, propelling him forward, on buckling knees, into the circle of firelight. And the vague, accompanying words from the lips of Joseph McIlwain: "No, we're not slaves. We are Aristotelians."

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IT WAS LIKE being in a moving tank, but strangely different. There was the heavy roar of engines—a heavier, more sonorous roar—and occasional jerks and drops; but the whole thing was too smooth, and the more he listened to the sounds the more clearly he realized that this was no tank. It was too large for one thing. Rubbing his sore head he looked about him and judged the chamber in which he was held to be about fifteen feet long, cylindrically shaped with a cross-section of five or six feet. And there was no sign of the driver who must therefore, be in another part of the machine. Pain savaged his head, and he cursed his own folly again; but it was futile to waste time on self-recrimination. He realized with surprise that he was unbound. He got to his feet, balancing himself unsteadily against a vague swaying motion. There was a kind of window away to his left. He walked over and craned his neck to peer out.

He saw the moon first, a full rich orb of silver. And from the moon he glanced down to see moonlight gleaming on fleeecy clouds—clouds billowing richly *beneath* the window from which he gazed. The realization was like a flaming brand through the hanging webs of his brain, burning, searing, destroying. He held himself rigidly for a moment, but then it was possible to repress his screams no longer—they echoed, like the howlings of a frightened animal, through the narrow fuselage of the airplane.

A small door opened, and Joseph McIlwain and Peter Sheppard ran towards him along the narrow compartment. They gripped his arms and forced him down into a seat, speaking in soothing tones.

Joseph McIlwain said: "You're all right. You realize that, don't you? You're quite all right."

"It's an airplane," he moaned.

"Be Null-A," the taller man said sardonically; "integrate it. You're in an airplane, and you are quite safe."

Integrate, yes, but how integrate something against which all his consciousness rebelled? There *had* been airplanes, he knew, in the past, but they had driven men mad in the high element of the air. And yet... He felt all right; he braced himself, recovering his confidence.

Joseph McIlwain said: "You had heard of airplanes, surely?"

He said uncertainly: "There were airplanes—towards the end of the ages of confusion. I know that. It makes men mad to endure the high altitude...at least..."

Peter Sheppard said: "He'll be all right now, Joe. Shall I leave him with you? I'll go up front and see that Mark's all right."

The other nodded at him and he left. Joseph McIlwain came over and sat on the seat beside his. He said: "Do you know what Aristotelians are?"

PRINCE John said: "They were... in the ages of confusion. Men were Aristotelians, then; it was before Null-A. They believed all sorts of crazy things—religions and things. They were thalamics. They had all sorts of contradictory impressions in their minds at the same time because they didn't understand Null-A integration."

McIlwain smiled. "That's a pretty clear picture. Primarily they believed in the 'good', the beautiful and the 'true'—even with confusions. That's not Null-A, is it?"

"Well," Prince John pointed out reasonably, "they are relative, aren't they? The good is what is good for me; the true is what I hold to be ture. Beauty? That's not important, is it? And no two eyes see alike."

"Yes," McIlwain repeated, "the good is what is good for you; every man's hand is against you and the weakest go to the wall. But that's hardly non-Aristotelian; pre-Aristotelian would be a better term. Three thousand years ago, much the same sentiments were held."

"Three thousand years ago," Prince John echoed contemptuously. "Aristotelians always dwell on the past; that's because they are thalamics; cortex undeveloped, thalamus overdeveloped."

"Thalamics?" McIlwain said softly. He paused. "What is the name of the Teachings of Null-A?"

"You man, the Abstracts," Prince John said.

"The Abstracts. Barred A?"

"Of course."

"Of course," McIlwain said. "A pun—a language identity obsession. A lovely example of thalamic reaction."

He paused again before continuing.

"We are Aristotelians, John. As I told you last night, we were looking for certain books in that city where you found us. We had come on a long journey, and now we are returning. We had to decide what to do with you; there was some argument, since we do not generally find their lines of action quite so clear-cut as you do. Finally we decided to bring you with us. You are very young, and that gives us hope that it may be possible to salvage you. We are taking you home with us."

The use of the womanish word 'home' was another shock. He said cautiously: "Home? Where?"

"On another continent. Come and look from the window."

McILWAIN LED him firmly to the side and pointed outwards. Through a gap in the bubbling clouds Prince John saw the wide, glittering sweep of the ocean. A new fear swept over him, and he clutched the man beside him for support. The Aristotelian said: "Another shock for you, I'm afraid. You see, John, there is only one way that the human mind can make itself impregnable to shock, and that is by limiting its experience. That's where the Null-A philosophers made their great mistake.

"It was understandable, really. They came in the wake of a century of tremendous technological and scientific advances. Scientists were explaining the 'how' of things so fast that is was very easy to overlook the fact that, by the very nature of their work, they could not even postulate a 'why'. And, of course, the 'whys' are the fundamentals; the 'whys' provide the permanent mental shocks which the mind of man must undergo. Witout them it atrophies."

Prince John said: "But Aristotelianism makes unwarranted assumptions—that's explained in the Abstracts. It's not empirical."

"Does that damn it?" McIlwain asked, "—not being empirical? A philosopher called Ouspensky pointed out once that empirical science rests on two fundamental postulates—matter and motion, and each has to be defined in terms of the other. Matter is that in which motion occurs; motion is a change in matter. The empirical can only deal in sensory perceptions."

"What other perceptions are there?" Prince John asked.

McIlwain laughed, "For you, probably none. I imagine that you are a proper Null-A savage. But back home we have one or two things we've salvaged from the wreckage of the cities. A few paintings by Rembrandt, Turner, El Greco... Some books of poetry. And a gramaphone on which we can play a record of Beethoven's

last quartets. You will have to take it from me that the experience of seeing and hearing those things transcends ordinary sensory perception. But you can't measure it, of course."

Prince John said: "But that old world passed away. Isn't that proof that it was inferior?"

"Null-A logic," McIlwain replied. "There's nothing that says the best man will win; even in your brutal world, accidents can happen."

"The winner wins," Prince John said flatly.

"Yes," McIlwain agreed, "and Null-A won—for the time being anyway. And there were a lot of reasons for it. Three wars within thirty-five years—colossal, planet-shaking wars, quite unlike the piffling warfare that in your world goes on the whole time. It must have been hard for anyone to continue to believe in objective goodness in the face of all that. The last ones—in which atomic bombs were used—were the turning point. They never ended; they simply died away into the permanent squabbles of petty chieftains. The highly-complex weapons gave way to the more primitive artillery and hand-weapons; naturally enough, since you need a co-ordinated and stable society to produce atomic bombs. And airplanes went, too, when the new feudalism made slaves of mechanics and thereby reduced their efficiency below the danger level. Were the mechanics efficient in your palace?"

Prince John shook his head. "No. We scourged them regularly, but they were never very good."

Joseph McIlwain laughed. "Fancy that! All over the world the little bullies, released from any kind of censorship by the painstaking non-Aristotelian philosophers of the late Twentieth Century, formed their little gangs and built their palaces and set up dynasties. Man, you thought, had depended on his reason, and that kind of reason lead him back to the jungle. It may have been necessary. It may be that fallow periods are as useful as the years of harvest."

Prince John said: "But if not reason, what can one depend on?"

McIlwain sighed: "Nul-A again. 'If not, what...?' The old error—the assumption that the universe can be made understandable to finite and earth-bound man. Why should it be? And why should there be any one faculty by which man must live? Reason, yes. It's a useful instrument,and should be used. There's emotion, too—that should be used. There are psychic faculties which we know little about.

"At the same time that the non-Aristotelian philosophers were writing their pretentious nonsense making a total hash out of the original and valuable formulations, I might add, scientific experiments were being conducted which gave evidence of telepathy, of psychokinesis—and of precognition. Such things—extra sensory by their nature—were barely within the scientist's scope. There are three attributes of knowledge for you—rational, emotional and psychic. There's a fourth, too, which some regard as the only real knowledge. Transcendent knowledge, it's called. No scientific instrument that ever has been, or probably ever will be invented, can measure it. But it's real enough; the artist and the mystic know how real it is. We have to find what order of reality it is."

Prince John said slowly: "You want me to give up a world of clear-cut blacks and whites for this contradictory world where there are no answers to anything—no real answers?"

McIlwain said: "You live in a universe that is infinite, from your viewpoint. You are a finite mind. If you want meaningful answers you must limit your questions. Contradictory? Why shouldn't the 'ultimate truths' of the universe be what we call contradictory?"

HE WAS ABLE to watch without fear or any emotional disturbance as the ground flung upwards to meet the descending plane. Mark brought it in to a good landing. They stepped out onto an airstrip that gave signs of having only recently been reclaimed from the wilderness, that reached clutching fingers to its very edge. There were mountains in the distance and the sky was blue; nearer, long avenues of olives were alternately green and silver-grey in a capricious breeze.

Prince John turned with the others to look at the people who came to meet them. They were all dressed in brightly coloured clothes, and he saw with astonishment that women and children mixed with the men, unafraid and unreproved. But their faces astonished him most—all of them bearing a happiness and contentment that was new to him.

One of the men called: "Did you get them, Peter?"

Peter Sheppard flourished a small case in his right hand. "Yes. They were intact. We shall have to send along a proper expedition. That library's hardly been touched."

Prince John said to McIlwain: "What books were you looking for?"

"Libraries suffered badly," McIlwain explained. "Especially here in what was Europe. The city where we found you was an American one that was reported to have missed the bombing, and yet had a good-sized library. Tomorrow we have the celebration of dedication of our citadel. And we have all the works of Aristotle and Korzyski, now that surved the earliier Dark Ages.

"Never heard of Korzybski, have you? It's ironic, my friend, because he was the founder of Null-A, and he wasn't anti-Aristotle, either. He merely found where Aristotle's formulations had been ossified into a system that made no sense so far as the real world was concerned, and where the formulations didn't apply. What you call 'Null-A' is a very fragmentary set of excerpts of a few aspects of Korzybski's systems—which include the valid findings of Aristotle—all jumbled with the worst hangovers of 'Aristotelianism'.

"Yes, it's an historical joke, but we who call ourselves 'Aristotelians' are much closer to Null-A behavior than you ever were."

John questioned no more at the time. It would have been difficult anyway in the press of people; the good-natured interchange of conversation swept him up, still dazed and unsure, for the rest of the afternoon and evening. There was a feast—a special one McIlwain explained, for the eve of the dedication—and the strange, exotic foods were another revelation after the plain fare of his father's palace. He drank wine cautiously, and listened half-attentively when Peter Sheppard stood up at the side of the long table in the enormous banqueting room.

"My friends", he said. "Tomorrow we name our city, and in so doing set up our challenge to the society outside. This shall be our fortress, and the focus from which the knowledge of man's dignity and man's humility shall spread out again, as it did once before from this same land. We are on the offensive now; we shall not look back."

HE WAS muzzy from the wine when the three, who had brought him to this place, took him with them to the room they had been given for the night. They each had a pallet bed; the window was open to the night breeze and the great, distant stars, flushed against purple. He watched them, lying awake, thinking.

The airplane—it represented power. Psychological power as well as real power. No palace could stand against him wielding that weapon. And he had watched carefully the way Mark had driven it; there were risks but the rewards were greater. To fly back, subdue his father's palace, and the

Hawkins', and all the other palaces of the continent. Power would breed power; s t r e n g t h would generate strength. He had learned much, and he would use what he learned. Goodness? There was power, and power was real and visible!

Emperor, he thought—and why not? Emperor of the Americas. A few years. Eventually—Emperor of the World. Granted the initial crushing supremacy that the airplane would give him it wasn't impossible. By the time these people could do anything the seed of his greatness would be germinating.

He glanced towards the evenly breathing figures beside him in the room. Vague starlight filtered in. They were sleeping all right. They had not troubled to search him. He felt along his leg for the hidden sheath, and the knife. He withdrew it, cautiously, and cautiously slipped out of bed. McIlwain first—his bed was the nearest of the three. Then the other two, for safety, and so out and down through the night to the airplane and escape and the dazzling future. He trod, carefully as he had been taught, along the space between the two beds.

Poised beside McIlwain he considered, the knife naked in his hand. He knew where to strike so that not even a sigh escaped the stricken body. One thrust and it would be over. There was nothing unusual about it. Less than a month ago his father had killed two slaves when he found them asleep outside his apartment. There was no reason for him to hesitate. It was quite Null-A.

But still he hesitated.

Goodness...? The thought drifted back into his mind, as though in its casual implantation it had taken root. To be with these men, to be a friend and equal amongst friends and equals —or to be Prince John, King John, World Emperor John. The temptation was almost overwhelming. And yet... He clutched the knife more tightly, and his gaze went out to the stars, brilliantly glowing in this alien night. In a sudden, intense surge of agony he called soundlessly for some help, some guidance in a confused and incomprehensible universe. And with that call, unanswered, unexplained, his hand holding the knife dropped wearily to his side, and he stepped back from the bed of the man he had been ready to murder.

Peter Sheppard's voice came from the shadowy third bed by the door: "All right, Joe. You can stop snoring now. You were right; but it was in the balance for a while."

A light switched on and, dazzled, he was still able to see Peter Sheppard's long figure clutching a gun as he lay on his bed. John began to speak in confusion, but McIlwain, sitting up, silenced him. "That's all right, John; I was in no danger. Peter has eyes like a cat. We had to test you this way. It will be all right now."

He began to laugh weakly, the first time in his life he had laughed at something other than the discomfiture of another creature.

"I was going to steal the plane", he gasped. "It seems so silly. And be an Emperor..."

McIlwain said softly: "You can be a man instead. It's a lot more fun."

ALL THE morning there had been rejoicing; this new wonderful thing which was called music, and singing and dancing, and friendly talk. Now, as the sun rose high above them in the blue sky of Greece, the noise hushed into silence. The city lay about them, hastily constructed for the most part, and unwalled. Here, at its heart, was the only large building as yet—the Library and Amphitheatre. Here at the top of the dazzling white steps in front to the building an old withered man, with a straggling beard but a face lined with wisdom and happiness, received from a red-robed girl a flame kindled in a bowl. He raised it high towards them.

"With the symbol of this flame," he cried, "we dedicate and name our city. We name it—Aristotle."

★

SHOO FLY

by W. Malcolm White

And the moral of this story, if you want a moral, might be, "Scrutinize before you Swat!"

(Illustrated by Luros)

WITH A wicked swish, the metal fly-swatter came down. *Ka-smack!*

Dunbridge smiled gleefully as he lifted the wire-net weapon and surveyed the results of his blow. A nice ugly little splatter of crumpled wings, black chitin and smeary goo—with just the proper trace of blood.

It gave him a sense of power; and it was righteous, he told himself—flies are such ugly insects, so messy and buzzy. So nasty, too—always walking around on things; trotting over the butter; investigating the drinking-glasses; rubbing their filthy front legs together like a greedy lawyer. The nice new swatter gave him a sense of glory. He grasped the turned-wood handle tightly, firmly; it was a weapon in the war of Dunbridge versus the insects.

Somewhere back in his childhood, the middle-aged bank-teller had read some pseudo-scientific work about the menace of the insect-world—something about ants outnumbering men and inheriting the world; or mayhap some bosh about the constant warfare humanity has to fight to keep what is his from relapsing into the clutches of nature. In any case, this particular man—who wouldn't dream of hurting anything as large and audible as a mouse—took a personal, fanatic pleasure in his battle against the unlucky flies, moths, and ants that invaded his suburban apartment.

The screens had been taken down by the superintendent a week early, this year; in consequence thereof, flies had found their buzzing way into the two-and-a-half rooms. While

this outraged Dunbridge, superficially, it pleased him, secretly; now he had an enemy to fight—an enemy he could see.

For the occasion, he had bought himself this nice new swatter. Insecticide he spurned for the time being; that would come later in the war—that was for the final mopping up. But now, the night was ripe for hand-to-hand combat.

Let the corpses gather where they may. He'd clean them off at the close of the evening's combat. Now...there was another fly in that kitchenette. He'd heard it buzz past a second before.

Ah, there it was; he saw it squatting against the ceiling, near the bulb. Out of his reach, eh? *Well,* Dunbridge thought, *you'll keep for a moment.* For another was nestling against the door-jamb.

Swish, bang! That one was accounted for. Dunbridge looked up again for the elusive one on the ceiling. It still clung there—a big one, slightly shiny, something like a blue-bottle fly rather than the dirty little black housefly types.

He swished the swatter around in the air; the fly didn't budge from its perch safely out of his reach.

DUNBRIDGE smiled a crafty smile. He reached over, flicked the light-switch plunging the room into darkness. This was the kitchenette, the "and-a-half" part of his apartment. For a few seconds he waited, then flicked the light on again. That usually worked; sudden darkness generally made the flies change position.

It had this time. The blue-bottle was buzzing around in mid-air, flying in circles around the light. Then it slowly came down, around and around, and lighted easily—right on the surface of the kitchen table facing Dunbridge.

The bank-clerk held his breath. *Oh,* he thought, *this is going to be the masterpiece. Wait,* he counseled himself, *wait for the strategic moment. Wait for it to start preening its face, or moving its forelegs.*

Dunbridge stood stock-still, the swatter poised. The fly was also still for a minute or so; Dunbridge almost lost patience. Then the insect's forelegs left the ground and waved in front of its bulbous, compound eyes.

Dunbridge put all the power of his right arm into the swing that followed. Down came the swatter with a shrieking swish.

He never quite understood what happened next. One instant the swatter was about to land its glorious arc; the next instant, it was as if a baseball bat had smashed against his arm.

There was a moment of violent pain all through his muscles; the swatter flew to pieces; there was a faint odor of smoke. The wire mesh, which had shattered in all directions, was glowing faintly red.

The fly stood there on the table, untouched, still waving its forelegs in front of it. The swatter, however, was no more.

Dunbridge stood there, completely dumbfounded, gaping, staring, his right arm and shoulder in pain, as injured as if he had received a terrible bruise. It was impossible; it was incredible. The swatter must have struck a live wire, or something, his mind finally conjectured.

But there were no wires within reach; nothing was short-circuited. Dunbridge scowled; it was a fluke. But he had no time for wondering; this was still the field of battle.

He reached behind him with his left hand, scooped up the evening newspaper, and folded it over and over to make a paper cudgel. Then, using his left hand this time, he again swung at the obstinate, shining blue fly.

The newspaper came down as before—and, as before, he couldn't quite tell what happened next. For

the paper was shredded all over the room and his left arm had joined his right in sudden agony.

The fly stood there, serenely untouched. Dunbridge had fallen back, groaning.

THE FLY rested another moment, stopped preening itself with its forelegs, and then took off. It buzzed around the room a while, going from the closed window (which Dunbridge had shut to avoid his victim's escape) to the stove. It alighted on the wall.

The bank-clerk slipped out of the kitchen-nook and into his living room; he plumped himself into a chair by the window and tried to gather his wits about him.

Outside the night was dark. There were not many house-lights in view and the sky, usually clearer in the suburban air, was filled with the panorama of the stars. Dunbridge opened the window, and got himself a breath of fresh air.

His arms still ached; he tried to assemble himself. But there was no question that something had happened tonight—something that had shaken him to the core.

Was this fly, he thought, something new? Is this the new species, the new type that will prove impossible for mankind to cope with? Is this the superfly that must replace the ordinary fly, as inevitably as the superman must replace *homo sapiens?* He tried to shake off the thought; that was Sunday-supplement stuff; that was comic book stuff. But the thought persisted.

Or perhaps this particular fly had become somehow charged with electricity, and so had delivered a bolt to the metal of the swatter? Something like an electric eel, only in housefly form? Only it wasn't a housefly, he remembered; it was a blue-bottle—a form usually associated with open fields, and especially with stables. That was a more consoling consideration; but it would be hell on farmers, he thought.

A buzzing came faintly to his ears. The fly had flown into the living-room and was idly circling about in the air.

Suddenly, Dunbridge became frightened; he longed to be somewhere else. He mentally regretted ever having molested flies at all. Was this a punishment? he wondered. Is there a god of flies—or perhaps a demon of flies that visits men like himself?

He tried to thrust that, and similar thoughts, from his brain but failed. The damned blue-bottle kept buzzing about—now over his daybed; now over his little bookcase, flying back and forth; now near the hall door; or over the floor lamp.

Superfly, he thought, *superfly.* He cowered back in his chair, and every movement he made reminded him in painful twinges of the inexplicable blows he had sustained.

For an instant, the thought of insecticide filled his head. Quickly he rejected it; surely this horror fly had an answer to that. He shuddered at the thought of what it could be.

For perhaps five minutes, he watched that fly buzz about at its leisure. For five minutes the beaten man watched this hated little insect enjoy its clearly-won superiority.

About and about it buzzed, here and there. Dunbridge had opened the window, hoping desperately that it would fly out. Then he could slam the window shut, make secure his fortress...and retire to his nightmares.

This was nightmare enough.

THE FLY flew closer; it buzzed about Dunbridge's sweating head once or twice, passed his fear-bulged eyes. Then, finally, it alighted on the window-sill, a few scant inches from the open night air.

Dunbridge stared at it. He could, he knew from experience, swat it with his hand. But he was licked

man; he knew he could never get up the courage to try.

The thought of the shredded newspaper came to mind—only this time it would be the shredded tendons of his hand; he didn't move.

The fly took its time, just stood motionless, its shining transparent wings folded along its back. Its red bulging eyes bugged forward, unblinking, shining faintly; its forelegs were silent on the ground. No plunger of a tongue visible as yet.

Dunbridge stared hard at his conqueror, at his enemy. It seemed like a reckoning; he was close enough to see it clearly in all its insect detail.

Then the fly seemed to vibrate a bit, ever so faintly, and its side opened!

A hole—a distinct hole in the insect's gleaming, metallic blue-bottle side! Something seemed to jump down, something incredibly tiny, yet still visible. Something that gleamed faintly, as if encased in chitinous armor—but something that seemed suggestively manlike; something that stood upright; the minutest fraction of a fraction of an inch high.

Something that walked about for the smallest fraction of a space; something that touched one shiny leg of the blue-bottle. Something that seemed to leap up to the rim of the little round hole in the fly's shining side.

Something that seemed to close a door in that hole, that sealed the fly tight and whole again. For an instant, Dunbridge thought he detected a slight glow about the insect; then it flew away.

It buzzed for a single arc about the room; then, heading straight as a bullet, it whistled out the open window and into the night sky, into the star-strewn sky where that comet was shining so brightly on the horizon.

And on the windowsill where it had rested that last moment, there was a faint burned spot and a tiny tiny speck—which resolved itself later, under Dunbridge's strong reading-glass, into a jumble of infinitesmally tiny, yet recognizable vacuum-tubes.

★

(Continued From Page 10)

there is a second choice, the will-control weapon, then all that has to happen is for one of the Council to get control, and let the machine make it—if it has no brain waves, I don't think it could control the thing itself; besides, there would be other controls possible—a machine with the "obey"-directive built in. And as soon as the Council realized the following points, there would be a mad scramble. For there is this to consider. Under the mind-control, there would be *no need* for any controlled culture to stagnate. The controller just wills to everyone: onward and upward; no stagnation; Excelsior! And everyone *has* to keep up a busy, happy civilization. They can't help it!

5. Why would any "static" society have to disintegrate? Just because past ones did, is no guarantee that every future one *has* to. This is an unwarranted inference. Particularly, with ultimate mechanical minds to help them along. Even the static societies of the past usually broke up finally only with outsiders smashing things up. *This* civilization would have no outsiders.

6. Why must a single, over-all civilization that is static in the political sense be static in any other sense? And thus collapse? Grant a permanent democracy or a permanent dictatorship with no outside foe. Couldn't one find non-stagnating activity in outward expansion—trans-galactic exploration, more medical research, etc—or the other find a continuously fresh supply of internal scapegoats to sharpen its claws on, as Hitler did with the Jews, and later with the Catholics? I think so.

7. Who says that an over-all democracy is "static", anyway? I challenge that. And if I'm right, then all the Federation has to do is wait until the Council is eventually weakened. Virtue will triumph, hurrah, hurrah!

Do you see what I mean? That story is riddled with flaws. I dare you to challenge me to, and I'll find you some more; I'm only stopping now because it's after midnight, and I have to sleep.

My best wishes to you and for your magazine. It's not the best, to be honest, but it *is* worth reading.

—R. J. F. Knutson,
150-29 115th Avenue,
Jamaica 4, LI, NY.

(You have a good point there about the "first answer in" aspect of the contest, which I'll admit had not occurred to me. Should we ever try this type of contest again, I'll make it the "best", rather than the first.

This is the kind of letter which makes me feel like spouting for pages and pages and pages. Unfortunately, there isn't time, now—and perhaps it's just as well, since the other readers should get the first chance to argue. You came very close to hitting the payoff answer—closer than any other non-winning contestant, I think; so, if the readers don't select your letter as worthy of an original on its own merits of interest, I'll arrange a consolation-prize—such penetrating labor shouldn't go unrewarded.)

●

THE PAST ARISETH

Dear Mr. Lowndes,

It was with genuine pleasure that I saw the first issue of SFQ with your name as editor. I had remembered you as the author of one of the funniest science fiction stories ever written, "The Martians Are Coming!" and I think you are making just as good a job as editor, especially in view of the large number of mags you are editing for this chain. It was S. A. Lombino's great story, "Silent Partner", that really prompted me to write this letter—which is my first to this magazine—and I am wondering if S. A. Lombino might not be Ye Edde... hmmmm?

Rog Phillips will be happy to hear that I can't find any basic flaw in the logic of "All the Answers". However, there are two minor ways in which I can find fault with his solution. First, throughout the story it is tacitly assumed that the Federation has a brain built by Reed Sloan, on the same design as the one known as "Will". Now, Will states that he is an "ultimate form" of mind, and that no matter how many times a brain like his is destroyed and rebuilt, it will have the same characteristics—because an ultimate cannot change. Therefore, it follows that the Federation's brains must also be Will, and the two brains be part of the same ultimate mind, and therefore aware of each other's exact thoughts. This being the case, the Council's "Will" would know that the Federation also had a "Will", and would not have made the meaningless suggestion that the Council give the "secret" to the

Federation. If the council had acted on their "Will's", advice there would have been no result, no change in the situation. Therefore, out this suggestion represents a breach of logic. My second point is the extreme danger of giving any human being the chance to use the weapon which would cause that person's brain to control the universe. Will gave his unbreakable word that he would aid Entor in conquering the Federation, and this could have entailed giving Entor the weapon tuned to his mind. To have promised this was a tremendous gamble. Suppose Entor had succeeded in playing a two-faced role with the Council long enough for the weapon to be made—and used it; then he would be lord of the universe, and nothing could stop him. It would have been so much simpler for the Brain to have simply tuned this weapon to its brain-wave pattern, once it was made, that I do not think it would have risked promising aid to Entor. So much for your contest.

Now to the stories. As I said, "Silent Partner", by S. A. Lombino, struck me as having great power and writing ability. It gets my number one vote for its development of the humanoid robot idea now used so often in stf. To use a common idea and still build to the punch that the ending of this story had is real genius. By the way, I think the first story to use this robot-mistaken-for-human idea was Ray Cummings, in "The Man from 2890", in *Super Science;* Dec. 43. Can you think of an earlier?

2. "All the Answers", by Pog Phillips: A startling exposition of the idea that organized societies need enemies to keep them organized, plus the other extra twists and new ideas we have come to expect from R. P. G.

3. "Welcome," by Alfred Coppel: Beautiful writing. I like stories with a quiet, but devastating, punch like this one. They are all too rare.

4. "The Seven Securities", by Hamlin Daly: A new name to me. I like his idea that "Security" is a dirty word. This cannot be pounded home too hard. The humorous approach used by William Tenn, in his "Brooklyn Project", is perhaps more effective than the defeatist attitude inherent in this story's ending, but still I enjoyed reading it very much.

5. "Wild Talents, Inc.", by Milton Lesser: Using Judith Merril's excellent idea, I would call this a Heinlein-future story very well done.

6. "Alien Restoration", by Charles Dye: I enjoyed the kaleidoscopic changes of viewpoint of this van Vogt-interstellar type yarn. Good suspense, too.

7. Goblin Planetoid", by Vaseleos Garson: Glad to see him back.

I'm not rating "The Mountain of Light", by L. Sprague de Camp, although I enjoyed it exceedingly. My reason is that I don't think you can rate articles and stories at the same time. In my opinion you should include a question in The Reckoning "Did you find this issue's article interesting? Yes or No."

That's right, no X's; it was a good issue. I liked the cover, and the imagination shown in illustrating a short story. Best letter was by Judd-y, followed by L. Sprague de Camp and B. A. Sodek.

—*R. R. Anger,*
103 *Ridge Dr.,*
Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

(Ray Cummings has done the robot-mistaken-for-human story a number of times, but the first time he did it was the first time it appeared in science-fiction, to the best of my knowledge. This was in his four-part serial, "The Exile of Time", which ran in *Astounding Stories,* April to July 1931. Which explains why you didn't see "The Man From 2890" in *Future,* back in 1941 or 1942.

Thanks for the kind words on that ancient story of mine, "The Martians Are Coming"; actually, my part in it was confined to working out the action-chart; Cyril Kornbluth did the writing. It was published under my name alone, for various intricate business reasons which I no longer recall, and which probably wouldn't make sense to me now if I did.)

●

EVIDENCE WANTED

Dear Sir:

I am now a "working girl", and though I still read all my favorite magazines, I find I seldom have the time (at the same moment I have enough energy, anyhow) to do any writing. So this is my first letter in so long a time to *any* magazine, I'm ashamed to tell you.

But you can console yourself—when I *did* write at last, it was to you, and certainly that shows a certain good taste, does it not?

I have only one complaint, which will be brief—but, believe me, it is a heartfelt one. Too long have we suffered under the

miserable shadow of what some (censored) in the publishing-department inanely refers to as "the cover". Not being vulgar, I cannot tell you how much the covers stink. But I do know that in this day and age, when the greatest paintings can be printed cheaply, and are sold the length and breadth of the nation to countless thousands of people who know and appreciate art—even in an amateur way—then the insistence of publishers in our beloved science-fiction field on printing horrors on the cover, because we aren't expected to know any better, is a gross insult to the readers, and colossal error on the part of your magazine.

Believe me, the majority of us buy your magazine in spite—*in spite,* mind you—of the cover. Think it over—please!

I see you have begotten a contest. Well, I found a flaw in the story, as requested. It may not be *your* flaw, but, to me, it springs to the eye.

It is my belief that the flaw in Rog Phillips' fine story lines in an impossibility. Not quite that, perhaps, but at least an improbability, in view of the facts presented.

The Mind was built in order to give the Council solutions, when desired. The Mind, however, was a bit too humanly perverse, and, as a result, failed throughout to give any information which would have enabled Reed to come up at the end with his rather involved (and unproven) answer, at the final moment.

In fact, the Mind so frequently worked on its own political preferences, that, actually, its information was more than useless.

Reed's solution, therefore, had no connection, actually to the influence accredited to the Mind. His entire speech contained no more and no less than his own private credo; and the proof of his statement was, perforce, lacking.

You may endorse his sentiments, or decry them, but the only yardstick possible would be your own personal credo, which can err drastically on either side of the ledger, without your being aware of it, since the theory of Reed's would have to be actually employed, to even partially test it. And even then, the test, if *repeated,* would rely upon its results, which could materially about-face, since the main factor is a human one, and humanity has long been unpredictable to an extreme.

In other words, the test could go any direction at all, needing only a push from one side or the other to determine the outcome.

This all merely underlines the fact that *Reed* solved the problem (if he solved it). Nobody else had a hand in it. As far as the Mind went, its value as an advisor was completely Nil.

Nevertheless, you can't beat Rog in the build-up of a situation, and believable characters to act it out. His skill and artistry is second only to the genius he employs in making paper-and-ink people live and speak and love. So, flaw or no flaw, Rog Phillips is the best author of most, and in this August SFQ, he tops the whole line-up, just because you published his story. Thanks!

The story by Hamlin Daly, "Seven Securities", gets second place, but it was uncomfortably close, because the characters were well defined, and the story well-planned—but I must be honest—my chief reason is that I'm simply daffy over stories aboard a spaceship, and dealing with the master and crew. I guess it's because I'm a Navy wife, and I find it wonderful to see a ship of the future manned with a captain and crew, which, by merely one twist of the imagination, is the true Navy of tomorrow. I can't explain it, but the "realer" the story is, the "daffier" I get over it! The more Navy tales on this theme you can find, the happier you'll make *me,* at any rate.

—Gwen Cunningham,
M&M Trailer Park, 2950 *Auburn Blvd., Sacramento, California.*

(You spotted the joker in Phillips' plot, all right—but that wasn't what we wanted. As a number of readers have pointed out, and as I've agreed, "All The Answers" is riddled with flaws, inconsistencies, absurdities, and non-sequiturs; the more you think about it, the more faults you can find.

And yet, I still believe it was a first-class *story,* a triumph of suspense and interest over logic, rational plot-line, etc.—in another story, any one of these clinkers might have been fatal. By all text-book rules, I should have rejected it; yet, the reader-respons shows that there are times when you can jolly well throw that book out the window. *Not a single letter of criticism and analysis* suggested that the story shouldn't have been published, although a number felt that the flaws did keep it from a top-rating spot.

How many long-suffering readers buy our magazine in spite of the cover? You

IF ENTHUSIASTIC LETTERS MEAN ANYTHING . . .

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COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, Inc., Dept. SF,
241 Church Street, New York 13, New York

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Address: .....
City and Zone ..... **State** .....

say you do, and I do not doubt that you aren't alone in that; however, I'm equally certain that this would be true of *some* purchasers, no matter what we had on the cover—even if it were of a nature to bring your wholehearted praise. You think that a majority of purchasers of our magazines consider the covers an insult to their intelligence; frankly, I do not agree. But we could argue this until exhaustion without coming to any satisfactory conclusion, because—so far—no way of proving the matter has been devised.

I wish we could find out; I really do. But until we start getting around 75,000 letters all agreeing on general like or dislike of a cover, I'm afraid it's just a guess as to who is really with the majority.)

●

AMUSIN' AND CONFUSIN'

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

It seems that Mrs. Ruth Fair and I have somewhat similar ideas about magazine-covers and unclad girls. For months, I've been both puzzled and amused by the fact that cover-artists seem to regard the so-called weaker sex as being so indestructible. Covers invariably picture the beautiful heroine clad in as little as possible, or slightly less. The handsome hero, on the other hand, is dressed in bulky space-suit and helmet. Somehow, this always strikes me as being an amusing and highly-improbable situation.

Personally, I cling to the old-fashioned idea that a person should breathe. I also like to be comfortably warm whenever possible. I doubt that I'd enjoy cavorting in outer space clad only in a few wisps of some transparent material. Why should the men get all the space-suits?

While I'm on the subject of covers, I'd like to mention something that happened about a year ago. I brought home the November, 1951 copy of SFQ, and was reading it when my sister, then just over two years, came in and demanded to see the magazine. Obediently I showed it to her. "Don't like that lady," she informed me. I asked her why not, and you can imagine my surprise when she replied, "Not got enough clothes on." Now if a two-year-old notices it...

Seriously, I don't mind gals on your covers most of the time, but *all* of the time is another matter. Of the six issues of SFQ I have, six have girls. Rather monotonous, I think. One copy has a man on the cover, but that's a rather poor average, isn't it? Why not consider your feminine readers for a change? We'd like to see a man or two once in a while. How about it?

In looking over the copies of SFQ I have, I see that I lack the first issue. I'd appreciate hearing from any fan who is willing to sell me a copy for a reasonable price. I don't want it badly enough to sell my soul.

May I put in a plug for a new and novel type of fan club? It is THE FANETTES, an all-female organization. The club was organized for a special purpose: to prove to the male segment of fandom that we gals know a little bit about science ficion, too. We publish a fanzine which contains fiction, poetry, articles, and several departments. It is *not* a slightly scientific version of the usual woman's magazine. THE FEMZINE uses material written only by female fans. A sample copy is 15¢, and a one-year subscription is 50¢. Any curious male is invited to send for a sample copy in order to see what it's all about. Any female fan is invited to do the same, and if the she likes the idea, we'd like her to join.

Issue No. 2 of THE FEMZINE is due to be mailed by the first of October.

For some reason, the lettering on your covers doesn't appeal to me. Possibly it's because it takes up too much of the cover. Otherwise, I think you've made a great improvement over the last issue.

For the three best letters, please list my votes for Mrs. Fair, Name Withheld, and Jean Rose, in that order.

—Marian Cox,
79th A. B. Sq.,
Sioux City, Iowa.

(As my esteemed colleague, Lester del Rey, who has sunk to my own level and become a science-fiction editor, notes in a recent issue of *Space Science Fiction*, current investigation on the problem of space-suits indicates that the cover-artists may have had the right idea, after all. The huge, bulky space-suit isn't really necessary; you need a breathing-apparatus, and a cooling-apparatus, but that's about all. The thing is, if the suit is constructed so that it covers you, it will also insulate you, and you won't lose heat; most likely, you'll pick up heat from radiation, and have to cool off frequently.

But, as I've noted before, don't shoot the poor cover-artists, who only try to make a living painting the kind of covers that are demanded. And—lay that pistol down!—give the publishers due credit; they've found that the "girlie" cover isn't

absolutely necessary, so aren't insisting on it all the time, now.)

●

ALL OVER, NOW

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

This is the first time I've written to you from the SFQ angle, but that's because it's the first time I've seen it on the stands here in Marysville. (I know, subscribe—but I'd rather throw in a gripe about the zine not getting to the stands, or just poor eyesight on my part.)

I'd fill out one of the little coupons in back to let you know how I liked the stories, but it's just a waste of time, and by not even mentioning the names of stories and articles, I thereby keep the old "X" down. If nobody sees that their yarn didn't go over in my particular case, they aren't so apt to be sore or hurt (in their feelings).

I haven't read the three novelets (pardon, two) yet, but I'll list the reading material as I have read it. "Defender of the Faith" had an old idea—to me—with a new twist, and ended up with a surprise—also to me—ending. All in all, a well-done job. "Scent of Danger" should have had a canine audience. Not that I didn't enjoy it, because on the contrary, I did. There hasn't ever been a story using just that theme before, to my knowledge, and I liked it, too.

"Signpost in the Sky" didn't show me much. It was strictly for the birds—although it was readable, or I wouldn't comment on it at all. There was a certain element of suspense as our boy crept closer to the danger-sun, following the signposts; and with what the line under the title told me, the suspense was a little more pronounced. Now, "Horatio, the Creator", was, to my way of thinking, the best short in the issue. That takes care of the shorts. The article hasn't been read, either. The letters, on the other hand...

Man, am I glad a deadline was set on that "All the Answers" contest. Just as I thought I had the answers—all the answers—I'd pick up some mag with the same idea in it, and I'd have to throw my letter away. On the whole, I like the letter-section of SFQ—and in particular, the one by Jean Rose. Second on my like-list Mrs. Ruth Fair. (Name Withheld By Request) draws a reluctant third. What's he afraid

[*Turn To Page* 126]

of? Nobody's going to bite him. (or her.)

—A/1C James White,
AF 19247861 2275th Base Sv. Sqdn.,
Beale AFB, Calif.

(Don't be hesitant about voting on the stories; slings and arrows are a calculated risk in the science-fiction author's life; I think most of them are willing to take the chance, in hope of picking up the kind of appreciation that many readers show them when they like a story.)

●

ARTICLE APPROVED

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

The authors, Robert A. Madle and Sam Moskowitz, are to commended highly for their article "Did Science Fiction Predict Atomic Energy?" in Nov. *Science Fiction Quarterly.* The footnotes are indicative of much research on their part. I thoroughly enjoyed the piece, learning many things I didn't previously know. If there are any prophets today, a great many of them will be found in the ranks of science-fiction writers. Jules Verne and H. G. Wells were pioneers in the field of prophetic science-fiction writing. It takes foresight, intuition and imagination even to *attempt* to write about the *future.*

I may be wrong but "The Last Robot" was the first Vignette I ever remember reading in your stf magazines. Were there others? If Richard Terzian took the iniative here, I hope other writers will follow it up and that the Stf Vignette becomes a regular feature, a la *American Magazine!*

This may be out of place here but let me offer my congratulations, Mr. Lowndes, on your article about the pulp magazines in the Sept. 1952, *Report To Writers Magazine,* called "They're Still Kicking." Success of your own magazines—especially the three stf ones—proves you know what you're talking about.

This "girlie-cover" debate has its pros and cons, not the least of which is selling the magazine; but if there must be undraped girls why have them looking like the girl next door (Nov. SFQ)? A fancy space-suit or headgear with protruding "antlers" doesn't change the girl's features. An exotically-beautiful girl with individualistic features (Oriental slanted eye, high cheekbones, sultry lips, etc) would be better and more imaginative. After all, if you're writing about the future, why assume the people then, especially if there

IT SAYS HERE

are other peopled planets, will look the way we do today?

Though I would have preferred Francis L. Fugate's "Horatio, the Creator" written in a more dramatic, serious—even tragic vein—I nevertheless experienced keen delight in reading this story, often very humorous and whimsical. The plot is clever and concise. The idea could take on Frankenstein proportions with one of the author's chatacters killing his creator, an indestructible being, real yet unreal, a menace to society, finally destroyed when a little boy accidentally discovers the Character-Creator, and with a turn of the deal eases Mr. Menace!

Why don't you run a contest to see what departments the readers look to first? I personally always read the letter section, then onto the article. The stories I read last. Continue having one article in each issue. The past selection of articles has been diversified and varied. Till next issue will say adios and keep up the splendid work you're doing.

—Leo Louis Martello, Director
American Hypnotism Academy,
49 West 85th Street, New York 24, N. Y.

(The theme in "Horatio, the Creator", has been presented numerous times in the dramatic-to-melodramatic, and on to sheer horror, vein; this is the first time I'd seen it as humor, which is why it appealed to me. I'm not sure I've seen "serious" treatments of it in science-fiction—but then, this is supposed to be fantasy, anyway!)

●

PREVIEW

Dear RWL:

Memberships for the 11th World Science Fiction Convention may now be obtained by sending a dollar to Box 2019, Philadelphia 3, Pa.

The time of the convention is Labor Day week end, September 5-7. The place, Bellevue Stratford, one of the finest and best known on the east coast. We have engaged for the exclusive use of the convention activities the main ballroom, the 18th floor, the roof garden, and the well known Clover Room. More important, from the point of view of you fans, is the fact that the Bellevue will give all convention members a special, flat room-rate: $6.

[*Turn Page*]

SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY

for singles, $10, for doubles. There has been some talk of special facilities for larger groups, but nothing is definite on that angle yet.

Also it is too early for a definite program schedule, but Lester Del Ray, program chairman, tells me we're going to match Chicago's brilliant "first", the s-f ballet.

So for one of the great fan experiences of your life, get that dollar in to Box 2019, Philadelphia 3; then you'll be a member of the 11th World Convention in Philadelphia in '53.

—Tom Clareson,
3731 Spruce St.,
Philadelphia 4.
Publicity Committee,
Chairman,

★

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF

Science Fiction Quarterly, published quarterly at Holyoke, Mass. for October 1, 1952.

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Louis H. Silberkleit, 241 Church Street, New York 13, N. Y.; Editor, Robert W. Lowndes, 241 Church Street, New York 13, N. Y.; Managing editor, Robert W. Lowndes, 241 Church Street, New York 13, N. Y.; Business manager, Maurice Coyne, 241 Church Street, New York 13, N. Y.

2. The owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a partnership, or other unincorporated firm, its name and address, as well as that of each individual member, must be given.) Columbia Publications, Inc., 241 Church Street, New York 13, N. Y.; Louis H. Silberkleit 241 Church Street, New York 13, N. Y.; Maurice Coyne, 241 Church Street, New York 13, N. Y.; Harold Hammond, 241 Church Street, New York 13, N. Y.

3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) None.

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5. The average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the 12 months preceding the date shown above was: (This information is required from daily, weekly, semiweekly, and triweekly newspapers only.)

LOUIS H. SILBERKLEIT
(Signature of Publisher)

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of October, 1952. Maurice Coyne (My commission expires March 30, 1954). (SEAL)

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THE RECKONING

A Report on Your Votes and Comments

As you'll see below, Eric Frank Russell's short story took a definite lead over the rest; I might add that his was the only story to escape slings and arrows of reader's outrage. The vignette drew a lot of comment, some unfavorable, but I'd like to hear from more readers before deciding whether we should or should not continue using single-page, "filler" stories. When all the votes were counted, the contents came out thus:

1.	**The Timeless Ones (Russell)**	2.62
2.	**The Captive Audience (Shaw)**	3.53
3.	**Defender of the Faith (Coppel)**	4.31
4.	**Scent of Danger (Morrison & Nix)**	4.37
5.	**Signpost in the Sky (White)**	4.62
6.	**The Prowler (Bailey)**	5.62
7.	**Horatio, the Creator (Fugate)**	6.25
8.	**Did Science-Fiction Predict Atomic Energy? (Madle & Moskowitz)**	6.26
9.	**The Last Robot (Terzian)**	7.85

There are eight items on the coupon this time. A first-place vote is noted on my sheet as "1"; a second-place vote "2", and so on. Any story marked "X", specifying positive dislike, goes down on the scoreboard in red, and is given 8 points—to differentiate it from a story which was liked, but came out in last place. The total score for each story is divided by the number of votes cast on that item, and the quotient is what you'll see in the point-ratings, next time.

Please let me know your reactions. The coupon below can be cut out, without mutilating any story or department, in the book, and is for your convenience if you have neither time nor inclination to write a letter. And vote your favorite letter-writers too.

Send your coupon to SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY, c/o Columbia Publications, Inc., 241 Church Street, New York 13, New York.

★

★

Number these in order of your preference, to the left of numeral; if you thought any of them bad, mark an "X" beside your dislikes.

—1. The Green Thumb (Anderson) .....
—2. The Four Commandments (Abernathy) ..
—3. Dugal Was A Spaceman (Gibson) .....
—4. Escape Valve (Dye) .....
—5. A Little Knowledge (Merril) .....
—6. The Great Charlatans (de Camp) .....
—7. Aristotle (Christopher) .....
—8. Shoo Fly! (White) .....

Would you like to see a fan magazine review department? .....

Who are your nominees for the three best letters in "It Says Here"?

1. .....
2. .....
3. .....

General Comment .....
.....

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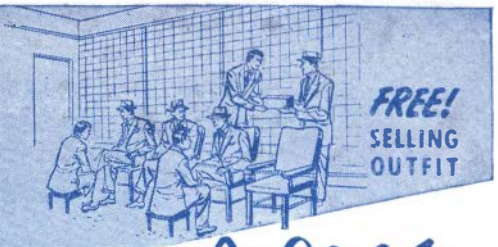

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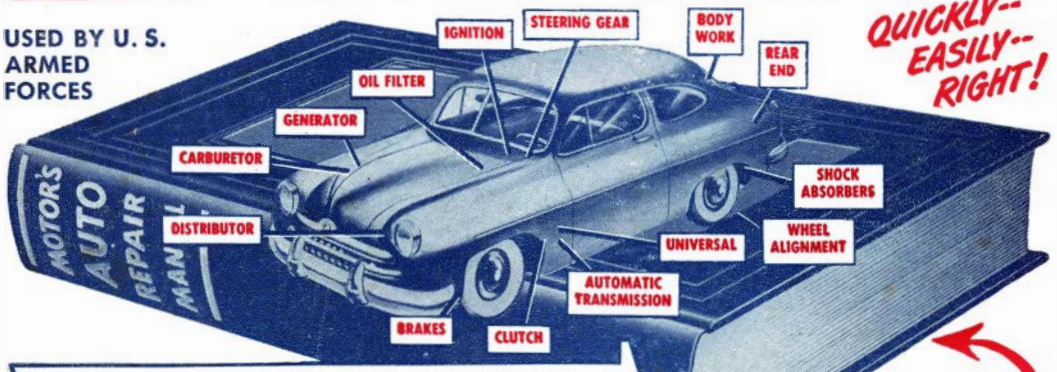

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